

Spirituality, Aesthetics, and Aware:
Feeling Shinto in Miyazaki Hayao's *My Neighbour Totoro*

by

Sherri Carbullido
BA, St. Edwards University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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The thesis will explore the idea of feeling Japanese spirituality of Shinto through a contemporary work of art, the animated film My Neighbour Totoro (1988). The idea of a felt spirituality revolves around Shinto's notion of kami, divine entities whose existence becomes manifest through one's feeling and perception to awe-inspiring things of the natural world and the aesthetic notion of aware, an immediate felt emotional response that coincides as the response/reaction when coming into contact with awe-inspiring things. This thesis conceives aware to be the meeting point in which the human and kami world converge, a Shinto concept known as shinjin-gōitsu, or the meeting of the human spirit with kami. This thesis will uncover themes of Shinto spirituality through a close reading of the functionality of specific components of the film: music, setting, characters, character interactions, and symbolism. Themes such as nature, community, symbolism and the role of aesthetics within the film will be discussed to showcase the idea of a spiritual encounter. It is a spiritual encounter/meeting that is facilitated through the aesthetics and components of the film which elicits a response of aware from the viewer.

Keywords

Animated film, Shinto, aesthetics, aware, spirituality, kami

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Dedication

To my sister Kathlee, who, no matter what I decide to do, where I decide to go, or who I decide to be, has always given me the support to do so.

To my loving mother and father, who taught me what it means to work hard and to always try and do my best. Thank you for instilling in me the real treasure of life, family.

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Introduction

This thesis seeks to address the value of *aware*, an immediate emotional response that began as an interjection of “ah!” in order to express a feeling of awe upon coming into contact with some thing of an inspiring or mysterious nature. It forms the basis of an aesthetic, spiritual, and emotional framework of this thesis. What necessitates our ability as humans to feel takes grounding in what compels us to feel. We are compelled to feel when we encounter the unexplainable, the mysterious, and the beautiful things that affect us leave an impression on us. In order to understand what cannot be explained, yet compels one to feel and respond, gives premise to an idea of a spirituality that is emotionally if not intellectually comprehended and one that is aesthetically expressed. What then is the nature of spirituality? And if spirituality can be aesthetically expressed—how does a work of art critique the spiritual and social contexts of a particular society?

The nature of spirituality can be one comprised of emotion. Japanese spirituality or Shinto forms its foundation around the idea of divine entities, *kami* whose existence is felt and perceived through one’s ability to be sensitive to things of the phenomenal/natural world. The ability for one to be sensitive to one’s surroundings is dependent, however, on one’s intellectual, cultural, and social background. Those who are familiar with Shinto and have an understanding of Japanese aesthetics, culture, and history will be more open to *feeling* and *perceiving kami*. Yet, as this thesis will demonstrate, this type of background is not necessarily fundamental to understand Shinto; rather, a work of art that beautifully renders the ideals of Shinto, through aesthetics, can elicit an emotional response from the viewer. That is to say, a viewer upon watching or viewing a work of art can have a direct and immediate response to the ideals of Shinto without having to *intellectually* understand Shinto. If *kami*’s existence is dependent on

one's feeling, we can suggest then a work of art, through a set of aesthetic techniques, is capable in rendering notions of spirituality, of *kami*, while evoking a felt emotional response from the viewer. It can then be posited if spirituality can be expressed through a set of aesthetic techniques then a work of art can compel its audience towards a greater awareness or sensitivity to a type of spirituality.

I argue that Miyazaki Hayao purposely renders in his animated film, *My Neighbour Totoro*, themes of Shinto spirituality within its plot, characters, setting, and imagery to subtly argue for a greater awareness of Shinto. Miyazaki through aesthetics idealizes a natural world that is beautifully rendered and portrays the idea of “nature spirits” living in harmony with the human community. It coincides with Japan’s traditional spiritual beliefs of the Shinto worldview in that humans, *kami*, and the natural world live in harmony. It is an opposite of today’s modern urban setting of Japan. Miyazaki relies on his art of film to reconnect his audience with the traditions of Shinto by intertwining Shinto themes of community, nature, *kami*, and more explicitly the use of Shinto symbolism in a manner that evokes the pure, instantaneous, and emotional response of *aware*.

To illustrate this, I will showcase *how* themes of Japanese spirituality are portrayed in *My Neighbour Totoro*. This entails a close reading or functional analysis on the form, components and techniques Miyazaki employs throughout his film that create for the content, the message of the film. I will point out specific scenes and look at particular components within the scenes and explain their function. In other words, I will take apart certain components within the film and break down their purpose: why they are used, how they are used, and what they represent. In doing so I will uncover what I consider the component’s true purpose and explain rather than describe the message of the film. I argue that one of the components Miyazaki uses is *aware*. In

doing so he not only causes a reaction/impression from the audience but he also instills messages of spirituality to the audience through feeling and emotion. This in turn enables the audience to contemplate or realize what it is to encounter or experience the divine.

Aware is an emotional response but more importantly as this thesis argues it is an emotional gateway that ties together Japanese spirituality with art. The main dynamic of *aware* and what bridges Japanese spirituality with aesthetics is emotion. In using emotion as the middle ground, where spirituality meets aesthetics, this thesis will illustrate that communion with the divine is possible in a modern form of art. The historic and evolutionary development of *aware* from an interjection, noun, emotion, to a type of aesthetic criticism contributed to the idea that *aware* could be used as a mechanism; a type of aesthetic technique that is often overlooked, yet is an exponential force in conveying aspects of Japanese spirituality in contemporary forms of art, such as animated film. This thesis, therefore, focuses on the emotional dimensions of Japanese spirituality and attempts to draw off aesthetics—the beauty of things—of the natural world, to evoke an emotional response—*aware*, in order to emphasize that it is feeling that determines the existence of the divine or at least a contemplation of such a spiritual experience.

In order to understand the relationship between Japanese aesthetics and spirituality and fully to explicate my argument of Miyazaki it is important to provide a specific intellectual context regarding Japanese aesthetics or *bigaku*, the love of simple, natural, and unobtrusive beauty. This is based on the Japanese aesthetic conscious, the *bi-ishiki*. It is also of equal value to discuss religion/spirituality as an emotional encounter between an individual and things of an awe-inspiring nature as expounded by religious scholar Nitobe Inazo. Then drawing from these two seemingly disparate philosophies, an emotional context in order to frame the significant role, *aware* will play in bridging the two together.

Religion for Nitobe was not an organized social construct, but an internal and personal realization or encounter caused by one's heart when sparked by the ah-ness of things. The ah-ness of things characterized the hidden, spiritual power that was not visible to eyes alone, but was felt and emotionally realized through the heart. Religion, then, is based on feeling and emotion. Religion, then, in the Japanese context did not necessarily require intellect or rationale. Religion was a culmination of and dependent on one's intuition and feeling. Religion in this light is emotive based, developed and conceived through feeling and emotion as inspired by the heart when coming into contact with things that inspire an exclamation of ah!

In determining the profound influence emotion has on religion, to bolster this notion, I will utilize the work of scholars who have offered insights into the emotional aspects of Shinto. Shinto the indigenous religion of Japan is considered by some as a spirituality situated and contingent on living and feeling the present reality, *nakaima*.¹ The perceived essence of Shinto—the world of *kami*—as divine entities that manifest themselves or become recognizable when one becomes emotionally affected by things of the phenomenal world coincides with Nitobe's idea of religion as a concept that is felt when coming into contact with the ah-ness of things. The ah-ness of things, characterize the awe-inspiring, mysterious, *felt* presence of *kami*.

The idea of being emotionally affected developed into understanding Shinto's notion of *kokoro*, or heart. The *kokoro*, the organ associated with one's intuition, feeling, and emotion, is a component that facilitates an unhindered, unbiased, immediate response to things. Because it is immediate and based on emotion it bypasses any sort of rational and intellectual kind of response. In understanding this, the emotional response given is one that is genuine and pure. Through the *kokoro* we are able to facilitate the idea of a communication between the human and

¹ James W. Boyd and Rob G. Williams, "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective," *Philosophy of East and West* 55 (2005): 46, accessed May 26, 2013, <http://jstor.org/stable/4487935>

divine worlds—human sensibility as affected by things of the world. However, the ability for a thing to affect us rests upon the aesthetic qualities, the beauty of the object/thing itself to make an impression on us.

This thesis positions the idea of beauty based on the Japanese aesthetic consciousness, the *bi-ishiki*. The Japanese sense of beauty or *bi-ishiki* considers beauty to be anything that has the ability to affect us. More specifically, those that are sensitive enough to be affected, ideally an individual that has a general background on aesthetics whom can pick up on the subtle implicit forms of beauty, yet even those without this background can understand and learn from a discussion of the *bi-ishiki*, an idea of beauty that is present in every day. From this perspective of the *bi-ishiki* we are able to characterize beauty in a manner that highlights all possible forms of beauty: natural, simple, mysterious, and pure aspects of beauty among other aspects. This broad scope of the *bi-ishiki* situates beauty in things, situations, and events. The value of beauty in this regard is existent in the reality of living. That is to say, the everyday simple even minute encounters that occur often or rarely manifest a sense of beauty. When some thing affects us whether it is a natural thing, such as a butterfly, or a human-made artifact, such as a broken tea cup, or even a situation, such as watching the sunrise there can be within these things a sense of beauty that may appeal to the heart. The heart resonates with the object of beauty and our response to this is one of emotion. We could then position the beauty of things as the initiator, the starting point, of a transcendent experience. In realizing the beauty of some thing we are brought into an emotional state that gives way to a pure emotional response of *aware*.

I can argue then the significance of *aware*, a broad concept that ranges from an interjection, noun, to a set of emotions, and theory of *mono no aware*, is based upon the emotionality of things. Because things of beauty have the ability to make us respond we are

connected to them on an emotional level. The initial feeling of awe from nature, the beauty of things, as it appeals directly to the human heart, the *kokoro*. The human sensibility to respond necessitates a human understanding or articulation of this “awe.” Transliterated as a religion, Shinto—*kami*, the world of the divine, a spirituality that encompasses a relationship between the individual and the awe-inspiring thing. The communion between the two is a Shinto concept known as *shinjin-gōitsu*. *Shinjin-gōitsu* is a spiritual encounter that emphasizes the human spirit meeting the divine and occurs through an aesthetic experience. It is a foundational idea that highlights the relationship of human with *kami* and will be emphasized throughout this thesis.

We are able to realize this relationship through *aware*. *Aware* is our holographic entry point. According to Thomas Kasulis, holographic entry points serve as points of entry where the manifestation of *kami* can be realized and experienced. The term holographic refers to “the whole (holo-) [as being] inscribed (-graph) in parts.”² The “whole” refers to the presence of *kami* as reproduced or replicated through parts—entities, objects, things, places. As this thesis contends *aware* serves as such an entry point because it allows us to realize or exposes us to the idea of *kami* through our emotional response. The ability for one to have an emotional response to things of beauty is dependent on one’s sensitivity or awareness to the things.

This concept is known as *mono no aware* or sensitivity of things and was re-articulated by Motoori Norinaga. *Mono no aware* took its basis as a Japanese aesthetic—the sadness of things. But Motoori framed *aware* to mean more than just sadness, *aware* described a variety of sentiments, namely sadness, joy, pathos, or surprise. Motoori also took the position that all things possessed a *kokoro* which further supported the notion that all things, then, were able to commune with one another on an emotional level if not intellectual level. Emotions then could

² Thomas P. Kasulis, “Helping Western Readers Understand Japanese Philosophy,” in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6. Classical Japanese Philosophy*, edited by James W. Heisig and Rein Raud (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2010), 226, accessed November 16, 2012, <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/2124>.

not be limited to sadness alone. *Mono no aware* for Motoori was as much an emotional as well as aesthetic experience that occurred when one was sensitive to the stimulating effect of the thing. Used as aesthetic technique artists strived to produce works of art that inspired or captured *aware*. It was the guiding principle for many Japanese artists in an attempt to re-create this emotional and aesthetic experience, which as this thesis will contend, is very much a spiritual experience as well. Drawing off this idea this thesis will take the position then that a modern work of art—animated film is also capable of producing such a stimulating encounter.

Therefore, to support my argument, I will analyze *My Neighbour Totoro* through the technique of close reading, to demonstrate textual evidence that informs my interpretation of the film's argument. The close reading will look at specific components, plot, characters, imagery, or music from the film and from these components to point out their functionality and explain the overall message of the film, all the while showing how *aware* as a technique is interwoven within the film. . In breaking down the functionality of these components we will showcase how each serves a purpose in facilitating an emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual experience.

My argument consists of four chief sections that I will present in four chapters. Chapter One, (An Introduction to Shinto) focuses on introducing to the reader the ideals of Shinto and what I consider to be the basic tenets of Shinto. These tenets are important in forming the religious basis this thesis will be centred upon. This chapter will address the origins of Shinto, the world-view, and the profound influence of *kami* that will lead to a discussion regarding essential pre-conditions for communion with *kami*.

Chapter Two, (*Bigaku* Japanese Aesthetics) will seek to address the Japanese conception of beauty as determined by the Japanese aesthetic consciousness, the *bi-ishiki*. In understanding the idea of *bi-ishiki*, the work of Donald Keene and his interpretation of Japanese aesthetics and

what he considers to be fundamental aspects of Japanese aesthetics: simplicity, irregularity, suggestion, and perishability.³ These aspects will be discussed at length allowing the reader to understand the diversity as well as simplicity that beauty encompasses.

Chapter Three, (An Introduction, History, and Evolution of *Aware*) will provide an almost encyclopedic account of the history and evolution of *aware*. This chapter introduces *aware* to the reader by highlighting its origin, multiple meanings, and influence as an aesthetic technique during the Heian era. I will then explicate the notion of *mono no aware* in order to bridge an understanding of the engagement with things, what happens during an “aware experience” how one’s sensitivity to things connects to the notion of what it is to know the heart of things.

Chapter Four, (Feeling Shinto in *My Neighbour Totoro*) will discuss other scholars who used *My Neighbour Totoro* in their own work to demonstrate the idea of Shinto spirituality or absence of. This chapter will bridge together the idea of *aware* used as a technique to facilitate a realization or contemplation of communion with the world of the divine. It will utilize the ideals of Shinto as well as mention aspects of beauty the film incorporates in order to provide concrete evidence of the idea that Japanese spirituality and aesthetics can be bridged through *aware*.

³ Donald Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” *Philosophy East and West*, 3 (1969): 298, accessed November 19, 2012, <http://jstor.org/stable/1397586>

Chapter 1—An Introduction to Shinto

This chapter will focus on Shinto, a belief system within Japan and generally considered Japan's indigenous religion. The chapter will explain the intrinsic *felt* connection Shinto—Japanese spirituality and world-view—and aesthetics—the beauty of things as manifested through an expression of simplicity, naturalness, and purity. . In order to demonstrate this relationship, I will first discuss the idea of an emotional and felt dimension of religion by introducing the scholarly work of Nitobe Inazo. He offers a view of religion that places our work in the context of the necessary and inherent emotional aspect of religion. From there, I will move on to discuss briefly the differences between the ideas and beliefs of Shinto, in accordance to the Shinto world-view from those of traditional Christian thought. This will lead to a discussion that will touch on the origination and deeply-rooted spiritual aspects that construct the basis of this belief system, while stressing the emotional, communal, and supportive aspects of Shinto. From there, I will incorporate the ideas of Nitobe and a few other scholars to emphasize what I call the basic tenants of Japanese spirituality before discussing in depth Shinto terminology, such as *makoto*, *kokoro*, *magokoro*, *musubi*, *shinjin-gōitsu*, and *kami*. From that point, I will discuss the idea of how the human and *kami* world overlap and meet through a shared emotional moment, what this thesis refers to as the mechanism of *aware*. *Aware*, is defined as an aesthetic ideal based on a felt, emotional response of awe, pathos, and/or amazement. It is a response that many Japanese arts strive to provoke from within their viewers. As this thesis argues, Miyazaki through his animated films also strives for this moment of *aware*. In order to understand *why* Miyazaki and other artists aim for this emotional moment and *how* his films achieve this effect, it is first important to understand the basics of Japanese spirituality.

In very basic terms, Shinto develops from the very simple idea that all things have a spirit, and those spirits of all things can interact and affect one another.⁴ This idea is pre-Shinto; and we may recognize in it ideas in common with belief systems from around the world, from many different historical periods.⁵ We may classify these belief systems as animisms, all things are animate.⁶ Because all things are animate, conscious living entities, they possess a shared ability to communicate and relate to one another not necessarily on an intellectual level, but on an emotional level. Religion can therefore be considered as the method for identifying this shared ability of communicating on an emotional level that occurs between all things. If emotion, and not intellect, is necessary in this communication, then emotion, and not intellect, must also be necessary in religion. This is an idea that Nitobe Inazo (1862-1933) developed, and so to understand it, it is necessary to introduce his scholarly work and his rendition of the term religion. Given Nitobe's background as a comparative scholar, he is well versed in the religious traditions of Japan as well as those outside of Japan. As a result, he is able to think critically of Japan's system of belief in terms of other religious philosophies.

Religion, as described and explicated by Nitobe in his text, *The Japanese Nation* is a construct that develops out of one's instinct and manifests within deep sentiment. Religion for Nitobe is one that does not require divine revelation or an infinite God; rather, religion is borne intuitively, gains depth through sentiment, and grows through emotion.⁷ In this view the faith of religion is one of the subconscious, reliant on emotions, and one that excludes intellect and rationality.

⁴ Timothy Iles, personal discussion. (PAAS 599, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, June 14, 2012).

⁵ Timothy Iles, personal discussion. (PAAS 599, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, June 14, 2012).

⁶ Timothy Iles, personal discussion. (PAAS 599, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, June 14, 2012).

⁷ Inazo Nitobe, *The Japanese Nation* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1912), accessed October 7, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/japanesenationit00nitouoft.117-118>.

Religion, then, in Nitobe's words is: "...the exercise or yearning of the heart to reach forward to that which is invisible to eyes of flesh."⁸ It is "...a recognition of supernatural power accessible to human spirits."⁹ In another sense, Nitobe is describing an event or process that the heart or *kokoro*; the organ mostly associated with one's intuition, feeling, and emotion, is a natural indicator used as a channel to communicate or recognize a "supernatural power"; one that cannot be seen with eyes alone, but suggests that it may necessarily be felt with the heart through sentiment or emotion. This engagement leads to a greater awareness of things awe-inspiring or "supernatural."¹⁰ And it is through this rendering that religion becomes a construct of the heart.

Nitobe's articulation of understanding the human relationship to the divine remains so deeply ingrained in the Japanese philosophical traditions that even when he speaks of religion in the general sense he presents it through a filter of what we have come to know and understand as Shinto.¹²

With that said, the intention of this chapter is to understand and highlight the fundamental tenets of Shinto, the religion of Japan, what we will consider for this thesis, an expression of Japanese spirituality. Nitobe's rendition of religion is an important one in order to frame religion in the Japanese sense of the term. Religion in this light is the by-product of the heart, or *kokoro*, not only the organ of sensibilities and feeling, but also the "seat of the will and the source of volition and motivation."¹³ Religion is therefore conceived and developed through feeling and emotions rather than through rigid scriptures or formulated doctrines. As Picken writes: "Shinto

⁸ Inazo Nitobe, "The Religious Sense of the Japanese People," *Pacific Affairs* 2 (1929): 59, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://jstor.org/stable/2749846>

⁹ Inazo Nitobe, "The Religious Sense of the Japanese People," *Pacific Affairs* 2 (1929): 59, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://jstor.org/stable/2749846>

¹⁰ Timothy Iles, personal discussion. (PAAS 599, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, October 16, 2012).

¹² Iles, personal discussion.

¹³ Stuart D.B. Picken, *Essentials of Shinto* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 346.

is indeed a religion that is “caught” rather than “taught,” its insights “perceived” before they are “believed,” its basic concepts “felt” rather than “thought.”¹⁴ Religion thus has an emotive capacity that ultimately gives expression to a form of spirituality that is felt rather than learnt and sensed rather than seen, a spirituality that is oriented towards life and living within the world.¹⁵ This approach to religion is necessary to conceive Shinto from a deeper, more intuitive level, ultimately representing the essence of Japanese spirituality in a manner that divorces it from the political or nationalistic interpretation commonly associated with the study of Shinto. This understanding of Shinto will hereafter create the foreground that this thesis will perceive the Shinto religion in the proceeding chapters. With that said, we may now begin our discussion regarding Japan’s belief system known as Shinto and the basic tenets it encompasses.

Shinto is the term used to describe the religion of Japan. What Joseph Kitagawa in his text *On Understanding Japanese Religion*, regards as: “...an ensemble of contradictory and yet peculiarly Japanese types of religious beliefs, sentiments, and approaches, which have been shaped and conditioned by the historical experience of the Japanese people from the prehistoric period to the present.”¹⁶ However, as we’ve mentioned earlier the purpose of this thesis is to conceive Shinto as a necessary form of Japanese spirituality that is expressed through sentiment and emotion, one that involves building a greater sense of awareness or sensitivity to things of an awe-inspiring or supernatural nature through an experience we will refer to as *aware*. The term Shinto was given in the early sixth century and was used in contradistinction to the religious philosophies of Buddhism and Confucianism that were permeating Japan at the time. Derivative of the Chinese characters *shin*, meaning unfathomable spiritual power, superhuman, god-like

¹⁴ Stuart D.B. Picken, *Essentials of Shinto* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), preface xxxii.

¹⁵ Thomas P. Kasulis, *Shinto The Way Home* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 3.

¹⁶ Joseph M. Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion* (Princeton Univ. Press, NJ) 1987. 139.

nature or being, and *tao*, way, path, or teaching, the term Shinto is commonly translated as “way of the gods” or “way of the *kami*.¹⁷ *Kami no michi*, the Japanese pronunciation of Shinto, in the same sense is interpreted as “the *kami* divine way.”¹⁸ The *mi* in *michi* means “august” or “divine” and *chi* being interpreted in ancient Japanese for “way” and *kami* meaning “divine spirit.”¹⁹ Prior to the generalized use of “Shinto,” the faith was known as *kami-nagara* or *kannagara*. *Kami-nagara* roughly translated means “being like gods” or “being in a state of godhood.”²⁰ In this particular definition *kami* stands for gods and *nagara*, which is derivative of the Japanese *naku* and *aru*, implies a state of being or not being.²¹ *Kami-nagara* thus implies a faith that is constituted around the notion to be like or being that of *kami*. In another sense of the term it is a recognized way of living. Shinto here is a *way* of life, “the way of the *kami* within the flow of life in the universe, as a way of seeing and experiencing the divine in the midst of life.”²²

The Shinto notion of *kami*, one that will be further elucidated within the chapter is one of many meanings and therefore difficult to define in one sense. As mentioned *kami* is a term generally interpreted to mean gods or divine spirits. Gods or divine spirits imply a sense of the awe-inspiring or mysterious. Both are constructs that cannot be explained or are beyond human reasoning and comprehension. *Kami*, we suggest then, is an entity that possesses an awe-inspiring or mysterious character that can be and almost often is considered to the extent of god-like or divine. *Kami*, as we will come to understand and appreciate, is a pervasive, necessary, and

¹⁷ Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion* 139.

¹⁸ J.W.T. Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto*. (Kennikat Press, 1935) 58.

¹⁹ Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto*. 60.

²⁰ Nitobe, *The Japanese Nation* 122.

²¹ Nitobe, *The Japanese Nation* 122.

²² Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 347.

crucial catalyst of Shinto theoretical precepts, one that continues to have a profound effect on Japanese culture and understanding the way of life. While it may be argued Shinto praxis has been greatly influenced in part by the religious traditions of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Shinto's character as a distinct religion of Japan remains intact due to the intrinsic belief in *kami*. This belief in *kami* is supported by the Shinto world-view.

The phrase world-view is used to describe how a society interprets itself and the world based on its religious spiritual traditions.²³ The traditional Shinto world-view is one that places a strong emphasis on a harmonious interconnected community of humanity, nature, and *kami*.²⁴ It embraces a reverence in *kami* and nature. Stuart Picken contends that Shinto is a religion oriented on community and family and because of this “self-understanding of the community” Shinto has been able to sustain its presence in Japan.²⁵ The underlying motivation of this world-view is based on Shinto cosmogony or theory of origination. A concept that will be elucidated further, but before doing so, the characteristics that make for the Shinto world-view will be highlighted briefly.

