

= The Garden of Words =

The Garden of Words (Japanese : ????? , Hepburn : Kotonoha no Niwa) is a 2013 Japanese anime drama film written , directed and edited by Makoto Shinkai , animated by CoMix Wave Films and distributed by Toho . It stars Miyu Irino and Kana Hanazawa , and featured music by Daisuke Kashiwa instead of Tenmon , who had composed the music for many of Shinkai 's previous films . The theme song , " Rain " , was originally written and performed by Senri Oe in 1988 , but was remade for the film and was sung by Motohiro Hata . It was adapted to a manga with illustrations by Midori Motohashi and later novelized by Shinkai , both in the same year as the film .

The film focuses on Takao Akizuki , an aspiring 15 @-@ year @-@ old shoemaker , and Yukari Yukino , a mysterious 27 @-@ year @-@ old woman he keeps meeting at Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden on rainy mornings . While Takao is skipping his morning class to design shoes , Yukino is avoiding work due to personal problems in her professional life . Yukino tells Takao nothing about herself , including her name , while Takao opens up to her , sharing his passion for shoes by offering to make a pair for her . When Takao learns Yukino 's identity , emotions come to a head as both learn that they have been teaching each other " how to walk " . Shinkai wrote the story as a tale of " lonely sadness " , based on the meaning of the traditional Japanese word for " love " , and uses shoes as a metaphor for life . The story 's motifs include rain , Man 'y?sh? poetry , and the Japanese garden . The age difference between the two main characters and their character traits demonstrate how awkwardly and disjointedly people mature , where even adults sometimes feel no more mature than teenagers , according to Shinkai .

The Garden of Words premiered at the Gold Coast Film Festival in Australia on April 28 , 2013 and had its general release on May 31 , 2013 in Japan . For the Japanese premiere , the film was screened with an animated short called Dareka no Manazashi (????????, lit . Someone 's Gaze) , also directed by Shinkai . The Garden of Words had an unusual release schedule since it was released digitally on iTunes the same day as the Japanese theatrical premier , and its DVD and Blu @-@ ray were released while the film was still in theaters , on June 21 . The film has been licensed by Sentai Filmworks in North America , Anime Limited in the UK , and Madman Entertainment in Australia . The film performed well in theaters for an extended period of time and was hosted at many local and international film events . It ranked highly on iTunes Store during 2013 and was selected as the Year 's Best Animation in iTunes ' Best of 2013 . It won the 2013 Kobe Theatrical Film Award and awards at the Fantasia International Film Festival and the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film . Online reviews were generally favorable with universal praise of the art , though opinions were mixed regarding the story 's length , plot and emotional climax .

= = Plot = =

The Garden of Words is considered a romance and drama film . It opens at the start of the rainy season in Tokyo with Takao Akizuki (?? ?? , Akizuki Takao) , a 15 @-@ year @-@ old student and aspiring shoemaker , opting to skip his first class and sketch shoe designs in the garden at Shinjuku Gyoen . There he encounters Yukari Yukino (?? ??? , Yukino Yukari) , a 27 @-@ year @-@ old woman who is skipping work and enjoying beer and chocolate . When she notices the school crest on his uniform , Yukino bids him farewell with a tanka (a form of Japanese poetry) , leaving Takao puzzled as to its origin and meaning . The two continue to encounter each other and socialize in the park on rainy mornings , but never formally introduce themselves . After Yukino expresses an interest in Takao 's shoemaking , he decides to make a pair of shoes in her size . With the end of the rainy season , Takao stops visiting the park and focuses on his work .

Following summer break , Takao returns to school and spots Yukino . His friends inform him that she is a literature teacher and that she had been the target of gossip and bullying . Out of kindness and to avoid further confrontation , Yukino opted to avoid work and retreat to the park , hoping she would learn to overcome her fears and be able to " walk " again . However , Yukino quits her job and leaves the school . That afternoon , Takao meets Yukino at the park and greets her by reciting the 2,514th poem from the Man 'y?sh? Japanese poetry collection , the correct response to her tanka ,

which he found in a classic Japanese literature textbook . After getting soaked by a sudden thunderstorm , both head to Yukino 's apartment and spend the afternoon together . When Takao confesses his love following dinner , Yukino is visibly moved , but then reminds him that she is a teacher and tells him that she is moving back to her home town on Shikoku . After Takao abruptly excuses himself , Yukino realizes her mistake and runs after him , finding him in the stairwell . Still upset , Takao angrily takes back what he had said and criticizes her for being so secretive and never opening up to him . Yukino embraces him and the two cry while she explains that their time together in the park had saved her .

