

The Literature that Influenced Hayao Miyazaki

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The Literature that Influenced Hayao Miyazaki Outline:

- Intro
 - Introduce personal history with Miyazaki and intrigue in literature and connection between his movies and books.
 - Introduce two research questions
- Paragraph 1:
 - Background of Miyazaki and his recurring themes in film
 - List films in chronological order with literary influence:
 - Castle in the Sky; My Neighbor Totoro; Kiki's Delivery Service; Howl's Moving Castle; Ponyo; The Secret World of Arrietty; From Up on Poppy Hill
- Paragraph 2-8(?):
 - Begin breakdown of each film's literary influence, similarities, differences, etc. and critic reviews/author reactions
- Paragraph 9:
 - Close/the future of literature-influenced movies

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Often referred to as the Walt Disney of Japan, Mr. Hayao Miyazaki, master writer and director of Studio Ghibli, has long been a staple in the realm of animation. Miyazaki's work was unique, entrancing, and most importantly it conveyed a story with characters that stay with you long after the movie's end. An interesting and important attribute of entertainment is that it can influence itself. Books are made into movies, movies made into book series, and when you have the incredible influence of a man like Miyazaki, the possibilities are nearly endless. Which here begs the question, what of his many unique and influential movies were originally works of literature? In addition, what was the popular opinion of the movie with the literary background?

Entertainment takes many forms in its quest for reaching the audience. From television to movies, books to comics, the world has been exposed to an incredible amount of material. Hayao Miyazaki is one animator that seized the opportunity of adapting literature as well as some aspects of folklore into a number of his films. The casual viewer will also note that his works also carry any of the following themes throughout the film: challenging traditional versus contemporary expectations, flight, technology, nature, aquatics, growing up, and pacifism. An important distinction to make in analyzing literary influence is whether or not the movie was entirely based off of a work of literature or merely loosely alluding to aspects of literature or folklore. For instance, *Spirited Away* has also been referred to as Miyazaki's version of *Alice in Wonderland* (Bradshaw), though those who watch it will agree that that was not the intention. Miyazaki's films that are *based* off of literature, or borrow distinctive attributes from it, are as follows: *Castle in the Sky*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Ponyo*, and *The Secret World of Arrietty*.

One of Miyazaki's oldest films is his 1986 animated production of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (*Tenkuu no Shiro Rapyuta*). Those familiar with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* will immediately recognize the distinctive landmark of the floating island of Laputa. "The world, which I interpret the flying or floating island, is in the original *Laputa*, whereof I could never learn the true etymology" (Swift). In Miyazaki's film, a young maiden falls—or rather floats—from the sky and into the arms of a young orphan boy. It is later discovered that she is a member of the lost ruling family from the royal city of Laputa, the Castle in the Sky. The pivotal difference between Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Miyazaki's *Castle in the Sky* is the nature of Swift's idea of technology and Miyazaki's.

"While the Swiftean city parodies early modern scientists as literally above the cares of everyday life, Miyazaki's version—a city that rains atomic fire from the sky—takes aim at the political will to dominate through technological superiority." (Lioi).

Castle in the Sky has across the board high scores amongst the top three movie review platforms: 95% from Rotten Tomatoes, 4/5 from Common Sense Media, and an 8.1/10 from IMDb from a Google search for "castle in the sky reviews".

Miyazaki's first film that is truly based off of a novel is that of his 1989 adaptation of *Kiki's Delivery Service* (*Majo no Takkyubin*). The themes of flight as well as the impact of growing up are apparent in this film that focuses on the life of a young witch who leaves home to apprentice in a foreign city. Miyazaki also toys with the notion of breaking tradition in that Kiki agrees to wear the dark, traditional dress, while at the same time adorning her outfit with a bright red bow and orange messenger bag (Wikipedia). Described as "Disney's cautious entry into Japanese animation", the film was well-reviewed by all audiences (Nichols). Doing a simple Google search for "kiki's delivery service reviews", Rotten Tomatoes gave it an unprecedented

score of 100%, Common Sense Media a 5/5, and IMDb a 7.9/10. However, these scores were almost nonexistent. The movie is based off of a children's book, "Majo no Takkyuubin" by Eiko Kadono, which was a series of short stories following the young witch, Kiki, and her encounters while running deliveries (Toyama). According to Toyama, Ms. Kadono was not pleased with how Miyazaki saw the cinematic possibilities of Kiki's Delivery Service and the changes that he made in order to carry the story throughout a film (Toyama). Fortunately, through the perseverance of Miyazaki and Suzuki (the producer of Studio Ghibli), who went to Ms. Kadono's home and even invited her to the studio to see what the storyboards looked like, she decided that Miyazaki's interpretation of Kiki and her fantastic companions would be permissible (Toyama).

Arguably one of Miyazaki's most famous films due to its exposure in global theaters in 2004, *Howl's Moving Castle (Hauru no Ugoku Shiro)* is also the most well-known of the movies to have been a book-to-film adaptation. Based on a young adult fiction novel by the same name, Diana Wynne Jones was a long-time Miyazaki fan before he approached her about breathing life into Howl, being first exposed to *Castle in the Sky* at a science-fiction convention (Bradshaw). Jones is quoted saying, "It was the most amazing thing when nearly 20 years later I suddenly got these overtures saying Miyazaki would like to make a film of Howl" as well as expressing her overwhelming approval of Miyazaki's portrayal of Howl, explaining: "I don't think I've ever met anyone before who thinks like I do. He saw my books from the inside out" (Bradshaw). Of all the movies that are influenced by books, *Howl's Moving Castle* has the largest percentage of characters that are also featured in the novels; however it is often critiqued for dramatically changing many of these characters and plot points.

