



JANUS FILMS *presents*

Jean Cocteau
*
BEAUTY
AND THE
BEAST



Written and Directed by
Jean Cocteau

Starring
Jean Marais
Josette Day
Marcel André

Jean Cocteau's sublime adaptation of Mme Leprince de Beaumont's fairy-tale masterpiece—in which the pure love of a beautiful girl melts the heart of a feral but gentle beast—is a landmark of motion picture fantasy that still beguiles and enchants seventy years after its release. To celebrate *Beauty and the Beast's* anniversary, Janus Films is proud to present this classic in a new 4K restoration.

“A FILM OF ALMOST FLAWLESS QUALITY.”

—Tennessee Williams, *The New York Times*

“ONE OF THE MOST MAGICAL OF ALL FILMS.”

—Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*

France • 1946 • 93 minutes • Black & White • Monaural
In French with English subtitles • 1.37:1 • Formats: 35 mm, DCP

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DARK MAGIC: ON JEAN COCTEAU'S *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*

By Geoffrey O'Brien

OUT OF THE extravagant variety of Jean Cocteau's work—the paintings and drawings, the poems, the plays and novels and memoirs, the opera librettos and ballet scenarios—it is likely his films that will have the most enduring influence, and among those, *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) will have the most pervasive effect. When it comes to fairy-tale movies, there is Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*, and then there is everything else.

The film is virtually a showcase for the best in French production design (Christian Bérard), music (Georges Auric), cinematography (Henri Alekan), and costuming (Marcel Escoffier). Yet the net effect is, if anything, austere rather than lush. Shooting began four months after the German surrender. This harshness in the background is perceptible in other ways as well. The storybook setting of a seventeenth-century farmhouse, into which we are ushered with the phrase “once upon a time,” is revealed within a few moments as a place of vanity and venality, cowardice and petty-minded squabbling, slaps and insults.

By establishing how truly oppressive is the world that Belle and her father inhabit, Cocteau makes all the more uncanny the discovery, by the harried merchant, of a passageway out of it, into the Beast's realm. It is like the breaching of a seam, and we are carried through every part of the process: through the misty forest and up a deserted staircase, through the great door and, in the most otherworldly of camera movements, down the hall of human arms extending candelabra whose flames spontaneously flare up—a rite of initiation that loses none of its power when one learns that it was achieved by filming the action backward, and that it was shot not by Cocteau but by his assistant, René Clément.

If this is magic, it is a shaggy, palpable sort of magic. As a true poet—whether writing verse or otherwise—Cocteau had a poet's hard-earned mistrust of the merely atmospheric, decorative vagueness misnamed “poetic”: “My method,” he wrote at the outset of his journal of the shooting of *Beauty and the Beast*, “is simple: not to aim at poetry. That must come of its own accord. The mere whispered mention of its name frightens it away.” The result, of course, was a film that, as much as any other, has been praised as lyrical, almost unbearable in its ethereal gorgeousness, a triumph of the imagination—even when it may just as accurately be described as tough-minded, down-to-earth, ferociously unsentimental.

In *Beauty and the Beast*, as previously in *The Blood of a Poet* (1930) and later in *Orpheus* (1950), Cocteau was able to realize the fantastic not as an escape from the real but as an extension of it, as its reverse side. He has no interest in Neverlands or Wonderlands. He approaches the paraphernalia of the fairy tale—those enchanted mirrors, keys, gloves—with a technician's dispassion, no more taken aback by their existence than by the existence of

trees or streams or horses or rose gardens, but endlessly curious about how they function. For Cocteau, “movie magic” was not a glib catchphrase.

And the magic is unmistakably sexual throughout—a fantastic, but not in the least morbid or phantasmal, sex magic. The irresistible effect of everything that happens after Belle enters the Beast's castle is tied to the pair's aura of forbidden intimacy: her slow-motion advance into the Beast's great hall, as she moves past the billowing white curtains and Auric's music bursts out in choral ululations; her passage through the talking door, into the privacies of mirror and bed; the night wanderings in which she spies on the Beast in the aftermath of his nocturnal slaughters, while he stares in horror at his smoking hands.

