“IT’S NOT A FAIRY TALE ANYMORE”

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

by HENRY JENKINS III

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Abstract

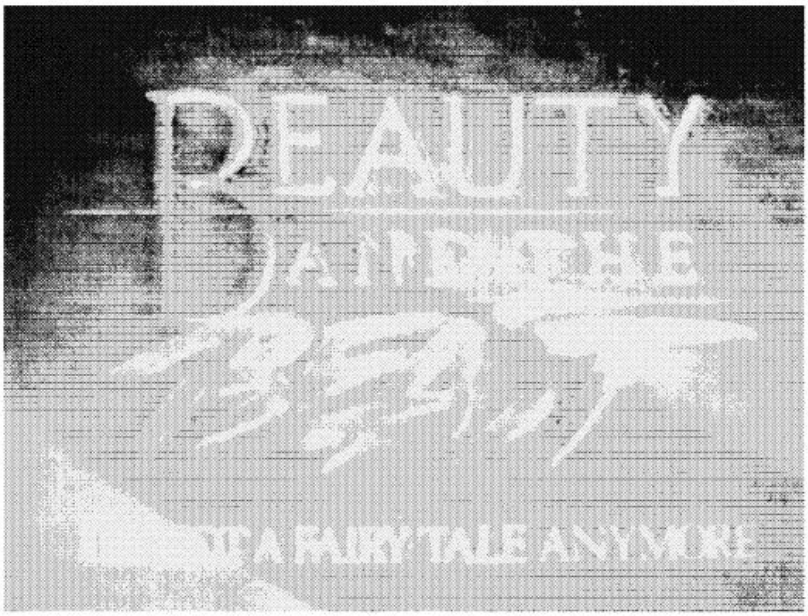
An essay is presented on examination of variety of materials such as club newsletters, letterzines, scrapbooks, and fan fiction to trace the controversy surrounding the film “Beauty and the Beast.” It magnifies the understanding of the fans in terms of reception process by employing theoretical models drawn from the Cultural Studies literature.

4

"It's Not a Fairy Tale Anymore": Gender, Genre, *Beauty and the Beast*

"Believe the impossible. Everything you've heard is true. It's not a fairy tale anymore." (*TV Guide* ad for *Beauty and the Beast*'s third season opener; Burke and Dunadee)

"Speaking of doing things the right way, anyone who starts a story with 'once upon a time' should end it with 'happily ever after.' " (*Beauty and the Beast* fan, personal interview, 1990)



4.1 Network Promo for *Beauty and the Beast*'s third season premier.

The January 13, 1990 issue of *TV Guide* featured a profile of *Beauty and the Beast* and its faithful fans: "The show that wouldn't die . . . and the fans who wouldn't let it" (Carlson 1990, 2). *TV Guide* sympathetically documented the massive fan culture around the program, and the charity efforts of the Helper's Network and other local clubs. A particular focus was the grassroots movement directed in response to its initial cancelation and its much publicized return to the airwaves. While noting some fan dissatisfaction with plot developments in the program's third season, the magazine confidently concluded that "most fans will remain loyal." Ironically, just two days before this issue hit the news stands, CBS had canceled *Beauty and the Beast* a second and final time. The series which "refused to die" was now officially dead and many of its "loyal" fans reacted as much with relief as with mourning.

Beauty and the Beast fans, who only a few months before had seemed united in their efforts to save the show, now were sharply divided, unsure how to respond to recent format changes. Most fans were saddened by the departure of series star Linda Hamilton (who was pregnant and wanted more time to spend with her family) and by the producers' decision to dramatize the murder of her character, Catherine. Some continued to urge loyalty to the producers, expressing hope and confidence that they would resolve difficulties caused by the star's departure: "Respect them enough to trust them; trust them enough to believe; believe them enough to know that they will satisfy us" (Herbert 1990, 5). Others remained equally loyal to their own conception of the series which they felt had been violated by the network and the series' creators: "I don't even recognize this as *Beauty and the Beast* anymore. Do you seriously think that *This* is what people want to watch?" (Kopmanis 1990, unnumbered). Many expressed their sense of frustration and powerlessness, their inability to protect their favorite series from being radically altered.

The changes were widely perceived as an effort to attract a more masculine audience, even at the expense of the program's committed female fans and their desires for a happy resolution of the characters' romance. CBS President Howard Stringer lent credence to this claim with some particularly ill-conceived remarks at a network press conference about what he described as the "exotic" appeal of the "hot house" show: "I've gotten a lot of letters from nuns—I don't know what to make of that. Makes me very nervous actually. Were we targeting it just for nuns? I think we have to target priests,

too" (Ostrow, 1989, unnumbered). Convinced that the program's survival depended upon its ability to attract "priests" (and other masculine viewers) rather than an "exotic" following of "nuns" (and other female spectators), the producers not only shifted the series' focus from the love story toward more action-adventure plots but also killed the show's female protagonist, foreclosing a subsequent return to romance.

The heated reception of *Beauty and the Beast*'s controversial third season raises questions about the political and cultural status of television fans. *TV Guide* and the network both fell into the trap of taking for granted the fans' unconditional loyalty to the series and its producers. The *Beauty and the Beast* fans, however, were anything but uncritical; their membership within a larger community of fans and their public commitment to the program encouraged them to protest not only the network's actions endangering its future but also the producer's actions violating their collective sense of the program. Individually, they could draw upon the consensus of the larger fan community as a basis from which to criticize subsequent plot developments that ran counter to their expectations about the characters. Increasingly, many fans had come to recognize that their interests in the series were not aligned with the producer's interests. Moreover, these fans saw this conflict not only in personal terms ("You" vs. "Us") but in terms of a set of economic relations (producers vs. consumers) and political categories (male power vs. female desire). One fan described the producers as treating the fans like trained dogs: "Since the end of May, it's been 'sit fans, fetch fans, roll over fans, beg fans,' and now I suppose they'd like us to play dead, or at least quietly slink off, tail between our legs, whimpering softly and licking our wounds" (Landman 1990, unnumbered).

This controversy suggests how fan reading practices can be mobilized into active opposition to producer efforts, how the fans' own rewriting of the textual materials makes them active critics of future narrative developments and protectors of what they see as central to the program. By tracing fan response to *Beauty and the Beast*, then, it is possible to get a more concrete sense of the process by which a fandom may move from the eager acceptance of a new text toward active resistance to its subsequent transformations. But, first, it is important to get a firmer sense of the role of genre within popular television since producers, networks, and fans all appeal to generic conventions to justify their positions on the controversial third season.

ONCE UPON A TIME . . .

