The film *The Wind Rises* by Hayao Miyazaki centers on the life story of Jiro Horikoshi, the noted Zero fighter plane designer. The story covers the time from Jiro’s Taisho era boyhood until about 1945 following the end of the Second World War. “The protagonist, Jiro Horikoshi, is a character combining the essences of the designer and engineer Jiro Horikoshi—creator of the Zero, a famous machine that later made its mark in the history of aviation—and Tatsuo Hori, a man of letters who lived at the same time” (Miyazaki, 2013, 10). As part of Jiro Horikoshi’s character portrayal, Miyazaki inserted dream sequences at key points in the plot of the film story. Describing the dream inserts as free and lyrical, Miyazaki says in the introduction of *The Art of The Wind Rises* that “the dreams will embody the obsessive singular focus of Caproni and Jiro” (Miyazaki, 2013, 9). There are basically five dream sequences that occur in the film and each of them reveal something about Jiro Horikoshi’s character according to their narrative content, visual imagery, and placement within the film. These can be considered as scaffolding around which the film story itself evolves.

The dreams indicate important aspects of the protagonist’s interior life at the time of each dreaming. Also, the two main characters Jiro and Caproni, and their conversations in the dream, provide the viewer with the introspective depth of Jiro’s state of mind that is not always revealed by Jiro’s material life in the film story. This essay looks at the dream sequences and offers interpretations on their meaning in the film work with regards to character development and overall theme.

In looking at the use of dreams in Miyazaki’s film-work, it is evident that several of his major films have included dreams and oneiric elements. These dreams may appear in the film while characters are sleeping and dreaming such as Mei and Satsuki in *My Neighbor Totoro* or Princess Nausicaa in *Nausicaa*
of the Valley of the Wind. Others occur in the form of a memory by the main character, as seen in the story-telling visualization of Marco when told to Fio in Porco Rosso. In some cases, the dream sequence appears as a stream of consciousness into which the character experiences a marvelous almost surrealistic landscape, as Sofie Hatter did in Howl’s Moving Castle. In these stories, the various dream sequences provide the viewer with vital interior information about the main character as well as the others in the dream sequence, and serve as a metaphorical device for the underlying vision of the film.

The Wind Rises technically begins and ends with a dream sequence, differing from other the oneiric insert styles in the above mentioned Miyazaki films. Those film dream sequences mainly appear at one or two points in the story, but in the The Wind Rises dream sequences form a thread that ties the beginning of the story to the final frame. In this sense the use of dream narrative here is a more significant component in the actual thematic composition of the story realting to Jiro’s character development, while the film plot naturally unfolds in a basic restricted linear narration through which key periods in Jiro’s life are portrayed.

The film plot takes the viewer through the Taisho and early Showa eras of Jiro’s personal and professional life while the dream sequences, defying both time and space, indicate a deeper intrinsic theme of the story. The portrayal of Jiro’s character and its development is one of the main thematic threads that holds the entire film story together. The dream sequences thus serve as guideposts that indicate the direction in which the main character is evolvmg.

The poetic nature of the dream inserts in this film is first felt visually and literarily through the opening words of the French writer Paul Valéry in the first frame of the film, “Le vent se lève, il faut tenter de vivre,” which are also echoed in the final scene by Nahoko’s spirit when she appears to tell Jiro that ‘he must live.’ From this bittersweet and nostalgic theme of accepting to live one’s life with hope, arises the first dream with the boy Jiro at home early one morning in his bed as he dreams of flying a small bird-like airplane over the fields and town at dawn.

In the first dream Jiro flies his child-size craft with ease and confidence, as he sails at sunrise in the plane with lyrical-like ease over green fields, a river and the Taisho-era country town. At first he seems able to fly the plane without use of glasses or goggles, as if he is naturally able to fly the craft. The happy and pastoral feeling of the dream comes to a disturbing halt when suddenly looming high above him Jiro spots a huge fantastical Zeppelin type of craft with bizarre dark-man bomb bugs suspended from its belly. One of them collides with his little craft, abruptly crashing the shocked Jiro back down to earth. He awakens from the dream, checking to see if he is at home safe in bed.

