


# De Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast*: A feminist analysis

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De Beaumont's fairy tale *La Belle et la Bête* published in 1757 in France is examined in this article by analysing gender roles and performativity, using the feminist and new historicist frameworks. The characters of Beauty, her sisters and that of the Beast are analysed for evidence of typical, patriarchal behaviours and relationships or more modern, innovative ones. Adapting her tale from the much longer text by De Villeneuve, De Beaumont created an innovative tale which discusses gendered expectations and marriage relationships in modern ways. Her characters and their relationships are often inverted and they behave in ways unexpected and unaccepted by the overtly-gendered, 18th-century patriarchal rule. As her tale was created primarily to educate her younger 18th-century readers, the tale is an interesting commentary on gender roles of 18th-century France. De Beaumont provided alternatives to the typical female fairy tale characters, depicting an empowered Beauty who makes her own decisions and in doing so, is able to free the Beast from his imprisonment in a beastly body. De Beaumont faced a number of challenges in creating her tale, making it a subverted feminist rendition, often portraying contrasting female characters in ways subtler than more recent renditions of the classic tale. Beauty does not aggressively contrast patriarchal ideas of gender, and neither does the Beast; however, their characterisations present alternatives to these patriarchal expectations and stretch their boundaries on masculine and feminine behaviour.

**Keywords:** Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont; *Beauty and the Beast*; 18th century; France; gender roles; patriarchy; fairy tale; literature.

## Introduction

Fairy tale literature has long been studied for its considerable influence on readership. Eighteenth-century fairy tale literature focused on educating readers on the society's particular moral expectations. Zipes (2006) maintains that:

[E]ducated writers purposely ... converted [*the oral folktale*] into a type of literary discourse about mores, values and manners so that children and adults would be civilized according to the social code of that time. (p. 3)

Emphasising the part these tales played in the moral education of their readers. The ideals included in the tales are those which the writer deems essential in inculcating societal values. Jeanne-Marie LePrince De Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast* initially titled *La Belle et la Bête* (1757) was published with the idea to educate her readership. Turning to the fairy tale genre, she believed that it was through this form of storytelling that she could best educate her young reader about, as Korneeva (2014:234) states, 'the conduct of courtship, marriage, and family relationships' without them realising it. Korneeva (2014:235) states that 'this intention to provide her female readership with practical guidance for worldly life brings the tale close to the tradition of conduct manuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. Conduct manuals, such as *The Gentlewoman's Companion; or A Guide to the Female Sex* (1675) by Woolly and *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) by Gisborne, were popular literature which included ideas of how men and women were expected to behave within the society in which they lived. Zipes (2006:53) argues that De Beaumont's tale is an educational commentary on the expected and acceptable manners, morals and social expectations of men and women.

Women writers did not receive the recognition they deserved with regard to their influence on 18th-century fairy tale literature. Although they wrote many tales – Seifert and Stanton (2010:30) maintain that at least two-thirds of the tales produced from 1690 to 1709 were produced by women – many of these tales reflecting innovative and dynamic gender relationships and narratives have been ignored and forgotten. Thus, the general consensus is that the genre has men, such as Charles Perrault, Andrew Lang and the Grimm Brothers to thank for its

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development and so for many years, they have been considered the original fairy tale writers. These popular tales exhibit gendered characters. Males are reflected as virile, powerful characters in charge of their lives and circumstances. They are often on heroic quests to rescue beautiful maidens (Talairach-Vielmas 2010). The female character is traditionally submissive, quiet and controlled, endowed with beauty and virtue. They are most commonly seeking to be rescued by and married to a handsome prince (Kuykendal & Strum 2007; Rowe 1986; Zipes 1987).

Gilbert and Gubar (2004) discuss the common occurrence in patriarchal texts: to categorise women as either angels or monsters. The angel female character is to behave according to the 'proper acts of a lady' (Gilbert & Gubar 2004:816) and those who do not embody these characteristics are regarded as monster-like, or at the very least are painted as dislikeable characters. This would mean that research which focuses on the male fairy tale canon and excludes women writers, is one-dimensional and forgets an important piece of the fairy tale puzzle – tales written by women. This gap in the literature highlights the importance of studying the texts written by women. In doing this, the structure, characters and themes of these tales can be exposed and analysed for their patriarchal and/or feminist content.

As a female writer publishing in the patriarchal 18th century, De Beaumont's tale includes characterisations and events which are commentaries on the gender ideals of her society. The aim is to examine the female characters. This will provide an understanding of the way in which these characters are presented in typically gendered ways, in which case the text will be critiqued for its inclusion of patriarchal content, or if they are empowered to act in imaginative, dynamic ways. Furthermore, a study of the structure of the characters' relationships within the tale also provides understanding of gender concepts within the text.

