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ENG – 326 – 01 : Writing In An Endangered World

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Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind: A Critical Environmentalist Work

The film Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind contains direct similarities both thematically as well as otherwise to the concepts discussed throughout the course entitled Writing In An Endangered World taught by Prof. Long. Within the course, various texts concerning both the general topic as well as the cultural movement known as environmentalism were dissected to varying degrees; all of which yielded similar sentiments of outrage and omnipresence relating to the ever-growing issue that is how cruel and unfairly humanity as a species treats the world in which it inhabits: the undeniably more than human world. It's this characterization of the world as more than human as well as the painstakingly imperative cautions which humanity as a species ought to be taking with regards to its environment that resonates profoundly on multitudes of levels throughout the film's interworkings as a cinematic environmentalist work. Hayao Miyazaki's Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind contains direct aspects which illustrate themselves as glaringly indicative of environmentalist values, considerations and goals as a cultural ideology within a myriad of contexts; both awesome as well as awful, in all of their auspicious authenticity.

Firstly, Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* illustrates several parallels of environmentalist sentiment as well as philosophy which work to both clarify as well as elaborate upon similar notions contained within Miyazaki's work. At one point near the beginning of the novel, it

reads, "I am gloriously old. I am ripening." (p.32) as Dora-Rouge acknowledges her age with a remarkable amount of pride as she's being carried by Agnes & Angel (as she can't perform this function herself) to simply sit outside temporarily, illustrating a very apparent acceptance and even a certain degree of exuberance at the thought of death. Consequentially, this intrinsic knowing of the connectedness of life on earth which is associated with certain people in old age cuts across all aspects of the natural world. All forms of life have a finite amount of time on earth however, amidst this finitude, the larger landscape as a whole will always persist, finding means to propagate the succession of the species which it houses despite what seeming roadblocks might cross its path. It's this succession of life as well as the more than human world's consistent perpetuity which Nausicaa is a wholehearted believer in, and also chooses to stake the fate of her world upon throughout the course of the film. Upon characterizing one of the only male figures within her novel, Linda Hogan's narrator describes John Husk; "His main desire in life was to prove that the world was alive and that animals felt pain, as if he could make up for being part of the broken contract with the animals." (p.35) echoing Nausicaa's consistently empathetic means by which she views the world around her as well as all animals, even those which inhabit the toxic jungle. These parallels exist in conjunction with one another and in attempting to understand these sentiments within both contexts of the film as well as the novel, only serve to further build upon each other's subsequent meaning which one can make of either of them. Later still within Hogan's novel, Angel tells of Dora-Rouge's attempt at her estranged mother's origin story, "...Two wolf children were found there...Their wary eyes were the standard against which she (Dora-Rouge) measured all other wild things, including Hannah Wing, my mother, whose own fierceness and danger made the feral children seem

tame by comparison.” (p. 65-66) this description allows for an inherently more humanized interpretation of these animals by illustrating them as ‘feral children’. This resonates with Nausicaa’s consistently underappreciated sentiment of considering animal life of all kinds as equally important as human life on earth.

Gary Snyder’s *Turtle Island* also serves to build upon these same sentiments of thoughtful concern and consideration for the environment. From his poem entitled *Spel Against Demons*, Snyder writes, “The stifling self indulgence of anger in the name of - Freedom – must cease.” (p. 17) Acknowledging humanity’s child-like tendency to simply curb its most basic desires of greed and want in the face of an unrelenting and even potentially unbeatable threat such as nature; indicative of its hubris as species as well as its apparent lack of connection with the fact that this anger which its afflicted with would dissipate if humanity decided to work in tandem with nature as opposed to against or in spite of it, such as Nausicaa is consistently suggesting to both her kingdom as well as others surrounding her, in spite of constant feuding between human settlements within the film. Later within this same poem, the lines read, “The man who has the soul of the wolf – knows the self-restraint – of the wolf.” Introducing a comparison between man and animal as both possessing a sort of decisive consciousness and, while clearly not the kind of consciousness that humanity likes to incunuate that it solely possesses, still remains as the kind that allows for a controlled restraint of some sort even amidst the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the wilderness itself. The very next lines read, “aimless executions and slaughterings – are not the work of wolves and eagles – but the work of hysterical sheep” Again invoking a comparison between man and animals to which we ascribe certain qualities, Snyder takes care to delineate that humanity is not as noble as an

