


# International *Beauties and Beasts*: A feminist and new historicist analysis of *Beauties and the Beasts* from around the world



## Author:

Monique Banks<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup>Department of English,  
Faculty of Social Sciences and  
Humanities, University of  
Fort Hare, East London,  
South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Monique Banks,  
moniquebanks313@gmail.  
com

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Other than the most widely-recognised *Beauty and the Beast* tales of de Beaumont and Disney, a number of writers from all over the world have recreated the tale. These writers originate from a number of social contexts, and each has recreated the tale according to the expectations of these societies. Alexander Afanasyev's Russian tale *The Enchanted Tzarévich*, Consiglieri Pedroso's Portuguese tale *The Maiden and the Beast*, Evald Tang Kristensen's Danish tale *Beauty and the Horse*, the Italian tale *Zelinda and the Monster* and Chinese folk tale *The Fairy Serpent* are analysed in this article. These international remakes will be analysed using the New Historicist and Feminist frameworks. The article aims to understand the extent to which these less-recognised tales share patriarchal ideas. Moreover, the analysis draws connections between the ideas presented in the tales and their historical backdrop, emphasising that a literary work cannot be separated from its social context. The tales tell the story of gender inequality. They perpetuate patriarchal behaviours and expectations through the behaviours of and relationships between the beauties, Beasts, fathers and sisters depicted. The male characters are empowered decision-makers, who for the most part have control over their lives; however, the female characters are submissive and passive, given little to no control. Moreover, the tales relate closely to their social contexts, and this article analyses each tale in parallel with a discussion of its social context. The patriarchal nature of each tale suggests that the 19th century encouraged gendered inequality and differences as well.

**Keywords:** *Beauty and the Beast*; international fairy tale; 19th century; Russian fairy tale; Portuguese fairy tale; Danish fairy tale; Italian fairy tale; Chinese fairy tale; feminism; new historicism; patriarchy; gender expectations in tales; social context.

## Introduction

*Beauty and the Beast* is well-known throughout the world, and it reaches back to 16th- and 17th-century France. Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's text is often referred to as the original tale, which is the most commonly recognised tale from this time. Her fairy tale was only the start of a long line of remakes. Today, one cannot think of *Beauty and the Beast* without associating it with Disney's earlier, animated film or the most recent 2017 live-action filmic retelling coming to mind. However, these renditions are western in origin and make up only a small percentage of the *Beauty and the Beast*-like tales, which have been created. Many renditions originated from the 19th century, in which many tales about *Beauties and Beasts* were published. These tales originated in countries all over the world, depicting how popular the tale's storyline is. Unfortunately, not all of these earlier tales are commonly recognised today, as is Disney's tale. This leaves a gap in the literature when this tale is concerned, as the origins from which the modern story comes have been thrust aside and, for the most part, ignored by the 21st-century society.

The fairy tale tradition is fluid; tales are remade and changed time and time again. Over the years, they take on new meanings and characters develop new characteristics. The change in how a tale is told is, however, not only determined by the change in time but also a change in the context. Tales spread throughout the world and are retold in a number of different social contexts. When retold, writers reshape these tales and mold them according to social expectation. Stephens (2009:91) further emphasised this, stating that a remade tale includes 'important literary and social functions, inducting its audience into the social, ethical and aesthetic values of the producing culture'. Popular tales, says Zipes (1987:107), are those that embody the ideas of the particular society in which it is read. A writer who aims to have his or her text read will include common

societal expectations, for example, on gender, into his or her tale, in the hopes of catching the attention of the readership.

Drawing on the theories of Stephen Greenblatt and Gayle Rubin, this analysis examines to what extent the international tales of *Beauties and Beasts* include patriarchal ideas, thus reflecting the extent to which each society was patriarchally structured. The popular *Beauty and the Beast* is one tale which, since the publication of de Beaumont's 17th-century text, has been remade by a number of writers all over the world. The emergence and increase of global trade in the 19th century also resulted in the cultural trade of ideas and even tales. Information was shared more commonly and easily because of the advancements in trade. This article analyses some of the less recognised, international retellings of the tale and analyses how each tale was adapted for its social context.

It must be observed that each tale originated in the 19th century, which is known for its patriarchal structures and regimens. That each writer independently created his own tale of a *Beauty and a Beast*, is an interesting occurrence. It brings one to wonder whether the tale's popularity stemmed from an interest in the storyline and the idea of a Beastly suitor or if the social contexts of this time afforded writers the opportunity to create tales referencing male dominance and female submissiveness.

