

A Tale as Old as Time: The Evolution of Love in *Beauty and the Beast*

By: C. Grace Honeycutt

*As the years passed, he fell into despair and lost all hope.
For whom could ever learn to love a beast?*

-Walt Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)

In the fairytale genre, “Beauty and the Beast” is one of the most retold stories in modern media. Since Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont wrote the original French tale in 1751, the tale has taken on a life of its own. Though Beaumont’s tale is not the one typically thought of when the phrase “Beauty and the Beast” is brought up, that honor goes to the 1991 Disney movie of the same name. The core of the story is as follows: two outcasts find love and transform for the better because of the relationship. As time progresses, the story’s adaptations incorporate elements to fit with the changing times such as adding elements of feminism, changing masculine ideals, and psychological influence. One of the most recent adaptations of “Beauty and the Beast” is ABC’s *Once Upon a Time*; this show mixes modern ideas with the classic tale and explores the challenges of transformation. Even though this tale is vastly different from the original Beaumont tale, the themes of love and transformation remain at the story’s core. Within this essay, I will be analyzing different adaptations of “Beauty and the Beast” and examine why this tale is so important to retell.

Beauty and the Beast explores how relationships can be the catalyst for transformation. By analyzing Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” and its adaptations, Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and ABC’s television series *Once Upon a Time*, through a feminist lens, I argue both Belle and Beast transform independently within the relationship. Belle transforms internally with her gaining more agency and going from being an outsider to having friends and people she can relate to. Meanwhile, Beast’s transformation is both external and internal with him physically and mentally changing from a Beast to a gentleman. As the story is retold, Belle develops as the catalyst for change and gains more initiative and individuality throughout each retelling, while Beast becomes more human, educated, and temperate which shows the transformation from a toxic beast into a kind man. The relationship between the two not only helps them transform, but it displays how relationships are two sided and both sides must work together to make the relationship work. Throughout all the retellings of this classic tale, the themes of trials, love, and transformation touch all ages.

Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont wrote “Beauty and the Beast” in 1751 for a popular girl’s magazine in England during her time as a governess. The reason why she wrote the tale is a debate among scholars, with some saying it is an adaptation of the Greek myth “Cupid and Psyche” while others, such as Joan Gould, believe it was to help girls accept their marriages to older men: “[I]t was aimed at girls who would soon face the prospect of themselves being married to unknown ‘beast’, possibly twenty years older than they were, quite possibly sexually demanding or impotent, in matches arranged by their parents.” (135) While the mystery of Beaumont’s reasoning is still a prevalent question, the story has come to take a life of its own displaying a kind daughter who has agency, a beast who transforms into a man, and a relationship built on friendship.

The original tale begins with an old merchant coming back from a long journey with gifts for all but his daughter, Beauty, who only wants a single rose. The merchant comes across a castle with a beautiful garden of roses; taking this opportunity, the merchant picks a single red



rose, unknowingly notifying the master of the castle. The master of the castle is a ferocious beast who enslaves the merchant within the castle for picking one of his flowers. The merchant convinces the Beast to allow him to go home and see if he could convince one of his daughters to come to stay in his stead. The only one of the merchant's three daughters to volunteer to come in his stead is Beauty, the youngest daughter. Beauty goes to the castle and the beast is very gentlemanly, but also each night he asks Beauty to marry him, to which she refuses. After spending a long time in the enchanted castle, the two become close friends. The Beast falls in love with her and lavishes her with gifts and luxury. Even though Beauty is happy at the castle with the Beast as her friend, she misses her family, and she asks the Beast if she can visit them. The Beast says she can, but she must return by the end of the week. The sisters keep Beauty past the deadline, and when she returns to the castle, she finds the beast lying on the ground, dead. She confesses her love for him, and the Beast transforms into a handsome prince.

