Pretty Women and Perfect Men: The Evolution of Gender Representations in Disney Studios' Animations

Faye Olivia Laverick-Stovin

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Research

York St John University

School of Humanities

September 2021

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Abstract

Since the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), Disney Animations, more specifically their prince and princesses, have become global icons who influence and inspire generations. Decades of animations with characters so often idolised by children who through childhood development come to desire similarities between the fairy tales and their adulthood aspirations, forged from fairy tales and folklore that offer a glimpse of true love, happily ever after and a sense of positivity, while morality is otherwise lost in translation against the detail and prettiness of the films. Such detail that more often than not centres on the female protagonists overshadowed by monstrous women or oppressive men who are catalysts for the unrealistic 'happily ever after' sought after by not only the leading characters, but the demographic audiences observing them.

Not only does Disney Studios produce beautiful films likely to be treasured for generations, but they seem to have a lasting impact involving the representations of gender and sexuality that – whether intentional or not – does not seem to reveal an entirely positive influence for said generations. Change is just around the riverbend however, and in depth exploration of their animated adventures is necessary to discern the evolution of gender representations since the initial 1937 release to modern day expectations of worldly culture and society.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The topic of gender as represented in film, in this case animation feature lengths, and how they are regarded over the course of decades to the modern era is by no means new. From the twentieth century to the twenty-first, the development of media, the 1990s pop culture frenzy, and the internet, forged physical, cultural and social expectations that were vividly tied into film characters as well as real life people, thus pinning sex and gender into focused hierarchies and social roles that are and were adhered to in American culture. Writers, feminists, anti-feminists, celebrities, politicians, and many others have discussed this subject in varying degrees of depth and seriousness.

One such institution that wove decades of gender stereotypes into their films is Disney, a film studio that has continued to release successful films even years after the death of the man it is so named after. Successful films that this thesis will analyse and discuss in regard to how its narrative and characters present gender, gender stereotypes, and whether those tropes have evolved since the company inception to more recent film that have been produced and films. Specifically considering the likes of Disney princesses and princes, heroines and heroes, their appearances and behaviours, and the context of American society and its changes through the decades, this thesis questions Disney's reliability to produce a consistent formula for gender roles, and considers the imagery of women most of all to map the evolution of their representation shown in media and American society at large.

This thesis analyses the construction of human, female characters in Disney's animated films from between 1937 and 2016. It is based on the assumption that, in the representations of femininity or gender as a whole, that Disney films reflect the attitudes and social norms of the wider society in which the films are produced and released, and that the formula in which they construct their characters has slowly evolved from the initial 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to the 2016 release of *Moana,* with those changes to said formula allowing the company as well as their films to endure decades of popularity. It attempts to establish the extent to which these characterisations were shaped by wider popular stereotypes by putting

the films in a chronological order of discussion, thus in context of the times in which they were produced and released in each era of American society, and to compare the similarities and differences between said eras of society and Disney film releases in terms of gender representation. Furthermore, since within the subject of US animation it is the works of Disney Studio that has reigned, and continues to supremely reign, it is upon these films this study concentrates.

There are of course setbacks when researching and writing studies on Disney however. Though the interest and scholarly writing has certainly blossomed over the decades with thanks to film and animation studies becoming academic disciplines, one major issue when undertaking a study of Disney is by the organisation itself. Scholars and writers quite rightly seek the most logical place for any source of Disney information, the company archives at Walt Disney Productions in Burbank, California. Unfortunately, while earlier researchers were able to utilise the archives for their work, it was closed indefinitely to both academics and the public during Michael Eisner's leadership of the corporation. So whether academic research in the archives will be permitted again in the future remains to be seen, considering Eisner has since left. Naturally, it is a hope that such will be the case when the value of scholarly access to the archives is indefinable when said archives holds a treasure trove of information that can be offered up for professional analysis once more.

Another setback during the research and writing of this thesis was the unfortunate circumstances in which it was entirely written. A pandemic lockdown is no sweet vacation to sit and enjoy the construction of a thesis argument and chapter writing when the writer themselves are unlucky enough to catch the spreading illness, especially when said illness has a lasting impact for the study's duration and even through extensions. Writer aside, the pandemic brought additional problems with it (deservedly so, of course, when thinking of the safety of others) as society was placed into lockdown. Institutes closed, meaning a lack of physical sources from the likes of universities and libraries. In short, everything was either to be available online, or not available at all. Sources for this thesis were plucked from many searches over Google Scholar or the York St John online library and archives, as well as the physical copies of books bought and delivered online, or loaned from friends

and family. While the internet is boundless, so much can be withheld behind passwords or payments, and this was an unfortunate obstacle when it came to researching and writing, that at times work felt lacking on top of the weight of ongoing illness. It is not an ideal situation, but one must overcome and do their best with what is on offer, which has manifested in this thesis that strives to examine both the films as individual texts and the patterns formed by these texts when looked at as examples of cultural and gender representation.

The main sources of this thesis are the Disney animation films. Chapter one focuses on examining Disney from 1937 to 1959, with the films *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) as the basis for what is to be discussed as the three categories of women; the maid, the mother, and the monstrous woman. Included in chapter one is the comparison of the three Disney princesses, those who have set the standard for the company's royal heroines, and the differing characteristics of Slue-foot Sue and Katrina van Tassell in the Pecos Bill segment of *Melody Time* (1948) and the Sleepy Hollow segment of *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949) respectively. This standard Disney formula of female characters sways back and forth between these comparisons, with the latter challenging the societal norms of what was considered a 'good woman' in American society at the time.

Chapter two takes a deep-dive into the context of American society from 1937 up to 1989, and the gender stereotypes of femininity seen later in the Disney era. It first focuses on discussions of women in American society, of what becomes the general understanding and expectations of a woman, and the social role in which a woman is placed compared to men. This includes analysis of the film industry, what is now understood as Hollywood film, and the social grandeur that has evolved over the decades when one is involved in the Hollywood film scene, for example, theatres become grand movie palaces, the notion of the 'movie premiere', and the female starlets renowned of the era. Chapter two then considers the shift in societal context that one would assume pushed Disney to evolve their films and characters to better fit the society America was becoming by the 1980s, especially in the wake of the 1960s women's movement. This involves analysis of 1985's *The Black Cauldron* and how the

film was a critical failure for its attempts at releasing something different than what Disney is known for, despite its character's showing promise in those differences, and 1989's *The Little Mermaid,* where one is privy to Disney returning to their prior and more popular portrayals. The latter finds greater analysis of its characters, with interesting discussion regarding a back-and-forth of 'old Disney' and 'new Disney' gender representations.

Chapter three delves into what is considered the 'Disney renaissance' of their films, where after the popular success of *The Little Mermaid* (1989) near enough revived the company, they began releasing a thread of animations that each time were more and more successful. Not only were they popular, however, but the films themselves seemed to have a newfound sparkle of characterisation and gender representation. The chapter relies heavily on the film analysis of 1991's *Beauty and the Beast,* and touches upon characters and narratives of 1992's *Aladdin,* 1995's *Pocahontas,* and 1998's *Mulan.* The live action remake of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) is also discussed as a more contemporary analysis and discussion of what differs between then and now. After an in-depth dive of the 1990s heroine leads (rather than princesses), the chapter then turns tables by analysing and discussing the changes in Disney's male characters, considering the definite and almost ironic shift from male characters who are all handsome, all heroic, and physically capable champions of women, to male characters who are frankly the complete opposite (or at least they are just less physically robust). This is detailed by the likes of Quasimodo in 1996's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* by Milo Thatch in 2001's *Atlantis: The Lost Empire,* and Jim Hawkins in 2002's *Treasure Planet.*

Chapter four of this thesis rounds off the discussion of Disney's evolution of gender representation with analysis and discussion of twenty-first century films, such as 2009's *The Princess and the Frog,* 2010's *Tangled,* Pixar's 2012 release of *Brave,* 2013's *Frozen,* and 2016's *Moana.* The likes of including Pixar's 2012 film *Brave* was decided due to Walt Disney Productions releasing the film and capitalising on the princess brand surrounding the main character, Merida, thus throwing the character into the renowned pile of Disney princesses. Not only this, but many of the characterisations within the film fit the thesis argument in terms of feminine imagery

by Disney and the comparison of what is different now to previous princesses. The other texts used in this chapter similarly reflect a change in Disney's female and male characters, for example, in 2013's *Frozen* when Elsa declares that "you cannot marry a man you've just met" is an amusing comment slapping at the old notions of Disney films where the heroine or princess always ended up in marriage or alluded to a happily ever after through marriage.

A multitude of other sources throughout the thesis, either for helpful evidence or to compete arguments with, are referenced as appropriate. With writers such as Jack Zipes' *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (2012) sharing discussions on the basis of fairy tale and its impact on the consumer, using Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) to thread a link between the Disney films in terms of villains (especially the female villains) and the thesis argument of feminine categories in which one is the monstrous woman, to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008) that defined the points of narrative in which so many of these films align with regarding adventure, the heroes and heroines, the obstacles in which said heroes and heroines face and overcome, romance, and the journey home. The most profound source of information and academic study on this thesis argument, however, ultimately comes from Amy Davis' books *Good Girls & Wicked Witches* (2006) and *Handsome Heroes & Vile Villains* (2013), which provided mouth-watering amounts of detail on Disney, past research as well as more present findings, and interesting points of analysis and discussion that underlined the justification of this thesis and argument.

Texts that were not used in this thesis, or were perhaps only briefly mentioned, such as

While it is discussed that Disney does make important cinematic changes over their century of success, it is the ways in which Disney films present larger ideas and themes such as love and morality that is most important in this thesis. Particularly significant are how these themes are presented, and how their presentations change over time. It is the intention of this thesis to dive into the ways in which Disney have adapted fairy tale and folklore narratives into animations, thus making them relevant and attractive to contemporary cinema audiences. Yet the primary focus of the study

itself is concerned with the examination of the characterisation of female character in a selection of Disney animation feature films.

The question is posed whether or not the characterisations of female characters analysed and discussed reflect not only the stereotypes and societal expectations of their time (as in when each selected film was released), but also modern stereotypes within Western society. It is the hope of this thesis to add to the understanding of twentieth-century and twenty-first century American social and cultural perceptions of women, as well as to contribute to the better understanding of Disney animated content and their place in American society.

That the Disney studio has been successful is undeniable: from starting as a tiny independent studio with a staff of four in October 1923 to growing into a beast of a film and merchandise corporation that it is presently, it is one of the richest and most powerful multi-media businesses in the world. Viewers resonate with the colourful appeal of the films and their stories, and such is what Disney owes the massive success to (for the most part) for their ability to continuously produce successful features. The fact that many of these films have achieved classic status, and are continuously referenced by other films and animated works, and that they are fruitful enough to warrant scholarly attention just as much as the immeasurable popularity from civilian audiences as well as critics, shows that these films play an important cultural role. But it is how much they tap into their culture's ideas, roles, hopes and fears, and attitudes in general, is what this study seeks to understand.

Chapter One

"You'll love me at once, The way you did once upon a dream."

The Maids, the Monsters, and the Happily Ever After of Classical Disney.

At the turn of the 20th century, the written words of fairy tale and fiction evolved into moving pictures that saw the likes of Walt Disney's animation studio skyrocket into the forefront of what would become a sensational career of both short animations and later the renowned feature length animations. Despite the American

financial depression that had rolled over from the previous decade for many companies, by 1934 Disney Studios had emphasised the difference in sophistication between short and feature length animations, and separated the two kinds of cartoons by the level of artistry needed, and in the studios' success was such that it could easily support creating stories that involved much more intricate and varied displays of emotion. According to Amy Davis, this made it clear that shorter animation works were no longer as economically viable as they once were and that Walt came to the conclusion that his studio was capable 'both financially and commercially to undertake such a challenge' as to create its first feature animation and that 'his animators were by now more than capable of meeting the technical and artistic demands such a project would involve,' (2006, p.88) thus sparking the onscreen magic that audiences have come to love for decades ever since such a decision was put in place to set the foundation and a resulting high standard of animated features that were unparalleled until recent decades. From the first critically popular success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) up to Walt Disney's death in 1966, the studio released nineteen animated features to varying degrees of popularity, and of those the following chapter of study will primarily focus on three of the classic Princess animations to explore and discuss their narratives with consideration of gender and fairy tale stereotypes; *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The choice of these three features is that they serve as prime evidence for social context in terms of gender stereotypes at the time of their releases, how they also differ from said stereotypes and considering the evolution of gender representations in the animations, as well as allowing interesting analysis for fairy tale tropes in their respective narratives in association with said gender formulas.

When considering that many of Disney's animations are inspired by or are adaptations of well-known fairy tales, it is best to first understand their origins and how they were moulded to create the stories that most audiences worldwide have cherished since childhood. Definitions of the noun of fairy tale ranges from it being a traditional story written for children that usually involves imagined creatures and magic, to the adjective of fairy-tale as having a special and attractive or beautiful quality, like something in a fairy tale. For example, Jack Zipes writes that 'humans

began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech. […] Informative tales […] were simply told to mark an occasion, set an example, warn about danger, procure food or explain what seemed inexplicable. People told stories to communicate knowledge and experience in social contexts.' (2012, p.2) Zipes' final sentence there shares points with this thesis' discussion on fairy tale as an educational form and function. Just as similarly, fairy tale derives from folklore or folktale that are traditional stories told by a particular culture or region amongst themselves and through generations, and as such might make them seem timeless when said stories are echoed over decades if not centuries, spread far and wide by word of mouth and later by writings, reflected on by Teverson who comments on fairy tale as timeless 'not because it has no history, but because it has too many histories, because it is plural and many voiced.' (2013, p.5) Many voiced due to the definition of the tales being retold between humans, either to educate or to entertain, and this is further reflected by Disney in their animations inspired by classic tales such as Brothers Grimm's *Snow White* (1812) and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1837) where the studio adapted the narratives to better suit their magical animations. Therefore, it is well to understand for the following discussions that the stories under analysis are both unique products of a specific time and place and have been moulded by numerous contexts to be understood in different ways, making fairy tale a diverse genre to explore.

Focusing first on the narrative formula that Disney used as a foundation for feature animations, the most common is the female lead vying for freedom away from the unhappy gaze of an evil and jealous stepmother, forced to overcome obstacles and aided by a masculine presence in order to achieve a happily ever after, usually in marriage. This formula is replicated in various ways throughout the three selected Princess animations, first seen in the initial feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* where the title character escapes from the evil Queen's attempts to kill her due to her beauty, pulling at the notion that beauty must be policed by a controlling figure (parental or a romantic male), second in *Cinderella* where the wicked stepmother forces the title character into domestic submission as punishment for her beauty but also to give her evil step-sisters a better chance at winning over the prince, and third in *Sleeping Beauty* where the princess must be hidden to escape the

wrath of a jealous witch who seeks to punish the royal family out of spite. It is interesting to find that the villains of all three narratives are older women duped by younger and fairer female characters that are sought to be punished for simply existing, something one might consider strange when each feature is released years apart in times when social constructs had likely changed, and yet the foundational tropes of the Disney princess narrative remained much the same. Similar personality is shared amongst the three princesses and similar hatred is thrown at them by the wicked women. The few differences between the girls are largely superficial, stylistic and artistic, as Davis writes how Snow White is 'characterised very much by the sounds of Hollywood's golden era' while Cinderella 'has a definite "Grace Kelly" quality' and 'Princess Aurora epitomises Christian Dior's "New Look" with her tiny waist and her full-skirted, three-quarter length dress' (2006, p.101) thus creating the template for the studio to copy and paste throughout several narratives that reflect gender stereotypes of women highly sought after at the time of their release. From this comes the three primary categories of female characters portrayed in these animations, and form the basis of the argument of female gender in Disney: an innocent and virtuous maiden, the domestic mother, and the monstrous woman.

To identify the pinnacle of female innocence in Disney, one should not look further than the girl who started it all, their very own Snow White who reflects all of the values coveted by early 20th century men. She embodies the first two of the womanly categories, innocent and domestic, and naturally per the good versus evil formula she surpasses the envious Queen who had denied her happiness. Snow White's victory is achieved via the simplest of character development as is often the case when childhood transitions to adulthood; an innocent girl portrayed at the beginning of the feature, to the motherly figure during her time with the dwarves, and ultimately romantic as she finds happily ever after with the Prince. So, the central motif of the story is 'the pubertal girl's surpassing in every way the evil stepmother who, out of jealousy, denies her an independent existence – symbolically represented by the stepmother's trying to see Snow White destroyed' (Bettelheim, 1991, p.16) but as the innocent woman, Snow White cannot save herself from the Queen's onslaught but instead is saved by men – first by the dwarves, their care and protection is vital

while she hides in their home and when they encase her in the glass coffin to await true love's kiss, and later by the prince who provides the kiss to lift the Queen's curse.