The first dream, in which there is no dialog, offers points that visually show its importance to the
Hayao Miyazaki’s *The Wind Rises*

narrative. First, it presents the true deep desire of the main character Jiro, who even as a boy dreams of flying and of beautiful airplanes. The harmonious purity of his dream-experience over the pastoral countryside is interrupted by the overshadowing menace of the armed Zeppelin. While Jiro dreams of airplanes and flying as something beautiful and wonderful, the huge machine of war seems to have appeared above him from behind the clouds revealing the grim omen of a possibly unfulfilled life overshadowed by the reality of war.

The placement of the dream at the very beginning of the film is meaningful. Basic features of this initial dream portray the very first look at the protagonist of the story. In this dream it is clearly shown when he is dreaming and where he is as he dreams. He is the boy Jiro, 13 years of age at home dreaming of flying a small child-size plane. This vision preludes the more complex and mundane scenes from his practical life. This is the start of the dreaming, inspiration and life aspirations of Jiro which make a kind of metaphorical thread that practically ties the beginning of the film to the end, (which is also a dream insert as well). What is subsequently created in his life or whatever he did in his life as shown through the linear plot narrative is connected to and emerges out of this first initial dream sequence in childhood. It represents the original great spark of pure inspiration that arises in the unblemished child’s mind. All things are possible, even flying a plane without glasses by someone who has poor eyesight.

The second dream comes soon after Jiro had been given some English magazines that feature Gianni Caproni, the noted Italian aeronautical design engineer whom he greatly admires. He lies atop the tile roof of his house with his little sister Kayo looking up at the stars. The dream time starts there but finishes with Jiro sleeping inside in a tatami mat room with his mother nearby. It is not clearly indicated but the change of location may indicate Jiro has had the same dream on several occasions. Jiro’s dream is a dialogue between himself and Mr. Caproni, who only appears in his mind, never in the actual events of the film story. These dialogues are a kind of narrative strategy in which Caproni appears as a mentoring-like muse and voice of reason for Jiro. Miyazaki states in the introduction notes to the film, “Caproni appears in Jiro’s dreams as someone who inspires and advises Jiro; he is also the mouthpiece for Jiro’s interior.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 9).

As Jiro meets with Caproni for the first time in this dream, we see them talking in a wide, green field after which they board a plane designed by Caproni. They continue their discussion. We learn about a fundamental aspect of Jiro’s mind. We know his dream is to become an aeronautical engineer. Caproni enlightens Jiro on important ideas such as life itself being a dream, knowing his own true dream in life,
as well as how dreams are the platform for inspiration in life. Caproni also tells Jiro about the difference between the naivety of beautiful dreams and how they might end up being misused in real life. He warns him, “Remember this, Japanese boy. Airplanes are not tools for war. They are not for making money. Airplanes are beautiful dreams. Engineers turn dreams into reality” (Miyazaki, 2013, 238).

In their initial meeting Jiro tells Caproni that this is his dream. However the word itself “dream” seems to retain a fluidity and reflects potentially multiple interpretations. Jiro says to Caproni that he is dreaming. Caproni tells Jiro, “Interesting. Yes, this is a dream. This world is a dream.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 237). We are not shown if Caproni means that the dream itself is the world he is referring to, or if the real physical world outside is the dream. Either way, this narrative acts as a springboard from Jiro’s dream life into his real one. This childhood dream in which he first encounters Caproni is the initial turning point in his character development. He has decided to become an aeronautical engineer.

One interesting aspect to these encounters with Caproni is the stance between Jiro and the Italian mentor-muse. Caproni’s style is friendly and inspiring, yet he always refers to Jiro by the descriptive term of “Japanese boy.” On the other hand, Jiro always addresses his muse as “Mr. Caproni,” an indication of respect for the older and wiser figure. The Caproni figure could be psychologically interpreted as a part of Jiro’s own deeper and more mature inner psyche. However, Caproni is unique in that while he is an historical person, he only appears as a dreamscape character in the film. The true nature of Caproni being either a metaphysical fantasy character or a deeper part of Jiro’s self are both possible if not feasible in Miyazaki’s established pattern of blending and merging worlds seen and unseen within the fabric of one story.

