

Hayao Miyazaki

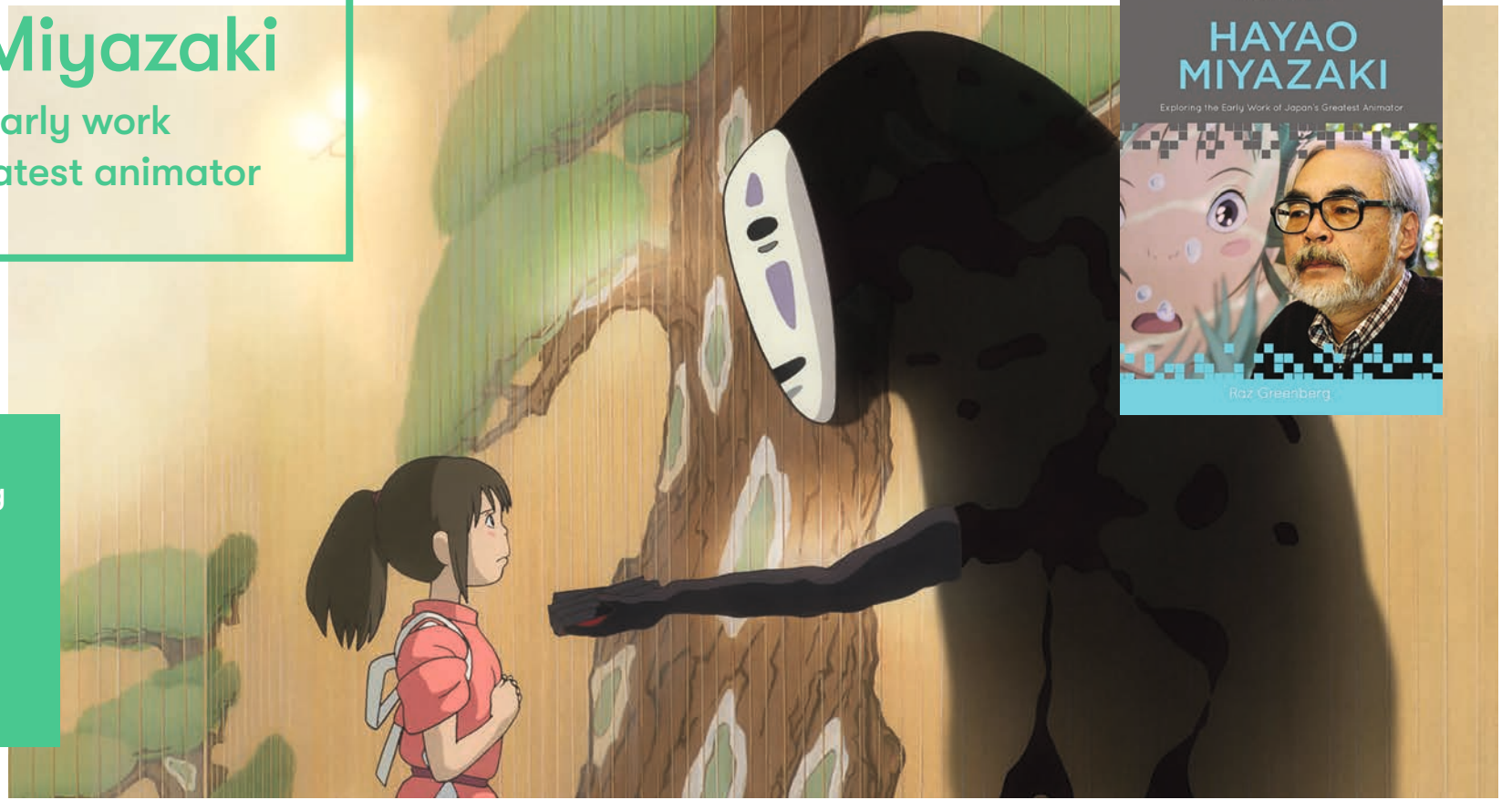
Exploring the early work of Japan's greatest animator

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Reviewed title

Hayao Miyazaki: Exploring the Early Work of Japan's Greatest Animator

Raz Greenberg. 2018.

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Still from 'Spirited Away (2001)'. Reproduced with permission. © Studio Ghibli.

