

# TALE AS OLD AS TIME: INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE EVOLUTION OF "BEAUTY AND THE BEAST"

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The fairy tale has captivated and fascinated the world, particularly the Western world, for generations. How do we explain our obsession with the fairy tale? How do we reconcile the fact that certain fairy tales, hundreds of years after they were transformed from oral folk tales into the literary fairy tales that we recognize, are still popular, even pervasive, in today's culture while others have fallen into obscurity? The answers to both questions can be traced in certain fairy tales which have grown and evolved over time and have been transformed through the re-visioning process of many different authors, illustrators, and filmmakers.

A partial answer to these questions is found in Pamela Travers' idea in *The Meanings of Beauty and the Beast: A Handbook*: "We go to fairy tales not so much for their meanings as our meanings," (qtd. in Griswold<sup>1</sup> 10). This idea, that we return to fairy tales, not because they contain a universal truth but because the fairy tale is a uniquely reflective genre, that is, fairy tales reflect back the meanings we, as readers, need and want to find, is crucial to understanding how and why fairy tales remain in the public eye.

In addition to Travers' theory, an understanding of the concept of intertextuality, particularly as put forth by David Cowart in his work, *Literary Symbiosis*, is crucial to understanding a fairy tale's timelessness and prolific nature. Cowart suggests that despite the negative connotations our culture reads into dependent texts, there is a beneficial aspect of intertextual relationships. The degrees of intertextual relationships range from parasitism, where only the guest text benefits, to mutualism, where both texts benefit, to commensalism when only the guest benefits but the host text suffers no harm (Cowart 4). Cowart's theory leads me to conclude that, in the case of a fairy tale, examples of symbiosis can explain the perpetuation and prevalence of a fairy tale from era to era.

Combining Travers' and Cowart's ideas, I postulate that certain fairy tales possess a more reflective nature, allowing readers, authors and artists to discover their own personal meaning in the story and to create a myriad of dependent texts to illustrate their personal meanings. It is the constant, prolific retellings that recreate and make fairy tales new each time they are retold. If we accept Cowart's idea that "classics must be reinterpreted for every age" (10) then it would seem logical to surmise that the fairy tales that are reinvented and retold are the fairy tales that remain most popular and relevant. I also suggest that it is the fairy tales that are particularly reflective are the most often retold and thus, the most pervasive in our society.

To try to explore this phenomenon in fairy tales in general or even in the "big name" fairy tales would be to undertake a project of immense proportions; thus, I have chosen to narrow my research to examining only one fairy tale, "Beauty and the Beast," and how its many varied revisions have given it, in Western society, a unique social

<sup>1</sup> I owe a great indebtedness to Jerry Griswold and his work. For more about this please see the Acknowledgements page.

and cultural relevance. Choosing one fairy tale as the exclusive focus of this project was not an easy matter, but after careful research, I determined that "Beauty and the Beast" is the ideal focus for this study. Echoing Griswold, I concluded that "Beauty and the Beast" provides a convenient way to examine how meaning is discovered in, or imposed on, fairy tales" (Griswold 53). In this paper I will explore the thematic evolution of this story while also probing the theoretical basis behind my assertion that the meanings of "Beauty and the Beast" are reflective of changing societal values and require an understanding of the interdependent nature of fairy tales.

As the Disney film suggests, "Beauty and the Beast" is a "tale as old as time" and its endurance is one measure of the story's significance and power" (Griswold 15). In our current society there seems to be no end to modern retellings and adaptations of the tale. There are, in fact, so many different versions that one could not possibly discuss each version in one paper. The most obvious example of a retelling as literary symbiosis is parody, which typically falls into the category of commensalism, which implies that "the guest organism benefits but the host organism suffers no harm" (Coward 4). We see parody in retellings and revisions that fall in the "politically correct" fairy tale genre. While fascinating (and often funny), such parodies rarely impact their precursor text or point out any missed concepts of the previous texts. So rather than focus on such retellings, I've focused more on adaptations that offer a "more comprehensive statement about culture in the interaction of the original's theme or aesthetic and the theme or aesthetic of the guest text" (Coward 9).