The third dream comes much later in terms of placement within the plot. Jiro is now a young man poised to begin study at university in Tokyo. The vision comes in the form of a daydream. Jiro sits exhausted, by the ruins of his university shortly after the 1923 Kanto earthquake had destroyed most of Tokyo. He rests with his friend Honjo by piles of books rescued from the burning school library. By chance the wind blows a postcard to him. He picks it up and sees that it has the photo of Caproni along with one of his airplanes. The scene shifts to his daydream at Lake Maggiore and Caproni’s failed airplane test flight on the lake. While Jiro is daydreaming, he does so literally sitting in the middle of a huge disaster area at the university. He visualizes Caproni’s frustration at his failed airplane test. Right after the crash, an animated Caproni turns toward Jiro to ask him, “What do you think Japanese boy? Is the wind still rising?”, as if he is ironically checking on Jiro ability to live even in the midst of chaos, death and disaster. Jiro answers in the affirmative. So Caproni responds, “Then you must live. Le vent se lève”
Hayao Miyazaki’s *The Wind Rises* (Miyazaki, 2013, 242). The poetic echo of the film’s underlying theme of hope once again appears from deep within himself sustaining Jiro’s faith in life even through the horrific times.

This scene shows Jiro and others struggling in the aftermath of the 1923 Kanto earthquake. Even in such circumstances, Miyazaki reaffirms the wisdom of choosing life and hope over pessimism and defeat. Jiro and his friend Honjo are only at the start of their university life. They have just experienced a devastating earthquake, but they still have the willpower to live. In the introduction to the film notes Miyazaki writes that the film “portrays a character who tries to live each day as though it were a precious gift” (Miyazaki, 2013, 10). This appreciation for each day of life, even in the worst of times, is reflected in the juxtaposed images of Jiro’s colorful dream of Caproni with the harsh reality of his life circumstances. It displays the inner character development of the young man who is sorting out the conflicts within himself, determined to confront life without giving into the temptation of hopeless surrender.

In terms of the linear narrative time frame, the next dream insert does not occur for many years. The narrative shows Jiro’s student days at the university, his securing a job with Mitsubishi in Nagoya and the start of a promising career designing aeronautical parts for planes. He goes through various advances and endures failures in his work. His childhood dream of becoming an aeronautical engineer seems to have become a reality. But the reality of this dream is much more challenging than he might have imagined. Not only does he face the competition of other designers, he is forced to acknowledge his own technical limitations as a designer and creator of beautiful airplanes while being overshadowed by the superiority of German engineers. The screenplay narration shows that in 1929 Jiro and Honjo are sent by their company to visit Germany and study their aircraft design and planes. It is in these circumstance that the next dream insert occurs.

The two men have just finished a tour of German aircraft and production sites. They learned that Japan’s technical skills are far below that of the Germans and Honjo complains about their plight in the hotel room. When Jiro starts to admire even the design lines of the radiator in the room, Honjo remarks, “Okay, I get it. German technology is so superior that they can put wings on anything and fly it, including their damn radiators…” (Miyazaki, 2013, 252). They go for a walk in the cold winter night and talk about running to catch up with German technology. Jiro indicates he still has hope of designing a good plane. He thoughtfully tells Honjo “I wonder if there’s a different way to run, Honjo” (Miyazaki, 2013, 252). The two men walk on in the cold night only to find secret police chasing men in the next street. They soon return to the hotel. Jiro is exhausted and falls asleep on the bed. With that, the next dream commences, reflecting a conflicted and bothered state of mind following all that he has experienced while in Germany.
In his dream, he is surrounded by aircraft wreckage on a cold and snowy plain at night. The first images reflect death and darkness as A G.38 plane crashes overhead, crashing down in flames. Jiro observes silently, walking past the wreckage in the snow and towards a train. The dream vision continues with a cut-jump into the night train. Once again Jiro meets Gianni Caproni who comes and sits down next to him.

