

Environment and its Manipulation: An Ecocritical Analysis of Selected Studio Ghibli Films



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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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Dedication

To the souls and the survivors

To the resisters and the believers

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Abstract

Animation goes beyond the surface to explore diverse scopes; portraying contemporary issues which are presented through its visually compelling approach advocating for awareness. This thesis aims to compare two films associated with Studio Ghibli: *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki and *The Red Turtle*, directed by Michaël Dudok de Wit, based on concepts such as anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism and technological advancements. Using the deep ecology technique within the ecocritical framework, the study investigates how each film depicts the influence of industrialization and pre-industrialized viewpoints on environmental degradation and restoration. Additionally, human and non-human realms will be explored along with how specific characters embody or fail to embody these environmental values. This research is supported by credible arguments and secondary sources that address related topics, including animated landscapes, environmental issues, destructive nature of humankind, human-nature power relations etc. The references include several aspects that improve comprehension of de Wit and Miyazaki's environmental approach in their work. Moreover, the chosen research methodology is qualitative in nature that uses ecocriticism as the theoretical framework in order to analyze the primary texts. Consequently, through this research, the purpose of which is to highlight the ways these films have shaped a greater sensitivity for ecological issues while inspiring awareness for our connectivity with the environment.

Keywords: ecocriticism, anthropocentrism, industrialization, environment, Studio Ghibli, deep ecology, technology, nature.

Chapter One

Introduction

Nature and humanity coexist in a form where human essence can either be the protector or the desecrator of environmental elements. Consequently, animated media effectively represents such pivotal concepts through its plot, setting, narrator and most importantly, characters. The field of animation offers far more than just mere entertainment for children. As Shinobu Price reminisced: “Westerners often conflate Japanese animation with children’s cartoons which are associated with simplified storylines and formulaic happy endings” (qtd. in Chan). *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* are two remarkable creations from Studio Ghibli that showcase similar theoretical perspectives, including significant ecological outlook, offering much more than simple entertainment for children.

Hayao Miyazaki, the Japanese animator, filmmaker and the director of the most acclaimed animation company, Studio Ghibli, emphasizes the concept of environmentalism as one of the recurring themes in his creations. The prioritization of nature and its elements is evident throughout his films as he is renowned for his skillful utilization of natural landscapes in his films. It can also be seen how much detailed work is prioritized to highlight each of the elements of nature which also suggests the landscapes are not merely used for filler purposes. Michaël Dudok de Wit also has portrayed his excellence through his minimalist slow paced styled animated pieces. His film explores nature and solitary existence impeccably. Consequently, the films *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* extensively deal with Studio Ghibli’s ecological philosophy, advocating environmental concerns. Therefore, the research aims to bring the perspective of environmental concerns or consciousness to the

animated film industry by using ecocritical framework and to show how animated media is effective in serving ecological values differently in the two films along with increasing the knowledge of ecocriticism in popular culture.

As a reflection of Studio Ghibli's ecological philosophy, in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* the island of Laputa is utilized to illustrate the issue of environmentalism by examining the connections between people, the natural world, and technology. It is regarded as an ecological parable that serves as a cautionary tale about what might happen when one's reach is too great. The film addresses the idea of environmentalism by depicting Laputa as a mysteriously disappeared utopia that represents the harmonious coexistence of technology and nature. The film uses rich, intricate backgrounds that showcase Laputa's natural beauty, including its expansive, flourishing landscapes and cascading waterfalls that are protected by advanced technology; robots. Nature and technology coexist peacefully without any human's adversity and avarice. *The Red Turtle*, on the other hand, is a Studio Ghibli co-production and is known as An Animated Fable Of Humanity, Nature, And The Nature Of Humanity. In this silent animation, a guy who is stuck on a tropical island battles nature's powers to get off the island until they give him a reason to stay. *The Red Turtle*, to a great extent, explores the relationship between humans and nature and the way one interacts with it. This film focuses on aspects such as nature's duality, adversity and beauty. As the story progresses, the main character faces challenges and learns at the same time that nature isn't actively plotting against him. Instead, it exists apathetically, much like an unyielding backdrop he must navigate. The film's crucial message is that humans must adjust to their environment to survive; otherwise, they'll succumb to it. However, harmony between humans and nature is possible if adaptation is achieved.

The research aims to offer thorough comparative analysis of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* by discussing aspects of anthropocentrism along with ecocentrism. Furthermore, drawing attention to how different industrial eras affect the balance of ecology including the exploitation of natural elements through technological advancement, the animation field helps to convey awareness regarding environmental sustainability. It helps to construct a positive approach toward the environment to encourage preservation.

Research Questions

- What differences in the representation of various industrialization eras between *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* as portrayed by Studio Ghibli?
- How do *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* critique anthropocentric views, and what kind of implications do these perspectives hold regarding environmental aspects?

Methodology

The research is conducted qualitatively. The primary sources for this study are *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki and produced by Studio Ghibli, and *The Red Turtle*, directed by Michaël Dudok de Wit in co-production with Studio Ghibli. Additionally, several scholarly journal articles as well as book chapters have been utilized as secondary sources. These secondary sources help enrich the study's context and depth in order to justify the arguments. The research engages in general discussions through an ecocritical lens, which is the same theoretical framework that many authors in these secondary sources have employed. Within this lens, the deep ecology approach is used to analyze the two films. This lens allows for a deeper exploration of the ecological themes present in the primary sources and facilitates a more detailed analysis. The theoretical reference is drawn from Cheryll Glotfelty's book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, to further discuss the aspects of ecological impacts. The chapter "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis" from this book has been employed to analyze thoroughly. The utilisation of the deep ecology approach which was developed by Arne Naess, explores diverse environmental themes in the films as well as present appropriate arguments for the current research. The thematic contrast between the two films, particularly the industrial effect on ecology, emphasizes environmental preservation by highlighting environmental concerns within the animated film industry. Using an ecocritical framework, the current research aims to show how animated media effectively convey ecological values in distinct ways throughout these two films.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The films created by Hayao Miyazaki and Michaël Dudok de Wit are widely regarded as world's finest animations, including a collection of award-winning movies that are constantly recognized as some of the best in the industry. Miyazaki and de Wit have their unique style of storytelling which touches relevant themes related to environmental aspects through the dynamic characters and films. Such themes are also portrayed in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* which further explores the concept of human-nature relationship. Therefore, the research intends to focus on a comparison between these two films examining themes regarding different industrial eras, human and non-human realms, anthropocentrism along with ecocentrism through the lens of ecocriticism's deep ecology approach. Likewise, numerous literary research has explored Studio Ghibli's creations on similar aspects such as environmental concerns, spiritual themes, landscapes, human-nature relationships, interplay of characters, disparities in perception and influence of settings.

