

The Red Turtle [PG] 2016|France/Belgium/Japan|80 min

UK release date	26th May 2017
Director	Michael Dukok de Wit
Screenplay	Pascal Ferran
Animation	Studio Ghibli
Cast (Voices/sounds)	Emmanuel Garijo (The Father); Tom Hudson (The Son – young adult); Baptiste Goy (The Son – child); Axel Devillers (The Baby); Barbara Beretta (The Mother)

Directed by UK-based Dutch animator Michaël Dudok de Wit, who won an Oscar for his 2000 short, *Father and Daughter*, *The Red Turtle* is an ambitious east-meets-west endeavour that had been gestating for a decade; a Japanese-French-Belgian co-production (a first for Ghibli) made at Prima Linea studios in Paris and Angoulême, under the long-distance supervision of Ghibli mainstays Takahata and Toshio Suzuki.

A poignant, wordless tale of a man shipwrecked on a desert island, it boasts a sublime simplicity that unifies its complex elements into a singular, universal voice. Eloquent, profound and moving, it left me with a heart full of bittersweet joy, a head dizzy with dreamy visions and cheeks wet from tears that rolled like waves on a distant beach.

We open with a blue-grey vision of the sea, rising like Mount Fuji against charcoal skies – the pre-credits shipwrecking of our nameless Robinson Crusoe. Marooned on an island that in profile resembles a giant whale, this sole survivor discovers a strange new world of scuttling crabs, bamboo forests, precipitous rocks and awesome isolation – Eden and Inferno intertwined. Initially desperate to escape, the man builds a series of rafts, each of which is scuppered by a vast sea beast – the titular red turtle.

But after vengefully overturning this wondrous creature on the shore, our antihero experiences Ancient Mariner-style remorse, his empathy apparently prompting miraculous transformation. Just as the goldfish in Miyazaki's sublime *Ponyo* turns almost unnoticed into a young girl, so the shell of this turtle falls away to reveal something astonishing, reminiscent of the selkies from the wonderful Irish animation *Song of the Sea*.

To explain more would spoil the experience of this magical realist fable for readers, a discovery that needs no words, just the finely observed gestures and crisp visual storytelling that defined the golden age of silent cinema. Suffice to say that the official one-line synopsis of *The Red Turtle* – “the milestones in the life of a human being” – rings entirely true; the cycle of birth, death and rebirth is expressed with piercing clarity.

Seamlessly combining analogue and digital animation (the granular heft of charcoal, the malleability of the computers), they compose a visual symphony that seems to comprise a history of cinema itself; from monochrome nights to richly hued days; from porous green trees to luminous blue seas; orange sunlight to pearlescent moonlight.

Haunting dream sequences provide the crack through which surreal transformations seep, accompanied by the music of Laurent Perez del Mar, whose breathtaking score perfectly complements the minimalist visuals. Integrating his cues with the natural soundscape, the composer utilises wood and bamboo percussion, gentle flutes and soaring strings to negotiate the film’s kaleidoscopic tones. The melodies have a nursery rhyme candour, yet encompass themes of longing and anguish, despair and delight, love and death.

This is a film that respects the sound of silence. It is a work of art which transcends boundaries of language, culture, geography and age. It is simply magnificent.

After Mark Kermode, *The Guardian*, May 2017

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