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**Miyazaki Hayao's "Howl's Moving Castle":
Environmental, War-Related, and Shojo Discourses**

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Introduction

Hayao Miyazaki, one of the most well-known Japanese animators in the world, has directed a number of successful and influential animated works since the mid 1990s, and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) is by far one of the most visually-pleasing and well-known of his works. The film is based on a fantasy young adult novel by Dianna Wynne Jones of the same name (*Howl's Moving Castle*, 1986). Both film and book share the same plot and characters, yet differ in their underlying themes. In my paper, I will demonstrate how Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) is different from the original book (1986) it is based on in three key themes: the ecological, the anti-war, and the *shojo*. I will argue that these three key elements in the movie transform the story into a criticism of contemporary Japan society. In other words, Miyazaki uses the differences between film and book as a trigger to speak of certain issues that dominate Japanese society. The film and book's story is centered around Sophie Hatter, a young girl who is cursed by the Witch of the Waste into becoming a 90-year-old woman. As a result, Sophie escapes to the countryside of Ingary and finds shelter with Howl, who is a powerful wizard living in a moving castle that roams in the outskirts of Ingary.

In the first chapter, I will argue that the comparative elements of the moving castle in both book and movie (i.e. whether the moving castle touches the ground or floats) allow Miyazaki to provide ecological criticism and vision revolving modern day Japan. This difference (between book and movie) can be used to interpret the film *Howl's Moving Castle* as one that promotes ecological discourse connected to the theory of ecological modernization, which examines the potential of science and technology to create better conditions for the environment. In addition, I will discuss the contradictory discourse involving the idea of an ecologically modern Japan. Last, I will argue that the 'flying' moving castle as seen in the last scene of the

film is similar to the flying utopian island of Laputa displayed in Miyazaki's other hit movie *Castle in the Sky* (1986). This observation can lead to a discussion connected to Miyazaki's futuristic idea of an ecological utopia he so eagerly envisions in both films.

The second chapter will revolve around the incorporation of war as a theme in the film, in which I will discuss the Japanese political identity crisis which resulted from pacifist ideals in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (1946), which prohibits Japan from having a national army and participating in wars. The Article and the question of revising it has created a 'split' in opinion in relation to the question of a 'pacifist' Japan. Howl's own political identity crisis, which juggles between self-defense and the futility of participating in war, reflects the 'split' Japanese political identity that Miyazaki criticizes has come to be due to international pressure on Japan to become a 'normal' nation. In addition, *Howl's Moving Castle* was released in theaters a year after the Iraq war (2003), which Miyazaki greatly objected. Therefore, the film could also be used by Miyazaki to blatantly criticize the Iraq War (e.g. Cavallaro 2014).

Finally, the third chapter will discuss the *shojo* phenomenon, a discourse unlikely found to be connected to the original book (1986). *Shojo* translates as “young lady,” and is connected to the “cute” youth subculture which emerged in Japan. This produced *shojo* protagonists (in Japanese animation) with cute and vulnerable personalities. At first sight, Sophie Hatter can be examined as the typical *shojo*, yet through her various metamorphosis back and forth from an old lady to a young woman, she acquires independent and strong-willed qualities unlike the traditional “cute” *shojo* personality, similarly to other Miyazaki female protagonists. (e.g. Kiki's Delivery Service) I will argue that Sophie allows the “disappearing” of the *shojo*, since Miyazaki presents Sophie as the embodiment of old age, which criticizes both the *shojo* phenomenon itself and the aging Japanese population that longs for youth.

The Moving Castle: Environmental Discourse

Through his various animated productions, Hayao Miyazaki has managed to emphasize on the importance of nature and ecological discourse as a major theme in his films (e.g. *Princess Mononoke*, 1997). In *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), Miyazaki attempts to create a harmonious relationship between machine and



