Beauty and the Beast: Hayao Miyazaki and the Illustrated Fairytale

Jane A. LIGHTBURN

I Introduction

The fairytale Beauty and the Beast is known for its timeless qualities of romantic love and redemptive transformation. Its heroine has virtues such as loyalty, obedience, and tolerance. Many illustrated book versions of this tale have been produced since the 19th century literary fairytale expansion. The numerous retellings in illustrated book adaptations includes one by the Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki who had in 1980 produced a series of watercolor image boards and later wrote a narrative for it that was based on the 1756 Madame Le Prince de Beaumont version of the tale. It was published in 1993 by Studio Ghibli under the title of “Princess Mononoke.”

The strength of Beauty and the Beast as a fundamental and irrepressible story, according to folktale scholar Betsy Hearne, is its ability to “adapt to reflect new variations of culture and creativity. The core of motifs, images and characters and conflicts remains constant. Yet the changes of form, detail, and tone show the tale plasticity.” (Hearne, 1989: 1) Moreover, this plasticity allows for a multiple dimensionality that makes it appealing to both children and adults. It is no wonder that popular versions of the story have greatly expanded into various media including film, opera, novel and illustrated book.
Hayao Miyazaki is best known for his anime film works. He is also the author of various manga and serialized manga books, including his outstanding landmark work “Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind” (1983). The work “Princess Mononoke” totally diverges from his other typical manga style as the format is an illustrated book using independent watercolor image boards which were collected and complemented with a storybook type of narrative that adapted the well known literary fairy tale Beauty and the Beast.

As both artist and storyteller Miyazaki allowed the flowing style of his image board illustrations to dominate, simple yet at times even sketchy, supported by the narrative that remains brief yet decorative in describing the content of the watercolor images. This style allows the pictures to carry the story forward while allowing the simple text narrative to enhance the storytelling aspect of the work by explaining the illustrations. The dominance of the image boards necessitates the compact narrative in his illustrated version. The text is infused with a direct simplicity that provides us with a straightforward folk tale like storytelling quality yet preserves a subtle depth to the meaning behind the words.

This essay looks at some of the basic aspects of the narrative, characters and motif content of the Miyazaki picture book adaptation of Beauty and the Beast and its ties to the original Beaumont version. There are similarities and differences regarding these three aspects of the two story versions. Though true to the basic story line, Miyazaki reveals in this book his ability to adapt a powerful story into his own style of storytelling.

II Sources

The Beauty and the Beast is a tale type which belongs to Aarne-Index
type 425A, “Monster or Animal as Bridegroom” and to 425C, “Beauty and the Beast.” This story type is known across many cultures in a wide variety of versions and styles that testify to the strength of its inherent narrative and thematic power reflecting its importance as a tale of great value. “There are similarities in the versions and what emerges is a sense of the shared story or ur-structure that lies behind them.” (Griswold, 2004; 116)

The strength of Beauty and the Beast with respect to its core elements show that its basic story has flourished and crossed various cultures and even historical time periods. Some folklore scholars consider the earliest version to be the story of Cupid and Psyche, which was known from the Latin text “The Golden Ass” stories, drawn from Greek mythical sources, or the Indian classic The Panchatantra, in the story of The Woman who Married a Snake. (Griswold, 2004; 15)

This tale type is also known in the Japanese folk tale tradition. In his study of “Types of Japanese Folktales” Keigo Seki included a section on supernatural wives and husbands. He cites several tales about supernatural grooms who marry the youngest of three daughters. Some of these are the Serpent Bridegroom (133), the Demon Bridegroom (134), the Monkey Bridegroom (135) and the Grateful Frog (136). (Seki, 1966; 69) However, each of these tales has its own special set of motifs within the narrative. This feature signals the adaptable versatility of the core tale that is able to keep certain essential elements while changing others to fit a different cultural context. For example, in some of these stories, the ending may not be so fortunate for the groom or the father that we see in the French Beaumont narrative.