## **Eighteenth-century context**

The 18th-century society's gender ideals highlighted the 'implicit and explicit inequalities between the sexes' (eds. Barker & Chalus 1997:1). Men and women were expected to behave in contrasting ways and act in different societal spheres. Whilst men were expected to behave in controlled, powerful and independent ways, the ideal woman was expected to be 'modest, chaste, pious, and passively domestic' (eds. Barker & Chalus 1997:2). Women were expected to remain in the private sphere and take care of their husbands, children and their households (Hübner 2011).

Education encouraged the differences between boys and girls, as education deemed suitable for boys was not appropriate for girls (Cohen 2004:586). As women were expected to remain at home, the content taught at schools was deemed 'useless' to young girls (Cohen 2004:586). In fact, Bennett (1787:138) emphasises the belief that 'a mother seems the only governess intended by nature' for young women. Mothers were able to teach young girls all society

expected them to know and so, formal education was not believed necessary.

Upper-class girls' education was aimed at making them marriageable and involved 'basic reading and writing as well as feminine activities such as needlework and dancing' (Bondy & Edwards 2001). For the most part, they were commonly taught by a young governess at home.

Marriage relationships also exemplified the inequalities between the genders, as women were seen as under the control of their husbands. Hugh Hume Campbell, Earl of Mormont, wrote a letter to his wife, Elizabeth Crompton, in 1750 – around the same time that De Beaumont wrote her fairy tale. The letter's contents (Campbell 2011) create a good understanding of marriage relationships in the 18th century:

[A]s long as you love me, the most endearing word to my thoughts is wife, because it implies my possession & enjoyment of you whole love for all my life ... I must be first, & superior, in your heart & thoughts, your affection as a parent, must be derived from you[r] love as my wife. (n.p.)

The Earl's control over his wife is evident. Hugh defined his love in that it ensured his possession of his wife.

However, his wife was expected to place everything, even her children, second to her love for her husband. Eighteenth-century marriage called for an unequal and gendered relationship between husband and wife.

Although patriarchy can be easily identified in the 18th century, gender ideas were not limited to patriarchal beliefs. Barker and Chalus (eds. 1997:3) highlight the rise of feminist thought and a shift in the understanding of gender politics during this era. Miller (2013) discusses 18th-century literature and its heroines, highlighting the 'rejection scenes' found in these texts. These include characters in Jane Austen's texts rejecting the marriage proposals made to them by male suitors. The rejection is an example of 'the subtle ways by which women were able to integrate the cultural feminine ideal without entirely forfeiting their personal identities' (Miller 2013:5). They could elusively incorporate ideas of female independence and freedom into their tales whilst still maintaining their uniqueness, even though their unique identities were limited because of the immense shadow cast by the 18th century's patriarchal structure. The term 'subtle' is important here as it emphasises how controlling and limiting the century's patriarchal expectations were. Writers included veiled rejection or countering of popular, gendered ideals, as their society did not allow for grand contrasts and rejections of the status quo.

Fairy tales play an important role in socialising readers of preconceived gender expectations. The increased discussion around feminist thought and its resultant expression in women-authored literature, which challenged previously accepted patriarchal ideals, meant that some 18th-century women writers were motivated to use the fairy tale genre to create alternative literature. The realm of

fairies provided them with the freedom to create characters, gender relationships and expectations, which questioned the widely accepted 'normality' of patriarchy and masculine dominance. Feminist tales and remakes of classics critique and provide alternatives for gendered characters and expectations. Yet resistance to these feminist expressions, which rejected the contrasting male and female characters, were prevalent making the job of female writers far from easy. Male dominance within the fairy tale developed as a mirror of the patriarchal society, which frowned upon female writers. Haase (2000) furthers this, stating that:

The ambiguous, ambivalent, experimental, and sometimes fragmented fairy tales penned by women during this time reflect their struggle to find their voices in a literary genre that had been institutionalized and aligned very quickly with the values and perspectives of patriarchy. (p. 31)

