Beauty AND THE Beast

VISIONS AND REVISIONS OF AN OLD TALE

BETSY HEARNE

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With an Essay by

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Preface

The study of fairy tales is by nature interdisciplinary, requiring some familiarity with folklore, literature, art, history, psychology, and education. Although researchers must guard against thin scholarship in dealing with so many diverse canons of knowledge, they otherwise risk limitations of vision within a narrow specialty. Numerous recent essays by scholars of widely differing backgrounds attest to the importance of a holistic approach.

In this respect, the tradition of children's literature in librarianship provides a logical springboard for the study of fairy tales. Librarianship is by nature interdisciplinary in its goals of gathering, organizing, and preserving knowledge of all kinds, in many forms. That knowledge includes oral narrative, and for many years, children's librarians have been staple tradition bearers. Before the turn of the century, they pioneered storytelling programs to which children all over the country had free access. The first library schools, established in the early 1900s, included storytelling and children's literature—long before education or English departments offered such courses or recognized them as academically worthwhile. Those early courses emphasized a common core of folklore and mythology, and they stressed both the theoretical and the practical aspects of studying fairy tales. Children's librarians were also crucial, in the 1920s and early 1930s, to the establishment of children's book publication, which is now the primary medium for the popular dissemination of fairy tales. The first children's book editors were either children's librarians or in close working relationship with children's librarians, who were often consulted on publishing decisions and, as primary consumers and critics, always crucial to the success of a book.

While I have pursued "Beauty and the Beast" through thickets of reading in various disciplines, my fundamental appreciation for the tale is that of a

storyteller. I grew up in a time and place that included many illiterate adults for whom storytelling and story singing were art forms. I have told stories to children and adults for twenty-five years, reviewed children's books professionally for twenty, and written some as well. Throughout my study of "Beauty and the Beast," it was the artistry of the story's tradition bearers that sustained and refreshed me. Each teller/interpreter recreates the tale anew. Every listener/reader hears a different story, according to his or her life experience. It is not a correct reading that I seek here, but an exploration of the multiple dimensions embodied in any great work of art, whether it is oral, visual, or literary.

This is a study of the art and artifice of the story rather than an analysis of its meaning. In paying more attention to the forms of the story's regeneration than to its interpretation, I am exposing myself to charges of staying on the story's surface. In this introspective era, the study of a story's meaning sometimes overshadows the story itself. We must remember that the story is fundamental and irrepressible, the meaning secondary and chameleon in that it shifts with time and culture. A story can be appreciated for one meaning, for many, or for none on an interpretive level. It is the art of a story that moves us, not the Freudian, Jungian, or other conceptualization of it. In fact, explaining a metaphor can sometimes limit its meaning more than expand it. The art and the idea of a great story, the outside and inside, are synonymous. As Shakespeare has Antony describe the crocodile to Lepidus: "It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs; it lives by that which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates. . . . Of its own colour too. . . . 'Tis so; and the tears of it are wet." (2. 7. 42–49). This brings to mind the words with which C. S. Lewis accused Jung of explaining one myth only by creating another: "Surely the analysis of water should not itself be wet" (*Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, 71). The art of the story is the heart of the story.

Any analysis, of course, creates an interpretive environment. Interpretation is implicit in the analysis of form and will suggest itself to readers. Moreover, I have occasionally but inevitably touched on interpretation in discussing point of view, style, plot, characterization, and historical nuance, as has Larry DeVries in his appended essay on the folkloristic structure of the tale. The study begins with an overview of the story's survival in oral and literary traditions and proceeds with an analysis of selected versions from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. The first appendix consists of Larry DeVries's structural analysis of the folk narrative. The second provides

the Beaumont text, the third presents an oral version collected by Paul Delarue and Marie-Louise Tenèze, and a fourth appendix provides a list of nineteenth-century printed versions. The bibliography is divided into story sources and critical sources. I have tuned my comments for general as well as academic readers because "Beauty and the Beast" appeals to several levels of interest, aesthetic and emotional as well as intellectual. The most fruitful scholarship I encountered in the course of this study acknowledged all three levels.

