



ANIME

# When Marnie Was There (Omoide no Mani)

Joan G. Robinson's 1967 children's classic *When Marnie Was There* – the story of a solitary and brooding London orphan called Anna who is sent to stay with family friends for a summer on the north Norfolk coast, where she encounters a kindred spirit called Marnie living in the mysterious Marsh House – now comes with a postscript appended by Robinson's daughter Deborah Sheppard in 2002. In it Sheppard relates the story of a Japanese man, a fan of the book since his youth, who had ventured out on the same coastal bus ride as Anna in hopes of making a pilgrimage to the story's setting of Little Overton. None of the man's fellow passengers had heard of the village, however, and he was beginning to get rather anxious when the bus drew into Burnham Overy, and he recognised the very windmill that haunts Marnie's imagination – and then too the Granary which Robinson fictionalised as the Marsh House, and the marsh path to the beach where Anna and Marnie make their magical trysts. (Sheppard describes him even managing to find a local Japanese resident, who kept in touch and later delivered him a photo of Robinson.)

Given that Japan's Studio Ghibli has now adapted Marnie at the behest of Hayao Miyazaki, the great animator known for his love of both European landscapes and classic children's literature, one's fancies wander. Could this pilgrim possibly have been Miyazaki-san? After all, Marnie appears on his list of 50 great children's books shortly after *The Borrowers* (adapted at Ghibli as *Arrietty* in 2010 by Miyazaki's former key animator Hiromasa Yonebayashi) and *The Little Prince* (an influence on Miyazaki's 2013 film *The Wind Rises*). According to Yonebayashi, who was also tasked with the adaptation of Marnie, the answer is no – but the book's Japanese translator did know the man, and Yonebayashi had heard of the episode and even seen photos the man had taken of Burnham Overy.

Yonebayashi's Marnie moves the story's present tense to modern-day Hokkaido, Japan's northern island, but otherwise takes fewer liberties with the moods and meanings of Robinson's text than, say, Miyazaki did in his 2004 adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*; Marnie even remains a blue-eyed blonde, to Miyazaki's reported consternation. Like *Arrietty*, it's dramatically discreet, without the madness of Miyazaki's fantasias, but rich in visual detail, and steeped in Ghibli's reverence for the power of nature: the trickiness of the light, the wilfulness of the sea. Where *Arrietty* was built around relativities of space and scale, with its characters living among insects and hiding from towering humans, *Marnie* remoulds time, transposing us through eras to reconnect with our late ancestors' experiences and stories: both the 50-year-old book itself, and the lives it reaches back further to remember.

All of which makes it, if not Ghibli's very finest hour and 43 minutes, then certainly a wondrous and heartfelt keepsake, a bequest from a legendary studio now in a state of suspension. Only in 2014 had *Marnie*'s then 37-year-old producer Yoshiaki Nishimura, also justly credited with steering the intractable Isao Takahata through the interminable production of his *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013), been nominated as heir to Ghibli's founding

producer Toshio Suzuki. But as confirmed in the fleeting interview I got when Nishimura and the 42-year-old Yonebayashi passed through London last October, both men have since left the building.

*Your film follows a story about finding a refuge from the metropolis, using geography as a route to an alternative world and way of life. When did you first read the novel and what did you think of it?*

It was a very absorbing and moving tale, but I thought it would be really difficult to make, because the story is mostly written as a depiction of Anna's internal thoughts and feelings. It was difficult to think how to visualise that. Actually Mr Suzuki asked me to work on the book, and initially I said, 'No, it is too difficult,' and turned him down. But I thought about Anna and Marnie and came up with the scene when they dance, which isn't in the original novel. Or the set-up with Anna as a girl who draws: that wasn't in the novel either. As I came up with these I was beginning to convince myself that it could be a beautiful story.

*Turning her into a visual artist gives you more access to her in a visual medium.*

Of course, we could just have resorted to a monologue, but because I'm an animator, I wanted to express her thoughts through her actions. The pictures she draws, and even the way she draws – her physical position and everything – reflects her mind and soul. But yes, that visualisation was very difficult.

*This is your second adaptation of an English children's classic, following Arrietty. Is that a special relationship for you?*

It's because Miyazaki likes English children's classic literature. He chose the book and I was given it by Suzuki, the producer, and read it. Of course I enjoyed and was moved by *Arrietty's* source novel [*The Borrowers*] too, and its central theme is something adults can relate to as well. And because this is children's literature, the ending isn't going to be like a disaster; there is hope at the end. That's how Miyazaki likes it too. And I liked the way it ended. A disastrous ending is not only hard on an audience, but on the creators as well.

*I found the visual styling very evocative, particularly in terms of place and interiors as expressions of states of mind. For example, Anna's bedroom in Sapporo conveyed a strong sense of the present and what life might be like for a girl in such a city now, and that helped to make the contrast with the sense of something different in the countryside. It's not something a Miyazaki film would dwell on. I wondered if you were conscious of any attempt to do anything different in visual terms, or develop the Ghibli house style?*

I'm glad you noticed because the background is very significant. It was important to depict Anna indoors: when you see her in her room you can tell what kind of a person she is. And when she enters her room in the country house, it was important that you can see people who lived in it before she moved in. And I took a lot of care to show a difference between the Marsh House past and present. Scenery also depicts Anna's mood and state of mind: the sky, water or wind. In the novel there is a phrase: the sky is described as grey as a pearl. I interpreted that as an image of Anna's soul. Ghibli's films usually have blue skies and white clouds, whereas in this film the sky is cloudy all the time. So there's a difference.

**Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, July 2016**

---

## WHEN MARNIE WAS THERE (OMOIDE NO MANI)

Directed by: Hiromasa Yonebayashi

©: GNDHDDTK

A Studio Ghibli production

Presented by: Nippon Television Network Corporation, Dentsu, Hakuho DY Media Partners, Walt Disney Company (Japan) Limited, Mitsubishi, Studio Ghibli, Toho Co. Ltd., KDDI Corporation

Executive Producer: Toshio Suzuki

Producer: Yoshiaki Nishimura

Production: Koji Hoshino

Line Producer: Tamaki Kojo

Finance Manager: Noriyoshi Tamagawa

Casting: Ryuji Hayashi, Takuro Okada

Screenplay by: Keiko Niwa, Masashi Ando, Hiromasa Yonebayashi

Based on the novel by: Joan G. Robinson

Director of Digital Imaging: Atsushi Okui

Supervising Animator: Masashi Ando

Editing: Rie Matsubara

Production Designer: Yohei Taneda

Art Directors: Yoichi Nishikawa, Yohei Takamatsu, Takashi Omori,

Noboru Yoshida

Titles: Malin Post

Music: Takatsugu Muramatsu

Piano: Takatsugu Muramatsu

Classical Guitar: Milos

Sound Designer: Koji Kasamatsu

Sound Re-recording Mixer: Koji Kasamatsu

### Voice Cast:

Kiernan Shipka (*Marnie*)

Geena Davis (*Yoriko Sasaki, 'Auntie'*)

John C. Reilly (*Kiyomasa Oiwa*)

Grey Griffin (*Setsu Oiwa*)

Catherine O'Hara (*old lady*)

Ellen Burstyn (*nanny*)

Vanessa L. Williams (*Hisako*)

Japan 2014

103 mins

---

## THE HISTORY OF ANIME

### Early Days of Anime Shorts Programme 1917-1946 + intro

Tue 29 Mar 18:00; Mon 11 Apr 20:40

### Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors (Momotarō: Umi no Shinpei)

Wed 30 Mar 21:00; Wed 13 Apr 18:30

### Exploring Anime: Panel Discussion

Thu 31 Mar 18:15

### Astroboy

Fri 1 Apr 18:15; Sun 17 Apr 12:10

### Kimba the White Lion (Jangaru Taitei)

Fri 1 Apr 20:45; Sat 9 Apr 12:40

### Belladonna of Sadness (Kanashimi no Belladonna)

Mon 4 Apr 20:30 (+ intro by Helen McCarthy); Mon 18 Apr 15:30

## ANIME CLASSICS PART 1

### Steamboy (Suchimubōi)

Sat 9 Apr 20:20; Fri 15 Apr 20:30; Wed 20 Apr 18:10

### Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise (Ōritsu Uchūgun: Oneamisu no Tsubasa)

Tue 12 Apr 18:00; Sat 23 Apr 20:40

### Patlabor: The Movie (Kidō keisatsu patorebā: Gekijō-ban)

Wed 13 Apr 20:40; Sun 17 Apr 18:20; Thu 28 Apr 18:15

### Cowboy Bebop: The Movie (Cowboy Bebop: Tengoku no tobira)

Thu 14 Apr 20:45; Sat 16 Apr 20:30; Fri 22 Apr 20:40

### Patlabor 2: The Movie (Kidō keisatsu patorebā: The Movie 2)

Fri 15 Apr 18:15; Thu 21 Apr 20:30; Thu 28 Apr 20:45

### The Case of Hana & Alice (Hana to Arisu Satsujin Jiken)

Sat 16 Apr 18:35; Tue 26 Apr 20:55

## EMERGING FEMALE VOICES

### A Silent Voice (Koe no Katachi)

Wed 6 Apr 20:30; Mon 18 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Dr Rayna Denison, Professor in Film and Digital Arts, University of Bristol)

### The Anthem of the Heart (Kokoro ga Sakebitagatterunda)

Thu 7 Apr 20:30; Fri 22 Apr 18:10

### Maquia: When the Promised Flower Blooms (Sayonara no Asa ni Yakusoku no Hana o Kazarō)

Fri 8 Apr 18:00; Sat 23 Apr 17:45

### Liz and the Blue Bird (Rizu to aoi tori)

Thu 21 Apr 18:15; Sat 30 Apr 17:45

## STUDIO GHIBLI

### Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi)

Mon 28 Mar 20:35; Fri 29 Apr 18:00

### When Marnie Was There (Omoide No Mani)

Tue 29 Mar 20:40

### My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)

Tue 5 Apr 18:20; Fri 8 Apr 20:50

This season was co-programmed by writer and academic Hanako Miyata



Japan Nakama is an online community for Japanese culture enthusiasts and a marketplace for Japan-made and inspired products.

---

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

## BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

## BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](http://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)

---

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780