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**THE HERO'S JOURNEY AND *KISHOTENKETSU* IN
MIYAZAKI'S *HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE*: THE CO-
EXISTENCE OF STORY STRUCTURES**

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalizing world, we are exposed to different cultures and customs, including different storytelling techniques. However, a desire to identify or interpret stories through the lenses of a single encompassing model seems to exist in Western societies, which may result in a limited or false understanding of other cultures. Furthermore, as we tend to think and understand the world through stories, it is paramount that we do not only acknowledge the differences in perspective but also do our best to consider alternative ways of understanding the world to enrich our own personal thinking. As an attempt to explore and introduce two possible ways of telling a story and how they can productively co-exist, this thesis analyzes Hayao Miyazaki's retelling of the British novel *Howl's Moving Castle* through the Western Hero's Journey and Japanese *kishotenketsu*, since the movie provides a compelling example of hybridized storytelling.

The thesis begins with a general overview of the relevance of the topic and is followed by a more in-depth theoretical background of other related subjects. Later in the thesis, the movie is analyzed using the story structures in question and some further differences not directly connected to the models are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of stories on our minds is undeniable. As many scholars have established (see Armstrong 2014, Herman 2017, Hogan 2012, Zunshine 2006), stories not only evoke emotions, construct memories, and influence our behavior, but since we think in a narrative form, also create an understanding of the world we live in. As stories are cognitively important, it seems wise to consider what kind of stories surround and influence us. Generally, many European and North American popular stories, found in different periods and media, seem to follow a single hero who goes on an adventure and returns home with something useful. This model, typically known as the Hero's Journey or the monomyth, may seem so natural and obvious that it is easy to forget that different cultures have other story-telling customs and styles that reflect or emphasize their values. However, there seems to be a tendency to attempt to explain or interpret unfamiliar structures and models through Western lenses, often resulting in a misunderstanding or a misrepresentation.

Owing to globalization, the abundance and wide spread of information means that people can be inspired by anything that piques their interest. This means that every individual or group will adopt what aligns with their existing or desired values and disregard the rest. The same can happen with stories. Thus, it seems safe to assume that a single story can also contain more than one story structure. As mentioned above, exposure to different storytelling models can enrich our thinking, which first requires awareness of these patterns.

In the Western world, we tend to be more used to the aforementioned Hero's Journey story model, but it is not so in other parts of the world. Another story structure to consider is the Japanese *kishotenketsu*, which consists of four parts (*ki*, *sho*, *ten*, *ketsu* – introduction, development, “turn”, and conclusion, respectively). It may seem straightforward at first glance, but it carries cultural implications. For example, the conclusion (*ketsu*) of *kishotenketsu* does not need to be decisive, its purpose is simply “to end”, often leaving

questions unanswered and doubts unaddressed (Hinds 1982: 80). As *kishotenketsu* is of Chinese origin and mainly prevalent in East-Asia, it is only natural that *kishotenketsu* seems to reflect values and thought patterns related to collectivist societies rather than individualistic ones. Although these are generalizations, it is very intuitive for people of Western thought to define and place an object in a sort of hierarchy, whereas Eastern thought tends to value harmony and seems to be more comfortable with uncertainty (see Nisbett et al 2001).

An instance where Western and Eastern elements seem to converge and peacefully co-exist is in some works by Hayao Miyazaki, a Japanese animator and the co-founder of Studio Ghibli. In particular, the 2004 movie *Howl's Moving Castle* is an excellent example of a clear blend of Western source material (a novel by the British author Diana Wynne Jones) and Japanese values and characteristics. While considering the movie as an adaptation may inspire endless discussions, this thesis focuses on identifying and analyzing the movie through the lenses of the two above-mentioned story structures: the Western Hero's Journey and the Japanese *kishotenketsu*.

The benefits of this analysis are numerous. It aims to raise awareness of the existence and widespread use of both the Hero's Journey and *kishotenketsu* but also provide an example of how these structures could be identified and show the effectiveness of these models. Additionally, it will resist the notion of observing only one narrative structure per story, as indicated by Koenitz (2023: 52). Regarding the choice of *Howl's Moving Castle* as the subject of analysis, while it is not a Western product, the original story is, providing us with a clear example of a hybridized storytelling method, the normalcy of which will most likely increase due to globalization. Furthermore, *Howl's Moving Castle* is not an experimental work nor a postmodern narrative, thus providing us with an authentic, non-biased example of popular culture. It is also important to note that this movie, having a target

audience of all ages, exposes children to new ways of storytelling, which may impact the stories of the future besides influencing our thinking now.

In this thesis, the terms “Western” and “Eastern”, and more specifically “East-Asian”, are used to denote the general difference between Europe alongside the United States and East-Asia. While these geographical and cultural regions are by no means pure examples of any cultural values (due to globalization), general tendencies exist, which are referred to by the words “Eastern” or “East-Asian” and “Western” as any further specification would be beyond the scope of this thesis. The first chapter will provide a more in-depth overview of the importance and prevalence of story structures, the Hero’s Journey, *kishotenketsu*, and the Western influence on Hayao Miyazaki and *vice versa*. The second half of the thesis includes the analysis of the Hero’s Journey and *kishotenketsu* in *Howl’s Moving Castle* and a discussion of relevant aspects.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Stories are everywhere. Stories exist as (re)tellings of events in a time frame but also as the result of interacting with the world and making sense of it (Mäkelä and Björninen 2022: 14). Stories on a communal level are essential as they create a frame of reference for morals, behavior norms and achievements (Kawai et al 2023: 5-6). Similarly, one of the four functions of myths, i.e. ancient stories, is to promote a specific way of life (Campbell and Moyers 1991: 50). Therefore, it seems safe to assume that collective narratives provide a kind of template or direction for individual stories, but the individual stories in turn indicate a great deal about the culture in which they exist (McAdams 2008: 21). Stories and narratives have also become relevant communication strategies in numerous fields, such as psychology, politics, journalism, science and business (Mäkelä and Björninen 2022: 12-13, 15-16).

