


Hayao Miyazaki's Mythic Poetics: Experiencing the Narrative Persuasions in *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Ponyo*

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Cheng-Ing Wu

National Dong-Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan

Abstract

Some of Miyazaki's mythic narratives, rendered within dreamlike figurations, are certainly not detached fantasy. The director portrays relatable human actions and a reasonable amount of setbacks during the (heroic) spectating process. Miyazaki's animated realm infuses the audience with a bright outlook for the future. His narratives are often based upon graphical details and a calculated emplotment. The present study proposes reading Miyazaki's animated tales by means of the audience's internal projection onto the signs in the film frame. In this article, the narrative highlights that render *Spirited Away* (2001) an archetypal quest will be discussed. Finally, the article examines the narrative oscillation in *Ponyo* (2008). Alluding to Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological perspective, the study aims to look into the textual aspects of the three cases, demonstrates how Miyazaki renders the film frame to exert persuasive impact upon the audience, and describes Hayao Miyazaki's persuasive artistry.

Keywords

anime, emplotment, Hayao Miyazaki, heroic tales, *Howl's Moving Castle*, narrative analysis, *Ponyo*, reader-oriented reading, *Spirited Away*

Introduction

This article aims to look into the narrative renderings and emplotment of Hayao Miyazaki's animated feature films. Miyazaki's stories may be regarded as modern mythic narratives and some of the cases discussed are rendered as archetypal. According to Carl Gustav Jung, mythic narratives

Corresponding author:

Cheng-Ing Wu, National Dong-Hwa University, Department of English, No. 1, Sec. 2, Da Hsueh Road, Shoufeng, Hualien, ROC 97401, Taiwan.

Email: chengyingwu@outlook.com

contain archetypes that bear ‘an inheritance of symbolic representations common to all humanity’ (Walter, 2008: 11). As the present study aims to show, archetypal stories might help encourage readers to make sense of the films themselves and to have their own thoughts about the imitated actions. Through thought-experimenting actions in an animated tale, one may come to better understand similar actions in the real world. An animated archetypal story nourishes the spectating process by inviting ontological practices, and readers’ responses might be rich in psychological manifestations.

According to Joseph Campbell’s study of world mythology in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), most mythic tales share one inherent narrative structure: the monomyth.¹ Mythic heroes depart from their homeland and embark on a journey that enhances their knowledge and experiences. In the process of accomplishing the task, the hero or heroine undergoes trials, receives rewards, and may obtain important messages. The hero or heroine then returns to his or her homeland to restore the initial order. For the audience, the heroic journey may be perceived during the reading activity as an inward projection (Bachelard, 2011: 3) and this is important as many of us experience similar trials to those represented in the story.² In an animated film, viewers may project their partial self into the animated character in order to experience the story (Ricoeur, 1991: 34). By seeing the character conquer the monster and complete the quest, viewers may experience a cathartic moment. Having been cleansed, they may return to the real world emotionally refreshed. Thus, an animated tale can be considered a special medium, having a profound effect on its viewer.

According to Campbell (1949: 18): ‘Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche.’ Miyazaki’s mythic poetics is certainly not detached fantasy. The director portrays accessible human actions and a reasonable amount of setbacks during the spectating process. Miyazaki’s animated realm infuses the audience with a bright outlook for the future. His narrative perspective, actively engaging the audience, is often based upon graphical detail and calculated emplotment. The present study proposes to read Miyazaki’s animated tales by means of the audience’s internal projection. Dream, myths and heroic tales are frequently found in animated films. These stories are rendered with ‘dreamlike figurations’ (Campbell, 1949: 27). They may seem unreal upon initial viewing, and the dense images in the film frame may require more of the audience’s attention in making sense of them. Animated tales, in a hermeneutic light, are interpretation-friendly objects that address a global audience by means of an abbreviated³ form of mimesis (Ricoeur, 1976: 41).⁴

According to Hauke and Alister (2001: 2):

... cinema offers both a means and a space to witness the psyche – almost literally in projection. Cinema films deliver a contemporary experience set apart from ‘daily life’... Cinema has the possibility of becoming an imaginal space – a *temenos* – and by engaging with films a version of active imagination is stimulated which can then engage the unconscious – potentially in as successful a fashion as our conscious attention to dream imagery and other fantasies.

Archetypal stories or mythic narratives are metaphorical texts distanced from the reader–audience’s present reality. Although distant, these stories reflect universal human actions, compelling characters and an imaginatively habitable world. In this article, we will discuss the narrative highlights that render *Spirited Away* (2001) as an archetypal quest. Then we examine the trope of the human psyche as spatial in *Howl’s Moving Castle* (2004), considering how the cinematic space of the castle is an optimized symbol of Howl’s psyche. Finally, we examine the narrative oscillation in *Ponyo* (2008). The study aims to look into the textual aspects of the three cases to see how these stories are rendered as interpretation-friendly objects, and to describe Hayao Miyazaki’s persuasive artistry.

The heroic poetics of *Spirited Away*

The first scene of the film establishes Chihiro as an immature subject and the Ogino family's penetration of a liminal realm. The film opens with a shot of Chihiro's flower bouquet and a medium close-up of Chihiro lying on the backseat of the family car, languid as if just awakening from sleep. While driving, the parents signal to their daughter to look out of the window to see her new school. Chihiro sits up and sticks her tongue out, showing her dislike. This scene corresponds to Miyazaki's observation of a type of young girl who seems un-stimulated by the everyday life. The task of the film is therefore to 'inflate Chihiro's otherwise weak sense of self' (Miyazaki, 2008: 197–198).

