Throughout the late 1970s, Mamoru Oshii worked in the anime industry, mainly drawing storyboards for various television series. After starting his career at Tatsunoko Productions, Oshii followed his mentor, Hisayuki Toriumi, to Studio Pierrot where he began to hone his skills at directing animation. While there, Oshii worked on a number of shows, most notably *Nils's Mysterious Journey*. An adaptation of a Swedish fairy tale, *Nils* is a tale of a young boy’s quest for identity that features geese as the boy’s traveling companions. It is noteworthy that Oshii was involved in a retelling of this tale at the beginning of his career; the story of Nils also has been cited as an early influence by Nobel Prize–winning Japanese author Kenzaburo Ōe. As Susan J. Napier states, “Just as the young Ōe would grow up to commingle the Western Other in both his art and his life, so Nils seems happier among the alien geese than with humans.” Perhaps, like Ōe, Oshii could see something of himself in Nils and his quest.

The relationship with an alien Other would be highlighted in a more comedic manner in the first major project of Oshii’s budding career. Oshii began work on the *Urusei Yatsura* television series in the early 1980s,
marking the first time he was able to exert creative control on the course of an entire series. The program ran from October 1981 to March 1986 for 218 episodes, of which Oshii was chief director of the first 106. Like many popular animated franchises, *Urusei Yatsura* began life as a manga series. First published in 1978 in the weekly manga magazine *Shōnen Sunday*, the manga became the first hit by artist Rumiko Takahashi. With future titles like *Maison Ikkoku*, *Ranma 1/2*, and *Inu Yasha*, Takahashi would go on to become one of the most popular (and wealthy) manga authors in Japan, not to mention the best-known female manga author. “*Urusei Yatsura* is a title I had been dreaming about since I was very young,” said Takahashi. “It really includes everything I ever wanted to do. I love science fiction because sci-fi has tremendous flexibility. I adopted the science fiction-style for the series because then I could write any way I wanted to.” Takahashi has cited her influences as ranging from American sources like *Spiderman* and *Archie* comics and the *Bewitched* television show, to the writings of Japanese novelist Yasutaka Tsutsui. Of Tsutsui’s novels, which have been called “metafiction” for the way in which they play with and conflate notions of what is real, Takahashi has said, “I’ve wished I could draw manga that was as absurd as that.” Oshii’s work on *Urusei Yatsura* continued this idea of playfully toying with reality. As chief director of the series, Oshii could influence the tone and mood of many episodes, although his unique artistic vision for the series eventually led to creative conflicts with Takahashi. “I had to struggle with the ideas and views of the original writer,” Oshii has said. “I only met with [Takahashi] a couple of times—there is no friendship between us.”

Oshii was able to become a director so quickly in his career due to a combination of talent and luck—his rise to the position of chief director of the *Urusei Yatsura* series was primarily because there were not enough qualified staff at the studio. Studio Pierrot’s president therefore ordered Oshii to direct the series. Oshii’s involvement with *Urusei Yatsura* also allowed him to develop some of his cinematic ideas and direct his first two full-length films, *Urusei Yatsura: Only You* (1983) and *Urusei Yatsura: Beautiful Dreamer* (1984). Although a light romantic comedy on the surface, the *Urusei Yatsura*