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# Beauty and the Beast: Across Cultures and Time.

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Beauty and the Beast: Across Cultures and Time

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**Beauty and the Beast: Across Cultures and Time**

**By: Bridgette Johnson**

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## Introduction

The tale of Beauty and the Beast has enchanted audiences since Lucius Apuleius wrote “Cupid and Psyche” in the second century in *The Golden Ass*. The idea of a beautiful woman falling in love with a man whom is hideous, or whom she is not allowed to look upon has stubbornly persisted into the twenty-first century, especially since Disney turned the story into an animated feature film in 1991.

Both Beauty and the Beast take different forms in different cultures and evolve even more when the classic tales are compared to modern retellings. “Modern retellings” are fairy tales that are based off of Beauty and the Beast that have had a first publication date occurring after 1970. “Classic tales” refers to all stories published before 1970, and most of these classics were published during the nineteenth century. Since the time for modern retellings is set in the years following the feminist movement of the 1960s, it allows for contemporary readers to see if this and other social movements had an impact on how the tales are told.

The Beast takes many forms across different cultures, often appearing as an animal that is common to the area where the tale is told though there are some exceptions like the Appalachian “Snowbear Whittington” where the beast is a white bear. The Beast is rarely beastly in both his appearance and actions, though one beast in the form a hog does eat his first two wives in the French Missouri “Prince White Hog.” The Beast is symbolic of the fears women would have about marriage, especially arranged marriage.

Beauty varies less from culture to culture, almost always the youngest daughter of three or more children, the most beautiful, and the most loved. Depending on the variant of the tale, Beauty will reveal her husband's beastly nature to someone and be forced to go on a quest to save him. In a fashion more well known to Western readers, Beauty often is granted leave from the Beast's palace to visit her father, like in Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont's version of the tale, but must return within a set amount of time or the Beast she will die. Beauty returns with only minutes to spare and saves the Beast, providing a bit of role reversal to the common trope of the damsel in distress yet still reinforcing patriarchal norms because Beauty decides to stay with the Beast.

The relationship between Beauty and the Beast is best understood when it is viewed as reflective of that of an arranged marriage. Beauty's father's willingness to allow her to go to the Beast in his place after he steals from the Beast, or his willingness to simply hand her over, is the same as a father handing his daughter over to a real husband in an arranged marriage. The character of Beauty being so willing reinforces gender and marriage norms along with adherence to the father's wishes. The character of the Beast is reflective of what women might fear from a husband who is a complete stranger but also reflects the possibility of the new husband being kind, generous, honest, and respectful.

The idea for Beauty and the Beast functioning as an arranged marriage was drawn from the work of Maria Tatar's introduction to the tale in *The Classic Fairy Tales* and Maria Warner's chapters on the tale in *From the Beast to the Blonde*. Both women mentioned how closely the fictional story mirrored real life events, which helped to structure the first section of the paper. Barbara Fass Leavy's *In Search of the Swan*

Maiden provided insight into how Beauty would function within the Beast's world, within a new environment. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantments* was consulted, but ultimately had no bearing because Bettelheim delved deeply into the psychology of fairy tales and the persistence of the Oedipus Complex, which stands in contrast to Beauty and Beast's relationship reflecting an arranged marriage. While Jack Zipes presented a wealth of knowledge of almost all aspect of fairy tales, his findings were not specific to Beauty and the Beast, or their relationship, except for an essay on Disney versions of fairy tales. However, since the Disney version was purposefully left out of discussion in this paper, his findings were not applicable though very interesting.

When moving from the classic tales to the modern tales, analytical scholarship specific to modern retelling was nonexistent. The only theories found were those functioning around the topic of the modern tales, which helped to explain the cultural shifts behind the tales, but not the tales themselves. The biggest shift both Beauty and Beast have endured is their roles in modern tales. Beauty has undergone a subtle yet significant change as modern authors choose not to make her beautiful. The modern Beauty is not ugly, but she is no longer considered undeniably beautiful by all who see her. Beauty can also become the Beast, by her own free will, and the Beast is sometimes not returned to his human form by his wife. The Beast can also be incredibly handsome, his true beastliness lurking behind his flawless façade.

Beauty and the Beast has endured for centuries and will continue to endure because of its timeless themes of doing anything for love and the necessity for seeing a person for who he or she truly is. Beauty and the Beast is unequivocally a tale as old time

and its ability to change as cultures change will allow the tale or preserve for as long as fairy tales are told.



**Part One**

**Classic Tales**

## Chapter One: The Beauty

The character of Beauty across different cultures does not vary as greatly as the Beast, but there are differences, especially in those tales considered “Questing Beauties” by Betsy Hearne in *Beauties & Beasts* (1993). The biggest differences in personalities are in comparison to Jeanne-Marie Leprince De Beaumont’s 1756 version. De Beaumont’s Beauty embodies the power of femininity to civilize an uncivilized world: selflessness, kindness, gentleness, while valuing respect, gratitude, and kindness in a partner above physical appearance. Though, when looking at a cross-cultural spectrum, many of the Beauties in other tales do end up enforcing the same notions, they are not as explicitly stated.

Many of the Beauties do not sacrifice herself for her father, but instead are forced to go because of a deal her father struck with the Beast. Often these tales begin with a father asking his daughters, most often three of them (though are stories that feature more), what they desire him to bring back to them after he returns from his trip. The oldest two generally ask for materialistic things—jewels and dresses—but the youngest, almost exclusively his favorite, typically asks for a type of flower or something else that is not a material possession. On the return trip home, without Beauty’s gift, the father gets lost or just happens to see the present Beauty desired, and meets the Beast. In De Beaumont’s tale, the father hears “a loud noise and there appeared a beast so horrible that he thought he would faint” (6).

