

# Disney's movie beauty and the beast and angela carter's the tiger's bride: what do...

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Is the real beast the patriarchy? From a story where beauty becomes a beast, underlying issues of femininity, identity, and society are questioned, years before Disney upheld traditional notions of a female's role through their portrayal of Beauty and the Beast. *The Tiger's Bride* by Angela Carter is a feminist revision of the traditional fairytale, written in 1979 at the peak of 2nd wave feminism in the UK, when bra-burning and power suits were the emblem of female empowerment. The tale centers on a beautiful woman from Russia, her gambling father, and a man-tiger. In this version, beauty becomes a beast. Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* was released in 1991, but it has the distinct flavor of Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont's 1740 version of the story. Focusing on traditional gender roles and the themes of self-sacrifice and obedience, Disney narrates the life of Belle, who saves her father from—and eventually finds love with—The Beast. Some argue that this retelling is feminist, but the clear cycle of abuse and the theme of obedience keep the 1991 film in the 1700's. Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* reinforces stereotypical gender roles and remains airtight with a storyline that dates back to the 1700's, while *The Tiger's Bride* moves forward, allowing the heroine to express herself and be viewed as not just an object of her obedience or purity, but as an autonomous individual.

Disney's narratives continue to treat women as antiquity did and reinforce obedience and make physical beauty a commodity, even though it is modern. Released in 1991 as a children's movie, Disney's film sought to empower little girls...to a point. Women (read: Belle) were encouraged to be intelligent, but they were also encouraged to endure captivity and abuse with little protest or complaint. The first quote deals with Belle's personality

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and conditioned outlook on life. As she sings in the opening number, she takes a moment to enlighten some willing sheep on the plot of her favorite story: “ Here’s where she meets Prince Charming, but she won’t discover that it’s him ‘til chapter three” (00: 05: 33). Even though Belle is presented as atypical and independent, her favorite story is a Prince Charming fairytale. She is rejected by the entire town for her individuality, but she still has the aspirations of your average fairy-tale woman. She wants to “ adventure”, but she also wants to find love. Additionally, she only grows to love the Beast through proximity and grooming, willingly putting up with abuse for the promise of a better life and the protection of her father. This is what passes for “ true love”. The only reason that the girl in the story Belle is reading doesn’t know that the Prince really is Prince Charming is because she hasn’t been groomed to regard him as such yet. Belle effectively foreshadows her own run-in with Stockholm syndrome. Next is a statement from the beginning of the movie, when the witch visits The Beast (aka Prince Adam) in his castle. He turns her away because she is ugly at first, and she curses him in turn—“ She warned him not to be deceived by appearances, for beauty is found within” (00: 01: 23). This statement is humorous, considering the fact that Belle’s name literally means beauty, so really, the Beast learned nothing. The Beast still proves to be beastly and abusive when he threatens a sick old man with death, forces the man’s daughter into imprisonment to save her father’s life, and when he repeatedly bullies and isolates Belle during her stay in the castle. His traits are intimidating, yet through Belle’s self-sacrifice and kindness, he eventually becomes more civilized. This is less of an indication that he learned his lesson—rather that he finally got what he

wanted, a pretty woman to baby him. The most apt commentary on this dichotomy between Belle's perceived independence and intelligence versus her femininity comes from ' Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses'. The author states, " This princess [Belle] was the first to show very high rates of intellectual activity as she read books frequently, though this was used in the film to characterize Belle as strange and served to separate her from the other villagers" (564). Carrying on with my assertion, the " feminist" traits of Belle were what made her hated, isolated, and treated with disrespect when she was among the townspeople. Her masculine traits, like an adventurous spirit, inquisitive nature, and autonomy served only to make her an object to the hyper-masculine Gaston or a love interest to the also hyper-masculine Beast. It was only after she became more obedient and self-sacrificing that she was rewarded with acceptance and marriage, and the Beast adopted more feminine traits.

