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Topic: The magical bildungsroman of *Spirited Away*

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Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Abstract (Not more than 150 words giving a rough outline of your research)

Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter

1.1 Background

Anime, a style of animation originating in Japan allows for the fantastic suspension of belief that is somewhat necessary for the audience to be able to engage with the plots in Ghibli films such as *Spirited Away*. Ghibli films have been known to almost exclusively feature young females entering adolescence, where it utilizes the possibilities of fantasy to discover the protagonist's adolescence self and liminal identity. Anime as an unrestricted, non-photographic medium, have become extremely popular due to its limitless graphic possibilities, which allows for magic in realistic scenes and plots.

Spirited Away was written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki, and animated by Studio Ghibli, where it became the most successful film in Japanese history, grossing over \$289 million worldwide, and was named the second "Best film of the 21st Century So Far" in 2017 by the New York Times. In the film, the main protagonist, Chihiro and her parents enter the spirit world, where her parents are transformed into pigs by the witch Yubaba, and Chihiro takes a job working in Yubaba's bathhouse in order to find a way to free herself and her parents, and return to the human world. *Spirited Away* is viewed as a bildungsroman where Chihiro enters the spirit world as a sullen and spoiled girl, but returns to the human world as a more independent and self-reflective person altogether.

We witness the significant presence of magic realism in the film, where there is the incorporation of fantasy elements in the real world, which means that the inclusion of magic elements is supposed to be impossible but it is portrayed in such a realistic and believable way that we seem to accept it without questioning it. Hayao Miyazaki chooses to marry ideological thought with reality in order to create the magical realm, an extension of the movie's intention to point to an odd circular world where fantasy and reality blur to the point where it is indistinguishable. (Ong, 2017) This research paper hence seeks to analyse the

magical bildungsroman in *Spirited Away* where the use of the magic realism in the film elucidates the unique and enriching experience that the protagonist goes through in her establishment of her own identity in her adolescence. This paper therefore seeks to inform our understanding and deepen our appreciation of the bildungsroman genre in the film.

1.2 Rationale

Adolescence is a universal experience that everyone goes through in their life, making it an enriching and insightful cinematic experience ripe for interpretation. The utilization of the fantastical possibilities and magic realism in the discovery of the protagonist's transitional identity have been of much focus in the film. Notably, the coming of age theme and the desire for independence in the protagonist in the film are reasons for the immense popularity of *Spirited Away*. Unfortunately, these scenes in anime are often treated as juvenile as animation in the Western world is almost always aimed at children. In order to eliminate this traditional stigma, these scenes should therefore be studied in detail to contribute to the lack of research in the newly emerging anime industry, and should not be dismissed merely as entertainment for kids.

Hence, the study in this research paper seeks to present a fresh view on the magical bildungsroman, as well as examine magic realism as a genre that is not designed or intended to express escapism and childishness simply because it is unrealistic. This research paper hence sheds light not only on the significance of animation as a medium that has been considered too trivial for serious research, but also offers a better understanding of the value of magical bildungsroman in Hayao Miyazaki films.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do the elements of magic realism interact with the elements of a bildungsroman in the film? What insights can we draw from the interactions within these seeming incongruities?
2. How can Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development be employed to explain Chihiro's transformation as an adolescent while she finds her identity during her transition into adulthood?

1.4 Thesis Statement

The unique narrative of magical bildungsroman is borne out of the magic realism that has been utilized in *Spirited Away* through the protagonist's evolution and establishment of identity in the film.

1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s)

This research paper will reference the film *Spirited Away*, and explore the concept of magic realism and how it has been successfully utilised in the film. The conclusions made in this paper regarding the bildungsroman in *Spirited Away* will also reference extensively the scholastic articles on the genre, in order to analyse anime's unique ability to utilize and incorporate magical elements to describe the adolescent experience.