Parts of the manuscript have been presented previously, first during a *Booklist* Open Forum at the American Library Association Conference in 1978 and later as essays in *New Observations* and in *The Lion and the Unicorn* 12 (2) 1988, reprinted by permission of Johns Hopkins University Press. I am deeply grateful to Zena Sutherland for her championship of children's literature and of this study in its original dissertation form. I have benefited, as well, from discussions with Hazel Rochman and Roger Sutton on aspects of cultural myth in children's and young adult literature. Alan Dundes provided helpful criticism of the manuscript in an earlier stage, although he is of course not responsible for errors and omissions in the finished book. Thanks also to Larry DeVries, who strengthened my knowledge of oral narrative, contributed a folkloristic essay, and stimulated ideas related to the "Cupid and Psyche" variants he has studied. I am indebted to Don Swanson, who, during his deanship, supported my humanistic interests at the Graduate Library School when his own were scientific. The Joyce Foundation gave a grant making possible the reproduction of color plates that are crucial to discussions of the art. Catharine Lange photographed many of the illustrations and did so clearly, cheerfully, and on time. Finally, thanks to my family for their love of story and their patience with its development.

There is no one true version of which
all the others are but copies or distortions.
Every version belongs to the myth.
Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth"

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ONE

The Survival of a Story

"Beauty and the Beast" offers proof of simple story as a powerful form of complex statement. It is a story told to children but echoed in literary and artistic elaborations through hundreds of years. Based on an ancient folktale with global variants, the story has not petrified as a relic of the past but has adapted constantly to reflect new variations of culture and creativity. The core of motifs, images, characters, and conflicts remains constant. Yet the changes of form, detail, and tone show the tale's elasticity. Its endurance of transition proves it to be one of the great metaphors of oral and written tradition.

The very survival of the story raises a host of questions. What is its source? What makes it persist while other stories fade from memory? What has happened to it through the two hundred and fifty years since its publication in the 1700s? Which of its versions are most effective? What central aspects are most often retained? How does one reconcile conflicting interpretations? The study of fairy tales has generated many psychological, historical, cultural, and aesthetic theories. A close look at the variations and constants of one tale over a long period of time shows it to have kaleidoscopic implications for all these areas.

In the story of "Beauty and the Beast," a wealthy merchant with three beautiful daughters, the youngest incomparably lovely and good-hearted, loses everything through misfortune. Hearing of one cargo ship's safe return, the merchant sets off to straighten out his finances. His older girls clamor for rich gifts, but Beauty requests only a rose. After a fruitless journey, the merchant turns homeward, gets lost in a storm, and discovers a magic palace, where he plucks from the garden a rose. This theft arouses the wrath of a terrible Beast, who demands he either forfeit his life or give up a daughter.

Beauty insists on sacrificing herself but becomes, instead, mistress of a palace and develops an esteem for the Beast. In spite of her growing attachment to him, however, she misses her ailing father and requests leave to care for him. Once home, she is diverted by her two sisters from returning to the palace until nearly too late. She misses the Beast, arrives to find him almost dead with grief, and declares her love, thereby transforming him into a prince who makes her his bride.

Animal groom and bride stories have varied as widely across time and culture as versions of the Cinderella theme. Traditional tales bearing striking parallels with "Beauty and the Beast" have been collected from India and Central Asia, Europe, and Africa. The tale of "Cupid and Psyche," one of the earliest recorded predecessors of "Beauty and the Beast," was available in published form to French writers by the middle of the seventeeth century. The most familiar version of "Beauty and the Beast" is the one written by Madame Le Prince de Beaumont in 1756 in *Magasin des enfans, ou dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusiers de ses élèves de la première distinction* and translated into English several years later in *The Young Misses Magazine, Containing Dialogues between a Governess and Several Young Ladies of Quality, Her Scholars* (reproduced in appendix 2). The wife of a minor French aristocrat, Beaumont emigrated to London in 1745 and established herself as a tutor and writer of educational and moral books, which were to amount to some seventy volumes before her death. The story of "Beauty and the Beast" is buried in the midst of tedious, didactic conversations among figures such as Mrs. Affable and Lady Witty. There are other stories that appear in the same series, none of which has ever drawn the same following as "La Belle and la Bête."

Beaumont's story is based on the first known literary version of "Beauty and the Beast," a 362-page romance by Gabrielle Susanne Barbot de Gallon de Villeneuve, who wrote *La jeune amériquaine, et les contes marins* in 1740, not for children but for the entertainment of court and salon friends ("J'aime les jeux innocents avec ceux qui ne le sont pas").[1] Various other ladies of the court played with similar tales, among them Madame D'Aulnoy in "Le Mouton."

