

Confronting Master Narratives: History As Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of De-assurance

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There is something . . . timeless about the concept of global culture. Widely diffused in space, a global culture is cut off from any past. As the perennial pursuit of an elusive present or an imagined future it has no history. A global culture is here and now and everywhere, and for its purposes the past only serves to offer some decontextualized example or element for its cosmopolitan patchwork.—Anthony D. Smith, “Towards a Global Culture?”

If you opened a map of Japan and asked me where was the forest of the *shishigami* that Ashitaka went to, I couldn't tell you but I do believe that somehow traces of that kind of place still exist inside one's soul.—Miyazaki Hayao, in an interview with Yamaguchi Izumi, 1997

“Who speaks for the past?” Robert Rosenstone asks in his introduction to *Revisioning History*, a discussion of New History Cinema. Recently, this question has gained in importance as the past is acknowledged as one of

the key elements in the formation and maintenance of national identity, paradoxically (but hardly coincidentally) at a time when “historicity” seems to be on the wane. As the trend toward globalization has intensified over the last decade, both national histories and national identities have become contested territories, as the citizens of an increasingly interdependent world attempt to define themselves vis-à-vis what many fear to be an oppressively homogeneous global culture dominated by the United States. This “struggle for memory,” to use Henry Giroux’s term, takes place not only in the areas of policies and politics, but also within the mass entertainment industries of television, video, and film, which increasingly take on the job of “speaking for the past” to the audience.¹ If anything, far more than the diatribes of pundits or the letters (or characters) on a printed page, it is the visual representations of an embodied historical “reality” offered by the hybridized popular culture space of film, television, and video that most profoundly affect the viewing subject, offering the audience visually arresting and seductively plausible simulations of historical time and space. Depending on both producer and audience, these simulations can be either palatable or provocative, reassuring or subversive, but they are always more than simple reproductions of historical reality. As Shohat and Stam put it, “Narrative models in film are not simply reflective microcosms of historical processes; they are also experiential grids or templates through which history can be written and national identity created.”²

If film and the visual mass media in general can indeed help to “write history” and “create national identity,” the question of who speaks for the past in these industries becomes of particular importance. In the immediate postwar period in Japan, for example, the spokespeople included filmmakers such as Kurosawa Akira, whose vivid, humanistic *jidaigeki* (period films) both exploit and deconstruct the mythology of samurai warfare, and Ozu Yasujiro, whose films, although set in a contemporary postwar world, consistently elegize a vanishing past in which patriarchal authority was still sacrosanct. Even though Kurosawa’s films often problematized certain myths and Ozu’s work lamented their passing, they both offered memorable visions of a past that still had room for heroism and humanity and which, though separate from the contemporary world, resonated deeply within a Japan that was struggling to redefine its identity after its defeat in the Pacific War. With the

rise of television in the 1960s and the beginning of the animation boom in the 1970s, concurrent with the deep cultural changes occurring as Japan went from economic dependent to economic superpower, however, visions of the Japanese past became both fragmented and ideologically diverse. They now ranged from the conservative remapping of World War II history into a vision of twenty-first-century collective sacrifice in the animated science fiction classic *Uchusenkan Yamato* [Space Battleship Yamato] (dir. Matsumoto Leiji, 1972), to Imamura Shohei's carnivalistic celebration of popular upheaval in his 1981 film *Eijanaika*.

In the U.S. context one strong candidate for “speakerhood” is unquestionably Walt Disney pictures, whose films manifest a distinct U.S. style and tone and have met with great success since the inception of the Disney Studio in the 1920s. Disney's influence both in the United States and globally is so immense that it has also generated a backlash. Indeed, some commentators such as Scott Schaffer suggest that there is a “guiding pattern behind Disney's use of local stories or histories [which is] the expansion of American political, economic, and cultural imperialistic power in the second half of the twentieth century.”³ This assertion to my mind overstates Disney's agenda, which is, after all, primarily to entertain and sell as many tickets and as much tie-in merchandise as possible. At the same time, however, it is also clear that, as Schaffer and many other commentators suggest,⁴ Disney products and projects, which distort history and culture, function as mass cultural legitimations of an essentially U.S. worldview, one that is upbeat and centered on individual action and initiative, and—while it acknowledges Otherness—often ends up erasing difference through its joyously inclusive finales, such as the “group hug” ending of *Aladdin* or the uniting of mermaid and human in *The Little Mermaid*. As such, these films participate in a larger project of American cinema, especially its most popular films, and that is to function as a cinema of *reassurance*, to use Robin Wood's term,⁵ which promotes a vision of a world in which all problems are solved and harmony is restored under the aegis of U.S. ideology and values.

This vision, as evidenced by the global success of Disney and films by directors such as Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, is one that resonates worldwide. Indeed, few would be likely to disagree with the notion of Disney and U.S. mass culture in general as a winner in the contest of cultural

expansion throughout the world, and this article does not minimize their influence.⁶ Instead, I give an example of a mass cultural alternative that offers its own distinctive vision of the world, a vision that at times directly challenges the thematics of reassurance of so much of U.S. cinema. The alternative is the Japanese animation industry, whose products, usually called *anime*, embrace a far wider continuum of approaches to culture, history, and national identity in general than most of the products from the contemporary Hollywood film industry. In contrast to most U.S. cartoons (at least until the recent success of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*), anime texts offer a dark and complex view of the world. Even conservative fare, such as the popular Gundam and Yamato series of the 1970s and 1980s, is set in dangerous science fiction worlds where favorite characters die and, in the memorable climax to *Farewell Yamato*, national icons such as the beloved space/warship are last seen embarking on a suicide mission. More recent anime set in the domestic world of high school life, such as *Revolutionary Girl Utena* or *Serial Experiments Lain*, portray the vaunted Japanese education system as a chaotic world of bullying, betrayal, and fear with no redeeming authority figures to intervene.

This is not to suggest that all anime is subversive or that all anime texts are masterpieces. As truly mass cultural products, anime texts differ widely in quality. Estimates vary, but at least 40 percent of the Japanese film industry's product is animated. With such an enormous output, it is inevitable that a considerable amount of anime can seem simplistic, repetitive, and boring to everyone but the most devoted fan. Even in its most juvenile form, such as the popular Pokémon television series, however, Japanese animation has achieved global impact (with Pokémon on the cover of *Time*), leading one scholar to declare it "Japan's chief cultural export."⁷ Not only is anime worth studying in terms of its status as cultural export, but it is also a fascinating harbinger of what might be a new way of looking at national culture and identity, one that rests less on a firm separation or even interplay between self and Other, and more on the gradual acknowledgment that in the transnational postmodern world of contemporary mass culture, the Other (in terms of both national and gender divisions) might increasingly be imbricated within the self.

