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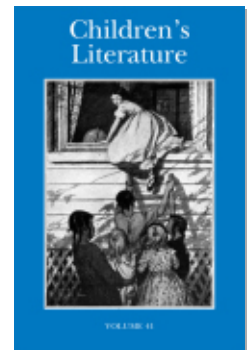
The Tale with a Thousand Faces: "Beauty and the Beast"

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*The Tale with a Thousand Faces:
“Beauty and the Beast”*

Martha Hixon

The Meanings of “Beauty and the Beast”: A Handbook, by Jerry Griswold.
Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 2004.

Fairy tale studies have come a long way in the last few decades: the scholar who wishes to study these stories as literature now has a small library at his or her command rather than just half a shelf or so. Yet most full-length studies still tend to be broad in the selections of the tales they consider, surveying several tales at once rather than only one or two in close detail. In fact, only three specific fairy tales have been the sole focus of book-length literary study: “Cinderella” (Alan Dundes’s *Cinderella: A Casebook*); “Little Red Riding Hood” (Dundes’s *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, Jack Zipes’s *Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, and Catherine Orenstein’s *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*); and “Beauty and the Beast” (Betsy Hearne, *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale*). The fairy tale scholar today might then wonder why, with such a plethora of tales still to be analyzed, another full-length study of “Beauty and the Beast” is necessary. Griswold’s “handbook,” however, is indeed a useful addition to that scholar’s library.

The Meanings of Beauty and the Beast: A Handbook grew, according to the introduction, out of Griswold’s personal obsession with this tale and is the result of more than ten years of thinking about its myriad meanings and forms. The aim of the text is to view “Beauty and the Beast” through a multifaceted lens, beating the bush, as Griswold describes it, to get to the heart or center of this story. In chapter one, citing as evidence the many ways in which the central theme of “Beauty and the Beast” is part of American popular culture, Griswold argues that “Beauty and the Beast” is the “dominant myth of our times” (18). Griswold postulates that the story appeals to modern society because it speaks to both men and women about our lost “wild side,” what it means to be civilized. It also speaks about “Otherness” and helps us work out our cultural and personal reactions to Otherness in all its forms: what does it mean to be a “beast”? How do we define that na-

ture, and what is appealing about it? How do we define "beauty" and why do we value it?

Chapter two, "The Tale and Its Author," focuses on the version of the story that was penned by Madame LePrince de Beaumont in 1756, which Griswold calls "definitive and most influential" (27). Griswold first offers his own version of Beaumont's tale, then follows with a brief examination of the character roles in her story. The chapter ends with a brief analysis of how the story reflects Beaumont's own experience with arranged marriages and as a governess. Griswold argues that Beaumont's story takes a middle position in the cultural debate of her time regarding arranged marriages: Beauty's free will plays a major role in the resolution of the tale, and she agrees to the marriage to the Beast because of her feelings of gratitude and affection, not romantic passion. Griswold argues that Beaumont's story can be viewed as "not only written by a governess (Beaumont herself) and told by a governess (Mrs. Affable), it also echoes the familiar Story of a Governess," later immortalized in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (52).

Chapter three is a brief, readable, though somewhat oversimplified survey of the three main critical approaches to "Beauty and the Beast": psychological, sociohistorical, and feminist. Griswold neatly sums up the Freudian and Jungian approaches to the tale, then moves to theories put forth by Jack Zipes as to how Beaumont's story reflects class conflicts and the historical issues of its time. He then takes up feminist critiques of the tale, noting that such opinions can be split into two camps: those who see "Beauty and the Beast" and other traditional fairy tales as suppressive tools of a patriarchal culture, and later feminists such as Marina Warner who view the tale as a metaphor for feminine eroticism and empowerment.

The rest of Griswold's "handbook" examines specific versions of "Beauty and the Beast" that have been told over the centuries. Chapter four, "Sources," considers the two main earlier versions of the tale: the story of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, and the French tale that predated Beaumont's story by a few years, by Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve. Most of this chapter is devoted to reproducing these two stories; after each, Griswold provides a few pages of comparative analysis between that tale and Beaumont's version. Chapter five places "Beauty and the Beast" in context with a variety of other folktales that share similar motifs, breaking the story into five stages, or "acts" as Griswold terms them. This chapter is, perhaps, the weakest section of this study in terms of argument; not only does

Griswold fail to give his reader a detailed enough look at how folklorists have considered the individual motifs of the story—one short paragraph is all—but he also includes a completely different tale type, “Cinderella,” as a “Beauty and the Beast” story, using the Grimms’ “Ashenputtle” as his test case.

Chapters six, seven, and eight move to contemporary versions. Chapter six focuses on illustrated versions, repeating a good bit of Betsy Hearne’s earlier analysis of the picturebook versions of this tale, noting, as did Hearne, how various illustrators visually depict the Beast’s “beastliness” and their choices of setting. Walter Crane and Mercer Mayer get extended treatment, while a handful of others are mentioned in passing. This chapter contains nearly two dozen color plates, many but not all of which are also available in Hearne. Chapter seven includes the complete texts of two contemporary short stories, Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” and Tanith Lee’s “Beauty,” along with a brief literary analysis of each, pointing out how Carter turns the tale into a woman’s “walk on the wild side” and Lee turns it into a racial allegory (10). Chapter eight focuses on the two major film versions, Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête* and Disney’s animated film. It is perhaps the most thought-provoking of the chapters, given Griswold’s opening argument that both the Cocteau and the Disney films “essentially present [“Beauty and the Beast”] as a gay version” (231), an argument which he supports by connecting biographical information about Cocteau and Disney lyricist Howard Ashman to specific elements of these two films. Here, Griswold’s information about how Ashman refocused the Disney script crafted by Linda Woolverton, shifting it from a feminist text into a “discussion of masculinity,” is particularly enlightening; Griswold observes that it was Ashman who reoriented the screenplay to focus on the Beast rather than on Belle, and Ashman’s lyrics often reference “differentness.” Griswold goes on to discuss the ways in which the villain, Gaston, and the mob scene both highlight the gay subtext of the film. He ends with a general discussion of how the Disney film is intertextual, playfully and consciously echoing a multitude of earlier works from popular culture.

All in all, *The Meanings of “Beauty and the Beast”: A Handbook* provides a readable and multivalent look at the many faces this tale has donned over the hundreds of years it has been told. Given that the book is produced by a respected textbook publishing company, Broadview Press; that it is subtitled “A Handbook”; that a great deal of the text is an anthology of versions of the tale; and the fairly non-

academic language used throughout, Griswold's study seems intended as a college English classroom text, or perhaps for the general reader. As such, it is accessible and informative. As a reference text for those scholars wishing to extend their familiarity with the dynamic character of folktales in general and of this story in particular, it is also useful, but should be read in tandem with Hearne's earlier text, a book to which Griswold acknowledges indebtedness, as well as with other folktale studies.

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