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Changing the Nature of the Beast: An Analysis of Significant Variations From Madame De Beaumont's La Belle Et La Bête In Disney's Beauty and the Beast

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The University of Southern Mississippi

CHANGING THE NATURE OF THE BEAST: AN ANALYSIS OF SIGNIFICANT
VARIATIONS FROM MADAME DE BEAUMONT'S *LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE* IN
DISNEY'S *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*

by

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Abstract

Madame Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont wrote and published *La Belle et La Bête* while working as a governess and educator in 1757. She told the tale to a young female audience as a means of teaching important life lessons. Walt Disney's animated film *Beauty and the Beast*, released in 1991, is clearly inspired by Beaumont's story, yet Disney makes many alterations to her characters. This thesis locates and analyzes these changes, arguing that they greatly alter the message of Beaumont's story from one that is empowering to women to one that is harmful and ultimately anti-woman. This thesis also examines the first cinematic version of the Beauty and the Beast tale, *La Belle et La Bête* (1946), because Disney's version also clearly draws a great deal of inspiration from this adaptation. In order to historically and socially contextualize the original tale, this thesis also includes a brief biography of Beaumont.

Key words: Beauty and the Beast, adaptation, film, variations, message, gender, fairy tale

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Introduction

At a very young age I was exposed to various forms of Walt Disney media, be it movies, cartoons, or books based on animated films.¹ My favorite Disney character from childhood has always been Belle of *Beauty and the Beast* because she, like me, was interested in books, traveling, and adventure (or so I thought) more than waiting around for a boy to fall in love with her and save her from her dreary life. Sitting in a theater watching a real-life Belle sing about love of books in a production of the Disney musical, I suddenly realized that her intelligence plays little part, if any, in the Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). For instance, her love of books is merely a plot device used to create romance between her and the Beast rather than a means by which she expands her intellect. Instead of being at the core of her personality, Belle's supposed intelligence is an artifice that conceals her true value to the story as a mothering figure.

My interest in the story was piqued after reading what is considered the definitive version of the Beauty and Beast story, *La Belle et La Bête* (1757) by Madame Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont.² This version of the tale features a family of the new middle class, particularly an intelligent daughter named Beauty, whose discernment is essential in freeing both the Beast from his curse and her family from their troubles. While Disney claims to have created a new, more feminist-friendly heroine in Belle, her supposed intelligence falls short of that of her predecessor's, for she uses neither intelligence nor discernment when breaking the spell on her Beast. By drawing largely

¹ Walt Disney Pictures will hereafter be referred to as Disney.

² For the sake of readers and consistency, I have chosen to normalize all variations in spelling and punctuation pertaining to "Beaumont" and "*La Belle et La Bête*."

upon these two versions of the tale as well as a few other interpretations of the tale and using close textual and cinematic analysis, I will identify and analyze the significant alterations Disney makes from the original *La Belle et La Bête*. I will also demonstrate that these changes alter the message from one that is ultimately positive to one that is ultimately negative and even dangerous.

Only a handful of studies examine the differences between Beaumont's and Disney's versions. One of the most helpful and complete of these is June Cummins's "Romancing the Plot: The Real Beast of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*" (1995). Cummins argues that "The differences between the version that Disney created, now becoming canonical, and [Beaumont's version], may seem insignificant but in fact are dramatic" (23). Cummins provides examples of some of these changes, particularly focusing on the changes made to the character of Belle and demonstrating the many ways in which she is forced into a love story "that robs [her] of self-determination and individuality" (22). Another study that supports the idea that Belle is disempowered in Disney's version is Kathleen Manley's "Disney, the Beast, and Woman as Civilizing Force" (2003). Manley argues that "Belle's relationships with men in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* reinforce this long-running stereotype of the beautiful woman as civilizing force, a model of acceptable behavior for people in Western culture" (80). Manley examines some of the ways Disney alters the men in the story and thereby alters Belle, for because of Disney's alterations to the men, she must be more of a mother figure to them rather than be allowed to develop her own character. Similar to Manley's article is "Desacrilization of Image and Confusion of Sexuality in the Disney Studio's *Beauty and*

the Beast” (1998) by Martha Bartter, in which Bartter analyzes Belle’s and the Beast’s relationship in terms of religious imagery and sexuality. Bartter’s argument is akin to that of Manley, for she maintains that Belle is the only true adult in the film and that rather than Belle being the focal hero who moves from youth into adulthood, that role is played by the Beast (61).

While the articles mentioned above are not the only ones that critically analyze *Beauty and the Beast*, they are the ones that lend themselves most easily to this thesis. They each analyze a different facet of the changes Disney has made to the tale’s heroine. However thorough those analyses might be, they do not cover many areas of the film, such as the changes Disney makes to other major characters. There is to my knowledge no complete published analysis of the meaningful variations between Beaumont’s textual version and Disney’s film, no study that examines all aspects of the story. Jerry Griswold’s *The Meaning of “Beauty and the Beast”: A Handbook* is perhaps the closest example of a text that attempts to offer an all-inclusive look at the tale, as its title suggests. The handbook contains Griswold’s in-depth close reading of Beaumont’s story, provides a summary and discussion of important scholarship on that version, and includes several folktale variations and contemporary retellings of the story. Griswold’s book discusses Disney’s version yet lacks any comprehensive or satisfying analysis and comparison of the two versions in relation to each other. Griswold accepts and essentially glosses over Disney’s decision to shift the emphasis of the tale from the female characters to the male characters, which is troubling for reasons that will be discussed at the end of

this thesis, where I will also discuss other, broader studies that I plan to consult for future revisions of this thesis.

Because of the absence of in-depth scholarship on all Disney's major alterations to the original tale, I plan to explore the most significant of those deviations from the text and how those deviations change the characters and ultimately the message of the tale. This thesis will include a discussion of the most drastic changes made in Disney's version, not only to its heroine but also to all other major characters and plot points.

Chapter One: Character Comparisons and Analysis

Beauty's father / Belle's father Maurice

In the seminal text, Beauty's father is described as a very wealthy merchant and a "man of sense" (Beaumont 1) who employs that good sense to educate his six children. He loses his fortune and must move his family from the town to the country, where all members of the family except his two eldest daughters must work for a living. He hopes to regain some of his fortune when he hears that one of his ships is returning to port after long being thought lost at sea, but he is disappointed when the ship returns with no goods. Wearied on his way home, he takes refuge in a mysterious palace where he eats food anonymously provided to him, sleeps in an empty bed, dresses in rich clothes he finds in his bedchamber, and attempts to leave the next morning. Before leaving the castle, he thanks whatever spirit that has cared for him. Having not returned with any of the riches asked for by his two eldest daughters, the merchant decides to pick a rose, the gift Beauty requested. But then, a great and "frightful beast" appears to him and scolds him for stealing the roses after having been given food, drink, rest, and clothing (Beaumont 14). The Beast gives the merchant his choice of punishments, saying that if one of the merchant's daughters will come back to the Beast's castle willingly, the merchant may be spared his life, but if none of his daughters will come in his stead, the merchant must return to the castle within three months to receive further punishment. Before leaving, however, the merchant is granted a great chest full of riches. The merchant is ever thinking of his children, saying to himself, "Well, if I must die, I shall have the comfort, at least, of leaving something to my poor children" (Beaumont 15). The merchant then

journeys back to his country house and relates his tale. Upon hearing this, Beauty stubbornly affirms that she will return with her father to take his place at the Beast's castle. Later in the story, Beauty leaves the castle to comfort her lonely father and in doing so, jeopardizes the Beast's life.

Beauty's father is portrayed as a self-made, wealthy man with common sense. He is a prosperous merchant who is living a more modest lifestyle because of bad luck, not because of any real failures on his part. Even after losing much of his fortune, he is able to provide a fairly comfortable life for his six children. The focus on his wealth and *savoir faire* is surely one of the things that lead some critics to classify this text as "purely bourgeois" (Bartter 58). By contrast, Belle's father Maurice is characterized in the Disney film as a bumbling but ambitious inventor. Our first glimpse of Maurice in *Beauty and the Beast* is of a pudgy, disheveled-looking elderly man struggling with an exploding machine. He appears to be confused by his own invention. Belle repeatedly comforts him and consoles him after he loses confidence in his ability to put together a reliable invention that can provide for them. Belle speaks to him as if she is a mother consoling a disheartened child, saying that she has always believed in him and is confident that he will become a successful inventor.