Nowhere is this trend more obvious than in the animated features written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao for his Studio Ghibli. These films are both popular and subversive, especially in regard to conventional gender coding. Furthermore, the studio's most recent hit, *Mononokehime* [Princess Mononoke] (1997), also problematizes traditional notions of Japanese history and national identity. Despite its sometimes unconventional representations, however, Studio Ghibli is the most important animation studio in Japan, occupying a position roughly equivalent to that of Disney, and Miyazaki is the best-known animator in Japan today. Although he bristles when described as the Walt Disney of Japan and the studios have in certain respects different agendas, they also share many similarities that cannot be ignored, especially after Walt Disney Enterprises in 1996 acquired the rights to a number of animated films produced by Studio Ghibli.

Ghibli was not established until the 1980s, but, like Disney, it was a family operation (and still is), presided over by one creative genius whose vision imprinted itself strongly on the studio's products. (In Miyazaki's case this includes his imprint on films created by his colleagues at Ghibli, Takahata Isao and the late Kondo Yoshifumi.)⁸ This vision was not simply aesthetic (although it is that as well—both studios consistently produce films and tie-in merchandise that have a distinct studio look), but also encompassed a moral and ideological worldview that both critics and supporters might describe as an “agenda.” Both filmmakers use similar tools such as tightly controlled narratives, at least by Japanese animation standards, with upbeat endings often involving children or teenagers as the central protagonists, and psychological realism, overlaid with a strong dose of the fantastic, to impart certain messages to a target audience that is usually a family market. These messages can be described as humanistic and emphasize such values as loyalty, friendship, responsibility, and initiative. Indeed, though Miyazaki's work has darker elements than the Disney films, much of his work can also be considered to negotiate an essentially reassuring narrative structure.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the way the two studios are alike is that they have consistently mined the folklore, history, and fantasy of other countries and cultures for material for their films. In the case of Disney these include such well-known examples as *Aladdin* (dir. John Musker, 1992), set in Arabia and inspired by the story from *A Thousand and One Nights*; *Mulan* (dir.

Barry Cook, 1997), set in historic China and inspired by a famous legend; and *The Jungle Book* (dir. Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967), set in nineteenth-century India and inspired by the Rudyard Kipling books. Works of Miyazaki include films such as *Majo no takkyubin* [Kiki's delivery service] (1989), about a young witch exploring a fictional European city whose architecture and landscape contain hints of both Stockholm and the Mediterranean; *Kurenai no buta* [Porco Rosso] (1992), about an Italian aviator flying the Adriatic immediately after World War I; and, perhaps the most imaginative, *Tenku no shiro Laputa* [Castle in the sky Laputa] (1986), about two children searching for a castle in the sky that is clearly inspired by the flying island Laputa of *Gulliver's Travels*. Miyazaki says the heroine of the postapocalyptic *Kaze no tani no Nausicaa* [Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind] (1984), set entirely in a future world, was inspired by the young princess Nausicaä, who cares for Odysseus's wounds in *The Odyssey*, and the valley she lives in, with its windmills and castles, is clearly reminiscent of Europe.

Although they both decontextualize other cultures for material, there are crucial differences between the ways the studios use this material. First, Miyazaki uses non-Japanese sources to serve as the basis for distinctively original visions. With the exception of *Kiki*, which is based on a children's novel by Japanese writer Kadono Eiko, the other works are entirely Miyazaki's creations. In contrast, Disney follows the essential framework of the original story (often within very broad outlines) and then adds the touches that transform the original into a more Disney-like product.

Even more important is the difference between the ideological messages from each studio. Although both messages are broadly humanistic, it seems that Disney, almost paradoxically, concentrates on "Other" cultures to construct or at least reinforce its vision of U.S. identity. As Schaffer suggests, "[Disney] does this by utilizing stories from the past—from traditions, generally those of other countries—in such a way as to reinforce the values and cultural practices of America."⁹ The female protagonist in *Mulan*, for example, seems to owe more of her plucky humor and self-starting ability to contemporary idealizations of the young American female than to the actual heroine of the legend. No matter what country or culture they belong to, virtually all of the Disney protagonists engage in what might be called "performing Americanness."

In significant contrast, Miyazaki's characters can almost never be solely described as "performing Japaneseness." Instead, Miyazaki seems to use his cosmopolitan sources and settings to create characters that, while retaining certain characteristics linked to Japanese society, are distinctively more independent in thought and action from the group-oriented characteristics traditionally celebrated in Japanese culture, such as the group allegiance of the samurai in Kurosawa's *Shichinin no samurai* [Seven samurai] and the collective fighting power of the "Sailor Scouts" in the anime series *Seera munu* [Sailor moon].¹⁰ In other words, Miyazaki's works do not simply decontextualize foreign countries and cultures to reinforce a national identity. Instead, he works them into the narrative in a way that subtly erases traditional distinctions between the Japanese self and the foreign (usually Western) Other. This is especially true of his female characters, who are often the protagonists.

These female protagonists are an intriguing mixture of characteristics that include elements that are explicitly Japanese as well as others that suggest a Western identity. On the Japanese side, they clearly partake in contemporary Japan's culture of the *shojo* (young girl). As delineated by both Japanese and Western scholars, the *shojo* occupies the site of play (*asobi*) in modern Japanese culture. Feminine, innocent, and cute in the quintessentially Japanese form of cuteness known as *kawaii*, the *shojo* serves as an appealing alternative identity in contrast to the image of the hardworking, highly pressured Japanese male. In the works of writer Banana Yoshimoto, they are also linked with nostalgia, an aspect that can be seen in the vision of 1950s female children in Miyazaki's *Tonari no Totoro*. Often, however, the *shojo* is depicted as older and is subtly eroticized. Most of Miyazaki's heroines are in their early teens, and although their sexuality is never highlighted, characters such as Nausicaa and San have clearly female figures and relationships with male characters that seem at least potentially erotic.¹¹

Miyazaki's heroines differ from the typical *shojo*, however, in their activeness, determination, and independence. Even in the 1990s the *shojo* depicted in anime and *manga* (comics) often had overtly traditional characteristics, as exemplified by the dreamy, nurturing, and ultimately passive heroines of such 1990s romantic comedies as *Aa megamisama* [Oh my goddess] and *Denei shojo Ai* [Video girl Ai]. Although the heroines in recent, more subversive

shojo anime such as *Serial Experiments Lain* or the comic *Sailor Moon* are more complex (in the case of *Lain*) and more aggressive (in the case of the heroines of *Sailor Moon*), they often are at the mercy of complex, sometimes frightening forces over which they have little or no control.

In contrast, many of Miyazaki's female characters are remarkable for taking charge of their lives. For example, Kiki in *Kiki's Delivery Service* stoically leaves home at age twelve to learn to be a witch, and the heroine of *Nausicaä* explores the apocalyptic wasteland and performs scientific experiments entirely on her own. In *Mononokehime*, San is a raging mix of anger and aggression who in one memorable scene attempts to take on human civilization with only the help of her two wolf "siblings." Rather than try to refract contemporary Japanese reality through an idealized fantasy lens, Miyazaki instead seems intent on producing figures whose prime attributes could be found in Japan, but they exemplify more Western-type models of courage and heroism. Furthermore, these are attributes that are conventionally coded as male.

