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Queerness in Adaptation:

Constructions of Sexuality and Identity in Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)

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Abstract

Fairy tales are powerful tools of socialisation where, often, identity is of some thematic significance. In this regard, this essay analyses how Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) differentially depict their characters – being la Bête/the Beast, Belle, Avenant/Gaston, and their primary relations – in connection to normative sexual and gendered ideas of each film's time of production. In this essay, I argue that the characters are depicted in a variety of relations to these ideas, in which they exhibit varying degrees of Otherness, as well as representing and parodying normative masculinity. This is done through an examination of the role of sexuality and the manner in which desire manifests in each film, how alternative notions of sexuality are depicted in reference to a heteronormative social order, as well as the presentation of the relationship between la Bête/the Beast and Avenant/Gaston, which, I argue, constitutes a homosocial rivalry. Furthermore, this essay will discuss the performance of gender in each film, the different types of masculinities and femininities that are represented therein, and a certain notion of "over performance"; this, I argue, subverts both the traditions of the fairy tale insofar as they pertain to identity, as well as the cultural associations established in the mind/body dualistic account.

Keywords: Beauty and the Beast, queer reading, gender performance, compulsory heterosexuality, desire, othering

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Introduction

"Beauty and the Beast" is a "[t]ale as old as time" (*Beauty and the Beast*, 00:57:55–01:00:00). It is one of the most popular tales across all folk and literary traditions, with numerous and, indeed, continuous retellings and reworkings. The core narrative itself can be traced back to the "Beauty and the Beast" cycle of fairy tales, or, more broadly, the "Animal/Monster as Bridegroom" grouping, wherein a human woman is betrothed to an animal who is eventually revealed to be a human prince that is either under a curse or simply disguised as an animal.[1] Whilst these collections of tales are not inherently queer in themselves, they undeniably deal with themes that are also central to many conceptions of queerness. Indeed, they can be read as so, with Seifert's assertion that "fairy tales specify with extraordinary precision and economy a culture's prototypical quest for identity [...]" (Seifert 2) giving a sense of affirmation and validity to this: where prototypical identity exists, it cannot do so without tension. Inspired by this cycle of folklore and the emerging prominence of literary fairy tales in late seventeenth century France, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve wrote and anonymously published what is considered the oldest modern variant of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale in 1740. However, the most commonly read version of this tale – and the only written version that holds any particular importance to this essay – is Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's reinvention of de Villeneuve's publication, first published in 1756. In an effort to recapture the folk roots of the tale and direct it back to a younger audience – particularly middle to upper class young girls – as a much more simplified didactic story (Bartter 55, n. 2; Cummins, 23), de Beaumont greatly reduces de Villeneuve's lengthy version, and produces a highly accessible, and reproducible, abridgement. This written version is the most popular, not only in its own right, but also through its serving as the basis for the film adaptations that are of central concern to this essay: Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) and Walt Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

To briefly summarise the core story: a poverty-stricken merchant's youngest daughter, Belle,[2] asks him for a rose as he departs on a trip, and, after seeking shelter at an enchanted castle, he plucks one from the castle's garden. In doing so, he is apprehended by a Beast – one which lacks any decisive descriptions from de Beaumont – who demands either the merchant's life or one of his daughters in return for the rose. Belle insists on taking her father's place. At first, she is terrified of the creature, but, after several months of the Beast attempting to court her, as well as her brief return home that nearly causes the Beast to die of grief, Belle grows to love the Beast, resulting in him being cured of his beastliness. The story, then, ends with their marriage, where Belle "lived with [the Prince] a very long time in perfect happiness, because their happiness was founded on virtue" (de Beaumont 142). A primary element of the tale as de Beaumont wrote it, is that Belle, in light of her virtue, is rewarded with marriage, as "marriage is

[1] Other tales in this grouping include 'The Frog Prince', 'The Singing, Springing Lark', and 'The Donkey's Head'; additionally, the contemporary tale of *Shrek!* by William Steig is an explicit subversion of this genre.

[2] English translations of de Beaumont's text often translate 'Belle' to 'Beauty', as 'belle' is the French word for 'beautiful'. I have used the French in all references to the character of Belle, as both film versions use Belle as the name of the character, not Beauty. Additionally, any mention of the character of 'la Bête' or 'the Beast' are meant in reference to the 1946 film and 1991 film respectively – unless otherwise noted.

the ultimate reward for a good girl's behaviour", whereas the Beast gets both an obedient and modest bride, alongside all of his rights and properties restored (Zipes 123). In this version, the fairy tale is clearly used as a means for reproducing a particular set of gendered norms and immensely conservative constructions of identity, insofar as they derive from the middle-class values present in eighteenth century France.

