

Diversity in Disney Films

*Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity,
Gender, Sexuality and Disability*

EDITED BY JOHNSON CHEU



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For May and Anne
and everyone who was young once

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A Place at the Table: On Being Human in the Beauty and the Beast Tradition

TAMMY BERBERI and VIKTOR BERBERI

One finds versions of the beauty and the beast tale as early as Ancient Greece and in cultures spanning the globe, from India to Africa, France, and Italy. Its universal appeal is certainly due to its archetypal nature, in the juxtaposition and proximity of two fundamental categories of human existence: beauty and repulsion. Lennard Davis, author of *Enforcing Normalcy*, describes the role of such stories in explaining human impulses in this way:

Myths of beauty and ugliness have laid the foundations for normalcy. In particular, the Venus myth is one that is dialectically linked to another. This embodiment of beauty and desire is tied to the story of the embodiment of ugliness and repulsion. So the appropriate mythological character to compare the armless Venus with is Medusa.¹

This chapter examines this dialectic in three versions of the tale that are inspired by the French tradition. The best known of these was written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont and published in France in 1756.² It clearly served as the basis for Jean Cocteau's 1945 film, *La Belle et la bête*, the script of which reproduces verbatim much of Leprince de Beaumont's tale. In contrast, Disney's 1991 animated film represents an extensive revision of the classic tale that nonetheless remains faithful to the objectives of the traditional fairy tale genre. As Jack Zipes points out, these aims were "part and parcel of the class struggles in the discourses of that period."³ Zipes goes on to cite Armstrong and Tennenhouse on such struggles for hegemony: "A class of people cannot produce themselves as a ruling class without setting themselves off against certain Others. Their hegemony entails possession of the key cul-

tural terms determining what are the right and wrong ways to be a human being."⁴

Over the past thirty years, disability theory has been pivotal in redefining the "the right and wrong ways to be a human being." It may seem a bit of a stretch to use disability theory to discuss Cocteau's rather homely beast or Disney's buffalo with a fiery temper. Yet, as Paul Wells points out in the introduction to *The Animated Bestiary*, such characters are "able to carry a diversity of representational positions. At one and the same time, such characters can be beasts and humans, or neither; can prompt issues about gender, race, and ethnicity, generation and identity, or not; and can operate innocently or subversively, or as something else entirely."⁵ In short, once you put a buffalo in breeches, anything goes.

The extent to which each version challenges notions of the Other can be explained in part by authorial intention and the starkly different creative visions of Cocteau and the Disney production team. Working on his film at the end of World War II, Cocteau clearly meant for his aesthetic choices to resist not only the conventions of contemporary cinema (and the public's taste for films of a certain kind), but those of the fairy tale, as well: "To realism, I would oppose the simplified, formalized behavior of characters out of Molière (at the beginning of the film). To fairyland as people usually see it, I would bring a kind of realism to banish the vague and misty nonsense now so completely worn out."⁶ Indeed, in creating his vision of the classic fairy tale, he intended to shatter its mold:

My story would concern itself mainly with the unconscious obstinacy with which women pursue the same type of man, and expose the naiveté of the old fairy tales that would have us believe that this type reaches its ideal in conventional good looks. My aim would be to make the beast so human, so sympathetic, so superior to men, that his transformation into Prince Charming would come as a terrible blow to Beauty, condemning her to a humdrum marriage and a future that is summed up in that last sentence of all fairy tales, "And they had many children."⁷

Thus in the final frames of the film, a transformed Prince remarks, "What's wrong, Belle? It's almost as if you miss my ugliness," and continues, "Are you disappointed that I look like your brother's friend?" "Yes," she replies, and then revises, "No." For the Prince, she is an "odd little girl," dazed and bewildered, as though anesthetized by the Beast's metamorphosis. When the Prince asks, "Are you happy?" she offers a tentative smile, answering, "I'll have to get used to it." Hereafter she becomes increasingly girlish in her replies. The Prince seems to prop her up, the camera angle making her appear much smaller than he. She offers meekly, "I like to be afraid ... when I'm with you" and looks up at him to ask, "Is it far?" the kind of simplified question a little girl might ask about a fairytale kingdom. And off they fly, literally, on some

sort of zipcord, into a slate gray sky, their ridiculous feet reeling behind them.⁸

