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Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind and *Princess Mononoke*:

A Change of Environmentalism

Hayao Miyazaki is known for his environmental messages throughout his films, and nowhere is that more apparent than in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997), both of which star young women in a fight to save and preserve their homes and environment. Despite these similarities, these two films take drastically different approaches to human interactions with nature. Through the main character's love and compassion, *Nausicaä* is much more hopeful that one day, the earth will heal from the wounds inflicted by humans. *Princess Mononoke*, however, takes a much more violent view that humans must live with what they did to the earth. When these two movies were released, the environmental movement was changing in unprecedented ways. Around the early 1990s, there was a shift from Second Wave Environmentalism to Third Wave. This greatly changed how the earth was viewed even within the movement. Miyazaki falls directly in the Second Wave and so *Nausicaä*, which is about repairing the bond between humans and nature, can be seen as an affirmation of the Second Wave. *Princess Mononoke*, on the other hand, deals with mankind's break from nature and represents Miyazaki's pushback against the views of Third Wave Environmentalism.

By the late twentieth century, Global Warming and the international environmental movement became prevalent not only in scientific circles, but among the general public. The 1970s were marked by several discoveries (harmful effects of Chlorofluorocarbons and methane, the 1997 agreement that the earth's temperature would rise, not lower) that further proved that humans were leaving an unmistakable mark on the earth (Weart). And that mark was negative. In

1981, just three years before the release of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, it was predicted that the results of climate change would be seen by the year 2000—an admission that Global Warming was happening faster than originally expected (Weart). By the time *Nausicaä* was in production, it had become increasingly clear that humans had changed the environment of the world, and it was not quite clear if it was fixable. Many scholars put the beginning of the Second Wave around the 1960s, with its end around the beginning of the Third Wave in the 1990s.

Second Wave, then, arose in these turbulent times when human impact was becoming noticeable.

Second Wave Environmentalism is based on morality, with the underlying philosophy of, “Everything is connected to everything else, so when we hurt the Earth we're hurting ourselves.” (Gordon). The focus of saving the earth is not so that the resources can be used for human gain, but to protect it because it is the right thing to do. Mankind should want to save the earth because it is our home. Because of this view, regulations under Second Wave Environmentalism do not have any financial incentive (Gordon). For example, carbon dioxide scrubbers in factories should be required by all factories and not incentivized by placing a tax on carbon emissions. Reducing emissions should be done by companies because it is the right thing to do—and emissions ultimately harm humans in the long run—not because they risk losing money if they do not. In line with the morality of the Second Wave Environmentalism is the view that “man has a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment,” a sentiment declared in The Stockholm Declaration as a result of the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 (Gordon). This view does not present environmental protection as something that is to be incentivized, but something that must be done because it is mankind’s “responsibility.”

Another key point of Second Wave Environmentalism is the focus on “nonviolent direct action” (Santas). The late twentieth century was a tumultuous time around the world. Japan did experience its own protests that turned violent. The environmental movement, in keeping with the basis of morality, advocated for nonviolence. “Nonviolent direct action” can consist of protests, sit ins, and boycotts. As described by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Nonviolence seeks friendship and understanding. Nonviolence does not seek to defeat the opponent” (“Six Steps”). This step is labelled “Reconciliation.” And reconciliation with nature becomes a major part of the Second Wave as those in the movement believed that humans can still save the earth by changing the way they interact with it.

The environmental movement shifted drastically in the 1990s, however, and this coincides with the changes found in the philosophy of *Princess Mononoke*. The first major change was the introduction of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (a precursor to the Kyoto Protocol in 1998) in 1992. The UNFCCC sought to “achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” This, the treaty said, should be done through policies that take into account different “socio-economic contexts” (*United Nations Framework*). This is the acknowledgement that developing nations may need to produce more greenhouse gases in order to develop—once they are developed, they must adhere to the same treaty rules as developed nations. Japan is a developed nation, and therefore must respond to the UNFCCC according to the rules of a developed nation. That means that Japan must “Formulate, implement, publish and regularly update national and, where appropriate, regional programmes containing measures to

mitigate climate change,” among other provisions—mostly about implementing policies to mitigate climate change (*United Nations Framework*). Japan had seemingly approached this treaty (and its renewal as the Kyoto Protocol in 1998) with open arms, having ratified it and marketed itself as a leader of environmental change.

