

Down the Abyss

STEVE ODIN

In the various works of Hayao Miyazaki focusing on environmentalism, the landscape is often populated by the sacred presence of Shinto gods and spirits (known as *kami*), who live in a parallel world separated by a thin membrane within the multi-dimensional continuum of nature, itself connected to our familiar physical dimension through the opening of a tunnel, vortex, hole, or abyss.

My Neighbor Totoro is an enchanted tale of two young girls who fall down a hole under a sacred camphor tree decorated as a Shinto shrine, descending to the bottom of a tunnel, thereby to encounter a magical tree-dwelling nature spirit named Totoro. This is reminiscent of Alice's descent down the rabbit hole into to a fantastic Wonderland, but the Shinto animistic vision of nature as a sacred habitat or place filled with divine spirits and gods is just the starting point for a rich Japanese history and tradition of environmental thought.

Japanese Buddhism depicts nature as an aesthetic continuum of interrelated events having the intrinsic value of beauty. The Zen concept of nature includes a Buddhist metaphysics of harmonious interpenetration between the many and the one. This Zen metaphysic of nature as a continuum of interpenetrating dimensions and events is illustrated by the organismic metaphor of "Indra's Net," whereby all events in nature are visualized as brilliant jewels in a dynamic network of relationships, so that each gem mirrors the whole universe as a microcosm of the macrocosm.

The Japanese Buddhist view of nature has many points of convergence with the environmental ethics and aesthetics of Aldo Leopold, whose 1949 book *A Sand County Almanac* is often cited as one of the primary works on environmental ethics in the Western philosophical tradition. For both the environmental philosophy of Aldo Leopold and Japanese Buddhism, nature is similarly viewed as a "web" of interrelationships wherein the individual organisms and their surrounding environments are mutually dependent in a symbiotic ecosystem.

The modern Japanese philosopher Tetsurō Watsuji (*Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku*) develops an ethics based on a Zen concept of the person (*ningen*) as an individual-society interaction, which exists not in an isolated ego, but in the "betweenness" (*aida*) or relatedness of persons. Moreover, for Watsuji's Japanese ethics the person is a spatial field of relationships, including not only relations to others in society, but also to the surrounding "climate" (*fūdo*) or environment of living nature. Watsuji, like Leopold, thereby suggests that his Japanese Buddhist ethics must be expanded beyond inter-human relations, to an environmental ethics that includes relationships between humans and nature. According to Leopold's environmental ethics, it is the intrinsic value of beauty in nature which commands both an aesthetic appreciation and moral respect for nature. Likewise, just as Leopold's land ethics is itself based on a land aesthetics, Watsuji underscores the profoundly aesthetic character of ethical relationships both to other humans and to the environment.

Engaging Nature

Miyazaki's *Nausicaä*, like both the environmental ethics of Leopold and the traditional Japanese Shinto-Buddhist concept of living nature, represents a paradigm-shift from an anthropo-centric (human centered) to an *eco*-centric model of the environment.

In his autobiographical work *Starting Point: 1979–1996*, Miyazaki describes the environmental motif focusing on the human-nature relationship in his original manga version of *Nausicaä*, stating: "A major theme of this work is the manner in which people engage with nature surrounding them" (p. 251). Miyazaki describes his deep interest in the environmental themes of *Nausicaä* as in part having been inspired by reading various books on ecology such as *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* by Clive Pointing.

Elsewhere Miyazaki describes being influenced by Frederic Back's 1987 animated film *The Man Who Planted Trees*, a film that promotes the sense of place and conservation of nature by replanting trees. Miyazaki writes: "The old man in this film has the face of a philosopher . . . Back wanted to draw someone with a far-reaching gaze, someone overlooking the planting of trees, someone watching them grow and become forests and homes to the honeybees" (p. 146). From these and other references, it becomes clear that Miyazaki's environmental theme in *Nausicaä* and other works is informed not only by his own love of nature, but also his research into ecology as well as his interest in activist movements for sustainable green living dedicated to the protection of the wilderness.

