

Save the Monster Save the World: Living in  
Harmony with 'Monsters' in *Nausicaä of the Valley  
of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997)



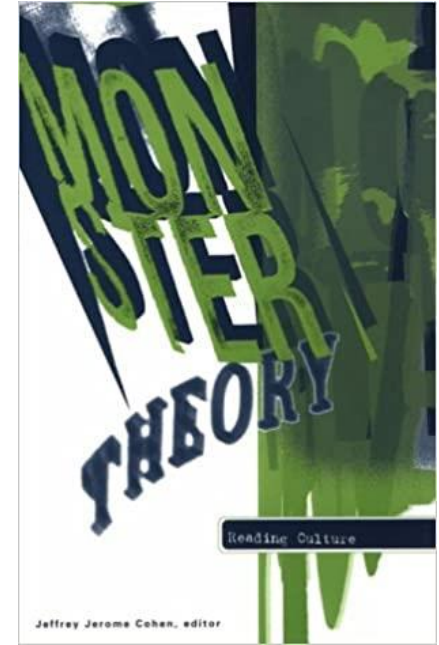
Amanda Potter, Open University  
amandapotter@caramanda.co.uk



# Characteristics of a monster

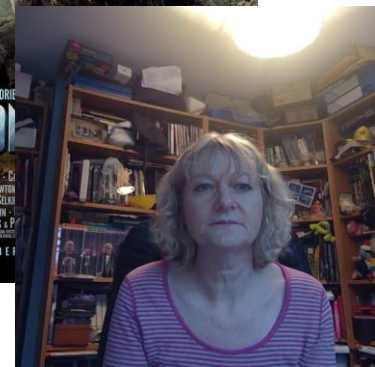
Jeffrey Cohen 'seven theses' (1996) 1. cultural body, 2. always escapes, 3. harbinger of category crisis, 4. Exists at gates of difference, 5. On the borders of the possible, 6. Fear is a type of desire, 7. stands at the threshold of becoming

Liz Gloyn (2019) 'abnormally large, they perform hideous acts of violence, they break down barriers in our understanding of the world, they demonstrate physical hybridity, they resist or reject human control'



