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Gender, Class, and Ethnicity
in the
Disney Princesses Series

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I. INTRODUCTION

I have some confessions to make. As a prototypical child of the nineties, I was not only guilty of wearing the most hideous fluorescent leggings, or collecting the tackiest house and techno tracks, but also of suffering from a severe Disney addiction. Having personally experienced the 1990s Walt Disney revival – with its accumulation of new feature-length animated movies, and re-release of old Walt Disney “classics” – I remember being able to recite complete dialogues and act out entire scenes from my favourite movies with my brother and sister. Although Disney movies are generally regarded as innocent family entertainment by many parents, it could be frightening to discover the extent to which these scenes, repeatedly reviewed over many years, could have had an influence on and become tangled with millions of children’s personal conceptions regarding issues such as gender, class, and ethnicity. For what if the content of Disney movies is not so innocent after all?

1. RESEARCH QUESTION

What I want to investigate in this study is, foremost, the nature of ideological messages regarding gender, class and ethnicity, conveyed through Disney animated movies. First, I will outline the various possible sources responsible for the content of these movies. The two leading figures of the Walt Disney Company during the twentieth century, Walt Elias Disney and Michael Eisner, are considered as possible influences. In addition, the prevalent ideologies in the United States at the time of production are briefly addressed. The second and main part of this study consists of a detailed analysis of the depiction of the heroines from the Disney Princesses series, containing the movies *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998). Lastly, I will briefly summarize possible evolutions that can be derived from the analysis, and compare them with the conclusions from previous research and the ideologies of the people that can be held responsible for the content of the movies, as mentioned at the beginning of this study. I will end by suggesting other potentially interesting topics for future analyses.

2. LIMITATIONS

Much scholarly research has already been written on Disney. I deliberately opted for an analysis of the medium of animated movies. George Gerbner and Larry Gross point at the power of the media in general to “[make] people perceive as real and normal and right that which fits the established order” (Gerbner and Gross cited in Hoisington n. pag.). According to Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, films in particular are known to “unconsciously reaffirm the ideological system in which they are created” (Comolli and Narboni cited in Hoisington n. pag.). While De Kuyper claims the medium of film already conveys certain messages by presenting characters first and foremost as physical, bodily entities, Paul Wells argues that animation, or caricature, has even more power in the ability to disproportionately enlarge certain details until reality is blurred (De Kuyper cited in De Cuyper 77; Wells cited in De Cuyper 78). Jack Zipes too claims that animation has the power to manipulate the audience and even rob it of its own vision; Disney would have been twice as effective in blurring this aim with visual esthetics, humour and eroticism (Zipes cited in Coppens 58). As Elizabeth Bell observes, “nothing accidental or serendipitous occurs in animation as each second of action on screen is rendered in twenty-four different still paintings” (Bell 108). This is why I chose to focus on the animated Disney movies, instead of the combined animation and live-action movies, the Disney theme parks – as Deane Michelle Hoisington and Lynn E. Weiner did – or the Disney gadgets and consumer objects, as Kent A. Ono and Derek T. Buescher did.

In addition, I choose not to include short-films or cartoons in my analysis, as Sam Abel did, nor sequels of previous Disney movies, which were for the most part directly released on home videos or DVDs. I did not try to capture the whole range of movies released by the Walt Disney Company, as Steven Coppens did, nor did I merely focus on the ones released during the last decades, like Veerle Van Oost, Libe Zarranz García, or Ken Gillam (the latter of which examined the masculine characters in Disney’s Pixar movies). Instead, I opted for the so-called Disney Princesses series, because these are generally regarded as the most popular Disney movies among different generations due to their many re-releases. In addition, they were produced during the most successful decades of the Walt Disney Company. By combining all movies from the same series, instead of elaborately discussing

one or two movies – like many scholars did¹ – I tried to discern if these Disney movies demonstrated an evolution over the years.

Within the movies of the Disney Princesses series, I decided to mainly focus on the female, adolescent protagonists, unlike Litsa Renée Tanner, Shelley A. Haddock, Toni Schindler Zimmerman, and Lori K. Lund, who examined the depiction of couples and families; Tom Robinson, Mark Callister, Dawn Magoffin, and Jennifer Moore, who looked at the portrayal of older characters; or Veerle Van Oost, who treated all characters. Other elaborately spun out characters (which mostly means they contribute largely to the movie's dialogues) are discussed whenever deemed relevant in relation to these protagonists. Although within Disney's fantasy world, the distinction between human characters, animals and animated objects is often unclear, I chose to only take into account the characters that are human or have predominantly human characteristics during most of the movie. Finally, I tried to complement already existing studies on the representation of gender in the Disney Princesses, for instance by Christine M. Yzaguirre with an extra focus on class and ethnicity.

3. METHODOLOGY

Unlike Christine M. Yzaguirre or Veerle Van Oost, who chose to perform a quantitative analysis, I was more inclined to carry out a qualitative analysis, like Deane Michelle Hoisington. I did not examine the formal qualities of the movies, but instead performed an ideological textual analysis. The dominant ideology is generally understood as the collection of values and norms adhered to by the most powerful, privileged class, who have the power to control the transmission of information by the media, rewrite their own collective identity of the past, and thus omit dissonant or minority voices from the dominant culture (Hoisington n. pag.). Apart from gender studies, I leaned on (multi)cultural studies to investigate the additional concepts of class and ethnicity in the examination of relations of power. Basically, this implies that I combined the research of various different disciplines, ranging from history, art history, American studies, literature studies; over media studies, (corporate and public) communication studies, film and television studies, social science, gender and woman's studies, postcolonial studies; to psychology, psychoanalysis, neurology, pedagogy, family therapy, and children's studies. I tried where possible to complete the literature available on

¹ Liesbeth De Cuyper, Naomi Wood, Efrat Tseëlon, Deborah Ross, Susan Z. Swan, Allison Craven, Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, Lauren Dundes, and Stefaan Van Den Abbeele.

the subject with my own conclusions on closely examining the movies, paying specific attention to the visual representation of characters, along with their dialogue and actions.

II. DISNEY, EISNER, AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

When one analyzes the complex and hidden meanings regarding issues such as gender, class, and ethnicity conveyed through a cultural artefact like the Disney feature films, the first investigation of interest is to discover where exactly these meanings come from. Unlike some critics, like Pamela Colby O'Brien, who exclusively hold Walt Elias Disney, and the continuing legacy of his perceptions, responsible for the content of the movies launched by the Walt Disney Company, I would like to argue that more factors had their influence on the final result (O'Brien cited in Yzaguirre 62). First of all, Disney as a person could only oversee the story-making process until his death on the 15th of December 1966. Because the production of Disney princesses movies stagnated after Disney's death until the end of the eighties, I will propose to discuss the motives of Michael Eisner, who appeared as a manager within the Disney corporation in 1984, as one of the main ideological sources behind the messages delivered through the Disney princesses movies released during the popular revival of the nineties.² In addition, the prevailing ideologies during the time of production, for instance, seem to me another aspect too important to be overlooked.

The ideology of Walt Disney himself is often hypercritically condemned. According to Naomi Wood, "Disney oversaw the story-making process from beginning to end, and all ideas had to receive his approval before they could be used in a movie" (Wood n. pag.). In adapting the source texts into animated movies, Disney would have "replaced stereotypes of European *märchens* with American ones" (Wood 29). Disney movies would thus contain plenty of "middle-American normative expectations", and, apart from some hinted at sexual or homosocial puns, would mainly follow "predetermined didactic patterns" (Wood 33; 42). Libe Zarranz García sees this "sanitization" and "Americanization" as typical elements of the "Disneyfication" (Zarranz García n. pag.). Walt Disney, who himself climbed "from rags to riches", would fiercely preach the "American work ethic" (Hoisington n. pag.). Jack Zipes blames Disney's nostalgia for the conservative, patriarchal content of his movies (Zipes cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). Frances Clarke Sayers and Bruno Bettelheim as well see his world as "an amalgam of cultural stereotypes filtered through the cleaning lens of nostalgia" (Sayers and Bettelheim cited in Wood 29). Naomi Wood also recapitulates his views as

² For a complete overview of the history of the Walt Disney Company, I would like to refer to Rein Van Willigen's *Mouse Entertainment*.

“conservative” and “anti-intellectual” (Wood 25). Although more characters were added in comparison to the fairy tales on which the movies were based, many critics think of Disney’s versions as morally simplified.³ Jack Zipes regards Disney’s world view as simplified, with a “thematic emphasis on cleanliness, control, and organized industry” (Zipes cited in Wood 28). In particular, the fairy tales used as a source would be merely reduced to their romantic plotline. Tanner et al. argue that family relationships are deemed very important in Disney movies: since they provide “a caring and nurturing environment”, their members are prepared to make great sacrifices for each other, and even place “their families’ well being before their own” (Tanner et al. 367). Pamela Colby O’Brien claims that Disney’s own views were largely shaped during the 1940s, and preached the ideal of a nuclear family, in which a woman should be considered inferior and should mainly develop her graceful, charming, and domestic qualities (O’Brien cited in Yzaguirre 62).

Women in Disney are, according to Elizabeth Bell, mainly categorized in terms of their ageing process and divided into “the teenaged heroine at the idealized height of puberty’s graceful promenade”, “female wickedness ... rendered as middle-aged beauty at its peak of sexuality and authority”, and “feminine sacrifice and nurturing ... drawn in pear-shaped, old women past menopause, spry and comical, as the good fairies, godmothers, and servants in the tales” (Bell 108). This radical division based on age is supposed to be part of Disney’s attempt “to align audience sympathies and allegiance with the beginning and end of the feminine life cycle, marking the middle as a dangerous, consumptive, and transgressive realm” (Bell 109). Many critics see Disney’s depiction of women as idealized. According to Edholm, they express qualities deemed appropriate like beauty, sexual attractiveness, humbleness, innocence, and mothering, caring, and obliging urges; Van Zoonen comments that they are mainly presented in the domestic sphere (Edholm and Van Zoonen cited in Van Den Abbeele 73-74). Bell is one of the few critics to read Disney’s threefold depiction of women as a positive, realistic representation:

The women in these films are not bifurcated into good and bad, but represent a continuum of cultural representations of women’s powers and performances; the films celebrate the ambiguity, the diversity, and potency of women’s bodies, and the multiple sites and sources of their cultural construction. Moreover, these constructed performances are rooted in a physical timeline

³ Wood suggests Waller Hastings’ “Moral Simplification”, June Cummins’ “Romancing the Plot”, Eric Smoodin’s *Disney Discourse* and Douglas Street’s *Children’s Novels and the Movies* as interesting studies on Disney’s moral simplification of ancient fairy tales.

that decrees that these bodies will change: from the tentative strength of youth, to the confident carriage of middle age, to the aplomb of old age. (Bell 121).

Many critics, on the other hand, point at the striking absence of middle-aged, nurturing mothers in Disney movies: the teenage heroines are either orphans – as is the case with Snow White and Cinderella – or only have fathers – like Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas (Tanner et al. 361). When the mother is present, as is shown in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Mulan*, I noticed her to be the least developed character, merely symbolizing helpless dependence on her husband, mothering concern for her daughter, and a general effort to sustain tradition and patriarchal order. Tanner et al. claim that these few mothers are represented as “primary caregivers who are automatically attached to their children and provide them with unconditional love” (Tanner et al. 363). Because these mothers are depicted “in marginalized and powerless roles once married with children”, girls would receive confusing messages, because they are at the same time encouraged to become a wife and mother (Tanner et al. 369). Fathers, on the other hand, are frequently present in Disney movies, and are either depicted as “controlling, aggressive, protective disciplinarians” who “expect their children to earn their love”, like King Triton in *The Little Mermaid*, or as “nurturing and affectionate parents that listened to their children”, like Maurice in *Beauty and the Beast*, the Sultan in *Aladdin*, Chief Powhatan in *Pocahontas*, and Fa Zhou in *Mulan*; all, however, are prepared to sacrifice themselves for their daughters (Tanner et al. 363-364). Dorfman and Mattleart claim that Disney, by leaving out mothers, tried to omit sexuality and reproductive abilities from the story, while Haas argues that the omission signifies the downplaying of the importance of the mother’s heritage (Haas, Dorfman, and Mattleart cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Either way, “patriarchal order is legitimized and strongly reaffirmed” (Hoisington n. pag.). Moreover, stepmothers like the Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Lady Tremaine in *Cinderella* are depicted as the villains, who act in an uncaring manner towards their stepdaughters and are jealous of their beauty (Tanner et al. 362). Steven Coppens even suggests they abuse the trust given to them by their stepchildren as pseudo-parents by using them for their own purposes (Coppens 101).

Tanner et al. thinks Disney either simplified complex family structures or depicted them in an unrealistic or negative way. When only one parent is presented, “very little explanation is provided for the absence of the other”, which would not provide a productive example of a mutual parental involvement in children’s education. Moreover, a child might infer that, after a divorce, it might never see one of its parents again, or that, when one of the

parents finds a new partner, he or she will inevitably dislike and mistreat them. Couples in general are said to reflect traditional gender stereotypes. Unfortunately, these couples provide unrealistic portrayals of relationships, in which both partners can easily “live happily ever after” without any efforts. In addition, the emphasis on “love at first sight” places too much attention on the importance of “physical appearance” for entering intimate relationships (Tanner et al. 367-368).

Such simplifying stereotypes do not only affect gender depictions: various minorities suffer from it as well. Adair claims that all content that did not fit the Disney universe was left out or completely deformed in the movies (Adair cited in Van Den Abbeele 47). As Bell states, Disney’s “[a]nimated heroines were individuated in fair-skinned, fair-eyed, anglo-saxon features of Eurocentric loveliness, both conforming to and perfecting Hollywood’s beauty boundaries” (Bell 110). Giroux believes Disney’s creation of a strictly white, middle class universe is “accomplished through the excision or marginalisation of non-white, non-middle class peoples” (Giroux cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Patriotism would be one way of achieving this goal (Hoisington n. pag.). Spike Lee is one among many who have accused Disney of being racist, while an accusation of Disney as displaying anti-Semitism was first found in *The Disney Version*, a 1968 book by Richard Schickel: “Disney appears to have shared, in mild form, some of the anti-Semitism that was common to his generation and place of origin. His studio was notably lacking in Jewish employees, and at least once he presented a fairly vicious caricature of the Jew on screen” (Davis 220; Schickel cited in Davis 219).⁴ In addition, Wood argues that, within Disney movies, “physical and mental disabilities provided

⁴ For an example of overt racism in Disney, I suggest a look at an early, uncut version of the “The Pastoral Symphony” scene in *Fantasia*, released in 1940 (Youtube, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPKpFNm3QMM> >). This version, which circulated until it was banned by Disney in 1969, not only displays the very conservative emphasis on romance (including the constant reduction of women to objects of the male gaze) typical of other Disney features, it also contains some very shocking depictions of African people as inferior. In addition, the centaurs in this scene bear a striking similarity to the characters in Fritz Lang’s 1924 movie *Die Nibelungen*. Despite the fact that Lang’s *Metropolis* was apparently greatly admired by Adolf Hitler and Lang was “offered the leadership of the German film industry by the Nazi propagandist, Joseph Goebbels”, Lang fled Germany to the United States; his first wife, Thea Von Harbou, however, would stay in Germany and “became an ardent Nazi” (Cook 99-100). Walt Disney, on the other hand, made an anti-Nazi propaganda movie, *Der Fuehrer’s face*, featuring Donald Duck. (Youtube, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YroTk6Vobww> >). Still, I was astounded that not a word is mentioned about the Jews’ fate. Disney mainly seemed shocked by the treatment of the “poor German citizen”, exhausted by the Nazi war economy. This did not prevent the Nazis from “accusing” that “filthy mouse” Mickey of being Jewish: “Mickey Mouse is the most miserable ideal ever revealed ... Away with Jewish brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse!” (Spiegelman 164)

material for ‘gags’ – verbal handicaps like lispings, stammering; clumsiness; absent-mindedness” (Wood 30).⁵

Amy M. Davis, however, wrote an essay in defence of Walt Disney called “The ‘Dark Prince’ and Dream Woman: Walt Disney and Mid-Twentieth Century American Feminism”. The aim of her essay is to counter persisting misconceptions about Disney’s “attitudes towards race, religion, politics, and sexual equality” using biographical evidence from the man’s life. She begins by describing how Walt was consistently influenced by female figures during his childhood, especially by his mother Flora, his younger sister Ruth, his aunt Margaret (who encouraged his drawing talent), and a schoolteacher named Daisy Beck. Even after he married Lillian Bounds, one of the women working at the Ink and Paint department of his studio, he would share his home with his wife’s sister Hazel and niece Marjorie Sewell, who would both influence his attitudes towards women. Despite this early influence of women, and the fact that he had two daughters, Diane and Sharon, Walt apparently had little other experience with women; Katherine Kerwin, one of his Ink and Paint girls, commented that he was “shy and uncomfortable around girls” (Kerwin cited in Davis 213-215).

One Disney scholar, Stephen Watts, argues that his attitude towards women turned from “respect” into “resentment” “when the adolescent Walt saw his ideal violated” (Watts cited in Davis 215). He presumably hints at Walt’s unfortunate experience during and after the first World War. Upon arriving in France with the Red Cross in 1918, the young soldiers are supposed to have been shown “films about the dangers of venereal disease”, which aroused Walt’s suspicion of women (Davis 215). Moreover, upon returning home from the War, Walt discovered that his high school girlfriend had deceived him and already married another man without informing him their relationship was over. This deception is given as the reason for the “two highly contradictory notions of Woman as source of love and goodness, and Woman as source of danger and duplicity” in his later movies (Davis 215-216). The good women would, similarly to his own childhood experience, take the shape of young girls “on the verge of achieving sexuality” (ibid.).

⁵ Naomi Wood refers to “Walt Disney’s Interpretation of Children’s Literature”, in which Jill May discusses “the implications of relying upon handicaps for laughs” (Wood n. pag.). Iftah Biran and Israel Steiner, for instance, discuss stammering in their article “The Speech Disorder of Doc in Walt Disney’s ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’”.

In his professional relations with women, on the other hand, Walt highly appreciated a female input of ideas, despite the fact that women mostly worked at the Ink and Paint department, deemed lower in status than the Animation department, which for the most part consisted of men. During a speech in 1941, he apparently specifically admonished his more conservative staff: “The girls have the right to expect the same chances for advancement as men, and I honestly believe that they may eventually contribute something to this business that men never would or could” (Disney cited in Davis 217-218). Still, Davis adds the following note: “Whether or not this acceptance of women as profession equals extended to the concept that they should be paid as equals, however, cannot be known at this time as this information does not seem to be available in the public domain, and the closure to outsiders of the Disney Archives prevents investigation into this matter” (Davis 229).

Despite the questionable and arguably anti-Semitic and racist content of some of the Walt Disney movies, Davis argues that some have noted that Walt had several Jewish and African-American employees working at his studio, some of them at senior positions. One of his African-American employees, Floyd Norman, defended Walt in an interview, stating he never experienced the man as voicing anti-Semitic or anti-Black views; Walt would even have “regularly supported Jewish charities and contributed funds regularly to a Hebrew orphanage” (Allan cited in Davis 119-220). Allison Craven hints at the possibility that even Walt Disney’s own wife Lillian could have been of Native American origin, since she “grew up in Lapwai, Idaho, on the Nez Perce Indian reservation” (Craven 137). Davis argues that these alleged misconceptions might have sprung from Walt’s “social awkwardness” and “moodiness” in dealing with his employees in general (Davis 220-221). She agrees, however, that he had conservative and patriotic ideals. Walt was known as a vehement anti-Communist, although Steven Watts argues that “Walt’s endorsement of the FBI’s ‘broader agenda’ during the Cold War was not any different from that of many other Americans” (Watts cited in Davis 222).

To explain what many view as politically incorrect messages traceable in the Disney movies, Davis too points at the possible influence of American society during the period of production and, hypothetically, the possible sexism of Walt’s colleagues at the Disney studio (Davis 214). This possible influence of Disney’s employees seems to be a valid argument: a look at the credit titles shows that the screenplay and most of the story were written almost exclusively by male employees – and not Walt Disney himself. Still, it should be noted that Walt, as the senior executive of the Walt Disney Company, had the power to decide which

jobs went to whom and thus could have employed more women at senior positions. As Elizabeth Bell claims: “the production staff was overwhelmingly male except for 200 women in the Painting and Inking Department” (Bell 107). This predominantly male input on the level of story-writing could partly explain the derogatory content towards women. As I will explain in my analysis of *Beauty and the Beast*, the input of a female screenwriter, namely Linda Woolverton, can affect the movie’s content to the extent of even providing a feminist message. Similarly, the team responsible for the screenplay of *Mulan*, another movie depicting a less conventional type of femininity, contained slightly more female employees than the teams for other movies.

In “Uncle Sam en Ome Walt, Beschermengelen van de Amerikaanse Moraliteit”, Steven Coppens argues that Walt Disney’s views reflected (or even helped to shape) the values of American society. He discerns some elements characteristic of the United States as a “space”, which I compressed into two opposite groups: importance is paid, on the one hand, to the “American Dream”, freedom and individualism, and a protestant (capitalist) work ethic and colonizing attitude towards both nature and other continents (including Europe); on the other hand, to patriotism, a community spirit, a nostalgic populism, and a traditional family to oppose external chaos, including a woman’s place at home. In addition, Coppens explains Walt Disney’s ideological views through an analysis of the changing mentality during the twentieth century. He depicts the 1930s as the era of the Depression, which led to Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal” policy, a general patriotic fondness of “collective liberalism”, a heightened concern for social issues, a rejection of high-brow intellectual entertainment, but also (following on the “hedonistic” 1920s), a severe censure by introducing the Production Code, and a reactionary attitude towards women. During the Second World War, the culturally enforced differentiation between men and women was further heightened: while men were bravely serving a higher cause at the front, women – although massively replacing men’s posts in the working field – were depicted in escapist Hollywood entertainment as merely pursuing a marriage, children and a household. The post-war years featured an increased national self-assurance, combined with a suspicion of the Communist “red danger” during the Cold War. Although the family was promoted as an “unconquerable fortress” against these lurking dangers, men could no longer entirely prevent women from entering the job market. Times were changing: the consumer society saw its inauguration, families moved to the suburbs, middle class population rose (due to the “baby boom”), and teenagers started to rebel against their parents (Coppens 39-52).

Brenda Ayres and Pamela Colby O'Brien also think that Disney simply complied with the need for escapist entertainment, during the eras preceding the Second World War and the Cold War respectively, by providing the audience with reassuring images of stable, nuclear families (Ayres & O'Brien cited in Yzaguirre 62). According to Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews, "the Disney Corporation in the 1930s and 1940s was deeply involved in Third World politics and issues"; while Julianne Burton-Carvajal argues that *The Three Caballeros* "happens to be an allegory of First World colonialism par excellence [because] every story ... is a narrative of conquest or of enslavement" (Burton-Carvajal cited in Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews 84). Coppens claims the "American Dream" is reflected in the personality of the Disney protagonists: all reach their seemingly unattainable goals, as long as they persevere in the face of numerous adversities and keep believing in a general sense of justice (Coppens 104). In addition, Coppens points at a rejection of "European" customs, such as the policy of marrying off children, in favour of the more "American" notion of true love in Disney movies (Coppens 66). Wood illustrates the exploitation of "middle-American prejudices" too by examining, for instance, the difference in accents (European or American) of the younger and older generations in *Cinderella* (Wood 32). Coppens further argues that Snow White represents the 1930s house wife, who performs domestic chores, while the masculine dwarfs work outdoors to earn money (Coppens 75). He sees Cinderella's reduction to the domestic sphere and main task to produce offspring as mirroring post-war reactionary politics concerning women, along with the sudden "baby boom"; Nicole Arthur too reads Cinderella's domesticity as mirroring the "family-oriented ideals of the 1950s" (Coppens 76; Arthur cited in Yzaguirre 63). Although Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario explains Aurora's self-centred languishing about her hearth-throb as representative of the emergence of "the first true American teenagers" during the 1950s, Coppens thinks she acts too resigned and passive compared to the spirit of the era, which could explain why the movie was not met with much enthusiasm by the audience at the time of release (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 62; Coppens 76).

The elements Coppens mentions are nearly all present in the then dominant ideologies of the Hollywood cinema. According to Robin Wood, Hollywood adhered to the ideology of "American capitalism", which is said to contain the following aspects:

capitalism (individual ownership, land for economic use); the work ethic (hard work is admirable); marriage and family (heterosexual relations, ownership of women and children by men, woman as civilizing force belonging to the home); nature as agrarianism (untouched land as paradise) and the wilderness (civilization is built on the subjugation of wild land); progress, technology, the

city (civilization at its peak); success and wealth (what one must strive for, though remain humble about); the Rosebud syndrome (the poor are better off because it is the wealthy who have all the problems); America as a land where everybody can be happy (problems are solvable within the existing system, acts of subversion are appropriated to serve the dominant ideology, produces “the happy ending”); the ideal man of adventure (potent man of action); the ideal woman of the home (domestic wife and mother); the settled husband (“dependable but dull”); and the erotic woman (the femme fatale) (Wood cited in Hoisington n. pag.).

The Hollywood inheritance in Disney is most obvious in the borrowing of the “femme fatale”, the “deadly woman” known from silent movies or Hollywood classics starring Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Bette Davis or Joan Crawford (Bell 115-116; Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 63). These “vamps”, provocative and sexually mature (almost predatory) women, dressed in dramatic dresses made out of luxurious materials, and wearing jewellery and expressive – or as Negrin argues, deceiving – make-up, pose a threat to men because of their “unnatural, phallic” power and authority (Bell 115-117; Negrin cited in Van Den Abbeele 74; Place cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). Von Franz suggests that the hard-heartedness of these women is the result of a negative psychological virilisation, and stems from vanity, resentment, and an inability to cope with insults (Von Franz cited in Van Den Abbeele 83-84). Jack Zipes, on the other hand, sees male expectations as leading women to this frustration, madness, and vehement competition (Zipes cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Bell observes: “[w]hile the femme fatale of film noir directs her catastrophic powers at a man who is powerless under her fatal force, Disney’s deadly women cast their spells not only on their young women victims, but also on the entire society from which they are excluded” and thus pose “threats to order” (Bell 117).⁶

Bell further argues that Disney supplemented the original fairy tale descriptions of their princesses “with contemporaneous popular images of feminine beauty and youth, their

⁶ These femme fatales would be contrasted in the Disney universe with the sexually “nonthreatening, unavailable, and harmless” grandmothers, good fairies and servants, whose personality is seen as “calm, relaxed, cooperative, affable, warm, forgiving, sympathetic, soft-hearted, generous, affectionate, and kind” (Bell 118-119). Still, their magic, used in guiding “at crucial moments of transition in the world of women: childbirth, sexual maturation, and marriage”, is seen as a matriarchal power, possibly threatening to male bureaucracy in their capacity, as Daniel Lawrence O’Keefe claims, “to counter the terrors of the symbolic world that man has created and to get some control over it” (Bell 119; O’Keefe cited in Bell 120). For a counteranalysis of the depiction of older people in Disney – in terms of gender, ethnicity, appearance, role, personality, and physical characteristics – as negative, and the extent to which this influences children’s perception of older people, I would like to refer to “The Portrayal of Older Characters in Disney Animated Films”, a paper written by Tom Robinson, Mark Callister, Dawn Magoffin, and Jennifer Moore.

sources ranging from the silent screen to glossy pin-ups” (Bell 109). Snow White would thus be “reminiscent of the *ingenue* of silent movies” and imagined as a “Janet Gaynor type” – described by Molly Haskell as “one of the most ethereal of the angel-heroines [of the silent films of the 1920s]” (Bell 109; Haskell in Bell 120). Coppens recognizes some of the looks of Mary Pickford and Sylvia Sydney in Snow White’s face, as well as the natural spontaneity of Maureen O’Hara and Ingrid Bergman, who both frequently played dependent women, yearning for love and safety, or Maureen O’Sullivan (Coppens 64). Cinderella would be “reminiscent of the sophisticated elegance of Grace Kelly, another girl next door destined for royalty” and look like the “Draw Me Girl” of the 1950s, while princess Aurora would be modelled after a Barbie doll and display the elegance of Audrey Hepburn (Bell 110; Coppens 64). Murphy too sees Disney’s depiction of its heroines as following, instead of dictating, the prevalent notions on female beauty, ranging from pale, silent dolls to more ambitious, natural beauties (Murphy cited in Van Den Abbeele 47).

Chris Cuomo argues that the good virtues of the Disney princesses are enhanced by contrasting them with the evilness of the “jealous queens” or femme fatales (Cuomo cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). Haskell, Dorfman and Mattleart equally discern a “virgin-whore dichotomy” (Haskell, Dorfman, and Mattleart cited in Hoisington n. pag.). The opposition of the femme fatale to the innocent virgin is, according to Kitch, a recurring theme in twentieth century mass media (Kitch cited in Van Den Abbeele 74). Wells sees the valuation of women in terms of their beauty, as opposed to men, who are valued in terms of their personality and actions, as typical of animated movies in general (Wells cited in Van Den Abbeele 79).

Davis points at another tendency the Walt Disney studio shared with early classical Hollywood cinema was the assumption that its target group was shaped by a rather homogenous white, middle class, and mostly female audience. The fact that Walt claimed his movies were “seeking to appeal to the child in the adult”, combined with the majority of his audience being female, could lead one to assume that “he saw women as essentially child-like” (Davis 224-225). Davis, on the other hand, refutes this interpretation and sees it merely as a proof of Walt’s belief that women were “possessing a unique emotional quality that made it possible for them to *attune* themselves emotionally to the world of childhood without in themselves being child-like” (ibid.).

She even claims that, compared to prevailing stereotypes of women in the 1940s to 1960s, Walt’s attitudes were rather progressive (Davis 227-228). She states that, in the sixties,

men urged women to return to their places in the home, which they had left during the second World War to fill the need for “nurses, teachers, and social workers” (Davis 216-217). Davis concludes with regard to Walt Disney’s attitude towards women:

[F]or the most part, Walt believed in the over-riding view of women in the 1940s and 1950s as a group who could be characterized by such traits as emotionalism, domesticity, maternal concerns, an over-all emphasis on beauty and romance (as opposed to more “practical” concerns). It was also widely considered at this time that women had a generally softer, quieter, more delicate approach to viewing the world. (Davis 223).

It should be noted, however, that Amy Davis’s analysis of Disney was meant to be one-sidedly positive as her main aim was to refute prevalent “misconceptions” about Disney. Her analysis might be a bit biased by her own ideological views, which seem to tie in with Walt’s conservative and gender stereotypical beliefs. I do not think that all of the sometimes questionable content of Walt Disney’s movies can be justified by coming out with some anecdotal “facts” about the man’s personal relationships with women and ethnic or religious minorities.

After a period severely lacking in creativity following the death of Walt Disney in the 1960s, “due to weak management and an identity crisis”⁷, top manager Michael Eisner injected the Walt Disney Company with new zeal near the end of the 1980s (Hoisington n. pag.). New feature-length animation movies were launched, following each other quite rapidly, and old “classics” were rereleased. The Walt Disney Company was a popular success again. In an effort to stay loyal to the “spirit” of late Walt Disney, the content of the new series of Disney princesses movies stayed conservative, to the point of becoming reactionary (Hoisington n. pag.). Coppens, for his part, thinks Disney has been lagging behind contemporary tendencies since the 1970s (Coppens 77). The princess heroines were adapted to the nineties, but, as many critics claim, in the end they still were the same pretty, harmless girls looking for romance introduced with Snow White. I would even argue that increased attention is paid to the tradition of marrying off girls in the latest movies; whereas in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella*, the princesses were rather rebelliously marrying against their educators’ will, the adolescent girls in *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas* and *Mulan* are forced by their parents to marry. Still, I noticed some changes. From *Beauty and the Beast* on,

⁷ Recent articles criticize the unoriginality of post-war Disney movies, which were proven to repeatedly recycle old scenes and characters (Impens, Tom. “Disney kopieerde vrolijk zichzelf”; video available on Youtube, “Ressemblance dans les films Disney” < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOIrXGd51jE> >).

the female protagonists at least could have their pick of several male candidates. No longer restrained by rigid fairy tale sources (except for *The Little Mermaid*, which was based on a tale by Hans Christian Andersen), the Walt Disney Company decided to let fantasy prevail, merely using historical anecdotes as a point of departure for their story. Not only had the amount of characters increased, their personality was elaborated as well, presenting complex, changing characters.⁸ A second “classical Disney element”, which I think is largely absent in the 1990s movies, is the presence of the *femme fatale*. Only Ursula the Sea Witch in *The Little Mermaid* is still reminiscent of the sexually threatening Hollywood divas, but her appearance clearly deviates from the slim, angular contours of the Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Lady Tremaine in *Cinderella*, and Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*. All subsequent movies feature villains who are *masculine*.

