
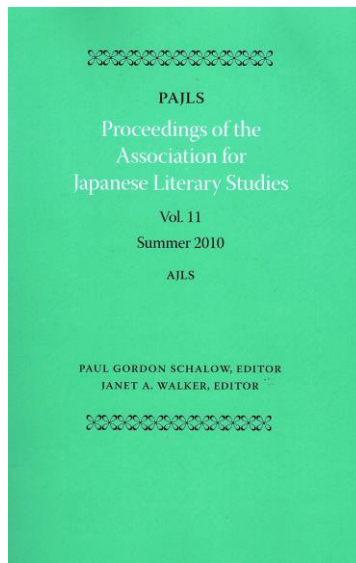


“The Garden and the Sky: Gender and Space in the  
Films of Miyazaki Hayao”

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# The Garden and the Sky

## Gender and Space in the Films of Miyazaki Hayao

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Space and place and our senses of them . . . are gendered through and through.

—Doreen Massey

Miyazaki Hayao, Japan's greatest animation director, and arguably the world's greatest living animator, is known for a number of trademark elements that recur constantly in his films—exhilarating flying scenes, lavish evocations of nature, a consistent use of fantasy, and a privileging of female characters as independent agents of their own lives. Although all of these elements are important, perhaps the one most distinctive to Miyazaki is his famous flying scenes, among the most iconic and singular aspects of his work. With the exception of *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononokehime*, 1997), and his most recent film *Ponyo* (*Gake no ue no Ponyo*, 2008), every Studio Ghibli production by Miyazaki has contained at least one scene of flight that is often the climactic moment in the film. These scenes are literally and emotionally soaring, engaging both protagonists and viewers in ethereal ballets of weightlessness, allowing the audience to explore one of the most basic of human fantasies—the power and exhilaration of achieving altitude. Even more distinctive to Miyazaki's work is the fact that so many of these flying scenes involve female protagonists: the young witch Kiki weaving through the sky on her broom, Princess Nausicaa skillfully manipulating her glider, Dola the pirate leader casting off from the crumbling flying castle Laputa—each one memorable in her own way.

Miyazaki's use of female protagonists in the sky is truly intriguing, a feminist occupation of a space that has in the twentieth century been considered to belong to the masculine realm, at least in the West. As the title of the 1965 film *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* so colorfully expresses, technology, masculinity, and flight seem to connect seamlessly in Western thought, rendering a figure such as Amelia Earhart important precisely because of her uniqueness.

Rather than the masculine expanse of the sky, women are usually associated with domestic interiors, literally house-bound.<sup>1</sup> For women in traditional Western culture, if they were associated with the outside at all, the preferred realm of existence was the garden, starting as early as the *Song of Solomon* with its evocative line “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse,”<sup>2</sup> or even going back to the Garden of Eden—although it should be noted that Eve in Eden has considerably more agency than many of her female heirs. As we shall see, both sky and gardens have different associations in Japanese culture, and this is perhaps one reason behind Miyazaki’s insistent positioning of women in the sky. Gardens also play a significant role in Miyazaki’s films, although here too the director occasionally defamiliarizes them by bringing a potentially masculine element into this conventionally feminine space.

Why are these two *mise en scènes*—the sky and the garden—so important to Miyazaki, and is there any element that connects the two? While preparing for this lecture I happened to be reading a delightful novel called *The Baron in the Trees* by the Italian fantasist Italo Calvino. *The Baron in the Trees* is quite a simple story, virtually summed up by its title. Set in the eighteenth century, it concerns a young aristocrat who suddenly one day decides to abandon his family and live the rest of his life on top of the trees that populate his family’s densely wooded estate. He never sets foot on the ground again, and at the end of his life is said to rise off into the sky in a hot air balloon.

Reading the novel while working on Miyazaki, a question occurred to me that relates to this presentation. The question was, “Could there be a Baroness in the Trees?” It seemed to me that this would be unlikely in Western literature, simply because, as I have suggested, higher altitudes seem to be largely reserved for men (with the important exception of witches in European folklore, whose brooms are conventionally depicted as skimming above roofs and treetops). Furthermore, as feminist criticism has made us aware, the male has consistently been the default gender position. When I think of Miyazaki, however, I cannot help but imagine that, almost certainly, were he to create a cinematic version of the novel, it is likely that the story would indeed become “The Baroness in the Trees.” While living in the treetops is not the same as flying through the sky, similar motifs of power, freedom and agency are invoked in the Calvino text, that, in Miyazaki’s world, are often connected with flying female characters.