Similarly, narratives offer a way for individuals to navigate through change or overcome their personal tragedies (Kawai et al 2023: 6, 9). As an example, Tsuda-McCaie and Kotera (2023) interviewed people in their early 30s who had changed careers in their 20s and discovered that the participants had created a coherent narrative about their experience in order to better cope with its meaning and impact on their lives. What is especially noteworthy regarding the previous example is that these narratives subconsciously followed the Hero's Journey narrative pattern (Tsuda-McCaie and Kotera 2023: 68), a model first presented by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004; first published in 1949). Several great fictional stories in the English-speaking world seem to follow in the steps of the Hero's Journey (Koenitz et al 2018: 4), as Campbell (2004) points out, since the stories we tell tend to stem from deep within a person's psyche. It is no secret that the fundamental principles of the Hero's Journey story structure have been used not only in (screen)writing but also in teaching, psychology, counseling, video game design, and the structure of scholarly studies (Vogler 1998: xi). However, Campbell (2004) also seems to

suggest that the model is universal, implying that only one type of story exists and that it is true for everyone everywhere. Consequently, Campbell's (2004) theory has been criticized, among other matters, for the focus on male heroes exclusively, being based on selective evidence and for being a convenient interpretation of Carl Gustav Jung's ideas (Mäkelä and Meretoja 2022: 195).

Even though certain aspects of the Hero's Journey model may appear to be deeply ingrained in Western culture, it is presumptuous to assume the same for other geographical regions and cultures. Furthermore, the Hero's Journey, with its air of universality, poses a threat of misunderstanding or misrepresenting, if not complete dismissal of, other cultures' story structures. In addition, due to globalization, it is not unthinkable that more than one structure could be observed in a single story.

1.1 The Hero's Journey: Origin and Criticism

The monomyth, also known as the Hero's Journey, was first presented by Joseph Campbell (2004) as a set of elements so integral to the human psyche that they are present in all myths and most stories. No matter the culture, the journey seems to follow a character (hero) who ventures to a new world, encounters a certain force, and returns having improved (Campbell 2004: 33). The main stages are usually described as *separation-initiation-return*: the hero encounters a new 'world' different from their own, survives in it, and returns to their original world with something that could benefit their community (Campbell 2004: 28). Each of these three acts contains several other stages which Campbell (2004) explains and illustrates with examples of myths, stressing the psychological change which takes place at each step.

Christopher Vogler (2017: 10), a Hollywood screenwriter, discovered Campbell's book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and realized it could be used as a guide in storytelling

since it contains descriptions of not only the typical story structure but also descriptions of the psyche, which helped him to correct or improve upon a story. Vogler (1998: 11) explains that due to the universal themes of Campbell's Hero's Journey, stories inspired by it are bound to resonate with nearly everyone and therefore be more financially successful. Thus, Vogler (1998) wrote a textbook for writers (*The Writer's Journey*), making Campbell's model more accessible to a broader audience. Campbell's (2004) seventeen stages are reduced to twelve in Vogler's (1998) book, the descriptions are more concrete, and the examples are from more modern stories, making it much easier to read, while maintaining the essence of Campbell's writing. It should be noted that Vogler (2017: 10-11) was aware of the criticism concerning Campbell's (2004) approach even when he first discovered it. In his book, Campbell (2004) ignores the possibility of the female hero and her journey, and because the model focuses on the psychological aspects, it was abused by some leaders during World War II (Vogler 2017: 10-11). The Hero's Journey is also disliked by folklorists because it seems to suggest that all stories are Hero's Journeys, resulting in a harmful overgeneralization (Vogler 2017: 10).

The monomyth structure continues to be criticized, mostly due to the claim of universality. The Hero's Journey limits the narrative to a main conflict, a single hero and one climax (Koenitz et al 2018: 5), which is not the case in, for example, stories belonging to the African oral tradition, which have cycles and multiple climaxes (Koenitz 2023: 52). In the Japanese *kishotenketsu* narrative structure, the climax is not the result of accumulated tension either, but rather a surprise element (Koenitz 2023: 52), thus providing a model that has fewer contrasts and less noticeable conflicts than the typical Hero's Journey's plot development. Leaving specific structures aside, Koenitz et al (2018: 4) argue that not only at the audience level, but even at a scholarly one, exists a marked tendency to view narrative only through Western lenses, causing a dismissal of other cultures' story structures.

Similarly, Koenitz (2023: 52) highlights a tendency to only consider one narrative structure at a time. Therefore, we should not use Western notions of narrative as our only reference point; instead, it would be beneficial to also familiarize ourselves with story structures from various cultures to become more aware of the existence of other story structures, diversify our thinking and expand our knowledge of the world. Consequently, this thesis will only examine in-depth the *kishotenketsu* structure as an example out of several different ways of telling stories.

1.2 *Kishotenketsu* and its Implications

Kishotenketsu is a narrative structure that originates from classical Chinese poetry (Hinds 1982: 80). Very few English sources seem to discuss *kishotenketsu*, and in most cases the concept is mentioned in passing. This may be due to *kishotenketsu* being so diverse that it is difficult, or perhaps even counterproductive, to devise a comprehensive definition. It seems much more practical, as is usually done, to explain *kishotenketsu* in the context in which it is applied, keeping in mind the likely possibility of meaning nuances. Murao (2003) uses *kishotenketsu* to analyze music composition, pointing out nuances that are relevant to songs and not writing, for example. Unsurprisingly, *kishotenketsu* can be used in both persuasive writing and narrative writing (Cahill 2003: 180), which also carry different meaning nuances. However, variation of interpretation can ever occur within the same genre – it is especially prevalent in essay writing (see Cahill 2003).¹ Nevertheless, knowledge of these details contributes towards a more complete understanding of *kishotenketsu*.

Novielli (2018: 1) provides a short overview of the structure: *ki* as the introduction, *sho* as the development, *ten* as the “turn” or “pivotal event”, and *ketsu* as the ending. All four

¹ For an example of the diverse use of *kishotenketsu*, see Phillips (2015) for an overview of its application in the Mario game design.

parts of *kishotenketsu* are linked based on the relationships between each element and to the general theme (Jin'Ichi et al 1975: 50). As mentioned above, the Japanese climax (*ten*) usually comes as a surprise (Koenitz 2023: 52). Hinds (1982: 80), although describing the *kishotenketsu* of an argument, points out that the *ten* usually highlights a relation to a subtheme. Cahill (2003: 183-184) introduces the different understandings of *ten* among Japanese scholars, with some regarding *ten* as the section suited for further elaboration or comparison, some the part that goes against the expectations created by *ki* and *sho*, or, for some, the part that grabs the reader's attention and makes them wonder. Contrary to Koenitz (2023), Cahill (2003: 184) states that most Japanese scholars do not think that the *ten* should be surprising but agree that it should have an impact. In regard to the final part *ketsu*, Hinds (1982: 80) explains that it does not have to provide answers but can simply highlight an uncertainty. Murao's (2003: 26) interpretation of *ketsu* further confirms this, highlighting the meaning of "to end" and "to conclude". Considering that most Western stories' endings tend to be relatively decisive, it is not unlikely that an uncertain conclusion may cause some dissatisfaction among Western audiences.

The final part of *kishotenketsu* highlights a major cultural difference between Western and Eastern thinking and understanding of the world. Nisbett et al (2001) outline the main discrepancies between what they call "analytic and holistic cognition", Western and Eastern systems of thought respectively. According to Nisbett et al (2001: 293), Western thought is characterized by the tendency to view an object isolated from its environment and to solely judge it based on its characteristics, creating rules to predict its behavior. Eastern thought instead can be conceptualized as more intuitive and experience-based, focusing on the bigger picture and the object's relations to its environment (Nisbett et al 2001: 293). Holistic thought has no qualms with contradictions, values multiple perspectives, and pursues the 'golden mean' while analytic thought avoids contradictions (Nisbett et al 2001:

293). It is important to remember that these are generalizations and that it might be difficult to make such clear distinctions. Nevertheless, these findings align with Hofstede's (2011: 12) Individualism/Collectivism dimension where Western countries tend to be individualistic and Eastern ones collective.

Several examples could be used to explain these tendencies. For example, the lack of comprehensive definitions for the parts of *kishotenketsu* can be viewed as proof that appropriate context or the understanding of relations is valued more than a definition, and frustration at the lack of definitions is equally telling. Additionally, holistic thought can also be seen in ideas associated with Zen-Buddhism and Shintoism that emphasize a human's interconnectedness with nature, contrary to the Western conceptualizations of the relationship between humans and the environment (Bigelow 2009: 59). Owing to this acknowledgement and respect for interconnectedness, the notions of "right" and "wrong", "good" and "evil" have no relevance in holistic thought (Bigelow 2009: 63). In analytic thought, however, not only are the categories of "right" and "wrong" relevant, but they also tend to be mutually exclusive (Feng and Park 2015: 372).

1.3 Hayao Miyazaki and Anime in the Western Society

Hayao Miyazaki, a Japanese filmmaker and storyteller, is a widely acclaimed and relatively well-known figure in Western societies. Various reasons for his success and popularity could be argued, but one frequent idea that is mentioned in the context of the success of Japanese media in the West is the blending of Japanese and Western elements. In the context of the US at the end of the 20th century, the positive reception of anime has been explained by the novel and progressing storylines (Zipes 2014: 63). Although this is not the only reason for the success of Japanese media in the US, it highlights the need for variation. Another reason could be seeing something familiar in a new light. Darling-Wolf (2015: 121)

explains that as Japanese studios adapt European and American literature, the question of origin and representation fades with the Western audiences consuming a re-imagined version of what is already familiar to them. Miyazaki has such an approach to culture, as Yoshioka (2008: 257) states, “Miyazaki was interested in the diversity of Japanese culture. For him, even Western things became part of Japanese culture.” Miyazaki enjoys depicting European settings in his movies and has adapted literary sources (Hernández-Pérez 2016: 305, 307). For instance, Miyazaki’s *Howl’s Moving Castle* (2004) is a loose adaptation of the British novelist Diana Wynne Jones’s novel of the same name. Miyazaki’s movies in general have been described as enjoyable but also thought-provoking (Otmazgin 2014: 58). This could be due to the cultural differences (emphasizing different values) but also due to the “freshness” of the approach to storytelling.

Hayao Miyazaki’s Studio Ghibli is often compared to Disney both on grounds of prestige and influence. Although Disney has moved on to more modern techniques, the studios used to share the admiration for Old Europe and adapt literature, relying on a few narrative tropes but attracting all kinds of audiences (Hernández-Pérez 2016: 305, 307, 309). However, as Zipes (2010) points out, the differences between the two studios’ approaches are striking. Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*, a story of unconditional love, “[t]he Disney corporation transformed the tale into a stupid pubescent musical that celebrated the spunk and illusions of a spoiled princess, who is awarded a handsome prince because she is so charming” (Zipes 2010: 108), while Miyazaki, working with the same Western fairy tale, created *Ponyo*, a story dealing with overcoming differences, trust and patience (Zipes 2010: 109). Additionally, Disney has been criticized for over-simplifying their narratives when compared to the literary source material (Hernández-Pérez 2016: 307), which is something that cannot be said about Miyazaki’s works. Miyazaki’s only purpose seems to be sharing his philosophical ideas about history

and the present, transforming them into a highly visual medium and presenting his message to the public in an unconventional way to spark discussion (Bigelow 2009: 56).

One way this “oversimplicity” of narratives can manifest is through dichotomous characters. Disney characters tend to be either “good” or “evil”, but Miyazaki’s characters are never only one or the other. However, this can be mainly attributed to differences regarding culture and thought. As Feng and Park (2015: 371-372) explain, analytic thought believes that a person is inherently good or bad, while holistic thought sees actions as a result of circumstances. Miyazaki is also praised for his strong female leads, who are usually young girls, for being positive role-models (Hernández-Pérez 2016: 306). Focusing on accurately depicting young girls, Miyazaki aims to justify their struggles but also foster humility and an understanding of the complexities of the world (Zipes 2010: 107). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Miyazaki’s movies have long been seen as strong competitors for Disney’s traditional cartoon fairy tales (Zipes 2010: 30).

1.4 The Hero’s Journey and *Kishotenketsu* in Tandem

Very little literature in English seems to concern *kishotenketsu* in-depth, and it seems that only Arnavas and Bellini (2023) have sought to explore the combined use of both the monomyth and *kishotenketsu*, precisely in the context of Miyazaki’s movies. Miyazaki’s *Howl’s Moving Castle* has been analyzed (see Wu 2016) but not from a cultural and structural angle, and not as extensively as, for example, *Spirited Away* (2001) (see Zipes 2010, Napier 2006, Yoshioka 2008). However, Wu (2016) has pointed out the potential connection between Campbell’s monomyth and Miyazaki’s representation of universal human desires, highlighting a connection between the Western and Eastern material.

In conclusion, the Hero’s Journey structure provides a framework for analyzing a story based on plot elements while *kishotenketsu* focuses more on the relationship between

and effect of its four parts. Originating from different parts of the world, some cultural differences can be observed in both models. Signs of analytic thought can be observed in Vogler's clear descriptions of each of the stages, and holistic thought is evident in every aspect of *kishotenketsu*. Additionally, the Western characters tend to be consistent in their roles and are either "good" or "evil", while Eastern characters are not. This, among other aspects, has allowed for Hayao Miyazaki's works to be highly acclaimed by Western audiences for displaying a unique approach to storytelling. However, due to globalization and Miyazaki's fondness of drawing inspiration from Western stories, his works contain both Western and East-Asian elements.

2. ANALYSIS OF *HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE*

As already mentioned, the movie *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) is based on the novel of the same name by the British author Diana Wynne Jones (1986). Studio Ghibli's version, directed and written by Hayao Miyazaki, is only a loose adaptation of the original – Miyazaki has honed the skill of drawing inspiration from a literary source and producing something distinctly unique yet similar to the original (Hernández-Pérez 2016: 307). Miyazaki rewrites the stories for the Japanese audience but also combines Western elements with more East-Asian ones (Bigelow 2009: 57), or, in other words, combines the Western influence (the result of internationalization) with the familiar and traditional Japanese culture (Napier 2006: 287). This results in a beautiful blend of both Western and Japanese elements, which cannot be adequately explained with only Western approaches. In this case study, Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* is analyzed using both the Hero's Journey and the Japanese *kishotenketsu* by identifying the corresponding sections to every part of both narrative structures. It is important to note, however, that these analyses represent only one potential application of the models. The two structures are chosen based on the source material and the country of origin of the movie.

2.1 Vogler's Hero's Journey

As explained in the previous chapter, Vogler (1988) modified Campbell's (2004) model of the Hero's Journey for a more practical use intended for screenwriters and novelists, reducing Campbell's (2004) seventeen stages to twelve. In the following analysis, Vogler's twelve-stage model will be used as the main reference due to its practical output as a screenwriting guide and its consideration for more modern stories (as opposed to myths). It is also important to note that this analysis assumes that Sophie is the protagonist (or

hero(ine)) since the audience experiences the story through her perspective. However, Howl is also a likely hero-candidate around whose adventures, problems, and growth the story can be seen to revolve. Here we can see that even before the analysis of the twelve stages, identifying a single hero for the Journey is not straightforward. Additionally, the need to identify a single or the main hero (as opposed to a group of people) highlights the individualistic orientation of Western societies in general.

As the original work is not a wholly Western product, not all Vogler's twelve stages can be easily identified. Nevertheless, the Hero's Journey allows for enough variation (Vogler 1998: 26, 27, 238) that it is theoretically possible to do so. However, for the sake of clarity and brevity, the analysis will avoid too much speculation. Vogler's (1998: 26) overview of the full structure is as follows:

1. Heroes are introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD, where
2. they receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE.
3. They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL, but
4. are encouraged by a MENTOR to
5. CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD and enter the Special World, where
6. they encounter TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES.
7. They APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE, crossing a second threshold
8. where they endure the ORDEAL.
9. They take possession of their REWARD and
10. are pursued on THE ROAD BACK to the Ordinary World.
11. They cross the third threshold, experience a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience.
12. They RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR, a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World. (Vogler 1998: 26)

The term "Ordinary World" means the familiar and "Special World" denotes the new, unknown territory for the protagonist, physically or emotionally (Vogler 1998: 15, 136).