Traditional notions of genre as a class of texts, a set of narrative features and conventions, or a formula by which fictions are constructed seem inadequate to the struggle over *Beauty and the Beast*'s generic placement. For the most part, such models ignore the role(s) played by genre in readers' efforts to make meaning from textual materials. Thomas Schatz's claim (1981) that film genres represent a tacit contract between media producers and audiences seemingly gives equal weight to the role of formulas in both encoding and decoding films, for he speaks of a "reciprocal studio-audience relationship" (1986, 97). His account, however, implicitly favors the generic knowledge of the filmmaker over the activity of the spectator. Schatz gives us little sense of the nature of the audience's expectations or how they originate; these expectations are read from the texts, rather than documented through audience response. What Hollywood delivers is presumed to be what the audience wanted, largely based on the economic argument that the industry anticipates and markets to audience demand. Schatz's examples fit unambiguously within single categories (musicals, westerns) and therefore pose few problems about generic placement and interpretation. The reader's decision to purchase a ticket to such a film thus signals their acceptance of a set of conventional expectations about the likely development of the plot or disposition of the characters; once the appropriate genre is identified and accepted, readers simply interpret the narrative according to those conventions.

Most recent accounts focus even more explicitly on ways genre shapes the viewer's experience of given films, though, as with Schatz, this is typically characterized as a top-down process. Such accounts may discuss, often in highly sophisticated ways, the taxonomic problems encountered by scholars and critics in identifying the conventions and boundaries of particular genres, but take for granted that popular reading is determined, one way or another, by the reader's early and correct recognition of texts as belonging to particular genres. Rick Altman (1987), for example, suggests that genre "short-circuits the 'normal' sequence of interpretation" and usurps the function played by the interpretive community in making sense of the narrative: "Seen in this light, genres appear as agents of a quite specific and effective ideological project: to control the audience's reaction to a specific film by providing the context in which that film must be interpreted" (4). Dudley Andrew (1987) pushes this

concept of a top-down control over meaning-making even further: "[Genres] ensure the production of meaning by regulating the viewer's relation to the images and narratives constructed for him or her. In fact, genres construct the proper spectator for their own consumption. They build the desire and then represent the satisfaction of what they have triggered" (110). John Hartley (1985), writing from a different theoretical position, contends that "audiences' different potential pleasures are channeled and disciplined by genres," which pre-determine the range of their likely responses (as cited in Fiske, 114). These approaches offer us limited insight into the mental life of the viewer; even when theorists seem to be suggesting a "contract" between media producers and media consumers, that contract is, in fact, remarkably one-sided, a contract of adhesion allowing readers little more than the right to refuse engagement with a particular media product.

Such models may provide insight into the role of genres within the classical Hollywood cinema (though space alone requires me to concede that claim here); we should be suspicious, however, about importing them into television studies. If film scholars were forced to rethink the broad generic classifications of literary criticism (such as comedy and tragedy) into the much more specific categories of the Hollywood marketplace (such as screwball comedy, film noir, or the adult western), television critics are often forced to make the opposite move, creating relatively broad categories reflecting the blurred generic boundaries of network programing. Thus, David Thorburn (1987) sees melodrama as the dominant television form, a genre including "most made-for-television movies, the soap operas, and all the lawyers, cowboys, cops and docs, the fugitives and adventurers, the fraternal and filial comrades who have filled the prime hours" (539–540); David Marc (1984) offers a similarly broad notion of television comedy, while John Fiske (1987) makes large-scale distinctions between masculine and feminine programing.

If the Hollywood studio system promoted distinct genres as consistently appealing to particular audience segments, contemporary American television relies upon a process which Todd Gitlin (1983) has called "recombination" to broaden the appeal of any given program: "The logic of maximizing the quick payoff has produced that very Hollywood hybrid, the recombinant form, which assumes that selected features of recent hits can be spliced together to make a eugenic success" (64). The networks thus promote series which belong not to a single genre but to multiple genres, hoping

to combine the security that comes from building on past success with the novelty that attracts new audience enthusiasm; generic traditions are manipulated as well with an eye toward combining different demographic groups with different cultural interests into the large audience needed for ratings success (Tulloch, 1990).

Beauty and the Beast is a textbook example of this recombination process. The program was carefully constructed to build on multiple genre traditions in its quest for ratings; the polysemous address of the program also reflected creative differences between its producers and the network executives and sparked disputes with the program's fans. What remained unresolved throughout the series' run was its generic status and the interpretive strategies by which this program was to be understood.

Most accounts credit CBS Entertainment Division President Kim LeMasters with originating the idea for a series based on *Beauty and the Beast* following a viewing of Jean Cocteau's classic film. LeMasters approached Witt/Thomas productions about developing the idea into a series for possible inclusion in the 1988–89 season. As Producer Paul Witt explained in an interview shortly after the show's premier, "We didn't want another monster show. We didn't want a show where the beast breaks through walls. We wanted something classy" (Oney 1987, 37:2). Writer Ron Koslow, hired as the program's creator, viewed the show as a chance to create a "classical love story in classical terms" as well as to explore the mythic possibilities of a utopian society underneath the streets of New York City (Kloer 1987, 4). Koslow hoped to contrast the "frantic pace and intensity of New York" with the "lyrical romance of the underground." The program was intentionally constructed as a hybrid of several different genres and intended to attract a broad-based audience of women, men, and children (Gordon 1988, 26). Producer Witt similarly described the show as "consciously designed to have a split personality." He continued, "Everything above-ground is filmed in a stark, even brutally realistic style; everything below the surface is shot through a vaporous haze in hope of creating a mystical environment" (Oney 1987, 37:2).

This format requires a curious crossing of traditional gender boundaries: the professional stories with their adventure plots center on Catherine in her own sphere of action, while Vincent's world is the more domestic and relationship-centered. Catherine's job as an investigator for the district attorney's office ("where the wealthy and the powerful rule") provided a base for traditional action-adventure

plots; her professional activities bring her into contact with the harsher elements of contemporary life (street gangs, drugs, prostitution, child abuse, voodoo cults, subway vigilantes) and place her into dangerous positions from which Vincent can rescue her. (See, for example, "Terrible Savior," "Siege," "No Way Down," "Beast Within," "Dark Spirit," "A Children's Story," "Temptation," "Everything is Everything," to cite only first-season episodes which focus primarily on Catherine's confrontation of above-ground problems.) Vincent's role as one of the leaders of an underground utopian society ("a secret place far below the city streets . . . safe from hate and harm") allowed the series to shift its focus onto the dilemmas faced by this alternative community and its colorful members. Drawing on a nineteenth-century tradition of underground utopias and dystopias (Williams, 1990), these fable-like stories delve into Father's traumatic rejection of the world above ("Song of Orpheus"), and his struggle to articulate the ideals of a new kind of community. Recurring plot interests include his divisive dispute with a renegade community leader *Paracelsus* ("The Alchemist," "To Reign in Hell"), the community's festivities and celebrations ("Dead of Winter," "Masques"), and its struggles to define and preserve its ideals.

