

Gendered Power in Studio Ghibli's *Shōjo*:
Subversion, Containment, Reinscription

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Introduction

Within the realm of *anime* and *manga* fans, the works of Studio Ghibli's world-famous animator Hayao Miyazaki are resoundingly applauded for their supposedly progressive depictions of young women in Japanese animated film. Many viewers assert that the young female leads taking positions of power and partaking in combative roles is a clear subversion of patriarchal gender dynamics and power, separating Miyazaki's *shōjo* ("young woman") characters from mainstream *anime*. However, in this thesis I will work to bring Studio Ghibli's films back into the discussion of gender representation in Japanese animation using a theoretical feminist media reading of the works' depictions of gendered power within three key films: *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Howl's Moving Castle*.

My main argument will assert that these films ultimately do not challenge or subvert the patriarchal system, but rely heavily on the idea of an inherently maternal quality of women which affords the Ghibli *shōjo* a more benevolent ruling presence, in and of itself an inherently sexist foundational ideology. Furthermore, I will be drawing off of the works of Bell Hooks, utilizing her ideology that female rulers more often than not take on stereotypically "male" qualities, which is reflected in the combative roles of the *shōjo* and older female antagonists. This adoption of male characteristics simply reaffirms male-centric ideas of power and upholds patriarchal social norms. Finally, I will work to affirm that, through a psychological analysis of *otaku* subculture, this non-progressive gender representation in animated media results in real-life consequences

such as the Lolita complex, or sexualization of young female characters and young women.

Chapter 1: The Development of the *Shōjo*: Contextualizing and Contrasting Miyazaki's *Shōjo*

I believe it essential to first establish what exactly a *shōjo* or “young woman,” character is and where she comes from so that we may begin to understand why she is depicted the way she is in current media. Therefore, in this chapter the development of the *shōjo* character type and genre in Japanese media will be addressed, ultimately contrasting the typical historical depiction of *shōjo* and their real-life origins to that of Studio Ghibli's films. I will first begin by analyzing the historical significance of gender relations in Japan and how this set the social stage for gendered representation in media, followed by a brief overview of the development of *shōjo* media specifically, finally establishing a deeper awareness of how Hayao Miyazaki's works fit into the larger umbrella of *shōjo* media and gendered representation in Japan. My goal for this section is to establish a greater understanding for the gendered representation of varying *shōjo* character types with relation to their real historical contexts, which is significant in and of itself in understanding the situation of Studio Ghibli's gendered representation, as well as allows for a deeper analysis of specific Studio Ghibli *shōjo* characters in following chapters.

To begin, a background on significant gender norms in Japan is necessary to understand the basis of gendered media representation, and my discussion essentially begins with shifting gender norms during the 1960s. From the beginning of the 1960s the

idea of *mai houmu shugi*, roughly meaning the ideology of homeownership, began to spread, quickly gaining mass popularity by the middle of the decade.¹ This ideology connoted the drastic social shifts occurring as a result of high-speed industrialization: masses of people moved from urban to rural areas to take wage-earning jobs, thus separating the traditional connection between the home and work, resulting in urban housing becoming more and more dislocated from one's place of work as well as severing pre-established social communities. The nuclear family unit came to define the modern household, with the house as well as the woman of the house herself becoming an idealized "safe-haven" from the modern world outside of it.²

During this time period, the role of the woman was still inextricably tied to her role as maternalistic caretaker situated within the home. It is at this point that it is essential to note a newly significant demographic from around 1960 onwards: young *unmarried* women. It is important to note that the marked difference between these young women and their counterparts is their marital status. While married women were still inextricably tied to their role as maternal homemakers, these young unmarried women came to represent a new and momentous ideal young woman in Japanese culture and media, coming to have an enormous impact on the gendered representation of the *shōjo*.

Many critics of the 1980s such as Otsuka Eiji characterized the *shōjo* by passivity, the commodification of young women, narcissism, and empty consumerism, as well as

¹ Mackie, Vera. "The Homefront." *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*, 246.

² Ibid.

perhaps representing the infantilization of the nation of Japan.³ Others such as John Treat argue that the *shōjo* represents “the freest, most unhampered elements of society,” and that at the *shōjo* constitutes a gender of its own, neither male nor female but an androgynous adolescent figure unique in and of itself.⁴ This ideas of young female figures as the most idyllically free and unhindered figure in modern Japanese society as well as linked to modern consumerism no doubt stems from early marketing strategies in the 1960s. One major economic shift that began during the 1960s and 1970s was the segmentation of marketing in order to more cost-effectively sell existing products to specified markets rather than taking on the entire market all at once. This movement particularly emphasized marketing towards youth, principally the demographic born after baby-boomers and who were engendered into the new world of commercialization and consumerism. Within this new generation, young single women were seen as the new “model consumers.”⁵

Scholar Tomiko Yoda has invoked the words of Hamano Yasuhiro, an influential fashion marketer and lifestyle producer wrote in 1970: “In fashionized society, in the society of flux, in order to prognosticate triggers of change, one needs to focus on youth. Hence all products will *youthify*... and the mass of ‘young at heart’ will evolve, *youthifying* the whole society.”⁶ Yoda notes that “thus, young female consumers evoked in the new marketing trend were less an actually existing, coherent body of the

³ Orbaugh, Sharalyn. "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the *Shōjo* in 1990s Visual Culture." Edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill. In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 204.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Tomiko Yoda, "Girlscape: The Marketing of Mediatic Ambience in Japan," ed. Mark Steinberg and Alexander Zahlten, in *Media Theory in Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 173.

⁶ Quoted in Tomiko Yoda, "Girlscape: The Marketing of Mediatic Ambience in Japan," *Media Theory in Japan*, 173.

population than a lifestyle group, called forth by the very marketing of *young thinking* and *young feeling* (or, more specifically, *girl thinking* and *girl feeling*.)”⁷

This marketing scheme resulted in small groups or individual young women taking up travel and fashion, often seen in the streets dressed in the very styles and carrying the very magazines advertising such a free and youthful lifestyle to their demographic. These groups of young girls were often the target for minor social mockery, seen as harmless ditzes duped by the media, but these small groups quickly transformed into a wide variety of subculture and cultural movements in the 1970s, taking increasingly greater roles in political and social upheavals as the turbulent post-war decades continued. Many critics argue that the actions of many subcultures and girl groups during these transformative decades were never truly subversive to patriarchal society or the media, maintaining that they remained molds of the media which shaped them. Yoda, however, suggests that it is insignificant whether they were manipulated by the media and societal norms or not, what matters is that female bodies and energy were mobilized in never-before-seen proportions, significantly altering the geopolitical sphere of Japan.⁸

Miyazaki, too, exhibits this same thinking in his depiction of *shōjo* characters, seeing them as a new and unrestricted demographic, able to (often literally) fly above normal society. Miyazaki’s emphasis on flying as a medium of empowerment for the *shōjo* is stressed time and again; the *shōjo* transcends the boundaries of reality and its societal expectations, sending a message of endless possibility in which emotions,

⁷ Ibid, 182.

⁸ Ibid, 190-194.

imaginations, and technology combine to offer hope of a better alternative,⁹ embodying the same marketing techniques from the 1960s specifically targeting young women as a newly idealized entity. In succeeding chapters I will delve further into the specific discussion of *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke* regarding this notion of young women as the newly idealized “freest” member of society, but for now, it is simply worth noting that the development of the modern *shōjo* as depicted in Miyazaki’s films indirectly sprang forth from this earlier societal construct of the modern young woman, separating her from normal society in a very idealized form.

In continuing this overview of the development and understanding of the *shōjo*, scholar John Treat suggests that the modern *shōjo* is separate from the “productive economy of heterosexual reproduction,” and may be seen as a potential form of resistance to the nuclear family and industrial capitalism.¹⁰ Yet Treat, among others, does not deny the sexual potential of the *shōjo*: for example, Jennifer Robertson characterized the *shōjo*’s sexuality as that of “homosexual experience and heterosexual inexperience.”¹¹ Thus the *shōjo* is simultaneously sexualized yet desexualized, feminine yet not entirely female, and “secures her identity as a desirable female yet keeps the abject content of mature feminine sexuality at bay.”¹²

During the earlier stages of *manga* and *anime*, these fictional works were quickly separated for gendered audience, *shōjo* fiction, aimed at an adolescent female audience,

⁹ Napier, Susan. “The Enchantment of Estrangement: The Shōjo in the World of Miyazaki Hayao.” *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, illustrated ed., Springer, 2001, p. 138.

¹⁰ Orbaugh, Sharalyn. “Busty Battlin’ Babes: The Evolution of the *Shōjo* in 1990s Visual Culture, 205.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Greenwood, Forrest. “The Girl at the Center of the World: Gender, Genre, and Remediation in *Bishōjo* Media Works,” ed. Lunning, Frenchy. *Mechademia 9: Origins*. 239.

typically geared towards romantic and erotic appreciation whereas *shōnen* fictions, intended for an adolescent male audience, were geared towards preparing young boys and men for their future leadership roles in society and indulged in mechanically-minded adventure.¹³ *Shōnen* was then divided into *shōnen*, specifically for younger boys, and *seinen*, specifically for young men or older male teenagers, hinting at levels of development for young boys whereas young girls remained *shōjo* until they “enter society by marrying and starting a family.”¹⁴

Along this line of thought, during the rapid economic growth of the 1960s, *shōjo* *manga* were particularly used to indoctrinate women to the newly emerging gender roles of the modern age; ones where the man was increasingly involved in a corporate economy and the nuclearization of the family meant the woman was solely responsible for childrearing and home management.¹⁵ *Shōjo* *manga* narratives began asserting female characters as newly capable and hard-working, overcoming personal obstacles to reach new goals, in concomitance with the previous assertion of young, unmarried women as freer and more empowered than ever before. Yet these *shōjo* *manga* each ultimately ended their narratives with the *shōjo* terminating her freedom, succumbing to rigid structures of capitalist heteronormativity, meaning marriage and childbirth.¹⁶ Therefore the *shōjo*, representing the newly free and uninhibited young woman of modern Japan, was only free so long as she remained young and unmarried. Yet this stage of freer existence was not permanent, but rather a temporary phase set to be terminated by traditional patriarchal demands on the woman.

¹³ Orbaugh, Sharalyn, 206-207.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 208.

¹⁶ Ibid, 209.

However, the 1982 *manga* *The Rose of Versailles*' new emphasis on gender bending elements challenged this previous tradition and set the scene for the major androgynous and gender role-bending elements seen in the majority of subsequent *shōjo* works.¹⁷ In the late 1980s elements of the genres of *shōjo* and *shōnen* began to fuse, as illustrated by the 1990s *manga* and *anime* megahit *Sailor Moon*. Although the characters of *Sailor Moon* still largely retain the visual and narrative *shōjo* elements of slim and long-legged body types, strong interest in romance, compassion, feminine aesthetics, intense emotion, and adolescent, “innocent” sexualization intended for the male gaze, they also take on the *shōnen* elements of transformation, innate power, combat, and plot-driven narratives, thus creating a new fusion of the *shōjo* and *shōnen* media types.¹⁸

Socio-historically, the *shōjo* of *Sailor Moon* most accurately represented this time period's depiction of young women from the 1960s through the 1990s in Japan: a newly empowered demographic of young women who, although socially freer and gradually taking on more stereotypically “masculine” elements, ultimately maintained a strong interest in the romantic and sexual relationships that would terminate this indefinite freedom from traditional social bonds. For example, in the *manga* of *Sailor Moon*, once Usagi Tsukino finally marries Mamoru Chiba, she is immediately impregnated and transformed from the free young woman to the modern housewife. Even her alter-ego, the Neo-Queen Serenity of the Moon Kingdom, married to Mamoru Chiba's alter-ego King Endymion, is much more subdued and takes no personal role in combat or action; her married state revokes her freedom, transferring her power to her younger unmarried

¹⁷ Ibid, 210-211.

¹⁸ Ibid, 215. Napier, Susan. *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 125.

self, Usagi Tsukino. Yet this increasingly empowered depiction of the *shōjo* in *Sailor Moon* was transformative for the *shōjo* genre during the 1990s. It is here that the comparison between Miyazaki's *shōjo* and this typical *shōjo* of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Usagi Tsukino in *Sailor Moon*, must be drawn.

The *shōjo* of Miyazaki's films are not characterized by the ultrafeminine, romantic, and ditsy personalities that make up the characters of "Sailor Moon," yet they do combine certain traditional *shōjo* elements with attempts to make them more progressive. Visually, Miyazaki's *shōjo* are still slim and attractive, yet their forms are much more proportional than that of the exceedingly long legs, tiny waists, and enormous eyes of the traditional *shōjo* such as Usagi Tsukino. Additionally, Miyazaki often depicts his *shōjo* as short-haired or as becoming short haired¹⁹ in a transformative experience, using the loss of the inconvenient aesthetic of long hair for women as a visual to denote efficiency and disregard for traditional aesthetics. For example, in *Castle in the Sky*, Sheeta has her long hair shot off during the final battle scene in which she ultimately transforms and matures as an individual; the loss of long hair visually signals this transformation and inner progression.

