

## Inklings Forever

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Volume 4 A Collection of Essays Presented at the  
Fourth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S.  
Lewis & Friends

Article 33


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3-2004

# Comparing Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke

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### Recommended Citation

Seland, John (2004) "Comparing Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke," *Inklings Forever*: Vol. 4 , Article 33.

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**INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume IV**

A Collection of Essays Presented at  
The Fourth

FRANCES WHITE EWBank COLLOQUIUM

ON

**C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS**

Taylor University 2004  
Upland, Indiana

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Seland, John. "A Comparison between Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*." Inklings Forever 4 (2004) [www.taylor.edu/cslewis](http://www.taylor.edu/cslewis)

## A Comparison between Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

John Seland

### Introduction

The aim of this essay is to compare the epic saga animation, *Princess Mononoke* (Mononoke Hime, 1997), by Hayao Miyazaki, one of Japan's leading animators, with J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-6) in order to ascertain their viewpoints towards God, or the gods, and how this affects man's basic relationship to nature. We also wonder, what is the basis, or origin, of their thinking about God and nature?<sup>1</sup> In short, how do these two artists, coming from quite different cultural backgrounds, compare with each other, and what does this reveal about their religious as well as ecological beliefs?

### *Princess Mononoke*

In making the film, *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki acknowledged that he used a number of sources. One is the *Gilgamesh* epic.<sup>2</sup> The theme of the quest relates closely to Bunyan's work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The relationship between San, the heroine in the animation—she is Princess Mononoke—and the wolves finds an echo in the fairy tale, "Beauty and the Beast." There is even a possible influence from Tolkien in the wound that Ashitaka, the hero,<sup>3</sup> receives from a boar-god, who has turned in a tatarigami.<sup>4</sup> Like Frodo, this wound gives him great power, but also great distress.

Another possible linkage are the gruesome apes who bear similarity to Tolkien's orcs. At one point, the apes want to eat Ashitaka, hoping in this way to imbibe his human skills as well as eliminate one more human responsible for (they think) cutting down their forest. One can also associate certain aspects of the film with the English Romantic tradition, particularly its portrayal of the forest as "a place of magical and spiritual renewal" (Napier 187). However, as Susan Napier points out, the forest of the shishigami is also "a wild

and threatening place . . . rather than a refuge it is a locus of revenge" (187). She also notes: "In the film nature is beautiful, sacred, and awesome, but it is also vengeful and brutally frightening. Embodied in the spiritually remote shishigami, it exists in the eyes of Eboshi and the Yamato court as yet another vision of the Other, an object to be repudiated and ultimately destroyed" (188)<sup>5</sup>.

Another source could be the Roman legend of Romulus and Remus. Soon after birth, the twin boys were thrown into the Tiber by their mother's uncle. Later washed ashore, they were found by a she-wolf who suckled them. There is also a possible influence from an old Japanese story—and actually, it may be the most direct source for the animation—Yahazu no Uji no Matchi. (One day Matchi decided to cultivate some land in the forest and make it into a rice field. However the yato no kami, a snake god, and other gods tried to stop him from cultivating what they considered was their land. At this Matchi got angry and killed the yato no kami and scattered the other deities.) Otherwise the film reverberates with echoes from Japanese history, folklore, myth, customs, and religious beliefs, some of which are changed, indeed, "subverted" (Napier 180), by Miyazaki to fit his own purposes.