Hoisington argues that Eisner himself echoed Disney’s successful “from rags-to-riches story” and consequent emphasis on work ethic. The movies launched under his supervision, however, generally convey the message that wealth is “only attainable through inheritance or marriage”. Where Disney was, at his worst, described as being “moody” towards his employees, Eisner is allegedly said to behave like an unscrupulous, litigious, excessively controlling business man, mainly concerned with making profit. The economic expansion of the Disney empire to continents all over the world seems to be reflected in the content of their movies. Many of these, as it happens, caricaturally depict other ethnicities either as barbaric or as primitive, equalling children or “noble savages” in their naivety. The subjugation of these “underdeveloped” people by Europeans or North Americans is thus made to look as natural and meant to improve the former’s well-being. As with the early Disney movies, Giroux claims that whiteness is thus universalized, because “children are taught that cultural differences that do not bear the imprint of white middle-class ethnicity are deviant, inferior, unintelligent, and threatening” (Giroux cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Deborah Ross, on the other hand, argues Eisner is more concerned with making profit than with inscribing radical ideological messages in the Disney movies: “Fortunately, however, because the overriding goal is self-promotion – because Disney will absorb and use whatever works, or whatever sells the product – the movies lack the philosophical consistency of propaganda” (Ross 63).

⁸ I would like to point at the reflection of a character’s degree of complexity in the titles of the movies: whenever male characters’ personalities are rendered in detail, their name appears near the princess’s (*Snow White “and the Seven Dwarfs”*, *Beauty “and the Beast”*) or even completely replaces hers (*“Aladdin”*).

Steven Coppens claims that, from the 1960s onwards, women and ethnic minorities vehemently demanded equal rights; movies, therefore, adapted to a more cosmopolitan, adolescent audience and depicted – since the abolition of the Production Code in 1968 – more sex and violence. Later on, the digital revolution in the movie industry would trigger an exponential growth in spectacular action scenes. Developed from depicting the upper class, to appealing to the middle class, and even sympathizing with the social underdogs, movies increasingly depicted their villains as rich people, corrupt and criminal. A deepening gulf between the poor and the rich, together with racial conflicts, furthered the need to discuss social issues during the 1990s, while traditional religions made way for more alternative spiritual movements (Coppens 53-56).

Whether women or people of colour are depicted in a politically correct manner in Disney movies is much disputed. As with the princesses during the Walt Disney era, the nineties heroines have been modelled after contemporary beauty icons. Ariel's looks were supposedly based on Farrah Fawcett's, a 1970s actress and pin-up girl (Bell 110). Sherri Stoner, a member of the Groundlings (a Los Angeles improvisational group), weighing only ninety-two pounds, served as a live-action model for both Ariel and Belle (Bell 113). The rather conservative ambitions of Ariel are explained by Pamela Colby O'Brien as typical of the 1980s, an era during which young women are said to have rejected the more feminist, challenging ideas of the 1970s, while still retaining the aim for economic equality (O'Brien cited in Yzaguirre 15). This resulted in a confusion and ambivalence of expectations imposed on teenage girls, seen by critics such as Lauren Dundes as representative of reality in the late twentieth century. First of all, she claims young girls are nowadays encouraged to meet with increasingly unrealistic beauty ideals, which force them to present themselves as sexualized objects. On the other hand, they are cautioned not to enjoy their awakening sexuality too openly, since the pride and interest of their family or community still prevails over their own happiness in intimate relationships. Secondly, as Coontz argues, their emancipated mothers have developed successful professional careers, which further heightens the pressure, because girls are now expected to combine being the perfect housewife and mother *as well as* the successful business woman (Coontz cited in Dundes 359). Faced with such demanding and conflicting expectations, it is not surprising that many girls end up with low self-esteem, fearing they will always fail at something. In *School Girls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap*, Orenstein discussed the results of a survey held among 3,000 boys and girls ranging from the age of nine to fifteen. This survey proved that the majority of girls

suffered a loss of self-esteem once they reached adolescence and, as a consequence, questioned their competences (Orenstein cited in Dundes 359).

Many other critics, however, look at nineties Disney heroines such as Ariel and Belle as strikingly liberated and enjoying their own sexuality. Leadbeater and Wilson, for instance, argue that Ariel reflects the “New Women” of the late nineteenth century, who would have been “intelligent, independent, and comfortable with their sexuality”, and meanwhile challenged social expectations (Leadbeater and Wilson cited in Yzaguirre 20). *Beauty and the Beast*, as well, has been described as “the first feminist Disney film, a liberated love story for the ‘90s” (Swan 352). Following the romance novels of the 1980s, which “reflected feminist ideals, with independence for the female and a balance of social and task roles for both male and female”, the 1990s movie provided another step forward in offering “a hopeful reading for women who are tired of holding the emotional responsibility for their relationship” (because both Belle and the Beast needed to change in order for the relationship to work) (Swan 366). Moreover, the story offers a “postmodern” model for “fulfilling and functional” intimate relationships, simultaneously “exaggerating the ironies, the absurdities, of contemporary sexism” (Walker cited in Swan 366). According to Swan, the story would appeal to older female spectators – who remained single due to successful careers, or were widowed, divorced, or “trapped in meaningless marriages” – because these might “long for the transformation of the male gender in a way not often understood by teens” and secretly enjoy the disruption of traditional roles (Swan 354; 356; 366). Maria Warner argues that the *Beauty and the Beast* movie is “vividly aware of contemporary sexual politics” (Warner cited in Craven 124; Warner cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). Allison Craven as well sees Belle, the Disney woman openly showing desire, as representative of “western heterosexual femininity” or “pop femininity”; similarly, Beast was urged to “adopt the codes of white-western maledom” (Craven 130-131; 133). Unlike Elizabeth Dodson Gray, who reads Beast’s ferocious personality as fitting the “psychological profile ... of a violence prone wife batterer”, most critics assess Beast as representing a gentleman, opposed to the macho represented by Gaston (Gray cited in Craven 133). Susan Jeffords reads the movie as a struggle between Gaston’s hyper-masculinity and Beast’s pseudo-masculinity:

With his cleft chin, broad shoulders, brawny chest, wavy hair, and towering height, Gaston fulfils the stereotyped image of male beauty, the hard body that populated the films of the 1980s. And with his pastimes of hunting, drinking, and male-bonding, he fulfils as well a stereotyped image of masculinity. Gaston does not simply look the part of the hyper-masculine male, he holds all the opinions that are supposed to go along with it ... Gaston is the kind of male

chauvinist pig that would turn the women of any talk-show audience into beasts themselves. And the Beast – where does this new gender scenario leave the Beast?

He is the New Man, the one who can transform himself from the hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the eighties into a considerate, loving, and self-sacrificing man of the nineties. His appearance is more than a horrific guise that repels women; it is instead a *burden*, one that he must carry until he is set free, free to be the man he truly can be. (Jeffords 152-153).

Zarranz García argues that *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), which I did not include in my analysis because it was released outside of the Disney Princesses series, illustrates the sudden change in Disney's display of female sexuality. Its gypsy heroine Esmeralda is, according to critic John Kelly, "drawn with more curves and beguiling shadows than you'll find in the typical Disney heroine" (Kelly cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). The construction of her provocative sexuality was allegedly achieved by copying Demi Moore's voice and manners in *Striptease*, released during the same year. Although Esmeralda mirrors the threatening power of the female villains of the Walt Disney era, she is one of the first female Disney characters to "display a blatant sexuality without risking their inner goodness" (Zarranz García n. pag.). Hoisington argues she uses her sexuality (and gypsy magic) to evade being caught by the male authorities, who all lust after her; her underlying motivation, however, is to ask "help from God for the outcasts of the world" (Hoisington n. pag.). Amy Davis explains this change by means of contemporary sexual politics: "by the 1990s, the notion that a woman could be both good and sexy had ceased to be such an unimaginable concept in representations of femininity in much of America's popular culture" (Davis cited in Zarranz García n. pag.).

Byrne and McQuillan claim that "the Disney text ... is a site for the representation of the conflicting ideologies in operation in Western society at the time of production and so therefore has a non-simple relation to American cultural and economic imperialism" (Byrne and McQuillan cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). Michael Parenti comments on American imperialism:

Today the United States is the foremost proponent of recolonization and leading antagonist of revolutionary change throughout the world. Emerging from World War II relatively unscathed and superior to all other industrial countries in wealth, productive capacity, and armed might, the United States became the prime purveyor and guardian of global capitalism. Judging by the size of its financial investments, and military force, judging by every standard, except direct colonization, the U.S. empire is the most formidable in history, greater than Great Britain in the nineteenth century. (Parenti cited in Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 67).

The empire's "political centralization" is propagated as "Progress, Development, Uplift, the benign 'evolution' of human society towards 'civilization'", as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels state in *The Communist Manifesto*:

[The Bourgeoisie] ... compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates the world after its own image ... Just as it made the countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, East on West" (Marx and Engels cited in Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 66-67).

The so-called benign motives of the empire are part of its "manufacture of consent", to win citizens' support of their cause. The real objectives, or "military-industrial concerns", protected by the "National Security State" are thus blurred; George Kennan once revealed these true objectives in a "now infamous (originally top secret) State Department policy document":

We have about 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population ... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity ... We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction ... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans, the better. (Kennan in Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 69).

Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews claim that "where U.S. forces go on behalf of empire and the National Security State, corporate entertainment naturally follows"; thus, "Disney's *The Three Caballeros* (1944) is set in Latin America. Disney's *The Jungle Book* is set in colonial India. *Aladdin* is set in the Middle East. *Pocahontas* (1995) is set in colonial Virginia ... Disney's *The Lion King* (1995) is set in Africa" (Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 85). Stuart Hall distinguishes three characters to embody "race" within the Disney universe: "*the slave figure*, childlike, simple and devoted, though capable of plotting against his master when he is away; *the native*, either the "noble savage" – simple and dignified, or cheating, cunning, savage, and barbaric ... ; and *the clown or entertainer*, he embodies humor and physical grace" (Hall cited in Hoisington n. pag.). The movies discussed in my analysis could, to me, be seen as displaying other ethnicities as "natives". This split category is, on the one hand, associated with "nature" and "primitivism", which could be explained by "both a nostalgia for an innocence lost forever to the civilized, and the threat of civilization being over-run or undermined by the recurrence of savagery [or by an untamed sexuality]" (Hall cited in

Hoisington n. pag.). The image of barbarity, on the other hand, could stem, according to Shaheen and Giroux, from the negative media images popular during the end of the Persian Gulf War (Shaheen and Giroux cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Stephen Shalom's discussion of the United States' dubious role in the Persian Gulf War in *Imperial Alibis: Rationalizing U.S. Intervention After the Cold War* is summarized as follows: "Control, profit, and the further destabilization of the area is achieved by selling arms to both sides. The U.S. mask of neutrality is merely that – a mask that barely conceals a reckless desire to proliferate, regardless of the human cost" (Shalom cited in Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 81).

III. ANALYSIS OF THE DISNEY PRINCESSES

Previous studies have already carefully analyzed certain aspects of the Disney Princesses. In this paragraph, I will briefly summarize the main arguments presented by two earlier studies on the same subject. What follows is my own detailed analysis of each Disney Princess heroine, supported by literature available on the subject and combined with my own close readings of the source movies. In my conclusion, I will outline the extent to which my contribution sustains or refutes the already existing research. Christine M. Yzaguirre maintains there is a clear division between the “older” Disney heroines from the “Disney Classics”, created during the lifetime of Walt Disney – i.e. Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty – and the “newer” Disney heroines, mostly created during the nineties Disney revival – i.e. Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan. She sees an evolution in the newer heroines’ eagerness for adventure and personal fulfilment, before they yearn to enter a romantic relationship like the older heroines, with Pocahontas as a break-through exception who remains single. She also claims that the newer heroines are more rebellious than the older passive ones, rejecting social roles instead of accepting them. In addition, she argues that their actions are emphasized more than their mere physical beauty; these heroines would no longer depend on others to save them. Still, the more sporty newer heroines are said to display a more sexualized physical beauty than their graceful, prudish predecessors. Yzaguirre further argues that, over the years, diverse ethnicities have been included in the Disney universe, while almost all heroines still belong to royal class (Yzaguirre 31-32; 41-43). Deane Michelle Hoisington, who mainly discusses the heroines categorized by Yzaguirre as “newer”, detects three commonly returning views concerning gender, ethnicity, and class. Marriage would be used to restrain female characters from adventure, other cultures would be represented as barbaric, and wealth could only be attained through inheritance or marriage instead of hard work (Hoisington n. pag.).

1. SNOW WHITE IN *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS* (1937)

“Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?” The evil Queen’s key question is familiar to many, as is the answer. According to Elizabeth Bell, Snow White, among with the other “older heroines”, is portrayed as a beautiful girl already in the literary tales (Bell 109). The mirror in the movie continues this tradition and describes her appearance as follows: “hair black as ebony, lips red as the rose, skin white as snow” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). The details of her appearance had to be invented and added by the Walt Disney Company. On the screen, she has brown eyes and wears very subtle eye make up and blush. Maria Tatar makes the comparison between Snow White’s red lips and cheeks and the redness of the apple that will kill her (Tatar cited in Grimm, 251). Nicole Arthur describes Snow White as “not a cover girl, but a pretty pubescent girl, with chubby cheeks and a flat chest” (Arthur cited in Yzaguirre 28-29). Forgacs argues the roundness of Snow White’s plump face is associated with goodness and health, as opposed to the skinnier female villains (Forgacs cited in De Cuyper 83).⁹ Although skinny-legged, her hips are beginning to expand. According to John Grant, Walt Disney opted for “girl-next-door prettiness rather than out-and-out beauty” (Yzaguirre 51).

Deane Michelle Hoisington and Veerle Van Oost refer to Snow White – and all (older) heroines – as “teenage heroines” (Hoisington n. pag.; Van Oost 25). John Grant, too, stresses her “child-like” attractiveness in her plumpness as well as her short, curly black hair and delicate heels (Yzaguirre 29). I find it quite remarkable that even her voice and speech are very much those of a young child, in content as well as in tone. In the Disney version, she appears to be around the age of fourteen, which makes her one of the youngest Disney princesses. Yet, in the original version by the brothers Grimm, she was even younger, nearly reaching the age of seven. Maria Tatar comments that “[i]n earlier centuries, especially before the onset of public education, childhood was of a much shorter duration, with the child integrated into the adult world of work even before the onset of puberty”; however, “[m]ost illustrations for the story depict her as an adolescent or young adult approaching an age suitable for marriage” (Tatar cited in Grimm, 244). Because of her young age, she is still a bit clumsy, especially when walking on high heels: her dress gets stuck in the branches of the

⁹ Coppens applies this distinction on the shape of their costumes as well: the protagonists are said to mostly wear round shapes, while the antagonist’s attire is adorned with sharp and pointed adornments (Coppens 63).

trees in the forest and she plunges into a lake. At other times, however, she moves around in an aristocratic, ballet dancing manner. Bell calls her movements graceful, stately and elegant (Yzaguirre 27). Arthur adds on her elegance that she is “so dainty and ladylike that she rides sidesaddle atop the prince’s horse along the way to his castle” (Yzaguirre 28).

De Cuyper points at the association of Snow White with light colours (De Cuyper 104). Coppens argues Snow White’s clothes are either made of bright primary colours, or neutral earth-like shades, as opposed to the primarily dark clothes of the antagonists (Coppens 63). I agree with Yzaguirre’s observation that Snow White’s long dress – with white collar, blue puffy sleeves, yellow skirt and laced underskirt – red cape, high heeled shoes with a bow, and hair constrained by a red ribbon offer a traditional, prudish look on femininity by not revealing too much naked skin (Yzaguirre 51). Besides, when discovered in bed by the dwarfs, although she is dressed, Snow White shyly covers her body under the sheets. At the beginning of the movie, however, Snow White is presented to us “dressed ... in rags”, because the Queen had “forced her to work as a scullery maid” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). But, as the Mirror says to the Queen: “A lovely maid I see. Rags cannot hide her gentle grace. Alas, she is more fair than thee.” (ibid.). Because of the plain dress, her legs are shown up to the knee, and her neck and arms are bare.

This innocence of Snow White is contrasted with the sexually more mature Queen by Bruno Bettelheim, who interprets alternative versions of the fairy tale as focussing on “the oedipal desires of a father and daughter, and how these arouse the mother’s jealousy which makes her wish to get rid of the daughter (Bettelheim cited in Tatar 240).¹⁰ I think it is striking that a woman as powerful as the Queen is still frustrated about not being the most beautiful, which would suggest that beauty remains the most desired quality in a woman.¹¹ Tatar comments on the Grimm version that the stepmother is “trapped by the magic mirror” and “locked in a state of narcissistic desire” (Tatar cited in Grimm 243-244). The mirror thus serves as a male judge on female beauty, which is seen as the only standard by which to grant

¹⁰ The jealous *mother* merely featured in the Grimm’s first edition of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which appeared in two volumes in 1812 and 1815 (Tatar 399). It was only from the second edition on, which was released in 1819, that the biological mother was changed into a stepmother, “in an effort to preserve the sanctity of motherhood” (Tatar 242). The Disney version was probably based on the seventh and definitive edition.

¹¹ Moreover, in an effort to become more powerful, the Queen wishes “to transform my beauty into ugliness”, and to be changed into “a *harmless* old peddler woman” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, own ironic emphasis). A few moments before her transformation, a shelf with books on astrology, black arts, alchemy, witch craft, black magic, disguises, sorcery, and poisons is shown. In my opinion, the allusion is made that intelligent or powerful women are inevitably ugly and evil.

women any value: “The voice in the mirror may be viewed as a judgmental voice, representing the absent father or patriarchy in general, which places a premium on beauty. But that voice could also be an echo of the queen’s own self-assessment, on that is, to be sure, informed by cultural norms about physical appearance” (ibid.). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar too argue the absent king is only present as “the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgement that rules the Queen’s – and every woman’s – self-evaluation” (Gilbert & Gubar cited in Craven 128).¹² Still, despite the Queen’s “submission” to male judgements, she treats both the “slave in the mirror” and Humbert the Huntsman, who seems to be economically dependent on her, as submissive creatures (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*).

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar rather stress the opposition between the two women:

They describe how the Grimm’s story stages a contest between the “angel-woman” and the “monster-woman” of Western culture. For them, the motor of the “Snow White” plot is the relationship between two women, “the one fair, young, pale, the other just as fair, but older, fiercer; the one a daughter, the other a mother; the one sweet, ignorant, passive, the other both artful and attractive; the one a sort of angel, the other an undeniable witch. Gilbert and Gubar, rather than reading the story as an oedipal plot in which mother and daughter become sexual rivals for approval from the father (incarnated as the voice in the mirror), suggest that the tale mirrors our cultural division of femininity into two components, one that is writ large in our most popular version of the tale. In Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, we find these two components fiercely polarized in a murderously jealous and forbiddingly cold woman on the one hand and an innocently sweet girl accomplished in the art of good housekeeping on the other. (Gilbert & Gubar cited in Tatar 242).

In addition, I would like to argue that the Queen, and all sexually more mature female villains in general, attempt to lure the innocent princesses into losing their innocence, under the pretext of giving them advice on how to attract men. Maria Tatar as well suggests that the story of *Snow White* depicts “the trajectory of normal female maturation” (Tatar cited in Grimm 245). The Queen, in disguise of an “old granny [who] knows a young girl’s heart”, confides to *Snow White* that “It’s apples pies that make the menfolk’s mouth water!” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). She pretends to share some secret female wisdom with the girl,

¹² Steven Coppens, on the other hand, interprets the mirror as a tool for introspection, apart from narcissistic vanity; the preference of *Snow White* over the Queen could thus be explained because of the difference between inner and outer beauty (Coppens 96-97).

who is ignorant of love's tricks: "I'll share a secret with you. This is no good old apple, it's some magic wishing apple ... One bite, and all your dreams will come true ... Now, make a wish, and take a bite ... There must be something your little heart desires. Perhaps, there's someone you love?" (ibid.). Here I agree with Tater, who links the apple, "invested with powerful symbolic significance", with the Garden of Eden (Tatar cited in Grimm 251). Like the snake, who presented the apple to Eve in the Garden of Eden, the Queen-Witch is persuading Snow White to take the apple. Having taken a bite of the apple – symbolic of yielding to sexual desires – both Eve and Snow White (who moans and says she suddenly feels strange) fall into sin; the former's punishment is to painfully give birth to children, the latter's punishment to "die", unless she is awakened by "love's first kiss". The Queen, however, thinks this is very unlikely: she is very cynical about the idea of love: "Love's first kiss, ha! No fear of that!" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*).

With regards to her personality as well, Snow White is portrayed as both still a child and already preparing to become a mother. In my opinion, this duality is expressed when she first sees the Dwarfs' cottage: "Oh, it's adorable, just like a doll's house. I'll like it here" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). The reference to the doll house might suggest that she, as an object of charm, resembles a doll; or that in wanting to play with dolls or live in a doll house, she is both still a child and already preparing to care for children (or dolls) as a mother. As I argued in my bachelor paper: "According to Marcus, the comparison with a doll equals 'the reduction of woman to the passive object of the male gaze'. The doll is seen as 'mindless' and 'so clearly a creature of male science and male desire'"¹³ M.G. Lord would have said about Barbie, the prototypical doll, that "she is made up of two distinct components: the doll-as-physical-object and the doll-as-invented-personality" (Lord cited in Buescher and Ono 40).

She seems naive, coy and easily surprised or scared, and often thinks of herself as silly: "Oh, how silly of me ... And all because I was afraid. I'm so ashamed of the fuss I've made" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). Her naivety is shown in some of the "solutions" she thinks of: "What do you do when things go wrong? Oh, you sing a song!" (ibid.) Songs seem to be the source of comfort and support for every obstacle: "Live goes along with a

¹³ For more information on dolls as objects of charm or symbolic children, see Malfroid, K. "Djuna Barnes and the Representation of Women: Cross-Gendering in *Nightwood*", p. 22-24.

smile and a song” and “Just whistle while you work, and cheerfully together we can tidy up the place” (ibid.). After singing, she utters: “I really feel quite happy now. I’m sure I’ll get along somehow. Everything’s going to be alright” (ibid.).

Apart from these childlike qualities, she displays a playful and disarming charm. She is aware of her own beauty and concerned with her looks, for example when she quickly straightens her skirt and arranges her hair before facing the Prince. Although Maria Tatar claims the Dwarfs’ “diminutive stature makes them sexually unthreatening”, Naomi Wood remarks that Dopey stands in the line, hoping to receive a kiss on his lips, more than once, while Grumpy, “after receiving his kiss, blushes uncontrollably and falls into a tree, his nose suggestively penetrating a hole” (Tatar cited in Grimm 246; Wood n. pag.). Naomi Wood argues that the Dwarfs get away with these sexual expression because they are so cute: “this sort of humor allows for physical contact, titillation, and satisfaction, but does not threaten to become overtly sexual, though it contains those elements” (Wood n. pag.). Grumpy, the misogynistic dwarf¹⁴, poses a special challenge for Snow White. Even if she mocks him at first – mimicking him, sarcastically asking if he is alright and provoking him with the words “What’s the matter, cat’s got your tongue?” – she is secretly eager to please him as much as any other man: she bakes a pie specifically for him and the night before, she ends her prayer by asking “Oh yes, and please make Grumpy like me” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). Jill Henke explains this stereotypically female tendency to passively and unchallengingly please others with Julia Wood’s standpoint theory: “Survival for those with subordinate status often depends quite literally on being able to read others, respond in ways that please others and assume responsibility for others’ comfort” (Yzaguirre 19). A woman’s position within her culture would thus shape and define her experiences (ibid.).

¹⁴ Grumpy acts very suspicious and hostile towards women. About Snow White, he says in advance: “She’s a female, and all females is poison. They’re full of wicked wiles” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). Women like the Queen, who are intelligent, scare him even more: “She’s an old witch. And I am warning you! If that Queen finds her here, she’ll swoop down and wreak her vengeance on us ... She knows everything, she’s full of black magic. She can make herself invisible. She might be in this room right now” (ibid.). Unlike the other Dwarfs, who are willing, against their habits, to wash in order to “please the princess”, Grumpy stubbornly refuses to take trouble for her: “Phuh, her wiles are beginning to work. But I’m warning you, you give ‘m an inch, and they’ll walk all over you! ... Next thing you know she’ll be tying your beard up in pink ribbons and smelling you up with that stuff called, uh, ‘perfoom’ ... A fine bunch of water lilies you turned out to be. I’d like to see anybody make me wash, if I didn’t want to.” (ibid.). Ironically, Grumpy’s warnings against women making men effeminate comes true, as the other Dwarfs conspire to put him into the wash tub and ridicule him by putting curls and blue ribbons in his hair: “You look kind of cute ... Ain’t he sweet! ... Smells like a petunia!” (ibid.). The Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* will go through a similar feminization when he has his hair done after taking a bath.

Besides still bearing some childlike traits, while already aiming to beguile men, Snow White also displays the characteristics of a wannabe mother: she is shown as good and caring. It is because of this caring nature that she feels pity for a lost bird as well as for the supposedly fainting old witch (the Queen in disguise), which makes her succumb to the fatal lure of the poisoned apple. But mostly, her mothering qualities are shown in her behaviour towards the dwarfs. When she first arrives at their cottage in the forest, she thinks of them as seven cute but untidy little children. Because the house is not kept clean, she immediately infers that their mother must be absent and, before even meeting them, takes pity on them: “Maybe they don’t have no mother. Then they’re orphans. That’s too bad” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). As a training mother, she sacrifices herself to obediently do the washing, dishwashing, cleaning and cooking in order to please and to be accepted: “And if you let me stay, I’ll keep house for you. I’ll wash and sew and sweep and cook” (ibid.). Especially the cooking is well received by the dwarfs. However, as she is promoted to being the commander in the domestic sphere (instead of the servant), she can now delegate chores to the forest animals and order the dwarfs what to do. After commanding the dwarfs to show their hands before dinner, and reprimanding them during the inspection, she orders them to “[m]arch straight outside and wash, or you’ll not have a bite to eat” (ibid.). After supper, she exclaims that “[i]t’s bed time. Go right upstairs to bed” (ibid.). Steven Coppens reads Snow White’s bossy corrections of the dwarfs’ (and the animals’) behaviour as attempt at educating them (Coppens 67-68).¹⁵

Her power as head of the housekeeping, however, does not extend outside of the private, domestic world. What’s more, Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario claims that not only Snow White, but all of the “older heroines” were extremely “passive” and “unchallenging”: “[t]hey did domestic chores, obeyed authority and never questioned what was expected of them” (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 18). Jacqueline Layng describes Snow White as “innocent, naïve and obedient” (Layng cited in Yzaguirre 23). Marcia Lieberman highlights Snow White’s passivity as well, designating her as an eternal victim in need of being saved by marriage; according to her, “beauty, helplessness, and passivity are the catalysts and rewards for destined marriage and money. Goodness is linked to victimage and martyrdom” (Lieberman cited in Bell 112). Snow White resigns in her designation as a servant by her stepmother and

¹⁵ In his discussion of the final scenes of the movie, on the other hand, he treats the Dwarfs as “pseudo-fathers”, attempting to save their “adopted daughter” (Coppens 97).

simply hopes for a man to change her fate. Indeed, as Yzaguirre states, Snow White needs someone else, a man, to come to her rescue (Yzaguirre 49). Moreover, I noticed that in the scene where Humbert the Huntsman intends to kill her, she is rendered completely helpless and weak: she surrenders and cries emotionally. Liesbet De Cuyper argues Snow White's helplessness is already rendered using camera movements: she is mostly shown from a bird's eye-view, which makes her look small, helpless and pitiful (De Cuyper 115). When confronted with the need for a place to sleep, she turns to the animals in the forest for help: "Maybe you know where I can stay. In the woods somewhere? You do? Will you take me there?" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) Even when arriving at the Dwarfs' cottage, she is completely dependent on their permission to stay: (to the forest animals) "I know, we'll clean the house and surprise them. Then maybe they'll let me stay" and (to the dwarfs) "Oh, please don't send me away. If you do, she'll kill me" (ibid.). Steven Coppens argues this helplessness is caused by long-lasting social isolation. The estrangement from society turns the protagonists into innocent, credulous and naive creatures. Because of their vulnerability, they are shocked once confronted with the abuse by the evil outside world. Disney would have deliberately made his protagonists prove themselves in the outside world (with some help from magical powers), before uniting within a family situation: the protagonists would be aware of their naivety and wanting to become more combative by searching for a potential family (Coppens 60-61).

Maria Tatar connects Snow White's comatose state with the element of "snow" in her name: "Snow suggests cold and remoteness, along with the notion of the lifeless and inert, yet it also comes down from the heavens" (Tatar 240). Nicole Arthur stresses the fact that Snow White is asleep at the end of the movie and thus quite passively undergoes the seduction by the Prince (Arthur cited in Yzaguirre 25). Further, I'd like to remark that when she first meets the seven dwarfs, Snow White is asleep too, and therefore a vulnerable object to be looked at. Kathi Maio puts it even stronger by suggesting that "all Disney heroines are 'dead' until they unite with a man" (Maio cited in Yzaguirre 13). As Ayres says, Snow White is literally dead, "cold and lifeless" in her glass coffin, before she is vivified by the Prince's kiss (Ayres in Yzaguirre 13). The glass coffin emphasizes, as Tatar points out, that "Snow White becomes an object that is put on aesthetic display" (Tatar cited in Grimm 254). Gilbert and Gubar see the glass coffin as "a metaphor for the conditions of patriarchal life", "for dead and self-less in her glass coffin, she is an object, to be displayed and desired, patriarchy's marble 'opus', the decorative and decorous Galatea with whom every ruler would like to

grace his parlor” (Gilbert and Gubar cited in Craven 129). They explain the coffin – and Snow White’s resurrection from it – as women’s struggle against patriarchy, “longing to attempt the pen, [who] have longed to escape from the many-faceted glass coffins of the patriarchal texts whose properties male authors insisted that they are” (ibid.). Moreover, her resurrection is “an act of recovery or liberation from her incarceration by her wicked stepmother” (ibid.).

The Prince, consequently, mainly falls for Snow White’s beauty rather than her personality. Brenda Ayres concludes that Snow White’s beauty is her only remarkable trait, and instead of using it in a self-liberating way, her being the “fairest in the land” only helps her to attract a husband (Ayres cited in Yzaguirre 24): “The fairest in the land, she will marry the most powerful in the land” (Craven 129). Furthermore, as Yzaguirre points out, her beauty, and not her personality or actions, is the only reason for her stepmother’s jealousy and hatred (Yzaguirre 44). I would like to remark that it is also her beauty that prevents her from being killed by the huntsman or the dwarfs (who, until they saw her, wanted to kill the intruder), or being buried immediately after dying, and thus eventually leads to her rescue: “So beautiful, even in death, that the dwarfs could not find it in their hearts to bury her” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*).

Tanner et al. observe that, in most of the Disney movies, love at first sight is very common: “For the most part, it took a matter of minutes for couples to fall in love” (Tanner et al. 364). As Snow White sings, “Someday I’ll find my love, someone to call my own. And I’ll know him the moment we meet, for my heart will start skipping a beat” (*Snow White*). They add: “Another common message was the notion that when a man and a woman meet, they almost always fall in love” (Tanner et al. 365). This inevitability of love is explicitly present in the movie: as Snow White says, “Anyone could see that the Prince was charming, the only one for me ... There’s nobody like him anywhere at all ... He was so romantic I could not resist” (*Snow White*). Snow White clearly shows her lack of expectations in life other than becoming a wife and mother. Wood remarks that Disney altered the original plots to suit the demands of the adults in the audience, who preferred a romance plot: “the myth of love at first sight was already in place, but Disney ensured that it was more romantic, heart-prompted instead of being prompted by family or other considerations. Also enlarging on the romantic aspect was the notion that ‘love’s first kiss’ should break all evil enchantments, so that Snow White is wakened by the kiss of a prince she already knows” (Wood 29). Furthermore, Tanner et al. observe that falling in love and maintaining the relationship seem like very easy things

to do. When relating how she met the Prince to the dwarfs, they ask Snow White if falling in love was a hard thing to do, to which she replies that “it was very easy” (Tanner et al. 364). I found the end of the movie to illustrate this “easiness” in a peculiar way: after being kissed by the prince and taken to his castle, the screen reads “and they lived happily ever after”, upon which the book, which functions as a coordinating narrative device, simply closes. To me, the message given is something like “marriage is the end, any further discussion is deemed irrelevant”.