In the book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty introduces the foundation of ecocriticism as a distinct field that is relevant to the current environmental crisis. She recognizes William Rueckert and states that "The term *ecocriticism* was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay" (Glotfelty xx). She also recognizes nature as an independent entity as important as humans. She draws connections with literature and Anthropology, psychology, philosophy along with theology. She mentions how "nature is not the only focus of ecocritical studies" but the other topics such as animals, cities,

geographical region, technology are also relevant (Glotfelty xxiii). The field of ecocriticism is presented as a broader framework that confronts anthropocentricity and is considered a dynamic as well as inclusive perception that advocates for essential environmental awareness. Furthermore, Glotfelty mentions the role of humanities in the age of environmental crisis that includes climate action, natural resource exploitation, pollution, neglect etc. The initial focus of Glotfelty is to find out the connection between the physical environment and literature that includes cultural texts. Multiple essays have been referred to by the author in regard to “acknowledging the roots of modern ecocriticism and giving credit where credit is due” (Glotfelty xxvi). Glotfelty’s development revolving in this field in this chapter will further help the current research in examining how ecocritical aspects have been circulated and employed in the studio Ghibli productions, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle*.

The Deep Ecology approach is extensively discussed by David Rothenberg in the chapter “Deep Ecology”. Rothenberg mentions Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher who introduced the term in 1972. This approach goes beyond arguing in depth aspects of the ecological systems that focuses on the intrinsic value of nature. The author adds how the human and nonhuman spheres are individualistic worth which indicates nature having its own value regardless of human convenience. Moreover, it draws focus on Anthropocentric perceptions and challenges this view that only supports human benefits disregarding environmental crises where natural resources are exploited. “It is an open call to realize that the science of wholes and relationships in the biosphere involves a moral insistence on the preservation and admission of the intrinsic value of nature and the search for the best human place within it” (Rothenberg). He emphasizes on “sense of humility in the face of nature” and the morality regarding deep ecology that helps (Rothenberg). To emphasize on the sustainable measures, the author additionally focuses on

economical and technological policies related to deep ecology. Through detailed analysis, this article will be a valuable resource for the current research in understanding the environmental themes and ecological issues in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle*.

The approaches regarding anthropocentric premise and the connotations of environmental ethics written in western literature are established by Bryan L. Moore in “Introduction: Anthropocentrism, the Anthropocene, and the Apocalypse”. How literature challenges the human centeredness perceptions are emphasized by the author’s arguments which transcends historical, philosophical, and rhetorical boundaries. He refers to the historical and cultural contexts revolving anthropocentric outlooks including *Genesis* and *Psalms* as well as philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, and Descartes. Moore also traces the long tradition of writers which include poets, novelists and essayists from the earlier eras who criticize Anthropocentric focus and tend to promote ecological sensitivities among the readers. The genre of ecological apocalypse urges the readers to consider the wider implications of the actions that might impact the ecological aspects by focusing on the consequential effects of human existence and natural resilience. Moore refers to Val Plumwood who claims "human-centeredness" helps fuel the crises raised in ecology by countering the aspects of anthropocentrism that contribute to disasters regarding the environment (6-7). “Plumwood notes that philosophers seldom discuss anthropocentrism, and when they do, they routinely dismiss it as unfeasible or as an epistemic impossibility (Moore 7). Furthermore, he brings forth the contrasting representation of anthropocentrism which supports the interests of humans first with ecocentrism and biocentrism which prioritizes and recognizes the inherent worth of the living beings. Moore additionally suggests how the later chapters explore a form of literature and art that is “subversive, directly and indirectly, in conceiving of a

natural world that exists for itself, not as a thing to principally be owned, exploited, or profited from”, delving deeper into the advocacy of nature’s intrinsic worth (7).

Melanie Chan focuses on two Studio Ghibli films that deal with environmental issues, industrialization, animated landscapes, and both human and non-human domains in the chapter “Environmentalism in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*” from her book *The Animated Landscape*. The author uses an ecocritical stance to highlight how Miyazaki's films serve as sentimental vehicles for examining environmental topics, making an important contribution to modern environmental discussion and portraying wise implementation of technology to raise awareness about communal concern for environmental issues in film. She shows Hayao Miyazaki's advancement throughout the films by drawing parallels between spirituality and the natural world. She also discusses the negative effects of capitalist culture along with human meddling on nature and its various elements. The chapter further argued that Miyazaki's two films “invite audiences to become enchanted with the natural world through the representation of the beauty and majesty of the landscape” (Chan). On top of that these films raise issues by presenting “wider debates about the environment, climate change and risk” (Chan). Chan’s analysis captures the depth of environmental issues by challenging the notion that the human realm is superior to the natural realm, suggesting a more integrated and respectful connection with the environment. This argument will help the current research investigate the extent of anthropocentrism and how Studio Ghibli incorporates the influence of distinct industrial-era concepts on ecological impacts in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle*.