After the Beast discovers the father's theft, it appears the Beast will kill him, but the father begs to be spared. He makes a deal with the Beast: in exchange for his life, he will give the Beast "whoever meets you first when you reach home" (Hearne 15). The father usually notes his apprehension at this because his youngest is usually the first to greet him, but as the lion in "The Singing Soaring Lark" points out "what first meets" (Hearne 61) him could "easily be a cat, or dog" (Hearne 61). This, of course, does not happen. Without fail, the youngest daughter rushes out to greet him and her fate is sealed. In only a few short days, she must leave her home to go live with a Beast, beginning the tale that is now so beloved. In a fashion similar to De Beaumont's Beast saying "I will gladly pardon you on the condition that one of your daughters come here voluntarily in your place" (6), the beast in the "The Princess and the Pig" promises to help the pasishah out of the mud if he promises to give his "youngest daughter as my bride" (Hearne 19).

As her name suggests, Beauty is almost always undeniably beautiful. There are tales where Beauty's physical appearance is not mentioned, but it is assumed she is rather beautiful, especially since, when she is given a name, it is almost always "Beauty." The Norwegian "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" describes the youngest daughter as being "so lovely there was no end to her loveliness" (Hearne 66). In the oldest variant, "Cupid and Psyche," Psyche is so beautiful that she rivals the beauty of Venus, the love goddess herself. In the Turkish "The Princess and the Pig," "the king has three daughters who are "each one more beautiful than the one before" (Hearne 18). De Beaumont's tale describes Beauty as being "so beautiful, so much loved" (Hearne 3) that the name literally clung to her. The trait of beauty across all the cultures signifies culturally that physical beauty is valued above all else in women, but this beauty also signifies

personality traits like being virtuous, kind, gentle, and selfless. Not only does a woman need to possess physical beauty, she must also possess the traits assumed to come with it.

In a tale about the regenerative power of love and seeing beyond physical appearance, it seems like a bit of a contradiction to have an undeniably beautiful maiden finding the beauty within a beast. It is understandably hard for Beauty to come to love the Beast, but it is not hard for the Beast to love Beauty because Beauty is beautiful. Beast does fall in love with Beauty's kindness, but he also must feel very grateful that the woman sent to him is beautiful almost beyond words. His Beauty could have ended up looking like a troll or an ogre or had some sort of deformity that made her less than perfect. If Beauty had been less than beautiful, the Beast could have needed to see past physical appearances.

The reasons beyond the apparent hypocrisy are cultural, societal, and symbolic. Culturally, the character of Beauty being beautiful, and Beauty finding happiness, implies that women need to be beautiful to find happiness. Being beautiful leads to finding a husband and finding a husband is how a woman finds happiness. Societally, the tale reinforces that women should admire men for their actions and not their looks, but for men it encourages them to look for a wife who is beautiful. A man, even if he is a beast, should not settle for a woman who is not beautiful, but a woman should never concern herself with a man's looks and should be willing to settle for the most hideous individual. Almost every version of Beauty and the Beast has Beauty seeing past the Beast's appearance to the kind, gentle, intelligent soul beneath the animal skin. She often breaks his curse and her reward for seeing past his beastliness is a handsome prince, giving both characters the coveted happily ever after. Beauty and Beast's marriage and happily every

after reinforces cultural norms and expectations of a woman finding happiness through a man, marrying him, and living with him until the day she dies. It also reflects society wishing to instill this belief in young women and men: young women to find a man and for young men to find a young woman to marry. Culturally and societally, Beauty and Beast's marriage reinforces and reflects marriage norms and patterns of a man marrying a woman. With marriage also comes the leaving of her father's home, no matter how close they may be.

Beauty has a strong sense of duty to her father in nearly all the tales from all cultures. When her older sisters refuse to go to the Beast, it is the youngest, Beauty, who agrees to go to the Beast to save her father's life. Exactly why Beauty is willing to give herself up for a father, who says that he loves her best, yet is willing to give over a daughter to a beast to pay for something he did is unclear. In "A Bunch of Laurel Blooms for a Present" the father says "he would rather die than do that" (Hearne 23) and in "The Fairy Serpent" the "poor man tried every argument he could think of" (Hearne 30) to release him without offering up a daughter and "could eat no supper" (Hearne 30) when he returned home. The father in "The Fairy Serpent" was afraid of what fate might befall his daughters if he died and they lost his protection, but he is alone in this way of thinking. De Beaumont's father character does not agree while the father in "The Princess and the Pig" willingly gives his daughter to save himself. If the father truly loved his daughter as much as he claimed, why not sacrifice his life for hers and spare her the fate of marrying a beast? The answer is in the relationship of Beauty and the Beast reflecting that of an arranged marriage.

The reflective nature of the agreement comes back into play in attempting to

understand such a decision. The relationship between Beauty and Beast in the classic tales is best understood when viewed as reflecting that of an arranged marriage. Beauty's father's decision to either give his daughter over to the Beast or to allow her to go to the Beast is expected and understood when viewing the relationship this way. Beauty's father hands her to the Beast in a similar way that a real life father would give a daughter to a husband to marry. The relationship as reflective of an arranged marriage also helps to reinforce gender ideals about women doing as her father wishes even if it is to go to a Beast.

The function of the Beast in the arranged marriage both reinforces and assuages any fear women might have about marriage, arranged or otherwise. While the Beast in the stories is literally a beast physically with animalistic qualities, in culture and society he symbolizes women's fear about her future husband. A woman entering into an arranged marriage may know very little or nothing about her future husband; she could have conjured up an image close to the way Beast is described. When the Beast first appears, he embodies every fear a woman could have about a husband. He is brutish in appearance; he demands a life to be given to him; he is uncivilized and uncouth; he may have no respect for his wife. He is an unknown, an Other, a potential threat. By the end of the story, he has alleviated the very same fears. In DeBeaumont's tale, the Beast gives Belle her own room, even placing a placard that says "Belle's Apartment" (Hearne 8) on the door of her room and "three months passed happily enough" (Hearne 10). Through his actions, the Beast has revealed himself to be a kind, gentle soul who desires nothing more than for Beauty to love him for who he is and not for his appearance. Though Beauty does feel that he is ugly, she decides that his "goodness of character, virtue,

unselfishness” (Hearne 11) has earned her respect, friendship, and her love. If she made him unhappy, she would regret it the rest of her life.