Whether or not Miyazaki's protagonists are realistic is another question. The critic Murase Hiromi quotes a letter she wrote to the director when she was twelve asking was he ever going to create a "real" female protagonist. As with Disney, therefore, Miyazaki seems to be explicitly fashioning his heroines as inspirational icons for his audience. The difference, however, lies in the fact that these heroines are indebted to both Japanese and Western sources for their overall characterization, unlike Disney's more purely American protagonists.

Miyazaki's works were part of national debate in Japan during the 1970s through the 1990s (and, indeed arguably, from the Meiji period opening to the West) about what it means to be Japanese in an increasingly global world. Japan's national discourses and practices of this period often contradicted each other and increasingly showed the fault lines of any notion of national unity and homogeneity. On the one hand, the Japanese from the 1970s on bought books on *Nihonjinron* (theories of the Japanese people emphasizing Japan's uniqueness vis-à-vis other countries) while a Diet member, Ishihara Shintaro, and Morita Akio, president of Sony, issued a controversial book urging the Japanese to "say no" to Western demands. The Japanese

National Railway even launched an immensely popular campaign, “Discover Japan,” in which passengers, especially young women, were exhorted to go on journeys that would lead to a recovery of Japan’s vanishing past and a discovery of the self as well. On the other hand, during this period many Japanese traveled abroad, and an increasing number of young Japanese attended summer school or spent semesters in the United States and Europe. Furthermore, supported by a government-sponsored program known as *kokusaika* (internationalization), Japanese citizens imported and consumed Western goods in enormous quantities, while on the more abstract level of culture, Japan remained, in Marilyn Ivy’s words “a voracious and seemingly insatiable consumer of American cultural forms.”¹²

In the case of Miyazaki, with the exception of his nostalgic personal fantasy *Tonari no Totoro* [My neighbor Totoro] (1988), most of his work supports the *kokusaika* side of the debate, as both texts and subtexts of his films clearly advocate a flexible openness to and appreciation of other cultures. Throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s, the director mined with great box office success a rich vein of global fantasy, legends, and science fiction to create original stories that reinforced a distinctly transnational message focusing on human responsibility and the oneness of humans with nature and minimizing distinctive racial or national characteristics. This is not to say that Miyazaki’s narratives do not contain elements more traditionally associated with a specifically Japanese identity, such as the clearly Shinto-esque elements in *Totoro*,¹³ but that overall, these were minimal compared to his tendency to use exotic locations and stories.

The Japanese public has responded strongly to Miyazaki’s blend of international and native elements. Although much of anime is for children and teenagers, Miyazaki’s films are also appreciated by families and are consistently box office hits. Some of them even became the highest grossing films of the year, such as the Mediterranean fantasy *Porco Rosso* (1992), a tragicomedy about a lonely, presumably Italian, World War I aviator with the face of a pig, or the postapocalyptic science fiction film *Nausicaä*, which is still the favorite family film in Japan.¹⁴ In contrast, therefore, to Disney’s dissemination of U.S. cultural attributes in exotic disguise, Miyazaki’s work seemed comfortable in an equally exotic world where different cultures and national identities playfully intermingled to offer audiences an alternative

to a sometimes oppressively defined national identity. At one point, for example, when asked why he prefers “exotic” or European locales, Miyazaki bluntly explained, “I think that right now the last thing that Japanese people want to see is Japanese people.”¹⁵

In the mid-1990s however, Miyazaki turned away from such cosmopolitan visions, choosing instead to create *Mononokehime*. The film at first glance appears very different from his previous work; it gives a vision of Japanese culture and identity set in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Muromachi period. Miyazaki’s vision of Japan’s past is as idiosyncratic and original as his view of the rest of the world, and *Mononoke* is certainly not a conventional history film. Despite its unconventionality, however, it was an immediate box office success. By the end of 1997 the film was the most popular in Japanese history and remains the country’s highest-grossing film. Even after it left the theaters, *Mononoke*’s popularity continued, and when it was shown on television in January 1999, it drew a 35.1 percent audience share.¹⁶

Mononoke’s success is somewhat surprising. Although its production values are stunning and its narrative, essentially a conventional questromance, has enough action to appeal to a wide audience, the film’s text is also complex, ambiguous, and dark and confronts many long-held notions about Japanese identity. *Mononoke* exemplifies an increasing tendency in Japanese pop culture and society to offer visions of both Japanese history and historical Japanese femininity, which take into account alternatives to the master narratives that were promoted after the Pacific War in Ministry of Education textbooks. For example, the live action film *Eijanaika* includes a tumultuous climax in which the female characters lead an uprising. And the popular 1990s anime series *Rurouni Kenshi* recreates the Meiji period of the 1870s as a world in which martial values are viewed as problematic and a young girl can be a superb fighter and also run a *dojo* (martial arts academy) on her own.

Princess Mononoke adds a darker edge to these visions of popular resistance and feminine strength. In contrast to the idealized myths of harmony, progress, and an unproblematic homogeneous Japanese people (*minzoku*) ruled by a patriarchal elite that held sway in Japanese textbooks and postwar Japanese history, the film offers a vision of cultural dissonance, spiritual loss, and environmental apocalypse in which humans and nature battle each other and

women are major players. The film also offers conventional elements such as a love story, heroic warrior, and inspiring visions of natural beauty, but overall it suggests a theme of de-assurance. This is true not only in comparison to the themes of reassurance offered by Hollywood, but also in comparison to previous Miyazaki films, which are full of dark elements, such as the vivid depiction of apocalyptic catastrophe in *Nausicaa*. However, Miyazaki's films subsumed these elements with upbeat endings that, as with their Disney counterparts, usually offered a vision of inclusiveness and harmony.

In this regard, the film's enormous popularity is intriguing. Rather than provide a happy form of closure, the film ends on a note of uncertainty and fear. Instead of being disappointed, however, Japanese audiences were provoked to a variety of enthusiastic explorations of issues in the film, including the role of women, the nature of the premodern Japanese people, and the vulnerability of the environment, as evidenced in the variety of letters from *Mononoke* fans collected in the book *Mononoke o kaku kataru* [Writing, telling Mononoke].

