

# Cultural Perception of Colour in Film


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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) 3D Design, Modelmaking and Digital Art DL828. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

 Signature here  
Timothy Dignam

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## Abstract

The difference in the perception of colour based in culture you grew up in and the language that you speak has an impact on the way you view media and the way media is created for or by you and differs largely from the perception and use of colour in a different culture. The world is a diverse place with many different cultures, languages and environments that mould us into the people we are today. Depending on where you grew up, what language you speak and the media that you are exposed to, your perception will often differ from those who grew up in a different location with a different language and different culture to your own. This perspective on the world is often unique to the culture and these differences can be seen in how we perceive and relate certain emotions to different colours. The aim of this thesis is to critically analyse two animated films from similar companies with similar goals from two different parts of the world and compare and contrast how they use colour, when they use colour, how much they use colour, why they have chosen to use a specific colour, how that relates to their target audience's cultural perception of colour and what the differences between them are. The two films are Beauty and the Beast by Disney and Princess Mononoke by Studio Ghibli. These two films were chosen for their setting, the year they came out and the differences in culture, one being between a western animated film aimed at western audiences the other being a Japanese animated film aimed at Japanese audiences. This thesis argues that these two film studios rely on their viewer's perception of colour to imply alignment, meaning and emotions of scenes and characters and that these differences are based on the unique history and culture of their respective target audience and the studio who created them.

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## Introduction

The inspiration for writing this thesis was when listening to Stephan Fry's book *Mythos* (2017) he takes a chronological approach to telling the ancient stories of the Greek Gods and their many decedents. It was something Fry mentioned off hand in his book that was interesting, he said that the ancient Greeks didn't have a word for the colour of the sea and simply referred to it as "wine dark".

Perceiving that the ocean was a shade of wine was strange to a native English

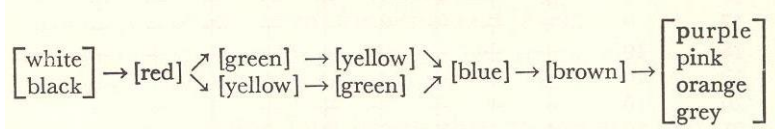


Figure 1: Berlin and Kay's Basic colour term evolution stages.

speaker. After further investigation there are many different languages that lacked term for blue and other colours, the Himba People in Namibia have 12 words for the colour green and blue is considered part of the green hue, it seems strange to native English speakers but after looking into this topic most languages lacked some basic colour terms and that there was an order that most language followed as they developed as to which colour names are created first and last, as shown by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay's work although there are many exceptions to this finding and critics of their work. This is a hugely debated topic in linguistics as to whether or not the differences in how colour is defined in language has an impact on if we see actually see the colour differently or not, some suggest that there is a feedback loop after you have a new colour name and you can spot the colour out more easily than others after you have a name for it. This never-ending spiral of research into colour and the scientific background to it was fascinating but found that the meaning other cultures put on colours was more interesting. For example, yellow is associated with royalty and luck in China not cowardness as the west would perceive it as.

To investigate these differences in colour *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) were chosen. Both these films came out at a similar time, they are both animated, have similar in design elements, target audience and realise date and have used similar colours in similar ways but for different reasons. They were also made by two similar studios at the time with both Studio Ghibli and Disney producing the most popular animated films in their

country. *Beauty and the Beast* was chosen because it was set in France in the 1700's so the colours used would not be influenced by Disney trying to emulate another culture like *Mulan* (1998) or *Pocahontas* (1995) and chose *Princess Mononoke* for similar reasons, its set somewhere between 1336 and 1573 in Japan and not trying to emulate a culture like in *Porco Rosso* (1992) nor is it too fantasy themed like *Nausicaa* (1984), Both these films are representative of the cultures they are portraying.

These two films were also created before Japanese media was popular in the western world and vice versa, there was not the same mix of cultures and Japanese wasn't as anglicised as it is in modern day with as many alternate anglicized colour terms for Japanese colour as investigated by James Stanlaw, a professor of anthropology in the University of Illinois, in his book *Japanese English: Language and Cultural Contact* (2004). *Princess Mononoke* was also made for the Japanese audience with no consideration for other cultures, British author Helen McCarthy references a CNN interview with Hayao Miyazaki in her book *Hayao Miyazaki Master of Japanese Animation* (1999), he states "I'm only worried about how my film would be viewed in Japan. Frankly, I don't worry too much about how it plays elsewhere"<sup>1</sup>

All these reasons made it clear that these two films are ideal to compare and illustrate the idea of the differences in the use of colour and the colours chosen being quite different to each other. After learning about Japanese's colour meanings *Princess Mononoke* becomes a more engaging film as a result and there is subtitle meanings that a western viewer would not pick up on without this cultural knowledge and the same can be said of *Beauty and the Beast* for native Japanese speakers.