After passing into Yubaba's world, the family comes to a restaurant but finds no owner. They decide to sit and eat but Chihiro refuses, strolls along the street and arrives at the bathhouse. On the bridge, Haku warns Chihiro to turn back to their world. When Chihiro returns to her parents, they have metamorphosed into pigs. The ensuing shots heighten the pathos of the heroine's isolated situation: Chihiro drags her father's sleeve to urge him home; a close-up of her father's pig-head; Chihiro's shocked expression; a medium shot of the father being whipped to the ground by a shadowy entity; another close-up of the father's moaning pig-head; and then Chihiro yells helplessly for her parents in a street filled with shadowy entities. Trying to turn back, Chihiro finds the pasture saturated with water and is on the edge of a nervous breakdown, denying what is before her eyes and believing it must have been a dream. Here the director appeals to pathos by evoking the childhood fear of getting lost and being cast into the unknown. Not only does the heroine experience isolation but she also witnesses her parents being assaulted. She is deprived of parental protection, which is definitely traumatic to a young mind. Yet this devastation heralds Chihiro's possible path towards maturation. The initial devastation is an event embedded within the narrative employment, preparing the spectator for the final catharsis. In this light, Miyazaki's visual poetics is highly structured and saturated with symbolic images to add to the pathos on the part of the spectator.

Chihiro's quest in Yubaba's world is an individual one. After being guided by Haku into the bathhouse, Chihiro is required to secure a job from Yubaba, who changes Chihiro's name to Sen (I will refer to her as Chihiro). Chihiro must ascend to Yubaba's office through Kamaji's boiler room, and before the passage to Kamaji, Chihiro's efforts are foregrounded in the film frame by an abrupt and long ladder climb. This scene bears symbolic significance representing a person's efforts towards maturity. As Jolande Jacobi (2012: 334) employs in his psycho-therapeutics, mountains or ladder climbing recur as oneiric motifs.⁵ One must undergo such challenges unaided, in order to dramatize the dream-patient's effort and struggled experience in the real world. This climbing mirrors the passage to personal growth, and we empathize with Chihiro's hesitations in taking the first step and feel her struggles. These graphical and narrative details gradually infiltrate the audience's experience, guiding them slowly into Miyazaki's animated realm. As will be shown later in the film, Chihiro will undertake an even greater challenge with ease, which serves as the evidence of both her maturation and of the director's focus on the projected quest for internal individuation.⁶

Frequently, Miyazaki is inclined to highlight Chihiro's insecure position by contrasting the heroine's miniscule stature with gigantic spirits. Along her way to Yubaba's office, Chihiro takes the elevator with a Radish Spirit. The enormous bulk squeezes Chihiro into a corner of the elevator, adding to the heroine's fragile, minute, oppressed, and vulnerable state of being. In Yubaba's office, Chihiro is threatened and poked at by the gigantic-headed witch. When baby Boh⁷ first meets Chihiro, he also threatens the heroine, commanding her to stay and be his playmate or he will break her tiny arm. Judging from these scenarios, the director places the heroine within an environment full of potential hazards that put the little girl constantly on guard. Chihiro is required to adapt to a new environment. She needs to work to please the customers and to earn Yubaba's recognition

through labor, all of which affirms her personal process of socialization to the institutional system of the bathhouse.⁸ Internally, she can no longer rely on her former self, and she needs to affirm her strength in order to survive in the foreign place. As a laboring young female subject, Chihiro may resonate with the audience who may undergo similar difficult processes.

Haku is an important guide and mediator for Chihiro in Yubaba's world. After Chihiro obtains a position in the bathhouse, Haku takes her to see her parents. After the previous interpersonal frictions, the anime presents exuberantly detailed images of flowers and cabbage fields. The two heroes arrive at the hoggery, and Chihiro promises to save her parents. Outside the hoggery, Haku returns Chihiro's clothes and the bouquet card written with her birth name Chihiro Ogino. Haku requires Chihiro to keep her name in case she fails to recall it – she was renamed as Sen by Yubaba in a contract – and thus not find her way home. He gives Chihiro three rice-balls, and after eating them, she bursts into tears. Haku is not a participant in Chihiro's journey, but he gives practical guidance to Chihiro. The heroine's emotional outbreak is carefully embedded within the overall plotment. Since entering into Yubaba's world, Chihiro has suffered many unexpected pains: anxiety over losing her parents; confusion about the cause and a solution; alienation as a foreigner; and challenges to her inexperience. Miyazaki carefully and patiently leads us through these processes, and Chihiro releases all her negative emotions thanks to Haku's warm guidance. This scene has a strong impact upon the audience, since Chihiro is perceived as a subject projected on the film frame for the audience to sympathize with. This idyllically soothing scene gives the heroine and the audience time to digest the previously experienced setbacks so that both parties can rise up to the challenges that follow.

After seeing her parents, Chihiro is refreshed by Haku's guidance and ready to work. At the workplace, before her first success, she is still a fragile subject and it is through her successful attendance to the Stink God that her sense of self begins to grow. From that point onwards, Chihiro's inner strength – a force she could not have imagined (Miyazaki, 2008: 198) – emerges. During work time, Chihiro blocks other colleagues' way to the punch cards. Her slowness in mopping the floor is sharply contrasted with other young co-working apprentices. She has a difficult time wringing mopping-rags. When filling the bath, Chihiro later inadvertently lets No-face enter into the bathhouse. During her first day at work, she is also tasked with the drudgery of cleaning the grand bathing room with Rin, scrubbing the tub and cleaning up the dried herbs on the ground. These detailed, nitty-gritty actions in Chihiro's working life add to the audience's vicarious experience of being-in-the-film-world. These actions render authentic the heroine's personal journey and process of maturation. To adopt Napier's (2005: 164) notion, Chihiro's prosaic hard-working actions are anchored in Yubaba's fantastic world. These actions are not at all detached, but authentic and accessible to the audience's genuine experience.

