

On *Maboroshi no Hikari* 幻の光

Due to a particular mood, I watched again my favorite Japanese live action film *Maboroshi no Hikari* 幻の光 (1995) directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. The film is truly a cinematic masterpiece in the sense that it relies only on the essence of cinema – the art of composition and the rhythm by which the compositions are linked. The camera in the film is a distant observer that concentrates so precisely on the certain quality of memories that constantly recur silently throughout life. The compositions make sure that the environment and nature are as significant, if not more important, than the manifestations of the actors. Matter of fact, the heavy use of natural and available lighting and the abundant amount of silhouette shots mask out any expressions of the actors. Further, the film is almost entirely composed in wide angle shots. As such, the actors are rendered as part of a picture rather than sticking out from it and overpowering the essence of cinema. There are countless films in which actors perform fantastically. But so what? If the actors cannot render themselves into a cinematic image, then they are simply doing theatre in front of the camera (take Dustin Hoffman as an example) – and it should be clear to us all by this point that theatre and cinema are absolutely different forms of art.

The film also beautifully lacks any development in the story and the plot. It should again be stated that the essence of cinema is in the art of composition and the rhythm by which the compositions are linked. It is the most common mistake in filmmaking to conceive that storytelling is the means to an end. Let's put it this way: a storyteller is not obligated to make a film, so why should a filmmaker be obligated to tell a story? Koreeda certainly feels no obligation to tell a story but rather fully concentrates in the visual manifestation of a particular state of mind that only the art of composition can gently evoke.

Further, the film also shows that Koreeda stands next to great filmmakers such as Andrei Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman. The film is as well composed as any of Tarkovsky films, but it is, I admit, superior to couple films of Tarkovsky's, *The Sacrifice* (1986) and *Ivan's Childhood* (1962). Although Tarkovsky is the absolute master of cinematic composition, his films can be extremely wordy, but perhaps purposely. It is my personal opinion that Tarkovsky's films may actually be better if they were shot silent. Koreeda, on the other hand, is a master cinematic composer, not as masterful as Tarkovsky, and has the ability to achieve cinematic height without relying on words.

There is no more to say about Koreeda's masterpiece. The film contains itself, as a true work of art is composed with nothing but its own.

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