The first stage of Vogler's (1998: 15) model, The Ordinary World, acts as a reference point for the viewer to understand the Special World the hero (or heroine; the main character) is about to traverse. Although it may seem peaceful, the Ordinary World holds the protagonist's problems, which usually take the form need, lack or recent loss (Vogler 1998: 86, 90). In the case of *Howl's Moving Castle* and the protagonist, it is not clear what Sophie's (or the problem in general) is. There are signs of war, a topic which becomes important later,

but Sophie never expresses her feelings about it nor tries to stop it. Sophie is targeted by the Witch of the Waste only after meeting Howl, which is something she could not control. Therefore, it seems that Sophie does not have a problem she needs to solve. While the Ordinary World has other (optional) functions (see Vogler 1998: 86-97), some of which could be discussed in the context of this movie as well, it seems safe to assume that *Howl's Moving Castle* does not have an Ordinary World stage.

The Call to Adventure represents an event where the main character comes face to face with something inevitable (Vogler 1998: 15). Also known as the 'inciting incident', it establishes a goal and the cost of failure, allowing for the audience to become invested (Vogler 1998: 99, 16, 94). Following the expected flow of the story, the Call to Adventure can be seen as Sophie's meeting Howl as this is the point after which Sophie's world changes. Although no goal or consequences of failure are established, this may be the reason why a viewer may become interested in the story. Sophie's sister Lettie telling her sister to stand up for herself could also be seen as a Call to Adventure, the adventure of taking responsibility for and control of one's life. In any case, *Howl's Moving Castle* does not have a clear, undisputable Call to Adventure.

The following step is the Refusal of the Call or showing reluctance, which can span from a moment to a longer period and occur multiple times (Vogler 1998: 17, 114). Assuming that the Call to Adventure is Lettie's plea, Sophie may have contemplated it before arriving at the shop; there is no clear refusal, but rather a feeling of uncertainty. If the Call to Adventure is meeting Howl or even the Witch of the Waste, it is noteworthy that Sophie does not have a choice: she cannot avoid meeting Howl or being cursed by the Witch (for the Witch would have cursed her in any case). Sophie embarks on her journey unwillingly, which is another big diversion from the typical Hero's Journey pattern.

At some point in the beginning of the story, the main character encounters a Mentor character who prepares her for the journey by giving advice or providing the hero with some items; the Mentor can also be used as a catalyst for the story (Vogler 1998: 17-18). Sophie's sister Lettie worries and asks Sophie to stand up for herself, offering general advice. However, when Sophie follows her advice, she is cursed by the Witch,² who turns Sophie into an old woman. The curse seems to undermine the usefulness of Lettie's advice. Moreover, whether the advice helped to move the story forward is debatable (see footnote 2).

Crossing the First Threshold marks a point in the story where the hero decides to respond to the Call and cannot return to the Ordinary World (Vogler 1998: 18). As was established above, the Ordinary World by its typical definition is not present in the Hero's Journey. However, after Sophie is turned into an old woman, she can no longer remain at home and must find a way to break the spell to return home and to her normal life. This concludes the first part of *initiation-separation-return* (or the first of the three acts), and it is at the last stage of the act that an element of the Hero's Journey is easily identifiable. The characters, the world, a main problem, and a question have been established; the audience's attention is captured mostly by the mystery.

The *separation* phase begins with what Vogler (1998: 19) calls "Tests, Allies and Enemies". Now that the protagonist is in a new world, they will learn more about it, encounter tests, find allies and make enemies (Vogler 1998: 19). In Sophie's case, the Scarecrow, Markl, Howl and even Calcifer (and later the Witch and the spy-dog Heen) become her allies. Sophie gets in closer contact with magic by talking with Calcifer and becoming a cleaning lady at the castle, observing Markl's spells and witnessing or

² As mentioned above, the Witch would probably have cursed Sophie regardless of her bold attitude because the Witch was jealous of Sophie.

experiencing Howl's magic. Vogler (1998: 136) remarks that the Special World has a different feel and new rules and priorities. This is certainly true as the castle door can lead to four locations, for example, but it is most evident in Sophie herself – her view of the world changes to suit her perceived age. After some time, she almost unnoticeably gives up trying to break her spell (which drove her out of her home in the first place) and becomes more concerned about saving Howl and Calcifer.

After the hero has had time to learn the rules of the Special World, they will start preparing for an encounter (The Approach to the Inmost Cave) with the most dangerous aspect of it (The Ordeal) (Vogler 1998: 145, 20-21). The Ordeal itself is a manifestation of the main character's biggest fear, which causes them to be reborn as a better version of themselves (Vogler 1998: 21-22). While it is not quite obvious, the Ordeal could be Sophie's dream (or jump into the future) in which she wishes to save Howl when it is already too late. However, there is no Approach (preparation) stage preceding the Ordeal. The Reward stage, which follows the Ordeal, consists of the effects of surviving the Ordeal, usually resulting in character development or gaining an item or useful knowledge (Vogler 1998: 22-23). Yet, this stage seems to be missing as well, unless we count Sophie and Howl's relationship improving. The Reward stage concludes the *separation* phase.

The third and final act (*return*) begins with the Road Back stage which involves dealing with the consequences of the Ordeal and the Reward (Vogler 1998: 23-24). Although the name implies a return to the beginning, it can also manifest as a desire to advance on the journey (Vogler 1998: 193). This can be observed as Sophie realizes her feelings for Howl and wishes to move the castle in order to remove Howl from the war. During the second to last stage, Resurrection, the protagonist must experience the Ordeal once again to prove that they are ready to return to the Ordinary World (Vogler 1998: 24). The main character, once again, is forced to face their greatest fear and grow (Vogler 1998: 203). The Ordeal involved

Sophie following Howl into the cave in her dream revealing the future, but the Resurrection takes Sophie back to Howl's childhood where she learns of the contract Howl made with Calcifer, giving him his heart in return for more powerful magic. After Sophie returns, she must once again face what she had seen in the cave: Howl's transformed state. Similarly to the Ordeal, there is no test nor challenge waiting for Sophie – she must simply face her biggest fear. However, unlike during the Ordeal, the act of gaining something is much more obvious, which is fitting for the climax of the whole story (Vogler 1998: 161). As Sophie emerges from Howl's childhood, she Returns with the Elixir, the knowledge of how to save Howl. It is crucial that the hero returns with something useful to prove that the journey was of value (Vogler 1998: 25). While the knowledge is meaningful by itself, the journey would have been pointless if Sophie had not used it to save Howl.