In *Nausicaä*, the atomic and biochemical war known as the Seven Days of Fire was a catastrophic holocaust of near-total destruction leveled by giant

high-tech robotic Gods of War. The story begins a thousand years in the future, when medieval tribes attempt to survive in a post-apocalyptic world, including an ever-spreading Sea of Corruption (Fukai) emanating from a polluted jungle of toxic spores, acid lakes, and giant mutated insects named the Ohmu. In this nuclear wasteland of radioactive and biochemical pollution, humans must wear gas masks in order to survive the toxic poisons in the air, soil, water, and plants.

Apocalypse, the Abyss, and Overcoming Nihilism

Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* is an apocalyptic vision of the future, which uses imagery similar to "the Abyss" in Nietzsche's existentialism. For Nietzsche, the central problem of existence is "nihilism," or loss of all absolute values through the death of God, which is like an earthquake that opens up a dark abyss. Influenced by Nietzsche's existentialism, the modern Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani, in his book *Religion and Nothingness*, develops Zen Buddhism as a method of overcoming nihilism *through* nihilism, thereby shifting from the life-denying standpoint of nihilism, to the life-affirming standpoint of positive nothingness. For Nishitani, Zen overcomes nihilism by a descent to the bottom of a nihilistic abyss of negative nothingness, which itself nullifies all substantial being, resulting in a breakthrough to the field of positive nothingness wherein emptiness is fullness and fullness is emptiness, so that all life is affirmed as it is in suchness.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche proclaims: "And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you" (p. 89). In a monochrome picture frame displaying Nausicaä surrounded by a dark void or abyss of nihilistic nothingness, the narrative description echoes the words of Nietzsche, saying:

The mind of a fragile person would be destroyed by the sight of that abyss. Because the one who looks into that darkness must endure the gaze returned by the darkness itself. This girl had the unprecedented power to reach the shore of that abyss. (Volume 6, p. 32)

However, just as for Nietzsche's existentialism the task is to overcome nihilism through a joyful Dionysian affirmation of existence, so Nausicaä descends to the bottom of a dark abyss, only to defiantly resist nihilism by affirming the positive value of all life. As clarified by Hiroshi Yamanaka ("The Utopian 'Power to Live': The Significance of the Miyazaki Phenomena"), just as Nietzsche strives to overturn the life-denying moral values of nihilism through the life-affirming moral values of Will-to-Power, so Miyazaki explains how Nausicaä resists nihilism by the *power to live*. Hence, Nausicaä herself proclaims: "Life survives by the power of life" (Volume 7, p. 198). According to Yamanaka, a recurrent motif in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* is that of overcoming nihilism by going *down to*



the bottom. Thus, for Yamanaka, Nietzsche's existential theme of countering nihilism by the power of life-affirmation through descent to the bottom of an abyss, is seen in Nausicaä's descent through a vortex to the bottom of the Sea of Corruption, thereby to discover a purified green forest in the process of renewal.

Susan Napier analyzes Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* as being characterized by elements such as "apocalypse," or a vision of the end of the world, and "elegy," an elegiac sense of nostalgia and grief over loss. This apocalyptic destruction of the environment is an element in Japanese literature partly due to historical events such as the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, along with natural disasters throughout Japan's history, including devastating earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Again, an apocalyptic element is contained in the Japanese Buddhist idea of *mappō* or the age of decline in the last days of the law. Yet Miyazaki's dystopian apocalyptic vision of a future nuclear wasteland in *Nausicaä* is not the total pessimism that characterizes that other great apocalyptic narrative of neo-Tokyo, Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1988), another groundbreaking animated film originally based on a manga. Whereas Otomo's *Akira* is a celebration of the nihilism of apocalyptic destruction, Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* is an apocalyptic story that instead ends with an optimistic hope of rebirth and renewal, guided by a prophetic vision of a world reborn into the Buddhist Pure Land of peace and joy through the saving activity of Nausicaä, likened to a savior, messiah, or compassionate bodhisattva.

