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Articles

(Re)learn to walk: The melodramatic narrative strategy in *Garden of Words*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the development of the character Yukari Yukino in the anime *Garden of Words* (2013), to present how audiovisual productions that are not part of the melodrama genre use its narrative strategies in the dramatic construction of the works. Therefore, bibliographical research about melodrama and film analysis of excerpts from the animation were accomplished to identify the latter in the conception of the protagonist's story. As a result, the analysis indicated how a Western concept (melodrama) can be used in a Japanese animation, contributing to the sentimental load of the narrative, and facilitating its access, considering that it is spread around the world in different media, such as cinema and streaming platforms.

Keywords: Melodrama. Melodramatic imagination. Anime. Japanese animation. Makoto Shinkai.

Introduction

Anime are media products from the Japanese pop culture (or *japop*), which became known worldwide after their distribution to the West. Currently, they are everywhere, whether on television, streaming platforms, the internet or printed. Because it does not have constraints or obligations to follow a standard, anime can invent realities, as they have creative freedom

to stimulate imagination, facilitating exchange between countries. According to Napier (2005), when spectators watch anime, they get inserted into this environment and appear to be psychologically less “resistant”, as they do not have the same expectations of verisimilitude as when they consume a live action¹ film, for example, which gives space for several visual experiments. Furthermore, anime reflects the social conditions of society and creatively explores subjects such as local history, religion, philosophy, and politics (NAPIER, 2005). These productions carry messages with values, meanings, and ideals from the context in which the creators live.

As part of a research (SANTOS, 2021), in which three anime by director Makoto Shinkai (*Children Who Chase Lost Voices*, *Garden of Words* and *Your Name*) were analyzed, this article analyses excerpts of *Garden of Words* (*Kotonoha no Niwa*, 2013) to show situations in which melodrama served as a narrative strategy in a production that does not necessarily fit as melodrama and, more specifically, in a Japanese animation. The excerpt selected for this analysis was the journey of the character Yukari Yukino² in her effort to get back on her feet and, in her own words, learn to walk again after suffering a major trauma. The film shows the friendship between Yukino and the teenager Takao, addressing problems related to growth and life, conflict resolution, depression, encounters, self-acceptance and self-knowledge, aid to others, unfulfilled love, and the dilemmas of adult life.

Melodrama, in the classical genre conception, became known for dealing with moral issues with exaggeration and for using sound as support for dramatic framing (THOMASSEAU, 2012), leading the public to follow the feelings, tricks, twists and other sensations represented on theater stages and in movies. However, it is preferred to use melodramatic imagination (BROOKS, 1995; ELSAESSER, 1991) as a lens of observation, instead of the melodrama concept, as it is a freer and more adaptable way of thinking about its characteristics in contemporary productions. According to Peter Brooks (1994), melodramatic imagination has become a way of looking at the world, understanding current dreams and problems, following the place and time of production of each work, so that narratives of any genre can be in constant dialogue with melodrama, since classic characteristics are updated and given new meaning in these fields.

Analyzing a Japanese animation from this perspective shows the flexibility and topicality of melodrama, which continues to be part of narratives as an efficient way of narrating, and it also helps to understand productions from other countries than the viewer's. Furthermore, the film had already been in the Brazilian Netflix catalog for a few years, before being removed in 2018, which facilitated people's access outside its country of origin. In other words, narrative and distribution strategies contribute to the accessibility and understanding of the audiovisual work.

1 Live action films are recorded with real people and locations, but due to the impossibility of performing some scenes and situations in person, special effects are added, including the animation itself, to produce the desired result.

2 Name in Western reading, in Japanese the surname is referred first, Yukino Yukari.

That said, the article is based on the understanding that associating a Western concept with an Asian production is a valid and viable activity, as shown in the research from which this paper is derived and is presented here. The writing of this text unfolds from the question “How does the melodramatic imagination portray the emotional recovery of Yukari Yukino in *Garden of Words*?” Therefore, the first topic addresses the theoretical issues regarding melodrama and the emergence of the term melodramatic imagination in order to approach its updating. The second topic presents the methodology employed ; and the third brings the analysis of the excerpts of the film.

