

Beast's Paradox

Fairy Tales and Their Misunderstood Purpose

Kristina Thompson

Brigham Young University- Idaho

**Beast's Paradox:
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by

Kristina Thompson

Senior Writing and Critical Thinking Seminar

Rodney Keller

Brigham Young University- Idaho

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Kristina Thompson

156 Viking Dr. Apt 403
Rexburg, ID 83440

719.761.6114
kthomp8@gmail.com

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Rodney D. Keller
Brigham Young University-Idaho
English Department
370 Smith
Rexburg, ID 83460-4540

Brother Keller:

Enclosed is my report, "Beast's Paradox: Fairy Tales and Their Misunderstood Purpose," requested January 2011 as part of the Senior Writing and Critical Thinking Seminar. This paper focuses on proving that the phrase "misinterpreted the fairy tale" is often simply a paradox caused by a lack of understanding regarding fairy tales.

This paper is different than the initial proposal as this focuses on disproving current critical analyses of modern renditions of "Beauty and the Beast" rather than analyzing the repeated motifs in connection with the Aristotelian Triangle of Rhetoric. This change was made because the research for my previous idea proved to be redundant with previous studies. Instead I focused my argument on current criticism. In my research I found many accusations towards the Walt Disney Company and Angela Carter, the subjects of my paper, and decided to refocus my attention on proving or disproving these claims.

My conclusion is mostly of defense for the authors. When given proper context and background for the fairy tale genre, the renditions of Disney and Carter can be defended as legitimate fairy tales that although very different from Madame Beaumont's tales, are not misinterpretations, but are instead simply reinterpretations.

I thank you for your patience regarding the lateness of this report. As I mentioned before, I had difficulties finding a solid research topic and creating a solid research thesis. This combined with other duties has made it difficult to present this at the deadline, but again I thank you for patience and understanding

If you have any further questions, feel free to email me at tho08019@byui.edu and I will respond promptly.

Best Regards,



Kristina Thompson

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Current Criticism and Discussion	3
The Story of Fairy Tales: Identity Created	5
Beast’s Myth: Background of the Tale.....	7
Madame Beaumont’s “La Belle et La Bête”	9
Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride”	11
Disney’s Beauty and the Beast	16
Conclusion.....	19
Bibliography	20

Abstract

“Beast’s Paradox: Fairy Tales and Their Misunderstood Purpose” is written to explain how the phrase “misinterpreted a fairy tale” is often a paradox. This idea is fairly common in negative criticism towards modern renditions of the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast.” This idea, however, is largely unfounded because of the nature of the genre. The ancient origins of the fairy tale in myth form have very distinct purposes that apply to how fairy tales as a genre function; the transformation of fairy tales in France slightly altered the purpose. This paper discusses the origins and transformation of the genre, and afterwards will defend Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” and Walt Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. The defense is grounded in the heritage of the fairy tale, as the essay will point out that these tales meet the necessary criteria (similar motifs, directed towards an audience with individualized theme, and creates a utopian society) for the fairy tale genre, and despite their dramatic differences, are still fairy tales.

Beast's Paradox: Fairy Tales and Their Misunderstood Purpose

Introduction

Song writer Alan Menken and lyricist Howard Ashman were not far off when they wrote the lyrics, “Tale as old as time, True as it can be, ... Ever just the same, Ever a surprise, Ever as before, Ever just as sure” for the Disney production of *Beauty and the Beast* – a rendition of possibly the oldest fairy tale with a vast number of retellings covering over two thousand years.

Storytelling is a sophisticated craft; because it began as an oral tradition, stories took on vast evolution before the time of written literature began to form. The most basic motifs of a story allow the ideas to be passed down despite the voices that take their turn in the conversation, and yet the simple story maintains its various layers of understanding. As Betsy Hearn, an American librarian and writer, describes it, “Each teller/interpreter recreates the tale anew. Every listener/reader hears a different story, according to his or her life experience” (xiv). In this way, a child and adult can listen to the exact same story and hear a different tale, and then can, and often will, tell their own version.

Madame Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's rendition of “Beauty and the Beast” created in 1756 has been recognized as the standard tale by many Anglo-American critics and authors. Since then, there have been numerous retellings of the story– many praised and many criticized, but few both; such stories include Angela Carter's “The Tiger's Bride” and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. Although these renditions have received a great amount of recognition, they have also been criticized as misinterpreting the original tale. Yet, following Hearn's understanding of storytelling, it is my belief that neither is right or wrong, just unique as they

still remain true to the motifs of the ancient tale while creating a distinctive tale with its own themes and morals.