In part the film's popularity reflects the rising acceptance of a new form of historiography in contemporary Japan that is expressed in the writings of scholars Amino Yoshihiko and Sasuke Nishio, whose works Miyazaki knows. Amino in particular takes issue with conventional narratives of Japanese history from the "top down" (history as made only by the court and warrior aristocracy), stressing the contributions of conventionally marginal groups such as women and particular kinds of laborers, while Sasuke's work reexamines how rice farming, traditionally one of the most powerful symbols of Japanese culture, negatively affected the indigenous Japanese national landscape of great glossy-leaf forests. The film explores both issues and offers a vision that consistently and consciously problematizes any simplistic notion of Japanese history. In an interview Miyazaki explicitly distances himself from the work of his predecessor Kurosawa, calling the *Seven Samurai* "one of the great entrapments for period film creators." Miyazaki says he wants to go beyond the "simple, historical perspective, or concepts like 'farmer good guy/samurai bad guy.'" ¹⁷

With its insistent offering of alternative visions of Japanese identity, *Princess Mononoke*'s success constitutes an intriguing link with Miyazaki's earlier "exotic" films and suggests that the Japanese audience is increasingly

comfortable with more varied and wide-ranging identities, not only in the worlds of fantasy and science fiction, but also within Japanese history itself. By confronting and even subverting traditional notions of the past, the film offers a new approach to constructing Japanese national identity, one that is not necessarily based on a strictly accurate adherence to historical fact but instead intermingles fact, extrapolation, and fantasy to provide a provocative, heterogeneous, and often bleaker view than the conventional vision of Japanese history and identity.

The film employs a number of strategies to accomplish this. Miyazaki uses the fantastic and the feminine to defamiliarize and even subvert conventional notions of history, progress, and gender coding in Japanese culture. In contrast to his previous films, which mined the history and legends of other countries, Miyazaki this time decontextualizes and defamiliarizes his country's past to create a vision of shifting alterities allowing the audience to range freely across a far wider continuum of both historic events and historical identities than the traditional history film usually presents.

Miyazaki realizes how his film confronts traditional notions of the past. In his introduction to his book about the film he states, "Contrary to the usual period film (*jidaigeki*), this is a movie in which few samurai, peasants, or feudal lords appear. And if they do they are simply on the sidelines. The main protagonists are people and wild gods (*kamigami*) who usually do not appear on the stage of history."¹⁸ The film itself establishes its paradoxically ahistorical tone from its opening scene, set squarely in the realm of the nonhuman: a wide-angle shot exposes dark, mist-laden mountains over which are superimposed the words "Long ago, this country was covered by deep forests in which, from ancient times, there lived the gods." The film begins in liminal space, a notion supported by the fact that there is no explicit date in the film (although the promotional material states that it is set in the Muromachi period). Even when humans are introduced, *Mononoke* continues this liminal theme by focusing on a group of marginal people, the Emishi (the promotional literature says they are the equivalent of the Ainu), whose dress, choice of steed, and architecture indicate their differences from the Yamato, or "pure" Japanese people.

The film focuses on marginals throughout its narrative, which is a quest with romantic, epic, and apocalyptic overtones: Ashitaka, a young lord of

the Emishi tribe, is cursed by a dying boar god. In hope of undoing the curse, he travels to Yamato (the traditional name for Japan). There Ashitaka discovers two unusual places. One is a forest, a realm of myth and nature, ruled by a gigantic deerlike presence known as the *shishigami*, with creatures that are either explicitly supernatural, such as the doll-like spirits known as the *kodama*, or that go beyond nature, as in the clans of sentient animals such as wolves, monkeys, or boars who also populate the forest. The other place is Tataru, a product of civilization quite different from conventional notions of settlements during the Muromachi period. Ashitaka learns that Tataru is a weapons manufacturing plant that mines iron ore for armaments. In another example of undermining expectations for the conventional, guns, rather than swords, play a major part in this supposedly medieval setting.

Tataru is to some extent in league with the Yamato court, since they are both united against a common enemy, the gods of the forest. As a consequence and again contrary to what audiences might expect of a medieval setting, the important battles of the film are not between samurai and samurai or even samurai and peasants. Instead, various human factions battle the beasts and spirits of the forest. Furthermore, the emperor, whose usual role was to bring the forces of nature into harmony with his court and subjects, is shown as inimical to nature as he sends forces to fight the forest gods.

In another subversion of traditional conventions, Tataru is governed by a woman, Lady Eboshi, who has created a refuge for outcast women and people with incurable illnesses such as leprosy. Eboshi is pitted against forest creatures and another female human, a girl named San, the *mononokehime*, or “possessed princess,” of the title. Although *mononoke* traditionally means “possession by a human spirit,” in this case San is clearly possessed by the fearsome spirits of nature. Raised by Moro, a female wolf, San detests all things human and lives only to destroy civilization, which to her is Tataru. Eboshi, in turn, is determined to destroy the forest, which means she must kill the *shishigami* for victory.

In the film’s apocalyptic climax, Eboshi, along with samurai and priests from the court, battles the forest and cuts off the head of the *shishigami*, which causes the destruction of the forest. The earth turns brown and cracks open, the forest spirits die, while the *shishigami*, barely alive, searches for its head. Eboshi has promised the head to representatives of the Yamato court, who

intend to take it back to the emperor, but in the film's penultimate scene, San and Ashitaka seize the head and return it to the *shishigami*.

Princess Mononoke ends with the apparent restoration of nature and harmony, including a patently reassuring scene in which the world turns green and flowers bloom, but ambiguous currents remain beneath the surface closure. Although Ashitaka is seemingly freed from his curse and decides to stay in Tatara to work with the now penitent Eboshi, he cannot convince San to live with him. She insists that she cannot forgive humans and continues to lament the death of the forest god. Ashitaka in turn maintains that the *shishigami* is still alive, but Eboshi remains unpersuaded. The last lines of dialogue between the two have them agreeing to "visit each other sometime."

Although it uses historical material, *Princess Mononoke* is clearly "history as vision," as Rosenstone describes the New History Cinema,¹⁹ creating a representation of historical reality that is recognizable yet unfamiliar and therefore provocative. Or as Komatsu says about the film, "This is not a work based on historical faithfulness . . . this is fantasy dressed as historical fiction with a variety of facts and fictions gathered together."²⁰ Miyazaki himself makes this clear when he says that he chose the Muromachi period because "marvelous encounters and beautiful things could still exist."²¹

The way the film mixes "facts and fiction" is an important element in its overall defamiliarizing effect. Perhaps the two most important aspects of this defamiliarization are the film's outright subversion of conventional female characterization and its "supernaturalization" of nature. With his female characters in *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki not only undermines a plethora of female stereotypes from conventional Japanese culture and from the anime world itself, he also proceeds in a somewhat new direction from his previous female creations.