In addition, Miyazaki's *shōjo* often have gender-neutral names, exhibit power and confidence, and are not yet sexually active.²⁰ Rather than relying on a group to accomplish tasks, as does Usagi Tsukino in "Sailor Moon," Miyazaki's *shōjo* address problems head-on and without asking for assistance (although usually accompanied by a

¹⁹ Orbaugh, Sharalyn. "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the *Shōjo* in 1990s Visual Culture." Edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill. In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 216-217.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 210, 214. Hasegawa, Yuko, "Post-Identity *Kawaii*: Commerce, Gender, and Contemporary Japanese Art," ed. Fran Lloyd. In *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, 136.

male accomplice), confronting issues with stereotypically “masculine” character traits.²¹ Yet, although Miyazaki’s films seem to present a new type of *shōjo*, I maintain that they still explore the *shōjo* from the standpoint of what scholar Thomas Lamarre calls “the mechanically minded boy.”²²

Lamarre notes that despite often attempting to work against a clear gender binary, such as with the warrior-woman characters and differing visual characteristics, Miyazaki’s films more often than not associate boys with engineering roles and girls with communicative roles. For example, although Nausicaa of *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* presents skill with a glider and sword, the burdens of communication, biological nurturing, and self-sacrifice still fall on her.²³ Furthermore, Nausicaa is placed within a god-like role, removing her from an existence rooted in sexuality. Miyazaki chooses to keep his adolescent characters presexual yet on the edge of maturity, focusing on non-sexual yet intimate relations between boys and girls rather than on the relations between men and women in which the gender authority of men is already established by social norms.²⁴

In connection to the previous synopsis of the development of the *shōjo* and *shōnen* media, wherein the *shōnen* was then divided into *shōnen* and *seinen*, hinting at levels of development for young boys whereas young girls remained *shōjo* until they

²¹ Napier, Susan. *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 125.

²² Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 210.

²³ Ibid, 210. Napier, Susan. *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 137.

²⁴ Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 214.

“enter society by marrying and starting a family,”²⁵ the lack of proceeding stages of established development for the *shōjo*, combined with Miyazaki’s *shōjo*’s lack of sexuality and maturation into adults, allows the *shōjo* to remain outside of the traditional structures of capitalist heteronormativity. As scholar Sharalyn Orbaugh has stated, Miyazaki’s *shōjo* can potentially remain in an empowered, liminal stage of gender-nonconformity forever.²⁶ Yet this is not without its own unique complications, and I will work in the following chapters to break down how despite Miyazaki’s intentions, his *shōjo* are in fact far from free from capitalist heteronormativity and traditional patriarchal norms of gendered power dynamics.

In conclusion, I have illustrated how Miyazaki’s depiction of *shōjo* characters stems from marketing techniques from the 1960s which specifically targeted young women as a newly idealized entity, one capable of transcending normal society as a newly free and unhampered demographic. Yet the *shōjo* is not truly unhampered as, despite attempting to remove the element of mature sexuality from his characters in an attempt to avoid predetermined social norms in adults, Despite often working against a clear gender binary, such as with the warrior-woman characters and differing visual characteristics, Miyazaki’s films still continually adhere to certain patriarchal norms such as associating his *shōjo* with the patriarchal notions of maternalistic communication and sacrifice. In the following chapters I will further delve into the issues of gender representation and gendered power in Miyazaki’s films, positing that in respect to feminist theory, Miyazaki does nothing to truly transform the social systems in which his

²⁵ Orbaugh, Sharalyn. "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the *Shōjo* in 1990s Visual Culture." Edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill. In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 206-207.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 225.

characters are placed, but merely replaces traditionally male roles with female figures in the same way in which early feminist movements pushed for women to assert traditionally masculine dominance in order to rise in the patriarchal system. Additionally, Miyazaki heavily relies on the misogynistic notion of an inherent nurturing, sacrificial quality of women in society, associating women with nature and men with culture, continually forcing his female characters into sacrificial roles, again furthering the narrative of gender difference as established by patriarchal society.

Chapter 2: *Nausicaa*: Gendered Power in Studio Ghibli's *Shōjo*

These next chapters will work to develop a more in-depth analysis of one specific film, beginning with *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, with respect to feminist theory, taking a deeper look at Miyazaki's gendered depictions of power. This section will posit that although Miyazaki is often applauded for his progressive depictions of young women in powerful roles, his representations ultimately conform to the traditional patriarchal norm due to the remaining emphasis on the maternalistic sacrificial qualities of his young female characters as well as their methods of exercising militaristic power and dominance in the same way in which a male would. In respect to feminist theory, Miyazaki does nothing to truly transform the social systems in which his characters are placed, but merely replaces traditionally male roles with female figures in the same way in which early feminist movements pushed for women to assert traditionally masculine dominance in order to rise in the patriarchal system. Additionally, Miyazaki heavily relies on the misogynistic notion of an inherent nurturing, sacrificial quality of women in society,

associating women with nature and men with culture, continually forcing his female characters into sacrificial roles, again furthering the narrative of gender difference as established by patriarchal society.

Much of this argument will be based upon the ground-breaking writings Bell Hooks, and it is therefore necessary to establish the foundations for such an argument. In her ground-breaking work *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Bell Hooks notes that in both first and second wave feminism, many feminist activists stressed the idea of women taking more power in the corrupt, already established system, sincerely believing that women would exercise power differently than men. However, Hooks continues, this is a fundamentally sexist idea of difference between genders, one founded upon an innate maternal, saint-like quality of women as asserted by patriarchal ideals. Miyazaki, too, subscribes to this in how he places female characters in leading roles, believing them to be more gracious rulers than males, taking on a sentimental view of women as biologically nurturing entities.²⁷

Hooks asserts that, “Like most men, most women are taught from childhood on that dominating and controlling others is the basic expression of power... [women] do not conceptualize power differently” and would therefore not exert power differently within that same system. It would take a complete revolution of the system for a difference in the exertion of power to occur, not simply a gender switch within the same system. Hooks continues, stating that if feminist women had actively reconceptualized power that would not have, purposefully or not, shaped the feminist movement using the

²⁷ Hooks, Bell. "Changing Perspectives on Power." In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 84-95. Second ed. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000, 86, 91.

preexisting social hierarchies of class and race; they would not have encouraged women to emulate men, the so-called “enemy,” furthering the narrative of exerting dominance, strength, confidence, and decision-making ability as exemplified by upper-class white males. Lower-class, working, non-white women did not become the role models for the feminist movement as delineated by the bourgeois white women because they were not seen to possess the forms of power valued by the society to which the bourgeois white women were indoctrinated.

Therefore, while middle to upper class white feminist activists continued to urge women to take more power within the patriarchal system, they did not offer instructions or alternatives on how to exercise that power, but rather operated under the assumption of inherent female differentness, inadvertently continuing the same sexist narrative under which they were oppressed.²⁸ Miyazaki’s female leads function in exactly this way.

Next, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* must be examined as it is another excellent example of how Miyazaki’s female leads conform to a traditionally masculine ideal of power within a patriarchal society, yet also depend on the misogynistic notion of an inherently maternalistic, sacrificial quality of women as depicted through the characters of Nausicaa and Princess Kushana.

Miyazaki was originally approached by Tokuma Shoten, the publishing company for the magazine *Animage*, in the early 1980s to produce a serialized *manga* for the publication. Miyazaki began drawing the *manga* of *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* in 1982 and continued to work on it for over a decade, even after the production and

²⁸ Ibid, 93.

distribution of the subsequent feature film, which took off at the end of 1983.²⁹ Nausicaa is inspired by the Japanese folktale *The Princess Who Loved Insects*, the fictional works of William Golding, Ursula Le Guin, J.R.R. Tolkien, Homer, and more, as well as the catastrophic mercury poisoning of the Minamata Bay, which poisoned the fish population and caused an international scare surrounding the trade and consumption of Japanese fish. Furthermore, the ability of the fish to adapt to the poison and continue living and reproducing specifically inspired the poisonous plants of the film, which adapt to reflect either the poison of the jungle or the fresh water provided them by Nausicaa in her private laboratory space underground.³⁰

In examining the opening scene of *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, the character of Nausicaa is at first the perfect example of Miyazaki's attempt to *mélange* the traditionally masculine and feminine stereotypes, hoping to arrive at a more neutral expression of gender representation for his *shōjo*.³¹ At first, Nausicaa is presented as a mysterious figure isolate in a world of post-apocalyptic wonder and strangeness, with her face covered by a mask and seemingly omniscient as she collects samples in a flask and removed the *omu* (an enormous insect species in this world) shell with gunpowder from her rifle. Yet this is quickly offset by her excited squeals about finding the shell, revealing a typically high-pitched, young, feminine *shōjo*-esque voice. This feminine side is emphasized as she lays on the *omu* watching spores fall like snow, whispering *kirei* (beautiful), displaying a stereotypically feminine admiration for the aesthetic.

²⁹ Cavallaro, Dani. "Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, 47.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 48.

³¹ Napier, Susan. "The Enchantment of Estrangement: The Shōjo in the World of Miyazaki Hayao." *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 136.

Following this, Nausicaa quickly reverts to warrior mode upon hearing the sounds of explosions, yet bothers to say “sorry” to the insects she disturbs as she runs out to her glider. After again displaying complete omnicompetent power and ability in saving her comrade Master Yupa and sending the raging *omu* back to the forest, she again reverts to a child-like *shōjo* figure as she squeals in delight, playing with her new furry companion Toto the fox-squirrel.³²

Yet in a jarring visual display of violence uncanny for such a cute and caring *shōjo* figure, upon returning home to find her father murdered by invading Tolmekian soldiers, Nausicaa becomes wild with grief and fury, slaying every one of the soldiers in her father’s room with her sword. This overt and out of place display of violence is an interesting narrative decision in that, in making his female characters as violent or even more violent than his male characters, Miyazaki seemingly defamiliarizes a popular stereotype and gender role expectation in his *shōjo* character.³³ Yet this adoption of violence does not inherently challenge the patriarchal social system and, additionally, functions on the incorrect belief that women with inherently exercise power differently from men due to an innate sense of maternalism.

As previously mentioned, Hooks notes that many participants in the early feminist movement stressing the idea of women taking more power in the corrupt, already established system sincerely believed that women would exercise power differently than men. Yet this is a fundamentally sexist notion of difference between genders, one founded upon an innate maternal, saint-like quality of women as asserted by traditional

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 137.

patriarchal ideals.³⁴ Miyazaki, too, subscribes to this in his placement of female characters in leading roles, believing them to be more gracious rulers than males. Yet one excellent example of female leaders exercising power in the same way ruthless way as their male counterparts can be seen in the figure of Princess Kushana.

The Tolmekians, led by the callous Queen Kushana, proceed with the goal of exterminating the forest and its insects completely, ignorant of the folly of their goals, even attempting to resurrect the half-dead *kyoshinhei*, the enormous monster partially responsible for the earth's destruction in past eras.³⁵ Princess Kushana is Nausicaa's opposite with regard to maternal instinct as she subjects Nausicaa's people to physical domination, orders the murdering of Nausicaa's father, the king, and turns a gun on Nausicaa after Nausicaa saved her life, saying "you're too naïve. You shouldn't think we're best friends now just because you saved me."³⁶

In contrast to Princess Kushana, Nausicaa is placed within an almost god-like role, with Napier noting that, "Nausicaa's 'masculine' bravery is matched only by her 'feminine' willingness to sacrifice her life for the sake of world harmony."³⁷ Nausicaa is continually defined by self-sacrifice in the hopes of transforming others similarly to how Hooks notes early feminists assumed an inherent maternal quality in female rulers. Firstly, she allows Teto, the wild fox-squirrel, to angrily bite her finger, winces, but does not withdraw, causing Teto to calm and immediately develop affection for her. Later, as her fellow survivors of the ship's attack are panicking, she takes off her breathing mask,

³⁴ Hooks, Bell. "Changing Perspectives on Power." In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 86.

³⁵ Cavallaro, Dani. "Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, 49.

³⁶ Reinders, Eric. "If You Think There's a Solution, You're Part of the Problem: Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind." In *The Moral Narratives of Hayao Miyazaki*, 16.

³⁷ Napier, Susan. "The Enchantment of Estrangement: The Shōjo in the World of Miyazaki Hayao." *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 137.

inevitably inhaling poison yet smiling and giving the thumbs-up like a pin-up girl painted onto the side of a WWII fighter pilot, causing the men to calm in the same manner as Teto previously did. Nausicaa continually absorbs pain to deflect it from others.³⁸

The most prominent example of her sacrificial maternalistic qualities can be seen in the final scenes of the film, where she sacrifices herself in the attempt to save a baby *omu*, resulting in her getting shot in the foot and shoulder, and as she attempts to restrain the baby *omu* from entering the deadly acid lake it is only when her foot enters the lake and she screams in pain that the *omu* quiets and its eyes turn from red to blue.

Afterwards, as she reconnects the baby *omu* with its rampaging hoard, she is knocked high into the air and Miyazaki states that she was killed in this moment, sacrificing herself in another attempt to save humanity, and her sacrifice transforms the raging *omu* swarm, saving her village from being trampled as she is reborn through the power of the glowing *omu* tentacles, bringing the heroine to her apotheosis through her self-sacrifice.³⁹ Both instances of sacrifice again signify Nausicaa's absorption of pain to deflect it and save others, placing her within a god-like maternal role, or what Hooks would term the "life affirming nurturer"⁴⁰ role expected of females and female rulers.

In conclusion, not only do the female leads in *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* take on traditionally masculine character traits in order to more effectively function within a traditionally patriarchal society, with the extreme case being the ruthless Princess Kushana, they are also forced to rely on the misogynistic notion of an inherent

³⁸ Reinders, Eric. "If You Think There's a Solution, You're Part of the Problem: Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind." In *The Moral Narratives of Hayao Miyazaki*, 22-23.

³⁹ Ibid, 24. Cavallaro, Dani. "Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, 49.

⁴⁰ Hooks, Bell. "Changing Perspectives on Power." In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 91.

female nurturance and form of maternal self-sacrifice as rulers. The film does nothing to truly reconceptualize society, power, or gender roles, and therefore does not create a work any more socially progressive than any other.

