

THE ECOFEMINIST CYBORG: A POSTHUMAN ANALYSIS OF THE MANGA SERIES *NAUSICÄÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND*

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Abstract

In the era of a deteriorating ecology and rising technology, the boundaries of social identity are repositioned as shaped by the intersection of gender, nature, and technology. This paper is an analysis of the English translation of Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, a Japanese manga series originally written and illustrated by Hayao Miyazaki. The paper is grounded in Posthuman theory by Rosi Braidotti to explore Donna Haraway's concept of cyberfeminism and techno maternalism, as exemplified by the protagonist Nausicaä, and Foucault's concept of biopolitics. This character challenges the traditional division between nature and machine, war, and control by embracing care, compassion, and rationality. While previous studies explored ecology, little attention has been paid to her role as a powerful leader in a patriarchal society. The paper concludes that human survival is situated in a posthuman rooted coexistence among humans, non-humans and technology.

Keywords: *biopolitics, ecofeminism, cyberfeminism, posthumanism, techno-maternalism, manga*

As men attained power, they assumed higher positions of dominance in society. This power was also accompanied by exercising supremacy over not only women but also nature. While this condition has persisted for decades, it highlights the profound interconnection between human social structures and the exploitation of nature. Many writers have resorted to literature that illuminates the ways narratives reflect reality and human domination over non humans. As the intersection of ecology and literature grew widely popular in recent decades, it became an imperative field of study to inquire about the relationship. The theory of posthumanism, within this field, has emerged as a powerful lens that draws a connection between the exercise of power over non-humans and resistance to patriarchal power within society. It invites a rethinking of anthropocentrism by foregrounding connections between life, subjectivity, and agency, emphasising multispecies, interdependence, and hybridity.

Manga, a Japanese art form that originated in the 13th century and developed during the late 19th century, refers to comic books or graphic novels. Unlike Western comics, their distinctiveness is marked in its artistic style, narrative techniques, with peculiar characters, cultural conventions and are typically read from right to left. After World War II, the Japanese manga transformed into its modern form, introducing dynamic panels and cinematic techniques, which led to its establishment as a significant art and entertainment medium. Furthermore, the adaptation of manga into anime has led to global recognition and worldwide popularity. Hayao Miyazaki is a well-acclaimed manga artist, film-maker, and co-founder of Studio Ghibli.

It is believed that his manga series, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, constituted the foundation for the establishment of Studio Ghibli for its celebrated film adaptation in 1984 with the same title. This research adopts a close reading of the first volume of the manga series *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* to critically analyse the character of *Nausicaä* to explore the manner in which Miyazaki destabilises humanist binaries. The research is foregrounded in the theory of posthuman studies in literature. It is a study of the concept of biopolitics by Foucault, ecofeminism, cyberfeminism and the concept of techno materialism to explore *Nausicaä's* symbiotic relationship with the non-humans, echoing care, compassion and sovereignty. Through an analysis of the depiction of toxic ecologies, non-human entities, the paper demonstrates that the selected manga reimagines life as relational and distributed across all agents. Furthermore, the paper attempts to redefine the idea of nature and technology as enemies, but rather as an existence within the intertwined systems.

Many scholars and academicians have explored this manga series as part of their research thesis. An understanding of these studies will assist in drawing connections to bring novelty to the research.

- a. Denise Nunes, in her research article, *The Toxic Heroine in Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, is an ecocritical study of the manga and studies it through the lens of new materialism. She adopts the theory of trans corporeality to analyse *Nausicaä* as she surrenders herself in the toxic environment to protect and flourish together with the non-humans.
- b. Maitreyee Mishra and Manisha Mishra's paper titled, *Eastern Princesses: Hayao Miyazaki's Women, Nature and Identity*, is an analysis of two films of Miyazaki, one being *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, which was released in 1984. The research focuses on the representation of female characters challenging patriarchy and the symbolic link between women and nature using the theory of ecofeminism.
- c. Ju-yu Catherine Cheng's paper titled, *Ecological Time in Hayao Miyazaki's Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is an exploration of both manga and its film adaptation, investigating the concept of time as non-linear progress and ecological interconnection between all life forms across time.

