

A Spiritual Film Language:
An Analysis of Spirituality in Hayao Miyazaki's *Our Neighbor Totoro* (1988)

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Abstract

Norsk:

Denne masteroppgaven handler om hvordan spiritualitet fremkommer på film gjennom en analyse av *Min Nabo Totoro* (1988) av Hayao Miyazaki. Oppgaven utforsker hvordan spiritualitet blir forstått av film tilskueren, og hvordan Miyazaki skaper en spirituell atmosfære, selv uten at tilskueren har kunnskap om Japans religioner. Gjennom å kombinere religion med film teori, analyserer jeg filmen gjennom økologi og setting, Shinto og karakter, animisme og film fenomenologi, og folkereligion og auteur teori. Gjennom hans animasjon og forskjellige film teknikker, formidler Miyazaki en følelse av spiritualitet og budskap om et forhold til naturen og spiritualitet. I tillegg inneholder *Min Nabo Totoro* flere symboler fra Japans komplekse spirituelle historie.

English:

This thesis examines how spirituality is represented through the film language by analyzing *Our Neighbor Totoro* (1988) by Hayao Miyazaki. It also explores how spirituality translates through the screen, and how Miyazaki creates a spiritual atmosphere, even without the viewer's knowledge of Japanese religions. By combining religion with film theory, I analyze the film through ecology and setting, shinto and character, animism and film phenomenology, and folk religion and auteur theory. Through his animation and a variety of film techniques, Miyazaki is able to convey a sense of spirituality and a message of reconnection to nature and spirituality. In addition, *Our Neighbor Totoro* contains a plethora of symbols from Japan's complex spiritual history.

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Introduction

The works of Hayao Miyazaki exhibit a profound attention to spirituality through the animation, the story, the characters, the setting, and symbolism. Miyazaki's animation not only moves us emotionally, but transforms us spiritually (Gossin 228). This thesis seeks to examine how Miyazaki represents spirituality through the film language. How does spirituality translate through the screen to the audience? How does Miyazaki create a mood or atmosphere of spirituality, even without the viewer's knowledge of Japanese religions?

In order to examine these questions I will analyze one of Miyazaki's earlier films, *Our Neighbor Totoro* (1988) — from now on referred to as *Totoro*. The film is set in a normal village in the Japanese countryside in the 1950s. It also features fewer supernatural characters than many of his other films, such as *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* (2001). The story begins with the ordinary. Two young girls, Satsuki and Mei, move to the Japanese countryside with their father to be closer to their mother who is staying at a nearby hospital, recovering from an unknown illness. Satsuki is around 10 years old, and has considerably more responsibilities than her younger sister (around 4 years old). The family moves into an old house with a large garden, in front of a giant camphor tree. The film gradually moves into the supernatural when one day, when Mei is playing in the garden, she sees two small fluffy creatures carrying a sack of acorns. She follows them, and falls down a tunnel to the root of the big camphor tree, where she meets Totoro, a similar creature, only bigger. Totoro is a friendly creature, and the relationship between Totoro and the girls develop as they settle into their new home. At the end of the film Mei goes missing, and after a desperate search, Satsuki asks Totoro for help. Satsuki rides a cat-bus summoned by Totoro, and is reunited with Mei.

Compared to Miyazaki's other works, *Totoro* portrays a relatively ordinary story through the daily life in the village. The reason I have chosen this film as my focus for analyzing spirituality is because Miyazaki shows that even through the ordinary, he is able to convey a strong sense of spirituality. Miyazaki does not portray spirituality in his films in a didactic way, nor do I believe he intends to do so with any of his films. However, his films still show that he values Japan's rich religious history and draws inspiration from it to convey a message of reconnection to nature to a modernized audience. His work has also received international attention after *Spirited Away* won an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2003 (Bartholow and Moist, 2007, 30). For this

reason, I will also explore how spirituality is able to translate to a western audience, without knowledge of Japanese history. This thesis argues that spirituality is conveyed through the way Miyazaki uses the film language. I will analyze certain scenes in *Totoro* that are meaningful in regards to spirituality or where the film language creates a spiritual atmosphere. In some cases it is also useful to bring in examples from Miyazaki's other films to strengthen my arguments. As spirituality is a theme Miyazaki uses in his other works as well, it will be natural to mention important scenes where this is the case.

I will analyze the film by looking at four areas where film theory and spirituality align. The areas are: ecology and setting, Shinto and character, animism and phenomenology, and folk religion and auteur theory. The thesis explores how both religion and film theories are represented in the film. By examining how they appear in the film my aim is to give insight into how Miyazaki creates a universal understanding of spirituality, while also analyzing it through Japanese spirituality. Miyazaki's work has often been analyzed for its environmental message. His work is popular, and deserves attention for its depiction of the destruction humans can bring to the environment, as well as the idyllic image he portrays when humans and nature live in harmony. However, in relation to spirituality, I believe there is still value in examining Miyazaki's work further. A plethora of different spiritual traditions and practices are represented in Miyazaki's films. However, Miyazaki is still able to convey a unified message of reconnection to nature, spirits, and a simpler life. In this thesis I will explore how he delivers this message through the combination of spirituality and the film language.

Chapter one examines ecology and setting in *Totoro*, and how it contributes to the representation of spirituality in the film. Pamela Gossin is a professor in the history of science and interdisciplinary literature, and her article "Animated Nature" discusses different ways Miyazaki focuses on environmentalism in his films. This article is useful in that it connects ecology with spirituality, which is my aim for the chapter. In addition, Stibbe Arran's "Zen and the Art of Environmental Education in the Japanese Animated Film *Tonari no Totoro*" explores how the film delivers a message of environmental learning, and how the animation is used for this purpose. This thesis does not focus on Zen because it is less relevant in *Totoro* compared to the other religions I have included. Stibbe's article is especially useful because it analyzes differences between the Japanese and English dub of the film. If not specifically mentioned, this thesis examines the Japanese dubbed

version of *Totoro*. As the focus of the chapter is the film's setting, the chapter focuses on ecology as the 'study of home', and a new relationship to ecology as a mutuality between humans and nature.

Chapter two gives insight into one of the main religions of Japan, Shinto. The chapter incorporates two elements from Shinto — *kami* and *kokoro* — to examine how the film portrays these concepts in relation to the characters in the film. Boyd and Nishimura's article "Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki's Anime Film 'Spirited Away'" gives an analysis of *Spirited Away* through Shinto symbolism and tradition. They also highlight some important differences between the Japanese and American dubbing of the film, indicating that the perception of spirituality will be different depending on the audience. This became especially important for my thesis, as western audiences will presumably not recognize the Shinto elements in *Totoro*. The article emphasizes the message of *kokoro* — of being pure hearted to overcome difficulties, which inspired the character engagement in the chapter. In addition, the chapter examines how the film language is used to portray Totoro as a *kami*.

The third chapter of this thesis discusses animism in *Totoro*. By analyzing Miyazaki's messaging around an animistic value, such as respect for all beings, the chapter gives insight into how the film language is used to portray an animistic message. I will also use film phenomenology, focusing on an article by Film Studies Scholars, Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich, to describe a spiritual tension in the film, which I argue comes from Miyazaki's representation of animism. Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich's article defines film phenomenology both generally and specifically by how it has been used, which is useful for describing the spiritual atmosphere in the film. The chapter also uses a concept from Edward Branigan to analyze the phenomenology in the film, focalization.

In chapter four I will look at how Miyazaki uses Japanese folk religion in *Totoro*, and how it coincides with auteur theory. Miyazaki's work has been analyzed through auteur theory in many articles, but in this chapter I will use auteur theory to examine how Miyazaki uses nostalgia. My argument is that combining folk religion and nostalgia portrays Miyazaki's affinity for old rural villages in Japan, pre-modernization. I also introduce the Japanese concept of *furusato* and his use of pacing and passivity, and how it contributes to Miyazaki's authorship.

Research on Miyazaki and spirituality are not uncommon. Most of them are found in journals on religion or on film studies. By combining religion and film theory, my aim is to give a thorough

analysis of how film techniques and theory can be used to convey a message around spirituality. Few research articles make use of both academic disciplines, and for this reason I believe the research on Miyazaki's films and spirituality is still lacking. For this reason, I explore the areas where I find religion and film theory combine to create a sense of spirituality through the film language. My aim is also to explore new ways Miyazaki creates a sense of spirituality. By examining how the two disciplines work together, we can find where spirituality translates most effectively to the audience.

Chapter One: Ecology and Setting

In “Techno-animism in Japan” Jensen and Blok write: “It has been suggested that, in pre-modern Japan, ‘Shinto’ (...) might be better seen as ‘ecology’ than ‘religion’” (98 cf. Golly, 2008: 275). While Shinto certainly has many ecological values, the complex history and distinctive rituals of Shinto make it more than just ecology. However, ecology is an important part of explaining spirituality in Miyazaki’s films. For this reason, chapter one will be dedicated to ecology. How does ecology and spirituality connect in the film? Humanity’s relationship with nature is a common theme in Miyazaki’s films. Some of these include *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), and *Totoro*. At times this nature is depicted as spiritual, and often portrayed as an actor capable of influencing the characters and the story. In this chapter I will examine the elements in the film related to ecology, how spirituality and ecology are connected, and what kind of message this conveys.