After Beauty vows to love Beast for the rest of her life, Beast becomes a beautiful Prince and makes Beauty his queen. Beauty has successfully civilized the Beast and by making him human through her love, she has brought him back into mainstreamed, cultured society. This also suggests that to be loved, one must be beautiful and that being loved can make one beautiful. The Beast “becoming human” means that he loses his ugly physical appearance, becomes beautiful, and his physical appearance now matches his personality. Symbolically, Beauty is telling women that a husband, no matter how beastly he may first appear, has a handsome prince lurking beneath. The way to conquer the Beast is to remain faithful, virtuous, kind, and obedient. As long as women embody those traits, they will be rewarded with happiness, with a husband.

Sometimes, however, the nature of the marriage is less symbolic and more explicit. In “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” the father is happy to give his daughter to a “great big White Bear” (Hearne 67) who promises to make him “as rich as you are now poor” (Hearne 67) if he only gives the bear his youngest daughter. The father spares no thought of the loss of his daughter to the bear thinking only that he needs to talk to her first, though in truth he has already given his word to the bear. The youngest daughter at first says no and refuses to change her answer, forcing her father to tell the bear to return next Thursday. In order to change her mind, her father tells of all the riches they will gain if she agrees to go with the bear. Eventually, the daughter thinks better of it and agrees to go with the bear. Though her actions are different from other tales in which Beauty goes willingly and creates Beauty as an unmaterialistic character, the daughter

does agree to go partially because of a sense of duty to her father. If she truly did not wish to go, not even for riches, she would not have acquiesced to the will of her father.

The Beauty in “East of the Sun, West of the Moon” is not as selfless as some of the others, and she is also interested in wealth, a feature lacking in many other Beauties. In fact, this Norwegian tale is a departure from the primary traditions, where Beauty is an unmaterialistic character. When their father asks what Beauty and her sisters want him to bring them back in DeBeumont’s “Beauty and the Beast”, “The Singing Soaring Lark,” “The Princess and the Pig,” “The Enchanted Tsarevitch,” and “A Bunch of Laurel Blooms for a Present,” her sisters ask for material things—silk dresses, pearls, diamonds, jewels—anything that is expensive and shiny. Beauty inevitably asks for an item that is not materialistic, usually a flower, though it sometimes something else from nature, like a lark. Yet it is Beauty who is rewarded with riches. Even in his beastly form, the Beast is most often very wealthy, his palace filled with riches, gold, and jewels. Beauty readily accepts her new wealth and appears to have no problems adjusting to a life of such finery. Beauty’s adjustment reveals that the apparent reward for not desiring material things is enough money to buy any material possession she desired. Because she saw past the Beast’s appearance, she has been rewarded with gold, money, and material possessions, reinforcing the value of material possessions but only for those who do not desire them.

The Missouri French “Prince White Hog” is a notable exception to this tradition, not only in the comical yet vicious Beast as a hog who eats his first two wives, but that the Beast has no castle in which to live. Beauty must sleep with the hog in his stone pen outside in the yard. Of course, the hog turns into a handsome prince when they are alone, helping to assuage any misgivings the new bride has about her husband. Yet still, Beauty



is a “symbolic outsider... the *other* and marriage demanded and intimate involvement in a world never quite her own” (Levy 2). Beauty is in a world not quite her own because she has entered the world of the Beast. She does not know how or if the rules will change as she transitions from living with her father to living with a man who is or will be her husband. This seems to be particularly true for a Beauty who is marrying a Beast who is an animal or for a poor Beauty moving into a palace surrounded by wealth she could never have dreamed of. This builds on the idea of Beauty and the Beast’s marriage being reflective of that of an arranged marriage. Any girl entering into a marriage, arranged or otherwise, will most likely feel like an outsider for the first few months when she is in the company of her in-laws and sometimes even with her husband in their new home.

Beauty reflects the values society and culture enforced, but she also represents the values society would wish to reinforce. Many of the characteristics Beauty embodies are traits that women would have, but just as many are traits that society would wish women embodied. The hybrid of Beauty both reflecting and reinforcing societally acceptable behaviors for women is significant because it shows what is valued in society, especially for women. The character of Beauty can represent the many facets of femininity, but those traits exhibited are most often that of selflessness, virtuousness, kindness, and women’s supposedly innate ability to see past physical appearances and peer into the beauty within. Yet, Beauty also holds the power to kill and save the beast. Without Beauty, the Beast will perish. Without Beauty, he is destined to stay a beast forever.

## Chapter Two: The Beast

The form of the Beast varies dramatically from culture to culture, most often taking the form of an animal that is common in whatever culture the tale is being told in: “a formless, winged snake with three heads” (Hearne 15), “an ugly old pig” (Hearne 19), a giant “toadfrog” (Hearne 23), “a great big White Bear” (Hearne 67), and a woman with a “face [that] seemed almost like an animal... yellowing tusks for teeth... twisted and deformed” (Hearne 134). What the Beast does share across cultures is that his Beauty comes to him through some fault of her father’s (usually taking a gift from the Beast’s home), and he is not as beastly as he appears. There are tales wherein the Beast eats his wife; more abundant, however, are the tales that depict the Beast as someone who is misunderstood, cursed, and lonely. In “Cupid and Psyche,” “The Serpent and the Grape-Grower’s Daughter,” “Whitebear Whittington,” and “Bull-of-all-the-Land,” the Beast is not a Beast every minute of every day. Many Beasts have the capability to be a Beast during the day and a man at night and vice versa. Most often, the decision to change the Beast’s appearance is left with his new wife and the bride chooses to have him as a Beast during the day and a man at night. This gives Beauty a sense of autonomy, but it is not true autonomy because it is agency given to her by a male. Beauty receives agency, but it is still within the confines of a patriarchal structure and culture.