The research papers indicate that ecological studies are one of the popular literary trends in contemporary society. It can also be deduced that the film adaptation of the manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is comparatively more explored in research studies. Although popularly studied through the ecological lens, certain gaps persist. This research is an attempt to bridge those gaps.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, written and illustrated by Hayao Miyazaki, is a manga series originally written in Japanese, while the English translation was published in 1988. Volume I of the manga is set in the future, depicting a post-apocalyptic world. The preface provides the context that the Seven Days of Fire have resulted in the self-destruction of industries that had rapidly expanded over a few centuries, and the burning of cities, leading to poisonous clouds. Furthermore, the land is dominated by a forest of toxic bacteria and corruption, while a small number of humans live scattered in the margins of the toxic environment. Miyazaki writes,

“A thousand years had passed since the Mammoth Industrial Civilizations of the past had diminished, and faded into the dark vastness of time. It was the closing of the ceramic era. The Valley of the Wind was a small kingdom on the edge of the frontier, given frail protection against the poison of the Sea of Corruption by the constant winds blowing through from the ocean” (1995, p.24).

The narrative focuses on Nausicaä, the protagonist and humans trying to navigate the toxic forest with strange and dangerous creatures, one being Ohmu, and encounter various challenges, emphasising the connection between humans and non-humans.

Michel Foucault delivered a series of twelve public lectures each year at the Collège de France from 1971 until he died in 1984, wherein he explained his research and understanding of the previous year. The lectures he delivered in the mid-1970s marked a shift in his focus from analysing disciplinary power to exploring biopower that traces the emergence of war, race, and biology into modern politics. He explores the manner in which modern states regulate health, birth, death, sexuality, hygiene, sanitation, etc., through institutions, norms, and policies to optimise and regulate life. According to Foucault, before the modern era, power was sovereign. The king, emperor or state had the power to decide the right to life. He writes, “Sovereign power is the right to take life or let live.” (1976, p.456). In this manner, power was exercised negatively to punish or restrict. These lectures were published posthumously under a book titled *Society Must Be Defended* (Eng. 2003). Likewise, the lectures he delivered from 1978-79 investigate ordoliberalism, neoliberalism and the idea of governmentality. These lectures were published under a book titled *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Eng. 2008). Foucault argues that the power from the 18th century onward does not only concern the right to kill, but the right to life itself, its sustenance and regulation. Thus, it is important to understand the exercise of power over life itself, from humans to ecosystems. This is the emergence of the concept of biopower or biopolitics.

Torumekia is a militaristic and hierarchical human empire representing power and dominance even in the post-apocalyptic world. It attempts to forcefully seek a powerful mysterious stone that Princess Rastel of the Pejitei had entrusted to Nausicaä. Upon the discovery of a living God Warrior in Pejitei, an industrial city, Torumekia attempts to destroy the city to seize the embryo. It wages war under the larger project of saving humanity from the annihilation of the world, illustrating imperial ruthlessness. Later it is revealed that the stone has activation key or control mechanism for God Warrior. On the other hand, Pejitei is no longer seen as a competitive city but a state that is treated as a rival, a biopolitical risk for fostering something that could destroy life. This reflects Foucault’s idea of war in modernity as a tool for securing biological existence and controlling the population. Also, the illustrations and Kurotowa’s mocking thoughts on using such dangerous beings reflect Torumekia’s objective to manipulate beyond ethical and moral limits. Furthermore, in one of the scenes, the priests of Torumekia announce the Sea of Corruption as the “wrath of Heaven” for polluting the environment, underlining the idea that humans must fight to protect themselves and restore the world. The use of religion is often an attempt to justify human domination and imperial oppression, at the same time framing destruction as inevitable. Figure 1 from the manga denotes the scene of Pejitei being attacked.