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<sup>1</sup> McCarthy, Helen. *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation: Films, Themes, Artistry*. Berkeley, Calif: Stone Bridge Press, 1999. Print.



# Chapter One

## The use of colour in *Beauty and the Beast*

## Introduction

*Beauty and the Beast* (1991) uses colour to tell large amounts about the characters and settings. The colours used are straight forward and easy to understand to many audiences and especially small children which in turn shapes how those kids will relate colours with emotions. The colours in this film are mostly different shades of red and blue and are used in different ways to tell us about the tone, Red is used as an evil or negative colour and blue is used often to show danger or sadness but this is not always the case as the shade of the colour has a huge impact on its meaning in the film. Each character will be discussed with reference to their colour palette, the colour palette of the environment and how these colours tell us about their characters. Dr Amy Davis's books *Good Girls and Wicked Witches* (2006) and *Handsome Hero's and Vile Villains* (2013) along with David Scott Kastan's book *On Colour* (2018) will be key in the discussion of topic of the western perception of colour.

### Contrasting red and blue

Disney uses colour in a way that informs the viewer of the feelings, themes of the characters and film. Colour is imbedded in every scene of the film and enhances the viewing experience. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the colours can be primarily be just two colours red and blue. Red is used as a



Figure 2: Still Taken from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). Bella standing out from the rest of the village.

contrast colour and to define the villainous characters in the film i.e. Gaston and things that Gaston is associated with in contrast with the light blue, blue and white colours that Bella is dressed in throughout most of the film. It is seen in the introduction song at the start of the movie how this is used effectively as the whole village is dressed in warm ochre tones with a few greens and the same can be said about the village itself with all the buildings and the road adopting a similar colour scheme with exception to our first introduction to Gaston and Le fool who are dressed in Bright red to distinguish them from the villagers and give them an evil look. This use of red tones tells us that the villagers and the village itself are one with Gaston and while they are different characters the

pallet tell us their actions align with Gaston, shown in Gaston’s song, as LeFou puts it best in the opening of the song “There’s no man in town as admired as you, you’re everyone’s favourite guy, everyone’s awed and inspired by you”<sup>2</sup>. The use of contrast also shows the Beast’s transformation throughout the film in this wardrobe, going from red cloak when he is without Belle to bright blue when they are together showing Disney use of contrasting colours to highlight important themes in the film.

### Bella and light blue

Reds and oranges used on Gaston and the village are in contrast to Belle who is seen in her light blue dress which not only tells us that she is different to all the other villagers but also that she is more passive and a bit brighter not only in colour but in intelligence. The choice of a light blue gives Belle a more vibrant look as dark blue is associated with the Beast and his castle it shows that while they are different, they are both just different shades of the same hue. This choice of colours nicely sets up the world, who the protagonists are and who the villain is. The light blue of Belle’s dress signifies her difference from the rest of the characters in the film and the background, she is always standing out when in a scene even when she is in an area with the same colour palette like the forest or the castle. This shows Disney’s use of colour to aid in visually juxtaposing characters to highlight their inherent differences.

Light blue in western culture is seen as calming and trustworthy colour largely seen in many business logos as seen in figure 3. These characteristics shown by the colour choice are the same characteristics that



Figure 3: Various popular company logos



Figure 4: Blessed Virgin Mary, Sassetto, 1650.

are associated with belle, she is a calm, intelligent, loyal and trustworthy character which is seen when she returns to the beast to help save him and the colour choice reflects that as light blue is traditionally a colour of good in western culture. Historically seen in artwork of

<sup>2</sup> Beauty and the Beast. Dir Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise. Walt Disney Pictures. 1991. Film.

religious icons such as many depictions of the virgin Mary in combination with white, Dr Amy Davis points out when she talks about Belle as a good daughter, in her book *Good girls & Wicked Witches* (page 193), that it is Belle praying that brings the Beast back at the end of the film “It is at the end, when she thinks first of herself – praying for the Beast not to die because she loves him – that Belle’s good works are able to set the world to rights. This idea, however, is somewhat underplayed in the film. Her one “selfish” act – to think of her own sorrow if the Beast died rather than thinking about the impact of his death on his servants and the tragedy of his losing his life – is rewarded by the Beast’s transformation from beast to human and his being returned to life.”<sup>3</sup> This is an interesting association between Belle and prayer and highlights the selflessness of the character, and how she only thinks of others throughout the film, Davis goes on to criticise this scene for the downplaying of this theme.

