**On “Beauty and the Beast”**

The original fable of “Beauty and the Beast” was written in England in 1757 by a Frenchwoman, Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, who worked as a governess to the children of the Prince of Wales and published it in a controversial ladies’ magazine in the 1750s. Born in 1711 in Rouen, Jeanne-Marie Le Prince, came from a family of numerous children. Her decision to become a teacher was considered radical in her day. A brief and unhappy marriage which produced one daughter was annulled in 1745 and Madame de Baumont left France for England in 1748. She had quite a following in her old age, with notable exceptions of her neighbor Voltaire, who detested her.

Certain elements of the thematic structure of her famous tale can be tied to her own experiences: the merchant father who journeys to the seaport, the large number of children in her household (her daughter had six children like in the tale) and her lesson the dangers of bad marriages (she considered herself to be a victim of her ex-husband and one of the first women to ask for a divorce and freedom).

However, there is also an attitude that certain elements of the story are intermingled with British folktale and legends. They argue that the author lived in England and must have heard ghost stories there, as well as rumors of those sons of certain great families who were hidden away become of some birthmark or blemish that might frighten society and dishonor a noble name. Possibly one of these monsters, shut up in some Scottish castle gave her the idea of a human beast who bears a noble heart under a frightening appearance and suffers the pangs of hopeless love.

In her tale, the Beast is lacking in beauty and wit. The opposition lies in two dominant social values of the XVIII century upper class – beauty and wit. Therefore, the story, being influenced by her own life experiences and social circumstances, sounds many realistic and true messages: a) true love is when you are willing to sacrifice yourself for another; b) It’s not what’s on the outside but what’s on the inside that counts; c) Vanity is never attractive; d) selfishness has no plate in costing, loving relationship; e) don’t let criticism believe your self-worth; f) don’t settle for the second best; g) your biggest enemy is sometimes yourself; h) always stand up for your morals and values.

Belle is the author’s persona in the story and therefore she is beloved princess who appreciates women’s freedom to choose life path, read and beveducated, to teach children reading and be courageous and faithful to family.

Beside Disney animated and live action movies, this story inspired some more literary works such as: Robin McKinley’s novel: *A Retelling of a Story of Beauty and the Beast*. So the story goes on.

Therefore, “Beauty and the Beast” tells in its much diverse variations, a different story, of a bridegroom redeemed from monstrousness. The changes to this fairy tale reveal the interweaving of social customs and laws with fantasy narratives.

It also includes a history of relations between humanity and animality and brings different answers to the questions: Who is the beast, who is the beauty? Moving forward, we must take subtext into consideration and analyze the story throw several sides so that we become aware of what kind of Belle is presented to our children.

Task

a) Please, read the story

Madame de Beaumont, “Beauty and the Beast”, www.gutenberg.org

Watch the animated and live-action films:

- Trousdale, Gary, Wise, Kirk, “Beauty and the Beast”, Walt Disney Pictures, 1991.

- Condon, Bill, “Beauty and the Beast”, Walt Disney Pictures, 2017.

b) Answer the following questions:

1. Which approach is close to your views: feminist, psychological, gothic or fairy tale? Explain your choice.

2. If you were Belle/Beast, which one would you be? Why?

3. How would she look like today?

4. Who/what is Beast? Where is it – in ourselves or the outside? Do today exist Beasts? Where do you see them?

5. Which aspect of the story is appropriate for preschool children? What would be the dosage of fear/brutality?

Think about these things and write down an essay.

P.S. Pay attention to the scene from 2017 film – it is set in the plague caught Paris and the doctor visits Belle’s mother. Have you known what were masks like then. Be patient onlooker and notice it. So long ago, but the theme is so familiar to us today for fear of the pandemic.