

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY: FROM TRADITIONAL THEATRE FORMS TO
CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CINEMA

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CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CINEMA

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INTRODUCTION

All cultures have mythology that has helped shape them. However, different cultures have their modern lifestyles shaped in distinct ways by their ancient mythology. To help illustrate how this occurs, this thesis examines how traditional Japanese theatre is heavily influenced by the Japanese mythology that preceded it. In turn, Japanese film has been heavily influenced both by this mythology and the way that traditional Japanese theatre presented this mythology. This is not an exclusively Japanese phenomenon, as other cultures often draw on the myths they have inherited for the purposes of modern entertainment. Regardless, this thesis focuses on this phenomenon as it pertains to Japan. This thesis explores this theory by examining the works of three diverse Japanese film directors and how Japanese theatre and mythology have influenced selections from their body of work. Each of these filmmakers drew upon mythology for their own means, whether for the sake of entertainment or to make an artistic statement.

Traditional Japanese theatre forms examined herein include Noh and Kabuki. Major Japanese film genres

discussed in this thesis include samurai films, horror films, and anime films. The works of three directors will be examined: Akira Kurosawa, Takashi Miike, and Hayao Miyazaki.

To understand the Noh influence in film, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of Noh theatre. The origins of what is now considered Noh theatre can be traced back to the 14th century Japanese performer, Kan'ami Kiyotsugu and his son, Zeami Motokiyo. Kan'ami was a *sarugaku-no* performer whose talents happened to catch the eye of the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (Ortolani 94). *Sarugaku-no* was an early form of what would become known as Noh theatre (Leiter 334).

Japanese theatre scholar Benito Ortolani says "Kan'ami is credited with the creation of a new synthesis between *monomane* and *yūgen*; i.e., between the popular dramatic mimetic element and the sophisticated spectacle attuned to the aristocratic taste of the Shogun's court" (Ortolani 94). After Ashikaga saw Kan'ami's troupe perform, he took them "under his patronage and granted them privileges that placed them among the highest officials of the court. Within this rather refined atmosphere, Noh drama assumed its characteristic form" (Brockett 626). Zeami built upon

the teachings of his father and is responsible for refining Noh into what it is known as today.

Zeami's writings make him integral to the history of Japanese theatre. Not only did he write twenty-six treatises laying out the theoretical concepts of Noh theatre, he is also responsible for writing many of the Noh plays that are performed. Scholars estimate that 100 of the 240 Noh plays belonging to the repertory were written by Zeami. This means that "Noh is above all a product of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; no play written during the past 400 years holds a permanent place in the Noh repertory" (Brockett 626). Zeami's many treatises discussed aesthetic elements of Noh including *monomane*, *hana*, *kokoro*, *yūgen*, and *rōjaku*. *Monomane* refers to theatre truthfully imitating an object (Ortolani 120-121). *Hana* refers to the "Flower" which is the effect caused by successful communication by the actor to the audience (Ortolani 121-122). *Kokoro* refers to the concept of the Noh actor being "governed in each step by the invisible heart that holds all forms and techniques of the nō together, and unites all powers in his masterful performance, in his life, and in his audience" (Ortolani 125). *Yūgen* by Zeami's definition means "truth and beauty that is hard to see" (Ortolani 125). Ortolani says that

"Zeami seems to find towards the end of his career a greater *yūgen* when his heroes and heroines become the representatives of humanity, suffering from causes beyond human control, for which, like Oedipus, they have no personal responsibility" (Ortolani 125-126). *Rōjaku* describes old age and is an important part of Zeami's aesthetics because "the interpretation of an old person is for Zeami the true mystery of the way of the *nō*, and is symbolized by a lonely flower blossoming on a withered branch of a cherry tree" (Ortolani 126).

The performance and staging of Noh account for many of its distinct features. The *shite* is the main actor and the *waki* are the secondary actors. Sometimes the actors are masked and sometimes they are not. There is also a chorus referred to as *ji*. The *ji* contains six to ten members which narrate and speak the masked character's dialogue. The text of a Noh play eventually leads to a dance at the end (Brockett 627). Oscar Brockett says that Noh can be described as "the art of walking" because "a great deal of focus is given to the way in which a character enters, moves around stage, and exits. All movement, including the main dance, is restrained and seems to be almost in slow motion" (627). The Noh stage consists of a bridge for entrances and exits. Another unique feature of the Noh

stage is the painted tree on the back wall, which many argue as a reference to *sarugaku-nō* originally being performed outdoors (Ortolani 145). Others argue that the pine tree is representative of "the famous Yōgō pine at the Kasuga shrine in Nara beneath which, according to tradition, the god of the shrine was seen dancing in the shape of an old man" (Ortolani 144).

Zen Buddhism is a major influence on the types of stories Noh plays tell. Oscar Brockett writes:

The most typical Noh plays have as protagonists ghosts, demons, or obsessed human beings whose souls cannot find rest because in life they had been too much devoted to worldly honor, love, or some other goal that keeps drawing the spirit back to the physical world. Although Noh plays are extremely varied, all draw on these Buddhist views. (Brockett 626)

Noh plays are typically divided into five groups. The first of these is the *waki nō*, which have deities as main characters and often tell the origin of his or her shrine. Secondly, there is *Asura nō*, where ghosts of famous samurais attempt to gain salvation from a monk. Thirdly, there are the *katsura mono* types of plays where the main character is female. Additionally there are plays grouped

together because they are generally staged fourth in a program of five noh plays. These include the *kyōran mono*, which revolve around insanity, the *genzai mono*, which take place in contemporary settings, and the *onryō mono*, which are about vengeful ghosts. Lastly, there are *kiri nō*. These are performed last in a program of Noh plays and feature demons and other such mythological creatures as the main characters. Most Noh plays traditionally follow a two-act structure (Ortolani 132-133).

Whereas Noh theatre played to aristocratic audiences, Kabuki played to the popular audiences of its time. Kabuki's origins are typically attributed to the dancer, Okuni in the year 1603. However, it is agreed among scholars that the style of dance used in Kabuki had at least been around since the 1590s (Ortolani 174). Okuni was a dancer who started to appear in performances that mixed short plays with sequences of dance. Okuni's style of performance eventually grew in popularity and spread throughout Japan (Brockett 629). Okuni's shows consisted of bawdy sexual situations and eroticism. Prostitutes began to stage shows similar to Okuni's in order to advertise for themselves (Ortolani 175). This association of Kabuki with prostitution lead to a series of events that lead to one of Kabuki theatre's most distinct features, the

onnagata. Oscar Brockett traces the events which followed Kabuki's association with prostitution:

In 1629 local authorities forbade women to appear on the stage. Women's Kabuki was succeeded by Young Men's Kabuki, which was suppressed in 1652, for the boys proved to be as seductive as the women. Next, came Men's Kabuki, destined to be the permanent form, although the men were required to shave their foreheads and to avoid any emphasis upon physical charms. (629-630)

The term, *onnagata*, refers to these bald men who performed as females in Kabuki plays.

Kabuki stages were designed to emphasize the spectacle aspects of the art form. Key among these features were the *hanamichi*, trap doors, and a revolving stage. The *hanamichi* refers to the bridge that runs from the stage to the back of the auditorium and is used for entrances and exits (Brockett 633). Ortolani says that "the *hanamichi* became central to *kabuki* acting and choreography as a place enhancing, like a frame, the high points of solo performances by the stars, spectacular entrances and exits, and parades of courtesans and *samurai*" (196).

Contrary to Noh theatre where the performers mainly practice "the art of walking," kabuki performers tend to

engage in much more spectacle-oriented styles of performance while on stage. Some of the performers wear makeup, which symbolizes their characters. For example, red and black symbolizes good characters, whereas blue and brown would generally symbolize evil characters (Brockett 632). One element found in Kabuki performances is the use of *kata*; this term "literally means 'forms,' and is used to describe fixed dance patterns as well as all conventional forms of performance, especially those referring to acting" (Ortolani 188). Ortolani adds: "*Kabuki's* stylized movement can be construed as sequences of *kata* which move from one statuesque position to the next, interspersed with pauses until the climatic sequence suddenly freezes in a uniquely expressive pose called *mie*" (189). Stage fighting and acrobatics are common in Kabuki performances. These are known as "either *tate*, which include some two hundred precisely stylized patterns, or *tachimawari*, a more generic term describing all fighting movements" (Ortolani 189).

The types of stories commonly told through kabuki theatre are varied. There were both historical plays (*jidaimono*) revolving around samurai and domestic dramas (*sewamono*). There are also the double suicide plays where two people would commit suicide because they could not be together (Brockett 630). There are also many Kabuki plays

involving the supernatural. There are even Kabuki superheroes. Ortolani explains the use of the supernatural in Kabuki plays by saying:

In general, the bridging of the gap between the world of our experience and the "other dimension"-where divine powers, friendly and revengeful ghosts, and strange animal spirits influence the human condition-is essential to the determination of the course of events in numerous *kabuki* plays from the very beginning of the form to the present repertory. (173)

Though, they may have some similarities, both Noh and kabuki are distinct art forms stemming from the same culture and history.

In the cultural history of Japan, samurai play a prominent role; they frequently appear as characters in Noh and Kabuki plays, and they provide the protagonists for the genre known as samurai films. Alain Silver says, "the Samurai is a figure grounded in historical realities but embellished by oral traditions, isolated in an unfamiliar past, and elevated through repeated representations in art to the level of myth" (13). While some Samurai films are more historically accurate than other ones, "separating the actuality from the mists of legends is, if possible at all,

no simple task" (Silver 13). Patrick Galloway defines Samurai as "the elite warrior class in Japan from roughly the eleventh century to the mid-nineteenth century. Not unlike their European counterparts, the chivalric knights, these proud warriors followed a code of honor (Bushido), served their feudal lords (daimyo), and fought battles to advance and defend the interests of the clans" (13).