The world-view of Shinto places belief in a united world. In the context of traditional Christian thought: a divided world of good versus bad and God versus Satan.²⁶ For Shinto, the world is harmoniously united within itself and a division between good and evil or God versus Satan does not exist.²⁷ In relation to this, the Shinto concept of human nature is one that is inherently good and capable of growth; in contrast, evil or badness in a person's character exists

²³ James W. Boyd and Rob G. Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective,” *Philosophy East and West* 55 (2005): 34, accessed May 26, 2013, <http://jstor.org/stable/4487935>

²⁴ Yotaro Miyamoto, ed. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman. Vol 1: *The Spirit of Sustainability*. Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2010.

²⁵ Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, xxvi.

²⁶ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan*, 110.

²⁷ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan*, 110.

because of pollutions by which purification is necessitated to remove.²⁸ Likewise, the belief in one omniscient god is unfamiliar to Shinto thought. Instead Shinto believes in the existence of many deities or *kami*, but they are neither omniscient omnipotent, nor necessarily immortal. In addition, this united world of Shinto lacks an afterlife, Shinto focuses on living in the present with the goal of the harmonious development of life and community through continuous growth and creativity; a final goal of heaven or paradise is absent.²⁹ Shinto, therefore, lacks a separation between the spiritual and material or a world of *kami* and a world of humanity; instead Shinto stresses an overlap, an interrelatedness in which these worlds combine and permeate one another.³⁰

This interrelatedness is based on the notion of *musubi*. The term *musubi* means “combination,” “joining,” and/or the “binding together.”³¹ *Musubi* refers to the Shinto notion of a creative life generating and connecting power that forms the basis of all life including that of humans and manifests itself in all of Great Nature or *Daishizen*.³² The term Great Nature is used to describe the totality of all physical and spiritual manifestations within the world and what we will continuously refer to as nature or the “phenomenal world” and all that it encompasses.³³

As we mentioned, Shinto maintains a world-view that human, *kami*, and the phenomenal world, are interconnected in a three-part relationship and that the balance and order of all three entities are tied to one another.; This a notion that is explicit in Japan’s cosmogony or theory of

²⁸ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan*, 109, 113.

²⁹ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan*, 110, 113.

³⁰ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan*, 113.

³¹ Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation,” 34.

³² Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation,” 34.

³³ Picken, “*Essentials of Shinto*,” xxiii.

origination written in the *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan* and *Kojiki Records of Ancient Matters*, Japan's oldest extant records regarding Japan's earliest beginnings and historical events.

According to the *Kojiki*, the earlier of the two records, compiled in the sixth century Japan's cosmogony revolves around the primordial couple Izanagi-no-kami (male *kami* who invites) and Izanami-no-kami (female *kami* who is invited) who were ordered by the three heavenly self-created *kami*, Ame-no-minakanushi (heavenly center lord), Taka-mi-musubi (august producing *kami*), and Kami-musubi (divine generative force *kami*) to generate land within the primordial waters below the Plain of High Heaven (*Takama-no-hara*).³⁴ Doing as they were ordered, the couple stirred the primordial waters with their jeweled spear, lifted it, and the brine that dripped from the spear generated an island which the couple inhabited and where they were married. Through copulation, the couple continued to produce various other *kami* including those of trees, mountains, plains, and finally fire from which Izanami died. In an attempt to see his wife Izanagi went to the netherworld only to find an unsightly Izanami that he fled and he cleansed himself in a nearby river. Upon cleansing his left eye, the sun goddess, Amaterasu was generated, in cleansing his right eye the moon god, Tsukiyomi, and from his nose the storm god, Susanoo came into existence. Because of this, in accordance with the cosmogonical myth, Shinto contends having no creator that everything was generated or pro-created.

Shinto directly associates this creative and generative connecting force of *musubi* with various *kami*, in particular the “self-created” *kami* of Japan’s cosmogony: Taka-mi-musubi and Kami-musubi whose names comprise of the term *musubi* are regarded as *kami* “in and through whom life is generated, grows, and advances.”³⁵ In understanding this, all things of the

³⁴ Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*. 143.

³⁵ Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation,” 34.

phenomenal world including humanity are begotten of *kami* or descended from *kami*, not made.³⁶

Therefore, the inherent relatedness of human, *kami*, and the phenomenal world is of the same nature as the procreator. It is through this relationship, Shinto maintains, that human beings are intrinsically tied to *kami* and the phenomenal world.

In understanding this, we can suggest then the Shinto world-view emphasizes a harmoniously interrelated community of humanity, nature, and *kami*. Central to this, is the idea of *musubi*. *Musubi* acts as a bonding agent in which all things are manifested, connected, developed, and sustain their livelihood. By extension, *kami*, which are a manifestation of *musubi*, participate in the sustainability and continuity of life by providing the nourishing, life-developing, and creative capacity of *musubi*, by existing through concrete instances of nature such as plants and vegetation. As part of this interrelated community and humans share in the same material or “nature” as that of *kami* and humanity’s role within this community is to cooperate, acknowledge, and respect the benefits of nature which is ultimately of *kami*.³⁷ In doing so the cultivation and nurturing of nature is established and in return provides for the benefits of nature to humanity. In other words, nature and humanity take care of one another. The community of Shinto in this regard is mutually beneficial. It is for this reason nature and *kami* partake a special role in the Shinto world-view.

Therefore, the concrete forms of *musubi* through their life sustaining and life developing characteristics reveal themselves as entities of the phenomenal world, that is, things of nature are considered to be *kami*.³⁸ For this reason, Boyd and Williams describe *kami* as: “not countless gods, but countless phenomena that stimulate a sense of wonder and possess a kind of awesome

³⁶ Nitobe, *The Japanese Nation*. 130; Floyd Hiatt Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965) 114.

³⁷ Ross, *Shinto the Way of Japan*. 113-114.

³⁸ Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation,” 34.

potency.”³⁹ *Kami* as we mentioned earlier take on a variety of nuances, but are almost always associated with inspiring a sense of awe or wonder.

As stated earlier in reference to Nitobe’s interpretation of religion as one that lacks divine revelation or an infinite God we can suggest Shinto, which has neither founder nor sacred scripture, is very much a religion where sentiment or emotion was heavily relied upon for guidance in place of written scripture. For Shinto, as Nitobe suggests had the doctrine of *kami*.⁴⁰ *Kami*, the quintessential construct of Shinto tenets, commonly interpreted in the Western sense as “God,” “gods,” “deities,” are common interpretations that vary from the Japanese conception of the term. *Kami*’s meaning is as numerous as the amount of *kami* Shinto claims to possess. *Kami* is the awe-inspiring, omnipresent, and divine force, what Nitobe refers to as a “supernatural power” that provides for the foundation of Shinto spiritual praxis and its sentiment-based precepts. For this reason, it is essential to engage in an understanding of *kami*, one in resonance with the Japanese conception, a description of *kami*; rather, than a definition of *kami*.

To this end, it is important to highlight the scholarly work of Floyd Hiatt Ross and his text: *Shinto the Way of Japan*. Ross asserts: “If *kami* is to be understood in its fuller Shinto sense, it must be experienced in the context which lies beyond words or theological concepts.”⁴¹ In this regard, *kami* is beyond the interpretation of words. For one to describe or know *kami*, one must experience *kami*. *Kami*, then, is more than mere ideology. *Kami* is made concrete through an

³⁹ Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation,” 34.

⁴⁰ Nitobe, *The Japanese Nation*, 123.

⁴¹ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 32-33.

experience or an engagement with things of the phenomenal world. This engagement is one that involves *kami*'s ability to evoke a sense of awe and wonder just "as it is" (*onozukara*).⁴²

Mark Shields describes *kami* simply as a "felt presence of awe."⁴³ In relation to this is the fundamental aspect of feeling that *kami* evokes, Shields contends:

[feeling] is perhaps best considered as the relation between an external spirit or power and an internal response to such. Or the relation might even be framed in reverse, such that is the feeling that gives rise to or realizes the external spiritual force [*kami*]...In Shinto, it is precisely the nearness and conditionedness of *kami* that makes it so powerful; it is literally "within you" –if only for that moment of overjoyed response.⁴⁴

This overjoyed response is what we will refer to as *aware*, a spontaneous emotional response that is produced when coming into contact with things of an awe-inspiring or mysterious nature, the central concept that this thesis will explore and apply to animated film. *Aware*'s history, conceptualization, and relation to *kami* will be elucidated in greater detail in chapter three of this thesis. Returning to the idea of *kami*, Boyd and Williams write that *kami* is a "...superior instance of the vital potency of Great Nature."⁴⁵

The spirit of Great Nature may be a flower, the beauty of the mountains, the pure snow, the soft rains or the gentle breeze. [Kannagara] means being in communion with these forms of beauty...when people respond to the silent and provocative beauty of the natural order, they are aware of Kannagara.⁴⁶

In other words, it is in feeling and being aware, enough to have a response of *aware* to the "silent and provocative beauty of the natural order" to nature "as it is" that allows one

⁴² James W. Boyd and Rob G. Williams, "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective," *Philosophy East and West* 55 (2005): 43, accessed May 26, 2013, <http://jstor.org/stable/4487935>; Yotaro Miyamoto, ed. Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman. *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability*, s.v. "Shinto," Vol. 1: *The Spirit of Sustainability*. Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2010.

⁴³ James Mark Shields, "Beyond Belief: Japanese Approaches to the Meaning of Religion," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39 (2010): 136, accessed November 14, 2012, <http://sir.sagepub.com/content/39/2/133>

⁴⁴ Shields, "Beyond Belief," 136.

⁴⁵ Boyd and Williams, "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective," 43.

⁴⁶ Boyd and Williams, "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective," 43.

to follow the way of Shinto (Kannagara) to see and experience the divine in the present moment. That is to say, one experiences or encounters *shinjin-gōitsu*. Shinto's *shinjin-gōitsu* is a term used to designate an aesthetic experience that involves communion of *kami* with the human spirit, an encounter that can only take place through one's genuine and pure heart, *makoto no kokoro*.⁴⁷ In emphasizing the aspect of feeling that goes hand and hand with *kami* Shields contends: "Whether *kami* (conceived as spirits dwelling within nature or objects) really exist is entirely beside the point, for the existence of *kami* rests upon the feeling that one has in encountering anything awesome."⁴⁸

We have an opportunity here to bring several ideas together. It is *feeling* that determines the existence of *kami*, rather than an intellectually-valid, verifiable form of 'existence'. Also, the emotional experience of *kami* brings the human and the divine worlds into harmony. The conception of *shinjin-gōitsu*, or the "unification of *kami* and humans," is an aesthetic as much as a spiritual one, as well as the highest form of understanding the nature of existence: the unification of all things through the forces which create all things. Now, we may begin to understand the importance of *aware*, or the emotional, affective quality of things: when one experiences *aware*, either through a natural sight, or an artistic one, one has an opportunity to experience unity with the divine. *Aware* is an opportunity for a transcendent experience; it is a window, a doorway, an entranceway into a radically *full* form of existence—a form of existence intimately and inextricably bound together with all things and all *kami*. That is to say, it is an entranceway to the form of *all* existences, as they always are, even though human beings are not always aware of this reality. *Aware* is an opportunity to become aware.

⁴⁷ Boyd and Williams, "Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective," 43.

⁴⁸ Shields, "Beyond Belief," 136.

It is through an experience can one feel *kami*'s awe-inspiring presence, which is made known through the senses, that such an event could only be described. In understanding this, let us now refer to Ross' interpretation of *kami*:

It [*kami*] stands for that which is everywhere present in varying degrees, and it stands for that which is not entirely present or visible to people. It stands for mystery, for the feeling of “awesomeness” akin to the sense of “the holy”... *kami* is something to be respected. *Kami* provides the power for all growth, for development and creativity. *Kami* is something to make man “walk on,” to progress toward his hopes. *Kami* is in nature and man is in nature also, and *kami* is in man.⁴⁹

In asserting Ross' interpretation *kami*, then, is very much an omnipresent force transcending even within the human body. *Kami* 's presence not only is necessary for the livelihood of humans, but also is an underlying force shaping their basic attitude towards life if one is open to experiencing its awesomeness. *Kami* is also the invisible guiding principle present through one's ability to recognize *kami* that resides within them. In reiterating the concept of *shinjin-gōitsu* to be in resonance with *kami* is to experience *kami*, yet as we stated earlier in order to be receptive to the presence of *kami* and responsive to it, one must have *makoto*.

Makoto is part and parcel of the Shinto tenet *makoto no kokoro*. As Nitobe states the ancient Chinese characters used for *makoto* were equivalent to the phrase “the word done” and the Japanese derivation of *ma-koto* means “thing, real thing” or the “essence.”⁵⁰ In other words, *makoto* is truth, honesty, sincerity, and faithfulness. *Makoto*, then, can be interpreted as a concept that reflects being real and genuine not only in one's thoughts, but through one's words and actions that *makoto* is then made tangible. Ross writes: “‘Truth’ here is not an abstract something but a concrete living-out of the present situation.”⁵¹ In traditional Japanese thought *makoto* or

⁴⁹ Ross, *Shinto The Way of Japan*, 32-33.

⁵⁰ Nitobe. “Religious Sense,” 58-59.

⁵¹ Ross, *Shinto the Way of Japan*, 108.

truth is an entity capable of transforming itself into numerous forms in time and space and manifests itself within the real world being revealed to people through their encounter with things of the phenomenal world, that is, through their engagement with *kami*.⁵²

This engagement involves the *kokoro*, the second component of *makoto no kokoro*. The *kokoro* is an essential element of Shinto and one that will be greatly emphasized within this thesis. In very basic terms, the *kokoro* is “our unique set of personality traits, dispositions, sensibilities” and it is the source of our will and motivation.⁵³ It is commonly translated in the Western sense as heart, mind, or spirit; however, the Japanese conception of *kokoro* is a combined component of both mind (thought) and heart (feeling). Through this conceptualization the *kokoro* becomes a mechanism of felt emotional thought that is provoked through affectation from coming into contact with external things. This thought is one absent of intellect and rationality; rather, it is based on the feeling and emotionality associated with the individual’s heart which enables an internalized connection to external things. Johnathan Flowers articulates *kokoro* as follows:

Presented as the “heart/mind,” *kokoro* is a jointed cognitive/emotional apparatus that allows us to come in contact with the *kami* of the phenomenal world around us as realized through felt dimensions of nature. That is to say that in as much as the phenomenal world is perceived, classified, and organized by the mind through the physical senses, the *kokoro* necessarily feels, empathizes, and shares in the nascent emotion implicit in the *kami* of all things. That is not to posit that cognition or perception comes before feeling, but rather that the two are joined within one apparatus as to be inseparable.⁵⁴

For this reason, the *kokoro* is not made of two entities as in heart *and* mind but a single component. Therefore, Kasulis defines *kokoro* as “mindful heart” a single entity capable of both

⁵² *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Shinto,” accessed September 27, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/540856/Shinto>.

⁵³ Boyd and Williams, “Japanese Shinto: An Interpretation of a Priestly Perspective,” 43; Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 346.

⁵⁴ Johnathan Charles Flowers, “*Aware* as a Theory of Japanese Aesthetics” (MA thesis, Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, 2011). 19-20.

thinking and feeling yet incapable of separation from one another.⁵⁵ To this end, the *kokoro* for Shinto plays a fundamental role as an internalizing component bridging the human with the phenomenal world through its ability to both feel and think, therefore, producing a resonant response in reaction to an engagement with things of the world.

In understanding the significance and meaning of *makoto* and *kokoro* we can comprehend the concept mentioned earlier of *makoto no kokoro*. Translated as “heart of truth” or “true heart” *makoto no kokoro* or simply *magokoro* stands for “sincerity, pure heart, and uprightness,” and constitutes as the Shinto attitude necessary towards life and in the recognition of the awe-inspiring *kami* that resides within humans.⁵⁶ The concept of *magokoro* states that truth is represented by *kami* because Shinto maintains humans are internally related to *kami*, to be *magokoro* means to be one with *kami*.⁵⁷ In other words, a human that reflects the attitude of *magokoro* reflects being true and honest in one’s actions, thoughts, and words. This kind of truth is a reflection of *kami*. *Makoto no kokoro* is, therefore, considered the “dynamic life attitude,” the catalyst for virtues of honesty, loyalty, love, faithfulness, and filial piety.⁵⁹ *Makoto no kokoro* is fundamental to Shinto precepts because it is a reflection of the human understanding and respect that *kami* exists and in acknowledgement of this existence humans should reflect *makoto no kokoro* through their words, thoughts, and actions. In other words, to be *magokoro* one must have *makoto* or truth. When one is *makoto* one’s *kokoro* is pure and genuine, free from impurities and pollution that would otherwise impede one’s feelings and perceptions that would in turn reflect in one’s words and actions. This not only interferes in communion with the divine, but hinders a clear and pure state of mind. In other words, we are unable to be true to ourselves

⁵⁵ Kasulis, *Shinto The Way Home*, 25.

⁵⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Shintō”

⁵⁷ Kasulis, *Shinto The Way Home*, 24.

⁵⁹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Shintō”

and others. When one reflects *magokoro* one reflects the *kami* within through one's external actions and words.

Central to this respect and reverence for *kami* is the idea of ritual. Ritual is Shinto's method of communicating with and showing reverence for *kami* and takes the form of festivals, dances, prayers, and purification. Festivals or celebrations known as *matsuri* are communal events the entire community partakes to revere *kami* and acknowledge the community's dependence on *kami*.⁶⁰ Dances or *kagura* involve an elaborate sequence of prayer and specified dances with the purposes of perpetuating a communion with *kami* and prayers that involve giving thanks, showing respect, requests for safety and protection.⁶¹ The idea of purification, while a ritual, serves a greater purpose in acknowledging *kami*.

The purpose of purification is to restore oneself to *magokoro*, a pure heart, a state of truth and honesty and one that is fundamental for communion with the spiritual world. Symbolic in nature, purification is an essential ritual and necessary process that “cleanses” the individual from *tsumi*; the impurities or “pollution” of the everyday secular world.⁶² Shinto considers *tsumi* to be any sort of negative or damaging energy that interferes with one's *kokoro* and can be in the form of words, thoughts, or actions.⁶³ When one's *kokoro* is tainted in this manner, one cannot be *magokoro*. And, therefore, unable to experience *aware* fulfill communion with the spiritual world, nor be true to oneself and others. Purification reminds one of purity and cleanliness and reaffirms one's original state of innocence. In doing so, purification assists in preparing the individual for an encounter, for *shinjin-gōitsu* by restoring oneself to one's original state of

⁶⁰ Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 176

⁶¹ John T. Brinkman, *Simplicity: a distinctive quality of Japanese spirituality* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1996), 44.

⁶² Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 171.

⁶³ Timothy Iles, “Tsumi” Message to Sherri Carbullido. 19 June 2013. Email.

magokoro. It is an encounter that occurs through an aesthetic experience known as *aware*, our “holographic entry point,” which allows one into the realization, an awareness of the spiritual world that surrounds them.

In relation to this, *aware* being an unmediated experience and emotional response it is also a pure one in as much as it has not been influenced by any external factors. It is a direct response from coming into contact with things of an awe-inspiring nature. The immediacy of *aware* reflects the absence of any rational or intellectual thought that would otherwise affect the type of emotional response given. In this manner the pure emotional response of *aware* is in itself a reflection of the unclouded pure state of *magokoro*. In feeling this unmediated response, one is reminded of one’s own purity, one’s own state of original innocence of *magokoro*.

Magokoro enables for one to come into communion with the spiritual world.

The goal of this chapter was to illuminate the Shinto tenets for a basic understanding of the Shinto values and beliefs as demonstrated through the world-view, community, emotional dimensions of Shinto. What I refer to as basic tenets of Japanese spirituality. It is in understanding the very basics of Shinto that we may understand the depth of feeling and emotionality that this system of belief encompasses. And through this initial understanding we may come to comprehend the prolific role something as subtle and common as emotion will play in cultivating Japanese culture. This understanding allows us to weave together through emotion, a common thread between Japanese spirituality and aesthetics. With that said, the relationship Shinto has with an *aesthetic* concept of *aware* is one that is situated upon the beauty of things whether awe-inspiring, mysterious, sorrowful, or impermanent. *Aware* is an aesthetic experience, but it is very much a spiritual one as well. Through aesthetics that is the beauty of things, which enables one to fulfill a spiritual encounter and reach a form of purity that enables for such a

spiritual encounter. With that said, it is now important to engage in a discussion regarding Japanese aesthetics.

Chapter 2—Bigaku, Japanese Aesthetics

In this chapter we will discuss *bigaku*, Japanese aesthetics. I will illustrate an aspect of beauty that recognizes feeling as the determinant for what is considered beautiful in the context of things. This idea views beauty as something beyond what is on the surface and recognizes beauty for the feeling it inspires within us. The beauty of things can, therefore, be anything that affects us or makes an impression on us. To better understand this idea of beauty we will discuss the Japanese aesthetic consciousness known as the *bi-ishiki*. From there we will move into a discussion of the four key concepts of Japanese aesthetics: suggestion, simplicity, irregularity, and impermanence as considered by Donald Keene. As well, describe some key terms of Japanese aesthetics associated with these concepts such as *yūgen*, *wabi*, *sabi*, and *mono no aware*. The idea here is to understand and recognize that the beauty of things places us into an emotional state, one that may lead us to experience the emotional moment of *aware*, which as we have discussed, puts us in a state of purity (*magokoro*), the basis that allows us to experience or recognize communion with the spiritual world.

Aesthetics is a modern branch of philosophy that developed in mid-eighteenth century Europe to describe a kind of object, judgment, attitude, experience, and value.⁶⁴ Aesthetics as a broad concept encompasses taste, beauty, and ethics.

The term aesthetics was foreign to Japan until the 1870s, a time of cultural revolution and prominent western influence.⁶⁵ During this time the concept of beauty (*bi*), methods, and words to discuss art (*geijutsu*) and fine arts (*bijutsu*) of Japan was not yet conceptualized.⁶⁶ Nishi

⁶⁴ Michele Marra, *Modern Japanese Aesthetics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 1; James Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/aesthetic-concept/>.

⁶⁵ Michele Marra, trans., ed. *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2001), 4.

⁶⁶ Marra, *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, 5.

Amane introduced and developed the western concept of aesthetics and the idea of beauty from a Japanese perspective in a series of lectures known as The Theory of Aesthetics, 1877 (*Bimyōgaku Setsu*).⁶⁷

I will be using the term aesthetics throughout this thesis to refer to the idea of beauty from the Japanese conception of beauty. To understand this idea of beauty it is first important to understand the background of the term beauty in Japan. The idea of beauty was at first positioned as a type of goal of the enlightened society of Japan—the newly-western-influenced society of Japan—yet the word beauty was ambiguous with no real definition.⁶⁸ “The expression ‘beauty’ was used to describe an experience that was never before felt as beauty.”⁶⁹ Therefore, when I use the term beautiful or beauty I use it in the sense as a technique, the use of beauty to influence an emotional experience. The term aesthetics (*Bigaku*) applies to the broad category of beauty as understood in the Japanese sense of the term.

In Japan aesthetics is known as *bigaku*, the study of beauty.⁷⁰ For the Japanese *bi* or beauty has always held a special place in their traditions and culture. Donald Keene positions beauty has the central element in all Japanese culture.⁷¹ For this reason the Japanese aesthetic consciousness or “sense of beauty” what we will refer to as *bi-ishiki*,⁷² is an aesthetic sense fundamentally conscientious of the beauty in all things at any given moment or time. To elucidate, the Japanese aesthetic conscious, the *bi-ishiki* values beauty for its immanent existence

⁶⁷ Marra, *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, 5.

⁶⁸ Saeki Junko, “Longing for Beauty,” in *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, ed. Michele Marra. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press) 31.

⁶⁹ Saeki Junko, “Longing for Beauty,” 31.

