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UNDER THE SKIN OF US: THE UNFAILING NARRATIVE POTENTIAL OF BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

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ABSTRACT

This thesis represents an initial exploration into the reasons behind the enduring creative vitality of the "Beauty and the Beast" motif among creators. It offers a forward-looking perspective on the untapped narrative potential of this motif, based on an analysis of the evolution of character archetypes and derivative works, primarily in film, over time.

The thesis begins by tracing the evolution of *Beauty and the Beast* from its earliest fairy tales to subsequent major film adaptations. It then examines why Belle and the Beast, as characters, have continued to captivate audiences and readers across changing eras, setting them apart from the stereotypical male and female protagonists found in romantic fairy tales aimed at a female readership. Through the lens of the Karpman Drama Triangle model, the thesis delves into the intricate and sophisticated shifts in power dynamics within the triangular relationship introduced by French director Jean Cocteau. The subsequent sections draw connections between Cocteau's introduction of a queer perspective to the motif and the strong association established between the story and the audiences' personal journeys. In the final part, the author expands the discussion to include the adaptation of the "Beauty and the Beast" motif in other film narratives, further analyzing how emotional connections between audiences and the fairy tale motif enrich genre storytelling.

In conclusion, this thesis articulates how the archetypes of characters and relationships within the "Beauty and the Beast" fairy tale motif resonate with readers and audiences across different eras, social classes, races, and genders in their journeys of self-exploration and self-reconciliation. It also expresses optimism for the future development of this enduring motif.

UNDER THE SKIN OF US:

THE UNFAILING NARRATIVE POTENTIAL OF *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*

by

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Introduction

It was an epiphany. During a casual conversation with my professor one ordinary summer day before my thesis year began, I rambled on for almost twenty minutes trying to explain the loose frame of my intended story. At that time, I only had a vague concept—"personal journey"—in mind. Despite spending much effort on reading the related materials, often blindly, I had still failed at this point to find a solid place from which to truly embark on my research. My professor pondered for a while, and said, "It sounds like *Beauty and the Beast* to me. Have you thought about that?"

I hadn't. But, of course, it was *Beauty and the Beast*. The sudden realization struck me like lightning, dispelling the fog that had clouded my path. Whether or not it appeared similar to someone else's perspective, the dynamics among the individuals from this story had unconsciously surfaced across my whole body of work over the years. They were deeply embedded in the stories that I constantly revisited whenever I felt perched on the edge of an old cliff, struggling to restrain myself.

Evidently, I was not alone in my fascination. *Beauty and the Beast*, or *La Belle et la bête*, in its original form and through various adaptations across different narratives, has resonated with audiences for centuries, offering solace to groups that had endured stigmatization and marginalization and illuminating their challenging path toward self-acceptance and self-reconciliation. The archetype echoed with the queerness and the lingering sense of alienation within me, as well as the inner conflicts that other people struggled to articulate.

Among all the mediums, it is film, intimately tied to cultural contexts, that has provided the most diverse perceptual perspectives on narratives and played an indispensable role in

creators' attempts to explore the motif. Filmmakers from different eras and cultural backgrounds have deconstructed and reconstructed the story's essence, altering the focus on characters and making critical adjustments to the world-building to reach various audiences, which consequently keeps the motif timeless and relevant. Through my thesis research, I aim to dive into the development of the "Beauty and the Beast" motif in films using several representative adaptations of the original texts as a starting point, in order to what has propelled it to its current state and what the future may hold via reviewing a few alternative reinterpretations of this motif. Armed with this knowledge, I can establish a more solid foundation for my own interpretation in my visual thesis.

Historical Footsteps of *Beauty and the Beast*

It all started in 1740 when the aristocratic lady Gabrielle-Suzaan Barbot de Villeneuve published her collection of stories, *La Jeune Américaine et les contes marins* (The Young American and Marine Tales). It included the first version of "*La Belle et la bête*" (Beauty and the Beast).

The story's heroine is the youngest of twelve children of a wealthy merchant and is renowned for her exceptional beauty, thus named "Belle," the French term for "beautiful woman." Disaster befell the merchant when his shipment was lost at sea, followed by a house fire that bankrupted him. Abandoned by friends and allies, the once-rich family relocated to the countryside. When Belle's father left on a journey, her five sisters requested jewels and fine clothes, while Belle, sympathetic to her father's plight, only asked for a rose. But the simple act of plucking a rose in an strange castle's garden led to the merchant's capture; the Beast, as the

owner of the property, seeing beyond the immediate, proposed a trade: Belle for her father. Belle accepted the request in exchange for her father's safe return.

