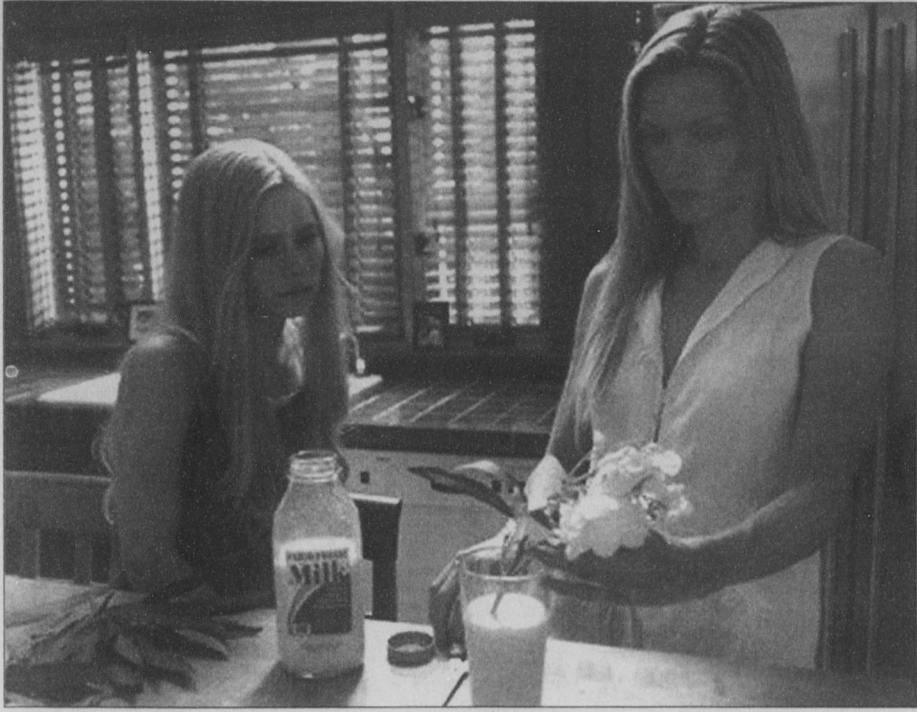


# 'White Oleander' Captures Novel's Drama in Rushed Format



Michelle Pfeiffer (right) and Alison Lohman play a mother-daughter pair struggling for identity and happiness in the powerful film interpretation of the novel "White Oleander."

By MICHELLE JARBOE  
Staff Writer

The more extreme the physical beauty, the more trauma and dysfunction is masked by that beauty in the blonde-ridden movie adaptation of Janet Fitch's "White Oleander."

Following the lines of the novel, the film centers on Ingrid Magnussen (Michelle Pfeiffer) and her daughter Astrid (Alison Lohman), a distinctly Aryan mother-daughter team.

But beneath the facades of their appearances, both Ingrid and Astrid — along with the other women featured in the film — aren't anywhere as close to true perfection as they might seem at the beginning of the story.

Though overtly telling the story of Astrid's life in foster care while her mother serves life in prison for murder, the film actually depicts the dynamic between Astrid and Ingrid.

This plot may sound like the perfect setup for an estrogen fest. But it stays true enough to Fitch's psychological and dramatic novel to prevent comparisons to humorous and less weighty chick flicks like "Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood."

There's little to laugh at in the course of Astrid's travels from temporary home to temporary home, from the outside

world to the prison-walled environment of her manipulative but enrapturing mother and from complete captivity to struggling freedom.

But the characters are sometimes amusing for their oddly believable eccentricities.

Robin Wright Penn — another blonde — dramatically diverges from memorable past roles such as Buttercup in "The Princess Bride."

Taking on the part of Starr, a short-skirted cleavage-sporting foster mother, her catch phrase quickly becomes, "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal savior?"

Each foster family incident is dramatically set yet illustrated with restraint by director Peter Kosminsky. The film works much like a book, with sections devoted to each of the families and interludes both with Ingrid and with Astrid's graphic-novelist-in-training love interest (Patrick Fugit).

The story only suffers from the essential nature of translation from paper to the big screen — compression. With fewer foster families to harden Astrid along the way and without much of the sensually detailed imagery of the novel, "White Oleander" becomes far more straightforward, and a bit rushed, in film form.

Personalities are less developed, and many essential facets of the novel were obviously placed in the dustbin in favor of achieving an accessible 110-minute

running time. Leaving bits of the plot to the imagination, some cuts suggest that pivotal features of the storyline, such as sexual interludes, were discarded to keep a PG-13 rating and thus allow for a wider range of filmgoers.

Though these manipulations satisfy the length and rating requirements guaranteed to draw a wider range of filmgoers into theaters, they also alienate the audience a bit more than necessary and could potentially confuse viewers who cannot fill in the gaps from having read the novel.