Whilst both Cocteau's film and the Disney production differ from de Beaumont's tale – with the Disney film diverging much more so – they still share much of the core story. Importantly, however, all three texts were produced in and for greatly different times, and, therefore, exist within different cultural contexts. Thus, instead of yet again reproducing the conservative values of eighteenth century France, these two films use the fairy tale form and that time period's aesthetic to imagine and "construct an idealised version of past discourses of love as a counter-reality for the present" (Seifert 116). *La Belle et la Bête*, in entering production on August 27th 1945 (Cocteau 6–8), was filmed in a France that was still dealing with the immensity of the Second World War; whereas, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* was produced towards – what is often considered to be – the end of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. This essay, then, will discuss the ways in which these film adaptations use, and portray, this classic fairy tale as informed by their own precarious cultural contexts. Firstly, there will be a section devoted to examining la Bête/the Beast's characterisation, how he appears as a victim of heteronormative social structures, as well as how he serves as Belle's alternative to the relationship with the chauvinistic Avenant/Gaston, and, through its unorthodoxy, how this can be read as a presentation of queer desire. Secondly, there will be a section examining, more explicitly, notions of femininity and masculinity present in both films, as well as the Beast's positioning on the margins of society with the significance of the rose/AIDS allegory therein; thus, this section will discuss how notions of "Othering" lend themselves to, or are products of, conceptions of identity – especially identity as it relates to gender.[3] In this undertaking, the essay is principally concerned with the ways in which the films both subvert, and reinforce, the constructions of sexuality and identity present in the traditions of the fairy tale narrative.[4]

1. The Queering of Beastly Desire

As stated above, the principal story of "Beauty and the Beast" is one that results in a woman being courted by a man who, for the majority of the story, is, in appearance, completely undesirable. De Beaumont's rendition, in this sense, is not very dynamic. However, with some additional elements in both film adaptations – that of Avenant/Gaston as a stereotypical masculine suitor, as well as giving la Bête/the Beast a defined, anthropomorphic form – Erb says

[3] Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, of gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender [...]' (Butler 2006: 30, emphasis in original). This quotation has greatly informed the structure of this essay where, in an effort to combat the heterosexualisation of desire and to offer more appropriate analyses therein, the substantial examination of the role of desire as it relates to sexuality in both films, as well as the discussion as it pertains to identity more generally, are, respectively, separated into the first and second sections of this essay.

[4] As *La Belle et la Bête* is in French, any dialogue quoted from Cocteau's film is my own translation, with the original text referenced in accompanying footnotes.

that "[r]ather than stressing the use of heterosexual romance as a guarantee of a smooth merger of worlds, the feminist critique should arguably concentrate upon the tensions, losses, and repressions resultant from the overall process of bringing different worlds into alignment" (52). It is in this reorientation of the narrative that one can begin to destabilise, and necessarily queer, the heterocentric readings of the fairy tale, and especially of these films. Thus, this section will discuss, firstly, the portrayal of la Bête/the Beast as a queered individual; in this, Cocteau's positioning him in terms of self-isolation and self-hatred in relation to his bestial (read: non-normative) desires will be explored, contrasted with the Disney depiction which is more akin to a stubborn "Prince Charming" character. Following this, the positions of subject/object of desire and direction of power will be considered through an examination of the relationship of la Bête/the Beast and Belle more explicitly. And, finally, this section will end by directing the analysis toward Avenant/Gaston, and the part that this character plays in the understanding of alternative notions of sexuality.

2. Beastly Desire Manifested

Through the necessity of visuals apparent in adapting this story to film, the sparse descriptions of la Bête/the Beast in the written text had to be organised – though mostly interpreted – in order to create something intelligible and definite. Where, in de Beaumont's story his appearance is simply described as being "so hideous that [Belle's father] nearly fainted" and possessing such a "hideous face" that it causes Belle to shudder uncontrollably (134, 136), Cocteau – and the Disney film thereafter – assigns to him a decisively anthropomorphic form. It is in this translation, then, from written language to filmic visuals, that "the body's mechanics and the mind's complacency comes into full effect" – that is, where sexual transgression changes "from the act itself to the stirrings – so difficult to perceive and formulate – of desire" (Foucault 19–20). Perhaps, in a metatextual conception, then, it is la Bête/the Beast's absence of a definitive physical form where this Foucauldian notion of transgression and desire initially derives from. Thus, while the reader can only picture him as a monster or animal in vague terms and then be pleased when he transforms into the Prince – being a recognisable human shape without the necessity of tension – the films produce a definitive and human-like form that is, by design, embroiled in transgressive tension; this instills in the viewer a consideration of his beastly nature beyond simply wondering what he looks like. This, also, is not to minimise the original text, but rather, as Garcia states, Cocteau's "*La Belle et la Bête* required narrative integrity, as well as subtexual [sic] elements that would communicate Cocteau's raison d'être for making the film [...] Cocteau's literary source did not hint at any other interpretation beyond the story of a girl who marries a beast" (15–6).

