Japanese Apocalyptic Dystopia and the Role of Steampunk in Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*

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Abstract: Japanese film director, screenwriter, and animator Hayao Miyazaki created an intricate adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones's fantasy novel *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986). Both the 2004 eponymous Japanese anime film and the novel seem to be set in the Edwardian era. The novel operates more as a fable, carrying traditional tropes of European folklore, while the film is closer to a dystopian alternate history. My paper examines how the adaptation, even though Japanese, manages to rework the story as a steampunk fantasy. The examination of the visual aspect of the anime illustrates how a Japanese adaptation of a British novel represents a steampunk story whilst bearing traces of the Japanese sense of apocalypse. The comparison of the source material and the film reveals a cross-cultural phenomenon: an engagement of typically Japanese animation components and an essentially British setting. This paper examines the film as an adaptation that operates with vastly differing plot elements: war and the exploitation of magical powers obtain much more important, sinister roles as subsidiary themes, especially in light of the fact that the Iraq war had started a year before the film's release. This study, focusing on the thematic and visual components, identifies how a Japanese adaptation of a British novel gives a translation of a steampunk story whilst conveying a critique of modern wars.

Keywords: steampunk, adaptation, cross-culture, anime, apocalyptic, war, Japanese, British

Japanese film director, screenwriter, and animator Hayao Miyazaki created a multi-layered adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones's novel *Howl's Moving Castle*, first published in 1986. Both the 2004 eponymous Japanese anime film and the British novel seem to be set in the Edwardian era, yet the latter operates more as a fable, carrying traditional tropes of European folklore, while the former is closer to a dystopian alternate history. I intend to examine the film as a steampunk adaptation which operates with vastly

differing plot elements: war and the exploitation of magical powers obtain much more important and sinister roles as subsidiary themes, especially in light of the fact that the Iraq War had started a year before the film's release and that the shadow of World War II and the atomic bombings still looms over Japan (Napier 250). In the film, magic is used for military purposes, with wizards constrained to follow the orders of the ruling power against their will: the introduction of war as a significant component thus emphasises the Japanese sense of the apocalyptic (249–50). The anime combines the technological advancement that characterised the Edwardian era (VanderMeer and Chambers 9) with the fantasy element of magic in a dystopian setting. This paper will also examine the visual aspects of the anime: the comparison of the source material and the film reveals a cross-cultural phenomenon, a joint product of typically Japanese animation components in an essentially British setting.

Howl's Moving Castle is a fantasy novel set in the world of Ingary, "where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist" (Jones 7). It focuses on young Sophie Hatter, who, because she is the eldest of three sisters, believes herself to be bound to fail and lacks self-esteem. The traditional fairy-tale plot of each sibling seeking their fortune is introduced, only to be altered as Sophie's two sisters, Lettie and Martha, decide to switch their assigned places as a witch's apprentice and a bakery-shop assistant, which makes Sophie even more disgruntled. After learning of her sisters' doings and going back to the family hat shop to which her stepmother has assigned her to work, she is visited by the Witch of the Waste, who casts a spell on her that turns her into an old woman; it is this change that finally compels her to go on a quest to seek her fortune. Along her journey, she becomes a resident of the wizard Howl's moving castle, where she makes a bargain with Calcifer, the fire demon tied to the fireplace: should Sophie break the spell that binds the demon to the castle, the demon would in turn help break the spell upon the girl. Sophie eventually regains her youth, frees Howl and Calcifer, and achieves a happy ending at Howl's side.

My study will not simply engage with perspectives of fidelity criticism, as recent scholarship, including Brian McFarlane's seminal volume *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* and the work of scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Susan Hayward regard fidelity as an issue that has "bedevilled" the discourse of adaptation, partly due to the established view of literature's "greater respectability in traditional critical circles". Fidelity criticism depends on a concept of the text as one bearing and ensuring a single and correct "meaning" to the "(intelligent) reader" which the adaptation either adheres to or violates or tampers with in some way (McFarlane 8). Timothy Corrigan, in an overview of definitions of adaptation, concludes that more-recent definitions offer a useful perspective: adaptation is "an act of reception in which the reading or viewing of that work is adapted as a specific form of enjoyment and understanding" (23). I will regard adaptation as a process of (re)interpretation, as I am primarily concerned with Miyazaki's individual reading of the source text. While it is possible for novel and film to share the same story, "the same 'raw materials'", the two remain distinguished by devices including distinct plot strategies that "alter sequence, highlight different emphases, which – in a word – defamiliarize the story" (McFarlane 23). For instance, novels rely on a completely verbal sign system whilst films involve, often simultaneously, various visual, aural, and verbal signifiers (26). Visual signifiers will be my focus here, as it constitutes the main representation of the anime's steampunk aesthetic, and contribute to the introduction of war as a thematic element that aids Miyazaki's adaptation in translating Jones's novel into a steampunk dystopia.