Beaumont's character Beauty has a small character arc throughout the story. She starts out kind and caring and ends kind and caring. The aspect of Beauty that transforms is her awareness of her sisters' jealousy. In the beginning, she is depicted as being very different from her sisters in both attitude and appearance. Beauty is, as her name suggests, the most beautiful of her sisters (internally and externally) which makes her sisters' very jealous; "When she was little everybody admired her and called her 'The little Beauty;' so that, as she grew up, she still went by the name of Beauty, which made her sisters very jealous." (Beaumont). She also takes on the majority of the housework without complaint while her sisters lounge around all day and complain about their now humble lifestyle. When Beauty does leave, her sisters feign sadness, but then rejoice at their sister's departure. Beauty states that she misses her family and her sisters in contrast. When she does return, her sisters are jealous of her relationship with the Beast and her newly lavish home. Then, to try and take away their sister's happiness, they pretend to care for her and make her stay:

"Sister," said the oldest, "a thought just strikes my mind; let us endeavor to detain her above a week, and perhaps the silly monster will be so enraged at her for breaking her word, that he will devour her."

"Right, sister," answered the other, "therefore we must show her as much kindness as possible." After they had taken this resolution, they went up, and behaved so affectionately to their sister, that poor Beauty wept for joy. When the week was expired, they cried and tore their hair, and seemed so sorry to part with her, that she promised to stay a week longer. (Beaumont)

It is only when Beauty dreams of the Beast dying that she realizes the true nature of her sisters. This character arc displays Beauty's transformation and shows her agency.

While Beauty's agency is not overtly displayed, it is still prevalent within the tale through her choices. The tale centers around Beauty's choices: her choice to take her father's place, her choice to leave to see her family, and her choice to come back and choose the Beast. Fairy tale Scholar Marina Warner in her book, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, discusses the importance of choice in her chapter on "Reluctant Brides". In this chapter, she discusses "Beauty and the Beast" tales and Beaumont herself. She investigates the influence of female writers during the time period in which the original tale was written. Warner discusses the importance of choice within this chapter and how it influences the tales of the time:

They especially attacked the custom of marrying off daughters at very young ages (fourteen or fifteen was not uncommon) to strangers. In this regard, women of high rank suffered from total powerlessness, and there was not much change in matrimonial matters

until the Revolution ushered in a new era of comparatively free choice. (Warner 277-78)

The purpose of this tale and Beauty's character serves as a double-edged sword: at first glance, the tale reads as propaganda for a good marriage that was "forced" by her father, but when reading further into the text, it is evident that the story is about "choice" with Beauty choosing her own path. Beauty's character is very deep and serves as a beautiful baseline for her later counterpart, Belle.

In contrast to the nuanced transformation of Beauty, the Beast has a more apparent and dramatic change. When the readers are first introduced to the Beast, he imprisons the merchant for "stealing" a rose but still gives him a chance to go home to say goodbye and offers him the chance to have one of his children take his place: "[Beast says] 'But you say you have got daughters. I will forgive you, on condition that one of them come willingly, and suffer for you. Let me have no words, but go about your business, and swear that if your daughter refuses to die in your stead, you will return within three months.'" (Beaumont). This displays how the Beast is a monster but still has a heart. When Beauty arrives at his home, he treats her as a guest and acts like a gentleman. In the annotations of the tale provided by the website Surlalune, it discusses how the Beast is an animal bridegroom who has become gentle after he has suffered loneliness and only wins Beauty over with conversation: "The Beast is the animal bridegroom, an animal with human abilities, grotesque in appearance. He is usually wise and kind as a result from his suffering..." ("Beauty and the Beast" (Beaumont) Annotations"). The Beast is depicted as a gentleman who gives Beauty choices. The definition of a "gentleman" is someone who is honorable, courteous, chivalrous, and polite. He displays this at the dinners when he only sits at the table with her if she grants him permission, and even though she rejects his marriage proposal every night, he still provides friendship and is honorable to her wishes. When the Beast lets Beauty visit her family, he also gives her the option to never come back. By giving her choices and displaying his gentlemanliness, he displays he is not a monster on the inside. Once Beauty comes back and declares her love for him, he becomes as handsome as his heart is. Though the original tale does not display the emotional transformation of the Beast, it still provides a baseline for later iterations of the character.