Then, in the castle of enchantment and grandeur, the Beast wooed Belle nightly. Yet, her dreams were crowded with a nameless prince and a wise fairy. They presented a riddle: see beyond the surface. Pulled by familial ties, Belle returned home. But she was warned by the Beast that if she didn't return to the castle on time, he would die. She was reluctant to go back to the Beast even though her whole family felt that she should. After the fairy urged her to return, she found only a dying beast upon her arrival. Emotions surged, and a declaration of love saw the Beast morph into the prince of her dreams.

Fifteen years after the initial publication of *Beauty and the Beast*, Madame de Villeneuve passed away. The following year, another French female author, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, released her fairy tale collection, "*Magasin des enfans, ou dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusieure de ses élèves*" (*The Young Misses Magazine, Containing Dialogues between a Governess and Several Young Ladies of Quality Her Scholars*). This included a streamlined version of *Beauty and the Beast*, which, apart from the Disney rendition, remains the most well-known version.

Madame de Villeneuve's story was much longer and more intricate, with an extended storyline after the Beast's transformation, featuring the prince's powerful queen mother, the drama among Belle's biological parents, the fairy realm and her adoptive father. In Madame de Beaumont's adaptation, which was tailored for younger readers, many complexities were removed. The emphasis on royal lineage and issues of class and marriage were eliminated. Belle was portrayed as the youngest of a normal merchant's three sons and three daughters, and the

Beast's nightly advances changed from amorous to matrimonial proposals. This got Belle out of the criticism that she managed to stay the course only with frequent support from a Good Fairy and magical dreams rather than bravery and, at the same time, rendered the Beast a much more sentimental and sympathetic character (Bartter 1998, 55).

Figure 1. Poster of Jean Cocteau's *la Belle et la Bête (Beauty and the Beast)* (1946)

In 1946, almost two decades after Madame de Beaumont's influential adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, the French director Jean Cocteau made an interpretation of Madame de Beaumont's version. In his film, Beauty's family was further reduced to a spendthrift brother, two envious sisters, and their merchant father. Over time, Beauty overcame her fear of the Beast's appearance and grew fond of him. After returning home due to her father's illness, Beauty's sisters stole the keys to the Beast's castle, while her brother and his friend Avenant (who had been pursuing Beauty since the beginning of the story) plotted to rob the Beast. However, upon realizing Beauty's growing fondness for the Beast, Avenant attempted to kill

him, only to be turned into a beast himself by the offended goddess. The Beast, now a prince, and Beauty then lived happily ever after.

The next grand title, Disney's animated film *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), showed significant influences from Cocteau's 1946 version. Disney adopted Cocteau's human suitor character, Avenant, played up the character's excessive male posturing, and further simplified the narrative to better cater to younger audiences. Belle's family was downsized to a father-daughter relationship and an emphasis was placed on the enchanted rose, which directly symbolized the Beast's life force. In addition, Disney replaced the invisible servants in the castle with a group of anthropomorphized daily objects to add to the Beast's childlike nature and naiveness, and to also serve as a foil to a more easily perceived independent and mature image of Belle.

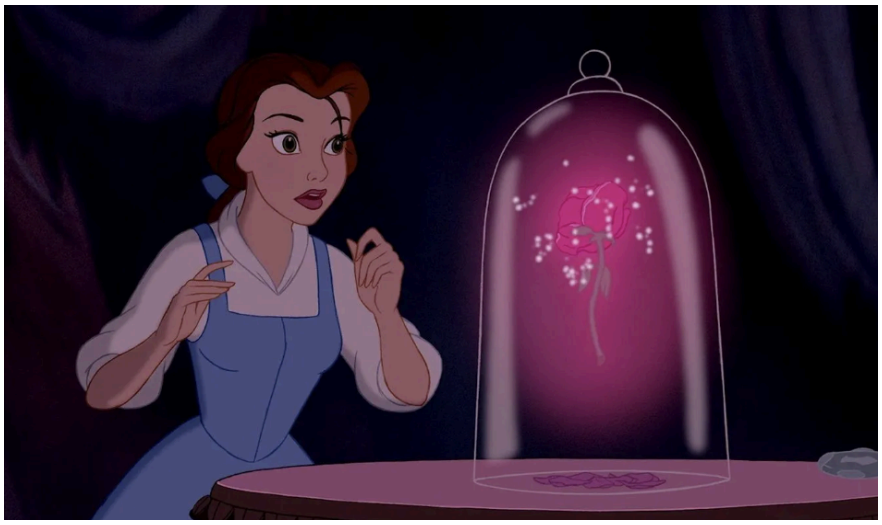

Figure 2. Belle finds the Beast's secret enchanted rose in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)

Disney's live-action reboot in 2017 took the sophisticated trappings of Belle much further by elaborating the costume and set design in detail and through ever-so-slight changes in characters' gestures. A comparably introverted and intelligent Beast also became part of the

reason that the social hierarchy shifted considerably within the story, bringing a new form of balance into the relations.

