

How are the themes of greed and gluttony represented and aestheticised in Miyazaki's Spirited away?

Spirited away (2001)

Spirited away is a film that has people still talking about it even 23 years after its release in the west, with its amazing style, storytelling and hidden meanings it's no denying that Miyazaki's spirited away is quite possibly one of the greatest animated films ever made and also a fun detail is that he was inspired to make the film from one of his close friends's 10 year old daughter (Hayao Miyazaki's Spirited away and the anxieties of growing up December 13 2023). One area I really want to focus on and discuss is the concept of gluttony and greed and how it is portrayed within the film as well as discussing the way in which the film achieves this with all of its hidden symbols and messages.

Spirited away is a film that very clearly plays around with the concept of greed and gluttony from the hidden face of no face's mask to Chihiro's parents who show an example of greed by consuming large portions of food without permission from the spirits, they are then turned to pig to represent their glutinous behaviours. I will be going in depth and explaining why Spirited away so cleverly portrays these things. Firstly Spirited away focuses the majority of the film in bathhouse, is where a lot of spirits and entities go to "replenish themselves" (Spirited away 2001) as said by the character Yubaba in the film, this is where you begin to notice the concept of greed within the film as this establishment was made by Yubaba for the sole purpose of making as much money as possible, even going to lengths such as allowing a putrid and disgusting "River spirit" which would rot anything it comes near to bathe in her establishment for the hopes of gaining a large profit and making a lot of money or allowing the dangerous No face character to stay in the bathhouse because he gives a lot of the workers and herself gold even though he kills a lot of people in the bathhouse , money is all she cares about. This is a very simple yet effective way the film shows off greed and gluttony.

Another way the film portrayed greed is through physical character transformation, the first example of this is in the start of the film where Chihiro's parents discover a huge heap of delicious food seemingly left there for people to eat, before any transformations even happened, you start to notice Chihiro's parents acting like animals over the food by "following their nose" and sniffing the air as if they were dogs or pigs and this leads to them to their ugly fate. As Chihiro's parents begin to devour the mountain of food Chihiro begs her parents to stop in case they get in trouble for stealing food and being greedy however her father insists saying he has plenty of "credit cards and cash" (spirited away 2001) and at this point is when you start to view Chihiro and her parents as morally different people, her parents give in to their greed and receive a punishment of being turned into ugly fat pigs by Yubaba. Another transformation we see later in the film involves the character No face, no face lures a lot of the workers in Yubaba's bathhouse with fake gold and takes advantage of their greed to eat them and gain more power and as he does this No face grows to be much bigger in size, gain a deeper more evil sounding voice and constantly be begging for food to be given to him, he basically abused others people's greed to gain power and in turn became greedy and gluttonous himself and if this isn't a good physical representation of greed within Spirited away then I don't know what is!

Another way greed is represented is through some of the film's symbolism, particularly within the character No face. Through the course of the film, No face is always seen wearing some sort of mask (hence the name No face) and it seems to hide the real him, in the course of the film the more No face falls into his guilt, the more you notice his true features emerge from beneath his mask such as his grotesque set of teeth and his voice, the mask represented No face and him trying to hide his inner greed with the mask. Another big form of symbolism is how Miyazaki himself is not afraid to show the destructive nature of greed and the consequences it can have on characters in the film and that if left unchecked, greed and gluttony can only lead to bad things.

The themes and representation of greed and gluttony is also further enhanced by the visual aesthetics of the film and its use of colours. For example, in the moments of the film where all seems to be ok the colours used tend to be more vibrant and bright which gives off a feeling of calmness, however the destructive nature of the film becomes more apparent not only when a character succumbs to their greed but also in those moments when you notice the bright happy colours fade out and become replaced by darker greys, blacks and browns. It is basically showing that the more characters give in to their twisted and selfish desires the more darkness can envelop the world which is also a very powerful message to portray, so simple yet so effective. Another area greed can be interpreted in the film is through the

characters Yubaba and Haku, they seem to always be within a power struggle which in of itself is showing greed from both parties, Yubaba wants power and money while haku wants power and the land of his old river back after it was demolished and drained due to construction. I really like this view on the concept of greed and it just goes to show that no matter how far or deep you look into it, spirited away does a fantastic job in representing greed.

To contradict some of my previous points however , I would like to mention how Chihiro was “able to grow as a person because of other characters greed” , After witnessing her family turn into pigs and after helping No face return to being a simple quiet spirit, you see her mature as a person and realise that giving into your greed can only lead to bad things, it helps her learn some important lessons and if it was not for those other characters and their greed, Chihiro might not have ever learned to grow up and move on with her life. This is a very different angle to view Spirited away and its concept of greed however it just goes to show that there are many layers to this beautifully crafted tale. It's great to see a character go from being seemingly childish and “whiny”(Chihiros journey: Analysing Spirited away August 12 2015) to how she ends up in the end of the film. It's a brilliant transformation of character and represents growth.

In conclusion Spirited away has shown how greed can physically affect you like with Chihiros parents and them turning into pigs and No face giving into his greed and turning into a monster as well as how some internal struggles between different characters longing for money, power and even food can have extremely negative effects on themselves but also the world around them, what is interesting as well is how the idea of greed can also be seen seen as a positive aspect in regard to the growth of the character Chihiro and how she matures over the course of the film. Overall Miyazaki has crafted an amazing world in Spirited away and the theme of greed and gluttony is definitely one of if not the main concept that has been portrayed within the film and its representation from its characters, colours , aesthetics and deeper meanings all play an important role in conveying the films message.

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