Light blue also has associations with femininity primarily before WWII but as the film is set loosely around 18<sup>th</sup> century France Disney would have used this cultural association with the colour combination to emphasize Belle’s femininity in the film and while modern culture would associate pink more closely with femininity than light blue within the context and setting of the film light blue reads to the viewer as being a feminine colour along with the fact that using the more cultural accepted pink for Belle would have removed the contrast and associations with red that the film uses to contrast the characters. Later on when the Beast and Bella are Getting to know each other better Bella’s dress has changed to a dark red/pink dress and the beast has changed to a blue suit, This has no underlining meaning other than the palette swap of the two characters signifies the progression of their relationship and their similarity of situations, both being an outcast for being different reasons and both going through transformations throughout the film both literal and figuratively.



Figure 5: Still Taken from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

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<sup>3</sup> Davis, Amy M. *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation*, Indiana University Press, 2007. Print

## Red and Gaston



Figure 6: Still Taken from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

Gaston is the direct opposite to Belle, where she is kind he is ruthless when she is brave he is cowardly and where she is calm he is angry and this is clearly shown throughout the film in the actions he takes and the mistakes he makes, Gaston is one of the classic Disney villains. Gaston wears bright red throughout the film without changing colour once unlike Belle or the Beast. This bright red helps define his character from the start, he is angry, violent, strong and driven by his love and passion for, these are all characteristics that red commonly defines in western media and we would associate with this character.

While red is known for passion or desire in his film it's more sinister with Gaston being more predatory in his nature rather than just in love. Red is used to show us the villain in this film because red is very much a colour associated with evil in the western world as well as passion and strength. Dr Amy Davis, a lecturer and author working in University of Hull, writes in her book, *Handsome Heroes & Vile Villains* about Gaston as a comic villain and his treatment towards Belle being that of a sexual predator. She writes this about their first encounter together saying that "When we first see Gaston interacting with Belle, he circles Belle, dominating the shot and her with his bulky frame and his bright red shirt (Belle, in a more sedate blue dress, is also significantly smaller than Gaston: he is about a head taller, and his shoulders and chest seem almost twice as wide as hers)"<sup>4</sup> we can see Gaston's passion in relation to red as well as his anger and strength, Gaston is the personification of the colour red in western culture.

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<sup>4</sup> Davis, Amy M. *Handsome Heroes & Vile Villains: Men in Disney's Feature Animation*, Indiana University Press, 2014. Print

People in the English language go “red with anger”, they “paint the town red”, get “caught red handed”, go “red with passion” and people decent into the “red mist” when angry. Disney uses this cultural perception to show and enhance Gaston’s character. Gaston and the villagers show us clearly how colour is used as a device to show alignment and ideals with one side of the film being clearly defined as the villains through the use of good world building, character development and importantly Gaston and the villagers show us how colour is used as a device to show alignment and ideals with one side of the film being defined as the villains.

### Blue/Red and the Beast

Similar phrases as the ones talked about for red exist for blue too for example: “feeling blue”<sup>4</sup> or “blue devils”<sup>4</sup>, David Scott Kastan, professor of English in Yale University talks more in his book, *On Color*, about the historic relationship that English/Europeans have with depression and phrases associated with the colour blue stating that “But blue had already come to



Figure 9: Picasso, Pablo. *Le Soupe*. 1902.

seem so inevitable in its connection to various intensities of unhappiness that it could retire as an adjective and be reborn as a noun, no longer an attribute of a feeling but the feeling itself. It became *what* you feel, not how. You were no longer in a blue mood; you were just blue”<sup>5</sup> Kastan uses artwork from Picasso’s blue period to highlight his point about blue and depression later in the chapter



Figure 7: Still Taken from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).



Figure 8: Still Taken from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

and this cultural connection to blue Kastan has describes has been used by Disney to enhance scenes where unhappiness and loneliness are prominent themes i.e. the Beast’s castle and the surrounding woods. environment reflects the Beast’s emotions by animating in a dark blue/navy colour this helps us understand the turmoil that the Beast is in without the need to directly tell the viewer, again showing that Disney mastery and

<sup>5</sup> Kastan, David. *On Colour*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. Print

understanding over the use of colour to show us in a visual way the character and emotion of their protagonists.

The Beast himself wears a dark red cape in the first half of the film to signify, in much the same way as red is used for Gaston, his angry, strong and terrifying appearance he puts on. In a way the colours of the castle are representative of the true feelings of the Beast and the colour of his cape represents a kind of mask he wears to hide his true loneliness from others. Later on in the film when Bella and the Beast are getting to know each other and becoming more friendly the beast changes to a blue suit in contrast to Belle's red dress to make the Beast feel not as Beast-like and more human-like but that is to signify their relationship as talked about when discussing Bella's colours. The castle itself also has a brighter colour palette to show the Beast opening up to another person for the first time and shunning the dark blue shadows of loneliness only to have them return again when Bella leaves again and they return along with the Beast's red cloak.