The film is set in the fourteenth century, the Muromachi Period (1333-1573), a period Miyazaki said he purposely chose because it compares so closely with the twentieth century, both ages being unsettled and having much social disorder. It was an unstable time, when the medieval period had collapsed and society was moving closer to the modern era. Susan Napier writes about this. "In Miyazaki's view, the fourteenth century is a period of significant historical transition from a world that was still in close contact with both natural and supernatural forces to a world that would become increasingly oriented toward the human. As he says, 'It was in this period that people changed their

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value system from goods to money.”(181)

During this time, the emperor system was being challenged by powerful landowners and military commanders who, in turn, fought among themselves.<sup>6</sup> It was also a time when many virgin forests were being cut down in order to make way for rice farming, housing and temple building and, in some places, mining for ore and minerals. Helen McCarthy writes about this period. “It appealed greatly to Miyazaki, who saw it as the point at which the Japanese people began to feel they could control nature, rather than having to placate or worship it. They cleared large tracts of primeval woodland and produced iron in greater quantities than ever before. This departure defined their relationship to their ecology.” (185)

The beginning of the film takes place in a primeval forest, near a village of an ancient people known as Emishi. A boar, one of the noble forest gods, driven insane by rage and hatred against those humans who had shot him with an iron bullet, has become a tatarigami, a cursed god. Now he seeks to attack the village of Iron Town, where Ashitaka happens to be visiting. The first ones he sees are a group of village girls. In order to defend them, Ashitaka shoots an arrow into his forehead, killing him. However, before dying, the boar splays his arm with a poison emanating from its dying body, a poison so deadly, it will eventually kill him.

Seeing a male enact the role of defender and warrior comes as no surprise. However, later in the animation, Miyazaki surprises us (as he does throughout the film) by the way he “subverts audience expectation” (Napier 179). Thus not only does a male act as a samurai, so too does a young girl, San. We see here how Miyazaki both employs and subverts Japanese ideas and customs.

Ashitaka's quest begins as he seeks a way not only to find out who shot the tatarigami, but also to learn why he has been cursed, and how he can rid himself of it. Traveling westward “to the central land of Yamato kingdom the area where the Japanese court held most sway during that period” (Napier 179), he reaches a village where he learns about the shishigami, a creature who, during the day appears with a deerlike body and the face of a human, and at night as a detarabotchi, a gigantic translucent being, its alter ego (Napier 187)<sup>7</sup> He is the god of nature, the supreme being of all the animals, plants, and water of the forest, embodying all the powers of nature, with power to heal and even to “bring back from the dead and regenerate a denuded forest in moments” (McCarthy).

Ashitaka also learns that a place called Tatara, or “Iron Town,” is waging a war against the forest, with the intent to kill the shishigami himself. (It was here that the iron ball that killed the tatarigami was made.) The leader of Iron Town is a woman, Lady Eboshi, who

thinks little of cutting trees for charcoal and destroying the forest in order to obtain ore. Though the beings of the forest hate her, she is loved by her people, many of whom she has rescued from a life of poverty and sickness. Later, Ashitaka learns that it was Eboshi who shot the boar-god.

The plot deepens when Iron Town is attacked by Princess Mononoke, a young girl, named San, who rides a wolf, Moro, another forest-god who, like the tatarigami and shishigami, is able to communicate with humans. She is a “possessed princess,” that is, she is “possessed by the fearsome spirits of nature” (Napier 179). Abandoned by her parents as a child, San has been raised by Moro and has taken their part. Like them, she is enraged by the way the people of Iron Town abuse nature. All this becomes a three-way battle with the entry of some samurai, their objective being to get the head of the shishigami and present it to the emperor, since it is believed it has the power to give eternal youth. The death of the shishigami also fits into Lady Eboshi's thinking, for she wants to show that the god's power cannot compare with hers, hence it is useless for the forest gods to fight against her.

At one point, San, Moro, and several of the wolf-gods attack Iron Town, but in the fight, Moro is shot. Soon afterwards, Ashitaka happens to see San sucking the bad blood from Moro's wound. When she notices him looking at her, she gives him a cold, hard stare; in her eyes he is merely another human intent on destroying the forest. Ashitaka then leaves. As he walks along, kodama, small transparent white creatures, in fact, tree spirits who seem to have a close relationship to the shishigami, suddenly appear. Apparently harmless, indeed, benevolent to humans, they lead Ashitaka through the forest. As he walks along, he suddenly sees a strange beast that looks like a male deer, with great antlers. At the same time, his wounded arm begins to shake violently. Then the shishigami disappears into the forest.

