Lily Glasner, "Entry on: Cruel Beauty (Cruel Beauty Universe, 1) by Rosamund Hodge", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1349. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Rosamund Hodge

Cruel Beauty (Cruel Beauty Universe, 1)

United States of America (2014)

TAGS: Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Daphne Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Furies Gaia / Gaea Hades Hera Hermes Nyx Pandora Persephone Prometheus Tartarus Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Cruel Beauty (Cruel Beauty Universe, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Rosamund Hodge, *Cruel Beauty*. New York: Balzer + Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2014, 346 pp.
ISBN	9780062224743
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Lily Glasner, Bar-Ilan University and Kibbutzim College of Education, lily.glasner@gmail.com
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Rosamund Hodge , b. 1984
(Author)

Rosamund Hodge is an American young adult fantasy writer who has published short stories, novella and novels. Amongst her publications: *Cruel Beauty* (2014), *Gilded Ashes* (2014), *Crimson Bound* (2015), *Bright Smoke, Cold Fire* (2016), *Endless Water, Starless Sky* (2018), *Desires and Dreams and Powers* (2019). In 2015 her novel *Cruel Beauty* was translated to Portuguese (Beleza Cruel). According to her website: "Rosamund Hodge grew up as a homeschooler in Los Angeles, where she spent her time reading everything she could lay hands on, but especially fantasy and mythology. She got a BA in English from the University of Dallas and an MSt in Medieval English from Oxford, and she now lives in Seattle."

Source:

Author's website (accessed: February 26, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

One day, one of the wise men of Arcadia is tempted to make a bargain with the "demon" who rules Arcadia. In return for granting his wish he agrees to give to him in marriage one of his unborn twin girls upon her 17th birthday. The girl, Nyx, is trained to kill her future husband and deliver Arcadia even at the price of her own life. Once she is in her husband's mysterious castle, she needs to carefully navigate her way to overcome her husband. And even though she falls in love with him, her commitment to her family and her land must take precedence. Thus, following her actions, the prince is ultimately imprisoned in Pandora's box and Arcadia is freed. Yet, in the last part of the novel Nyx challenges her husband's fate in an effort to undone it and liberate him too.

Analysis

Cruel Beauty is a complex re-telling of the classical tale of *Beauty and the Beast*. In the field of fairy-tales study, Apuleius' version of the forbidden love story of Cupid and Psyche (*The Golden Ass*, Books 4–6) is identified as the first known version of *Beauty and the Beast*. Even so, this classical tale as it is best known today (e.g., Walt Disney animated film of 1991) is based on a re-telling by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont [Madame de Beaumont] (1756) of a fairy-tale by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve (1740). It is claimed that in her writings Madame de Beaumont celebrated and promoted female intellect (see: Schaller). Yet, from the point of view of a 21st century reader, Madame de Beaumont's didactic tale seems to be first and foremost a guideline for the young girls of the upper class – of the writer's time and place – with regard to achieving a suitable marriage, their ultimate goal in life. The author draws a clear correlation between accomplishing this goal and exhibiting (what she perceived to be) the right feminine qualities. First and foremost, amongst these qualities is putting the needs and well-being of others before those of oneself. In this sense, Beauty is a more subtle version of the figure of Griselda (e.g., Boccaccio, *Decameron* 10:10).

Part of *Cruel Beauty*'s complexity stems from the fact that it combines the traditional ideal of female self-sacrifice with a feminist literary model, that of the active and resourceful heroine who is quite capable of rescuing not only herself but also her prince. The unresolved tension between these two colliding undercurrents is in fact a

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manifestation of the ambivalent nature of the genre of fairy-tale retellings (see: Haase 2004).

Three more factors contribute to the novel's complexity: 1) The story is not narrated chronologically 2) Unlike the one dimensional characters of the fairy-tale, the characters in the novel are multi-faceted 3) The fictional world consists of a mixture of components from different sources, most prominent amongst them: Graeco-Roman mythology, Plato's Dialogues, Christianity, elements from well-known fairy-tales (e.g. *Bluebeard*) and a surrealistic universe structure: the physical world – being under spell - is organized in a physically impossible structure.

The narratives in Apuleius' text and in Madame de Beaumont's text follow the chronological order of events. *Cruel Beauty* on the other hand begins in medias res. The very first words of the novel introduce the reader with its protagonist, the night before her wedding. From this point on the reader is confined to her consciousness and to her voice and with them the reader moves between the narrative's present time and the revelation of past events.

Whilst employing a different mode of narration from that of the classic fairy-tale, *Cruel Beauty* does indeed contain the main elements of the classic plot, beginning with a father who is willing to sacrifice his daughter and ending with the heroine's love for her husband that releases him from his "monster state of being". Yet there are also substantial differences in the plot.

For example, the fatal deal between the father and the monster is signed even before the protagonist is born. Thus, in Madame de Beaumont's version it can be argued that it is the protagonist who has brought about the calamity in the first place, since she asked her father to bring her a rose. In Hodge's version, however, the protagonist was born into a reality that was forced upon her by external forces.

Other fundamental changes concern the way in which the protagonist accepts her destiny and her motive to act upon it. She does not demonstrate a passive acceptance of the gods' decree (the oracle in Apuleius' version), nor does she act upon a desire to save the life of her father (as in Madame de Beaumont's version). Rather, Nyx actively and conscientiously takes upon herself the role of the redeemer of her people and her country. Nonetheless, whilst

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accepting her role as savior she also wrestles inwardly with hard and ambivalent feelings towards her family and towards the role that was assigned to her.

Nyx actions illustrate the contemporary new female-hero model: an independent woman who is able to save the world by exercising her own intelligence, knowledge and skills. The traditional role of "the savior" in Graeco-Roman mythology was played and displayed by the great male-heroes (e.g., Hercules and Theseus). In the contemporary novel this role is embodied by the female heroine.

Nyx then is an active, smart, brave and resourceful heroine. But even so, in Hodge's work the character of the active heroine is deeply rooted in the classical model of the woman who is sacrificing herself for her husband (*Alcestis*, Euripides). Thus, this complex novel enables us to witness and appreciate the ongoing tension that constitutes the nature of a contemporary Young Adult's subversive re-telling.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Daphne Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Furies Gaia / Gaea Hades Hera Hermes Nyx Pandora Persephone Prometheus Tartarus Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Death Emotions Family Gender expectations/construction Heroism Individuality Love Magic

Further Reading

Glasner, Lily, "Pandora's Split: Reading the Myth of Pandora in Cruel Beauty", in Lisa Maurice and Tovi Bibring, eds., *Gender, Creation Myths and their Reception in Western Civilization: Prometheus, Pandora, Adam and Eve*, London: Bloomsbury, 2021, forthcoming.

Haase, Donald, "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship", in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, Donald Haase, ed., Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2004, 1–36.

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Schaller, Peggy, "Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont (1711–1780)", Chawton House (accessed: 27 April 2021).

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