



## **Bakalářská práce**

# **Identification and analysis of Japanese cultural aspects in Ghibli's anime adapted from British novels**

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B0114A300068 Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

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## Zadání bakalářské práce

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## Zásady pro vypracování:

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl zdůraznit kulturní rozdíly zachycené v japonských animovaných adaptacích původních britských románů. Vybranými romány, jejichž adaptace bude analyzována, jsou: *Howl's moving castle* (Diana Wynne Jones, 1986), *When Marnie was there* (Joan G. Robinson, 1967), *The Borrowers* (Mary Norton, 1952) and *Earwig and the Witch* (Diana Wynne Jones, 2011). Adaptace Studia Ghibli (Tokio) implementují do svých filmů prvky japonské kultury a tradiční styl anime tvorby, což představuje zvláštní případ inter/trans kulturního vyprávění, které překračuje nejen obecné hranice anime, ale také se pokouší překlenout kulturní a generační mezery. Práce se zaměří na využití aspektů japonské kultury v již zmíněných čtyřech anime filmech. Především na jejich charakteristickou japonskou historii země, místa, přírody, architektury, náboženství a etiky. Kulturní aspekty britské i japonské kultury zobrazené prostřednictvím animovaných adaptací vytvářejí filmy, které osloví různé kultury i věkové skupiny. This bachelor thesis aspires to highlight the cultural differences displayed in Japanese animated adaptations of original British novels. The selected novels are: *Howl's moving castle* (Diana Wynne Jones, 1986), *When Marnie was there* (Joan G. Robinson, 1967), *The Borrowers* (Mary Norton, 1952) and *Earwig and the Witch* (Diana Wynne Jones, 2011). These adaptations by Studio Ghibli (Tokyo) implement elements of Japanese culture and the anime tradition, this constitution a peculiar case of inter/transcultural storytelling that cuts across not only generic boundaries but also attempt to bridge cultural and generational gaps. The thesis will consequently focus on the usage of the aspects of Japanese culture in these four anime films. In above all their distinctive Japanese history, settings, nature, architecture, religion and ethics. Aspects of both British and Japanese cultures exhibited through the animated adaptations create movies that would appeal to different cultures as well as age groups.

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## Annotation

This bachelor thesis aspires to highlight the cultural differences displayed in Japanese animated adaptations of original British novels. The selected novels are: *Howl's moving castle* (Diana Wynne Jones, 1986), *When Marnie was there* (Joan G. Robinson, 1967), *The Borrowers* (Mary Norton, 1952) and *Earwig and the Witch* (Diana Wynne Jones, 2011). These adaptations by Studio Ghibli (Tokyo) implement elements of Japanese culture and the anime tradition, this constitution a peculiar case of inter/transcultural storytelling that cuts across not only generic boundaries but also attempt to bridge cultural and generational gaps. The thesis will consequently focus on the usage of the aspects of Japanese culture in these four anime films. In above all their distinctive Japanese history, settings, nature, architecture, religion and ethics. Aspects of both British and Japanese cultures exhibited through the animated adaptations create movies that would appeal to different cultures as well as age groups.

## Key words

Anime, Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki, heroines, nature, religion, tradition, friendship, loss

## Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl zdůraznit kulturní rozdíly zachycené v japonských animovaných adaptacích původních britských románů. Vybranými romány, jejichž adaptace bude analyzovat jsou: *Howl's moving castle* (Diana Wynne Jones, 1986), *When Marnie was there* (Joan G. Robinson, 1967), *The Borrowers* (Mary Norton, 1952) and *Earwig and the Witch* (Diana Wynne Jones, 2011). Adaptace Studia Ghibli (Tokyo) implementují do svých filmů prvky japonské kultury a tradice anime, což představuje zvláštní případ inter/transkulturního vyprávění, které překračuje nejen obecné hranice anime, ale také se pokouší překlenout kulturní a generační mezery. Práce se zaměří na využití aspektů japonské kultury v již zmíněných čtyřech anime filmech. Především jejich charakteristická japonská historie země, místa, příroda, architektura, náboženství a etika. Kulturní aspekty britské i japonské kultury zobrazené prostřednictvím animovaných adaptací vytvářejí filmy, která osloví různé kultury i věkové skupiny.

## Klíčová slova

Anime, Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki, hrdinky, příroda, náboženství, tradice, přátelství, ztráta

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# 1. Introduction

Japan is a country that is known by many people not only because of its developed economy but also because of its unique culture. Cultural differences become apparent in most facets of life, especially in traditions, religion, etiquette, and so on. My goal is to collect and analyze cultural elements included in four Studio Ghibli films, which are adaptations of popular British children's books.

The thesis starts with the definition and the description of the historical background of anime and Studio Ghibli. Anime and Studio Ghibli are popular forms of mass media with a wide variety of audiences ranging from young to adult. Furthermore, it also occurred to me that it would be appropriate to include a question related to a gender in my work. Studio Ghibli is famous for portraying strong female protagonists, so I will analyze the roles of women in Studio Ghibli, in contrast to other animation studios as well as Disney princesses. I chose the comparison with Disney princesses mainly because Studio Ghibli's closest relationship in the West is with the Walt Disney Studios, as we will find out later. The question about a function of male characters will also be answered.

In the second part, I will focus on the research itself, which aims to answer research questions regarding the portrayal of culture in four Studio Ghibli films. The founder of Studio Ghibli is Hayao Miyazaki, who is regarded as one of the most well-known anime and manga artists who represent Japan in this regard. The culture is approached with a traditional stance, and his animations and the formation of his characters are influenced by Japanese culture.

To highlight the purpose of this thesis even more, the importance of this study lies in understanding the interconnected relationship between Japanese culture and its representation in Studio Ghibli films. The original novels are set in the cultural milieu of Great Britain.

However, Ghibli's take on the story and placing it in a traditional Japanese setting results in certain differences, which will be discussed later in the work. Even though the setting stays unchanged in the other two selected movies, we will still be able to observe the incorporation of Japanese aspects. The films that will be discussed are *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), *When Marnie Was There* (2014) and *Earwig and the Witch* (2020).

## 2. Anime

The term *anime* is defined as an animation style created in Japan. It represents hand-drawn or computer animation of specific characters and drawing styles. The Lumiere brothers' invention came to Japan in 1897. The short films mainly comprised scenes of geishas or ordinary people in their everyday lives. In the early 20th century, the Japanese started producing short animations, usually only a few seconds long (Odell, Le Blanc, 2013, p. 6).

In terms of time, the origins of anime can be placed into the first quarter of the 20th century. Until 2005, a four-minute silent samurai short called *Nakamura Gatana* ("The Dull Sword") was considered the oldest anime film. However, the oldest surviving example of Japanese anime was found in Kyoto in 2005 and dates back to 1907. The film *Katsudo Shashin*, by an unknown author, has a duration of four seconds and is thus one of the oldest anime films ever. The filmstrip depicts a boy who writes on a board, then removes his hat and bows (Novielli, 2018, pp.3-4).