Chapter 3: *Princess Mononoke*: Romance and the “Wild Child” of the 1990s

This chapter will be specifically analyzing the Studio Ghibli film *Princess Mononoke* with respect to the previously addressed feminist theory, certain shifts in social conceptions of childrearing and children’s psychological development during the 1990s, and sexualized gender relations reinforcing gendered power dynamics, ultimately historically contextualizing the film and the social implications of its *shōjo* protagonist San. I suggest that San is a uniquely fascinating character due to her position in relation to Japanese social shifts in the development of understanding the child psyche, positioned to act as a ‘repository of stored value’ emphasizing the natural origins of Japanese society; yet her position within nature as an essentialized ‘repository of stored value,’ meant to critique modern society is simply a reaffirmation of modern patriarchal social values regarding gender roles. San remains within the strict boundaries of the patriarchal system as she succumbs to the role of sacrificial savior, as well as the sexualized object of Ashitaka’s affections.

First, just as with *Nausicaa*, it is important to discuss the overall depiction of gendered power and gender roles within *Princess Mononoke*. Napier argues that the three primary female characters from *Princess Mononoke*, San, Eboshi, and Moro, are

completely outside of the typical misogynistic patriarchal norm due to their exceeding levels of violence, that they have a “gender-neutral, or at least deeply ambiguous, characterization compared to traditional female stereotypes.”⁴¹ However, San, Eboshi, and Moro simply follow the aforementioned early feminists’ ideals through combining traditionally masculine and feminine traits, each grasping for power in a patriarchal society, yet not exercising power differently from male counterparts and additionally ultimately exhibiting traditional ideals of inherently female, nurturing, maternal instinct.

For example, despite being a ferocious killer, San tenderly cares for the wounded Ashitaka and despite her hatred of the human race, ultimately joins Ashitaka in sacrificing herself to warn the humans and return the Forest Spirit’s head, showing the same self-sacrificing tendencies as Nausicaa. Lady Eboshi, despite wanting to “rule the world,” waging war against her male counterparts, and unflinchingly shooting the head of the Forest Spirit, cares for the leper colony in her village as well as the ex-brothel girls she has taken under her wing. Moro, also an enraged killer, maternalistically raised San and treats her with affection despite being a human. Each female lead’s violence and ferocity springs out of a maternalistic desire to protect what they care for, whether it be the forest, an individual, or the misfit society of Tatara (“Iron Town.”)

Therefore, despite Napier’s claims of their supposed gender neutrality due to overwhelming “masculine” violence, as well as the fact that the female survivors remain mostly independent of a male counterpart,⁴² Miyazaki simply follows early feminist ideals in their ironic push for women to take more positions of power, yet basing this

⁴¹ Napier, Susan J. "Princess Mononoke: Fantasy, The Feminine, and the Myth of “Progress”." In *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, 182.

⁴² *Ibid*, 190.

claim on inherent maternal instinct, thus inadvertently forwarding the same misogynistic narrative of their patriarchal counterparts, not representing any major progressiveness in gender representation in *Princess Mononoke*.

Beginning with a brief overview of family structure, maternalistic demands on the woman and her role within the home, the first section sets the stage for the conflation of mass social anxiety surrounding the sudden rise in acts of terrorism carried out by children during the 1990s. In connecting this social history with the film, I will illustrate how this anxiety surrounding child development neatly fits into a discussion of *Princess Mononoke*'s protagonist *shōjo* San. I assert that San is the antithesis of the reality of the “wild child” problem of the 1990s, that she is neatly contained in a depiction of a child which is not *too wild*, intentionally diverting the growing uncanny fear of the child in modern society and instead invoke a fascination of “energized innocence” and the potential for the recovery of essentialized lost wisdom from Japan’s past. Furthermore, as I will explain, this “wild child” and her situation in nature is a highly traditional, gendered, contextualization fraught with the same issues of gender relations and gendered power found in *Nausicaa*.

In recent decades the notion that Japan is an overly maternalistic society has been widely circulated, with paternalistic critics lamenting the loss of paternal authority within the family during the post-war period, pushing for the restoration of the significance of fatherhood (*fusei no fuken*, “the restoration of fatherhood”) and paternal principle in Japanese society.⁴³ Paternalism appeals to those effected by the destabilization of

⁴³ Yoda, Tomiko, et al. “The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society: Gender, Labor, and Capital in Contemporary Japan.” *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 239

Japanese masculine identity as a result of the economic downturn post-bubble-bursting, assuaging the fears of men who have been edged out of their corporate places in society, turning back to the home to find a sense of purpose. Often the return of a workaholic, estranged father and husband is met with indifference or upset by wives and children, yet the paternalistic discourse consoles men, stating that they do have a significant role to play within the family sphere and social sphere at large outside of their workplace, providing an “alternative vision of masculine legitimacy” and identity in post-bubble Japan.⁴⁴

Scholar Tomiko Yoda notes that such paternalistic critics excessively blame maternal influence for a myriad of societal, political, and economic problems, connecting the “excess” of maternalism with the erosion of the national in favor of the individual, with the rise in narcissistic and hedonistic consumer culture, and the egotistical notions of entitlement and victimhood. More specifically, with regard to the discussion of “the child” in national discourse, paternalistic critics blame maternalism for the rise in violent youth crimes, prostitution by middle-class teenage girls, and the refusal of children to attend school.⁴⁵ It is here that it is essential to delve further into this development of the “maternal ideal” within the historical framework of post-war Japanese society and the effect of this ideal on Japanese society as a whole.

The notion of the “maternal ideal” within the rapid industrialization of post-war Japan, specifically gained enormous social momentum during the *kigyō shakai*, or “enterprise society” of the 1970s and 1980s as it fit well with the regime of social and

⁴⁴ Ibid, 240.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 239.

familial management of the time. There has historically always been a strong tie between the reproductive functions and roles of women within the home in Japan and indeed in most nations around the world, but the specific promotion of economic and technological goals of modernization on a national scale as influenced by home management was a cultural phenomenon located by recent feminist researchers as beginning during the development of the modern, industrial capitalist nation-state.⁴⁶

However, it could truly be said to have begun at the turn of the century and drastically heightened during the World Wars, as the family unit was placed under stricter guidance and social regulation in order to provide for the nationalistic war efforts. With the ever-increasing presence of women in the work force through the Second World War, the issue surrounding the “laboring body of the woman worker as also potentially a maternal body” became particularly pronounced, and the government began to increase regulation on working conditions for women and children. This interest in women and children was inextricably linked to the nationalist discourse and desire to produce healthy subjects, workers, and soldiers to further Japan’s nationalistic goals.⁴⁷

For example, During the Kominka Era (the era of attempted colonization of Asia by Japan), many major government-backed media outlets were publishing numerous works on how to better structure the home as a means to maximize the war efforts and raising of young Japanese children, particularly young boys, to become healthy adults who would one day take their place among the ranks of Japanese soldiers. The “Manual of Home Cuisine” as published by the Women’s Division of the Green Flag Association

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mackie, Vera. “The Red Wave.” *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*, 76.

asserts exactly what meals out to be prepared for children versus adults, what types of ingredients would provide the optimal nourishment as asserted by the nutritional scientific research of the day, how the mother should discipline her children and support her husband, and so on.⁴⁸ Therefore, it may be concluded that the state and industrial society at large have continually exploited the maternal role for decades, even before the development of the industrial nation state.⁴⁹

Furthermore, as previously noted, the idea of *mai houmu shugi*, roughly meaning the ideology of homeownership, led to the nuclear family unit coming to define the modern household, with the woman of the house as well as the house itself becoming an idealized “safe-haven” from the modern world outside of it.⁵⁰ As previously mentioned, the notion of the “maternal ideal” within the rapid industrialization of post-war Japan specifically gained enormous social momentum during the *kigyō shakai*, or “enterprise society” of the 1970s and 1980s, creating a reinforced connection between the reproductive functions and roles of women within the home. In concomitance with this intensified structuring of gender norms and the home, there was a rapid increase, too, in the focus on childrearing practices, particularly following a number of gruesome incidents caused by child terrorists during the 1990s.

⁴⁸ The Women's Division of the Green Flag Association. "The Manual of Home Cuisine." Edited by Michele M. Mason. Translated by Helen J. S. Lee. In *Reading Colonial Japan: Text, Context, and Critique*, 143-58. 2012: Stanford University Press. Lee, Helen J. S. "Eating for the Emperor: The Nationalization of Settler Homes and Bodies in the Kominka Era." In *Reading Colonial Japan: Text, Context, and Critique*, 159-78. Stanford University Press, 2012. Mackie, Vera. "The Homefront." *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*, 113.

⁴⁹ It is important to note, of course, that a pat description of “exploitation” is a bit oversimplified given various women’s group’s participatory roles, but this nuanced discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁵⁰ Mackie, Vera. "The Homefront." *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*, 246.

As previously mentioned with the “Manual on Home Cuisine” during the war time efforts, the early to mid-20th century brought with it a new interest in child rearing and development, which is not to say that the significance of child rearing was lesser in the pre-war period, but the nature of child rearing and investment in child development drastically changed during the first World War. In fact, the parent-child relationship in Japan came to be thought of as a unique, defining factor that had enabled Japan’s success and difference from the rest of the world during the war.⁵¹

This interest in child rearing and development was took a fascinating turn during the 1990s in Japan when an overwhelming increase in the number of child-driven violent incidents took place in public and at home. The news was littered with incidents involving seemingly normal children attacking their classmates, parents, and committing seemingly unthinkably heinous acts previously unseen in Japan. Scholar Andrea Arai states that much of the Japanese society’s anxiety of the century was rooted in a plethora post-war social, economic, governmental, and social shifts, during the 1990s, but came to temporarily place its focus on “the child” and its development, creating popular discourse around topics such as *kodomo ga hen da* (children are turning strange) and *gakkyuu houkai* (the collapse of classrooms.)⁵²

One particular incident, the story of Shonen A, or the *Kōbe renzoku jidou sasshou jiken* (“The Kōbe serial killing and wounding of children incident”), as it was referred to by the press, marked a serious social hysteria and shift in the discourse of “the child” and child rearing and development. This incident, involving the severed head of an

⁵¹ Arai, Andrea G., et al. “The ‘Wild Child’ of 1990s Japan.” *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, 217. It is important to note that a great deal of this newfound interest in child rearing came about as a result of Euro-American influence.

⁵² *Ibid*, 216.

elementary school student found at the gate of Tomogaoka Junior High in Kōbe, commitment by a fourteen-year-old student, resulted in the particular attention to the relationship between parent and child, what parents may have previously been neglecting in understanding their children, and the child's psyche. The psyche in particular posed a particular point of fear, as it is the unknowable realm of the internal workings of the mind which could potentially subvert the practice of "nurture" as the predominant ideology for controlling the development of the child; the problem of "nature" takes the control away from adult subjects, from the family, from society, which were previously thought to be dominant spheres in cultivating a peaceful population.⁵³

This sense of intense fear and confusion was reflected by the parents of Shonen A in their memoirs *Shonen A: Kono Ko wo Unde* ("Shonen A: I Bore This Child"), which repeats expressions of deep remorse and responsibility for raising the perpetrator of such violent crimes, repeating the question: "*Watashitachi oya ha, doko de, nani wo, machigaeta ka?*" ("Where, and in what way, did we as parents make a mistake?") This is particularly expressed by the mother who emphasizes grief for having born such a child. Arai notes that in this cultural shift in the realization of the non-understanding of the child's psyche, "a dislocation has occurred, producing a sense of inadequacy and uncertainty of knowledge that gives off the eerie feeling of something gone wrong that is temporal in nature," thus alluding to the sudden uncanniness of children, of the familiar becoming unfamiliar.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid, 221-222.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 223-225.

Certain anthropologists propose the child's developmental shift as linked to the rapid industrialization of post-war Japanese society. Post-bubble bursting Japan of the 1990s could be categorized by the instability of the middle class, by the majority of the Japanese populace in constant flux between striving for a middle-class *futsuu*, "normal," life and the constant anxiety surrounding the increasing inability to maintain such a social standing.⁵⁵

This social stress and anxiety, of striving for constant modernization and consumption, too pervaded child rearing practices, as Norma Field argues that throughout the 1990s, Japanese children became objects of labor and consumption at increasingly younger ages; the post-war Japanese child was and is tightly locked in a system of around-the-clock schooling incredibly similar to that of the *sarari man* ("salary man") middle-class lifestyle, mirroring the tight scheduling and overwhelming sense of responsibility of the adult world.⁵⁶ One excellent example is that of the booming *juku* ("cram-school") industry in Japan. Just as in the war-time discourse, the late Twentieth Century national discourse in Japan characterized "the child" as increasingly "objectified in knowledge," pushing for heteronomy rather than individual distinction, as well as an intense emphasis on the cultivation and development of the child as a regulated entity of national identity. It is therefore natural to say that the child, in its position at the center of national investment, is also naturally a place of national anxieties about national futures.⁵⁷ It is here that an interesting discourse on the production of *Princess Mononoke* comes into play.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 228.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 229.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 229.