Susan Hayward argues in *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* that a literary adaptation can be referred to as a product that creates a new story, and, together with the characters, takes on a new life: these notions are certainly applicable to the Miyazaki film. Even though based on the original, both the narrative and characters become independent of the source text, as "film characterization creates a whole new mythology existing outside of the original text" (4). The adaptation, although a "synergy between the desire for sameness and reproduction", functions as an "acknowledgement of difference" as well: to an extent, adaptations are based on "elision and deliberate lack" and at the same time privileging "certain narrative elements or strategies over others", even to the point of excess (6). Moreover, Diane Lake states that the screenwriter's task is to reach inside the core of the source material and find a new way to unwrap the story with cinematographic devices, precisely because there is no possible way in which a film adaptation could simulate the exact same sentience as the book (408). Miyazaki's 2004 adaptation of *Howl's Moving Castle*, produced by the Japanese production company Studio Ghibli, while in large part true to the book, also diverges from the original story in significant ways. Several subplots and characters are altered or omitted entirely, and Miyazaki introduces the "subplot of a brutal war between two kingdoms", making Howl an "antiwar martyr after destroying warships" (Lenburg 93). The director's decision can be linked to the fact that, as opposed to Western studios, Japanese anime studios do not simply use children's tales as source material but lean on "well-known dramatic, mythical or literary antecedents" with serious undertones, and even on "realms of tragedy and epic" (Cavallaro, *Anime* 10). In adapting children's fiction, Japanese studios show a general tendency to include more mature themes and infuse the reimagined story with worlds of complex subtexts (10). One reason behind these alterations has been shown to be the looming 2003 Iraq War, which, as noted by Dani Cavallaro in *Hayao Miyazaki's World Picture,* undeniably influenced the film's thematics. Cavallaro also claims that Miyazaki, who voiced his concerns about the involvement of the United States in the ongoing Iraq War, in fact was aiming to alienate the American audience to an extent by making a film that would not be well received in the United States (61).

As Susan J. Napier asserts, the theme of apocalypse has a particular emphasis in Japanese animation; its fascination with the topic is one of its most striking features (249). Even as some animes, such as another Miyazaki work, *Princess Mononoke*, allow for the possibility of "potential betterment alongside their vision of collapse", destruction and loss remain the focus of numerous others. Whether the works are destructive or hopeful, Japanese audiences actively respond to such animes. Napier goes on to suggest that the apocalyptic, often intertwined with the elegiac or even the festival, is not only "a major part of anime but is also deeply ingrained within the contemporary Japanese national identity" (249–50). The reasoning behind this assertion is that times of social change and widespread uncertainty have a tendency to increase apocalyptic imagery and themes (250). Today, Japan still stands as the only country to have suffered the destruction and consequent devastation of atomic bombings. Even though the bomb itself does not always have specific delineation, it haunts postwar Japanese culture "in a variety of displaced versions, from the immediate postwar hit *Godzilla* (1953) and its many descendants" (253). The shadow of the atomic bomb continues to burden even present-day Japan, together with the recession that closed off a period of excessive economic prosperity (250). This shadow looms over Miyazaki's Howl as well, since he is forced to take part in a war, using his magic to fight in a metamorphic form reminiscent of Kamikaze pilots during World War II, while being at risk of losing his human side forever. Thus, Howl's character also embodies what Napier calls an "apocalyptic identity

… easily understood, perhaps even embraced" (250) by the Japanese, represented through the medium of the visual in the anime.