## Theoretical framework

New historicism's theoretical understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the literature and the context is a central component of this analysis. The literature cannot be separated from its context if one is to have a complete understanding of it, or as Colebrook (1997:2) observed, 'the meaning of a practice lies in its historical location'. Although Colebrook's ideas highlight a focus that is time based, his ideas can be seen as encompassing social context as well. This is because the sociocultural context is deeply rooted in the historical context. Moreover, this suggests that one cannot simply separate a text from its sociocultural context.

Furthermore, Foucault (2002:11) stated that one cannot simply 'escape' the social structure followed within a particular society. Greenblatt (1980:5), who emphasised a connection between a piece of literature and its sociocultural context, suggests that any piece of literature is bound to the episteme from which it comes and, hence, will include social structures and expectations evident within its original society. To truly understand a text, developing an understanding of social and cultural rooting is incredibly necessary. Hence, an analysis of a text, such as these tales, must be carried out hand in hand with an analysis of the social structure.

Feminist theorist, Gayle Rubin, suggests that each society includes a sex and gender system. She describes this system as 'the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity' (Rubin 2004:771). Therefore, a sex/gender system is evident in and a product of the framework of relations within the sociocultural

context. For example, the sex or gender system in a social structure that encourages male dominance is known as patriarchy. Patriarchy is, hence, not defined as an inevitable construct within a society; according to Rubin (2004), it is the outcome of a society that champions gender inequality and female suppression. Identifying a society's sex or gender system is, therefore, essential to understanding its gender relationships and expectations.

Interestingly, the writers of these renditions are all men. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar highlight the importance of recognising the gender of a writer. They discuss how a male writer's construction of a woman in his text casts 'male-defined masks and costumes' onto her (Gilbert & Gubar 2004:814). Women in male-written texts are hyper-feminised, submissive and passive within these tales, and essentially perpetuate the patriarchal hierarchy. Coventry Patmore's (1858) *Angel in The House*, a narrative poem inspired by Patmore's wife, stands as an intriguing example of the literature of its time. The poem locates ideal womanhood as rooted in domesticity and her objectification, echoing the hyper-feminised characteristics of male-authored texts. Gilbert and Gubar (2004) continued to highlight how women take on two roles in these tales: angel or monster. The angel is obedient to the patriarchal regime, and the monster is disobedient and actively works against it. Evidence of these female characterisations suggests that the text is based on patriarchal expectations.

This article uses Greenblatt and Rubin's theories to analyse a number of international tales of *Beauties and Beasts*. Throughout the analysis, reference is made to the sociocultural context of each tale, emphasising the relationship between each tale's content and its social context. Moreover, the analysis focuses on the sex/gender system present in each social context, along with how the system is evident in the tale's content. Analysing the male and female characters will allow an analysis of the sex or gender system present in each tale's original society. Gilbert and Gubar's (2004) angel versus monster theory is used to analyse the extent of patriarchal thought within the text, and in relation to this, its society. Ultimately, the analysis shows to what extent gender hierarchy appears in the international tales of *Beauties and Beasts*.

## International renditions of *Beauty and the Beast*

Fairy tales can be found in countries all over the world. As each tale is shared, written and published within a different country, and, therefore, social context, the narratives develop in unique ways. This means that, although tales have been published in many countries which depict the *Beauty and the Beast* motif, these tales differ in how they are approached. The following tales presented in this analysis were published in Russia, Portugal, Italy and China in the 19th century and, hence, each approached the tale in a new way.

Following the new historicist theory, each tale includes interesting commentaries on their societies and depicts the

social hierarchies and ways of life for its people. The commentaries emphasise the relationship between a text and the social context in which it is published. Using Feminist Literary Criticism, the following tales and their social context are analysed together to determine each society's ideas on gender and how they have been reflected in the tale.

### ***The enchanted Tsarévich by Alexander Afanasyev (1855–1863)***

Afanasyev's collection *Russian Fairy Tales* includes almost 600 tales he collected and published between 1855 and 1863, and no specific date can be found for the creation of *The Enchanted Tsarévich*. The Russian tale highlights that 19th-century Russian society perpetuated patriarchal expectations. The era's views on gender were heavily influenced by the gendered views of the Russian Orthodox Church, which instructed that a woman's purpose was to marry, have children and spend her days caring for her family (Chernyak 2016). This was how she was to serve her society and God (Chernyak 2016). Through its illustration of the submissive young girl and the powerful Beast, Afanasyev's tale succeeds in representing this sex or gender system.

#### **The youngest daughter**

Under Beast's commands, the young girl must give herself to him because she is the first to greet her father – she is not given a choice (Afanasyev 1916). The young girl selflessly agrees to do this, mentioning that it is 'God's gift' (Afanasyev 1916:284). This emphasises the importance of religion in 19th-century Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church was the religious authority in the country and played a significant role in determining and enforcing the country's gendered ideals. Furthermore, the Church maintained that a woman was to be 'modest and hardworking, pious and chaste, devoted to her household and children and submissive to her husband' (Engel 2004:9). The Church's ideals ensured that the society internalised and normalised its values and morals, and thus, its standing on gender as well – creating and upholding the society's sex or gender system. By including this, Afanasyev highlights the importance and strength of religious views in early Russian society.