Angela Carter's version of the " Lost Husband" tale-type places more emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the heroine and refuses to turn her into a commodity like in Disney's. Angela Carter revised several fairy tales in an anthology to follow a feminist paradigm. Though her story has disturbing images of captivity and treating women as property (the titular Tiger's Bride is bet and traded in a card game), her heroine is stubborn, resilient, and refuses to give in unless she gets her soapbox. Written in the 1970's, during 2nd wave feminism, the narrative definitely represents the heroine with more " masculine" traits and in a sex-positive light. The character's development is best exemplified through this quote from the book, " The

tiger will never lie down with the lamb... the lamb must learn to run with the tigers" (Classic/Carter 63). The heroine is portrayed at first as a lamb, but she quite literally becomes a tiger. She realizes her own worth. Her father's treatment of her makes her have no desire to be the self-sacrificing protagonist that we see so often in this tale type. She refuses to return to her father, just as she refuses to immediately submit to the desires of the Beast. Her personal decisions are more important to her—she is independent and takes her situation entirely upon herself. For example, when the Beast asks that she be naked in front of him because he desires to see virginal flesh, she states, " I wish I'd rolled in the hay with every lad on my father's farm, to disqualify myself from this humiliating bargain" (Classic/Carter 60). The heroine does not see her purity as important, but as a commodity. She wishes that she wasn't a virgin so the beast couldn't use it to cater to his own perversion. The male figure is clearly in the wrong, and the female lead doesn't have an issue with her choices. She is sexually independent, but also refuses to be a party to objectification. Treating the Beast's staff kindly is not a priority and she doesn't wish to return to her father or sacrifice herself. Also, her attitude shifts when the Beast is willing to reveal a part of himself to her. Her self-worth causes her to wish for equality and only relent when she feels that she is being treated fairly. This emphasis on balance and the shift to more masculine traits leads to the heroine to choose to become a beast. This choice is examined eloquently by Seago in ' New Wine in Old Bottles?: Angela Carter's Bloody Chamber of Revisioned Fairy Tales': " In addition, the tragic fate of being turned into a beast is presented as a positive choice in Carter's second version of ' Beauty and the Beast', ' The

Tiger's Bride', and is clearly meant as an unequivocal ' happy ending.'" (19 of 77-98) The heroine finds happiness in becoming a beast-she finds freedom. Beastliness is perceived as more beautiful than artificial human fronts and perceptions of society. Though the Beast is beautiful in his human costume, he is unbelievably gorgeous in his animal form. The return to animalistic nature and desires allows for the duality of male and female without belittling either for ethical choices.

The Tiger's Bride came twelve years before the Disney film, yet is more progressive in its portrayal of women in society. Disney's choice to hold fast to tradition is exemplary of the underlying patriarchal issues still present in our society. Carter's tale has the opposite effect, as detailed in an article from Inquiries Journal, " Angela Carter's Beauty does not act as a civilizing agent on the Beast" (Basu-Zharku). In fact, the heroine turns into a beast; she does not want to be civilized. Though resentful of the beast in the beginning, she grows to admire his way of life and his independence. Since her father treated her with disdain, and the nature of humanity is what perverted the desires of the Beast in the first place, beastliness is actually shown to be preferable to civility. Additionally, Carter's heroine couldn't civilize the tiger if she tried. He isn't cursed. His servants aren't cursed. He is a beast, and he stays a beast. Carter's protagonist is also hot-headed—she could not cool the Beast's attitudes and she is not meant to. However, Disney's Belle is meant to civilize the Beast. She is subservient to his desires and is supposed to keep a level head, even when he mistreats her. Her obedience and love facilitates the cursed Beast's return to humanity, and her

“rightful” place as a married woman. Secondly, Belle’s character is far weaker than her Carter counterpart. In ‘Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses’, this is examined in the following quote: “Belle was shown as independent more often than the prince, but she also was shown as very fearful” (p. 564) She collapses crying when she is captured, while the tiger’s bride is defiant and strong in the face of her captivity. Belle is demure, and she is compliant, however, her feminist counterpart, while well-bred and sophisticated, is also unafraid to question authority (e. g. the males around her). This makes her more equal to her oppressors. Carter’s heroine is portrayed as strong, while Belle is intentionally portrayed as weak. Lastly, sexist jokes intended for adult viewers of the Disney film keep it far away from the feminist ideals of Angela Carter. For example, a dialog between the Beast and his servant, Cogsworth, proceeds as follows, “Beast: I want to do something for her... but what? Cogsworth: Well, there’s the usual things: flowers... chocolates... promises you don’t intend to keep” (00: 46: 20). This quote is an obvious model of chauvinist adult humor. The men in the story see everything—including women—as conquests, and they see women as overly simple, becoming satisfied and therefore subservient through paltry shows of affection.

Disney’s Beauty and the Beast stays fairly unadulterated in comparison to the old narrative, while The Tiger’s Bride is a progressive, unapologetic example of 1970’s feminism, embracing sexuality and masculine traits. It is possible to regress, and Disney keeps its stereotypes close and its objectification of females closer. æ