



## Center for Japanese Studies 50th Anniversary *Hybrid Japan*

### **Anime Masters and Masterpieces: Grave of the Fireflies** **September 27, 2008**

On Saturday, September 27th, 2008, the Anime Masterpieces series at UC Berkeley's Pacific Film Archive premiered with a screening of *Grave of the Fireflies*, a 1988 anime feature film written and directed by Isao Takahata. Taking place toward the end of World War II in Japan, *Grave of the Fireflies* is the poignant tale of two orphaned children, Seita and his younger sister Setsuko, who try to survive amidst widespread famine and the callous indifference of their countrymen. Some critics consider it one of the most powerful anti-war movies ever made.

The Center for Japanese Studies invited a panel of distinguished speakers to discuss the film following the screening. The speakers included **Susan Napier** (Professor, Tufts University), **Frederick Schodt** (author of *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*), **Ian Condry** (Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and **Roland Kelts** (author of *Japanamerica*). Napier discussed the issue of Japanese masculinity as it is explored in the film, particularly how the Japanese men who survived the war, as epitomized by the character of Seita, were essentially phantoms, robbed of their prewar identity, ill at ease in the new postwar society, and powerless to bring about any positive change. Schodt explored the literary qualities of *Grave of the Fireflies*, attributing the film's power to director and screenwriter Isao Takahata's deliberate and careful translation of the original paperback story by Akiyuki Nosaka into a full-length animated feature film. He suggests that the long pauses and silences in the film force the viewer to pay attention to words, actions, and scenes, as Takahata lavishes attention on the details of nature and the minutiae of daily life in wartime Japan. Condry spoke of *Grave of the Fireflies* as an important reminder that we all have unfinished business in historical reconciliation, particularly with regards to the atrocities committed during World War II. He suggests that the seriousness with which much anime is able to and does tackle enduring problems of war, youth, and society, is part of what make the medium a global force today. Kelts discussed the emergence of manga and anime in post-war Japan, how it developed as a distinctly Japanese visual art form that was and is still, as in *Grave of the Fireflies*, capable of containing and conveying emotions often left unexpressed in society, although never left unfelt. The roundtable discussion was moderated by **Dan O'Neill** (Professor, UC Berkeley).

# Event Program – September 27, 2008

Location: Pacific Film Archive Theater, UC Berkeley

Time: 2:00pm-5:00pm



## OPENING REMARKS

**Duncan Williams** (Chair, Center for Japanese Studies)

## FILM SCREENING

***Grave of the Fireflies***, directed by Isao Takahata (Studio Ghibli, 1988, 88 min, with English Subtitles)

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

**Susan Napier** (German, Russian, and Asian Languages and Literature, Tufts University), author of *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*

**Frederick Schodt**, author of *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*

**Ian Condry** (Comparative Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), author of *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization*

**Roland Kelts**, author of *Japanamerica*

Moderated by **Dan O'Neill** (East Asian Languages and Cultures, UC Berkeley)

Co-sponsored by: The Pacific Film Archive, JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization)