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La esencia del ser y del quehacer docente

maestro



Temachtiani

La esencia del ser y del quehacer docente

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Portada: Medusa
Acrílico sobre tela / 150 x 110 cm

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Editorial

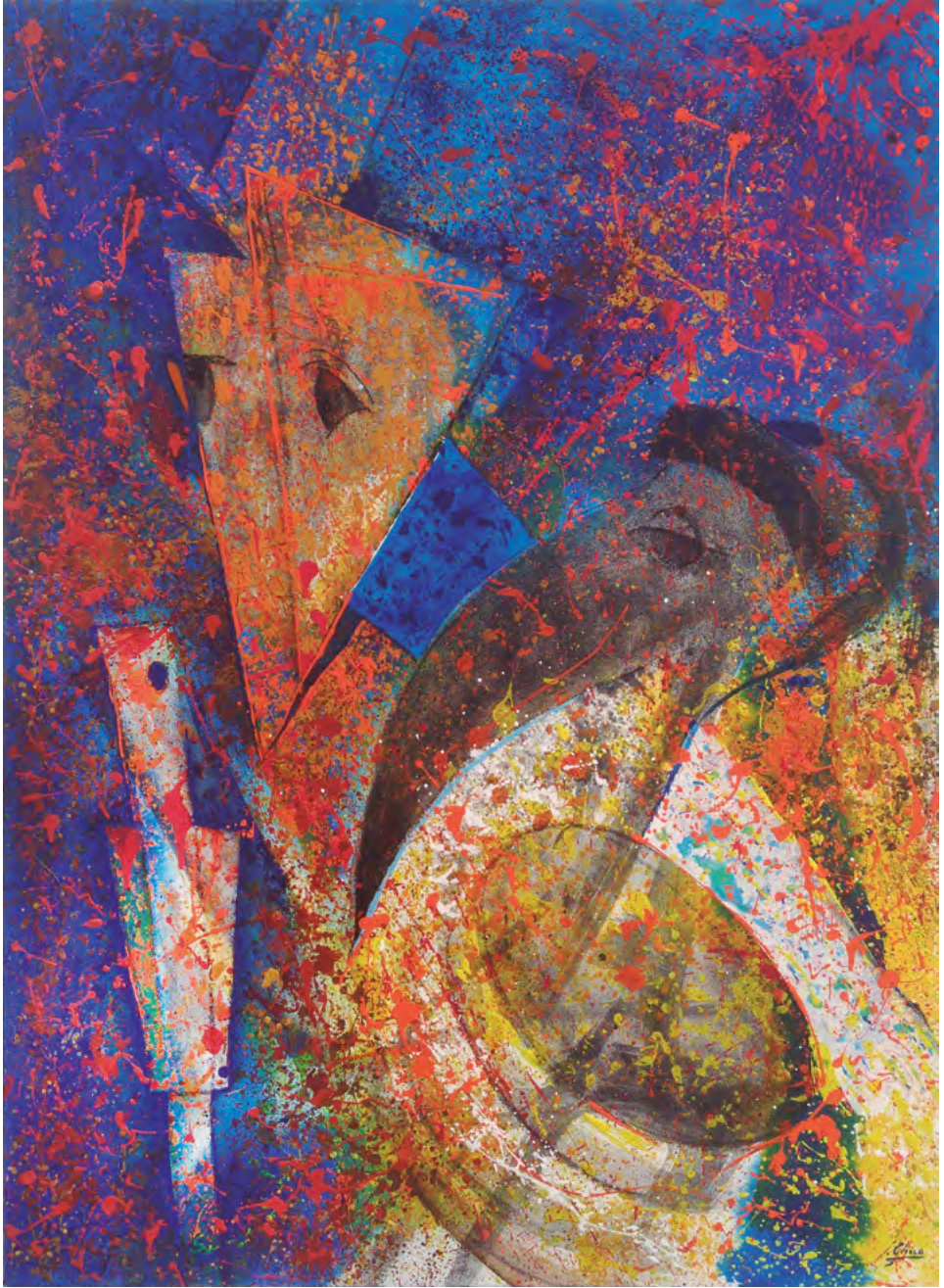
Las instituciones de educación superior han dejado de ser el claustro medieval, donde la única fuente de información era la palabra del profesor. Hoy en día el profesor más que una persona de consulta y un orientador de los ensayos, debe ser un investigador que se preocupe por los problemas de su entorno y de su institución educativa. En este sentido, la revista *Temachtiani* sigue siendo una ventana de diálogo, de experiencias y participación para los docentes e investigadores. Con el fin de ampliar su difusión, se ha implementado la distribución de la revista entre el mundo científico, tal como se observa en la página de la Red de Investigadores Educativos del estado de Chihuahua (REDIECH) y en la Red de Cuerpos Académicos de Investigación Educativa de la Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (REDCAIE-UAEMéx), así como en la plataforma del Sindicato de Maestros al Servicio del Estado de México.

En este número se incluye la participación de maestros de diversas partes de la República Mexicana con temas de gran interés como el de la paridad de género en los cargos de elección popular en el estado de Tabasco que presenta el maestro Remedio Cerino, quien formula algunas propuestas con el fin de que se homologuen los criterios para que el principio de paridad se cumpla en todo el país. Para ello, sugiere que desde las aulas, los niños y las niñas tengan una educación de calidad basada en los derechos humanos y la igualdad entre los géneros. Lincoln Felipe Ríos Gallegos reporta los hallazgos encontrados en un trabajo de investigación que muestra un sinnúmero de situaciones que aún se siguen viviendo en el trabajo de las unidades de servicio de apoyo dentro de las primarias regulares; de ahí que pueda servir de pauta para el análisis sobre el funcionamiento de dichas unidades.

El interés superior de la niñez como base de la educación es un tema que nos presenta Guillermo Hernández Cuarto en donde señala que los niños deben tener un tratamiento preferente y especial; por ello, la constitución federal y los instrumentos internacionales, garantizan que el interés superior de la niñez, guíe el diseño, ejecución, seguimiento y evaluación de las políticas públicas, incluyendo por supuesto a la educación. Víctor Manuel Galán Hernández, Carolina Serrano Barquín y Héctor Paulino Serrano Barquín nos presentan un artículo en inglés donde se destaca la importancia de la literatura infantil en la construcción de la identidad sexual y de los estereotipos de género durante la infancia y que, través de los primeros años, los niños aprenden un conjunto de actitudes, comportamientos y valores en su contexto sociocultural ya sea mediante la instrucción o la imitación del comportamiento del adulto. El artículo sobre "Arte y paz desde las prácticas docentes en bachillerato", presentado por María Zareth Cruz Hernández es el resultado de la investigación sobre intereses de estudiantes de un grupo de tercer grado en una escuela preparatoria oficial del gobierno del Estado de México, al desarrollar proyectos académicos en las materias que conforman el mapa curricular del quinto semestre de bachillerato en el ciclo escolar 2015-2016. Marisa Concepción Carrillo Manríquez en el documento "Una mirada de género en la escuela primaria" describe los resultados de un proceso de investigación cualitativa que se realizó en una escuela primaria de la ciudad de Chihuahua. Los resultados permiten dar cuenta del cómo se viven las relaciones de género en estos centros escolares y lo que se deriva de éstas. En "Educación. Signo de un Estado-nación", Antonio Cuadros Medina da cuenta de la importancia que entraña la educación para reproducir el sentido de pertenencia al grupo mediante símbolos que cohesionan al colectivo, a través de los conocimientos heredados; asimismo, analiza el papel del Estado para resguardar el control de las instituciones. Alma Espinosa Zárate y Sandra Isabel Guadarrama Rojas en el artículo "Las reformas educativas: sentido y significado de las prácticas docentes, a partir del reconocimiento de los Otros" presentan una reflexión sobre las recientes reformas educativas y la labor que los docentes realizan para que sus prácticas pedagógicas transformen los procesos de formación y profesionalización; aludiendo para tal efecto, a la formación como conciencia y cultura. En este número, se presenta Mario Arturo Alonso Vanegas con una parte de su obra poética. La ilustración corre a cargo del maestro Julio Chico, reconocido artista plástico mexicano.

La Revista *Temachtiani* se plantea una etapa de consolidación y de apertura a nuevos públicos y horizontes intelectuales. Para ello, se ha hecho necesario fortalecer su estructura organizativa con personas y objetivos que enriquezcan el proyecto editorial. Por estas razones y por el importante impacto que ha tenido la publicación, es que a partir de este número, se integran destacados y reconocidos investigadores como dictaminadores externos de la Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (Facultades de Derecho y de Ciencias de la Conducta) y de la Escuela Normal Superior del Valle de Toluca, quienes pertenecen al Sistema Nacional de Investigadores de CONACYT, al Comité Académico de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos y son representantes ante la Red Interna de Cooperación Internacional de la UAEMéx. Es un compromiso continuar trabajando para alcanzar estándares editoriales de mayor calidad.

