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DEFINING STEAMPUNK THROUGH THE FILMS OF HAYAO MIYAZAKI

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## ABSTRACT

### **Defining Steampunk Through the Films of Hayao Miyazaki**

Steampunk is a subgenre of speculative fiction that often explores an alternate future and that borrows from many characteristics of Victorian England in terms of visual style, social strata, and cultural beliefs. However, what characterizes steampunk is the presence of advanced technology in a retro-futurist, “road not taken” context. Airships, clockwork machinery, and steam-powered mechanical devices all play large roles in steampunk society. The “punk” aspect references the plotlines of these stories, often revolving around elements of rebellion and social change. Steampunk has risen in popularity in novelized fiction, comic books, videogames, fashion, and film. In exploring this very specific genre, I will examine the visual representations of steampunk through the animation and visual style of Japanese anime director Hayao Miyazaki. His films have risen to prominence and continue to be critically successful all around the world. Miyazaki’s works have a distinct visual style which is considered to be steampunk. This paper will analyze what makes each film steampunk and what unifies all of his films visually in this way. Ultimately, I will derive a working definition of visual steampunk and prove that Miyazaki himself is the originator and perpetuator of steampunk as a visual aesthetic. Furthermore, I will uncover the reason for the consistency in style in his films and determine the reason for their popularity.

Keywords: Miyazaki, steampunk, anime, retro-futurism, film, animation, science fiction

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The term “steampunk” is one that has yet to work its way into mainstream academic vernacular. It has, however, a hugely popular presence in popular culture and on the internet. In fact, steampunk can best be described by entering the term into Google and searching for images. What will be found is a series of drawings, paintings, photos, and screenshots depicting gears, goggles, and various accoutrements characteristic of steampunk style.<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* included the term in 2003, and defines the style as “science fiction which has a historical setting (esp. based on industrialized, nineteenth-century society) and characteristically features steam-powered, mechanized machinery rather than electronic technology.”<sup>2</sup> This style began as a literary movement, showcasing futures that share both technological and social characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian culture. Indeed, the Victorian fascination with technology present in several works from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries serves as a precursor to steampunk. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* illustrates fears of expanding scientific knowledge. Conversely, Jules Verne’s works *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and *From the Earth to the Moon* all reflect a sense of wonder with machines that allowed humans to explore the heretofore unknown. H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* is yet another story that deals with technology expanding beyond human understanding. Modern science fiction authors like K.W. Jeter (the originator of the term “steampunk” itself),<sup>3</sup> Neal Stephenson, Tim Powers, and William Gibson all perpetuate the term, crafting stories that draw similarities to the works of Shelley, Verne, and Wells. So, how did pop culture take these works of fiction, mix them with rebellious “punk” sci-fi, and create steampunk? Since steampunk is so heavily visual,

the answer lies in an examination of steampunk imagery. In order to craft an academic knowledge of steampunk, we must look to the works of the man who first presented audiences with an idea of what steampunk looks like and effectively created the concept- Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki.

Miyazaki is a writer and director of anime, a term for Japanese animation.<sup>4</sup> Anime in general is enormously popular across the globe and constitutes a huge portion of Japanese cinema and television. It has existed in Japan as one of the most popular forms of entertainment almost since the dawn of the moving picture, but made its way to America in the 1980s where, with Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, it gained popularity.<sup>5</sup> Anime varies in style quite significantly, ranging from oddly proportioned characters with bizarre colored hair to highly realistic depictions of facial features and eye styles.<sup>6</sup> What remains notably consistent about anime is the obvious influences of traditional Japanese art such as exaggerated lines and/or linear perspectives.

Hayao Miyazaki is a co-founder of the incredibly popular Studio Ghibli, an anime studio that has produced some of the most critically acclaimed pieces of animation in the world.<sup>7</sup> His film *Spirited Away* won an Oscar for Best Animated Feature, the first anime film to win an Academy Award. His other works including *Princess Mononoke*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Castle in the Sky*, *Porco Rosso*, *Kiki's Delivery Service* have all received praise. His work as an animator has spanned approximately fifty years, and his studio continues to produce films that are distributed worldwide, most recently by the Walt Disney corporation in the United States.

Steampunk's place in the zeitgeist of the times is slowly establishing itself; Miyazaki himself is wholly responsible for the visual side of this yet remains heretofore uncredited as a founding mind in steampunk. Therefore, it is only through examining Miyazaki's films that we will be able to solidify its definition. Miyazaki's contribution to steampunk is mostly a visual one, but the themes at play in his movies are also a large part of what constitutes steampunk. It was Miyazaki who, after author K.W. Jeter coined the term "steampunk," gave us the idea that an entirely new genre could be created from his set of concerns and through his visuals. The first and most obvious connection between Miyazaki and steampunk is the relationship with flight, flying machines, and Neo-Victorian constructions of steam-powered, wind-powered, and gear-heavy designs. Miyazaki's imagined airships are wholly responsible for those seen in modern steampunk fictions. Furthermore, Miyazaki is responsible for the "punk" aspect of the phrase "steampunk." Not only do his films present ideas of rebellion and change, but they do so with regard to nature and purity and with a yearning for a simpler time, both technically and philosophically.<sup>8</sup> Miyazaki does not present overtly fanatical depictions of "punk" ideas; rather, he shares them in an approachable, legitimizing way. He has provided viewers with an idea of what makes steampunk an ideological force as well as an aesthetic one.

To characterize his films broadly, Miyazaki rejects the potential for Victorian notions of sexism, classism, and imperialism; his protagonists are nearly all strong females, his stories cross virtually every class, and his only consistent villain is war itself. Miyazaki suggests what the 19<sup>th</sup> century could have or should have been. In reference to *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, Miyazaki stated that it was written as a "science fiction novel which was written in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>9</sup> With several of his other films, Miyazaki depicts environments characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup>

century Europe as suggested by characters' clothing and by background architecture. Given this idea of a Victorian world, instead of merely animating the likes of Dickens or Hardy, Miyazaki creates dynamic and atypical (at least to a Western eye) characters who often do not fall into categories of good or evil.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Miyazaki seeks to embody what Dani Cavallaro refers to as “the Japanese notion of *akogare no Paris* (‘the Paris of our dreams’) – namely, an elaborately fantasized version of Europe as seen ‘through Eastern eyes.’”<sup>11</sup>

So what exactly is the connection between steampunk and Miyazaki? The answer is that Miyazaki's films are almost all decidedly steampunk. In fact, it is safe to say that Miyazaki himself could be considered a steampunk director. As an animator with the capacity to illustrate literally anything, for a number of reasons, Miyazaki gave the world images of airships with whirring gears and gadgets coupled with stories of rebellion and social change. However, his films do not directly follow any single established tradition; rather, they have effectively created a visual culture that we are just now fully understanding in fashion, film, literature, videogaming, and just about every element of popular media. It is because of Miyazaki's films that we may understand steampunk through the great many facets of popular culture in which it exists.

## Chapter 1- Endnotes

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## Chapter 2

### Hayao Miyazaki

From an early age, Hayao Miyazaki was surrounded by just about everything we might now recognize in steampunk; in many ways, he is the perfect person to tell steampunk stories. Hayao Miyazaki born in the town of Akebono-cho on January 5, 1941. During this time and throughout Japan's involvement in World War II, his father Katsuji Miyazaki worked for Miyazaki Airplane, a company owned by Hayao's uncle. The company was responsible for the making of fighter plane parts, something that clearly made an impression on young Hayao. As a young child he sketched airplanes and cultivated a near obsession with aviation. Most modern steampunk places emphasis on flight and flying machines, usually from a fantasy angle that Miyazaki may have fantasized about, growing up around planes, parts, and engines. Furthermore, Miyazaki grew up at a very dynamic time in Japan's history. As the country grew in the post-war era, so was a young Miyazaki's mind shaped. He was a perceptive and discerning boy, causing him to become acutely aware of the change that was happening so rapidly around him. This would manifest itself through the "punk" element of his steampunk stories; never is there a Miyazaki film that doesn't pertain to some form of personal or social revolution.