Studio Ghibli, led by Hayao Miyazaki and the late Isao Takahata, is one of the most celebrated Japanese animation studios and has attracted a global audience for over 30 years. Many books and articles have been written in English about Studio Ghibli's works, including Susan Napier's *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (Palgrave, 2001), Helen McCarthy's *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation* (Stone Bridge Press, 1999), Thomas Lamarre's *Anime Machine* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), and Rayna Denison's edited volume *Princess Mononoke: Understanding Studio Ghibli's Monster Princess* (Bloomsbury, 2018). Yet until very recently, Miyazaki's early work has been less explored by scholars outside of Japan. A notable exception is Susan Napier's recent groundbreaking autobiography, *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art* (Yale University Press, 2018). Raz Greenberg's new book, *Hayao Miyazaki: Exploring the Early Work of Japan's Greatest Animator*, is a welcome

volume filling this gap in the literature in English. In this book Greenberg aims to offer "Miyazaki in context" in its reflection of how Miyazaki grew within the emerging post-World War II Japanese animation industry and how his rise within the same industry is a very important part of his country becoming an animation superpower" (pp.xii-xiii).

The book showcases the richness of styles, narratives and themes in Miyazaki's works and how his creativity has evolved over the 50 years of his career. It starts by tracing Miyazaki's early life – his childhood dream of becoming a manga artist, his encounter with Tōei Animation's first featured animated film *Panda and the Magic Serpent* (1958) – and his early years as an animator at Tōei, the first large-scale animation studio in Japan, between 1963 and 1971. The first chapter examines many works that Miyazaki was involved in and the studio veterans he collaborated with, including Takahata,

Yōichi Kotabe, Yasuji Mori, and Yasuo Ōtsuka. Greenberg also discusses how Miyazaki was profoundly influenced by Paul Grimault's *The Adventures of Mr. Wonderbird* (1952) and Lev Atamanov's *The Snow Queen* (1957) in terms of conceptual, visual, and narrative styles.

The second chapter examines Miyazaki's role in the animated adaptations of classic children's literature in the 1970s, including *Heidi*, *Girl of the Alps* (1974), *3,000 Leagues in Search of Mother* (1976), and *Anne of Green Gables* (1979) as well as the original short films *Panda! Go Panda!* (1972, 1973). Miyazaki's first trip abroad was an important source of inspiration, and his great love for the European landscapes were integrated into these shows. Linking these early television series and short films to Miyazaki's later films with Studio Ghibli, Greenberg argues that Miyazaki started practicing new forms of narratives, styles, and themes through these projects. The third chapter focuses on Miyazaki's directorial debut feature film *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) as well as the preceding animated television series *Lupin the Third* (1971, 1972), which are based on the popular action manga by Monkey Punch.

The fourth chapter offers a close study of Miyazaki's largest manga project, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1982–94), and the 1984 feature film adaptation he directed. This chapter examines how the world of *Nausicaa* was built upon a wide range of themes and tropes from Japanese and foreign literature and films. For example, *Nausicaa*'s character was inspired by the two literary classics *The Lady who loved Insect* from Heian Japan (794–1185) and Homer's *Odyssey*, while the post-apocalyptic world drew from American and British science fiction novels and films, including Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse* (1962), Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), and Douglas Trumbull's film *Silent Running* (1972). Greenberg suggests that Miyazaki's tendency to create strong female protagonists in his films can be traced to *Nausicaa*. Greenberg also finds a link between *Nausicaa* and the heroines of influential works such as *Panda and the Magic Serpent* and *The Snow Queen* as well as *Heidi* and *Anne*.

The fifth and sixth chapters explore Miyazaki's career as a feature-film director at Studio Ghibli: *Castle in the Sky* (1986), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), *Porco Rosso* (1992), and later works *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *Ponyo* (2008) and *The Wind Rises* (2013). Greenberg finds many affinities in stylistic and thematic elements between Ghibli productions and the works that Miyazaki was involved in before Ghibli, including strong female characters, rich background designs, and complex narratives that were inspired by Japanese

and foreign literature as well as Miyazaki's own life. Miyazaki's later works, most notably *Princess Mononoke*, however, depict far darker and pessimistic visions, and Greenberg suggests that his later works reflect the sociopolitical uncertainty of Japan in the 21st century.

