

Fall 2019: ENG 461 – 01 (Youngblood)

The Works & Films of Studio Ghibli

Wednesdays, 4:00–6:45



Few terms set off more of an immediate reaction as *anime*. What once existed as a wildly niche fanbase in the States has now exploded into an overall phenomenon, and at a time in which the widespread promotion and utilization of Japanese animation into Western culture is reaching new heights, the influence of one creative force – Studio Ghibli – is increasingly evident. Go into a Hot Topic and you’ll likely find a bundle of *Spirited Away* t-shirts right alongside punk band memorabilia; take a look on any fan-based merchandise website and it’s near impossible to avoid Totoro’s fuzzy, plump mug staring back at you eventually (just as he is above).

So why Ghibli? What is that these films—spearheaded by two major creators, Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata—have tapped into, both at home in Japan and abroad? How have they managed to balance appeals to both younger and older audiences? What can be found in their blend of artistic style, thematic focuses, and overall view of what it means to be human? And what tension can be seen between the industry they helped launch to popular success and the viewpoints of the studio?

This class will focus on 11 movies from the studio, ranging from the first major production *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* to the recent *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*. Across these films, we’ll explore everything from environmentalism to the agency of women to the pacifism so intense in the studio that Miyazaki turned down going to America to receive an Oscar due to the Iraq War. Alongside scholarly articles, film critic editorials, and a mix of other resources, we’ll try to analyze what lies at the heart of each adventure, as well as glean insight into the storytelling and artistic elements of the Ghibli formula.

If you’ve never watched a Ghibli movie before, no worries; no prior experience is expected or required. And if the idea of a year of Japanese cartoon movies makes you want to jump in a river, don’t get soaked just yet. You may find more here to connect to than you might think.

Final projects may range from long-form written academic analyses to sample film scripts to multimedia productions, or a fusion of elements.