Only the Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion stage of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development would be applied to the analysis of this film, as the protagonist's age in the film can only be referenced to this particular stage in the theory. This thematic and stylistic approach to analysing the film would allow for a more holistic understanding of how the magic realism and the bildungsroman, two seemingly incongruent elements, are married together by Hayao Miyazaki in his creation of a narrative film.

1.6 Significance of Research / Usefulness

Traditionally, anime has been stigmatized as a childish and vain industry by mainstream pop culture, resulting in anime not being taken seriously. Hence, such attitudes and mindsets towards anime have resulted in little literary research that regards anime seriously as animation films that actually portrays many moral dilemmas (Halsall, 2010). Despite the indeterminate study in the field of anime, the usage of magic realism in *Spirited Away* should definitely not be dismissed.

Furthermore, *Spirited Away* is an excellent film choice of how the quest for an identity is made possible because of the transformative magical elements included in the film, allowing the character to take on a certain transformation in the maturity and mindset while establishing a new identity for themselves. Hence, this paper strives to establish the correlations and interactions between the elements of magic realism as well as the bildungsroman in order to apply this understanding through the study of anime. Through examining anime as literary texts, magical bildungsroman is also introduced as a literary genre seen in many Miyazaki films.

1.7 Limitation(s)

Though this film has been discussed extensively due to its popularity, there is a lack of depth analysis of how magical bildungsroman is apparent in this film. Hence, the analysis done is also not conclusive of what magical bildungsroman may entail, and could be somewhat speculative, but can be supplemented by constant reference to established theories and frameworks, such as Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which are being applied to this study of anime.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A survey of available sources suggests that the predominant focus of magic realisms in films is on how the supernatural is weaved into everyday life realistically. The bildungsroman primarily focuses on the protagonist's formative years or spiritual education, while the Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is largely based on the re-examination of one's own identity in the transition from childhood into adulthood.

2.1 Magic Realism In Anime

Magic realism as a theme itself is presented as an oxymoron, whereby there is the fusion of contradictory terms that appear in conjunction, fantasy and reality, in order to create a new perspective. Magic realism is recognized as a literary genre that originated in Latin America, with famous writers such as Gabriel Garcia Mârquez and Alejo Carpentier. Since the 1980s, critics have used the term 'magic realism' to categorize works of literature as well as film produced worldwide. (Peterson, 2013) As defined by Matthew Strecher, magic realism is "what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe". (Strecher, 1999) In his book *Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981*, Seymour Menton presents the most salient features of magic realism, including representational, whereby "Magic realism injects a touch of magic in reality. Fantastic realism portrays a fantastic world in a realistic way. Magic realism is based on the representation of what is possible but not probable." (Menton, 1983) Because of the fact that magic realism breaks down the distinction between the usually opposing terms of magic and realism, it is often considered to be a disruptive narrative mode. For this reason it is considered that "magical realism is a mode suited to exploring... and transgressing... boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic". (Zamora and Faris, 1995)

Contemporary magical realist critics such as Amaryll Chanady explains in a 1985 study that this narrative method relies upon an “absence of obvious judgements about the veracity of the events and the authenticity of the world view expressed by characters in the text” (Chanady, 1985), meaning that the readers would presumably fully accept the fidelity of the fiction regardless of how different this perspective may be to the reader’s opinion and judgement. The specific mode of animation as a medium has been found to portray the genre of magic realism most clearly, and specifically, in Hayao Miyazaki films. The employment of magic realism in animation creates a narrative visual space where fantasy and reality can be incorporated to create a new perspective. It is also somewhat a “main ingredient” that is crucial to fuel the characterization and evolution of the protagonist in the film. In rejecting mimetic precepts, Miyazaki’s animation is still capable of evoking a universe replete with characters and situation imbued with connections with the real world we inhabit everyday. (Cavallaro, 2015) For example, in *Spirited Away*, the elemental inclusion of spirits such as No-Face, the river spirit, and susuwatari (“sootballs”) is the combination of the spiritual and the physical brought to life through magic realism, something that is only possible to be conveyed visually through animation. The worlds portrayed in Miyazaki films constantly feel tactile and realistic, no matter how far-fetched or how imaginary the story outline and plot is. In Hayao Miyazaki’s book, *Starting Point* (1996), he articulates his position on the subject and mentions that, “Anime may depict fictional worlds, but I nonetheless believe that at its core it must have a certain realism. Even if the world depicted is a lie, the trick is to make it seem as real as possible. Stated another way, the animator must fabricate a world that seems so real, viewers will think the world depicted might possibly exist.” This means that to achieve a successful portrayal of magic realism as Hayao Miyazaki so often does in his films, there must exist an underlying familiarity with the characters and the world where the story takes place.

