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Finding Miyazaki

Bachelor's thesis in Filmvitenskap

Supervisor: Sven Østgaard

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1. Introduction

The discussion of the legitimacy of the auteur theory and who can be considered an auteur has been broadly discussed for several years. An auteur is often categorized as a director who leaves a clear personal impact on the films they direct (Grant, 2008, p. 1-2) (Sarris, 1962, p. 43) (Staiger, 2003, p. 37-38, 43-44). In later years the collaborative nature of film and TV production has been brought into the discussion. Bringing up the question of whether others in the production can be considered auteurs as well (Banks, 2014, p. 117) (Batty, 2014, p. 11).

This assignment will discuss whether the Japanese animation director, Hayao Miyazaki, can be considered an auteur and if his childhood experiences have influenced his movies. This report will give an overview of Miyazaki's childhood. Then move on to argue how his childhood experiences help qualify Miyazaki as an auteur, through focusing on his filmography.

The report will also reflect how living in Japan might have affected his films, specifically from an environmental standpoint as living in a geographical place that is known for natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis might have impacted the depiction of natural disasters in his films. (Banks, 2014, p. 121).

2. What is an auteur?

The terms for being qualified as an auteur have always been vague, leading to differing methods for qualifying them. In early auteur theory, an auteur was a director who had full creative control over the production of his project, giving him the credit for being the driving force behind the success of a film. In later years this view of the auteur has changed, people realized film production was a collaborative effort. There are many people in the production of a film who might have a creative impact on the final product. Such as the writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors (Banks, 2014, p. 117) (Batty, 2014, p. 11) (Wollen, 1969, p. 55-56, 63-64) (Caston, 2015, p. 151-152, 157) (Staiger, 2003, p. 27-28, 42) (Anania, 2021, Para 7, p. 18, 28-29).

Miyazaki could fit right into the early auteur theory. He usually has full creative control over his films. Miyazaki writes and animates major parts of his films himself. Every single storyboard is usually drawn by him, and he is very particular about how things will look in the final edit. He even has some power over the marketing of his films. One famous incident was during the marketing of his film Totoro. The original poster claimed that “This kind of strange creature doesn’t live in Japan anymore” but Miyazaki demanded that they changed it to “This kind of strange creature is still living in Japan” because he insisted that Totoro was real (Napier, 2018, p. 132) (Banks, 2014, p. 125) (Caughie, 1981, p. 22-23) (Grant, 2008, p. 1-2) (Sarris, 1962, p. 43) (Staiger, 2003, p. 37-38, 43-44). This indicates that Miyazaki takes certain ownership and pride in the world he has created (Anania, 2021, para 17). Miyazaki is clearly an above-the-line worker that has more creative power than any of his below-the-line workers. He is in the foreground in the public eye and behind the scenes (Banks, 2014, p. 123).

Miyazaki is known for leaving a big impact on the films that he directs through his full creative control. At his animation company, Studio Ghibli, the director has the most creative control over their projects. A good example of this is the film “Whisper of the Heart”. This is the only film Miyazaki wrote but didn’t direct. It is directed by Yoshifumi Kondo. Some of Miyazaki’s character tropes can be found here, but most of them are not present in this movie. It demonstrates that Miyazaki has a bigger impact as a director than a writer, but even as a writer some of his tropes were snuck into the final product, proving that the writer of a film can influence the final product. At Studio Ghibli the director has the bigger impact on a film

than the writer, as Kondo left a significantly bigger impact on the film than Miyazaki (Staiger, 2003, p. 35, 43-45) (Batty, 2014, p. 11) (Grant, 2008, p. 1-2).

Not all directors qualify as an auteur. For a director to qualify it is important that they have a clear creative impact on the movies they direct. To be able to understand if a director has a profound impact on their films, we will have to look at their filmography and see if there are certain elements in their films that recur. A debate when it comes to the classification of auteurs has always been whether we should look at the recurring themes and meanings in a director's work, or if we should look at the film's stylistic choices. These two ways of looking at auteur theory do not necessarily have to be separate. A lot of directors can have both recurring themes and visuals. I believe Miyazaki mainly focuses on having recurring themes in his films, but even he has repeating visual motifs in his films (Caughie, 1981, p. 23-25) (Wollen, 1969, p. 56-57, 60-63) (Grant, 2008, p. 1-2, 5) (Sarris, 1962, p. 43) (Staiger, 2003, p. 37-38).