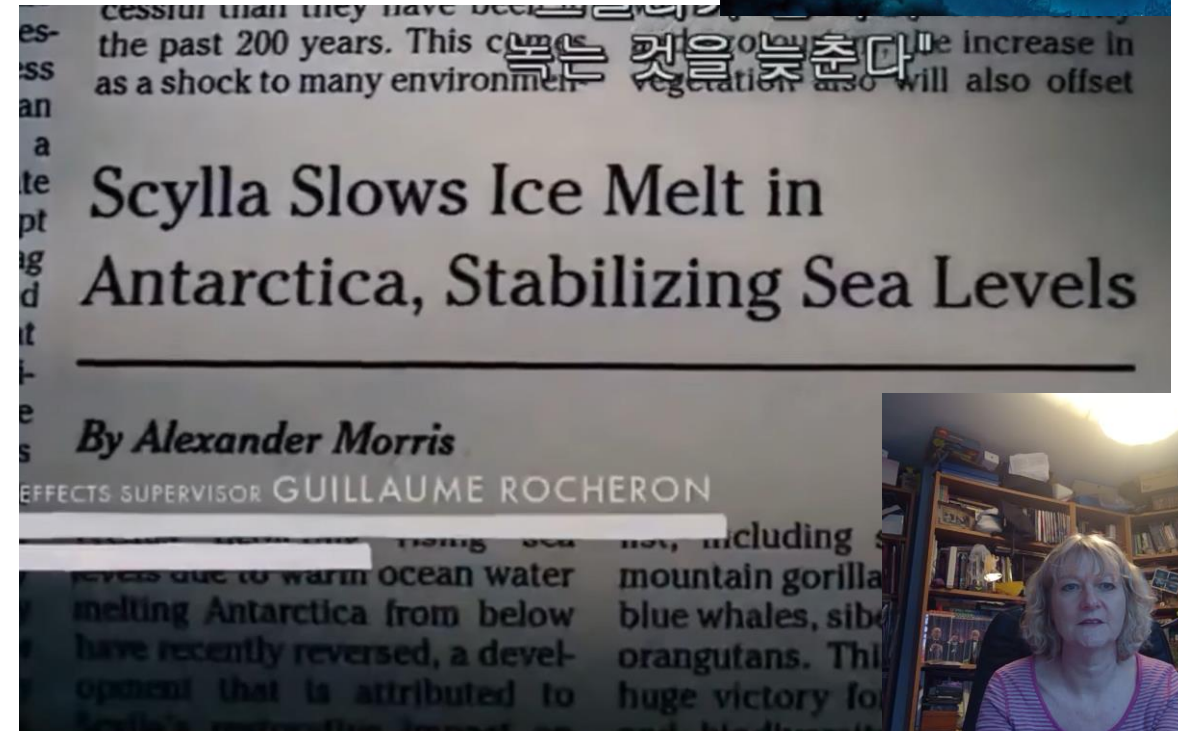
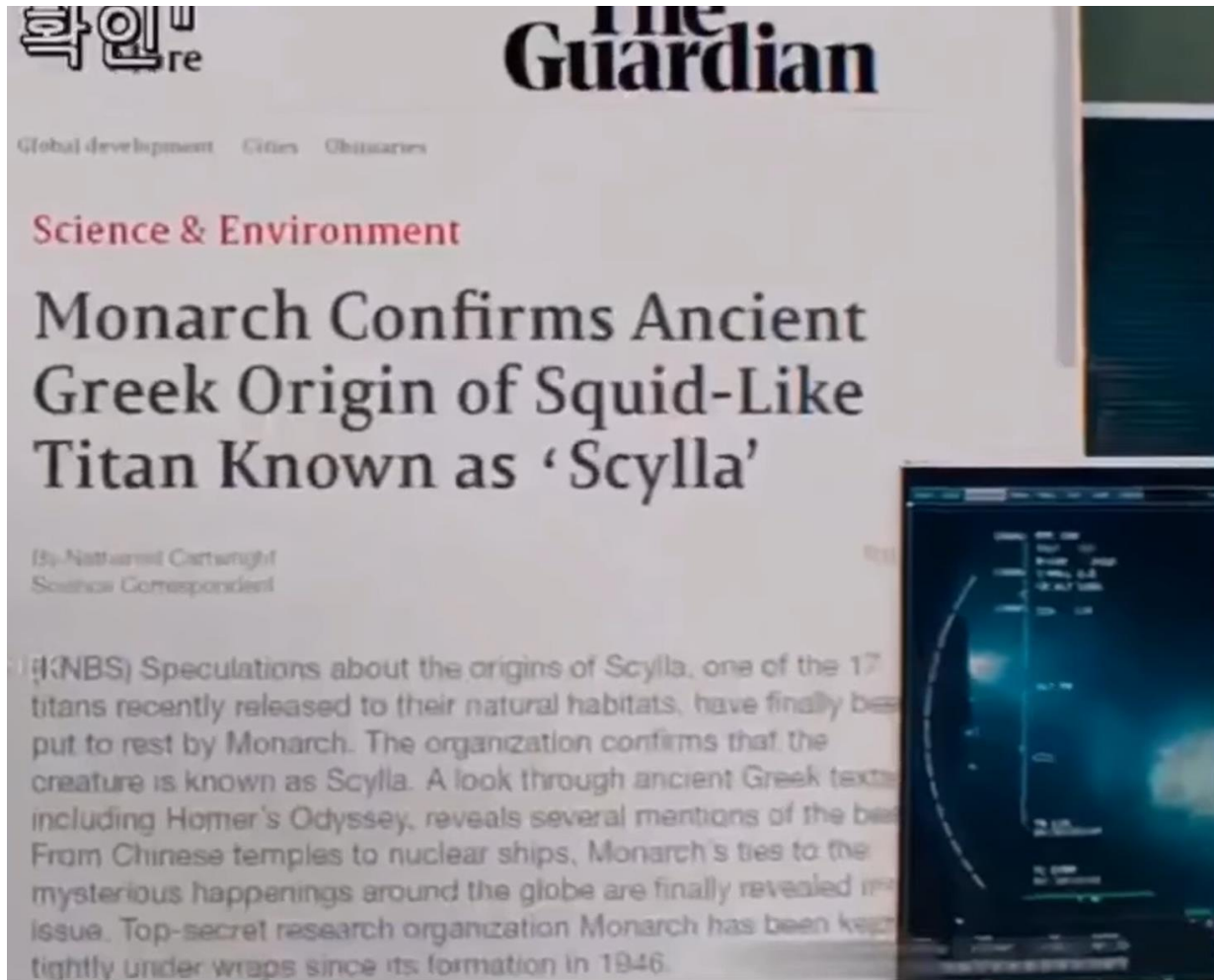
# Monstrous Nature

- Is pitted against humans in a struggle for survival
- Fights back against the humans that have attempted to exploit or destroy it





In the 21<sup>st</sup> C classical monsters are being reinvented as a force for good – recent example *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019)



# Hayao Miyazaki and the Western tradition

Andrew Osborne (1998)

‘At university, Miyazaki joined a children's literature group, discovering such writers as Philippa Pearce, Rosemary Sutcliffe, Eleanor Farjeon and Arthur Ransome. Decades later, the director cited these as among his greatest influences, calling Britain in particular a treasure trove of children's authors.’

‘Miyazaki read a wide range of classic western SF and fantasy, including Verne, Asimov, Aldiss, Le Guin and JRR Tolkien’.