It is understandable why she would be given this choice, especially since she barely knows her husband. For a girl who has just married a complete stranger, and one who is in the form of animal, and knowing that the marriage must be consummated, the choice to have her husband be a man at night is obvious even though it will leave her

very lonely during the day. In the tales where the Beast does not have that option, or does not tell his wife such an option is a possibility, the readers are left to imagine how intercourse occurs between the two. In few tales it is specifically mentioned, most only hinting on it, or acknowledging sex only when it must be revealed that Beauty is pregnant or has already given birth to a child. Beauty and Beast's marriage is reflective of that of an arranged marriage and Beauty's fears are similar to what a bride entering into an arranged marriage would feel. As Marina Warner notes in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Beauty's father "hands over Belle to the Beast in exactly the same kind of legal and financial transaction as an arranged marriage, and she learned to accept it" (317). As Maria Tatar notes in her introduction to Beauty and the Beast in *The Classic Fairy Tales*, "it [Beauty and the Beast] attempted to steady the fears of young women... to brace them for an alliance that required them to affect their own desires and to submit to the will of a "monster" (28).

Viewing the tale as reflective of an arranged marriage, common in many parts of the world in past centuries and in current times, Beauty's lack of rebellion against the marriage is understandable. Women were expected to marry someone of their father's choosing, even if he was a complete stranger. Hopefully, the father would have spent some time picking a suitable husband for his daughter, and the two would have been able to meet before marriage, but even so, the new husband could turn out to be truly beastly, not in physical appearance, but in his actions. At the same time, he could turn out to be a kind, gentle, loving husband who could never wish to cause his wife distress. The Beast ultimately represents the second option, fulfilling a trait typical of fairy tales, and most literature, in that it creates a safe space for the reader, of whatever age, to explore his or

her fears and explore the options he or she would have if faced with a similar situation.

These fears and possibilities can be seen in the different versions of Beauty and the Beast along with the fear the bride will not be able to please her new husband. In the tales where Beauty must go on a quest after disobeying her husband, usually by revealing his true form to a family member or looking upon him or touching his animal skin, he leaves her. Beauty must complete several impossible tasks, and it is only with supernatural help that she can be reunited with her husband, who is usually only days or hours away from marrying another woman. In the "Black Bull of Norrway," Beauty must serve a blacksmith for seven years who will then make a pair of steel shoes to climb the glass hill, which is obstructing her path from reaching her husband. In "The Singing Soaring Lark," Beauty follows her husband, who is in the form of a dove after a ray of candlelight struck him, for seven years "never looking about her or resting" (Hearne 63). Even after the seven years, Beauty suddenly loses her husband and must have help from the sun, wind, and moon to try and find her husband, and must also "strike a dragon" (Hearne 63) to return the dragon to its human form as a princess. The dragon is fighting with a lion, which the south wind tells her is her husband.

After striking the dragon, Beauty is to fly on the back of griffin to reach the castle where her husband now is. Except that the princess grabs Beauty's husband and the two of them fly away on the griffin. Beauty eventually discovers the place where "both of them were living together" (Hearne 64) and must use the presents the winds, sun, and moon had given her to gain entrance into the bridegroom's bed chamber to speak privately with him. Of course, things do not go as planned since the prince is given a "sleeping potion" (Hearne 64). It isn't until the third night that Beauty is able to speak to

her husband and “they lived henceforth happily until their death” (Hearne 65).

While Beauty going on a quest subverts the notion of the dutiful wife who stays home, it also reinforces patriarchal values. With the exception of “The Singing Soaring Lark,” Beauty is only going on a quest to save her husband because she disobeyed; all her further actions and consequences can be viewed as a warning to wives to obey their husbands, especially considering fairy tales’ history of inserting a moral into the story. In this aspect, it sets the Beast up as an almost tyrant, a man who is unwilling to forgive his wife without her completing arduous tasks. The Beast can represent men in general, in the various cultures at various historical points. In men, “external appearances, and even charm, count for nothing” (Tatar 27) yet Beauty possess all of this, but they supposedly do not matter. No original tale is told from the point of view of the Beast, so it is unclear if the Beast is in love with Beauty because of the essence of her or because of her undoubtedly pleasing physical appearance.

Beauty in DeBeaumont’s tale says that a husband does not need “good looks nor great wit” (Hearne 11) to make a woman happy, but it is “character, virtue, and kindness” (Hearne 11) that please and satisfy a wife. Thus, in this case, physical appearance matters naught as long as the man is kind and virtuous. While that is a nice ideal to have, it is not expressed in many tales that men should be held to such a standard also. There are even tales where the woman is the beast, but they are few. Two different Scottish tales—“The Laidley Worm of Spindelston Hughes” and “Kemp Owyne”—have a woman who is cursed by her jealous stepmother and must have the kiss of a man to return her to her rightful state. In “The Laidley Worm” the princess is turned into a loathsome dragon for no other reason than that the queen is envious. In “Kemp Owyne,” the princess is more

monstrous when her “breath grew strange, her hair grew long, /And twisted thrice about the tree, /And all the people, far and near, /thought that a savage beast was she” (Hearne 144).

While these tales offer a gender switch and argue that men, just like women, should value inner goodness, the characters in the stories do not get to know one another as Beauty and the Beast do in other versions. In “The Laidley Worm” it is actually her brother, not a potential husband, who saves her. “The Laidley Worm” is based off of “Kemp Owyne” so it is possible the male in that tale is also her brother, which does not allow for an interpretation that men can and should see beyond a woman’s physical appearance. Assumedly, a brother will love his sister no matter what she looks like. Though their love is not romantic, the stories still reveal implicit views on beauty. After the beast in “Kemp Owyne” is kissed she is transformed into “as fair a woman as fair could be” (Hearne 114). The implicit message in this tale is that no one will desire someone who is ugly, who is a beast, and the only way to be accepted is to become beautiful. This same ideals applies to another story, “Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady,” which features a female beast.