In this paper I will discuss the nature of fairytales in relation to “The Tiger’s Bride” and Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. It is my understanding that many of those who criticize Disney, Carter, and other new authors have a misunderstanding about the history, purpose, and intricate structure of the fairytale genre and consequently have unfounded reasons for their disapproval.

Often there is an overemphasis on the psychological, sexist, and sociological implications within the ancient motifs, and because of this, will dismiss any tales lacking the deep levels. Other times there is protest at the overemphasis or unusual takes on these same themes. Both views, however, are oversimplifying richness innate to the genre.

I will begin by summarizing the negative criticism of the fairy tale trend by noted critics as well as attempting to put into perspective the outcry from the public. From this basis I will then explain the fairy tale as a genre by explaining its roots and evolving purpose of the tale. Following this explanation will be a small history of the myth that brought to life Beaumont’s tale and subsequently will be an examination of her tale, Angela Carter’s darker rendition, and Disney’s playful story. The paper will then conclude explaining how the claim that authors have misinterpreted a fairy tale is a paradox.

Current Criticism and Discussion

English Professor Roger Sale said that “In this century... so many people know fairy tales only through badly truncated modern versions, that it is no longer really fairy tales that they know” (qtd in Einfeld 12). Roger is not alone in this belief. In fact, professors, scholars, and bloggers in the fairy tale arena often have similar statements about the distortion of fairy tales from their original form. This belief stems from the undisputed fact that “Most fairy tales differ from the popular conceptions of them and contain much more profound messages” (Einfeld 12).

Such discussion about fairy tales did not occur until years after the death of Walt Disney in 1966. The commercialization of the genre with theme parks, games, toys, and videos drew attention to fairy tales as a genre that people claimed had been uprooted from its origins, and then over simplified. The Disney films *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella* were so popular that “the appeal of his animated characters ensured that Disney’s versions would be seen by millions of people worldwide. [And] so influential were his fairy-tale features that they... supplanted the original tales” (Einfeld 27). *Newsweek* in 1983 made the observation that Disney had entertained and educated three generations (Einfeld 27); since then there have been many more, and still today Disney continues to do so with new releases such as *Tangled* and *The Princess and the Frog*.

Still, critics tear down the Disney empire and many of those who have redesigned the fairy tale believing that they have “trivialized and sanitized the genuine tales beyond all recognition” (Einfeld 28). Marcia Lieberman in her article “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale,” claims that the current fairy tales are “training manuals in passive behavior” for girls, which is completely counterproductive to their literary purpose (Einfeld 28).

Blogs and other community web forums have also provided the general populations perspective on Disney. James Kendrick, a writer from Q Network Film Desk, believes that Disney has oversimplified the characterization; “Belle is so decidedly positive in every regard, so simplistically shaped to meet the desires of all audience members (both dreamy little girls and feminist objectors), that she ultimately fails as a character.”

Disney, however, is not the only one criticized for their interpretation of the tale. Angela Carter has also been a largely disputed author. Some believe that she is the fairy-god mother to the contemporary fairy tale, while others believe that she has used a distorted and abused the fairy tale medium in order to push forward her own political agenda, especially in the world of feminism. Dan Schneider, an American actor, writer, and producer, finds Carter’s writing childish and unsophisticated. He sees her “deploy clichés and pointless modifiers at almost every opportunity” and her writing is “filled with bad puns, and so suffused with modifiers that [the tale] sinks.” In short, “The problem is that Carter simply did not have a good imagination. This is because almost all her tales are derived from others’ works—obviously, blatantly, or indirectly, and they almost all go over the top in their efforts to make them different from their source material” (Schneider).

While some of these claims do have a foundation and evidence for their arguments, to accuse authors of misinterpreting or ruining one of the greatest love stories of all time is inaccurate and unfounded.