The biggest transformation within the original tale lies within the relationship between Beauty and Beast. Though the relationship begins in a rocky place, with Beauty taking her father's place as the Beast's prisoner, it quickly develops into a friendship that lasts throughout the story and transforms into a romantic relationship at the end. Even though the Beast clearly states his desire to marry her by him asking "Beauty, will you be my wife" every night at dinner, he respects her desire to just be friends with each rejection (Beaumont). Beauty and Beast's friendship is apparent and valued on both ends; when the Beast hears Beauty's desire to see her family again and he obliges. Beauty realizes her love for the Beast only after his death with her crying at his side: "'No, dear Beast,' said Beauty, 'you must not die. Live to be my husband; from this moment I give you my hand and swear to be none but yours. Alas! I thought I had only a friendship for you, but the grief I now feel convinces me that I cannot live without you.'" (Beaumont). This realization triggers the Beast's transformation into a man. There are sexual undertones to this story as stated by Gould in "Chapter 8" of her book *Spinning Straw into Gold*, where she says the story is implicitly about sex and bodies with the beast's main goal to get a human virgin and discusses the fears, concerns, desires, disgust, and transformation of sex (Gould 136). While the undertones are there, the physical and emotional transformation of Beauty and Beast's relationship is the basis for its adaptations to take this story further.

When people think about “Beauty and the Beast” tales, they often think about the Disney movie from 1991. The Disney film takes a deeper look into the tale while also having stark differences from the original. One of the major differences is Belle and her father, named Maurice, are outsiders and alone in their “little town” (“Belle”); unlike the original tale, Belle only has Maurice whereas Beauty has multiple siblings. The town they live in views Belle as “odd” and objectifies her as a beautiful oddball, going on to sing a whole song about how she is “Beauty but a funny girl” (“Belle”). The movie also differs by adding a foil character to the Beast named Gaston. Gaston is the villain of the story and sees Belle as the ultimate trophy, wanting to make her his wife at any cost. One of the most drastic changes that Disney made to the tale was the Beast. Unlike Beaumont’s tale where the Beast starts and ends as a gentleman, the Beast in Disney’s version starts off rude, impatient, temperamental, and displays traits of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is defined in *The Journal for School Psychology* as “the constellation of socially regressive [masculine] traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Ingram). The Beast starts as a toxic male, displaying traits stated in Ingrams article, but ends as a gentleman showing a more dramatic transformation. The transformation of both the individual characters and their relationship within the Disney movie are greater than the original tale.

Modern viewers and scholars often argue whether Belle has Stockholm Syndrome or not. Scholar Cole Reilly argues that Belle, though she has the drive for freedom, suffers from the syndrome: “Belle willingly exchanges her own freedom for her father’s. While this sacrifice is admirable, it leads her into an abusive relationship that is romanticized to the point that she seems to fall victim to Stockholm Syndrome. She presumes to fall in “love” with her controlling captor and marries into the role of princess” (54). Cole’s interpretation may align with some viewers of the Disney movie, but she exaggerates the Beast temper (which is not abusive), undermined Belle’s agency, and does not define Stockholm Syndrome or provide evidence for why this is abusive or a case Stockholm Syndrome. The definition of Stockholm Syndrome provided by the American Heritage Medical Dictionary is “A psychological syndrome in which a person being held captive begins to identify with and grow sympathetic to his or her captor, simultaneously becoming unsympathetic towards the police or other authorities.” The key points of Stockholm Syndrome are that the captive’s ability to choose is taken away and gaslighting, convincing someone they are crazy, wrong, or guilty for the gain of the one performing the gaslighting, occurs. In Erin Lee’s paper, “Curing Beauty’s Stockholm Syndrome,” she explains how Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* is not a case of Stockholm Syndrome due to the servants being so kind to her outside of the Beast’s authority:

The servants play a vital role in the elimination of Stockholm syndrome from the story and have a much bigger role than in any previous adaptations. The Beast never gaslights Belle throughout the movie and Belle’s choices are what move the plot of the movie, also showing her agency. (111)

The other reason this movie is not a portrayal of Stockholm Syndrome is the fact that Belle is not isolated. She has a support system within the castle, which is something that those who suffer from Stockholm Syndrome do not have; “Though Belle is physically isolated from her family in the Beast’s castle, she is not ideologically isolated thanks to the support of these magically-transformed servants.” (Lee 112). *Beauty and the Beast* is not a case of Stockholm Syndrome since Belle has a support system and the ability to choose, which drives the story.

Belle also shows agency within the story through her choices and how she interacts with the other characters throughout the film, mainly her father, Gaston, and the Beast. Belle is very

attentive to her father and his needs throughout the film, going as far as to take his place as the Beast's prisoner so he would not die in a prison. Film scholar Amy Davis discusses in her book, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, how Belle displays traits of a character archetype known as the "good daughter" (*Good Girls and Wicked Witches* 186); she defines this archetype as "a young woman who, out of loyalty to her good but naïve father, finds herself in a potentially threatening situation and must use all her personal resources to survive, an exercise which usually ends in a personal triumph for the heroine." (Davis *Good Girls and Wicked Witches* 190). Belle fits this perfectly and it is displayed throughout the movie as she sacrifices her freedom and happiness multiple times for her father: First, by taking her father's place as the Beast's prisoner, and second, when she almost gave up her hand in marriage to Gaston so her father would not be sent to the Asylum. She does get a happy ending with her father, but he is also the reason she is in those situations.

Belle is respectfully dismissive of Gaston at the beginning of the movie when he is trying to flirt with her. In the scene directly after the song "Belle," Gaston approaches Belle and tries to seduce her, but she dodges his advances calling him "positively primeval" which he mistakes as a praise (*Beauty and the Beast*). She is very witty in her comments and shows her distaste for him after she rejects his proposal through the song "Belle Reprise": "Madame Gaston, can't you just see it/ Madame Gaston, his little wife/ No sir! Not me! I guarantee it!" ("Belle Reprise"). Even though he is beloved by the town, Belle is appalled by Gaston and displays it through her actions, dually showing her agency to defy the popular opinion of the town and it's favorite bully.

The first person to give Belle a choice is the Beast. Much like the original Belle, much of her agency is displayed through choice and actions. When Belle first meets the Beast, she is taken aback, but stands her ground against before him as she chooses to take her father's place. She also makes a promise to the Beast to stay but breaks that promise due to how rude he was to her and how he scared her, but she chooses to come back once the Beast saves her from being eaten by the wolves. When she returns to the castle, she chooses to take care of him and stands up to his temper, which is something no one has done before. She also shows her gratitude by thanking him for saving her life (*Beauty and the Beast*). After this, the Beast starts to be kinder and the two form a friendship, seen through a montage and the song "Something There." The Beast gives her the freedom to choose, to leave, and to love him, never forcing her to do anything after she nurses his wounds. Belle is very independent and has a greater amount of agency than her original counterpart Beauty, as well as a greater transformation.

Belle's transformation is displayed through her actions and how others perceive her. Belle begins the movie as an outsider who desires adventure and a friend who understands her, as shown in the song "Belle Reprise": "I want adventure in the great wide somewhere, /I want it more than I can tell, /and for once it might be grand, to have someone understand /I want so much more than they got planned" ("Belle Reprise"). Belle is also depicted as a bookworm with a love for reading and learning which the town considers "odd" ("Belle"). The town objectifies Belle as an odd beauty, but no one objectifies her more than Gaston who sees her as a prize to be won:

[Gaston] 'It's true, LeFou. And I've got my sights set on that one.'

[LaFuo] 'Hmm the inventor's daughter?'

[Gaston] 'She's the one - the lucky girl I'm going to marry.'