An Arthurian Romance, “Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady” has a female Beast who exercises great control over her own life. She is a very active character who saves a king’s life, outwits a sorcerer, wins a husband worthy of her, and is transformed by him while she reforms him. The Beast, Dame Ragnell has a “pushed-in nose, and a few yellowing tusks for teeth. Her figure was twisted and deformed... no tongue could tell the foulness of that lady” (Hearne 134). Sir Gawain must help King Arthur solve the riddle of what women desire most to have his life spared by Sir Gromer. Dame Ragnell holds the

key to Arthur's life, so Sir Gawain decides to marry her to gain the answer to save his king's life. Ragnell tells him what women desire most is "to rule over any man" (Hearne 136).

With that answer, Arthur's life is saved and Dame Ragnell begins to plan her very public wedding, despite others insisting on a smaller, private affair. Queen Guinevere "begged Dame Ragnell to be married in the early morning" (Hearne 137), but Dame Ragnell wanted to marry openly with the fanfare of any lady marrying a knight. After the wedding ceremony, Dame Ragnell appears to Sir Gawain as a most beautiful lady, and she informs her husband that he had only half broken the spell her stepmother cast on her. Just like the male beats, Dame Ragnell can be foul by day and fair by night or vice versa and her husband must choose. Yet he does not choose. Sir Gawain feels that is far too important of a choice for him to make. He tells her "The choice in your hands" (Hearne 138), giving his new bride dominion over her own body. With his decision to make her choose which way she wishes to be, the rest of the spell is broken now that she has a husband who had given her "sovereignty of all his body and goods" (Hearne 138). Now, he will have her fair both day and night.

Whatever form the Beast takes in any culture, male or female, the Beast is somewhat dependent on someone else to break his or her spell. Most often the Beast is completely dependent on Beauty, giving her the power to save him, in a reversal of the typical damsel in distress. This could be viewed as pro-feminist and giving Beauty agency and autonomy, but it is a limited autonomy and agency. Beauty does get to decide, but she is not free from the Beast. She is given a choice, but her choices are limited. Even when the Beast is a female, she does not feel like she is powerless,

especially in “Sir Gawain” where she is in complete control of her life. The Beast, when it is a male, can represent the fears and anxieties women had about getting married, especially if the marriage was arranged. The Beast also represents a way for a few Beauties the chance at a different, and sometimes better, life than the one she is used to, like the Beauty in “East of the Sun and West of the Moon.” The Beast, his monstrosity, is always in flux, changing to meet different cultural expectations at different times in history.



**Part Two**

**Modern Tales**

## Chapter One: The Beauty

With the advent of mass media, it is no longer rare or shocking to see a breathtaking beautiful woman. Every time a person turns on a television, looks at a magazine, drives past a billboard, he or she is bombarded with images of beautiful people. Rarely does a modern audience pause and marvel at beauty. It is the less than perfect, the plain that now gives pause and generates reflection. This influx of beautiful images is reflected in the modern version of Beauty, who now considers herself plain and sometimes ugly. Beauty's journey has shifted from going on a quest to gain back the trust of her husband after betraying him to that of a bildungsroman, to a journey of the self to discover who she is. The audience for the tales has also shifted from being written for adults to very specifically being written for children and adolescents.

Girls, boys, men, and women have grown increasingly more self-conscious about their bodies in the past two decades, so much so that the American Medical Association changed its policies concerning the use of Photoshop in advertising. They suggested working with those concerned with children and adolescent health to “discourage the altering of photographs in a manner that could promote unrealistic expectations of appropriate body image” (ama-assn.org). In a world where eight-year-olds associate being overweight with being inferior and being thin as being superior (Hill & Palin), having a female protagonist who is considered to be beautiful beyond words does not resonate with a modern, adolescent audience. More appealing is the idea of a more plain, insecure Beauty. Though the modern tales maintain the name “Beauty,” for its cultural

resonance, now it is a nickname, often bestowed at a young age when the protagonist does not properly understand what beauty is.

The modern tales are also still reinforcing happiness through marriage, through men, though they are cloaking the ideal in Beauty's journey of self-discovery. This may be because authors do not wish to alter a tale so drastically in not giving Beauty and Beast a happily ever after. The authors provide a first person narrative so that it is not marriage that is reinforced, but love, acceptance, kindness, and respect from another individual is emphasized and marriage happens to be the end result offsetting the reinforcing of outdated models of happiness being achieved only by marriage.

It is also important to note that retelling of fairy tales are often not written for adults as many of the original tales were, especially those of the Brothers Grimm. Each retelling is written for a specific audience with the majority falling into the genre of Young Adult/Teen, which is generally considered to be for readers ages twelve to eighteen. The shift in readership accounts for many of the other cultural shifts in the story because authors are now catering their stories and their Beauty to a modern teenager, who is usually female, and have to take into account modern values. Teenage girls will not be interested nor understand the relationship between Beauty and Beast as that of reflective of an arranged marriage, but will understand a Beauty who is insecure and dislikes herself. What will resonate most deeply with a modern, teenage audience is a Beauty who comes to love herself by loving someone else, by seeing her beauty as someone else sees it.

In Robin McKinley's *Beauty* (1978), Beauty's real name is Honour, but she dislikes it and says to her father "I'd rather be called Beauty" (McKinley 5). The name sticks though Beauty does not become beautiful. She feels she is plain, especially in comparison with her older sister's undeniable beauty. Beauty's oldest sister Grace grew into a "beautiful and profoundly graceful young girl... her eyes were long-lashed and as blue as a clear May morning after rain" (McKinley 2). Beauty's older sister, Hope, has hair the color of "rich chesnut-brown, and her big eyes turned a smokey green" (McKinley 3). Beauty describes herself as having hair "neither blond nor brown" and eyes of a "muddy hazel" while she also "thin, awkward... with big long-fingered hands and huge feet" and with skin "broke out in spots" (McKinley 3-4). Beauty shuns the company of other, preferring books and her horse, Greyheart, to everything else. Beauty has a dream to be a scholar, though women rarely ever do such a thing in her time (which is most likely in the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century though a specific date is never given). Her desire to be a scholar stems from being the clever sister because she feels being clever will make up for her lack of physical appeal.

