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## The Fictional World Of Makoto Shinkai: Study Of Progressive Postmodern Trend

**Chumdemo Tungoe**

Research Scholar

**Dr. R Vasanthan**

Associate Professor

**Nathanael Ayeh**

Research Scholar

Department of English

Institution: Nagaland University

State: Nagaland

Country: India

**Abstract:** Makoto Shinkai is a Japanese writer, animator and director who has produced several renowned work of animation. Shinkai's films are known for its blend between reality and fantasy elements. He often incorporates fictional elements with reality to add layers of intrigue and complexity to the narrative. The adaptations produced by Shinkai have often left the audience speechless and star gazed. The objective of this paper is to study the works of Makoto Shinkai through the lens of post modernism, analyze the technique of adaptation to compare how it has evolved over the years and how his works blends with the era of post modernism. This work was analyzed from the perspective of use of history, intertextuality, pastiche, subversion of facts of information and open endedness. This study will also compare the works of Makoto Shinkai to other contemporaries to see how his style of modern adaptation sets him apart from other animators and directors. Lastly the study will follow a qualitative approach to scrutinize Shinkai's work based on post modern elements.

**Keywords:** Post Modern, Fragmentation, Magic Realism, Hybridity, Pastiche.

## Introduction

The concept and topic of adaptation as evolved over the years. The term adaptation in film refers to the transformation of literary work such as novel, play or short story into a screen play or screenplay material that can be produced and filmed. It involves adapting the story, characters, setting and theme from the original source material to make a cohesive and visually compelling narrative suitable for cinema. Adaptation can be a challenging process as filmmakers must balance staying true to the original material and the medium of film while also creating a unique and compelling cinematic experience.

Regular adaptation refers to the conversion of written work into a film and television series through the use of cinematic equipments like settings, costumes, props, actors and other sound and VFX effects. However animated adaptation, on the other hand involves adapting a written work into an animated film or series, using various animation techniques such as 2D or 3D animation. Animated adaptation allows for greater creative freedom as it can depict the events of fantasy and magic realism in a grandeur way which is challenging and obscure in a real-life adaptation.

**Makoto Shinkai** (1973- ) is Japanese author, animator and screen writer known for his visually stunning animated films which revolve around the themes of isolation, solitude, love and human relationship. He is known for his animated works such *The Voice of a Distant Star*, *Children Who Chase Lost Voices*, *Your Name*, *Weathering with you*, and *5cm per second*. Shinkai's films are also known to reflect the problem of increasing solitude and isolation among the growing teenager in the current time due to the fast paced life. The theme of destruction is also highlighted throughout his film which becomes the conflict of the show. The destruction portrayed are the natural disaster such as earthquake, tsunami, volcanic eruption and landslide reflecting Japan's prone to natural disaster. These elements allow for a sense of realism in his fictional which helps to connect with the audience much efficiently.

## Theoretical Framework

**Alexander John Holmberg (2019)** *A Film Analysis of Makoto Shinkai's Garden of Words, 5cm per second and Your Name: Examining themes of Isolation, Missed connections and Passage of time* studied the use of cinematography and narrative in order to make an effective film. The research paper focuses on the technical aspect of filmography such as lighting, setting, and camera angles. The isolation that is discussed by Holmberg is the isolation of objects and characters in the setting of the film. It is purely a study of cinematic expression and its effect of longing and yearning among the audience through technical aspect of the movie.

**Kassandra Schreiber (2018)** “Sacred Time In The Works Of Makoto Shinkai” Kassandra Schreiber critically analyzes the two films of Makoto Shinkai: *5cm per Second* and *Your Name* from the perspective of time. It uses Eliade and Deleuze theory of time to analyze and explain the scenes and frames of the film. The thesis has also studied some realist aspect of the film by bringing out the details of the characters and the surroundings according to the passage of time depicting as sense of realism in the film. The current research paper will not discuss about the technical aspect but the ideas and themes that the director has set in his films. The literary devices, elements and works of postmodern features will be discussed.