The Archetypes: What is Behind Them and Why

From the earliest rendition of the story penned in 1740 by Madame de Villeneuve to the most recent adaptation by Disney in 2017, the narrative has undergone significant changes in detail and pace. However, several elements remain remarkably unaltered, one of which is the foundational characterization of the characters. For instance, Belle's inherent kindness and courage when facing challenges, and the Beast's battle with self-loathing juxtaposed with his pure heart, are consistently portrayed throughout the various adaptations. The images of Belle and the Beast are not mere components of the narrative; they serve an essential role in evoking readers' emotions and are reminiscent of readers' real-life experiences. As socio-cultural contexts evolve, these characters undergo subtle modifications, ensuring that they resonate emotionally with contemporary readers—and potentially even future generations.

Throughout the various adaptations of *Beauty and the Beast*, the core essence of the Beast's character appears consistently stable. In romantic fairy tales targeting traditionally heterosexual female audiences, the ideal male protagonist often follows a specific archetype. Such characters are expected to "have the sexual charisma of an untamed beast and are unbeatable in battle, but are intelligent, erudite, and gentle with women" (Bordo 1999, 242). The Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* was, seemingly from its inception, deliberately crafted as a figure somewhat resembling, but not precisely echoing, this stereotype:

- Rather than possessing a wild "sexual charisma," he embodies the true visage of a beast—massive, covered in fur, physically distinct, and his fearsome appearance alone is enough to invoke disdain and fear from nearby humans.
- He is not "untamed and unbeatable in battle." In most adaptations, not only is he injured while assisting or rescuing Belle, but he is also often in a relatively passive role due to the curse, hoping Belle would reciprocate his feelings. When Belle leaves to visit her family, he can only tell her that "he would die if she didn't return within a certain period" and hopes she will return to the castle on time.
- In the early stages of their relationship, he appears somewhat dull and clumsy compared to the ideal male stereotype. His interactions with Belle are neither graceful nor gentle. His self-awareness about his terrifying appearance and his brash romantic advances often plunge him into self-loathing and doubt, occasionally making him seem somewhat aggressive—contrary to the typical "active" trait expected in male protagonists.

However, it is precisely because the Beast is so distinctively different from the male protagonists in tales from similar genres that he stands out from the "animal groom" fairy tale motif. Folklorist Jeana Jorgensen once noted in her examination of masculinity and male bodies in fairy tales that, in the context of romantic fairy tales which often frame the female body as an object of male desire, "masculinity is more likely to be framed in such a way that male characters are idealized to the point of appearing anonymous or interchangeable with one another" (Jorgensen 2018, 353). Consequently, due to female bodies constantly being the focus of ideological scrutiny, male characters are often relegated to mere roles of a "prince-rescuer

waiting in the wings for his cue" or "cogs in a happily-ever-after machine" (Jorgensen 2018, 353). By characterizing the Beast as a figure who both physically and mentally deviates from traditional expectations, *Beauty and the Beast* successfully allows him to break these confines, creating ample room for the character's growth and transformation influenced by his relationship with Belle. Moreover, since the Beast's body and psyche also bear significant narrative weight, in many ways, he finds himself in a social position similar to that of women: compared to his human counterparts, he is an outsider forced into isolation and constantly subjected to the gaze of others. Both his appearance and actions make him an easy target for ridicule, hence making respect and love contingent upon even more stringent conditions. As a result, the Beast is no longer the impersonal, flawless shell commonly found in traditional male roles, but a fleshed-out character constantly grappling with his differences from others, suffering in a tangible quasi-realistic predicament, yet remaining hopeful—an empathetic male figure.

At the same time, the evolution of Belle's character portrayal is somewhat more intricate than that of the Beast.

Compared to Madame de Villeneuve's original version, one of the most significant alterations in Madame de Beaumont's adaptation concerning Belle's story is the removal of her lineage as a fairy-tale descendent and the complicated, dramatic conflicts with the Beast's royal family. This adjustment, to some extent, magnifies the significance of Belle's inherent bravery and kindness in overcoming obstacles and connecting emotionally with the Beast. It minimizes the notion that her eventual happiness with her love is owed chiefly to the advantages of her family background, a sentiment more aligned with traditional bourgeois ideologies. However, on the other hand, when one considers many elements related to Belle that can be linked to the author's own experiences (her father was a port merchant, she was one of several siblings, and