As Murase points out, there are actually three important female characters in the film: Eboshi, San, and Moro, San's wolf-mother.²² Female characters have traditionally been important in Miyazaki's oeuvre, but these three depart from his more typical heroines. They are infinitely less "cute" (*kawaii*) than previous Miyazaki female protagonists, who, independent and self-possessed though they might be, still provided the audience with the reassurance that these assertive young women were fundamentally feminine. Since "cuteness" constitutes an entire cultural style in contemporary Japan,

linked to the culture of the *shojo*,²³ the absence of “cute” traits in the female protagonists of *Princess Mononoke* is especially notable.²⁴ Overall, *Princess Mononoke*’s females possess a relatively gender-neutral or at least ambiguous characterization that is far from the traditionally female and completely outside of the misogynistic patriarchal collectivity that was rapidly becoming the foundation of Japanese society at that period. Eboshi is a leader who, while she cares for the sick and the outcast, is equally concerned with military matters and the destruction of the *shishigami*. Moro appears to be a wise and brave mother, but she is also a ferocious killer. Most intriguingly of all, San, who one might expect to occupy the conventional “heroine position” as such Miyazaki protagonists as Kiki or Nausicaä, is shown as a ruthless figure of unrelenting violence. She has her moments of softness, as when she cares for the injured Ashitaka, but the viewer is most likely to remember her first appearance in the film, when she is clad in a costume of fur and bone, her mouth smeared with blood from sucking the wound in Moro’s side.

This remarkable initial appearance is worth probing, especially since it is this depiction of San that appeared most often in promotional material for the film. Her blood-smeared face, fierce demeanor, and fur clothing obviously associate San with both violence and nature, but there is also a strong element of the sexual, primordial female as well. The blood around San’s mouth (metonymically reinforced by two slashes of red paint on her cheeks) suggests menstrual blood and an aggressive sexuality that is clearly confrontational rather than reassuringly feminine. The fur around San’s neck, visually reinforced by Moro’s furry coat, might also suggest genitalia, but in a far from comforting or traditionally feminine manner. San’s body is thus inscribed with wildness and primitive sexuality, making her Otherness not only female, but also bestial.

This reading is supported by most of her appearances in the film, which emphasize her aggressive, terrifying intensity. For example, the scene of her attack on Tatara is a tour de force of assaultive action. The viewer first sees her from a distance running with her two wolf “siblings” in a horizontal streak that zooms across the screen. Horizontals switch to verticals in the scene of the attack as she leaps, rolls, and plunges from rooftop to rooftop, knife in hand. Overwhelming the clearly outmatched citizens of Tatara and far more frightening than her wolf companions, San appears as terrifyingly

Other, a creature of supernatural forces, totally outside the realm of the human and only barely within the territory of the animal.

San's "mother," Moro, is also a destabilizing mixture of characteristics. Although clearly sentient and intelligent, she contrasts markedly with the cuddly anthropomorphic creations that viewers of family animation (both in the West and in Japan) have come to expect. She does have nurturing qualities. For example, in a strangely poignant scene, San buries her face against Moro's fur, creating another destabilizing vision of mother-child bonding because San, wearing a fur headpiece, appears as both human and animal. And she gives wise advice to both her real offspring and San. But she is also a relentless fighter as emblemized by her death scene: as she is dying, her head magically flies from her body and she bites off Eboshi's arm.

Eboshi is perhaps the most ambiguous character of all. Without any apparent family ties or a hint of male support, she rules Tatara independently. Even more than Moro, she is characterized by an odd amalgamation of the nurturing and the ferocious. She is clearly protective of the diseased and outcast citizens, and, at the same time, she is fanatically determined to destroy the *shishigami* and, by extension, the natural world of the forest. Even more than San, she does not belong to any historical context. There is a tradition of isolated utopian communities throughout Japanese history, and the film's presentation of the fourteenth century as a time when iron ore manufacturing appeared is apparently accurate. But the notion of such a community being led by a woman who is also a military commander and a fiercely determined fighter is clearly fictional. Furthermore, in diametric opposition to San and Moro, Eboshi aligns with technology and culture.

The question remains: Why did Miyazaki choose to present his female characters in such a self-consciously Other light?

In her provocative essay, Murase sees the three females as occupying significantly different positions in relation to the nature/culture dichotomy that is one of the main pivots of the film. For Murase, San and Moro exist as a mother-daughter coalition aligned with nature and in opposition to the "civilization" of Tatara that Eboshi rules. Eboshi in turn can be seen as a kind of artificial mother to the collectivity of Tatara. In the death of Moro at the film's end, in contrast to the continued existence of both Tatara and Eboshi, Murase sees nature being overwhelmed by culture and also, perhaps, a hint

of the transition from the flesh-and-blood ties that characterized premodern Japan to the kind of suprapersonal relationships that characterize the industrial collectivity of contemporary Japan.²⁵

Murase also suggests that Miyazaki might be covertly playing with gender boundaries behind the screen of the nature/culture dichotomy. It is certainly true that all three female protagonists possess characteristics and play roles that are traditionally coded as male. It is also true that, with the exception of Ashitaka, there are no other male heroes in the film. In a departure from recent Miyazaki films we see the film's female protagonists through the focalization of Ashitaka. This male focalization, however, might make the female protagonists appear all the more Other in relation to Ashitaka's more normative figure. The fact that the female protagonists are really not "there" for the male in any substantive way underlines the strong separation of genders in the film.²⁶

But it is also possible that using females in conventionally male-coded roles is another strategy to destabilize. The three female characters defamiliarize what might otherwise be hackneyed film roles. Even Moro could have been a male wolf, the standard patriarchal beast of the forest. But making her a mother without conventionally maternal characteristics destabilizes the audience—there is no assurance that the beast is nonthreatening. Moro remains an unrepentant threat to the humans until her death, which is portrayed unsentimentally.

Even more obviously defamiliarizing is Eboshi. Her character subverts any conventional notion of the traditional female role, or, what Keirstead and Lynch term a "vehicle for tradition."²⁷ Furthermore, had Eboshi been a male in charge of making armaments, governing a collectivity, and leading troops into battle against the denizens of the forest, the audience would likely have found her far less interesting and read her as being another typical representation of the evil human male pitting his draconian technology against helpless nature. By making her a female who can both destroy and rebuild, the film problematizes any facile stereotyping of technology/armaments/industrialized culture as evil. Eboshi's tragedy is that she is not evil and is coerced into her destructive attack by her natural desire to protect a collectivity that is in many ways a utopia.

Eboshi's character thus defamiliarizes the standard notions of both historical femininity and industrialized culture. San's character, while it too defamiliarizes the feminine, in contrast, it also defamiliarizes at least one conventional view of women and nature, that of the feminine and the natural as a form of sanctified Japanese harmony (*wa*). Even today modern Japan emphasizes women and nature as emblems of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Thus, as Brian Moeran points out, fashion magazines such as *Katei gaho* feature only Japanese models, usually wearing kimonos and performing some seasonal activity to promote the magazine's image of traditional harmony: "together with nature, something Japanese."²⁸

Obviously, San's connection with nature is far from romantic and mystical. The "nature" that San epitomizes suggests assault, destruction, and profound, unstoppable rage. In this regard, San's character is a link to historical Japanese beliefs, such as the *kami* in Shinto. In Shinto's animistic beliefs, natural products, animals, rocks, and mountains, as well as individuals, can all become *kami*. *Kami* were gods not because of any moral attributes (as would be the case in the Buddhist pantheon that came to Japan later) but because of their special powers. Although not a *kami*, San is clearly a liminal figure, infinitely closer to the animal and other *kami* characters, who are at least as important in the film as the human protagonists.