[LaFuo] 'But she's- '

[Gaston] 'The most beautiful girl in town.'

[LaFuo] ‘I know, but-‘

[Gaston] ‘That makes her the best. And don't I deserve the best?’
 (“Belle”)

This objectification of Belle contributes to her being outcasted and alone at the beginning of the movie. Then once she takes her father’s place and is brought into the castle, the castle attendants and the Beast objectify her as “the one to break the spell” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Belle is only seen for who she is after she confronts the Beast and nurses his injuries. The scene where Belle is trying to nurse Beast’s wounds and she confronts him about his temper is where the switch flips and she is now seen as a strong and intelligent person instead of the key to the curse (*Beauty and the Beast*). After this, Beast tries to be a better person and the servants start seeing Belle as a friend. Belle even chooses to come back and save her friends after she is set free by the Beast. This transformation parallels Beauty’s transformation in the original tale, with both being nuanced and internal. By the end of the movie, Belle transforms from an objectified outsider to someone who is valued for her kind nature and intelligence.

Though Belle is often thought of as the main character of *Beauty and the Beast*, the movie focuses on the Beast instead. He is the center of the film, he goes through the biggest transformation, and he has a character foil who begins like him and shows what could have happened if Belle never came. Davis states in her book, *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains*, how the production team argued over who the main character of the film is: “Don Hahn from a *Newsweek* article published in 1991 (The year of the film’s release) when he says that ‘It was Ashman who realized, contrary to tradition, that this had to be the Beast’s story. We didn’t agree with him right away. But he was right. The Beast was the guy with the problem.’” (*Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains* 157). She later goes on to explain how the Beast’s transformation is the heart of the film (Davis *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains* 157). Whether the Beast is the story’s center or Belle is, each go through a transformation that changes them at the end of the film.

The dramatic transformation of the Beast from a toxic male to a gentleman is the main plot of the movie. The film begins with a prologue explaining how the Beast was cursed by a witch due to his rude and spoiled nature. She cursed him to look like a terrifying Beast and for his servants, who made him this way, to turn into furniture and objects. The viewers get to see his rude and toxic behavior during the first part of the film when he hurls Belle’s father into jail for coming in from the cold, is rude to Belle and demands her to do stuff and has an uncontrolled temperament towards Belle and his servants. He knows Belle is his last chance to break the curse but is also convinced she could never love him due to his looks. He is shown to regret his actions after he scares Belle, and she runs away. Beast goes after Belle and saves her from wolves, causing him to get injured. Then the first act of kindness Belle shows him occurs when she helps him back to the castle and nurses him back to health. From this point forward, the Beast has fallen in love with Belle, as displayed in the song “Something There,” and he starts to become a gentleman. He starts to have conversations with Belle and treats her as his equal rather than a subject. He also learns manners and takes interest in her passion—reading—which causes the two bonds over books. Belle is kind to Beast, and the Beast falls in love with Belle, but he respects her enough to not force her to love him back. When she leaves, he accepts that his love will not be returned and gives up, almost letting Gaston kill him until Belle shows up. He wants to protect her from the man who is a worse reflection of his former self and almost dies doing so. At the end of the film, he and Belle confess their love for each other, and both see each other as

people, not a Beast and not an object. The Beast's transformation is the opposite of the film's main villain, Gaston.