These eighteenth-century versions were followed in the nineteenth century by a profusion of chapbooks and collections that featured "Beauty and the Beast" and imprinted it on the cultural subconscious of French, English, and Americans, among others. This is a story with levels of meaning for all ages. Its audience has always fluctuated between children and adults. Children absorb the symbolic dimensions through the literal, while both

aspects offer possibilities for elaboration that attract sophisticated adults. Although some versions clearly are created for children and others for adults only, the broad age appeal is an important aspect of the tale's popularity with readers and its perpetuation by writers and artists who find it challenging.

Listed in Mary Eastman's *Index to Fairy Tales* are sixty-eight printed editions of "Beauty and the Beast," from single editions to rare old collections. A 1984 On-line Computer Library Center (OCLC) printout of publications, films, and recordings under the title entry ran to 257 items. There are at least twenty different single editions of the story dated from 1804 to 1900 in the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Pierpont Morgan, and Newberry Libraries.[2] These range from the most pedestrian samples of text and illustration to work by writers such as Charles Lamb (1811) and Andrew Lang (1889) and artists of the caliber of Walter Crane and Eleanor Vere Boyle (both 1875). One of the richest blends of art and text is anonymous and undated, part of the Aunt Mavor's Toy Books series, published by George Routledge in London during the 1860s for sixpence (plate 1).

Nineteenth-century forms of the story vary as greatly as the physical editions. All the nineteenth-century versions, however, are faithful to the narrative surface of the story, whereas many of the twentieth-century versions abandon narrative surface for an emphasis on internal themes. Charles Lamb's 1811 "Beauty and the Beast," for instance, is a chronicle in iambic tetrameter; John Heath-Stubbs' 1943 "Beauty and the Beast" is a lyrical poem that extracts the tone and images of the story in order to beam an existential spotlight on the two main characters. J. R. Planché's 1841 "Grand, Comic, Romantic, Operatic, Melo-dramatic, Fairy Extravaganza in Two Acts" is embroidered with witty dialogue but takes none of the liberties Fernand Nozière does in his 1909 "Fantasy in Two Acts." There the merchant-father, his lover, the two sisters, their suitors, Beauty, and the Beast weave elaborate sexual repartee and games from the simple erotic threads of the original. Jean Cocteau's 1946 film projects the duality of nature and magic into a surrealistic vision much more introverted than Andrew Lang's room of mirrors, where Beauty sees multiple reflections of herself.

Versions of "Beauty and the Beast" expanded during the twentieth century to include opera, dance, film, radio, and television productions in addition to drama, poetry, novels, picture books, and science fiction stories. Popular dissemination has affected the tale but not necessarily weakened it. Eighteenth-century versions, for instance, are affected by the forging of folk narratives with a new literary tradition; nineteenth-century versions, by innovations in bookmaking and printing; and those in the twentieth century, by

the influence of psychological interpretations, new media techniques, and mass market distribution. Yet the fact remains that "Beauty and the Beast" translates flexibly and successfully. Central aspects of the story endure from century to century, medium to medium, culture to culture, artist to artist. The content of the tale to some extent defies the form, or remains basic despite variations of form.

Whether the variations are textual, with realistic or fantastical elaboration, or visual, as in the contemporary spate of picture books illustrating Beaumont's story, "Beauty and the Beast" is still identifiable by its core elements. The tale's survival through so many re-creations would seem to demonstrate the fact that plurality does not dissipate a story but may in fact be healthy and even essential to its continuation. Living things change. Printing and reproduction have not frozen these tales. Before printing, every telling varied around a central pattern. Now multiple printed and illustrated versions still vary around a central pattern. Acting, dancing, filming, painting, cartooning have not decreased the imaginative power of the story.

Roger Sale in *Fairy Tales and After* seems to idealize the oral tradition as a high point after which the literary tradition became self- and audience-directed. The old tradition bearers, he claims, shared "a power that has been lost or debased in the latter days."[3] Yet there is little evidence that storytelling in illiterate cultures is not audience- and self-directed. Texts do not include body language, tempo, nuances of successful or unsuccessful adjustment. Storytelling at its best has always been a sophisticated craft, whatever the medium. The technological era is similar to the oral tradition in many ways. There are simply too many parallels across time among storytellers, whether they are talking, singing, acting, writing, painting, or dancing, to identify some set point of development or deterioration in the total artistic spectrum.

