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# Passive and Active Masculinities in Disney's Fairy Tale Films

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**ABSTRACT**

Disney fairy tale films are not as patriarchal and empowering of men as they have long

been assumed to be.  Laura Mulvey's cinematic theory of the gaze and more recent

revisions of her theory inform this analysis of the portrayal of males and females in *Snow

White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast,* and

*Aladdin.* This study reveals that many representations of males in these films actually

portray masculinity as an object of female agency.  Over time, Disney's representations

of masculinity have become more supportive of male agency and individuality, but this

development has been inconsistent and much-delayed. While early films generally show

princes who lack character and ability, later films present men as more individuated and

active, and eventually present men with more options and power.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a pillar of American culture, Disney films exert immense influence on contemporary society. The unavoidable presence of Disney in America has provoked much criticism of the ideologies Disney promotes within these films. Scholars regularly critique Disney's films for upholding conservative patriarchal and colonialist ideals. Although modern patriarchal attitudes and institutions are not the same as those active at the release of the first Disney film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), this critical position has remained static. Critics claim that the institutions that Disney supports are traditionally elitist, hierarchical, and misogynistic. Critics including Roberta Trites, Kellie Bean, Jack Zipes and Patrick Murphy have argued that Disney's androcentric world marginalizes and disenfranchises women. According to this school of thought, Disney's brand of patriarchy values men and subordinates women to domesticity, which hearkens back to Victorian gender ideals, as Brenda Ayres, Lara Sumera and Deborah Ross note.

Stephanie Coontz elaborates on the major features of so-called Victorian gender roles, which generate from the separation of males and females. This specific brand of

patriarchy puts forth the idea of separate spheres for men and women. These spheres can be described as "female domesticity and male individualism" —in other words, the woman's place is in the home and the man protects and rules the home (144). He is the ultimate authority and the woman is subordinate to him, relying on him for direction and connection to the world outside the home (143). These Victorian ideals stereotype women as cooperative—gentle, sensitive, expressive, altruistic, and tender—and men as competitive—ambitious, authoritative, powerful, logical, calculating, and potent (58). Coontz explains "maleness represents a world of achievement, autonomy, and effectiveness" and femaleness represents the opposite (62).

Coontz fascinatingly points out that these so-called Victorian gender roles exist independently from historical reality (2). These gender distinctions to do not accurately reflect gender relations of the Victorian period, although they are named for it, and are only ideals. Actual gender relations were far more complex, and the so-called Victorian gender ideals are actually myth. Similar insistence on feminine domesticity and subordination to male authority and independence reoccur in the 1950s, in slightly different form as the "Ozzie and Harriet" model – which, just like the Victorian, reflects a popular mythology, not historical reality (23). Similarly, Disney's Victorian view of gender may be more mythical than actual, since masculine superiority and feminine subordination fail to permeate the films in a way that would suggest the Victorian valuing of males above females that Disney has been charged with.

Nevertheless, critics continue to accuse Disney of maintaining Victorian patriarchal ideals. They base these charges on two things: the overriding insistence that Disney represents males as superior and dominant to females, and modifications to the

original tales that decrease the prevalence of female characters and increase males. Disney's films retell classic folktales, whether German (The Brothers Grimm inform *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*), French (Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast* and Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*), Danish (Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*), or Middle Eastern (*Aladdin*), which present traditional Western gender roles. These traditional conceptions of gender provide the foundation for the Victorian myth of gendered spheres, which Disney builds on, but does not actually change. Therefore, analyzing the discrepancies between the source texts and Disney's film versions is not part of my project, although many critics have done so. For example, Jack Zipes criticizes Disney's omission of the little mermaid's grandmother and diminished emphasis on the mermaid's relationship with her sisters which degrades females (*Enchanted Screen* 255). He also claims that certain films, such as *Snow White* and *Beauty and the Beast* use the prince to frame the narrative instead of the princess, imbuing the Disney prince with more power or importance  than the original and making him the focal point instead of the princess ("Breaking the Disney Spell" 36-39; *Enchanted Screen* 24).  However, viewing the addition of a prince's time on screen and subtraction of female characters as proof of misogyny is alarmist and reductionist at best, especially when evidence from the films shows that they present more women characters than men characters, and these females have more time on screen than males.

The princes play small roles compared to those of the princesses, which is understandable since most of the fairy tales that inspire these films are likewise focused on the heroine. However, Disney makes changes to the stories, like the one Zipes bemoans, but fails to add more male characters or increase male centrality. Zipes claims

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that Disney does make the male the focus but later contradicts himself, saying that he is only an accessory to the plot (*Enchanted Screen* 124, 122). Only recent films include modifications that increase the presence and emphasis on males, which is reflected in their titles: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*. All of the other films give the princess top-billing, which cements the fact that the focus of the film is the princess, and as Zipes agrees, the prince is pushed to the outskirts of the story. The male character frames the story, as Zipes claims, but he cannot be both the focal point and the framing apparatus, which is why the prince remains in periphery.

The princess is the main character—the story begins and ends with her and the prince's story is only included when it affects the princess. Since the female character is the central figure, the central conflict generally involves females. Whether between Snow White and the Evil Queen, Cinderella and her Stepmother, Aurora and the good fairies and Maleficent, or Ariel and Ursula, the contesting parties are overwhelmingly female. Even the main cast of characters is overwhelmingly female—*Beauty and the Beast* is the first film to have a larger number of male main characters than female.

Despite the prevalence and privilege of female characters, critics still contend that Disney promotes men's authority over women and romanticizes women's lack of power. However, other scholars such as Laura Sells, Libe Garcia-Zarranz, and Rebecca-Anne C. DoRozario contend that instances of feminine authority and independence do in fact exist in Disney films. These critics push against the traditional view of Disney's patriarchal ideology by questioning the degree of misogyny present in Disney films.

To assert that Disney operates from a male-normative perspective, that it is androcentric and emphasizes the role of males while diminishing that of females is to

assert that Disney supports and empowers men over women. However, the films themselves do not support this charge. Women actually dominate Disney's fairytale films, and it is men who are marginalized. Although Disney does in many ways marginalize women, the hierarchical Victorian ideal of elite males ruling over domestic females fails to explain the mistreatment of men. I will argue that focusing on Disney's patriarchal tendencies has kept scholars from exposing the misandry that accompanies Disney's misogyny.  The classic fairy tale films *Snow White, Cinderella* (1950)*, Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992) provide evidence of Disney's subordinating, dehumanizing, marginalizing, and objectifying treatment of men.

Disney's portrayals of both men and women have evolved over the almost sixty years between *Snow White* and *Aladdin*. However, these changes are superficial—as Zipes, Sumera, and Ross note—and do little but make the same old Disney ideology more palatable to contemporary viewers. I suggest that the ideology that remains undisturbed at the heart of Disney's films is not one of perfect Victorian patriarchal privilege but a much more nuanced ideology that is as detrimental to men as it is to women. Disney is not chronologically moving towards equality from an ultra-patriarchal baseline because there is no such baseline. They are moving towards equality from a much different place, where men's identities are as maligned as women's. I will demonstrate how men have been the victims of Disney's mistreatment all along.

The scope of this project spans from 1937 to 1992 and includes only the traditionally animated fairy tale films.  Newer releases, like *Brave, Tangled, The Princess and the Frog* are omitted for many reasons. They are not adaptations of literary fairy

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tales, the advent of Pixar and computer generated animation complicate the cohesive nature of Disney's animation until that point, and they do not offer any understanding of Disney's traditional or historical representation of men. Reassessing Disney's representation of masculinity necessitates looking back at how men were originally represented and how that has changed or not changed over the years.

To glean that information, I will look at men, specifically the princes, in the six classic fairy tale films. These films are all animated in Disney's famously realistic style which reproduces "a cartoon version of movie-style *mise-en-scene* and acting" (Leslie 147). This style is known for its emphasis on realistic movements and adherence to the physical laws of gravity and perspective (149). Disney's style of animation closely imitates real life; the films were shot in such a way to mimic live-action films. Because animation studies lack a basic critical language (Pilling xxiii) and Disney's animation so closely approximates traditional film style, traditional film theory can be applied to these animated films. Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze offers a particularly insightful tool with which to analyze these films.