Figure 1: The moving castle roams through the outskirts of Ingary

nature through the moving castle (see figure 1). The movie begins with a breath-taking and aesthetically pleasing scene which depicts an industrially and technologically enhanced castle with mechanical feet moving in what seems to be its natural habitat. Calcifier, the fire demon that sits in the castle's fireplace, is the main magical power behind the castle's ability to move among the hills of Ingary. Interestingly so, the author of the book on which the movie is based (1986) states that “the castle is more like a hovercraft and floats an inch or so above the ground”.¹ Making sure the castle does not touch the ground, even if it is by approximately one inch only, implicates an absence of communication between the castle and nature. Being in contact with the ground enables the moving castle to convey a harmonious relationship with nature. This very small yet subtle difference between the description of the castle in the book and film enables Miyazaki to express both ecological criticism and vision through the film. So far, Miyazaki has emphasized in former movies such as *Spirited Away* (2001) a rejection of the evils of “capitalist consumption and production” existing in modern day Japan as it can cause the loss of all spiritual connection to nature (Suzuki, 2009). In contrast to this, Miyazaki presents a new environmental perspective in *Howl's Moving Castle*, in which the machinery of the moving castle is characterized as seemingly harmless in what appears to be its natural habitat, where the sheep and country folk are not frightened by the sight

of the large castle moving about in the land as though it was a normal situation. Thus, this could hint at the role of the castle in harmonizing the modern industrial world with its natural counterpart; the ultimate implication that the moving castle and the natural world can live in peace together. This idea comes hand in hand with a theory called “ecological modernization,” which can be a possible way to interpret the role of the castle in the movie. The harmony between nature and machine can also be indicative of Miyazaki's criticism towards society's negligence of nature for the good of technological innovations, which at many times are only used to enhance the quality of human life, thus forgetting about the condition of nature. Therefore, the subtle difference between the castle's features in the book and film is the initial portal to discovering a part of the director's social criticism of Japanese society.

Ecological Modernization

At its core, the theory of ecological modernization stands for “the practicability of attaining environmental improvements through transformation of production and consumption patterns,” and “explain[s] the potential for a societal shift to a less wasteful form of interaction between humans and the natural environment” (Barrett, 2005: 3). One of the five of the goals of ecological modernization that aims to positively transform and eliminate ecological problems in society, as stated by Mol and Sonnenfeld, is the alteration of the position of science and technology where they can stop being “judged for their role in the emergence of environmental problems” and come to be “valued for their actual and potential role in curing and preventing them” (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000: 6). Similarly, in his book that emphasizes the many ways in which people and nature can positively influence each other, Buttel states that “in the ecological modernization perspective, the solution to environmental problems caused by industrialization requires more industrialization – or “superindustrialization” – ” (Buttel 2001 cited in Barrett

2005: 6). The potential to fulfill these requirements for an ecologically modern society can be examined in the structure of the moving castle, since it requires a form of technology and magic to construct its movement and remains in total serenity with nature, which symbolizes a way in which modernized technology can successfully work together to create a peaceful ecologically modern future. In addition, it is notable that the castle's interior is messy and unclean, until Sophie, the main protagonist of the film, becomes the new cleaning lady of the castle. Sophie, who has lived in the city of Ingary her whole life, brings a sense of modernity to the castle with her. After eliminating every speck of dust in her sight, the household (Howl, Calcifier and Markl) are noticeably affected by this foreign woman who has managed to change the castle's environment, and their way of life. Therefore, Sophie can be seen as a symbol for the “modern” part of the “ecologically modern” equation, as she comes from a technologically industrialized city, and uses her modernity to fix environmental issues in the castle. In short, the moving castle's exterior and interior represent the main argument of ecological modernism that centralizes around how “modern science and technology emerge as central institutions for ecological reform” (Barrett, 2005).

The Future of an Ecologically Modern Japan

As Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* promotes an ecologically modern system symbolized by the moving castle, one might conclude that Miyazaki promotes an ecologically modern Japan. According to Berrett, “Japan has been referenced as the first non-Western, industrialized democracy to exhibit features of ecological modernization,” with Mol and Sonnenfeld referring to the country as an “ecological front-runner” that has started to show signs of a “transition in environmental discourse and practice” that agrees with the theory of ecological modernization (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000: 204). Furthermore, according to Dryzek

(1997), Japan is one of the five ecologically modernized states in the world largely due to the “energy-efficiency of its economy” (Dryzek, 1997: 139). Notwithstanding, other researchers conclude that while Japan has witnessed an enormous growth in its economy since 1946, and achieved “about 10 percent of the world's economic growth,” which is termed as an “economic miracle,” it was accompanied by an environmental crisis, consisting of massive pollution² and especially in the “loss of tropical rainforests and the exploitation of endangered species” (Barrett, 2005: 8). This creates two conflicting viewpoints on whether Japan indeed has the potential to become an ecologically modern state while preserving an environmental crisis free society. Therefore, this discourse questions the viability of an ecologically modern Japan, if problems such as pollution and other risks put on the environment due to the ecologically threatening aspects of technological innovations continue to exist.

