

Beauty and the Belles

Discourses of Feminism and Femininity in Disneyland

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ABSTRACT This article presents a critical analysis of Disney's animated film and stage production of *Beauty and the Beast*, especially of the heroine, Belle, within a more general and brief historiography of the fairy tale. It is argued that Disney's version displaces the heroic focus from Belle (Beauty) to Beast, while also narrating a response to feminism that involves compressing feminist ideology into conventions of popular romance. The broader representation of femininity in Disney is also examined with reference, particularly, to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and with reflections also on non-fictional characters from media with a relationship to Disney, specifically, Diana Princess of Wales, (Mrs) Lillian Disney and Ellen DeGeneres. Teresa de Lauretis's 'elsewhere of vision' is introduced to disrupt and rewrite the domesticating effects of Disney's feminism on its heroines.

KEY WORDS beauty ♦ bestiality ♦ *différance* ♦ Disney ♦ fairy tale ♦ feistiness ♦ glass coffin ♦ motherless ♦ spectatorship

Fairy tale and feminist polemic are among the predominant forms of writing in which ideas about femininity are mass produced. To some extent, feminist scholars compete with international media in disseminating political accounts of femininity, and challenging regressive stereotypes that circulate in global gender economies. The commodification of feminist ideas in popular culture produce strange contradictions; Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and its heroine, Belle, is a case in point. Meanwhile, the rewriting of fairy tale has long been a practice of feminists, perhaps the most notable being Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1981), which extends her theoretical construct, 'the Sadeian Woman' (1978). *The Bloody Chamber* (1981: 7–41) specifically rewrites 'Bluebeard', but is pointedly intertextual with 'Beauty and the Beast', and Carter was responsible for several other wondrous rewritings of this

story. Fairy tale as a genre tends to be seen as patriarchal folklore, moral fables, and Carter, for example, writes against this tradition.

The association of fairy tales with children is a most familiar convention of retelling of fairy tales, but, as Rose (1994) argues, this convention is derived from the period in which fairy tales were 'downgraded from the French aristocratic salons in which they had originally circulated'. Furthermore, she argues, in the 19th century, fairy tales are associated with children as the effect of an identification of cultural infancy and childhood (Rose, 1994: 56). The industry today of fairy tale telling by transnational corporations of the size and power of Disney creates other meanings of fairy tale concerning the infantilization of mass audiences, or the psychological diminution of the watcher's power over the images on the screen, and as Belle demonstrates in this article, these processes are gendered.

The relationship between feminism and fairy tale is broadly considered in this article, in which Disney's version of *Beauty and the Beast* is shown to depict an historic change in the narrative and in the characterization of the heroine, Beauty, who is known in the Disneyland version as 'Belle', while both heroines are distant relatives of the mythic goddess Psyche. A kitsch adaptation of the traditional fairy tale, Disney's Belle is a down-to-earth girl, fussy about boys, and a bit of a feminist to boot. The Disney love plot develops around the Beast's anxieties not to offend her feminist sensibilities, and this occurs after a moment in the drama when Belle is seen to erotically appraise the Beast before accepting his proposal to her to be his hostage in place of her father. In this way, Disney twists the traditional story of the relationship of Belle/Beauty and the Beast from one of learning and understanding to one of falling in love, a very modern arrangement of romance stories. Warner (1994) has also noticed that the film is 'vividly aware of contemporary sexual politics', that it 'consciously picked out a strand in the tale's history and deliberately developed it for an audience of mothers who grew up with Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, who had daughters who listened to Madonna and Sinead O'Connor' (Warner, 1994: 313). Cummins (1995), rebuts critics' claims that Belle '[breaks] the sexist mould of its fairy-tale heroines', and says that the film 'encourages' the belief that 'true happiness for women exists only in the arms of a prince' (Cummins, 1995: 22). Furthermore, Cummins argues, 'Disney . . . strips the traditional fairy tale of anything but the romantic trajectory . . . and woos its vast audience into believing it has been educated as well as entertained' (Cummins, 1995: 22). The 'education' provided appears to be about 'feminism' but under the curious moralistic guise of education about 'beauty'; hence Warner's conclusion that, '[above] all, the film placed before the 1990s audience Hollywood's cunning domestication of feminism itself' (Warner, 1994: 313).

The transformation of 'Beauty and the Beast' in Disney's version is typical of the modernizing of old tales. Readers of numerous storybooks will be familiar with the tale of a virtuous merchant's daughter, who keeps house for her beloved father and sisters (and, in some versions, brothers). The merchant's ships come in and he ventures to the city to reap his fortune, promising to bring glorious gifts for his daughters on his return. Unlike her sisters, rather than splendid clothes and jewels, humble Beauty asks only for a rose. On his way home, the father remembers his simple promise to Beauty and plucks a rose from a mysterious garden. In a memorable fairy tale landmark, the father is apprehended by a terrifying Beast who threatens dire peril for the father if he does not make reparation for the theft of the rose by giving the Beast one of his beloved daughters. In some versions of the tale, the Beast asks specifically for Beauty. Against all his anguished wishes the father complies, and Beauty is sent to live with the Beast. Throughout a grim courting, Beauty learns of the Beast's truly kind nature, and falls in love with him, causing a witch's spell to dissolve, and the Beast's true identity as a handsome young prince to be revealed. This has been the Beast's intention all along, as the breaking of the enchantment demanded the true love of a fair woman. Beauty and the Prince are united forever.