The Story of Fairy Tales: Identity Created

First and foremost we must understand that fairy tales were not originally created for children. Jack Zipes, a leading scholar in fairytale tradition, wrote “It has generally been assumed that fairy tales were first created for children...Nothing could be further from the truth” (Spells 1). Fairy tales were not created to teach universal truths and morals; instead they were written to “humanize bestial and barbaric forces” through metaphors (Spells 1). And so although children were drawn to the story aspect, the tales were originally told to adults by adults. Eventually the cohesive motifs that survived the test of time began to be fostered by the beliefs and customs within different communities; each time they were exchanged, they would be modified according to the needs of the orator and the audience. These needs often revolved around ideas of immortality, purpose, and hope; and, as Zipes describes it, “they ... formed like musical notes of compositions” as each teller would chose words that enunciated their own position on the world (Spells 2). Similarly, the audience would accept the tale inasmuch as it reflected their own views. Because this was the initial use of fairy tales it is logical that this intent remains. A genre formed on personal interpretation merits that it continues to evolve as each author interprets their own story.

As these tales were written in the fifteenth century, the idea of fairy tales for children emerged, but was not initially accepted. The reception of children tales came about when French authors of the eighteenth century took the tales as their own and in so doing shaped the Western fairy tale to its popular form. Noted French authors such as Charles Perrault, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (who coined the term fairy tale), and Antoine Galland published their stories which slowed the evolution of fairy tales, as the stories were now standardized on paper for reading rather than a spoken, transforming tale. It was also with publication that the wording was abridged and simplified in order to accommodate the needs of “children and nonliterate folk

[sic]" (Zipes, *Spells*, 12). Publication also changed the position of authority; instead of oral tradition being the source for literary versions, the published work became the source for orators to share stories; in so doing, this took a large part of the individuality out of fairy tales. It was not for another hundred or so years that tales began to be reinterpreted, and not until the twentieth century were their dramatic liberties taken.

But as afore mentioned, fairy tales by and large were still not considered "prime reading material" or "healthy" for the development of children's minds and bodies"; and so although there was a change in language for them, those raising children still preferred more didactic tales for children's education. This left interpretation out of their learning and focused their minds on what was correct and good and would cultivate manners and morals appropriate to their needs. Fairy tales were dismissed as ideal literature for children because of the risqué material still present, and it was not until a cleansing of such material in the nineteenth century did they become appropriate teaching tools.

This final, cleansed, pure form of fairy tales is the subsection standardized by the French and used most often for critiquing fairy tales. This type is characterized by its very hopeful and utopian (meaning "no place") ideas (Zipes, *Spells* 4). The "once upon a time" phrase is meant to distance the person from reality in order to explore a world outside of their own, and in its place provides a utopian perspective about various problems. This utopian seed is what remains with a person even after the "happily ever after" delivers them back into their own shaky world, and this seed is capable of taking on the blows of life because of the hope stored within.

Madame Le Prince Beaumont in her publication *Magasin des Enfants* in 1756 which included "Beauty and the Beast" was one of the first renditions to begin the bridge from the bawdy and lewd to the refined and cultured.

Beast's Myth: Background of the Tale

Claude Lévi-Strauss in “The Structural Study of a Myth” concluded that “There is no one true version of which all others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth.” In the case of “The Beauty and the Beast” the closest version to a myth is in Lucius Apuleius’ *The Metamorphoses*, a vulgar Roman adventure novel, which records “Psyche and Cupid¹.” The myth, intended to criticize females’ unrestrained curiosity, is seen across various cultures including eastern China and India to western Scandinavian countries. The strongest link between “Psyche and Cupid” and Beaumont’s tale is seen in the Norwegian fairy-tale, “East of the Sun and West of the Moon²,” often told to pacify anxious brides on their wedding night.

The tale continued to take on various transformations noted by authors such as Charles Perrault until it reached the French social arena where women would read and write stories to

¹Summary of “Psyche and Cupid”: Venus (goddess of love, beauty, and fertility) is jealous of the beauty possessed by the mortal Psyche and sends her son Cupid (god of desire, affection and erotic love) to prick her with an arrow as she sleeps; then, when she awakes, will fall in love with the ugly creature he will place before her. Instead Cupid is struck by his own arrow and falls in love with her. Through a series of events and after much controversy the two are wed; however, Psyche is not aware of her bridegroom’s nature. On her wedding day she is attended by invisible servants until nightfall; at that time her promised bridegroom arrives and the marriage is consummated. Cupid visits her every night to sleep with her, but insists that she never light any lamps– she cannot know who he is until the time is right. Later during a visit to her two jealous sisters, she is persuaded to reveal her husband’s nature. The sisters tell her that she has married a serpent that will devour her and her unborn child in the night. That night she lights a lamp and sees her husband is the god Cupid. She then is pricked by one of his arrows and is overcome with love for him. As she leans to kiss him, a drop of oil wakes him and he flees out of anger. From this point on Psyche is sent on a series of tasks given by the goddess Venus so that she can again be with her love. In the end Cupid, who at this point has forgiven her, rescues her from a deep sleep befallen her and Jupiter declares them man and wife. Psyche is then given a drink which grants her immortality.