Furthermore, trees also perform important functions in Miyazaki’s work. *Princess Mononoke*, set in the fourteenth century, when forests still covered much of Japan, begins with the ominous cracking sound of trees being felled by a possessed creature. More positively, one of the most memorable scenes in another work

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of women, architecture, and the city see Rendell 2000, “Gender, Space,” pp. 101–107.

<sup>2</sup>*Song of Solomon* 4:12, Bible (King James translation).

of Miyazaki's, *My Neighbor Totoro* (Tonari no totoro, 1988) and one that is also connected with flying, begins with a vision of a gigantic tree literally mushrooming into the sky from a garden that two little girls have planted, just before they take flight into the heavens on the furry woodland god, Totoro. In this case the tree acts as a mediator/connector between sky and earth. *Totoro* also contains an earlier sequence in which the girls and their father bow before a gigantic camphor tree, whose sacredness is emphasized by the Shinto rope tied around it. Perhaps most significantly, in Miyazaki's film *Castle in the Sky: Laputa* (Tenkū no shiro Laputa, 1986), the massive weapon of destruction that constitutes the flying city of Laputa is destroyed, to reveal inside it an enormous airborne tree, roots and all. Trees not only suggest natural or sacred power, in contrast to technology, but they may also be seen as hermaphroditic, their phallic trunks connected to feminine roots, another symbol of mediation.

*Laputa* is a film in which both male and female protagonists are skyborne, but it is still the case that flying women are generally more privileged throughout Miyazaki's oeuvre. Why this is so is a question worth asking. Miyazaki's own stock answer is simply that female characters are more interesting, because they are unusual. Placing female characters in what are conventionally viewed as male occupations—such as Nausicaa's exploring the post-apocalyptic wasteland in the eponymous movie *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* (Kaze no tani no Nausicaa, 1984), or Dora's captaining of the sky pirates in *Castle in the Sky: Laputa* defamiliarizes hackneyed film tropes and contributes to a fresher perspective.

It is also true that Japanese culture contains some important examples of women and the sky, most notably the beloved tenth-century court tale *Taketori Monogatari* (The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter) and the famous sixteenth-century Noh play *Hagoromo*, both of which privilege women whose powers are enhanced through their associations with the upper sphere. *Taketori* tells of a bamboo cutter who adopts a beautiful baby girl he finds among bamboo nodes. After he and his wife have raised her to adulthood, she suddenly announces that she is actually a moon princess who must join her people. Returning to the moon, she leaves behind a number of discontented earth-bound suitors, including the emperor. While it is arguable how much agency the moon princess actually possesses, it is clear that her heavenly origins give her the power of unavailability to the male, even to the emperor. *Hagoromo* also plays on the motif of the unavailable female but adds an aesthetic dimension. In this case the sky figure is a heavenly being who has left her magical feathered robe on the shore of the Japanese seacoast, where it is found by a fisherman. Without her robe, the angel cannot return to the sky and will decay until she dies, but knowing this, the fisherman still refuses to return the robe. Ultimately the angel promises to dance for him if he gives it back, and the last part of the play consists of her dance up into the sky wearing her feathered robe. In this evocative scene, woman and sky are woven together through the motif of the dance, giving us a glimpse of sublime Otherness usually not available to mortal men.

The motif of women and the sky is not a new one, therefore, in Japanese culture but it is still intriguing that Miyazaki pursues this vision so strongly. I would suggest that Miyazaki's consistent privileging of female characters, especially in relation to flight, indicates something deeper than cultural legacies or simply a desire to defamiliarize certain cinematic tropes. Instead, I would hypothesize that, by populating the sky with female characters Miyazaki may be performing a complex form of compensation in regards to both his personal and his country's past. To explore this idea further, it is worth examining the one major Miyazaki work which exclusively privileges male flight, his 1992 film, *Porco Rosso* (Kurenai no buta).