The credits show Takao barely passing his final exams , but still working towards his goals , while Yukino moves back to Shikoku and resumes her teaching career . In a post @-@ credits scene , Takao revisits the park that winter , reads a letter from Yukino , places her finished shoes on the bench and then vows that he will find her after he has made progress with his career .

In the manga illustrated by Midori Motohashi , scenes were either added or slightly modified from the anime version . For example , after the conclusion of the rainy season , Takao was unable to visit the park during the only rainy morning that summer because he had scheduled to visit the footwear college he wanted to attend , disappointing Yukino who had hoped to see him in the park . Also , at the conclusion of the story , Yukino is seen wearing the shoes Takao had made for her .

= = Characters = =

Takao Akizuki (?? ?? , Akizuki Takao)

Takao Akizuki is a mature , hard @-@ working 15 @-@ year @-@ old first year high school student who hopes to become a shoemaker . On rainy mornings , he skips school to design shoes in the park . He is voiced by Miyu Irino in Japanese and Patrick Poole in English . In a scene depicting his childhood , he is voiced by Wataru Sekine in Japanese and Blake Shepard in English .

Yukari Yukino (?? ??? (" ?? ??? " in the manga) , Yukino Yukari)

Yukari Yukino is the mysterious 27 @-@ year @-@ old woman Takao meets in the park on rainy mornings . Takao later learns that she is a teacher at his high school , and that she , too , is skipping , but due to bullying by his upperclassmen . She is voiced by Kana Hanazawa in Japanese and Maggie Flecknoe in English .

Takao 's mother

Takao 's 47 @-@ year @-@ old mother is divorced from Takao 's father , and is focused more on her love life than her family life . She is voiced by Fumi Hirano in Japanese and Shelley Calene @-@ Black in English .

Takao 's brother

Takao 's 26 @-@ year @-@ old brother , who leaves home to live with his girlfriend , dismisses Takao 's shoe @-@ making as a whimsical . He is voiced by Takeshi Maeda in Japanese and Crash Buist in English .

Brother 's girlfriend

Takao 's brother 's 24 @-@ year @-@ old girlfriend is friendly with Takao and fascinated by his shoe @-@ making . She is voiced by Yuka Terasaki in Japanese and Brittney Karbowski in English .

Matsumoto (??)

Matsumoto is Takao 's classmate and friend , as well as Sat? 's boyfriend . He is voiced by Suguru Inoue in Japanese and Mike Yager in English .

Sat? (??)

Sat? is a second year student in Takao 's high school and friend . She is voiced by Megumi Han in Japanese and Alison Sumrall in English .

Aizawa (??)

Always surrounded by her friends , Aizawa is a third year student in Takao 's high school and the source of Yukino 's problems at school . She is voiced by Mikako Komatsu in Japanese and Hilary Haag in English .

= = Production = =

The Garden of Words was directed by Makoto Shinkai , who also wrote the original story and screenplay . He was responsible for the storyboards , animation composite , key animation , and editing . According to Shinkai , his numerous roles in the production of his works is due to the small size of the company , and in this film , it allowed him to tailor many elements of the film to more accurately portray his ideas .

The animated film was produced by Shinkai Creative , CoMix Wave Films , and the producer was Noritaka Kawaguchi . Kenichi Tsuchiya was the animation director and was responsible for character design , while Hiroshi Takiguchi was the art director . Planning for the film began in the spring of 2012 and was announced on December 24 of that year . The Japanese release was initially slated for the first half of 2013 . Production took only six months , starting with location scouting by Shinkai around Shinjuku . Production officially started after he had created storyboards based on the photos he took .

Shinkai was approached in early 2013 about adapting the material into a manga , which was then done by Midori Motohashi . In April , Shinkai stated that he was not contributing to the adaptation , leaving the work entirely to the manga artist . However , he did express interest in seeing the finished product .