Similarly, by taking an ecocritical approach, in the article “Creatures in Crisis: Apocalyptic Environmental Visions in Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*”, Gwendolyn Morgan focuses on two of the films where she relates the

ecological impacts to the Japanese cultural values that include Shintoism in Miyazaki's two films *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*. Miyazaki depicts nature's forceful response to humanity's disruption, depicting apocalyptic and post apocalyptic situations in which nature retaliates against human-caused chaos and destruction (Morgan 173). To address Miyazaki's viewpoints that concern natural elements and other aspects in the films, she draws attention to how this piece depicts issues related to the human turmoil by portraying conflicts in tribes and its effect on the environmental elements . Consequently, Morgan draws attention to Miyazaki's perception on "humanity's role regarding nature" further explaining humanity's determination to exert control over their surroundings in order to achieve their personal ambitions (Morgan 173, 174). The apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narrative according to Morgan portrays how environmental problems can lead to annihilation of humanity which at the same time creates awareness by inserting fear. Using Shintoism as a medium to expand her idea on the environmental consciousness for the readers through the characters, how essential is the usage of mediums and approaches to comprehend the characters' perception and the severity of environmental issues are presented in the article. Hence, this will contribute to existing study further by examining aspects of the influence of industrialization and pre-industrialized eras on the environment in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle*.

Miyazaki has consistently highlighted ecological beliefs throughout his films, emphasizing environmental issues and the link between nature and humans. Nathaniel H. Byant's journal article "Neutering the Monster, Pruning the Green: The Ecological Evolution of Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" elaborates on Miyazaki's ecological concerns by examining one of his well-known films, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, to highlight Miyazaki's environmental concerns and green message. The author takes an ecocritical approach to illustrate Miyazaki's

environmental conscience, which is evident throughout his films. Furthermore, he prioritizes and compares the extended form of the anime which is the manga series that portrays Miyazaki's broader vision of ecological and moral critiques. The author adds that in the manga, the "Sea of Decay revolts against mankind's arrogance and hubris at even the cellular level," highlighting the aspect of failure of the human realm to protect, let alone restore, natural elements and understand ecological values (Byant 124). Bryant also identifies the environmentally conscious character along with the concern with environmental consciousness and natural destruction. On the contrary, he undermines the destructive nature of humankind through the *Nausicaä* series. The author in addition establishes dominant troupes which includes man-nature relationship, industrialization and atomic power. Therefore, the detailed analysis on these troupes revolves around certain ecological impacts that will help the current research in understanding the comparative aspects including environmental values. in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle*.

In contrast, Zaki Ainul Fadli emphasizes on Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* to discuss ecocriticism and environmental issues in the journal article "Representation of Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Figures in Hayao Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke." He takes the ecocritical approach and discusses the representation of both anthropocentric and ecocentric characters in *Princess Mononoke*, emphasizing the conflicts between human exploitation of forest, embodied by Lady Eboshi and her iron plant and conservation of the environment, represented by Ashitaka and San. He illustrates the need for awareness of the effects and risks of exploitation of nature thus, promoting the necessity of environmental conservation measures in order to halt nature's deterioration. The conflict in this anime is between groups that wish to maintain and protect the forest with other party including Lady Eboshi and iron factory workers who chop wood in the

forest on a vast scale to use as fuel for iron processing (Fadli, 1). The article focuses on the film's environmental themes, highlighting its goal of illustrating “ecological damage due to human greed” (Fadli, 2). Through this article, Fadli is able to portray the ecocritical aspects that concern the ghibli film and other environmental issues which consequently will contribute in analyzing more on the anthropocentric along with ecocentric aspects of films in the current research.

Comparatively, Tracey Daniels-Lerberg and Matthew Lerberg focus on Hayao Miyazaki's one of the finest pieces, *Princess Mononoke* in “To See with Eyes Unclouded by Hate’: Princess Mononoke and the Quest for Environmental Balance”. The chapter emphasizes on environmental issues, focusing mostly on Ashitaka, one of the key protagonists, and his complex position. The authors cast doubt on Ashitaka's allegiances because he supports both the creatures of the forest and the people who harm the environment. Moreover, The chapter offers a discussion supporting the idea that the setting of the film suggests “timelessness of environmental vulnerability and exploitation” as well as the history of “human- orchestrated ecological damage” (Daniels-Lerberg, Lerberg 61, 62). The authors claim that the lack of a fair truce restricts a satisfactory conclusion, emphasizing nature and civilization's inherent connection. The film's finale does not provide universal answers; rather, it highlights the persistent tensions between industrial advancement and environmental sustainability. Insights from such discussions on environmental harm and restoration are particularly relevant to this study, which will use ecocritical theory, especially the deep ecology approach, to investigate how these issues are reflected in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle*.

On the contrary, Sema Mumcu and Sezai Yilmaz adopt a different way to discuss the environmental issues in their article, “Anime Landscapes as a Tool for Analyzing the Human-Environment Relationship: Hayao Miyazaki Films.” They explore classified versions of

landscapes such as wilderness, apocalyptic and responsible types as a medium for analyzing the relationship between human and environment in Hayao Miyazaki Films. Moreover, the article explores how landscapes “act as visual analogies for complex psychologies of characters” (Mumcu, Yilmaz 3). The main focus of it is the distinct animation landscapes and through this they focus on the right approach towards nature by landscape architecture and creation of responsible landscapes. Thevenin emphasizes on the deep ecology approach by making awareness among audiences through the characters “by making them confront the damage they create to the environment” (qtd. in Mumcu, Yilmaz 5). The authors also use Human-Nature power relations to portray how the relation between human and nature actually work. The issue with the forest’s ecosystem and its destruction is highlighted in it by Mumcu and Yilmaz as they refer to Miyazaki. This article holds a strong stance towards the concept of human-environment relationship which supports the current research in understanding the ecological values in film media through the deep ecology approach. However, the gap in comparing the industrialized and pre-industrialized eras in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* leaves a possibility for further analysis of how these films depict the consequences of human actions on the environment, ultimately emphasizing on the potential for a more sustainable future.