In the summer of 1997 as a reaction to the national anxieties surrounding the child, a flood of representations of a “wild child” appeared in Japanese media. One particularly popular one being the image of the blood-smeared face of San, the *shōjo* protagonist from *Mononoke Hime* (“Princess Mononoke.”)⁵⁸ In July of 1997, Miyazaki’s *Mononoke Hime* broke all previous box office records in Japan, grossing more than \$150 million, with about one tenth of the entire Japanese population recorded watching the film. The new use of software and other modern computer technologies for the film cause the expenses poured into *Mononoke Hime* to reach a total of \$19.6 million, a record not only for the Studio but for Japanese animation as a whole.⁵⁹ *Mononoke Hime* was set in the Muromachi period, a period Miyazaki states as containing a,

more diverse history than is commonly portrayed. The poverty of imagination in our period dramas is largely due to the influence of clichéd movie plots. The Japan of the Muromachi era... was a more fluid period, when there were no distinctions between peasants and samurai, when women were bolder and freer.⁶⁰

If one were to simply read a history book, it would quickly become quite clear that these assertions about social freedom are simply untrue. I believe that Miyazaki is intentionally working within an idealized distant past in order to create a specific critique about modern Japanese cultural identity. The character of San, clad in fur and a necklace of bones to mimic her wolf brothers, is specifically situated within nature and outside of human civilization in order to create within her the notion of a primitive truth or origin of Japanese people. As Arai states, San is a “privileged locus of the truth of origins,” created

⁵⁸ Ibid, 216.

⁵⁹ Cavallaro, Dani. “Princess Mononoke.” *The Anime Art of Dani Cavallaro*, McFarland & Company, 2006, pp. 120.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 122.

to didact a narrative about the failings of modern society and how it may be saved through rediscovering its origins.⁶¹

Despite all her ferocity, San is neatly contained in a depiction of a child which is not *too wild*, meant to intentionally divert the growing uncanny fear of the child in modern society and instead invoke a fascination of “energized innocence” and the potential for the recovery of previously lost wisdom from the past. Arai claims that *Mononoke Hime* represents the highly romanticized and essentialist view of the child, an apex of fascination with the idea “of childhood as the ‘repository of stored value.’”⁶² It is in this way that San represents the mirror image of Shonen A: both “wild children” are rooted in different origins, one defined by an unknown origin shrouded in fantastic mystery and wonder, one rooted in known “normalness,” which has inexplicably turned foul. While Shone A represents the issue of nurture gone wrong, San embodies the desired antithesis in “nature gone right.” San stabilizes a nationalistic discourse on the origins of Japanese culture, placing it comfortably within the image of the essentialized and idealized wild, but not too wild, child as a comforting substitute for traumatic social history.⁶³

This particular statement of “nature gone right” peaks my interest. What kind of nature is being depicted in this film, and how is it “right” in comparison to modern Japanese society? In my previous discussion of the development and characterization of the *shōjo* as well as in Miyazaki’s statements on the Muromachi period, both claim to be free of modern heteronormative social restrictions. However, I believe that the methods

⁶¹ Arai, Andrea G., et al. “The ‘Wild Child’ of 1990s Japan.” *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, 220.

⁶² *Ibid*, 229.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 231.

of gender representation throughout the film are, rather than working against modern norms and displaying a freer version of society without modern gendered power dynamics, the film simply reinstates such dynamics and clearly align the protagonists of Ashitaka and San to patriarchal gender norms, ultimately not providing any clear alternative to the problems Miyazaki identifies and critiques in modern society.

It is here that I think it necessary to dissect the ways in which San is stabilized as “not too wild,” for this provides fascinating insights in to the gendered power dynamics occurring within the film. Much of my argument is founded in the early feminist writings of Sherry B. Ortner. In her iconic work “Is Woman to Man as Nature is to Culture?” Ortner analyzes the varying reasons for which women have historically been associated with nature and men with culture, resulting in the dominance of man over woman just as with man over nature.⁶⁴ Just as is argued in Ortner’s work, Miyazaki, like the rest of patriarchal society, associates San with nature and forces his *shōjo* into maternalistic, sacrificial roles.

⁶⁴ Ortner’s argument for the association of women with nature is threefold. First, Ortner quotes Simone de Beauvoir, stating that it is because of the woman’s physiological “enslavement to the species,” meaning that the female body is necessary to the continuation of human reproduction while the man is free from any physical requirements such as child birth, lactation, etcetera, therefore placing a greater burden on the animalistic requirements of the female body while the male is free to take a more active role in culture. Secondly, because of these physiological demands such as lactation, women have historically been assumed to take on the role of child rearing, a time consuming and isolating task. Ortner notes that children are more or less akin to animals due to their lack of culture, thus placing women, too, closer to this animalistic existence as they work to teach children basic culture. Finally, Ortner argues that in society women’s psyche is seen as more primitive due to their concern for the interpersonal and subjective, while men tend to focus on the objective bigger picture. Overall Ortner’s work emphasizes that each of these points is not a necessary part of our construction of society, that each is a choice and largely due to cultural conditioning and patriarchal decisions rather than innate psychological difference. Of course Ortner’s argument is dated and missing many facets of the larger break down of patriarchal gender norms and roles as they have been discussed in more recent years, the traditional notion of patriarchal society connecting women with nature is the important piece of information to focus on here.

Throughout the film, Ashitaka is associated with culture, beginning with his role as prince of the Emishi people, and culminating in his invested role in Tatara, or “Iron Town.” He is invariably situated within the realm of “culture,” throughout the film, with respect to my argument on nature versus culture whereas San is situated in nature. In Ashitaka’s first encounter with San, she is depicted, as previously discussed, as the “sexual primordial female,” instantly catching Ashitaka’s attentions. The viewer is shown his insinuated sense of attraction through his long-held gaze as the camera holds prolonged focus on her fur-clad, blood-smeared figure from his point of view. This association with nature and her subordinate position in relation to Ashitaka’s male culture plays out in their interactions through the film.

After Ashitaka reaches Tatara, San, aided by her two wolf brothers, storms the fortress town with the intention of killing its leader Lady Eboshi. Ashitaka does not hesitate to run after San and stand between her and Lady Eboshi as they duel in the town square, surrounded by the jeering people of Tatara. Ashitaka comes between San and Lady Eboshi, saying, “there is a demon inside you. And in her.” Lady Eboshi, cognizant of Ashitaka’s feelings for San, mocks him saying, “I’m sure she’ll make a lovely wife for you.” Ashitaka finally knocks both women unconscious to end the fight, acting as a mitigating force on the two female lead’s exertions of power and dominance, putting them back “in their place,” so to speak, by exerting his own ideals as a patronizing leader. Ashitaka then lifts San over his shoulder, stating, “I’m leaving, and I’m taking the wolf girl!” He proceeds to carry San out of Tatara, thus verbally claiming her as his property and physically subduing her under his control. This scene particularly emphasizes Miyazaki’s adherence to traditional gender power dynamics, as Ashitaka acts as a

mitigating force on San's wildness, enforcing upon her wild nature a strong sense of patriarchal culture.

Following this scene, after Ashitaka carries San out of *Tatara* like a hunting trophy slung across his shoulder, while riding on the back of his trusty elk Yakkul, Ashitaka collapses due to blood loss after being shot by one of the women of *Tatara*, falling to the ground and waking San from her state of unconsciousness. San furiously questions Ashitaka with his own sword to his throat, yelling: "why did you stop me?! Tell me while you're still alive!" Ashitaka responds in a faint whisper, "I didn't want you to die." San angrily retorts "I'm not afraid to die! I'd do anything to get you humans out of my forest! I should kill you for saving her!" Ashitaka, close to death, confesses his attraction to San, whispering, "No... live.... You're beautiful."⁶⁵ San jumps back in shock and amazement, momentarily displaying an emotional vulnerability not yet seen in the film in the face of human affection. This interaction very clearly denotes a sexual attraction between Ashitaka and San, furthering the narrative of putting her in the place of object for his attraction after he has literally claimed her and carried her body out of the town's fortress.⁶⁶

This confessed attraction changes their dynamic and interactions, resulting in San's empathy as she saves Ashitaka's life by taking him to the *Shishigami*, or "Forest Spirit," and cares for him after the Forest Spirit restores his gunshot wound. Throughout this section of the film, San feeds Ashitaka by chewing his food and depositing it in his mouth like a mama bird feeding her hatchlings, shields him from the other forest

⁶⁵ Miyazaki, Hayao. "The Forest of the Deer God (Forest Spirit)." *The Art of Princess Mononoke: A Film by Hayao Miyazaki*, VIZ Media LLC, 2014, 84.

⁶⁶ Reinders, Eric. "It's Not About Winning-It's About Not Giving Up: Princess Mononoke." In *The Moral Narratives of Hayao Miyazaki*, 103-104.

creatures who wish to kill him, and houses him in her wolf family's cave until he regains his strength. San is forced into the role of maternalistic caretaker, instigated by Ashitaka's asserted feelings of attraction, enforcing culture's patriarchal gender dynamics on San's wildness, revealing her patriarchal "nature" as maternal caretaker in a highly traditional, non-progressive depiction of gender dynamics.

Additionally, in the ending sequences of the film, Ashitaka appeals to San's traditionally feminine maternalistic qualities, pleading with her to help save the people of *Tatara* and return the Forest Spirit's head to his body. The two proceed to return the head, together holding it up and being killed then reborn through the power of the Forest Spirit, found clutching to one another and laying in the grass in the aftermath. Again, here we see her subordination to Ashitaka's dominance as he pushes aside her devout hatred of the human race and forces her to act as a human, maternal savior figure acting in line with traditional expectations of gender roles.

Therefore, as previously discussed, despite her violent nature which attempts to break down gender norms, San still remains within the strict boundaries of the patriarchal system as she succumbs to the role of sacrificial savior, as well as the sexualized object of Ashitaka's affections as he exerts his patriarchal will over her continually throughout the film. In total, San is a uniquely fascinating character for her position in relation to Japanese social shifts in the development of understanding the child psyche, positioned to act as a 'repository of stored value' emphasizing the natural origins of Japanese society, yet as we have seen, her position within nature is not progressive representation of gender. This essentialized 'repository of stored value' meant to critique modern society is simply a re-inscription of modern patriarchal social values regarding gender roles due to

the way in which San is associated with nature and Ashitaka with culture, leading to the mitigation and subordination of nature by culture, therefore reasserting very non-progressive notions about gender relations in Japan.

Chapter 4: Transferred Nurturing: *Howl's Moving Castle*

Howl's Moving Castle, originally to be directed by Hiroyuki Morita but temporarily halted due to discrepancy between the director's and the studio's expectations, was restarted in February 2003 with Miyazaki as the new director. *Howl* had the most impressive domestic theatrical release, outstripping *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away* by being screened in 450 cinemas across Japan, being seen by approximately 12 million Japanese citizens and grossing more than \$90 million within its first month, and went on to win several international prestigious awards following its international release.⁶⁷ Many scholars, including famed Susan Napier, have argued that *Howl* is not only an anti-war film protesting the United States' involvement in the Middle East, but also it is also a social critique of Japan, that the unorthodox family in the film is Miyazaki's attempt to salvage the modern strength of family bonds which have been major issues of contention in recent decades, with issues such as the *hikkikomori* (social recluse who often do not leave the house for months on end and continually indulge in entertainment media to replace social interaction), decline in marriage rates, and so on.⁶⁸

Furthermore, Napier has stated that *Howl* projects a new direction for the depiction of *shōjo* in Japanese media due to Sophie's temporary transformation into an

⁶⁷ Cavallaro, Dani. "Howl's Moving Castle." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, McFarland & Company, 2006, 157-158.

⁶⁸ Napier, Susan. "The Castle, the Curse, and the Collectivity: Howl's Moving Castle." In *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, 226-227.

old woman and her maturation into a more assertive, confident young woman. However, I posit that due to the stereotypical gender roles assigned to Sophie throughout the film, Sophie simply transfers her maternalistic prowess from one home to another, beginning with her dedication to her family's home and shop, telling her sister Letty "The shop was just so important to father. And I'm the eldest, I don't mind," and ending in Howl's castle, where she quickly comes to run the home and provide maternal nurturance for all who dwell there, culminating in her sacrificial saving of Howl and Calcifer. Just as with what I have previously discussed in *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*, Sophie is simply depicted through traditional notions of gender roles and gendered power, but to an even more obvious degree than her predecessors in my opinion. Sophie's entirety is encapsulated by a maternalistic existence, from her dedication to her family's hat shop to her new role as mother and caretaker within the eccentric family forged, both past and present.

Howl begins with a slow introduction as we watch Sophie hand sew a decorative element onto a magenta hat, her shop window engulfed by black smog from the train in the town just below. While Sophie diligently works on her sewing, her fellow female shop workers explode with crooning squeals after seeing Howl's enormous, higgledy-piggledy Castle lumber through the mist in the distance. We are informed by one of the girls that Howl is a dangerous figure, prone to seducing girls and (we assume literally) tearing their hearts out for consumption. Sophie ignores this discussion, diligently working on her hat until completion and rejects the older shop woman's invitation to join the girls for an evening on the town, assigning herself to a solitary existence punctuated by long sighs.

It is here, at the very beginning of the film that some scholars have attempted to assert Sophie's socially unique disposition as that of going against gender norms. Susan Napier quotes Japanese critic Mari Kotani, who argues that Sophie's real curse was originally being trapped in the body of a young eighteen-year-old young woman, constrained by societal expectations of sexually charged, flirtatious behavior. Kotani states that young girls are constrained by society and expected to express their gender in certain coquettish ways, but Sophie initially rejects these expectations through her quietness, lack of socializing, and donning of a frumpy old hat,⁶⁹ in contrast to the hordes of other women in the film who consist of squealing ladies in bright pink and yellow dresses and flamboyantly feathered hats, often pictured drinking with crowds of soldiers in tea shops or giggling unrestrainedly while taking flights on the back of the soldiers' flying contraptions.