Snow White’s only goal seems to be “to create a nuclear family by marrying her prince and having his children” (Yzaguirre 13). Her desire for some romantic relationship is clear from her first introduction to the viewer: as Yzaguirre notes, the lyrics of the song “I’m Wishing” speak volumes: “I’m wishing for the one I love to find me today” (Yzaguirre 54). When granted a wish, which will come true if she bites the apple, Snow White wishes again “that he will carry me away to his castle and that we will live happily ever after” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*).¹⁶ Coming into maturity is thus narrowed down to the sole purpose of becoming a wife and mother. Bottigheimer argues marriage is presented as the rightful reward for enduring a state of physical and social isolation (Bottigheimer cited in De Cuyper 83). Forgacs remarks that this marriage mostly coincides with the protagonist’s reaching of maturity and additional separation of her parents or friends, who now consent to the feared for separation (Forgacs cited in De Cuyper 83). In Snow White’s opinion, the only task of a woman seems to be to make others happy by being light-hearted all the time: “Remember you’re the one who can fill the world with sunshine” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*).

It feels very natural and logical to Snow White that doing domestic chores comprises the major part of her daily activities; Allison Craven calls her relationship with the dwarves one of “domestic bliss” (Craven 129). The cleaning, cooking and housekeeping is an element borrowed from the original Grimm’s tale, although in the Disney version it is Snow White herself who proposes to do these tasks as a condition for allowing her to stay in the dirty Dwarf’s house, and not the neat Dwarfs who impose this: “The Dwarfs told her: ‘If you will keep house for us, cook, make the beds, wash, sew, knit, and keep everything neat and tidy, then you can stay with us, and we’ll give you everything you need.’ ‘Yes, with pleasure,’ Snow White replied, and she stayed with them.” (Grimm 248). Maria Tatar interprets Snow

¹⁶ Coppens too detects the yearning for a romance and a family of their own as a primary goal, not only for Snow White, but for Cinderella and Aurora as well (Coppens 73).

White's domestic chores, imposed by the Dwarfs in the Grimm's version, as part of her maturation process: "In carrying out domestic chores, Snow White moves into a new developmental stage, demonstrating her ability to engage in labor and to carry out the terms of a contract. No longer a child, she is preparing herself for the state of matrimony" (Tatar cited in Grimm 248). Liesbet De Cuyper seems to think of it as natural that the Dwarfs, after a long day's work, merely want to relax once they are at home (De Cuyper 108-109). Whoever's idea it was to propose the domestic chores, both the fairy tale and the movie share, as Jack Zipes argues in "Breaking the Disney Spell", a strong encouragement of the domestication of women (Zarranz García n. pag.). Naomi Wood present a somewhat different analysis: "While it is true that the Grimms edited their version of Snow White so that she was entrusted with more and more housework, she is not shown deploying housework as a weapon (Disney's Snow White sees it as a persuasive technique to convince the 'dirty children' to let her stay and the Grimms' dwarfs demand that Snow White keep their house as clean as it already is)" (Wood n. pag.). I would not go as far as to read Snow White's proposal to perform domestic chores as a powerful manipulative technique. In my opinion, she rather tries as hard as she can to please the male Dwarfs so that these will let her stay; after all, it is *she* who is dependent on *their* approval.

Stefaan Van Den Abbeele, who interprets Disney using ecofeminism, quotes Jack Zipes and Patrick D. Murphy in claiming that Snow White, who like all women is often linked to nature¹⁷, makes use of the animals in the forest to help her do the chores and thus to be accepted by the Dwarfs – and patriarchal society in general. This act of "disobedience" – by (ab)using the animals and not doing the work herself – is compensated at the end by reincorporating Snow White in the order of patriarchy, this time under control of the Prince (Zipes and Murphy cited in Van Den Abbeele 51). Another scene where Snow White opposes patriarchy is when she disobeys the order of the Dwarfs to not let anyone in. Maria Tatar states that "Snow White, like many fairy-tale heroines, violates a prohibition". Unfortunately, here again, she is punished for her disobedience: "the violation results in punishment rather

¹⁷ "Women ... are frequently associated with nature, as opposed to the dominating male culture. Butler claims that 'the binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely "imposes" meaning on nature, and, hence, renders it into an "Other" to be appropriated to its own limitless uses' (Martins 116). By imposing the rules of 'civilization' on nature, men confine women to the role of heterosexuals, producing progeny. Martins claims that '[i]t is in the interests of the cultural order to imagine a precultural "state of nature" ... Woman is identified with that which is outlawed, uncivilized, and natural, an identification that has been shown by feminists to reinforce women's subordination' (115)." (Malfroid, K. "Djuna Barnes and the Representation of Women: Cross-Gendering in *Nightwood*", p 2-3)

than serving as the pathway to adventure, as is true for many fairy-tale heroes” (Tatar cited in Grimm 249). Again, I would like to argue that Snow White’s behaviour stems not from a wish to disobey authority, but rather from her good-natured tendency to be kind to everyone. She does not refuse to do domestic chores (in the movie, she is clearly cleaning the house *together* with the animals), but rather delegates them because she sees herself as the housewife in charge of the tasks to be done in the private sphere. In fact, nobody ordered her to tidy up the Dwarfs’ cottage in the first place, she spontaneously took on this responsibility. Similarly, it is Snow White’s concern for the feeble old woman which makes her decide, after some initial hesitation, to make an exception to the rule and let a stranger in.

With regards to the representation of ethnicity, Snow White is equally problematic. Although every movie from the Disney Princesses series until *Beauty and the Beast* displays a purely white, Caucasian cast and thus universalizes whiteness, the element “white” in her name specifically draws attention to this aspect of her appearance. According to Tatar, “she is often connected with the purity and innocence that our culture associates with the color white ... Only the Grimms’ version of the story alludes to the heroine’s complexion in her name. Their fair-skinned heroine became, through the Disney film, an icon of feminine beauty for the latter half of the twentieth century” (Tatar 240). She is portrayed as a devote Christian, praying at the end of the day. Concerning class, Layng points out that even Snow White’s royal ancestry offers no guarantee for power: outside of the domestic sphere, she has to obey her stepmother and then the Prince (Layng cited in Yzaguirre 23-24). In this particular case, gender and race (because Snow White’s whiteness, as part of her beauty, helps her to obtain her goals) appear to be more crucial factors than class in power politics. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that Walt Disney and his fellow employees, themselves male, white, and slowly moving “from rags-to-riches”, considered the matter from their mainly privileged perspective.

2. CINDERELLA IN *CINDERELLA* (1950)

At the time of release, Cinderella was described in *Look* magazine in the following terms: “Like most Disney heroines, Cinderella is ... ‘the typical American girl.’ She is cute, lively, of medium build, weighing about 120 pounds – and with a tender heart for boys and animals” (Davis 226). Wood too describes her as “a normal, albeit idealized, American girl” (Wood 35). This time, Disney opted for a blue-eyed heroine, with a blonde ponytail and a fringe, long sultry eyelashes, pursed pink lips and finer facial features. The fact that her original dress for the ball was pink further hints at her resemblance to a Barbie doll. She appears older and sexually more mature than prudish Snow White: “she is beautiful (in a softly curved, Miss America, girl-next-door kind of way ...) [and] innocently sexy (one of our first views of her is her rear end charmingly presented under the bedcovers)”, although she still wears a wide and non-revealing nightgown with long sleeves (Wood 36). Naomi Wood argues Cinderella’s “sexuality is both announced and discounted. She is good because she is both sexy and self-controlled” (ibid.). Cinderella’s fairy godmother, like a concerned grandmother, permits her to charm the prince, but still she is expected to be home in time – at twelve o’ clock – and not to give in to the Prince’s attempts to kiss her. In another scene, Cinderella is shown as a sexual object to be looked at by men (a feature which I will later on discuss as characteristic of most “newer” heroines): both the Grand Duke’s monocle and the camera framing and angle, voyeuristically and appreciatively, “focus on and frame Cinderella, particularly her legs and feet” (Wood 32). Bell points out the remarkable difference between Cinderella’s beauty and the appearance of her stepsisters. Indeed, the stepsisters’ kitschy outfits, haughty noses, big feet, flat chests and disproportionally huge bottoms turn them into caricatures. Bell remarks that, in ballet productions of *Cinderella*, the parts of the stepsisters were often performed by men in drag: “Disney’s Anastasia and Drizella, with their flat chests, huge bustles, and awkward curtsies, could as well be read as comic drag acts” (Bell 112). Cinderella’s voice, according to Wood, resembles a “well-modulated middle-American [accent], fit for newscasters” (Wood 32). She also mentions her ability for keeping a tune: just like Snow White, she sings beautifully, unlike her stepsisters (ibid.).

Unlike the statement of Yzaguirre that each of the older Disney heroines wears “a full-length dress complete with high-heeled shoes”, Cinderella’s Brown skirt only covers the upper parts of her legs, and she wears flat black working shoes (Yzaguirre 51). Except when attending the royal ball, she wears a rather shabby working suit, with a torn apron and long

sleeves. Wood links the colour of Cinderella's clothes to her disposition: "In *Cinderella*, the heroine's warm brown outfit and yellow-toned skin and hair ... contrast her with the cold blue-toned, grays, and black coloring of the villains ... Cinderella gleams warmly in the cold room and reminds us visually of her shining personality" (Wood 30-31). In a similar way she contrasts Cinderella with her stepsisters: "The ugly stepsisters wear brighter colors than their mother does, but the colors clash and exaggerate their plainness: pink and green nightgowns, for example, with red and mud-brow hair. In addition, the colors they wear are blue-toned rather than yellow-toned, emphasizing their basic coldness in contrast with Cinderella's warmth" (ibid.).

Cinderella is described as graceful and, according to Do Rozario, she dances with the prince "in regal ballet style, spinning and twirling gracefully across the dance floor" (Yzaguirre 28). From the King's musical orders, the audience can infer that it is a waltz they are dancing. Even when walking, both Snow White and Cinderella move "in the hips-forward mode of ballet dancers" (Hoisington n. pag.). The dancing elegance of Cinderella is counterpointed by the clumsiness of her stepsisters: "Their strides are always heel first, bent knee exaggerations of incorrect ballet postures and movements" (Bell 112). Bell argues the use of "dancing" as a metaphor for the "older" teenager's sexual maturation is problematic¹⁸:

The formal carriage of the animated heroines is constructed on the bodies of actual women, shaped by the strenuous rigors and artful artificiality of classical ballet. Classical dance has always maneuvered natural body positions into unnatural ones; only the culturally coded ways of looking at ballet transform and render these stances and movements as 'natural' grace, form, and line. (Bell 111).

On the other hand, because these princesses, as dancers, "have backbone", "their bodies are portraits of strength, discipline, and control" (Bell 112). Bell adds that the *pas de deux*, in which "the upper body is stressed, accomplished through elongated necks and accentuated backs, his military straight, [hers] arched", both represents and replaces the sexual act; as Agnes de Mille claims, "Dancing represents sex in its least costly form, free from imprisonment and free to a great extent from the emotional responsibility and, above all, as a sure thing, independent of someone else's pleasure. In other words, it means freedom from sex ... In a strange transmutation dancing is a form of asceticism – almost a form of celibacy" (de Mille in Bell 113).

¹⁸ Steven Coppens points at the continuing importance paid to ball dancing in the United States, where the "prom night", at the end of teenagers' high school career is still seen as a key transition moment (Coppens 60).

Like Snow White, Cinderella appears sweet and soft (Van Oost 25). The mice introduce her as “nice, very nice” and, despite her unfair treatment, she “remained ever gentle and kind” (*Cinderella*). When offered help, from the mice or her Fairy Godmother, she is extremely thankful and easily pleased: “It’s more than I ever hoped for” (ibid.). Her goodness is even heightened by comparison with her stepsisters, who are sly, lazy, careless, selfish and spoiled. Although the stepsisters are themselves clumsy and dim-witted, they are very demanding towards Cinderella, impatiently ordering her about. Their affected quarrelling sometimes results in uncontrolled violence, for instance when tearing apart Cinderella’s dress or punching the Prince’s servant with the glass slipper.¹⁹ Although looking rather ugly, they are incessantly vain. Cinderella too is aware of her looks and pays attention to them; Wood calls her “vain” and “a knowing beauty”: “she enjoys looking at her own reflection and does so frequently in the movie” (Wood 35-36). Although rather modest, she is eager to please with her looks; about her dress she asks “Isn’t it lovely? Do you like it? Do you think it will do?” (*Cinderella*). When a new mouse arrives, Cinderella picks out little doll’s clothes for him. Just like Snow White with the dwarfs, she takes pity on the mice (“Oh, the poor little thing’s scared”), mothers them like children and gives them orders (ibid.). Wood claims that “their childlike diction also emphasizes their role as surrogate children to Cinderella, and makes them ‘cuter’” (Wood 32). Coppens thinks Cinderella’s mothering mainly consists in protecting her little mice against the evil cat Lucifer (Coppens 71).

There is a clear evolution in comparison to the portrayal of clumsy Snow White: “Disney’s Cinderella is capable: she waits on her stepfamily hand and foot (we see her climbing stairs with breakfast trays in both hands and one balanced on her head), cleans everything beautifully, and still has the time to sing and dream” (Wood 36). I think the amount of chores Cinderella’s stepmother and stepsisters command her to do is such a never-ending list that it becomes parodic.²⁰ Cinderella’s intention to adjust an old dress of her mother shows that she is creative as well. But most of all, her orderliness is accentuated: “An American innovation, Disney’s Cinderella is immaculately clean. As soon as she wakes up, she makes her bed, showers with the help of the (female) birds, primps at the cracked mirror,

¹⁹ As I will explain later on, violence is mostly associated with men in the Disney movies.

²⁰ Lady Tremaine orders Cinderella, among other things: “There’s the large carpet in the main hall, clean it! And the windows, upstairs and down, wash them! Oh yes, and the tapestries, and the draperies, do them again! And don’t forget the garden. Then scrub the terrace, sweep the walls and the stairs, clean the chimneys. And of course, there’s the mending, and the sewing, and the laundry. Oh yes, and one more thing, see that Lucifer gets his bath” (*Cinderella*).

and enjoys the benefits of her civilizing efforts among the animals who surround her” (ibid.). Wood, who calls her “the ideal housewife”, remarks: “In terms of the heroes and heroines, Disney maintained their ideal status [from the original fairy tales], but translated that perfection into American terms: both Snow White and Cinderella, in Disney, are good and happy housekeepers, an occupation that European *märchens* often depicted as demeaning ... Certainly no European version shows Cinderella taking the kind of pleasure in housework that Disney’s Cinderella does” (Wood 30; 36).

Naomi Wood claims that most commentators “call Disney’s heroine insipid”, a characteristic taken from the Perrault story rather than the Grimms’²¹: “Perrault’s Cinderella is sugar-sweet and insipidly good, and she completely lacks initiative” (Wood 26). Do Rozario claims that Cinderella, just like Snow White and the “older heroines”, is “passive” and “unchallenging”; she “obediently cooked and cleaned for her stepmother and stepsisters, despite their constant verbal abuse” (Yzaguirre 18-19). Astonishingly, as Yzaguirre states, “the estate that she works so hard to upkeep once belonged to her own father”: “Cinderella was abused, humiliated, and finally forced to become a servant in her own house” (Yzaguirre 47; *Cinderella*). Colette Dowling, who wrote *The Cinderella Complex*, even saw Cinderella as most representative of the helpless, dependent Disney heroine in need of protection. According to her, “women fear freedom and independence; they need someone to lean on, to rescue them and alleviate the anxiety of their own ambitions”: “We’ve been ... taught from the time we were very young to do only those things which allow us to feel comfortable and secure. In fact we were not trained for freedom at all, but for its categorical opposite – dependency” (Downing cited in Yzaguirre 19). Jill Henke agrees: “of the three older heroines, Cinderella best illustrates Disney’s stifling of its heroines’ voices and sense of self. She does not stand up for herself against her stepfamily’s abusive treatment of her and does not resist her isolation from society. She allows them to have complete control over what she does and where she goes” (Henke cited in Yzaguirre 19). Bell too claims that, like the other “older heroines”, Cinderella is a model of passivity and victimage (Bell 112). According to Marcia Lieberman, the state of victimage provides the heroine with some kind of masochistic pleasure: “the girl in tears is invariably the heroine ... The child who dreams of being a

²¹ Maria Tatar comments on these two versions: “Perrault’s version of 1697 from *Tales of Mother Goose* is among the first full literary elaborations of the story. It was followed by the more violent version recorded in 1812 by the Brothers Grimm ... the Grimms’ Cinderella is far more resourceful than Perrault’s Cendrillon, on whom Disney modeled his cinematic heroine of 1950” (Tatar 114).

Cinderella dreams perform not only of being elevated by a prince, but also of being a glamorous sufferer or victim” (Lieberman in Hoisington n. pag.).

Walt Disney, however, declared that he envisioned a stronger image of Cinderella: “I’d make Cinderella a sparkling, alive girl, even going so far as to give her a few human weaknesses ... we wish Cinderella to have a certain strength of character quite unlike the fairy story version of the heroine” (Wood 35). Wood illustrates this claim with Cinderella’s “cattiness” in her mocking remarks about her sisters’ singing abilities (Wood 35). I’d like to add that, whenever her bossy stepfamily is out of sight, she behaves like a giggly and rebellious girl: “Well, there’s one thing, they can’t order me to stop dreaming” (*Cinderella*). Moreover, when treated unfairly by her stepmother or accused of things she hasn’t done, she clearly objects, fuming on the inside. She stands up for her own rights, for example when the invitation letter for the ball arrives (“Well, that means I can go too ... Well, why not? After all, I’m still a member of the family”) or when the stepmother wants to lock her in her room (“Oh, you can’t! You just can’t! Let me out! You must let me out! You can’t keep me in here!”) (ibid.). To me, this seems like a clear indication of protest, showing her not to be so entirely passive and unchallenging after all.

Besides, her obedience can also be seen as a way of keeping her dignity in front of others: she never openly bursts into tears, shows no resentment and tries to minimize the importance of the ball: “Oh well, guess my dress will just have to wait ... Oh well, what’s a royal ball? After all, I suppose it would be frightfully dull and, and, boring and, and, completely, completely wonderful” (ibid.). Only when her dress is ripped apart by her stepsisters does she sink into despair and start to cry: “It’s just no use, no use at all. I can’t believe, not anymore. There’s nothing left to believe in, nothing” (ibid.). Cinderella has a firm sense of self-control, a quality valued highly by her stepmother as well (although the stepmother does not always adhere to her own regulations). Unlike her stepsisters, who “continually bicker”, Wood claims about Cinderella:

[S]he contains her anger at her stepfamily and at the ball she remembers the time, and though obviously preferring to stay, leaves appropriately. Only when she realizes that she has fallen in love with the prince and that he wants to marry her, does she lose control of herself, drops a serving tray, and lets the stepmother deduce the truth ... Cinderella’s lapse is pardonable, simply making her more “human”: it shows she is truly “in love” (Wood 36).

Naomi Wood explains the deeper meanings of Cinderella’s self-control: “Disney’s work presupposes a normative standard of American-style “civilité” –a standard that values reason

and realism over mystery and irrationality, sentiment over calculation, the morally right over the temporally powerful” (Wood 26). Just like the fairy tale by Charles Perrault on which the movie was based, the Disney movie is meant to civilize, “presenting examples of ideal types modelling proper behavior” (ibid.).

Self-control and devotion are seen as values foregrounded by patriarchal order, and it is because Cinderella obeys these norms that she is rewarded with the fulfilment of her dreams: “it promises that those women who follow the rules by being self-contained and submissive to a patriarchal order will be rewarded” (Wood 27). Wood states that “Cinderella offers the quasi-religious reassurance that hard work, clean living, self-control, and adherence to the ideal will produce the desired result, in this case, appropriate to the American Dream for Girls: rich and handsome Mr. Right ... Her acceptance and promotion of patriarchal values, as exhibited by her allegiance to patriarchal law and order and the word of her fairy godmother, provide the justification for the fulfilment of her dream” (Wood 34; 38). Wood draws on Freud’s notion that dreams express unfulfilled wishes from Freud, although she disagrees with his theory that people should be “liberated” from their dreams in order to “get them to deal with Real Life instead of the fantasies dominating their behavior”: “In Disney, dreams *can* come true; the movie insists reality is not all that bad” (Wood 33). Indeed, in the Disney universe, dreams, unrealistic as they may seem, are bound to come true: “Have faith in dreams and someday your rainbow will come smiling through ... No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dreams that you wish will come true” (*Cinderella*).²² At one point, however, Cinderella seems to agree with Freud’s view when teaching her dog Bruno that “dreams can be unacceptable wishes, which, if acted upon, could cost the dreamer his or her security and livelihood. Both Cinderella and Bruno, under the rule of an unjust and arbitrary authority, must suppress their dreams in the daytime” (Wood 38-39): “You know the orders; So if you don’t want to lose a nice warm bed, you’d better get rid of those dreams. You know how? Just learn to like cats ... I know it’s not easy, but at least we should try to get along together” (*Cinderella*).

²² *The Little Mermaid* is one of the few movies to mock the inevitable realization of the dream with the help of a benign being: when Flotsam and Jetsam try to entice Ariel to the evil Sea Witch Ursula, they persuade her with a parody on the “dreams come true” rhetoric: “Poor child ... Don’t be scared. We represent someone who can help you. Someone who can make all your dreams come true. Just imagine, you and your prince, together forever” (*The Little Mermaid*).

According to Pamela Colby O'Brien, Cinderella's display of "charm, grace and beauty" makes her more appealing to the Prince, which is why he picks her for a dance instead of the other "eligible maiden" at the ball (O'Brien cited in Yzaguirre 23). Giroux argues that, "since girls are chosen for their beauty, it is easy for a child to infer that beauty leads to wealth, that being chosen means getting rich" (Giroux cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Yzaguirre points out that, as was the case with Snow White, her beauty is the only reason for her stepmother and stepsisters to despise her (Yzaguirre 44). She claims that, analogous with Snow White and other princesses, Cinderella depends on a man (and a marriage) to save her from her current unhappy circumstances: the Grand Duke is made to roam the country in search of the girl whose foot fits the glass slipper (Yzaguirre 23). Furthermore, in order to be able to try the slipper, she needs to be freed from her room by her (male) animal friends (Yzaguirre 44). I'd like to object that men are not the only ones who lead the story into the right direction; without the Fairy Godmother, a female character, she never would have reached the ball in the first place. Moreover, near the end of the movie, when everything seems lost because the glass slipper is broken, Cinderella surprises everyone by coming up with the other glass slipper: "But you see, I have the other slipper" (*Cinderella*). Not only does she have an extra trump, she strikes the viewer as not being so stupid after all.

Cinderella's "dream", out of which she awakens at the beginning of the movie, is probably to escape her current situation. The means by which she wants to attain this goal, however, is not through rebellion of her own, but through resignation and the hope that someone will rescue her, as already mentioned above. Her main desire is thus to attend the royal ball for some diversion and, consequently, to meet the Prince and marry. The mother role, however, although hinted at in Cinderella's treatment of the mice, is only directly associated with marriage by the King. As the Prince's father, the King's main goal seems to have his son married and providing him with grandchildren (he even dreams about them): "No buts about it, my son has been avoiding his responsibilities long enough! It's high time he marries and settles down! ... I want to see my grandchildren before I go ... I want to hear the pitter-patter of little feet again ... there must be at least one who'd be a suitable mother, uh – a suitable wife" (ibid.). The King is under the impression that, when a girl and a boy meet, they are bound to fall in love: "With his silly romantic ideas ... Love, ha! Just a boy meeting a girl under the right conditions. So we're arranging the conditions ... if all the eligible maidens in my kingdom just happened to be there, why he's bound to show interest in one of them, isn't he? The moment he does, soft lights, romantic music, all the trimmings. It can't possibly

fail, can it?” (ibid.).²³ Moreover, the King never considers the option that the girl his son has chosen might possibly *not* want to marry him: “You’ll try this on every maid in my kingdom, and if the shoe fits, bring her in!” (ibid.). The personality of his son’s future wife seems of no importance to the King: “Who is she? Where does she live? No matter. We have more important things to discuss. Arrangements for the wedding” (ibid.). Similar to Snow White, Cinderella falls in love with her Prince at first sight. This time, however, emphasis is put on the Prince’s falling in love at first sight (similarly, he is the one who is expected to marry instead of the girl): “Suddenly, he looks up, for lo, there she stands, the girl of his dreams. Whom she is or when she came he knows not, nor does he care. But his heart tells him that here, here is the maid predestined to be his bride” (ibid.). Strikingly, Cinderella initially has no clue that the random stranger she fell in love with is in fact the Prince: “Oh, the Prince, I haven’t met the Prince” (ibid.).²⁴ Her misinterpretation can be seen as naivety or, more positively, as an honesty in love, regardless of class or money – as opposed to Snow White, who from the beginning wished for a Prince as a husband and not any ordinary man.

Wood argues that Cinderella, unlike aiming for a marriage, “does not wish for any more than this one night at the ball” and “because she asks for so little, her wishes are eventually fulfilled” (Wood 38). Regarding the limited scope of her dreams, Wood argues: “The Cinderella dreams of Disney are domestic dreams that assimilate the ideological structures that surround the movie. Rather than challenging the status quo, the dreams in this movie replicate it, fitting each dreamer into an ‘appropriate’ social position, determined by his or her morphology” (Wood 34). Wood calls her dreams particularly feminine, in contrast with masculine dreams of adventure: “This is not a quest that requires leaving home but being true to the wish. Sociologically, the dreams here are opiates of a sort in that they demand and receive a kind of subservience, an obedience to larger social structures: the institutions of love, marriage, procreation, and of patriarchal order” (Wood 35). Love is presented as the thing that “makes life worthwhile” (*Cinderella*). This duality in prospects – marriage for girls, adventure for boys – confirms Hoisington’s claim that marriage serves to obstruct girls’ craving for adventure (Hoisington n. pag.).

²³ In subsequent movies, the idea that the perfect conditions for romance can be arranged will return. Sebastian says to Ariel that “[f]irst, we’ve got to create the mood” (*The Little Mermaid*). Lumière reassures Beast that “[t]here will be music, romantic candlelight provided by myself” (*Beauty and the Beast*).

²⁴ The Prince does not know her name either: “No one, not even the Prince, knows who that girl is” (*Cinderella*).

Lady Tremaine, Cinderella's stepmother, will be punished at the end of the movie because she adhered a view on marriage based on personal profit instead of true love: throughout the whole movie she tried to match her daughters with the prince, merely to reach a higher class and attain more luxury (Coppens 98). Indeed, from the moment she is introduced in the movie, the narrator warns us: "Cold, cruel, and bitterly jealous of Cinderella's charm and beauty, she was grimly determined to forward the interests of her own two awkward daughters" (*Cinderella*). Lady Tremaine equals Snow White's Queen, and the other female villains, in being jealous of the princess's beauty, and "teaching her daughters the skills they need to attract men" (Wood n. pag.). This is the only movie, however, where the advice of the female villain is directed at girls other than the heroine: "Now, remember, when you're introduced to his Highness, be sure ... There is still a chance that one of you can get him ... Girls, now remember, this is your last chance. Don't fail me! ... Girls, girls, your manners!" (*Cinderella*).

Although located "in a faraway land", the whole cast remains as white as in the previous Disney Princesses movie (*ibid.*). Again, whiteness is falsely presented as a universal and neutral ideological default. With regards to class, Tanner mentions that there is an "unequal power division" in *Cinderella* (Tanner et al. 365). While the Prince belongs to royalty, Cinderella is of lower nobility: her father is described as a "gentleman", his second wife "a woman of good family" (*Cinderella*). She is looked down on by her stepfamily, who mock her role as a servant: "Oh, pay no attention to her! It is only Cinderella, our scullery maid ... From the kitchen ... She's out of her mind ... just an imaginative child" (*ibid.*). Still, as the opening tune predicts, she was predestined to climb the social ladder: "Though you're dressed in rags, you wear an air of queenly grace. Anyone can see a throne would be your proper place" (*ibid.*). Bell points at the inseparability of royalty and dancing: "Royal lineage and bearing are personified in the erect, ceremonial carriage of ballet and manifested not only in the dance sequences, but in the heroines' graceful solitude and poised interactions with others" (Bell 111). Naomi Wood, however, claims that, in *Cinderella*, "Disney's royalty ... are presented as more bourgeois, more American" than, for instance, ancient European royalty (Wood 30).

3. AURORA / BRIAR ROSE IN *SLEEPING BEAUTY* (1959)

I'll first clarify the double name briefly (and from now on refer to this princess as Aurora): Aurora is the girl's birth name as a princess ("Yes, they named her after the dawn, for she filled their lives with sunshine"), and Briar Rose is the name given to her to accommodate her forged identity as a peasant girl (*Sleeping Beauty*). At her birth, she is given "the gift of beauty": "One gift, of beauty rare, gold of sunshine in her hair, lips that shame the red, red rose" (ibid.). Even Maleficent confirms that "the princess shall indeed grow in grace and beauty, beloved by all who know her" (ibid.). Solomon designates Aurora as "Disney's most beautiful heroine" (Solomon cited in Bell 110). Her age in the movie is explicitly mentioned: she has just turned sixteen. As Bell states, even more than with Cinderella, "[c]omparisons of this statuesque blonde to the contemporaneous Barbie doll are difficult to avoid (Bell 110). Her golden hair is strikingly voluminous and undulating, worn loose with a coronet separating her fringe. Like Cinderella, her eyes are brown with long black eyelashes. Unlike Cinderella, however, she has more of the gothic, angular shapes attributed to the stepmother in the previous movie. She is extremely long and slim, has a pointed chin and the figure of an hourglass. This time I agree with Yzaguirre's claim that, as an "older heroine", *Sleeping Beauty's* body is chastely covered by her traditional long dress (Yzaguirre 51). In the fashion of the fifties, she wears plain beige three-quarter sleeves and a darker A-line three-quarter skirt. Her neck is covered, and when walking outside, she wears a brown veil. Her wedding dress, converting from pink to blue and back, might emphasize her resemblance to a Barbie doll, while the discussion of colour could go back to the discussion which colour, pink or blue, is suitable for baby boys or girls. She walks incredibly stately, with an almost religious solemnity. When she dances, she equals Snow White and Cinderella in grace, lifting her long skirt from the ground. Moreover, this heroine too has been granted "the gift of song" (*Sleeping Beauty*).

As for her personality, Aurora is called "sweet" and "all of her subjects adore her" (ibid.). Like her two female predecessors, Aurora too is seen by Do Rozario as a passive and unchallenging victim (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 19; 47). Overall, I think she gives a rather static impression. Before she is aware of her royal blood, she cleans the cottage of her three "aunts" and picks berries, living like a peasant girl. When her true identity is revealed, although obviously sad about her being married off to some Prince she has never met, she obeys and merely starts weeping. Only accidentally does her fiancé turn out to be the

handsome boy she met earlier in the forest. Jill Henke too stresses that Aurora's fate is completely determined by external forces: "she has no input or voice regarding the matter" (Henke cited in Yzaguirre 20). Nicole Arthur points out that, just like Snow White, Aurora is "paired with [her] true [love] while asleep" (Arthur cited in Yzaguirre 25). She too is merely a beautiful object, and needs the kiss of a Prince, "true love's first kiss", to undo the spell (Yzaguirre 44; 49; Wood 29, *Sleeping Beauty*). Even her nickname, Sleeping Beauty, indicates that being beautiful and asleep are her main occupations. Like Snow White, her existence before marriage seems of no importance, and she might as well appear dead in staying asleep: "One day you'll awaken to love's first kiss, 'til then, Sleeping Beauty, sleep on" (*Sleeping Beauty*).

Naomi Wood, however, links Aurora with later Disney heroines Ariel and Jasmine because of the "drama between old-fashioned (read: "ethnic, unassimilated") parents and modern (read: "WASP American") young people" (Wood n. pag.). *Sleeping Beauty* complains about the way she is treated by her "aunts" (who forbid her to speak to strangers) and titteringly rebels against it (even if only in her dreams): "Why do they still treat me like a child ... they never want me to meet anyone. But you know something? I fooled them. I have met someone ... and then, I wake up" (*Sleeping Beauty*). When she does meet a stranger, she first reacts as shy as Snow White, but enthusiastically arranges to meet again the same evening.

