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A black iron stove hisses and spits as it burns logs from a large basket on the hearth, and a grandmother clock chimes the hours. This is a house built in a Scandinavian-Swiss style, using natural materials and simple lines. A cheerful pig in Victorian costume grins down from the wooden nameplate, and a whole flight of larger pigs is painted round the upper levels, this time depicted with the simplicity of a child's potato-print.

It's very peaceful, but this is not a fairy-tale gingerbread cottage in Europe — we are only half-an-hour from the ultra-modern bustle of Tokyo's Shinjuku station. This is Buta-ya, the house Hayao Miyazaki built in 1998, just a few minutes' stroll from Studio Ghibli. The building is home to his office, and was built to give the famous director a space where he could work and hold meetings, but also relax and create outside the pressures of movie deadlines. Every Saturday, this is where he teaches his class for anime directors.

When he first comes down the stairs from his office in the eaves, Miyazaki's first concern is that everyone is comfortable. He puts logs on the stove and asks if I mind him smoking, then checks to see that all present are supplied with tea or coffee. We sit at the large oval table and chat through the long afternoon, save for one moment when the quiet is interrupted by an accident.

A small bird cannons into the rear window at great speed, and we rush to the glass to find a song-thrush lying on the walkway. Immediately Miyazaki is on the phone to the local bird sanctuary. One of the staff arrives and brings the bird inside, whereupon Miyazaki appears with a cardboard box, which he proceeds to line with cloth he has warmed in front of the stove. The bird is placed inside to recover, and the box is carefully placed on the corner of the wide hearth.

Half an hour later, a loud chirp from the box indicates that the patient is well on the road to recovery. Smiling broadly, Miyazaki excuses himself, gets up from the table, opens the door and gently places the box on the porch, lid open so the thrush can fly free.