This is indicated in the prevalence of male writers and the publishing houses that supported and presented their works, with the exclusion of works authored by women. Charles Perrault was a 17th-century French writer whose tales are widely recognised above those of women writers (Backscheider 2013). His tales include patriarchal concepts, depict a number of gendered characters and represent clearly delineated gender roles. Written half a century before De Beaumont's tale, *The Tales of Mother Goose* (1697) contains many 'classics' (Zipes 1987) and, although the story differs substantially to *Beauty and the Beast*, his collection even includes a tale portraying the theme of a beastly groom: *Riquet with the Tuft* (1967). The tale is patriarchal in nature and the moral enforces women to be quiet and submissive, even in the circumstance of arranged marriage, in which they are given no choice but happiness. The tale contrasts the more gender-dynamic tales of women writers in the 18th century. Zipes (2006:32) states that a major reason for Perrault's popularity over women writers is that Perrault was recognised as a 'more polished and acceptable writer'. However, it has also been argued that as his tales were strongly embedded in the society's patriarchal ideas, they were more widely accepted (Parsons 2004:137). His tales include beautiful maidens who are helpless and require handsome princes to rescue them. Male authority, independence and power are evident in most of his tales and the 'happily ever after' or marriage with children is the typical ending. These themes run through many 17th- and 18th-century texts and saturate the genre with patriarchal content. Rogers (1977:65) discusses the limited possibilities for women writers of the 18th century and states that 'women have always been under more pressure than men to stay within conventional bounds, in writing as in conduct'. The literary realm created boundaries for what was acceptable for texts, which included a 'feminine mode' for women writers that expected particular emotions and content, which did not counter the patriarchal ideas of the century (Rogers 1977:64–65). Lurie (1990) maintains that evidence of strong female characters is often found in lesser-known tales. The tales that pushed the boundaries of the expected feminine behaviours and created more

independent female characters were less recognised and shared amongst audiences in earlier centuries.

The challenges and adversities many women faced impacted the gender ideas and content of their tales, creating tales which in today's world, are often defined as watered-down and not feminist enough. Rowe (1986:71) highlights that these women writers ought not to be seen as 'pseudo-masculine' – consciously behaving or appearing as masculine – but rather as writers trapped by what was expected of this genre of story-telling. This is because texts which did not blindly represent society's required, gendered behaviours battled against the patriarchal giant and the widely accepted ideas of what men and women were capable of doing and should do. *Beauty and the Beast* is a classic tale and one not initially published by Charles Perrault nor The Grimm Brothers. It is a popularly shared tale written and re-written by women making it a unique tale indeed. *The Ram* (1697) by popular French writer Marie Catherine du Aulnoy (2018) introduces the animal-groom theme, and provided the foundation for De Villeneuve's tale. De Villeneuve's novel-length piece was then recreated by De Beaumont into the fairy tale well-known today.

The *Beauty and the Beast* tale created by Marie Leprince de Beaumont was created from De Villeneuve's (2017) lengthy tale by the same name. The tale's length makes De Villeneuve's story a less popular version and many consider De Beaumont's shortened version as the more readable original. De Beaumont's tale has even been defined as marking the beginning of the modern fairy tale (Robert 1982:146). The tale has received so much recognition that it is commonly referred to as the original *Beauty and the Beast*. As a prominent tale, an analysis into De Beaumont's *La Belle et la Bête* and its gender ideals is necessary.

Bottigheimer (2009:55) emphasises the popularity of De Beaumont's collection roughly translated as *Frau Marie Leprince de Beaumont's Teachings about Virtue and Wisdom for Young People* in which *Beauty and the Beast* appears. Her intent to educate through her works is evident in the title which was widely translated, accepted and read throughout 18th-century Europe. She directed her texts at the education of young girls. The text included a number of fairy tales, many of which were adapted and 'moralized' versions of tales written by earlier writers (Bottigheimer 2009:55). Her *La Belle et la Bête* was also published in her *Le Magasin des Enfants* (1756), which Stableford (2016) calls an 'educative manual for parents and teachers', again emphasising the didactic nature of her literature. Zipes (2006:53) also discusses the tale's 'didactic discourses on manners, morals, and social class'. Her texts commonly depict the ultimate success of young girls as either marriage, or the exhibition of 'self-sacrifice, diligence and modesty' (Haase 2008:184; Pine 2010:6–7). Considering Rowe's idea that these women writers are not pseudo-masculine, De Beaumont's social context can be seen as having an immense influence on her writings.

De Beaumont's commentary on marriage seems rooted in her own experiences. The writer experienced a short marriage to Antoine Grimand de Beaumont, which was annulled after two years as he gambled and carelessly lost their money (Pine 2010:2). De Beaumont's tale encourages young women to remain virtuous and good, even if their circumstances lead to marrying terrible men. Understanding the devastating reality that many young women in her society would have to marry men they did not know and potentially feared, she reflects the good life possible if these women behave in acceptable ways. After all, she had been 'married to a man she considered a monster, and she had survived' (Ness 2016), so she aimed to encourage her female readers to do the same. Furthermore, by portraying a relationship which blossoms as naturally as possible under the circumstances, De Beaumont lays commentary on what a successful marriage can look like, if a woman allows herself to love and be loved as expected.