This life-affirming attitude in the face of an abyss of nihilism is seen when Nausicaä enters an ancient temple, and a Buddhist monk proclaims the advent of an apocalypse (Daikaisho), whereupon the polluted forest will boil over to destroy the entire world. Although the monk tells Nausicaä that apocalypse is inevitable, Nausicaä declares:

Is there no way to stop the Daikaisho? . . . So many will die. . . No! Our God of the Valley of the Wind tells us to live! I love life! The light, the sky, the people, insects, I love them all! (Volume 4, p. 85)

Nausicaä thus overturns an existential attitude of angst or despair in the face of apocalypse as a dark abyss of nihilistic nothingness, into a joyful affirmation of all life, existence and nature.

Compassionate Savior

From the perspective of *eco-feminism*, it's significant that Nausicaä, like nearly all of Miyazaki's main protagonists, is a female. Nausicaä, as a young woman, is also the embodiment and personification of Mother Nature. Hence, Nausicaä becomes a paradigmatic eco-feminist, who protests against the domination, violation, and oppression of women as well as the correlate destruction of nature.

Miyazaki explains in *Starting Point* that Nausicaä is the name of a compassionate Phaeacian princess who saves the shipwrecked Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. Her character is further based on an ancient Japanese tale *The Princess Who Loved Insects*. As the heroine of Miyazaki's *Nausicaä*, Princess Nausicaä is a feminine, gentle, and peaceful young girl, who is at the same time a fearless warrior, skillful aviator, and pilot of a wind glider, a charismatic leader of her people, as well as a compassionate savior prophesied to lead all humankind to the Pure Land of peace and joy described by the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan.

The two main women protagonists are oppositional forces—the warlike Kushana of the Torumekians, and the angelic Princess Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind. Yet Miyazaki does not have a rigid black-and-white view of morality, but instead suggests an *ambiguity* between good and evil. Both Kushana and Nausicaä share a common aim to stop the spreading Sea of Corruption with its deadly toxic spores and army of giant insects, but their methods are completely different. While Kushana leads her people into war for the purpose of gaining control over the Earth's limited natural resources, Nausicaä adopts compassion, nonviolence, and acceptance to establish peace between the warring tribes. Against Kushana's path of war and violence, Nausicaä teaches compassion and peace: "That path leads only to hatred and an endless cycle of revenge. . . . Choose love over hatred" (Volume 6, p. 129).

In an effort to save the planet, Kushana seeks to destroy the toxic jungle with its giant mutated insects by reactivating an ancient robotic God of War. It is the very same technology of warfare using weapons that created the deadly toxic jungle. Moreover, Kushana uses the primitive emotions of hatred, violence, and revenge that led to the creation of the high-tech weapons of destruction resulting in the present biochemical and nuclear wasteland. By contrast, Nausicaä seeks to stop the spread of the toxic forest with its giant tank-like Ohmu insects, not by destroying them with robotic war machines, but through

sympathy, gentleness, and compassion. Nausicaä has a sympathetic intuitive bond not only with people, but with all the plants, trees, and animals of the forest, even insects such as giant Ohmu. When the Ohmu become angry, their eyes turn burning hot red; yet when they encounter Nausicaä, their eyes soon turn to cool blue. Her oneness with the forest is so deep that at one point we are told she is a divine personification of nature: "This honored person is the forest in human form, she stands at the center of both worlds. . . . We shall make her the guardian deity of our people" (Volume 6, p. 29).

Nausicaä's mystical power to telepathically communicate with all living beings in nature is reminiscent of Shinto *miko* priestesses or psychic female shamans of Japan's animistic nature religion depicted by the "magical girl" archetype in many Japanese manga and anime. Miyazaki explains his own vision of Nausicaä as a *miko* or magical shamanic priestess functioning as an intermediary between the physical, natural, and spiritual worlds, stating: "While creating the story, I realized that the role of Nausicaä herself was not to become an actual leader or even a guide for her people. Rather, it was to act as a type of *miko*, a shaman-maiden who works at a Shinto shrine" (*Starting Point*, p. 407). Her sympathy for all humans, plants, and animals also represents the compassionate bodhisattvas of Japanese Buddhism such as Kannon the goddess of mercy. Nausicaä is thus said to be the fulfillment of ancient prophecies of a blue-clad princess riding across a field of golden light who will become the messiah guiding all people to the Pure Land of peace and joy at the twilight of human civilization.