Kozo Mayumi, Barry D. Solomon and Jason Chang focus on five of the renowned films of Miyazaki while exploring themes such as ecological economy and environmental themes in the article, “The Ecological and Consumption Themes of the Films of Hayao Miyazaki.” to raise awareness of the effects on both the economy and the environment, the writers link natural features with ecological considerations. They also discuss how the films might inform and persuade audiences about the harm and pollution caused by contemporary society. The authors state “Such films have an important role to play in the educational process, but need to be

supplemented by films that can reach broader audiences to think and re-think their role in the world's ecosystems" (Mayumi et al. 2). Here, Studio Ghibli films by Hayao Miyazaki are highlighted to depict the ecological themes more notably. Referring to the iron producing technology of Tatara, the authors discuss the "imposition of environmental costs onto groups with less access to information" highlighting how the consequences of Tatara's operation, particularly the destruction of the forest, are not equally conveyed among the characters of the film. In this way, the authors focus on the messages on ecological issues along with societal issues.

Therefore, these studies will help in conducting the research by providing a better foundation to understand the themes related to environmental issues. Several aspects are covered in the sources that give a better understanding of Miyazaki's and de Wit's environmental approach with the films. Therefore, analyzing *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* through deep ecology within ecocritical lenses would be most effective and these sources will support the ideas as well as provide credible evidence in order to carry out the current research effectively.

Chapter Three

Juxtapositional Outlook: Comparing Industrial and Pre-industrial Narratives in the Films

The simultaneous presence of humans' vice and nature's perseverance is an idea that has been normalized consequently overlooked, diminishing the aspect of ecocentrism. The central concepts of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and *The Red Turtle* are uniquely characterized by the contrast between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives since the former illustrates the destructive influence of industrialization on the environment and human interactions, while the latter emphasizes a peaceful coexistence within an untouched natural world. Distinction between two films begins with the intervention of humans in the natural domain. The island from *The Red Turtle* and the city from *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, both isolated from dense urbanization, tell different stories formed by actions of distinct characters—one damaging ecological preservation and the other promoting peace with nature. Ghibli narrows the distinction within *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* by presenting a contrasting image of industrialization between Laputa (the island) and earth, where one is advanced to protect and other is destructing, consumed by greed. The story begins with the two characters; Pazu and Sheeta and their quest to rediscover Laputa and its secrets. The first peak at Laputa shows It is constructed around a large center tree, emphasizing the prioritization of ecocentric perceptions while advancing technologically (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:26:54). Laputa; a city that is not opposed by occupational domination and free from capitalist industrialization, gets disrupted with Muska's ambition is to reestablish Laputa's status as the supreme empire and to get control of Laputa's greater technical might. Schellhase refers to Prince Muska in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* saying, “Mr. Miyazaki opposes the exploitative use of nature for ends that are opposed to the harmonious flourishing of nature and human civilization.

Most of the few true villains in Mr. Miyazaki's films are exploiters". In the film it was seen the military was after Sheeta's levystone; a magic stone that holds power indicating the aspect of human greed and their inclination to feel threatened to undiscovered or unknown entities (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 42:28). Laputa, where the environment is accompanied and protected by highly developed robots, the "bird nest" symbolizes and extends the idea of this greatly enhanced technology being the ultimate protector and preserver of natural elements of the city (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:29:33). Laputa is presented as a technologically advanced industrialised city however, separated from human existence and interference but filled with its natural facets.

On the contrary, in *The Red Turtle*, the pristine island portrays a world free of industrialization, where human actions do not hinder the environment. The protagonist from this film is strictly bound and reliant on the natural resources in order to survive which creates a significant relationship that builds the plot of the film as more intriguing, constructing the environmental conception more prominent that helps to grab the audiences' attention. Ghibli exhibits two separate intriguing scenarios in the films that contain industrial as well as pre-industrial narratives, including how nature is perceived by humans. Innovative ideas can be employed justly as long as the motives of the human beings are virtuous despite the aspects of industrialization or technological progress. The robots in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, which are the man made products of technological advancements are designed to appear as gentle and amiable with natural elements, are more humane than the humans living underneath Laputa. "Miyazaki confronts us with wrathful, destructive and vengeful nature with apocalyptic landscapes when humans try to dominate it, especially with the misuse of technology" (Mumcu, Yilmaz 13). The similar advanced Laputan technology is being represented by the robots in distinct settings. First

one suggests where violence has occurred, and the other one portrays a picture of the environment and the machine living in harmony. Violence tendencies by humans ought to activate the robots' unpleasant destructive potential, otherwise, the default mode of the robots is set to be nurturing along with protecting the city and its elements, especially nature. “But in the manga, the Sea of Decay revolts against mankind’s arrogance and hubris at even the cellular level” (Bryant 124). The “Sea of Decay” from another Ghibli film conducts a similar purpose as the robots from Laputa by revolting against human vice. Studio Ghibli inspires action in a structured way, avoiding hollow biases that lead to futile environmental disputes. Instead of taking sides or preaching self-serving ideals, it encourages meaningful engagement. “Much of the rhetoric surrounding environmental discourse promotes the ideal of taking a stand, of taking sides, and in doing so deploys the language of heated battle rather than peaceful negotiation that might lead to lasting change” (Daniels-Legberg and Lerberg 59).