**Yirui Chen (2024)** “An Analysis of Aesthetics in Makoto Shinkai’s Animated Film” analyzes the aspects of aesthetic consciousness rooted in Japanese culture. The paper explores the common aesthetic ideas presented and shown in the films of Makoto Shinkai. The paper also explores on the aesthetic ideas and elements such as regret love and distance. The research was analyzed on the Shinkai’s concept of “momo no aware” (the pathos of things).

**Umme Aiman (2023)** “Unveiling the Familiar: Exploring Makoto Shinkai’s Anime Art” also examines the concept of aesthetic and how it depicts the real world accurately. The study has been conducted extensively on the aspect of central art style rather than structure and characteristics of the work. The work dives deep into the artwork of Makoto Shinkai to study the aspect of aesthetics. This is also another study on the basis of aesthetics of art rather than literature.

## Significance of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to study and analyze the works of Makoto Shinkai through the perspective of literature and highlight the literary elements and devices used. In this study the aspect and elements of post modernism will be analyzed.

Majority of the studies and research conducted on Makoto Shinkai is being done towards the aspect of aesthetics and film theories. The present study will attempt to introduce the study of Makoto Shinkai’s work through perspective of literature.

## Research Questions

- i. Are there substantial studies conducted on Makoto Shinkai works in the light of literary creations?
- ii. What post modern technique dominates the works of Makoto Shinkai?
- iii. How significant are his creation from literary perspective?

## Research Objectives

- i. To study the works of Makoto Shinkai through Post Modern lens.
- ii. To trace and highlight the post modern elements present in his works.
- iii. To approach the works and analyze it from a literary perspective.
- iv. To bring out new dimension and perspective towards study of animation.

## Sample of Study

The following are the works that will be analyzed:

*5cm per Second, Garden of words, Your Name, Weathering with You, Children Who Chase Lost Voices*

## Findings

### A Tale Fragmented Narration

One of the key elements of narrative technique developed during the era of post modernism is the technique of fragmented narration. Fragmentation here refers to the narratives jumbled up which forces the readers to make sense by collecting and reorganizing the events of the story. The concept of fragmented narration has been carried all the way from modernism. This concept can be seen in the earliest of works of writers like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* where the entirety of the story is conveyed through narratives of Marlow or through parts of letters. There is no linear path way for the story and completely breaks the concept of normal story telling. The key difference between a modern and post modern narrative is that, modern narratives comes to an end while post modern narratives are chaotic, disruptive and don't stick to the a single meaning. While post modern form of narrative doesn't follow the concept of a single truth and gives multiple interpretation. This concept is shown clearly in the work of postmodern writer John Fowles *The French Lieutenant*, where the author presents us with three possible endings instead one.

This concept of fragmented is used and experimented by Makoto Shinkai in his work *5cm per Second*. The story deals with the lives of two childhood friends Akari and Takaki. As time passes both their lives takes different turn and approach. The film follows up their separation and growth from three different perspectives. Instead of a usual traditional approach of linear plot, Shinkai breaks down the film in three different interconnected segments namely "The Cherry Blossom", "The Cosmonaut" and "5cm per second". The three parts follows the different stages of the character's life which highlights the passage of time and its impact on their relationship.



**Figure:1 Breakdown of 5cm Per Second into three Sections**

For instance the first segment “The Cherry Blossom” deals with the childhood and young budding relationship of Akari and Takaki. This part shows the character’s early life in elementary school. It is also the separation of the two childhood friends due to the transfer of Akari’s father. This separation causes a drift in their relationship thus creating a sort of void in their lives. The second part of the film titled “Cosmonaut” is narrated through the perspective of Kanae, Akari’s childhood friend. This section deals with lives of Takaki and Kanae in high school. The section skips a significant part of their lives shifts to their teenage age years. The cosmonaut section deals with the insight thought of Kanae and her unrequited love. This section shows the diverse and complexity nature of human beings. Lastly the third part “5cm per second” sums up the entire live story of Akari and Takaki. The final scene shifts to the adulthood of both characters working and living out their individual lives. Akari is engaged while Takaki still lives on with the memory of Akari. This part depicts two completely different lives going on simultaneously at its own pace. Towards the end both characters move on with their own lives. Throughout the film we see a completely different approach to a traditional form of storytelling. Shinkai tells us the story in three different parts with three different time skips. He never delves into the specifics of the characters but tells his story through the fleeting as time. This perspective completely symbolizes the busy schedule of reality. It is through the fragmentation and passage of time that the audience can put the puzzle pieces of the story together and come to their own understanding of the story. This approach follows a more traditional narrative by cutting off significant section of the story and presenting it in the form of fragments. This type of narrative often leaves the audience to interpret the missing parts of the story.