Both the Beast and Gaston begin the movie as toxic males that view Belle as an object; for the Beast, she is the cure and for Gaston, she is his trophy. While the Beast becomes a gentleman over time, Gaston gets worse as the movie goes on. Gaston pursues Belle even after she rejects him, seeing her as a prize that is rightfully his. After being rejected by Belle, His sidekick, LaFou, and the town sing a whole song praising Gaston's and making his ego grow: "No one's been like Gaston /A king pin like Gaston /No one's got a swell cleft in his chin like Gaston /As a specimen, yes, I'm intimidating /My, what a guy, that Gaston!" ("Gaston"). After this song, he schemes with LaFou to find a way to force Belle to marry him. When she rejects him again and claims the Beast as her friend, he gets angry and convinces the town to storm the Beast's castle and "Kill the Beast!" ("Mob Song"). The clash of masculine ideals is displayed when Beast and Gaston fight, as one represents a changed gentleman and the other an extremely toxic male who only sees Belle as an object. Beast only fights when Belle arrives and chooses him, which only angers Gaston more. Gaston loses and waits until the Beast turns his back to stab him, displaying how toxic masculinity is a façade and only wins due to underhanded methods, but this also causes his death by falling into the rocky moat. Gaston's downfall to become extremely toxic parallels Beast's rise to becoming a gentleman and a good friend and, eventually, romantic partner.

The story of *Beauty and the Beast* centers on the relationship development between Belle and Beast. At the start of the film, there is a lot of tension between the two with Belle refusing to obey the Beast's demands and seeing him as a monster and the Beast losing his temper with Belle and treating her like a subject. Their relationship changes after Beast saves Belle and Belle confronts the Beast about his temper. Belle shows respect to Beast, and he respects her in return. After this point, the two become friends, and Beast falls in love with Belle, as montaged in the song "Something There":

[BELLE]

There's something sweet, and almost kind
But he was mean and he was coarse and unrefined
And now he's dear, and so unsure
I wonder why I didn't see it there before

[BEAST]

She glanced this way, I thought I saw
And when we touched, she didn't shudder at my paw
No, it can't be, I'll just ignore
But then she's never looked at me that way before
("Something There").

Beast displays his affection for Belle within this song, and some interpret Belle as also displaying romantic feelings, but one could also interpret what she sings as her displaying joy in his change and platonic feelings towards the Beast. The two show their respect for each other with Beast giving Belle the library and taking interest in the books she reads, and Belle adapting to the Beast's "quirks" as she drinks her soup from the bowl since he struggles with the spoon. The music over this montage also displays the coming together of Belle and Beast in a platonic and romantic way; "[these] two characters represent disparate, seemingly incompatible worlds; through romance (and music), their worlds are eventually merged and harmonized in the creation of the heterosexual couple" (Erb 52). The music continues to display the relationship between

Belle and Beast within the song “Beauty and the Beast.” This song shows the two waltzing in a grand ballroom, showing how Beast and Belle are now close friends who trust and respect each other; but still, Belle only sees Beast as a friend, not as love. This greatly parallels Beaumont’s tale as both Beauty and Belle do not realize they love the Beast until he is dying. This call-back gives the story a greater impact since the viewers have seen the relationship progress. Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* takes a deeper look into Beaumont’s tale by making small changes and making the transformations for both Belle and Beast more drastic.

After the success of *Beauty and the Beast* and other classic films, one of Disney’s branches, ABC, takes a deeper look into the Disney versions of the fairy tales with their television show *Once Upon a Time* (*Once*). *Once* is the story of Emma Swan, the unknown daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming, reuniting with her son, Henry, and trying to connect with him by trying to uncover the mysteries of the town he lives in, Storybrooke, and Henry’s adopted mother, Regina Mills. While the main plot of the story is occurring in the real world, our reality, a coinciding flashback is happening, depicting the tale of Snow White in the Enchanted Forest. The audience is quick to realize that everyone in Storybrooke is a fairy tale character from the Enchanted Forest who has been cursed to forget their old lives and live in a world without magic. As the series goes on, the audience meets Belle, who was restricted in a mental ward for the first season, and Rumpelstiltskin who takes on the role of the Beast. Throughout the series, the two go through their ups and downs, and their tale is revealed to be deeper than it initially seemed. *Once* has the luxury of being a long-running television series that takes a deeper look into the tale of *Beauty and the Beast* and its ramifications.