*Porco Rosso* is an action adventure about a former World-War-I pilot so disillusioned with humanity that he has transformed his face into that of a pig and now goes by the name "Porco." Miyazaki originally intended it as an in-flight movie for Japan Air Lines, memorably describing it in an early directorial memo as a "cartoon movie for tired, middle aged men whose brain cells have turned to tofu."<sup>3</sup> In fact, much of the movie is light-hearted and dynamic, as the narrative hinges around Porco's prowess as a flying bounty hunter and involves intense scenes of aerial combat. One can also appreciate the charming interaction among a variety of compelling characters, including a bittersweet almost-romance between Porco and his best friend's widow, the lovely chanteuse Gina, and the growing respect and friendship between Porco and his teenaged female mechanic Fio, whose passion for building planes is only surpassed by Porco's passion for flying them. Fio easily belongs in the long line of Miyazaki's highly competent, slightly boyish heroines but, while she works on planes, we never actually see her pilot one. Atypically for Miyazaki, in *Porco Rosso* only men do the flying.

This is especially true in a scene I would like to examine closely, which occurs towards the end of the film. In this scene the audience sees Porco staying up late preparing for a major aerial battle against another bounty hunter the next morning. Also unable to sleep is Fio, who looks towards Porco and, in the dim light, sees that his face has been transformed back into a human one. But when she calls out to him, it changes back into that of a pig. Fio is unable to sleep so Porco agrees to tell her a story about an occurrence near the end of the war when he and his companions, including his best friend Berlini (Gina's husband), were involved in a vicious dogfight.

"I could no longer feel my hands and feet," he relates. "I thought I was dead . . . I realized I was lost in a cloud prairie." As he reminisces, the film goes back in time and we see him in human form, his little fighter plane emerging from a radiant white cloud. Above Porco's head is another aerial formation, a vast silver cloud streaming across the pellucid Southern European sky. While the young Porco sits mesmerized in his now motionless plane, other planes and pilots rise silently around him, including Berlini. But, unlike Porco's, these planes continue to rise,

<sup>3</sup>Miyazaki 2009, *Starting Point: 1979–1996*, p. 267.

even though he calls out to Berlino to tell his friend that he mustn't go and even volunteers to take Berlino's place. Ultimately Porco and the audience realize that the silver cloud stream above him is actually a vast river of fighter planes—Italian, German, Austrian, and English—carrying their flyers off to some unknown destination where he cannot follow. As he finishes his narration, the scene returns to his hideout, as a dark wave washes up on shore and the narrative shifts back to light-hearted adventure mode once again.

This episode, beautiful, strange, and slightly disturbing, raises some intriguing points. First, it ranges across a broad emotional continuum that includes yearning, loss, grief and guilt—hardly superficial entertainment. I have suggested in my previous work that *anime* often takes on an elegiac mode, and this is certainly true of *Porco Rosso*.<sup>4</sup> But what is this an elegy for? If we stick to the film's diegesis, it is clear that Porco is lamenting the loss of youth, friendship, life, and humanity itself—as indicated in his decision to take on the features of a pig (a decision pointedly re-emphasized by Fio's brief view of him with a human face). Porco cannot follow his friends to their unknown destination in the sky. The best he can do is make a magical statement about the hideousness of war.

But it is also possible that this episode is suggestive of more than simply Porco's grief, guilt and desire for compensatory self-punishment. While *Porco Rosso* is resolutely *un-Japanese* in setting, protagonists and period (World War I was not a war that Japan was deeply involved in), Miyazaki may also be exploring his own issues and those of his country in relation to World War II. Miyazaki himself was only five years old when the war ended but his father was a director of the family-owned factory that made parts for the Zero fighter aircraft that dominated the skies during the early years of the Pacific War.