Trying to pour more water, Chihiro inadvertently falls into the tub, and the gods hold her up. Chihiro feels a handle stuck in the body of the Stink God. Hearing this, Yubaba descends – offering Chihiro and Rin a robe – and requires all the attendants to draw out the handle, and tons of wasted metals are released from the body of the Stink God. The amount of released waste far exceeds the bulk of the god in the film frame. The sharp contrast of juxtaposing the excessive amount of waste and the minor bulk of the god is a narrative act of persuasion frequently employed by the director. This frame certainly has a direct impact on the audience. It invites the audience's response to the excessive filth to instill an awareness of the polluted condition of the river water. After the waste is released from his system, the god reverts to his original persona as the river god, enclosing Chihiro with his cleansed, watery body. This is also a symbolic cleansing of Chihiro (Boyd and Nishimura, 2004; Reider, 2005; Wei, 2013: 155). After surviving this trial, Chihiro is given a cinematic baptism in an enclosure of sacred water. This ritual heralds Chihiro's growing confidence, psychological maturation and social recognition from the people of the bathhouse.

At night after work, Chihiro and Rin return to the dorm. The two sit facing the immense ocean. When the lamp is dimmed, the scene is filled with moonlight, and the night sky and images of ocean water are contrasted with the previous activity, with nostalgic music in the background. The scene is juxtaposed with a train quickly moving through the vast ocean. This scene, an imaginative rendering of the water and night, serves as a visual-theatrical relief for the characters and the audience. Not participating in flattering the enlarged No-face character, Chihiro tries to climb the pipelines up to Yubaba's chamber to save Haku. This scene parallels her previous encounter with the ladder, and serves as evidence of her growth and her increased sense of courage. All her previously clumsy gestures are diminished by this audacious trespass of the pipelines.⁹ Asking for help from Kamaji, Chihiro is determined to return the stamp to Zeniba to help Haku recover. Despite Kamaji's warning that there is no going back from this trip, Chihiro takes Kamaji's train ticket and embarks on her journey.

According to Miyazaki (2001), the train scene to Zeniba is the most important scene in the film.¹⁰ This scene is important in that it mirrors the grander whole – Chihiro's hard-working days in Yubaba's world to save her parents.¹¹ This event is integral to the whole of Chihiro's heroic journey, and at the same time individual in its own right. Each shot of this scene carries a basic unit of meaning adding to Chihiro's journey. Chihiro boards the train, giving the ticket to the train conductor. This medium close-up does not include the conductor's head. The conductor and passengers' anonymity foregrounds the focused quality of the journey. The passengers do not wear flamboyant costumes like those in the bathhouse but plain, functional clothes, and they are faceless and shadowy in form. Like Chihiro, they do nothing but focus on their own travel. Their identities, viewed also by the audience, are external to Chihiro's pursuit, and to the audience expectation towards the end.

This scene marks the temporal linearity of the event (the heroic journey, or one's process of becoming in pursuit of a goal): the waiting time, or the passing of time, constitutes one required element in such a process. The train arrives at one stop from the right side of the film frame, and then departs for the next from the left side of the same frame. The passengers come and go as the day turns from bright to dusk. The train scene evokes a sense of nostalgia and the musical score is low in tone. Silence permeates the train. As time passes, the train carries fewer and fewer passengers; it is not crowded like the bathhouse, and the visual sparseness intensifies the weariness of the character. The scene is composed of many long shots of singular objects: immense ocean waters, an individual island, one cottage, one tree and sporadic passengers. These elements highlight the quality of personal growth through individual efforts and the passing of time. These are integral to Miyazaki's narrative.

The sequence includes perspective shots from the train towards the passing bus stops. Near the end of the trip, only Chihiro, No-Face, Boh and Yubaba's crow-minion remain on board and no one talks on the train. Chihiro is deep in thought, seeming more reserved now towards what is taking place around her, as she is more experienced than her initial entrance into this world. Miyazaki takes comprehensive care of and appeals to the pathos of the lonely process of being responsible for one's own choice by juxtaposing solitary objects and a nostalgic musical score. The views outside show passers-by, who are comparatively trivial in terms of Chihiro's personal pursuit for greater goals like returning the stamp to Zeniba, or finding a remedy for Haku's injury and a way of bringing her parents back.

Chihiro and her companions arrive at the witch Zeniba's cottages. Zeniba bursts into laughter as Chihiro stamps a leech-like creature to death – the leech is an element of Yubaba's magic to control Haku. Zeniba confesses that she can offer no help for bringing back Chihiro's parents, nor can she help Haku retrieve his name and memory, as this is only possible through Chihiro's own efforts. Zeniba says: 'What has happened cannot be forgotten. You just cannot remember them', urging

Chihiro to dig deeper into her inner self to trace her own memory, adding an internal dimension to her quest. Haku arrives at Zeniba's cottage and takes Chihiro up to the bathhouse and as Chihiro bids farewell to Zeniba, she recalls her true name. Chihiro not only breaks loose from Yubaba's binding contract but regains a better understanding of herself. On Haku's back, ascending into the air, Chihiro recalls a childhood memory of accidentally falling into water. On remembering, Chihiro utters the name of the river, which in turn unshackles Haku from his dragon persona and form. Towards the end of the film, narrative closure is satisfied by the two projected heroes – Chihiro the *anima* wearing red and Haku the *animus* wearing blue – who have regained control of their true names and of themselves. Having passed Yubaba's test, Chihiro has earned the recognition of her other colleagues in the bathhouse. At the frog-fountain, Haku suggests Chihiro doesn't look back, then she returns to her world with her parents.