Much like in traditional Japanese theatre, nature plays a large role in Samurai films. This is because both Shinto and Buddhist beliefs heavily involve nature as a spiritual force (Galloway 19). Galloway says that in Samurai films "nature imagery is more often than not used symbolically to provide subtext" (20). For example, "falling cherry blossoms might symbolize the fleeting nature of youth or the suddenness of death" (Galloway 20). As with any genre which spans several decades and contains a countless number of films, the Samurai genre is rife with diverse styles of films. They run the gauntlet from serious drams such as Rashomon, to series with never-ending sequels such as the Zatoichi films, to wacky '70s exploitation fare such as the Hanzo the Razor trilogy.

Chapter one focuses on Akira Kurosawa. Perhaps best known for his samurai films, he is arguably the most well-known Japanese filmmaker worldwide. His Macbeth

adaptation, Throne of Blood (1957), is heavily influenced by Noh techniques as well as by Zeami's play Black Mound (McDonald, Japanese Classical Theatre in Film 129).

Kurosawa's classic film Rashomon (1950) may at face value seem like a realistic work, but it draws on tales of the Oni (demons) (Whitlark). The Oni were represented with demon masks on the Noh stage. Kurosawa did not use masks in Rashomon, but he drew upon a villainous character type from Noh, and presented it in a contemporary and relevant way. Lastly, The Hidden Fortress (1958), which is often cited as the influence for Star Wars, also uses techniques from the Noh stage (Richie 136). Kurosawa's use of mythology in his films can be viewed as a way of presenting Japanese religious beliefs in modern times.

The second chapter focuses on the horror genre. Much like in America, horror films are a popular genre. After The Ring (a 2002 Hollywood remake of the Japanese film, Ringu), there have been a glut of Americanized remakes of similar Japanese horror films, thus creating a perception in the minds of American audiences that all Japanese horror films belong to the Ringu-style of horror. While this style of horror is quite popular in Japan, in actuality, Japanese horror can range from subtle (the Ringu-style) to campy (the style of most of the Gojira sequels) to

extremely violent (Ichi the Killer). Scholar Jay McRoy says of the Japanese horror film:

Often influenced by folklore and frequently indebted to the aesthetics of Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre, these films engage a myriad of complex political, social and ecological anxieties, including - but by no means limited to - apprehensions over the impact of western culture and military imperialism, and the struggle to establish a coherent and distinctly Japanese national identity. (1)

While there are a diversity of horror styles, this thesis focuses on what Jay McRoy describes as the “avenging spirit” genre of Japanese horror (3). McRoy discusses how these films draw on religious traditions as well as how they use “plot devices from traditional literature and theatre (including Noh theatre’s *shunen-* [revenge] and *shura-mono* [ghost-plays], and Kabuki theatre’s tales of the supernatural [or *kaidan*]) (3). Some of the more shocking “avenging spirit” films draw influence from western rape-revenge films such as the notorious 1978 film I Spit on Your Grave (McRoy 3).

In the horror genre, Takashi Miike is well known for cinema with levels of violence and sex that are far from

what is generally considered acceptable for American movie screens. He is stereotyped for this type of work, but when one looks at his filmography, one sees one of the lengthiest and most diverse of any director. This thesis looks at two of his horror films which fall into the "avenging spirit" sub-genre. The first film to be discussed is One Missed Call (2003). While this is a horror film, it is more of a suspense piece with some violence, instead of the over-the-top blood and gore fest with which Miike is usually associated. The Hannya, which is a type of female demon, has its own Noh masks (Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System). These Hannya bare more than passing similarities to the ghosts which inhabit the Ringu-style horror films, the style to which One Missed Call belongs. Takashi Miike claims that his films make no social or political statements, however, the way in which One Missed Call updates classic mythology with the modern technology of cell phones can be read as making a statement about society through the use of a classic tale. His more well-known film, Audition (1999) mixes a mythology influenced "avenging spirit" story with the elements of a western rape-revenge film.

Anime will be the focus of chapter three. Anime is a cultural phenomenon among Americans who are into science-

fiction and fantasy, but in its native country of Japan, it has a mainstream acceptance. The term, anime, is a French word which the Japanese used to title their animation; in turn, Americans used this same term to describe Japanese animation (Levi 1). Antonia Levi describes the technical difference between anime and traditional American animation by saying: "Disney Studio's productions are technologically far more sophisticated with their high cel count and smoothly flowing, realistic animation. *Anime*, by contrast, uses a low cel count which results in jerky, unrealistic movements. Backgrounds tend to be static and scenes are often linked together with stills in which nothing moves" (21). The less realistic animation reflects the anti-realism present in traditional Japanese theatre forms. Levi says that "Japan's artistic and theatrical traditions have never aimed at realism. Instead, both in art and drama, the Japanese have emphasized techniques that capture the essence of the subject in a way that assumes some participation by the audience" (21).

Anime is not so much a genre, as it is a style of filmmaking. If one were to attempt to put a family fantasy film like Kiki's Delivery Service (1989), a cyberpunk tale like Ghost in the Shell (1995), and a drama

such as Whispers of the Heart (1995) under one genre, that genre would encapsulate the widest variety of films possible. Anime is used to tell pretty much any type of story in Japan, whereas animation in America is generally limited to family films of the Disney and Pixar variety and adult comedies such as South Park.

While there are many anime directors, this thesis examines the work of Japan's most popular filmmaker, Hayao Miyazaki. He has frequently been called "The Walt Disney of Japan," and his works infiltrate the Japanese popular culture in the way films such as Star Wars do in America. This thesis looks at films that Miyazaki wrote himself. His films heavily involve nature, which is a central element to much Japanese mythology and Shinto religious beliefs. My Neighbor Totoro (1988) is a tale about living in harmony with nature. Princess Mononoke (1997) is a story about man's conflict with nature. Not only do these films deal with nature themes, but traditional Japanese theatre also deals with similar themes. What is unique about Miyazaki's films is how he draws upon multiple myths and combines them to create his own myths for contemporary audiences. Not only do these myths that Miyazaki creates entertain millions, they also comment on ecological

concerns and issues of technology and industrialization colliding with the nature-centered past of Japan.

The concluding chapter of this thesis examines how filmmaking in the West has been influenced by Japanese film making. In particular, this looks at Kurosawa's influence on prominent American film makers. Also, it looks at the trend of Hollywood remaking Japanese horror films. Finally, it examines how anime as an animation style has infiltrated America.

CHAPTER ONE:

AKIRA KUROSAWA: SAMURAI AND NOH THEATRE CONVENTIONS

Akira Kurosawa has left his imprint on the film making community worldwide. It has been said that "by far the most well-known Japanese director in the West, Akira Kurosawa introduced Japanese film to the world. A gifted artist who blazed a trail for his contemporaries, Kurosawa broke all the molds and provided the world with an incredible legacy of creative innovation in light and sound" (Galloway 31). The praise Kurosawa has gotten from Western critics and audiences has arguably hindered how his work was viewed in his native Japan. Galloway says:

After Rashomon won the coveted Grand Prix at the Venice International Film Festival in 1951, bringing praise from Western critics and audiences, Kurosawa was lambasted by critics at home. The rationale was that if foreigners could get a handle on his film, it must lack some intrinsic Japanese quality that would otherwise have repelled and confounded them. His

detractors concluded that it was mere novelty and exoticism that attracted the foreigners. (32)

Despite this criticism, Kurosawa's films are actually rooted in Japanese culture, drawing influences from traditional Japanese theatre and mythology. Their influences are evident when looking at films such as Rashomon, Throne of Blood, and The Hidden Fortress.

Even if one has never seen the film Rashomon, one is probably familiar with its title as a term to describe works that feature a multi-perspective narrative. Patrick Galloway praises the film as one that proves the samurai "genre can accommodate a masterpiece of world cinema" (51). He goes on to describe the film as "a puzzle piece. Nobody, not even the writer and director, really knows what happens in it, for it concerns truth and the way the light of truth reflects and refracts through the mind of the human being" (51). The story of the film takes the simple event of a rape and murder that occur in the woods and shows it from four very different perspectives. Rashomon "is based upon two short stories, 'In a Grove' and 'Rashomon,' both by renowned author Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927). The latter tale provides the frame story within which the former is played out" (Galloway 52).

Some debate that there is no direct influence from traditional Japanese theatre in Rashomon. Donald Richie goes so far to say that "despite foreign commentators on the subject, there is absolutely no influence at all from classical Japanese drama" (79). Richie himself happens to be a foreign commentator. In contrast to what Richie says, I would argue that there are some similarities to classical Japanese theatre in Rashomon. These similarities include both acting style and set design.

Kabuki and Noh acting have never strived for realism, and while the acting in Rashomon does not strive for realism either, it does so in a different way. Richie says of this film's acting that "it is apparently unrestrained, and it is in the grand manner which the West once knew but has now almost lost. Indeed, Mifune as the bandit was so 'grand' that even Japanese critics complained of overacting" (79). "Grand" acting is in the tradition of melodramatic theatre and strives to be unrealistic much like the acting styles of Kabuki and Noh. However, whereas Noh acting is stylized, but restrained, the acting in Rashomon is more in line with the over-the-top acting found in Kabuki theatre. The over-the-top acting in Kabuki involved actors freezing their bodies in a pose called a *mie* during a climatic moment in the story (Halford 451).