The young girl behaves according to patriarchal expectations when she moves in with the snake, stressing the importance of the gendered expectations of the Church. Living with the snake, the young girl receives everything she desires. However, the snake visits her every night instructing her to move his bed next to hers, and finally telling her to lay in bed with him. The young girl is obedient and obliges. Even though she is fearful, she 'strengthened her heart and lay down with him' (Afanasyev 1916:285). This implies that she had sex with the Beast and indicates that she does not have ownership of her own body. Related to the context of the 19th Century, Charles Petrie (2000:184) described what Victorian men were looking for in a woman: 'The stamp of masculine approval was placed upon ignorance of the world, meekness, lack of opinions, general helplessness and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male'. They were

expected to submit to men, regardless of trepidations. Women's submission even supersedes the Orthodox Church's teachings of chastity. The church encouraged that men and women remain chaste in all situations. However, chastity was defined as a moral watchfulness over the body, and in that lay sexual purity until marriage (Priest Pavel 2011). As the writer, Afanasyev, has the young girl give herself to this man before marriage, he emphasises the importance of the Russian society's sex and gender system: feminine submission and inferiority to men is undeniable important, and even more so that the teachings of the Church. Consequently, the young girl's lack of choice in the tale reflects this limited expectation of Victorian woman and the restriction and ownership society had over their own bodies.

The young girl, however, strays from her devotion when she stays the night with her family. Her decision is prompted by her jealous sisters. These women are jealous of their sister's happiness and luxurious living and work on destroying it. Chernyak (2016:311) discussed the Russian Orthodox Church's belief that women were seen as inherently evil; temptresses who, if not controlled, would ruin the family and cause disorder. These sisters embody this wicked nature, and, in doing so, they are depicted as depraved characters who stand in the way of their sister's happiness. Their characters echo the Church's theory of impious women and further illustrate just how damaging women can be when they do not submit to male authority. These women feed into the archetypal characterisation of 'ugly' sisters because of their unacceptable behaviours. Gilbert and Gubar's (2004) theoretical standpoint that patriarchal tales portray women as either angels or monsters is evident within this tale. Whereas the young, devoted girl is perfect – submissive and beautiful – her sisters are wicked and embody the 'monster'. The sisters disobey patriarchal expectations and so they must be punished in order to uphold the gendered hierarchy evident within the tale and its social context. The snake almost dies because of the young girl's disobedience and this presents as a warning, confirming the negative consequences when women disobey men's instructions. The tale emphasises the importance of obedience and passivity in women, and stresses that men should keep women under control, emphasised by the Russian Orthodox Church. This was the dominant sex or gender system of the time, and it is strengthened further by Afanasyev's tale.

Fortunately, for the snake, the young girl's devotion supersedes her desire to pacify her sisters, and when she returns, her kiss restores the dying snake. This kiss symbolises her love and devotion to the snake and leads to her ultimate, patriarchal reward – a handsome prince. As a devoted and passive female, the young girl is a perfect representation of what is expected of women. The typical fairy tale happy ending echoes that of previous tales, underscoring the importance of female devotion and submission, as it is through her good, docile, patriarchally acceptable behaviour that happiness can be reached.

### The Tsarévich (the snake Beast)

Afanashev does not provide the reader with much background or information about *the Beast* throughout his tale. His name, however, provides some context to his origin. A tsarévich is the name given to the oldest son of a Tsar or Russian emperor. The name indicates that *Beast* holds a high title in the society; however, he has been removed from the society because of his hideous physical appearance. This implies appearance taking supremacy over birth right and social hierarchy.

Afanashev's snake has wings and three heads, making him an even more terrifying creature, reminiscent of the Lernaean Hydra of Greek and Roman mythology, which is also suggestive of the Beast found in the Book of Revelation. Just as the young girl depicts typical feminine expectations, the snake Beast depicts powerful masculinity expected of men in early Russia (Chernyak 2016). There is no doubt that he is in control and holds power over others in the tale. He provides orders that must be obeyed and repeatedly exerts his authority, indicative of the role of a dominant man. This clearly suggests that a woman must submit herself to male leadership, regardless of how frightful and hideous he appears. This echoes Greenblatt's (2005) discussion on the relation between a text and its society: that texts are thoughtfully written and created by the writer in order to share messages with the reader. Afanashev's message here is certainly one that echoes patriarchal, gendered ideas of the Russian 19th century.