The connection between real-world actions and the fictional apocalypse depicted through the typically Japanese mediums of anime and manga is amorphous; however, as Napier writes, these two mediums are the most influenced by images of apocalypse, and a great number of the most popular genres of anime, including science fiction, fantasy, and horror, can even be said to abound with apocalyptic visions (251). The multifaceted nature of animation as a medium – that is, "its emphasis on image, speed, and fluctuation" – makes it well suited for depicting such visions. By this, Napier does not intend to suggest that apocalyptic animes consist solely of spectacle. She points out that, corresponding to the basic ideology of apocalypse, most works include such elements to formulate an explicit criticism "of the society undergoing apocalypse and an explicit or implicit warning as to why this society should be encountering such a fate" (254). Apocalypse can almost always be linked to human transgression, such as the misuse of technology, and is also frequently tied to the destruction of traditional social values (254), with which *Howl's Moving Castle* (Miyazaki) resonates by formulating a critique of war, the misuse of magic, and the authoritarian exploitation of people.

To create a representation that demonstrates both the world as depicted by Diana Wynne Jones and the Japanese apocalyptic, Studio Ghibli used steampunk and military tropes and settings embedded in a world based on neo-Victorian visual elements (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Steam-powered cars in Sophie's hometown, apparently set in late 19th- or early 20th-century England. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (03:32).

Steampunk, as defined by Barry Brummett in his introduction to *Clockwork Rhetoric: The Language and Style of Steampunk*, resituates aesthetic elements of the Age of Steam and the Victorian epoch to create an aesthetic that would have occurred if steam and electricity had not been overthrown by internal combustion as the primary sources of power (ix). The visual style that Miyazaki adopts originates from the fantasy and science-fiction works of the Victorian period, which were recycled in 20th- and 21st-

century neo-Victorian science-fiction and fantasy novels (Figure 2), also regarded as
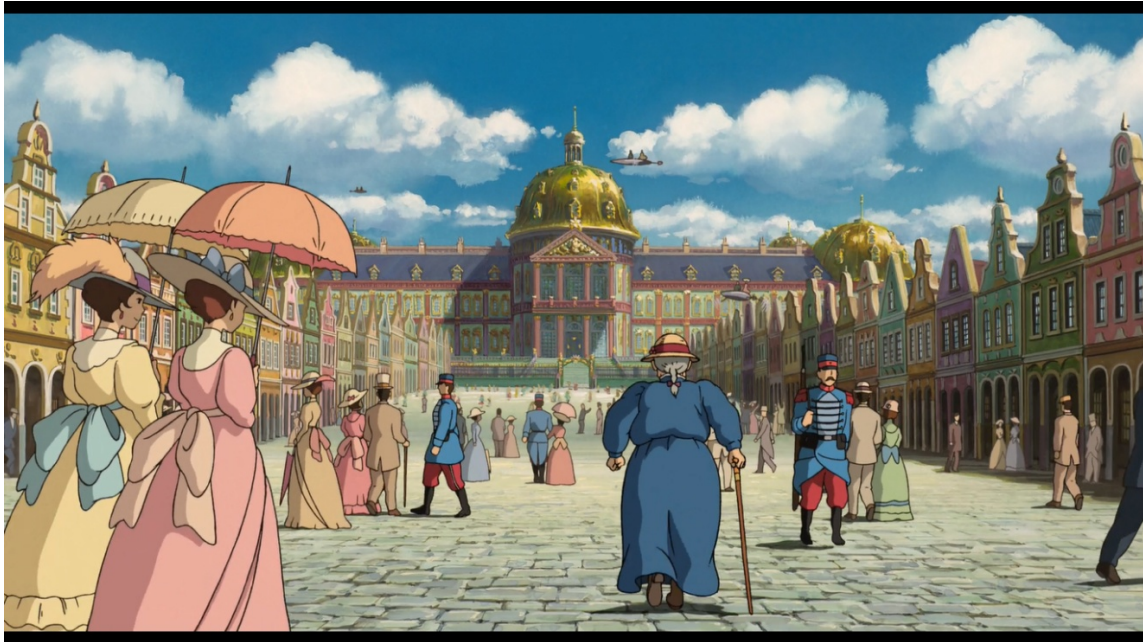alternative histories (Beard xvii).

Figure 2. Sophie heading to the royal palace in Kingsbury, which depicts a neo-Victorian setting:
men wearing suits and top hats, women wearing corseted dresses and hats adorned with bows and
feathers. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (53:15).