Rather than showing off his invention at what is vaguely referred to as "the fair" (*Beauty and the Beast*), Maurice fails at something as simple as reading a map and therefore becomes lost in the woods at night. He ignores his horse's apprehension at following a certain path and stumbles upon a dark, menacing palace. He runs to the castle to avoid being attacked by wolves and finds that the doors open for him. He wanders

around, eventually sitting in a large chair by a warm fire. He appears dumbstruck at it all and has completely forgotten his good manners, not thinking to thank whomever gave him repose, as does the father in Beaumont's tale. The Beast then makes his appearance, growling and snarling at the intruder sitting presumptuously in his chair. Maurice fumbles and stutters over his apology and is thrown in the dungeon. Belle is concerned about her father after his horse returns without him, and she follows the horse back to the castle, where she rescues him by volunteering to take his place in the dungeon.

Repeatedly throughout the film, this father is called names like "crazy old Maurice," "that old loon," and "harmless crackpot" (*Beauty and the Beast*). When he returns to the village and tells an outrageous tale of a terrible beast with fangs and claws, he seems so mad that other villagers believe he should be put in an asylum. Once again he must be rescued by Belle, as he wanders off into the snowy woods without having prepared himself for the elements with either food or warm clothing. Not only is he unable to take care of himself (he cannot even dress himself properly), but he is also apparently a poor judge of character: he thinks Belle should be interested in Gaston, the conceited, hyper-masculine village stud who eventually instigates the plot to have Maurice institutionalized; he also neglects to listen to the horse's intuition about the dangers that might come from veering off the path and is subsequently attacked by wolves and trespasses upon the Beast's castle. "Unlike [B]eaumont's merchant, who retires to the country to live frugally with his children—sometimes six, sometimes four, but never fewer than three—and who strives to manage under these reduced circumstances, Maurice seems impractical and ineffectual" (Bartter 59).

By altering the figure of the heroine's father, Disney presents Belle as more a mother-like figure because she must repeatedly cajole her father, who lacks self-confidence and common sense. Maurice needs constant care and reassurance from the very person he is supposed to be raising and taking care of, according to typical familial roles. Beauty's father never stops providing for his family and is a consummate father in the way he thinks about his children. This strong paternal figure is the polar opposite of Maurice, who is advanced in age but not in wisdom or fortune. All his years of ambitious inventing have only left him and his daughter as poor villagers. It should be noted that Beauty's father managed to provide for six children even after losing his fortune, whereas Maurice has trouble providing for only one child.

As a result of her father's immaturity, Belle is unable to develop as her own person to the extent Beauty is, since Belle must consistently think of her father first in order to maintain his safety. While Beauty *does* put her father first in many instances, these actions are a testament to her good heart, because she is not required to sacrifice herself in the ways Belle is if she wants to keep her father alive. Beauty's father, when left alone, is merely lonely, but when Maurice is away from Belle, or she from him, he gets himself lost in the woods, imprisoned, and even trapped in his own home by a mob. The emphasis on Belle as a maternal comfort to her father takes the focus off Belle as an individual who can pursue her own goals and interests. For example, just when she starts to develop and acknowledge her romantic feelings for the Beast, during the ballroom dancing scene when Beast professes his love for her, she must abandon that lifestyle, as well as her new-found romance and sexuality, to once again come to the rescue of her

“lunatic” father (*Beauty and the Beast*). She tells the Beast she cannot live with him because she is worried about her father. Beast shows her Maurice running toward the castle in the snow, poorly dressed and clearly distressed. Belle begs to be able to leave the castle to help her father, and the Beast consents.

The Beast

In Beaumont’s text, the Beast was formerly a prince cursed by a “wicked fairy” who “condemned [him] to remain under that shape till a beautiful virgin should consent to marry him” (30). In contrast to his ugliness, Beaumont’s Beast was kind and spoke to Beauty “very rationally, with plain good common sense,” so much so that Beauty “daily discovered valuable qualifications” in him and was so taken in by his demeanor and attitude that his deformity lessened in comparison (Beaumont 23). After seeing her sisters unhappily married to rich men who have conventionally desirable qualities, like good looks or biting wit, Beauty realizes the Beast possesses all the qualities that make a good husband: he is “kind and good” and exhibits “virtue, sweetness of temper, and complaisance” (Beaumont 27-28). In the end, the Beast is transformed into a handsome prince as a reward for Beauty’s generous heart that could see beyond physical appearance. Her “judicious choice” is rewarded with a rich prince full of virtue and wit.

It seems as though the writers for *Beauty and the Beast* modeled the Beast for the film as the direct opposite of Beaumont’s Beast. In the film, as well as in its Golden Book adaptation, Disney’s Beast is punished for being a “spoiled and selfish” youth when he denies a beggar shelter in his castle because of her ugly and grizzled appearance (Slater

1).³ The old woman reveals herself to be a sorceress who transforms the prince into a beast on the exterior to reflect his bestial attitude on the inside. The sorceress also turns all the other humans in the castle into animate household objects such as candlesticks and clocks. By making his transformation a punishment rather than a mean trick performed by a cruel fairy, *Beauty and the Beast* establishes that it is the Beast who must grow or somehow change during the course of the film. From the very first scene, the film paints itself as a *Bildungsroman* for the Beast, who must “learn to love and be loved in return” rather than one for Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*).

The first time the viewers see the Beast after his transformation, he is indeed a beast. He growls more than speaks and stalks angrily around the room on all fours. When he does speak, it is in an intimidating roar rather than in civilized tones. In the Golden Book adaptation, he hardly ever speaks and is rarely depicted doing anything but scowling or snarling. The book uses words like “howled” and “grunted” to describe the way the Beast communicates (Slater 7, 10). He has truly come to exude beast-like qualities in every aspect of his being, even though the sorceress did not change his personality as she does in the Beaumont text, where she supposedly makes Beaumont’s Beast more dull, without any additional evidence of this dullness in the text aside from the Beast’s saying so. Disney’s Beast is treated like the immature child he presents himself to be by the anthropomorphized objects in the castle. It is ironic and deeply revealing about his lack of emotional development over the span of years that he needs to be taught how to be more human by objects that are no longer human themselves. Rather

³ For this paper, I will be utilizing the children’s book version of Disney’s film that is adapted by Teddy Slater, illustrated by Ric Gonzalez and Ron Dias, and published in 1997 by Golden Book.

than tell Belle that “[she] alone is mistress [of the castle]” as Beaumont’s Beast did (21), Disney’s Beast bellows that if Belle “doesn’t eat with me, then she doesn’t eat at all” (*Beauty and the Beast*), after “ordering” her to dine with him (Slater 10).

As with her father, Belle must be a mother to the Beast by tending his wounds and scolding him for losing his temper. It is immediately after she bandages him and teaches him a lesson on self-control that the Beast admits “I’ve never felt this way about anyone,” meaning he is falling in love with her (*Beauty and the Beast*). The Oedipal implications here are quite striking. The Beast has developed romantic feelings for the woman acting as his mother. Yet again Belle is unable to be seen as a fully developed woman because she is most important as a maternal figure to the men in her life, rather than as an independent woman or a peer. If the earlier signs of an Oedipal complex were not sufficient to convince viewers, it becomes more obvious when their relationship moves forward by Belle’s instructing the Beast on how to eat properly, read, dress appropriately (in un-tattered pants and a shirt), and “act like a gentleman” (Slater 14). Rather than develop a relationship over many nightly dinners as they did in Beaumont’s text, Belle and the Beast learn to care for each other over just a few seconds of screen time, when they seem to develop a relationship more like teacher and pupil than romantic partners (Cummins 26). Clearly, Belle represents a civilizing influence when it comes to the Beast; he professes his love for her when they participate in the height of civilization and culture by dressing ornately, having a well-prepared dinner, and dancing daintily in a gilded ballroom (Manley 87). It is during the end of this scene that the Beast finally becomes selfless; Belle is worried about her father, so in order to ease her mind and make

her happy, the Beast lets her leave the castle to tend to Maurice, setting aside his own desires for those of Belle. The Beast's inner transformation can be seen most when he refuses violence and acts passively while an angry mob attacks him and his castle.