Battles between the nature gods and the humans continue, the forest gods becoming like wild animals in their rage against their human foes. During one of the battles, San again attacks. At one point, San and Eboshi meet. Ashitaka, seeing that they are about to fight each other to death, knocks each one out. Then he picks San up, intending to bring her to her home in the forest. However, as he carries her away, the people of the town try to stop him, and he is shot in the back. Nevertheless, the strength from his cursed arm enables him to walk into the forest carrying San. She then wakes. Feeling indebted to him for rescuing her, she seeks the shishigami to save Ashitaka's life. When the shishigami comes, Ashitaka notices how at each step of the deer-god, new plants sprout and grow. The shishigami then heals him of his gunshot wound, but not of the curse.

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Meanwhile, the relationship between Ashitaka and San deepens.

The story progresses, as the beasts and humans continue fighting each other. Eventually, Lady Eboshi, through the help of the priest Jiko, succeeds in shooting the shishigami, severing his head from his body. At this, the entire forest begins to die. Later, however, Ashitaka and San are able to retrieve the head, so that the shishigami becomes whole again, and, with this, life returns to the forest.<sup>8</sup> In the closing scenes of the film, Ashitaka and San, each having greatly matured due to their experiences, talk. She tells him that she loves him—as he does her—but that she cannot forgive the humans for their destruction of the forest. For this reason, she will continue to live with the animals. However, both she and Ashitaka agree to see each other sometimes. The last scene of the animation shows the magnificent figure of the shishigami standing proud and tall as he overlooks the forest and all its creatures.

Nevertheless, one wonders how, with the attitude of people like those in Iron Town, an attitude that sees nature mainly in terms of economic prosperity, nature will manage to survive. It takes little imagination to realize that the world depicted in *Mononoke* differs considerably from that in *The Lord of the Rings*. Both are set in the past—interestingly enough—in eras reminiscent of the Middle Ages. However, we also see that each work draws upon a quite different cultural and religious tradition: *Mononoke*, especially upon Japanese Shintoism and Buddhism; *The Lord of the Rings*, upon Jewish-Christian beliefs. Shinto is based on Chinese characters.<sup>9</sup> Shin refers to kami, the Japanese word for “god”; and doo, “the way”; thus, Shinto means “the way of the gods.” It is the native belief of Japan, “the root of all Japanese spiritual life” (*Spiritual Tapestry* 38), and primarily a system of nature and ancestor worship.

It may also be noted that in the oldest Japanese myths there were two kinds of kami. “The first three kami were said to have revealed themselves in the High Celestial Plain or among march reeds between heaven and earth. Kami of the second type such as “nature” kami—stones, mountains, rivers, and trees—appear as offspring of earlier kami (Eliade, 8, 243). Furthermore, not only do the gods exist in natural objects and natural phenomena, they also have control over natural and human phenomena (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 86). “The presence of the kami is overwhelming and pervades all aspect of life. Natural phenomena—wind, sun, moon, water, mountains, trees—are kami” (*Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* 1386). So too are animals, particularly such animals as the bear, fox, wolf, tiger, deer, monkey, etc.

In short, “every mountain river, and spring, and all the diverse phenomena of nature, even grasses and trees, had presiding spirits or kami and were worthy to be worshipped as deities” (*Collier's Encyclopedia*, 11,

679). Thus, Kami can be regarded as “the spiritual nature of each individual existence” (*The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 8, 243). In the opinion of Shintoist scholar Motoori Norinaga, they can be seen as “any entity with an unusually powerful spiritual function that imparts a feeling of awe” (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, 8, 243).