Melodrama and melodramatic imagination

The word melodrama, originated in Italy, was used in France to designate entirely sung dramas and began to conveniently classify “plays that escaped classical criteria and used music as support for dramatic effects” (THOMASSEAU, 2012, p. 17, free translation³). As a genre, it is a narrative form that reaches people’s imagination, a cultural and social manifestation that arises from the population’s needs at a certain moment to demonstrate the feelings of generations. “Such forms of expression would be imaginative modes that would remain until modernity, whose fears, difficulties, hope, moral and social values would give the tone to the plots” (NOGUEIRA; SAMPAIO, 2013, p. 343, free translation), and could lead viewers to reflection. When dealing with everyday issues, the melodrama demonstrates through the triumph of the good and justice towards the villain that things can end up fine, as long as determination and hope are not lost. Optimism, even in situations of extreme difficulty, guarantees a form of reward in the imagination.

In recent decades, Peter Brooks (1995) and Thomas Elsaesser (1991) popularized the term melodramatic imagination to update the characteristics of melodrama, recognizing them as historically and culturally situated, leaving aside a closed genre structure to exist as a way of seeing the world, an imagination. According to this conception, melodrama never dies out, but rather “transforms itself, for it is a remarkably adaptable form: its premises, of structure, rhetoric, vision, can be exploited for a range of subjects in many different media” (BROOKS, 1995, p. 89). For Brooks, melodrama is a way of understanding the modern imagination, which is why he saw the need to review its concept and adapt it to the changes of times.

According to Pires and Nogueira (2013), the concept of melodrama has remained the same over the years. The acceptance values taken *a priori* by the works have changed, i.e., melodrama can present different subjects by having a certain audience as its focus. “It is as if melodrama was a lens through which it is possible to look at the most unexpected situations, always within certain parameters” (PIRES; NOGUEIRA, 2013, p. 248, free translation), considering the moralizing character their messages have. Complementing the idea, Brooks

3 All the quotes that have “free translation” was written originally in Portuguese.

(1995) highlights that melodrama makes people realize that even the most daily and mundane things in life have meanings, transmits sensations, and shows that life itself is important.

In contemporary times, there is no need to label in all productions who is good or bad. These characteristics are often implicit in attitudes or thoughts because the most essential issue is the characters' reasons for making their choices. However, hope remains a constant quality, as the desire for justice and a happy or a well-resolved ending instigates spectators. The expectation for a turnaround, when acting on imagination based on the promise of restoration, consoles the public even when the good guy dies, since it indicates that everything happened for a reason. Human weaknesses and failures can be understood as transformation processes because all things will be resolved if the character's inner power is so formidable that even a loser can become a winner, if the conflicts and problems are dealt with perseverance, sincerity, and purity, and if they choose to follow the path of kindness (PIRES; NOGUEIRA, 2013).

Metaphors are used by the melodramatic imagination to show that everything carries a meaning and can be expressed in different ways depending on the starting points. Thereby, melodrama can be considered as an expressive genre, which, by detailing the feelings in its representation, takes the drama to a higher level of admiration, being understood as an expression of the moral imagination (BROOKS, 1995). For Brooks, its persistence and popular appeal arise from this need to say everything, because

if we can sense its appeal [...], it must be because we are attracted to [...] the imaginary possibility of a world where we are solicited to say everything, where manners, the fear of self-betrayal, and accommodations to the Other no longer exert a controlling force (Brooks, 1995, p. 42).

Pires and Nogueira (2013) highlight that the existence of a melodramatic imagination in audiovisual works affects the public directly, as there is an involvement between them in accordance with this imaginary, which is "capable of minimizing the public's levels of self-awareness, reaching the viewer at their most fragile point, in what they carry, hide and negotiate all the time: their judgments about the world" (PIRES; NOGUEIRA, 2013, p. 244, free translation). However, this does not mean that melodrama causes standardized or alienating reactions, but rather that it can be considered as an assistance for the individuals who live surrounded by information and images, which retakes Brooks' (1995) idea that melodrama contributes to understanding an increasingly fragmented and modern world. Melodrama adapts according to what is happening now, a constant search for new categories of emotions, and reformulates itself to enter different types of productions.

Therefore, when observing a film from the melodrama's perspective, it would be necessary to analyze it through the lens of an expansive imaginary, which acts on the issues of people's subjectivity in contemporary times and points to the instability of the genre itself, given that it uses games to provoke visual, sound, and affective stimuli (PIRES; NOGUEIRA,

2013). It is in these games that the duality between good and evil, characteristic of melodrama, is presented and deals with society's moralizing judgments of right and wrong.

