

From Beast to Prince

—Oedipal Beauty’s Psychosexual Development

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Abstract

As a well-down fairy tale, *Beauty and the Beast* has many variations. But no matter how different they are, there are three common features: absence of mother; oedipal love between Beauty and her father; and because of father, Beauty meets Beast. These three features best interpret a girl’s psychosexual development from love attachment to father to her real lover. When it happens, Beast becomes prince, girl becomes woman.

Key words: Oedipal complex, Psychosexual development

Beauty and the Beast is a traditional fairy tale around the world. There are hundreds of different versions. The popular one is Disney’s animated film in 1991, and the newly-released is the live-action adaptation in 2017 which is largely faithful to the 1991 animation.

The story was written and published firstly in 1740 by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve--- a novel-length story with nine chapters intended for adult readers and addressing the issues of the marriage system of the day in which women had no right to choose their husband or refuse to marry. Then it was abridged and rewritten by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756 with name *La Belle et la Bete* and by Brothers Grimm in 1884, Andrew Lang in 1889, to produce the versions most commonly retold. After that, many story variations appear from America, Greece and Scandinavia to Africa, Indonesia and China, among others. The Beast also takes different forms from bear, pig, and snake to frog, bull or horse. All the stories are classified into Animal-Groom story.

The different versions differentiate mainly from the following two aspects:

Family members are different. In Villeneuve version, the family has twelve children, six sons and six daughters; In Beaumont version, the family has six children, three sons and three daughters; in Cocteau’s film version, three girls and one boy; In Brothers Grimm version, three girls. And In Disney’s animation, Beauty is only-one child. It seems that with the family smaller, the story is shorter and simpler.

No matter how big the family is, if there are sons, they must be good-for-nothing. If there are other daughters, they must be selfish, pompous and unloving. Beauty, as the youngest, is always independent, courageous, and well-read with a pure and loving heart.

Father’s job is different. In Villeneuve and Beaumont version, Beauty’s father is a very rich merchant which match with the big family with twelve and six children because if he had immense wealth, he had also a great many children (Villeneuve, 1740, P1). The fortune makes the two eldest daughters have a great deal of pride. They gave themselves ridiculous airs, and would not visit other merchants’ daughters, nor keep company with any but persons of quality. They went out everyday to parties of pleasure, balls, concerts, and they laughed at their youngest sister, because she spent the greatest part of her time in reading good books. They said they

would not marry until met with a duke or an earl at least, but Beauty very civilly thanked the young men who courted her that she was too young yet to marry, but chose to stay with her father a few years longer.

Then, all at once the merchant lost his whole fortune, excepting a small country house at a great distance from town. The two eldest said they would not leave the town, for they had several lovers, who they were sure would be glad to have them, though they had no fortune; but the good ladies were mistaken. Everybody said, they do not deserve to be pitied, we are very glad to see their pride humbled, let them go and give themselves quality airs in milking the cows and minding their dairy. But we are extremely concerned for Beauty, she was such a charming, sweet-tempered creature, spoke so kindly to poor people, and was of such an affable, obliging behavior. Several gentlemen would have married her, though they knew she had not a penny; but she told them she could not think of leaving her poor father in his misfortunes, but was determined to go along with him into the country to comfort and attend him. When they came to their country house, Beauty rose at four in the morning, and made haste to have the house clean and dinner ready for the family. After she had done her work, she read, played on the harpsichord, or else sung whilst she spun. On the contrary, her two sisters got up at ten, did nothing but saunter about the whole day, lamenting the loss of their fine clothes and acquaintance. (Beaumont, 1756, P.1-2) This big change in life makes a good contrast between Beauty and her elder sisters.

In Disney animation (1991) and live-action (2017), Beauty's father is a music-box maker--- a little romantic job. He and his only daughter Beauty stick together and help each other to make ends meet. There is no big fortune, no big misfortune and no contrast between the daughters.

No matter how different the versions are, there are three common features for all: absence of mother, oedipal love between Beauty and her father and because of father, Beauty meets the Beast. This thesis will analyze these three core elements based on Beaumont version to conclude that Beauty and the Beast is a story about transformation of a virgin attached to her father into a mature female no longer afraid of her sexuality---that is a young girl's psychosexual development.

1. Absence of Mother

In *Beauty and the Beast*, all the versions don't tell anything about Beauty's mother. Only in the 2017 live action, with the help of Beast's enchanted book which can take you everywhere you want, Beauty knows before her mother's death of plague, they three lived happily in Paris. After her mother died, her father took her fled to a small village living the provincial life.

This condition can best explain Oedipus complex----a very important term of psychoanalysis

In a letter to Fliess dated 15 October 1897, Freud discusses the progress of his self-analysis:

I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealousy of the father, and I now regard it as a universal event of early childhood... if that is so, we can understand the riveting power of Oedipus Rex, in spite of all the objections...the Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he feels its existence within himself. Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in phantasy, just such an Oedipus...

Freud's understanding of the complex is that the son competes with his father for his mother and wants to eliminate him as his rival, and the daughter competes with her mother for her father and wants to do away with her. He names it "Oedipus Complex" firstly in a letter to Ferenczi, dated 28 June 1908 and underscores its importance at end of his life stating that: "No other achievement than the discovery of the repressed Oedipus complex...alone would give it a claim to be included among the precious new acquisitions of mankind".