Writing in 1968, Richard Schickel characterizes Walt Disney's perspective in these terms:

Disney, the man who could never bear to look upon animals in zoos or prisoners in jail or other "unpleasant things," was truly incapable of seeing his material in anything but reductive terms. [Walt Disney] came always as a conqueror, never as a servant. It is a trait, as many have observed, that many Americans share when they venture into foreign lands hoping to do good but equipped only with knowhow instead of sympathy and respect for alien traditions.⁹

The Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast* was taken up in the late 1980s by Walt Disney's nephew, Roy C. Disney. Interestingly, Walt Disney had explored the project in 1937, after the success of the animated full-length feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and again in the 1950s. On both occasions he struggled with some of the more daunting aspects of the project: the fact of there being only two main characters and the challenge of creating a beast that was at once "beastly" enough and sympathetic. Ultimately, he shelved the project in favor of others. It took another generation of animators to develop the storyline as it appears in the 1991 version, arguably the most successful feature Disney has ever produced. It won three Golden Globe Awards and was the first animated feature in the history of the Academy Awards to be nominated for Best Picture.¹⁰

The film had no shortage of commercial appeal but, for many critics, fell far short of capturing the magic of the original tale. In recasting the Beast as an appealing, humanized character, Disney's film allows for no real transformation. Long before Disney produced *Beauty and the Beast*, Schickel had pointed out Walt Disney's failure to answer "in imaginative intensity and depth of feeling" the original fairy tales he had remade, attributing it to a desire to overlook their more horrific aspects.

The beast's appearance is a *leitmotiv* in all three versions. In the 1756 version of the tale, the beast is "monstrous," and "horrible," so "hideous" that Belle nearly faints the first time she looks upon it. When the beast asks Belle whether she finds him ugly, she replies, "You are very kind. I must confess that your goodness pleases me, and when I come to think of it, you no longer seem so ugly." Thus it is conversations about its appearance that reveal the beast's humility and kindness as well as Belle's virtue, propelling the tale to its happy conclusion when the beast is transformed into a human prince as a reward for Belle's purity of heart: "You have preferred virtue to beauty and wit," declares the lady of Belle's dream.¹¹ Conversations such as these, present in both Leprince de Beaumont's version and Disney, invoke the Victorian correlation between an unsightly appearance and a blemished soul and its corollary, beauty and goodness. The cultural impact of this correlation—a refurbished

iteration of the Venus/Medusa archetype—was tremendous, shaping the reception of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* in the mid-nineteenth century and culminating in Cesare Lombroso's early theories of criminal profiling a few decades later.

Cocteau presents a hideous Beast, as well, and addresses directly by means of several aesthetic choices an issue that is less salient in the original: what exactly is the nature of a beast who walks, talks, and articulates a full range of human emotions? Is it human or an animal? Cocteau and actor Jean Marais went to great lengths in creating a realistic—that is, animal—beast, and it is one: it has coarse fur and long teeth, drinks from the river rather than a cup, hunts deer in the woods, and appears regularly bathed in the blood of wild prey. Indeed, the Beast is only human enough to suffer shame at these many indignities of being an animal in Belle's presence. As if to reiterate their different species, Cocteau films Belle walking through a hall filled with classical statues, while the Beast roams the garden among statues of dogs and deer. The Beast pines for Belle in her absence by stroking her white fur shawl; she wears a silly tiara with its silver garland sprigs that suggest an animal's antlers. At the precise moment that Belle openly challenges its repeated marriage proposals, admonishing, "Let's be friends. Don't ask me for anything more," the Beast is distracted by a deer running past through the woods. These many details in the film and Belle's accoutrements serve to underscore the authenticity of the Beast as *animal*.