Perhaps because of his background or simply normal boyish enthusiasm, Miyazaki from childhood on was fascinated by war, weaponry and the power displayed by them. In a revealing passage from Miyazaki's memoirs, he states, "I grew up very excited about war films and drawing military things all over the place . . . I expressed my desire for power by drawing airplanes with sleek and pointed noses and battleships with huge guns." Lost in admiration for the soldiers, sailors and pilots and "thrilled" by their bravery, the young Miyazaki vicariously leapt into their adventures, an experience that he expresses in many of the visceral battle scenes in his work. But, in an important coda to this reminiscence, Miyazaki concludes with these poignant words, "It was only much later that I realized that in reality these men had desperately wanted to live and been forced to die in vain."<sup>5</sup>

In the young Miyazaki's imaginary world, war and weapons were clearly coded as masculine and powerful, which he expressed in phallic noses and huge guns. But, as his poignant coda intimates, such power was ultimately futile, leading only to "vain" deaths. It is this sense of the futility and vanity of such masculine

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<sup>4</sup>Napier 2001, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, pp. 275–290.

<sup>5</sup>Miyazaki 2009, *Starting Point*, p. 45.

pursuits that leads, I would argue, to Miyazaki's feminization of the sky. The female protagonists who glide, soar, float and otherwise occupy this traditionally masculine realm may be seen as a kind of counter-force to the dead young male flyers of *Porco Rosso*.

Miyazaki is not alone in his creation of a female-occupied space as an alternative to masculine warfare. The Israeli director Ari Folman's animated war film *Waltz with Bashir* (Valz im Bashir) contains a scene of a swimming woman, which is instructive to compare with Miyazaki's flying females. In this scene a group of young Israeli soldiers are on a boat headed towards Lebanon. Although they pretend to be light-hearted, each is uncomfortably aware that they are part of an invasion force and that some may not come home. Alone on the deck at night, one of the soldiers has a bizarre vision of a gigantic nude woman who climbs on board the boat and moves toward him. The next scene is even stranger—the young soldier is lying across the woman's immense crotch as she backstrokes slowly out to sea. Folman's vision of a gigantic woman, both nurturing and sexual who (in dream form at least), saves the soldier from the invasion makes explicit what Miyazaki only metonymically suggests: women can serve as a counter-force to warfare. In Folman's film, it is water that goes from masculine gendered space (the young soldiers carousing on the boat), to female-occupied space, and women's salvatory qualities are explicitly shown in the young soldier riding peacefully on top of the woman's crotch, suggesting a return to the womb.

In *Porco Rosso*, there is no feminine counter-force to rid the sky of its associations with war and death. But an earlier Miyazaki film, the 1985 post-apocalyptic classic *Nausicaa*, clearly suggests its eponymous heroine as a feminine counter-force to war. The viewer first glimpses Nausicaa in a stunning scene of aerial pyrotechnics as she rides the winds in her little glider above the toxic wasteland that used to be the Earth. In this scene she is presented as essentially "owning" the sky—she is alone in it and in control, in contrast to her male friend Master Yupa who, earthbound, is forced to seek Nausicaa's aid to outrun the enormous insect known as the Ohmu. Many other flying scenes in the movie show Nausicaa as at least a good a wind pilot as any of the men.

But one scene in *Nausicaa* can be compared particularly effectively with the one in *Waltz with Bashir*. This episode occurs towards the end of the film, when members of the enemy army have captured a baby Ohmu and are carrying it aerially in order to provoke the vast herd of adult Ohmu to attack. Enraged by and horrified at this wanton cruelty, Nausicaa pursues them in her glider but they ignore her until she literally forces herself on them, jumping from her glider onto the enemy's aircraft. In the moment when Nausicaa prepares to jump, her body occupies the full screen, looming over the men in a way not dissimilar to the nude woman's approach on the deck in *Waltz with Bashir*. Even more overtly, Nausicaa has her arms spread out, taking a pose similar to a crucified figure, evoking the messianic and salvatory functions of her nature that other events in the film bring out as well.

Of course, in this case Nausicaa is saving a gigantic baby insect but, as the end of the film makes clear, her sacrifice ultimately saves her people as well, keeping them from warfare with both the Ohmu and the other humans. In Miyazaki's vision non-humans also deserve salvation, at least as much as does humanity (a point implicitly underlined in Porco's porcine countenance). It is also significant that Nausicaa's sacrifice and resurrection take place literally in the sky, as she is lifted up in the air by the gigantic Ohmu feelers, which revive her from death to the point where she wakes up and walks across the sky, striding through the golden insect stalks in a vision of aerial salvation underscored by triumphant music and the cheers and cries of the crowds below. Miyazaki has noted that the end of *Nausicaa* was created in some haste as a way to "tie up the film," and it should be acknowledged that the ending of the *Nausicaa manga* (Kaze no tani no Nausicaa, 1982–1994), is far more complex and dark. But it is possible to argue that the very lack of conscious thought in putting together the ending shows Miyazaki's instinctive desire to occupy the sky in a positive, indeed, transcendent manner, as if to purge the heavens of the visions of aerial combat that had occupied so much of the previous part of the film.