After the ratification of the UNFCCC, Japan’s government and industries initiated policies that put environmental concerns at the forefront. Keidanren, a “federation of economic organizations representing more than 1,000 private industry and business organizations,” publically released a document detailing how they would approach new policies regarding the environment (*The Industrial Green Game*). Japan seemed to fully embrace the new environmental outlook of the world, but Jonathan Taylor notes in his article “Japan's Global Environmentalism Rhetoric and Reality” that the new environmental focus was more rhetoric than actual change. He notes that Japan in the early 90s, after the UNFCCC, Japan was the highest important of lumber in the world, becoming a major contributor to deforestation. He also notes that Japan is one of the main contributors to overfishing—their fish consumption is second only to China (Taylor). These are only some of the examples he touches on, but it becomes increasingly clear that Japan merely posits themselves as a global leader of environmental change, but it is only just rhetoric. They still contribute to ecological harm just as much as any other nation. This change in policies, even if it is just rhetoric, still places the environment as commodities to be used and preserved to be used at a later date. This is what Miyazaki is critiquing in *Princess Mononoke* (as will be discussed later).

Finally, there is Third Wave Environmentalism, which focuses mostly on economics. This involves taxing businesses in order to incentivize them to enforce green policies (Gordon).

For example, placing a carbon dioxide tax on a factory in order to reduce the amount of emissions from the building. This is in direct contrast with Second Wave Environmentalism's refusal to incentivize green policies. Japan does not have very many environmental taxes, and the ones that are in place are environmentally *related* not directly environmental ("What Are Environmental Taxes?"). This leads to corporations and industries to continue to destroy the environment in a similar to the ways listed above. This calls to question the idea of self-regulation and its effectiveness. If the rules are not put in place by those in power and made absolute—scrubbers must be installed—but are instead only incentivized, will the rules be followed? If the environmental regulations were placed and enforced, there is no option to not follow them. There is a correlation between green taxes and less emissions, but there are still companies who do not adhere to the tax (Miller and Mauricio). Japan, as stated above, does not even have very many environmentally related taxes, so even if there is a correlation, there is not much being done in Japan.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind falls in line with the belief set of Second Wave environmentalism. The rising anxieties about human made disasters in the time period of Second Wave can easily be seen in *Nausicaä*. The Seven Days of Fire was a man-made apocalyptic event that destroyed the environment for over one thousand years (possibly a stand-in for nuclear annihilation). Towards the middle of the movie, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* reveals that the earth is healing from the toxins that humans placed in the soil—the Sea of Decay (or Toxic Jungle depending on the version) is actually reverting the soil back to its form before human intervention (*Nausicaä*). While humans harmed the earth and killed almost every living thing, the earth itself is bringing itself back to a time from before the humans even stepped foot on it.

Nausicaä is the one who discovers that the plants themselves are not toxic, but are actually the ones purifying the soil. She then spends the rest of the film trying to protect the Sea of Decay from the other nations of the world (*Nausicaä*). She decides that she has a solemn duty to protect the environment from humans due to the fact that they are the ones that destroyed it in the first place. There is no incentive to do this other than to save the earth. It is moral to protect the earth, so the people of the Valley strive to do it. Later in the film, Nausicaä, as foretold by a prophecy, is the one to “restore mankind’s connection with the Earth that was destroyed” (*Nausicaä*). *Nausicaä* is Miyazaki’s hope that the environment can be fixed through compassion toward the world, which is the backbone of the Second Wave.