Similarly another example of fragmented narration can be seen in the works of *Your Name* and *Weathering with You*. In the film *Your Name* (2016), we see another instance of fragmented story. The fate of the two protagonists Taki and Mitsuha remains completely unknown after their encounter in the last scene. It is only three years after with the release of *Weathering with You* (2019), that we see cameo of Taki and Mitsuha. It is through the movie and the light novel that audience finally comes to the conclusion that Taki and Mitsuha



got married, thus closing the story by giving it a happy ending. This ending is found only in the novel *Weathering with You* in the last chapter. It states:

*A lively family photo. Her grandson's wedding. (Weathering with You, Shinkai: 312)*

However this scene was omitted during the movie. It was a lost in transition from text to screen. Even though the start and the end of the story has been presented, the major section of the story has been skipped and left to the perspective to the audience. In the end it becomes the job of the audience to speculate and hypothesize the events that happened off screen. By following this procedure to storytelling, Shinkai breaks away from the concept of traditional work of art. Shinkai, in his works *5cm per Second* and *Your Name* moves away from the concept of single truth by giving the readers/audience conceive the story according to their own understanding. Shinkai doesn't bound the story to a single vacuum. Shinkai's story is not only fixed to pages and screens but transcends beyond by becoming a part of our daily lives.

### **The Hybrid Reality**

The term hybrid refers to the combination of two different things to create something new. Similarly hybridity in postmodernism refers to the blend of different culture, aspects, traditions, perspective, and artistic style to create a new form of art (Dana BĂDULESCU, *The Hybrids of Postmodernism*, 2014). Hybridity in post modernism is not a byproduct of modernism experimentation. Instead it challenges the concept of a single identity that modernism has presented. Modernism has often considered hybrid concepts as impure and rejected. However post modernism goes beyond this concept to recreate and reevaluate the notion of fixed identity and purity to create new form of art by defying the previous standards set by modernism.

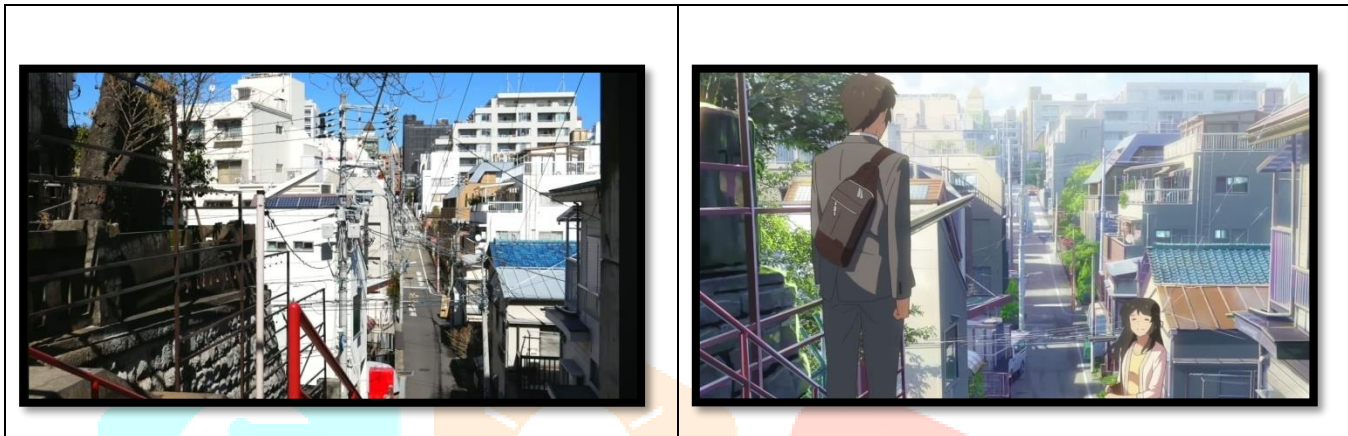
The concept of hybrid reality is presented throughout the works of Makoto Shinkai. One theme that recurs throughout the works of Makoto Shinkai is the concept of hybrid reality where the lines between reality and fiction are often blurred. This style of storytelling often serves as a metaphor for emotional and psychological state of mind that relates with the perception of reality with the audience.