Despite the Beast's ultimately selfless attitude, Belle must endure emotional and potentially physical trauma for the Beast to be thus changed. Much of their relationship for the majority of the film is grounded in the power the Beast holds over Belle. Even their size difference reinforces the Beast's role as the dominant, looming presence in Belle's life. Belle's and Beast's relationship shows many signs of being an abusive one, unlike the relationship between Beauty and the Beast in Beaumont's tale. To illustrate the extent to which Belle is in many ways trapped in an abusive relationship, I will use information gathered from the National Domestic Abuse Hotline to explain all the ways in which their romantic relationship is a dangerous one. According to the Hotline, if one's partner does any of the following, he/she may be in an abusive relationship and is encouraged to seek help (I have bolded the questions to which Belle could answer "yes"):

Does your partner:

- Embarrass you with put-downs?
- **Look at you or act in ways that scare you?**
- **Control what you do, who you see or talk to or where you go?**
- **Stop you from seeing your friends or family members?**
- Take your money or Social Security check, make you ask for money or refuse to give you money?
- **Make all of the decisions?**

- Tell you that you're a bad parent or threaten to take away or hurt your children?
- **Prevent you from working or attending school? [or, presumably, prevent one from leaving the premises, as the Beast does Belle?]**
- **Act like the abuse is no big deal, it's your fault, or even deny doing it?**
- Destroy your property or threaten to kill your pets?
- **Intimidate you?**
- **Shove you, slap you, choke you, or hit you?**
- Force you to try and drop charges?
- Threaten to commit suicide?
- Threaten to kill you?

Beast frequently yells at Belle for small things such as her asking to visit other parts of the castle, violently confines her to the dungeon and then to her room, denies her food, keeps her from seeing her father for much of the film, threatens to break doors down, and blames her for making him angry enough to abuse her. As one can see, Belle is clearly in a dangerous relationship that should not be a model of any kind for audiences, especially young children. One could argue that Belle does not begin a relationship with the Beast while he is angry and controlling toward her. However, there is little (arguably no) screen time devoted to the Beast's change in behavior from the time he makes Belle so afraid for her safety and future that she flees the castle (he runs after her) to the time that the audience sees Belle singing about how she has noticed a change

in Beast and may be developing romantic feelings for him. The fact that we as an audience do not see this change signifies one of two things: either there has been no change of heart and the Beast is merely pretending to be nicer so as to keep Belle close to him and under his control or there has been a change of heart and we are supposed to believe that it literally happened overnight. The second possibility is perhaps just as dangerous to viewers as the first, for it leads the viewer to believe that a dramatic change in personality and mindset can happen quickly and with no visible effort from the abuser.

It is far more likely that Belle begins her relationship with the Beast during the “Normal Behavior” phase in the cycle of abuse, depicted below:



Fig. 1. Smith, Melinda, and Jeanne Segal. “The Cycle of Violence in Domestic Abuse.” Illustration. *Domestic Violence and Abuse: Signs of Abuse and Abusive Relationships*. 13 March 2013. Web.

The ‘normal’ behavior phase is characterized by the abuser trying to regain his/her partner’s trust. This stage in the cycle is often called the “Honeymoon phase” because the abuser will frequently try to woo his/her partner with charming and seemingly reformed behavior. This stage lasts as long as it takes for another tense situation to arise, at which

time the abusive partner can justify the abusive or controlling behavior he/she will exert. The ‘fantasy’ stage and ‘normal’ behavior stage may occur simultaneously; the abuser will sometimes think of things his/her partner has done wrong or how the problems in the abuser’s life may be blamed on his/her partner. This mindset often culminates in another act of abuse, which completes and begins another iteration of the cycle.

Once one understands the cycle of abuse, it is easy to see that the danger in Belle’s and Beast’s relationship is not resolved with Beast’s sudden change of heart and eventual restoration into a human. It could be argued that Beast’s outward transformation into a human reflects the inward humanization of his heart and attitude, but the stipulation of the curse he was under was not that he become a good person—it is that he learn to love and be loved in return. One can love one’s partner and still be abusive, hence the great danger of anger issues in abusive relationships. Additionally, as Disney goes out of its way to show, humans (think Gaston) can still be beasts.

Beauty/Belle

Beaumont is careful to describe Beauty as a girl with an education, a love for reading and a great deal of discernment and virtue. Beauty is often shown in contrast to her two sisters in the text. While they “have a great deal of pride” and put on “ridiculous airs” because of their wealth, Beauty spends her time reading books, but more importantly, reading “good books” (Beaumont 8). After having lost their wealth, Beauty continues to “outshine her sisters, in her person as well as her mind,” for she possesses “humility, industry, and patience” (Beaumont 10). She politely denies any suitors she might have, saying that she is too young to marry and must remain with her father for a

time before marrying. She is not vain like her sisters, who ask their father for riches and fine gowns after learning that he might regain some of his wealth. She asks simply that her father bring her a rose. When her father returns from the Beast's castle, Beauty immediately makes up her mind to go to the castle in her father's stead. Her selflessness is rewarded, for she is given her own nicely-furnished apartment and is presented with "a large library, a harpsichord, and several music books" (Beaumont 20). Beaumont endeavors to tell the reader how much more important these accoutrements are to Beauty than the fine bedchamber, saying that the library, instrument, and sheet music "chiefly took up her attention" (20). Beauty is able to deduce that if she has been provided these things, then she will not be killed, because it would be a waste to give her an apartment of her own and ways to spend her time if she were going to be eaten by the Beast the very next day. When Beauty meets the Beast, she is able to see that he is a good-natured person below his ugly exterior: "I am pleased with your kindness, and when I consider that, your deformity scarce appears" (22). It is this discernment and ability to discriminate between exterior beauty or virtue (in the form of good looks and charm) and inner beauty or virtue that moves Beauty to consider the Beast to be a suitable husband, thus lifting the curse and restoring the prince to his human form. It is vital that Beauty possess the same virtue she values in the Beast, however, for only the matrimonial consent of "a beautiful virgin" would be enough break the spell. It is indicative of the time period in which this story was written that Beauty be a virgin. Clearly, Beaumont equates a woman's inner beauty to her virginity, because even if a sexually experienced woman could see past the Beast's outer ugliness to appreciate his tender heart, she would

not be virtuous enough to break the spell. Some might find the importance placed on virginity hypocritical, or perhaps just antiquated, considering that the message of the entire tale is centered around inner beauty, not physical attractiveness; there is nothing to say that a sexually experienced woman cannot possess inner beauty or virtue. One might find this requirement an odd one, for not even a widow or someone who has understandably lost her virginity is enough to break the spell. Perhaps this stipulation is a strong indication of the social climate of the mid-eighteenth century: Beaumont taught girls and young women to be intellectual but also prepared them for the reality that the majority of society would value them for their virginity, especially when it came to arranging marriages.

Like the woman Beaumont tried to create in her pupils, Beauty is an example of the total package: she is so beautiful that “Beauty” becomes her name (Beaumont 1), she is sweet, kind, and gentle-hearted, clever, and wise enough to cherish “valuable qualifications” like “virtue, sweetness of temper, and complaisance” (23), rather than good looks or a sharp tongue as do her sisters. Beauty is rewarded for her overall goodness; however, the magical fairy who had previously appeared in Beauty’s dream warns Beauty not to let her crown lessen her virtue or change her good heart.