Some argue that an auteur's work is only good according to the auteur theory and will therefore be biasedly judged as better than the films of lesser directors. Sarris argues that we should embrace the auteur theory as what truly defines an auteur is that even their weakest work is stronger than the strongest work of a non-auteur director (Sarris, 1962, p. 35-36). If we look at Hayao Miyazaki's work and compare it with his son Goro's work, we can see some truth to this. All of Miyazaki's films are universally praised as being masterpieces. Even his lowest-rated film on rotten tomatoes "Howl's Moving Castle" is rated 87%. Still ranking higher than his son's highest-rated work "From Up On Poppy Hill".

3. Miyazaki's Upbringing

Hayao Miyazaki is an animation director from Japan. He was born on January 4, 1941, during World War 2. Miyazaki's family was spared from most of the horrors of the war, because his father's airplane manufacturing company made parts for the Japanese air force. Miyazaki's father profited from the war, while sheltering his family from major parts of the conflict, but in 1944 his home fell victim to US bombing raids. They were forced to flee. The sight of his hometown in ruins would haunt Miyazaki for the rest of his life (Napier, 2018, p. 18-21, 28, 30-31) (Le Blanc & Odell, 2019, p. 2).

Hayao and his older brother got a new home in the countryside, with a big garden for them to play in. Miyazaki's appreciation for nature most likely started here. The peace was interrupted when their countryside town also fell victim to American air raids, forcing them to flee once again. Miyazaki claims that he still has the horrifying memories of the beautiful nature in flames engraved into his mind (Napier, 2018, p. 28-31).

In 1947, Miyazaki started school and his first signs of survivor's guilt started here. He went to class with several children who lost their fathers in the war. This is when Miyazaki started to realize that his father had profited from the war, strengthening his hatred for wars. This led to him having a strained relationship with his father, that never completely went away. Miyazaki had great admiration for his father, but at the same time conflicting feelings about his father's actions during the war. (Napier, 2018, p. 28, 31, 40-43).

Miyazaki didn't spend a lot of time outside playing with other kids. He spent most of his time indoors reading or drawing. He was inspired to draw from Manga, he read as a child. He was also fond of European literature which had beautiful illustrations and descriptions of European nature, creating a deep fascination for European nature (Napier, 2018, p. 39-40, 48-49) (Oscars, July 28, 2009).

Because of his father's airplane manufacturing company, Miyazaki got a lifelong fascination with airplanes. He loved drawing every moving part that made the airplanes fly. His fascination with airplanes illustrates his conflicted admiration for his father (Napier, 2018, p. 37-38) (Le Blanc & Odell, 2009 p. 3).

In 1947 Miyazaki's mother was diagnosed with tuberculosis. This led to the Miyazaki family having to move several times for his mother to get the best treatment possible. This meant that Hayao and his three brothers did not have the opportunity to make many friends in school and

would have to make do with each other (Napier, 2018, p. 127) (Le Blanc & Odell, 2009, p. 3). The two oldest sons in the family, Shirou and Hayao, were forced to grow up fast and become more independent at a young age. Chores like making food, doing the laundry, and cleaning the house were left up to the children while their father was at work. Miyazaki has stated that he is saddened that his childhood was taken away from him at a young age (Napier, 2018, p. 26, 38, 40-41) (Talbot, Jan 9, 2005, Para. 28-30).

Miyazaki's mother was cured of her tuberculosis in 1955. During her time with tuberculosis, she had grown more distant, because of the traumatic event of suffering from a potentially deadly disease. Miyazaki has tremendous respect for how strong and independent his mother was, but he wishes she was more loving as a mother (Napier, 2018, p. 44) (Talbot, Jan 9, 2005, Para. 28-30).

These childhood events had an impact on Miyazaki and his beliefs, which in turn also influenced his movies. Such as the depiction of war in his film "Nausicaa", the bombings in "Howl's Moving Castle", the destruction of the environment in "Princess Mononoke", and the depiction of a mother with Tuberculosis in "Totoro".