Sara Graciela Mejía Peñaloza



Los juguetes de Karlita
Acrílico sobre tela / 127 x 90 cm

Breaking gender stereotypes through children's literature: the beauty and the beast

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Summary

I. Introduction; II. The denied woman; III. The beauty, the start of a female rebellion; IV. Conclusion

Abstract: children's literature undoubtedly has an important role in the construction of the sexual identity and of the gender stereotypes during infancy. Through the first years, children learn a set of attitudes, behaviors and values in their sociocultural context -formal and informal education-; either through instruction or imitation of adult's behavior. Thus, social reality has historically been structured from a binary and confronted "male/female" system and its cultural reduction determines the gender inequalities which affect social coexistence. These inequalities are manifested in cultural products such as the children's literature and its derivatives –films, games and toys, among others– that construct sexual-identity confronting codes and symbolization. This way, it is necessary to perform an interpretative analysis of children's tales to reveal the construction and promotion of gender stereotypes, which may induce symbolic violence, and are assumed by society as "natural".

Key words: gender violence, childhood, children's literature.

Sumario

I. Introducción; II. La mujer negada; III. La bella o el inicio de la rebelión femenina; IV. Conclusiones

Resumen: es indudable la importancia que tiene la literatura infantil en la construcción de la identidad sexual, así como la construcción de estereotipos de género en la infancia, ya que desde los primeros años de vida, las niñas y niños reciben de su contexto sociocultural, una mezcla de actitudes, conductas y valores que son aprendidos dentro de la educación formal e informal, ya como modos de aprendizaje o modelos de imitación del comportamiento adulto. Esta realidad social se estructura históricamente a partir del sistema binario y confrontado "masculinidad/feminidad", cuya reducción cultural determina inequidades de género que afectan la convivencia social. Estas inequidades se manifiestan en diversos consumos culturales tales como los cuentos infantiles y sus derivados ya sean películas, juegos y juguetes entre otros que construyen códigos y simbolizaciones que confrontan equivocadamente las identidades sexuales. Por tal motivo, se realiza un análisis interpretativo de cuentos infantiles que evidencian la construcción y fomento de estereotipos discriminatorios de género que en muchas ocasiones provocan violencia simbólica y que la sociedad asume de forma "natural" para develarlos.

Palabras clave: violencia de género, infancia, literatura infantil.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the fairy and princess tales have been limited to the reproduction and promotion of the traditional female roles, as the confined housewife (Cinderella), the eternally passive and helpless woman (The Sleeping Beauty) and the long locked up woman who, because of her weakness, is always male dependent. However, The Beauty and the Beast, which has long been a well-known children's tale through adaptations in plays, films and literary versions, among other artistic expressions, depicts the story of a young woman who accepts to sacrifice herself in order to save her old father's life, but, who ends up saving a prince under the appearance of a monster. This tale deals with the transformation from physical ugliness to a moral beauty (Gillig, 2001), and although it is widely known, its author's name has been forgotten, giving more reconnaissance to another writer who

modified the original story into just a fairy tale. Although based in stories from the past, *Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve (1685-1755)* is The Beauty and the Beast first version author. She was born being a daughter to an aristocrat family and married Lt. Jean Baptiste Gallon de Villeneuve in 1706. Soon after her marriage she would know her husband's addiction to gambling when he lost the money and lands from the dowry. Some years later, a young widow without economical support, she moved to Paris and later started writing as a way to earn money. This way, between 1734 and 1753, she published a book of tales (Haase, 2008) with the name of *La jeune américaine, ou Les contes marines*, followed by what would be considered her best work: *La jardinière de Vincennes*.

II. THE DENIED WOMAN

La jeune américaine, ou Les contes marines' first tale is *The Beauty and the Beast* (*La Belle et la Bête*), which shows not only the courtship and marriage between a monster-transformed prince and an apparently merchant's daughter, but also the Beast's transformation and the Beauty's genealogy. However, as a shorter story, this tale would be best known by the hand of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, who, after Mme. Barbot de Villeneuve's death, re-wrote the story, ending with the marriage after the Beast's transformation into a prince.

The story's relevance lies upon the way the gender stereotypes are the object of a subtle criticism. The male is not represented as that kind, benevolent and brave protector. And the woman, on the other hand, is not completely depicted as in other tales. In fact, there are some elements between the Beauty and other female characters from different tales which permit the perception of a different woman.

Despite the fact that it has not always been that way, women have generally been put aside, giving more importance to the male, laying these ideas on the economical tasks which are based on the individual's biological sex (Conway, Bourque & Scott, 2003). This way, the biological vision, along with the economical one, would establish the role women would play. And even though women have not been exactly the same throughout history, it is assumed that, as Luna García (2010, p. 26) states, "their destiny, ideals and social functions seem to remain the same", promoting, therefore, gender stereotypes.

For instance, in the Greco-Roman culture, the most important figure in the family is the *kyrios* or *paterfamilias*, who, as the head of the family, possesses the power of decision upon everything and everyone in the family, even upon life and death of relatives and slaves (Jenkins, 1998). He was a kind of king in a private kingdom, where he was the master and could give or take anything. Although inside the family nobody held more power than this man, Mary Harlow (2014) claims that the *paterfamilias*' ability to control his wife, children and slaves, as well as to increase the lands and properties was socially judged.

This androcentric, patrilineally organized society gives women a secondary role, reduced to just a participation inside the house, where, according to Delgado (1988), without any consideration of the social status, women has to perform activities related to cooking, weaving, and children care. Besides, she only has contact with other women and servants. These activities are done under her husband's supervision, who is even believed to have the obligation to teach his wife how to manage all the activities developed in the household. This shows the way women go from the patriarch control to the husband dominance, always excluded from public life, lacking of liberty.

Women have been differently considered. Once they were seen as spoils of war for soldiers or as a prize considering their value by their virtues, their family name and fertility. This was the origin of the woman protectionist belief that, in the long term, led to confinement; making possible the creation of indoor areas exclusive for women. And not being able to leave, they would be forced to stay inside the household attending and obeying. Even in the early XII c. Gilbert of Limerick (*Balcão, 2001*) would emphasize that women serve men by claiming that they are wives to those who either pray, make war or work.

The Middle Ages would bring changes to the social and family order which would make the peasant families women leave the family space to work beside men. In the nobility, in contrast, women are still confined under the absolute control of men. For instance, it is said that women have no right to inherit (*Wilkinson, 2014*), since this was an exclusive right for male relatives, and even when there were no male relatives, the husband could become the heir. This would only leave the possibility for women to inherit in the case of not having male relatives. And even if the case, since it was likely for a woman to become fatherless before being an adult, all the properties and goods would be in charge of the mother or, as seen in *Goldberg (2014)*, the town government would name a male guardian who would take the inheritance for his own benefit, even arranging a marriage between the heiress and a son of his own, so to acquire total control of everything.

The latter shows the way women have been subordinated to the male (a father, a brother or a husband, including his family). In other words, the woman is disadvantaged vis à vis the man, due to the fact that while he is permitted certain liberties, especially sexual, she is demanded virginity (*Goldberg, 2014*). Men can inherit and women cannot unless with a man's assistance. All in all, women must be submissive to men, since in *Paul's letters to the Ephesians (v. 21-24)*, it is said that just as Christ is the head of the church, man is the head of the woman; consequently, she has to be obedient to man.

In addition, as a result of the treatment of higher class women, an architectural modification of the houses would be created. The peasants' houses only had a room that functioned as the labor room, stable, kitchen and dormitory. In aristocrats' houses chimneys were developed (*Adams, 2014*), and with them, dormitories exclusive for women, where they could develop privacy (*Balcão, 2001*), since husbands and wives could sleep in separate rooms, but the wife's room was away from public spaces. From this, it is perceived that religion determined social and family life, including male and female identities, as well as their roles in the social group. What is more, children differentiated education would establish that the most important virtue of a woman was the virginity and, because of this it became necessary to protect her. It was believed that due to her lustful nature (*Balcão, 2001*) only her marriage to God or to a man could help her reach a little of Virgin Mary. From this, it was seen as possible and necessary the existence of arranged marriages (*Goldberg, 2014*) even with seven year-old girls, although this practiced was rejected by the church.