In *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki does not indoctrinate his audience with the film's animistic highlights (Thomas, 2012: 123). The director leads the audience into Yubaba's world and asks the audience to sympathize with Chihiro; his acts of narrative persuasion are mediated with authentic life experience, universal human actions, and scrupulous animated pictorial imagery. *Spirited Away* serves as a heroic tale for the audience to consider. The film demonstrates Chihiro's individual transformation, from her hard work as an apprentice in the bathhouse, serving the Stink God, finding the courage to ascend to Yubaba's chamber, confronting the monstrous No-face, and being willing to embark on a no-return journey for her loved ones. These events highlight Chihiro's growing sense of self. She is well aware that, before finally saving her parents, she needs to make compromises in Yubaba's institutional system. Chihiro learns to withstand pressure, labor, and challenges. The anime leads the audience through this process so that we may be convinced (and may be emotionally cleansed to believe) that a reasonable amount of setbacks along one's own path towards a specific goal will lead to good results and personal growth.

The poetic space in *Howl's Moving Castle*

This section examines the animated poetics of space in *Howl's Moving Castle*. It will foreground how the cinematic castle-space is created as a symbol of Howl's psyche, a complex symbol that links together Howl's inner beast, childhood memory and internal conflicts. Howl's microcosm is subject to the macrocosmic threats of war in the narrative. The poetics of space renders visible the evolution of the young adult psyche, the desire for a home, and the threat of war. As Bachelard (2011: 75) writes: 'the house that is oneirically complete is one of the vertical schemata of human psychology.'¹² The chamber is frequently used as a motif in Miyazaki's representational strategy. The cinematic chamber may be perceived in Jungian psychoanalytic terms as an oneiric trope revealing aspects of the human psyche (Hamilton, 2014: 39).

There is much in evidence pointing to how the castle's material features reflect the psyche: the castle is powered by the fire demon Calcifer – the embodied form of Howl's heart, located in the central power source of the castle. Then, we learn about the neglected condition of the castle after Sophie's first arrival. Carrying the age spell, Sophie staggers from her hometown through the mountain trails, and she finds the moving castle on one bleak mountaintop in the evening. The audience is led by Sophie's perspective to experience the sublime mountain landscapes during daytime and thus feels the elder's labor in following the moving castle. Before Sophie's entrance, the audience imagines the effort involved in negotiating the wilderness. Upon Sophie's entrance, the interior of the castle is dimmed. The audience is guided into the static core of the castle; the ceiling is covered with cobwebs, the carpet tattered, and the desk piled with dusty grimoires, herbs and beakers. The audience feels relaxed, with Sophie enjoying the phenomenal warmth – and

the soothing sounds of the burning coal – of the hearth, Calcifer. Calcifer promises to break the witch's age spell on Sophie if the heroine in return clarifies the nature of Howl's pact with Calcifer. Sophie's initial arrival familiarizes the audience with the castle via seeing Markl selling magic powders and receiving recruitment letters, and Sophie trying out portals, cooking breakfast, cleaning, and doing laundry. As Sophie becomes more acquainted with Howl, she gets to see more of the castle, she is the privileged agent who can travel freely inside the structure.

The dusty interior symbolizes Howl's dusty psyche. As Markl reveals after Sophie's arrival, no one but his master Howl can put Calcifer to work. The fact that Sophie is only the second person capable of giving Calcifer orders implies Sophie's intimate relationship with Howl. Sophie is thus granted access to Howl's internal psyche. By tending to the internal affairs of the castle, Sophie gradually grows more attached to its members by performing some domestic actions. The scene just described confirms Napier's (2005: 164) description that Miyazaki's style of the fantastic is prosaically anchored in psychological realism. Miyazaki demystifies Howl's magical characterizations by allowing Sophie's criticism: 'Is this really a castle? It looks more like a tattered house.' Howl, like everyone else, is constituted by universal human traits that invite our identification. He is not portrayed as the kind of almighty wizard who can place everything in order with just a flip of fingers. He is not only burdened by the responsibility of protecting his nation but also by the need to clean up his own room. The castle also changes its interior structure along with Howl's mood. When he accidentally dyes his hair the wrong color, his heartbreak and internal darkness spread and the building begins to twist. Howl's emotions are visually represented through the castle's altering structure.

Howl and Sophie are hunted by the forces of Suliman. After Suliman's attack, Howl returns to the castle at night bearing wounds and this is when Sophie gains a second access to Howl's inner chamber. She dreams of walking through a tunnel which leads to Howl's room. The original room decor is all scattered across muddy paths. Due to fighting the war and Suliman's incessant hunting, Howl's external weariness corresponds to the internal jumbled condition of the castle. The heroine's entrance into the psyche of the hero is ambiguously anchored within the heroine's dream, which is not made explicit by the director.

At the end of the muddled tunnel, Sophie sees a gigantic raven which bears rich symbolic significance and could be explored with Carl G Jung's interpretation of dreams. The semi-zoomorphism of the dreamer-patient symbolizes the not-yet integrated animality (Jaffe, 2012: 264–265). A raven is also the darker symbolic aspect of the human psyche, a form of animal that embodies Howl's internal conflicts. The black color symbolizes the *nigredo* – the dark, crude and base substance in alchemy (Lennihan, 2001: 60).¹³ The *nigredo* symbolizes Howl's psychic part that waits to be refined. We witness the inward beast via the heroine's perspective. The dark raven-plumes, Howl's dark hair, the pact with demon and dark magic are all threaded together by the director to form a rich symbolic tapestry.

The next morning, Howl relocates and renovates the castle to prevent Wizard Suliman from tracing their whereabouts. This renovation, in part to repair previous damage, reinserts Sophie's original chamber. This chamber reminds the audience of the first shot of Sophie, connecting us to Sophie's hometown. This additional chamber in the castle is symbolic of Howl's recognition of Sophie. Seeing the chamber, Sophie is rejuvenated back to a youthful form. In addition to new rooms, the locations available to the castle portal are also reintroduced. Howl leads Sophie through the new pink portal: his childhood chamber and garden. Miyazaki reinterprets what the male psyche values most by bringing to the fore Howl's childhood playground, an immense green pasture, various kinds of blooming flowers, the blue sky and calm lakes. Howl shares this intimate space with the heroine and the audience, and childhood, natural beauty and a sense of security are evoked

here as what constitutes happiness. Seeing the immense pasture,¹⁴ Sophie reveals that it is as if she has been there before and overwhelmed by the landscape and memory, she is again rejuvenated. Howl shares that he spent many summers alone in the secret garden that, for him, is also a place of memory. He permits Sophie to visit as she pleases.