In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Mulvey offers an understanding of the way that patriarchal traditions influence and determine how films are made and viewed. Her oft-cited theory of the gaze, which is held by the male and directed at the female, is foundational to understanding gender representations in cinema. Since Mulvey's version of the gaze maintains the male as subject and the female as object, subsequent critics such as Miranda Sherwin and Steve Neale have found it necessary to amend it in order to account for instances of female spectatorship and male spectacle. The combined perspective on the cinematic gaze helps uncover how Disney depicts men. Since Disney

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is and has been irrevocably connected to American culture, this type of analysis elucidates the co-development of misandry as well as misogyny in American culture across the twentieth century.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCE

Victorian gender ideals value an authoritative, aggressive, and independent hero. Disney's heroes are princes who lack these attributes. The Disney prince is handsome and of high social rank, but also passive and easily manipulated. As one of the few roles for males in the Disney repertoire, the prince's lack of authority is symptomatic of overall masculine inefficacy, which promotes a damaging perception of masculinity. In Disney's fairy tale films, men are marginalized and disenfranchised, but scholars concentrate on exposing misogyny instead of examining masculinity. Elizabeth Bell's outline of the three female archetypes of Disney's fairy tales is a popular touchstone for much of this criticism. Jack Zipes, Brenda Ayres, Henry Giroux, Lynda Haas, Rebecca DoRozario, and many others cite Bell's differentiation in their work and support it by noting the limited roles of women, which fit into three distinct templates. Bell explains that each template corresponds to a different stage of life: young, middle, and old age. She defines each female archetype as follows:

> The teenaged heroine at the idealized height of puberty's graceful promenade is individuated in Snow White, Cinderella, Princess Aurora, Ariel and Belle. Female

wickedness – embodied in Snow White's stepmother, Lady Trumaine, Maleficent, and Ursula – is rendered as middle-aged beauty at its peak of sexuality and authority. Feminine sacrifice and nurturing is drawn as pear-shaped, old women past menopause, spry and comical, as the good fairies, godmothers, and servants in the tales. (108)

These limited female roles exemplify Disney's misogyny and patriarchal leanings. Critics have concentrated on exposing this misogyny so intently that, despite Bell's successful characterization of female archetypes, a similar demarcation of male roles or types is yet to be established. Some critics, like Zipes, DoRozario and Bell, hint at male caricatures in Disney, but these archetypes are not fleshed out. Discussions of the prince and the father figure begin to touch on the traits that define these characters, but usually only in passing when the females are the subject of interest. Further exploration shows that Disney historically represents men as either strapping young heroes, who are as one-dimensional as they are interchangeable, or as older, comically incompetent stooges, with no third archetype of masculine authority. Although I will define a third archetype, the *homme fatale* that I believe eventually emerges, this is only with the last of the classic fairy tale films.

Disney limits representations of males more so than females, since males are relegated to two stereotypical roles, while females are allowed three. The established tropes of youthful female, mature female, and postmenopausal female offer three ways to portray women. For men, there are only two ways: youthful and handsome or old and impotent. The prince corresponds to Bell's female ingénue model. He is young, royal, handsomely anglo-saxon and wholesome. He carries himself gracefully, befitting his

social status, and his posture is impeccable. However, the prince lacks personality and individuality. He is a generic trope of male attractiveness, and like the female youth, rarely asserts any agency. Snow White's prince, Prince Charming, Prince Philip, and Prince Eric embody this archetype of the trophy-male. They are beautiful props—desirable to the princesses because of what they are, not who they are. Traditionally, the hero plays a rather small role in the fairy tale, and the same is true of Disney's princes ( Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 36). For example, the prince in Disney's inaugural feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* only appears two times: once at the beginning when he meets Snow White, and again at the end when he rescues her with a kiss. Pushed to the margins, this prince has no name, no identity beyond his winning smile and privileged position.

Following the nameless prince is Prince Charming in 1950's *Cinderella.* His moniker is more of an attribute descriptor than proper name, but he merits slightly more screen time than his predecessor. Prince Charming appears during the ball where he meets Cinderella and again very briefly at the end of the film for their joyous reunion. Although he is not present often, the other characters reference Prince Charming so much that his presence is felt much more than Snow White's prince. But neither one of these princes develops as a character. Prince Philip in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) is the first of the male leads to earn his own name and be given more time to develop on screen; *The Little Mermaid*'s Prince Eric follows accordingly. Both have much more camera time and show a little personality to go along with their slightly more individualized identities. Both Eric and Philip have real names, more interactions with other characters to show their personalities, personal hobbies—riding and sailing—more distinct appearances. Disney's

first two princes both have dark brown hair and eyes and wear stately robes and uniforms; they could pass for identical twins. In contrast, Philip has fair hair and wears a cape and jaunty cap while Eric has longer black hair, blue eyes, and a casual shirt and pants costume. Most notably, Philip and Eric share much more screen-time and experiences with their lady-loves than the princes in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, actually engaging in conversation and activities with them between their initial encounter and eventual commitment.

However, more appearances on screen and marks of individuality do not correspond to more empowered portrayals. Eric and Philip are still trophy males. Although traditionally understood to be the hero, the male protagonist of Disney's fairy tale films is "nothing but an appendage to the story" (Zipes, *Enchanted Screen* 122). They have little importance to the film and they do very little that is actually heroic. Snow White's prince rescues her by kissing her lightly—an act that requires no courage or strength. Prince Eric needs to be saved from drowning by Ariel and lets her direct their romance. Prince Philip fights Maleficent; however, without the magical defense given him by the good fairies, he would not be able to defeat her. Prince Charming simply yawns through the gala his father throws for him, only rousing himself long enough to dance with Cinderella and leaving the work of finding her to his servants. Although the princess is always saved at the end of the film, the prince depends on others to assist him or provoke him into action. Their passivity and dependency contradict the notion that these men are examples of masculine authority.

Rather than exemplify male power, the trophy men embody male desirability. They offer two things: social security and physical beauty. To match the female's

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physical beauty, the prince epitomizes classical male attractiveness—tall, broad

shouldered, with regular features and dreamy eyes—the male version of a trophy-wife.

By making the heroes as beautiful as the heroines, Disney stresses the importance of

physical beauty for both males and females. Feminists who find the stress on beauty to be

evidence of Disney's misogyny must admit that it is also evidence of misandry when

applied to males. Disney values superficial beauty beyond other traits, and anyone—male

or female—must first be beautiful in order to be approved of or desired.  However,

extreme attractiveness alone is not enough for a man to be desirable. He must also be able

to provide security and status—which is why the young man must be a prince.

      In Disney fairy tale films, with the exception of *Aladdin* (1992), the male love

interest is always a born prince. The females are not all born into royalty, but even the

ones that are not—Cinderella, Belle, Ariel[1] —marry into it. Disney holds men to higher

social standards than women, and only values men with status. Females can improve their

social standing by marrying a prince, but males must start at the top. The only fairy tale

prince who does not begin life as royal, Aladdin, becomes princely through magic and

does not degrade his love interest's status by marrying her (since her father changes the

law), once again emphasizing the importance of wealth and social rank for females.

Securing high social standing is a necessity for a happy ending, and the most obvious (but

not the only) method of doing that is by marrying a prince. While the prince gets a pretty

wife out of the arrangement, the princess reaps multiple benefits: both a handsome

husband and domestic material comfort.

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[1] Ariel is born into mer- royalty, but not human royalty. On land, no one knows she is a
sea princess so her royal lineage does not count.