I. Study of Home

Ecology is the relationship between organisms and their environments (Dice 346). It can also be understood as the ‘study of home’, and spirit worship is often connected to physical places. In fact, Miyazaki’s films are often set in a village, a special house, or a specific location. The “haunted” house in *Totoro* becomes a new home to Satsuki and Mei as they learn how special the place is to their connection with Totoro and other creatures. The camphor tree can also be seen as a ‘study of home’, though it is perhaps more accurate to call it a *power spot*. Carter (2018) examines how the phenomenon became popular in Japan in the 1980s with the New Age movement. “Pronounced *pawāsupotto* in Japanese, the term loosely refers to a place thought to embody spiritual energies from the earth” (147). *Power spot* was originally used to describe shrines or temples with a special spiritual connection. With the development of the environmental movement, the term started being used for natural phenomena with a strong spiritual energy, such as rocks, rivers, or trees like the camphor tree in *Totoro*. As attraction around the New Age movement subsided in the west, the idea of *power spots* still remained popular in Japan through media, marketing, and tourism. In his article, Carter explains how people still go to *power spots* to rejuvenate or destress from the busy life of the city (151). *Power spots* are often located in nature, away from the noise and pollution of the city. In Shinto it is believed that *power spots*, such as giant trees, are places where spiritual beings, or *kami*, come to dwell. We are introduced to the tree as Totoro’s home when Mei falls down to the root of

the tree, and lands on his stomach. In this instance we can interpret Totoro as the *kami* resting in the tree, as explored in chapter two.

However, the camphor tree is also a character in its own right. Shots of the tree standing quietly by itself or swaying in the breeze may suggest that Miyazaki recognizes the tree as an actor. These scenes stand out because there is no one else in the shot. They would be unthinkable in classic Hollywood films because they do not move the plot forward. However, Miyazaki dedicates precious screen time to show that the tree is ever-present, and even “watching” the other characters. In “Animated Nature” Gossin describes the tree with human qualities like wisdom, strength, and protection (213). This demonstrates that Miyazaki wanted the camphor tree to be understood as a character.

Another ‘study of home’ are the villages depicted in the films of Miyazaki. Especially in *Totoro*, the characters and village as a whole contribute to the vitality of the setting. Gossin also describes Miyazaki’s close connection to villages. “He expresses a deep appreciation for the sweeping landscapes and detailed scenes of village life found in medieval Japanese scrolls, folding screens, and *ukiyo-e*-style woodblock prints” (212). *Totoro* is reminiscent of *ukiyo-e*-style woodblock prints in that the landscapes are drawn in detail, but depict an ordinary scene from a Japanese village. Miyazaki portrays the same respect and admiration for the collectiveness and cooperation a small village exhibits in times of need, as with Mei’s disappearance in the end of the film. Even though it is the remote and isolated location of their house which brings Satsuki and Mei closer to Totoro, they still find their place in the village, build their new home in it, and get help from the villagers. Pre-modernization, these villages were seen as sacred groves where *kami* would come to visit. In “Socio-ecosystem civilisations and fudo cults”, Sonoda Minoru writes:

“[V]illage life was further transformed by the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of the post-war period. In towns and villages alike, modern local societies have severely damaged the environment for the cause of economic development. This has undermined traditional ‘hometown cults’, and has taken ‘hometown communities’ to the brink of collapse. The period of rapid economic growth from the 1960s to the 1980s has done particularly severe damage to the country’s natural environment through overdevelopment and frequent pollution. The price of consumerism and material wealth has been paid in the form of the disintegration of ‘hometown communities’ and spiritual confusion” (Breen & Teeuwen 2000: 44).

Spiritual confusion is especially important here because Miyazaki portrays a time when spirituality was regarded as a natural part of village life. As *Totoro* was made in the 1980s, the modernization of Japan contributed to Miyazaki's choice of setting the story in the village, before they lost their spiritual merit. Through characters like Totoro, Miyazaki portrays the strong presence of *kami* in the countryside in the 1950s, and indirectly delivers a message of how the modernization has removed the spirituality from some of these villages. We can see how spirituality is accepted as a natural part of the village life. Satsuki and Mei's father is knowledgeable, and explains what the girls see around them. After moving into their new house, the father brings Satsuki and Mei on a walk up to the camphor tree. He asks for protection from and gives thanks to the camphor tree spirit for looking after his daughters. Despite his more scientific approach to nature, he acknowledges the spirit in the tree and its importance to the village. Spirituality permeates the village and the ecology in the film. As Sonoda explains, this has now turned into spiritual confusion. The need for spiritual connection and *power spots* are even greater now because of the modernization. Since the 1980s, Japanese society has had a need for reconnecting with nature, which Miyazaki emphasizes by giving a nostalgic look into village life of the past. *Totoro* can be seen as one way of venturing into the past, and as a way to heal the stresses of daily life. Through the camphor tree in the film, Miyazaki gives the viewer the sense of spiritual connection found in rural villages in the 1950s.

Trees are also a place of preservation from a Shinto and ecological perspective. For village life especially, the preservation of these giant trees has been imperative. Natural phenomena, such as trees, mountains, and islands have been revered as *kamiza*, sacred places *kami* can descend to for worship for centuries. Sonoda explains how 'socio-ecosystem civilisations' developed around an area of natural ecology that humans could develop and manage, such as agriculture, cutting down forest, etc. (33). Eventually these societies developed into 'socio-ecological religions', where rituals and myths developed around cultivating the land, forming a spirituality around the ecology (34). Cutting down sacred trees became taboo, and as more shrines were being built in the eighth century, strict laws were placed on deforestation. Not only for trees where *kami* were believed to reside but also for forests and rivers, to prevent droughts (38).

II. Ecology and Mutuality

Shinto has brought new meaning to restoration and preservation. While the western view on ecology often describes a 'wild' nature against culture, a Shinto-infused ecology emphasizes nature

and humans functioning together to create sites of worship, preservation of forests, and other naturally occurring sites (Jensen and Blok 100). A relationship of mutuality between nature and humans is seen in many of Miyazaki's films. The relationship that develops between Satsuki, Mei and Totoro is mutual because the girls are in need of Totoro's help, but they reciprocate when they give Totoro an umbrella on a night of heavy rain, or plant the seeds he has given them. The connection and mutual respect between the natural world and the human world functions as a revival of Shinto values in a modern Japan. "Miyazaki here literally re-animates the folkloristic tradition of Shinto, in order to evoke experiences of wonder and intimate connectedness in nature" (Jensen and Blok 101).

In "Animistic Nature", Gossin quotes Roderick Frazier Nash for: "seven foundational values on which an effective defense of nature can be built: (1) scientific; (2) spiritual; (3) aesthetic; (4) heritage; (5) psychological; (6) cultural; and finally, (7) (...) the intrinsic values (...)" (Gossin 211). The nature depicted in *Totoro* has several of the values listed above. The spiritual and aesthetic values are especially important in the film. Firstly, nature has a central role in the film, not just because it is important to Totoro and the other creatures, but because nature is so clearly embedded in the animation. There are several scenes where Miyazaki decides to linger on a natural phenomenon, as in the scenes with the camphor tree. Occasionally Miyazaki breaks off from Satsuki and Mei, and focuses on details in the natural environment around them — a leaf floating downstream or a frog croaking. Again, the contrast to classic Hollywood film comes to mind. Instead of having every scene actively move the plot forward, Miyazaki instead prompts us to notice the nature down to its smallest detail.

"In all of these scenes the natural phenomenon being framed for special attention is moving, but is painstakingly drawn in the intricate and realistic mode of drawing, making these scenes particularly realistic in contrast with the simplified style of human characters" (Stibbe 475). Not only is the nature in the film drawn realistically, but the realism of these shots are strengthened when the viewers are given insight into how the world around the main characters move forward, even without them. The fact that Miyazaki decides to show us this makes *Totoro* an environmentally conscious film. The shots of nature and its natural events encourage the viewer to think outside of himself. It is almost like Miyazaki is saying: "Look! This is what you are missing". Stibbe connects these shots to Zen, and uses a term from D.T Suzuki called 'isness' or 'suchness' (471). As pointed out earlier, this is to emphasize the value of noticing nature in itself, and perhaps more importantly

looking outside of oneself. As Stibbe describes, this becomes especially apparent in the Japanese dubbed version of the film. Through Satsuki and Mei's dialogue, we are introduced to their "sense of wonder" (Stibbe 472) to the new world around them. The girls marvel at the nature around them, pointing out peculiar details about what they see; how the fish glimmer in the sunlight, the looming quality of the camphor tree, and the possibility of ghosts living in their house. Stibbe gives a few examples: "'*otōsan, sugoi ki*' ('Father, amazing tree!'); '*Sakana! hora, mata hikattai*' ('Fish! look, they glimmered again'); '*Obake yashiki mitai*' (It's like a ghost house)" (478). In contrast to the amazement shown by the girls, their father explains the natural occurrences with logic. Stibbe writes: "The father, a university professor, clearly *knows* about the world, while the two girls actually *see* it" (477). The father's reaction can be compared to how the English dubbed version of the film made by Fox interprets Satsuki and Mei's lines. Instead of exclamations about the wonders they see around them, the English version turns the lines into questions, that in turn require logical answers. In the scene where the girls are observing the fish in the river, the English translation becomes: "What are those little things swimming around?" (Stibbe 478). The reason behind the change likely comes down to spirituality and ecology, where Japanese children are taught about the *kami* in the trees and the wonders of nature. The western idea of nature as 'wild' and 'foreign' comes into play, and perhaps Fox assumed that logic would resonate more with western children and adults. When discussing the film's connection to ecology, Stibbe's conclusion is this: "The frequent inability of the English dubbing to capture this connection is both a loss in terms of the English version's ability to contribute to environmental education, but also a gain in the potential for using the differences in translation to highlight key differences in culture" (480). This becomes especially important in a discussion on spiritual film language. A spiritual ecology is deeply embedded in Japanese culture, with its variety of religious movements and customs relating to the natural environment. Attempting to translate this to a western audience will ultimately fall short because there is no equivalent in western culture on a similar scale. The entire interpretation of ecology is different. Even though the environmental movement is growing in the west, there will still be a significant difference between how western audiences interpret *Totoro*, compared to Japanese audiences. Without the history of Shinto, Buddhism, animism, and other folk religions, the deeper meaning and messages in the film fall short. Even though we can explore how spirituality comes through in the film language itself, the film has a stronger spiritual impact if we know the history of Japan and its culture. The dialogue of the characters reflect this as well.