Innocence plays a large part of many of Disney's female characters, to be critical of femininity is to consider how innocent the desirable woman is or is not. In Clare Virginia Eby's *Silencing Women in Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence,* she claims that silence is designated a category of intelligence of the twentieth century in response to modern experience of alienation from reason, society and history, silence has also been called a feminist issue, one not confined to any historical moment but a form of imposed repression enforcing the traditional view of the appropriate condition for women whereby Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) is a novel poised between the Victorian and modern eras that provocatively examines the potential for women's freedom through a male centre of consciousness (1992, p.93). The idea that innocence is a focal point for men to allow women their freedom of self in a manner that suits the patriarchy is thus equalled by Disney who reflect the ideal standard of what their heroines should and should not behave like, for example; how Snow White has very few lines in the animation unless spoken to by a male character (the huntsman, the dwarves and the prince), and even then her dialogue is mostly projected in pretty songs; how Snow White's character is drawn to look, with pale skin and rosy cheeks, and a flattering silhouette of a body that all combined is to please the eye; and so the princess is contained in the ideal of innocence where the standard is created and maintained by the man.

This ideal of innocence is also represented through Snow White by her interactions with nature and some shorter interactions with the Prince. As the film relies heavily on tropes of the fairy tale genre, it is unsurprising for one to watch the princess interact so sweetly with nature, this is often through a call and response whereby Snow White sings in the most angelic voice and a flock of small, colourful birds sing back in a merry little tune. This captures the true beauty and innocence of the princess that is also mirrored in her moments with the prince, who is very quick to express his love after hearing her sing beyond a castle wall, prompting another chorus of the pair serenading one another. Again, it is interesting to note that Snow White has very few lines of dialogue and has the ability to communicate her wants

and feelings through this angelic singing voice. The nameless prince suddenly preaching his love for the fairest in the land within moments of meeting, promotes the idea and the imagery of these early century women as constructed to be looked at by men and appreciated for their beauty and innocence before being able to know their personality, making the princess a product of her time that now represents a retrograde of femininity. However, the idea of love and acceptance of another only because of their beauty is not mirrored by Snow White, although the dwarves reflect the prince's adoration of her as they are mesmerised by such beauty ("just like an angel" observes one of them), instead she is much more graceful and 'accepts the dwarfs for who and what they are, […] which – in life as it can be in Disney – is not always so easy to do.' (Pinsky, 2004, p.24) A rather deep moral code embedded into the studio's formula in terms of a life lesson to not treat a book by its cover, something repeated many a time in their later animations. In comparison to the softer imagery of Snow White with nature, her innocence is also highlighted in a sequence where one witnesses the stereotypical damsel in distress escaping death and the evil, magically alive vegetation that assaults her. She runs through dark and damp woodland, weeping and wishing for a saviour before collapsing unconscious, presenting a youth unable to cope with the burden and conflicts of life. Therefore, it seems that Snow White's inexperience is her undoing, fixed only by the help of a man at her side to make her understand the importance that had she not 'experienced and mastered those dangers which come with growing up, Snow White would never be united with her prince,' (Bettelheim, 1991, p.212) and once united with her prince, she sings Disney's chief principle that hardship will always be overcome with a song and a smile – and men.

Regarding Snow White as a mother figure as well as the virtuous maiden, she is shown to be organised and in-charge when in a domestic situation, primarily with the dwarves. Initially when first encountering the woodland cottage, she assumes that the filth and disarray of the small residence may be because the owners have no mother, thus foreshadowing her upcoming transformation into the role of mother. According to Douglas Brode, 'men […] are […] naturally inclined to chaotic behaviour,' and 'women, conversely, offer an organizing principal and sharp common sense,' (2005, p.175) which is reflected in the feature as the cottage is extremely dirty until a

right-minded woman takes charge. It is a strange transition to watch Snow White fumble from the dark and deathly woods to suddenly begin cleaning a stranger's house, but it does make an example of an early century woman being responsible and organised, without whom men would live chaotic lives. Domesticity makes her a passive character; she does not fight the Queen; she cries herself free of the woods, and cleaning a house holds no severe challenges to overcome for a girl whose main talents seem to be singing and doing housework. The fact Snow White symbolises femininity and purity through domestication makes her an impractical image for younger audiences to aspire to in modern times – modern times that surely do not agree with Brode where women must organise and provide common sense for the man - as her distinct love of housework correlates with the then American ideals of women in a society women who were expected to acquire the passive role of wife or mother, and to force 'a servitude which, incidentally, also identifies "nature" with the role of women in terms of labour within the home.' (Whitley, 2008, p25) Walt Disney himself explained that Snow White's character is purposefully 'a kind, simple little girl who believed in wishing and waiting for her Prince to come along' (Pinsky, 2004, p.25) and while such a character might fit the narrative of the fairy tale genre, the joy of the genre is being able to immerse and connect with the characters in a world unlike our own reality, and Disney's happily ever after formula promotes a significantly unfortunate message that a happy ending is only rewarded to women who are beautiful, domestic and passive but unachievable and therefore punished for sins such envy, pride and wrath.

The concept of a moral message is common within the fairy tale genre when once more considering the origins of the tales were at times used to educate children on life experiences, to understand right from wrong, and to reflect on their actions. However, the moral message of rewarding good and punishing evil is partially overshadowed by the representations of gender inequality within the feature, of which like its title character is a product of its time that evokes and reinforces the idea that women are damsels and home-carers, and men are heroic protectors of women. Mollet agrees that 'the story of Snow White seemed to illuminate the spirit of the 1930s like no other' while 'Disney felt drawn to fairy tales and the ideal of a happily ever after' (2013, p.109-124) and as such heavily focused on that desperate

desire to achieve a happy ending over a more original fairy tale approach of educating their audiences in morality. For Snow White then, in the end she survives conflict with the villain and finds great happiness because she needs the prince to be the hero, rather than finding herself the heroine for overcoming the obstacles she had faced.

The third category is represented through the Queen as the monstrous woman, plagued with anger and envy to make up the wicked imagery that has been replicated throughout many of Disney's feature animations where a woman is the villain. Wearing heavy make-up and dark clothing, the Queen is the epitome of narcissism, obsessed with her own image in the magical mirror, and upon feeling her beauty is threatened by the girl's youth seeks to have Snow White destroyed. The monstrous woman, or monstrous feminine according to Barbara Creed, is a conception that women are shocking, terrifying and horrific, linked to Freud's belief that a man's fear of women is that the mother is castrated (1927, p.154) and is mirrored by Joseph Campbell who names 'the so-called "phallic mother," a motif perfectly illustrated in the long fingers and nose of the witch.' (1976, p73) The witch is a familiar female monster portrayed through countless fairy tale narratives and is reflected in the evil Queen here, first by her magical capability and then by her transformation into the crone when the huntsman's planned assault on Snow White fails, seen with long crooked fingers and nose. For Creed, the crone is invariably represented as old, ugly and capable of monstrous acts, referencing witch trials where they were 'accused of the most hideous crimes; cannibalism, murder, castration of male victims, and the advent of natural disasters such as storms, fires and the plague,' (1993, p2) also reflected by the Queen as a crone because she destroyed the huntsman for his failure. Interestingly, her transformation to one of ugliness counters the argument that the Queen seeks her revenge because she is afraid of aging after confrontation with a fairer youth, but the transformation is only a means to an end for the villain to perform a much greater evil – the poisoned apple intended for Snow White. The imagery of the apple evokes religious connotations, specifically the use of the colour red and since Snow White has befriended woodland creatures, it arouses the biblical tale of Eden and humanity's loss of innocence. The Queen is therefore the evil temptress seeking to defile the princess of her virtue just as the devil serpent did to

Eve, with a single bite of the forbidden fruit Eden is profaned once more and the princess is plagued by the Queen's monstrous poison.

Similar to the evil Queen's monstrous feminine, *Sleeping Beauty* shares representations of women in a form of power as villainous, as well as tropes of the innocent and domesticated woman. The princesses always show elements of the first two categories (innocent and domestic), and the villainous woman is always envious and wicked for having been spited in some way. These fairy tales lend belief that prior to what one sees on the screen, there is a 'prequel' of sorts that is generally abridged by a narrator to explain why the fairy tale is occurring now – for Snow White it is said her mother died, her father remarried and the new Queen (evil stepmother trope) is jealous of his daughter, for Sleeping Beauty it is naturally assumed that upon the princess' birth that party invitations were sent but Maleficent did not receive one, and this in her case makes her a victim of social exclusivity which forces her to lash out, seen by her wicked, magical curse set upon Aurora at the beginning of the feature. It is thus interesting to note how women are just as vulnerable in social spheres as they are in domestic ones. Through Maleficent Disney once more proves that women of considerable power, especially those who appear unsightly (green-skinned and dressed in black as if Maleficent), are considered wicked and unwelcome. Her supposed gift, having known 'nothing of love, kindness, or the joy of helping others,' (Pinsky, 2004, p.75) is a hex upon Aurora to prick her finger on a spinning wheel and die. Her wickedness once more confirmed by the want of death for a child who insults her. However, likely from the nightmarish imagery seen in Snow White, Aurora's prophesised death is lightened to a heavy sleep as the forms and structures of fairy tales for children were 'carefully regulated […] so that improper thoughts and ideas would not be stimulated in the minds of the young.' (Tremblay, 2011, p.9) In a way, could this make a majority of Disney's monstrous women a victim considering the catalysts that scorned them to bite back? If the princess and the monstrous feminine are subjected to liminality however, then the only true difference between the princesses and their aggressors is that the former are granted freedom and access to society through their prince and fair looks. Gerard Lenne evades to identify women as monsters altogether, simply dismissing them as 'problematic' or 'secondary' when pitted against a truly terrifying male monster, instead he focuses more on the

attractiveness of the monstrous feminine and that women exist in horror primarily as 'perfect as a tearful victim, what she does best is to faint in the arms of a gorilla, or a mummy, or a werewolf, or a Frankenstein creature.' (1979, p35) To consider the Disney villains as a victim then, the narrative would have to explain further how these monsters came to be dark and deadly, but they don't when the focus lies so heavily on the protagonist's development and victory rather than finding salvation for the monster, and very rarely is one privy to a Disney villain fainting into the arms of a man. Their threat originates because they are alone and in a seat of power, an idea that links back to Creed's work of women castrating men, so it is interesting that for Disney the best narrative development is for the prince to slay the wicked villain (who only truly becomes terrifying for mere minutes at the end of the feature upon turning into a very menacing dragon) and usually with a sword, which holds sexual undertones to show male victory of winning back his masculinity.

For *Cinderella,* the monstrous woman is incredibly normal. Lady Tremaine has no magic to conjure poisonous apples or deathly woodlands for the prince to battle through, instead she plays mind-games and a social experiment of suppressing Cinderella's status in life. Once more with the fairy tale formula of a pre-story one cannot witness but must realise is there, Lady Tremaine married Cinderella's widow father until his death shortly after, leaving the evil stepmother and her brood of ugly daughters with his fortune while Cinderella is forced to live away from the luxury as their housekeeper. Typical of the evil stepmother trope and as part of Disney's containment strategy to categorise women, Lady Tremaine represents the harsher reality of womanhood that is not so desirable to men, she is strong-willed and cunning, active in society and takes no-nonsense from anyone in order to achieve what she wants without consequence. Naturally what she wants is nothing nice, and shares traits with other villains of being particularly sensitive and easily offensive (like Maleficent) but it is interesting that the only true active women in these features are the wicked women, and 'that their activity is forced upon them by their own jealousy and unhappiness.' (Davis, 2006, p.108) It seemed that luxury and the potential for her daughters to become royalty gave this Lady a glimpse of happiness, and so Cinderella's meddling in wanting to join society outside of the dusty kitchen is her catalyst for enacting further cruelty upon the girl. *Cinderella* once more echoes

Disney's principle that only the beautiful can achieve happiness as well, and that seems to be linked to be a passive woman, already seen by Snow White and soon to be in Aurora, Davis continues that 'goodness and happiness are not given only to the beautiful [...] instead, real happiness seems to be linked to one trait alone – passivity.' (2006, p.108) Since Lady Tremaine is very active as a monstrous woman and her two daughters are constantly named 'ugly', it stands to reason that they do not get a happy ending when they try to force the glass slipper on their feet to win the prince's affection, while Cinderella is willing to wait patiently for that happiness to come to her, therefore leaving the three wicked women defeated and alone.

It is important to consider how the villains meet their end, too. Their unhappily ever after is assuredly brought on because of their evil ways, but their punishment is often the design they had set for others, in some shape or form. For example, Lady Tremaine and the step-sisters forced Cinderella into servitude, to wait on them hand and foot, and of course in this story their feet are major focal points. When they whisk Cinderella away so not to try on the glass slipper, in the original Grimms' Tale, the step-sisters must gruesomely wedge their too-big feet into the slipper in order to make it fit, and one even cuts off her toes and endures severe agony just to win the man. Ultimately this does not work for the heroine Cinderella is to win the day, but it is curious how astute the Grimms were to know that "a fairy-tale character obliged to do any housework at all – let alone all of it – has the immediate sympathy of most children. To turn a heroine into a tragic martyr often require little more than putting a broom in her hands.' (Tatar, 1993, p.6-7) This seems to be something Disney took in their stride, and worked much the same imagery into many of their animations in regard to heroine versus villain, or in the end, the villain versus themselves.

While the category of the monstrous woman is more prevalent in *Cinderella* considering there are three villains (evil stepmother and the ugly step-sisters), the notion of Cinderella being one of innocence and domestic remains very much intact. She reflects more of Snow White than Aurora, although still quite passive in that she does not argue with the evil stepmother, Cinderella is forced to work as a maid in her own home after the death of her father. She cooks, she cleans, she helps create and repair dresses for the ugly step-sisters, and though the passivity of simply accepting

her new and unflattering role in the home as lesser than the other women, it is all in the mind to placate Lady Tremaine with the hope of attending the royal ball. Although it seems more for equality that men must acknowledge it, Brode writes that in a woman's life 'housework is equal in value to any labour performed "in the world" – that, in fact, the home is part of the world and the work done there equal in validity to anything achieve in an office' (2005, p.179) but such is not acknowledged by the stepmother who continues to belittle Cinderella despite her hard work. Here again is Disney's credo that domestication can bring you happiness, only to fall flat on its face when Lady Tremaine tells her 'no' to the ball and makes a weeping Cinderella run to her bed, wishing for help when her hard work is sabotaged. The first instance of fairy tale interaction is conjured by Cinderella's misfortune, as the Fairy Godmother brings magic and happiness for the poor girl, thus making the monstrous woman a catalyst again for the narrative's development in getting the good girl her happy ending. Cinderella's innocence shines bright in this sequence as well, having previously spoken and sang to the mice living in her room (like Snow White did with the woodland animals) they are turned into horses to help get Cinderella to the royal ball. Innocent in her desire to achieve happiness alongside animal allies, but the protagonist also shows a sense of bravery in ignoring her stepmother's cruelty and attending the ball regardless, since 'discovery by her stepmother would no doubt have resulted in Cinderella's public humiliation, or worse,' (Davis, 2006, p.102) therefore compared to Snow White's 1930s desirable woman, Cinderella's character has more dimension to her personality.

In terms of the good girl formula seen by Disney, the opening narrative immediately confirms Princess Aurora's prettiness as the three good fairies bless her with beauty and next with the gift of song. Like Snow White's characteristics, it reflects the time the animation was created and shares elements of the fairy tale genre, as when using the scenery of the woods where 'Aurora grows into a beautiful, blonde young woman with a melodious voice and a sweet disposition,' (Pinsky, 2004, p.75) it shows Disney echoing past animations as the princess happily cleans the house in which she is raised, and just as similarly to Snow White and Cinderella, sings softly to an owl and other woodland creatures. Her singing to them of having danced and loved a prince 'once upon a dream' just so happens to be overheard by a

prince who somehow knows the lyrics to her song and begins serenading with her through the woods, portraying a heightened image of her innocence when Aurora blushes and seeks to escape this handsome stranger, only to fall madly in love upon hearing his singing voice just as he did with her. It's an extremely dreamy fairy tale trope that Disney repeats for many features, however it poses the idea that happiness is achieved through the woman's self-sacrifice as when Aurora is dancing through the woods she is content amongst nature and on her own, reinforcing the image of a 'perfect girl' with blonde hair bouncing and an angelic voice, but after falling for the prince it seems all is 'forgotten are their dreams and explorations; they settle for marriage and a castle' (Tonn, 2008, p.17) which is only postponed because of Maleficent's curse on the princess.

