

The development of girl into woman is a difficult transitional phase, one that's ripe for cinematic interpretation, despite its lack of representation throughout the medium's history. It's fascinating, then, that *anime* (Japanese animation) is often compelled to interrogate this period. Adolescent narratives are commonly portrayed in anime, thanks to the medium's unrestricted, non-photographic capabilities. The protagonists of the typical Studio Ghibli anime, in particular, are girls in the throes of adolescence, and their films follow their struggles with the anxieties of aging, family, and identity.

Anime allows for the fantastic suspension of disbelief that's perhaps necessary for the audience to engage with the stories in Ghibli films like *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *Spirited Away*. These, among other anime, portray girls going through identifiable crises, like illness, moving, and relationships, as filtered through a fantastic genre, such as the fairy tale, magical *bildungsroman*, and the hero's journey. This work analyzes, through these films, anime's unique ability to utilize and portray fantasy elements to describe the adolescent experience. Assessing the films' aesthetics and narratives provides for the notion that anime is well-suited for exploring the challenges of growing up.

THE PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEART:  
THE FANTASY OF THE ANIME ADOLESCENT

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## INTRODUCTION

While the self and identity are constantly in flux throughout life's various phases, it is the particular liminality of adolescence that often seems to receive the most attention. The transitory period between childhood and adolescence is when life's transformative nature is at its most trying, filled with challenges motivated by changes in the developing body and sense of self. The dramatic imposition of adolescence upon a once untroubled child's body is overwhelming, and the accompanying physical and psychological changes are surrounded by anxious uncertainty. Despite how alone, insecure, or misunderstood the adolescent feels amidst these unstoppable transformations, the movement from the carefree, playful child years into adolescence, is a universal experience, and one that is ripe for narrative and especially cinematic interpretation.

The prevalence of this event throughout cinema, literature, and other media is due to its challenging metamorphosis, as the body and identity, once regimented and understood, are transformed into something unknown physically

and psychologically. The medium of animation in particular becomes a potent playground in which bodies can be thrust into confusion on the path to adulthood. Animation, and particularly Japanese *anime*, figuratively and literally visualizes the fearsome changes of adolescence to help both its own characters as well as its audience make peace with the transition. Exploring the self within this unrestricted, non-photographic medium reveals a powerful, unique, fantastical relationship between form and narrative.

The themes of transition from childhood to adolescence and the related quest to secure identity regularly appear within anime. When adolescence was first recognized as its own developmental period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it also began to be commodified in ways that would feed directly into anime. This commodification is discussed in Sharalyn Orbaugh's essay on "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shojo in 1990s Visual Culture," in which she introduces the concepts of shojo and shonen to further understand anime's portrayal of identity and gender. She writes:

Starting in the Taisho period (1912-1925) and continuing up to the present, the image of 'Shojoness' was marketed to girls themselves in Japan...During the same period, when 'adolescence' as a specific stage in human development was first recognized and exploited, there were many new magazines featuring fiction and essays meant to appeal to boys and young men as well (shonen and seinen zasshi).<sup>1</sup>

Shojo is the name for the specific concept of being a girl in-between being

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<sup>1</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shojo in 1990s Visual Culture." *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*. Ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i, 2003) 206-7.

a child and an adult; the male version is called shonen. These terms were created for marketing purposes, to sell media to boys and girls of a certain age to which they could personally relate. This material included books, magazines, and later, manga and anime.<sup>2</sup> The differences in the anime made for boys and those made for girls were apparent in the types of stories told, as well as in the qualities and characteristics their protagonists exhibited: heroism for boys, dreaminess for girls.<sup>3</sup> The connection between gender and narrative within anime is important to recognize when considering how the medium addresses and interprets the liminal period. Shojo and shonen make explicit anime's commitment to portraying adolescence, both as a cultural commodity as well as an artistic product.

Shojo as a concept has taken on significant cultural weight and meaning, which is evident in the heroes of some of anime's most formally and thematically intriguing works: the young girls at the heart of the films by famed director Hayao Miyazaki. As the co-founder of Studio Ghibli, the most renowned anime production company, Miyazaki has garnered respect for his artistically and thematically affecting productions, which almost exclusively feature young females entering adolescence. Notably, Ghibli films make use of the possibilities of fantasy to discover their heroine's adolescent self and liminal identity. However, they each also construct these quests in unique ways, utilizing fantastic contexts that are individual, ripe for formal analysis and influential over narrative

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<sup>2</sup> Orbaugh, 207.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



development. The use of fantasy is important, as it allows female protagonists to enter a protective space that affords them the ability to come to terms with their adolescence, unencumbered with societal pressures. Anime as an art form dabbles in the fantastic due to its limitless graphic possibilities. The Ghibli films render the fantastic nearly real, creating multi-dimensional spaces that are lush, constantly changing, and encouraging of the development of their inhabiting protagonists into strong, independent women.

The constitution of an empowered, positively secured adolescent identity infiltrates all facets of an animated work through the ways in which the unrestricted body navigates these fantastical spaces. Accordingly, the transition into adolescence is one that confronts the notion of self-identity directly. Identity is defined as the way in which one understands oneself in relation to the world. Psychologist Dan P. McAdams' definition of the term in his article "Identity and the Life Story" points to the particular importance of age in regards to the establishment of identity. McAdams writes that "identity is an integrative configuration of self-in-the-adult world."<sup>4</sup> Identity formation is not just about articulating one's self, but one's adult self. Adolescence becomes the necessary in-between stage in which the adult, fixed identity is constructed. McAdams writes, in fact, that one does not even acquire an identity until this period: "Identity becomes a problem when the adolescent or young adult first realizes he or she is,

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<sup>4</sup> Dan P. McAdams, "Identity and the Life Story." In Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self: Developmental and Cultural Perspectives (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 2003) 188.

has taken, and/or could be many different (and conflicting) things, and experiences a strong desire, encouraged by society, to be but one.”<sup>5</sup> The problem of identity naturally occurs as a child gains self-awareness as a social being. This realization of existing within a social sphere is followed by the need to establish one's self in terms that are congruent with societal convention. A developing child, particularly nearing adolescence, realizes she must be a concrete, defined individual, instead of a freewheeling neutral body.

Identity is an active pursuit in adolescence, often to a critical degree. Identity psychology theorist Erik Erikson's writes in his *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* that “the term identity refers, more often than not, to something noisily demonstrative, to a more or less desperate 'quest,' or to an almost deliberately confused 'search.’”<sup>6</sup> Self-identity, therefore, is something directly sought by the individual in order to secure a sense of who one is in the face of developmental change. Even more specifically, the identity quest directly corresponds to the transition into adolescence, a time fraught with change and insecurity.

Erikson writes that this journey manifests itself in the form of a “crisis” during the age of adolescence. During this period, the self-identity becomes most unstable, much like the rest of the developing body. It becomes absolutely necessary to define and solidify the identity in order to help understand the transition from the childhood stage to adolescence, as well as to confront the new

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>6</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968) 19.

challenges typical of the latter period. This crisis, Erikson says, “no longer connotes impending catastrophe, which at one time seemed to be an obstacle to the understanding of the term. It is now being accepted as designating a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation.”<sup>7</sup> The identity crisis becomes the important inciting incident, then, of the adolescent transformation. It is this crisis that becomes a driving force for many anime, and is the event around which the story and its characters are constructed. The crisis moment in this tender developmental stage is of great importance to the transforming post-child body, and that anime focuses on it confirms the medium's important and uncanny ability to illustrate this conflicted age.

Self-conflict arises in the crisis-driven liminal period between childhood and adolescence because it is a time during which the body is at its most vulnerable. In an essay on the creation and significance of the “monstrous adolescent” within anime, scholar Susan J. Napier writes, “[Adolescence] is the period that the subject feels the greatest discord between the body image and the lived body, between its psychical idealized self-image and bodily changes...the adolescent body is commonly experienced as awkward, alienating, an undeserved biological imposition.”<sup>8</sup> This bodily “discord” explains why adolescence is thematically prevalent in anime. The medium's transformative powers, stemming

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<sup>7</sup> Erikson, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Joliffe Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 53.

from its lack of photographic limitations, allows for its characters to explore themes of change and development in unrestricted, interpretive ways. Capitalizing on animation's status as untethered to "reality," anime creates fantastical vessels for viewer identification. The protagonists of these films are psychologically-complex from worlds that are equally plausible and supernatural, enticing the viewer to develop intense kinship with them. Through these characters, the viewer is able to explore and understand their own liminality.

While the liminal stage is difficult for anyone, female adolescence is even more complicated than that of males. The particular dramatic complexity of the young girl's maturation is often explored in anime. The portrayal of these identity quests is not only dramatically engaging, but also psychologically educational. Catherine Driscoll details in *Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* some of the complexities of the specifically female development out of childhood and towards adulthood. She writes: "The difficulties with which girls negotiate adolescence have mostly been interpreted as the struggle for proper femininity, or the struggle to retain a sense of self in the face of expected femininity."<sup>9</sup> Girls must construct identities to accommodate the conventions of female adolescence, while also dealing with the specific components of identity imposed on them because of their girlhood. Driscoll explains further how puberty

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 58.

(the physical aspect of the liminal adolescent period)<sup>10</sup> enacts change that is specifically gendered onto a more neutral girl body, writing that it is “initially differentiated according to sex, but insofar as it reformulates and replaces rather than merely activating the genders of childhood. As a child, the girl is posited as not fully female or feminine, and at adolescence both loses and gains sex/gender identity.”<sup>11</sup> This interpretation highlights the difference in the gendered adolescent development process. A child of indistinct sex must now learn how to wade through the societal, gender-specific specificity waters on the way to adolescence.

Unfortunately, through the maturation process the now specifically female body often becomes passive or underprivileged due to societal convention. The imposition of gender upon the adolescent body becomes, while not wholly negative, a social detriment. The production of “girl culture” as a social commodity and its infiltration into the feminine identity quest introduces new challenges that are difficult to conquer. This difficulty is due to the restraints placed on the female by historical social standards and notions of a female's necessary deference to the male. Because of these restraints, females and female characters in their adolescence and older are often portrayed as submissive or powerless, as well as dependent, brash, and weak. The portrayal of women as

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<sup>10</sup> Although Driscoll asserts “puberty is a set of narratives about social positions and cultural belonging; about lived bodies, identities, and power,” despite it being typically used in explicit reference to the “bodily component of adolescence” (Driscoll, 102). Therefore, the term is more broadly applicable here than just for using when referring to the physical changes in the adolescent creation process, despite what is suggested above.

<sup>11</sup> Driscoll, 87.

such is dismissive of the inherent strength of womanhood, while also creating the challenges that complicate female coming-of-age.

However, in shojo anime, and especially in Ghibli films, young girls are not restricted to stereotypically female tropes. Instead of being passive, dependent, and emotional, the heroines of Studio Ghibli films are adventurous, self-reliant, and active agents in their own journeys of self-discovery and identity reconciliation. Orbaugh argues that shojo films such as these combine elements from both sides of the gendered narrative dichotomy to create an altogether new hybridization. She writes:

Shojo-identified elements such as female protagonists, attention to character development and romance, the breaking of visual frames, and transformations that are innate and/or ontological are combined with shonen-identified elements, such as action and violence, an emphasis on responsibility toward society...[the hybrid shojo images] absolutely repudiate many of the earlier negative associations – far from being framed as signs of irresponsibility, weakness, and passivity, these new shojo are powerful and active as they lead the fight against the forces of evil...They are rarely dreamy and indolent, nor are they figured as passive consumers. And yet, being (unmarried) females, these protagonists retain the shojo-identified characteristics of liminality, relative freedom from socially prescribed roles, and an unmarked gender (“neither male nor female”).<sup>12</sup>

The shojo protagonists of Miyazaki's films adopt what are often considered masculine positions. These girls are strong heroines leading their own stories, growing up and out of submissiveness to assert their independence. Despite Orbaugh's assertion that the liminal shojo is genderless, this independence

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<sup>12</sup> Orbaugh, 217.

is nonetheless feminized, even as it circulates in masculinity. The areas explored by these female adolescent heroes are both universal, such as the awkwardness of adolescence, and personal, like the desires to overcome societal notions of femininity. At the same time, these narratives also deal specifically with what it means to grow into a female body. By prominently featuring these types of protagonists, Ghibli films are a fascinating and feminist exercise in the ability of anime to allow gender to be an asset and not a detriment. This quality is notable when looking at the cultural constructs that Japanese society creates. The girls of Ghibli films undergo typical situations in atypical ways, something that the medium of anime explicitly allows for them.

Each Ghibli film affords its young female heroes the space to embark on the journey that ultimately culminates in the achievement of a fully-developed adolescent self-identity. These dominant transformations are psychologically revealing as characters explore the complications that arise when trying to move through a liminal identity. This is why identity theory and psychology are quite relevant when analyzing these films, due to the sheer complexity of their powerful and atypical female characterizations. Not only does a survey and application of psychological theory on the formulation of identity have relevance and inform the analysis of anime's relationship to the process, but it also contributes to discussion of how anime creates viewer identification.

Understanding anime as a medium that allows for the transformation of

character and exploration of fantasy is of major psychological interest. The usage of fantasy and its interplay with identity challenges how the adolescent self is formed. When a character is given a body that transforms beyond its control, how do they learn to operate it when the setting in which they must do so is similarly transformative, malleable, and unbound? The Ghibli films feature unique fantastical contexts within which their female protagonists are challenged to develop themselves as they traverse realms recognizable and unfamiliar. The adolescent body and identity become vessels for the fantastic, which is generated by anime's specific capabilities.

While nearly every film by the studio features the theme of coming of age in an enchanted world, three Ghibli films in particular are given fascinating spaces to explore and journeys to undertake: *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *Spirited Away*. These films are excellent examples of how the identity quest is conjured by anime's transformative playground. Using different narrative constructs – the fairy tale, magical bildungsroman, and hero's quest monomyth, respectively – these films tell stories that are at once accessible and yearning to be unpacked to understand how the liminal psychologies of its adolescent protagonists are determined.

*My Neighbor Totoro*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki and released in 1988, features two young girl protagonists, Mei and Satsuki, finding relief from the unknowns that plague their reality, including illness, a move to an unfamiliar



location, as well as establishment of new societal roles. This story is motivated by the fantasy world of the creature Totoro and his kind, but more specifically constructed through the conventions of the fairy tale. The fairy tale as genre lends itself to the identity quest narrative because of its explicit connection to childhood, as well as its whimsical presentation of crucial life challenges. Jack Zipes explains in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* that this is because “fairy tales begin with conflict because we all begin our lives with conflict. We are all misfit for the world, and somehow we must fit in, fit in with other people, and thus we must invent or find the means through communication to satisfy as well as resolve conflicting desires and instincts.”<sup>13</sup> The fairy tale serves as a method through which the audience can live vicariously in a world of childlike wonder. Laura F. Kready also mentions the fairy tale’s vicarious properties, elaborating on their connection to childhood. In *The Study of Fairy Tales* she writes that “Fairyland is the stage-world of childhood, a realm of vicarious living, more elemental and more fancy-free than the perfected dramas of sophisticated adults whose ingrained acceptance of binding realities demands sterner stuff.”<sup>14</sup> Zipes does not hesitate to remind us that “fairy tales were not created or intended for children.”<sup>15</sup> However, Zipes himself explains that despite this, “[fairy tales] resonate with them, and children recall them as they grow to confront the injustices and contradictions of

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2012) 2.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Fry Kready, *A Study of Fairy Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916) 5.

<sup>15</sup> Zipes, 20.

so-called real worlds,” and their fantastical mimetic facets (such as recurring characters and traits, like monsters, witches, and magical tools and forces) establish the fairy tale as a genre perfectly suited for telling the story of childhood transformation.<sup>16</sup>

*Totoro* establishes itself as an anime fairy tale through its incorporation of typical fairy tale memes and traits, such as animals (or animal-like monsters), wonderment, adventure, and sensory details, all of which work to generate a unique, cinematic narrative of adolescent liminality. Additionally, the film resembles a fairy tale in the way its storyline approaches challenging real-world issues that center around the family unit, leading to the maturation of its adolescent girl protagonist, Satsuki. After establishing the notion of the “fancy-free Fairyland,” Kready goes on to explain that, despite the world of the fairy tale being an adult-free zone, the genre's primary purpose is to create a social manual for its child audience through the adventures of its protagonist. The fairy tale creates this set of social standards by “[appealing] to the child by presenting aspects of family life. Through them he realizes his relations to his own parents: their care, their guardianship, and their love.”<sup>17</sup> The interaction between *Totoro's* distinct, adult-less fantasy realm and the uncertain real world, populated by parents who themselves are insecure (as seen in the girls' mother's illness and their father's inadequate single parenthood), relates to the divided world-building that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Kready, 9.

exists within the fairy tale. It is in these interactions that one can best understand how the film maps change onto its young girls.

Another question that the fairy tale imposes on the film concerns the ways in which engagement with and access to the fantasy realm differs as one ages. Two sisters anchor the film, one in the throes of her childhood years (Mei) and the other on the cusp of adolescence (Satsuki). Their dynamic and difference in interaction with the titular creatures provides insight into just how fantasy supports and encourages transformation from child to adult. How does highlighting the contrasts between the bright fantasy and dark reality inform the parallel differences of the two sisters, especially elder Satsuki? How do these various aspects of the fairy tale contribute to and highlight the necessary transition out of carefree childhood and into the adult world? With these interrogations in mind, assessment of fairy tale parameters within the film makes even more explicit how anime can portray the development of adolescent identity.

The importance of magic to the fairy tale, as well as its ability to illustrate pubescent discovery and development, is something that is intrinsic in the genre but only faintly touched upon in *My Neighbor Totoro*. Instead, magic both as a convention and in its intersection with the genre of the *bildungsroman* makes a grand appearance in *Kiki's Delivery Service*. *Kiki's Delivery Service* (directed by Miyazaki and released in 1989) uses the fantasy of magic in order to create a narrative about asserting independence by reconciling the mismatch of

adolescence and a magical body in a non-magical society. This uncomfortable juxtaposition is conveyed through the specific magical being of the witch. Dani Cavallaro writes that while the appearance of the witch is multivariate, “its depiction almost invariably points to that figure's implication with a long and venerable heritage...in anime, the witch frequently embodies 'the instinctual, inner Self,' 'the archetypal aspect of the Great Mother,' or 'a kind of guide' helping humans to negotiate ”the other” or “the other world.”<sup>18</sup> Kiki's version of the witch most resembles the “guide,” tasked to mediate between the magical and non-magical worlds. Witchcraft becomes her alienating trait, which at the same time must help her learn to reconcile her “other” status. Kiki suffers from the alienation of adolescence, and then must duly endure this discomfort through the specific lens of witchcraft. While Kiki often feels like an outsider because of her magical powers, this type of magic also affords her the independence and strength necessary to enact her own transformation into mature adolescent. This dynamic creates interesting situations in which the difficulty of the liminal period is portrayed, as Kiki's active willingness to grow up and become self-sufficient is tested.