The ingénue always ends up with both prizes—social status and beautiful mate. Disney's strict adherence to this formula suggests that only a man who offers both these goods is worthy. In other words, these characteristics—and nothing else—are valuable traits. Personality, autonomy, authority, and individuality are all ignored in favor of social status and physical beauty. Furthermore, the princesses already have templates of what their princes should be like before they ever set eyes on them: Snow White sings "Someday my prince will come" and Aurora claims to have seen her prince in her dreams, describing him as "tall and handsome." An owl dresses up in a prince's cape and hat and serves as the prince for Aurora to dance around the forest with, conveying the message that any number of men could wear the prince's robes, and in a pinch even an owl can play the part. In other words, the young man must only be beautiful and princely, and other defining characteristics are unimportant. Individuality has no value to the princesses, so the princes are handsome but generic.

While the youth serves as a trophy to reward the princess, his older compatriot plays the turkey for comic relief. Although these older men vary in many ways, their inability to be effective unifies them. The Huntsman who fails to kill Snow White and instead brings a pig's heart to the Evil Queen initiates the tradition of older men's inefficacy which intensifies in later films. Bell hints at this elderly impotency, but she differentiates between two types of older men: kings and their lackeys. This distinction is unnecessary because the difference between these two groups is superficial—one is round and fat while the other prim and skinny. Their appearances are different in kind but not in effect: whether fat or skinny, they are extremely unattractive.

All of these men are unable to effect any change or accomplishment, hilariously inept and coded as unattractive and asexual. Bell describes the king caricature as " a short, stout, balding, blustering 'hollow crown' encapsulated in the admonition used in both *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Jungle Book* (1965): 'you pompous old windbag!'" (117). This archetype is readily recognizable as Prince Charming's father, Prince Philip's father King Hubert, Belle's father Maurice, and the Sultan in *Aladdin.* These "harmless daddies" (Zipes, *Enchanted Screen* 88) are practically interchangeable: white haired little meatballs, bumbling about their domains without any effect on the circumstances of the film.

Contrasting the roundness of these foolish kings are their angular, bony counterparts. These stuffier but still ridiculous characters are often advisors to the king himself, like Grimsby in *The Little Mermaid* and the Grand Duke in *Cinderella,* but can also be kings, like Princess Aurora's father, King Stefan. While the kings' unattractiveness is exaggerated because of their rotund shape and features, the advisors are too skinny to be attractive males. The older men's extremes of appearance code them as desexualized, like the older females, whose round, postmenopausal bodies make them asexual and non-threatening (Bell 119).

Another commonality between the older men and women is their exploitation for comic relief. Bell cites examples of the absentmindedness and ineptness of the grandmothers, which often involves physical or even slapstick humor:  for Bell, the three fairies who take care of Aurora botching her dress and birthday cake is an example (119). The old men provide visual humor even more than the grandmothers; for example, in *Cinderella* the king and his advisor engage in a battle that includes jumping on the royal

bedstead and crawling on the floor, and Maurice's invention blasts him through the air like a balloon with the helium let out. The "postmenopausal" men engage in foolish activities—stacking toy animals, overfeeding parrots, inventing dysfunctional contraptions, brandishing fish like swords, horsing around with their advisors and daydreaming about grandchildren. The ridiculousness of their pursuits and physically degrading humor makes a mockery of their authority. These men lack any of the gravitas usually associated with kingship, but they are funny.

The men's hilarious ineptitude "points to the fact that they exert no control over their children, their lackeys, their castles or their kingdoms" (Bell 117). Prince Charming's father, the Sultan, and Grimsby's efforts to get their charges married have no effect, Maurice repeatedly needs to be rescued by others, and King Stefan and King Hubert are powerless against Maleficent's evil magic. When one of these buffoons tries to influence anything, he either rages in frustration at his inefficacy or meekly accepts it. Their power is in name only. Since they are desexualized, these men are already marked as impotent, and their bureaucratic and parental inefficacies extend that impotency to all of their exertions. The power that these old men are expected to have derives from the institution of patriarchal monarchy. However, the patriarchs display no power, even though some women do. Interestingly, Bell finds feminine power in both the *femme fatale* and grandmother models of femininity. In both cases, she contrasts the female to the matured men to show the control allowed to the woman's role. The pompous old windbags and their lackeys both derive their would-be control from the patriarchal institution, but neither exert the kind of real power that females do (120).

The grandmothers, though asexual, non-threatening, and endearingly absentminded, manage to control and influence events in the film. The good fairies in *Sleeping Beauty*, for example, provide Prince Philip with the tools to defeat Maleficent and Cinderella's fairy godmother transforms her life with a flick of her wand. The grandmothers are more than just effective, they can do the impossible. Their male counterparts pale in comparison. Bell suggests that this male inefficacy, especially of the kings and their advisors, critiques patriarchal institutions, but whether or not these portrayals are actually critical of the patriarchy does not change the fact that they are unflattering and show these men to be goofy and useless (117). The role that should reflect male authority instead shows masculine power to be a farce. Instead of a mockery of the ruling order, as Bell suggests, Disney's portrayal of men mocks the rulers, and in doing so taunts the ruled for being dominated by such buffoons. The would-be male authority figure exercises no control, and contrasts dramatically against feminine power, especially the dynamic evil of the *femme fatale* archetype.

Bell characterizes Disney's *femmes fatales* as mature, active, sexual, vain, and animalistic. Their beauty and adornment with cosmetics and dramatic costumes assert their femininity and sexuality, which is often rendered in close-up. Bell notes that *femmes fatales* are the only characters who address the camera directly with a confrontational gaze and the only extreme close-up shots are of femmes fatales, which Bell notes is a cinematic convention for femmes fatales. This close-up often fades out so that only the *femme fatale*'s eyes are shown, glowing like a predator's (116-117). For Bell, Disney's depiction of the mature and sexual female body as evil and dangerous suggests great power to threaten the patriarchal order. Therefore, the *femmes fatales* must be overcome,

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a feat accomplished by both nature and the rest of the characters joining together, and only this unified effort stops her evil trajectory (118). The *femme fatale* archetype is one of genuine feminine power. Bell notes that Disney depicts this feminine power as inherently evil, Bell does not acknowledge that, although the characterization of sexual females as evil is misogynistic, it also acknowledges feminine control—recognition of power that males are not granted

Not only are there fewer options for men in Disney's film, but those roles that do exist are more limited than the corresponding female ones. Relegating men to two roles—comical old man or lust-worthy young hero—is limiting and misandristic, especially since both of these roles lack authority. While the three types of female characters are misogynistic, males do not necessarily fare better than the females in these films. The Disney institution, long assumed to be patriarchal and privileging of the male above all others, is not actually very supportive of masculinity. The presence of misogyny does not preclude the presence of misandry.

Analyzing the way in which the princes are animated or "filmed" shows how patently unempowered they can be. Their presence on screen is limited to the edges of the story, and they are not the controlling figures of the plot. Their physical beauty makes them spectacles for female consumption, contrary to the traditional system of male-spectator and female-spectacle.

Mulvey outlines how portrayals of males and females in film adhere to a strict binary. The female is looked at; she is passive. As an object of visual pleasure, she elicits the gaze of the spectator, who then experiences pleasure. There are two forms of visual pleasure: voyeurism, which corresponds to identification with the male lead, and

fetishism, the pleasure of looking at physical beauty, in this case, the female form. These two kinds of pleasure can operate separately or in tandem. The spectator who derives this pleasure may enjoy voyeuristic identification with the male lead all the more so when the female lead's desirability is emphasized. That is why, in both cases, the female spectacle often pauses the development of the narrative, and it is the "man's role" to be the one "advancing the story, making things happen" (28). The spectator then identifies with the male protagonist because he is the "main controlling figure" (28).

Mulvey's work focuses on emphasizing the male's place as spectator outside of the film and controlling force inside the film, so she does not delve into female spectatorship or narrative control. Briefly mentioning films with female protagonists, she asserts that any feminine power is "more apparent than real" and allows men to control from the sidelines (21). As Miranda Sherwin notes in her discussion of Mulvey's limited explanation of female spectatorship, "as spectators, women are forced into either passive masochistic identification with the female protagonist, always depicted as the object of male desire, or into masculinized identification with the male protagonist and his controlling look" (175).