“It must be noted that most of Miyazaki’s recent work has been directed at more mature audiences, which allows him to explore more complex themes that include violence and coercive power” (Mayumi et al. 5). Hence, Studio Ghibli is renowned in creating successful animated films that have been appealing to adults as well as children since the beginning of its journey, constructing and blending inventive storylines and plots with dynamic characters to convey meaningful messages. the capacity of Studio Ghibli to tackle topics such as degradation of natural resources, political tension and the correlation between human driven activity with the natural aspects has efficiently strengthened its image as a studio that goes beyond traditional approaches of animating industries. Through Studio Ghibli’s *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, for example, the struggle and adventurous exploration while encountering harsher conflicts in power ultimately constructs a tale which is able to explore the catastrophic potential of technological advancement

that once dispersed from its social responsibility. Thus, underscoring its dedication in making films and storylines which has the effect on its views where they are driven to perceive and think critically on subjects regarding environmental as well as social matters. Despite appearances, these artificial creatures did not lose control unlike the humans. Ghibli represents the robots protecting peace by protecting natural habitats while coexisting. Chan argues that films from Ghibli pose the question of how technology could potentially be used to complement natural patterns and processes of emergence, development, decay, and regeneration. Moreover, Chan indicates how studio ghibli urges viewers to care about environmental issues by depicting the landscape as magnificent, home to a variety of species, and of ecological importance. Thus, manifesting environmental essence to Studio Ghibli production by adopting ecological facets and contributing to the animation film industry.

“environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection” (Garrard 14). The possibility of humanity coexisting peacefully with the environment is illustrated by Laputa city which represents ecological and technological facilities. The harmful impacts as well as consequences of avarice and cultural stance that aim to prioritize dominance above coexistence, however, are demonstrated by its downfall. The explicit characteristic contrast between Muska's ambition which is to wield Laputa's power as a wrecking weapon and Sheeta's struggle to reverence and resistance for its natural harmony draws a picture of how cultural values have different effects whether ecological consciousness or understanding is applied for exploitation or preservation. This conception is also relevant in *The Red Turtle* as change in cultural mindset is demonstrated by the lone protagonist's transitional form from someone who was looking to escape the island to someone choosing to stay and living in

harmony on the island. His development to reverence for nature is consistent throughout the plot with the interdependence of ecological principles. The red turtle that serves as medium to relay the message and emphasizing the value of honoring natural domain instead of enforcing human authority. Mumcu and Yilmaz stated regarding Studio Ghibli production that “social themes reflect the different worldviews of humans/societies; how they understand and interact with nature, and how they construct their relationship with their environment is part of this worldview” (12). Laputa's notion regarding technology being independent of human defections means that ecotopia is tied to a rather spiritual metamorphosis that will result in cultural revolution. Nonetheless, the robot that Sheeta and Pazu come across when they initially arrive in Laputa, is Portrayed as a loving guardian safeguarding a bird nest. Instead of giving the robots any definitive personalities or characteristics, they are programmed to be either protective or destructive only based on the situation and the people who manage them. Humans who degrade the environment by emphasizing capitalist advancement over its preservation serve to the deterioration of natural balance. This is obvious in the constant exploitation of resources, which is frequently justified by the quest of economic expansion. The protagonist of *The Red Turtle*, on the other hand, embodies a more ecocentric viewpoint by accepting cohabitation with nature. Through his path of survival and eventual harmony with the environment, he symbolizes the possibility for a reciprocal and respectful interaction between people and the natural world which emphasizes the significant aspect of balance over dominance. The turtle's transition into female form represents humanity's integration with nature (*The Red Turtle* 32:10). It represents nature's kindness towards living beings despite its origin who acquire meaning from the natural environment rather than attempting to dominate or escape it which is a very common capitalistic mindset built in the core of the industrial era. Nature and their resources have been constantly

exploited by humans and their unethical ambitions. However, Ghibli draws a distinction by exhibiting the partnership between the protagonist and the female character that results in an offspring consequently symbolizing the continuance of life in harmony with the environment (*The Red Turtle* 46:28). In *The Red Turtle*, the main protagonist's sole dependence on nature creates a situation in which existence becomes a delicate, continual negotiation between human intentions and the forces of nature. Stranded on an estranged island, he finds himself dependent only on nature for survival, consuming only what his surroundings provide—food, shelter, and water. This reliance emphasizes his intimate link to nature, where surviving is more than simply physical endurance, but also about comprehending and responding to the natural cycles as well as difficulties that surround him. The island, which lacks human civilization, provides a space for the protagonist to confront and cohabit with nature's strength rather than ruling it. The simplicity of the island depicts a picture to the audiences and stands in stark contrast to modern industrialized countries, where nature is frequently commodified. The protagonist's gradual adaptability to the island and its resources such as building a home, obtaining food, and learning to cohabit with the wildlife, exemplifies a sustainable way of surviving and living solely on nature. This lifestyle represents the idea of a pre-industrial set of circumstances, which flourished by recognizing the value of nature and adjusting to the natural surroundings rather than exploiting them, thus emphasizing the ecocentric conception by Studio Ghibli.

Laputa: Castle in the Sky serves as a cautionary tale of what can occur when one's reach surpasses the limits of their ability but also reminding that the advancement of technology does not always bring harm to nature but can be the source to preserve. The film represents both good and evil to contrast human approach towards nature, depicting capability of potential altruism towards environment despite acquiring power. The process of restoration of natural resources

partly lies within their ability too. Chan points out that one of the Ghibli series; Nausicaä represents “the destruction of a former technologically advanced era could be interpreted as an environmental warning of the dangers of you-wei, whereas the Valley of the Wind is represented as a place where humans utilise technology in a way that does not unduly disrupt natural processes”. This demonstrates the importance of human responsibility in technological growth, emphasizing how technology may be employed for either beneficial or detrimental purposes. This narrative delves into the dichotomy of technology, highlighting its ability to cohabit peacefully with nature when utilized responsibly or to wreak disaster when mishandled. Furthermore, it compares the presence of technology and industry to a world devoid of both, highlighting the repercussions of each scenario. This contrast emphasizes the necessity of thoughtful innovation and the ethical application of technical advancement, calling for a balance that promotes sustainability rather than aggravating environmental deterioration; a more suitable scenario of the world without it and its vice. Miyazaki’s attention to complexity and creation of pseudo-historical environmental conflicts in Japan allows him to draw viewers into the difficulties of real environmental problem solving (Mayumi 6). This demonstrates Hayao Miyazaki's ability to incorporate complicated practical environmental challenges into fiction. Miyazaki's films depict pseudo-historical settings in which humanity, nature, and technology are in opposition as well as in support. These parallel contemporary Japanese environmental issues such as deforestation, pollution, and industrialization. Miyazaki uses fictitious settings and characters to urge viewers to ponder on real-life problems in a more passionate and complex way, promoting a greater awareness of the obstacles involved in resolving environmental concerns. “these films attempt to establish a shared sense of concern for environmental issues, which are especially acute in the context of growing levels of production and consumption in

