Structure of Spirited Away by Nathan Johnson

The film *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki portrayed thought provoking concepts on many levels. It is clear that in analyzing the film, it would be possible to find deeper meanings through recurring motifs and the overall structure of the movie. Miyazaki used the perspective of the film to give it the structure which allowed it to develop properly. He paired the perspective with events that may have been literal in the movie, but can be translated to life with a more profound meaning. The perspective though which the movie was told and the scenes that occurred behind the main storyline of the movie played a major role in the development of the film.

The story of *Spirited Away* by Miyazaki was told through the eyes of a young girl by the name of Chihiro. This perspective played a key part in allowing the film to more easily display the themes that he was trying to get across to the viewer. In the beginning of the film it was clear that the protagonist Chihiro was depressed about moving to a new region, this showed her immaturity which was like a foil to the character that was seen develop through the movie. The development of the immature and innocent main character allowed the viewer to see events of the movie through neutral and untainted eyes. When Chihiro first came to the spirit world it was easy to see that the other spirits had no respect for humans. They were viewed as lazy and arrogant. This was because Miyazaki was trying to criticize people during this time about pollution and over industrialization. This criticism is shown in the drying of the river that literally saved Chihiro’s life. It was clear that the river, and Haku, were given a positive connotation by Miyazaki, but humans did not care about the river. They allowed it to dry up and had buildings built over it. “…identity which he [Haku] could not remember because the river had been filled in and covered with buildings (likely Miyazaki’s critique of the over-building in Japan at the expense of nature).” (Quoted from “Journal of Religion & Film: Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki’s Anime Film ‘Spirited Away’” by James W. Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura). With the story being told through the eyes of this little girl, it was easy to see how Miyazaki was attempting to show a theme about over-building during the time.

Another prevalent theme was that of self identity; a theme that is a major topic in anime. The storyline was structured around this concept in a few different ways. This was emphasized through the fact that in the film, names had power. As the witch would take someone’s name, she would gain control over them and they would forget who they are. It was only because Chihiro was able to remember who she was and why she was there in the first place that she was able to survive. Along with this sense of self identity, Miyazaki was also able to use this theme in another sense. As the story progressed, it was clear that Miyazaki was showing that every person had their own identity, but this identity may not have been as simple as it had originally been shown. Just like in life, there is a good side and an evil side to everything. When a war is fought, the home country is always the “good guy” while the opposing force is the “bad guy”, but if one were to live in the opposing country they would most likely see things through their perspective. Things in life are not always as simple as they seem to be; usually there is no clear cut line between good and evil. This is first shown with Chihiro’s parents who were, in the very beginning, no different than any other child’s parents, but it was quickly shown that they were flawed in their arrogance and lack of thinking about the consequences (like when the dad drove carelessly through the woods, or the parents ate the food without knowing who’s food it was). This was eventually shown through all of the characters. The maid who Chihiro was paired with initially seemed to be very mean and snotty, but it was soon shown that she actually cared about Chihiro and what happened to her. Chihiro, being very young and unexperienced in the world, made for a great character to show the two sided qualities of the characters because she did not know what to believe about people right away, she simply followed her instincts. The structure of the film once again allowed for themes to show through. “But No Face is not a fixed figure of evil. Toward the end of the film he begins to learn from Yubba’s twin sister Zenba how to improve his attitude and act with genuine “sincerity” (makoto) toward others”. Quoted from “Journal of Religion & Film: Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki’s Anime Film ‘Spirited Away’” by James W. Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura. (In this case it was the archetypal fact that good and evil are not always as clear cut as they seem to be, everyone has their own yin and their own yang. Although some people’s intentions may be better than others, there is no such thing as purely good and purely evil. Only the person who commits the action truly knows their own intentions, all others only know what they interpreted the action to mean. Much life good and evil in life, people’s identities are complex and constantly changing; they are rarely as simple as they at first seem to be.

Miyazaki used the structure and perspective of the film to get his themes, and thoughts about the world at the time across to the viewer. In using Chihiro as his protagonist he made these points clearer and more emphasized.

**Bibliography**