= = Inspirations , motifs , and metaphors = =

According to Shinkai 's announcement of the film early during its production , The Garden of Words was his first attempt at making a love story using the traditional Japanese meaning of " love " . During the era of the Man 'yōshū , the native Japanese words today known as yamato kotoba (和語 , lit . " Japanese words ") were starting to be written using kanji , and the word for " love " , koi (today written 恋) was written as 恋し , or " lonely sadness " . As noted by Shinkai , a more modern concept of " romance " , represented by ren 'ai (恋愛) , came about by Western influence . The Garden of Words emphasizes the original meaning of koi ? a " longing for someone in solitude " ? but in a modern setting . Loneliness is the central element of the film , according to Shinkai . In an interview , he said the he created the film with the hope of cheering up people who feel lonely or incomplete in their social relations . However , he made a point that " this movie doesn 't treat loneliness as something that must be fixed . "

Although the story 's central theme is loneliness , it uses shoes and rain as motifs , along with Man 'yōshū poetry and the Japanese garden in which it is set . Although rain is typically seen as sad and gloomy , in The Garden of Words it makes the world more vivid and protects the two main characters from the reality of their lives and the limitations imposed by society . Shinkai also noted a parallel between love and rain ? that neither can be controlled or stopped .

According to Shinkai , shoes were a metaphor for life as Yukino learned to walk again , while Takao 's shoe @-@ making typified their relationship . Similarly , Yukino 's choice of food and beverages ? initially beer and chocolate , due to a stress @-@ induced taste disorder ? was a metaphor for her emotional health .

In many of Shinkai 's films , sad endings resulting from misunderstandings and unrequited feelings are common . According to Shinkai , his stories are intended to encourage teenagers as they learn to cope with these commonplace experiences . In an interview , he admitted that he had been accustomed to being turned down by women , and felt that his stories were encouraging because his characters continue to try , despite being unsuccessful at love . The Garden of Words also illustrated how people do not mature as linearly or elegantly as we often assume . Shinkai himself could relate with Yukino in not feeling as smart or mature at age 27 , stating , " We 're all still just children at age 27 , " a point that voice actress Kana Hanazawa also agreed with .

The original idea for The Garden of Words came from Shinkai 's desire to capture the beauty of the daily scenery in modern Tokyo and showcase it in a film . Having lived for ten years in Shinjuku , he selected it as the location of the film and set about taking thousands of photos , upon which he created his storyboards . Wanting to share the peace and harmony of his favorite locations in Japan

with the hope that it would encourage people to visit , Shinkai modeled the garden in the film to match Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden in Tokyo . Following the earthquake in March 2011 , he was worried that it could be destroyed and wanted to preserve it in an animated film .

= = = Animation = = =

Like other Japanese anime , The Garden of Words was created using a combination of hand @-@ drawn animation , rotoscoping and computer animation (CGI) , with the latter facilitating the realistic appearance of the film 's rain sequences . Shinkai made half of the film 's backgrounds by using his photographs as a base and then drawing over the top with Adobe Photoshop , while the other half were fictional settings created with traditional animation and computer graphics . As with his other films , the backgrounds are vivid and meticulously drawn scenery while the characters are drawn with less detail , though they are still convincing and realistic .

For the rainy scenes at the park , the color palette was toned down , and pale green shading was used to match the gloomy , rainy weather , thereby increasing the detail and defining the characters . Matching the tones to the background and lighting helped highlight the characters ' faces . According to Shinkai , a novel coloring method was chosen from other coloring methods following careful testing . The method involved integrating the coloring for each character with the background , a " new innovation of sorts " that mimics the refraction of light on the skin as seen in nature . This was accomplished by coloring the outline of the character , including the lines drawn for the separation of lit and shadowed surfaces , and then incorporating the background color onto the surface . Shinkai felt that this coloring method made the anime stand out from others .

= = = Character design and casting = = =

Shinkai originally envisioned Takao as a boy who wants to help people , but also felt that he should have a passion for making something , since creative work can be rewarding and fulfilling . On a list he made of potential crafts , he picked out the word " shoes " . After testing it out with his initial plans for the story , he found that it worked out , and in hindsight , he realized that shoemakers also assist people with walking .