The romance between the two characters provides a bridge between the two worlds and thus allows smooth transitions across different generic traditions. As series writer Howard Gordon explained:

> It is a constant source of satisfaction for me that one week's episode may take us through the mean streets of Manhattan, while the next week may take us into the very bowels of the Earth, encountering mythic characters like *Paracelsus*. . . . The only necessary denominator is to have Catherine and Vincent involved in some organic context—though not necessarily with equal emphasis. The tough part here is to find some central subject which interfaces with both worlds, relying, hopefully, on only a modicum of coincidence. (Gordon 1988, 26)

Gordon identified three basic types of plots which had been woven into the *Beauty and the Beast* format: action-centered stories which place the characters into jeopardy and require some "climactic liberation" ("No Iron Bars a Cage," "No Way Down," "To

Reign in Hell"); relationship-centered stories in which Catherine and Vincent help a third party, often involving the uniting of young lovers ("China Moon") or the restoration of family harmony ("Everything is Everything," "A Children's Story"); fables which center upon moral dilemmas confronting the tunnel world community ("Fever," "Shades of Grey," "An Impossible Silence"). In each case, the romance between Vincent and Catherine plays a secondary but important role, motivating their involvement in each week's plot without becoming its dominant focus. Only a limited number of the episodes ever centered exclusively or even primarily upon the characters' relationship ("A Happy Life," "Orphans").

Critics praised the series for its generic innovations and advised against a return to television formulas (Burke and Dunadee, 1990). Network executives, however, pushed the producers to incorporate more and more elements of conventional action-adventure into the format as a means of insuring its success with traditional Friday-night viewers. In a recent interview, series writer George R. R. Martin suggests that the networks and producers were, from the beginning, sharply divided over the nature of the series and its desired audience:

> There were certain elements from the network right at the beginning that regarded us as a hairy version of *The Incredible Hulk*. If we were going to be primarily an action/adventure show oriented towards children with an obligatory beast-out at the second act's end, and a major rescue to end the fourth act, I really didn't want to be involved. But from talking to Ron Koslow, it became clear that his ambitions for the show were very high and that he regarded it as adult-oriented drama. (Grosse 1990, 53–54)

Martin recounts initial network resistance to the development of the Tunnel World population or the more romantic aspects of the story; CBS, he suggests, saw *Beauty and the Beast* as "a cop show with a hairy hero who saved people." *Beauty and the Beast* appealed to female viewers and seemed capable of attracting a younger audience to its early evening time slot, yet it appeared to perplex and even annoy many male viewers. Only as the program began to gain a greater following were the producers allowed to break more fully with action-adventure formulas and to explore its romantic and fantastic elements. Yet, as ratings declined in the second

season, producers responded to pressures to broaden its audience base by trying to attract more male viewers. Martin's account of the series' production, thus, explicitly links its development to shifts in the network's perception of its ratings. Crudely put, romance-centered episodes meant more female fans, while action plots held the prospect of enlarging its share of male viewership. The program's audience continued to be dominated by women, while the series ranked 50th among 1987–88 programs and 78th among 1988–89 shows. The network could foresee no course of action short of canceling the series altogether or radically altering its format. On Friday, May 19, the network announced that *Beauty and the Beast* would not be returning in fall 1989.

The program's most active fans were prepared for this event, having been closely monitoring the ups and downs of the series' ratings for months. By the end of the second season, there were more than 50 major fan organizations nationwide, with a combined membership of 350,000. Some 90 different fanzines and newsletters were in circulation and there was a computer net discussion group devoted to the program, creating many different linkages between local fan organizations. Ratings analysis had become a standard feature in fan newsletters and a hot topic on the computer nets. Fans flooded the corporate headquarters with some 2,900 telegrams and overnight letters, tying up the fax machine and switchboard for hours. The cancelation announcement occurred only several days before MediaWest, a Lansing, Michigan convention attracting media fans from across the country; *Beauty and the Beast* supporters spent much of the convention discussing additional strategies and gaining insight from other fans involved in previous struggles to save television series.

The network quickly retreated from its cancelation plans, suggesting instead that the series was on hiatus and would be returning as a midseason replacement. Fans maintained constant pressure to insure that the network did not quietly back from this commitment, as it had retreated from a similar promise to viewers of *Frank's Place* that same year. Fan activists prepared a strategic manual reported in several regional newsletters. This guide included not only the addresses of corporate executives but also those of major sponsors, local affiliates, significant publishers and broadcast journalists, and even Halloween costume manufacturers and literacy campaigns; anyone who might be solicited to support their efforts to keep *Beauty and the Beast* on the air (Burke 1989, 1–7). The Helper's

Network (based in Fullerton, California) ran a phone-information line with daily updates about the campaign and the network's responses ("The Beastie Girls" 1989, 131, 137). Fans were encouraged to wear program related T-shirts to attract interest in the show and to leave personal notes to potential fans folded in library copies of the classic works cited on the program. Fliers were distributed on street corners and at local PTA meetings. Fans called talk radio stations, were interviewed on local news shows, and made headlines in community newspapers, continually forcing the campaign into the public spotlight.

CBS's commitment for the production of 12 new episodes and to return the series to the air by January 1990 was widely seen as a victory for this grassroots campaign, as evidence that viewers had finally discovered ways to hold the networks accountable for their programing decisions. In the words of David Poltrack, a CBS senior vice president for planning and research: "We have been listening to all those people who have been writing, calling and sending us telegrams. The response of the *Beauty and the Beast* fans certainly helped us make the decision to bring it back next year. This is probably the biggest public response for a program that we've had since *Cagney and Lacey*" (Burke and Dunadee, 1990). By July, CBS was writing to the program's vocal fans, thanking them for their "enthusiasm and interest," pledging their "deep commitment to this very special property" and promising that they have "no plans to make drastic changes in the format" (Faiola, 1989).

Fans soon had new reasons to doubt these promises and to suspect that the network planed to restructure the series in order to broaden its audience. Koslow told reporters that "you are going to be seeing more danger, more momentum in the stories and some big surprises." His comments suggested that the show would be focusing more heavily upon action-adventure plots (Weiskind, 1989). *TV Guide* ran a leaked synopsis of the season's opening episode, describing in detail a plot that involved Catherine's impregnation, kidnapping, and death and Vincent's ruthless pursuit of the murderer. This synopsis was denied by program spokespersons yet later proven accurate in every detail. Network executives also expressed publicly their sense that the second season had focused too exclusively upon the Catherine-Vincent romance and that the series needed to broaden its focus. (As CBS Entertainment President Kim LeMasters explained, "The problem with *Beauty and the Beast* ended up being that stories between Vincent and Catherine just got

more and more narrow, and we were unable to explore issues that we want to explore" [Burke and Dunadee, 1990]). Loyal fans warned that they would probably stop watching if *Beauty and the Beast* became "all action and no depth" (Burke and Dunadee, 1990). As *Pipeline* editor Stephanie A. Wiltse explained, "When a network changes a show, it's like brain surgery with a baseball bat. We tend to feel that shows taken off for retooling have been the worse for it" (Burke and Dunadee, 1990). Wiltse subsequently embraced third season when it was aired as did many of the 2,200 subscribers of her newsletter, *Pipeline* (Personal correspondence, 1991). Wiltse reported that the third season episodes attracted an unprecedented response from her readers with letters running two to one in favor of the program changes (*Pipeline*, March 1990, p. 2). Other fan newsletters and letterzines, such as *The Whispering Gallery* and *Once Upon a Time . . . Is Now*, attracted more strongly negative responses with many expressing outrage against the "retooling" of the series. I have found a similarly negative reaction to the episodes from other fans I have contacted and from panel discussions at conventions I have attended, though it would be difficult to be sure how representative this sample may be of the total fan community.