she endured an unfortunate marriage), Belle's character seems to bear shadows of realism (Pauly 1989, 84). According to the literature scholar Martha A. Bartter, "the source tale recommended the virtues of marriage to young bourgeois women who had little choice in the matter." Bartter alluded to an 18th-century French societal pattern: young unwed females' parents (usually only the father) had absolute control over their daughter's marital fate, determining when and to whom she would marry, even if the groom-to-be was elderly or repulsive. All the bride could do was believe that beneath this exterior, there might be a romantic lover (Bartter 1998, 63). At that time, *Beauty and the Beast* served predominantly as a remedy for culturally induced sexual anxieties (Zipes 1988, 22). Unlike traditional tales of beautiful princesses and perfect princes, Belle represented young commoner women of the time who embodied socially admired qualities—gentleness, loyalty, self-sacrifice—offering them a dreamlike illusion of reward, love from the kind and handsome prince hidden beneath the Beast's appearance, after enduring paternal authority, siblings' oppression and jealousy, and an unattractive marriage prospect.

Figure 3. The Beast is always depicted as a ghast, repellent creature in that era. Illustration by H. J. Ford

However, as waves of feminism swept the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, freedom and equality in marriage and romance (or more broadly, romantic relationships) became

new aspirations for feminist-conscious female readers. Influenced by these currents, Jean Cocteau's 1946 *Beauty and the Beast*, while retaining Belle's dedication to her family and her brave and gentle demeanor from Madame de Beaumont's version, introduced a new character named Avenant—a human suitor for Belle. This addition separated Belle and the Beast's romantic relationship from the conventional "arranged marriage" motif, substantially altering the original story's narrative and romantic dynamics. Cynthia Erb, associate professor of film and English at Wayne State University, highlighted that Cocteau essentially "Triangulated the romance and created a strong doubling pattern between Avenant and the Beast" (Erb 1995, 54). Within this character framework, the culmination of Belle and the Beast's romantic relationship no longer represents mere self-consolation for a woman with no alternatives. Rather than an unconscious submission to a terrifying Beast, Cocteau's Belle would proactively inquire about the Beast's absence at dinner, close her door in his face when he exhibited uncontrollable brutality, and even explore the Beast's secrets out of curiosity. Challenging the traditionally passive role women play in heterosexual romantic contexts, she emerges as an active, free-thinking agent within the romance narrative, presenting a romance founded on mutual trust and commitment.

Persecutor, Rescuer, or Victim: A Threefold Nature

In my endeavor to dissect the gender power dynamics within the triad structure composed of Belle, the Beast, and the Hunter—a role introduced and widely acknowledged since its adaptation from Cocteau's film—I encountered a surprising revelation when utilizing the Karpman Drama Triangle model, a framework frequently employed in script drama analysis.

The roles these characters assume within the dynamics of Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim (PRV) are utterly fluid. That is, at different moments and from various perspectives, each character has at times embodied the role of Persecutor, Rescuer, or Victim.

The Karpman drama triangle, a social model of human interaction, was proposed by psychiatrist Stephen B. Karpman. In his 1968 dissection of fairytale conflicts, he theorized that "the intensity of the drama is influenced by the number of switches in a time period and the contrast between the positions switched" (Karpman 1968, 39). Applying Karpman's methodology from his analysis of "*Little Red Riding Hood*" and "*Pied Piper*" to the characters of *Beauty and the Beast*, reveals:

- The Beast begins as the Persecutor when initially imprisoning Belle's father and later demanding Belle in exchange. When Belle flees the castle, the Beast transitions to the Rescuer, saving her from hostile creatures. Yet, when Belle lingers during her visit to her sick father, the Beast, because of the curse, becomes the Victim of her actions. Whether being robbed by the Hunter (Cocteau 1946) or attacked alongside villagers led by the Hunter (Disney 1991), the Beast is the Victim of the Hunter's actions. Throughout, the Beast remains perpetually the Victim of the magical curse.
- Belle starts off as the Victim, taking her father's place in captivity. However, in both Cocteau and Disney renditions, Belle is not entirely passive. Despite the Beast's overt physical power and possession, given his need for Belle's love to break the curse—a process complicated by his frightening appearance and self-loathing—Belle often aligns more with the Rescuer role. Her delay in returning and the subsequent endangerment of the Beast momentarily cast her as

the Persecutor. Yet, her eventual return and declaration of love, which breaks the curse, once again establish her as the Rescuer.

- The Hunter, in his relentless and rejected pursuit of Belle, perceives himself as the Victim, even though his frustration renders him a potential Persecutor. Upon discovering Belle's closeness with the Beast, the Hunter assumes the mantle of Rescuer, promising to rid the town of a perceived threat by confronting the Beast (Disney 1991), effectively becoming the main Persecutor in this triangle.