In this poignant exchange, Caproni again checks to see if Jiro is still confident enough to make his dream of a beautiful plane into a reality. He greets him, “Is the wind still rising?” to which Jiro answers, “It sure is” (Miyazaki, 2013, 253). The dream scene drastically shifts as Caproni invites Jiro to literally jump off the train and they fall into a sunny and green landscape showing a Caproni aircraft scenario. Caproni is taking his family and workers on a tour flight in his Ca.90 which is soon to be used as a bomber by the government. As Jiro and Caproni ride along, Caproni talks to him about aircraft design. Again we see how Jiro’s dialogs in the dreamscape reveal that he is able to transform his perception of his outer reality. As if he knew about Jiro’s designing dilemma after his encounters in Germany, Caproni reassuringly tells him, “Inspiration is more important than scale. Inspiration unlocks the future. I’ve found technology eventually catches up.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 254). However, Caproni also directly admits to him the sobering fact of a tainted future for their precious aeronautical designs, saying, “Humanity dreams of flight but the dream is cursed. My aircraft are destined to become tools for slaughter and destruction.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 254) to which Jiro can only answer, “I know.” Even at this early point in his professional life, Jiro senses the paradox of his dream, revealed in this key oneiric insert.

In this dream Jiro also shows Caproni for the first time his model plane design. It is a white inverted gull wing fighter plane. As it sails past them, Caproni encouragingly remarks, “Bravo! A beautiful dream.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 255). Jiro’s special design seems to be taking shape. In this dream not only is he working through the good and bad sides of creating his beautiful airplane, but he also seems to unravel a puzzle of what constitutes an authentic approach towards creating an original aircraft despite German technology’s superiority at the moment. This oneiric insert displays both Jiro’s growing maturity and his capacity for having faith in his own inspiration. Moreover, he is finally able to dive inside the unconscious creative mind and envision his plane, despite what he has seen in the world of German aircraft design.

This internal change towards a more confident maturity underlines how this character transforms inside, perhaps gaining a deeper spiritual sense to his life through numerous challenges or hardships that he must face and overcome. For Jiro, the ambition to achieve his boyhood dream of making a beautiful airplane drives his creative life forward in adulthood. In the project Proposal of *The Wind Rises* Miyazaki describes Jiro as a person who, “… as he moves through life he always has in his heart a burning ambition
to build beautiful planes” (Miyazaki, 2013, 9). Despite the temporary failures, the technical superiority of others in his field and the mitigating circumstances that would force him into being part of a world braced for war, Jiro finds his way through the maze as reflected in the dialogues with Caproni which express his character development. He is changing from an unseasoned, immature youth to a more experienced and stable man with acceptance of his ability to create with originality.

Following the Germany trip’s dream sequence the film plot portrays the mature Jiro hard at work in his company on various projects, endeavoring to design the needed aircraft for their military client. The years pass by. The next dream sequence does not come until the end of the film story, in 1945, which is long after he had achieved his Zero fighter jet design. Jiro had reconnected with and married Nahoko Satomi, who later died of tuberculosis in 1935, around the time of his successful Zero jet flight test. As described by Miyazaki, “Nahoko, the love of Jiro’s life whom he meets during the Great Kanto Earthquake, is the heroine from Tatsuo Hori’s novels The Wind Rises and Nahoko. She is depicted as a woman who lives a short, beautiful life.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 10)

The scene directly before the final dream insert is the moment when Jiro’s Zero fighter prototype plane test flight succeeds. It is within moments of the test that the scene shows Jiro intuitively knowing and feeling his wife’s death. The screenplay text indicates “Jiro’s face shines with pride. He suddenly starts, as if someone whispered in his ear. He turns and looks behind him Note: It is a few days after Nahoko quietly left the Kurokawa residence. Jiro has a premonition of her death here” (Miyazaki, 2013, 274). That moment marks another profound turning point in the main character’s life, in which one dream is born while another one passes away.

The scene of the Zero fighter test flight morphs into the final climactic dream sequence which is distinctly vague in terms of the dreamer’s time or place. There is no visual or narrative cue as to where or when Jiro is dreaming. According to the screenplay the year is 1945, and a visualization of B-29 bombers appears sending contrails across the sky above a city burning in war bombing. Jiro sees this, and his figure somberly strides through a dark field of crash wreckage. It is a stark metaphorical image of loss and defeat, surrender and death. Yet as the figure walks on, the landscape ahead becomes the familiar wide, sunny, green and grassy one from his childhood days in which the boy Jiro had first met Caproni and they had talked about their mutual dreams. Caproni reminds Jiro that this place is “our kingdom of dreams,” but Jiro can only pessimistically reply, “Now it’s the land of the dead” (Miyazaki, 2013, 274). Perhaps he not only means the defeat of Japan in the war but also the death of his wife Nahoko which he projects onto his current disillusionment of the ‘beautiful airplane’ dream.