In Cameron Dokey's *Belle*, Beauty's proper name is Annabelle, but she is called Belle, which is French for "beauty." Like McKinley's "Beauty," Belle does not consider herself beautiful and feels even plainer when compared to her older sisters. Belle sees her older sister, April, as possessing a type of "ever glowing light" that causes her hair to glimmer in the night, "like a spill of golden coins" (Dokey 32). Her oldest sister, Celeste, has a beauty that makes one "look once, then look again, as if to make certain you hadn't missed anything the first time around" (Dokey 33). Dokey's Belle makes distinction between "beauty" and "Beauty," claiming that her sisters possess "Beauty" while she can

only ever to catch a glimpse of “beauty” in herself. Belle takes her insecurities to an extreme by refusing to attend any social functions for years, only seeing her family and their servants because she feels herself so plain that no one should be forced to see her. Despite this, she does not ever use the term “ugly” to describe herself though that is undeniable how she feels. While her refusal to leave her home is extreme, it is an action that many teenage girls reading the book will relate to the desire to do the same.

Alex Flinn’s *Beastly* is a rare tale published in modern times where the setting is actually in modern time, sometimes in the early 2000s, judging by the mentions of MySpace and an Internet chat room. The novel is told from the Beast’s point of view, instead of Belle’s, making it a further rarity in not only re-telling but also in the young adult genre where first person female points-of-view are abundant. Flinn depicts the Beast when he was a normal high school freshman named Kyle Kingsbury and follows his transformation into the Beast after he plays a trick on a weird, Goth girl in class who is actually a witch in disguise. Kyle is the typical, rich, spoiled, blonde-haired blue-eyed hero of the school who thinks about no one except himself. His Beauty, Lindsey, is a girl he felt sorry for when he was human because she was poor and attending his school on a scholarship. With pale skin, freckles, red hair and braces when they first meet she stands in contrast to Kyle’s girlfriend, Sloan, who is blonde-haired, blue-eyed, tall, thin, and just as rich and shallow as Kyle. *Beastly* is more about the Beast’s transformation from a shallow high school kid, to a beast covered in fur with claws, to a kind, compassionate, empathetic young man than it is Lindsey’s ability to see past his beastliness.

In this tale, neither party would be considered to be universally attractive but they both come to love each other, and Lindsey breaks the curse. For a modern audience,

especially any girl reading the story, Lindsey accomplishes what many girls dream of: dating the hottest, most popular, richest boy in school. She is no longer invisible, no longer picked on, but has won the affection of the most eligible boy in school without having to compromise her own beliefs because she desired him in spite of all this.

Though Beauty is no longer the physical beauty as she was in many of the classic tales, the theme of true beauty lying on the inside is still inscribed in the modern tales, especially in the young adult genre when adolescents are often at their most vulnerable. The three authors mentioned all mentioned in an author's note their familiarity with other versions of *Beauty and the Beast*, particularly de Beaumont's now canonical tale. While modern readers most likely give little thought to a moral or message book, the modern young adult retellings serve much of the same purpose of de Beaumont's tale. The authors wish to impress on their reader that their physical appearance is not the most important aspect of their person, nor is it essential to gaining a boyfriend nor getting married. What is most important is what is inside a person, how he or she treats others, and what good he or she might do in the world. The belief is still strongly held and told that true Beauty is on the inside.

One distinction that separates the modern tales from the classic tales is the absence of a Beauty who goes on a quest to save her love. None of the modern tales marketed as a retelling of "Beauty and the Beast" features a plot similar to the "Cupid and Psyche," "The Singing, Soaring Lark," "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," "Whitebear Whittington," and others where the Beauty reveals the Beast's nature to her family and suffers greatly for it. The Beauty in each of these tales must go on a quest and face numerous trials in order to regain her love. The aspect most similar in the modern

tales to the classic tales is that the Beast allows Beauty to return to her home to visit her family with strict instruction to return in a certain timeframe or he will die. Beauty always returns in the last moments possible to save her Beast's life.

It appears to be a contradiction for a modern tale attempting to represent a modern, intelligent, independent, strong girl would not depict her protagonist as someone who could take on impossible tasks like climbing a class hill or wearing out a pair of steel shoes as the questing beauties did in the original tales. However, a girl risking her life to save her husband might not resonate with readers as much as a protagonist who is discovering who she is and growing into adulthood. Beauty's quest to save her love has turned into a journey of self-discovery to find her place in an adult world so very different from the safe environment of her family and childhood. Even when faced with troubles as a child, such as her father losing all of his fortune, the environment was a familiar, comfortable one, and she knew the people she was living with. By moving in with the Beast, an absolute stranger, Beauty enters an entirely new, foreign environment, into an adult world that all adolescents will eventually have to partake in.

What they can see and relate to is a protagonist who is struggling to find her place in the world as nearly all the modern Beauties do. Lindsey in *Beastly* does not fit in at school with the rich, popular kids nor does she fit in at home with her drug addicted father; Beauty in McKinley's *Beauty* often feels out of place with her sisters; Beauty in Dokey's *Belle* feels so out of place in her world that she refuses to leave her home. Yet all three characters find their place with the Beast in his home. While living with the Beast, each character finds her place in the world, not only in the Beast's world, but begins to view herself as others view her and becomes happy with her life.

Whether it was intended or not, the modern tales have sought to fix some of hypocrisy evident in many versions of the tale, especially De Beaumont's, where Beauty is beyond beautiful yet it is she who can see the beauty inside the Beast. By having a more average looking Beauty, the issue is resolved. The tale of Beauty and the Beast has moved from extolling the benefits of traditional femininity of caring, patience, and purity to telling the story of one young woman's maturation. Beauty and the Beast, while still continuing many elements and traditions are the classic tales, has become a bildungsroman, following the growth of Beauty from that of a young child into adolescence and finally into adulthood. The modern tales are not focused on Beauty's journey to seeing past the Beast's looks, but are centered around Beauty's inner conflict and turmoil and discovering who she is. Her journey is a journey that nearly every girl or woman reading the modern tales will go through or has already gone through.



