

Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art. By Susan Napier. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018. xviii, 303 pp. ISBN: 9780300226850 (cloth, also available in paper and as e-book).

Academic research on anime, just like animation for Miyazaki, is a cursed business. It is very similar to other **areas of study** in that there is an umbrella term for any research on anime that can take a myriad of different forms. As such, it is very difficult to produce or look for book-length academic work with comprehensive discussion on anime itself rather than areas around it such as fan culture. You *can* write and publish books on anime, especially if it is on a specific theme or a creator's works, as Dani Cavallaro does. However, academic books in English on anime that have a historical perspective seem to be so rare. That is possibly because they require detailed knowledge of anime in general and a lot of groundwork that potentially involves the collection and analysis of numerous Japanese language materials (Jonathan Clements' *Anime: A History* is the best example).¹ In addition, even if you do make the effort and try to publish, the chances are that you are met with **a** skeptical or negative response from publishers and/or reviewers doubting **the** academic value of your work. This could explain the absence of a **real successor** to Helen McCarthy's classic work on Miyazaki, which was published in 1999, until this book by Napier **was published**.²

Actually, between 1999 and 2018 a handful of books on Miyazaki (and Studio Ghibli)

Commented [SY1]: I wrote "area studies" meaning Japanese studies, Chinese studies, Asian studies, etc. I want to keep the term or if that is not clear, replace it with "area studies such as Japanese, Chinese, Asian or any other studies" or something along that line.

Commented [MW2]: I'm confused here. You say there is no successor, but then below you list a few books on Miyazaki. Can you clarify? Thanks.

¹ Jonathan Clements, *Anime: A History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

² Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999).

[were published](#) such as Jeremy Mark Robinson's *The Cinema of Hayao Miyazaki* (2011)³, and Collin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc's *Studio Ghibli: the Films of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata*⁴, which is in [the-its](#) third edition at the time of writing after original publication in 2009, ~~were published~~. [However, these books lacked comprehensiveness and depth of McCarthy's book](#). On the surface, with 16 chapters overviewing the animator's life and career in chronological order, Napier's book seems to be similar to these. The first three chapters cover Miyazaki's life up to the period before his first feature film *Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), which is discussed in chapter 4. After that, each chapter, except chapter 10 - which is on the manga version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), whose significance is often overlooked outside those familiar with anime, manga, or Miyazaki - focuses on one of his films all the way up to *The Wind Rises* (2013). However, as you can expect from this pioneer of studies on anime in the West, under the bonnet is a detailed and comprehensive discussion of Miyazaki's life and career with sound scholarship missing from ~~these-the~~ two [earlier](#) books [on Miyazaki](#). The first three chapters give us an overview of Miyazaki's private and professional life, detailing his family background and war experience as well as early days as an animator at Tōei Animation, using Japanese materials ~~so~~ that are not available in English. Once the focus shifts to the films, we are treated with a well-rounded discussion of the films covering the social and political context, production process, and analysis of the film text itself.

What is particularly noteworthy in this book is the centrality of Miyazaki himself.

³ Jeremy Mark Robinson, *The Cinema of Hayao Miyazaki* (Maidstone: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2013).

⁴ Colin Odell, Michelle Le Blanc, *Studio Ghibli: The Films of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2015).

Although the book does offer in-depth analysis of Miyazaki's films, it equally focuses on presenting Miyazaki's personal and professional life, placing his works within changes (and consistencies) in it. In the introduction Napier asserts that "Missing from the flood of commentary on [Miyazaki] . . . is much discussion of Miyazaki's own history" (xiv) and emphasizes the significance of paying more attention to his personal life and its relationship with a broader social and historical context, saying "[Miyazaki] remains an idiosyncratic genius, but he and his art are also an amalgam of the time and space he was born and raised, the extraordinary and sometimes excruciating cultural experience of twentieth-century and twenty-first century Japan" (p. xvii). Through extensive use of published interviews with Miyazaki as well as writing by him, Napier shows us how his works are linked with his personal and artistic values, and how those values, in turn, are associated with postwar Japanese social and political history. This certainly is an approach and viewpoint missing from earlier works on the director. It enables readers, especially those who are not familiar with Japan or anime, to appreciate significance of Miyazaki's works and career beyond what they can find in the films themselves or general materials found in media. As such, this book is clearly aimed at a non-academic audience, as evident in the overall writing style and structure – making it approachable to general readers. The work also avoids jargons and theories that may scare them away, although this by no means indicates that the book lacks academic depth. The strategy seems to be successful judging from the fact that tens of copies of this book were piled up in the bookshop of the British Museum when an exhibition of manga was held there back in 2019, and people were buying them. This book will also be an ideal reading for undergraduates and postgraduates who are interested in Miyazaki but do not have access to Japanese materials and/or detailed knowledge of anime or Japan.

Miyazakiworld is a significant starting point for further discussion of the director's works as well as Japanese popular culture. A possible future research topic could be more a critical look at Miyazaki's remarks and the very idea that he is an "an idiosyncratic genius": the image itself could be constructed out of his own speeches and writing by fans, media and Studio Ghibli as well as Miyazaki himself, possibly in a bid to separate "Miyazaki/Ghibli films" from other anime. Miyazaki's words in and outside his films do reflect the reality of Japan and the world at a given period, but at the same time, they are not immune from other factors such as need for commercial success.

Miyazakiworld seems to have a lot of uncharted territories beyond those Napier explored, but we should hail the pioneer for finally providing us with a good map of it.

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