The genre through which the transitional journey into a secure, magical adolescent identity is rendered is that of the magical bildungsroman. The bildungsroman is a coming-of-age story stemming from the Germanic literary

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<sup>18</sup> Dani Cavallaro, Magic as Metaphor in Anime: A Critical Study (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2010) 13.

tradition that meshes perfectly with *Kiki's* quest for growth. The bildungsroman, also known by the “neutral term” novel of formation, as Marianne Hirsch refers to it, can be defined by its quest story, the presence of side characters who “serve as reflectors on the protagonist, standing for alternative goals and achievements,”<sup>19</sup> the positioning of society and social order as antagonist, and an ultimate focus on “the story of a representative individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order.”<sup>20</sup> Hirsch writes that the protagonist in the bildungsroman is, in fact, typically a character subject to their surroundings. However, to refer to the protagonist of a bildungsroman as passive, even as the term references their status as involuntary party to the social and psychological change of “coming of age,” is reductive. The protagonist of a bildungsroman makes persistent strides towards overcoming the challenges which “[aim] at the formation of a total personality, physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral.”<sup>21</sup> This is because the “development of selfhood...is the primary concern of the novel of formation, the events that determine the life of the individual.”<sup>22</sup> The traditional, quest-centric bildungsroman is a natural choice to portray the story of a young heroine's mission toward achieving her own adolescent growth and identity, due to its explicit purpose of determining the self.

Cavallaro mentions the bildungsroman's specific relevance to the magical

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<sup>19</sup> Marianne Hirsch, "From Great Expectations to Lost Illusions: The Novel of Formation as Genre." *Genre* 13.3 (1979) 298.

<sup>20</sup> Hirsch, 296.

<sup>21</sup> Hirsch, 297.

<sup>22</sup> Hirsch, 298.

narrative in a late chapter in her book, explaining that “while magic bildungsromans...delineate a developmental trajectory, they tend to enlist the multifarious powers of fantasy to propose that genuine maturation should entail a recovery – or perhaps a rediscovery – of juvenile proclivities suppressed by the entry into the world of grown-ups: namely, a propensity to explore and experiment, a spontaneous capacity for play, and a willingness to dream.”<sup>23</sup>

Adolescence for the magical body, then, is not just about reconciling minority status in non-magical society, but learning how to re-appropriate the magical nature of childhood in the burgeoning adolescent setting. *Kiki's* dramatizes this in a highly personal way, while also using universalizing methods like setting the story in a world that cannot be easily located. In so doing, the film accentuates that the story is not just that of a female witch growing up, but one of a female growing up, magic notwithstanding.

Like *Totoro*, *Kiki's* uses its fantasy to create contrasts between it and “reality,” as Kiki directly and excitedly enters a system in which she is immediately recognized as “other” to other girls. While for Kiki, who comes from a lineage of strong, smart, successful witches, it is an honor to be the owner of a magical body, when she leaves on her year-long mission to define and master her magical witch powers, she is no match for the destabilizing forces of adolescence. For Kiki, magic is a force explicitly tied to the uncontrollable liminality of youth, as well as diegetically representative of the transformative nature of animation as

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<sup>23</sup> Cavallaro, 117.

a medium. Thus, the film reveals how magic serves its protagonist and colors her own bildungsroman-based identity quest and search for independence.

Additionally, considering the fantastical and developmental effects on the body creates a dialogue about how the medium reflects its content, and vice-versa.

Jumping ahead to the year 2001, *Spirited Away* is another Miyazaki production that builds on the themes of liminality and fantasy as imaged in *Totoro* and *Kiki's* to further interrogate the function of the identity quest as portrait of the specifically feminine adolescence. Incorporating the fairy tale creatures of the former film and the other-ized body narrative of the latter, *Spirited Away* also introduces topics of cultural tradition, modernity, and Joseph Campbell's monomythic heroic quest narrative into the medium. Of the three films, this is the one that most openly bears the traditional culture and history of its home country. The film positions the story of a young girl looking to deliberately reclaim her identity and subsequently save her parents against the backdrop of a Japanese bathhouse populated with various spirits and creatures. Amidst this detailed, expansive fantastic world, the young female protagonist must navigate her newly assumed identity and journey through several challenges, in order to secure her position as a stable adolescent.

These challenges correspond with the construct of the hero's journey monomyth, as outlined in Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The mythology and creation of the hero is one that is centered on the "rites of passage,

which occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.).<sup>24</sup> The pubescent rite of passage is when identity is specifically confronted, and its appearance in the monomyth manifests in a series of challenges for the hero that “are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind.”<sup>25</sup> These challenges typically accumulate with the intention of “initiating” the hero into their new life stage. The period being left behind (in this case, childhood) is followed by “an interval of more or less extended retirement, during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn.”<sup>26</sup> Through the monomyth, an adolescent is not just created, but born out of the remains of what was once a child. The literalization of the challenge of moving involuntarily towards adolescence makes the heroic monomyth a fascinating structure through which adolescent development can be interpreted.

These challenges are characterized by various themes and tropes whose appearance Campbell notes are integral to the monomyth. As in the fairy tale and bildungsroman, the hero is created in opposition to his (or her) society. Campbell

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1972) 10.

<sup>25</sup> Campbell, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



writes that detaching from social order creates a hero and their subsequent challenges. He explains that a hero must not simply explore the difficulties of the world, but those that exist within themselves and their psyches. The monomyth can in fact be reduced into stages relating to this required societal disengagement in the “battle past his personal and local historical limitations.”<sup>27</sup> These stages, which together are a prescription for the monomyth, are “represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return,” making up “the nuclear unit of the monomyth.”<sup>28</sup> Separation, also known as departure, includes five subsections following the hero from the initial call to action, to immediate refusal and then ultimate acceptance of the challenge. The next phase, Initiation, is described as a series of “trials and victories,” in which the hero encounters their personal set of events that will test whether they can overcome threats to their development.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, the hero is reborn as a self-aware and self-identified member of society. This culmination is referred to as a “return and reintegration with society, which is indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world, and which, from the standpoint of the community, is the justification of the long retreat.”<sup>30</sup> The journey becomes not just individually significant, but globally and spiritually important, as the balance of community rests in the resolution of the hero's quest for definition.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Chihiro, the heroine of *Spirited Away*, finds her adolescent identity through means which mirror the formula presented by Campbell. Her story involves a separation from family and the society with which she identifies, taking her to a mysterious, fantastical world that immediately strips and disables her childlike identity. She is forced to build herself back up into an adolescent by thrusting her into a high-stakes transitional period and world. Chihiro's desire to return to her own world drives her development, granting her the agency needed to assume the role of female hero and successful adolescent. The spiritual yet decidedly Japanese setting takes on great importance and is highly suggestive of the themes that are most salient in this heroine's quest, as well. These themes, such as historical and cultural awareness, identity confusion and subsequent affirmation, as well as the influence and infiltration of modern consumerism, are perpetuated by the film's formal and aesthetic qualities. The film's thematic and narrative structure, combined with its medium, reveals how anime becomes a powerful and relevant social machine, as well as a technical/artistic one. Integrating gender into the hero narrative deepens it while also potentially problematizing Campbell's monomyth, which is written from a masculine perspective, even as its applicability is ostensibly broader. How does the gendered body interact with the monomyth? Utilizing a masculine Western trope with specific, feminine Japanese ones invites readings and assessments of the specific capacities of *anime* as a medium to interpret the process of adolescence.

Each of these films illustrates the liminal period of adolescence in ways that make use and remind the viewer of the idea that anime as a whole excels at creating a space in which the viewer can identify themselves. *My Neighbor Totoro* uses the convention of the fairy tale to great effect, questioning how the genre's interaction with anime highlights the assets of each, while generating a narrative of girls facing similar challenges in unique, age-appropriate ways. *Kiki's Delivery Service* builds on fantastical themes established in its predecessor by incorporating the magic of witchcraft and the bildungsroman genre to explore how the magical body and identity interact within the coming of age story. Finally, *Spirited Away* again details the fantasy of girlhood by positioning its protagonist as a heroic adolescent body that is challenged to confront and create her selfhood. This film is reminiscent of its predecessors, resembling *Totoro* in its intrinsically magical, highly spiritual setting and *Kiki* in its emphatic portrayal of independence and hardship.

The specific and personal journeys told in these films, which share common goals of positive and successful transitioning into adolescence, remain universal. This generalizing allows for that identification that happens inside and outside of the films. How do the particular qualities of these films exalt this important facet? Looking at how the genre of anime contributes to fantastical renderings of the emerging adolescent experience confirms and re-conceptualizes the functionality of anime. *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and

*Spirited Away* exist as examples that contribute to deepening the understanding of what is often a marginalized stage of human development, within shojo anime and otherwise: girlhood. Analyzing each film as cinematic texts in which girls are encouraged to find their own independence is what is most appealing and enjoyable about studying these works.

CHAPTER 1: *MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO* AS ADOLESCENT FAIRY TALE

The use of fairy tales to study the connection between fantastical *anime* and a girl's journey towards maturation is an intriguing, but not unprecedented approach. “Anime has consistently come into fruitful collision with themes, images and symbols (archetypes included) associated with the fairy tale tradition,” writes prolific *anime* scholar Dani Cavallaro in *The Fairy Tale and Anime: Traditional Themes, Images and Symbols at Play on Screen*, a book that details at length the relationship between the genres.<sup>31</sup> Defining the characteristics of the fairy tale tradition, both independently of anime and as processed within it, is important in further determining its functionality in relation to the study of how anime processes fantasy. Bruno Bettelheim, one of the preeminent voices in the academic discourse on fairy tales, interprets the genre primarily in relation to its audience – the child. In his *The Uses of Enchantment*, a central text, he explains that “the child is subject to desperate feelings of loneliness and isolation, and he often experiences mortal anxiety. More often than not, he is unable to express

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<sup>31</sup> Dani Cavallaro, *The Fairy Tale and Anime: Traditional Themes, Images and Symbols at Play on Screen* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011) 1.

these feelings in words, or he can do so only by indirection: fear of the dark, of some animal, anxiety about his body.”<sup>32</sup> These “anxieties” are then directly confronted in the fairy tale with the goal of “[offering] solutions in ways that the child can grasp on his level of understanding.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, for Bettelheim, not only is the fairy tale a necessary tool in assuaging the fears of the anxiety-prone child, which their parents feel incapable of relating to or dissuading their children from, but it is also an educational genre within itself. The fairy tale provides a manual for a child about self-expression and how to overcome these youthful anxieties, in order to build a pathway towards successful, secure adolescence and subsequent adulthood.

The fairy tale imagines its confrontation of childhood anxiety through a series of tropes that create worlds both familiar and fantastical for the child. Defining traits of the fairy tale include distinctly polarized “good or bad” characterizations that mimic the way in which a child sees the world. The hero, unlike the one-dimensional figures who surround them, serves as an avatar for the child reader, someone onto whom they can project their desires, anxieties, and inquiries about the world. The fairy tale hero interrogates and explores these everyday worries through action, which “takes the place of understanding for a child, and this becomes increasingly true the more strongly he feels,” writes Bettelheim. He continues, “Not before puberty do we recognize our emotions for

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<sup>32</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976) 10.

<sup>33</sup> Bettelheim, 10.

what they are without immediately acting on them, or wishing to do so.”<sup>34</sup> The events of the fairy tale are therefore action-oriented without introspection, as this is how the child processes his or her emotions. These actions are centered around conflicts, as all stories are, and indeed as life is, as Jack Zipes notes in the beginning of *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. These conflicts are especially related to a desire for “transformation” of the world and of the self. “Therefore, the focus of fairy tales, whether oral, written, or cinematic, has always been on finding magical instruments, extraordinary technologies, or powerful people and animals that will enable protagonists to transform themselves along with their environment, making it more suitable for living in peace and contentment.”<sup>35</sup> These types of situations reflect a potent theme in childhood, that of constant change and growth. Through the types of conflicts that arise, and against which action is taken, fairy tales directly address the liminal, psychological space that the readers occupy.

The conflicts and actions of fairy tales externalize the psyches of their readers, doing so by interpreting them through a fantastic lens that uses unrealistic settings, characters, and situations to tell the stories of real-life childhood issues. This lens is not only narrative, but also technological. Cinema, and anime specifically, become the literal “magical instruments” through which these tales are constructed. Anime's non-photographic capabilities directly correlate to the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012) 2.

beyond humanly possible enchantment that is the fairy tale's crux. The particularities and possibilities of the non-photographic medium, as well as those inherent within this type of fantasy itself, are what set the animated fairy tale apart generically from other stories of young heroes. Laura Kready articulates this situation by referring to “the combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar” as “the most essential of the fairy traits” in her book, *A Study of Fairy Tales*.<sup>36</sup> Her book is a lengthy discussion of the educational benefits of the fairy tale, and she, like Bettelheim, insists that the removal from reality is most compelling for a child. She generates a list of traits of the fairy tale that are further dependent on the interests of its young readers, including magic, wonder, mystery, adventure, animals (which often take the form of “friendly helpers”), sensory details, and others.<sup>37</sup> Any combination of these can appear in a story, and they generally appear in a manner that further highlights the distinction of the “Fairyland” from the discernible real world. A fairy tale adventure most importantly culminates in a “happily ever after” for its hero, which is true no matter how threatening and dangerous a story is for its characters. “The fairy tale is optimistic, no matter how terrifyingly serious some features of the story may be. It is this...which sets the fairy tale apart from other stories in which equally fantastic events occur, whether the happy outcome is due to the virtues of the hero, chance, or the interference of

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<sup>36</sup> Laura Fry Kready, *A Study of Fairy Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916) 13.

<sup>37</sup> Bettelheim, 127.



supernatural figures.”<sup>38</sup> While life-threatening danger is not uncommon in the typical fairy tale, there is never any doubt that the protagonist will pull through and succeed at the end. The child reader is therefore presented with a text that they can proudly and safely identify themselves with and in. Their avatar, with the help of the fantasy world and its attributes, is able to achieve a goal that is analogous, albeit stealthily, to something that the child fears in their own life. These components form a cohesive whole that enforces the fairy tale as a medium, both narrative and cinematic, perfectly suited for creating the journey of a hero facing the anxious change towards a new phase in life – such as adolescence.

It is to this end of imaging the transitions imposed by adolescence and developmental change that the film *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988, dir. Miyazaki) most interestingly utilizes the fairy tale. The film tells the story of two young sisters whose move to a new home in the rural countryside is precipitated by their mother’s illness. As the elder of the two assumes maternal responsibilities in her mother’s stead, she is tasked with reconciling her persistent childhood desires with the requirements of her new adolescent lifestyle. In doing so, she gains access to the world of the titular Totoro creature(s), who grant her access to the fantastical fairy tale she still yearns for while simultaneously mobilizing her maturation process. The film’s privileging of fairy tale tropes, such as family, monsters, and the natural world renders it an example of the genre that directly

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<sup>38</sup> Bettelheim, 37.

attends to the themes involved with adolescent development.

However, as a product of Japanese cultural tradition and normative values, *Totoro* is at once a conventional and unconventional fairy tale by Western standards. Yet it is informed by the Western canonization of the fairy tale, as well as a specifically Japanese interpretation of the genre. Cavallaro elaborates on the similarities and differences between the Western and Eastern modes of the fairy tale, such as noting how a symbol as potent as nature for both representations of the genre is expanded upon in the Eastern – or anime – version. She writes, “In traditional fairy tales, nature operates as one of the richest – arguably *the* richest – repository of symbols, lending not merely a setting but also a narrative and dramatic backbone to the story and its personae,” while “in anime inspired by the fairy tale tradition, the natural environment insistently asserts itself as a protagonist.”<sup>39</sup> Nature, as illustrated within the film, is not merely a tool for crafting powerful sensory impressions upon the reader. In the anime fairy tale, it becomes as integral to the narrative as the protagonists themselves.

Another integral application of the fairy tale archetype is the usage of darkness within anime. This notion is asserted by Cavallaro's invocation of Japanese theorist Junichirou Tanizaki's “aesthetic assessment of the role played by darkness and shadows” in fairy tales, as specifically filtered through “Japanese attitudes.”<sup>40</sup> A magical space is usually represented by darkness due to its innate

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<sup>39</sup> Cavallaro, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 15.

mysterious, magical quality, yet while darkness is synonymous for “evil” or “bad” in the polarized fairy tale thematic language, Tanizaki suggests otherwise. Instead, there is a “propensity to seek beauty in darkness” and its magical creatures and Fairyland inhabitants interact with or exist within it as such.<sup>41</sup> Within this oft-limiting symbolic space, darkness takes on a more layered textual significance, in which it is representative not immediately of evil, but instead of a more ambiguous quality—that of beauty—which is still an attendant interest of the fairy tale. Understanding these subtle but unique aspects of the differing traditions is important when it comes to assessing an *anime* like *Totoro* as part of the fairy tale canon.

The fairy tale tropes that *My Neighbor Totoro* makes use of reveal themselves gradually over the course of the film. While it is not an overtly fantastical concept, family as a system is one theme that is important in both the conventional fairy tale and the film. Within the family structure, Satsuki's pubertal development becomes notable and dynamic. The appearance of the protagonist's family at the beginning of a fairy tale narrative creates the realistic setting that the story eventually deviates from, perhaps inciting the trend towards the fantastical by embedding the story in some identifiable, oppositional real world locus. Satsuki's relationships with her family members – her parents, and most importantly, her younger sister Mei – create the spaces within which her development is enacted, granting her the agency to mature while still highlighting

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the discrepancies between her attempts at adulthood and her more child-like reality. The initial family unit, as presented at the beginning of the film, appears to be sisters Satsuki and Mei along with their seemingly single father, Mr. Kusakabe. The father is notable as the first adult presence in the film, introduced simultaneously with his children and immediately serving as a counterpoint to them, although this is slowly revealed to be a false impression. When we first see them, the trio is traveling along a picturesque, quiet countryside. Only the father appears to be misfit, wearing his sweater vest and thick glasses in the rural setting. As they approach their new house, there is already a sense of something fantastical lurking, due to the way the house is framed. Seen mostly in long shots, there is a good deal of space surrounding the home in these frames so as to suggest that there is something existing in the space along the edges which is hinted at but remains unseen. This sense of mystery is present throughout the film; the house is often shot from a greater distance, so as to truly position it as part of its surroundings. The magic of this new setting in turn becomes increasingly apparent as the film continues on.

This mystery is suggested both by the early insistence of framing the house from afar and in wide shots and the actions that Satsuki and Mei's father takes when they begin to interact with the house. As the car pulls into their new home, and the girls rush to explore it with unbridled enthusiasm, their father does not call them back to help him unload the car, or even once become frustrated

with their behavior. Instead, he is often seen trailing behind them at the edges of the frame, unable to keep up with his daughters' exuberant energy. Rather than halting the camera as it moves to keep up with the girls, or working towards matching their pace himself, Mr. Kusakabe is instead content to drift in and out of the frame, deferring to and supportive of the excitement that his daughters share over their new home. However, after the girls discover a parade of black dust creatures living in their back room, their father is the one to explain, in calmer shots in which he is a more primary focus, that they are "soot gremlins." His response suggesting that he is just as able as they are to engage in these fairy tale, childish interests and events.

Yet as the film continues, the father's struggle to assume the supportive single parent as he tries to balance family and work becomes more apparent. Hayao Miyazaki himself describes the father in his "directorial memo" about the film as "[lacking] some of the abilities needed to balance the responsibility onto his daughters...he doesn't have the settled maturity of people used to always functioning within society."<sup>42</sup> Because of his own unstable adulthood, the father finds himself often defaulting to the help of Satsuki to fulfill the duties of a wife. He gives her responsibilities, such as helping out around the house with basic chores, which she happily accepts without argument. This trust then gives her the initiative to take on an even more adult role within the family, preparing lunch for herself, her father, and Mei, as well as being the one who is most immediately and

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<sup>42</sup> Hayao Miyazaki, Starting Point: 1979-1996 (San Francisco, CA: VIZ Media, 2009) 261.

primarily concerned with Mei's well-being. As Miyazaki notes in his directorial memo, “in a family whose mother is absent, [Satsuki] is fulfilling the role of homemaker.”<sup>43</sup> Satsuki is happy to do so, eager to assert her competence as an integral, mature member of the family structure. Her relationship with her father therefore serves the purpose of not just granting her the opportunity to exercise her developing interest and ability to perform adult tasks, but to even participate in a version of family life in which she acts as a co-parent.