This chapter has proved to be a controversial one with *Beauty and the Beast* fans and so I wanted to acknowledge their reservations here. I have received letters from fans across the country, some solicited, others unsolicited, expressing their appreciation for this chapter as accurately and sympathetically portraying their experience of the program. I have received a smaller number of letters and phonecalls complaining that I give a disproportionate amount of space to "dissidents" within the fandom and do not adequately represent the full range of fan responses to the third season. As one fan wrote, "I hope then you will forgive an unwillingness to let go unchallenged what could basically ennoble for posterity a rancorous scourge that did not originate from nor remain within the confines of the 'readings' you were discussing." (Personal correspondence, 1991). The heated tone of this and other responses I received reflects the passions that surround disputes about interpretations and evaluations within the fan community, as well as the stakes many fans invest in protecting the image of their favorite program.

So, I want to be clear about exactly what I am discussing in this chapter and why. My focus is primarily upon negative fan reaction, not because I feel these responses are necessarily representative of *all* fan response nor because I want to deny the role of

4.2 "Beastcake": Rita Terrell, Vincent as Minos of Ancient Egypt.

dissent and debate within the community's reception process nor because this negative reaction necessarily reflects my own judgments about the merits of third season episodes. Rather, critical responses raise most explicitly issues surrounding fan interpretation that are central to this book's argument. What I want to explore is how it is possible to remain a fan of a program while militantly rejecting producer actions that run contrary to one's own conception of the narrative. The tension between the producer's conception and the fan's conceptions of the series are most visible at moments of friction or dispute. I would argue that a similar gap exists even when the differences are not so great as to impair the fans' pleasure in the broadcast, though this claim would be harder to substantiate. In adopting this focus, however, I do not mean to represent this or any other fandom as univocal in its opinions and judgments.

Theories claiming that recognition of genre predetermines ideological response do not seem applicable to a text evoking as many different genres or as many different responses as *Beauty and the Beast* does. The producer's sense of its generic categorization differs from that of the readers and both contrast sharply with the network's perception of the same program. Series publicity signaled multiple genre categories as more or less equally appropriate: some ads feature romantic images of an embracing couple on a moonlit balcony, promising "a love story of a different kind," while others showed a roaring Vincent, poised for action, asking whether he was "Man or Beast?" (Burke and Dunadee, 1990). The reader must determine which generic formula(s) will yield the best results in appreciating and interpreting any given episode: just as the producers accented one or another generic tradition to attract different audience segments, some readers at least seem to have chosen to focus their emotional investment in the series romance as potentially rewarding while experiencing its action-adventure plots as a source of displeasure and dissatisfaction.

FROM READING THE ROMANCE TO READING AS ROMANCE

Peter J. Rabinowitz (1985) has suggested that genre study might productively shift its focus away from properties of fictional narratives and onto the "strategies that readers use to process texts," seeing genres as "bundles of operations," conventions, and expectations readers draw upon in the process of making meanings. As

Rabinowitz puts it, " 'reading' is always 'reading *as*' " (421). *Beauty and the Beast* will reveal different meanings, generate different pleasures if it is read *as* a romance or *as* an action-adventure series; or, to use Rabinowitz's example, Dashiel Hammett's *The Glass Key* poses different dilemmas when read *as* literature or *as* a popular detective story. Different genres evoke different questions readers want to ask and provide alternative rules for assigning significance and structure to textual content. Rabinowitz distinguishes between four basic types of interpretive strategies: (1) "rules of notice" which give priority to particular aspects of narratives as potentially interesting and significant while assigning others to the margins; (2) "rules of signification" which help to determine what meanings or implications can be ascribed to particular textual features; (3)" rules of configuration" which shape the reader's expectations about likely plot developments and allow the reader to recognize what would constitute a satisfactory resolution of that plot; (4) "rules of coherence" which shape the extrapolations readers make from textual details, the speculations they make about information not explicitly present within the story (421). The reader's experience, he suggests, thus requires an initial decision about what genre(s) will be most appropriately applied to a given narrative and then the systematic application of those generic rules to the process of comprehending the textually provided information.

Beauty and the Beast was readable within several different genres: as a fairy tale or fable which might provide "enchantment" to both children and adults; as a classical romance which, according to the producers, must end tragically; as a more contemporary romance which, according to fans, promises a happy resolution; as an action-adventure story about a couple of crime-fighters who struggle to impose their own notion of justice upon an imperfect world; as the saga of an underground utopian society's attempt to define and preserve its own values; as "quality television," a more nebulous category comparable to Rabinowitz's notion of "literature," which would foreground the series' production values, serious social themes, literary references, and classical musical performances as appeals to cultural respectability. Some of these generic placements would be mutually exclusive, or at least were perceived as contradictory within fan and producer discourse: romance fans were not drawn to the show for its action elements and vice versa. Others (romance, fairy tale, and "quality television") might be mutually reinforcing or potentially overlapping. Each reading, however,

would foreground different episodes or moments in episodes as particularly pleasurable or significant (rules of notice) and would ascribe alternative meanings to them (rules of significance); each would make its own predictions about likely plot developments (rules of configuration) and its own judgements about what would constitute a desirable resolution of its narrative (rules of coherence).