The haunting, macabre eroticism of the French fairy tale is transformed by Disney into something altogether more banal. Like all Disney animated features, *Beauty and the Beast*, is a musical film containing a number of rousing set-pieces in which the exposition is presented. As retold for a late 20th-century mass audience, it is about Belle and her father, who live together in a tiny provincial village in France, where Belle is desired by handsome but egocentric Gaston. Belle finds Gaston repugnant, and the villagers equally find Belle a strange girl who reads too much. When Belle's father, an elderly, hobby-inventor, disappears on a journey to a local fair, she seeks him and finds him a captive of the Beast, who comes upon her while she is trying to free her father. She bravely offers herself as an alternative hostage and Beast accepts. As his prisoner, Belle befriends Beast's household of Enchanted Objects, all talking, walking furniture and kitchen utensils. Unbeknown to Belle, Beast and his staff are all the victims of a witch's curse that has transformed them. Excited at the prospect of their release from the curse, the Enchanted Objects set out to engineer a romance between Belle and Beast, while, high in an attic, a rose in a glass case, gradually sheds its petals, measuring the time left in the witch's curse: if the spell is not broken, they will be enchanted for eternity. There are various episodes, feted by the Enchanted Objects, in which Belle's feelings for the otherwise abhorrent Beast, begin to be aroused. When Belle begs to visit her ailing father, Gaston also leads a campaign to attack Beast. A confrontation with Beast results in Gaston's accidental death, and in the near fatal wounding of Beast. Belle realizes

her love for him, expresses it, and the magic is reversed. Belle and her Prince are united forever.

'Beauty and the Beast' is said, by scholars of fairy tale, to have descended from the Greco-Roman myth of 'Cupid and Psyche'. According to myth, Psyche, a mortal woman, was transported to an enchanted place in which she was attended by invisible servants and made love to at night by an unknown lover. In spite of Psyche's jealous sisters' convictions that this lover must be a beast, he is revealed to be the god Cupid. Psyche is condemned to the underworld by Cupid's mother, Venus, where she survives various tortures and thus becomes immortal. The trials of Psyche can be seen to be traced in Beauty's and Belle's stories, although the latter is altogether a more humorous subject. Scholars argue that the myth first appeared as a French salon fairy tale in Gabrielle de Villeneuve's version (1740; see de Villeneuve, 1989), a '362-page romance', according to Hearne (1991). De Villeneuve's story is somewhat different to the outline described earlier, and not on the whole favoured by historians as most defer to a subsequent version, authored by Madame Leprince de Beaumont (1756; see de Beaumont, 1989), as the authoritative source for all those that followed in English. De Villeneuve's version contains a lengthy secondary story of the origin of the fairy's curse on the prince and, unlike de Beaumont's, is therefore a tale of conniving warrior women, changeling children, absent fathers, and with hints of incest. De Beaumont's version, which appears to retain only a slightly condensed version of the first half of de Villeneuve's, is reputed to have been written as a tale for the moral improvement of girls.¹

The life of the tale between its debut in the salon culture of France and the storybook moralism of English tale-telling is marked by a significant transition. Hearne describes the intertextual proliferation of 'Beauty and the Beast' in popular culture via book-making practices and illustrations from 1804 onwards, in 'chapbooks, toy book series, and nursery tale pamphlets' (Hearne, 1991: 33). The 19th-century versions emphasized education, marriage and 'dull logical probability', according to Summerley (cited in Hearne, 1991: 33), who therefore set out to return the tale to fairy tale (see Summerley, 1845). Hearne notes that Andrew Lang's version, dated 1889, in *The Blue Fairy Book*, was the best known in the 1890s, and with de Beaumont's, the most influential on 20th-century versions (Hearne, 1991: 49). The appearance of Disney's animated film of the story in 1991, the winner of Academy Awards, and subsequently reproduced as a global stage musical extravaganza first performed on Broadway in 1994, represents another development in the life of the tale. Disney reset the story in provincial France, in an Amer-European cartoon pastiche, and the narrative articulates reactions to feminism.

The remainder of this article considers the representation of femininity in Disney, and, in reconstructing the genre of Disney heroines, Belle's

story is examined more closely. The transformation of her character from mythical immortal Psyche, to de Beaumont's allegorical Beauty, a woman of learning, to Belle, the working-class subject of contemporary mass culture is examined, especially Belle's performance of 'feistiness', a hallmark of the femininity of Disney heroines. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle's 'feistiness' is adapted to an expression of – what might be called – consumer feminism, which also sets Belle apart from her literary and folklore antecedents. Apart from the conventions of Disney feistiness that involve a reduction of Belle/Beauty's power and status, Belle's romance is also implicated in discourses of bestiality, which, I argue, characterize a more general 'horror fantasy' of femininity in Disney, suggested with particular reference to Snow White and glass coffins. The curious figure of the glass coffin is a Disney signature that is most associated with tragic Snow White, the first animated Disney heroine, victim of her wicked witch stepmother, raised from her glass coffin by a handsome prince. This story typifies the manner in the Disney oeuvre, in which femininity is characterized as tragic, terminal and prone to evil, while Disney's heroines are those who evade the fall into moral decay. In falling for Beast, Belle is implicated in this horror fantasy, prone to bestiality, but is saved when Beast transforms into a prince. These imaginary figures also relay meaning in the fictionalization of certain 'real' women with strong connections to Disney, namely Diana Princess of Wales, Lillian Disney (Walt's late wife) and Ellen DeGeneres, the first openly lesbian Disney woman. In concluding the reflections on Disney heroines, real and fantastic, in this article, the disturbing representation of mother figures in Disney stories is considered with respect to the model of corporate patriarchy represented by the motherless Disney corporation itself.