Miyazaki attended Toyotama High School where, in his third year, he began to grow interested in animation. At this point, his interest remained an unlikelihood as he could only draw planes and airships; he was not as adept at drawing the human figure. Miyazaki graduated with degrees in both political science and economics from Gakushuin University in 1963 representing his strong interest in societal structure and social change. During his time at

university Miyazaki was also a member of the school's "Children's Literature Research Club" perhaps the only student organization that resembled a comics/animation club at the time. All of this experience in his earlier life would allow him to become the perfect person to present steampunk as a visual aesthetic.

Animation would become Miyazaki's tool for expressing steampunk; he chose to draw the elements of his childhood (planes, gears, cogs, engines) because of his uniquely steampunk background and set of concerns. In April 1963, Miyazaki decided to pursue his interest in animation and began work at Toei Animation. His first foray into professional animation was with the project *Watchdog Bow Wow (Wanwan Chushingura)*. By 1971, Miyazaki had played an in-between role for several projects and went to work for other animation studios. It was also at this juncture that he met Isao Takahata, a future co-founder and director of Studio Ghibli. In 1979, Miyazaki worked as a head animator on episodes of the series *Lupin III* as well as a *Lupin III*-themed feature film titled *The Castle of Cagliostro*. Eventually, in 1984, Miyazaki wrote and directed the film, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (Kaze no Tani no Naushika)*, an idea he adapted from his comic book (manga) series of the same name. Topcraft animation studios illustrated the film and Toei distributed it in Japan. It was released in a cut version in the U.S. as *Warriors of the Wind* in 1985; as a result, Miyazaki would later insist that no cuts be made upon distribution. His vision of steampunk would not be obscured. It wasn't until 2005 that the Walt Disney Corporation released the uncut version to home video in the U.S. The 1984 film is considered to be the first truly "Miyazaki" film, as it allowed his steampunk style and voice to manifest themselves fully; it remains a prime example of his steampunk aesthetic.

### **Studio Ghibli**

*Nausicaä* marked the beginning of Miyazaki's succession of steampunk films; it was Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli that would continue this succession, becoming (for Miyazaki) a veritable steampunk factory. In 1985, after the success of *Nausicaä*, Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and Tokuma Shoten founded Studio Ghibli to produce the film *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. The name Ghibli itself is rooted in steampunk's (and by definition, Miyazaki's) fascination with flight. The word is based on the Arabic word qibli or ghibli and it references the sirocco, a Mediterranean wind utilized by Saharan scouting planes in World War II. Studio Ghibli would become the house that Miyazaki built as all of his future films would be animated and distributed through it. The Studio's success was nearly instant; its first four films *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986), *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988 directed by Isao Takahata), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) were all met with enormous acclaim. After directing *Porco Rosso* (1992) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) he went into what would prove to be semi-retirement. He would later come out of retirement to direct his Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* (2001) and the Academy Award nominated *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). Miyazaki continues to make films today with his 2008 movie *Ponyo* and seems to refuse to retire completely. He remains the studio's most famous and prolific director and has gained enormous acclaim as an animator; however, he has never been linked consistently (or thematically) with steampunk. Nevertheless, Ghibli is, without a doubt, Miyazaki's workshop and the birthplace of steampunk imagery itself.

### **Common Animation Techniques**

Steampunk, like animation, has the potential to relate reality with fantasy, old with new, and, in Miyazaki's case, East with West. For instance, in many ways, Miyazaki is not typical among Japanese anime artists and directors. Nevertheless, "not only does his work have the same

rare combination of epic sweep and human sensitivity that the great live-action director possessed, but it also fails to fit into any of the neat child-sized boxes into which the West still tends to stuff the animated art form.”<sup>1</sup> He is noted as having an animation style that incorporates very defined, realistically proportioned eyes. This is unlike most anime, which is often associated with characters who have large, even over-sized eyes. Many anime films and series also feature humans with odd colored hair. Miyazaki contradicts this as well, giving his characters far more realistic hair colors (for the humans at least). Furthermore, Miyazaki rarely employs a series of predetermined facial expressions commonly used in anime to denote certain emotions. For example, in most anime, large sweat drops appear on the back of characters’ heads to indicate stress or embarrassment, while Miyazaki’s films tend to express emotion through realistic facial expressions. This allows a realism-driven West to appreciate and recognize a past with which it is familiar while simultaneously viewing another culture or subculture with which it is not. For this reason, Miyazaki’s animation technique is just as much a part of his steampunk aesthetic as any of the actual images he creates.

Additionally, part of modern steampunk’s appeal to an increasingly globalized popular culture is its juxtaposition of fantasy with a very specific time and/or place (usually the Victorian past). Often there is a focus on a particular technological element of that given time and place. From a technical standpoint, “Miyazaki is very successful in informing children (and adults) about the richness of Japanese traditions through the high-tech world of animation.”<sup>2</sup> However, where most anime employs the use of the multi-plane image, a technique of layering film cells to create perceptions of depth and motion, Miyazaki does not. As Thomas Lammare puts it:

Miyazaki generally avoids the sort of compositing associated with the multiplane camera. Although he certainly has access to large budgets and computer technologies that would allow him to lessen the sensation of movement between layers, he prefers not to. For the most part, he restricts the use of digital technologies to coloring or painting. This resistance stems from reluctance to composite the image, which would enable certain ballistic effects of speed... Miyazaki emphasizes lateral movement in ways that undercut the sensations of depth.<sup>3</sup>

Lammare notes that Miyazaki's rejection of the "ballistic effects of speed" is a thematic one; it makes his anime more fluid and less visually violent so that it appeals to our childish side rather than our rational awareness of speed. This is also a result of Miyazaki's resistance to digital animation. Miyazaki has used digital tools for some of his films but prefers to keep a balance between hand-drawn animation and digital techniques. Starting with *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki's films have all featured some element of digital coloring or animating (except for 2008's *Ponyo*, for which Miyazaki reverted to entirely hand-drawn colors and animation). As Lamarre states, "This is why so many of his films entail a quest for worlds based on clean, non-impact sources of energy—usually the wind and human muscle. His is a quest for another, better kind of action, another, better kind of energy, another, better kind of animation."<sup>4</sup> It is as though Miyazaki favors "steam-powered animation"; his process is identical to steampunk's nostalgia for the fantasized technology of the past.

### **Common Themes**

One can easily see several consistencies in theme across all of Miyazaki's movies; these consistencies are a huge part of what forms his steampunk aesthetic. For instance, as one critic

put it, “Hayao Miyazaki could not have become who he is, or created what he has created, without the influence of both his parents.”<sup>5</sup> Most apparent among his influences is his obsession with flight; virtually every one of his films features at least one flying sequence. These sequences incorporate some sort of flying machine of Miyazaki’s own design. Not only are these machines quintessentially representative of Miyazaki’s immense creativity, but they may also be attributed to his childhood. Miyazaki grew up around flying machines and learned a great deal about them from his father. He claims that his greatest talent is being able to draw planes and engines, and this is highly visible in his art. Steampunks today would surely agree that flight has everything to do with the genre.

Miyazaki also gathered a great deal from his mother; she was apparently a very outspoken woman who believed strongly in women’s rights and pacifism, both of which appear as common themes throughout Miyazaki’s work. In fact, nearly all of Miyazaki’s protagonists are young women on journeys of self-discovery. The youth of his protagonists also suggests an interest in childhood and coming of age narratives. Miyazaki often links this idea of growing up with a relationship to nature; as his protagonists grow, so does our understanding of both humans and nature. With steampunk’s focus on technology, it is only logical that learning the relationship between technology and nature would feature heavily in the genre. Mark Schilling believes that Miyazaki draws from other sources as well:

Some of his most popular films are visual and thematic grab bags, with bits and pieces gathered from the far corners of the globe. The setting of one, the 1989 *Majo no Takkyubin* (*Kiki's Delivery Service*), is a seacoast town that mixes Italian and Scandinavian port architecture with a dash of San Francisco streetcars, while the story of

another, *Tenku no Shiro Raputa (Laputa: Castle in the Sky)* was inspired by Gulliver's Travels. Miyazaki melds these bits and pieces into films that closely reflect his tastes, interests and concerns, while appealing to everyone from kids to adults and winning high critical marks, both at home and abroad, for their originality and excellence.<sup>6</sup>

Miyazaki's settings reflect the Japanese ideal of *akogare no Paris*, “the Paris of our dreams (imagination),” an ideal that Miyazaki draws from heavily in his steampunk aesthetic. It is an idealized version of a European setting that Miyazaki uses to access Japanese history, philosophy, and myth. The fantasy-history of *akogare no Paris* is at the heart of Miyazaki's environments and, subsequently, at the heart of steampunk. Miyazaki is a truly versatile director with a style that is at once universal and personally relatable. It's his signature on each movie that has created the concept we know of today as steampunk. In each of his films, there are elements of steampunk that characterize his vision as a director and the genre itself; given his background and personality, we may see how such a person could be linked to creating the steampunk aesthetic.