Following this, Cocteau's la Bête – played by Jean Marais, Cocteau's lover – resists stable classifications; his, by all accounts, masculine appearance would seem to exacerbate the prominence of his bestial and non-normative desires. Cocteau would appear to increase the self-inadequacy present in de Beaumont's text, raising the Beast's negative assertions of himself as "simple" and a "foolish animal" (138), to depicting la Bête in terms of self-loathing and utter revulsion instead. Clearly, la Bête is embarrassed of his non-normativity, illustrated through the frequent use of frantic cuts and claustrophobic framing in scenes where his animality is drawn

most into focus. In the same way, however, the horror of the story is amplified. In one such scene, which narratively follows the meal scene discussed below, after hearing an agonising cry from some animal, followed by a monstrous roar, la Bête is seen wandering with uncertainty through the castle halls; sinister music grows steadily louder, and, in a close-up shot, Jean Marais' eyes dramatically widen, responding to his hands/paws and the smoke rising from them in response to his shameful passions. Additionally, in the placement of this scene outside of Belle's bedroom, la Bête's disgust and anger can be traced to the non-normativity of his *sexual* desires, and his lack of engagement in traditional heterosexuality therein. Daniel Fischlin says that la Bête, in his "non-normative and unstable forms of desires, condenses the anxieties and guilt present in sexual difference and complicates any readings of the characterisation that prioritise heterosexualisation or even binary queering" (79, n. 24). Thus, whilst ashamed of his bestial desires and not outrightly embracing his animality, through his declaration of "We don't say "My Lord", we say "Beast"' (00:22:08–00:22:23)[5] in response to the merchant's pleading for mercy and apologising for picking the rose from la Bête's garden, he also notably rejects any explicit assertions of his humanity.

The Byronic proportions of the character are amplified to an even greater degree in the Disney film, with the Beast surpassing a constant state of self-doubt, and moving to brooding instead. In this adaptation, Belle does not ask her father – here named Maurice – for a rose, causing him to be imprisoned by the Beast on a whim, and Belle finding her way to the castle purely by way of an accident. Throughout the film, the Beast has to be convinced and reminded by his servants to attempt to court Belle, and, unlike previous versions of the tale, never once mentions marriage. Through this, as well as constant displays of anger, Bartter describes the Beast behaving as though he is merely an adolescent; he acts on a "pre-sexual" level with anger that is simply irrational and immature (59–60). The Beast's actions, in this sense, do not seem to resemble those of a queered individual, but someone entirely unengaged by sexual desire.[6] This explanation, whilst attractive, does not explore fully the tensions present in the heterosexualisation of the Beast; instead of seeing him as "pre-sexual", one could see him as a victim of heteronormative social structures with his irrational anger actually being a product of the societal expectations for him to conform. The renewed significance of the rose in the Disney adaptation would also appear to reinforce this reading. Instead of the Beast dying of grief due to Belle's absence, his mortality is tied to the life of a withering rose. Many queered readings of *Beauty and the Beast* liken this to an allegory for a person living with AIDS due to them both possessing "the same arbitrary and harshly abbreviated limitations on time" (Rather, 1992)**.** This, of course, as Griffin says, "does *not* automatically signal homosexuality", but simply means that it "can be linked quite directly to homosexuality" (136, emphasis in original), and fortifies queered readings of the Beast's character.

[5] 'On ne dit pas « Monseigneur », on dit « La Bête ».'

[6] This, of course, can be queer and can denote queerness, but cannot and does not inherently signal so, and will not be discussed as such in this essay.

3. Dynamics of Desire

Both Cocteau's and Disney's films are fundamentally structured around resolving the unsanctioned, and decisively non-normative, love that exists between la Bête/the Beast and Belle. Viewing la Bête/the Beast as a queered individual is not the only non-normative aspect of this love however, with the shape and direction that power takes in their relationship also being unconventional. Unlike stereotypical displays of courtship, Belle's status as an object of desire is not entirely static. Sabbadini argues that it is Belle who is submissive to la Bête, as "her main function is to be instrumental to the Beast's metamorphosis (by offering herself as the object of his love more than by loving him)" (106–7). Of course, Belle begins as a prisoner of la Bête/the Beast; but, Cocteau's la Bête is clearly submissive to Belle in the meal scene that follows shortly after, telling her that "there is no master here but you" (00:35:52–00:36:10),[7] with him growing smaller and nearly being subsumed into the frame as he lays his anxieties bare to her. The end of the film, additionally, when la Bête transforms into Ardent (the Prince), and his appearance changes from beastly to that of Avenant,[8] portrays his final moments on screen as the object of desire, not subject. The audience, alongside Belle, feels a collective sense of disappointment in the loss of la Bête and his transformation, visually, into Avenant – the suitor who was rejected. This collectivity is due to the scene being filtered through Belle's gaze as she is the active subject in the scene, with the disappointment formed through a desire for la Bête founded in his sudden lack of being. This, then, informs a reading where the displays and direction of desire and power between la Bête and Belle are something dynamic, and not entirely fixed as is traditionally so within the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