This brings us to the second major destabilizing strategy of the film, the use of the fantastic and uncanny to align nonhumans and nature with the supernatural. Robin Wood says that fantasy "can be used in two ways, as a means of escaping from contemporary reality or as a means of illuminating it."²⁹ *Princess Mononoke's* use of fantasy is clearly to disturb our notions of reality.

The center of the film's fantasy is the forest, which stands in uncanny opposition to the civilization of Tatara. Freud defined *uncanny* as something that is both unfamiliar yet eerily familiar (*unheimlich*). The forest certainly fits Freud's definition. For Miyazaki, apparently, the forest is a buried archetypal memory. According to Komatsu, *Mononokehime's* forest is based on Miyazaki's reading historical ecology, particularly Sasuke Nishio, whose works inspired a spiritual revelation. As Miyazaki said:

Upon reading [*Sasuke*], I felt my eyes being drawn to a distant height. A wind blew over me. The framework of the nation state (*kokka*), the wall emblemized by the word “racial people” (*minzoku*), the heavy weight of history, all fled away from me and the breath of life from the evergreen forests flowed into me. Everything was woven together in this book—the forests of the Meiji shrine where I liked to stroll, theories about farming in Shinshu during the Jomon period, the tales of everyday life in Yamanashi that my story telling mother liked to relate—and it taught me what I was the descendant of.³⁰

It is Miyazaki’s notion that he and other Japanese are the spiritual descendants of the “glossy-leaf forests,” which Sasuke theorizes once covered Japan until the country became dominated by rice cultivation. These glossy-leaf forests could exist in untamed nature. But the rice paddies proliferated and, by the twentieth century, the forests had all but disappeared.³¹

Miyazaki believes, however, that the vanished forests still exert an archetypal spiritual force on the average urban dweller. He shows this influence in the forest of the *shishigami*. As Miyazaki says in this essay’s epigraph, he could not locate the forest on a map of Japan. Rather, he believes that “somehow traces of that kind of place still exist inside one’s soul.”³²

In this interpretation, the forest of the *shishigami* is a place of magical spiritual renewal, but it is not a landscape that is welcoming to humans. In fact the forest has little in common with the vision of the natural world of the Muromachi period. Influenced by the Zen priesthood, the Muromachi landscape was enclosed, the carefully cultivated, safe framework of the urban Zen garden. In contrast, the forest of the *shishigami* is wild and threatening. Its Otherness is beautifully expressed in the night time manifestation of the *shishigami*, the immense and translucent *detarabochi*, which looms over the forest like an enormous iridescent shadow in one of the film’s most extraordinary scenes.

It is instructive to compare *Princess Mononoke*’s view of the relation between the natural and human worlds with the vision of those worlds the Disney animated films. In some cases, the visions are not so far apart. In *Pocahontas* (dir. Mike Gabriel, 1995), the title character, a young Native American princess who, like San, is linked to the natural world, introduces

Captain John Smith, the white male invader, to a world of natural beauty and harmony. This world is embodied in the song, “The Colors of the Wind,” in which the beasts, the natural setting, and the humans mingle in a celebration of harmonious interaction. *Pocahontas* also resembles *Princess Mononoke* in its downbeat ending, in which the two protagonists, although clearly in love with each other, are forced to separate. Also, scenes of the British soldiers’ attack on the forest at least suggest the bleak inevitability of the technological destruction of the environment.

The Disney animated film *Tarzan* (dir. Kevin Lima, 1999) has some particularly intriguing commonalities with *Mononoke*, and also displays some differences. Both films feature primordial natural settings and human protagonists raised by animals, and, to some extent, privilege a fantasy of revenge by the natural world on human technology. But the narrative strategies and imagery the films employ are significantly different, as are their underlying ideological messages.

Like *Princess Mononoke* and *Pocahontas*, *Tarzan* deals with contemporary social issues, such as difference, technological hegemony, and environmental damage (although it ignores the imperialist implications of its Victorian setting and story). To promote a politics of reassurance, however, it raises these issues and then undermines them with a comforting fantasy of human and environmental harmony that evokes the notion of the “noble savage” and even a restoration of the Garden of Eden. The film updates and simplifies Edgar Rice Burroughs’s story with a narrative in which “good” humans, animals, and nature are threatened by “evil” humans, technology, and capitalist acquisitiveness (and one ferocious leopard). In this version, Jane and her father are accompanied by an evil hunter, Clayton, who hopes to capture apes and Tarzan for exhibition in the “civilized” world. Ultimately, the good humans band together with Tarzan and the jungle animals and triumph over Clayton’s evil designs. In the film’s upbeat ending, Jane and her father decide to stay in the jungle with Tarzan, and the final scene shows all three frolicking with Tarzan’s animal friends.

The differences between the films are considerable. *Mononoke* insists on difference; *Tarzan* attempts to erase it. Thus, despite its jungle setting and an ending that upholds the autonomous power and appeal of the natural world, *Tarzan* ultimately privileges an anthropocentric view of the world,

with humans or human surrogates contentedly playing in a paradisiacal garden. The erasure of difference is obvious from *Tarzan's* evocative opening sequence in which, over a montage of lush jungle shots interspersed with cuts of the baby Tarzan and his parents, Phil Collins sings about “paradise untouched by man” and “two worlds/one family.” In fact, the animals in this “paradise” are anthropomorphic, a point the “one family” refrain strategically underlines. This is particularly obvious in the film’s depiction of the gorilla tribe that adopts little Tarzan after his parents are killed by a leopard. The animation creates humanlike facial expressions for the gorillas to match their humanlike interaction. Thus, even though Tarzan’s “father” occasionally roars and beats his chest gorilla-style, most of the time he behaves like a thoughtful paterfamilias as he tries to reason with his wife, who is eager to adopt the human baby, and tells her, “It’s not our kind.” In contrast to the “father’s” overstated masculinity, Tarzan’s “mother” is stereotypically maternal; she sings, jokes, and comforts her “child” like a human. Also little Tarzan’s gorilla and elephant playmates interact with him in ways that are amusing but have little to do with actual animal behavior.

The cuddly, inclusive behavior of Tarzan’s mother and friends stands in stark contrast to the violently antihuman feeling of the animals in *Mononoke*. Although Moro is wise and nurturing, she is also remote, a reminder of her nonhumanness. Furthermore, she is also unremittingly ferocious in her war against humans, as shown in the final scene when her disembodied head bites off Eboshi’s arm, a vision that stands in explicit contrast to the final scene of *Tarzan* when the gorilla mother cautiously extends her paw to Jane.