My choice of revisionary texts is based on two theorists: Zipes and Cowart. First, Zipes provides a way to discriminate between the different versions of a fairy tale. He suggests that retellings of the tale fall into two categories: duplicates and revisions. Duplicates are those retellings that remain true to the meaning of the original text while revisions reinvent parts of the text and imbue it with new or different meaning or significance. (Zipes, *Myth* 8). Also featured in my selection process is Cowart's "Symbiotic Spectrum," referenced in Appendix A. It offers degrees of symbiotic involvement, from pure translation on the left to imaginary self-begotten texts on the right. Neither end of the spectrum actually exists; even in translation there is some element of distortion. Just left of the center is the space literary symbiosis inhabits (6). Understanding what space a revision occupies helps us to understand the function such texts perform in relation to their precursors.

An exploration of several modern adaptations of "Beauty and the Beast" and their differences and intentions through an exploration of the motifs, characters, and themes of "Beauty and the Beast" that have been consistently represented throughout these multiple revisions, how, by transformation, will give us a sense of how such revisions work with each other, rather than merely competing against themselves, to reinvent "Beauty and the Beast." Each step of the evolution of this story is dependent on those that came before. It is important to note that the existing order of precursor texts is in existence before the new revision arrives. "With the arrival of the new text the order must be altered" (Coward 21-22). Take for example, "The Tiger's Bride," which, by inverting the traditional symbols of its precursors, explicitly deconstructs the iconic nature of "Beauty and the Beast," deliberately reversing the traditional meaning. Considering

the timing of this story, four years after the television program and only two after the Disney blockbuster, it is logical to assume that Carter's story is a reaction to the negative female socialization provided in the two prior versions. By examining how these texts work with each other, jockeying for position in this order, we can see that each of the modern retellings uses a different traditional aspect, symbol or theme of the traditional "Beauty and the Beast" story to reinvent the fairy tale for the current age.

## HUMANITY

By its very nature, "Beauty and the Beast" poses questions about humanity and who possesses it. The story strongly implies that because neither title character is a man, neither of them can be human. Both characters are prone to the question of who, or what, is human, and what this encompasses. Carter revealingly writes,

I could see not one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around men, then the six of us—mounts and riders both,—could boast amongst us not one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out. (Carter 176)

Very few versions of the story come right out and state the problem of humanity as Carter does, despite its presence in all versions of the story. What most versions do, rather than openly state the problem, is highlight the deficiencies of both the Beast and Beauty, embellishing the tale with images of false life. Such objects-turned-character represent the gray area that both the Beast and Beauty occupy, signifying the half-life they must endure.

## IMITATION OF HUMANITY

The story of "Beauty and the Beast" often makes use of non-human characters to signify the question of humanity: in the Crane version the servants are monkeys, in McKinley's *Beauty* the servants are invisible, in *Rose Daughter* a simulacrum lives a half-life, in "The Tiger's Bride" a mechanical doll reflects the idea of Beauty as object, perhaps most recognizably, in the Disney animated film the servants are inanimate objects. Each one of these stories imposes non-human servitors upon the story to contrast the comparatively human nature of both title characters. Such characters work so effectively in emphasizing the title characters' humanity, particularly the Beast's humanity, because it is hard to suggest that even at his most bestial, the Beast is less human than a teapot or an invisible breeze.

The question of suspended humanity is brought up in Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast*. The film clearly states that the curse has inflicted the Beast and his entire household for ten years. "For ten years we've been rusting" (Disney 1991) and yet this time frame does not match the characters. Mrs. Potts, who is ambiguously grandmotherly, has a son, a teacup, Chip, who is by his speech patterns, his missing tooth, and his depiction when he transforms back into a boy, is no more than six or seven years old. By the time frame provided by the song "Be Our Guest" Mrs. Potts would have had to have given birth to Chip as an inanimate object; however while

the objects clearly lust for one another (Lumière is constantly chasing the coquettish feather duster) we can see that they lack the necessary anatomy for reproduction. Mrs. Pots is quite clearly incapable of either conceiving or carrying a child, thus she could not have given birth to Chip while under the curse. What this suggests is that the objects-as-servants have been frozen in time, thus they are outside normal human experience. They imitate life, but they do not possess it, for all living things age and these characters cannot.

Another indicator of the significance of an imitation of life is the fact that, like the Beast in the Cocteau and Disney adaptations, Beauty is also occasionally divided into two parts. However, unlike the Beast, Beauty's other self is never alive, never real. She is always a mere imitation of life. Gilbert and Gubar would suggest that such division indicates the dual nature of woman as either angel or monster (19). The dual nature, as invented by both Carter and McKinley is an attempt to "kill the angel" and the "monster" in the house" (Gilbert and Gubar 17). In *Rose Daughter* McKinley creates an angel woman out of rose petals while Carter's "Tiger's Bride" provides perhaps the most interesting representation of an imitation of Beauty—a mechanical twin.

