

CHALLENGE TOWARDS WAR AS GRAND-NARRATION REPRESENTED IN STUDIO GHIBLI'S FILM GRAVES OF THE FIREFLIES

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Abstract— During World War II, the world is in a blink of chaos with the rise of AXIS power where Japan created propaganda that justified their attack to implement their Ideology as form of international fascism. This study aims to explain Graves of the Fireflies idea as a challenge towards war as a grand-narration that turned out suffers its citizen and become the research question of this paper. Binary opposition, Seita vs Society, as structure and relation to its historical setting and condition of surviving during World War II qualitatively become the data of this inquiry. This study uses Leotard Grand-narration as its theoretical framework and Semiotic approach to see how every scene generates meanings that challenge the war as Grand-narration; this paper reveals how war as Grand-narration justified the mistreatment and hardship of the characters Seita and Setsuko. An important implication of this study is the need to understand the horror of war impacting the under-privileged society as world vision seen in the characters timespan in the film.

Keywords—Grand-narration, Semiotic, War, Scene, Binary, History.

I. INTRODUCTION

During world war II japan joins the war siding with Germany and Italy, with so forming the AXIS side of war. It is no surprise that both party that join the war throw some propaganda in order to maximize both the soldier and public moral to keep being high. This mode of maximizing people condition is known as Grand Narration. Grand Narration itself is a principle of ontological unity that shapes social reality (Rachmawati, 2017: 14) or a set of principle which only works in their respective language game (Arifin, 1994).

Grand Narration had strong impact on how society works, think and behave. As what already been explain before, the existing propaganda serve as a way to keep the society to behave in certain way under constructed norm for their own good. The importance of social norm as check and balance shows another purpose of Grand Narration, which works as a tool to legitimize social institution to decide what a person can say and do (Mujiyanto, 2010: 83), because of that, Grand Narration became justifiable institution/group to demand person to act certain way. this is a rigid example of how a set of narrative can become legitimate system to determine people

move and thought. According to Agadjanian Grand Narration often used as “national value” (Agadjanian, 2006) as a result, someone identity always attached upon their nationality, socio-culture, and economy.

In postmodern paradigm, humanism and historicism criticism, it is a realization about the meaning of men's life and its world, that it is highly determined by the people at that part of history (Rachmawati, 2017: 11). In the *Grave of fireflies*, Setsuko and Seita's condition was highly determined by the moral standard created by the society, or the Grand Narration. Their failure in keeping up with the Grand Narration, as a product of modernism, is a form of humanism criticism that was shown through postmodern paradigm, which is when the existed ideology crumble apart and all the norm and knowledge transcendental metaphysic has lost its credibility. Lyotard, who opposed Modernism at that time, later stated his concern regarding the failing of Modernism ideology. He claimed that Grand Narration was failing its philosophy ground, which is to carry a progress, but instead, modernism rather ignore its essence, such the idea of welfare, integrity, dialectical, and subjective rationality (Rachmawati, 2017:14).

The object of this study is movie by Studio Ghibli “Grave of the Fireflies”. There is some article published discussing the movie. First is a thesis by Aulia Syarif Nasution with titled “ANALYSIS OF LEADING CHARACTER'S PERSONALITY STRUCTURE POTRAYED IN A GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES”. The article discusses on psychological condition reflected in the main character of the story when facing a great big trouble. However, the article mainly focuses on understanding the plot of the story and its correlation with Grand Narration. Another article discussing the movie is by Mrudula Lakkaraju entitled “Anime, a Component of Japanese Folk Culture: The Analysis and Appreciation of Grave of Fireflies”. The article discussed about an analysis on symbol and appreciation of the movie esthetic. Even though this research analyses the movie using sign system, but the intention of this study is to discover the meaning behind those signs as opposed to esthetic appreciation.

In postmodern paradigm, pragmatism play a big part in challenging modernism. The paradigm aggressively opposed metafiction or grand narration as a standard in