If the network and the producers sought to keep as many of these possibilities alive as possible in order to build a coalition of different audiences around the series, individual fans certainly preferred some readings over others. Some fans were drawn toward the "tunnel world" as an imaginary community whose values offer hopeful solutions to contemporary social issues, adopting it as a model for their own charity work; other fans were drawn to the series as exemplifying a particular notion of "quality television," tracking down the sources of literary references and musical passages or tracing the history of the character names and its symbolic imagery. While these potential interpretations do not completely disappear from the readers' experience of the series, most of the members of the Boston group were insistent that *Beauty and the Beast* was, first and foremost, a popular romance: "When you don't have that romantic element, the show goes down the tubes very quickly. You can do a show about the tunnel people and the tunnel world but that's not the major focus of the series. It's really about the love between these two people." (Personal Interview, 1990)

Aired episodes were evaluated, primarily, according to how much they contributed to the unfolding narrative of Vincent and Catherine's love. Asked to identify their favorite episodes, the Boston *Beauty and the Beast* fans consistently pointed toward episodes with a strong romantic focus or representing other important shifts in the character's relationship: "Once Upon a Time . . . ," "Masques," "A Happy Life," "Promises of Someday," "Orphans," "A Fair and Perfect Knight." Some cited the episodes involving the character of Elliott Burch, the only significant rival Vincent faced for Catherine's affections, while others focused their praise on the episodes involving the Paracelsus who threatens not only the romantic couple but the future of the entire tunnel world. Explanations given for these preferences focus on how these episodes had contributed to defining the characters and progressing the romance: "They are about characters I love and are truly romantic or [are] just *B&B* episodes as opposed to formula TV 'Cops & Robbers' episodes"; "These are episodes that emphasize Vincent and Cath-

erine, their relationship, and things, people and incidents (past or present) that affect their relationship, whether for good or bad." Many specifically opposed these relationship-centered episodes to the more action-centered episodes favored by the network executives: one women said that she preferred "those without violence and guns."

Asked to cite their least favorite episodes, many focused specifically on those episodes which contained the highest amount of violence or spent the greatest amount of time developing traditional action-adventure plots: "The Hollow Men," "The Outsiders, "Terrible Savior," "Dark Spirit." The fans complained that these episodes were "too ominous and dark," "concentrate on action without much character development," offered formulaic plots and too much emphasis upon "the problems of the guest star of the week." The action-focus of these episodes seemed irrelevant to their conception of the program (they "didn't move the relationship either forward or backward") and thus played a relatively minimal role in their interpretations. Their conception of the program's generic development, then, formed a solid basis from which the group could evaluate the merits of individual episodes.

"PROMISES OF SOMEDAY"

Fan interpretations consistently emphasized the most romantic aspects of the series text—even in episodes which are otherwise dominated by action-adventure. *The Whispering Gallery*, a popular regional newsletter, ran a regular column reviewing individual episodes, focusing primarily on those elements fans wanted to see developed more fully, and trying to speculate about "What They Don't Tell Us." These reviews give insight into the rules of notice fans applied in reading *Beauty and the Beast* as a romance and the rules of signification by which they assigned salience to those chosen elements. Consider, for example, one fan's discussion of "Terrible Savior," an episode frequently cited as one of the series' worst because of its focus on Vincent's violent struggle with a subway vigilante:

> It starts out with us not knowing whether Vincent and Catherine have seen each other often or whether the subway slasher incident has brought them together. . . . We also

> see that Vincent is sure of his relationship with Catherine and she is still testing and learning. . . . Why does she fear him? Does she not trust him yet? This is obviously the case when she pulls away from him, and Vincent almost strikes a lamp in his rage. We see Catherine's fear of Vincent change after she confronts him then has time to think about it. Vincent as always is forgiving, again. (The perfect man). (Terhaar 1988, 5)

Here, dramatic moments within a suspense-centered plot are being read for the clues they provide about the romantic relationship between the protagonists, with gestures, looks, vocal tones mined for their suggestion of a growing level of intimacy. Most of the first two seasons' episodes, fans insist, provide some moments that are meaningful primarily in terms of the character romance, even if those moments are often marginal to the primary plot: "No matter how grim it got, there was always a warm balcony scene at the end of each episode." (Personal Interview, 1990)

Fan critics focused their primary interest onto such moments, offering elaborate interpretations of each gesture or expression that fit them within an overall progression of the relationship. Consider, for example, one fan critic's reading of such a scene from "Chamber Music," an episode otherwise dominated by Vincent's efforts to help a young drug addict develop his musical skills:

> Catherine and Vincent are sitting in the tunnel entrance way listening to a concert in the park above them. This is only the second time Catherine and Vincent have been out on a "Real" date that didn't involve a murder, chase or rescue. . . . Are we going to see more of these little romantic times between Catherine and Vincent, where they are off spending time alone? . . . Farther into the scene, it begins to rain. Catherine begins acting like a care-free child, playing in the rain, laughing exuberantly. I wonder if Catherine has become much more comfortable around Vincent and finally let loose a little. Her actions and movements in the rain bordered on the seductive side, and we see Vincent watching and enjoying this. What is he thinking about? He smiles and chuckles along with her giddiness, but there is a hint of maybe a little more of the physical (desire?) side of this relationship. (Burke, 1988a)

As this example suggests, the fan's extensive extrapolations from these meaningful moments lead directly into speculations about possible future developments.

These localized interpretations are the raw materials from which fans construct a more global analysis of the series as rules of notice and signification are supplemented by rules of coherence and configuration. Fans may, indeed, engage in heated debates at this level of local interpretation, may disagree about how they read individual scenes or even the overall progression across scenes. Yet these disagreements occur within a shared frame of reference, a common sense of the series' generic placement and a tacit agreement about what questions are worth asking and what moments provide acceptable evidence for answering such questions. In one issue of *Whispering Gallery*, the newsletter editor raises questions about the second season: "A third element missing is the awakenings. The little clues and hints that maybe, just maybe Catherine might be starting to fall in love with Vincent, that maybe she can't live without him in her life or maybe Father is going to be a little more understanding of their relationship" (Burke, 1988b). Several issues later, another fan responds, citing specific moments in the second season which suggest to her such developments: "Think back to 'Brothers' and 'Chamber Music' and 'Remember Love.' . . . Check out the sickroom scene in 'Ashes, Ashes' and the balcony scene in the same episode. The final scene in 'Brothers,' the date scene and the parting scene in 'Chamber Music.' Don't tell me you don't see AND feel Catherine turn on to Vincent" (Almedina, 1988). Here, the individual moments which form the basis for this larger interpretation no longer need such detailed consideration; the scene from "Chamber Music" is reduced to a brief phrase, evoked for an audience which has already absorbed its local significance and fit it into their larger sense of the series' development.

Generic expectations are being fit to the particulars of this text; as rules of notice, signification, coherence, and configuration are applied episode by episode to the unfolding series, the more abstract generic formula is replaced by a program-specific meta-text. The fan's meta-text is always much more than simply the crude outline of a generic formula; it has built upon all the information specifically provided in the aired episodes, information offered by secondary sources (the "program Bible," published interviews) as well as upon the foundation of fan speculations about that information. Yet its point of origin is the reading hypothesis introduced by the viewer's

decision to interpret the text as belonging to a particular generic tradition. As Rabinowitz (1985) explains, "Literary works 'work' only because the reader comes to them with a fairly detailed understanding of what he or she is getting into beforehand. I am not denying that every work of fiction creates its own world, but I am saying that it can do so only because it assumes that the reader will have certain skills to begin with" (423).