The Hero's Journey structure that can be identified in *Howl's Moving Castle* is by no means a perfect example of the typical Hero's Journey. It defies expectations from the very beginning by not having an Ordinary World and then the Call being not much more than a Command – Sophie does not have a choice and embarks on her journey out of necessity. However, most of the stages can be identified by reading Vogler's (1998) elaborations of the stages, where he also explains the possible variations of the same element. Whether or not it is possible, it is still evident that *Howl's Moving Castle* defies an easy explanation using the Hero's Journey model. For this reason, the movie will also be analyzed using *kishotenketsu*, a Japanese story structure consisting of four parts: *ki*, *sho*, *ten*, and *ketsu*.

2.2 *Kishotenketsu*

The four elements of *kishotenketsu* (*ki*, *sho*, *ten*, *ketsu*), although not seemingly complicated at first glance, are difficult to provide with definite explanations (Cahill 2003: 182). Each discipline seems to have its own interpretation of what the four parts entail, and

the Japanese seem to prefer to explain its practical use (Dennett 1988: 116). However, the general idea accompanying *kishotenketsu* is the pursuit of beauty, which would explain the less formulaic structure. Dennett (1998: 116) describes how American readers tend to skim-read according to an expected structure, but the Japanese wish to create an emotionally engaging reading experience. The *kishotenketsu* structure seems to anticipate the reactions as much or more than the content, which may result in different interpretations of where a part ends and the other begins as it depends on how it is perceived emotionally. However, the following analysis is mainly focused on the content-related clues corresponding with each of these parts.

Ki is generally defined as an introduction (Novielli 2018: 1), during which all the necessary information becomes known to the audience. It is rarely the case that *ki* contains the main message of the story, but rather, it provides a transition into the topic (*sho*) (Dennett 1988: 117). The *ki* of *Howl's Moving Castle* is Sophie as the hatter, which also introduces us to her attitude to life, not to mention the presence of the military and magic. The Witch of the Waste cursing Sophie, Sophie's leaving the town and meeting the scarecrow and Calcifer are also part of *ki*. Howl and Calcifer's contract is the main problem throughout most of the story, which means that it needs to be introduced (established) in *ki*. All main characters shown during this phase (Howl, Witch of the Waste, Calcifer, the Scarecrow) also play an important role later in the movie (except Madam Sulliman and her dog Heen, who appear later).

Looking at *ki* as a harbinger of *sho*, the following stage, one can imagine how the story would be without *ki* to determine where to draw the line between *ki* and *sho*. Skipping *ki* would mean jumping right into the story (Dennett 1998: 119), essentially resulting in an *in medias res* beginning for the story, which would be Sophie working at Howl's castle. While this would require the audience to find out about the curse through Sophie's and

Calcifer's dialogue (and perhaps some flashbacks), it seems plausible. If *ki* were to conclude with Sophie returning to the hat shop, then the movie would begin with the Witch cursing Sophie with no real reason and the audience not understanding why Sophie treated the unwanted customer so sternly. Beginning the story with Old Sophie leaving the town would also pose too many questions that would be difficult to provide answers for. If *ki* were to transition to *sho* much later on, for example when Howl returns home after surveying the war, explaining the significance of Sophie's curse and fear of Blob Men would be an arduous task for the story. Therefore, *ki* concludes with Howl returning home and Sophie cooking breakfast, declaring that she will be his new cleaning lady and Howl not objecting.

Sho develops *ki* further (Cahill 2003: 171) and usually contains the core of the story (Dennett 1988: 117). In the beginning of *sho*, Sophie is officially accepted into the castle, Howl continues to escape from the Witch of the Waste (as he did when he was first shown) and the war moves closer as enemy bombs are dropped into the water near the harbor. Howl, disapproving of the war, sends Sophie to meet the king and sully his name, causing Sophie's second encounter with the Witch of the Waste. Through Madam Sulliman and Sophie's dream (or the jump forward in time), the audience learns more about Howl's true form. The Witch transforms into an old lady who later helps to keep Howl's location a secret. In short, the *sho* section comprises several events moving the story forward on multiple character levels but also through the environment. It may feel confusing due to the lack of concrete events which lead one to another, but the story is certainly not stagnant. It is also considerably the longest of the four parts, taking up over half of the movie's runtime. *Sho* continues until the castle collapses due to Sophie throwing water at Calcifer.

Ten is often interpreted as the "turn" (Cahill 2003: 171, Novielli 2018: 1), but the *ten* of a narrative marks a temporary departure from the main subject (Cahill 2003: 180). As Sophie goes through the door, we go (back) to Howl's childhood. This temporal change is

one of the most obvious digressions of the whole movie, diverging from the expected linear timeline. Cahill (2023: 186) concludes that *ten* adds something new (and surprising) to both *ki* and *sho*, and thus ties them together. The most obvious connection with *sho* is the location: flowery marshes where Howl spent his childhood summers. The connection to *ki* is less obvious but still present in Howl's first dialogue, hinting at the fact that he was specifically looking for Sophie. Another, simpler, interpretation is that *ten* gives more depth to *sho* (Cahill 2023: 185). After meeting in *ki*, Howl and Sophie's relationship deepens in *sho*, but *ten* reveals that they had met in the past, which makes their bond stronger and more meaningful. However, this is not only evident in the characters. For example, during *sho*, the audience learns how the castle door works (using the dial to access different locations), but once the castle has collapsed, in *ki*, the door (set to black) leads to the past, adding another layer of mystery to the magic by developing it.