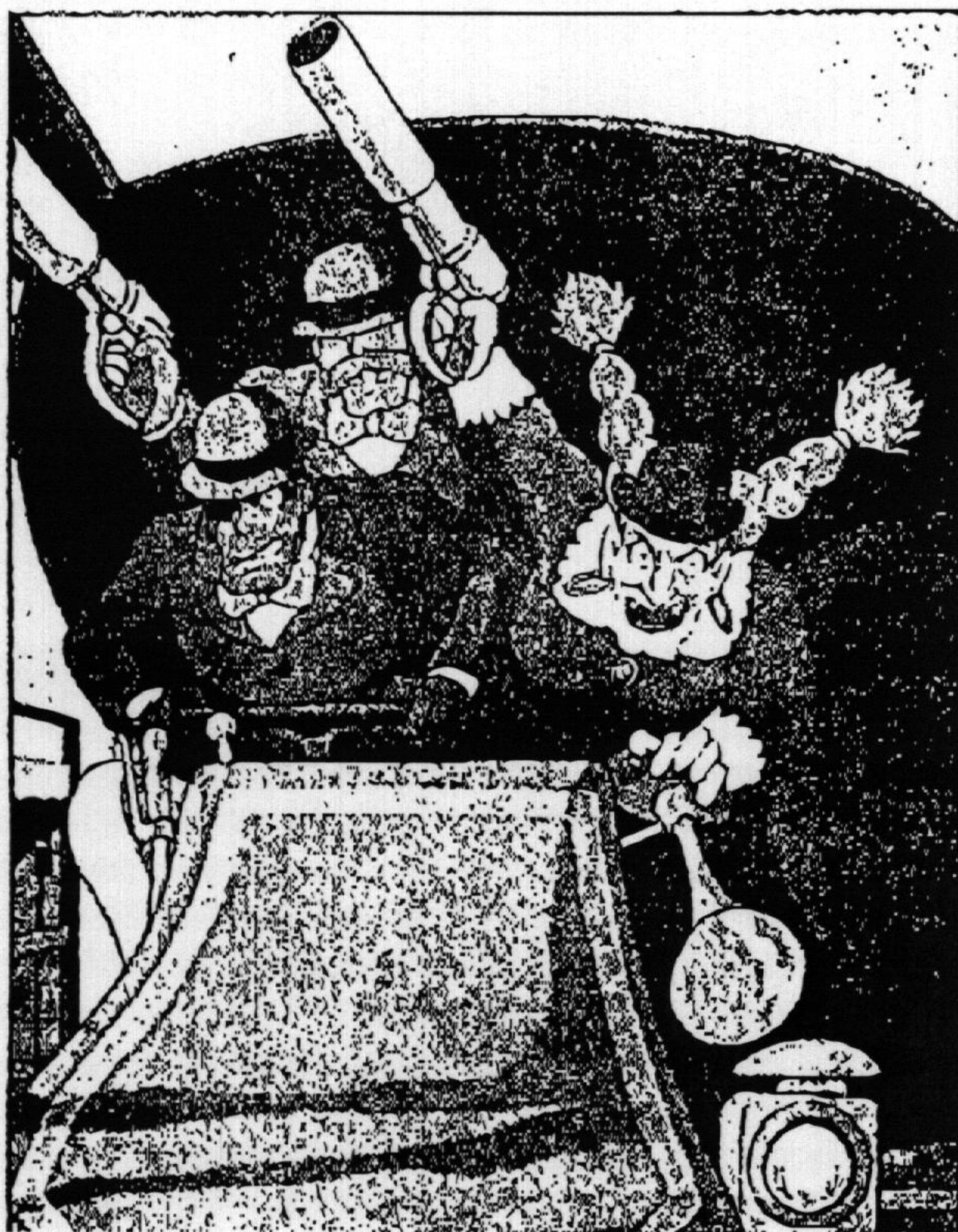
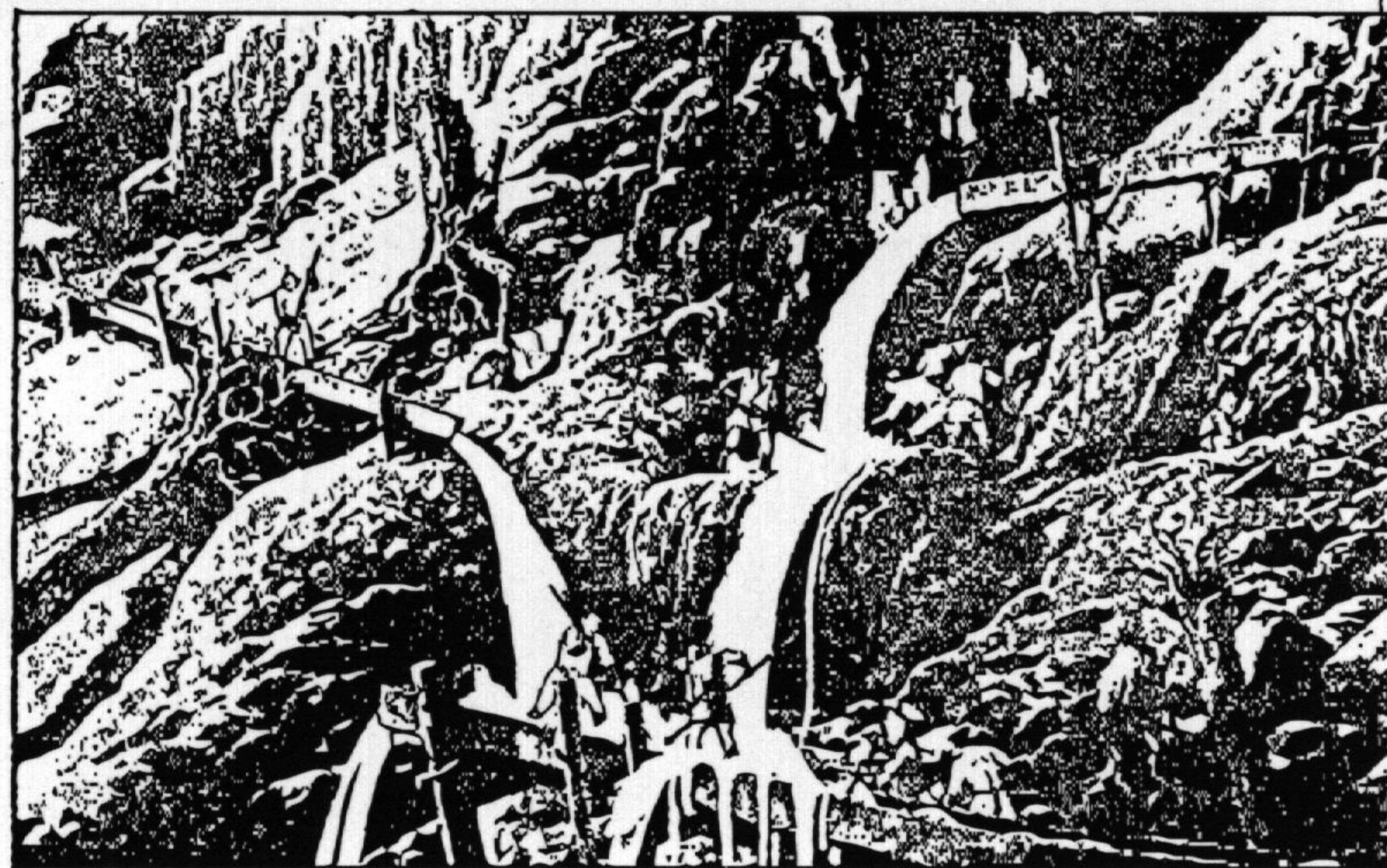
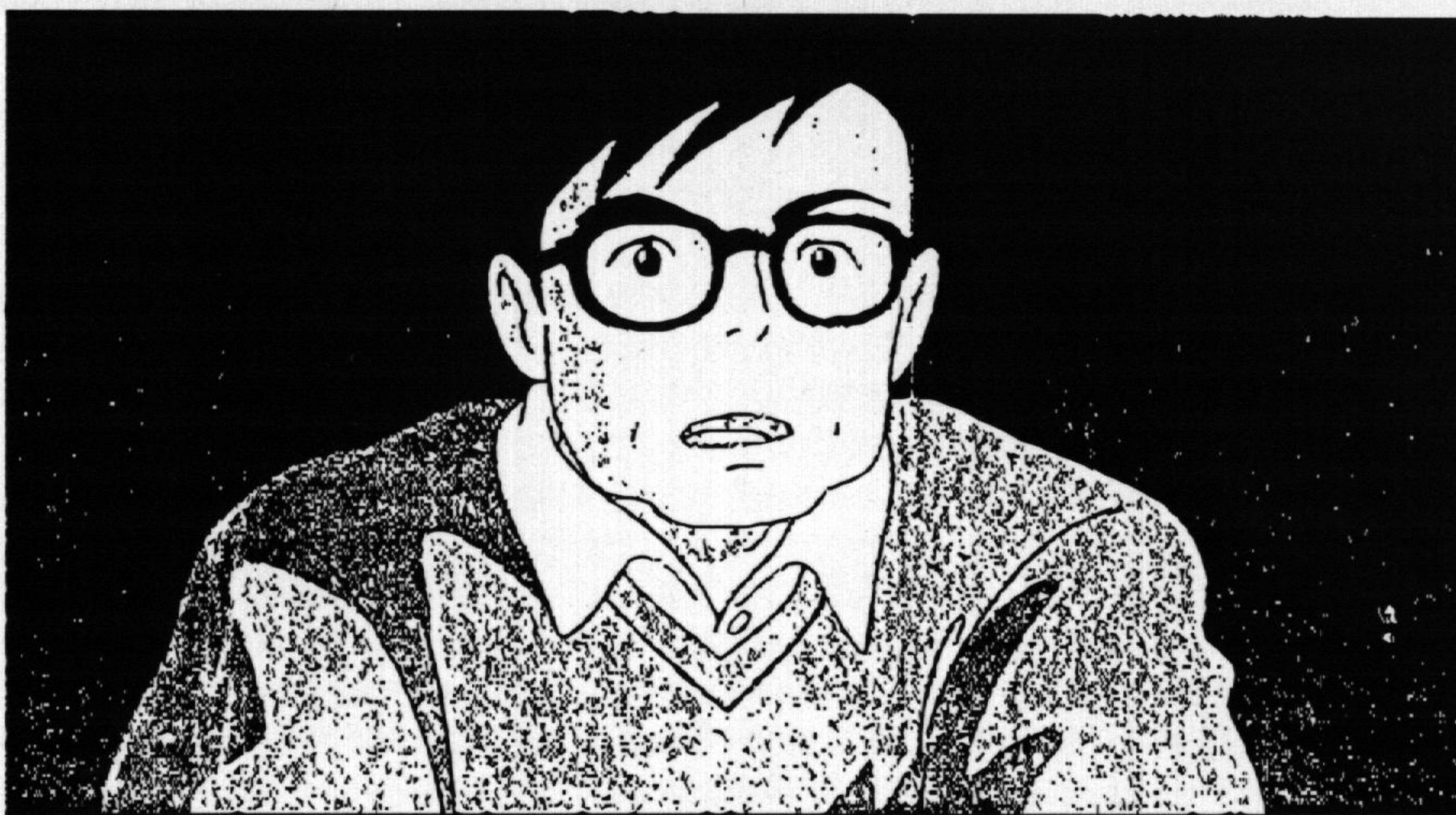
The interruption tells me as much about the man as the interview itself...

Miyazaki's home, but the house might seem a strange one for an animator. You took a degree in politics and economics and could have gone into any profession. Yet you chose this very demanding, physically arduous work. Did your parents object to your choice of career? And would you advise your own children to enter the animation world?

Miyazaki: My parents neither opposed me nor agreed with me — they left it up to me to choose what I wanted to do. I don't think being an animator is necessarily that physically demanding; it depends on your own working style. Personally, I rest for a long time between jobs. When I'm working, it's very tough, but after that there's a period of rest when I can get back to a normal pattern of life. As long as there's a balance, it's fine. As for advising my own children, they're grown up now and it's up to them to choose what they want to do. I always think of A.A. Milne's son Christopher Robin, being saddled for his whole life with that image his father created.

Your works depict family life and children's relationships with adults in a very individual way. Do you think that both your parents have had an influence on your work?

Clockwise: Whisper of the Heart: Father knows best. Mining Miyazaki-style. Ma Dola's boys from Castle in the Sky



It's hard to say what influences come from my mother and what from my father, and what ideas are my own, things that I've adopted from my experience. As a child, I felt I should rebel against my parents' influence and find my own way of doing things. Of course, over my lifetime I've also seen many different families, each with their own style of doing things, and that influence can't be discounted.