### Conclusion

Disney uses colour to set the themes of the film and their characters, alignments and ideals. They do this through the use of contrasting blues and reds to set a clear definition between the villains of the film, Gaston and the villagers, and the protagonists, Belle and the Beast. Using red and ochre tones to display Gaston's passion, strength and anger at the Beast and the Beast's anger at Belle, Maurice and the villagers for invading his castle. Various dark blues are used to highlight the Beast's loneliness and depression in his life as well as the ominous cold forest that surrounds his castle. Light blue is used on Belle exclusively to show her contrast in personality to those around her and to display her alignment to the good side of the film, being one of two protagonists. These uses of colour show that Disney relies on our western perception of colours to effectively use colour as a storytelling device, without the cultural knowledge of blue being associated with depression or red being associated with passion and anger that English speakers and Europeans have. Disney knowingly or unknowingly heavily rely on western perception of colour to show themes and emotions that are absent when colour is removed from the film as a factor.

# Chapter Two

## The use of colour in *Princess Mononoke*



## Introduction

The use of colour in *Princess Mononoke* (1998) and in many of studio Ghibli films is quite literal and what is meant by that is it is closer to how we see the real world, the sky is always blue, the grass green and objects are coloured the way that you would expect them to be. When you look at the choices that the studio has made in terms of colour it is best to keep this in mind as most of the colour is used to simulate reality rather than a thematic use to give a scene a particular feel or convey an emotion. In this chapter will be focused on discussing how Studio Ghibli uses colour in their film *Princess Mononoke* and to show how their colour choices are made with respect to their culture. The film is broken down into colours and each area will be talked about in relation to colour as it is the best way to discuss this topic. The discussion is separated into sections focused on realism of colour that Studio Ghibli uses, the use of reds and blues on characters and finally the supernatural and use of black and white in this film. The key texts used for this chapter are *Colours of Japan* (2000) written by Kunio Fukuda a professor in colour theory in Japan, *Japanese Mythology in Film* (2015) by Yoshiko Okayana a professor of Japanese culture in the University of Hawaii and Hu Tze-Yue's book *Frames of Anime* (2010).

### Studio Ghibli's use of realism in animation

Studio Ghibli's use of colour is quite literal. The choice to emulate reality is chosen to enhance the theme and message of the story which is of the destruction of the natural world for the sake of human progress and that the emulation of reality is a significantly harder thing to achieve in an animation. Realism has always been a large part of Studio Ghibli's practices, Tze-Yue G. Hu, an author and independent educator focused on the study of Japanese animation, writes in her book about the extent that Studio Ghibli goes through to get a sense of realism and how unique this approach is; "What distinguishes the works of Miyazaki and Takahata from other run-of-the-mill manga-anime in Japan and Disney-like animation feature films is their approach and emphasis on realism. It is realism that has become a major, if not primordial, ideological backbone of their animation aspirations. The constant desire and struggle to

portray reality, often at all costs, are reflected in their storytelling process, especially in the thematic contents and technical expressions.”<sup>6</sup> It is evident in their use of colour throughout their films and through their animation that they have an obsession with the emulation of reality, enhancing the film’s visual appeal.



Figure 10: Still taken from Studio Ghibli’s Princess Mononoke (1997), director: Hayao Miyazaki. Intense detail for a scene only shown for a few seconds.

The green and light blue in contrast to the dark grey/black used in the burnt areas of the forest enhances the central colours used on the characters which typically are reds, oranges, a variety of shades of darker blue and the white. These colours all assist in grounding the film to reality and giving the film a natural feel, assisting in drawing the eyes to the important colours used in the main characters while simultaneously setting the whole theme of the natural world in conflict with the human created world by having the natural green and light blue colours in direct conflict with the dark areas of the village and the burnt forest which continues throughout the whole film. While the use of colour may seem simplistic its quite an important stylistic choice for the films themes as well as green being such an important colour in Japan.

#### How red and blue are used on characters

Many of the characters outfits feature a predominantly red or blue clothing and if not, they are usually a secondary colour apart from the Iron Town Guard who wear orange tunics. The protagonist Ashitaka Wears a blue tunic like the ones his tribe wears in addition to some red elements like his



Figure 11: Still taken from Princess Mononoke (1997).

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<sup>6</sup> Hu, Tze-Yue G. Frames of Anime: Culture and Image-Building, Hong Kong University Press, 2010. Print.

hood and the red elk Yakul. Red and blue are contrasting colours, red meaning passion, anger and strength and blue usually meaning stability, trust, loyalty or intelligence, of course this depends on the shade, a lighter blue tends to be associated with purity and a darker blue is associated with sadness and depression. While Ashitaka is all the things we would associate with blue, apart from depression, in Japan blue is seen symbolising passivity, neutrality and a clam soul which is more in line with the character of Ashitaka and his tribe. The red represents his strength and passion again highlighting his character of being predominately passive and negotiable but becomes fierce and powerful when the situation needs it. The character of Ashitaka is quite simple, he is calm, open and listens to everything that is said to him and listens to all sides equally. Ashitaka has a goal of trying to undo the curse that was put on him by the giant boar seen at the start of the film but this is not his main concern, he is more concentrated on sorting out the conflict in the film listening to both side equally and making an educated conclusion on what the right thing to do is. This again is shown in the colour that he wears; the neutral blue symbolises his neutrality and passivity, not choosing a side until he has heard both arguments.

