

All right, now to review Hayao Miyazaki's movies, at least in terms of those I've had proper access to.

The Castle of Cagliostro (1979)

So far a really good and artsy start. This was also the most recent Lupin III film I had watched at the time after 3 others, which always made me think that anyone who could pull off a Lupin III film could pull off any film (just look at Takeshi Koike amongst others). The funny thing is that this would be one of the first times Lupin III would be portrayed in a cleaner light than his usual exploitative roots. That's not to say those same roots were what he was best known for, but with the colourful backgrounds, well constructed plot and complex slapstick to go with the action, Miyazaki started out intricately if nothing else. 9/10

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1984)

First time I saw this movie was only during the final act, but even that was enough to leave an impression on me. It reminded me of how anime could be a fantasy cornucopia while still be grounded in human empathy I've known since the times of Dragon Ball Z and Knights of the Zodiac. The second time, when I saw it completely, it was all right, though I couldn't help but get a sort of Terry Gilliam vibe if he was trying to phase out of his Monty Python style into more serious animation. Eitherway this was certainly a more Miyazaki film than his Lupin III debut, especially since it was based on a manga he had been working on since two years prior (making it his Otomo's Akira of sorts), furthering my point on how anyone who tackled the former would go on to tackle other fantastic products. 8/10

Castle in the Sky (1986)

Sort of a mixture between the perilous stakes of his first film and the imaginative fantasy of Nausicaä, it also might be the one where Miyazaki releases his inner Osamu Tezuka (particularly in the design of the robot). It's also the one that felt the most 80s of his work, from the Tolkienlike story to the colorful credits that evoke how it was just as influenced by the science fantasy that would come to be popularized since before that decade from Frank Herbert to Edgar Rice Burroughs. Of course it has a bit of social commentary in bits, but it's all mostly made up for, and even justified, thanks go Miyazaki's taut direction. Plus it definitely is a refinement of his penchant for character driven depth that would go on to grow in his oeuvre. 10/10

My Neighbor Totoro (1988)

One of Miyazaki's more calming (if questionably experimental) films, My Neighbor Totoro sheds the blockbuster thrills he garnered since his debut for a more meditative atmosphere. Which makes sense as it would go on to be one of the pioneers of "Iyashikei" which was best known for its adherence to a calm, welcoming immersion that felt less rushed and more soothing to the spectator. It's pretty much the first film since Nausicaä where one experiences his genuine, and plantiferous, touch despite being based on Norwegian folklore. 8/10

Kiki's Delivery Service (1989)

First time I watched this, which was somewhat the year it came out in America (give or take), it bored me too much to watch it past 4 to 6 minutes (or just the ending). Granted I wasn't even in middle school yet so, unlike Nausicaä, it would take years until I would give it a second and complete chance. Once I did I found it to be a perfect fusion between the calm approach his Totoro film helmed and a bit of those same thrills beginning to evolve before the 90s would alter most of his landscape. Plus it's definitely a further refinement of that same character driven kind of narrative he started in Castle in the sky. 8/10

Porco Rosso (1992)

One of Miyazaki's intentionally (albeit unsuccessfully) passable flicks, Porco Rosso feels as though it was just Miyazaki letting off steam with a surreal idea taken as seriously as he could manage yet still make fun and inventive. Whatever social commentary it may have tried to make is mostly hidden in the action, humor, and that same overall spirit found in his films. Mostly for Miyazaki die

hards, but his extensive knowledge on planes would only be the beginning here.
7/10

Princess Mononoke (1997)

One of Miyazaki's rare instances where he includes CG in his animation, Princess Mononoke is certainly one of his most artfully intricate works since his three debut films. Although this could've been mostly done to adapt with the 90s boom in animation, where as much Disney as Don Bluth and Dreamworks were aiming to create leviathan sized monoliths of any kind of animation they could manage, Mononoke is nothing less of the culmination of the 5 year hiatus he spent since Porco Rosso to really maintain his place in the pantheon. It is beyond groundbreaking as he really takes whatever the 90s were trying to say in terms of environmentalism and makes an art out of it. 9/10

Spirited Away (2001)

Miyazaki's own Alice in Wonderland, basically, that's not to say it's probably his most polished film in terms of mise-en-scene and detail. He essentially began the 2000s with this one better than he began the 90s with Porco Rosso. I personally never saw as much as most people did once the hype died down. But I can't deny it influenced a lot of animators from Makoto Shinkai to Takeshi Koike once more in terms of having enough borderline infinite narrative substance to justify the sublime and amazing style. If you ever want to start watching Miyazaki's films start with this one. 10/10

Howl's Moving Castle (2004)

Despite returning to his obvious roots, the eponymous castle is as far as the throwback goes (along with maybe the Gilliaesque design of the aforementioned building's architecture). Piggybacking more on the intricacy brought forth by Spirited Away it is less based on Alice in Wonderland and more on the Wizard of Oz, with a more realistically dark twist that Porco Rosso was trying to hint at. At its best it essentially does to steampunk to what both Princess Mononoke and Castle in the Sky did to science fantasy simultaneously. Plus it's also the movie where Miyazaki accomplishes in hiding the nonetheless arduously detailed CG the most. It's mostly style over muddled substance, but the ending is satisfying enough eitherway. 8/10

Ponyo (2008)

Miyazaki's second least Miyazaki-like film, despite being a perfected take on what My Neighbor Totoro aimed to accomplish. He certainly steps highly out of his comfort zone by leaving his august forests and skies in favor of conquering as much of the ocean life as he could get his eyes on. Granted there are surreal scenes of perilous tsunamis caused by the titular creature. Eitherway it's hard to really judge it too much despite teetering between that same Porco Rosso idiosyncrasy and that somewhat tame Totoro tonality. But as much the effort as that same attention to detail is there even as you could tell this was nearly intended to be Miyazaki's penultimate film. 7/10

The Wind Rises (2013)

Certainly his most serious film since Princess Mononoke, Castle in the Sky, and Castle of Cagliostro (if not topping them all) it's also his most uncomfortable film to watch. It does have bits and pieces of his signature touch, yet by choosing to helm a true story we feel less transported into fantasy and more into the kind of film he was practicing all along with Porco Rosso. As far as biopics go it's still impressively executed nonetheless, especially since it's based on a manga he made in his spare time like Nausicaä (though not quite as polished). Just know what you're getting into first before expecting the usual from the director. 8/10