From Folklore to Philosophy: A Genre Analysis of The Boy and the Heron Using Bhatia's Framework

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Abstract

This study explores Hayao Miyazaki's The Boy and the Heron through Vijay Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), uncovering how the film crafts a deeply emotional and culturally resonant narrative. By analyzing its script and structure, the research delves into how the film seamlessly blends Japanese traditions with universal themes of grief, growth, and transformation. The study focuses on four key areas: understanding the film's situational context, breaking down its narrative progression through move analysis, exploring the richness of its language and symbolism in textualization, and examining its interdiscursive connections to other storytelling traditions. The findings reveal a layered narrative that begins with the pain of loss and gradually moves through stages of conflict, exploration, and transformation, ultimately arriving at resolution and growth. The film's situational context, set in post-war Japan, shapes its themes of resilience and discovery. Its use of poetic language, meaningful silences, and symbolic imagery deepens the emotional connection with viewers. Interdiscursivity highlights how the film draws from Japanese folklore, existential philosophy, and global storytelling patterns to create a hybrid and timeless narrative. This research explains how The Boy and the Heron redefine anime genres by blending cultural authenticity with universal ideas, creating a story that connects deeply with audiences everywhere. It recommends using genre analysis to explore other anime films, helping scholars uncover the layers of meaning behind their narratives. For filmmakers, it highlights the magic of combining local traditions with global themes to create stories that resonate with everyone. Ultimately, this study affirms the power of anime to tell stories that heal, inspire, and bring people together across cultures.

Keywords: Vijay Bhatia model; Genre Analysis, Anime Narrative, Japanese Folklore, Move Analysis, Interdiscursivity, Textualization, Situational Context.

1. Introduction

"In this world, nothing is as simple as it seems." (The Boy and The Heron)

1.1 Background of the Study

Anime, with its colorful visuals, expressive characters, and imaginative worlds, has grown from humble beginnings into a global phenomenon. It all started in the early 20th century with *Katsudō Shashin*, a short three-second animation that showed the potential of this art form. By 1917, works like *Namakura Gatana* were experimenting with techniques such as cutter animation, where characters and objects were physically moved across scenes. Despite these early efforts, the anime industry faced major setbacks, including the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, which destroyed much of the early artwork (Massaccesi, 2019).

As anime developed, Japanese creators began adopting new techniques inspired by Western animation, especially Disney. They introduced cel animation, which allowed for smoother movement and more detailed visuals. This opened the door for anime to expand into a wide range of genres, from adventurous tales to emotional dramas. Anime became more than just entertainment; it became a way to reflect Japanese culture, exploring values, historical events,

and human emotions. Scholars have noted that understanding the role of genre in anime is important to see how it reflects cultural identity and creates meaning. Anime tells stories that connect deeply with people, using its unique blend of visuals and storytelling to explore cultural and emotional themes (Tardy & Swales, 2014).

Today, anime is known for its many genres, such as *shonen* (action-packed stories for young men), *shoujo* (romantic and emotional tales for young women), *seinen* (mature, thought-provoking narratives), and *josei* (stories about adult women's lives). However, there is little research on how individual films both follow and challenge these genre conventions. This study focuses on *The Boy and the Heron*, a modern anime film, to explore how it uses the genre to tell a story that is both emotionally and culturally significant. By examining Mahito Maki's journey through grief and self-discovery, this research looks at how the film uses symbolic elements, like the gray heron, to create deeper meaning and emotional impact.

To better understand how *The Boy and the Heron* fits into its genre and communicates its themes, this study uses Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993). Genre analysis isn't just about putting stories into categories; it's about understanding how they work, how they are built, and what they aim to communicate. It helps show how stories reflect culture, emotions, and the way people connect with the world (Swales, 1990; Paltridge, 1994).

Bhatia's model looks at four important areas to study a story. The **situational context** focuses on the purpose of the story and the cultural or historical background it comes from. **Move analysis** breaks the story into smaller parts, each serving a specific role, like setting up the plot, introducing challenges, or resolving conflicts. **Textualization** studies how language, tone, and symbols are used to create meaning and engage the audience. Finally, **interdiscursivity** explores how a story draws from other genres, traditions, and ideas to create something unique (Bhatia, 2004).

Using Bhatia's model to analyze *The Boy and the Heron* helps uncover how the film combines Japanese culture, emotional storytelling, and universal ideas to create a meaningful experience. The study shows how the film uses genre to explore grief, growth, and identity, while also redefining what anime can achieve as a form of art. By doing so, this research contributes to a better understanding of how anime tells stories that are both deeply personal and widely relatable, showing its power to connect with audiences everywhere (Sena, 2016).

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study explores how *The Boy and the Heron* use genre to blend Japanese cultural identity with universal themes like grief and self-discovery. By applying Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), the research highlights how anime operates as a powerful medium for storytelling, going beyond entertainment to communicate deep cultural and emotional ideas. For scholars, it offers a framework for analyzing visual narratives; for filmmakers, it showcases how genre conventions can be innovated while staying authentic; and for anime fans, it provides a deeper appreciation of the layers within the film. This research enriches the understanding of anime's artistic and cultural value, showing how it connects with audiences on a global scale.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Anime is loved worldwide for its rich storytelling and unique genres, but not enough attention has been given to how individual films both follow and break these genre traditions. While anime holds immense cultural and artistic value, there's still a lack of deeper study into how its stories reflect cultural roots and push genre boundaries. Films like *The Boy and the Heron* use powerful tools, like symbolism, structure, and connections to other genres, to tell stories about grief, identity, and transformation, but these techniques are often overlooked. This study aims to explore these elements using Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), showing how the film creates a story that feels both deeply personal and universally meaningful.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Stories have the power to transcend boundaries, connecting deeply with audiences through universal emotions and cultural nuances. *The Boy and the Heron* stands as a testament to this power, weaving a tale of grief, transformation, and self-discovery through a rich interplay of symbolism, structure, and tradition. This study seeks to uncover how the film uses genre-specific elements, such as its carefully crafted narrative and evocative imagery, to tell a story that is both deeply personal and culturally resonant. By applying Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), this research aims to reveal how the film redefines anime genres while reflecting profound Japanese cultural and emotional truths.

