

https://dspace.org/

Animation as a medium of socio-cultural critique: thematic development in Hayao Miyazaki's Spirited Away (2001)

Stucki, Tracy

2014-07-25
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/15032

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

MA RESEARCH REPORT

Animation as a medium of socio-cultural critique

Thematic development in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001)

Name: Tracy Stucki

Student Number: 577433

University of the Witwatersrand

Degree: MA Animation, Digital Arts

Date of Submission: 20 June 2014

Supervisor: Pippa Tshabalala

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the content of this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment for the *Masters of Arts in the field of Digital Animation by Coursework and Research Report* in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signature: _____

Name: Tracy Stucki

Student Number: 577433

On the _____ day of _____ 2014.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION 5

CHAPTER 2 - BEHIND THE DRAWING BOARD: Chihiro's Journey and the Creative Mind Behind It 10

2.1. Film Summary 10

2.2. Film Context 13

2.2.1. Miyazaki 14

2.2.2. Storytelling 17

2.2.3. Inspiration, Influence and Intention 18

CHAPTER 3 - PREPARING THE TOOLS: Narrative Strategies of Literature, Animation and Film 28

3.1. Literary Devices: Themes & Motifs 28

3.2. Animation Strategies: Metamorphosis 30

3.3. Film Techniques 32

3.3.1. Mise-en-Scene 32

3.3.2. Spatial changes 37

3.3.3. Framing 39

CHAPTER 4 - ENTERING THE SPIRIT WORLD: Thematic development in *Spirited Away* 42

4.1. Water 43

4.1.1. Tears 43

4.1.2. Bathwater 47

4.1.3. Conclusion of Water Motif in *Spirited Away* 54

4.2. Food 54

4.2.1. Healing Foods 55

4.2.2. Excessive Foods 59

4.2.3. Nurturing Foods 63

4.2.4. Conclusion of Food Motif in *Spirited Away* 64

4.3. Space 66

4.3.1. Staircase & Bathhouse 66

4.3.2. Conclusion of Space Motif in *Spirited Away* 71

4.4. Name 72

4.4.1. Job Contract 72

4.4.2. Farewell Card 75

4.4.3. Kohaku River 76

4.4.4. Conclusion of Name Motif in *Spirited Away* 80

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION 81

Works Cited 85

List of Figures 89

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

It is argued by scholars such as Lev Manovich in his book *The Language of New Media* (2001) that the first manifestation of animation was established in the form of painted moving images during the course of the 1800s before the emergence of photographic live-action cinema at the end of the 19th century. Nonetheless, live-action films were to dominate the cinema space "for thirty years, from the marketing of newspaper chains in the twenties to the marketing of television in the fifties, cartoons were continuously given the short end" (Klein 1). Only with its digitalisation in the form of computer animation and special effects in the 1980s and 1990s has the medium started to be acknowledged for its endless possibilities (Manovich 300), which allow for more creative freedom and enable the visualisation of difficult or impossible states within live-action. With the recognition of its enormous potential, the medium is increasingly utilised in areas such as Visual Effects (VFX), Computer-generated Imagery (CGI) and motion capture and has therefore finally moved from the side lines into the centre of cinema, where it is gradually taking over live-action films and has become an integral part of modern digital cinema.

Animation has mainly been awarded this degree of recognition, however, due to its ability to add to live-action, what live-action struggles or fails to portray, because animation, unlike live-action, is not bound to photographic reality for its footage, for it can modify or even create new worlds from scratch (Manovich 300), which is a great asset in terms of narrative extension. It becomes problematic, however, as pointed out by Tokyo-based journalist Susan Bigelow, "when cinema foregrounds the creative process of special effects

[through animation] without delivering believable story content" (68), utilising abilities of animation to add to the spectacle rather than the meaning of productions.

Without a doubt, the medium is capable of portraying visual effects that can add to the spectacle of a live-action film, yet to reduce it to such a superficial level only does not do it justice and even in its standalone form with no live-action input, there is room for further experimentation. As the diverse forms of animation, such as hand-drawn, clay and computer animation, its various approaches in different countries such as France, Japan, Croatia, England and USA to name some of the most known as well as its usages in live-action works have illustrated, the boundaries of the medium have not been reached and possibly only a small fraction of it is in use today. With the development of the animation medium, it is essential to rethink the meaning and role of it in its standalone form and in its application in live-action films.

While the technical and creative means of animation have been explored to quite an extent, it is especially the narrative side of it that needs further examination. Now that animation's status in digital cinema and its capacities for live-action in terms of visual effects have been acknowledged, it is necessary to investigate how the medium can further enhance the value of cinema through its narrative abilities. Spectacle has long since been an integral part of cinema and before that of theatre, but without supporting a strong story, it remains an entertaining, short-lived and impersonal experience. Animation, however, can create narratives of entertaining quality while being personal, emotional and educational at the same time. This is achieved through many means, yet in this paper, the focus will lay on how the medium can tell an entertaining and captivating story while allowing for the interpretation of different underlying meanings through thematic development.

A closer look at the capacities of animation highlights its narrative potential. This firstly leads us to the concept of realism and how it can limit narrative choices. At this point, animation has attained a level of realism that is nearly equal to live-action, in fact “it is now possible to generate photorealistic scenes entirely on a computer using 3-D computer animation” (Manovich 295) and the medium has long since strived to imitate the dominant form of live-action. In the process, it is often forgotten that animation can do so much more than depict reality. It can actually go beyond and portray close to anything that can be imagined by the human mind, but not captured on screen with a film camera. This vastly extends the narrative possibilities of film and with it the roles it can play.

A suitable illustration hereof is Japanese animation, largely known as *anime*, which offers a significant alternative to the more familiar style of American mainstream animation, which is still mostly regarded as an entertainment medium for children. Anime manages to engage child and adult as well as male and female audiences alike (Price 155); it offers a wide spectrum of genres and themes as well as a diversity, originality and depth of narrative that differs to Western animation (Price 167).

Japanese animation director Hayao Miyazaki acts as an excellent model hereof, because he is not only one of the most prosperous foreign animation directors, who create successful 2D films in a time when 3D animation is dominant, but for this study most importantly he uses strengths of animation such as detailed art work, metamorphosis, and imaginary elements to tell entertaining stories to children while increasing the depth and meaning of these stories through thematic development. These themes can carry educational, critical and other sub-meanings, conveying deeper messages to child audiences, while increasing the appeal for adult viewers as well.

Miyazaki's animated film *Spirited Away* in particular is a well-executed piece for several reasons. It was produced in 2001, the year that the Academy Award for the Best Animation Feature Film was introduced and the first winner was computer animated film *Shrek*. The following year *Spirited Away* won the award. It would be the first and last 2D film to win the Oscar up until now, with the exception of stop-frame animated film *Wallace & Gromit in The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* in 2005.Furthermore, while being one of Miyazaki's most Japanese-oriented and socio-culturally critical films, it had greater international success than any of his previous productions. As it stems purely from Miyazaki's own imagination with no literary basis like some of his other films, it illustrates superbly how subtle narrative strategies can be used effectively to create an appealing story with contemporary meaning through animation, because "Miyazaki still privileges storytelling over digital tricks to transport the viewer to that other world of imagination" (Bigelow 68). Therefore, his work serves as a successful alternative to mainstream animation and digital uses of the medium, leading the way to narrative and artistic corners of animation unseen before.

The aim of this study therefore is to analyse how Miyazaki offers socio-cultural critique through thematic development in his film *Spirited Away* as an example of how abilities of animation can be used for the enhancement of narrative, and not only spectacle, in future uses of the medium.

In order to explore how exactly he proceeds to do so, this thesis will firstly outline the film's content and background beginning with a brief but detailed summary of *Spirited Away* and followed by an investigation of the film's context, which gives an insight into the status and values of Miyazaki as an animation director, the story development process at his studio, common elements of his films also found in *Spirited Away* as well as the value of his

productions for the animation industry. Secondly, in order to establish the necessary tools for an analysis, definitions of important terms like themes, motifs and metamorphosis and the description of useful film techniques, such as mise-en-scene, spatial changes and framing will follow. Thirdly, it will be examined how the selected motifs of water, food, space and name as well as their respective sub motifs evoke certain themes and most importantly how that links to the main theme of cultural recovery, through which Miyazaki exerts socio-cultural critique.

CHAPTER 2 - BEHIND THE DRAWING BOARD:

CHIHIRO'S JOURNEY AND THE CREATIVE MIND BEHIND IT

An exploration of the film can only happen once there is an understanding of the film's content and the creator behind it. In order to do this, we must first examine a brief but detailed summary of the film and then move into an inspection of animation director Hayao Miyazaki and his studio.

2.1. Film Summary

While moving to a new home, whiny and spoilt 10-year old Chihiro and her parents take the wrong turn-off with their car and end up in a forest in front of a mysterious tunnel. Against her protests, Chihiro's parents enter the scary-looking tunnel and on the other end, they discover that they are in one of the abandoned theme parks that were built in the early 1990s, but went bankrupt during the bubble period when the economy in Japan had a breakdown. Following a delicious smell, Chihiro's parents find an open restaurant in a deserted street, with an enticing selection of huge platters full of food. Her parents decide to start eating with the intention of paying the bill when the restaurant owners return, but Chihiro refuses to join them and goes on by herself to explore her surroundings. Upon her arrival at a bridge in front of a bathhouse, a mysterious boy suddenly appears and urges her

to leave the theme park before it gets dark. Running to fetch her parents, she discovers in horror that during her absence her parents have turned into pigs and in despair she runs back down the street, which is now filled with floating black spirits. She is prevented from going any further, however, with the sudden emergence of a river, which she runs into in the darkness. Starting to get desperate, Chihiro realises that she is slowly dissolving, but is helped by the appearance of the stranger from earlier, who feeds her a red magical berry that turns her solid again. The boy is called Haku and he instructs her to find a job at the bathhouse, which as he says, is the only way for her to save her parents and herself. With the help of Kamaji, the boiler man and Lin, one of the staff, Chihiro manages to get to the top floor of the building, where she meets Yubaba, the witch in charge of the bathhouse. Although she is shaking of fear and insecurity, she continuously insists on getting a job, as Haku had advised her. She finally manages to convince Yubaba, who takes her name from her, by letting her sign a job contract and renames her Sen, which is her way of taking control of people. Early next morning Haku leads Chihiro to the pigsty for her to see her parents. The encounter shakes her emotionally and Haku hands her back her clothes with a farewell card from her friends to remind her of her real name, otherwise she would be lost in the spirit world forever, just as he is. He also hands her some rice balls to comfort her and she breaks down in tears. Back at the bathhouse, Chihiro spends the rest of the day learning how to do her job and is confronted with a number of challenges, which teach her Japanese values and let her mature. Finally, she receives the great task of taking care of a revolting ‘stink god’. Although clumsily at first, she does brilliantly and even discovers a thorn in the spirit’s side, after which the entire staff, on Yubaba’s instruction, help to pull it out and discover that it actually is a bicycle handle followed by a huge pile of litter. The stink god, who turns out to be a river spirit, rewards Chihiro with a magic dumpling.

The next morning, there is a state of excitement in the bathhouse. A new customer called No-Face is handing out gold in abundance in exchange for food. Chihiro shows no interest and decides to look for Haku instead. She finds him flying in the sky in his dragon form followed by hundreds of tiny white paper figures. Once she discovers that he is hurt, she follows him to the top floor, where she saw him disappear to. In a brave attempt to help him, she makes her way up the bathhouse walls on pipes and ladders, where she finds him unconscious on the floor in Yubaba's office still in his dragon form. One of the paper figures, which had followed Chihiro turns into Yubaba's good-natured twin sister Zeniba and she demands her golden seal back, which Haku supposedly stole from her. Before she can do anything to retrieve it back from him, dragon Haku and Chihiro manage to escape by dropping down a big shaft in Yubaba's office, which eventually leads them into the boiler room. Chihiro feeds him half of her magic dumpling, which causes him to spit out Zeniba's golden seal and a black slug, which Yubaba had placed in him in order to control him. Haku returns to his human form, but is seriously weakened and needs to rest. When Chihiro expresses her desire to Kamaji of returning Zeniba's seal to her and apologising on behalf of Haku for having stolen it, he gives her his train tickets, which he had been saving up for 40 years, for her to go to Zeniba's house. In the meantime, No-Face has literally turned into an untameable gluttonous monster and Chihiro, having gained in confidence and authority through all her experiences in the bathhouse, is the only one capable of dealing with him. She feeds him the other half of her dumpling, which makes him take out all the food and people he has gobbled up, while she lures him out of the bathhouse to the train station. Together they take the ride to Zeniba's house and the nice witch advises Chihiro that in order to help her parents and Haku, she should use her memory of them. She also gives her a magic hairband to protect her. Haku arrives outside Zeniba's house in his dragon form,

having recovered and awoken from his black-out. On their way back while Chihiro sits on Haku's back holding his horns, she manages to free him of his bond with Yubaba and save him from being lost in the spirit world by remembering his real name, which is the Kohaku River. His dragon scales blow away in the wind as he is transformed back to a boy for good. Arriving at the bathhouse, Yubaba gives Chihiro the final test of identifying her parents among a group of pigs, which she passes without hesitation, reflecting that her character development is completed and her job contract dissolves in Yubaba's hands. Haku bids farewell to Chihiro and shows her the way back to her parents, who are waiting for her in their human form close to the tunnel that they entered with. Although Chihiro seems her old whiny self again after crossing the tunnel and it seems like she might not remember her adventure, she does give the tunnel a long and intense look and upon turning her head to return to the car, the hairband she had been given by Zeniba lights up in the sun.

2.2. Film Context

With an understanding of the film's content, we can now move on to an examination of the film's context. It is crucial to gain a brief insight into the rise and current status of animation director Hayao Miyazaki, his studio's film-making process and the value-system that informs his works. Furthermore, a short comparison of *Spirited Away*'s message and characters with previous productions cannot be avoided while looking at the inspiration, influences and intentions for this film in particular. Finally, the reception of the film in Japan and worldwide will be considered and the meaning of it for the animation industry discussed.

2.2.1. Miyazaki

In the last two decades, Hayao Miyazaki has grown to be one of Japan's most well-known animation directors producing one box-office record after another in Japan and many of his works have been acknowledged with both national and international awards. Having started off as an in-between artist at Tōei Dōga Studios, Miyazaki's talent was soon discovered by Isao Takahata, a young director at the studio. It is not a secret that "Miyazaki's rise was due to Takahata's appreciation of his animating skills" (Hu 109). After many years of working closely together, they resigned from Tōei and eventually realised their dreams of creating "films as good as Walt Disney's animated films and other influential works" (Hu 108) and founded Studio Ghibli in 1985.