Here I would like to offer three brief critiques of this fascinating study of Miyazaki's early work. First, although Greenberg emphasizes Miyazaki's role in the animated adaptations of classic children's literature in the 1970s and links them to his later directorial productions at Studio Ghibli, more compelling and nuanced discussion of the animation production of these shows is needed. Miyazaki did play a key role in these projects by being in charge of scene design and layout, but it was director Takahata's idea to approach film and animation in a more realistic way by depicting the protagonist's everyday life in *Heidi* and other series (*3,000 Leagues and Anne*), according to both Miyazaki's and Takahata's writings. Second, including more primary sources – most notably, publications by Takahata and Studio Ghibli's Producer Toshio Suzuki – would be fruitful for contextualizing Miyazaki's career and works. These publications by key members of Studio Ghibli and their perspectives give insight into the studio and its creative process. Third, as Greenberg acknowledges, Miyazaki's sources of inspiration are indeed wide-ranging across time and space, from literary classics to children's literature, from Western sci-fi to manga to animation, and from his childhood memories to adult experiences travelling in Japan and abroad. Yet, what is less discussed is another important source: scholarly work. For example, *Princess Mononoke* is described as a historical fantasy set in Muromachi Japan and Miyazaki's "own take on the famous *Beauty and the Beast* legend" (p.136), but perhaps it is much more than that if we consider how Miyazaki was influenced by the works of archeologist Eiichi Fujimori, botanist Sasuke Nakao, and historian Yoshihiko Amino for many years. *Princess Mononoke* can also be read as an alternative historical imagination beyond the 'national history', as a Japan and its people that Miyazaki rediscovered and rebuilt.

In short, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in Hayao Miyazaki and anime as well as animation studies and film studies. It is an accessible book that invites the reader into the worlds of Miyazaki and his sources of inspiration through the careful analysis of his works.

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foundations of the country. By means of "guerilla filmmaking on a borrowed Super 8 camera, improvised editing and underground exhibition" (p.2), Patwardhan developed his unique form and practice of political filmmaking. His 1975 film *Kraanti Ki Tarangein* (Waves of revolution) is paradigmatic for the conscious positioning of filmmaking practices outside the Films Division of India, i.e. the "nationally dominant state-run documentary production and distribution agency" (p.2).

Subsequently, the term 'independent' was for a long time primarily associated with politically conscious (if not activist, see Arvind Rajagopal and Paromita Vohra, On the aesthetics and ideology of the Indian documentary film: A conversation, *BioScope* 3(1), 2012: 7–20) and privately produced documentary films that were distributed and screened outside the organized structures of the state or commercial film theatres. But, as Kishore convincingly argues, the distinction between independent and 'mainstream' or 'commercial' productions has become increasingly blurred (under which category would, for instance, NGO-sponsored films be classified?) during the last four decades, and the same holds true for the diversification and blurring of genre boundaries. Accordingly, Kishore selected filmmakers for her study who reflect the contemporary diversity of individuals, position(alities), artistic forms and aesthetic practices of independent contemporary filmmaking in India: Rahul Roy (New Delhi),

Amudhan R.P. (Chennai), Paromita Vohra (Mumbai) and the filmmaking partners Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar (Mumbai). Monteiro and Jayasankar also co-authored a major contribution to the increasingly vibrant study of independent documentary filmmaking in India (*A Fly in the Curry: Independent Documentary Film in India*, SAGE, 2015).

However, instead of focusing primarily on the textual level of their films, Kishore explores the specific practices, relationships, techniques, and evolving structures that form around the independent mode of filmmaking of the directors in focus. All these aspects contribute to a changing notion and meaning of cultural production and the relation between visual culture, cultural producer, and society. Throughout the five chapters of her book, the author draws on a wide range of cultural, sociological and media theory and thus offers new perspectives on a field of research that for a long time had been under-theorized. Luckily, a number of important books and academic articles have begun to fill this gap since the last 10 years or so. Students and scholars who are interested in Indian documentary film studies or who wish to deepen their understanding of the multiple ways in which individuals continue to resist through an array of aesthetic and sociocultural practices will find this book very insightful and interesting to read.

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