The visual representation of the characters is based in steampunk aesthetics, with
corsets, top hats, vests being among the most visible elements. Steampunk imagery is
dominated by the aesthetic of "the tinkerer, the explorer, the pioneer, the Edwardian,
and the Victorian" (Stimpson 20). The Victorian gentleman is depicted with idealised
characteristics: he is a powerful man no longer due to the status deriving from his
aristocratic origins, but to his own "pursuit of moral and intellectual excellence" (Hall
and Gunn 6), and is a subject of public visibility (7). Another significant aesthetic
category is the exotic, which is evoked by the look of "the adventurer, the explorer,
world traveler, and colonizer" (Stimpson 32).

Howl's figure in the novel is that of the magician-tinkerer who is obsessed with
his looks: he frequently wears a blue-and-silver suit, and uses his beauty to steal girls'
hearts, only to lose interest in each one in turn. His character is complex: he is a self-
regulated magician and an adventurer. Howl's attractiveness draws the public's
attention and makes him the subject of gossip, but, at the same time, he seeks to avoid
visibility and thus alienates himself from the public. He works under two different
names (Jenkins and Pendragon), and he often disappears to faraway lands for days.
He possesses some of the idealised features of the steampunk gentleman but also
shows some flaws, such as vanity and temper; for example, he is capable of throwing
a childish tantrum over his allegedly lost beauty after his blonde hair turns pink as a
result of Sophie's tampering with his cosmetic potions. The castle itself can be seen as
a retreat, granting safety and freedom: it has a door with four destinations, of which
only one is the actual door opening onto the castle's immediate surroundings; the
other three function as portals to other places (the worlds of Wizard Pendragon and
Wizard Jenkins and Wales, Howl's homeland). In the film, the portal to Wales is
replaced by one that leads to a battlefield where the war between the two kingdoms is
played out. Miyazaki's Howl fulfills the criteria of the autonomous steampunk hero to

a certain extent; nevertheless, as author Diana Wynne Jones herself notes in a personal interview, the anime characters are "gentler" and "more noble" than the ones in her books (Jones, qtd. in Greenwillow). The alterations might have been issued to make the audience recognise Howl and Sophie as more positive, antiwar characters. Even though the director decides to alter the characters, Howl is in fact Miyazaki's "first consciously beautiful male hero", who has Miyazaki's "first full-on screen kiss", and is also the first Miyazaki hero to "turn into a conventional father figure by the end of the movie" (Clements and McCarthy 289). The Japanese studio made the character aesthetically pleasing as well as the father figure of his family, which partly resonates with the characteristics of the steampunk hero and the Victorian idealisation of the patriarchal family. Filtered through the aesthetics of steampunk, Howl carries typical male sensibilities of the Victorian age, enveloped in an auratic presence that radiates idealised qualities such as eternal optimism (Hall and Gunn 7).

Howl's Moving Castle, like other Miyazaki works, amalgamates different traditions in unexpected ways, thus creating a mythology of its own that uses distinctively Japanese approaches towards animation and incorporates the director's personal messages, as Cavallaro points out (Hayao 10). Subsequently, an established director like Miyazaki can be regarded as an auteur who leaves his signature style on original works and adaptations as well, as several critics, including Margaret Talbot in "The Auteur of Anime", argue. As machines and technology are major components of the steampunk aesthetic (Stimpson 29), the director was granted the chance to use his attraction to 19th-century techno-visionaries as inspiration, and encouraged his team to lean on them as the film's visual and cultural sources (Cavallaro, Hayao 145), resulting in intricate designs such as steam-powered cars, trolleys, trains, and tanks. Howl's castle itself is a cross-cultural product: it has steampunk attributes and is powered with steam provided by Calcifer (Figure 3), who in the anime actually resembles a "kami" more than the fearful "demon" of the novel. In the Japanese Shintō religion, kamis are spirits, some of which are "kindly and helpful, while others are mischievous or selfish" (Cavallaro, Hayao 73–74).

Figure 3. The moving castle; Miyazaki's depiction relies heavily on steampunk machine aesthetics, including the emission of steam and smoke. Screenshot: Howl's Moving Castle (36:13).