When first presenting the original story to the rest of his team , Shinkai learned that Yukino had unintentionally come across as selfish . To remedy this , he gave her character nervous traits and personality flaws , such as letting her emotions spill over during mildly upsetting events . Shinkai later realized that some of these personality quirks and temporary professional challenges seen in Yukino were present in a former girlfriend , for whom he had written his short film She and Her Cat . In addition to making Yukino 's character more convincing , these character flaws also made it more difficult to plan since she had to be both flawed and attractive to a young boy . One aspect of her character that Shinkai focused on was her appearance . He felt that she had to be dressed in nice clothes , and particularly nice shoes . In order to balance realism with fashion , he researched shoemaking , worked with a clothing coordinator and stylist , and held weekly fashion meetings with his staff .

One of the " complicated realistic elements " of Yukino 's character was her sense of purity that only her voice could convey . Though it took days of listening to the audition tapes , Shinkai finally chose Kana Hanazawa , who had a very low natural voice , despite typically playing the roles of high @-@ pitched younger girls . One of the things that impressed Shinkai about Hanazawa 's voice was her ability to cover such a broad range of expression .

It was the final scene of the film that made Shinkai glad he had cast Hanazawa . He knew that when Yukino cried , it had to be something impressive in order to emphasize an intense release of emotion . According to Shinkai , music alone could not produce the needed effect , and Hanazawa performed perfectly and without instruction . In an interview , he said , " I believe that Ms. Hanazawa 's acting on that crying scene alone completes the film . " This final scene , which was recorded perfectly on the first take , played a pivotal role in the casting decision for Takao 's character . Though many Japanese voice actors could portray a naïve 15 @-@ year @-@ old boy , Shinkai

immediately recognized that only Miyu Irino could produce the intense emotion needed for the closing scene . Irino had also played Shun and Shin in Shinkai 's Children Who Chase Lost Voices .

In regards to the English dub , Shinkai did not feel that he could judge the quality of the voice acting since he could not speak English natively . He felt that it was good due to the feedback he had received and because he could feel the emotion in the characters ' voices . However , he noted that the experience would be different for viewers and that the final judgment could only be made by English @-@ speaking audiences .

= = = Length = = =

The Garden of Words is short , lasting approximately 46 minutes in length , a trend also seen among Shinkai 's earlier works . Although he had stated in an interview with Anime News Network that he does like making shorter films , Shinkai noted that he did not originally plan for the film to be played in theaters . Instead , he intended for people to casually view the film on tablets , computers , and in home theaters . A target length was never specified from the outset , instead the relationship between Takao and Yukino was emphasized , although it was known from early in the production that the film would be short .

Shinkai acknowledged that it is difficult to sell 46 @-@ minute films in theaters ; however , many individuals in the industry had requested to show the film in theaters and conventions . During an interview at Anime Expo 2013 , a representative from Toho , the film 's distribution company , emphasized that the quality of the story and the reputation of its director played a key role in the decision to bring it to theaters .

= = = Music = = =

In Shinkai 's previous films , the music was produced by Tenmon ; however , The Garden of Words features music by Daisuke Kashiwa . Kashiwa had been a fan of Shinkai 's 5 Centimeters Per Second and had sent him several of his albums . Shinkai listened to these albums while writing the screenplay and then elected to base the film 's music off of the songs from one of the albums . In an interview , Shinkai said that the music was primarily responsible for making the movie seem " unlike other anime " .

The theme song , " Rain " , was written and composed by Senri Oe , and was originally a popular Japanese song in 1988 . Shinkai enjoyed listening to Oe 's song regularly while attending university , and since one of the film 's themes was rain , it was the first song that came to mind while he worked on the production . He particularly liked the song because its lyrics reflected daily life , much like the film . The song was remade for the film in 2013 , and sung by Motohiro Hata . Shinkai met Hata on several occasions and noted a similarity between Hata 's passion as an artisan and that of the character Takao . Shinkai also felt that Hata 's voice was perfect because to him it carried an " underlying loneliness " and " sounded a little like an anxious young man " .

= = Themes = =

Two common themes among Shinkai 's films , including The Garden of Words , are subtle romances and lingering emotions . However , this film 's focus on " lonely sadness " (koi) was interpreted in a couple of ways . According to Cynthia Webb of The Jakarta Post , the loneliness is seen at the end of the film , when Takao learns to cope with Yukino 's move to Shikoku . Luke Carroll at Anime News Network felt the end of the rainy season and the resulting separation created the sense of koi .

