Analysis of Japanese Animation

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Q1. Human Creativity in Animation

There is an abundance of human creativity in animation. First, in contrast to the reflection of the real world seen in live action films, animation is a reflection of the world as seen through the artist's eyes; in other words, animation is an artist's creative interpretation of the world. This is similar to paintings such as Van Gogh's *Starry Night*—he saw the night sky as a swirling mass of blues, which is a very different in comparison to a photograph of the night sky. In the film *5 Centimeters Per Second*, we saw how the artist behind the animation, Makoto Shinkai, imagined the the character's world: it was not always a literal reflection of real places. For example, in the second part of the film, *Cosmonaut*, the male lead Takaki Toono imagined the sky when thinking about Akari Shinohara when they were separated and the artist depicted their separation with an imaginative view of an impossible sky: lights and planets that do not exist in a real image of space. It could be interpreted that the artist's repeated focus on space and the sky is a clever metaphor between the emotional space and distance the characters experienced in the film.

Another element of human creativity seen in animation is how the story is conveyed through real emotions and relatable experiences. Emotions are a very human feature and in animation they are evoked from relatable elements of the story that resonate with the audience. It is not uncommon to become emotional from an animated film, such as an involuntary laugh or a few tears. For example, although I am fortunate enough to have never experienced life as a homeless person, I could still relate to Miyuki in *Tokyo Godfathers* because I can relate to the difficulty she had communicating with her parents. The similar experience meant I shared a small piece of Miyuki's emotions at important parts in the film, such as when she tried calling home from the phone booth or when she found the note in the newspaper from her parents.

Another very relatable emotion in in the animations we watched is the feeling of loss through separation. In *5 Centimeters Per Second*, Takaki and Akari's relationship slowly fades over time due to distance and lack of communication. Although I did not feel the loss as acutely as Takaki appeared to have felt in the film, it still made me think of the friendships I had in elementary school which are non-existent today. Overall, human creativity is very apparent in animation.

Q2. Differences in *5 Centimeters Per Second* and *Tokyo Godfathers*

There were many differences between the two films we watched in class. For example, although both films' stories progressed through the perspective of multiple characters, *5 Centimeters Per Second* split the film into parts while *Tokyo Godfathers* took a more fluid approach. In *5 Centimeters Per Second*, the first part was from Takaki's perspective while the second part was from the perspective of the girl who had a crush on him and the third part from both Takaki and Akari. In contrast, in *Tokyo Godfathers*, the perspective changed based upon what characters were relevant to that point in the storyline. Not all of the characters were together for the whole film, so switching perspective was a natural solution for the audience to see the entire story. In both films, using multiple perspectives is a very effective way for the audience to experience a deeper connection with the story.

Another difference between these two films were the types of facial expressions. For example, in *5 Centimeters Per Second*, many times the facial expression was impassive or taut with emotion, but in *Tokyo Godfathers*, the facial expressions were largely exaggerated. The image that sticks in my mind the most from facial expressions in *Tokyo Godfathers* was the sniffing that Miyuki would do sometimes from the cold and sometimes from emotion; it was very different from the depiction of emotion on faces in *5 Centimeters Per Second*.

One more difference was the intensity of color. *5 Centimeters Per Second* had vivid depictions of the landscape and the variations in types of lights created a rich, colorful backdrop for the characters, which matched with the dreamlike psychological quality of the story. In contrast, the colors in *Tokyo Godfathers* were much duller, which created a more realistic effect that complemented the story grounded in more grim aspects of reality, such as homelessness.

Some other notable differences were the attention to unessential details and unique scenes. In *5 Centimeters Per Second*, many scenes in the film were simply imagery of the scenery or common actions in daily life without any element of the story. For example, the grass blowing in the breeze or opening a carton of milk did nothing to further the plot. In contrast, *Tokyo Godfathers* did not put as much deliberate focus on unessential details and progressed purely for the story. I think this ties into the more psychological aspects of *5 Centimeters Per Second* with a message similar to, "Stop and smell the roses." Lastly, in *Tokyo Godfathers*, the animators included the opening credits in various pieces of signage around Tokyo. This accomplished two tasks: establishing the environment as well as expressing creativity. In contrast, *5 Centimeters Per Second* did not have a credits scene, but in the third part the creators included a song scene that recapped the entire story, which was not seen in *Tokyo Godfathers*.

Q3. Opinion on Animated Films

Personally, because animation can affect the audience just as much as a live-action films—with effects such as tears, laughter, heartache, etc.—I believe animation is just as effective in conveying a meaningful story. In addition, the number of scenes in live-action movies nowadays that are entirely digitally created is so high that I think they should also be considered as "unreal" as animation.