Shintoism, then, is both animistic and polytheistic: believers worship any number of gods. These ideas find expression throughout *Mononoke*. In Shinto belief, when angry or upset, vagrant spirits of the living or dead are capable of possessing a person, or an animal, and cause death or illness (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 13, 87.) Thus, “even a god may send plague or disaster if offended by neglect or disrespect” (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2, 464). We see this enacted when the boar-god, a kind of angry, revengeful spirit enters the body of the boar, driving him wild. It can also be seen when the wolf-gods attack Iron Town. The kodama, the spirits of the trees, also reflect genuine Shintoist belief. As in Shintoism, though their being is of a different nature than that of humans, they are nonetheless real and able to influence human life.

The shishigami too reflects Shinto belief, and it is not surprising to see him being depicted as a nature god. In doing so, Miyazaki seems to revert to the oldest myths wherein certain nature gods were supreme. Thus, the shishigami is shown as the god of the forest, a being endowed with supernatural power. At the same time, here too Miyazaki subverts traditional belief, or, at least, to push this idea of the shishigami as the supreme god beyond traditional Shintoist belief. Thus, we see that he is able not only to invest nature with new life, but also, though susceptible to death, to rise and begin life anew.

During the day the shishigami appears as a stag, an animal that is often depicted in western mythology and art as trampling on the serpent. “The stag,” writes J.C. Cooper, “is pre-eminently a solar symbol, at war with the clothonic serpent” (216). Now, although Miyazaki does not see good and evil in stark opposition, his depiction of the stag fits this observation. In the film, when the stag first appears, it is noticeable that he is surrounded by bright light, in direct contrast to the dark colors used in portraying Iron Town. This association of the stag with the sun fits closely into Japanese mythology, since the sun, called Amaterasu, was often seen as a goddess.

There is still another point to consider. Ashitaka is a prince of the Emishi. The Emishi are depicted as a dying race, their culture and customs slowly giving way to the changes taking place in society. These people, we can surmise, represent the Ainu, the northernmost tribe in Japan, living now mainly in Hokkaido, who have had, and still experience, a certain amount of prejudice, since racially they differ from mainland Japanese. This, again, can be seen as a subversive element in the film,

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since we would expect the hero to belong to the main culture of the Japanese archipelago; instead, he is an Emishi.

Now, if we follow geographically the basic plot of the story, we realize that the action begins in northern Japan, either in Hokkaido, or in Shirakami, a mountainous area in northern Honshu, famous for its primeval beech forest. Then, in order to find a cure for the curse laid upon him, Ashitaka must travel in a westerly direction. If we see Japan in terms of the earth's natural contour, we realize that the islands of the country extend in a kind of diagonal direction, from east to west. Passing down the western part of the country, towards the central section, where the Yamato kingdom was located, the first notable place he comes to is Iron Town. (This would be in the vicinity of present-day Okuizumo, close to Matsue City, in Shimane Prefecture, in southwest Honshu, where steel manufacturing was carried out many years ago.) Another locale that can be mentioned is Yakushima Island, where there is a laurel forest and many yakusugi trees. This island is located within Kyushu, the southernmost island in Japan. It is possibly the place where the boar-gods have come from. What all this tells us is that the scope of the animation is vast, encapsulating a wide panorama that includes a history, geography, mythology, and theology, very closely related to Japan and Japanese life. We also sense that the tendency to denaturalize the landscape so vividly portrayed in the animation is something that will most likely worsen throughout the country with the passage of time.

This same wide breath of vision can be said of Miyazaki's depiction of the shishigami. Perhaps the most startling factor of this mysterious creature is his face; it is the face of a human, one, however, that is incongruous; it is smiling, but it is also red, the color of blood. It also looks directly outwards towards the viewer, as if it were pleading: You can see my beauty and vitality. Why, then, do you victimize me? This human aspect of the shishigami is further reinforced by his translucent shape: as Night Walker, the shishigami is transfigured into a detarabotchi, walking upright as a human and with humanlike limbs. This, again, is a subversion, for the shishigami is depicted as a kind of amalgam; he is at the same time a god, an animal, and a human. This is far beyond anything yet imagined in Shintoist mythology and belief. This last observation calls for further comment.