Nonviolence can be seen in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* as well. Throughout the film, Nausicaä refuses to harm any creature from the Sea of Decay and actively prevents Kushana from harming the Ohmu who, at one point, have surrounded them. In the climax, she dies trying to protect the Ohmu from the Pejites and the people of the Valley from the Ohmu (*Nausicaä*). Nausicaä is nonviolent (she often refuses to harm the Sea of Decay and its inhabitants and scolds Kushana for firing at the Ohmu) throughout the film because she recognizes that violence and greed is what destroyed the earth in the first place. It is only through actions and love that the earth can be healed. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that part of nonviolence was reconciliation. The non-violence of Nausicaä and the residents of the Valley of the Wind is juxtaposed against the war-like tendencies of the Pejites and Torumekians (or Tolmekians depending on the version), both of whom set their sights on the peaceful Valley of the Wind. Under orders of Kushana, the princess of the Torumekians, the people of the Valley are forced to burn their forests in order to protect the rest of the Valley—however this violent act

against nature was only necessary because the Torumekians and the Pejites brought spores to the Valley. According to Viktor Eikman, “the spores function as deadly metaphorical weeds of pollution,” and represent a power the Torumekians have over the Valley (46). It is only when the residents of the Valley embrace the ways of their princess and reject the cycle of violence, that mankind and earth are able to reconcile. It is once again the ideals of Second Wave Environmental (non-violence and a focus on morality) that saves the world another death. The residents of the Valley instead learn to live with the Sea of Decay after they learn that it is purifying the earth.

As shown in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Hayao Miyazaki largely agrees with Second Wave Environmentalism. *Princess Mononoke*, then, is Miyazaki pushing back against the Japanese stance on environmentalism and Third Wave Environmentalism as a whole (and mankind’s subsequent falling out with nature). The main antagonist of the film is Lady Eboshi, the leader of Irontown. Throughout the film, Eboshi seeks to reign over nature, even going as far as to kill the spirit of the forest to stop the spirits from waging war against the humans (*Princess Mononoke*). Irontown and Lady Eboshi can be seen as representation of what can happen under Third Wave Environmentalism. Irontown is a meditation on self-regulation and its failures. Lady Eboshi is given many chances to find a better way to make her money—the spirits tell her many times that what she is doing is killing the earth. She is told that if she changes her ways, the spirits will leave her alone (an incentive). Instead, she decides to kill the forest spirit to rid herself of the spirits entirely. Despite the forest spirit healing the earth, it remains dead (*Princess Mononoke*). Miyazaki is trying to show that only given incentives to protect the environment

only leads to humans breaking away and following their own desires. Environmentalism must be done because it is the just thing to do or people can ignore the incentive and not change.

Miyazaki has stated, “It’s a mistake to think about nature from the idea of efficiency, that forests should be preserved because they are essential to human beings” (Guitron). Japan’s view of nature in their new environmental policies is one of efficiency—incentivize people to not harm the earth through taxes (not because they should want to save the earth), save resources so that they are not depleted and can be used later. *Princess Mononoke* pushes back against this idea as it centers on a girl named San and a boy named Ashitaka as they try to stop an industrious town from killing a forest spirit. The people of Irontown view the forest around them as a commodity to be used to keep their furnaces running. *Princess Mononoke* represents the break from nature mankind experienced when they began to switch from the mindset that the earth should be protected because it is they are inherently linked to its future (as shown in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*), but because it is seen as resources to be used and consumed. Even though the spirit of the forest restores the damage done by the humans and its rampage after decapitation, it remains dead. The forest is irreparably damaged—its guardian is gone (*Princess Mononoke*). Viewing nature as something to be used, as is done by the people of Irontown, leads to a destruction of nature that can never be fixed.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind and *Princess Mononoke* are arguably Hayao Miyazaki’s most environmentally driven films, and despite being released only thirteen years apart, the differences between these two films are quite extreme. *Nausicaä* is hopeful about the future of the environment and *Princess Mononoke* is violent and angry about what humans have done to harm the natural world. Due to the changing climate around the environmental world,

Nausicaä is ultimately a movie about repairing what was broken between nature and humanity, while *Princess Mononoke* is about the initial break between the two.

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