4. Miyazaki's Themes and Messages

This analysis of Miyazaki and his films will be working under the assumption that he was inspired by his own life experiences while making his films, but as Roland Barthes text on “death of the author” states; The meaning behind the text is determined by the audience, not the author (Barthes, 1968, p. 99-100) (Grant, 2008, p. 4) (Staiger, p. 2003 27, 30-31, 45). The observations made in this text will therefore be based on my own interpretations of the meaning behind them, but as Andrew Sarris argues in his “notes on auteur theory”, it is not possible to completely separate the artist from the art (Sarris, 1962, p. 37) (Staiger, 2003, p. 30-31, 45). He believes you need to look at the director and his work as a whole to understand their meaning (Caughie, 1981, p. 25, 28). The meaning behind a text is determined by a combination of the creator and the receiver's vision of what it means (Banks, 2014, p. 118). All the observations made in this text will therefore be based on my knowledge of his past and how this affects my view of his films (Anania, 2021, para 9).

This analysis is based on the humanities form. Most of the observations will be based on Miyazaki as an individual and critical assumptions about the message behind his films. These observations will be based on qualitative research done by scholars like Susan Napier and Le Blanc (Banks, 2014, p. 119, 126-127).

4.1 Anti-war themes

We can find many anti-war themes in Miyazaki's films. Most likely originating from his childhood trauma. The movie “Nausicaa” opens with a clear anti-war message as we see a man riding through a devastated town full of dead people and ruined buildings. The air is polluted, and the man needs to wear a gas mask to be able to breathe. The images of the destroyed city seem similar to images you might have seen of the devastated cities after World War 2. The imagery at the beginning of the movie was clearly inspired by Miyazaki's own experience witnessing his hometown in ruins (Napier, 2018, p. 95-96).

War is a running theme throughout “Nausicaa”. Later in the film, an enemy nation invades the Valley of the wind. The beautiful green nature of the valley gets ruined by the horrifying war machines that they bring to their kingdom, and the lives of the peaceful valley people get ruined. This scene might have been inspired directly by the bombings Miyazaki witnessed as a child. For a period of his childhood, he and his family lived in a big house with a beautiful garden. This beautiful garden was a sanctuary from the horrors of the war for Miyazaki. The

peace was interrupted when the war eventually made its way to his town as the Americans bombed the city they resided in. The devastation of the valley of the wind might therefore be inspired by Miyazaki's own experience with seeing his peaceful valley get destroyed by invading forces (Napier, 2018, p. 28-31, 101-203).

We can also find anti-war themes in Miyazaki's films where war isn't the focus. For example, the main villain in "Laputa" is the military. There is no war going on but by making the military the main antagonist, it sends a clear message about Miyazaki's very own disdain for military warfare. One of the less-subtle references to war in the film is a scene where several robots get dropped from the flying castle Laputa, like bombs being dropped from a warplane (Napier, p. 2018, 116, 119).

In "Porco Rosso", the first world war has already happened, but there is still the looming threat of another war coming closer as we follow the Italian war veteran Porco trying to survive in an era where fascism is rapidly growing. He has trauma from the war that the movie visualizes through Porco being cursed to look like a pig. The movie never makes it clear how this happened, and Porco doesn't quite know either. He recalls an aerial battle where his entire squadron got whipped out by the enemy, at some point during the battle Porco passes out, and when he wakes up, he realizes he has turned into a pig. Porco's curse can be interpreted as a representation of his survivor's guilt. He does not feel he deserved to live when the rest of his squadron died, this is made clearer by Porco's lack of desire to cure the curse. This can be interpreted as a representation of Miyazaki's very own survivors' guilt after the war. Despite being a powerless child, he always felt guilty for surviving (Napier, 2018, p. 24, 47, 174-175, 182-183, 185, 255-256).

His film "Princess Mononoke" is a movie about the war between humans and nature. The first sight of war we see is a scene where the main character Ashitaka rides through a village and witnesses a group of soldiers who are slaughtering innocent civilians. Ashitaka tries to stop them, but there are too many of them, forcing him to flee. It shows us the brutality of war and the powerlessness of just one person. It could parallel how powerless Miyazaki felt during the war. The inhumane slaughter of civilians in "Mononoke" is similar to the bombs the Americans dropped on thousands of Japanese civilians during the war. "Princess Mononoke" does not shy away from showing the gory brutality of war, and while we don't see big battles between human armies directly, we do get to see the aftermath of a conflict leaving thousands of corpses scattered on a battlefield. It is a brutal but realistic sight of the horrors of war (Napier, 2018, p. 216-217, 223-225).