Revising Mulvey to address this shortcoming, Sherwin examines films that have a strong female protagonist, specifically a *femme fatale*, defined by Sherwin as a "sexually dangerous woman" (175). Sherwin's female leads drive the narrative forward, do not need men for sexual pleasure and only use them only for other personal agendas, and prey on men's ignorance to manipulate them. Contrary to Mulvey's theory, these women are active. Although Sherwin concedes that the women in these films are still subject to the male gaze, she finds that their agency and control (whether it lasts throughout the

whole film or not) problematize gender-based spectatorial identification. In other words, the *femmes fatales* do not perform traditional femininity which "exposes gender as constructed and performative" (182). Sherwin claims that this exposure leads to a confusion which complicates the assumption of the male gaze – suggesting the possibility of audience identification with a male or female protagonist, regardless of the spectator's gender.

As valuable as Sherwin's argument is, it is based on a very specific type of female protagonist—an evil one—and therefore limited. The *femmes fatales*, according to Sherwin, do not actually desire their male protagonists and have ulterior motives for their sexual relationships with them (17). The men are not viewed as erotic objects, either by the spectator or the female lead, and Sherwin does not discuss cases in which men are the object of the erotic gaze, which implies that the objectification of males might not exist, upholding the binary of male subject and female object. Thus, Sherwin denies the possibility of the objectification of men when it does in fact exist.

Male spectacle may be less common than female, but it does occur. Steve Neale addresses man-as-erotic-object and questions why the physical beauty that Mulvey says draws the gaze cannot be male as well as female (285). He finds that what Mulvey says is true for the female image is also true for the male image, although the male object is less common because "the spectatorial look in mainstream cinema is implicitly male" and images of the male erotic object are limited in the interest of repressing homosexuality and upholding binary views of gender (286). Neale also points out that men are clearly subjected to the look, or else there could be no scenes without females in them (284). Neale goes on to specify that when men are the object of the erotic female gaze, they are

feminized (286).  Disney's males, particularly the princes, are often the object of the feminine gaze, and are likewise feminized. As he is adoringly gazed at and framed within the screen, the Disney prince loses masculine authority

Over time, the way that Disney represents and films the prince has changed, as has the way females are represented. Both evolutions respond to demands of a contemporary society, but as Ross warns, "all the quasi-liberal sentiments that focus groups have no doubt caused to grace the surface of the last decade's Disney features" are "undercut by more conservative elements" within the films (53).  Noticeable developments, such as increased emphasis on the prince's role, the amount of activity he displays and narrative authority he wields, coincide with changing conceptions of masculinity.  The prince earns more individuality over time, as the generic story-book hero of the early films (*Snow White, Cinderella)* develops more personality (*Sleeping Beauty, The Little Mermaid*), and then a sensitive side (*Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin*). But this evolution involves only two major changes in almost sixty years of fairy tale films, a slow pace for chronological process.

Along with the creeping inflation of individuality, the prince's importance and power also increase chronologically: once a side character without so much as a first name, as in *Snow White*, the prince garners top billing decades later in newer features like *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*. The term prince has also become more liberal, since Aladdin is not born a prince but becomes one through marriage. However, he is the first male lead who advances in society to reach his royal stature, a feat of social mobility that females have been accomplishing since 1950's *Cinderella.*

CHAPTER III

*SNOW WHITE* AND *CINDERELLA*

Although they were released thirteen years apart, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella* feature strikingly similar male leads.  Both are blandly handsome princes who facilitate happy endings for their respective princesses, Snow White and Cinderella, and neither of them develops as a character. They appear in only a fraction of the scenes, and the scenes in which they do appear expose their lack of personality and agency. They serve a very specific function as the mechanism of the princesses' salvation, which depends on their social status and gender and has nothing to do with them as individuals.  Disney's portrayal of these princes objectifies and devalues them, degrading male individuality and authority by equating male worth with beauty and status and limiting men to peripheral positions. Disney's prince of 1937 is nearly identical to the prince of 1950, suggesting that male inefficacy and triviality is a constant, unaffected by social changes. The other male characters reflect some of the differences between the two time periods even though the princes do not, but even these characters do not offer examples of traditionally Victorian powerful, individualistic or strong masculinity.

The cultural differences of masculinity between these time periods are illustrated by the contrast between the Huntsman in *Snow White* and the King and the Grand Duke

in *Cinderella*. The Huntsman acts as a lone force, and although he fails to complete his task of killing Snow White, he ventures out alone and plans on acting without an accomplice. This type of masculinity—singular, independent, and unconcerned with family—reflects the male loner popular during the war years of the 1930s. The Huntsman can be seen as a "tough loner," the kind of hero celebrated in film during the 1930s and 1940s (Coontz 27). By the 1950s and 1960s, increased importance of familial values and a return to domesticity mandated that this masculine role correspond to evil, not good (Coontz 27). The new hero was not a loner but a family man who valued stability, like the King in *Cinderella.* His obsession with Prince Charming's marriage and subsequent offspring correspond to the cultural emphasis on family during the later time period. However, neither the familial nor the loner version of masculinity appears powerful or authoritative. The king's obsession with grandchildren and unorthodox relationship with the Grand Duke make him laughable; the huntsman cannot carry out his task of killing Snow White because her beauty breaks his will. The audience of both films may recognize different types of masculinity, but both kinds fail to live up to expectations of masculine authority.

Although these films are cartoons, Disney's style of animation imitates reality so consistently that these films' projected images of maleness relate to real-life masculinity as much as those of live action films. For example, the audience of Disney's films sees the action take place from a "fourth wall" perspective—as if the camera forms a barrier between the end of the world on screen and the audience's world. This cinematic technique insists on the separation of the diegesis of the film and the audience, and eliminates the kind of self-reflexive action other cartoons are known for (Wells,

*Animation and America* 109)[2]. Furthermore, the films are animated in such a way as to

make them appear as much like traditional live action films as possible Walt Disney

famously insisted on maintaining realistic physical features and qualities within his

animated films  which he achieved by having his animators study live actors and anatomy

so that they could illustrate characters' movements as accurately as possible (Wells,

*Understanding Animation* 37; Pallant, "Disney Formalism" 346). Likewise, the films are

animated in such a way as to mimic the way live-action films are shot.  The similarity

between Disney's cartoons and traditional live-action cinema invites analysis from a

traditional cinematic perspective. For example, the way that different characters are

presented and portrayed on screen and their relationships to the narrative offer insight

into their importance to the film. This understanding reveals that the prince is one

character whose value is notably low in these early films. The extremely small amount of

screen-time Disney affords the princes, and the manner in which they are shown when

they are on screen makes evident the princes' lack of value.

Disney omits the prince as much as possible, only bringing him on screen when

absolutely necessary to perform one of his stereotypical functions—to fall in love with or

rescue the princess—and  neither Snow White's prince nor Prince Charming appears for

more than two scenes. In *Snow White,* the prince enters the picture when he first meets

and shares a song with Snow White. They fall in love immediately, but he is absent from

the rest of the film until the very end (over an hour later) when he enters the clearing

where the dwarfs pay their respects to Snow White in her glass coffin.  Jack Zipes points

out that this provides the prince more screen-time than in the original Grimm's fairy tale,

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[2]  Although later Disney films begin to dabble in self-reflexiveness, the earlier films are
completely devoid of this characteristic.

but he also suggests that this supplemental screen-time does not make the prince into anything but an accessory ("Breaking the Disney Spell" 36; *The Enchanted Screen* 122). Disney's addition of having the prince "search far and wide" for Snow White but not showing this action on screen validates Zipes' claim. Instead of showing the prince's quest for Snow White, Disney inserts storybook pages with text that glosses over his search and eventually gives way to Snow White's coffin in the clearing. Substituting the text on screen for actual frames of the prince diminishes the importance of the prince, effectively fast-forwarding through his part of the story, and shows that he is only valuable for the role he plays in Snow White's story, not for his personal experience. Disney's device minimizes the emphasis on the prince, even though he enters the story much earlier than in the original fairy tale. In this case, the addition of scenes that involve the prince does not translate to his having additional prominence within the film. Prince Charming experiences the opposite treatment—subtraction of scenes—but to the same result.