Surprising as it may seem, certain elements in the animation seem to echo events in the life of Jesus, particularly his Passion and Resurrection. The behavior of the priest Jiko, who acts as a kind of Judas, reinforces this idea. When he first meets Ashitaka, he befriends him. However, he gives the impression that he is not beyond using people for his own advantage. It is

he who, ultimately, leads Lady Eboshi to the shishigami, thus allowing her the opportunity to kill him. More significantly, it is the resurrection of the shishigami that most closely resembles the experience of Jesus, the only difference being that the shishigami will experience lasting death if he does not find his head within the space of a day. In any case, the relationship between the shishigami and Jesus—if such a relationship can be postulated—would be Miyazaki's most extreme subversion of traditional Japanese belief.

### **The Lord of the Rings**

When we turn to *The Lord of the Rings*, we come to realize that it rests on a different source, Scripture. This is most clearly seen in *The Silmarillion* (1997), Tolkien's mythological account of the creation of Middle-earth and the source and inspiration of the novel.

In writing *The Silmarillion*, as well as *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's problem was to create a mythology that was different from the biblical account, and yet one that expressed beliefs that coincided with his personal faith. He is certainly able to do this when he writes about subsidiary matters, such as the way Eru created the world (through the Valar and music), or the creation of the three Silmarilli, or that of the Two Trees. However when he deals with more basic matters, such as the essential nature of Eru (His love and goodness), or the origin of evil, or the way good and evil oppose each other, Tolkien's indebtedness to the Bible becomes obvious. Eru is hardly different from the biblical God, just as the Valar are hardly different from the angels. Valinor, the Blessed Realm, is like heaven, just as Middle-earth is like our world. The rebellion of some of the Valar matches closely the revolt of the bad angels in Scripture, Melkor having the same base motives as Lucifer, while Manwe fulfills the role given to the angel Michael.

All this has a direct bearing on the stories in *The Lord of the Rings*. Although Tolkien repeatedly denied that his novel had any allegorical meanings, nevertheless, we are able to see that behind all the mythology and history of Middle-earth, there is a great deal of representation at work. Nothing, for instance, happens by chance; a divine providence guides those who are good, just as it opposes those who are evil. Thus Frodo is chosen by a higher, unseen power as the Ringbearer. Gandalf too has been chosen as a guide to help the Fellowship in their struggle with evil, mainly in the form of Sauron, a Valar who was seduced by Melkor early in the First Age, but also of Saruman, an Istari like Gandalf, but who later became corrupted by his love of wealth and power.<sup>10</sup> Galadriel, Queen of Lorien and helper of the Fellowship, has affinities with the Virgin Mary. We can see Aragorn also in this light;

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another leader meant to guide the Fellowship and to establish a kingdom at the beginning of the Fourth Age, he is a clear embodiment of the kind of good king idealized in the Old Testament. We see, furthermore, how supernatural gifts are also periodically provided to the Fellowship to help them in their journey: miruvor, a drink giving new strength of heart; various magical swords and protective armor; lembas (or waybread, akin to the manna given to the Jews as they wandered in the desert); magical rope; the crystal phial containing the light of Earendil's star that Galadriel gives to Frodo; and so on. Also, as in Scripture, throughout the story evil is made to work for good, as can be seen most dramatically when Gollum snatches the Ring from Frodo's finger and falls into Mount Doom, thereby accomplishing what the Fellowship had set out to do, destroy Sauron's power. As the penultimate and ultimate sections of the novel show, however—here too Tolkien and Miyazaki show another similarity—the future of Middle-earth cannot be seen too optimistically. As Miyazaki demonstrates in his animation, there is no clear-cut victory for one force or another. Thus, in the novel, there is no guarantee that someone like Sauron, and his at-one-time lieutenant, Saruman, will not threaten both men and hobbits in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Needless to say, the religious backgrounds of Miyazaki and Tolkien differ: one giving a great amount of credence to Japanese beliefs; the other showing the influence of his Christian faith. Their respective beliefs are also based on different philosophical presuppositions. Tolkien follows the thinking of Augustine and Aquinas. He would argue that the being of God, while being distinct from that of creatures, is nevertheless in some ways similar. God is His own being, whereas finite things have their being by way of sharing or participation (*Colliers Encyclopedia*, 11, 183). Miyazaki, consistent with Shintoist faith, favors a more pantheistic kind of creed, God being identified with the universe and, conversely, the universe with God.