The spiritual value of nature depicted in *Totoro* contrasts with the western perception of nature. The nature of *Totoro* is not ‘wild’ or ‘other’ from humans and culture. It is in harmony with humans, open for them to step into the spiritual world if their *kokoro* is pure (more on this in chapter two). The nature is also interconnected, where both humans and *kami* can find their home. The old house of Satsuki and Mei does not intrude on the nature surrounding it. Rather, nature is starting to occupy and take over the house when they first arrive. As the title of the film suggests, Totoro and the girls are friendly neighbors that stumble upon each other from time to time. Likewise, the village is also at peace with nature. The modernization of Japan has not yet reached the village, which lets *kami* and creatures flourish there. The film strengthens the idea that if humans and non-humans can live side by side in harmony with mutual respect towards each other and nature, it becomes a basis for spirituality to thrive.

The spiritual film language is also emphasized in *Totoro* through how ecological elements are portrayed in the film. This is done through the attention to detail in nature, not only in the animation, but also in the pacing and plot of the film. The willingness to pause briefly in the plotline to explore the natural occurrences in nature not only makes *Totoro* environmentally conscious, but insists on the importance of the ecology. Totoro himself is also a part of the ecology, as he is referred to as “*mori no nushi*(keeper of the forest)” (Stibbe 482). From the beginning, where the plot deviates from the girls to follow the leaf down the river, Miyazaki declares that the ecology will be equally as important as the main characters in this film. In the same way that Totoro is represented as a *kami* and the keeper of the forest, the lines between spirituality and ecology become blurred. From the beginning, the ecology is portrayed as a spiritual ecology.

From the concept of *power spots*, one of nature’s values lie in its ability to heal and bring peace from the modern world. *Power spots* are places of particular spiritual energy of the earth. Miyazaki portrays the camphor tree's spiritual energy in *Totoro* by making it the centerpiece of the film. The plot revolves around the tree. In addition, all the mystical characters the girls encounter live in the tree, and find a home there. It becomes a literal image of ecology or the ‘study of home’. The tree’s spiritual energy is also strengthened through the shots that dwell on the tree or through the scenes where the natural passageways that lead to the tree are blocked off when Satsuki tries to enter. Miyazaki depicts this as a choice made by nature, and not just a wrong turn or a coincidence. Later in the film when both Mei and Satsuki try to make their way back to Totoro’s home inside the tree, they are tunneled back out into their own garden. This clearly shows us that the roots and bushes are

changing, and that the tree has a spirit or will of its own. Another scene that emphasizes the spirituality of the camphor tree is when Satsuki and Mei discover the sootspirites in their house. As the sootspirites decide to leave the house, they drift upwards towards the camphor tree. The tree functions as a home for all spirits, and the fact that it is such a central element to the plot, affirms that the tree functions as an actor and a *power spot* with a special spiritual energy.

As in the case with *kokoro*, *Totoro* is a depiction of the world through the children's innocent and curious point of view. Only the children are able to see the magical creatures, and likewise, only Satsuki and Mei show their awe and amazement at the natural things around them. As Stibbe points out: "[N]ot only are the fantastic creatures invisible to the adults, the trees and flowers and ordinary nature are invisible too, simply because the adults are so concerned with other things that they do not look" (Stibbe 483). Spirituality is able to come through because of how everything is seen from the children's perspective. Everything is new and exciting. The film let's us truly see nature for what it is. It gives us insight into the details of nature's daily occurrences, something that adult viewers presumably have not stopped to look at in a while. This is the ecological message the film conveys. Spirits are all around us and open to us if we are willing to see them. In *Totoro*, spirituality does not only refer to *kami* or the Shinto symbols we see throughout the film. It also refers to the spiritual quality of nature, and how enchanting it can be to a young child.

Chapter Two: Shinto and Character

This chapter is an analysis of the main characters in *Totoro* through two concepts from Shinto — *kami* and *kokoro*. First I will give a short introduction of Shinto, its history, and values. Then I will start by analyzing the character of Totoro by comparing him to the term *kami*. Lastly, through the term *kokoro*, I will examine the character motivations and values of Satsuki and Mei. By exploring how Shinto can be used to understand the characters, I argue that spirituality lies in how the characters are represented.

Shinto has from the beginning been considered a folkreligion. However, since the 20th century more people have started disassociating themselves with the term. The history of Shinto has been turbulent and the religion has over the centuries mixed with several other religions, making it difficult to distinguish: what exactly is Shinto? Shinto religion has no sacred scripture like Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, though it shares similar values with for instance Buddhism. At the centre of Shinto we find *kami*-worship, rituals, ancestor worship, traditionalism, and themes like purity and pollution. Gradually Shinto has played a bigger role in promoting living in harmony with nature, but this has not always been the case. In the 20th century, *State Shinto* was introduced in Japan. Shinto became state religion, and it was used to promote nationalism and to justify Japan taking part in World War II. Since then this has been what many associate with Shinto.

In the Danish book, *Religioner i Japan*, Esben Andreasen describes how the history of religions in Japan can be separated into three periods: (1) a formative period of *kami* worship with Buddhist and Confucian influence, (2) a development period where traditions melted together, and (3) solidification and renewal, where different religions blossomed and declined (Andreasen 13). Andreasen explains that Shinto is a relatively new term, first appearing in the 1300s as a way to separate it from other ways of understanding the world, like through Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. But many of the rituals and practices related to Shinto have been a part of Japanese spirituality since long before then. Before this point, Andreasen explains that it is better to refer to the religion as a *kami*-cult (19), but we can also call it Folk Shinto. This is the version of Shinto that I will be discussing in relation to *Totoro*.

I. *Kami*

Kami are the most central part of Shinto religion and spirituality. *Kami* are spirits with the ability to occupy an object or living thing. They are worshipped as Gods or sacred spirits in Shinto. However, the term *kami* can also be used as a trait to describe places or objects. Shinto tradition describes how *kami* are worshipped for fertility, and Shinto festivals or *matsuri* are celebrated at different times of the year to worship *kami*, and pray for fertile crops and a year of fertility. As opposed to for instance *Princess Mononoke* (1997), where some creatures are clearly referred to as *kami*, Totoro is never directly referred to as a *kami*. Instead, the girl's father calls him the "keeper/lord of the forest". The two sisters refer to him as something completely different entirely. Totoro gets his name from the younger sister, Mei, mispronouncing the Japanese word for troll. A troll does not come from Shinto, but instead is well-known in Scandinavia, and believed to derive from Norse mythology. It is likely that Miyazaki decided to use the word "troll" as a reference to Scandinavian fairy tale writers and children's story tradition. In the end credits of the film there is a shot of Satsuki and Mei reading a book with their mother. The image on the cover of the book is from the "Three Billy Goats Gruff", a Scandinavian fairy tale which features a troll.

From the way Totoro is drawn, however, the image of a troll is likely not what Miyazaki had in mind. Instead, he is a fluffy, round creature with big eyes, claws, and a big mouth. This is not a typical *kami* from Shinto either. It seems Miyazaki wanted to design a creature which would appeal to young children without the context of any kind of previously known story, myth, or religion. However, Miyazaki still depicts Totoro as a *kami*. There are several ways to determine this. The most discernible is the *Shimenawa* rope around the camphor tree. The rope signifies purification or a sacred place. When tied around a tree the rope can signify that *kami* are able to inhabit the tree. This is quite literally depicted when Mei stumbles into the center of the tree to find Totoro as he is resting. The tree is portrayed as his home or at least his resting place for the moment. From a point of Shinto traditions, this is a clear-cut representation of Totoro as a *kami*. The second way we can determine that Totoro is portrayed as a *kami* is by his connection to nature, specifically to fertility. In one scene Satsuki and Mei are given different seeds to plant after lending Totoro one of their umbrellas. After planting the seeds in their garden, the sisters are anxious to see what they will grow into. One night, Totoro and his friends come into the garden to perform a ritual to help the seeds become fertile and grow. Satsuki and Mei wake up to see this, and joins the creatures in their ritual around the patch of soil. In deep concentration Totoro lifts the umbrella he is holding towards the sky, and a small seedling with two leaves pops up from the ground. Soon enough the patch of soil is filled with small trees, growing taller and taller at an unnatural pace. The girls are overjoyed at

seeing the seeds grow. The next morning, however, all that remains of what had turned into a grove of tall, thick trees, is the patch of soil full of little seedlings. Despite this, the girls are delighted that their garden is growing, and thankful to Totoro for helping them. Fertility is one of the key values in Shinto. For decades rituals and festivals have been dedicated to encourage fertility by praying to *kami* for good luck. It is believed that the *kami* are capable of improving the crops. In the film we can see that nature and fertility is an important value for Totoro as well. But perhaps more importantly, this scene shows us that Totoro has the power to improve agriculture and encourage growth. This strengthens the argument that Totoro is a *kami*.

Similarly to how people pray to *kami* for fertile crops or to encourage their wishes coming true, Satsuki also makes a wish to Totoro. When Mei disappears in the end of the film, and the day turns to dusk, Satsuki becomes more and more desperate. She seeks out Totoro for help, but is unable to reach him or find the tunnel to the inside of the camphor tree. She makes a wish to Totoro to let her find him so he can help her find Mei. After praying to him, Satsuki walks through the tall grass and is able to find Totoro. In a similar manner as praying to *kami* in Shinto traditions, Satsuki prays for help from Totoro, and together they are able to find Mei in good health. The way Miyazaki incorporates Shinto in the film is not to promote the religion, but instead to portray the value in the traditions.