The fan's predictions about future narrative developments are grounded not simply in their sense of the stories romances typically tell but also in their sense of these particular characters, the concrete problems to be overcome, and the circumstances that might create greater intimacy. Their interpretations must necessarily be confirmed and reconfirmed by references to specific episodes. Nevertheless, their descriptions of these characters and their problems still bear a striking resemblance to the conventions of the "Ideal Romance" Janice Radway identified. Radway characterizes romances as "exercises in the imaginative transformation of masculinity to conform with female standards;" romances describe the process by which men and women overcome gender differences in levels of intimacy and communicativeness to arrive at sharing and nurturing relationships (Radway 1984, 147). The man's harsh and stoic exterior masks "his hidden, gentle nature" (Radway 1984, 139). According to the fan community's reading, Vincent is torn between his gentleness and his realization of a darker, bestial side he fears will forever block his chances for romantic fulfillment. Only by resolving this contradiction can Vincent hope for happiness with Catherine. Moreover, Radway suggests, the ideal romance deals with "the female push toward individuation and actualization of self," the female push for autonomy and personal identity within terms compatible with the desire to reaffirm heterosexual marriage (Radway 1984, 147). The fans' Catherine must reconcile her desires for professional autonomy and romantic affection.

It is important to note that few of the members of the Boston *Beauty and the Beast* club regarded themselves to be regular readers of popular romances or regular viewers of soap operas, though some expressed interest in "literary classics" that told romantic stories, such as *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*, and many listed television series with romantic subplots (*Remington Steele, Moonlighting, Scarecrow and Mrs. King, Dark Shadows*) as particular favorites. In fact, many of the women were openly hostile to the conventions of the popular romance, particularly those they saw as undermining

4.3 Fans tended to focus on the "fairy tale" romance between Vincent and Catherine. Artwork by Rita Terrell.

the autonomy of the female protagonist; traditional romances, they protest, transform women who are "very tough and feisty" at the book's openings into "Millie Milquetoast characters" by their conclusions. Those fans who did "occasionally" read romantic fiction were quick to assert that the conventions of that genre were changing in response to "feedback from the female fans" and beginning to reflect the greater possibility of feminine authority and independence following marriage. Almost all claimed, however, that *Beauty and the Beast* offered a style of romance not readily available in other popular fiction.

To understand the meanings these women placed on the romance, it is useful to consider their social status and ideological orientation. All of the women in the group worked outside of the home, some in traditional female service jobs (teachers, nurses), others in low-level or middle management jobs, and several in executive positions. Many of them were married, yet some were single. Most were in their early to mid-thirties, though several were older and a few younger. All of the women identified themselves as feminists, though some qualified that label in some fashion: "yes and no," "Yes, but not strident about it." This group differs sharply with the stereotype of bored housewives eagerly consuming popular romances; these women confronted the contradictory expectations surrounding femininity in the late 1980s, actively pursuing careers without rejecting romantic commitment or without losing aspects of traditional femininity they saw as desirable. These women did not feel entirely comfortable labeling themselves as feminists, despite the degree to which their professional lives broke with traditional feminine roles and the degree to which some of them remained entirely independent from men. They also did not feel comfortable identifying themselves as consumers of popular romances, an image too closely bound to restrictive notions of femininity.

Their emotional commitment to Catherine—a character herself torn between professional ambitions and a desire for a more traditional lifestyle—might help them to explore their own ambiguous relationship to feminism. These fans describe the characters in ways that evoke a break with conventional gender roles, while simultaneously attaching to them valued aspects of traditional gender identities:

> Vincent can be sensitive without being wimpy. I think all women want a sensitive man but there are some men who

> have this sensitive side but then they lack a masculine side. I think he's a blending of both sides that's the most perfect. (Personal Interview, 1990)

> Catherine is my favorite character on the show. I have a problem with the woman's movement in fact. Because of it, certain women are less valued because they stay at home or have kept certain aspects of their femininity. I find Catherine to be tough, resourceful, reliable. She can take care of herself. But she's also allowed to cry. . . . I see her more as a person than as a woman. She's not like certain women on shows now who are stereotypical women's libbers. They're tough—they act like men, while Catherine is strong yet very feminine and I like that about her. (Personal Interview, 1990)

> We had a heroine of the rarest kind on television—one who developed strength, courage, and determination while remaining feminine and vulnerable. Too often strong, resourceful women are depicted as pseudo-males, aggressive and non-emotional (for a perfect example, see the third season). This was a fictional character I could feel proud to relate to—someone who was growing, someone capable of crumbling at times under the demands of others, just like we all are, but someone at all times in touch with her femininity, bringing a perfect balance to Vincent's primitive-male image." (Diane Davis, Personal correspondence, January 1991)

The relationship between these characters was seen, then, as one which would provide each with room to exercise both their strength and their vulnerability; the program, they hoped, would provide a romance relevant to an age of changing gender roles, a romance not based on submission but rather on mutual trust and commitment:

> Vincent loves her—he loves everything about her and accepts her for the good and the bad. . . . He supports her whatever comes. (Personal Interview, 1990)

> Vincent taught her to feel other people's needs and she's just grown so much [during the series] and of course, she gave it back to him. She let him know that he could be loved just the way he was, not out of gratitude for his help

> or out of pity because he's alone, but just because he's Vincent. (Personal Interview, 1990)

Romantic consummation, then, did not entail simply the fulfillment of the viewers' erotic fantasies, but rather posed an ideological solution, a reconciliation of differences, the possibility of trust and intimacy between two people who are so different and yet so alike:

> There is a confrontation and a resolution that has to happen. It doesn't have anything to do with people going to bed together. It has to do with completeness. It can be touching. It can be hugging. It can even be just standing looking at each other but the completeness needs to be there and for Catherine and Vincent, they never got it. We only get a hint of it. (Personal Interview, 1990)

Such a reading helps to explain why Catherine was a particularly pivotal figure for these women. As Radway (1985) suggests, the romance's heroine becomes the focus for feminine identification; if she can successfully negotiate these conflicting demands, her story offers hope for the readers' own efforts to reposition themselves during a period of social change: "I saw a lot of myself in her. The character's gone through a lot of what I've gone through." (Personal Interview, 1990) The fans' expectations about the likely development of the series, thus, were bound to their hopes for Catherine's success in resolving the dilemmas they confronted in their own personal lives.