2.2 Magical Bildungsroman

The bildungsroman is a term frequently used to describe a literary portrait of the development of a central character in fiction (bildung=formation; roman=novel). (Beckson, 1960) Bildungsroman literature, then is a distinct literary genre that focuses on developmental changes. (Mckenzie, 1975) As a literary phenomenon that originated from Germany before spreading to the rest of the world, the bildungsroman was developed by German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the nineteenth century. The genre which encompasses the transitional journey into a secure, magical adolescent identity is known as the magical bildungsroman, which can be correlated perfectly with the experience that Chihiro goes through in her establishment of her own identity. Marianne Hirsch, who refers to the bildungsroman by an English translation from the German, the “novel of formation”, writes that “the novel of formation’s plot is a version of the quest story; it portrays a search for a meaningful existence within society, for the authentic values which will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities”, a notion that is aptly exemplified by the magical body (Hirsch, 1979) Spirited Away primarily focuses on the journey of the main protagonist to reclaim her parents from the clutches of an oppressive witch which includes numerous tasks that pushes her to recognize the maturing, selfless, and independent self within her. The film charts a young person’s development through a complex world of magic and reality, therefore making the interpretation of the film as a magical bildungsroman extremely appropriate. The film utilizes magic within this literary structure as a method to explore feelings of alienation caused by developmental change, as rendered through a gendered, magical adolescent identity in a thoroughly cinematic way. (Frank, 2015) The transformation of the literary elements of the bildungsroman – such as its emphasis on “the formation of a total personality, physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral” and its “biographical and social concerns” – into

formally motivated aesthetic ones is made possible by deliberate decisions regarding shot distance, angles, and lighting, among other cinematic techniques. (Hirsch, 1979) Through the symbiosis of the literary and the filmic in the conveyance of the message of the story, we are able to ascertain that indeed, anime as a non-photographic medium is extremely appropriate to image the types of fantastic narratives as seen in *Spirited Away*.

2.3 Erikson's stages of psychosocial development

The theory that will be employed to analyse the scenes in *Spirited Away* is Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, which is articulated by Erik Erikson in collaboration with Joan Erikson. This comprehensive psychoanalytic theory describes eight fundamental psychosocial tensions that individuals must balance throughout their lives (Syed & McLean, 2017) These eight tensions are frequently referred to as "stages", in which a healthy developing individual should rightfully pass through from infancy to late adulthood. In contemporary terms, the eight psychosocial tensions theorized by Erikson can be thought of as developmental tasks, which are general, universal psychological issues that conventionally, individuals will encounter and must confront and resolve in order to realize healthy development. As mentioned by Syed and McLean, "thinking of the eight tensions as developmental tasks helps us understand the psychological issues that are particularly salient to individuals at different points in their lives." With the help of the theory, one would be able to perceive the significance of, and grasp the idea that individuals would definitely experience personal problems or difficulties at separate occasions in their life. For the purpose of this study, only the fifth tension of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, Identity vs. Role Confusion, will be employed in the analysis of the different scenes of the film, as the main protagonist's age would be relevant only to this particular stage in the theory. During this stage, adolescents would search a sense of self and personal

identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals. As mentioned in his book *Youth: Change and challenge*, Erikson mentioned that “the adolescent mind is essentially a mind or moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult.” During adolescence, the transformation, or transition from childhood into adolescence is of paramount importance in the individual’s life. This major stage of development would allow the adolescence to re-examine his/her own identity and try to find out exactly who her or she is. Erikson believed that individuals would experience a conflict that would serve as a turning point in development, and that that conflict would be centered on either developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. During these times, the potential for personal growth is high, but so is the potential for failure. (Pailan, n.d.) The teenager undergoing adolescence would work at developing a sense of self by testing different roles before integrating them to form a single identity. Expressions of identity by the adolescent would include certainty about sex role identity, active interest in opposite sex, challenging of adult authority and the tendency to be self-accepting. (Del Rosario, n.d.) According to Helen L. Bee’s book *The Developing Child* (1992), presumably what should happen at the end of this stage would be “a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one’s appropriate sex role”. The success of completing this stage would thereafter lead to the virtue of fidelity which is “the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions and confusions of value systems.” (Stevens, 1985) The individual would be able to demonstrate faithfulness, loyalty and support to a person, cause or belief. (Mulenge Mulambula, 2013)

Chapter 3: Methodology

This paper would be analysing the interactions observed between magic realism and the bildungsroman in the film, and would be applying the Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development in order to explain the protagonist's transformation and identity formation during her adolescence.

A total of scenes of the correlations found between magic realism and the bildungsroman are selected and analysed using the research framework. These scenes range from the outset of the film where Chihiro sulks moodily in the back seat of the car and whines and complains miserably about leaving her comfortable life with her old friends, to the end of the film where she crosses the riverbed connecting the human world and the spirit world and reunite with her now restored parents.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Interpretation

4.1 Characters and setting in *Spirited Away*



Fig. 1. The transformation of Chihiro's parents into pigs on consuming the food meant for the spirits and customers of the bathhouse.

From the outset of the film, magic realism in the film is seen when Chihiro's parents are transformed into pigs by the witch Yubaba for consuming the food greedily at the food stall. In reality, it is impossible for a human to become a pig, but in the film, it is a symbol of the greed that took place during the Japanese Recession of the 1980s. The transformation of Chihiro's parents into pigs is the main catalyst factor for Chihiro's venture into the bathhouse. As their presence in the film greatly diminishes, she is now forced to become an independent figure and embark onto her quest herself to save them from Yubaba. Her journey into the bathhouse is openly defined as one of self discovery, where she is at the very particular age of twelve, an age typically regarded as the entry point into adulthood.

As mentioned by Dani Cavallaro, in rejecting mimetic precepts, Miyazaki's animations are still capable of evoking a universe replete with characters and situation imbued with

connections with the real world we inhabit everyday. (Cavallaro, 2015) The elemental inclusion of spirits in *Spirited Away* is the combination of the spiritual and the physical brought to life through magic realism, something that is only possible to be conveyed visually through animation.



Fig. 2. & 3. Chihiro's encounter with the stink spirit

The first magical spirit that aids in the development of Chihiro's adolescence is the stink spirit. The stink spirit's design and outer appearance in the film is integral in the establishment of his character, through the evocatively dirty brown of his oozing flesh and the vapors and gases that it emits. Through anime's specific abilities, such a grotesque and fantastic event can be imaged in such an engaging manner.

In her first task of cleansing the stink spirit, Chihiro starts off by being extremely expressive in a distinctly childish way, her face unable to hide her disgust and fear of the situation. Eventually, the now accepting and courageous Chihiro shows her valiance and fights through the thick mud and her own fears in order to help this customer bathe. Ultimately, Chihiro comes to understand and believe that serving the customers is a duty and responsibility she has to take on in order to save her parents, thus she puts in her sincere effort to cleanse the stink spirit, as can be seen when she tries to pull out the rubbish from his body. This is in contrast to the initial service that she previously paid rather unwillingly to Yubaba whose attitude and interests are largely motivated by material gains. This scene emphasizes that a truly stable and secure sense of self and maturity comes from recognizing the fallibility of these materialistic attitudes and interests. The challenges that Chihiro faces in the bathhouse helps to solidify her identity and aids in her adolescent journey.