The sets of Rashomon can almost be described as theatrical stage sets. Richie claims that instead of these sets being influenced by classical Japanese theatre, they are instead influenced by modern Japanese theatre. He proclaims that using this style of scenery was necessary because "the budget was small, the sets (there are only two-both studio sets-the gate and the prison courtyard) are deliberately stylized, deliberately simplified in the manner of modern stage scenery (again not Kabuki scenery, which is flamboyant, detailed, and very nineteenth century to the eye" (79). Despite the style of Rashomon's set going for the more realistic instead of flamboyant, the use of style and simplicity shows that the set design owes a lot to the set design of classical Japanese theatre.

Though Kurosawa himself claims to be influenced by film and not theatre when he discusses Rashomon's style, it is hard to deny that the style of film he was influenced by has many similarities to classical Japanese theatre.

Kurosawa himself said:

I like silent pictures and I always have. They are often so much more beautiful than sound pictures are. Perhaps they had to be. At any rate, I wanted to restore some of this beauty. I thought of it, I remember, in this way: one of

the techniques of modern art is simplification,
and that I must therefore simplify this film.

(Richie 79)

Richie notes that "simplification is also one of the techniques of Japanese art and long has been" (79). Much like classical Japanese theatre, Rashomon relies on the simplicity of visual images to communicate a story to the audience.

There are elements in the plot of Rashomon which reflect the mythologies and religious beliefs which influenced the stories found in the plays of classical Japanese theatre. For example, the bandit Tajomaru can be viewed as an *oni*, which is a type of demon found in many classical Japanese plays. Tajomaru's character serves a similar purpose in the plot of Rashomon, as *oni* characters served in the plots of classical Japanese plays. James Whitlark says that "Tajomaru has a perennial significance as the inevitable entry of disorder into human plans, with the potential to restore humanity to a more-caring condition as all boundaries, including those between people begin to dissolve in a clash of perspectives."

Much like how classical Japanese plays reflected Zen Buddhist beliefs, so does Rashomon. The character of the murdered samurai who tells his perspective of the story

through the medium owes something to Noh protagonists who also could not pass on to the afterlife due to what has happened to them on Earth. Another way in which Rashomon reflects Zen Buddhist beliefs is in the ending. In the ending, an abandoned baby is discovered, and the woodcutter adopts him. Some have argued that this is trying to input a Christian message into this film, however, "it actually has a closer analogy to Japanese traditions than to mercy for the sake of Christ (who is never mentioned in the film). In Zen, for instance, enlightenment comes characteristically after a period called the 'Great Doubt,' a loss of faith in everything coupled with a passion to understand" (Whitlark).

Whereas the connections between classical Japanese theatre and Rashomon can be argued to be somewhat loose. The influences of Noh theatre on Kurosawa's Throne of Blood are widely acknowledged by a variety of sources. At its most basic, Throne of Blood takes the plot of Shakespeare's Macbeth and places it in the Sengoku period (1478-1603) of Japanese history. Kurosawa discusses why Noh influenced him in the making of this film:

I like Japanese ceramics, Japanese painting-but I like the Noh best of all. It's funny though.

If you really like something like this, you don't

often use it in your films. At any rate, I've never much cared for the Kabuki, perhaps because I like the Noh so much. I like it because it is the real heart, the core of all Japanese drama. Its degree of compression is extreme, and it is full of symbols, full of subtlety...in the Noh, style and story are one. (Richie 117)

The scholarly work detailing how Noh influenced Throne of Blood is not merely academic theory, as Kurosawa himself admits that it influenced this film.

One key difference in plot between Macbeth and Throne of Blood is that the Weird Sisters from Shakespeare's play have been replaced by a single ghost. This is because as Kurosawa says "the story is understandable enough but the Japanese tend to think differently about such things as witches and ghosts" (Richie 117). Patrick Galloway says that "Kurosawa knew that Japanese culture, rooted as it is in nature worship, sees witches and sorcerers in a more neutral light" (72).

While characters do not ever wear Noh masks on screen in Throne of Blood, Noh masks did influence some of the actors' performances. Toshiro Mifune plays the Macbeth of this picture and his character is called Taketori Washizu. Patrick Galloway says of Mifune's performance: "his

face...seems to resemble a Noh mask, the Shikami, a demon spirit suffused with agitation and rage. Rarely does it leave his countenance, even from the first frame" (73). Isuzu Yamada who plays Lady Asaji draws even heavier upon a Noh mask in her performance. Galloway says:

During the filming, Kurosawa handed Isuzu Yamada a Deigan mask (used for female spirits in Noh dramas). As Ms. Yamada relates in the 2001 documentary Kurosawa, the director instructed her, "don't ever blink-you are a Noh mask." Yamada, a talented stage and screen veteran, followed her director's mandate to the letter.

(73)

Chieko Naniwa who plays the Ghost (which some scholars refer to as a witch) also was influenced by Noh masks in her facial expressions. Keiko McDonald proclaims that "the witch in each forest sequence of The Throne of Blood is made up to resemble a specific Noh mask. When she first appears, the face is similar to the female masks called *yaseonna* (old lady)" (Japanese Classical Theatre in Films 129). Later on when the ghost reappears near the end of the film, her face resembles a *yamauba* mask which represents a mountain witch (McDonald, Japanese Classical Theatre in Films 131). It is a testament to the actors'

talent that they were able to execute such fine performances considering the restraints of controlling their facial muscles to replicate the effects of wearing Noh masks. As McDonald says about Noh masks in general: "certain types of masks, especially the female kind, are static and almost blank. Depending, however, on the illumination and to a great extent the actor's physical movement, the static mask is capable of expressing a multitude of emotions" (McDonald 126).

Camera work is another area where the influence of Noh is present in Throne of Blood. Richie makes note that this film almost completely lacks close-ups and mentions that "Kurosawa has said that this was because of the Noh influence where, naturally, everything is seen full" (121). Any kind of live theatre, regardless of national origins, lacks close-ups unless giant screens are used to display the actor's faces to the audience. About the close-ups, Kurosawa in his own words said "there are very few close-ups. I tried to do everything using full-shots. Japanese almost never make films this way and I remember I confused my staff thoroughly with my instructions. They were so used to moving up for moments of emotion and I kept telling them to move back" (Richie 121). Richie goes on to argue that the lack of close-ups and emphasis on full shots may

have been done to achieve an alienating effect on the audience (121). Interestingly enough, Richie says that "the camera is always furthest away from its characters when they are undergoing the most strain" (121).

A chorus is rarely used in non-musical films, however, Throne of Blood has one. McDonald describes the opening: "[O]n the sound track a choral incantation describes the scene. It tells us that these castle ruins, once so glorious and proud, show that in the past, as now, this way lies *shura*, the path of bloodshed" (Cinema East 156). Much like in classical theatre of both the Greek and Japanese kind, the chorus comes back in at the end and "informs us again of the outcome of soaring ambition and the mutability of human affairs" (McDonald, Cinema East 163).

McDonald discusses how Kurosawa built a "phantasmagorical world" in Throne of Blood through the influence of Noh theatre (Cinema East 155). According to McDonald, Kurosawa bases the style of this film off of "*mugen*, or phantom Noh drama," where "reality is more complex: a twofold reality of the natural and the supernatural" (Cinema East 155). Throne of Blood takes place during a civil war, which is a realistic event, yet Kurosawa inserts moments of the supernatural throughout the film to build what McDonald calls a "phantasmagorical

world." McDonald says the scenes which build this reality consist of: the scene where the ghost is first encountered, the scene where Washizu sees Miki's ghost at the banquet, and lastly the scene where Washizu returns to where he first saw the ghost to ask her to tell the future (Cinema East 156). Though these scenes have their roots in Macbeth, they help to make the film similar to a "phantom Noh drama" instead of a drama representing contemporary reality.

McDonald draws comparisons between Throne of Blood and a specific Noh play titled Black Mound. In the scene where the ghost is first encountered, there is a spinning wheel and a thatched hut which are props that "suggest the extreme economy of means characteristic of the Noh stage, and they are readily identified, as well, with a specific play, Zeami's Kurozuka (Black Mound), which Kurosawa had once seen" (McDonald, Japanese Classical Theatre in Film 129) McDonald describes the plot of Black Mound as:

A party of wondering monks encounters an old woman sitting at a spinning wheel. She sings alone how fleeting this world is and how sinful human beings are, just like the witch in The Throne of Blood. She also curses the fate that brought her into this human world. After the

monks have asked to be given shelter for the night and been taken in, they see the phantasmal world. The old hag reveals her true identity: she is a demon living on human flesh. Behind her hut is a pile of human remains. She engages the monks in combat only to be defeated in the end.

(Japanese Classical Theatre in Film 129)

Also of interest is how the ghost in Throne of Blood is similar to the demon from Black Mound in the fact that she "is gifted with supernatural insight into the progress of human affairs and the darkest secrets of the human heart" (McDonald, Japanese Classical Theatre in Film, 129).

Moving away from the heaviness of Rashomon and Throne of Blood, the more light-hearted adventure film The Hidden Fortress also draws upon Japanese classical theatre. David Desser says of the film, "The Hidden Fortress is simple, direct, and light-hearted, content, for the most part, to offer up a rousing entertainment. Despite some undertones that distinguish it from the average formula tale, the film emerges as primarily a rousing action-comedy" (92). Because of the action-comedy characteristics of this film, it stands unique amongst Kurosawa's other works. The basic plot boils down to a princess, a general,

and two peasants attempting to get gold out of enemy territory in order for the princess to rebuild her clan.

