

Response to beauty and the beast

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In every culture and throughout every generation the presence of fairytales and folklore has been evident, because just as each culture has its own morals and manners, so does every culture need its own fairytales to represent what is important to those people at that time in that place.

While there are many fairytales told to children around the world every year, there are none so famous as Beauty and the Beast by Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont, a story in which a young maiden who is kind-hearted and loving to her father learns to love and appreciate a Beast, looking beyond his appearance to his soul.

This fairytale represents a great deal of the important morals and values that are important to every generation, especially during the time it was written. The basic belief in goodness, faithfulness to one's family, and the ability to love someone for who they are and not what they are becomes the themes of this fairytale, and the interpretation of its meaning becomes apparent through analyzation of the characters and their actions. Fairytales can tell us a great deal about the time and place in which it was developed.

Beauty and the Beast was written in 1756 by a French writer living in England and was based upon a folktale that was well-known at the time. The author wrote it to be included in a book for use by governesses when teaching their young female scholars "of quality", and therefore by analyzing it the audience can learn about the types of lessons that would have been taught to young girls. All of the major characteristics expected of young women are embodied by the character of Beauty: selflessness, studiousness, a love of reading, hard-working, and devoted to her father and family.

Young girls would have been able to look up to a character like Beauty, and society would have encouraged girls to be like her. The main character, after all, is faithful to God, obedient to her father, and compassionate to her family despite the fact her sister's are selfish and jealous. She works hard even when her father loses their fortune and she is forced to run a household without luxury. The story also stresses the importance of keeping one's promises.

In the one instance where Beauty does not keep her promise to return to the Beast in one week she is overcome with guilt and runs back to him, to find that he is nearly dead because of loneliness for her. When she does the right thing and keeps her word, she is rewarded with the Beast becoming a prince who gives her his kingdom. During a time and in a place where a girl's formal education was more geared towards rearing them to be good daughters, wives, and mothers than scholars, these traits would have resonated with the girls who were looking for heroes to mirror themselves after.

Like any good fairytale, Beauty and the Beast involves romance. Each generation loves romance and loves the thought of falling in love and of a young woman meeting her prince. In this particular fairy tale, that is slightly different because the love interest isn't a handsome prince at first, but a Beast. At first the Beast appears to be kind: caring for his father when he ends up stranded at the castle, leaving him food, and providing a place for his horse to stay. Yet, when the father picks a rose for his daughter Beauty we see the angry, frightening side of the Beast.

With Beauty, however, we only see the caring side during their long conversation every night at 9 o'clock, when he would join her for a meal. Beauty describes him as being "kind and good, and that is sufficient". Every night he would ask her to marry him, having fallen completely in love with her for her beauty and her kindness of heart. When Beauty decides to marry him for his goodness and is able to overlook his appearance and his lack of sense, Beast turns into a handsome prince and Beauty is given a kingdom to rule next to him.

This romantic aspect of the story has drawn in many fans, but it also conveys an important message to those who read it and use it as a moral allegory. The story is meant to show that it is not what is on the outside that counts, but what is on the inside. This theme is one of the oldest and most cliched, but it is a lesson that was thought to be important to young people hundreds of years ago, as well as today. Literature from this period and of this type is known for its symbolism and this demands interpretation to understand how it all fits together.

The first object that requires a deeper look is the rose, which becomes the thing that creates the entire storyline. When Beauty's father leaves and he asks his daughter what she wants him to bring back, she asks simply for a rose. When her father takes the rose from the Beast's garden he is confronted by the Beast, who says that he loves his roses more dearly than anything, and that in payment he demands either the father's life or one of his daughters.

Of course, Beauty submits herself to whatever fate she will have at the Beast's hands, but what is interesting about the rose is that she becomes, in

a way, the Beast's most prized possession, much like the rose itself. At the end of the fairytale the two greedy sisters are turned into statues by the fairy, who says they will remain that way until they repent of their wrongs and so they can always see Beauty's joy.

The morals of the time would have taught young women to not be selfish, and that being that way would turn them into bitter old women, just as the sisters are turned into statues. The fairytale of Beauty and the Beast is one that is widely known and loved. Movies, books, and cartoons have all been made based on it, and in terms of literature, it holds up as a story that is beautiful and that would have been used to teach morals and values to generations of young women.

While times change and the definition of womanhood changes with it, the values taught within Beauty and the Beast are not all to be disregarded. The idea that we can fall in love with someone for who they are and not how they look is one that still resonates, and the ability to be the best we can be and do what is right is also a value that everyone should embody. This story was meant as a moral allegory to young women and children, and today it still stands up as a fairytale to be told through the ages.