The movie showcase that there are good and bad people on both sides of a war and the reasons why good people do bad things can be complicated. The animals attack the defenceless humans to stop their pollution and protect their homes. While the humans fight back because they want to protect their loved ones. This could reflect on the conflict Miyazaki felt about his own father's actions during the war. He profited off the war to protect his family even when that could be considered immoral (Napier, 2018, p. 43, 287).

Near the beginning of "Howl's Moving Castle", a war against an unnamed nation breaks out. The emperor of the nation demands all the Wizards in the kingdom to sign up for the military to fight in the war. The wizard Howl refuses to join, partly because his hatred for war, but mostly because of how powerless he feels to stop the war, even with all his magic power. The war isn't the focus of the story, but it's always a looming threat in the background. None of the main characters have any power to stop it. Howl hates war, just like Miyazaki. He feels just as powerless as Miyazaki did during the war. Miyazaki was not directly involved with the war, but it was always a looming threat. This threat grows closer throughout the movie until the war finally catches up to the characters as the city they reside in gets bombarded and they are forced to flee. You can see the parallels between this and Miyazaki's very own experiences fleeing from the bombs as a child (Napier, 2018, p. 248-249, 253, 259-161).

"The Wind Rises" does not have a lot of anti-war messages, despite taking place during the war. However, there is a German character in the film who is very audible about his disdain for the new Nazi regime. But for the most part, the war is pushed to the background as a framing device. The most notable anti-war message in the film is when the aircraft designer Jiro has a nightmare about his aircrafts being used for war (Napier, 2018, p. 19).

There are several different events and characters that represent Miyazaki's anti-war theme in his movies. By analysing these recurring elements, we get a grasp of what the themes of his work really are beyond the surface of the story. Wollen claims that it could be argued that only the lesser auteurs have the same running themes in their movies. The greatest directors are defined by their ability to change. However, Wollen also argues that auteurs could be great even with the same themes if they know how to subvert expectations and stray from the formula (Wollen, 1969, p. 61-63). I would argue that Miyazaki does exactly this by subverting our expectations in "The Wind Rises" by setting the movie during the war while also straying away from his heavy anti-war themes. He also sometimes shifts his focus to having an environmentalist approach to his films, and sometimes he makes films like "Totoro" that have no anti-war or environmental message (Napier, 2018, p. 285-287).

4.2 Environmental messages

Miyazaki often put environmental messages in his films. The environmental message in “Nausicaa” is clear. The earth is dangerously polluted because of human warfare, and in some places, the air is so polluted humans need to wear gas masks. Humans believe that it’s the insects that are to blame for the increase in pollution as the toxic forest they reside in grows larger. They want to burn down the forest and everything in it. Near the end of the film Nausicaa, the main heroine of the film, realizes that the reason why the Toxic Forest is growing is because nature is healing itself and if humans were to destroy it, it would lead to a rapid spread of toxic gasses that would wipe out humanity. It’s a clear message about how deforestation and war is ruining our planet. Miyazaki has had a love for nature ever since he was a child. His hatred for the destruction of the environment most likely started when he witnessed the destruction of the garden he loved, during World War 2. (Napier, 2018, p. 96-97, 101-102, 196, 199-200).

In “Laputa” we see nature taking over technology in the gardens of the flying castle. It shows nature thriving without humans interfering. The castle is surrounded by endless gardens, probably not too different from what Miyazaki imagined the garden of his mansion looked like as a child. At the end of the movie, we are left on a sombre note as the castle crumbles to pieces, yet another part of nature being destroyed by humans. You could draw parallels to Miyazaki’s own experiences witnessing nature being destroyed by war because the destruction of the castle was caused by the intrusion of military forces looking to harvest its power (Napier, 2018, p. 108, 116-119, 121).