One of the key ways in which The Hidden Fortress is influenced by classical Japanese theatre is through the use of music. Donald Richie describes the Noh music used in this film as "pure Noh, delicate little rattlings from the drums, a ravishing obligato for the flute, grand punctuation from the great *taiko*-and the tableau is seen as a ballet, it looks just like Noh" (136). Richie finds that the Noh music tends to be a motif for Princess Yuki throughout the film. He gives some examples:

When she first appears, high on the rocks surrounding the hidden fortress, there is a piercing call in the Noh *fué*. Later, she is given a dagger with which to kill herself if captured and the Noh flute is again heard... At the end of the film the farmers (certain they are to be executed) raise their eyes and see the princess and the two generals now in full regalia, revealed as royal heroes. (136)

Kyogen (comic interludes between Noh plays) music is also featured in this film. This is used as Richie points out when the peasants still believe Princess Yuki to be a mute servant and "the two engage in a pantomime to convey to her

that the horses need water, at the same time trying to hide their intention of stealing horses and gold" (136). It is very fitting to use *kyogen* music during this moment in the film as it can be described as one of the film's comic interludes.

One of the most thematically important uses of music in The Hidden Fortress occurs during the fire festival scene. The lyrics to the song sung during this festival are as follows:

The life of a man
 Burn it with the fire
 The life of an insect
 Throw it into the fire
 Ponder and you'll see
 The world is dark
 And this floating world is a dream
 Burn with abandon.

Richie makes an important point about this song: "at the fire festival the music is folk-music but when the princess in captivity sings the festival song, she gives it Noh intonation-and the same thing occurs when Fujita is making up his mind to join the fugitives" (136). Fujita is the rival general. Galloway says that much like Noh music, this song has a "Buddhist theme" and interestingly enough

it "contrasts with the two peasants' gold fever, emphasizing it all the more" (76).

The use of Noh music in this film is very fitting because as Richie says "the structure of the story is rather Noh like" (136). Richie breaks down the structure of the film as follows: "the princess is disguised (just as the god or demon is disguised in the first half of the Noh play) and the farmers think she is merely a mute servant. At the end, as at the end of the Noh play-she is revealed as her goddess-like self" (136). What is intriguing about this film using both a Noh story structure and Noh music is the fact that "as the film progresses, it becomes apparent that Kurosawa is telling a fairy-tale" (Richie 136). Kurosawa announces early on that he is telling a fairy tale and Richie says he does this through "the farmers' accidentally discovering the gold (accompanied by percussive and Noh-like sounds on the soundtrack)...and Mifune's splendid entrance" (136). Toshiro Mifune plays the general on the side of Princess Yuki. His entrance is in a scene where the peasants are:

Rummaging around the rocks, pushing and pulling each other, each trying to find the next piece.

The camera pans with them and as they continue to scramble we see, in the furthest distance,

perfectly framed by a cleft in the rocks, Mifune standing-tiny in the distance-looking at them.

It is an entrance of a tenor, it is like the entrance of Ivan in L'Oiseau de feu: mysterious, glamorous, the very image of heroic possibility.

(Richie 136)

Fairy tales like Noh plays tend to have morals, and The Hidden Fortress is no different. The moral in this film is "given by the princess, for this down-to-earth and sensible young lady is the only one who keeps her head throughout the film. She finds what she believes in the song of the fire-festival and-as she later explains-it is an exhortation to be yourself, to be what you are, to realize yourself" (Richie 137). The audience of the film goes on a wish fulfillment fantasy as they identify with the characters of the two peasants who discover gold (Desser 97). David Desser proclaims that "this fairy-tale aspect...distinguishes the film and has made it so attractive here in the West" (97).

Other films of Kurosawa's have always drawn upon noh theatre techniques and Japanese mythology. Oddly enough, one of these film has many similarities to Kurosawa's little seen 1945 film They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail. This is because "Kurosawa has said that he wanted to remake

They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail with many sets, with more music, with much more technique. Without advertising the fact, he has done so in The Hidden Fortress" (Richie 137). Many of the Noh influences found in The Hidden Fortress can also be found in They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail. The use of Noh music can also be found In They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail as well as the use of the same Noh story structure found in The Hidden Fortress (Richie 136). At the end of both films, the peasants "like the porter in They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail come to realize that they have been adventuring with demigods" (Richie 136). Akira Kurosawa's filmography is not just limited to samurai films, he also directed domestic dramas such as domestic drama, Ikiru (1952).

CHAPTER TWO

TAKASHI MIIKE: AVENGING SPIRITS IN MODERN HORROR CINEMA

Takashi Miike is the epitome of a cult Japanese film director. Western fans of Japanese cinema can turn to his films when they feel the need to see how bizarre and extreme (in terms of violence and sexual content) Japanese cinema can be. His film directing career started in 1991 and the Internet Movie Database currently lists eighty-four projects he has worked on as director, with two of those yet to be released. Though his filming style is very different, he has also worked as a stage director once.

In 2000, he directed a Kabuki-style play called Demon Pond, which has been released on DVD. This play revolves around "the modern-day story of a man searching for a friend who has mysteriously disappeared, with a magical tale involving strange creatures, a heartbroken princess, and a pact that can't be broken" (Brown). Because of his stage work, he is aware of the conventions of traditional Japanese theatre.

Unlike Kurosawa who sometimes drew directly upon the conventions of traditional Japanese theatre and placed those within his film, Miike uses his film work to display a radically different style than his stage work. However, the mythology and stories which have influenced traditional Japanese theatre, have also influenced the film work of Takashi Miike.

With such a prolific body of work, it is obvious that Miike has directed a large variety of projects. He has even veered into mainstream family films in recent years. The films which shall be discussed herein belong to the "avenging spirit" sub-genre of horror film which was discussed earlier. This chapter examines how this sub-genre was handled in Noh theatre with the play Lady Aoi and in the Kabuki play The Ghost of Yotsuya; it then compares it to how Miike presents two tales of an "avenging spirit" in his films One Missed Call and Audition.

Lady Aoi is a classic Noh play possibly written by Zeami and based upon one chapter from the book The Tale of Genji (early 11th century). This play, like others dealing with avenging spirits, belongs to the fourth group of Noh plays ("Aoi no Ue: Synopsis and Highlight"). In this play, Lady Aoi, the wife of Genji is possessed by the spirit of Lady Rokujō. Lady Rokujō is one of Genji's lovers, who

feels she has been scorned in favor of Lady Aoi.

Eventually, a priest is called in to do an exorcism and:

The jealousy in Lady Rokujō's heart embodies itself as a female ogre. Turned out to be an enmity personified, Lady Rokujō assaults not only Lady Aoi but also the praying priest. After a bitter fight, the vengeful phantom of Lady Rokujō [is] overcome and calm[s] down. Lady Rokujō's spirit [becomes] peaceful and capable of becoming a Buddha. ("Aoi no Ue: Synopsis and Highlights")

Lady Aoi is only one of many Noh plays dealing with an "avenging spirit." However, this understanding of the plot of one of these plays provides insight into how these types of stories are presented in modern popular Japanese cinema.

Very similar stories of "avenging spirits" are also prevalent in Kabuki theatre. However, the Kabuki plays in this sub-genre include more of the spectacle and entertainment value that horror films strive for. The Kabuki play examined here is Tsuruya Namboku's The Ghost of Yotsuya (1825). This play sounds much like the ultimate horror film. According to Benito Ortolani it contains: "a world of frightful ghosts, thefts, murders, and hallucinations worthy of Edgar Allan Poe brought [to] strikingly modern themes of despair and horror, and an

atmosphere of torture, killings, grotesque and supernatural apparitions to the Japanese stage." (184)

This play concerns a man named Iyemon who is married to a woman named O Iwa. In the first act, a girl called O Ume has fallen for Iyemon. O Ume's parents poison O Iwa, thus turning her into a hideous creature. When Iyemon sees what his wife has been transformed into, he flees in horror.

In the second act, Iyemon is seeking refuge from his wife in the house of O Ume's parents. They urge him to marry O Ume due to his wife's transformation and he agrees. Iyemon tries to treat O Iwa badly, so she will leave him. His servant, Kohei begs for money for medicine to treat O Iwa, but he refuses and after a fight scene, Iyemon locks Kohei in a cupboard. While Iyemon is away, O Iwa kills herself with a sword. Worried about what will happen due to Kohei witnessing Iyemon mistreating his wife, Iyemon kills Kohei. Iyemon has Kohei and O Iwa tied to a plank and dumped in a river. At the wedding of Iyemon and O Ume, Iyemon sees O Ume as O Iwa, and kills her with his sword; coming out of his hallucination, he realizes that he has killed his new bride. He then sees who he believes to be Kohei and kills him too; however it turns out to be his new father-in-law.

In the third act, Iyemon is in a dream-like state, and walking along the river. The plank with O Iwa rises up and screams for Iyemon. Iyemon tries to thrust the plank back down into the water, but it comes back up again, this time with Kohei's body calling out to Iyemon. This causes Iyemon to kill himself by jumping into the river (Halford 373-374).