Yet I do not agree with this argument simply based off a deeper reading of Sophie's actions and self-deprecating statements at the beginning of the film. If we revisit this opening scene, after completing her hat and letting out a long sigh, Sophie goes down to the lower level of the shop where we see her standing in front of a mirror, looking at her reflection as she holds her plain straw old hat on. She is forcing a smile, attempting to mimic the cutesy behavior of her contemporaries but finally shoving the hat on her head in frustration, frowning and stomping out of the shop, clearly unhappy with her reflection. Furthermore, following Sophie's first meeting with Howl and subsequent balletic flight across the town, while talking to her sister Letty in the sweet shop's back room: Letty warns, "He was trying to steal your heart! You are so lucky Sophie. If that

⁶⁹ Napier, Susan. "The Castle, the Curse, and the Collectivity: Howl's Moving Castle." In *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, 221.

wizard were Howl, he would have eaten it.” to which Sophie dismally replies, “No he wouldn’t, Howl only does that to beautiful girls.” And continues to stare off into the distance, in some kind of romantic trance or mental fantasy world of her own.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the scene of Howl’s distress following the incorrect dying of his hair after Sophie takes up cleaning the castle. Howl, hair newly dyed orange following a mishap in his usual beauty routine, runs downstairs with a towel around his waist screaming at Sophie (in elderly form), “Sophie! You’ve sabotaged me! Look what you’ve done to my hair! Look!” To which Sophie replies “What a pretty color!” Howl continues ranting on, “It’s Hideous! ...I give up, I see no point in living if I can’t be beautiful.” Howl then, slumped in a chair, begins to ooze green slime and summon the spirits of darkness, startling Sophie who finally bursts out: “Fine! So, you think you’ve got it bad! I’ve never once been beautiful in my entire life!” and she storms out of the castle to go cry in the rain.

Each of these defining scenes, establishing the character of Sophie through minimal actions and dialogue, do not paint the picture of an empowered young woman rejecting societal norms, but rather one devoid of self-confidence, clearly wishing she could appear and act more like her contemporaries. It seems that initially, Sophie does indeed wish to be more like the colorful and flirtatious young women around her but lacks the self-confidence to do so, even lamenting in her aged form, as if she truly were an old woman, that she has never been beautiful. She is not, as Kotani would suggest, intentionally distinguishing herself from other young women in a progressive way but rather mourning her difference. In this way, I do not believe that Kotani’s argument is an agreeable reading into the depiction of Sophie with regard to the depiction of gender

norms. Sophie is simply the stereotypical social outlier looking in with her nose metaphorically pressed to the glass, wishing she could be more like what she sees in others.

Furthermore, it could be argued that Sophie ultimately more or less gets her initial wish to be more like other girls as, in the ending sequence of the film, we see her perched on the edge of the (now flying) castle bannister, kissing Howl in a bright yellow dress and hat. She has adopted the norms of others in engaging in flirtatious or sexual behavior and wearing the bright, flamboyant garb constantly seen on other women throughout the film. Visually, Sophie is simply indoctrinated through unorthodox means into the norms of her society.

Along a similar line of thinking, it is important to further address Sophie's appearance as so many scholars have commented on her form as an old woman as being again, progressive in allowing the *shōjo* to transcend the bounds of sexuality to achieve greater character development. Scholar Dani Cavallaro has stated that unlike Miyazaki's other films, the female protagonist in *Howl* cannot actually be defined as a *shōjo* due to her old age. He states that this posited the challenge of "having to conjure up an attractive character without the assistance of well-tested aesthetic and generic conventions."⁷⁰ Cavallaro notes that an old woman's appearance is traditionally marked by a sinister undertone, for example, evil queen's transformation in Disney's *Snow White*. Sophie, through the Witch of the Waste's curse, takes on an appearance similar to the stereotypically evil old hag with bent shoulders and a long, crooked nose, and upon her

⁷⁰ Cavallaro, Dani. "Howl's Moving Castle." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, McFarland & Company, 2006, 159.

first entrance into the moving castle, its inhabitants, too, question whether or not she is witch due to her appearance and unexpected emergence from the Wastes.⁷¹

Cavallaro argues that Sophie taking on the stereotypical appearance of the sinister old hag yet continually asserting her kind-hearted maternalistic tendencies creates for the audience a breaking down of visual stereotypes as well as a rejection of the humanist notion of a unified identity. Furthermore, he notes how Sophie's cursed form is not simply a pat depiction of an old woman in a static form. Sophie's form is continually shifting and transforming throughout the film to reflect her internal struggles with both gaining confidence and reverting to self-deprecation. The most notable fluctuations occur when Sophie and Howl visit Howl's childhood retreat, surrounded by fields of flowers; in Sophie's discussion of Howl with Madam Sulliman; and while Sophie is sleeping. The subtle fluctuations in hair length, extensivity of wrinkled visage, bodily strength and agility, and height, give the impression that Sophie is neither 18 nor 90 but simultaneously several ages at once, and the final resolution of her return to a young body still marked with silver-grey hair notes Miyazaki's idea that although curses may be broken and obstacles overcome, markers of past experiences will always remain.⁷² Cavallaro states that the film continually urges viewers to reject the notion of an inherent correlation between physical appearance and character, not only through Sophie but through each of the other main characters as well.⁷³

Although I do not disagree with Cavallaro's reading of the breaking down of the traditional correlation between appearance and personality, I believe that this choice to

⁷¹ Ibid, 163.

⁷² Ibid, 161.

⁷³ Ibid.

represent Sophie as an older woman does not propel the *shōjo* into a new era of representation. Rather than work to depict a more progressive and socially freer form of *shōjo*, Miyazaki has simply circumvented the issue altogether by choosing to not depict the *shōjo* throughout most of the film, yet still characterizes both the *shōjo* and the older woman through the same problematic terms as previously discussed in other films. As I have explained with regard to other *shōjo* protagonists, Miyazaki has proven incapable of representing a young woman without restricting her to established social norms of gendered power and gender roles, and this proves no less true with Sophie. In order to prove this point, we must take a look at Sophie's role as a housekeeper and adoptive mother/grandmother in Howl's castle.

Sophie's role as housekeeper in Howl's castle is critically defining to her entire character and supposed character development throughout the film. Napier has argued that the main cause for celebration in the film is Sophie's gain of a greater sense of confidence, assertiveness, and sense of self through her work, not unlike Chihiro from *Spirited Away*, emboldened through her forced scrubbing of disgusting bathtubs.⁷⁴ However, Cavallaro unwittingly notes Sophie's inherent ties to maternalistic nurturance and self-sacrifice, stating that Sophie's journey towards developing this sense of identity is marked by a significant sense of interpersonal responsibility. He goes even further to note that Sophie's role is defined by both as supposedly inherently Japanese ideal of group mentality and feminine *yasashisa*, or kindness, compassion, and sensitivity.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Napier, Susan. "The Castle, the Curse, and the Collectivity: Howl's Moving Castle." In *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, 220-221.

⁷⁵ Cavallaro, Dani. "Howl's Moving Castle." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, McFarland & Company, 2006, 164.

Despite these troublingly essentialist tones,⁷⁶ I would like to expand upon what Cavallaro states about Sophie's identity being rooted in feminine interpersonal responsibility.

When Sophie first enters the castle, leaving Turnip Head to bounce behind the castle outside, she sits herself in a wooden chair in front of the large fireplace, criticizing the castle's filthy state and quickly dropping into a doze. The quietly crackling spittle of a fire grows, revealing a pair of eyes which stare at Sophie in momentary amazement, before saying, "I don't envy you lady, that is one bad curse. Curses are tough and you're gonna have a very hard time getting rid of that one." Sophie, equally amazed by the fire, enters into a discussion with it to discover that she is conversing with a fire demon named Calcifer, and that Calcifer is somehow magically bound with Howl in a curse similar to her own. Sophie and Calcifer then strike a deal to help each other discover and break the other's curse, with Sophie sleepily muttering, "all right, it's a deal," before dozing off again in her chair.

Despite this initial scene, in which Sophie and Calcifer agree to work alongside one another to break the other's curse, it is notable that Sophie's curse takes a majorly back seat role throughout the film. Although there is a hinted sense of sequence to this curse breaking, as Calcifer says that "if you figure out how to break this thing that I made with Howl, after that I can easily break the spell that's on you," this sense of sequence does not come to fruition in the sense of Sophie's curse being intentionally broken by another character's efforts. It is broken through her maternalistic devotion to and

⁷⁶ By "essentialist tones" I am referring to the issue of identifying some quality as "inherently Japanese," thereby essentializing, othering, and simplifying an entire nation of heterogeneous subcultures and individuals into one singular quality. This is something often done on orientalist writing and ought to be avoided in order to foster a more nuanced, sophisticated understanding of a culture and its people in my opinion.

nurturance of others. Napier notes that Sophie does not, as one might expect, focus her energies throughout the film on dispelling her own curse but rather focuses her attention on the nurturance and care of others who, by the end of the film, come to include Howl, Markl, the mostly reformed and subdued Witch of the Waste, and the old wheezing dog Heen, previously owned by Madam Suliman.⁷⁷ Compared to the attention given to the curse shared between Howl and Calcifer, Sophie's curse takes on a secondary status and ultimately resolves itself through her work to nurture and heal others, placing her within the role of maternal sacrificial figure just as we have seen with Nausicaa and San.

For example, around the middle of the film, Howl has once again spent the night in his beastly winged form, adopting the role of vigilante in the war, attempting to fight against the war planes and other sorcerers in monstrous forms on his own through his reckless use of magic. He quietly returns home, slowly making his way across the living room partially invisible, still in his monstrous form, and dripping blood, causing Calcifer to worriedly whisper, "oh no, this is not good, Howl!" Sophie awakens in a partially youthful form, specifically in a young body but with long grey hair, and follows Howl to his bedroom upstairs which has been magically transformed into a monster's lair. In pursuing him to the back of the lair she finds him in his miserable monstrous state and begs him to tell her about his curse, to allow her to help him. He ultimately refuses, flying off once more and as he does so, Sophie yells after him, "Howl, no!" and is transformed back into her elderly state.

⁷⁷ Napier, Susan. "The Castle, the Curse, and the Collectivity: Howl's Moving Castle." In *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, 221.

This strange scene is generally commented on for its fascinating blending of dream and reality, and its particular use of animation techniques allowing the monster Howl's cavern to come to life. However, I find this scene especially intriguing because it perfectly exemplifies Sophie's transformation through nurturance. She is emboldened and regains a young form through her love and care for others, illustrated here by her young form pursuing Howl upstairs with the intention to help him. Contrastingly, it is only through the rejection of this nurturance that she is forced back into her grandmotherly form, clearly exemplifying the key role maternal care plays in Sophie's personal transformation. We are given the sense that it is only through taking on the role of sacrificial maternal figure that Sophie can be freed of her own curse, not through others helping her as was initially stated in the bargain with Calcifer.

This is made most obvious during the climactic scenes at the end of the film in which Sophie ultimately saves the family, discover Howl's curse, and return his heart to him. As the city is now fully engulfed in the war, blazing with fire from the bombs being dropped and the Hatter hat shop and attached house is being bombarded by Suliman's henchmen, Sophie has, in a more stable way, reverted to a younger form, yet still marked by her curse by her long grey braid. She inexhaustibly protects the house, looks after Markl and the Witch of the Waste as if they were her own child and decrepit grandmother, and is concerned for Calcifer's weak state. Howl continues to play the part of vigilante, pulling bombs away from the shop and house, telling Sophie, "I'm done running away. I've finally found something I want to protect: it's you." Following this confession of love, Sophie is further emboldened and decides to "move the shop,"

through Calcifer's magic to force Howl to abandon his efforts to protect the shop and house.

This "move," meaning to magically separate the castle from its other physical locations, entails a sacrifice from Sophie. Calcifer states that he is too weak to perform such high-level magic on his own, and Sophie consoles him, stating, "I know you can do it. I've never seen a fire with more spark." Calcifer finally concedes, but with the requisition that he needs something of Sophie's in order to perform the magic. She offers her braid, and after consuming her hair Calcifer turns into an impressively large, blue fire demon, lifting the roof of the room with his blazing form and setting the castle in a frenzy of motion. This sacrifice of Sophies, of physically giving a part of herself, fits into a trope of Miyazaki's in which many of his *shōjo* undergo a haircut of some kind, for example Sheeta from *Laputa Castle in the Sky* having her pigtails shot off by Muska, signifying her newly empowered state. Yet this transformation for Sophie does not symbolize personal empowerment so much as it signifies personal sacrifice for the family, reinforcing her role as the giver to those she is looking after.

Following the start of the move, Calcifer, in response to further comments of encouragement from Sophie, says, "imagine what I could have done with your eyes, or your heart!" The Witch of the Waste becomes cognizant of the fact that Calcifer is the keeper of Howl's heart, something for which she has long desired and searched for. She grabs the heart in the hearth of the flame, causing Calcifer to lose his power and the castle to crumble and split in half. Sophie is separated from the others, falling off a cliff as the others go rambling on the other half of the broken castle without her.

In her despair, Sophie notices that the ring Howl gave her is emitting a faint blue light pointed towards the castle door among the ruins laying with her at the bottom of the mountain valley. The door takes her back in time into Howl's childhood, allowing her to relive the moment when Howl caught Calcifer, then a dying star who fell to earth, saving Calcifer by giving him his heart, magically binding the two characters together. Upon seeing this, Sophie gasps that she now understands the curse and how to break it, while a black hole appears, pulling her back to the present. In desperation she calls out to the young pair, "Howl! Calcifer! It's me, Sophie! I know how to help you now! Find me in the future!" and with that, is sucked out of the past to walk through a purgatory-like space back to the castle door and the present.