As can be seen, the *ten* does not dissolve tension but rather adds a hint of the unexpected (Koenitz 2023: 52). Similarly, a good *ten* catches the audience's attention, and a poetry textbook explains that the *ten* should make the reader wonder about the reason for the change (Cahill 2023: 184). After Sophie emerges from the rubble, the ring points to Calcifer's location with a blue beam, not a red one. The castle door leads Sophie to the black, generally unknown dimension, this time in the form of Howl's childhood. It is unclear why these changes took place both in the ring and door. However, it seems safe to argue that this part of the movie is unexpected or at least a deviation from the established mood, just like a successful *ten* of an essay alters the whole tone of it (Cahill 2003: 184). Nevertheless, the *ten* of *Howl's Moving Castle* runs from the castle collapsing to Sophie emerging from Howl's childhood. Sophie's return to the 'present', armed with new knowledge, marks the end of *ten*.

The final part, *ketsu*, is typically interpreted using the word “conclusion” (see Cahill 2003: 171, Murao 2003: 26) but also “solution” (Novielli 2018: 1). The story seems to end rather neatly: Sophie returns Howl’s heart, the prince’s curse is broken, and Madam Sulliman decides to end the war. However, the Japanese “conclusion” does not need to provide a definite outcome for the story – it simply needs to “conclude” enough to make the viewer think or try to answer a question (Hinds 1982: 80). This is present in the ending as well: although Madam Sulliman’s comment prompts the audience to assume that the war will end, the scene with the flying airships makes it unclear whether the negotiations were successful or if the war broke out again. Although we see Howl, Sophie, Markl, the Old Witch and Heen on the flying castle, their destination and the prince’s whereabouts are unknown. The number of unknown factors is greater than it might first seem.

According to Dennett (1998), the purpose of *ketsu* is to “end it beautifully” (116). The ending of *Howl’s Moving Castle* is above all peaceful: even if there are warships, the flying castle soars above them. This ending ignores all the possible darker aspects of the situation, especially when a “conclusive conclusion” may be too unrealistic or not beautiful. Another point to consider is the importance of context in Japanese culture. Nonverbal communication, which is also useful in evoking emotions, is valued (Dennett 1988: 116), rendering it unnecessary to say anything at the very end. The viewer is most likely expected to watch and understand the situation without anything being said explicitly.

A final comment to make is that of satisfaction. The impact and execution of the *ten* is valued so much that it is expected to make the viewer feel satisfied (Cahill 2003: 183), from which we may conclude that the ending, *ketsu*, is not expected to have such an effect. This shows how understanding another culture and their storytelling principles helps to better understand the stories they tell as well.

2.3 Discussion on Conflict and Characters

As can be seen by the two analyses, the structures are very different. *Kishotenketsu* relies on the emotional response of the viewer and principle of continual development regardless of the topic, but the Hero's Journey structure is, by nature, more action- or change-oriented. This seems to follow Hofstede's (2011: 12) generalization that Western societies tend to be more individualistic while Eastern societies value harmony and proper relations with the group, which may also explain the avoidance of conflict in the movie.

Another aspect to consider is how challenging it is to determine the roles of characters. It is unclear whether Sophie or Howl is the hero, and the same is true for antagonistic roles. The character of the Witch of the Waste is an interesting case as she turns from an antagonist to an ally in the most subtle way possible while still retaining and acting upon her own motives. The Hero's Journey model seems to rely on the existence of a hero and opposing forces, but the movie instead seems to be full of characters with fluid roles. This avoidance of labeling people "good" or "evil" most likely stems from the importance of interconnectedness in (Eastern) holistic thought (see Bigelow 2009: 63, Nisbett et al 2001).

It is also possible for the antagonistic force to take the shape of the environment or a circumstance instead of a character. In *Howl's Moving Castle*, it could manifest as the war. Howl's anti-war attitude becomes evident as he attacks warships, regardless of their origin, showing that he despises war in general and does not want either side to win. While Howl is involved with the war, Sophie is not, nor does she try to stop it. Moreover, the details of the war are never revealed, calling its role into question. Nevertheless, this highlights a crucial cultural difference. Japan ranks as one of the highest high-context cultures on Hall's High Context/Low Context spectrum (Samovar et al 2019: 56). In high-context cultures, both verbal and non-verbal communication are valued and thus used (Samovar et al 2019: 57). In

comparison, low-context cultures value clarity, directness and being specific, putting everything that needs to be communicated into words (Samovar et al 2019: 57). Considering this, it seems logical that the Japanese audience is expected to understand the war without it being specifically addressed and thus the war remains mostly in the background throughout the whole movie.

Howl's Moving Castle is most notably influenced by Eastern thought in general, explaining why it could be labeled as “fresh” or “unique” by Western audiences. Nevertheless, the story can in fact be analyzed using both the Hero's Journey and the *kishotenketsu* models. Since the two are so different, they seem to complement each other nicely and offer a new perspective to either side, no matter how perfect or imperfect the analysis.

CONCLUSION

This thesis provides an analysis of Hayao Miyazaki's 2004 movie *Howl's Moving Castle*. The movie is analyzed through the lenses of both the Western Hero's Journey and the Japanese *kishotenketsu* owing to the British origin of the source material and the evident East-Asian influence added through Hayao Miyazaki's retelling of the story. Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* is an excellent example of how two models can be observed within the same story, and the analysis attests to the possibility of the co-existence of several story structures and provides an example of such a case.