Kaze of Beneath The Tangles , however , disagreed with these interpretations of koi and the notion that the story was a " bittersweet romance " or " another love story " , and instead felt that the theme was unrecognized . Focusing instead on the human need for companionship and understanding , Kaze noted that both Takao and Yukino lacked meaningful connections with their peers and friends , a view shared by reviewer Bradly Storm at Hardcore Gamer . Together through their conversations

? in their " garden of words " ? they found companionship : Takao finding someone he can share his passion with , and Yukino finding someone who treats her as a person . However , because of the age difference , this discovery varied between the characters . For Yukino , an older and more experienced individual , her hopeless feelings of lonely sadness disappeared when she learned she could connect with Takao , a revelation that she saw as her salvation . For Takao , a boy with an unsupportive family and friends who seemed more like acquaintances , he did not realize his lack of companionship until he discovered it with Yukino , a new feeling he mistook for romantic love but only realized its true nature after she had moved away . According to Kaze , " romantic love could potentially bloom from such feelings , but that is not what the story is about " . Instead , the love they shared was more basic , making the age difference immaterial . At the end of film , both characters maintained their friendship through letters , but otherwise began growing as people by moving on with their lives and presumably finding new relationships with other people . The hope was that one day they could reunite and renew their companionship " without needing to cling to each other " . However , neither could " learn to walk again " if they continued to isolate themselves from the rest of the world and take shelter with each other in the garden at Shinjuku Gyoen .

Another one of the themes discussed by the film 's reviewers was rain or water . According to Cynthia Webb , the rain represented " unfulfilled longing " , while Bradly Storm saw water as a third main character to the story , acting to both bring Takao and Yukino together and to symbolize the renewal of life . Kaze felt that the rain symbolized their lonely states , though also acknowledging Shinkai 's statement that the rain symbolized uncontrollable love . Following the reasoning that rain symbolized their lonely states , Kaze noted that the tanka had not only romantic intentions , but was also a " simple plea " by Yukino for someone to stay with her , even when she 's no longer lonely , and not just out of pity .

= = Media = =

= = = Anime = = =

The anime film was announced in Japan on December 24 , 2012 , with the release scheduled for the first half of 2013 and news updates available on its Facebook page . On February 20 , 2013 , the film 's production company , CoMix Wave Films , released a trailer with subtitles in multiple languages on YouTube and announced that it would be released in Japan on May 31 , 2013 .

In early April , it was announced that the world premiere of the film would be held at Gold Coast Film Festival (GCFF) in Broadbeach , Queensland , Australia . Scheduled for the end of the festival at 4 : 00 PM on April 28 , 2013 , the film was part of the ' Cool Japan ' Gold Coast lineup and included a guest appearance and discussion with Shinkai . The film 's premiere was hosted in Australia as a way of showing appreciation to Australians for their support . According to the GCFF 's director , the film sold out in advance and was relocated to a larger theater . Despite feeling nervous about the world premiere , Shinkai provided a discussion of the film and asked everyone to not share the plot and story until after the Japanese release the following month . Shinkai was scheduled for an hour @-@ long movie poster signing , but ended up staying two and a half hours to accommodate the high turnout .

Following the world premiere , but ahead of the Japanese premiere on May 31 , the first five minutes of the film were previewed on TV Tokyo and NTV on May 12 . On May 22 , it was announced on Shinkai 's official Twitter account that the film would play in Japan , Hong Kong , and Taiwan at the same time and that the film would be available on iTunes on the day of the release . Additionally , the Japanese premiere would include a screening of Shinkai 's short film , Dareka no Manazashi , which was released earlier that same year . By October , it was reported that many theaters in Japan had extended screening of the film .

The official English language premiere of The Garden of Words was next shown in the United States at the Los Angeles Convention Center on July 6 and 7 as part of Anime Expo 2013 . Sentai Filmworks hosted the film , and Shinkai was the Special Guest of Honor for the expo . The Canadian

premiere was held at Montreal 's 2013 Fantasia International Film Festival , where the film was screened on July 22 and 25 . The film then returned to Australia when it screened alongside Ghost in the Shell : Arise at Madman Entertainment 's Reel Anime 2013 .