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## Chapter 3

### Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind

Miyazaki's first film as creative head is his first depiction of the steampunk aesthetic; the story he chose to tell is one characterized by flight and flying machines. Critic Brian Ruh provides a synopsis Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) at its most basic: "In director Miyazaki Hayao's adaptation of his own manga, he showed how animation can focus attention on real-world problems such as environmental degradation and the need to coexist with other cultures (and even other species) yet still tell an enthralling tale that still looks fresh nearly twenty-five years later."<sup>1</sup> *Nausicaä's* influence is far greater than mere parable however. It illustrates Miyazaki's presentation of flight, one of the key elements of his steampunk aesthetic. Miyazaki's obsession with flight is one often linked to his father's work in aviation. Flight and flying machines are present in virtually every one of his works. Using technology to literally reach new heights is a theme Miyazaki explores in *Nausicaä* and in his other films. As the flying machines used by characters might seem the most recognizable element of steampunk, *Nausicaä* establishes the beginnings of his visual aesthetic.

Steampunk is not merely the presence of certain technologies; it is an examination of said technologies and how they affect the world around them. Gearing up in goggles, gas masks, and other pieces of machinery, Nausicaä and her people must adapt their technology to survive the environment itself. Goggles have become particularly emblematic of steampunk culture. An enormous portion of steampunk imagery features emphasis on cleverly designed goggles. *Nausicaä* is, in essence, a look through the steampunk goggles. Nausicaä is a princess in one of the human kingdoms in the Valley of the Wind. She is a complex character, one that can be seen

from either side of the goggles. Dani Cavallaro believes that she is “the *Odyssey*’s own Nausicaä...the Phaeacian princess renowned for her love of nature and music, her fervid imagination and disregard for material possessions.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more directly relative to Nausicaä’s character is the Japanese folktale *The Princess Who Loved Insects* as Nausicaä meets the ambiguously antagonistic mutant insects of her world with awe and respect rather than fear. With her goggles, Nausicaä examines the insects and is intrigued by nature and the bugs that inhabit it. As Patrick Drazen puts in *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation*, “Her unorthodox actions would hardly make her traditional heroine material, but there is a context for everything she does that justifies her behavior.”<sup>3</sup>

Miyazaki is not content to simply focus on technology; perhaps relative to this is another element he adds- the idea that a completely new world may be achieved through total destruction. In the film, Miyazaki suggests that an entirely new world may be achieved through total destruction. In fact, in an interview with American essayist and *New Yorker* columnist Margaret Talbot, Miyazaki has declared that he believes, in some ways, that total destruction is better. As Talbot states, “He’s said, not entirely jokingly, that he looks forward to the time when Tokyo is submerged by the ocean and the NTV tower becomes an island, when the human population plummets and there are no more high-rises.”<sup>4</sup> In *Nausicaä*, the human population is implied to have been wiped out by something like nuclear disaster. While this may seem typical of science fiction dystopias, Miyazaki further implies that the remainder of human existence in a post-apocalypse may choose to be at peace with itself and with whatever nature survives. In this way, Miyazaki’s steampunk aesthetic tends to favor destruction as a cleansing force and one that is completely relative to mankind’s relationship to nature. Despite the marvels of steampunk’s

airships, goggles, and machinery, humanity still must acknowledge and respect the beauty and strength of nature. This concept becomes hugely important throughout Miyazaki's steampunk.

The contrast between flight and civilization serves steampunk well as an ideal in its technological aesthetic; both are not necessarily two sides of the same coin. Rather, they are independent facets of a broader range of similarity. As earthbound creatures, there is both a natural and unnatural way to achieve and to use the gift of flight. Therefore, the push and pull between nature and technology is also significant to steampunk. For example, Miyazaki seems to characterize flight in two different ways in *Nausicaä*: flying with nature and flying against nature. Nausicaä herself flies with nature, a concept emphasized by her glider (called *mēve* or “*mehve*” in Japanese; it translates to the German word “*möwe*” meaning “seagull”). The glider features folding wings and is jet-assisted but draws most of its power from the wind. Not only is the glider a technical marvel, but it also enables Nausicaä to explore her world using the power of nature to do so. Steampunks would certainly approve. In fact, in 2004, a project known as OpenSky Aircraft Project in Japan made efforts to construct a real-life, personal jet glider based on the *mēve* from the film.<sup>5</sup> Two were actually built and named after Nausicaä's glider in the film. At one point in the film, “when the Valley has been invaded and occupied by the Torumekians, one Valley man says to the Commander: ‘You use fire. We use a little of that too, but too much fire gives birth to nothing. Fire turns a forest to ash in one day. Water and wind take a hundred years to nurture a forest. We prefer water and wind.’”<sup>6</sup> The denizens of the Valley are the kind of steampunk that Miyazaki idealizes. They fly with nature in mind rather than their own gratification/destruction at their heart.

Miyazaki's steampunk is a pacifistic one that discourages flight as a means to destroy and instead accepts that it may be an ideal reached simply for the wonderment of doing so.

Technology is also used against nature throughout *Nausicaä*. The warring factions of Torumekia and Pejite both fight one another with heavily armed airships. The two also attempt to combat the insects of Fukai Jungle with armored tanks and battleships. Each is met with failure and, ultimately, it is Nausicaä's fascination and kind help toward the insects that save her from injury. As one who flies with nature, Nausicaä is rewarded, while those who fly against nature are met with failure. In this way, Miyazaki is suggesting, perhaps, that through responsible technology and use of resources, we may still find ways to achieve the greatest of human endeavors. Both the insects and the humans have the capacity for flight, though while the insects simply use their resources to survive, the humans have divided themselves through war and destruction. If the humans, or perhaps civilization itself, attempt to understand the insects, they will, like Nausicaä, be rewarded with a peaceful co-existence.

*Nausicaä* is the first example of Miyazaki's steampunk aesthetic. It stresses the importance of flight technology to steampunk as well as the symbolic presence of goggles. Furthermore, Miyazaki foreshadows an important concept that will appear in his other steampunk works. The idea that a new world may be achieved through destruction is one that is present in *Castle in the Sky*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, and *Princess Mononoke*.

### Chapter 3- Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ruh, Brian. "Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity."

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<<http://muse.jhu.edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/journals/mechademia/v005/5.ruh.html>>. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Cavallaro 4.

<sup>3</sup> Drazen 261.

<sup>4</sup> "The Animated Life." *The New Yorker* 17 Jan. (2005). Web. 6 Feb. 2011.

<[http://web.archive.org/web/20060524092154/http://www.newyorker.com/online/content/?050117on\\_onlineonly01](http://web.archive.org/web/20060524092154/http://www.newyorker.com/online/content/?050117on_onlineonly01)>.

<sup>5</sup> *OpenSky*. OpenSky Project, 1 June 2003. Web. 6 Feb. 2011.

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<sup>6</sup> Wright, Lucy, and Jerry Clode. "The Animated Worlds of Hayao Miyazaki: Filmic

Representations of Shinto." *Metro Magazine* 1 Jan. 2005: 46-51. *Communication and Mass*

*Media Complete*. Web. 4 Nov. 2010.