1.5 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives using Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993):

1. To explore the situational context of *The Boy and the Heron*, focusing on how its cultural, emotional, and historical background shapes the story.
2. To analyze the narrative structure of *The Boy and the Heron*, breaking it into stages using move analysis to understand how the story is built and its themes are developed.
3. To study the language of the film's script, looking at how the words, dialogue, and moments of silence bring the story to life.
4. To examine how *The Boy and the Heron* combines elements of Japanese folklore, philosophy, and global storytelling styles to create its unique style.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How does the situational context of *The Boy and the Heron* reflect its cultural, emotional, and historical background, and how does this shape the story's meaning and impact?
2. What are the key moves in the narrative structure of *The Boy and the Heron*, and how do they contribute to the development of its themes and overall purpose?
3. How does the language used in the film's script, including dialogue and silence, enhance the storytelling and emotional depth of *The Boy and the Heron*?

4. In what ways does *The Boy and the Heron* combine elements of Japanese folklore, philosophy, and global storytelling traditions to create a hybrid and unique genre identity?

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in its scope as it focuses solely on *The Boy and the Heron* and does not include comparisons with other anime films or genres. While it applies Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993) to analyze the film's narrative structure, symbolism, and cultural influences, the findings are specific to this single work and may not fully represent broader trends in Japanese animated cinema. Additionally, the study relies on the film's script and cultural context, which may lead to interpretations influenced by the researcher's perspective and available resources. The analysis also excludes visual elements such as animation techniques, focusing primarily on the narrative and linguistic features, which could leave certain aspects of the film unexplored. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into the film's genre dynamics and its cultural and emotional depth.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

This study is specifically focused on analyzing *The Boy and the Heron* through the lens of Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), concentrating on its narrative structure, symbolic elements, and cultural influences. It does not address the visual aspects of the film, such as animation techniques or artistic styles, as the analysis is restricted to the film's script and storytelling. The study is also limited to exploring the genre dynamics within the cultural and thematic context of this single film, excluding comparisons with other anime films or broader genre categories. These choices were made to maintain a focused and in-depth exploration of how *The Boy and the Heron* communicates its themes through its genre-specific tools.

2. Literature Review

Swales (1990) provides a foundational understanding of genre within academic discourse communities, focusing on how genres like research articles and theses serve communicative and structural purposes. His detailed analysis reveals how genres adapt to meet the specific needs of academic settings, emphasizing their functional role in scholarly communication. However, Swales' approach remains largely tied to academic writing, limiting its scope when applied to creative or multimedia contexts. This narrow focus leaves questions about how genres function in dynamic, non-academic spaces, such as visual media, unexplored.

Paltridge (1994) critiques Swales' emphasis on linguistic features, arguing that a purely language-based approach fails to capture the full complexity of genres. He advocates for incorporating cognitive and contextual boundaries, emphasizing the role of content, conventions, and appropriateness in defining genres. This broader perspective enriches genre analysis by acknowledging its social and cultural dimensions. However, Paltridge's approach risks underplaying the importance of linguistic markers, which remain essential in identifying and differentiating genre-specific elements.

Bhatia (1997) extends genre analysis into professional and academic communication, particularly in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). By analyzing texts from fields such as law and business, Bhatia highlights the structural and functional aspects of professional genres. His model bridges theory and practice, offering practical applications for improving communication in specialized fields. However, his work primarily focuses on textual features, sometimes neglecting the sociocultural factors that influence how genres are constructed and evolve.

Bhatia (2004) critiques traditional genre studies for isolating genres, emphasizing the importance of interdiscursivity in understanding how professional genres evolve through interactions across texts, practices, and cultures. By examining cases like corporate disclosures and arbitration, the study shows how professional practices creatively adapt and blend genres to achieve strategic goals. However, while the concept of interdiscursivity is well-argued, the study leans heavily on theoretical insights and lacks sufficient empirical data to fully demonstrate its practical implications.

Tardy and Swales (2014) integrate traditional and modern approaches to genre analysis, emphasizing how genres shape communication in academic and professional settings. Their comparative framework highlights the adaptability of genre analysis to emerging forms, such as digital and non-traditional media. While their work offers valuable insights into established genres, it stops short of exploring how hybrid or experimental genres challenge conventional boundaries, leaving room for further exploration in evolving media landscapes.

Sarjit Singh, Shamsudin, and Zaid (2012) apply Bhatia's model to professional communication in the Malaysian petroleum industry, focusing on the structural features of work procedure documents. Their study demonstrates the effectiveness of move analysis in understanding professional genres, highlighting the practical applications of genre analysis in specific industries (Kaur, 2012). However, their research remains narrowly focused on one sector, limiting its relevance to broader or more creative contexts where genre conventions might function differently.

Sena (2016) uses Swales' model to analyze promotional texts, examining their language and structure to understand how they achieve persuasive goals. By studying materials such as brochures and emails, the study showcases how promotional genres are tailored to influence audiences. While Sena's findings are insightful, the focus on a single genre type offers a limited view of how promotional texts interact with or borrow from other genres, leaving potential connections unexplored.

Ali (2024) examines political speeches delivered at the UN General Assembly by Pakistani leaders Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan using Bhatia's model. The study identifies rhetorical moves and communicative strategies that align with genre conventions, revealing how the leaders craft their speeches to meet diplomatic and political objectives. Although effective in analyzing text-based genres, the research does not consider how these rhetorical strategies might translate to hybrid forms like visual media or digital platforms.

Sattar, Khurshid, and Anwaar (2024) apply Bhatia's model to analyze job application letters written by Pakistani graduates, focusing on rhetorical strategies and move structures. The

study highlights how these letters adhere to conventional patterns while incorporating innovative cultural and personal adaptations. However, the analysis is confined to written genres, leaving unexplored how similar rhetorical strategies might function in more dynamic or multimodal contexts, such as film or animation.