Belle therefore raises questions of spectatorship on all aspects of Disney. As witness to Beast's transformation, and in the semiotics of the Disney spectacle, I argue that Belle 'is' the audience and she thereby enacts the 'explicit gendering of mass culture as feminine' (Huyssen, 1986: 192). Belle's position as 'looker' rather than 'to-be-looked-at' reflects on her history and on Disney audiences. Therefore, de Lauretis's (1984) analysis of the Oedipalism of all narrative, underpins the discussion of Belle. De Lauretis rereads the Oedipal cinema narrative as folk tale in a staged theoretical engagement between theory of narrative and the semiotics of spectatorship. De Lauretis argues that 'narrativity, because of its inscription of the movement and positionalities of desire, is what mediates the relation of image and language' (de Lauretis, 1984: 79). The struggle for de Lauretis is not to resolve the primary and secondary identifications in cinema spectatorship, but to resolve the cinematic tensions between 'image' and 'narrative'. Within the article, de Lauretis's 'elsewhere of vision', enables the construction of a different 'narrative temporality' in order to escape the Oedipalism of narrative movement that compels the

reduction of heroines. In considering the genre of Disney heroines, including their, as it were, 'real-life' counterparts, I seek to widen the implications of the transformation of heroic Psyche and virtuous Beauty into feisty Belle.

DISNEY HEROINES: OUR FEISTY FRIENDS

Stewart (1984: 12) defines 'postliterate' genres, that is, non-literary genres of 'things' or 'forms', as dependent, like all genres, on 'a set of textual expectations emergent in time and determined by (and divergent from) tradition' (Stewart, 1984: 6). In postliterate genres, 'the time system of the viewer is collapsed into the time system of a machine that has erased its author' (Stewart, 1984: 12). The postliterate genre of Disney cartoon heroines includes Minnie Mouse, Daisy Duck, and more recently, Ariel, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan and others, all of whom display an ambiguous relationship to humanity. Of the traditional/classic fairy tale heroines, Belle ranks with Tinker Bell, Snow White, Alice (in Wonderland), Pollyanna, Mary Poppins, Sleeping Beauty (Aurora) and so on, all of them (except Aurora) distinguished by bad or non-existent relationships with mother figures, but great loyalty and affection to father figures, often counterpointed with romance with ugly suitors.

Among the many stories that Disney likes to tell of itself, one is that it produced the 'first feature-length cartoon' in 1938 (Allen and Denning, 1993: 90; Juddery, 1996), and this is a story of a beautiful heroine and a collection of freakish or ugly men – *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Belle therefore is only one in a long line of Disney heroines who struggle with the monstrous masculine, making Snow White something of a prototype of the Disney heroine. Snow White, however, is an old tale revised by Disney as, according to Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 36), it is based on the Grimm Brothers' story of 'Little Snow White' and 'dramatizes the essential but equivocal relationship between the angel-woman and the monster woman' of 19th-century literature. Gilbert and Gubar explain how Little Snow White struggles with her stepmother and memories of her dead mother, arguing that 'the conflict between these two women is fought out largely in the transparent enclosures into which . . . both have been locked: a magic looking glass, an enchanted and enchanting glass coffin' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 36). They comment, 'to be caught and trapped in a mirror . . . is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 37). In the Grimm version, the king in the story is absent except, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, for his presence as 'the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment that rules the Queen's – and every woman's – self evaluation', making female bonding 'extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 38).

For Gilbert and Gubar, given their particular interest in women's historical exclusion from canonical literature, the glass coffin is a metaphor for women 'longing to attempt the pen, [who] have longed to escape from the many-faceted glass coffins of the patriarchal texts whose properties male authors insisted that they are' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 43). Of Little Snow White, Gilbert and Gubar argue that the glass coffin is a metaphor for the conditions of patriarchal life:

For, dead and self-less in her glass coffin, she is an object, to be displayed and desired, patriarchy's marble 'opus', the decorative and decorous Galatea with whom every ruler would like to grace his parlor. Thus, when the Prince first sees Snow White in her coffin, he begs the dwarves to give 'it' to him as a gift, 'for I cannot live without seeing Snow White. I will honor and prize her as my dearest possession'. . . . At this point, she regurgitates the poison apple . . . and rises from her coffin. The fairest in the land, she will marry the most powerful in the land. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 41-2)

Snow White's resurrection might also be seen as an act of recovery or liberation from her incarceration by her wicked stepmother, whose vivid jealousy is as poisonous as the apple on which Snow White chokes. The poignancy of Snow White is as much produced through her relationship to this terrifying and tragic femininity as it is in the tender spectacle of her domestic devotion to the seven dwarves. The slightly screwball domestic bliss of Snow White's relationships with the seven, an exemplary array of Disney's mutant masculinity, befits its era, the 1930s, and can be seen to prefigure Belle's love for Beast. Tolerance of grossly unattractive masculinity is inherent in the quality of 'feistiness' that defines Disney heroines. Belle's feistiness – her graceful, perky, fighting spirit – is also modified to incorporate a few (rather simple) feminist sentiments, a quality which makes her an outcast among the townsfolk and endears her to Beast! When the curtain rises on Belle's home town, the audience is quickly schooled in how Belle is different to other girls: bookish, bored with provincial life, and devoted to her potty old father. By volunteering – while cornered – to be Beast's prisoner, raising her eyebrow, and demanding of him to, 'step into the light' (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991), insofar as Belle/Beauty appears to be acting relatively freely, she fulfils a fate championed for her by others, and it is Beast's fate. The story of *Beauty and the Beast* therefore emblemizes the Oedipal conditions in which narrative, according to de Lauretis (following Vladimir Propp) is made, whereby, irrespective of form, the movement of narrative 'seems to be that of a passage, a transformation predicated on the figure of a hero, a mythical subject' (de Lauretis, 1984: 113). For this subject, the 'quest or action is directed toward "the sphere of action of a *princess* (a sought-for person) and of *her father*"'. This view of myth and narrative therefore 'rests on a specific assumption about sexual difference' (de Lauretis, 1984: 113).