Belle enters the series at the end of season one and is instructed to find Mr. Gold, also known as Rumpelstiltskin. The audience soon discovers that Belle is his wife, making him the Beast. During her first appearance, she believes that Rumple, as she refers to him, has changed and is now a good man, but is quickly mistaken once he starts doing underhanded acts again, such as swindling Emma into giving him the last vial of magic so he can bring magic into Storybrooke (Episode 22, Season 1). When Belle sees that he has not changed, she gives him an ultimatum that is the pivotal point of his arc; choose Belle or choose darkness, power, and greed. Belle is shown to take on leadership roles in the community when the main group is gone and is an emotional backbone for the main characters. In flashbacks, the audience is shown that she was “the price” her kingdom paid for prosperity and protection, and she went willingly. She is deterred by Rumple at first but grows to see his human side as she works for him as his maid. She and Rumple are shown to both have romantic feelings but keep them aside for their friendship at the start. Once they are in an established relationship, it is a battle between Belle and the Darkness within Rumple. She is shown to give him many chances and helps him become a “man” again instead of being the “Dark One.” The “Dark One” is Rumple’s title, as he is the holder of ultimate power at the price of being consumed by darkness or evil. As the timeline of the show continues, Belle and Rumple are shown to be willing to do anything to protect each other and Belle helps him fight to become a “man” instead of a Dark One.

Mr. Gold plays the dual role of the Beast and Rumpelstiltskin. Rumpelstiltskin has his own story which displays him as a “dark fairy godmother” who can grant wishes for a price. In his original tale, he spins straw into gold for a girl so she can marry a prince, but at the price of her firstborn. At the end of the tale, the princess does get her child back, but Rumpelstiltskin is displayed as a different kind of Beast. Where the traditional Beast character displayed by Disney is rude, impatient, and selfish, Rumpelstiltskin is cunning, manipulative, and greedy, requiring a bigger transformation into a man. In the series, the audience comes to understand why

Rumpelstiltskin became the Dark One after multiple hardships (his wife leaving, his son being taken away, and being mocked as a coward are some of the many reasons) and how the power came to consume him. There are two people in the series who bring out the good in Rumple and he is shown to deeply care about are his son, Baelfire, and Belle. These two are his good roots and he will go to any lengths to keep them safe. His love for these two displays how he changes from the hash dark one to a loving man; but as much as he loves these two, he also loves power and is in a constant struggle to obtain more. In “Chapter 15: The Commodification and Critique of Fairy Tale in ABC’s *Once Upon a Time*” of *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television* by Rebecca Hay and Christa Baxter, they explain that Rumple’s setbacks in his relationships and in his development make him more relatable to the audience since change is difficult in both real life and this fantasy world (321). By the end of the series, Rumple has transformed from the Dark One into a man attempting to be a good father, grandfather, and husband.

The relationship dynamic between Rumple and Belle is one of patience, persistence, and perseverance. Some may say that Rumple, or the Beast character from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, is abusive and this story is telling people to stay with abusers if they think they can change, but this is the exact opposite. Beast and Rumple are not abusers; they both don’t intentionally try to physically or emotionally hurt Belle. Both characters display their love for their partner and their want to keep them safe; they also protect them from characters who do abuse them and only see Belle as an object -- Gaston. Rumple never intends to hurt Belle. He disappoints her when he falls back, but then he makes a stronger effort to be better with each setback. An example of this is in the fourth episode of the second season when Belle sees that Rumple lied to her, as he has not changed his underhanded and manipulative ways; she leaves him even though she still loves him. During this time, Belle’s father finds her and tries to erase her memory so she would hate Rumple as much as he did. Rumple does save her, but he also respects Belle’s desire to be on her own and helps her find a place and open the library in town (*Once*). Similarly, the Beast never hurts Belle. He does argue with her and is rude in the beginning, but then she directly tells him he is being rude, and he should “Learn to control [his] temper,” and he works to make a change (*Beauty and the Beast*). These relationships are not toxic; they are realistic. Relationships take work, and there are times in every relationship where one part upsets, disappoints, argues, or hurts the other. But the way to differentiate a healthy relationship from an abusive one is how the party that did the wrong tries to make it right and fix the problem; they change for the better. Belle and Rumple face many challenges throughout the series, but with each challenge they come out stronger. The love these two have for each other transforms them into better people and the Dark One becomes a man.