II. *Kokoro*

The concept of *kokoro* has different meanings, the essential of them being “heart”. Boyd and Nishimura describe *kokoro* at length by its relevance in *Spirited Away* (2001). They specifically emphasize the term in relation to purity, one of the core values of Shinto. It is the purity of Mei and Satsuki’s *kokoro* that enables them to see Totoro. Boyd and Nishimura write: “[T]o experience the *kami* presence of any one of these aspects of nature requires an aesthetically pure and cheerful heart/mind (*kokoro*), an emotional, mental and volitional condition that is not easily attained” (4). From this we can discern two aspects of *kokoro*. The first is the essence, the “heart”. The second is the state that allows one to experience *kami*. The pure, innocent, and cheerful state of a child is the ideal for being receptive to *kami*. This is another reason we can relate to Totoro as a *kami*. The fact that it is Satsuki and Mei’s *kokoro* or cheerful heart/mind/soul that gives them the ability to see Totoro becomes clear when we see how differently they interact with the world, as opposed to the adults in the film. The world around them is new, and every detail is worth paying attention to. Even

faced with a scary old house that seems like it might collapse on them, the girls take on the responsibility of cleaning up the house to make it their home. They are happy to be living in the new village, and welcome the change. Even a small acorn is a treasure to them, which shows their innocence and appreciation for the things around them. As established earlier, *kokoro* can be linked to purity. In *Totoro* this is portrayed quite literally in the scene where the family starts to clean up the house, or when they take a bath after a long day. In a way, the cleaning of the house brings back the *kokoro* of the house itself. After the family moves into the abandoned house, it is as though life is brought back to the house, as if it were a living thing. As stated previously, the quality of *kami* can also be applied to objects. It is either through Satsuki and Mei's *kokoro* that they bring life to the house, or the *kokoro* of the house is returned to it.

The film starts off with the girls running around wildly when exploring their new home. Their carefree nature is emphasized from the beginning by their excitement of seeing the new house. The younger sister, Mei, mimics her older sister in everything she does. At this point, the girls seem similar in their playfulness and innocence. They just want to run around and play. We quickly discover that as the older sister, Satsuki, has to take on more responsibility and is given the important task of looking after her younger sister in the absence of her mother. Satsuki diligently accepts all her responsibilities as the older sister, even when the tasks she has to do are tough and prevent her from acting like an actual child. This also emphasizes Satsuki's pure *kokoro*. "[E]ach one of us is basically in charge of our attitudes and our actions, and we can either give in to unfavorable circumstances or try to 'clean up' matters and improve our situation, as difficult as that may be" (Boyd & Nishimura 5). Towards the end of the film Mei goes missing, which puts Satsuki in a desperate position. As Boyd and Nishimura write, in the face of an unfavorable circumstance, in the end it is Satsuki who improves their situation and requests the help of Totoro. Even as the hours go by and she is unable to find her sister, she takes matters into her own hands to resolve the situation by going to Totoro for help. *Totoro* shows us that it is not only the innocent, younger children who are able to see *kami* (even though Mei has considerably easier access to Totoro than her sister). It is also those with a pure heart and mind that are willing to go to great lengths to save their loved ones.

Despite Satsuki's bravery and love for her family, we can find examples of different levels in *kokoro* and who is given access to Totoro. Mei is the first one to see Totoro and his friends, and she is the first to discover and access the tunnel leading to Totoro's home. A part of this has to do with age.

Granny mentions in the beginning of the film that she also used to see the sootspirits or *makurokurosuke* when she was a little girl, but eventually stopped seeing them as she grew older. Miyazaki clearly relates the ability to see the spirits with age. However, the fact that Mei is the one who is given access to Totoro's home in the tree says something about how a *kokoro* may become weaker the older one gets. Especially from seeing the responsibilities that are given to Satsuki, this might explain why she sometimes has trouble reaching Totoro. The film shows us how the family functions without their mother. Even though the absence of their mother is repeatedly mentioned or indicated, the family of three still manages to build a loving home. However, at times the film makes a point of showing Satsuki's frustration at having such a big responsibility over her sister. At one point in the film Mei is sent to stay at Granny's place for the day when Satsuki goes to school and their father goes to work. Satsuki is excited to be going to school and being able to play with other kids her age. The excitement ends abruptly for Satsuki, however, when Mei decides she wants to be with Satsuki, and has to sit in class with her sister. The whole affair embarrasses Satsuki. Throughout the film we can see that Satsuki loves her sister, but that the responsibility sometimes becomes too much for her, especially when their father is at work during the day. When Satsuki and Mei find out that their mother could not come home as quickly as planned, Satsuki scolds her sister when she complains. Perhaps Satsuki's *kokoro* might have allowed her to see Totoro at will if she did not have such a big responsibility on her shoulders. However, it might also be that the hardships have made Satsuki's *kokoro* stronger, as Boyd and Nishimura pointed out, and that the unfavorable circumstances Satsuki is faced with becomes a form of purity when she overcomes them. Another reason that the adults are not able to see Totoro is also closely related to purity and pollution, specifically to "unpolluted" thoughts. Satsuki is able to see Totoro, but only in certain instances. She is starting to know more about the world, taking more responsibility and perhaps starting to leave more of her dreams behind. Miyazaki shows us that becoming an adult means leaving behind the world of spirits and dreams where the extraordinary becomes ordinary. When Satsuki is around Mei she is able to see more of the spiritual world, but when she is alone she struggles to find Totoro.

Shinto represents a big part of Japanese identity as Shinto symbols can be found all around Japan. In *Totoro*, seeing a shrine is just as likely as seeing someone working in the fields. The *torii* and the *Shimenawa* rope establish the camphor tree as a place for *kami* (*kamiza*) is. These symbols, in addition to how the girls' father acts around the tree, confirms this for those in the know. However, western audiences and younger viewers especially may get the impression that the camphor tree is a spiritual place, but will not identify it through the term Shinto.

Throughout the film the girls gain more insight into the world (and the spiritual world as well) due to the purity of their *kokoro*. In the scene where the girls are waiting for their father to arrive at the bus stop, Mei comes across a *Inari* shrine (a shrine for the worship of the fox *kami*). She watches the fox statue carefully, perhaps almost bracing herself for it to come alive. The world of *Totoro* allows for the spiritual to surprise you at any time. Their *kokoro* allows for the unexpected to appear at any moment. Seeing a *kami* or a spiritual creature is just as likely as seeing a normal person.

Chapter Three: Animism and Film Phenomenology

This chapter focuses on understanding how Miyazaki uses animism in his films. In *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (2005), Graham Harvey, professor of Religious Studies, explains that ‘old animism’ is known for describing a physical element innate in all living things, *anima*, similar to how charcoal and metals have attributes that make it burn or oxidize (3). I will start by giving a brief summary of the origin of the term ‘animism’, and its relevance in Japan. Then I will examine how Miyazaki uses animism in the world view of his characters, and how his messaging is closely linked to it. In the second part of this chapter I will explore the use of film phenomenology in *Totoro*, which I argue is similar to how we can understand animism in the film.

I. Animism

In 1871, the term animism was established by Edward Tylor, who described it as ‘the belief in the soul's continued existence in a life after death’ (Tylor, 1920, 1). It was Tylor’s belief that animism functioned as a way to explain how the world works for those “not yet fully acculturated to the practice of rationalist science” (Harvey, 2005, 6). Tylor’s perception of animism was influenced by the imperialistic teleology of the time. It set the belief in spiritual beings of natives against the theistic religions of the West. However, the belief in spirits has been an important part of Japan for thousands of years.

Miyazaki portrays animism in his work through the characters in his films. This is evident in the many non-human characters in Miyazaki’s films, especially the spiritual beings, or *kami*, found in *Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and *Spirited Away* (2001), many of which do not have physical bodies. *Spirited Away* is an obvious example of this, as the plot revolves around a bath house for spirits. Believers of animism value all things, in the belief that they are inhabited by spirits. Miyazaki seems to extend these values to all beings. “For Miyazaki, the idea of ‘anima’—the essence or ‘soul’ of living beings—seems to properly apply to everything that has being, as existence in the universe is itself a special—even spiritual—state” (Gossin 227). This is the case in *Spirited Away* when the spiritual being, “No-Face”, becomes a source of conflict during the film. By classic Hollywood standards, No-Face would be seen as an antagonist only. However, Miyazaki usually resolves conflicts in his films, not by killing off the enemy, but by having the characters come to an understanding. He emphasizes that all beings have both good and evil within them. This

coincides with his belief that everything which has being is special, and should be treated with respect.

“In his aesthetic eco-philosophy and animation, he extends his sense of admiration and honor beyond the realm of human life and nonhuman life to the equal miracle of being itself: nonliving entities and objects, abstract processes and even the unknown and unknowable. In Miyazaki’s ‘animated’ nature, everything that is, is holy and is equally deserving of ethical treatment (‘civility’)” (Gossin 227-228).

Another way Miyazaki portrays animism is the worlds in which he sets his characters. The worlds the characters experience are real to them. The spiritual world is never portrayed as something irrational in Miyazaki’s films. *Princess Mononoke* is set in a time when angry or polluted spirits are as real of a threat as sickness. In *Totoro*, Mei’s decides that Totoro's stomach is a great place to sleep. In *Spirited Away*, Chihiro crosses over to the spirit world with her parents, and accepts that she is stuck there and works to free her parents. The spirit world is depicted as a real place which is possible for humans to access. However, Miyazaki usually follows this with the message that humans are not supposed to enter the spirit world. In *Spirited Away*, humans are usually eaten by the supernatural creatures. In *Princess Mononoke*, humans cause destruction when encountering spirits. *Totoro* is the only film that takes a more gentle approach to the interaction between humans and spirits, though it is made clear that only very few are able to see or access the spirits at will. From this we can conclude that Miyazaki draws inspiration from the animistic world view, but is more pessimistic to the human involvement in it. For this reason he encourages a sense of respect towards all beings in the belief that spirits may inhabit them.