Belle's difference is encoded in several ways: in her unconventional femininity or feistiness and her non-conformity, making her the object of Gaston's desire, and suitable candidate to break Beast's spell. Unlike the traditional Beauty, adored for her virtue and beauty, bookish Belle is at odds with her community, and this makes her the object of Gaston's attention. Her comic rejection of Gaston is boisterous; when he tries to trap her into marrying him, she upends him in a pond. This humour also reflects negatively on Belle's femininity in a way that is restored by her confrontation with Beast, the raising of her eyebrow and her engorged eyes, signs of desire. Barring some opening ambiguity, Belle's romantic destiny is never in doubt, especially as her sexed identity is secured generically by her costume.

Belle's costumes are typical of a Disney fairy tale heroine, and she wears them like uniforms: a blue pinafore followed by transformation into a Cinderella-like ball gown (also a Queen Antoinette-style crinoline). But Belle has other costume changes. Nurse-like, in her hooded cape and pinafore, Belle 'chooses' to stay with Beast. Belle's female beauty and sexuality is animated as large eyes and raised eyebrows, demure shape, fineness against Beast's excessive body; demurely dressed, the pinafore puritan. She is also vaguely animal, wearing fur-lined hoods and luscious sexualized capes; a lush. When Beast takes her through his library she wears a formal full-length green dress and when she tutors him in how to eat delicately, she wears pink. Belle's semi-ritualized coming out as sexual debutante and possible wife for Beast occurs in a ball gown in the ballroom scene, a vignette unique to the Disney version. Here, Belle's social mobility is suggested by the opulence of her costume provided from Beast's magic wardrobe.

Disney's Belle is therefore barely recognizable as a relative of the traditional fairy tale Beauty, but instantly recognizable as a feisty Disney heroine, her character and narrative having been dramatically modified to fit comfortably into the Disney oeuvre, and to comply with the conventions of consumer romance narratives. On film, Belle is an animation, a cartoon, while on stage, she is an embodied, scripted performance, a glittering, breathing replicant of the cartoon Belle. As a configuration of 'Beauty', animated or acted, Belle's Disney feistiness is a carefully scripted concept of pop femininity, constructed to be acceptable and entertaining to both children and adults.

BELLE, BEAUTY, PSYCHE, AND *DIFFÉRENCE*

Beauty and Belle are the same character played in different retellings of the same myth, rewritings of an idea of a woman. The names of the character homologize a gap between the classical and the popular: Beauty, an

eternal synonym and allegory for virtuous femininity, Belle, a kitsch pun on a French name. This Belle is a provincial town girl, ostracized for reading, while Beauty is a rural wench despised by jealous sisters and loved by a devoted father, who eventually trades her to save his own life.² In either of these scenarios, Belle's departure from home is part of a narrative of transition between wealth and poverty, and transformations in the name of the heroine narrate timely and culturally specific meanings. As Hearne notes, comparing English and French versions of 'Beauty and the Beast', '[In] English, we have dropped the first article in "Beauty and the Beast" to turn Beauty into a name, but in French, "La Belle" remains a generic term like "La Bête"' (Hearne, 1991: 27). Belle is very different to Beauty while she shares her cultural heritage and literary/folklore ancestry. 'Belle/Beauty' as a nexus of difference from the self-same can be clearly heard when the name is uttered, while, to adapt Derrida (1973), the 'difference between the *e* and the *a* marked in "différance" eludes vision and hearing' (Derrida, 1973: 133). 'To differ' signifies both 'non-identity' and 'the order of the *same*' (Derrida, 1973: 129). Yet this requires 'a common, although entirely different [*différente*], root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally give the name *différance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical*' (Derrida, 1973: 129). The Derridean schematic of non-identity of the self-same embeds the historic continuity of images of female oppression in myth and popular culture. It is in her *différence* from her self-same sisters that Belle/Beauty can be seen to represent and ritualize the ethics of western heterosexual femininity and the associated politics of desire.

Warner comments on how Beauty is different to Belle and Psyche in most 20th-century versions, arguing that 'Beauty stands in need of the Beast, rather than vice versa, and the Beast's beastliness is good, even adorable' (Warner, 1994: 307). Unlike Psyche, 'she has not mistaken a human lover for a monster' nor, like Belle, has she 'failed to see a good man beneath the surface'; instead, the 'Beast's beastliness will teach [Beauty] something' (Warner, 1994: 307). This, for Warner, precipitates an entirely different and ambiguous approach to Belle/Beauty's response to Beast: 'her need of him may be reprehensible, a moral flaw, a part of her carnal and materialist nature; or, it can represent her understanding of love, her redemption' (Warner, 1994: 307).