This utopian portrayal is not overly optimistic in terms of narrative employment. Although she has access to Howl's childhood chambers, Sophie cannot confront her fear: the possibility of losing Howl to war. Miyazaki manifests Sophie's psychological response by making her relapse into her elder form. This is Miyazaki's Oriental addition to Jones's European story. Sophie's physical transformation is particular to the Japanese director who sheds light on an Asian, collectivist female psyche. Although this psychical change seems opposed to the new possibilities and to the self-fulfillment implied in her quest, Miyazaki encourages his heroine to rise to the challenge.

This scene of memories, natural immersion and romantic commitment is interrupted by Suliman's aircraft's intrusion. If the poetics of space optimizes the ideal of the universal human yearning for peace and for an integrated family, the most fearful threat to this is war. War will jeopardize the secure space of the castle that has been established with care along the course of the narrative. The anxiety of separation by war is magnified.¹⁵ Towards the end of the film, war breaks out; several shots of fleets of aircraft are juxtaposed with unintelligible figures of expatriates. The cruelty and harshness of the war is presented in the frame for the audience. The bombardment of the intimate space adds pathos to the spectacle.

The protagonists, too, experience the impact of the war, in the form of tar-monsters barging into Sophie's old house. During the war, one bomb lands on the courtyard, and the recently renovated space is close to annihilation. Howl comes to stop the bomb. Seeing Howl returning from the battlefield, Sophie urges him to escape from the front. Not following his usual escapist tendencies, he rises up in defense of the newly established family, and both characters fight for the home. Realizing an authentic purpose, Sophie's curse has been inadvertently lifted, and she remains rejuvenated until the end of the film. Relying on the projected figures of a husband, a wife, a child, an elderly member and a dog, *Howl's Moving Castle* presents an image of an alternative family.

To divert Howl's attention from protecting the home, Sophie compels Calcifer to relocate the castle far from the battlefield. She removes Calcifer from the castle, and the structure collapses. Sophie re-establishes the castle by surrendering a segment of her hair to the demon, and when the castle is reconstructed in a minimal scale, it is directed towards finding and helping Howl. Yet the witch removes the heart from the fireplace. Trying to retrieve the fiery heart, Sophie pours a bucket of water onto the witch, the heart is extinguished, then the depowered castle tumbles into the valley. Parted from the witch and Markl, Sophie sits by the ruins of the castle at the bottom of the valley, crying over her rashness. The heroine is faced with her ultimate fear: losing Howl and the integrated family. By confronting the debris and making a decision, she experiences a turn of mind and finds a resolution to her present state. The ring previously bestowed by Howl emits a ray of light pointing to a remnant of the castle door. Through the door, she travels back to Howl's childhood and witnesses the young wizard's pact with the demon. Having discovered the nature of the pact, Sophie returns to the present and finds Howl in the form of a raven. Both reunite with Calcifer. Sophie puts Howl's heart back; then the demon is driven off and Howl is revitalized.

In foregrounding the family, Miyazaki addresses a universal yearning for a secure home. Through Sophie's efforts as an agent inside the castle and Howl's protection outside, the castle as the personal microcosm, the idea of home and alternative kinship, are rendered complete during the course of narrative. This home is established with care by the protagonists and it is subject to the war in the story. The represented space is used not just to imitate universal conditions of the human psyche. The harmony of psychical well-being is premised on the constructed poetics of space.

Ponyo: Narrative dialectics of mundanity and transcendence

From the beginning of *Ponyo*, which is based on Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid', we can find narrative traces of Andersen's legacy. Miyazaki opens with a long shot of a calm surface of the sea, then the plain frame is followed by images of exuberant ocean creatures: millions of white jellyfish, colorful seaweed and fishes. The shots above and below sea level are sharply contrasted, which endows the latter with highlighted vivacity. At the source of the jellyfish stands Fujimoto, a red-haired wizard tending the natural equilibrium of the ocean with magical potions. According to Miyazaki (2008: 419), *Ponyo* portrays a

world where magic and alchemy are accepted as part of the ordinary. The sea below, like our subconscious mind, intersects with the wave-tossed surface above. By distorting normal space and contorting normal shapes, the sea is animated not as a backdrop to the story but as one of its principal characters.

In *Ponyo*, the audience is led through the details of the young boy Sozuke's everyday life. After the opening scene of Fujimoto tending the ocean and her daughter, the goldfish Ponyo, sneaking out from her father's submarine, the camera takes us to Sozuke's house. Ponyo floats up to the surface and sees Sozuke, but she is suddenly swept into a trash-collecting boat and gets stuck in a glass jug. Sozuke picks the jug up and breaks it with a rock. He cut his thumb, and the faint goldfish licks a drop of blood from it. When the boy tries to carry Ponyo away, an eerie, animated and personified wave of water comes swarming up the shore but fails to retrieve the goldfish. Sozuke puts Ponyo into a bucket and fills it with water. Fujimoto appears in front of the house to find her daughter, but is ignored by Sozuke's mother Lisa, who then takes the boy along with the goldfish to the kindergarten, where Sozuke tries to find a place to put Ponyo. He comes to the *Himawari* nursing home where an elderly resident praises the goldfish. However, one of the grumpy residents named Toki advises Sozuke to put the goldfish back into the ocean as otherwise her absence from the sea could generate a serious tsunami. Ponyo responds to Toki's remark by squirting water on her face. Sozuke flees to the nearby shore while his mother Lisa urges him to apologize to Toki. Sozuke then assures her again that he would protect her. Hearing his name, Ponyo calls the boy's name and asserts her own name as 'Ponyo', and confesses her fondness for Sozuke. Miyazaki (2008: 198) believes in the spiritual power of words and often encourages his child heroes to say what they mean and be responsible for their own words.