The reduced presence of Prince Charming is one of the many differences between the original European fairy tale and Disney's adaptation of *Cinderella*. In both versions, the prince does not make an entrance until the ball where Cinderella meets him. Although his image appears earlier in Disney's version, as his father the king gestures to oversized portraits of his beloved son, Prince Charming actually has less of a presence in the film than in the literary version. This pseudo-appearance does nothing to enhance the development of Prince Charming as a character and, like the marginally-increased presence of the prince in *Snow White*, adds nothing to his character. Inserting Charming's visual presence by having him in pictures, which are little more than scenery for his

father to refer to, is overwhelmingly insufficient to account for omitting him from more important scenes. In the fairy tale, the prince himself goes searching for Cinderella and visits the other maidens who hope to wed him.  It is personal search for his love that facilitates Cinderella's opportunity to try on the slipper. However, in Disney's film version, the prince does not leave the castle after Cinderella disappears. He sends his servants instead, and they make the rounds with the slipper. Cinderella has to orchestrate her own release, with the help of her domesticated animal friends, to try on the glass slipper.  Disney's Prince Charming only reappears on screen at the very end, rushing down the carriage steps with Cinderella as wedding bells ring. This scene is brief and relies on recognizable wedding tropes to signal the action that has just taken place but was not shown. Bells ring and onlookers toss rice to imply that the lovers have just been married. The cliches communicate the message so clearly that the newlyweds need only be shown briefly in order to achieve the desired effect. This scene acts as an epilogue to the rest of the tale, disconnected from the body of the film.

By using this technique, Disney avoids showing more of the prince, who would logically be included in these scenes that are only implied. Instead of flowing continuously from the scene of Cinderella's triumph, the shot fades from slipper to wedding bells. The close-up on the bells serves as an introduction to the new scene—the wedding. Presumably, Cinderella has travelled to the castle, reunited with Prince Charming and prepared for her nuptials in the time in between the two scenes. However, that narrative action is not shown and only implied by the fact that the wedding has taken place. The quick transition glosses over part of the narrative and frames this final scene as a brief afterthought, which translates to even less screen time for the prince.

Although both Prince Charming and Snow White's prince are absent for most of the film, the few scenes in which they do appear speak volumes about their importance to the narrative. Even though the prince may be present, he is often still hidden from view or harder to see than other characters, especially the princess. The animation seems to avoid showing a clear picture of either prince as much as possible. One striking example of this, which invokes issues of the gaze, is that both princes appear in images at important times. Separating the prince from his appearance underscores his spectacular nature as something to be looked at. As mentioned earlier, in *Cinderella* the king shows off his larger-than-life portraits of Prince Charming long before the prince himself appears on screen, and Cinderella gazes at his reflection in the water on their romantic stroll. Similarly, in *Snow White*, the audience sees the prince as he rides up to Snow White's castle, but her first glimpse of him is in the reflection of the water in the wishing well. Her view of him is distorted by the ripples in the water so that this reflection fails to faithfully represent the prince. Rippling water also distorts the reflection of Cinderella and Prince Charming as they gaze into it, even though Cinderella sees her own reflection perfectly clearly earlier in the film.[3]

Other obstructions block the view of the prince, like interfering scenery and lighting. Snow White meets her prince under the shade of the well's roof, which keeps him in shadow and makes his features hard to make out. As he approaches the castle wall

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[3] Cinderella looks into a fountain when she is by herself and her reflected image is accurate to her appearance, presumably because the water is still. When she and the prince look into the water together, the ripples may be attributed to the fact that they are looking in a stream instead of a fountain, but Snow White's well is no more likely to have ripples than Cinderella's fountain, and yet it does. Therefore, in Disney's realm, the presence of ripples does not necessarily correspond authentically to running water, so the fact that the stream is running water and the fountain's water is still does not explain the distortion of one reflection and not the other.

and as he sings to Snow White once within that wall, tree branches with tiny blossoms come between him and the screen, blocking the viewer from seeing him in entirety. The extradiegetic view of him is interrupted by forces within the diegesis. This obfuscation is repeated when Prince Charming and Cinderella dance in dimly lit spaces after a very brief time waltzing in the well-lit ballroom. As they revolve, her features light up the screen: her bright blue eyes, pink lips, and white teeth are vibrant and contrast the dull, muddy visage of her dance partner, Prince Charming. These instances are examples that show that unadulterated views of both princes are rare—and when they do occur, the viewer sees the prince at an angle, from behind, or from far away.

Direct images of the prince's face rarely make it on the screen, as both Snow White's and Cinderella's romantic heros are usually shown at least partially turned away from the  fourth-wall camera view, and at a greater distance. While the faces of both princesses feature prominently in the films, both straight-on and close up, those of their male counterparts appear only fleetingly. The animation often zooms out or pans away from the prince to avoid having him in the shot. For example, as Snow White's prince advances toward her sleeping form, he barely manages to stay on screen, and only does so because he moves slightly ahead of the camera as it zooms in on her. Similarly, Prince Charming appears on screen for short intervals, most less than five seconds long, and instead of staying in the frame as the various maidens step forward to be introduced, quick shots of him are intercut with longer takes of each maiden advancing toward him. Instead of leaving the camera on the prince, Disney avoids showing him.

Snow White's prince and Prince Charming are hard to see and hardly seen. Although the degree of effort that the films' decision-makers put into avoiding showing

either male is striking, it has largely escaped critical notice. Perhaps these efforts are less obvious when viewing the film because it is animated, not live-action. A non-animated film in which the hero is constantly obscured, omitted, avoided, and shown from behind would appear strange since such appearances are generally limited to villains and mysterious characters—not the love interest. But these princes are not evil or mysterious, so why are they treated this way? The answer must be that they are less important figures. Limiting the prince's presence in the *mise en place* of the film suggests that he is not central, and therefore not important. Marginalized to the outskirts of the screen, these heroes possess little significance, which contradicts the Victorian idea of absolute masculine authority.

The actions, or lack thereof, of both princes also fail to adhere to traditional Victorian ideals. Although Zipes' description of the typical Disney hero as "cunning, fortunate, adventurous, handsome, and daring" corresponds to the Victorian ideal of masculinity, fortunate and handsome are the only traits that Disney's earliest heroes embody, so his characterization is as flawed as the Victorian classification (*The Enchanted Screen* 19). They are generally inactive and engage in no adventures in which to prove themselves daring or cunning. The two activities they do partake in are singing (Snow White) and dancing (Cinderella), which are not traditionally Victorian masculine endeavors but the princesses seem to find them desirable. They are not aggressive or competitive and although they appear to be physically fit, they show very little strength or athleticism.

The princes' movements, which Disney was dedicated to rendering as life-like as possible through animation, are slow and unimpressive, not dynamic and decisive. Prince

Charming bows slowly and stiffly, barely moving as he greets the maidens introduced to him and yawning as if even he is bored by his own passivity. He dances methodically and without passion. Snow White's prince is apparently strong enough to lift her and the dwarfs (separately), but these feats are also slow and deliberate, not active or dynamic. He first enters the film riding his horse along the castle wall, moving forward through no exertion of his own. In contrast, Snow White first appears vigorously scrubbing the castle steps, obviously exerting physical strength. Later, she prances quickly away from the prince, runs through multiple obstacles in the woods, and returns to her domestic endeavors at the dwarfs' cottage. All of these activities require dynamic movement and physical activity on her part. Her prince expends far less energy: his most athletic pursuits are hoisting himself up on the castle wall and then pausing, lifting the dwarfs up to Snow White one by one, and plodding along next to his horse as Snow White rides.