### The Maiden and the Beast by Consiglieri Pedroso (1882)

*The Maiden and the Beast* (1882) is a Portuguese tale. Portugal was, at that time, ruled by a dictatorship imposed by King Carlos I. The tale introduces a theme of arranged marriages common in Western European traditions, as the father quite clearly knows he is trading his daughter for a gift. Moreover, the society's gendered view of men and women can also be identified in the characterisations of the maiden, her sisters and the Beast.

#### The maiden

In this tragic tale, the female character remains nameless and her physical appearance is not provided; in fact, little, if any, information is offered about her, except that she is the most adored daughter of three. Simply referred to as the man's daughter or the girl, she is not given an independent identity. Following the same theme as the classic tale, the young girl is the most loved daughter and the one for whom he will do anything.

The young girl earns this pedestal in her father's eyes because she is perfectly good, falling in line with gendered expectations of women. Patel (2009:17) highlighted that 'good women do not save the day, they do not scheme, nor do they get themselves out of bad situations', because 'good' women are expected to be compliant agents of gendered

expectations. The young girl is obedient, submissive and placid in her ways and so can be described as good, according to patriarchal expectations. The girl's obedience is shown in many ways throughout the tale. Firstly, when her father implores her to ask for a gift, she obliges, not wanting to pester him. Secondly, she agrees to leave her family for Beast, without a second guess, saying: '[d]o not distress yourself, father, for I shall go, and whatever God wills, will happen' (Pedroso 1882:42). Again, the young girl acts to please her father and surrenders herself on his behalf. Finally, the girl follows the Beast's instructions without question when she visits her family, returning, as he requires.

The 19-century Portuguese society's sex or gender system was largely patriarchal and women were expected to be subservient to their husbands, fathers or other male relatives (Solsten 1993). The society gave men the power in their households to rule over their wives and children (Wall et al. 2017:18). The young girl depicts this submission. Throughout the tale, she is instructed on what to do by men, and men's decisions determine her fate. Initially, her father and the Beast make a deal to trade the girl for an object. Then, living in the castle, she asks the Beast each time to visit her family. It is only with his permission that she is allowed to leave; she does not do so independently. When she follows the words of her father and the Beast, her life is happy, and all her needs are provided. In fact, it is only when the young girl unknowingly disobeys the Beast's instructions that true devastation occurs.

The Beast warns the young girl that her disobedience will lead to misfortune, if she disobeys: 'you and they [her sisters] will be the most unhappy girls in the world if you do not come back at the end of the three days' (Pedroso 1882:44). Her sisters interfere with her intent to return to the Beast, leading to the death of Beast and the girl. The young girl and her sisters depict Gilbert and Gubar's (2004) angel and monster characterisations through their contrasting behaviours. Happiness is depicted when the angel-like girl follows masculine authority and she is doomed when she does not. Pedroso represents the importance of feminine subservience with the death of Beast and the young girl, by presenting this negative consequence when the young girl does not fulfil his instructions. Even her sisters suffer misfortune because of their disobedience and deception – their behaving like the monster in Gilbert and Gubar's theory. Patel (2009:17) maintained that late 19th-century and 20th-century fairy tales depict two types of women 'the helpless and the malicious'. Whereas the young girl takes a submissive stance and allows events to happen to her, her two sisters actively go against the Beast's instructions. By countering patriarchal expectations of feminine obedience, the two sisters are ill-fated and lose their fortunes, slipping into poverty: a just punishment for their malicious behaviour. The tale's dark ending further highlights the consequences of interfering with patriarchal ideals, thus strengthening the power of submitting to patriarchal gender roles.



The father enters the castle and knowingly trades his daughter's life for 'a slice of roach off a green meadow' (Pedroso 1882:42). This roach is a type of fish, and so the young girl asks her father for a fish, which is native to a green meadow. This is definitely not possible, and so the young girl has asked for something, which is quite impossible to obtain, and in essence, she is asking for nothing. In taking the gift from the Beast and agreeing to trade her life, the father likens his daughter's life to the value of the gift; she is objectified in this exchange. The classic version of the tale does not depict a father who knows he is trading his daughter's life and including this lends Pedroso's tale more towards a commentary on the trade of women as objects.

Pedroso's father character is adamant to give his daughter what she asked for, and it is this desire to please her, which is his downfall. Although the gift is non-existent and impossible to find, Beast presents it to the father. By conjuring the roach on the meadow, the Beast demonstrates his desire to have the submissive maiden, and by presenting it to her father, he begins the exchange.