As the two men talk Caproni appears to be paradoxically optimistic while Jiro counters him with
pessimism, and regrets. Caproni responds, “Not quite, in some ways, yes. But what about your ten years in the sun? Did you live them well?” Jiro answers, “Yes. Things fell apart toward the end, though.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 274). He reflects on what his beautiful dream had actually become in the reality of a war-scarred time of history making it seem like an unredeemable broken hope. Jiro tells him that not one of the Zero fighters returned, and Caproni finally has to admit, “There was nothing to return to. Airplanes are beautiful, cursed dreams waiting for the sky to swallow them up” (Miyazaki, 2013, 275). Caproni’s words echo the frightening omen from Jiro’s first boyhood dream in which the huge war-machine zeppelin had crashed his little bird-like plane out of the sky.

Against the backdrop of a blue sky and white clouds the disillusioned Jiro pauses on the crest of a hill in the field with Caproni, nostalgically suffering over the traumas of his life. But then something unexpected happens. There is a vision of Nahoko, and Caproni points her out to him. “Someone is waiting for you…. She’s been waiting here a long time” (Miyazaki, 2013, 275). Nahoko, the face and voice of love, appears with her great white parasol in the breeze. She has been alive inside Jiro’s dreamscape world waiting for him to see her. It is only after ten years that he is able to hear the most important message of all. She tells him, “You must live darling…. You must live.” (Miyazaki, 2013, 275). The screenplay text describes her as “joyous and relieved.” As he acknowledges her words, Nahoko smoothly fades away and merges into the wind. Her message is reconfirmed by Caproni as he tells Jiro matter-of-factly “You must live.” This is the same original theme which first appears as a quote from Valéry’s poem at the very start of the film. The scene shows Jiro and Caproni walking over the hill and out of sight with only the green grass waving in the wind, a blue sky and puffy white clouds as the final image, hinting at the possibility of life yet to be lived with hope. The simplicity of this final pastorally toned significant scene shows us that it no longer matters where or how Jiro is dreaming because it reveals the resolved change in Jiro’s state of mind clarifying he has chosen life and hope over death and defeat. It is the final poetic thread in the fabric of the film story.

In examining the film The Wind Rises one could easily focus on the limited external and material aspects that subscribe to a superficial point of view which only sees Jiro Horikoshi’s life through the lens of history, politics, and the various socio-political events of that era, including war. However, the presence of the several dream inserts in this film guide us to see a deeper level of Jiro’s story and offers a more poignant personal point of view. Miyazaki indicated in his introduction to the film in The Art of the Wind Rises, that he wanted to focus on the portrayal of the person and his character. The linear plot is naturally set and evolves through an historical backdrop that starts in the Taisho era and ends in the 1940’s, but an important subtle character development is presented through the oneiric inserts through which Jiro’s story
can be better appreciated and understood.

In his landmark book Starting Point 1979–1996 Miyazaki wrote about various important aspects to creating animation. He wrote, “The most important thing of all it seems to me, is to have an interest in people, in how they live, and how they interact with things” (Miyazaki, 1996, 125). These sentiments, clearly mirrored through the oneiric scenes in The Wind Rises, present us with a deeper look at the character Jiro Horikoshi, and serve as a way to present the importance of character development in the film.

As a storyteller, Miyazaki has taken someone who not unlike himself, earnestly applied his whole self to the realization of a beautiful dream, be it in animation, in airplane design or in something else. In the project proposal notes Miyazaki explained, “I want to portray a devoted individual who pursued his dream head-on. Dreams possess an element of madness, and such poison must not be concealed. Yearning for something too beautiful can ruin you. Swaying toward beauty may come at a price. Jiro will be battered and defeated, his design career cut short. Nonetheless, Jiro was an individual of preeminent originality and talent. This is what we will strive to portray in this film” (Miyazaki, 2013, 8).

Endnotes

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