² Summary for “East of the Sun and West of the Moon”: The White Bear approaches a poor man and says if he will let him marry his youngest daughter, he will make the father rich. At first the daughter is reluctant, but finally agrees and the bear takes her to his enchanted castle. At night he takes off his bear covering and reveals a man underneath; however, because of the darkness she never sees his human form. At one point she becomes homesick and persuades him to let her return home for twenty-four hours. He agrees insisting that she does not speak to her mother alone. At home she does eventually talk to her mother alone who convinces her that the White Bear is a troll, and to be sure, must light candles that night to see his true form. She is convinced and lights the candle that night revealing a handsome prince. She instantly falls in love, but accidentally spills three drops of tallow (primitive wax) on him. Waking he explains to her that because she did not hold out a full year he must now return to the castle of his wicked stepmother and must marry her ugly daughter. In the morning she wakes to find that the palace has vanished and she is left to find her mate. After help from the earth winds she finds the castle. She makes three agreements with the hideous daughter in order to win her lover. Two nights the daughter tricks the girl by having the prince drink a sleeping potion so that the girl cannot wake him. On the third night he does not drink and is awake when the girl enters the room. They devise a trick; he will not marry anyone who cannot wash the tallow from his dress. The evil daughter cannot do it, but the young daughter can and so they are wed. The prince and his bride free the other captives and leave the castle located east of the sun and west of the moon.

share with their friends. At this point in time the stories were still very much intended for adults. In 1740 Gabrielle Susanne Barbot de Gallon de Villeneuve wrote *La jeune américaine, et les contes marins* for such entertainment; this 362-page romance became the basis of Madame Beaumont's story. It was here that the lewdness and more adult themed material was simplified or taken out to create a story structured to teach cultured manners and customs to young children.

Madame Beaumont's "La Belle et La Bête"

Madame Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont was a governess, an occupation she held for fourteen years after leaving an unhappy marriage in France 10 years before. Interestingly this marriage was arranged and only lasted two years. During her time as governess she met a new man in England, was wed, and had several children. Beaumont has been described as "Industrious and high-minded" (Warner 292). In her writings "she issued a stream of pedagogical writings, often translating her own French into English for the edification of an aristocratic female pupillage under the age of eighteen" (Warner 292); even in her own writings she wrote with her pupils in mind. This ideology condensed the aged tale with various themes to a child-like tale with fewer, less complex themes about the ideal woman. However, the themes are still very much present.

Being briefed on Beaumont's history as an author and placing the text in historical contexts, I will now discuss her text in order to prove that using her text as a standard is not only unfair to the other revisions, but it is also an example of the true art of fairy tales as it has taken the original tale "Psyche and Cupid" to make it her own, and has already done exactly what many other critics have used as a claim to denounce other renditions.

Beaumont's story is unique because it is introduced with surrounding context. Beaumont has created a fictional conversation between the Mrs. Affable, a governess, and three of her students. The ladies have requested a tale that Mrs. Affable previously promised them, and so she begins the tale. The form itself takes on a storyteller discourse similar to the "once upon a time" introduction to so many other tales. But, within these story lines is a very detailed manners- book for the young ladies who read it.

Beauty and her two sisters are foil characters to one another. While Beauty is described as "such a charming, sweet-tempered creature, [who] spoke so kindly to the poor people, and

was of such affable, aliging behavior” whereas her sisters were devious, prideful, and possess “ridiculous airs” (Hearne 193). As the story plays out, these opposing characteristics play against themselves in order to reveal the character of Beauty. Beaumont is very careful to dictate the thoughts behind the characters actions in order to help the reader recognize the admirable qualities. One instance is when Beauty’s father lost his fortune; instead of thinking about the loss of her fortune she “said to herself, ‘were I to cry ever so much, that would not make things better, I must try to make myself happy without a fortune’” (Hearne 193, punctuation added).

