Analysis Of Protagonist Chihiro In Spirited Away

Introduction

Written by Hayao Miyazaki and produced by Studio Ghibli, the imaginary and adventurous themed animation has received many awards such as the second Oscar for Best Animated Feature. Based on a ten-year-old naive and modern girl named Chihiro, her closed perception widens having to adapt to the traditional Japanese culture in the Spirit World. In order to save her parents, it was essential to conquer all challenges set by the owner of the bath house Yubaba; who turned her parents in to pigs for iniquities of greed and gluttony.

From start to end the animation takes us on a breath-taking journey, its immersive winning soundtracks and implausible storyline are reasons to why the movie has earned its achievements. Breaking down to theories along with my perspective to why and how the audience are engaged and emotive to Spirited Away, main topics that'll be discussed to support these views are: the protagonist, personal favorite scenes, and its music.

Protagonist Chihiro

Miyazaki often creates inspirational female lead roles to promote capability of the female gender. Also having a male side character does not indicate the lead role's rescue, but instead supports the lead role as a friend. The movie begins with Chihiro annoyed and isolated at the back of the car. Whilst her parents are always ahead of her, they hold expectations of her to catch up to them even as they walk through the abandoned theme park. This portrays her parents' actions always influence her decisions, and the time her parents aren't with her is when she becomes lost and afraid.

"Sympathy, pity, admiration, hope and fear are the major empathic emotions" according to Tan (Film Induced Affect, p.--), we feel for the characters despite understanding they are fiction, we remember the protagonist is only ten years old and being detached from her parents is naturally distressing, we comprehend as we have felt distress ourselves or similar; like anxiety.

Whilst watching, we tend to relate our real-life experiences to fiction events as like Tan has stated "viewers relate to the character's experience of the fictional world" (Film Induced Affect, p.--). Miyazaki takes inspiration from universal real-life events and characteristics, before embedding all into the animation. – and so, we feel apologetic this event has happened to Chihiro because commonly, these kinds of problems occur in real life.

After temporarily losing her parents, Chihiro gained courage from a male friend called Haku and entered the bathhouse to gain permission to work from Yubaba. From a girl who was lazy and dependent on her parents, she was now alone having to make her way to the evil sorceress on the highest floor. During the journey of saving her parents, she faced all sorts of characters that guided her to walk with bravery and built courage to help others. In her attempt to employment she was told to "finish what you start" by a side character Kamaji, which stimulated her strong will.

This creates paradoxical feelings amongst us, where participants view this scene metaphorically and relate it to their own lives. Kamaji speaking to Chihiro could be perceived as if he's educating us as well. As Zacks has mentioned in Flicker Precis, operant conditioning is taken place when viewers watch a movie; once we experience a stimulus, we are likely to "make the same response". In other hand, when Chihiro was encouraged with wise words to enhance her in to doing good deeds – we were likely to feel encouraged with her.

Miyazaki created Spirited Away and placed an ordinary girl as the protagonist, for the "people who used to be ten years old, and the people who are going to be ten years old". With this mindset, he made sure Chihiro learned valuable assets like responsibility, and maturity. He offered these lessons about human nature and life through an enchanted world, to encourage and guide children in to appreciating the beauty of the world we live in. Despite the many flaws in this world, there are subtle beauty hidden within.

Miyazaki integrated deep abstractions "within the very metaphoric imagery and structure of his animation" (P.Gossin, page 217), therefore deep insights from his experiences or perception of human life and nature were shown across his creations. His intention for Spirited Away, was a symbolism of cheer to "those that wander aimlessly" and lack purpose in life.

Scene One: Chihiro visits the pig farm

A personal favorite scene that led me on an emotional ride was Haku taking Chihiro to her parents, at the pig farm. Miyazaki could have cut a lot of scenes and have Chihiro arrive at the pig farm, to reduce time and in fear of audience losing engagement. However, a distinctive element of Miyazaki is that he presented the passive full scene of Chihiro waking up, to walking through all the locations that were already portrayed early in the animation, to the pig farm instead.

Viewing the protagonist is also guiding viewers through an expedition, we'd appreciate and feel more absorbed in their world – and the world end up seeming more real as we are constantly shown these sceneries. According to Insider, the intention was to provide the audience a chance to breathe from the many tense action scenes. A Japanese term for this is 'Ma', meaning pause – an effect to have spectators absorb the nature and what Chihiro sees; this creates an emotional wave throughout the movie as we feel a wave of emotions from excitement, to suspense, and back to sadness.

As these 'pause' scenes happen, it allows us to quietly reflect the current events that has currently happened to Chihiro, and act as an enhancement "of viewer empathy" as Kate Weedy has mentioned in Perceptual Modulation. Back in the modern life of Chihiro, she was most likely spoiled with meals and never felt the need to exceed her consumption – therefore suggests her lack of temptation when her parents invited her to join them to eat. However, adapting to the traditional culture, where she struggled to perform the basics such as mopping the ground and cleaning bathtubs, this exposed her lack of struggles back in her previous lifestyle.

The scene also revealed Haku feeding Chihiro with two rice-balls, indicating she hadn't had the chance to eat since arrival. As she bit into the rice-ball she broke into tears as she understood her situation, we use this 'Ma' scene to realise how Chihiro is feeling. As Tan has said, "Character's understanding of the situation is relevant for the viewers' emotion" the audience

empathizes with the protagonist as not only was her parents the cause of her situation, but she now must find a solution independently. We end up feeling a desire to watch the character's progress and "witness her subsequent success". Ingeniously done, these scenes build anticipation to watch till the end.