Jameel, Akbar, and Arslan (2024) conducted the study which critically examined how linguistic duality is employed in Pakistani business visiting cards, blending Urdu and English to reflect both global and local identities. Using Swales' and Bhatia's (1990) move analysis framework and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) semiotic approach, the research analyzes 30 business cards from diverse industries to understand their linguistic and visual elements. Findings reveal that English signifies professionalism, formality, and international affiliation, while Urdu reinforces cultural identity and national pride, creating a bilingual identity that appeals to both local and global audiences. By focusing on textual and visual features like names, credentials, and design elements, the study underscores how language choice and layout encapsulate sociocultural and professional values, offering significant insights into the symbolic capital of bilingualism in Pakistani professional contexts.

Matthews and Glitre (2021) explore movie genres using topic modeling techniques to analyze plot summaries, identifying lexical patterns that define specific genres. Their research tracks changes in genre composition over time, providing valuable insights into the evolution of genre conventions in cinema. While innovative, the study's focus on lexical features limits its depth in addressing how narrative and symbolic elements shape the audience's engagement with the genre.

Mustonen (2019) analyzes horror movie trailers to uncover their narrative and structural strategies, identifying a common three-part structure of introduction, confrontation, and climax. The study highlights how elements like sound, music, and editing are used to create tension and meet audience expectations. While insightful, the study primarily focuses on surface-level techniques, leaving a deeper exploration of how these elements contribute to broader genre dynamics untapped.

De Jong and Burgers (2013) examine the differences between professional and consumer-written film reviews, focusing on language use and structure. Their findings reveal that consumer reviews are more personal and evaluative, while professional reviews adopt a neutral and descriptive tone, reflecting distinct sub-genres within online criticism. While their work sheds light on these differences, it does not delve into how these sub-genres influence audience perception or interact with the broader genre of film criticism.

Cho et al. (2018) analyze anime genres using a faceted approach to improve the classification and retrieval of titles. By categorizing genre terms from various databases, their study enhances the precision of anime labeling systems, making it easier to organize and recommend anime. While their findings are valuable for improving accessibility, the study does not address how anime as a medium challenges or redefines traditional genre boundaries through its narratives and themes.

Massaccesi (2019) reviews Denison's Anime: A Critical Introduction, which explores anime as a cultural phenomenon rather than a singular genre. Denison's work examines how

global fan communities, industry practices, and cultural contexts shape anime's dynamic nature. While the review emphasizes the importance of studying anime's broader impact, it leaves room for a deeper exploration of individual films and their role in pushing genre boundaries.

VanDenBos (2013) explores the limitations of Joseph Campbell's monomyth by examining its application in the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft. The study critiques the universality of Campbell's framework, highlighting how Lovecraft's narratives subvert traditional heroic structures by rejecting notions of triumph and personal growth. Instead, Lovecraft's work centers on themes of cosmic insignificance and existential dread, which directly conflict with the optimistic and transformative arc central to Campbell's model. By analyzing Lovecraft's deviation from the monomyth, the study challenges the assumption that Campbell's framework can universally apply to all storytelling traditions. VanDenBos's research provides valuable insights into how certain genres, particularly horror, disrupt traditional narrative patterns, inviting a broader reevaluation of the monomyth's relevance in diverse literary and cultural contexts.

Despite extensive research on genre analysis, there is still much to uncover about how visual media, like anime, engages with and transforms traditional genre conventions. Most existing studies focus heavily on written and formal communication, leaving creative and hybrid forms like anime underexplored. When applied to media, analyses often emphasize surface-level features like structure, language, or sound, overlooking the deeper cultural and symbolic elements that shape audience connection. This creates a gap in understanding how visual narratives like anime use genre to reflect cultural identity, tackle emotional themes, and push the boundaries of traditional storytelling.

Additionally, while anime has been studied as a broad cultural phenomenon, there is limited focus on how individual films innovate within their genres. Much of the current research either categorizes anime genres or examines their general cultural impact but does not explore the unique ways specific films redefine genre conventions. This research seeks to fill these gaps by analyzing how The Boy and the Heron blend storytelling techniques, cultural symbolism, and emotional depth to offer a narrative that reimagines genre while connecting deeply with its audience.

4. Research Methodology

Every genre tells a story, not just through its words but also through its structure, its rhythms, and its subtle nuances. This chapter sets the stage for analyzing *The Boy and the Heron*, a film that straddles the realms of fantasy and philosophy, using Vijay Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993). By focusing on the film's script and narrative structure, this study seeks to uncover the unique ways the film communicates its message and adheres to, or innovates within, the conventions of Japanese animated cinema. The aim is to explore how linguistic choices and structural elements work together to craft a genre-defining experience that resonates deeply with audiences.

This methodology treats the film as a text and a dynamic cultural artifact. The script provides the linguistic foundation, filled with dialogue, narration, and subtle expressions that guide the viewer through the story's world. Meanwhile, the film's structure, its carefully

designed narrative moves, and visual storytelling act as the architecture that shapes its genre identity. Together, these elements will be dissected and analyzed through the lens of Bhatia's model to reveal the interplay between tradition, innovation, and artistic intent that defines *The Boy and the Heron* as a genre exemplar.

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, particularly suited for analyzing complex and creative works like *The Boy and the Heron*. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the film's script and structure, treating them as rich texts filled with meaning. Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research focuses on interpretation, context, and the deeper layers of meaning embedded in the text.

By using a case study approach, the film is analyzed as a singular example of its genre, offering insights into the unique ways it communicates and resonates with its audience. The script, filled with dialogue, narration, and subtle linguistic cues, is examined for its role in shaping the film's narrative and emotional tone. At the same time, the structure of the film, the sequence of its narrative moves, and visual storytelling techniques are analyzed to understand how it fulfills the conventions of its genre while introducing innovative elements. This qualitative design ensures a holistic and nuanced understanding of the film as both a linguistic and cultural artifact.

4.2 Data Collection

The primary data for this study is derived from *The Boy and the Heron* itself, including the film's script and its narrative structure as presented visually and verbally. The script, containing all dialogue and narration, serves as the basis for linguistic analysis. Each line of dialogue, each spoken word, becomes a clue in unraveling how the film communicates within its genre.