The Walt Disney Animation Studio had an influence on early Japanese animators including Miyazaki and Takahata, hence "the beginnings of Studio Ghibli were rooted in a classic style of animation" (Hu 118). Following the classic tradition, but incorporating their own visions and styles in their films, Miyazaki and Takahata were increasingly successful and today, "Studio Ghibli is the most important animation studio in Japan, occupying a position roughly equivalent to that of Disney, and Miyazaki is the best-known animator in Japan today. Although he bristles when described as the Walt Disney of Japan and the studios have in certain respects different agendas, they also share many similarities that cannot be ignored" (Napier, "Confronting Master Narratives" 471). With regards to their "agendas", as anime scholar Susan J. Napier points out, which is essential to the argument presented here, the two studios are indeed worlds apart. It is Studio Ghibli's return to storytelling and inherent capacities of the medium of animation that greatly deviates from the norm of American mainstream animation with its focus on technical innovation and the use of risk-

free story formulas. This is what makes Ghibli's films so unique, because they are richer and more complex in visual and narrative terms. Noy Thrupkaew summarises the differences between Ghibli and Disney in the following words:

> And although Disney is behind the U.S. release of his [Miyazaki's] latest film, there's little the two have in common save their popularity and the ubiquity of their marketing. For one thing, Miyazaki is idiosyncratic, fond of non-linear plotting and visual flights of fancy. And where the Mouse House has a tendency to swap sweetness for saccharine, to simplify the tangled and to lighten the dark, Miyazaki rarely indulges in such tendencies. (32)

Instead, the animation director likes to show it as is or as it would be if it was real. Even if his stories are imaginary, they are realistic and never idealistic like its American counterpart. Therefore "the visual components of any Miyazaki and Takahata feature film (except *My Neighbors the Yamadas* [2000]) are often photo-realist, and are fluid and natural in movements" (Hu 119). For them, "it is realism that has become a major, if not primordial, ideological backbone of their animation aspirations" (119), observing reality closely and portraying it to the best possible extent in their films. It is consequently not surprising that "the constant desire and struggle to portray reality, often at all costs, are reflected in their storytelling process, especially in the thematic contents and technical expressions" (119), which means that through their accuracy in depicting real-looking details and movements, they are able to address universal themes and issues that affect us as humans in their stories even within a partly fantastic setup.

Mixing real and fantastic elements is particularly characteristic of Miyazaki's work, which "makes them able to exist comfortably inside a larger realm that could legitimately

include our own universe as well. … This heightens the fantasy world's 'believability.' The viewer finds in each film a topography that is exotic … but at the same time so richly realized down to minute details that it seems at least potentially contiguous to our own world" (Napier, "Akira" 152-3). These minor details therefore make a major difference in terms of viewing experience as the audience is able to connect with the characters on a deeper level for they can identify with and imagine themselves in these realistic-looking detailed setups, which make up a great deal of the appeal of Miyazaki's films.

Possibly no other studio in Japan or the rest of the world pays such meticulous attention to detail and utilises that to convey cultural and social messages. This is one of the reasons why "Miyazaki also differentiates his work and that of his studio (Studio Ghibli) from anime, insisting that his works are *manga-eiga* or manga films. Manga films are not adaptations of manga but feature-length animated films, largely geared to children or general audiences" for he disapproves of some of the more common practices of anime production, which is why "he's publicly rejected what he sees as the genre's nihilistic violence, and instead combines a love of Japanese folk tales with an environmentalist message" (Lamarre 42; Thrupkaew 32). In this way, he has managed to still produce successful classic 2D hand-drawn films in an era where digital 3D computer animation has closed down most classic studios and "Studio Ghibli is probably the only classic animation studio in the world today" (Hu 118), at least of this size and with this amount of success.

2.2.2. Storytelling

So the question is how does Miyazaki do it? He runs one of the biggest animation studios in the world utilising 'outdated' hand-drawn animation to produce often unconventional, alternative and critical films and does so in a very successful manner. This section will hence explore the studio's story process and Miyazaki's work ethics further in order to gain an understanding of how he builds his stories and interweaves them with underlying messages as this is of importance to the argument presented in this paper.

Miyazaki's way of creating stories varies quite drastically to the American model, because "rather than a scripted storyline**,** Miyazaki starts with images**,** which he then visualizes in storyboards. The story unfolds while he is drawing it, and production begins while he is still in the midst of drawing" (Bigelow 68) and he himself draws all the storyboards for the entire film. He states however, as mentioned by Bigelow, that there is no fully-fledged plan on how things will happen in the film, so they just work on it and see where it leads them (68), which is an interesting approach, but hard to grasp for Western studios that plan out everything carefully in advance. When asked "what order or method he adheres to if the ending is not known in advance, he replied that there is an internal order that the story itself demands as it leads him to the conclusion: … 'It's not me who makes the film. The film makes itself and I have no choice but to follow' " (Bigelow 69), which is essentially why he is called "a master storyteller, a master at allowing the story to tell itself" (Harris 66). This is a very risky way of making a film, as Miyazaki admits himself, but even more so it is a rare skill that permits for a great deal of freedom and changes along the way and enables him to construct his stories in a way that allows the viewers to get involved. His desire to encourage his audience to participate stems from one of his main concerns that

people are becoming more passive and are not critical of certain states, which is why he confronts them with social and cultural issues through deeper messages in his films.

For him and Takahata, animation is "more than a medium for children or a commercial form of entertainment" (Hu 124) because "what distinguishes them [Miyazaki and Takahata] from other animation industry personnel is their constant self-regards of themselves as 'social and cultural filmmakers.' Their films are not only for entertainment, but also carry personal, artistic and socio-political messages" (Hu 123). They see it as their creative duty "that in making anime they hope to entertain and educate the public at the same time" (Hu 126). Miyazaki feels very strongly about this, as he states in an interview that "if you disregard the task of being able to recover the future life of the girl in front of you, then the work becomes hollow. If you have to decide which is more important, that is more important, and without that, I think there is no basis for making movies (Miyazaki, 2002: 223)" (Bigelow 69-70). This is a very strong statement, which illuminates his motivation for making films and explains the subtle criticism and guidance that flow into his stories. It further illustrates what makes his films so unique and why he is often called "an original, a modern-day mythmaker" (Thrupkaew 32).

2.2.3. Inspiration, Influence and Intention

Having gained a general insight into the filmmaking process and viewpoint of Miyazaki, the study will proceed into applying this understanding to interpret *Spirited Away* in particular. It will explore different aspects that are of importance to Miyazaki's productions and to this film especially, such as the influence of Western and Japanese cultural elements, feminism, fantasy and children. It needs to be explained, at this point,

that Takahata and Miyazaki are running Studio Ghibli in a joint effort, but they mainly work on separate projects, which is why only Miyazaki is mentioned in connection with *Spirited Away.*

Starting with the character of Chihiro, we will investigate how she exemplifies the content and meaning of this film and what makes her different to Miyazaki's other female protagonists. Most of Miyazaki's works make use of female lead characters, which is not unconventional "but their active independence is unusual for most fairy tales, particularly in Japan, where active protagonists are almost exclusively male" (Napier, "Akira" 155). His reason for creating such strong female characters is because "his use of the feminine discourse is a way of subverting established patriarchal agendas both in the practice of filmmaking and the art of storytelling" (Wells, "Hayao Miyazaki"23). Miyazaki is generally fond of questioning conventional thought and fixed gender roles are among that. As he states himself: "The reason I present the hero as a girl is probably because society traditionally accords control to man, in Japan and in the rest of the world. We've reached a time when this male-oriented way of thinking is reaching a limit. The girl or woman has more flexibility. This is why a female point of view fits the current times" (23), which is an astonishing opinion from a man from an older generation and traditions.

Therefore also in *Spirited Away* "the task of recovery falls on the shoulders of a young girl**.** In this case however, Chihiro initially seems a less than heroic character**.** In fact, her self-absorption, nerves, and fears make her seem far more 'real' than most of the female characters in previous Miyazaki films. But this only makes her journey toward maturity all the more interesting" (Napier, "Akira" 183) and more tangible for girls of similar age. This was the initial thought behind making this film, for as Miyazaki stated "he deliberately made *Spirited Away* in order to provide some useful lessons to a few ten-year-old girls of his

acquaintance" (Napier, "Akira" 180), which explains not only where Miyazaki's inspiration for the character of Chihiro came from, but also his motivation in trying to fill an educational gap because, as Bigelow states, he noticed that there were hardly any productions geared at that age group with meaningful content and characters (69). So Miyazaki's conscious decision for this film was that unlike most of his previous heroines, he wanted to create an average human girl with no special powers but with the abilities that we all share as humans, for he states that "'I wanted to be able to tell those kids … without being born beautiful or with talent or as the daughter of a tribal chief or being able to fly in the sky, everybody has that sort of power' (p. 223)" (Bigelow 72) and he clearly demonstrates this human power in the internal metamorphosis of Chihiro, who turns from a whiny girl into a confident young lady. In portraying her struggles and rewards, Miyazaki attempts to create an oppositional example for modern young people who he believes are becoming lazier to help and work and more indifferent to the happenings around them (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 288). Once they understand their power, as Chihiro does during the course of the film, they will realise that they are capable to reverse the course older generations have taken, so that "the young Japanese of Chihiro's generation will find themselves making up for their parent's excesses, and will be spiritually tougher: more realistic, more sensitive, more responsible, and more self-reliant" (Harris 65). Miyazaki wants to empower and encourage the youth through his films and stories, because he is not only aware that it is the younger generations that can transform the future and make a difference (Bigelow 70), but he knows that "stories have an important role in forming human beings [and] he insists that one has to understand the direction of social change to be able to create stories that capture an era with the power to amaze and inspire (Miyazaki, 2002:45)" (Bigelow 70). It is evident with this project in particular that he wanted to reach young Japanese generations and empower them through

this story. Unlike his previous and following stories and heroines, this is a specifically Japanese story of an ordinary Japanese girl in modern Japanese times and surroundings: "The films before *Spirited Away* are set in the past, and fantastic events take place within the 'real' world of the film. Those films do not directly depict contemporary Japan; *Spirited Away* is the first to do so" (Yoshioka 257), which is exactly what sets it apart from his previous productions and makes it so valuable, for it deals with current socio-cultural issues.

That does not mean that the film lacks fantastic and imaginary elements, on the contrary it overflows with them, as becomes apparent with all the mythological spirits and strange creatures, the metamorphoses and magical incidences. If the viewers understand the link to their personal realities, they are more likely to interpret the fantastic elements as relevant symbols for the current times as well. Miyazaki definitely supports this concept because the viewer can easily "identify with Chihiro, experiencing no gap between her world and their own. And when she takes her other-worldly journey, the audience moves smoothly in step with her. In other words, Miyazaki blends the real world with the fantasy world in a way that makes it an extension of our reality" (Yoshioka 269). He utilises the ability of the fantastic to express subtle and hidden messages and it is vital for him to mix reality with fantasy, for he is of the opinion, as Bigelow states, that we can learn just as much from imagined adventures as we can from real-life states (72). It is therefore his aim to help people, and children in particular, to make sense of the world around them, part of which forms his approach to Japanese culture.

He has long struggled to accept his own Japaneseness due to "his guilty conscience over the barbaric behaviour and crimes committed by the Japanese army in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia during the Second World War" (Yamanaka 250), but when finally overcoming these feelings and accepting himself as Japanese, he found the positive aspects

of Japanese culture and defined his own understanding of it, which is inherent especially in his newer films and possibly the most in *Spirited Away*.

He views "contemporary Japan's complex cultural identity" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 287) as borderless meaning that instead of using concepts from other cultures to stress Japaneseness, he turns it around and incorporates them into Japanese culture, creating, as Napier states, an extended Japanese identity ("Confronting Master Narratives" 473). His acknowledgement of this fact is what enables him to incorporate and blend so many diverse elements in his films, particularly in *Spirited Away*, which is the best "example of the Japanese 'mosaic' that combines Asian and Western culture. Therefore, Miyazaki's Japaneseness is not absolute or objective. It also transcends temporal and territorial boundaries, tending toward inclusivity rather than exclusion, commonalities rather than uniqueness" (Yoshioka 272), an approach that speaks to many modern Japanese people while also explaining its strong universal appeal.

This Ghibli film is one of the first recent ones to have gained so much attention worldwide, but its success is unprecedented in Japan and the deeper meanings it has for the country are possibly not pursuable for a majority of Western viewers. Nonetheless, the film is viewed and liked across borders and became a considerable box-office success not only locally but internationally. In Noriko T. Reider's comprehensive article "Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols" (2005), the author explains references to Japanese folklore and spiritual symbols and the meaning of the characters and their names in greater detail, giving the Western viewer an insight into the Japanese specific meanings of the film. Including these explanations in this report would go beyond its limitations, but just to get an idea of the deeper Japanese context, the Japanese title *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* will be briefly looked at: "First to be discussed is a folk belief, *kamikakushi* (literally, hidden by

kami/deities), which is part of the title of the film. In the past, when children or women suddenly disappeared and could not be found for a long time, it was presumed 'they had met *kamikakushi*'" (Reider 8), which often was understood to be "a verdict of 'social death' in this world, and coming back to this world from *Kamikakushi* meant 'social resurrection'" (Reider 9), a concept that can be seen in Chihiro's character development. The whole title *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* means 'the hiding away by the gods of Sen and Chihiro' (Harris 64), which is a very suitable title for the film for most of it does happen in the spirit world that Chihiro disappears into and the fact that both names are mentioned in the title hints at the identity change she goes through. Miyazaki cleverly sets up her character transformation in this other-worldly somewhat historical realm and "some of the film's principal characters such as Yubaba (a descendent of *yamauba* or mountain witch) and Kamaji (a *tsuchigumo* or earth spider) are reminiscent of characters found throughout Japanese folklore" (Reider 4). These mythological figures and spirits in *Spirited Away* teach Chihiro Japanese cultural traditions, such as politeness and teamwork which in return strengthen Chihiro's self-esteem and allow her to face the obstacles ahead and to mature enough to overcome the final challenge on her journey to freeing her parents. In this way, the animation director manages to intertwine Japanese history, mythology, spirituality and culture in this film and make it accessible and attractive to newer generations.

