Outline

Introduction to the Director -- Agatha

Historical Background of the film — Ellen

Main Argument

Themes

(4) The Mysterious Center (Debby),
(1) Ironies (Tony),
(2) US Invasion (Shirley)
(3) Survival= Fly (Jocelyn)
(5) Agrin

Questions
Bahman Ghobadi

▸ Born on February 1, 1969 (age 42) in Baneh, Kurdistan Province.

▸ Receive a Bachelor of Arts in film directing from Iran Broadcasting College.

▸ *Turtles Can Fly* won Glass Bear and Peace Film Award at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Golden Shell at the San Sebastian International Film Festival.
Where did the story of the film come from and how did it take shape in your mind?

With inexperienced children who had never acted before, how did you manage to write the dialogues?
Historical Background
Kurdistan History: up to 7th century

- c. 614 B.C.: Indo-European tribe came from Asia into the Iranian plateau
- 7th century: Conquered by Arabs → many converted to Islam
Kurdistan History: 7th – 19th

♦ Kurdistan is also occupied by: Seljuk Turks, the Mongols, the Safavid dynasty, and Ottoman Empire (13th century)

♦ 16th-19th: autonomous Kurdish principalities (ended with the collapse of Ottoman Empire)
Kurdistan History: after WWI

Treaty of Sevres (1920)

- It proposed an autonomous homeland for the Kurds
- Rich oil in Kurdistan → Treaty of Sevres is rejected
- Oppression from the host countries
Kurdish Inhabited Area

Kurdish population mainly spread in:

- Turkey (12-14 million)
- Iran (7-10 million)
- Iraq (5-8 million)
- Syria (2-3 million)
- Armenia (50,000)
- Georgia (40,000)
Operation Anfal (1986-1989)

♦ Genocide campaign against Kurdish people
♦ 4,500 villages destroyed
♦ 1.1 – 2.1 million death:
  → 860,000 widows
  → Greater number of orphans
Halabja (Halabcheh) Massacre

- March 16, 1988: aka. Halabja poison gas attack → used of chemical weapon
- Killed 3,200~5,000 people
- Injured 7,000-10,000
- Diseases, birth defects
1991 Uprisings in Iraq

♦ A series of anti-government rebellions (against Saddam gov.)
→ But soon suppressed
♦ 1.5 million Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran
No-fly Zone (1991)

In concern of Kurdish people’s safety, the U.S. and British army established **no-fly zone (NFZ)** to facilitate the return of Kurdish refugees.

The setting of the film “Turtles Can Fly”
Iraqi Kurdistan after Gulf War

♦ October 1991, it was allowed to function de facto independently
♦ At the same time: Iraqi government imposed an economic blockade and reduced its oil and food supplies
**Current Iraqi Kurdistan Situation**

**New Constitution of Iraq (2005):**
- Iraqi Kurdistan as a federal entity of Iraq
- Arabic and Kurdish as Iraq’s joint official languages
- Iraqi Kurdistan president: Masoud Barzani
Main Argument

To survive between the invasion of America and the oppression of Iraq doesn’t necessarily mean “turtles can fly”
Theme 1

Debby Lin
The Epitome of Adults’ World from Children’s Perspective

★ Children are the center.
★ The opposition between Hengov and Satellite.
★ “Those who work for me aren't allowed to work with him.”
Mysterious Center

★ Crystallization of Hengov, Agrin and Riga
★ Siblings? Family?
★ Riga’s stop from Agrin’s death
★ Hengov’s prediction.
Theme 2
Irony in “Turtles Can Fly”
Collapse of the Social System

- **The children** (Satellite) became the leader.
  → “I'm responsible for the village children. I have to make income for them.”

- **The elderly** always ask Satellite for help. (set up the antenna, interpreting the news)
  → “What is this Bush saying?”
  → “He says it will rain tomorrow.”

- **The school** is not a school anymore.
  → “They have to learn how to shoot now.” (Satellite)
Cruelty of Wars

♦ Riga is looking for his “parents” by searching around piles of bombs.
♦ The cruelty of wars push the children to grow up.
  → Satellite acts like a leader of the children’s community.
Hangov’s prediction

- “He said everything would come to an end tomorrow morning.”