Daniel Fischlin states that Cocteau's "film articulates a postwar vision that simultaneously effaces any traces of the war from its visual images [...]"(72), but that it is nonetheless "predicated upon a logic of difference [...] that structures the film's meaningful constructs" (74). As men were sent to fight in the second World War, women were forced to assume a more active role beyond that of simple domesticity. This dynamic is clearly reflected in the film through the above, but also reinforced by the film beginning with Cocteau addressing the audience directly by writing on a chalkboard in a classroom. He speaks directly to the viewer, asking the audience – presumed to be adults – to suspend their preconceived notions and to allow themselves a little childlike simplicity or naivety (00:00:30–00:01:00),[9] and, indirectly, is asking for the possibility of a different world, instead of a regression into pre-war traditions. Additionally, the almost ritualistic and somewhat indirect nature of desire between la Bête and Belle – especially evident in the meal scene as discussed above – creates the same atmospheric conditions under which queer desire was forced to manifest under the Vichy regime in France. It was, after all, the Vichy regime that "reintroduced into French jurisprudence the insidious

[7] 'Non. Il n'y a ici de maître que vous.'

[8] La Bête/Avenant/Ardent are all performed by Jean Marais.

[9] 'C'est un peu cette naïveté que je vous demande [...]'.

distinction between natural and unnatural sexual relations" (Sibalis 302), by which homosexuality was explicitly recriminalised in France. Of course, the extent of how obvious this was to Cocteau's intended audience is uncertain; but the intensely subdued and negotiated intimacy between la Bête and Belle is profoundly non-normative, and clearly draws parallels to what queer individuals – and those engaged in non-traditional forms of intimacy – were forced to navigate under the increased wartime surveillance placed upon them. Cocteau, in inviting the suspension of disbelief and cynicism, is offering the chance for a war-ravaged audience to enjoy an escapist fantasy, whilst also returning them to the classroom and opening them up to the potentiality of post-war cultural growth through a state of child-like wonder and simplicity.

Whilst Cocteau's film can be read as presenting this desire for a growth in acceptance of non-normative relationships, Sabbadini's affirmation that "there are no three-dimensional women in Cocteau's film" (106) cannot be so easily disputed. Although there is a degree of non-traditional dynamics present, Belle is consistently depicted in relation to a masculine figure – either her father, or a suitor – in some form. In Disney's film however, Belle – as a product of post-World War cultural growth and second-wave feminism – is a much more vibrant character, with her story almost acting as a subversion of the male-oriented Bildungsroman (Cummins 24); it is not simply a didactic tale like de Beaumont's story, but also one where adventure is central. The song "Belle" illustrates this, where, after a sort of lyrical call and response of "How's your family? [...] How's your wife?", sung against displays of patriarchal family life, Paige O'Hara as Belle sings, seemingly out of desperation, "there must be more than this provincial life!" (00:04:45–00:05:00). Belle is decisively not passive in this adaptation, through her finding the castle by way of Maurice's blunders, it is entirely Belle's decision to take her father's place. Whilst the Beast attempts to assert his place as master of estate in demanding Belle to dine with him, she rejects his displays of power, ignoring his demands, and holds the freedom to wander throughout the enchanted castle. Belle is constructed as a much more independent character – one who is undeniably three-dimensional; in this, Sabbadini's previous criticisms of Cocteau's Belle cannot be levied here. Even though the romance of the story is greatly emphasised over previous versions of the tale, Disney's Belle is not simply there to act as the object of the Beast's desire, allowing his transformation into a Prince. Rather, as illustrated in the Beast's reluctance to engage with Gaston's threat, as well as his servants needing to convince him to pursue Belle, it is the Beast who assumes the passive role against Belle's more active one.

4. The Hunter and The Hunted

In discussing *Beauty and the Beast* specifically, Griffin recognises and somewhat affirms this active role mentioned above, stating that the "female lead's only duty is to choose whether she will marry an egotistical macho jerk or a male behemoth" (207–8). Whilst this criticism cannot be wholly denied – and no efforts will be made to decisively do so – the "male behemoth" in these films still offers an alternative notion of love to the normative masculinity of Avenant/Gaston; in la Bête/the Beast, Belle's desire is entirely unorthodox, utterly unstable, and is fundamentally transgressive in its subversion of societal expectations. Yet, through the addition of Avenant/Gaston in these films as principal characters, a very particular question arises: in "Beauty and the Beast", who is the Beauty, and who is the Beast? As Griffin states,