Brooks (1995) understands that the melodrama's value lies in describing the various forms of each culture. In addition, Pires and Nogueira (2013) highlight that melodrama reflects society, because even though it has modernized and gone through new experiences, it still depends on some binary values. Melodrama continues to renew ways of imagining the world by pointing up subjects that cannot be easily ignored; it transmits meanings that operate on people's individuality, explores social life, and creates new interpretations of the world.

Methodology

This article uses the following methodological procedures: bibliographical research (STUMPF, 2005) to understand melodrama and its update to melodramatic imagination, and film analysis (BORDWELL, 2008, 2013; VANOYE; GOLIOT-LÉTÉ, 1994). The analysis aimed to observe specific scenes in which the character's story is told and shown, to describe the events so that the viewer can capture the atmosphere and feelings of the moments, and to make associations with the situations and the way they were produced, such as the colors, soundtrack, features, and other details that helped the narrative construction. In this way, analytical excerpts that focus on the changes in the character Yukari Yukino's life and the melodramatic narrative strategies used to represent these transformations were chosen.

The observation starts from the character's main problem, the bullying she suffered and its emotional and professional consequences. Because of the event, Yukino loses the sense of taste, except for chocolate and beer, and is unable to go to work. At this point, she meets Taki and tries to learn to walk again, a metaphor for being able to return to live her life normally. Along the way, the analysis of some circumstances is important, such as: the duality between public and private, concepts explored in Japanese culture and presented in the film as it shows people with and without shoes; the shoes made by Taki to protect Yukino on her new journey; the rain that comforts and helps solve the protagonists' problems; the colors and features that change according to the rainy or sunny seasons; the emotionally charged ending, which leads to the closing of the story followed by a bright sun and a rainbow. These situations were chosen because they guided Yukino to the possibility of being able to move forward again, find another job and start a new life, to find courage to continue.

Garden of Words: Yukari Yukino (re)learning to walk

The film *Garden of Words* (2013) shows the protagonist Takao on a journey of self-discovery, in which he encounters Yukino. The teenager lives with his older brother and his mother, who leaves them to live with her younger boyfriend. Takao's biggest dream is to become a shoemaker, but since the necessary materials and courses are very expensive, the

boy needs to get temporary jobs to save money. On a rainy day, Takao decides to skip his first class in school and go to a park in the city. When he arrives, he meets an older and mysterious woman, Yukino, who recites a *tanka* (a type of Japanese poem) and leaves him intrigued. From that moment on, Takao skips school every rainy day to go to the park, hoping to meet her again. As the story unfolds, the characters reach a level of enlightenment and bonding that not even distance can change.

Yukari Yukino (Figure 01) is a 27-year-old teacher with a youthful and kind appearance. She used to teach literature at Takao's school but quit her job due to her involvement in a scandal invented by female students. The boyfriend of one of the girls fell in love with Yukino and the student spread the word around school that the teacher had an affair with an underage boy, in an attempt to get revenge on the woman her boyfriend fell in love with. The episode harmed Yukino and resulted in her isolation at home, therefore she was unable to go to work. Every day she got ready and went to the station, but was not able to get on the subway, so she returned home or headed to the park. Because of the emotional problems developed by the shock and confusion, Yukino lost the sense of taste, except for beer and chocolate, which she began to ingest frequently. Her apartment (Figure 01) reflects her emotional chaos and is always messy, with clothes and trash everywhere.

Figure 01 – Yukari Yukino (00:12:35 and 00:17:52)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013).

In relation to melodrama, the protagonists would be the representation of good, Yukino as virtue corrupted by evil and Takao as her hero. The villainy appears as the students' bullying, who unfairly accused her of something she did not do and disturbed her life for fun and revenge. The absence of support from close people reveals the fragility of human relationships and the lack of concerns when judging others, since Yukino did not receive help during her depression and Takao searches for a dream that no one considers relevant.

The narrative makes several references to people's feet and the act of walking. There are numerous scenes in which images of feet are highlighted (Figure 02). Culturally, for the Japanese, being barefoot in public is unusual because it is an act reserved for their homes'

private space, where one cannot enter with the same shoes used on the street, to avoid carrying impurities inside from the outside⁴. In this way, the movie sets up the feet metaphor as something intimate. Furthermore, there are associations with the word walk in the sense of walking from one side to another and as a metaphor to get on with your life, walk your own path, get out of inertia. Shoes are also important, as they are responsible for protecting people's feet and allows them to walk on the streets. For Takao, shoes represent his future and freedom, because when he graduates and becomes a professional shoemaker, he will have the opportunity to leave home and live off his own efforts. Interestingly, Takao's feet are shown a few times during the film, possibly because he already has a path for himself, while Yukino's feet appears frequently, since she is going through an emotional crisis.

