

Reflection on grave of the fireflies (1988)



**ASSIGN
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As a carrier of art, animation plays the same media role as other art works, they deliver human emotions and thoughts. Not only that, because of the unique expression methods of the animation itself, its expressive power tends to surpass other art carriers. In Isao Takahata's animated film *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), it uses realism to make the animation works to a great degree of realism, making people feel the hardship of World War II. In this film, the combination of the fate and historical background of the characters makes the society and the changes of the times are reflected in characters.

People's perception of reality usually based on the common understanding of lives experience. So in the world of animation, the director's problem is how to make the audience feel the "realness" in the animation character. The same question is also mentioned in Roger Ebert's film review, he thinks the characters in *Grave of the Fireflies* are lack of "visual realism". (Ebert, 2000) Animation appears to conflict with this directly, as it departs from live-action and seems to more closely resemble fiction. (Shaw & Chute, 2017) Although the role of animation is based on the image of a human being and creation of human backgrounds, they are indeed very different from real human beings. However, in Paul Wells's article, he answered this question. "Any definition of reality is necessarily subjective." (Wells, 1998) The realism theory applying to animation world is not about how close the character to real human beings, or how similar the settings close to modern society. The key of realism in animation works is how to make the audience unconsciously perceive the reality and experience the emotional ups and downs of the characters. *Grave of the Fireflies* is a model of realist animation which also

has a realistic story theme. A pair of siblings have experienced the pain and hopes of life in the war, they left the world while waiting in the end. The theme of this animation begins with reality, reflecting the disaster that war brings to people and even children. But the film is dramatic from the ordinary people's life, not the heroic, salvation and exaggerated dramatic factors as the main line of the story, so that the material world can be more realistically depicted. This kind of drama from reality and ordinary people's lives is what realism advocates. The realism elements in animation are formal elements of realist animation, it is an important basis for measuring whether a work has a realist spirit or not. In addition to that, with the changes of times, the elements of realism are constantly changing and changing, its thinking about human destiny and its concern for reality itself are permanent. The expression of realism that focuses on recreating the true original appearance of society will continue to have a profound impact on future animation works.

In *Grave of the Fireflies*, there are also many details and techniques that can reflect the aesthetics of realism. "September 21, 1945... That was the night I died" this is the first line of the whole film, it already laid a sad atmosphere. 1945, in the real world history, it was also the end of the Second World War, when the US launched the atomic bomb to Japan. The design of the film is correspond to the real world, so that to bring audience sense of reality. It is common to tell stories in flashback of literary techniques. However, director used natal recollection to develop narratives, adding a realistic color to this realistic theme animation. In the war, this sibling only have one relative left, but this relatives is not good to them the

war has alienated the family. The human nature under the war can't be tested, this is also the theme that the *Grave of the fireflies* really wants to explore. It truly describes the cruelty of human life under the war. The imbalance of social order during the war made the relationship between people weak, and the lack of material made people indifferent ruthless. As Ryan mentioned in his article, " ' realism' is not synonymous with " reality," those experiences of phenomena that are lived". (Laliberty, 2014) Realism and reality are not necessarily the same, but it is figured out from the real life experience of the audience. The embodiment of realism aesthetics in this film is that it depicts the ugly side of human nature. Through animation, the smiles and tears of the characters are magnified, and people can understand the emotions brought by the film and understand the information that the film wants to convey. It makes the audience feel the same, this is the realism aesthetics brought to the audience.

In the final scene of the film, the souls of the brothers and sisters are dependent on each other, the camera slowly rises, and the bustling metropolis appears in the picture. The ruins of the past have become a brightly lit city. This scene is like watching the history of people not repeating the war and cherishing the present. In summary, the film of *Grave of the Fireflies* reveals the pain that war brings to people, using realism technique to make the audience understand human nature under the war. In this film, the embodiment of realism does not lie in how close the character is to the real human image, but in how much the audience feels the anti-war information that the film want to convey after watching the movie. In human cognition, authenticity relies on the understanding and perception of

objects, information and background. A realist film is to enable the audience to perceive the mood of the characters in the film so that they can understand their situation. The director Isao Takahata said in an interview, “ ‘ Grave of the Fireflies’ isn’t an anti-war film simply because it cannot prevent another war from happening.”(Takahata, 2015) The realism in his film truly depicts the scene of war and the visual impact it brings to the audience. The director believes that people should not forget the suffering caused by the war. As his film describes, the pain that war brings to ordinary people is not time to alleviate. People must cherish the world of peace.

Citation

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