An Imagined Ecotopia

In the concluding scene of *Howl's Moving Castle*, which is nonexistent in the book by Jones, the moving castle appears to have wings and flies above the battleships that roam the skies (see figure 2). Howl's moving and flying castle can now peacefully roam the skies or coexist with the rest of the entities that rule the sky. The ability of the moving castle to fly



Figure 2: The moving castle takes flight.

allows it to be compared to that of another well-known flying castle or island called *Laputa*, which was made famous in Miyazaki's 1986 visually enticing production, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. In the movie's essence, there exists a flying island (with a castle on its top), where human beings had lived during a time in which the ultimate ecological utopia (ecotopia) had been achieved. This enabled the humans on the flying island to peacefully coexist with various

technological innovations such as artificial intelligence. In “The City Ascends: *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* as Critical Ecotopia,” Lioi argues that the use of flying castles could be used as a portal to discuss Miyazaki's 'green' vision of an ultimate ecological utopia channeled by the harmonious peace of nature and technological innovations that rejects “the political will to dominate through technological superiority” (i.e. technology and nature are united to eliminate the presence of imperialism). *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986) is an original story by Miyazaki, that models its flying city on that of the writer Jonathan Swift's flying city of “Laputa” (1726). Even though *Laputa* is not entirely a flying or moving castle such as the one we have in *Howl's Moving Castle*, one of the most important conclusions connected to both is that violent human behavior and dominion can destroy the harmony existing between nature and technology. Furthermore, the robot that lives in the flying island and who was discovered by the two main characters after finding a path to the flying city “represents a restored relationship of technology to nature when the human impulse towards warfare and destruction is overcome” (Lioi, 2010: 6). This implies that technological machines, such as Howl's castle or the robots in *Laputa*, can be essential in restoring a graceful relationship between nature and technology to create a better ecologically utopian future as artistically expressed by Miyazaki in the last scene of *Howl's Moving Castle*. Therefore, it can be concluded that machine and nature can potentially have a harmonious relationship that works to create an ecotopia, however there still remains the ultimate obstacle that can jeopardize the harmonious relationship between them, which is the ever-growing threat of war, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Howl: Article 9 and the 'Pacifist' State

“The game is over. Get me the prime minister and the minister of defense. It's time to put an end to this idiotic war.” -Madame Suliman towards the end of *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004)

Though the book and film have many direct and indirect differences, one of the most prominent differences is the incorporation of war in the the film. The book by Jones (1986) only states that there exists a war between Ingary and a neighboring kingdom, unlike Miyazaki who heavily incorporates scenes of war into the film. The movie is immensely concerned in highlighting the horrific aftermath of war, as seen in Howl's transformation into a monstrous bird-creature, and endangered civilians being horrifically affected by war (see figure 3 and figure 4). Moreover, the character of Howl is forced to face war,



Figure 3: Howl in bird-form flying above the war-struck city of Ingary.



Figure 4: The bombing of civilians' homes.

despite his unwillingness to participate in the fighting, and almost gives in to the monstrous entity that transforms him into a large bird when he battles against enemies. It is also notable that the Witch of the Waste is “no less critical of the war than Howl – even though she is too selfish to do anything about it – and is likewise unwilling to lend her magical powers to the cause” (Cavallaro, 2014: 17). Unlike her, Howl is more than willing to use his magic – transforming into a powerful bird-like creature – to stop the fighting and protect his loved ones, including Sophie. In light of this, Howl's growing need to protect Sophie serves as one of the