Belle resembles Psyche in the manner in which she is something of an outcast, while Beauty is usually an object of affection (except from her sisters). Hearne notes the differences between Beauty and Psyche and places them in context of the difference between folk tales and philosophical allegory, saying, 'Cupid and Psyche' is 'a literary tale based on folklore' (Hearne, 1991: 15); but, whereas Beauty is always in control, declining suitors and taming the beast, Psyche is not. Men fear her because of her virtuous qualities; when her secret lover (Eros/Cupid)

visits by night she revels in the loss of her chastity and is unhappy that men leave her alone (Hearne, 1991: 15). Belle changes into a princess, like Diana of Wales, in 'ballgowns and tiaras' enacting a social ritual symbolic of transformation into adult sexual life, and the associated acquisition of prosperity through love and marriage with a powerful man. The mortal Belle's experience is less dramatic than that of her mythic ancestor Psyche, whose transformation from mortality to immortality occurred through her love for Cupid (Eros). Bakhtin (1981: 118), however, sees in the story of Psyche a pattern (a 'sequence') of 'guilt', 'punishment', 'redemption', 'blessedness'.

Belle and de Beaumont's Beauty depart from de Villeneuve's changeling princess Beauty, who can be seen to enact Propp's (1968) patterning of the cross-cultural movement of narrative in folk tale. In this movement, 'the object of the hero's quest (action) is "a *princess* (a sought-for person) and *her father*" (Propp)' (de Lauretis, 1984: 79), hence Propp's hypothesis that the connection between the princess and her father 'derives from her historical key role in dynastic succession, the transfer of power from one ruler to another and from one form of succession, in a matriarchal system, to another in the patriarchal state' (de Lauretis, 1984: 113). While de Villeneuve's Beauty was born a princess, de Beaumont's heroine is the daughter of a merchant, and Disney's Belle is the working-class daughter of a village hobby-inventor. This social descent is replicated in a similar pattern of downgrading of Belle's intellectual interests. Cummins (1995: 23–5) argues that, apart from her reduction from noble to merchant class, de Beaumont's Beauty was considered 'a new kind of heroine', that the tale was written 'specifically to reinforce the goals of the meritocracy for the young women who were the intended audience'. As a lover of music and books, de Beaumont's Beauty is a 'reading woman', an 'important concept' in the period of the advent of popular literature. Cummins notes that Disney 'begins with a focus on Belle's intellectual and inquisitive nature' but, she argues, appropriates these qualities into the construction of Belle's marginalization; because she reads she is 'odd', 'strange', and 'peculiar'. Hence, 'reading is the symbol of this difference'. Gaston disparages her reading, throwing her book in the mud and resting his boots on it, while for Belle 'the most exciting part of the Beast's castle is its large, well-stocked library' (Cummins, 1995: 23–25). Ultimately, Belle's 'learning' amounts to the tawdry moral recorded on the video cover, that 'real beauty' may not be visible on the outside; a very degraded remnant of de Beaumont's scholarly, intellectual Beauty. And Beast, of course, learns nothing at all, really, except how to get girls.

BELLE AND THE LOSS OF BEAUTY

However, the action in the Disney narrative turns on Belle's successful tutoring of the Beast. She tutors Beast in manners and behaviour acceptable for her to love until he recognizes his need to behave like a 'gentle man, a gentleman' (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991; Disney's, 1995) and to adopt the codes of white-western maledom to achieve Belle's love and his transformation. But the blurb tells a different moral to the child or adult video-shopper, that 'Belle soon learns the most important lesson of all: that true beauty comes from within' (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991). That is, external ugliness means nothing. In this outrageous turn around, it is Beast who is advertised to be the possessor of 'beauty' and Belle must learn its nature, and Beast (actually the student of Belle's improving influence) is positioned as moral instructor; Belle's fate is his. It is Belle – robbed of her traditional Beauty – who is being instructed in how to elicit beauty from beastliness. 'It is Belle and not the Beast who must learn to love ugliness and literally embrace the bestial' (Cummins, 1995: 26). For Disney to extract this moral requires outrageous disregard of the worst aspects of Beast – his cruelty, rages and hostage-taking. Gray (1992: 159) suggests that Beast – whom she compares to key members of the men's movement – has the 'psychological profile . . . of a violence prone wife batterer'. But the words of the blurb instruct that Belle is marked as learner, causing the audience to identify with her and placing all under Beast's instruction, not Belle's.

' . . . AN ELSEWHERE OF VISION': BELLE'S EYEBROW

In so many ways, Disney maintains the masculine–feminine polarities, which, de Lauretis (1984: 83) argues, it is the feminist's work to disrupt 'to open other spaces for identification, other positionalities of desire'. Hence, the task is to 'address the spectator from an elsewhere of vision' by the creation of a 'different narrative temporality' to 'position the spectator and the filmmaker not at the center but at the borders of the Oedipal stage' (de Lauretis, 1984: 83). Belle's eyebrow tweaks at Mulvey's (1975) theory of female spectatorship and feminine 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Belle is a cute teenage emblem of the woman spectator, glancing, eyebrow raised, at a monster who, with her consent, is about to take her hostage for eternity so that, she thinks, she can free her father, but actually so that the monster can free himself. Her look at Beast, her sizing him up, her spotting of his 'talent', is a moment of identification for the woman spectator, a moment of recognition and realization that, in patriarchy, female desire is captured before it is aroused. Belle is trapped, then she looks and decides/chooses. She does not choose before her capture, and her consent

comes after. But Belle is also caught in classical film theory which identifies only two available positions: the 'masculine, active gaze and narrative point of view' that is overlaid by the secondary identification of the 'feminine, specular, masochistic position' (de Lauretis, 1984: 78), which Belle can be seen to occupy, reflecting the position of the captive female audience, consenting after Beast has trapped her.