⁷⁰ Masahiro Hamashita, “Nishi Amane on Aesthetics A Japanese Version of Utilitarian Aesthetics,” in *Japanese Hermeneutics*, ed. Michele Marra. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002) 89.

⁷¹ Donald Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” in *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*, ed. Nancy G. Hume. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005) 27.

⁷² Jisho.org, s.v. “*biishiki*,” accessed March 12, 2013, <http://jisho.org/words?jap=biishiki&eng=&dict=edict>.

in the phenomenal world; it is an existence that resides in all aspects of life and nature, concealed in the depths of reality.⁷³ In other words, there is an appreciation for things that cannot be created nor controlled by humans such as natural phenomena, time, and even death.

The composition of *bi-ishiki* has its foundation in a myriad of national, religious, and cultural amalgamation stemming from Shinto, Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Yet, the most notable influence upon the Japanese aesthetic conscious would be that of Zen Buddhism, whose principles of “nature, beauty, emotionality, simplicity, and restraint” coincided with much of Shinto spirituality and offered a world-view that stressed the notion that there was neither a beginning nor end of space, which had a profound effect upon the Japanese aesthetic conscious’ understanding of space, time, emptiness, existence, and non-existence.⁷⁴ Regardless of the origin, the contributions and influences from the multitude of foreign influence have allowed Japanese aesthetics to progress in the manner that it did, giving Japanese aesthetics and their conception of beauty a place in the field of aesthetics.

The expression of beauty for the Japanese may take place in the simplest of things and may take its form in the ordinary everyday life. For this reason, *bi* cannot be easily defined nor measured through one mode. Antanas Andrijauskas articulates the Japanese concept of *bi* as follows:

Bi (beauty), a concept close to the modern Western category of aestheticism, is seen as the eternal essence hidden in all the phenomena of existence. It unfolds in the structure of the universe, in the world of nature, in the spheres of human existence, art, and feeling. *Bi* is understood as a constant which not only in one way or another exists *a priori* in all the phenomena of existence, but which is also characterized by the power to change its outer shape and acquire a new form.⁷⁵

⁷³ Antanas Andrijususkas, “Traditional Japanese Medieval Aesthetics: Comparative Studies in Contemporary philosophical discourse” in Publications of The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Series IV, Vol. 26 CH 9 ed. Juarate Baranova (2005) <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series04/series-IVA.htm>

⁷⁴ Andrijususkas “Traditional Japanese Medieval Aesthetics”

⁷⁵ Andrijususkas “Traditional Japanese Medieval Aesthetics”

In other words, beauty in the Japanese sense takes its form in the existence of things, situations, events that happen within the realm of existence. Beauty takes composition in a manifold of everyday activities through which feelings are involved. This involvement of feelings is one that we may especially take note of. To elaborate, Andrijauskas writes: “the essence of beauty is known not intellectually, but intuitively, through the most sensitive emotional experiences.”⁷⁶ That is to say, in essence beauty, then, is anything that has the ability to affect us. Beauty has the ability to make us aware or draw us into an emotional state and allows for us to experience an emotional state such as *aware*. *Aware* then allows us to feel a certain emotion as stirred in the heart. Here we can begin to understand the significance of aesthetics: “beauty” serves as a starting point for facilitating a transcendental experience. As we’ve mentioned, *feeling* determines the existence of *kami*. Recognizing the beauty of things in all of beauty’s manifestations; old, ugly, mysterious, weird, and even monstrous ignites feeling and enables us to begin this process of *aware*. The beauty of things is but a manifestation of the spiritual that exists. Beauty is another entry way, a holographic entry point in recognizing and appreciating *kami* that exists in all things. In understanding the Japanese conception of *bi*, beauty then can be exercised through different modalities and embody different extremities. To explicate further, it is necessary to examine some key principles of beauty within Japanese aesthetics as expounded by Donald Keene from his article on Japanese aesthetics. These are the principles of suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability.

The principle of suggestion in Japanese aesthetics according to Keene offers a preference for the beginnings and endings of a work of art, rather than a climactic moment the “Beginnings that suggest what is to come, or ends that suggest what has been, allow the imagination room to

⁷⁶ Andrijuskauskas “Traditional Japanese Medieval Aesthetics”, <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series04/series-IVA.htm>

expand beyond the literal facts...”⁷⁷ Therefore, Japanese aesthetics strives to suggest rather than to be explicit. For example, this is reflective in Japanese monochromatic paintings when only a few brush strokes are used to suggest ranges of mountains.⁷⁸ Is there something more beyond the mountains? What color are the mountains? The element of suggestion in Japanese aesthetics offers a view of beauty that accentuates ambiguity, mystery, and alludes to an indefinite depth of continuity. It strays from certainty and leaves room for one’s own interpretation of atmosphere and emotional state. “Suggestion depends on a willingness to admit that meanings exist beyond what can be seen or described.”⁷⁹

Suggestion, therefore, imparts the aesthetic notion known as *yūgen*. *Yūgen* is sometimes referred to as the dark beauty,⁸⁰ mysterious beauty, and even profound grace.⁸¹ Such descriptions of *yūgen* only allude to its mysteriousness and capacity to ascertain what cannot be conceived or articulated with words alone, that is because *yūgen* describes the things that resound with the profound, remote, and enigmatic.⁸²

Yūgen brings about a depth of instilling silence, a profundity to the world we live in by suggesting that there is something beyond than what we are led to see or led to believe.⁸³ This was expressed greatly in the art of *Nō* theatre, a type of representational theater that incorporates

⁷⁷ Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” 31.

⁷⁸ Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” 31.

⁷⁹ Donald Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” *Philosophy East and West*, 3 (1969): 298, accessed November 19, 2012, <http://jstor.org/stable/1397586>

⁸⁰ “Early Japanese Aestheticism,” accessed January 24, 2013, <http://hmclio.hubpages.com/hub/Early-Japanese-Aestheticism>.

⁸¹ Graham Parkes, “Japanese Aesthetics,” accessed November 20, 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/Japanese-aesthetics>.

⁸² Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*. (New York: Columbia, 1958), 284.

⁸³ Parkes, “Japanese Aesthetics”

elements of the dark, dramatic, and mysterious.⁸⁴ Nō achieved its utmost acclamation during the great era of Nō master Zeami, which he produced Nō as a symbolic theatre, one that suggests the most important of actions.⁸⁵ To illustrate, the gesture of the Nō actor:

...the slowly raising of his hand corresponds not only to the act which he is performing but alludes to something behind the mere representation, something eternal...the hand that points to a region as profound and remote as the viewer's powers of reception will permit...a symbol of an eternal silence.⁸⁶

Recalling then that there is more to this world than what is shown at face value. This implies as Edgar Allen Poe articulated “a suggestive indefiniteness of vague and therefore of spiritual effect.”⁸⁷ That is to say *yūgen* leaves room for imagination and through a cultivated imagination one is able to reach a depth of insight to something greater and mysterious, symbolic of the spiritual. *Yūgen* conjures our senses and makes us yearn for something more. We feel it or sense it in the depths of our hearts and through our intuition⁸⁸ that there is something more, mysterious, awe-inspiring, unexplainable, incomprehensible, the unknown that seems to keep going on infinitely. It is a beauty in and of itself. Junichirō Tanizaki illustrates a similar feeling when describing the alcove of a Japanese room in his essay, “In Praise of Shadows”:

An empty space is marked off with plain wood and plain walls, so that the light drawn into it forms dim shadows within emptiness. There is nothing more. And yet, when we gaze into the darkness that gathers behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ “Early Japanese Aestheticism”

⁸⁵ Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 284.

⁸⁶ Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 284.

⁸⁷ Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 284.

⁸⁸ Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 285.

⁸⁹ Junichiro Tanizaki, “In Praise of Shadows,” trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker, (New Haven: 1977), 20.

The principle of suggestion compels one to seek out what lies beyond form and pattern and to find the beauty in the inexplicit.

This leads us to our second principle of beauty as articulated by Keene, irregularity.

Irregularity is related to suggestion in as much as it allows room for the imagination to expand and suggest: what could be, what was, and to appreciate what is. As Keene suggests the Japanese prefer asymmetry and irregularity over symmetry and regularity because they allow for suggestion.⁹⁰ Irregularity is a principle of beauty that takes shape in the imperfection of things.

The beauty of pottery lies in its imperfection, a manifestation of irregularity. Ceramics that show repaired chips and cracks are highly revered in contrast to those that remain intact and perfect.⁹¹ The lopsidedness and irregular shapes of a tea cup or bowl showcase the individuality and skill of the potter. It is something that cannot be obtained through regularity. For the Japanese regularity is predictable and boring. It offers no play of the imagination and leaves much to be desired. Japanese ceramics are associated with *chanoyu*, or the tea ceremony and this relates us to the imperfect, irregular beauty of *wabi*.⁹² The aesthetic notion of *wabi* and the ritual of the tea ceremony derive their principles from Zen Buddhism: revealing the beauty within austerity, imperfection, and simplicity.

There is not one simple definition to describe *wabi*. Haga Kōshirō describes the *wabi* aesthetic as three forms of beauty: a simple, unpretentious beauty; an imperfect, irregular beauty; and an austere, stark beauty.⁹³ The term *wabi* in its aesthetic sense derives from “lacking things,

⁹⁰ Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” 298.

⁹¹ Parkes, “Japanese Aesthetics”

⁹² Haga Kōshirō, “The Wabi Aesthetic through the Ages,” in *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*, ed. Nancy G. Hume. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005) 247-248.

⁹³ Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic through the Ages,” 245.

having things run entirely contrary to our desires, being frustrated in our wishes.”⁹⁴ *Wabi* thus “embraces disappointment, frustration, and poverty.”⁹⁵ *Wabi*, then, implies not only an aesthetic notion, but a notion that enforces a way of life, to appreciate and find the beauty in the bare minimum, simple, common place things. This is exemplified not only in the simplicity of a tea house, but also during the tea ceremony that the tea utensils consist of simple earthenware objects. As Kōshirō asserts *wabi* is “simple, unpretentious –at first glance even impoverished—sense of beauty.”⁹⁶

The term simplicity means an absence of luxury, pretentiousness, ornament, or plainness⁹⁷ and is the third principle of beauty. Keene describes simplicity in terms of naturalness, the use of natural materials deliberately unpainted wood in both interior and exterior of a home, a reflection of Zen’s “spirit of simplicity.”⁹⁸ This element of beauty is emphasized greatly mirroring simplicity in the construction of homes, temples, tea houses, although this type of simplicity is not limited to buildings alone. In this sense of simplicity Japanese architecture is unequivocal.

The naturalness of buildings and homes blends in with the nature that surrounds them. Again referring to Tanizaki who expresses this natural simplicity in terms of the Japanese toilet:

...but the Japanese toilet truly is a place of spiritual repose. It always stands apart from the main building, at the end of a corridor, in a grove fragrant with leaves and moss... a Japanese toilet where surrounded by tranquil walls and finely grained wood, one looks out upon blue skies and green leaves.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic through the Ages,” 246. This is quoted from Jakuan Sotaku, *Zen-cha Roku*, in *Sen Sōshitsu*, ed. Chado Koten Zenshū, vol. 10 (Kyoto: Tankōsha, 1961), p. 297.

⁹⁵ Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic through the Ages,” 246.

⁹⁶ Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic through the Ages,” 246.

⁹⁷ Dictionary.com, s.v. “simplicity,” accessed March 27, 2013, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.

⁹⁸ Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” 302.

⁹⁹ Tanizaki, “In Praise of Shadows,” 3-4.

Tanizaki's description of the Japanese toilet that stands apart from the main building, its desolate location may give intimation to a sense of solitude, but also a moment where one may reflect and meditate upon the nature that surrounds one. This may be what Tanizaki meant by "spiritual repose." The bucolic surroundings of a Japanese toilet and the natural growth of moss referring to age lead us to the aesthetic notion known as *sabi*.

Sabi in its earliest use in the *Manyōshū* meant "to be desolate" and later acquired the connotations "to grow old" and "to grow rusty."¹⁰⁰ It refers to the beauty in things and by extension spaces that reflect a presence of the old and rustic. Thus, *sabi* is commonly referred to as "rustic beauty" or rustic patina.¹⁰¹ Patina is a surface oxidization or incrustation indicating great age of an object. The bucolic sense of *sabi* embraces an idyllic scenery or space and welcomes the rural and rustic feel of the worn and withered away of man-made objects; the natural surroundings untouched and unkempt. The appeal of *sabi* lies with appreciating and taking pleasure in those that are "old, faded, or lonely."¹⁰² Referring to Tanizaki again who illustrates well the notion of *sabi*:

While we do sometimes indeed use silver for teakettles, decanters, or sake¹⁰³ cups, we prefer not to polish it. On the contrary, we begin to enjoy it only when the luster has worn off, when it has begun to take on a dark, smoky patina...we do love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colors and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them. Living in these old houses among these old objects is in some mysterious way a source of peace and repose.¹⁰³

And yet all the things we have described as beautiful will eventually come to an end. Even things of age and rust eventually fade away and return to dust. Understanding what we cannot control,

¹⁰⁰ Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 286.

¹⁰¹ "Early Japanese Aestheticism"; Parkes, "Japanese Aesthetics"

¹⁰² Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 286.

¹⁰³ Tanizaki, "In Praise of Shadows," 10-12.

such as death and time, gives us a greater sense of value and appreciation in our fourth and final principle of beauty, perishability. According to Keene, perishability is a necessary element in beauty for the Japanese.¹⁰⁴ Kenko articulates, “If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, but lingered on forever in the world, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty.”¹⁰⁵ In other words the brevity of human existence makes one realize the beauty in all things that would eventually perish. The cherry blossom is the epitome of beauty that instills the principle of perishability. It is a flower whose beauty lies in its evanescence. Its period of brief blossoming is one that evokes a sense of sadness at its falling; and yet, one is overcome by the serenity of the scene itself. The realization of the frailty of human existence that coincides with the beauty of all things perishing and the sorrow of that realization came to be known as *mono no aware*. Perishability or impermanence forms the basis of this aesthetic notion. It is a term that will be discussed in far greater depth within the *aware* chapter.

In all that we have discussed regarding beauty in the Japanese sense of the term and the principles of beauty exemplified by Keene assist us in our overall understanding of what could possibly be considered beautiful. It allows us to understand that beauty is possibly anything. Beauty may lie in those things and spaces that are often overlooked. Things that for some are often regarded as old and replaceable; imperfect and therefore ugly; broken and of no use; a mere shadow. Within all these things that represent beauty one thing that remains consistent are the emotions provoked by beautiful things. Beauty is felt. Beauty as we've mentioned earlier is anything that affects us. One realizes something is beautiful because it causes a stir in one's

¹⁰⁴ Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” 305.

¹⁰⁵ Keene, “Japanese Aesthetics,” 306. This is quoted from Kenkō, *Essays in Idleness: the Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 7.

heart. When the heart is stirred it provokes a spontaneous emotion. The rust on an old tea kettle evokes a sentiment of nostalgia; the falling of the cherry blossoms evokes a sentiment of sadness or serenity; the darkened corner of a room evokes fright or anxiousness. But beauty can also be something peaceful like the setting of the sun.

Such an experience is what we refer to as *aware*. *Aware* as mentioned is an emotional response that is engendered when coming into contact with something so powerful that it evokes an immediate emotional response from the viewer. Many Japanese arts try to capture this emotional aspect of beauty. Because things of beauty are able to stir the heart they too can be considered holographic entry points. To reiterate, holographic entry points are what Thomas Kasulis refers to as phenomena that allow one to realize that the whole is reflected in every part. In other words, beautiful things result in the stirring of the heart. We feel or are made to give an immediate emotional response of *aware*. The heart as we've positioned it allows us to commune with *kami* through our emotions and it is within emotions that we can feel the existence of *kami*. Through the beauty of things we can come to a realization that the manifestation of *kami* is possibly everywhere and in anything, even human-made things. *Kami* is the whole that is reflected in every part. In understanding the relationship that feeling shares with beauty we can now understand how aesthetics relates to Japanese spirituality and how we may use *aware* has the mechanism that bridges the two together. With that said, we can now move on to discuss the notion of *aware*: its history, conception, and relation to all things of the phenomenal world.

Chapter 3—An Introduction, History, and Evolution of *Aware*

This chapter will focus on *aware*. *Aware* or *mono no aware* is one's ability to be aware or sensitive to the things around one. This heightened awareness is reflected in an immediate felt emotional response, awe, pathos, surprise, a response that coincides with the emotionality of things and situations. *Aware* is a notion foregrounded in feeling and emotions, internal abstract concepts that provide premise for its association with Japanese spirituality. Feelings and emotions are the product of the heart, the organ closely associated with the sensibilities. As maintained by Shinto, the heart or *kokoro* is a two-fold component of cognition and feeling enabling one's ability to perceive, feel, and in essence empathize with the phenomenal world. Through the emotional and felt characteristics of *aware* that has given it the flexibility of being applied to literary works of art as well as the fine arts. This diversity also allows for its potential use, as this thesis will argue, in applying to a work of art such as animated film. As this thesis will argue, Miyazaki Hayao's animated film *My Neighbour Totoro* not only provides for a visual component, but also allows for discourse in the emotional qualities of things in relation to Japanese spirituality. In an attempt to illustrate this I will highlight specific themes of Japanese spirituality, what I consider to be essential components of an underlying message of Japanese spirituality that Miyazaki specifically reinforces through his use of film components, such as the use of beautifully rendered natural imagery in *My Neighbour Totoro*, in order to engender *shinjin-gōitsu*, that encounter, or “reconnection” of humans with *kami*. An encounter that this thesis argues occurs and is realized through the mechanism of *aware*.

This third chapter will take a comprehensive look at *aware* from its earliest inception to key historical periods such as the Heian era which the term evolved. In it we will look at the

etymology of *aware* briefly mentioning its grammatical forms and various meanings before moving on to discuss in greater detail Buddhism's three tenets of existence and more specifically, the notion of *mujō* or impermanence. This will lead to a discussion regarding the Heian period and the effects of Shinto and Buddhism's contrasting world-views. From here, we will move to a consideration of how aspects of *mujō* became influential in determining the meaning and functionality of *aware* during the Heian era and its subsequent effect on literature such as *The Tale of Genji* before moving on to Motoori Norinaga and his rendition of *mono no aware*.

In addition, a discussion of Motoori's concept of *mono no aware*, the sensitivity to things, provides the cornerstone for the felt and emotional capacity of Japanese spirituality this thesis will argue for. In building a greater understanding and awareness of *aware* it is then the intent of this chapter and fundamentally this thesis to approach *aware* from an alternate perspective contending that the concept of *aware* is not limited to written traditions, but may function as a mechanism that ties Japanese spirituality and aesthetics within a modern form of popular culture, the animated films of Miyazaki Hayao. The animated films of Miyazaki Hayao, as this thesis contends, are holographic entry points capable of manifesting a "sacred experience" that is facilitated through the mechanism of *aware* whereby one is able to re-connect or engage with the spiritual realm of *kami*.

The notion of *aware* as a mechanism that links Japanese spirituality to animated film is based upon the felt emotional response that is engendered through an engagement with things of the phenomenal world. This engagement is based upon Shinto's precept of *kokoro*. Shinto contends that everything of the phenomenal world has a *kokoro* or heart and through the heart humans are able to commune with the phenomenal world that is ultimately of *kami*.

The heart or *kokoro* is a theoretical concept emphasized greatly in Japanese religious philosophy and cultural traditions. For this reason, it will be briefly mentioned within this chapter to stress its fundamental role in the formation of poetry and by extension other works of art. The *kokoro*, as Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu position it is the “creative ground of *waka* [poetry]” this is also maintained by Ki no Tsurayuki in his preface to the line: “*rooted in the human heart*, Japanese song finds expression in a myriad of leaves.”¹⁰⁶ The Izutsus write:

The implication of this is that the *kokoro* is supposed to be a sort of psychic potentiality or dynamics of the subject to be activated—when stirred and stimulated by the external things and events—into function, manifesting itself as *omoi* (thought, thinking, including images and ideas) and *jou* (feeling and emotion).

It is in feelings and emotions that this thesis contends necessitates a reconnection with the spiritual, the divine world of *kami*. This thesis takes the position that *aware* is the gateway that we can feel *kami* as positioned through the *kokoro*, the organ of the sensibilities, feeling, emotions, and intuition. It is then postulated that the *kokoro* is the ground in which all creativity is borne. Works of art are, therefore, by-products of our thoughts, images, and ideas as enforced and created through our feeling and emotions of the heart from being stimulated by an outside source. The *kokoro* is a ”creative impetus,”¹⁰⁷ to borrow JWT Mason’s terminology, the creative grounding within a work of art whether it is *waka* or film. Therefore, a work of art such as an animated film could constitute an outlet, a channel through which the spirituality of Shinto is aesthetically and emotionally expressed. Thereby arguing animated film has the mechanics to engage an audience in a type of spiritual praxis not necessarily of a religious context, but through a commonplace activity such as watching a film.

¹⁰⁶ Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty In The Classical Aesthetics of Japan* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 6-7. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ J.W.T. Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1935), 15.

With that said, *aware* is a term of intricate origins that through its history of meaning and conceptualization has established itself as an influential term that varies from the literary to the visually aesthetic fields of Japanese culture. From as early as the Nara era the term *aware* has taken on the literary nuances of an interjection and of an adjective to the cognitive sensibilities of expressing a type of emotion commonly associated with sadness and impermanence. An aesthetic ideal of the Heian era, *aware* was a critical concept once used as a form of criticism to judge a work of art. In addition, *aware* is the key term of Motoori Norinaga's poetic theory *mono no aware* that *aware* is associated to mean sensitivity. Given this, the term *aware* has developed extensively from a mere form of expression to a theoretical concept that engenders an emotional response from an individual, a response that one could argue as being universal. In order to understand the intricate origins and evolution of *aware* and its necessary value it is important to first begin with a comprehensive look at the term *aware*.

Perhaps a general, yet, comprehensive definition of *aware* is that of Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner of their text, *Japanese Court Poetry*:

Aware—Touching, pathetic, beautiful, moving the sensibilities, evoking the proper emotion response. Applied to those aspects of life and nature or their embodiment in art which stir the sympathies of the sensitive person of cultivation and breeding, impressing him with deep awareness of the ephemeral beauty of a world in which only change is constant. Also applied to the person's response itself, which is usually one of bittersweet melancholy, although often combined with joy, delight, or awe.¹⁰⁸

Aware is indeed a complex term. This definition only suggests to the complexity of the multifaceted *aware*. The earliest extant form of *aware* appeared in Japan's written literary traditions as a type of exclamation or sigh in the form of two combined interjections: “*a*” and

¹⁰⁸ Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 503.

“*hare*.” *Aware* appeared in Japan’s first written (*manyōgana*¹⁰⁹ style) record of ancient matters, the *Kojiki* (712) three times as an interjection of “ah,” considered by western scholars as a natural response from human beings to the “ahness” of things.¹¹⁰ However, *aware*’s literary function did not cease at expressing interjections, rather, *aware* continued to evolve within the literary traditions of Japan appearing not only in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* (720) as interjections, but also appearing in the eighth century collection of poetry, the *Manyōshū* (759) transforming into various grammatical forms: *awaretoiu*, “I speak *aware*”; *awareto*, adverb form, *awaremu*, verb form of *aware* meaning to pity, have mercy on, or sympathize with.¹¹¹ Used adjectivally, *aware* meant “pleasant” or “interesting.”¹¹² Moreover, the poets of the *Manyōshū* applied *aware* as a noun to describe a type of emotion evoked upon hearing the melancholic cries of birds and other living things; *aware* attested to the beauty and transitory qualities a mere sight or sound possessed and as the sensitivity of the poets heightened the association of *aware* with sadness and impermanence increased as well.¹¹³

The notion of impermanence to the Japanese was not one of new discovery via Buddhism. When the idea of impermanence reached Japan it only reinforced what the eighth century (Nara era) poets of the *Manyōshū* were to some extent already aware of, that is the mutability of the phenomenal world. They employed the term *tsune nashi*, meaning “the lack of

¹⁰⁹ *Manyōgana* is the earliest form of Japanese writing that utilized the phonetics of Chinese characters. It was not until later that *aware* began to commonly be written with Japanese phonetics あわれ to free the word from the connotations of sorrow or pity the Chinese characters 阿波礼 associated with *aware*.