Karpman's analysis of "*Little Red Riding Hood*" elucidates that while characters in fairy tales might frequently assume a role within the PRV system, they don't necessarily embody every role (Karpman 1968, 39). The switch in identity represents not only the change in the character's situation but, more importantly, the shift in power relations and dramatic tension between characters. Taking the traditional Rescuer role as an example, the Rescuer empowers the Victim and disrupts the Persecutor's control over the Victim. The transformation of Belle from Victim to Rescuer to Persecutor and back to Rescuer suggests a negotiation of power in her relationship with the Beast. Initially, the Beast appears to control Belle's freedom and life (the Beast holds the power), but his survival ultimately depends on his ability to win Belle's genuine love despite his terrifying appearance and self-loathing (a collision and exploration of power relations). When Belle decides to delay her return without clearly understanding her feelings for the Beast, she almost causes his death (the Beast chooses to relinquish power to Belle by deciding to let her leave) (Cocteau 1946). Fortunately, Belle's return saves his life (Belle responds to the Beast's relinquishment of power). During this process, Belle transitions from the object of the gaze in the conflict to the observer of the drama (the Beast's courtship) and finally becomes the expected resolver of the new crisis she incites. This seamless transition

among different roles ensures that any single perspective of the narrative yields a completely unique experience, obscuring the full picture. This, in turn, adds a new dimension to each character's personality as viewed by different individuals at different moments.

Figure 4. Belle's sister sees herself as a monkey in the mirror in Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1946)

Beyond face-to-face interactions, Cocteau's film introduces the magical mirror—a symbol hinting at the self-gaze and gaze from others—that allows one to see their innermost desires. Disney retained this concept, expanding the notion of the gaze through Gaston's habitual mirror-checking as an assertion of masculinity. Cynthia Erb suggests that in *Beauty and the Beast*, the magical mirror can "make it possible to suggest that the business of seeing an/other is inextricably bound up with the business of how one sees oneself," and "it can also suggest that the drives towards loving images and hating them run very close indeed" (Erb 1995, 65). The Beast, particularly conscious of his appearance, sees a grotesque creature in the mirror, which he believes is unappealing to Belle. Yet, his gaze upon Belle through the mirror represents his admiration of her, always serene and beautiful. Belle, missing her family, sees her ailing father through the mirror but later witnesses a vulnerable and isolated Beast suffering

from the curse, leading her to recognize her feelings for him. Gaston, viewing himself daily in the mirror, sees only a flawless, irresistibly charming man. Through Belle's magical mirror, however, the calm Beast becomes a terrifying, greedy monster in Gaston's prejudiced interpretation.

Through such intricate conflict design, the main characters of *Beauty and the Beast* have a depth that far surpasses the typical expectations of a romantic fairy tale. Depending on their unique experiences and purposes, audience members will interpret and connect with different facets of the story.

Through the Queer Lens

The queer interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast* stands prominently amongst the most insightful interpretations of the work. Cocteau's 1946 film version featured the queer actor, Jean Marais, who portrayed both the Beast and Avenant, and concluded with an imagery of dualism where the appearances of the Beast and the Hunter almost interchange. More significantly, the renowned queer composer Howard Ashman, known for creating the animated version of *The Little Mermaid* laden with hints of homosexual identity, played an indispensable role in introducing an undeniable queer aspect to Disney's 1991 animated movie narrative. Bearing the background of the creators in mind, Erb points out that the vocabulary used when Belle is misunderstood by the villagers for her progressive ideas and actions, and the lyrics sung by Gaston and the villagers as they march against the Beast, could subtly allude to the society's critique on homosexuality and the post-AIDS era panic (Erb 1995, 63-66).

If interpreting Gaston's compulsive habit of repeatedly checking his reflection in the mirror to affirm his robust masculinity, as an early sign of denial about his own masculinity

might be a stretch, then the West Wing of the castle, which hides the secret of the Beast's true identity, is a far too overt metaphor for the "closet"—a room off-limits to outsiders, in this case, Belle, containing a rose symbolizing the Beast's remaining life force and his former portrait, which, in Erb's perspective, is closely related to the film's allegory of AIDS (Erb 1995, 67). The Beast, after being critically wounded by Gaston (who embodies past denial) breaks the curse and returns to his human form upon experiencing love from Belle, who harmoniously embraces his quirks. This, through a queer lens, resonates as a narrative that many queer audiences see as parallel to their own stories.