constructing the truth that later pertained as social norm that became an institution who control human behavior. Pierce argued that pragmatism criticize the correctness of a theory depend on how it is applied in the realm. In pragmatism paradigm, human live in a constant experience change, because of that, there exist an expiration of certain moral or narrative as a result of experience growth. human change the way they think and live, so does the idea of truth. Because of that, pragmatism did not give a room for absolutism in oppose to life dynamic nature (Mujiyanto, 2010: 102). To answer the research question, which is Challenging war as Grand Narration, Lyotard theory on postmodernism is used to define the Grand Narration as a product of modernism and to challenge it through pragmatic view of Pierce triadic model by providing the subtle message and condition that explains how modernism have failed in providing progressivism as their philosophical ground. Pierce triadic model relevancy to postmodernism theory is seen from Pierce view on Pragmatism, which can be found in the triadic model, interrelation to postmodernism paradigm. One of postmodern paradigm characteristic is highly dependent on language as deconstruction paradigm. This deconstruction nature of Pierce triadic model later become the hook of its theory to postmodernism as a critic to modernism (Mujiyanto, 2010: 114). Through the study of sign, decoding authors idea applies structuralist insights to the comparative study of human cultures, semiotics applies structuralist insights to the study of what it calls sign systems (Tyson, 2011). Tyson once said in his book that in providing the social conditions a sign system is a linguistic or nonlinguistic object or behavior (or collection of objects or behaviors) that can be analyzed as if it were a specialized language. In other words, semiotics examines the ways linguistic, nonlinguistic objects and behaviors operate symbolically to “tell” us something. In terms of literary analysis, semiotics is interested in literary conventions the rules, literary devices, and formal elements that constitute literary structures (Tyson, 2011). In reaching the subtle meaning, or modernism pragmatism, behind the grand narration, the need to understand the convention of the literary structure constructed by the author is important to carter the implicit or explicit message. Here, Pierces provide us with his triadic model consists of Interpretant, Representamen, and Object. Peirce did not believe that interpretant was a straight forward binary relationship between a sign and an object, and he viewed this innovative part of his triad as how we perceive or understand a sign and its relationship to the object it is referring to (<https://www.decodedscience.org/charles-sanders-peirces-semiotics-the-triadic-model/22974>) it is rather a mental concept where it is not as conventional and collective as Representamen, so an interpretant is the sense we make out of the sign, or representamen, except that it is a sign in the mind of the interpreter and this is where the pragmatism paradigm is being explained. Representamen was a concept where it is rather convention and collective, Peirce was interested in the signifying element of a sign and emphasized that not all the elements of a sign are necessary or carry the same weight in its interpretation. Thus, in his view,

Representamen have the nature of common agreement and more physically explained and it is not the sign as a whole that signifies an object but those elements most crucial to its functioning as a signifier (<https://www.decodedscience.org/charles-sanders-peirces-semiotics-the-triadic-model/22974>). Object, in the other side is what the sign represents (<https://www.decodedscience.org/charles-sanders-peirces-semiotics-the-triadic-model/22974>). The sign can only represent the object; it cannot furnish acquaintance with it. The sign can express something about the object, providing that it is an object with which the interpreter is already familiar from collateral observation (experience created from other signs, which are always from previous history) (<https://www.decodedscience.org/charles-sanders-peirces-semiotics-the-triadic-model/22974>)

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as a Qualitative descriptive research applying Jean Francois Lyotard theory on postmodernism as the theoretical framework in explaining the Grand Narration and Peirce’s Triadic Model in semiotics as the theory in interpreting subtle message behind the grand narration that later challenges the Grand Narration. The material object of this study is studio Ghibli’s film *Graves of The Fireflies*. The data was collected through careful reading of the novel and analyzed through several procedures, (1) Signifying data of Grand Narration as the view of Postmodernism; (2) Classifying data based on Peirce’s Triadic Model in interpreting the subtle message behind the grand narration.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part will discuss how the grand narration depicted in the film and the subtle message behind the grand narration in studio Ghibli’s film *Graves of The Fireflies*. Through Pierce triadic model interpretation, this part will reveal the condition of Japanese people around world war II, represented by Seita and Setsuko, that become the data to challenge the Grand Narration through the subtle message obtained behind the grand narration at that time.

The grand narration of world war II depicted by studio Ghibli’s film *Graves Of The Fireflies* are portrayed through the condition and action of Seita, Setsuko, and the Society. The first grand narration occurred in the film is when a solider chanting “long live the lord emperor” and Seita reading war magazine and war nursery rhyme.

(The two manage to get away to a grove by the sea; various scenes follow.)

MAN Emperor [ALT: Lord Emperor], Ban-zai!! [ALT: Long live the Lord Emperor!!]

(The raid passes.)

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992:96)

(Seita laying down his body reading war magazine and singing a nursery rhyme about the soldier)

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;00:28:52)

in showing the support of Japan domination that created confederate war with America, the Grand Narration exist as a form of loyalty to their lord emperor and an constant unconscious support towards the war that became a habit. Because of the propaganda and the normalization of war, as the citizen you were burdened and obliged to take part in supporting the war, thus the grand narration was created as a form of support and loyalty.