¹¹⁰ Mark Frederick Meli, “The Genesis of Aware: Emotion, Perception, and Aesthetic Value in Early Japanese Poetry” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1997), 16; Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*. (New York: Columbia, 1958), 176.

¹¹¹ Meli, “The Genesis of Aware” 19.

¹¹² Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition*. (New York: Columbia, 1958), 176.

¹¹³ Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary, Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 176.

anything lasting.”¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, Buddhism’s three tenets of existence were an exponential force in reinforcing the idea of inevitable change an influential piece into the sadness and earnestness of Heian’s *aware*.

Impermanence or the Japanese Buddhist term *mujō* literally meaning “without continuation” is part of Buddhism’s three tenets of existence: *anitya* (impermanence), *duhka* (suffering), and *anatman* (no-self).¹¹⁵ In referring to Charles Shirō Inouye and his text, *Evanescence and Form*, *anitya* is the belief of continuous change not only in the phenomenal world we live in, but also how we perceive the world to be changing.¹¹⁶ In other words, nothing of the phenomenal world including ourselves is permanent and lasting everything is in constant change and transient. As a result, *duhka* or suffering becomes prevalent because we try to or desire to hold on to a reality that we never really had a grasp of in the first place. Inouye contends: “We suffer because we desire the impossible and the unobtainable” that “there is an emotional and devotional intention for thinking that nothing in this world is permanent.”¹¹⁷ In understanding and accepting the impermanence of life we are able to heal the suffering caused by the desire to want what we perceive as never changing and understand that even the unchangeable is very much changeable and impermanent. Understanding that the concept of *anatman*, or no-self means we are also of the phenomenal world and, thus, subjected to change as well, in view of this we gain a far greater appreciation for the phenomenal world that we belong to.¹¹⁸ Therefore, in reinforcing the idea that nothing lasts forever it is suggested that a greater appreciation of the phenomenal world could be gained, reaffirming the already set

¹¹⁴ Charles Shirō Inouye, *Evanescence and Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 31.

¹¹⁵ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 31, 227.

¹¹⁶ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 31.

¹¹⁷ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 31.

¹¹⁸ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 32.

premise for valuing the transience of the phenomenal world, of nature, which would assist in the development of the notion of *aware*. It is through partial influence of Buddhism's notion of *anitya* that greater awareness and appreciation of the phenomenal world began to permeate at a time when Japan believed in the existence of a world where gods, humans, phenomenal nature were intrinsically tied together: humans could be gods, the dead were very much a part of the living, and nature was to be revered and feared.

Briefly, as we discussed in chapter one the belief system of Japan, Shinto consisted of an undivided polytheistic spiritual realm believing in not one, but many *kami*; the practice of ritual to communicate and respect *kami*; and animism, the belief that all things of the phenomenal world are animate, living entities capable of communing with one another. The early people of Japan believed in such a world and as a result developed an intimate relationship with the environment they inhabited, acknowledging that *kami* were a viable presence that co-existed alongside humans. As Inouye attests, "Such a world encouraged the interaction of the human and the divine, of people and their environment, and of the living and the dead, to the extent that such a world view encouraged an *available* kind of sacred experience."¹¹⁹

This "sacred experience" or *shinjin gōitsu* is what we could argue poets of the *Manyōshū* were trying so desperately to capture in words and what we could suggest upon returning to Ki no Tsurayuki's famous preface of the *Kokinshū*:

Rooted in the human heart, Japanese song finds expression in a myriad of leaves. Making their way through this tangled world, men and women use what they have seen and heard to give voice to the feelings of their hearts. The singing warbler among the blossoms, the croaking frog in the pond—is there any living thing not given to song? Without exertion, poetry moves heaven and earth. It stirs the feelings of the gods and the spirits of the dead. It softens relations between men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce warriors.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 32.

¹²⁰ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 34.

To put it another way, poetry or *waka* solidifies a kind of “sacred experience” in which the use of words, language would link human with beast, human with gods, an experience where the hearts of all are equally resonating with one another and expressed through a felt lyrical and emotional module of poetry. Ritual was replaced with the lyrical while the preservation of early Japanese spirituality was maintained in the assertion that poetry facilitated a reconnection to a world that gods, humans, and phenomenal world were a community of one, co-existing neither one dominating as master.¹²¹ The lyrical legacy of poetry to reconnect with this sacred world required the felt emotive sensibilities of the heart that required an event or moment of spontaneity to stir it.

This spontaneity of a moment that elicits a reaction or felt emotional response from the individual’s heart is referred to as, *jihatsu* and for the purpose of this thesis is what we will consider as the precursor to *aware*.¹²² To further demonstrate, a *jihatsu* situation occurs when an event or situation of an evocative and powerful nature moves the heart in such a way to elicit an immediate response from the individual.¹²³ This may occur at the sight of falling cherry blossoms, sunrises or sunsets, or the view of Mount Fuji from afar. Hence, the implied effortless creation of poetry “without exertion” stems in part from a *jihatsu* moment in which the heart is moved. In addition, Inouye asserts that the heart is moved because it resonates with the changing of the phenomenal world.

To explain this concept further I will return to Inouye and the Buddhist concept of *anitya*. Inouye argues that the phenomenal world is one of change, not only in mere reflection of the transitory character things and situations undergo, but “something more

¹²¹ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 34.

¹²² Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 34.

¹²³ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 34.

direct and heartfelt.”¹²⁴ In revisiting a world that humans are intrinsically tied to the phenomenal world humans were, as a result, able to identify with change itself through what they felt. In other words, “a change of environment or situation results in a corresponding change of emotion. In sum, the changing world makes me feel this and that emotion.”¹²⁵

Furthermore, when the Buddhist notion of *anitya* came to the foreground it repositioned the phenomenal world as one in constant motion and change. In other words, it articulated a world of instability, desolation, while at the same time reinforcing a world of acceptance and appreciation to the impermanence of things. Yet, the early spiritual realm of Japan already framed a reality that necessitated things of the phenomenal world to remain awe-inspiring. As a result a combination of different emotions were evoked and described by the term *aware* as Inouye articulates:

...a complex mix of sometimes conflicting sentiments was captured in the term *aware*, an exclamation turned noun --Ah! Hare! That expressed the existence of something both remarkable and sad. The world makes us respond spontaneously. We cry out “Awesome!” We do so in joy and trembling.¹²⁶

To this end we can suggest, *aware* was the immediate response employed to an evoking *jihatsu* situation taking the initial form of an interjection, an exclamation or sigh of “a!” or “hare...” in order to give expression to the felt emotive content of one’s heart during the spontaneous moment when one comes into contact with feeling *kami*.

Although the literary scope of *aware* does not end here, it is important to note this aspect and origination of *aware* exemplifies the Japanese people’s earliest attempt at capturing or

¹²⁴ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 35. My emphasis.

¹²⁵ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 35.

¹²⁶ Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 36.

describing a set of feelings or emotions that were attuned to the phenomenal nature of the world around them when coming into contact with some thing of an evoking and powerful nature, of *kami*. What could be expressed verbally through an interjection, a sigh or exclamation at the sight of some thing that gave an impression of being awesome, fearful, or melancholic was maintained and recorded lyrically through poetry in order to describe a set of emotional responses. It is from this point that the literary aspect of *aware* imparted an emotional context that court society of the Heian era would aspire to capture and idealize in their arts.

HEIAN ERA

Aware of the Heian era was one that represented an ensemble of themes and attitudes of the time, an ideal borne of sentiment, aesthetics, and virtue. The transition from a mere interjection to an emotional response would be the first of many that *aware* would undergo throughout its long history. Thus, as we will come to explore within this section *aware* would transform to reflect an age that idealized it. This age is known as the Heian era (794-1191) and represented a moment in Japan's history where the arts and literature flourished, what some consider a hallmark achievement of Heian.¹²⁷ However, it was also during this era that *aware* began to take on a darker, melancholic nuance. Its functionality as an expressive emotional response of delight and awe transitioned to reflect an expressive somber emotion, a sign of the times per se; in the case of Heian it was one of sorrow and reflection. To borrow the words of Edwin A. Cranston: "a feeling of gentle, sorrow-tinged appreciation of transitory beauty."¹²⁸ *Aware* was a kind of nostalgic pessimism. With the continued and influential presence of Buddhism and its notion of *mujō* in contrast with Shinto's own worldview there coalesced a

¹²⁷ Edwin A. Cranston, trans., *The Izumi Shikibu Diary: A Romance of the Heian Court* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1969), preface viii.

¹²⁸ Cranston, Edwin A. *The Izumi Shikibu Diary*, 232.

sentiment of sadness for an ephemeral reality and a profound appreciation for the beauty in all things evanescent. The term *aware*, then, would be conceptualized to embody such a sentiment. Because of this *aware* became the profound sentiment that men and women of the Heian court would with great effort subscribe to the arts and literature, especially poetry. Its functionality increased with use and developed into a kind of tool by which works of art would be measured. *Aware*, applied in such diverse ways, became the pervasive aesthetic ideal of the Heian era.

Although it is not the intention of this section to give a full account of the Heian era, fundamentally, the purpose of this section is to highlight the dynamics of the Heian era that were critical in formulating Heian's notion of *aware* and by extension its shift in functionality. This shift is in essence derivative from the Buddhist notion of *mujō*, a notion as we've already mentioned would paint a bleak and pessimistic worldview for the court society of the Heian era. At the same time, this perceived worldview not only altered *aware*'s meaning and conception, but also provided the foundational basis to which *aware* would become a tool in interpreting and judging works of art and literature.

Later in this chapter, as we will discuss Motoori Norinaga's theorized notion of *mono no aware*. This takes *aware* on yet another drastic shift in functionality, one in which Motoori Norinaga re-imagines the term in order to structurally ground it within a Shinto context, a nativist approach that we will briefly touch upon, for it is one that ultimately becomes a source for politics and ethnocentrism for the Japanese nation. The shift in functionality *aware* takes from the Buddhist interpretation and returns *aware* to its Japanese spiritual roots that is, back to the Japanese belief system of Shinto. In doing so we can position *aware* as a mechanism capable of manifesting a sacred experience through an engagement with things; a position as already mentioned, that is central to this thesis and one that this thesis argues reconnects human with

kami and that is capable of manifesting within animated film. In order to further explain these crucial shifts of *aware* let us return to the discussion regarding the Heian era.

The Heian era, as the name implies, marked a period of ‘peace and stability’,¹²⁹ qualities that would not only distinguish the Heian era, but would also factor into the era’s focus on affairs of the arts and literature. For this reason, the Heian era is known for producing some of Japan’s greatest literature and by the same token prominent writers such as Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji*. Due to its devotion to the arts and literature scholars have described the era as one of “esthetic” and “unique”¹³⁰ proportions. That is to say, the court society of Heian necessitated a particular distinction and sensibility within the aesthetic field of fine arts such as music, dance, painting, calligraphy, and poetics.¹³¹ Coupled with the aspect of uniqueness, this era possessed such a strong devotion to the arts and literature that poetry in particular became a means of embodying the court life of Heian.¹³² In addition, poetry thrived during this time for another reason, namely the decline of Chinese influence. This decline led to a redefining of native traditions predominantly the development of *kanabungaku* also known as “women’s writing.”¹³³ It should be noted, women of this time were generally excluded from the studying of Chinese, *kanabungaku*, however, used mainly by women, was a script derivative of Japanese native syllabary. It consisted of about fifty characters and to a large extent did not utilize the phonetics of Chinese characters.¹³⁴ This meant for the field of Japanese literature that was poetry

¹²⁹ Ibid., preface vii.

¹³⁰ Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 158. To borrow the words of distinguished historian of Japan, Sir George Sansom.

¹³¹ Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 158.

¹³² Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 158.

¹³³ Ivan Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), 28.

¹³⁴ Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 158; “Chapter 6 The Heian Aristocrats,” Topics in Medieval Japanese History, accessed January 24, 2013, <http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/gjgjs4/textbooks/480/ch6.htm>; William J. Puette, *Guide to The Tale of Genji*. (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Inc., 1983), 45-6.

and literature could be articulated in one's own native language. This was an important aspect for Japanese poetry. According to William J. Puette, poetry of the Heian era, for the aristocrats, was a method of communication, a means of expressing oneself in a subtle, yet suggestive manner, intimating through images of nature (trees, flowers, rain) subjective emotions, that is the poet's own personal emotions.¹³⁵ Therefore, poetics to be accurately articulated was critical to express the covert and subtle meaning of the poet, in the words of Puette in reference to *The Tale of Genji*:

There are nearly eight hundred poems woven into the *Tale*, representing not the formalistic Chinese poetry composed by the males at court competitions, but the native Japanese *tanka* or *waka* (not *haiku*) form, consisting of thirty-one syllables. As is surely the case in all literatures, the linguistic peculiarities of the language largely determine the possible verse forms. We cannot expect sonnets to spill out of every tongue, nor was Chinese poetry particularly successful in the completely different character of Japanese speech...¹³⁶

Because poetry was such an important part of daily life for the court, the court society played an intimate role in the articulation of *aware* during the Heian era.

The court life of the Heian era was one attuned with beauty, refinement, and the sensibilities. It was a life circumscribed to the elite and enjoyed by the privileged whose leisurely time was spent on perfecting both aesthetic and literary arts. However, in all of the delights and perfections achieved there was an underlying sentiment of dread, a pervading truth that the world the court society so reveled in was but all to disappear. This pervasive feeling spread like an epidemic rampantly within the court society of the Heian era and grew primarily from the dissonance of two religious world views: Buddhism and Shinto. As mentioned earlier, Buddhism's notion of *mujō* or impermanence provided the backdrop and reaffirmation of an

¹³⁵ Puette, *Guide to The Tale of Genji*, 46.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 45.

instable and turbulent worldview, the mutability of the phenomenal world; this not only led to valuing those things of beauty and worth in nature and human splendor, but also led to an unshakable sense of anxiety that resulted in a somber approach in Heian literature.¹³⁷ On the other hand, Shinto proclaimed a world view that harnessed the human, phenomenal world, and *kami*, to delight in the awe-inspiring of the phenomenal world. Thus, from these two contrasting world views resulted a sentiment of sorrow for a fleeting reality and a profound appreciation for the beauty in all things transient. The Heian society associated this sentiment with the term *aware*.

Therefore, *aware* of Heian as envisioned by the court society was influenced heavily by Buddhism's notion of *mujō* that was marked by a darker undertone and accentuated by one's sensibility or sensitiveness to the fleeting beauty of a transient world. It was the reoccurring motif in most if not all of the Heian literature. This was expressed best through their foremost means of communication, poetry, and as Puette maintains the most "perfect expression" of *aware* is in poetry."¹³⁸ As mentioned earlier, poets used their natural setting, things of the phenomenal world, to express their emotions. These emotions were highly reflective of the *mujō* concept and as a result the phenomena of nature became a means of reflecting the passage of time and served as a reminder of the brevity of human life.¹³⁹ This in turn accentuated nature as an essential component in expressing emotion and one that a work of art could not be without. In understanding this, one could argue that people of the Heian court continued to be intrinsically tied to the phenomenal world through a representation of emotions in the form of natural imagery within their poetry. A notion, which I assert, stems from the early spiritual realm. The

¹³⁷ "Chapter 6 The Heian Aristocrats"; Earl Miner, Hiroko Odagiri, and Robert E. Morrell, *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). 28.

¹³⁸ Puette, *Guide to The Tale of Genji* 45.

¹³⁹ Cranston, Edwin A. *The Izumi Shikibu Diary*, preface ix.

animistic legacy in which the root of *aware*, an interjection, was borne upon seeing or coming into contact with something awesome. What we argue is *kami*--the underlying presence within the phenomenal world. In remembering that crucial to this thesis, is the idea of feeling as an emotionally communicative means to “reconnect” with the spiritual realm. Therefore, we can contend this same premise continues to play a role for the people of the Heian court society, rather, they used the phenomenal world to communicate and express their emotions, reaffirming that emotions continue to have a strong role as an effective means of communication. However, it should also be noted that this notion was greatly affected by Buddhism’s *mujō*¹⁴⁰ that assisted in intensifying an even greater appreciation for nature.

With that being said, nature, the phenomenal world, during the Heian era was still very much a continuous and important if not essential component of their daily life. The Heian court used poetry to express their emotions through what they were intrinsically tied to: nature, that is the phenomenal world, and ultimately *kami*. In order to be in consonance with the phenomenal world, one needed to be sensitive to one’s natural surroundings. For the Heian court society the natural environment was a source of inspiration and a form of guidance of how one should uphold one’s self. According to Ivan Morris, his depiction of the Heian court life as rendered by *The Tale of Genji* in his text, *World of The Shining Prince*, the significance of the natural environment in relation to emotion is based upon the belief that those who are sensitive to their natural surroundings are by extension aware of the subtle moods of the phenomenal world, to reiterate, a change in environment corresponds to a change in one’s emotion, because of this acquired awareness one’s capacity in understanding oneself and the world around oneself results in their cultivation as a human being.¹⁴⁰ Upon acquiring this type of sensitivity one was able to

¹⁴⁰ Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 35-36.

enter the “emotional quality of things.” In other words, one is sensitive to the inherent emotional state of things within the phenomenal world. Upon identification with the emotionality of things, by extension one becomes emotionally tied with the external world through one’s internal emotional response. This response is in essence understood as *aware* and what the court society deemed foundational for an aesthetic and moral awareness.¹⁴¹ Those who were capable to demonstrate this were considered to be of the ‘good people’, those who had the ability to be adept not only in expressing their emotions through poetry and other works of art, but experiencing these emotions as well, requirements to participate in the daily activities of the court.¹⁴²

Aware then was applied to encompass the emotional sensibility of the etiquettes and arts of the time. Structured as an aesthetic ideal in which the sensitivity or sensibilities of human beings became a measurement of the ‘good people’ who were grounded through the sensibilities of valuing and understanding the beauty of a transient world. Thus, the functionality of *aware* became that of a tool used to critique those who could or could not express well *aware* in their art. *Aware*, then, was not only an ideal, but representational of an abstract quality people of the court sought to capture within their poetics and other works of art.¹⁴³ In this manner the scope of *aware* was not limited to the first hand emotional experience of the author or producer alone, but allowed those who came in contact with the work of art to *personally* experience or be led to experience *aware* as well; therefore, works of art that carried qualities of, portrayed, or captured *aware* were considered excellent and praised—a reflection of the producer of the art.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 36, 207.

¹⁴² Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 36; Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 187.

¹⁴³ Meli, “The Genesis of Aware” 24.

¹⁴⁴ Meli, “The Genesis of Aware” 24.

One such work of art that was highly praised for its exemplification of *aware* was Murasaki Shikibu's novel, *The Tale of Genji*. The term *aware* appears over a thousand times in the entire span of the novel and often in the phrase *mono no aware*.¹⁴⁵ *Mono no aware* in the context of *The Tale of Genji* translates to “the pathos of things,” that is the suffering of things.¹⁴⁶ For the Heian era, *mono no aware* encompasses a profound empathetic appreciation to the fleeting beauty manifested in human life and nature and the sadness at the transience of both.¹⁴⁷ In *The Tale of Genji*, *aware* as described by Morris suggested the inherent suffering in response to an understanding of the inevitable end that humans and beauty of the phenomenal world were both destined to succumb to.¹⁴⁸ *Mono no aware*, then, as Morris articulates is the perceived connection between the beauty of things and the sadness associated with coming to terms with the fact that even those things of beauty will not last, further emphasizing to the sensitive individual the insubstantiality of human life in a world where all things are transient.¹⁴⁹ To give a brief understanding and literal definition we could state that *mono no aware* is a phrase that integrates the “things” of *aware*. *Mono* meaning “thing” and *no* being the possessive particle. *Aware* as we continue to learn throughout its history maintains a wide range of connotations that reflected the times. Remembering that during the Heian era *aware*’s connotation was one of darkness and even suffering as articulated by Morris’ highly influential of Buddhist religious philosophy. Therefore, *mono no aware* is sometimes defined as “the sadness of things” or “the sensitivity to things.”

¹⁴⁵ Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 207-208.

¹⁴⁶ Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 207-208.

¹⁴⁷ *The Kodansha Bilingual Encyclopedia of Japan*, #ed., s.v. “Mono no Aware” 518-520.

¹⁴⁸ Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 208.

¹⁴⁹ Morris, *World of the Shining Prince*, 208.

Mono no aware is commonly associated with Motoori Norinaga, prominent scholar and philosopher of the 18th century who is credited with reviving the term *aware* and re-imagining the phrase *mono no aware* from a nativist perspective, one that emphasizes a return to the indigenous religious philosophy of Shinto, focusing primarily on Shinto's precept of *kokoro*. As we've come to understand the Heian era was one in which the Buddhist religious precept of *mujō* was ever present. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an influential movement known as the *Kokugaku* movement swept across the nation. The *Kokugaku* movement or national revival movement was grounded in the notion that upon studying the ancient texts of Japan, initially poetry from the Nara and Heian eras and later the *Kojiki*, one could expose the true and intrinsic beliefs and origination of the ancient Japanese before exposure to the foreign influence of Buddhism and Confucianism.¹⁵⁰ In doing so, one hoped to uncover the authentic worldview of Japan from its initial onset in an attempt to forge a unique national identity and religion, distinguishing Japan from the rest of the world. Thus, the *Kokugaku* movement in part was a conscious effort to distinguish Shinto from the amalgamation of Buddhism and Confucianism.

Motoori Norinaga was a highly influential exponent of the movement; however, in relating to our main purpose for discussing *mono no aware*, we will only be focusing on Motoori's notion of *kokoro* and its relativity to *mono no aware* and "knowing the heart of things." Briefly, while studying the ancient texts, Motoori expounded upon the precept of *kokoro* by developing his own notion of the term. His development of *kokoro* was grounded as a type of poetic and religious expression; *kokoro* for Motoori was not something inherent in humans alone, but also extended to things and even included words.¹⁵¹ Ingrained in the Shinto precept of

¹⁵⁰ Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga 1730 -1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) 2.

¹⁵¹ Kasulis, Thomas P. (1998). Japanese philosophy. In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. Retrieved December 01, 2012, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G100SECT7>

magokoro, that is genuine heart, for Motoori a poet who possessed a genuine heart was able to be in resonance with the heart of things and the heart of words.¹⁵² It is from this perspective of Motoori we may converge and understand *mono no aware* and its association with Shinto. This is highly indicative of Motoori's nativist approach but ties our work back to Shinto theoretical precepts. By emphasizing Motoori's *mono no aware* it is the purpose of this section to illustrate the process of what it is to experience *aware* and ultimately experience communion with the divine realm. In doing so we can relate *how* a work of art is capable of manifesting a sacred experience through *aware* and through the facilitation of "knowing the heart of things," a notion especially emphasized by Motoori. This will allow us to conceive *aware* through its engagement with things. That is through *mono no aware* we can argue things are the source of an emotional response. This will allow us to reiterate that emotions allow one to reconnect with the sacred, emphasizing that we are intrinsically tied to *kami*.

It should be noted at this point that *mono no aware* and *aware* are one in the same. *Aware*, as we've come to learn is any intense emotion or the immediate felt response when coming into contact with things. In other words, without things, there could be no response or no *aware*. Both concepts are used to designate the immediate emotional response evoked from coming into contact with things of an awe-inspiring nature. *Mono no aware* is the awareness of the thing or occasion that provoked such an immediate response or feeling. In other words, Motoori's interpretation of *mono no aware* is used here, to describe the process of experiencing *aware*, what I argue is in essence a moment to experiencing *kami* and how this is possible through an engagement with things, whether in a work of art or embodied within the phenomenal world. *Kami* is a continuous and pervasive entity that surfaces and becomes concrete when one feels

¹⁵² Kasulis, "Japanese philosophy"

and emotionally experiences an event or thing that causes one's heart to overflow with emotion.

One then cannot help but have an immediate emotional response of *aware*. The *kokoro* is positioned to be the internalized component that resides in all things. It is through the *kokoro* that communication between the material (human), *kami*, and the phenomenal world is possible. To emphasize these it is important to begin with a discussion regarding Motoori Norinaga and his interpretation of *mono no aware*.