When Sophie reaches the present, she is reunited with her eccentric family, and coaxes the Witch of the Waste to let go of Calcifer and Howl's heart. Sophie takes them both in her hands and returns Howl's heart to his limp body, causing Howl to awake with a grunt of pain and Calcifer to return to his form as a star, zooming off and cackling with delight at his newfound freedom. The scene in which Sophie brings about Howl's redemption by returning his heart to him, permanently dispelling his monstrous bird form, is remarkably similar to the scene in *Spirited Away* in which Chihiro does the same for Haku by remembering his real name.⁷⁸

Essentially, the entire second half of the film is dedicated to Sophie fostering the bonds of family within this misfit group, and subsequently bringing about the redemption of said group through her sacrificial behaviors. Furthermore, it is especially interesting to

⁷⁸ Cavallaro, Dani. "Howl's Moving Castle." *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, McFarland & Company, 2006, 160.

note that because Sophie traveled back in time to Howl's childhood, causing him to first greet her on her way to Letty's sweet shop in the beginning of the film, saying, "there you are sweetie, I was looking everywhere for you," Sophie's entire character is defined by her nurturing connections to Howl and the other characters from the beginning of the film. Her entire character and character development is encapsulated by a maternalistic existence, from her dedication to her family's hat shop to her new role as mother and caretaker within the misfit family she forges, both past and present.

Finally, it is worth noting one other significant female figure within *Howl*: the cunning sorceress Madam Suliman. After it is exposed, through the dog Heen's vantage point, that Prince Justin has been released from his curse (being turned into the scarecrow "Turnip Head") and has once again regained human form, Madam Suliman states that she intends to end the "idiotic war." Yet this capricious decision is not altogether reassuring, for there is reason to believe, in one interpretation, that it was perhaps Madam Suliman who first put the Prince under his curse to begin the war. Cavallaro states that the viewer is led to believe that although the current war is to be ended, this by no means ensures a peaceful future—that an equally destructive war could be waged at any point in time at the whim of a nation's virtual rulers.⁷⁹

Madam Suliman is another excellent example of my argument for applying Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory* to Studio Ghibli's gender representations. Madam Suliman is the virtual ruler of her nation, effectively overshadowing the puppet king acting as the face of the nation when it comes to making actual decisions, but in taking the place of a powerful figure she adopts traditionally male characteristics in doing so. Hooks argues that often,

⁷⁹ Ibid, 171.

in order to gain power in a patriarchal system and take the place of traditionally male leadership roles, women resort to adopting (overarchingly negative) stereotypically male characteristics such as assertiveness, volatility, aggressiveness, and ruthlessness, in order to do so. Madam Suliman is no exception. Although she appears to look the part of a docile older sorceress, lacking the stereotypically frowned upon qualities attributed to her female counterpart the Witch of the Waste (such as vanity, hypersexuality, vindictiveness, and laziness), she proves to be astoundingly controlling, threatening, and volatile, seeing her pursuit and desired recapture of Howl as a game in a very similar manner to the Witch of the Waste, though for different reasons. Madam Suliman, just as with Princess Kushana and Lady Eboshi, is simply re-inscribed into the patriarchal norms in a very mundane way.

In conclusion, as Kotani has qualified, Sophie's role as a housekeeper is perhaps the most conventional role out of all of Miyazaki's heroines thus far, and her cleaning of the castle is simply a metaphor for her cleaning of Howl's personality.⁸⁰ Sophie's role as housekeeper and eventual caretaker and maternal figure within the castle establishes her, from her earliest connection to Howl in his childhood to the uncharacteristically congenial end of film, as a maternal sacrificial figure just as we have seen with Nausicaa and San. Furthermore, her appearance as an old woman does not circumvent her prescription to societal norms, but rather this prescription is reinforced from beginning to end, from her obvious wish to be similar to her contemporaries to her wish being granted through her eventual relationship with Howl. Sophie's adversary, Madam Suliman, too follows the same argument I have used before in the way that she adopts the

⁸⁰ Napier, Susan. "The Castle, the Curse, and the Collectivity: Howl's Moving Castle." In *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, 219-220.

stereotypically male, conniving personality traits required to gain power in a patriarchal system. *Howl's Moving Castle* proves to be not a heralding triumph of the liberation of a young woman but rather her successful re-inscription into an unoriginally patriarchal society.

Ultimately, in these first few chapters I have worked to develop a more in-depth analysis of three specific films, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Howl's Moving Castle* with respect to feminist theory, taking a deeper look at Miyazaki's gendered depictions of power. I have shown that although Miyazaki is often applauded for his progressive depictions of young women in powerful roles, due to his emphasis on the maternalistic sacrificial qualities of his female characters as well as their methods of exercising militaristic power and dominance in the same way in which a stereotypical male would, he is simply visually reemphasizing the *shōjo*'s fundamental limitations by and prescriptions to patriarchal society. Miyazaki does nothing to truly transform the social systems in which his characters are placed, but merely replaces traditionally male roles with female figures in the same way in which early feminist movements pushed for women to assert traditionally masculine dominance in order to rise in the patriarchal system. In the next two chapters, I will illustrate the ways in which this depiction of *shōjo* translates into real-life issues of gendered power in society through analyzing the psychological connection of *otaku* viewers to fictional media.

Chapter 5: The Atomization of Japanese Media and *Otaku* Subculture

In this section I will work to establish a basic understanding of the socio-historical development of the individual's relationship to modern media technology in Japan, with the ultimate goal of creating an argument for the sexualization of Studio Ghibli characters by otaku viewers, illustrating the real-life consequences of Studio Ghibli's representations of gender in their films. First, a foundational understanding of Japanese media and its viewers is established through a historical look at the economic boom occurring between the 1950s and 1980s. Many scholars such as Anne Allison and Thomas Lamarre have asserted that the economic prosperity during this time period resulted in not only the popularization of modern entertainment technology, but by the late 1980s Japan saw the atomization of entertainment technology. Furthermore, major cultural shifts turned this media atomization into a refuge for the socially jaded, resulting in many individuals relying on this technology to maintain the "homeostasis of the self" through fiction, thus began the development of *otaku* subculture.

Next, I will establish a basic working definition for *otaku* as that referring to young adult males obsessed with elements of popular culture but with disregard for their broader social and historical contexts, generally deemed as socially invalid and relying on this consumption of popular culture to fulfil their needs for socialization and sexual pleasure.⁸¹ Finally, I will use theories from Thomas Lamarre and Jacques Lacan to prove that *anime* naturally lends itself to a sense of perceived intimacy between the viewer and the fictional media. Each of these elements is significant in laying the groundwork for understanding the psychological relationship between Japanese media and its viewer,

⁸¹ Yoda, Tomiko, et al. "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan." *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Duke University Press, 2006, 36-37.

allowing for a later analyzation of the sexualization of Japanese *shōjo* characters and, finally, those specific to Studio Ghibli.

To begin, it is important to establish a historical background enabling a general understanding of the development of media-based subculture in Japan, beginning with a socio-historical look at the rise and atomization of entertainment media in Japan. Japan's post-war period was marked by a drastic change in national ideology,⁸² from one marked by struggle to afford basic necessities to one striving for the material abundance of the United States, leading to the nation's obsession with material things.⁸³ Between 1950 and the late 1980s, Japan's economy saw the "Japanese miracle," referring to the extended period of high-speed growth in the economy, in which the economy doubled in size every seven years,⁸⁴ made possible by the "iron triangle" of intense industrial development, increased bureaucracy, and single-party politics.⁸⁵ One major industry that saw a rapid increase in Japan was television. In the beginnings of television in Japan in 1953, NTV (*Nippon Television*) had set up roughly two hundred and twenty large TVs in fifty-five locations in front of busy train stations around the capital city of Tokyo.⁸⁶ In stark contrast, recently, censuses report the rate of three and a half hours (approaching four) of television viewed per day for the average Japanese person in 2003. For postwar Japan,

⁸² It is of course important to note the recognition of a vast number of social continuities from pre-World War I and II to post-, but this argument specifically works to analyze the changes in media consumption post-World War II.

⁸³ Allison, Anne, "From Ashes to Cyborgs: The Era of Reconstruction (1945-1960)," in *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, Illustrated ed. (University of California Press, 2006), 67.

⁸⁴ Allison, Anne, "From Ashes to Cyborgs: The Era of Reconstruction (1945-1960)," 68.

⁸⁵ Yoda, Tomiko, et al. "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan." *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Duke University Press, 2006, 17.

⁸⁶ Shun'ya Yoshimi, "From Street Corner to Living Room: Domestication of TV Culture and National Time/Narrative," ed. Frenchy Lunning, trans. Jodie Beck, in *Mechademia 9: Origins*, 1st ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 126-127.

television became the predominant form of media and information dissemination with overwhelming social influence and significance.⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that this major shift accounts for not only the number of televisions in Japan and the number of people watching, but also for how and where they began watching.

As the access to affordable televisions grew, viewers left the streets and busy train stations to enter the home, where the television became a prized family luxury. In a survey conducted in 1980 by *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* (“Japan Broadcasting Corporation,” often shortened to NHK), fifty percent of Japanese people answered that they felt that television had increased the amount of intra-family interaction, and only nineteen percent felt that it had decreased such interaction.⁸⁸ Shun’ya Yoshimi and other social historians posit that this shift in television from the streets of Tokyo to the home represents a greater shift in Japanese mentality, from a group mentality with a locus placed in the capital to a more individualistic mentality centered around the home.⁸⁹

However, this atomization of the nation did not stop at the nuclear family limits. As previously noted, the post-war economy was one marked by striving for the material abundance of the United States, and this consumerism-centric economic boom also led to an increased level of isolation of the individual as never seen before. The luxurious TV, once a prized family item positioned in the center room of the house where the family would gather together to watch and interact beginning in the early post-war period, is highly contrasted to the latter years of the economic boom in which society began to see each individual possessing their own television, own computer, and own cell phone, with

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 137-138.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 134.

which they interacted solitarily. Many media outlets and cultural critics have attributed this to the faults of younger generations, stating that they are selfish and non-traditional in and of themselves, calling it the “atomism” or “orphanism” of millennial Japan rather than recognizing that this generation are a product of the choices made by previous generations’ cultivation of post-war consumer culture.⁹⁰

Regardless of whether or not this shift was at the fault of a difference between generations, it is here that I will further pursue this atomization of the Japanese nation specifically with regard to a major by-product of this atomization and increased solitary intimacy with modern technology: *otaku* subculture. In drawing off the scholarship of Azuma Hiroki who writes on the theories of Osawa Masachi and Shinji Miyadai, Masachi once posited the breaking down of modern Japanese history into three periods for the sake of theoretically understanding major social paradigm shifts. The one most significant to my argument is the second era, or the “Era of Fiction,” taking place between 1970, with the Red Army Incident, to 1995’s *Aum Shinrikyō* incidents.⁹¹

This “Era of Fiction” was marked by the breakdown of grand narratives and national ideals, and many individuals began using both reality and fiction, in concomitance with the boom in technological advancement during the bubble economy, to maintain what Miyadai called “the homeostasis of the self.” Such individuals were dubbed *otaku*, and the term initially carried a negative connotation, often referring to individuals on the

⁹⁰ Allison, Anne, “From Ashes to Cyborgs: The Era of Reconstruction (1945-1960),” 70. Yoda, Tomiko, et al. “A Roadmap to Millennial Japan,” 42.

⁹¹ Azuma, Hiroki, “The Animalization of Otaku Culture,” trans. Furuhashi, Yuriko and Steinberg, Marc, ed. Lunning, Frenchy. In *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire*, 178.

outskirts of society incapable of conforming to expected social norms.⁹² A certain subset of *otaku* came to hate reality altogether and yearned for an Armageddon-like event to bring about a “resetting of reality,” and such were the individuals responsible for the *Aum Shinrikyō* incidents.⁹³

Yet not all *otaku* were terrorists. Here, I believe it important to establish a basic definition of the terms “subculture” and “*otaku*” as used in this paper. Firstly, I will be focusing on male *otaku* specifically.⁹⁴ Secondly, Ōtsuka Eiji defines “subculture” as differing from mass culture in that it is characterized by “fragmentary and acontextual characteristics,” and is an amalgamation of incongruent ideas, phenomena, and objects which have separated from their historical origins. Furthermore, Tomiko Yoda posits that the prefix *-sub* connotes that subcultures no longer participate in a dominant, shared ideal of a society and its goals, not necessarily as an opposing facet to the dominant norm, but simply outside of it.⁹⁵ In referencing these two definitions, we arrive at a loose definition of the male *otaku* as an individual somewhat extraneous to mainstream society, who partakes in separating media and social phenomena from their historical origins, yet this does not yet provide a full, satisfactory definition.

⁹² Hairston, Marc. “A Cocoon with a View: *Hikikomori*, *Otaku*, and *Welcome to the NHK*.” *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, 312. Yoda, Tomiko, et al. “A Roadmap to Millennial Japan.” *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Duke University Press, 2006, 22.

⁹³ Shinji, Miyadai, “Transformation of Semantics in the History of Japanese Subculture since 1992,” trans, Shion, Kono, ed. Lunning, Frenchy. In *Mechademia 6: User Enhanced*, 235. Azuma Hiroki posits that this loss of the supremacy of reality over fiction, as well as the increased obsession with database consumption, led to the final and current era known as the “Era of Animals.” But Azuma’s notion of the recent “animalization” of modern culture is somewhat extraneous to this paper.

⁹⁴ Of course, not all *otaku* are male, and the definition of *otaku* is becoming increasingly difficult to pinpoint, but early definitions vaguely defined the subculture as mostly consisting of young males, and it is young males with which this paper’s definition is concerned.