contemporary capitalist culture” (Chan). Consequently, positioning different scenarios and characters from different films help in finding out along with assessing the mindsets in this modern era and what is needed to rectify the environmental issues. “This binary is central to the literature I discuss in subsequent chapters, though there are variants on, and degrees of, anthropocentrism, ranging from the notion that *Homo sapiens* (“wise species”) is the only species that matters on the earth and that everything—the earth, animals, the oceans, and so on—belongs to it to exploit at will, to “softer” types of anthropocentrism that may be politically more practical than sheer ecocentrism or biocentrism” (Moore 5). The ecocentric and anthropocentric conception based on the films suggests two scenarios and represent different eras where the audiences are able to be conscious about the recent worldview regarding environmental degradation. Sole human-centric practices and the beliefs that only prioritizes anthropocentrism, disregarding environmental significance, should be replaced by “softer” types of anthropocentrism. Although ecocentric perspectives help conform ecological goals, anthropocentrism, especially the “softer” type can be utilized to advocate for shared values. “Since humans appear to be uniquely self-conscious, it may be true that a completely nonanthropocentric view is finally impossible, but it would be disingenuous to conclude, as some have, that the matter is settled there” (Moore 6). The scope to analyse and understand the value of these issues benefit in the long run of ecocriticism. This method not only broadens our knowledge concerning ecological narratives, but also emphasizes the shifts in human-nature interaction across periods. By analyzing the ecocentric and anthropocentric viewpoints offered in these films, viewers may critically examine their individual ecological ideals and initiatives. Such analysis raises awareness and motivates real action toward sustainability, strengthening the ecocritical discourse.

Human existence in a particular area along with their surroundings which also includes non-human domain entails the interplay between the two aspects. Through the representation of dynamic characters and landscapes, Studio Ghibli brings forward the necessity to employ environmentalistic consciousness in animated films. The characters represent both moral and immoral characteristics in a way that allows the viewer to analyse whether they succeed in embodying morality or fail to embrace those certain qualities. The human treatment towards the non-human, naturalistic aspects and interrelation between these two is exhibited in Ghibli's *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. Since the film contains numerous entities such as, robots, natural resources, humans, magical devices etc, the consideration of these elements' coexistence become more intricate and complex since humans behaviours, morality, their perception as well as treatment towards these entities varies widely. Through this process, Ghibli raises awareness on these issues, making the audiences chief critics of their works. One of the major elements from the non-human domain in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* is the robots which were accessible for the people of the city of Laputa in order to improve the lifestyle of the citizens residing there. Robots are also presented as amiable companions to the creatures surrounding them and wrapped in vines which suggests their role as the protector of the city's resources (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:29:22). The treatment and usage of these technologies differ based on the characters since the robots were initially designed for humans and the guardian of the city's natural elements, programmed to destruct when in a hostile environment (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 54:31). Since it is the owner of the levistone who controls the robots with its power, the humans are the sole accountable ones who are responsible for the destruction as well as preservation. It is evident that, although these technologies directly carry out the catastrophic actions, it depends on the human beings who use the technology unjustly. This human-centric perception where the

non-human domain which also includes natural resources, are taken for granted, fueling the normalised notion of unethical use of technology. Eventually due to the antagonist Muska's tyranny, these robots start destroying the surrounding, reacting against the military troops (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:49:16). As a result, natural resources and the surroundings are seen to be in shambles, with humans indirectly responsible for this destruction.

The comparison portrays the changes occurring throughout the eras, Ghibli successfully exhibits through these films the social changes that lead to environmental changes. This includes the changes in attitudes of human beings and their perceptions towards environmental resources. The studio masterfully illustrates how the change in human attitudes and behaviors directly influences the natural world, showing modernity, industrialization, and growing disconnections between humans and nature. Such films often explore the consequences of exploitation, overconsumption, and neglect of environmental resources that reflect changes in human perception about their surroundings. By setting traditional life in harmony with nature against strong disruptive forces for progress, Studio Ghibli critiques at once the trajectory of both societal change and urges audiences in rethinking their relationship with environments. This thematic focus allows the studio to delve into the implications of human morals and ethics and reach an understanding of how detrimental it is to the delicate balancing of the planet.

Chapter Four

Delving Through Deep Ecology: Intrinsic Worth Beyond Human Sphere

With the continuous growth of industrialization, environmental issues are also gradually increasing which is going unnoticed due to the glories and allure of the benefits brought by modernization. Using these exact benefits, environmental concerns can be emphasized and prevented by portraying its consequences, causes, process, effects etc. Consequently, animated film industries including Studio Ghibli are able to play a crucial role in advocating for ecological aspects through their films. Belonging to different eras and containing different approaches with the storyline, the viewers are able to interrelate the two films on the basis of ecological themes and aspects that highlight how non-human domains are dealt with by human beings. “these films invite audiences to identify with different locations and characters in order to develop an emotional connection to the environmental concerns they represent” (Chan).