This insistent anthropomorphism is typical of many Disney films, and their vision of a natural world that is not fundamentally different from the human and is also consistently inclusive. Even *The Lion King* (dir. Roger Allens and Rob Minkoff, 1994), with its all-animal cast and frightening scenes of violence, has a subtext of the “circle of life” in which weaker animals are shown as almost happy to sacrifice themselves to more powerful predators as part of their proper place in a grand “circle of existence.” Tarzan has an animal enemy in the form of a ruthless leopard, but the other animal characters, especially a young elephant, get along very well with the gorillas. And, with the exception of Clayton, the human characters are portrayed as

being far less destructive than the marauding British soldiers of *Pocahontas* or the weapon-wielding denizens of Tatara in *Princess Mononoke*.

In contrast to *Mononoke*, *Tarzan*'s gender codings are simplistic. The film's implicitly Victorian time frame allows for the characters to play traditional gender roles. Tarzan's mother is iconically maternal. Jane, although bright and inquisitive, is clearly the follower of the leader Tarzan, who wants to "show her his world," as Phil Collins sings. The romantic attraction between the two remains childlike, underlined by the film's final view of the family's jungle romp.

Tarzan and Jane's innocent idyll is never threatened by the possibility of their maturing. Instead, the threat comes from the one-dimensional figure of the villain, Clayton. Like Eboshi, Clayton is signified first by a bullet and then by a gun, but, unlike Eboshi, he is depicted negatively with no motivation for his actions beyond his greed and stupidity. And although Clayton, like Eboshi, threatens the natural world, the film purports the trite notion that good always triumphs. Clayton is conquered by the forces of innocence, and the technological threat that he brings is simply ignored.

Mononoke's world is one in which innocence can play no part and nature is never cozy, but one that remains remotely beautiful, potentially threatening, and, as in the extraordinary and utterly nonanthropomorphic depiction of the *shishigami* and its nighttime manifestation, the *detarabochi*, insistently Other. This is also a world in which technology cannot be erased or ignored; rather, it must be dealt with as an unpleasant yet permanent fact of life. *Tarzan* uses fantasy to offer a utopian vision of harmony with nature to gloss over the inconvenient facts of historical change; *Mononoke* employs the fantastic to reveal how the tragic complexities of history affect us to this day.

In introduction to *Movies and Mass Culture*, John Belton asserts that "the movies assist audiences in negotiating major changes in identity; they carry them across difficult periods of cultural transition in such a way that a more or less coherent national identity remains in place, spanning the gaps and fissures that threaten to disrupt its movement and to expose its essential disjointedness."³³

Certainly this is the case with *Tarzan*. In its attempt to span the issues of contemporary multiculturalism with what Edward Rothstein, writing in the *New York Times*, called a "message of cultural equivalence,"³⁴ *Tarzan*

is instead wrapped in a vision of idealized American childhood in which all differences are obviated. *Mononokehime* stands in stark contrast to this. Rather than promoting a “more or less coherent national identity,” the film problematizes the whole notion of a single Japanese identity, and rather than “spanning the gaps and fissures” of cultural transition, it exposes them, manifesting a world in which technology and progress cannot be seen as unambiguously positive.

At the same time, it must be emphasized that *Princess Mononoke*'s overall message is not only one of “de-assurance.” Miyazaki is, after all, in the business of making films that sell, particularly to families, and it is probably the reason the film ends with the paradoxical combination of stunning visual imagery and a bleak environmental message. As with *Nausicaä*, Miyazaki's previous work of ecological apocalypse, the film presents a vivid warning about ecological disaster that is somewhat undercut by the beauty of its visual representations. *Nausicaä* counterbalances its tropes of destruction and the wasteland with pastel-colored visions of the pastoral Valley of Wind and the triumphal final scene. In the end the heroine is reborn and strides across the sky in a field of gold, offering a message of unification and hope to both the humans and giant insects who populate her thirtieth-century dystopia. Similarly, *Mononoke* balances scenes of the forbidding industrial wasteland of Tatara with the lush beauty of the forest of the *shishigami*. In a final paradox, the scene of budding flowers and new green grass at the film's end pastes a rather forced upbeat visual closure over the brilliantly evoked scenes of environmental apocalypse shown only moments before.

Princess Mononoke does not have the equivalent triumphant, religious revival closure (swelling music, revived heroine preaching harmony between humans and nature) that *Nausicaä* has. But the dialogue between San and Ashitaka in their last scene can also be read as a problematic attempt to span the fissures of technology versus environment that the film dramatizes. That Ashitaka and San are willing to live apart and visit each other while Ashitaka helps Eboshi suggests a resigned acceptance of the necessity of the wholesale industrialization that the film was at such pains to attack in earlier scenes. The ambiguous fate of the *shishigami* is problematic as well. Although San insists that the god is truly dead, Ashitaka's vehement rejection of her

statement in combination with the lush natural beauty surrounding them offers viewers at least a strong hint that it is San who might be mistaken.

Despite these clearly reassuring elements, the film's ending is still a far cry from the resolutely upbeat ending of *Tarzan*. With its myopic vision in which the imperialism of the Victorian period and the technological future it pre-saged can be escaped simply by finding refuge in a jungle, *Tarzan* ultimately ignores historical reality for the sake of a reassuring fantasy. In contrast to this vision of U.S. culture, Japanese society remains aware of plurality and otherness. Miyazaki's earlier films reflected this awareness in an upbeat way, offering visions of other worlds and identities in a nonthreatening, even empowering manner. *Mononoke* takes a darker, more realistic look at this issue. In Ashitaka and San's agreement to live apart, the film suggests the pain involved in choosing identities in a world in which choices such as theirs are increasing. Although set in a historical past, the film reflects the extraordinary array of pluralities that exist in the complex world of the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 See Henry Giroux, "Memory and Pedagogy in the 'Wonderful World of Disney,'" in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995).
- 2 Ellen Shohat and Robert Stam, "From the Imperial Family to the Transnational Imaginary: Media Spectatorship in the Age of Globalization," in *Global/Local*, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 154.
- 3 Scott Schaffer, "Disney and the Imagination of Histories," *Postmodern Culture* 6, no. 3 (1996): 19.
- 4 For further commentary on Disney and ideological imperialism, see Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York: International General Editions, 1975). Also see Giroux, "Memory and Pedagogy"; and Julianne Burton-Carvajal, "Surprise Package: Looking South with Disney," in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Smoodin (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- 5 Robin Wood, "Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 206.
- 6 A measure of America's cinematic dominance can be seen in Richard Kuisel's statistic that 80 percent of the film market in western Europe is "in American hands." Richard F. Kuisel, "French Cinema and Hollywood," in *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American*