Figure 4. No-face greedily consumes the food offered to him by the bathhouse workers.



Fig 5. Chihiro refuses to accept the gold nuggets that no-face attempts to offer her.



Fig 6. No-face declares himself as alone without any friends or family.

As defined by Matthew Strecher, magic realism is “what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe”. (Strecher, 1999) No-face is the second patron that Chihiro serves in the bathhouse, and like his name, he does not have an actual physical appearance. This particularly enigmatic character almost seems to not know who he is, or what purpose he serves in life.

This can be seen through the dialogue that he has with Chihiro:

Chihiro: Where is your home? Don't you have any friends or family?

No-face: No, no. I'm lonely. I'm lonely.

This negative self-declaration from no-face causes his neck and mask to withdraw into its body, almost as if though it was expressing the pain of rejection. It seems that he is just a lost spirit who is probably 'empty' on the inside and desperately wants to belong. His gluttony in the bathhouse could be perceived as a means to fill himself up with food and humans in order to escape the emptiness, but clearly as we have witnessed, it was unable to provide him with any satisfaction.

The setting of these particular scenes also serves to provide realism to the flow of the plot in the film. The fantastical bathhouse run by the witch Yubaba is the key location in *Spirited Away*. Its exterior appearance is extremely grandiose and opulent, and it exudes much importance through its overbearing structure. Built in a traditional Japanese bathhouse style, the key setting for the film was most directly inspired by Dōgo Onsen Honkan located in the castle city of Matsuyama on the island of Shikoku, and it can also be inferred as one of Hayao Miyazaki's key efforts in incorporating elements of Japanese culture in the most realistic way possible. Such elements help to provide a more authentic and representational setting of the Japanese bathhouse, and aids in the graphic of the film.

In no-face's repeated attempts to lure Chihiro and offer her bathhouse tokens and handfuls of gold nuggets, Chihiro politely refuses and denies the offer, belying her young age and her immature behaviour previously observed in the human world. With a level head and an unclouded heart, Chihiro is able to retain her virtues and develop into an independent, courageous and resourceful individual, simply through resisting greed, the one aspect that

separates her from the rest of the workers at the bathhouse, as well as the virtue that her parents succumbed to.



Fig. 7. & 8. Chihiro attempts to save Haku and tend to his injuries.

The last spirit that Chihiro encounters in her journey is Haku, who is also the first person that Chihiro encounters on her journey.

Haku saves her from losing herself literally, as her parents have done, by feeding her food from his spirit world, an act that commits her to the magical realm and to the journey that it requires, thus establishing himself as Chihiro's immediate protector. Haku accommodates Chihiro's entrance into the unfamiliar spiritual location of the bathhouse and informs her that she has to find employment to survive in this world of spirits. When Chihiro begins to work in the bathhouse, Haku is the one who motivates her to complete her challenges, which involves cleansing the excessive, grotesque spirits that patronize the facilities, as mentioned above.

Haku first appears as a boy of about sixteen, but in the later parts of the film, Chihiro discovers that he is actually a magical being - the lost spirit of the Kohaku River that also can take the form of a white dragon. In the context of Japanese culture, dragons are legendary mystical creatures largely associated with rainfall and bodies of water, thus this can also be viewed as Miyazaki's attempts at assimilating and integrating characteristics of Japanese culture into the film.