This context full of social and institutional contradictions also shaped the vision of women based on religious beliefs considering women as evil and sin bearers (*Duby, 1981*). Thus, since their early years, boys were preferably treated inside a family (*Goldberg, 2014*). At seven, education for boys and girls was not the same. Girls stayed with their mothers since they were seen as a model for the girl's education. From their mothers, they would learn, according to Ward (2014), about chastity, virtuosity and all the tasks necessary for the time when she is married, such as, spinning, weaving, housework and taking care of children. All of these skills were expected to be reinforced by the husband soon after the marriage. On the other hand, daughters to nobility would also learn music, dancing and embroidering. At the end of the Middle Ages, in addition, they could be taught to read as a complement to the religious devotion.

At the birth of the Modern Ages, even though families still follow the patriarchal and offspring model, there are two modifications in the way it is conceived. On the one hand, there is more acceptance of the religious marriages as the only possible way of living as a couple and procreation. On the other hand, family was seen as a reflection of the state and church, where the male was the head and authority of organizations. This idea was justified on the supposedly "female's gender's scant rationality and the incapacity of minors" (*Cavallo, 2014, p. 17*), which legitimized the father's and husband's guidance and authority inside the family. According to this vision, the higher class males should guard and increase the assets, select the servants and, when necessary, discipline his wife, children, and servants, all seen as subordinates. The wife's role in this model was to supervise, under the male's orders, everything related to food, dress, as well as the children's and servant's moral and religious instruction.

Between the XVI and XVII centuries, during the transition from a theocentric to an anthropocentric society, a new vision of the family is spread, partly by the art, through the paintings where emotional ties bond each member in the family (*Cunningham, 2012*), which may be found in *The Beauty and the Beast*, in the merchant seems to have an emotional based relationship with his sons and daughters. Although this new model does not include the extended family, the assets and servants, it is still patriarchal. According to *Cavallo and Evangelisti (2014)* the authority of the male over the female and children is still accepted. This way, the family is where girls will learn to become good Christians and to subordinate to fathers and husbands.

During the XVIII century, children start being considered an important part of the family. Nevertheless, when adults, women would still be considered as minors since they are still under their husbands' supervision, the same way it had been in the past. In fact, such as boys and girls, women had to learn that their will depended on others' decisions –fathers or husbands– (*Cunningham, 2012*), therefore, learning to deny their own ideas and dreams and desires, because it was accepted that "women, in general, possess a weaker but more inquisitive mind than men" (*Fénelon, 2014, p. 4*). Furthermore, being considered as inferior to men, it is commonly thought that they lack of the necessary abilities to educate children, and could spoil them by coddling.

In France, there is a vindication of public education and knowledge (*Gadotti, 2003*), although there is still an elitist and rather gender differentiated education, exclusive to wealthy families. This differentiation can be found in treatises on education, such as in François Fénelon's *Treatise on the Education of Daughters (originally published in 1687)*, where he shaped some proposals on the way wealthy families' daughters should be educated and would claim that because of their natural weakness it was not convenient to give them studies since they could become infatuated (*Fénelon, 2014*). What is more, he suggests that women should only be educated to love and serve men, so their education should only consider their social duties. Therefore, the aim of women's education should be to teach them to be quiet and to serve. Fénelon even claims to find the origin to his proposals

III. THE BEAUTY, THE START OF A FEMALE REBELLION

on some experiences of women who were ridiculed by their own desire of knowledge and science. To illustrate, having been born in a male dominated world, women interested in knowledge knew little appreciation of their work and faced rejection from their male colleagues; and yet were only considered as being assistants. To summarize, they were, as shown in *Alic (2014)*, satirized because of their supposedly pretensions of knowing. And he goes even beyond by claiming that all those women who pretend to learn science become laughable beings. And not only does he reject science. *Fénelon (2014)* emphasizes his rejections to books promoting fantasy through created adventures since they have no relationship with the real life of a world viewed through the eyes of business, meaning that only the utilitarian learning may be valid. So, the woman who does not follow the pattern will not be socially accepted.

In addition to this, Fénelon stated that knowledge could make women vain and pretentious and that the only science they should know was to manage the house do as they were told. With this, the patriarchal family's perception, conceiving women as lacking of intelligence and the ability to think by themselves is reinforced, since it is inferred that women are relevant only when taking care of their husbands inside their houses, pursuing their husbands' happiness.

It was in a world like this that *Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve (1695-1755)* was born a daughter to an aristocrat family. This could have made possible an education for her under Fénelon's precept.