## Feminist framework

Whereas the 18th century in which De Beaumont wrote was, for the most part, bound to the constricting views of patriarchy, later centuries saw the rise of prominent feminist thinkers, whose theories encourage the questioning and recreation of restrictive gender roles. These innovative theorists introduced new ideas related to gender expectations and allowed for the development of feminist thought into the powerful theory it is today. Feminist theorists De Beauvoir (1908–1986), Friedan (1921–2006) and Irigaray (born 1930) maintain that labelling women as 'other' or lesser than men stems from society's expectations of men and women. Irigaray (1985:23) mentions that 'female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters' as women are always compared to or discussed in relation to men. This comparison then places women in a position secondary to men. Friedan (1963:31) argues that the patriarchal society which forces women to behave in feminine ways creates 'chains' that do not allow women to become independent and self-actualised. She identified these chains in all aspects of social life and highlighted the important role literature played in strengthening them. It is then important to analyse a particular piece of literature for evidence of how it comments on gender, and male and female expectations.

Literature is a powerful tool containing numerous messages for its readers, especially about gender expectations. Irigaray (1993:7) maintains that sexual difference is a notable issue within the society.

Emphasising the importance of empowering women, she states that women have always been defined as lesser because they are unlike men whose position is central to societal order. Irigaray states that the differences between men and women should not be ignored when women want to empower themselves. She emphasises that women can find empowerment when they are actively behaving as women; as themselves. Hence, it is important that women do not

reject their femininity and turn to masculinity, simply because they seek power and independence. Through acting in her own way, undeterred and unlimited by society's vision of men and women, and embodying strength, resilience and intelligence, a woman can embody feminism and also find empowerment (Irigaray 1985:27). This suggests that masculinity is not superior; femininity can become just as powerful when given the chance. Irigaray's theory suggests one way in which feminists can create empowered female characters and alternative gender relationships, and Judith Butler provides another.

Butler's (1988) Gender Performativity theory stresses that the idea of gender is not a natural one but is created through the way society behaves: through women behaving in feminine ways and men in masculine ways, these behaviours are internalised as facts and are blindly accepted by society. The patriarchal ideas of gender manipulate how a person thinks and behaves, because of their perceived unchangeable nature. Butler also discusses how language creates ideas about gender and so emphasises the importance of changing behaviour and language in a way which no longer enforces gender hierarchy. This change does not mean women must inherit masculine qualities to gain power and control, but it encourages equality and freedom in men and women performing gender.

Ultimately it is important to recreate behaviours, language and eventually society if one wants to overcome patriarchy. Both Irigaray and Butler emphasise the importance of presenting new, unrestricted behaviours for males and females. Hence, literature should also present characters with more fluid characteristics, if it is to share a more gender-equal idea to its readers. Each writer is influenced to create his or her tale 'to express their views about young people and to prepare them for roles that they idealistically believed they should play in society' (Zipes 2006:30). Each tale is therefore created according to how the author aims to mould his or her reader into what he or she believes is acceptable. Specifically, a tale's characterisations, gender relationships and societal structure inform particular gender ideals that the author intends to convey to the reader. Gilbert (1994) states that fairy tales are commonly created around the dominant discourse of patriarchy.

Readers are informed by the tales they interact with and so when reading patriarchally-informed texts: 'girls come to know that their value lies in men's desire for them, and the characteristics and qualities that will assure their desirability are revealed in cultural storylines' (Parsons 2004:136). Actively influencing their behaviours and thoughts, tales have the power to vindicate or question society's status quo.

This analysis highlights the female characters of De Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast*. The tale is well-known amongst fairy tale literature and has even been referred to as 'definitive and most influential' (Griswold 2004:27). The tale's following makes it a significant piece of fairy tale

literature, which needs significant analysis. The rendition analysed below is the 2017 version published by Enchanted Media, and the title of the publication is *Beauty and the Beast – All Four Versions*.

## ***Beauty and the Beast* by Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont (1756)**

De Beaumont's tale covers the story of a beautiful, young woman and a beastly man, who through the curses and plots of fairies, fall in love and lives happily ever after. It also focuses on Beauty's initial entrapment and then willingness to love the Beast. Further, it acknowledges that it is only Beauty's freely given love that will save Beast's life and free him from his curse (Aske 2012:4).