Cocteau's emphasis on their different species is countered by Belle's skepticism as she describes the Beast to her father. To his supposition, "So this monster has a soul?" she replies, "He suffers, father. One half of him struggles with the other. He is crueler to himself than he is to other human beings." This characterization of the Beast clearly invokes Cartesianism in the father's assumption that an animal would not have a soul. Belle's reply challenges Cartesian logic, describing a struggle between two "halves" of itself: the animal who is absolutely in his element tracking deer in the woods and cleaning his paws, and the human who longs for love. This exchange is unique to the Cocteau version and important in understanding his aims: the Victorian analogy between appearance and morality is present in Belle's depiction, but not in the Beast's. In fact, for Cocteau, the divergence of character and appearance is essential to setting up the "humdrum life" that Cocteau imagines for Belle, and serves as the linchpin for his condemnation of normative values pertaining not only to gender roles, but to notions of normal embodiment.

At the end of Leprince de Beaumont's story, as the Beast lies dying next to the riverbed, Belle sprinkles water on its forehead in an attempt to revive it. This clear allusion to baptism precipitates the Beast's metamorphosis, as if to confirm the presence of a soul. Surely inspired by this detail in the original tale, Cocteau gives the Beast a magic glove, which Belle places on its right hand. The glove introduces thematically the central conflict of Lancelot legend:

Lancelot's quest for Guinevere's heart has been read as an allegory for man's quest for salvation and Christ's quest for a human soul. On the other hand, the love between Lancelot and Guinevere is adulterous, so its realization precludes Lancelot's salvation. In a similar catch-22, the Beast's love for Belle is also forbidden—they are different species—and yet its transformation completely undermines its purity of intention: Belle must resign herself to a fairy tale fate.

In contrast, Disney's Beast hardly seems animal at all. With its broad shoulders, silky fur, and rich, molasses voice, it is anything but horrible in its appearance. Nonetheless, when Belle's father arrives in the castle, the Beast's reaction on seeing him—"What are you staring at? [...] So, you've come to stare at the Beast, have you?"—suggests that this film, too, means to address the monstrous nature of the Beast's body, as well as its freakish appeal.¹² The Beast's question confirms that it understands itself as spectacle and challenges the audience to wonder about its own role in perpetuating such tales. Yet an insistent focus on the Beast's fiery temper prompts us to look past the uniqueness of the Beast's body and its predicament in favor of the human moral failure that predominates in its depiction. Its status is further mitigated by the fact that animals as well as everyday objects—teapots, candelabras, ottomans, and clocks—are anthropomorphized in a way that both trivializes and universalizes difference. This Beast's metamorphosis invokes Christian motifs, but in rather hyperbolic terms: the Disney Beast, already so humanized, undergoes a sort of apotheosis, becoming a suffering *pietà* cradled by the Beast's swirling pelt and then a man (in the classical Western image of Christ) with rays of light shooting from his fingertips.

Disney's reticence to engage with "unpleasant things" explains in part why its beast is only animal in a figurative sense, able to reflect the negative human qualities of anger and impatience. Indeed, the beast we encounter in Disney is resolutely human, depicted neither as sufficiently abject visually nor as truly conflicted as to his true, fundamentally human, nature. By glossing over any real encounter with the Other, Disney avoids calling into question assumptions regarding the nature of what it means to be human. Patrick Murphy relates such consolatory notions of the human in part to the absence in the Disney films of "wild nature," something that, as Other, might challenge these static notions:

Disney's full-length animated films reveal a consistent, although incoherent, worldview on nature and women that is escapist and androcentric. The escapism is based on denying wild nature as an integral part of the biosphere at the world level and as a part of individual character as the personal level. The denial of *wild* nature serves the fabrication of a timeless, universal, and unchanging order articulated in part by means of cultural values and generalizations.¹³

In Leprince de Beaumont and Cocteau, instead, the way in which the visual

encounter between Belle and the Beast is depicted underscores their different natures, asking us to question the very categories of human and animal as they are constructed one against the other. In *Staring: How We Look*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson reminds us that faces are "the first territory our eyes inhabit when we encounter one another, and goes on to describe Levinas's "ethics of the face," according to which "the face is an expression of the person and a moral signifier."¹⁴ The encounter with the face of the Other not only asks us "not to let him die alone," but puts us in a position "to be unable to kill."¹⁵ Levinas is among those thinkers who have engaged in a deep reflection on the relationship between humans and animals and the ethical implications of this relationship. The brief essay "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" describes his own experience in a Nazi prison camp at the end of the Second World War and, in particular, the extraordinary episode of a lost dog who finds his way into the camp. The dog, given the name Bobby by the prisoners, is referred to by Levinas as "the last Kantian in Nazi Germany" for its apparent ability to recognize the humanity of these individuals who have been reduced by their captors to the status of animals. The looks exchanged between Levinas and Bobby, however, are complicated by the fact that, in the end, the animal can only respond to the human gaze to the extent to which the observer projects the animal as human.¹⁶