Belle has the option of two suitors: Avenant/Gaston, possessing outward beauty but internally ugly; and la Bête/the Beast, possessing external ugliness but internal beauty. And, whilst narratively, it is still Belle's love which cures la Bête, the importance of Avenant in Cocteau's climax is, perhaps, even greater than Belle. The sequence cuts back and forth between Avenant breaking into the pavilion and la Bête's death; with Belle in the centre, the alternating scenes elicit an association between la Bête and Avenant in the form of an "erotic rivalry". In this, "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved"; "the bond of "rivalry" and "love" [...] are equally powerful and in many ways equivalent" (Sedgwick 21). Regardless of Belle's look of love which is said to be responsible for the transformation, sequentially, it is not until after Avenant is shot by Diana's arrow that la Bête becomes Ardent, and Avenant's ugly interior is transformed and reflected in a beastly exterior.[10]

Erb describes how, in Cocteau's film, "the relationship between hunter and Beast functions primarily as a male homosocial relationship of rivalry of the type charted by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men*", where it necessarily "overtakes the heterosexual union in narrative significance" (54); before, rightly, saying that it is present to an even greater degree in the Disney film (63). The rivalry between them in Disney's film is much more complicated however. The climax, in this version, does not simply cut between Gaston and the Beast, but takes the form of a violent fight which results in the death of both characters; Belle is largely absent from this sequence – primarily acting as a reminder for the Beast to engage in this rivalry – until the end where she narrowly succeeds in reviving the Beast. In this, the homosocial erotics of the story are emphasised to greater extent than in Cocteau's film, as the climax primarily acts as a conclusion of Gaston and the Beast's conflict; but, in its heightened significance, it is also the Beast, through Gaston's aggression, being "marked by an unwanted violence against [his body] in the name of a normative notion of human morphology" (Butler, 2004, 24). Gaston desires Belle for her external beauty, as, in his normative assertion of chauvinistic masculinity, "That makes her the best" (00:06:55–09:07:05); the Beast, then, in his non-normativity and lack of culturally inscribed visual intelligibility, threatens Gaston's assertions, not only becoming another for Belle to desire, but also an Other, and the alternative to the heteronormativity that Gaston represents therein.

5. Sympathy for An/Other, and the Absence of Belonging

If Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* is deemed to be a product of any particular cultural moment, then that would undoubtedly be the HIV/AIDS epidemic as it occurred in the United States in the 1980s – as was touched upon above. Howard Ashman, the lyricist and executive producer of the film, died due to AIDS-related complications part of the way through the film's production where, initially, he was brought on to reinvigorate a dormant, and essentially failing project. It was him who pushed for the film to place a bigger emphasis on the Beast and make it,

[10] It should also be noted that the Roman Goddess Diana is famously described as either the virgin goddess, or one who abstains from heterosexual love. Virgin, in the ancient context, was often understood as a social term, rather than physical, and was used to refer to an unwed woman, or simply one not married to a man; the ascetic notion of 'sexual purity' is a much more contemporary description.

fundamentally, the Beast's story (Griffin 136–7, 145, n. 7; Cummins 23–4; Erb 60). It is Ashman's involvement in the project that, through a notion of authorship, often contextualises queer readings of the Disney film – both in popular culture and academic settings; this also, however, acts as an introduction to the presence of social stigmatisation and "Othering" present in both film adaptations. This section, then, will discuss constructions of identity, particularly gender, insofar as they relate to notions of "Othering", in the texts. In this, there will be a consideration of the performances of masculinity and femininity in relation to a normative, patriarchal worldview. Firstly, the ways in which both la Bête/the Beast and Disney's Belle constitute an Other will be discussed in relation to their subversions of gendered norms, before, finally, directing the essay to an analysis of "over performance" and theatricality in relation to normative presentations of gender.

6. Degrees of Difference

In their discussion on mind/body dualism, Judith Butler says that "[t]he mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether. The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism [...]" (2006, p. 17). Butler is not wrong in this assertion, and, while this is, in part, true in de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast", the same cannot be said for the two film adaptations. These films would appear to subvert these well documented cultural notions – each to varying degrees. In these films, la Bête/the Beast, in being a beast and inhabiting a beastly nature, would seem to suggest a presentation of masculinity that is, contrarily, associated with the body and embodiment; Belle, also, in her inclination and desire to read and for education, would appear to represent an alternative notion of femininity that is, in this sense, non-normative. The significance and portrayal of la Bête/the Beast's divergence from these cultural associations will be addressed first, followed by a consideration of Belle's Othering, as "the spectre of the threat of otherness [...] clearly subsumes the narrative logic of the film[s]" (Fischlin 75).