Totoro came out in 1988, when Japan’s modernization was at its peak. The film is set in the 1950s, when Japanese farming villages still relied on human labor to cultivate the land. Historian, Andrew Gordon describes the 1950s in *A Modern History of Japan* (2003):

“Photographs of the 1950s resemble those of the 1930s more than the 1970s. People in the countryside wore sandals and kimono-style everyday clothing. Houses still had thatched roofs, roads were unpaved, and oxen plowed fields. Labor on farms was scarcely mechanized. A photograph of a young woman’s hands taken in 1963 could just as well have been taken from the early days of the century. Farmwork was arduous and literally left scars. Some exciting consumer innovations were spreading in cities and in the countryside. But until the late 1950s, these consumer goods were not

basically different from those of the 1920s and 1930s: electric lighting, radios, record players, and telephones” (Gordon 252).

Gordon’s description coincides with what we see in *Totoro*. The only mechanical elements we see in the film are cars, telephones, electric lighting, and radios. As the use of machines became more common in farming, agriculture became more efficient. At the same time the relationship with the land became more impersonal. In the film we can see how appreciative Satsuki and Mei are towards getting to eat Granny’s homegrown vegetables. *Totoro* strengthens the message of the value of nature by showing us the contrast to how we relate to nature today, and even how Japanese children related to nature in the 1980s. Miyazaki lets us notice how alienated we are from nature. The film also emphasizes the healing power of food grown without the use of chemical fertilizers, as it becomes an important plot point when Mei is set on delivering one of Granny’s corncocks to her mother. It elevates it to something more than just food, to a spiritual and physical healing power. In the film it is also emphasized how important Totoro is to the agriculture, as he can make plants and trees grow. We see this when Satsuki and Mei plant the seeds they have been given by Totoro, and he performs a ritual to make them grow. All this contributes to a message of respect for nature and the power it has to heal and sustain us. The humans in the village and the spirits are connected through the agriculture. Miyazaki emphasizes animistic values by emphasizing the mutual gain both humans and spirits can have through respect, and thus encourages a reconnection to spirituality and nature.

II. Phenomenology

Animism also comes into play with the countless shots of the quiet village landscape. The shots where Miyazaki lingers on the natural environment creates a message of a living, spiritual nature. Being introduced to the spirits of the village creates an expectation that spirits exist in all natural things. This makes every shot where human characters are not present loaded with a spiritual tension, and the potential for spirits to inhabit ‘dead’ things. Shots of shrines, the camphor tree, and a pond explore the potential for spirits living there. We can describe it as film phenomenology, as it emphasizes sensory experiences in scenes where *anima* in nature is present. Film phenomenology deals with the sensory experience the viewer experiences from film. Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Julian Hanich describe the different areas in which one can use film phenomenology:

“from a general description of the experience of film as such (...) to an investigation of very specific aspects that we experience when watching films. Think of the lived body experience of senses like touch (...) or smell (...), the spatial experience of video games (...), or depth in film (...), the temporal experience of documentary films (...), or slow cinema (...), the collective experience of the cinema auditorium (...) or the aesthetic experience of film worlds (...)” (Ferencz-Flatz et al., 2016, 3).

In *Totoro*, the phenomenology is related to passive scenes that showcase the natural environment and its potential spiritual connotations. The first time the viewer may experience this in the film is during the first night the family spends in the house. Satsuki runs out into the garden to gather some wood for heating the bath inside, when a strong gust of wind hits her and blows the wood out of her hands. Satsuki stops and looks anxiously at the trees around her. The animation pans slowly over the trees blowing briskly in the wind. The sky is dark, and the shot contrasts with the colorful images from when the family arrived. The sound of the wind is aggressive, testing whether the family is fit for living in the house, and signals that they are not welcome there. Satsuki hurries inside. The scene is chilling, and the viewer becomes anxious as the powerful wind continues into the next scene. This atmosphere is what I recognize as phenomenology in the film.

“[P]henomenology can direct its attention to imagination just as much as time, to perception just as much as space, to intersubjectivity just as much as the body, but also to atmospheres, to the act of reading, to emotions, and, of course, to film” (Ferencz-Flatz 4). In *Totoro*, it directs its attention to spirits, either through the visible symbols of spirits or by drawing attention to what we do not see. The wind is an example of the film's focalization on what we do not see. Edward Branigan describes focalization as:

"Focalization (reflection) involves a character neither speaking (narrating, reporting, communicating) nor acting (focusing, focused by), but rather actually experiencing something through seeing or hearing it. Focalization also extends to more complex experiencing of objects: thinking, remembering, interpreting, wondering, fearing, believing, desiring, understanding, feeling guilt" (Branigan 1992, 101).

When Satsuki goes out to collect wood, we see her stop and look up towards the forest when the branches are "taken" from her. This first part represents the external focalization in the scene, where we follow the character, but do not learn something about their inner state. The shot is followed by the pan over the forest, which represents the internal focalization of the scene. As the shot of Satsuki looking towards the forest is followed by the pan, it seems to represent Satsuki's

perspective. An internal focalization is characterized by following a character's positioning. We follow her reaction to the strong wind — one of fear. *Totoro* is mainly comprised of static shots, where the action comes from the characters. However, the forest shot is one of the few "moving" shots from Satsuki's perspective. This movement emphasizes that Satsuki notices the strong wind as something abnormal and ominous. Together with the darkness of the scene, and potentially our knowledge of trees as potential objects for spirits to reside through animism, the scene creates a spiritual tension. We do not know whether it is a spirit with good or bad intentions. However, the scene creates an atmosphere of spirituality. Phenomenology is especially useful for analyzing spirituality in film because, as in this scene, the spirit is invisible. This does not mean we omit the visual side completely. On the contrary, it is through the camera movement, through the darkness of the scene, and through seeing Satsuki's reaction that we learn of the abnormality of the scene. However, it is the atmospheric sense that creates this spiritual phenomenology. More than the atmosphere of the action, it is the viewer's emotional atmosphere as a response to Satsuki's reaction to the wind that creates the phenomenology. Later, when the family sits in the bath, the wind rattles the shutters of the house. When it dies down, an ominous howling follows. The father suddenly starts laughing, and explains that ghosts go away when they hear laughter. Satsuki joins in, and eventually Mei too. A shot of the *makurokurosuke* floating out of the house and up towards the big camphor tree may suggest that the spirit of the tree has decided that the family is welcome to stay thanks to their light-hearted spirit. As explained previously, Miyazaki is not interested in contrasting good versus evil, but instead explores how good and evil exists in all beings. The same goes for the depiction of spirituality in *Totoro*. Sometimes it is aggressive, eerie or haunting, and other times it is friendly and helpful like Totoro.

Another example of phenomenology in *Totoro* is the rain. The sound of rain is closely linked to the spiritual elements we see in the film. In addition, the atmosphere changes drastically with the rain. Satsuki's first meeting with Totoro happens during the rainfall. The rain first appears when Satsuki and Mei are walking home from school, and it suddenly starts pouring. The girls seek shelter under a roofed temple by the road. Satsuki respectfully asks the Jizo Bodhisattva for protection from the rain, and the film shows the girls waiting for the rain to stop for a long time. The scene is quiet, except for the rain, but it is not boring or unnecessary. Instead, it is loaded with spiritual energy. With the rain the film becomes darker, and takes on a blue and gray color. The music disappears for a while, and the people also disappear except for the main characters. The atmosphere becomes suspenseful, which is strengthened by the shots of the forest and rice fields. It contrasts with the

previous scene of the lively school yard. The same happens when the girls later go to the bus stop where they will meet their dad. The rain has not let up, and as the girls wait at the bus stop, the mood is strange and eerie before Totoro shows up. This is shown as Mei walks up to the *Inari* shrine and after watching it closely, runs back to Satsuki and hugs her tightly. Mei is scared by the strange atmosphere the shrine gives off. The fox *kami* are also known to be tricksters in Shinto. It is also believed that their spirits can possess people. "The most significant superstitious phenomena in present day Japan are probably the idea of possession by the spirits of foxes or dogs (*kitsunetsuki* or *inu-gami-tsuki*) and related taboos as well as tragic social alienation of the possessed person and his family members" (Hori 45). However, it is unlikely that Mei, being of such a young age, would be aware of this folk religious belief (more on folk religion and superstitions in the next chapter). Here, Miyazaki also makes use of internal focalization as the camera cuts from Mei, to the *Inari*, and back to Mei when we see her running to Satsuki. The shot is still, except for a rain drop that drips from the shrine. In addition, the sound of the rain drop echoes and is louder than the rest of the soundscape. Miyazaki emphasizes the abnormality through the sound because in reality a single drop would not be as distinguished. In addition, the bus stop seems to be located in the liminal space between the human world through the bus stop — the point of connection to the outside world for the village — and the spirit world with Totoro and the cat-bus appearing there. The *inari* shrine also marks it as a spiritual place. This contributes to the spiritual phenomenology and the possibility of spirits appearing there.

The darkness of this scene also adds to the eerie atmosphere. In both of these scenes, Satsuki and Mei are waiting for something — either for their father or for the rain to stop. The passivity of these scenes also makes us expect that something spiritual or out of the ordinary might happen. One reason the viewer may expect this is because the bus stop is located in front of the *Inari* shrine. The bus stop is also fittingly named “*Inari Mae*” 稲荷前, or “in front of *Inari*”. The spiritual connection of the place makes the viewer expect that spirits may appear there, and so it does in the form of Totoro.