The most prominent feature of Makoto Shinkai's adaptation is the visual aspect. Shinkai's adaptations are known its breath taking visuals. Though his works presents reality, fictional and fantastical elements, the main source of inspiration for Shinkai himself are the real life locations of Japan. According to fictional theory, a discipline that applies a form of reality to literature, explores, the relationship between the two different perceived world of fiction and reality. The main principle according to this theory denotes that that the relation between actual world and speculative fiction is complicated. Shinkai presents an element of reality in fiction and fiction in reality. In an interview with Crunchyroll, Shinkai stated that he likes to present forgotten real life settings in his works to breathe them a new life. This aspect gives a magical feeling to the ordinary locations and the sublimity to transport one into the magical realm. We see a lot of

real life locations of cities, countryside, stores, parks and other locations in his films. These elements of reality in a fantasy make the audience appreciate not only the movie but also the real life location.

Some of the real life location in Makoto Shinkai's films is as follows:

**Fig:1** *Your Name* (2016):



**Fig:2**

**Weathering with You**

**Odaiba Bridge**



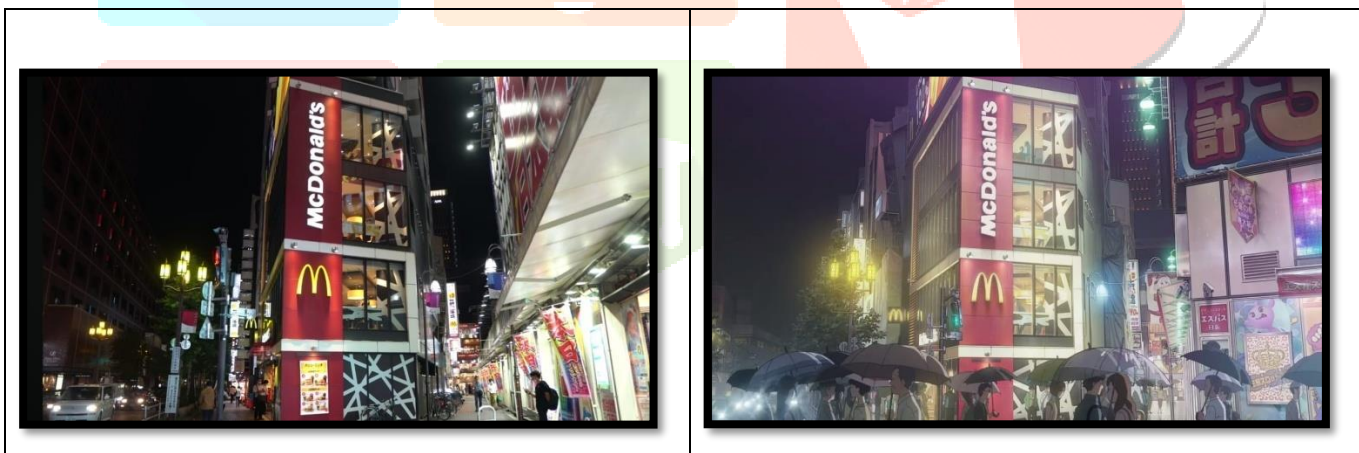
## Nozomi Slope

Fig:3



## MacDonalds. Seibu Shinjuku Station.

### *Garden of Words*





**Fig:4****Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden.****Garden of Words**

Through the images depicted, we can see that Makoto Shinkai uses real life location as inspiration and setting for his films. Most of his location revolves around real life places in Tokyo. Shinkai uses the art style of photorealism to make his art feel like a photographic image with element of reality. Unlike Hayao Miyazaki who fabricates the real life settings to give it a more fictional approach, Shinkai doesn't tamper with the real life settings. Thus Shinkai's and settings feel more realistic and lively as compared to that Miyazaki. The details presented in his art exactly mirrors to that of the real life location which has become Shinkai's trademark. The visuals not only capture the reality in fiction but give us a sense of reality in fiction. Shinkai goes beyond by capturing every single detail like grass, leaves, lights, rain and other elements to give it a photo realistic effect.