“In the case of Hayao Miyazaki’s version of Diana Wynne Jones’s rollicking fantasy novel *Howl’s Moving Castle*, what gets lost are quite a number of subplots, and possibly the entire original theme. What gets added is the storytelling imagination of the creative genius behind Japanese anime films *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*. The resulting hybrid is gorgeous if frequently perplexing.” (Burkam).

Miyazaki’s version of the story also included aspects of if not whole-heartedly supporting his general themes of challenging traditional versus contemporary expectations, flight, technology, nature, growing up, and pacifism. “That Miyazaki expanded the book’s single sentence about war into a major subplot seems understandable, if not entirely kosher; he has his own story to tell, with his own themes” (Burkam).

Miyazaki’s attention to the traditional aspects of life in early industrial era with trains and primal automobiles, is offset with his magical *Moving Castle*, which is held together by the will of magic and the demon Calcifer. The warring kingdoms in the film also have a number of flying machines, in addition to Howl transforming into a winged beast, cohesive with that of his powers from the books. Technology is amplified in a steam-driven way, as well as alluded to with the use of magic such as with the communication of Heen and the Queen. Nature is exemplified in the beauty of the landscapes, Sophie’s appreciation of them, and the pollution that comes from the air raids. The central theme of growing up follows Sophie as she matures and learns to be strong for herself, instead of others. This parallels the novel in that Sophie develops magic abilities through Jones, though with Miyazaki she is portrayed as a “normal girl turned by a curse into an old woman, reacting to strange events around her, more the object of the plot’s action than its protagonist” (Burkam). As stated, Miyazaki expanded on a single sentence and created

an entire subplot focused on war and Howl's desire to be a pacifist by avoiding his summons for aid in the war, destroying airships, and diverting bombs (Burkam).

Surprisingly enough, even with the pleased support and consent of the author, *Howl's Moving Castle* debuted with mixed reviews such as 87% on Rotten Tomatoes, 4/5 on Common Sense Media, and 8.2/10 on IMDb.

In 2008 Miyazaki introduced to the world an adorable take on *The Little Mermaid* with the production of *Ponyo (Gake no Ue no Ponyo)*. Similar to that of Andersen's Little Mermaid choice to become human on her own accord, Ponyo also decides by her own conscience to become part of our world; however has a slightly different ending than that of Hans Christian Andersen's fated end (Ross). Also running in time with Andersen's mermaid, Ponyo swims to the surface out of sheer curiosity and finds there the love of her life (Ross). Miyazaki's themes are present yet again in the form of nature, aquatics, and growing up. Miyazaki placing more emphasis on the deterioration of the oceans than that of Andersen, understandably so as the oceans weren't polluted at all at the time of Andersen's penning of the story. Aquatics run rampant in both stories with mermaids, sea monsters, and vengeful oceans. In Miyazaki's tale of Ponyo and Andersen's tale of the Little Mermaid, growing up is a feature that is prevalent. The primary difference—as there are obviously many—is that of Miyazaki's happy ending with Ponyo and Sosuke promising to grow together and love each other always, whereas Andersen's Little Mermaid dies and becomes the foam in the sea. *Ponyo* was also received with mostly positive reviews scoring 92% from Rotten Tomatoes, 4/5 from Common Sense Media, and 7.7/10 from IMDb. *Ponyo* is not often referred to as Miyazaki's take on *The Little Mermaid*; however the similarities are uncanny and can argue easily in favor for the support.

Another critically acclaimed Miyazaki creation with literary influence is the 2010

production of *The Secret World of Arrietty* (*Karigurashi no Arrietty*). Based on the novel series by Mary Norton, *The Borrowers*, Miyazaki retains nearly all the characters from Norton's original series, and even gave name to "The Boy" calling him Shawn. Miyazaki also nods to the original title series when Arrietty explains to Shawn: "My mother, father, and I are all borrowers. We borrow things like soap and cookies and sugar—things that beans don't miss if they're gone." (Miyazaki). Some differences between Norton's Borrower's and Miyazaki's film include the setting of the story which differs from 1950s England to modern-day Koganei (Anime News Network). It is known that Miyazaki and fellow Ghibli founder Isao Takahata had been planning on making a film adaptation of *The Borrowers* for nearly 40 years, emphasizing Miyazaki's desire to create a unique and successful film (Anime News Network). Miyazaki's theme of growing up again makes an appearance as Arrietty and Shawn ("The Boy") learn more of each other's worlds. Although Mary Norton never was able to see this adaptation of her work, as she passed before it was completed, *The Secret World of Arrietty* was well-received by the audience and critics, scoring an impressive 95% from Rotten Tomatoes, 4/5 from Common Sense Media, and 7.7/10 from IMDb.

Hayao Miyazaki has directed, produced, and written over two dozen films and shorts, as well as announced retirement six different times, and come back from all of those to have a hand in Studio Ghibli's films (Wikipedia). With this knowledge as well as the immensely positive feedback from all Miyazaki's films, there's no doubt he will continue to fascinate and captivate viewers for years to come. Entertainment is presented to audiences in various forms. When entertainment influences itself and books are made into movies, the possibilities are endless, and when brilliant animators like that of Hayao Miyazaki are involved, masterpieces are born.

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