McKinley's rose simulacrum may be another side to Beauty, but unlike many of the symbolic halves of the Beast, she does not exist at the same time as Beauty. Her presence is not a symbol for finding a balance between the two halves of the self, but a suggestion of the inhumanity the role of angel forces upon a woman. The simulacrum's story is learned through the course of three retellings of a village folk tale. Each of these tales reveals different truths about the simulacrum, most significantly that this almost-woman has no name, and when she died, she returned to a rose. She has no heart of her own; instead the Greenwich (the old woman/fairy character McKinley creates) tells Beauty that she "took my own heart to beat in her breast" (McKinley, *Rose* 278). Without a heart of her own, the simulacrum cannot truly live. The Greenwich also reveals that the simulacrum was not even a real woman for while the "simulacrum could make love like a woman, but she could not bear a child" (McKinley, *Rose* 279). The simulacrum is pitiable for she shoulders the burden of women without any of the joys of womanhood such as love or having children. Her existence is confined by her lack of humanity.

Despite her lack of humanity or, as McKinley strongly suggests, because of it, this simulacrum is angelic in a way Beauty can only wish to be: "She was not human, the simulacrum, so she could not love and hate and wonder as humans can" (McKinley, *Rose* 214). The lack of personality indicates her angelic status. The simulacrum exists, but it does not live as a human does.

However, despite her many virtues, the simulacrum's story is a tragic one. In a fit of rage the evil sorcerer, her lover, destroys her and then brings the terrible curse down upon the Beast. McKinley uses her to suggest that women who live life for someone else, particularly a mother character, as signified by the Greenwich living vicariously through the simulacrum, are actually living a half or false life. The simulacrum is not even granted enough life to die properly: "The simulacrum was not dead, for she had never been alive" (McKinley, *Rose* 214). Instead of truly dying the simulacrum becomes a ghost, but again the poor simulacrum is not granted full status. "She is in some sense

a ghost, but in some sense she is not a ghost" (McKinley, *Rose* 225). The simulacrum does not possess enough humanity to truly exist in either life or death. McKinley's depiction of the simulacrum's unhappy half-life and eventual pointless half-death is put forth as evidence that living as an angel is a destructive role for a woman.

In contrast to McKinley's angel-character, Carter's creation is a monstrous twin who mimics Beauty. She is a mechanical doll that Beauty sees herself reflected in. She is described as follows:

a soubrette from an operetta, with glossy, nut-brown curls, rosy cheeks, blue, rolling eyes; it takes me a moment to recognize her, in her little cap, her white stockings, her frilled petticoats. She carries a looking glass in one hand and a powder puff in the other and there is a musical box where her heart should be; she tinkles as she rolls towards me on her tiny wheels. (Carter 172)

Carter's explicitness almost takes the punch out of her creation of the monstrous doll. She states clearly that the doll represents Beauty, saying, "My double...This clockwork twin of mine" (Carter 173) and finally, practically hitting the reader over the head with the parallelism, "had I not been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given her?"(Carter 176). Such statements are unnecessary as Carter clearly draws a strong parallel between the mechanical doll and Beauty. They act as one woman and, at first, Beauty is compelled by the doll's imitation of life: "As she succumbed to sleep, I had no option but to do so too. I dropped on the bed as if felled" (Carter 173). The parallelism between the two halves of Beauty, the woman and the doll, indicates the duality of the life that women often lead and harkens back to Gilbert and Gubar's idea that "for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness...called the 'Female Will'"(28). The fascinating aspect of Carter's overt parallelism is that, while the reader cannot help but know that these two characters are two sides of the same coin, Carter's description leaves the reader to come to the conclusion of which one is angel and which one is monster.

What is of greater interest than Carter's use of the parallelism between Beauty and the mechanical doll is Beauty's reassuming her own identity. Signifying her own internal awareness, Beauty no longer associates herself with the doll, saying "my maid, whose face was no longer the spit of my own..." (Carter 179). Finally Carter's Beauty does not just separate herself from the doll, she transfers her identity onto the doll: "I will dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to perform the part of my father's daughter" (Carter 179). Beauty's act suggests that the woman who Beauty was does not cease to exist once she discovers her desire to live a more primal life. Rather it suggests that she must transfer her identity onto another so that she may assume her new life as a beast.