Very few early animations survived after one of the most natural disasters happened in 1923. On September 1, the Great Kantō earthquake devastated Tokyo, Yokohama, and surrounding prefectures. Disaster caused most of the work to be lost or destroyed (Clements, 2023, p. 55).

The anime productions are divided into *the pre-war* (1923-1939), *war* (1939-1945), and *post-war* (1945-) periods. In the pre-war era, only black-and-white films were produced, and more than 80% of movies were still silent, as the Japanese government refused to spend funds to finance animated productions (Litten. 2014, p. 7).

The 1930s and 1940s were turbulent times for Japan. The Japanese army invaded and occupied Manchuria, followed by involvement in World War II. The government became increasingly interested in controlling the media, transforming the anime into a tool for

promoting the war. Many authors received commissions to create Ministry of Education films and, later in the war era, from government offices to produce war propaganda films for the promotion and shaping of the Japanese war effort, mainly for the navy (Odell, Le Blanc, 2013, p. 8).

The technical innovation of fully synchronized sound in a Japanese animated film was created in 1933. The short film is called *Chikara to Onna no Yo no Naka* ("World of Power and Women"), produced by Kenzo Masaoka, and aimed to promote war. Only a few images remain from the film as the animation was lost (Sharp, 2011, p. 18).

After WW2, animator Sanae Yamamoto gathered over 100 people involved in animation production and established Shin Nihon Dogasha. The company then changed to Toei Doga (now Toei Animation) in 1956 and is the longest-running animation studio still operating today. This studio created some of the most famous anime in the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Dragon Ball* (1984-1995), *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997), *Digimon* (1999), and *One Piece* (1997-) (Clements, 2023, 108).

The company released the first color anime feature film ever, *The Tale of the White Serpent*, in 1958. The work of Toei Animation also influenced many years later very famous animators, such as Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki (Cavallaro. 2006, p. 29). Shooting films with a war theme was taboo after the end of the war, so fairy tales and children's heroes became the main subjects. Walt Disney greatly influenced the development of Japanese animation during this period.

The first anime broadcast out of Asia was the TV series *Astro Boy*, created in 1963 by Osamu Tezuka. It is the first modern anime and the only one exported to other countries at the time. *Astro Boy* was sold to NBC Enterprises in 1963. Between 1963 and 1965, episodes were aired in the USA with English dubbing (Clements, 2013, p. 218). The show combined science fiction and action creating a unique and entertaining story.

In the 1980s, the video player industry increased, and animation studios started focusing on producing works intended directly for videocassettes. A work released on portable media without prior theatrical or television release is called an OVA (original video animation). The production of OVA was relatively cheap and allowed animators to experiment with different styles (Odell, Le Blanc, 2013, p. 11).

Anime reached mainstream popularity on the market in the 1990s. Japanese manga (Japanese comics) and anime engendered tremendous interest in people of all ages worldwide, and they have played a significant part in world popular culture. Some animated series, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996) or *Cowboy Bepop* (1998-1999), were a big hit overseas. Exporting Japanese animation, particularly anime, has become a staggering international business. An estimated 60% of the world's animated television programs originate from Japan (Leheny, 2006, p. 214).

It is essential to distinguish between cartoons and anime. Cartoons are primarily defined as child-targeted, featuring humorous and light-hearted themes. On the other hand, modern anime covers a wide range of genres, sometimes geared towards more serious topics such as loss or death. Some anime are also age-restricted, containing more violent and sexual themes that are not appropriate for younger audiences (Cavallaro 2006, p. 19).

Japanese anime is typically produced by a single studio and is often based on popular manga. It is then aired on Japanese television and later distributed internationally through licensing agreements (Bielby, Harrington, 2008, p. 16). There are many Japanese studios, each with a distinguished animation style and genre. They produce films and series that appeal primarily to viewers from adolescence to adulthood, thus creating an international phenomenon out of anime.

### 3. Studio Ghibli

Studio Ghibli is a Japanese animation film studio founded in 1985 by Hayao Miyazaki along with Takahata Isao and Toshio Suzuki. The name Ghibli for the new studio was chosen by Hayao Miyazaki himself after the famous Italian model of the Caproni Ca.309 Ghibli aircraft used in World War II. This plane originated from the Arabic word for a “desert wind”. Miyazaki and colleagues chose the name Ghibli for their studio because of Miyazaki's love for flying and airplanes from childhood. Another reason was the created analogy to the model of the aircraft for the very meaning of the name, to feature the studio as being “a hot new and unstoppable wind blowing through the animation industry” (Greenberg, 2018, p. 110).

Hayao Miyazaki was born on January 5, 1941 in Tokyo. Miyazaki's fascination with animation started in 1958, when he saw the first colour Japanese animated film, *The Tale of the White Serpent* (1958), in high school. In 1959, Miyazaki enrolled in economics at Gakushuin University. Here, he became a member of the student literary club, which dealt with manga, among other things. He began his career in 1963 as an animator at the Toei Animation Company, where he met his lifelong friend and work colleague Isao Takahata. In the 1970s, both continued their partnership and worked under Nippon Animation, directing and contributing to *Conan: The Boy in Future* (1978) storyboards. The breakthrough began in 1984 when Miyazaki wrote and directed the film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, based on his 1982 manga. It became an artistic success. Together with Takahata and director Suzuki, Miyazaki formed Studio Ghibli a year after, in 1985 (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 30-31).

The first film to be animated by Studio Ghibli is called *Castle in the Sky* (1986) telling a story of orphans Sheeta and Pazu, whom the government chases for her magical crystal necklace. The story also reflects Miyazaki's ecological philosophy because it highlights

environmentalism and the relationship between people and nature. Those motifs are seen in all of his works, along with themes of loss or abandonment.

Outside Hollywood, Studio Ghibli became the most profitable animation company in the world, garnering international film festival awards. In 2002, the anime *Spirited Away* (2001) even won an Oscar for best-animated film, which makes it the only Japanese anime ever to win this award (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 9). Another two Miyazaki's movies were nominated for this award: *Howl's Moving Castle* in 2005 and *When Marnie Was There* in 2015. From 1986 to 2014, Studio Ghibli produced 22 movies, all available to watch on American streaming service Netflix or HBO Max.

In 1996, a partnership between Disney and Studio Ghibli started. Disney made a deal to distribute the Japanese studio's movies worldwide. Disney also dubbed or re-dubbed most of the movies. This agreement has been highly beneficial in increasing the popularity and presentation of Miyazaki's works to the world (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 43).

The main protagonist of many Ghibli films is a child or adolescent, usually a girl. The films often have a bittersweet tinge that reflects the joys and sorrows of growing up and offers a sense of empathy and understanding for young people navigating the challenges of adolescence. The point of choosing juveniles for the stories is to show the innocence of a child's soul and their point of view. Children have a vivid imagination that helps them overcome serious and dangerous life situations with ease and even gives them determination. On the other hand, having a child as a leading figure also functions as an avatar for the adults, thus offering them the possibility to return to youth, innocence, and fantasy worlds through the film (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 18).