Pedroso depicts an exchange of a woman between two men. The trade between the Beast and father is further emphasised when the Beast gives the young girl money to present to her father. These funds can be compared with bride price often paid by a husband to his new wife's family. The sex or gender system of Western European marriage is depicted here. Rubin (1975:176) discussed how history has seen a number of women being exchanged 'simply as women'. Unlike men, who are traded for physical labour, etc., women are trafficked, exchanged and bartered – in the process of the marriage structures – just because they are women. The patriarchal idea behind such exchanges is that women are of equal value to objects that can be bartered by men. Therefore, the tale reflects this sex/gender system of bride payment, which is a financial exchange between men for desirable women.

Originally, marriages in Portugal were arranged relationships; however, later, families allowed their children to marry for love. These marriages always needed the permission of the family before they could commence, making the family an ever-apparent part of Portuguese marriages. Studies of traditional Portugal reveal that arranged marriages were not the country's common practice.

The exchange between the father and the voice reflects an arranged marriage deal often made in 19th-century Europe (Hauch 2019). Greenblatt (2005) theorises the connection between the literature and the social context. The European society included arranged marriages, and these made their way into 19th-century European tales. Evidence of these marriages confirm that marriages arranged by elders still occurred in and around Portugal and Western Europe.

### The Beast

Pedroso's Beast is elusive, interacting with the father and the young girl as a voice throughout the tale and only appearing

as himself just before he dies. Although he is not physically present, he still holds power and control over the other characters, such as the young girl and her father. Minimal interaction occurs between the Beast and the maiden in Pedroso's tale.

The Beast's death occurs because of the sisters' deception. They prevented the young girl from returning to him, and their choice to disobey the Beast's instructions resulted in his death. The evil sisters represent divisive, rebellious women who act against patriarchal expectations of their gender. As their actions go against the ideas of feminine submission, they face the dire consequences of Beast's death and their sister and personal poverty. Therefore, the tale conveys a message – those who behave outside of patriarchal, gendered expectations must face the destruction their actions procure. Enforcing gender roles, Greenblatt's (2005) theory of the connection between the text and context suggests that Pedroso is echoing the gendered construction of his Portuguese society. The reciprocal nature of literature and social context also means that Pedroso's enforcing of patriarchal gender roles influences his readers and encourages them to follow these gender roles as well.

### ***Beauty and the Horse* by Evald Tang Kristensen (1884)**

This Danish tale differs from the 'classic' storyline because *Beauty* plays no part in her destiny with the horse and the decisions of the men around her determine her future. Published during the late 19th century in Denmark, the tale includes a hierarchal dynamic between men and women, one in which women are expected to submit to male authority and control.

### Beauty

Beauty does not request any gift from her father. It is her father's action to pick the flowers for her, which causes the conflict in this tale. What makes Kristensen's tale even more starkly different to the classic is that Beauty's father actively decides to send Beauty to the horse to save himself. Whereas previous fathers are devastated and obliged because Beast forces them to, Kristensen's father character decides to barter Beauty for his own life. Kristensen even takes the exchange a step further than Pedroso's tale. Where Pedroso's father character knows the decision he is making in taking the gift, Kristensen's father character knowingly saves himself by agreeing to sacrifice his daughter. The idea presented is that the life of a young girl is worth less than a man's.

The exchange also replicates a trade-off between a father and suitor, similar to Pedroso's tale. Noticeably, the decision does not consider the girl's possible misgivings. She is traded from one man to another and must accept the decision. She is expected to be submissive and this is seen on two occasions. Firstly, when her father returns and informs her that 'he had been obliged to make the fatal promise to the horse, in order to save his life' (Kristensen 2016). Although her father clearly

indicates that he has traded her for his life, the young girl obliges: 'I am willing to follow you, father, and am always glad to help you' (Kristensen 2016). No mention is made of the poor girl's feelings towards the trade and so it seems they do not matter. Secondly, the young girl is passive and obliging when she meets the horse. She is fearful when she first sees him, but hides her anxiety as she 'had all she could do in keeping her tears back' (Kristensen 2016). She conceals her true feelings of fear and doubt and quietly conforms. Beauty's behaviour here aligns with patriarchal expectations of women and so the tale encourages these gendered behaviours.

Beauty does not always find it easy to conform, however. At first, she is unable to make the decision to stay with someone who looks like a horse, saying that 'it would seem very singular to live with a horse all her lifetime' (Kristensen 2016) – highlighting the difficulty of the decision. It is her pity that makes her agree to be with him. It is not as easy as agreeing to be with someone who is not her ideal suitor but coming to terms with his unappealing looks and Beastly form takes time. Stressing the difficulty of this decision makes Beauty's final choice to be with the horse almost heroic. The picture of the depressed, sighing horse is touching, and Beauty's decision to stay with him comes as a courageous choice. Her decision is rewarded with a handsome suitor whom she marries. Her bravery and commitment to patriarchal expectations have afforded her the happiness of marrying an attractive man.