Satsuki not only desires maturity, but it is required of her, as Miyazaki suggests: “Because she has to look after her father – who is deficient in his ability to master the realities of daily life – and her little sister, she has been forced to exercise forbearance. This necessitates her having to be mature.”<sup>44</sup> In essence, Satsuki replaces their sick mother around the house, serving as the necessary maternal figure for her younger sister. The mother is clearly an important figure in the girls' lives – which is why her absence is so significant. The family's move is motivated by a desire to be both closer to the hospital in which she is staying as well as to provide her with a more natural, airy setting in which she can better recover from her tuberculosis. The hospital, hidden behind dense trees, is framed as almost impenetrable. This location differs from the family's home, which is immediately accessible to the viewers and the girls, set in the foreground with the magical forest lying behind them. Instead, the hospital is protected by this same

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<sup>43</sup> Miyazaki, 259

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

natural world that obfuscates its viewers from full view on first appearance. Shot from a high angle, this location is filmed so as to accentuate the effort that is required of the family to go visit their mother, traveling several miles by both bicycle and foot. When the girls finally enter the hospital to see their mother, they find her in a room that is full of natural lighting, unlike the shaded back room and attic of their new house. The hospital room, and subsequently their mother, is carefully and exclusively shot from higher angles and from a mid-distance. The distance emphasizes the presence of the natural world behind her, yet at the same time the viewer is made aware of the fact that there are windows and walls separating her from that same space. It is at once a place welcoming to and filtering out nature, creating a marked sense of a sanitized reality.

With her mother gone, Satsuki assumes her role, something she does competently but not wholly securely. She vacillates between being Mei's maternal figure and being her older sister. This duality is exemplified when the family goes to visit Mother in the hospital; Mei immediately clamors for physical affection, while Satsuki, who has been making herself out to be a surrogate for the mother that she herself still wants, “feels some inhibition about nestling up to and clinging to her, which her little sister Mei can still do.”<sup>45</sup> Eventually, however, she caves in, by allowing her mother to brush her hair and admitting that she still “aspires” to be like her mother, suggesting that she still feels unstable in this position. This instability extends to her adolescent role as an in-between stage

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<sup>45</sup> Miyazaki, 260.

after childhood and before adulthood, while also stemming from her situation. She has assumed this role abruptly due to the sudden, persistent illness that has hospitalized her mother. Therefore, while she appears to have achieved a successful and secure adolescence, she has not been properly emotionally prepared to handle its hardships, even as she seems to carry out its tasks with ease.

The film's most central familial relationship is that of the two sisters, elder Satsuki and younger Mei. As Raz Greenberg explains in her article on “*Giri and Ninjo: The Roots of Hayao Miyazaki's My Neighbor Totoro in Animated Adaptations of Classic Children's Literature*,”

While the design of Satsuki, the older sister, is realistic and basically presents her as a younger version of the adult characters, the design of Mei, the younger sister, is far more cartoon-like, as evident in her big head (slightly disproportional to the rest of her body), and her exaggerated gestures...This design makes Mei stand out in the society that surrounds her. In a sense, Mei is the only real child in the entire film.<sup>46</sup>

This differentiation is readily apparent from the start. At the beginning of the film, when they are first inspecting their new home, Mei and Satsuki are quickly defined for the viewer by their movements, as well as their reactions to the fairy tale creatures inhabiting their attic and back rooms. Running towards the house, they both exhibit immediate, unrestrained excitement for their new home, embracing it for the new adventure it presents to them. Their movements are

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<sup>46</sup> Raz Greenberg, "Giri and Ninjo: The Roots of Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro* in Animated Adaptations of Classic Children's Literature." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 40.2 (2012) 103-4.



matched effectively by the music, which is driving and percussive. As they race around the yard and interact with the house in very physical ways – pushing on the rotten support beams, padding across the dusty wooden floors – Satsuki's long limbs bear striking contrast to Mei's shorter, stubbier ones. Satsuki is in possession of her body, gangly as it is; she is stable in it, propelling herself forward with ease. Even her physicality suggests that she is able to take on far more than she has been emotionally prepared for at her age. Her energy, as conveyed through the animation, is specifically childlike, but compared to that of Mei, it has a more mature appearance. Unlike her sister, Mei is unable to run without tripping over herself or even falling on her face, which is imaged explicitly later in the film. In a scene in which the girls are trying to get themselves out of the rain, Mei falls very swiftly right onto her face, getting mud all over herself. It is a testament to her own preternatural confidence that she does not burst into tears, and that Satsuki does not worry that she has hurt herself. Both accept that her constant teetering is the limitation of her prepubescent body. In this way, Mei is less insecure than Satsuki, who refuses to show physical or emotional weakness, and Mei's body makes physical her overall tendency towards unrestrained emotion and activity.

The differences between Mei and Satsuki are physically apparent, and present in terms of their familial roles as well. Due to the newness of their family situation – its restructuring as Mother spends time away from the family in the

hospital and its repositioning as the family moves to a quiet, pastoral village to be closer to Mother – Mei and Satsuki's bond is presumably stronger than ever. Satsuki's new maternal role develops strictly from the necessity of having a mother figure for Mei, who is still deeply emotional and dependent on those around her. It is in this role that Satsuki most assuredly attains credibility as an adolescent, as someone with more mature responsibilities than a child. When asked to help around the new house, Satsuki jumps to it immediately because she understands that this is expected of her. Mei, however, follows along, not because she wants to help, but because she wants to be with and be like her caregiver, Satsuki. Satsuki, who understands that this is her position within the household now, with Mother gone, enables the dependency that Mei craves from her. By relying on her sister, Mei grants Satsuki the agency she desires, because in comparison to her younger sister, Satsuki truly resembles an adult. Through Mei's eyes, Satsuki seems capable beyond her years, her spirit unbroken by the situation that is proving more difficult for Mei. Mei is prone to more emotional outbursts, but Satsuki, silently reconciling her childish nature with her increasing maturity, maintains strength in the face of grave realities; she remains positive and refuses to show her true feelings of fear and concern.

Mei and Satsuki's high-energy romp throughout the house comes to a sudden pause when Mei, who has gone off by herself to attempt to catch one of the “soot gremlins” that the girls discovered when inspecting the rooms, bumps

into their elderly neighbor, Granny. In the presence of their elder, the difference between Mei and Satsuki's social awareness is apparent, with Satsuki taking on a more formal, polite tone while Mei instead is silent, unsure of how to communicate with an older stranger as well as completely uninterested in showing the respect demanded by the situation. This exchange showcases Satsuki's adeptness at translating her personality between its child form and its adolescent form. She is able to assume proper formalities immediately after screaming with her sister at the small fairy tale creatures that populate their attic.

Granny becomes another important adult figure in the girls' lives, and is directly tied to the generic fairy tale in which the film is quietly engulfed. The presence of elderly figures is conventional for the fairy tale, and Granny (who has no other name, making overt her role as the “wise elderly person”) emerges to serve as a provider for the fairy tale lore that becomes more and more visible within these girls' lives. With her large, expressive eyes, her appearance is both weathered with age yet reminiscent of Mei's softer, more cartoon-like body. This dichotomy helps to establish her connection to both the adult world, to which she is most responsible, as well as to the fantastic world of children, for which she still has empathy. Just prior to meeting Granny, the girls find small, black creatures residing in their back room, a sight that shocks these high-energy girls into silence. After a silently static wide shot of the girls staring wide-eyed into the room, following the quick cuts and close-ups of the obscured fuzzed out circles

darting in every direction, they begin to scream again, a scream filled with fear as well as fascination with the fantastical creatures. While the scream begins with the girls on-screen, a cut quickly puts them behind the camera, instead facing the room so as to give the viewer the time to investigate the film's first intimation of a fairy tale unraveling within these seemingly normal walls. This static wide shot enhances the fantasy of this scene, utilizing silence to allow for the viewer, and Mei and Satsuki, to get a sense of the sheer quantity of these creatures. The combination of silence and meditative camera work gives the creatures a sense of life, which recalls the quiet moments that occur after true surprise, while also working to highlight the mysteries that fill the room. This shot slows the pace down considerably, ending the girls' high-energy explorations suddenly and deliberately with a long take that emphasizes that there is something fantastic building underneath the surface, a world different from their own. However, after leaving the room, Satsuki is able to leave the fantasy behind her and return to the pursuit of discovering and cleaning up the house, as is asked of her. While Satsuki and Mei both encounter these creatures together and are similarly intrigued by their presence, Satsuki is more readily able to return to the "real world" without them. Mei, on the other hand, greatly desires to catch one and present it to her sister when they reappear, in order to assert that the creatures do not belong purely to a separate fantasy realm.

Another scene in medium-wide-shot, filmed by a fixed camera, illustrates

Mei's stoic dedication to this task. Right before she meets Granny, Mei again stares defiantly at a crevice in the wall in the attic. Mei truly believes in the magic inhabiting her house, and thus is certain this space houses the "soot gremlins," as they are termed by their father. It is a powerfully tense moment that again connects the presence of another world to a more deliberate pace, a rhythm unlike the varied cutting, shot length, shot distance, and reliance on music of their earlier explorations. Granny emerges to acknowledge the dichotomy between these realities, the childhood and adult worlds between which Satsuki travels, while Mei firmly belongs to the former. Granny says that she used to be able to see the gremlins when she was young like them, implying that with age comes a disconnection from the fantasy to which the girls are connected. Satsuki is nearing the period of life in which the fairy tale of these home-dwelling spirits is no longer relevant or virtually manifested, but Granny proves that while these creatures exist in a world separate from adulthood, the appeal of fantasy does not wear off with age. These childhood pursuits are enviable and universal. Granny's understanding of the girls' interaction with the soot gremlins therefore allows for and encourages their further adventures into the fairy tale world of the spirits that live around their new house.

Indeed, the soot gremlins are merely the first fantastical creatures that the girls encounter, and this anticipates the fairy tale world's increasing intersection with the girls' reality. Granny's magical justification of the creatures' existence

proves a necessity for childish pursuits in Satsuki and Mei's lives, in the context of their uprooting and the seriousness of their mother's illness. The succeeding scene that takes place in the hospital enforces this need for magic. The viewer, along with Satsuki and Mei, is removed from the liminal space of the house, teeming with creatures unfamiliar in their illustration, into the striking reality of the hospital. As Satsuki's responsibilities as the replacement maternal figure grow, her mother's fragility and immobility are reinforced by seeing her bedridden in the hospital and solely at eye-level. Her mother is positioned as equal to or even beneath her growing, limber eldest daughter, which makes it clear that the real world is filled with an uncertainty that is even more unsettling than the experience of staring down small dust creatures in the attic. Thrusting the soot gremlins into their initial house exploration was crucial to providing the foreground for the film's primary fairy tale voyage into an intersecting fantasy world, one that both intrigues them with its mysteriousness, while comforting and accommodating them with its childhood exclusivity. Fantasy, then, becomes an important device in distracting from and relieving the anxieties that develop within their new reality, one that is especially complex for the adolescent Satsuki as she tries to accommodate her new leadership roles within her reconstructed family system, and in reconciling childhood and adolescence. The appearance of these fantasy creatures at this specific moment in the girls' lives is not coincidental, but in fact directly related to the insecurity of their new situations.

The fairy tale at the heart of *Totoro* builds upon the appearance of the soot gremlins, which are visually obscure and unfamiliar as they scurry away so quickly that the viewer sees them less as physical objects and more as impressions and motion. These creatures introduce a fantastic, dreamlike outlet within the girls' more serious reality, a larger world that is simultaneously separate from this latter sphere and specific to the childhood experience. It is the realm of the titular Totoro creatures and their ilk. The ambiguously rabbit-like Totoros, as Mei believes they are called, represent the animal helper trope that is often found in fairy tales. Inhabiting a giant camphor tree whose size is made immediately and pointedly apparent upon introduction by a measured tilt up its length, one of the film's few instances of a mobile camera, the Totoro creatures are at once readily accessible to the child who believes in their fantasy. The proximity of the Totoros' home to that of the girls is integral to their intersection with their lives. Satsuki is defined by her outward desire to steal herself away from the emotional outbursts of childhood, while Mei looks to be close to her sister, even if she is incapable of mimicking her more mature behaviors quite yet. Therefore, the fact that the Totoros' tree is located so close to where the girls already live means that they are able to stumble upon it, enabling their entry into the fairy tale world that exists parallel to their own.

And so stumble into it Mei does, while her father is working and her sister is away at school. As the younger, more emotionally available sister (not to

mention the one with the most free time on her hands), it is only fitting that Mei be the first of the family to encounter the Totoros. Left to her own devices, Mei does some exploring around the grounds, only to discover a small, furry creature – the first Totoro sighting. Accompanied by the introduction of what will become the recurring Totoro theme, an important identifying musical cue that reinforces the whimsy inherent within this dreamlike, quietly surreal situation, Mei is entranced by the little white creature to the point of silence. However, her lack of emotional self-consciousness means that she is quickly able to launch herself “down the rabbit hole” toward which this creature leads her. Joined by a larger, blue Totoro, the pair escape underneath a bush into an impossibly small passageway that only someone child-sized could follow them into. Again, Mei is the essential explorer here, and the entryway into the Totoro world is specifically engineered for someone her size. While later, her father and Satsuki follow her back into this passage, only Mei is immediately comfortable navigating it. Satsuki, whose body has already shed much of its childhood malleability, fits through but with some unease, while their father is able to enter the passage only by using force. It is the physicality of childhood that gives way to the fantasy realm at the end of the tunnel, and Mei emerges after the Totoros in their vast home, filled with tremendously oversized trees. It is a world in which the small appear even smaller, dwarfed by the magnitude and majesty of nature. The creation of these inherently child-specific spaces is the production of anime as a



medium. Anime is able to accentuate the differences in children and adults' abilities to enter certain spaces by illustrating them as impossibly small, and then just as quickly transforming them into something implausibly magnificent. Not required to reproduce reality as photographic languages are, anime instead endeavors to mechanize Mei as a body able to navigate the transformative space of the passageway, and the subsequent magically gigantic size of the Totoro world. As illustrated, it is a true fantasy realm, one that thrives on the wonder most organically produced in childhood, as well as in anime.

The Totoro's "home world" is sparsely populated, its natural elements aside; the natural environment is emphasized in the foreground, as opposed to the background as in the human world. "A profound respect for nature in all its manifestations" is idiomatic in Japanese culture and, subsequently, art.<sup>47</sup> Mei, after landing on the luscious grassy knoll beneath her, immediately looks up, and another tilt up the trunk of the camphor tree serves to inspire awe within the viewer, rather than establishing a coherent space on the other side of the tunnel. As the camera moves skywards, the world suddenly becomes much larger; the fairy tale setting is a grandiose one, most importantly, one whose potentialities exist far beyond the frame's restrictive borders. Thanks to the limitless nature of anime as non-photographic, the camera constructs a sense of infinite wonder that is integral to the establishment of this fairy tale setting. The art within the frame

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<sup>47</sup> Dani Cavallaro, *Magic as Metaphor in Anime: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2010) 9.

conveys this intrigue, too, as the detail and sheer amount of greenery surrounding Mei in this place is so ripe and lush as to seem only possible within a space unpopulated by humans. This sense is especially powerful in contrast with the more typical “anime”-style image of Mei, whose features become even more pronounced in contrast to the magical realism of the natural world surrounding her. This is a key moment in establishing the specific evocative power of anime. The creation of the Totoro world as childhood fantasy stems directly from evoking a satisfying and artistically-motivated sense of difference as well as sameness between the human figures and the non-human within this world. The forest may resemble reality in comparison to the bodied Mei, yet it still exhibits features only possible in a limitless medium such as anime. The never-ending, magnificent height of the trees is highlighted by a tilt down the trunk that does not even begin to capture the entirety of its majesty, and the fact that the forest is born out of a small, impossible entryway tunnel are key examples of these anime-only possibilities. Anime allows for Mei to coexist with this delicate, detailed pastoral world, even as her round body and specific cartoon features (big eyes, pigtails) suggest that she does not belong.

The iconic figure in this world is the largest Totoro creature. The Totoro also stands out against its backdrop as a creation specific to its medium, due to its beady eyes and comically oversized mouth (reminiscent at times of the Cheshire Cat, the classic fantasy creature from *Alice in Wonderland*), along with the

ambiguity of what it exactly *is* (is Totoro a rabbit? A bear? Or simply a Totoro?). There is something distinct about the Totoro's appearance, such as the stripes on its stomach and the claws on its hands and feet, yet at the same time it presents itself as a character upon which the audience and Mei can project their desires. Totoro's lack of specific animal referent allows for it to become a true fairy tale creature in that it exhibits traditional fairy tale creature qualities while also allowing for those with which it interacts to create their own understandings and interpretations of who or what it truly is. Totoro's ambiguity refutes Bettelheim's claim that the fairy tale is not suited to the illustrated format, as "the illustrated story is robbed of much content of personal meaning which it could bring to the child who applied only his own visual associations to the story, instead of the illustrator."<sup>48</sup> Totoro, as visualized by Miyazaki, is at once an entity that allows for personal connections to be crafted between the children within the film (Mei in this first instance) and the audience. Totoro is first seen from behind in a beautiful, broad wide shot, and is then approached more fully as the shots become closer and more intimate, scaling this large creature into a size more accessible for the children for whom this fantasy truly exists.

At first, amidst this imposing, yet never threatening, natural landscape of implausibly tall trees and accompanying fauna, the Totoro still manages to appear gigantic, which is compounded by the fact that he is sleeping and snoring powerfully. Its snores are the only sound audible in the forest until Mei, who has

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<sup>48</sup> Bettelheim, 60.

climbed upon the deeply sleeping Totoro's stomach, begins screaming with excitement, overwhelmed by the happiness she feels in proximity this creature. These screams are a release for her, a cathartic action that is permitted by the unperturbed Totoro. The screams do not alter or negatively impact this beautiful, restful place, and instead Mei fits seamlessly into it, almost symbiotically. Just as the Totoro theme music is important for creating that initial sense of whimsicality, Mei's interaction with this otherwise silent soundscape adds distinct texture to it, proving that this world can accommodate the needs of a child. In fact, thanks to the silence, Mei's screams become even more puncturing than they might be in the constant din of her normal reality. For these reasons – the world's and the Totoro's tacit acceptance of Mei and her emotionally-motivated child status through sound and action – the fairy tale realm imaged here immediately suggests that it and its inhabitants exist as champions of youth, and especially a youth that has been encumbered and affected by more serious external pressures.