I would like to argue that Maleficent, like her evil female predecessors in the previous movies, tries to lure the innocent heroine into sin. She encourages Aurora to touch a spindle and prick her finger: "Touch the spindle ... Touch it, I say!" (ibid.). The blood lost due to the pricking of a finger is connected by Tatar, who came across a similar passage in the Grimm's version of *Snow White*, with the wish for and almost immediately following impregnation with a child (Tatar cited in Grimm 243). Maleficent is definitely reminiscent of the sexually confident femmes fatales from Hollywood movies. Her treatment of Prince Phillip, who is physically appraised, kept in confinement and attached to chains, even contains some hints at possible sexual abuse: "Well, this is a pleasant surprise. I set my trap for a peasant, and lo, I catch a prince. Away with him! But gently, my pets, gently. I have plans for our royal guest ... What a pity Prince Phillip can't be here and enjoy the celebration. Come, we must go to the dungeon and cheer him up" (*Sleeping Beauty*). Like Snow White's Queen and Cinderella's stepmother, she seems to be jealous of others' beauty or happiness in love; just like them, she defies true love: "The years roll by, but a hundred years to a steadfast

heart are but a day. And now, the gates of a dungeon part and our Prince is free to go his way. Of he rides on his noble steed, a valiant figure, straight and tall, to wake his 'love' with 'love's first kiss' and prove that 'true love conquers all'" (ibid.).

Yet, again, love strikes at first sight: "I know what you do, you'll love me at once" (*Sleeping Beauty*).²⁵ The following quote illustrates the naivety and ignorance of Sleeping Beauty on the subject of love: "I wonder if my heart keeps singing, will my song go winging to someone, who'll find me and bring back a love song to me" (ibid.). Just like Cinderella, she falls in love without knowing the boy's name or royal status. But, as with Snow White, there is the feeling they know each other already: "I know you, I walked with you once upon a dream. I know you, the gleam in your eyes so familiar a gleam" (ibid.). Like Cinderella, she is dreaming of meeting a man as a way out of her current life: "But they say if you dream a thing more than once, it's sure to come true" (ibid.). Immediately after meeting a man, Sleeping Beauty envisions a possible future: "This is the happiest day of my life, everything's so wonderful. Wait 'til you meet him" (ibid.). Love, again, is seen as the logical result of two people meeting (Tanner et al. 364-365). King Hubert is the most radical father with regards to this matter: "What's this about anyway ... The children are bound to fall in love with each other" (*Sleeping Beauty*). King Stephan, on the other hand, has his doubts about the immediacy of their love: "Now, be reasonable, Hubert. After all, Aurora knows nothing about all this ... It may come as quite a shock" (ibid.). As with the previous protagonists, "marriage and/or children were the expected course for couples" (Tanner et al. 360). At the day of her wedding, Aurora acts in a caring and mothering way towards the Prince's father, while herself honouring *her* mother, who is the first one she embraces after her arrival at the castle. King Hubert, Prince Phillip's father, is the one who clings to this vision the most: "And now, to the new home ... Children need a nest of their own, what? A place to raise their little brood, eh? ... Getting my Phillip aren't you? Want to see our grandchildren, don't we? ... Well, there's no time to lose. Getting on in years!" (*Sleeping Beauty*). King Stephan, Aurora's father, follows a more moderate and patient course: "Well, I suppose, in time" (ibid.). The practice of marrying off people is questioned for the first time. Aurora quite easily resigns in her being betrothed to some prince she (thinks she) does not know and obeys to the fairies' commands: "You've met some stranger? ... Tonight, we're taking you back to your father, King Stephan ... I'm sorry, child, but you must never see that young man again" (ibid.). Merryweather, the more down-

²⁵ As a little boy, however, Prince Phillip clearly displayed an aversion to baby Aurora, his future bride.

to-earth, feminist one of the fairies, is the first one to object: “Oh, I don’t see why she has to marry any old prince” (ibid.).²⁶ Like Ariel, Jasmine, and Pocahontas in the following movies, Prince Phillip disagrees on the ideas of the previous generation with regards to marriage: he is determined to marry the girl he loves – whether she is of royal descent or not – and planned to meet her instead of arriving at his arranged wedding: “Now father, you’re living in the past. This is the fourteenth century” (ibid.).

Like *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty* takes place “in a faraway land”. Remarkably, however, the cast is not only white but almost entirely blond. I’d also like to note that, although eventually both Aurora and the Prince turn out to have royal blood, their family would have been a lot less pleased if one of them had chosen a partner of poorer origins: “A peasant girl? You’re going to marry a peasant girl? You’re joking ... No, you can’t do this to me. Give up the throne, the kingdom, for some nobody? By Harry, I won’t have it! You’re a Prince! And you’re going to marry a Princess!” (ibid.).²⁷ Aurora too is told she cannot forsake her predestination as a queen: “A crown to wear in grace and beauty, as is thy right and royal duty” (ibid.). Eventually, there seems to be no need to address the issue further, because the wedding turns out as planned.

²⁶ From the start, Merryweather was quite cynical about the fairies’ ability to raise a child and perform domestic chores (without using magic): “We don’t know how ... But who’ll wash? And cook? ... But I’ve never baked a fancy cake ... But you can’t sew, and she’s never cooked ... I think we’ve had enough of this nonsense” (*Sleeping Beauty*). She functions as the antithesis to Fauna, who is the hopelessly naïve, benevolent fairy, ardently desiring the task of mothering someone: “Take care of the baby? Oh, I’d like that ... And wash it and dress it and rock it to sleep. Oh, I’d love it” (ibid.). All three fairies, however, act like (grand)mothers towards Aurora, raising her as if she were their own child, and fearing for the moment they will have to let go of her: “Oh gracious, how that child has grown” “Oh, it seems only yesterday we brought her here” “Just a tiny baby” “After today, she’ll be a princess, and we won’t have no Briar Rose” “We all knew this day had to come” “But why did it have to come so soon?” “After all, we’ve had her for sixteen years” “Sixteen wonderful years” (ibid.).

²⁷ Maleficent too, upon inviting herself to the christening feast of Aurora, mocks the three fairies because they belong to a lower class: “Quite an assemblage ... royalty, nobility, the gentry, and, ha ha ha, how quaint, even the rabble” (*Cinderella*).

4. ARIEL IN *THE LITTLE MERMAID* (1992)

Ariel is said to be the first Disney heroine to display “more modern and unconventional” looks (Yzaguirre 52). Essentially, however, this means she still follows the prevalent beauty ideals, but is more openly presented as a sex object. Henry Giroux pictures her as “a cross between a typical rebellious teenager and a Southern California fashion model” (Hoisington n. pag.). O’Brien points at her “thin waist and prominent bust”, while Giroux even describes her as a “slightly anorexic Barbie doll”, altogether “a dangerous model for young women” (O’Brien and Giroux cited in Zarranz García n. pag.).²⁸ The tresses of her red voluminous hair move wildly instead of “being pinned back neatly” (Yzaguirre 53). She has big blue eyes, a tip-tilted nose and a red pout. Celeste Lacroix, however, argues that Ariel still has the “porcelain skin tone” and “dainty physical features” of the “older heroines” (Lacroix cited in Yzaguirre 29).

The “newer heroines” are said to be portrayed as sexual beings (Van Oost 27). Ariel and her sisters are put on display in a shell, as sexual objects: “Your daughters, they will be spectacular” (*The Little Mermaid*). Ariel’s clothes, “nothing more than a seashell bra to cover her upper body”, enhance her status as a sex object (O’Brien cited in Yzaguirre 30). Pauline Kael called Ariel a “teen-age tootsies in a flirty seashell bra” (Kael cited in Bell 114). Even as a human, she wears dresses with a plunging neckline and bare shoulders. Bell remarks that, apparently, “the costuming of a mermaid is problematic”, since Disney did not want to show any bare breasts (Bell 114). Ariel is especially aware of her own beauty, posing in her first human clothes and styling her hair to one side of her face. In her giggly childish way, she enchants men: as Ursula says: “The little tramp! Ah, she’s better than I thought” (ibid.). According to O’Brien, Ariel’s “charm, grace and beauty” offers her some advantage over her other sisters and makes her the favourite of her father Triton. Ariel is shown in a “coquettish striptease pose” several times (ibid.). This “look, but don’t touch” message would recall “the conventions of the burlesque”, like those of Busby Berkeley’s movies, which Haskell describes as follows: “American eroticism has always been a different provenance and complexion than the European variety, an enjoyment both furtive and bland that is closer to a blushing cartoon than sensual celebration ... His was a vision of women as sex objects raised

²⁸ Tseñlon argues that anorexia nervosa serves as the twentieth century version of the nineteenth century epidemic of hysteria; both would be alternative ways of communication (through their body) for women who felt “suppressed by patriarchal domination” (Tseñlon 1023).

to a kind of comic sublimity, a state of formal grace” (Haskell cited in Bell 114). Tseëlon points at Ariel’s ambivalent sexuality as a Mermaid, known for an “impossibility of satisfying the desire she provokes” because of her fishtail: “Her cosmological anomaly prefigures her present-day alignment with the enigma of the woman caught up between conflicting images of nature and culture, seduction and nurturing, evil and holiness” (Tseëlon 1019). In addition, he claims that mermaids normally create a distance by avoiding sexual intimacy; because Ariel – by letting her tail split into legs – show her availability, she is rendered less desirable for the Prince, which makes him choose another girl as a desired object (Tseëlon 1025). This analysis is reminiscent of my introductory argument on the conflicting messages on sexuality received by adolescent girls during the 1990s.

I think Scuddle the seabird, in a similar way as the mirror in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, is representative of men in general, staring at Ariel and telling her how to work on her looks: “It’s a ‘dinglehopper’. Humans use these little babies to straighten their hair out. See? Just a little twirl here and a yank there and voila, you’ve got an aesthetically pleasing configuration of hair that humans go nuts over! ... Look at you, look at you! There’s something different. Don’t tell me. It’s your hairdo, right? You’ve been using the ‘dinglehopper’, right? ... New seashells? ... Now Ariel, I’m telling you, if you want to be a human, the first thing you’ve got to do is dress like one [whistles] You look great, kid. You look sensational” (*The Little Mermaid*). Sebastian is giving advice on how to attract men as well: “Now, we got to make a plan to make that boy kiss you. Tomorrow, when he takes you for that ride, you’ve got to look your best. You’ve got to bat your eyes, like this. You’ve got to pucker up your lips, like this” (ibid.).

Yet, most advice on the gendered behaviour Ariel has to display in order to become a woman still comes from Ursula, the female villain. She assures Ariel that she will not need her voice to seduce men:

You’ll have your looks, your pretty face. And don’t underestimate the importance of body language ... The men up there don’t like a lot of blabber. They think a girl who gossips is a bore. Yes, on land it’s much preferred for ladies not to say a word, and, after all, dear, what is idle prattle for? Come on then! They’re not all that impressed with conversation. True gentleman avoid it when they can. But they dote and swoon and fawn on a lady who’s withdrawn. It’s she who holds her tongue who gets the man. (ibid.).

Like Snow White’s Queen, she is intelligent: “Of course, I always was a girl with an eye for a bargain” (ibid.). She claims, however, that her magic is used to help others as a match maker or even a plastic surgeon: “And I fortunately know a little magic. It’s a talent that I always

have possessed. And here, lately, please don't laugh, I use it on behalf of the miserable, lonely, and depressed. Pathetic. Poor unfortunate souls. In pain. In need. This one longing to be thinner. That one wants to get the girl, and do I help them, yes indeed" (ibid.). She equals the other female villains in mocking true love: "I can't stand it. It's too easy. The child is in love with a human ... So much for true love!" (ibid.). Like Maleficent, she suite enjoys the looks of the prince herself: "Now you're here because you have a thing for this human, this, uh, prince fellow. Not that I blame you. He is quite a catch, isn't he?" (ibid.). Her true prey, however, is King Triton: she flirtatiously touches his trident when he passes ("Why, King Triton, how are you?") and wants to own and humiliate him as her captive: "And then I'll make him writhe! I'll see him wriggle like a worm on a hook!" (ibid.). With her beauty spot, low sensual voice, gala dress, and voluptuously shape, she represents the past glory of Hollywood divas.²⁹ Her grotesque body is interpreted as "[transgressing] multiple boundaries, becoming a potential site for feminist pleasure (Zarranz García n. pag.). As Marry Russo states, "the grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change ... opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek" (Russo cited in Zarranz García n. pag.). Sells, however, argues Ursula, with her excessive and theatrical "cross-dressing", rather presents gender as an artificial construction: "Ariel learns that gender is performance; Ursula doesn't simply symbolize woman, she performs woman ... Ariel learns gender, not as a natural category, but as a performed construct" (Sells cited in Hoisington n. pag.; Sells cited in Zarranz García n. pag.).

Although she has a beautiful singing voice, Ariel has to give up her voice in order to become human. Giroux marks the sacrifice of her voice as a price for "a teen-aged girl's passage from adolescence to womanhood"; Laura Sells calls it a "physical sacrifice" (Giroux and Sells cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Susan White remarks that, although "we live in an age of plastic surgery when, more than ever, becoming a woman may be marked by carving one's body into an acceptable size and shape", the transition to womanhood is not, as was the case with the original 1837 tale by Hans Christian Andersen, accompanied by extreme pain (White cited in Hoisington n. pag.).³⁰ Patrick D. Murphy claims that "the unnatural transformation of

²⁹ At one point, she literally recalls her past glory: "In my day, we had fantastical feasts, when I lived in the palace. And now, look at me. Wasted away to practically nothing; Banished and exiled and practically starving" (*The Little Mermaid*).

³⁰ Deborah Ross refers to Warner, who discusses the connection of the Mermaid's blood and pain in the Hans Christian Andersen tale "with the dawning of female sexuality" (Ross 65). Tseelon too claims that "[e]xiting the pre-sexual world and entry into sexuality is represented through the symbolism of the transformation of the fish

Ariel is approved, since it elevates her to a higher nature through participation in a more progressive – because industrial – world” (Murphy cited in Van Den Abbeele 53). Remarkably, Ariel chooses this sacrifice voluntarily. She is willing to give up many things to acquire the love of Eric: “What would I give to live where you are! What would I pay to stay here beside you! What would I do to see you smiling at me!” (*The Little Mermaid*). Hoisington adds that, besides abandoning her voice, Ariel thinks of it as a natural sacrifice too to leave her father and sisters (Hoisington n. pag.). Because she opts for the human world, Ariel loses the support and strength she normally has in the underwater world and is rendered helpless. Unaware of what is expected of women above sea level, the Prince is free to manipulate her (Van Den Abbeele 54). According to Mies and Shiva, women sometimes devalue their own positions to attain a higher hierarchical level, i.e. that of men (Mies and Shiva cited in Van Den Abbeele 54). O’Brien thus marks Disney’s *Little Mermaid* as merely guided by “self-interest” and contrasts it with the original Andersen’s tale, in which “*Little Mermaid* is faced with a choice: she must either kill the prince (who loves her only as a sister) and his bride which will allow her to become a mermaid again or return to the ocean where she will die and become sea foam”; her subsequent self-sacrifice is then rewarded by turning her into an angel (O’Brien cited in Dundes 357).

Ruth Bottigheimer already claimed that the Grimm’s heroines are “voiceless”: “the pattern of discourse in *Grimms’ Tales* discriminates against ‘good’ girls and produces functionally silent heroines” (Bottigheimer cited in Bell 112). Hans Christian Andersen’s *Little Mermaid*, however, is the first one to become literally “voiceless”. According to Lauren and Alan Dundes, this inability to speak is “confirming the male chauvinist ideology that the ideal woman is beautiful, yet dumb” (Dundes cited in Yzaguirre 25).³¹ This is in line with Kaplan’s claim that, in general, women’s roles in Hollywood cinema are “silent, absent, and

tail into legs”, while “the bleeding and the pain recall menstruation”; he links the Mermaid’s pain and sense of shame at discovering her sexuality (and thus, becoming aware of her own nakedness) to the Biblical curse put on Eve in the Garden of Eden (Tseëlon 1021). For an in-depth analysis of the original Andersen tale as “a myth of castration”, see Efrat Tseëlon’s “The Little Mermaid: An Icon of Woman’s Condition in Patriarchy, and the Human Condition of Castration”, in which birth, growing up, desire, and death, are seen as different separations or “castrations” throughout a human life.

³¹ According to Lacan, “language is the medium through which human beings are placed in culture and their sexual identity formed” (Lacan cited in Tseëlon 1022). Unfortunately, as Edwin Ardener explains, “in every culture dominant modes of expression fit best the experience and perspective of the dominant group. Such arrangement forces the powerless into a choice between channeling their communication through the dominant modes, or being rendered inarticulate” (Ardener cited in Tseëlon 1022). Women are thus, linguistically and sexually repressed and socially silenced (Tseëlon 1022). Ariel’s silence would thus be a symbolic act of rebellion, because it represents “the frustration of being misinterpreted and trivialized” and the fact “that she is locked into a system which prevents her from expressing her desire” (Tseëlon 1024).

marginal” (Kaplain cited in Hoisington n. pag.). As Kathi Maio states, “Ariel is literally silenced by her longing for male acceptance” (Maio cited in Yzaguirre 25; Maio cited in Van Oost 27). Carol Gilligan sees this “silence” as representative of adolescent girls in general: “the onset of puberty finds active, verbal, and confident girls suddenly quiet and reticent, internalizing and enacting newly realized cultural cues for womanhood” (Gilligan cited in Bell 112). Tragically, it was exactly Ariel’s voice which was attractive to Eric. Van Den Abbeele claims that the Prince did not fall for the stereotypical “sois belle et tais-toi” woman, but for Ariel’s ambition and opposition against being dominated. Van Den Abbeele quotes Murphy, who designated Ariel’s voice as the centre of her power: “As Ariel sings of access, autonomy and mobility, she yearns for subjecthood and for the ability to participate in public (human) life” (Murphy cited in Van Den Abbeele 54). Laura Sells, consequently, sees Ariel as “reinventing the category of ‘woman,’ or reimagining women as speaking subjects” (Sells cited in Zarranz García n. pag.).

Ariel is seen as “sensual, aggressive, boyish, adventurous, independent, intelligent and rebellious” (Van Oost 27). Curious as she is, she boldly investigates everything of interest to her, and even swims to the ocean’s surface. She is designated as the first Disney heroine who actively rebels against her father’s expectations, and is very determined to achieve her own goals (Yzaguirre 44-45). As a “headstrong teenager”, she is frequently opposing her father and stubbornly keeps quarrelling: “I’m sixteen years old, I’m not a child anymore ... But if you would just listen!” (*The Little Mermaid*). She feels alone and not understood: “If only I could make him understand. I just don’t see things the way he does ... He would never understand” (ibid.). Her whole wish to become human, although heightened because of her crush on Eric, initially stems from a desire for freedom, away from the realm of her father: “Flipping fins, you don’t get too far. Legs are required for jumping, dancing, strolling along ... up where they walk, up where they run, up where they stay all day in the sun, wandering free, wish I could be, part of that world ... Betcha on land, they understand, but they don’t reprimand their daughters” (ibid.). Out of revenge towards her father, she even turns to the malicious Ursula for help, purposely choosing to hang out with “the wrong kinds of people” (Hoisington n. pag.). Although longing to be treated like an adult, she still revels in childlike mischief during her stay at the shore: she combs her hair with a fork during dinner, blows the ash of Grim’s pipe into his face, jumps on the bed, snatches away a glove puppet and dangles out of the carriage with her head down. When given the horse’s reins, she conducts the carriage very recklessly. Much of this “improper” behaviour, regarded as weird or funny at its

best, can be explained by her ignorance and unfamiliarity with human habits. At other times, however, she is considerate and responsible in dwelling upon the consequences of her actions: “If I become human, I’ll never be with my father or sisters again” (*The Little Mermaid*).

In the spirit of post-war Europe and the United States, the protagonist is a “teenager, looking for her identity” (Van Oost 27). Marina Warner pointed at the frequency at which the word “want” is uttered by Ariel; according to Deborah Ross, she is a typical “eighties heroine”, belonging to the “me decade”, because she wants so much (Warner cited in Ross 59). Unlike her female predecessors, Ariel, and the other “newer” heroines, are active and looking for adventure (Hoisington n. pag.). Do Rozario too stresses this challenging nature of the “newer” heroines: “these heroines neglect societal expectations of them and long for the freedom to make their own choices. They challenge and often disobey authority and genuinely want to grow intellectually” (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 20). As Ariel states herself: “Bright young women, sick of swimming, ready to stand and ready to know what the people know. Ask ‘em my questions and get some answers” (*The Little Mermaid*).³² According to Janet Maslin, this sort of behaviour “affirms both the daughter’s need for independence and the importance of the father’s being able to relinquish his parental control” (Maslin cited in Yzaguirre 20).

Reginda Bendix observes that, although Ariel “spiritedly and aggressively challenge[s] authority at the start of the film”, she abandons her “[quest] for adventure and autonomy” at the end of the movie, becoming “naive and helpless” from the moment she falls in love (Bendix cited in Yzaguirre 13). Leadbeater and Wilson, O’Brien and Trites seem to agree on the shift in Ariel’s goal. While at the beginning of the film, “she longs to grow intellectually, to expand her horizons and face new experiences” – mostly by disobeying her father and meddling with humans – from the moment she saves Eric she aims for a marriage (Leadbeater and Wilson, O’Brien and Trites cited in Yzaguirre 14-15). Susan White argues that “the film implies that the sense of freedom necessary for exploration and accomplishment must finally be curbed if one is to become a woman” (White cited in Hoisington n. pag.). Hoisington too claims that “the obligatory heterosexual marriage is the natural antidote for those untamed desires” (Hoisington n. pag.). Both Roberta Trites and Jack Zipes think Ariel’s

³² According to Tseñlon, the Mermaid’s quest for knowledge implies a quest for (knowledge about) sexuality: “knowledge implies sexuality as well as knowledge of good and evil (the phallus often appears in free associations as the organ of knowledge as well as of reproduction)” (Tseñlon 1021).

longing for the love of Prince Eric is quite a step backwards compared to the original version by Hans Christian Andersen, where the mermaid still “pines for an immortal soul” (Trites and Zipes cited in Yzaguirre 61; Trites and Zipes cited in Van Oost 27). Tseëlon claims that in the Disney version, the original myth is oversimplified into a folktale, in which the idea of romantic love is exaggerated (Tseëlon 1026).³³

Bendix judges Ariel “incapable of being independent”, “[s]he never pursues a life that does not include male protection; she aims to leave behind her father’s world to embrace Eric’s” (Bendix cited in Yzaguirre 21). Indeed, it is not Ariel who ultimately faces the villain, Ursula, but her father Triton and lover Eric (Yzaguirre 22; 23; Van Oost 27). Sells detects Ariel’s submission to patriarchy in the exchange from the realm of power of her father to the one of her husband: “As Ariel passes from her father’s hands to her husband’s hands, the autonomy and wilfulness that she enacted early in the film becomes subsumed by her father’s ‘permission’ to marry Eric” (Sells cited in Van Den Abbeele 54). Van Den Abbeele even claims that this exchange portrays Ariel as a “consumer object of low exchange value between two parallel patriarchal systems” (Van Den Abbeele 54). Ursula literally says that “[t]he daughter of the great sea king is a very precious commodity. But I light be willing to make an exchange for someone even better” (*The Little Mermaid*). However, as Zarranz García remarks, “[i]t is interesting to remember that it is Ariel who initially saves a male human being from drowning, thus transgressing her father’s rules and proving her courage and determinacy” (Zarranz García n. pag.). At times, I think Ariel gives a very resolute and courageous impression, saving Flounder and Eric while putting her own life at risk (*The Little Mermaid*).

It should be noted too that Ariel is the first heroine to choose a husband that her father disapproves of (Hoisington n. pag.). As was the case in *Sleeping Beauty*, there is a fierce disagreement between children and parents on the concept of marriage (Wood n. pag.).³⁴ The movie ends, however, with a reconciliation between father and daughter. Like the

³³ He adds that, in the film, “abstract concepts are materialized”; complex female characters (like, for instance, Ursula) are rendered black and white; “both mermaid and prince are constructed as reactive to other people and to over-determined situations, and not as agents of their own choice”; the Mermaid’s inner conflicts are externalised onto other, male characters; and a romantic, consummated marriage is preferred over unselfish love or the wish for a human soul (Tseëlon 1027).

³⁴ Grim, for instance, constantly pushes Prince Eric to get married: “Of course, I had hoped it would be a wedding present ... oh, Eric, it isn’t me alone. The entire kingdom wants to see you happily settled with the right girl” (*The Little Mermaid*). Eric, on the other hand, seems not so eager to be settled, and even has some fear of

former Disney princesses, Ariel too falls in love at first sight (Eric at first “hearing”) (Tanner et al. 364). As Ariel says: “I’ve never seen a human this close before. Oh, he’s very handsome, isn’t he?” (*The Little Mermaid*).³⁵ The next day, she stays in the bathroom all morning, upon which her sisters exclaim: “Oh, she’s got it bad ... Isn’t it obvious, daddy? Ariel’s in love” (ibid.). Like Snow White, Aurora and their princes, Ariel and Eric have already met before: “You seem familiar to me. Have we met? ... We have met. I knew it” (ibid.). Like Cinderella and Aurora’s prince, Eric initially does not know Ariel’s name. Like Aurora, Ariel is very eager to see her lover again as soon as possible: “He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me. I knew it! I got to see him again, tonight!” (ibid.). In another scene, however, she play-acts saying to Eric “Why, Eric, run away with you, This is all so sudden” (ibid.). When Eric chooses Vanessa – the Sea Witch in disguise – for a fiancée, she first naively continues to think she will be the future bride, and upon seeing her rival, starts crying, disappointed in love. Although I agree with Van Oost that the desire for mothering is less explicitly shown, Ariel is very caring towards Flounder, her guppy side-kick (Van Oost 27).³⁶ In contrast with the former Disney heroines, Ariel is never seen performing domestic chores. Unlike Cinderella, she is incapable and clumsy, for example when first walking on legs. Still, she is able to dance with the Prince after only a day with human feet.

Deane Michelle Hoisington indicates that most Disney characters belong to royalty; moreover, “their elevated position in society is a matter of birth” (Hoisington n. pag.). Changing from being the daughter of a king to becoming the wife of a prince, Ariel “maintains her royal status” (Hoisington n. pag.). Some scholars, like Laura Sells, see the underwater world as “colonized” by the humans, which brands the inhabitants of the sea as members of an “inferior race”:

[Th]e film firmly establishes a colonialist, first-world/third-world relationship between the human and sea worlds. The world under the sea, despite its aristocratic decor, is the colonized space of marginalized or muted cultures, often invisible to the inhabitants of the white male system. Sebastian, and many others of the sea creatures, have the facial features of people of color. When in their own world, the sea creatures spend their days singing and dancing to

commitment: “Come on, Grim. Don’t start. Look, you’re not still sore because I didn’t fall for the Princess of Glowehaven, are you? ... Oh, she’s out there somewhere, I just – I just haven’t found her yet” (ibid.).

³⁵ Eric as well believes that “when I find her, I’ll know, without a doubt. It’ll just – bam! – hit me like lightning” (*The Little Mermaid*).

³⁶ The only other characters in this movie who explicitly act in a mothering way, are middle-aged women. After her eels have died, Ursula cries: “Babies! My poor little poopsies!” (*The Little Mermaid*). Carlotta, Eric’s maid, immediately decides to take care of Ariel by giving her a bath and washing her clothes.

calypsomusic. When they venture across the boundary into the “real world”, they risk being reduced to human food. (Sells cited in Van Den Abbeele 54-55).³⁷

Sells sees a dichotomy between the “marginalized culture” of Ariel’s underwater world, and the “dominant culture” of Eric’s human world: “those who are privileged by the white male system are oblivious to anything outside the system, while those outside the system know about the dominant culture as well as their own marginalized culture” (Sells in Hoisington n. pag.). Hoisington adds that the dominant (human) culture, produces wares that are wanted and consumed by the marginal (mermaid) culture (Hoisington n. pag.). Because of her “compulsive need to collect multiple human objects”, Ariel is seen by Byrne and McQuillan as “the very embodiment of consumer-fetishism”; Laura Sells calls her “bourgeois” (Byrne and McQuillan and Sells cited in Zarranz García n. pag.): “She’s got everything ... but who cares? No big deal. I want more” (*The Little Mermaid*). Her elaborate collection reminds me of teenagers’ tendency to collect all items available connected to their (musical) idols. Patrick Murphy argues the Mermaids’ non-productiveness implies that the Caribbean culture is lazy, underdeveloped, and sub-human (Murphy in Hoisington n. pag.).

Still, I would like to argue that the only one to openly display xenophobic prejudices is King Triton, instead of the humans. He thinks of them as “barbarians”, who are “dangerous”, so that “contact between the human world and the mer world is strictly forbidden” (*The Little Mermaid*). About Eric, he generalizes: “One less human to worry about ... I don’t have to know him! They’re all the same: spineless, savage, harpooning fish-eaters incapable of any feeling!” (ibid.).

37 Deborah Ross thinks Disney failed to present the human world as exciting and wondrous (which makes the audience wonder why she would prefer this world over her own marvelous underwater world), unlike Andersen, who “reawakened his listeners’ sense of wonder at their own city lights, sunsets, forests, and hills” through a continuous shift in perspective between the mermaid and the human world (Ross 59-60).

5. BELLE IN *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* (1991)

I agree with Celeste Lacroix, who observes that Belle, as a “newer heroine” still has many of the dainty physical features of the “older heroines” (Lacroix cited in Yzaguirre 29). She has brown straight hair, tied together with a blue ribbon. Yzaguirre points at the continuation of the traditional in Belle’s clothes (ibid.). Like Cinderella, her regular clothes include a white apron and flat working shoes. Allison Craven agrees that “Belle’s costumes are typical of a Disney fairy tale heroine, and she wears them like uniforms: a blue pinafore followed by transformation into a Cinderella-like ball gown (also a Queen Antoinette-style crinoline)” (Craven 130). Craven further links Belle’s costumes with certain actions and transitions:

When Beast takes her through his library she wears a formal full-length green dress and when she tutors him in how to eat delicately, she wears pink. Belle’s semi-ritualized coming out as sexual debutante and possible wife for Beast occurs in a ball gown in the ballroom scene, a vignette unique to the Disney version. Here, Belle’s social mobility is suggested by the opulence of her costume provided from Beast’s magic wardrobe. (ibid.).

Unlike the claim that newer heroines are more “exotic, sexual and sporty” (Yzaguirre 29), I think Belle is remarkably non-sexualized, especially in comparison with the lascivious blonde triplets in the village, who are presented as more conventional beauties, blonde and voluptuous. These three girls are a mocking answer to the way earlier heroines naively fall in love at first sight, meanwhile echoing the affected manners of Cinderella’s stepsisters (i.e. fainting and crying): “Look, there he goes. Isn’t he dreamy? Monsieur Gaston, oh, he’s so cute. Be still, my heart, I’m hardly breathing. He’s such a tall, dark, strong and handsome brute” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Zarranz García too sees them as “a parody of traditional femininity” (Zarranz García n. pag.). Belle, on the other hand, is “demurely dressed, the pinafore puritan” and “nurse-like, in her hooded cape” (Craven 130). Only in the ball room scene, she wears a gown with a lower neckline and bare shoulders. She appears very natural, wearing little make-up. At other times, “she has no fear of looking dishevelled – with hair wet and clothes bedraggled” (Swan 361). Despite all this, Belle is still regarded as the most beautiful girl in town by the villagers, including traditional hunk Gaston: “Now it’s no wonder that her name means Beauty. Her looks have got no parallel” (*Beauty and the Beast*).