### **Beauty**

Beauty shows independence and is liberated early in the tale. Cummins (1995:23) maintains that 'De Beaumont's Beauty was considered a new kind of heroine, a marked departure from the protagonists of earlier fairy tales'. When approached by suitors, she voices her inability to accept their hands in marriage because she 'chose' to stay home (De Beaumont 2017:89). She is given a voice and is able to reject the men who intend to determine her future and save the 'charming, sweet-tempered creature' (De Beaumont 2017:89). The suitors' desire to save Beauty from poverty and what they see as unhappiness is a typical patriarchal ideal: men are to be heroic in their pursuit to rescue a woman from disaster. Beauty's independent thought and ability to reject these suitors presents her as a more decisive, liberated woman than is expected of women in the 18th century. The patriarchal ideas of the time encouraged the 'ownership of women' (Hazarika 2012:352), which intended for women to live submissively under men. Moreover, they were presented with very little if any, choice in their life story, as men decided this for them. De Beaumont, therefore, creates a new woman, different to the one expected by her society: one that questions and provides an alternative to female passivity.

Beauty further stands out as a dynamic female character when juxtaposed with her status-orientated sisters.

Where their ideas of success lie within wealth and class, Beauty does not see any value in these things. She sees importance in family and chooses to stay at home with her father and works hard to cook and clean because of her love for her family. Furthermore, although her sisters insult her, Beauty is quick to forgive and love: 'for she was so good, that she loved them and forgave heartily their ill-usage' (De Beaumont 2017:93).

She does not react in the aggressive way her sisters do. The young woman embodies particular traditional feminine characteristics seen in her love of family, commitment to household duties and virtuous nature. The character's dynamism must be noted. Although she embodies ideals

which contrast with patriarchal expectations, she fulfils other patriarchal expectations, highlighting the subtleness of De Beaumont's feminist criticism within the tale. Rowe's (1986:71) idea that the gendered social context in which De Beaumont lived limited her range of criticism is essential. Her inability to reject patriarchal ideals of gender in robust ways could be a consequence of the era in which she wrote – one which strictly governed what was publishable and therefore limited the voices of independent, authoritative women writers. The occurrence of patriarchal roles and expectations may be an effect of the powerful influence of her gendered social context. Butler (1988) cites the strong influence of gender ideals, which easily and unconsciously make their way into an individual's behaviour and thoughts. De Beaumont's inclusion of such patriarchal ideas is an example of this control, which runs so deep that it makes its way into the writings of an empowered woman.

Despite her refusal to marry and leave her father, Beauty does act in patriarchally expected ways. She accepts her lot in life, although upset by the family's loss of finances. She cleans and cooks for her family daily: things her two, older sisters refuse to do. It is for these reasons that her father places her above her sisters, and values her 'humility and patience' (De Beaumont 2017:90). Although her father has lost his wealth and suitors no longer pay attention to her unbeloved sisters, 'several men would have married her [Beauty]' and this because 'she was such a charming, sweet-tempered creature, spoke so kindly to poor people, and was of such an affable, obliging behaviour' (De Beaumont 2017:89). Beauty is not only treasured by her father, but also her kind-hearted, feminine demeanour makes her a beloved commodity for suitors as well. Once again, this reflects a more patriarchally acceptable character, further emphasising the subtle nature of De Beaumont's contrasting of gendered expectations. She both subverts – through rejecting her suitors – and conforms to patriarchal expectations. When Beauty behaves according to patriarchal expectations, she can be seen as echoing Irigaray's idea that women should actively become feminine to emphasise the equal position of the feminine. Behaving in these ways here, therefore, does not make Beauty a weaker character.

Beauty's courage is shown in her actions: she decides to go to the Beast, ignoring her father who urges her not to go, believing that he intends to devour her. She is determined to rescue her father from death and plays a hand in her own destiny. Beauty actively decides for herself and goes against the advice of the men around her, so that 'my father shall not suffer upon my account ... you cannot hinder me from following you' (De Beaumont 2017:93). Her ability to govern her life gives Beauty characteristics not permitted to women within patriarchal, 18th-century France. Rather, she performs behavioural traits typically expected of men: thus characterising Beauty in a way that suggests alternatives for women's behaviour. De Beaumont provides a female character that makes her own decisions, echoing the ideas

of Butler (1988) and Irigaray (1985) – of a century later – who urge feminists to recreate literature in ways which encourage gender equality and freedom.

Furthermore, Beauty is rewarded for her selfless act and is given a magnificently appointed chamber in the Beast's castle and the distinguished position of being the mistress in charge. However, what takes Beauty's full attention in the chamber is not the beautiful and expensive adornments, but the collection of books, a harpsichord and a compendium of books on music (De Beaumont 2017:94). Through this, Beauty is depicted as a young woman who is uninterested in frivolous beauty and expensive trappings. She is drawn to education and objects which develop her mind and creative skills.