The extraordinarily beautiful shot in which we see the Beast from behind, his head haloed in light, as he ascends the stairs with Belle in his arms, while on the other side of the screen light streams through dungeonlike grillwork, conjures with gothic intensity the imminence of a sexual fantasy fulfilled, in a setting made for such fulfillment—a bedroom hidden within a castle hidden within a forest. The erotic force of the episode that follows is outdone only by the even greater emotional force of the restraint that stops the Beast in his tracks and sends him rushing out of the room, saying, “You mustn't look into my eyes.”

It is, of course, his eyes that we look at, glistening from within the multilayered makeup that cost Marais five hours of application each day, makeup so expressive that Marais' real face seems a blank by comparison. We cannot shake the certainty that an actual creature has been introduced into the world, and the sorrow provoked by his disappearance recurs anew on each viewing. I doubt whether so solitary and tragic a figure has been so fully realized in movies before or since, and he is realized here not only through Hagop Arakelian's makeup skills and Marais' performance but through the universe created to form a context around him, made out of Cocteau's words, Auric's music, and Alekan's images.

As for Belle, she is, finally, almost as much of a cipher as the statue of Diana that breaks the spell by shooting an arrow into the rascally Avenant. When the Beast tells her, “You are the only master here,” he underscores the cruelty at the heart of Cocteau's fable: a Beauty who may offer love or capriciously withhold it, a Beauty who wants only a rose—even if that rose may threaten death to anyone who gives it to her—a Beauty who may, after all, know herself least well and therefore never fully grasp her own power. Only in the world of art can Beauty and Beast truly cohabit. And even for Cocteau, master of such a range of arts, what art but cinema—the magic mirror itself—could ever realize that cohabitation so persuasively?

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

By Ellen Schafer

Beauty and the Beast was acquired via the purchase of Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC) by Groupe M6 in 2005. An active restoration program was initiated by Groupe M6 in order to preserve and rejuvenate the SNC classic film catalog. This new restoration was carried out in 2013, to coincide with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Jean Cocteau's death.

In preparation for the restoration:

A call for film prints and intermediate materials predating a restoration from 1995 was made in order to find source material for missing negative frames and to analyze prior grading choices.

A collaborative team consisting of representatives from SNC (Groupe M6), Filmo, and La cinémathèque française was constituted to supervise the process.

A wide range of reference material was consulted: notes and 35 mm reference prints made under the supervision of cinematographer Henri Alekan; Cocteau's writings; 35 mm nitrate prints (including a print from the Deutsche Kinemathek collection); and the technical indications present in the shooting script.

A restoration guideline was established in order to respect the balance between three main components: the physical reality of the film's original negative, the artistic and filmic intentions of the author-director (according to his journal), and finally, the orientations and premises of the 1995 restoration supervised by Henri Alekan.

Fortunately, Cocteau kept a daily diary during the filming and sound recording of *Beauty and the Beast*, between August 1945 and April 1946. This document not only is a wonderfully written and highly entertaining read but also served as an exceptional technical guide for the film's restoration.



FACTS ABOUT *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*

- During filming, director Jean Cocteau kept a detailed journal of the trials and tribulations that accompanied the production, eventually published under the title *The Diary of a Film*.
- Playwright Tennessee Williams, in a 1950 review of Cocteau's diary that appeared in the *New York Times*, called *Beauty and the Beast* "one of the great films to come out of Europe since the war," and as "fluid and effortless as the flow of a dream."
- Cocteau originally planned to shoot the film in color but abandoned that plan when the acquisition of color film stock proved impossible.
- The shortage of available film also led Cocteau to use a wide variety of film stocks from different laboratories, all of which possessed distinct qualities that Cocteau considered beneficial to the poetic look of the film.
- Cocteau frequently filmed his actors performing scenes backward, then reversed the film in editing to give the action a dreamlike appearance. This can be seen most prominently when Belle's father enters the castle and encounters candles that appear to burst into flame—they were actually blown out on set.
- During shooting, both Cocteau and actor Jean Marais were plagued by physical problems: Cocteau, boils, eczema, jaundice, and gum disease; and Marais, a carbuncle on his inner thigh that required constant lancing.
- The technical aspects of filming were also difficult: the cameras used were erratic and prone to jamming; the unpredictable climate of the shooting location (Tours, in central France) led to lighting problems and missed takes; and the vacillating electrical current in the studio where interiors were shot caused arc lights to explode without warning.
- The famous anecdote that has actor Greta Garbo exclaiming "Give me back my Beast!" after seeing Marais' final transformation is likely apocryphal, and has also been attributed to Marlene Dietrich, among others.