### 3.1 The plot of four Ghibli movies

For this thesis, four movies, *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), *When Marnie Was There* (2014), and *Earwig and the Witch* (2020), are selected because they are the only Studio Ghibli's films, which are adapted from British books. Studio Ghibli follows the original stories but incorporates Japanese cultural aspects into its films, giving a whole new dimension to the stories. It is essential to start with a brief introduction of the stories. Otherwise, the arguments concerning the Japanese culture and Studio Ghibli culture discussed later might be incomprehensible.

The story in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) depicts the adventure of the young Wizard Howl and an eighteen-year-old girl named Sophie, who has been cursed and transformed into a ninety-year-old woman by the Witch of the Waste. Unwilling to show herself to her family in her decrepit state, Sophie runs away from home to the hills. Along the way, a magical walking castle appeared before her, and she invited herself to the castle to stay for the night. The owner is the Wizard Howl, and the one who powers the house is a fire demon named Calcifer. Calcifer is a fallen star whom Howl caught. To prolong his life, he and Howl strike a deal: Calcifer gets Howl's heart, and Howl receives full access to Calcifer's powers. In order to stay in the castle, Sophie starts working as a house helper, which includes cleaning, cooking, and shopping. Simultaneously, Sophie and Howl encounter various obstacles, including a war between neighboring kingdoms. As they journey together, Sophie and Howl develop a strong bond. A significant theme of *Howl's Moving Castle* is mental and emotional growth, also associated with physical transformation, friendship, and love (Levi, 2008, p. 262, 263).

The film *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010) tells the story of 14-year-old Arrietty, who lives under the floorboards with her parents, Pod and Homily. They are minuscule



human-like creatures measuring 5 inches, called Borrowers. Arriety and her father are traveling through the walls to get to the first floor of the house. They borrow all different things according to what they need. One night, while borrowing, a boy named Sho sees them. He is staying at his aunt's house through the summer. Sho has had a heart problem all his life, which made it impossible for him to make friends. Her parents always told Arriety to be careful not to get caught because humans are dangerous. Despite this, Arriety and Sho become friends and he protects her from maid Haru, who would endanger Arriety and her parent's lives. However, Haru eventually finds Arriety's mother, Homily, and captures her in the jar. With the help of Sho, Arriety saves her mother. Since their identity was revealed to Haru, they had to flee and find a new home. They farewelled in the woods and said their final goodbyes.

The plot of the film *When Marnie Was There* (2014) follows Anna Sasaki, an introverted and asthmatic teenage girl. After an asthmatic attack, the doctor recommends staying somewhere with fresh air to improve her health. On recommendation, her foster mother sends her to the countryside to stay with relatives for the summer. While there, she discovers an abandoned mansion across marsh, which feels familiar. One day, Anna sees a blonde girl in a window of the mansion. To get closer to the house, she took the boat and met a girl her age, Marnie, in front of the house for the first time. Anna and Marnie form a close, intimate relationship with each other. After spending time together, Marnie disappears, and Anna wakes up alone, not knowing what is happening. Afterward, she is convinced that she only created Marnie in her head so she would not feel lonely. This conviction changes when she meets a local painter named Hisako, Marnie's friend, and tells her a story about Marnie. Anna found out that Marnie was her grandmother, who took care of her after her parents passed until Marnie died a year later. Subsequently, Anna remembered that as a baby, she lived in the mansion with her grandmother, who told her childhood stories before putting her

to sleep. Subliminally, Anna projected those stories into which she integrated herself. This revelation helped to bring Anna closure about her identity, and she realized she was never truly abandoned by her biological family.

The final movie is *Earwig and the Witch* (2020), which revolves around an orphan named Earwig, or Aya, in its original Japanese dubbing. She and her best friend Custard lived in an orphanage until a strange couple, Mandrake and Bella Yaga, came to adopt her. When Aya comes to her new home for the first time, Bella Yaga tells her she is a witch just like herself. Assuming that she would learn magic, Aya was surprised that Bella Yaga did not adopt her to teach about spells but used her as an extra pair of hands to help around the house. Bella Yaga threatens her that she will send a flood of worms into her room if she does not listen. After that, she discovers that the witch's cat, Thomas, talks and helps Aya create a spell that will protect her from all the witch's spells. Mandrake cares for Aya because her mother is his longtime friend. Mandrake orders the witch not to bully Aya and teach her spells. For the first time, Aya feels safe and accepted in the house.

Although all the selected films are adapted from British books, we will later take a closer look at the Japanese cultural aspects that Studio Ghibli incorporated into the films, which is the primary purpose of this research.

### 3.2 Uniqueness of Studio Ghibli

One of the studio's strengths is the diversity of its output. Most Ghibli films remain fantasy animations, but many of these stories are set in the real world. Almost all Ghibli films are available in dubbed form of multiple languages, which is rare for Japanese anime. All four mentioned movies have Japanese and English dubbing; some are even dubbed into German, Polish, or Czech.

The process of Miyazaki's creation also differs from that of other anime we see nowadays. He still prefers traditional animation techniques, using a pencil and paper. This traditional technique of creating 2D animation by hand is called *cel animation*. Artists draw outlines of images on paper and transfer them onto transparent plastic sheets called '*cels*.' Each cel features one drawing with an outline on one side, and the other is filled with color. Background images are then placed at the bottom of the pile, and the composite image enters the photography stage. This form of animation was outweighing in the 20th century, as popularised by Walt Disney Studios. The end of the 1990s was a starting point for computer-generated film, replacing the slow process of a hand draw animation. To this day, Hayao Miyazaki sticks to the traditional method, using the digital program only for image enhancement to achieve a complex visual presentation (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 25). He also does not use a script or know how the plot will evolve because the narratives fluidly develop with the storyboards (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 12).

Miyazaki's works aim to entertain the audience but also focus on serious topics related to adolescence that make people empathize or even identify with the characters. The significant theme for Ghibli films is dealing with some loss or potential loss the majority of the time. As a rule, it is about the loss of a family, depicted in all selected works. In the film, *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2014), the main character, Arrietty, loses family members except for her mother and father, and the main characters in *When Marnie was There* (2014), and *Earwig and the Witch* (2020) are orphans. *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) then deals with a loss of confidence, which causes the heroine to transform into a 90-year-old woman, reflecting her low self-esteem (Levi, 2008, p. 262).

As mentioned above, female protagonists experience complex emotions and personal growth that give depth to the story. Some frequently recurring characteristic anime elements,

such as large eyes or unnaturally colored hair, are minimized here to achieve greater realism of characters. The idea of traditional femininity is put aside, and rather than physical appearances, the focus is on their personalities and journey of self-development (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 144).