La Bête/the Beast, in all versions of the tale, is positioned as living outside the bounds of social intelligibility; this is done, in part, through his estate being utterly separate from the rest of society and his living in self-isolation. The queerness of his character is not simply portrayed through his desire. Gracia notes how his estate acts as a metaphor for the knowledge abandoned in the pursuit of the ideal patriarchal formation, where only *logos* – that is, purely rational forms of discourse – is valued (20), indeed, where "pure reason" is associated with masculinity and given hierarchical superiority to alternative modes of discourse. La Bête/the Beast, in this regard, is an archetypal representation of the Other. In other words, he does not fit into the culturally acceptable modes of discourse, with his Othering being both a product of his non-normativity, and also this notion of non-normativity being that which causes his Othering in the first place; it was an unsanctioned display of magic against him that caused his sudden beastly transformation, after all. La Bête/the Beast and Belle's mutual desire for one another, at least initially, does not resemble an obvious, and normative, heterosexual formation founded on the basis of reproduction; however, this, combined with la Bête/the Beast's existence outside of normative society, is not to say that they are victims of absolute repression in discourse. Contrarily, as

Foucault says, this "unnatural" existence in the discursive "world of perversion" (36–49), is precisely that which causes the heightened, and violent, interest Avenant/Gaston, and, indeed, the village people – representing normative society – take in la Bête/the Beast.[11] In the eyes of normative society, the mutual desire between la Bête/the Beast and Belle is not simply an immoral or sinful act that must be punished, but la Bête/the Beast himself, as an Other, is raised to be in an unintelligible state of immorality and perversion: rather than engaging in an unnatural act, his very being is considered unnatural and becomes a source of both anxious and hostile fascination.

This dynamic is much more overt in the Disney film than in Cocteau's film. In Cocteau's film, although both Avenant and Ludovic, Belle's brother, do eventually take heightened intrigue in la Bête and wish to kill him as a result of his "perverted transgressions" against Belle, the idea to do so only arises when Belle's sisters, Félicie and Adélaïde, as a result of their jealousy of Belle's luxurious life in the castle, trick them into doing so. In the Disney film, however, it is indisputably different. In this, Erb says, "Gaston is increasingly used to suggest violence and animosity directed by straight men against gay men" (64). This is apparent in the film, where, after initially seeing the Beast, Gaston, in an attempt to rile up the villagers, says that "The Beast will make off with your children [...] He'll come after them in the night [...] We're not safe [...]" (01:05:55–01:06:00). This language greatly resembles that which was used to proliferate the stigmatisation of people living with AIDS during the HIV/AIDS epidemic throughout the 1980s that arose, primarily, out of homophobia, and, more broadly, prejudice against queer people. Additionally, in the musical number that follows shortly thereafter, "The Mob Song", the villagers sing the lines: "We don't like / What we don't understand / In fact, it scares us [...] Unafraid although the danger just increased [...] And fifty Frenchmen can't be wrong" (01:06:05–01:09:20). This, clearly, reflects the weaponisation of anxieties and, often violent, Othering that was prevalent at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States towards people living with AIDS, as well as queer people generally; this film, however, through Ashman's pointed lyrics, "definitely sides with the demonised rather than the lynchers speaking" (Griffin 135).

The positioning of Belle in regard to the village also resembles an archetypal depiction of the Other, although not one entrenched in *violent* fascination – as is the case with la Bête/the Beast. In the opening number of *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle stands out against the village, visually depicted through the contrasting colours of their clothes, with the lyrics of the song, "Belle", also clearly signifying this Othering. In this, one shopkeeper sings, "But behind that fair façade / I'm afraid she's rather odd / Very diff'rent from the rest of us"; the chorus of townsfolk

[11] It should also be noted that, in this world of perversion, normative sexual relations are directly linked to normative gendered ideas, and that which is immoral is anything that falls outside of strict notions of monogamous heterosexuality performed within marriage – that is granted with parental consent and sanctioned by law – for the sole purpose of reproduction. Thus, things like rape, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality are deemed immoral and unlawful, but also, in some way, are equated. Additionally, in this discursive category, intersex individuals are seen as 'crime's offspring', as 'their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union' (Foucault 37–38). Sexuality, then, is linked to a binary notion of sex, which is linked to a binary notion of gender, and anything that does not conform is labelled, among other things, 'perversion', creating taboo discursive categories over simply labelling an act as sinful.

reaffirm this immediately with the lines, “She’s nothing like the rest of us / Yes, diff’rent from the rest of us is Belle!”, before ending the song with, “That girl is strange but special [...] She doesn’t quite fit in” (00:03:20–00:08:20). Belle, in her desire for education and rejection of the typical masculine suitor, does not perform normative femininity. These lyrics are emblematic of the ways in which cis-heteronormative individuals puzzle over presentations of queer desire, but also queerness in general (Erb, 62–3). Notably, however, the villagers cannot name what it is that makes her odd. And, whilst Belle is Othered, she is still an object of normative desire through Gaston. He says “It’s not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas and thinking [...]” (00:08:44–00:09:00), before suggesting that it is through their heteronormative marriage that her Otherness can be “fixed”. Unlike the Beast, then, Belle’s Otherness does not render her socially unintelligible. Rather, due to the expectation for her to perform femininity – the Other in the heteronormative gender binary – her non-normative femininity is not seen as threatening to the gender binary in the same way as alternative masculinities are. This is not to discount Belle’s Otherness, but displays how difference is only made meaningful through the perception of the dominant groups.