Beaumont also uses a dream to further tell the readers the importance of good character. Belle’s dream recounts as follows: “A fine lady came, and said to her, ‘I am content, Beauty, with your good will; this good action of yours in giving up your own life to save your father’s shall not go unrewarded’” (Hearne 198, punctuation added). In the end we see this in the conclusion of the story as the final line reads, “[Beast] married Beauty, and lived with her many years, and their happiness, as it was founded on virtue was complete” (Hearne 203). And so the story ends, Beauty is a queen who is guaranteed happiness because of the virtue she and the Beast possess.

In relation to the earlier myths the tale is certainly recognizable, but distinctively different. The first and most distinguishing difference is the focus on mannerisms. The story leans toward being didactic, not only because of the final line, but also because of the continual reminders about Beauty’s virtues. The tale has also subtly created a utopian world, but like most other fairy tales, it is an impression left with the readers and not necessarily a literal place defined for the reader. Beaumont with these requirements—parallel characteristics to the original myth, but still distinct plot changes, an obvious moral for the audience to remember, and a utopian seed planted in the reader—has validly created her version of the tale.

Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride"

Angela Carter was born at the beginning of World War II in England, in the time of great political unrest and change. In 1960 she married Paul Carter which she insisted she did in order to get away from her family, and not out of real love (Zipes viii). These two factors in her youth have largely formed how Carter wrote her fairy tales.

Her first novels "were explorations of sexual fantasies and employed fairy-tale motifs in unusual ways to test the limits of realism" (Zipes viii). This theme was not uncommon to Carter, and many argue that this view point has dominated in her fairytales in such a manner that it leaves the traditional genre of a fairytale and moves it into a much more adult piece of literature.

These original ideas later exploded after she spent time in America. After touring there, she later reflected about her experience: "I can date to that time and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968 my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a woman. How that social fiction of my 'feminity' was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me was the real thing" (Zipes viii). It was soon after that she separated from her husband and later divorced him.

From this point forward her stories began to develop and speak openly about her "deep political commitments to the feminist movement and to leftist causes" (Zipes x). As Jack Zipes explains it, "Carter argued that women, especially feminists, too often begin with the assumption that they are victims and have little agency in their lives. Instead [of] victimization she focused more on how women could realize their deep sexual desires, whether sadistic or masochistic, and could determine their sexual and social roles with greater freedom" (x). This is where Carter's "The Tiger's Blood," her original rendition of "Beauty and the Beast," takes its hits.

"My father lost me to The Beast at cards" begins Carter's tale (Tiger's 51). Immediately the narrator has identified her father as a foolish man. She claims that "his gaming, his hording,

his agonizing repentances” killed her mother, and now she too has become his victim (52). As she is carried off in the Beast’s carriage the father cries “I have lost my pearl, my pearl beyond price” to which the Beast replies, “If you are so careless of your treasures, you should expect them to be taken away from you” (53).

The pearl is Carter’s first tool used to tear down the objectivity of women by men. Women are often compared to objects, a pearl being one of the prime examples. Generally, these affectionate phrases cause girls and women alike to blush and smile at the compliment. However, in Carter’s mind this diminishes the value of women. The narrator, who we know is beautiful with her “nut-brown curls, rosy cheeks, blue, rolling eyes”(59) is nothing more than an object that has been sold for nothing less than a king’s ransom, but at no more than a king’s ransom either (54).

This objectification continues through the look-alike soubrette. The wind-up soubrette is nothing more than a mechanized stock character, a second object used by Carter. In the end this look-alike is sent to her father as a replacement because, once it is dressed in her clothes, cannot be distinguished from the narrator and is competent enough to perform her previous role—after all she is just an object (65).

As the narrator takes a horseback ride with the Beast and his valet she contemplates her relation to these half human, half beast creatures. “If I could see,” she reflects, “not one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around me, the six of us—mounts and riders, both—could boast amongst us not one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things” (63). It is here that the narrator realizes that she is not much different than these animals. She,

like them, is treated like an object in her real circumstances; she has been painted up to fit the needs of those around her.

Carter has also implemented a few references to utopian societies in her work: the world within Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Samuel Coleridge's "Kublai Kahn"; the world that the narrator is placed in takes on a utopian appeal as nothing around her and "nothing about [the Beast] reminded [her] of humanity" (64). This statement has taken the term humanity and made it negative; if humanity was no longer the ideal characteristic, but instead a horrible society formed on the basis of control and power from the male sex.

