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La Belle et la Bête Analysis

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American football coach, Lou Holtz once said, “In the successful organization, no detail is too small to escape close attention” (Holtz). Studying a film helps reveal detail that may refer to various mythological references. In the 1946 film, *La Belle et la Bête*, director Jean Cocteau uses several techniques to capture elements of mythology in his film. This classic French film uses architecture, elements of magic, themes, and other mythological references to benefit the overall movie.

Architecture in this movie is intricate, in the sense that much of the construction of the setting is inspired by mythological designs. The interior and exterior of the character Beast’s house has various points of mythological notations. For example, the grand fireplace is constructed with an ancient Grecian or Roman ideas. Two columns frame either side with a stone head statue included, along with an intricate mantle atop of the fireplace, making it look like an entrance to an ancient building. The house also includes a room dedicated to Belle, a woman who falls in love with Beast. This room is furnished with fauna; bring the outdoors inside Beast’s house. Plants are organic and a symbol of life and rebirth (“Plants in Mythology”). In this film, Beast is a creature who longs for love and companionship, for his appearance is his fault. When Belle enters the house, she brings life into Beast’s empty soul. On the outside of Beast’s chateau, statues of dogs sit upon pedestals lining Beast’s land, perhaps

acting as protection of his property. The overgrown gardens cascade up the house, and extend throughout the land; this too is representative of a safety for Beast. Animals and plants in mythology are very significant, and in this movie they are a component to the Beast's life, and are there in order to watch over him from his intruders and the evil in the world.

Different camera angles in a film may affect how a scene is interpreted. When Belle first arrives to the chateau, she walks through a hallway where window are draped with white linen, in which blow majestically into the hall. Belle skims the floor through this passageway, giving the appearance that she is flying; a very dreamlike atmosphere. The Beast is also given an angelic presence, particularly when he carries Belle up the stairs in his arms during a scene where she has fainted after being startled by the Beast's presence. A light gleams from the top of the staircase, illuminating the crown of his head, then eventually his whole body, until they disappear into the white shadow. Another detail to note is the opposite times of day at the Beast's home compared to the rest of the world. When it is day, it is night at Beast's chateau. This further leads to the ideas of transformations and transgressions that occur in *La Belle et la Bête*.

Transformations are commonly seen in many myths. In the movie, both Belle and the Beast transform from the beginning to the conclusion. Belle is a character who experiences an internal transformation by changing perspectives of Beast. This film begins with her having the likely thoughts that most individuals would have after seeing this creature. Belle is fearful and does not want to stay long with the beast, but would rather go home to take care of her ill father. Beast even recognizes this and states to Belle that she should not look into his eyes, for she would be even more terrified. Then after a series of encounters with Beast, Belle begins to feel resentment and is pitiful toward Beast. Belle senses the depressed emotions that he has because

she will not accept who he is. Beast displays this self-consciousness when he comes inside the house covered in blood after killing an animal. Alarmed, Belle questions him. Shameful that she had to see this side of him, Beast admits that unfortunately being a beast, it is his nature to kill. Belle then begins to gain respect for him. Her fondness is later transformed into a love, especially when she returns home and he delivers the magic mirror to her house. The mirror usually has bad scenes in the reflection, however this time Belle saw how much Beast has missed her. Her adoration for him can also be proven by the change in her language when talking about him. Belle no longer called him “the beast”, but rather “my beast”.

Themes of mythology are also present in the film. Tricksters have been noticed in mythology for quite some time. An example can be seen in the Oceanic myth of Maui. Maui is a character who is attempting to enter the underworld without waking the sleeping goddess and it accompanied by a bird. The bird is viewed as being a trickster when laughs, waking the goddess up, they are then punished by being killed by her. Belle’s brother and the man that wants to run off with her are characterized as tricksters. For example, these mischievous characters plot to steal the Beast’s treasures that they have learned about. They involve Belle’s sisters, stealing the key to a shed-like building containing Beast’s treasures. Unsuccessfully, these tricksters fail as one of them is shot down by a statue, which is a replica of Diana, the mistress of the animals, woodlands, and hunting. A mythological reference is again used in this reference to Dianna. Dianna was known to be vengeful, perhaps explaining why she shot an arrow at the trickster.

As Lou Holts points out, it is important to have detail, especially in film, just for the simple reason to add creative aspects. The details in the film, *La Belle et la Bête*, refers to mythological components, further adding to the artistic components making this film such a classic. Analyzing this film may help better understand uses of mythology in film, as well as the

ability of director Jean Cocteau to create such a fantastic piece of film. Elements of the film are influenced by various aspects of the culture of mythology, especially the architecture and various other themes of mythology.

Works Cited

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