Further evidence of princely lethargy can be found when both princes' romantic interests run away from them. In both cases the prince advances a step or two, slowly, and then lamely reaches out his hand, as if incapable of giving actual chase. In the case of Prince Charming, Cinderella escapes completely and only the Grand Duke, not the prince, chases after her. Neither one of these supposed heroes displays the main quality expected of a hero—namely, action. The absence of princely action once again contrasts with the mythic Victorian ideal of masculine authority, autonomy, and control. Using Mulvey's theory of the gaze to determine control of the narrative further exposes the absence of masculine power. Neither prince drives the narrative forward; both are ancillary to the plot which revolves around the princess. The princes offer an escape to

both princesses, but it is not their actions as much as their existence that influences the narrative.

An analysis of the plot and rising action of these films demonstrates the minimal importance of the prince. Some critics like Jack Zipes ("Breaking the Disney Spell" 36) contend that Disney's earlier introduction of the prince makes the conflict about him—the Evil Queen being jealous of the prince's love for Snow White—but the conflict is really between the queen and Snow White. The Evil Queen's insane jealousy focuses on Snow White's beauty, not her beau, which is obvious because her ultimate goal is to kill Snow White so that she can be the most beautiful. If the queen envied Snow White's prince, her goal would be to posses him, but he does not even factor into her plans. Therefore, the conflict is between Snow White and her stepmother and it is their actions that move the narrative forward. The prince facilitates the happy ending of the film, but he does not affect the resolution of the main conflict. By the time he brings Snow White back to life with a gentle kiss, the main issue of the film has been resolved: the Evil Queen is dead and can no longer threaten harm to Snow White.

Moreover, when the prince is on screen, the plot stalls and the narrative lags. He is not, in Mulvey's terms, a "main controlling figure," but a spectacle. The idea that the prince exists to be looked at, and yet is so rarely seen presents a paradox. Although the film's audience does not gaze on the prince of these films very much at all, the audience does see others direct their gaze at him. In *Cinderella* the gathered crowd at the ball focuses all attention in Prince Charming's direction, and even when he is not on screen his location is implied by the other characters' attention. The king also stares in Charming's direction, eyes wide and mouth open, and nearly falls out of his balcony with

excitement when he sees Prince Charming's interest piqued by Cinderella. Instead of showing Prince Charming experiencing the ball, the film showcases others' reactions to his experiences. Using the animated equivalent of eye-line match or perspective shots (which show a character's perspective on screen) would enhance the audience's understanding of the prince's experience by showing what he sees, but these kinds of shots are notably scarce. Despite the fact that he is not always a spectacle for the audience's consumption, it is obvious that he is a spectacle for the other characters within the diegesis of the film.

However, the attention on him inside the fourth wall formed by the camera has nothing to do with the prince as an individual and everything to do with his social status. It is the idea of the prince that captures the fascination of Snow White and Cinderella, which is why he is both spectacularized and marginalized. The attention of others does not make him a central figure, but displaces him further. Like Snow White who runs inside to view her prince through the framing apparatus of window and balcony, the spectators would rather gaze at the prince than interact with him. It is not him but his image, which represents patriarchal status and masculinity–that they value. The Victorian ideal of masculinity promotes male authority, which is undermined by spectacularization. These princes are not Victorian males, and in fact neither posses nor exert the kind of power expected of Victorian men.

CHAPTER IV

*SLEEPING BEAUTY*

Of the six films considered to represent Disney's classic fairy tales, critics analyze *Sleeping Beauty* the least, even though this film's representation of the prince is markedly different from the earlier films. Prince Philip is a constant figure throughout the film, appearing heavily and starring in many scenes by himself, unlike Snow White's prince and Prince Charming who are little more than props trotted out for special occasions. Prince Philip also has a real first name, not just an adjective, and much more personality than the earlier male leads. He talks more, does more, and has more individuality than the earlier princes. He appears intelligent and useful, as well as handsome and noble.

Since Philip has plenty of lines throughout *Sleeping Beauty,* he develops a personality as a character. He speaks in his first scene (as an adult), even though he is the only human character, and talks more than he sings, speaking in the vast majority of his scenes. The "camera angle" of the animation, as it were, shows his face unobstructed and close-up, and even his animated features are more individuated than those of the earlier princes, adding to his heightened individuality. His expressions change to indicate emotions – widened eyes denoting interest when he first glimpses Aurora, eyebrows raised expectantly when talking to her. Even the very first scene to feature Philip, in

which he is just a child, shows him making a non-plussed expression when he sees his betrothed—the baby Aurora—for the first time. She is just an infant and he a small boy, and he wrinkles his mouth to the side, clearly unimpressed, like any young child would be in such a situation. This reaction sets the stage for his more rebellious and active nature which becomes apparent later in the film when he resists his father's marriage arrangements. Philip is good-natured and cares for his father, but still stands up for himself and seems to convince his father to drop the arrangement. His clever argument skills and oral abilities mark him as intelligent and quick-witted.

Philip's intelligence also appears in his persuasion of others to see his side – as he does with his father, his horse, and the princess. When his horse, Samson, is being stubborn, Philip knows how to entice him with carrots to do his bidding. When they first meet and Aurora hesitates to dance with him since he is a stranger, he assures her that they have met before "once upon a dream," cleverly using the words from her own song to romance her. Philip's assertive behavior and manner of speaking also appear to convince Aurora to agree to meet with him. At first, she tells him she can never see him again, but Philip refuses to accept that answer, and she eventually tells him to come to her cottage to see her. His quick-thinking responses prevent Aurora from running off, never to be seen again, the way that Cinderella does. Philip's quick wit also makes him funny, so that he can deliver comedic lines without becoming the butt of the joke. For example, when convincing King Hubert to allow him to marry as he wishes, he admonishes his father for being old fashioned with the line "Now father, you're living in the past. This is the 14th century!" While the audience gets the joke, King Hubert is so flustered that he can barely get a word in to contradict his son. Philip's command of language allows him

to outsmart his father who barely realizes what he has agreed to before Philip gallops off again.

Philip's mental fortitude complements his physically commanding presence. Although he is slight and lithe, like the other princes, he is strong and athletic and holds the attention of others. His power greatly outshines that of his father, who is helpless against Philip's authority. While they are debating Philip's marriage plans, King Hubert's blind repetition of Philip's lines is evidence of his superiority, as is his physical response to Philip's behavior. King Hubert attempts to reject Philip's appeal to marry as he wishes by saying no and shaking his head, but Philip nods his head repeatedly in assent and Hubert almost immediately follows suit. Philip makes his entrance in this scene on his horse, riding with great speed, in contrast to Hubert's bumbling footsteps. Philip approaches his father and places a hand on his chest and back as if Hubert is a child, and then picks him up and waltzes him around the courtyard despite Hubert's cries of "Put me down!"

Easily lifting his rotund father up and carrying him with little effort exemplify Philip's physical strength and activity. He is more than just a smooth-talker—he is also a courageous and active male lead. When he is on horseback, he often rides quickly or jumps over obstacles, and he is light on his feet and strong. His style of riding appears much more athletic than that of Snow White's prince, who rides slowly and cautiously; Furthermore, Philip's name itself relates to horsemanship and emphasizes how capable of a rider he is. Philip's jaunty rides are accompanied by energetic music to highlight the active way that he leads his horse, maintaining control over his steed instead of allowing the horse to determine their pace. He also maintains a position of authority over Aurora

when they first meet by taking a dominant stance in which he can see her but she cannot see him. He holds her hands as they dance, and although she is obviously startled, he remains in control.  As their initial meeting goes on, the camera shows them much more equally than Snow White and her prince or Cinderella and Prince Charming. During their dance and conversation, both of their faces appear with equal prevalence. He is also the first male lead to draw a sword or deal with combat, from which he does not shy away.