Another similarity between Snow White and Sleeping Beauty is the use of a character's deathlike passivity, until their respective princes arrive to give true love's kiss. This imagery was common for Disney's early animations that represent the loss of their innocence, an idea that Bettelheim confirms as 'the end of childhood is nothing but a time of quiet growth and preparation, from which the person will awaken mature.' (1991, p.232) Like Snow White who at a crucial point in her development is encased in glass and preserved until she can be rescued, Aurora falls into a deep sleep under Maleficent's curse and is later reborn, 'further emphasised because not only she but her entire world [...] returns to life the moment she does.' (Bettelheim, 1991, p.236) The reawakening symbolises each Princess reaching a higher stage of maturity and understanding, typically for marriage and motherhood, and Aurora's rebirth by true love's kiss pins her as the incarnation of perfect femininity saved by the man who is ready to marry. At the time of their death-like slumber however, it is difficult for fairy tales to detail a character's internal process, so it is translated into visual images where the hero is confronted by inner conflicts, usually presented as being lost in a dense and impenetrable wood, not knowing which way to turn (as seen in Snow White). Yet it is not Aurora (who lies motionless and pretty on a bed of silk) who overcomes the obstacle of a deathly forest but her handsome prince who must battle through the overgrown, evil forest to save her.

Magic is also a driving force for both the innocent girl and the feature's mother figure, in this case split into the three fairy characters who raise Aurora and use their good magic to keep her safe. Much like Snow White's omniscient and omnipotent Magic Mirror and its Queen, the opposingly good three fairies are the predominant magical beings in this tale. Like the monstrous woman, the use of fairies is a conventional fairy tale trope as they are heavily featured in the belief systems of past folktales, although the feature presents them to be more than a pretty and curvaceous blonde with glittering wings and an attitude problem seen earlier in Disney's Peter Pan (1953). As Jack Zipe explains, 'the fairy tale's form and contents were not exactly what they are today […] the fairy tale underwent numerous transformations before the innovation of print led to […] conventions of telling and reading.' (2002, p.21) While the magic in this fairy tale remains similar to original values of the genre, Disney has moulded its conventions to better suit their narratives. Not only do these characters fit the criteria of their genre then, but also the categories in which they are placed as women. These fairies are older, kind and gentle with good humour and big hearts. Seen as the three wise men's counterparts who bestow nice gifts upon the princess, the elderly fairies are filled with good intent and often fuss over how Aurora acts and looks, otherwise becoming concerned when she speaks of meeting her true love – evoking the stereotype of a doting mother. Their replacing her true mother, the queen having sacrificed being a happy family for many years alongside the king, is a narrative so often used by Disney regarding parents, in this case caused by the villain Maleficent's spite.

It is interesting to also explore the narratives and intent of the male characters in these three features. All three animations have a varying number of gendered characters, for Snow White the male character dominates considering there are seven dwarves, the huntsman, the prince and the magic mirror voiced as male compared to the female characters of Snow White and the wicked Queen. For Cinderella there is the title character, the evil stepmother and the ugly step-sisters, and the fairy godmother against Prince Charming, the king and grand duke, and the two mice allied with Cinderella are considered male also. In Sleeping Beauty, Princess Aurora stands alongside fellow women of the Queen, the three fairies and Maleficent, while the men are lacking with Prince Phillip, King Hubert and King Stefan,

though Maleficent's goons are presented as male they are not leading characters. Considering the varied characters where two out of the three feature's present more female characters, it begs the question as to why the female majority are passive and the men very heroic. As Amy Davis agrees, not only 'this reputation that female characters outnumber the males, but also this supposed high proportion of princesses in Disney films, is misleading' (2006, p.92) when one might believe the women to take on greater tasks when more populated than they do. Instead, once more the passive princess is rescued by her handsome prince, but in Sleeping Beauty's case their relationship only slightly differs from the norm as when they both met they were unaware of either being royalty. Despite this, their happily ever after reinforces the ideals of American marriage also reflected on by Davis who states, 'the notion that women must find a marriage partner is deeply engrained in American (and Western) history and a verity of cultural formations.' (2006, p.7) Aurora and her prince may be a love match of independent choice, their dancing and singing through the woods having reflected a stereotype of the fairy tale genre, but both Snow White and Sleeping Beauty remain to be conventional female-rescue fantasies with essentially passive heroines, each girl skilled at house cleaning and often with the assistance of woodland animals. As such, 'Disney marketing presents an image of women whose lives are defined by their good looks and romantic relationships' (Rustad, 2015) but upholding the belief that hard work and a good song will bring you a happy ending.

The question of the perfect happily ever after comes into question then, if fairy tale is based on humanity extending our belief system into something more than what our reality can conceive, how is the very normal and human idea of marriage a magical happy ending that Disney replicates in so many of its features. In this case, the audience are not able to catch even a glimpse of the wedded bliss to come after the prince and princess ride off into the sunset, it's left to imagination and hope that the beautiful ending will simply continue regardless of whether it is spectated or not. Jeanine Basinger points out that 'the happy-marriage film most commonly presents a story in which the union is a background for another, broader story' and so argues that it is because 'audiences knew what marriages were like and were familiar with the problems,' (1993, p322-323) and therefore can be said why it would be pointless

to show after the happily ever after wedding, considering marriage is engrained through centuries of human life and happy marriages tend to serve as background for stories about other subjects. This links into the fairy tale formula to educate the listener with a moral message, marriage is the happy ending for Disney's princess narratives but as previously discussed they portray several, more subtle lessons throughout the features.

Opposite of the three prime Princesses comes the portrayal of two females who overall are much more challenging to the Disney trope of womanly behaviour. Insofar of the three categories that have been discussed, neither of these two girls can be securely placed within them, nor are they titled princesses or married into royalty. In this case, Disney has instead shown women as flirtatious and complicated, entirely independent from the norm of innocent, mother or villainous imagery, thus painting an interesting comparison when considering the culture timeline of America and the desire for the good woman housewife.

In the 1948 *Pecos Bill* segment of the film *Melody Time,* Slue-foot Sue (otherwise known as Sweet Sue) is a cowgirl and the focal romantic interest for Pecos Bill. During this classic Disney period, only Slue-foot Sue lives an active life outside of the domestic circle, although we see nothing of her life prior to meeting Pecos Bill which is unsurprising considering he is the main character. Yet from her description in the narration and her introduction in the film, it is well to surmise that she has lived an outdoorsy lifestyle before their meeting, as was common for cowgirls or girls of a similar ilk. She is curvy but with a slender build, fair of skin, blue eyes, red braided hair, red lips and rosy cheeks. So in terms of character design, Slue-foot Sue does represent much of the Disney stereotype of their classical women, but that is where the buck stops. A thrill-seeking daredevil, Slue-foot Sue has no fear nor shame for anything, and is the only female to show true agency. As discussed prior, the female leads tend to be passive, in other words the likes of Snow, Cinderella and Aurora simply react to the things happening around them, and when their struggles work out it is generally with thanks to a combination of luck and someone else's efforts (typically a man) or influence. (Davis, 2006, p.94) Sue's independence is rife throughout the segment; when she and Bill first meet, it is Sue

who takes the lead between them; when Sue pursues and encourages Bill's few efforts of initiative, it is she who is seen to be more experienced and calmer than the man who instead turns bright red and bashful; and when they kiss, it is Sue who guides Bill's arms around her with her more dominant pose over him. As Davis further explains, up until *Atlantis* (2001) fifty-three years later, it is the only instance in a Disney film in which a man was in a sexually subordinate position, and the only instance when a female character initiates the couple's first kiss. (2006, p.94)

While it is all very fair for an independent woman to be shown so strong, unfortunately for what would presently be a woman's strength is instead punished for Slue-foot Sue. Much like the villainous women who are penalised for their greed of power and desires, Sue is permanently punished for her more forward personality and stubbornness. Her exaggerated femininity is her undoing, not only from her direct romance with Bill that results in his horse Widowmaker becoming extremely jealous of a lack of attention by his owner once their flirtations begin, but also by Sue wearing a bustle beneath her dress that causes her to bounce and lose grip on the jealous, bucking horse that she demanded to ride for their wedding ceremony. As Davis also suggests, it is as if she is being punished for trying to be too "girly" and compares her to the likes of Cinderella who is also disciplined and suffers for her desire to dress up (2006, p.95), but in Sue's case, her punishment and forever-after is being stranded on the moon. This means that neither the female nor male lead achieve their heart's desire, but what makes the story differ from the prior three is that this *Melody Time* segment is a tall tale focused on Pecos Bill, not his wife-to-be. Her inclusion lasts barely half of its running time, while the rest is to exaggerate Bill's origins of growing up with coyotes and his heroic abilities that amount to incredible incidents (for example, he is credited with digging the Rio Grande, making Texas the Lone Star state, and contributing to the formation of the painted desert, etc). Ultimately, the story segment and its heroine differ from the other animations and leading figures within Disney films because Slue-foot Sue is not a typical Disney heroine, and the story itself is not a typical fairy tale so often chosen by the studio. She is not a princess or damsel in distress, she has no evil female nemesis, nor is she oppressed, shy, motherly or maiden-like. The biggest complication of them all is

the lack of a happily ever after, which arguably makes it the most unique story as well.

Following the likes of Slue-foot Sue came the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" segment of *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949) where a Katrina van Tassell is introduced by song with lyrics that tell of a notorious flirt and specifically states three times during the one-and-a-half minute song that she is coquette. Though she is another female lead who is not a princess nor is she a maiden, mother or crone, unlike the independent cowgirl however, Katrina is not "punished" for being her salacious self or even punished at all through the segment. In the end, aligned with the prior classics, she does get married to Ichabod Crane's rival, Brom Bones. In terms of her personality, Katrina is treated like a princess by everyone in Sleepy Hollow, with her being presented as very cheerful, graceful, kind, demure, poised and elegant, yet the young woman also appears rather carefree and frivolous, and oblivious to the fawning attitude of everyone around her. According to the original author, Washington Irving, in his narration of her does her write that she is a blooming, plump as a partridge, ripe, melting, and rosy-cheeked woman, while her look in the film is a combination of 'a Dutch girl from a Delft painting and a Hollywood-style vamp.' (Davis, 2006, p.97) Her looks make for a striking resemblance to classic princess Cinderella, too. Katrina is regarded as the most beautiful and most stunning person in Sleepy Hollow, as well as the prettiest, loveliest, finest and fairest in all of New York City. Wearing a pretty pink dress with a sweetheart neckline to complement her blue eyes, fair skin, pink lips and rosy cheeks, and strawberry-blonde hair, she is a vision of feminine stereotype previously seen by both Cinderella and Aurora. And though looks are only face value and it is once more refreshing to have a female lead intended for independence, this spoiled treatment of her may have left Katrina unaware of the problems surrounding her, and feeling entitled when she so often hopes for a champion to appear, to sweep her off her feet, against the boisterous Brom (whom she ends up marrying anyway).

Looking at a character like Katrina Van Tassel is useful as she is of a similar age as Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, but as mentioned is more independent, thus bringing together traits of both the traditional heroine and villain, and

complicating the notion of the Golden Era Disney heroine. The fact that she is less well remembered is part of this, since it hints at the idea that the more "traditional" depictions of women in Disney aren't the sole depictions of women that Disney wanted to incorporate. For Katrina, who spends the majority of the segment engaged in such activities as is considered the norm for women (fluttering her long lashes, smiling coyly, shopping, dancing, manipulating men), she is the embodiment of the salacious vixen simply seeking her desire for attention. In this regard, perhaps the idea of the villainous woman is most appropriate were Katrina (or even Slue-foot Sue) to be placed into a category, and yet it is only their learned want to be loved and be tied in marriage to a good man that saves them from it. What differs between Slue-foot Sue and Katrina, and ultimately Katrina from the rest of the classic films and segments, is that she has undoubted intelligence enough to pit man against man with reward of her hand in marriage. Brom is considered the 'alpha male' prior to Ichabod's arrival, the latter who offers a serious challenge to the former's dominance in a number of ways, that the deciding factor is upon the lively and coy Katrina, the 'alpha female' so to speak. It is obvious that the sense of deciding power is enjoyed by her, however, despite her possessing such intelligence and certainly high wealth and social status, she uses her intellect only for manipulation of her suitors, and regardless of having pleaded for a heroic champion to rescue her, does in the end happily settle for marriage with Brom, thus putting into question her entire game, reliability, and efforts of making the men rival one another for her affections.

To sum up, the three princess feature animations share more similarities than otherwise while the following two shorter animation segments challenge the classic ideas of a leading Disney female, especially when exploring and comparing the categories of women with the main female characters within them. In terms of their personalities, the princesses are very much alike with how they share kindness, grace and beauty as well as innocence and capabilities of housework, while Slue-foot Sue and Katrina van Tassell both present a greater sense of independence and intellect for their own actions. Aside from Katrina, they all succumb to personal conflict and outside obstacles from the monstrous women or nemesis in their lives, and all but Slue-foot Sue survive through the help of handsome men. The monstrous women of the features similarly share characteristics of envy and spite, and are often

seen as active women who threaten both male and female power with their independence and ability to live without a man specifically, While the mother figures in each feature animation differ between representation in the leading girls or by secondary characters (Sleeping Beauty's the fairies), the stereotype of the domestic woman is prevalent and shines through each respective character's personality in some form, whether through housework or the protection of a child-like character. Overall, Disney constructs the fairy tale genre to their liking in order to get their principle message across, molding original tales such as Grimm's Snow White to use magic and imagination to shape the audience's expectations of a happily ever after, as Teverson iterates how the genre has been 'shaped by the East and the West, the North and the South;' and has existed in 'visual culture, literary culture and oral tradition' and 'is capable of expressing an admixture of dominant, residual and emergent ideas.' (2013, p.8)

Chapter Two

"It's she who holds her tongue who gets a man"

America, Feminism and the 'new' Disney.

It is said that a film reflects the society in which it is produced, and certainly Disney animations are no different. Passing from the classical women of Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Slue-foot Sue and Katrina van Tassell, the following string of animations discussed were released during times of great change for American culture and society, and Feminism. Society made a habit of separating and defining the sexes, generally by their looks and intelligence, but also through cultural, economic and political means that helped develop hierarchies and roles that society strictly adhered to, and replicated in its media (for example, the maid, the mother and the monstrous woman). In the wake of World War Two where women had become more independent of their male partners off at war, having taken over jobs and roles of authority in society, women were instead finding themselves returning to the division of the sexes that had them reliant on their bread-winning husbands once more. Davis cites Barbara Welter's *The Cult of True Womanhood* by saying that

'middle-class women found themselves contributing less and less to their families' livelihoods and became increasingly financially dependent upon a male bread-winner (usually a husband or father)', underlying the justification that society declared men inhabited the public sphere and politics, while women had the private sphere of home and family (1966, p.151-174), thus making their worth change from the goals they could achieve themselves to what they could produce in terms of their beauty and accomplishments from mere feminine appearance. Simply put, their goals and achievements only reinforced their status as ornaments.

According to Naomi Wolf, it was the ability to mass produce printed images of women and their beauty ideals during the nineteenth century that led to the standardisation of fashion and beauty norms still found in magazines and media throughout the twentieth century, (1991, p.11-15) and certainly bled into the twenty-first century as well with thanks to present-day media and online sources. Although the twentieth century saw two major changes in women's power within society – the first being the right to vote, achieved by American women in 1920, and second being the women's movement from the 1960s onward – the idea that a woman's societal function was as a consumer and that women could be openly judged on the basis of their appearance, are two severe restrictions that Wolf further claims to reduce other accomplishments that women could aspire to. American women were subjected to unnecessary criticism for looks and behaviour, that they were forced to fit within the narrow limits of what society believed acceptable for them, and ultimately promoted what the ideal woman should be to both children and adults that it set a trend for almost the remainder of the twentieth century. As Wolf states, 'the qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behaviour that that period considers desirable: *The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behaviour and not appearance.'* (1991, p13-14)

What is interesting to consider is the audience that these animations are catered to. Naturally one would assume it is to a female audience; the love story, the pretty animations and the sing-along style of music is all a buy-in for girls and women to enjoy. For Sue Thornham, the female point of view dominates the narrative and produces an excess which precludes satisfaction, as their 'fantasy escape' is

marked as illusory and gives the final message of even if a heroine resists the pressures of society, those pressures will catch up with her in the end. (1997, p.49) Otherwise, the crowd is female, but the critic is forever male, the former restricted to enjoy the images in which they are themselves bound by, and the latter able to dictate those images and roles in which women abide.