I generally depict a certain kind of father, kind and gentle but not soft. The reality of urban life today is that many children only see their father late at night when he comes home from work. Given that, the mother is the strong leg of the stool.

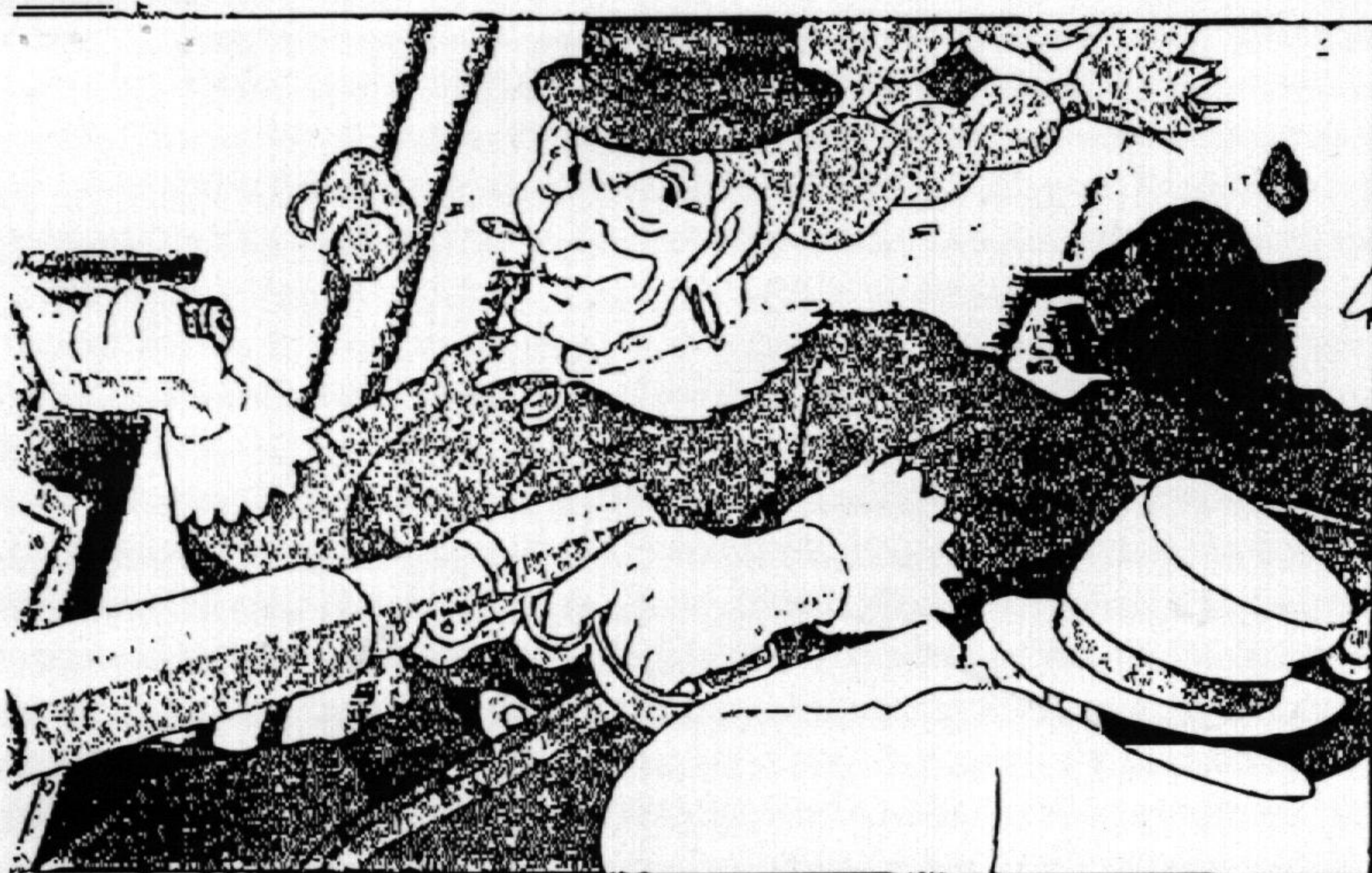
Laputa: Castle in the Sky ©
1988 Nibariki/Tokuma
Shoten

Whisper of the Heart ©
1995 Nibariki/
TNNCA/Hiragi

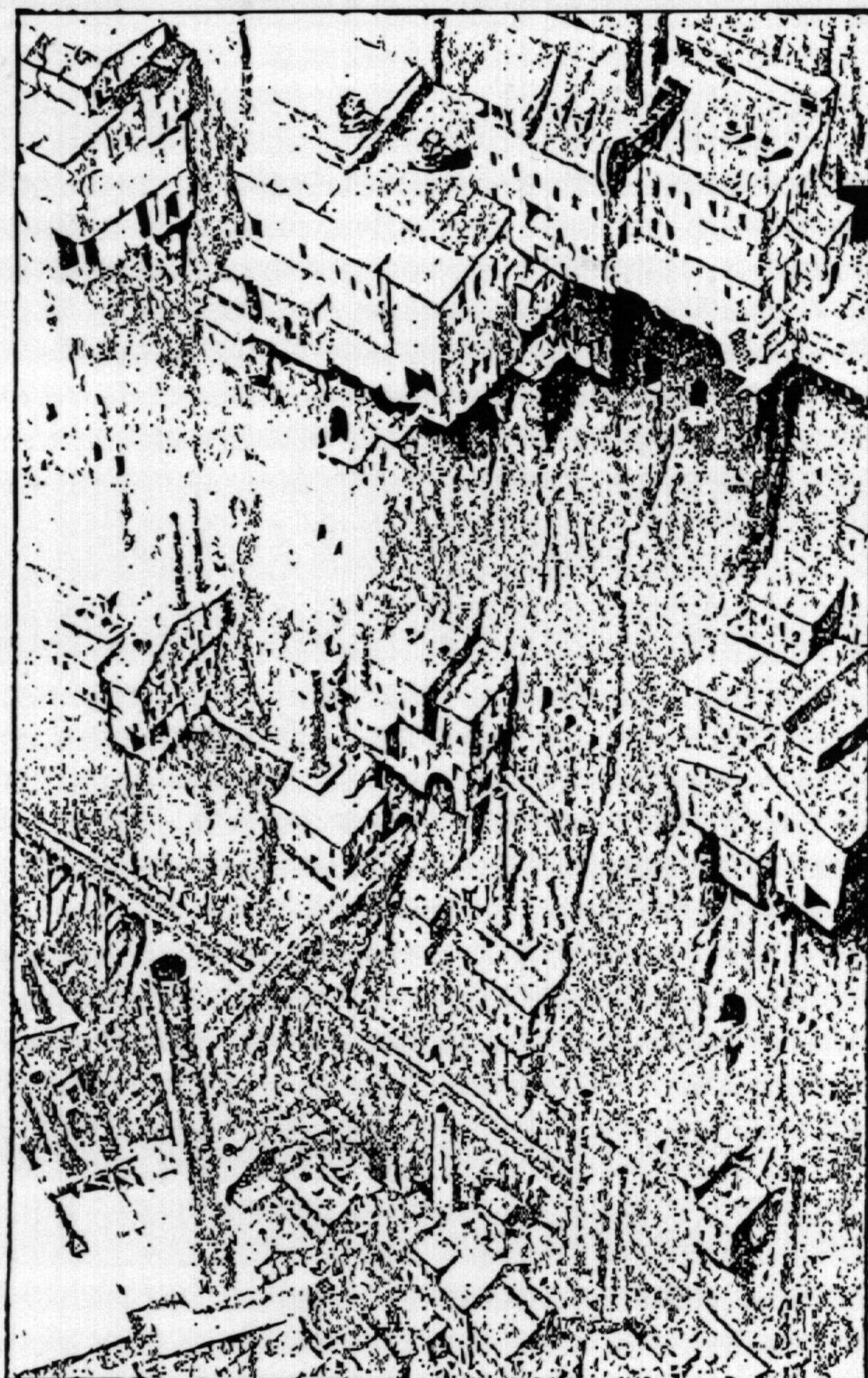
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Mother dearest,
Ma Dola



This spread: Is
this Heaven? No
it's Wales...