→ In fact, what really comes to an end is only Agrin and Riga’s life.
Theme 3
Invasion of America
Invasion or Redemption
Invasion of America — Invasion or Redemption?

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Symbols of American invasion

antenna, satellite, prohibited channels, English, mines, red fish, message delivered by the helicopter, and broken arm of Saddam Hussein’s statue.

America plays as an exploiter who dominates Iraq with armed force rather than friend and brother.

Satellite’s transition in attitudes.
Red Fish

- A sign of hope
  → the hope shatters as the color of the fish fades
Speak English to make money, to rule the refugee children, and to survive.

- e.g. “OK! OK!” “One, two. Get out. Get out.” “Hello, mister!” “How are you?” “Okay, mister! How much mine?” “Thank you very much Mr.!”
Teacher: “You kept saying USA, USA, until you fell on a USA mine.” (01:17:34)

Shirkooh: “The Americans said not to collect American mines any more. They will pay us money to collect these.” (01:23:00)
Shirkooh: “They say it’s very important. I sold all my mines to get it. The Americans said it’s very expensive.” (01:22:56)

How about the refugees’ broken arms? (like Hengov)
Imperialism → “It's the end of injustice, misfortune and hardship. We are your best friends and brothers. Those against us are our enemies. We will make this country a paradise. We are here to take away your sorrows. We are the best in the world.” (00:59:33)
Satellite's Transition in Attitudes

Not long now before USA comes!

Learn 2 "OKs" and all will be fine.

American...
Theme 4

Survival & Fly

Jocelyn Lin
To survive, to fly

♦ The **survival** under American invasion + Iraq oppression ≠ turtle can fly
♦ Collecting mines
♦ Following Satellite’s leadership + Hengov’s prophets
♦ Trading **weapons** = guns/transmission of news
  *Satellite*
♦ **Escape / Exile**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satellite, Soran (boy)</th>
<th>Satellite, Antenna (devices)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smart (street knowledge), middleman</strong>&lt;br&gt;Eg. “Mr”&lt;br&gt;Eg. bargaining “Can we can give you some radios and pay half in cash?” (00:11:53)</td>
<td><strong>News =lies</strong>&lt;br&gt;“These days money is in the news.” (00:09:30)</td>
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<td><strong>(within community)</strong>&lt;br&gt;All-knowing, all-capable&lt;br&gt;Eg. Dependence of chief (adults)+children</td>
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<td><strong>Gentle heart</strong>&lt;br&gt;Eg. Mine zone, border, save Riga (01:13:49)</td>
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<td><strong>External forces → afraid, incapable</strong>&lt;br&gt;Eg. Rent weapons “I don't want to buy it. I want to rent it for three months.” (01:01:26)</td>
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Which one should people count on?
Escape/ Exile

✈️ The wish to fly
✈️ Shirkooh leaves for town “I am looking for a new job. I want to make some money.” (01:24:36)
✈️ Satellite stops idealizing America
*Fish no longer red, turn back to American army
“Look! Didn’t you want to see the Americans?” (01:30:31)
✈️ Hengov leaves, continues being an exile
(01:28:00-01:29:23)
✈️ Agrin’s suicidal cases, Riga’s death
= relief, freedom
Theme 5
Agrin as the Beauty of Kurdish

Alice Hsu
Argin - Kurdish Beauty
Reflection in the Pool
Dress, Loneliness & Stability
QUESTIONS
Questions

1. Central Question: What does the title “Turtles Can Fly” mean or suggest? What does “turtles” refer to?

2. Please describe how different characters (Satellite, Argin, Hangov, Shirkooh, Pasha) survive, or fly. What’s their attitudes at the end of the film (do they change)?

3. Do you find any symbols in the film (characters’ names, items)? What does those symbols represent and how are they presented?

4. How do you think the role of America in this film? Is the invasion of America redemption? Or just another invasion?

5. How are the children in this film related to one another?

6. What do you think about the scene when Agrin stands on the tanks? Is the figure true or just a hallucination?

7. Why Agrin decides to commit suicide?

8. At the end of the movie, Hangov says that “in 275 days something else will happen in the area.” What is it?
Thank you for your listening!