Not all of Miyazaki's sky scenes are as clearly salvatory or compensatory as the one in *Nausicaa*, but most do suggest a female-centered vision of flight that can be seen as an alternative to male aerial combat. *Castle in the Sky: Laputa*, for example, begins with two contrasting visions of flying. The first is that of men piloting a gigantic airship which is, in turn, attacked by air pirates (captained, intriguingly, by a woman, Ma Dora), leading to a frenzied fight in the sky. The second is of the pirates' objective, the young girl Sheeta, as she floats serenely down to earth, protected from falling by a magic stone. Many commentators have pointed out that Sheeta is relatively unassertive in this film, especially by the standards of Miyazaki's typical heroines. Thomas Lamarre describes her as a "mere resource to be seized."<sup>6</sup> But it is worth noting that Sheeta's actual action (or rather non-action) of serene and quiet floating memorably contrasts with the frenzy of combat around her. As Lamarre says, her body "approximates a technology of light,"<sup>7</sup> but this "technology" is a peaceful one and one that, in the form of the protective stone that allows her to float, has been handed down through the female line.

Two other Miyazaki works, *Kiki's Delivery Service* (Majo no takkyūbin, 1989) and *My Neighbor Totoro* link females and flying in a more active manner and in a way that privileges a specific female flying gaze that again, I would argue, serves to contrast especially sharply with masculine aerial combat and technologizing the sky in general. This female gaze relates to the question of positioning in aerial space. As Jane Rendell points out, "positioning is integral to knowing,"<sup>8</sup> and, I would argue, is integral to power as well. Both *Kiki* and *Totoro* contain flying

<sup>6</sup>Lamarre 2009, *The Anime Machine*, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>8</sup>Rendell 2000, "Gender, Space," p. 107.



scenes with point-of-view shots that emphasize the feminine gaze over the countryside, thus uniting both knowledge and power. They are also essentially non-technological, pacifist gazes, as opposed to a conventional film where the sight of countryside spreading out below a flying vehicle often evokes the possibility of aerial bombing. The flying scenes in *Kiki* are beautiful—a vaguely European-looking countryside opens up below the young witch, as she takes off on her first independent journey to find a place where she can live and take care of herself for a year. Kiki's positioning on her broomstick allows her to gaze down at her world, an implicit assertion of power and control that is underlined by the autonomous point-of-view shot. It is also interesting to note that the males in *Kiki's Delivery Service* are all earthbound. Ultimately, Kiki's flying is resolutely unspectacular, but practical. She survives in her new home by delivering packages around the city on her broomstick, but this very prosaic quality of her flying stands in intriguing counterpoint to more militant uses of the sky.

The aerial gaze of the girls in *Totoro* is even more intriguing. Mei and Satsuki are two extremely ordinary young sisters whose difficult situation, a move to the country and a, presumably temporary, loss of their sick mother to hospital care, is alleviated by their friendship with a magical forest god, an enormous furry creature whom they call a Totoro. Their friendship with Totoro is an empowering one. It leads first to their planting of a garden whose growth they help to foster one moonlit spring night when they, Totoro, and his two miniature totoro companions, perform a ritual dance at the garden's edge. The garden magically begins to spring to life. Seedlings sprout all around them and a giant tree literally mushrooms up in the sky in front of their eyes. The mushrooming tree is evocative of an atomic bomb blast but, as with his femininization of the sky in *Nausicaa*, here too Miyazaki reconstructs a military image into one of nurturing and hope.

After the tree has grown to its full height, Totoro begins to spin around on a giant top that is clearly about to leave the ground and he implicitly invites the sisters to jump on his stomach and join him in flight. Mei, the younger daughter, accedes joyfully while her older sister Satsuki is a little more hesitant, but ultimately they both end up grasping on to Totoro's welcoming stomach as he lifts off in flight above the moonlit countryside. The scene shifts to an ethereally beautiful point-of-view shot of the Japanese countryside, with its rivers and rice paddies opening up in the moonlight to the gaze of the girls and to Totoro. This scene gives the girls not only the gaze but a voice as well, as they lift up their voices to imitate Totoro in a triumphant roar, underlining the impression of power and agency.

