

Surprising...!

Written by George Goodwin

Omoide Poro Poro

Completely surprising! Maybe I'm a sentimentalist, but the more I watch Studio Ghibli Films, the more I like them. In this case it's *Omoide Poro Poro* (Only Yesterday) that has me pleasantly surprised. When I first saw a copy of the film in the collection I decided to watch it, just so I could say that I had seen a few more of Studio Ghibli's works. When the film started, I expected to see a little bit of everything that Studio Ghibli is famous for -- somewhat developed characters with generally decent animation and a nice little plot line that followed to a tidy conclusion. Instead I watched the film unfold and was stunned by the scenery that was revealed. I was also incredibly pleased by the development of the characters, but I was perhaps most pleased with the plot -- the whole story just seemed to fit together.

Okajima Taeko is a businesswoman who has a good-paying job in downtown Tokyo, but she imagines that she has lived on a farm all of her life, though she has only been to the rural countryside once when she was younger and once a few years prior to getting her job. She longs to go to the countryside and has always envied her friends who had family that they could go and visit there. Thus she decides that a business break to the countryside would not be a bad thing and takes one.

Throughout the story Taeko has flashbacks of her fifth grade year. This is a crucial element to the plot of the story as half of it is spent following her daydreams. That year she grew up quite a bit as she slowly started to learn and experience experiences that most of us usually remember quite fondly when we are older. She remembers her first trip to a bathhouse, her first fresh pineapple and the disappointment she felt when it was tough and not very sweet. She remembers her school lunch and the fact that her school only allowed her to throw away one thing on her plate, her first love and even her first sex-ed course.

Taeko has many other memories that she shows us in the film and quite a few others also come out, revealing the character deep inside the adult -- the fifth grader longing for a release. As an adult she helps around the farm where she is taking her vacation

by harvesting poppy flowers, organic rice and other foodstuffs. As an adult, she also tells Toshia (the farmer with whom she is staying) her feelings and memories of her fifth grade year. He is a good-humored farmer who takes the memories in stride and appreciates them for what they are: experiences aged by time and fondly remembered through her adult years. Omoide Poro Poro

There are several things which simply amazed me about Omoide Poro Poro. First is the fact that the movie is over two hours long (though exactly by how much I'm not quite sure) which gives rise to the second fact -- that the long span of the movie allows the characters to develop completely, except for the minor characters of course. It is good to see that Studio Ghibli is willing to sit down and actually develop its characters and it's also good to see that they were willing to stick out their necks to make a longer movie so that such character development was possible. Third, the scenery was, to be blunt, incredible. While there were not computer generated holographs or sci-fi like effects, the whole range of colors grabs the eye, from the sunsets and sunrises to colors of the poppyseed flowers. The characters themselves are somewhat pastel, but this does not present a problem: Studio Ghibli managed to make them blend in with the scenery when necessary. I highly recommend watching this film because it is something that you can relate to -- even the most hardened fans will get tears in their eyes and a lump in their throat when the film finishes. The only minor drawback is the length itself. The movie might be somewhat difficult to sit through for someone who doesn't enjoy anything but non-bloody sports, but it is touching, which makes it all worthwhile.