While the film is obviously filled with these Japanese elements, there are many Western influences as well. For one, the story's structure follows Joseph Campbell's archetypal hero's journey, as identified by many scholars including Susan Bye in her text "Spirits of Times Past: Fantasy, Tradition and Identity in *Spirited Away*" (2012). The film has therefore been compared to more unconventional Western stories featuring young heroines on their path from childhood to adulthood in fantastical setups such as *Alice in Wonderland*

and *The Wizard of Oz* as addressed by Ando Satoshi in his article "Regaining Continuity with the Past: *Spirited Away* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*" (2008) and in a conference presentation by Stefan Hall titled "Spiraling Homeward: Shifting Realities in *Spirited Away*" (2004). Since he began making films, Miyazaki has been influenced by Western artists, landscapes and stories, which due to scope cannot be discussed further here, but is an important characteristic of his films and often mentioned as another one of the reasons for the international appeal of his productions.

With *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki gained the long overdue attention and respect his films deserve. His skills had long been recognised in Japan, but this film overtook even his 1997 success Princess Mononoke and "within five months of its opening in Japan in July 2001, Miyazaki Hayao's film *Spirited Away* … had been seen by nearly 25 million people" (Yamanaka 237). This makes it the highest-grossing film in Japanese history up until today, exceeding even *Titanic* (1997). Internationally, Miyazaki received numerous acclaimed awards for his film including the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film of 2002. Timothy Harris claims that "as is not the case with most "blockbuster" films, this success is deserved: *Spirited Away* is not only very good entertainment but an important and profound work of art that does not inertly express or acquiesce in the times, but stands against them" (Harris 64). Miyazaki is not afraid to criticise and advise in his films, an approach to filmmaking that differs to American mainstream productions, which "participate in a larger project of American cinema, especially its most popular films, and that is to function as a cinema of *reassurance*, to use Robin Wood's term, which promotes a vision of a world in which all problems are solved and harmony is restored under the aegis of U.S. ideology and values" (Napier, "Confronting Master Narratives" 469). Japanese animation in comparison does not refrain

from depicting less simplified and more de-assuring views, but often concluding on an upbeat note as well or at least on an open but hopeful ending (Napier, “Confronting Master Narratives” 470). So instead of closing his eyes to reality, Miyazaki consciously integrates it into his films and he therefore “shows that the commodity of cinema, the most popular and the most strategic communication medium, can be re-purposed by the artist to communicate an understanding of the problems of our history and our time” (Bigelow 56).

He has chosen the medium of animation to reach younger audiences specifically as well, because the medium offers a great deal of flexibility to a filmmaker due to “the distinctive properties of the animation medium itself, a medium that is genuinely unique. Animation, perhaps from its very inception, has existed as an alternative form of representation, a representation that privileges very different properties and conventions from that of live action” (Napier, “Akira” 292). That is what allows Miyazaki to create the wondrous settings and characters of his productions and especially their transformations from one state into another, which is another typical trait of his films: “Transformations and metamorphoses are the essence of Miyazaki's film and are not restricted to the primary character alone. Japanese myths often use shape-shifting bodies which reveal themselves as facades concealing a deeper reality. In this regard, animation is ideally suited for playing with the possibilities of shape-shifting” (Hall 6). Miyazaki is a master of transformations and uses them for narrative purposes as well.

He has long experimented with and utilised these strengths of animation that have only recently been discovered in live-action production and it is now understood that “animated films [function] as an Other within a production practice dominated by live action films … embodying the irrational, the exotic, the hyperreal” (Napier, “Akira” 292), concepts that are difficult to achieve in live-action film. Those elements are easier achieved in

animation, but 3D computer animation is at a level now where it is close to portraying reality nearly as well as live-action and hence it is animation's ability to interblend the imaginary with the real that makes it such an asset to film. This is one of the reasons why, as Napier quotes Paul Wells: "Animation is arguably the most important creative form of the 21st century.... it is the omnipresent pictorial form of the modern era" ("The Problem of Existence" 72), a fact that has finally been recognised in recent digital filmmaking, after decades of being overlooked and overshadowed by the live-action form.

The long-lasting tendency of animation to compete with live-action and imitate its stories and styles however, is questionable, because the inherent capacities of the medium offer narrative possibilities that go far beyond the limitations of live-action and allow it to contribute so much more to cinema than merely in form of superficial spectacles. In fact, "Miyazaki's struggle between the imaginary and the virtual is the struggle for narrative over spectacle, for communication over audiencing" (Bigelow 68). So while the whole world is in excitement about all the new possibilities of digital animation, Miyazaki reminds us that new technology is only as good as we make it and that what is more important is how these technologies can aid us in making a difference in the world, like he tries to do with his tools and through his films. An excellent example of his effort is "the use of iconic re-definition in Miyazaki's film *My Neighbour Totoro*" (Wells, "Hayao Miyazaki"24) with the rapid growth of a huge tree in the garden:

> The tree literally erupts from the ground, visually echoing the atomic 'mushroom' clouds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This clearly operates as a re-working of what has become a culturally-charged iconic image fixed in its meaning. Miyazaki replaces the horrific associations of the bombings, and their place in Japanese lives, with an alternative model of

> Japanese history, literally rooted in a world that pre-dates humankind - a world that is essentially 'innocent'; a natural world that is wholly predicated on organic cycles, and the 'act of bringing to life'. The art of animation itself chimes with this notion, and it is no coincidence that Miyazaki condenses form and meaning in this way. … A chilling, seemingly immutable image of destruction and inhumanity has been transformed into one of optimism and hope. (Wells, "Hayao Miyazaki" 24)

Miyazaki makes use of such imagery in many of his films, always with a positive and hopeful outlook on the future, but *Spirited Away* is filled with culturally meaningful visual expressions, making it "Miyazaki's best attempt to transmit the heart of Japaneseness to future generations" (Yoshioka 272). The film's enormous success suggests that Miyazaki might have accomplished his goal to some degree at least. It is through those images, motifs and themes that Miyazaki manages to integrate subtle yet strong messages, which is the reason why they have been selected for analysis and are of particular interest to this study.

CHAPTER 3 - PREPARING THE TOOLS:

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF LITERATURE, ANIMATION AND FILM

3.1. Literary Devices: Themes & Motifs

As this paper is attempting to understand how Miyazaki manages to incorporate socio-cultural critique within *Spirited Away* through the use of themes and motifs, it is necessary to first establish these terms. A theme is "a subject (issue, question) that recurs in a narrative through implicit or explicit reference. With motif, theme is one of the two commonest forms of narrative repetition. Where motifs tend to be concrete, themes are abstract" (Abbott 95). Although they originated in literature and consequently are still often defined as such, many dictionaries do acknowledge the fact that these concepts are used in other media as well, such as music, art and film. Animation as a subcategory of film and art is well-suited to include motifs and themes in its works.

The following description from the Oxford Dictionary gives us a more in-depth understanding of the concept of theme in particular:

> A salient abstract idea that emerges from a literary work's treatment of its subject-matter; or a topic recurring in a number of literary works. While the subject of a work is described concretely in terms of its action (e.g. 'the adventures of a newcomer in the big city'), its theme or themes will be described in more abstract terms (e.g. love, war, revenge, betrayal,

> fate, etc.). The theme of a work may be announced explicitly, but more often it emerges indirectly through the recurrence of motifs. ("theme")

This definition only refers to themes in literary texts, since that is where the term stem from, but like mentioned above, other sources, such as the Collins English Dictionary take newer media into account as well and talk of the concept of theme as: "(in literature, music, art, etc.) a unifying idea, image, or motif, repeated or developed throughout a work" ("theme"). The idea of theme in film in particular is briefly mentioned in *Film Art* (2004), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's widely acknowledged introductory book to film analysis: "The abstract quality of implicit meanings can lead to very broad concepts often called *themes*. A film may have as its theme courage or the power of faithful love" (56). In our case, the main focus will be on the reoccurring and ever-present theme of cultural recovery in *Spirited Away*. As was discovered previously, Miyazaki creates films to educate and criticise and in this film in particular, the chosen motifs all refer to themes around the loss and recovery of cultural values and roots, which is why cultural recovery was chosen as the main theme in this study. It is referred to by a number of subthemes, which are evoked through the utilisation of motifs. The concept of motif in film is well explained by Bordwell and Thompson: "We shall call *any significant repeated element in a film* a motif. A motif may be an object, a color, a place, a person, a sound or even a character trait. We may call a pattern of lighting or camera position a motif if it is repeated through the course of a film" (61). For this study also of importance is the notion of the leitmotif, as explained with the following definition from the Oxford Dictionary: Where an image, incident, or other element is repeated significantly within a single work, it is more commonly referred to as a *leitmotif*" ("motif"). For this study the following four relevant leitmotifs were chosen: water, food,

space and name. Each of these leitmotifs will be looked at in selected scenes where they occur in different forms and how each link to the main theme of cultural recovery. These instances will be analysed in depth using selected narrative techniques mainly used in film, as introduced in this chapter.

3.2. Animation Strategies: Metamorphosis

The concept of metamorphosis is such a relevant element of animation and of Miyazaki's works that it needs to be included in this thesis, even if it cannot be expanded on to a great extent. Metamorphosis is a much discussed notion in the animation discourse and is often said to be the one special feature of the medium that is distinct to live-action. This is echoed in animation theorist Paul Well's fundamental book *Understanding Animation* (1998) when he states that "one particular device is unique to the animated form, and some would argue that it is the constituent core of animation itself. *Metamorphosis* is the ability for an image to literally change into another completely different image" (69). Some scholars, like Wells, like to emphasise the abstractness of metamorphosis which allows for creative freedom unachievable in live-action as it is necessarily bound to the physical space. This thesis, however, is not going to enter into these debates of live-action versus animation, as it is not of relevance to the argument, but is simply going to define the concept and look at how Miyazaki utilises it. Wells gives an elaborate description of the term, which contains a number of useful explanations for an interpretation of the concept in Miyazaki's work:

> The ability to metamorphose images means that it is possible to create fluid linkage of images through the process of animation itself rather than through editing … Metamorphosis in animation achieves the highest degree of economy in narrative continuity … Metamorphosis also legitimises the process of connecting apparently unrelated images, forging original relationships between lines, objects etc., and disrupting established notions of classical storytelling. Metamorphosis can resist logical developments and determine unpredictable linearities (both temporal and spatial) that constitute different kinds of narrative construction. ("Understanding Animation" 69)

In this definition of importance is the fact that Wells establishes metamorphosis as a narrative rather than visual strategy and mentions how it can influence a story. This is definitely in accordance with the metamorphoses in *Spirited Away* for they have their narrative purpose in the story, although a metamorphosis is naturally also a visual spectacle, as it is never clear what someone or something will turn into, ensuring an element of surprise.

While Wells mostly emphasises the abstract function of metamorphosis, Miyazaki's use of it takes on more concrete shapes, mostly of animals, which is also often labelled as shape-shifting. Wells briefly comments on this aspect of the metamorphosis concept, stating that "it can also achieve transformations in figures and objects which essentially *narrate* those figures and objects, detailing, by implication, their intrinsic capacities" ("Understanding Animation" 69), which is an interesting observation that will be taken into consideration.

A final expression of metamorphosis found in *Spirited Away* is character development. Wells' definition of metamorphosis does not include this aspect, because character development is of an internal rather than an external nature and is illustrated

solely through narrative instead of visual means. This paper argues, however, that since it does contribute and make a difference to the story, it can also be acknowledged as a kind of metamorphosis, as will be investigated further.

On a final note, it is significant to acknowledge that the protagonist, who will be the character in focus experiencing internal transformations, is the one to reverse major metamorphoses of other characters mainly caused by the witch Yubaba and her twin sister Zeniba, as will be investigated further in the next chapter.

3.3. Film Techniques

3.3.1. Mise-en-Scene

Film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's enlightening book *Film Art* (2004) will mainly provide the filmic methods needed for a thematic examination of the chosen case study. Although the book mainly focuses on live-action, there is a consideration of animation in some areas. Animation theorist Maureen Furniss has further applied their concepts to the animation medium, although she only vaguely touches on them andin their place, she introduces the elements of "images, colour and line, and movement and kinetics, all of which can be considered components of the animated mise-en-scène" (62). Instead of considering the techniques that are shared by both media, she emphasises the ones that are particular to animation. Her investigation, however, is more of a historical overview of the uses of these elements in previous animated productions and how concepts such as images and movement are created in animation in general, and less about actually defining

concepts, such as Bordwell and Thompson do, which are necessary in order for them to serve as tools for analysis. Furniss' notion of colour provides interesting definitions and examples for the term that can be used for an interpretation and which will be included in the spatial changes section below, where Bordwell and Thompson's approach to colour will also be discussed.

Since film - and this includes animation - unlike literature, is essentially a visual medium, themes are expressed less through words and primarily through visual cues. The metamorphosis of the parents turning into pigs for example, is a visual motif implying the theme of greed. It is therefore essential to utilise methods of film analysis that focus on the explicitly visual parts of film, such as the aspects of mise-en-scene in order to gain an understanding of the implicit matters, hence a significant part of the analysis chapter will be focusing on the mise-on-scene of the case study:

> In the original French, *mise-en-scene* (pronounced meez-ahn-sen) means 'putting into the scene' and it was first applied to the practice of directing plays. Film scholars, extending the term to film direction, use the term to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame. As you would expect from the term's theatrical origins, mise-en-scene includes those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume and the behavior of the figures. In controlling the mise-en-scene, the director *stages the event* for the camera. … Animated and abstract films may control mise-en-scene to a degree impossible with performers shot in real time – as is seen not only in drawn or puppet animation but also in computer graphics. (Bordwell and Thompson 176)

The last sentence of this quote hints at a significant difference between live-action and animation that cannot be elaborated on here, but still needs to be taken into

consideration. Live-action takes photographic shots of real scenes and people, cuts and edits those pieces of reality and puts them together to make a film with its own narrative, but the images are there already and are captured and reused as needed. Of course, all aspects of the mise-en-scene can be manipulated. Settings can be transformed, costumes altered, lighting rearranged and characters' behaviours changed. Yet in animation, nothing is given, the elements of mise-en-scene have to be set up, created and planned in detail beforehand. There is no image but a blank sheet of paper or a plain screen from which the animation director has to start planning "what appears in the film frame" (Bordwell and Thompson 176) and whatever she or he decides has to be built from scratch, drawn, handcrafted or digitally created as an image, as it is not a photographic image taken from the real world. It follows that the pre-production process of an animated film naturally involves more work and as a result takes much longer than it does with a live-action film, but simultaneously, it allows more freedom for anything the human mind can think of and translate into animation as opposed to being contained by reality (which is one of the main reasons why in the era of digital cinema, live-action productions involve a high use of CGI).

Miyazaki is well aware of this advantage and makes use of it to the fullest as will be illustrated. Hence when examining *Spirited Away*, it should be kept in mind that each setting, each lighting setup, each prop and each character was planned and created from scratch and the way they look and act is not a coincidence, but carefully thought-through and masterfully crafted frames strung together. Therefore, they can be very different from each other and while one technique can be more pronounced in one scene, it can be less useful to another, which is why only those methods and results that are relevant for a specific scene will be discussed further in the analysis section.