Both Levinas's essay and Cocteau's *La Belle et la bête* belong to the same historical moment—no doubt Cocteau had begun making preparations for the film while Levinas was still a prisoner of war—and, indeed, both works stand out as anomalous, yet distinct, responses to the tragedy of the war. If Levinas's initial discussion of the ethical problem of killing and eating animals strikes one as inappropriate given the immediate context of the slaughter and brutalization of human beings, Cocteau's reelaboration of the beauty and the beast tale was on its release similarly jarring. Betsy Hearne notes: "At the time it came out [Cocteau's film] shocked a population devastated by World War II with its focus on what seemed of slight importance—a fairly tale—compared to the harsh realities of survival."¹⁷ Both texts, however, acknowledge the danger of speaking in fables, which of course is also the danger of recourse to figurative uses of the other. Twice in the course of his essay Levinas interrupts the flow of his thought as his language threatens to descend into the purely figurative. At one point, he exclaims: "But enough of allegories! We have read too many fables and we are still taking the name of a dog in the figurative sense."¹⁸

Cocteau goes so far as to suggest that his film is accessible only to those capable of a particular relationship with animals: "The poet Paul Eluard says that to understand my film version of *Beauty and the Beast*, you must love your dog more than your car."¹⁹ In the film, when Belle, having asked the beast to allow her to visit her sick father, strokes his head, he comments: "You coax me as though I were an animal." Her reply makes clear her surprise that he would imply otherwise: "But you are an animal." Like Levinas's biblical text—

"troubled by parables"—Cocteau "challenges the metaphor" of the beast by asking us to dwell on literal meanings rather than hastily reproduce codified figurative associations projected onto difference. And as Levinas will always be, Cocteau, too, is invested here in maintaining a kind of integrity of the Other. In this sense, just as Levinas's Bobby proves ultimately to be, Cocteau's beast is also "*trop bête*."²⁰ The ability continually to define and redefine notions of the human in a way that allows for a kind of *coming into being* requires that one avoids imagining the Other in figurative terms. If Disney seems unable to allow the other to challenge our understanding of what it means to be human, it is perhaps more than anything a result of a habit of thought that appeals to static anthropomorphism of animal and object become the human other. Mickey will forever be the "man who doesn't know he's a mouse."²¹

The stark difference in aesthetic priorities is also apparent in the portrayal of the servants in both films. In Cocteau, their limbs jut from walls and slither out of tables to serve a guest's every whim, yet spectators are offered no explanation. Are their bodies perhaps trapped within its walls? Cocteau devotes considerable energy to capturing Belle's father's reaction as they slither in and out of his visual field, their oily gray tone often blending with the dark walls of the castle. They are somewhat familiar and awfully accommodating, yet at the same time terrifyingly strange. Spectators watch him, wondering at, and learning from, his quietly startled response to them. One cannot help but wonder whether these specific aesthetic choices are symbolic of the dehumanization of prisoners of war in Nazi camps, and Belle's father's tentative reaction symbolic of that of the French, who were unaware of the real goings on in the camps until the liberation in 1944 but may have understood on a subconscious level the real implications of their existence.

