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## Closing The Doors Of The Past And Welcoming The Present; Trauma In Makoto Shinkai's Suzume No Tojimari

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**Abstract:** This paper will analyze the portrayal of personal and collective trauma in Makoto Shinkai's anime Suzume no Tojimari. By employing the theory of trauma and Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious this paper will do a thorough study on the protagonist of the movie as well as the Japanese society. And look at how Shinkai seamlessly weaves Japanese myth with the narrative of the movie and deals with the theme of trauma and repressed emotions. Further, the paper will also explore how Shinkai makes his movie a therapy to heal himself and his audience.

**Keywords** – Trauma, Collective Unconscious, Repressed emotions, Japanese anime

Makoto Shinkai is a renowned Japanese animator, filmmaker, and director known for his visually stunning animated films. Some of his most famous works include "Your Name" (Kimi no Na wa) and "Weathering with You" (Tenki no Ko). Shinkai is celebrated for his storytelling, character development, and the breathtaking animation quality in his movies. His films often explore themes of love, connection, and the impact of nature on human lives. Critics consider Shinkai's style similar to that of Hayao Miyazaki. Makoto Shinkai's films consistently showcase his talent for weaving intricate emotions into stunningly detailed visuals, earning him a dedicated fan base and critical acclaim in the world of anime filmmaking. In Japan, animes are not just films but beyond that, it is a great part of the life of the people of Japan. Animes have played a major role in bringing the myth, legends, history, and Japanese way of life before the world. And one of the most integral elements in Shinkai's animes are Japanese myths and legends. The plot of the animes is subtly knitted together with the myths and legends of Japan. His movies explore human emotions and relationships in a beautiful manner. And portray the deep wounds left on Japanese society by environmental calamities. Nature is another main element in his movies. His movies often show the stark difference between metropolitan cities and rural countryside. And thereby symbolically discusses environmental issues. In Kimi No Nawa, Weathering with you and Suzume No Tojimari Shinkai deals with environmental issues in a very intellectual manner that blends with the plot of the movie. In almost all his movies we see an intermingling of nature and human lives.

Suzume no Tojimari, (Suzume's Locking Up) is a 2022 Japanese animated coming-of-age fantasy adventure film written and directed by Makoto Shinkai, produced by CoMix Wave Films, and distributed by Toho. The movie opens with a dream sequence, where we see a young child searching for her mother in a deserted grassland. The child stumbles upon a magical door and she opens it. And suddenly 17-year-old Suzume wakes up from her dream. The magical door has been visiting Suzume in her dreams for a long time. Suzume lives in a small village called Kyushu. We come to know that she lost her mother to the great East Japan earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011, and ever since then, she has been living with her aunt Tamaki. As Suzume rushes to her school one day she meets Sota, who is looking for a door in an abandoned place. Suzume tells him the way to the onsen ruins. When Sota leaves Suzume becomes curious about the door as well as Sota. And she goes to find the magical door. Suzume goes to the onsen ruins and sees a mystical door in the middle of the ruins. It looks completely strange, and she walks towards it and opens the door. And what she witnesses is a celestial sky-filled night sky and a grass hall. She enters through the door but she is unable to reach the magical world because she ends up on the other side of the door frame in the onsen. On the floor, she sees a weird stone statue and she picks it up but it turns into a mystical white cat. She is startled, and the cat runs away. Afraid and freaked out Suzume runs to school, leaving the door open. When she reaches her school, she looks out of the window of her classroom and sees smoke rising from the mountains. Panicked, she shows it to her friends, but they say they don't see anything. Suddenly warning alerts start to blare on everyone's cellphone. It is a warning of an earthquake. Meanwhile, Suzume is stupefied seeing the smoke turning into large pillars of smoke. Suzume hurried back to the area where she saw the door. By the time she reaches there, the smoke has taken the shape of a monster. She sees Sota trying to close the door and together with all their might they manage to close the door. Sota locks the door with a key chanting an incantation simultaneously. Sota gets injured and Suzume takes him to her house. And there they see the mystical white cat again. The cat starts to speak and turns Sota into a chair. Suzume tries to catch it, but it runs away. The two of them run behind the cat and unknowingly they board a ship heading to Ehime. And there begins Suzume and Sota's adventure to catch the cat. During their adventure, both are taken to several doors in different parts of the country by the mystical cat. Wherever the cat reaches the magical door opens and Suzume and Sota are forced to close it. Because only by closing the door they will be able to protect Japan from the forces that are unleashed within the doors.