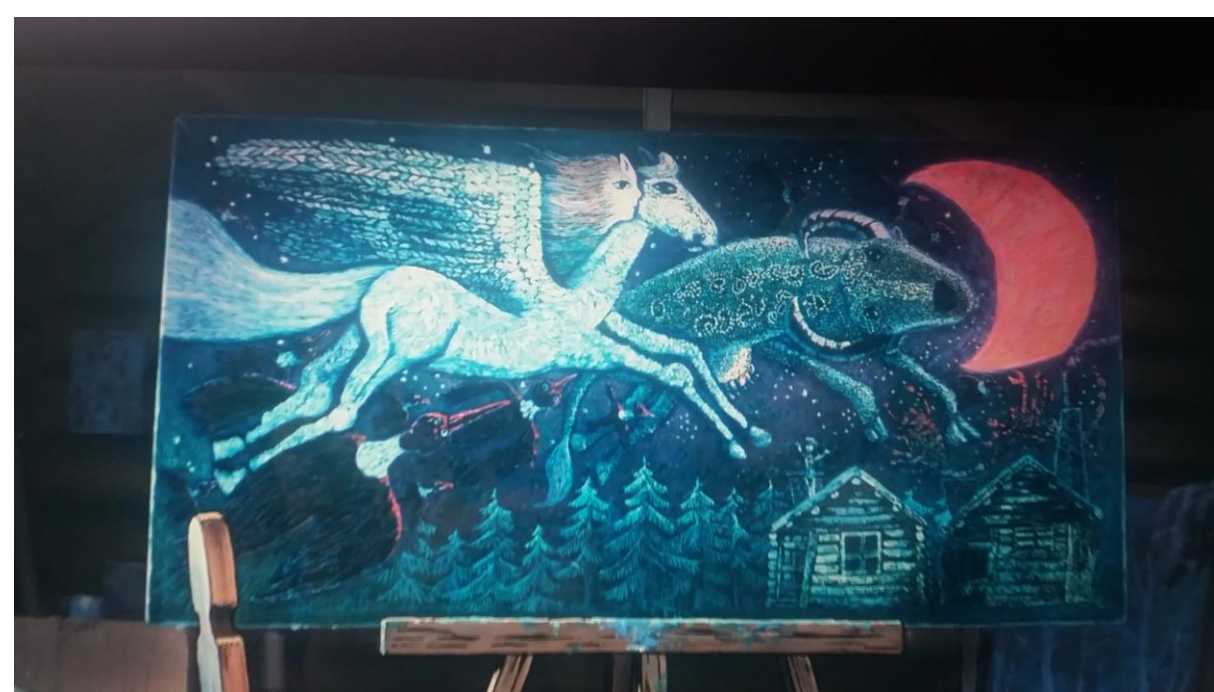




# Hayao Miyazaki at Studio Ghibli – classical elements



Castle in the Sky (1986)



Kiki's Delivery Service (1989)

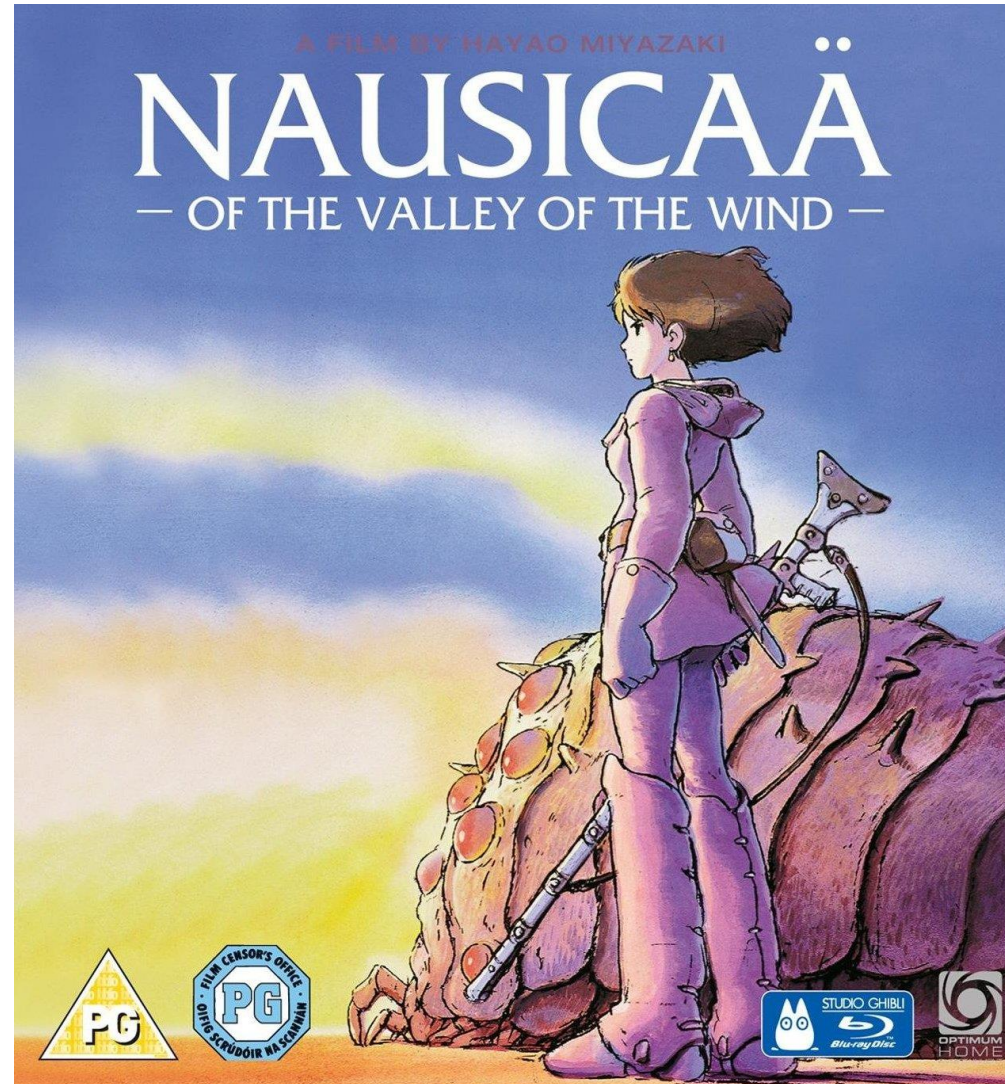


Spirited Away (2001)