Is Disney a part of the roaring Hollywood film success, then? As a film studio, it would be easy to place them into it – it being the film industry that felt pressure to become more respectable to reflect the changes occurring in society. Previously, during the 1910s, cinema was commonly regarded in the USA as an entertainment medium for immigrants and the working class, and according to Benshoff and Griffin, some middle-to-upper-class white Americans felt that cinema was potentially a disturbing social institution that promoted 'dangerous' ideas to the lower class. (2021, p.32) Yet as the decades pass and post-American depression era, the film industry would become a lucrative business that wanted to capture the middle-class audience that had previously shunned it. This was done so by upgrading show houses with opulent theatres (or 'movie palaces'), where it was not unusual to have marble foyers, crystal chandeliers, and curtained boxes. A movie palace that was able to seat hundreds of patrons at once helped to elevate the cultural status of film to something closer to that of live theatre, the opera if you will. With these upgrades came the next evolution of famous identity – the movie star – which only provided added restrictions on social norms for women and women's appearance. Famous movie actresses such as Olivia de Havilland, Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, Marlene Dietrich, and Ingrid Bergman lit up the screens and were renowned for their beauty more often than their acting skills, and Disney played into the stardom just as much. In fact, Disney doubled-down on the rising popularity of the film industry and the movie star simply by having the delightful animation on one hand, and the actors and actresses who lent their voices to the characters that garnered their own stardom for it.

Snow White's angelic voice was gifted by Adriana Caselotti, Cinderella's by Ilene Woods, Aurora's by Mary Costa – timeless names for arguably timeless films – and then came the likes of Mary Poppins, starring Julia Andrews, that flipped the

animation head by incorporating it with live action, thus allowing the stars to be both seen and heard. According to the Disney feature *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013) that relives the development, production and release of *Mary Poppins* (1964), the premiere night of the movie was one of the most extravagant ordeals at the time. Walt Disney held nothing back to impress the author, Pamela Travers, while her work was adapted for the big screen, and this is where Disney folds into the Hollywood film industry without question. The grandeur of premieres and the stardom of its workers has persisted since its inception, all with the idea of dressing up to the nines and glittering down a red carpet. Women in particular were subject to the highest degree of criticism at this time. What are they wearing, who are they wearing? Brand matters, beauty matters, a woman's appearance matters. The images of popular magazines and media in general may have remained relatively similar throughout the twentieth century, but in Hollywood films a more noticeable change was occurring.

With the 1960s women's movement, the ideals that Disney once portrayed of tight-waisted girls with big eyes and sing-song voices was to evolve into the beginning of what might be considered the Disney renaissance of the latter twentieth century. In the wake of Disney's success with the likes of Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, other feature length animations (1955's Lady and the Tramp, 1961's 101 Dalmatians, 1970's The Aristocats, 1977's The Rescuers, and 1981's The Fox and the Hound to name a few more) focused on the lives of sentient animals, rather than the fairy tale lovestruck story of prince and princess.

However, in 1985 came the company's most expensive animated film created at the time, *The Black Cauldron*, and was soon found and labelled a failure by critics, the audience and its creators too, having competed with more successful releases such as the Disney re-release of their own 101 Dalmatians and – to great embarrassment – The Care Bears Movie. After such a huge investment of time and money, where hopes had previously pinned the animation as a classic for a new era, the new CEO Michael Eisner and chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg advocated to write it off and begin a new chapter that would come to be known as the 'Disney Renaissance'. This is a time between 1989 and 1999 (arguably stretching to 2002, as is later discussed) where the company threaded successful animation after

successful animation with thanks to lyricist Howard Ashman and the popular songs that Disney is commonly known for, with the first major triumph being 1989's *The Little Mermaid*. At the time of the film's creation and release, not only is there change in the style and music of the animations but also the change when depicting their female protagonists and their character development, hoping to provide a more in-depth heroine for the demographic audience. In this feature length animation, there are rare glimpses that foreshadow greater attempts at allowing the female characters their freedom while retaining their usual tropes involving women that still make it so obviously Disney-esque, especially in the characters of Ariel, Eric, Triton and Ursula. But what made *The Black Cauldron* flop beforehand?

For Disney animations, the three categories to contain female characters have been discussed; the maiden, the mother and the monstrous woman; but do these stereotypes of women live on in animations produced during a very different time in society? Looking at iconography, the female characters, their roles that are portrayed and how they are positioned in the narrative are the differing ideals once more competing between one another. Disney's heroes and heroines are the product of the male gaze, and while at times the heroes and heroines co-exist to drive the narrative equally rather than in separate categories, ultimately the women still fall short, and herein lies the focal foundation of analysing Disney's *The Black Cauldron* (1985) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989).

Immediately, what is striking about *The Black Cauldron* is its much darker themes and overall animation. It lacks the traditional "Disney" elements that make so many of their films the easy and delightful watch that they are, such as bright colours, an uncomplicated fairy tale narrative, and upbeat sing-along songs, while this film offers darkness, bland characters and a gothic-fantasy setting that is impossible to feel enthusiasm for. Its only possible appeal would be the inclusion of various technological innovations within the film; its PG rating, the use of computers to enhance animation, and the already mentioned and unprecedented high budget for a Disney animation. Its one significance that is so often overlooked when considering their films however, is the nature and writing of its heroine, Princess Eilonwy. She is the fourth Disney heroine to be a princess, and certainly does she look the part with

blonde hair (much like Aurora's) and medieval-style clothing. As Davis writes, 'it is with her physical appearance that Eilonwy's similarity to her predecessors at Disney ends: she is strong, feisty, wilful, adventurous, and independent.' (2006, p.157) Additionally, she is the first heroine to have magical powers of her own, a spirited girl whose magic bauble follows her everywhere and seems to possess a mind of its own, which certainly hints at Eilonwy having superhuman abilities. Yet despite this rather interesting twist on a Disney heroine, she is not set apart from those around her in the film; an ordinary boy who takes care of a oracular pig, a talking animal-like sidekick (Gurgi), and minions of darkness with the evil Horned King. The lack of Disney diving deeper into what could have been a first and substantial evolution of their heroine princess simply crawls along the baseline of bland characterisation attempt.

What does set Eilonwy apart, however, is her girlhood. The film has a total of six female characters (Eilonwy, Henwen the pig, the three witches, and an unnamed, unfeatured woman shown in the initial scenes of the Horned King's castle whose sole function is to entertain the King's human lackeys), but Eilonwy is the only female character whose personality is at all explored, and is the only female of the main adventuring party in the film. Her introduction is made in the Horned King's dungeon, where Taran finds her already in the midst of an escape plan. With a never-desperate tone of voice, Eilonwy does openly share her disappointment since Taran is no hero nor Lord as she was "so hoping for someone who could help me escape." It is interesting to pinpoint her need for help to escape – a plan she had already set in place – rather than someone to simply rescue her. In fact, the only thing keeping her from truly escaping is her lack of a weapon. Instead, she must partner up with a farm-boy who so happens to pick up a sword on their way out (which turns out to have magical powers), and along with Eilonwy's calmness and knowledge of the dungeon can they make a somewhat safe escape.

In the scene after their escape, Eilonwy and Taran do argue about whose role in their rescue was more important, as if Eilonwy couldn't have escaped herself if Taran hadn't of shown up, or Taran wouldn't have been able to escape without her intelligence. Yet in the end, as is typical of Disney to form some kind of moral message

or uplifting moment, the pair do acknowledge that it doesn't matter who gets the credit since it was only through working together as equals were they able to escape the castle, and only through working together again will they succeed in finding Taran's pig, Henwen. Overall, the film is a focus on Taran and his story, of a young man coming to terms with what he does, and how that defines who he is. As much as it is a first for the Disney heroine (Eilonwy is not a passive female lead by any means), it is also perhaps the baseline for what Disney would later use in regard to developing male characters such as the Beast versus Gaston, and especially the likes of Milo Thatch from *Atlantis* (2001). At the end of the film, Taran does not turn out to be a long-lost foundling prince or powerful hero, where Pinsky simply details that 'he is a pig keeper at the beginning of the movie and a pig keeper when it ends. His courage and honesty and willingness to sacrifice – like Gurgi's – come from within.' (2004, p.108) Another first for Disney, especially for the male lead, is that neither religion nor stars nor fairy godmothers intervene in his life to transform him, and the one thing that could have made him more the heroic champion (the enchanted sword) he willingly throws away. Sometimes, according to Disney, being normal isn't a bad thing.

Otherwise, as already discussed, Eilonwy is absolutely a departure from the previous Disney heroines (the Disney princesses), in that she has incentives other than romance, and that she has enough fighting spirit and self-confidence to argue for herself and her rights. What makes her fit into the Disney mould is her youth, the one factor threaded from Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora to herself, but otherwise is given much more freedom and adventurous tendencies to be argumentative, and not simply slotted into one of three categories. Although she could be reaching puberty, Eilonwy is still just a girl, and the fact she is a princess seems to be largely insignificant in the grand scheme of her film journey.

In the wake of *The Black Cauldron's* critical failure came 1989's *The Little Mermaid,* that saw Disney revisiting their formula for a colourful fairy tale adaption, including romance, a prince and (mermaid) princess, and brilliant musical numbers. In general, Disney has certain codes and conventions often used when they are constructing a new Princess or female lead, the former often depicted as innocent

and virginal against the latter who is more so seen as a motherly figure or simply villainous, for example with Snow White and Cinderella who are in constant battle against their evil Stepmothers, showing 'the teenage heroine at the idealised height of puberty's graceful promenade… Female wickedness… is rendered as middle aged, beauty at its peak of sexuality and authority' (Bell, 1995, 108). Whereas the father figures in Disney animation are typically seen as controlling, or attempting control, yet overall seen as loving and wanting what is best for the daughter, 'an argument meant to resonate with fathers and daughters on the other side of the screen – and it does' (Pinsky, 2004, 139) and this is certainly the case when looking at the relationship between Ariel and Triton.

Though *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is part of Disney's revival period leading into their successful renaissance of animations, the character of Ariel conveys many of the same characteristics as their earlier feature films. Much like Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora, Ariel is a young girl – "I'm sixteen years old. I'm not a child!" She exclaims to her father, King Triton, early in the film – whose priority and desire is to find something more than the day-to-day life she's come to know under the controlling, iron fist of her King father. Something more, meaning her independence and ultimately the happily ever after she dreams of after seeing Prince Eric. Her age plays a big role when placing the Princess character in the category of female innocence, where so many believe children are untainted from reality until they reach adulthood, and yet considering the lack of clothing which is much less than the norm for an expected Disney Princess – though arguably due to the fact she is a fantastical mermaid creature, thus interesting it did not prohibit the studio from sexualising her human features – it begs to differ the entire belief she is only a teenager when feminine curves are so visibly on display and vaguely hidden beneath mere sea shells thus heightening her sexuality. Proved first and foremost in the first frame of Ariel where one 'finds her peering over the broken mast of a shipwreck, her breasts covered by a horizontal mast, this coquettish striptease pose,' (Bell, 1995, 114) and if one is to believe Disney were attempting to pave the way forward for their animated heroines then from the get-go the character of Ariel is limited simply by her looks, once more forging rigid gender roles and giving power that continues to inform Disney's repetitive production of 'negative stereotypes about women and girls gains

force, in part, through the consistent way in which similar messages are circulated and reproduced, in varying degrees, in all of Disney's animated films.' (Giroux, 1995, 13)

Continuing the focus on the portrayal of Ariel, she is very contradictory from her looks and character to the role she plays in the narrative. From being presented as innocent yet sexual and rebellious, then yet again completely controlled by someone else – first by her father King Triton, then by Ursula the sea witch and in the end her new Prince husband, Eric – it's clear that Disney wished to continue some of their tropes whereby the princess is 'embedded within the classic narrative about an adolescent girls coming of age is a very contemporary story about the costs, pleasures and dangers of women's access to the human word' (Sells, 1995, 176), therefore she is beautiful with sweet vocals, a slim but curvy body and long, fiery red hair, and this is important because without her voice this beauty remains the focal of the characters around her, a beauty she must use specifically because she does lose her voice and has to seduce the prince in order to achieve her happily ever after in the human world. Ariel's loss of voice is intertwined with the evolution of feminism since before women had the same rights as men, they were seen to not have a voice in society and their looks were the one important factor and a tool into making themselves be heard, while at first look the audience is made to believe her loss of voice is her own choice to achieve what she desires in her life, it is still at second glance a driving force to inform and control her by a man. Though there is an attempt to show feminine freedom, one that she is a symbol of the struggles that women have had to endure in the past and to an extent in the present, ultimately they are still struggles she willingly dives into just to win the man of her dreams.

Exploring the dynamic between Ariel striving for freedom and her independence away from the patriarchy of her underwater kingdom, rebelling against her father's orders in a home where she still has a voice and is able to argue her wants and desires, to the sudden want to not only be free but attempt said freedom with a man is questionably naïve and corresponds with her young age. Exchanging a loving home where they only want the best for her and to keep her safe for a man where no words have been spoken at all, the lyrics of her renowned song 'Part of your World' do not

quite count when the prince is unconscious, further conveys the typical Disney tropes of the princess and the prince being the ultimate happily ever after goal no matter how the relationship begins. Yet what one believes is a rebellious girl breaking free of the Disney norm does not in fact swim so far than the contract with the sea witch, as Ariel must conform to what is expected of a woman in order to have the prince and 'while children might be delighted by Ariel's teenage rebelliousness, they are strongly positioned to believe in the end that desire, choice and empowerment are closely linked to catching and loving handsome men.' (Giroux, 1995, 12)

Another segment to Ariel's sexuality is the imagery of her as a siren. Returning to her first encounter with Prince Eric after saving him from the stormy shipwreck, Ariel sings a reprised version of 'Part of your World' to him that shows her change in want of independence to her want of being with him. It's the most basic of sailor folklore that details beautiful sea creatures, alike mermaids, who sing and seduce a ship's crew to sail closer and ultimately meet their demise, so as Ariel sings the last few lines to a waking Prince Eric, he is immediately blinded by the beauty and magical voice of a red-haired, barely clothed girl asking to be with him, only to disappear into the water thereafter. It beckons Eric to follow her a few splashing steps into the ocean before his butler calls him back to reality. The power of a siren comes from their alluring voice however, this would be the first chord that won Eric to Ariel, so for a time it is perfectly acceptable that she loses her voice when the prince is already in her grasps, even the sea-witch Ursula tells the girl that taking away her voice is not so bad because men aren't all that impressed with conversation from a woman, "It's she who holds her tongue who gets a man" (Pat Carroll, 1989), and so long as she wins the prince then why should she care if she has a voice at all, therefore 'the message is dramatized when the Prince attempts to bestow the kiss of true love on Ariel even though she has never spoken to him.' (Giroux, 1995, 13) Just as Disney pushes the ideals and standards of women needing a man to live happily ever after, they similarly push for the prince or hero to win the woman and live happily ever after, even if they share little to no words but so long as the pair look beautiful and sing prettily.