*Totoro's* flying scene begins in a garden, and I would like to end this paper with a discussion of the garden in Miyazaki's works. In many ways, the garden is more conventionally coded in Miyazaki's films than the sky. While traditional Japanese gardens (usually designed by men) have an enormous iconic significance in Japanese cultural history, the gardens seen in Miyazaki's works initially seem more conventional, either typically European-style decorative gardens, such as Gina's in *Porco Rosso*, or gardens meant for food and sustenance, as in *Totoro* or

*Princess Mononoke*. In Miyazaki's works gardens are associated with nurturing and renewal, and are usually created by women.

It is interesting to note that medieval Japanese women are depicted as having more agency in the garden than what was traditionally allowed the medieval woman in European art. Mara Miller has pointed out that the medieval or Renaissance European woman is usually pictured as immobile in the garden, surrounded by objects and/ or creatures, "at once idealized and silenced,"<sup>9</sup> the clear object of the male gaze. In contrast, the Japanese woman in art is often depicted *above* the garden, frequently alongside of male visitors.<sup>10</sup> Thus she is positioned to share a dominating gaze, rather than being entrapped within walls and within the male gaze.

Furthermore, as Miller describes, medieval images showed women *writing* in their gardens. Especially popular were depictions of Murasaki Shikibu, the author-ess of the eleventh-century *The Tale of Genji*, itself a work in which women's gardens, and their associations with them, are prominently featured.<sup>11</sup> Murasaki writing in her garden is an active agent, expressing a number of different sides of her character. As Miller says of one such portrait, "[the picture's iconography] suggests the interconnectedness of [Murasaki's] life and her work, reality and imagination, her persona and her achievement . . ."<sup>12</sup>

The girls in *Totoro* are also active agents in their garden. Although helped along by their magical friend, they are the ones who plant the seeds and aid in their flowering, symbolically suggesting that they have gone from dependence on the nurturing of others to being able to participate in their own self-nurturing. This newly born independence is further underlined in the subsequent flying scene when they gaze down at the countryside and find their voices.

Miyazaki's 1997 film *Princess Mononoke* features another version of a garden connected with female agency. This is the garden belonging to Lady Eboshi, the complex, indeed problematic female leader of the fortress town of Tataraba. Lady Eboshi is initially associated with technology, particularly the weaponry that destroys the immemorial balance between the woodland gods and the encroaching humans. In this brief scene, however, we see another side of her, as she guides the male protagonist, Ashitaka through her garden. Significantly, our first view of the garden is ground level—a vision of green plants (not flowers) being brushed by the hem of what turns out to be Eboshi's robe. She strides through the garden, clearly in control (Ashitaka following, rather hesitantly, some spaces behind), explaining to him, "This is my garden—everyone is afraid to come near it." She then adds, "Follow me, if you wish to know my secret."

<sup>9</sup>Miller 2000, "The Lady in the Garden," p. 196.

<sup>10</sup>Miller gives an example by Masanobu, an early-eighteenth-century woodblock print artist who shows Murasaki Shikibu, the creator of *The Tale of Genji*, at a writing desk, looking languidly out over her garden. Miller 2000, pp. 200–202.

<sup>11</sup>In an important episode of *The Tale of Genji* the eponymous hero invites a number of his current and former lovers to reside in his mansion and has gardens constructed for each one, based on the seasons and their respective personalities.

<sup>12</sup>Miller 2000, p. 201.

As the camera opens up to a wide-angle shot we see the two of them encased in a large green circle of plants, which is in turn encased by a threatening looking fence, surrounded by water. Clearly this is a “garden enclosed,” but lacking the sexual connotations of the one in the *Song of Solomon*. Instead, Lady Eboshi’s “secret” turns out to be that she takes care of and gives work to physically sick and deformed people who reside in the shelter at the end of the garden. We assume that they are lepers, although this is never made explicit.