Nevertheless, superb acting and a captivating pace make "White Oleander" an engrossing film that takes familiar actors and casts them in new, intriguing positions. Pfeiffer and Lohman dominate the film — the mother's detached and methodical methods of destruction clash with the daughter's continual attempts, and failures, to escape domination and to find some warmth.

"White Oleander" makes the greatest impact as a book, but the story survives and is well-told on screen.

Through flawless acting, the film manages to provoke thought and to create a complex world, one that isn't so pumped with blonde estrogen as to become a cliché.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

# Japanese 'Spirited' Defies Animated Boundaries

By BRIAN MILLIKIN  
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

It took a long time for animated films to get respect in the United States.

But audiences and academics still remain cold to Japanese animated films. Maybe it's the foreign language or a fear of bad English dubbing. Maybe it's the

adult plots or a lack of musical sequences. Aside from the juvenile "Pokémon," no Japanese animated film has found success in America.

If there's any justice in the movie world, "Spirited Away" will be the straw that breaks that camel's back.

From the remarkably fertile imagination of landmark filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki, "Spirited Away" has become the biggest moneymaker in Japanese history, and for good reason. There isn't a more refreshing film in theaters this year than "Spirited Away."

The animated masterpiece is blissfully bizarre and wildly imaginative, from the rich stable of ghosts that populate the film to the dreamy form of the narrative itself. "Spirited Away" is a rush of creativity and is delightfully absurd — different, and better for it.

"Spirited Away" reimagines and reinvents the animated film with its ethereal and moodily metaphorical take on Alice

and the rabbit hole. Spoiled adolescent Chihiro (voiced in this English-dubbed version by "Lilo and Stitch" star Daveigh Chase) wanders with her parents into a spooky abandoned amusement park. When her parents eat part of a curious feast lying unattended in a food stand, they are transformed into pigs.

Darkness falls, and a terrified Chihiro finds herself surrounded by a vibrant sea of ghosts and spirits, all converging at the gigantic bathhouse in the center of the living park. It's a startling and wondrous sequence, teeming with a frightening suspense most scary movies could hardly dream up.

Chihiro quickly becomes trapped as an employee in the dizzying carnival bathhouse, indentured to Yubaba, an elderly witch with an enormous face. Yubaba takes Chihiro's name and assigns her a new one — and when she forgets her true name, she'll be buried at the spirit palace forever.

"Spirited Away" is a film about children but for adults. Miyazaki's film plays to both young and mature audi-

ences in a way that all the double entendres of "Shrek" never could.

The film is impossibly thick with symbolism and meaning, with lyrical imagery and an undertow of philosophy. The film challenges its audience but never abandons it, alternating fluidly between comedy and drama, subtle frights and sublime thrills. There are moments of silence, when the film takes an introspective pause, that U.S. animated films sorely lack.

"Spirited Away" is an animated film by default alone — it could just as easily have been a live film. It certainly lives and breathes like one.

It's probably a bitter pill to swallow for a lot of U.S. film fans that this year's best film to date is not only animated but from a foreign country. "Spirited Away" has that much magic.

Respect for the animated genre has been a long time coming — now it just needs to go this one last mile.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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27 SU MEST w/ Catch 22, Homegrown and Madcap\*\* (\$10) 7:30PM  
28 MO International! Books! Jesse Helms Retirement Party (\$10)

30 WE BJORN AGAIN (ABBA TRIBUTE)\*\* (\$20/\$22) (International) Noise Conspiracy, Division of Laura Lee, Small Brown Bike, Amish Jihad\*\* (\$10)

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1 FR (Late show) MELISSA FERRICK\*\* (\$12)  
2 SA CALIXICO w/ Black Heart Procession\*\* (\$10)  
3 SU LES SAUV FAV w/ Pretty Girls Moke Groves and Ex Models\*\* (\$8)  
6 WE PEDRO THE LION w/ Seldom and Scientific\*\* (\$9/\$10)  
7 TH GRAN TORINO w/ Ingram Hill  
8 FR THOMAS MAPPUMO\*\* (\$12)  
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13 WE BEAUSOLEIL\*\* (\$12 adv/\$15 at the door)  
15 FR KIM RICHEY w/ Jay Bennett and Edward Burger\*\*

16 SA COSMIC CHARLIE  
18 MO FRANK BLACK & THE CATHOLICS\*\*  
19 TU JENNIFER NETTLES BAND, VIRGINIA COALITION  
22 FR ACOUSTIC SYNDICATE\*\* (\$12/\$14)  
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30 SA ROLLY GRAY AND SUNFIRE