“Howl’s Moving Castle” never directly states its environmental message, but it utilizes the visuals to demonstrate it. From the horrible visual of bombs destroying previously beautiful pastures of grass, to every vehicle in the movie releasing excessive amounts of gasses from their tailpipes. Miyazaki’s disdain for the humans’ destruction of the environment through fossil fuel and war is clear. In the film “Ponyo” the water in the sea is cluttered with an excessive amount of garbage, visually showing us the pollution of the sea that humans have caused (Napier, 2018, p. 269).

“Princess Mononoke” deals directly with the consequences of the human pollution of the environment. In “Mononoke” we see the humans strip the forest of all its natural resources. Animals are dying as humans are ruining their habitats through deforestation and mining. Eventually, the animals retaliate. The consequences of the human pollution have caught up

with them and it leads to war between the animals and humans. The animals are blinded by rage and cannot see reason, while the humans try to defend what they hold dear, without realizing what they did wrong. Early in the movie, we see an animal who has gotten corrupted by pollution and turned into a demon. Blinded by its rage it let itself get turned into a slug monster. The slugs surrounding the corrupted animal are reminiscent of flowing oil. Possibly done deliberately to show the corruption humans have brought to the earth. (Napier, 2018, p. 211, 216-217, 219, 223-225).

Many of Miyazaki's films reflect the conflict between man and nature. It is similar to the description that Wollen gave of the reoccurring themes in the films of the American western director, John Ford. His films often had themes of "the wilderness versus the garden" showcasing the American wilderness as a dry desert or a beautiful garden. Wollen found these themes by analysing the symbolism in Ford's films and boiling them down to their basic elements (Wollen, 1969, p. 61). Similarly, I can find the running theme of man versus nature in a lot of Miyazaki's films by studying the symbolic destruction of nature in a lot of his films.

4.3 Nature

Miyazaki became an environmentalist at a young age when he witnessed the destruction humans could cause to the environment through warfare. This does not mean he showcases the destruction of the environment in all his films. He has always been an admirer of nature and always makes sure to illustrate its beauty, even in movies without an environmental message. He has always had a special admiration for European nature. This admiration originates from reading European literature as a child. Most of his movies take place in Europe to show his admiration for the region (Napier, 2018, p. 39, 47, 49, 65).

An example of a Miyazaki film that showcases European Nature is "Kiki's Delivery Service". "Kiki" takes place in a city heavily inspired by Sweden and through its beautiful flying scenes, it makes sure to capture the beauty of the Swedish forests and mountains. Another example is Miyazaki's first film "Castle of Cagliostro". The country of Cagliostro is full of endless beautiful fields of grass and flowers inspired by Dutch and Belgian pastures. The beautiful scenes in the garden of the castle seem to be inspired by Miyazaki's experience with playing in the gardens as a child (Napier, 2018, p. 29, 65, 80, 162).

Despite most of his movies taking place in Europe, a few of his movies are based on Japan. Most notably “Totoro”, “Spirited Away”, and “The Wind Rises”. In “Spirited Away” we encounter numerous spirits from Japanese culture and Japanese architecture. Despite it taking place in Japan the little nature we do see in the movie seems to be weirdly inspired by European nature. Most notably at the beginning of the film when the protagonist of the film Chihiro, and her parents transition from the human world to the spirit world. We see them walk through beautiful fields and hills that would not look out of place in his films set in Europe.

“The Wind Rises” aims for a more grounded approach to Japan. This does come with also showing some of the less desirable parts of Japan. Most notable are the earthquakes that often hit the country. A particularly devastating earthquake hits the characters early in the film. This earthquake was based on a real earthquake that hit Japan a few years before the war. Miyazaki first learned about this earthquake as a child when his father told him about the devastating effects it had on his airplane factory. Had it not been for the war, they might have never financially recovered (Napier, 2018, p. 11, 20).

In “Totoro”, the sisters Satsuki and Mei move to a countryside village together with their father where they get a big garden and massive forest to play freely in. For this film Miyazaki took clear inspiration from his own childhood memories of playing in the gardens in the countryside with his older brother (Napier, 2018, p. 28-29, 127, 131, 137).

5. Storytelling technics

Miyazaki sees himself as a storyteller first and an environmentalist second. He has several reoccurring storytelling techniques and character types that play an integral part in his films.