“Beauty and the Beast” is a tale that can touch all ages with its themes of love and transformation. Beaumont’s tale has become a household name because of its adaptations, Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* and ABC’s *Once Upon a Time*. The story’s main protagonists both transform in different ways and are good examples of how people can change within a relationship. This is not a tale of Stockholm Syndrome, staying with the abuser, or toxic masculinity; it debunks all of those within the adaptations. I have a personal connection to this story since it was my favorite as a child and still holds as one of my favorite fairy tales to read or watch because it shows a more realistic version of love. The story of two outsiders falling in love and transforming into better people has touched the heart of millions, mine included, and will continue to do so as more retellings are told.

C. Grace Honeycutt '25 is an English major from Edinboro, PA.

Work Cited

- Ashman, Howard, Menken, Allen. "Belle" *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Picture, 1991. Movie.
- "Belle Reprise" *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Picture, 1991. Movie.
- "Beauty and the Beast" *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Picture, 1991. Movie.
- "Gaston" *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Picture, 1991. Movie.
- "Something There" *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Picture, 1991. Movie.
- Beaumont, M. J.-M. L. de. (n.d.). *Beauty and the Beast: Annotated Tale*. Sur La Lune Cinderella annotated tale. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from <https://surlalunefairytales.com/a-g/beauty-beast/beauty-beast-tale.html>
- "Beauty and the Beast" (Beaumont) Annotations." *Sur La Lune // Cinderella Annotations*, <https://surlalunefairytales.com/a-g/beauty-beast/beauty-beast-annotations.html>.
- Davis, A. M. (2007). The Good Daughters- Belle, Mulan, Jane. In *Good girls and wicked witches: Women in Disney's feature animation* (pp. 189–194). essay, John Libbey.
- (2014). Handsome Princes. In *Handsome heroes and vile villains: Masculinity in Disney's feature films* (pp. 156–164). essay, Indiana University Press.
- Erb, Cynthia. "Another World or the World of an Other? The Space of Romance in Recent Versions of 'Beauty and the Beast.'" *Cinema Journal*, vol. 34, no. 4, [University of Texas Press, Society for Cinema & Media Studies], 1995, pp. 50–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1225577>.
- Greenhill, Pauline, et al. "Happily Ever After: The Commodification and Critique of Fairy Tale in ABC's 'Once Upon a Time.'" *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television*, Wayne State University Press, 2014, pp. 316–335.
- Gould, Joan. *Spinning Straw into Gold: What Fairy Tales Reveal about the Transformations in a Women's Life*. Random House, Inc. 2005.
- Horowitz, Adam, Eddy Kitsis, Ginnifer Goodwin, Jennifer Morrison, Lana Parrilla, Joshua Dallas, and Robert Carlyle. *Once Upon a Time: The Complete First and Second Season*. United States. ABC Studios, 2013.
- Ingram, K. M., et al. *Longitudinal associations between features of toxic masculinity and bystander willingness to intervene in bullying among middle school boys [Abstract]*. *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 77, 2019, pp.139-151. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022440519300901>
- Lee, Erin "Curing Beauty's Stockholm Syndrome," *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*: Vol. 13. 2020
- Reilly, Cole. "Chapter Four: An Encouraging Evolution Among the Disney Princesses? A Critical Feminist Analysis." *Counterpoints*, vol. 477, Peter Lang AG, 2016, pp. 51–63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45157186>.
- "Stockholm syndrome." *The American Heritage® Medical Dictionary*. 2007. Houghton Mifflin Company 3 May. 2022 <https://medical.dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Stockholm+syndrome>
- Trousdale, Gary, and Kirk Wise. *Beauty and the Beast*. Buena Vista Pictures, 1991.
- Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*. Farrar, Stratus, and Giroux, 19 Union Square West, New York. 1994.