Beauty is always reading and finds pleasure in reading 'good books' (De Beaumont 2017:89) throughout the tale. Before mentioning Beauty and her physical appearance, De Beaumont makes a point of discussing how the merchant paid a good sum of money to ensure his children's education. From the very beginning, it is clear that Beauty and her siblings are well educated; something which is uncommon with other female protagonists in fairy tales. In this way, Beauty is given knowledge and with that comes power. In his book *Sacred Meditations* first published in 1597, Bacon (2015) highlighted the connection between these two concepts, stating that 'knowledge itself is power' and Beauty exemplifies this. She is given an opportunity which positively impacts her ability to think reasonably and rationally. By giving Beauty books and the ability to think, De Beaumont demonstrates the positive influence education, empowerment and equality can bring.

Although her father ensures her education, the extent of this is not clear. What does become clear is that Beauty takes an active role in her own education as she is often reading in her leisure time, resembling 18th-century educated women. She seeks more education than what is provided by her father and in doing so she is educated beyond what patriarchy expects of her. Beauty's commitment to this reading and knowledge seeking reflects a committed and resilient woman, and provides her with more knowledge and independent thought than was deemed necessary for a woman during the 18th century, in which the tale was written.

Full of courage and decisiveness, Beauty holds back her fear and shock when she encounters the Beast's 'horrid form' (De Beaumont 2017:93). When she does give in to grief, she rationally calms herself with thoughts of God (De Beaumont 2017:94). Her ability to rationalise is another characteristic trait that sets her apart from other women, who society, encouraged by the ideas of Plato, commonly believed had 'fallen prey to their irrational and emotional sides, and that women as inferior beings, must be ruled by men' (Kasubhai 1996:37). Thus, women were expected to be irrational and illogical, unable to think objectively and were prone to emotional outbursts, all of which made them

the so-called weaker sex. De Beaumont does not allow her Beauty to take on this patriarchal notion and produces a character that can think logically. She even gives her father counsel on what he should do with the secret fortune he receives from the Beast; trusting his daughter's judgement enough to realise that consulting her can benefit him. Once again, impressing her father with her intellect. De Beaumont makes a powerful statement – allowing women independent thought and elevated education enables them to reason, which can be advantageous to men.

Each evening, Beauty's dinner with the Beast allows them time to speak, and Beauty is soon able to discern between the Beast's fearful outward appearance and his good nature and virtue: 'I own I am pleased with your kindness, and when I consider that, your deformity scarce appears' (De Beaumont 2017:95). The two become good friends and, although at the beginning she cannot imagine marrying the Beast, for his frightful appearance as she describes in her statement: 'This thousand pities ... anything so good natured should be so ugly' (De Beaumont 2017:96), she begins to realise that he is much more than his ugly appearance. Beauty makes her decision to be with the Beast on her own; her love is a natural, uncoerced development; growing from countless hours of conversation – unlike many of the planned marriages of the 18th century. The happy ending which comes from this emergent love, stresses the importance of a couple knowing each other before marriage. The quick marriages of Beauty's sisters to men they hardly know results in heartache, reflecting the potential outcome should one enter marriage too quickly, and for monetary reasons alone. In contrast, Beauty and her handsome prince's happiness represent an ideal outcome from a relationship which has been given the time to blossom. Including such a relationship allows these characters to act out behaviours different to what was common in the 18th century. The author advocates an alternative to the patriarchal expectations of men and women. By getting to know each other and falling in love and being happily married, the pair's behaviours provide alternatives to those of typical arranged marriages. This echoes Butler's (1988) *Gender Performativity*: by having her protagonists behave in these ways, De Beaumont presents an alternative to typical, societal expectations, and in doing so enforces that these behaviours are a possibility for men and women getting married.

Cummins (1995:24–26) states that 'Beast's metamorphosis is only one aspect of a multifaceted story, and Beauty's character development is at issue as much as the Beast's'. This young woman is not simply a chess piece who can be moved around the fairy tale board to please the men around her. Beauty develops her own feelings and makes her own decisions about loving and marriage. Through this, she creates an empowered female, something that was not encouraged in the mid-18th century. Beauty's decisive character contrasts with the patriarchal ideals of a submissive, contrite female

and creates a new feminine narrative; one that suggests the importance of empowered women who make their own decisions.