In contrast to these uncanny limbs, Disney brings a whole staff of cheery accoutrements to life. When resurrecting *Beauty and the Beast* for the third time in the mid-eighties, creators had to figure out how to sustain spectator interest in only two characters. The addition of anthropomorphized household objects solved that challenge but introduced new ones. Animators struggled with how, in specific terms, to humanize a candelabra or a teapot. Ultimately, Lumière, who does not have legs, manages to dance the cancan thanks to animators creating the impression of movement through blurring; Mrs. Potts, only a head, is able to express a full range of emotions and movement. In essence, while Cocteau made the creative choice to dwell upon fragmentation of the human form, Disney strove to maintain the illusion of wholeness and a complete range of abilities.²²

Despite the stark differences in aesthetic projects, all of these peripheral figures relate to meals and eating, the central trope that best establishes a tradition. In each of the three versions, strangers enter the castle to find an elaborate table, so that the scene is a first indication of the Beast's social class and the thematic introduction of class difference. In Leprince de Beaumont and

Cocteau, scenes of eating serve the double function of reinforcing exclusionary notions of propriety related to class and community: in both versions, after her father loses his fortune, Belle is forced to take up duties as a servant. In Cocteau, during her visit home, Belle's royal appearance and diamond teardrops heighten an already singular thematic focus on issues of class. In one key scene, as Belle serves dinner, Félicie remarks, "She misses her luxuries and our commonness disgusts her ... Mademoiselle surely thinks she is too good to wait on us now."

Equally important in both versions is the Beast's request to watch Belle as she eats. These scenes associate the theme of looking at/seeing/understanding the Other with the site of the display of human propriety from which the Beast is ultimately excluded. In Leprince de Beaumont's tale, the magnificent table that Belle and her father find waiting for them prompts her to speculate on the Beast's intentions:

The horse went of its own accord to the stable, and the good man entered the great hall with his daughter. There they found a table, magnificently dressed and laid with two places. The merchant had no desire to eat, but Beauty, forcing herself to appear calm, sat down at the table and served her father; then she said to herself: "The Beast gives me such food because he wants to fatten me before eating me."

Subsequently, the beast's pleasure in watching her eat would seem to confirm Belle's initial suspicion:

At noon she found the table laid, and while she ate the meal she heard an exquisite concert, although she could not see anyone. In the evening, as she was about to sit down at the table, she heard again the noise the Beast made, and in spite of herself she shivered with terror. "Beauty," said the monster, "are you willing to let me watch you sup?"

Such scenes find their culmination in the tale's conclusion, when the beast's attempted suicide takes the form of a repression of his natural desire to eat as an animal, which is compensated by a kind of scopophilic pleasure: "The Beast opened his eyes and said to Beauty: 'You forgot your promise, and my sorrow at losing you made me want to die of hunger; but I die content since I have the pleasure of seeing you again.'"²³

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva develops the notion of the abject as something that, situated outside of the symbolic order, "disturbs identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders, positions, rules."²⁴ The encounter with the abject, often embodied in the marginalized individual, is characterized by a sense of repulsion and is experienced by the subject as a traumatic event. Our sense of the abject is at times triggered by the experience of eating. Kristeva writes, "Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection."²⁵ She goes on to discuss dietary

restrictions in *Leviticus*.²⁶ In Cocteau's film, in which depictions of voyeurism and eating repeatedly coincide, it is during the various representations of meals and eating that the repulsive nature of the beast as Other becomes most apparent, and where he stands outside of the Biblical prohibitions regulating the human consumption of flesh.²⁷ In one scene where the Beast is caught having feasted on wild prey, the stage directions in the film's screenplay underscore the power of the gaze in forcing an internalization of the experience of abjection:

BEAUTY: My God! You're covered in blood!

She starts back in horror.

THE BEAST: Forgive me...

BEAUTY: For what?

THE BEAST (*almost groveling*): For being a beast, forgive me.

BEAUTY (*firmly*): It doesn't become you to talk in that way. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Go and clean yourself and go to sleep.

She stands there looking at him in all her innocence and purity. The Beast is overcome with shame and self-disgust.