Mono no aware has conceived by Motoori according to Shigeru Matsumoto author of *Motoori Norinaga 1730-1801*, is:

...[an] experience [that] involves some intuitive and aesthetic understanding of the “heart” of an object, which implies a certain sympathy for or even empathy toward the object. In short, *mono no aware* as Norinaga conceives it may be understood as man’s emotional and aesthetic experience on being aware of the stimulating or affecting significance of the object with which he is involved.¹⁵³

That is to say the “heart” or *kokoro* is the internal component of the sensibilities: feelings and emotions. The *kokoro* is the natural indicator that allows humans to encounter *kami* through the mechanism of *aware*. When one is involved in experiencing *aware*, one knows the heart of things. For Motoori, his connotation of *aware* required a return to the etymological origins of the term, an interjection, as in the expressions “aya” or “ana,” these were words that exclaimed “heartfelt” sentiments through a sigh or an exclamation as we’ve discussed earlier.¹⁵⁴ Motoori contends that any thing or situation that is capable of “stirring,” “touching,” or “moving” the heart is *aware*, even things that may be considered bad or evil may stir the human heart.¹⁵⁵

Aware, therefore, signified more than an expression for Motoori, it also represented a moment in time when the heart was in resonance with a situation or object in such a profound

¹⁵³ Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga 1730 -1801*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) 45.

¹⁵⁴ Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga*, 44; Meli, “The Genesis of Aware” 66.

¹⁵⁵ Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga*, 44.

manner that only the heart could produce an impulsive emotional response. Those are the deep internal emotions felt within an individual's heart: amusement, happiness, joy, sadness, mourning, or yearning. The spontaneity and irresistibility of such emotion is *aware*, something natural that cannot be controlled nor contained by the human heart in reaction to the external world, things or events that are outside an individual's internal reality, beyond one's realm of self and control.¹⁵⁶ In understanding this, Motoori did not limit *aware* to the connotation of sadness thus shifting its meaning away from Buddhist influence and returning it to that of a more neutral and positive connotation, one more reflective of Shinto's worldview. By this account, the term *aware* continues to be heavily grounded in emotions; its consistency as an emotional response remains intact, coupled with *mono*, objects or things in the world, an integral part of the *aware* experience. *Mono* is a term of significance, for it is the things of *aware* that facilitate the *aware* experience of *mono no aware*.¹⁵⁷

Mono no aware may occur in two different states: *koto no kokoro* and *mono no kokoro*, one cannot be without the other.¹⁵⁸ *Koto no kokoro* refers to the *kokoro* of a natural object or situation that we intuitively sympathize with, thereby gaining appreciation for that object or situation's aesthetic quality, and *mono no kokoro* refers to the recognition of particular qualities of *mono* (natural objects) and being deeply moved by such.¹⁵⁹ The term *mono*, as mentioned earlier, refers to things or objects. *Mono* in the Japanese sense of object can be psychological or spiritual and can also refer to a substance, that which a thing consists of.¹⁶⁰ *Mono* indicates an orientation towards something, it specifies an object, what an individual is seeing, thinking, or

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 43, 79.

¹⁵⁸ Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Appreciation of Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25 (1985): 243.

¹⁵⁹ Saito, "The Japanese Appreciation of Nature," 243.

¹⁶⁰ Michael F. Marra, "On Japanese Things and Words: An Answer to Heidegger's Question" *Philosophy East and West* 54 (2004) 558.

knowing.¹⁶¹ “*Mono* is the object of the heart or mind that is oriented towards something.”¹⁶² That is to say, in relation to Motoori’s *mono no aware*, *mono* is the object of the *kokoro* that is oriented towards something that something, this thesis will argue, is *kami*. In order to reinforce the notion of *kami* and *mono* and the relation of the two, I will discuss briefly *kami* in the sense of Motoori, one that is in consonance with *kami*’s ability to inspire awe and wonder.¹⁶³ Motoori asserts:

Generally speaking, ‘kami’ denotes, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient texts and also the spirits enshrined in the shrines; furthermore, among all kinds of beings—including not only human beings but also such objects as birds, beasts, trees, grass, seas, mountains, and so forth—any being whatsoever which possesses some eminent quality out of the ordinary, and is awe-inspiring, is called kami.

Among things which are called *kami*, the thunder is evidently included, since it is usually referred to as *narukami* or *kaminari* (pealing *kami*). Also such things as dragons, *kotama*, foxes, and so forth, which are eminently wonderful and awe-inspiring, are *kami*. *Kotoma* is what people today call *tengu*, and in Chinese writings it is referred to as a mountain goblin.... In the *Nihongi* and the *Man'yōshū*, we see the tiger and the wolf, too, called *kami*. There are also the cases in which peaches were given the divine name *Okamuzumi no mikoto*, and a necklace was called *Mikuratana no kami*. Furthermore, we often find cases in which rocks, stumps of trees, and leaves of plants spoke audibly. All these are *kami*. Also, frequently, seas and mountains are called *kami*. It is not that the spirit of the sea or the mountain is referred to as *kami*, but that the sea or the mountain itself is regarded as *kami*. This is because they are exceedingly awe-inspiring.

Thus, *kami* are manifold; some *kami* are noble, while some others are lowly; some are strong, whereas others are weak; again, some *kami* are good, while some others are evil. Corresponding to this variety, the will and act of *kami* are also diverse. Therefore, we cannot speak of *kami* in definite terms.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, for Motoori, *kami* also accounts for a manner of diverse things or *mono*, and is reflective also in the properties and actions of particular “things” that associate with

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 559.

¹⁶² Ibid., 559.

¹⁶³ Robert S. Gall, “Kami and Daimōn: A Cross-Cultural Reflection on What is Divine,” *Philosophy East and West* 49 (1999): 64.

¹⁶⁴ Gall, “Kami and Daimōn” 63-64. My own emphasis.

being *kami*. In other words, the significance of things is based not only in their ability to be *kami*, but also in their extraordinary, phenomenal productivity they provide.¹⁶⁵ *Kami* reveals this potentiality of things in the world, that is, when one is attentive to things as Gall suggests, one is opened to the “wondrous—and therefore divine—nature. Their [*kami*] mystery lies in their nearness and in their diversity.”¹⁶⁶ This attentiveness to things is what we can suggest, to know *mono no aware*. Therefore, as asserted by Motoori, when one is able to know, that is to “discern” the heart of things, one knows what it is “to know *mono no aware*.” To “know *mono no aware*” is to recognize that every living thing has a feeling heart.¹⁶⁷ A feeling heart is one that is able to discern or ought to discern a particular felt emotion from the heart of a thing, when this is occasioned by a sigh or exclamation of “ah” it signifies the thing has the ability to “move” us.¹⁶⁸ This is what it means “to know *mono no aware*.” The terms “discern” or “discernment” and “to know” are used here interchangeably; however, it should be noted for Motoori the term discernment carries with it a deeper meaning in regard to emotions. The phrase, “discerning the heart of things” has its meaning on the basis of two characteristics: emotion and a type of aesthetic judgment based on sense perception.¹⁶⁹ Motoori contended that discerning the heart of things did not require logical or scientific knowledge; rather, it was a discernment based entirely on emotions alone.¹⁷⁰ As articulated by Motoori:

¹⁶⁵ Gall, “Kami and Daimon” 65.

¹⁶⁶ Gall, “Kami and Daimon” 65.

¹⁶⁷ Michael F. Marra, ed., trans., *The Poetics of Motoori Norinaga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007) 172.

¹⁶⁸ Meli, “The Genesis of Aware” 79.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 82.

[...] when we come into contact with some thing at which we ought to be happy and we do indeed feel happy, we have then discerned the heart, the essence, of that thing, and have become happy. Likewise, feeling sorrowful at coming into contact with a thing at which we ought to feel sorrowful means that we have discerned the heart of this sorrowful thing and have become sorrowful. Thus, in our contact with things of the world, discerning the heart of such a...thing is what we call “knowing *mono no aware*. ” In times when we do not know the heart of such things, there is neither happiness nor sorrow, and we therefore feel nothing in our hearts.¹⁷¹

The above passage demonstrates the “correct” type of discernment Motoori is concerned with, one that is based upon emotion. Thus, to achieve the correct discernment one must feel a certain way and recognize the type of emotion at that moment as being in relation to the state of being of the thing as it is reflected through the characteristics of the thing.¹⁷² Meli refers to this as the thing’s ability to make an impression upon us. In Motoori’s words, the thing has “moved” us. The ability for some thing in the world to make us exclaim “ah” upon contact because we have felt that thing and it has moved us or made an impression upon us is correlated to the second characteristic of “discerning the heart of things.”¹⁷³ It is based on a type of aesthetic judgment through sense perception.

Sense perception can be conveyed as perceiving the outside world through the senses rather than use of intellect.¹⁷⁴ According to Motoori “Sentient beings all have a heart. Because they have a heart, when they touch things, they necessarily have feelings.” He further states: “When a person has a stimulating experience, in touching some thing in the world, his heart moves and cannot be silent.”¹⁷⁵ Conversely, for Motoori sense perception meant more than the physical act

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷² Ibid., 86.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 79.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 77.

of touching things, more than the practical use of perception as in finding your way through a dark hallway by use of your hands and fingers to feel your surroundings. In other words, sense perception as conceived by Motoori was perception that made us feel something in the depths of our heart. Perception of this type allows us to feel things through the senses in a manner that could not be captured through physical means alone. The perception that Motoori is concerned with is heavily involved in giving us a sensation that leaves an impression upon us, this perception prescribed by Motoori allows us “to feel and be moved.”¹⁷⁶ According to Motoori:

To be moved means to have a variety of sentiments, such as being happy at times, sad at others; or being angry, or joyful, or delightedly interested, or terribly worried, or full of love and hatred, or longing for someone, or being disgusted. The heart is moved because it knows *mono no aware*.¹⁷⁷

Thus, in “knowing *mono no aware*” we are able to ascertain a certain kind of emotion, a feeling that is based on the impression a thing in the world has on us.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, this impression seems to be also of our own aesthetic judgment. How we perceive the characteristics and the state of being the object is in is based on our own depth of intuition. Therefore, in “discerning the heart of things” there are degrees to which one discerns the heart of things.

Motoori refers to the depth of degrees as shallowly and deeply. Motoori states that among those who are inherently shallow discerners are animals, because in comparison to humans it seems as though they know of no discernment at all.¹⁷⁹ Humans on the other hand, are greater discerners because we are superior among animals in our ability to think among other things, however, among humans there are still those who discern

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹⁷⁷ Michael F. Marra, ed., trans., *The Poetics of Motoori Norinaga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007) 172.

¹⁷⁸ Meli, “The Genesis of Aware”, 83.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 84.

shallowly and deeply.¹⁸⁰ Those who are unable to discern deeply in comparison to those who are, do not necessarily “not know *mono no aware*,” rather it is that they have not been exposed to such a feeling before. Therefore, as stated in an above quote earlier: “In times when we do not know the heart of such things, there is neither happiness nor sorrow, and we therefore feel nothing in our hearts.”¹⁸¹ No matter how much a thing’s state of being and characteristics reflect a potential *aware* experience, when a person has no prior disposition to such a feeling then he or she are unable to discern the heart of the thing because they did not know the heart of the thing to begin with.¹⁸²

All things considered, “discerning the heart of things” is part and parcel of the *aware* experience of *mono no aware*. Therefore, Motoori’s *mono no aware* is a concept based on a felt emotion that presents itself upon contact with a thing. Upon this contact an interjection is released either in the form of a sigh or exclamation. This sigh experience is grounded on emotions that are stimulated by the object or thing in the world. This ability the thing has to stimulate a response from an individual is *mono no aware*.

The possibility for things to stimulate a response from an individual, however are not limited only to the beauty of things or objects that exist in the realm of the natural world. As mentioned in Chapter Two beauty in the Japanese conception is possibly anything. It can range from a mere shadow to a rustic kettle. The kettle is the product of human endeavor. But it too is considered an object of beauty. Its beauty is enhanced by the natural aging process that causes it to rust. With that in mind, then, things or products, that is, works of art created by the human hand could also be considered objects of beauty capable of inspiring awe or possessing

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 84.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁸² Ibid., 85.

mesmerizing qualities that are enough to stir the heart. As we have mentioned, poetry and novels are works of art that are known for stirring the heart. This too can apply to other works of art, such as animated film.

Unlike poetry or novels, what makes animation particularly intriguing and stimulating is the ability of the animator or director to manipulate the components that make the animated film in a manner that would stir a response from the viewer. This applies to Miyazaki whom we argue uses his ability as an animator and director to render his films into stimulating masterpieces that give many opportunities for an individual's heart to be stirred or stimulated, thus causing an emotional response. Not only are his animated films beautifully drawn, a stimulus in itself, but together with the other components of film, music, characters, imagery, plot, events, storyline, all of which work together their functional relation to stimulate a response from the viewer, while at the same time these components work simultaneously towards building and enforcing the message of the film. In other words, animated film engages an audience or an individual through a manipulation of components and techniques in a manner that makes for beauty to be apparent or realized in most if not all parts of the film. In being stimulated by this particular work of art one is made not only to visualize the message but to *feel* the message. That is to say, in animated film when something stirs our heart we are made to associate that thing or image with a particular aspect or message of the film. The emotions felt assist in internalizing the message or part of the message of the film. The viewer is engaged, personally experiencing the work of art as we will discuss in our next chapter, our analysis of Miyazaki Hayao's animated film, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

Chapter 4—Feeling Shinto in *My Neighbour Totoro*

This fourth chapter will attempt to apply the idea of *aware* as a mechanism that bridges the human and the divine world. *Aware* acts as a meeting point where Japanese spirituality and aesthetics converges enabling communion between the human world and the world of the divine. This chapter will demonstrate that the use of aesthetics, of *aware* in this manner facilitates an entry way into the receptivity of Shinto as it is exemplified in Miyazaki's *My Neighbour Totoro*.

I will analyze *My Neighbour Totoro* using a close reading. Through this technique, I will highlight specific scenes that support my interpretation. Although every scene or sequence in the film has the potential of being an *aware* moment, the scenes chosen for my interpretation are based upon specific components of the scene and how these components affectively guided me to such an interpretation. My analysis will look closely at the way these components within the film work together to create a mood or feeling that causes my own heart to be stirred, thus formulating what I feel is the message of Miyazaki's work. I point to these scenes to demonstrate to the viewer the idea of *aware* and fundamentally Japanese spirituality in Miyazaki's work.

To illustrate briefly, the natural world is drawn to be beautifully rendered. However, the beauty of the natural world is actualized not just through its rendering of vivid coloring and life-like portrayal, but also through the confluence of music; the harmonious melody playing in the background; the characters themselves their actions and dialogue; the use of the forest as the setting for playful banter and discussing the marvelous beauty of a tree. These components are brought together for a reason and a purpose to convey a message. The components can range from the characters, objects, setting, plot, color, music, drawing style, anything within the scene we suggest serves a specific function.

Scene selection is determined on particular components within the scene that are more functionally distinct and direct in conveying what I interpret to be the message of Miyazaki's work. This interpretation is entirely based on my own emotions but also on a framework built around the idea of component functionality, an approach to interpreting film as illustrated by Noel Carroll through what he calls "the functional account to film form."¹⁸³ According to Carroll, the form of a film is comprised of components and techniques that *function* to realize the overall purpose of a film through particular scenes or sequences:¹⁸⁴

This account uses the notion of a function to explain why the individual film is the way it is. It enables us to say why the film has the shape and structure it has. The form serves a function. It is designed to serve a film's purpose (or purposes), a means to securing its points or points. It is that which makes manifest the point or purpose of the film.

The functional account explains why the film is the way it appears by showing that a formal element [component] has been selected because that element realizes the film's point and that the choice occurs in the work in order to realize its point.¹⁸⁵

The components of a film therefore function or serve a purpose in advancing, promoting, or realizing the point or purpose of the film.¹⁸⁶ And according to this approach there are scenes within the film that are more distinct than others in illustrating and conveying the message, the "purpose," of the film through the components functional value. Therefore, my selection of scenes is based on the use of selective components and techniques that serve a particular function. That is to say, I am looking selectively at just those scenes whose particular components or elements are of a more functional value in contributing to what I interpret as the overall message of Miyazaki's work. This will then allow me to *explain* the message of

¹⁸³ Noel Carroll, "Film form: An argument for a functional theory of style in the individual film," *Literature Online* 32, no. 3 (1998): 6, <http://lion.chadwyck.com>

¹⁸⁴ Carroll, "Film form" 6.

¹⁸⁵ Carroll, "Film form" 7.

¹⁸⁶ Carroll, "Film form" 6.

Miyazaki's work through the component's design function rather than simply describe it. *What* the components are and *how* they are used are distinct "choices" made on the part of the director in order to secure the point or purpose of the film.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the message of the film can be interpreted based on the functionality of a film's components and techniques, a film's form. The use of such components on the part of the director make for the message of the film whether it is the intended message of the author or not. This can be further explained through Wimsatt and Beardsley's notion the intentional fallacy.

Wimsatt and Beardsley write:

Intention is design or plan in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write. Yet, to insist on the designing intellect as *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as standard.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, the subjective intention of the author for creating a particular work of art does not make it the "standard" or the accepted meaning of that art. In other words, the intentional fallacy recognizes that the author's intention does not necessarily determine the meaning of the work of art. Wimsatt and Beardsley continue:

A poem can *be* only through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. *Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant...*¹⁸⁹

That is to say, what the art embodies. Poetry uses words and language. Film uses imagery, symbolism, sound, dialogue, and characters. A film's medium *is* its components. These components are relevant because they serve a purpose and perform a

¹⁸⁷ Carroll, "Film form" 6.

¹⁸⁸ W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M.C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review*, 54 (1946): 469, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27537676>

¹⁸⁹ Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," 469. Last line my own emphasis.

function. Through these components only then can the work's meaning be determined. Therefore, the intentional fallacy provides for us a basis in determining the meaning of a work of art based on what the work of art embodies and not what the author intended.

It is through its components that film transmits the meaning which leads to the argument of this thesis. I argue that the animated film *My Neighbour Totoro*, through the use of its components, is aesthetically rendered to purposely engender the viewer to have an emotional response, *aware*. It is through this mechanism of *aware* that assists in the facilitation of the realization or appreciation of the Shinto worldview, by enforcing or creating a sense of community, the realization and appreciation for nature, and recognition of Shinto symbolism.

Generally it is understood and recognized that the films of Miyazaki carry with them a religious or spiritual dimension by scholars as we will explore shortly. But what scholars have not recognized is *how* the beauty of Miyazaki's work through the presence of *aware* facilitates the appreciation or awareness of that spiritual dimension, the overall message of the film. Through moments of *aware*, our entry point, one is brought to an emotionally communicative state. Although a viewer's emotional response will vary, anyone who appreciates the work will have an emotional response suggestive or contemplative of communion with the world of the divine. While Miyazaki does not explicitly state his religious affiliation, associate his films with the spiritual traditions of Shinto given his films ubiquitous use of Shinto symbolism and themes. *My Neighbour Totoro* goes beyond the scope of a children's film. It is a multidimensional and complex film in which themes of Japanese spirituality take the guise of a children's story conveniently folded in amongst the characters, setting, plot, and natural imagery.

The films of Miyazaki allow us to experience Japanese spirituality through a deeper intuitive sense. His work engages the audience through the use of beautifully rendered natural imagery, explicit and implicit themes of Shinto, theoric music, character interaction and development, and the most subtle of components assist in building up to a moment of an immediate emotional response, one that requires neither intellect nor rationale, an emotional response that is direct and instantaneous. It is “intuitive” because it is a response from the heart, one that does not require a secondary source to pass through, what we have come to learn and comprehend as *aware*. Therefore, Miyazaki’s films allow us to not only visualize spirituality, but facilitates and emotionally encourages us to *feel* Japanese spirituality by engendering isolated moments, “holographic entry points,” within his films that evoke and engage the audience to produce an immediate emotional response. We can recognize such points because of the feeling we suddenly feel.

As a viewer of film, it is but impossible to have some of our own preconceived notions of the film. Film like any work of art is a text that can be “read.” James Phelan writes: “the text acts upon us and we act upon it; the text calls upon—and we respond with—our cognitive, emotive, psychological, social, and ethical selves (though of course different texts will engage some of these selves more fully than others).”¹⁹⁰ He further states that the activity of reading a text or in our case viewing a film is not without internal and external influences: “who we are, our training as readers, how we are positioned socially and culturally, and other traits and dispositions” influence our reading and by extension our interpretation of a text.¹⁹¹ Our response as a reader will vary. Given my own background as a scholar of Japanese history, culture, religion, and

¹⁹⁰ James Phelan, “Toward a Rhetorical Reader-Response Criticism: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Ending of Beloved,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3&4 (1993): 711

¹⁹¹ Phelan, “Toward a Rhetorical Reader-Response” 712

aesthetics, I am unavoidably tied to a particular interpretation of *My Neighbour Totoro* that is influenced by the above factors. By explicitly pointing out themes and symbols of Shinto in *My Neighbour Totoro*, I may be in some way “programming” the reader’s response of the film—or at least guiding the reader to realize the spiritual dimension infused within the film through its functional components.

As we mentioned earlier, anyone who appreciates Miyazaki’s work will have an emotional response, in essence this response is individual but one that grows in part from the functions of the components. The coalescence of components that together point to a message, one that is ultimately conducive and related to the purpose, the “intention” of the work of art. While “anyone” is capable of producing a response I am referring specifically to a viewer who can recognize in a similar fashion the functionality of the components that point to this message, in other words, the viewer can recognize and agree with my interpretation. Because a viewer’s response may differ it is important to frame a specific viewer. This viewer is whom I will refer to as the “ideal viewer.”

I interpret the “ideal viewer” from three degrees. To a large degree the “ideal viewer” is someone who possesses knowledge in Shinto, a background in Japanese aesthetics, history, and an understanding of the geography or nature of Japan. Undoubtedly not all viewers will possess this background, therefore, the “ideal viewer” may also be considered as one who has a general sense and sensitivity to aesthetics and spirituality and to an even lesser degree may be someone who is open minded, receptive, and to a certain extent naïve to the ideals of Shinto, Japanese culture, aesthetics, and history—in other words, a viewer that is open to my interpretation. Yet, even the non-ideal viewer can be guided by the text. I am referring back to Miyazaki’s use of specific components and technique. Through the use of explicit symbols, music, imagery,

characters, the idea of *aware* instilling that emotional response --the rendering of *My Neighbour Totoro* in such a manner that facilitates the non-ideal viewer to have a response regardless of their cultural, social, and intellectual background.

The implied reader as described by Wolfgang Iser is another approach to consider in the analysis of film. It is an account that relies on the objectivity of the viewer rather than the subjectivity of the viewer. In this manner bias or preconceived notions are absent. From this account the reader is actively guided into the world of the book through the process of reading and reacting to the text.¹⁹² Through the process of reading the reader is exposed to the pre-structured potential meaning by the text as developed by the author.¹⁹³ The meaning becomes actualized through the process of reading in which “the reader is guided and made to draw his own conclusions from the text.”¹⁹⁴ In the case of film the meaning is generated through the use of components and actualized through the process of watching the film.

FILM SYNOPSIS

The 1988 film *My Neighbour Totoro* is about a young family who moves from the big city to the country side. However, the move proves to be more than just a move for the young girls of the family. For Mei and Satsuki the transition to be closer to their ailing mother becomes a journey in discovering the wonders of the natural world, of life, and community. The young girls experience their share of life’s ups and downs. The start of the film sets the pace for the excitement of moving into a “haunted” house and transferring to a new school; however, the panic and anxiety of being lost and the thought and fear of losing someone dear take place as

¹⁹² Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) xiv.

¹⁹³ Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, xii.