After Mei establishes an enthusiastic kinship with Totoro, Satsuki's reactions to her sister's claims of a Totoro world further complicate and confirm her status as a not yet secure adolescent. Satsuki returns home to find that her father and Mei have not eaten the lunch she had prepared for them, and that her father has not seen Mei for hours. Satsuki immediately launches into maternal mode, running to find Mei as her father belatedly tags along. This action is not that of a sister searching for her playmate, but instead an elder looking for her

child with frustration and underlying concern. When Satsuki finds a sleeping Mei in the tiny passageway, she is first stern with her until Mei talks about meeting the Totoros. Satsuki, unbelieving while not incredulous at such a story, follows behind her younger sister with matched enthusiasm. The tone she had taken upon discovering her sister on the ground in the tunnel had belied her position as her sister's fellow child, as opposed to primary caregiver. Yet when the passage does not lead to Totoro as it did before, Satsuki reverts back to her maternal role; she and her father do not immediately believe in Mei's story now that she is unable to prove her discovery. However, their father sets the precedent for an acceptance of the Totoro that will allow for Satsuki to accommodate it within her transforming, liminal psychological space. While Mei is purely emotionally-driven, Satsuki prefers logic, which is exemplified by her enforcing of the family's status quo by picking up the tasks that her ill mother has been unable to complete. Their father, as he explains that Totoro must be a forest spirit as opposed to the questionable description Mei had given them, affords legitimacy to the Totoro entity, thus giving both of his daughters the go-ahead to pursue it. Satsuki, as with the soot gremlins before, is perfectly fine believing in and even getting excited about something with a proven history, especially one that is passed down to her by her elders. Yet it is not with a practiced reverence that she approaches Totoro's tree – it is with the same high-speed childish energy that her sister shares. Their father has indeed grounded the Totoro figure for the girls, but his basis is both spiritual

and historical in a fairy tale way. Totoro may be tied to the great spiritual history that is predominant in Japanese culture, but this does not preclude it from being a fairy tale creature, much to Satsuki's childish delight.

Satsuki later writes a letter to her mother – a mature act that Mei is not capable of – about how Mei was lucky enough to encounter Totoro, and how she hopes that she will be able to meet it, too. As she writes, Totoro solely belongs to the child Mei, who does not restrict her childhood priorities like Satsuki does. Satsuki missed out on meeting Totoro not due to any lack of interest, but because the increasing responsibilities of maturity restrict her from indulging this side of herself as much as she used to be able to, before her mother got sick. Her mother's illness has aged Satsuki, who just as badly as Mei craves something pure and fantastic, to relieve her of the stress that can erupt from her duties in relation to her mother's uncertain health situation. The letter reveals how much Satsuki longs for what Mei has – the constant indulgence of the id, an unencumbered pursuit of all things that speak directly to her emotional side, as well as her childhood love of magical creatures. The seeming injection into her reality of these fantasy and spiritual elements gives Satsuki a renewed vitality, however briefly.

Despite her letter to her mother professing her desire to see the forest spirits for herself, Satsuki remains entrenched in the real world, her academic and domestic selves requiring her to devote herself more fully to adolescent activities. While Satsuki reads her letter to her mother in excited voice over, suggesting her

deep interest in Mei's fairy tale world, in the scene immediately following Satsuki is seen happily going to school. Mei, who is not in school and thus has the free time to do so, has met Totoro because she can devote her time to pursuing the fantasy of her new surroundings. Satsuki pines for that childhood free time, while also finding security in the routine nature of school. Satsuki is seen positively interacting with her classmates, people her own age that allow her to explore her pre-teen identity. However, Mei interrupts the affirming adolescent space of school when she shows up there with Granny. She is crying uncontrollably, feeling bored and insecure without her sister/mother figure. The intersection of these two highly separate roles, the academic adolescent one and the dependent, carefree child one, results in a scene that most dramatically highlights the growing distance between the two sisters. As Mei sits sandwiched between an irritated Satsuki and a friend in her classroom, she calls attention to herself. While the students are doing their writing exercises and other classwork, Mei is doodling pictures of the Totoro creatures that Satsuki can only hope of engaging with in a life filled with other tasks. Mei is fascinating to these pre-teens because unlike them, she is still allowed to be reckless and imaginative. Due to the attention Mei receives from her classmates, Satsuki becomes embarrassed by her sister for the first time, as well as perhaps envious of her. Her facial expression is unlike any we have seen her wear before; Satsuki is uncomfortable, frustrated, perturbed by her sister's presence, making even more apparent how removed Satsuki is from

this child life she once led herself. Satsuki longs to be a secure and successful adolescent, something she often seems to achieve, but Mei, doodling away, has no interest in that lifestyle at this time. This situation reflects an important fairy tale notion of the distinct, bittersweet adolescent understanding of adulthood. As Bettelheim writes, “To become a man or a woman really means to stop being a child, an idea which does not occur to the prepubertal child, but which the adolescent realizes.”<sup>49</sup> Watching them in this sanitized, non-fantastical adolescent setting strongly characterizes this important difference between the two sisters.

It is especially fascinating, then, that this scene is succeeded by Satsuki's first encounter with Totoro, an interaction in which Mei is not present. Waiting at the bus stop for their father to come home from work, Satsuki holds Mei on her back, seemingly alone in this peaceful, rain-soaked world of responsibility. When Totoro walks over to the pair of sisters, also waiting for a bus of his own, Satsuki sees its feet first, and then slowly looks up the side of its body. As opposed to Mei, who looks upon the entirety of Totoro all at once, her big-headed yet small, child's body immediately appearing even smaller in his presence, Satsuki's measured, analytic perusal of the creature's body, piece by piece, action by action emphasizes that she is approaching Totoro from a place of deepening adulthood. A cut to her disgusted facial expression after she looks up to see Totoro scratching itself is especially telling of her interpretation of this creature. Yet despite the seeming reluctance to submit to the emotional fantasy of childhood from which

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<sup>49</sup> Bettelheim, 99.



Totoro comes, which she exhibits in the preceding scene at school, Satsuki quickly confirms and accepts that this is the Totoro that Mei has become obsessed with, and offers it her extra umbrella. Next to Satsuki, and in the midst of her positive, affirmative behavior in response to Totoro, the creature seems in fact smaller than before. Satsuki's lithe, long body and calm confidence in comparison to her sister's renders Totoro into something more akin to her peer. This impression is heightened by the scene's deliberate pacing, which Dani Cavallaro praises in her chapter on the film in *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*: “The impression of slowness is reinforced by the pervasive silence, deftly punctuated by the murmur of the rain and by the big Totoro's guttural utterances.”<sup>50</sup> In this crucial moment, Satsuki keeps her calm, and the film matches, and even motivates, this quiet, slow integration of Totoro into her reality. Through its refusal to cut away without giving time to digest the surroundings, the film slowly integrates the magical and the real.

Along with its cathartic, gentle pacing, what is perhaps most striking about this beautiful first meeting between Satsuki and Totoro is that it takes place during the graying darkness of the rainstorm. The dark/light codification that is generic for the fairy tale comes into play here, skewing the typical association of these concepts. Through their small interactions, Totoro proves itself to be anything but a threat to these two girls, who have never ever feared him; it speaks directly to their youthful belief in every being's innate goodness. In the typical

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<sup>50</sup> Cavallaro, 76.

fairy tale, Satsuki's first encounter with this bizarre animal in inclement weather at nighttime would inspire fear within the viewer, if not Satsuki herself. In this scene, however, there is a distinct lack of fear, only curiosity and excitement for Satsuki to finally meet the elusive Totoro. This is because, as Miyazaki says in an interview about the themes and production of the film, "For Japanese who don't think [in the terms of a dark/light dichotomy], the gods are in the darkness. They may come out into the light at times, but they are usually deep in the forest or mountains."<sup>51</sup> As a "godlike" forest creature, Totoro is used to the dark; it spends most of its time asleep, inside of a tree that is only accessible by tumbling down a rather dark, narrow tunnel. Light and dark exist organically in equal parts, and are celebrated for their presence in nature, which Miyazaki enforces by making Totoro nocturnal. At the same time, however, there is a demonstrated awareness of the importance of light in a filmic context, and in turn the "goodness" that it signifies within the fairy tale structure. While the majority of the film up to this point has been shot at eye-level or lower angles, in this scene at the bus stop, there is a series of high-angle shots framing Satsuki, hunched over with Mei on her back, in the light of the lamppost next to her. A medium-wide shot illustrates just how potent the light emanating from this lamp is; the road and what lies beyond it is hardly visible, and the usually detailed trees and plants are instead darkened and drained of their vitality in the rainy dusk. A shot from high above and behind Satsuki lingers upon the lamppost, positioning it at the center of the frame, so that

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<sup>51</sup> Miyazaki, 359.

it is protecting Mei and Satsuki as they wait for those whom they consider their guardians. All facets of this magic-tinged reality conspire not against these sisters, but for their safety and survival.

Totoro recognizes and appreciates Satsuki's treatment of it, especially the kindness she displays in offering the umbrella, and as its charmingly surreal "Catbus" appears to take it away (to Satsuki and Mei's surprise and confusion), it offers them a token of its appreciation in return. Totoro matches Satsuki's human world gesture with a fairy tale one, handing over magical acorns, again emphasizing its connection to the nature-centric magical world while also making use of another deliberate fairy tale item – the magical seeds. These acorns later serve to further bring Satsuki over into the fantasy world that Mei accepts so easily. After participating in a ritualistic dance to help the acorns sprout into gigantic trees, Totoro invites the sisters for a ride on his stomach. Greenberg writes that this activity proves that Satsuki, like her sister, "also needs her own retreat into the world of emotional childhood."<sup>52</sup> The possibility of flight was hinted at by the film's usage of wide shots and tilts up the tree, associating Totoro with a mobile camera. The film's ability to convey this feeling of flight is integral to the film as a medium for the fairy tale. Each frame seems limitless and the flight appears natural even as Satsuki initially perceives it otherwise, as "unreal." This conversion of unnatural action into something believable is something that anime does specifically, and specifically well. The unbound space of animation

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<sup>52</sup> Greenberg, 105.

allows for the transgression of gravity's restrictions, and the ability that anime in particular has of exploring and imaging this space enhances the depth of the fantasy. When Mei and Satsuki finally take off upon Totoro's stomach, it is not just their childhood abandon mechanizing their flight, but it is the medium through which their story is told that makes magic possible.

Despite her initial apprehension to give herself over to the fantasy of flight, Satsuki learns to recognize the value of this emotional fantasy, and in her letters to her mother in the hospital, she excitedly recounts her encounters with Totoro. Through her acceptance of Totoro and its accompanying fantasy, Satsuki is finally able to find a true release for the adult responsibilities that dissuade her from pursuing the same childhood pleasures as her sister in her regular daily life. Totoro displays tacit understanding of Satsuki's underlying need to be the child she once was, and that her sister still gets to be, and in inviting her to partake in its fantastic nighttime adventure, Satsuki is able to let loose again, even if just for the night.

Satsuki's carefree flight of fancy is short-lived indeed, as soon after their playtime with Totoro, the family receives a telegram from the hospital. The presence of threat, according to Bettelheim, is “crucial to the fairy tale – a threat to the hero's physical existence or to his moral existence,” and in this case, as Satsuki and Mei both fear for the worst in regards to their mother's health, the

threat imposed upon the sisters' lives comes to present both types.<sup>53</sup> Both worry that their mother has gotten very sick again, which would prevent her from coming home for the weekend. It is Satsuki who takes action while Mei stewes in her wordless concern. In the shade of the moonlight not so long ago, Miyazaki reveals Satsuki and Mei as the children they truly are, or ought to be, their mouths wide with delight as they glide around on Totoro. The harshness of the sunlight when Satsuki then runs to find a phone and call her father, again enforces the revisioning of the dark vs. light system, this time allowing a serious threat of “disaster” to intimidate the generally positive connotations of daylight. When Satsuki has to relay the news to Mei that their mother will not be able to come home from the hospital over the weekend as originally planned, the sisters' reactions suggest that Satsuki has again, out of necessity, reverted to her older persona. While Mei bursts into fat and uncontrollable tears, Satsuki admonishes her for refusing to “grow up,” words indicative of Satsuki’s maturity. In this stressful moment, she must disavow herself completely of any of the same vulnerability that Mei exhibits, in order to uphold her image as a secure and mature young adult. This is a defense mechanism, as Satsuki insists on keeping her guard up, weakened as it is by her recent return to her emotional side. However, when Mei walks off-screen in deep, unabashed sobs, the next shot establishes a change of location, back to their house. We then see a long take of Satsuki lying silent and motionless on the floor, only to have a cut to another part

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<sup>53</sup> Bettelheim, 144.

of the house to show Mei in mirrored position. The girls are buried under the weight of their fear, and are worn out to the point where they are forced to lie still in it. Satsuki, it seems, may just be impersonating the adult she wishes she truly were, the adult that she has proven she has not quite yet become, as her travels with Totoro and her emotional paralysis in the face of threat show.

However, it is thanks to Totoro that Satsuki is able to exhibit her most responsible act of the film, after it teaches Satsuki that she can use its fairy tale world to the advantage of her own development. Satsuki's commitment to finding her sister by any means necessary, fantastic or otherwise, proves that the fantastic is not merely a valve for regression into childhood fantasy, but is also a tool for her to comfortably realize the bounds of her potential. When Mei goes missing after her fight with Satsuki, the film is charged with the kinetic energy previously reserved for the excited tromps through the house, or delight at the confirmation of the presence of fantasy within their world. Satsuki is thrust into the true heroic position; it is understood that as Mei's primary caregiver, she alone is capable of locating her sister, despite the community's efforts to help. Satsuki travels through the vast, rural landscape that seems to stretch out endlessly around her, hoping to locate her sister. When her solitary attempts on foot prove fruitless, she knows exactly where to turn for help: Totoro, the figure who most represents the childhood escapism that motivates Mei's disappearance. The camera sets the stage for this realization during Satsuki's anxious sprints through the countryside,

filming her from behind and rendering her diminutive in wide shots, as well as panning towards the sky, reminding the viewer both of the camphor trees and the sky, which are both associated with Totoro. As suggested by the framing, in order to locate her sister, Satsuki must avail herself one final time of emotion-driven fantasy. This time she does so not for the purpose of evading her reality but instead to fully grasp it, “a direct confrontation with the fears of the adult world,” as Greenberg puts it.<sup>54</sup> Her plea to Totoro to help her find Mei, spoken in a voice polite, calm, and confident as always, is Satsuki's final attempt at bridging her two worlds, and Totoro's agreement to help is the vehicle she needs to truly overcome the fears she has about adulthood. As Cavallaro writes in *Anime Art*, the Totoros, due to their relationship to nature and symbolic ties to the fairy tale, are more than just these girls' “guardian angels,” but “rather enablers – what nature offers...is not pure protection...but rather a means of understanding and coming to terms with the values of free will, choice, and responsibility.”<sup>55</sup> Totoro provides the outlet for the girls (primarily Satsuki) to not just bask in the dream of childhood, but to take the fantasy tools handed to them and discover their own strength and abilities.

Satsuki has learned that she can trust Totoro, and she does not turn to it for a hug or an escape from the fear of what might have happened to her runaway sister, but instead knows she can use its status as a fairy tale “animal helper” to

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<sup>54</sup> Greenberg, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Cavallaro, 70.

her advantage. Therefore, at Totoro's insistence, the Catbus takes Satsuki directly to her sister. Again, the film insists upon highlighting its seamless ability to incorporate fantasy into a dramatic, "real world" situation, transforming the entire world into something to be traversed. The Catbus is seen in various, quickly edited shots galloping through a highly malleable forest, then launching itself onto telephone poles with ease. After finding Mei at the end of this fast-paced sequence, the pair takes the Catbus to go see their mother, who is not as ill as they had feared. It is this final act that evaporates the pressing fear that has stood in Satsuki's way from the start of the film – that she will have to become the full-time parental figure before she is confident in her ability to do so. The confirmation of their mother's health leads to a chain of events revealed in the credits of the film, rendered in a more simple style reminiscent of Mei's immature drawings glimpsed earlier on, which further asserts the film's status as a formative childhood text. With the quintessential "Totoro" theme playing over the images (this time with lyrics), we learn that Satsuki and Mei no longer interact with the Totoros, even as they watch over them and glimpse their lives from time to time. The girls have become more socially active than before (an important adult trait) especially Mei, who is now seen with children younger than her. She is growing up, too, no longer the film's youngest character. Greenberg explains that the separation again of the Totoro realm from Mei and Satsuki's increasingly grounded lives stems from the fact that "the fantasy world [Totoro] represents



supported both characters' emotional world throughout their childhoods, provided them with a means of escape from the threat of becoming orphans in the adult world, and finally allowed them to confront and overcome this threat. On this optimistic note, they can grow on to a good ordered adulthood.”<sup>56</sup> The Totoro world both supplemented and encouraged Satsuki's (and Mei's) emotional growth, acting as a stable and comforting presence during their time of great need, while also mobilizing them to directly address and reconcile their fear about the major concerns occurring just below their surface of their lives.

Moreover, *My Neighbor Totoro's* fairy tale framework in particular is used to emphasize how integral Satsuki's traversal of the liminal space is to the overarching narrative. The film is characterized by its gentle collection of moments, propelled forward by interactions between human beings as well as with the pervasive natural world that is inescapable throughout. Through these interactions, the development of Satsuki becomes increasingly apparent, as she is nurturing in one scene and excitable in another. The film's careful pacing highlights this growth, as does the centrality of the family unit. This is also communicated through the usage of fairy tale tropes: spirits, animals (and animal spirits), a threat or conflict (their mother's illness), the incorporation of the fantastic within an otherwise conventional reality, and, again, the emphatic presence of nature. The female adolescent as constructed within *Totoro's* fairy tale context is encouraged to grow and mature, while also reminded to never

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<sup>56</sup> Greenberg, 106.

completely abandon the impulses of childhood. These two sides of the spectrum are encouraged repeatedly to join, and the film ultimately suggests that while growing up is necessary and inevitable, it is still important to accommodate the power inherent within the emotional fantasy of childhood.

CHAPTER 2: THE MAGICAL *BILDUNGSROMAN* OF *KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE*

The fantastic and illustrative medium of *anime* lends itself directly and poignantly to the possibilities afforded by the fairy tale, as well as purely magical narratives. As Dani Cavallaro writes in the introduction to her book, *Magic as Metaphor in Anime*, “Anime has engaged assiduously with themes, symbols and narrative strategies drawn from the realm of magic since its inception as an art form.”<sup>57</sup> Due to anime's status as a non-photographic, phenomenological medium that employs the structure of the cinema, it depends upon its creators' abilities to conjure from the ether of their imaginations a world that is material, illustrative, and aesthetic. The creation of animation, then, might be said to be magical.

Animation utilizes magical tropes in a way that speaks to its inherent nature of seeming implausibility. Magic as a conceptual form operates as an instrument and articulation of fantasy, and while fantasy can exist without magic, magic is dependent on the existence and implementation of fantasy within a

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<sup>57</sup> Dani Cavallaro, *Magic as Metaphor in Anime: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2010), 1.

narrative to create a world in which it becomes possible, even integral. Thus, the magical realm is one seeped in a variety of fantastical themes and effects, a list which often includes: “possessions, hauntings, enchantments, spells, charms, body swaps, curses, mediums, spirit observers and specters” alongside “animals replete with magical connotations,” such as the cat or bird.<sup>58</sup> Using these types of imagery in a performative or ritualistic manner is key to denoting them as magical. Magic stems from the combination of supernatural or otherworldly motifs that challenge conventional reality.

