Film Studies Assignment – Mulan
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Upon first glance, Disney's animated classic “Mulan” seems to be no more than your average children's film – animated, filled with musical numbers and of course, with it's own trademark Disney heroine. However, there is so much more to the 1998 film than just that. Based on the ancient Chinese legend of Hua Mulan, this movie tells the tale of Fa Mulan, a teenage Chinese girl, whose goal in life is not to find her very own “Prince Charming” and run off into the sunset with him; but to instead successfully disguise herself as a man and take her injured father's place in the Chinese army.

For my film studies assignment I have decided to analyse the scene where Mulan makes the decision to leave home and serve the army in her father's place. I would consider this to be the turning point of this movie.

The scene opens to Mulan bursting out onto her back porch into the pouring rain. Low, melancholic music plays in the background as she starts to cry and slowly sinks to the ground in resignation. Thunder and lightning strike as the audience is shown Mulan sitting at the base of a large stone statue, looking forlorn as she watches her parents' silhouettes through their window. Throughout this part of the scene, the music, sound effects (the thunderstorm), and Mulan's expressions and body language are used to convey her current emotions to the viewers – she is shown to be downtrodden, miserable and unpredictable.

Mulan is shown to suddenly spring into action. The music gets louder and faster, matching her newfound determination. She quickly prays to her ancestors and the 'clang!' of the incense burner is heard, adding to the atmosphere as it makes her actions seem more real. Silently, she enters her parents' room and exchanges her lotus hair-comb – a symbol of her position in society as a woman, for her father's summons. Then, resolute in her decision to leave, she cuts her hair using her father's sword and dons his armour in exchange for her traditional women's clothing – yet another symbol of her position in society, along with her long hair. These actions finalise her decision; she has effectively cut herself out of her present life in order to complete her transformation and start anew. Once again, the addition of sounds such as the scrape of Mulan's sword against it's sheath and the swish of billowing curtains add realism to the scene.

The scene closes with Mulan fetching her horse and leaving. She shows a fleeting moment of uncertainty where she glances back briefly, before bursting out of her family's estate and galloping off into the distance. Yet again, realism and dramatic tension are added to these final shots by the gradual addition of background noise, such as Mulan's footsteps, her horse whinnying, the gates to the family estate slamming open and the clip-clop of her horse's hooves against the ground.

The cinematography in this scene has a large impact on the atmosphere that is created, as it can slow the scene down and/or speed it up, draw the viewer's attention to something and cause certain shots to stand out. For example, the “camera” follows Mulan for the majority of the scene, making it clear that she is the centerpiece around which the whole scene revolves.

The scene opens with a tracking shot of Mulan running out of her house. The viewer is then shown a full shot if her sinking to the ground, situated near the edge of the screen. This choice to place her at the edge of the screen, and not perhaps the centre, sends the message that her problems are insignificant when compared to others; as at the edge of the screen she is not the focal point of the shot. In the next shot, the camera slowly pans down from the top of a stone statue to Mulan sitting at it's base. This, along with the slow music slows down the pace of the scene, matching Mulan's numb state of mind.

Next, a long shot of Mulan in the rain is shown, which reflects her mood brilliantly as she is feeling alone and upset. The camera then cuts to a long shot of Mulan's house with her parent's silhouettes visible through the window, cutting back and forth between the two to catch Mulan's expression as she watches them.

The camera follows Mulan as she springs to life, cutting to a high angle mid-shot of her praying to her ancestors – the camera angle showing how she is inferior in comparison the her ancestors, who are divine beings. As the tempo of the music increases, the camera shots become shorter to match – thus, speeding up the pace of the scene. Mulan's reflection is shown on her father's sword as she unsheathes it. Next, a full-shot of Mulan cutting her hair is shown and the camera pans down, following her hair as it falls – adding emphasis and drama to the action.

The camera then cuts to a low angle shot of Mulan looking imposing dressed in her father's army uniform –
the camera angle showing that in her new position as a man she is superior than her former self, giving an insight into the sexist society that she lives in.

The scene ends with a mid-shot of Mulan looking back at her house; soft focus being used to shift the viewer's attention from Mulan to her house, before cutting to a full shot of her bursting out of her estate on her horse, the camera tracking right to follow her as she disappears into the distance.

Finally, the editing also has a huge impact on this scene as it determines the rhythm and pace of the scene, which also adds to the overall atmosphere.

As “Mulan” is an animated film, the editing was very simple – the shots are mainly joined together using straight cuts, causing the scene to flow seamlessly. However, some shots are joined together by dissolving the first shot into the next – such as the shot of Mulan on her back porch to the panning shot of Mulan at the base of the stone statue. Another interesting method used to join two shots together was when a billowing curtain cut across the screen and turned it white, before pulling away to reveal a shot of Mulan fully clad in her father’s armour.

Overall, the mise-en-scene, cinematography and editing pull the whole scene together and set a suitable atmosphere for such a powerful and moving scene. As a result, this is one of my favourite scenes from this movie as the poignancy of Mulan's departure is portrayed brilliantly using these three filming processes.