Unlike many anime filmmakers and manga artists who feature females (and characters in general) with disproportionate physiques, Miyazaki focuses more on realistic-looking appearances. For decades, stereotypes in Japanese manga and anime have referred to the *bishōjo* character (a beautiful girl) to appeal to a male audience and the *bishōnen* character (a beautiful boy) aimed at a female audience. The aim is to spread the attractiveness of Japan and create a product that is appealing to society. In this ideology, young women are depicted as cute, feminine, and fun, and young men are portrayed as handsome with sports talent and high intelligence (Toku, 2015, pp. 111-112). As an example of the opposite of this stereotype, throughout most of *Howl's Moving Castle* movie, Sophie's character lives as an older woman, which goes straight against the idea that women in media should be young and cute.

Studio Ghibli also creates a peaceful atmosphere where characters exist without dialogue, usually in front of nature. For example, characters lie in the meadow (*The Secret World of Arrietty* 0:57:56), eat by the lake (*Howl's Moving Castle* 0:39:16), or draw nature with the wind blowing and birds singing in the background (*When Marnie was there* 0:23:02). This absence of speaking is called *Ma*, i.e., *Moments of silence*. *Ma* is what separates Miyazaki's films from those from the Western world and also other Japanese studios. Whereas other films feel the need to fill the silence, Miyazaki reflects reality through the moments of silence, whose purpose is not to help with the plot progression. It has a function to invite the audience to take a breather, absorb the movie's atmosphere, and think about its effect on the overall perception on a subliminal level (Cavallaro, 2015, p. 65).

Another significant contrast that differentiates Studio Ghibli from other anime is Studio Ghibli's setting. The real-life European locations influenced the places of their creations and are notable in several films—such as the settings of a Scandinavian town in *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), the Mediterranean island in *Porco Rosso* (1992), or the French city, Colmar, in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). Miyazaki and his team even traveled to Sweden to accurately draw the Scandinavian neighborhood but simultaneously balanced reality with fantasy (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 23).

### 3.2.1 Difference in Ghibli heroines and Disney princesses

As mentioned in the previous chapter, most animated heroines are designed to be physically appealing to the viewers. However, visual gratification should not come at the cost of reinforcing the harmful idea that a woman's value rests in her physical appearance. That is the reason why Ghibli films are unique and refreshing compared to some Disney princesses and anime heroines from different studios. Studio Ghibli turns its focus away from the visual character design towards the depiction of emotional complexity, which creates characters that girls and women can relate.

Both Studio Ghibli and Disney have achieved popularity for making animated movies. However, the characterization of female protagonists differs distinctively, especially in movies made in the last century. Ghibli films tend to focus more on the personal growth and emotional journey of the protagonist rather than the traditional fairy tale narrative of a Disney princess. Additionally, Ghibli heroines are often depicted as flawed and complex individuals, while Disney princesses are typically portrayed as more one-dimensional characters who do not achieve a greater awareness of themselves (Davis, 2014, pp. 48-49).

The first generation of Disney princesses, such as *Cinderella* (1950) or *Snow White* (1937), has a typical fairy tale theme presenting women as the weaker sex, the damsels in distress waiting to be rescued by a prince whom they eventually marry and live happily ever after. However, a child audience may get the message that women are emotionally dependent on male characters, and they only gain happiness and fulfillment, when they marry a man.

On the other hand, Studio Ghibli creates a heroine confronted by a challenge and does her best to find a solution herself. Hayo Miyazaki's central protagonists are young girls or adolescent women experiencing the journey, learning from the journey, and in the end, growing as a person. The inspiration behind choosing a courageous and autonomous female protagonist is Miyazaki's mother, who raised him and his brothers (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 29). In one of his interviews, Miyazaki said: "*My female leads are brave, self-sufficient girls. They will need a friend or supporter but never a savior*" (Baritoux, 2017).

Women are often treated as equal to the male protagonists in many Studio Ghibli films perceiving a prominent leadership position. *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) features many powerful women. The magical advisor to the king is a woman and The Witch of the Waste is a powerful and dangerous woman. The main character, Sophie, is far from tolerant and often stands up to Howl for his immaturity and to magical fire Calcifer for his insolence. At the beginning of *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2014), the female lead joins her father on a trip to the house as a borrower for the first time. Though her mother is against the idea, saying it is dangerous for a girl, Arrietty is determined to experience a totally new world. Arrietty shows masculine traits such as confidence and adventurousness. This shows Miyazaki's philosophy about gender roles, that even a woman can represent masculine traits.

The girlhood of Ghibli's heroines has magical, imaginal, and ethereal elements, which make movies more engaging. However, the female leads still seem so real and

relatable. In light of this, another relatable aspect is the absence of beauty standards. Disney princesses and other anime females are often portrayed in a more idealized and romanticized way. They are represented with perfect figures and outstanding facial features with applied makeup. On the contrary, Studio Ghibli emphasizes self-discovery and self-development, with the protagonist usually looking more ordinary (Liu K., Chang, Liu Y., 2022).

Looking at today's anime, Japanese animated characters are still optimized to incite as many positive emotions in the audience as possible through their appearance. The exaggerated femininity, such as short skirts, unnatural large breasts, and big eyes, is still represented in the anime world. On the contrary, gender role portrayal in Disney films has changed to follow new societal expectations. Disney is trying to break ties with previous common stereotypes of women being submissive and represent a strong female lead in the story, who can stand by herself and does not dream about having a love interest (Kakade, Vandana, 2021, p.110).

To illustrate that, in the movie *Brave* (2012), the main character is 16-year-old Merida, characterized as bold, brave, and rebellious. She is skilled in archery and sword-fighting and wishes not to be a princess. Throughout the film, she grows into a more understanding person but remains her true self.

Another character who does not fit the stereotypical princess role is *Moana* (2016). She is a heroine who is strong-willed, fearless, and physically capable. Moana approaches new experiences and fights for what she values. She also experiences self-doubt, which makes her character more real and imperfect.

Although other Japanese anime studios still focus on female physical appearance to attract audiences, the portrayal of gender roles in Disney princess films has changed in recent years. Princesses are becoming closer in character to the heroines of Studio Ghibli. The two

examples above illustrate that Disney has changed its view of portraying gender roles and represents princesses who can be independent, strong-willed, and do not need a love interest in their journey, as in Studio Ghibli's stories.

### 3.2.2 Importance of male characters

While in the previous chapter, the discussion revolves around a depiction of Ghibli's females, this chapter will focus on the importance of male characters in Studio Ghibli films. The chapter answers the question about their importance in the films and what function they hold.

Miyazaki's films deal with gender relations, depicting intriguingly ambivalent characters that frequently transcend stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity. Female characters show masculine traits such as bravery, determination, and assertiveness. On the other hand, males are depicted as supportive, empathic, and emotional. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main leads in his movies are predominantly females, but it does not mean the males are irrelevant to the story. They do not exist to represent the typical hero or have a romantic interest in a female lead; at least, it is not the primary purpose. Male leads function as helpers and supporters and are indispensable in the plot.