There is another kind of blue that is used often which is indigo and while there is a large amount of people who wear it indigo does not have the same meaning behind it like bright blue does. Indigo in Japan was worn by most people throughout its history and was a very common colour to see on clothing. Kunio Kukuda, a professor of colour theory at Joshibi University of Art and Design talks about the history of indigo in Japan in the book *Colours of Japan* stating that “It was traditional believed in Japan that the smell of indigo was efficacious in warding off insects and poisonous snakes, and indigo dyeing was an indispensable feature of everyday Japanese apparel”<sup>7</sup> which is why it was used for background characters to, as discussed previously, emulate reality which again is a key part of Studio Ghibli’s animation style and would have been seen by Japanese people as a separate colour from the blue that Ashitaka wears.

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<sup>7</sup> Hibi, Sadao and Fukuda, Kunio. *The Colours of Japan*. Kodansha International Ltd, 2 Feb. 1999. Print.



Figure 12: Still taken from Princess Mononoke (1997).

In comparison to Ashitaka, Lady Eboshi wears a red under shirt with a dark blue cloak showing her strong and passionate soul and the peaceful cloak she wears as a leader willing to negotiate but force is her main method. Although Lady Eboshi represents the human side of conflict she is not the villain, there is no defined villain in the film with exception to maybe Jiko but he is just doing as commanded to, and this is shown in her outfit, her blue cloak of peace worn when it is suitable but discarded when needed, highlighting her fierce, passionate red side when she gets the opportunity. The Iron Town Guard who make, maintain and protect the village are all shown in orange clothing, which typically in Japan represents knowledge and happiness. This is quite a nice choice for these people given their situation, them being lepers usually outcast from civilisation but given a new fulfilling propose by Lady Eboshi.

#### How black and white are used in the supernatural

What is important to understand for these spirits and demons is that it is a miscommunication of Japanese terms for their deities and they do not work as the English translation would imply.

Yoshiko Okuyama, a professor of Japanese studies at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, describes in her book *Japanese Mythology in*

*Film* "What is unique in the Japanese cultural context is that the kami manifests itself in one of four types, or shi-kon (lit., four souls). 15 A kami may appear as an ara-mitama (angry soul), a nigami-tama (peaceful soul), a saki-mitama (blessing soul), or a kushi-mitama (miracle-giving soul)." This is an important distinction as Nago is not seeking revenge, his ara-mitama has taken control and needs to be tamed or as Okuyama puts it "Labeling Naga "a demon," as translated in the film, is misleading; Nago is the god of the mountain whose ara-mitama (angry soul) was triggered by the human-caused destruction of his territory and the iron bullet shot by a hunter. These human indiscretions turned



Figure 13: Still taken from Princess Mononoke (1997).

Nago into an araburu-kami (raging god).”<sup>8</sup> While this difference is subtle it gives context as to why Ashitaka tries to calm him rather than fight and to why he started on the quest to find who made the bullet that shot Nago, This entity is not evil rather the evil part that has been unlocked.

White and black are two important colours in this film, they represent the purity of nature and the taint humanity leaves on nature. In Japan the colour of white, much like that of the western world, considers white to be associated with purity and holiness, it’s clean colour fitting for Kami of the forest and contrasts well with their environment. Black is usually associated with malice, mourning and criminal activity, well suited to it use in the film being used for the burnt forests and forest shojo (the monkey spirits) that have turned vengeful. The turning of the Kami of the forest into black versions of themselves is a simple way of showing the viewer instantly what has happened to the spirits and what their purpose is, this is most obvious for when Lord Okkoto is injured and turns



Figure 14: Still taken from Princess Mononoke (1997).

demonic near the end of the film and in the beginning of the film the God boar Nago who taints Ashitaka has turned black and demonic from the Iron bullet that was used to try kill him.

The use of these two different colours is enhanced by the environment they live in, we see the forest spirits and the wolves are a pure white and stand out quite clearly from their environment giving them an other worldly presence as they don’t fit in or seem to belong with any environment that they appear in. The character of San who also wears mainly white but in combination with red takes on a different meaning in Japan. In the Shinto religion the combination of white and red symbolises purity and the ability to ward off demons as Yoshiko Okuyama says while discussing a similar outfit in the film Onmyōji one and two “What is the semiotic significance of the paired colors, red and white? Red is believed to have power against evil



Figure 15: Still taken from Princess Mononoke (1997).