Belle of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* does not have sisters to whom she can be compared, so she is initially compared to the other members of her village. The first time we see Belle, everyone in the village where she lives is talking about her. During the scene in which Belle laments that “every morning’s just the same [in] this poor provincial town,” and longs for “more than this provincial life,” the other villagers call her

“strange,” “a funny girl,” and “peculiar” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Her fondness for books is established in this early musical scene when she visits the local bookseller and shares with him her excitement about her favorite book, full of “far-off places, daring sword fights, magic spells, a prince in disguise”—essentially, her own story. Before even addressing the amount of reading Belle does in this story, it is critical to first examine what kind of books she is reading. While Beauty reads “good books” that expand her mind or teach her a skill (Beaumont 8), Belle reads about a fantasy love story. Cummins points out that “The trait that makes Belle different, more intelligent, and more ‘liberated’ than previous Disney heroines is that she likes to read books about Disney heroines” (25). Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* was released in 1991, during which time, it was celebrated for its apparently innovative portrayal of the heroine, Belle, who is still particularly admired because she is a supposedly feminist-friendly, smart, and powerful heroine. But “in spite of this insistence that Belle is a strong female character, that this fairy tale is ‘different,’ [there is] the same old story, a romance plot that robs female characters of self-determination and individuality” (Cummins 22). Furthermore, viewers are meant to believe Belle’s supposed intelligence makes her a better match for the Beast, but her love of books appears to be merely a plot device used to get her and the Beast to spend more time together once she arrives at the castle. In fact, Belle is only shown reading once (at the insistence of the magically animate household objects) after she gets access to the Beast’s library. Even then, the scene is about Belle and Beast reading together to further their romantic relationship, not Belle reading to gain more knowledge, which is “a crucial indication that Belle's quest for adventure and education will be swallowed by the

romance plot” (Cummins 25) rather than a resource used to make Belle a more well-rounded or virtuous individual like Beaumont’s Beauty. Furthermore, the children’s book adaption of the film describes Belle always as “beautiful” and “lovely” but never uses words like “clever” or “smart” or even “kind” to describe her (Slater 4, 5, 15). The emphasis is consistently placed on her appearance, not her personality. Her interest in books is not used to make Belle a more intelligent woman, but is instead a plot device manipulated by the scheming objects who want her to fall in love with the Beast so they may be returned to human form.

This view of Belle being nothing more than a tool for the objects’ exploitation is never more evident than when she firsts enters the castle. The first thing any of the objects say is “A girl? She could be the one to break the spell!” Belle is essential to the Beast not just as a love interest, but as someone who can break the spell over him, meaning that she is twice the plot device and half as much her own person than are many other fairy tale heroines. In the end, “Belle’s desires, her interest in exploration and education, have no meaning except in terms of how they can be manipulated into a romance to benefit the Beast and the bewitched servants” (Cummins 23). Disney takes the well-rounded woman of Beaumont’s tale and deprives her of any interests that cannot be used to further the love story between her and the Beast, rather than letting Belle have her own story.

As if to flatten Belle’s character even more, her desire for adventure and travel as previously expressed in song—“there must be more than this provincial life”—is completely unsatisfied during the only chance she has to travel over the course of the

film, because this desire gets lost in her need to take care of her father. He had supposedly traveled some distance when he stumbled upon the castle, but when Belle sets out to find him, the movie cuts directly to the castle, so all of her journeying and sense of exploration has been erased or visually ignored. This exclusion of Belle's independent journey is particularly troubling since *Beauty and the Beast* is an animated film, meaning that the illustrators can include or tell any story they choose. The fact that the illustrators choose not to give Belle any time when she is not alone, or unaccompanied, or interrupted by magical objects, or any scenes in which she can make decisions for herself signals to viewers that those moments are not important to Belle, nor are they important to the story, which seems to conflict with the strong heroine Disney is trying to portray.

Contrary to what Disney tries to make audiences believe, Belle's most important attribute is not her intelligence but her ability to nurture. She is more of a mother to Maurice than a daughter, for she comforts him, takes care of him, and even rescues him more than once. Belle must soothe him after his Rube Goldberg machine malfunctions. She rallies behind him like a supportive parent and inspires him to go to the fair rather than quit after said malfunction. She sacrifices herself to the Beast in his place, then leaves the Beast to save him from an icy death as he wanders through the forest.

Belle's concern for Maurice provides several developments in the plot. For one, Gaston assumes she will sacrifice herself to be his wife in order to save her father from the insane asylum. Based on Belle's previous actions of sacrificing herself to take her father's place in the Beast's dungeon, Gaston assumes correctly. Furthermore, the Beast releases her only when he realizes how deeply she cares for her father and how much it

distresses her not to act in a care-giving capacity towards him. Belle's commitment to her father and not to her own personal development as a woman and an individual is what provides much of the plot of *Beauty and the Beast* (Cummins 25). The same might be true of Beaumont's Beauty had she not already been a more self-aware and fully developed character before her sacrifice on behalf of her father and if her father desperately required her presence in his life as Maurice does Belle's. Repeatedly, Belle must rescue her father because she is the only important person in his life. She only deliberately chooses once to save him; other times, such as when he is locked in the Beast's dungeon, she stumbles into saving him. Beauty, on the other hand, confronts her fate boldly when she rides to the Beast's castle to take her father's punishment. Beauty is aware of the danger that awaits her when she journeys to the Beast's castle. Belle simply lets the horse lead her and unwittingly comes upon the castle.

Belle's maternal influence is the focus of not only her interactions with her father but also in the development of the story between her and the Beast. It is after she cleans his wounds and scolds him for losing his temper that he develops feelings for her. This is also the time when she starts to change her mind and see more to the Beast than just his sour attitude and frightening form. It is vital to the story that Belle fall in love with the Beast, for that is the only thing that can break the spell. Belle's purpose in the story is not to find love on her own or develop as a person. It is to raise the Beast into becoming a man worthy of loving. Her importance to his story arc is two-fold: she must civilize him and she must be the one to love him, thereby breaking the curse over him and the castle. Their romance is an essential plot point. In order for Belle to contribute to the story, she

must be in a relationship, either with the Beast or with Gaston. The audience is forced to connect the character of Belle with the idea of romance and coupling. She is not allowed to move through the narrative freely and is restrained by her forced participation in a love story.

To reinforce the connection of Belle and romantic relationships, Disney creates another potential suitor. Also vying for Belle's affection is Gaston, who is a hunter of both animals and women. The fact that Belle is literally pursued by both a predatory beast and a hunter depicts her as passive prey in both scenarios. In no instance is Belle the active one making her own decisions about the person with whom she will become romantically involved. The only reasons why she rejects Gaston's proposals are based on her more esoteric, less boorish interests. Her supposed love of books and elevated mind are what enables her to see Gaston as the brute he really is, even though Belle has not read anything (that the viewer knows of) that would help her discern the difference between a brutish misogynist and a gentleman. In fact, the prince in her storybook is "in disguise" (*Beauty and the Beast*), so one might even ask whether he acts with the manners befitting of his station. This confusion might supply a further conflation of the prince and the brute in an already-muddled message.

Rather than include more females like Beauty's sisters, Disney omits them in favor of Gaston, the Beast's eventual foil, in order to further highlight the romantic elements of the story. Disney fashions Gaston's character to perhaps mimic or serve the same function as Beauty's sisters and their husbands in Beaumont's original tale. Beauty sees that Beast does have all the desirable qualities of a good husband after seeing her

sisters unhappily married to rich men, one with a handsome face and the other with a sharp wit. Riches, good looks, and wit are all criteria valued by the aristocracy. Her sister's presumptions to marry above their bourgeois station into the nobility is mocked in the form of their unhappiness. Beauty must see her sisters unhappily married to men with these popular qualities before she can see that the Beast really is a suitable husband. Luckily, she was able to see these good qualities in the Beast to begin with during their nightly dinners, which she came to enjoy and anticipate (23). Gaston, however, demonstrates that were it not for his misogynistic and egocentric attitude, he would make a suitable husband for Belle. He is a good provider because he is an accurate and acclaimed hunter. He is good looking, repeatedly called "handsome," "cute," "a pure paragon [of masculinity]" (*Beauty and the Beast*), and has a following of infatuated women who serve to affirm his desirability. The trio of star-struck women is literally credited at the end of the film as "the Bimbettes," so conveniently they also reinforce the idea that Belle is the most intelligent figure in the film.