¹⁹⁴ Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, xi.

well within this endearing film. Yet, as we come to understand throughout the film, the girls are never really alone. They are able to get through these troubling times with the help of a company of spirits of the forest, known as totoros. Mei, when confronted with the thought of her mother's loss, in panic runs away to the Shichikokuyama Hospital where the mother is being treated, only to get lost in the process. When the villagers are unable to find Mei in a desperate search the older sister Satsuki looks to Totoro. With the help of Totoro and the furry friendly cat bus Satsuki is reunited with Mei and together they are able to see from a tree branch looking into the window of their mother's hospital room that she is fine. The film ends on a happy note when the girls are reunited with the granny and Kanta. The ending credits reveal the mother comes home and the family is united once again. *My Neighbour Totoro* is more than a film about magical creatures of the forest and the fun-filled imagination of Miyazaki. Totoro is able to magically transform the girls' reality into an adventure of wonder and awe through the simplicity and beauty of the natural world. It is a film that ventures into discovering the wonders of the natural world and the realization that simple doesn't always mean mundane and boring. Simple can be wondrous, intriguing, and beautiful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Set against the backdrop of a 1950's rural farming village in Sayama Hills¹⁹⁵, which is now a suburb of Tokyo, *My Neighbour Totoro* provides the viewer a glimpse of what it was like in Japan before the urbanization and expansion of metropolis cities like Tokyo. With its lush green farming lands and richly detailed untouched forests, the warm and sunny atmosphere offers the viewer a chance to imagine a time when the natural world, humans, and magical creatures co-existed.

¹⁹⁵ Helen McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 120.

According to Helen McCarthy, *My Neighbour Totoro* is a film created by Miyazaki intended for children. One of the goals for Miyazaki in creating the film was to provide a film that allowed the mind of a young child to be captivated by the warmth and innocence of a country childhood, rather than filled with conflict and struggle of the confrontational “kids-against-adults” story lines so often portrayed in Japanese animation.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, *My Neighbour Totoro* was created with the intent to capture the warm disposition of a child’s world in which only children were able to see totoros or “nature spirits,” as Miyazaki refers to them, and communicate with these magical creatures in ways that did not require words.¹⁹⁷ Set against the backdrop of a bucolic country side that we the viewer are exposed to an array of traditional spiritual elements of Shinto. Yet according to McCarthy, Miyazaki was adamant in stating that “this movie has nothing to do with that or any other religion.”¹⁹⁸ McCarthy contends that:

“...My Neighbour Totoro’s plot deliberately sidelines religion in favor of nature. Because it’s set in Japan, the *trappings* of rural religious tradition are clearly visible, but *as far as the plot is concerned, they’re decorative, not functional.*”¹⁹⁹

Miyazaki states that “he makes movies primarily for entertainment, and doesn’t try to give his audience any particular message.”²⁰⁰ Yet through these elements we are somehow guided into associating *Totoro* with a spiritual dimension that one cannot help, but to associate Miyazaki’s “nature spirits” with *kami*.

Jolyon Thomas writes: “Miyazaki clearly draws upon but also modifies pre-existing religious themes in his films. The nature spirits in *My Neighbour Totoro*, for example, seem to be

¹⁹⁶ McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation*, 121.

¹⁹⁷ McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation*, 121.

¹⁹⁸ McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation*, 121. This is a direct quote from *A-Club*, June 1987, 19.

¹⁹⁹ McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation*, 121. My own emphasis.

²⁰⁰ McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation*, 121.

based upon traditional Japanese conceptions of *kami*,²⁰¹ while we can agree that Miyazaki's film *Totoro* is entertaining we are compelled to reason however that his films are rendered in a way to engender a particular meaning or message about Shinto. Thomas makes the compelling argument that Miyazaki is participating in *shūkyō asobi*, or religious entertainment. The phrase *shūkyō asobi* is a new terminology proposed by Thomas to describe the "common space" entertainment media provides for religion and entertainment.²⁰² This, as, Thomas argues, provides for a shared space between religion and entertainment rather than a distinction that usually surfaces amongst the two, and this shared space, as Thomas contends, results in the formation of "entirely new religious doctrines, interpretations, rituals, and beliefs."²⁰³ In addition, *shūkyō asobi* can also mean "playful religion," in this manner the concept distinguishes an area whereby "modifications of religious behavior, outlook, and/or knowledge occur within spaces equally devoted to entertainment or, alternatively, where religious practice and pedagogy simultaneously behave as entertainment experiences."²⁰⁴ In understanding this, we could suggest that *Totoro* participates in both: the modification of Shinto spiritual thought such as *kami* as depicted by Totoro and Shinto ritual seen as entertainment as depicted in a scene of the girls and Totoro taking part in a ritual to grow a forest.

As Thomas writes:

The *totoro* represent a simultaneously new-old type of nature spirit strategically set in contrast to the preexisting (institutional) notions of *kami*. Whether or not Miyazaki's audiences believe in the existence of the *totoro* themselves, the film promotes an alternative perception of *kami*, tactically deploying traditional religious motifs as a foil for the magical, cuddly, and spiritually fecund *totoro*.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Jolyon Baraka Thomas, "Shukyo Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao's Anime," *The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 10 (2007): 83, accessed May 10, 2012.

²⁰² Thomas, "Shukyo Asobi" 73.

²⁰³ Thomas, "Shukyo Asobi" 73.

²⁰⁴ Thomas, "Shukyo Asobi" 77.

²⁰⁵ Thomas, "Shukyo Asobi" 83.

For our purposes Thomas' assessment of *shūkyō asobi* provides the fusion between religion and entertainment, supporting the notion of the religious or spiritual aspect that takes place within the animated film of *Totoro*, in which the components of film are capable of such modifications or depiction of religion possible.

Similarly others have also acknowledged that Miyazaki is sending a message. McCarthy contends: "Religion is a human construct and has nothing to with nature."²⁰⁶ Yet, she still acknowledges the elements of Shinto: "There are statues of foxes and protective deities, Shinto shrine gates, and ritual cords of rice straw and paper streamers around the trunk of the camphor tree, but none of this affects Totoro and the Catbus or the daily life of the forest creatures,"²⁰⁷ and she also acknowledges that Miyazaki is sending a message as she writes:

Yet in My Neighbour *Totoro*, it seems to me that he is making a statement. The title tells us that humans and the rest of nature are neighbours; we should strive to be good ones, or the relationship between us will break down. Look, Miyazaki seems to say, at this beautiful country. This was ours not so long ago. Japan is very beautiful and the world is very beautiful, but we can't take it for granted. Be careful.²⁰⁸

While this is valid, her interpretation of *Totoro* focuses more on the nature aspect of the film, she mentions nothing of religion. Yet, even her interpretation is along the lines of traditional Shinto thought. In recognizing the nature aspect of *Totoro*, which is a fundamental part of Shinto tradition, she is, we can suggest, unintentionally acknowledging Shinto. The notion of Shinto's community "humans and the rest of nature are neighbours; we should strive to be good ones, or the relationship between us will break down" is indicative of Shinto's notion of community that

²⁰⁶ McCarthy, Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation, 123.

²⁰⁷ McCarthy, Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation, 123.

²⁰⁸ McCarthy, Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation, 121.

we are interrelated and dependent on one another. This relationship is important in order to continue in a harmonious balance of life, environment, and spirituality. Our actions affect nature and vice versa, we communicate with nature through prayers, ritual, to *kami* in order to respect and keep order and balance. But we must also do our part as humans to respect nature and do what is right for the environment. This instills our own place and order within this community of one. So while McCarthy contends there is no religion in *Totoro*, she herself is guided into acknowledging the principles of Shinto without explicitly stating them as such.

Lucy Wright's take on the films of Miyazaki provides for an interesting and provocative discussion. She analyzes themes and symbols of Shinto mythology and spiritualism within the earlier works of Miyazaki which include *Totoro* to argue that "Miyazaki is cinematically practicing the ancient form of Shinto."²⁰⁹ Wright argues Miyazaki's early films such as *My Neighbour Totoro* focus more on and depict the early Shinto notions of animism, the continual relationship between the natural world (and by extension *kami*) and humanity, at the same time the films allude to the dissonance of the natural world within the films from the reality and modern world of Japan. As Wright points out, Miyazaki's detailed and striking rendering of the natural world provide the setting for associating his work with the notions of the animistic legacy of early Shinto and support the idea of a "mystical connection between humans and the natural world."²¹⁰

Wright suggests that the film *My Neighbour Totoro* is one that expresses nostalgia. It is a sense of nostalgia that yearns for a time when humans and nature shared a special relationship,

²⁰⁹ Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects"

²¹⁰ Wright, "Forest Spirits, Giant Insects"

people could rely on an “extended family” and childhood was a magical time.²¹¹ Wright mentions that Japan of the 1980s (*Totoro* was created in 1988) was a period known not only for the bubble economy, but also for its “production of nostalgia” it was a culture of “maturation and forfeiture.”²¹² Wright continues by stating: “The nostalgia that is expressed stems from the sadness of severing spatial and temporal links with the natural world and the past respectively” and that “Miyazaki’s films regret leaving behind the richness of a childhood spent in the woodlands, or the heartfelt spirituality that comes with being a part of nature and of social tradition.”²¹³

Wright’s interpretation of *Totoro* we could, suggest associates us with the traditional Shinto thought of community, the “extended family” a community in which people and nature participated. However overtime that Shinto tradition, the sense of community that humans shared through the sanctity of nature, began to lose its grasp on a generation caught up with the rapid economic growth of the bubble economy and the use of space (nature) to accommodate such urban and industrial development. Thus, the close ties which humans shared with nature established by past spiritual traditions suffered, having been severed in exchange for modernization and urbanization. But we could also suggest in taking her interpretation a bit further and extending it not only to community and nature but also *kami*. It is nostalgia for the traditional Shinto ideals of community, nature, and by extension *kami*.

Wright acknowledges that: “Representations of *kami* and the natural world in Miyazaki’s films express an underlying belief of the early Shinto worldview, that is, *continuity between*

²¹¹ Lucy Wright, “Forest Spirits, Giant Insects, and World Trees: The Nature Vision of Miyazaki Hayao,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, X (Summer 2005), <http://www.usask.carelst/jrpc/art10-miyazaki-print.html>

²¹² Wright, “Forest Sprits”

²¹³ Wright, “Forest Sprits”

humanity and nature,”²¹⁴ and she does recognize in *Totoro* the significance of Totoro as *kami* as symbolized through the great tree. She explicitly states: “The majestic camphor tree often plays an important role as signifying both *kami* and ancestors. In the case of *Totoro*, the giant tree is home to King of the Forest [Totoro]...”²¹⁵ Interestingly enough in the case of *Totoro* while she recognizes the appearance of traditional (Shinto) elements she does not find them to be essential to the plot of the story. She writes: “The appearance of traditional elements, while not central to the plot, yet have an ubiquity that is an accurate representation of their situation in Japan.”²¹⁶ In other words, she instead associates their depiction in the film to represent a realistic portrait of Japan’s landscape that includes a pervasiveness of such elements.

Thomas, McCarthy, and Wright’s evaluation of Miyazaki’s *My Neighbour Totoro* are certainly insightful and compelling perspectives to the meaning and understanding of the film and undoubtedly aide in our own evaluation of the film. Thomas and Wright both associate the film with Shinto traditions through specific symbolic elements they identify with such as Totoro as a representation of *kami*. Thomas’ notion of *shūkyō asobi* associates Miyazaki with transmitting a message of Shinto spirituality even if Miyazaki himself denies it claiming his films are for entertainment only. Wright’s perspective accurately associates *Totoro* with nostalgia for simple times and for tradition and spirituality, and McCarthy’s interpretation is not to be discredited, she and Wright make worthy assessments of Miyazaki’s rendered setting of nature to distinguish it as an important element of the film. McCarthy’s perspective allows us to understand the bigger picture. We are all neighbours of nature (part of a bigger community) and

²¹⁴ Wright, “Forest Sprits”

²¹⁵ Wright, “Forest Sprits”

²¹⁶ Wright, “Forest Sprits”

we should strive to be good neighbours in this world or our relationship with one another will breakdown.

While these scholars have recognized to some extent Miyazaki's use of elements to generate a symbolic meaning, what they have not recognized is how these elements of film, that is, the components, which includes techniques of the film such as the setting of nature, objects of symbolism, characters, sound, and other components, work as a whole to generate for the meaning of the film. In relation to this are the techniques used to assist in the facilitation of the meaning of the film, of those techniques, is the mechanism of *aware*. As stated earlier, McCarthy argues that *Totoro*'s plot "deliberately sidelines religion for nature." That the religious iconography is for decorative purposes and do not serve a function. Wright furthermore contends that the religious traditional elements illustrated in *Totoro* as far as the plot is concerned are "not central to the plot," but as we have already established through the intentional fallacy, we can argue for the purposes of our own interpretation of the message of *Totoro* these elements or components are essential to the plot. Even if it was not the intention of Miyazaki, his use of religious traditional elements such as explicit Shinto symbolism, their presence alone in the film, is enough to rekindle thoughts of traditional Japanese spirituality. And nature happens to be a quintessential part of that tradition. Miyazaki could have very well not employed their use, but he does so because it moves the plot forward and aides in giving meaning for the message of the film. For example, the use of a *torii* gate leads to the sacred tree (*shimboku*) which then leads to the scene discussing notions of makkuro-kurosuke and susuatari which facilitate the idea of the mysteriousness of *kami* this is then solidified with a scene of *Totoro*. This pattern reoccurs throughout the film.

This means then, that everything within the film serves a purpose and by extension is of necessary value in determining the meaning of a work of art such as film. They are relevant simply because they exist within the film. Therefore, to state that certain elements within the film are for mere decorative purposes and serve no function is to limit the meaning of the work of art itself. With that said, this chapter will be looking at specific scenes and sequences, what I consider to depict underlying themes of Japanese spirituality, explicit use of Shinto symbolism, nature, and community, while highlighting a few moments of *aware* within these scenes that enforce such themes.

Shinto symbolism

The use of Shinto symbolism becomes a reoccurring theme throughout the film. Its reoccurrence alone suggests that it is an essential element in *Totoro*. We are made aware of it from the outset of the film. The image of a small red *torii* (traditional Shinto gate) is part of the background as the family drives along the dirt road. (See Fig. 1) We are then exposed to *torii*, *jizo* statues, small shrines, sacred trees, and the idea of *makkuro kurosuke* and *susuatari* elements used to reinforce the idea of Shinto spirituality. We suggest the frequent use of Shinto symbolism is meant to move the plot forward while conveying the ideals of traditional Shinto spirituality, central to which is the notion of *kami*, in an entertaining yet implicit manner. For example, the use of pine nuts



Fig. 1 and 2

Shortly after when the family arrives at the new home, we get a sequence of the girls playing in their yard. The scene continues and we get our first shot of the camphor tree. It is interwoven in this scene as part of an observation from Satsuki, she comments on the size. (See Fig. 2) The camera facilitates in highlighting the size of the tree. It pans from the bottom to the top of the tree emphasizing its overwhelming height. The tree is drawn to overlook the rest of the forest and land in order to make it significantly stand apart from the rest of the trees in the forest.

We suggest that the use of this giant tree is to represent *shimboku*, or a sacred tree. But its use also facilitates the plot forward as other events are situated around the sacred tree, around the idea of *kami*. The sacred tree is an important symbolism of Shinto. According to Shinto tradition, trees of massive size and age were considered to be the dwelling of *kami* and therefore a symbol of *kami*.²¹⁷ In relation to this, the forests that these trees occupied were honored and considered as areas of worship known as *himorogi*.²¹⁸ The forest of Totoro we can suggest is one such *himorogi*.

²¹⁷ No author given, “Shinto Symbols I,” *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 7 vol. 1 (1966): 19, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30232983>

²¹⁸ “Shinto Symbols I,” 19

The use of a giant tree represents more than the abode of Totoro. The functional use of the giant camphor tree in *Totoro* is to represent *kami*, and *kami* is essentially Totoro. The giant camphor tree appears several times throughout the film signifying its importance and by extension of *kami*. Shortly after Satsuki's acknowledgement of the large camphor tree we are given a few more scenes depicting the notion of *kami* in the manifestation of soot.

In the next few scenes, I will illustrate how components are used to subtly intertwine notions of *kami* within the plot. The first encounter of the girls with the soot *kami* occurs as the family begins to move into the home. The father asks Satsuki to open the back door and when she does a flurry of black spots scurry away. Startled and frightened the girls shout in an attempt to scare out whatever was in the now abandoned room. The girls with brave faces march into the room and look around only to find nothing. Their father comes and checks around as well and suggests the idea of *makkuro-kurosuke*, he says that they are not ghosts, but black spots that appear in front of your eyes upon entering a dark room after being exposed to the sunlight. Relieved the girls sing and laugh off the incident. However, they encounter the entities again when looking for a set of stairs. After Satsuki finds the stairs for the second floor both her and Mei venture up the darkened stairs, where the soot *kami* rummage about. Mei then is able to "capture" one that she smashes between her hands. At this point the grandmother tells the story of the *susuatari* who live in old houses and create dust and that when she was young she too could see them. She then mentions that the *susuatari* are probably discussing whether to move out of the house. The scene then switches to a shot of the ceiling where we see the soot *kami* and hear the sound of tiny voices as they huddle around another explicit symbol of Shinto, the *gohei*.

In this sequence there are a few elements we suggest are used to facilitate the notion of *kami* to the viewer. To illustrate, the appearance of the soot is one element used to facilitate the

idea of *kami* to the viewer. The soot are drawn like specks of dust, however, they are life-like, infused with a spirit, are incredibly swift, and communicate with one another without the use of words. Because of this they are mysterious, odd, and inspire surprise and wonderment from the girls, reflecting their *kami*-like presence. (See Fig. 3) They also seem to be a manifestation of nature, of their surroundings they create the dust, but are also dust themselves, reiterating that *kami* can be anything. The use of the *gohei* is another component that hints to us that soot is *kami*. A *gohei* is another symbol of Shinto. It is an offering wand with paper streamers attached to it and also symbolizes *kami*.²¹⁹ It is shown briefly during the grandmother's discussion of the soot in the ceiling. (See Fig. 4)



Fig. 3 and 4

The function of the elderly woman, whom we refer to as the grandmother, as a character component is multiple. For example, she is a subtle transmitter of Shinto tradition, in this particular scene she reinforces the idea of *kami*. This is also achieved through her dialog. The manner the grandmother talks about the soot suggests that she too believes they have a spirit or a consciousness by stating that they are probably “discussing” whether to move out. Through her dialogue we can infer that soot are friendly and cause no harm if you are good. She also

²¹⁹ No author given, “Shinto Symbols II,” *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 7 vol. 2 (1966): 19, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30232989>

mentions that when she was young she could see them just as Satsuki and Mei. This goes along the lines that Mei and Satsuki represent the Shinto notion of *makoto no kokoro* what we have characterized as one's ability to be sincere and genuine in one's words and actions. It is a notion that Shinto tradition stresses we must strive to be. It is also something that this film suggests we possess when we are young, (Mei and Satsuki), but tend to lose as we grow older, the (grandmother).

As the viewer we are also somehow guided into taking part in understanding the mysteriousness of the *kami* portrayed in this scene. The components of this particular sequence work just as well to elicit a response from us as relaying the message of *kami*. When Satsuki opens the backdoor and we see the entire room go from pitch black, nothing in the room can be seen, to a gradual lighting of the room, the soot unveiling in their leave objects that make for a kitchen. This is an *aware* moment that makes us the viewer either jump or squeal. It is a moment that even Satsuki goes "ah!" (See Fig. 5)



Fig. 5

There are a few components we can point to in this scene that contributes to the mysterious nuance of *kami* and guides the viewer into feeling this effect as well. First there is a

lack of background music. We can only hear the sound effect of Mei unlocking the door and opening it. She slowly opens it and we are given just an angle view opening, and we see nothing but pitch darkness. The darkness assists for building up to that surprised and unexpected moment. Because of the silence we are able to hear the sound of the soot, which sounds like a flurry of rustling leaves in the wind, before we actually see them this alone inspires a sense of wonder. The movement of the soot, swift and disappearing, is also a factor that stirs amazement. Their black color is dark and accounts for elements that aide in their mysteriousness and elicitation of an emotional response. As the viewer, we are drawn into wondering what the black specks are as well.

The idea of *kami* is further reiterated in yet another scene that involves explicit use of Shinto symbolism. As we mentioned earlier, one of the more frequent and main Shinto symbolisms used in the film is the sacred tree, or *shimboku*. We get an even more exclusive view of the sacredness of this tree and by extension nature, in the scene following Mei's encounter with Totoro. When the father explains to Mei that she has met the "keeper of the forest" (*mori no nushi*) he suggests that they should go and offer proper greetings (*aisatsu*).

The scene cuts to a panoramic view of the country side and in it we get a shot of the Kusakabe's house next to the forest. From this shot we are able to see how small the house is in comparison to the enormity of the forest. The nature that encompasses this scene is once again emphasized through its greenery, its ubiquity, and idyllic characteristics that guide us into appreciating or realizing that nature is beautiful as is. The farming fields are drawn in to remind us of nature's nurturing and productive properties. It is awe-inspiring simply because its existence provides us with the means to exist as well. The characteristics of nature that are employed throughout the film and in this brief shot are done to not only facilitate an emotional

response from us regarding nature, but to also assist in facilitating the idea that nature is a phenomenon and as such should be appreciated and respected.

As the shot pans from the house to the forest we are exposed to another symbolism of Shinto, the *torii*. (See Fig. 6) The *torii* as it is depicted in this scene is used to mark off sacred territory from the secular world. It is also deployed in this scene to emphasize that the characters themselves are walking into sacred territory. We watch as the family enter through the *torii* and walk up a series of stoned steps. From the *torii* we are led into the sacred forest and to the sacred tree which is that of Totoro.



Hurry, let's go.

Fig. 6

The sacred tree is once again highlighted throughout this sequence. The camera pans from the top of the tree until the trunk giving us an idea of the size and depth of this great tree. From this view we are given another symbolism of Shinto, the *shimenawa* that is tied around the trunk of the tree. This rope is a mark of religious consecration used to designate sacred

entities.²²⁰ Attached to the *shimenawa* are *gohei* or *shide* paper streamers. As the family begins discussion on the tree the camera pans from one side of the tree to the other, its branches width spread out to once again emphasize its great size. Shot after shot we are given of the sacred tree. These shots are meant to inspire amazement and are used to emphasize the natural awe-inspiring properties of the tree such as its size, age, beauty, but to also reinforce the idea of nature's sacredness and the existence of *kami*.

The Kusakabe family personify a family that have a respect for tradition and Japanese spirituality. Miyazaki employs this three-minute scene to reinforce the Shinto idea of ritual—giving thanks to the sacred tree that in essence is *kami* under the guise of Totoro whom we consider to be Miyazaki's modern take on *kami*. The function of the Kusakabe family in this scene is to convey the idea of ritual and *kami* in a subtle yet traditional and entertaining fashion. One of the ways this is done is through the character's actions. Mei's action as a character functions to enhance and stir excitement to the idea of *kami*. She does so through her child-like innocent behavior. The scene prior shows her honesty and excitement when describing Totoro to Satsuki and the father and even her disappointment when they laugh at her. Her actions contribute to this mysterious and unbelievable notion of *kami*. Satsuki is also a character that functions to enhance and move forward the idea of *kami* in the plot as she continually points out the giant camphor tree, which also signifies to the audience the important role of the tree. In this scene when Satsuki points to the giant tree, Mei immediately associates it with Totoro and the girls run toward the tree. When they reach the tree the disappearance of the hole Mei fell into also functions to facilitate the mysteriousness of *kami*. Reiterating the idea that *kami* is something not necessarily seen, but felt in this scene the girls express excitement at the thought

²²⁰ No author given, "Shinto Symbols II," *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 7 (1966): 100, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30232989>

of Totoro, we the audience may share in this excitement or be curious to the mysterious nature of Totoro.