purposes of Miyazaki, as mentioned by Producer Toshio Suzuki, to portray “romance under the fire of war” through the movie, however the inclination of war into the movie serves a deeper purpose, which is to declare war as a pointless process that humanity goes through (Akimoto, 2013). Miyazaki's eagerness to present the foolishness of war through the movie refers to his own “personal dilemma” concerning war, where Howl's own dilemma between his unwillingness to fight and eagerness to protect the people living in his castle is based upon Miyazaki's own encounters with war. As a child, Miyazaki recalls the time when World War II had forced him to “escape Tokyo and the ravages of war,” where he commented about “the guilt and trauma that he felt over his family's refusal, as they escaped Tokyo by truck, to help other families begging rides along the way for their children” (Murakami, 2005: 105). Murakami, in his review on *Howl's Moving Castle*, interprets the film as Miyazaki's personal protest against war due to his traumatized experiences of it while growing up. In the film, many characters deem or mention war to be “pointless”; even the war-advocate Madame Suliman contradicts herself by stating that “it's time to put an end to this idiotic war” by the end of the movie. Moreover, Miyazaki has proved himself to be a pacifist – one who renounces war in all cases – due to his response to the question of amending the pacifist article of the Japanese Constitution (1946). In an interview with the monthly Studio Ghibli magazine *Neppu* on 2013, Miyazaki stated that he is “obviously against [amendment of the Constitution] ... it is something the government should never do. Because it determines the future of the country, this issue should reflect the opinions of as many people as possible.” Therefore, the characters and plot of *Howl's Moving Castle* allow the viewer to understand the director's most clearest statements on war and enables an interpretation of the movie to be a warning on the atrocities that come with war.

Shaping Japanese Identity Through Article 9

In another part of his 2013 interview with the monthly *Neppu* magazine, Miyazaki insistingly states that “Japan is not a country where a war can be fought” (Miyazaki, 2014). While Miyazaki expresses his personal views of war, he could also be strongly alluding to Article 9, which is the most important Article in the Japanese Constitution that has shaped Japanese political identity. Specifically, Article 9 in Chapter 2 of the 1946 Japanese Constitution states:

“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese forever renounce war as a sovereign of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”³

So, the position of Miyazaki on war can be justified, if not by the strict conditions of his country's Constitution. Furthermore, In *Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and the Rule of Law* (2005), Port argues that “the original intent of Article 9 was to deny Japan the right to possess any armaments whatsoever, for offensive or defensive purposes”, and “the Japanese people have used this original intent to create, at least in their minds, a pacifist state” (Port, 2005: 3). Furthermore, the “Yoshida Doctrine”, a set of policies determined by the Japanese prime minister Shigeru Yoshida (1878-1967) was considered as the basis to eventually determining Article 9 as a gateway to defining Japanese political identity. Middlebrooks states in light of the doctrine that “Japan was defined as a unique “peace state,” dedicated to putting into practice the pacifist ideals in Article 9 of its Constitution.” In addition, Miyazaki's strictly pacifist standpoint on the amendment of Article 9 is in correlation with others who claim that “amending Article 9 would, in fact, be the death of Japanese pacifism,” since Article 9 is the

“keystone of Japanese pacifism” (Middlebrooks, 2008: 22). Therefore, the definition of Article 9 correlates to the definition of Japanese political identity. Miyazaki highlights the dangers of amending this Article, which includes the right to collective self defense (i.e. the right to start wars), through the horrific aftermath of war in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

'Split' Japanese Political Identity: Howl's Dilemma

Along with the possibility of Japan indulging in more horrific wars, the amendment of Article 9 risks the rising of new confusions or dilemmas among the Japanese public concerning the country's political identity, which is similar to the calm yet disturbed character of Howl in *Howl's Moving Castle*. For one thing, the “Yoshida doctrine”, as mentioned, was a post-WWII expression of a new Japanese political identity heavily influenced by Article 9. As Middlebrooks pertains, this set of policies had opened up new horizons for Japanese political expression as:

“[it] provided the Japanese with a reason to be proud of their country again for reasons other than military prowess and imperial expansion.⁴ Their country, the Japanese were told, was a “peace state,” and had, in some respects, evolved beyond the politics that characterized the interactions of other nations. Japan was, its people concluded, unique, and arguably superior to other states, in its rejection of military might as the means of securing its place in the global pecking order.” (20)