5.1 Female characters

Miyazaki has always had great respect for his mother, despite her being emotionally distant for most of his childhood. She was strong and independent, and managed to survive a deadly disease. This has led to Miyazaki having a lot of strong and independent, yet innocent female characters in his movies. Even in movies with a male protagonist like “The Castle of Cagliostro” and “Porco Rosso” he makes sure to have strong female characters alongside the male lead. Like Clarisse and Fujiko in “Cagliostro”; and Gina and Fio in “Porco Rosso”. Miyazaki has stated that this is because he thinks that “men are no fun without women” (Napier, 2018, p. 44-47, 88).

Nausicaa is young but headstrong, she cares for all the creatures on earth even the insects that the rest of humanity hates. She might be a bit naive, but she is strong and can take care of herself. This type of female lead character can often be seen in Miyazaki’s films. Most notable with the young woman San from “Mononoke”. She is similar to Nausicaa in both age, personality, and title as princess. In a way, she is a more violent version of Nausicaa. The main female leads in his other films such as Sheeta in “Laputa”; Kiki in “Kiki’s delivery service”; Chihiro in “Spirited away”; and Ponyo in “Ponyo”, are a lot younger than Nausicaa, but they share a lot of the same rebellious and independent tendencies that Nausicaa has. These characteristics most likely stem from how independent and headstrong Miyazaki’s mother was. (Napier, 2018, p. 217-218, 221).

5.2 Child characters

These female characters are often young children. Most of Miyazaki’s films follow child characters that must grow up fast and take on adult responsibility at a young age. The protagonists of “Laputa”, Sheeta and Pazu, are young children who are forced to take on their nation’s entire military to save the world from destruction. Chihiro from “Spirited away” must work at a bathhouse for spirits to save her parents from the curse of being turned into pigs. Kiki in “Kiki’s delivery service” must leave home at the age of 12 to live on her own in an unknown place. Here she must find a way to survive by opening her own business. Kiki has a

cat companion she can talk to, but by the time the movie has reached its end, she can no longer understand him. This is a sign of her having matured (Napier, 2018, p. 160-161, 163-165, 171, 173, 247).

Even Miyazaki's adult characters must go through an arc of maturing. Nausicaa is still young and naive when she must take on the responsibility of taking care of the people of her village, because her father, the king, lies sick. Once the invading forces kill her already dying father, she is forced to step up to make sure her people survive. The protagonist of "Howl's Moving Castle" is a young and beautiful hatmaker named Sophie. She lives with her head in the clouds and does not know what she wants to do with her life. One day a witch turns her into an old lady. Forcing her to literally and figuratively grow up. She takes on the cleaning and food-making responsibilities in the castle of the wizard Howl. By the end of the movie, she has learned to be independent. When her curse has been lifted her previously brown hair stays grey even when she is young again, a sign of her having matured (Napier, 2018, p. 252, 256-258, 104-105, 195).

Children having to take on adult responsibilities is most likely inspired by Miyazaki's experience with having to do the same at a young age. When his mother got tuberculosis and his father was absent trying to provide for his family, Miyazaki and his brothers were left alone most of the time. Leaving him and his older brother the responsibility of taking care of their younger brothers. They had to clean the house, make dinner, and do laundry all by themselves (Napier, 2018, p. 40).

5.3 Mother figures

Miyazaki often shows his respect for his mother through the countless mother figures in his movies. Nausicaa herself takes on the role of a mother. She is like a caring mother for all the insects in the movie that the rest of the world sees as monsters. In "Cagliostro", Fujiko pretends to be one of Clarisse's handmaidens and through this acts as a mother figure, giving her motherly advice throughout the film. The wolf god in "Princess Mononoke" found San as a baby and rather than killing her, she raised her to become a protector of the forest. "Ponyo" has two mother figures. Ponyo's mother who is the goddess of the sea is kind and caring, but also absent most of the time. She must take care of the sea in a rapidly more polluted world. Lisa, the mother of the film's human protagonist Sosuke, is also kind and loving but in contrast to Ponyo's mother, she is very attentive and rarely absent. She would do anything to protect Ponyo and Sosuke. In "Howl's Moving Castle" Sophie turns into a mother figure for