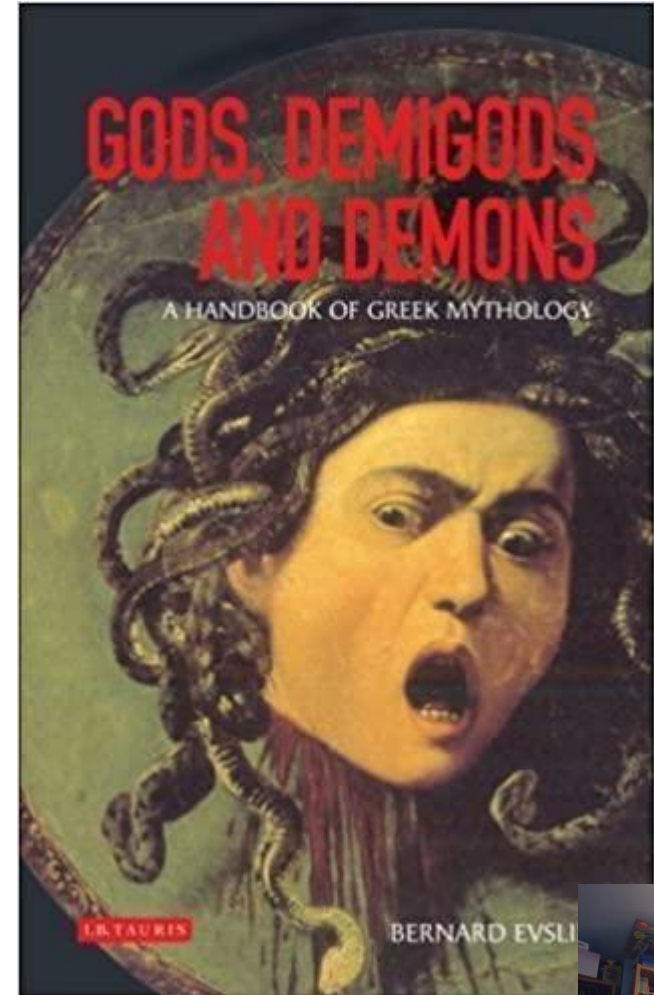
# *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1984)*



# Hayao Miyazaki 'On Nausicaä'

Nausicaä is the name of a Phaeacian princess in the Greek epic poem, *The Odyssey*. I learned of her when reading Bernard Evslin's *Handbook of Greek Mythology* (published in Japan by Shakai Shisousha and translated by Minoru Kobayashi) and have been fascinated ever since. When I actually read Homer's *Odyssey*, I was disappointed not to find the same splendour in her there as I had found in Evslin's book. So, as far as I am concerned, Nausicaä is still the girl Evslin described at length in his paperback. I can tell that he was particularly fond of Nausicaä as he devoted three and a half pages to her, but only one page each to Zeus and Achilles.

Nausicaä – she was a beautiful fanciful girl. She possessed a particularly sensitive character and took delight in nature, the lyre and song more than worldly comforts or the attentions of her suitors. Unafraid, Nausicaä saved Odysseus and nursed his wounds when he drifted ashore covered with blood, and it was she who improvised a song and softened his heart.