Insect Life

Nausicaä's compassion for all living beings in nature, including humans, plants, and animals, results in her moral stand on "animal rights." Describing Nausicaä's equal regard for the welfare of both humans and animals, even insects, Miyazaki writes: "She seems to regard the lives of insects and humans in the same way" (*Starting Point*, p. 334).

The foremost ethical philosopher in the area of animal rights is Peter Singer. According to Singer, the case for animal rights rests partly on the basis of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian principle of moral equality, which states that one should have equal consideration for the interests of others. Moreover, Singer, following Bentham's Utilitarian ethics, holds that the principle of moral equality should be extended to *all* animals, both human and nonhuman.

Singer points out that in the Utilitarian ethics of Bentham, it is the capacity for *suffering* which gives a being the moral right to equal consideration, whether human or animal. In Bentham's words: "The day may come when the rest of

the animal creation may acquire those rights . . . The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but Can they *suffer*?" (as cited by Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 7). Likewise, in Japanese Buddhist ethics, compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings in nature is also a fundamental principle. The *Nirvana Sutra* proclaims: "All sentient beings have (or are) Buddha-nature." All sentient beings in nature have equal moral standing and intrinsic value by virtue of their ability to suffer, as well as their potential for enlightenment. Nausicaä thus inquires: "Why must the plants and the birds and the insects suffer as well? So many will die. Who will atone for the pain and sadness of the Ohmu?" (Volume 4, p. 89). For Nausicaä it is an ethical axiom that *no unnecessary suffering or pain should be inflicted on any living creature*, so that all animals, even insects, have an equal right to live.

Nausicaä's method is reminiscent of the "nature study" (*shizengaku*) of Kinji Imanishi in *A Japanese View of Nature*. His Japanese "nature study" is influenced by the modern Zen philosophy of Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945). According to Nishida, founder of the Kyoto school of modern Japanese philosophy, there is a nondual continuity between humans and nature in a Field (*basho*) or "place" of nothingness. Imanishi's nature study combines the Zen feeling of oneness with nature with a study of environmental sciences, including evolutionary biology, ecology, zoology, botany, primatology, and entomology.

Nausicaä likewise attempts to understand the ecosystem, not only through a Zen-like sympathy with all living nature, but also by a study of environmental sciences. Throughout the story there are many scenes of Nausicaä as a scientist in her laboratory conducting experiments with flora and fauna specimens collected from the toxic jungle. Her scientific research is aimed at solving the problem of pollution in the ecosphere, to discover medical cures for illnesses caused by the poisoning of the environment, and to find a method for cleaning up the Sea of Corruption so as to restore the purity of nature by sustainable green lifestyles.

Through scientific experiments conducted in her secret underground laboratory, Nausicaä discovers that plants collected from the Sea of Corruption are not themselves poisonous, but have absorbed toxins from the soil polluted by humans (Volume 1, p. 76). However, at the conclusion of Volume 1, Nausicaä discovers the real secret of the Sea of Corruption (Volume 1, pp. 112–128). Nausicaä descends into a hole down through a spiraling tunnel-like vortex of quicksand, to the bottom of the Sea of Corruption. Here she takes a shamanic journey down a tunnel into a dreamlike underworld, followed by an upward ascent to share her revelations with others. By her descent to the bottom of a nihilistic abyss, she discovers that the water, air, and soil are pure underneath the Sea of Corruption, and there is no need to wear a mask. She

realizes that the huge trees filter out the poison from the toxic jungle: the trees turn to stone, the stone to sand, the sand to dunes, so that nature dies, followed by rebirth as a green Pure Land of abundant life:

But the day shall come when the Sea of Corruption ceases to be, and a green, Pure Land is reborn. (Volume 7, p. 195)

The giant tank-like Ohmu evolved to protect the ecosystem that is functioning to purify the toxic jungle. When Nausicaa discovers an ancient place in the poison forest that has undergone the one-thousand-year filtering process of purification, she rejects staying in this paradise in order to return to the suffering world, thus to become a compassionate bodhisattva who descends from the transcendent realm of Nirvana to save all suffering beings in the realm of samsara.