eagle or as decisive as a wolf, but is as simple-minded and aimless as a sheep, which humanity understands as an animal whose sole purpose is to follow the flock, mindlessly. This sentiment of stubborn irrationality with regards to humanity's treatment of the environment is illustrated in any given interaction that Nausicaa has with the people of her kingdom at large within the film, during which she is attempting to convince them that their inability to separate themselves from the widespread beliefs of their people is in fact what's accelerating their own doom.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* focuses upon these same themes and issues as Miyazaki's work. A measurable way into the work, it reads, "The truth...is that nature is not so easily molded and that the insects are finding ways to circumvent our chemical attacks on them." (p. 245) from chapter 15, entitled Nature Fights Back, detailing the insect world's miraculous ability to adapt & change with whatever man-made variable humanity might introduce into their environment. It's this adaptability and capacity for change which exists and pervades throughout all natural life on earth, and is something which humanity is further cautioned by Nausicaa to understand and prioritize as the movie progresses. Directly following this sentiment is a glaring example of exactly that which Nausicaa is attempting to convince her people of, it reads, "The insect world is nature's most astonishing phenomenon. Nothing is impossible to it; the most improbable things commonly occur there." (p. 245) Carson here is quoting Dutch biologist C.J. Briejer in an attempt to exalt this particular area of nature as a special example which can defy any given amount of odds which are measured regarding it. This sort of anomaly directly parallels the means by which humanity likes to consider itself among the natural world, especially in regards to the people within the kingdom which Nausicaa hails from within

Miyazaki's work. Elaborating further upon this dynamic, Carson writes, "But the broader problem...is the fact that our chemical attack is weakening the defenses inherent in the environment itself, defenses designed to keep the various species in check." It's this dynamic which evokes a sort of echo within the way something as inherently life-giving as humanity's immune systems tend to function. Despite one's view as to whether or not vaccines are indeed effective, it's been proven empirically that when one introduces an artificial means of performing a function within an organic environment which was already previously supported as well as carried out by that environment before this mechanism was introduced; that that environment's capacity to perform that function without the presence of the artificial mechanism will significantly weaken if not completely eliminate itself over time. This is exactly what Rachel Carson is touching upon within this quote, directly relating to Nausicaa's consistently displayed apprehension with regards to humanity's attempt to 'curb' the earth of the presence of the toxic jungle, when in actuality they should be working in harmony with it. Now, while it's explained that the toxic jungle is a direct result of humanity's long-withstanding insolence as a species as well as the perpetual violence and nuclear warfare of their imagined world's history (in other words, innately-human causation) the toxic jungle is simply the more than human world's reaction to humanity's introduction of multitudinous amounts of destructive variables. Bear in mind that the 'body' in this analogy is not just humanity, but it as well as the living environment upon which it lives. So, humanity (as well as it's hubris), in this case, would be the vaccine, and the toxic jungle is simply a reactionary symptom upon first being introduced to it, such as a fever. In this analogy, however, the vaccine is anything but effective, because humanity is mistaking the reactionary measures of its own immune system

as though they are the disease itself. Imagine if one mistook the condition of a fever on its own as the root cause of their illness; when in actuality a fever is, while certainly unpleasant to deal with due to the body's forced allocation of determinably scarce resources under the condition of being sick; the body's direct attempt to combat and simultaneously kill whatever pathogen, infectious microbe or protist has invaded its territory, through the process of raising one's body temperature so as to make the environment less inhabitable for the invader. These processes of interpreting, reacting, responding, and eventually further understanding the dynamics between different environments as well as the consequences wrought by these processes are directly related to the plight of the more than human world today.

Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild* works to further unearth the complexities of humanity's struggle to understand itself within the larger context of the more-than-human world, in tandem with this same struggle which is illustrated throughout Nausicaa's story as well. Near the starting point of Snyder's literary work, he writes, "The physical universe and all its properties – I would prefer to use the word *nature* in this sense. But it will come up meaning 'the outdoors' or 'other-than-human' sometimes even here." (p. 9) this is interjected after mulling over all of humanity's proposed definitions of nature, and all of which that might or might not encompass. It's this careful consideration for both the variability of the term's definition as well as the inevitably more-than-human characterization of the natural world which is central to humanity's accurate understanding of their place within it. On the very next page, Snyder states, "Wild is largely defined in our dictionaries by what – from a human standpoint – it is not. It cannot be seen by this approach for what it *is*." (p. 10) This apparently simply dynamic shift in regards to the onlooker's perspective is echoed loudly throughout the

plight of the people of Nausicaa's fictional world within the film. As the people of her kingdom can only see the toxic jungle as well as the insects which rose from it as anything but enemies, do to their mistaken delineation of anything as non-human as a foe, and anything that's human as a friend; they become unable to understand that the toxic jungle was only birthed by their own consistent failure to understand that the prioritization of all natural life on earth is the only means by which this living organism will continue to sustain itself. "Wilderness may temporarily dwindle, but wildness won't go away...The millions of tiny seeds of the original vegetation are hiding in the mud on the foot of an arctic tern, in the dry desert sands, or in the wind." (p. 16) This perpetuating quality of wildness as Snyder describes it may waver in the degree to which it illustrates its presence, however it will never cease to exist. It's this quality of constancy which Nausicaa as the protagonist is aware of regarding the wilderness in which her people inhabit that's central to the film's theme of environmentalism in conjunction with Snyder's understanding of the wild as an element of unrelenting consistency.

Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America* works to highlight as well as deepen one's understanding of these same themes and ideas regarding humanity and its relationship with the more-than-human world as depicted and understood within Miyazaki's film. Berry writes, "The question of human limits, of the proper definition and place of human beings within the order of Creation, finally rests upon our attitude towards our biological existence, the life of the body in this world...What connections or responsibilities to we maintain between our bodies and the earth? ...This question is also agricultural...Our bodies live by farming; we come from the earth and return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh." (p.101) This particular insight with regards to the treatment of our bodies as inherent microcosms of the

way we treat the earth, as we're only allowed the privilege of existence due to our environment's ability to sustain us as living creatures to begin with, is exactly the kind of connection which Miyazaki draws attention to through the utilization of Nausicaa as a character. While she isn't concerned explicitly with the way her people treat their physical bodies, she is consistently searching for any means by which she might be able to make them understand that they must show an equivocal respect to the planet as they would a fellow human. It's this characterization of the natural world as an inherent responsibility of humanity in the same vein as one's care of one's own individual body that strikes upon the clear environmentalist values which pervade both Berry's as well as Miyazaki's works throughout each of their respective expanses of existence.

Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* raises several points concerning the environmentalist ideology as an integral means of interpreting humanity's place among the more than human world. Texts discussed in Prof. Long's *Writing In An Endangered World* course also contain various amounts of environmentalist sentiment that serve to lend themselves to a corroboration of this perspective as an imperative lens through which to view the human race as inhabitants of the more than human world. Both of these media take care to dissect the problem of humanity's apparent & widespread lack of empathy in regards to it's environment; attempting to understand some of the root causes of this growing apathy towards the land upon which humanity lives and thrives off of. Whether it's Rachel Carson's abundant awareness of the threat of DDT upon the future livelihood of truthfully organic crop yields or the looming insidiousness of the ever-intensifying toxic jungle amidst the post-apocalyptic world of which *Nausicaa* is apart of, the largely one-sided nature of humanity's

dynamic with respect to it's treatment of the environment is struck upon multitudinously. It's this urgent emphasis upon issues of a greater magnitude concerning all life on earth as well as the introduction of specific ideological means so as to potentially combat this kind of thinking which is necessary if one is to consider where all of these works leave a reader/viewer in terms of how one might keep thinking and, consequentially dealing with these issues of poison and perpetuity among the natural environment.

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