Figure 1 Attack on Pejitei by Torumekian Military. Miyazaki, H. Vol. 1, Page Number 41.

Torumekia's deployment of bumblecrows, military airships symbolises its technological, industrial and military strength. These bumblecrows also represent humans' attempts at dominating weaker humans, nature and other non-human living beings, the state's power to reshape biospheres. Foucault also describes the requirement of technology in biopolitics to act on the mass population. Torumekia also releases a group of worm-handlers on Pejitei; they are the humans who have adapted themselves to the toxic Fukai and its creatures. Their aim to stir up insect attacks to use Fukai against the enemy states reflects Torumekia's philosophy of exploiting anything to gain power. Consequently, it causes a rampage of Ohmu swarms into human settlements. Torumekia does not perceive worm-handlers as fully humans; they exist outside the norm. Thus, their act of using worm-handlers reinforces the species hierarchy wherein certain lives are allowed to die. For others to survive. This highlights Foucault's idea of state racism and exploitation of underclass lives for the sake of the dominant population.

One of the distinct scenes that reflects the idea of biopolitics is voiced through Torumekia's belief that humans and insects cannot coexist. This recurring belief positions insects as enemies and implies that for the survival of one species, it is acceptable to eliminate the other. Foucault argues the manner in which modern power uses racism as a biological filter to justify its act of tagging a life as unworthy and eradicating it. It resonates with Torumekia's ideology of drawing a border and positioning humans as superior; thus, it is not an ordinary war, but a biopolitical cleansing. Nausicaä rejects and resists these biopolitical acts by questioning whether humanity is the supreme and has the right to decide the life of other living beings. She opens a space for a world that is grounded in coexistence rather than domination. The domination over land, life, and the subjugation of women highlight the concept of ecofeminism.

The term ecofeminism, coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la mort*, emphasises parallels between the subjugation of women and the destruction of the environment by linking it to patriarchy and social structure. Moreover, she advocates for identifying and dismantling these oppressive systems and inculcating collaborative societies that respect growth. This concept of ecofeminism can be traced in the selected volume that places the female protagonist at the heart of a toxic environment.

Nausicaä, the eleventh child of King Jhil, but the only one to live to maturity, is the beloved princess of the Valley of the Wind. At a very young age, her family moved to the Valley of the Wind, a small country located on the edge of the Sea of Corruption with a population of about 500. The manga opens with Nausicaä entering the toxic forest in the Sea of Corruption, which most humans are terrified of entering. The illustrations in the panel depict apocalyptic scenes, spores floating in the air, skeletal remains of ancient creatures lying everywhere and the air is poisonous for humans without a mask. Nausicaä is seen observing the plants and gathering spores gently so as not to disturb the ecosystem within which sets the ecofeminist tone of the manga. Her attitude towards the forest is in sharp contrast with the humans (Figure 2.2). While the patriarchal states attempt to destroy the toxic forest, Nausicaä displays traditionally feminine traits; she is gentle, curious and approaches the forest with care. Furthermore, while exploring the Toxic Forest, Nausicaä comes across the oldest tree, huge and towering above all others. She communicates with the tree, hugs it, expresses gratitude for purifying the poisoned earth, and apologises for the inhuman actions of humans against the environment. The tree responds through its presence. Her act of communicating and listening to the tree symbolises giving voice to the voiceless, whereas it rejects the patriarchal notion of objectifying and dominating the natural world (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

Figure 2.2.1 - Nausicaä Collecting Spores from the Toxic Forest for Research. Miyazaki, H. vol. 1, Page Number 8. 2.2 - Nausicaä Communicating with the Oldest tree in the Forest. Miyazaki, H. Vol. 1, Page Number 67.

At the outset, Nausicaä comes across a baby Ohmu panicked and wounded due to the injuries caused by humans' attack. While soldiers attacked it to prevent a stampede from reaching human settlements, the distress of baby Ohmu provoked the herd into a violent rampage.