The application of the elements described above in an unexplained, ritualistic manner elevates them from the simply fantastic into the magical. They seem inexplicable because they appear to stem from the great, innate powers of a central figure. These figures can be magicians, or they could be (male) wizards – or, even more notably, (female) witches. Magic becomes localized not only within a larger world, but also within a specific body. That these magical bodies are gendered becomes relevant in discussions of the significance of magic in contexts both narrative and cinematic. Containing magic within these bodies suggests that magic is an active fantastical concept, as opposed to something passive such as a setting, situation, or object. Granting agency to bodies by literally imbuing them with magic reveals itself through formal analysis of anime. Further, these cinematically-portrayed magical bodies contrast the presentation of magic with that of the fairy tale. Magical characters interact with fantasy in a more physical

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<sup>58</sup> Cavallaro, 47.

way than pure fairy tale characters, so that the signifiers of the genre are dependent on the characters' interactions with them. This is unlike in the fairy tale, which is posited as a separate world co-existing alongside the protagonists' realities. Magic, in this sense, occurs closer to home.

These magical symbols and traditions within the narrative structure of the *bildungsroman* particularize anime as a cinematic art form most effectively. The *bildungsroman* as a genre that traces the development, or coming-of-age, of a young protagonist is a storyline that is perfectly suited to interrogate the challenges that come with growing up and into a magical body. Marianne Hirsch, who refers to the *bildungsroman* by an English translation from the German, the “novel of formation,” writes that “the novel of formation's plot is a version of the quest story; it portrays a search for a meaningful existence within society, for the authentic values which will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities,” a notion that is aptly exemplified by the magical body.<sup>59</sup> The *bildungsroman* as genre is geared towards the quest narrative compounded by the difficulties of adolescence. While the fairy tale as a narrative structure allows for the exploration of this theme, this construct even more emphatically coheres around liminality in a way that also accommodates the physicality and agency of magic.

The possibilities of the *bildungsroman* for illustrating the relevance of magic in the journey into adolescence are apparent and wide-ranging. Thus,

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<sup>59</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “From Great Expectations to Lost Illusions: The Novel of Formation as Genre.” *Genre* 13:3 (1979). 297.

interpreting a film like *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989, dir. Miyazaki), whose primary concerns are equally shared between the representation of magical fantasy and the hardships of youth, as a magical bildungsroman is apropos. The film utilizes magic within this literary structure as a method to explore feelings of alienation caused by developmental change, as rendered through a gendered, magical adolescent identity in a thoroughly cinematic way. The transformation of the literary elements of the bildungsroman – such as its emphasis on “the formation of a total personality, physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral” and its “biographical and social concerns” – into formally motivated aesthetic ones is made possible by deliberate decisions regarding shot distance, angles, and lighting, among other cinematic techniques.<sup>60</sup> Conveying this story through this symbiosis of the literary and the filmic further proves how appropriate anime is as a non-photographic medium to image these types of fantastic narratives.

One way in which the animated bildungsroman asserts itself as an essential genre for studying the magical tale of *Kiki's Delivery Service* is through the conflation of magical identity and burgeoning adolescent identity. From its outset, the film posits magic not simply as an inherent part of childhood, but also as a significant marker of adulthood. The film begins with a beautiful landscape, reminiscent of a painting, before panning slowly over to a dreamy Kiki lying still as she listens to the weather report on her radio. This slow, deliberately paced introduction to Kiki seems to suggest through its subtle camera movements and

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<sup>60</sup> Hirsch, 296-7.

meditative medium shots that she is already at peace with a more patient, adolescent position. Jonathan Ellis writes that the film begins in this “dreamlike” state “because that is how Kiki sees her life and seems to pass each day – in a kind of daydream waiting for the weather to change. When it does, a welcome chaos ensues, for the animators and audience just as much as for the characters.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the tone initially set by the film's first moments is broken by the introduction of upbeat, European-sounding music that offers a soundtrack for Kiki's dash through the woods and back to her house to share the news with her family. Hearing that the weather that night will be perfect for traveling, she has decided that she will embark upon her journey at once.

Kiki's quest is openly defined as one of self-discovery, which she is to embark upon, as all witches do, at the very particular age of thirteen, the age typically regarded as the entry point into adolescence. This journey leads from Kiki's childhood home, in which she is settled and surrounded by other magical beings, such as her mother (also a witch, whose intellectual and professional focus is now geared towards a scientific crafting of potions), to a new town without a witch, in which she can enable and confirm her independence. A whirlwind series of introductions to Kiki's parents, whose appearance in the film greatly diminishes as soon as their daughter takes her leave, asserts that Kiki emphatically strives for self-reliance, and that she craves the autonomy and confidence that will be born as

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<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Ellis, “The art of anime: Freeze-frames and moving pictures in Miyazaki Hayao's Kiki's Delivery Service” *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 2:1 (2010), 26.

she heads out on her journey. Both of her parents are at first taken aback by their daughter's insistence that she must leave *now*, earlier than planned. Her mother is strong and self-assured like her daughter, while her father is lax and doting, slightly reminiscent of Mei and Satsuki father in *Totoro*. The film moves quickly through scenes in which Kiki's parents come to terms with their daughter's decision, recognizing that she is, indeed, growing up. There seems to be an understanding by her immediate community that the possession of a magical body, when coupled with an adolescent one, is dependent on this distancing from the family and entrance into the broader, less magical world in order to truly take ownership of it.

This exploration of the magical self is motivated by the need to reconcile magic and childhood with the new interests and responsibilities of adolescence and, later, adulthood. Much of this introspection stems from an inherent discomfort in the changing body, something that Kiki expresses through her words and physical actions. As she prepares for her journey, Kiki's parents interact with her in ways that speak to and highlight magic's intersection with the anxieties of the adolescent body. With the help of her mother, Kiki dons for the first time the conventional outfit of a witch, which operates as the first personal signifier of her magical identity. Dressing her daughter in the dark purple shift, which becomes her iconic uniform, which is unchanging throughout the film, Kiki's mother grants her daughter access to a magical adulthood that emphasizes



function over aesthetic. Kiki's disappointed and self-conscious response to her new outfit, however, reveals her quiet resistance to the traditional magical aesthetic and its related developmental path. She decries the dress' unflattering cut and color, which her mother chose instead of her suggested lilac, in a way that resonates with the female body image struggle as elucidated in psychologist Catherine Driscoll's book, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*. Driscoll summarizes these difficulties as “the struggle for proper femininity, or the struggle to retain a sense of self in the face of expected femininity.”<sup>62</sup> This desire to fit into the mode of “proper femininity” is one that Kiki is at once reluctant and compelled to express through her self-aware frustration with the superficial issue of the dress. Kiki's mother exercises control over her image in the wake of her quest to secure adulthood by not only choosing what dress Kiki will wear, but also demanding that her daughter use her own adult-sized broom as opposed to the one Kiki crafted for herself. These actions compound the sense of lack of control that drives the adolescent quest. Kiki reveals herself in these moments as an adolescent in the feminine mold, one whose age-appropriate self-consciousness conflicts with the requirements of the magical identity that she also wishes to attain.

Following the scene with her mother, Kiki's conversation in her bedroom with her father further makes explicit her movement into adulthood. The film

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<sup>62</sup> Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 58.

juxtaposes her desire to be held by her father in the same way that a much younger child is held with his recognition that she has most definitely arrived at the age that necessitates the departure from the home. In this final embrace, Kiki's father spins her around, an action that is immensely pleasurable for each of them in that it exercises Kiki's childish exuberance, her boundless energy, and allows her father to engage with his daughter as the child he wishes she would remain for one final moment. While Kiki's interaction with her father suggests anything but a discomfort with the body, following her self-conscious dress fitting with her mother it suggests her struggle to accept her changing body as a tool for her magical powers in competition with her innate childish whimsy.

Kiki's body as the locus of development is interpreted cinematically as the film begins to construct her both as empowered by her magical identity while simultaneously frustrated by it. This struggle is first notable in the scene in which her family and other community members surround Kiki as she prepares to take off. Surrounded by other girls her age, Kiki is emphatically differentiated from them by the way she is drawn. While the group of girls is on a whole excitable, smiling, and laughing, Kiki stands out from them for her appearance. In comparison to her friends, who are swaddled in bright colored dresses and have full, tan cheeks, Kiki is pale, almost ghostly so, and her dark dress threatens to blend in with the dim lighting surrounding her. Kiki is often shown clinging to the shadows, as if her skin acts as a reflecting surface, and her dress absorbs the light

around her. She is purposefully imaged in a way that makes her at once an outlier and an avatar. While here she certainly stands out due to her distinct look, which is based upon the conventional Western appearance of the witch as a trope, her boyish haircut, undecorated dress, and generic facial features establish her as less of a specific character and more a screen on which the viewers can project themselves, accessing the film and character in an empathetic manner. This appears to be a deliberate mechanism, one that mirrors the similarly generic look of Satsuki in *Totoro*, with her short black hair, large eyes, and lack of individualizing features. This story benefits from the viewer's total integration with its world, as illustrated.

While the film portrays Kiki in sharp contrast to the other, non-magical girls around her through her generalized design, it also interprets her difference in a way that is at once mobilizing: her ability to fly. Kiki's first ascent is an event heightened by the film's use of wide shots, which dramatically build tension and accelerate the film's pace by utilizing off-screen space. From early on and throughout the rest of the film, when Kiki is seen in two-shot, her size in comparison to the numerous adults around her confirms her youth. These types of shots work to contrast Kiki's demonstrated confidence and force of will with the reality of her stature and related position as a developing adolescent who still must look up to adults. The film's predilection towards establishing Kiki through the reality of two-shots serves as a contrast for the widened lens pointed towards

her as she embraces and mechanizes the female technology that is both her broomstick and her physical being. Surrounded by her well-wishers, Kiki is accompanied by the standard witch's best friend, the chatty black cat Jiji, and is introduced in medium-close-up on the ground, granting the viewer intimate access to her face, which is at once expressive, conveying her focus and drive. However, this shot is then dramatically exploded in a quick cut into a wide shot in which Kiki has unstuck herself, raucously launching herself into the air. Her body, which once filled the frame, has minimized so quickly that it appears as though only seconds have gone by until she has all but disappeared, blending into the darkened trees lining the sky.

The camera, however, finds her again in another wide shot; she has flown off-screen, as the magical power imbued within her body grants her access to infiltrate the space beyond what is demarcated by the frame. In the air, she is again small as she was in the two-shot, yet this time her size allows the sheer spectacle of her magic to manifest itself. Additionally, the wide shot is important in that it aligns Kiki's excitement of her witch's body with the natural world around her, reminding the viewer that there is an intrinsic spiritual, pastoral component to her growth into a reconciled, mature magical figure. Kiki's ability to fly is an essential part of her character and her liminal position, one which makes use of her childhood "flexibility...[as depicted by her] changing patterns of motion in relation to her broom, depending on whether she is learning, unlearning, or

relearning how to fly, and accordingly exhibiting various degrees of control or hesitation, confidence or tension, elegance or clumsiness,” as Cavallaro explains in *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*.<sup>63</sup> This ability later provides her with the means through which she can begin to truly unlock and incorporate the experiences that provide her with the tools of adulthood, both psychological and fantastic. Indeed, it is this ability that best characterizes the sheer transitional-bodied spirit of magic, and thus the mastery of flight becomes the most essential component of Kiki's coming-of-age, which has now begun.

The particulars of the bildungsroman in the film become evident after Kiki kicks off from the ground and into the air, heading towards the ideal town for her to inhabit. Saddled comfortably on her mother's broomstick, Jiji in tow as both her beloved companion and guardian, Kiki's arrival to Koriko, the geographically ambiguous city that she soon calls home, serves as the inciting incident for what becomes a series of personal and developmental challenges. In contrast to the bright, beautiful colors of the city – the red rooftops, the yellow brick, not to mention the vast blue sea that surrounds it – Kiki at once stands out in her darker colors, which are more utilitarian than decorative. Similarly, while the film's setting evinces a certain European feel with its vaguely Gothic architecture and cobblestone streets, it appears most Euro-inspired in comparison to Kiki's generalized anime heroine look.<sup>64</sup> As soon as she flies into the area's perimeter,

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<sup>63</sup> Dani Cavallaro, *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 88.

<sup>64</sup> Miyazaki has referred to Koriko as a mash-up of a variety of European cities, such as Paris,

Kiki becomes a noticeable outsider, aesthetically differentiated immediately. Yet it is notable and in fact important that the city she chooses to become her home is only vaguely European, and that its urbanity comes across in ways that are defined more by color and architectural style and less by industry (although its industrial capacities and tendencies too become apparent upon the introduction of flying machine-obsessed neighbor boy Tombo). This ambiguity renders the town of Koriko a universal space in which Kiki is at once challenged due to her obvious difference yet is ultimately welcomed, thanks to the basic necessities that the town does boast, including the accessibility of nature and a vast, uninterrupted skyline, not to mention the townspeople's own fascination with flying. Due to its lack of specific placement within the world, the town itself is engendered with a kind of magic, one that is built upon its knowing artifice and construction as Kiki's "battleground." Further, as Dani Cavallaro writes,

The magic of cinematic sets is arguably most bewitching when architectural structures are purpose-built for a specific movie – as is inevitably the case with animation...for it is at that point that genuinely new or alternative worlds come into being and fantasies are given tangible incarnation. It is in such instances, moreover, that we may become aware of fantasy as something far more profound than sheer escapism: namely, as a reflection upon, and imaginative extension of, cultural and philosophical preoccupations that are very real indeed.<sup>65</sup>

The tangibility of the fantasy perpetuated by the town grants the film accessibility to both its characters (Kiki is given a physical world through which

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Lisbon, and notably Stockholm, the first foreign city he traveled to in his life. (Nausicaa.net/miyazaki/kiki/faq.html.)

<sup>65</sup> Cavallaro, 89.

interactions help her understand her own powers and limitations), as well as its audience, which can project upon Kiki's new untethered location their own understandings of and concerns about adolescence.

The town, magically constructed through its cinematic medium, is often photographed in a way that enables Kiki's flight, her primary developmental mechanism, and the way in which this ability affects the adolescent body. Kiki's titular delivery service begins after kind, pregnant baker's wife Osono and her husband offer her a room and advertising in exchange for help around the bakery. This is a deal that comes about after Kiki's natural kindness and desire to prove herself compels her to offer to complete an errand for Osono, whom she meets while drifting through town, deflated and beginning to lose faith that she would find her place. The eponymous delivery service relies on Kiki's ability to control her body as well as maintaining her spirit, two things that are constantly put to the test by the town and her various clients. The different errands that Kiki runs, as well as her work around the bakery and her room, give her the sense of responsibility and purpose that she desperately needs in order to assert herself as a mature witch. As she often must deliver presents to people around her age or even younger, Kiki's level of maturity is dramatically contrasted against these patrons, and this again differentiates her in a way that is physically apparent, due to her style of dress and the way she conducts herself around her peers. Despite her foreign status in this town, which is made apparent through her social interactions,

Kiki's increasing sense of responsibility directly correlates to an increased sense of security in her young adult identity.

Most important to her growth, however, is that Kiki's delivery service makes use of her own body as its mode of transport – that is, her magically empowered female body and its gift of flight via broomstick. In fact, it is her magical skill that enables her to even create the delivery service at all, thereby confirming her magic to be an integral part of her mature being. Thomas Lamarre discusses in his book on anime and technology, *The Anime Machine*, the gendered, bodily technology of flight in the films of Miyazaki, *Kiki's* among them. Lamarre writes that the characters in this film and its ilk are animated in such a way that their bodies demonstrate their gender-based “energies,” with which they are able to make manifest that which is necessary to take to the skies. He goes on to suggest that “[the female body] approximates a technology of flight...while boys...must build flying machines, girls...have natural access to a magic that allows them to fly.”<sup>66</sup> This latter idea is most obviously perpetuated in the film by Kiki's inherent ability to fly, versus Tombo, the boy who desperately wants to befriend Kiki and is constantly tinkering with his own modest flying contraptions. Kiki's feminine body is made active and empowered by her flying ability; it makes her an intriguing and perhaps ideal presence to people such as Tombo, and it grants her the tools necessary to begin carving out a mutually

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 82.



beneficial niche for herself in town. She is given the chance to assert herself as an independent young adult with a stable profession, and the town is able to take advantage of her young female magic.

Because her gift of flight is indeed a skill that she has naturally developed, even as it is localized within her broom, an external yet essential part of her witch identity, Kiki is imaged by the film to suggest her specific relationship to the natural world. When she takes off on her first delivery, both Tombo and the also flightless Osono (who is especially grounded and weighed down thanks to the baby inside her) watch Kiki with wide eyes and wider smiles from the ground. Kiki is seen from a high angle, and just as during her initial take-off, she becomes tiny. She disappears this time into the vast open sky above. The camera slowly tracks her, keeping pace with both her and the landscape dotted with trees below her. The slow and subtle disappearance of trees from the frame is what makes this otherwise illusive cinematic technique apparent. The camera reminds the viewer that Kiki is the primary focus and that her flight is heavily reliant upon the natural world. Trees never completely disappear while Kiki flies high above the town, and unless we are watching her from the grounded perspective of a character like Tombo, we see her from a place high above in the sky. At this point, Kiki is able to attain great heights, creating visual space that is necessary to show her wildly swinging limbs, which are still insecure upon the broomstick.

Kiki's flying as perpetuated by her mechanized body and subsequent

delivery service is a major influence on her relationships with (and within) her adopted hometown, through interactions that are both physical and personal. A major part of Kiki's desire to create the delivery service initially is that it provides a way in which she can become integrated within the community, something that she hopes will help her achieve acceptance both from them and from herself. Her deliveries are not just of toys and gifts, but also of Kiki herself to the townspeople. She offers herself as a confident, mature witch who can assert herself as capable of overcoming challenges, thus demonstrating her loyalty to and interest in the town and its functioning. This is a fascinating “defamiliarizing” tactic, as Susan Napier notes in a chapter in *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, writing that “making [Kiki] a witch whose fantastic powers are prosaically anchored in the need to survive in a modern money economy” is a narrative concept that makes Kiki's magic something that is realistically translated for its audience, both diegetic and non-diegetic. She argues that in doing so, “the film's message of empowerment becomes far more effective.”<sup>67</sup> Thanks to this blending of the fantastic and the real, through the commodification of her magical powers in support of the delivery service, Kiki receives the desired “adult treatment.” Few people in town look at her and see a child, at least from her perspective, as she soars high above in wide shots that obscure her true stature by powerfully enveloping her with the vast sky, accompanied by the jangling, wistful score. The

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<sup>67</sup> Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). 164.

film itself, however, constructs Kiki's complicated attempts at community integration by often framing her in two-shots with townsfolk, which reveal that she is, indeed, a child in comparison to those she hopes to make her peers. Standing opposite characters as diverse as Osono's husband and the old woman whom she helps, Kiki's age-appropriate appearance is juxtaposed to her more adult behavior, highlighting the teenage liminal space she occupies. Her mother's adult broom leaning against her, Kiki's insecurities become blatant and physically obvious.