One such example can be found in the movie *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2014). A normal-sized male, Sho, is a shy boy with a heart condition. He knows about little people's existence in the house because his mother told him that she often saw little people when she was a little girl living in the house. While Arrietty and her dad, Pod, borrow in the house, Sho sees her for the first time. From then on, Sho and Arrietty often meet and gradually become friends. Sho is protecting her and her family from being found and also brings a new kitchen from the dollhouse into her home. After maid Haru discovers the dwelling of Borrowers under



the floor, she captures Arrietty's mother, Homily, and puts her in a jar in the pantry. Arrietty then asks Sho to help rescue her mother from the maid's captivity and succeed. The motif of the tiny female hero cooperating with the boy to solve a problem and developing a deep connection, which results in friendship, is seen here.

In *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), most of the movie is the main protagonist, Sophie, seen as a 90-year-old due to the spell cast on her by a witch. Her curse is tied to her self-esteem. Throughout the movie, Sophie changes into her younger self for some moments when she feels worthy and confident. The male protagonist, Howl, is shown being emotionally vulnerable with the female protagonist, reminding Sophie of her worth and helping her find purpose in life. Eventually, she breaks the curse by realizing her self-worth and allowing herself to love Howl. Sophie is also the one who breaks Howl's and Calcifer's contract and saves Howl's life.

This proves, that Ghibli's men have strong relationships with the women in their lives, which are portrayed as genuine connections based on mutual respect, understanding, and support. While male-centered heroism is often apparent in other animated films, Studio Ghibli is stepping away from traditional gender-based roles. Ghibli males are depicted with feminine traits such as support, shyness, physical weakness, or getting rescued. In essence, Studio delivers a modern-day version of masculinity to which the male audience can relate.

## 4. Japanese culture in Ghibli anime

Studio Ghibli is known for its beautiful and enchanting animated movies that often showcase various aspects of Japanese culture. From the traditional Japanese architecture in *When Marnie Was There* (2014) to the rural Japanese landscapes in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), the studio has captured the essence of Japan in many of its films. Additionally, the studio often explores themes such as tradition and environmentalism, which are deeply rooted in Japanese society. Studio also references to the Shinto religion in some of his movies, especially shrines and religious objects. Other topics, such as food, kitchen equipment, and etiquette, will also be included in the thesis.

The following chapters will analyze and highlight the elements of Japanese cultural aspects in four film adaptations. Those cultural aspects are chosen for commentary, due to the clear differences compared to the Western world in which the original novels are portrayed. Studio Ghibli's rendering of them is almost magical. Some aspects, such as food and kitchen equipment, are so ordinary that the viewer would not think to focus on them, yet the food is an essential part of Japanese culture and its identity.

### 4.1 Food and kitchen equipment

As previously mentioned, the first Japanese cultural aspects represented in the movies are food and kitchen equipment. Japanese dining and the type of food in a traditional style are very different from European dining. The Japanese cuisine is called *washoku*. *Wa* means Japan, and *Shoku* means to eat (Yoshihiko, 1991, p. 198). The predominant manner of eating is to use chopsticks made primarily from wood or bamboo. There is also an etiquette for eating with chopsticks. Pointing at someone with chopsticks, as well as leaving chopsticks upstanding in a bowl of rice, is taboo. A Japanese-style dinner is centered on white boiled rice

accompanied by soup and side dishes served simultaneously. Japanese food primarily consists of rice, seaweed or miso soup, fish, and vegetables. This diet is nutritious and low in calories (Kochevar, 2001, p. 96). Aside from being a dietary staple, rice has been integral to Japanese culture, history, and cuisine for centuries. It holds deep cultural significance in Japan as a symbol of prosperity, fertility, and good fortune. The Japanese, therefore, include rice in almost every meal. In *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), Sho eats rice with chopsticks, which is separated in a different bowl from meat and vegetables during dinner. Another example of this diet is captured in *When Marnie Was There* (2014), where the family eats a bowl of rice along with miso soup, shrimp, and side dishes using chopsticks to pick up the food. As rice is the staple food in Japan, Europe's primary food elements consist of bread and potatoes. Looking at the meals in the book, which this movie was adapted from, their meals consisted of bread with cheese and pickled onions, sausages, or English brown stew.

The Japanese type of dining is also worth noting. As mentioned in a previous paragraph, meals are separated into different bowls. This allows each meal element to be appreciated individually and helps control and maintain an accurate portion (Ashkenezzi, Jacob, 2003, p. 22).



Figure 1: Japanese dining (*When Marnie Was There*, 2014)

In *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), the food served is Western, but the meals here fulfill a different function, which also falls into the Japanese tradition. The film revolves around the character Sophie, who transformed into a 90-year-old due to a spell. Because she did not want her family to see her like that, she left town—on the way, finding a moving castle and started to work there as a cleaning woman. As the movie begins, we see Sophie lost and miserable, illustrated by the food she eats. She chooses to eat a simple meal of bread and cheese. The more she felt comfortable and accepted in the house, the more nutritious and delicious food she ate with others at the dining table. This example illustrates, that food serves more than just the sole purpose of nourishment. It carries the Japanese tradition of eating and enjoying food together (Chacko, 2019, p. 40). In the movie, the feast consists of delicious food is served when everyone is present at the table.

Another element referring to the Japanese environment is the kitchen equipment. *The Borrowers* is a British novel written by Mary Norton in 1952. Miyazaki changed the movie's name to *The Secret World of Arrietty*, after the main character, because a live adaptation of the same name was already been filmed in 1997 by a British director, Peter Hewitt. The significant difference between the anime adaptation and the book is its time period. The British novel's setting is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Queen Victoria, and *The Secret World of Arrietty* takes place in 2010, the same year the film was first aired.

*The Borrowers* tells the story of the Clock family - Pod, Homily, and their daughter Arrietty, who live under the floor in the house of the elderly Mrs. Sophie and make a living by borrowing household items. When traveling from under the floor to the kitchen, they pass through the gaps between the walls and with nails planted above each other, which function as stairs, allowing them to reach the first floor of the house. They come and go from the self-made sliding little door in the back of the dish cabinet or through a plug socket. Many scenes

occur in the kitchen in both the book and the film. Arrietty and her dad, Pod, borrow food and other helpful materials for their home.

The story in the book takes place in Victorian England, so the kitchen equipment differs from the ones in the movie. Electricity was absent in Victorian households, so fire and gas were the most prevalent lighting methods. Without electricity, cooking was performed on a cast-iron stove with a firebox inside, and the heat radiated around the oven's surface. The book illustrates a picture of the same 19th-century stove (Groft, 2005, p. 19).