The film's structure, including its progression of scenes and visual storytelling techniques, is equally critical. Here, elements such as pacing, transitions, and key narrative moments are analyzed to understand how the story unfolds.

4.3 Theoretical Framework

Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993) forms the backbone of this research, providing a comprehensive framework for dissecting *The Boy and the Heron* as a complex and hybrid genre artifact. This model is particularly suited for analyzing creative works like Miyazaki's films, as it offers tools to uncover both the text's structure and its socio-cultural functions. Through Bhatia's lens, the study focuses on three core components: **move analysis**, **textualization**, and **interdiscursivity**. Each of these dimensions guides the analytical procedures to explore the film's script and structure as expressions of its genre identity.

3.3.2 Situational Context

The analysis begins by situating *The Boy and the Heron* within its socio-cultural and artistic context. The situational context includes the following elements:

- **Purpose**: The film's communicative intent goes beyond entertainment, engaging with deeper themes such as loss, growth, and existential reflection.
- **Audience**: The film caters to a diverse audience, from Japanese viewers who are deeply familiar with Miyazaki's storytelling style to international fans who view it through a globalized lens.
- **Context**: The historical and cultural backdrop of the film is crucial, including Miyazaki's personal motivations and Studio Ghibli's creative ethos. These factors provide the foundation for understanding how the film operates as a genre artifact.

3.3.3 Move Analysis

Move analysis breaks the story into key parts, each serving a specific purpose. In *The Boy and the Heron*, these moves guide the audience through Mahito's journey while building the story's themes.
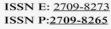
- **Opening Move:** The story introduces Mahito, his grief over his mother's death, the arrival of his stepmother, and the mysterious gray heron, setting the stage for his emotional and fantastical journey.
- **Development Move:** Mahito begins questioning his reality, growing curious about the tower and frustrated with those around him, as the emotional and narrative tension deepens.
- **Conflict Move:** Mahito's inner struggles intensify as he wrestles with his grief, mistrust, and doubts, pushing him closer to confronting the unknown.
- **Exploration Move:** Mahito enters the tower's strange world, encountering challenges and surreal creatures that test his courage and reflect his internal journey.
- **Transformation Move:** Mahito begins to accept his grief, embrace change, and grow stronger as he gains a deeper understanding of himself and his relationships.
- **Resolution Move:** The story ties together as Mahito makes peace with his past, reconciles with Natsuko, and moves forward with a newfound sense of hope and acceptance.

Each move plays a vital role in building the story's emotional and thematic depth, creating a powerful blend of personal struggle and fantastical adventure.

3.3.4 Textualization

Textualization examines the linguistic and semiotic features of the film, focusing on how these elements contribute to its genre identity:

- **Language**: Dialogue, narration, and subtitles are analyzed for tone, cultural references, and word choices, revealing how language shapes the narrative.
- **Visual Semiotics**: The film's symbols, color schemes, and animation techniques are studied to understand their role in constructing meaning and emotional resonance.

- **Sound**: The analysis includes music, sound effects, and moments of silence, which serve as critical tools for emotional engagement and narrative impact.

Through textualization, the study uncovers how the interplay of these elements enhances the film's communicative effectiveness and contributes to its genre identity.

3.3.5 Interdiscursivity

Interdiscursivity explores how *The Boy and the Heron* interact with other genres and discourses, creating a hybrid storytelling style (Stukker, 2023). The analysis focuses on the following areas:

- **Cultural Connections**: The film draws extensively from Japanese folklore and mythology, grounding its fantastical elements in a rich cultural tradition.
- **Genre Blending**: Western cinematic influences are interwoven with Japanese storytelling techniques, creating a hybrid genre identity that appeals to global audiences.
- **Thematic Interplay**: The film engages with broader themes such as environmentalism, existential philosophy, and human relationships, transcending its immediate genre and resonating on a universal level.

Overall, the study highlights how *The Boy and the Heron* not only belongs to its genre but also transforms it. It contributes to its evolution in contemporary cinema by examining these interconnections.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical standards in research by ensuring that all sources used for analysis, such as the film's script and scholarly references, are properly cited and acknowledged. The study respects intellectual property by focusing on an interpretive analysis of *The Boy and the Heron*, avoiding any unauthorized use or reproduction of its content. As the research relies on textual analysis rather than involving human participants, there are no direct ethical concerns related to privacy or consent. However, care has been taken to ensure that the interpretations remain respectful to the cultural and artistic significance of the film, avoiding any misrepresentation or bias. The study aims to contribute to academic discourse while honoring the creative and cultural context of the work under analysis.

5. Analysis

5.1 Situational Context Analysis of *The Boy and the Heron*

The situational context of *The Boy and the Heron* sets the emotional and cultural stage for the story. By diving into its purpose, audience, and cultural backdrop, the script reveals the depth of this coming-of-age tale.

5.1.1 Purpose: Grief, Resilience, and Searching for Answers

At its heart, the story is about healing from loss and finding meaning in a world that feels broken. Mahito's journey begins with the devastating death of his mother during a fire, a memory that haunts him:

> *"[Mahito] Mother. Please stand back! Go back home!"*
> *"[building rumbling, crackling]"*
> *"[Mahito] Three years into the war, Mother died."*

This line doesn't just explain the backstory, it plunges the audience straight into Mahito's pain. The grief isn't just his; it's raw, tangible, and universal.

As Mahito tries to make sense of his new reality, his father introduces Natsuko, who is meant to fill the role of his late mother. But instead of comfort, her arrival sparks conflict:

> *"[Mahito] She looked exactly like Mother. ... So, Mahito, I'm going to be your new mother from now on. Sound good?"*

The hesitation in his response shows a child caught between honoring the past and facing the future. Mahito's story isn't just about loss, it's about the messy, complicated process of moving forward when life refuses to wait for you.