The framing is accompanied by a fascinating use of lighting to render Kiki an as-yet insecure community member. When she first speaks to Osono about staying at the bakery in exchange for delivery service publicity, the light that naturally falls on Osono is very pointedly behind Kiki. As the scene cuts between the two, the shadow on Kiki becomes quite pronounced by contrast, and dramatically highlights the degree to which she remains in the dark about how to best manage and massage her adolescent growth. The room she moves into above Osono's bakery, the procurement of which is her first adult success, is also shadowed or pointedly blocking out the light, a stylistic choice that again establishes Kiki's difference from the town at large. When she awakes in her room after her first delivery, it is cast in darkness, the light from the sunshine outside suppressed by the shades on the window. The dim light that surrounds Kiki not only emphasizes her own trepidation about herself and honoring her quest, but

also corresponds to her inability to fully embrace the town, as well as its reluctance to fully accept her. This pattern recurs when she is on delivery runs, too, as she remains in the evening shade while the package recipients almost always stand unwelcoming in the brightly lit doorway, barring Kiki from the light of carefree frivolity. This situation is especially, painfully noticeable when Kiki delivers an unwanted gift to the spoiled granddaughter in the middle of a rainstorm. When the lighting upon Kiki does begin to match that of the townspeople, such as when she is in the older female customer's grand estate, it becomes apparent that this is because they are of similarly good dispositions, and that Kiki has allowed herself to become vulnerable. They are united in their genuine, selfless spirits, thus they share the same light source, unlike the many selfish or self-interested people in the town that Kiki encounters and cannot truly engage. Her room becomes increasingly better lit, as well, such as when Osono cares for Kiki when she is sick after her rainstorm delivery nightmare. When Kiki is able to stop posturing as a fully self-confident woman and instead allows herself to open up to those around her, she finds the necessary light that allows her to truly become a part of the larger Koriko community.

This light both guides Kiki and betrays her, as shown by her two young adult deliveries; these patrons also serve as a direct contrast to her personally. In these two situations, Kiki is again locked out of the light, yet here the light is impure, tainted by the missing goodness that these young, immature, ungrateful

children lack. The light here is desirable only when considering the oppressive nature of the elements that Kiki must face outside, such as cold, foul weather, but even in these situations, Kiki's inherent goodness and strength of spirit shine through. As she sails through the air in an emotionally-charged medium-close-up, racing to deliver the old woman's granddaughter's gift on time, the rain beats down upon her ceaselessly. Yet Kiki's inner goodness protects her, and she appears to be literally shining brightly in the dim rain. This glow could be the result of her body's magic, and it renders a dramatic sequence even more affecting. The fantastic light that emanates from within and is swaddling her in the harsh weather marks the scene as one that promotes the importance of magic to Kiki's overall being, serving here as a guiding and protective force. Yet after she is exposed to the light inside of the house where the granddaughter's party is taking place and she discovers that the girl is harshly different from her kind, caring grandmother, it is as if the light has been sucked out of Kiki, too. She drifts back in the direction of home in a depressed, disappointed daze, completely overcome by the shadows to which she still belongs, despite her best efforts.

Kiki's interactions with these other young people in town, such as the spoiled children to whom she makes these unsuccessful deliveries, are important in assessing how socialization relates to her development within a structure wherein she is the "other." While the non-magical girls in her own countryside village celebrate Kiki for her difference, in this more urban, materialistic city the

film's lighting becomes more strictly dichotomized. Kiki's self-consciousness about her looks becomes even more taxing and debilitating. One way in which this problem is constructed is through the colors used to illustrate and illuminate the vibrant and varied town and its people. The other girls her age are always shown in well-lit spaces that highlight the details and colors of their clothes, which are contrasted with Kiki's single outfit of a dark purple dress and red bow. Kiki is rendered iconic of her kind – that is, she wears typical (by Western standards) witch clothes that serve to pointedly mark her for her difference, keeping her out of the teenage inner circle to which she quietly very much wishes to belong. Meditative, brief scenes frame Kiki in medium-close-up as the camera cuts between her and bright red, fashionable shoes in a store window, as well as a young couple. We observe in an over the shoulder shot from behind Kiki, encasing them on the other side of the window and showing them at a distance. These sights seem to weigh heavily on the young heroine, as she refuses or is unable to verbalize her desire to be understood and wanted.

One place where Kiki does find acceptance, even as she resists it, is with Tombo, a local boy who comes to represent her budding sexuality alongside her more mundane teenage desires. The construction of female sexuality within this mode is something that Lamarre identifies as typical of Miyazaki, writing that the director “prefers to keep his children presexual yet protosexual, on the edge of maturity, with beautifully innocent yet intimate relations between boys and

girls.”<sup>68</sup> Protosexuality, then, is specific to the transitional space of adolescence, directly referring to the intrinsic developmental properties of the period. This is not only typical of Miyazaki, but of the shojo genre of anime overall, which “has become a shorthand for a certain kind of liminal identity between child and adult, characterized by a supposedly innocent eroticism based on sexual immaturity,” as articulated by Napier.<sup>69</sup> These categories are immediately and readily applicable to the characterization of Kiki as both a magically-bodied character in a fantasy setting and a young shojo protagonist in a more “realistic” world, one that at most exoticizes (and regularly otherizes) the production of fantasy. By highlighting both aspects of Kiki's personality, most visibly through her connection to Tombo, the film actively creates a system in which both fantasy and reality do not merely co-exist; instead, they are symbiotic. It is through a triumphant display of her magic as well as her other skills as a witch that Kiki endears herself to Tombo, ultimately helping to secure herself as a mature, realized young woman.

Tombo seems to immediately find Kiki interesting and attractive from the moment he first interacts with her, in a way that due to their age is understood to be non-platonic through iconography and verbal subtext. When Kiki first arrives in Koriko, she is seen from above in establishing shots that separate her from the townspeople. Kiki is framed in isolating medium shots, with the natural setting of her new town positioned behind and around her with its people notably assigned

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<sup>68</sup> Lamarre, 214.

<sup>69</sup> Napier, 148.

their own distinct frames. Tombo's first appearance, however, is an immediate intrusion upon Kiki's medium shot, as he zooms in on his flying machine-bicycle-contraption, challenging Kiki – and the film – to accept him as her equal. This maneuver is a surprise to Kiki, whose inclination is to alternate between ignoring and chastising the boy for his attempts to talk to her without a “formal introduction.” Kiki, prior to this moment, has seemed like an outgoing, friendly, and, importantly, young person, and Tombo's strong demonstrated interest in her is something new and foreign, which represents a female-male dichotomy of intimacy previously uncharted for her. It is a challenge she has not prepared for, and her refusal to engage with Tombo is emblematic of her changing relationship to boys as a developing heterosexual female. This scene also introduces her tendency towards posturing and projecting an image of an adult self that she has not yet attained. The film follows this exchange by filming Kiki from a low angle – from Tombo's perspective. Situating the viewer with Tombo is a key move that aligns us with him, asking us to view Kiki from his perspective, which suggests that his perspective will be of importance to the film and to the development of Kiki's character throughout.

Considering Tombo's interest in mechanisms for flight is also fascinating when contrasted with Kiki's, and as such, highlights the latter character's similarities to and differences from her non-magical peers. Each character is often paired with the sky, the wider world, and the beauty of the town, with the camera



framing them in medium shots that emphasize the natural life behind them and the expansive sky to which they aspire to fly. Yet while Tombo is introduced and filmed as being just as infatuated with and connected to flying as Kiki is, for him flight is a production of labor-intensive mechanics. On the other hand, Kiki's flight is a manifestation of her innate magical personhood. In this way, magic is distinctly feminized, and the female body specifically is given a kind of agency that the male body can only hope to construct. This female independence by way of magical flight is integral for Kiki's character and development, which is why it is of note when Tombo finally succeeds in entering Kiki's space, which the film once asserted belonged solely to her. After a delivery that goes poorly – when Kiki meets the lovely old woman's granddaughter who is anything but grateful, the completion of which involves Kiki sacrificing a “date” with Tombo – Kiki finds herself at a loss, finally vulnerable enough to allow someone like Tombo to become truly close to her. She begins to travel on foot, as opposed to using her broken broom, which is another casualty of the unfortunate delivery, alongside her bout with illness, broken spirit, and severed communication with best friend Jiji. The now far more mobile, bike-riding Tombo is then observed at a high angle while Kiki is below him. They are formally trading places, which allows Kiki to enter the more “typical” teenage space that Tombo inhabits, as motivated by the perspective from which the camera films her.

This final crossover into a blended diegetic space occurs when Kiki

accompanies Tombo on the back of his bicycle-turned-flying machine for a ride. They are completely on screen together, biking into the sky, going so fast that the camera can barely keep up with them. The sequence is visually reminiscent of Kiki's own exuberant flying sequences from the earlier part of the film. Tombo has become like Kiki now, only flying on a bike instead of a broom, with the sea and sky traveling alongside him. Just as the camera was impressed by and unable to keep up with the once-soaring Kiki, it struggles to follow along with Tombo. Kiki is almost secondary in this scene, simply an accessory to his successful melding of the magical and the real. This sequence speaks to the film's construction of flight as something thrilling and able to be integrated into the non-fantastical space (in fact asserting that these spaces are co-existent and symbiotic), while also suggesting Kiki's transforming understandings of her independence. Kiki begins to recognize that she should serve others while still allowing herself to enjoy the majesty of magic and flight. While her magic is innate and thus her presence may, in fact, be contributing to Tombo's successful flight, she is primarily a passenger on this voyage. She tells Tombo after they safely land from their brief romp above ground that she does not typically enjoy flying, that it is simply her job. The magic in her has been rendered a professional instrument, while Tombo utilizes it purely for fun and enjoyment. Although Tombo's reproduction of flight is not as purely fantastical, due to his male, non-witch limitations and access only to the mechanical production of mobility as opposed

to the feminine power of magic as an internalized process, it does force Kiki to reconsider her own relationship to flying.

Through her interactions with the town and its denizens, such as Tombo, Kiki develops a complex understanding of not just her innate flying ability, but of magic as both an empowering and dis-empowering facet of her being. While her relationship with Tombo is instigated by his fascination with her seemingly effortless actions of transcending gravity, magic emerges most strongly and importantly as a force that connects Kiki with other women. These women endow her with the strength of spirit and autonomy that is required in order for her to survive in society. Kiki's most meaningful relationships are not with those who are in her peer group, but instead with people who are her role models and parental figures. With these independent women, who are also outsiders, she finds solace through their similar construction by the film.

One such important female presence who emerges in Kiki's life is Ursula, the friendly and independent painter whom Kiki meets by chance after a delivery goes awry, and she is forced to reclaim a lost gift from Ursula's cabin (after doing some housework for her). Like Kiki, Ursula too lives among shadow, deep in the heart of the woods. While Kiki finds her own light from her inherent magic ability, as well as by opening up to receive help from those around her, Ursula is illuminated by her work – her paintings. A self-reflexive conceit within the film is Ursula's painting that resembles Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, which immediately

identifies her as both the producer of her own illumination as well as her own independence. The painting's Western style contrasts dramatically with the *anime* aesthetic of the rest of the film, suggesting that Ursula's interests and perception of the world lie within a different hemisphere entirely, and the painting's name and subject matter is overtly about living amongst the stars, the light, high above the stifling forest. Drawn to the painting and to Ursula as a figure of mature, autonomous womanhood, Kiki finds kinship and empathy with her, which becomes especially important when she is in danger of losing touch with her magical powers. To recharge after finding her powers gone, she spends time with Ursula in her cabin in the woods, during which they discuss their similar experiences of being abandoned by their inner spirits. This discussion demonstrates self-awareness on both of their parts, a change for Kiki that signals her own shift towards a less narcissistic adolescence and adulthood. In this scene each woman is illuminated in Ursula's otherwise dark room, harkening back all the way to the beginning of Kiki's journey when she encountered the mature, older teen witch who rides elegantly, silently, on her broomstick, her path illuminated by a lantern. The possession of light, and the entrance into its comfort from the shade of childhood, is a necessary component of accepting adulthood within the film's context. Ursula and Kiki are both independent, often solitary beings, which is why their relationship is so important here. Kiki finds great comfort in the open arms and home of this young woman who is also driven by

her passion for her work.

This relationship deeply affects Kiki, and it is after returning from Ursula's house that she is truly able to regain her magic. Kiki leaves from the forest where she feels at peace and at one with herself to return to the modern city on public transportation, still unable to conjure the essence required to power her broom. It is quickly upon her return, however, that she is re-calibrated back into her magically infused, confident self. Her innate relationship to her magic and the connection it gives her to other women, like Ursula and her mother, a fellow witch upon whose broom she begins her journey, is emphasized through these interactions and their portrayals in the film. While Kiki differs from them in age and maturity level, these women represent the secured future self to which she aspires, and the intrinsic nature of her feminine magic means that these connections run deep.

While her magical pubescent body certainly affords Kiki opportunities for self-development, growth, and personal connection, it also imposes challenges upon her. Aside from the social conflicts that having a magical body amidst non-magical, "normal" teens creates, there are also psychological effects, namely the depression the put-upon, oft-isolated Kiki experiences as she finds herself more and more ill-prepared to handle the independent witch lifestyle. The film steadily shifts from framing Kiki from above, positioning the viewer to admire her for the height she achieves in the sky, to placing her at ground level as she becomes

increasingly unsure of herself and, as a result, stops utilizing her magic. The shift away from wide shots that emphasize her connection to the sky and natural world is important because these shots denote an important part of her magical self. Seeing Kiki from a wide perspective, we are reminded of the unstable nature with which she often flies on her broom, the specifically childlike excitement she initially has for it. With decreased camera distance, we are granted intimacy that suggests her vulnerability, while we are also discouraged from considering her as an able-bodied young woman, one whose physicality is her greatest instrument.

Magic's effect on Kiki as at once a child and an adult is thus portrayed in more debilitating ways towards the film's latter half. This is a sharp turn from the film's early weightlessness and excitement by and for the fantasy of young witchdom. Nowhere is fantastical dis-empowerment more apparent than in Kiki's changing relationship with Jiji, her cat and sidekick, whose presence in her life becomes smaller and quieter as Kiki's tenuous grasp on the fantasy of her childhood overwhelms her. Her depression about her failures, socially and professionally, result in her losing her ability to tap into her magic, and this becomes apparent to her only after she realizes she no longer can speak with Jiji in their shared language as she once did. The changing of this relationship is key, since Jiji had been Kiki's main confidante. Kiki relies on her feline companion to be the voice of anxious, adult reason, a tempered contrast to Kiki's tendencies to dive in headfirst and challenge herself to go perhaps too far beyond her limits. Jiji

begins the film as a constant, vocal presence, but this is diminished as Kiki allows her feelings of insecurity to overwhelm her, and as a result can no longer express herself through magic. Kiki's ability to hold conversations with her signature black cat is in and of itself a signifier of her innate magical ability – the Western witch trope often features a black cat as a pet, and this is half of what Jiji is for Kiki. Yet due to her age, he is more than just her pet. He is also a parental figure, ensuring her safety and acting as the questioning, nervous sidekick that Kiki does not allow herself to be. The Kiki-Jiji relationship, therefore, is at once mobilized by the magic inherent in her status as a witch, as well as the developmental changes she is undergoing as an adolescent.

In the beginning of the film, Kiki embarks upon her journey with the enthusiasm of a child unencumbered. Yet by the time Jiji is no longer able to communicate with Kiki, she has experienced adult hardships and dealt with challenging, complicated adolescent feelings, as well as battled with her identity as a magical “other.” As a result of the accumulation of these mature episodes and emotions, Kiki stumbles into the realization that Jiji now resembles the typical cat, not her magical outsider compatriot and primary support. The evaporation of this kind of magic, and one of Kiki's strongest relationships, is indicative of just how much growth and accompanying duress Kiki has undergone throughout the film. Her magical identity now requires a reassessment and subsequent repositioning into one that can accommodate navigation without the help of a

parent – feline or otherwise.

Despite her initial, somber recognition of Jiji's silence, Kiki is able to achieve her mature, magical adulthood without his guidance, which Jiji's move towards the non-magical is supposed to inspire. While ultimately Jiji does not converse with Kiki again (in terms that she can comprehend, at least), she is not heartbroken; no longer does she require Jiji to be her only friend, even as he remains important to her. Her grand rescue of the endangered Tombo at the end of the film solidifies that relationship, thus giving Kiki permission to incorporate non-magical, typical adolescent interactions into her fantastical personal life, while also confirming that she has found a way to reconcile her desire to be self-reliant with her need for human relationships. Having proven her autonomy and grasp over her inner magical strength, she has shown to herself and the manifestations of her magical self (such as Jiji) that parental supervision is no longer necessary for her. The film, nonetheless, essentializes Kiki and Jiji's relationship by giving him the last “word” of the film before the end credits begin to roll. In a medium-close-up, he appears on Kiki's shoulder seemingly out of nowhere as she is giving an interview in order to contribute his own statement, which comes out as a proud “meow.” By immediately following this with the credits, it is confirmed that now that Kiki is accepted as an integral member of the town, witch status and all, Jiji has shifted to be more of a secondary companion to Kiki, who has become her own caretaker. This shot and action asserts that Kiki,



having demonstrated the necessary self-confidence and selflessness that helped her regain her magic and save Tombo's life, is now far more capable of taking care of herself and finding pride and purpose in her “other,” but no longer “outsider,” status. In this way, magic empowers her, even as it keeps her at a gentle distance away from the typical teenage normalcy she secretly pines for throughout the film.

By reconciling her magical body with her outsider status, Kiki is able to overcome the adolescent insecurity that blocks her from accessing her powers. In doing so, she reestablishes her magical powers as an integral part of her being, a defining part of her of which she can be, and is proud, and which she uses for self-betterment, as well as to the aid of others. Her magic, in the end, is a crucial, necessary facet of her confident, stabilized adulthood. Her own magical bildungsroman is communicated through a variety of formal choices, all of which drive home the notion that adolescence is a trying time both physically and psychologically. Yet Kiki securely and defiantly comes of age by the film's conclusion, proving that magic and fantasy can help to develop relationships and face challenges necessary for maneuvering through the liminal space of maturation.

### CHAPTER 3: THE FEMALE HERO'S JOURNEY IN SPIRITED AWAY

The fairy tale and the magical bildungsroman both exhibit elements of Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomythical "hero's journey." This narrative structure further affirms the fantastic cinematic potential of anime to explore the identity crises of liminality. The concept of the monomyth readily incorporates tenets of both of these genres, while serving and imaging much of the same developmental functions and properties. Yet even more than the fairy tale or the coming-of-age story, the monomyth reveals the psychology of its protagonist, as Carol Pearson explains in her work on *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*. Pearson elaborates on the conventional definition of the quest to suggest that the hero's journey is, in fact, a "psychological journey in which the hero escapes from the captivity of her conditioning and searches for her true self...[and] descends into the underworld of her psyche to encounter the life-denying forces, or 'dragons,' within. These are the forces of fragmentation, self-loathing, fear, and paralysis. When she slays the dragons, she becomes, or is

united with, her true self.”<sup>70</sup> The connection drawn between the obstacles the hero must contend with throughout her quest and the issues these obstacles represent immediately suggests not just fantasy, but the adolescent struggle similarly imaged by the fairy tale and bildungsroman. In fact, Campbell himself in his work on the heroic journey, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, explicitly compares the sequence of events in his narrative theory to the rites of passage.” This theme similarly appears that at the center of the fairy tale and the bildungsroman genres. The narrative constituents of the archetype of the hero's journey occur in three stages based upon the development of the “true self”: departure, initiation, and return. Analysis of these narrative phases reveals the monomyth's intrinsic kinship with fantasy and liminality, which speaks to anime's enormous potential to interpret them.