Fathers in general in Japan are now being urged to build a more real relationship between themselves and their children, but they're not sure of the best way to handle this. The fathers in *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *My Neighbour Totoro*, and also the father in *Whisper of the Heart*, are the kind of figures I prefer to present as typical Japanese fathers.

Mothers, on the other hand, are very busy; they have to deal with the house and all the work, so they're... well, not really bossy, but very strong and organised, like Dola. When I was a little boy, my mother was ill in bed for almost ten years, and of course that was a huge influence on me. It doesn't matter if parents are good or bad, they carry their own shadow, and that shadow reaches down to their children. I remember many years ago I saw a French drama; I can't remember the writer or title, but one girl character says something like "my mother taught me about disappointment and hatred." It's important to bring that kind of reality to characters, not just to depict them as good guy/bad guy figures but to show how they came to be as they are.

The difficult thing about presenting stories for children is not a question of setting them a fantastic and wonderful environment, it's how to set them along the path of becoming a better person.

One thing Japan has had in recent years is fantastic economic success; so the problem for the Japanese people was not any longer how shall we survive in the world, but what kind of people should we be? Now that things are starting to turn around, and there may be economic collapse on the horizon, we have to think about how to eat again, it has the effect of creating an environment where you can make artworks that think about the way to live our lives. When times are good, people don't tend to think about such moral

questions as the best way to live our lives. It's when times are becoming hard that those questions can be asked.

You were very interested in children's literature from your college days and you read many works by European authors.

Are there any writers or books you remember particularly?

And do you still get time to read children's books?

Phillipa Pearce is someone whose work I really enjoyed. Arthur Ransome is another of my big favourites. If the opportunity ever arose, I'd love to make a TV series based on Ransome's work.

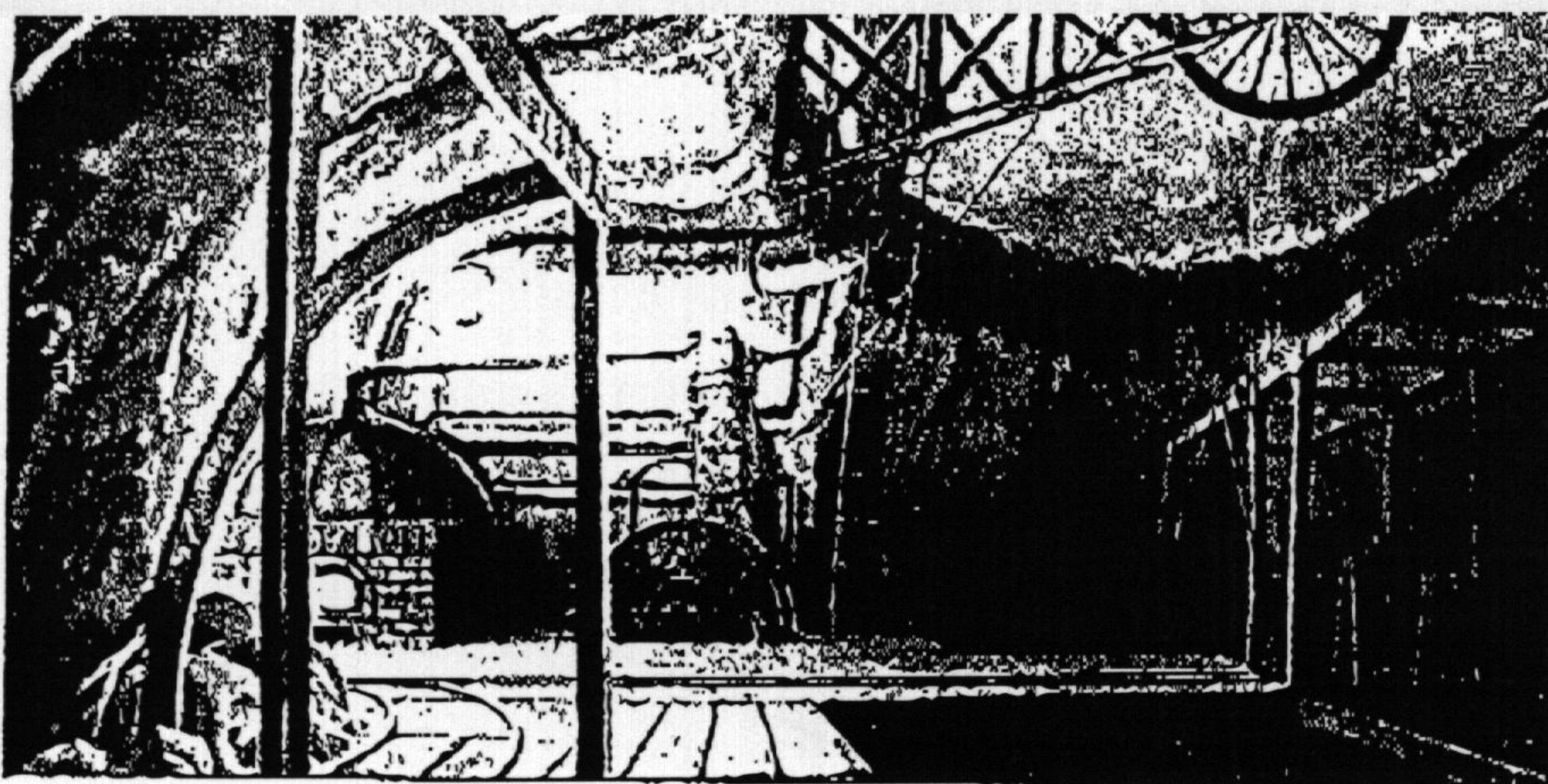
like *swallows and Amazons*?

I'd like to make an animated series based on those books! I love Ransome's world - peaceful, carefree summer holidays in lovely countryside. One day I hope to go to the English lakes and see that wonderful landscape for myself.

I do still try to find time to read children's literature. A lot of contemporary children's literature seems to express much darker ideas and feelings than in the Fifties and Sixties, and so many of them are basically picture books. With the rise of games, videos and so on, children are being caught up in commercial traps used to force their parents to spend more money, and we'll pay the price in the next century.

because there's no encouragement of individuality?

Well, individuality is not such a global concept. It might apply in Europe and the USA but it's not so widely accepted elsewhere. I remember when I first watched Henry Fonda in *12 Angry Men*,



I thought his character was such a jerk for insisting on his ideas against everyone else. I thought that in a democracy that wasn't the right way to do things!