## Chapter 4

### Castle in the Sky

Steampunk's focus on flight is one that idealizes the ability to leave the earth; it marvels at the human technology that can do this (airships, planes, etc.). Miyazaki is very clear to make certain distinctions between ideals of flight and what humans have the capability to do. In *Castle in the Sky*, he acknowledges that, although flight is a part of human nature, to be constantly flying is an ideal that can never be reached. The beginning of the film details a legend of ancient man-made cities that remained in a constant state of flight. Humans, it states, were fascinated with the sky creating gradually more complex ways of leaving the earth. Modern steampunk culture employs this through depictions of airships and planes; as a genre, it assumes a fascination with flight technology. Eventually, the cities were somehow destroyed, though tales tell of one remaining city, Laputa, hidden by a maelstrom of clouds. The name "Laputa" is a reference to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*<sup>1</sup>. When Gulliver is captured by pirates and subsequently left to the sea in a canoe, he discovers a flying island called Laputa. Miyazaki's Laputa is a steampunk marvel, a robotic city run by clockwork androids and whirring propellers. The film itself takes place long after the collapse of these cities. Nevertheless, Miyazaki creates a civilization obsessed with flight. Everyone flies on airships and airplanes, be they civilian, military personnel, adventurer, or sky pirate. It is because of this film that steampunk idealizes (to mythological proportions) the technology that allows for constant flight.

Protagonists' relationships with their aircrafts will become "a classic Miyazaki emblem of joy"<sup>2</sup> in addition to a particularly strong idiom in steampunk. The protagonist, Pazu, unlike Nausicaä, is responsible for building his flying machine. However, in the course of the film, he

does not complete it. Miyazaki uses this concept to stress the idea that true flight is a matter of trust and maturity. Pazu is young, and, in many ways, naïve. Therefore, he is unable to achieve flight on his own until he matures and begins to trust the Laputian girl Sheeta. Where Nausicaä places trust in nature and in the winds to carry her across the skies, Pazu must also rely on faith in his relationship with Sheeta and in the magical nature of Laputa to gain the gift of flight. Sheeta, a descendant of the Laputian people, and Pazu embark on a quest to discover the true nature of Laputa, met along the way by others, some military agents, others pirates, who, for either power or money, also seek the legendary city. It is the discovery of Laputa that highlights Miyazaki's message in *Castle in the Sky*; there is only an enormous tree rooted to the center of Laputa and a robot, taking care of the plants and animals that have taken refuge there. Despite humanity's obsession with flight, it is, according to the film, inextricably linked to nature, an entity separate from human existence. Furthermore, as we see with Pazu's individual relationship to flight, "Laputa is not a Neverland in which children are invited to stay children forever, but a challenge to follow its children into adulthood, a condition in which empires repent, take responsibility for planetary flourishing, and invite ecotopia to come down to earth."<sup>3</sup> Humans' relationships with their flying machines signal a relationship of trust and maturity with regard to nature.

Throughout steampunk (and throughout punk narratives in general), there is a constant state of struggle, usually between an establishment and a smaller, less likely to succeed group of heroes. This struggle is related to Miyazaki's concept of flying with and against nature. This is most certainly the case in *Castle in the Sky*; Sheeta and Pazu are clearly the heroes, yet they find themselves banding together with pirates to help destroy the government's capability to use

Laputa's power crystal. The crystal itself is also a device of utter chaos; it is never to be used as a weapon against humanity as Colonel Muska intends to use it. As one of Miyazaki's few villains, Muska flies against nature, using the crystal and the flying technology of the military to achieve destructive ends; he seeks to harness the power of Laputa to conquer the world with his own military might. In order to stop him though, Sheeta and Pazu ultimately decide to use a different kind of destruction (a magical process called the Spell of Destruction) in order to eliminate both Muska and Laputa itself. As in *Nausicaä*, Muska is condemned for immediately using this ultimate power for destruction; Sheeta and Pazu use a magical spell to destroy both Muska and Laputa. Miyazaki's point is clear. In steampunk, flight is not an ideal that can be reached by a violent humanity. Even those who feel entitled to the gift of flight, may not have its power if they use it for evil. As the film closes, the remainder of Laputa ascends into the stratosphere, becoming literally unreachable. *Castle in the Sky* reflects several ideas of "punk" sensibilities. The fact that the main characters are all on the run from the government suggests an element of rebellion. One form of destruction leads to a form of creation in *Castle in the Sky*; the story would not exist if not for the push and pull of several conflicting elements: ground vs. flight, nature vs. humanity, law vs. piracy. It is on this framework that Miyazaki crafts the punk element of steampunk.

Furthermore, Miyazaki's steampunk was heavily influenced by the plight of Welsh miners in 1984 where, in Wales, he "witnessed the miners' strike at first hand and farmed the whole harrowing experience into his 1986 animation *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*." The working-class miners became emblematic of Miyazaki's sense of rebellion inherent to the "punk" element of steampunk. In fact, Miyazaki has stated that while visiting Wales he came to appreciate the

working values of the miners there. In an interview in 1999 he said, "I was in Wales just after the miners' strike. I really admired the way the miners' unions fought to the very end for their jobs and communities, and I wanted to reflect the strength of those communities in my film."<sup>6</sup> This is the sort of punk response that Miyazaki tends to favor; steampunks are those who fight for a peaceful way of life.

Laputa's ascent into the skies draws heavily on the mythological notion of stellification—that is, the concept of an earthly body transforming into a celestial entity; in this case, the stellification of Laputa is the achievement of a steampunk nirvana. In astronomy, the term “stellify” is used to describe an object that turns into a star. In this way, Miyazaki is placing emphasis on the divine nature of physical ascension, stressing that the city is beyond human and, incidentally, better off for it. Anthony Lioi stresses this point:

In the absence of human inhabitants, however, Laputa has become something unprecedented: a place where artificial intelligence has become the companion and guardian of the environment. The incident that makes this clear occurs right after Pazu and Sheeta manage to land their glider on one of the outer rings of the city. A giant robot, of the type that liberated Sheeta from Muska's clutches by force, approaches the glider as Pazu tries to ward it off, fearing an attack. Instead, the robot gently lifts the glider and puts it aside, revealing a bird's nest underneath, which Miyazaki renders in close-up, so the point is not lost.<sup>4</sup>

In Classical mythology, being stellified was perhaps the greatest posthumous honor for a mortal.<sup>5</sup> As Laputa is a product of mortal instruments, it is bestowed the gift of constant flight and,

beyond that, the gift of ascension. It is because of Miyazaki's desire for constant flight that modern steampunk idealizes a perfect balance between nature and the technology of the past.

#### Chapter 4- Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lioi, Anthony. "The City Ascends: Laputa: Castle in the Sky as Critical Ecotopia." *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*. 5.2 (2010). Dept of English, University of Florida. 4 Feb 2011. <[http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5\\_2/lioi/](http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_2/lioi/)>. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Lioi 12

<sup>3</sup> Lioi 17

<sup>4</sup> Lioi 8

<sup>5</sup> "stellify." *Wiktionary*. 2011. N. pag. Web. 4 Feb. 2011. <<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/stellify>>.

<sup>6</sup> Brooks, Xan. "A God Among Animators." *The Guardian* 14 Sept. 2005. Web. 4 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/sep/14/japan.awardsandprizes>>.

## Chapter 5

### Kiki's Delivery Service

Setting in steampunk is a huge portion of the genre that we owe to Miyazaki. The Japanese idea of *akogare no Paris* is the foundation for which Miyazaki constructs any of his steampunk settings. The setting of *Kiki's Delivery Service* is a prime example of one such steampunk setting. The film tells the story of a young witch who is learning and adjusting to her powers, only one of which she seems to be particularly good at (the power of flight). Lucy Wright and Jerry Clode detail how “the enterprise and courage of a young witch is brought out by a thoroughly European setting, complete with unfamiliar continental architecture, puzzling geography and troublesome traffic.”<sup>1</sup> Kiki leaves her parents to make a life in the city of Koriko (a clockwork city right out of any steampunk story). This city is perhaps one of the most steampunk elements at play in *Kiki*; it is one that will manifest itself in Miyazaki's later works (like *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Porco Rosso*) and in the visual representations of steampunk settings in other fictions. One of the key features of the city is the clocktower; in fact, it is the keeper of the clocktower who first welcomes Kiki to Koriko. Additionally, it is at this clocktower that the penultimate climax seems to drift toward, thereby implying that the tower is a center of action and reaction. Kiki's journey toward self-discovery practically begins and ends within sight of the structure. This suggests that clockwork and the technological marvel of an urban environment can be inviting, friendly, and even ideal. Miyazaki successfully synthesizes a distinctly Japanese animation with a Stockholm-esque city; like the idea of *akogare no Paris*, Miyazaki provides a “Stockholm of his dreams.” Wright and Clode suggest “that such success is built on Japan's unique ability to ‘glocalise’ a host of foreign influences for re-packaging to a global market.”<sup>2</sup> This theoretically Japanese aesthetic is obviously a key part of the steampunk

process; in *Kiki* Miyazaki furthers the idea that one may anachronize history with fantasy to create an utterly believable world. Susan Napier distinguishes that “Miyazaki’s works do not simply decontextualize foreign countries and cultures to reinforce a national identity. Instead, he works them into the narrative in a way that subtly erases traditional distinctions between the Japanese self and the foreign (usually Western) Other. This is especially true of his female characters, who are often the protagonists.”<sup>3</sup> Miyazaki uses *akogare no Paris* to approach a Japanese sense of character and philosophy through the context of a familiar, fantasy-Europe that is undoubtedly steampunk.