Figure 02 – Feet (00:11:14, 00:16:58, 00:32:53, 00:35:36, 00:22:40 and 00:38:04)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013).

4 In Japanese homes there is a space called *genkan* (玄関) where people who arrive leave their shoes and exchange them for a *surippa* (スリッパ), a specific slipper for walking inside the house. The *genkan* is one step below the level of the house and serves as a border between the home's interior and exterior. As it originates from Buddhist temples, it is believed that it protects the home's harmony from impure energies from outside, in addition to bacteria and dirt from the streets (KUTSU..., 2020).

During their second⁵ meeting, the characters just sit in the same gazebo and do their own things without exchanging many words, but they notice each other. By metaphorically associating bare feet with sharing something private, it is clear that the teacher wanted to open up to the boy, as she was swinging her feet with the shoe held only by her fingers, playing with it until it almost fell (Figure 03). Being close to taking off her shoes in public reveals Yukino's restlessness and, in a way, her desire to show her innermost self to Takao. The boy notices the teacher's movements, watches carefully, and draws her bare feet in his notebook (Figure 03). After this moment, the woman finally talks to Takao and asks about his classes. Takao, irritated by the insinuation that he had missed a school day (which was true), responds by asking about Yukino's work and stares at her beers on the bench. The teacher lowers her head and says she did not go to work. Takao realizes that something was wrong, tries to cheer her up instead of lecture her for the beers, and advises her to do not drink without eating to avoid getting sick. Yukino takes out from her bag several chocolate bars and shocks him, but adds that everyone has their little quirks, so it was okay if he thought she was weird. The boy gets up to go back to school, says that he decided to skip classes only on rainy mornings and Yukino gets excited, as she thinks it was implied that they had an agreement to meet again in those conditions.

Figure 03 – Yukino swinging her feet (00:08:38 and 00:08:45)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

It becomes clear during the movie that the traumatic experience Yukino went through triggered depression and the loss of taste, except of beer and chocolate. Even though she is not addicted to alcohol, this circumstance can be related to what Ien Ang (1985) says about alcoholic characters in melodramas. The author argues that alcoholism is used as a metaphor to represent the characters' powerlessness, since the intention is not to focus on the drinking addiction, but on the psychological state, the suffering, and the emotional conflicts they are struggling with. In addition to having beer cans (Figure 04) scattered around the

5 Sequence 00:08:11 – 00:10:00.

house, Yukino usually takes them to the park, where there is a sign indicating that alcohol is prohibited inside, but the teacher ignores it. Beer as the only liquid option Yukino was able to taste takes viewers into her internal problems, her inability to work, move on with her life and be happy after the incident. Thomas Elsaesser (1991) contributes with the argument by explaining that:

[...] drink does become interesting in movies where its dynamic significance is developed and its qualities as a visual metaphor recognised: wherever characters are seen swallowing and gulping their drinks as if they were swallowing their humiliations along with their pride, vitality and the life force have become palpably destructive, and a phoney libido has turned into real anxiety (ELSAESSER, 1991, p. 87).

Figure 04 – Yukino’s alcohol (00:16:31 and 00:24:23)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

Based on the idea that shoes help achieve a better future, Takao works hard to make good ones for Yukino because even without meeting her, he wants to create a pair that will make her stand up and walk again. In other words, in addition to her personal growth, Takao aims to help Yukino find her own path and move on with her life. This attitude relates to a previous moment in the park ⁶, when the teacher decides to help him draw a shoe, noticing that Takao was struggling to get the shape of a female model. As an exchange of pleasantries, Yukino takes off her sandal and puts her feet on Takao’s sheet of paper (Figure 05) to help him measure and trace the pattern from a real female foot. In return, Takao also helps her, as he manages to make her open up to him. By taking off her shoes in a public place, Yukino exposes something that should be kept and revealed only in a private space. At the same time, the teacher reveals some aspects of her life and confesses that she was unable to walk properly. Takao asks if she was talking about her work, since every morning she would skip it and go to

⁶ Sequence 00:18:52 – 00:20:45.

the park. Yukino confirms but says that it was also about several other subjects. Without getting into details, Yukino addresses her past, exposes her fragility and associates it with the act of walking because when referring to a bad moment in her life and a difficulty she experienced, she summarizes it as “not being able to walk”, that is, she was not able to overcome the problem and move on with her life, to “move forward”.

