

Individual Impact on Climate and Person to Person Exploitation: An Eco Representation Comparison

In the 1997 Studio Ghibli film *Princess Mononoke* and the 2006 Nickelodeon cartoon *Avatar: The Last Airbender (ATLA)*, both the encouragement of individual action to help the natural world, as well as the direct criticism of humanity's obsession with greed are primary themes illustrated throughout both texts and is what I have chosen to discuss within this comparative reflection on eco representation within contemporary animation.

Princess Mononoke follows the story of a young prince who sets out on a quest to find a cure for a curse that provides him superhuman strength in exchange for his life and on his journey is exposed to a conflict between the gods of a fictional Japanese forest whose resources are being overconsumed by the humans who inhabit around it. The episode in *ATLA* that I will be focusing on for this comparison is episode three of the show's third season, "The Painted Lady", which follows the protagonists on their journey to overthrow the Fire Lord and on their quest, stop in a Fire Nation village whose water supply is polluted by the town's factor, poisoning and starving its people. In *Princess Mononoke*, San, a girl raised by a pack of wolves, thus resulting in her hatred for humankind and their greed, is the film's representation of combating environmental exploitation at the hands of human consumption, while Katara is *ATLA*'s representation of rejecting both natural exploitation while also providing an understanding of how humanity's complacency in this is more often multifaceted in practice, and cannot always be punished.

In *Princess Mononoke*, when the village's monarch, Lady Eboshi, comes to collect natural resources from the forest taken by the villagers, San makes an attempt to kill Eboshi for neglecting to treat the forest with dignity. In response to this, both Eboshi's soldiers, as well as

villagers make attempts to attack San, who in some way, is fighting to save them from Eboshi as well, even if that is not her intention. What is interesting about San and her character is that her detachment to humanity has made it so she cannot see that the complacency the villagers exhibit working under Eboshi is not a decision made with complete autonomy or that the villagers, like the forest, are also victims of overexertion and exploitation. However, in *ATLA*, the same cannot be said for Katara.

In “The Painted Lady”, when Katara is made aware that the factor near the village is polluting the water supply, contaminating their food and starving them, she does not think twice about delaying her trip to help them. She makes multiple attempts to help decontaminate their food and even destroys the factor polluting their air and water. Even though the villagers in *ATLA*, like in *Princess Mononoke*, make their own decisions to not overthrow the Fire Nation and the soldiers working in the factor, Katara can see that these decisions are not being made lightly and that once the factor is destroyed, the villagers, the river, the fish, and the air will all be free of harm and exploitation. Their complacency is understood as decisions made in order to survive, not out of the disregard for the natural world, like thought by San. What makes this determination to help all the more compelling is that the villagers Katara is helping are both the oppressors of her hometown and the nation she wishes to abolish.

Princess Mononoke addresses the power imbalances between humanity and nature and challenges our understanding of humankind’s obsession with overconsumption. *ATLA* addresses these same issues, but also emphasizes that these power imbalances translate in person to person relationships and only results in both humanity and nature being exploited in the process.

Works Cited

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