(_At the bank_)

TELLER: Here, 3000 yen.

MAN1: I hear the typhoon's nearing?

MAN2: No matter how much the Kami-kaze [ET: God-Wind] blows, if it comes

after we

surrendered to the Americans, it's of no use whatsoever. How ridiculous!

SEITA: Surrender? You mean we lost the war?

MAN1: You don't know anything?

SEITA: Is it true that we lost? Japan? The Japanese Empire?!

[ALT: The Imperial Japan?]

MAN2: Yup. Unconditional surrender.

SEITA: What happened to the combined fleet...

MAN2: No good, no good. That got sunk long time ago and there's not one left

anymore.

SEITA: What!? You mean Dad's cruiser got sunk as well?! Is that why we never

got any

letter back?!

MAN2: Why should I know!? [ALT: How should I know?] What a strange kid!

SEITA: Dad, you fool! [grrrr: doesn't translate well. It's like "Damn you, Dad",

but not

that strong]

(He runs, but hunger slows him.)

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;01:13:40)

Japan finally surrender to America and revoked all their troops. The war causes a lot of loss, pride and death. However, Seita's reaction was showing a strong loyal and support in extend to denial. The strong narrative of war sets Seita in denial state because how much he believed, support, and loyal to the grand narration that Japan was going to win the war, loosing is something impossible and out of their sight. The loss of Japan and death of Seita's father created shocking factor that impacting not only emotional loss but also financial loss to the extend that his father will no longer be able to help him and Setsuko in pursuing normal sustainable life.

In challenging the grand narration, through Pierce triadic model interpretation, this part will show another part of the war that was pretty much excluded and rejected by the grand narration. The task in challenging the grand narration is by showing the horror of the war, through Seita and Setsuko condition during the attack, and showing that the support and the loyalties as the impact of the Grand Narration is not necessarily a prosperity for Japanese society.

Applying the Pierce Triadic Model, The Object of the model is Seita and Setsuko following order of norm set by war Grand Narration in hard time during war, that will show the event in the film. The Representamen is Seita and Setsuko condition during war, that will describe the event denotatively to achieve the general understanding of the event. The last is interpretant, which is the subtle meaning of Seita and Setsuko living under war as Grand Narration, this data will become the canon in showing the truth and the horror of war as the impact of the grand narration.

The first object is Seita's aunt scolding Seita and Setsuko for not contributing to war and condition where Seita and the condition where Setsuko didn't get the same amount of food as their aunt family whose work as government official

(_Next day, breakfast_)

SEITA: What's the matter?

SETSUKE: I don't like zo^sui. ["zo^sui"=watered barley/rice meal]

SEITA: The pickled plums that I brought... There're no more?

AUNT: That thing... You know that it ran out a long time ago. (To her son:) Here,

your

lunch.

BOY : Thanks. [LT: Then, I'll be taking it.]

AUNT: Gokuroh-sama [LT: Thanks for the labor/toil; ALT: Have a good day.]

GIRL: Well, I'll be going!

AUNT: Take care!

SEITA: Look. Lunch will be white rice, so bear it and eat it.

AUNT: Cut it out! For those that are here during the day, lunch will also be zohsui!

Why should the lunch for those that work for the country and those that just sit

Around all day be the same? Seita-san. You're old enough; start thinking about

how you can be of help. You two don't give us any rice but expect to eat it. It just

doesn't go that way. No way. You let them eat white rice for a while and my, they

become so picky about taste. [ALT: picky about food]

SETSUKE: But that rice is our rice... [ALT: But it's our rice.]

AUNT: What was that? Are you saying that I'm cheating you, then? What a thing

to say! What's the use of taking in two orphans, if they say such things to me?

[ALT: Why should I bother to take in two orphans, if they...]

Fine! Let's cook

separate meals from now on. You won't have any complaint, then. And Seita-san.

You do have other relatives in Tokyo, don't you? There's that someone from your

mother's family. Why don't you send out a letter? Nishinomiya [ALT: This place]

might be bombed any day.

