

There was once a very rich merchant who had six children, three sons and three daughters ... so begins the best-known written version of *Beauty and the Beast*, which was published by the French aristocrat Madame de Beaumont in 1756 as part of a collection of children's stories.

Since then, of course, de Beaumont's tale has been supplanted in the public mind by the 1991 Disney cartoon, and subsequent hit Broadway musical. Thanks to the magic of touring companies, the musical has been performed on stages around the world (including Regina's Centre of the Arts in 2000).

Now, the Globe Theatre is set to give Regina audiences a second crack at this enchanting tale with its own production of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*.

Such a big-budget extravaganza has become a holiday tradition at the Globe. Last year it was *A Secret Garden*, in 2002, it was *Honk! The year before, The Wizard of Oz*. (It's also become an annual holiday cover on the front of this magazine, as alert *prouit* dog readers—and what other kind are there?—will recall.) But with this year's offering, Globe director Ruth Smillie has set what some might regard as an impossible task for the cast and crew. How do you out-Disney Disney? The answer is, you don't.

"We do extravaganza, but we do it our own way," says Smillie. "I would compare it with *The Wizard of Oz*. Both have a huge cultural footprint. The challenge for us is to create our own footprint. Our designer, Judith Bowden, has completely reimaged the characters and the way the story's staged. Which she had to do with a cast of 14 instead of 44, and on a 20-foot stage with no fly gallery [as opposed to a proscenium theatre]."

Seeing a stripped down version of a lavish spectacle like *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, Smillie feels, allows the storyline and characters to come to the fore. "It becomes much more of an actor piece, where they carry the show because there aren't the special effects you find on Broadway."

Seeing a stripped down *Beauty* might also prompt viewers to think more deeply about the

ences. But Ruddick is willing to cut the corporation some slack. "What Disney is trying to do is adapt folk tales that were never intended for small children. While Disney's versions of *Cinderella* and *Snow White* are much different than the [original written versions], the changes have been made with a great deal of thought. They're not ignorant changes." Similarly, Disney has been criticized by conservatives for being anti-parent because so many of their classic tales involve children who are either orphaned, or being menaced by evil step-mothers and step-siblings. But during the Middle Ages, when maternal mortality rates were much higher than now, that situation would not have been uncommon. "Many of the stories intended for girls have to do with how a daughter can survive and get married happily even though she doesn't have a mother to look after her," says Ruddick.

Which brings us back to *Beauty and the Beast*. Originally, it was intended for girls of marriageable age. "According to custom, their marriages would be largely arranged," says Ruddick. "Families would try to marry their daughters off to the upper class. Often, these wealthy husbands would be old, ugly, unpleasant perhaps, married several times before. What [the tale was designed to do] was reconcile girls to getting hitched to a very unappealing man with the idea that if they could maintain the various virtues Beauty maintains—patience, loyalty, self-sacrifice—the 'beast' might well turn into a prince."

When fairy tales were taken over by the middle class, as occurred when Madame de Beaumont adapted a pre-existing French folk tale for her book, their moral elements were emphasized—one of Beauty's virtues, for example, is her sense of duty toward her father. The Grimm Brothers, as German folklorists, says Ruddick, played a major role in transforming fairy tales into the undoubtably menacing, but ultimately edifying, stories we know now. "When they discovered [in the early 1800s] that their tales were being bought by middle class parents and read to their kids they cashed in on that and started to customize their tales and make them much more genteel."

*As originally circulated among*

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST DECEMBER 1-JANUARY 2 GLOBE THEATRE

WHERE THE WILD