The Beast reveals his true nature, a tiger, and the girl, realizing that she is equal to him, bows down to his wishes and begins to shed her clothes as he has shed his. She goes as far as her shirt when the Beast lowered his head, as if in shame, and the valet gestured that she had done enough. The narrator begins to realize that the tears shed earlier by the Beast were not tears of shame, but of sadness because she did not recognize her own innate worth.

After this revealing, her thoughts revolved in a new, almost incomprehensible fashion. She reflects, "I felt I was at liberty for the first time in my life" (64). Having fulfilled her obligation she is allowed to go home, but as she looks in the mirror at a "hollow-eyed girl whom [she] scarcely recognized" (65). She now realizes she has no desire to return to the world of men, but wishes to stay in this world, away from all others, and live her utopian life much like Gulliver lived with the horses (55).

As she undresses herself she experiences "atrocious pain" as if she were stripping off her own underpelt (66). Carter at this point has incorporated the Biblical phrase about the lamb and the lion to create her own interpretation of femininity. Women must break free of their doll-like identities, the lamb character and embrace the parts of them that are strong, alive with desire, and

even ugly. “The lamb must learn to run with tigers” is no longer adequate; the lamb must realize that they are tigers who have been taught to identify themselves as lambs. Carter insists then that women are no longer opposite from men, but simply have been blinded by their treatment from the male sex.

This telling, opposes the popular theme that women must tame men and their sexual desires, and instead must learn to be tigers—as it is truly their innate character.

Critics have been split about her artistic liberties and interpretation. Some have said that she is a quintessential contemporary writer (Mordoh). Lorna Sage, however, says that this contemporary style has overwhelmed any sense of the fairy tale and has instead become a discourse for Carter to express her feminist views. Feminism and pornography combined debate fields in the 1970s, and Sage accurately points out that this is the debate Carter intended to enter with her rewritten fairy tales. Sage argues that “like pornography, fairy tale relies on repeated motifs, multiple versions and inversions, the hole in the text where the readers insert themselves” (Mordoh), and thus Carter has created a political statement in a pornographic-like fairy tale.

Sage is not alone in this conviction. Merja Makinen wrote in the *Feminist Review* that Carter’s failed attempts at “constructing an active female erotic are badly compromised— if not a reproduction of male pornography” (4). Patricia Dunker, cited in Makinen’s essay, agrees stating that “the stripping of the girl’s skin ‘beautifully packaged and unveiled,’ is the ritual disrobing of the willing victim of pornography” (12).

In addition to literary pornography Makinen argues that “Many a reader has found the savagery with which she can attack cultural stereotypes disturbing, even alienating” (2). Despite Carter’s popularity, this claim has proven to be valid. Twentieth century readers, more often than not, expect the cliché “once upon a time” and “happily ever after” story with mild changes to the

plot in between. Upsetting the reader's expectations is largely what has sparked the upheaval of her stories, but this displeasure creates no grounds for dismissal as a fairy tale.

"The Tiger's Bride" is Angela Carter's viewpoints about a cultural aspect written into a metaphorical story in order to convey various levels of meanings to her intended audience; she has also used many of the same motifs included in the original: an enchanted mirror, a rose, a beast, a distant castle, etc. Further, she has created a utopian society within her story, despite the fact that it disturbs the audience's expectations. So although the story may be appalling to some readers because it is not appropriate to children, that is not part of the criteria for a fairy tale and therefore cannot be dismissed as being a misinterpretation of the fairy tale.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast

The Walt Disney Company began its legacy of feature-animated films in 1938 with the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It was an immediate success and the company followed up with more animations including *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and others. The team of animators was so revolutionary that by the time they passed on their legacy to a team of animators in the 1980s there was a large shoe to fill. This shoe was daunting to the young animators; they were “haunted by the spirit’s of the past” and “needed to figure out who they were” (Beyond Beauty).

Walt Disney, who had since passed away, had tried numerous times to recreate *Beauty and the Beast*. The Snow White team had tried multiple times to tell Beaumont’s story but failed time and time again because the “essential story is very bland” (Beyond Beauty), and other critics say that they were intimidated by the shadow of Jean Cocteau who had released his version during that same time. Eventually the story was put on the shelf until a new team of animators was ready—or rather forced—to take on the task. The original director, Richard Purdum, and story board team again tried to stay close to the original tale, and thus created a dark and sinister story. However, the original story board was turned down and Disney took a new direction; they brought on two new directors, Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, screenwriter Linda Woolverton, and added music through lyricist Howard Ashman and composer Alan Menken. This direction, claims those interviewed on the documentary “Beyond Beauty: The Untold Stories of Beauty and the Beast,” was what made the movie successful as it won two Academy Awards, three Golden Globe Awards, and four Grammy Awards.