But it is important to involve children in doing things, not just passively watching. The danger of the increasing acceptance of computers in our world right now isn't that they are bad things in themselves, but rather that people think you can conquer the world using computers. We'll probably find that's not true.

On a personal level I'm not pessimistic, because I think if I can find a way to help the children I know learn what makes them feel good and what will make a better world, I can help them to deal with the future through my work. When I make a film I always think of specific children, the children I know. I make my films for them.

There's a kindergarten near here, and when Buta-ya was finished we invited the children and their teacher over for a visit. They lined up there [he points to the wooden bridge which sweeps across the main room in the caves] and I took a picture of them. The smiles in that picture made me feel that making this building will be worthwhile.

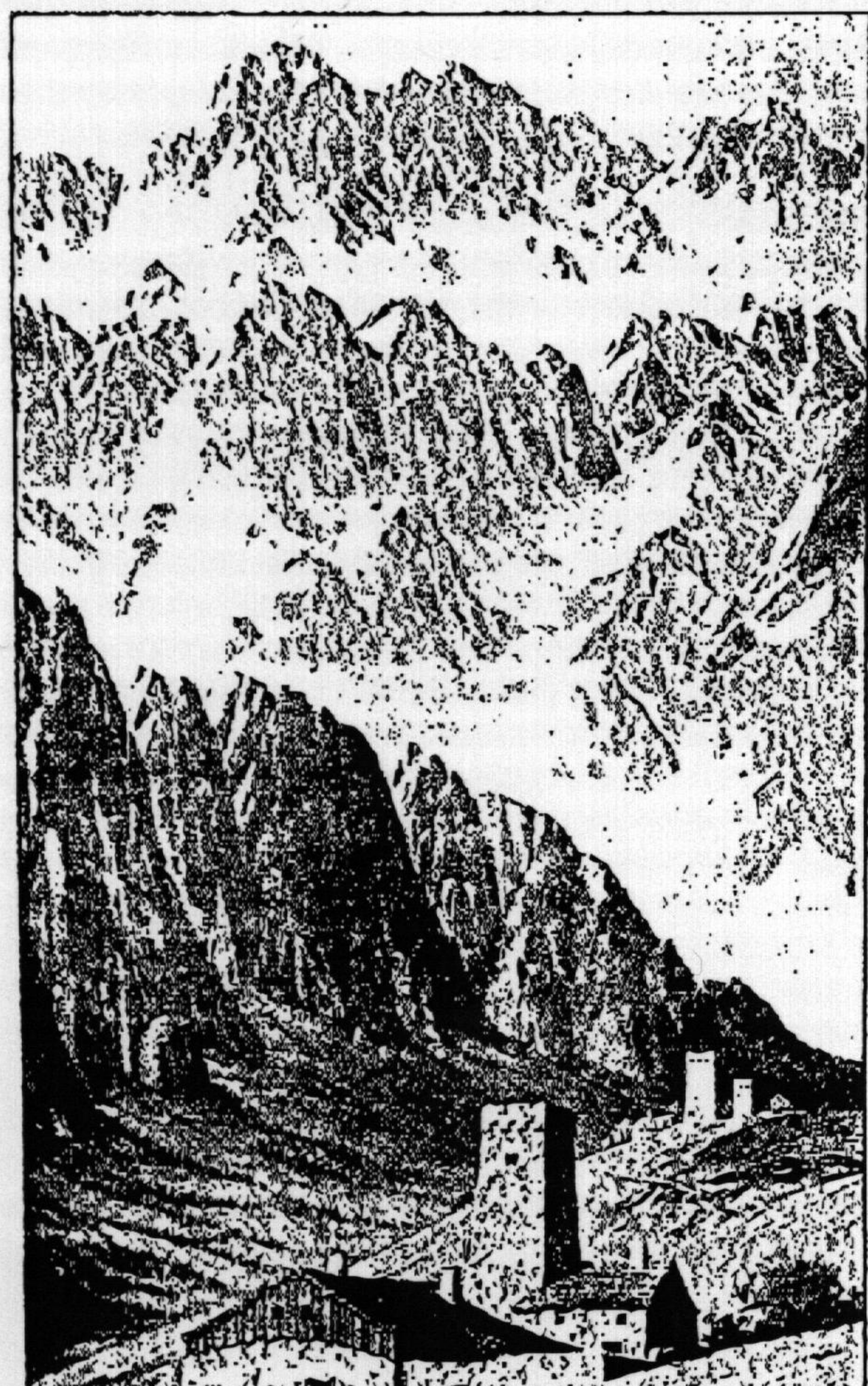


going back to your earlier comments, many men who used to work in heavy industry are now unemployed, and have to ask themselves how they will live, what's the purpose of their lives. It was interesting that you visited Wales during your research for *Castle in the Sky*, saw very poor mining communities with a powerful community spirit, and brought that spirit into the film.

I actually went to Wales twice, once before I made *Castle in the Sky* and once just after. I was there around the time of the miners' strike. I really admired the way the miners' unions fought to the very end for their jobs and communities, and I wanted to reflect the strength of those communities in my film.

I saw so many places with abandoned machinery, abandoned mines. The fabric of the industry was there, but no people. It made a strong impression on me, to see a whole industry with no work. I visited a huge pit that had been turned into a kind of theme park where people could study the history of the industry. As I was walking round the mine I could see these great lumps and seams of coal – in Japan we'd have to go down 1500 feet or more to get anything like that. I thought what a pity it was that the industry was dead; but on the other hand I knew that there was nothing that could be done about it. The miners' strike was one of those cataclysmic events, like the explosion of the Hindenberg. After that happened the whole technology was discarded. Events had just gone too far to continue with it, so all the pilots and staff lost their jobs.

Did you go to North Wales, as well as to the valley communities in the South? Pazu's village in *Castle in the Sky* is set in mountains that remind me more of Snowdonia than of the Rhondda.



