

Michelle J. Smith and Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario. “Race, Species, and the Other: *Beauty and the Beast* in Victorian Pantomime and Children’s Literature.” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2016, pp. 37–53.

The nineteenth-century fondness for fairy tales was all-encompassing, from the adult-oriented spectacle of Fairy Extravaganzas to cautionary moral chapbooks for children. “Beauty and the Beast” is exemplary of the versatility of the fairy tale in this respect, from its unabashedly erotic origins in the story of Cupid and Psyche, it emerges as a lesson in dutiful feminine abnegation and its concomitant economic and social rewards. Smith and Do Rozario attend to both performance and print in their analysis of “Beauty and the Beast,” perhaps the most popular fairy tale adaptation of the Victorian period. Their focus is on the “beastliness” of the Beast and how the story provides us with a vehicle for observing differing ways of conceptualizing Otherness, with significant distinctions to be seen between theatrical adaptations and the tale as it was presented in picture books.

“Beauty and the Beast” was introduced to English readers by the celebrated dramatist J. R. Planché in his *Four and Twenty Fairy Tales: Selected from Perrault and Other Popular Writers* (1858). Planché’s pantomime version of his translated tale was much performed, epitomizing for Smith and Do Rozario the duality of the Victorian relationship with “Beauty and the Beast,” being at once “both literary and theatrical” (38).

Pantomime’s unique reflection of the requirements of its audience, provides the historian with an immediate chronicle of its time, offering specific comment on issues of the moment, from everyday trivia to major crises. Adaptations of “Beauty and the Beast” proved steady but increased to “almost twenty theatrical productions” (41) a year after the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), in which he claimed that “there was no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties” (40). Post-Darwinian scientific racism provides the broad contextual frame for Smith and Do Rozario who contend that scholarly attention to “Beauty and the Beast” has been limited in its exclusive focus on picture books. Pantomime representations of the Beast now began to emphasize hierarchical difference between races alongside species difference between human and animal, sometimes fusing the two to associate beastliness with racial difference.

Beauty’s upward mobility, from merchant’s daughter to Prince’s wife, requires a level of “engagement with the Other” (38). Where evidence of Reason and expressions of Civility were significant factors in the transformation of eighteenth-century fairytale beasts into handsome princes, contemporary debate about the lines between human and ape, between evolved and “lower” races, alternatively troubled and solidified distinctions between civilized and “barbarous” for the late Victorians. Smith and Do Rozario’s analysis of theatrical representations of the Beast shows developing anxieties about the “boundaries between self and other” (38) reflected in specifically racial terms. They point to major productions that feature blackface minstrelsy and “coon songs” during the Beast’s scenes, and pantomime advertisements that juxtapose Beauty’s virginal purity with an ape-like Beast, hinting at miscegenation.

While blackness and bestiality intertwined in theatrical expression of the monstrous, illustrated books appear more sympathetic to the human/animal divide, returning to eighteenth-century notions of Civility and, in the wake of Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) they argue, an eighteenth-century affinity for the anthropomorphic. Walter Crane's (1874) iconic illustrations depict an elegantly garbed boar, his castle replete with signifiers of refinement and taste, Chinoiserie panels, Liberty prints and leopard skin rugs. In the preface to his own *Fairy Extravaganza*, Planché commented that his predecessors set "Beauty and the Beast" in Oriental regions "for the splendour of the *mise en scène*" (39). Costume and settings deriving from an ebullient mash-up of whatever Persian, Indian, Chinese, or Arabian might look like, remained a convenient trope for situating "Beauty and the Beast" in story books.

The notion of what monstrosity entailed for the Victorians, conclude Smith and Do Rozario, oscillated between racial, species, or Oriental Otherness, and continued in this state of flux into the Edwardian period. They nevertheless observe a move in print versions from animal back to raced representations of the Beast. Sustaining the tradition of Orientalist association, Edmund Dulac's *Beast* (1910) wears a feathered turban, sashed robe and slippers with curled up toes. His features, while Moorish in their "hooked nose and partial beard" (48) are simian. Charles Conder illustrates Ernest Dowson's *Beast* (1908) as "an ugly black man with grotesquely large, red lips" (48).

Their survey of text-based and pantomime versions, hitherto unconsidered as "a corpus," reveals telling divergences in the ways in which the monstrosity of the Beast was conveyed. In considering "Beauty and the Beast" in its entirety of representation, Smith and Do Rozario's richly detailed analysis is exemplary of the growing recognition of pantomime as a significant resource for understanding popular response to contemporary scientific debate.

Anne Witchard
University of Westminster