When Belle is captured by the Beast, one might fear that she will be displayed as a sexual object to be looked at by men. Traditionally, the “male gaze” can be defined as follows: “[Women] are portrayed as the passive object, or the ‘muse’, sexually submissive to the male desire and viewed as an object of desire by the male voyeur. Susan Griffin notes

that ‘women ... were to be looked upon as “other” to the male hunter/gazer, master and cultural creator’, an automatism denominated by Laura Mulvey as ‘fetishistic scopophilia’” (Griffin and Mulvey cited in Malfroid 3). Surprisingly, Belle is not the one who has to endure the male gaze; quite the opposite is true. As Craven claims, “Belle is seen to erotically appraise the beast”, “raising her eyebrow, and demanding of him to ‘step into the light’” (Craven 124; 129). The fact that Belle seems to find Beast attractive could stem from the Greco-Roman myth of “Cupid and Psyche”, in which the story is said to have appeared first³⁸. Psyche too can not control her sexuality; as Hearne claims, “when her secret lover (Eros/Cupid) visits by night she revels in the loss of her chastity and is unhappy that men leave her alone” (Craven 131-132). Belle’s demand, together with her “engorged eyes”, prove that Disney showed an image of female desire for the first time, thus offering a female alternative for the male gaze (Craven 130). As Haraway claims, “in submitting to captivity by Beast, Belle does appear as a kind of Sadeian woman, especially as she raises her eyebrow to gaze on him and decide” (Haraway cited in Craven 134). Warner reads Belle’s desire in a different way: “her need of him may be reprehensible, a moral flaw, a part of her carnal and materialist nature; or, it can represent her understanding of love, her redemption” (Warner cited in Craven 131). I rather agree with De Lauretis, who thinks that, despite this illustration of female desire, Disney failed to disrupt “the masculine-feminine polarities” “to open other spaces for identification, other positionalities of desire”, because, after all, Belle is held in captivity; the fact that she does not seem to mind (because she rather likes the Beast’s appearance) is only a coincidental stroke of fortune:

Belle’s eyebrow tweaks at Mulvey’s theory of female spectatorship and feminine “to-be-looked-at-ness”. Belle is a cute teenager emblem of the woman spectator, glancing, eyebrow raised, at a monster who, with her consent, is about to take her hostage for eternity so that, she thinks, she can free her father, but actually so that the monster can free himself. Her look at Beast, her sizing him up, her spotting of his “talent”, is a moment of identification for the woman spectator, a moment of recognition and realization that, in patriarchy, female desire is captured before it is aroused. Belle is trapped, then she looks and decides/chooses. She does not choose before her capture, and her consent comes after. (de Lauretis cited in Craven 133-134).

The predominant interpretation, however, is a negative one, in which Belle is seen as a “female bestial subject” related to pornography or to the “horror feminine”. Although

³⁸“Psyche, a mortal woman, was transported to an enchanted place in which she was attended by invisible servants and made love to at night by an unknown lover. In spite of Psyche’s jealous sisters’ convictions that this lover must be a beast, he is revealed to be the god Cupid” (Craven 126).

represented as a sexual, desiring subject, Belle illustrates the “utopian sexuality of pornography”; as Craven says, “Disney heroines ... never struggle with pregnancies or sickly babies” (Craven 137). She thereby quotes Lucas, who argues that, “within ‘phallogocentric economies’, women are required ‘either to occupy the muted and relational positions of wife, daughter, sister to a significant male, or ... they must deny the sexual and reproductive aspects of ... femaleness’ to take ‘neutered, although actually masculinised public power’” (Lucas cited in Craven 137). Creed explains the “affinity between monster and woman”, through classic horror films: “Both are constructed as ‘biological freaks’ whose bodies represent a form of sexuality that is ‘threatening’ to ‘vulnerable male power’” (Creed cited in Craven 134). When Belle tries to escape, however, Beast defeats the wolves, not only subduing the animals but also regaining Belle and thus domesticating her. Craven reads the end of this scene, where Belle cures Beast’s wound, as “a wolf-mother myth, as Belle nurses her animal-lover-child (Beast)” (Craven 135). Earlier on, she had called Belle “vaguely animal” and “a lush”, “wearing fur-lined hoods and luscious sexualized capes” (Craven 130). Creed explains the connection between women and animals by “an early 20th century theory of ‘devolution’ in which woman ‘was particularly aligned with nature’ while man was seen to be ‘evolving’, but ‘some men and all women were in danger of devolving to lower animal forms’”, thus perceiving traces of ecofeminism (Creed cited in Craven 135).

Swan, on the other hand, equals Belle with humanity and sees Beast as the animal. Already in the classic myth, Eros is said to have represented “the more sexual side of love”, while Psyche expressed “the more spiritual side” (Swan 356). Later versions sported “animal grooms”, who “make life unpleasant for many female protagonists, but turn out to be gentleman or princes in disguise” (ibid.). Bettelheim reads the symbolism as representing “the subconscious fears of a maiden as projected onto potential husbands” (ibid.). According to McGlathery, “One task of a Gothic heroine is to distinguish wisely between the animal groom and the true beast [murders masquerading as civilized men], lest she end up maimed (physically or emotionally) or murdered” (McGlathery cited in Swan 357). Near the end of the movie, Belle has made this distinction and sees through Gaston: “He’s no monster, Gaston, you are!” (*Beauty and the Beast*).

Swan argues that the division of roles, between Belle as a human and Beast as an animal, is already apparent in the title *Beauty and the Beast* (Swan 364). She summarizes the several concepts that have been introduced to denominate this Animal / Human duality. Within these dichotomies, Beast, associated with “Ugliness, Captivity, and Nonthinking”,

clearly represents the first categories, and Belle, linked to “Beauty, Freedom, Thinking” (and Oddity) the second. White, for instance, places “wildness (along with savagery, madness, heresy, and division) in conceptual antithesis to civilization (along with humanity, sanity, orthodoxy, and unity)”; Burke distinguishes “motion (the instinctive, biological aspect of the body) and action (the wilful, conscious aspect of the mind)”; Jung opposes “the Unconscious” to “the Conscious”; and Castillejo sees both our “Shadow” other self, which can “distract and destroy us”, and our mature, full “Self”, “requiring mindfulness of our own individuality as well as recognition and respect of the individuality of other” as two aspects one needs to come to terms with (White, Burk, Jung, and Castillejo cited in Swan 357).

Allison Craven describes Belle as “a down-to-earth girl, fussy about boys, and a bit of a feminist to boot” (Craven 124). Van Den Abbeele claims that Belle is associated with “rationality”: she assists her father-inventor with technical insight, a supposedly male characteristic (Van Den Abbeele 55). Although she is equally grateful as the former Disney princesses, she is definitely less naive and even a bit suspicious of men. On the whole, she is presented as an intelligent woman who eagerly reads books. Susan Jeffords claims: “The earlier Beautys were also avid readers, but the Disney film marks Belle’s interest as more of a social than a character feature, and uses it to mark her as better and less provincial than the rest of the townspeople (Jeffords 153). Allison Craven too marks her as “different to other girls”, she is “bookish, bored with provincial life, and devoted to her potty old father” (Craven 129). She is smarter than many men in the movie (“I figured it out for myself”); both Gaston and Beast have trouble reading (*Beauty and the Beast*).

According to Sharon Downey, “Belle’s intelligence, independence and love of reading make her a social outcast” (Downey cited in Yzaguirre 20). In being an outcast, she resembles Psyche. Cummins claims that the connection between reading and oddness downgrades Belle’s intellectual capacities, making her “a degraded remnant of de Beaumont’s scholarly, intellectual Beauty” (Cummins cited in Craven 132). The French fairy tale version by Madame Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, written in 1756, is considered as “the most influential on 20th century versions” (Craven 126). The tale by de Beaumont was meant to please the 19th century female audience, who were mostly “reading women” in “the advent of popular literature” (Craven 132). Disney, on the other hand, “begins with a focus on Belle’s intellectual and inquisitive nature”, but “appropriates these qualities into the construction of Belle’s marginalization, because she reads she is ‘odd’, ‘strange’, and ‘peculiar’” (ibid.). The villagers see her reading and imagination as the reason why she has trouble fitting in: “Never

part of any crowd, ‘cause her head’s up on some cloud ... I wonder if she’s feeling well, with her dreamy far-off look and her nose stuck in a book, what a puzzle to the rest of us is Belle” (*Beauty and the Beast*). As Gaston claims, “[i]t’s not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas and thinking” (ibid.). The villagers feel threatened by Belle and try to alter her rebelliousness into obedience by opposing her and separating her from the persons or objects that bring her joy (Yzaguirre 21). Allison Craven remarks that within the Disney movies, “femininity is characterized as tragic, terminal and prone to evil, while Disney’s heroines are those who evade the fall into moral decay” (Craven 127). About the villagers, Burke and Jung argue that most people are “constrained by learned patterns, scripts, and schemas”, accepting “the reification of once-flexible structures into immutable truths” (Burke and Jung cited in Swan 358). Society has thus become “dehumanized”, while “the actions of the self are habitualized and unmindful” (ibid.). Consequently, they see Belle as “submerged” by her community and stress the need “to separate our self from our community”, i.e. to become unique and independent, as necessary in the “process of individuation” (ibid.). Belle voices this desire early on in the movie: “I want much more than this provincial life. I want adventure in the great wide somewhere. I want it more than I can tell. And for once it might be grand to have someone understand I want so much more than they’ve got planned” (*Beauty and the Beast*).³⁹

Her solid and determined mind thus make her an agent who overcomes her problems; as Maria Warner says, she is “mistress of her own fate” (Warner cited in Yzaguirre 20). Like teenage heroin Ariel in the previous movie, Belle is very stubborn, although she does not rebel against her father, but against the Beast’s orders: “I don’t want to get to know him. I don’t want to have anything to do with him” (*Beauty and the Beast*). She refuses to bow under his authority: “Promise or no promise, I can’t stay here another minute” (ibid.). Susan Swan argues that Belle feels “confident” in her “uniqueness”, which makes her overcome “the discomfort she feels in being different” (Swan 355). Belle validates the argument of Do Rozario that “newer heroines” question society and its domestic norms (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 55). She displays an “unconventional femininity” and “non-conformity” (Craven 130). Despite society’s expectations, she refuses to accept Gaston’s marriage proposal and

³⁹ Deborah Ross argues that, “[b]y marrying a man who can help her get what she wants, and who wants the same things, symbolically she is marrying an aspect of herself” (Ross 62-63). She adds that the Beast’s face, after his transformation, bears a striking resemblance to Belle’s. This idea, “that men and women aren’t nearly as different as some men would like them to be”, would stem from “women’s romantic writing from the seventeenth century on” (ibid.).

actively chooses “to love and care for the Beast, instead of shunning him as an outcast as the rest of society does” (Yzaguirre 25; 45).

Belle thinks of Gaston as “positively primeval” and refuses to marry him in a rather scornful way: “Is he gone? Can you imagine? He asked me to marry him! Me, the wife of that boorish, brainless ... Madame Gaston, his little wife. No sir, not me, I guarantee it” (ibid.). According to Jeffords, by mockingly rejecting Gaston and refusing to bear his children, Belle disrupts traditional role patterns (she wants more than a domestic, provincial life) and “is, for all intents and purposes, a Disney feminist” (Jeffords 153). Beast too has to mind “not to offend her feminist sensibilities” (Craven 124). The noticeably feminist nature of Belle, as opposed to the other Disney heroines, could partly be explained by the fact that for the first time the screenplay for the movie was written by a woman, Linda Woolverton (Swan 354). Allison Craven calls Belle “feisty”: she has a “graceful, perky, fighting spirit” (Craven 129). As Swan argues, “She wants adventure, as well as someone with whom to share it” (Swan 361). She is curious (entering the forbidden west wing of the castle), daring and courageous. Belle is not only independent, she saves others too: she has the power to undo the spell put on Beast and the castle (Yzaguirre 21). As Yzaguirre says, “it is *the Beast* who needs *Belle*, not the other way around” (Yzaguirre 25; 49). Swan too points at Belle’s power, which makes her realize that “even though she may be a prisoner physically, she will never be wholly captured”, as is proven by the fact that she ran away and could have escaped if she wanted to, but stayed out of compassion for the Beast (Swan 361). Moreover, she is brave enough to ride out to search her father, confront the Beast, and join the battle against Gaston. This “boldness of action that reflects her internal strength” is said to be typical of Gothic heroines (ibid.).

This is in stark contrast with the view of Susan Jeffords, Kathi Maio, and June Cummins, who think of Belle as merely a “tool”, “object”, “mechanism” or “plot device” to tame the Beast and help him undo the spell. As Jeffords says, “Belle is consistently cast as the Beast’s teacher ... ‘He didn’t know how to eat with a fork and a knife, so she taught him. He didn’t know how to read, so she read to him. She taught him how to feed birds and how to play in the snow’” (Jeffords 151). To me, this echoes Snow White’s attempts at educating the dwarfs. Furthermore, Belle seems the complete opposite of the former Disney princess Ariel with regards to table manners. Henry Giroux notices Belle’s civilizing efforts too, and thinks of her as “a model of etiquette and style” (Giroux cited in Van Oost 28). He stresses the positive aspects of this re-education: Belle turns a “tyrannical, narcissistic muscleman” into a “sensitive, caring and loving” “New Man” (ibid.). Craven agrees: “She tutors Beast in

manners and behaviour acceptable for her to love until he recognizes his need to behave like a ‘gentle man, a gentleman’ ... and to adopt the codes of white-western maledom to achieve Belle’s love and his transformation” (Craven 133).⁴⁰ Kathi Maio, on the other hand, reads this as a confirmation of women’s responsibility in patriarchal order: “If a woman is beautiful and sweet enough, she can transform a violent, untamed beast into a charming prince” (Maio cited in Yzaguirre 26, own emphasis). Cummins agrees that “it is Belle’s utility as a female, and not her beauty, that makes her attractive and valuable” (Cummins cited in Craven 134). As I will argue further on, however, this type of reading, in which Belle needs to teach Beast how to behave properly, is only one possible interpretation.

Feminist as she might be, Belle is still not completely independent: she helplessly needs Beast to rescue her from the wolves who attack her in the forest, has to turn to Gaston for help to save her father, and depends on Chip to free her and her father out of their house. Besides, like Snow White, she falls into a (frozen) lake and off her horse into the snow. Matti and Liosky add an interesting theory on the level of personal decision making. They claim that, although presented as resolute decision makers, female characters like Belle chiefly take “personal decisions”, not expressing their authority and only putting themselves at risk, or “influenced decisions”, following other people’s advice. They “blame themselves” when things fail and, on the whole, are regarded as “incompetent” in taking important decisions (Matti and Liosky cited in Van Oost 24). Indeed, Belle only puts herself at risk (and not others) by proposing to take her father’s place as a prisoner. When she realizes that the imprisonment disables the fulfilment of her dreams, she cries (Hoisington n. pag.). Furthermore, she blames herself for leaving Beast and letting the villagers assail him: “I have to warn the Beast. This is all my fault ... Oh, this is all my fault, if only I’d gotten here sooner” (*Beauty and the Beast*).

Just like the former heroines, Belle is graceful and shown dancing with Beast (Yzaguirre 29). She is not only delicate in movements, but in behaviour too: “she complements the objects in the castle; she drinks from her bowl at dinner to prevent beast

⁴⁰ While Gaston selfishly loves Belle and wants to “possess her by force”, Beast merely wants to free Belle instead of oppressing her (Ross 62). At one point, Beast explains to his servants that to love someone is to grant them freedom: “I let her go ... I had to ... because I love her” (*Beauty and the Beast*). For more information on Beast, Gaston, and masculinities, I would like to refer to my discussion of gender in the 1990s in general, and Susan Swan’s analysis of Beast’s transformation in her essay “Gothic Drama in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*: Subverting Traditional Romance by Transcending the Animal-Human Paradox”, p. 359-364.

from feeling foolish because he can't use silverware; and, when she discovers he can't read, saves him from embarrassment by proclaiming the book she has selected is the 'perfect book to read aloud'" (Swan 361). Earlier versions of the story argue the Beast commanded Belle's father to give him his most beautiful daughter, after which Belle is sent away (Craven 125). Unlike the Disney version, these older Victorian tales claim she has sisters and/or brothers and keeps house for them; she is described as "virtuous", "humble", and "an object of affection" instead of an outcast (Craven 125; 131). She is called "Beauty" rather than "Belle", and her virtue is said to make men fear her: "Beauty is always in control, declining suitors and taming the beast" (ibid.).⁴¹ Her "gentility and purity", as an example of "idealized womanhood", are stressed (Swan 365). This interpretation, popular during the 19th century, which emphasizes "education, marriage, and 'dull logical probability'", stems from the "tale for the moral improvement of girls" by de Beaumont (Craven 126).⁴² In the Disney version, however, it is precisely her difference which makes her desirable to men: "Unlike the traditional Beauty, adored for her virtue and beauty, bookish Belle is at odds with her community" (Craven 130). Moreover, Disney's Belle is sporty and active, horse-riding or throwing snow balls. The heroic nature of Belle, who rides horseback to search for her missing father and "bravely offers herself as an alternative hostage", is an element not present in earlier versions.

Warner stresses the difference in dependence and moral message in the three versions (i.e. the characters of Psyche, Beauty, and Belle): "Beauty stands in need of the Beast, rather than vice versa, and the Beast's beastliness is good, even adorable ... she has not mistaken a human lover for a monster [nor] failed to see a good man beneath the surface [but instead] the Beast's beastliness will teach her something" (Warner cited in Craven 131). Cummins, however, claims that in essence, Disney conveys the same moral (i.e. Belle being taught by Beast that "external ugliness means nothing" and that "true beauty comes from within"):

⁴¹ Craven also points out the difference in meaning of the changed name: "Beauty, an eternal synonym and allegory for virtuous femininity", as opposed to "Belle, a kitsch pun on a French name" (Craven 131).

⁴² The version of de Beaumont advises girls not to wait until they find their perfect partner, but to choose wisely among the limited range of choices they have; eventually, they will develop "esteem" and even "tenderness" for their partner. Bettelheim and Warner, on the other hand, argue that the main element of the oldest versions of the tale (from the Cupid and Psyche tale to Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*) is precisely that the girl needs to actively want the Beast before he can transform into a prince, and that "sex in conjunction with love is pleasant rather than frightening" (Bettelheim and Warner cited in Ross 61).

[I]t is Beast who is advertised to be the possessor of “beauty” and Belle must learn its nature, and Beast (actually the student of Belle’s improving influence) is positioned as moral instructor; Belle’s fate is his. It is Belle – robbed of her traditional Beauty – who is being instructed in how to elicit beauty from beastliness. “It is Belle and not the Beast who must learn to love ugliness and literally embrace the bestial” (Cummins cited in Craven 133).

Craven remarks that even “the words of the blurb instruct that Belle is marked as learner, causing the audience to identify with her and placing all under Beast’s instruction, not Belle’s” (Craven 133). Bettelheim and Ralph too stress the acceptance of Beast’s nature as important; wholeness seems to come “through changing one’s lenses rather than transforming one’s nature” (Bettelheim and Ralph cited in Swan 365). Hearne, on the other hand, thinks Beauty illustrates a “process of maturation” to “find wholeness within one’s self” (Hearne cited in Swan 365). Beauty has to accept the duality within herself by acknowledging that there is something beautiful and beastly in everyone.⁴³ This reading, however, merely focuses on Beauty’s growth, assuming that Beast is already “fully human, except in appearance” (Swan 365). The version by Madame de Villeneuve, on the other hand, stresses the fact that it is Beast who needs to learn to control himself (Ross 61). Swan argues that the Disney version combines these two previous approaches, showing a “growth in both parties”:

Belle and Beast are both required to be transformed, each as the agency for the other. No longer do we have the mature, if rough-exteriored, male mentoring a beautiful, naïve female into relational (and sexual) maturity, but two humans seeking within for the maturity they lack so they may then reach out to build an adult relationship ... No longer is it the female’s role to single-handedly identify who are the “real men” (strong, but not brutalizing) and free them into expressing their tenderer side, but both male *and* female must free themselves by uniting their thinking and feeling sides. (Swan 365).

Instead of clashing with each other and trying to eliminate the other’s beastly or human aspects, Swan argues that Belle and Beast encourage each other to find a compromise, in which both will have to change, without losing their characteristic features. Their difference is thus seen as an added value instead of an insurmountable obstacle, as both discover aspects of themselves they never registered before. Thus, Belle’s human qualities, like “compassion, courage, and honor” entice Beast to abandon his animal qualities and rediscover his hidden human ones (Swan 362-363). Beast, on the other hand, invites “empathy and identification” from Belle, who starts to accept her “uniqueness” as an outsider and has finally “found someone who can give the understanding that she longed for in the village” (Swan 363-364).

⁴³ Clarissa Pinkola Estes and Marina Warner, for instance, claim that the heroine has to acknowledge the beastly side of her personality, which is her inner sexuality (Estes & Warner in Ross 65).

The same process helps to awaken their love for each other, although it evolves very slowly. Belle “needs time and distance to realize her seeing is true and that she loves Beast despite his beastly appearance. Only then does she enter the relationship out of Freedom rather than Captivity” (Swan 364). Gradually, she discovers his positive inner qualities: “There’s something sweet and almost kind, but he was mean and he was coarse and unrefined. And now he’s dear and so unsure, I wonder why I didn’t see it there before” (*Beauty and the Beast*). In the end, she even speaks in defence of Beast to the villagers: “He’d never hurt anyone. Please, I know he looks vicious, but he’s really kind and gentle. He’s my friend” (ibid.). Because of their mutual understanding and compromises, both Belle and the Beast “negotiate new ways of being in relationship”, in which both have to change. Hereby, “one person’s transformation becomes supportive of another’s. Belle’s willingness to see and Beast’s openness to love occur in parallel” (Swan 363). As Swan claims:

These transformations do not negate either the Animal aspects or the Human aspects of Beast or Belle, but rather unify them into a transcendent whole of two Selves in a mature and loving relationship ... They each find a balancing of the Animal and Human aspects without losing either masculine or feminine energy. Belle combines deep intuition with firm self-assertion; Beast merges his strength with tenderness and relational responsibility. (Swan 364).

Belle and Beast thus exemplify what is called a “comedic approach” to resolve dualities: instead of eliminating one of them (the human or the animal aspect), they “achieve unity by finding a higher order structure that allows the poles of a duality to co-exist” (Swan 358).

The Disney version still has many gothic elements in common with the version by de Beaumont, one of them being the animal human paradox, as mentioned above. The five main characteristics of a gothic novel can be found in the Disney version: (1) the dark, gloomy castle where Beast lives, (2) Belle, a young adolescent woman who feels isolated and has to uncover a dark secret, the magic spell, “which requires skills beyond the traditionally feminine” and from which she “at some point flees in terror”, (3) “a flawed romantic lead who must be taught how to love”, i.e. Beast, (4) “a rival or alternate lead who turns out to be evil”, i.e. Gaston, and (5) a “process of redemption” or “transformation” in order to achieve a happy end for the couple (Swan 353; 355). Like most adult fairy tales, the Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast* is meant for “females in late adolescence (late teens and early twenties)”, rather than for children (ibid.). Unlike “male” gothic stories, which nowadays constitute the base for horror stories, “female” gothic stories, which are now the core of (historical) romance stories, focus on women’s “interiorized drama” or “schizophrenia” (ibid.). Fleenor explains this schizophrenia as “the layering of conscious and subconscious levels of a woman’s life as she

strikes against the limits culturally imposed on her. The heroine is often characterized by self-division, experiencing loneliness and a metaphoric split of personality created by being ‘in conflict with the values of her society and her prescribed role’” (ibid.). After visiting the village, Belle feels uncertain, asking her father “Papa, do you think I’m odd? ... Oh, I don’t know. It’s just that I’m not sure I fit in here. There’s no one I can really talk to” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Belle’s designation as an outcast thus stems from a Victorian critique on societal expectations.

Notably, Belle feels a strong concern for her father, and even sacrifices herself out of love for him (Van Oost 39). Her father seems to be the person she loves most: “If only I could see my father again, just for a moment. I miss him so much” (*Beauty and the Beast*). She is very worried about his health: “Oh, no. He’s sick. He may be dying, and he’s all alone” (ibid.). As a responsible daughter, she often feels she has to help and take care of him. When people ridicule him, she furiously counters: “Don’t you talk about my father that way! ... My father is not crazy, he’s a genius!” (ibid.), which shows her belief in his scientific talents. Tanner et al. see Belle’s sacrifice as an illustration of how high a priority family relationships are: “she believed her family came before herself” (Tanner et al. 361). Gaston tries to make use of Belle’s love for her father by threatening to put him in a mental asylum if she refuses to marry him (ibid.). Bell, Jeffords, Sells and White, on the other hand, see Belle’s taking her father’s place as a prisoner in Beast’s castle as an act of rebellion, against the wishes of her father (Hoisington n. pag.). Propp offers an interesting hypothesis on “the connection between the princess and her father”, claiming that “the object of the hero’s quest (action) is ‘a princess (a sought-for person) and her father’” (Propp cited in Craven 132). This connection would derive from “[the daughter’s] historical key role in dynastic succession, the transfer of power from one ruler to another in the patriarchal state” (ibid.).

Van Oost claims Belle’s main motivation is self-development (Van Oost 39). Kathi Maio and Brenda Ayres argue that, despite her initial longing for adventure, at bottom she longs for a romantic relationship (Maio and Ayres cited in Yzaguirre 55). Hoisington deduces from Disney that the inevitable “antidote for the adventuresome female spirit”, is marriage: “adventure should be left in the hands of men, and furthermore, adventure ends with heterosexual marriage and family” (Hoisington n. pag.). Murphy thinks Belle somehow betrays her independence by marrying: “the smart woman gets the prince ... by means of her self-sacrificing devotion and selfless love” (Murphy cited in Van Den Abbeele 55). Cummins states that “the film encourages the belief that true happiness for women exists only in the

arms of a prince ... Disney ... strips the traditional fairy tale of anything but the romantic trajectory ... and woos its vast audience into believing it has been educated as well as entertained” (Cummins cited in Craven 124). Craven concludes that the “‘education’ provided appears to be about ‘feminism’ but under the curious moralistic guise of education about ‘beauty’” (Craven 124).

I disagree with this view of a supposed shift in goals (from adventure to romance) by newer heroines. According to me, Belle expresses her longing for a man from the beginning, long before she sings for adventure, by pointing out her favourite – romantic – scene in a book. I would thus argue that the two goals, romance and adventure, need not replace each other, but can coexist. Hoisington claims that Belle experiences adventure merely through reading, which is a safe and controlled way for a woman to seek adventure, because “its boundaries are limited and confined” (Hoisington n. pag.). As Murphy says, “Belle is supposedly a ‘smart’ woman who reads books, but her sense of possible destinies for women is based on romances” (Murphy cited in Van Den Abbeele 55). Books, however, especially gothic romance novels, did more than proffer an imagined escape into adventure. According to Ellis and Walker, they “allowed a voicing of the unspeakable (such as domestic violence or rebellion against one’s role in the home) with a possibility of at least imagining that one could act against these dangers” (Ellis and Walker cited in Swan 353). The books read by Belle lead her to maturity by giving her “the insight to make her own choices”: “In them, Belle finds archetypes for fighting injustice, even against an overwhelming opponent (Jack and the Beanstalk); for seeing beyond the surface (in the book read at the well); for strength in one’s oddities (Arthur); and for courage, perseverance, and depth of feeling (Guinevere)” (Swan 361).

I do not agree with Tanner’s claim that love at first sight is common in this movie too (Tanner et al. 364). I think it clearly develops in a more gradual way than in the previous movies. Various scenes illustrate how Belle’s attitude towards Beast changes from disgust to affection. Instead of rushing, the servants decide to “let nature take its course” (*Beauty and the Beast*). From the beginning of the movie, the idea of a slowly developing romance is preferred: “It’s my favourite part because you’ll see, here’s where she meets Prince Charming, but she won’t discover that it’s him till chapter three” (ibid.). Falling in love is no longer as easy as Snow White pretended; Belle and Beast go through a lot of quarrelling and subsequent compromises before they start to appreciate each other: “If you hadn’t have run away, this wouldn’t have happened” “If you hadn’t frightened me, I wouldn’t have run away”

“Well, you shouldn’t have been in the west wing” “Well, you should learn to control your temper” (ibid.). Love is no longer seen as the logical outcome of a boy and a girl meeting. I would like to add that this is the first movie where there are different male candidates for the girl to choose from, in contrast with *Cinderella*, where the prince could pick a potential wife among all the “eligible maidens” in the country.⁴⁴ Thus, Beast feels insecure and fears his looks and behaviour will not be to the girl’s liking: “Oh, it’s no use. She’s so beautiful and I’m – well, look at me ... I’m just fooling myself. She’ll never see me as anything but a monster. It’s hopeless” (ibid.). Beast thinks he has to do something special to earn Belle’s love: “I’ve never felt this way about anyone. I want to do something for her, but what? ... Belle, there’s something I want to show you. But first, you have to close your eyes ... it’s a surprise” (ibid.). Instead of engaging in mere dull romantic scenes, they teasingly pelt snowballs at one another.

When the mood is romantic, they both feel rather awkward, “both a little scared, neither one prepared”, experiencing something “new and a bit alarming” (ibid.). Rather than the Prince “showing” his love with a kiss, this time the girl has to confess her love in order for the spell to be undone. Just like both needed to change, both need to fall in love in order to break the spell: “But he was so close” “After all this time he’s finally learned to love” “That’s it then, that should break the spell” “But it’s not enough, she has to love him in return” (ibid.). Still, once their love is revealed, the further course of their relationship seems smooth and uncomplicated: “Are they going to live happily ever after, Mama?” “Of course, my dear, of course” (ibid.). Nevertheless, Belle is never openly showing mothering behaviour, although she strokes a little girl’s head, caresses her horse and Beast’s dog, and takes care of the wounded Beast.⁴⁵

From a feminist point of view, the notion of romantic love has sometimes been rejected, seen as a “curse that lies heavily upon women” by de Beauvoir or “the pivot of

⁴⁴ Gaston embodies the complete opposite of all the “renewing” elements mentioned in this paragraph. He falls in love at first sight: “Right from the moment when I met her, saw her, I said she’s gorgeous and I fell” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Rejection is not an option for this self-declared lady-killer; he already thinks himself married, without awaiting Belle’s opinion: “I’ve got my sights set on that one ... Just watch, I’m going to make Belle my wife ... I’d like to thank you all for coming to my wedding. First, I better go in there and propose to the girl” (ibid.). Moreover, he believes becoming a wife and mother are a girl’s only dreams: “You know, Belle, there’s not a girl in town who wouldn’t love to be in your shoes. This is the day your dreams come through ... Picture this: a rustic hunting lodge, my latest kill roasting on the fire, and my little wife massaging my feet, while the little ones play on the floor with the dogs ... We’ll have six or seven ... Strapping boys like me” (ibid.).

⁴⁵ Mrs. Potts is the real mother in this movie, continuously ordering her son Chip to be neat and go to bed in time.

women's oppression today" by Firestone (de Beauvoir and Firestone cited in Swan 352). Others, like Kristeva, think love does not necessarily have to be used to serve patriarchy in restricting women, but can also free them (Kristeva cited in Swan 352). Swan develops a similar argument to prove that *Beauty and the Beast* in an alternative reading offers "a model for entering adult relationships as a partnership between two whole Selves", instead of two separated dualities (i.e. an animal and a human nature) (Swan 352). I think this second view is – or should be – representative of how most people nowadays approach relationships: as a primarily pleasant interaction in which both partners respect the other's individuality (even if this strokes with their own) and, despite some necessary compromises, can be enriched by the other's presence.

Throughout the history of the story, Belle seems to have been socially downgraded: "While de Villeneuve's Beauty was born a princess, de Beaumont's heroine is the daughter of a merchant, and Disney's Belle is the working-class daughter of a village hobby-inventor" (Craven 132). Although Belle's father is "an unsuccessful inventor", she climbs the social ladder by marrying a Prince: "Belle changes into a princess ... enacting a social ritual symbolic of transformation into adult sexual life, and the associated acquisition of prosperity through love and marriage with a powerful man" (ibid.). As was the case with Cinderella, the power division within the couple is unequal (Tanner et al. 365). Farrell applies Marxism to read the story as "a class struggle between the peasantry (working class) and the aristocracy (corporate America) of post-modern society" (Farrell cited in Swan 365). Gaston can be seen as leading the proletariat against the gentry. He claims that, "[i]f you're not with us, you're against us" (*Beauty and the Beast*). The villagers are told that "there's something terrible inside" the castle, that must be destroyed. In a communist mood, Gaston argues that private property must be stolen from the rich and redistributed: "Take whatever booty you can find" (ibid.). The idea is stressed that the will of the majority is right: "Raise the flag, sing the song, here we come fifty strong and fifty Frenchmen can't be wrong" (ibid.). The servants in the castle, on the other hand, never question their life of taking orders and are even represented as preferring this hierarchy: "Life is so unnerving for a servant who's not serving. He's not whole without a soul to wait upon ... needing exercise, a chance to use our skills. Most days we just lay around in the castle, flabby, fat and lazy" (ibid.).

Like Hoisington, I noticed the inherent racism in Gaston and the French villagers' fear and hatred of the unknown (Hoisington n. pag.). Gaston deliberately stirs up the villager's fear: "The beast will make off with your children. He'll come after them in the

night. We're not safe until his head is mounted on my wall" (*Beauty and the Beast*). The villagers literally say: "We don't like what we don't understand. In fact it scares us" (ibid.) Beast too acts very unwelcoming towards Maurice, when the latter enters his castle: "There's a stranger here ... Who are you? What are you doing here? ... You are not welcome here!" (ibid.).