Chapter Four: Folk Religion and Auteur Theory

In this chapter we will examine *Totoro* in relation to Japanese folk religion. Japanese folk religion is a myriad of different belief systems that have changed with different streams of influence over the years, and still affects Japanese spirituality today. Ichiro Hiro was a professor of the history of religions at the University of Tokyo. In *Folk Religion in Japan*, he describes his research on folk religion in villages in 1947 (Hori 59). This age is close to the setting of *Totoro*, which makes it interesting to examine how Miyazaki has drawn inspiration from folk religions in his film. The village depicted in *Totoro* also makes for a prominent place where folk religious traditions may be practiced. What kind of belief systems from folk religions can we find in *Totoro*? In the second part of the chapter, I will also discuss how auteur theory is related to how Miyazaki portrays folk religion in *Totoro*.

I. Folk Religious Beliefs and Villages

Folk religion, as Hori describes it, is based on two traditions or belief systems: “a little tradition, which is based on blood or close community ties; and a great tradition, introduced from without, which is adopted by individual or group choice” (49). The little tradition refers to native beliefs shaped by the geography and culture of Japan, such as Shinto. The great tradition refers to outside influences, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. We can see the influence of the great tradition in *Totoro* — especially the influence of Buddhism — by Granny’s prayer after finding a sandal in the dam, where she believes Mei has drowned. The prayer is typical of the Pure Land school of Buddhism, as we can hear her recite “Nanmandabu, nanmandabu” — or “Namu Amida Butsu”, praying for Amida Buddha to save Mei. The film depicts several symbols from both the little tradition and the great tradition. The *Inari* shrine by the bus stop is Shinto, while the Jizo statue Satsuki prays to for shelter from the rain is from Buddhism. These symbols are a part of Japan’s complex religious history, and not something distinctive to Miyazaki’s films. Spirituality is important for the story of the film, but the combination of religious symbols would be natural to see in a rural village in Japan in the 1950s.

The village depicted in *Totoro* relies on agriculture. In the beginning of the film, the family stops by a rice field to introduce themselves. Both young and old villagers contribute to the farming. Hori describes two different belief systems in the agrarian society we see in *Totoro*. The first is called the

uji-gami type, where a particular family or clan are dedicated to the worship of an ancestral spirit (30). The second is the *hito-gami* type, which is based on the relationship between an individual *kami* and a religious specialist, such as a shaman or medicine man (31). The belief system we see in *Totoro* is more reminiscent of the *hito-gami* type. This is not only because Miyazaki portrays Totoro as a *kami*, but also because Totoro is portrayed as forest spirit rather than an ancestral spirit. However, there is no clear shamanistic figure in the film. The closest we come to a religious specialist is Granny as she describes seeing spirits when she was younger. If we determine that she is a shaman, then this must also apply to both Satsuki and Mei. However, they relate to Totoro not as media, but as friends. The title of the film also suggests this: *Tonari no totoro*, or *Our Neighbor Totoro*. Totoro happens to be their neighbor, and they interact with him from time to time. One way we can connect the village to the *uji-gami* type is through the agriculture and its close connection to nature. Hori states:

“[T]he discovery of the seed as the source of the continuity of plant life strengthened the consciousness of tradition and increased the importance of the ancestor in human life. Furthermore, immobility and deterministic control of both plants and farmers by nature seem to have led to the consciousness of solidarity of destiny between plants and human beings” (20).

Hori connects the worship of ancestors to the importance of tradition in agriculture. The film uses traits from both types, in addition to portraying the influence of other religions. From Granny’s prayer to Amida Buddha it is clear that her beliefs are centered around Buddhism. However, Satsuki and Mei’s father, having moved from another city or village, seems to keep a more scientific approach to religion (as described in chapter one) in that he explains what the girls comment on through logic. He shows respect towards the camphor tree or the forest spirit by bowing to it, but we do not learn more about his beliefs. As he clearly shows some kind of acknowledgement towards the forest spirit, he seems to adhere to some kind of spiritual belief.

Miyazaki depicts folk religious beliefs as a natural part of life in the countryside. His approach to spirituality may be connected to an acceptance of all beliefs, as Hori describes:

“It has been a long time since one religion called another superstition or heresy. Among the various fragmental beliefs, there might exist the cultural experience or *Volkskunde* accumulated within the long history of the common people. Therefore, common beliefs or even superstitions must not be treated as non-scientific or irrational” (45).

Hori also explains that this is because of the emotional associations that people have to spirituality or superstitions, which go beyond rationality (45). Because spirituality is so rooted in Japanese culture and history, the use of spiritual themes in Miyazaki's films is not depicted as something “exotic” or irrational. Mei encounters the two spirits collecting acorns in her garden. Instead of getting shocked or scared by creatures she has never seen before walking around with a sack of acorns on their backs, Mei becomes curious and chases down the spirits as if she wants to play with them. Mei becomes curious and decides to follow, but she is not shocked or scared that creatures she has never seen before are walking around with a sack of acorns on their back. Hori also explains that this is because of the emotional associations that people have to spirituality or superstitions, which go beyond rationality (45). Perhaps more importantly, spirituality is beneficial for emotional consolation.

In other scenes, too, spirituality is demonstrated to be a source of emotional consolation as claimed by Hori (x). A direct example of this in the film is when Granny prays as she sits by the dam, holding the sandal between her hands. Another is the consolation sought from Jizo Bodhisattva. “Jizo, popular bodhisattva among the Japanese since the tenth century, is believed to be a savior of spirits of the dead, who otherwise would be suffering tortures in hell, as well as a guardian deity of children” (Hori 208). In other words, Jizo helps existences in a liminal position so in folk religious practices statues of Jizo are often placed along the road and street corners (kado jizou 角地藏) and the limits of a village for the protection of the wayfarer or the people within the borders. In the film statues of Jizo are included three times: on the road to Shichikokuyama Hospital, on the road between the school and home of Satsuki, and a group of six Jizo, rokujizou 六地藏. It is by this last group that Mei sits when she has lost her way and is found by the cat-bus at the end of the film. Even though this moment is the climax of the film, the scene is calm when the cat-bus with Satsuki finds Mei. Japanese audiences may feel reassured by seeing Mei with the Jizo statues. Although non-Japanese audiences will be unaware of the meaning of the statues behind her, the scene is still joyful because we are relieved to see Mei is alright and reunited with her sister, but will be unaware of the meaning of the statues behind her. There can be little doubt that Miyazaki here used the folk religious association of Jizo bodhisattva being the protector of children. Like Jizo, Totoro is also portrayed as a children's guardian. When Satsuki and Mei wait at the bus stop in the dark, Totoro appears. Typically, children would be afraid of the dark, but when Totoro appears the scene

becomes active again, and the music returns so we understand they feel safe again. Shortly after Totoro has left with the umbrella in the cat-bus, their father arrives at the bus stop. Totoro kept them company (and presumably kept them safe) until the bus arrived. Thus, Jizo and Totoro are portrayed as protectors in the film. This contributes to the film's light-hearted atmosphere, and they are both examples of emotional consolation.

Hori also describes the concept of *dozoku*. “*Dozoku* is the smallest family unit in contemporary rural Japan and is, so far as we know, the smallest unit in which collective beliefs lie” (52). In the past, a Japanese village of one or more families, *honke* 本家, each of which often had several branch families, *bunke* 分家. We can see the remnants of this social structure in *Totoro*. When Satsuki gets a letter from the hospital and has to call her father, Granny sends her off to the granny's elder sister's place, the only family that owns a telephone. The village in *Totoro* is agrarian, and the film does not emphasize social differences between families. However, the telephone scene tells us that in those days, telephones must have been expensive, as few households own one.¹ It is not made clear whether this family is the main family in the village, but their wealth may demonstrate this. Hori states: “The relationship between the main family and the branch families in the Saito *dozoku* group is reflected in mutual aid in daily life” (55). We are introduced to Satsuki and Mei's family as migrants to the village. They are treated as a part of the village from the moment they arrive. The mutual aid from the village becomes clear when the villagers immediately start to look for Mei when she is missing, and start searching through the dam when they find the sandal. Even the character of Granny, who is not related to Satsuki and Mei, quickly becomes part of the family in the absence of Satsuki and Mei's mother. We also see this cooperation when Granny helps the family clean and get their house in order. However, this may be due to Granny's family owning the

¹日本の家庭における固定電話の普及率は、1955（昭和30）年の段階でわずか1％。1972（昭和47）年の段階でも30％でしかなかったといます。それでも、この年は業務用の電話加入数を家庭用の電話加入数が追いついた年。その後、家庭用の固定電話加入数はそれまでにない勢いで伸びていきます。また、業務用の固定電話の加入数も、家庭用ほどでないものの伸びていきます。In 1955 about 1 percent of the Japanese households had a telephone and in 1972, still only about 30 percent.

そして、だれの家にも固定電話が置かれるようになったのは1980年代に入ってからでした。電電公社がNTTになった1985年より前の電話加入権は8万円。1985年から7万2000円。人びとは高いお金を払って、固定電話を家に置いたのです。Before 1985, a telephone cost 80000 yen, after 1985 the price was lowered to 72000 yen. [I haven't found the price for 1955] (<http://sci-tech.jugem.jp/?eid=3068>) You can find an income index here: <http://sirakawa.b.la9.jp/Coin/J077.htm#E03>

land or house they move into. Granny mentions how she would have cleaned more if she knew the family was coming so soon.