© 1986 Nibariki/Tokuma Shoten

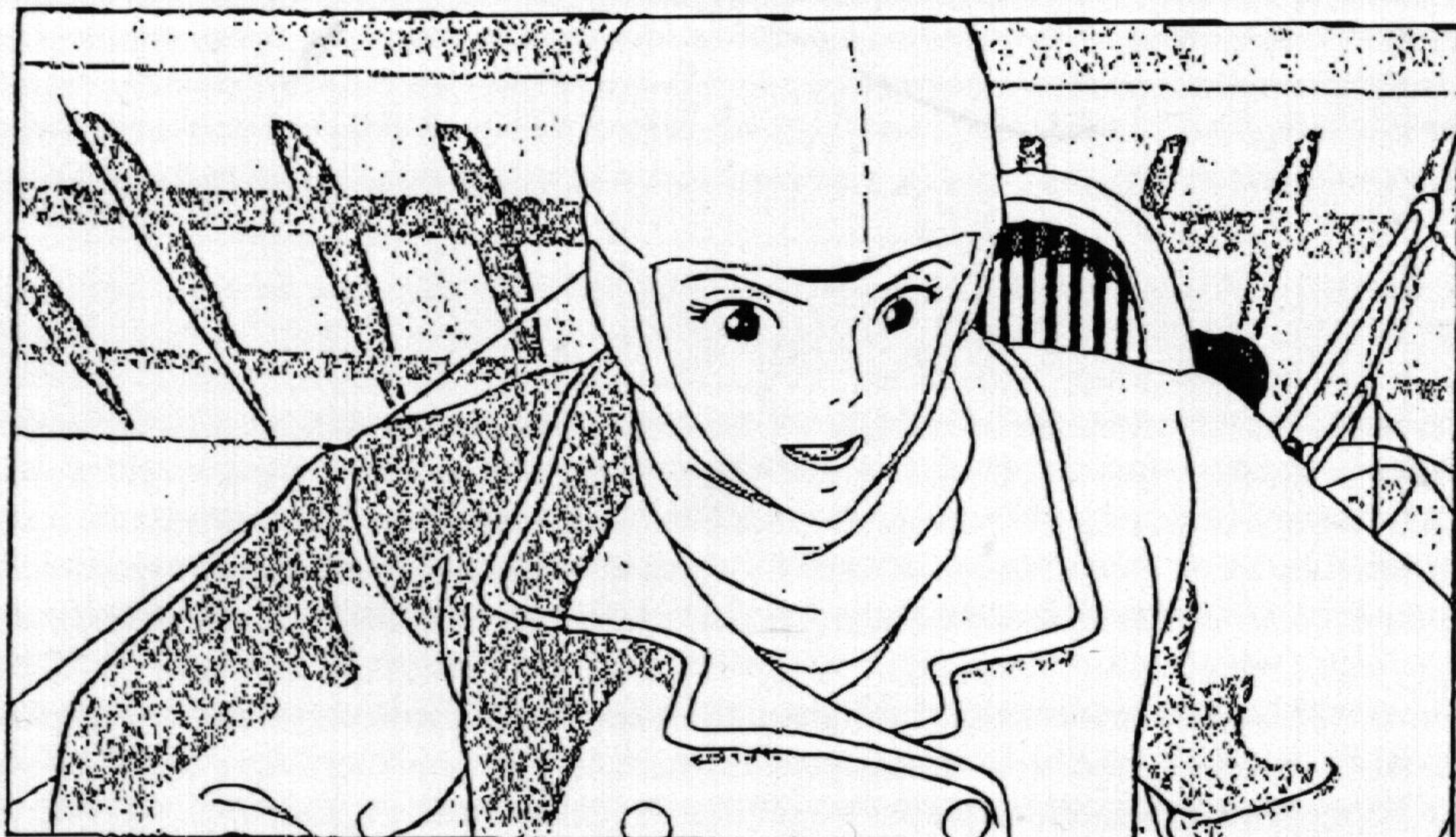
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ices, I went to North Wales as well. It was very beautiful. Sadly I didn't have time to climb the mountains of Snowdonia. I just looked at them.

Wales has a very strong rugby team, the Red Dragons, although they don't seem to be doing so well right now! I went to see them play. One thing I remember really vividly from the match, was the National Anthem. Not everyone realises that "God Save the Queen" is the English national anthem, and Wales has its own, "Land of my Fathers". When they played "God Save The Queen", not everybody joined in; but when they played the Welsh national anthem, everybody really got into it and sang their hearts out!

Gina just wants to be a modern girl.



Marco: the Porco Rosso

Marco: the Porco Rosso is a very different sort of hero from the heroes of most Miyazaki films. He's a disillusioned character, and he starts out without a lot of hope. Why did you decide to make a hero like him?

Original Laputa: Castle in the Sky poster.

Some animation programmes are just made for purposes of baby-sitting. In the US there's an expression for people involved with those programmes, they're called Saturday morning animators. It's a category. But there's so much bad material out there, if you pour one glass of crystal clear water into the dirty water, it may get lost in all the dirt. Still, you have to try to do your work in the hope that someone will enjoy it before it's lost in the mass of bad stuff.

Western planners and producers see children's programming not as something to make children think and grow, but just to keep them quiet?

I suppose so. And perhaps it's not possible to raise the whole level of children's programming right away, but with just a few changes they could do things better.

I've talked about the importance of making films for children, and it's obvious that you see yourself first and foremost as a film-maker for children. So when you made *Porco Rosso*, it was a departure for you – a film with mostly adult protagonists and historical connections to the modern world and the troubles which are still going on the Balkans.

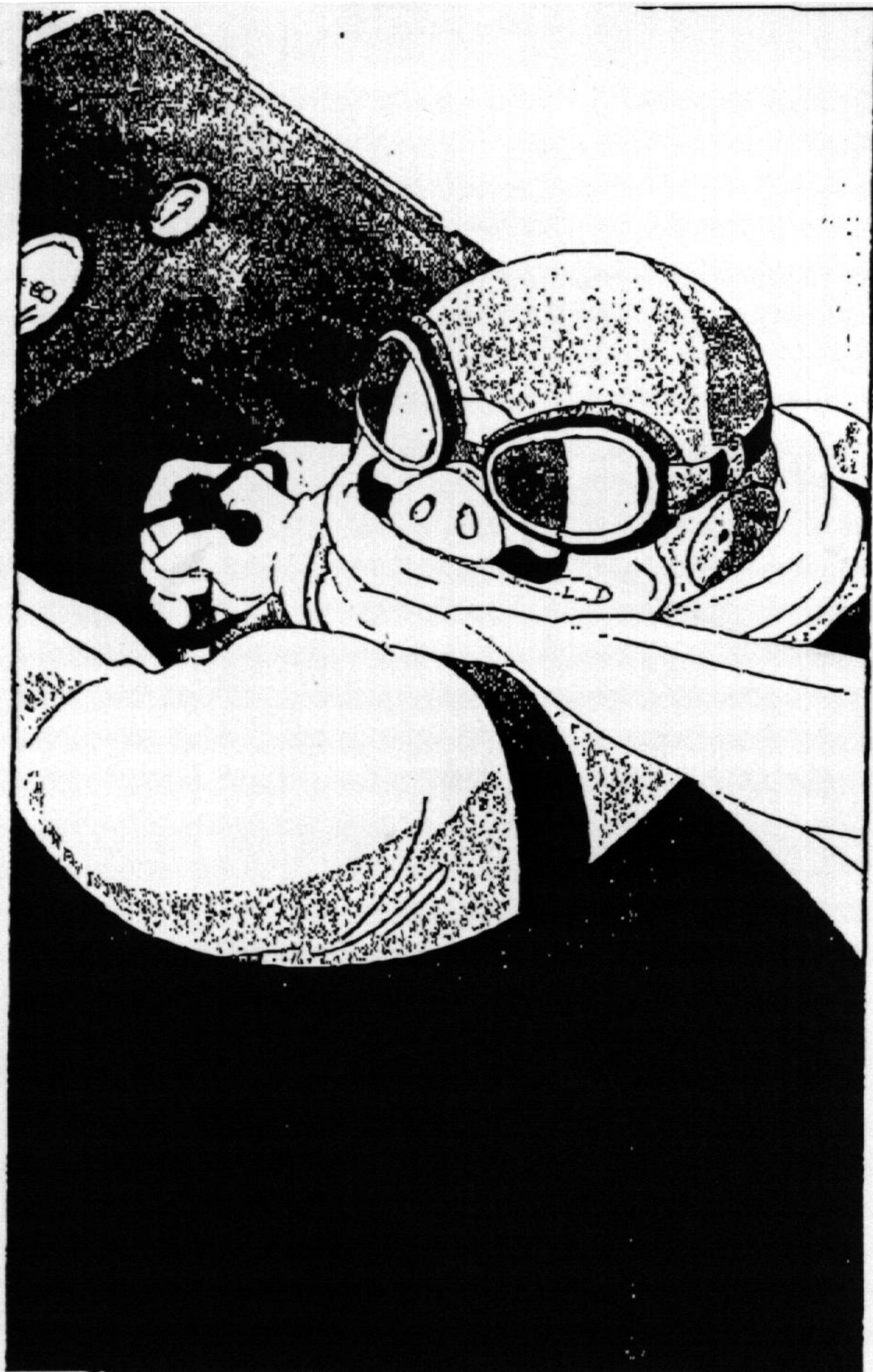
The bottom line is I like that style of aircraft, and even though I make films for children, that particular film was really made as my personal tribute to all those wonderful planes. I made *Porco Rosso* for myself. Until finishing *Princess Mononoke* I felt a little... not really guilty, but that I'd indulged myself.