Miyazaki's efforts to create a new ecosystem called the Sea of Corruption, which is a toxic jungle functioning to purify nature by filtering all poisons to renew the forests and sustain the environment, is an animistic concept of nature reminiscent of the "Gaia hypothesis" in James Lovelock's environmental philosophy. Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis does not suggest that the planet Earth is a sentient creature, goddess or spirit; rather, it holds that the Earth is an organismic, holistic, interrelated, self-regulating system, that maintains climatic, atmospheric, and environmental conditions optimal for life in nature (*The Revenge of Gaia*).

In his latest work, Lovelock speaks of the "revenge" of Gaia as the planet Earth attempts to purge itself of any source of over-population, pollution, and industrial waste, which like a cancerous tumor, needs to be removed in order for the ecosystem to survive. Miyazaki discusses his idea of an ecosystem as a "forest on the attack" functioning to restore a sustainable environment. In this context he expresses his effort "to overturn the concept of defenseless plants always being destroyed and instead create a forest that was offensive" (*Starting Point*, p. 418). Miyazaki's animistic concept of nature, thus converges with Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, whereby the planet Earth is itself a living organism, in the sense of a holistic *self-regulating* system that functions to maintain an optimal environment to sustain life.

The Web of Living Nature

In the environmental ethics of Aldo Leopold, moral respect for nature is itself grounded in an appreciation for the intrinsic value of beauty in nature. Likewise, in the tradition of Zen Buddhism, spiritual reverence and moral respect for nature are inseparable from insight into the beauty of nature,

such as the pervasive aesthetic value qualities of *mono no aware* (pathos of things) or the sad beauty of perishability, and *yūgen* or the sublime beauty of profound mystery. Moreover, for the environmentalism of both Leopold and Zen, the aesthetic, moral, and spiritual values of nature are rooted in a deep metaphysical insight into the interrelatedness of everything in the web of living nature. According to Napier, the Japanese aesthetic philosophy of transiency as the *mono no aware* or sad beauty of evanescence itself adds to the apocalyptic and elegiac vision of *Nausicaä* with its expression of grief for what has been lost in the passage of time (*Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*).

Throughout Miyazaki's graphic novel, the stunning beauty of the surreal landscapes in the toxic jungle is breathtaking. The most astonishing visual characteristic of Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* is its imaginative vision of an entirely new eco-system of a toxic jungle with poisonous fungi and their deadly bacterial spores infested by a newly evolved species of giant insects. At the very outset of the story, Nausicaä is under the transparent eye lens from the exoskeleton of an empty Ohmu shell, watching the deadly spores from the giant fungi in



the toxic jungle fall like snowflakes, expressing sheer aesthetic delight in their delicate beauty. Moreover, from an ethical standpoint, Nausicaä's view of the toxic jungle through the lens of an empty Ohmu shell, itself reveals her ability to arrive at moral decisions by seeing nature from the multiple perspectives of others, including the perspective of insects.

Nausicaä describes a Japanese Buddhist view of the ever-changing impermanence of all life: "To live is to change. . . . We will all go on changing" (Volume 7, p. 198). As pointed out by Charles Shir Inouye in his book *Evanescence and Form*, the Japanese aesthetics of evanescence, with its underlying metaphysics of impermanence, has its origins in the early Japanese poetic tradition, wherein perishability of life was first symbolized by the image of *utsusemi*, or an "empty Cicada shell" (pp. 17–26). He further clarifies how there is a contemporary return to the ancient Japanese aesthetics of evanescence symbolized by an "empty Cicada shell" in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä*, wherein the heroine enters the Sea of Corruption to discover the empty insect shell of a giant Ohmu (pp. 195–97).

Mysterious Beauty

The new edition of the English version of Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* is now available in its original Japanese manga format, reading top to bottom and right to left, with splendid monochrome line drawings that include all the original Japanese onomatopoeia sound effects written in katakana script, with an English glossary of equivalent meanings at the rear of each volume. As the reader quickly scans the extended page layouts in this lengthy work, it gives the manga a "cinematic" quality. All the onomatopoeia with sound effects written in the katakana script accompanying the pictorial frames adds a kind of audio-visual "synaesthesia," or intersensory fusion of sights and sounds into the juxtaposed montage of a unified aesthetic impression.