6. Performance and Theatricality

Regardless of Disney’s insistence that the aforementioned AIDS allegory was not intentional and that Ashman was not aware of his condition throughout the filming process (Rather 1992), *Beauty and the Beast*, evidently, makes conscious efforts to humanise a range of Othered individuals. Thus, it continues the trend of the story’s positioning as a moral, or educational, tale – seen in Cocteau’s film through the opening scene, as discussed above, being the director himself writing on a chalkboard in a classroom, informing the viewer how they should approach their viewing experience. As briefly stated in the previous section, de Beaumont’s tale was a didactic one – that is, it was written, first and foremost, for educational purposes. However, if Disney’s Belle, as asserted here, acts contrary to notions of normative femininity and is often described as a feminist depiction of the character, to what extent could de Beaumont’s tale be considered proto-feminist? After all, if Disney’s Belle diverges from normative femininity in her desire to read and for education, then so would de Beaumont’s Belle, as her sisters “laughed at their younger sister, who spent most of her time reading [...]” (131). Zipes says that some fairy tales “were intended to civilise young children by inhibiting their development” (119), and there is likely little difference with this version of the tale. Where the film adaptations create dynamic and queer-coded characters in la Bête/the Beast, de Beaumont does not. Rather, de Beaumont’s tale appears to assert that whilst “male aristocrats may look like beasts [...] they have gentle hearts and kind manners” (Zipes 123). This is not to say that her tale is not concerned with furthering the interests of women through placing priority on education, but that, fundamentally, it is contained within the interests of the bourgeois masculinist hegemony.

Class dynamics – at least directly so – are largely absent in the Disney film. With the company existing amongst the wealthiest corporations globally, to draw attention to class in any substantial manner would likely not be in Disney’s best interests. Cocteau’s film, however, has quite overt class dynamics at play. These dynamics relate to Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity where “the “coherence” and “continuity” [of personhood is] socially instituted

and maintained by norms of intelligibility" (2006, 23), in this, they say that "[...] gender proves to be performative – that is, [...] gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed [...]" (34). Gender, as this section has endeavoured to explore thus far, is not something that exists in stasis, and, indeed, is not something that exists in isolation either. Gender, in this regard, is not simply a social concept, but a socio-political concept and, indeed, a nomadic one.[12] This, in relation to Félicie and Adélaïde in Cocteau's film, is seen in their "over performance" of their femininity and normative expectations in order to better fit in with their desired class after their family loses all of their money; they do this due to that fact that "[...] conformity to the prevailing standards of bodily acceptability is a known factor in economic mobility" (Bartky 34). Additionally, this is an attempt to cling on to a life that has unexpectedly disappeared from their grasp, not unlike the uncertainty present in post-war France. In order to combat their anxieties regarding their societal position and to minimise the risk of being Othered, Félicie and Adélaïde exaggerate their femininity through a policing of their appearance; they obsess over their physical beauty and wear clothes that accentuate the features expected of an upper class woman. In doing so, they commit to a conscious performance of gender, resulting in an over performance in the service of an anonymous patriarchal Other in whom their existential anxieties manifest.

"Over performance" in the Disney film takes a much more theatrical form and, by doing so, appears more as a pastiche of gendered norms. Gaston, whilst treated as an example of normative masculinity thus far, has a presentation that is more complicated than that; throughout the film, he consistently acts as both a pillar, and parody, of normative and, indeed, "fascist" masculinities. Disney animators are no strangers to parodying masculinities throughout their films, especially in the service of creating queer-coded characters – or, at the very least, attractive characters that queer individuals can identify with in some capacity. Often, this takes the form of exaggerated, hyper-masculine bodies – such as King Triton in *The Little Mermaid* and Gaston – or sly and campy elegance – such as *The Lion King*'s Scar and *Aladdin*'s Jafar. And, whilst this is present in Disney due to the important part that Andreas Deja played in all of these films (Griffin 141–8), it is also present in Cocteau's film through la Bête. Whether Cocteau's film, in any capacity, can be credited with inspiring the creation of these other queer-coded characters cannot be stated without a significant degree of speculation; however, as addressed above, la Bête is clearly depicted in relation to non-normative gender presentations. In this regard, his portrayal and appearance, compounded with the fact that "his costume is assembled from both masculine and feminine accessories (a man's doublets and boots, a