The subplot of war gives an opportunity to include, alongside what Napier defines as the Japanese sense of the apocalyptic, the imagery of steampunk airships and weaponry the film is saturated with images of battleships and weapons made of steel and other kinds of metal, together with elaborately designed aircrafts. The director's love of flight is also expressed in the forms of various aircrafts and in sequences centered on Howl in his metamorphic form ("Hayao" 146) as a creature resembling a swallow.

In Miyazaki's films, inspired by classical Japanese aesthetics, even everyday activities such as cooking are shown artistic care on a par with high art (Cavallaro, *Hayao* 43). Such care is applied to the visuals of *Howl's Moving Castle*, also incorporating anime's tendency to adopt painterly effects and elaborately detailed backgrounds along: with "a meticulous approach to product design" that ensures that settings are consistently saturated with accessories to make them convincing (Cavallaro, *Anime* 24).

Figure 4. Howl's room, showing the attention to detail typical of Japanese anime. The setting evokes pictures of Victorian interiors crowded with accessories, together with "exotic" steampunk aesthetics. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (50:54).

Figure 5. Breakfast prepared on Calcifer. Much attention is paid to the animation: the slice of bacon that started cooking earlier is already half done, and the egg that was put into the pan a little later still has some of the transparency of rawness. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (30:02).

Both the book and the anime are concerned with children's struggles with lack of self-belief, set in "magical, mystifying and highly mutable otherworlds" (Bradshaw). However, as I have already asserted, Miyazaki's anime deviates from Jones's work in numerous ways. One difference is the handling of evil: in the book, it is centered on the Witch of the Waste as an incorrigible evil, who wants to get hold of Howl's heart, whilst in the film, evil is lifted from her character and spread out onto others (Bradshaw), such as Madam Suliman and the wizards working for her, as a more complex abstraction. Coupled with a critical attitude towards war, the film expands the moral dimensions of the story novel by making Howl an embodiment of the apocalyptic, adding to the complexity of the character. This is also present in the different levels of interpretation of the question of Howl's heart, which beats inside Calcifer due to a pact they have undertaken: Howl's heart keeps Calcifer alive, and Calcifer places magic powers at Howl's disposal. Consequently, their lives are connected and dependent on each other; however, Jones and Miyazaki present the dangers of borrowed power in different ways. In the novel, Howl cannot fall in love and leaves girls heartbroken after pursuing them, and is at risk of having his heart consumed by magic for having been bound to the fire demon; however, in the adaptation, Howl's use of magic to destroy Suliman's army to prevent a tyrant from gaining more power comes with the risk of his entrapment in swallow form forever. The exploitation of magic is addressed through and tied to war: wizards fighting under the king's command have turned into metamorphic creatures, and Howl himself struggles with this danger (Figure 6). After his return from battle, he finds it harder and harder to turn back – the transformation into a human literally pains him.

Figure 6. Howl in his metamorphic form, flying amidst burning battleships, smoke, and debris.
Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (40:37).

The fact that the metamorphic transformation of a wizard can potentially become irreversible legitimates the question whether this changed form is the consequence of the wizard's innate beastly features or the result of the unnaturally extensive use of magic. Cavallaro contends that the motivation behind the transformation lies in Miyazaki's belief that humans are primarily animals (*Hayao* 22); thus, it can be reasoned that there is a latent animalistic side to humans that overpowers both the body and the mind as the overuse of magic takes away too much of the person's overall self-control. Both the exploitation of magic and the cruel reality of bloodshed function as catalysts that trigger the fateful decline of humanity. Consequently, the fall of the wizards formulates a critique of real-world wars: as Howl says, "they won't recall they were ever human" (Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle* 42:26). Howl's body and mind get invaded by war, and he is forced to commit to possibly irreversible changes; thus he bears within himself the sense of the apocalyptic, represented by his swallow form (Figure 6).

Appearance plays a significant part in the anime, since several characters go through noticeable changes throughout the story. For instance, as the Witch of the Waste is depraved of her magical powers, she turns from a menacing woman into an adorable, somewhat feeble old lady. Howl himself is first introduced wearing a rather grandiose outfit (Figure 7). As the plot progresses and romance strengthens between Howl and Sophie, he acquires a more natural appearance (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Howl in his first outfit: a shirt adorned with frills and a suit that makes his figure appear bigger than he actually is. His hair is also dyed blonde. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (32:23).

Figure 8. Howl, wearing a simpler shirt and no suit, thus appearing as a frail boy. His hair is also back to its natural black color. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (01:22:37).