Did you base the planes on real planes, or make your own designs?

All the planes in *Porco Rosso* were created from my own imagination, but they're all based on the technology of the time, on what was possible then. It's my hobby – I love those planes, both the real ones and imagining what kind of flying ships could have been made. The only authentic, real plane featured was Curtis' plane, although the original didn't have any machine guns mounted on it. The Italians inspired me. They were the best plane makers of the early part of this century because they were real design geniuses – they used their unique sense of style to create such beautiful, elegant planes. Studio Ghibli got its name from a plane by an Italian firm called Caproni.

Marco: the Porco Rosso is a very different sort of hero from the heroes of most Miyazaki films. He's a disillusioned character, and he starts out without a lot of hope. Why did you decide to make a hero like him?





People have come to me with two different views of the ending. One says Marco will definitely come back to the Hotel Adriano, maybe in a week, just like always – the other says he'll never come back. I say yes to both views, because of course both are right, but personally I feel that the first is true – he would carry on as before.

And, remember a wonderful Marco in the French dub of the film. Is there any chance he might be Marco in the English dub?

I hope so. The French cast was superb, in fact I thought they gave an even better performance than the original Japanese actors. Those characters really need French voices. There's a quality in the French voice that you really need for those roles. The French Gina has something wonderful in her voice. That's a woman who could stand on her own two feet, by herself, and yet she's a very feminine woman.

There's been a lot of fan discussion of your attitude to feminism and some fans don't feel Gina is a good role model. But Gina's choice of Marco is made independently and shows her strength.

If I met a woman like Gina and a very "politically correct" feminist, I think I'd rather talk to Gina. That's because she is trying to be herself; even in a male-dominated society, she tries to express her own feelings and wishes. Even under difficult circumstances, a woman can express herself if she's strong, and I think Gina is like that. Some staff here think that drawing the heroine as a beautiful girl is discrimination, but I don't think of it in that way.

Left: Flying high in Porco Rosso. Bottom left: Ashitaka from Princess Mononoke. Below: Gina phones home.

Porco Rosso © 1992
Nibariki/INNC

Princess Mononoke © 1997
Miyazaki/Nibariki/Tokuma
Shoten.



Marco wasn't intended to be the kind of character children would appreciate. I wasn't really making *Porco Rosso* for children, but in fact when it came out children went to see it, so there wasn't much I could do. When I make a film for children, I try to show the kind of heroes children can relate to. They have great optimism and believe nothing is impossible – the future is full of possibilities. With *Porco Rosso*, I was making a film for adults, so the hero is a character who can't go back to the past and try things again. He can't revisit his past, he has to live with what he's done. I was a little embarrassed that so many children went to see a film with such a character as a hero! I don't think I made a really weird film, but I do quite strongly feel that this film appeals most to middle-aged males.

... with appeal for older females, because she is in the same position – she can't go back and undo the past. Many people feel that Marco becomes human again at the end of *Porco Rosso*, and he and Gina get together, but others feel they never see each other again. Who's right?

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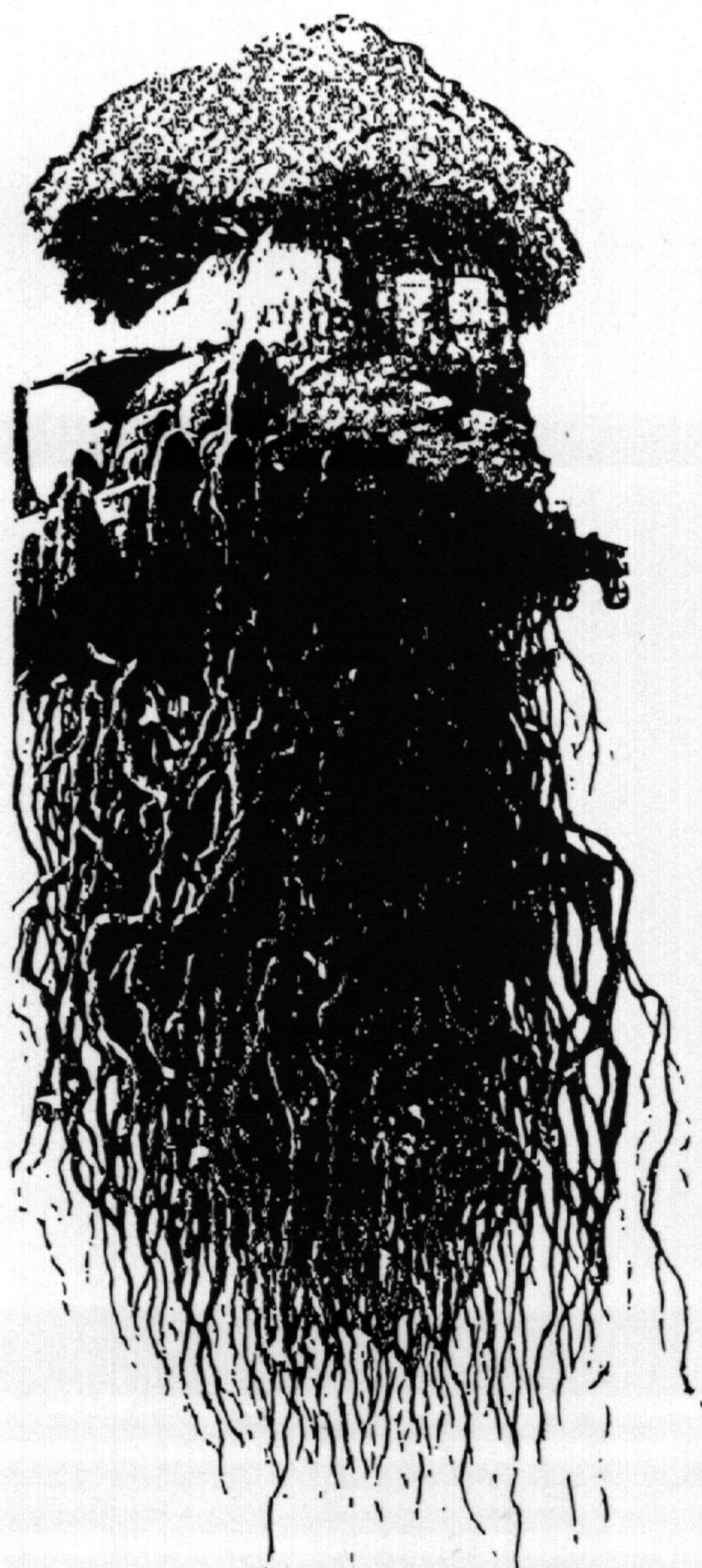


Even though he's young and attractive, Ashitaka in *Princess Mononoke* is like Marco in many ways. He starts out on his journey without a lot of hope and has to rediscover a way to live a meaningful life.