Lady Eboshi’s garden is far from the decorative, idealized and immobilizing space of the garden of her pictorial medieval European counterpart. Its lack of flowers suggests a “practical” garden, one that nourishes physically in terms of plants both for food and, presumably, for healing. It is also a protective place, one that the townspeople dare not visit, allowing Eboshi to do her work unhindered and unobserved—the only gaze in this garden is that of Lady Eboshi herself. In this regard, the garden resembles an earlier quasi-garden in *Nausicaa*: Nausicaa’s secret underground laboratory where she grows supposedly toxic plants in order to study them and, she hopes, find a cure for the poisons they unleash on the earth. In both cases, these “working” gardens suggest what would be traditionally coded as “masculine” or at least gender-neutral activities—farming and science. Just as Miyazaki reconfigures the masculine sky as a feminine space, these gardens imply potentially masculine involvement in what is conventionally considered a passive female realm.

Miyazaki’s works do include one vision of an almost stereotypically female garden, of the classic European kind. Not surprisingly, this garden appears in Miyazaki’s most overtly “European” film, *Porco Rosso*, and it belongs to Gina, the widow of Porco’s best friend, and the object of Porco’s secret affections. Gina, it should be stressed, is not simply a passive love object, however. She operates a successful nightclub where she appears nightly as a singer. Her enchanting walled garden, surrounded by the sparking Mediterranean sea, is clearly a place of refuge from the anxieties of daily life. She is, therefore, understandably annoyed when her quiet time in the garden is invaded by an annoying and aggressive American suitor, Curtis, Porco’s bounty hunter rival.

Curtis’s intrusion, however, gives Gina the chance to explain that she is waiting for something: she is waiting for the day a certain man will come to visit her garden and they can speak of love. On cue, Porco’s little red plane shows up, darting and swooping through the clouds above them in a daring display of masculine prowess. Curtis exclaims in disgust, “The bastard’s come back!” but Gina remains silent, her hat and dress fluttering in the wind whipped up by the plane. She is lost in a vision of a childhood memory, where a young boy, presumably Porco, gives her a ride on his open cockpit aquaplane. In the flashback, as they gain altitude above the water, the film cuts back and forth between their two excited faces and the speeding plane. As the youthful Porco looks back at her one more time, Gina’s dress blows over her face, exposing her fluffy white bloomers. Porco looks away and the scene returns to the present day, as the red plane climbs one more time

through the sky. The grown-up Gina gazes after it and utters one word: “Baka” (idiot.)

It could be argued that the childhood vision of Gina being piloted by Porco is a regressive one, particularly when her skirts fly up. But this relatively innocent eroticism also serves to underscore both their attraction and their separation, as Porco looks away, perhaps determined not to be swept up in woman’s sexuality. Their next scene together seems to underline this resolve—Porco in his plane taking off alone, Gina left to her garden solitude. But it is Gina who has the last word, “idiot.” It is masculine idiocy that weaponizes the sky and ignores the garden. Miyazaki at his most hopeful attempts to unite both garden and sky and to transcend or counter their conventional gendered nature.

Perhaps his most successful vision in this regard is the final moments of *Castle in the Sky: Laputa*. In the film’s climax Sheeta and Pazu, the girl and boy protagonists, unite to destroy the flying island, that they now realize is a weapon of destruction, by reciting an ancient spell, passed down to Sheeta by her family. Under their command, the castle begins to fall apart as enormous roots tear through its stony walls. Ultimately, the viewer is left with the vision of a gigantic airborne tree, its roots reaching toward the earth, its branches toward the sky, surrounded by the remnants of a garden. This is literally a garden *in* the sky, where masculinity and femininity are connected through the enormous hermaphroditic tree that suggests, perhaps, the potential to transcend gendered space once and for all.

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*Tenkū no shiro Laputa* (Castle in the Sky: Laputa), 1986.

*Tonari no tootoro* (My Neighbor Totoro), 1988.

*Majo no takkyūbin* (Kiki's Delivery Service), 1989.

*Kurenai no buta* (Porco Rosso), 1992.

*Mononokehime* (Princess Mononoke), 1997.

*Hauru no ugoku shiro* (Howl's Moving Castle), 2004.

*Gake no ue no Ponyo* (Ponyo), 2009.