THE BEAST (*in despair*): Close the door! Close the door! (*She doesn't move.*)

Quick ... quick, close the door. Your look is burning me, I can't bear it.²⁸

Here, as in Leprince de Beaumont, short of death, there is no question of the Beast's inability to forsake his animal nature to join Belle at the table. In contrast, Disney's Beast invites Belle to dinner and sits down to dine across from him. This Beast is not so much an animal as an extremely awkward, ill-mannered human being; its clumsy manner and slurping will be remediated with practice as part of an overall grooming process undertaken by the castle's lively band of accoutrements. In order to win the girl, the Beast must temper his anger, hide his fangs, stand up straight, and learn to use a knife and fork. Of course, the stakes are high for all involved, for if Belle can learn to love the Beast by midnight on the eve of its twenty-first birthday, household accoutrements will also undergo metamorphosis, returning to a life as cheerful (human) servants. A rousing choral number, "Human Again," apparently cut from the original script because its lyrics destabilized the temporal frame of the rest of the storyline, was rewritten and included in the 10th Anniversary DVD edition. It includes a scene of Belle and the Beast reading (*Romeo and Juliet*). Belle is cast as a tutor, which both underscores the Beast's blossoming humility and clarifies her role as conveyor of cultural norms. Spectators are to deduce from the scene that the Beast, having softened (and taken up Shakespeare), is increasingly human, transformed by love as well as learning. Significantly, an alternative version of the lyrics of "Human Again," widely cited on the Internet, reveals Belle and Beast reading about Guinevere's grief after King Arthur's death: the shift to *Romeo and Juliet* for its publication on the 10th Anniversary DVD serves not only to remedy the potential obscurity of

medieval legend but removes the prohibition on their relationship and places it on par with a timeless love story.²⁹

The Disney acculturation process follows the same trajectory as what Paul Longmore terms a "drama of adjustment," the stock depiction *par excellence* among stereotypical portrayals of disability.³⁰ In a drama of adjustment, a central character copes with anger and resentment about his impairment. Non-disabled characters in the film condemn a "bad attitude" and encourage his emotional adjustment and self-acceptance, proffering advice as if they understand better than he the issues at hand. Such dramas culminate with an angry confrontation, at the end of which the central character acquiesces. As Longmore points out, dramas of adjustment never engage issues of prejudice or social injustice; the responsibility for conformity to prevailing discourses about ability and disability falls squarely on the shoulders of the individual. Thus in Disney's version, Mrs. Potts and her entourage groom the Beast, coach him in the use of good manners, and even hand him a spoon at the dinner table. One of the film's most memorable moments, the song "Be Our Guest" (sung by the servants who welcome Belle to a formal dinner with the Beast), calls up a range of ideas associated with the high-brow world of French culinary pomp, its choral nature invoking a sense of community and demonstrating by association the complete acculturation of the beast into the human world.

Paul Darke adds to Longmore his formulation of the "normality genre" and the notion that an "impaired" present time frame is typically juxtaposed to an idealized, normal past.³¹ For Darke, impairment must be contained and / or normalized in order to uphold social norms relating to both beauty and ability. In the film, the Beast isolates himself from others, having internalized the stigma of its difference. The Beast's idealized past is symbolized by the slashed portrait of the prince and literally kept under lock and key in the west wing of the castle that Belle is forbidden to visit. Her transgression and discovery of this ideal is a necessary step in the exposition of the film that culminates in their courtship and in the Beast's acculturation process: his sudden ability to dress the part of a suitor and waltz Belle around the ballroom floor.

Yet, at the same time, Disney juxtaposes an alternative narrative that highlights the complexities of stigma and social prejudice. The film opens with "Belle," a rousing *hommage* to 19th-century cultural norms that depicts petty mercantilism and the rise of capitalism in a provincial village. In contrast, the Beast withdraws into the solitude of his dark castle, so ashamed is he of his new, unsightly appearance. Yet rather than casting withdrawal as a "natural" response to the Beast's appearance, the movie on the whole suggests the importance of learned responses. As such, Gaston leads the charge to "Kill the Beast!" drawing upon all sorts of lore to rally the crowd and insisting, "If you're not with us you're against us!" While Gaston's reaction capitalizes upon fears of (Belle's father's) supposed madness, spectators are left to consider Disney's depiction of mass hysteria, which is far too over-determined to be taken at

face value, and which itself alludes to the titillating appeal of such universal narratives of difference: "It's a nightmare but it's one exciting ride." The film thus draws upon a host of tropes central to understanding the perception and categorization of difference, particularly as the bourgeoisie gained ascendancy and as its identity as a class solidified.³²