There are a couple of noteworthy things about how this play is a forerunner to modern horror films. The revolving stage of the Kabuki theatre is used in a way which allows for "quick scene changes that in the case of Yotsuya Kaidan create a fast pace and allows an ironic montage sequence (in horror movie style) to be established between O Iwa's doom and Iyemon's proposal" (Hand 23). A trademark of almost all horror films are a focus on special effects, and in Kabuki these effects were referred to as *keren* (McRoy 16). Richard J. Hand gives examples of how *keren* were heavily used in this play:

In the poisoning scene O Iwa's hair comes off in bloody clumps, her skin turns purple, one of her eyes distends and a sword pierces her throat. When she returns as a ghost, *keren* enables her to float in midair and appear inside a lantern; in a garden scene,

eggplants transform into a representation of her face.

(23)

The Ghost of Yotsuya was first performed when violence in Kabuki was graphically realistic (Toshio 181). This blood, called *suōjiru*, is made “from sappanwood, a tropical tree which, when its red heartwood is boiled down, produces a dark red juice” (Toshio 181). It differs from other types of stage blood because it “flows smoothly, hence it splatters and oozes easily thereby making it possible to create graphically realistic ‘bloody scenes’ with all the appearance of real gore” (Toshio 181).

The Noh plays (unlike the Kabuki plays) that featured “avenging spirits” were not intended to thrill and frighten their audience in the way that horror films do. One Missed Call is one of many Ringu-inspired horror films. To put this into perspective, Ringu-inspired horror films are similar to the American (and Canadian) slasher films from the 1980s which came out because of the success of John Carpenter’s Halloween (1978). In other words, they are numerous and feature similar plots as the film which first inspired them.

It should be noted that with Miike being such a talented director, his film manages to rise above being

just another Ringu imitation. In an online review, film critic Jeremy Knox says:

What's masterful of Miike's direction is that he never quite lets the audience know if he's going for a parody or homage, letting them make up their own mind about what's onscreen. It's a tricky kind of tightrope to walk, but Miike is arguably the only director on this planet who can pull it off since he's perfectly in control of his films and comfortable using any style.

Knox also says that the clichés of the "avenging spirit" genre are taken to "such insane heights that you sit there agape that he could use such familiar elements to surprise you." In other words, One Missed Call is not only a good example of Miike's use of the "avenging spirit" theme, it is a good example of how this genre is generally treated in Japanese popular cinema which Miike's execution takes to a higher level.

The basic plot of One Missed Call is that people die after receiving a message from the future on their cell phone; the message they receive foreshadows their death. Throughout the film, characters attempt to avoid their death as the two main characters, Yumi (a college girl) and Hiroshi (a detective), attempt to find out the mystery

behind the series of gruesome deaths. Despite numerous elements similar to Lady Aoi, the way One Missed Call presents an “avenging spirit” story is very different. The “avenging spirit” in One Missed Call is described by a character in the film as “a woman who died full of hate.” This kept her tied to the earthly realm where she seeks vengeance, much like the “avenging spirits” in Noh plays. However, the execution of this “avenging spirit” story is different from how it would have been handled in a Noh play.

Many “avenging spirit” Noh plays feature exorcisms, and One Missed Call is no different in that regard. The exorcism scene in Lady Aoi is as follows (the waki is the priest, and is referred to as the Saint in this translation):

Shite (Rokujō): Go back, Gyoja, go back to your home;
do not stay and be vanquished!

Waki (Saint): Be you what demon you will, do not
hope to overcome the Gyoja's subtle
power. I will pray again.

Then the Saint calls upon the spirits of the north, south, east, and west to exorcise the demon from Lady Rokujō.

After this is done:

Shite (Rokujō): The voice of the Hannya Book! I am

afraid. Never again will I come as an
angry ghost. (Waley)

In Lady Aoi, the power of Buddha is not only able to cure Lady Aoi of possession, but the ensuing dialogue shows that this manages to turn the possessing spirit, Rokujō, into a Buddha.

In One Missed Call, an exorcism is performed on Yumi's friend, Natsumi, who has been marked for death by one of the cell phone messages. This exorcism is performed on live TV, thus parodying the media's love of the sensational. The exorcism fails miserably, and concludes with Natsumi twisting her own head off, and then her body continues to walk without a head for a moment. This scene is something straight out of a *keren*-heavy scene from The Ghost of Yotsuya. In the realm of a Takashi Miike film, spiritual beliefs are not enough to save someone, which gives insight into how modern Japanese society does not view religion as a means to save someone from an evil force. When the classic Noh plays were written, Japan was much more invested in its religious beliefs, and thus those plays tended to reaffirm those beliefs. The general over-the-top and darkly comical nature of the exorcism scene in One Missed Call is heightened by the obviously theatrical sets on the sound stage where the scene takes place.

Whereas the exorcism scene in One Missed Call is its most over-the-top scene, the tone of the film throughout is one which tends to shock and thrill the audience much like a theme park haunted house. On the contrary, Noh plays moved at a slow pace with restrained acting, subtleness, and little action. In One Missed Call, whenever the "Ringtone of Death" (which signifies the "avenging spirit" is calling) is heard, it is used as one of the film's many jump scare tactics. Jump scare tactics are something completely absent from Noh plays, but are similar to the spectacle one would find in a Kabuki play.

It is interesting to look at how an "avenging spirit" horror film ends compared to a Noh play of this genre. In the Noh plays, the spirit was put to rest and was exorcised; it was able to leave Earth as it had let go of whatever held it to the Earthly realm. Instead, the modern Japanese horror films tend to have ambiguous and unresolved endings. In One Missed Call, the ghost possesses Yumi at the end, instead of leaving this realm. This fits the modern horror cliché of leaving things open for sequels. There were sequels to One Missed Call, but they did not follow up on this ending.

Audition is a more violent and shocking film than One Missed Call, but at the same time, it has a slower pace

and more focus on character development. The film concerns a widower named Aoyama, who after many years of being a single parent decides to remarry. Along with his friend, they come up with a plan that involves holding a fake movie audition to find Aoyama's new wife. Aoyama is drawn to one of the auditioners, a girl named Asami. Asami vanishes about half way through the film, leading Aoyama to investigate. He finds out that Asami is a victim of brutal physical and psychological abuse by her uncle and that she also killed a record producer before meeting him. By the end of the film, her dark secrets are revealed and Aoyama ends up her latest victim.

Audition is not a story based in the realm of the supernatural such as One Missed Call and many of the "avenging spirit" Noh plays. In many ways, Audition is like a realistic take on the "avenging spirit" genre. The killer, Asami, is a real person and not a ghost or otherworldly being. However, she possesses many qualities of the "avenging spirits" from classic Noh plays. One thing to note, is that like much of Miike's work, Audition tends to be an ambiguous film which can be opened up to multiple interpretations. The ambiguous nature of many Japanese films is rooted in the traditional Japanese beliefs of the real world and the spirit world interacting

as opposed to western beliefs where things such as ghosts are viewed as delusions. There are many scenes in the film which could not happen in the real world. This examination of the film will look at these scenes viewing them as moments that occur only in Aoyama's imagination. This reading of the film supports Asami as being a real life "avenging spirit."

One thing striking about Audition, is that for the first half, it is basically a domestic drama about a man wanting to remarry. It is almost unheard of for an American horror film to spend so long on the build up. Oftentimes, a first kill is required before the opening credits as seen in most of the Friday the 13th films. However, Miike takes a page from the Kabuki ghost plays and has things play out like a domestic drama for the most part, until Asami disappears and Aoyama goes looking for her. After that the film proceeds to being a mystery, then an all-out horror film mixing delusions with very real torture. Steffen Hantke quotes Gary Morris in describing it:

For close to an hour it has the look and feel of a classic Japanese family drama. Just past midpoint everything changes: the film bails on the narrative, intertwines dream sequences and reality so densely

there's no telling what's real, and pushed the gore and grue to a limit rarely seen outside the cheesy cinematic bloodbaths of 1960s schlocksters like Herschell Gordon Lewis or Al Adamson. (59)

As discussed above, one characteristic about Kabuki plays is the gore and Audition definitely has that. There is a decapitation by piano wire and one of the lengthiest torture scenes in cinema history.

Audition also lacks any elements of the supernatural. While Aoyama sees things such as a tongue palpitating on its own and Asami turning into his dead wife and son's girlfriend, these things are delusions that Aoyama is perceiving. These delusions are caused by Aoyama's drink being spiked and are "a combination of his guilt and desires rolled into one" (Mes 187). In Japanese film, what the viewer sees is not always what is happening. Unlike One Missed Call which takes place in a fantasy version of modern Japan where ghosts are still possible, Audition is free from any references to mythology, which in many ways, makes it very distant from classic Kabuki plays.

What is really important to look at here is how Miike places the female avenger in a modern, realist setting. The female avenger is what all the plays and films discussed so far have in common. Even though Asami is not

literally supernatural, she has been described as "a quasi-supernatural incarnation with a vendetta against men" (Hand 25). Hantke says "what is striking about Miike's treatment of the female avenger, however, is that he employs it purely as a generic element. That is to say, he makes no noticeable attempt at endowing it with a sense of aesthetic freshness or originality" (58).