The first methodological elements to be considered are the four different aspects of mise-en-scene as mentioned above, but adjusted to the animation medium. Since some of these concepts are explained in terms of live-action in *Film Art* and cannot always be applied to animation in the same way, a comparison of these two film formats where necessary, makes it easier to understand their differences and similarities and the particularities of animation.

Beginning with the crucial notion of setting, it is important to see that it "plays a more active role in cinema than in most theatrical styles … Cinema setting, then, can come to the forefront; it need not be only a container for human events but can dynamically enter the narrative action" (Bordwell and Thompson 179). This is true for both live-action and animation films. While live-action has a choice between filming an existing location and constructing its own setting, animation has no option but to create its settings from scratch. Although, it can be inspired by or even copy reality, it can also easily build imaginative and fantastic settings. Of particular interest to the examination of setting is the concept of colour and how a "change in the settings' colors supports a narrative development" (182). This is of great importance to most of *Spirited Away's* scenes as well, as will be demonstrated. Other important components of setting are so-called 'properties' commonly known as 'props': "When an object in the setting has a function within the ongoing action, we can call it a prop" (183). A prop can take on the function of a motif, such as Chihiro's farewell card.

The same applies to the element of costume, which "can have specific functions in the total film" (184) and "can play important motivic and causal roles in narratives" (186). Although the costumes in *Spirited Away* do not take on major roles, they do have their significance, particularly in the way they change and the way characters go through various

metamorphoses from humans to animals and vice versa, which essentially is a radical change of costume and happens quite frequently in *Spirited Away* and other films of Miyazaki.

One of the major aspects of film narrative however, is that of lighting. Many filmmakers see it as one of the most essential filmmaking tools, because "much of the impact of an image comes from its manipulation of lighting. In cinema, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions" (191). It has quite a number of functions, which are best explored through the interpretation of the "four major features of lighting: its *quality*, *direction*, *source* and *color*" (191). In both live-action and animation lighting needs to be arranged to suit each scene's specific requirements. The lighting in *Spirited Away* is rather subtle and supportive of the narrative. In the scenes where it does play a more vital role, this paper will provide discussion.

The last component that forms part of the mise-en-scene is staging, which involves the movement and acting of the characters in a film. Staging is planned in advance and hence "the director may also control the behavior of various figures in the mise-en-scene" (198). Staging does differ, however, between live-action and animation. In live-action the behaviour of the character is set, but is acted out by an individual who will bring in his or her own way of performance and style. Of course, this can add to the personality of a character or take away from it. In animation, characters are entirely made up from an individual's mind and he or she has to shape and control the character's personality and movement to the last detail. Next to the protagonist Chihiro, the case study looks at a few complex and some grotesque characters in *Spirited Away* that offer a basis for further investigation.

3.3.2. Spatial changes

These four elements of mise-en-scene do not stand on their own, but interact with each other and "each usually combines with others to create a specific system in every film" (Bordwell and Thompson 207) and in this regard, an important factor that has to be kept in mind at all times is that "our visual system is attuned to perceiving *change*, both in time and space … Our sensitivity to these changes allows the filmmaker to direct our notice across the two-dimensional space of the frame" (207-8). It is the interplay of the elements of mise-en-scene that evoke "changes of several kinds: *movement, color differences, balance of distinct components, and variations in size*" (208). These spatial changes are crucial to an analysis of the themes and motifs in *Spirited Away.*

All of the chosen scenes contain varied degrees of movement and it is particularly the quieter moments where "we are sensitive to even the slightest activity within the frame" (209). There are quite a number of those instances that vary with more rapid fast-paced ones, which emphasise the change in movement within the scene but also from one scene to another.

Another change on screen can happen through the use of colour contrast, which means "for instance, bright colors set against a more subdued background are likely to draw the eye" (209) and "because cool or pale colors tend to recede, filmmakers commonly use them for background planes such as setting. Similarly, because warm or saturated colors tend to come forward, such hues are often employed for costumes or other foreground elements" (209). Miyazaki utilises this technique to a great extent throughout his film and it is a very useful tool for the medium, because "animated films can achieve brighter and more saturated color than most live-action filming, so depth effects can be correspondingly more

vivid" (213), which explains the colourfulness of his films. There is particularly one colour combination that keeps reappearing in *Spirited Away*, which is red and green. This combination is called a complementary colour scheme and is quite different to a monochromatic colour scheme, which basically is one colour in different shades. What makes them distinct from each other is the effect they have on the viewer because "monochromatic schemes may be more unified and thus calming in nature than a complementary scheme, which contains a range of opposing colours" (Furniss 73). The specific effect the colour scheme has in the various scenes will be looked at in the analysis chapter.

This leads us to compositional balance, which "refers to the extent to which the areas of screen space have equally distributed masses and points of interest" and it also means that "since the film shot is composed within a horizontal rectangle, the director usually takes care to balance the left and right halves" (Bordwell and Thompson 210). Since *Spirited Away* is in the widescreen format, it is a long rectangle that needs to be filled and composited. Throughout the film, Miyazaki makes use of what Bordwell and Thompson call "the simplest way to achieve compositional balance", which is "to center the frame on the human body" (211). He is aware that "unbalanced shots can also create strong effects" (212) in any event, which is why he also employs them when appropriate to the narrative. Most importantly yet, is the fact that "compositing is a matter of assuring that the gaps between different elements within the image are not noticeable" (Lamarre 31), which is true for both animation and live-action as long as it is a still frame. As soon as the camera moves, however, especially in depth, the means to achieve balance and no gaps differ. While the camera is moved in the real world in live-action and records foreground and background elements on a single layer at the same time, in animation "it is a matter of rationalizing the

relations between different layers of the image, and thus of harnessing the force of the moving image in certain ways, to specific ends" (31). Since the animation camera is moved in a drawn or virtual world consisting of multiple layers, it is harder to composite an animated film once there is camera movement, as these different layers all have to be considered especially in terms of depth of field.

Size, which is another component that can bring about changes on screen, but which is subordinate to the previously listed ones, takes on a very important role in the case study. Miyazaki plays a lot with size and anything from the child-like little soot balls to the frightening witch with an oversized head that fills the whole screen is present. One of the preconditions of size is that "we will register the larger shapes first and then discriminate smaller ones" (Bordwell and Thompson 212), a fact Miyazaki continuously utilises and manipulates according to the narrative's needs.

3.3.3. Framing

The last significant factor that will be required in an examination of *Spirited Away* is framing. It is "important because it actively *defines* the image for us" (Bordwell and Thompson 252) and "can powerfully affect the image by means of (1) size and shape of the frame; (2) the way the frame defines onscreen and offscreen space; (3) the way framing imposes the distance, angle, and height of a vantage point onto the image; and (4) the way framing can move in relation to the mise-en-scene" (253). These aspects are more or less applicable to the case study, but particularly the onscreen and offscreen space is of no relevance to the film and will not be further pursued. The other elements will be discussed when relevant to the portrayal of a motif.

Frame dimension and shape basically refers to the aspect ratio, which is "the ratio of frame width to the frame height" (254) and as we have identified, *Spirited Away* has a so-called widescreen aspect ratio of 2.40:1, "which is the aspect ratio of Panavision, today's most frequently used anamorphic system" (254).

As for the angle, it can be said that "the frame implies an angle of framing in respect to what is shown. It thus positions us at some angle onto the shot's mise-en-scene" (260). Miyazaki does not make extensive use of angle, but reserves changes in angle for suitable situations, which renders him aware of the advantages of the "three general categories: the straight-on angle, the high angle, and the low angle" (261). The most common of the three is the straight-on angle, which is what most of the film comprises of, but there are some low- and high-angled frames as well, which are of significance to this study.

Height is related to the concept of angle because framing "from a high angle entails being at a vantage point higher than the material in the image" (261). The height of the camera can have a function of its own, like showing the world from a different perspective, as Bordwell and Thompson point out: "For instance, the Japanese filmmaker Yasujito Ozu often positions his camera close to the ground to film characters or objects on the floor" (262) in order to emphasise certain actions or details, a practice that Miyazaki also employs in a few instances.

The final important element of framing is camera distance, which "supplies a sense of being far away or close to the mise-en-scene of a shot" (262). It is generally measured with "the scale of the human body" (262) while the "universal units of composition are the long shot, the medium shot and the close-up" (Katz 121), which roughly equalise to a full body, a half body and a face shot. These units could be further divided, but are sufficient for the analysis of our case study, although in order to examine Miyazaki's use of them, their

differences and advantages need to be explained. In his book *Film directing shot by shot* (1991). Katz explains that “the close-up is used to bring us into closer contact with the action” (123), so the camera might focus on parts of the body like the face to see an expression or the hands to see a gesture in order to emphasise an action or emotion. He goes on to describe that “like the full shot, the medium shot captures an actor’s gestures and body language, but is still tight enough to include subtle variations in facial expression” (Katz 127), which is the reason why this camera distance is well liked by filmmakers and the most commonly used. And lastly he states that, “the full shot as an alternative to the medium or close-up shot has fallen into disuse in the last twenty years, relegated to the function of an establishing shot when it is necessary to connect a character and a location in a single shot” (Katz 128), which is not true for Miyazaki, who extensively makes use of long shots, especially for the landscape shots he is renowned for.

All these film devices are responsible for the visual look of each frame and its emphasis and consequently have great influence on the appearance of each motif, which will help us understand how they were constructed to evoke the theme of cultural recovery.

CHAPTER 4 - ENTERING THE SPIRIT WORLD:

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN *SPIRITED AWAY*

Having established the reasons for this research, the content and context of the film to be investigated as well as the necessary narrative strategies it utilises, we can finally move into the analysis, where we will examine the chosen themes, motifs and scenes in order to understand how they relate to each other, how they build a thematic development throughout the film and how they ultimately allow Miyazaki to interweave them with socio-cultural critique and educational messages. We will also look at the meaning of metamorphoses that coincide with below motifs and themes.

This chapter will be divided into the four chosen leitmotifs of water, food, space and name and each of these sections is further subdivided into sub motifs. The leitmotif section will be layered into a brief introduction and mentioning in literature, while the sub motif sections will be looking at all occurrences in the film, description of the chosen scene and finally, the application of the relevant filmic devices as identified in the previous chapter. Furthermore, instances of metamorphosis will be examined, where applicable. Most importantly, however, each section will conclude with an analysis of the acquired results in order to get a closer understanding of what the filmic devices can tell us about the particular motif, what subthemes are evoked by the motif, the meaning that each motif has for that particular scene and for the whole film and lastly, the meaning that each motif has concerning the main theme of cultural recovery.

4.1. Water

One of the most present and symbolic motifs in *Spirited Away* is the element of water. It is repeatedly found in different forms and this study will consider the following two in depths: tears, and bathwater. The first has only briefly been discussed in the relevant literature, whereas the bathwater motif has been elaborated on by a few scholars. As described in the introduction of this analysis, each of these sub motifs will be examined separately according to the relevant film techniques.

4.1.1. Tears

Description of Scene:

There are only two moments in the film where visible tears are shed by the protagonist and since they both have a climatic function in two significant scenes, it is essential to get a better understanding of their meaning. Due to the limited scale of this paper, only one instance can be investigated in depth and will briefly be compared to the other scene.

Described as “a scene that in some ways is the emotional core of the movie” (“Akira” 186) by anime scholar Susan J. Napier, the moment after Chihiro gets to meet her parents in the pigsty for the first time and finds her farewell card with her name on it between her clothes that Haku is handing back to her, is quite moving. In that instant, she does not only realise how alone she is and how much responsibility she has to carry, but that she was about to forget her name and get lost in this strange world, like Haku did. So when he gives her onigiri (rice balls) to console her, it all seems to dawn on her and she sheds

unrealistically large tears. While much attention is given to these rice balls in academic discussions, which will be looked at in the food motif section and which seem to release her tears, the meaning of these tears is not examined any further.

Application of Filmic Devices:

When exploring the mise-en-scene of this scene, the first discovery we make is that of an idyllic peaceful morning garden setting and lighting with green bushes and pink and purple flowers. It stands in contrast to the fear, confusion and darkness of the previous scenes (where Chihiro finds her parents turned into pigs and has to overcome many obstacles in order to get a job at the bathhouse). It also stands in contradiction to Chihiro's sadness at that moment. Furthermore, the green of the garden is opposed to the red traditional clothing Chihiro has changed into, a complimentary colour harmony that, as we will see, keeps reappearing throughout the film. As seen in the previous chapter, where the tools were introduced, because red and green are colours that are directly opposite one another on the colour wheel, they automatically create contrast, which distinguishes more prominent to less prominent elements in the frame and makes the image visually more attractive, because the human eye is very sensitive to contrast. Furthermore, they do not have a calming effect, but rather an exciting or an even disturbing one. That is somehow contradictory in this particular scene, which features one of the more quiet moments of the film, but the contrasting colours might be a reflection of the contrasting worlds that Chihiro finds herself in the middle of, that of the modern space and that of the spirit realm. The staging of the characters in this instance however, does follow the standards of a peaceful setting, for there is very little movement and it is a very quiet scene with not many words spoken: "Chihiro's troubles are memorably presented, although often through visual or

nonverbal signs, such as her virtual fading away at the beginning of the film and her tearful eating of the onigiri after her traumatic encounter with her parents in the pigsty" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 309). This comes to show that Miyazaki and his animators are well aware of the advantages of visual media and in particular of animation and make use of its strengths to the fullest.

In this quiet scene, the major action that does stand out, although it is a small motion, is Chihiro's slow munching of the rice ball that turns into a near gobbling of it and climaxes in her shedding these big tears and being shaken by sobs. The emphasis here is created and enhanced through the aspects of framing, composition, size and movement.



Fig. 1: Chihiro's outbreak of oversized tears while eating a rice ball

Firstly, the framing is organised as such that Chihiro is seen from the side in a close shot. Secondly, compositional balance is provided by placing Chihiro off centre to the right in order to have the frontal line of her face with her eyes and mouth and her hands in the middle of the frame, since that is where the eating and crying happens. The left side of the screen is basically green garden, but to give it some depth, we see darker reeds behind the lighter flower bush Chihiro sits in front of. Thirdly, as mentioned, size matters but movement

can override it. As such it is interesting to see that even though the tears are the smallest entity on the screen due to their unusually large size, they shift into focus. Furthermore because they literally run through the centre of the long rectangular frame from top to bottom, which is possibly the most contrasting movement possible on a screen with a unicolour background, they , become the most important element of the scene (see fig. 1).