**Magic Realism**

Magic Realism is one of the key elements that originated during the era of post modernism. Magic Realism refers to the literary device/technique that incorporates reality with supernatural/fantastical elements without disrupting the narrative. Postmodernism is associated with dismantling the concept of fixed truth and idea. Magic realism seeks to disassemble this idea by blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction. The concept of magic realism in post modernism is often experimented with fragmented narration and non linear narrative. Salman Rushdie *Midnight's Children* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are the perfect example of post modern magic realism.

Though Makoto Shinkai's is known for portrayal of realism, yet plenty of magic realist elements can be observed throughout his works. Shinkai often presents an elements of supernatural, magical, mystical or time bending properties in his work. These magical elements are often used and treated as part of the story

without raising much concerns. We can see this example in works like *Your Name*, *Weathering with You*, *Suzume no Tojimari*, and *Children who Chase Lost Voices*.

For instance we see magical and supernatural moments like time travel, body swap and changing history and landscape in *Your Name*. In *Your Name*, the core concept of the movie relies on the ability of the two characters Taki and Mitsuha to swap bodies and experience each other's life. This magical/supernatural element is blended with everyday life of the characters. This concept is treated as the driving force of the plot and not something extraordinary. We also see the concept of time travel as Mitsuha travels back in time and forever changing the course of history. Similarly *Weathering with You* presents us with the character Hina's weather manipulating ability and makes sunshine appear. This supernatural ability is also not treated as an out of ordinary element, instead Shinkai weaves this magical moment with daily activities. The children use this ability to make profit by making sunshine appear during rainy days. Moreover Shinkai uses elements of magic realism to make Japanese folklore and mythology come to life. The mixing of the supernatural with the ordinary and mundane makes the story appear natural without crossing the boundaries.

## Results

After analyzing Shinkai's adaptation through the lens of Post modernism the paper has come to the following conclusion:

### i. Shinkai's Narrative

Makoto Shinkai's narrative technique follows that of a post modern approach. The basic concept of plot goes follows with exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. However postmodernism has broken concept of a linear story telling.

This approach is clearly as shown:

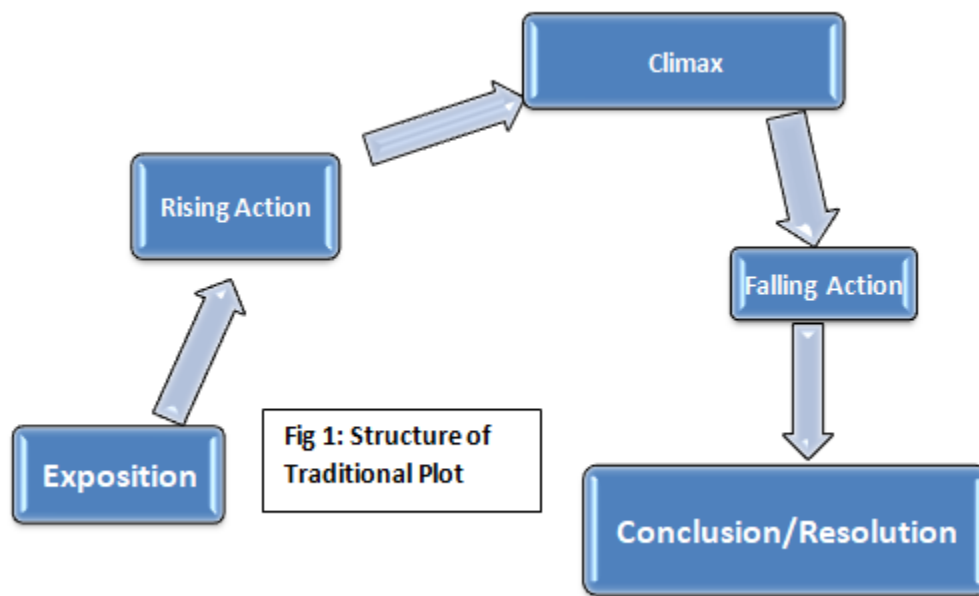
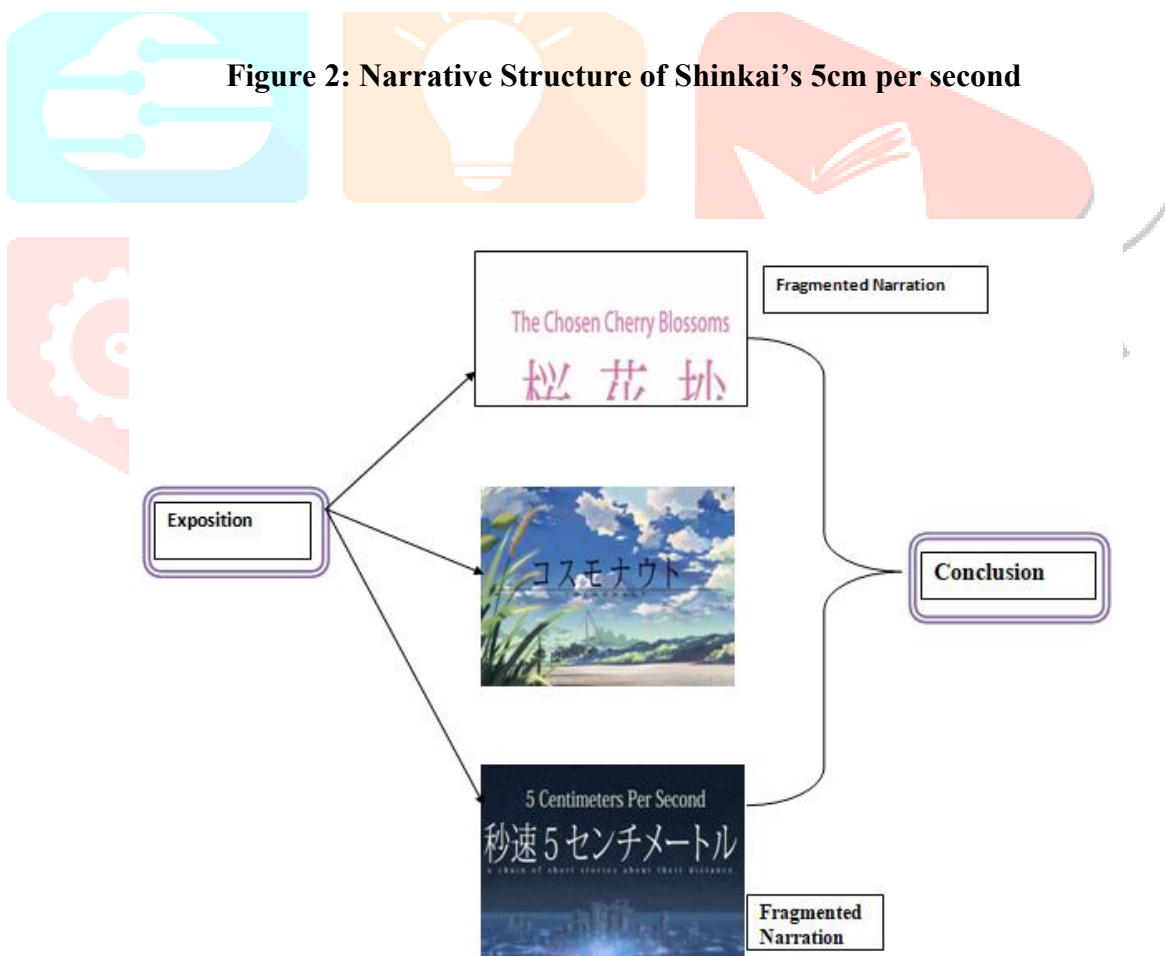
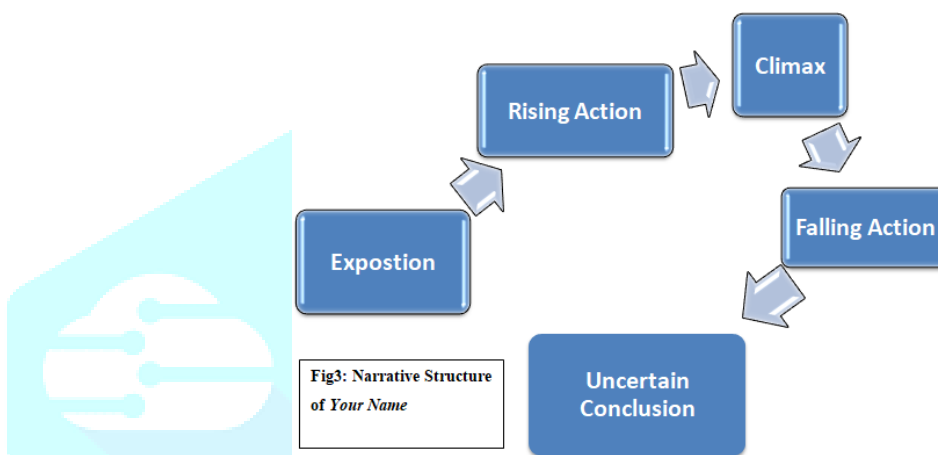