Throughout their journey, they manage to close five doors. Amidst this journey, Sota is turned from a chair to a stone that protects Japan from earthquakes. Daijin (cat) was the stone meant to protect Japan from destruction, but he turned Sota into that stone. Suzume becomes devastated at seeing Sota turn into a stone. And she is willing to go to any extent to bring him back. For that, she has to return to her childhood home to find the final door. In the end Suzume understands that she was the one who started all this long before when she was just four. She opened the door for the first time searching for her mother. And she finds that she is the one who can put an end to this by closing the final door forever. When Suzume tries to become the stone herself, Daijin sacrifices himself to become the stone again. And Sota and Suzume return to the real world.

The plot of the movie is highly cryptic and symbolic. And it has layers of meaning. One of the most important themes of the movie is trauma. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or Catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled Repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena". For Caruth, the experiences of trauma are not accessible to us consciously. In the movie, each of the magical doors is a doorway to the past. The world inside the door represents the past repressed emotions. In the opening of the movie, we see the four-year-old Suzume opening the door of the past. The world within the door contains the memories of her deceased mother. In the dream sequence, we see the child self of Suzume walking through the grassland with a small chair in her hand. The chair is something close to her as it was made by her mother. It is the same chair that we see years after in Suzume's house and which Sota turns into. Throughout the movie we see that the chair is with her which shows her inability to move on from the death of her mother. We see Daijin turning Sota into that same chair and Suzume trying hard to change him into his former self. But we understand that it is the chair that Suzume really wants back because it is something that her mother gifted her. When Daijin turns Sota into a stone actually it is the chair that turns into the stone. Suzume becomes devastated when Sota turns into the stone but as we look closer, we come to know that at some point Suzume is heartbroken that she has lost the chair. Suzume is even ready to become the stone herself to help Sota. But in reality, Suzume is ready to sacrifice herself not for Sota but for her mother's love. As Suzume was growing up the trauma of her mother's death has been repressed deep inside her unconscious because she sees them in her dreams. The 17-year-old Suzume has recurrent dreams about her mother.

And this internal struggle may have forced her to again open the door in the Onsen. Suzume tries to enter the magical world, but she is unable to do so. And by this Shinkai is telling his audience that the past is always the past and it cannot be relived.

When Suzume opened the door, she had opened a portal to the past. Whenever a new door opens a monster-like smoke appears to engulf the entire place. The monster-like smoke and the earthquake that follows it alludes to the real-life earthquake that occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011. It was the day Suzume lost her mother. The monster-like smoke alludes to the personal trauma of Suzume. But in the movie, we see that the smoke not only affects Suzume but also the entire Japanese society. So, it symbolizes not only the personal trauma of Suzume but the collective trauma of the people of Japan. One way or the other the people of Japan were affected by the great earthquake. And it is here we can come up with the theory of Carl Jung i.e., the theory of unconscious. Carl Jung believed that human beings are connected to each other and their ancestors through a shared set of experiences. Hence, we can say that the smoke represents the Japanese people coming face to face with their collective unconscious. The inability of the people of Japan to get out of the traumatic past of the earthquake. And this traumatic past has been repressed in their unconscious mind. With Suzume opening the door Shinkai is pointing at the devastating effect of trauma on people. The movie thereby points out the importance of shutting down the traumatic past. Sota makes an incantation whenever locks up the door “We know that death is next to us. But still wish even if only for a year a day a moment more we want to live longer. Oh, the fierce great deity! Please! Please! I beg you” (0:12:30). These words show human beings urge to live is resonated through those words. And to live we must embrace the present and forgo the past.

According to an interview Shinkai did for the Berlin Film Festival, the Great Earthquake of 2011 changed his life (and the life of his compatriots) radically. He realized that he could no longer create entertainment for the sake of it, but his mission had to be to use his art to share that traumatic experience with the world, and perhaps find some meaning in it (Cacciatore). From these words of Shinkai, we come to know that this movie was an escape for him from the traumatic past. And through this film, he is not communicating just to the Japanese society but to him as well. At the end of the movie before returning to the real world with Sota, the 17-year-old Suzume meets her younger self lost in the grassland. All those years Suzume believed that the person whom her younger self met in her dream was her mother. But in end, she realizes that the person she used to see in her dream was herself. The grown-up Suzume looks at her younger self and gives the little the chair that her mother made. This scene is cryptic and complicated, but it conveys the act of letting go of the past. The chair symbolizes Suzume’s memories of her deceased mother, her grief, and her trauma. As she gives the chair to her younger self, she is relieving herself from her traumatic past. She realizes that all these years she has been chained by her past and it is time for her to live in the present. Thereby we can conclude that the film acts as a therapy that heals its audience and reminds them to close the doors of the past and accept the present.

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