Howl's increasingly natural appearance hints that he is gradually becoming more aligned with his true self: because of his growing attachment to Sophie, he can let go of the unnecessary facade. Even as he is practically turning into a monster as a consequence of using his magic in the war, his human form becomes truer because of the honest nature of his fondness for Sophie.

Sophie's form also changes constantly: immediately after the Witch's curse is cast on her, she looks like a very old woman (Figure 9). Although the effect seems to be irreversible, the film emphasises that her age alters according to her emotional state.

Figure 9. Sophie facing herself after her transformation, frightened by her reflection. Her posture
is hunched and her affect is cranky. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (12:04).

When Sophie is more in touch with her true identity – that is, when she is expressing her most honest emotions – the curse seems to weaken and she grows younger (Figure 10). She also transforms back to her young self when asleep.

Figure 10. Sophie crying in the rain. She is considerably younger in this scene; her posture is
straight and her face is much less wrinkly. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (47:48).
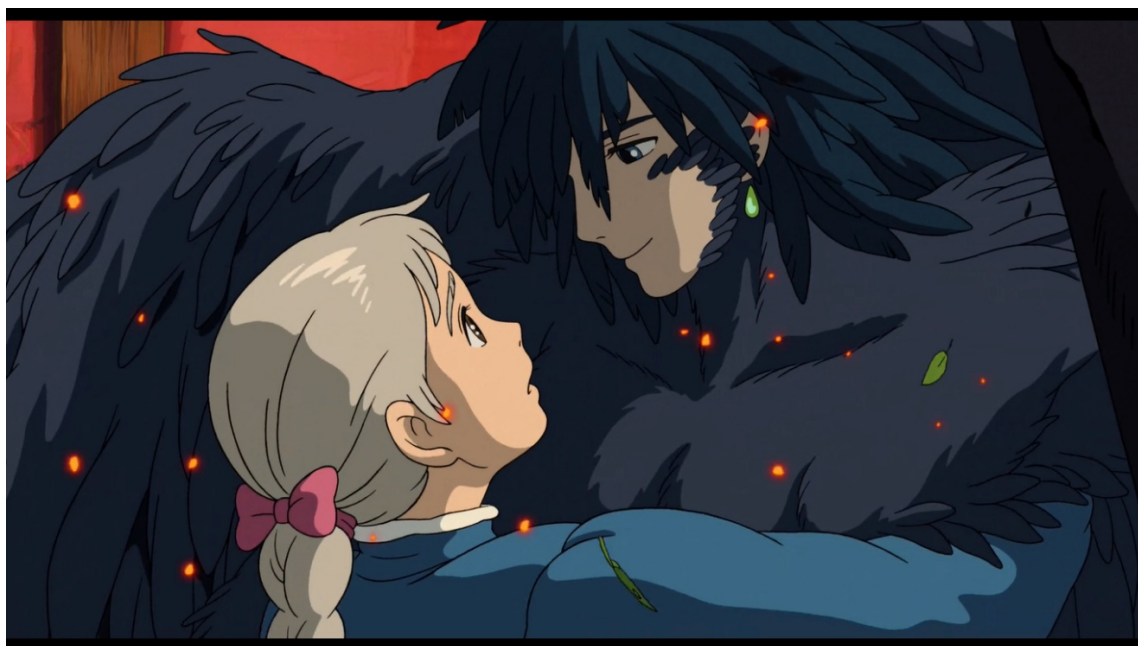
Figure 11. Young Sophie greeting Howl in his swallow form in the midst of battle. Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (01:32:40).

At the beginning of the story, Sophie's character is meek: she is a shy and timid girl, believing herself to be ugly. Her naturally brown hair in the anime might be chosen to make her character seem more average and to put greater emphasis on her starting position as a gray mouse. As her love for Howl progresses, she also acquires self-appreciation, which helps her turn back into her young self. As the conflict of war and Howl's metamorphosis culminate, Sophie turns permanently back to her real age, albeit her hair stays silver (Figure 11). In the novel, after the curse is lifted, Sophie's hair is back to its natural red gold color. The permanent silver color can be regarded as proof of her maturity and accentuation of her new uniqueness.

