

Chapter 14

Tainted Away: Violence Over Nature in the Anime of Hayao Miyazaki

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ABSTRACT

*Global climate change and its effects on the planet attract attention by policymakers as well as scholars. Global ecological crises are gradually being examined both in cultural and scientific terms all over the world as a concept as the relationship between nature and people is examined further. Japanese animation director Hayao Miyazaki stands out with his critical approach to the relationship between humans and nature. Miyazaki's animated films such as *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*, and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* provide us with a different perspective on Mother Earth and the relationship between nature and people in connection to “past,” “present,” and “future.” In this chapter, Miyazaki's three films are examined through three approaches in ecocriticism—deep ecology, ecofeminism, and dark ecology—to show how Miyazaki maintains a unifying, and a not discriminatory, narrative in our perception of nature by finding balancing solutions to dichotomies such as nature-man, human-nonhuman, man-woman, technology-nature.*

INTRODUCTION

Miyazaki, in his filmography, deals with issues related to human-induced environmental degeneration. In doing so, he addresses the conflicts between the dualities of the mother earth-modern world / femininity-masculinity / humans-animals and translates these philosophically relevant conflicts into a visual language.

Ecocriticism serves as a useful tool to address these conflicts, since, genealogically, it consists of a body of literature that expresses the different ways in which artists and philosophers re-evaluated their relationship to nature in the face of an emerging environmental crisis. Ecocriticism gradually merged with posthumanism which conceives of humans as part of an evolving ecosystem. In general, we can

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say that ecocriticism & posthumanism, considering humans as a part of nature / not the master of it, blurs the above distinction. Since the 1970s, distinct eco-philosophies and different approaches to the environment were developed. Each approach –such as Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism and Posthuman Ecocriticism– explains environmental crises in its own way, and therefore offers solutions it holds dearest.

As critic Yoshiyuki Shimizu explains, Miyazaki's works mostly take place in worlds where the systematical structures and processes of rationalization of the modern world have been dismantled, in addition to a situation of chaos and commotion (S. J. Napier, 2016: p. 153). Moreover as Cavallaro points out that there is a subtle understanding between East and West in Miyazaki's films which is also heightened by a thematic and structural exchange. There are specific themes he uses recurrently. One such theme is a persisting concern over the ecosystem. He tackles these continuing issues in three of his animes. These issues over a diverse time scale can be observed in the different settings he used from ancient Japan in *Mononoke* to the present day in *Spirited Away* as well as a post-apocalyptic future in *Nausicaä* (Cavallaro, 2015: p. 9).

Mayumi argues that Miyazaki helps us to recognize the intricacy of our world by depicting power relationships between characters, in this way he shares his understanding of contemporary environmental problems (Mayumi et al., 2005: p. 6). Miyazaki mostly uses child figures who are open to possibilities, non-altered with adulthood realities and bias. He makes them confront major challenges and responsibilities. In *Princess Mononoke*, we observe outsiders with different backgrounds. The conflict that was born from these differences makes finding a common ground important especially in environmental issues. Setting in the past, *Mononoke-Hime* shows us the beginning of human-induced destruction of nature. *Spirited Away* displays how humans have continued to harm nature until today. *Spirited Away*'s main character must work hard to fit into the imagined society. By working hard, she connects with nature/spirit world and eventually matures. Thus, with her new relationship to nature/spirit world, she sees the modern world and the problems of our environment with a new perspective. In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, we meet with a post-apocalyptic world where humans altered the balance of nature because of wars. The main character shows us a way to establish a good relationship with nature and humans. In all of them, Miyazaki creates a mediator, a balancing character in a setting with different disasters or ecological problems. While he is depicting these worlds/settings he does not separate the social problems and the environment. On the other contrary, he approaches them together as one.

BACKGROUND

Ecocriticism was established as a literary theory in the late 1970s. In that period the human-induced environmental degeneration forced mainly artists and philosophers to re-evaluate their relationship with nature. Glotfelty states that ecocriticism is simply the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. She adds that whereas feminist theory analyzes text from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxism examines it in the light of production and economic class, Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. As a theoretical statement, ecocriticism tries to find a middle ground between the human and the nonhuman, taking a critical stance that sits squarely between literature and earth (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: pp. xviii–xix).

Although environmentalism as a cultural, political and philosophical phenomenon is relatively new, it has already given rise to different eco-philosophies such as Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Posthuman Ecocriticism, Dark Ecology, as well as other approaches. Every approach has its own way of defining

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