Analysis:

Chihiro's tears in this moment are presented in such a way that it is evident that they must bear great significance. From the context and the identified film techniques applied in the scene, an attempt at analysis will be provided here. Having just been confronted with her 'pig parents' in the pig stall, this is probably the first apparent explanation for her crying. Therefore, these meaningful tears can be interpreted as tears of the loss of her parents and the burden of her responsibility to save them. Linked to that are tears of fear of the new circumstances she finds herself in, for herself and the loss of her childhood and for being forced to jump from a dependent spoilt child to a responsible mature teenager in an instant. Finally, the fact that while Chihiro is shedding these big tears, she is in this traditional place of the bathhouse, in a Japanese garden, wearing Japanese clothing and eating Japanese rice balls, strongly suggests a link to Japanese culture and that she cries tears for traditional Japan, which has partly been lost and forgotten. There are many reasons for Chihiro's tears and heavy burdens she has to carry, which explains their big size. This leads us to the final conclusion that similarly to all the other appearances of water, the tears ultimately serve as a way of self-purification and cleansing.

The effect is that having purified herself from all the burdens, the tears seem to help her gain in confidence and strength, because as we came to know her as a whiny character,

we can observe that this is the point where she cries her last tears and through all her obstacles, as hard as they might be, she does not shed another one until the very end, where she cries tears of joy for Haku.

So this instance is one of the first in the film where we can observe an internal metamorphosis of the protagonist as she struggles through all these emotions, but eventually overcomes them, helped by Haku and his comforting rice balls and coming to terms with the fact that her family's future is her responsibility now and she needs to mature and depend on herself in order to face the challenges ahead.

4.1.2. Bathwater

Scene Description:

The most prevalent and discussed appearance of water is the bathwater in the bathhouse which due to its function is always present, but particularly emphasised in one important scene. Its significance is further stressed through the accompaniment of rain followed by the bathhouse being surrounded by water. It can also be linked to the unexpected occurrence of water at the beginning of the film.

This crucial scene in which Chihiro has to fill a bath for the so-called stink god is possibly one of the most climatic moments in *Spirited Away*. Having just started working at the bathhouse and still struggling with her new job, she is given the unpleasant task of taking care of this revolting looking and smelly customer. She tries her best, however, even when covered in knee-high slimy filth to give him a good service. In attempting to pour herbal water over the god, she falls into the tub as well and is lifted back out by his giant hand. The scene then takes on a new turn as Chihiro discovers that there is a thorn in his side, which

turns out to be a bicycle handle and with the joint effort of the bathhouse inhabitants, they rid the stink god of a whole pile of junk and discover that he actually is a river spirit, who was polluted by all the rubbish people threw into the river. As Napier points out "this scene … has obvious ritualistic aspects - Chihiro as the 'new girl' is forced to deal with an immense and unpleasant task at which she succeeds brilliantly, earning the approval of her fellow bath attendants and helping to develop her own confidence, symbolized by the gift of the river god" ("Matter out of Place" 302), and continuing to grow in maturity until the end of her journey.

Application of Filmic Devices:

Movement and colour are the most prominent elements in this scene. While the setting of the bathhouse with the wooden rooms, the relaxing bathtubs inside and the soft rain outside evokes the impression of a peaceful state, there is a slow build up to the visit of the stink god, who intrudes the space with his huge filthy slimy self. In contrast to the static bathhouse stands the constantly dripping dirt on his body, which is the first major movement of this scene. The second even more significant motion is that of the herbal bath water cleansing the stink god and in the process, also Chihiro. Finally, the third big shift is the eruption of the trash from within the stink god. All of these large movements, however, would not be of significance, had they not be counteracted by the characters' actions, Chihiro's in particular. Next to these flowing entities, she is the other most active subject in the scene and the one that is exposed to and even immersed in these substances the most. It is therefore a great achievement that she manages to master the situation first on her own and finally with the joint effort of the bathhouse attendants.

This whole interchange of big masses and small characters is further stressed through the difference in size of these massive entities to the comparatively tiny characters as well as through the complimentary colours of green and red represented mainly by the herbal water and Chihiro's clothing. The colour change from dirty brown colours to clean greens also plays an important role as it reflects the characters' achievement of tackling and resolving this invasive problem. Furthermore, the scene is well supported through the composition as well as the framing, because these elements allow the viewer to get an understanding of the dimensions of the space, for example through high-angle shots, and the significance of certain moments to the story often found in close-up shots, like that of the bicycle handle.

Analysis:

Many scholars have identified the importance of the bathhouse: "On a symbolic level, the bathhouse is also associated with a significant liminal substance, water. Not only is it surrounded by water (Chihiro has to cross a bridge to get to it and later must leave the bathhouse by boat) but, as a bathhouse, its function is of course totally dependent on water" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 297). This becomes even more apparent in the discussed instance which actually makes use of the bathwater and portrays how the bathing process in the bathhouse works. While the water inside the bathhouse plays a significant symbolic role for this scene, it is further enhanced by the preceding rain which accompanies the arrival of the stink god and the water surrounding the bathhouse resulting from all the rain. Interpreting these occurrences of water as purifying acts, this whole scene can be understood as a major cleansing process not only of the stink god, but of the bathhouse and Chihiro in particular (see fig. 2).

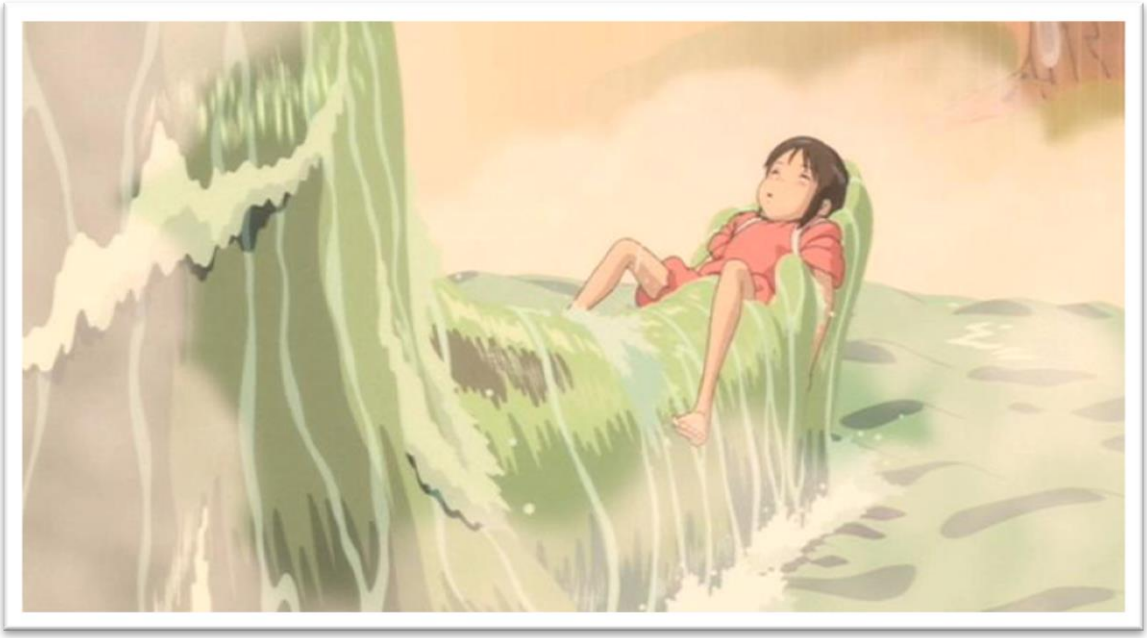

Fig. 2: Chihiro is lifted out of the bathwater by the Stink God after falling in

The most obvious purification is that of the stink god "who appears as an invader at the beginning, its filth and odour threatening everything the bathhouse represents. Its successful cleansing becomes not only a rite of purification but an exercise in recognition and correct identification" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 302). This is another important theme of the film, as will be seen in the section where the identity theme is further analysed. At this point, it is crucial to understand that this guest did not simply need a bath, but needed to be freed of more than just filth, as Chihiro recognises correctly, because "as the group pulls more forcefully, the pile of pieces ultimately becomes untangled and the stink god is revealed to be a river spirit, finally freed from the pollution and detritus of modern life" (302). He undergoes a metamorphosis from a stinky and filth-dripping god to a dragon-like long river spirit, helped by Chihiro, a transition which was necessary in order to reveal his true identity. On a symbolic level, the fact that a modern child liberates a spirit from modern waste equalises the start of a healing process and a subtle request for modern viewers to follow the example.

This cleansing of the stink god/river spirit obviously refers to the problem of river pollution with the waste of modernity. At the same time, it also hints at the suffering of forgotten spirits, for "in a commentary on *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki specifically states that, 'I really believe that the river gods of Japan are existing in that miserable, oppressed state. It is not only the humans who are suffering on these Japanese islands'" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 303). Miyazaki's statement is interesting, since he does not only talk about the suffering of the gods but also of the people. For the animation director, humans that have no spiritual connection or in his words "a man without history or a people that forgot its past [sic] will have no choice but to disappear like a shimmer of light" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 291-2), which leads us to one of Miyazaki's most fundamental concerns and reasons for filmmaking. He announces that "our children, surrounded by high-tech machines and shallow industrial products, are rapidly losing their roots. We must show them what rich traditions we actually have" (Yoshioka 259). This is exactly what he does in *Spirited Away*, where he visually achieves the reconnection of the younger generations with the spiritual world and with Japanese history by throwing his protagonist into this spirit world and confronting her with challenges she has to overcome using traditional Japanese values. Specifically in the discussed bath scene, "at one point in the cleansing process, she herself is plunged into the filthy bath water, hinting that Chihiro needs to confront her own impurities in order to grow and ultimately transcend the liminal state" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 302). Naturally, Chihiro can be understood as a representation of Japanese youth in general and Miyazaki seems to suggest that young generations need to undergo a kind of self-purification to rid themselves of modern pollution in order to reconnect with their past. This is supported by the fact that right after her fall into the water she is able to connect to the god and consequently to her spiritual and cultural history. Furthermore, she is then capable

of discovering the 'thorn', freeing the spirit of all the waste and restoring him to his rightful self. Most essentially, however, "newly purified at the end of the experience, she seems to have grown in maturity in terms of her personality and in her dealings with her fellow bath attendants, who begin to respect her much more after this" (Napier, "Akira" 184). From then onwards, she plays an increasingly important role in the bathhouse.

The whole process of purification and linked to it Chihiro's growth in terms of maturity, is first hinted at in a very early scene of the film, where Chihiro, in trying to find her way out of the spirit city, unexpectedly finds herself in a river. This short encounter with water can be seen as a reference to later appearances of it and as such it can be interpreted that when she jumps back out of the water so quickly, it could mean she is not yet ready to be purified and hence to reconnect to her past. Once she starts working in the bathhouse and gains some confidence, the actual purification process is slowly introduced by a lighter form of water, which is rain. It follows with the heavy flow of the herbal bath water which as discussed, serves as a turning point in Chihiro's journey. Finally, the remaining sea of water surrounding the bathhouse seems to point out that the cleansing process of Chihiro and the bathhouse is still ongoing and it is only with her train ride to Zeniba's house towards the end of the film that the water ends and the purification as well as the maturation process is complete. Only one last scene thereafter deals with water again, which is Chihiro's final memory of her first encounter with Haku. He once saved her when she fell into a river called the Kohaku River as a younger child and it turns out that he is the river spirit that inhabited that river. As this moment strongly links to the theme of memory and identity, it will be discussed further below in the name section. At this point, it is just of significance that similar to the above purification scene with the stink god, when she fell into the Kohaku River, she was able to connect to its river spirit and although this spiritual connection was

unconscious, it is present when she enters the spirit world, which explains why Haku remembers her name and why she knows deep within her that he means well.

She overcomes all the challenges she has to face during her stay at the bathhouse through the use of typically Japanese values, like politeness, which she has to learn in her very first scene in the bathhouse after "having been admonished by Lin for forgetting to thank Kamaji for giving her a job, Chihiro's politeness never again falters" (Bye 125). In the bath scene, it is through her self-purification and the help of the other staff that she manages to overcome the issue with the stink god, which again "emphasizes a major Japanese value, that of joint effort. It is also interesting to note that the cleansing of the Stink God is accompanied by the waving of Japanese flags, perhaps another gesture toward traditional Japanese culture" (Napier, "Akira" 184). There are further expressions of Japanese behaviour found in the film and Susan Napier skilfully summarises and interprets them in the following words: "[*Spirited Away* is] a quest to rediscover and reincorporate elements of purity, self-sacrifice, endurance, and team spirit, all of which have been historically regarded as quintessential Japanese, and reintegrate them into a form that has resonance for the contemporary world" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 289). In essence, it can be understood that the younger generations of Japan should be pro-active in remembering and connecting to their roots and cultural values, for this is the way, as Miyazaki seems to suggest through the film, that cultural recovery in modern times can take place.

4.1.3. Conclusion of Water Motif in *Spirited Away*

While the water motif is present throughout the film in different forms, its purpose stays mainly the same, because especially "in its cleansing and purifying function [it] plays a major role in the film" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 297). This is where it links to the major theme of cultural recovery, because Miyazaki seems to propose that a reconnection to the spirit world and one's own roots can only happen by getting rid of certain negative traits linked to modern lifestyle through a cleansing and purification process, such as the ones Chihiro goes through when crying her tears and finally when falling into the bathwater.

These cleansing events allow for a spiritual connection in the literal sense, as Chihiro meets with spirits during and after being in contact with water, and in a symbolical sense, since she is not always conscious of these connections. Therefore the spiritual connection will always be there, even if it cannot be remembered.

4.2. Food

A central theme of *Spirited Away* is the consumption of food, which is found throughout the film in various forms and meanings. For this analysis, it will be divided into three subcategories: Healing foods, excessive foods and nurturing foods. As will be illustrated, some of these consumptions have positive results, while others have negative impacts; some are taken on a voluntary basis and others are forcefully fed. Eating in its different forms has been identified as an important theme in the relevant literature as well, often linked with the image of excretion, which will however not be discussed in further

detail in this thesis, as it would be a another theme on its own and cannot be accommodated within the required length of this paper.

4.2.1. Healing Foods

Scene Description:

Healing foods are the first kind of consumption of importance to the film. They are small and have an unpleasant taste, but an immediate healing effect on the affected person and are not voluntarily taken but given to the refusing consumer in order to restore her or him to a healthy state. There are three occurrences of such medical foods in the film. Not all can be discussed here in detail, hence there will be an emphasis on the first instance to get a general understanding of the meaning of healing foods in the film, but because each has its significance, they will all be briefly examined.