The version from which Miyazaki created his adaptation came from within the literary circles of 18th century France. Miyazaki openly references the story in his book notes, “This story is an adaptation of Beauty and the Beast by Jeanne Mary Le Prince de Beaumont.” (Miyazaki, 1993; 100) Although
Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve’s 1740 longer version of Beauty and the Beast was the primary literary version, Madame Beaumont’s shorter 1756 tale became the classic model for most later versions. (Hearne, 1989; 21) An English language version appeared in 1759 for the Young Misses Magazine. (Griswold, 2000; 27) While the earlier Villeneuve plot is wordy, complicated and lengthy, the Beaumont story is less so and more easily reworked as material for other versions. The illustrated book is one adaptation of the Beaumont version which continues to be popular and was explored by Miyazaki.

III Tales and characters

Miyazaki, having understood the timeless nature of this particular tale adapted and reset it in a medieval Japanese folklore setting and transformed the characters in the tale accordingly. His adaptation of the story structure somewhat follows the traditional folk tale type of the third and youngest daughter being surrendered by her unfortunate father to marry a beast-groom of some sort in order to save himself from certain doom. In this pattern the girl goes to live with the beast but for some reason needs to return to the father. Due to her absence the Beast suffers. Later the girl chooses to return to the Beast and in the end they are reunited as partners in a new life together.

According to Betsy Hearne in her analytical work on this particular tale, the constant elements of the story are characters, narrative structure, and objects and symbols. (Hearne, 2002; 141) Likewise, Miyazaki’s picture book in general reflects to a certain degree these constant elements as found in the earlier Beaumont version. However, the Miyazaki narrative is simple and basic compared to the literary French version. There is a subtle feeling of child-like directness expressed in his portrayal of the key characters, events and symbolic
objects.

In Miyazaki’s story the characters live in a Japanese feudal-like setting. In this scenario, the father is a battle weary and defeated samurai, not an unfortunate, once-wealthy merchant. The samurai’s wife and other two daughters are briefly present, only to leave shortly after he returns home, limiting their minimal role in the narrative. This is in contrast to Beauty’s jealous sisters in the Beaumont story, whom she meets once again when she returns to her father’s home.

In the Miyazaki story, soon after the samurai father returns home he is possessed by a demon and suffers from the supernatural affliction, quite a different image from the romantic picture of Beaumont’s lonely, pining father still comfortably living in his home. In the Miyazaki story, a clear danger causes the daughter to return to him, as opposed to a nostalgic attachment for family and home. Furthermore, when the daughter does return home in the Miyazaki version, she is not welcomed by a loving father as Beauty is by her family in the Beaumont story. In fact the demon that controls her father is very antagonistic to her. After much effort, the princess expels the demon but loses her father at the same time. In the end, the father passes away. On the other hand, in the Beaumont version he is certainly alive and celebrates good fortune at his daughter’s wedding to the wealthy and handsome prince. Throughout the Miyazaki narrative we see the father doomed to a rather unfortunate role, but it is a pivotal one. Through his encounter with the Beast the third daughter meets her true mate and protector, and becomes the true heroine of the story.

The character of Beauty is merely called “the third daughter or princess” in the Miyazaki story. She is similar to the Beaumont character of Beauty in that her character reflects loyalty, kindness, courage and a pure-heart which are evident from the beginning to the end of the tale. As with Beauty, the princess is not unkind to the Beast and from the time she is made to live in his forest
hovel, she shows him respect just as she had shown to her father. On the other hand, the Miyazaki version of Beauty is the daughter of a samurai warrior in feudal Japan and her illustrated appearance reflects this fact. (see figure 1) Her clothes reflect a simple traditional Japanese context. Although in the Beaumont version we know from the text that Beauty was educated and highly cultured we are provided with no such specific information for the simplistic folk-tale like character that is rather naively shallow in comparison. However, her role as the virtuous daughter is unmistakable, and in that respect, she is, as Beauty, the heroine of the story.

The third important character that appears in both tales is the Beast. In the Beaumont version one must conjecture what manner of creature he might really be. As noted by Griswold, the original text "provides virtually no clues or directions to an illustrator ... instead the would-be illustrator is provided with synonyms that circle back to the concept of beastliness since he is described as frightful, horrid, hideous, ugly and monstrous. (Griswold, 2004; 152) But the

Fig. 1 The third daughter/princess, sisters and mother, Princess Mononoke, Hayao Miyazaki (Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, 1993) 17.
Miyazaki illustrated book clearly shows the Beast’s appearance. His version of the Beast resembles a composite of characters that remind one of his original anime figures Totoro and the Cat Bus. (see figure 2) This Beast combines a familiar likeable cuteness with the beastliness of a giant mountain lion-like creature that is a wild and fearful anthropomorphic being.