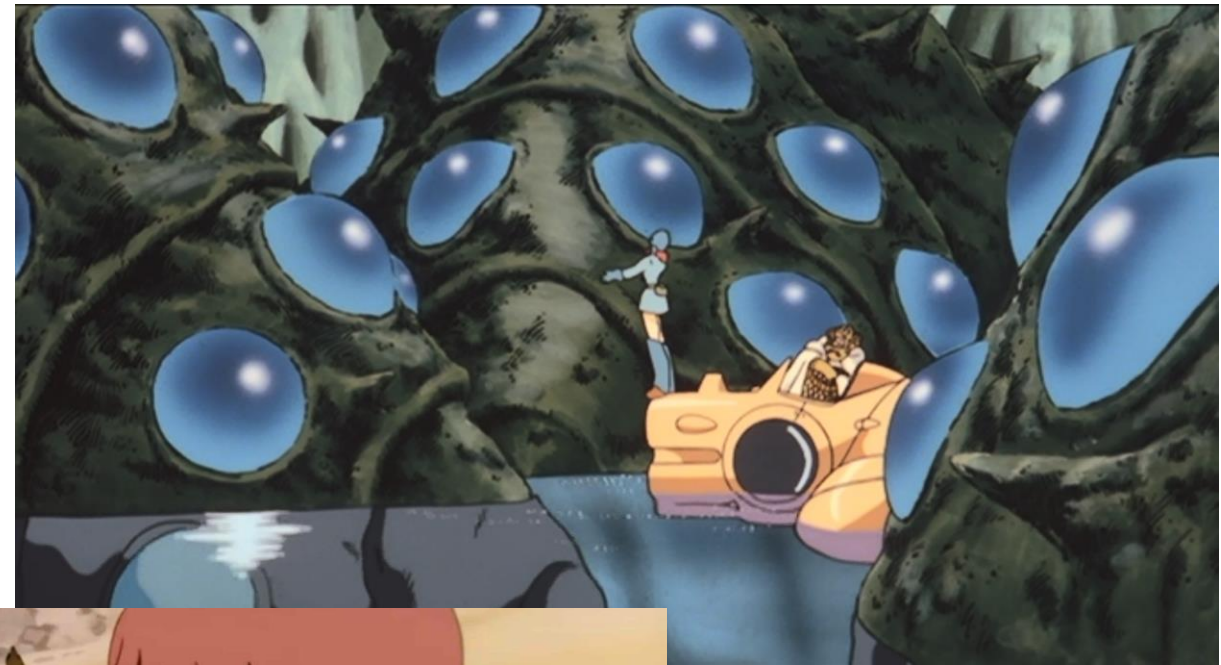




# A princess at home in the natural world



‘Insects and humans cannot live in the same world – you know that!’





Nausicaä has found that nature is repairing the world made toxic by humans



Kushana: 'You must learn to live with the monster.... The insects must be stopped!'

Valley Men: 'You're not anything at all like our princess!'

Kushana: 'The jungle is killing you, yet you want to live in harmony with it?'

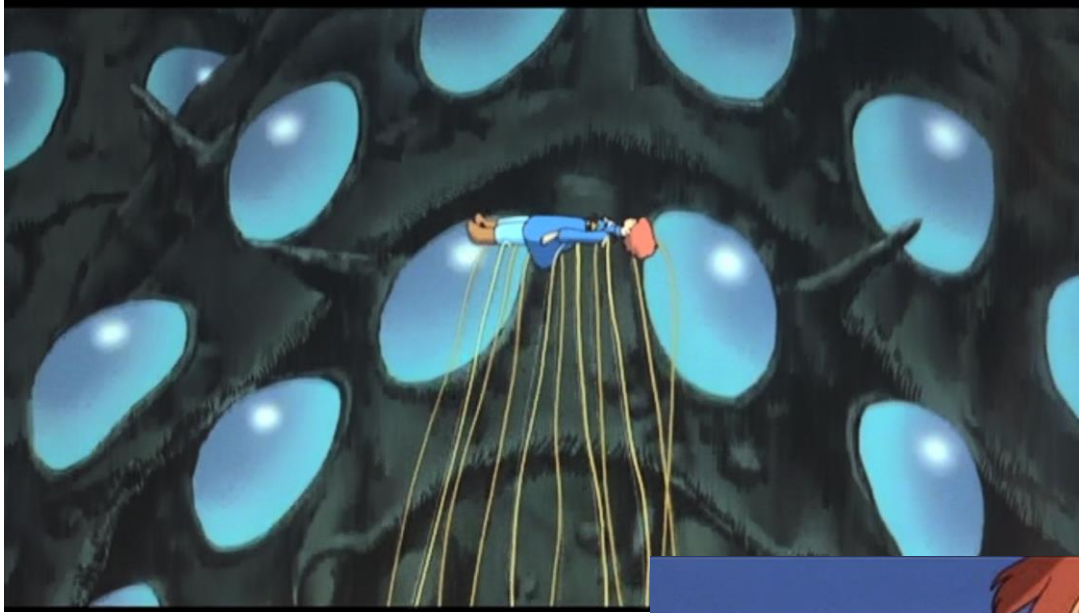
Valley Men: 'We prefer the ways of the water and the wind.'

Kushana: 'I've chosen the bloody path.'





Can we live in harmony with the monstrous in nature?



# Princess Mononoke (1997)



Picture of the year at the Japan Academy Awards

Highest grossing film in Japan in 1977





Support The Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

Contribute →

Subscribe →

Search jobs

Sign in

Search

UK edition

# The Guardian

News

Opinion

Sport

Culture

Lifestyle

More

Film Music TV & radio Books Art & design Stage Games Classical

Film

## Princess Mononoke



Peter Bradshaw

@PeterBradshaw1

Fri 19 Oct 2001 02.19 BST



**T**his 1997 movie, much admired as the crowning work of Japanese animation master Hayao Miyazaki and his Studio Ghibli, is now on release in the dubbed American version - although British critics were shown the subtitled original - and it emerges as a fervently inventive and imaginative legend about man's collision with nature: medieval warrior Prince Ashitaka and his alliance with Forest Spirits and Wolf Gods against the early Iron Age profiteers. I must admit to being agnostic about the animation: particularly the humans' saucer-eyed moppet faces: but the story has simplicity and force, with captivating images and gutsy narrative ideas recalling Kipling, Ovid and Homer.