Disney’s story begins with a stained glass window and a typical introduction “Once upon a time, in a far away land, a young prince lived in a shining castle” (O’Hara). Here, they have taken the liberties to create a definite story behind the Beast. They continue, “Although he had

everything his heart desired, the prince was spoiled, selfish, and unkind” and “he had no love in his heart.” And so the fairy turned him into a Beast until “he could learn to love another, and earn her love in return.” The story’s driving tension begins with “who could ever learn to love a beast?” Here is where our heroine, Belle, finds her purpose. We are introduced to Belle as a strange, odd, and peculiar girl; she is obviously different than the rest of the townsfolk. Yet, she is beautiful and because of that is desired by the villain Gaston, a new addition to the story by the Disney team. Belle, although placed in Neoclassical France, carries many of the personality traits of a twentieth century woman, which is critical to the development of the story because the spotlight is not focused on Belle as it has in other renditions. The Disney animators made a conscious decision to put the emphasis on Beast as it was his story because he went through the most change.

This attention on Beast is mostly seen during the song “Something There” sung by Belle. It is during this song that Belle begins to see a gentler side of Beast, but there is still quite an emphasis placed on Beast when he decides he wants to do something for Belle; a decision motivated from admiration and enchantment. This shift in focus slightly altered the themes from earlier stories, but there is still a resemblance in more sophisticated terms.

When Beast escorts Belle around the castle he instructs her “The castle is your home now, so you can go anywhere you wish, except the West Wing”; she, however, is intrigued and asks “What’s in the West Wing?” to which he replies, quite angrily, “It’s forbidden!” Later, Belle disobeys this instruction and purposefully searches out the West Wing to discover its secrets—very similar to the female curiosity in Charles Perrault’s “Blue Beard,” Apuleius’s “Psyche and Cupid”, folktale “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” etc.

Disney has been accused of ruining the fairy tale in various respects: namely oversimplifying its themes, creating impractical or unrealistic romance, and not being educational.

One of the greatest arguments against this is from Betsy Hearne; she says:

Disney's modifications originate from accurate readings of our culture. This is where we live. We who criticize Disney have seen the enemy, and he is us. What he does to fairy tales and classics is, in a sense, our own shadow. We don't have to like it and we don't have to keep quiet about it, but we do have to understand our own society and the lore it generates. (qtd. in Einfeld, 29)

Authors create stories to reflect their times, and their success depends on how well it relates to their audience. The movie's success shows how well it was received and proves that the Disney creators told a timeless fairy tale for their generation. If critics are to condemn Disney for its interpretation, then they must also acknowledge that the story is simply a replication of the surroundings and more are to blame than Disney.

The story still has created a moral theme for audiences young and old, has taught lessons about respect and virtuous feelings, and has formed a utopian society inside the enchanted castle that many audience members wish to take part in, and therefore has met the criteria for a fairy tale.

Conclusion

All of this discussion has been to make one very simple and plain point: to misinterpret a fairytale is a paradox.

Although the French popularized and institutionalized the fairy tale, it is unreasonable to deny that the fairy tales has its roots in mythology. Therefore, when critics debunk interpretations of the tale based on the standardized form set by the French, they have denied the true authors of fairy tales their dues of glory and credit.

Furthermore, tales are created out of the dust of their times and often reflect nothing more or less than the ideas of their time. Beaumont is the first example of this as she created a manners book for her duties as governess in the time leading into the Victorian age. Walt Disney's fairy tale expedition began in the depths of the Great Depression and continued through World War II, and the legacy continued through the disco age, rock eighties, the Vietnam War, and still into today with America's War on Terrorism, economic instability, and lingering shadows of the past. It is no surprise that fairy tales still maintain their utopian hope of a better world. Even dark renditions like Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" do not dismiss this hope, although an initial reading will often leave readers confused and upset with the ending.

The fairy tale shape changes as the stories surroundings demand a change of purpose, but the core elements endure times of despair as well as progress; this is an obligation that the various authors meet by making a tale appropriate to their times, portraying applicable and timeless morals, but possibly most importantly planting the utopian seed of hope in their audience.

Fairy tales are about learning, understanding, remembering, and hoping for a better world; if this is accomplished, then they are indeed a fairy tale.

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