*Kiki’s Delivery Service* continues Miyazaki’s insistence that steampunk establish relationships between its characters and their aircraft. As the title suggests, Kiki starts a delivery service to make a living for herself and to make good use of her broom-flying skills. While hers is not a technologically based system of flight, Miyazaki incorporates his love of aviation into the story. Kiki makes friends with a boy named Tombo, a proud member of the city’s ragtag “Aviation Club” who is obsessed with flight and creates his very own self-powered, ornithopter aircraft. This aircraft, like Pazu’s, is not portrayed in the same vein as Nausicaä’s glider; Tombo’s flyer is consistently breaking down. This further implies that maturity can be inferred from one’s relationship with flight. As Tombo fumbles with his aircraft, so too does he fumble in his maturity; Kiki makes several comments about his (admittedly charming) lack of manners and “juvenile delinquency.” As her time in Koriko goes by, Kiki begins to lose her flying prowess as well as her witchly ability to speak to her cat Jiji. Disheartened, Kiki struggles to find her sense of identity and purpose. Her system of flight defines her growth from girl to woman; this is how steampunk may be used to tell coming of age narratives. Eventually, Tombo gets himself into

trouble, left hanging from one of the city's dirigibles. Kiki, mustering her powers of flight in dire crisis, rescues him from the potential dirigible accident much to the city's delight. Miyazaki here highlights the heroism of flying in addition to the sense of wonder and magic associated with the ability to leave the ground. The human element of flight is one heretofore unexplored by Miyazaki. Nevertheless, Kiki's powers are natural for her and she uses them for good; evil does not present itself in *Kiki*. Instead, there is a return to flight as "a classic Miyazaki emblem of joy."<sup>4</sup> The profound relationship between flight and human development is what makes *Kiki* a significant example of Miyazaki's steampunk aesthetic.

## Chapter 5- Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Wright 48

<sup>2</sup> Wright 47

<sup>3</sup> Napier, Susan. "Confronting Master Narratives: History As Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of De-assurance." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9.2 (2001): 467-93. *Project MUSE*. Web. 6 Feb. 2011. 473.

<<http://muse.jhu.edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/journals/positions/v009/9.2napier.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Lioi 12 (see Chapter 4- Endnotes)

## Chapter 6

### Porco Rosso

Steampunk's aesthetic is founded in historical fantasy with special regard to its technology; Miyazaki creates this visually through constant depiction of planes, airships, and other flying machines. *Porco Rosso* is Miyazaki's ultimate fairy tale tribute to aviation; everything about it is an homage to planes, flight, and pilots. The entire plot and indeed every scene seems to revolve around fighter planes characteristic of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While, historically speaking, these types of planes were not around in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Miyazaki's sense of wonderment at the technology of flight is one that matches the steampunk mindset. Patrick Drazen states in "Sex and the Single Pig: Desire and Flight in *Porco Rosso*" that "Porco Rosso is set in a specific time and place (the Adriatic Sea in about 1930) but also carries elements resembling a fairy tale."<sup>1</sup> Even the main character is subject to the magical realism of fairy tale; as a result of post-war survivor's guilt and disillusionment with his participation in a fascist Italian Air Force, he turns into a pig, changing his name from Marco Pagot to Porco Rosso (meaning "Red Pig"). This transformation alludes to a sense of wonderment in the technology of flight itself. Just as the Victorians were consciously aware and in awe of flying technology, so too is Miyazaki's steampunk fascinated by his own aircraft.

The film is a deep look at Miyazaki's depiction of his steampunk settings; they are worlds where, in this case literally, pigs can fly, suggesting that virtually anything is possible with the power of flight. Furthermore, in this world, unlike in *Castle in the Sky*, flight can last forever. In one scene, Porco tells Fio a story to help her sleep. In a flashback we see him flying with the Italian Air Force as Marco Pagot, alongside his friend Bellini. Porco describes how he

and his patrol encountered enemy fighters and how, suddenly, he experienced a bright light. His plane seems to fly on its own and, stunned, Marco sees an enormous line of planes drifting slowly above him. To his left and right, planes, both enemy and ally fly upward to the formation of planes. We come to realize that this is a heaven for fallen pilots as Marco sees Bellini gliding upward to the procession of fallen pilots. Marco pleads with Bellini friend to come down so that Marco may go instead. The visual is a distinct reversal of a military “Missing man formation” in which, at a pilot’s funeral, a ceremonial flyover is enacted, with the flight leader visibly breaking away and disappearing from the rest of the line.<sup>3</sup> In this scene Porco, the living, breaks away from the spirits of the fallen pilots. This surreal depiction of death highlights one of Miyazaki’s most important concepts in *Porco Rosso* and, subsequently, a very big part of steampunk subculture. The ability to fly is extremely valued and sought after; it is regarded with a magic awe. In the case of *Porco Rosso*, the divine ideal of constant flight is reachable (unlike in *Castle in the Sky*), although it is only in death that a pilot can fly forever. Drazen also reminds us that “Flight is very often a solitary pursuit for his characters.”<sup>2</sup> We might get the sense then that flight is a spiritual undertaking in Miyazaki’s steampunk world. As various religions have suggested an afterlife, so too does Miyazaki portray the pilot’s journey from the struggle to remain airborne to the peace of everlasting flight. As in *Castle in the Sky*, the characters search for the steampunk nirvana that is achieved through balance. While the film is set in or around 1929, its historical context is not one of significance. Rather, it is the visual depiction of the world of constant flight, the *akogare no Italy* so to speak, that Miyazaki is interested in.

Miyazaki again reminds us that steampunk favors those who fly with nature and against a violent establishment. *Porco Rosso* is itself an anti-fascist, anti-war punk tale, whose titular

character embodies a post-modern, “punk hero.” Porco has not only lost his original identity after the climate of World War I, but he has abandoned being a military pilot in favor of a feud with a bumbling group of pirates and with his rival Curtis (so named after American aviator Glenn Hammond Curtiss, co-founder with the Wright Brothers of Curtiss-Wright Corporation)<sup>4</sup>. All of this reflects what modern steampunk will come to mean (with particular emphasis on the “punk” element). Concerning Porco’s appearance, Dani Cavallaro states that, “It could be argued that Marco willingly embraces his bestial identity not only as a punishment commensurate with his unredeemable sense of guilt but also as an irreverently graphic indictment on the hypocritical values upheld by his culture in order to camouflage the actual tragedy of warfare.”<sup>5</sup> The fact that his appearance is that of a pig plays on the “fascist pigs” expression; since Porco looks like a pig, he is constantly reminded of his time in the institution of violence that is the Italian Air Force. Steampunk, like most punk narratives, rejects establishment in favor of achieving one’s own unique identity. Furthermore, Cavallaro reminds us that, “From a Buddhist perspective, the pig symbolizes human imperfection and hence alludes to a creature’s regression to an inferior form of life in the cycle of reincarnations.”<sup>6</sup> Porco however does not embrace fascism; instead he fights against it, but only insofar as he can avoid it completely. Throughout the entirety of the film, he is on the run from the military. As a steampunk hero, he rejects the war machine of the IFA that flies against nature.