The camera records the boy's finding, protecting and losing the goldfish. The camera meticulously follows the process, showing the boy's perspective, his living environment on land, and how he cherishes the mermaid. These narrative acts familiarize the audience with the island landscape, evoking an attachment towards the land and the sea (Ross, 2014: 27). This scene also summons childhood memories of discovering and caring for sea creatures, actively engaging the audience via the 'gently warped lines' (Miyazaki, 2008: 421) and vivid children's voices. These gentle lines, shapes and warm coloring slightly differ from Miyazaki's previous works in that the gentleness itself caters in part for the infantile perspective of a preschool audience (Miyazaki, 2008: 419). The audio-visual excellence plus the narrative summoning add to the ethos of Sozuke as a successful actant.

Images of the everyday and the supernatural are juxtaposed in the initial plotment of the film. In the human realm, actions, events and items of everyday life are presented. After the scene in which Fujimoto successfully retrieves Ponyo, more quotidian elements set in: how Sozuke deals with the initial loss of Ponyo and how Lisa comforts her son. The camera records Lisa taking him to the supermarket, having an ice-cream and driving home. At home, Sozuke puts the green bucket upon the fence as a sign of Ponyo's return. Lisa then prepares dinner for the family. Close-ups of kitchen utensils are brought into the frame: a steaming red pot, a bronze pot with boiling water, and

green vegetables soaked in and softened by the boiling water. These objects with their saturated colors are followed by a medium shot of the kitchen with Lisa's back to the camera. This medium shot gives the audience a broader view of the kitchen, adding a sense of homeliness to the scene. Sozuke receives a phone call from his father Koichi, saying that he is preoccupied at sea and is thus unable to return home. Disappointed, Lisa turns the stove down, removes the food and immediately grabs a beer from the refrigerator, all in a swift and forceful manner. At night, Sozuke seeks his father's ship through a telescope; on the ship, Koichi passes his house from afar, he signals his apology via lights and Lisa then quickly replies via the signal lights. This scene is significant in that Sozuke learns from his parents the importance of keeping a promise. Seeing Lisa disappointed by Koichi breaking his promise of returning home, Sozuke cannot help but think of his failure to protect Ponyo. This scene faithfully incorporates themes of everyday life, a represented life may be reminiscent of the audience's own. By appealing to the pathos of the memory of absent and beloved family members, this simple scene is certainly not dull but rendered with powerful affect.

This everyday family scene is juxtaposed with Fujimoto's magical curtailing of Ponyo's newly-obtained human power. Under the sea in the coral tower, Fujimoto first expresses his regret at taking the girls out so that they are exposed to human pollution. Then, the little mermaid reveals her willingness to find Sozuke. Having tasted human blood, Ponyo is granted the power to grow her own hands and feet, yet Fujimoto suppresses the 'evil' power within her. While the father is away, the sisters bite through the protective spell on Ponyo and her strength is unleashed. She breaks through her father's protective spell, lets in ocean water and fills up the Well of Life situated in the coral tower. The oceanic energy within the Well overflows and Ponyo, soaked in the golden liquid of life, is temporarily transformed into human form. From the overflowing Well, Ponyo stands on the tip of the fish-shaped tidal waves and bursts out from the abyss of the sea, into the sky and descends onto the land in the form of a tsunami. The enclosure of the sacred water marks the surging presence of Ponyo's identity. The harnessing of enormous tidal waves dramatizes, embodies and highlights Ponyo's passionate determination to break loose from Fujimoto's parental prison. The tidal waves are symbolic also of Ponyo's feminine power and the destructive force of the ocean.

According to Miyazaki's (2008: 423) memo on music for Joe Hisaishi: 'the setting is a place where the sea and the land meet, and the scenes go back and forth between and under the sea.' Each domain is represented by a protagonist: Sozuke dwells on the land and belongs to the masculine principle, and Ponyo the sea and the feminine principle (see also Ross, 2014: 28). The realm of the supernatural clashes with the realm of the civilized: each domain interacts in its own 'language'. Following the outburst of Ponyo's oceanic energy, shots follow of Sozuke and Lisa preparing for evacuation from the nursery: Sozuke saying goodbye to his preschool teacher; leaving the preschool in the heavy rain; opening the closed door of the senior day care center; his perspective of the working staff; a member of staff urging Lisa and Sozuke to return home before the rain gets heavier; Sozuke giving his paper charms to the seniors; Sozuke saying goodbye; Lisa and Sozuke driving home in the pouring rain. The human characters are not aware of Ponyo's mythical intervention. They understand the phenomenon as just the coming of a tsunami. On the way home, Lisa and Sozuke are chased by Ponyo running on the tidal waves. This parallel between Lisa's racing car and Ponyo's running on the fish-shaped waves heralds a following semiotic convergence of the land and the sea. From this scene onwards, Ponyo's reunion with Sozuke should not be taken literally as the two children being reunited, but should be seen rather as the merging of the land and the sea. The meticulous portrayals of the everyday details are embellished with mythical colors.

