

Spirited Away

(Miyazaki, Japan, 2001)

Component 2: Global Film; Narrative, Representation & Film Style

Focus Area: Representation

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Sequence 1 - 'Opening Sequence' 0:00 – 00:06:10

Sequence 2 – Chihiro meets Haku/ enters the spirit world 00:10:48-00:15:11

Sequence 3 – Chihiro meets Kamaji / enters the Boiler Room 00:21:55 – 00:24:30

Sequence 4 – Chihiro at Zeniba's house with No Face 01:45:52 – 01:48:08

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting)

- High angle mid shot (MS) of Chihiro in the back of the car denoting her place within the family as a child/female.
- Camera movement changes as they enter the forest reflecting the importance of the setting and the change in narrative.
- Sequence One contains lots of establishing shots of a modern, Westernised and urban Japan that contrasts with establishing shots of the nostalgic bathhouse/spirit world later in the film. Low angle shots from within the car looking out, positioning the audience with Chihiro.
- Daylight signifies safety and the lowering sun and casting shadows and signifying danger. A traditional fantasy/horror trope.

Mise-en-Scène

- Mise-en-scène is deliberately grey (colour of cars, roads, buildings) drawing attention to the wires, retaining walls and other modern elements of urban life. This then contrasts with the distinctly green and natural colours that emerge as the family begin to lose their way.
- In sequence one the use of an Audi car, highlighting that Japanese culture has embraced European/Western products.

- The initial dress codes are gender neutral and western in nature, contrasting with the traditional Japanese clothes worn in the spirit world by Chihiro, Haku and others. Once Chihiro leaves the Bathhouse (for the train ride was Miyazaki's original ending; the remaining aiding the film's coda) she removes her Bathhouse uniform and returns to her original, androgynous and Western clothing.
- The buildings were designed to evoke nostalgia in the viewers and seems like a parody of the past (linking to her father's comments about it being a 'theme park').
- Red lighting throughout the newly emerged spirit world in sequence 2, signifying the danger.

Editing

- Slow pace to establish characters, narrative and setting.
- Continuity editing used to support the audience's understanding narrative and the strange world that the spirits inhabit.
- In contrast to the more familiar low-budget anime Miyazaki kept a higher frame rate (30fps) as opposed to the more commonly used 24fps.

Sound

- Soundtrack used to emphasise emotions of Chihiro (sadness at leaving her home) and danger (in the car and at the gates to the spirit world). Hisaishi's music reaches a crescendo as Chihiro's father has to stop to avoid crashing.
- Naturalism is created through the use of voice and sound effects. For example when Chihiro first encounters Kamaji in the Boiler Room. There is an array of diegetic sound effects to emphasise the industrial nature of the boiler room. For the 1st minute of the sequence there is no verbal content or dialogue, allowing the viewer to absorb the surreal visual elements alongside the familiar aural cues; Kamaji and his Susuwatari are fantastical creatures and yet the setting, and sound, naturalises them within the narrative. Students can first listen to the scene and discuss their visual expectations before watching the scene.

- The soundtrack often reassures the audience that, despite the grotesque or frightening nature of the characters that Chihiro is encountering, she is not in any serious danger. In sequence 4, we can hear the diegetic sounds of Zeniba spinning yarn and teaching No Face how to knit. In the background, the soothing tones of the soundtrack are heard; this is vital in reassuring the audience, as we see a brief medium shot of Chihiro sat apart from the busy group, curled up and in distress. She then joins the group, addressing Zeniba as 'Granny' but then outlining her fears of having failed (Haku and her parents being dead and her inability to remember anything). This narrative crisis could prove very worrying to the (young) audience, and so Hisaishi's soundtrack reassures through a calm and uplifting melody. The narrative then quickly reflects this (with the joyful return of Haku).

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

- The film is an example of 'shojo' – narratives in manga and anime that are told from the perspective of young female protagonists.
- Miyazaki was concerned about the impact of development on the environment and on the culture- the spirit world, although scary and unpredictable, teaches Chihiro and the audience that we need to look after the world around us and value our cultural heritage.

Historical

- Miyazaki is considered the 'godfather' of Japanese anime and co-founded Studio Ghibli in 1985.
- The film is the highest grossing film in Japanese history and won the 2003 Best Animation Oscar having been released through Walt Disney Studios outside of Japan.
- The distinctly 'hand-drawn' style of the film is in contrast to the standard CGI style favoured by Hollywood and the anime tradition draws on a range of influences from Japanese culture.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus - Representation

- Focus should be on **gender, ethnicity, age and different cultures**.
- Gender can be explored through Chihiro as the young female protagonist; her representation is

key to the film and we follow her journey from whining child to the heroine of the narrative.

- Gender can also be explored through Lin, a young female worker in the Bathhouse who supports Chihiro.
- Yubaba is an older female antagonist in charge of the Bathhouse and therefore an interesting representation of age and gender. Her twin sister, Zeniba, is her binary opposite in character and therefore worth looking at how she can alleviate the (young) audience's fears.
- Haku is the male counterpart to Chihiro and the 'helper' (Propp). Also explores the theme of environmentalism as he is a River Spirit who is victim to the vast development experienced in Japan.
- Boh (Yubaba's baby) can be read as a representation of how the younger generation are infantilised by parents/older generations.
- Chihiro's parents and No Face represent a criticism of (Japanese/ Western/ Global) consumerism and how their greed turns them into grotesque, mindless monsters (Parents = Pigs for slaughter).
- Representations of traditional Japanese culture are present throughout the spirit world and the film has a nostalgic element in regard to the simplicity of life in the Bathhouse.
- *Spirited Away* emphasises the importance of female resourcefulness, strength and independence through a narrative of a young girl who finds herself lost (p.18 spec.)