Figure 05 – Takao taking measurements of Yukino’s feet (00:19:41 and 00:19:45)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

The rain is another important element for the film, from which various connections can be made, as if it were a character itself. The rain brings people together through smell and moisture, it fills rivers and roads, brings life to nature, and makes the sky more palpable, as it acts as an intermediary, a link between the distant sky and the rest of the world. The work explores these characteristics and exhibits the rain as something comforting, which represents encounter, discovery, and hope. Normally, the rain is related to negative factors, such as the impossibility or difficulty of moving around (especially on foot), wet clothes and laziness, but for *Garden of Words* it is a metaphor for a rite of passage, because it is during the rainy season that the protagonists' lives are transformed.

To demonstrate the relevance of the rain, Makoto Shinkai and his team chose to give it a green coloration, especially in scenes where the characters are calm in the park. With the intention to dissociate it from the restrictive sense, from a cold that leaves people isolated indoors, they decided to put a tone in the image that made the rain appear to be green (Figure 06). When it blends with the local vegetation and the lake, the green rain gives viewers a comforting feeling. The director explains (Shinkai, 2013) that he selected this coloring to break the idea that rain is depressing and gray, and to show that its water brings life to the environment. Therefore, the green rain should be a way to emphasize both the nature and characters' lives.

Figure 06 – Greenish rain (00:00:55 and 00:11:48)

Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

For Yukino, the rain appears to be even more important because the rainy season brings comfort and hope for a better life, whereas the hot season⁷ represents unpleasant moments, since during this period the characters do not meet. The heat is also linked to the day-to-day obligations, as both need to face their tasks. Yukino is unemployed, therefore she spends her time walking around the city without a specific reason and goes to the park expecting to meet Takao, which does not happen. Her mood and expression change completely, and she walks through the streets with her head down (Figure 07) aimlessly and apparently unhappy. Yukino goes back to drinking beer and eating chocolate (Figure 07), a habit she had stopped after getting involved with Takao, which represents a relapse. The teacher spends the end of July and the entire month of August anxious and depressed. The images also demonstrate her restlessness. They have bluish and cold tones, an opposition to the vibrant colors expected from a hot climate. At one point⁸, alone in the park, Yukino quickly swings her foot and throws her shoe away, as if she does not care about anything anymore.

Figure 07 – Sunny days (00:21:44 and 00:24:22)

Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

⁷ Sequence 00:21:15 – 00:23:09.

⁸ Sequence 00:24:17 – 00:24:40.

Interestingly, the rainy season started earlier and ended later than the region's average in past years, which could mean that the rain attempted to continue allowing the encounters between the characters, so they could resolve some issues before facing the sun, especially Yukino. The nonseasonal rain implies the existence of pending issues between the protagonists, and another rainy moment was necessary to clarify things. Then⁹, the most emotionally loaded occasion of the entire film occurs, the ending of their story. In her building, Yukino runs to catch up with Takao (Figure 08), ignores her shoes at the apartment door and goes down the stairs, which brings back the previously associations about the feet, walking, and the search for a better future. While running barefoot on the wet stairs, the teacher slips and falls, but gets up and continues to run. The moment demonstrates Yukino's effort to try to walk alone and pursue what she wants, that is, to make peace and strengthen her relationship with Takao, ignoring the obstacles in the way.

Figure 08 – Yukino runs after Takao (00:37:49, 00:38:06 and 00:38:07)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

Yukino finds Takao leaning against the stair railing, watching the rain, and remains motionless in front of him (Figure 09). The rain intensifies, Takao says he hates her, asks her to forget everything he said and exposes the bad things he thinks about her, including her attitude of just listening to the boy's stories and never opening up and sharing who she is with him.

⁹ Sequence 00:37:40 – 00:40:30.

Takao gradually raises his voice until he starts screaming and crying. Yukino also cries, and a ray of sunlight illuminates a part of her face. Then, the teacher throws herself into the boy's arms and submits herself emotionally to him. Yukino explains that every morning she got dressed to go to work and could not make it because she was too scared, but after the encounters in the park she was saved by Takao, which resulted in changes in her life. The characters hug each other and cry intensely (Figure 09), the sky clears, and the sun illuminates them on the stairs, which represents their ability to continue with their lives and ideals. The film's closing sequence begins after this scene.