Figure 2: Narrative Structure of Shinkai's 5cm per second



In fig 2 of Shinkai narrative structure of *5cm per Second* we can see that the author has distributed his story into three different sections. This completely breaks down the traditional approach of plot and tells a story through assumptions, speculation and theories. The story starts with an exposition and later breaks down into three different stories with its own climax and falling action. The three fragmentation combines together to form a whole another story. However due to the breakdown of the story into multiple parts, certain sections of the story gets left behind or gets omitted. It is through the narrative that the readers speculate or hypothesize what happened and interpret the story according to their understanding.

**Figure 3: The Uncertain Conclusive Nature of Shinkai's Narrative**



Another post modern narrative technique of Makoto Shinkai is an uncertainty to his conclusion. In this narrative technique Shinkai follows the approach of a traditional story line; however he doesn't give a definite ending to his story. His works *Your Name* ends on a cliff hanger towards the end without a conclusion or giving an end. It is only three years later that in *Weathering with You* that we are confirmed about the fate of Taki who ended up marrying together. This type of narration often leaves the audience to interpret and speculate. This style often falls under the category of post modern where the idea of a single truth is rejected and it's upon the readers.

## ii. Reality in Fiction and Fiction in Reality

The second finding of this study was the use of post modern, hybrid reality in Shinkai's work. He uses the concept of reality in fiction as exactly as possible without much alteration and fabrication. Shinkai uses a lot of references from Tokyo city and areas of Japan for settings in throughout his works. There is also reference of places like Library, city centers, bridges, cafes, parks and other ordinary locations. Most of Shinkai's Locations are based on Tokyo city but there are also some secluded areas across Japan. The usage of real life location gives this ordinary location a sense of magic realism that can transport us into the magical real of fiction.

Some of the real locations in Tokyo shown in Shinkai's works are shown below:



Locations	Film
<p><b>National Art Center</b> (Roppongi, Minato City, Tokyo 106-8558)</p> 	<p><b>Your Name (2016)</b></p>
<p><b>Yotsuya Station</b> (Tokyo)</p> 	<p><i>Your Name (2016)</i></p>
<p><b>NTT Docomo (Yoyogi Building Tokyo)</b></p>	<p><i>Your Name (2016)</i></p>

