*BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* (1946)

*Beauty and the Beast* [*La Belle et la Bête*] is a black-and-white French film directed by Jean Cocteau. Based on the fairy-tale by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, *Beauty and the Beast* was Cocteau’s first feature-length film. Influenced by the modernist experiments of the Parisian avant-garde, the film is celebrated for its surrealistic combination of fantasy and realism. The narrative describes the story of Belle (Josette Day), the beautiful captive of the Beast (Jean Marais), a loving but monstrous figure. Initially disgusted by the Beast, Belle ultimately falls in love with him, at which point he is transformed into an attractive prince. Emphasizing identity, desire, gender, appearance, and social status, the film betrays a modernist fascination with psychological themes. Cocteau employed a realistic, documentary style for the film, produced through the use of unsophisticated camera movements, numerous fixed camera shots, as well as framing and mise-en-scène recalling the realist paintings of Vermeer. In counterpoint to the film’s realism, a fantasy, fairy-tale story-world is also presented, in which a monstrous beast is actually a dashing prince in disguise, characters transform into other humans and animals, and physical objects magically come alive. Cocteau’s stylistic innovations and authorial vision in *Beauty and the Beast* helped establish him as an Auteur director and position him as a predecessor of the French New Wave.

References and Further reading:

Cocteau, J. (1950) Diary of a Film (La Belle et la Bête), New York: Roy Publishers.

Sheaffer-Jones, C. (2002) “Fixing the Gaze: Jean Cocteau’s La Belle et la Bête”, Romantic Review 93 (3): 361-374

Williams, J.S. (2006) Jean Cocteau, Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Palgrave.

Paratextual Material

- The Criterion Collection provides a trailer for the film as well as a photo gallery of Jean Marais transforming into the character of the Beast: <http://www.criterion.com/films/177-beauty-and-the-beast>

- The entry for the film on Allo Ciné provides numerous stills from the film, including this shot which demonstrates the influence of Vermeer: <http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-772/photos/detail/?cmediafile=21008158>

- The poster for the film is featured in the BFI entry for the film: <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b6a59e27b>

Contributor: Valerie Uher