Belle must continually reject Gaston. Whereas the Beast becomes more selfless throughout the film (letting Belle leave the castle, treating others with more kindness), Gaston becomes more selfish and brutal. The hunter plots against Belle's happiness by attempting to force her to marry him to keep her father from being institutionalized. At the end of the movie, he commits the ultimate act of selfishness: when he learns of Belle's feelings for the Beast, he attempts to murder the Beast so that Belle will have no one else in her life and be forced to turn to him. Beaumont's message that true virtue lies in one's ability to see past an ugly or off-putting exterior is one that can be universally

applied to both men and women, yet Disney's message that handsome, capable men are not always the best husbands is strictly directed toward girls and women. Rather than provide boys an example of how to be a good man, Disney finds it easier to tell girls to be wary of aggressive men. Interestingly, Disney has no problem vilifying Gaston's brutish behavior yet urging Belle to tolerate the same behavior in the Beast.

As Cummins concludes, "Belle functions as a plot device even more than do heroines in many other fairy tales; she is necessary to the Beast not just for romance, but to undo the spell he is under" (23). When one examines the degree to which Belle is allowed to act freely and follow her own desires, it is easy to see that "Belle's desires, her interest in exploration and education, have no meaning except in terms of how they can be manipulated into a romance to benefit the Beast and the bewitched servants" (Cummins 23). By presenting Belle as a different kind of Disney Princess, one who reads, is strong-willed, and has a strong desire for independence, yet by limiting her character to that of a plot device rendered important only because of what she means for the Beast and his servants, Disney actually commits the worst kind of crime against feminism: Disney presents children with a supposedly positive, progressive role model that is, in fact, regressive. Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* is a sexist story masquerading as feminism. The film gives children the wrong ideas about what being a strong woman entails.

Gaston

The character of Gaston is not present in Beaumont's *La Belle et La Bête*. He is a mostly the creation of Disney, though he may have been inspired by the character Avenant in Jean Cocteau's film *La Belle et La Bête* (1946), of which more below. Gaston serves as a foil to the reformed Beast. In fact, Gaston exudes all the qualities for which the Beast was punished—arrogance, pompousness, temperamental anger; he is “the epitome of an uncivilized person, believing in the use of force rather than rational discussion, having no interest in the arts, and lacking respect for those he believes to be physically weaker than he (such as Belle and Maurice)” (Manley 82). Gaston's personality is perhaps best encapsulated during his first appearance in the movie. He has just returned from hunting. Upon his return, his companion Le Fou compares his prowess as a hunter to his prowess with women, establishing a predator-prey relationship in both instances. The scene in which Gaston proposes to Belle (read: attempts to force Belle to marry him) is quite unsettling, for it paints Gaston as being overly sexually and physically aggressive. He refers to Belle as his future “little wife,” effectively yanking her back to the domestic sphere that she is trying to escape. She expresses her disgust at the thought of massaging his feet, cooking dinner, and taking care of all (“six or seven”) of their children (*Beauty and the Beast*). Gaston sexually threatens Belle by cornering her, chasing her around the room, trying to keep her from dodging him, and even turning over table and chairs to try to get to her. It at this point in his development when Gaston's similarities to the Beast cease and he becomes the reformed Beast's foil. After

both Gaston and the Beast trap Belle in the domestic sphere—Gaston by trying to get her to give up her dreams and become his “little wife” and the Beast by literally locking her inside a castle—Gaston resorts to physical and even sexual violence (as described above), whereas the Beast grows to see Belle as human with needs, interests, and a life outside of him (*Beauty and the Beast*). While the Beast eventually becomes more human and civilized, Gaston is repeatedly called “a brute” (*Beauty and the Beast*). His actions become more and more underhanded as the plot unfolds, for he threatens to resort to throw her father into an asylum if she will not marry him. He rouses a mob and incites wide-spread looting and violence, and, rather than fight honorably, he literally stabs his enemy in the back after being defeated and rescued.

This brutish, “boorish” character also serves to underscore some of the inconsistencies in Belle’s actions. He disrespects knowledge on several occasions. He throws Belle’s book in the mud and tells her to get her head out of the clouds and pay attention to more important things, such as him. Gaston’s telling Belle to ignore personal pursuits for the sake of romance seems misogynistic and repressive. However, this abandoning of personal goals (particularly those of traveling and having adventures) is exactly what Belle does when she chooses on multiple instances to stay with the Beast.

Gaston’s presence in the movie also serves to keep the romantic aspects of the plot at the forefront of conflict and is a constant reminder to viewers that Belle is supposed to be seen as an object of romance and manipulation. The omission of Belle’s siblings and their spouses also serves to place more focus on the romance in Belle’s life. Rather than seeing her sisters as unhappy with their choices of husbands and having that

realization become one of the most important reasons Belle acknowledges her love for the Beast, Disney's story forces Belle to accept the Beast after she has mothered him and done a good deal of raising him. Belle chooses to be with the Beast because the only alternative is Gaston, someone even more bestial.

The enchanted objects

When the sorceress punished the Prince by turning him into the Beast, she also unfairly turned all the castle's employees and inhabitants into enchanted objects, such as an anthropomorphic candelabra, clock, wardrobe, teapot, etc. These objects add little to the story, save for pushing Belle to forgive the Beast's angry outbursts and hurtful ways in an attempt to get her to fall in love with him. The singing, dancing objects immediately see Belle for what she is: a plot device best used to make them and the Beast human again. Two specific times Belle is recognized as being "the one who can break the spell" (*Beauty and the Beast*). All Belle's interactions with the objects consist of their consoling her after she has been hurt by the Beast and coaxing her into forgiving him and giving him another chance. Their presence and especially their songs detract from Belle's growth as an individual because they seek ultimately to manipulate her for their own benefit.

By Disney's transforming the characters of Beauty's father and the Beast, Belle functions more in a maternal or mothering/nurturing capacity than as a fully developed or autonomous individual. As a result of this change in its female protagonist, the Disney film sends a dangerous message to audiences both young and old that women are to tolerate abusive or immature behavior in the hope that the abuser will eventually undergo

a magical transformation into a more caring, less abusive individual. Belle's presence as a maternal figure is harmful to both men and women. Men can use it as a justification to act like beasts, because they can rely on a woman to rescue them and avoid being accountable for their behavior. Women can become convinced that they should act as mother or teacher in a relationship, that those roles should fulfill them, and that they can change or reform men who treat them badly. Belle's intelligence, her yearning for travel, and her goals are largely ignored in the tale's resolution, as the emphasis of the story is placed on her maternal care-giving and her romantic interests. "Because it aspired to move beyond this conclusion and snared us into thinking that it might, the Disney version is ultimately more dangerous than the most blatantly sexist fairy tales" (Cummins 27).

Chapter Two: Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête*

This chapter will examine French director Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête* in order to provide an example of a cinematic adaptation of Beaumont's tale that does not compromise the strength or development of its heroine and retains a bestial Beast. The film was released in 1946 and is the first film adaption of the Beauty and the Beast tale. The story moderately follows that of Beaumont's, but Cocteau, who also wrote the film's screenplay, makes some additions and innovations of his own. The film, with its changes, demonstrate that it is possible to tell Beaumont's story on the silver screen to a modern audience without sending the dangerous messages found in Disney's version. Cocteau's film is a brilliant example of how a filmmaker can alter a story and add his own touches without creating a message that is completely contrary to that of the original.

One of the primary departures from the text is found in the kind of beast portrayed onscreen. Rather than depict the Beast with a real animal, as was popular in many illustrated retellings ("Beauty And The Beast: Visions And Revisions Of An Old Tale: 1950-1985" 75, 76, 78), Cocteau cast famous actor Jean Marais in the role of the Beast. This film broke barriers and set new standards in terms of costuming and makeup; Marais wore real fur on his face and hands to create a truly bestial spectacle.



Fig. 2. Cocteau, Jean. *La Belle et la Bête*. 1946. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. *The Collection*. Photograph.