When Ponyo finally steps onto the land, she carries the green bucket, with her physical form shifting from animal to human. Later, Lisa, Ponyo and Sozuke arrive home, and enter into the domestic sphere. This scene resonates with Bachelard's (2011: 89) 'oneiric house' in that it activates

viewers' reveries by leading them into a warm and cozy interior and thereby sheltering them from within. In contrast with the previous speed racing and wave dodging excitements, this scene foregrounds the quiet and stable domestic experience of shelter. Ponyo is appointed to hold the emergency lighting device – a symbol of the phenomenal fire – that radiates warm rays of light. Sozuke introduces Ponyo to their house and Lisa wraps Ponyo in a dry and furry blanket, boils water and prepares drinks. Ponyo, owing to the novelty of this first visit to her beloved friend's place, runs excitedly around in the house. They share honey tea, generate electricity, secure the antenna, and wait for the instant noodles. All the aforementioned acts soothe viewers from within the interior space of Lisa's house, sheltering both the characters and the viewers from the violence of the storm. After Lisa pours hot water into their bowls, she requires the children to shut their eyes. Then, a medium close-up of Lisa withholds her actions, not letting the audience see Lisa put ham into the bowls. This act is not just withheld from the children. The cinematic concealment of her hands also prevents the audience from seeing. Miyazaki's visual rhetoric – the evoking of childhood family memory – is comprehensively demonstrated not only via pictorial colors, images, sound effects, and lyrics but also by what the camera does not show.

When the tsunami calms down at night, Lisa departs from the house to the Sunflower day care center, leaving Sozuke and Ponyo at home. Before Lisa goes, she says:

This house is like a lighthouse in a storm. Many travelers in the dark rely on the lights of the house for their direction. Though strange things occur and no one knows about the explanations, we will soon find out. If you help me keep watch of the house, I will become more determined.

As demonstrated earlier, the symbolic resonances of Miyazaki's buildings are profound. Lisa and Sozuke's house is portrayed as a lighthouse standing on the highest point of the town. The house is a symbol in that it shields the protagonists from the storm, lights the direction for Koichi and other ships in the storm, and invokes a strong sense of home in the audience's imagination.

In the latter half of the film, the imaginary water permeates the earthly realm. The tsunami brought by Ponyo blurs the demarcation between the human land and the maternal sea, as the water overcomes most of the land and the mountain. Sozuke and Ponyo set out on the toy boat to look for Lisa. On the way, ancient fishes from the Devonian Period swim around, and the child heroes meet a couple with an infant in their boat. Out of her natural instinct, Ponyo insists on nursing the infant, demonstrating her femininity: she shares soup and sandwiches with the mother and gives a kiss to the infant. In return, the father gives Sozuke a candle as a gift for their boat. They also encounter villagers, on a long boat rowed by several people, evacuating to the nearby hotel. The villagers heartily ask the couple and the two children if any help is needed. Although meeting the people on the way to the Sunflower day care center does not further the plot, the scene emphasizes the genuine interactions between people. In the Berkeley interview, Miyazaki maintains that his aim of producing the film is not to dishearten the spectator via staging an apocalyptic tale of a tsunami. Rather, this flood motif is indeed a magical cleansing for the diegetic characters and the spectators, evoking a past when people were genuinely united in helping one another during a natural disaster (Miyazaki, 2009).

On the way to the Sunflower day care center, Ponyo's power weakens, and she gradually falls asleep. Underwater, a bubble is launched to protect the day care center. The bubble is a heterogeneous space reminiscent of the *Ryūgū-jō* (the dragon palace underwater), inviting the elders of the nursery to joke that they were the *shojo* in the mythic tale of *Urashima Tarō*. Outside the bubble, Sozuke hurriedly takes Ponyo through the tunnel to the day care center, and Fujimoto summons his warty minions to bring them all to Gran Mamare. Finally, Sozuke embraces Ponyo's identity as a

mermaid and passes the trial. Gran Mamare agrees to Ponyo's transformation, encloses her in a bubble and requires Sozuke to kiss it on the land.

Based on Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid', Miyazaki not only renovates the Western story but 'tints' it with oriental color. Miyazaki's rendering of *Ponyo* is a hybrid of east and west, antiquity and modernity. The semantic innovation of *Ponyo* is threaded with the traditional etiology that once a *ningyo* lands on earth, the creature is bound to summon an overwhelming tsunami. The poetics of the house is a symbol that shields the protagonists from the storm, lights the direction for Koichi and other ships in the storm, and invokes a strong sense of domesticity in the audience's imagination. The narrative dialectics – retaining Andersen's narrative legacy – of mundanity and transcendence carefully retain the semiotic property of each respective domain (land vs sea; Sozuke vs Ponyo; human vs mermaid; male vs female); this oscillation – serving also as cinematic relief – places the audience within a well-balanced rendering of a fictional world. Miyazaki indeed successfully reframes his oriental mermaid tale.

Conclusion

Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Ponyo* are anchored within dreamlike figurations that engage audiences around the globe. His heroic narratives are rendered with forms of mimesis that grant access to these audiences, actively engaging them in the animated realms. His narratives often depend upon graphical details and calculated employment. For Miyazaki, anime is a creative frame in which he mobilizes semiotic contents, whether drawn from traditional Japanese Shinto beliefs of Animism, myths, or even the material imagination of water and space. The animated frame provides spectators with food for thought and helps us better interpret the process of maturation. Miyazaki does not present the audience with detached fantasy; the audience concretely experiences the child heroes' journey including a reasonable amount of setbacks. These setbacks are vicariously felt by the audience, and they resemble challenges encountered in our daily lives; we stumble, cry and learn with the heroes. The happy ending of *Spirited Away* is somewhat similar to that of JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings* (1997): both reward the heroes, who have confronted much sorrow, frustration and challenges during their quest, at the end of the tale; and both establish a poetic concordance that infuses the audience with an optimistic desire to make better sense of the maturation process, imitated actions and difficult aspects of our real life.