Moreover, the role of the Beast in the Miyazaki book is not quite the same as the one in the Beaumont story. The seemingly rich, civilized Beast in the Beaumont version is relatively passive and required to wait for Beauty at his castle while she goes home to her father. He plays no role outside his castle realm. But the Beast in Miyazaki’s version is far from passive. He is an active partner in the heroine’s quest to rescue her father from demonic control. The Beast is given an engaged role throughout the illustrated book. From the beginning until the end, the Beast demonstrates his key role as a potential groom, friend and partner to the third daughter/princess.

Furthermore, and perhaps most important, the Beast does not turn into a

Fig. 2  Mononoke drops samurai warrior, *Princess Mononoke*, Hayao Miyazaki, (Tokyo, Studio Ghibli, 1993) 14.
handsome prince at the end of the story. Miyazaki purposely made him remain as he was in beginning: a huge cat-like being, indicating that he is somehow acceptable as he is as the Beast. “Actually, I made the monster return to human originally but I thought the last scene was awkward and changed the end so that the monster remained as a monster.” (Miyazaki, 1993; 100) There seems to be no need for him to change physically. It is known from the story that before being the Beast, he was in fact a young man, the princess having seen his human image in the magic mirror. But this Beast was not a victim of a magical curse from an outside fairy source. As the princess discovers by seeing him in her mirror, he succumbed to bestiality by himself and because of himself. The later inevitable transformation that is essential occurs inside his heart—from loneliness to love, from beastliness and anger to trust, loyalty and respect for the third daughter/princess.

The plot of Miyazaki’s story entails numerous diversions from the original source text of Beaumont. Both stories show the father returning from a long absence at home. The Beaumont story first portrays the life of the once seemingly prosperous and happy father and his children. Later in the narrative later he is shown returning from his unsuccessful business trip and his subsequent misfortunate episode of being lost in the dark forest. He then finds a wonderful and grandly lighted castle with great riches and food within and encounters the princely Beast.

In contrast, Miyazaki shifted the story to a Japanese setting and starts the narrative at the point in which a lonely and tired samurai lord returns from defeat in battle only to find in the dark forest the dirty cave-like hidden forest lair of the Beast. He helps himself to food and a bed, only to have the Beast return and angrily confront him. As in the Beaumont version he is made to promise his daughter as a bride for the Beast if he will spare him. Unlike the Beaumont tale, in which the father returns home by himself to a welcoming
family, in the Miyazaki story the Beast flies and carries the samurai all the way back to his home and drops him there in disgrace. His wife and two elder daughters in comical disgust over his defeat demand to leave when they hear the news of his loss and meeting the Beast. Although in both versions the third, youngest daughter chooses to remain faithful and stays with her father, from this point onwards in the Miyazaki version, the events differ drastically from the Beaumont tale.

In the Miyazaki story, the father/samurai is tempted by a demon spirit which promises him limitless power. He allows the spirit to control him and it takes over his mind and body. The third daughter/princess fears for her father because of the demonic possession. After one month, as promised, the Beast comes to the samurai's house again to get his bride. The demon/father gladly gives her away and he takes her back to the forest lair. The princess does not resist and even when the Beast threatens her life, she remains steadfastly uncooperative but polite and insists that she must return to save her father before she can agree to stay with the Beast.

Eventually, the Beast gives in to her perseverance and begins to sympathize with her plight. When he sees her deep determination he decides to help her in her quest. He takes her on an arduous journey to find a much needed magical object that is only known to a great and revered turtle in a far away deep lake. The two reach there only with much difficulty and the princess retrieves the magic mirror at the bottom of the lake. The wise old turtle then advises her on what seems to be a hopeless situation.