6. JASMINE IN *ALADDIN* (1992)

According to Celeste Lacroix, Jasmine's looks mark a "transition between older and newer heroines" (Lacroix cited in Yzaguirre 30). She still has a "petite, dainty frame, as well as a small nose and mouth", but also "large, almond-shaped eyes" (ibid.). She wears dark and sultry make-up and has an unnaturally thin waist. Addison agrees that Jasmine has more "exotic" features and calls her "an Arab Barbie doll in a belly-dancer costume" (Addison cited in Yzaguirre 30). Her minuscule top exposes her shoulders and midriff, which makes her a sex object like Ariel (Yzaguirre 52). Her status as an object on display is enhanced by the interior of her room: she lies on a lounge chair, visible through transparent curtains. In order not to expose herself to other men on the streets, she is completely covered in a long and inconspicuous brown garment and wears a veil over her head. In general, all women in the movie have their body and face almost completely covered in the streets. When inside, on the other hand, they are displayed as voluptuous beauties who are aggressively sensual, wearing no more than underwear, some jewels and transparent veils. They act as servants or members of a harem, fanning Prince Ali with plumes. The women on the streets mirror the blonde triplets in *Beauty and the Beast* when they affectedly faint at a blown kiss from Prince Ali. Even sceptical Jasmine casts covetous eyes upon Prince Ali and vainly brushes her hair in front of the mirror.

From the moment Jafar is in power, Jasmine too becomes a chained and submissive slave who is forced to feed her master with fruit. Even Jafar himself mockingly says: "It pains me to see you reduced to this" and this time asks her to marry him purely out of lust (because he already has obtained power). I think it is striking that her harem outfit differs from her regular princess outfit only in colour; one might question whether being a princess or a slave makes much difference in women's fate. Jasmine spontaneously employs her sensuality as a tool to attain her goal: although clearly disgusted with Jafar, she kisses him on the mouth to distract attention away from Aladdin. Zarranz García, on the other hand, positively reads Jasmine's kissing of the villain as a transgression of the viewers' expectations and stresses it as a heroic deed, "a performance to protect her kingdom and her real lover, Aladdin" (Zarranz García n. pag.). I found a second scene where Jasmine distracts men by seducing them, only to suddenly reject them afterwards: to Prince Ali Ababwa, she pleasingly claims: "I'm rich too, you know ... the daughter of a sultan ... a fine prize for any prince to marry ... Right, a

prince like you, and every other stuffed shirt, swappering peacock I've met! ... Just go jump off a balcony!" (*Aladdin*).

Do Rozario likes to divide the princesses into an older, graceful category, and a newer, sporty one (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 30). In her opinion, Jasmine – at one point jumping from one roof to another with a pole – is clearly sporty (*ibid.*). I would like to object that Jasmine is able to climb walls only with the help of Aladdin or her domesticated tiger Rajah; without them she is rather clumsy, stumbling over her own feet or bumping into people. Erin Addison remarks that, although Jasmine is represented as “intelligent” and “confident”, she fails to recognize Aladdin through his disguise (Addison cited in Yzaguirre 22). I would argue, however, that she pretended the whole time, which is shown when she accuses Aladdin of lying: “You are the boy from the market! I knew it! Why did you lie to me? ... Did you think I was stupid? ... That I wouldn't figure it out?” (*Aladdin*). Nevertheless, as Addison argues, despite this initial suspicion, she is easily taken in by Aladdin's implausible story (Addison cited in Yzaguirre 22). Although she feels telling the truth is very important, she rapidly forgives Aladdin when she finally discovers his lying. When applying Matti and Liosky's level of decision making, Van Den Abbeele argues that Aladdin is lead more by others when making a decision than Jasmine (Van Den Abbeele 24). I think, however, that both are presented as bad decision makers: Jasmine too at one point exclaims “It's all my fault” (*Aladdin*).

Like Ariel, Jasmine rebels against societal expectations imposed by her father: “The law is wrong ... I hate being forced into this” (*Aladdin*). There is a conflict between generations on the subject of marriage, similar to the one in *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Little Mermaid* (Wood, n. pag.). When, as a princess, she is forced to marry at a certain age, she hollers “Then maybe I don't want to be a princess anymore!” (*Aladdin*). On overhearing marriage settlements for her, she is offended and shouts “How dare you! Standing around trying to decide my future – I'm not a prize to be won!” (*ibid.*). When confronted with Jafar's possessive demands, she pours a glass of wine in his face and objects “I will never marry you ... We'll never bow to you” (*ibid.*). I agree with Zarranz García calling her “determined”: she is strikingly stubborn and Iago even calls her a “shrew” (Zarranz García n. pag.; *Aladdin*). She runs away from home and explains her need for freedom by pointing out how stifling the atmosphere is at the palace: “I can't stay here and have my life lived for me ... People who tell you where to go and how to dress ... You're not free to make your own choices ... You're trapped” (*Aladdin*).

Erin Addison, however, points out that Jasmine is strikingly submissive for a “newer heroine”: when she is caught by the royal guards, she obediently returns to the palace (Addison cited in Yzaguirre 49). As was the case with Snow White, Jasmine’s power does not extend to the public sphere. Jacqueline Layng connects this observation with Jasmine’s helplessness – she completely relies on others after she has run away – and infers from it that Jasmine, like Snow White, is still acting like a child (Layng cited in Yzaguirre 23). Like Ariel, she is a playful child, as shown by her pranks with potential marriage candidates whose pants are “accidentally” torn by her tiger pet Rajah. I agree with Yzaguirre that Jasmine depends on others to save her: she needs Aladdin to free her from a sandglass (Yzaguirre 50). Earlier on, I noticed that she needed Aladdin too to save her from a merchant who wanted to cut off her hand for stealing an apple.

I would argue that Jasmine is portrayed as a very helpless creature, easily scared and unprepared to face the real world outside the palace. Aladdin reproaches that she doesn’t “seem to know how dangerous Agrabah can be” (*Aladdin*). She assumed she could survive without money and could count on her father if things went wrong: “Pay? ... Oh, I’m sorry, sir, but I don’t have any money ... Please, if you let me go to the palace, I can get some from the Sultan” (ibid.). I get the impression she was overprotected and even a bit spoiled before: “I’ve never done a thing on my own. I’ve never had any real friends ... I’ve never been outside the palace walls” (ibid.). Like Ariel, Jasmine looks unfamiliar with common customs; it is very obvious to Aladdin that she visits the market place for the first time. In order to escape her punishment for stealing an apple, she is forced to act like she is mentally disabled. When Jasmine orders Razoul (the lead of the royal guard) to release Aladdin, her order is ignored. Addison uses this example to claim that, in general, Jasmine’s words are not to be taken seriously, which I think is too strong a generalization. Susan Swan argues that, with Jasmine, Disney has taken a step backwards after the more feminist Belle, returning to the “submissive, beautiful creatures forced into distasteful circumstances” of the previous movies (Swan 352). She points out that all of them “are admired for passively accepting abuse and need to be rescued by and then wed to a handsome prince, who they barely know” (ibid.). I agree with her analysis of Jasmine’s unchallenging nature: when she finds out her lover has been executed, she is resigned to his fate and, after some initial objection, merely cries on her daddy’s shoulder.

Hoisington claims that Jasmine is looking for adventure (Hoisington n. pag.). I’d like to remark that the only adventures Jasmine experiences are the trips to foreign countries on

the magic carpet, offered to her by her lover Aladdin. It is a pity she needed a man to show her “a whole new world” (*Aladdin*). On her own, she would never have gotten further than the nearest market place before getting into trouble. According to Addison, Jasmine’s main goal of freedom is limited to “the freedom to marry whomever she chooses”, while she could have shown more ambition, for example by wanting to succeed her father, the Sultan, on the throne (Addison cited in Yzaguirre 14). Yzaguirre objects that Jasmine does consider the “option of remaining unmarried”, because at one point she exclaims “*If I do marry, I want it to be for love*” (Yzaguirre 14, own emphasis). One might question, however, to what extent her marriage with Aladdin is out love, as the two barely know each other and, as Tanner et al. state, fall in love at first sight (Tanner et al. 364). Jasmine is easily seduced by the smooth talker Aladdin, whom she almost immediately trusts.

Like Cinderella and Aurora, they fall in love without knowing each other’s name (“I didn’t even know his name”) or wealth (*Aladdin*). Like Snow White, Aurora, and Ariel, however, Jasmine shares a bond with Aladdin in having the feeling she knows him already. She further resembles Aurora in immediate enthusiasm, proclaiming “Oh father, I just had the most wonderful time. I’m so happy!” (ibid.). Although Aladdin, like Beast, is essentially insecure about his chances to win Jasmine’s heart⁴⁶, in his role as Prince Ali he arrogantly claims that Jasmine is bound to fall in love with him: “And I’m pretty sure I’ll like Princess Jasmine ... Your majesty, I am Prince Ali Ababwa! Just let her meet me. I will win your daughter” (ibid.). Kathi Maio sees Jasmine as “nothing more than a pawn traded back and forth between Aladdin and Jafar”; Addison too sees Jasmine as an “object of social exchange”, because the first line that is heard about Jasmine is “Good luck marrying her off” (Maio and Addison cited in Yzaguirre 26). Van Den Abbeele made a similar remark about Ariel (Van Den Abbeele 54). Marriage is seen as the logical outcome of their romance, which is assumed to be flawless: as the Sultan says, “you two will be wed at once! ... And you’ll be happy and prosperous!” (ibid.). What’s more, Jasmine is forced to be married at a certain age, even against her own will: “Dearest you’ve got to stop rejecting every suitor that comes to call. The law says you must be married to a prince by your next birthday ... If the princess has not chosen a husband by the appointed time, then the sultan shall choose for her” (ibid.). This

⁴⁶ He thinks his true self, as a poor boy, is worth nothing and will make him lose Jasmine if she ever finds out: “If Jasmine found out I was really some crummy street rat, she’d laugh at me” (*Aladdin*). In the end, he has decided he has to stay loyal to who he really is, even if that means losing his chance to marry Jasmine: “Jasmine, I do love you, but I’ve got to stop pretending to be something I’m not” (ibid.).

practice of marrying off girls is defended under the guise of fatherly concern: “It’s not just this law. I’m not going to be around forever, and I, I just want to make sure you’re take care of, provided for” (ibid.). Children, on the other hand, are never mentioned in the movie as the preferred outcome of their relationship, although Jasmine acts very caring towards her pet birds and tiger. Moreover, at the market place, she takes pity on a hungry child and offers him an apple.

As was the case with *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*, there is an unequal division of power between the two partners (Tanner et al. 365). I’d like to add that, unlike these two previous movies, in *Aladdin* the *female* protagonist belongs to royalty, and the *male* protagonist is a poor “street rat” with fleas who has become “a one-man rise in crime”. Unlike King Hubert in *Sleeping Beauty*, the Sultan takes up a stand in the discussion on a cross-class marriage; he grants poorer Aladdin the right to marry his daughter, a princess: “You’ve certainly proven your worth as far as I’m concerned ... From this day forth, the princess shall marry whomever she deems worthy” (*Aladdin*). In spite of her higher rank in society, Jasmine’s gender prevents her from exercising power: male orders (those of Jafar) seem to take precedence over female orders. Her command to release Aladdin is not only ignored, she is even hit by Razoul and ridiculed: “Look what we have here, men – a street mouse!” (ibid.). On the other hand, Libe Zarranz García argues that Jasmine is the first Disney princess to realize “the benefits of royalty”: she reminds Jafar that “At least some good will come of my being forced to marry. When I am queen, I will have the power to get rid of you” (Zarranz García n. pag.). This illustrates that, once she surpasses Jafar in rank, her female gender will not lessen her degree of power. Hoisington makes a similar remark about Aladdin: he too is taught that “the one who has the gold makes the rules”, or that wealth brings along power (Hoisington n. pag.).

I find it remarkable that Disney protagonists are almost never lowered in social rank; they can only move upwards on the social ladder. Despite her initial plan to run away, there is no question Jasmine would ever abandon her royal privileges forever. Still, Hoisington remarks that the only way by which “riffraff” like Aladdin can attain wealth is “through marriage or inheritance” (ibid.). Jafar realizes that a marriage to the right girl can increase his wealth: “Marry the shrew. I become the Sultan. The idea has merit” (*Aladdin*). Although he claims “My life is but to serve you, my lord”, he secretly wants to become the most powerful being in the world. Once his megalomaniac wishes have come true, he takes pleasure in humiliating *his* servants: “Now where were we? Ah, yes, abject humiliation ... Don’t talk back

to me ... You will do what I order you to do, slave!” (ibid.). Aladdin, on the other hand, resigned in his fatalistic fate to stay poor, although he clearly wanted to become a rich man: “You were born a street rat, you’ll die a street rat” (ibid.). The Genie too accepts his fate as a servant, although, unlike the servants at Beast’s castle, he would love to be free one day: “But oh, to be free. Not to have to go ‘Poof! What do you need?’ ... To be my own master, such a thing would be greater than all the magic and all the treasures in the world. But what am I talking about? Let’s get real here. It’s not going to happen” (ibid.).

The movie takes place in Agrabah, an Arabian city. Avins, claims that “[t]he length of noses, color of skin, and shape of eyes for the two young protagonists, Jasmine and Aladdin, were all hotly debated in the Disney shop” (Avins in Bell 122). The merchants on the street, on the other hand, all seem to have big lips and noses, black beards, a fat and short body, and a dark skin. On the whole, I think their culture is represented in a very negative and stereotypical way as “barbaric”. Apart from the disparaging depiction of women, which I already mentioned, the “Arabian nights” are said to be “hotter than hot in a lot of good ways”, hinting at looser morals as well as exoticising sexuality in a non-western context. Moreover, criminality is represented as being omnipresent, and violence is very explicit and extreme. The royal guards punish crimes by throwing knives, threatening to cut off hands, hitting people – even women – unconscious, or beheading them without a proper trial. Hoisington sees the cruelty of beheading as a punishment for too adventurous characters (Hoisington n. pag.). Only when Jasmine objects to her father about the immediate beheading of Aladdin is the gravity of the verdict questioned. Furthermore, the street vendors are portrayed as unreliable and annoying hagglers, selling worthless rubbish. When the merchandise needs to be paid, they react in a very greedy and ruthless manner. In addition, the streets are dangerous, noisy and cluttered. The inhabitants are shown to engage in “strange” and masochistic entertainment, like walking on nails or hot coals, putting knives into their throat or juggling with fire. Hoisington, on the other hand, thinks the Arabian “marginal culture” serves as the producer of goods, meant to be consumed by the white “dominant culture” (instead of the opposite situation in *The Little Mermaid*), and that the “shopping” and “entertaining” is presented as if part of a tourist brochure (Hoisington n. pag.).

Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews argue that Aladdin is used as propaganda to induce consent about the United States’ intervention in the Persian Gulf War. They claim that the “smooth and steady aerial-like movement of the camera” during the opening sequence equals the view through a fighting pilot’s cockpit screen, and that the audience is thus

encouraged to aim at the Arabian citizens as possible targets (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews 81-82).⁴⁷ The camera even strikes against an old Arabian man's face, which would show Hollywood's complete lack of respect, because the audience is encouraged "to laugh at the violence committed on our behalf by the forces of technology" (Phillips & Wojcik n. pag.). Aladdin's donation of food is read as representative of the "starving (though *deserving*) children fed by sympathetic U.S. soldiers while on tours of military duty abroad (*undeserving* children and adults are left)", which would encourage "a private response to poverty rather than a public call for the redistribution of wealth necessary to overcome the structural causes of impoverishment" (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews 82). The Genie would symbolize how a weapon of mass destruction is presented as innocent and harmless; his switching sides, according to who is the most powerful master instead of the most morally correct, would stem from the fact that "late-monopoly capitalism and 'free trade' requires of capital no allegiance except to the accumulation of more capital" (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews 83).

⁴⁷ The animators allegedly based these scenes on stills from *Top Gun* (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews 82).

7. POCAHONTAS IN *POCAHONTAS* (1995)

Many critics view Pocahontas as the most physically “exotic” and sexual Disney princess. Mel Gibson, who provides the voice for John Smith in the movie, apparently claimed in an interview that “she’s a babe” (Gibson cited in Yzaguirre 30). Janet Maslin adds the following: “Fathers across America will soon be volunteering in record numbers to take the children to the movies, and here’s why: Pocahontas is a babe. She’s the first Disney animated heroine since Tinker Bell with great legs ... She’s got sloe eyes, a rose-bud mouth, billowing black hair and terrific muscle tone” (Maslin cited in Buescher and Ono 33). Remarkable is that much more attention is drawn to her body in comparison to other Disney princesses (Yzaguirre 30). As Celeste Lacroix states, “she is tall and slender, with long legs, thick ‘untamed’ hair and a developed bust” (Lacroix cited in Yzaguirre 30). Many critics compared Pocahontas to a Barbie doll (Buescher and Ono 32-33).⁴⁸ Nicole Arthur suggests that “Pocahontas was modelled ‘in part on supermodel Christy Turlington’” (Arthur cited in Buescher and Ono 40). I think she resembles Angelina Jolie, including the black eye-liner and tattooed arm. Bell, Haas, and Sells argue that “Pocahontas also continues Disney’s tradition of presenting a body type which is exaggerated and unattainable” (Bell, Haas, & Sells cited in Dundes 362). A New York Times article claimed, however, that Pocahontas’ face was modelled on “Dyna Taylor, a 21-year-old college student”; her movements would have been based on 15 other real women of colour (Ramirez cited in Buescher and Ono 40). Lacroix points at her revealing clothes: “Her shoulders are bare and much of her thigh can be seen through the slit in her skirt” (Lacroix cited in Yzaguirre 18).

This blatant sexuality is all the more striking since the “real”, historical Pocahontas was an 11-year-old girl (instead of 20), who had no romance with John Smith (Robertson cited in Dundes 362; Kilpatrick 37; Maslin cited in Buescher and Ono 33). A New York Times article expressed outrage because “Pocahontas the doll is sexy, wearing what no Native American 11-year-old would have worn in the early 17th century – a one-shouldered fake deerskin halter top with a matching metallic fringed skirt” (Louie cited in Buescher and Ono 40). Glen Keane, the film’s supervising animator, said to have “made a few ‘adjustments’” because he was not very impressed by the paintings of the real Pocahontas (Keane cited in Kilpatrick 38). Ono and Buescher claim that “marketers promote Pocahontas as a visually

⁴⁸ For instance, Joyce Purnick, Janet Maslin, Karen Grigsby Bates, Peter Travers and Laura Shapiro.

pleasurable image and discursive object ... and a purchasable good” (Buescher and Ono 28). This echoes Van Den Abbeele, Maio and Addison’s claims about Ariel and Jasmine as consumer objects (Van Den Abbeele 54; Maio and Addison cited in Yzaguirre 26). Moreover, Ono and Buescher term Pocahontas as “pornographic”: “since the sexualized gaze is at a child, that ... men are invited to gaze at ... we choose to emphasize the excessive and illicit nature of this sexualisation” (Buescher and Ono 39). They further argue that “the original Barbie was modelled after a sex doll for men” and that “explicit references to, for example, Playboy emerge in the discourse [on Pocahontas]” (Buescher and Ono 32; 39). Betty Sharkley, for instance, claimed Disney turned “the 12-year-old Pocahontas into an animated Playboy playmate” (Buescher and Ono 33).

Like Cinderella, Ariel and Jasmine, Pocahontas can be vain, wringing out her wet hair or looking at her reflection in and posing with John Smith’s helmet. She tails John Smith and peeps at him through the bushes. This female gaze reminds me of Belle and the portrayal of female desire; while Pocahontas’ crawling movements can be associated with the hunting position of animals. Pocahontas tumbles down a hill and halts on top of John Smith, and in another scene, which “was deemed too racy and was cut from the film”, she “cavorted with the shirtless Smith” (Arthur cited in Buescher and Ono 40). Paul Rudnick comments on the changed display of female sexuality: “Disney heroines, like those in *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*, are usually spunky and pert, tossing their ringlets and fins and demanding library cards and legs. Pocahontas is far more lusciously sexual” (Rudnick cited in Buescher and Ono 33). Nicole Arthur’s comparison with older heroines leads to a similar conclusion: “Where Snow White was essentially asexual, Pocahontas is aggressively sexual ... Pocahontas is not just a babe, she’s a superbabe” (Arthur cited in Buescher and Ono 40). When Smith notices her the first time, however, she runs away, startled. Dundes remarks that Pocahontas, although she obviously feels attracted to John Smith, restrains from kissing him, and thus suppresses her desire (Dundes 358). She explains this confusion about “permissible sexual behaviour” as typical for young women in the 1990s and quotes Coontz, who claims young women ignore their own sexual needs and merely address those of their partners: “Girls who become sexually active at an early age, far from being feminist in outlook, tend to have exceptionally strong dependency needs. They are more often motivated by desire to please their partners than by a search for their own sexual satisfaction” (Coontz cited in Dundes 358).

Do Rozario remarks that, unlike the previous clumsy (although elegant) princesses, Pocahontas is very athletic, “running, jumping, even diving off waterfalls and river-rafting along dangerous currents” (Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 30-31). Dundes makes a similar claim about Pocahontas’s fondness of sports, calling her a new breed of heroine (Dundes 354). Yzaguirre adds that she climbs rocks and “somersaults without even batting an eye” (Yzaguirre 53). Like Jasmine, Pocahontas forsakes the elegant ballroom dances (ibid.). Not only is Pocahontas physically active, Jill Henke also sees her as an active decision maker: “She acts on political stances, such as alternatives to violence, that impact not just Pocahontas, but her fellow Indians and English settlers as well” (Henke et al. cited in Yzaguirre 25). The image of Pocahontas as an agent is most clear in the scene where she prevents her father from killing John Smith, “thereby preventing a war between her tribe and the English settlers” (Yzaguirre 45). Van Den Abbeele calls her “intelligent, courageous, erudite and politically correct” (Van Den Abbeele 28). Her confident behaviour is said to be a trait inherited from her mother, which, as Zarranz García argues, portrays “the inheritance of the mother’s character as a positive force in woman’s learning process” (Zarranz García n. pag.).

In fact, the reference to her mother is the first thing mentioned about Pocahontas. Pocahontas is clearly expected to follow in the footsteps of her mother; as her father says about her mother, “Our people looked to her for wisdom and strength. Someday, they will look to you as well” (*Pocahontas*). The main activity of the other women in the tribe is the harvesting of corn. Still, the main wish of her mother seems to have been to see her daughter married; as Pocahontas’ father says when handing her her mother’s necklace, “Your mother wore this at our wedding. It was her dream to see you wear it at your own. It suits you” (ibid.). The necklace seems to me a symbol for the reaching of a marriageable age. Female family members are shown to share a very powerful bond: Pocahontas frequently turns to her Grandmother Willow for advice. Her grandmother is also the first to whom she introduces her lover.⁴⁹ In addition, Pocahontas is the first Disney Princesses movie to include a female friendship, namely the one between Pocahontas and Nakoma (Zarranz García n. pag.). In the presence of Nakoma, Pocahontas mirrors Ariel’s playfulness (turning over the canoe and

⁴⁹ When John Smith is introduced to her, Grandmother Willow inspects him like the sexually mature female villains Maleficent and Ursula did: “Don’t be frightened, young man. My bark is worse than my bite ... Come closer, John Smith. He has a good soul. And he’s handsome too ... Well, I haven’t had this much excitement in two hundred years ... I want to see him again” (*Pocahontas*).

spitting water into Nakoma's face) and Belle's mocking comments on Gaston (about Kocoum, she ironically says "I especially love his smile") (*Pocahontas*). Nakoma, on the other hand, is easily impressed by Kocoum, claiming that "he's so handsome" (ibid.). Stone argues Nakoma illustrates "female volatility": attracting a suitable marriage candidate is seen as a competition, in which Nakoma would be jealous of Pocahontas and therefore send Kocoum to find Pocahontas embracing John Smith (Stone cited in Dundes 355-356). However, I think her behaviour stems more from her dutiful and at times even moralizing character than from jealousy. She reacts to Pocahontas' pranks with an adult "Don't you think we're getting a little old for these games?" and warns Pocahontas "Don't go out there. I lied for you once, don't ask me to do it again" (*Pocahontas*). She reproaches Pocahontas for being disloyal to her tribe: "If you go out there, you'll be turning your back on your own people" (ibid.). Overall, I think her behaviour expresses her concern about her friend: "Pocahontas, please, you're my best friend, I don't want you to get hurt ... I was worried about you, I thought I was doing the right thing" (ibid.).

Pocahontas does not depend on others to save her and instead saves people herself, like John Smith, "who lies bound and powerless" (Yzaguirre 49; Dundes 354). Disney particularly stressed the audacity of Pocahontas, who, unlike the historical Pocahontas who merely warned Smith of a planned attack by the Native Americans⁵⁰, positions herself in between her father and Smith, as a protective shield against the mortal blow (Dundes 354; 362). She defies her father with the words "If you kill him, you'll have to kill me too" (*Pocahontas*). Like Ariel and Jasmine, Dundes claims that, instead of obeying the wish of her father and choosing the safe way, Pocahontas rebels against what is expected of her. Her actions express her own "self-awareness and empowerment" and have "far-reaching consequences" (Dundes 354-355). I would argue that she thus takes a "commanding decision", which, in terms of Matti and Liosky's definition, can bring risk or danger to the ones surrounding her, and is normally associated with male characters (Matti and Liosky cited

⁵⁰ Kilpatrick, however, reveals another version of reality which claims that, initially, there was no mentioning of Pocahontas' saving Smith's life. Kilpatrick ascribes this omission to Smith's embarrassment in being saved by a child. Another possibility she proposes is that Smith, no longer having the prospect of more adventures, simply stole the anecdote from the Utica woman who saved Juan Ortiz eight years earlier when writing his chronicles. In the eventual report he would claim that Pocahontas urged her father to keep him alive in order to make beads for her. John Gould Fletcher thinks this was merely a cover story for Powhatan, who secretly wanted Smith to stay alive and thus saved him himself – but blamed it on Pocahontas to save face in front of his tribe (Fletcher in Kilpatrick 37).

in Van Oost 24). She seems very determined and confident in her actions: “I have to do this ... I know what I’m doing” (*Pocahontas*).

Hoisington, however, thinks Pocahontas’ decisions are depicted as irresponsible: “According to Powhatan, her ‘foolishness’ caused Kocoum’s death and Smith’s death sentence” (Hoisington n. pag.). Her father severely reproaches her: “I told you to stay in the village. You disobeyed me. You have shamed your father!” (*Pocahontas*). At other times, she is depicted as hesitating and unreliable in opinion: “What am I doing? I shouldn’t be seeing him again. I mean, I want to see him again ... I don’t know what I can do” (ibid.). Like Ariel and Jasmine, she seems maladjusted to European customs: she has never heard of money and thinks the “yellow” thing, which “comes out of the ground” and is “really valuable”, is corn (*Pocahontas*). Like Belle and Jasmine, she blames herself when things go wrong: “All this happened because of me ... I was wrong, Grandmother Willow, I followed the wrong path” (ibid.). According to Matti and Liosky, Pocahontas was mostly influenced by others when taking decisions and thus merely takes “personal decisions” (Matti and Liosky cited in Van Oost 24). Indeed, at the end of the movie, Pocahontas decides to do what is best for John Smith and her family, i.e. that *he* returns to England to be cured and that *she* stays behind with her family (Dundes 358).

Yzaguirre sees a similar evolution in the goals of Pocahontas to those of Ariel, Belle and Jasmine, i.e. the shift from an initially adventurous spirit to a woman, blinded by love, whose only objective is to be united with the man of her dreams (Yzaguirre 57). Like Cinderella and Aurora, Pocahontas’ goals are reflected in her dreams. She dreams of a spinning arrow, which is leading her to another path, full of exciting things. The object of her dreams turns out to be John Smith’s compass, and John Smith the bringer of adventure and romance. As was the case with Aurora, Ariel, and Jasmine, Pocahontas disagrees with her father’s ideas on marriage. Chief Powhatan wants his daughter in a “steady” relationship with brave and serious war hero Kocoum: “My daughter, Kocoum will make a fine husband. He is loyal and strong and will build you a good house with sturdy walls. With him, you will be safe from harm” (*Pocahontas*). Pocahontas objects “Father, I think my dream is pointing me down another path ... But why can’t I choose? ... Can I ignore that sound of distant drumming for a handsome, sturdy husband who builds handsome, sturdy walls, and never dreams that something might be coming just around the riverbend?” (ibid.). I think the doubt of Pocahontas mirrors Eric’s fear of commitment, still looking for the mysterious girl with the beautiful voice who saved him; or as Grim advises him, “far better than any dream girl is one

of flesh and blood, one warm and caring and right before your eyes” (*The Little Mermaid*). Pocahontas too seems to think the grass is always greener on the other side, as is metaphorically shown by her hesitation at the branch in the river: “Should I choose the smoothest course, steady as the beating drum? Should I marry Kocoum? Is all my dreaming at an end? Or do you still wait for me, dream giver, just around the river bend?” (*Pocahontas*). She does not rebel as much as Ariel and Jasmine, however, and most of the time calmly resigns herself to her father’s orders. Further, like Belle, she is concerned about and deeply cares for her father: “I’m so glad you’ve come home safely” (ibid.).

Yzaguirre’s claim is thus valuable, since Pocahontas’s expectations change from the hope for an undefined adventure to the mere desire not to leave John Smith (Yzaguirre 57). Tanner et al. and Hoisington remark that, despite the language barrier, Pocahontas fell in love with John Smith at first sight: “John Smith and Pocahontas fell in love based on appearances, as they did not speak the same language (Hoisington n. pag.; Tanner et al. 364). Indeed, it is only Pocahontas’ beauty which keeps John Smith from shooting her. Moreover, like Jasmine, she almost immediately trusts Smith – who claims he’s “not a stranger anymore” – and takes his hand (*Pocahontas*). As was the case with Aurora and Ariel, the couple wants to meet again the same night. Still, a positive aspect of their romance is their mutual interest in the other’s culture: they both learn each other’s language and Pocahontas teaches Smith to reconcile with the earth.⁵¹ When John Smith explains Pocahontas how the Europeans say hello, she remarks that “Nothing happens”, upon which he replies “I need your hand first” (ibid.). This might symbolize the idea, present in *Beauty and the Beast*, that both partners need to fall in love before they can enter a relationship. Many critics, however, argue that Pocahontas does not depend on a marriage for her happiness – because she rejects both Kocoum and John Smith, or, as Henke says, “choose[s] a destiny other than that of heterosexual romantic fulfilment” – and instead accepts herself and resumes a role of leadership within her tribe (Henke cited in Yzaguirre 16).⁵² Hoisington argues the absence of an intercultural marriage is pitiful, wondering if Disney tried to avoid “what you get when races mix” (Hoisington n. pag.).

I tend to agree with Lauren Dundes, who in “Disney’s Modern Heroine Pocahontas: Revealing Age-Old Gender Stereotypes and Role Discontinuity Under a Facade of

⁵¹ Both *Pocahontas* and *Mulan* offer illustrations of alternative forms of religion or spirituality.

⁵² Zarranz García, Gabriel, James, Riemenschneider and Birnie, Zimmerman and Smith also argued this.

Liberation” reads Pocahontas’ denounce of romance as “a progress from selfish absorption in relationships to selfless dedication nurturing others”; “Although she wishes to stay with the man she loves which also would allow her to pursue further adventures, she instead fulfils her perceived obligation to stay with the villagers who ‘need’ her” (Dundes 353). Pocahontas, after comparing herself to a wild river, eventually sighs “But people, I guess, can’t live like that, we all must pay a price, to be safe we lose our chance of ever knowing, what’s around the river bend” (*Pocahontas*). Dundes regrets the missed opportunity to stress Pocahontas’ ambition of leadership, which might have been a fulfilment for her: “The viewer has no sense that she craves a leadership role nor that she has a sense of duty to continue to promote peace, but rather that she regretfully but willingly will fulfil an expected function as a community member” (Dundes 360). The fact that Pocahontas does not choose happiness in love is all the more remarkable because the historical Pocahontas went to Europe and there not only married John Rolfe, but was able to “explore new worlds” and “serve as an ambassador representing her people” (Dundes 354; 360).