Advertisement

FROM ACCLAIMED SCREENWRITER-DIRECTOR  
RAMIN BAHRANI

# THE WHITE TIGER

BASED ON THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE WINNING NOVEL

JANUARY 22

**NETFLIX** [LEARN MORE >](#)



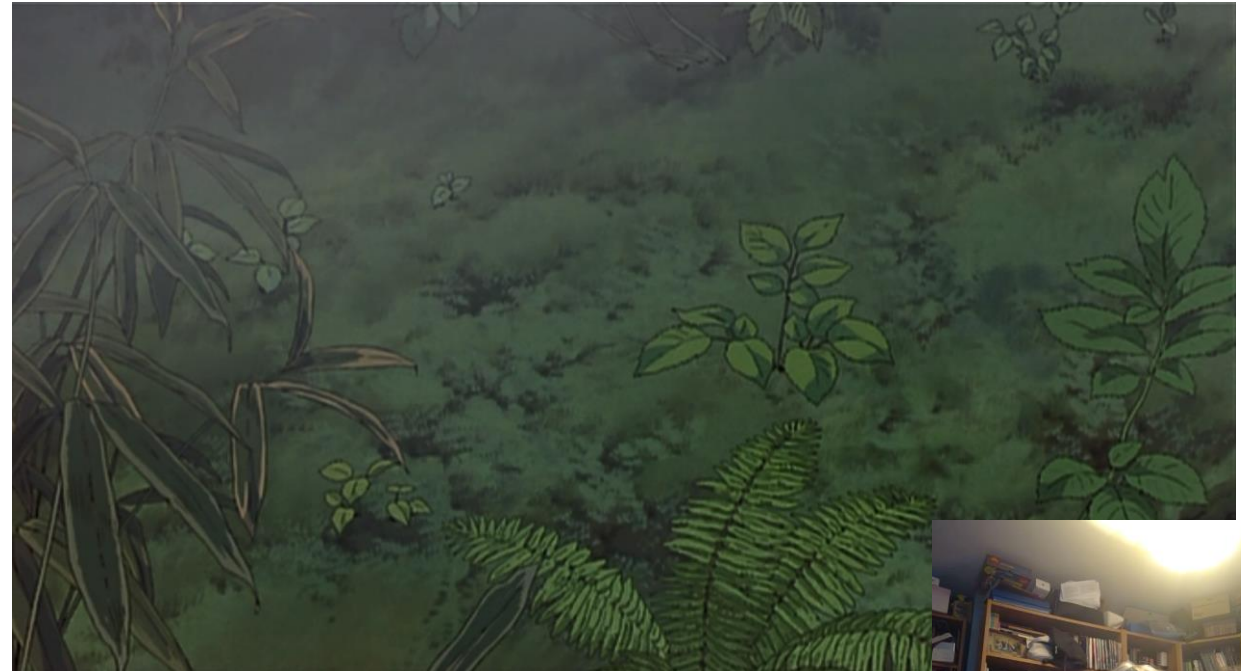


# *Princess Mononoke* and classical/Western stories





'In ancient times a land lay covered in forests where from ages long past dwelt the spirits of the gods. Back then man and beasts lived in harmony but as time went by most of the great forests were destroyed. Those that remained were guarded by gigantic beasts who owed their allegiance to the great forest spirit. For those were the days of gods and of demons.'







Like the villagers from the Valley of the Wind the Emishi people live in harmony with the natural environment, and Prince Ashitaka only when he cannot save the village peacefully  
'Calm your fury, mighty Lord... Leave us in peace'



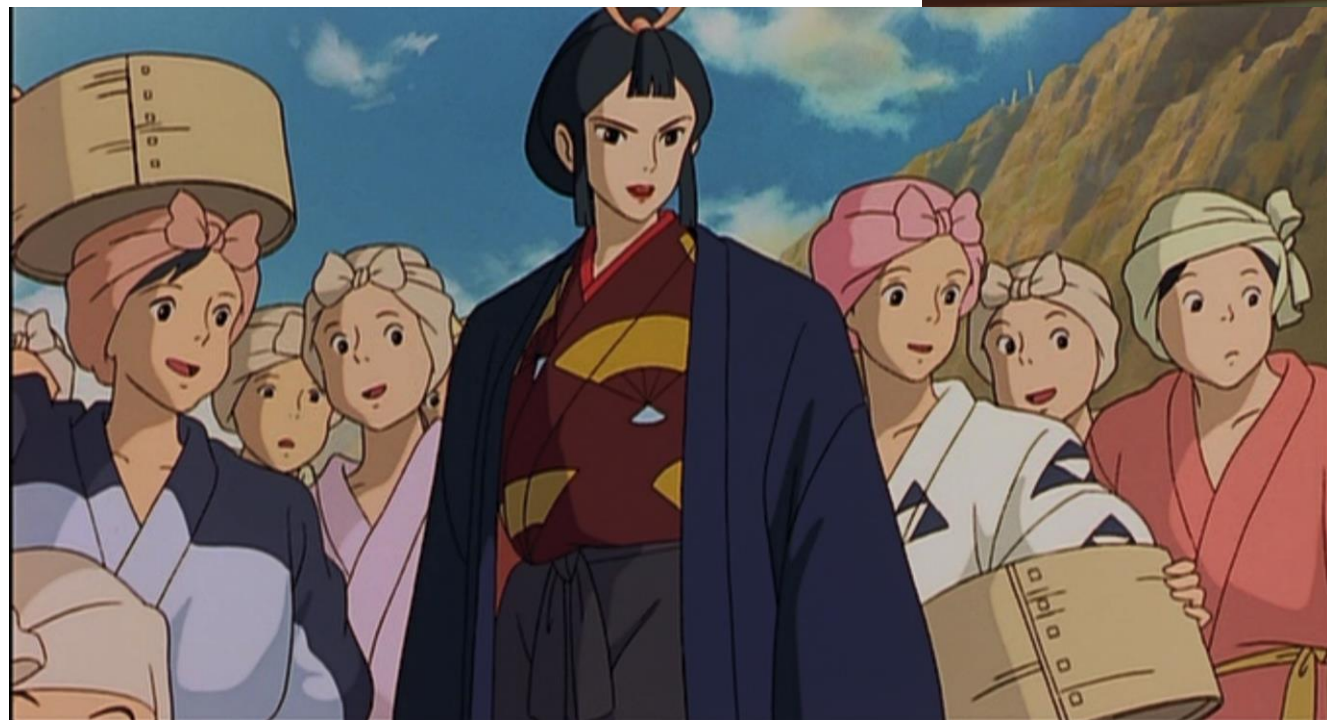


The animals are led by old gods, like Moro the Wolf and Okkoto the boar. Balance is brought to the forest by the forest spirit, with power over life and death





Leper: 'Lady Eboshi  
wants to rule the world.'





Eboshi: 'Princess of the spirits, of ghouls, beasts and ancient gods. The wolf stole her soul and now she lives to kill me.'

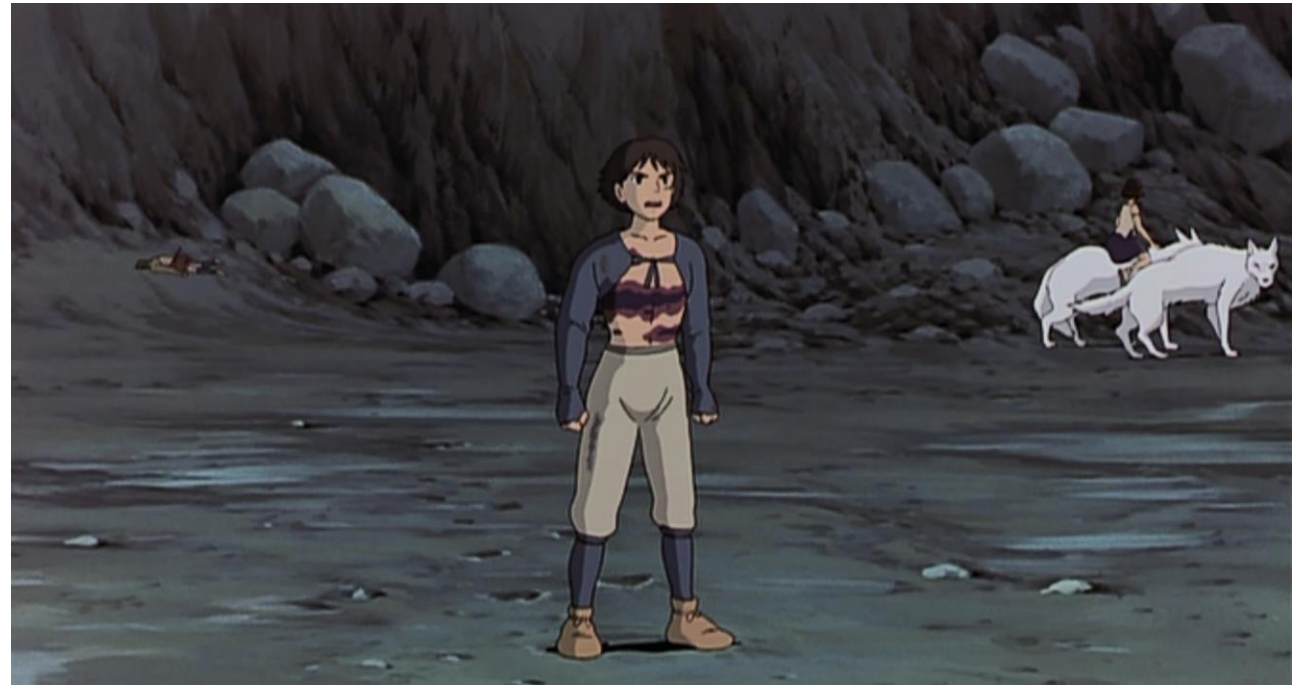
Ashitaka: 'Theres a demon inside of you. It's inside both of you'

San: 'I'd do anything to get you humans out of my forest... that woman is evil, and there is no one who can stop me from killing her.'