Beauty finally reaches the conclusion that (De Beaumont 2017):

[I]t is neither wit, nor a fine person, in a husband that makes a woman happy, but virtue, sweetness of temper, and complaisance, and Beast has all these valuable qualifications. (p. 97)

Educated with this new-found knowledge, she agrees to marry the Beast and is rewarded as the Beast changes into a handsome man, full of wit. Through her ability to hold virtue over beauty and wit, Beauty is able to break the Beast's curse and they live happily ever after. The final words of the tale emphasise De Beaumont's message that physical appearance need not matter when it comes to love and marriage: 'their happiness – as it was founded on virtue – was complete' (De Beaumont 2017:99). Painting the Beast as a better choice for a husband than one who is handsome yet neglectful, or one who is witty but rude, stresses that goodness, purity and righteousness are essential ingredients to find in a man, no matter his outward appearance. If she finds a man who is pure at heart and is full of virtue, a young woman should endeavour to marry him, leaving her selfish opinions of his appearance aside.

Furthermore, Tatar (2017) states that De Beaumont's tale encourages the young, female reader to selflessly give herself to a husband. Likening the relationship between Beauty and the Beast to an arranged marriage, she highlights that just as Beauty exhibits fear and anxiety for living with the Beast, so women in the 18th century would feel frightened to marry men whom they did not know. However, De Beaumont paints Beauty's decision to marry the Beast in a positive light and rewards her with true happiness. She aims to 'steady the fears of young women ... brace them for ... effacing their own desires and submitting to the will of a "monster"' (Tatar 2017:xiii). In doing this, De Beaumont successfully encourages women to choose happiness when it comes to arranged marriages. Irigaray (1985) comments that women need not embody behaviours deemed masculine to have power or freedom; they can do so by actively being women and acting feminine. This 'mimesis' emphasises that femininity is not a collection of inferior behaviours, but a different way of behaving than masculinity, neither better than the other (Irigaray 1985:76).

Beauty's happiness with the Beast reflects this decision to follow the path of marriage, and embodies a more patriarchal response to the Beast, than turning him down. Beauty is given an option here: the power to choose her own destiny. Although she chooses a patriarchally inclined path, this does not make her choice any less important. In fact, according to Irigaray, her choice of this path strengthens this discretion. The happy ending and the Beast's freedom also highlight the benefits of actively choosing to be feminine.

## Beauty's sisters

The selfless, educated and moral Beauty is in complete contrast to her sisters. They are mean, jealous and vindictive (De Beaumont 2017:93). The sisters do not hesitate to encourage Beauty to take their father's place by putting the blame on her, and when she leaves the two are very happy. Cummins bluntly comments: 'The sisters are not only grubby and stupid but also self-centred. Moreover, they are deceitful' (Cummins 1995:26).

They actively work to get rid of Beauty, when she returns to visit her father; even planning her death, hoping that the Beast will kill Beauty if she breaks her promise. They plan to 'detain her above a week, and perhaps the monster will be so enraged at her for breaking her word, that he will devour her' (De Beaumont 2017:97).

This jealousy stems from the beauty and virtue of Beauty's character. They call her 'stupid', 'mean-spirited' and 'little wretch' (De Beaumont 2017:90, 92), all because she is able to find happiness in their peasant lifestyle and does not ask for fine clothes and jewellery when her father's wealth returns. They, however, cannot accept their loss of wealth, are devastated by their fall in status, and are only too happy to burden their father with requests for expensive garments when he leaves to claim his fortune. The author juxtaposes these sisters and Beauty, presenting their unkind behaviours as the reason for Beauty's misery and their own. Ultimately, relating this poor behaviour to unhappiness and punishment.

These women's choices in men are also called into question throughout the tale as they choose men who are handsome but have no virtue and morality. Because of their inability to value a good disposition and honourable behaviour above physical appearance and wealth, their marriages are far from happy. The suitors they hope to marry at the beginning of the tale are superficial and quickly abandon the two sisters when their wealth and status are lost. Furthermore, when they finally marry, they are treated poorly by their husbands, who have monstrous personalities and low morals. De Beaumont uses these husbands to emphasise on Beauty that appearances do not make men monsters, but their lack of integrity does. Finally, she concludes: 'I should be happier with the monster than my sisters are with their husbands' (De Beaumont 2017:97), a comment which holds morality and virtuosity above physical appearance.

The comparison of Beauty's happiness and her sisters' unhappiness further emphasises the importance of a relationship which focuses on personality, over appearances. Beauty's realisation that she will be happier with the Beast over her sisters' husbands, highlights her own realisation: personality triumphs over looks and status.

The patriarchal 'chain' (Friedan 1963:31), which encourages physical appearance as extremely necessary for happiness, is removed here and Beauty realises what value lies in character. Beauty's behaviour in choosing the Beast over an attractive

suitor, introduces a behaviour set contrary to the century's typical-gendered expectations and, through the lens of Butler's Gender Performativity, creating this new set of behaviours encourages a change from the previous, gendered behaviours to new ones.