Dundes explains this change via Carol Gilligan’s theories about an “ethic of care” and the evolution from selfish to more altruistic behaviour among female adolescents (Dundes 353). The initial selfish behaviour is Pocahontas’ “total absorption in her romantic relationship”; as Dundes states, “Pocahontas’ actions are driven by selfish love, rather than a more noble, altruistic cause” (Dundes 354-355). In another scene, “her main concern is for her own mental health – not for the warrior who has died nor for Smith who is scheduled for execution nor for the mounting tension between the settlers and the Indians” (*ibid.*). Both are examples of what Lawrence Kohlberg calls “egocentrism”, which is said to be a primary level in moral development, normally associated with children, in which “the individual aims to meet his or her own needs” (Kohlberg cited in Dundes 355). In the subsequent level, an individual takes others into account by obeying certain rules; in the final stage, the individual’s behaviour is based on universal human rights principles (*ibid.*). Dundes admits that Kohlberg’s stages of morality can be criticised for being “based on male patterns of duty” (Dundes 355). Moreover, caring (seen as characteristically female) behaviour, heedful of others, is still seen as inferior to rational (supposedly male) thoughts (Dundes 356).

Gilligan, on the other hand, does not judge the supposed superiority of one type of moral reasoning over another. Gilligan’s “ethic of care”, is mainly based on other’s feelings and relationships; this focus on relationships would stem from the fact that “girls are not urged to separate from their mothers” (Gilligan cited in Dundes 356). Pocahontas’ final self-

sacrificing attitude is supposedly an “apt preparation for the sacrifice demanded in motherhood”, upon which Dundes questions the narrow range of possible choices for female adolescents – “between self-abnegation and self-indulgence” – which marks women as primarily nurturing and makes them dependent on others for approval (Dundes 354). Pocahontas, for example, displays “nurturing” behaviour when she gives a healing bark from a willow tree to John Smith (Dundes 358). In another scene, she shows mothering affection towards a bear cub.

Hekman claims the transition from selfish to selfless behaviour occurs at the age of ten, when “girls receive signals to repress their feelings”; close relationships are then regarded as dangerous, and decisions based on them are no longer appropriate but egocentric (Hekman cited in Dundes 356). This could explain why Pocahontas, who acted so rebelliously earlier on, does not “accompany her beloved John Smith on an unknown adventure”, but accepts society’s expectation of mature women to “subjugate her own desires in order to benefit others” (Dundes 356). Because selfishness is seen as “a moral failing”, and “authentic” relationships with others need to be set aside or changed into “idealized” relationships, maturity for women means “a profound psychological loss” (Brown & Gilligan cited in Dundes 356). Anthropologist Ruth Benedict terms this abrupt change in expectations “role discontinuity”. She claims that because these differences in cultural conditioning are drastic and often occur unguided – whereas in some cultures the transition from childhood into maturity is accompanied by rituals – many adolescents are confused and handle the situation incompetently:

Adults in our culture put all the blame on the child when he fails to manifest spontaneously the new behaviour or, overstepping the mark, manifests it with untoward belligerence. It is not surprising that in such a society many individuals fear to use behavior which has up to that time been under a ban and trust instead, though at great psychic cost, attitudes that have been exercised with approval during their formative years. (Benedict cited in Dundes 353; 357).

Unlike men, who are deemed noble as long as they base their judgements on duty, women “are excluded both from the masculine model of autonomous selfhood and from the kind of open, honest relationships that they knew as preadolescent girls” (Brown & Gilligan cited in Dundes 356-357). Thus, while John Smith can still follow his own adventurous interests and stay immature, Pocahontas must let “her sense of individuality ... become subsumed within a web of bonds in her community” (Dundes 358-359). As her father orders, “It is time to take your place among our people. Even the wild mountain stream must

someday join the big river” (*Pocahontas*). At the end of the movie, however, Pocahontas’ father accepts John Smith, calling him “my brother” and claiming that he is “always welcome among our people”; he even advises Pocahontas to “choose your own path” when Smith asks her to follow him to Europe. Still, Pocahontas, although she feels lost when her relationship with Smith is obstructed, reprimands herself that “It would have been better if we had never met” and says goodbye to Smith, claiming “I’m needed here” (*ibid.*). Sanford and Donovan claim that the need of other’s approval leads to further instability and is generally regarded as a weakness (Sanford & Donovan cited in Dunes 359). Ono and Buescher apply this duality, i.e. men as desiring adventures and “Pocahontas being the *adventure to be found*”, to the gendered and racially defined meaning in commercials for *Pocahontas* toys (Buescher and Ono 31).

I find it quite remarkable that Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, a movie released four years earlier, does not bother to comply with the expectations of the French village, while Pocahontas, a member of a Native-American tribe, does. One might wonder if Disney is giving the impression here that non-European cultures are more effective than European cultures in repressing the needs of an individual. Henke, on the other hand, points out that Belle equals Pocahontas in self-sacrifice and nurturing behaviour when she offers to take her father’s place as a prisoner, does not flee the castle to nurse the wounded beast, and returns to Beast to warn him of danger (Henke et al. cited in Dundes 362-363). Dundes contrasts Pocahontas with former Disney heroine Ariel, who is claimed to bear no traces of nurturing behaviour or self-sacrifice (Dundes 357). In this case, I disagree since, as I argued earlier, Ariel’s behaviour towards Flounder could be seen as nurturing, and I summarized several other opinions who agree about Ariel’s self-sacrifice. However, it is correct that, unlike Pocahontas who stays home and is “bound to serve a community that does not share her interest in and tolerance for outsiders”, Ariel is more determined to choose adventure, even if she has to ignore the wishes of her father (*ibid.*)

Lacroix reads Pocahontas’s self-sacrifice as a characteristic feature of her Native American ethnicity (Lacroix cited in Yzaguirre 18). Pocahontas was promoted as an “authentic” and “respectful” film towards Native Americans, or as co-director Eric Goldberg claimed, “We’ve gone from being accused of being too white bread to being accused of racism in *Aladdin* to being accused of being too politically correct in *Pocahontas*. That’s progress to me” (Goldberg cited in Kilpatrick 36). Many critics, however, argue that Disney committed an even worse crime this time by *presenting* the movie as “politically correct”

when it is anything but: “Disney appropriates the experience of oppression as if to end it, while simultaneously creating and sustaining new ways to oppress, thus in fact contributing to the history of oppression through its various strategies and practices” (Buescher and Ono 35). Kilpatrick points out that the Native Americans are mainly portrayed as “warlike” (Kilpatrick 38). He frequently engages in war speeches and acts out of revenge: “Your weapons are strong, but now our anger is stronger. At sunrise, he will be the first to die” (*Pocahontas*). As was the case with Aladdin, John Smith is cruelly sentenced to beheading, which, according to Hoisington, serves as a punishment for his adventurous mind (Hoisington n. pag.). The Native Americans are portrayed as clinging to tradition: “Help us keep the ancient ways” (*Pocahontas*). Like the villagers in *Beauty and the Beast*, they distrust the unknown: “This is what we feared, the paleface is a demon. The only thing they feel at all is greed. Beneath that milky hide there’s emptiness inside ... They’re different from us, which means they can’t be trusted” (ibid.). Like Gaston, Kekata, the tribe’s shaman, stirs up the fear and hatred (and continues the “Beast” symbolism): “These are not men like us but strange beasts with bodies that shine like the sun and weapons that spout fire and thunder. They growl the earth like ravenous wolves consuming everything in their path” (ibid.). Still, I think it can be argued that they only use violence in a defensive way. Moreover, Pocahontas equals Jasmine in influencing her father to change entrenched views on violence: “We don’t have to fight them! There must be a better way ... maybe we should try talking to them” “My daughter speaks with a wisdom beyond her years. We have all come here with anger in our hearts, but she comes with courage and understanding. From this day forward, if there is to be more killing, it will not start with me. Release him” (ibid.).⁵³

Buescher and Ono criticize the way in which “the ugly reality of mass annihilation” is substituted by “a harmonious union of colonizers and natives” (Buescher and Ono cited in Dundes 354). Indeed, Disney took a great liberty in adjusting historical details. Fjellman adds that “the past was cleaned up – ‘vacuum cleaned,’ in Mike Wallace’s words. Unpleasantries would be dropped from history, and stories of the past would be told in carefully (and commercially) re-mythologized form to which Americans were becoming accustomed

⁵³ John Smith, on the other hand, adheres a more pessimistic view on the matter, which, unfortunately, is closer to reality: “Pocahontas, talking isn’t going to do any good. I already tried talking to my men, but everything about this land has them spooked ... You see what I mean? Once two sides want to fight, nothing can stop them” (*Pocahontas*). It should be noted too that, when he tried to convince his men not to attack the Native Americans, his main argument was that they could be useful to the settlers: “They’re not savages, they can help us. They know the land. They know how to navigate the rivers” (ibid.).

through the movies and television” (Fjellman cited in Buescher and Ono 35). The real Pocahontas left her tribe to discover adventure in Europe and functioned as an ambassador of the Native Americans (Dundes 354). According to Tilton, she “renounced savagery, embraced Christianity and was renamed Rebecca” (Tilton cited in Dundes 362). Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, on the other hand, stresses the violent and sad nature of reality and claims Pocahontas “was kidnapped and raped by the English” (Kilpatrick 37). Moreover, after she followed her husband John Rolfe to England in 1616, despite adjusting perfectly to the English customs (she is said to have impressed playwright Ben Jonson as well as the King and Queen of England) she wanted to return home but was infected by smallpox during the voyage and died at the age of twenty-two (ibid.).

These tragic “details” are nowhere to be found in the Disney movie, with the only justification that the real story would have been “too long” (uttered by producer James Pentecost), or that “[t]he history of Pocahontas is, in and of itself, a source of much controversy. Nobody knows the truth of her legend” (said by Peter Schneider, president of Walt Disney Studios’ animation division) (Pentecost cited in Kilpatrick 38; Schneider cited in Buescher and Ono 36). Ono and Buescher argue that traditional culture was dishonoured basically to more effectively adapt Pocahontas, who “was meaningful in Native American history and culture” long before Disney adapted the story, to the Western consumerist society (Buescher and Ono 25). They claim the same about Pocahontas’ appearance: “in comparing Barbie with Pocahontas (or Native American Barbie), form, body, race, ethnicity, sex, and gender are all fetishized for consumer culture, further commodifying the Native American woman. This process effectively erases Native American identity from the form itself, while merely appearing to be based on a real Native American identity” (Buescher and Ono 34). Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund made a similar claim about Mattel’s colored dolls: “Cultural difference is reduced to surface variations of skin tone and costumes that can be exchanged at will ... ‘difference’ is remarkably made over into sameness, as ethnicity is tamed to conform to a restricted range of feminine beauty” (Urla & Swedlund cited in Buescher and Ono 40). Ono and Buescher argue that the appropriation of Native American culture by Euro-Americans “relies on culturally specific views of ownership and property rights and is an act of subordinating Native Americans to Euro-American culture” (Buescher and Ono 36). They rely on Laurie Anne Whitt, who in her essay “Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America” claimed:

A form of oppression exerted by a dominant society upon other cultures, and typically a source of economic profit, cultural imperialism secures and deepens

the subordinated status of those cultures. In the case of indigenous cultures, it undermines their integrity and distinctiveness, assimilating them to the dominant culture by seizing and processing vital cultural resources, then remaking them in the image and marketplaces of dominant culture. (Whitt cited in Buescher and Ono 36).

Pocahontas is thus created as “interchangeable, substitutable, and replaceable – translatable into any and every colonial and masculine) desire” (Buescher and Ono 38).

Disney’s “omissions” do not justify the distorted representation of colonialism. Buescher and Ono argue that, in the Disney movie, the white invaders are represented as “enlightened”, which would legitimize their actions (Buescher and Ono cited in Dundes 354). The settlers, who feel superior, aim to colonize the “ignorant” Native Americans, while presenting their suppression as a good deed: “We’ll show your people how to use this land properly, how to make the most of it ... You think that only because you don’t know any better ... There’s so much we can teach you. We’ve improved the lives of savages all over the world” (*Pocahontas*). Pocahontas, however, sharply objects to his sense of superiority: “You think I’m an ignorant savage, and you’ve been so many places, I guess it must be so, but still I can not see if the savage one is me. How can there be so much that you don’t know?” (*Pocahontas*).

I would like to object that the English settlers are not portrayed as flattering as Buescher and Ono claim. Like Hoisington, I believe there are several instances where Governor Ratcliffe hints at the future annihilation of the Native Americans: “We will eliminate these savages once and for all ... Destroy their evil race until there’s not a trace left ... There’s no room for their kind in civilized society. And I say anyone who so much as looks at an Indian without killing him on sight will be tried for treason and hanged!” (*Pocahontas*). The English settlers too fear the unknown Native Americans, as Ratcliffe states, “They’re not like you and me, which means they must be evil”. Ratcliffe is especially suspicious of the Native Americans: “They don’t want to feed us, you ninnies! They want to kill us, all of us. They’ve got our gold, and they’ll do anything to keep it ... I told you those savages couldn’t be trusted ... Smith tried to befriend them and look what they’ve done to him!” (ibid.). He calls them “bloodthirsty savages”, “murderous thieves”, and “insolent heathens”. Hate and fear are encouraged: “What can you expect from filthy little heathens. Here’s what you get when races are diverse ... Their skins are hellish red, they’re only good in death, they’re vermin as I said” (ibid.). The sailors display an image of masculinity as rough, drinking and violent, and even make a game out of killing the Native Americans: “We shot ourselves an

Indian, or maybe two or three. It's just a little fun" (ibid.). Anyone who does not meet these standards is regarded as a failure. A weaker, older sailor is pushed down by Ratcliffe. Shy Englishman Thomas as well is frequently depicted as helpless and weak; he needs John to help him tie the cannons tightly and is saved by him when nearly drowning during a storm at sea. He tries to compensate for his cowardice by using tough language: "I'm going to get a pile of gold, build me a big house, and if any Indian tries to stop me, I'll blast him" (ibid.). Still, when the time comes to actually shoot, he feels incompetent to do so and is a disappointment to Ratcliffe: "Oh, and Thomas, you've been a slipshod sailor and a poor excuse for a soldier. Don't disappoint me again" (ibid.). As a result, both John Smith and Governor Ratcliffe teach him how to use a gun properly, because, in Ratcliffe's words, "a man's not a man unless he knows how to shoot" (ibid.). Finally, Thomas is manipulated into killing Kocoum to demonstrate his manliness.

Hoisington applies Burton and Carjaval's reading of *The Three Caballeros* to Pocahontas. Burton and Carjaval argue that the Latin American woman is often depicted as "playful, alluring, and receptive", passive and "willing to be conquered" (Hoisington n. pag.). Green and Sunquist too stress American Indian women's status as "object of White men's sexual desire", and add that they helped white men, while they resigned in the conquering of their own people (Green & Sundquist cited in Dundes 355; Kilpatrick 38). Strikingly, as Buescher and Ono point out, Pocahontas prefers a white man, John Smith, over a Native American candidate, Kocoum (Buescher and Ono cited in Dundes 362). This disrespectful view on Native American women is *seemingly* absent in *Pocahontas*: John Smith, and the sailors in general, take off their hats when Pocahontas and the other Indian women come past. At other times, however, they threaten to act in a less respectful manner towards Native American people in general.

Pocahontas, and the Indian tribe in general, are depicted as "closely associated to nature", which, in terms of ecofeminism, positions them on a lower level in evolution (Hoisington n. pag.; Kilpatrick 38). Yet, Pocahontas objects, reproving Smith that "You think the only people who are people are people who look and act like you" (Hoisington n. pag.). The dignity of Pocahontas and her father Powhatan is stressed, which makes them "noble savages", innocent and not yet corrupted by society (ibid.). Ono and Buescher see the depiction as noble savages as an example of the "fantasy of colonizers" and conclude that the movie primarily wants to appeal to non-Native American audiences (Buescher and Ono 34). Furthermore, they see *Pocahontas* as a "product of the contemporary political and social

imaginary”: “Pocahontas promises to satisfy the need to end colonial history, racism, and sexism. Through images, it conjures up utopic [sic] hopes and desires, diverting attention away from the materiality of daily life, hence away from contemporary social problems” (Buescher and Ono 35).

Like most of her predecessors, Pocahontas is the daughter of a very powerful man; her father is the Chief of their tribe (Hoisington, n. pag.). Ratcliffe is a governor, who “came so highly recommended” (*Pocahontas*). He seems frustrated and desperately wants to become richer and gain more success. About himself, he claims he has “never been a popular man”, is “a pathetic social climber who’s failed at everything he’s tried” and is “very well aware that this is my last chance for glory” (ibid.). He possessively wants to appropriate the gold, because “there’ll be heaps of it, and I’ll be on top of the heap” (ibid.). He clearly wants to surpass “those backstabbers at court” in power: “My rivals back home, it’s not that I’m bitter, but think how they’ll squirm when they see how I glitter. The ladies at court will be in a twitter. The king will reward me. He’ll knight me, no, lord me ... My dear friend, King Jimmy, will probably build me a shrine when all of the gold is mine” (ibid.). Kilpatrick notes that the English are “extremely one-dimensional in their bumbling greed” and argues that the contemporary villain is portrayed as a capitalist swindler (Kilpatrick 38). Instead of earning his gold himself (I’d help you to dig, boys, but I’ve got this crick in my spine”), he exploits his sailors: “I’ll need those witless peasants to dig up my gold, won’t I?” (*Pocahontas*). The crew, however, starts a mutiny: “Oh, sure, we’re having loads of fun, right? Look at us: no gold, no food. While Ratcliffe sits up in his tent all day, happy as a clam ... If you ask me, Ratcliffe has been lying to us since we left London” (ibid.). Only Ratcliffe’s obsequious servant Wiggins unquestioningly obeys him. Hoisington reads Ratcliffe’s failure as another illustration of Disney’s message that wealth cannot be attained “by any other means that inheritance or marriage” (Hoisington n. pag.).

8. MULAN IN *MULAN* (1998)

Unlike the tendency towards more openly sexual Disney princesses that started in the early nineties, Mulan's female features are never accentuated; even without her soldier's clothes, she is quite "tough-looking" and rather androgynous (Yzaguirre 53; Van Den Abbeele 80). Apart from her long black hair, big lips, and dark eyes, I think Disney tried hard to give her an unpretentious appearance: her round face (with even a hint of protruding ears) and sturdy calves constitute a more true-to-life image of girls, away from the overly delicate depiction of earlier princesses. Mulan is declared unfit by the Matchmaker because she is "too skinny, not good for bearing sons" (*Mulan*). The makers seem to have returned to the concept of first Disney princess Snow White as the average girl-next-door in creating Mulan. Mulan's clothes too are a lot less girlish: she is first shown wearing pyjama shorts and top, and spends almost the entire movie dressed in a man's armour. The term "Sleeping Beauty" is only applied to her as an ironic nickname by Mushu. In front of her family, on the other hand, it seems more appropriate for her to wear long skirts, which again links her to the traditional Disney princess. Like these previous Disney princesses, she secretly glances at her own reflection in the water, in a helmet or in stone. Despite her toughness, Mushu accuses her of possessing some basic "stupid girly habits" (*ibid.*). These "stupid girly habits", however, simply refer to the fact that she values hygiene; she does not display extraordinary or unnecessary vanity: "Just because I look like a man, doesn't mean I have to smell like one" (*ibid.*).

Like Snow White, Mulan anxiously covers her naked body from the sight of men, once when she is bathing in a lake, and a second time after her wounds have been bandaged. Initially, she seems to show no sexual interest in men at all, and merely thinks of the tattooed, nose picking soldiers who "don't rinse out their socks" as disgusting (*ibid.*). She is very embarrassed to have to look at Yao's exposed genitals, and exclaims, quite shocked, "I never want to see a naked man again" (*ibid.*). Unlike the other Disney princesses – except maybe for Belle – Mulan opposes her reduction to a sexualized object of the male gaze. When Mushu claims "My eyes can see straight through your armour", she answers his impertinence with a slap on his face (*ibid.*). She equals Belle, however, in curiously glancing at the muscular torso of Li Shang, who is nicknamed a "pretty boy" (*ibid.*).

Mulan is first shown eating rice, which is a strong symbol of fertility (Van Den Abbeele 79). During the beauty ritual, further comparisons with nature are made. Most of all, she is compared to a lotus flower.⁵⁴ Mulan's transition into maturity is symbolized by her father's comments on spring flowers: "My, my, what beautiful blossoms we have this year. But look, this one's late. But I bet that when it blooms, it will be the most beautiful of all" (*Mulan*). Near the end of the movie, the Emperor confirms this prediction: "The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all" (ibid.). The beauty specialists want to shape her "like a lotus blossom, soft and pale", while both her father and her mother pin a comb in the shape of a flower in Mulan's hair (ibid.). Van Den Abbeele argues that this comb becomes a symbol for Mulan, as she replaces her father's sign of summons by the comb when taking his place for the enrolment in the army. Moreover, when Mulan is distressed, she flees to the garden; and at the army base, her tent is placed in the open field, at some distance from the others, suggesting that nature is a place of refuge for her. This is confirmed by her urge to jump into the lake. Van Den Abbeele interprets Mulan's bond with her horse Khan as a sign that she belongs to the Chinese horoscope sign of the "horse", which would include the features of autonomy (unusual in the Chinese group mentality), hard working, cleverness, and friendliness. This affection for her horse, her initial refusal to catch fish, and the reproach by Chi-Fu that she is a snake, make Van Den Abbeele conclude that she feels closely related to animals, and nature in general (Van Den Abbeele 80-81).

The lotus flower, ready to be picked, is read as a metaphor for entering the age ready for marriage and being incorporated into a male-dominated family (Van Den Abbeele 84). I think the flower metaphor obviously hints at an encouraged deflowering of the innocent girl. Unlike the Queen in *Snow White*, Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, and Ursula the Sea Witch in *The Little Mermaid*, Mulan's natural parents encourage her to lose her innocence, instead of anxiously trying to preserve it. Fa Li, Mulan's mother, sees it as the main priority in the education of her daughter to teach her to behave in a modest way in order to answer the ideal of traditional femininity (Van Den Abbeele 103). This emphasis on self-control as an important virtue mirrors the stepmother's severity in *Cinderella*. Other qualities of Mulan, like her intelligence, seem to be insignificant to her mother, who does not know any better than merely to prepare her daughter for marriage (Van Den Abbeele 104).

⁵⁴ According to Croll, even the name "Mulan" means "wild orchid" (Van Den Abbeele 79-80).

The beauty specialists too never seem to question that Mulan will be turned into the perfect bride, or at least look like one (Van Den Abbeele 108). Themselves extravagantly enlarged illustrations of their beauty ideal, they believe their “recipe for instant bride” can easily “turn this sow’s ear into a silk purse” (*Mulan*). Like Carlotta, Eric’s maid in *The Little Mermaid*, they give the girl delivered to them a bath to transform her into a charming beauty: “We’ll have you washed and dried, primped and polished till you glow with pride” (ibid.). Within their beauty salon, they have the power – acquired by adjusting to patriarchal expectations – to manipulate women in order to validate the existing order (Van Den Abbeele 108-109). Mulan is mercilessly soaked in a freezing bath, has her hair tied neatly up and her waist laced up, and is overloaded with excessive make-up and jewels. The potential brides are thus made to look like “cultured pearls, each a perfect porcelain doll” (*Mulan*). According to the beauty specialists, “A girl can bring her family great honour in one way, by striking a good match” (ibid.). They preach that “Men want girls with good taste, calm, obedient, who work fast-paced, with good breeding and a tiny waist” (ibid.). A rigid role division between men and women is unquestioningly accepted: “We all must serve our Emperor ... a man by bearing arms, a girl by bearing sons” (ibid.). The little children playing on the streets seem to prepare already for their future rigid roles; the boys by fighting, the girl by playing with a doll. Unluckily for the beauty specialists, Mulan has a will of her own, and rebels against her reduction to a mindless dolled up object by personalising her neat hairdo with a loose curly lock (Van Den Abbeele 108). I think this lock nicely expresses her tendency to maintain her own playful, rebellious personality – as a mischievous girl who is late, is indecisive to enter an ice-cold tub of water, and likes to cheat at interrogations – despite the rigorous prescriptions. Earlier on, when Mulan was rehearsing the descriptions to which she should correspond – “Quiet and demure. Graceful. Polite. Delicate. Refined. Poised. Punctual” – she immediately rebelled against them by talking with her mouth full, and in the meantime writing notes on her arm to peep at (*Mulan*).

Finally, Mulan is sent to the Matchmaker, who possesses the highest power within the female community to endorse the prevailing system in inspecting the future brides (Van Den Abbeele 109-110). The Matchmaker adds to the beauty requirements some prescriptions on appropriated conduct: “Fulfil your duties calmly and respectfully. Reflect before you act ... To please your future in-laws, you must demonstrate a sense of dignity and refinement. You

must also be poised – and silent!” (*Mulan*).⁵⁵ Ironically, as Van Den Abbeele says, in preaching the ideal femininity, she displays masculine regularity; at one point, her smudged make-up and ink-painted beard make her look like a man. She thus obviously elicits Mulan’s dressing up as a man, by illustrating that gender is not an inherent but a culturally acquired construction (Van Den Abbeele 109-110). According to Haque Rahman, however, Matchmakers did not exist in traditional rural China (Rahman cited in Van Den Abbeele 109).

Mulan is frequently patronized by her family and the Matchmaker, and although she clearly does not agree on the imposed expectations, she wants to satisfy them anyway (Van Den Abbeele 79; 82). Croll and Haque Rahman argue that this obedience is common in traditional rural China (Croll and Rahman cited in Van Den Abbeele 82). Her father Fa Zhou seems to be the one who most accepts Mulan’s uniqueness and treats her as someone equal; once outside the farm, however, he too seems to apply the patriarchal system of inequality, in which Mulan stands at the lowest level (Van Den Abbeele 83). Still, he holds on to traditional values, which is why he supposes Mulan is dependent on him until she is married. Ultimately, however, he is what Raffaelli calls a “failed patriarch”, since he has no real authority over his daughter (Raffaelli cited in Van Den Abbeele 100). Mulan’s mother Fa Li seems to be the most severe and reprimanding, while her grandmother undercuts this authority by allowing Mulan to follow the royal announcement – a feature which, according to Croll, is typical of Chinese grandmothers (Van Den Abbeele 83; 105). Croll highlights the importance of grandmothers for the socialization of young women in traditional Chinese society (Croll cited in Van Den Abbeele 105). In my opinion, Mulan’s grandmother is more traditional concerning gender patterns than her ironical remarks and crazy behaviour would suggest. Like the fairies in *Sleeping Beauty*, she offers her granddaughter “gifts” that each represent a certain virtue: “An apple for serenity. A pendant for balance. Beads for beauty, you must proudly show it” (*Mulan*). When Mulan returns home from fighting the war, she is clearly disappointed: “Great, she brings home a sword. If you ask me, she should have brought a man” (*ibid.*). Within the patriarchal system, a second hierarchy between women, based on age, experience, and wisdom, is seemingly at work; here too, Mulan ends up at the lowest rank (Van Den Abbeele 85; 105). At home, for instance, she is in charge of feeding the chicken, but deploys her dog to do her chores, a feature that connects her to Snow White, the

⁵⁵ Like Ursula the Sea Witch, who also acted like a matchmaker, she teaches girls that men prefer them to be silent. In *Aladdin* too, Jafar said: “You’re speechless, I see. A fine quality in a wife” (*Aladdin*).

first Disney princess. According to Bell, Haas, and Sells, the Fa family, which has a patriarch at the top but still incorporates women on subordinate levels, can be seen as a miniature representation of Chinese society as a whole (Bell, Haas, & Sells cited in Van Den Abbeele 100).

The soldiers too, and especially Ling, seem to hold very conservative ideas on women (Van Den Abbeele 94). Ling literally says “I want her paler than the moon, with eyes that shine like stars” (*Mulan*). His reference to these natural features would suggest that he considers women as more closely related to nature (Van Den Abbeele 94). Apart from beauty, the soldier’s ideal women are required to possess great cooking skills. I think it is striking for men who make such enormous demands that they think their mere rank as soldiers will suffice for girls to adore them: “I bet the ladies love a man in armour” (*Mulan*).⁵⁶ Mulan’s suggestion of some alternative requirements, “How about a girl who’s got a brain, who always speaks her mind?” is not met with much enthusiasm – except, eventually, by Li Shang (*ibid.*). Even Mushu, her side-kick from the start, only points out Mulan’s beauty in his effort to cheer her up: “Look at you, you look so pretty” (*ibid.*).

When Mulan is made to dress up like a future bride, “she appears embarrassed and awkward” (Yzaguirre 53). Unlike Cinderella, she seems incapable at performing her enforced domestic chores: she is clumsy at pouring tea and nearly drops the tea pot. I think her appointment with the Matchmaker perfectly illustrates her disastrous accumulation of clumsy acts. On arriving at the door, she lowers her parasol slightly asynchronously compared to the other girls, and blurts out her name before receiving permission to speak. During the test, she almost makes mistakes in reciting the final admonition, despite the (now unreadable) notes on her arm. The ink is smeared on the Matchmaker’s hand and face, while the hot tea is spilled everywhere – including on the Matchmaker’s face. Moreover, in an effort to remove a cricket from the cup of tea the Matchmaker is about to drink, Mulan makes her fall backwards, upon which the cricket falls into the Matchmaker’s bosom, and the Matchmaker lands on a pushed over bin of hot coals. Efforts at extinguishing the Matchmaker’s burning behind only further stir up the fire. The Matchmaker concludes, very convinced, that Mulan is unfit for marriage and will never bring her family honour.

⁵⁶ “My girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars” “My girl will think I have no faults” “My manly ways and turn of phrase are sure to thrill her” “When we come home in victory, they’ll line up at the door” (*Mulan*).

Mulan clears off, feeling terribly ashamed, and covers her face for both the crowd and her father. Once back at home, she sadly expresses her disillusionment and starts to doubt her ability to unquestioningly fit in by restraining her true self:

Look at me, I will never pass for a perfect bride, or a perfect daughter. Can it be [that] I'm not meant to play this part? Now I see that if I were truly to be myself, I would break my family's heart. Who is that girl I see, staring straight back at me? Why is my reflection someone I don't know? Somehow I cannot hide who I am, though I've tried. When will my reflection show who I am inside? (*Mulan*).

To me, this song serves as a turning point for Mulan: afterwards, she openly protests against her father. In doing so, she disobeys important rules; she faces men outside of the farm and even addresses them directly in objecting that her father has already fought bravely in previous wars. Her temper is anything but subdued, and she openly disagrees with her father: "You shouldn't have to go! There are plenty of young men to fight for China!" (ibid.). While she mirrors Ariel and Jasmine's juvenile rejection of the father's authority, it should be noted that she primarily acts out of concern for her father, which, to me, links her more to Belle. Still, Fa Zhou, who has taken offence at Mulan's protest, equals Chief Powhatan in claiming that she has dishonoured him. It is only now that he angrily reprimands her: "I know my place, it is time you learned yours!" (ibid.).

Van Den Abbeele claims that Mulan's unconventional personality traits can only start to develop *because* she failed to meet the traditional standards for women. He remarks that Mulan wipes off the make-up from the left side of her face first, and interprets this preference for the left as a sign that the left side of her brain, containing the capacity for rational behaviour and usually considered "masculine", is more developed. He seems to neglect, however, that nerves are cross-connected between the brain and body, and that left parts of the body are coordinated by the right half of the brain and vice versa. The cutting off of her long hair, a symbol of femininity, by using her father's sword, a phallic symbol of masculinity, is read by Van Den Abbeele as a final transition to manliness (Van Den Abbeele 80).

Van Den Abbeele suggests Mulan's outer transformation into a split male and female persona could be representative of her inner conflict. He calls her a "hybrid" character and thinks the nickname "chicken boy", given to her by the other soldiers points at both her female ("chick") and her male ("boy") side. He further argues that Mushu, with his phallic appearance, can be equalled to Mulan's male alter ego, Ping, and functions as Mulan's

conscience; in fact, he argues Mushu and Mulan can be seen as the male and female part of the same being (Van Den Abbeele 79-81). I would not go as far as to diminish Mushu to a mere component of Mulan, and think he clearly stands out as a character on his own.