On the other hand, the movie is set in the present, so the kitchen in the movie has modern appliances such as refrigerator, blender, and microwave are part of the kitchen. Furthermore, the movie also adds traditional Japanese cooking utensils. The chopstick holders and soy sauce bowls are depicted in closer shots of the kitchen furniture. Among the Clock family's findings is a fish-shaped plastic bottle used for soy sauce in one of the bags, which the family uses as a water container.

The traditional Japanese food and equipment were depicted in only two selected movies. This is due to its setting, because the stories are transferred from England to Japan, so the food and equipment were customized to fit into Japanese households. In *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), the characters eat Western food because of its unchanged setting. However, Miyazaki still incorporated the Japanese tradition of eating, which is enjoying the food together with loved ones.

## 4.2 Architecture and household

The second cultural aspect is traditional architecture and the household. Studio Ghibli movies focus on preserving and defending traditional and cultural heritage against

modernism. Miyazaki often incorporated elements from traditional Japanese architecture into his films to raise awareness of his country's traditional values.

Traditional Japanese architecture is characterized by a preference for natural materials when building a house, mainly wood. Since wood can breathe, it is suitable for the Japanese climate. Wood absorbs moisture in the humid months and releases it when the air is dry. Additionally, residents can sit on the wooden floor without getting cold. The floor of traditional dwellings in Japan is elevated at a certain height above the ground to avoid pests and floods and also for ventilation (Cohen, 1996, p. 18).

The rural housing, called "*minka*", also represents traditional Japanese architecture. Initially, it was the home of a commoner who was not an aristocrat or samurai. Now, *minka* is primarily used to describe farmhouses with heavy wooden structures and thatched roofs (Mehta, Teda, 2005, p. 108). This type of housing appears at the beginning of the movie *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) to illustrate the contrast between picturesque and harmonious countryside against noisy and industrialized city. However, Miyazaki stated that modernization is not necessarily bad, but we must consider how it is used and to what extent (Odell, Le Blanc, 2009, p. 16).

Among the features that apply to most East Asia traditional houses are sliding doors between rooms called *Shoji*, made of latticework wooden frame and covered with translucent paper. Nevertheless, in modern Japan, a household is relatively typical to have *Garasudo*, meaning a glass sliding door with a wooden framework (Chuki, Sarkar, Kurar, 2017, p. 114). For example, *When Marnie Was There* captured the style of both *Shoji* and *Garasudo* doors. Since the book's story takes place in England, the doors here are regular and look the same as in most countries of the world.



Figure 2: Sliding doors (*When Marnie Was There*, 2014)

Another feature of a Japanese household in this movie is wind chimes. A wind chime, called *furin*, is a small bell usually hanging from the porches of Japanese houses in summer. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the most common materials were copper and bronze. Glass chimes gained popularity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are currently the most purchased chimes. *Furin* consists of three parts: a bowl-shaped or bell-shaped exterior called *gaiken*, the clapper called *zetsu* with a colorful strip of paper hanging called the *tanzuku* (Durston, 1997, p. 171). In the past, *Tanzuku* included poems written on them. Today, people write various wishes. In the movie *When Marnie Was There* (2014), the uncle of the main protagonist, Anna, handmade a wind chime and hung up a piece of paper with the word *Norikiru*, translated as "to get through the weather," which should fulfill this wish. When *tanzuku* catches the breeze, the sound of wind chimes promotes a sense of coolness to help overcome Japan's hot and humid summers (*When Marnie Was There* 0:54:05).

Studio Ghibli does not represent only Japanese culture in its movies. Animators also took inspiration from European features and included Western aspects in their movies, especially houses and interiors. For instance, we can see a miniature Victorian-style house built purposely for borrowers in *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), houses and shops on the

streets in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), English brick-built houses standing next to each other in *Earwig and the Witch* (2020), and Marnie's luxurious western-style house and its interior in *When Marnie was there* (2014).

### 4.3 Etiquette

Another characteristic feature of Japan is its unique rules of etiquette. Politeness and proper social behavior are fundamental to Japanese etiquette and differ significantly from the Western world. In the West, shaking hands is a universal form of greeting. Meanwhile, in Japan, the typical non-verbal communicative behavior is bowing. Bowing represents humility and respect, which has been performed since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This practice was introduced by China together with Buddhism (De Mente, 211, p. 37). Bowing as a form of greeting or gratitude was represented in all four animated movies.

Another moral principle for Japanese people is taking care of elders. Traditionally, the Japanese family looks after their aging parents as a matter of course under the Confucian ethic of filial piety. Meiji Civil Code reinforced it in 1898, and under this system, the eldest son was responsible for his elderly parents. Although, in reality, his wife took care of them. This filial obligation compels children to repay their debt of gratitude to their parents and, in return, inherit the family's assets (Lee, 2010, p. 648).

The movie *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) portrays this kind of behavior of taking care of elders. This example is unrelated to the family, but it shows how the Japanese generally behave toward the elderly. The villain in this movie is the Witch of the Waste. She falls in love with wizard Howl, but he leaves her after discovering she uses magic to appear young. After she sees Howl rescuing Sophie from the men harassing her, she curses Sophie to grow old so he does not fall in love with her. After the King's Royal Sorcerer takes away the Witch's power, she returns to her actual age. She goes from a malicious witch to a senile



woman. Afterward, they take her to their home, give her a bed, and even feed her (*Howl's Moving Castle* 1:16:38). In contrast, in the British book, she has not lost her powers and has been killed by Howl at the end of the story. This example indicates how deep-rooted respect for elders is in Japanese culture.

Japan is known for being a formal and hierarchical landscape associated with politeness, which is also evident in its language. The Japanese language has many degrees of politeness depending on the person's status or age. The language has many honorific suffixes for addressing people. The common ones include *-sama* and *-san*, which are gender-neutral. The only difference is that *-sama* is used with a person who is older or has a higher ranking in society, and *-san* is usually used between equals of any age, also equivalent to *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, or *Miss*. An informal honorific, mainly used for young males is *-kun*, and *-chan*, which primarily applies to young females (Chan, Wong 2017, 492, 493). For instance, Anna Sasaki is called by her aunt *Anna-chan* in *When Marnie Was There* (2014), and Earwig calls her friend from the orphanage *Custardo-kun* in *Earwig and the Witch* (2020). Also, in *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), Sho's aunt calls her maid *Haru-san*, but in the book, she calls her *Mrs. Driver*, which is a common honorific in the West.

#### 4.4 Religion

Religion is not a prominent theme in Studio Ghibli films, but some of their movies do draw on elements of Shintō and Buddhist beliefs. Buddhism and Shintoism are the dominant religions in Japan but differ from each other. Buddhism is originally a foreign religion centered around the teachings of the Buddha, who taught that the ultimate purpose of life is to achieve enlightenment and escape the cycle of birth and rebirth. Buddhism emphasizes meditation, self-discipline, and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion (Bocking, 2004, 266).