Howl and his child apprentice as she whips them into shape, while she cleans and cooks for them. In “Porco Rosso”, Fio represents the motherly figure in the movie as she scolds a gang of dangerous pirates into submission after they implied they were going to destroy Porco’s airplane. It is often thought that Dola, the mother and leader of the sky pirates in “Laputa” is completely based on Miyazaki’s mother. She is a strong leader, but she is also strict and makes sure to not show off too much of her emotions to her sons, but deep down it is clear that she cares about her children. (Napier, 2018, p. 13, 31-32, 104, 115, 189, 266-267, 274-276)

The owner of the bath house ,Yubaba, from “Spirited Away” seems mean at first, but as the movie progresses it becomes clear that despite being strict, she does care for the main character Chihiro. She isn’t a bad person; she is just very strict with her employees and acts as an indirect mother figure for them. We see her loving side when we find out she has a son named Boh that she spoils rotten. She is intimidating at first, but by the end of the movie she has softened up enough to let Chihiro refer to her as “grandmother” (Napier, 2018, p. 231-232, 240, 245-247).

For most of “Totoro”, Mei and Satsuki’s mother is absent because she is suffering from tuberculosis in the hospital, but even here you can find a mother figure. Totoro acts as a substitute mother figure for the two sisters. (Napier, 2018, p. 133).

At the age of 12 Kiki must move away from home, leaving her mother behind. Kiki also gets a substitute mother figure in the baker Osono, who lets Kiki stay in their guest room for free, and even lets her run her own business on their property. Whenever Kiki felt down, Osono would give her motherly advice, and she would take care of Kiki when she got sick (Napier, 2018, p. 166, 170).

Another similarity that a lot of these parental figures have with Miyazaki’s own mother is the running theme of characters suffering from lung diseases. Nausicaa’s father has a lung disease clearly inspired by tuberculosis. In “Totoro”, the mother suffers from Tuberculises, and the wife in “The Wind Rises” does as well. Even Kiki being sick and bedridden for a short duration of her movie could be referencing Miyazaki’s mother’s tuberculosis. (Napier, 2018, p. 26-27, 40, 127, 286, 290).

By studying these characters deeper than what is on the surface I can figure out their roles and thematic purposes. A lot of these characters aren’t really mothers but as Wollen points out in his text on auteur theory, you will have to look beyond the surface of the character and find

the function of the characters in the story (Wollen, 1969, p. 60) (Grant, 2008, p. 5) (Sarris, 1962, p. 43). For example, Osono is a baker, but if you look beyond that you will see her real function in the film as a mother figure for Kiki.

5.4 Airplanes

Despite his troubled relationship with his father Miyazaki did harbour a deep-seated love and respect for his father that influenced his work. Most notably in his love for airplanes. In most of Miyazaki's films, you can find airplanes in some shape or form. In the post-apocalyptic world of "Nausicaa", everyone travel with airships, and in "Laputa", there are several flying robots that resemble planes, and sky pirates flying in aircraft. The protagonist Pazu is building an airplane in his garage inspired by his diseased father who also built airplanes. Just like how Miyazaki's father built airplanes. Kiki's best friend Tombo also makes his own airplanes. The protagonist of "The Wind Rises" is an airplane designer who built airplanes during the War, clearly being heavily inspired by Miyazaki's father. "Porco Rosso" is a film all about airplanes. Miyazaki was determined to get all the flying scenes perfect, so he insisted on animating all of them himself (Napier, 2018, p. 34, 36-38, 179-180).

6. Conclusion

Miyazaki channels his childhood trauma through his work by depicting war from the eyes of young children who are forced to grow up early in an increasingly more brutal world. His childhood trauma is also reflected through his use of the destruction of the environment and depictions of characters suffering from lung diseases similar to his mother's tuberculosis.

He channels his happy childhood memories in his films through the depiction of lush, beautiful nature reminiscent of the gardens he used to play in as a child; and through his child like admiration of his mother despite their strained relationship, showcased through the countless amounts of mother figures in his films. His childhood fascination with drawing airplanes has also followed him into adulthood. Leading to depictions of airplanes in almost all his films.

The impact Miyazaki has on the final product of the movies he directs is clear. He utilizes reoccurring themes and character types in all his films that shape the story and messages he wants to convey to the audience. The personal impact he has on his movies makes him more than qualified to be considered an auteur.

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