Even though Miike is taking the female avenger out of the supernatural realm, this has been done before in Japanese action films such as the Lady Snowblood series. What is distinct about Asami compared to the female avengers of classical Japanese theatre is that:

Aoyama, through far from perfect, does nothing to deserve Asami's ferocious violence. On the contrary, Miike goes to great lengths to present him as a well intentioned, decent man. Nonetheless, Asami's revenge, once initiated, seems inevitable, a process that once set in motion, cannot be stopped. (Hantke 60)

Never in the film is Asami scorned by Aoyama; he doesn't cheat on her, try to kill her, or any of the other traditional things that will cause someone to go on a quest for revenge. Hantke theorizes:

If we see Asami as a figure in the Japanese tradition of the female avenger, her capacity for violence and destruction is directed against Aoyama as a proponent of a reactionary ideology of the family, if viewers experience a sense of ambivalence about this attack, it may be because we see this family as 'often already dysfunctional' and male authority as 'often already undermined'. The violence is presented as a revenge for Aoyama's breaking the promise to love 'only her', which leads Asami to extend her aggression, albeit unsuccessfully, to Aoyama's son. (60)

Hantke goes on to say that "the social role into which romantic love is eventually channeled, that of the perfect wife, is still rigid and constricting; this is the role that Aoyama has scripted for Asami" (60). It can be argued that Asami is seeking revenge for being molded into this ideal feminine role.

There is debate over whether Audition is pro or anti feminism. Hantke says of Asami that "she may appear specifically as a backlash phenomenon against late 1960s feminism" (61). This is referring to a fear of women getting to powerful and thus extracting their control gained from feminism on men as seen in the torture scene. However, Tom Mes says that "many critics in Europe and the

USA read the film as a feminist statement and the torture scenes were regarded as proof" (189). However, Mes goes on to say that "at no time during the film is she representative for an entire gender, just an individual with a troubled history" (189). Also, she killed the female manager at the bar she used to work at, so she is not seeking revenge solely on men (Mes 190). There is no strong evidence to support this film as pro or anti feminist.

Much like One Missed Call, Audition goes the route of having the "avenging spirit" not be put at rest by the film's conclusion. Asami is stopped by being pushed down the stairs by Aoyama's son, and is left to die. No one in the film attempts to redeem Asami or put her spirit at rest. This is in line with slasher films with wronged villains like Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger; the heroes and heroines never bother to put their souls at rest, they just want to stop them until they come back for the next sequel. In contrast, older horror stories tended to opt for redemption of the villains as a central theme, such as Frankenstein's monster being viewed as misunderstood.

Like any kind of trope that has been around for centuries, the female avenger has taken on many different forms. Even one contemporary director has given two

different takes on it. Miike has shown how a trope rooted in Japanese mythology can still be relevant today. Instead of them being used to teach religious lessons, Miike uses these "avenging spirit" tropes to comment on social issues such as modern society's reliance on cell phones, and gender issues such as Asami's role as a woman in Audition. The Noh and Kabuki plays were very much like classical Japanese folk tales. In contrast, Miike makes these tropes more modern by making them more psychological and realistic, especially in Audition, where the "avenging spirit" is human.

CHAPTER THREE:

HAYAO MIYAZAKI: SHINTO IN MODERN BLOCKBUSTERS

Hayao Miyazaki is widely regarded as the “Walt Disney of Japan.” His films are usually blockbusters with wide audience appeal and plenty of merchandising tie-ins. All of the films he has directed have been anime fantasies. These range from very calm and relaxing films to films filled with epic battles and tension in the vein of the Lord of the Rings trilogy and the Harry Potter films. One element all of Miyazaki’s films have in common is the use of Shinto themes which often are used in the service of ecological messages. He also uses techniques from Japanese theatre in his work (Hu 34). The films examined here are from extreme ends of the spectrum of Miyazaki’s filmography. My Neighbor Totoro (1988) is a gentle film, while Princess Mononoke (1997) is a dark and violent one. The first demonstrates people at peace with nature, while the second film depicts people at war with nature.

My Neighbor Totoro is the story of Satsuki and her younger sister Mei who move into the country with their

father. Their mother is sick and hospitalized. Because of the dust bunnies, they begin to think their new house is haunted and are thrilled at the idea. One day Mei spots a weird creature and follows it to the hidden forest area where she finds Totoro, a larger version of the same furry creature. Later on, the sisters are waiting for their father at a bus stop and he is late. Then Totoro appears showing himself to Satsuki for the first time. A bus that appears to be a living and breathing giant cat appears to take Totoro away. Shortly thereafter, their father arrives. Satsuki and Mei were set to see their mother come home for a visit, but the visit was delayed because she took a turn for the worse. Satsuki is very upset and soon after Mei disappears. During the search, Satsuki asks Totoro for help. He summons the Catbus, and they go and find Mei. Afterwards, they are taken to see their mother in the hospital, but they only view her through a window. After that, the mother says she believed she saw her daughters for a moment outside the window, but they have disappeared. The ending credits show the mother returning home while Totoro and his friends look on unseen.

Miyazaki employs elements from the Noh theatre in My Neighbor Totoro. Tze-Yue G. Hu, author of Frames of Anime: Culture and Image Building, says that a Noh theatre element

found within the works of Miyazaki is “the moments of non-action, rest, pause, feelings of space and time, intervals between events, and ‘silent breath’ of the protagonist” (34). These types of moments are described as the “‘art of *ma*’ signifying the science of time and space in storytelling” (Hu 34). Hu quotes Zeami saying “‘what [the actor] does *not* do is of interest’ and, as a result, such silent *ma* moments moved the audience mutually to experience his contemplative world” (34). Being a very slow-paced film, moments of rest are found throughout My Neighbor Totoro: these moments draw the audience into the peaceful setting. A particular example is:

The scenes of *furusato* (hometown) and summer-time seem to operate on *nō’s mugen-kaisō-ho*, that is, the “reflection in visual method”, which transports the spectator back to Japan in the 1950s and the “real” rustic experiences could be recollected and enjoyed before one’s eyes. While Zeami’s metaphysical concept *kokoro* describes the highest levels of *nō* performance, in the cinema of Miyazaki and Takahata it could be translated as a collective cultural will to allow reminiscences (*kaisō*) of pre-industrial Japan. (Hu 34)

Even American animated features with very little dialogue such as Pixar's Wall-E (2008) (which is also an ecologically themed film) contain frequent moments of action and slapstick, whereas My Neighbor Totoro lingers on the silent moments with no desire to excite the audience. Hu makes a comparison between Noh masks and anime in general as he says "the masks which actors wear in *nō* theatre are essential artistic narrative devices; they allow the actor to assume the 'living space' of the characters and to draw the audience's attention. In anime, the drawn characters and the background are "art surfaces" upon which the audience may dwell and further reflect" (34).

Much like the plays of classical Japanese theatre, My Neighbor Totoro is full of references to Shinto beliefs. One blogger explains Shinto's view of nature by saying "in Shinto, the world is alive with a multitude of spirits, every place has its own spirit, as do plants and animals – everything in nature, really" (Waters). Shinto is heavily grounded in nature worship and that is demonstrated in this film and "can be seen in details such as the Shimenawa rice straw and paper ribbon rope on Totoro's tree, which signify that it is sacred. Viewers can also spot an abandoned Shinto shrine under the camphor tree and, at the entrance to a hill, a Torii Shinto shrine gate" (Kjolseth).

Instead of referencing all the various Shinto allusions in the film, this thesis focuses on how Miyazaki uses Shinto beliefs to serve the film's ecological message. Writer Pablo Kjolseth for Turner Classic Movies says "the celebration of nature and the gentle spirit that guides My Neighbor Totoro is even hinted at in the title, since the Totoro represents nature and it implies the need for co-existence." Totoro himself "has power with growing and living things, and is totally at home in the elements of earth, air, and water" (Waters). The camphor tree (which Totoro lives in) is highly regarded in Shintoism and these types of trees are "are venerated for their age, height, and healing properties" (Drazen). Totoro can be described as a *kami*, which are spirits who have "a certain power to heal and also to destruct" (Hu 127). Miyazaki is using these ideas from Shinto beliefs to send ecological messages about being at peace with nature. Miyazaki paints a "tranquil Japan in an eternal summertime where it is full of breezes, sunshine, and rain. At the same time, nature's other living creatures bask in peace and contentment" (Hu 127).

While My Neighbor Totoro is usually seen as a film about being at peace with nature, due to the often ambiguous nature of many Japanese films, there is another

theory on how to read this film. One blogger named Sukekomashi-Gaijin discusses a theory that claims Totoro is actual Shinigami, the Shinto god of death. While theories are always debatable, there is actually quite a lot of evidence within the film that support this one. Studio Ghibli, the producers of the film, deny these rumors (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). However, one must realize that Totoro is a major marketing force in Japan, much like Mickey Mouse is in the America. The Disney Corporation tends to overlook the nature of Mickey's origins, where he was more like Bart Simpson than the completely benign and toothless corporate mascot he has turned into over the decades. Ghibli, much like Disney realizes that revealing the truth behind their mascot's history is not necessarily good for merchandising sales. (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). However, just because Totoro may be Shinigami, that does not mean he is evil. Death is a part of life, and the god of death should not necessarily be demonized like the western Grim Reaper often is. The fact that the film comes across as so calm, shows that if Miyazaki was intending for the film to be about death, he was not trying to make death frightening.

To help understand how Totoro is the god of death, one must also understand the Sayama Incident which has many

similarities to the plot of My Neighbor Totoro.

Sukekomashi-Gaijin describes it:

The Sayama incident occurred in May 1963. It's quite an important case for discrimination in Japan. The case goes that one day, in Sayama (in Saitama prefecture), a young girl was kidnapped for ransom, raped and then murdered. Her older sister apparently found her body, but was so traumatized by it, when asked what she had seen, she merely said "I met a large Tanuki (looks like a raccoon)" and "I saw a cat monster." Sound familiar? Anyway, the older sister later committed suicide.