Despite this, as the years went by, the Japanese public opinion has divided itself into two camps of thought regarding political identity as Koschmann refers to Kato's “Haisengoron” by concurring that “Japan's political identity since the Pacific War has been deeply split between those who have defended the constitution as the “most universalistic and radical” document of its kind and those who have persistently sought to revise article 9 and other aspects of the constitution so as to allow Japan to be an “ordinary nation” capable of employing force if

necessary” (Kato cited in Koshmann, 2006: 128). Moreover, while it was reluctant to do so in the past, the official Japanese government statement on Article 9 is that Japan does have the right to defend itself, “but may only expend the minimum level of force necessary to do so” (Middlebrooks, 2008: 24). Therefore, Article 9 has managed to create a divide between citizens who hold onto the 'pacifist' Japanese political identity, while there are those who call for the international right to arms like any other 'normal' nation. In the film, Howl takes on an interesting role as a pacifist wizard who prefers to work on his magic than join in the existing war, unlike the book where he does not express any sentiment regarding war. In a scene in which bird-transformed Howl returns home after fighting enemies, he sits in front of the fireplace to talk to Calcifier about how the “war is terrible,” while stating that people participating in war “won't recall they ever were human.” This suggests that Howl is aware of the atrocities of war, yet he has no choice but to defend his home when threatened by it, which creates a dilemma regarding his stance on war. Levi, in her review of the 2004 film, perfectly sums up Howl's dilemma:

“He recognizes that the war is pointless and spends his night defending the innocent on all sides from hideous organic bombs that are often actually wizards transformed into weapons. To do so he must transform into a monstrous form himself: a huge predatory bird. The more often he changes and the longer he remains in bird form, however, the harder it is for him to return to his human form. Howl is a wonderful metaphor for what happens to soldiers -even antisoldiers- in war. He fights to defend others, especially those he loves, but the act of fighting is turning him into a monster” (Levi, 2008).

Therefore, it can be argued that the character Howl in *Howl's Moving Castle* symbolizes the constant change that occurs within the definition of Japanese political identity regarding Article

9. This definition is stuck between the amendment of Article 9, which includes the right to collective self-defense like any other 'normal' nation, and preserving the pacifist aspect of Japan by rejecting calls of war by the international community. This is similar to Howl, who is willing to participate in a war that is slowly turning him into a monster, yet declares on many occasions in the film that “war is pointless.”

'The War on Terror'

A call of war by the international community that has significantly pushed Japan into abandoning the pacifist ideals of Article 9 is the Iraq War (2003), which Miyazaki absolutely criticizes through the film. Dani Cavallaro, in her book entitled *The Late Works of Hayao Miyazaki: a Critical Study, 2004-2013*, argues that while *Howl's Moving Castle* obtains 'war-related elements' which clearly exemplify Miyazaki's anger towards war, there can also be room to interpret the film as “his indignation about the Iraq War.” A number of factors assist this claim as Miyazaki specifically states that “the film is profoundly affected by the war in Iraq” (Miyazaki 2005 as cited in Cavallaro 2014: 14). In addition, “he was angered” when hearing the American President (Bush) at the time declare the right to fight “terror” in Iraq (Akimoto, 2013). It can be seen that the “transformative adaptation” analytical tool, which Akimoto refers to in his essay *Howl's Moving Castle and the War on Terror*, is used by Miyazaki in his adaptation of the book by Jones (1986) into a film. Akimoto cites Smith (2011) as she argues that “applying the 'transformative adaptation' analytical method in order to scrutinise “transformed meanings”... encourage[s] critics to move beyond a mere study of how a book and a novel differ when analyzing the adapted text” (Smith 2011 cited in Akimoto 2013). Therefore, this method, which considers movie adaptations (from books) a tool used by directors to criticize certain issues, is used by Miyazaki in *Howl's Moving Castle* to politically criticize the Iraq War and Japan's

“political support” of it, since these decisions encourage the Japanese nation to abandon its pacifist ideals and deepens the Japanese political identity crisis.

Sophie: The Disappearing Shojo

“Is someone different at age 18 or 60? I believe one stays the same.”- Hayao Miyazaki in an interview with the French Artist Moebius, 2005.

One theme unlikely to be of any concern in the book by Jones (1986) is the *shojo* that emerged with the immense popularity of Japanese animated productions and the “cute” culture. In the book, Sophie transforms from a young woman to a 90 year-old old woman, while staying in this position throughout the whole novel until she finally breaks free from the curse and returns to being her normal red-haired young self, however, the



Figure 5: Sophie's initial transformation into a 90-year old woman.

movie by Miyazaki presents the viewer with the idea of character metamorphosis through Sophie's various physical (and mental) transformations, comprised of four main figures:

“[Sophie's] original brunette girl self, a hump-backed old crone, an upright old lady, and a young women with prematurely grey hair” (Levi, 2008: 262) (see figures 5-8). This transformation is most noticeable when Howl transforms the moving castle's interior to Sophie's hat shop. When Howl shows Sophie her old bedroom in the hat shop, she becomes excited and turns into her young grey-haired self (see figure 8), but appears to have self-doubt as she proceeds to shape-shift into an older yet lady-like version of herself when Howl asks her whether she liked the room (see figure 6). What this implies is that Sophie's feelings have the ability to help her shape-shift into her different forms.



