



Two important life lessons come to mind after watching the 2017 live-action remake of Disney's brilliant 1991 Oscar nominated feature, *Beauty and the Beast*:

1. If it ain't broke, don't fix it (my dad taught me this one).
2. Just because you can doesn't mean you should (the brilliant theme of *Jurassic Park*, and a lesson many, many filmmakers ignore every year).

I saw *Beauty and the Beast*, the former, in a tiny screening room (it seated about 12 people) when I was in college. I fell in love with it. It is my favorite pre-Pixar Disney animated film (the post-Pixar award goes to 2009's *Up*, an Oscar winner, but in what I consider an invalid category, so ... there's that).

Anyway, I loved the original, so my anticipation for the remake came tempered with hesitation. And as I watched the remake, I couldn't help but wonder if my disappointment was solely due to the natural inclination to compare the two.

But then I thought that a remake really has two hurdles to overcome.

First, it must be able to stand up to the scrutiny of comparison – after all, if you decide to remake something, you're essentially announcing to the world that you believe you can do it better. Why else do it?

Second, it must be able to stand on its own. It should be strong on its own merits – entertaining to both those who have seen the original and those who have not. And as with any other feature film, it should tell a good story, feature interesting characters (preferably ones who change between the first act and the closing credits), and provide a satisfying experience.

The 2017 *Beauty and the Beast* does neither.

To begin with, the original film clocked in at a respectable 84 minutes and offered not a single dull moment from start to finish. The creators of the new version apparently felt they needed 129 minutes to tell the exact same story.

Well . . . not the exact same story. They made changes. Quite a few changes, actually. And not a single one of them was necessary.

A new introduction was created to show the audience how awful the soon-to-be beast was prior to his transformation. His crimes seemed to include wearing far too much makeup, throwing lavish parties, and (as explained by the VO narrator) taxing the villagers to pay for said extravagances.

As fancy and grand as it is, this opening falls into the category of "just because you can doesn't mean you should." It adds absolutely nothing to the narrative, and had this been the first draft of the original, a good script editor would have removed it to give the first act a much-needed jump start.

As the film continues, additional added scenes and "explanations" continue to bog down the story's forward momentum. Many of these additions feel exceptionally forced – they were obviously added to "fix" things the writers felt were too old fashioned in the original. [MINOR SPOILERS AHEAD]

Belle gets extra scenes to reinforce (and reinforce and reinforce) how special she is because she reads. Also, it's not daddy who invents things in this version. Belle is the inventor; Maurice is ... an artist? He builds music boxes and draw a lot, so I'm going to go with artist. Oh, and in this version Belle has a mother who died of the plague. Because ... I have no idea. Knowing what happened to Belle's mother adds nothing even remotely valuable to the story.

Gaston gets some backstory, too, and his wooing efforts are given more time and energy, perhaps in an attempt to round out his character more. Honestly, Luke Evans, who played Gaston, was, by far, the most charismatic actor in the entire film; I would have enjoyed a spin-off story about this Gaston more than a disappointing remake of a near perfect film.

And it's not just unnecessary "corrections" that have been added. Several new songs have been crammed in there as well. The new songs are fine, I suppose, but in a film that already feels like it's been padded like a book report that didn't quite reach the required page count, adding even more unnecessary sequences is just extra-super tedious.

Oh, also for no reason at all, one character is transformed into a gay man (not by a magic spell in this case, but by a – I can only imagine – bored screenwriter).

Finally – yes this may seem like a petty complaint, but it bothered me, so I'm going to bring it up – the adorable little French maid feather duster in this version is some kind of weird bird. I'm not sure what kind of house – even an 18th century rococo French palace – would have an army of

floaty birds lying around for maids to turn into. I mean, clocks, candelabra, bureaus, and dishes are all common household items. As are feather dusters. Floaty birds? Not so much.

*[Note: In searching for a picture of the floaty bird, I discovered that she was still meant to be a feather duster – just one with wings, I guess. So, my bad. I guess she was a household item after all.]*

And then there are the parts they kept. The musical numbers in particular. They're not just different. They're, frankly, not as good.

The new vocals fail to capture the energy and excitement of the originals, and often even fail to capture the enunciation necessary to enjoy the delightful lyrics. Wonderful lines like, "Try the gray stuff; it's delicious. Don't believe me? Ask the dishes!" are given no emphasis, so the joy in their delivery is completely lost. Every song completely lacks passion. It's as if the singers were told that, since the writers had added a bunch of extra nonsense, they (the singers – not the writers) needed to rush through the original songs to keep the running time reasonable.

And finally [SPOILER ALERT], my biggest objection arrived at the end.

To begin with, in this version, Belle's village has more going on in it, which leads one to wonder why Belle is so unhappy with her "provincial life" – she's a successful inventor in what seems to be a thriving town! What more is she hoping for?

Oh, that's right. She deserves romance with a prince in a castle where great, lavish balls are held.

Remember how the movie started with a great, lavish ball that served as proof of the prince's arrogance and obsession with all things glamorous (i.e., surface over substance)? Oh, and don't forget that ball was paid for by, presumably, the folks living in Belle's little town.

Well, once the Beast is turned back into a prince, the first thing he and Belle do is ... wait for it ... throw a big ball to celebrate.

Yes. That's right. They hold a big, lavish, extravagant ball. In the big, lavish, extravagant palace.

So . . . circle of life? What exactly is the message here? It's okay for the prince to hold a big ball now that he's learned his lesson? Who is paying for this one? And why do the townspeople all decide they like him now? Did he apologize and give back their tax money off screen?

Sure, it's possible that Belle and the prince in the 1991 version eventually threw some big parties. But in that version, the prince hadn't already been chastised for doing so.

Ending the remake with a ball essentially negated everything that happened in between. And since everything that happened in between was a longer, less compelling version of the original, it left me thoroughly discouraged as I exited the theater.

The original feature was nominated for Best Picture in 1991, and it deserved the nod. It was beautifully animated, well written, entertaining, exciting, and fresh. This version deserves to disappear into a black hole. What a colossal waste of celluloid.

Lesson #3: Never try to remake something you don't understand or respect.

Final Grade: F