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Notes

1. See William Indick (2004: 72):

The monomyth is a single structure, just as the hero is a single figure. Just as the hero has a 'thousand faces,' the myth has a thousand plots. In turn, both the hero and his myth share common archetypal elements. These elements were broken down by Campbell and structured in his model of the adventure of the hero. The most basic commonality behind all mythic structure is the symbolism behind the hero's journey, which is the same as the symbolism behind the dream. Each stage of the hero's adventure relates directly to the identity development of the hero's character. The key to the hero's adventure is that the protagonist is not a hero in the beginning – he must become a hero through the process of his journey. This transformation resonates with all people, because every human being must at one point in their life experience a similar identity transformation from boy into man, girl into woman, apprentice into master, etc.

2. See Bachelard (2011: 3):

All matter we imagine, all matter on which we meditate, is at once the image of interiority. This interiority is deemed to be remote from us; philosophers explain that it lies hidden to us forever, that one veil is lifted only for another to be drawn straightaway over the mysteries of substance. Yet the imagination does not come to a halt because of these good reasons. It immediately turns a substance into a value, and therefore material images at once transcend sensations. While images of form and color may well be sensations.

3. Ricoeur (1976: 40) defends the value of artistic images (pictorial paintings, engraving, and etching) against the Platonic shadowy image as the secondary reality. He maintains that a theory of eikons resides in the 'iconic augmentation', characterized by pictorial activity. This iconic augmentation – acts of 'saturation and culminations' – contains 'abbreviated signs' that increase the meaning of the universe. As opposed to ordinary, realistic vision, 'painting ... enhances the contrasts, gives colors back their resonance, and lets appear the luminosity within which things shine' (p. 41). Ricoeur, then, embraces the revelatory function of pictorial imagery.
4. The world of the text is therefore not the world of everyday language. In this sense, it constitutes a new sort of distancing which could be called a distancing of the real from itself. It is this distancing which fiction introduces into our apprehension of reality. We said that narrative, folktales and poems are not without a referent; but this referent is discontinuous with that of everyday language. (Ricoeur, 1981: 142)
5. See Jacobi (2012: 334):

A mountain pass is a well-known symbol for a 'situation of transition' that leads from an old attitude of mind to a new one. Henry [the patient] must go alone; it is essential for his ego to surmount the test unaided.

6. In addition, this ladder scene demonstrates Miyazaki's Romanticized characterization of the hero. The challenge appointed to the hero derives not predominantly from social interactions or conventions but from the subject's introspection and his or her struggle with the natural environments. Miyazaki concentrates on the heroine's grapples with inanimate objects, bringing into play the heroine's such emotions as frightfulness and the meticulous taking of steps.
7. Boh is Yubaba's son. He is a baby of enormous size, who first threatens Chihiro to play with him. Later in the story Boh is turned into a mouse by his aunt Zeniba. Boh travels with Chihiro to visit Zeniba in search of a cure for Haku. Boh himself is Chihiro's miniature self. Boh lives in the highest tower-chamber under Yubaba's full attention and control. He is ignorant of the outside world, a well-protected animus, mirroring the protected male-inclined psyche of Chihiro and the audience. By being transformed into a mouse, he is able to venture into the unknown realm with Chihiro and travel, learn and conduct actions which are prohibited to his former self and safety zone. He imitates Chihiro and becomes her apprentice, like Chihiro's being Rin's apprentice. Thus Chihiro's elevation to a master affirms her growth.
8. By contrasting with Robinson Crusoe's anti-socialist individualism, Yamanaka (2014: 224–245) affirms Chihiro's efforts to gain social recognition from members of the bathhouse.
9. Her ascending to the highest chamber in search of Haku is reminiscent of Miyazaki's first directed feature film *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979). Lupin, against all odds, also strives to ascend to the highest tower-chamber to rescue the abducted princess Clarisse. Boh's chamber, decorated with the same alterable roof wallpaper resembles that of Clarisse's chamber. Whether intentional or not, the ascension motif and the Western-style decoration is implanted within Miyazaki's artistic consciousness.
10. This direct comment can be found in the DVD features of the film.
11. For more description of the narrative device *mise-en-abyme*, see Chen, 2008.
12. See Bachelard (2011: 87):

Thus, an *oneiric* house is an *image* that, in our memories and dreams, becomes a protective power. It is not just a setting in which memory rediscovers its images. We love to go on living in a house which

no longer exists because in that house, we relive – often without being fully aware of it – a dynamics of comfort. The house has protected us, therefore it comforts us still. *The act of dwelling* is overlaid with unconscious values, unconscious values that the unconscious does not forget. The unconscious can be layered (in the horticultural sense), but it cannot be uprooted. Beyond clear impressions, and the crude satisfactions of the *instinct for ownership*, there are deeper dreams, dreams that wish to take root. (emphases in original)

13. See Jacobi (2012: 343):

In alchemy the ‘prime material’ was often represented by such monstrous and fabulous creatures – mixed forms of animals. In psychological terms, they would probably symbolize the original total unconsciousness, out of which the individual ego can rise and begin to develop toward maturity.

14. In my view, Hayao Miyazaki is ingrained with this romanticist tendency of artistic representations. He is inclined to probe into his child heroes’ internal conflicts, anchoring them within sublime landscapes. Questions central to Miyazaki are individual introspections rather than interpersonal power struggles and social conventions. He also has nostalgia for the pastoral past (*Mononoke*, *Totoro*, *Kiki*, *Spirited Away*, and *Ponyo*, etc.).
15. The director borrows Jones’s story and renders it with oriental colors. Lindsay Smith argues that *Howl’s Moving Castle* is the director’s critique of the contemporary US operations in the Iraq war (see Smith, 2011, and Akimoto, 2014).

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Author biography

Cheng-Ing Wu is a graduate student of literature and media studies at the Department of English, National Dong-Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan. This article is developed in parts from his MA thesis, supervised by Professor Fanfan Chen. The author's research interests include new media studies and narrative theory.