Applying the fifth stage of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development to the particular scene on the right, we are able to assert the fact that Chihiro has successfully managed to complete this stage. Mulenge Mulambula mentioned in his paper that the individual would be able to demonstrate faithfulness, loyalty and support to a person, cause or belief, on the completion of the fifth stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. (Mulenge Mulambula, 2013) This loyalty is clearly seen in Chihiro, where she is willing to sacrifice her own well-being in order to save Haku. Knowing that she will have to feed Haku the bitter dumpling given to her by the river spirit in order to save him from the injuries incurred by the paper shikigami, she forces his mouth open and reaches all the way

down with no regard to the sharp and menacing teeth that line the dragon's mouth. Even though the dragon showed menacing gestures to her, Chihiro places Haku's life before her arm, facing her fears and thrusting her arm into the jaws of the suffering dragon. The kindness that Haku previously displayed towards Chihiro has now been repaid.



Fig. 9. Yubaba, the younger twin sister of Zeniba is the proprietor of the bathhouse.



Fig. 10. Zeniba, the older twin sister of Yubaba, weaving in her cottage

Yubaba is the other essential female figure in *Spirited Away*, and she is also Chihiro's employer at the bathhouse. Securing a job from her is one of Chihiro's first tasks and she has

to put in lots of effort and sacrifices in order to do so. On first impression of Yubaba's appearance, she represents aristocracy and the selfishness of privileging consumption over tradition. There is a large emphasis on the sheer difference in the appearance of Yubaba and Chihiro, as can be seen from Yubaba's inhumanly large figure and head alone which is already almost the size of Chihiro's entire body. As the main antagonist of the film, Yubaba exudes an extremely intimidating and overbearing personality, and displays much greed for gold, similar to the other workers at the bathhouse. It can be said that she would even be willing to prioritise gold over her own family, as can be seen in the example of Zeniba, who she has displayed much hatred for.

Within the bathhouse, Yubaba dresses in a western style and lives among European décor and furniture in her quarters, which is in clear contrast with the minimalist Japanese style of the living quarters that her employees reside in. Her physical appearance as well as her outfits are evidently a representation of the Western capitalist influence over Japan during its Meiji period, during which the Japanese society moved from being an isolated outdated, feudal society to a much Westernised form.

Being Yubaba's twin, Zeniba has an identical appearance to Yubaba, except for one distinguishing feature, which is that Zeniba wears glasses when she is doing needlework in her cottage, implying that she might be far-sighted. Zeniba only makes an appearance in the later parts of the film, where her kind and helpful nature is revealed. She provides Chihiro with much advice and encouragement, and later even forgives Haku for stealing her steal. Her invigorating words serve much purpose as they eventually aid in Chihiro's help in remembering Haku's real name.

Yubaba and Zeniba, the twins that appear in the film, provides us with the notion that there are both good and evil in the world, and that often, they exist within the same person. Despite Yubaba's unpleasantly overpowering nature, and her suggestive physical features, it can be seen that she still possesses much motherly care and softness for her child, Boh. Initially, Zeniba seems to be as unmoral and unprincipled as Yubaba, but she eventually displays her righteous and honest personality that seem to resound much more with viewers. Despite their identical appearances, they seem to be complete opposites of each other, which many differences between them. Zeniba expresses her criticism and disapproval at greed and overconsumption, as well as Yubaba's indulgent parenting. Although she is not entirely good either, the wisdom that she exhibits helps everyone, including Chihiro, no-face and Haku, find their true identities and abilities.

Towards the end of the film, Sen also addresses Yubaba and Zeniba similarly as "Granny", suggesting that both twins are actually wise in their own way, but that they are simply two sides of the same coin: supposedly similar but seemingly different.

4.2 Power of words and value of names in *Spirited Away*

"Today, words are exceedingly lightweight. You can say whatever you like because words are as substantive as foam to us. That's no more than a reflection of how empty our reality has become. And yet even now, the truth is that words are power. It's just that we're meaninglessly drowning in a sea of powerless, vacuous words." – Hayao Miyazaki, 1999, in his director notes for *Spirited Away*. Words play an extremely important role in both Chihiro's initial enslavement at the bathhouse by Yubaba, as well as her eventual escape and reclaim of freedom with her parents from the spirit world. Haku and Yubaba also understand the power of words right from the start, both having experienced the weight of words.



Fig. 11. Yubaba had the ability to manipulate Chihiro's name.



Fig. 12. Chihiro discovers the card with her name on it from the bouquet of flowers that she received from her friends.

On the application of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, Del Rosario mentioned that the teenager undergoing adolescence would work at developing a sense of self by testing different roles before integrating them to form a single identity. (Del Rosario, n.d.) This can be seen in Chihiro when she was thrust with the opportunity to work at the bathhouse under a different name.

On learning from Haku that employment at the bathhouse was the only way for her to survive in the spirit world, Chihiro was given her first task: to obtain a job from the witch Yubaba. At the bathhouse, through determined, unrelenting persuasion, Chihiro pleaded with Yubaba for a job. Eventually, Yubaba relents and agrees to give her a job on one condition: that Chihiro would work under the name of “Sen.” Having no choice, Chihiro agrees, and Yubaba lifted the words off the contract, leaving only ‘Sen’ in its place. The significance of Yubaba leaving a letter instead of replacing the whole name is that there is still one small part of Chihiro left. We later find that it is her undying virtue that remains a constant force throughout the film.

The next day, Sen discovers the card from her friends inside the pocket of her shorts which reminded her that she had a real name – Chihiro. Chihiro was now able to remember her past and purpose, and the weakness that she used to exhibit is now replaced with courage and a sense of responsibility, which also frees her from Yubaba’s mind-washing control. Haku then warns Sen not to forget her former name or she would be trapped in the spirit world forever. It is undeniable that our names are a crucial factor in developing ourselves and propelling onto life’s paths. Hence, it is extremely important that Sen remember the qualities that contribute to her character and personality and remain true to them, even though her name, the one word that defines her, has changed. Eventually at the end of the film, Chihiro is able to retain her old name but with a new, improved personality developed through the obstacles and challenges that she faced in the bathhouse.

The choosing of Chihiro’s name specifically also plays a significant part in the film. Her name does not have any meaning per se, but can be written using different Kanji characters. By breaking down the Kanji, the first character 千 can be pronounced as sen, and would mean 1000 in English. This character is also the only character left on the contract when

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Yubaba extracts characters of Chihiro's name. The second Kanji 尋 can be pronounced as hiro, which would mean to search or inquire in English. Her name is extremely apt in the plot of the film, and could be interpreted as the finding of herself and the establishment of her own identity through the different magical elements that she encounters throughout her adolescence in the film.



Fig. 13. & 14. Chihiro and Haku finally manage to find themselves.

Haku is living proof of what will happen if one were to forget his/her true identity in the spirit world. Names are of fundamental importance in the spirit world, and clearly Yubaba understands this very well, as she uses this to her advantage and power and steals and changes the names of the bathhouse workers in order to control them. Only characters who display the inner strength and capability and hold onto their names and identities and not lose themselves to others can then obtain freedom.

Chihiro is able to successfully regain her identity and eventually towards the end of the film, helps Haku regain his as well, ultimately freeing them both. In doing so, Chihiro is able to reunite Haku with his true spiritual divine form, which results in Haku and Chihiro flying through the air, first with Chihiro atop Haku in his dragon form, and afterwards floating with him through the power stemming from their bodies. In this magical, sensational moment, Chihiro has finally proven herself to be magically evolved and mature, in relation to her previous traditional identity, where she expressed her gratitude and affection to Haku for saving her life as a child, and her modern identity, where she reclaims her human name for herself.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Adolescence is a universal experience, that everyone goes through in their lifetime. Hence, through the magical elements that have been included in the realistic setting of the film, the portrayal of the bildungsroman in the main protagonist in *Spirited Away*, Chihiro is greatly enhanced. This paper hence provides clear research on the significance of animation as a medium that has been deemed as too trivial for serious, in-depth analysis and research, and offers a better understanding of the value of magical bildungsroman in Hayao Miyazaki films, specifically, *Spirited Away*.

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