Despite warnings, Nausicaä removes her gloves and touches the baby Ohmu to calm it. She is covered with its blood and slime, but her empathetic nature towards all living beings recognises its suffering and communicates connection across species. Lord Yupa speaks to himself, "She means to calm them without hurting them" (1995, p.19). Her approach successfully averted the catastrophe and reflects ecofeminist ethics, which rejects hierarchy. Nausicaä's ability to communicate with Ohmu and other non-human species highlights the manner in which she transcends boundaries. It suggests a new kind of agency that is entangled with technology, indicating a multispecies posthuman future beyond patriarchal anthropocentrism.

Donna Haraway's essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1985), is one of the foundational texts for the study of posthumanism and the cyborg. She defines cyborg as a hybrid of machine and organism that blurs the boundary between a creature of reality or fiction. She writes, "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (1985, p.149). Thus, the cyborgs dismantle rigid binaries such as human/technology, nature/culture, self/other, etc. that are structured by human society as the basis for domination. According to her, cyborg also critiques fixed notions of socially constructed identities and embraces fragmentation and fluidity through technology. This provided a strong base for theorists to think about feminism beyond essentialist notions of identity and reimagine women's relation with technology. Cyberfeminist literature is often characterised by digitally connected, technologically equipped female protagonists who challenge traditional gender roles and behaviours.

The character of Nausicaä can be analysed as a female cyborgian figure, for her hybrid identity uses technology not to dominate, but to connect and heal the ecosystem. She is deeply curious about the toxic forest and navigates the forest by integrating human skills and technological tools such as respirators and sensors to learn more about plants and carefully collects spores, understands the forest and purifies the earth. Her laboratory at home with soil and plant samples is a symbol of using science and technology for the knowledge and betterment of society.

Despite living in a post-apocalyptic world where much of the old world's technology is lost, Nausicaä stands apart for her use of technology. She is rarely seen without her Mehve, a white glider that her father gifted her on her 13th birthday. It is lightweight and powered by wind; it resembles a bird. The glider, thus, is a symbol of balance that blends mechanical qualities, but its non-destructive nature reflects her non-violent philosophy. Unlike Torumekia's large metallic warships, Nausicaä's Mehve dismantles patriarchal binaries by employing technology not as a means of domination, but by finding newer ways of co-existing in the world. Her aerial abilities are repeatedly emphasised and admired by everyone around her. She flies effortlessly with precision and courage, not just as a tool but as an extension of herself. Even the soldiers of Torumekia are astonished to find a girl gliding through the air currents. Soldier exclaims, "I can't believe it! A woman Gunship Pilot! There's never been anything like it!" (1997, p. 87).

Nausicaä's hybrid mode of living aligns with Donna Haraway's idea of a cyborg, as she reflects a cyberfeminist vision that challenges the distinction between human and machine, consequently moving towards a posthuman existence.

Rosi Braidotti, in her work, *The Posthuman* (2013), argues that the classical humanist subject is outdated for being male-centric and autonomous. According to her, subjectivity in the posthuman world is not about human supremacy but about relational with non-human others. Throughout the manga, Nausicaä embodies a posthuman subjectivity, embedded and entangled with the non-human beings, as she does not see herself as separate or superior to nature. Techno-materialism is a concept that emerged in the late 1990s from Donna Haraway's theory of cyborg and works by other feminists on technoscience. While Haraway has not coined the term techno-maternalism, scholars have coined and developed it based on her ideas to examine intersections of technology, reproduction, and motherhood as a way of reimagining care technocentric world. Haraway critiques the traditional form of maternalism and unchanging perspectives of femininity. For her, motherhood is not necessarily tied to biological reproduction and the offspring of the same species. It can be reimagined as an ethical and technological practice of nurture, care, forming relationships, and taking responsibility for the non-human world as well.