Figure 5. Avenant in the process of the transformation in Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast (1946)*

For queer audiences like myself, the most striking element in this story is the cognitive pattern constructed by the Hunter, the Beast, and Belle, moving from denial to doubting and self-loathing, through self-analysis to reconciliation, and finally arriving at a frank and

comfortable acceptance of one's true identity. Since Cocteau introduced Avenant (the Hunter) into this narrative, the complex relationship of disgust and jealousy between him and the Beast is difficult to ignore. It reflects that they are two sides of the same coin: Avenant is envious of the Beast, who, despite his unsightly appearance and solitary existence, possesses Belle's favor, castle, and wealth. This jealousy breeds malice and greed, which ultimately transforms Avenant into a beast. In contrast, the Beast, due to his sincere love for Belle, regains his human form.

This metaphor, where "everyone has a beast inside them, and only kindness and sincerity can break the curse," easily brings to mind the traumatic reaction of some individuals who, due to their misunderstanding and resistance to their queer identity, display aggression towards other queer individuals. Disney's adapted version of Gaston follows a similar pattern, even incorporating cruel humor by assigning him an openly-gay fanatic follower, LeFou. The Beast's self-deprecating and defensive attitude resulting from his curse, contrasted with Belle's comfortable and self-assured demeanor amidst her family or villagers, parallels the transformation that members of the queer community undergo in accepting their true selves. In this tripartite narrative, the three characters form a complete character arc of a queer individual struggling with an identity crisis. The storyline, where the Beast frees himself from the hunter's entanglement and gains self-awareness and reconciliation with the help of Belle, can essentially be interpreted as a process guided by the pursuit of an ideal self, shedding the confusion and anger brought about by identity ambiguity, and eventually winning understanding and acceptance. Along with the Beast's journey, readers who are struggling in similar circumstances can also reflect and find comfort and encouragement from this story.

Beyond *Beauty and the Beast*

In reality, it's not solely the queer community that's captivated by the enchanting redemption narrative between Belle and the Beast. It also resonates deeply with broader groups that have experienced marginalization or those that harbor inclusivity and kindness towards societal outliers. Their hope for recognition and understanding is continually reimagined through various captivating renditions of *Beauty and the Beast*, each presenting unique angles depending on the backdrop of the story.

To illustrate, let's just take films as an example. Numerous reinterpretations have emerged since the late last century, retaining the dramatic triad established in the Cocteau system. One such work is Guillermo del Toro's *Shape of Water* (2017). Mirroring the spirit of *Beauty and the Beast*, it alters the redemption theme to a mutual one. The brave mute cleaning lady and the magical Amphibian Man, who is treated as a non-human experimental subject, both bear the dual roles of the Beast ('the other') and Belle ('the savior'). Under the oppressive post-war government regime, they rescue each other and craft a unique life together. In Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), the artificial man, Edward, who faces difficulties in ordinary daily communication due to his scissor hands, connects with the kind saleswoman Peg and her daughter Kim, who moves from hesitation to acceptance, then to protection and support of Edward. This serves as a metaphor for the plight of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families and friends.

A more notable example is Peter Jackson's 2005 adaptation of *King Kong*. The film directly references "Beauty" and "the Beast," making it a frequent subject of scholarly comparison to *Beauty and the Beast*. While *King Kong* literally casts its lead roles as "Beauty" (Ann, the female protagonist) and the "Beast"(King Kong), it untraditionally denies the Beast a

typically happy ending. This changes the undertones of the whole story: the narrative subject, King Kong, does not – and perhaps does not want to – reconcile with the "civilized society" that opposes him. Dr. Merrill Schleier mentioned a possible connection between the image of King Kong and the multiethnic construction workers during the building boom following World War I (Schleier 2008, 33). Coupled with the racial and class tensions in society and the movie's portrayal of Beauty and Beast's fleeting closeness yet eventual separation, this adds a hint of realism to the trope's alternate directions. As Cynthia Erb wrote in *Tracking King Kong*, "Kong's tragic story develops from his definition as a cultural outsider" (Erb 1998,14). The inability of Kong, a true beast, to communicate linguistically with humans pushes him to the furthest fringes of the otherness spectrum. Thus, Ann's attempts at understanding and empathy seem founded purely on self-projection, adding tragic intensity to the film's denouement.

There are numerous interpretations that retain the fundamental character archetypes and relationship structures while incorporating major plot twists, such as in *Sin City* (2005), where volume 1, *The Hard Goodbye*, tells the story of Marv (the Beast) and Goldie (Beauty). Marv, muddled by "his condition," short-term memory loss and occasional hallucinations, seeks vengeance for Goldie's death and unravels the mystery with Goldie's twin sister. The twin Beauty characters distinctively frame the core narrative contradiction where the Beast momentarily finds a purpose in life. In the 2014 film *Maleficent* directed by Robert Stromberg, the "Beast" archetype who bears a misfortune is directly designed as female.