Miyazaki is an artist whose work repeatedly poses philosophical and political questions relevant to the present world (Cavallaro, *Hayao* 1), including, but not limited to, the politics of greed, which is conducive to global downfall; the growth of aggressive militarism; the distortion and simplification of history in mainstream history books; the erosion of children's innate capacities in the process of socialisation; and the damage to nature caused by humans' arrogant and selfish actions (6). As a result, to enunciate a critique of autocracy, Miyazaki adds the character of Madam Suliman to the story; more specifically, he merges two characters from the novel – Howl's former teacher and the king's head sorcerer – to create the king's head sorceress. In the novel, the main conflict lies between Howl and the Witch of the Waste, who wants to take revenge on him for crossing her in the past. The adaptation shifts the focus from a personal conflict with the witch to Madam Suliman and the war, which turns out to have started because of a prince gone missing from the neighboring kingdom – a character who has far less significance in the original story. Cavallaro identifies Madam Suliman as a manifestation of autocracy: the royal palace, as a locus of power, serves as a symbolic representation of the institutions where the élite professionals shield themselves from the world (*Hayao* 19). The wizards who overuse their powers on military duty lose their humanity and become metamorphic creatures, yet their condition is not regarded as a problem, because they follow the orders of the

king and Madam Suliman. However, both the Witch of the Waste and Howl have made a bargain with a demon: they practice magic that is not approved by the head sorceress, who thus condemns them for misusing their powers. The sorceress invites the Witch to the palace only to deprive her of her magic, rendering her powerless. The royal palace, providing a "vivid literalization of processes through which modern societies … ensure their subjects' compliance" (19), is the locus of the dominant power, which rejects any divergence.

Figure 12. Howl and Sophie at the end of the film. Sophie's hair is shorter and not braided, and her dress has frills at the skirt. This illustrates that she is content with herself and her beauty.
Screenshot: *Howl's Moving Castle* (01:54:52).

To further accentuate the contrast between the two opposing sides, Miyazaki's adaptation opts to alter the closure of the story. The novel ends with a scene that includes Sophie's stepmother and two sisters, as well as Wizard Suliman, all talking together: the former detachment, driven by uncertainties and disagreements, completely dissolves as the characters engage in friendly conversation after Sophie manages to safely separate Calcifer from Howl's heart and defeats the Witch of the Waste and her demon. The film, however, ends with images of Howl's castle flying amongst clouds, carrying the newly established family comprising Howl, Sophie, Howl's child apprentice, the wicked Witch turned harmless grandmother, and a dog. In the anime, before the happy ending, even family members turn on one another: Madam Suliman forces Sophie's mother to deliver her a peeping bug and a cigar which, when smoked, turns out to be harmful for Calcifer, who runs the castle with his magic. Thus, war interferes even with family relations, further establishing Howl's castle as a place of withdrawal from aggression and corruption: it literally lifts its inhabitants to a higher level, establishing that Howl and Sophie transcend everyday life (Figure 12).

Even though the anime has been criticised as hard to follow (Lenburg 95), director Miyazaki decided to stand by the film's ending (96). In fact, he stated that it is in this film "that his belief that life must go on at all costs is expressed most exhaustively, and in the most fulfilling fashion for him personally" (Cavallaro, *Hayao* 171), naming *Howl's Moving Castle* as his favorite amongst his works (171–72).

This study identified how a Japanese adaptation of a British novel presents a steampunk story whilst conveying a distinctively Japanese rendition. I investigated how the adaptation reworks the story as a steampunk fantasy that successfully draws attention to the highly relevant topic of the destruction and dehumanisation caused by war, drawing on the Japanese fascination with the apocalyptic. An in-depth examination of Howl's character concluded that he is an amalgamation of the steampunk hero and the Japanese apocalyptic identity. The typically Japanese elements and modes of adaptation and animation, intertwined with the use of steampunk features, function not solely as an illustration of the critique of present-day militarism, but also as an echo of both the post-war Japanese standpoint and the Victorian age, on which the steampunk genre builds in an often uncritical manner, disregarding the fact that it was an epoch of imperialism and aggressive expansion (Beard xxvii). Miyazaki's disapproval of the Iraq War results in a work that bears traces of what the steampunk genre tends to overlook, thus often idealising the Victorian era and betraying a lack of critical subjectivity, yet takes a critical standpoint by formulating a critique of war, underscored by the Japanese sense of the apocalyptic.

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