Challenging the strict anthropocentric perceptions, Ghibli shows nature can also exist as a sole sacred entity, independent of human contact. “Nature must be appreciated for its intrinsic value, or worth in itself, regardless of how humans might benefit from it” (Rothenberg). Despite the interconnectedness and relationship between humans and nature, nature has its own values that are capable to thrive on its own nourished with its self-sustaining structure. However, for humans, dependency on nature and its resources is required entirely to survive. Anthropocentric beliefs blinds human morals and principles thus, ending up taking environmental resources for granted. “As philosophy of science, deep ecology questions science but inserts values into science, giving humanity a sense of humility in the face of nature. Beyond simply studying the relationship between organisms and their environment and making a place for humans in such a relationship, it encourages us to take a moral stand” (Rothenberg). Consequently, misusing and

disregarding leads to unwanted depletion of these resources along with imbalance in ecology which eventually backfires humanity itself.

Through *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, Studio Ghibli presents Laputa; a floating city in the sky, secluded from human touch. This ancient city is solely operated and coexisted by entities from the non-human domain such as robots, animals, birds, plants as well as magic. It can be interpreted how Ghibli leaves a scope to comprehend nature's intrinsic significance through such characteristics and plot. In the film, the first look at the city revealed the flourishing image unaltered from direct human influence (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:26:54). Natural creatures are shown to be living harmoniously under the supervision of robots (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:30:15-1:33:48). After Pazu asks the gardening robot whether it was alone or not, several creatures start climbing onto it, indicating the friendly relationship between nature and technology (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1:33:40). Although the robots are technological products made by human intelligence and potential, their involvement with natural elements are not required but recognized and appreciated. Even the human made products, rather than humans themselves, can help in sustaining the natural world which would not be possible with the direct influence of humans. In such a way, Ghibli shows nature's intrinsic worth defying anthropocentric perceptions where humans can be both the reason for environmental degradation as well as the means of restoring natural resources. In *The Red Turtle*, the natural elements and aspects are portrayed very vividly which overpowers anthropocentric conception including human activity and existence, demonstrating their subtle yet crucial significance as a sole entity with its individual value. With the absence of overpopulated human habitation in the island, it portrays a different approach of human beings towards nature and their surroundings. Throughout the film, the ecocentric aspects are portrayed by showing nature's sole existence in

addition to the protagonist relying and being favored by nature. Ghibli indicates the intrinsic value of nature despite the dependence and relation of human beings with nature. While the protagonist finds means to survive from and with the help of nature, nature stays unchanged without any human dominance, except for the incident where the protagonist attempts to punish the red turtle (*The Red Turtle* 26:27).

Hayao Miyazaki, through Studio Ghibli recognizes and eventually undermines the perspective where “the drive to rationalize behavior in other organisms is a kind of paternalism that is part and parcel of the same mentality that eventually gives rise to mankind’s more destructive behavior” (Bryant 125). This human-centric perception where humankind is primarily concerned over non-human beings, leads to a position where humans exploit the resources of nature which is damaging for both humankind and nature. This statement fundamentally implies such anthropocentric viewpoints where disregarding nature's inherent values is detrimental to nature as well as humanity, leading to ecological consequences. “Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening” (Rothenberg). Studio Ghibli exhibits two different representations, one that includes human interference with nature and the other where it was more of interaction with nature rather than interference. Technological advancement due to industrialization is rapidly increasing where humans forget to recognize or to protect naturalistic aspects. On top of that, rather than restoring the natural elements, humans are causing the demise of ecological sustainability. Environmental degradation is occurring as well as surging due to the vices and ignorance of human beings. *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* evokes consciousness by representing contrasting characters who carry both attributes that include the attempt to restore and desire to destroy using technological innovations. “Humans can be part of nature yet impose imbalanced power relationships, or

humans can see themselves as above nature yet preserve the wholeness of an ecosystem” (Mumcu, Yilmaz 13). In this way, even after embodying paradoxical attitudes, it depends on the individual who decides to disrupt or sustain the ecological balance. Ecocentric perceptions are also needed to recognize these factors to ease the environmental degradation. The floating city Laputa in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* as well as the island in *The Red Turtle* pose as natural entities with individualistic fundamental worth, capable of existing independently.

The concept of deep ecology is incorporated into many Studio Ghibli films where film directors like De Wit and Hayao Miyazaki take unbiased stance, subtly portraying the ecological factors and environmental concerns through their films as well as giving value to nature’s intrinsic worth. These ecological and environmental factors often offer room for the viewers for their own interpretation where animation companies bring out different plots and characters to who embody moral or immoral characteristics to raise awareness about environmental issues. “What Miyazaki tries to explain is that the greediness of humans and their anthropocentric understanding makes the problems more complicated. In his films, Miyazaki displays an ecological way of thinking that is parallel to deep ecology and argues that each part is meaningful for the system and has its place and own value within it” (Mumcu, Yilmaz 13). Consequently, audiences play the role in deriving meaning from these animated films that define and deconstruct natural aspects throughout the storylines by assigning value to each one. By doing that, nature as a whole and individualistic entity is granted the spotlight where ecocentric perceptions are more emphasized and highlighted. Moreover, perceiving nature as it is helps protecting ecosystems and resources and decreases environmental degradation. “Miyazaki’s ecological views are best epitomized by his own words: I think it better to think of environmental problems in view of courtesy proposed by Ryotaro Shiba (1923–1996), a novelist who has

written about many distinguished figures in the history of Japan. We need courtesy toward water, mountains, and air in addition to living things. We should not ask for courtesy from these things, but we ourselves should give courtesy toward them instead. I do believe the existence of the period when the power of forests was much stronger than our power” (Mayumi et al. 3). Miyazaki’s deep ecological statement indicates how he supports and incorporates such values through his films or characters. Not asking for “courtesy” rather giving it to nature as he mentions, suggests deep ecological characteristics, where nature's own individualistic worth should be appreciated and protected instead of exploiting these natural resources. This statement also challenges the anthropocentric perspective while focusing on the ecological implications. Conventionally, nature and its resources are utilized extensively for the development and advancement which is in another word taking “courtesy” from it. Rather than benefiting and capitalizing upon the resources, these resources need to be preserved. Instead, the industrial sectors are constantly overlooking these factors, bringing instability in the ecosystem.