BESTIAL BELLE

Indeed, Belle appears to find the monster Beast quite attractive. But, as a female bestial subject, Belle does not have much of a discourse into which to insert herself. She is mythically and filmically one of the brides of Dracula, and Frankenstein; she is Fay Wray to King Kong; she is Phaedra to the Bull. There is a discourse of female bestiality in literature but it is closely related to pornography. Similarly, feminist writing on bestiality is rare. Brownmiller (1976) and Lederer (1982) include references to bestiality in discussions of heterosexual pornography. However, Haraway (1989: 162) tells that the virgin's gaze 'unmans the beast'. Indeed, in submitting to captivity by Beast, Belle does appear as a kind of Sadeian woman, especially as she raises her eyebrow to gaze on him and decide. The adult viewer of the scene is permitted to share in the bestial sexual joke but this is a brief moment for the Disney adult audience, a wink and a nod, a nudge of an adult elbow. Belle's girlish heroism is quickly restored as she is escorted away by the Enchanted Objects, leaving Beast to his cantankerous confusion. Still, in her stoic feistiness, she is typical of Disney heroines, especially those of the semi-animal world (such as Ariel, the Little Mermaid) because, rather than telling stories of individual heroism, Disney 'focuses attention on the *romantic* aspects of fairy tales' (Cummins, 1995: 23), and the romance plot 'is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole' (DuPlessis, cited in Cummins, 1995: 24).³ Rather than Sadeian, Belle's bestiality is part of an interdiscursive narrative in which she is stripped of her traditional strength and learning, and is even stripped of her 'beauty'. Indeed, Cummins argues that 'Belle functions as a plot device . . . she is necessary to the Beast not just for romance, but to undo the spell he is under' (Cummins, 1995: 24). So it is Belle's utility as a female, and not her beauty, that makes her attractive and valuable.

Belle's bestial ambiguousness is an instance of the Disney 'horror' feminine. Creed (1993) argues that classic horror films frequently represent an 'affinity between monster and woman' in that 'woman's look acknowledges their "similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing"' (Williams, cited in Creed, 1993: 6). Both are constructed as "'biological freaks"' whose bodies represent a form of sexuality that is 'threatening' to "'vulnerable male power"'.⁴ However, Belle's bestiality is

entirely domesticated by Beast, and both the bestiality and domestication of Belle appear to apotheosize in a scene in which Belle abandons her pledge to remain as prisoner and leaves, only to be attacked by wolves, rescued by Beast and, then, in turn – in a kind of romance set piece – nurses the wounded Beast. From this event, their romance blooms. This scene and its development are unique to Disney as in earlier versions Beast, while monstrous, never threatens Beauty enough to make her want to leave (until her father becomes ill). The scene therefore plays on Belle's bestiality and, in the film's symbolic, is at least related to a wolf-mother myth, as Belle nurses her animal-lover-child (Beast). Creed (1995: 96) cites an early 20th-century theory of 'devolution' in which woman 'was particularly aligned with nature' while man was seen to be 'evolving', but 'some men and all women were in danger of devolving to lower animal forms'. In fin-de-siècle art, Creed argues (following Dijkstra) that devolution was manifest in the depiction of 'half-bestial creatures' while 'there was no need to find a symbolic form to represent [woman's] bestial nature' and, hence, women were depicted 'frolicking' with satyrs and centaurs in dark woods (Creed, 1995: 96–7). In Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, the odd scene of Belle, Beast and the wolves is somehow darkly reminiscent of this devolutionary imaginary. While not frolicking, Belle is somehow 'consorting' with the wolves and exposing herself to a known danger in defying Beast, for which Beast is rewarded for protecting her. This scene therefore connects discourses of bestiality and of romance, while Belle's display of courage in leaving the Beast is no doubt imagined by Disney as a positive virtue of 'feistiness', her reward for which is recapture and romance with Beast.

MOTHERLESS DISNEY AND MYTHS OF FEMININITY

The Oedipal elsewhere beckons Disney heroines, who are not only animated, but a human variety also transits from fiction to real life. On the borders of the Oedipal Disney stage and screen are women such as Lillian Disney, Ellen DeGeneres and Diana Princess of Wales. Diana's life, in particular, was frequently compared to various fairy tales, including 'beauty and the beast'.⁵ The representations of these women can be seen to replicate certain of the myths of femininity perpetuated in Disney fiction, including feistiness, tragedy, associations with mutant masculinity, and an unusual relation to maternity. The application of Disney scripts to their lives is the material trace of the ideological femininity of Disney characters. Like the screen heroines, including Snow White in her glass coffin, Lillian, Ellen and Diana are envisioned behind glass in ways that seem to reflect on the position of the screen viewer, gazing on a picture through glass (the television screen/Internet/photograph). The

transparency of glass enables a character, even a dead one, to be seen, the transparency of the feminine being both textual and physical, enabling the penetration of the gaze to occur.

Diana Princess of Wales was imagined in the international press as a Disney-style icon of femininity. Indeed, an elaborate mythology surrounds her representation, ranging from tragic film celebrity nostalgias (especially for Monroe) to hagiography to 'Mariolatry' as well as allusions to Disney. Treneman (1997: x), for instance, notes that 'Americans admire Diana and her Disneyesque world of ball gowns and tiaras, but there is very little real understanding of a world where kings and queens are more than figureheads on playing cards'. Mackesy (1997: xiii) asks whether Diana is 'Saint or a Disney star', observing in the sea of flowers outside Kensington Palace following Diana's death, a Minnie Mouse doll. 'Saint, artist's model or Disney character? Only time will tell'. These reflections convey the image of the glittering feminine in Disney, yet the Disney feminine is also dark and often morbid, a quality also of Diana's media characterization. On her death, a tabloid front-page sighed, 'Goodbye, England's Rose' (Mackesy, 1997). In the photograph, sombre men in black (her family), including the motherless sons, walk behind a mourning car filled with blurry flowers, and the corpse smiles from beneath her tiara: images from a funeral as the headline sings the theme-song. The morbid spectacle of the death and funeral of the Princess of Wales was a scene somehow reminiscent of Snow White. It suggests an iconographic mood of global spectacle, heralded by Baudrillard (1994) in his adoption of 'Disney' as a metaphor for theme-park-style globalism, and explication of the 'hyperreal'. Baudrillard (1994) concocts a bizarre mythic landscape, in which the first Disney heroine is figured:

It is Dracula against Snow White (the Dracula myth is gathering strength all around as the Faustian and Promethean myths fade). We have a good idea who is going to suck the other's blood once their glass coffins are broken open. (Baudrillard, 1994: 47)

Snow White and glass coffins: Disney figures play all around in Baudrillard's rich, prophetic and dismal prose. The Nostrodamus of cultural critics seems to be as familiar as any regular Disney reader with the Disney signature of female death, the glass coffin, and Snow White, the first lady of feature-length animation, is one of Disney's greatest heroines and corpses. Baudrillard does not make the connection between glass coffins and dead femininity, and Disney does not do Dracula. Instead Disney does blood-thirsty witches: she that cursed the Beast, and Snow White's stepmother, and Cruella de Vil (*101 Dalmations* 1996) wear the Disney vampire costume. In a corporation that produces fairy tales for children, and grows rich on advertising family values, it is

chilling to reflect that many of these stories are distinguished by the absence of mothers.

Disney as a corporation has only a father figure, Walt. Little is known of Mrs Disney. My first encounter with her was in an obituary published in 1997 (*New York Times*, 1997). The subject of the obituary, Lillian Disney, is described as an 'Arts patron' and is pictured in her youth with Walt and a Mickey Mouse toy. Among other things, the obituary tells that Lillian met and married her husband while working as an 'inker' at 'the new Walt Disney studios'. It also tells how Walt 'would discuss his ideas – from *Snow White* to the creation of Disneyland – with her, seeking her approval'. An anecdote – unsourced – is related in the style of a fairy tale in which, 'once, on a train ride', she offered the name, 'Mickey', for Walt's new character, 'Mortimer Mouse'. The obituary tells of her US\$50 million contributions to the Music Center of Los Angeles County, and, without directly disclosing her racial heritage, it is mentioned that 'Lillian Disney grew up in Lapwai, Idaho, on the Nez Perce Indian reservation. . . . Last year she donated \$US100,000 to the Nez Perce Indians.' Her public appearances were rare, although one is noted in which she defended (the by then, late) Walt after a critical book was published about him. Hauntingly, Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney, gives the eulogy: 'Mrs Disney was a full-time partner to Walt and we are all grateful for her contributions in the creation of Mickey Mouse and the Disney Company, and the example she set for family life and community service.' She was 98 years old.

The importance of the late Lillian Disney's role in this motherless corporation somehow seems to be incorporated into the Disney oeuvre. Disney heroines, for instance, never struggle with pregnancies or sickly babies. Fairy tale in this way resembles the utopian sexuality of pornography. In the final paragraphs, the obituary mentions two Disney daughters, Sharon, adopted and now deceased, and Diane the 'survivor' of her mother, along with '10 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren'. Lillian, the late heroine, is photographed with Walt and Mickey Mouse.

There is a strange rhythm to the obituary that echoes the configuration of mother-child relations within patriarchy, modelled by Lucas (1998). She describes how within 'phallogocentric economies', women are required 'either to occupy the muted and relational positions of wife, daughter, sister to a significant male, or . . . they must deny the sexual and reproductive aspects of . . . femaleness' to take 'neutered, although actually masculinised public power' (Lucas, 1998: 35). She says, the 'links between mothers and daughters are suppressed' and made 'subject to the hierarchies of the Fathers: a daughter is not autonomous, a mother is not able to protect her from marauding masculinity'. The 'arbiter' of justice is the 'distant' father (Lucas, 1998: 35). It is this that Disney's motherlessness *most* falsifies – the closeness or intimacy of fathers. In the actual absence

of a mother figure, challenges to the father hierarchy are redundant. The same effect is derived from emphasis on romance. In Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, female characters are trimmed from the story by the reduction of Belle to an only child. Cummins also notes the removal of the sisters and of the 'fine lady' of Beauty's dreams, while Gaston is added to the story, and the father's personality is modified (Cummins, 1995: 26); Cummins suggests these are strategies to reduce the earlier version's concern with virtue, and to further intensify the focus on the romance (Cummins, 1995: 26).

There were potentially different implications, however, for the genre of Disney heroines, romance conventions and father hierarchy in the coming out of Ellen DeGeneres, star of *Ellen*, a show coproduced by ABC Entertainment and Touchstone Television, both part of the Walt Disney Company (Handy, 1997: 68). The coming out episode combined Ellen's televisual and real-life lesbian self by involving real-life friends of DeGeneres in sitcom character roles. While ABC and Touchstone were reported to be happy with the episode, Handy tells how the task of explaining this to Disney stockholders was to be held over until after the scheduled stockholders' meeting so that 'chairman Michael Eisner would be spared having to defend that as well as his salary and Mike Ovitz's lavish payout' (Handy, 1997: 70-1). DeGeneres is quoted in the article saying, 'I kept saying to everybody, "I'm the one who's going to get the biggest boycott. . . . You can cancel the show . . . make another one. It's not going to hurt you. *I'm* the product here"' (Handy, 1997: 71); a product indeed, of Disney and of postfeminist 'acceptance' of gay sexuality. An appearance by Ellen and her then (real-life) partner, Ann Heche, in *Woman's Day*, headed, 'Ellen's My Wife' (Davis, 1998), presented the partner of the Disney heroine again as a kind of mutant man: two women seen through glass (a camera lens). The story about 'Hollywood's hottest couple' concerned, not surprisingly in a women's magazine, their 'legal' marriage, and focused on the subjects' roles in each other's lives as 'wives'. Pictured together, of even height like twins (or dwarves?), they may have stepped straight from a Disney cartoon, shimmering and glistening in colourful evening wear, both blonde and lipsticked, fingers lovingly interlocked around a mutual handbag; who carries the handbag, appearing to be more significant than which of these two women 'wears the trousers'. The demise of *Ellen*, the show, is a postscript to this tale.