## Chapter 6- Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Drazen, Patrick. "Sex and the Single Pig: Desire and Flight in Porco Rosso." *Mechademia 2* (2007): 189-99. *Project MUSE*. Web. 3 Nov. 2010. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Drazen 195.

<sup>3</sup> "The History of The Missing Man Formation." *Old Glory Traditions - Friends of POW-MIA*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.oldglorytraditions.com/missingmanhistory.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Toyama, Ryoko. "FAQ // Porco Rosso // Nausicaa.net." *Nausicaa.net*. Team Ghiblink, n.d. Web. 6 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/porco/faq.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Cavallaro 97.

<sup>6</sup> Cavallaro 97.

## Chapter 7

### Princess Mononoke

*Princess Mononoke* is less responsible for crafting the obvious imagery associated with steampunk but nevertheless, conveys his steampunk aesthetic. The film engages with Japanese myth and history through the “goggles” of a steampunk fantasy. It is a dualist examination of Miyazaki’s concerns about the relationship with technology, humanity, and nature. Furthermore, it condemns those that would fly against nature, using technology to encroach on the natural world. Instead of evoking the images of gears, cogs, engines, and planes, *Princess Mononoke* serves Miyazaki’s steampunk aesthetic in that it favors resolution through achieving the steampunk nirvana- the balance of a civilization’s technology with nature itself.

The film is set expressly in Japan’s Muromachi period though, in concordance with Miyazaki’s steampunk aesthetic, the film is not completely historical; several elements of fantasy and magic work their way into the narrative, though the film’s focus remains on technology. Demons and spirits are as much a part of this world as human beings. Susan Napier highlights, “guns, rather than swords, play a major part in this supposedly medieval setting”<sup>1</sup> a reflection of the seemingly necessary technological element of any steampunk tale (although, historically, guns were used well into the Muromachi period). The story revolves around the struggle between the civilized humans of Iron Town (also known as Tatara in the original Japanese) and the guardians of the forest from which they gather most of their resources. In between the two sides is Ashitaka, the last prince of the Emishi people. It is the setting that is characteristic of Miyazaki’s steampunk aesthetic; Iron Town is known to be technologically superior to other villages. Iron Town is technologically in the vein of Miyazaki’s steampunk. The use of guns to

fight nature is particularly significant; the film is again clear to point out that guns are particular to this settlement. The fact that Iron Town is at odds with nature suggests that even the most advanced of technological civilizations is subject to nature's fury at being subjected to the whims of civilization. The setting itself is constructed on the basis of fantasy-history but, as is necessary for Miyazaki's steampunk, the focus remains on its technology.

Just as steampunk subverts the conventions of the Victorian past, so too does *Princess Mononoke* subvert those of the Muromachi. The feudal society of the period was a savage food chain; it is characterized in *Princess Mononoke* through the villages that feed upon the natural world, while Iron Town itself is fed upon by the governing warlords (or "daimyo") of the land. Ashitaka, the film's "punk" figure is the one to challenge each link of the chain. Like Porco or any of Miyazaki's steampunk heroes, Ashitaka rejects the system that flies against nature. Granted, Lady Eboshi, the leader of Iron Town, is also hugely representative of the punk character. Eboshi is characterized by Patrick Drazen as neither good nor evil, an essentiality it seems with Miyazaki's punk, saying that she "provided jobs and dignity to the castoffs of society while also despoiling the environment and selling arms to the highest bidder."<sup>2</sup> She is also an ambiguously steampunk figure as she is a distinct departure from the normative characterization of women in historically medieval Japanese stories:

In another subversion of traditional conventions, Tatara is governed by a woman, Lady Eboshi, who has created a refuge for outcast women and people with incurable illnesses such as leprosy. Eboshi is pitted against forest creatures and another female human, a girl named San, the *mononokehime*, or "possessed princess," of the title. Although *mononoke* traditionally means "possession by a human spirit," in this case San is clearly possessed

by the fearsome spirits of nature. Raised by Moro, a female wolf, San detests all things human and lives only to destroy civilization, which to her is Tatara. Eboshi, in turn, is determined to destroy the forest, which means she must kill the *shishigami* [sic: meaning “forest spirit”] for victory.<sup>3</sup>

Essentially, *Princess Mononoke* is Miyazaki’s way of rejecting medieval presumptions particularly about the role of women of certain societal classes. Miyazaki uses his steampunk set of ideals to subvert a conventional history with one born from fantasy.

The end result of *Princess Mononoke* suggests that, like others in Miyazaki’s steampunk succession, a better life could be achieved by the destruction of both nature and civilization (as was also suggested with *Nausicaä*). The final scene depicts a tree spirit known as a Kodama appearing in a revitalized forest, signifying that nature (and life itself) has risen again. To achieve the steampunk nirvana that Miyazaki seeks, there can be no good and evil in the conflict of the film; our sympathies are not intended to favor either the people of Iron Town or the spirits of the forest. There is absolutely no clear victory for either, and Miyazaki’s message is simply that that relationship between humanity and nature is a cyclical one; as nature changes, so too must humanity change to adapt. Miyazaki seeks to achieve the steampunk nirvana in this way.

## Chapter 7- Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Napier, "Confronting Master Narratives: History As Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of De-assurance." 479.

<sup>2</sup> Drazen 189.

<sup>3</sup> Napier, "Confronting Master Narratives: History As Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of De-assurance." 479.

## Chapter 8

### Howl's Moving Castle

*Howl's Moving Castle*, a story based loosely on Diana Wynne Jones' work of the same name, is perhaps Miyazaki's most recognizably steampunk film; its setting matches Miyazaki's steampunk *akogare no Paris* aesthetic perfectly. The environments of the film are obvious nods to Victorian life; each town the characters visit is a clockwork city reminiscent of London, Zurich, Vienna, or Paris. Again we are reminded of the notion of *akogare no Paris* as these are clearly the cities of Miyazaki's dreams. These cities are not the central location of the film, however. The titular moving castle is the key setting, a giant walking structure that is essentially wheels, cogs, metal and wood held together and propelled by the magic of a fire demon called Calcifer. While not a flying machine, the castle is most definitely a product of Miyazaki's steampunk ideal (not to mention the gliders that also are used during a chase sequence in the film). The world of the film is one of high fantasy, driven by both magic and technology. It is as though Miyazaki re-imagined Europe as a place populated with his own imagined constructions.

Nevertheless, Miyazaki is quick to show that, despite these wonders of technology, war can tear everything apart; again he antagonizes the society that flies against nature. The flying machines in *Howl* are nearly all products of a war-driven society. However, it is not flight itself that is driven by the machine of war; when Howl and Sophie fly together to escape an evil witch's forces, the beauty of flight is highlighted. Miyazaki makes the distinction between flying with and against nature. The film details Howl's struggle to survive in a world torn apart by war. As Antonia Levi puts it, "He recognizes that the war is pointless and spends his nights defending the innocent on all sides from hideous organic bombs that are often actually wizards transformed

into weapons.”<sup>1</sup> Miyazaki’s steampunk reminds us that even the fantastic may be turned into a technological weapon for destruction. Howl is cursed to become a weapon, nightly transforming into a hideous bird creature. It is here that Miyazaki shows flight as a monstrous tool; when used for violence and to fly against nature, Howl’s flight can only be achieved as a result of becoming an unnatural monster. Howl himself is staunchly against the war and yet cannot seem to break away from the fighting. “Howl is a wonderful metaphor for what happens to soldiers—even antisoldiers—in war. He fights only to defend others, especially those he loves, but the act of fighting is turning him into a monster. Howl’s dilemma also plays into Sophie’s story in that she takes the greatest physical and emotional risk of her life by attempting to save Howl from the war and from himself.”<sup>2</sup> By creating a villain out of war itself, Miyazaki again showcases the pacifism that is inherent to his steampunk aesthetic.

As with his other films, Miyazaki further characterizes steampunk flight as a sign of maturity in *Howl*. Only once Howl gets his heart back and accept Sophie's love does Calcifer make the reborn castle fly at the end of the film. Howl's flight up until this point is a reflection of his inability to seek anything more than power and beauty for himself. The moving castle of the title is limited to fairly slow ground movement until Howl himself matures. By the end of the film Howl's castle becomes his own true home and, in response, Calcifer stays to power the castle to literally new heights.