Maria Tatar, an American academic expert in children's literature and folklore, summarized in her discussion on the performative and transformative aspects of fairy tales:

> "Children...begin to move from the childhood condition of lacking the words needed to name, describe, and define what affects us. Fairy tales help children move from that

> disempowered state to a condition that may not be emancipation but that marks the beginnings of some form of agency" (Tatar 2010, 63).

However, I contend that such experiences aren't exclusive to children. Regardless of age, individuals encountering new (especially traumatic) events can feel as lost as innocent children, seeking an objective lens to step out of the current situation and understand and analyze their feelings, the actual reasons triggering those feelings, and the correct ways to handle them. At such times, fictional narratives then become their voice. Just like childhood fairy tale reading sessions, engaging with the experiences of characters—whether it's a timid lion, brave girl, or envious hedgehog—allows readers to empathize and consequently heal. *Beauty and the Beast*, as a rich and flexible narrative that encompasses conceptual conflicts, self-healing, love, and inclusivity, has not only made its presence felt in the queer community but has also enlightened countless creators from diverse backgrounds to reinterpret this trope from more varied perspectives, turning it from the dry and rigid "one of the folktales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 425C" (Harvard Library 2023) into a narrative starting point with infinite potential.

Visual Presentation

When it comes to my own reinterpretation of *Beauty and the Beast*, I was profoundly moved by the narrative richness that this motif can encompass, and I aspired to perform my rendition from a perspective distinct from the most classic versions. Particularly after witnessing the Hunter intricately intertwined with the Beast, as sculpted by Jean Cocteau, I couldn't halt the proliferation of imaginative musings about this often glossed-over yet deeply exploitable aspect of the triadic relationship: Belle's encounter with the Beast inadvertently unveils the latent "beastly side" buried within the Hunter—encompassing jealousy and fury; while the Beast,

through his meeting with Belle, breaks the curse, allowing his outward appearance to revert to his true “human side”—characterized by kindness and restraint. Belle, in this regard, acts as the thread weaving through all events, sparking, facilitating, and ultimately precipitating this bilateral transformation. Could it then be posited that Belle is the trigger for this tragic/comedic twist? If the Hunter had foreknowledge of his tragic fate, how would he view Belle, who once was the object of his affection and the Beast's redemption? What reactions would ensue if the Hunter and Beast, two sides of the same coin, were to meet in Belle's absence? What if they carried different burdens unknown to each other? My inner queerness incessantly queries—my own journey of self-exploration hasn't been as idyllic as *Beauty and the Beast*, and I've witnessed too many peers embark on even more convoluted and challenging paths; for most, it's a solitary battle. Hence, I longed to see a dialogue between “me” and “me”: although “I” might sometimes be Belle, sometimes the Beast, and occasionally the not-so-kind Hunter. We’ve seen numerous renditions of dialogues between Belle and the Beast or Belle and the Hunter, yet rarely (if ever) have the Hunter and the Beast been depicted (even briefly) standing on common ground. Therefore, I wrote this story—*Beasts*.

Figure 6. The designs of the main characters

In “Beasts” I reveal a species, the Nuhulus, which exists beyond the material plane without physical bodies and shares a collective consciousness, their lives neither beginning nor ending. Endless time brings about a calm ignorance and indifference from not knowing loss, along with a lofty curiosity after observing humanity for millennia: the struggles born from limited lifespans and fragile bodies seemed enchanting and mysterious to them, “What kind of feeling is that?” Driven by curiosity, they wish to create a being with a human body that can share their consciousness. The first seemingly successful prototype of this endeavor is Antone. However, a prototype is just that. Once the novelty of observation has waned, it should be left to its own devices—this was the expected outcome. But Shaw, a member of the Nuhulus, perhaps moved by the first genuine interaction with a material being, chooses to abandon their eternal existence and decides to bring the partly human Antone back to human society. Meanwhile,

Kane, who has been connected to Shaw's consciousness for eternity yet doubts Shaw's decision, follows Shaw to human society with complex, unclear motives.