The absence of mother implies Beauty's oedipal fixation and attachment to her father because as a girl, according to Freudian theory, her death-wish is directed against her mother. ABSENCE here means a natural

parricide. Without mother in her way, she is able to be attached to her father unconsciously especially on sex.

2. Oedipal Love between Beauty and Father

It is obvious that Beauty and her father love each other. When the family is rich, the other daughters are dreaming marriage with duke or earl. The Beauty just says she doesn't want to marry because she wants to stay with her father a few years longer and take care of him.

When the family loses fortune, Beauty gives up chances to marry a gentleman and stays in town because she can not think of leaving her poor father in his misfortunes. When they are living in country, other daughters are idle everyday, but Beauty shoulders the wife's or mother's role to take care of her father and whole family.

When Father has to go on a trip with hope to regain some money, He asks girls what gifts they want. The elder girls ask new gowns, headdresses, ribbons, and all manner of trifles; but Beauty asks for nothing for she thinks to herself, that all the money her father is going to receive, will scarce be sufficient to purchase everything her sisters want. It is really like a sort of consideration from wife, not a desire from daughter. When asked again and again, she says to her father: "since you have the goodness to think of me, be so kind to bring me a rose."

Rose is a symbol of love, sexual love. It is usually a gift for Valentine's Day. On leaving castle, the father steals a rose to bring to his best-loved youngest daughter. His doing so symbolizes both his love for her and also an anticipation of her losing her maidenhood, as the broken flower---particularly the broken rose---is a symbol for the loss of virginity(Bruno Bettelheim P306) . This echoes Freud's view that "the Oedipus complex is a reflection of the sexual behavior of the parents" (Nunberg and Federn, 1975, P.234) and "child's Oedipus complex reflects that of his parents" (Fenichel's 1931, P.421).

When Beauty is determined to live with Beast in exchange of her father's life, she says: "I will deliver myself up to all his fury, and I am very happy in thinking that my death will save my father's life, and be a proof of my tender love for him" (Beaumont, 1756, P5).

But because of incest taboo, this Oedipal love between Beauty and her father usually goes hand in hand with terror. It is doomed that they have to suffer some beastly experience. So, a frightening Beast appears just as the father picks up rose.

3. Because of Father, Beauty meets Beast

The Beast appears and says to Father that he has stolen his favorite rose and has abused his hospitality and should die. Father pleads with him and is finally allowed to go home under the condition that one of his daughters come willingly and suffer for him. Father accepts and goes home having in mind not to keep his promise. But when Beauty hears about it she insists on going to stay with the Beast and save her father's life.

So, it is the father who gets lost in the dark forest and finds the enchanted castle, it is the father who makes Beast appears. And to rescue her father, Beauty finally meets with Beast.

It implies father, especially his unconscious masculinity plays a crucial role on girl's developing sexual identity and sexuality. Plato said, 2500 years ago, opposites define each other. If masculinity and femininity are opposites, on this axis, how to position her is the difficulty for a girl to master.

Freud maintains the girl is bound to idealize father and devalue mother by the fact that her first relationship with mother is full of frustration and conflict. Melanie Klein agrees that the girl will devalue mother (first object) because she is castrated and idealize father (second object) because he is a powerful possessor of penis.

But behind the idealization, there is persecutory anxiety coming from girl's perception of the father's unconscious primitive masculinity which is as frightening as Beast. Idealization is just a defense against the

father as a persecutor.

So, idealization and persecution is a split in girl's unconscious toward masculinity. For Beauty, real idealized father and Beast is this split. She has to choose to live with father or Beast, but not with both of them at the same time. In order to save her idealized father, she chooses to stay with Beast. Although being treated royally, she refuses Beast's request to marry because of feeling disgusted. It shows the split is hard to be bridged.

Until one day, Beauty knows her father falls ill and gets permission to visit him. She stays with her father for longer than she had promised. She dreams on the tenth night that Beast extending on the grass plat seems just expiring and in a dying voice, reproaches her with her ingratitude. Beauty bursts into tears: "Am I not very wicked to act so unkindly to Beast, that has studied so much, to please me in everything? Is it his fault if he is so ugly, and has so little sense? He is kind and good, and that is sufficient. Why did I refuse to marry him? I should be happier with the monster than my sister are with their husbands; it is neither wit, nor a fine person, in a husband, that makes a woman happy, but virtue, sweetness of temper, and complaisance, and Beast has all these valuable qualifications." (Beaumont, 1756, P9). This is an announcement for a girl to grow up to be herself. So, Beauty goes back and says to the dying Beast: "you must not die. Live to be none but my husband...I cannot live without you." (Beaumont, 1756, P.10) At that moment, Beast becomes charming prince. That is the reward of her judicious choice. Because she has preferred virtue before either wit or beauty, and deserve to find a person in whom all these qualifications are united.

It shows the healing of the split comes about by the lessening of both idealization (father being ill) and persecution (Beast dying of a broken heart). At that moment Beauty realizes the vulnerability in both the father and the Beast and perceives the humanness in both. The extremes of idealization and persecution collapse. Beauty is now ready to love a man by seeing the vulnerability of the Beast. And the Beast can turn into a man only through Beauty's love and through giving up his own beastly power. (Christina Wieland, 1984)

Thus, when the Beast turns into prince, Beauty, as a girl, finishes her psychosexual development, detaches from her idealized father and transforms love from father to her lover.

It is the process of maturation and self-discovery for women. It is the riddle of femininity.

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Biography

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