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;00:39:20)

The representamen of the object talks about Seita's aunt as a member of society push the siblings to be a functional member of society. Because of the war, the goods production and distribution became hampered. As a result of goods limitation, each household needs to regulate their consumption strictly to make sure that there would be something left to eat. However, Seita's aunt decided to give her family, excluding Seita and Setsuko, more food because her family need more energy to manage the country, thus the distribution is quite imbalance for Seita because he does not have significant activity but rather only taking care of Setsuko. The interpretant explains that there is a burden that a child had to bear in time of war and Because of war, there exist distribution segmentation based on the hierarchy. The limitation of goods obliged and set a narrative to society that only some who deserve it. Those who contribute more to the society will be rewarded more or even given the standard comparing to the one who contribute less. Because of Seita's trauma about his mom dead, he wanted to make live more meaning full by giving Setsuko the life she deserves after the loss of her mom. This event, is a justification to normalize trauma. No matter how scary life gets Seita and Setsuko, society will not tolerate to give you special treatment because of the war that already put them enough stress. Because of that, Seita and Setsuko, who was at that time, powerless, have to fall to such system in order to survive. Which society used to justify their treatment to people for greater good. In countering the "support" and "loyalty" of the war, the idea of working an underage and trauma normalization is something that is justified. Thus, the Grand Narration failed to provide Protection, welfare, and subjective rationality for the society.

Second object is Seita sold his possession to support his aunt family
(_At the aunt's home _)
AUNT: About your mother's kimono... I hate to say it, but since there's no more use for them, why don't you exchange them for rice? I myself have been bartering a little at a time for some time to supplement i think this would be about one- toh
SEITA: One toh?!
AUNT: You must get more nourishments. You're going to grow strong and be a soldier, right?
SEITA: This would be one toh ?
AUNT: I'm sure your mother would be pleased about it, rather than have these just lie about. Well, I'll be going.
SETSUKO: You can't.
AUNT: Why, Sett-chan, you were awake?
SETSUKO: It's Mom's, You can't! It's Mom's. You can't, you can't!
SEITA: Setsuko!
SETSUKO: No, no, no! No, no, no!
(Seita's rei covers his ears, not wanting to hear Setsuko's tormenting cry. The

kimono their aunt took for item exchange was a formal kimono their mother wore. The fall of the cherry-blossom petals changes to the fall of white rice into a container.)
(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;00:36:20)

The representamen from the object is after they both leave their aunt because of the bad treatment, they decided to live by their own in a cave near a lake. Their life was not as great as what they imagined because they started to lose their life supplies. Not having the ability and will in joining the war, which will support them in many factors, and job field limitation force them to sold everything they have in order survive. The interpretant explains that the sibling possession which was a memento for their dead parent needed to be sold to help the cause of their survival Is a prime example on how personal thing should be put secondary for the good of greater cause. The nonexistence private property and personal possession is a result of how Grand Narration have failed to provide integrity.

Third object is when Seita took Setsuko and lived in bomb shelter to preserving his family honor
SEITA: Hey... Do you want to make this our home? No one would come here and the structure is solid. We can do as we please.
SETSUKO: Is it okay to make it our home?
SEITA: Yup. [ALT would be a broken "yes": yeah, n-hmph, ah-huh]

(Seita is packing their stuff onto a cart. Setsuko notices the Aunt coming.)
SEITA: We've overstayed our welcome. [LT: We've interrupted you for a very long time.] We'll be moving elsewhere.
AUNT: elsewhere? where are you going?
SEITA: I don't know for certain, yet.
AUNT: Well, be careful... Sett-chan, goodbye.
(They come to the cave. Setsuko is thoroughly enjoying herself.)
(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;00:48:37)

The representamen of the object is because of all bad treatment from their aunt family, Seita and Setsuko decided to live by their own in a bomb shelter near a river. The interpretant explain that Seita took his sister and lived in bomb shelter are some of the casual thing which Grand Narration such as this, here means war. The image for condition that happened during war, the same condition also happened in London at the same time. One thing that war give was a poor life condition that here is presented, this become a concrete example that the Grand Narration have failed to provide welfare for the society.

Fourth object is Seita and Setsuko not having the food ration and proper medication because the army needs more

MAN: There. That's the rationed portion for two.

SEITA: Only this much?

MAN: Yup. The next ration will probably be in July.

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;00:43:27)

(_Doctor's office_)

DOCTOR: Breathe in. Breathe out.

SEITA: And her diarrhea hasn't stopped for several days now.

Her rashes don't seem to be heat-rashes either...

When I wash her with salt water, all it does is give her pain.

DOCTOR: It's a prostration due to malnutrition. Her diarrhea is the result of that. Okay, next person!

SEITA: Some medicine or shots...?

SETSUKE: I don't like shots.

SEITA: Anyhow, please give her treatment of some kind. Please.

DOCTOR: medicine or anything... Well, I suggest that she get some nourishment. That's all that can be done.

SEITA: You say nourishment, but...