The heroic quest is enlivened by the medium's limitless potential to portray the challenges encountered by a hero, male or female. These challenges can be physically imaged as “dragons,” as suggested by Pearson, whether they are actual fantasy monsters and creatures reminiscent of those belonging to fairy tale realms, or they take on other, no less terrifyingly imaginative forms. Early on in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell explains the link between mythological imagery and the psychic fears they represent within the prescribed steps of the hero's journey. Campbell writes that the evils that motivate the heroic

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<sup>70</sup> Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (New York: Bowker, 1981) 63.

departure, the initiation into the mythic realm of the challenge, and the subsequent return from this world can ultimately be reduced to “the inconvenient or resisted psychological powers that we have not thought or dared to integrate into our lives.”<sup>71</sup> These symbolic roadblocks are the inciting factor for a hero's quest and speak directly to the trying liminal period of adolescence, which tasks those who enter it with finally facing “the unexorcised images of our infancy” so as to successfully traverse “the necessary passages of our adulthood.”<sup>72</sup> In order to achieve the goal of secure, unburdened adulthood, the hero must “depart” from their place of comfortable resistance, become “initiated” into the dense and unstable mythic adult realm, and then, after a series of trials testing their readiness, return to their society, ready to be regenerated by the new understandings of the conquered fears. Anime, such as Studio Ghibli's Oscar-winning, *Spirited Away* (dir. Miyazaki, 2001), readily supplies this journey to conquer these psychological terrors with fantastical worlds, creatures, and concepts, such as rapid transformations and a variety of spirits whom inhabit the film's central setting, a maze-like bathhouse. It does so by taking cinematic tools, such as color and lighting, and exploding them with the flexibility afforded by its non-photographic, illusory boundaries.

The imaging of what the hero must face in their attempt to vanquish their foes and securely return to their own world varies according to medium and the

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<sup>71</sup>Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1972) 8.

<sup>72</sup>Campbell, 11.

specific details of the story. The journey itself is intended to be a universal model, which is applicable to the male or female in conflict with society. Yet, as Pearson points out: “[Campbell] begins [his argument] by saying that the hero may be either male or female. He then proceeds to discuss the heroic pattern as male and to define the female characters as goddesses, temptresses, and earth mothers.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, femininity is embodied in other ways, such as the archetypal cave housing the dragon or other major obstacles. Spaces like these are at once threatening and womb-like. Pearson and other scholars argue that gender has a relevant and differentiating position in discussions of the journey as a trope, and that the female hero offers specific idiosyncrasies to the narrative. While she writes that the crux of the journey is centered on the individual and the neutral space of their self-development and maturation, gender stereotypes and assumptive roles complicate the female within the archetype of the hero. The hero's journey is not an inherently masculine one, she argues, but rather, the discussion of the hero has an implicit male bias that warrants correction. Qualities traditionally thought of as “heroic” are those generally codified as masculine, which leads Pearson to suggest that, “If the hero is a woman, the treasure she seeks or wins at the end of her quest would require the development of qualities associated with the male rather than the generative nurturing qualities traditionally associated with the female.”<sup>74</sup> Despite this important similarity in the pursuit of

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<sup>73</sup> Pearson and Pope, 4.

<sup>74</sup> The “treasure” in traditional heroic narratives, it must be noted, is often a princess. The quest

heroes within this gender binary, feminine qualities like selflessness and caring are societally undervalued, and thus for a female to succeed she must subscribe to these “masculine” traits, which typically include “courage, skill, and independence.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, females must markedly forfeit those qualities that are stereotypically ascribed to them in order to assert themselves as heroes within this model.

Pearson writes that not only must a woman assume a more masculine presentation behaviorally, but that the dissonance between her “inner self and the facade that she presents to the world often is greater than a man's because the conventional female role so thoroughly precludes independence, strength, and individual achievement.”<sup>76</sup> Yet this dichotomy means that a female hero is exceptionally well-suited for the journey, which requires the traversal of a separate, mythic realm. Indeed, one could read the female hero as reclaiming what has been codified as masculine – independence and agency – for equal use, subverting the traits and roles belonging to the typically weak female characters populating the male versions of these stories. Due to the patriarchal norms from which the heroic journey model stems, it is impossible to consider the female hero without simultaneously locating her within the conventions of that dichotomy. The female hero is thus a less common breed than the male, yet her position at the

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requires typically masculine traits, and its end goal involves the rescue and subsequent acquisition of a helpless, objectified woman. Pearson and Pope, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 49.

margins makes her a fitting subject for the challenge undertaken by a film like *Spirited Away*.

The discussion of gender and the hero's (or heroine's) journey becomes especially salient in conjunction with anime's interpretation of the model. *Spirited Away* in particular features a ten-year-old female protagonist, a young girl (Chihiro) whose journey to reclaim her parents from the clutches of an oppressive witch involves numerous tasks which push her to recognize the maturing, selfless, and independent self within her. This narrative, like *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*, is both informed by the age and gender of its central adolescent figure, who is anxious, codependent, and insecure when introduced, while also removing any limitations typically assigned to the feminine in typical fantasy narratives. Chihiro and her ilk are both maternal and assertive, and are most importantly active participants in the development and declaration of their own secured adult selves. The film makes Chihiro's self-empowered growth an adventure that thoroughly explores the broadly identifiable psychological themes which Campbell asserts are universal. In the film, Chihiro is challenged to make the seemingly impossible retreat out of the frightful bathhouse full of odd smells, strange and inconsiderate co-workers, and the lingering sadness of loss and futility, and return to her human world with her rescued parents in tow. She does this not just by overcoming the difficult tasks lobbed at her, but, crucial to her position as a female hero, by empathizing with the world that her fears inhabit,

and crafting relationships with those who seek to oppress and antagonize her. This move to understanding the world instead of attempting to control it is key, Pearson writes, and it is a trope that becomes apparent in stories featuring heroes from generally marginalized backgrounds, such as, in Chihiro's case, young females. Her specifically feminine understanding and acceptance of her obstacles enables a quest that grants her a quintessentially male agency.

Chihiro must earn this agency through her heroic journey, which the film posits will be quite difficult through its thematic interest in interrogating and, ultimately, decrying modern consumer culture. The viewer's first interaction with Chihiro through her point of view immediately connects us to her in an intimate way. From her perspective we can tell that she is lying down in the backseat of her family's car, which establishes her as a markedly less active protagonist, as well as indicating a more modern setting than those established in most Ghibli films. However, what is most important is how we see Chihiro: from her own point of view, emphasizing that relating to and accepting her and her position as a frustrated, immature, even "bratty" young girl will be necessary if we are to embark on her journey with her. Cutting to a high angle shot which nonetheless keeps minimal distance from her establishes that she is, indeed, lying prone in the backseat, her cherubic face broadcasting both frustration and apathy. We learn so much about Chihiro just from her pose and how she is framed in the film's opening shots, as we watch her cling furtively to her possessions from the life she



has unwillingly left behind, stewing in childish misery in the car as her parents drive through their new town to find their new home. The trajectory of her heroic quest becomes slowly apparent as she is first seen in a diminutive position, which nonetheless urges the viewer to take her seriously and prepares for the development of an intimate and evaluative viewer-character relationship.

Understanding Chihiro's status as a modern adolescent hero depends upon the viewer's willingness to empathize with her as a character, just as she must later do in relation to those she encounters during her journey. How she is constructed is notable because of this requirement of empathy on the viewer's part, as well as in how Chihiro operates in contrast to characters like Satsuki and Kiki, of *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*, respectively. There are immediate differences between these characters, which are made more apparent through their similarities. While Kiki and Satsuki's physical appearances diverge from conventional femininity, with their short haircuts and ambiguously gendered faces, Chihiro wears her hair in a ponytail and has a decidedly girlish face, one that is as expressive as Satsuki's younger sister, Mei's, and betrays her nakedly emotional nature. Further, each character finds herself moving to a new location at the beginning of their stories, yet unlike the excitement that Satsuki and Kiki share, Chihiro's move is one tinged with melancholy, even anger. She does not exude any of the maturity, postured or otherwise, that these previous characters do when faced with the beginnings of their own adventures. However, unlike Satsuki

and Kiki, Chihiro is first seen from her own perspective in an intimate point of view shot. Despite her distinct immaturity relative to the other two characters, Chihiro and her journey are experienced from much less distance than her predecessors. Kiki is often seen from high angles, establishing a much greater distance between her and the viewer that suggests her unwillingness to become vulnerable. Satsuki, too, is framed in a way that discourages the kind of closeness of perspective that Chihiro, in her preteen state of melodramatic anguish, invites. Cinematically, then, Chihiro's insecure female adolescence is made overt through framing that suggests her claustrophobic, pre-pubescent narcissism, ignores her surroundings, and highlights her apathy towards the new world before her. There is no prancing around the new home, as in Satsuki's story, or tense and exciting flight up into the expanse of the sky as in Kiki's.

Chihiro's unique brand of immaturity and related insecurity about her adolescent development comes through not only in the point of view shots afforded to her, but also in the sense of the contemporary world in the film. This envisioning of the contemporaneous is striking for the seasoned viewer of Miyazaki's filmography in relation to the iconography of the film. A major example of this anomalous approach is present at the film's beginning in Chihiro's intentional disinterest in the natural surroundings, particularly those that the family car drives quickly past on its way to the new house. Unlike in other films in which the characters revere their surroundings and are cinematically linked to

them, Chihiro and her family are locked away from them inside of their car. Their new town is conveyed to the viewer through very quickly edited wide shots. The establishing the setting of this area in this way is, it seems, unimportant. Instead this first scene emphasizes this modern, disinterested family. This type of family appears to be defined by a lack of conversation, degrees of animosity between members, and a preference for the superficial and material over what is naturally, freely occurring around them.

Chihiro herself is enchanted by the sentiment and importance in ephemeral objects rather than the forest and shrines her family drives by, but she is not as explicitly linked to the consumer culture of modern society as her parents are. (One of her prized objects, gifts from her old friends, is a bouquet of flowers, after all.) It is her parents who are truly the materialistic ones of the family. Chihiro's departure upon her journey arises from her parents' disrespectful tromp past the forest shrines and statues that lay before a tunnel that her father perceives as a shortcut. While Chihiro is fearful of these unfamiliar icons, which have no cultural value in her modern, commercial world, the film also connects her to them by showing her standing in wide shot next to the spirit statue that stands in front of the tunnel. Her parents walk right past it, but the camera makes sure to linger on Chihiro in the same frame as this idol, establishing their connection, however obscure it is to her and the viewer at the beginning. It is when they arrive in a ghost town full of shops, where the colors are diverse yet suspiciously muted,

that Chihiro's journey is realized. In a scene that is nearly as comic as it is tragic, her parents gorge themselves on food that they insist they can pay for with “credit cards and cash.” Chihiro admonishes them for their behavior, which results in them transforming, literally, into pigs. The magical transformation of the parents from human to animal is the film's first explicit usage of fantastic tropes, and yet it is not at all fanciful. Chihiro is a girl who is unfamiliar with and does not yet embrace the potential of magic in her otherwise conventional reality. This act is the film's way of making an exaggerated yet pointed social critique of the modern commercialism within which this family circulates. That this manifests as the humiliation of the parent characters that, in other Ghibli films, would typically be beloved aspirational figures for the young female hero recognizing her own identity, dramatically conjures a sense of danger for Chihiro, who is now forced to become an independent figure.

Initiating Chihiro's journey through her family's display of cultural ignorance and excessive consumption, which leads to her sudden destabilization, speaks to the thematic importance of historical awareness to the film. The ghost town appropriately becomes populated with eerie black ghosts as soon as Chihiro's parents succumb to their self-indulgence, cementing the crossover from their reality into the spirit world. This is the final threshold to cross before she can begin the initiation phase, with the town's bright lights looking artificial amidst the dull color quality and degenerating illustration of the stands that enticed the

family with the prospect of consumption. The ghost town connects the modern consumerist imperative to the traditional setting that the film shifts toward and remains in for the majority of its running time. The ghost town's dissolution from modern world into a culturally traditional, spiritually-inhabited bathhouse marks both Chihiro's entrance into the liminal adolescent space and, in terms of the film's thematic commentary, the dangers of consumer culture.

Realizing the futility of the consumerist attitude becomes the core of Chihiro's journey when, after her parents become pigs her own body begins to disappear. The only way to rescue herself and her parents is to enter into this spiritual space and successfully complete a job, which she learns from the boy she meets just before the transformation, named Haku. As Dani Cavallaro writes of the film in *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, "*Spirited Away*...evinces a pragmatic acknowledgment of the apparent significance of tradition for the contemporary world, and hence of the necessity—if one is to engage with the past and its values at all – of making traditions relevant to the present."<sup>77</sup> The bathhouse emphasizes the degradation of culture by blending contemporary obsessions with wealth with a traditional, cultural space. This juxtaposition relates to Campbell's notion of "detachment" as the hero's first step on their journey towards defining their own heroic self. Entering the fantasy world is an explicit detachment and withdrawal from Chihiro's society, and leaving that space behind for the potential of fantasy causes her imminent growth. The turn towards fantasy

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<sup>77</sup>Dani Cavallaro, *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 138-9.

is a psychic movement, Campbell writes, as this transitional spirit realm Chihiro becomes entrenched in “is precisely the infantile unconscious...the magic of childhood.”<sup>78</sup> While this spiritual space encourages Chihiro to make sense of her burgeoning adult self, it does so in a way that speaks explicitly to who she is as a child. Because she is willing to explore and utilize the latent magic within her youthful body, she is asked to traverse this world to save her parents, rather than the other way around.

The world in which the bathhouse belongs is appropriate for *Spirited Away*'s Campbellian narrative as detached from reality, and this is reflected in the building itself. Due to its structure and design, it is an ideal location for Chihiro's Initiation phase, and is indeed where the bulk of her challenges take place. The bathhouse immediately signifies a decidedly pre-modern era through its shrine-like appearance and the historical Japanese garb of its patrons. Yet it is the true in-between space of Chihiro's world and the historical-spiritual realm of which she must gain an understanding in order to reclaim her parents and assert her mature self. The liminal nature of the structure is communicated through the *mise-en-scene*, using what Susan J. Napier refers to as “postmodern approaches such as bricolage and pastiche to create settings that contain Western and Chinese elements as well as Japanese ones.”<sup>79</sup> This amalgamation of styles is central to the film's aesthetic. The entire film visually constructs for its hero a space that is

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<sup>78</sup>Campbell, 17.

<sup>79</sup>Susan J. Napier, “Matter out of Place: Carnival, Containment, and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki's 'Spirited Away.’” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 32:2 (2006), 290.

simultaneously contemporary and not, while challenging her to identify with those aspects that are culturally specific. In this way, the bathhouse is the physical center of the journey as it mirrors Chihiro's transitory position and cultural quest in its own mixed visual heritage.

The bathhouse's liminality is also evidenced by the inaccessibility created by its architecture. Chihiro initially enters the building by climbing a seemingly endless staircase, her long uncontrollable limbs dashing wildly towards the very bottom of the structure. This staircase, however, at least offers a direct route to where Chihiro must go to begin her journey. Her next stop, up to the penthouse of her frightening new boss, the witch Yubaba, is accessible only by a multitude of elevators. Chihiro is framed within these elevators in uncomfortable medium shots and from high angles that highlight her own insecurity about traversing this new, impossibly tall space. The architecture and color palate of the space suggest the hierarchical nature of the social structure within. Cavallaro refers to the colors as a “contrast between somber and ostentatious shades,” which speak directly to the nature of the place as a lonely middle-ground, in which some lower-class, poor occupants (like Chihiro) are held prisoner, and only upper-class, wealthy spirits can enter and exit as they please. The mixes of reds and whites in the baths and the browns and blacks in the living quarters suggest hierarchy, as well as the concomitance of fantasy and reality. The bright, dramatic shades in the lower levels, as well as on the uniforms Chihiro and her new co-workers must wear,

characterize the space as fantastical in a fanciful vein typical of other Miyazaki films. Yet the undercurrent of darkness that permeates other places, like the boiler room that provides Chihiro her entrance and occasional exit from the building, reminds the hero and her viewers that this fantasy is unpleasant, and the reality of her situation is grave and intimidating.

The bathhouse is an essential location for Chihiro's journey due to its design, as well as because of the characters that inhabit it. These characters that challenge Chihiro embody the blending of reality and fantasy, cultural tradition and modernity. The first person that Chihiro encounters on her quest is Haku, who operates as the Initiator during the primary phase of the quest. The hero leaving behind their familiar world to enter one that is unknown to them characterizes this Departure phase. Haku is the figure that accommodates Chihiro's entrance into the unfamiliar spiritual location of the bathhouse, thus allowing for her departure from the comfort of her modern world and inciting her journey. He also importantly serves as the motivation for this second, most integral phase of Initiation. When Chihiro first meets Haku, she is wandering away from the excess that her parents are partaking in and discovers the bridge to the bathhouse. He happens upon her admiring the grand structure and encourages her to leave quickly. Chihiro's initial encounter with Haku on this bridge directly between their two disparate realms represents each character's liminal status. Chihiro stands before the locus of traditional, spiritual energy within the film as a firmly



modern figure in this early stage. Haku, on the other hand, is what James Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura refer to as “an embodiment of...traditional Japanese cultural values. His attire resembles that of the Heian period; he wears something similar to a hakama, part of a Shinto priest's formal costume. In addition to this courtly dress, his speech is formal and traditional.”<sup>80</sup> The juxtaposition of these two characters appearance-wise illustrates their strong ties to their respective worlds, and this contrast serves to make their relationship essential to Chihiro's journey, which in turn stresses how integral cultural acceptance is to her solidification as hero. The importance of Chihiro's relationship with Haku is reinforced by the film's tendency towards framing the pair in two-shots that assert their equal standing. Even when Chihiro drops low to the ground, when she is with Haku we do not see her from a high-angle. Instead, we see her from straight-on so as to ensure that she and Haku continue to be connected and equivalent visually, confirming their bond. This technique is noticeable when they meet again shortly after they are introduced, when Chihiro's parents succumb to consumer culture and become pigs. Chihiro meets Haku again while she is breaking down, afraid and unsure of what to do when she is on her own. Haku stabilizes her by feeding her food from his spirit world, an act that commits Chihiro to that realm and to the journey that it requires. In doing so, Haku establishes himself as the initial primary task-giver of this journey, and his

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<sup>80</sup>James W. Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura, “Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki's Anime Film 'Spirited Away,’” The Journal of Religion and Film 8:2, 2004.

importance to it cannot be understated.

Haku emerges as Chihiro's immediate protector when he saves her from losing herself, as her parents have done, and then informs her that in order to survive in this world of spirits, she must find employment. When Chihiro begins to work in the bathhouse, Haku is the one who motivates her to complete her challenges, which involve cleansing the excessive, grotesque spirits that patronize the facilities. The first spirit who visits as a test of her willpower and strength is quite literally referred to as a “stink spirit.” He does so by coming to represent love, appreciation, and affection, which drive Chihiro to save Haku from the bathhouse's stranglehold. Their relationship is not posited as an explicitly romantic love, however, which is typical of the Ghibli female protagonist on the cusp of pubescence. However, unlike other teen boys who find themselves falling for the female protagonists, Haku exhibits a feminine agency himself. As the physical manifestation of the spiritual realm's intrinsic traditional values (however skewed they are in reality), Haku possesses the ability to fly that traditionally belongs to the young, liminal female body. He flies with his masculine-presenting form, but is also in fact a magical being – a dragon, as well as the spirit of the Kohaku River. The fantasy behind his corporeal state reveals itself throughout the course of the film, and Chihiro endeavors to understand his various forms by becoming a diligent worker in the bathhouse. Her increased sense of responsibility grants her access to the truth of Haku's feminine fantastical abilities

of flight and transformation, which mobilizes her to complete her quest even as she herself does not have permission to utilize her body in that same way. Her transformation is emotional while Haku, her compatriot and motivation in her liminal journey through the bathhouse and beyond, develops physically. This is why their unity is so necessary: they represent two halves of the same developmental journey.