**Chapter 8- Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Levi, Antonia. "Howl's Moving Castle." *Mechademia* 3 (2008): 261-63. *Project MUSE*. Web. 3 Nov. 2010. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Levi 262.

## Chapter 9

### Steampunk As Told By Miyazaki

So precisely how did Miyazaki impact other (perhaps more Western) fictions that we have come to know as steampunk? First, it is important to stress that the term “steampunk” was not originated by Miyazaki. It was author K.W. Jeter who originated the term steampunk and is credited with being the first to publish a steampunk work. Nevertheless, we have Miyazaki to thank for originating and materializing the idea as an aesthetic style and as a philosophical idea. The term itself is speculated to have first been used by Jeter in a 1987 letter to science fiction magazine *Locus*<sup>1</sup>:

Dear Locus,

Enclosed is a copy of my 1979 novel *Morlock Night*; I'd appreciate your being so good as to route it to Faren Miller, as it's a prime piece of evidence in the great debate as to who in "the Powers/Blaylock/Jeter fantasy triumvirate" was writing in the "gonzo-historical manner" first. Though, of course, I did find her review in the March *Locus* to be quite flattering.

Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective term for Powers, Blaylock and myself. Something based on the appropriate technology of the era; like "steampunks," perhaps...

— K.W. Jeter

The other authors referenced in the letter are Tim Powers, author of *The Anubis Gates* (1983) and James Blaylock, author of *Homunculus* (1986). The science fiction community came to refer to these particular authors as “the steampunks”: writers whose works fit what Jeter called the “Victorian fantasy.” Jeter’s phrase (and in fact his novel *Morlock Night*, a reimagining of H.G. Wells’ future race of underground-dwellers) may have been derivative of the so-called “cyberpunk” genre that had emerged in science fiction shortly before the naming of the steampunks. Cyberpunk is often set in a dystopian future rife with technological advancement.<sup>2</sup> The presence of computers and digital technology is at play more frequently as exemplified in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, a preeminent cyberpunk novel featuring the exploits of computer hackers. Gibson would, in fact, go on to write *The Difference Engine* (1990) with author Bruce Sterling; the novel is an excellent example of steampunk telling the (fictionalized) story of inventor Charles Babbage and the creation of his “difference engine,” a device that would later become the inspiration for the computer. As the steampunk literary genre grew, more authors began to tell stories set in pseudo-Victorian retro-futures that were very specifically Western and very specifically derivative of Jeter. Eventually, the term began to apply to the genre as a broad expression for any story that had a similar setting. However, the term deserves an even broader, pan-cultural definition, one that incorporates Miyazaki’s aesthetic and his creations. In tracing Miyazaki’s influence, one can see elements of his films at play in works of literature, film, video games, music, and fashion. Many of these elements are visual, drawn from the uniquely beautiful animation of each film. Others are conceptual, taken from the idea of steampunk created by Miyazaki.

### Steampunk in Literature

The earliest instance of modern steampunk in literature is commonly believed to be Jeter's *Morlock Night*. However, it is unlikely that Miyazaki read this book before making his first film; his steampunk aesthetic comes from his background and his ability to, with the goggles of fantasy, translate Japanese ideas through Western settings. *The Diamond Age* (2000) written by Neal Stephenson, is one of the first examples of steampunk fiction authored by a writer of cyberpunk<sup>3</sup>; it is also one of the first consciously multicultural works of steampunk as it is set in Shanghai. Furthermore, its society is one that we might find in any Miyazaki film; it takes steampunk and incorporates Confucian customs into the society it creates. Science fiction for both adults and young adults has begun to follow suit. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (the first of which *The Golden Compass*, was made into a film)<sup>4</sup> and Cassandra Clare's *Mortal Instruments* series have been considered steampunk; both enjoy a wide readership.<sup>5</sup> Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker*, also published as a young adult novel, has been optioned for a film adaptation and has received both critical acclaim and commercial success.<sup>6</sup> All of these works draw from Miyazaki in their own ways; Pullman's protagonists adventure with a group of "airship gypsies" reminiscent of *Porco Rosso* and of *Castle in the Sky* and Priest's work centers on the reclamation of a lost city (in her case, a fictionalized Seattle rather than a Castle in the Sky). Modern steampunk literature is beginning to owe less to Jeter and far more to Miyazaki; as readers span an entire globe, so too must a genre span both East and West.

Because Miyazaki is an animator, it seems logical that comics would enjoy the notion of steampunk as an alternate future; indeed popular superheroes have found themselves in steampunk settings as "one-shot" stories or within the pages of a graphic novel. Brian Augustyn

and Mike Mignola's *Gotham by Gaslight* puts Batman in a 19<sup>th</sup> century version of Gotham city where he tracks down a killer that just might be Jack the Ripper. Other comics borrow and re-imagine Victorian literature directly. Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, for instance, takes characters from 19<sup>th</sup> century literature- names like Captain Nemo, Alan Quatermain, Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde- and joins them together as misfit anti-heroes in a London full of invention and steam-powered machinery. Fewer comics have risen to success by creating wholly original steampunk worlds, though one example, *Girl Genius*, remains a popular print comic turned webcomic. It is what co-author Kaja Foglio calls a "gaslamp fantasy" having more to do with adventure and less to do with elements of rebellion. All of these owe their imagery to many of Miyazaki's films.

### **Steampunk in Hollywood**

Miyazaki's films are most definitely not Hollywood movies, though their visual aesthetic is one that many Hollywood films have attempted to emulate (some more directly than others). Marie Bodley defines the place of technology in steampunk films: "It shows viewers that, in retrospect, this antiquated technology was actually 'safe' and 'manageable' – at least in comparison to what viewers find today in their pockets (from cell phone to wireless internet) and homes (such as microwaves and speaking computers) – and can be used to save the day."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, steampunk has, over time, found its way into big-budget Hollywood films (though one of the first films ever made, *A Trip to the Moon*, could be seen as steampunk in some senses as it was derived from Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*). Stephen Sommers' *Van Helsing* is a throwback to the Universal Monsters of the 1930s and 40s. Van Helsing is depicted as a young, heroic, hunter of monsters. The backdrops of the film are heavily Gothic but also incorporate

large mysterious devices with obvious gears and undisguised mechanics.<sup>8</sup> The same is true of *Wild Wild West*, a blockbuster set in a high-tech American west.<sup>9</sup> Both films owe a great deal to both *Nausicaä* and *Howl's Moving Castle* as their heroes are ones seen from both sides of the goggles. Hollywood is also particularly fond of adapting written works and has done so with a number of different steampunk stories. 2009's *Sherlock Holmes* depicted an action-oriented Holmes in a highly industrial 19<sup>th</sup> century London (the "London of our dreams" perhaps). Though Arthur Conan Doyle's stories were not necessarily steampunk, Hollywood, in order to appeal to a wide audience has, knowingly or unknowingly, crafted a new steampunk hero.<sup>10</sup> Books that were originally steampunk have also made their way to the big screen; Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* and Alan Moore's graphic novel *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* have both been given film treatments.<sup>11</sup>

### **Steampunk in Music, Fashion, and Lifestyle**

It is easy to imagine that a set of visual aesthetics may even characterize a whole genre of music in response; such is the case for Miyazaki's steampunk. His visuals have created inspiration for artists to dress as his characters might or to incorporate gear-heavy pieces of technology into their very instruments. While debate among steampunks is sure to be present as to what constitutes "the steampunk sound," there are a selection of artists and albums that steampunk fans will agree accurately portray elements of the genre in a way that matches some of Miyazaki's aesthetics. One of the consistently identifiable steampunk albums is Abney Park's *Lost Horizons* album. The band began its career as a goth/industrial band in the late 90s. In 2008, the band, noticing a rise in popularity of steampunk beyond the science fiction literary community, created fictional personas for themselves that they described as steampunks. Any of

these personas could be characters plucked from the ranks of Miyazaki's airship pirates (in fact, one song on the *Lost Horizons* album is titled "Airship Pirates"). That same year, the band released *Lost Horizons* with the disclaimer that it was a steampunk album and with the clear idea that fans of the genre would appreciate the scene if not the music itself. Generally, the music combines synthesizer beats with a heavy dose of strings, usually in the form of violin. The band's latest album *The End of Days* continues this pattern and has been met with just as much popularity within the steampunk community. Other bands such as Rasputina have followed a similar model of growth and still other artists in the neo-cabaret, darkwave, and dance scenes are slowly emerging as steampunks. As a musical genre, steampunk is still materializing, though Miyazaki's influence will surely continue to appear everywhere from the album covers to the live performances of each artist.