It is considered a case for discrimination because the Japanese police wrongfully arrested a man from an outcast Buraku district, and he remains in prison to this day. Buraku people are stereotyped as being more violent than regular Japanese people ("The Sayama Case"). While some of the similarities should already be obvious, there are many small details in the film that reinforce the interpretation that this film is based on the Sayama Incident.

One of the most striking similarities is in the naming of the two sisters. Sukekomashi-Gaijin says "the real murder took place in May. Also the youngest child is named Mei (pronounced 'May'). This could be a coincidence, but

the older sister is named Satsuki, which is also another way to say May." Names of characters are often used to convey symbolism and deeper meanings in films. Since both sisters' names mean the same thing, this is likely no coincidence.

Even more tiny details are more telling of this film's connection to the incident. On a box of tea in the background of one scene, the Japanese word for Sayama is written, which is extremely direct. Also the calendar in the mother's hospital features the same dates that would have been during the year of the Sayama massacre. Even the hospital is based off of a real hospital in Sayama (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). There is one scene in the film where Mei is crying and in the background are six Jizou statues. These represent "a Buddhist deity that looks after the souls of deceased children and aborted fetuses in Japanese" (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). There were several suicides related to the incident and the total number of deaths related to it is six.

Unintentional coincidences occur in films, but there are so many details related to the Sayama Incident, that suggest Miyazaki was basing the film around it. However, with no one involved in making the film admitting to it being based off the Sayama Incident, one can only theorize

the reasons why Miyazaki might have based it off the Incident. Maybe he wanted to pay his respects to the victims. Also, it is quite possible that he may have merely used it as inspiration for the time and place the film is set in, and all these allusions may have nothing to do with the Totoro representing death. One internet writer thinks the connections are merely coincidental saying:

While it does take place in the same region as the Sayama Incident, it's a pretty tenuous link. Not every story about two sisters from a certain place need be related, and probably aren't. As far as I've ever known, populated areas tend to be populous and family patterns tend to repeat the more populous an area gets. So, cross that off the list. (Sonin)

However, she goes on to say that "the Sayama Incident was a terrible tragedy, and maybe, in a way, Miyazaki was trying to give the girls a better ending if he was thinking about them at all" (Sonin).

Now that the connection to the Sayama Incident is explained, the spiritual elements shall be examined. The dust bunnies near the beginning of the film are better known as *susuwatari*. Some believers of the theory argue that whoever sees these will die soon. The Cat Bus, better known as the *Nekobus*, symbolizes a carriage into the next

world (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). This is supported by the Japanese writing of the destination on the Nekobus, which translates to the words "grave" and "road." Even the lyrics to the songs of the Nekobus translate to "those guests who ride are cheerful ghosts" (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). In the Sayama Incident interpretation, when Mei goes missing, she is actually murdered and "Satsuki, feeling grief decides to join her. She enters into the realm of the Shinigami (death god) – Totoro...She hops into the Nekobus; the vehicle to the next world, and they go to see their mother together, but they don't *actually* meet her" (Sukekomashi-Gaijin). Remember, they only see her mother through the window. The mother can see her daughters, because she is also close to death, and the ending credits can be viewed as memories from when they were all alive (Sukekomashi-Gaijin).

When one watches My Neighbor Totoro without this knowledge they will find a film without much narrative structure, however, the film makes more narrative sense under this reading. It seems that a theme of the film is that "death is not to be feared," hence the friendly Totoro and the lyrics to the Nekobus' song. Some even argue that the film is told out of narrative order much like a Tarantino film. Diana Sonin says:

It's a happy movie with a happy ending. Unless, of course, Miyazaki is a sly fox and is not telling a linear story. Some people believe that, in fact, Mei and Satsuki have passed on quite soon into the film, as soon as they see Totoro, and any interactions we see after that are just flashbacks to happier times. Sonin goes on to disagree with that theory, but with the loose narrative structure of the film, it is a possibility. Maybe Miyazaki placed no hidden meanings in the film, but with the subjective nature of art, multiple interpretations of the film are viable.

Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke is very different film than My Neighbor Totoro, but also features the use of Shinto themes in service of an ecological message. In contrast to the slow pace of My Neighbor Totoro, Princess Mononoke is a fast-paced film much like big budget Hollywood fantasies, but with uniquely Japanese characteristics. It can be argued that Princess Mononoke has somewhat been influenced by kabuki theatre with its emphasis on moments of spectacle. It can be said that "if My Neighbor Totoro shows how deference to spirits can lead to harmonious coexistence between worlds then Princess Mononoke shows what happens when they come into conflict, with results that are not pretty" (Odell and Blanc, 110).

The film starts off with a giant demon-possessed boar attacking a village. This is when the protagonist Ashitaka is introduced. He battles and defeats the boar, but this results in the curse which infected the boar to infect Ashitaka. This curse is going to kill Ashitaka, so he leaves his village in search of a cure.

On his journey, Ashitaka meets the monk Jigo who tells him that a forest spirit might be able to cure him. When he arrives at the area where the Forest Spirit resides, he encounters Iron Town, a town where people are at war with the creatures of the forest because they want to use the resources in the forest to make weapons. In the forest, there is a young girl referred to as San (and sometimes referred to as Princess Mononoke) whose adoptive mother is the wolf Moro. She fights along with the creatures of the forest against the humans. The Forest Spirit resembles a deer-like creature during the day and at night it becomes an extremely tall, human-shaped creature made of stars referred to as the Night Walker.

One night, San invades Iron Town and tries to kill its leader, Lady Eboshi, but Ashitaka steps in and stops her from fulfilling her goal. Ashitaka is leaving the town with San and is wounded by a bullet. San takes Ashitaka to the Forest Spirit who cures his gunshot wound, but not the

cursed arm. The boar which cursed Ashitaka was first cursed himself by a bullet fired by Lady Eboshi.

Okkoto, the boar god, leads an army of boars on an attack of Iron Town. Jigo returns with hunters from the imperial army; he wants to give the head of the Forest Spirit to the Emperor for legal protection of Iron Town. Okkoto is wounded, and Eboshi shoots the head off of the Forest Spirit (in Night Walker form), when the Forest Spirit comes for him. After losing his head, the Forest Spirit transforms into a large tar-like monster rampaging and destroying everything in search of his head. Ashitaka and San return the head to the Forest Spirit, who then falls into the lake curing Ashitaka of his curse and turning the land green. Ashitaka and San go their separate ways, but hope to meet again. Ashitaka decide to help rebuild Iron Town, which Eboshi also hopes to improve.

It is hard to draw conclusive evidence that this film was inspired by kabuki theatre. However, if Kabuki was capable of having epic battles on stage, the kind of spectacle-heavy entertainment contained within Princess Mononoke are elements that would have appealed to the common people who went to see kabuki plays. There are still occasional moments of pause and rest in this film. These moments tend to be common in Japanese film and do not

necessarily represent a direct noh influence. Much like some kabuki plays, there is also some gore on display here. This film never begins to reach the violence levels of the Saw films, but it does contain its share of severed body parts.

Much like My Neighbor Totoro, Princess Mononoke is not based on any particular Shinto myths. However, once again Miyazaki uses Shinto worldviews in the purpose of commentary on ecological issues (Hu 126). The Shinto tenets Miyazaki focuses on are "respecting the *kami* and love of nature," and during the events of this film, these beliefs are "under threat from modernization and industrialization" (Wright). Miyazaki, much like Ashitaka in the film, plays a mediator role in this conflict. Miyazaki is quoted as saying of this film: "There can be no happy ending to the war between the rampaging forest gods and humanity...even in the midst of hatred and slaughter, there is still much to live for. Wonderful encounters and beautiful things still exist" (Wright).

Miyazaki uses the characters of this film to show the need for coexistence between nature and industrialization. There are three characters that most serve this purpose: Ashitaka, San, and Lady Eboshi. San and Lady Eboshi are at different sides of the spectrum in this conflict with, San

representing nature and Eboshi representing industrialization; as mentioned above, Ashitaka is used as mediator. This is even represented in the film itself, during the fight between San and Lady Eboshi where they try to kill each other, but Ashitaka steps in to stop them.

In a typical Hollywood narrative, Lady Eboshi would be used as an unsympathetic villain portrayed as being pure evil. Lucy Wright says "she epitomizes the modern drive that moves towards progress at any cost." Despite her strong determination to get the iron ore from the forest, even if that means destroying the entire forest, she also has good qualities. These include "caring for lepers, empowering women to be more than brothel-workers, [and] building a community in a hostile world" (Wright). Ultimately, she reforms herself once she witnesses the wrath of the Forest Spirit, but she still plans on mining for iron ore in the forest. Miyazaki is quoted as saying "if you portray someone who's evil, then you off him, what's the point?...It's easy to create a villain who's a maniacal real estate developer, then kill him and have a happy ending. But what if a really good person becomes a real estate developer?" (Princess Mononoke).

San is just as determined to protect the forest as Lady Eboshi is of getting the iron ore from it. San's

character can be described as follows:

She's a wild free-spirit, a cross between Kipling's Mowgli and Boudica. Her hatred of all humankind which she sees as destructive of the forest and the natural order of things, has seen her reject any notion that she is human at all. (Odell and Le Blanc,111)

San is at first very dismissive towards Ashitaka, but "she finally accepts him on account of his worthiness, and that of his people, relayed to her by Ashitaka's faithful steed Yakui" (Odell and Le Blanc, 111). It is Ashitaka who comes in and helps San see that not all humans want to destroy nature.