One member of the Boston fan club described her sense of the program's overall plot: the first season saw the characters deciding to "pursue a relationship together," a decision reached by the season's conclusion ("A Happy Life"); the second season should have "deepened" their relationship by working to resolve the differences which separate them, reaching a crisis point by the seasons' three-part finale; the third season should have begun with their realization "that they belonged together" and "move towards some of their dreams, towards maybe some kind of life together below, some kind of wedding or other symbolic ceremony. Then, at the end, they could have had Catherine expecting a baby or having a baby and have it end happily—play the thing through from beginning to end." (Personal Interview, 1990)

Her *Beauty and the Beast* had always been advancing toward a happy ending which would have resolved the difficulties separating the couple, revealed those problems to exist largely within the characters' minds, and allowed them the "satisfaction" of a traditional life together. Other fans offered similar visions of a desirable resolution:

> I would like to have seen significant progress made in V & C's relationship throughout the season, perhaps resulting in a wedding or some other commitment vows or ceremony by the end of the season. But not without a *few* obstacles to overcome along the way to make things interesting. Vincent being able to come to terms with his dark side, which is essential if their relationship is to progress. (Survey Response, 1990)

> Catherine and Vincent would have consummated their love, married and had a child. (Survey Response, 1990)

> [The series should end with] Catherine moving into the tunnels. (Survey Response, 1990)

The consistency with which the fans return to these same images—marriage, sexual consummation, birth—as a means of resolving this "perfect and impossible relationship" points to the degree to which they rely upon familiarity with generic conventions to shape their experience of the series.

The fan's projections closely mirror Radway's account of the "Ideal Romance" formula:

> 1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed. [In "Once Upon a Time . . . ," Catherine is mistaken for another woman and disfigured; Catherine repudiates her previous engagement, rejects her place in her father's firm, and seeks a new life for herself.]
>
> 2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male. [In "Once Upon a Time . . . ," Catherine reacts with fear and fascination upon her first encounter with Vincent.]
>
> 3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine. [Throughout the early part of first season, Vincent desires Catherine and yet he sends her away; Catherine fears Vincent in "A Terrible Savoir."]

7. The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated. [In "A Happy Life," Catherine fleas to New Jersey hoping to resolve her conflicting desires, planning to end her relationship with Vincent.]

8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly. [The characters embrace at the end of the first season.]

9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness. [Catherine comes to feel closer to Vincent as second season begins.]

10. The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of a previous hurt. [Second season offers several episodes exploring Vincent's past, including a story of his first romantic experiences; the crisis which Vincent faces in reconciling his gentleness and his bestiality heightens throughout the season.] (Radway 1985, 187)

Having successfully mapped each of these expected movements within the series's romantic narrative, the fans came to anticipate the final completion of the formulaic plot:

11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness.

12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally.

13. The heroine's identity is restored. (Radway 1985, 187)

So grounded have these expectations become in the fans' interpretation of textual specifics, in meaningful moments from the episodes, that they seem to originate not from an outside interpretative formula but rather from within the series itself. *Beauty and the Beast* appears to promise the romantic resolution that its producers had consistently denied: Vincent and Catherine *must* consummate their relationship and thus provide appropriate closure to this romantic narrative.

"FEEL THE FURY"

As Radway (1985) documents, romance readers often turn to the back of the book to confirm that the resolution will satisfy their generic expectations before reading it; "Dot," the bookstore em-

ployee, advised the Smithton women on which books would best satisfy their tastes, which would frustrate their desires. The viewers of an unfolding television series, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, have no similar means of verifying that the program will bring its narrative to an appropriate resolution. Instead, the fans were forced to place their trust in the producers to provide them with the story they wanted to watch. The producers' persistent refusal to provide viewers with those plot developments (increased intimacy between Vincent and Catherine, Vincent's resolution of his personal conflicts, the achievement of stable romantic commitment) was perceived by some fans as a betrayal of implicit promises made by virtue of the program's apparent reliance on those generic formulas. Many members of the Boston club expressed the suspicion that, even if Linda Hamilton's departure had not forced the producers in other directions, they would not have delivered on their commitments: "It would have been a lot more near misses. They never would have given us our romance." (Personal Interview, 1990)

Their intense displeasure in the third season fed upon several years of disappointment in the series' refusal to gratify their romantic fantasies, a history of *TV Guide* blurbs promising romantic interludes which proved more teasing than gratifying, and scenes that edge toward romantic commitment, only to be interrupted or to have the characters back away from consummation. If, for many fans, the cryptic and hurried consummation in "Though Lovers Be Lost . . . ," the third season opener (with its trite images of "lava flowing and flowers opening") was a "ludicrous nightmare," denying viewers the desired warmth and intimacy, that moment was simply the last in a series of "insults" to their hopes and expectations: "They were tremendously electric scenes but afterwards you just felt annoyed."

By the beginning of the second season, the fans were already expressing disappointment about the producers' refusal to develop that potential. If the network complained that the second season had centered too closely upon Catherine and Vincent, that the romance seemed in danger of "imploding upon itself," the fans felt the season was too preoccupied with other subplots. Consider, for example, several fan responses to the series' second season:

> The appeal, last year, was the *development* of Catherine and Vincent's relationship. This year the relationship has

> stopped growing. My interest has dropped. (Fan response cited in Burke and Dunadee)

> This year most of the episodes have centered on others, not on the relationship between Catherine and Vincent. While liking some of these other characters, it's not why I watch *Beauty and the Beast*. I find myself asking where Vincent and Catherine are. I miss the relationship I, as a viewer, have built with them. . . . I'm ready to move on [with the relationship], but the episodes don't seem to be. (Hughes 1989, 3)

Fans wanted something from *Beauty and the Beast* its producers were unable or unwilling to deliver. Initially, fans could find textual explanations for the couple's inability to achieve romantic fulfillment (Father's divisive influence, Vincent's anxieties and fears about his bestial nature, Catherine's desires for autonomy). Yet these explanations crumbled in the face of progressively more "teasing" and exploitation. Some fans shifted their anger onto the producers who would not deliver what the series appeared to be promising.

As a fan culture devoted to *Beauty and the Beast* emerged, as fanzine stories began to appear, these new narratives focused increasingly on the show's unfulfilled romantic possibilities, representing possible ways Vincent and Catherine could overcome the obstacles blocking personal fulfillment. Some fanzine stories even provided images of Vincent and Catherine as parents, living in the "world below" and raising a new generation. The fanzine titles, *Cascade of Dreams*, *A Promise of Eternity*, *Sonnets and Roses*, *Tunnels of Love*, *A Life Without Limits*, *Crystal Visions*, and *Faded Roses*, evoke the program's most sentimental images as a basis for new narratives fulfilling those romantic fantasies frustrated by the broadcast episodes.

By the time the belated third season began, the fan community had a firm sense of how the romance between Catherine and Vincent should be resolved. Each saw its resolution in somewhat different images, under different circumstances. Yet a consensus had evolved that the characters *must* overcome the intense differences separating them and achieve the family happiness so long denied them. This solid meta-text allowed some fans to deny the "authenticity" of the third season episodes, rejecting them from the series's canon and dismissing them as binding on fan speculations:

4.4 Fans invisioned a future for the characters that went well beyond the aired narrative. Artwork by Rita Terrell.

> I looked at it as a separate version of possible reality. . . . I don't choose to believe this is going to be the reality for these characters. In my mind, they are off living happily ever after and I will continue to read stories and write stories about them. . . . I don't feel emotionally depressed about it because I don't feel any ownership of the third season. I don't feel that that's really what happened to the characters. (Personal Interview, 1990)

For others, however, the televised images proved too vivid, their closeness to these characters too strong, to allow them distance from the events: "What should have been a joyous time for Catherine and Vincent has turned into a terrible nightmare and I feel trapped in it with them" (Freeman 1990, 3).