Ariel's one saving grace in the animation was thoroughly used at the beginning when she saved Eric from the shipwreck, a hope that could have continued whereby the princess saves the prince rather than the reverse that Disney is renowned for, yet in the end such a dream remains far out of reach as Ursula takes Ariel captive and Prince Eric closely follows in order to save his true love, showing how 'female characters lack participation in key rescue behaviours and are highly limited in their romantic outcomes.' (England et al. 2018, 2)

In absolute contrast to the young and delightful character of Ariel comes the power hungry villain, Ursula the sea-witch. A comparatively strong and outspoken woman that is 'the most grotesque characterisation that Disney writers and animators have created for a female villain up to now,' (Pinsky, 2004, 140) pushing her into the female category of the jealous monster within the film's narrative. Previously, Disney's villains have been particularly thin, skeletal figures with a fading beauty that once upon a time would have made them a leading lady, thus forcing them to hate the younger, purer princess character out of spite for their own aging woes, yet Ursula is different. She is large and curvy, and is constantly adorning thick make-up and hair products to better portray herself as beautiful, even if beauty is clearly absent from her drawn character 'the octopus sea witch, Ursula, unlike her earlier villainess counter parts, is steadfast and hyper sexualised.' (Silverman, 2009, 19) Regardless of if a curvy figure is usually considered feminine, Ursula's figure seems to be over exaggerated with several moments of animated hip-thrusts, and coupled with her deep, gravelly voice ultimately takes away her femininity. In fact, it was reported that 'the official Disney explanation is that she is based on the Norma Desmond character in the classic film Sunset Boulevard. In fact, she was modelled on the modern drag queen Devine,' (Pinsky, 2004, 140) and such a drag element is ever present throughout the animation. In fact, being modelled on the drag queen Devine whose performance of gender parodies the sexualised female body, it suggests that in Ursula's case it is a more reactionary emphasis on deviancy and manipulation. The invocation of drag here actually contains and reinforces gender binaries rather than challenges them. Particularly in the scene where King Triton comes to question Ursula, her voice lowers and she circles him like a predator courting its prey, attempting to seduce the underwater king with light finger touches

and curls of her octopus legs, but considering her ugly characteristics and undoubtedly villainess agenda, King Triton cannot be fooled, and the sea-witch does not achieve the attention she so desired. She defies the definition of what gender is supposed to be, what a woman is supposed to conform to and how one is supposed to be represented in society, instead the sea-witch 'drag denaturalises gender by showing us its imitative structure, it operates on the contradiction between anatomical sex and gender identity, a contradiction that is interrupted by the performance itself.' (Sells, 1995, 183) At the time of the film's release, Ursula's performance of femininity is not considered natural in the same way that Ariel's is. She could be considered the mother figure at first glance, offering her magical help to Ariel to achieve her dreams, but for Sells, of course much like Ariel the audience is tricked by the façade of 'a multiple cross dresser, she destabilises gender' (1995, 182) as shown by her ability to change form at will, becoming the slim and alluring Vanessa while using Ariel's stolen voice and much like a drag artist, uses the disguise to attract attention even though her character is defeminised by the way she performs being a woman. Throughout the performance she gains power, and she tries to teach Ariel that this is the way gender is for 'in Ursula's drag scene, Ariel learns that gender is performance; Ursula doesn't simply symbolise women, she performs women,' (Sells, 1995, 183) and Ariel does initially take on the villain's advice as when she first lands on the beach with her new human legs, she models and performs what she believes is feminine sexuality while wearing rags and rope. This is simply another way that Ursula reigned over Ariel and how she abused her power to influence another woman, making her the villain who, again for Sells, 'is the female symbolic encoded in patriarchal language as grotesque and monstrous, she represents the monstrosity of feminine power.' (1995, 184) *The Little Mermaid* presents stereotypical gender tropes in order to define its characters and narrative, Ariel is extremely feminine while Ursula is more ambiguous yet sultry, and Prince Eric and King Triton remain powerful male entities that lead to a successful happy ending.

To conclude, the way gender is represented in these adapted films, women in particular, often falls into three main categories; the pure-of-heart girl, the motherly figure and the envious monster, though at times – as is shown by Ursula in *The Little*

Mermaid (1989) – the latter two can intertwine to suit the villain's agenda. Also, it is not uncommon to see heroines such as Ariel be feminine, beautiful and willing to do anything to get the man she loves, such qualities found in many other Disney films and romantic comedies. Ponyo is a similar example of young innocence but ultimately emerges as the stronger female heroine who proves much more equal if not higher than the male sidekick. Iconography is used to establish the gender roles within a text, therefore determining where the character stands in the narrative and without this gender representation there would not be the diversity that makes the characters unique and interesting. Not only is it interesting to explore and discuss the representations established within both films, the similarities and differences, it is also important that the characters form links between other characters in their films, such as Ariel and Ursula's link by their desire for something they cannot have compared to Ponyo and Sosuke wh9o are linked by their equal want to help others and keep them safe, their bond ultimately contributes to the narrative's depth and meaning.

Chapter Three

"It's a pity and a sin, She doesn't quite fit in."

The attempted change of formula for Disney's men, women and stories.

Having addressed the beginning of the Disney Renaissance with 1989's *The Little Mermaid*, it is imperative to explore and discuss the successes and failures that followed in the coming decade as Disney continued to adapt and grow with changes in society, while still grasping the ideals and standards that made up the initial foundation for their animation narratives. This includes the containment strategy for female characters by categorising them in three ways, the maiden, the mother and the monstrous woman. Yet by the early 1990s, not only were female characters given deeper meaning, more dialogue and more diverse appearances – changes that slowly came to question the three categories - the studio also began giving their heroes more depth and aspirations rather than just a pretty face for the girls to fall in love with. It is thus interesting to explore the evolution of male representation in Disney

animations as much as the female, at a time when men were not expected to prove their masculinity as much and to a point that Disney questions and parodies what male masculinity should be, for example Gaston in 1991's *Beauty and the Beast* compared to Phoebus and Quasimodo in 1996's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, or Milo in 2001's *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*. This decade of change also began slowly implementing different ideas of love rather than the stereotypical prince and princess, but rather familial love between parent and child, or sibling love.

Considering that in just short of two decades the studio remastered their classic narratives to better represent the changes in American culture and society, as mentioned how the stereotypical maiden of Disney's franchise began to develop real independence, no longer reliant on a male love interest from the beginning and is allowed to pursue a time of singledom to find a sense of self, something deeper for the character that all demographics might have a chance to relate with. This finding is therefore made from exploring the evolution from the early characters such as Snow White and Cinderella, to the changes seen in the leading ladies of the Disney Renaissance, and also in the development of their villains. No longer are the villains lonely, wicked women specifically envious of the maiden's beauty and virtue, but a long line begins to form of villain variety; female, male and monstrous creatures, the undead and animals too; Disney took what was already a relatively successful narrative formula and expanded it into something that was able to flow with the evolution of society. Adding toe-tapping musical numbers to better imprint in the audience's memory became the studio's winning number amongst dozens of timeless animations. The question is how and why the studio decided the best time for change was then, how they continued to use fairy tale tropes in a modernising era, and was the change made for the studio to be leading society by example or, so their works weren't left behind in a completely different culture of gender-social values. This chapter will seek to explore these questions, the evolution of Disney's gender representations for both male and female characters, while investigating how the changes were implemented into the Disney animations at the time.

It is interesting to first discuss the evolution of society in America before the new millennium, to better understand the change that was then seen in Disney

Studios work. According to Colin Harrison, in his introduction to *American Culture in the 1990s* (2010), it had been labelled well before the decade had begun, era-defining labels with favourites such as The Sober Nineties, The Gay Nineties, and The Practical Decade; he mentions it as 'the decade of leanness and thrift' or for others it would be known as 'a time of liberation and abandon'. (2010, p.1) His comments continue with how fragmented personal lives were under the pressures of flexible capitalism, where some observed a trend running from the 1990s being an era of commuter marriage – a marriage where spouses live apart, usually due to locations of jobs, so must travel regularly to be together but ultimately a form of distant relationship – while others like the *Seattle Times* penned the 90s as a time for aging boomers to stay at home, sip chamomile and fall asleep. Harrison thus believed to some extent that these labels offered an insight into Americans' expectations of the coming decade, and that the perceived excesses of the 1980s were to be put at a distance with many hoping to forget. This does coincide with the failure of Disney's excessively funded *The Black Cauldron* (1985) which by every sense proved that simply being the most expensive animation does not equal a high standard or garner positive review, something that the studio pushed at a distance themselves. Not only did the 1990s pave way for new societal thinking in America, but the hysteria of pop culture and mass media boomed into the forefront. Harrison also comments how 'for numerous theorists the reproduction of images of the past […] threatened to displace more authentic or politically enabling forms of historical knowledge, reducing history to little more than a set of stylistic variations.' (2010, p.2) He then cites Fredric Jameson's 1991 *Postmodernism* with the beliefs that we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach. By many accounts then, the 1990s capitalism, mass media and growth of electronic obsession posed a profound threat to human experience.

So how does this context of American social culture define some of Disney's changes in their animations? The 1990s did become a time of liberation and abandon, where women felt more freedom, jobs were much more available, and marriage became a back-seat notion for later in life rather than a necessity for women to live their lives – in short, men no longer held power over a woman's personal life. This is

the first ideal that Disney attempted to implement in their modern era of animations, after the success of 1989's *The Little Mermaid*, song and dance was to remain but something much more significant was to occur for their lead female characters in terms of finding freedom and a sense of self before entertaining romance. As mentioned previously, this was first attempted in *The Black Cauldron* (1985) with the character of Princess Eilonwy. Initially, the princess is held captive by the Horned King and his dragon-like servants, and the audience is made to believe the animation's hero Taran will save her while on his quest to protect a magical pig from the Horned King's evil plans. Instead, upon Taran's own capture by the villain, the princess frees herself and then also frees Taran. Unfortunately, that is the extent of her character development and does very little to drive the narrative thereafter – after all, Taran remains the main character.

Fast forward several years to the continuing success of Disney in the wake of *The Little Mermaid*. In 1991, once more with the great help of lyricist Howard Ashman, the studio released *Beauty and the Beast* to extremely popular reviews. This animation promoted better ideals and standards for women, amongst other moral virtues often embedded in the fairy tale genre. Much like its predecessors, *Beauty and the Beast* does detail another beautiful female character who is expected to become domestic for her supposed future husband, however, contrasting with previous female characters who portray innocence, Belle dreams of more than this "provincial life." According to Booker, 'Disney's films have been perhaps the single most powerful force in determining expectations about feminine behaviour in American society […] since the 1930s' (2010), and this animation looks to rectify those previous portrayals of women, considering Belle often rejects typical, womanly tropes, for example, aiding her father in his mechanical inventions, and declining Gaston's proposal. It is interesting to find Belle more focused on education and her literacy than finding true love. With no interest in the overly athletic, muscular and dim-witted Gaston, she calls him "positively primeval" because of his view on a woman's place in domestic life. Therein Disney questions and parodies their prior beliefs and ideals so often narrated in their animations. His wanting to marry Belle, because she is the most beautiful girl in the village, does categorise her alongside previous Princesses as nothing more than pretty things to look at, but Belle's decision

to refuse him defines her otherwise, leaving the man humiliated and his ego wounded. Children privy to this animation, then, can see how Belle is able to live happily without a love interest, a modernised princess doing 'a phenomenal job of teaching girls how to defend against the patriarchy.' (Stokes, 2014) This is a major milestone for Disney animations who clearly noted that the real life of the 1990s woman had changed since the initial success of Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, and the desire to find and marry a man was no longer the be all and end all for a woman's life.

Though there are clear changes in Disney's character developments, the character of Belle still paints an image of feminine beauty within and without which as mentioned links her to the category of the maiden, yet the category is only skin deep. Not only does her name itself mean 'beauty', but she is also independent and free-thinking – often with a book in her hand. It is particularly stirring in the scene where the Beast is enjoying Belle reading to him, 'since reading and being read to are essential means of education – it seemed appropriate and valuable' (Bettelheim, 1991), forging a great contrast to Gaston's declaration that a woman's literacy is "not right." Finally, Disney has developed a female role model for young children, one that prioritises education over love. Interestingly, this character independence is likely due to Belle having never been oppressed, no evil stepmother or wicked witch to force her asleep, instead, Belle is loved by her father, and 'neither of them is punished for their mutual attachment: on the contrary, Beauty saves her father' (Bettelheim, 1991). This stirs the idea that love does not primarily have to be romantic, but can be familial. While still using the typical, motherless narrative for their films, this change in Disney heroines is welcomed, resulting in 'more recent princess movies [...] around female characters for whom romance is not the primary motivation' (Cohen, 2015), creating hope for more independent and strong female figures in animation. Playing on this change of Disney heroines, *Beauty and the Beast* is more than a simple "don't judge a book by its cover" animation that 'characterised so many of its predecessors. For Belle is, for all intents and purposes, a Disney Feminist.' (Pinsky, 2004)

Additionally, *Beauty and the Beast* contains other narrative evolutions for Disney animations, reflecting their growing sophistication in modern times. The dead

and dying animals, shot by Gaston, that appear on-screen in the animation are an image that would have been contested in the early twentieth century, and not only this, but the villain Gaston appears to perish at the end of the film. Death, while inevitable in real life, is not so easily touched upon in previous Disney feature-films, and though it has been implied at various times, 'it is really up to us – what stories we choose to tell' and 'how we tell them.' (Warner, 2014) The fact we see blood from the Beast after Gaston stabs him also defies previous animations, Disney challenging tradition with this dark, contrasting imagery that originally was very dominant in the fairy tale genre, but not so much for children's films. Indeed, while they are new steps taken by Disney, the likes of death and blood are not so new to the overall fairy tale genre, for example, in the original 1837 tale of *The Little Mermaid* written by Hans Christian Andersen, the mermaid's legs are ripped apart in her transformation to human, and blood gushes in the water as a result, much different than Disney's more pleasant and musical *The Little Mermaid* (1989). It is interesting to note, however, that Disney did touch upon the darker side of fairy tales in *The Black Cauldron* (1985), where scenes of the dead being resurrected and the death of a beloved character – Gurgi – makes for a very different Disney animation, but 'since there is no sharp line drawn between living and dead things, the latter, too, can come to life.' (Bettelheim, 1991) Alas, as previously mentioned, this difference in their fairy tale creation proved unbeneficial for the studio in 1985, the demand for princesses and happily ever after was too much, but in the modernising era of the 1990s, imagery of blood and death was never too far from their screens.

This new trend in *Beauty and the Beast* also provides interesting material regarding male stereotypes and the evolution of male representation. The strapping villain Gaston, who calls Belle his "little housewife," is the embodiment of Disney's former, misogynistic views; his nickname for the film's heroine provoking similar themes to *Snow White* of a domesticated woman needing a man to truly live. Evidenced by Brode, these 'superficial images of helpless princesses, subserviently trusting males to carry them off and live "happily ever after" in a retro world of post marital bliss' (2005) confirms that being the passive, domesticated woman is the easiest way to accomplish a happily ever after. The character of Gaston, then, is not only a villain to Belle but also to Disney's demographic, considering that children are

easily influenced by what they watch, typically those who fantasise often and begin to believe they're realistic since 'fairy tales reveal truths about mankind and oneself.' (Bettelheim, 1991) As such, parents might want to use *Beauty and the Beast* to begin a serious discussion about the way appearance affects one's judgements. Children can be severely cruel to others based on their physical attributes, and this is particularly true when 'reinforced every day by media, popular culture and [...] advertising that exalts aesthetic perfection,' (Pinsky, 2004) and though perfection is considerably subjective, modern perfection is unattainable to most. Therefore, it might be helpful to ask how Belle finds the beauty in someone seen to be different, touching upon the moral virtues of the fairy tale that seeks to educate the reader or listener, in this comes the ideal of not judging a book by its cover.

Famed Disney lyricist, Howard Ashman, sadly passed in 1991 due to heart failure caused by the HIV/AIDS disease, but was able to see an early screening of *Beauty and the Beast* prior to his death. His ability with music, however, was continued and revised through the remainder of the Disney Renaissance animations, for example in 1992's *Aladdin*. While the films are renowned and feel nostalgic due to the songs, something that felt specific and new at that time in the Disney franchise, the narrative tropes remained very similar with the changes continuing slowly. The studio granted more female characters a chance at freedom, again in 1992's *Aladdin* there is the princess Jasmine – a headstrong, wilful and beautiful woman pining for freedom away from royal life. Not only was *Aladdin* the first Disney animation to feature a foreign culture, but the first female lead who actively wished to not desire the glamour and perks of royalty or royal men. Regardless of these slow sprinklings of female change and development in the modern era, at Princess Jasmine's introduction, the ideal woman image is exposed once more, and despite the character being of a different ethnic background to Snow White, she is portrayed as thin, beautiful and articulate since 'the beauty of the face exceeds the beauty of the clothing.' (Tatar, 2009) Her beauty is unrealistic, thus creating idealistic fetishes for boys and girls as her eyes are bigger than her wrists, and 'even the older Disney classics, such as the 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, had much more normally proportioned' (Cohen, 2015) bodies. At times, her character is presented as childlike with the need to be protected, Jasmine throws tantrums when

she is not allowed to pursue her personal wants and desires, which perhaps unintentionally enforces Disney's former ideals that a woman's singular goal is to get married or remain in a domestic setting because they cannot survive on their own without a man or parent. This link with childlike behaviour means they are also 'associated with […] small animals such as birds and squirrels, an editing trope that seems to suggest that women are naturally cute and defenceless' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009), which is evidenced by Jasmine with the birds in the palace gardens and also owning Raja the exotic pet tiger.

Contrastingly, from following the convention that beauty 'in fairy tales […] is always more that skin deep' (Tatar, 2009), Princess Jasmine is explained as "smart, and fun, and beautiful" by Aladdin himself, not only emphasising that she is defined by her education and humour before her appearance, but also that women of education can be good looking as well. Also, while she is dressed in a revealing outfit, this heroine is still able to save 'the hero's life in some way or another. […] These are all strong female characters with strong positive aspects to their depictions' whose 'motivation to do what they want is never solely romantic love.' (Davis, 2006) In this animation, the princess not only challenges that she is "not a prize to be won" - wanting to find love when only she is ready – but again Jasmine also wants to escape the controlled lifestyle of a princess. Without passively waiting for love, she instead actively takes part in Aladdin's story and happens to find love on the way, so 'it is as if the point of *Aladdin* is to shatter the idea that being a princess is something to strive for, since all being a princess means to Jasmine's life is that she has no personal freedom.' (Davis, 2006) Davis then continues that as the princesses are animated, their entire appearance has been constructed to be 'a unique combination of printed popular culture […] and the twentieth-century's later emphasis on the more life-like visual media' (2006) and further claims that they are 'within the most constructed of all moving images of the female form' as every visual aspect of the princess has been chosen specifically, from their tiny waists to their huge eyes, to create images of an ideal but unrealistic woman. This model is used on all the princesses and shows an untrue, unachievable representation of women that children grow up striving for as seen by the hysteria of the 1990s mass media and pop culture.