## Chapter Two: The Beast

The Beast has undergone a massive transformation from the original tales. The Beast has retained an animalistic aspect, usually that of a vague four-legged mammal like a bear or a wolf. He can walk upright as any human can though sometimes he does run on all fours and howl at the moon. He continues to be separate from society, locked away in a huge castle or mansion, cursed to live like a beast until a Beauty can love him as he is and break the curse. While that is similar to the original tales, Beast is now able to be either male or female, and when the Beast is a female the journey to becoming a Beast is liberating. With the rise of retellings in young adult literature and the popularity of the first person narrative, the mind of the beast can be explored through the Beast, with the exception of Kyle in *Beastly*, does not enter into a journey of the self as Beauty does. The Beast no longer functions to symbolize and assuage women's fear about marriage, but represents the darker parts of all humans, perhaps especially for women, for Beauty. Where the classic tales had Beast becoming human to join Beauty's society, now Beauty becomes a beast to join Beast's society.

The Beast is also able to be physically handsome with his bestiality lurking beneath his handsome veneer. Tanith Lee's short story "The Beast," published in *Ruby Slippers, Golden Tears* (1996) features a Beauty—Isobel—who unlike other modern adaptations is beautiful and a Beast who is handsome. The Beast—Vessavion—is under no curse and has no fur or claws. He is extremely wealthy, handsome, and slightly aloof from society. He collects the finest possessions that could ever be owned, ancient

manuscripts, unknown paintings by the greatest artists, and his latest greatest possession in the story is the African Bible, which Beauty's father gives to the man as a "gift" while he and Isobel dine with Vessavion, but what the father actually wants is an amber rose the Beast owns, which Vessavion gives to his daughter just as her father desired. Vessavion and Isobel begin to date and after eight meetings they agree to marry.

Their relationship seems to progress smoothly and they both seem mostly content though Isobel does begin to wonder where her handsome husband disappears to for hours every few days. Isobel dismisses the idea of him cheating, but when he refuses to tell her what he does, she enters the one room in his castle that she has never been in and discovers his secret. Inside the room she finds a "lustrous plait of red hair held in claws of gold... white teeth scattered... two eyes gleaming in the crystal of protective fluid... one finger with a tarnished wedding ring...the solitary foot. And—more" (Lee, 30).

Vessavion is obsessed with perfection in humans and sees it as an injustice when an otherwise ugly person possesses some aspect of perfect beauty. He stalks them and cuts off the beauty to place in his collection of other rare, beautiful things. Isobel is understandably appalled and leaves him after which Vessavion dies. When Isobel returns to his home several months later, she finds him dead with "the face of a beast" (Lee 32). Vessavion's transformation was not to stop looking like a beast, but for his inner bestiality to emerge on his outside after his lover discovered his horrendous secret.

This transformation reflects the same ideal as expressed in the original tales, but with an opposite meaning. The original tales told readers to look beyond physical appearance to find the beauty within; a person's personality, not his or her looks, was

most important. What was found underneath was beauty, kindness, generosity, and virtue. The same concept applies to Lee's story, but with a drastically different outcome. Isobel sees past Vessavion's physical perfection to the animal inside him, to his inner Beast. Lee's story offers no saving grace or redemption, but the knowledge that individuals can have dark, lurking dangerous beasts inside and no one in society is any the wiser. The shift may have occurred because more and more people recognize an inner bestiality and though Vessavion is never violent toward Isobel, he can fit the mold of the outwardly perfect boyfriend, husband, or partner, but who, in secret, beats his family and wife. Vessavion is literally a serial killer who lived and interacted everyday with non-violent people while killing ugly people who happened to possess one beautiful physical quality.

Lee's description of Vessavion offers no concrete details, leaving what he actually looks like up to the imagination of the reader as is common in both the classic and modern versions of the tale. The Beast in McKinley's *Beauty* is undeniably animalistic, but even his animalistic aspects are downplayed. His claws are envisioned more as long, sharp fingernails rather than the true powerful claws of an animal. He walks upright and dresses in human clothes, most likely to make Beauty feel more comfortable and to mask his animal characteristics though he does mention that it took him a decade to be able to walk upright. Alex Flinn's beast in *Beastly* is oddly the most animalistic of the modern beasts actually described as having claws and sharper, canine teeth. He repeatedly howls at the moon like the wolf he now is and does run on all fours on a few occasions also. An important aspect of the differences is whose point of view the story is told through. *Beastly* is one of the few tales told through the Beast's eyes, so his description of himself may be exaggerated just as Beauty's description of the Beast in other stories is perhaps

under exaggerated as she begins to fall in love with him. In *Beauty*, concrete descriptions of the Beast's appearance are not given until Beauty falls into a routine of companionship with him. Before that, she could not bear to look at him.

Both McKinley's and Flinn's Beast stand in contrast to Lee's because they offer a more traditional conception of the Beast where his outward appearance is not indicative of his inward goodness in line with the classic tales. Flinn's *Beastly* is apart from other modern retelling also because it is not a bildungsroman for Beauty, but for Beast. Kyle Kingsbury, the Beast, was more like Vessavion before he turned into a beast—the hottest boy in school, but a wretched, selfish person. Once he becomes a Beast, an outsider, he learned that it is not material possessions or looks that make a person worthy, but how they treat other people. The same can be said for McKinley's Beast. In *Beauty*, the Beast was cursed for his arrogance and forced to live as Beast until someone could love him in spite of his appearance. The result of the classic tales has been turned on their head; the sentiment is the same, but the result is different. It is still inside what matters most, but no longer does a handsome prince equate with a handsome personality. The shift most likely has occurred with more and more individuals striving for unattainable perfection, tricking people into thinking he or she is perfect, while the beast within is hidden beneath a trapdoor, unleashed only in privacy. If anything, the modern stories are warning girls and women not to be tricked by charms, flattery, good looks, and money. No matter his appearance, it is what is inside him that matters most.

Two tales that take a different approach are Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" and Francesca Lia Block's "Beast," where the Beauty becomes a beast. Block's Beast is not adequately described other than that he often runs on all fours in the woods. In

Carter's short story, the beast is a tiger, oddly specifically described, but it is not the Beast who undergoes a transformation. The tiger's tongue "ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world... My earrings turned back to water... I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur" (Carter 67). The Beauty has now become the Beast. Beauty's story is no longer of discovering the beauty beneath the Beast's appearance, but discovering the Beast within herself.