Moreover, the figure of the wayward mendicant, an original addition to the Disney frame story, ties into cultural iterations of difference in the 19th-century. In *The Ugly Laws*, Susan M. Schweik studies a series of local ordinances that were passed in cities across the country from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of World War I in what she describes as a kind of "civic contagion" prohibiting the exposure of disease for the purposes of begging. As late as 1974, a few such ordinances remained on the books. Chicago's city ordinance, passed in 1881, reads,

Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares, or public places in this city, shall not therein or thereon, expose himself to public view, under the penalty of a fine of \$1 for each offense.³³

In *Claiming Disability*, Simi Linton offers a modern update to the nineteenth-century ugly laws, citing a pair of letters to Ann Landers in 1987:

I have the right to go out and I pay good money for a meal to enjoy it. The sight of a woman in a wheelchair with food running down her chin would make me throw up. I believe my rights should be respected as much as the rights of the person in the wheelchair ... maybe even more so, because I am normal and she is not.

In my opinion, restaurants should have a special section for handicapped people, partially hidden by palms or other greenery, so they are not seen by other guests.³⁴

Conjuring the same scopic fascination and repulsion that is so prevalent in the three versions and so closely associated with food, the letters are evidence that the impulse to sequester physical difference was still part of the American imaginary surrounding issues of physical difference while the Disney film was in production. Indeed, the late eighties was a period of sweeping change in the history of the disability rights movement, and a few other details in the film lend themselves to parallels in this realm. President Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in July of 1990, legislation that acknowledged that a whole population of people with disabilities who had grown up benefiting from the protections afforded by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were now poised to graduate from college and expected to participate fully in the benefits and opportunities of adulthood, as employees as well as consumers. One of the most original provisions of the ADA was the role that stigma, or the perception of a person's abilities or disabilities, might

play in shaping a person's opportunities, and the legislation sought to guarantee access as well as attempting to prevent discrimination in the workplace.³⁵

This history seems to lend significance to the specific details of the film's exposition, making contemporary the emphasis on capitalist productivity in the film's opening sequence. Historical context might also explain the visual exposition of "Human Again," wherein the servants associate their return to human form with the physical labor of cleaning the castle after such a long period in disrepair. Its idealization of a full range of physical abilities is remarkable, for not only are they to clean, they are to clean while waltzing in rhythmic and graceful unison with dozens of their peers. Cogsworth's dream of a peaceful and prosperous retirement suggests the opportunities that the ADA seeks to guarantee. Likewise, the prologue seems to parallel the intent of the legislation, as in order to break the spell, the Beast must be alluring enough to make Belle love him before he reaches legal adulthood, the demographic the ADA drafters had in mind. In the meantime, Belle is forbidden to visit the "west wing" of the castle. Here, the magic rose, with its last petal dangling, is kept under glass and Belle (who transgresses the prohibition) gets a glimpse of the prince's former beauty and, by extension, of an idealized, "normal" past. The west wing of the castle, "off-limits," may of course be read as the West Wing of the White House, itself a loaded metaphor for the full participation in civic life that so many activists felt had been denied them.

In essence, this reading of the implications of physical difference in three versions of the beauty and the beast tale has come full circle, beginning with an exploration of the beast as fundamentally Other, especially in Cocteau. In contrast, Disney apparently sought to mitigate the Beast's absolute difference by humanizing it and indeed, making it an *ideal* suitor. This depiction, less transgressive than its predecessor, nonetheless incorporates elements that seem to acknowledge progressive historical developments, making way for alternative readings of disability and a place for the Beast at the table.

Notes

1. Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy, Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995) 131.
2. Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. *La Belle et la bête*, Trans. Francis Steegmuller, in *The Criterion Collection notes for Jean Cocteau, La Belle et la bête*.
3. Jack Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, 21-42) 24.
4. Cited in Zipes, 24.
5. Paul Wells, *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009) 3.
6. Jean Cocteau: *Beauty and the Beast* (Criterion Collection Notes, 2003, n.d.).
7. Criterion Collection Notes.
8. *La Belle et la bête* (1946), Dir. Jean Cocteau, perf. Jean Marais, Josette Day (The Criterion Collection, 2003, DVD).

9. Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) 226.
10. *The Making of Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Disney Classic, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 21 April 2010 youtube.com.
11. Leprince de Beaumont.
12. *Beauty and the Beast, 10th Anniversary DVD*, Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale, 1989.
13. Patrick Murphy, "The Whole Wide World Was Scrubbed Clean": The Androcentric Animation of Denatured Disney," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, 125-136) 125.
14. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 95.
15. Qtd. in Thomson, 100.
16. Emmanuel Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 151-153).
17. Betsy Hearne. *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 79-80.
18. Levinas.
19. Criterion Collection Notes.
20. David Clark, "On Being 'The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany': Dwelling with Animals After Levinas," in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, eds. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997, 165-98) 188.
21. See Andrea Dini, "Calvino e Walt Disney: Iconografia della bestia" (*Quaderni del '900*, II, 2002, 35-50) for a discussion of anthropomorphism in Walt Disney's essay that appeared in the Italian journal *Il Politecnico* in 1946 (no. 20, Feb 9) with the title "La mia officina."
22. *The Making of Beauty and the Beast*.
23. Leprince de Beaumont.
24. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.
25. Kristeva, 2. See especially the chapter "Approaching Abjection," 1-31.
26. Kristeva. See the chapter "Semiotics of Biblical Abomination," 90-112.
27. "You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs" (Exodus 22:31).
28. Jean Cocteau, *Three Screenplays: L'Eternel Retour, Orphée, La Belle et la Bête*, trans. Carol Martin-Sperry (New York: Grossman, 1972) 224.
29. Alan Mencken and Howard Ashman, "Human Again," Metro Lyrics, 24 May 2010 <http://www.metrolyrics.com/human-again-lyrics-alan-mencken.html>.
30. Paul K. Longmore, "Screening Stereotypes: Images of Disabled People," in *Screening Disability: Essays on Cinema and Disability*, eds. Anthony Enns and Christopher R. Smit (Boston: University Press of America, 2001).
31. Paul Darke, "Understanding Cinematic Representations of Disability," in *The Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Tom Shakespeare (New York: Continuum, 1998) 181-200.
32. Lennard J. Davis's foundational essay, "Constructing Normalcy," originally published in *Enforcing Normalcy, Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (pp. 23-49), focuses on the rise of embodied norms as part and parcel of the development of the bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century France.
33. Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 2.
34. Excerpts from Ann Landers column, spring 1987, cited in Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 34.
35. For a concise overview of the bill's drafting and passage, see Joseph P. Shapiro, *No Pity: Americans with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994), especially chapter four.

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SECTION IV—UP AND OUT: ESSAYS ON REIMAGININGS AND NEW VISIONS

Is Disney Avant-Garde? A Comparative Analysis of Alice in Wonderland (1951) and Jan Svankmajer's Alice (1989)

WILLIAM VERRONE

Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is considered a misstep, a film that loses its child-friendly appeal because of its unusual story and source material. The result is a heady mix of exaggerated, diverse, and bizarre characters that, while likable enough, seemed too "odd" a fit for the Disney name. Disney's film of Carroll's allegorical books is somewhat of a departure from the animated films of the Disney canon. Carroll's books ostensibly are about a child's perspective of the irrational and nonsensical world of adults, and *Alice in Wonderland*, the film, eschews Carroll's (supposed) pointed criticism in order to highlight the wonders of childhood—a "fantasyland" that would come to dominate Disney's thinking, in terms of his grandiose theme park—as opposed to the more relevant and important themes of dream and imagination. This does not mean the film is completely bad; in fact, its subversive nature and dark humor make it a worthy case study, I believe, of an atypical Disney film. The Disney version plays upon the tropes of "otherness" and power/subjection, which may explain its lasting appeal inasmuch as it is simply another "Disney cartoon for children." However, Disney did not *intend* for the film to have these themes. Quite unexpectedly as well, the film was somewhat embraced by the counterculture of the 1960s and gained a new, albeit different, audience in the 1970s, who admired the psychedelic "feel" of the film. I would like to discuss the film and another version, Jan Svankmajer's *Alice* (1988), a surreal and disturbing version of the Carroll stories. Svankmajer's *Alice* is a "re-imagining" and highly uncompromising avant-garde film. It is an astonishing