Despite changes from the studio, the animations still hold typical tropes of the fairy tale genre, as 'nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as [...] fairy tales.' (Bettelheim, 1991) *Aladdin* teaches child audiences that stealing is wrong, but still shows how rough life can be while retaining some compassion. It seems to take the audience on a rollercoaster of moral messages however, considering this leading male character is also selfish. Aladdin's wish to marry Princess Jasmine is for her title and wealth, evidenced through Aladdin's want to become a fake Prince to gain her favour. With this, it seems the film is littered in domineering male characters, not only of Aladdin, but the Sultan who wants an arranged marriage for Jasmine, and Jafar, who is the essence of self-interest. The levels of patriarchy here show of gender inequality as Jasmine has no say in her marriage proposals, and her forced betrothal to Jafar hints at traditional marriage ideals; "you're rather quiet. I like that in a wife," he says. These words symbolise a strong image of oppression to women overall, a link to early twentieth century ideals for marriage with men as the dominant, but also to the traditions and values of middle eastern culture. According to Bettelheim, 'fairy tales leave to the child's fantasizing whether and how to apply himself what the story reveals about life and human nature,' and 'a child trusts what the fairy story tells, because its world view accords with his own' (1991); this is evidenced in *Aladdin* despite Disney Studio's attempt at portraying a foreign ethnicity since much of the animation seems heavily influenced by American culture, making it easier for children to believe in and relate to the narrative.

Leading further into the 1990s, changes in the animations come both at gender representations and representations of foreign cultures. Already noted by 1992's *Aladdin*, come 1995 the studio releases *Pocahontas.* By History, it is well known that the winner writes the books, and in this case Disney has moulded a historical time of America's past into one of their fairy tale narratives. In-keeping with the discussion of gender, in the case of both *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas,* the women are categories as exotic beauties. They portray 'non-white women as exotic and sexually exciting and white men as inherently superior' (Allen, et al. 1992), exemplified in the scene where John Smith meets Pocahontas. Here, John, the superior white man, plans on shooting Pocahontas whom he sees as a savage until he is closer and falls for her exotic

beauty. As she is seen this way, Pocahontas is objectified by John, becoming a stereotype of women of colour 'according to the white male imagination' rather than her own character and personality, and thus is 'denied self-definition, self-realization and […] selfhood' (Allen, et al. 1992). For a short time, though the animations still proved successful, these portrayals of women – not just as foreign culture – is a questionable step back for the studio amidst many other animations that paved the way forward for change. For example, Disney touches upon Chinese folklore in 1998's *Mulan* which presents a culture that is strong but one where the man dominates the woman, forcing a girl to fake her gender identity in order to protect both her family and country. Thus, Disney does not seem consistent in following the stereotypes previously seen in their animations. It is when Mulan believes in herself that she succeeds as a soldier, and while portraying an independent female character, she can both save China, and also win love on her own terms by becoming a couple with Shang at the very end. Gwendolyn Limbach analysed *Mulan* as an interpretation that Disney 'adapted from this well-established legend, the version retains certain "distinctive Chinese cultural traits and historical facts to construct a 'Chinese flavor" while organizing the film around an Americanized cultural pathos.' (2013) This is particularly damning in terms of racism regarding Chinese culture and folklore that the Studio westernized. Yet it is interesting that they should detail one of their princesses after such a folk legend, though many do 'find folk fairy tales more satisfying than all other children's stories' (Bettelheim, 1991) as they carry some form of truth to them in History. From this, conventions of female gender stereotypes are surely broken, not only promoting independent role models for young children but also showing another culture's heroics through a female character that can be internationally related to. Furthermore, making use of a cultural folklore provides another layer to that legend, considering that 'the fairy folk tale […] is the result of a story being shaped and reshaped by being told millions of times, by different adults to all kinds of other adults and children' (Bettelheim, 1991), therefore it is almost meaningless to argue the Studio's racism when the origins and moral messages of this tale are so changeable and it can be said this rendition is simply another reshaping of the legend.

Developing on the new themes within Disney, one that is becoming more common is the use and subtle hints of a character's sexuality, rather than simple gender. Initially, heterosexuality is not only shown more than other sexualities in films, 'it is presented as the *only* sexual orientation' and 'such an assumption – that heterosexuality is the only (or only normal) sexual orientation – is a powerful aspect of Hollywood's heterosexism' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.309). Disney follows this assumption, focusing greatly on heterosexual romance through the princesses finding their princes, Mickey pursuing Minnie, and thus neglecting any other sexual orientations. Regarding Disney's animations, 'marginalised groups [are] portrayed negatively, rarely, or not at all' (Towbin, et al, 2004, p.20), and when it comes to sexuality, 'queer representation within Disney animation is kept to a minimum' (Elledge, 2010, p.263). It then must be mentioned once more that their beloved Howard Ashman, one who brought great success to the Renaissance, was homosexual and unfortunately passed due to the HIV/AIDS disease. It therefore is questionable how they welcome LGBT+ within company ranks, but very rarely or unintentionally touch upon such a topic in their animations. The absence of sexual minorities means 'audiences watching these films experience worlds wherein sexual identity [is] never questioned – everyone [is] straight, and heterosexual desire [is] understood as "natural" because there [are] no other choices' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.310). By excluding any openly LGBT+ characters, Disney promotes the idea that heterosexuality is normal and other sexualities are not, preventing many young children from access to characters they could relate to. With film, 'regardless of the genre or the specific goals of the protagonist, classical Hollywood cinema almost always includes the struggle to unite the male-female couple' (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p.309), yet never includes the struggle of uniting same-sex couples. With many films involving some element of romance, or in Disney's case every film involving an element of romance, which is nearly always between a cisgender male and female, the lack of other sexualities is then emphasised. Disney is no exception to this, exampled through its early princess animations where Snow White gets her Prince, Aurora gets her Phillip, and Beauty gets her Beast. None of these animations include an established gay couple, although in the live remake of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), it is subtly hinted that LeFou is attracted to Gaston and is later seen dancing with a

potentially queer man too. Whilst it is arguable Disney has chosen to avoid these representations, it could equally be blamed not on Disney, but on the heavy censorship of children's media.

Despite this, when Disney does include potentially homosexual characters, they are never obviously so and are presented negatively, such as Prince John in *Robin Hood* (1973), who is 'portrayed in a stereotypically effeminate way, he has a high-pitched laugh, a limp wrist, wears a lot of jewellery, and is too small to fit his robe or throne' (Towbin, et al, 2004, p.34), or Governor Ratcliffe in *Pocahontas* (1995) who follows the same stereotypes by singing and dancing in flamboyant, sparkling outfits. As both characters are villains, the negative representation of homosexuality is further enforced. Also, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), despite Gaston's determined pursuit of Belle and his attraction to the village girls, some critics see stereotypically gay, narcissistic undertones in his portrayal, noticed by how he is only truly interested in the male gaze, and thrives amongst an all-male tavern where they sing and celebrate his masculinity. Contrastingly, the Beast is the modern man, one who can transform himself from 'the hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the 80s into a considerate, loving, and self-sacrificing man of the 90s' (Pinsky, 2004, p.147). Furthermore, where Gaston is concerned, it seems all who associate with him are detailed by Disney's former stereotypes, exampled by the empty-headed female admirers portrayed with large breasts and low-cut dresses, within which emphasises female sexuality and contrasts with Belle's more modest appearance. Again, Disney parodies their former standards. Such a contrast, when regarding the heroines as role models, 'this film has received an overwhelming amount of praise for challenging the gender and romantic tropes of Disney films' (Rustad, 2015, p.3).

On a woman's sexuality while looking at Disney's more recent princesses, Walter states 'Ariel and Jasmine have obviously made up faces and skimpy costumes that show a lot of their prominent breasts' (2010, p.69). This shows images of women from the general media have spread to media aimed at children, meaning 'even those heroines that are part of a very childish culture have begun to take a more sexualised look' (Walter, 2010, p.68-9), thus causing a lack of diverse representations of women for children. Also, as 'the range of female characters and role models available for

young girls has narrowed' because 'sexualised images of young women are threatening to squeeze out other kinds of images of women' (Walter, 2010, p.68), Disney's huge influence has led to a narrowed range of female characters by presenting its princesses as sexualised women only valued for their beauty. As well as characters, there are many scenes in Disney's animations in which 'same-sex affection between men is considered disgusting and receives ridicule' (Towbin, et al, 2004, p.34), such as in *Beauty and the Beast* when 'after winning a battle, a male candle kisses a male clock on both cheeks, and the clock reacts with disgust' (Towbin, et al, 2004, p.34). Also, in *Mulan* (1998), 'when she is posing as a male soldier, [she] slaps one of the male soldiers on the behind [and] this makes him angry' (Towbin, et al, 2004, p.3). These scenes give the idea that homosexuality causes discomfort, and this negative portrayal presented in Disney can have a very serious impact on its young audience. Non-binary gender is also presented in Disney through the character of Mulan, believably gender fluid due to her comfort in both genders, displayed in her achievements as a male soldier and her success in saving China as a woman, and as such, she 'seamlessly move between genders,' and even with displaying 'overtly masculine and clumsy movements when undertaking traditionally feminine tasks such as pouring tea' (Elledge, 2010, p.260), she ends the film as her long-haired female self.

Far beyond the successes and pitfalls of Disney's changes to their animations and characters, or the non-existent changes seen in others, the one consistent difference is how they narrate love throughout, and more so nearing the end of the 90s decade into the turn of the new millennium came the evolution of their male gender representation. The evidence in Beauty and the Beast's Gaston is more than enough to argue how Disney realised the need for change, and what makes a man desirable for their female demographic to enjoy. No longer is muscle and brawn considered sexy and wanting, but intelligence and emotional depth. Therein promotes the release of 1996's The Hunchback of Notre Dame, a Disney animation that once more questions the traditions of man and his wife – through the character of Judge Claude Frollo, who secretly pines and attempts bribery to win the hand of heroine Esmeralda – but also presents the new ideals that men don't have to be mean to keep the woman keen, or that a man is only a good man if he looks just as good on the

outside. The thought of the 'unlikely hero' as defined by Amy Davis in *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains* (2013) are Disney's male characters who are vulnerable, intellectuals and rather sympathetic to the story and ongoings with other characters. With this she focuses on a variety of animations from the studio, *The Rescuers Down Under* (1990), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001) and *Treasure Planet* (2002), the latter three included in this discussion of Disney's male representation and its evolution.

With Disney's change came the new male characters, ones who were more significant as a leading figure rather than the prize for a happily ever after. In terms of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), the characters of Quasimodo and Phoebus throw away old conventions of the Disney man with a new sense of adventure and drive in the fairy tale narrative they reside in. According to Joseph Campbell in his revised *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008), a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. This ideal can be linked to three animations, but first with Quasimodo the Hunchback who is kept hidden in the cathedral desires to be out in the city of Paris, amongst the people and make friends other than the church gargoyles. He is the unlikely hero – vulnerable and physically disfigured – who ventures out from his common day (in Notre Dame cathedral), encounters fabulous forces (Esmeralda the gypsy woman) and wins victory (finds and makes good friends of both Esmeralda and Phoebus), then returns to the cathedral to save his new friends from the narrative's villain before celebrating and bestowing his friendship (boon) in return to the open world that welcomes him amongst his fellow man. Again, Disney plays on the education of fairy tale tropes to educate its audience with moral virtues previously noted in *Beauty and the Beast*, to not judge a book by its cover. Whereby, once upon a time, their heroes were continuously good looking by general media standards (muscular, healthy, charming and physically attractive) they question prior stereotypes by proving with a current hero in Quasimodo that anyone with a good heart can save the day. It is further interesting then, that the "side-kick" to Quasimodo's heroism is the typical blonde haired, muscular and charming Captain of the city guard, Phoebus. While he does

take away the romantic love interest in Esmeralda from Quasimodo, it does allow the lead hero to claim the glory of saving Paris from the animation's villain, and ultimately accept his victory still won in terms of his original desires – to find real friends, rather than the focus of leading characters in love. A significant difference for Phoebus compared to previous leading male characters, however, is that he cannot help but admire Esmeralda's strength as well as beauty (seen when she fights off ten soldiers and he exclaims "what a woman!") but admires her just as much for her intellect and freedom of self. During the cathedral scene where they spar, it is clear that Phoebus acknowledges them as equals as 'their cut and thrust demonstrating that they have compatible personalities and temperaments.' (Davis, 2013, p.137)

The next unlikely hero comes from 2001's *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* which sees studious Milo Thatch, a scholar and expert in ancient and modern linguistics with a wide range of degrees and academic interests, become a strong leading male character. It becomes apparent early in the animation that his academic interests have unfortunately ruined his career – despite his obvious brilliance – as he seeks to find the lost empire of Atlantis, believing it real and not the myth it is assumed to be. Once more touching upon Campbell's stages of the heroic journey, for which there are nine stages, again they link to the narrative progression of the animation and Milo's heroic journey. The hero's adventure begins in the ordinary world – 1914, Washington D.C – but soon he must depart when he receives a call to adventure (Mr Whitmore, an adventurer and old friend of Milo's grandfather). With the help of this mentor, the hero will cross a guarded threshold that leads him to a supernatural world and embark on a road of trials where he is tested along the way (the montage of scenery showing the expedition trek through numerous landmarks and unknown locations) and is sometimes assisted by allies. As the hero faces the ordeal, he encounters the greatest challenge of the journey (Milo's accidental burning of their camp that throws the expedition into chaos and they must abandon much of their equipment) but upon rising to the challenge will receive a reward or a boon (the team finds Atlantis and Milo's reward is knowing he was right in his beliefs of the empire). It can also be said that Milo's biggest challenge was having realised Rourke and the team's betrayal to himself and to Atlantis, and this in itself is when the audience realises his strength as a lead character – not only to save the woman he had come

to love, Princess Kida, but that he would have fought to save the Empire regardless of her being in danger or not. The hero must then decide to return with this boon to the ordinary world (Milo does not, in fact, return to the world outside of hidden Atlantis, but the team does return to Mr Whitmore with gifts of gold and the Atlantean crystal with Milo's blessing). Upon the hero's return, the boon or gift may be used to improve the hero's ordinary world in what Campbell calls 'the application of the boon'.

It seems, then, that many of Disney's animations can follow these stages that Campbell presented, though with some variance in the inclusion and sequence of some. Still, literature and folklore follow the motif of the archetypal narrative, paralleling the more general steps of 'departure' (or separation), 'initiation' and 'return'. The narrative of the hero's journey only strengthens the personalities already seen in the male character though, for Milo he is seen to have a driving ambition early on as he aggressively resigned from his job at the museum, throughout the journey to Atlantis he is the force that leads the expedition to their goal because only he can read and understand the academia on offer, and when Atlantis is betrayed and his crystalised lover taken for profit by Rourke, it is the scholarly Milo that heads the retaliating army of the Atlanteans to save their empire and royalty. Milo is a male character the audience roots for, a character made sympathetic by real life plights of job issues or the belief that the 'nice guy' (in current terms considered the 'nerdy guy') never wins the girl, but this thin and bookish man does it all on his own conviction. Davis might have considered him the unlikely hero of this story, but Milo Thatch is perhaps one of the first Disney leading males to pave way for real life 'unlikely heroes' who were very rarely represented in film previously, or only seen as the side-man to the main action-man heroes, she comments that 'in many ways, Rourke is depicted as the hard-bodied man and Milo the sensitive "new man" of the 1990s.' (2013, p.105) as Milo has brains and heart, which do ultimately triumph over the brawn exhibited by Rourke.

Similarly in 2002's *Treasure Planet,* there are three leading male characters who take on this 'new man' or differing love interest to Disney's earlier animations. First in Doctor Delbert Doppler, the dog-eared astrophysicist who accompanies the main character, young and rambunctious Jim Hawkins, into space, and the

ambiguously villainous cyborg John Silver. Doppler presents many of the same characteristics at Milo Thatch, an academic fussiness on one hand, and unbridled enthusiasm for his scholarly ambitions on the other. Much of the spaceship's crew are known pirates and not to be trusted, physically characterised as strong beings, but again the audience is privy to brains outmatching the brawn when an exploding star (turned black hole) attempts to suck in and destroy the ship, where Doppler saves them with scientific knowledge of mathematics, physics and astronomy to get them out and to safety. Thereafter the scholar is hailed a hero and is signified as something more than what he first seemed, again touching on the moral message of not judging a book by its cover, a Disney favourite. The animation echoes the romance of Atlantis as well through the bookish astronomer winning the love of fierce Captain Amelia, who together once fought like cats and dogs do (literally) but ultimately come to appreciate each other's strengths and weaknesses. Theirs was not the only love interest however, yet in this case is something Disney had only briefly touched upon in earlier animations but in much of their later animations more – the love of family.