Eventually, through her transformation into a beast, Beauty's choice reveals the significance of each character, woman and doll. Beauty herself descends into the monstrous by sloughing off her humanity and embracing a primal life while the doll picks up Beauty's half-life where Beauty left off. This transition, however, is more than just assuming the "mythic masks" so often imposed on women by male authors

(Gilbert and Gubar 17). The story transcends such stereotypes because Beauty-as-Beast is infinitely more sympathetic than the doll-as-woman. This suggests that the rigid gender roles women are confined to are truly monstrous, while women who embrace their primal, animalistic natures are to be lauded, while the woman-as-doll, a creature that does not even possess a heart, is already damned.

## CONCLUSION

Revised versions of "Beauty and the Beast" reveal both how the revisionist views the meaning of the story as well as what they judge to be the current needs of society. Such artists use symbols and rituals to signify the shift in meaning from version to version; from adaptation to adaptation. Each time a common symbol, such as the rose, or the magic mirror, is reinvented, the meaning of the story is also reinvented. The meanings inscribed upon the symbols are reflective of the revisionists' intent to recreate the precursor text. By including, adapting, or even deconstructing the traditional aspects of "Beauty and the Beast" a revisionist is transforming and manipulating its meaning.

Working with the notion that some fairy tales have persevered in our culture, avoiding obscurity and becoming cultural icons leads us to question why certain fairy tales survive, enjoying continuous popularity while others fade from public awareness. Using "Beauty and the Beast" as a representative of fairy tales and exploring this phenomenon has led me to the conclusion that certain fairy tales have survived, even flourished because of an interdependent relationship they enjoy with subsequent revisions and retellings of such fairy tales. In the case of "Beauty and the Beast," revisions make use of literary allusions, symbols and deconstruction to create an intertextual dimension of the stories that refer back to the modern adaptations' source or precursor text and even that story's precursor text. Considering this idea, it is important to examine "Beauty and the Beast" in light of its different incarnations; this story has been revised numerous times, indicating its significance to our society. As Zipes says, we copy the stories we wish to hold onto (*Myth* 8). The tenacity with which a society holds onto a story is an indication of the story's significance. Considering this idea, it then becomes clear that the volume of duplicate versions produced in our society in every era suggests the cultural importance of "Beauty and the Beast."

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And Angela one take, Beauty and the Beast, one take. Incredible. See more ».

As Robert Osborne states: "It's one of the Disney films that will last forever." He's so right. Like a true classic, this "tale as old as time" will be remembered as long as the other Disney animated features that began in the '30s.

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10 of 20 1987 "The Modern-Day TV Series. Belle in the Big Apple: Linda Hamilton is a Manhattan lawyer whose life is transformed when a nobleman-beast named Vincent (Ron Perlman) rescues her from an attack.

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Give valuable feedback to the author. The score ratings help other users find suitable scores. Tale as Old as Time. Michel Dikovec. pro. Beauty and The Beast Disney Alan Menken tale as old as time pdf. Tale as Old as Time. Pages. 2. You've seen Beauty and the Beast on stage, in film, and in books, but do you know how it first started, and the real tale of the Beast? Beauty and the Beast is a tale as old as time, and has been around since the 1700s. Authored by Gabrielle-Suzanne Bardot de Villeneuve, then expanded upon by Jeannie-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, it has enchanted us for years. You've seen this story on stage, in film, and in books, but do you know how it first started, and the real tale of the Beast? There was once a very rich merchant, who had six children, three sons, and three daughters; being a man of sense, he spared no cost for their education, but gave them all kinds of masters. His daughters were extremely handsome, especially the youngest. The concept of intertextuality is key to approaching fairy tales in a folklore and literature framework and, even more broadly, in a web of cultural practices that crosses media, genres, and languages. Tales mingle with one another, anticipating, evoking, interrupting, and supporting one another in unpredictable ways that have to do with each teller's and the storytelling's situation and [Show full abstract] purposes, the teller's story chest, the various discourses in which the tales participate, and the narratives that listeners/readers/viewers bring to them as well. Thus, if we follow Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, intertextuality is not a dialogue of... The story of Beauty and the Beast finds new life in this magical and imaginative retelling that's filled with romance and adventure. By the time her sixteenth birthday comes around, Belle feels more convinced than ever that she is being called by the wrong name. Unlike her older sisters Celeste and April, whose names suit them perfectly, Belle knows that she is not beautiful. She begs to be called by her given name, Annabelle—or even Anna for short—but to no avail. Her solace is her wood-carving hobby, and she longs to find the Heartwood tree: Legend has it that, when carved by the right hands, it can reveal the face of one's true love.