This theme plays out in a collection of short stories by Francesca Lia Block, published in *The Rose and the Beast* published for young adults, in a short story titled "Beast" where the Beauty becomes like the Beast. In "Beast," Beauty willingly goes to the Beast's home, not only to save her father's life after he stole a rose from the Beast, but because "secretly, without even knowing it herself, she had been waiting for a Beast to go to" (Block 184). Though Beauty claims she wants to go the Beast, once she comes within sight of the Beast's house, she becomes afraid. She'd "had so little time to feel herself, without the weight of her sisters' jealousy, her father's love. She wanted more... Now she was going into another locked place" (Block 185-186).

Beauty's transformation into a Beast begins almost immediately as she stoops over her plate and licks it "like a wild animal" (Block 187). When Beauty awakes from falling asleep, she finds she has been undressed and it is shortly revealed it is the Beast who undressed her. Despite this, Beauty wishes to run with him in the woods until they are both exhausted, and she wants "to lie against his warm, heaving side and sleep" (Block 188). Beauty has met the Beast halfway, becoming more like him instead of seeing his goodness beneath his ghastly appearance for him to become more like her. Carter and Block have both taken the approach that Beauty becoming Beastly is

liberating and a type of sexual awakening, especially in Block's with Beauty's desire to lay with the Beast and her acceptance that he undressed her.

By becoming like the Beast, Beauty is defying gender roles were she is dutiful housewife, full of kindness, virtue, and graciousness that allows her to see past the Beast's appearance. It is not that Beauty does not possess those qualities, but these qualities are not necessary for Beauty to remain desirable to the Beast. The Beast no longer exists as the Other and less so of women's fear in marrying and leaving home, especially if the marriage was arranged. By Beauty becoming more like the Beast, she both gains and loses some of her autonomy. By becoming more Beastly, she gains power because it is her choice to change, but anytime a choice is made something else must be given up in return to potentially gain something. By the Beauty becoming a Beast, she melds her identity with his, losing part of herself to better understand and be a part of his world. These tales that feature Beauty becoming the beast fit in with the idea that Beauty and the Beast has morphed into a bildungsroman for the character of Beauty, and rarely, that of the Beast like in Alex Flinn's *Beastly*. Beauty becoming the Beast is part of the maturation process because by becoming the Beast she is both literally and symbolically recognizing the beast within herself, peering into the dark shadows of her personality. Beauty is recognizing what Jung calls the Shadow self, the parts of personality that one "rejects or remains ignorant of the least desirable aspects" (Young-Eisendrath 319).

Where once thinking of the Beast almost invariably brought up an image of a male covered in fur or some other sort of animal skin, no such assumption can be made going into a reading of a modern version. Storytellers have reclaimed and reformed the

story for a new generation with different values living in a different time than its literary predecessors. The tales have been reclaimed to allow both genders to recognize the parts inside of them that society may not wish them to acknowledge like a woman being able to be free and wild and a man being able to be kind, generous, and vulnerable. The modern stories also serve as a warning to judge a person based on his or her appearance. Unlike the original tales, what is underneath is not always beauty and kindness. Lying beneath a handsome appearance can be a beast; beneath a beastly appearance can be kindness. If a person acts beastly and arrogant, eventually their outside will begin to mirror their inside and it is only through learning to treat others with kindness, dignity, and respect that a beastly person can find someone to love them despite their faults. The beastliness is more subjective now, more open to interpretation, and able to be claimed by both genders.

## Epilogue

Beauty and the Beast have both changed drastically and remarkably stayed the same in the centuries since a version of the tale first appeared. While some authors like to throw the tale on its head by having Beauty become the Beast or having the Beast handsome, still at play is the theme that a person's physical appearance is not nearly as important as his or her actions. What is most important is how a person treats other people, not how beautiful or ugly he or she is. Beauty and Bestiality can coexist in every living person.

The tale of Beauty and the Beast is no longer about extolling the virtues of femininity, assuaging women's fears about marriage, or detailing the redemptive power of love, though the latter continues to be a common theme. Beauty and the Beast has morphed into a bildungsroman for Beauty and at times for the Beast also. Beauty has changed from the most loved, the most beautiful daughter and maiden into a more modern young girl who is insecure with herself and her body. She is someone who might be overlooked by other people and may not consider her worthy of special attention. Beauty and the Beast has changed into a bildungsroman, into a journey, because the target audience for such stories are all on a journey of their own. Though they may be seeking different things, heading to different locations, be a different stages in their life, each person reading the story is searching for something and can see a piece of their life, their struggle, their journey in both Beauty and Beast.

However, this journey also reinforces heteronormative, patriarchal values as Beauty marries Beast. Beauty has a choice—to return to the Beast—but the ending of the story reveals that her choice is supposed to be the correct choice. The correct choice is to



stay with the Beast, to marry him. Beauty always has a romantic relationship with the Beast; there is yet to be a story that features Beauty and Beast having a platonic relationship. Without a story with a platonic friendship, Beauty will remain with the Beast. There is nothing inherently wrong with choosing marriage, but unless other options are presented in modern tales, young women and men are both being told they possess a limited autonomy that will end in marriage. A future other than marriage is not acceptable. Though individuals can see a piece of their selves in Beauty and Beast, until options other than marriage as the end result are presented, the story can appear outdated and limits Beauty's ability to choose for herself, to complete her journey.

Despite Beauty's limited choices, she now does go on a journey of self-discovery. Not only is the story now about the journey, but also it is also about being able and willing to acknowledge the good and bad, the light and dark, in you and in other people. Beauty and the Beast has become about their journey to finding each other, to finding acceptance by another person who loves every aspect of them, the good and the bad. Beauty and the Beast is about accepting the light and dark in yourself and in another person to become a more complete, whole individual, to be able to love someone because you love yourself.

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