It is interesting that Doppler was given the true romantic element which elevated him from mere sidekick or secondary character to a level almost equal to Jim and John Silver in terms of character development. As Davis explains, it is not a plotline original to the novel or found in Disney's 1950 adaptation, thus in the fifty-plus years since, 'Disney seems to have decided that the film needed a romance, but rather than alter the storyline further and provide a romantic partner for Jim, instead the characters of Doppler and Amelia were created.' (2013, p.109) It could very well be that the studios' consideration for this change was to not take away the character development and familial bond seen between Jim and John Silver, something that relates to a father-son dynamic, and Doppler is used to drive the narrative in order for Jim to find this meaningful relationship that he was unable to have with his biological father. Said relationship between Jim and Silver is primarily developed through a series of quickfire scenes that show Silver teaching Jim how to tie rope knots, to cook and clean, and Silver saving him in the end from the destruction of Treasure Planet (his fatherly heroics rewarded with Jim granting his freedom, and Silver returning some gold and jewels). So while none of these men might be the most dashing of Disney's heroes, Doppler specifically provided the narrative with the

means to allow Jim his own heroic journey and ability to find the fatherly love he had craved at home, a strong degree of comic relief and a figure to use for Disney's obligatory romance subplot.

Overall, the 1990s Disney Renaissance saw many changes, more than had occurred in previous decades for the studio. No doubt the development in America's society helped in this case, a culture openly thinking and involved to more than class or gender which allowed Disney to develop with it and proceed to trial and error several narrative changes. Considering earlier works seemed quite static in their story progression and character development, ones that always included a main romantic love, by the 1990s that wasn't always wanted or at least necessary in their original forms – such as the change to familial love over romantic love – or the independence from love. For example, Milo's love for Kida made him strong, but he would likely have continued fighting against all odds regardless due to his moral outrage against the villain's actions. These changes, between women not being so constrained in the three feminine categories (maiden, mother and villain) and Disney's 'new man' becoming more involved and developed in personality, allow their roster the chance to broaden focus and address themes and stories not previously considered, like male characters not of royal blood, as Davis comments 'have no duty to marry and continue the royal line' meaning that 'while they can be romantic leading men, they can be other things, too.' (2013, p.146)

Chapter Four

"Almost There" but not quite. Disney in the 21st Century.

Disney Studios and their animated films are a huge part of the entertainment industry in America, with great influence to reach children through many avenues, not just with movies, but through clothing, games and toys as part of the company's marketing scheme. As the studio has been around for over 80 years, during this time they have played a role in how society displays gender roles, and with modern culture from the twenty-first century changing to more inclusive ideals of gender roles

compared to many of Disney's earlier depictions, the studio can also be seen making changes in their representations of genders, especially in their female characters. The beginning of this study first focused on the foundation that started it all, the three categories of feminine characteristics that could be described in three ways: the innocent maiden, the mother, and the monstrous woman. Later came the rebellious woman, seen in the likes of Ariel, Belle, Mulan and Kida, all strong-willed and seeking independence. More recently is the 'new woman' of true independence and self-worth before any attempt of romance, seen through the characters of Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Elsa and Moana. Through different research and literary reviews, including the movies themselves, Disney can be seen slowly taking the initiative to develop deeper meaning for their characters, both heroes and heroines, alongside the surrounding culture and changing times in American society.

The time and culture that America lives in revolves around technology, advertising, and different forms of popular media that consists of music, video games, movies and television. Children and young adults of this generation have grown up with the 'online lifestyle' and its influence on the world. The influence of film and television alone is noted solely by Disney's renown and considered essential to many current adult's childhood development, where according to statistics there are 116.4 million homes in the United States that have at least one or two televisions (Newswire, 2015) or that Americans alone spend collectively 250 billion hours per year watching television (Tonn, 2008). Considering such statistics are by no means recent, it can only be assumed those numbers have increased since the involvement of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

So having addressed the evolution of gender representations in Disney animations from the initial release of 1937's *Snow White* to 2002's *Treasure Planet*, this fourth and final chapter explores the changes made since in a modernised culture, with analysis of gender roles in 2009's *The Princess and the Frog*, 2010's *Tangled*, Pixar's 2012 *Brave*, 2013's *Frozen*, and 2016's *Moana*.

To begin with *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), one must make clear that an unfortunate majority of the film has the leading female and male character as frogs, not humans. Initially the film drew most of its attention due to the fact the main

character, Tiana, is a black woman from 1920s New Orleans. Considering this is Disney's first African-American princess it is unsurprising that critics pointed out the fact of her being a frog for most of her screen time. Neal A. Lester writes that 'many noted that the first and only African-American princess, unlike other Disney princesses, is not a princess by birth but rather becomes a princess through marriage to a prince.' (2010, p.297) This is particularly untrue, on the part that Tiana is the first to become a princess through marriage, as Cinderella was not a princess until married to Prince Charming, and Belle was a girl from a "poor provincial town" until she married the Beast. Once more Disney has shaped an original fairy tale to fit their silver screen, where a prince-turned-frog must kiss a princess in order to be human again – except Tiana is not a princess by birth, therein lies the issue and obstacle the characters must overcome through the film. Yet before the issues of them both being frogs (due to the spell backfiring when Tiana kisses him at the start), it is interesting to note that Tiana is first characterised as a hard working woman seeking to make her own fortune as a restauranteur, as inspired by her late father's excellent cooking. She has strong values, a healthy and loving relationship with her mother, and takes on the responsibility of two waitressing jobs in order to make ends meet and save for the restaurant she hopes to one day open. This is miles beyond the female independence Disney has portrayed in previous animations, Tiana – for all intents and purposes – really does not need a romantic love interest to live a happy life.

Unfortunately, a quick step backward has Disney throwing the original source material of *The Princess and the Frog* toward Tiana and her independence. Suddenly green and sticky, she fights tooth and nail alongside Naveen in order to become human again, but through their journey fall in love as is typical of a Disney narrative. Of course, after they expend all of their ideas to get back their human bodies has failed, the pair simply decide to stay together as frogs and get married in a bayou-set wedding, thus making Tiana the princess to Naveen's princedom, and their marital kiss granting them the happily ever after they had fought for. In the aftermath, Tiana is able to achieve her independent dreams also, by buying the restaurant in which Naveen becomes a waiter and a musician – here is it pivotal to point out that it is Tiana's own hard-earned money that allows her to buy the restaurant, not from

Prince Naveen. Davis writes that 'this is especially empowering for Tiana is something that goes unnoticed' as 'Naveen may make Tiana a princess, but Tiana – and her kiss – is what makes them human again.' (2013, p.173) Therefore, although it is unfortunate that Disney must throw romance into their animations to make a wholesome narrative, it is refreshing to find the heroine ultimately saving the prince rather than the other way around, and for once the audience is able to see the happily ever after, after the wedding, and it is exactly as one would wish it to be.

Not only has Disney played with this new ideal of feminine independence with Tiana, but has continued the 'new man' standards set by the likes of Milo Thatch and Delbert Doppler. Initially, Prince Naveen is selfish and narcissistic because that is how he was brought up by royalty, he never learned to work a day in his life and thus avoids working because it is not only distasteful to him to do so but also that he has no idea how to work. Lazy, perhaps, but the Prince does seem to go to great lengths in order to find himself a rich wife so that he can continue living the high life he is accustomed to. In the end, his character development is therefore greater than Tiana's, as the man comes to learn and love a balance between work and life as influenced by Tiana on their journey together. In-so-far that Naveen almost plays out the most selfless act of marrying Charlotte, even though he is in love with Tiana, because he believes it is the only way for Tiana to achieve her dreams. Evidently, as the overall narrative makes clear and through the inner transformations of the film's leading characters, that they find true happiness together while retaining separate personalities, and continue to enjoy the dream they achieved.

Another modern Princess animation by Disney that continues to reflect the new ideals and standards for gender roles that was addressed in *The Princess and the Frog,* is 2010's *Tangled*. As women in society were gaining more and more independence, breaking social barriers and challenging what was considered the norm, Disney once more created a strong female protagonist that would break the princess pattern. *Tangled* (2010) is another animation adapted from fairy tale, specifically Brother Grimm's fable of a girl trapped in a tower. The animation shares similarities with the original fairy tale, however the story is drastically changed in order to add comedy, cheerful music and for the trapped girl to instead burst with

adventure and the desire to explore the world she had never seen. Rapunzel, like many princesses that came before her, wanted so much more than the life she lived in the tower, and with a natural sense of adventure sought to bamboozle Mother Gothel in order to achieve her dream of independence. The unfortunate predicament that sees Tangled fall back in line with Disney's earlier classics, is that Rapunzel only gains her freedom from the tower because she enlists a man to help her. Rapunzel, unknowing of her princess status from the start, relies on the bandit and scoundrel Flynn Rider (not a prince) to safely escort her to see the floating lights from the far away city. While this contradicts the idea of Rapunzel being an independent character, throughout their journey she is seen to save Flynn more often than he does her, and although some criticise the film for taking attention away from the feminist message by ending it in marriage, this is done because 'women can […] have it both ways, though only if, like Disney's role model characters, they finally believe in themselves as individuals, and as women.' (Brode, 2005) It is also interesting how Disney has allowed the heroine and her prince to get to know one another before confessing their love, making it clear that the princesses are valued by who they are and not how they look.

The film does represent a sense of change in Disney's representation of princesses. After she discovers that she is a princess, one taken by Mother Gothel as a baby in order to sate her hunger for youth via magical hair, she becomes determined not to stay in the tower and will thwart her fake mother in any way necessary to get away. There is a sense of light and change in this film because in the end it is Rapunzel who saves the day, similar to Tiana, and makes the heroic sacrifice of cutting her hair to lose its power. Her act of true love to save Flynn Rider is another leap forward for Disney, in the sense that the original ideal of the damsel-in-distress is forgotten by Rapunzel's final heroics and her ambition to save the man she loves. In the end, it is not the girl who becomes royalty through marriage to the prince, but the thief-turned-lover who becomes a better man through the princess. The transition from classical Disney, to the Disney Renaissance, to the modern Disney provides huge changes in terms of feminine independence and character development, from these two animations alone, as Coontz mentions how the mentality went from the 1970s with two-thirds of Americans believing that women

belonged in the home caring for the family, to the 1990s with two-thirds of Americans rejecting that notion (2013).

From this, it is clear the new princesses are 'spunky young feminists' who are 'more independent […] than the traditional princesses' (Rothschild, 2013), and who have higher aims than falling in love. Pixar's *Brave* (2012) is a key example of their new independent princess, as she shows no interest in men and fights against her mother's attempts of finding her a suiter, meaning that instead of romance, the relationship between mother and daughter is focused on. This echoes the change from 2002's *Treasure Planet* that sought to focus on the development of a father-son relationship between Jim Hawkins and John Silver. The bond of family is a greater need here, and more attainable for a happily ever after than true love, thus Disney 'completely casts off the patriarchal clichés of their predecessors by focussing heavily on the relationships between women, and treating romance as a secondary consideration.' (Ebersol, 2014) In terms of their princess collection though, this is Disney's first time breaking the gender expectations of their female characters and the pattern of their princesses that came before Merida. With the release of Brave, Disney showed audiences that a princess does not need a man or marriage to find happiness, she can be independent and unique, and realise that her worth is much more than the domestic home and making a family.

Brave (2012) is a Pixar animation film released by Walt Disney Pictures, and has been included for this discussion due to Disney capitalising on the princess heroine for merchandise. Her name is Merida, and she is clever, independent, strong-willed and refuses to be anything but herself. She steps out of the princess stereotype because she also refuses to be confined by the bonds of marriage, and despises the notion of being fought over for a competition (Garabedian, 2014) where the prize is her royal hand. In fact, she would rather fight for her own hand than let a stranger prince decide her fate. Therein forges the obstacles she must face, not through the men (who soon come to respect her decision and leave the poor girl alone) but by her mother who for all intents and purposes is lost to royal tradition. Merida must focus her heart and intelligent mind to persuade her mother that she can be a good princess and queen without the need of a man, to follow her own destiny instead of

sitting around and waiting for it to happen – or to happen because a man is at her side. For Masri, Merida is different than the princesses that came before her because she embodies the twenty-first century woman, one that modern girls can relate to as not only is she rebellious and blames everything on her parents, but that she feels alienated and misunderstood (2013).

Instead of focusing on love interests and romantic obstacles a couple must overcome to achieve happily ever after, the audience is captured by a narrative of familial love and the discovery of self-worth, the importance of family and how one sometimes has to make sacrifices for what is important. Merida might not care much for boys and romance, but when it comes to caring for her family – regardless of the bickering between mother and daughter – she fights against all odds to protect them, while still achieving her independence and keeping a sense of self. In fact, this journey of independence and family importance is hard-rivalled by any other animation released by Disney, if one is to consider the evolution of their gender representations.

In the following year to *Brave*, 2013's *Frozen* was released with another princess that would break boundaries and expectations of gender roles. The film contains two lead female characters, Anna and Elsa, royal sisters who become estranged due to Elsa's magical power that forced their parents to hide her away in the name of safety. As is accustomed to Disney films, their parents are written off and the two sisters must come together to first celebrate Elsa's coronation, and secondly hope to rebuild their sisterly bond. Again, Disney touches more upon familial love rather than romantic (although the latter does become involved shortly after Elsa's coronation) as the animation focuses on the bond between sisters who, despite their differences, come to selflessly protect one another.

To start, *Frozen* broke boundaries by way of Queen Elsa declaring that Anna "cannot marry someone you just met", ultimately challenging every romantic fairy tale Disney had previously released, considering so many of their princesses did and have married their prince within moments of the man saving them. Therefore, Anna is the parody link to original princesses, ones who fall in love after singing with a stranger (for example, Anna and Hans sing 'Love is an Open Door' during the

coronation ceremony), and Elsa is the continued representation of the 'new woman' glimpsed first in Tiana and cemented by Merida. From this, Disney is showing young girls that it is okay to question tradition. Just as the presentation of innocence through Snow White represents the perfect image of a 1930s woman, highlighting a questionably moral message for young girls and their idea of true love, Elsa promotes a more equal and feminist agenda by saying you cannot marry a man you just met.

Disney continue to parody their original princess formula, as the elements of romance threaded through the film (though still not the focal point) becomes an almost comedic aspect to the narrative. Later in the movie there is the idea of true loves kiss, one that Anna needs in order to save herself from being lost to Elsa's ice magic. She believes it is Prince Hans who must do it, the man she shared a tuneful song with, but turns out the false love as he admits that he never loved her and simply wanted to take over the royalty of their kingdom. Therefore, Disney presents Elsa as the intelligent woman, the woman of independence. Yet with her independence arouses critical review however, because 'if a woman is authoritative, she is considered bossy. If a woman is strong, she is considered unfeminine' (Feder, 2014) and some argue that 'Disney's treatment of gender - especially in the representation of the long line of Disney princesses - has been problematic over the years' (Booker, 2010), while others believe that Disney have been providing strong female characters for its audience from as far back as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It cannot be countered, though, that in recent years, Disney's princesses have become less stereotypical and better role models for both girls and boys. This is evidenced by the ending of *Frozen* where Anna throws aside the notion of true love in order to save her sister, Queen Elsa, from the oncoming sword of Hans, proving once more that familial love is the stronger bond.

The final animation addressed in this study, to demonstrate the changes and evolution of Disney's expectations of gender roles is 2016's *Moana*. Once more do they produce a strong and independent female character, Moana is brave and puts both brain and strength together to do anything to keep her island and people safe, even at the expense of her freedom. She wishes to travel the oceans, but her father (the island Chief) forbids it and declares it too dangerous, and that she must stay with

their people to care for them and keep the status quo. What makes Moana different from other Disney princesses, however, is that her character traits do not seem to conform to the tradition gender stereotype so often seen in previous animations (similar to other rebellious characters analysed). Once the crisis of resources is voiced on their island, Moana's grandmother tells her that she could save the island by returning the heart of Te Fiti, but that she needs to ask for Maui's help.