- Culture in Western Europe and Japan*, ed. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger (New York: Berghan Books, 2000), 208–222, esp. 216.
- 7 Analee Newitz, “Anime Otaku: Japanese Animation Fans outside Japan,” *Bad Subjects*, no. 13 (April 1994): 11. For a brief but provocative discussion of anime’s place in global culture, also see Susan Pointon, “Transcultural Orgasm As Apocalypse: Urotsukidoji: The Legend of the Overfiend,” *Wide Angle* 19, no. 3 (1997): 41–63, esp. 41.
 - 8 Although the films of Takahata Isao are quite different in style from Miyazaki’s, they are often quite dark, particularly *Hotaru no hata* [*Grave of fireflies*], which many consider Takahata’s masterpiece, and have strong ideological subtexts such as the environmental messages of *Omoide poroporo* [Only yesterday] and *Heisei tannuki gassen ponpoko* [Modern day racoon war Ponpoko]. However, Takahata’s films are explicitly tied to Japanese settings and themes. The above-mentioned films, whose subjects range from the Pacific War to a war waged by Japanese badgers against developers, could have been made only in a Japanese context. They also have less complex characterizations and promote a more black-or-white moral agenda.
 - 9 Schaffer, “Disney,” 5.
 - 10 Although Miyazaki downplays the influence of Disney and U.S. pop culture, his young protagonists share the adventurous traits of postwar Disney creations such as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* (dir. Gary Trousdale, 1991) or the title character in *Aladdin*. A more significant influence, however, might have been the books of Eleanor Farjeon, Rosemary Sutcliffe, and Phillippa Pearce that Miyazaki read in a children’s literature class at Gakushuin University. Pearce, for example, often writes of lonely young protagonists who find adventure and companionship through the interpolation of the fantastic in their lives, much like young Mei in *Totoro*. Another Miyazaki favorite is Arthur Ransome, whose stories also privilege adventuresome children and boy-girl camaraderie, a persistent trope in many of the films.
 - 11 For a discussion of nostalgia and the *shojo* in the works of Banana Yoshimoto, see John Treat, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: The Shojo in Japanese Popular Culture,” in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, ed. Treat (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 1996.
 - 12 Marilyn Ivy, “Formations of Mass Culture,” in *Postwar Japan As History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 257.
 - 13 In her book on Miyazaki, Helen McCarthy suggests that the religious trappings in *Totoro* are “decorative, not functional,” suggesting that the nature spirits the film invokes “live outside” religion. Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Stonebridge Press, 1999), 122. In fact, I think that Shinto’s animistic spirit clearly infiltrates the film, especially in the vision of the great camphor tree the girls and their father bow down to and that later becomes a symbol of power and empowerment. At the same time, the “totoro” itself is an equivalent of the European troll, another transnational touch in what is perhaps the most “Japanese” of Miyazaki’s films.
 - 14 For a discussion of these films, see McCarthy, Hayao Miyazaki.

- 15 Miyazaki, in an interview with Shibutani Yoichi, in *Shibutani, Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi: Nihonjin no sannin no enshutsuoka* [Shibutani, Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi: Three directors] (Tokyo: Rocking On Inc., 1993).
- 16 For further details concerning *Mononokehime*'s box office success, see McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*.
- 17 Miyazaki, in a roundtable discussion, "Anime and Animism," in *Kyoto Journal* 41 (1999): 32. Some Japanese commentators say that *Princess Mononoke* was the 1997 equivalent to Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. See Kobayashi Kyuzo, "Shichinin no samurai kara no ketsubetsu o kuwadate" [Undertaking a farewell from *Seven Samurai*], in *Mononokehime o kaku, kataru, Comic Box* 3 (1998): 152–153. In fact, the two films have some interesting parallels. Both promote moral agendas using historical situations to serve as warnings for the present day (although Miyazaki's "history" is more clearly fantastic); both subvert certain myths of the samurai as warrior hero; both implicitly point to a technological future with guns replacing traditional means of warfare; and both celebrate the power of nature, although *Mononoke* sees nature as almost always antithetical to humanity, and the final scene in *Seven Samurai* shows the peasants planting rice in seeming harmony with the rhythms of the natural world.
- 18 Miyazaki Hayao, *Mononokehime* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1997), 8.
- 19 Robert Rosenstone, *Introduction to Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 6.
- 20 Komatsu Kazuhiko, "Mori no kamikoroshi to sono noroi," *Eureka* 29, no. 11 (1997): 51–52.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 22 Murase Hiromi, "Kumorinaki sunda manako de mitsumeru 'Sei no yami,'" *Pop Culture Critique* 1 (1997): 64–65.
- 23 For a discussion of "cuteness" in Japan, see Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. L. Skov and B. Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).
- 24 This absence of cuteness is particularly interesting in the case of San, especially in comparison to Miyazaki's other famous female warrior character, Nausicaä. While Nausicaä is a superb fighter (in a genuinely shocking scene early on in the film she kills a group of armed men who had killed her father), she also performs reassuringly cute *shojo* actions as in the scene in the Sea of Corruption where she discovers a giant insect carapace and removes the eye shell to take home to her people. While showing herself as adventurous in exploring the forest and competent in removing the shell, the film also has her exclaim *kiree* (pretty!) at the beauty of the shell and shows her twirling around with it in a clearly feminine dance of appreciation. Like San, Nausicaä also has an animal sidekick, a "fox squirrel," which, typical to the film's dynamics of reassurance, she tames and makes "cute" as well. This is in significant contrast to San's two wolf "brothers," who remain thoroughly untamed throughout the film.
- 25 Murase, "Kumorinaki," 64.

- 26 This distancing of the genders is not confined to Miyazaki's worldview but also appears in the "high cultural" texts of Japanese literature. Whereas, before the war, Japanese writers such as Natsume Soseki or Kawabata Yasunari often depicted female characters as oases of nurturing tenderness for their suffering male counterparts, recent works by male writers such as those of Nakagami Kenji and Murakami Haruki portray men as painfully deprived of any union with the women (except, perhaps, a temporary sexual one). See Susan J. Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 53–90.
- 27 Thomas Keirstead and Deirdre Lynch, "Eijanaika: Japanese Modernization and the Carnival of Time," in Rosenstone, *Introduction*, 71.
- 28 Brian Moeran, "Reading Japanese in *Katei Gaho*: The Art of Being an Upperclass Woman," in Skov and Moeran, eds. *Women*, 121.
- 29 Wood, "Papering the Cracks," 223.
- 30 Quoted in Komatsu, "Mori no Kamikoroshi," 49.
- 31 The forest in *Totoro* with its magical denizens might be considered a twentieth-century remnant of these wild forests.
- 32 Miyazaki, in an interview with Yamaguchi Izumi, *Eureka* 29, no. 11 (August, 1997): 44.
- 33 John Belton, "Introduction," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, 2.
- 34 Edward Rothstein, "From Darwinian to Disney-esque," *New York Times*, 15 July 1999.