Then comes the gray heron, shaking up everything Mahito believes about life and death:

> *"[Gray Heron] Your mother is not dead. The truth of the matter is you did not see your mother's dead body. Am I right?"*

This moment throws Mahito (and the audience) into a spiral of doubt. What if the world isn't as it seems? What if the loss isn't the end? These questions drive the story forward, turning it into more than just a tale of grief. It becomes a quest for truth.

5.1.2 Audience: Connecting Cultures and Themes

The script bridges Japanese cultural elements with universal feelings that resonate with anyone who has loved and lost.

Cultural roots shine through in moments like Natsuko's introduction of the gray heron, a bird tied to wisdom and guidance in Japanese folklore:

> *"[Natsuko] That's our local gray heron. He must be giving you a special welcome."*

For a Japanese audience, this moment is rich with cultural meaning, but for others, it still carries a sense of mystery and significance.

The struggles within Mahito's family, though specific to his situation, feel universally relatable. When his father insists that Mahito accept Natsuko, the tension is palpable:

"[Father] You're the man of the house now, Mahito. Look after Natsuko. Be strong for her."
"[Mahito] You're asking me to treat her like my mother? I'm not going to do that."

These exchanges reflect the frustration of trying to rebuild relationships in the wake of loss. They highlight the universal challenge of balancing personal grief with the expectations of family and society.

Even the heron's cryptic, almost philosophical remarks are designed to intrigue a global audience:

"[Gray Heron] Why do you cling to the human world? This tower holds the key to the truth you seek. Enter, and you will understand."

This line adds an air of fantasy and mystery while connecting to deeper questions about life and identity, themes that transcend cultural boundaries.

5.1.3 Cultural and Historical Context: Post-War Japan's Shadow

The setting of *The Boy and the Heron* is rooted in Japan's struggles during and after World War II, and this historical backdrop quietly shapes the narrative. Mahito's family, for example, represents Japan's attempts to rebuild amidst destruction, as seen when his father proudly shows him the factory he has built:

"[Natsuko] Do you see that structure? The one in the distance? That is your father's brand-new factory."

The weight of the war lingers over Mahito's memories, coloring his view of the world:

"[Mahito] The war took everything. My home. My mother. And now, even my peace."

This line is not just a statement, it's a cry from a boy who feels robbed of stability, reflecting the trauma of a country and a family trying to recover from the devastation.

The tower, a central symbol in the story, represents both the past and the unknown. Its history ties it to Mahito's family, but it also beckons him toward something greater:

"[Natsuko] That tower was built a long time ago by our mother's uncle. He was educated and very smart, but they say he read too many books and lost his mind."

The tower's dual nature, as a relic of family history and a mysterious portal, mirrors Japan's own struggle between holding onto tradition and embracing change.

The gray heron emphasizes this tension, inviting Mahito into the tower with riddles that mix the past and the present:

"[Gray Heron] This tower is both a relic of the past and a gateway to something far greater. Your path begins here."

The situational context of The Boy and the Heron is deeply immersive, blending universal themes of grief and healing with the unique cultural backdrop of post-war Japan. Through heartfelt dialogue and meaningful symbolism (Cho, 2018), the story feels both personal and relatable, drawing viewers into Mahito's world. It is a world defined by loss but brimming with the hope of growth and transformation, offering a powerful and emotional journey.

5.2 Move Analysis of *The Boy and the Heron*

The move analysis using the Bhatia Model (1993) of *The Boy and the Heron* is rich and layered, progressing through multiple functional stages that guide Mahito's emotional and physical journey. Expanding on the previously discussed moves, this analysis includes the **Opening Move**, **Conflict Move**, **Development Move**, **Exploration Move**, **Transformation Move**, and **Resolution Move**. Textual examples from the script demonstrate how each move contributes to the story's depth and progression (Bhatia, 2004).

5.2.1 Opening Move: Introducing the World and the Emotional Conflict

The opening move sets the stage by introducing Mahito, his family, and the emotional and fantastical challenges he faces.

- The story begins with a tragic memory of Mahito's mother's death, immediately grounding the narrative in grief and loss:
  "[Mahito] Mother. Please stand back! Go back home!"
  "[Mahito] Three years into the war, Mother died."
- Mahito's discomfort with his stepmother, Natsuko, highlights his emotional struggles and inability to accept change:
  "[Natsuko] So, Mahito, I'm going to be your new mother from now on. Sound good?"
  "[Mahito] You looked exactly like Mother."
- The mysterious gray heron introduces a fantastical element, hinting at the journey ahead:
  "[Natsuko] That's our local gray heron. He must be giving you a special welcome."

This move establishes Mahito's emotional conflict and foreshadows the blend of reality and fantasy that defines the narrative.

5.2.2 Conflict Move: Introducing Doubts and Challenges

The conflict move intensifies the tension as Mahito begins to question his reality and is drawn toward the mysterious tower and the gray heron.

- The heron plants doubt in Mahito's mind about his mother's death, creating intrigue and inner turmoil:
  "[Gray Heron] Your mother is not dead. The truth of the matter is you did not see your mother's dead body. Am I right?"

- Mahito's frustration with his father and stepmother adds to the emotional strain:
"[Mahito] Why does it feel like everyone's lying to me? Father, Natsuko, even this stupid heron."
- The tower is introduced as a symbol of the unknown, drawing Mahito closer to the heart of the mystery:
"[Gray Heron] That tower holds secrets you are not ready to understand, but it will call to you when the time comes."

The conflict move builds tension and prepares Mahito (and the audience) for the next stages of his journey.

5.2.3 Development Move: Deepening the Emotional Journey

The development move focuses on Mahito's growing awareness of the challenges ahead and his reluctant but inevitable decision to engage with the unknown.

- Mahito begins to feel the weight of his loss and his growing curiosity about the tower:
"[Mahito] If this tower can tell me the truth, why am I so scared to enter it?"
- His bond with the gray heron deepens, though it remains tense and ambiguous:
"[Mahito] Why should I trust you? You keep talking in riddles!"
"[Gray Heron] Because riddles are where the truth hides, boy."
- Mahito's interactions with the people around him highlight his inner conflict. For example, he lashes out at Natsuko, projecting his unresolved grief:
"[Mahito] You're not my mother, and you'll never be her!"