The first scene in question is when Chihiro, who has just watched her parents turn into pigs, is urged by Haku to cross the bridge before nightfall. It is when she reaches the border of the newly emerged river and starts to literally dissipate into air that the first magical healing food is used. Rushing to her aid, Haku forces Chihiro to eat a small red berry for her not to disappear and it immediately turns her solid again (see fig. 3). While this moment has very strong links to the theme of identity, the focus here will be on the healing food used and Chihiro's vanishing will briefly be addressed in the name section.



Fig. 3: Chihiro swallows the magic red berry

Thereafter, it is Chihiro herself who receives a magic dumpling from the river spirit as a reward for freeing him from his polluted self and even though she had intended to use it to reverse her parents' transformation, she decides to heal other characters with it on two occasions instead. Firstly, when Haku is hurt and in need, she feeds him half a dumpling while he is in his dragon form (see fig. 4), forces him to swallow it by bravely holding his snout closed and manages to save him. Secondly, in the hope of changing No-Face (the visitor she had thought to be a customer) to his previous self, she throws the second half of the dumpling into his open mouth (see fig. 5), which in return makes him spit out all the food and people he had previously engorged, healing and restoring him to his normal size and behaviour.



Fig. 4: Chihiro sacrifices half of her magic dumpling to save Haku

Application of Filmic Devices:

Even though it is actually early in the evening in the scene where Chihiro nearly vanishes, the setting is nearly completely black. It is only the dark green grass and some plants that can be made out. This serves as a contrast to Chihiro's fading away, for she turns lighter until we can see through her body, which seems to cast a soft white glow. In this scene, lighting plays a crucial role. Only the soft moonlight mixed with the light emanating from the theme park with the restaurants informs us of place and time. Without the influence of these ligh ts, the scene would be completely in the dark. Haku's white clothing

also oppose the darkness, but the most prominent colour in the scene is the red of the magic berry Haku gives her to eat, which emphasises its importance, particularly considering its tiny size within the frame. In terms of acting, Haku's extreme calmness (he hardly blinks in this scene and only makes slight movements) is contrary to Chihiro's despair. Especially in the moment when she refuses the medicine and wants to push him away, which is the largest and fastest movement of this scene, he does not move one inch as her arms float right through his head. There are quite a few small essential actions in this scene, hence the use of many close-ups, such as Chihiro's rejecting arms flying through Haku, her reaction as she realises what just happened, Haku feeding the red berry to her and finally their hands touching as Chihiro turns solid again.

In the next two scenes where Chihiro gives away her magic dumpling, the application of filmic devices only happens briefly. What is emphasised in both instances is her courage, especially with regards to the difference in size and strength of her and the two creatures she faces, which is Haku in his dragon form and No-Face having turned into a big black monster.



Fig. 5: Chihiro offers the other half of her magic dumpling to No-Face

The strength of the dragon is depicted in close-ups of a few vigorous movements and his tail hitting hard on the wall and floor, fighting small Chihiro, who has to use both her arms and the weight of her whole body to keep his dragon snout closed in order for him to swallow the magic dumpling. In the second scene, it is the difference in size and movement that highlights Chihiro's braveness, because although her small figure nearly vanishes in the overly colourful room next to the large and terrifying monster, she sits calmly and confidently in front of its twisting and turning black mass.

Analysis:

The fact that it is a river spirit who comes to aid Chihiro in the beginning and urges her to "eat some food from this world" (*Spirited* Away) implies that she has to somehow maintain a connection to the spirit world in order not to vanish. Her initial refusal shows that she feels not ready yet. Although "from the look on her face, Chihiro seems to find the taste very unpleasant" (Napier, "Akira" 186), as is characteristic of good medication, "the food does restore her body and give her the strength to begin her adventure in the bathhouse" (186), indicating that if such a small part of the spirit world can have such an immense effect on her, how much more will she be able to gain from it, if she allows herself to be open to it. In fact, "Chihiro's own metamorphosis is also linked to consumption" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 306), another instance of her identity development, particularly visible in this scene as she visually disappears and reappears.

Possibly the most interesting aspect about the use of healing foods in this film is that the roles are switched half way through and it is now Chihiro that needs to aid the gods and spirits. She wants to return the kindness she has received from Haku and No-Face and is eventually the only one capable of freeing Haku from his spell and the bathhouse from the

invasion of No-Face. She does so with a similar calmness as Haku had in the beginning when giving her the magic berry. The similarity suggests that spirits and humans should work together and help each other in the restoration process, which is exactly what is happening because not only does she heal and restore spirits, but she herself is transformed in return. With the help of her magic dumpling, she is able to reverse their previous metamorphoses and return them to their original healthy states.

Her newly obtained values such as caring for and helping others and being less self-focused and whiny eventually lead her to the selfless act of giving away her magic dumpling to restore two people to their previous selves indicating another value in Japanese culture, which Chihiro has incorporated. This is further enhanced by the love she has for Haku, which is named as the single force for breaking powerful spells, such as the one Zeniba put on the magic golden seal that Haku stole from her, reflecting not only the strong connection she has entered into with a spirit, but also the immense character growth she has gone through that make her master any situation.

4.2.2. Excessive Foods

Scene Description:

The subtheme of the overconsumption of food occurs particularly in two scenes. It is introduced in the beginning with Chihiro's parents' excessive eating of food on platters in an empty food place, of whose patronage they do not know. Their piggish behaviour eventually turns them into pigs. No-Face, who is the second absorber of great amounts of food and of people as well, does not turn into a pig, but into a gross black monster with a big mouth.

While the two scenes are separate, they are linked through their common elements and hence cannot be analysed on their own.

Application of Filmic Devices:

Characteristic of both instances is the focus on the food that is being consumed, which is mostly portrayed in the foreground. Chihiro's parents are lured to the food by its smell and once they start eating, Chihiro nearly disappears in the background and their food orgy takes over the screen (see fig. 6: top). In No-Face's case, the bath attendants balance the food in front of him and while they become moving platters in the foreground, No-Face's engorging becomes the focus of the upper half of the screen, where we see him sitting in a bath tub (see fig. 6: bottom). Both scenes work with horizontal lines to emphasise the vertical action of putting food from the platter to the mouth and the colours of green and red are resumed.



Fig. 6: Similar framing of Chihiro's parents eating away (top) and No-Face gobbling of food (bottom)

Analysis:

Without a doubt, the most obvious message of gorging food in the film is visualised through the negative transformation of the appearance of the parents and No-Face,

suggesting that excessive and greedy behaviour cannot lead to any good and "it is through swallowing unpleasant medicine rather than indiscriminate gorging that the characters can develop and change" (Napier, "Matter out of Place 306), as becomes visible with No-Face, who is first enlarged through eating too much and then resized to healthy proportions after consuming the magic dumpling. The form that No-Face turns into reflects his personality, because his transformation into a constantly fatter growing monster undoubtedly depicts his own greed.

The metamorphosis of the parents into pigs is the most memorable and has the most obvious meaning. Although the actual transformation from parent to pig is not shown on screen, it is not immediately clear that they have changed and because they still wear their clothes, sit on their chairs and gobble up food similar to when they were last seen, the viewer is as shocked at the sight of pigs instead of humans as Chihiro is. It is clear, however, why they have turned into this specific animal given their behaviour and personalities. Their metamorphosis into greedy pigs is also a visual manifestation of the theme of greed. Finally, their transformation has an impact on the story, as it is the reason Chihiro is separated from them and more importantly, it is because she cares for her parents that she takes on a job in the bathhouse in the first place. It is not immediately clear why working in the bathhouse will actually help her parents, but it is an advice from Haku she simply needs to follow, because she does not have a choice and the audience is forced to move along with her, as no further indications are provided.

Since it is Chihiro who eventually succeeds in returning No-Face as well as her parents back to their original forms, we can conclude from this fact that Miyazaki's appeal is to younger generations to save older generations from the greed and excess of modernity. Even Chihiro is influenced by these negative aspects of modernity, as in the first scene she

complains that she had to wait to move to a new home before getting a flower bouquet and her mother reminds her that her father had bought her a rose for her birthday, to which Chihiro replies that one rose is not a bouquet. This is further represented through the setting of the abandoned theme park, which went bankrupt during the bubble economy, when the Japanese economy had a break down, as Chihiro's father points out to his daughter and simultaneously to the audience. Chihiro's parents can be identified as part of this generation and so can Chihiro to some degree, but her rejection of the food in the theme park "already suggests an inner moral or at least ascetic strength which will prove useful in her coming trials in the bathhouse" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 300). Part of these trials she has to face are her own impurities as well as the burdens of modern excesses that she brought with her in the shape of No-Face. So once she reaches a certain level of maturity and cleanses herself, she is then the only one able to rid herself and the bathhouse of the greed in the form of No-Face by healing and leading him away.

The fact that she mistakes No-Face for a spirit implies that greed is often disguised. Strongly proposing that not only are greed and overconsumption unhealthy, but they make one blind and voiceless to the substantial values of life, which explains why No-Face has no voice and hence no words, for as Miyazaki states: "a word is one's will, oneself, and one's power (2001,1)" (Yamanaka 242). This explains why No-Face has no identity of his own, but 'borrows' other peoples' by devouring them.

4.2.3. Nurturing Foods

Scene Description:

Consumption of foods that are in some way nurturing form the last part of the food motif analysis. One scene is of particular importance here, which is the same one in which the protagonist sheds her big tears, as discussed in the water motif section and which are caused by the consumption of the rice balls she receives from Haku. This is the major instance of a nurturing food in the film. It has a similar effect to healing foods, but has a pleasant taste. Since the application of the filmic devices has already happened in the tears section, it will not be repeated, but as the investigation was focused on the tears, a short inspection of the rice balls will be given, for as mentioned above, they have been discussed and their importance pointed out by a number of scholars.

Analysis:

As previously identified, this scene is of great significance to the film and inhabits a number of the important motifs at once. While water in the shape of tears has already been looked at, it is the rice balls representing the food motif that are investigated here.

The first point that needs to be made clear is why the rice balls can be identified as a nurturing food. Considering that Chihiro had just been left alone by her careless parents who had turned into pigs can be understood as “an implicit critique of the absent parent” (Napier, “Akira” 187) and throughout the rest of the film Chihiro has to function on her own without her parents, but with the help of spirits, indicating that if young generations cannot rely on their guardians, they have to learn to rely on themselves and the spiritual world. Therefore, “it is only in the fantasy world of the bathhouse that Chihiro begins to receive

proper nurturance. Even more important, this nurturance is intimately connected to a culturally specific food" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 307), not only proposing a reconnection to traditions and hence to the past, but that in the modern world she was living in with her parents, she did not get the right nourishment and it is here in the spirit world where she can receive it.

While bitter healing foods and unhealthy excessive foods have their importance in the story, "this quiet scene of Chihiro's eating rice balls, a staple of Japanese culture … has tremendous emotional depth, demonstrating the traditional values that form the heart of the film and give it its emotional and moral framework" (Napier, "Akira" 187), especially because of the combination of the rice balls with the significant tears discussed above.

It is evident that the consumption of these rice balls is very meaningful to the film and even more so the fact that they are given to Chihiro by a spirit, implying that she needs to return to traditional Japanese values in order to remember her roots and history, which can only happen if she (literally) absorbs them and makes them part of her being. It becomes "clear from the next scene, which shows her back in the bathhouse hard at work, that the onigiri [rice balls] have helped to resuscitate her" (Napier, "Akira" 187), indicating that remembering her cultural background helps her to grow in maturity and confidence and as she receives, accepts and finally incorporates more of it, she is able to reconnect to her roots.

4.2.4. Conclusion of Food Motif in *Spirited Away*

Through the motif of food, Miyazaki strongly criticises modern excess and a focus on materialism and he demonstrates the consequences of such behaviour through visual

means, as seen above. Even though Chihiro grows up in such circumstances and is affected by them, she still has a healthy instinct and refuses to eat any of the food her parents gobble up in the restaurant and later in the film, whenever she is offered anything in abundance by No-Face, she only takes as much as she needs and then politely rejects, unlike him or the bathhouse attendants, who all greedily want as much as they can get. Miyazaki's practical advice in the film is to get rid of greediness, be it through purging, purifying or in the extreme case, through leaving. In whatever way, cultural recovery cannot happen if blinded by greed and excess, but only once a healing process has started that externalises such matters. While Haku and No-Face are quite radically healed through the magic dumpling halves that Chihiro feeds them, in her case, it is a gradual healing process, which happens through the intake of the red berry and later the rice ball, suggesting that she literally needs to internalise cultural values and make them part of herself in order to re-establish the connection to her history and be able to draw energy from that knowledge to heal. In conclusion, Susan Napier summarises the significance of this scene for the recovery of culture in the following words:

> No Face's orgy of excess is ultimately contained, allowing the film's final message to be one of somewhat guarded optimism for the survival and even perhaps the renewal of traditional culture. The agent of this renewal is, of course, Chihiro, transformed from her earlier apathetic and dependent self (not, perhaps, so different from No Face in certain respects) at the beginning of the film to a figure of moral authority and courage by the end. (306)

4.3. Space

One of the most powerful motifs of *Spirited Away* is space, as it "also influences what action can take place" (Matthews 138) and hence the spaces in this film are well thought-through. Particularly Chihiro's treatment of external spaces such as the staircase and the bathhouse are of importance and will be investigated below. The different space scenes will be examined in conjunction and in their appearing order in the film. Although these spaces are depicted in several scenes, since the analysis serves to understand the function and meaning of the space motif in general, not each scene will be treated separately in depth. Instead, a staircase space in the two scenes will be looked at in further detail with a short outlook on the function of the bathhouse space.

4.3.1. Staircase & Bathhouse

Scene Description:

The bathhouse is the major setting of *Spirited Away* and most of the film plays in or around it, but for this analysis of interest are the moments in which Chihiro interacts with this space, such as "the precarious staircase Chihiro at first descends with terror to enter the bathhouse: at a later point we see her negotiate this without a second thought" (Matthews 138). Therefore these two instances as well as the happenings in between require further investigation and will briefly be compared to Chihiro's ultimate conquest of the bathhouse space in a later scene. This motif has briefly been discussed in a few academic texts.

Chihiro's climb down the flight of stairs to the boiler room happens right after she has to leave her parents who have turned into pigs and is instructed by Haku on how to proceed from there. It is the first scene where she is completely on her own in this strange world and her fear is visible in each and every movement she makes. Her descent down the long staircase therefore turns into a careful and slow expedition at first, until one of the wooden steps breaks under her weight, causing her to rush down the rest of the steps in a mad dash (see fig. 7), being stopped only by the wall she finally bumps into.