⁹⁵ Yoda, Tomiko, et al. “A Roadmap to Millennial Japan,” 36.

Thomas Lamarre notes that post-1970s, the image of *otaku* as terrorists began to wane in favor of the image of the *otaku* as a failure in sociability and masculinity, an individual characterized by a disconnected pathos, even pathetic pathos, with relation to the male individual's consumption of *shōjo* media and pornography but the inability to develop relationships with actual girls or women in real life.⁹⁶ In 1991 Gainax, a Japanese animation corporation, produced *Otaku no video*, a video spoofing the lifestyle of *otaku* males.⁹⁷ In particular, this video heavily emphasized the image of young men lacking social skills, content instead to focus their attention on idealized fantasy, pornography, and other masturbatory pleasures, an image which continued to dominate the public opinion of young male *otaku* from the 1980s through today.⁹⁸

Gainax particularly insisted on the idea that this pitiful pathology would not lead to violence in the real world as with previous *otaku* generations, which of course completely disregards the exploitation and abuse of women in the pornography industry as well as the twisted representation of young women in fictional media, but successfully steers the public opinion of *otaku* away from the image of terrorists.

With the explosive popularity and commercial success of Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in the 1990s, the interest in *otaku*, or rather *otaku*-like consumption was reinvigorated as a means to salvage Japan's post-bubble-burst economy. In his 2002 essay published in *Foreign Policy*, Douglas McGray coined the term "national-cool" with regard to Japan and Japanese popular culture, referencing the rising global phenomenon

⁹⁶ Lamarre, Thomas. "Perversion." In *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 248-249.

⁹⁷ This company is responsible for producing globally known works such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*.

⁹⁸ Lamarre, Thomas. "Perversion." In *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 248-249.

of Japan's marketing success, which was essentially rooted in this *otaku*-like consumption of popular culture.⁹⁹

In combining these definitions of “subculture” with this historical context of the development of *otaku*, we arrive at a loose definition of *otaku* as referring to young adult males obsessed with elements of popular culture but with disregard for their broader social and historical contexts, generally deemed as socially invalid and relying on this consumption of popular culture to fulfil their needs for socialization and sexual pleasure.¹⁰⁰ (Of course, as previously mentioned, it is important to keep in mind that not all *otaku* are male, and the definition of *otaku* is becoming increasingly difficult to pinpoint, but early definitions vaguely defined the subculture as mostly consisting of young males,¹⁰¹ and it is young males with which this paper's definition is concerned.) It is with this definition in mind that I progress with my argument in the next chapter.

In conclusion, I have established that between 1950 and 1980 in Japan, the Japanese people saw an economic boom resulting in not only the popularization of modern entertainment technology such as the television for the family, but further onto a personal level with the late 1980s seeing the atomization of entertainment technology like never before. Major cultural shifts going on in Japan turned this atomization into a refuge for those on the social periphery, resulting in many to rely on this technology to maintain the “homeostasis of the self” through fiction, developing the *otaku* subculture. Furthermore, I have established the working definition of *otaku* as referring to young adult males

⁹⁹ Yoda, Tomiko, et al. “A Roadmap to Millennial Japan.” *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Duke University Press, 2006, 36.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰¹ Napier, Susan. “The World of Anime Fandom in America,” ed. Lunning, Frenchy. In *Mechademia: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*, 50-51.

obsessed with elements of popular culture but with disregard for their broader social and historical contexts, generally deemed as socially invalid and relying on this consumption of popular culture to fulfil their needs for socialization and sexual pleasure.¹⁰²

Chapter 6: Merging Fiction and Reality and the Lolita Complex

This chapter will work to understand why and how *otaku* merge fiction and reality to bring their perceived intimacy with fictional characters into the real world. I work to develop a solid theory which allows us to understand the sexualization of Studio Ghibli films' fictional female protagonists, or *shōjo*, through the understandings of *otaku* psychology. In using Thomas Lamarre's use of Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as case studies on media conventions, the idea of *seichi junrei*, or "sacred site pilgrimage(s)," as well as commercialization such as the Studio Ghibli Museum and the recreation of the Kusakabe house from *My Neighbor Totoro*, I explain how each of these elements act as vehicle of fusion for reality and fiction, furthering the sense of *otaku*'s actualized personal intimacy with fictional media and subsequent sexualization of Studio Ghibli's *shōjo*.

To begin, it is important to return to the atomization of media technology in Japan in relation to its viewers, as this is highly telling as to why *otaku* develop such intimate relationships to fictional media. This is important as it sets the groundwork for understanding the later argument for the *otaku*'s close relationship to Studio Ghibli

¹⁰² Yoda, Tomiko, et al. "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan." *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Duke University Press, 2006, 36-37.

works, and consequently, a closer look at the sexualization of the main female leads in Studio Ghibli films. Media theorist Thomas Lamarre has noted that there is an inherent dissonance in the medium of animation, that animated characters are psychologically perplexing because they break the sense of material connection between the image and the human afforded by photography. In the case of live-action cinema and television, the proximity of the viewer to the actor as a result of viewing the media in a private space on a small screen creates a sense of intimacy, and Lamarre states that many viewers feel that if they were to see an actor in real life they would be hard pressed to not approach them as a result of this perceived sense of intimacy. With an animated character, however, this sense of intimacy is not grounded in reality yet is no less psychologically “real” for the viewer.¹⁰³

Secondly, in building off of his theory of intimacy vis-à-vis media consumption, Lamarre applies aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a deeper means to understanding this personal connection with fictional characters. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, humans are characterized by lack: In his "Mirror Stage" essay, Lacan states that babies do not develop a full sense of self as that separate from others until they first view themselves in a mirror, a self-image that is already inherently displaced from the self. Furthermore, despite this development of a separate self-image, Lacan posits that humans are born too early and their helpless nature as babies is therefore psychologically countered by the ceaseless drive throughout their development to create a self-image as that of being whole, powerful, and autonomous. Thus, need turns into desire, and the lack is no longer

¹⁰³ Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media*, 194.

purely physical but majorly psychological.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, in this drive to create such a self-image, a person will latch onto various objects or notions which seemingly aid in the development of feeling whole. These objects are often dubbed “partial objects.”¹⁰⁵

Lamarre reasons that this latching onto partial objects is often seen as a transitional investment, something that allows the individual ease in transitioning from the position of being cared for by a maternal figure to that of the cruel, castrated position within the larger, paternal world. This transition object often manifests in what many call “fetishism,” denoting a sexual relationship between the individual and the partial object.¹⁰⁶ In applying this Lacanian theory to viewers of *anime*, Lamarre establishes his understanding of *otaku* intimacy with fictional media, stating that these partial objects, in the form of fictional pop culture media, take the form of *otaku* fetishes. Put another way, *otaku* use animated media as partial objects, substituting the media for real-life human interaction as a means to mitigate their dissatisfaction with, or trouble integrating into, normal society.

Therefore, through the proximity of the viewing experience and the psychological need to rely on “partial objects,” *anime* naturally lends itself to the development of a sense of perceived intimacy between the viewer and the fictional media, causing *otaku* viewers to develop a fascinating bond with fictional media to fulfil their needs for socialization and sexual pleasure.

In conclusion, I have use Lamarre’s assertions to show that through the proximity of the viewing experience and the psychological need of *otaku* to rely on “partial objects,”

¹⁰⁴ Lamarre, Thomas. "Perversion." In *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 243.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

anime naturally lends itself to the development of a sense of perceived intimacy between the viewer and the fictional media, resulting in the *otaku* fetishization of said media. The establishment of each of these elements is significant in laying the groundwork for understanding the psychological relationship between Japanese media and its *otaku* viewer, allowing for a the next chapter's further analysis of this *otaku* merging of fiction and reality, further proving that the *otaku* sexualization of Studio Ghibli's *shōjo* characters is very much a real-life issue.

Now, it is important to return to Lamarre's discussion of animated media with respect to the fact that, unlike photography-based media, the sense of perceived intimacy with animated media is not grounded in reality. This inherent dissonance in animation as a medium itself may explain the *otaku* drive to establish a connection to the *anime* by a means rooted in reality, but this establishment of the fictional within the real, and it is here that I begin to explore the ways in which *otaku* work to bring this perceived sense of intimacy into reality. Lamarre argues that many *otaku* attempt to ground animation and their perceived sense of intimacy with it in some form of reality by acquiring material goods which bring the animation into reality in the form of commercialized objects, or by making pilgrimages to locations connected to the animation.¹⁰⁷

Firstly, with regard to the idea of making pilgrimages to locations connected to a fictional media, the *otaku* subculture phenomenon of conventions ought to be examined. Now, despite the initially negative attitude towards *otaku*, in the later years of the "Age of Fiction" the concept of global "*otaku*-ization," meaning that we are all at some level an *otaku*, spread, leading to the gradual de-stigmatization of *otaku* and the global loss of the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 195.

supremacy of reality over fiction.¹⁰⁸ The most increasingly popular and obvious visualization of the blending of the fictional and the real can be seen in conventions, or *cons*, in which individuals partake in cosplay, or costume role-play, as well as various cultural activities which attempt forms traditional Japanese cultural immersion, merging the fictional worlds of *anime*, *manga*, and videogames with an essentialized, often historical, real-world Japan.¹⁰⁹ These conventions merge fictional worlds with the simplified real world, but of course within limited temporal and spatial boundaries, meaning the time and place of the temporary convention. Scholar Susan Napier has done an excellent case study on cons, which I believe will help illuminate my point.

Susan Napier notes the idea of what she calls “subculture capital,” which can include a wide range of “data” such as experience going to conventions, club attendance, merchandise collections, expertise that allows one to win trivia or other related pursuits, the creation of “accurate” costumes in cosplay, and so on, which all inspire further interest in and enthusiasm for fictional worlds through real-world participation. Napier states that within this “subculture capital,” knowledge and experience pertaining to both the fictional worlds as well as real-world Japan and Japanese culture is critical, resulting in what is intended to be an immersive experience including not only fantastical immersion but also an attempt at cultural immersion, with conventions often introducing boiled down Japanese culture to the West in the forms of particular foods, exhibitions of traditional Japanese martial arts and swordsmanship, tea ceremonies, maid cafes, and

¹⁰⁸ Lunning, Frenchy. *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire*, 172.

¹⁰⁹ Napier, Susan J., “Anime Nation: Cons, Cosplay, and (Sub)Cultural Capital,” in *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West*. Palgrave and MacMillan, 2007, 150-151.

more.¹¹⁰ However, it is important to note that these conventions take place all over the world, both in and outside of Japan and are not solely related to introducing Japanese culture to the West; within Japan as well conventions include both the fictional and essentialized elements of traditional Japanese culture. In all, these conventions merge fictional worlds with the simplified real world, effectively merging fiction and reality within the spacial and temporal confines of the real world.

However, this merging is taken one step further, out into the wider world with the recent development of the phenomenon called *seichi junrei*, or “sacred site pilgrimage(s)” undergone by *otaku*.¹¹¹ According to Victor Turner, a pilgrimage is a rite of passage in which the individual separates from the community, enters a liminal stage which transforms the individual, and, upon reentering the community, the individual has elevated status for having undergone this transformative rite of passage, very similar to Napier’s idea of gaining “subculture capital.” Scholar Dale K. Andrews notes that in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, religiousness and spirituality have become increasingly separated from religious establishments and the spirituality is instead focused on individualistic ritual and transformation. Recent scholars have emphasized the idea of “spiritual tourism” as a growing phenomenon with relation to this increasingly individualistic form of spirituality.¹¹² Andrews suggests that for *otaku*, taking part in *seichi junrei* is a form of individualistic spirituality, heightening their perceived sense of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Andrews, Dale K. and edited B. Frenchy. “Genesis at the Shrine: The Votive Art of an Anime Pilgrimage,” *Mechademia 9: Origins*, 218.

¹¹² Katharine Buljan and Carole M. Cusack, “Power Within: The Fan’s Embrace of Profane and Sacred Worlds in Anime,” in *Anime, Religion and Spirituality: Profane and Sacred Worlds in Contemporary Japan*, Illustrated ed. (Equinox, 2015), 196.

personal intimacy with the *anime* connected to the pilgrimage site and raising their status through gaining this form of subculture capital within the *otaku* community.

Anime productions regularly incorporate backdrops adopted from real places, and an increasing number of fans are choosing to embark on trips to these places in order to establish a connection between their fictional and realistic worlds, creating “*manga/anime* realism.”¹¹³ These *seichi junrei* include not only sites from the *anime*, but also maid cafes, the homes and workplaces of *anime* and *manga* artists, factories manufacturing *otaku*-valued commodities, and so on. One of the earliest noted *seichi junrei* was when the fans of “Sailor Moon” began to gather at the Hikawa Shrine in Motoazabu, Tokyo in the early 1990s.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, an increasingly popular point of interest in these pilgrimages lies in the *ema* (votive tablets) of shrines. Typically, in Shinto tradition one writes their wishes on an *ema* in order to supplicate the gods for their divine favor, and *otaku* have adapted this tradition by either drawing their own versions of *anime* or *manga* characters on the *ema*, by writing particularly notable phrases from the media on the *ema*, or writing notes about their own devotion and obsession to the media and the personal significance of their pilgrimage on the *ema*. This act is called by *otaku* “*itaema*,” or, “painful votive tablet,” because it is seen as humiliating to publicly express their private obsessions, potentially subjecting themselves to social stigma or ridicule.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Andrews, Dale K, ed. Frenchy, Lunning. “Genesis at the Shrine: The Votive Art of an Anime Pilgrimage,” *Mechademia 9: Origins*, 218.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 222.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 219.