Later, back at the Beast's lair she looks into the magic mirror and the true human form of a young man that had become the Beast is revealed to her. The princess feels compassion for him and understands his loneliness and suffering. The princess resolves to go back and rescue her father in his castle. The Beast also goes with her but when they arrive they are attacked by soldiers and must
retreat back to the forest. For some time the princess must wait with the Beast. But after a while she again tries on her own to get into the castle to save her father from the demon. This is quite different from the Beaumont story in which Beauty returns to her home where friendly family wait for her enchanted arrival and her father has cause for celebration.

The Beast, finding the third daughter gone, soon follows after to protect and perhaps rescue his dear one. In the Beaumont story the Beast does not go with Beauty. He waits for her alone as a passive suitor hoping for the return his future bride and the rewarding state of blissful reunion. The Miyazaki Beast helps the princess fight and expel the angry demon in a fierce battle. Her father finally peacefully passes away as a human, in his home with the princess at his side. The story concludes with Beast and the princess returning happily together to the forest to live their life together.

In sum, the established plot of the Beaumont tale has a basic order of events: the unfortunate father meets Beast; gives up daughter to wed to Beast; daughter must stay with Beast for some time; she befriends the Beast; she must return to her father for a limited time; she returns to the Beast for a happy ending as daughter becomes wife. The plot in the Miyazaki version also includes all of these components, yet his narrative is so reconfigured with new elements and events that it has omitted others making his story able to stand on its own, independent of the original tale.

IV Motifs

Folk tale motifs are a key element evident in both the Beaumont Beauty and the Beast and the Miyazaki illustrated book adaptation. One of the many traditional folk tale motifs that are included in both versions is the magic mirror.
The magic mirror motif is featured in many traditional European folktales and more contemporary fantasy literature stories. The beholder sometimes uses the mirror as a way to know some hidden truth or visually manifest a desire. Some of these stories are Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, and Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, which all have some kind of magic mirror motif.

This motif in the Beaumont version is a magical item that belongs to the Beast and is given to Beauty to use. The mirror, or looking glass, is in the castle and readily available to her to “see” her home, father or the Beast. However the mirror in the Mononoke story is not among the Beast’s possessions. In particular, it becomes a goal of a quest that the Beast and the princess must take in order for the princess to rescue her father. They travel far to retrieve it from the bottom of a deep lake. The princess learns that the mirror is like a magical talisman which can dispel the evil spirit from her father.

However, the mirror is also used in both stories as a kind of “scrying” object in which the girl is able to see something important to her. In the Miyazaki version the princess uses it one night to see the true form of the Beast which is a young man, while in the Beaumont version Beauty sees her lonely father pining away for her back at home.

The magic mirror motif in the Miyazaki story serves two important purposes. The princess/third daughter looks into it on a full moon night and can see the true image of a human who misused and lost himself only to become the beast. Through this seeing, she understands his heart and learns to trust him. The second function is a talisman of power used as a means of disenchantment. (Thompson index D771/D1442. Disenchantment by use of magic object) The princess finally confronts the evil spirit controlling her father by holding the mirror up to his face and then thrusting it onto her father’s chest, along with herself. In this way she expels the spirit and frees her father. In the end, the
samurai lord was so weak from the spirit possession that he passes away, albeit peacefully in human form.

A second interesting motif that is found in the Miyazaki narrative is the giant turtle who is helpful to the princess in her quest for the magic object. In the Thompson Motif Index of Folk Literature 6.2, the list includes the turtle as a helpful creature (B491.5 Helpful Turtle) and (Giant Tortoise, B 875.4, 1960J). In Miyazaki’s story the giant and wise old tortoise guides the third daughter/princess to where a magic mirror lies at the bottom of the lake. He later advises her before she departs that in her quest to save her father, “eventually the strength of your mind (heart) will decide everything.” (Miyazaki, 1983; 44) In folk tales, helpful animals and creatures often assist the hero in the quest and offer supernatural assistance or magic of some kind. Here, the turtle guided the princess/third daughter to the magical mirror and offered her words of wisdom.

Another motif that is used in the Miyazaki story, though not in the Beaumont tale, is the evil spirit taking possession of the human, a motif found in the D. Magic section of the Aarne. Thompson index of motifs (AT D683.6, Transformation by Evil Spirits). Miyazaki incorporated this feature of spirit possession which infused a Japanese demonic folk element into the narrative. The samurai father character is possessed by an evil spirit which inhabited a stone gargoyle in his castle. He tempted the father with great power and strength and the father agreed, so the demon took control of his body and mind.