On the other hand, Shintoism is a native Japanese religion focused on shrine-worship and devotion to the ubiquitous *kami*. *Kami* are not visible to the human eye; they are spirits or gods, that reside on sacred places and inside various natural objects such as rocks, trees, or rivers. Shintoism emphasizes purity, simplicity, and the importance of living harmoniously with nature. Shintō customs include paying respect at shrines by praying and sometimes leaving offerings (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 21).

Other cultural artifacts are *stone lanterns*. A stone lantern is a religious object that symbolizes a lotus lantern for offering fire to Buddha. Those lanterns were portrayed on the small garden bridge in the movie *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010). Those lanterns are used in Buddhist and Shinto shrines or for domestic usage. The object is divided into five pieces; each represents one element. The bottom piece, touching the ground, represents *chi* (the earth), the following sections represent *sui* (water) and *ka* (fire), while the last two sections represent *fū* (air) and *kū* (spirit), which are pointing towards the sky. The segments express that a person's physical body will return to its original, elemental form after death (Parent, 2015).

In the movie *When Marnie Was There* (2014) is a scene, where Anna and her friend Hiromasa visit a shrine on a Japanese holiday called *Tanabata*. The path to the shrine is through a traditional Japanese gate called *torii*, which symbolizes a transition from the mundane to the sacred world (Kalman, 2009, p. 14). The shrine is located in a forest and has a tranquil atmosphere. The shrine symbolizes a connection to nature and the spiritual realm, a common theme in many Studio Ghibli films. The scene also highlights the importance of respecting and preserving natural spaces, as the shrine is shown to be a place of reverence and sanctity.



Figure 3: Path to the shire (*When Marnie Was There*, 2014)

Ghibli's films do not explicitly refer to Shintō, but its customs are enshrined within Japanese culture. Miyazaki himself does not profess any religion, but he is influenced by Shinto practices, which are closely linked to environmentalism. Therefore, he often incorporates religious practices and objects into his films or draws attention to ecological issues.

#### 4.5 Tradition

Great Britain and Japanese traditions are vastly different from each other. Great Britain is a country with a long and rich history, which is reflected in its traditions. It is known for its royal family, tea-drinking culture, and literature. On the other hand, Japan is a country that has preserved its traditional culture while embracing modernity. Shintoism and Buddhism heavily influence Japanese traditions and value respect, harmony, and hierarchy (Hartz, 2009, p. 54). They have a unique tea ceremony, calligraphy, and anime industry. Additionally, Japan has a strong martial arts culture with traditional sports like sumo, wrestling, and karate. Overall, while both countries have their unique traditions, they are vastly different from each other.

While the Japanese lifestyle has been westernized in the last decades, Japanese people still do everything possible to preserve their rich cultural heritage. For example, a well-known tradition in Japan is dressing in a *kimono* or *yukata*. Even though those clothes were worn on a daily basis in the past, they are still used today for celebrations such as holidays, weddings, funerals, or tea ceremonies. Wearing a *yukata* was depicted in the movie *When Marnie was There* (2014) while celebrating the previously mentioned holiday called *Tanabata*, also called *Star Festival*. The holiday celebrates the reunion of deities Orihime and Hikoboshi and takes place on the seventh day of the seventh month. Along with the *yukata*, people also wear wooden flip-flops and hang small pieces of paper with wishes on the tree, called *tanzuku*. People also carry hanging lanterns at night, which are said to bring good luck (Ashkenazi, 1993, p. 21).



Figure 4: Traditional clothing "yukata" (*When Marnie Was There*, 2014)

Nowadays, Japan combines both tradition and modernity. In a world where technology overshadows cultural heritage, Japan still holds close to its traditions and celebrates them. Miyazaki considers preserving traditions an essential part of Japanese culture, which is why he portrays traditional Japanese customs in his films. Miyazaki's goal is to make people more

aware of Japanese traditions and realize how important it is to maintain traditions during modernization (Heise, 2017, p. 117).

#### 4.5.1 Japanese names

Japanese name order is different from that of the West. The Japanese and all other East Asians place the family name first, then the given name follows. Although it is taken for granted today, a Japanese person did not have his surname until 1868. The right to own a surname was only a privilege of the aristocracy. After introducing the general obligation to choose a surname in 1868, people usually chose one related to their occupation or place of living (Power, 2008, p. 4).

Japanese is a polysyllabic language, meaning that one word often has two or three syllables, such as クラス (ku-ra-su), meaning class. However, single-syllable words, such as 日 (hi) translates as a day, also exist. The ancient Japanese did not feel the need to distinguish between consonants and vowels in writing and developed a phonetic syllabary, not an alphabet. They developed two exactly parallel syllabaries - *hiragana*, which is the main one, and *katakana*, using it for writing in italics or foreign words and names in Japanese. Hiragana indicates the correct reading, printed beside the character; in this usage, it is called *furigana*. Furigana helps Japanese children and foreigners learn how to pronounce every character. (Power, 2008, p. 5).

Parents are not restricted by any list of permitted names when choosing names. The possibilities are unlimited, but the only condition is to choose from existing characters and choose from around 2000 of them. Besides that, every Japanese name has its meaning. In the Western world, parents name their child after a family member, celebrity, or just because they like it. In Japan, parents mainly consider the meaning of a name when picking a name.

Hayao Miyazaki is known for his passion for creating stories that transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. He sometimes modifies the pronunciation of English names to make them sound more natural in Japanese. When the films are set in Western or European-inspired settings, he keeps the original English names for all characters. For this reason, he decided not to change any of the characters' names in the film *Howl's Moving Castle*, because the story takes place in Europe. In the other two movies, some of the names were changed to Japanese ones to reflect the story's setting, which takes place in Japan.

Three out of the four main characters' names were unchanged from their original English names. However, some other characters' names were changed to Japanese ones. In *Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), three characters have Japanese names: the maid, Mrs. Driver, is changed to Haru; Arrietty's friend Sho is named Shawn in the book; and Sho's aunt Sophie is introduced as Sadako. Miyazaki changes even five names in *When Marnie Was There* (2014). The first one is Priscilla to Sayako, a girl who moved with her family to the house where Marnie lived; a childhood friend of Marnie, Penelope Gill, was changed to Hayako; Anna's aunt, Mrs. Preston to Yoriko; fisherman Wuntermenny to Toichi and Sandra to Nobuko, with whom Anna goes to the *Star festival*. The name change in both films is due to a shift of the story setting from England, where the story originally takes place, to Japan. The names thus fit more into its environment.

The only exception, when the main character's name is changed to a Japanese one, is in the movie *Earwig and The Witch* (2020), a computer-generated animation directed by Miyazaki's son - Gorō Miyazaki, under the Studio Ghibli brand. Aya Tsuru (Earwig or Erica Wigg in the English version) lived in an orphanage until a witch adopted her to use her as "an extra set of hands" to work around the house. By dividing her name, we get the word *aya*, which means beautiful in Japanese, and *tsuru*, which means crane. Using the word separately

means "a beautiful crane," but using it all together as "ayatsuru" means "to manipulate," and manipulation was part of her personality.