Not only is this a portrayal of differences in generation but presents loss of culture as technology and modern values has taken over Japan, suggested by the animation showing Chihiro in an Audi A4 car. Once again, Miyazaki most likely wanted his target audience to appreciate their origins as identity played a huge theme in Spirited Away. The scene ended with Haku reminding Chihiro to remember her name, otherwise she'd never be able to return to her world just like him, who had forgotten his identity long ago.

Scene Two: The Train Ride

After an incredible tensed action scene of No-Face chasing after Chihiro, the pace reduced and diverted into another 'Ma' scene. A technique of 'Animetism' that is slightly different from Cinematism, is used during this serenely scene where Chihiro boarded a sea train. With the separation of the images placed into multiple planes, this creates a multiplanar image; often Japanese animators use as another form of expression. (T.LaMarre, The Animation Machine, p.3-4) The effect creates a sense of panoramic perception, with Chihiro no longer belonging in the same space as the Spirit World but in the train – viewing the landscapes with the viewers, as the train moves her across the world.

(Thomas LaMarre) Chihiro felt "the gap between the world of the train and the world of the landscape". This modulates viewer's perception, letting us feel a sense of feelings from just her presence and the comforting atmosphere; emitting a sense of reflection within us. A realistic sensation of the train travelling enhances with the camera placed opposite Chihiro, as if we're pedestrians riding on this train also. The diegetic effect helped Miyzaki create a dimension where us viewers feel their world as our physical space. (K.Weedy, Perceptual Modulation, p-00) We feel immersed and experience having an alternative world as our physical environment, as this scene is a great example of Tan arguing that the screen is just "a window giving access to a completely fictional world".

We were provided a full journey of the protagonist's train ride, with landscapes of the sea and buildings swayed across the train windows. A close-up camera shot dedicated us Chihiro lost in nostalgia, as she's absorbed by her surroundings with the calming sensation from staring out at the sea. In this moment, we also felt similar due to our natural responses which remain difficult to suppress (Zacks, Flicker Precis, P.7). Just like Chihiro we quietly reflect also, for the "enhancement of viewer empathy". (K.Weedy, Perceptual Modulation, p-00)

This scene had recapped me to the start of her story, from following her parents in fear of being alone to now boarding a train without her parents. In this case, No-Face symbolises her as he insisted on joining her in fear of loneliness. Reflecting, I had realized she has acquired attributes hidden within her such as courage, strength and determination. A girl who weren't afraid to take initiative of any situations for the sake of her parents, but also due to her love for Haku.

A sense of estrangement personally applied in this scene as it helped me perceive the growth of Chihiro, it allowed me to critically analyze why Miyazaki has intended this 'Ma' near the end of

her journey. Metaphorically, the protagonist represents everyone who are blinded from comfort and protection, in which disables their intrepidity. Only those that faces their circumstances can stimulate their courageousness and bring out strength held within them.

The spirit world was a test for Chihiro to overcome her hard-ships, and as a result became a strong spirited girl who wasn't afraid to accomplish the worst tasks given to her; such as cleaning the stink ghost that the whole bath-house employers including Yubaba refused to take on. In the end she had proved everyone wrong with her kindness and sturdy will and gained their respects. Like Susan J. Napier argues, the narrative holds "themes of metamorphosis" (Susan J.Napier, Matter Out of Place, P.295, 2006).

Harmony

The creation of Spirited Away's magical atmosphere was no other than Hisaishi Joe, a well-renowned musician who has won countless awards such as the Japanese Academy Award for Best music. Whilst Miyazaki captivates us with physical visuals, Hisaishi touches our hearing senses; together they were a flawless combination that accomplished sophistication.

Hearing the melody of one of the famous soundtracks One summers day, it enhanced emotional characteristics of the enchanting characters. From this, viewers were able to grasp the raw emotions in the animated world along and helped us visualize the atmosphere of the spirit world, and Chihiro's sadness. Articulated by Wen Tian, it is an "emotional catharsis" to feel the same as these characters through the combination of Miyazaki and Hisaichi's creations. (W.Tian, Study of Harmony, p.02, 2018)

It is no doubt the music has boosted immersion and helped us forget about the real world and visualized being a part of the animated world. Engagement is a success when viewers can relate their experiences such as emotions or social interactions, to an animation presenting these experiences within the narration and the characters. As One summers day played during the first scene analysed, the tune enhanced Chihiro crying which brought me to tears. The harmonious melody contained nostalgia, in which helped me envisage her suffering. Separation is a universal experience, so naturally I related my experience of feeling separation to Chihiro missing her parents – and sympathized with her. However, as the animation advances, a smile developed across my face as I witnessed Chihiro's perseverance.

As Kracauer states, music isn't only just sound, but they are "rhythmical and melodious movement". Its role is to "breathe life into the silent pictures", also agreeing to the statement of music boosting immersion. The atmosphere felt magical and dream-like, a kind of feeling that'd only be felt in the world of Spirited Away.

Conclusion

I interrogated to why and how the audience are engaged and emotive to this animation. Miyazaki can touch the soul of the viewers with his magical and captivating narration, sceneries and characters. We felt immersion from the metamorphosis of Chihiro growing into a capable strong girl; through the obstacle of hardships faced from the separation of her parents to boarding the sea train to save Haku. Empathy was felt deeply across the 'Ma' scenes, as we witnessed the protagonist at her lowest to then seeing her achievements.

Over-all, fiction-based emotion was deeply integrated throughout the whole animation – with the music boosting magical and nostalgic feelings. I felt intensely immersed in their world to the point I hoped for Chihiro to remain in the spirit world a bit longer, so I could remain in their world a bit longer; although deep down I knew she must return to her original world.