

Spirited Away: A Glance at Hayao Miyazaki

By Enes Erbay*

“For the people who used to be 10 years old, and for the people who are going to be 10 years old” is the definition of the movie *Spirited Away* by its director Hayao Miyazaki.

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Spirited Away (the original title: Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi) is Hayao Miyazaki's animation which was made in Japan in 2001. The movie made a huge success all over the world and became the most watched movie ever in Japan. The success brought several awards such as the Golden Bear in the 52nd Berlin Film Festival and the Best Animation Oscar in the 75th Academy Awards.

Spirited Away is about Chihiro's journey to be a grown up and to learn the responsibility of standing on her feet alone while experiencing the magic of love with Haku. The 10 year old Chihiro and her family have to move to another city due to the change in her father's career. When Chihiro and her family are on a trip to their new home, they experience many exciting events. After they lost their way in jungle, they find a tunnel which connects the real world to the world of souls. When they go through the tunnel, they find their selves in a world of wonders: A bathhouse designed for gods... Chihiro's parents turn into pigs because of their humanistic weaknesses and of their greed. This place was designed for only gods. In the world of Yumama, the owner of the bathhouse, people who do not work have been transformed into animals. So, Chihiro has to impose herself and get a job in the bathhouse to save her parents afterwards. Of course for a price: she has to abandon her name.

Miyazaki explains *Spirited Away*: “Film is based on a bathhouse where most of the gods visit. I always had some weird feelings about Japanese bathhouses. So that is why I always wanted to make a film about bathhouses and I thought it would have been funnier if the bathhouse is only for gods. I think the Japanese gods are going to the bathhouses just like us to get rest. They want to stay there longer but when the weekend finishes they have to go back to their routines. Because I believe that they are busier than other times nowadays.”



Absentation of elders/parents

Miyazaki's cinema is identified as 'modern day far eastern fairy tale'. It is also possible to make more complex identification as most parts of the *Spirited Away* is based on the function of "absentation of elders/parents". However, the roles within the characters change a lot during the movie (e.g. the roles changes between Chihiro, Haku and Zeni-ba). Chihiro becomes victim in some parts of the movie and Haku helps her. Haku was a victim and Chihiro helped her while Zeni-ba was villain and transformed into a donor character at the end. It can be said argued that only some characters' role is steady within the story.

Chihiro is not a typical type of Miyazaki character. Normally he employs more positive and irregular characters in his other movies but in this one Chihiro is a little girl from present age without a perfect character. He accepts this as a challenge to himself because he says that using these kinds of characters is harder than the other ones. So, that is why the roles between characters in the story changes a lot and that makes it more complicated and harder to figure out with Proppian theory.

The common points in Miyazaki's movies

Like *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki's animations are representatives of Japanese mythology and Japanese fairytales. All his movies are full of mythological metaphors such as people turning into animals, use of crows, use of flying objects, use of gods and so on... Here are the main things that we can see common in Miyazaki's cinema:

◆ Flying Scenes: One of his biggest hobbies is vintage planes. His father was a manager in a plane factory during the World War II. Also in Japanese mythology it is very common to see flying people, flying objects and such.

◆ Optimism and Pessimism: His main characters are mostly optimist characters such as Chihiro in this movie. On the other hand he tries to discover the dark parts of human beings within his other characters in his movies.

◆ Female Characters: In most of his movies his main character is a female character. For instance; *Laputa*, *Kiki*, *Mononoke*, *Totoro*, *Nausicaa*, *Chihiro* etc. Miyazaki thinks that male characters move and attack with their animal instincts when they face a dangerous situation. However, female characters understand the situation and reacts in more mature way. Also, as a man he always finds women's attitude and behaviours more powerful. Due to this, he choose female leading characters most of the time.

◆ Pigs: Pig is a quite powerful figure in Japanese fairytales. Miyazaki has a personal interest on Pigs and you can see a lot of examples of pigs in his movies such as Chihiro's parents turning into pigs in *Spirited Away*. **PR**

Note:

* **Enes Erbay** is an M.A. Student in Directing: Film and Television at the University of Westminster.