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<sup>8</sup> Okuyama, Yoshiko. Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime, Lexington Books, 2015. Print

while white represents purity. As Miyata (2006a) has pointed out, Japanese culture has an abundance of red and white items. Such examples include *ko-haku-mochi* (a pair of pink and white rice cakes), *akagumi-shirogumi* (a traditional method of making a match between two groups, “red team” and “white team,” in sporting events or other competitions), and *ko-haku-utagassen* (a popular annual television contest between two groups of famous singers sponsored by the Japanese national broadcast network, NHK, and aired on New Year’s Eve).<sup>9</sup> The use of these two contrasting colours is quite simple and straight forward but they are used sparingly and effectively.

### Conclusion

Studio Ghibli has a unique use of colour throughout their films, this is clearly shown through the film with their choice to use colour to subtly imply a character’s position in the world, their outlook and their story. They use colour not as a device to show emotions within the story but to inform the viewer certain themes within the film. The decision to use the same colours in human character’s with conflicting beliefs and goals tells us that while these characters are fundamentally different from one another they have similar ways of achieving their goals. The use of black and white also shows us the clear difference between the good of nature and the natural spirits versus the evil destruction and effects that come about when the natural world is affected so greatly in a negative way. The characters and themes exist in a grey area with no good or evil side. The spirits are in conflict with the humans for destroying their forest and want what they see as rightfully theirs and the humans are doing the best they can to make a home and a livelihood with those in the community that are traditionally looked down on like lepers and prostitutes and to defend that home from things that will destroy it like the spirits. While colour is not the main device for character development or storytelling it helps the viewer understand the characters and themes better. It is also evident that Studio Ghibli relies on the cultural perception that their target audience has on colour, using colour in a way that make cultural sense to the viewer.

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<sup>9</sup> Okuyama, Yoshiko. *Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime*, Lexington Books, 2015. Print

# Chapter Three

Comparing the use of colour in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Princess Mononoke*.

## Introduction

The basis for this chapter is to take the points that have made about each of these individual films and compare and contrast their methods and reasons why they choose to use colour in the way that they did and what the differences are between their choices in regard to the meaning of the colour in their respective cultures. The choices that these studios have made differ from each other in a variety of areas including the cultural differences talked about earlier but also in their individual usage of colour. Disney primarily uses the same colour in the whole environment that a character is currently occupying to describe their emotions and traits to the viewer i.e. the whole castle reflects the Beasts emotions not just the way he acts and the colour of his outfit. Studio Ghibli uses colour in a more subtle way by use of a variety of colours to describe each setting and using a realistic interpretation of the world to draw us into the setting and help us understand the environment. These differences will be discussed in relation to how it was used in the environments, how it is used in the design of the characters and how culturally the use of these colours differs from each other. This chapter will be comparative and focuses on images/stills from both films to compare them as well as references from Tze-Yue's book *Frames of Anime* (2010), artwork from both cultures and Tommaso Buonocore's article on *chromatic storytelling* (2019).

### Difference in colours used in the environments/backgrounds

These two studios have different ways of using colour in their backgrounds. By putting two stills from each film next to one another the different approaches to the colours used in each background will become clear.

As discussed about in chapter two, Studio Ghibli has a realistic approach to their backgrounds, trying to get as much detail and real colour as they can into each

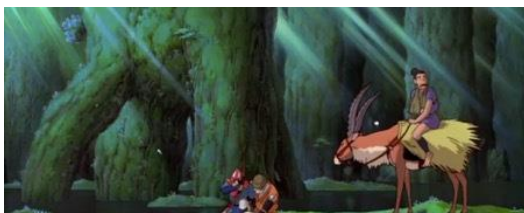


Figure 16: Still taken from *Princess Mononoke* (1997).

scene which in a primary philosophy in Studio Ghibli's films shown in the animation of their film *Omohide Poro Poro* (1991) as said by independent educator and author Hu Tze-Yue G in



her book *Frames of Anime*: “Intrinsic in any animated mise-en-scene is the treatment of color. Both Miyazaki and Takahata are known to have spent a considerable amount of time discussing with their chief colorists so that they could find the best colors. For example, in the making of *Omohide Poro Poro* (Only Yesterday [1991]), in order to achieve reality, 450 different colors were used. As the scenery of the film is based on a farm community in Yamagata Prefecture, it was reported that the color department took a year to find the right shade of “red” that looked like the bright flowers blooming during the summer time.”<sup>10</sup> This shows the extent Studio Ghibli would go through to achieve a realistic background for *Omohide Poro Poro* and they would go through similar processes for all their films. The use of real, bright colours of the forest in contrast to darks browns seen in the other areas of the film serves to set the films main theme of human progress versus the natural environment. The background also serves to contrast the colours used on characters as no character wears green or brown cloths so they will always stand out from the detailed environments as we can see when Ashitaka is taking the wounded men through the forest.