Where Beauty is rewarded for her selfless decisions, her sisters are punished for their unpleasant nature and evil actions. The fairy turns them into statues until they acknowledge their faults. The change seems permanent, because the fairy says that 'the conversion of a malicious and envious mind is a kind of miracle' (De Beaumont 2017:99). Beauty's sisters and their focus on wealth and physical appearance illustrate how the aspiration for meaningless things and one-dimensional beauty will only lead to unhappiness, whereas choosing virtuous qualities above superficial ones will lead to contentment and happiness. Gilbert and Gubar's (2004) angel versus monster critique of patriarchal tales is evident here. Beauty is presented as one with the qualities of an angel, and is blessed with a happy marriage because of it. Alternatively, her sisters face terrible husbands and are turned into statues as punishment for their unacceptable behaviours. The difference in De Beaumont's tale, however, is that the 'goodness' in Beauty does not simply come from her passivity and submissive nature. Instead, she is good because she sees the value of morality and personality, and overlooks the Beast's hideous features.

The heroic act of choosing to be with the Beast despite appearances earns her a happy ending. Heroism is often defined as a masculine trait, and her behaving as such pushes the boundaries of the feminine behaviours expected of her. Hence, through the angel versus monster dynamic, De Beaumont is able to emphasise the importance of good nature and behaviour to her readers.

De Beaumont's text is didactic, published in the era of conduct books, and although her tale does not enforce that a woman must be passive in life and simply allow decisions to be made for her, the tale does encourage good behaviour and morality. Her beauty exhibits the ideas of grace, purity, politeness and elegance, which Gilbert and Gubar (2004:816) call 'eternal feminine' characteristics. Again, there is evidence of patriarchal thought within the text, emphasising the powerful nature of the gendered hierarchy in the 18th century.

A hierarchy which disallowed women to completely break from the 'chains' of patriarchal thought (Friedan 1963:31) and ensured that even those who aimed to reject it, were still limited by its grasp.

## Conclusion

De Beaumont published a subversive tale which challenged previous models of fairy tales and patriarchal ideals. Beauty represents a good-natured, decisive and devoted character. Furthermore, she is decidedly intelligent and craves

knowledge, indicating advancement within the character type. Beyond creating a persevering and benevolent female protagonist, De Beaumont gives life to a witty, educated Beauty, whose upstanding nature is incomparable to the same character portrayed in previously published tales. This develops the feminine ideal, as De Beaumont ensures that her Beauty is afforded an education, something not generally offered to women in either the 18th or preceding centuries. In addition, the character, especially that of Beauty, portrays roles which counter the 18th century's stereotype expectations of women. Tales establish appropriate behaviours and values, and convey particular expectations through characterisations and structure (Parsons 2004:136). This tale reflects fascinating characters that encourage autonomous behaviours. De Beaumont constructs a female protagonist who actively works against patriarchal, gendered expectations. She refuses to remain just a pretty face. Beauty is given the power to decide her fate, and her willingness to surrender her life – first for her father and then for the Beast – saves them both. By empowering Beauty, De Beaumont develops an autonomous female character that is wiser and more in control than the Beauties of previous tales. She opposes typical patriarchal ideas that women are to accept their lot submissively, and stands as an alternative to feminine passivity and obedience. The resultant happy ending enjoyed by De Beaumont's Beauty emboldens the view in favour of female empowerment through providing women with a choice in their own destiny.

Furthermore, this tale is a critique on marriage, and a comment on the expectations of women in marriage. Beauty is given the power to choose and the freedom to fall in love with the Beast, if she so chooses. She is not forced into marriage, as was often the case in the 18th century; she is given the power to choose her own destiny. This furthers her liberation as a feminist character.

As a woman writer in the overbearing 18th century, De Beaumont's tale reflects on some of the boundaries to female behaviour. Beauty, whilst challenging the status quo of gender expectations, mirrors some patriarchal behaviour. She becomes a devoted woman and in doing so is able to receive a happy life with a handsome man; her happy ending a direct result of her decision to love the Beast. Although her tale does not present solely female-empowering beliefs throughout the tale, her rendition made strides within the 18th-century context. Through her depiction of Beauty and her sisters, De Beaumont encourages the resistance of traditional gender roles and limitations, and presents a new narrative for gender behaviours and expectations.

Beauty performs masculine and feminine traits throughout the tale, making her a character which pushes the boundaries of typical, patriarchal limitations. By creating this dynamic character, De Beaumont creates a tale which presents contrasting ideas to the perceived feminine traits the patriarchal 18th century deemed necessary for women. Hence, the tale provides a new narrative to its readers and highlights that women can step outside of gendered boundaries and behave in a multitude of ways.



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