The idea of *kami* is also reiterated through the character's dialogue. The father functions to play the older figure, just as the granny, in relaying past traditions to the new generation. He relays Shinto tradition to the girls in a story-book manner. Through his dialogue he states: "Isn't this a beautiful tree?," "its been here since long, long, ago," "back then, man and trees were friends."²²¹ The father highlights the beauty and age of the tree to emphasize his own appreciation for nature and respect and acknowledgement for the long held relationship humans and nature shared. The camera pans out and we get a view of the small family foregrounded against the massive trunk of the camphor tree, again this shot emphasizes the beauty of something so old and ancient and accentuates its sacredness with the *shimenawa*. (See Fig. 7) As the audience we are given a moment to take in the magnificent beauty of the tree in this scene just as the family does. The ritual scene is made complete when the family bows to the tree and say: "Thank you for taking care of Mei," "from this moment on please continue to do so."²²² The family's action of bowing in front of the sacred tree and their dialogue are actions that function to exemplify the Shinto tradition of respect for nature and communication with *kami*. They pay respect to the tree/Totoro because he has taken care of Mei. It is an essential part of this sequence because it emphasizes a necessary process in Shinto, humans rely on *kami* to protect, provide, and guide them in life, in return humans give thanks by paying homage to *kami* through ritual, dances, prayers, and simply through the cultivation and caring for nature, not destroying or taking advantage of nature. Humans must cooperate with nature. This is a necessary cycle in Shinto to maintain the harmonious relationship humans share with nature. Another element used

²²¹ *My Neighbour Totoro*. DVD. Directed by Miyazaki Hayao. 1988; Japan: Toho Company, 1988.

²²² *My Neighbour Totoro*. DVD. Directed by Miyazaki Hayao. 1988; Japan: Toho Company, 1988.

in this scene that we can point to occurs right at the end as the family races back home. As Mei runs to catch up with Satsuki and the father her hat flicks right off when she passes underneath the branch of the camphor tree. She looks up and around and grabs her hat and continues to run. The use of this simple gesture we suggest coincides with the idea of *kami* watching over Mei. It is done to signal to the audience that Mei is not alone the presence of *kami* is near.



Fig. 7

Throughout this entire sequence Miyazaki has employed the use of character interaction and dialogue, the setting of a wooded enclosed forest, explicit and repeated use of the camphor tree, the *torii* gate, *shimenawa*, explicit Shinto symbolism, the ritual, are all components associated with Shinto. This is enhanced further with the music that plays throughout the entire scene. It has a calming and soothing ring to it and is employed during moments when the children interact with Totoro or the idea of Totoro is present. These are moments of happiness, excitement, or wonderment. In remembering that *aware* is any immediate emotion and we posit the existence of *kami* is essentially determined by *feeling*, when we feel we know *kami*. Our reaction to the subtle nuance of Shinto ideals enforced through this scene is our entry way to the idea of communion with the divine that is supported through the components within this scene in

which we may be inclined to have a sense of nostalgia or we may be humbled by the simplicity and beauty of Shinto ritual.

Although this scene may be typical of Japan's landscape and cultural milieu Miyazaki did not have to employ the use of this particular scene, but he does so because it moves the plot forward and it immediately follows after Mei's encounter with Totoro once again associating Totoro to the idea of *kami*. In addition its employment situates Miyazaki's work around the idea of *kami* and Shinto spirituality. As the viewer we are exposed to the ideals of Shinto in a way that is simple, subtle, and enjoyable without having to necessarily comprehend Shinto rationally or intellectually.

Nature

Nature is an essential and impressive dynamic element in *My Neighbour Totoro*. We will illustrate through the beauty of nature as it is richly detailed and aesthetically portrayed throughout the film. The efficacy of nature is captured in "empty moments" of reticence; it is the backdrop during encounters of surprise and bewilderment; provides the scenic atmosphere for playing and having fun; and is present during sorrowful moments of worry. This implies, for us that the use of nature is not only something beautiful to look at and appreciate in the film but alludes to its important role in Shinto. Nature in *Totoro* provides for us the overall setting and places us within the world of *Totoro*. We are taken into this sacred, yet magical realm in which our view of something as subtle and simple as nature is transformed into something spectacular and awe-inspiring. Nature as we will illustrate is sacred and a quintessential part of the community.

With that said, in this section we will be looking at scenes that focus on the setting, aesthetics, and sacredness of nature in *Totoro*. We begin our analysis by looking at the opening

sequence, what we will consider as the establishing shot for our overall setting of *Totoro*. For this sequence, the components of natural imagery, colors, and music will be highlighted. We will analyze their functionality that allow for us to feel as though we have transported into the world of *Totoro*.

Right on the onset of the film our attention is caught at the wide-screen shot of the vivid landscape. The green fields stretch across the screen and the blue sky is akin to a blue sea, vast and open. The moving truck appears small as it is set against the grand landscape. It ticks across the screen moving at a mediocre pace. While there does not seem to be anything too particular about this scene, for the colors used are all natural colors of the earth; hues of green for the trees, fields, and grass; a gradation of blue as it fades into white for the clouds; earthy browns for the fields and dirt paved roads. These colors are simple and ordinary. But it is with the simple and ordinary that makes this scene worthwhile. The realism employed through the use of color depicts the nature setting of *Totoro* like no other.

Nature in *Totoro*'s world is simple but it is thriving and alive. The fields and trees are green a natural color, but a color we generally associate with plants to mean life, health, and happiness. Thus, the forests of *Totoro* are alive, in abundance, and well. The great clear blue sky, its blue stillness is calming; its clearness is purity and represents a world of cleanliness. We are given a view of this nature, scene after scene. Even the moving truck, its mediocre pace accentuates a carefree, peaceful, and to some extent almost surreal atmosphere. We the viewer are somehow captivated through the music, the colors, the rendering of the natural imagery to feel something. We are tempted to close our eyes and think of a world not so different from our own. The setting of *Totoro* is rendered so ordinary and simple that we are led to associate it with our own world. Even through animation, the rendered beauty of nature, its brightness and clarity

allows us to respond to it as if it was an actual day in our time. The beauty of things, the beauty of art, real or not, makes us respond in such a way. The opening sequence is articulated in a manner that we are able to have an emotional response to the setting of *Totoro*. While the image is not real, our response *is* real. In viewing this sequence we are made to see nature in its most simple and ordinary fashion, but it is in this fashion that nature thrives.

Although the aesthetics of nature is made explicit throughout the film it is made more apparent in empty moments. For our purposes, empty moments are brief moments in the film when we are given the opportunity to pause and reflect on what is portrayed in the scene. The empty moments in *Totoro* are subtle, but provide one with an entry way into experiencing *aware* simply because it is a beautiful moment. After the opening sequence, we get our first shot of an “empty moment.” (See Fig. 8) In this particular empty moment the camera is focused on a shot of a small stream of rushing water. The water is flowing in a downward motion along a bed of rocks. It is a shallow stream but its clarity reflects the cleanliness as the sun gleams down upon it. The sun’s brightness reflects against the rocks. Although this scene only lasts for a few seconds its image allows us to contemplate the beauty of nature in a most simple and unobtrusive way.



Fig. 8 & 9

A second empty moment occurs in the film right after Mei's encounter with Totoro, a key scene that we will discuss later in this chapter. (See Fig. 9) In this empty moment we are given a point of view that places us between two plants and allows us to look out beyond, to view again, the lush green fields and trees, and blue sky. On one of the plants a snail listlessly climbs up a stalk. The listless crawl is almost as though time as slowed. The snail, a tiny specimen that we seldom think about and rarely notice appears large from this view. We are made aware of its presence from its magnified size. From this scene we are made to view this aspect of nature, to recognize that even the tiniest things of nature are alive and have an existence. Nature is alive, precious, beautiful, and endearing. As humans, like this snail, we too are but a tiny specimen in this great big world. And like this snail, we do not live outside of nature, we are not above it, and we are not without it. We need nature to thrive, like this snail we thrive because of nature. It provides for us the means to do so.

To illustrate, let us refer to a harvesting scene that takes place in *Totoro*. In this scene, Mei and Satsuki are rummaging through the corn fields, gathering corn with the granny. Later in the scene we see that they have gathered an assortment of vegetables: green beans, eggplants, tomatoes, and cucumbers. A couple of the tomatoes and cucumbers are placed in a woven basket that is then soaked in a small stream of cold fresh water surrounded by a fauna of plant life. The granny removes the freshly picked, cold vegetables and the girls enjoy their afternoon snack of the fresh cucumbers. This scene is illustrative of the bounties nature provides us humans with. Like plants, animals, and other natural life we need nature to grow and thrive. Nature in itself is a phenomenon. It is something that replenishes our energy, our bodies and by extension our minds. We may relate this to the life-generating and life-sustaining properties of *musubi*, the basis of all life and "glue" that connects all things together. Manifesting itself has phenomena of the natural

world that is as *kami*. We are in this light somatically and by extension psychologically tied and reliant to nature. This represents not only the sacredness of nature but one of the communal aspects of nature. Nature provides for us a means to continue living and as such makes for the community that Shinto stresses in which humans are bound to nature and by extension *kami*.

The sacredness of nature in *Totoro* is illustrated in a number of ways. One of the ways we suggest Miyazaki depicts the sacredness of nature is through the rendering of Totoro's dwelling. Totoro's dwelling is an embodiment of nature situated within the camphor tree—what we have suggested represents *shimboku* and is an essential component Miyazaki uses throughout the film. In a scene following a chase sequence Mei falls down a hole and through a dark hollowed tunnel within the camphor tree. The camera follows Mei as she stumbles out of the dark tunnel and into a lightly lit mossy area. She is situated atop soft patchy clumps of moss and is surrounded by fluttering butterflies. Bewildered from the fall, Mei looks around her surroundings. Taking Mei's point of view, the camera tilts upward along the moss covered rooted walls to a large opening, viewing out to the camphor tree. The scene switches back to a wide-shot view of Mei looking upwards at the large opening. From this shot Mei appears tiny. The use of nature that embodies this scene is fantastical and while it is within Mei's world it gives us the impression that Mei has entered another realm, a sacred realm.

The sacredness of nature in this scene is encapsulated in a few components. First, we have the sound of silence when Mei initially enters into the mossy dwelling. The silence within this scene, we suggest, is similar to the type of silence you get upon entering a cathedral, a temple, a shrine, or any space that may inspire mysterious or an awe-inspiring feeling. The silence is followed by a series of chimes and “ah’s” similar to incantations or spiritual meditations that further enforces the notion of sacredness within this dwelling of nature.

Secondly, the location of the dwelling itself while within nature, is out of the ordinary, unexplainable, and beyond anything human-made. Its size is great and reflects its age and alludes to a profoundness of the inhabitant of the dwelling. Its depth made apparent from the wide-shot angle of Mei.

Thirdly, the lighting of the dwelling from the large opening, while dimly lit, is focused, beaming down to give off enough light that gives a warm radiance to the location. Again this may remind one of stained glass windows or skylights in a cathedral. This warmth is further accentuated by other natural things employed in this scene. The soft, patchy moss surrounding the dwelling that broke Mei's fall is cushiony and comforting and the fluttering butterflies, one of nature's gentlest creatures, all partake in creating a non-threatening, peaceful, and gentle atmosphere. The use of nature to demonstrate a sacred space is exemplified by Totoro's dwelling. Totoro lives in the camphor tree his home is within nature, not a construct outside of it. In other words, there is no separation from this world and the sacred.

Mei's entrance into the dwelling is what some scholars refer to as entering into the liminal realm. According to Boyd and Nishimura, the liminal realm is a space that is neither here nor there but is a required passage in order for one to be "sensitized" to the presence of *kami*.²²³ In order to be sensitized to the presence of *kami* one must abandon one's old self and "experientially" move from the "mundane and everyday world" through a liminal space returning as a *restored* person.²²⁴ Yet, in understanding this, in the context of this scene we can suggest the hole Mei enters is *within* the great tree and therefore of this world. The dwelling, the "realm" is not a separated space that is neither here nor there, but represents an overlap between

²²³ James W. Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki's Anime Film 'Spirited Away,'" *Journal of Religion and Film* 8, no. 2 (October 2004), <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol8No2/boydShinto.htm>

²²⁴ Boyd and Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives."

the human and *kami* world. Mei's entrance through the hole can therefore be considered a marker, an example of a holographic entry point. The hole is used to mark the specific, the sacred, just as a *torii* would. Furthermore, Mei is different that her character does not need to pass through a liminal realm in order to be “sensitized” she is in fact, an example of someone whose sensitivity is still intact. It is for this very reason she is able to enter through the hole, the sacred marker and meet with Totoro in the first place. That is to say, come into communion with *kami*. We will illustrate with our next scene, Mei's meeting with Totoro is that of *shinjin-gōitsu*.

With that said, our next key sequence depicts Mei's first encounter with Totoro. This sequence takes place after Mei's stumble into the dwelling of Totoro. Mei approaches, out of curiosity, the gray furry tail of Totoro. She reaches out to the tail and pets it surprised by its texture: soft, furry, and squishy. She continues to poke at the tail until it moves and brushes up against her face. Tickled by this Mei is immediately filled with excitement hugs and jumps on the tail causing Totoro to move and change his sleeping position and in the process Mei winds up on Totoro's belly. After a few nose tickles and an exchange of roars Mei finds herself conversing with Totoro. The sequence ends on a warm note as Mei and Totoro comfortably fall asleep in each other's company. The sound of a string ensemble begins to play tenderly as the camera zooms out and we are given an endearing overhead view of Mei sleeping on Totoro's belly, surrounded by nature's blooming flora and butterflies.

As a main character, Mei is an essential component in *Totoro*. Her function as a character serves many purposes. She is a character that helps facilitate the idea of *kami*. In relation to this she functions to depict the human relationship with *kami*. That is to say, Mei and Satsuki are characters that function to symbolize humans. Their actions, appearance, experiences, and feelings are dynamics that we too can relate to in varying degrees. Because of this their roles and

actions to some extent have the possibility of influencing our own. Mei's interaction with Totoro is one of the ways we are led to find this scene humorous and endearing. She herself assists in eliciting an emotional response of *aware* from us through her role as an impressionable young child. Her curiosity and excitement is conveyed through her actions, her wide-eyed facial expressions, and shrieks of happiness. When Mei roars loudly in response to Totoro we are surprised, astonished, and may find it funny that a small child could possess such powerful vocals. (See Fig. 10) The drawing style of Mei such as her oversized mouth, her child-like voice, and the vibrating of the camera to create a rumbling effect as Mei roars assist in the evocation of these feelings. Of course for Mei she is only mimicking Totoro but her action surprises even Totoro. Her actions such as tickling and roaring are humorous attempts at communicating with Totoro. But they are also actions used to convey Mei's innocence and naivety. Mei is rendered in this manner in order to show the pure and honest characteristics necessary for an encounter with *kami*. As we've stated earlier Mei is a character that is already sensitized to the reception of *kami*. Mei is like any four-year old child, she is young, impressionable, and naïve.²²⁵ In this scene she is rendered as curious, playful, and unafraid when encountering Totoro. Yet, she is also depicted as a child that is innocent, endearing, honest, and sincere. Mei tries to do good even if it causes her to get into trouble along the way as when she runs away to Shichikokuyama Hospital to give an ear of corn to her mother. She does so because she believes the corn will help her mother get better, but she forgets about her own well-being. Mei possesses a genuine sincerity in her thought and action. Mei in other words, is the character representation of a human that epitomizes the notion of *makoto no kokoro*. And in order to be receptive to *kami*'s

²²⁵ McCarthy, *Miyazaki Hayao Master of Japanese Animation*, 124.

presence one must exude this principle of Shinto. This is why Mei and later Satsuki are able to meet Totoro.



Fig. 10

Totoro is a character that functions to represent *kami*. His home is the great camphor tree, a *shimboku* and allows us to associate him with the sacredness of *kami*. But his appearance also assists in this interpretation. He possesses a heartfelt, magnificent, and powerful presence. Like his dwelling Totoro is massive in size and awe-inspiring. His appearance can be described as a fusion of the many animals of this world. He is neither bear nor raccoon but has whiskers that could belong to a cat; claws that could be a koala's; and a smile as wide as a crescent moon. He is a strange and puzzling entity that can make the winds howl with a roar and the ground to shake with a stomp—awe-inspiring actions and characteristics. Totoro is all these things because he is *kami*. He is the *kami* of the giant sacred tree and *mori no nushi*, keeper of the forest. And as a *kami* he is powerful, his presence is to be acknowledged and respected.

We are through this sequence mesmerized by the powerful yet, gentleness of *kami* and awe-struck by Mei's own fearlessness towards Totoro. As the viewer we are guided into comprehending the relationship Totoro and Mei share. Mei sleeping on the gentle giant's belly is reminiscent of a child sleeping in the comfort of a loved one. She is surrounded by the beauty of

nature. It is a beautiful and comforting moment that Mei experiences with Totoro. (See Fig. 11)

We are made to understand this through the visual and aural components within this sequence. As the scene ends and the camera zooms out we get another entry way into *aware*, our hearts stir at this beautiful shot of nature it is accompanied by the soft string ensemble that creates for this scene to be all the more endearing and comforting. The beauty of nature fills the whole frame with gradient shades of green and blooming flowers in gentle pastel shades of yellow, white, blue, and purple. The blue butterflies continue to flutter and the warm radiance of sunlight beams down on both Totoro and Mei. These components create for the non-threatening setting of Totoro's abode; the blooming flowers and fluttering butterflies all assist in creating an atmosphere within this particular scene that makes us feel reassured. This moment can be categorized as *shinjin-gōitsu*. It is both a spiritual and aesthetic experience and occurs when "one approaches the other with the "sincerity and purity of one's heart (*makoto no kokoro*); there is a "deep sense of mutual relation" between a person and nature, Totoro is an entity of nature and Mei being able to fall asleep soundly with Totoro expresses her level of *makoto no kokoro*.²²⁶

(See Fig. 12)

We are through the creativity of animation able to visualize the spiritual communal relationship of human with the sacred. Through this visualization we are at least able to contemplate and if we are sensitive enough to even feel what it would be like to come into contact with *kami*. This scene is illustrative of the human relationship and understanding (Mei) that the divine or sacred exists manifested in the form of Totoro. It is also illustrative of the gentle and nurturing aspects of nature as it is solidified through the sense of community between Mei and Totoro or the sacred community between human and *kami*.

²²⁶ Boyd and Nishimura, "Shinto Perspectives."



Fig. 11 & 12

Community

The sense of community is another integral theme of *Totoro*. The sense of community can be understood as a shared perception of similarities, understanding, and the cooperation of one another to achieve a mutually beneficial and interdependent relationship that fosters a feeling of being part of a bigger dependable and stable structure.²²⁷ The sense of community is portrayed within the farming village and it is most poignantly expressed within scenes of spiritual communion as we illustrated with Mei's first encounter with Totoro. A sense of community is an integral part of our livelihood as emphasized within *Totoro*. It stresses a togetherness of a people and provides for closeness with spirituality and nature. Community makes us aware of one another, teaches us to care for one another, and to respect one another. For Shinto this applies not just to community of people but to the community of nature as well as the spiritual.

We are made aware of a sense of community from several scenes involving the farming village. In these scenes the components of character interaction play a vital role in depicting the sense of community within the farming village of *Totoro*. The grandmother as we will illustrate

²²⁷ Sarason, S.B. *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974) 157.

is one of the more essential components in enforcing the idea of community within the farming village. Her interaction with the family before and after the family moves to the farming village is vital. And her subtle presence plays an important role throughout the film in her relationship with the children, especially Satsuki.

To begin, let us recall the harvesting scene we mentioned earlier, this scene involves the community of both people with nature. Nature assists in bringing people together through its edible treasures. (See Fig. 13) The grandmother and the girls work together and share in their wholesome rewards. And during the school scene when Mei wants to be with her sister Satsuki there is no hesitation on the part of the teacher or the other children to let Mei stay with Satsuki for the duration of the class. There is an understanding on the parties that Satsuki's mother is ill and that they should all work together and be kind and cooperate in helping out another member of the community who is in need. While these scenes are short in length and play minor roles in the overall film their employment within the film are significant in order to exemplify a sense of community within the small farming village.



Fig. 13

One of the more explicit scenes involving community of the farming village concerned the search for Mei. After receiving a telegram from Shichikokuyama hospital there is an

overwhelming sense of worry and fear from Mei and Satsuki regarding the well-being of their mother. Mei takes it upon herself to do what she believes will help their mother get better and will help her older sister as well. Determined, Mei runs away with the ear of corn to Shichikokuyama hospital but gets lost along the way.

The search for Mei takes place during dusk just before the night begins to settle in. As in all scenes of Totoro the component of nature is the foremost part of the setting. In all scenes it is ever present, but in this particular scene nature's presence is a reminder that darkness will soon fall making it harder to find Mei. The shades of dusk, pinks, oranges, greys, purples, and blues reflect a somber atmosphere accompanied by the solemn playing of wind instruments that once again partake in reflecting the mood of this scene. Nature's sky is soothing yet ever pressing. As the viewer we are guided into feeling the sense of urgency and desperation of Satsuki as she searches for Mei (See Fig. 14).



Fig. 14

Fortunately, Satsuki is not alone in this search. Everyone in the farming community is searching for Mei as well. The search is heightened when a pink sandal similar to Mei's is found in a nearby pond. The men of the village sweep the pond searching for any signs of Mei. When Satsuki gets word of this she fears the worst for her little sister. But when Satsuki reaches the

nearby pond she confirms that the sandal does not belong to Mei. Relieved, the search continues and Satsuki looks to the camphor tree.

Satsuki as we stated earlier is a character that functions to symbolize a human. As such she is a character that we may be able to relate to in one way or another. Satsuki is a cheerful and boisterous ten year old girl. She is the older sister of Mei. As the eldest she takes on an array of responsibilities. Taking care of Mei is undoubtedly the most important of responsibilities. In many ways she is forced to take on the responsibilities given to her by circumstance with a father who is a university professor and a mother who is staying in a hospital. Satsuki in this view is a character that portrays a child that is struggling to understand her own situation while trying to take care of her little sister. Satsuki is someone who must endure the responsibilities of an adult although she is a child herself. When she learns about her mother's postponement she struggles with her own emotions as she tries to keep calm for Mei's sake but cannot help but cry before the grandmother. Through her actions she reflects the responsible older sister: making breakfast and lunches for the family; scolding Mei for falling asleep in the middle of nowhere; gently explaining to Mei about the mother's postponement even though she herself is still trying to come to terms with it. When Mei gets lost, Satsuki becomes overwhelmed with fear and worry.

During this sequence we are made to empathize with Satsuki. Satsuki is different from Mei because she is the elder sister that takes on more responsibilities and stress than Mei. She is a child that is responsible, earnest, and innocent and maintains a genuine sincerity through her words and actions. She always means well, but has her share of unforeseen circumstances. She is as we've mentioned earlier another character that exudes the Shinto principle of *makoto no kokoro* and as such she is able to meet *kami*. As a child that possesses *makoto no kokoro* she is able to seek out and meet Totoro.

In this particular scene community of people is portrayed through the bonds of compassion and humanity during the search for Mei. The farming community is small, but their dependability on one another is immeasurable. A sense of community is illustrated through Satsuki's relationship with the grandmother and Kanta. The grandmother and Kanta rally the community to help search for Mei. These two are but a small part of the community but they play a major role in assisting Satsuki and the Kusakabe family overall. The grandmother as stated earlier is a character with multiple functions. She is a character that depicts a caretaker assisting Satsuki with household chores and takes care of Mei while Satsuki is at school, but she is also there as a consoler to comfort the girls, especially Satsuki during turbulent uncertainties concerning their mother and Mei. Satsuki relies heavily on the grandmother when her mother and father are absent. And the grandmother relies on Kanta whom in his own way also greatly assists Satsuki. He is there to relay urgent messages and does not hesitate to assist Satsuki when she needs to phone her father. He gives her his umbrella when he sees her with Mei taking shelter from the rain underneath a small shrine, but he does so out of his affection for her. Nonetheless, he is also willing to go all the way to Shichikokuyama Hospital for Satsuki during the search for Mei. The close relationship that these two characters share with Satsuki is vital for Satsuki and Mei's well-being.

We learn through this scene that community is necessary between people, neighbours, friends, and family. We must learn from one another in order to live in a peaceful and understanding environment. As exemplified by the grandmother and Kanta they work hand and hand in any situation but come together even more so during a time of need. When people rely on one another they learn to also care for the well-being of one another and to respect one another. Yet, as we come to understand the community of people can only go so far in relying on

each other's ability. When the community of people becomes exhausted people look beyond themselves for assistance. The next scene we will describe of Totoro depicts the necessity of community between humans and *kami*. Satsuki is at a loss, she looks to the great sacred tree for help.