Literature is to entertain, teach and, as stated by *Ros García (2013)*, when reading, boys and girls construct their own vision of the world around them. At the same time, it promotes symbols working as starting points for the behavior models adopted by minors in such a way that each individual accepts his or her place in society and what is expected from him or her.

Traditional and fairy tales were originally created to be listened to and, when retrieved from oral culture, oblivion is prevented. Nevertheless, in order for the children's literature to achieve promotion, it must fulfill postulates like didacticism and morality (*Cerrillo, 2007*). On the contrary, *Larrosa (2013)* states that literature does not educate although it fosters certain models people, especially children, learn; which fit into the most accepted social models of the time.

Regarding gender, traditional tales promote female stereotypes, such as the submissive woman, who does not support the family economically, and the activities she performs have no importance neither to the family nor the community. In addition, they promote women as being weak, unintelligent, submissive, disobedient and even irresponsible; hence fostering the belief that women are similar to children, because they also need to be prevented from harm due to their lack of intelligence and skills if they break rules or disobey the male.

Therefore, the submissive, quiet and hardworking woman would become the only accepted role model. This woman would also have other characteristics, such as beauty being one of her most important features. After that, according to this patriarchal vision, she would need to show how valuable she is through the abilities to perform all those activities peculiar to her sex. And, in spite of being a princess, she should know that her place is the house, the kitchen, or a bed: always locked.

In spite of the existing similarities between female characters in traditional and fairy tales with those in *The Beauty and the Beast*, there are also different features that make the Beauty a female character trying to escape from the patriarchal stories' female stereotypes. Contrary to the common vision of women at the time, this story intends to leave those stereotypes behind through a subtle criticism of the gender roles imposed to women.

The forest is a constant symbolic space in the tales. *Segura (2014)* claims that the forest represents a dangerous place for women and a welcoming place for those who will not follow the normal conventions. In *Rapunzel*, an old witch takes a man's baby daughter away and locks her up in a tower in the forest. *Snowwhite* runs away to the forest, where she finds a house to hide in. And it is in the forest where the *Little Red Riding Hood* will find some perils with the wolf.

In the *Beauty and the Beast*, the forest is not necessarily a dangerous space. It is not a place full of villains and witches, but a shelter to the merchant and his family after their misfortune, where the only possible crime was to have lost their richness. After rejections from family friends, daughters' suitors and "having no resource whatever, they shut themselves up in their country house, situated in the middle of an almost impenetrable forest, and which might as well be considered the saddest abode in the world" (*Barbot de Villeneuve, 2014, p. 194-195*). The family takes refuge in that place, which is not perceived as a confinement, but a protection, independence and happiness for one daughter. Therefore, for the Beauty, the forest symbolizes freedom from her social bonds, since in that hidden cottage she is happy and even tries to amuse her father and brothers trying to forget her past life.

The ideal model promoted by the tales is beauty. The most accepted women are beautiful, therefore they are good. *Snowwhite, in the Brothers Grimm's version (2003, p. 219)* was "prettier and prettier, and when she was seven years old her complexion was as clear as the noon day, and more beautiful than the Queen herself". It was the same with *Rapunzel*, "who grew to be the most beautiful child under the sun" (*Grim, 2003, p. 95*). *Perrault's Cinderella (2002, p. 146)* is so beautiful that even when wearing "bad clothes and all, was still a hundred times more beautiful than her sisters, even though

they dressed superbly". When attending the prince's ball "a great silence then fell; people stopped dancing and the musicians stopped playing, everyone was so intent on observing the great beauty of that unknown young lady" (*Perrault, 2002, p. 150*). She is so beautiful that even the old king whispers his wife that he had never seen such a beautiful and lovable girl, establishing the common conception that the beautiful woman is also a good woman and the fact of being good comes as a result of prettiness.

The Beauty, although sharing a characteristic with other female characters from different tales, her beauty is highlighted by her charming personality, intending to leave, this way, the physical appearance not as a main characteristic. In fact, she is adorable not because of her appearance, but because "a generous and tender heart was visible in all her words and actions" (*Barbot de Villeneuve, 2014, p. 195*). This would make the Beauty a charming person to everybody.