Nature and the human sphere are distinct entities with distinct significance although humankind relies heavily on the natural domain by using elements from it. Garrard argues that everything that humankind produces, whether it be machines, structures, or advanced technology, eventually becomes a part of nature. This is due to the fact that humans are naturally occurring animals that have evolved. Moreover, all human inventions are based on natural materials and adhere to physics and other natural principles. For instance, the Earth provides the steel, plastic, and other materials, and machines function according to physical laws like motion or gravity. Thus, even our most intricate cultural products can be considered "natural" since they come from and are influenced by the same natural universe that creates everything else (10). Therefore, the robots and air ships from the *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* can also be considered as

“natural” however, the irony of using these exact “natural” products to cause excessive destruction proves humans normalization of severe anthropocentric behaviours, undermining inherent worth of nature. The shared values of both humans and nature should be taken into account which can be achieved by employing Moore’s idea of “softer types of anthropocentrism” (5). Delving into the films based on these themes, can inspire shifts in human perceptions of nature which will eventually aid in environmental sustainability in the long run. Despite nature and humans possessing their intrinsic value, nature and humans are two aspects that are interconnected in one way or another. They have their own worth despite the relevance of human necessities; however, humans are part of nature. One of the strengths of Studio Ghibli is the utilization of mesmerizing landscapes exhibiting the nature-human relationship. “Miyazaki rejects the definition of the human as separate and distinct from nature and others and draws on notions of human interconnectedness with sentient and non-sentient beings” (Mumcu, Yilmaz 5). Which does not justify putting human interest at first and prioritizing human needs by exploiting natural resources but inspires a balanced form of coexistence, giving priority and value to both. The focus shifts to the natural realm, away from human intrusion where audiences are able to emphasize more on the value of natural resources by observing the advanced yet isolated city in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and the island in *The Red Turtle*. Audiences are also able to reflect on the consequences of human interference and exploitation of natural resources, which, in turn, help to recognize the intrinsic value of nature and inspire the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles through the narratives presented in the films. “The totalizing challenge of climate change has captivated the attention of philosophers in recent years, moving beyond earlier calls for recognizing the value nature has in itself, and the lighter idea that human societies could be made more ‘sustainable’ by using less energy and not growing at an intractable rate”

(Rothenberg). This demonstrates the need for valuing human and nature inherently to address the urgency of global issue revolving environment and advocate for structural reform. Debunking the anthropocentric ideas in the films, viewers are encouraged to reconsider the hierarchical position in nature through different tones, styles and elements of the films. Laputa as the symbol of harmony, being untouched and unaltered by the human authoritative supremacy, reflects nature's spontaneous existence and balance of the exocology. In *The Red Turtle* too the turtle and the protagonist reflects a non-hierarchical relationship that represents non-dominant cohabitation. Such depictions resonate with deep ecology's Endorsement for the promotion of humane perception regarding nature and dismantling sole human supremacy. *The Red Turtle* and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* both indicate that the sustainable measures are not only the purpose of the policy but also a philosophical shift that calls on people to adapt to ethics by rejecting exploitative tendencies and emphasizing mutual reliance.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Along with the subject of coexistence of human and nature, the aspects of ecological consequences of industrialization also become evident. Representations of such consequences are illustrated in film media, especially animated films. Studio Ghibli as one of the most acclaimed animation studios retains its status with its dynamic artistic creations which also include areas that focus on the environmental concerns. *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* directed by Hayao Miyazaki and *The Red Turtle* directed by Michaël Dudok de Wit serve as captivating narratives that explore the aspect of human-nature coexistence.

The comparison of the two films using ecocritical framework brings emphasis to the different industrial eras and its impact on the ecological balance in the research. Moreover, through the deep ecology approach, this research tends to examine the intrinsic value of the natural realm, thereby helping to understand the value of preserving natural resources instead of not normalizing their exploitation. An alternative range of anthropocentric resolutions which focuses on the shared value of both human and environment rather than only centering on human demands, should be employed to consider as well as address both humanity and environmental aspects.

By focusing on such comparative environmental factors in the film, the study suggests the importance of environmental preservation and ecological sustainability which can be employed through animated film productions. Between the thriving industrial setting of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* and the minimalist technique of *The Red Turtle*, the films provide a comparative representation of different attitudes towards ecological Restoration and degradation.

more precisely, instead of directly taking a moral stance, the film's plot and the characters inspire the viewers to construct their own discernment since the characters convey both flawed nature as well as virtuous qualities in the same film. The narrative in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* depicts diverse facets of industrialization including exploitation of natural resources carried by immoral characters along with the protagonist and other non-human entities that try saving the natural realm from the destruction. The preindustrial narrative in *The Red Turtle* preaches for environmental sustainability in a different approach by portraying excessive human intervention in natural settings. The diversity of Studio Ghibli production provides insight on the potential of animation industries to address environmental challenges while providing compelling storytelling that appeals to the viewers.

With the recent growing concern surrounding environmental degradation which has often been undermined by taking natural resources as granted and making human interests as first priority, using literary forms, including films to portray the consequences of exploiting natural resources is a valuable medium to convey environmental consciousness. Consequently, with such an approach, these films elevate ecological discussions on a larger scale, eventually contributing to the broader dialogue for environmental sustainability and recognition of ecological issues.

Limitations

However, relying solely on the qualitative method which is exceptionally subjective, the research leaves scope to analyze variations in the interpretation of environmental aspects among different viewers, which could also be assessed quantitatively, based on individual observations, surveys and results. The research is highly based on the narrative of the two films from the same production studio. Including different films from other production companies allows possibility for various cultural contexts that could provide a deeper understanding of ecological values and messages in film media.

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