The Garden of Words was shown in Moscow on September 27 , 2013 , after which Shinkai made an appearance to answer questions . He also attended the UK premiere , which took place during Scotland Loves Anime 2013 in mid @-@ October , where it was played in conjunction with Shinkai 's earlier work , The Place Promised in Our Early Days . By late February 2014 , the film had been shown in 11 countries . In 2014 , it was showcased at Amsterdam 's Imagine Film Festival in mid @-@ April , at the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film in late @-@ April , with Dareka no Manazashi on May 21 in Italian theaters as part of the Nexo Anime project , and at the Japan Film Festival of San Francisco (JFFSF) in late @-@ July .

== == DVD , Blu @-@ ray , and digital == == ==

The film was released in digital format on iTunes on the same day as the theatrical release , which was very unusual for a film . Furthermore , the DVD and Blu @-@ ray were made available while the film was still playing in theaters . With the Japanese premiere on May 31 , the DVD and Blu @-@ ray editions were released in Japan less than a month later , on June 21 . The DVD came with a 16 @-@ page booklet and approximately 30 minutes bonus features , including a short version of some interviews with Shinkai and the cast . The Blu @-@ ray had similar features , except it contained 90 minutes of bonus features , including a long version of the interviews .

On April 24 , 2013 , the video distribution company Section23 and the licensing company Sentai Filmworks announced their acquisition of the license and plans to release a digital version and the North American bilingual DVD and Blu @-@ ray later in the year . The DVD and Blu @-@ ray were both released on August 6 , 2013 . The Blu @-@ ray used 1080p AVC (Advanced Video Coding) with an aspect ratio of 1 @-@ 78 : 1 Widescreen and audio encoded with the lossless DTS @-@ HD Master Audio codec . Its packaging did not include inserts or a reversible cover .

The DVD and Blu @-@ ray releases for the UK were licensed by Anime Limited , which was announced on October 18 , 2013 . During the 2013 Lucca Comics & Games convention , the Italian publisher Dynit announced that it had acquired the rights to distribute the film . Australian distributor Madman Entertainment released the DVD on February 19 , 2014 . The French publishing company Kazé released a German and Japanese dubbed DVD on March 28 , 2014 , which also included the short film Dareka no Manazashi .

== == Manga and novel == ==

A manga adaptation of the story with art by Midori Motohashi was serialized in the June to December 2013 issues of the monthly seinen manga magazine Afternoon . It was bundled into a single volume released by Kodansha on November 22 , 2013 . In February 2014 , North American publisher Vertical announced at the Katsucon anime convention that it had licensed Motohashi 's manga ; the English translation was released on October 28 , 2014 .

With editing by Media Factory , Shinkai himself created a novelization of the story , which drew many responses on Twitter following serialization . It was released in monthly installments in the September 2013 to April 2014 issues of Da Vinci magazine . The full novel , which contained new scenes not present in the film or serialized novel chapters , was published by Kadokawa Shoten on April 11 , 2014 @,@

== Reception ==

Like many of Shinkai 's other films , The Garden of Words was considered most appropriate for teenage and adult audiences due to its more intense and personal mood . The film performed strongly at the box office , with many theaters offering extended screenings . Because of its theatrical success , the film has been considered Shinkai 's biggest hit . Shinkai considered it one of

his best films , and reviews of the story in each media form were equally favorable . The digital version ranked 7th on the iTunes store for Western and Japanese films by the end of 2013 . In the year following its initial release , it continued to be a popular at local and international film events . The news and review site , ICv2 , listed the DVD under " The Best of 2013 : Anime " .

= = = Reviews = = =

At Anime News Network , Luke Carroll praised the film , calling it a " visual treat " , but was disappointed in the short length and found Shinkai 's new coloring method to be distracting . Jon Hayward was impressed by the " almost photo realistic " quality of the scenery , particularly in Shinjuku Gyoen . The Managing Editor , Bamboo Dong , described it as " beautifully designed and tenderly animated , it is nature eye candy at its finest . " She was impressed by the film 's unrushed yet thorough story despite its short length and praised both the music and art . In particular , she noted the beauty of the light reflections , rain scenes , and camera angles .