Also, in the tales, every female character has an antagonist: a bad and evil witch who is often an old, ugly woman willing to harm beauty because of envy or jealousy. This representation of women promotes the idea of old age or ugliness as synonym of evil. This is *Snowwhite's* stepmother's case, a witch who tries to kill the main character in the story. In the *Sleeping Beauty*, there is the old fairy who cast a spell against the young princess while a young and nice fairy tries to save her. As for *Cinderella*, her stepmother is a cruel woman. And her stepsisters, despite their appearance, were also naughty and proud, revealing a nasty character before *Cinderella*.

In the Beauty and the Beast, the Beauty's sisters are not physically described, although it can be inferred that they are also beautiful considering the number of suitors they have. But in spite their prettiness, it is clear in the story that they are proud and vain; and the only happiness they show is when being courted or when thinking of riches. This way, Mme. Barbot de Villeneuve emphasizes that physical beauty is not necessarily the most important characteristic of a woman, since there are women whose beauty is obscured by negative attitudes.

Regarding men, the tales promote conception of the male as being a hero, a protector; a young prince, the savior who will show his courage to face all kinds of dangers in order to rescue that woman who is a victim of the circumstances produced not by men but by other women. He may not know the woman he wants to save, but he is completely in love with her. In other words, the male is the future husband, and it seems that only through him and a marriage with him, the woman will be able to reach happiness. Therefore, according to what may be understood from the patriarchal stories, the purpose of female existence is to live for and through men.

An example of the above is the prince in Snowwhite, who falls in love with the sleeping woman in the coffin. He asks the dwarves to let him take her, showing himself as a protector. In Perrault's Cinderella, on the other hand, the prince falls for the mystery woman after seeing how beautiful she is; while in the Brothers Grimm's version the prince seems to announce his ownership when claiming the beautiful woman is his partner and not letting any other get close to her. In Rapunzel, a prince falls in love with a woman confined in a tower, who, without knowing him, accepts his marriage proposal. As for the Sleeping Beauty, when the prince approaches the room where the princess sleeps, he is so amazed at her beauty that feels encouraged to kiss her at once. That kiss wakes the princess up, who is waiting to be rescued. This is also a characteristic of the female stereotype, since women in the stories are waiting for a man to save them through a wedding, which will also make women happy. Besides, in the Little Red Riding Hood, a little girl, although represented as the most beautiful among those in the village, is a disobedient and little naïve young woman (Segura, 2014). Because of this, she is tricked by the wolf. In this story, the hero, the savior, is not a prince, but a huntsman, a good man who saves the Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother.

As may be seen, men in the stories demonstrate the ability to rescue and to protect beauty and the treasure represented by the woman, putting an end to her lethargy and therefore she may come to life with that first kiss. Accordingly, it may be understood that the woman has not had a previous life before the man's arrival. Her life before the prince would have been one full of sacrifice. And this sacrifice may finish with the promise of life and eternal happiness that comes with the wedding.

In The Beauty and the Beast there are some elements, however, that make the story different to the fairy tales, even when it was written in a moment when the woman's role was determined by the androcentric culture. The most important character is this woman who tries to stand and awaken not by the kiss of a man but by herself. So, contrary to other stories, her character and strength is over her beauty.

The story, written by Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, presents the story of a woman, daughter of a merchant who, in a reverse of fortune, loses his wealth. This obliges every person in the family to work in labors they had never performed before. His six daughters, as it was normal at the time in poor families, had to work in the rural life or doing domestic labors. Five of them reject work, regret the city life and its attractions and show a mean spirit, while the youngest one, the Beauty, after the sorrow, displays a great perseverance and becomes cheerful, showing, this way, a "strength of mind which is not common in her sex" (Barbot de Villeneuve, 2014, p. 195). She shows herself as a new woman in times of adversity.



La cena
Acrílico sobre tela / 155 x 110 cm



Máscara
Óleo sobre tela / 64 x 45 cm

The Beauty, as she is called, is young and as beautiful as her sisters, who are “flattered by the attentions of the handsomest young gentlemen” (*Barbot de Villeneuve, 2014, p. 194*) and think of the opulence they would live in. Unlike them, however, the Beauty is not waiting for a fiancé or attentions from other young men. Contrary to her sisters, who are inconsolable, she is more reserved and stronger in adversity, then becomes a support to her father and brothers.

