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JPNT 179: Graphically Speaking

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Ghibli Manga & Music: A Critique

Justin Lee's final project for Pomona College's JPNT 179 course is titled, "Ghibli Manga & Music," and is seven minutes and eight seconds long. The video serves as an anthology of sorts, containing scenes from three Hayao Miyazaki films, in manga form: *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*), *Howl's Moving Castle* (*Howl no Ugoku Shiro*), and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (*Majo no Takkyūbin*). Specifically, the video consists of one scene from each movie, in the form of a slideshow, with Lee's violin covers of Joe Hisaishi's original soundtracks for the corresponding movies playing in the background. Lee's work highlights an interesting effect that arises when a manga is read with intimately related music playing in the background. The manga scenes themselves are overall well crafted and reverent to Miyazaki's original framings and compositions. True to manga form, the piece is meant to be read right to left, top to bottom, and the transitions between pages simulate the turning of a page from left to right. Lee does an admirable job of taking scenes from an animated medium and adapting them into the more static, frame-by-frame medium of manga. This critique will first focus on the manga elements of the project, followed by an evaluation and discussion of the work's juxtaposition of manga and music.

The first scene is taken from *Spirited Away*; the pages of Lee's adapted manga depict Chihiro's experience at Zeniba's house, where she is surprised by the fact that Haku is alive. The entire scene has a duration of two minutes and twenty-two seconds, and each of the manga scene's nine pages is displayed for fifteen seconds. The pages vary in format, though there are at

most three rows and two columns on any given page. Framing and pacing is used effectively to demonstrate the importance of key events, such as when Zeniba hands Chihiro a hairtie, made from threads woven together by the young protagonist's friends. Another example can be found when Chihiro walks towards the entrance of the house, with no idea of who awaits her outside. The page builds tension by showing three total frames, with each showing Chihiro slowly make her way towards the door. Although the pages were of commendable quality, the scene ends rather abruptly. This may have been due to either time constraints, or the fact that the manga pages had to align with the duration of the accompanying music, or a combination of both. An improved version of the work may portray scenes of longer duration, and perhaps illustrate a longer narrative arc by using multiple songs and scenes from each movie.

The second scene is taken from *Howl's Moving Castle* and depicts when Howl shows Sophie a new exit to the front door of his house that leads to a beautiful, serene meadow. He claims this vibrant area full of flowers is his gift to Sophie. Howl guides her through the expanse, confessing to her that this place was left to him by his uncle, and that he used to frequent the area when he felt alone. The scene lasts for two minutes and thirty-one seconds and consists of thirteen pages that are each shown for twelve seconds. Like the pages in the first section of the work, the pages in this section were well-crafted and do not skip any of the shots depicted in the original movie. A very similar page layout was used, as well. In the third and final section, Kiki from *Kiki's Delivery Service* talks with her newfound friend, Tombo, as they sit next to one another in front of the ocean. They talk about their childhoods, and Tombo demonstrates himself to be an overwhelmingly positive and cheery presence in Kiki's life that she deeply appreciates. The scene lasts for two minutes and thirteen sections, with nine pages of fourteen second durations. Each page's general construction and layout was, once again, consistent throughout the entire work.

All three of the scenes, though short, exemplify the power of relationships (platonic or romantic) in three of Miyazaki's films. The consistent visual language, as well as the smooth transitions between the scenes from each movie, contributes to the understanding of this theme across three different narratives, and those who have seen the movie will understand the power these scenes have in representing how much the characters care for one another. Each scene depicts one character showing a deep level of commitment to another, and the intentions are reciprocated. In this respect, the manga anthology was successful, and evokes feelings of love and nostalgia. As for criticisms, because manga is meant to be read at one's own pace, the pacing of the page transitions seemed rigid and a bit too consistent. However, because the project is in the video format, the durations of the pages must be predetermined. This detracts from some of the gravitas of the scenes, as the reader may not know how much time he or she has to dwell on each page. In addition, there is often an incongruous amount of text on certain pages as opposed to others, which also affects this issue of pacing in the manga adaptations of the movie scenes.

For all the music, Lee was able to utilize covers made by YouTubers online as backtracks upon which he could overlay and record each song's melody on his violin. The music from the *Spirited Away* scene is called, "One Summer's Day." The track used in the *Howl's Moving Castle* scene is called, "*Howl's Moving Castle Theme*." The final song used in the scene from *Kiki's Delivery Service* is called, "A Town on the Waterfront." Each song can be considered the theme of each movie, as they contain motifs that are sprinkled throughout the soundtracks of each movie. The presentation of a manga with background music allows the two elements to work together to bring a new perspective and experience of Miyazaki's iconic films. The experience of watching the film, which engages audiovisual senses, is mixed with the experience of reading a manga, which can be considered a purely visual medium. Lee's work provides a different type of reading experience that can be considered entirely unique from just reading the

manga scenes, or just watching the original films. By taking scenes of great emotional significance and coupling them with movie soundtracks that also heighten the emotional gravitas of scenes, the work has the potential to evoke strong emotions, especially for those who have seen all of the movies.