At UK Anime Network , Andy Hanley gave it a score of 10 / 10 , calling it " visually beautiful with a touching story to match " . He praised the natural progression of their relationship , despite the age gap , and enjoyed the emotional climax of the film . Hanley felt that The Garden of Words had a " tighter focus " than Children Who Chase Lost Voices and a better ending than 5 Centimeters Per Second , concluding it was Shinkai 's best work yet . Dan Rhodes called the film " a real return to form for Makoto Shinkai " following Children Who Chase Lost Voices , which he felt had been an attempt by Shinkai to live up to the common expectation of being the " next Hayao Miyazaki . " He praised the film for its beauty , romance , pacing , and subtlety . Although he felt that the film 's ending was an improvement over the ending to 5 Centimeters Per Second , he described it as rushed and overly emotional . However , he was very critical of the English dub , which he felt adversely affected both content and mood .

Bradly Storm at Hardcore Gamer gave it a 4 @. @ 5 out of 5 , describing it as " painfully intimate and touchingly sentimental " and " the single most beautiful animated film ever created " . Despite the film 's length , Storm was impressed that Shinkai was able to connect his audience with his characters faster and more effectively than full @-@ length films . He worried that some viewers might miss the subtle message of the film and view it as a " by @-@ the @-@ books love story that can feel cliché or even trite " . Curtis Stone of Geekenstein gave it a 5 out of 5 and rated it # 1 in his top five list of anime for 2013 . He praised not only the art and music , but especially the voice acting , which he felt was perfect for the final scene . Lindsay Nelson at Midnight Eye compared the film to Whisper of the Heart by Studio Ghibli for its poetic use of " seemingly bland and uninteresting locations " . She was impressed with both the sound and art , and particularly the sweeping view of the Docomo tower with the sunset in the background . However , she criticized it for its " tearfully over @-@ the @-@ top climax " , " treacly " pop theme song , and lack of reflective silence .

Andrew Hamlin at Northwest Asian Weekly gave it a 3 @. @ 5 out of 4 stars , applauding its poetic use of nature while criticizing the film 's brevity . Trung Rwo at Twitch Film also praised the artwork and felt the film displayed " honest and fresh emotions " . He described it as " clean and cute , a little bit cheesy " due to the highly emotional ending . Sam at Otaku 's Study gave the film an A- , describing it as an " immersive love story " and complimenting the Japanese voice acting and music . Allen Moody of T.H.E.M. Anime Reviews praised the artwork and claimed it overshadowed the film 's flaws , which he felt were its short length and underdeveloped story . Chris Beveridge at The Fandom Post praised the artwork , but felt that the story was weak , noting the simplicity of the plot , the abrupt ending , and the awkwardness of the age difference between the two main characters . Amy Wong , the editor at Yam , called it " a story of solitude and heartache that comes before love . " She praised the animation as its best feature , but also enjoyed its pace , though she saw the climax as overblown . Akumetsu at Anime e Manga thought the film could have been a masterpiece , but felt the plot was too straightforward , the film was too short , and the conclusion came too dramatically .

Chris Beveridge at The Fandom Post reviewed the Blu @-@ ray release , noting that the dialogue was " clean and clear " throughout the entire playback and described the high definition video as

something worth showing off . He also felt the disc included a fair amount of extras given the quick release . Matt Hinrichs at DVD Talk felt the video made a clean transfer from digital to Blu @-@ ray , the atmospheric sound effects were " carefully crafted " , and that the dialog in the center channel was clear . Dan Rhodes at UK Anime Network gave the DVD by Anime Limited a 9 out of 10 , calling it a " barebones release " , though praising its reversible insert .

= = = Awards and other recognition = = =

Not only did the iTunes Store staff recommend The Garden of Words , it was selected as the Year 's Best Animation in iTunes ' Best of 2013 . In addition to the high acclaim on iTunes , The Garden of Words won the 2013 Kobe Theatrical Film Award . At the 2013 Fantasia International Film Festival , it shared the Satoshi Kon Award for Achievement in Animation with Berserk : Golden Age Arc III ? Descent while winning the Audience Award for Best Animation Feature . At the 2014 Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film , it won the AniMovie Award for feature films .

Storyboards , original art , and other material from The Garden of Words were exhibited between June 28 and October 19 , 2014 at the Ooka Makoto Kotoba Museum in Mishima , Shizuoka Prefecture . The museum , run by Z @-@ Kai Co . , also featured Shinkai 's commercial Cross Road (made for Z @-@ Kai Co .) , along with She and Her Cat and 5 Centimeters Per Second . In addition to the display materials and film viewings for each of the works , a replica of the shoes designed by Takao was also on display .

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