TALES AND LESSONS: BELLE AS AUDIENCE

Within patriarchy and allegory, 'beauty' is the essential quality of femaleness. Renamed, Disney's feisty Belle is a feminist beauty who loves a beast and thereby, according to Disney, learns a lesson in what is real

'beauty'. Belle can be seen more clearly in the context of Disney heroines in which she appears as a feisty pro-feminist girl, motherless, and haunted by the heritage of the Disney heroines-behind-glass, and in her *différance* from related Beauties. However, in its advertising for the stage musical version of *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney promoted its product by means of implied identification between Belle and audience, and the appeal of the spectacle of the Beast. Advertising for *Beauty and the Beast* did not promote the figure of Belle as heroine or star at all but rather the Beast, and the rose; instead, Belle and audience were positioned, in a sense, as subjects of learning, moral instruction and sexual desire. The show is named after the traditional fairy tale, 'Beauty and the Beast'; the heroine, Belle, is not mentioned in the title. The beauty of the spectacle to be witnessed is the production itself and the fantastic transformation of the monstrous Beast into a prince. 'Beauty and the Beast', therefore, signify not the names of the subjects but the positionalities of desire inscribed in the narrative. Audiences were hailed partly by appeal to education, 'For Who Could Ever Learn to Love a Beast?' (1996); partly with appeal to the herd, '250,000 Tickets Sold' (1995); sometimes with appeal to romance fantasy, 'Catch the Greatest Love Story Ever Told' (1996); sometimes by appeal to a desire for unsafe sex, 'He's Had 4,000,000 Lovers! You Could Be Next!' (1996); but mostly by appeal to an irresistible power, 'For Who Could Resist Booking to See a Beast?' (1995). The 'irresistibility' is rhetorical; the question of 'who could ever *learn to love* a Beast?' is a teaser and a challenge to the contemporary feminist audience, critical – like Belle – of hegemonic masculinity. But by posing the question as a matter of *learning* and not love, the 'you' addressed is almost certainly Belle and her reading women, because Disney marketers are shrewd enough to know that the question 'who could ever *love* a Beast?' would attract nobody.

The interventions within temporal movements and positionalities of desire enable Belle to raise her eyebrow at the spectacle of Beast's transformation, and to perceive how it is obtained through her own placement as 'purely symbolic other', Cummins's realization that Belle is included as 'plot device' only. Belle's feistiness may be a strategy for survival in Disneyland where only the most superficial feminist concerns are valued, but if she's so feisty, then why, when accosted by Beast, did she raise her eyebrow at his size instead of just standing up to him and telling him to hand over the key to her father's prison, and let them both get out of there. This is not a story that Disney would tell because it is not the story of a captive audience. The subject of mass culture signifies a *difference* between '“mass” culture and some other kind of culture', according to Williamson (1986: 99), the difference being not in the cultural artefacts, but in the people who watch them, 'the masses', and the '*vehicle*' for the 'representation of difference and otherness within mass culture [is] “woman”' (Williamson, 1986: 101), Belle. But with eyebrow raised, Belle's

vision is a mystery, because the beauty of the spectacle of woman looking is in her act of looking elsewhere.

NOTES

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1. Published in *Magasins des enfants, où dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusieurs de ses élèves de la première distinction*, translated into English as *The Young Misses Magazine, Containing Dialogues Between a Governess and Several Young Ladies of Quality, Her Scholars* (Hearne, 1991: 2). The dialogues occur (in English) between Lady Affable, the governess and her scholars, Lady Sensible, Lady Witty, Lady Mary, Lady Charlotte, Lady Trifle and Lady Tempest, during which the girls are told a tale for their moral improvement.
2. There are several versions, some in which the Beast demands one of the merchant's daughters, and Beauty either volunteers or is chosen; alternatively, Beast asks for Beauty. Only in Disney's retelling does Belle go in search of her missing father and, meeting the Beast, negotiates her own captivity in exchange for her father's freedom.
3. DuPlessis is speaking of romance in general, not Disney romance in particular.
4. For Creed, Williams's argument 'challenges the assumption that the monster is identified with masculinity and opens the way for a discussion of woman's "power-in-difference"' (Creed, 1993: 6). The argument cited is in Williams (1984).
5. Following the announcement of her impending divorce from Prince Charles, in 'Diana Plays Beauty to the Post-Modern Beast' (Starkey, 1995), Diana was compared in terms of her inferior position of power to Charles personally, and to the British monarchy more generally. Another writer described her as Sleeping Beauty in 'reverse' (Adams, 1995). Following her death, Morrison (1997) described her as 'the acceptable face, the blonde beauty to Mrs Thatcher's blonde beast. As a glowing, unknown bride, she seemed to promise that fairytales could come true for everyone', especially as 'she made the Windsors look zombieified and grotesque' (Morrison, 1997).

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