This move reveals Mahito's growing tension between staying in his comfort zone and stepping into the unknown, setting up the exploration phase of the story.

5.2.4 Exploration Move: Entering the Fantastical Realm

In the exploration move, Mahito crosses into the tower's fantastical world, encountering strange creatures and challenges that mirror his internal struggles.

- Mahito's first steps into the tower are filled with hesitation and awe:
"[Gray Heron] Step inside, boy, and leave the human world behind. Your truth lies here."
"[Mahito] What is this place? It feels alive... but it's also terrifying."
- His encounters with surreal creatures test his courage and resilience:
"[Creature] Why have you come, human child? This is no place for mortals."
- As Mahito uncovers fragments of his family's history within the tower, he begins to piece together the truth:
"[Mahito] Mother… did you know about this? Was this tower part of your secret world?"

This move marks a turning point where Mahito actively engages with the challenges before him, both physical and emotional.

5.2.5 Transformation Move: Facing the Inner and Outer Conflict

The transformation move focuses on Mahito confronting the fears and doubts that have haunted him since the beginning of the story.

● Mahito encounters a spirit resembling his mother, forcing him to face his unresolved grief:
  "[Spirit] Mahito, why do you hold onto the pain? Let go, and you will see clearly."
  "[Mahito] I can't let go. It feels like losing her all over again."
● The gray heron challenges Mahito's understanding of loss and growth:
  "[Gray Heron] Grief is not the end, boy. It is the beginning of something greater. Learn to see it as a door, not a cage."
● Mahito begins to take control of his destiny, symbolized by his decision to leave the tower:
  "[Mahito] I'm done running. It's time to face whatever comes next, no matter how hard it is."

This move reflects Mahito's emotional growth and sets up the resolution of the story.

5.2.6 Resolution Move: Achieving Closure and Moving Forward

The resolution move ties the narrative threads together, offering closure to Mahito's journey while leaving room for reflection.

● Mahito finally comes to terms with his mother's death, acknowledging her memory without letting it hold him back:
  "[Mahito] I couldn't save you, but I'll carry your memory with me. Always."
● He reconciles with Natsuko, showing that he has embraced his new reality:
  "[Mahito] I don't need you to replace her. I just need you to be here. That's enough."
● The gray heron leaves Mahito with a parting message that encapsulates the story's themes:
  "[Gray Heron] You have found your truth, Mahito. Now live it, and soar higher than you ever thought possible."

This move provides emotional and narrative closure, leaving the audience with a sense of completion and hope.
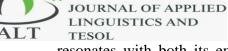
The expanded narrative structure of *The Boy and the Heron* reveals how the story unfolds through six distinct moves. Each move, opening, conflict, development, exploration, transformation, and resolution, builds on the last, weaving together emotional and thematic threads that create a rich and compelling narrative. Through these stages, Mahito's journey transforms from one of grief and uncertainty to one of acceptance and growth, reflecting universal struggles and triumphs.

5.3 Textualization: Linguistic Analysis of the Script

The textualization of *The Boy and the Heron* focuses on the language used in the script to convey its themes, emotions, and character development. This section examines how dialogue, narration, and moments of silence are crafted to balance simplicity with depth, creating a script that

resonates with both its emotional and fantastical dimensions. Key aspects include the use of symbolism, tone, and poetic expression, as well as the interplay of language and silence (Païs, 2012).

5.3.1 Dialogue: Conveying Emotional Depth

The dialogue in the script is carefully constructed to reflect the inner turmoil of the characters, particularly Mahito. His words often carry the weight of grief, confusion, and a longing for clarity.

● Mahito's frustration with his father's decisions and his inability to process his grief are evident in his sharp responses:
  "[Mahito] You act like moving on is easy. Like replacing her will make everything okay."

This line reflects not only Mahito's anger but also his deeper struggle to reconcile his love for his mother with the changes in his life.

● His hesitancy to trust the gray heron is conveyed through defensive, almost childish retorts:
  "[Mahito] Why should I trust a bird? You've done nothing but confuse me!"

This interaction highlights Mahito's resistance to accepting help, mirroring his emotional walls in other relationships.

● Moments of vulnerability are equally poignant, such as when Mahito reflects on his mother's absence:
  "[Mahito] I still hear her voice sometimes. In the wind. In the silence. Is that crazy?"

The simplicity of this line amplifies its emotional impact, inviting the audience to feel the depth of Mahito's longing.

5.3.2 Symbolism and Poetic Expression

The language of the script often uses symbolism to layer meaning, allowing simple phrases to carry greater significance.

● The gray heron's cryptic remarks are imbued with symbolic weight, encouraging Mahito (and the audience) to interpret their deeper meaning:
  "[Gray Heron] Grief is not the end, boy. It is the beginning of something greater. Learn to see it as a door, not a cage."

This metaphor transforms grief from a burden into a catalyst for growth, aligning with the film's overarching theme of transformation.

● The tower, a central symbol in the narrative, is described in terms that suggest both danger and possibility:
  "[Gray Heron] That tower is both a relic of what was and a gateway to what could be. It is waiting for you."

Such language turns the tower into more than a physical structure (Païs, 2012); it becomes a metaphor for Mahito's journey into the unknown.

- Mahito's reflections are often poetic, revealing his growing self-awareness:
"[Mahito] Maybe life isn't about finding all the answers. Maybe it's about learning to live with the questions."

These moments elevate the script, giving it a lyrical quality that resonates deeply with the audience.

5.3.3 Tone and Emotional Shifts

The tone of the script shifts seamlessly between grounded realism and whimsical fantasy, reflecting the duality of Mahito's journey.

- In moments of grounded realism, the tone is raw and reflective, as seen in Mahito's confrontation with his father:
"[Mahito] You think building a factory makes everything better? It doesn't bring her back."

The bluntness of this line cuts through the emotional fog, revealing the anger and pain Mahito harbors.

