Feminism in Princess Mononoke

Feminism is a social, political, and psychological concept that has existed in various forms throughout history. While we are currently in the third wave of the feminist movement, current feminism oftentimes draws from many different contexts including past feminist theory. In Hayao Miyazaki’s classic masterpiece, *Princess Mononoke*, two very different ideas of feminism are presented. Examples of both radical and cultural feminism are evident in the film. Lady Eboshi, proprietor of Iron Town, represents a radical view of feminism, while the character of San and the forest creatures represent cultural feminism.
Lady Eboshi and the Girls of Iron Town

There are multiple story lines and plot elements contained within the epic that is *Princess Mononoke*, but Lady Eboshi and Iron Town seem to be involved in all of them. In fact, everything in the story has been set into motion by Lady Eboshi. In establishing Iron Town, Eboshi has created a safe haven for transient women, especially those abused in brothels. This represents the strong feminist ideal that women should not prostitute themselves for men or anyone. What is terribly ironic about the situation, however, is the fact that Iron Town is responsible for creating deadly weapons that hurt others.

A bullet from one of Eboshi’s guns struck an ancient boar god that was defending its mountain from her fires and battles. This boar becomes filled with hate and eventually turns into a demon, which the story’s hero, Ashitaka, eventually encounters. During his encounter with the demon god, Ashitaka becomes afflicted with its deadly curse. Ashitaka’s physical and spiritual journey, which propels the story, is set into motion by Eboshi’s malicious acts towards the forest and its creatures. In this sense, her idea of
feminism is flawed. She saves women who have been abused, but will willingly harm and
kill the forest and its inhabitants. In this sense she is a radical feminist. Eboshi considers
women to be more important than the very forest that gives everyone life. She also
attempts to kill the Spirit of the Forest to get the samurai Lord Asano off of her back once
and for all – to get rid of men that have power over her once and for all. She in turn, uses
the same women that she saved from being used to free all of them from male oppression.
She has taken the abused and turned them into the abusers.

Iron Town is very unique because the men and women have literally shifted roles.
The women go out to work and fight, while the men stay at home and cook and clean.
This represents a radical utopian feminist society in which women can now objectify men
and hold the power in the relationship.

The Forest and Its Princess

On the other end of the feminist spectrum we find San, the princess of the wolves.
San is extremely interesting because she has been raised to believe that she is in fact a
male wolf. What is fascinating about this is that her mother is a goddess – the ultimate
form of ideal feminism. It can be argued that her mother raised her to think she’s a man
because that would give her more strength and void her of the complications of having to
be a female in a patriarchal society.

San, despite her psychological gender confusion, is at constant odds with Eboshi.
Eboshi is destroying the forest to further dig for her precious ores, and needless to say,
the princess of the forest does not take kindly to this. San tries to kill Eboshi on numerous
occasions, but Ashitaka always manages to break it up. San’s desire to live with the forest creatures and have to “deny all contact with men” makes her the representative of cultural feminism. This has an incredible double entendre in that she is both denying contact with human males (she fights of Ashitaka and all men who attack the forest), but by living with creatures and not humans, she is even denying contact with the species of “man”. San and Eboshi clash because Eboshi wants women to be in power of everything, even the forest, and San wants everyone to leave her alone, even other women.

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**Ashitaka, the Balance Keeper**

Throughout the chaotic world that *Princess Mononoke* inhabits, the hero Ashitaka remains the key focus. Ashitaka’s tale is tragic, and through his tragedy he brings balance to the feuding world and ultimately saves himself and everyone else around him.
Ever since he first arrived in Iron Town, carrying injured men whom Eboshi left behind no less, people were wondering whose “side” Ashitaka was on. He saves San from the clutches of Eboshi before he even knows anything about her. He shows understanding and compassion for everything and everyone – women, men, creatures, gods, demons, nature, everything. In this sense Ashitaka represents perfectly harmonious feminism ideals. He also represents liberal feminism, because he is essentially fighting for universal equality for everyone. Due to their ignorance, all parties involved continually fail to understand how Ashitaka can be on all sides and no one’s side at the same time. He is balance, and he finds common ground between Eboshi’s radical feminism and San’s cultural feminism.