As seen in the photo (Fig. 2), he is beastly in appearance in that he has to hunt and slay his food, much like wolf or another kind of predator. Despite his animalistic qualities, he is human enough to be ashamed by his predatory behavior and has enough dignity to dress himself nicely and maintain aristocratic manners. He acts with a gentlemanly code of honor: he gives Belle's father time to prepare to die, asks him to swear to return, acts according to his word, and trusts that others will act according to that same code and keep their word as well. Beast is also kind enough to gift him with a great horse named "Magnifique." This Beast keeps the castle ready for visitors at all times, plans and hosts elaborate meals, and takes pride in his carefully-crafted and well-maintained garden. Within his garden, there lies a mysterious building called the Temple

of Diana, of which the audience knows little until the end of the film and which will be further discussed below.

In addition to being extremely civilized, Cocteau's Beast is also magical. He can create/summon a string of pearls from nowhere and performs many little tricks like this throughout the film. There are five items of particular magical significance: a rose, a key to riches, a glove of transportation, a hand-held mirror, and the aforementioned horse Magnifique, who knows where to go. The Beast's magic also extends to his castle, where there are animated arms that hold candlesticks, serve food, and complete various servant-like tasks around the castle. Disney animators were obviously inspired by this film when they created the enchanted objects-cum-servants.

The film's story can be viewed as the midpoint between Beaumont's and Disney's versions. Disney borrows heavily from the Cocteau film. For example, Avenant, the heroine's roguish potential suitor, is clearly the model for Disney's character Gaston. Avenant is a gambler and a "scoundrel" who is friends with Belle's brother, while Gaston is the village stud. Gaston makes the same decision as Avenant when it comes to the Beast: both characters make the choice to try to kill and steal from the Beast. Avenant wants to go to the castle to kill the Beast and take some of his magical items, which is what Gaston, a more extreme version of Avenant, does in fact do in the Disney version. Gaston's sexual aggression is clearly cut from the same pattern as that of Avenant, who tries to kiss Belle when he proposes marriage, though she refuses him many times in favor of staying with her father. Avenant's pursuit of Belle serves as a model for the scene in which Gaston asks Belle to marry him and chases her around the cottage,

pinning her to the wall so she cannot escape him and will feel pressured to accept his proposal. Avenant breaks into the Temple of Diana in order to steal forbidden treasures. This act of forced entry into the realm of the virgin goddess is a thinly-veiled representation of rape or sexual violence, thus showing Avenant for the beast he really is. In fact, he even transforms into an ugly beast-like creature after the statue of Diana shoots him with an arrow.

In both Beaumont's and Cocteau's version of the tale, Beauty/Belle is less troubled by the Beast's ugliness because his deficiency is superficial and does not lie within his heart or his character. Avenant's and Gaston's ugliness is harbored in their hearts and personalities and is hidden by an attractive exterior. Disney's Beast *does* have a deficiency of character, as he is angry, temperamental, and selfish and therefore must be tamed and educated by Belle before he is worthy of loving. Yet both Cocteau's and Disney's heroines are discerning enough to see the corruption in their suitors' personalities. Cocteau's resolution is problematic because when the Beast transforms, he assumes the human likeness of the recently-slain Avenant. Belle is not visibly pleased with this similarity and expresses her hesitation with the phrase "Faudra que je m'habitue," or "I'll have to get used to it."

In "Beauty and the Beast: From Fable to Film," Rebecca M. Pauly has organized a chart that compares certain elements of Beaumont's version and Cocteau's reimagining. I have adapted the chart below, making slight additions and modifications for clarity and extrapolating material from my analysis of the Disney film for a third column. While I disagree with Pauly's characterizations of Beaumont's and Cocteau's Beasts as

respectively “stupid” and “ferocious,” the rest of the chart is very helpful for locating similarities and differences among the three films.

Beaumont	Cocteau	Disney
Father has three daughters, three sons	Father has three daughters, one son	Maurice has one daughter only
No suitor present for Beauty	Avenant always present	Gaston a potential suitor
Father lost in snowstorm	Father transported by wind and blowing leaves	Father lost in the woods
Father takes treasure chest	Beauty takes treasure chest	[No chest]
Father accompanies Beauty to castle	Father stays behind	Father imprisoned
Father ruined by speculation	Father ruined by sons' gambling	Father poor because incompetent with unsteady income
Beauty dines at nine p.m.	Beauty dines at seven p.m.	Belle dines at unspecified times, only once with Beast
Beauty transported by a ring	Beauty transported by a white horse, glove	Belle transported by a horse
Beauty sees scenes in dreams and mirror	Beauty sees scenes in mirror only	Belle sees scenes in mirror only
Magic book serves Beauty	Invisible servants serve Beauty	Former servants that are now animated objects serve Belle

Beaumont	Cocteau	Disney
Treasure chest disappears	Necklace turns to rope	[No chest]
Beauty's sisters marry unhappily	Beauty's sisters do not marry	[No sisters]
Beast is stupid	Beast is ferocious	Beast is immature, untamed
Beauty waits all day for Beast	Beauty rushes to garden to find Beast	Beauty does not seek out Beast
Sisters become statues at end	Statues appear in castle throughout the film	No sisters, but the statues in the Beast's castle become animated
No one is similar to the Beast	Avenant dies and exchanges bodies with the Beast	Gaston dies in a struggle with the Beast
Beast is granted a grander, larger castle	Beast becomes a prince	Beast becomes a prince; servants are made human
Beauty's family brought to castle	Beauty flies off with Prince	Beauty and Beast dance with family and servants present
All transported to magic kingdom	Beauty and the Beast disappear into clouds	Beauty and Beast dance at end

Table 1. Similarities amongst popular retellings of *La Belle et La Bête*, adapted. Pauly, Rebecca M. "Beauty and the Beast: From Fable to Film." *Literature Film Quarterly* 17.2 (1989): 90.

As one can see, Cocteau's film makes alterations to Beaumont's tale that Disney then expands on in its film. Perhaps Disney borrows many of the elements in Cocteau's film as a way of paying homage to such a milestone in cinematic achievement. In any

case, the existing similarities in plot and execution demonstrate that Disney could have retained similarities in character development that would not have resulted in the vast alteration of Belle and the Beast. The fact that there are so many similarities between Cocteau's film and Disney's film prompts one to wonder why Disney felt it had to change the heroine to the degree it did. Cocteau's Belle is far more empowered and strong than Disney's, and this is Disney's own fault. As Cocteau's film demonstrates, it is possible to adapt *La Belle et La Bête* for a modern audience in a way that does not sacrifice any character development in either Belle or the Beast.

Chapter Three: Madame LePrince de Beaumont: A Biography and A Contextualization of *La Belle et La Bête*

In order to fully appreciate Beaumont's expert crafting of *La Belle et La Bête*, it is necessary to understand the social and pedagogical influences on the story's first publication, especially since the social issues in the story and Beaumont's influence on current pedagogy highlight the degree to which Disney warps the story.⁴ I trust that readers will have a better understanding of the importance of the original tale and its life lessons after learning about Beaumont.

Jeanne Marie LePrince de Beaumont was born in 1711 in Rouen and died in 1780. She and her sister were educated in a convent school, yet rather than choosing to take her vows and become a nun as was her family's plan, Beaumont chose to begin a professional life teaching young girls. She spent most of her life as a governess in France. In 1748, Beaumont left France for London, where she became a *gouvernante* to many upper-class young ladies. Despite being a very important pedagogical figure, Beaumont is often overlooked when it comes to famous individuals of the eighteenth century, just as her version of Beauty and the Beast is considered definitive yet has attracted very little scholarly attention.

Beaumont was busy in London; she published 21 works in her 15 years there.

Among them are novels and periodical publications.⁵ According to Beaumont biographer

⁴ I have not presented this information on Beaumont before now so that it would not detract from the various analyses that are more central to my thesis.

