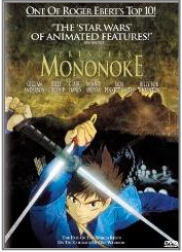


Princess Mononoke

Mononoke-hime, 1997, Japan

Film Overview



Set in medieval Japan, Miyazaki's original story envisions a struggle between nature and man. The march of technology, embodied in the dark iron forges of the ambitious Tataru clan, threatens the natural forces explicit in the benevolent Great God of the Forest and the wide-eyed, spectral spirits he protects. When Ashitaka, a young warrior from a remote, and endangered, village clan, kills a ravenous, boar-like monster, he discovers the beast is in fact an infectious "demon god," transformed by human anger. Ashitaka's quest to solve the beast's fatal curse brings him into the midst of human political intrigues as well as the more crucial battle between man and nature.

Miyazaki's convoluted fable is clearly not the stuff of kiddie matinees, nor is the often graphic violence depicted during the battles that ensue. If some younger viewers (or less attentive older ones) will wish for a diagram to sort out the players, Miyazaki's atmospheric world and its lush visual design are reasons enough to watch. Recommended for ages 12 and older. --Sam Sutherland, Amazon.com

Roger Ebert placed the movie sixth on his top ten movies of 1999. *Mononoke* also became the highest grossing movie in Japan until *Titanic* took over the spot several months later. Overall, *Mononoke* is the third highest grossing anime movie in Japan, next to 2001's *Spirited Away* and 2004's *Howl's Moving Castle*, both also by Miyazaki.

Hayao Miyazaki is a prominent Japanese filmmaker of many popular animated feature films. He is also a co-founder of Studio Ghibli, an animation studio and production company. In 2006, Time Magazine voted Miyazaki one of the most influential Asians of the past 60 years. In 2005, he was named one of the Time 100 Most Influential People. (Adapted from Wikipedia)

Cultural Notes

- **Shinto** is the natural spirituality of Japan and the Japanese people. It is characterized by the worship of nature, ancestors, polytheism, and animism, with a strong focus on ritual purity, involving honoring and celebrating the existence of *Kami*. *Kami* are defined in English as "spirit", "essence" or "deities", that are associated with many understood formats; in some cases being human like, some animistic, others associated with more abstract "natural" forces in the world (mountains, rivers, lightning, wind, waves, trees, rocks). It may be best thought of as "sacred" elements and energies.

Those who fail to take into account the feelings of other people and *kami* will only bring ruin on themselves. The worst expression of such an attitude is the taking of another's life for personal advancement or enjoyment. Those killed without being shown gratitude for their sacrifice will hold a grudge and become a powerful and evil *kami* that seeks revenge (*aragami*). Shinto also teaches that certain deeds create a kind of ritual impurity that one should want cleansed for one's own peace of mind and good fortune, not because impurity is wrong in and of itself. Wrong deeds are called "impurity," opposed to "purity." (Adapted from Wikipedia)



- **Muromachi Period** The story takes place in the Muromachi Era (1392-1573, or 1333-1467, depending on the scholar). Miyazaki chose this era since the relationship between the Japanese and nature changed greatly around that time. During the Muromachi Era, iron production jumped, which required great numbers of trees to be cut down (for charcoal), and people came to feel that they could control nature. Also, it was the time before Japan as we know it was formed. It was a confusing, yet lively era. Women had more freedom, and a lot of new arts were born. The rigid class structure of Samurais, farmers, and artisans was yet to be established. <http://www.mv.com/users/ctwilkes/MH-text-i/mononoke1.html>