Figure 09 – Final emotions (00:38:31, 00:39:56, 00:40:00 and 00:40:01)



Source: Montage made by the research using frames from *Garden of Words* (2013)

Although the film covers different months in just thirty minutes, the time's passage was done with tenderness and serenity, in contrast to the scene described above, which has approximately four consecutive minutes of emotional intensity. The characters shout their thoughts and emotions at each other, releasing everything they kept to themselves during the months that had passed. The reappearance of the rain to ensure the closure of Yukino and Takao's stories, followed by a bright sun, indicates that their time together in the park is over and a new future with new beginnings awaits them. By shouting their emotions until the sun shows up, the characters complete their journeys, put an end to possible misunderstandings, and find themselves ready to learn from the bad parts and move forward. Yukino can finally turn the page of a troubled chapter and start her life over again, since she managed to relearn how to walk, be in public and pursue new paths.

Final considerations

From the analyzed excerpts, it can be seen that the anime *Garden of Words* (2013) presents everyday life with sensibility and shows the melodrama's characteristics. The movie portrays the consequences of bullying, the quest to make dreams come true, the behavior of helping others, the overcoming, the changes that occur in people's lives, relationships that do not work out and heightened emotions. The teenager Takao helps the teacher Yukino overcome a delicate moment, while working to achieve his own ambitions.

The rainy season represents a rite of passage for the characters, who meet in a park and become friends. The main message involves metaphors about feet and the act of walking, which transmit the notion of public and private, the capability to walk alone and get on with one's own life, situations that involve discovery (of oneself and others), overcoming problems and metaphors about how to live: a teenager at the beginning of his journey and an adult with conflicts to be resolved. Viewers have access to the protagonists' thoughts and can share their emotions, desires, and concerns with them. At the end, a short scene with great emotional appeal shows the importance of seeking help and continuing your journey, a symbolic occasion that portrays a difficult moment everyone can experience.

Moral values are presented in the private universe of the characters, who at various moments questions their life choices and make changes. Evil is referred by bullying, as a teenagers' thoughtless attitude transforms Yukino's life, triggers depression and other emotional issues on her, to the point where she needs to reinvent herself, to change her job and city to recover. The relationship between an adult and a young person would be problematic if it came to fruition, but as Takao's passion is not reciprocated by Yukino, the fact that they are twelve years apart is ignored and replaced by the idea of an unconventional friendship, but deep and necessary for that moment in their lives. In a way, Takao wanted adult approval for his career choice because his mother and brother did not take him seriously. He found in Yukino the acceptance he was looking for. Yukino discovered in Takao's youth the comfort she needed, since it was teenagers who harmed her life and adults did not believe her word.

The movie's resources, such as music, aesthetic choices, the passage of time and the emphasis on elements of nature, help the transmission of messages and emotions, consequently, they facilitate the public understanding and reinforce the representation of the beauty of everyday life and the value to watch it. The characters' effort to achieve their goals emphasizes their nature and willpower, which can help people from different parts of the world to overcome their problems and not give up on their dreams. Furthermore, the relation between the rain, the feet, and walking highlights that even in adverse times, when hope seems to have been abandoned, it is necessary to continue fighting and moving forward until the sun rises again.

The chosen metaphors can reach viewers outside of Japan, considering that the connection between feet and walking, and the changes that occurred in the seasons are situations shared with people from different places. Besides the fact that everyone has feet, understanding them

as a passage, a metaphor for moving forward, is a way of thinking that goes beyond borders, as it also makes sense outside Japanese culture. The same happens with the rain and the sun, which are natural entities that everyone shares and attributes similar meanings to them, such as relating sunlight to the idea of renewal and new beginnings, and rain to introspective and reflective moments. Although the narrative was constructed in the Japanese context, the melodramatic imagination's strategies in conjunction with the metaphors are effective in reaching viewers from various parts of the world, by indicating issues that are part of these people's daily and imaginary lives, making understanding and the production itself more accessible.

This article does not intend to exhaust the subject or the film, but to show, through excerpts of *Garden of Words* which highlight the character Yukari Yukino, how melodramatic imagination can be used to portray personal, sentimental, and overcoming issues in a Japanese animation. The availability of anime, and this one in particular, in movie theaters and streaming platforms, helps more people to discover it and become interested in Japanese media products, meeting another culture.

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Authors' contribution

Santos, T. S.: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft.; Satler, L. L.: conceptualization, arguments' structure, reading, writing – review and editing.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available by the authors upon request.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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