This particular motif of evil spirits is found in Japanese folk tales such as *setsuwa*, which are short tales about extraordinary events. Termed as “on-ryou,” or “aku-ryo” in the Miyazaki book, these spirits are believed to be able to return to the physical world and influence for better or worse those who are living. Noriko Reider writes in her study of Japanese Demon Lore that “in varying degrees Japanese people believe in life after death, deities, ghosts and demons. (Reider, 2010; xviii) Michael Ashkenazi, in Handbook of Japanese Mythology,
also remarks that in traditional Japanese belief “ghosts are a large category of nonhuman entities who afflict humanity. (Ashkenazi, 2003; 56)

With respect to the Beast himself, he is mostly referred to by Miyazaki as a “mononoke” which according to Reider’s study means “evil spirits.” She says that during the Heian period (794–1185), the “mononoke” character exerted influence on the lives of Japanese people. She describes it as a spiritual perception that negatively affected the people of that time period. (Reider, 2010; 6) She cites historian Kazuo Osamu, who wrote that “through Buddhist beliefs in Japan in the minds of Japanese people, various oni such as the mononoke and vengeful living spirits were believed to exist and their activities were threatening to the lives of people.” (Reider, 2010; 11–12)

However, while the traditional meaning of “mononoke” may typically evoke a dark and dangerous image, the giant wildcat character in the Miyazaki story seems to be merely more wild and undisciplined than darkly evil. Not only does he spare the samurai’s life but he later becomes the friend and protector of his daughter rather than a villain of the story. This adaptation into a double persona for the Beast creates an important dynamic between the third daughter/princess, the father, and the Beast. The Beast’s active role is obvious in the princess’s quest to save her father. Not only did he help her find the mirror, but he also protects her from the wrath of the demon possessing her father. He fights the demon in her father whom he had wanted to kill in the beginning of the story. He changed because he loves the princess. He is a co-hero with the heroic princess. This is an example of how Miyazaki takes a particular motif or character type, mold into his own storytelling style, and reshapes it to serve the narrative adaptation.

Moreover, with respect to Miyazaki’s particular style of story adaptation, we can understand his preference for certain types of character in his stories. This could be referred to as a heroine-hero couple who work together to achieve a
task or endure an arduous quest in order to secure a treasure of some kind. In this tale the heroic pair is comprised of the Beast and the princess. The main protagonist is of course the third daughter/princess, but her equally important partner is the Beast. They act as a team not unlike other heroic partners in the film repertoire of Miyazaki: Sheeta and Padzu in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, Sophie Hatter and Howl in *Howl's Moving Castle*, Nausicaa and Asbel in *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, and Ashitaka and San in *Princess Mononoke*.

In addition, transformation as an underlying theme is common in many of Miyazaki’s original or adapted stories. The transformation of a main character results from how he or she faces challenges or an arduous quest. The quest itself also acts as a defining element that propels the narrative forward, regardless if the events are taken from existing tales or original works of his own. The story of the (Beauty) third daughter and (Beast) Mononoke, shows the transformation of the meek and obedient girl into an independent, courageous young woman who not only tames the wild Beast but defeats an evil demon too. The transformation of the Beast is a subtle one. He transforms from the merely wild and lonely Beast to the fearless defender of the princess. He changes from ruthless and wild to kind and loving. Only his form remained the same perhaps suggesting that the most important transformations occur inside the heart, a transformation of love.

Miyazaki found the story of Beauty and the Beast worthy of telling through his own style of visual and narrative imagination. He did this by combining and streamlining various elements. He took the base tale of a third daughter sent off to marry the monster groom, and explored it in the context a traditional Japanese setting. He changed the dynamic of the relationships between the father, daughter and the monster groom by creating a protagonist hero role for the Beast. Finally, he kept or added traditional folk tale motifs that creatively
reconfigured yet preserved the magical fairy tale quality in the tale of Beauty and the Beast and made it one worth retelling once again.

References


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