Showing the difficulty of Beauty's dilemma, Kristensen presents a clear, realistic example of the decision that young girls, who are forced into arranged marriages, were forced to make. He champions the young girl for making such a decision, and therefore, encourages those young girls of 19th-century Denmark to bravely make this decision in line with social expectations. Furthermore, that Beauty is objectified and submissive, with no independence, speaks to social context. The 19th-century Europe afforded women little independence and they were not even allowed to vote until early 20th century (Nielsen 2014:49); moreover, because they were barred from finding work, their lives revolved around preparing for marriage (Appell 2001). In addition, Turner (1913) stressed the devastating situation of Victorian women, their lack of independence, sufficient education and the painstaking steps taken by the suffrage movement to finally receive the right for women to vote. This social context and its gendered ideas are evident in Kristensen's work. Beauty's happy ending and marriage to a handsome man stress the importance of adhering to the society's gendered expectations, which maintains that through embodying submissiveness, young girls can also receive happiness and satisfaction.

### The horse

The 'Beast' in Kristensen's tale is not the grotesque, frightening Beast of earlier tales. However, because he is an animal, he is undesirable to Beauty.

The horse is interested in the merchant's daughters and is quick to demand one. His words 'give me the daughter

whose name is Beauty' (Kristensen 2016) reduce Beauty into an object, which can be obtained. The horse does not consider that Beauty may have misgivings about being given from one man to another, and rather simply suggests that her father make the decision for her. Beauty is given little value here; moreover, her diminished state is presented as equivalent to an object. Hence, the horse's words about giving the girl to him reflects the position women held in the 19th-century Danish society. A position that defines women as inferior to men and in a chattel position.

### ***Zelinda and the Monster* as recorded in a collection of tales by Thomas Frederick Crane (1885)**

Originating in Italy, *Zelinda and the Monster* (1885) contains commentary on the gendered expectations of 19th-century Italian men and women. It paints an intricate picture of a submissive young girl who sacrifices herself to a dragon-like monster – an action that saves her father from death.

### **Zelinda**

Zelinda is described as fairer, more civil and has a better disposition than Rosina and Marietta. She is painted as a polite and well-mannered girl, embodying patriarchally expected feminine passivity and virtue. Not only is she described as a more agreeable woman than her sisters but she also behaves as such. Zelinda passively agrees to take her father's place and is willing to be sacrificed to a monster without complaint. This fulfils the explanation offered by Gilbert and Gubar (2004:815), who argued that the patriarchally 'good' female character has no life or will of her own and simply lives to serve the men in her life. Zelinda lives according to this dynamic, because she exhibits no independent thought, action or opinion in the tale and seeks only to please others. Her decision to go to the monster's castle is influenced by her sisters, who demand that she takes her father's place, and she decides to marry the monster to save her dying father. Ultimately, Zelinda does not make decisions to ensure her own happiness or survival but to save or satisfy others around her. She surrenders control of her own life and willingly accepts the hand that deals with her life. According to Gilbert and Gubar (2004), behaving in the typical, expected ways of femininity suggests that Zelinda portrays the angelic female character – emphasising even further her good nature and kind heart. Once again, the reference to a woman as an angel is apparent in the 19th-century literature, similar to Patmore's (1858) *Angel in The House*.

Zelinda agrees to become the monster's 'faithful and constant wife' (Crane 2016); these words symbolise servitude and passivity. They emphasise the inferior position she and young 19th-century women have when marrying men, who are expected to reign over their wives (Reeder 2010:20). Placed mainly in the private sector of the home, Italian women were positioned under their husbands' rule and expected to behave accordingly.

In discussing female archetypes in tales, Nanda (2014:246) states that 'good' girls get married to handsome princes and live in castles, happily ever after. As a reward for behaving along gendered expectations, these girls are allowed to be happy, and Zelinda is no exception. In the end, the monster becomes a handsome prince because she agrees to marry him. Her submissive decision to marry a man she does not desire further underscores her subjugation and surrender to masculine authority. However, the tale concludes with the assurance that when a girl submits to male leadership, she will be rewarded with a happy life ever after.

### The monster

The monster is a terrifying Beast that resembles a dragon. When he first appears, he emerges out of flames from the ground. This creates an interesting comparison between the monster and the devil, and amplifies his threatening demeanour. This harsh exterior is just a prelude to his ruthless, domineering behaviour. He does not allow the father to leave without agreeing to pay his debt. However, the monster goes further in stating that he will kill either the father or Zelinda, which highlights his vicious, powerful, masculine nature. Reeder (2010:22) contended that according to 19th-century Italy, theft was considered a 'sin that the confessor would not absolve because it harms one's neighbours and, above all, stains one's honour'. The monster's seemingly extreme reaction to the poor man stealing his rose is then easier to understand in this context. Through the monster's extreme anger and the threat of death, the tale illustrates Italian society's ideas on theft, reinforcing the notion that it is intolerable.