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13 FR CYRIL LANCE BAND  
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10/27 The Pattern, Hot Hot Heat, Von Bondies, The Washdown  
10/31 Evil Weiner  
11/1 Scories, Cold Sides, Vroom, Disband  
11/2 Matt Pond PA  
11/3 The Stereo Total, Soviet  
11/5 Explorations in the Sky  
11/6 Mary Prankster  
11/7 Ranier Maria  
11/8 Mountain Goats, John Vanderslice  
11/11 Shannon Wright, Pinetops 7, Mick Turner (from Dirty Three)  
11/13 Freeloader  
11/14 Carbon Leaf  
11/15 (Single) w/ Eric Choir  
11/16 One Man Army, Ann Beretta  
11/17 Glory Fountain  
11/18 Drums & Tubo  
11/21 Shallow Be Thy Name, Shark Quest  
11/25 Matt Pond PA  
11/26 Today is the Day, Bloodlet, All That Remains  
12/5 Greenhorns w/ The Man

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**movie review**  
"Spirited Away"  
★★★★★

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WHITE OLEANDER\* Daily 3:35, 7:15, 9:35  
RED DRAGON\* Daily 3:40, 7:05, 9:40  
SWEET HOME ALABAMA\* Daily 3:25, 7:00, 9:25  
RULES OF ATTRACTION\* Daily 3:10  
THE TUXEDO\* Daily 5:25, 7:25

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THE TRANSPORTER\* Daily 3:15, 5:15, 7:25  
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**ROMAN CANDLE**  
From Page 5

Furthermore, it will be appearing on the cover of the newest issue as a promotion for the festival.

And in last week's CMJ's Top Ten Most Added Songs, which gauges play time songs get on college radio stations across the nation, Roman Candle's Latin-inspired love song "You Don't Belong to This World" ranked ninth. MTV's special

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LITING IN A DRESS FULL OF WOMEN CAN BE *Blonde*

7:00, 9:15, SAT-SUN 2:00, 4:40  
**MOSTLY MARTHA** 7:10, 9:30, SAT-SUN 2:10, 4:30  
**MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING** 7:15, 9:20, SAT-SUN 2:15, 4:20

"You Hear It First" will feature the band this winter, it will appear on the World Cafe program, and it even has a U.K. tour planned for several months next year.

Basist Carter Gaj put it best: "Our future's so bright, I gotta wear shades."  
With all of the good news and praise, you would think Roman Candle would be getting a swollen head. But just when you think the band members are getting too big for shows at the local dive bar, they rekindle their home-grown feel.

Roman Candle is a major band with a local attitude, which means despite the money and madness, despite the shows and signings, despite the groupies and gold albums, it will still enjoy — more than anything — playing "Happy Birthday" for a fan.

Quiet and composed, keyboardist Timshel Matheny, Skip Matheny's wife, summed up the band's sentiments. "Above all else, we are just thankful."

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



Samara (Daveigh Chase) appears in "The Ring" in a strange videotape that kills people seven days after they view it.

# Psychological Thriller 'Ring' Haunts Screen and Viewer

By DUNCAN PITTMAN  
Staff Writer

Talk about violence on television. Parents might advocate that TV rots your brain, but in the case of "The Ring," the new film by Gore Verbinski, parents might want you to stick to the idiot box and stay away from the big screen.

"The Ring" stars Naomi Watts ("Mulholland Drive"), a single mom who searches for answers behind a mysterious video tape rumored to kill you after you watch it. The tape is a grainy, black and white short film reminiscent of an experimental student film.

Its spooky visuals, from creepy women in mirrors and dead horses to burning trees and icky insects, are accompanied by searing sound effects. It's shocking and disturbing to the point that when the tape ends, the viewer is thoroughly entranced by the images.

Soon after, however, the phone rings, and a child's voice informs the viewer that he will die in seven days. The film traces Watts' quest to put a stop to the tape's grisly multimedia massacre — with one chilling revelation after another.

Unlike the usual foray of campy horror films like the "Scream" trilogy and all its bastard knockoffs, "The Ring" is unique because it plays with the human psyche and the boundaries of film versus reality. While the film focuses on death, its emphasis on keeping the audience members cringing in their seats is alive and well.

The film also works because it uses recurring imagery to reinforce images from the video tape in the viewer's mind and guides you through the characters' excruciating quest to stop the ghostly filmmaker. The tragic and disturbing mood of the film is accentuated by rainy, melancholy landscapes and decaying settings drenched in a sullen blue filter.

And the script deserves particular applause for not falling into the Hollywood cliché of ending a mystery by releasing a tortured soul — though the audience might think it will.

To say "The Ring" is disturbing would be an understatement — but rest assured, its frightening images will stay in your mind and creep you out hours after you've left the theater. The film trailer says, "Before you die, you see the ring," but that statement would be best reworded to all moviegoers as, "Before you die, see 'The Ring.'"

Just don't tell mom and dad.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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**Two thumbs up** "Punch-Drunk Love" is sweet and strange with an ending whose heart-melting sincerity had several tough critics (including this one) in tears. A.O. Scott, The New York Times

**"Amazing"** David Byrne, Spin

**PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE**

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