Mutuality is also common when it comes to festivals for local deities (Ellwood, 2007, 38). It is likely that the villagers share many of the same beliefs — focused on ancestor worship and fertility (cf. Hori). As mentioned in chapter two, the camphor tree functions as a spiritual power spot in the village, Shinto traditions and beliefs developed around it, as seen by the material culture at its foot point. Hori explains how this may have happened. “Ancestor worship (...) gradually deteriorated with the rise of the tutelary *kami* or deities of these *dozoku* which attained social prominence, and these newly emergent *kami* ultimately became the ordinary village *kami* (*mura-uji-gami*) of today” (57). This may explain why we do not see much of ancestral worship in *Totoro*, but instead why Miyazaki depicts Totoro as a *kami*. Another explanation of the absence of ancestor worship would be that Satsuki and Mei's father is the younger son in his family, whereas Satsuki and Mei belong to a branch family (*bunke*). In this case, the ancestor altar (*but sudan*) would be in the main family (*honke*). However, young children are probably more interested in the giant fluffy Totoro compared to ancestors. As Hori describes it, Totoro could have been a village *kami*. The village *kami* is believed to protect the village and bring a good harvest (68). However, as Satsuki and Mei for the most part encounter him near the forest, we can also regard him as the forest *kami*. The girls' father calls him the lord of the forest, which attests to this. The film clearly shows that Totoro values both the forest and the village, as he makes it his home. The village does not seem to know of Totoro, other than that there is indeed a *kami* in the tree. For this reason, Totoro is likely a forest *kami*.

The belief in the village as the ‘inside’ and the unknown world around it as the ‘outside’ developed in agrarian societies. Hori explains how agrarian communities found similarities between human beings and plants (36). He continues: “A form of hospitality peculiar to agrarian peoples has emerged from this fundamental religious view, so that supernatural powers must usually come to the people from the outside, because the latter, like plants, are immobile, having settled permanently in a specific area” (36). Miyazaki portrays this in the film when we see the *Inari* shrine on the border of the village and the forest. This may be another reason why Mei is wary of the *Inari* shrine, but accepting of Totoro. If supernatural beings were believed to come from the outside of the village, lingering on the borders may prove to be dangerous. Other supernatural creatures that are referred to in *Totoro* are ghosts. “There are also some beliefs or rituals connected with legends and the beliefs

in ghosts and goblins, some of which seem to have survived as transformed myths, fairy tales, or folk legends” (44). The girls are highly influenced by myths and fairytales, which is clear when the first thought of their house is "ghost house". Practices from folk religion were not only used for emotional consolation, but also to tame or appease angry spirits and supernatural creatures. Shrines, statues, and temples were built for the purpose of worshipping different spirits and gods in exchange for protection.

II. Auteur Theory

Auteur theory became part of film discourse with the French New Wave, where directors such as André Bazin were seen as the artists behind a film, as opposed to script writers or producers. A tradition emphasizing the director's style and interpretation of the source material blossomed (Hayward, 2000, 17). What makes it interesting to examine auteur theory in relation to Miyazaki is how involved he is in his productions. Bartholow and Moist describe Miyazaki's approach to his work: “Miyazaki is a legendarily detail-oriented hands-on filmmaker. He writes and directs all his films, mostly from his own original concepts that draw on a diverse range of sources (...), and also oversees his films' animation” (Bartholow & Moist 30). In the case of animation, usually the artists and directors are hidden under the brand of big studios, like Disney or Toho. Miyazaki has however managed to make a name for himself, not only in Japan, but throughout the world due to the international success of *Spirited Away*. “Discussions of film authorship have seen diverse filmic aspects as significant in expressing the authorial presence, including visual style and techniques, narrative elements, and thematics” (Bartholow & Moist 31). We can determine that Miyazaki uses a variety of elements to create his authorial presence within his films. Here, I will focus on one specific element of his authorship which links to spirituality and the parts of folk religion discussed in this chapter — nostalgia. The reason for examining Miyazaki as an auteur is not to put him on a pedestal or to make comparisons to other directors. Rather, it is to understand how his affinity for spirituality permeates most of his films. From the recurring themes in his films we can begin to understand the importance of Japan's religious beliefs and traditions to the director. Miyazaki uses spirituality to create a wondrous world where anything is possible, but he also represents this world as something of the past, of nostalgia.

Until now we have explored some of the ways nostalgia is portrayed in *Totoro*; reconnection to nature, character values, and the belief that spirits exist in all things. The way nostalgia appears in

regards to folk religion is through his depiction of the village in the film. As previously mentioned, the folk religious villages of the 1950s disappeared with the modernization of Japan, and they had changed drastically by the time *Totoro* was released in 1988. Miyazaki grew up in Japan in the 1940s and 1950s. He would have witnessed the rapid modernization of Japan firsthand as technology and apartment buildings gradually caught up to the countryside. Agrarian villages needed fewer workers in the fields, and the belief in the healing power of homegrown vegetables was replaced with the use of chemical fertilizers. As explained earlier, agriculture and spirituality were intimately related in folk religion:

“In both wheat culture and rice culture, the staple farm products are regarded as sacred in themselves or as the gift of a superhuman being. Therefore, farm work is also regarded as a sacred action or rite and not merely productive labor. At the end of each agricultural task, various magico-religious rituals are performed in order to ensure the favorable course of the ripening of wheat or rice plants” (Hori 21).

Japan's relationship to spirituality changed with modernization. It is clear through several of Miyazaki's films that the modernization made a big impression on the director. Both *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) explore the negative consequences of human made machines and technology for wildlife and the world order. In addition to a nostalgia for nature and the preservation of the environment, Miyazaki also connects nostalgia with spirituality. He values preservation of nature in the event that spirits of any kind may rest there. He explores the different angles of the village and its spiritual landmarks to not only show the layout of the village, but to show that the entire village is in unity with spirituality. The Jizo statues and torii gates connects the different locations of the village. The Jizo statue protects the children on the way home from school, and the torii gate marks the entrance to the camphor tree. Whether it is Shinto, Buddhist, or their mixture into folk religious spirituality, the world depicted in *Totoro* lives in harmony with spirits. In addition, Miyazaki portrays spirituality as a natural part of villages of 1950s Japan. The relationship to spirituality set the social structure and traditions of a community. In his films, Miyazaki portrays this unity of religious beliefs. He portrays the spiritual world as real because it was real for the people of that age, and still is to many. Whether it is through emotional consolation or protection from angry spirits, spirituality has a place. Miyazaki creates a spiritual nostalgia in his audience as he portrays folk religion as deep rooted in villages in the 1950s. And it

becomes an ecological nostalgia when connecting the spirit-filled Japanese villages of the 1950s with pure water, sun energy fixated in healthy vegetables, and the sense of solidarity.

In particular, Miyazaki seems to portray nostalgia around *furusato*, or a person's hometown.

"The *kokoro no furusato* theme, as used by such writers as Kino Kazuyoshi and as it resonates in the common parlance, suggests the idealized peace and harmony of a traditional village, with thatched-roofed houses and bright green ricefields nestled around ancient shrine and temple. This is a place of family intimacy, traditional virtues, and the regular annual cycle of seedtime and harvest, marked by established festivals and folklore" (Ellwood 360-361).

The urbanization in the 1980s evoked nostalgia towards people's 'homeland of the heart' (Ellwood 361). Life in the city was disconnected and impersonal compared to the social connection and collaboration in the villages. Even though few of the urbanites actually wanted to live in a traditional village, the sentiment was there, and Miyazaki brought this into many of his films as a recurring theme (361). *Spirited Away* shows Chihiro's difficulty when moving from her hometown to a new place. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* depicts Nausicaä's struggles when trying to save her village from being destroyed by the Sea of Destruction. *Totoro* represents the ideal of the *furusato*, the connection and openness of the village. The utopian image depicted of the village in *Totoro* is strengthened by the same folk religious values of mutual aid and community. Here Miyazaki connects folk religious spirituality to the sentiment of *furusato*. The village is depicted as the ideal place for its healing power. Miyazaki portrays it as healing for their sick mother, but it also indirectly represents the healing of Japanese urbanites. Similarly to how power spots functioned as a place to heal (as discussed in chapter one), the *furusato* became a place of longing and reconnection to family, friends, and community, and the healing of the heart.

Another reason why Miyazaki has been referred to as a Japanese auteur is through his unconventional narrative style. Miyazaki dissociates from the classic Hollywood-style of film making, and uses a slower pacing in his films, especially in *Totoro*. In *Totoro*, this works well to emphasize the tranquility and peace of life in the village. It also makes it possible for Miyazaki to explore spirituality in the moments of passivity. Even though there is not much action visually, the scene is still active through the tense atmosphere. Here, the audience is processing what the film language is telling us through color, sound, music, cutting, pacing, and characters. We have also

seen how Miyazaki deviates from the characters to focus on the natural environment. This also attests to his authorship, and is recurring in many of his films. One reason he does this is to emphasize that spirituality lies in nature and our surroundings. For this reason, the depiction of village life and his unconventional pacing are only a few aspects of Miyazaki's authorship. They are also important for establishing spiritual themes in his films.

Conclusion

In this thesis we have combined four different areas of religion and film theory. The first, ecology and setting, examined how Miyazaki portrays ecology in *Totoro* through power spots, the village, the detail in the animation of the environment, and the film's potential environmental education. It also explored how important the setting in a rural village is to create a sense of spirituality. This is done through representing nature's healing power and depicting the camphor tree as a character. In addition, the film emphasizes the value of living in harmony with nature, as opposed to the western perception of a 'wild' and 'strange' nature. The camphor tree is especially important for the ecology and setting of the film. It functions as a center point, where the plot revolves around it. Even though Totoro is the embodiment of spirituality and an active figure, the tree also represents an important role through passivity with a spiritual omnipresence in the film. As environmentalism becomes a bigger issue, these values become more well-known to the western world as well. The western way of seeing nature as 'other', 'wild', or 'strange' may be what prohibits us from changing the negative course the world is heading in. Perhaps the western world needs a change in their core beliefs around nature, where the two sides can live harmoniously together, like how Satsuki and Mei live in harmony with their neighbor Totoro. "To see nature more purely, we humans must unlearn some of our attitudes and beliefs, including our tendency to polarize 'nature versus culture' and valorize culture as somehow superior to it" (Gossin 223). At least values from Shinto can be an introduction to such a solution.