Moana is thus characterised as adventurous, brave, ambitious, smart, independent, rebellious, loving, assertive, affectionate, nurturing and decisive. It is by her doing that she persuades the demi-god Maui to help her save the island, and it is her bravery that inspires near enough every character she meets along the way. As Kimsey defines, a risk taker is 'willing to take a chance on personal safety or reputation to achieve a goal' (2011, p.17). This is reflected from Moana's character song "How Far I'll Go" where she indicates her decisiveness through singing "Every turn I take, every trail I track / Is a choice I made, now I can't turn back." Once more decisiveness is defined as 'quick to consider options/situations and make up mind' (2011, p.17). Even before Moana gains help from Maui, her determination and ambition are highlighted through the song as she starts her journey regardless of being alone.

As the narrative develops, Moana's assertiveness is shown. This is reflected from her actions toward Maui and her instructions to make him follow her to help in her heroic journey, even though initially Moana seems scared, she manages to overcome her fears and continue her quest. At this time, more than her assertiveness is highlighted, such as her independence. Moana manages to survive out at sea for a while on her own, more so after some teachings from Maui in terms of navigation, therefore becoming more skilful and self-reliant. Ramadhan comments on her ambitious character when Moana's boat is broken by the film's main antagonist Te Ka, after Maui left her alone at sea. Here, 'even though Maui left her, her ambition to return the heart of Te Fiti and save her people remain. She will do anything to fulfil her ambition.' (2019, p.17)

Another of her characteristics as mentioned is her rebellious nature, first seen at the start of the animation when she continuously attempts to sail out to sea, but is reprimanded by her father who deems it too dangerous. Her rebelliousness takes

over and she goes ahead with sailing out on her own in order to prove her father wrong. Instead, she is punished, and the ocean becomes too unstable for her to control the boat. Her rebelliousness subverts the traditional gender expectations mapped out by previous Disney animations, but is certainly shaped by the modern day, independent woman. In fact, it could be said that she portrays more masculine traits than feminine traits, if one is to consider these traditional standards set by Disney. For Ramadhan, Moana demonstrates nine masculine traits compared to three feminine traits, these are: brave, adventurous, independent, ambitious, assertive, decisive, rebellious, smart and fearless, versus: loving, tender and nurturing (2019, p.22). Whether one is to consider these traits as either masculine or feminine, something that is very much challenged in modern society for gender tropes, it remains a step forward for Disney studio to represent gender so mixed. Such a portrayal seems to indicate a positive attempt to fight against gender expectations in children's film, and is important for the industry to consider and avoid falling back into the traditions of gender stereotypes. As Moana denies the old ways by not conforming to what is strictly feminine or masculine, and purposefully banishing any form of romantic storyline, she still finds her happily ever after with family, knowing she was the main power in saving her island and its resources.

This analysis of *Moana* and other, more modern Disney animations shows that main female characters can be portrayed as someone who is brave, ambitious, smart and independent, but can retain traits such as being loving and nurturing. Overall, it cannot be questioned that Disney has sought to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes, save for the odd parody of their own work through various characters or for comedy. Women can be just as powerful as men and do not have to relinquish such power to a man in order to gain a happy and healthy life. Again, while certain aspects of Disney animations do regress with some of their characters or narratives, for example the (almost) consistent necessity for some form of romantic interest, for the most part the studio does seem to be pushing such notions of true love away from the ideal of a happily ever after that could be achieved through a variety of avenues taken by the lead characters.

Conclusion

It is by no means a stretch to say that Disney's impact on American twentieth century popular culture is not limited to an influence on animation, as Walt took on the role of America's predominant story-teller for most of the century, the studio became an inseparable part of American culture as well as the country's social fabric. Due to the studios' status in twentieth century America, critics of Disney and the way its represented certain themes, morals and attitudes from fairy tales have become increasingly prevalent. One aspect of Disney's animations that is especially true to critical review is in its portrayals of femininity and masculinity through their range of characters. Characters such as Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are as integral now to the studio as Walt Disney was at their creation, the renowned original Princesses, and yet are just as often criticised as symptoms of what is wrong with Disney in terms of old versus new gender representation. However, it cannot be ignored that they were a product of their time, and created by a man who sought to build a utopia of the ideals and standards of gender expectations believed at the time, compared to present day which Molly Haskell explains is 'like two-way mirrors linking the immediate past with the immediate future, women in the movies reflected, perpetuated, and in some respects offered innovations on the roles of women in society.' (1987)

It cannot be denied that one aspect of Disney's animations, which is important to understanding twentieth century American expectations of women, is the fact that so many of the studios' films focus predominantly on female characters. As discussed over the course of this study is that many of the early princesses are considered weak or passive, leaving them vulnerable to the villain or being swept of their feet by a stranger prince in the name of true love, something present day critics repeat. Disney's female characters are often named 'too beautiful' or 'too good', linked to the feminine category of the innocent maiden or mother that in reality might be too far out of reach for every day women aspiring to achieve unattainable perfection. Even in the Disney animations that focus on male characters (for example *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* or *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*), as soon as the female

character appears on screen they steal the show and often drive the narrative and male characters around them (like Esmeralda and Princess Kida). It is simple to criticise old Disney with films such as Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, and say that they give young girls messages about true love and self-worth that were drastically at odds with late twentieth century feminist ideologies. After all, it is characters like Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty who, although in danger by the evil queen or wicked step-mother, are more concerned with cooking, cleaning and mothering, and certainly in the end can only be saved by the handsome prince and true loves kiss.

Yet as well as it is to mark Disney down for their earlier passive heroines, there are a dozen or more heroines in later animations who are unquestionably active, wilful and intelligent, seeking their independence first and foremost before entertaining the idea of romance. For example, Eilonwy, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Esmeralda, Mulan, Kida, Nani and Lilo, and Captain Amelia, Tiana, Rapunzel, Elsa and Moana. By no means are they perfect in terms of feminist ideologies, and some still exhibit passive tendencies in their narratives, but for the most part they are strong-willed and developed female characters that (for at least the majority of them) do not sit and wait to be rescued by a love interest. It is thus interesting to note that while Disney films rarely portray female friendships within the individual films, there has been a growing tendency on the company's part to portray its heroines as friends and peers in a marketing scheme for film merchandise. Davis comments how at the turn of the twenty-first century, 'a highly successful and persuasive new marketing trend has been the grouping together of such characters as Snow White, Princess Aurora, Belle, Ariel and Jasmine into what the Disney corporation calls "The Princess Collection".' (2006, p.227) Doing this places less emphasis on the animations they originate from and more emphasis on the heroines forming a friendship club, to reconstruct the company image as a supporter of women's solidarity.

Though Disney films are by no means perfect, the studios track record show showing balanced representations of gender roles has slowly improved over the decades. In fact, it is a great leap from their major involvement of female characters

and their development over the development of male characters, until the Disney Renaissance. Their depictions of masculinity, as much as their depictions of femininity were, are influenced by social culture and gender expectations at the current times. From the 1980s 'action-man' came the parody of Gaston in 1991's Beauty and the Beast, an overly muscular and narcissistic man who believed who could win the heart of not just any girl, but the leading girl, compared to the 1990s development of the 'new man' who shared vulnerability and intelligence with female characters on screen, like Beast listening to Belle read, like Milo's superior intelligence matching Kida's to make them equal, and like Doppler's scientific mind softening the harder edges of Captain Amelia. In this, Disney is keen to keep their audience, a broader demographic from young girls to include both girls and boys. Again, the studios depiction of masculinity is not perfect, but are improving over the years with each new animation released, having realised that their modern era audience deserves and expects well-developed characters, strong narratives, interesting villains, but still with a nostalgia for the entertaining songs. As such, Davis tells that 'Disney fans tend to be lifelong fans for a reason: the films they enjoyed as children continue to be meaningful to them as adults because, like the heroes and heroines of the film, the viewer has continued to learn and grow during their journey through life.' (2013, p.253) The variety of gender representations seen in the last two decades proves of Disney's improvement, and sets up good role models for the boys and girls who watch.

To conclude, 'we cannot explain why the origins of the fairy tale are so inexplicable and elusive' but they 'continue to be irresistible, […] offering hope that we can change ourselves while changing the world' (Zipes, 2012, p.20), and as such, Disney is progressing in its portrayal of men and women by creating strong female characters in stories that promote the importance of family and friendship rather than romance. Again, although this progress has been evident in many Disney princess films, it is also clear that Disney is yet to create a fully independent and feminist princess, one that does not appear passive or romance-obsessed during any part of her storyline (like Slue-foot Sue and Katrina van Tassell), and if mirrored in animation, it may prove more fruitful for the education of children on gender stereotypes and how best to break them.

In the end, it is clear from this study that the significance of fairy tales being an important medium to uncover meaning, thus having an impact on all generations (specifically on children and their development) was impacted by Walt and the studios' reshaping of original source material. From exploring Disney animations, it contrasts with how fairy tales are expected to nurture and educate children, providing unrealistic images of women in society along with severe idealisms of true love. While it is deeply dissatisfying to find portrayals of weak women in the earlier animations, it is encouraging that Disney continues to create and develop a broad range of female and male characters who learn to become good people.

Bibliography

Allen, R. Bonner, F. Goodman, L. Janes, L. & King, C. (1992). Imagining Women: Cultural Representations in Gender. United Kingdom: Polity Press.

Ashman, H. (1989) Part of Your World - as sung by Pat Carroll, Ursula.

Basinger, Jeanine. (1993). A Woman's View How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960. London: University Press of New England.

Bell, E. (1995) Soma Texts at the Disney shop – Constructing the Pimientos of Women's Animated Bodies. In From Mouse to Mermaid. Indiana University Press.

Benshoff, H & Griffin, S. (2021). America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies. 2nd ed. Sussex, John Wiley & Sons.

Bettelheim, Bruno. (1991). The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. London, Penguin Books.

Booker, M. K. (2010). Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films. Santa Barbara, CA, United States: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Brode, D. (2005). Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment. USA, University of Texas Press.

Buckland, Warren. Film Studies. 2003. 2nd Edition. Teach Yourself: London.

Campbell, Joseph. (1976). The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology. Penguin Books.

Campbell, J. (2008) The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Joseph Campbell Foundation. New World Library.

Carew, A. (2014) The Wind Rises. A Genius Departs. Screen Education. vol. 74, pp. 8-15. Film & Television Literature Index with Full Text.

Cohen, Philip. (2015). The Distorted Way Disney Depicts Male and Females Bodies Isn't Good for Us. [Article]. [Available at]: http://time.com.yorksj.idm.oclc.org/3667700/frozen-brave-disney-princesses-heroes-and-sexism/

Coontz, S. (2013, February 16). Why Gender Equality Stalled. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/17/opinion/sunday/why-gender-equalitystalled.html?_r=1

Creed, Barbara. (1993). The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis. Routledge. London and New York.

Davis, Amy. (2006). Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation. Eastleigh, John Libbey.

Davis, A. (2013) Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains. John Libbey Publishing Ltd.

Edwards, Kim. Hidden Depths. Screen Education, vol. 74, 2014, pp. 38-45.

Elledge, J. (2010). Queers in American Popular Culture. (Vol. 1) California, Praeger.

Freud, Sigmund. (1927). Fetishism. Essay.

Garabedian, J. (2014). Animating Gender Roles: How Disney is Redefining the Modern Princess. James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal. 2(1), 22-25. Retrieved from http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=jmurj

Giroux, H. (1995) Animating Youth: The Densification of Children's Culture. European Media Culture.

Harrison, C. (2010) American Culture in the 1990s. Edinburgh University Press.

Hine, B. Ivanovic, K. England, D. (2018) From the Sleeping Princess to the World-Saving Daughter of the Chief: Examining Young Children's Perceptions of Old versus New Disney Princess Characters. PDF.

Hutcheon, L. (2012) A Theory of Adaptation. Taylor & Francis Group.

Klein, Norman M. (1993) Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon. London.

Kimsey, C. M. (2011). Gender stereotypes bias in dystopian young adult literature (Unpublished master's thesis). University of North Carolina.

Lenne, Gerard. (1979). Monster and Victim: Women in the Horror Film. Article.

Limbach, Gwendolyn. (2013). "You the Man, Well, Sorta": Gender Binaries and Liminality in Mulan. McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers: Jefferson, North Carolina, and London.

Masri, A. (2013) A "Brave" Schism From Traditional Gender Portrayals: Merida and the New Princess.

Mollet, Tracey. (2013). With a smile and a song…': Walt Disney and the Birth of the American Fairy Tale. Detroit: Marvels & Tales. Wayne State University Press. [Available at]: http://literature.proquest.com.yorksj.idm.oclc.org/pageImage.do?ftnum=2949587131&fmt=page&area=criticism&journalid=15214281&articleid=R04779429&pubdate=2013

Newswire . (2015). Retrieved November 13, 2015, from: http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/nielsen-estimates-116-4-million-tvhomes-in-the-us-for-the-2015-16-tv-season.html

Pinsky, Mark I. (2004). The Gospel according to Disney. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Ramadhan, Y. Z. (2019). Gender Stereotypes in Moana (2016). Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia.

Rustad, R. (2015). True Love's Kiss: Disney Romance from Snow White to Frozen. New York, United States: New Element Publishing.

Sells, L. (1995) "Where do the Mermaids Stand?" – Voice and the Body in The Little Mermaid. In From Mouse to Mermaid. Indiana University Press.

Silverman, R. (2009) New Dreams, Old Endings: Searching for "A Whole New World" in Disney Second-Wave Animated Romance Films. Wesleyan University.

Stokes, Colin. (2014). The Hidden Meanings in Kids' Movies. [Online]. [Available at]: https://singjupost.com/hidden-meanings-kids-movies-colin-stokes-transcript/

Tatar, M. (1993). Off With Their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood. Princeton University Press.

Tatar, M. (2009). Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood. USA, W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

Teverson, Andrew. (2013). Fairy Tale; the new critical idiom. Routledge.

Thornham, S. (1997) *Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film Theory.* Oxford University Press Inc.

Towbin, M.A., Haddock, S.A., Zimmerman, T.S., Lund, L.K. & Tanner, L.R., (2004). Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films. Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 15(4), pp.19-44.

Tremblay, Paul. (2011). Home Sweet Home: The Cautionary Prison/Fairy Tale. Leeds: Subaltern Media. [Article]. [Available at]:

http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.yorksj.idm.oclc.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=45d83495-3eb5-45a2-b068-f2afec9a15f6%40sessionmgr103&vid=2&hid=113

Trisciuzzi, M. T. (2017) "Hayao Miyazaki. The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness." History of Education & Children's Literature. Digital. pp. 483-505. Arts & Humanities Citation Index.

Tonn, Theresa. (2008). Disney's Influence on Females. Perception of Gender. University of Wisconsin Stout.

Walter, N. (2010). Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism. Great Britain, Virago Press.

Welter, B. (1966) The Cult of True Womanhood. American Quarterly.

Warner, Marina. (2014). Once upon a Time. Oxford University Press.

Wolf. N. (1991) *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women.* London: Vintage Books.

Zipes, Jack. (2012). Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion. Milton Park.

Zipes, Jack. (2012). The Irresistible Fairy Tale. Princeton University Press.

Filmography

Aladdin. (1992) [DVD] Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Atlantis: The Lost Empire. (2001) [DVD] Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animation Studios.

The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad. (1949) Directed by Jack Kinney, Clyde Geronimi and James Algar. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Beauty and The Beast. (1991) [DVD] Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Beauty and The Beast. (2017) Directed by Bill Condon. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Pictures and Mandeville Films.

The Black Cauldron. (1985) [DVD] Directed by Ted Berman and Richard Rich. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animations Studios.

Brave. (2012) [DVD] Directed by Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman. Hollywood, CA, Pixar Animation Studios.

Cinderella. (1950) [DVD] Directed by Geronimi, C. et al. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animations Studios.

Frozen. (2013) [DVD] Directed by Christ Buck and Jennifer Lee. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame. (1996) [DVD] Directed by Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animation Studios.

The Little Mermaid. (1989) [DVD] Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Melody Time. (1948) Directed by Jack Kinney, Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske and Wilfred Jackson. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Moana. (2016) [DVD] Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Mulan. (1998) [DVD] Directed by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Pocahontas. (1995) [DVD] Directed by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

The Princess and The Frog. (2009) [DVD] Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Robin Hood. (1973) [DVD] Directed by Wolfgang Reitherman. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Sleeping Beauty. (1959) [DVD] Directed by Clyde Geronimi, Les Clark, Eric Larson and Wolfgang Reitherman. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Productions.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. (1937) [DVD] Directed by David Hand, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce and Ben Sharpsteen. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Tangled. (2010) [DVD] Directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard. Hollywood, CA, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Treasure Planet. (2002) [DVD] Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Hollywood, CA. Walt Disney Animation Studios.