Steampunk fashion draws just a significant portion of its designs from Miyazaki's imagery. Steampunk as a fashion should not be confused with mere Victorian costuming; the focus of steampunk, like with Miyazaki, is on technology. As steampunk blogger Ay-Leen the Peacemaker points out in her post "#1 Technology Eastward," "One of the big differences between neo-Victorian and steampunk is the level of technology incorporated in the aesthetic."<sup>12</sup> Outfits featuring brass goggles and other vintage accessories appear as much edgier twists on the Victorian style and can easily be identified as steampunk. Drawing heavily from both Miyazaki's characters and from romantic goth subculture, the movement toward steampunk seems to have been foreseen by the fashion industry as more models continue to sport clocks, gears, and goggles.<sup>13</sup>

As Miyazaki crafted steampunk through animation, many in the crafting world have incorporated steampunk as a verb (e.g. to “steampunk” something) adapting a very punk, do-it-yourself attitude to creating “steampunked” accessories. Creators of these artifacts have gathered at what are known as “makers faires”; they are places where steampunks buy and sell their wares ranging from vintage watches to jewelry to redesigned laptops, cell phones, and music players. Consequently, these faires have further evolved into full-blown conventions like TeslaCon (named after maverick scientist and inventor Nikolai Tesla, an icon in steampunk culture). Other pop culture conventions have seen a large portion of steampunk cosplayers- convention-goers who dress in costumes and adopt fitting personas- including the “League of STEAM” also known as the Supernatural and Troublesome Ectoplasmic Apparition Management or, more commonly, the steampunk Ghostbusters. Participants in these conventions have essentially adopted steampunk fashion as just a part of a philosophy; the “steampunk way of life” is a value held by certain practitioners of anti-establishment counterculture. The philosophies of Neo-Victorian identity have essentially been overhauled to create a wholly new identity for steampunks. The movement has rejected Victorian social strata and attempted to remove the negative elements of the period instead adapting the visual aesthetics. To “steampunk” something is to recognize the universality and adaptability of the genre as embodied by Miyazaki’s Japanese brand of steampunk.

### **Steampunk in Other Media**

Despite Miyazaki’s leanings away from digital media, steampunk has, not surprisingly, found its way into games. Like many elements of science fiction and fantasy literature, gamers have incorporated steampunk into tabletop role-playing experiences in the form of campaigns

like *Regency Punk* and *Flintlock Fantasy*. Videogames have also adapted steampunk as a genre. Franchises like *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* have each had installations that incorporate steampunk. *Final Fantasy VI*, for instance, takes place in a world that has completely replaced its native magic with steam-powered, gear-heavy technology. *The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks* follows the journey of protagonist Link as a train engineer seeking to find a tower that houses spirits. Other stand-alone titles have created steampunk experiences across a number of different types of games. *World of Warcraft* and *Warhammer Online* have both mixed Tolkien-esque fantasy with steampunk technologies to create massively multiplayer role-playing games with a steampunk flavor. The *Bioshock* series has used steampunk to create a completely original first-person shooter experience, creating both weapons and enemies made from spare parts, gears, and other bits of clockwork characteristic of steampunk. The PC game *Arcanum* mixes the character creation process of *Dungeons and Dragons* with a steampunk setting; players must choose to align their character with either the forces of magic or those of technology.

### **Steampunk's Future**

Steampunk continues to grow as a genre, a fashion movement, and a lifestyle for some. All of these examples of steampunk in fiction, film, music, and gaming illustrate how Miyazaki has defined steampunk visually and conceptually. They are the foundation for truly understanding steampunk as both a visual style and as a substantive genre of fiction. Ando Satoshi states that, "Most fantasy novels (and films) seek the past in some way, which is a reflection of the time's anxiety and pessimism."<sup>14</sup> This only scratches the surface of how we might understand steampunk; it is far more universal than Satoshi implies. Nowhere is this most

apparent as in steampunk fictions. It is important then to remember that all of these examples of steampunk would likely not have manifested themselves in the way that they did without the ideas of Hayao Miyazaki. His films are responsible for the design of virtually every steampunk story from *Steamboy* to *Van Helsing* to *Lost Horizons*.

### **Conclusion**

What we see as steampunk can be largely attributed to Miyazaki, who is without a doubt the creator of steampunk's visual aesthetic. Because of this, one could surely say that Miyazaki is a steampunk director. Given the themes of nature versus technology, flight, destruction, and *akogare no Paris*, Miyazaki speaks to the punk element of his viewers in a way that is not overtly radical, but in a subtle acknowledgment of its importance and legitimacy. Furthermore, Miyazaki gave his viewers ideas that grew into what would become the genre of steampunk. While Neo-Victorianism would likely have emerged as a philosophy and/or genre of entertainment through the likes of K.W. Jeter and the science fiction community, it is safe to say that, without Miyazaki, the steampunk movement would not have been characterized by the fantastic visuals of flying machines, technology with exposed gears, and steam-powered wonders. So, knowing the origins of steampunk as told by Miyazaki, we may define steampunk as a visually and environmentally characterized genre of speculative fiction that draws from visuals established by Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki.

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<sup>13</sup> *Beyond Victoriana: A Multicultural Perspective on Steampunk*. N.p., Oct. 2009. Web. 13 May 2010. <<http://beyondvictoriana.com/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Satoshi 2.

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Academic Vitae

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### **Education**

The Pennsylvania State University, Brandywine Campus May 2011

- Jane E. Cooper Honors Program
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### **Honors Thesis**

Defining Steampunk Through the Films of Hayao Miyazaki Spring 2011  
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Kathleen Kennedy, Assistant Professor of English  
Thesis Reader: Dr. Myra Goldschmidt, Associate Professor of English

### **Work Experience**

The Writing Studio, Penn State Brandywine, Media, PA, Jan. 2010-Present  
*Peer Tutor*

- Assist student writers with a variety of assignments in multiple disciplines including sciences, business, literature studies, as well as resume and cover letter writing.
- Work with students on any aspect of their assignment from brainstorming to organizing to finalizing and editing the final draft.

Mike Lemon Casting, Philadelphia, PA. Jan.-Aug. 2009  
*Casting Intern*

- Worked with actors and clients to organize smooth running of auditions for film, television, and commercial acting.
- Maintained a professional studio space while facilitating the needs of producers and casting directors.

Self-Employed May 2009-present  
*Freelance Writer*

- Write and sell articles to various websites and private blogs.
- Promote articles and generate interest from potential buyers.

## **Presentations**

Shaner, Andrew. *The Urban Center in Cyberpunk Anime*. Presented at Northeast Regional Honors Conference, Harrisburg, PA. April 8-11, 2010. Presented by Andrew Shaner

## **Extracurricular Activities**

Penn In Hand Literary Magazine, Penn State Brandywine  
Associate Editor

- Edit submissions for student-run literary arts magazine.
- Layout magazine in a visually captivating manner.
- Plan fundraising efforts to meet cost of printing.

The Lion's Eye Newspaper  
Section Editor

- Write articles covering campus news, world/local news, sports, and entertainment topics.
- Edit and layout articles.

Honors Service Committee  
Chairperson, October, 2008

- Participated and organized participation in "Sweat for Hope", a 5K walk/run charity event.
- Raised money for Profugo, an organization that supports fair trade in developing countries.

## **International Education**

Penn State Brandywine's International Program in London, England  
November 20 - 27, 2009

- Enrolled in ENGL 297 – Independent Study Abroad (3 credits)
- Traveled throughout London
- Visited Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, one of Charles Dickens' homes, the British Museum, The London Museum, The Globe Theater, and several other areas.

Also traveled to Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Germany, & Switzerland.

## **Language Proficiency**

Spanish, proficient in written and spoken; French, basic written and spoken; Japanese, very basic spoken