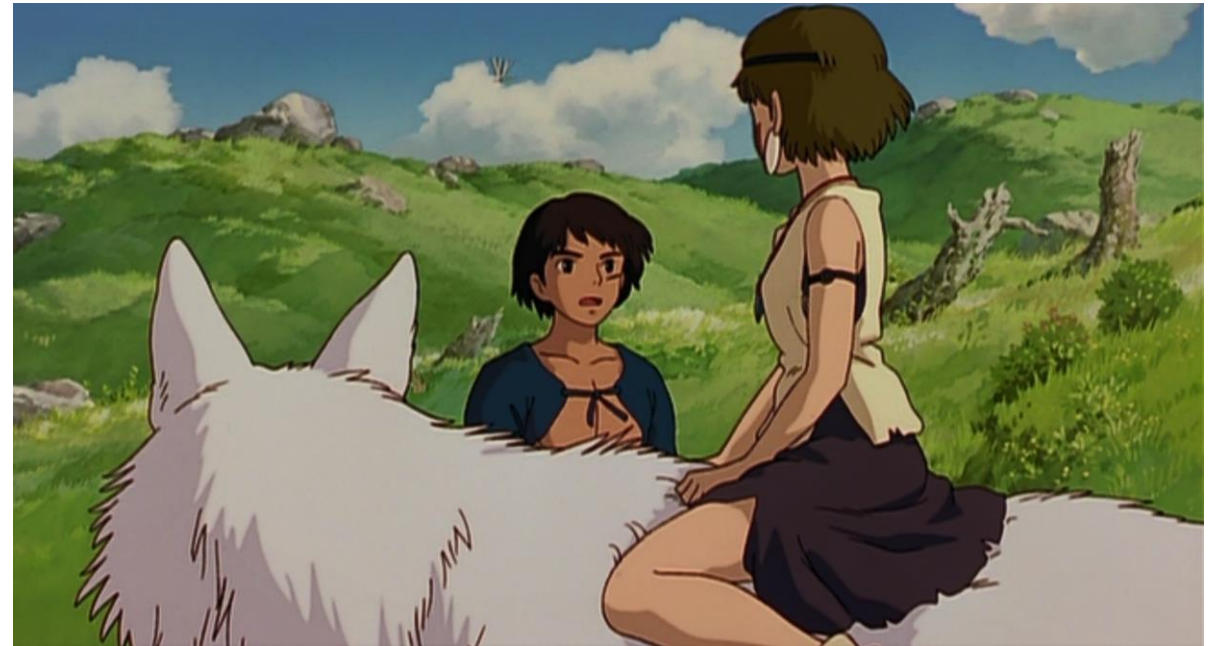


Ashitaka, with 'eyes unclouded by hate', tries to bridge the world between nature and humans, saving the people of Iron Town and the forest





Eboshi: 'The wolves and that crazy little wolf girl helped save us all'



San: 'Ashitaka you mean so much to me but I cant forgive the humans for what they've done'



An ambivalent ending. Will Eboshi really 'build a better town'?



Miyazaki: 'It's not bad people who are destroying forests. Hard working people have been doing it.'





# Bibliography

- Bellot, Gabrielle (2016) 'The Magic of Miyazaki's Literary Imagination: On Studio Ghibli's Rich Literary DNA at <https://lithub.com/the-magic-of-miyazakis-literary-imagination/> (accessed 21 January 2020)
- Cavallaro, Dani (2006) *The Animé Art of Hayao Miyazaki* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland)
- Cohen, Jeffrey (1996) 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.) *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 3-25
- Denison, Rayna, ed. (2018) *Princess Mononoke: Understanding Studio Ghibli's Monster Princess* (London and New York: Bloomsbury)
- Gloyn, Liz (2019) *Tracking Classical Monsters in Popular Culture* (London and New York: Bloomsbury)
- Liu, Marjorie and Sana Takeda (2015 - ) *Monstress* (Image Comics)
- McCarthy, Helen (1999) *Hayao Miyazaki, Master of Japanese Animation: Films, Themes, Artistry* (Berkeley California: Stonebridge Press)
- Miyazaki, Hayao (2012) *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* Box Set (VIZ Media)
- Murray, Robin L. and Joseph K. Helmann (2016) *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press)
- Napier, Susan J. (2006) *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle; Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: St Martins Griffin)
- Odell, Colin and Michelle LeBlanc (2015) *Studio Ghibli: The Works of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata* (Harpending: Kamera Books)
- Osmond, Andrew 'Nausicaä and the Fantasy of Hayao Miyazaki', a revised and updated version of an article that originally appeared in the SF journal Foundation, Issue 72, Spring 1998, p57-81, available online at [www.nausicaa.net/w/images/4/4f/Nausicaa\\_and\\_the\\_Fantasy\\_of\\_Hayao\\_Miyazaki\\_by\\_Andrew\\_Osmond.txt](http://www.nausicaa.net/w/images/4/4f/Nausicaa_and_the_Fantasy_of_Hayao_Miyazaki_by_Andrew_Osmond.txt)
- Potter, Amanda (2020 forthcoming) 'Bringing Classical Monsters to Life on BBC Children's Television: Gorgons, Minotaurs and Sirens in *Doctor Sarah Jane Adventures* and *Atlantis*' in Katarzyna Marciniak (ed.) *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's Adults' Culture* (Heidelberg: Winter)
- Theisen, Nicholas (2015) 'Unreading the *Odyssey* in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*' in George Kovacs and C. W. Marshall (eds.) *Son of Comics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