Nausicaä assumes a distinctly maternal role in the selected manga. In one of the scenes, she leads Lord Yupa to a hidden underground room beneath the castle that she had been using as a secret laboratory for conducting ecological research. The illustrations depict the room filled with healthy plant species that usually grow only in the toxic Sea of Corruption. However, inside her lab, these plants do not produce any kind of poison as the plants are growing in a clean environment. Nausicaä had collected soil and water from deep beneath the ground, purified them and used them to create her own underground ecosystem. (Figure 3). She proves that the plants or the trees are not toxic; they become toxic due to the polluted soil and water from the industrial waste. In fact, the Sea of Corruption emerged to purify the toxins from the world. This discovery counters a widely held belief by patriarchal humans that the forest is humans' enemy. Moreover, the plants' toxicity is a way of cleansing the earth. She informs Yupa, "It's not their fault. The earth itself that's polluted!" (1995, p.80). For Nausicaä, this discovery becomes a scientific revelation and a spiritual awakening that becomes the foundation of her ecofeminist and techno-maternal attitude.



Figure 3 Nausicaä shows her secret laboratory to Lord Yupa. Miyazaki, H. vol. 1, page number 80.

Nausicaä is consistently portrayed caring for the insects, plants, and animals of the Fukai. She understands emotions and gently communicates with the frightened and enraged Ohmu to calm them down. Her motherly care is not only limited to creatures but also towards humans. In one of the iconic scenes in the manga, Nausicaä stays back while informing others to go back to the valley for safety. She says, “I’ll save your lives if it’s the last thing I do! Dump your cargo! Lighten the barge!” (1995, p.98). Later, she removes her protective mask inside the toxic forest and shares it with Asbel to save him. She begins to cough and collapses due to the risk she has been taking; however, she prioritises others’ lives and determinedly helps him. Her actions resonate with maternal imagery for creating safe conditions, showing empathy, compassion, and intimate connections towards all beyond biological reproduction.

Conclusion

The study examines Volume I of Hayao Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and reimagines humanity’s interconnection with the ecosystem, technology and power. It is foregrounded in the theoretical lenses of biopolitics by Foucault, concepts like ecofeminism, cyberfeminism, techno-maternalism and posthuman theory. The selected manga, commonly understood as an ecological story, is a critique of patriarchal domination and biopolitical control over the weaker groups. The Torumekian Empire embodies Foucault’s notion of biopolitics by attempting to control the life and death of the insects in the sea of corruption, Ohmu, as well as the people living in neighbouring cities. For this, Torumekia resurrects God Warrior to illustrate fear, dominance, and power. However, Nausicaä shows resistance towards biopolitics and questions power. She exhibits alternative politics grounded in peaceful coexistence.

Miyazaki's portrayal of the toxic forest and Nausicaä's feeling of connection with the non-human world underscores the concept of ecofeminism. Nature is not passive but responds and communicates with those who care. Scenes like Nausicaä communicating with the oldest tree of the forest, calming the Ohmu, protecting insects, etc. reflect the idea of ecofeminism while contrasting the patriarchal violence of the Toremekian empire. Furthermore, Nausicaä embodies the ideal cyborgian as laid out by Donna Haraway. The manner in which Nausicaä effortlessly uses glider Mehve to fight against the dominating patriarchal Toremekia empire is appreciated by everyone. She uses technology not to overpower or suppress, but to dissolve rigid binaries. Nausicaä's leadership through the lens of technology becomes techno-maternal. She creates an underground greenhouse laboratory where the poisonous plants are no longer harmful. She protects the Ohmu and communicates with them, transcending human connections. Nausicaä even saves humans from their untimely death, nurturing care, maternal leadership, and an alternative display of power.

The concepts and theoretical frameworks highlight Miyazaki's vision of a posthuman future characterised by a shared ecosystem, coexistence, technology, and hybrid bodies. Nausicaä stands at the intersection as a cyborg and a techno-maternal figure that reimagines life beyond anthropocentric hierarchies. Ultimately, the manga challenges humans to think beyond the binaries in the current posthuman world.

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