Since he is more active, Philip is more traditionally masculine than the princes of *Snow White* and *Cinderella.* However, the improved individuality and power of this masculinity does not mean total independence or authority, and so does not translate to an empowered (let alone Victorian) maleness. Although Philip fights and defeats the evil Maleficent, he does so only with the assistance of the three good fairies, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather; as DoRozario asserts, "the elderly fairies are the actual rescuers of the princess, simply working through the prince" (40). They not only free him from his bonds in Maleficent's dungeon, but give him shield and sword to fight her with. Although he wields these weapons, the fairies micromanage his battle with them and protect him from Maleficent's offensives. The fairies even state that these "weapons of righteousness will triumph over evil," which suggests that no matter who holds them, they will conquer Maleficent. When Philip throws the sword for the killing blow, it is clear that there is more than just his strength behind the assault; just before he throws it, Flora casts a spell on the sword and magic sparkles surround the blade as it flies into Maleficent's chest.

In addition, Philip would not be alive to play the conduit for the magic weapons if the fairies did not protect him from Maleficent's attacks. Her evil forces lobby arrows and boulders at Philip, which the fairies turn to flowers and bubbles. The fairies also cast

rainbows over him to protect him and his horse from falling dangers. The fairies' power dwarfs Philip's; although he is active, his attempts are futile without their aid.

Although he is stronger than other princes, Philip's power is outshone by that of the good fairies. The contrast between their first scenes exemplifies this difference. To show the adult Philip for the first time, the animation mimics a camera zooming underneath Aurora down to a lower level of the forest to reveal Philip. This is a slight high-angle shot—which looks down upon a character, making them appear to be small and weak. This effect is very subtle since the camera cuts to a more close-up, lower-angled shot after a few seconds, but there is a point when Aurora is clearly above Philip on screen. The fairies' entrance is polar opposite to Philip's, since their first appearance is shot from a low angle perspective, a technique used to denote power and largesse. As they float down into the castle hall in a beam of sparkly light, they are introduced as "most honored and exalted Excellencies," while young Philip and his father are merely "royal highnesses." King Hubert and young Philip initially appear at eye level, and kings Hubert and Stefan are shot with the same angle throughout the majority of the film. In contrast, the camera traces the fairies as they waft down their magical beam to the floor, as if to show how low they must bring themselves to be on equal footing with the other human characters. Their magic gives them special status and authority. When they give up their magical power to keep Aurora safe in the woods, they turn into bumbling old ladies who cannot accomplish the most basic of domestic tasks. But once they reclaim their magical abilities, they regain authoritative status.

The only male characters in *Sleeping Beauty* other than Philip are King Stefan, King Hubert, and their drunken minstrel, none of whom exert power or authority

approaching that of the fairies. As Bell notes, "the narrative diegesis constantly points to the fact that they exert no control" (117). Both kings are helpless against Maleficent and rely on the fairies to help them undo her curse. Stefan and Hubert also quickly turn irrational and Hubert especially has a quick temper. Much like the King and Grand Duke in Cinderella, their squabbling quickly turns to ludicrous violence and just as quickly subsides. Another similarity between *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* is the feminized kingly obsession with grandchildren. King Hubert tells Stefan that he has built a home for their children so that they can start a family, and is so impatient for that to happen that he insists they marry as soon as she returns. Hubert's insistence on grandchildren marks him as a familially or domestically concerned, which contradicts the traditional Victorian male individuality. Furthermore, his reliance on Philip, his son, to provide him with children shows that he himself is impotent. Stefan understandably balks at "losing" his daughter before he actually sees her again, a sentiment to which Hubert reacts dramatically. Hubert takes offense, and thus begins their hilarious miniature battle—with a fish as a sword and a platter as a shield –which underscores their discomfort with matters of real danger.

In the face of the evil and dangerous Maleficent, the kings fail to assert authority or make a stand.  They are helpless, "powerless and almost irrelevant" (DoRozario 43). When Maleficent arrives at the castle, neither Stefan nor Hubert says anything to her. Only Merryweather, perhaps unwisely, stands up against Maleficent and only Stefan's queen thinks to inquire if Maleficent is offended by not being invited to the celebration of Aurora's birth, while the kings stand by mutely. After Maleficent announces her curse, the queen rushes to the baby to protect her while Stefan simply points and orders "Seize

that creature!" which is impossible. His next measure to protect his child is to burn all the spinning wheels in the kingdom, since the curse says a spinning wheel will be the cause of Aurora's death, but as the fairies know "a bonfire won't stop Maleficent" and so they create the plan to hide Aurora in the woods.

Aurora appears less frequently in this film than Cinderella and Snow White do in theirs, but she is clearly the central figure of the film. The whole world seems to revolve around her, as the narrator notes the name Aurora means dawn, which her parents chose for her because "she filled their lives with sunshine." This choice is interesting since the sun is traditionally masculine, and the traditional royal heir is a prince. It appears that the king and queen are happy to have a daughter and revere her as much as they would a son. The name Aurora for the Princess in *Sleeping Beauty* was added by Disney, suggesting that Disney's version attempts to emphasize her importance in the film more than the tale it is based on, which recalls the inflated roles of the princesses in the earlier two films. By stressing her centrality in the story, Disney places superior value on Aurora.

The grandiose celebration, accompanied by a song calling "hail to the princess" over and over again, is evidence at how thrilled the king and queen are by the birth of their child. Even though she is absent from their lives, it seems they spend the whole time thinking of her, or as King Stefan says "Sixteen years of worrying!" Even the woodland animals hold her at a high level of importance: as she walks through the forest, the birds wake up the other creatures so that they do not miss the pleasure of her company. Furthermore, as DoRozario also notes, the fairies put the whole kingdom to sleep while she is under the spell as if life is not worth living if she Aurora is not conscious, which indicates Aurora's significance and emphasizes female centrality (40). However,

Aurora's centrality does not displace Philip; in fact he has as many scenes and speaking lines as she does. The images Disney presents of them are more equivalent than the representations of male and female in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* depicts a much more developed version of masculinity, even though this film was made only nine years after *Cinderella.*

Aurora and Philip appear as equals, more or less, which is a huge improvement for Disney's representation of masculinity. They have comparable amounts of screen time and activity, and are shown on screen in similar fashions. Both Aurora and Philip hold the cinematic gaze, as shown when Philip awakes her from her slumber and they walk down the castle stairs together. The staircase descent is a classic method of displaying a cinematic spectacle (Doane 136), which marks both of them as the object of the films' gaze. They also appear to share the spotlight—although the characters within the film focus on Aurora, Philip at times appears to be the main controlling figure of the film. Although not always in total control, he is involved in the events that drive the narrative forward. Because of his activity and increased subjectivity, the audience can identify with Philip more than the earlier princes.

Unlike *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* portrays a stronger, more active masculinity. Philip is a person, not a prop. His activity, personality, and apparent power make him a much stronger male character than either of the princes that came before him. Although he is not the most powerful figure in the film and subordinate to other characters in many ways, he is a much more authoritative male hero than Disney had previously shown.

CHAPTER V

*THE LITTLE MERMAID*

*Sleeping Beauty* appears to be a step forward for gender equality in Disney films because it presents more balance of males and females than either *Snow White* or *Cinderella.* However, thirty years stand between the release of *Sleeping Beauty* and Disney's next fairytale film, *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Those years appear to have allowed for some regression in male representation, as *The Little Mermaid* returns to a more female-centered model with weakened male figures. The contrast between the female lead, Princess Ariel, and male lead, Prince Eric, illustrates this devolution, especially when analyzed with the cinematic gaze in mind.

Traditionally in cinema studies, to be looked at is to be feminine, and to look is to be masculine. Ariel and Eric's relationship in *The Little Mermaid* does not follow this tradition of masculine subject and feminine object. Instead, Ariel gazes at Eric, and although he also gazes at her, it is clear that she is the subject of gazing, rather than the object of the gaze. Her looking at Eric stands out in many scenes—when she first sees his face and swoons at his handsomeness, and again when she gets close to him for the first time after she rescues him from drowning. She makes him a spectacle for her

consumption, a feat underscored by the screen showing him as he appears to her in scenes like the ones mentioned above.