In this pivotal scene after Satsuki confirms that the pink sandal does not belong to Mei, Satsuki rushes off in the direction of the camphor tree. She knows that Totoro is her last hope for finding Mei. She takes a shortcut passed a *torii* and reaches the thicket of bushes and pleads to them for the sake of her sister for passage to Totoro's dwelling. Once again the components of the camphor tree and the *torii* remind us that Satsuki is entering sacred territory and associates Totoro with the idea of *kami*. She too is able to crawl through and go through the same dark tunnel, the sacred marker, Mei had also stumbled upon. Satsuki tumbles onto the soft and bouncy belly of a sleeping Totoro. When Satsuki begins to cry, Totoro's eyes become large with concern. He gently places his paw behind her, grasps her, sits up, smiles at Satsuki and gives a loud roar. Totoro then leaps up through the large opening runs up the camphor tree in a comedic manner until he pops out on the very top of the great tree (See Fig.15 & 16). Still holding onto Satsuki he takes in a deep breath and gives out a ferocious roar. The sound of upbeat playful music begins to play and Satsuki can see from afar the cat bus approaching. In the façade of wind the cat bus rushes past trains, between people, over the farming lands, and across the pond until it reaches Totoro and Satsuki (See Fig. 17) The cat bus opens his door to let Satsuki in. An astonished but reluctant Satsuki looks over to Totoro who reassures her with a smile and a gentle paw to the back (See Fig. 18). She climbs into the cat bus, an interior that is all soft and furry. Totoro waves goodbye and away they go in their search for Mei through the fields and forests,

and on top of electric poles. Satsuki's worries begin to dissipate as the search for Mei turns into an adventure.



Fig. 15 and 16



Fig. 17 and 18

Character interactions are the key components that suggest the communal relationship between human and *kami*. As we've already mentioned the climax of the story, Mei being lost, brings together a community, but it also forces one to seek out a community beyond the human community. We are through this climactic moment made to realize the necessity of the community between humans and *kami* as exemplified through the character Satsuki when she seeks out Totoro as her last hope.

The character interaction between Satsuki and Totoro in this scene is indicative of a community beyond the human realm. Satsuki's plea to Totoro is a prayer for assistance to find her little sister. As we have already established Totoro represents *kami*. He is a sacred entity yet his anthropomorphic attributes allow us to associate him with an entity that also understands the human emotions conveyed by Satsuki. His sleepy eyes grow bigger with concern when Satsuki begins to cry Totoro knows something is wrong. He too can feel and grows concerned for Satsuki's well-being. Although he cannot talk through his gestures Totoro reassures Satsuki. His gentle paw to the back, his embrace, and his cheeks that turn pink when he smiles at her, are anthropomorphic attributes that bring about a sense of community that allow Satsuki to know that everything will be alright, a sense of reassurance that she too can depend on Totoro that he is there for her just as much as the farming community. We know that Totoro is a powerful *kami* he leaps out from his abode with a mighty roar that calls upon another *kami* of the sacred community the cat bus. Totoro's ability to do so reflects his influential role as keeper of the forest, that if anyone can find Mei in this land it is Totoro.

The cat bus is a *kami* that looks like a cat in the shape of a bus. He depicts the notion that *kami* can be everywhere and anything with multiple legs that allow him with ease to sweep across the land. Like Totoro he is unable to talk but through his actions we are able to understand his close relationship with the girls. When he reaches the top of the great tree where Satsuki and Totoro are he welcomes Satsuki with a large smile and with the opening of his door to take comfort in his plush interior. With his assistance Satsuki is able to safely and quickly find Mei. The cat bus assists Satsuki and Mei because he knows they are friends of Totoro that they too are part of the community that he and Totoro share. As such the cat bus cares for the well-being of the girls. In another gesture of assistance after finding Mei he takes them to their mother's

hospital to which they are able to confirm that their mother is fine and brings them back home as well to be reunited with Granny and Kanta.

Recalling that the girls reflect *makoto no kokoro*, they are able to seek out and meet *kami* especially during turbulent times. The actions of Totoro and the cat bus suggest for dependence and assistance *kami* provides to the girls. And it is also through these actions that the children are made to feel a sense of reassurance, safety, and relief from being in the presence of *kami*, from being part of the bigger Shinto community. The girl's interaction with Totoro/ *kami* allows them to have the courage and support to get through the day. This is but one aspect the spiritual community provides for people.

Remembering that in Shinto in order to meet *kami* humans must also reflect the same principle of *makoto no kokoro* just as the girls do. In practicing to reflect *makoto no kokoro* people participate in cultivating their well-being. By extension in reflecting this attitude towards others allows for the cultivation of a community. Through genuine sincerity, having this attitude allows one to reflect the truthfulness and honesty of *kami*. It is an invisible guiding force that is necessary not only during turbulent times but throughout people's livelihood. *Kami* is everywhere and if we are sincere in our words and actions we too can meet *kami*.

In the next few scenes, the idea of community is expressed in a most ordinary but heartfelt manner. The idea of community is integrated in the event of waiting for the bus. Within the next few scenes we will be looking at the events that occur within this sequence that are used to express the idea of community. But we will also note how *aware* moments are integrated in the events to help facilitate the idea of community that we argue this scene expresses. The event itself is a functional component to express the message of community while human and *kami* interaction are key components to move the event forward and carry out the message. Explicit

aware moments occur specifically in this scene in order to fortify Miyazaki's message of community. By having the scenes leave an impression on the audience, in making us respond, Miyazaki instills the message. Miyazaki's technique of integrating normal, ordinary events or situations is chosen to subtly portray a sense of community while purposely rendering them in a manner that elicits a response from the viewer.

The use of an ordinary, common event such as "waiting for a bus" is employed in this scene for a reason. Using ordinary events allows Miyazaki to relate the viewer with the situation. As the viewer when we are able to relate or connect with something familiar to us, generally speaking we are able to empathize with the situation. Waiting for a bus is one of those situations that we can all relate to generally speaking.

Satsuki who is waiting for the bus is joined in line by Totoro. One of the things we can point to that this event helps facilitate is the familiarization of Satsuki with Totoro. Totoro gets in line and scratches his side. We can suggest that Totoro's actions are purposely made to be quite normal and resemble that of something a human would do when getting in line to stand for a bus. Because of this normalcy as the viewer it strikes us as humorous simply because it is Totoro doing the action. For Satsuki the sense of loneliness begins to dissipate because there is someone standing next to her. Although she is surprised and a bit puzzled at who is standing next to her, she resumes her standing position and she and Totoro like two normal people continue to stand in line.

We are then given a moment where the two stand in the rain like normal. Totoro's presence and Satsuki's puzzled facial expression is enough in this scene to cause an *aware* reaction. But there are a few other techniques used in this scene to elicit an *aware* response. For one, Totoro is purposely drawn next to Satsuki. This allows for the viewer to make a comparison

between the two characters. Satsuki has her rain boots and umbrella to shelter her from the rain, Totoro a leaf beret. Satsuki is small and skinny, Totoro giant, round, and wide. Totoro's eyes are wide while Satsuki's eyes are wide-eyed because a big furry creature is standing next to her with a leaf on his head. The way these two characters are portrayed in this empty moment is comical and done for a reason to elicit a response from the viewer.

As we mentioned this event helps familiarize Satsuki with Totoro. When the empty moment ends the two continue to stand in line. Again because this is such a normal situation and Totoro is portrayed to be like anyone else waiting for the bus Satsuki is not afraid of Totoro and calls out to Totoro like she would to someone she knows but is not quite sure if it is them. When Totoro acknowledges her a familiarization with him is established. And at this point any sense of loneliness has been immediately replaced with happiness and excitement. A sense of reassurance knowing now that Satsuki has someone who is with her and part of her familiar community. Totoro's presence in this scene represents assurance and protection. The stable and dependable structure a sense of community provides. In relation to this scene let us reiterate Shinto's notion of *kami*. As Wright states the relationship between humans and *kami* was that of familiarity and friendliness: "*kami* are entities that are not beyond or distant to humans, they are in fact capable of human emotion and accessible to mortal communication, the *kami* were respected and honored, but usually not feared."²²⁸

In the next scene the message of community is further emphasized through an event that involves Satsuki giving an umbrella to Totoro and showing him how to use it. This event is significant for three reasons: (1) to emphasize the human and *kami* relationship; (2) this goes along the lines of the human and spiritual relationship the interrelatedness of humanity, *kami*,

²²⁸ Wright, "Forests and Giant Insects."

and nature (the use of rain a feature of nature to bring together this event); (3) the empty moment could also be another entry point into experiencing *aware*; the use of *aware* is integrated in this scene to assist in the recognition of that sense of community.

After Satsuki is acknowledged by Totoro she hands him an umbrella to keep him from getting wet (See Fig. 19). This gesture is representative of someone from the community caring for another person that is also part of the community. It also represents Satsuki's acknowledgement and appreciation for Totoro. She is happy he is there and Totoro is there for Satsuki's sake. He does not have to wait for a bus. Totoro can roar and the cat bus will appear anywhere and anytime for him. But he waits there with Satsuki because they are both part of the same community. He too cares for her and represents this with his presence alone. Another way this event represents community is the small act of Satsuki teaching Totoro how to use the umbrella and Totoro acknowledging this and learning from Satsuki. This not only fulfills some sort of satisfaction from Satsuki on the part that she is able to help and show Totoro how to use something, but the umbrella itself is functional because it brings together these two entities, it is an item that the two share. The rain functions in facilitating the use of the umbrellas, but its function does not cease there.

The scene cuts to another empty moment and we are given an almost identical shot of the first empty moment we discussed earlier in this scene. However, this time around Satsuki has a smile on her face and she and Totoro are both using umbrellas. This empty shot is yet another moment of experiencing *aware*. The shot may show the two characters using umbrellas under the rain, but it also represents a bond between the two characters, between human and *kami* that is necessitated through a feature of nature, rain. We may be inclined to respond to this empty moment because of the umbrellas, Totoro is a giant and the umbrella only covers just enough of

his head. But this empty moment leaves an impression on us whether we respond to it because it is cute, humorous, or silly we associate it with Satsuki sharing and teaching Totoro how to use an umbrella. (See Fig. 20)



Fig. 19 and 20

Another function of the umbrella is it is an item that makes Totoro happy. It is almost in this sense like a type of offering to the *kami*. Satsuki is giving thanks to Totoro but it is also demonstrative of a supportive act. She is helping him take shelter from the rain just as he is helping her by being present for her. With the umbrella Totoro is able to hear and enjoy the sound of raindrops falling on an umbrella. A sound that he utterly enjoys that even in this scene we are able to experience an *aware* moment. For this scene the only sound that is used is the ambient sound of the rain falling. The silence instilled within this scene is done in order to focus the attention of the viewer on the rain. We are then given a close-up face shot of Totoro. From this position we are able to view how Totoro's facial expressions are drawn in reaction to the raindrops falling on the umbrella.

When the drops hit his umbrella he is at first startled his eyes and body reverberate with surprise. His eyes shift upwards and a few more drops fall. His eyes become wide with glee and he smiles. Again his eyes shift upwards and this time he waits in anticipation for the next

raindrops to fall. The scene switches to a close-up shot of a single raindrop falling from the bristles of a tree. The drop falls and a ricochet effect occurs on the bristles thus causing multiple raindrops to fall. When they do fall and hit his umbrella his eyes sparkle, his smile widens even more, his cheeks turn pink with delight and he cannot contain his excitement (See Fig. 21). The next shot Totoro leaps into the air and lands with a thud Satsuki herself loses her grounding (See Fig. 22). Then we get a shot of a cascade of rain drops falling. They fall causing a rain shower on both Satsuki and Totoro. Satsuki looks on with astonishment at Totoro.



Fig. 21 and 22

Rain plays an important role in this scene. We are exposed to it throughout this sequence, but in this segment rain is especially augmented through Totoro's own actions. The few shots of rain that we are given are employed to show the beauty of the natural phenomenon of rain and are entry points into experiencing *aware*. This scene demonstrates that rain is beautiful as is, it glistens, and the sound it makes as it falls are all natural attributes that inspire awe. Miyazaki uses Totoro to demonstrate that nature and its natural occurring phenomenon such as rain can be mesmerizing and fun, but also beautiful simply because it exists.

Totoro's response to the rain is one that is rendered to be friendly and comical. The reverberation of his eyes and body at the first sound of the rain hitting his umbrella demonstrates

that he feels and has emotions too. By extension then Totoro possesses a heart and a consciousness. His cheeks become flushed with delight makes him expressive without the use of words. Totoro is a *kami* that feels and thinks and expresses his emotions through not just his facial expression, but through his actions his leaping demonstrates his ability to have fun. The emotions that Totoro demonstrates are his way of communicating to Satsuki, and for Satsuki, for both of them, a method into understanding one another. This communicative behavior through emotions that Totoro reflects as a *kami* with Satsuki is fundamental in demonstrating a shared characteristic between the two, similar to the function of the umbrella. This shared behavior binds the community they share and reiterates the interconnectedness of humanity, *kami*, and nature.

Community, then, is expressed through the interpersonal actions between Satsuki and Totoro. The sharing of an umbrella and having fun in the rain are events that facilitate this sense of community and structures community as being beneficial for both parties. Satsuki is happy Totoro is there and Totoro is happy because of the umbrella Satsuki has given him. This is integral part that makes up a community helping one another fulfills satisfaction or happiness on both parties and thus creates for a harmonious relationship.

In relation to all of these components and techniques that we have discussed that create for the message of community. At the same time this entire scene is that of an *aware* moment. It has made an impression on us. As the viewer we too are able to relate to Totoro through his interpersonal actions, his smile, and mannerisms appeal to us. The way Miyazaki has portrayed Totoro in this scene communicates to us the viewer through our emotions. When Totoro leaps into the air we get excited. When he lands back down with a thud, we laugh. Our emotional responses may vary, but we react. We are able to respond to this scene because we respond to

Totoro just as Satsuki does. In having an emotional response to this scene we remember and associate it with the images of sharing, togetherness, friendship, in short these concepts that relate to community.

In our last and final scene we have the opportunity to bring together several elements of Shinto. The idea of ritual and community, the communion of human and *kami*, nature and its life giving properties, and we also have the opportunity to experience *aware*. This scene is a fun and amusing take on conveying elements of Shinto. The scene begins with the totoros circling around the seeds Mei and Satsuki planted. The girls join in and mimic the actions of the totoros and together they are able to grow a giant tree.

The scene uses several components that function to facilitate the idea of ritual and community, of those are the characters. Mei and Satsuki as stated earlier represent humans while the totoros are representations of *kami*. These characters function throughout the film to facilitate the idea of a harmonious relationship humans have with *kami*. In this particular scene this idea is made more explicit through the entertaining event of growing a tree. The girls and the totoros actively participate in what is suggestive of ritual and dance. The totoros initiate the dance and ritual of circling around the buried seeds, but it is not until the girls join them that the seeds begin to sprout at a rapid pace.

Once again a giant tree is the focal point of this scene. Its function is multiple. As Wright contends, the camphor tree's role in *Totoro* is to signify *kami* the tree itself according to Shinto cosmology is vital as it represents the power of productivity and fertility of *kami*.²²⁹ As illustrated several times the tree is a component that appears repeatedly throughout the film. The use of a giant tree, the children, and Totoro in this sequence illustrates the cooperation between

²²⁹ Wright, "Giant Insects and Forests"

humans, nature, and *kami*. The seeds, symbolic throughout the film, are now used to reveal the productive properties of *kami*. The instantaneous sprouting of the seeds that transform rapidly into trees that combine to form one giant tree is illustrative of the productive and fertility power *kami/Totoro* possess. In relation to this, the setting is also a component that cannot be overlooked. This particular scene takes place during the evening and it occurs on a patch of farming land. Farming is associated with the growing of crops, the idea of vegetation and food, life sustaining elements provided by nature yet cultivated by humans. Miyazaki uses this particular setting we suggest to highlight and associate *kami*'s ability and power to provide for humans and the human element, the children, to maintain it.

As the scene continues the camera pans out to a wide-shot view and we the viewer are able to see the girls, the totoros (the smaller versions of Totoro), and Totoro working together (See Fig.23). This scene we can suggest also indicates Shinto's notion of *shinjin-gōitsu* the communion of the human spirit with *kami*. The tree we can suggest is the by-product of this spiritual union of the girls and Totoro. It is used to bring together human and *kami*—it is purposely rendered in a fantastical and beautiful manner that stirs amazement not only for the girls, but the viewer as well. The girl's reaction, their emotional experience from being with Totoro (the emotional experience of *kami*), from the sprouting of the seeds, their reaction is one of “ah!” and happiness, to the final result of achieving a full grown tree, shouts of “hooray!” (See Fig. 24), is indicative of the human and divine worlds coming together harmoniously through an emotional response of *aware*. Human, *kami*, nature work harmoniously together when this occurs nature develops and thrives.



Fig. 23 and 24

As the viewer, we too are able to experience this emotional response of *aware*. We may react similarly either to the girls' reaction or to their actions. Our experience, however, is heightened through the confluence of music, the familiar theme of Totoro plays as soon as the seeds begin to sprout the spontaneity and rapid growth that take the final shape of the tree. And through the different camera angles we are guided not only to visualize the beauty and the amazement of the tree through this scene, but emotionally we feel awe-struck and wonder as the camera pans out to emphasize the growth of the branches from the right to the left of the tree and finally to a shot of the giant tree encompassing over the house. It is truly an amazing site. (See fig.25)



Fig. 25

My Neighbour Totoro may be on the surface level depicted as a children's film. It incorporates the use of nature spirits who can "magically" appear and disappear and the main characters are children. The girls themselves are oblivious to Totoro as being *kami* to them he is but a special friend of the forest. But the real magic of this film is Miyazaki's ability to incorporate themes of Shinto within this work. It was our attempt through our close reading of the functional components to uncover the themes of Japanese spirituality: nature, community, and Shinto symbolism and show how these themes can be realized and emotionally enforced through the mechanism of *aware*. In doing so the ideal-viewer and even the non-ideal viewer could contemplate or experience what it would be like to come into communion with the divine world of Shinto.

Conclusion

The fundamental goal of this thesis was to argue that works of art can engage with the ideologies of their contexts in a variety of ways. I used the notion of *aware* to demonstrate the relationship between Miyazaki's film, *My Neighbour Totoro*, and the values of Japanese spirituality. *Aware*, as a reaction to beauty, is also an experience of the divine. I argue that a spiritual experience can manifest in art. My argument is that *aware* is not just a description of the experience but an understanding and explanation of the *process* that led to a transcendental encounter with the world of the divine. To understand this idea from a Japanese context, we required a sensitive understanding of the religion of Japan, Shinto. I argued that understanding the relationship between humans and Shinto's central tenet, divine entities known as *kami*, became the focal point in understanding the Shinto religion as one that was necessarily felt and perceived. This is because *kami* are existent in all manifestations of nature. Those who are able to respond to the beauty of nature, those things that inspire us, or cause us to be awe-struck, determined our awareness, our sensitivity to things and in essence to feeling *kami*.

Because of this, this thesis posited emotion to be a form of communication between human, *kami*, and by extension the natural world. I then argued that *kokoro*, an apparatus existent in all things, was the component that facilitated this emotional communication between the human and divine. *Kokoro* gave an immediate response that resonated with the awe-inspiring thing.

The immediate emotional response is what we referred to as *aware*. Through our historic research we discovered *aware* was a term used to describe a set of emotions the early Japanese felt upon being visually stimulated by their natural surroundings. They tried to recapture these feelings lyrically through poetry and artistically through art. What they were describing in their

art and poetry we posited was a transcendental experience of coming into contact with *kami*. We then argued that *aware* could be a window in experiencing communion with the world of the divine in a similar manner through a modern work of art, animated film.

I argue throughout that Miyazaki uses highly aesthetic qualities in his films, as formal elements, to reinforce a particular message, that works of art can make us feel, and through this, can bring us into contact with the divine. In this way, Miyazaki's work argues for the continuing importance of both traditional aesthetics and traditional spirituality which, I have shown, the word *aware* ties together. Although *My Neighbour Totoro* was claimed by some not to have any spiritual connotation it was another goal of this thesis to prove otherwise. This also gave my project a concrete means to explain *how* the idea of a spiritual communion was to be accomplished by providing for the reader the visualization needed to contemplate this idea. Drawing from this visualization were the technical components that went into creating the animated film. Of those we argued that Miyazaki used *aware* to facilitate the realization or contemplation of a spiritual encounter by instilling an emotional reaction from the audience at the same time this emotional reaction or response would assist in instilling messages of Shinto by relating what the audience felt to what we argued was depicted in the scene. Of the visual and aural components, I argued that certain components were designed and used functionally to facilitate themes of Shinto spirituality. *Kami* was depicted by Totoro, the overall setting of the film was situated within nature and created in the film an ideal and sacred view of nature, community was subtly intertwined in the plot itself through scenes of everyday activities of the farming community, and the presence of Shinto symbolism alone gave us the starting point to associate *My Neighbour Totoro* with the spirituality of Shinto.

Upon doing the close reading of *My Neighbour Totoro*, by explaining the functionality of characters, character interaction, Shinto symbolism, natural imagery of the setting, we were able to piece together the message of Shinto tenets: the children represented the pure state of *magokoro* which allowed them to come into communion with *kami* who we suggested was Totoro. We illustrated Totoro was *kami* by associating him with the giant camphor tree, the *shimboku*. His visual appearance and awe-inspiring attributes all facilitated the idea that Totoro was *kami*.

One of the main challenges in proving a transcendental experience in *My Neighbour Totoro* was the multiplicity of scenes every scene could in some way appeal to the viewer. The scenes used appealed to me but would they appeal to other viewers in a similar manner especially those that had no prior background to Shinto. Could they still feel an emotion when viewing this scene? If they did, was it powerful enough to illicit a response? Some of the scenes used were my attempt to show a relationship between the children and Totoro. Through this visualization it was hoped that one could see the “communion,” have a response to it, and contemplate for themselves the idea of an encounter with something divine.

With that said, it should be noted that there were a few limitations to this analysis. The use of only one film may restrict the variety of emotions *aware* encompasses. In particular, the use of *My Neighbour Totoro*, a “simplistic” child’s film, it is not a violent or action packed film. Therefore, the level of affectation *My Neighbour Totoro* encompasses in scenes consist mainly emotions of joy, excitement, or happiness versus an animated film of explosions or evil giant monsters attacking the hero, scenes of violence, angst, or anxiety. However, this limitation does not restrict the idea of *aware*, rather it bolsters the idea that *aware* being an emotion based concept that is intertwined in any film, even the most subtle and simple of films that lack special

effects, thrilling scenes, or award winning soundtracks has the ability to affect us. Another limitation is the analysis is based on my own personal emotions. What I felt and what led me to feel is entirely my own and may not be conducive with what others feel. Yet this supports the idea that *aware* cannot be limited to a single emotion, such as sadness. As intellectual creatures humans respond to different things with varied emotions. Therefore, the analysis took into account the “ideal viewer” one that was familiar with Shinto, Japanese culture, aesthetics, and history. Yet as this thesis tried to prove through the components of the film, even the non-ideal viewer could be guided into feeling and contemplating some idea of the world of the divine.

This project has illustrated that *aware* remains an important aspect to Japanese culture. We pointed out that emotion is a fundamental part in experiencing Japanese spirituality and that while other scholars had pointed out the aspect of Shinto spirituality in *My Neighbour Totoro* by focusing on the visual components we were able to through an explanation of the functionality of both visual and aural components to showcase an aspect of the film through an emotional dynamic. In pointing out the emotionality works of art encompass we discovered that Shinto spirituality in *My Neighbour Totoro* can also be realized through feeling. As the viewer watching the film unfold we may only view the film as two girls having an adventure with a friendly, furry, nature spirit known as Totoro. In uncovering the multi-dimensional layers of aesthetics, emotion, and spirituality in *My Neighbour Totoro* we discovered there was a lot more to this seemingly child’s film.

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