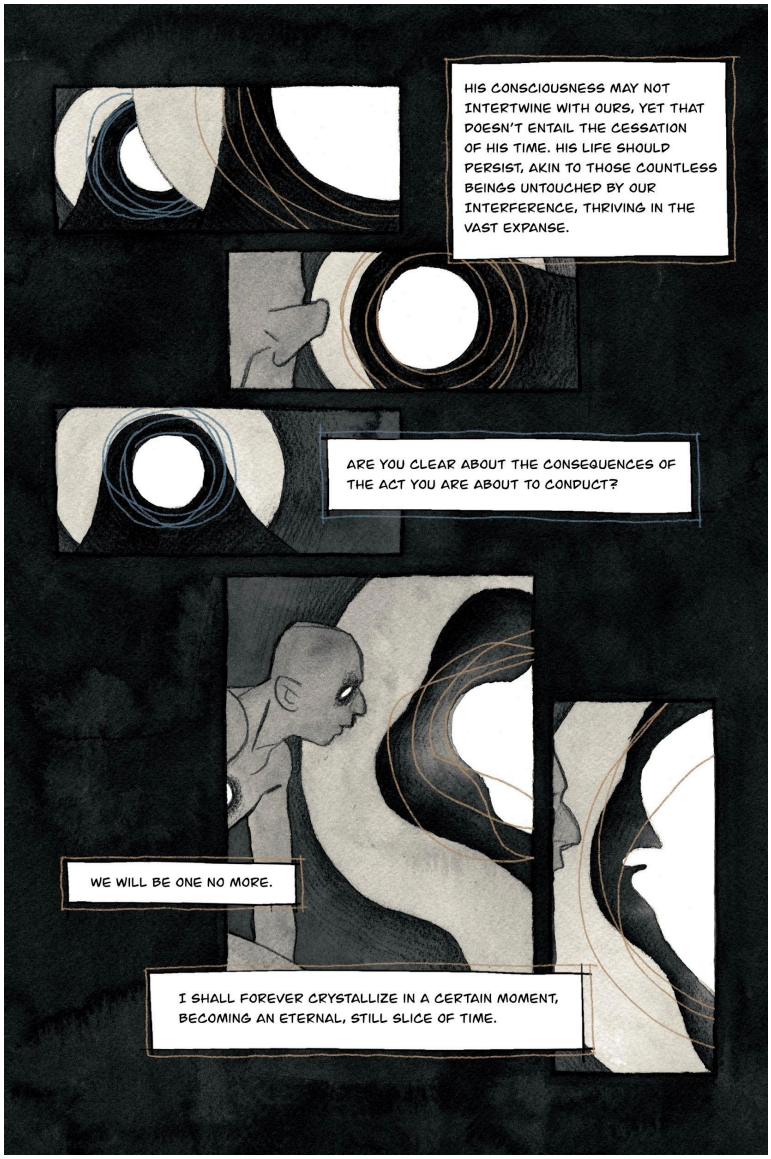

Figure 7. *Beasts*, 29

The material world, with its sensory stimuli and complicated interpersonal emotions, is too intense and foreign for Antone. The energy belonging to the Nuhulus within him, like flammable material fluctuating with his emotional ebbs and flows, remains unstable despite Kane possessing a bullet capable of counteracting this energy to restrain him. Kane holds no

hope for Antone's future path and, after a dispute with Shaw, leaves the gun behind and abandons the group. As Kane predicted, the events that unfold lead to Shaw being eternally erased from existence, prompting Antone to seek his own end.

Figure 8. *Beasts*, 18-19

But the story doesn't start here. It begins with Antone, who has lost all memories yet remains alive, the "bullet" inside him calling to the shells left behind on their journey, returning to where they first arrived in human society, where the first bullet was fired—also where Kane returned after parting from the group. Kane, vaguely sensing Shaw's demise without knowing the specifics, carried a mix of schadenfreud and disdain for Antone, who erased their former companion, and a completely foreign "emotion" stemming from Shaw's death, embarking on a journey with Antone to find the lost bullet shells and memories.

Figure 9. *Beasts*, 27

This story is a prolonged dialogue between the Beast, Antone, and the Hunter, Kane. I chose to weave the main chapters, set in the present timeline with third-person narratives including Antone's flashback memories, and interludes from Kane's perspective set in the past timeline. This is to gradually reveal the conflicts and development in the relationship between the two current travelers and the departed Shaw, as well as the shifts in power dynamics and character growth across different narrative junctures.

Conclusion

Works crafted using *Beauty and the Beast* as their foundational archetype continue to exhibit remarkable vitality even today. Such enduring popularity undeniably owes to the intricate and delicately woven relationships between the central characters in the story, as well as the unyielding aspiration of its readers to explore the true essence of kindness and beauty. Every individual approaches the tale bearing their own confusions, pains, or curiosities, fixating perhaps on Belle, the Beast, or even the oft-criticized yet profoundly multifaceted Hunter with his flaws. Or they could focus on Belle's father, the Hunter's loyal sidekick, or even a mere candelabra in the Beast's castle. The shared commonality probably lies in the expectations harbored within each author and reader. Fictional narratives serve as an alternative life outside our own, granting us opportunities to perceive and contemplate snippets of existence from varying angles. This is especially so in the case of compelling tales. The exploration of storytelling knows no bounds. *Beauty and the Beast*, alongside other enchanting tales, will forever inspire both authors and readers to turn a new page.

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