Although a frightening monster in the presence of the father, when alone with Zelinda, the monster is affectionate and caring for her. He sees that she has everything she desires and 'make[s] loving speeches to her' (Crane 2016). He behaves in a courteous fashion – so much so that, despite appearances, Zelinda begins to see him as civilised. The monster's more human-like demeanour presents a different side of the relationship between Zelinda and the monster. Presenting the monster's more caring side emphasises that this relationship is potentially not all bad, as it initially seems. Moreover, when relating this to the social context, it seems to suggest that the marriage between a young girl and an older, less desirable man may not be a bad idea as it initially seems. Here, the tale's storyline advocates for a woman's submissive agreement to an arranged marriage, suggesting that the social expectations of his society advocated for the same thing.

However, his behaviour is simply not enough for Zelinda to overlook his appearance and she cannot agree to marry him. What is different about this tale is that the young girl is forced into marrying the monster to save her father. Not only is she asked to move into the castle and face possible death to save him but she is also told that, if she does not marry the monster, her father will die. Zelinda is compelled to sacrifice herself for a second time and agrees to marry the hideous monster. When the monster transforms into a handsome prince, the

tale seems to convey a message, which champions the notion that a submissive woman will be rewarded with a happy life ever after. Moreover, it is her compliance with this gendered sex/gender system that produces the handsome husband. This also elevates her own husband and leads one to conclude, based on the tale, that within the confines of marriage, a woman's role is to uplift her husband's status rather than her own.

### **The Fairy Serpent collected and shared by Adele M. Fiedle (1893)**

The extreme gender divide and inequality of early Chinese societies is depicted in *The Fairy and the Serpent*. The tale speaks of arranged marriages and the bride price, which is popular in Chinese tradition. Moreover, it also sheds light on the gendered ideas of the times, which encourage 19th-century Chinese women to remain submissive and domestic, whilst men carried the authority both in the home and in the public sector (Yang 2014).

### Beauty

Similar to Kristensen's tale, the young girl does not ask her father for a rose or any sort of gift. Her father, out of love and devotion, picks the flower for her and her sisters. Thus, the punishment of living with the snake is not a result of the young girl's actions or requests. Yet, she still offers to leave her family and marry the snake. Once again, few details of Yin are provided regarding her physical appearance, who remains unnamed. However, she depicts the skills revered among most young woman of her era in her domesticity and embroidery.

The divide between men and women was clear in early China. Yin and Yang philosophy prescribed the contrasting positions of men and women. 'Yin' was considered the woman and the ideas of being soft, passive and caring, whereas 'Yang' represented the man and his domination, power and control (Zhu 2018:391). Furthermore, Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are Chinese philosophies that comment on morals and ethics. These philosophies are what cemented the gendered Chinese social context, as they encouraged women to embody a more submissive, passive position in relation to empowered men. Cheung (2014:28) argued how women were presented with a choice: either find happiness in their lives being confined at home completing tasks considered feminine or 'simply accept fate passively without improving themselves'. Women were provided no independence to make decisions and were limited to the private sector. Cheung (2014:28) highlighted a Chinese idiom, which sums up the poor position women faced in early China: 'a woman's virtue is to have no talent'. She was to quietly devote herself to her household and act only in ways that would benefit her husband or the patriarchal society at large, not herself.

The selfless behaviour expected of Chinese women is reflected in the female protagonist. She is devoted to her father and agrees to marry the serpent 'if he [father] would



care for his own health properly' (Fielde 1893:49). Her actions are a result of concern for her father, and she is willing to sacrifice herself for his safety. This tale reinforces the patriarchal notion that when a young girl surrenders herself, she will be rewarded. This is seen when the young girl agrees to marry the serpent, and he is transformed into an attractive man. The success and happiness of the couple are shown when the young girl and her newly transformed husband provide gifts to her family. Hence, the young girl's life is changed when she agrees to selflessly marry the serpent. Greenblatt (2005) emphasised the connection between the tale and its social context, and so connects the young girl's behaviour to the gendered expectations of early Chinese society. Complying with the social context's patriarchy sex or gender system affords her the opportunity to live a happy, fulfilled life.

The tale compares the young girl's happiness with her 'less happy' family (Fielde 1893:51). By refusing to comply with their father's request to marry the serpent, the selfish sisters place their family at risk of life-threatening consequences. The potential dangers are clear when the father ponders 'the misfortunes that would overwhelm his whole family should the contract be disregarded' (Fielde 1893:46). Their selfish disregard for their family ultimately leads to their own unhappiness. By disregarding the expectations of Chinese patriarchal society, they bear the brunt of their disobedience. The message emphasised here is that women who behave contrary to expectations will forfeit happiness, whereas those who altruistically put the needs of others before their own and surrender to male authority will be rewarded with contented lives.