[12] On this point, Daniel Fischlin discusses the blatant anti-Semitic portrayal of the moneylender in Cocteau's film which, with the World War cultural context of the film, provides heightened marginalising of this Other. Fischlin says that, as the moneylender's appearance is clearly inspired by the lack of distinctions made in the mediaeval church's definitions of unorthodoxy, "[b]oth the Jew and queer instantiate a nomadic identity constituted by their non-orthodox relation to normative discourses [...]". In this, he equates ethnic and sexual Otherness through the exaggerated physical features of the moneylender which, in comparison to the physical ailments suffered by Cocteau during production, acts as a bodily marker of the Jew's sexual difference (72, 77, 81, n. 16). This is also present in the Disney film through the portrayal of Monsieur D'Arque, the asylum owner, also greatly resembling anti-Semitic stereotypes, sharing much in common, in appearance and characterisation, with Cocteau's moneylender.

woman's high, rigid lace collar, and so on)" (Erb 55), certainly exists along the same lines as the over performance of campy theatrics present in many queer-coded Disney characters.

Gaston serves a similar role in *Beauty and the Beast*. Alongside serving as the pole of normative masculinity and being used to portray the typical violence directed from straight men towards queer individuals, his performance parodies normative masculinity in the same vein as a drag act.[13] This history of drag performativity is present through Gaston's obsession over his body image, where, alongside mirrors holding symbolic significance in their use to show reflections in the narrative (Sheaffer-Jones 367–72), they are used to show Gaston's fetishisation of his ideal physical masculinity. His solo number, "Gaston", is also emblematic of this, with the entire production playing out like a drag king or – perhaps more suitable in this instance – a male impersonation performance. This musical number acts as a constant reaffirmation of Gaston's manliness, existing as an "elaborate fetishization of the powerful male body, carried out in the most hyperbolic terms" (Erb 64). The lyrics and presentation of this number portray, essentially, performing any physicality to a high degree as being symbolic of the perfect masculine form; this is apparent through Gaston's boasting of how "I've got biceps to spare [...] And every last inch of me's covered with hair" as well as "When I was a lad, I ate four dozen eggs / Every morning to help me get large / And now that I'm grown, I eat five dozen eggs / So I'm roughly the size of a barge" (00:28:30–00:29:22). His masculinity is directly linked to a notion of "bigness", whereby, in taking up more space and pleasure in excessive behaviours and physical displays, he is the most masculine, and thus desirable, in the village. Indeed, in Lefou's assertion that the thickness of Gaston's neck makes him "Perfect, [and] a pure paragon!" (00:27:40–00:27:50) of masculinity, his theatrical over performance of gendered norms appears to caricaturise the very cultural assumptions that tie certain notions of gendered performance to embodiment.

Conclusion

Seifert's assertion that "[...] fairy tales popularized for the mass market [...] continue to valorize generic structures such as the marriage closure that reinforce highly conservative gender norms, even while featuring more active heroines" (4) is, at least initially, not wrong. However, to read these texts and examine the tensions that exist in the portrayal of these conservative gender norms offers non-normative interpretations, and necessarily begins the process of destabilisation in the service of queered readings. In this, each character is depicted in varying degrees of relation to the normative gendered cultural associations. The characters range from absolute social unintelligibility – such as that of la Bête/the Beast – to representing absolute normativity, or, even parodies therein – such as that of Avenant/Gaston. Of course, these notions are not static descriptions; la Bête/the Beast was a victim of a physical transformation in which he held no power, and, in Belle's family losing their money, her sisters' increased performance of femininity is a physical manifestation of the gendered anxieties that occur when gender can be

[13] Famously, Ursula, being the villain in *The Little Mermaid* – Ashman's preceding film with Disney – took great inspiration from the drag performer Divine, with the film releasing little over a year after his death.

thought of, in some sense, as a unity of experience – that is, one that intersects with other aspects of identity and, indeed, desire.

Desire, in this regard, can be understood as a longing for social intelligibility that contradicts Otherness, but also in the context of both heterocentric, and deliberately polarised, readings of the texts themselves. Where, "the films' narrative development [...] hinge upon the eventual formation of the heterosexual couple" (Erb 51), the presentation of their desire is anything but; it is entirely non-normative, and, at points, is embedded in the midst of a homosocial rivalry that takes precedence over the traditional romance. In this regard, the core thesis of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale can, undoubtedly, be taken as being that appearances are deceptive. And, whilst non-normative readings are not as textually evident or prevalent in de Beaumont's original telling – with it instead prioritising notions of aristocratic socialisation and bourgeois *civilité* (Zipes 124, n. 1) – a queered reading of these films, then, does not necessarily constitute an alternative reading, but, perhaps it is a reading that looks even deeper beyond the surface of the texts.

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