Jane Yolen contends in her provocative essay on Disney's version of "Cinderella" that "the magic of the old tales has been falsified, the true meaning lost, perhaps forever."[4] Although she cites persuasive evidence from current media, the effects of mass market dissemination on the shaping of a story may not justify quite such a sense of doom. We have developed a fairy tale about fairy tales, that in print or film they become culturally, textually, and graphically fixed. Some critics, including J. R. R. Tolkien and Bruno Bettelheim, have even deplored the illustration of fairy tales as further limiting them to a frozen confine. Of course, what can become fixed is, by implication, fixable, perfectible. The version of the tale closest to the oral tradition, or most compatible with a set theory, or best suited to an aesthetic

definition, or simply dearest to a childhood memory is the truest. This assumption of an ideal, in either form or meaning, is not neccessarily a bad thing and may in fact figure in the story's perpetuation. Yet the power of radically different versions, the elastic nature of story, is undeniable, and, as we shall see, common to printed as well as oral versions.

Following this tale through its first centuries of printed history, in the countries that shared the earliest and greatest impact of its publication, shows that literary versions have varied in storytelling patterns reflective of the oral tradition. Certain central elements of structure have supported a range of differences in style and meaning. One can hypothesize that the same kinds of storytelling variation would surface in studies of printed versions in other languages, but this remains to be shown.[5] The following study traces "Beauty and the Beast" from its printed birth in France through its migration to England with its "author," Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, and its subsequent dissemination in primarily English and American publications often but not always considered the realm of children's literature.

Stories pass back and forth between oral and literary traditions, are told, written down, read, remembered, retold. Books go in and out of print. Celluloid deteriorates, the images made upon it fall out of fashion. A film is considered old after ten years. A book is considered old after twenty-five years, rare after seventy-five. Over the course of a hundred years, literary versions differ substantially. By folkloristic standards that is a short time. We have barely arrived at a point when enough time has elapsed to allow perspective on a story's development in literate societies. Cartoon versions can make a story affecting—or disembowel it. The criticism of popularized versions is sometimes justified. But powerful new forms accompany them as well. There is also the growing factor of mass production; as more of everything becomes available, good as well as bad, quantity itself comes under fire as potentially depersonalizing. Many criticisms of cheap, gutted, or bowdlerized versions seem based on an objection to something originally commonplace—now accepted because of age and tradition—becoming newly commonplace.

Folktales are not always profound or even coherent, much less moving. No telling is above modification. Wilhelm Grimm's tidying up tales to suit society had an impact as pervasive as Disney's. And the Grimms, needless to say, did not "fix" them, either in the sense of freezing them or in the sense of achieving a terminal ideal. It was the Grimms' versions that touched off rebellious new forms such as Anne Sexton's fairy tale poetry and Tanith Lee's

fictional reworkings. The strong story is greater than any of its tellings. The core elements remain because they are magnetic to each other, structurally, and to people, variably but almost universally.

To some extent, scholars of the fairy tale have added their voices to the storytellers'. Interpretations vary as widely as versions of the tale: Freudians, Jungians, Marxists, feminists have all attributed different meanings to it. Usually these meanings are both insightful and contradictory; sometimes they are limited by an attempt to fit story into theory rather than generate theory from story; and often they do not take into account the tale's multiple variants. Whether it appears in the form of a Buddhist moral tale, a Scandinavian folktale, a French romance, an English chapbook, or an American picture book, "Beauty and the Beast" has a nucleus of elements that has survived cultural, historical, economic, and aesthetic change. The flexibility of the metaphor allows for a range of adaptation and interpretation. The story has outlived many theories and will outlast many more.

A close look at representative examples of "Beauty and the Beast" from its first printed appearance in 1740 to current editions reveals not only the persistence of intrinsic elements despite great variation of treatment, but also some patterns common to each historical period. The versions on which this book concentrates are selected for qualities both typical of the period represented and important in the tale's aesthetic development through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Although other relevant versions, from chapbook to television production, are not excluded from the discussion, those listed below provide the main focus of examination.

Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve, 1740 (story)
Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, 1756 (story)
Comtesse de Genlis, 1785 (play)
Charles Lamb, 1811 (poem)
J. R. Planché, 1841 (play)
Walter Crane, 1875 (picture book)
Eleanor Vere Boyle, 1875 (illustrated novella)
Andrew Lang, 1889 (story)
Fernand Nozière, 1909 (play)
Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch/Edmund Dulac, 1910 (illustrated story in collection)
Margaret Tarrant, 1920 (illustrated story in collection)
John Heath-Stubbs, 1943 (poem)
Jean Cocteau, 1946 (film)
Philippa Pearce/Alan Barrett, 1972 (picture book)

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