In the stories, women suffer in different ways. They may be victims of murder intents, mistreat by relatives, forced to confinement or any other abuse, which make them helpless and in need of a savior, which will be a man. On the contrary, the female character in *The Beauty and the Beast* is not mistreated and is not expecting to find a supposed well-being that comes with the man. In fact, it can be seen from the beginning of the story that she is the savior, a heroin. She will try to save her father at first, but in the end she will be presented as the beast-prince savior by showing the love she feels for the monster. In other words, the Beauty is not presented as weak, but as an intelligent woman who recovers herself. This may be shown in the moment when she saw the Beast “approach, whom she could not behold without a shudder, she advanced with a firm step, and with a modest air saluted him very respectfully” (*Villeneuve, 2014, p. 208*), which seems to please the Beast, who may have been waiting a negative reaction.

On the other hand, the Beauty escapes the accepted representation of women through literature, although it is worth mentioning that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, literature is not completely accepted. In fact, Fénelon, before Rousseau, rejects the access of women to the reading of texts full of fantasy. His rejection is based on the belief that women who read fantasy books are “are vain, and vanity is a sure incentive to talk. They become giddy, and volatility prevents those reflections from rising which would shew them the value of silence” (*Fénelon, 2014, p. 8*). Nonetheless, Mme. Barbot de Villeneuve describes a woman with a great love for reading, although because of the family situation she has not been able to read until when in the Beast’s palace she has access to all the available books, because “since her sojourn in the country she had been deprived of this pleasure” (*Barbot de Villeneuve, 2014, p. 213*).

This way, Mme. Barbot de Villeneuve rejects Fénelon’s statement due to the fact of the Beauty not fitting into the description of female readers as vain. In fact, it may be inferred that the Beauty, in spite of being recognized as such, she does not seem to matter about physical beauty. Furthermore, she is a woman who knows how to remain silent depending on the situation and knows how to listen, unlike her sisters, who are fickle, jealous and are always complaining.

Besides, the Beauty breaks another stereotype. In most of the stories the female character stays in the areas dedicated to women, such as inside the house, the kitchen or the bedroom. The Beauty, however, leaves the house to support the family. She then leaves her family space to save her father from the beast-prince. In short, she is a woman, capable of working the same as men, and, even more, she is not a woman to be rescued, since she may be the salvation to others.

The representation of women promoted in fairy tales is that of a woman unimportant to the family or the society. That is the reason why all the activities she performs are of a minor importance to the development of the household economy, as shown by Ros *García (2013)* in a study about gender in tales. Nevertheless, the importance of the female character in *The Beauty and the Beast* goes beyond the household, since she accomplishes the most significant task: that of saving not only the beast-prince, but the entire kingdom by marrying the monster, despite the queen’s denial.

IV. CONCLUSION

Mme. Barbot de Villeneuve presents, this way, another criticism to society at the time and the way women were used as a subject of commercial trade by means of marriages. During the eighteenth century and before, arranged marriages were a constant, especially in wealthy families. There, the union was seen as a way of keeping and improving the family wealth; and women had no power of choice whatsoever; since this was a decision taken by the father. The Beauty, in opposition to this custom, is able to decide whether to marry or not. This may be expressed when the Beauty categorically rejects a marriage with the prince if there is any possible doubt in him. She even suggests that before any kind of interests, the most important in a marriage must be the affective relationship between the spouses.

As it may be perceived in this brief gender stereotypes analysis, children who have access to this kind of cultural consumption gather an accumulation of anchors which make evident the permanence of gender identity defining components that perpetuate female submission and binding. Over the course of centuries, this overwhelming promotion of sociocultural slogans has had an influence on girls and what they learn for their lives as adults. Besides, men are obliged to be strong, rational and not emotional. They are intended to rescue weak women, and place beauty over any other value, including female's intellectual abilities. For women, most of the ideals of femininity may be simplified in the expectations of a kiss from a Prince Charming, the ideal man, reinforcing, this way, the belief of women dwelling among emotions, while men dwell among rationality.

A subtle female defiance to the promoted and reproduced stereotypes in children's literature, especially in traditional tales, is perceived in *The Beauty and the Beast*. This story depicts a woman who opposes moderation and intelligence to physical beauty, since the female character in the story is beautiful, not because of her physical appearance, but because of her personality, her intelligence and ability to live with others. The Beauty is a woman who rejects vanity and superficiality as female characteristics in traditional tales. She is a woman who, in adversity is unwilling to suffer. She is an intelligent woman who likes to read in times when this activity for women is not well accepted. She can take her own decisions. In conclusion, the Beauty is a woman who indirectly denies the way gender roles in the androcentric society have traditionally been imposed.

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