- In contrast, the gray heron's dialogue introduces a more whimsical, fantastical tone:
"[Gray Heron] What you see is only half the story, boy. The rest is hidden in the cracks of the world."

This playful yet mysterious tone contrasts with Mahito's seriousness, emphasizing the fantastical elements of the story.

5.3.4 The Role of Silence

Silence is as powerful as dialogue in the script, used to heighten tension, emphasize emotion, and create space for reflection.

- Mahito's silent pauses during conversations often say more than his words, especially in moments of grief or realization. For example, after the heron's revelation about his mother, Mahito's silence speaks volumes:
"[Gray Heron] You didn't see her body. Am I wrong?"
"[Mahito is silent, visibly shaken.]"

This pause allows the audience to feel the weight of Mahito's doubt and confusion.

- Silence is also used to create tension during Mahito's exploration of the tower. The absence of dialogue in these scenes amplifies the sense of mystery and unease:
"[Mahito walks through a dark corridor. No sound except his footsteps echoing.]"

These moments allow the audience to immerse themselves fully in the atmosphere, heightening the emotional stakes.

5.3.5 Interpersonal Dynamics Through Language

The interactions between characters are brought to life through nuanced language that reflects their relationships.

● The tension between Mahito and Natsuko is clear in their clipped, awkward exchanges: *"[Natsuko] I'm trying to help, Mahito." "[Mahito] You can't help. You don't even know me."*

This dialogue reflects the emotional distance between them, rooted in Mahito's inability to accept her as part of his life.

● In contrast, the heron's dialogue reflects a mix of guidance and provocation, challenging Mahito to think differently: *"[Gray Heron] You cling to the human world as if it's the only one. What if I told you it isn't?"*

This dynamic drives the narrative forward, forcing Mahito to question his reality and confront his fears.

The script of The Boy and the Heron beautifully captures the emotions, symbolism, and shifting tones of Mahito's journey. With heartfelt dialogue, poetic expressions, and meaningful silences, it brings the story's themes of grief, growth, and self-discovery to life. The language doesn't just tell the story, it deepens its impact, making the audience feel the emotional weight and universal messages woven into the narrative.

5.4 Interdiscursivity: Blending Genres and Traditions

The interdiscursivity of *The Boy and the Heron* reveals how the film draws from and interacts with various genres, cultural traditions, and storytelling approaches. This blending creates a rich, hybrid narrative that appeals to both local and global audiences. By examining elements of Japanese folklore, philosophical undertones, and broader cinematic influences, this section highlights how the script constructs a dialogue between tradition and innovation.

5.4.1 Japanese Folklore and Mythological Influences

The film is deeply rooted in Japanese cultural traditions, drawing inspiration from folklore and myth to create a sense of familiarity for its domestic audience while also enchanting international viewers with its mystical charm.

● The gray heron is a central figure that embodies the connection to Japanese folklore. In traditional Japanese culture, herons symbolize grace, wisdom, and mystery. This symbolism is woven into the heron's cryptic dialogue: *"[Gray Heron] The answers you seek are beyond the world you know. Follow me, and I will show you the way."*

- The tower itself feels like a nod to Japanese mythological spaces, blending the real and the fantastical. Its description carries an air of mystery tied to ancestral knowledge: *"[Natsuko] That tower was built a long time ago by our mother's uncle. They say he read too many books and lost his mind."*
- Mahito's journey into the tower echoes the traditional Japanese hero's journey (monomyth), where a protagonist crosses into the unknown, faces trials, and returns transformed. His initial hesitation mirrors the archetypal reluctance of a hero: *"[Mahito] What if I go in and never come out? What if I don't find anything at all?"*

These references to folklore ground the fantastical elements in a cultural framework, adding depth and resonance to the story.

5.4.2 Existential Philosophy and Universal Themes

Beyond its cultural specificity, the film engages with existential questions about life, death, and identity, making its themes universal and relatable.

- The heron's repeated challenges to Mahito's understanding of life and death create a dialogue with existential philosophy. The heron's cryptic yet profound remarks encourage Mahito to question his assumptions: *"[Gray Heron] What makes you so certain that death is the end? Perhaps it's simply another kind of beginning."*
- Mahito's journey becomes a metaphor for the human condition, reflecting themes of growth through suffering. His reflections on loss reveal a shift in perspective: *"[Mahito] Maybe letting go isn't forgetting. Maybe it's making space for something new."*
- The script also touches on the interconnectedness of life, a theme found in many philosophical traditions, particularly in Buddhism and Shinto. This is reflected in Mahito's epiphany during a key moment in the tower: *"[Mahito] Everything is connected, my mother, the tower, the heron. Maybe even me."*

These philosophical undertones enrich the narrative, making it resonate across cultures and age groups.

5.4.3 Western Cinematic and Narrative Influences

While deeply rooted in Japanese storytelling, *The Boy and the Heron* also borrows from Western cinematic traditions, blending visual and narrative techniques to create a hybrid identity.

- The hero's journey, popularized by Joseph Campbell (VanDenBos, 2013), is evident in the film's narrative structure. Mahito's crossing of the threshold into the tower mirrors Campbell's "call to adventure" phase: *"[Gray Heron] This is your choice, boy. Enter the tower, or remain in the shadows of your fear."*
- The blend of the ordinary and extraordinary evokes comparisons to Western fantasy genres, where characters grapple with fantastical worlds while facing personal struggles.

Mahito's dual focus on the external mystery and his internal grief parallels works like *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Harry Potter*.

● Themes of reconciliation and growth align with Western coming-of-age stories, though the film retains a uniquely introspective tone. For example, Mahito's eventual acceptance of his stepmother mirrors the resolution of fractured relationships seen in many Western narratives:
"[Mahito] I don't need you to be her. Just… stay. That's enough."

These influences create a bridge between cultural storytelling traditions, allowing the film to speak to a broad, diverse audience.