Mulan's cross-dressing is not exactly met with sympathy by her family: her ancestors reproach each other that "[y]our great-granddaughter had to be a cross-dresser", while Mushu blames her for his being doomed, "all because Miss man decides to take her little drag show on the road" (*Mulan*). As I discussed in my bachelor paper on cross-gendering in a modernist novel, cross-dressing can be positioned as enabling female liberation and diversity.⁵⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert claims that the metaphor of transvestism is used completely different by male and female writers:

Literary men often oppose false costumes to true clothing... their obsessive use of sex-connected costumes suggests that for most male modernists the hierarchical order of society is and should be a pattern based upon gender distinctions, since the ultimate reality is in their view the truth of gender, a truth embodied or clothed in cultural paradigms. (Gilbert cited in Malfroid 8)

For these male writers, revealing and removing false clothing – men dressed as women, women dressed as men – confirms men's mastery over women. Gilbert argues:

The feminist counterparts of these men, however, not only regard all clothing as costume, they also define all costume as false ... to show that all our roles... are merely costumes ... feminist modernist costume imagery is radically revisionary in a political as well as literary sense, for it implies that no one, male or female, can or should be confined to a uni-form, a single form or self. Feminist writers object male modernists who used transvestism "to maintain or reassert a fixed social order" and claim instead that "that social order is itself fallen or at least misguided." (Gilbert cited in Malfroid 8).

Near the end of the movie, another positive example of cross-dressing is given, this time displaying the soldiers Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po dressed as women. Because of their disguise, they are able to distract the enemy troops and eventually win the war. Van Den Abbeele remarks that Mulan used fruits, i.e. natural elements, to suggest female forms. Moreover, he reads Mulan's transformation of men into women as a sign of her power in being female (Van Den Abbeele 84). Indeed, the transvestite soldiers use their shawls as a whip, which can be interpreted as a symbol of their female dominance. Still, I'd like to object that the feminized soldiers are depicted in a very stereotypical way, asking "Does this dress make me look fat?" (*Mulan*). They continue the affected behaviour of the blonde triplets in *Beauty and the Beast* by crying and going off in a swoon about how "cute" the Hun soldiers are. Moreover, I would

⁵⁷ Malfroid, K. "Djuna Barnes and the Representation of Women: Cross-Gendering in *Nightwood*", p 8.

argue that they parody Jasmine's seductive qualities in manipulating men: they literally deploy their breasts (the pieces of fruit) as a weapon.⁵⁸

Yzaguirre reads Mulan's transformation into a man in a negative way: according to her, the impression is given that Mulan can only achieve success "appearing, speaking and acting as a male" (Yzaguirre 16). Similarly, the soldiers are said to become literally effeminate because they display emotions, a behaviour based on instincts, and a close bond to nature, features stereotypically considered as feminine and inferior to male rationality (Van Den Abbeele 93; 95). Giroux too thinks that Mulan does not stay loyal to herself, and in switching gender validates the notion that war is a men's business instead of protesting against patriarchy's celebration of military violence (Giroux cited in Van Oost 28). Violence is indeed portrayed as a main aspect of masculinity.⁵⁹ Mulan, who punches her fellow soldiers, who practices archery and kung fu, and fires canons, is the first princess to use violence in a Disney movie.⁶⁰ Her capacity for sports is one aspect typical of the "newer" heroines that seems to have been continued (Yzaguirre 53). Mulan is presented as a trained horsewoman, while the twigs in her hair prove that she is not afraid to look dishevelled; in my opinion, these two features clearly show her resemblance to Belle. Moreover, Mulan seems to have completely abandoned the feminine gracefulness of the traditional Disney princesses. Do Rozario claims that, at the end of the movie, Mulan's father is emphatically celebrating the fact that he has a daughter: "[h]e does not wish for a son or comment on the absence of a son"

⁵⁸ The Genie from *Aladdin* too spontaneously dressed and acted like a woman with his caricatural impersonation of an airhostess, a female reporter and harem women: "That physique, how can I speak, weak a the knee ... Adjust your veil and prepare to gawk and grovel and stare at Prince Ali" (*Aladdin*). In addition, Governor Ratcliffe could be considered as effeminate, because of his vanity, the braids in his hair, and his pink clothes with lace on the sides.

⁵⁹ For explanations, for instance, of how white, heterosexual, middle class men try to restore the power they gradually lost over the feminine, ethnic, or homosexual "other" by using, for instance, domestic violence, see Lynne Segal's *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*.

⁶⁰ In the previous Disney movies, violence was mostly reserved for men (with female villains like the Queen in *Snow White*, Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, and Ursula the Sea Witch in *The Little Mermaid* as the only exceptions). From the Dwarfs in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the King in *Cinderella*, Chef Louis in *The Little Mermaid*, Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, Razoul in *Aladdin*, to Kocoum in *Pocahontas*, masculinity has continuously been associated with violence. For more information on (male) violence in Disney movies, I'd like to refer to "What is Your Child Watching? A Content Analysis of Violence in Disney Animated Films", a paper written by Philip J. Aust and Kimberly Everhart. Negative views on male violence in Disney were expressed through a Youtube video named "Sexism, Strength and Dominance. Images of Masculinity in Disney Films", which was launched on the internet by Sanjay Newton as part of an inequality project (Youtube, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CWMct35oFY> >). An analysis of more subtle (male and female) aggressive behaviour can be found in Sarah M. Coyne and Emily Whitehead's article "Indirect Aggression in Animated Disney Films". Overall, masculinities in Disney constitute an interesting topic for further analysis. Due to lack of space, however, I had to restrict my analysis to the depiction of femininities, particularly the ones represented by the adolescent princesses.

(Do Rozario cited in Yzaguirre 27). While Mulan bows to her father and wants to do him honour by presenting him “the sword of Shan Yu and the crest of the Emperor ... gifts to honour the Fa family”, Fa Zhou throws the valuable items away and embraces Mulan, assuring her that “the greatest gift and honour is having you for a daughter” (*Mulan*). This proves that Mulan’s femaleness is still regarded as essential and appreciated the most.

Men too seemingly have to meet certain standards. Li Shang, who demands immediate discipline (“Tranquil as a forest, but on fire within”), is determined to “make a man out of you”; the soldiers are told they “must be swift as a coursing river ... With all the force of a great typhoon ... with all the strength of a raging fire, [and] mysterious as the dark side of the moon” (*Mulan*).⁶¹ Mulan still feels awkward, even in this new identity as a man. Her enacted maleness is overdone and thus comes across implausible: “I see you have a sword. I have one too! They’re very manly and tough! ... You know how it is, when you get those manly urges and you just got to kill something, fix things, cook outdoors” (*ibid.*). She even mimics Gaston, the macho of machos, in trying to expectorate. Despite Mushu’s advice to act tough and his encouragement of comradely violence, Mulan fails to adapt to the unfamiliar male army culture. Like Jasmine, who went out on the streets for the first time, Mulan is embarrassed and appears mentally deficient: Chi Fu calls her “an absolute lunatic” (*ibid.*). Van Den Abbeele too notes that, as was the case with the bride preparations, within the army culture as well, she is regarded as an outsider who does not know the rules of their

⁶¹ In other movies, too, young bachelors – just like their female counterparts – are showered with advice on how they should look and act. King Hubert was the first to reprimand his son, Prince Phillip, that he should “change into something suitable” because he “can’t meet [his] bride looking like that” (*Sleeping Beauty*). I think Beast is the prince who has to cope with the most advice on how to attract a lady. The primary advice of his servants is to “Please, attempt to be a gentleman” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Cogsworth proposes to opt for the easy strategy: “Well, there’s the usual things: flowers, chocolates, promises you don’t intend to keep” (*ibid.*). Lumière disagrees that “it has to be something very special, something that sparks her”, and, himself a ladies man, he suggests Beast should “say something to her” or “invite her to dinner”, among with many other orders: “When she comes in, you give her a dashing, debonair smile ... Impress her with your rapier wit ... shower her with compliments ... and, above all, you must control your temper” (*ibid.*). Mrs. Potts intervenes with her own commands: “Well, you can start by making yourself more presentable. Straighten up. Try to act like a gentleman ... But don’t frighten the poor girl ... But be gentle ... But be sincere” (*ibid.*). Beast is told he “must be bold, daring”, instead of “timid”: “When the moment is right, you confess your love” (*ibid.*). Eric, too, is encouraged by Sebastian to not “be scared, you’ve got the mood prepared, go on and kiss the girl” (*The Little Mermaid*). Like the Emperor who encouraged Li Shang to commit himself to Mulan (as I will discuss later on), Grim remarks to Eric, “If I may say, far better than any dream girl is one of flesh and blood, one warm and caring and right before your eyes” (*ibid.*). Although Aladdin looks like a man who knows the ways of the world, he too needs some extra advice from the Genie to impress Jasmine. First of all, the Genie improves Aladdin’s looks: “First, that fez and vest combo is much too third century. These patches, what are we trying to say, beggar? No, let’s work with me here ... I like it, *muy macho!*” (*Aladdin*). Secondly, he advises Aladdin to forsake the self-centred air he thinks will work well, and keep true to himself: “A woman appreciates a man who can make her laugh ... All joking aside, you really ought to be yourself ... Enough about you, Casanova, talk about her!” (*ibid.*).

“brotherhood”, and brings chaos instead of order (Van Den Abbeele 80; 83). At one point, her clumsiness and irresponsibility (which were actually Mushu’s) gave away the Chinese soldier’s position to the Hun army, which lead to an overwhelming attack, by which Shang was shot. To me, her clumsiness in her masculine role shows that this is not her true nature either. It is quite striking, however, that while fulfilling the expectations of being a woman or a man both require huge efforts, Mulan shows more perseverance in acting as a man than she did trying to act as a woman, an effort she rapidly abandoned. Despite being dismissed hastily by Shang because she would be “unsuited for the rage of war”, Mulan perseveres, even at moments of total exhaustion, and compensates her lack of physical strength with her insightful intelligence. Unlike Jasmine, she can not rely on any help from the other soldiers – who initially conspire against her – and has to learn how to manage the situation on her own (with a little help from Mushu).

Yzaguirre sees Mulan – and most of the “newer” heroines, as strong, determined, independent, and taking her destiny in her own hands (Yzaguirre 46; 50). After her heroic deeds, she is praised by her fellow soldiers as “the craziest man I’ve ever met”, “the bravest of us all”, and “king of the mountain” (*Mulan*). I think Mulan’s decision to take her father’s place in the army, disguised as a man, can be interpreted both as a very brave and a very reckless act, since she is sure to be killed when her true identity is discovered. Her gender transformation is also seen as disrespectful towards traditional values enforced by the Emperor, due to which men are supposed to fight in the army, and women to bear children (Van Den Abbeele 98-99). She twice undermines her Captain’s authority too by stubbornly executing her own alternative strategies, which I think clearly demonstrates her confidence in her own judgements. In the end, *she* is the one who orders her fellow soldiers, and her former Captain, what to do. Although, as was the case with Jasmine, Mulan is not taken seriously anymore once she is unmasked as a woman (“I’m sorry, did you say something? Hey, you’re a girl, again, remember”), she sticks to her point in trying to convince the soldiers that the Huns are still alive. She publicly denounces Shang’s two-fold appreciation of advice, based on gender (“You don’t belong here, Mulan, go home”) with the accusation “You said you’d trust Ping, why is Mulan any different?” (*Mulan*). When Shan Yu merely focuses on defeating Shang, and completely ignores Mulan because she is a woman, she defies him by obstructing his escape and throwing a shoe at him. Her behaviour is twice described as both irresponsible and noble by others. After Mulan’s initial failure, Mushu says, with much sarcasm: “You risked your life for people you love ... You went to save your father’s life. Who knew you’d

end up shaming him, disgracing your ancestors, and losing all your friends?” (ibid.). The Emperor of China discerns the same contradiction: I’ve heard a great deal about you, Fa Mulan. You stole your father’s armour, ran away from home, impersonated a soldier, deceived your commanding officer, dishonoured the Chinese army, destroyed my palace, and – you have saved us all” (ibid.). Ultimately, Mulan is praised as a war hero. Her rank now exceeds the others’ (except for the Emperor himself), and all pay tribute to her by bowing.

Van Den Abbeele, however, remarks that, despite these strong features, Mulan is frequently dominated by and dependent of her male superiors – whether at home or in the army; Croll argues that she is “always practising the virtues of humility, modesty and servitude” (Croll cited in Van Den Abbeele 78). Li-Shang inspects Mulan from a bird’s-eye view, which, according to Peters, would point at a feeling of superiority towards her. Although she saves Li Shang’s life twice, Van Den Abbeele remarks that she still needs her fellow soldiers to save her from falling into an abyss (Van Den Abbeele 83). I’d like to remark, however, that Mulan could only be saved by them because she was able to return the arrow connected to a rope, which the soldiers had let slip through their fingers. Still, she needed Li Shang to help her carry heavy loads during the recruit training. Moreover, she is in constant need of Mushi’s advice to be able to pose as a man; without him, she is “only a woman” (Van Den Abbeele 80; 88). It is only with Mushu’s intervention that Mulan is able to light the canon which will blow up the snow mountain and help her defeat the Huns (Van Den Abbeele 87). Finally, her need for a male doctor to be cured lead to the discovery of her secret identity. Due to her heroic behaviour, however, she earns the respect of Li Shang, who acknowledges her equality by letting her live (Van Den Abbeele 83). Besides being a sign of gratitude, I think the former example can also be seen as further evidence that she, as was the case with Snow White and Humbert the Huntsman, depends on the compassion of a man to be saved from being killed. The fact that Mulan is wounded, naked, and lying on the cold ground, puts her in a very vulnerable and subordinate position. Still, she keeps her dignity by responding Chi Fu’s misogynist reproach that she is, as a woman, a “treacherous snake” with a call for respect: “My name is Mulan” (*Mulan*).⁶² After she has been left alone in the cold, however, she sinks into despair, and blames herself to be a bad decision maker: “I should

⁶² Chi Fu’s denigrating attitude towards women is shown on two other occasions. When Mulan objects to her father’s enlistment in the army, he silences her, reproaching her father: “You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man’s presence” (*Mulan*). When Shang defends Mulan, calling her a hero, Chi Fu mutters: “That creature’s not worth protecting ... it is a woman, she’ll never be worth anything” (ibid.).

never have left home ... I was wrong ... I'll have to face my father sooner or later. Let's go home" (ibid.). Coppens argues that at this point, Mulan felt she was in need of the security provided to her at home (Coppens 75).

She can write, which Van Den Abbeele marks as a rational property usually attributed to men (Van Den Abbeele 79). Haque Rahman highlights that Mulan's literacy is all the more striking since she is a woman living in a rural area (Rahman cited in Van Den Abbeele 79). This, however, did not prevent Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* from reading either. Just like Belle, Mulan is curious enough to investigate what initially scares her – in this case, Mushu the dragon. Mulan is shown to be intelligent in a tactical way. Van Den Abbeele provides the example where she ends a game of chess with one move. Later on, she plans her secret leaving in detail, rather than instinctively running away. Once in the military training camp, she earns the respect of the other soldiers, and can even be regarded as slightly superior to them, by tactically using the heavy weights to ease the climbing of a pole. When tactically aiming a rocket at a mountain to cause an avalanche, she becomes completely hostile towards nature, and thus, towards her own femininity (Van Den Abbeele 79-81). Bell marks the use of nature in defeating an enemy as a feature typical of Disney movies (Bell in Van Den Abbeele 81). Van Den Abbeele reads Mulan's changed treatment of her horse Khan – as a mere animal of service – as a proof of her sudden (male) lack of respect regarding nature. In her final heroic act to rescue the emperor, she is said to combine both her (female) instinct and her (male) strategic sense to defeat the enemy; this time, it is culture – represented by the Chinese capital – she destroys in order to win (Van Den Abbeele 82-83). The cunning way in which Mulan takes away Shan Yu's sword with a fan, and pins his cape to the roof to prevent his escape, is another example I found of her use of cleverness to compensate her lack of strength.

Nevertheless, Mulan can easily display emotions. She is the only one to comfort Li Shang, and cries twice, once for the fate of her father and once for her own (Van Den Abbeele 81). Regardless of all rules of etiquette, she even hugs the Emperor to show her gratitude. This is in stark contrast with Li Shang, who, as Susan Jeffords claims, in the fashion of male Disney protagonists, does not easily express his feelings (Jeffords cited in Van Den Abbeele 89). At times, however, Mulan seems to make it easier for Li Shang to show his emotions (Van Den Abbeele 90). Her final conspiracy against the enemy Shan Yu and temporary leadership of the other soldiers (and even over Li Shang) can be read as feminine too: according to Van Den Abbeele, she illustrates the victory of a feminine culture of mutual

agreement, based on compromises, over a masculine macho culture featuring one central leader (Van Den Abbeele 84).

Van Den Abbeele argues that, since neither being female nor male feels right, she is driven back to nature to reconstruct her true identity.⁶³ In the end, she has found a healthy personal balance in being an “atypical woman”: unlike her mother or grandmother, she combines nature, emotionality and instinct – regarded as feminine within ecofeminism – with culture, rationality and planning – traditionally regarded as masculine. The denial of traditional expectations has proven to be an enriching experience. By staying loyal to herself, she earns the respect of the Emperor and the whole nation; on returning home, her father, mother and grandmother as well no longer treat her as inferior (Van Den Abbeele 78-85).

I interpreted the following monologue as proof that Mulan’s motivation shifts from an urge to save her father to a mission of appreciating her own positive traits: “Maybe I didn’t go for my father. Maybe what I really wanted was to prove I could do things right, so when I looked in the mirror, I’d see someone worthwile” (*Mulan*). Gillian Youngs, on the other hand, claims that Mulan did not enter the war to “discover her own capabilities and self-worth”, but “to uphold the family honor” and make her father proud, and thus continues to embody the expectations of patriarchal society (Youngs cited in Yzaguirre 16). Yzaguirre suggests this urge to “bring pride” is typical of the “relationship-oriented nature of the Chinese”, although I think her actions are rather reflections of a more universal sense of compassion, combined with patriotism, and not necessarily “typically” Chinese (Yzaguirre 63). Moreover, in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Pocahontas*, family relationships were equally shown to be valued highly (Tanner et al. 361). Like Belle, Mulan is deeply concerned about her father’s health: she sees to it that he takes his three cups of tea in the morning, and another three at night, just like the doctor prescribed. A second scene where I think Mulan quite literally mirrors Belle is when she decides to take her father’s place as a soldier, against his will.

Yzaguirre claims that, unlike the “older” heroines, whose main goal was love, and the “newer” heroines, whose goal shifted from adventure to love, Mulan’s only motivation throughout the entire movie is to bring honour to her family (Yzaguirre 59). Indeed, from the

⁶³ Van Den Abbeele claims that, on top of finding her own identity, Mulan needs to help her lover in reconstructing his identity after he has lost his father; she does this by assisting him in saving the emperor, his substitute father, and in incorporating him into a new family, i.e. her own (Van Den Abbeele 89).

beginning, she is afraid to disappoint her father and prays, “Ancestors, hear my plea, help me not to make a fool of me, and to no uproot my family tree, keep my father standing tall” (*Mulan*). In the end, she declines a future career as a counsellor of the emperor and returns home to serve her family: “With all due respect, Your Excellency, I think I’ve been away from home long enough” (ibid.). To me, this echoes Pocahontas’ lack of ambition and choice to serve her family. Van Den Abbeele, on the other hand, initially reads Mulan’s refusal to take her place within the formal hierarchy of the counsel as an indication that she can be equally powerful as an independent woman (Van Den Abbeele 84-85). He argues that the Emperor’s proposal was meant to extend his power over a dissident woman by incorporating her into his own formal power structure (Van Den Abbeele 99). The underlying intention of the Emperor seems to be that the only alternative for being incorporated under his direct authority is entering into a marriage with his surrogate son Li Shang, and thus being “tamed” under Shang’s authority (ibid.). In his discussion of Chi Fu’s character, on the other hand, Van Den Abbeele too interprets Mulan’s refusal to take over Chi Fu’s task as a preservation of patriarchal tradition (Van Den Abbeele 117).

Although it is not “her main priority” to “find love”, Mulan seems disappointed at Li Shang’s remoteness, and the end still hints at the beginning of a romantic relationship (Yzaguirre 59). Giroux reverses this logic, and claims that the underlying (main) motivation for Mulan’s fighting was still to attract a powerful husband (Giroux cited in Van Oost 28). The unexpected visit of Li Shang thus fits the initial wish of Mulan’s family to see her married (Tanner et al. 360). Strikingly, during the time Li Shang still thought of Mulan as a man, they were merely friends; from the moment she is revealed as a woman, however, he starts to fall in love. Tanner et al. infer from this change in feelings that only heterosexual relationships are allowed in the Disney universe: “families with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender members are not represented in the Disney animated film” (Tanner et al. 364; 367). Van Den Abbeele, on the other hand, argues that Chi-Fu’s homosexuality is hinted at by the Chinese soldiers, who claimed that “the only girl who’d love him is his mother” (Van Den Abbeele 115). Earlier on in the movie, Chi-Fu was already represented as effeminate in wearing a head towel for bathing and squealing “like a girl” (Van Den Abbeele 116). I think Mulan too is portrayed as attractive to other women. In one scene, the army passes a group of girls harvesting rice, and several of them react giggly at Mushu’s whistling that seems to

come from Mulan. Yao too says to Mulan: “Bet the local girls thought you were quite a charmer” (*Mulan*).⁶⁴

Tanner et al. argue that, unlike the previous movies (except *Beauty and the Beast*) which suggested love strikes at first sight, Mulan and Li Shang need an entire movie to fall in love (Tanner et al. 365). When Mushu teases Mulan that “I saw that ... You like him, don’t you?”, she is reluctant to admit she starts to be fond of Shang (*Mulan*). Li Shang too needs the Emperor’s encouragement that “You don’t meet a girl like that every dynasty” before he openly shows his affection (ibid.). Before that, he merely praised her qualities as a soldier: “You – you fight good” (ibid.). As was the case with *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, lovers Mulan and Li Shang feel rather awkward when it becomes clear they have fallen in love. Shang uses the horrible opening sentence that Mulan has forgotten her helmet as an excuse for visiting her. Surprisingly (for a Disney heroine), it is Mulan who takes the initiative to invite Shang for dinner. Van Den Abbeele remarks that, unlike previous Disney Princesses movies, this one does not end with the traditional kiss between the protagonists (Van Den Abbeele 84). Still, I found two more traditional examples where Mulan’s mothering heart aches: when a girl’s doll is taken away, she returns it, and when an entire village is massacred by the Huns, she takes a moment to pay homage to the doll of a killed girl. Coppens interprets this second scene as symbolic of a mother, mourning for the child she could not save (Coppens 72). Tanner et al. think the movie depicts women as obedient and inferior to their husbands; alternative types of relationships are regarded as impossible or reserved for men only (Tanner et al. 365). I would like to object that, although traditional Chinese marriages are depicted rather negatively, Mulan and Li Shang provide a counter example of a love based on mutual respect, equality and support. Besides, Li Shang seems to fall for Mulan’s courage and strength of character, rather than for her beauty only.

As Van Den Abbeele observes, initially there seems to be a clear difference in status between Mulan and Li Shang. Not only is Li Shang a man, which within Chinese culture automatically positions him on a higher hierarchical level, his military rank as a captain even

⁶⁴ For an earlier example of homosexual relationships, hinted at in Disney movies, see Naomi Wood’s analysis of the relationship between the King and Grand Duke in *Cinderella* in “Domesticating Dreams in *Cinderella*”, p 40-42. Hoisington claims the Genie and Wiggins, Governor Ratcliff’s aide, can be seen as homosexual as well (Hoisington n. pag.). An elaborate analysis of the Walt Disney Company’s progressive attitudes towards gay and lesbian communities, both within the animated movies and the company itself, can be found in Sean Griffin’s *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens*.

surpasses the legendary reputation of Fa Zhou, who, outside of military life, seem to live as a humble farmer (Van Den Abbeele 89). Li Shang is introduced as “Number one in his class, extensive knowledge of training techniques, an impressive military lineage” (*Mulan*). Over the course of the movie, however, Mulan enhances her status by becoming a war hero for whom the entire nation needs to bow. Still, she never treats Li Shang as an inferior, and they are said to end the movie as equal in rank (Van Den Abbeele 91). Van Den Abbeele argues, on the other hand, that Li Shang only treats Mulan as equal because she has proven to be rational and courageous and not because of an inherent respect for women; if Mulan would have been a “traditional” Chinese woman, she would have been dominated by Li Shang (*ibid.*).

I noticed that the Chinese are portrayed in a rather stereotypical way. They appear almost undistinguishable with their small posture, moustache and goatee, and knot of black hair. Moreover, they sometimes look squint-eyed or seem to have protruding ears. Their culture is depicted as “exotic”, including parades with macabre masks, paper butterflies and dragons, drums, a gong, and fireworks. Similar to the Arabian citizens of Agrabah, they perform tricks, for instance walking on their hands. The Huns are chiefly portrayed as extremely evil: Shan Yu is easily capable of killing children and even sarcastically jokes about it: “A little girl is missing her doll, we should return it to her” (*Mulan*). The Huns’ eyes are bloodshot, which could symbolize their bloodthirstiness. They kill unscrupulously and without a sense of moderation. They seem to possess a supernatural strength; as Mushu says, “[t]hey popped out of the snow like daisies” (*ibid.*). Like Jafar in *Aladdin*, Shan Yu dreams of being a tyrant who can humiliate the Emperor: “I tire of your arrogance, old man. Bow to me ... then you will kneel in pieces!” (*ibid.*). I think for the first time in a Disney movie, the extent and cruelty of war is depicted so sharply: entire villages are massacred. Moreover, as Van Den Abbeele observes, the Hun ethnicity is depicted as animal-like: Shan Yu has a beastly size, claws for hands, sharp teeth, and the eyes of a predator. Shan Yu’s soldiers too bear traits of snakes, bulls or bears. Shan Yu’s movements remind one of feline predators, while his overdeveloped senses further mark him as an animal.⁶⁵ Final proof of his non-human nature is given by his fear of, or extinction by, fire, an element naturally threatening to animals. His bond with nature – his main aim is to destroy the Chinese “culture”, symbolised

⁶⁵ I noticed that, at one point, Shan Yu dangles from the roof, upside down, like a monkey, and even starts growling.

by the Chinese wall – and emotional temper could be interpreted as stereotypically feminine (Van Abbeele 110-113).

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study, I analyzed how gender, class, and ethnicity are depicted in the Disney Princesses series. A first part was dedicated to the personal views of Walt Disney and Michael Eisner on the matter, combined with wide-spread views from the twentieth century. Secondly, I discussed each Disney princess in detail. In what follows, I will outline the general evolutions I detected.

First of all, the physical depiction of Disney heroines seems to have followed prevalent beauty norms. Over the years, their appearance has evolved from pretty girl-next-doors to idealized women with the looks of a Barbie doll and the figure of a top model. While Snow White and Cinderella were still characterized by a healthy roundness, from Aurora on the princesses are all forced to meet with unattainable, nearly anorexic, body images. Like Yzaguirre observes, from naive and innocent, prudish girls, they have evolved into lascivious sex symbols; the length of their skirt or coverage of their cleavage seems to have followed. Still, they should not enjoy their sexuality too openly: their main concern is to make sacrifices to please men and serve as almost pornographic or bestial objects to be looked at. It should be noted that there seemed to be a tendency in the “newer” movies to depict extreme sex objects as “exotic”: both Jasmine and Pocahontas are literally depicted as more aggressively sexual, using their seductive qualities as a weapon.

Belle and Mulan – not surprisingly designed by (mainly) female screen play writers – are the only two notable exceptions to this pattern. Belle, nicknamed a “Disney feminist”, refuses to be sexualized and instead appraises men. Still, Mulan is the most “atypical” woman. She refuses to be reduced neither to a sex object nor to a single type of traditional femininity. She enhances her androgynous features by dressing and acting like a man, which appears to be a necessary enrichment to find a personal balance between her supposedly female emotions and supposedly male rationality.

Secondly, the teenage princesses seem to be encouraged to lose their innocence (read: virginity) as quickly as possible. Both men and (evil or good) women shower them with advice on how to attract a man: overall, they are told that the “*tais-toi et sois belle*” will be well received. The female villains, borrowed from Hollywood’s *femme fatales*, obviously have bad intentions in doing so: while their own sexual experience has already made them mock the idea of true love, they are still jealous because the younger girls spontaneously

attract the princes they secretly desire. Ursula and Mulan's Matchmaker are peculiar within the category of "femme fatales", because their behaviour and (quite plump) appearance rather reveal gender to be an artificial construction or performance.

A more positive evolution can be detected in the behavioural patterns expected of adolescent girls. While Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora spontaneously took on domestic chores, seemingly happy to be a housewife, no "newer" heroine is ever seen cleaning or cooking. Even if men and women expect Mulan to cook, serve tea, or feed the animals, she either fails because of her clumsiness or passes the buck to others. In addition, the tendency of "older" heroines to spontaneously act in a mothering way towards others, or to be expected to bear children, seems to have disappeared in the "newer" movies. Mulan, however, is again both showing mothering behaviour *and* expected to bear children.

Still, all Disney princesses are expected to marry or are forced into a prearranged marriage. Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas are the only ones who can choose a partner out of different candidates. All princesses – except, initially, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan – (literally) dream of a romance themselves. Pocahontas is the only one who does not marry, but – despite her hinted at fear of commitment – she obviously regrets having to repress her feelings. The Disney world view is clearly a simplified one, especially with regards to romance. Love at first sight, based on appearances, is common and seen as the inevitable result of a boy and a girl (since heterosexuality is universalized) meeting under the right circumstances in all movies except *Beauty and the Beast* and *Mulan*, where romances depict female desire, develop slowly and – rather than being easy – require mutual effort and compromises.

As Yzaguirre claims, unlike the "older" heroines, who suffered from a "Cinderella complex" through which they fooled themselves that (sleep- or death-like) passivity and helpless dependence on men are glamorous, the "newer" ones stand up for themselves. While Cinderella, the embodiment of self-control, merely dared to utter protest when nobody could hear her, nearly all heroines from the fifties on rebel against their parents' expectations. The practice of marrying off children seems to be the main cause of disagreement between different generations. The Disney princesses increasingly want to grow intellectually and have a taste of adventure. However, they are unprepared for their encounters with the outside world, which are filled with dangerous obstacles and can only be overcome with the help of others. The more the princesses are sporty and intelligent, the less they are dependent on

others: Belle, Pocahontas, and Mulan are confident and brave enough to engage in risky rescue operations of others. Nevertheless, even they often doubt their competence in taking important decisions and blame themselves when things go wrong. In addition, their unconventional personality traits make it hard for them to fit in. Still, it could be argued that in order to engage in noble deeds, they necessarily need to act reckless.

These “daring expeditions” outside the domestic sphere are allegedly incorporated on purpose, because, as Yzaguirre and Hoisington argue, they eventually guide the princesses towards a romantic encounter. Women are never seen to show higher ambitions, for instance to take on a leadership position in their community, even if they are offered the chance. Especially the Native American and Chinese girls are less defiant of their fathers - mothers are largely absent – and seemingly act out of a strong concern for the latter and their honour, which is deemed more important than the girls’ own happiness. This is in line with the importance paid to family values through the first part of the twentieth century. The “real” and violent adventures, like World Wars, for instance, continue to be reserved for men.

In all Disney Princesses movies, whiteness is universalized, either by ignoring the existence of other ethnicities or by stereotypically depicting them as “noble savages” or – as Hoisington observes – “strange” barbarians. Either way, other ethnicities are presented as closer to nature and animals. Fear and hatred of the unknown is continuously stirred up, which results in intense racial violence. History is even distorted in order to present colonialism or American imperialism as “enlightening”, instead of based on military and industrial concerns and the wish to make profit.

The Disney protagonists either belong to royalty, as Yzaguirre states, or climb the social ladder through marriage, as Hoisington argues. No means other than marriage or inheritance can bring wealth, although some villains desperately try to get rich by deceit or by physical force. Walt Disney and Michael Eisner seemingly wanted to keep their success stories limited to themselves.

I believe that Disney will continue to be the base for critical analysis. Apart from focussing on characters other than the princesses in the movies I mentioned, the soon to be released *The Princess and the Frog*, featuring the first Afro-American Disney princess, Tiana,

promises to provide new and interesting material.⁶⁶ Moreover, as Linda Holmes pleads, the cooperation with Pixar could in the future consider to depict a female heroine who is *not* a princess. In addition, as Wendy De Schrijver did, the structural patterns in Disney narratives can be further explored, or the technical evolution in animation. Concrete findings about the impact and popularity of the Walt Disney movies and merchandise (both in the past and in the present), like Lore Michels' public research on the image of Disney among adolescents, could always make a valuable contribution to the existing studies. Finally, more research like Baker-Sperry's is needed on how children "decode" the messages manifest in Disney movies and how alternative readings might contextualize these messages.

⁶⁶ According to speculations in newspapers like *The New York Times* and *De Standaard*.

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