The first page of each volume begins with a foldout color poster of Nausicaä, a map of the Valley of the Wind and surrounding regions, while other color foldouts contain a diagram explaining the new ecosystem that evolved within the Sea of Corruption. However, each manga volume of *Nausicaä* is otherwise drawn in black-and-white monochromatic style. Miyazaki develops a graphic style of monochrome line drawing influenced by traditional Zen brush painting techniques used to depict the pervasive atmospheric beauty of nature as an undivided aesthetic continuum. Indeed the very source of Japanese manga is traced by some to the satirical Zen monochrome line drawings featuring comic parodies of Zen monastic life known as "The Animal Scrolls" (*Chōjūgiga*) attributed to the Buddhist artist-priest Toba Sōjō (1053–1140). In contrast to American comic books



drawn in vivid color, Miyazaki's manga consists of traditional Japanese-style monochrome line drawing with surrounding blank spaces resembling the dark voids of a Zen inkwash landscape painting.

The Zenlike monochrome line drawings of Miyazaki's manga includes not only blank spaces of voidness, emptiness, or nothingness, but are often also devoid of any dialogue so as to have prolonged intervals of silence and stillness. In traditional Japanese aesthetics developed under the aegis of Zen, these empty voids and intervals of silence that characterize the monochrome backgrounds of Zen poetry, painting, and other arts, is known as *ma* or the beauty of negative space. This use of Zenlike voids in the monochrome landscapes functions to capture the pervasive aesthetic quality, mood, feeling-tone, or atmosphere suffusing transitory events throughout the continuum of nature. These monochrome line drawings of Miyazaki's graphic novel, similar to Zen black-ink landscape brush paintings, depict not only the aesthetic quality of *aware* or sad beauty of this empty insect-shell world of evanescent phenomena arising and perishing in the flow of nature, but also the aesthetic

quality of *yūgen* or the beauty of darkness and shadows that pervades the horizon of nothingness, thereby to suggest the profound beauty of mystery and depth of all things in nature.

A special feature of Zen monochrome landscape paintings is that they disclose the interrelatedness of all phenomena in the environment as each part shades into the whole as well as into all the other parts within the undivided aesthetic continuum of nature. Frederik Schodt describes the minimalist style of traditional Zen monochrome brush painting and its influence on the monochrome line drawings of Japanese manga when he writes:

Unlike mainstream American and European comics, which are richly colored, most manga are monochrome except for the cover and a few inside pages. . . . some manga artists have elevated line drawing to new aesthetic heights and developed new conventions to convey depth and speed with lines and shading. Using the "less-is-more" philosophy of traditional Japanese brush painting many artists have learned to convey subtle emotions with a minimum of effort. (*Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, pp. 23–24)

Hence, the beautiful and sublime landscapes of Miyazaki's manga *Nausicaä* involves not only an environmental ethics, but also an environmental aesthetics, including both a philosophy of the beauty of nature as an undivided aesthetic continuum, along with a correlate mode of graphic artwork used to depict the mysterious atmospheric beauty of darkness evoked by the continuity, fusion, and wholeness of nature.

Green Living

Nausicaä has become widely recognized as a visionary anti-war, anti-industrial, anti-pollution, pro-ecological manga and anime that has inspired a new green movement in Japan devoted to conservation of nature. The environmental issue of sustainability through green lifestyle movements using alternate energy sources is addressed throughout Miyazaki's narrative. *Nausicaä* is a cautionary environmental tale with a strong anti-war message that alerts the reader of the dangers of warfare using biochemical and nuclear weapons capable of apocalyptic destruction of both nature and human civilization.

Moreover, *Nausicaä* contains an anti-industrial theme criticizing all technology misused to destroy the environment, while at the same time exploring alternative energy sources, especially natural wind power. To begin with, *Nausicaä* lives in the Valley of the Wind, wherein the wind itself protects the village from the poison miasma falling from the toxic Sea of Corruption. The ever-spinning windmills providing a sustainable alternate energy supply further help to blow away the poison spores from the toxic forest to keep

the Valley free of pollution. Nausicaä at first rides on her *mehve* plane using an engine, but later rides the wind using her elegant wind glider. While at first she uses mechanical energy, later she uses natural and sustainable energy of the wind. Likewise, she uses the sustainable wind power of windmills to pump up the pure water from deep beneath the polluted soil to conduct her scientific experiments for cleaning up the toxic jungle and restoring the natural environment.