The analysis illustrates how the Hero's Journey model relies on the identification of a hero and its opposing forces, focusing on certain events, while *kishotenketsu* considers the emotional response and logical structure of the story, relying on the relationship between the parts. These tendencies reflect the characteristics of Western and Eastern cultures more generally, such as the way objects are categorized. For instance, the Western desire to have clear definitions and boundaries and the view that an object's characteristics are innate is reflected in the monomyth's focus on identifying clear events and characters' roles (e.g. hero, antagonist, etc.). However, the Eastern focus on community and harmony and the understanding of interconnectedness manifests itself in the constituent parts of *kishotenketsu* and in Miyazaki's characters being more malleable by their circumstances rather than acting solely based on their disposition. Looking beyond the two models, it is evident that Miyazaki's movie seems to emphasize the East-Asian elements of the retelling, although the perception may depend on what is novel to the respective audience.

The Eastern way of understanding the world is so different that Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* is considered a viable alternative or a possible addition to Western cultural products, such as Disney and Hollywood movies. However, the full effect of movies containing a new perspective may go unnoticed by mere viewing, as what is seen is only the

manifestation of a different perspective. Therefore, it is beneficial to be familiar with other story models, in this case *kishotenketsu*, and understand their implications. Moreover, it is also important to be aware of, and understand, the culture we tend to primarily consume and to acknowledge that there are alternative storytelling structures, even if the Hero's Journey (or some other model) is suggested to be universal.

This thesis is primarily limited by the analysis of only two story structures. Alternative models and approaches exist in both Western and Eastern cultures, not to mention other parts of the world. Similarly, the general opposition of the East and West may be too vague in some contexts as differences between European and North American storytelling conventions exist as well. This is especially problematic when the whole of Europe is attributed the same experiences and storytelling preferences as the US. Analysis-wise, identifying the Hero's Journey with Howl as the hero may produce a different interpretation of the story. Furthermore, a longer analysis may be useful for exploring the Hero's Journey more in-depth. Due to a lack of information on *kishotenketsu* in English and the possible invisible Western bias, finding and reading sources in Japanese would result in a more precise analysis.

These limitations point to further research possibilities. Although the choice of the Hero's Journey and *kishotenketsu* are not arbitrary, analyzing the same movie through the lenses of other, more location-specific story structures may result in further insight into the movie and any other lesser-known story structures. As Wu (2016) alludes to as well, Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* could be analyzed for Campbell's (2004) archetypes, which is a topic that this thesis does not discuss. Alternatively, an analysis involving the original British novel would offer more insight into the storytelling tropes used in the West and allow us to analyze the movie as an adaptation.

This thesis aims to contribute to the awareness of alternative story structures, especially in light of claims of universality. It also promotes the understanding of cultures one may encounter regularly, in this case English-speaking and East-Asian cultures. The analysis of a movie by Hayao Miyazaki follows the trend of appreciation for Miyazaki's stories but also examines how a story by a British author can be reimagined with the elements of another culture. The most significant discovery of this thesis may be the way cultural tendencies naturally manifest in the nature of the respective story structures, further disproving any claims of universality.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Laura Kiik

The Hero's Journey and *Kishotenketsu* in Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*: The Co-existence of Story Structures / Monomüüt ja *kishotenketsu* Miyazaki filmis „Howli liikuv kindlus“: narratiivi struktuuride üheaegne eksistents

Bakalaureusetöö

2024

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Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on analüüsida Hayao Miyazaki filmi „Howli liikuv kindlus“ kahe narratiivstruktuuri põhjal, et illustreerida, kuidas nende abil filmi süžeed erinevalt mõtestada, ja lähemalt mõista nii Lääne ühte levinuimat loojutustuse meetodit kui ka Jaapani versiooni Ida-Aasia mudelist. Jaapani päritolu film põhineb Briti autori Diana Wynne Jones'i samanimelisel romaanil.

Lõputöö koosneb kahest osast. Esimene osa annab ülevaate Joseph Campbelli monomüüdi (*Hero's Journey*) ja Christopher Vogleri monomüüdi käsitlese ajaloost ja üldisest kriitikast. Lisaks tutvustatakse Jaapani *kishotenketsu*'t ja tuuakse välja ning pakutakse põhjendusi kultuurilistele erinevustele. Tausta luuakse ka Hayao Miyazaki'le ja tema töödele Lääne ühiskonnas, jõudes järelduseni, et Miyazaki kombineerib erinevaid kultuurilisi aspekte, mis on ootuspärane tänapäeva globaliseerunud maailmas. Teine osa analüüsib filmi sündmustikku lähtudes Vogleri monomüüdi käsitlesest ja *kishotenketsu* osade kirjeldusest, mis lõpeb aruteluga tähelepanuväärsetest aspektidest, mis analüüsis otseselt ei avaldu.

Analüüsi tulemusel selgus, et monomüüdi struktuur, mis sõltub järjestikustest sündmustest, ei avaldunud filmis klassikalisel viisil. *Kishotenketsu*, mis lähtub nelja osa omavahelistest suhetest, tuvastamisel ei esinenud raskusi. Need tulemused on loomulikud, kuna struktuurid on oma olemuselt erinevad. Küll aga avalduvad kultuuri mõjutused mõlemas struktuuris selgelt, näiteks harmoonia väärtustamine Idas ja ühe (peamise) kangelase identifitseerimine Läänes. Vaatamata analüüsi tulemuse üksikasjadele on tähtis olla teadlik kultuurilistest erinevustest ning mõista eri kultuuride mõtte- ja mõtestamisviise.

Märksõnad: narratiiv, monomüüt, *kishotenketsu*, Hayao Miyazaki, kultuurid

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