Each respective work, *Mononoke* and *The Lord of the Rings*, shows us, moreover, that the focus of each author is different. Miyazaki's interest is mostly ecological: he wants to impress on us the beauty, violence, power, and fragility of nature, and the importance of maintaining a good relationship with all created beings. Unlike Miyazaki, who shows that evil and good are not always so distinct—Lady Eboshi, for example, does cut down the forest, but she is also very charitable to the poor and sick—Tolkien's concern is to differentiate good from evil in the strongest possible way. The principal battle in the novel is that between

the forces of good and those of evil, evil being seen as a powerful cosmic force bent on destroying God's work (Ephesians 6:11-13). At the same time, Tolkien is also deeply interested in ecology. Tom Bombadil, representative of nature itself, plays an important role in the story, since it is he who rescues Frodo from the clutches of Old Man Willow and, later, the barrow-wrights. The Ents' role is no less vital. When they see how Saruman is devastating the forest, they move against him, and eventually destroy his stronghold at Isengard. (As Jane Chance says, appropriately, the tree-killer Saruman is overcome by trees 75). Destroying nature, Tolkien seems to say, ultimately works to man's detriment.

Although the genre of each work is different, a comparison between them brings to light the focal concerns of each artist. Besides learning of the cultural and theological beliefs underpinning each work, we are also able to see that they compare closely with each other in their concern for the environment. Both men question the progress brought about by machines and technology, making us think about the losses man incurs when he destroys the earth. Both also show the error in thinking that we live independent of nature. As Stephan Covey argues, all nature is interdependent . . . there is an ecological system that governs nature, including society (49). Neither artist, furthermore, allows us a settled position. Sans ferocity, we can suppose, will cause Eboshi to think about her ruthlessness in destroying the forest; at the same time, Iron Town does continue to exist, which is to say, industrialism will continue to wreck havoc on nature. Tolkien also ends his novel on a dubious note, with Gandalf, the Elves, and Frodo heading for a safer refuge than Middle-earth can afford. As previously mentioned, there is no guarantee that another Sauron may not rise again.

Both artists also show that the way humans relate to nature is a sign of their spiritual condition. Each work, ultimately, argues in the strongest possible terms that man's future survival depends on the way he regards nature. If he uses it merely for his own selfish purposes, it will turn against him; on the other hand, although protecting and nurturing the earth will not solve all mankind's problems, it will certainly make an improvement on the quality of human life.

### **Notes**

1. The American version, *Princess Mononoke*, was released in 1999.
2. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a poem, divided into twelve cantos. In the first canto, Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, disturbs the citizens by his violence and lust. Because of this, they ask the gods for aid. Aruru creates Enkidu, who lives in a state of nature

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with the wild beasts. Gilgamesh hears of this and sends a prostitute to seduce him. After this experience Enkidu loses his wildness and becomes a dweller of Uruk and a close friend of Gilgamesh. (See John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* 311.)