DOCTOR: To the next patient What seems to be the matter?

SEITA: Where can you find nourishment?!!

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;01:11:10)

The representamen tells about with Seita's bearing income to fulfill his daily need and Setsuko's, he had to think an alternative to support his life. Depending to government support was one of it, however, it was not as significant as what they expected to be, because of the goods limitation and distribution segmentation, they, who are classified as the less contributive, were not prioritized to get food. Setsuko was really sick because not getting proper vitamin and nutrition for her growth, when she got famine. When Seita asked for a doctor to give him medicine to cure Setsuko's Famine, the doctor rejected his request because he still hadn't restocked the empty medicine supply because of the war, army took all of the medicine. The interpretant explains that war between America and Japan causes so much casualties especially damage and loss of Japan troops. Many of them died or physically damaged. With the stock limitation of medicine, government need to prioritize the army for the state sustainability. The children were not as important as the army because they cannot do anything at that time. The normalization of suffering created narrative that there was no such compassion for the citizen unless you're in military. Empathy will help them a lot in getting a standard of life, especially when they both are still categorized as underage, but in war, there's a different rule. Often being called as the dark time of human history, war have violated so many human rights. The Grand Narration created such phenomena that normalize the suffering of the citizen because of the mass casualties that had happened is another example how the Grand Narration have failed to provide protection as oppose to welfare and subjective rationality that demand sympathy and empathy.

Fifth object is the moment when Setsuko died because of famine

(Seita returns.)

SEITA: Setsuko, I'm sorry I'm late. I'll cook you a white rice porridge.

SETSUKE: It went down... It went up... Ah, it stopped...

SEITA: Luckily, I was able to buy fish and eggs. And... (notices that Setsuko has something in her mouth. Picking up the drop can,) Setsuko! What are you licking! These are marble pieces. it's not drops! Today, I've gotten something much better. It's something you like.

SETSUKE: Here you go, Nii-chan...

SEITA: What's this, Setsuko?

SETSUKE: It's a meal. I'll give you the cooked okara. [Note: "Okara" is soybean milk crust that is a by-product of making tofu.]

SETSUKE: Go ahead, eat. Aren't you going to eat?

SEITA: Setsuko...! Look, watermelon. Isn't it great? I didn't steal it. Here, watermelon.

SETSUKE: It's delicious...

SEITA: Wait a moment. I'll cook you a rice-porridge with eggs immediately. I'll leave the watermelon here. Okay?

SETSUKE: Nii-chan... Thank you...

R/ SEITA: After that, Setsuko never opened her eyes again.

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;01:15:52)

The representamen talks about Because of the goods limitation and incapability in coping up with the crisis, Setsuko, who was only a child at that time, died because of famine. This is the climax of not having the ability to be supported by the government in terms of standard of living and health. The interpretant explain that the narrative in times of war, having standard quality of life, is a luxury. Looking after the quality to have your vitamin standard consumption fulfilled is the priority of every state, especially for children, however, there were a different rule for war. Because of the ongoing attack, food security was not the priority of the state but rather than national security. because of that state prioritized those who contribute more to the state, which is the military and the rich. With its gambling nature, for middle to lower class, they have to suffered from being unprioritized. It means they cannot depend on the government in providing basic needs. The goods limitation and bias distribution only left a time until all the poor died.

Last object is is the moment when Seita choose to starve himself to death out of shame

R/SEITA: In 1945, on the night of September 21, I died.

(*The Grave of Fireflies*, 1992;00:01:24)

The representamen explains that Because of Setsuko dead, Seita choose to end his life by committing suicide out of shame, for not being able to take care of his sister. The interpretants define that Seita act starve himself are a common Japanese warrior code. This will be done if someone were cornered and in the state of embarrassment. The same thing also happened for Japanese soldier in warzone they choose to commit suicide rather than being taken prisoner as part of

Japanese warrior code. By the existing of war as grand narration, and Japanese warrior & Society individual life being become secondary.

IV. CONCLUSION

Applying the theory of Postmodernism, which already challenging the Grand Narration as a product of modernism, Seita and Setsuko representing the horror of the Grand Narration in portraying another point of view towards the war as grand narration. The harsh condition of Seita and Setsuko made because of constant support and loyalty to their country as a result of the Grand Narration. Grand Narration supposed to provide progressivism for the society but in reality thousands of Japanese soldier and society lived under constant oppression. This proves that war as Grand Narration, have failed its philosophical ground in providing welfare as in

sustainable life, Integrity as in having personal possession, and rationality as in protection, society concern, and substantive policy.

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