Figure 17: Still Taken from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

Disney has a different and opposite approach to using colour in their environments. As can be seen in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) the backgrounds blend in with the characters themselves and are often used to set the tone of the scene. For example, in Gaston’s scene where he sings “Gaston” the whole scene is tinted with reds and oranges to help set tone of passion, pride and strength that Gaston emanates. It is also seen in the beginning song with Belle where the villagers and the village itself is coloured in various shades of orange and ochre in contrast to Belle wearing a white and light blue outfit which sets her apart from the whole environment to show us that she is different and that she does not fit in with her surroundings.

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<sup>10</sup> Hu, Tze-Yue G. *Frames of Anime: Culture and Image-Building*, Hong Kong University Press, 2010. Print.

These two examples show how Disney uses colour in the environment to help inform the viewer of character traits and themes in the film. This does however mean that the film itself lacks the kind of detail that Studio Ghibli has, although *Beauty and the Beast* is one of Disney's most detailed films, but Disney does not have the same obsession with emulating the real world that Studio Ghibli has.

### Difference in colour palettes



Figure 19: Colour palette of *Princess Mononoke* (1997).



Figure 18: Colour palette of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

Tommaso Buonocore, an author for the website Towards Data Science, writes about using AI program's to get a colour palate for a film in an article he has written called "*Exploring chromatic storytelling in movies with R*" and comments on the differences between colour choice in Wes Anderson, Christopher Nolan and Hayao Miyazaki's films, "With a great love for pastel tones, Anderson puts these kinds of colours into almost every element of the scenery. This allows him a complete monopoly over the meaning and subtext of his films. There are many conscious and unconscious bias that lead a director to choose similar palettes over his/her career. For instance, nature and ecology are the milestones of Miyazaki's mindset, and this is clearly reflected in the color palette he uses in the vast majority of his masterpieces."<sup>11</sup> Taking Tommaso's colour palate of *Princess Mononoke* (1998), editing it and comparing it to a similar edited one for *Beauty and the beast* the two as Tommaso has done with Anderson and Miyazaki, shows the difference in the way that Disney used colour in *Beauty and the Beast*, the film heavy on contrast between red/blue while *Princess Mononoke* is more varied in colour. Studio Ghibli uses a large variety of colour to achieve

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<sup>11</sup> Buonocore, Tommaso. Exploring chromatic storytelling in movies with R, Towards Data Science, April 8th, 2019. Web

their desired affect with mostly greens, spots of red and patches of dark blue and light blue showing up as night and the sky.

### Differences in use of red and blue

Red and blue are two common colours in both of these films and are used in a similar way however not only have a different meaning depending on the culture they are viewed by but also the reasons for their use and the extent of their use differ greatly from *Princess Mononoke* to *Beauty and the Beast*.

Red in both cultures is seen as representing strength and passion however we might see it as an eviller colour associated mainly with fire, blood and hell in the catholic religion as seen in Hieronymus Bosch's depictions of hell in the late fourteenth century. Red in *Beauty and the Beast* is used predominately as an evil colour, used on Gaston, Le Fool and the village who, as said in chapter one, is an extension of Gaston's character

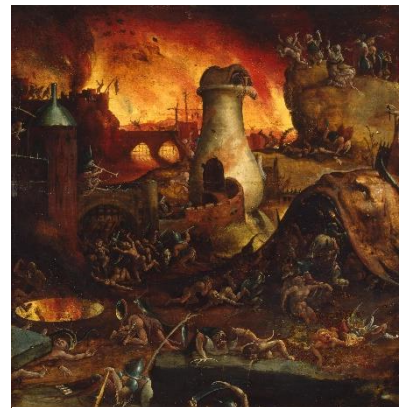


Figure 20: Bosch, Hieronymus. Hell 1500-1504.

rather than their own characters. Red is seen most often as a background colour when the focus is on Gaston and the Beasts cape at the beginning of the film to show his anger at Belle and Maurice. The colour red is used on characters to show their alignment and predominant emotions.

In Japan however red is associated more with the repelling of spirits rather than the representation of them which is why many shrines and temples in Japan are painted red/vermillion. Therefore, Studio Ghibli uses red in the way that they do. An intense red or vermillion is used sparingly and only in places where it would make scene to use it in a spiritual way i.e. as a secondary colour in Ashitaka's design,



Figure 22: Utagawa(shunsai), Tasimasa. Iwato kagura no kigen, 1887.



Figure 21: Still taken from Princess Mononoke (1997).

on San's mask as she is trying to fit in with the wolf spirits and red is often depicted on sprints and god robes in the Shinto religion and art work as seen in this artwork, *Iwato kagura no kigen*, by Utagawa(shunsai) Tasimasa in 1887 gods are often depicted wearing red and white, on Jijo's robes who is pretending to be a monk and thus wears the tradition red and white robes and places where red is suited to achieve realism like blood, scratches and sunsets.