Fig. 7: Chihiro's flight down the long staircase

While this scene goes on for more than a minute, depicting every unsecure step and move Chihiro makes, she climbs the same flight of stairs the very next morning to go and see her parents, after she has found the courage to ask Yubaba for a job and had spent the night crying. Her ascent up the stairs is comparatively extremely brief, but she takes it on as if she would do so every day without further hesitation.

Much later during the course of the story, while chaos breaks loose inside the bathhouse due to No-Face's spread of excess, Chihiro discovers that Haku is hurt and bravely decides to aid him. As he flies to Yubaba's office in his dragon form, she decides to climb up the bathhouse walls to get to him. On the way, she needs to cross a thin water pipe in order to get to a long metal ladder leading all the way up to the top floor, where she finds him lying on the carpet.

Application of Filmic Devices:

Although the setting of the two staircase scenes stays the same everything else changes. A major alteration in the mise-en-scene is the lighting. While the first scene is set in the dark of the evening, the second happens during the early morning hours, just after sunrise. There is also an important transformation in costume, as Chihiro descends the stairs in her modern clothing, but ascends them in her new traditional wear. Most significantly, however, it is Chihiro's staging that leaps from terrified to at least partly confident. This change is mainly reflected in the contrasting movements reflecting the emotional state Chihiro goes through at the two different times. It is further stressed by the compositional balance and the framing of the two scenes and how they vary from each other. While the shorter second scene was created in a fairly conventional way, it is especially the longer first scene that utilises more unconventional modes of compositing and framing. Among the elements that stick out are the diagonal lines brought about by the staircase and the diagonal lines of the wall at the top of it that run through many of the frames, causing them to be unbalanced, reflecting Chihiro's own imbalance and insecurity felt at the time. Through many variations in camera angle, height and distance, this is further enhanced. Miyazaki makes use of low- and high-angled cameras in this scene to visualise Chihiro's fear of climbing these steep steps down into the unknown dark alone. At one point, he also changes the camera height and focuses on her shoes on a step in order for the audience to concentrate on the careful moves of the feet and to watch her climb into frame. Finally, to emphasise her emotions and actions, the camera jumps in between different camera distances such as close-ups and medium shots to observe her facial expression while carefully examining the step to wider shots of her looking down, and finally, falling and rushing down the stairs. Miyazaki eventually even lets her run from further above straight

into the camera while she is running down the stairs in order to get an understanding of the direction and speed she is running at.

In contrast, the ascent up the stairs the following morning consists of only three different still framings, highlighting Chihiro's determined and energetic walk, which is very rhythmic and vertical and hence stands in contrast to the diagonal horizontal line of the staircase and as she walks in and out of the frames, the focus really lies on that movement, which lacks of the previous evening's terror.

The most fearless overcoming of space is Chihiro's climb outside the bathhouse walls. All the visible elements express peace and calmness, such as the grey walls, the blue sky, the white clouds and even the floating birds. This stands in contrast to the chaos that is evolving within the bathhouse and the dangerous mission Chihiro is on. Only her daring dash across a



Fig. 8: Chihiro's brave sprint across a water pipe

pipe, which is obviously not strong enough to hold her weight, briefly disturbs the tranquillity of the moment, and therefore is the main movement of the scene (see fig. 8).

Analysis:

The motif of space is an excellent example of the capabilities of Miyazaki's films. He takes a picture, such as a staircase or a bathhouse and turns it into a motif by applying meaning to it to convey a theme. In this case, "the film also uses repeated interactions between Chihiro and the space to present character development. By showing her traversing the same spaces multiple times it allows us to see her changing response, in particular a growth in her courage and resourcefulness" (Matthews 138). Therefore the space turns into an external reflection of the character's internal state. In fact, when comparing the two staircase scenes, it becomes evident from the first to the second instance that Chihiro has already undergone a mediocre character metamorphosis, which is visualised in her handling of the space and further enhanced through the use of compositional and framing components, as we have seen above. Most intriguingly in this regard is the fact that the staircase as a space plays a further symbolic role for it can either be seen as ascending or descending. It is consequently unlikely that it is a coincidence that Chihiro first needs to climb down the staircase before she can climb it up again, suggesting that in order to get up somewhere, we first need to get down, as has been true of Chihiro's adventure. The two scenes also demonstrate the development Chihiro goes through just from the short period she spends in the bathhouse and the challenges she has to overcome during that time, such as climbing those stairs alone, asking Kumaji for a job, learning how to be polite, getting to Yubaba's office without being noticed and finally convincing her that she just wants to work. Although the ascent of those same stairs the next morning is much shorter, it is long enough to demonstrate her slowly developing new confidence, as there is no fear left from the previous night's descent.

It is therefore interesting to observe that “the bathhouse is laid out according to an ‘upstairs downstairs’ hierarchy. There are its lower levels, containing the bathhouse machinery and its operators, where Chihiro first gains entry; there are its mid-levels, where customers and employees interact; and there are its upper levels, containing Yubaba’s rooms, the centre of power” (Matthews 138). While Chihiro starts at the very bottom and lingers on the middle floors some time, it is “the extraordinary scene in which a tiny Chihiro scales the walls of the bathhouse to get to Yubaba's rooms in order to help Haku [that] makes it clear that her heroic transformation has been completed” (Bye 125), for she has literally ascended to the highest point. Undoubtedly, unlike in the beginning, Chihiro voluntarily and determinedly decides to conquer this final space of the bathhouse, which is a great deal more dangerous than the staircase, indicating that she has nearly completed her metamorphosis, learnt new values and gained in confidence to the extent that she even risks her life running across a weak looking pipe in order to save Haku. Furthermore, while the settings are described to the utmost detail allowing the viewer to have an understanding of the dimensions of the presented world, the way the bathhouse and Chihiro’s journey are structured invite the audience to experience her development first-hand and empathise with the character on a deeper level.

4.3.2. Conclusion of Space Motif in *Spirited Away*

The main theme of cultural recovery is not immediately apparent in the manifestations of space. While it soon becomes clear that Miyazaki intended Chihiro’s treatment of space to reflect her internal state and for the audience to experience her character growth, the recovery of culture can only be found indirectly in this motif, for it is

through Chihiro's discovery and reconnection with her cultural roots that she gains in confidence, which in return is mirrored in her increasingly brave handling of different spaces.

4.4. Name

As identified by many scholars, the concept of identity is a subtheme of *Spirited Away* that keeps reappearing throughout the film, but is often not connected to a specific motif. In any event, it is manifested in several instances and objects, some of which have been referred to above in the context of other motifs, while others will briefly be mentioned in this section. The main focus of this section, however, will be on the expression of identity through the name: the job contract, the farewell card and the Kohaku River, which means Chihiro's memory of Haku's real name. Each has a different function that will be analysed below.

4.4.1. Job Contract

Scene Description:

A major appearance of an expression of identity in the form of the name happens relatively early in the beginning and again towards the end with the job contract that Chihiro signs with Yubaba. When Chihiro reaches Yubaba's office and eventually convinces her to give her a job, she needs to sign away her name to the witch, who literally takes possession of the name by making the symbols come off the page and fly into her outstretched hand. She then gives Chihiro the name Sen, which Chihiro keeps until the end of the film. It is then

that she tells Yubaba's twin sister Zeniba her real name and soon afterwards her contract dissolves in Yubaba's hand as she stands her final test and correctly identifies that her parents are not among the pigs she is presented with.

Application of Filmic Devices:

This study will look at the film techniques used for these two scenes in comparison, as there are some crucial contrasts. To begin with, the setting superbly represents the situation, as in the first scene, the dark room lit only by an orange fire and some table lamps reflects not only Yubaba's character, which can be dark and fiery at times, but also Chihiro's state at this point, as she is fearful of the task ahead of her to convince a frightful witch to employ her. Similarly in the second scene, it is just after the break of dawn, which was symbolically accompanied by the revelation of Haku's real identity, and instead of Yubaba's secure home, it is on the magical bridge separating the bathhouse from the theme park that they meet for the last time. The main difference, however, is in the staging and movement of Chihiro. Since in the first scene she is still her sullen self, there is a stark contrast to the confident young lady she turns into by the end of the film. This is further stressed by the appearance and difference in size of Yubaba and Chihiro. The scene in Yubaba's office is filled with frames of her huge head and of a tiny shaking Chihiro next to her, while in the later scene, Chihiro confidently faces Yubaba, who is not framed as the dominating one anymore. An interesting change from one scene to the other happens in regards to costume. On her way to the train station, Chihiro takes off her work clothes, underneath which appear her own clothes, already suggesting a change back to her old self but loaded with confidence and independence. Furthermore, it can be said that the job contract acts as a prop in these scenes, for it has a specific function, namely of taking and returning Chihiro's identity.

Analysis:

In order for Chihiro to reconnect with her roots and take on a renewed identity, it seems necessary for her to give up her name and individuality for a short time, in order to develop and internalise Japanese values, such as focusing on the community rather than on oneself. At the same time, it becomes clear that keeping her name and therefore her identity is of utmost importance, because otherwise she would remain in the spirit world forever, just like Haku did. Haku reminds Chihiro of the importance of remembering herself while being known as Sen by the bath attendants. It is during her time as Sen in the bathhouse, "a place of ritual and initiation where Chihiro loses her original identity and is forced to undergo a variety of trials before constructing a new, more powerful form of subjectivity, which enables her to achieve the purging of the bathhouse in several significant episodes" (Napier, "Matter out of Place" 298), the last one of which is the enticement of No-Face out of the bathhouse, where he accompanies Chihiro to Zeniba's House. It is there that she finds her answers and her journey ends, which is signified through Chihiro's wish to tell Zeniba her real name. Interestingly enough, Zeniba replies to her that she has a pretty name which is the exact same words that Yubaba tells her before taking it away from her earlier. The meanings are completely opposing, however, as Yubaba's response is that it belongs to her, Yubaba, now, while Zeniba simply says Chihiro should take good care of it, illustrating again the immense development she has gone through and the long journey she has taken to get to that point. Her final test hence becomes an easy task for her considering all she has learnt and her triumph with the disappearance of the job contract marks the end of her journey.

4.4.2. Farewell Card

Scene Description:

Similar to the job contract, the farewell card plays a pivotal role in the portrayal of name and identity within the film. It can also be understood as a prop, for it carries the function of reminding Chihiro of her identity.

In the very first frame, the viewer is shown Chihiro's farewell card while she reads it aloud. It is this same farewell card that will eventually play an important role in a later scene, when "Haku has taken Chihiro to see her pig/parents**.** Clearly agitated by this experience, Chihiro becomes even more upset when Haku returns her human clothes along with a farewell card from some friends that has her name on it" (Napier, "Akira" 186), reminding her of her true identity, which she was about to forget.

Analysis:

While the first scene can merely be understood as an introduction of the farewell card and a hint of the theme of identity, it is the scene in which Chihiro finds the card among her old clothes that has strong meaning to the story (see fig. 9). As it reappears, just before she is given the rice balls and cries her large tears, there is no need to repeat the filmic devices used in this scene, but instead identify the connections of these motifs.



Fig. 9: Farewell Card with Chihiro's name on it

This scene starts out with "Chihiro's acknowledgment that she has almost forgotten her

name reminds the viewer of her vulnerability to the erasure of identity, a reminder of the more graphic vision of her near vanishing at the beginning of the film" (Napier, "Akira" 187) and a sign of her proneness to identity loss in the state she is in and as a result her need for a spiritual and personal transformation. This is not a reflection of her alone, but of a whole generation of Japanese people: "In this scene Chihiro is alone, temporarily orphaned, and seemingly powerless. Like modern Japan itself, she seems constituted by loss and amnesia and surrounded by others with similar circumstances, most notably Haku, who cannot remember his real name" (187). Therefore Chihiro can be understood as an embodiment of Japan, close to losing its identity due to having lost touch to its historical and traditional roots and being reminded in this moment of the importance of remembering. In fact, the memories are right there in form of a spirit and the Japanese rice balls he gives to Chihiro, strongly suggesting the need to reconnect with traditional values. The last motif of the scene, as discussed earlier, are the tears that Chihiro sheds thereafter for herself and Japan at the near loss of this connection but possibly also at the joy of having found it again. Modern Japan and in particular, the younger generations of Japan are encouraged through this film and through the character of Chihiro to reconnect to their traditions in order to know where they come from and who they are.

4.4.3. Kohaku River

Scene Description:

Twice during the course of the film the Kohaku River appears in Chihiro's memory. The first occurrence is unexpected, confusing and shorter while the second instance resolves the whole mystery and correctly identifies and consequently frees Kohaku, the river spirit. It

is the last appearance of water in the film, but since the incidence happened many years ago, it can also be perceived as the first one. It will, however, be discussed here in the name section because its link to the theme of identity is stronger than its connection to the concept of purification. The fact that some motifs overlap just emphasises how interlinked the themes are and that they all lead to the main theme of cultural recovery.

Chihiro's flashback of her first encounter with Haku happens when he is transformed into a dragon and she sits on his back for the first time and holds his horns, which is what seems to trigger the memory of her nearly drowning in a river but being mysteriously saved. It is very short though, as it only comprises of three brief images of Chihiro's hand, legs and face. In the second scene, the memory goes on for longer and includes a picture of a floating pink shoe as well. It happens right after Haku picks up Chihiro from Zeniba's house in his dragon form.

Application of Filmic Devices:

These memory pieces are well presented, as they are depicted like a dream or a faded memory and it is easy to picture a younger Chihiro experiencing that event. To begin with, there is a great deal of motion and variations in size due to the predominant water and the focus on different parts of her body swimming in it, such as her legs, her shoe, her hand and finally her face. Additionally, the colours are similar throughout and consist of watery

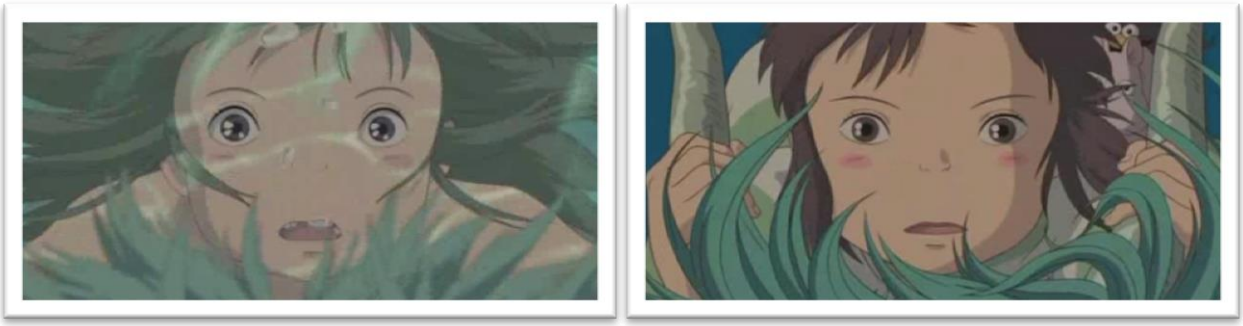

Fig. 10: Similar framing of actual memory (left) and remembrance of memory (right)

blue, green and white representing the water with the only contrasting colour being the pink shoe floating on the green-blue river. Lastly and most importantly, each memory is framed differently with varying camera angles, heights and distances, which makes each more memorable. In the first frame, her legs are dangling alongside the dragon's tail in the water. The second impression is that of the pink shoe drifting away, while the third one is a point-of-view shot of her outstretched arm in front of her dipping into the water as she falls from above. Her final memory is a close-up of her astonished face facing the camera and the shifting green dragon hair at the bottom of the screen. This is of great relevance because the exact same framing is repeated at the moment when Chihiro remembers Haku's real name and tells him about it (see fig. 10), which creates a strong link of the present to the past, an excellent sample of what the whole film represents and tries to achieve.