There is no explanation for why Miyazaki changed the character's name to the Japanese name Aya Tsuru, even though the story takes place in England. Another question is why the only name that was changed was hers. The director might have changed the name because the meaning of the name Aya Tsuru suits her character more accurately due to her behavior.

#### 4.6 Nature

Another theme in Ghibli's anime is environmentalism, or how humankind interacts with nature. As discussed in the previous chapter, environmental concerns are closely related to Japan's indigenous religion, Shintō, which sees gods and spirits in every natural element, resulting in a respect for harmony between humans and nature. Besides, Japan is an island country that often faces natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. Therefore, Japanese people worship and appreciate nature even more (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 15).

In Ghibli's films, climate plays a vital role for aesthetic, emotional, or thematic reasons. Furthermore, the weather is often used to reflect the characters' feelings. The climate, together with the feelings, changes as the characters experience sad and happy moments throughout their journey. For example, in the movie *When Marnie Was There*, the weather is gradually changing due to the character's self-development and getting rid of the feeling of loneliness. At the beginning of the movie, the weather is gloomy, which reflects the character's mood in the sense of being lonely and misunderstood by others (*When Marnie Was There* 0:05:28). With time, the sky starts getting brighter when she meets her first friend. As she faced feelings of inferiority and loneliness along the way, the sky darkened, and rain

began to fall (*When Marnie Was There* 1:14:12). In the end, when she finds her true self and removes her fears, the pinkish-orange sky occurs, along with the shining sun whose sunbeams fell on and the sparkling surface of the ocean. As soon as the weather brightened, so did she (*When Marnie Was There* 1:36:37).



*Figure 5: Anna feeling lonely (When Marnie Was There, 2014)*



*Figure 6: Anna with a friend (When Marnie Was There, 2014)*



In *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), nature is also an essential theme throughout the movie. In this film, the weather also depicts the characters' mood. When Sophie was depressed or in despair, the weather became gloomy or rained (*Howl's Moving Castle* 0:47:52). The blue sky full of clouds appeared at joyful or restful moments (*Howl's Moving Castle* 0:39:13).

With these examples, it can be said that the weather is not just a backdrop; it is a storyteller reflecting a character's emotions by visually externalizing them, thereby immersing the audience in the character's feelings even more.

Furthermore, the film *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) showcases the beauty and power of nature, along with the impact humans have on it. The landscape around the castle is lush and verdant, with rolling hills and a picturesque lake. However, we also see evidence of environmental destruction when Sophie and Howl journey through a wasteland-like area caused by a war. The war theme is not included in a British book, Miyazaki specially incorporated it to illustrate war's damaging impact. The film contains anti-war themes and is profoundly affected by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Le Blanc, Colin, Odell, 2009, p. 95). Hayao Miyazaki was interviewed in the US magazine *Newsweek* in 2005, and he expressed his views on this war: "*Actually, your country had just started the war against Iraq, and I had a great deal of rage about that*" (Gordon, 2005).

#### 4.6.1 Emotional moments in front of nature

As already stated, the feelings of the characters and the climate are interconnected in the films. In addition, Ghibli also sets emotional scenes in front of nature. In a depiction of two anime movies, the most emotional scenes are displayed in or in front of the forest.

The first movie, *When Marnie Was There* (2014), displays the most touching moment when Anna finds out that the girl she is seeing and befriends is the imagination of her late grandma. After her parents died, her grandmother raised her for a year and told her stories about her life as a little girl before she passed. When she remembered, she was standing on the balcony of her relative's house, looking at the forest ahead and crying. Anna realized she was never abandoned by her family and no longer felt unwanted (*When Marnie Was There* 1:36:02)

A parting between friends occurs in the movie *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2014). Measuring 5 inches tall, Arrietty and her family live under the floor until they have to move out after the maid discovers their existence. At the movie's end, Arrietty and her parents leave the house and travel to find where their relatives live. Before that, she had to part ways with her friend, who supplied them with new items from the dollhouse, helping them hide and eventually running away from the house. On the day of departure, Sho and Arrietty say farewell, and he tells Arrietty that she has given him the courage to live again. Arrietty then gives Sho a parting gift: her hair clip as a memory. At dawn, they part ways in the forest, and Arrietty and her parents float down the river in a kettle to look for their lost family (*The Secret World of Arrietty* 1:30:12). In the book, a little boy helped family to escape but did not get a chance to say goodbye to Arrietty. The Ghibli adaptation changed the ending to be more emotional, thus showing how strong the bond between them is by giving them a chance to say goodbye properly.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Arrietty and her parents must flee because a human discovers their existence. Thereby, Miyazaki wanted to point out a global environmental issue of biodiversity and a species in danger, the ongoing loss caused by humanity (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 124). This topic is linked to Arrietty and Sho's dialogue in the

meadow. He refers to a changing environment and how species are dying out, saying that the same fate awaits Arriety and her family. Realizing that her species might be truly endangered, she gets very emotional and even starts to cry (*The Secret World of Arriety* 1:00:34). Sho tells her this information in the movie with concern, but he makes fun of it in the book (Norton, 1953, p. 87), which is something that Studio Ghibli would not include in their films, as they do not take environmental issues lightly.

Overall, Studio Ghibli films connect the natural world to the characters' strong emotions and also draw attention to environmental issues. By highlighting the importance of nature, Miyazaki's films encourage viewers to appreciate and protect the natural world.

## 5. Conclusion

The main goal of the bachelor's thesis was to highlight how Studio Ghibli incorporated Japanese culture into four selected anime films adapted from British books. The movies stay true to the original books but add their own unique twist, resulting in a fresh and exciting take on the stories. It is evident that most Japanese cultural aspects are shown in the movies *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010) and *When Marnie Was There* (2014), where Miyazaki changed its setting to Japan and could thus incorporate more Japan-related features. Nevertheless, observing those aspects and Miyazaki's beliefs in the other two films was still possible.

As previously concluded, Studio also frequently features strong, independent females who challenge traditional gender roles. Miyazaki broke free from the traditional concept of female heroines and proved that even strong and emancipated women can take men's places. Therefore, the work also discussed the differences between Ghibli heroines, Disney princesses, and other anime female characters, showing how Ghibli protagonists differ from the mainstream presentation of women in the animation industry.

In conclusion, Studio Ghibli movies offer a unique and insightful perspective on Japanese culture, focusing on nature and its emphasis on environmental issues, etiquette, tradition, and even personal growth. These cultural themes are woven throughout the films, providing viewers with a rich and immersive experience. Whether it is visiting a temple in *When Marnie Was There*, or a journey to self-discovery in *Howl's Moving Castle*, Studio Ghibli films offer valuable insights into Japan's cultural values and beliefs, which can broaden our perspective and help us respect and appreciate different cultures.

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