The young girl's choice to marry the serpent illustrates the role of arranged marriages prevalent in 19th-century China. Matchmaking or betrothal marriage involved elders deciding which man and woman would marry. The couple were provided little, if any, say in who they married. It is likely that the partners chosen for them were not the choice the bride or groom would have made themselves; however, their desires were of no importance. The young girl's decision reflects the expectations of Chinese marriage practices: to passively agree to any marriage relationship offered to her. The young girl is perfectly feminine when she moves in with the serpent, waiting on him and cleaning up after him. She performs her expected duties with no complaint. Her reward for her acceptable behaviour is the serpent's transformation. By transforming the serpent into a handsome man, the author is able to emphasise the gratification and joy a young woman will receive if she allows herself to marry the man her family chooses, even if that means ignoring her own dissatisfaction or disagreement.

Another important part of Chinese marriage practice, and the dominant sex/gender system, is the bride price paid by the groom's parents to the bride's family. This is paid to acknowledge the debt a new husband has to his wife's family for allowing her to enter his family. The marriage means her family loses her as a worker in their home and any children

she bears will belong to her husband's family and take his name; thus, they lose any offspring as well. The bride price is a way of recognising and compensating her family's loss. It is essential to recognise the bride's limited value to her parents: her ability to cook, clean and bear children. Within the tale, the gifts the young girl and her husband present to her family resemble the bride price practice. Again, the author creates the tale in line with Chinese customs and dominant sex/gender system, therefore, encouraging the use of these practices within the society. The gifts are a symbol of wealth and abundance and so in presenting them to the young girl's family, the serpent-turned-handsome-groom proves he is able to take care of the father's daughter and make her happy.

### The serpent

Similar to *The Enchanted Tsarévich*, Fielde writes of a serpent Beast, and this decision is fascinating, considering the Chinese context. Chinese symbolism describes a serpent as a symbol of 'good luck and prosperity' (Chao 1979:199). The animal was popular throughout Chinese history, and there is evidence of snake graphics on weapons, pillars on buildings and family seals.

Selecting a serpent, the author references this symbolism, suggesting that if the young girl chooses to be with the serpent, she will receive this prosperity and luck. Her final decision to save the serpent means that she has chosen him, and so she receives good luck and abundant happiness embodied by the snake.

The serpent is described as having 'warty' skin and initially Beauty sees him as 'repulsive' (Fielde 1893:50); his physical appearance cannot be easily overlooked. However, contrary to his repulsive exterior, the serpent is good hearted and treats the young girl well. His immense love for her is seen as he longs for the girl whenever she leaves his side. It is his loveable treatment that causes her to develop feelings for him and she becomes accustomed to his appearance, also missing him when he is gone. Upon seeing the serpent dying of thirst, the young girl rushes to save him. Her duty to him grew as she began to know and be loved by him, so much so that she is not repulsed when she plunges him into the water, but does so eagerly to save his life.

This character exhibits the patriarchal gender role of masculinity acting with domination and superiority, yet showing tenderness; thus, assuring young unmarried girls that their submission to male authority will be rewarded with tender love. It also encourages specific masculine behaviours and insists that a man should take care of his wife. Greenblatt (2005:4) postulated that the literature cannot be separated from the understanding of its author. The tale's ideas on the treatment of women in marriage comes through here. Although he is the head of the household and must hold the superior position, the serpent's treatment of the maiden reflects his respect for her and they are both rewarded with life and happiness.



## Conclusion

Each of the international tales includes commentaries on gender, relevant to its social context. The tales differ in particular ways, and each does incorporate its social context in a unique way; however, each tale exhibits a sex or gender system of feminine inferiority and masculine superiority. Each tale perpetuates the idea that submissive young girls are to accept their Beastly suitors and show love, affection or commitment to them. If they do this, they are rewarded by Beasts' metamorphosis into handsome suitors. This reward secures the girls' happiness and ensures that they are content at the end of the tales. These endings and the happy women who receive them further strengthen the sex or gender system evident within each society, encouraging the submissive choices of women.

Furthermore, the tales' gendered make-up provides insight into the social contexts in which each tale is written. The irremovable and unavoidable connection between the text and the social context allows one to view a society through the tales it produces. The extent of the patriarchal thought in each tale paints a fascinating picture of the 19th-century historical context as one that encouraged men and women to behave according to particular gendered ideals. The gender hierarchy represented in each tale shows that this was universal throughout the 19th century, and beyond the sociocultural norms and values of any one society or culture.

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The author declares that no competing interest exists.

### Author's contributions

The author declares that she the sole author of this research article.

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