Miyazaki's profound lifelong interest in environmentalism, ecology, and green living is recorded in his autobiography *Starting Point: 1979–1996*. Here he describes how his creation of *Nausicaä* was itself inspired by several events, starting with the pollution of Japan's Minamata Bay with mercury so that the fish and other seafood became inedible, thereby destroying the fishing industry in the region. Furthermore, Miyazaki explains how the Yanase River near his own home became so polluted that no fish or plants could live within it:

The Yanase River runs near my house, and all it takes for me to feel really good is to see a few minnows swimming about in it. Twenty-five years ago, when I moved to the area, the river was more like a polluted ditch. . . . Twenty-five years ago, the river was so filthy people felt helpless. . . . Around ten years ago, I think it was, we started seeing duckweed growing in the river. We were thrilled to see something green thriving in such a barren wasteland. (pp. 166–67)

He adds that now The Totoro Forest Project—inspired by his works—has become active in cleaning up the Tanase River and the woodlands at its source in the Sayama hills. The Totoro Forest in the Sayama hills was purchased by the National Trust movement known as The Totoro Home Fund. Miyazaki has himself participated in community projects for cleaning the river and forest region while also donating large sums of money for The Totoro Home Fund. It is this immersion in the natural science of ecology which has led Miyazaki to create not only manga and anime focusing on environmental themes, but also to have inspired as well as participated in the development of green movements directed toward environmental activism that aim to protect nature through developing principles of conservationism and sustainability through green living.

Art Imitating Life

Beginning with both the manga and anime versions of *Nausicaä*, Miyazaki's art depicts an astonishing vision of the evolving human-nature conflict and growing environmental crisis, leading toward a possible apocalyptic destruction of the world as it develops throughout the ages, from the ancient past, to the

present, to a prophesied Armageddon doomsday event in the distant future. The value of Miyazaki's vision—and more importantly, its impact—is perhaps best expressed by Tetsuji Yamamoto:

Recently, Miyazaki-san finished drawing [his manga] *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. I was moved to tears. This makes me want to ask Miyazaki-san about his views on the environment. People find it very difficult to understand environmental problems from discussions about the ways in which the environment is being destroyed or the fact that the earth is facing these sorts of changes. But when these issues are depicted as in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, they are forced to think about them in a symbolic manner. I am now urging my students to read *Nausicaä* because by reading it we are made to think and feel much more deeply than we do when we listen to what scholars say. (*Starting Point*, p. 414)

Nausicaä is speaking. The question is, will we listen? Perhaps because of Miyazaki, we shall.

ZEN NO MICHI	203
15. Being Good Takes Practice <i>Hero Heel</i> JOSEF STEIFF	205
16. Kenshin Is Not An Emo Pansy <i>Samurai X</i> DAISUKE MATSUURA	219
17. Showing the World the Right Path <i>Gundam Wing</i> GORDON HAWKES	229
18. The Brink of Extinction <i>Ark Angels</i> ASHLEY BARKMAN	241
①9 Down the Abyss <i>Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind</i> STEVE ODIN	253
20. Drawing the Self <i>Sexy Voice and Robo, Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle, FLCL</i> SALLY JANE THOMPSON	267

STEVE ODIN teaches in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii. He's the author of *Artistic Detachment in Japan and West*, and regularly travels to the Land of the Rising Sun to research Japanese aesthetics, including literature, art, crafts, and cinema. He has now evolved into the cyberspace Otaku dimension of Manga and Anime, where—inspired by Azuma Hiroki—he develops *otaku tetsugaku* (Otaku philosophy), such as the chapter in this book. Concerned that the Toxic Jungle will soon boil over as the biosphere collapses and rushes into Apocalypse, he has now joined Nausicaä the Pure Land Messiah in the study of nature, ecology, and environmental philosophy.