3. Ashitaka is a warrior-prince of the Emishi, a northern tribe very likely related to the Ainu, aboriginal people of Japan. (See McCarthy 191-2.) In the scenes where he appears, his skill with the bow, his courage and horsemanship (or, better, deermanship, since he rides a deer, rather than a horse) become apparent. Here Miyazaki draws on Buddhist practice, as can be seen in its concept of the bushi, the warrior, or samurai, as well as bushido, the samurai code of chivalry. Bushido dedicated itself to horsemanship, archery, swordsmanship, and leadership of men, and placed great value on austerity of lifestyle (*A Spiritual Tapestry* 57). The concept originated in feudal Japan. It refers to the code of the samurai, which places great value on unqualified loyalty and obedience, while valuing honor above life.
4. Tatari is the Japanese word for curse or evil spell. Miyazaki may deliberately be trying to link the cursed god with Iron Town, this place being a kind of curse on the earth. At the same time, in one part of the video we see Ashitaka, certainly a model of good behavior, joining the women in making iron, an action that fits Miyazaki's idea that good and evil should not be seen in terms of total distinction. (Iron Town is not evil, though it destroys nature.) Interestingly enough, since early times there has been a peculiar steel manufacturing method in Japan called tataru. It required a large amount of charcoal and iron sand. A great deal of tataru was done in the Okuizumo district of western Japan where these materials were plentiful. In his study of the forests of Japan, Conrad Totman writes about this. The medieval period witnessed a great increase in demand for hardwood charcoal. Only it could generate the intense heat that forged swords for the flourishing armies of samurai. The manufacture of other weapons—armor, spear points, arrowheads, daggers, and eventually arquebuses and cannons—the iron tools and equipment of commoner life, and the cast bells, lanterns and other implements of monumental architecture also consumed charcoal (*The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Preindustrial Japan* 43).
5. The term Yamato (now Nara Prefecture) refers to the centralized bureaucratic state that came into being with the Taika Reform of 645 [or even as early as] the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century . . . sometime in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century a local chieftan based in Yamato subdued neighboring chieftans and achieved a

measure of political unity in central Honshu. Gradually the Yamato leader extended his rule to include more northern parts of Japan. He did not rule a state in the modern sense (*Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 8, 308).

6. One of the most powerful of the warlords, Oda Nobunaga, gradually began to unite the country with his capture of the capital, Kyoto, in 1568, and his success in overthrowing the Muromachi Shogunate, in 1573, thus depriving the emperor of any real power.
7. The word shishi in Japanese can be translated as wild boar, or lion. However, there is a dance—still performed in northern Japan—called shishi odori, the deer dance. Miyazaki may have become familiar with this dance, since he depicts the shishigami as having the body of a deer. Also, traditionally the shishi odori was performed in order to avert evil. When the head of the shishigami is reunited to its body, evil is averted, and the various warring factions are at peace, at least, temporarily.
8. It is interesting to note that the ones who help the shishigami find its head are the children, San and Ashitaka. This accords with several of Miyazaki's other films. In *Tonari no Totoro* (*My Neighbor Totoro*, 1988), for example, it is only to two young girls, sisters to each other, that the spirits of nature (the totori) appear. Children, the pure in heart, Miyazaki seems to be saying, are more in tune with the world of the supernatural than are adults, or, if least can be said, are pure enough in heart to merit contact with the spiritual world.
9. The term Shintoo first appeared in the *Nihonshoki*, or *Chronicles of Japan* (edited in A.C. 720). In its most primitive stage, Shinto worship was confined to natural phenomena. Later—and this is the tradition that we see enacted in *Mononoke*—the idea of spirits and demons entered Shinto. (See *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 13, 86.)
10. The [Istari were] five (or more) beings sent to Middle-earth by the Valar about TA 1000 to unite and counsel the Free People in their struggles against Sauron. They were forbidden to dominate the peoples of Middle-earth or to match Sauron's power with power. When Saruman, the greatest of the Wizards, disobeyed this injunction, he was cast from the order and banished from Valinor. At the end of the third Age the Istari passed from sight, for with the fall of Sauron their work was done. Gandalf passed over the Sea with the Last Riding of the Keepers of the rings, and the other surviving Istari may also have returned to the West (Foster 276).



**A Comparison between Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*  
and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* • John Seland**

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