Figure 6: Sophie as a content old lady.

When she is confident, she is a cheerful old lady, but when full

of self-doubt she goes back to being bitter. The setting of Sophie in the movie challenges the usual *shojo* character found in Miyazaki's other movies. Through Sophie, Miyazaki also challenges the traditional attributes of the *shojo* character and perhaps advocates for the “disappearance” of the *shojo* phenomenon itself.

The *Shojo*

Sophie in the film by Miyazaki (2004) has distinct “cute” characteristics which can be seen through her various metamorphosis states, such as her grey hair by the end of the film (see figure 8). This distinctive look of innocence and



Figure 7: Sophie before the curse.

“cuteness,” is usually attributed to *shojo* characters as seen in Japanese animation. This “early 1970s” phenomenon is popularly known as the *shojo* or as the emergence of a new “youth subculture” known as *shojo culture*, which is translated as “young girls' culture” (Daliot, 2014: 43). It can also be called the “cute culture” (term coined by Kinsella 1995) due to



Figure 8: Sophie during one of her metamorphosis under the curse.

“its conspicuous childish and naive aesthetics saturated with cartoon characters and pastel colors; and its adoration of anything and everything *kawaii* (adorable)” (Daliot, 2014: 43). This new subculture introduced the *shojo* characters, who are exceptionally “cute” and were “objectified, and commodified a longing for childhood and offered new means to express emotions socially” (Daliot-Bul, 2014: 44). This lead to the association of *shojo* to themes of “consumption,” where she (the character) was either consumed or a consuming body herself⁵ (Napier, 2005: 170). Furthermore, Kinsella estimates that the popularity of the *shojo* subculture in Japan relies more so on the youthful subject's “weakness, dependence and inability” than on the qualities relating to “their strengths

and capabilities” (Kinsella, 1995: 237). These cute *shojo*-like behaviors are usually described as “childish behavior and innocent looks,” and “adolescent women (*shojo*) provide the elusive model for cute culture” (244). Therefore, the traditional *shojo* is a young female character who is *kawaii* (cute), naive and consumable. On that note, Miyazaki has been notoriously known to deviate his characters from the two latter attributes.

Miyazaki's *Shojo*

In one of the key scenes that introduce Sophie as a *shojo* character, Howl uses his magical powers to allow Sophie to briefly fly above the town. The momentous glory of Sophie letting go of her fears and embracing change in her dull life in the hat shop exemplifies the qualities that sharply define all the *shojo* protagonists that are seen in almost every Miyazaki film. These attributes as described by Napier are “steadfast, empowered, and independent.” The significance of allowing Sophie to fly is also noted as Miyazaki uses flight as a “possibilit[y] of escape (from the past, from tradition)” (Napier, 2005: 126). She also notes that the journal *Eureka* describes Miyazaki's female protagonists as “youths wearing *shojo* masks.” In Miyazaki's *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), Kiki is a young witch who is forced to abide by “the rule of the witch” and move away from her home for a year. When she is confident, she acquires the power to fly on her broomstick, but when full of self-doubt she is incapable of fulfilling that power. According to Napier, “flying is based on both confidence and competence, and Kiki's self-doubt destroys her powers” (133). This is also similar in Sophie, as self-doubt is able to destruct her whole self when she is insecure and thus effects her metamorphosis and destroys her 'power' of being both simultaneously old in age and young at heart; she returns to being a bitter old lady when in fear.

Therefore, Miyazaki's *shojo* character, characterized as independent, secure and autonomous, is

distinctively different from the traditional naive and objectified *shojo* that is usually apparent in classic animated films and TV series.