Chapter two explores the importance of Shinto in Japanese spirituality by analyzing the main characters in *Totoro* through the concepts, *kami* and *kokoro*. Shinto is an important part of how Miyazaki represents spirituality in his films, but rather than just examining symbols such as the *Shimenawa rope* or the *torii* gates, the more interesting question would be how Shinto elements and values are depicted in the characters. For those in the know, the connection with the *Shimenawa rope* around the tree, and Mei later falling into the tree and finding Totoro there, would suggest that Totoro is a *kami*. Even though Totoro's appearance is perhaps not what one would expect a *kami* to look like, his actions are a stronger indication of his role as a *kami*. He values fertility, and can make seeds sprout and plants grow. He answers to prayers of those with a strong *kokoro*. The film portrays similar values as Shinto, but does not promote or use it in a didactic way. With Mei's naming of Totoro, it relates him to something from a fairytale. His fluffy appearance also draws away from any Shinto associations, and appeals more to children. The second part of chapter two,

kokoro, focuses on the two girls, especially Satsuki. Through *kokoro*, Miyazaki uses Shinto to portray admirable values for young children. The most important thing in regards to Shinto and character, is how Miyazaki does not focus on Shinto practices, but rather Shinto values. Even without knowledge of the concept of *kokoro*, we can still link the ability to see the spirits to age, which is made clear through the dialogue, but also through state of mind. Miyazaki makes a point to show how differently the girls react to the world around them compared to adults. However, the film also portrays how the transition into the adult world with more responsibility may have an effect on our spiritual connection. *Totoro* shows us that knowledge of Shinto is not necessary to notice the spiritual connection to character values.

The third chapter, animism and film phenomenology, examined the film to find out how our experience of spirituality can be constructed. Arguing for a spiritual film phenomenology, the chapter uses animism as an entry point into creating a spiritual tension in the film. Miyazaki uses animism for a suspension of disbelief in his films. His characters believe the spiritual world they are in is real, and Miyazaki depicts it as such. In addition, the spirits in Miyazaki's films are complex characters. Sometimes they bring conflict, and sometimes they bring the solution. They have deep motivations and desires, just like any of Miyazaki's human characters. In this chapter I argued that animism, the belief that spirits can inhabit things, is shown through the film phenomenology. The area of film phenomenology I explored is the atmosphere. Miyazaki is not afraid to explore the potential for spirits to appear at any moment. In the beginning of the film, the spiritual atmosphere is tense and and ominous when Satsuki goes outside to collect wood. The internal focalization of the pan over the forest contributes to this. It shows what Satsuki is reacting to — the unusually strong wind — and portrays her anxiety around it. The passivity of these scenes make us expect something out of the ordinary to happen. In addition, the rain scenes in the film are passive, and create the same atmosphere. Shots of the natural environment contribute to this suspense, as we expect the spirits to inhabit and control nature. In addition, Miyazaki uses the Japanese interpretation of the fox kami as a trickster or to possess to intensify the suspense.

The final chapter analyzed the film in relation to Japanese folk religion. Miyazaki is heavily inspired by customs of old folk religious villages, and the commingling of beliefs that developed over time. The director features several religions through symbolism, but also through how people act. The village's mutual aid and contribution is one of these elements. The reason for depicting the various folk religious beliefs coincides with his thorough depiction of the Japanese countryside, as

the myriad of beliefs was a part of it. Miyazaki portrays folk religious beliefs, not because he favors one over the other, but because of his acceptance for all beliefs. *Totoro* shows that spirituality does not need to mean choosing one over the other, but to use it for one's own benefit, whether that is emotional consolation or appeasing angry spirits. Miyazaki also makes use of the Japanese sentiment of *furusato*, the 'homeland of the heart', when depicting the village in *Totoro*. The nostalgia Miyazaki creates through the film is closely linked to the spirituality of rural villages, as it represents the home of many Japanese and a completely different culture than that of the city. Chapter four also explores Miyazaki and auteur theory in relation to nostalgia. Throughout his work Miyazaki portrays his character's connection to places, especially to villages, as either the ideal place to grow up or heal, or as the source of conflict when people claim villages as their own. Another reason why Miyazaki has been referred to as a Japanese auteur is through his unconventional narrative style. Miyazaki dissociates from the classic Hollywood-style of film making, and uses a slower pacing in his films, especially in *Totoro*. By deviating from the main characters, and focusing on natural elements like trees, rivers, lakes, etc., Miyazaki emphasizes the potential for spirits to appear. He separates himself from the expected narrative structure, which creates a tension in the audience due to the unpredictability of the storyline. All these elements in the film language contribute to the spirituality of the film, but it is only some aspects of what makes Miyazaki an auteur.

In the beginning of this thesis I asked; how does Miyazaki represent spirituality through the film language? Even though spirituality is not as prominent in *Totoro* as many of Miyazaki's other works, the film still contains an abundance of elements and techniques that portray spirituality. Most of them are related to Japanese spirituality and religions. I believe it is due to the variety of religious beliefs in Japan that make it possible for Miyazaki to portray spirituality so extensively in his films. Throughout the chapters, a recurring element that contributes to Miyazaki's representation of spirituality is the value of spirituality. Even though Miyazaki makes use of both Shinto, Buddhist, and folk religious elements in *Totoro*, he puts more emphasis on what each religion represents and the values the audience can take from them. As seen in chapter one, Miyazaki portrays the value of the natural environment through the aesthetics of the setting in *Totoro*. He also takes values from Shinto, such as *kokoro* and purity, to give a new perspective on how we can get in touch with spirituality, but also with ourselves. By representing the values of animism — of respecting all living things — he portrays a morality in his characters, and relays it to the audience. And finally, by showing the value of cooperation and mutual aid in the village, and portraying nostalgia around

furusato, Miyazaki shows us that deep connection and fulfillment is found through a simpler life in rural villages. Miyazaki is able to convey these values to a younger audience, but also to an adult audience. Even though animated films are seen as only being for children, Miyazaki has shown us that his films convey much more than a simple story. There are layers for all audiences to explore, and especially in regards to audiences from different countries and cultures. They will all interpret the spirituality in the film differently.

How does spirituality translate through the screen to the audience? To most non-Japanese audiences, the specifics of Japanese religion is still unknown. When I first started writing this thesis, I was a part of that group. Still, one does not need to know everything about a religion in order to notice spirituality. The spiritual atmosphere of *Totoro* is what drew me to write this thesis, even before I learned about Japanese religions. Especially through the power of film, the sense of spirituality is able to be conveyed in many different ways. Even if the viewer is unaware of Jizo Bodhisattva and Miyazaki's intended meaning behind showing the statues, the director still manages to convey the message that Mei is protected and safe. Even if the audience does not know what a *kami* is, they are still able to recognize Totoro as some kind of spirit, and understand his affinity for nature. From the English dub of *Totoro*, we have seen that the western perception of spirituality is represented differently from the Japanese. The western perception of spirituality as 'wild' or 'other' is still common, which shows the importance of Miyazaki's entrance into the international market, and also the importance of his role as an auteur. The Japanese spirituality is important today, especially with its emphasis on preservation, mutuality, and respect. Miyazaki's intended message with *Totoro* as opposition to modernization is different from how we can interpret it today, with global warming. It is important to understand the differences in the setting of *Totoro*, the time it was released, and the time in which I am analyzing it now. Miyazaki from the 1980s most likely wanted to depict the film as the nostalgic return to the ideal of the 1950s, pre-modernization. In the 1980s the pollution of the modernization was probably one of the biggest concerns for Japanese at the time. Today, most audiences will most likely see it as a voice for the environment against climate change. In this regard, not much has changed. We still value a simpler life, and feel a disconnection to nature. Spirituality is one of the ways we can regain this connection.

Miyazaki is able to portray a cohesive understanding through the way he uses the film language. That is why the combination of religion and film theory is useful here. We have examined how Miyazaki uses the detailed animation of the nature to emphasize its value. The camphor tree also

represents a central element for both the value of nature and the tree's spiritual value. He is not afraid to step outside classic Hollywood standard boundaries to explore a different pacing in *Totoro*. In scenes of passivity, Miyazaki builds the tension by fading the music, darkening the colors, and removing people from the frame. I believe Miyazaki's efficacy in portraying spirituality lies heavily in the way he uses the film language. Miyazaki's films make it possible to theorize spirituality in film as a form of art. Miyazaki uses spirituality for the sake of storytelling, and not to promote a specific religion. This makes it possible to use film theory to explain how Miyazaki uses film techniques to convey a spiritual atmosphere and how it drives the story. Phenomenology is especially useful for analyzing spirituality. For further research in the future, I would be interested to see if it would be possible to develop a spiritual phenomenology. As this thesis has been mainly focused around one film, the spiritual scope for analysis is limited. Examining how Miyazaki represents spirituality in films like *Princess Mononoke* or *Spirited Away* allows for a different interpretation of spirituality, even though Miyazaki uses many of the same elements in his work. In addition, other works from Japan's anime culture explore different kinds of interpretations of spirituality, dealing with for instance Buddhism and rebirth. Research comparing other interpretations of spirituality in anime to Miyazaki would also help widen the scope of the different belief systems and religions of Japan. In this thesis I have only covered a few forms of spirituality that Japan has to offer, but especially in regards to Buddhism, there is still much to be explored. Another way to further research this topic would be to also examine films from other countries that also portray spirituality. Through this thesis we have seen the complexity of Japanese spirituality, and my analysis of *Totoro* only covers a small portion of it. I believe Japan's history and religious traditions allowed for Miyazaki to cover a variety of spiritual aspects in *Totoro*, but that Miyazaki is able to create his own message of the value of spirituality through how he represents it in the film. However, it would also be interesting to see similar research on films made by directors from perhaps all countries, but especially in countries with a complex religious and spiritual history. There is still a plethora of aspects to be explored in regards to spirituality and film.

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