⁵ Novels: *Le Triomphe de la Vérité* ('The Triumph of the Truth' 1748), *Civan, roi de Bungo* ('Civan, King of Bungo' 1754), *Lettres diverses et critiques* ('Diverse and Critical Letters' 1750). Periodical publications: *Le Nouveau magasin français* ('The New French Magazine' 1750-52), *Magasin des enfans* ('Children's Magazine' 1756), *Magasin des adolescentes* ('Adolescents' Magazine' 1760), *Anecdotes du quatorzième siècle* ('Anecdotes of the Fourteenth Century' 1760), *Principes de l'histoire sainte* ('Principles of the Holy

Peggy Schaller, “Each of these works demonstrates, in the female protagonists they feature, a sense of intellectual capacity to confront, debate, collaborate, and resolve significant social and moral issues.” This dedication to female intellect is fitting coming from Beaumont, for she is regarded as the first woman to write and edit a magazine. Furthermore, Beaumont was according to pedagogical scholar Penny Brown “the first person to write fictional works in French for young readers that took into account children’s capabilities, characters, and interests and reflected the actual world in which they lived” (207).

The vast majority of her publications deal with the education of young ladies. Beaumont disagreed with society’s tendency to teach girls to be pretty but empty-headed. In her preface to *Magasin des enfants*, she speaks out against what she thinks is the “male conspiracy to hamper and ridicule female pretensions to learning” (by which Beaumont means, “claims to learning”) (Brown 208). According to noted critic Patricia Clancy, Beaumont fashioned moralistic lessons in the form of fairy tales and stories in order to teach her pupils “social responsibility to family, servants, and the poor” and that “beauty is not important, no one person is better than another, and all must work in their own way” (202). A common thread that runs throughout all of Beaumont’s publications is “the importance for boys and girls alike of personal and social responsibility, self-awareness, virtue, charitableness, and clear and independent thinking” (Brown 208). Specifically, Beaumont believed “We are all born with flaws: honest people had as many as bad

History’ 1761), and *Instructions pour les jeunes dames qui entrent dans le monde* (‘Instructions for Young Ladies Entering into the World’ 1764). Ordinarily, I would include these texts in my works cited. However, I am unable at this time to provide publication information for many of them. I hope to track down such information for an extended version of this project in the future. I expect to locate them at the British Library in London or the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

people when they were young, but the former have been corrected; that is all the difference there is” (“Nous naissons tous avec des défauts: les honnêtes gens, quand ils étoient jeunes, en avoient autant que les méchants, mais les premiers se sont corrigés: voila toute la différence qu'il y a,” *Magasin des enfants* 1: 144-5). It is then clear that Beaumont stressed teaching good morals and self-awareness because she believed these qualities would lead to more responsible, honest adults. Beaumont’s legacy lies in her revolutionizing of pedagogical methodology. In her serialized publications, *Magasin des enfants* and *Magasin des adolescentes*, Beaumont uses a dialogue format to teach on a variety of levels, teaching other instructors as well as children. She developed instructional methods that encouraged other governesses and instructors to involve students in learning from stories such as *La Belle et La Bête*, which facilitates a higher level of comprehension and retention. She also taught a range of children and adolescents who read her publications for the stories, rather than for pedagogical reasons.

Interestingly, while Beaumont was a governess to many aristocratic and royal children, including the Prince of Wales, she taught them largely middle-class or bourgeois values. In *La Belle et La Bête*, which appeared in *Magasin des enfants*, the heroine comes from a bourgeois family, for her father is a merchant, a man of self-made wealth. Beauty’s lack of pretension when it comes to marriageable men is one of her virtues. She does not aspire to rise on the social ladder, as do her sisters, who end up marrying above their own station yet are miserable. Beauty’s inner virtue is rewarded with a prince that has it all—money, a title, a wholesome personality, and good looks. Disney’s version of this tale lacks the class-based implications. As a result, Disney’s tale

is far more modern, because in late-twentieth-century America the majority of the population maintains bourgeois values of hard work and self-improvement that are indebted to the country's tradition of what has been called the "Puritan work ethic." Belle's father Maurice is perhaps a failed bourgeois because he attempts to provide a living for himself and his daughter by selling his inventions, yet he cannot elevate them to a standard of living above that of a peasant. While Beaumont's version of the tale urges young women to capitalize on their own personal characteristics to make better lives for themselves, Disney's version underscores Belle's usefulness not as an individual but strictly as a caregiver. In many regards, Beaumont sends a far more progressive message to her audience than Disney send to its audience.

Although her ideas about women's education were indeed seen as radical in her time, Beaumont accepted the societal norm that put men at the head of the home, the political world, and religion. Her insistence that Beauty be a subservient daughter and stereotypically domestic figure does not negate Beauty's ability to be a rational individual. Beaumont uses the character of Beauty to teach her pupils that stereotypically feminine characteristics can be effective vehicles for communication and eventually action (M. Schaller 110). For example, Beauty is kind-hearted, a quality that compels her to be patient and oblige the Beast when he asks her to dine with him every night. She easily could have declined or chosen to dine with him but not speak to him. That same kindheartedness allows her to learn more about the Beast's personality and to develop an emotionally satisfying relationship with him over the course of their daily visits rather than ignore the virtues of his personality because of his frightening outward appearance.

Beaumont's emphasis on rational and philosophical discourse can be seen in how the relationship of her Beauty and Beast is built on conversation and dialogue rather than on more traditional methods of courting. Indeed, Beaumont is sometimes included in the ranks of such philosophers as Locke, Voltaire, and Rousseau (M. Schaller, vi, 2; P. Schaller 1) because of the philosophical nature of many of her publications. However, despite being a very important pedagogical figure, Beaumont is often overlooked when it comes to famous individuals of the eighteenth century, just as her version of the Beauty and the Beast tale is considered definitive yet has attracted very little scholarly attention.

Beaumont greatly influenced the pedagogy of future centuries. In addition, as scholar Mary Wellington tells us, Beaumont "rationalized the fairy tale by highlighting in her version of *La Belle et La Bête* elements specific to the eighteenth century with reference to character portrayal, psychological mind-set and resolution of conflicts" (100). She created a place for herself in pedagogy and in retellings of fairy tales, for she "balances a pre-existing narrative content with her own form containing a philosophical orientation that, for her, is a contemporary reality" (Wellington 100). As demonstrated previously, Disney erases many of the important empowering and innovative lessons that Beaumont weaves into *La Belle et La Bête*, thereby erasing Beaumont's contribution to the Beauty and the Beast tale and to fairytales as a whole.

Conclusion

Despite the problematic issues in Disney's version of the story, and even after looking at them under a microscope for the length of this project, I still enjoy watching the film. It is just as visually stunning, engaging, and entertaining to me as an adult as it was to me as a child. This thesis is not meant to discourage others from watching or enjoying the movie, only to encourage viewers to be critical and mindful of the film's messages. The movie itself is entertaining. Disney's movies generally attempt to combine entertainment with the teaching of a moral lesson, and in fact the combination of entertainment and teaching has become a staple of children's media, so much so that one might imagine it is impossible to entertain without teaching some kind of lesson or imparting some kind of message and whether children's media can afford to be entertaining without being concerned with the lesson it is teaching.

As for *Beauty and the Beast*, there is so much framing in it of the lessons the Beast needs to learn that one must conclude that this film intends to teach as well as to entertain. The danger lies in Disney's teaching a potentially harmful lesson. It is true that children watching this movie will not pick up on the discrepancies between how Belle is presented as an independent, intelligent heroine and how she actually behaves as a plot device that enhances the stories of the men around her and as a selfless mother figure. Yet that is exactly why Disney's changes from Beaumont's tale are troubling. While children will not recognize the more nuanced problems with Belle's characterization that have been discussed in this thesis, they will internalize the story itself and remember how Belle acts in it, especially since Belle is now marketed as a role model in the Disney

Princess Collection. Interestingly, all outward pretense to Belle being an avid reader have been purged from her image in the Disney Princess Collection, for she is now most often marketed holding a rose rather than a book (*Belle's Page*). Adults and parents must be critical consumers of media, and of children's media in particular, because adults are able to see problems where children often cannot. It is important to ensure that the didactic stories children absorb are teaching beneficial lessons that help them become well-rounded, empowered adults. I do not presume to tell anyone how to raise their children, but certainly one can see that it is important for adults to be critical and aware of children's media.