'Now You See Her.. Now You Don't': The Disappearing *Shojo*

As argued by Susan Napier in *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* (2005), a different kind of *shojo* character has recently emerged in contemporary Japanese animated productions. This character is described as having dark features and she generally exhibits a more complex personality, while having “challenging narratives set in liminal worlds” (Napier, 2005: 170). This new-found phenomenon is connected to another one coined by Napier to be the “disappearing *shojo*.” Moreover, Napier makes a distinction between “disappearing *shojo*” such as Chihiro in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001), who “vanishes” in a negative light and Sophie in *Howl's Moving Castle* who is empowered through her positive “disappearance” (transformation) into an old lady, as she discovers the secret “powers” that come with her vanishing, such as the ability to be carefree and “invisible” as an old lady. Though old ladies might seem to be helpless and weak, when Sophie lets go of her self-torment and doubt she physically and mentally transforms into a younger peaceful and less angry old lady. This intake shows that Miyazaki aims to empower old 90-year-old women to not continuously yearn for youth. In accordance with this, the theme of old age, itself, as the chapter concurs, is specifically aimed towards the Japanese audience, since “Japan is currently the most rapidly aging country in the world, and its media are full of disturbing prognostications as to how this will change Japanese society” (Murakami cited in Napier 2005: 193). Therefore, Napier interprets that the “disappearance” of Sophie can refer to the disappearance of the *shojo* phenomenon itself, since the film replaces the classic young *shojo* character with a mature female character. Finally, Sophie's gradual acceptance of her old-aged self can be interpreted as Miyazaki's desire to

inform Japanese society that "all *shojo* eventually disappear" (i.e. youth is not a permanent stage in life) (193).

Conclusion

This paper has thoroughly discussed important themes that can be found in Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), which are connected to environment, war, and *shojo* discourses in Japan. The disconnection of these themes to the original book (Jones, 1986), on which the film is based, proves that Miyazaki intended to criticize or comment on certain aspects of contemporary Japanese culture and society through the film.

In the first chapter, I suggested that the moving castle, which embodies harmless industrial and magical elements, can be seen as a much desired symbol of harmony between machine and nature. I argued that this can be compared to many aspects of the ecological modernization theory, and its uncanny resemblance in structure and concept to the flying island in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* works to envision Miyazaki's imagined ecological utopia. It can be concluded that machine and nature have a potential to come together in order to prevent the ultimate life-threatening obstacle that is war.

The second chapter largely works through the role of war in the film, which is not the focus in the book by Jones. In interviews, Miyazaki has made clear his stance that war is “pointless” and that he holds Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (1946) to be detrimental in preserving Japan as a nation of peace. I argued that Howl is a character that symbolizes the 'split' Japanese political identity existing in modern-day Japanese society. Miyazaki also criticizes the Iraq war (2003) through the film, as Japan's support of this operation is likely to push more Japanese citizens to abandon pacifist ideals determined by Article 9.

The last chapter deals with the phenomenon of *shojo* and Miyazaki's role in ending the phenomenon by choosing to focus on the body metamorphosis of Sophie in the film. Sophie, in her appearance, channels the look of the traditional consumable *shojo* body, however along with

the distinctive characteristics of Miyazaki's female protagonists and Sophie's transformation into an old woman, Miyazaki criticizes the aging population of Japan who long for youth and allows Sophie to become the “disappearing *shojo*.”

As the paper suggests, Miyazaki has wonderfully adapted the book onto screen and altered its themes to pass on his own personal criticism of society, while staying true to the main premise of the original book. On a personal note, I hope this paper can lead more people to watch the movie (while taking in mind the themes discussed in the paper) and breath in its energy that celebrates life and love.

Reference List

[1] In the 2008 edition of Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle*, an 'Extras' section is added, which consists of an exclusive interview with the author, where she answers a few questions about the movie adaptation of her book.

[2] As Broadbent(1999) in “Environmental Politics in Japan: Networks of Power and Protest” states: “Atmospheric concentrations of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) rose from 0.15 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere in 1960 to 0.60 ppm in 1965. This intense pollution caused asthma and other respiratory diseases.” (page 12)

[3] Japanese Constitution. Article 9. Chapter 2 Renunciation of War. 1946. The Constitution of Japan can be accessed online at:

http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

[4] Prior to its surrender at the end of WWII (1945), Japan was a powerful imperialist military force, which is contradictory to its post-war 'pacifist' policies, as determined by Article 9 in the 1946 Constitution.

[5] Napier summarizes what can be seen as the negative effect of the *shojo*: “The *shojo* is typically linked with consumption, either as a body consumed by males whose dreams seem to revolve around nonthreatening schoolgirls or as consuming subjects themselves.”

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