It is interesting to note that the *otaku* partaking in these *seichi junrei* do not communicate with one another face to face, but rather through these devotional *ema* and the *emakake* (wall of votive tablets.) Andrews hypothesizes that these communications through the *ema* function in the same way that an *otaku* internet site would function: the *otaku* each make posts (*ema*), search for others' posts on the website or page (the *emakake*) and move more notable ones to the front for others to see, and sometimes write messages related to other *ema*, which acts as a threaded discussion online.¹¹⁶ Thus, as Marshall McLuhan once famously wrote, the medium is the message.¹¹⁷ The illustrations of the characters and writings related to the *anime* or *manga* associated with the site on the *ema* are in and of themselves what constitute the vehicle for the transfer of characters from fiction to reality. The content on the *ema* at the shrine take the characters out of the home, out of the television or computer screen, and place them into the real world "in the status of persons," thus transforming the characters into deities or persons or the imitation of Shinto gods to which the *otaku* "pray and ask for favor."¹¹⁸ This is just one example out of many in which the development of *otaku* subcultures has led to the merging of fiction and reality; next, I will clarify the specific case of Studio Ghibli's appropriation into *otaku* subculture by this method.

Although Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli insist on styling their animated films as *manga eiga* ("manga films") in contrast to *anime* to distance themselves from mainstream *anime* and *otaku* subculture, their actions are often convoluted in this respect and lend

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium Is the Message." Ed. W. Terrence Gordon. In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Andrews, Dale K, ed. Frenchy, Lunning. "Genesis at the Shrine: The Votive Art of an Anime Pilgrimage," 229.

themselves to *otaku* appropriation nonetheless; here, specifically with respect to *seichi junrei*. In 2005 Studio Ghibli created a life-size replica of the house of Satsuki and Mei Kusakabe from *Tonari no Totoro* (“My Neighbor Totoro”) as a part of the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi Prefecture, and in 2001 opened the Studio Ghibli Museum.¹¹⁹ Yet Studio Ghibli states that they try to minimize the feel of commercialism in their branding. For example, the Ghibli Museum is the antithesis to the stereotypical theme park in many ways: as opposed to the Disney Land Tokyo which is centered in a large commercial area and is full to bursting with commercial products and experiences all solely designed for consumption, the Ghibli Museum is located in proximity to nature and filled with playgrounds, sketches and production cels, and stroboscope animation machines, emphasizing a healthier amalgamation of play, art, and education. With the museum and its merchandise likewise, Ghibli exercises commercial restraint, trying to ensure that its products are tasteful and appear to be “non-commercially driven commerce.”¹²⁰

However, this line of action is destined to fail. Firstly, anyone intent upon visiting the museum is presumably doing so out of intense appreciation for the films, attested to by the museum’s perpetually sold-out and highly coveted tickets, and these visitors can therefore also be labeled as some form of *otaku*. Although it is highly unlikely that all visitors are necessarily *otaku*, certainly not by my previous definition, all visitors do inadvertently participate in an *otaku*-esque manner of consumption through participating

¹¹⁹ Katharine Buljan and Carole M. Cusack, "Power Within: The Fan's Embrace of Profane and Sacred Worlds in Anime," in *Anime, Religion and Spirituality: Profane and Sacred Worlds in Contemporary Japan*, Illustrated ed. (Equinox, 2015), 198.

¹²⁰ Thomas Lamarre, "Compositing," in *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 97.

in the site.¹²¹ Furthermore, the *otaku* flocking to the museum are essentially no different from the *otaku* flocking to the Hikawa Shrine in Motoazabu, Tokyo, and their visiting the museum is a form of *seichi junrei*.

Secondly, it is important to note that some of the major attractions are the museum's creations of life-size figures of characters from their films; for example, the large Catbus from *My Neighbor Totoro* which children may enter and play in, and the giant robot from *Laputa Castle in the Sky* outside of the museum. These life-size creations act similarly to the *ema* of *otaku* visiting a shrine: they take the characters out of the home, out of the digital viewing device, and place them into the real world as "in the status of persons," thus transforming the characters into actual entities with which the *otaku* interact in real life.

Additionally, Studio Ghibli is inherently working against a national *otaku*-ization movement promoted by the Japanese government. The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) endorses tourist pilgrimages in their promotion of a "Japan *Anime* Map" which features various *anime*-related destinations, especially museums, galleries, and theme parks such as the Ghibli Museum.¹²² The JNTO promotes not only official sites related to the films, but also emphasizes that creators of *anime* find inspiration from indirect sources that *otaku* can also visit and be inspired by. For example, in the case of *Spirited Away*, the JNTO stated that "Miyazaki visited the Edo-Tokyo *Tatemonoen* (Open Air Architectural Museum) in western Tokyo's Koganei Park. He found magic in its

¹²¹ Similar to the previous discussion of otaku-like consumption adopted to create "J-cool" to boost the Japanese economy.

¹²² Buljan, Katharine, and Carole M. Cusack. *Anime, Religion and Spirituality: Profane and Sacred Worlds in Contemporary Japan*, 198.

snippets of the city's built history, from the 200-year-old farmhouses to a 1960s streetcar."¹²³

The JNTO recognizes the *otaku* desire to find magic in such locations and physically enter the fictional world of the *anime*, even stating on their website that “the main thrill that visitors derive from going to such locations is the feeling of blending right into the story when they see the actual scenery or buildings depicted in *anime*.”¹²⁴ Even Aso Taro, the Japanese Prime Minister from 2008 to 2010, was a self-proclaimed *otaku* who pushed for the national *otaku*-ization and created the Japanese government's International Manga Award when he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2007.¹²⁵ Therefore, Studio Ghibli's desire to not be associated with obsessive *otaku* subculture is subverted by their own nation appropriating their films not only on a subcultural level but on a national, governmental level as well.

Regarding the *otaku* appropriation of Studio Ghibli's merchandise, as previously stated, the company makes an effort to limit the amount of merchandise they produce in addition to attempting to give the illusion of “non-commercially driven commerce.” The first Studio Ghibli officially controlled merchandise did not appear on the markets until the first stuffed toy Totoro in 1990, two years after *Tonari no Totoro*'s (“My Neighbor Totoro”) film release.¹²⁶ *Tonari no Totoro* remains Ghibli's biggest earner regarding income from merchandise, as the lead producer Suzuki stated in his essay “Ten Years of

¹²³ Ibid, 199.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Hairston, Marc. “A Cocoon with a View: *Hikikomori*, *Otaku*, and *Welcome to the NHK*.” *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, 313.

¹²⁶ McCarthy, Helen. “The Miyazaki Machine: More Than Just Movies.” In *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation*, 208. Cavallaro, Dani. “The Ghibli Era: A Brief History of Studio Ghibli.” *The Anime Art of Dani Cavallaro*, McFarland & Company, 2006, pp. 41.

Studio Ghibli” that *Totoro* merchandise allows the studio to cover any financial deficit from film production every year. Still, Ghibli controls the production of merchandise by seriously limiting the number of product licenses they issue, with only twenty-four makers listed as of 1999. Even the monstrous corporation of Disney did not have a product license despite their distribution of the English versions of the Ghibli films.¹²⁷

Additionally, Miyazaki himself has stated that he wishes for people to only view his films once a year or on special occasions, not regularly. Once, when a reporter asked, “you wrote something to the effect that ‘children can get along fine without *manga* or TV or animation,’ but here you yourself are making animation like this. What do you think about this contradiction?” to which Miyazaki replied, “frankly, I’m just a bundle of contradictions and dilemmas in my work.”¹²⁸ Therefore, Miyazaki is aware of his works’ and words’ inherent irony, as well as the fact that the studio’s marketing strategy may easily fail. If an individual sits in front of the television repeatedly watching the studio’s films and obsessively collects the films’ merchandise, the studio’s intentions have failed. This is a major reason Studio Ghibli tries to limit its marketing and distribution of consumer goods: to distinguish itself from television *anime*, the consumer-centered ever-growing industry, and *otaku* subculture. Yet, as I have discussed, *otaku* tend to flock to Ghibli films, merchandise, and film-associated locations nonetheless, as a means to bring fiction into reality as Lamarre asserted.¹²⁹

In conclusion, the subculture phenomenon of participation in *cons*, *seichi junrei*, and obsessive collection of merchandise all exemplify the merging of fiction and reality by

¹²⁷ Ibid, 209.

¹²⁸ Miyazaki, Hayao, trans. by Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt. *Turning Point: 1997-2008*, 207.

¹²⁹ Lamarre, Thomas, "Giving Up the Gun," *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 98.

otaku. Studio Ghibli's attractions, such as the Ghibli Museum and the recreation of the Kusakabe house from *My Neighbor Totoro*, act as mediums for enacting the *otaku* merging of fiction and reality, just as the *ema* at a shrine associated with an *anime* do, therefore placing the Studio within the grasp of *otaku* appropriation through *seiche junrei*. Additionally, the studio's commercialization is exacerbated by the Japanese government's push for *otaku*-ization to aid tourism and national economic growth, all contributing to the increased ease of *otaku* appropriation of Ghibli media.

In combining what I have hypothesized in this and the previous chapter, of the previous theories on *otaku* intimacy with fictional characters as well as this new specific understanding of *otaku* relationship with Studio Ghibli, I believe I can be naturally deduced that *otaku* who view Studio Ghibli media develop a sense of intimacy with Studio Ghibli characters, using the visual and commercial consumption of Ghibli characters to fulfil their needs for socialization and sexual pleasure. In furthering this argument to its climactic point, it is at this point that my discussion of the Lolita Complex comes into play.

The "Lolita complex," or "Loliconization phenomenon" of Japanese society refers to the widespread commodification of young girls and young women as sexual symbols in society. The term "Lolita complex" was originally intended to refer specifically to male pedophilic sexual desire in reality, but currently broadly refers to the vaguely pedophilic sexual desires of *otaku* subculture and even societal desire in general.¹³⁰ In her book *The Condition of Marriage (Kekkon no joken, 2002)*, feminist writer Ogura

¹³⁰ Chizuko, Naito, et al. "Reorganizations of Gender and Nationalism: Gender Bashing and Loliconized Japanese Society." *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, 328.

Chikako explained that in Japan in recent decades, the increased social emphasis on women's right to choose a partner for marriage, as part of the general decline of the patriarchal system, has in part led to the decline in the number of annual marriages and births each year. Ogura claims that due to this legitimization of women's rights, many men find it increasingly difficult to assert their traditional social dominance and desires, and the commodification of the woman for consumption by man is increasingly negated. As a result, this commodification is transferred from women to young girls, or *shōjo*, who are the antithesis of the fully grown and empowered women: the young *shōjo* lacks the will of the woman and is therefore an easy subject for men to project their desires onto and exercise their assertiveness.¹³¹

Therefore, this social shift of men asserting sexual dominance onto women to young girls, developing into the widespread Lolita complex, along with Miyazaki keeping his *shōjo* presexual yet on the edge of maturity, and the *otaku* tendency to develop a sense of intimacy with fictional characters, naturally leads to the conclusion of the *otaku* sexualization of Miyazaki's *shōjo* and the subsequent role that Miyazaki's films play in the Lolita Complex of Japan. Miyazaki's forms of gender representation within his films are not merely isolated entities, but politicized actions that have real-world effects. In this case, Miyazaki's non-progressive representation of gender and gendered power in his films ultimately work to subsume women, both fictional and real, under the umbrella of patriarchal society, subjecting them to sexualization by the male gaze and overarching gender inequality.

¹³¹ Ibid, 328-329.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have worked to illustrate the gendered power dynamics as represented within the *shōjo* protagonists of three of Studio Ghibli's most prominent animated feature films directed by Hayao Miyazaki: *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Howl's Moving Castle*. Through incorporating the feminist theories of Bell Hooks, I have shown that despite his reputation for supposedly progressive depictions of young women, attributed to their taking positions of power and partaking in combative roles, these depictions ultimately do not challenge or destabilize the patriarchal system. Through the female protagonists and rulers taking on stereotypically "male" qualities, the male-centric ideas of power and the patriarchal social norms are simply reaffirmed rather than subverted. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how Miyazaki relies heavily on the idea of an inherent maternal quality in women which affords the Ghibli *shōjo* a more benevolent ruling presence, in and of itself an inherently sexist foundational ideology. Additionally, this reliance on an inherently maternal presence is exacerbated by his repetitive narrative structures forcing each *shōjo* into sacrificial positions.

Finally, through the works of Thomas Lamarre and his application of Lacan's psychoanalysis, I have illustrated the ways in which *otaku* viewers develop a sense of personal intimacy with fictional media. This perceived sense of intimacy envelops the problematic gender representation in Studio Ghibli and other animated media, resulting in real-life gendered issues such as the Lolita complex, or sexualization of young women and young female characters.

I would like to note that I do not believe that all of Studio Ghibli's films neatly fit within the framework I have created here. I do believe that there is an argument for each film containing its female leads to traditional patriarchal gender norms, but not necessarily in the same ways in which I believe Nausicaa, San, and Sophie have been. However, to analyze the entirety of Miyazaki's works was unfortunately too much to squeeze into one master's thesis, but perhaps may be expanded upon in future.

For now, I hope this work has been successful in disrupting for my readers some of the popular opinions surrounding Hayao Miyazaki's works. I do not, however, wish to give the impression that I am denouncing these films as bad or not worth watching; on the contrary, I believe that despite his failure to truly subvert a patriarchal paradigm, Miyazaki's depictions of *shōjo* were a significant and productive shift away from the historic depiction of the *shōjo*, as discussed in my first chapter. I hope that future generations of animators will build off of Miyazaki's success to work towards creating increasingly freer depictions of gender in animated media.

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