Disney tends to use Blue more often and dominate whole scenes with it while studio Ghibli saves it for use on characters, sky's and rivers. The use of dark blue in *Beauty and the Beast* is primarily on the character of the Beast and his castle giving the castle a



Figure 23: Still taken from *Princess Mononoke* (1997).

cold and depressing atmosphere which is akin to how the Beast feels for the first half of the. Blue is also used as a contrasting colour to show the two different sides of the film, Belle and the Beast in blue and Gaston in red. Blue is used in a similar way but a different tone in *Princess Mononoke*. Ashitaka and his village are the only characters to wear bright blue in the film, the lighter tone suggests a neutral, cool and passive personality. While the cultural symbolism of these two colours has similar in both the west and Japan it is interesting that they have saved this shade of bright blue for just Ashitaka, the environment and the forest spirit. This was done to link Ashitaka to the natural world and to make him stand out in scenes in which he is an outsider like when he is in Iron town and stands out from the people around him as well as not to have him blend in with any environment, Ashitaka is a neutral character for the viewer to see the world through and having bright blue as his primary colour not only infers that but sets him out from any other character in the film. As mentioned previously the indigo colour worn by many of the villagers is more representation of reality rather than an intentional colour choice used to define traits and themes.

### Conclusion

These two studios have two unique ways of using colour to enhance the story and the themes in their respective films. The cultural differences between each studio makes a significant difference in the choice of colours and the way that

they are used. Disney uses contrasting colours and will change the whole environment's colour palate to display the emotions of characters and the themes in the film, using largely blues and reds to represent depression and hatred respectively. Studio Ghibli uses colour to inform on a character's personality traits in a similar way Disney does, with different meanings and use in the case of red and blue, but they use a larger amounts of different colours to show good, evil, the natural world and the influence humanity has on the natural world. A deep visual analysis of the colour palates of the films emphasises this difference in the use of colour. Each studio uses their perception of colour, influenced by their unique histories, to impart emotions and themes however the way in which they are used, and the colours chosen to represent the themes and emotions are fundamentally different in many examples.

# Conclusion

The question is whether the culture you grew up in has an impact on the way you perceive and use colour in relation on film. By comparing two similar films by two similar studios from the same time by largely different cultures we can see that there is a difference in how colour is used and when it is used. In critically analysing *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Princess Mononoke* (1998) with research from a variety of sources and then comparing the differences in these two films in relation to colour it is clear to see that the way colour is used in these films are representative of their unique and different cultures. While the enjoyment of either film is not hampered by the lack of cultural knowledge it does bring more life and meaning to each of the films after learning about why colours are used and how.

In the first two chapters the use of colour in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Princess Mononoke* was analysed. The use of colour, how it was used, when it was used and why it was used was investigated thoroughly in relation to each culture's history and art. Through an analyses of *Beauty and the beast* it was found that Disney uses large swathes of colour to dominate backgrounds and scenes assisting in setting the tone of the scene and using it to show the alignment and emotions of a character through their costume choice, having Gaston and the village dressed in bright reds to show his evil passionate nature, Belle in a white and blue dress to show her kindness juxtaposed against Gaston and the Beast wearing red when he is angry, blue when he is bonding with Belle and having his whole castle in blue tones to symbolise his depressive, lonely state. In chapter one these were discussed and investigated through the eyes of the west and its history, showing that Disney relies on our cultural perception of colour to assist in storytelling.

In chapter two *Princess Mononoke* was analysed in the same way *Beauty and the Beast* was analysed by looking at when the colour is used and why it is used and investigating what meaning those colours have in Japan and why they have that meaning. After research into Japanese history and culture it is now clear that studio Ghibli has a greater amount of detail, uses less colour, mostly reserving the bright colours for use on characters and that the colours chosen for certain scenes and characters have a different connection in Japan and using the green

natural environment in contrast to the black burnt forests to show the human vs nature theme in the film but also to make the colour of the character's costumes stand out in their environment rather than blend in like in *Beauty and the Beast*. Studio Ghibli relies on the Japanese perception of colour and their history with colour to achieve all these themes.

In chapter three, after analysing both films in chapter one and two, they were compared with each other to highlight the differences in the use of colour. After thoroughly comparing both films and analysing the why and how they have used colour it is clear that the difference in culture has a large impact on the way that the films are perceived, messages that you might not have understood or gotten confused are clearer when shown why they have been chosen and the history behind their choice. The context in which colours are chosen and displays a significant difference in the meaning of colours between these two cultures.

These two films are different and similar in many aspects but the approach to colour in these films is different and after a through breakdown of the use of colour in both films it is clear to see that the history and culture of both studios makes the use and choice of colour unique to their respective cultures and that the location you grew up in has a significant impact on way you perceive colour in media as a whole.



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