Between these two characters comes Ashitaka who can be seen as a surrogate character for Miyazaki. Ashitaka's role as mediator is quickly established:

The first few moments of Ashitaka's appearance onscreen show both his connection to the forest and his commitment to human community. He is riding competently through the dark and sacred forest, yet his first action in the film is to enter a human settlement to warn the village girls of approaching danger. (Kraemer)

Throughout the film, he is sympathetic to those belonging to nature as well as the humans and he "is uniquely able to

recognize the interdependence of the two" (Kraemer). It is very evident that there is an extremely strong hatred between San and Eboshi. Ashitaka's curse has infected him with hatred, but he manages to control it, just as he attempts to control the hatred between San and Eboshi. Christine Hoff Kraemer says: "The two warring sides are guilty of a hatred that bursts into violence both between them and within their ranks."

The kabuki-style gore is necessary in this film to show the effects of hatred. The most symbolic moment of how Ashitaka learns to control hatred occurs in the following scene:

As Ashitaka steps between the two women, separating them forcibly, the scar on his arm erupts in a halo of groping, transparent tentacles. As an emblem of hatred, the scar demonstrates hatred's working - it destroys the one who hates as surely as it destroys the enemy. Yet Ashitaka's commitment to compassion and discernment enable him momentarily to harness the scar's power -and his own anger - and use it to halt the conflict. As he holds Eboshi and San's weapon arms firmly, his participation in the curse that inhabits all three of them gives his words added weight. He tells Eboshi, "There is a demon inside you. And in

her," but adds as the scar bursts its ghostly tentacles forth, "Look on this! It is the form of the hate within me!" Ashitaka experiences and participates in the cycle of hatred without allowing it to master him. (Kraemer)

By the film's end, after much destruction and violence despite Ashitaka's attempts to hinder it as best he could, he is freed from the curse after the death of the Forest Spirit. Ultimately, "we see a dawning realization in the townspeople's minds that the forest and the town are interdependent" (Kraemer). The hatred inside Ashitaka was symbolic of the hatred between nature and humans. Once this curse of hatred is cured, the hatred between San and Eboshi ceases, even though they still have conflicting interests.

Between My Neighbor Totoro and Princess Mononoke, Miyazaki has managed to give two distinct takes on both Shinto beliefs and the ecology. These are very uniquely Japanese films, and the overall messages can be viewed as universal, but the way these messages are delivered is in a very Japanese way. For example, Wall-E also has an ecological message, but it doesn't draw on any spiritual or religious aspects of American culture to deliver that message. Instead, it draws directly upon contemporary

American culture to show what the future may be like if humans continue down their current path. In contrast, Miyazaki focuses on the Shinto beliefs of respecting the *kami* and love of nature to get his messages across.

CONCLUSION:

THE JAPANESE INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN POP CULTURE

This thesis has examined the influences on Japanese film, but it has been well known that Asian cinema, particularly Japanese cinema, has greatly influenced American film making in recent years. Akira Kurosawa was one of the first of the foreign directors to influence American directors. More recently, American horror films have drawn upon the style of Japanese horror films, oftentimes outright remaking them. Due to the explosion of the popularity of Anime in the west, many animators have been influenced by its style.

When Kurosawa talks of his directing career, he says "from the very beginning I respected John Ford. I have always paid close attention to his films and they've influenced me I think" (Desser 58). Samurai films and westerns are often compared to each other, and this is likely because there has been a cycle of them influencing each other throughout film history. It is said that "Kurosawa's fondness for Hollywood westerns in the John

Ford tradition is seen in the epic sweep of Hidden Fortress" ("Akira Kurosawa: A Biography"). The most direct influence of Kurosawa's work in the west is seen when "*Seven Samurai* was remade in the US under its alternative title *The Magnificent Seven* and the lone samurai hero *Yojimbo* was the inspiration for Clint Eastwood's man with no name persona, most obviously in A Fistful of Dollars" ("Akira Kurosawa: A Bibliography"). There have been several films to adopt the Rashomon-style of story telling. These range from the western The Outrage (1964) which is similar enough to be a remake of Rashomon, to the animated film Hoodwinked! (2005), which tells the story of Little Red Riding Hood from different perspectives ("Remakes and Films Influenced by Kurosawa's Works").

The most famous work that Kurosawa inspired is George Lucas' Star Wars series. While some film buffs claim that Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope (1977) is a direct imitation of The Hidden Fortress, there are differences as well as similarities. Susan Doll summarizes some of the similarities:

The bumbling farmers and their incessant bickering recall the robots R2D2 and C-3PO, while a feisty, weapon-brandishing princess who is desperate to save her kingdom is the very description of Princess Leia.

The dry, barren landscape of the enemy's territory brings to mind the harshness of the desert planet in Star Wars.

While there are certain character types and plot devices taken from The Hidden Fortress, the first Star Wars film also contains many elements unseen in The Hidden Fortress such as a weapon that can destroy entire planets (the Death Star) and the whole idea of the Force (which is influenced by Eastern spirituality) just to name a couple of elements. At the same time, some of the cinematography seems indebted to Kurosawa such as "Lucas's extensive use of unusual wipes, including a clock wipe, seems inspired by Kurosawa's measured horizontal wipes to signify major shifts in time and locale" (Doll). So Lucas was not only influenced by plots and characters found within Kurosawa's films, but also by the technical film making styles employed.

Over the last decade, Hollywood has been mining not only their own backlog of horror films to remake, but also the horror films of Asia and, in particular, Japan. The film which started this craze was The Ring (Hansen 30). However, these remakes are often not considered to work as well as the Japanese originals. One writer says this is because "The reason many J-horror remakes don't work is because they replace creepy, homemade visual and sound

effects with CG" (Gornstein). Even One Missed Call was remade in 2008, and even though the plot of the American version is fairly faithful to the original, one critic says that while the original was self aware and Miike "took the basic premise to a hilarious extreme," the remake is played straight and feels like just another Ringu imitator (Doom and Malice). There tends to be distinctly Japanese elements to the originals, which do not translate well to Hollywood cinema. The best way to explain the differences between the Japanese originals and the American films is to look at how Kelly Hansen of San Diego State University compares The Ring to Ringu. She says:

The Hollywood version offers a more pragmatic, factual depiction of the storyline for Western audiences, who may be more accustomed to movie plots that progress logically with clear explanations. Japanese audiences, this would seem to suggest, are more willing to tolerate loose ends and ambiguity. (31)

Also, Ringu draws upon many tropes of the avenging spirit genre such as a victim turned monster, whereas in The Ring, the villain has been evil since she was born (Hansen 32). By losing the uniquely Japanese qualities of ambiguous story telling and female avengers in The Ghost of Yotsuya tradition, these films lose much of what made them work in

the first place.

Anime has influenced American television and film in both animation style and story-telling techniques. Disney animator, Glen Keane says "well, it's hard to ever separate the huge influence that Japanese animation has had on me. I was just in awe of Miyazaki's work, and have emulated his sensitivity, his approach to staging" (Lee). The DC Comics-based animated series Teen Titans and Batman Beyond have anime influences. One writer says of these series, that they "are NOT considered anime since both were created by WB Animation and not a Japanese company. Both, however, are similar to anime in design and do incorporate Japanese elements (such as *kanji*) in them" (Bundy). There is even one episode of South Park called "Good times with Weapons" (2004) where Cartman, Kyle, Kenny, and Stan buy martial arts weapons and during segments of the episode they are drawn in anime-style and they engage in anime style fight scenes. These anime sequences are complete with Japan-inspired backgrounds featuring *kanji* writing and Japanese style buildings. Also, the Nickelodeon series Avatar: The Last Airbender contains art design that has "heavy anime influence and the color palette is not your typical bright Nick colors. Some of the critter designs are quite original, including penguins with weal-like whiskers. The

action is often done [as] time-lapse frozen frame[s] one often sees in anime" (Baisley). Even specific to Miyazaki's influence is the "six-legged 'bison' Appa [that] seems to have been imported wholesale from Hayao Miyazaki's My Neighbor Totoro, where the Catbus would certainly recognize it as a close relative" (Robinson).

As mentioned, there are also anime influences on the narratives of American film. The filmmakers at Pixar are known to be fond of Miyazaki's work. Even though their computer-generated style of animation is very different from Miyazaki's style, they draw upon his work for influence on their story telling. Pete Doctor, the director of UP (2009) says of American film plots:

It's all about plot and keeping things moving forward and what [Miyazaki] does is to take these real observed truthful moments. A lot of time nothing's happening next, it's just right now how does this little kid behave, look at the way the water just ripples down and drops, just beautifully observed little moments of truth that you just recognize and respond to and we just try to put some moments like that into this film. (Accomonado).

Pixar's success has shown how American film makers have used Japanese story-telling techniques in mainstream films.

Even some live action films have been influenced by anime. One of the most influential anime films on American films is Ghost in the Shell (1995). The Wachowski Brothers, directors of The Matrix (1999), "borrowed many of Ghost's key details, including the digital "rain" of green numbers that signifies cyberspace, and the way humans plug themselves in through holes in the backs of their necks" (Rose). There are also many similarities in the plots and themes between The Matrix and Ghost in the Shell. Steve Rose also says "Ghost in the Shell's influence on Spielberg, another fan, is clear in AI: Artificial Intelligence, which ponders the philosophical implications of the human-automaton interface, and in the future-tech visions of Minority Report."

As displayed in this conclusion, the influences of Japanese culture and film on American culture and film. This is largely due to the increased globalization of media, as years ago it would have been very challenging to easily find Japanese films to view in America. With American films featuring so much influence from Japan, Americans are being exposed to Japanese history, culture, and religion without even realizing it.

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VITA

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