This thesis is an important contribution to existing Disney criticism. As already mentioned, a few articles do discuss the problems in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. June Cummins's "Romancing the Plot: The Real Beast of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*" provides a close look at how Belle functions as a device of romance rather than as a full-fledged person. Martha Bartter's "Desacrilization of Image and Confusion of Sexuality in the Disney Studio's *Beauty and the Beast*," and Kathleen Manley's "Disney, the Beast, and Woman as Civilizing Force" both examine the ways in which Belle acts as a mother to the men in her life and how her role as nurturer take away from her overall development as a person. It was after reading these articles that I realized something was missing from scholarly discourse: a discussion of the major changes Disney makes not only to Belle but also to other characters. To my knowledge, this thesis is the only scholarly examination of the significant alterations that Disney has made to Beaumont's version in Disney's film; other studies focus mainly on the character of Belle.

This thesis has thus focused on comparing Beaumont's and Disney's respective versions of the Beauty and the Beast tale. One of the best studies on how the tale has morphed through time is Betsy Hearne's *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* (1989). One will notice that Hearne's book was published in 1989, two years before Disney released *Beauty and the Beast*, so I chose not to include it in my thesis. I also excluded it as it would add further complications to my simpler trajectory of Beaumont's tale, followed by Cocteau's, then Disney's. But any future development of my thesis that includes other retellings will certainly make use of this text. Hearne's book examines different popular retellings of the Beauty and the Beast story and compares and contrasts them with each other yet avoids analyzing the stories. Hearne herself states that her work is "a study of the art and artifice of the story rather than an analysis of its meaning," for in Hearne's mind the meaning of the story is secondary because it shifts over time (*Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* iv). Hearne's work is a valuable addition to scholarship on the fairy tale.

Jack Zipes has also made many significant contributions to fairytale scholarship, including *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1983), *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (1979), and *Don't Bet On the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (1987). Zipes has written at least two works specifically on the Beauty and the Beast tale, such as *Beauty and the Beast and Other Classic French Fairy Tales* (1997) and "The Dark Side of Beauty and the Beast: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale for Children" (1981). Had this thesis been more

theoretical or inclusive of Beauty and the Beast's fairytale predecessors, I most definitely would have drawn from the above texts a great deal.

The psychological implications of the Beauty and the Beast narrative are examined in Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) and in Jacques Barchilon's "'Beauty and the Beast': From Myth to Fairy Tale." These texts would be useful if I ever decide to expand this thesis in terms of analyzing the mechanics of the original tale rather than simply comparing two versions. One modern retelling of Beaumont's *La Belle et La Bête* is Robin McKinley's novel *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast*. McKinley successfully modernizes the tale and retains the feminist message apparent in Beaumont's original by having a strong, truly intelligent heroine who acts of her own free will while simultaneously delivering a refreshing view of the classic story.

Jerry Griswold's *The Meaning of "Beauty and the Beast": A Handbook* provides an excellent summary of scholarship on the tale. Griswold also offers a thorough close reading of Beaumont's *La Belle et La Bête*, as well as a glimpse at subsequent retellings, including Jean Cocteau's film of the same name and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. While the particular chapter on Disney's version presents an interesting and valuable argument on the film's homosexual undertones and its presentation of masculinity, I disagree with Griswold's stance on the importance of the film and how it stands in comparison to previous retellings and Beaumont's original. Griswold quotes the film's director Don Hahn as saying that "contrary to tradition, [this] had to be Beast's story" and acknowledges Disney's decision to "convert the story into a discussion of masculinity"

(241). In fact, lyricist Howard Ashman “completely reworked the script” that scriptwriter Linda Woolverton had crafted in which Belle would be a feminist heroine (241). Yet neither Griswold himself nor the director he quotes make any justification as to why a story about empowering young women must be made into a story about men. The only explanation of this major change is that the final version of the film is one in which Woolverton’s and Ashman’s scripts are blended and “feminist and gay discourse overlap” (241). Griswold praises this version of the Beauty and the Beast story, saying that its “genius . . . lies in the fact that it is a wonderful amalgam of prior versions of the story, a kind of *summa* that gathers together and echoes and responds to the story tradition” (247), but it is illogical for Griswold to acknowledge the film’s focus on men and masculinity as a radical departure from tradition at the same time that he praises the film for being a conglomeration of previous retellings. The Disney film has very little in common with those retellings, because previous versions have been focused on the heroine. Disney’s version, as admitted by Griswold himself, changes the focus of the story completely by shifting attention to the male characters and displaying different types of masculinity. In the very beginning, the Beauty and the Beast story was written by a female (Beaumont), had a female protagonist (Beauty), and was delivered to a female-only audience (Beaumont’s students), yet for some reason, Disney decided to take ownership of one of the most empowering, female-centric modern fairytales and alter it to be about men. Furthermore, for another inexplicable reason, Griswold agrees that this vastly altered version is simply an “amalgam” of previous versions and does not

acknowledge the grievous slight Disney has committed against women by removing them and their heroine from their own story of empowerment.

Perhaps Griswold thinks Belle actually remains empowered, for he states that the “pining for papa that is so much a part of Beaumont’s story is largely absent” in Disney’s version (250), yet I have already discussed and demonstrated how Belle’s maternal role in relation to her father is what supplies two of the movie’s major plot points. To say Belle’s concern for her father is reduced in the Disney film than in Beaumont’s story is to ignore the findings of two important critics of the film, Martha Bartter (“Desacrilization of Image and Confusion of Sexuality in the Disney Studio’s *Beauty and the Beast*”) and Kathleen Manley (“Disney, the Beast, and Woman as Civilizing Force”), both of whom demonstrate how Belle is relegated to the role of mother when it comes to the men in her life, including her father. Griswold maintains that Belle is just as assertive as Beauty because she refuses to dine with the Beast on her first night at the castle (251), yet Beaumont’s Beauty resists the Beast every single night of her stay at his castle (Beaumont 24). In fact, she does not simply resist an invitation to dinner, she resists the often repeated and much more emotional question “Will you marry me?” In Beaumont’s story, the drama is centered around Beauty’s choice and ability to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the Beast as she wishes. For Disney, the drama stems from Belle’s fear of Gaston and fear of the Beast, not in her power of choice. Indeed, for Belle, it seems that she almost cannot help falling in love with the Beast, and she is robbed of the power to say ‘no’ to a proposal because she is never asked the question. Disney has taken away what decision-making power the original heroine had. In addition to robbing Belle of her power, Disney

also robs Belle of her own complete story. Griswold states that “Belle’s own story. . . is deliberately situated within the context of other traditional tales,” that of Prince Charming, or in other words, the Beast (252). He says that “her story and this film is just the newest incarnation,” yet neglects to acknowledge that this incarnation is fundamentally different than past versions *because* it sandwiches Belle’s tale in between that of men. Belle’s independence is sacrificed for the sake of male characters’ story arcs. What attention Belle *does* have is altered so as to paint her as less of a person and more of a device—maternal support or magical spell-breaker. By refusing to recognize how Disney’s alterations intrinsically harm the character of Belle, Griswold commits the same sins against women and children that Disney does, in that he tells a tale of faux-empowerment, shifting the focus of the tale from a woman to the men around her rather than letting her have her own story.

While Griswold’s book is an important contribution to Beauty and the Beast scholarship, it serves to highlight the importance of consuming media with a critical eye so as not to gloss over any dangerous undertones that may be present in popular culture. This thesis identifies some of those harmful messages, argues that what is seen as a strong character may not actually be, and points out how some of those harmful messages pass unseen by many. That Disney’s heroine is supposed to be feminist-friendly and represent female strength is troubling, because, as demonstrated, she is not and does not. In changing the nature of the Beast, Belle, and other prominent characters from their originals in Beaumont’s *La Belle et La Bête*, Disney changes the message of the story from one of feminine empowerment to one of feminine objectification. Rather than being

the head of the class, Disney's heroine is relegated to simply being the Belle of the ball.

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