Ashitaka has great courage, represented by his scar. He'll never completely be rid of the scar, there's always the possibility that it will appear again. The dangers he's been through are always with him. And if he loses his scar he'll no longer be Ashitaka. People are made up of their experiences, the good and the bad, and have to strive to keep them in balance. Everyone has to carry their scars. Ashitaka represents the children of today.

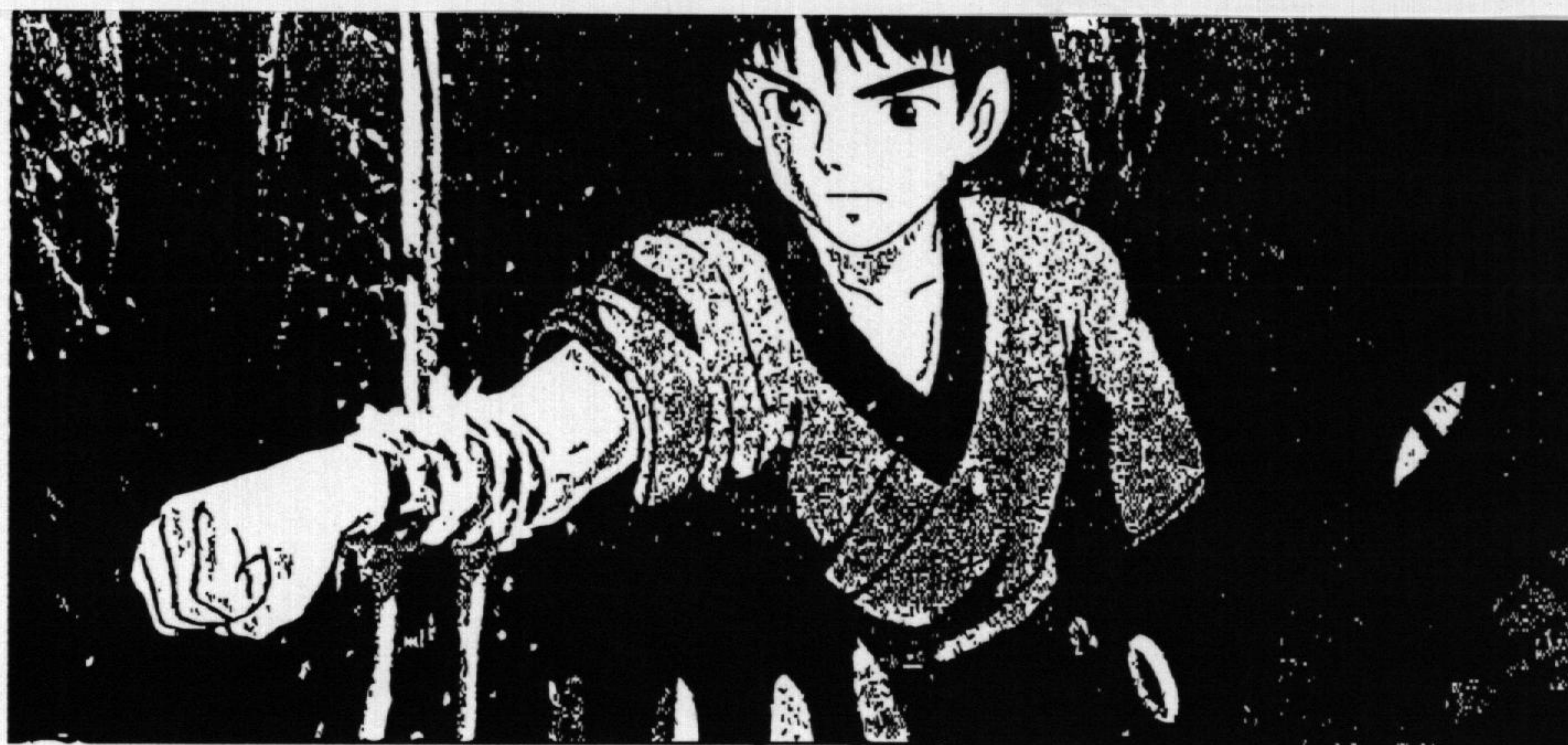
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Below: and trees
might fly



Top right: Ashitaka – the wound that will not heal. Right: Lady Eboshi & her men.

Princess Mononoke © 1997
Miyazaki/Nibariki/Tokuma
Shoten.



It's not just a metaphysical thing ~ it's really important that the scar be seen as a *physical* threat that's always there. From less dangerous conditions like eczema to huge threats like AIDS, people need to be aware of the possibility of physical demise. The scar is what makes Ashitaka a contemporary person. People today are marked by all kinds of threats and problems

and dangers. Ideal figures like saints aren't real because they're unmarked by life. In a way, the scar represents original sin.

"Original sin" is an interesting phrase, since *Princess Mononoke* is a film about people losing their need for their gods. The animal gods in the film diminish in size as well as importance, and people lose respect for their gods to the extent that they'll consider cutting off their heads for money. The film reflects the loss of faith, the loss of ground of many churches throughout the world.

In that context, Lady Eboshi represents the civilised, modern person because she doesn't try to get salvation from anything. She doesn't need a god. She's probably deeply hurt by life, but she still doesn't look for a god or gods to give her soul relief.

From some points of view, modern mankind might be interpreted as a new kind of demon in his attitude towards nature. I remember reading a Victorian book which featured a demon who was very sophisticated, civilised, intelligent and good company. He invited a group of people to a party at an inn, made sure they all had a good time, then during the night he stole their souls. People today treat nature in the same way. Lady Eboshi behaves this way towards nature – she uses it for her own ends, even if that destroys it. She's a very contemporary character.

Looking to the future, now you've started work on your next film, can you tell us anything about it?

I'm still waiting for the idea to take final shape. It's like a jigsaw puzzle – right now I have three pieces from here and here and here, but I still have to find the other pieces! [spreading his hands far apart and laughing]

The clock has chimed four: some time ago, and outside it is almost dusk. Miyazaki waves me off at the door, and as I walk away, I hear something in the garden. The plot on which Buta-ya now stands had been vacant for many years – the previous owner refused to sell unless the buyer agreed to preserve the huge tree that stands on the premises.

Miyazaki was the only person prepared to give that commitment, and now the tree still stands at the rear of Buta-ya like a sentinel and a sanctuary. A bird is singing loudly in the branches, and I wonder if it was the same one I saw Japan's greatest director nursing so carefully that afternoon. If Miyazaki has his way, we would all of us care for others with such kindness, and not one sparrow would fall without us taking notice.

As long as Miyazaki is making films, some small part of that sincerity and compassion will always shine through – in the children of all ages who love his creations, all around the world. ●

Thanks to Steve Alpert, Haruyo Moriyoshi and Taisan of Studio Ghibli for their kind assistance. The Art of Princess Mononoke will be published by Hyperion later this year. My Neighbour Totoro and Kiki's Delivery Service are available on video in the US. Laputa: The Castle in the Sky and Princess Mononoke will be released later in the year.