The *Beauty and the Beast* these fans had watched and supported was officially dead; its producers and the network had killed it, shifting the program toward generic formulas that held no compelling interest for them:

> I think they were going for the heroic image, not realizing that when we saw Vincent, we didn't just see the heroic image. We saw the romantic Vincent. They did their best to build the perfect heroic image which meant that they had to provide an equally great villain. . . . The problem is that to do so—they sacrificed the romantic side of the plot and that did it! That act of killing Catherine made him the greatest villain I've ever seen. Nonetheless, they had given up forever the chance to go back and bring in the romantic element of Catherine, which is what they had that was so valuable to begin with. (Personal Interview, 1990)

These fans felt no "ownership" of the third season episodes because the producers had violated the spirit of what attracted these women to the show. Instead of the possibility of greater intimacy and romance, of a reconciliation of differences, the long-delayed consummation scene was reduced to a succession of quick and cliched images. So cryptic and confusing was the sequence that some fans have jokingly referred to Catherine's baby as the result of an "immaculate conception." Rather than using consummation to achieve greater trust and intimacy between the two lovers, of resolving the conflicts separating them, sexual intercourse broke the

empathic bond that joined them; Vincent lost his memory not only of that moment but of much that transpired between the couple:

> For two years, we've waited for that grand, passionate kiss of our dreams and what we get instead is mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and not much of that! . . . The fact that Vincent *never* once remembered that anything had happened just makes it worse. For him, subjectively speaking, nothing *did* happen. And now that she's dead, nothing can *ever* happen. . . . Why did the writers deny this experience to Vincent and Catherine (and to us) when they'll never have the chance again?!" (DeLeon 1990, 3)

From that moment, the program assumed the worst features Radway's readers identified in the "failed romance": "Where the ideal romance appears to be about the *inevitability* of the deepening of 'true love' into an intense conjugal commitment, failed romances take as their principal subject the myriad problems and difficulties that must be overcome if mere sexual attraction is not to deteriorate into violence, indifference or abandonment" (Radway 1985, 162). The series moved relentlessly to foreclose any possibility of romantic fulfillment for Vincent and Catherine, and in the process, took away much the fans had found endearing about earlier episodes. Catherine is tortured and murdered. Vincent goes on a rampage seeking vengeance for her death, his gentleness often overpowered by bestial fury. Violence invaded the "special places" from previous episodes, spaces saturated with meaning through the fans' repeated rereadings of those scenes and embedded within the fans' own narratives. Beloved characters were revealed as traitors or killed.

The producers sought to appease fans by the introduction of a new female protagonist, Diana, who some fans suspected was designed to be a future lover for Vincent, a new "Beauty." They felt this development would only further undermine the "specialness" of the Vincent-Catherine romance. Moreover, some felt that Diana's strength and independence pushed too far against romantic conventions; they insisted that she lacked those aspects of traditional femininity that had drawn them to Catherine: "Diana can take care of herself. She doesn't need to look to anyone for help. But I can't picture her on the balcony in a silk nightgown. . . . Catherine was all soft and Diana is all hard edges." (Personal Interview, 1990)

Several of the women suggested that they liked Diana's character and that she might become the focus of a fascinating series but that Diana did not fit their expectations for *Beauty and the Beast.*

Not all *Beauty and the Beast* fans rejected the third season; indeed, some preferred it to the previous seasons, suggesting that the introduction of Diana renewed their interests by restoring elements lost during second season's development. Morgan, one member of the Boston group, felt the producers had weakened Catherine's character to the point that she no longer could function as a focus of her identification: "When Catherine was first introduced, you saw the softness and the strength. By the time they killed her, all she was was soft, soft, and soft. Keep pushing down, all you get is soft." (Personal Interview, 1991) Morgan saw Diana as a stronger, more "realistic" female character: "Catherine went around issues rather than face them. Diane confronts problems face to face. . . . Vincent was stronger than Catherine emotionally; he was Catherine's support. Diana would have been the other way, constantly telling Vincent that he needed her help. The result would have been a more equal partnership between them" (Personal Interview, 1991). Both Morgan and Cindy, another member of the Boston group who also expressed a preference for the third season, stressed that they were not centrally interested in the romance but rather saw it as one of several important aspects of the program. Cindy emphasized that third season allowed the producers to explore Vincent's personality, broaden Father's character, and focus more fully on the tunnel world:

> If they weren't going to progress the love story, it was time to move onto something else. . . . There are so many different directions that program could have gone and it looked like they were starting to explore them when it ended. . . . As far as I'm concerned, the tunnel world could have been its own show and I would have watched it. Who cares about New York? I've seen other cop shows. I want to go down and look at this community, how they live, how they do their laundry. The third season was starting to really focus on that world down there. . . . There's nothing so special about Catherine. I want to know more about Vincent, who he is, why he's there. (Personal Interview, 1991)

Here, as well, their interest in the third season reflects something other than an unconditional commitment to the series. These

women endorsed the third season precisely because it came closer to fulfilling the generic potentials they saw in the series, because it better satisfied their interests in the characters and their world.

As third season unfolded, tensions between fans and producers erupted publicly. Some fans wrote angry letters demanding the series's immediate cancelation; some broke all ties with *Beauty and the Beast* fandom. Letterzines and club newsletters overflowed with pained reactions to the third season as well as equally passionate defenses. Some reacted with relief when the series was finally pulled from the air. Both Morgan and Cindy described to me tense encounters with other fans as a result of their willingness to publicly defend the third season and this is one reason why they wanted me to include some acknowledgement of third season fans in this chapter. Yet it would be a mistake to describe this traumatic break between some fans and producers (as well as between different segments of the fan community) as the end of *Beauty and the Beast* fandom. The characters had established such a coherence and stability through the fans' own meta-textual extrapolations that they retained a life within fan culture even after the series itself ceased production. Fans could now turn their attention entirely to the creation and consumption of zine narratives more perfectly fulfilling their generic expectations and satisfying their desires. "Classic" fans, (i.e. fans of the first two seasons), could write stories in which Catherine lives and finds happiness with Vincent; Third season fans could write stories that built upon that season's new developments. The Boston meetings are often spent in informal discussions of recent zines, evaluations of their contents, exchange of fliers, solicitation of stories for zines the members were editing, or speculations about narratives fans would like to write. The infrastructure established during the long struggle to protect the series from cancelation now serves as the basis for an autonomous fan culture, drawing inspiration from the broadcasts yet taking the characters in directions unimagined by the producers. The next chapter looks more closely at fan writing as a critical response to television programs, as a way of rewriting the series in order to better facilitate fannish interests.