Analysis:

Since Chihiro's maturation and purification process has already been completed, she is the only one now capable of helping others to find their place and identity, and hence "it is finally up to Chihiro to create presence out of absence, not only to recover her own vanishing self but also to help others recover their own genuine subjectivities" (Napier, "Akira" 187), starting with the bathhouse and then No-Face and ending with the significant realisation that Haku is the spirit of the Kohaku River. It is revealed later on that their connection originates in the incident where Chihiro fell into his river. By remembering his name, Chihiro does not only return his identity to him but also reverses his shape-shifting into a dragon for good. Having just been reminded of his own identity, this transformation back into a young man seems questionable at first, as the dragon form actually seems to be his original form as a river spirit. Understanding his background, however, makes us realise

that he cannot exist as the spirit of the Kohaku River anymore, since it was filled in and it seems he was trapped in this form as he could not find his way home, yet Chihiro managed to free him. It was necessary for him to undergo this metamorphosis, in any case, or else she would not have had a chance to fly on his back and consequently be reminded of their previous encounter.

The fact that where the river once was is now an apartment complex again emphasizes that certain aspects of modern living have blocked the connection to the spiritual world and even the spirits seem to have forgotten their place. Interestingly, however, Haku remembers Chihiro's name and because he cares, she feels that he means well. This indicates that Chihiro unconsciously felt the spiritual connection during her stay at the bathhouse, a connection that has been there all along, but she is only able to identify once she opens up to her history and is able to reconnect to her past.

Some literature explains the conclusion of the film with a similar kind of unconscious memory: "The implication here is that Chihiro is losing her memory of her fantasy world, just as she forgot her previous encounter with Haku" (Yoshioka 271). It seems indeed like Chihiro might not remember her other-worldly experience once she leaves the tunnel (although in contrast to the original Japanese version, where Chihiro and her parents drive off in their car silently, in the American version we hear Chihiro's voice answering her father that she thinks she can handle the new school and home, an addition that drastically alters the meaning of Miyazaki's intentionally unresolved and thoughtful close). There still is reason to believe that she does carry away something from her journey, because "the fact that she still has the hair band, however, suggests that her 'fantasy' is 'real'. This is precisely Miyazaki's point. Even if she forgets what happened, it still remains a part of her" (271) and this knowledge awards the end of the film a very hopeful note after all despite its open ending.

4.4.4. Conclusion of Name Motif in *Spirited Away*

Miyazaki exerts socio-cultural critique through the name motif by portraying Chihiro's feeble identity in several moments, indicating that Japanese youth and in fact modern Japan is on the verge of disappearance due to the near loss of its history and traditions. He does not leave it at that, however, and gives subtle yet concrete advice in his film on how recovering its cultural values will in turn help recover Japan's identity. Firstly, an acknowledgement of the loss is necessary, which happens when Chihiro finds her farewell card and realises that she has nearly forgotten her name. Secondly, Chihiro's willingness to learn and her openness to her new surroundings are further aids in reconnecting to culture. And finally, memory and actively remembering is a major step in achieving this goal as is demonstrated with Haku's example and the hairband Chihiro receives in the end because, as Miyazaki proposes, memories form part of a human's being and cannot be lost (Yoshioka 271).

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

Through this film in particular, Miyazaki illustrates that animation's potential goes much further than telling entertaining stories to children and adding visual effects and digital characters to live-action productions. The vast increase in technical innovations for creating animation can be a valuable addition to the medium, as long as new technologies do not replace but rather support a narrative. Miyazaki mostly tries to avoid new technologies in his films, demonstrating how more weight can be shifted from spectacle to storytelling with the help of animation. Rather than seeking external ways to extend the possibilities of animation, he enriches his films from within and from the means enhanced or enabled through the medium, such as detailed art work, metamorphosis and the depiction of fantasy elements which would be difficult to portray in live-action. For this study most importantly, however, it is mainly storytelling that allows him to convey content of socio-cultural and educational value.

As discovered earlier, the depiction of detailed elements is one way Miyazaki uses the medium to make his works more real and believable to the viewer. Another strategy is the use of metamorphosis, which as discussed, has an influence on the progress of a story and while it bears a significant connection to the character it transforms, it can furthermore act as a reflection of its personality or even as a motif, conveying one of the film's themes. Finally, fantastic elements in Miyazaki's works do not simply form part of an other-worldly experience, but are an extension of reality and consequently reach down to a deeper level to help us understand our own realities.

With regards to storytelling in the case study, every single element in *Spirited Away* is supportive of its basic storyline, which tells of a girl who enters a bizarre spirit world and has to face many challenges and strange creatures in order to grow in confidence, until she is ready to return to the human world.

Simultaneously, as illustrated in the analysis, the selected reoccurring motifs and subthemes ultimately all link to the main theme of cultural recovery, communicating a clear critical and advisory message of how certain behaviours and lifestyles can ultimately lead away from or to cultural recovery.

With the protagonist's involvement with the water motif in different forms, such as the tears, the lake, the rain and the bathwater and her cleansed and refreshed self after each encounter, the audience is recurrently reminded of the importance of purification. It can get rid of negative influences from a modern lifestyle, hence allowing for a reconnection with the spiritual world, which is a major step towards the recovery of culture.

The characters' behaviours in the film that are consumed by greed and excess, however, are Miyazaki's way of repeatedly demonstrating through the motif of food the extreme discrepancies from the traditional to the modern lifestyle, the need to get rid of such negative traits and get healed through the intake of medical and cultural foods in order to reconnect to one's own roots and therefore restore culture.

Chihiro's increasingly brave handling of spaces reflects her growing self-confidence that she receives after being cleansed and hence being open to her history, allowing her to recover culture as she rediscovers it and in turn become stronger through this acquisition of knowledge.

The motif of name and linked to it the theme of identity is possibly present in each single scene. Since Chihiro can be understood as a representation of modern Japan and its

youth, as mentioned in the analysis, this indicates that at the beginning of the film Miyazaki is portraying a Japan that has lost its identity and is very feeble but is strengthened through the cultural changes and spiritual encounters it undergoes, eventually leaving it reinforced and with a strong knowledge of its identity. He makes use of this motif throughout the film to demonstrate how cultural recovery can happen.

The animation director therefore utilises thematic development to convey socio-cultural critique and educational messages, for it forms an ideal tool for animation to transmit underlying meaning while entertaining. Motifs and themes are simple narrative devices that are easily adopted into the visual form of animation and are very effectively used in this film. In this way, since animation is still mainly regarded as a children's medium in many parts of the world, it also offers great educational opportunities that should be explored further. Especially considering that it seems as if television is partly replacing teachers and parents or at least has a significant influence on children viewers - which is most likely due to a stronger exposure to the medium - and as a result needs to contain valuable content for children and youngsters, which is what Miyazaki attempts to achieve through his films.

With this in mind, Miyazaki is not afraid to include culture-specific references in his works in order to share cultural knowledge with the Japanese youth and remind older generations of their traditions. This is rather unusual for a work produced in a globalised world, because to get worldwide distribution, a film has to have universal appeal. It seems though that Miyazaki has found a combination that has universal attraction and culture-specific value. This achievement should be of interest to other directors as well, as it is often the case that global content is preferably produced over local content due to the existing

funding opportunities. It would be highly important especially for children to learn about their own cultural values and not only about frequently Americanised global norms.

Withstanding the fact that Miyazaki's films have universal appeal, he still tries to make them personal. Ultimately, his motivation for producing films is to make a difference in people's lives and hence to have an influence on his viewers; to let them think about their circumstances and make proposals on how to change matters. In doing so, he is not shy to address and criticise cultural norms and social circumstances. That is how his stories gain contemporary value and consequently make them more interesting to the viewer, for if a story directly affects us, we are able to relate to it better. This is one of the most important lessons that *Spirited Away* can teach, as a story will have no relevance if it has no value to offer and if viewers cannot identify themselves with the presented characters and themes. As impressive as special effects might be, if they do not support a story that has meaning to audiences, they are nothing more than a momentary spectacle that cannot leave a lasting impression, unlike what a good story and memorable characters can. So *Spirited Away* really serves as an excellent example of how animation productions can use the inherent advantages of the medium to extend and deepen their narratives.

The examination of Miyazaki's film presented here and the possibilities he demonstrates will hopefully inspire further practical and theoretical explorations of the animation medium and its potential, not only of technical, but especially of narrative and artistic nature, in particular in a time when there is a growing acceptance of and increasing interest in the medium.

WORKS CITED

- Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.

- Bigelow, Susan. "Technologies of Perception: Miyazaki in Theory and Practice." *Animation: an interdisciplinary journal* 4.55 (2009): 55-75. *SAGE publications.* Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 7th Ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.

- Bye, Susan. "Spirits of Times Past: Fantasy, Tradition and Identity in *Spirited Away*." *Screen Education* No. 67 (2012): 121-128. *Informit.* Web. 24 May 2013.

- Denison, Rayna. "The Global Markets for Anime: Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* (2001)." *Japanese cinema: texts and contexts*. Eds. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer. London: Routledge, 2007. 308-321. Print.

- Furniss, *Maureen*. *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics.* 2nd ed. Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2007. Print.

- Hall, Stefan. "Spiraling Homeward: Shifting Realities in *Spirited Away." The 25th Annual International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts.* Ft. Lauderdale, FL. March 2004. Conference Presentation.

- Harris, Timothy. "Seized by the Gods." *Quadrant* 47.9 (2003): 64-67. Print.

- Hu, Tze-Yue G. *Frames of Anime: Culture and Image-Building*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. Print.

- Katz, Steven D. *Film directing shot by shot: visualizing from concept to screen*. Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 1991. Print.

- Klein, Norman R. *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon*. London: Verso, 1993. Print.

- Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.

- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001. Print.

- Matthews, Kate. "Logic and Narrative in *Spirited Away*." *Screen Education* No. 43 (2006): 135-140. *Informit.* Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

- "motif." *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (3rd Ed.).*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Oxford Reference. Web. 29 Aug, 2013.

- Napier, Susan J. *Anime from Akira to Howl's moving castle: experiencing contemporary Japanese animation.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

- ---. "Confronting Master Narratives: History as Vision in Hayao Miyazaki's Cinema of De-assurance." *Positions: east asia cultures critique* 9.2 (2001): 467-493. *Project MUSE.* Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

- ---. “The Problem of Existence in Japanese Animation.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149.1 (2005): 72-79. *JSTOR.* Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

- ---. “Matter out of Place: Carnival, Containment, and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 32.2 (2006): 287-310. *JSTOR*. Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

- Noy, Thrupkaew. “Animation Sensation. Why Japan’s magical *Spirited Away* plays well anywhere.” *The American Prospect* 13.19 (2002): 32-33. Print.

- Price, Shinobu. “Cartoons from Another Planet: Japanese Animation as Cross-Cultural Communication.” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24.1-2 (2001): 153-169. *Ebsco-Host.* Web. 10 May 2013.

- Reider, Noriko T. “*Spirited Away*: Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols.” *Film Criticism* 29.3 (Spring 2005): 4-27. *ProQuest Central.* Web. 13 Feb. 2013.

- Reinke, Steve. “The World is a Cartoon: Stray Notes in Animation.” *The sharpest point: animation at the end of cinema.* Eds. Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke. Toronto: YYZ Books, 2005. 09-26. Print.

- Satoshi, Ando. “Regaining Continuity with the Past: *Spirited Away* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.” *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children’s Literature* No. 1 (2008): 23-29. *Project MUSE.* Web. 13 Feb. 2013.

- *Spirited Away*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli. 2001. DVD.

- "theme." *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition*. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009. *Dictionary.com*. Web. 14 Mar. 2014.

- "theme." *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (3rd Ed.).*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference*. Web. 29 Aug. 2013.

- Wells, Paul. "Hayao Miyazaki: Floating Worlds, Floating Signifiers." *Art & Design* 12.3-4. (1997): 22-26. Print.

- ---. *Understanding Animation.* 1998. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.

- Wright, Lucy and Jerry Claude. "The Animated Worlds of Hayao Miyazaki: Filmic Representations of Shinto." *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*. Metro Magazine No. 143, 2005: 46-51. Web. 04 Feb. 2013.

- Yamanaka, Hiroshi. "The Utopian "Power to live": The Significance of the Miyazaki Phenomenon." *Japanese Visual Culture: explorations in the world of Manga and Anime*. Ed. Mark W. MacWilliams. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008. 237-255. Print.

- Yoshioka, Shiro. "Heart of Japaneseness: History and Nostalgia in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*." *Japanese Visual Culture: explorations in the world of Manga and Anime*. Ed. Mark W. MacWilliams. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 2008. 256-273. Print.

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1: Chihiro's outbreak of oversized tears while eating a rice ball.....45

Fig. 2: Chihiro is lifted out of the bathwater by the Stink God after falling in 50

Fig. 3: Chihiro swallows the magic red berry.....55

Fig. 4: Chihiro sacrifices half of her magic dumpling to save Haku.....56

Fig. 5: Chihiro offers the other half of her magic dumpling to No-Face 57

Fig. 6: Similar framing of Chihiro's parents eating away (top) and No-Face gobbling of food (bottom).....60

Fig. 7: Chihiro's flight down the long staircase 67

Fig. 8: Chihiro's brave sprint across a water pipe 69

Fig. 9: Farewell Card with Chihiro's name on it 75

Fig. 10: Similar framing of actual memory (left) and remembrance of memory (right).....77

Source: *Spirited Away*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Studio Ghibli. 2001. DVD.