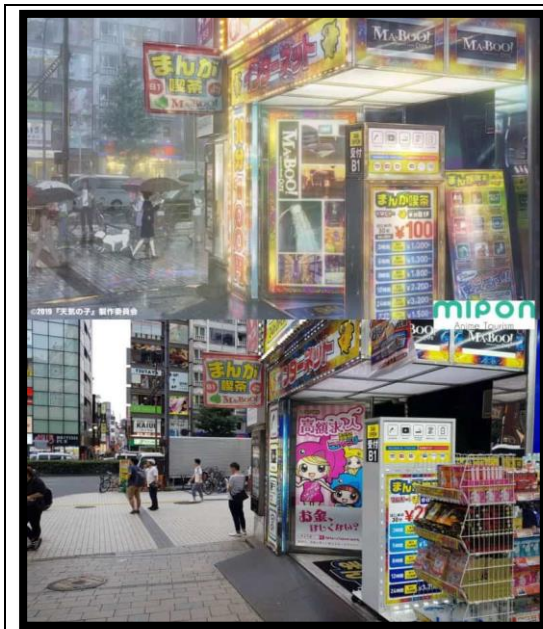


Stairs to Suga Shrine (Tokyo)



Manga Café (Tokyo, Shinjuku)

*Your Name (2016)**Weathering with You*



**Shinjuku O-Guard**  
**Tokyo**

*Weathering with You*



**Tabata Station**  
**(Tokyo)**

*Weathering with You*



National Park Shinjuku Imperial Garden

*Garden of Words*

YawatahamaStation

*Suzume no Tojimari*

(Chome-11-5 Edooka, Yawatahama, Ehime 796-0031, Japan)



### iii. Use of Pastiche

Shinkai's adaptation often includes a blend of genres from other work, culture and artistic influences. Pastiche is a blend of several influences to create a new form of art. These include elements like unreliable narrator, uncertain endings, experimentation with styles and other elements. Shinkai uses works of art and popular culture into his works. Shinkai's visual art is often inspired by Miyazaki's art but he gives it his own unique touch. There are also intertextual allusions from stories, folklores, classic novel and other form of art.

#### List of Pastiche in Shinkai's Work

Reference	Reference
Tohoku Earthquake (2011)	<i>Suzume no Tojimari</i>
Uzume (Japanese Mythology)	<i>Suzume no Tojimari</i>
Goddess Amaterasu (Japanese Mythology)	<i>Weathering with You</i>
The myth of Agartha	<i>Children who chase Lost Voices</i>
Tanaka Japanese Poetry (Manyoushu)	<i>Garden of Words</i>
Cameo to <i>Your Name</i> (2016)	<i>Weathering with You</i>
Reference to Ghibli films ( <i>Princess Mononoke</i> , <i>Castle in the Sky</i> )	<i>Children who chase Lost Voices</i>

## Conclusion

After studying and analyzing the research/study concluded with the following results:

### **I. Are there Substantial studies conducted on Makoto Shinkai's works in the light of literary creation?**

During this period of study and literature review, substantial works and study on Makoto Shinkai existed only in the field of film studies and aesthetics. There were no literary studies conducted on Shinkai's work.

### **II. What postmodern techniques dominated the works of Makoto Shinkai?**

Though Shinkai's work is not directly declared as a post modernist, we can see his adaptations make reference to work of art and literature which is a trademark of post modern story telling. All the post modern elements which have been used consciously or subconsciously by the author fall under the category of post modernism. The blend of several works, fragmentation, magic realism, openness and interpretation to art, no fixed truth or meaning, all come together to dominate Shinkai's works. The ability to challenge modern notions in art and culture gives his work a sense of uniqueness makes him a prominent post modern artist of the century.

### **III. How significant are his creation from literary perspective?**

Makoto Shinkai's creation are known for its blend with reality and fantasy elements. He often incorporates the concept of fiction with supernatural to add layers of intrigue and complexity to the narrative. Shinkai's films are also known to reflect the problem of increasing solitude and isolation among the growing teenager in the current time due to the fast paced life. The theme of destruction is also highlighted throughout his film which becomes the conflict of the show. The destruction portrayed are the natural disaster such as earthquake, tsunami, volcanic eruption and landslide reflecting Japan's prone to natural disaster. Shinkai's creation acts as visual poetry and art where literary figures such as metaphor and similes come to life. His creation is a blend between contemporary and classical works which adds more weight and quality like other literary works.

## Conflict of Interest

None

## Funding

No

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