5.4.4 Environmental and Intergenerational Themes

As with many of Hayao Miyazaki's works, *The Boy and the Heron* incorporates environmental and intergenerational themes, blending them into the narrative seamlessly.
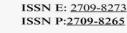
● The industrial backdrop of Mahito's father's factory contrasts with the natural world represented by the heron and the tower. This tension echoes Miyazaki's environmental messaging, where industrialization is often portrayed as a double-edged sword:
"[Natsuko] That factory will secure our future, but the land around it… it may never be the same."
● The tower represents an intergenerational legacy, symbolizing both the wisdom and mistakes of the past. This duality is highlighted in its description:
"[Gray Heron] This tower holds the echoes of those who came before you. Their triumphs… and their regrets."
● The balance between preserving tradition and embracing change is reflected in Mahito's internal journey, as he reconciles his mother's memory with his new reality:
"[Mahito] I thought holding on would keep her close. But letting go doesn't mean losing her. She's part of me now."

These themes add complexity to the narrative, grounding its fantastical elements in real-world concerns.

The interdiscursivity of The Boy and the Heron brilliantly combines elements of Japanese folklore, existential philosophy, Western storytelling, and environmental themes to craft a deeply layered narrative. This blend creates a story that feels firmly rooted in Japanese culture while resonating with universal human emotions. The film's hybrid approach invites viewers into a world that is both magical and deeply relatable, offering profound reflections on grief, personal growth, and the connections that bind all life together.

6. Discussion

The story of *The Boy and the Heron* is a mix of emotions, fantasy, and meaningful themes, creating something that feels both fresh and familiar. Using Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), this research explored how the film builds its emotional core, how the story is structured, how the script uses language, and how it blends cultural traditions with global ideas.

By tying these elements together, the film becomes a story that touches both the heart and the mind.

Looking at the situational context, the film draws its power from its emotional depth. Mahito's journey begins with the heartbreaking loss of his mother. This grief shapes his entire world, from his struggles to accept Natsuko, his stepmother, to his curiosity and frustration with the mysterious gray heron. These personal struggles make the story feel raw and real. Yet, it doesn't stop there. The film uses cultural elements like the heron, a symbol of wisdom and mystery, and the tower, which represents family history and the unknown, to ground the story in its Japanese roots. While deeply tied to its culture, the themes of grief, growth, and finding hope speak to anyone, making the story universal and relatable.

Through move analysis, the research broke the story into stages, each with its purpose. The opening introduces Mahito's pain, showing his grief and his strained relationship with his new family. The development move builds tension as Mahito starts to question his reality and grows curious about the secrets of the tower. The conflict move brings his doubts and fears to the surface, pushing him closer to the truth. The exploration move takes him into the tower, where he faces challenges that test his courage and mirror his emotional struggles. The transformation move is where Mahito begins to let go of his pain and accept change, growing stronger and more self-aware. Finally, the resolution ties everything together as Mahito makes peace with his past and takes steps to embrace his new reality. These moves mirror the ups and downs of real life, making the story feel natural and deeply emotional.

The textualization of the script adds another layer of richness. The film uses simple but powerful language to bring out the characters' emotions. For example, when Mahito tells his father, *"You think building a factory makes everything better? It doesn't bring her back,"* it captures his raw pain in just a few words. The gray heron's riddles, like *"Grief is not the end. It is the beginning of something greater,"* challenge Mahito to think differently and encourage the audience to reflect on life and loss. Even the silences in the film say so much. When Mahito pauses after the heron suggests his mother might still be alive, the silence speaks louder than words. These quiet moments allow the emotions to sink in, making the story hit even harder.

Interdiscursivity shows how the film borrows from different storytelling traditions. It is deeply connected to Japanese folklore, with the heron acting as a guide and the tower symbolizing both history and the unknown (Cho, 2018). At the same time, the film explores big ideas about life, death, and transformation, drawing from philosophical traditions that feel universal. It also takes inspiration from global storytelling styles, like the classic hero's journey, where Mahito steps into the unknown, faces trials, and returns changed. This blend of cultural and global influences makes the film feel unique, combining local traditions with themes that touch people everywhere.

Bhatia's model helps show how all these pieces fit together. The situational context makes the story relatable and rooted in real emotions. The move analysis reveals how the story flows naturally, each part building on the last. The textualization highlights the power of language and silence, showing how the script brings the story to life (Paltridge, 1994). Interdiscursivity adds depth, showing how the film connects different traditions and styles to create something new.

In the end, *The Boy and the Heron* is more than just a film. It's a story that stays with you, making you think, feel, and reflect long after it ends. By using Bhatia's model, this research uncovered how the film balances its cultural roots with universal themes, creating a genre that is both personal and timeless. It's a story about grief and healing, but it's also about how stories themselves can connect us, challenge us, and help us grow. This is what makes *The Boy and the Heron* unforgettable.

7. Conclusion

The journey of The Boy and the Heron is more than Mahito's personal story, it is a reflection of universal human experiences, exploring loss, growth, and the search for meaning in life's struggles. Using Bhatia's Genre Analysis Model (1993), this research delved into the layers of this extraordinary film, examining its narrative structure, language, cultural influences, and interdiscursive connections. The study revealed how the film constructs a genre identity that is both deeply rooted in Japanese cultural traditions and universally resonant. Through situational context, the film reflects its cultural roots while addressing timeless themes of grief and self-discovery. Move analysis highlighted the seamless flow of Mahito's journey, while textualization emphasized the power of poetic language and silences. Interdiscursivity showcased how the film blends Japanese folklore, philosophical questions, and global storytelling traditions to create a narrative that speaks to the heart and the mind.

This research goes beyond academic inquiry, offering insights for storytellers, scholars, and anyone who loves meaningful narratives. For creators, the film demonstrates the art of balancing cultural authenticity with universal appeal. For scholars, it expands the application of Bhatia's model to visual and textual storytelling. For viewers, it provides a deeper appreciation of the film's emotional and cultural layers. The Boy and the Heron is not just a film; it is an experience that stays with its audience, bridging cultures and sparking reflection. By showing how stories can connect deeply with emotions, address profound questions, and inspire growth, this study underscores the transformative power of storytelling to heal, connect, and redefine how we see the world, and ourselves.

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