Haku and Chihiro are, most importantly, equals in their quest to regain control over their identities. This is in fact the crux of Chihiro's journey, even more than the simple rescuing of her parents. The revelation that Haku is not, in fact, the male spirit guide she believes him to be but in fact is a spirit himself comes about at the end of Chihiro's journey, right before she enacts her return to her world. Yubaba, the film's other essential female figure, drives both Haku and Chihiro to the re-establishment of identity. Yubaba is Chihiro's boss in the bathhouse, and securing a job from her is one of Chihiro's first tasks and the one that confirms her Initiation into the transitional space. On first impression, Yubaba represents aristocracy and the selfishness of privileging consumption over tradition, a concept which bleeds into this specific cultural location. These facets are conveyed through Yubaba's appearance throughout the film. The way that lighting in particular functions in the film to portend the fallibility of upper class and capitalistic goals is especially noticeable when Chihiro, after numerous uncomfortable elevator rides, enters Yubaba's office early in her journey. Yubaba

as a character is designed to cartoon-ish proportions, which emphasize her sheer difference from Chihiro: Yubaba's head alone is almost the size of Chihiro's entire body. While the contrast in their design suggests Chihiro's identifiable, human qualities and Yubaba's presence as alien and magical, what is most interesting is the portrayal of her quarters. There are numerous pieces of fine china, jewelry, and other expensive objects featured throughout the room, yet the film refuses to create the impression of any natural or bright lighting that would allow the viewer to get a good look at them. Instead, the room is lit only by dim lamps, diminishing the importance of these material objects that typically would connote stature and surely are of import to the class-conscious patrons of the bathhouse. This is Chihiro's first awareness that wealth and consumerism are foul, and she demonstrates increasing disinterest in them as her journey continues. Chihiro's first encounter with the bathhouse's dimly lit, excessive artifice leads to her acceptance of the cultural and spiritual nature latent in this space, distancing herself from the modern consumerist facets that have seeped through.

The shadows cast across Yubaba's office that allow the viewer to properly see Yubaba and Chihiro are nightmarish, and create sense of insecurity for Chihiro at the start of her set of challenges. The creation of this space, and indeed the world of the magical bathhouse, as threatening contrasts Chihiro's journey to the adventures of other Ghibli characters like Satsuki in *Totoro*. As Susan Napier mentions, "the young girls' encounter with a mysterious but essentially benign

other world [in *Totoro*] shows them reacting with enthusiasm and confidence.”<sup>81</sup>

Chihiro's initial brushes with the spiritual and fantastic are frightening and engender fear in her. This scene culminates in Chihiro's sacrifice of her name to Yubaba in exchange for being allowed to work in her bathhouse. This act is contractual as well as magical when Yubaba removes Chihiro's name from a piece of paper and thus existence, renaming her Sen and highlighting the intrinsic and frightening connection between capital and fantasy in this space. Most importantly, the lighting of this space, and all of Yubaba's subsequent spaces (such as the rest of her similarly expensive yet shaded penthouse), suggests that unlike in the human world where Chihiro is connected to her objects, here she is encouraged to privilege personal connections instead, in order to fully realize her heroic adolescence.

The establishment of this heroic adolescence is contingent on both the triumph over “the excess 'stuff' that the contemporary world has produced and human greed for it,” as Dee Goertz writes, as well as the reclamation of identity, which she achieves through interactions with the film's major characters.<sup>82</sup> Chihiro establishes personal relationships throughout the Initiation phase, beginning with Haku, and doing so represents the successful completion of the trials which return her to parents and her own world. Yubaba is one of the integral

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<sup>81</sup>Napier, 298.

<sup>82</sup>Dee Goertz, “The Hero with the Thousand-and-First-Face: Miyazaki's Girl Quester in *Spirited Away* and Campbell's Monomyth.” Millennial Mythmaking: Essays on the Power of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, Films and Games (Jefferson, NC: 2010) 72.

figures throughout each of Chihiro's trials – she is often the one assigning them to her – as well as the chief representative of the co-mingling of fantasy and identity that permeates her journey. Chihiro's sudden transformation into Sen by Yubaba's hand launches Chihiro toward her ultimate goal of reclaiming her name and I identity. By enforcing the name change, Yubaba is the one driving Chihiro to redefine herself, and to grow from the preteen Chihiro into the accomplished, secure adolescent one. This specific action represents a subsection of the “trials and victories of initiation” as outlined by Campbell: “the meeting with the Goddess' (*Magna Mater*), or the bliss of infancy regained.”<sup>83</sup> With Yubaba as the effective “goddess” of the fantasy realm, insofar as it is represented almost solely by her bathhouse, the clean slate of Sen is the pure medium through which Chihiro can best connect to her new surroundings.

After Chihiro becomes the “infant” Sen, Haku instructs her to never forget her true name, as doing so will preclude her from exiting the spirit world and making a successful “return” from her journey. But in order to fully remember it, she must redefine it through maturation, as accrued during her Campbellian tasks. Yubaba perpetuates and enables this journey through her imposition of a new self upon Chihiro, and the canvas of Sen gradually becomes filled through the jobs Chihiro completes in the bathhouse. Greedy and selfish co-workers who are only interested in accessing the wealth of their patrons initially challenge her commitment to her work. These characters diminish Chihiro visually, as she is

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<sup>83</sup> Campbell, 36.

regularly seen from a high angle when speaking with them in order to emphasize the futility and uselessness of her position in this hierarchical system. Cavallaro refers to these spirits inhabiting and visiting Yubaba's bathhouse as “emphatically fleshy, decadent quasi-aristocrats anxious only to be pampered and fed the choicest of dishes.”<sup>84</sup> Similar to her parents, these characters are driven by greed, which is often their downfall. Chihiro's deep apathy towards the entitled, aristocratic lifestyles led by those around her suggests her strong sense of self and force of will, which only deepen over the course of her journey. That her development stems from her disavowal of her world's materialist culture with signifies its function as a critique of said culture. For instance, in her task of cleansing the “stink spirit,” Chihiro starts off extremely expressive in a distinctly childish way, her face unable to hide her disgust and fear of the situation. The stink spirit's design is integral in establishing how disgusting his character is, through the evocatively dirty brown of his oozing flesh and the vapors and gases that he emits. However, since she recognizes the patron as a spiritual being, one whom she is constantly framed alongside in intimate medium shots, she is able to help the spirit purge itself of the extreme consumption that plagues him and all of the spirits in this realm. For her efforts, which are conveyed in a propulsive and engaging scene, which really showcases Chihiro's childish flexibility and expressive bodily qualities and animation's specific abilities to image such a grotesque and fantastic event, she is rewarded with the medicine she needs to

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<sup>84</sup> Cavallaro, 138-9.

eventually save her parents and other figures. The juxtaposition of the traditional, pre-modern setting and contemporary consumerism emphasize that a truly stable and secure sense of self and maturity comes from recognizing the fallibility of these materialistic attitudes and interests. The fantastic challenges that this materialism poses to Chihiro helps to solidify her “Sen” hero identity as impervious to its trappings.

Chihiro's resistance to consumerism is especially obvious in one of Chihiro's later challenges, when the frightening and enigmatic spirit No-Face enters the bathhouse (thanks to Chihiro) and, baiting its patrons and workers with fake gold, gobbles them up after they accept it. The spirit consumes more and more people, as the spirit realm's aristocracy, are indeed “the choicest of dishes.” Its features become more grotesque, and are often framed in uncomfortable medium shots from a low angle, so that its transforming body fills much of the visual space. The only person who is impervious to No-Face's trick is Chihiro, who at this point in her journey has gained strength of character and a confidence that belies her age and her immature behavior in the human world. She denies his offerings of gold and even offers him the magic medicine she receives from the stink spirit to heal her parents, an action which asserts her growing selflessness – a feminine quality typically discouraged by the hero archetypes. She redefines what it means to be a hero, and what a female hero can look like.

Chihiro's control over her identity while dealing with the nameless, mask-



wearing No-Face suggests the essential establishment of self to the narrative in another way. No-Face symbolizes what it means to have a self in flux – his body is constantly changing, and he has no actual name. His existence is defined, at least at first, by his nature as a tool to challenge Chihiro. Yet it must be stated that Chihiro is the one who invites him into the bathhouse, an act of (feminine) kindness that ultimately betrays her when No-Face wreaks havoc on the other workers. It speaks volumes that No-Face does not even have a voice until he begins to gobble up those around him. When he and Chihiro face off, he stands in complete contrast to her, in wide shots that they share in the harshly, artificially lit room with its plates and jewels strewn everywhere. Chihiro tackles this especially imposing creature in a notably atypical fashion for the monomythical hero. Goertz notes: “In a more conventional film, this [scene] is where the hero would draw his ancient, storied sword and whack the head off the monster.”<sup>85</sup> There is no literal slaying of her dragon, as Chihiro is unarmed, and instead the limitless potential of the anime constructs and dismantles threat through sheer fantasy. Instead of the film merely weaponizing its hero for an easy defeat, the color palate and camera create No-Face's frightening transfiguration. No-Face expands to an impossible size, closing in on the steadfast Chihiro, who bests him through the power of language. Chihiro's measured response to No-Face's imposing threat is, ironically, more likely to have an impact upon her villain amidst the visual decadence of the scene. Instead of contributing to the overwhelming sight of a gigantic, looming

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<sup>85</sup>Goertz, 74.

No-Face, seen at low angles, with a dramatic gesture of resistance, Chihiro's pacifism reinforces that her power is derived from a respect for the spirit world and its creatures. Miyazaki's work heavily features these types of thoughtful, small moments and actions, and instead of having Chihiro give into the scene's excess, she combats it with a mature offering of acceptance, a verbal reconciliation. No-Face recognizes in Chihiro the exaltation of the self when removed from the weighty and negative behaviors of the spirit hierarchy circulating within the bathhouse. No-Face admires Chihiro's creation and subsequent assertion of her identity, which she has completely made from scratch at the beginning of her Initiation phase, and after accepting the medicine he is offered, he admits defeat and shrinks back into his initial slender frame.

Attracted to Chihiro's demonstrated strength of character, No-Face thus joins Chihiro on her final trek, which takes her outside of the bathhouse and into the beautiful colors and natural lighting of the outside world. Their differences are again apparent when they share a beautifully quiet, meditative train ride away from the bathhouse to Swamp Bottom, in a final effort to save the ailing Haku and reclaim his original self. Seated next to each other as gentle, wistful music plays beneath them, the scene offers an emotional reprieve from the intensity that has characterized much of Chihiro's journey towards unifying her newly-defined Sen with the childish Chihiro of the human world, No-Face's destabilized form seems especially insecure next to the straight-faced, thoughtful Chihiro. His awareness

of the falsity of his posturing and his lack of identification is physically evident here as he participates in this train ride. The train is a modern vessel in this oft-anachronistic space, cutting across the screen as it glides over the beautifully expansive water. This ride over a cleansing substance is indeed purifying for No-Face, and just as Chihiro being wiped clean into Sen proves to be a boon for her ability to find her inner strength, No-Face's ride on the train allows him to reject his behaviors and grotesqueries in the hopes of finding a real, better self.

The film takes on a surreal quality beginning with this train ride, as the tenuous division between reality and fantasy is eroded. The natural lighting that dominates this ride differs from the artifice of the bathhouse, as well as from the modern world. Instead, there is a brightness that suggests that this realm is a purely spiritual and fantastical. The ability of the heroic Sen to enter this intermediate and more positively magical area suggests that she fully accepts the spirit world now, which is required of her in order to enable her return to her original world. Campbell notes that the return stage is “indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy in the world,” and while the integral aspect of it for Chihiro is the “Crossing of the Return Threshold,' or the return to the world of common day,” just as necessary to this production of a spiritual force is the hero's status as “Master of the Two Worlds.”<sup>86</sup> This mastery comes from the final rescue of her parents, which importantly follows an emotional decompression out of the bathhouse to a wholly naturalistic place: the swamp,

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<sup>86</sup>Campbell, 36-7.

home of Yubaba's twin sister Zeniba. That this location is the only one explored outside of the bathhouse in this fantasy world reflects how much Chihiro has achieved in terms of accepting the world, as well as respectfully transcending its restrictive boundaries. It also is a reprieve for the characters, a meeting ground in which fantasy and modernity co-exist peacefully and within nature. Characters like No-Face derive a sense of purpose in this space, thanks to Chihiro's acceptance of him, and he stays behind with Zeniba to become her sewing assistant. But it is the reveal of Yubaba's identical twin that deserves most attention here. Zeniba's existence emphatically alludes to the film's central notion that the fragmented self, represented by Chihiro's division into the infant-stage Sen and Haku's separation from his river god/dragon forms, is not splintered, but a cohesive whole. Zeniba is completely the opposite of her sister: kind, caring, nurturing, the owner of a modest, warmly-lit home. Yet her identical appearance to her sister highlights that the magical body is one in possession of a multiplicity of selves. Through the revelation of Zeniba and Yubaba as identical, Chihiro can finally reconcile her self as mature, self-possessed Sen with the younger Chihiro body which could not have accomplished all that she has done. In doing so, she is also able to reunite Haku with his true, divine form, a feat which results in the film's most blatantly magical moment. Haku and Chihiro fly through the air, first with Chihiro atop Haku in his dragon form and then floating with him without vehicular mediation, but instead through a power stemming from their bodies.

This sensational moment fully proves Chihiro to be a magically evolved, mature self, in relation to both her traditional identity (her reverence and affection for Haku as the river god that once saved her life as a child) and her modern one (reclaiming her human name), a melding that is essential to her specific hero story.

After the fantastic, transforming creatures who have assembled themselves as her heroic crew deem her ready to make her return, Chihiro is able to return to the bathhouse – only this time, she does not dare enter again.<sup>87</sup> She remains outside of it, standing securely underneath the beautiful blue sky, never to be subdued by the building's interior artifice again. Darkened Yubaba, projecting her more villainous self, albeit one which Chihiro now recognizes as an affectation, presents Chihiro with her final task upon the bridge between the human world and the spirit one. She must correctly identify her parents in a line-up of pigs, who are also covered in the spirit world's oppressive shadow. Now that Chihiro has achieved such a strong sense of her own identity, and has come to an understanding of the overall concept of the self, she can recognize the subtle differences between these animals, so that she realizes that her parents are not included. This is the correct answer and in giving it, she earns mass celebration and praise from the entirety of the bathhouse denizens. While her parents are freed from Yubaba's curse, it is important to note that Chihiro's heroic journey

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<sup>87</sup> An excellent moment of this affirmation is when Yubaba's gigantic, terrifying baby, metamorphosed into a charming and chubby mouse, is seen valorizing Chihiro as a hero to his fellow spirit creatures, pantomiming her now-legendary story.

ends with her departing alone, a quintessential aspect of the quest. This solitary re-entry into her world is especially important for the female hero. Pearson writes that the return is significant for the female hero in that it represents a recognition of societal burdens to become a certain kind of person (such as conventionally feminine or ignorantly modern) and a realization of “both her freedom and her ability to determine her own life.”<sup>88</sup> Leaving the journey as she entered it – on her own – is an entrance into a spiritually reconciled modern world in which she can now stake her own self-determined claim to adolescence and all subsequent life stages.

As she re-discovers her parents on the other side of the bridge, waiting for her in their human forms, the viewer is aware of how much Chihiro has grown. On her way back to her parents, she is dwarfed by the size of the sky and the grass beneath her. She melds perfectly into them, the green on her sweater explicitly matching that of the trees and ground. She belongs to them now, and is a physical bodied representation of their spiritual and fantasy energy. Yet despite her growth being visually and narratively apparent, the film has an ambiguous ending. Chihiro's parents have no memory of being pigs or even visiting the ghost town, and their return back to their car operates as a strict reversal of their steps and recreation of the scene in which they entered the liminal space at the beginning. Chihiro again clings to her mother, yet the same close-ups on her face that illustrated her childlike fear now prove her new steely resolve. It is subtle, but her

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<sup>88</sup>Pearson, 104.

expressive face and new, quiet perseverance are revealing. Her parents are frustrated when they return to the car to find it covered in leaves, a typical modern reaction of disgust towards nature. But Chihiro remains quiet, appreciative of the sight before her, and it is apparent that while her parents remain unchanged, she has a new self-identity with enormous strength and even greater potential for accomplishment. She is ready to face her fears with her new mature understanding – her fears of being in this new town, of growing up. Although only Chihiro is aware of it, she has successfully undertaken a true hero's challenge and emerged victorious.

## CONCLUSION

The combination of anime as a medium unrestricted to the photographic image and the limitless possibilities of fantasy effectively and affectingly generates compelling adolescent narratives. This combination of anime and the liminal story is particularly interesting when it is embodied in genres such as the fairy tale, bildungsroman, and hero's journey. Each genre is particularly well-suited to illustrate the developmental and self-identification processes that mark adolescence. Scholars such as Laura Kready and Jack Zipes have explained how the fairy tale helps educate children about the responsibilities of adulthood through the use of a fantastic lens. The bildungsroman is also useful in portraying the liminal phase and young adulthood, as Marianne Hirsch explains, in the detailing of the rites of passage that are part of coming of age. Joseph Campbell's hero's journey model, based upon the classic narrative structure, is similarly concerned with the particular challenges attributed to development, doing so in metaphorical and exciting ways. These genres image the movement through adolescence and towards adulthood in ways literal and fantastic, different yet



strikingly similar.

The application of these genres to the cinema, and particularly animation, proves just how valuable and appropriate they are for depicting the liminal transformations of youth. The medium is loaded with the potential to illustrate these grand storylines in fantastic ways. Because it is free of the constraints that are part of the photographically based cinema, anime can construct narratives of adolescence in an enlightening and exhilarating fashion. The films of Studio Ghibli and director Hayao Miyazaki in particular are examples of the medium's potency and fantastic tendencies. *Spirited Away*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *My Neighbor Totoro* prove to be particularly strong examples of the medium's aptitude for illustrating this particular phase of life. *Spirited Away* sends its protagonist on her own heroic journey in order to secure her empowered, adolescent self. The witch at the center of *Kiki's Delivery Service* applies magic to the bildungsroman to portray another kind of coming-of-age quest. *My Neighbor Totoro* uses the tropes of the fairy tale to create its own central theme of reconciling the pleasures of childhood and the requirements of being an adult. Each film maximizes the fantastic potential afforded by the medium of anime in particular by exploring their protagonists' adolescence in ways that are imaginative but not unrealistic, impressive but grounded.

What I found most interesting in my study was that these films convey the challenges inherent in adolescent development and transformation by focusing on

the physicality and psychology of female protagonists. Focusing in on the feminine adolescent process ultimately confirms that while these journeys are specific, they are stories that are necessary to tell and appealing to experience. Analyzing these films within the constructs of their narrative structures reveals their more universal applicability and appeal. Examination of anime in this context reveals journeys toward self-discovery under gendered lenses that vary in each film. While each film uses gendered lenses to depict the adolescent period in unique ways, what they have in common, is wondrous illustration, unforgettable narratives, and strong, empowered young female heroes. These are the role models that anyone of any gender or age deserves, whether they are about to confront their own liminality or are still trying to make sense of it, years later.

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