When the female protagonist looks, like Ariel does, she is masculinized and when the male protagonist is looked at, like Eric is, he is feminized. This role reversal is at work throughout the film: Ariel is active and Eric is passive; Ariel controls the narrative through her actions, and Eric does not. The spectator, then, may identify with Ariel since she is the driving force of the narrative and controls the events on screen, even though she is female. This may appear to be contradictory to the assumption of a male protagonist, because she is female, but her subjectivity makes her masculinized, so she is not typically feminine. Her masculinization is due to her possession of the traditionally male position and is further evidenced by the fact that she is a sexual subject, not just an object. She gazes on Eric, and although he gazes right back, he is passive and lacks control. Eric, though male, is feminized, and Ariel, though female, is masculinized, which, like Sherwin's films that "assign and reassign masculine and feminine values and positions regardless of biology," exposes gender as socially constructed and performative (182). This may seem to unmoor the power of these constructions and the performances that maintain them, but it celebrates them instead: the gender performances in *The Little Mermaid* are rewarded. Ariel may exercise typically masculine control, but she knows better than to show it: Instead, she engages in gender performance and plays feminine, which in turn allows Eric to play masculine.

One element that serves to maintain Ariel's femininity is her dress, or lack thereof. Throughout the majority of the film she is shown in the typical mermaid attire of a shell-bra, leaving her mostly bare down to where her fish scales start. Close-up scenes

show her body to the waist, highlighting her bareness, or to the shoulders, which gives her the appearance of true nudity since her clamshell bra is strapless and cannot be seen in these shots. Her exposed body is obviously female, so there is no question of whether she is supposed to be masculine or feminine. Ariel's almost-nudity also marks her as an erotic object, the typical role of females. When she is in human form, she is more covered, but even then Ariel's costume (dresses) is clearly marked as feminine. The spectator and Eric (and the other characters of the film) can see that she is female and so her un-feminine actions are forgiven because she is more notable for her potential to be objectified. Watching her swim around naked or flail about barely clothed on land distracts from her potentially destabilizing activeness. Eric is expected to gaze at her, and he does: their relationship is based on mutual objectification. Both fall in love with the other's superficial qualities, but only Ariel acts as a subject despite Eric's objectification of her.

While the outside gaze may be focused on Ariel's dazzlingly bare midriff, it is clear that her gaze is unabashedly focused on Eric. From the very beginning of their relationship, when she first sees him on his ship, their relationship takes place through mostly visual exchange. Ariel swims up to Eric's ship and spies him through an opening in the gunwale, hidden from his view but able to see him clearly. The aperture frames Eric as the object of her gaze, making it clear that he is a spectacle for her consumption, like Prince Charming and Snow White's prince are for Cinderella and Snow White. Ariel's gaze is fixed on Eric, and her eyes widen as if bewitched as she stares at him, dreamily noting "he's so handsome." As Ariel gazes on Eric for the first time, the camera slowly zooms in on her face to showcase the wide-eyed stare she has fixed on him. The

shot cuts from his face back to her reaction of seeing his face—which is obviously pleased. This reaction shot only briefly flashes on Eric's face so that the audience can understand what she sees, and then returns to the more important face of Ariel. The audience sees Eric as Ariel sees him, but the view of Ariel's face is not from Eric's perspective, since he has not even seen her at this point, which encourages the audience to identify with Ariel and not Eric.

As Ariel watches on, Eric is presented with a larger than life statue of himself as a gift, which suggests that Ariel is not his only spectator. The main attraction for Ariel (and seemingly his other fans) is his extreme handsomeness. The first time that Ariel sees Eric, the camera shows her visual experience of seeing him; the shot pans up his body slowly and pauses briefly before his face comes into the picture, at which point it cuts immediately to Ariel's reaction. His body piques her interest, but she does not react to what she sees, as exhibited by the shot of her gazing dreamily, until she sees his face. After this initial one-sided encounter, Ariel again fixes her stare on Eric's visage after she saves him from shipwreck and drowning. He lies unconscious on the beach as she stares at him and lovingly touches his face, singing about being with him and murmuring "he's so beautiful" as he lies supine on the sand. Echoing previous films in reverse, she leans over him in the same posture that Snow White's prince and Prince Philip leaned over their respective princesses before delivering the redeeming kisses. As she hovers over him, she touches his face and turns it toward her to better view him and sings "what would I do, to *see* you, smiling at me," stressing the visual nature of her fascination with him. She is enrapt by his physical beauty and enthralled by the unexpected proximity to

her desired object. Even as she retreats into the sea, Ariel cannot tear her eyes away from Eric and looks back to him on the shore.

Eric's physical beauty is the object of Ariel's gaze, and her objectification of him is reinforced through her reaction to representations of his appearance. For example, Ariel's friend Flounder presents her with the statue of Eric, which has been salvaged from the shipwreck. Upon seeing it, Ariel is delighted because "It looks just like him! It even has his eyes!" The reaction shot again shows her expression of delight at seeing the representation of her object of desire. Immediately, she treats it possessively, touching the statue and swimming in a circle around it as if inscribing it within her territory. She instantly slips into a fantasy, fawning over the statue and sighing "Why Eric, run away with you? This is all so, so sudden!" like a breathless lover.

Unfortunately for Ariel, her reverie does not last long because her father surprises her and destroys the statue. However, Eric's face remains intact in one large shard, which further fetishizes his facial appearance. Ariel's love for Eric is based on the beauty of his face, and reducing him to his appearance distances him from subjectivity. Ariel's desire and love for Eric is based on Eric's beauty and reminders of his beauty remind her of her love. Roberta Trites notes how recalling Eric's physical beauty works to convince Ariel to pursue him, no matter the cost. There are two instances where this occurs: first is the shard of statue with Eric's face on it that Ursula's minions flick toward Ariel when they first approach her about going to the witch, and the second occurs when Ursula invokes Eric's image in her crucible as she finally persuades Ariel to enter into a contract with her (6). Once again, Eric's physical beauty is foregrounded as the basis of her love for him. Her fetishizing gaze makes him the sexual object.

There is some debate as to whether this fetishization of Eric is explicitly erotic or not, since he is also the mechanism that allows Ariel to enter the human world, which she has long found fascinating. Sells and Trites both interpret Ariel's love for Eric as a natural focusing of her love for the human world (Sells 180; Trites 3). These critics contend that her fascination for all things human is logically translated into love for a human. Other readings find other motivations for Ariel's love; for example, Patrick Murphy calls Ariel's love for Eric "commodity fetishism," and Jack Zipes contends that Eric is a "prize catch" because of his social status ( Murphy132; Zipes, *Enchanted Screen* (256). Therefore, Eric's value to Ariel could be understood to be based on his human status, social status, or physical beauty. Ariel is a princess in her own world, so she is not lacking in social status or in need of a prince to improve her standing. While it is possible that her fascination with humans leads her to love Eric only because he is a human, Ariel's original interest in him has nothing to do with becoming human so that cannot be the foundation for her love for him. Ariel does not even consider becoming human, and it appears as though she is not even aware of the possibility, until Ursula suggests it. Before Ursula convinces her that the only way to be with Eric is to become a human, Ariel's only plan (lame as it is) is to swim up to his castle. She is shocked when Ursula tells her she can turn her into a human and gasps "You can do that?" It seems that being human is not her goal, and she only accepts it so that she can be with Eric, the object of her affection. Ariel's objectification of Eric is rooted in desire and attraction, unlike the *femmes fatales* that Sherwin discusses, and Eric is an erotic object—not a pawn in a bigger scheme. Becoming human is a side effect of Ariel's relationship with Eric, not the reason for it.

However, attempting to read Eric as nothing but an instrument in Ariel's greater plan is understandable because he does not appear as a typical erotic object. Feminine objects of desire are generally recognizable because of the display of their bodies. Eric is fully clothed throughout the whole film, and it is his face, rather than his body, that is eroticized, which suggests that males experience visual erotic pleasure differently than females, who focus on the face instead of the body. His face alone is what ignites Ariel's infatuation and is the focus of her desire for him, as shown in shots of her reaction to seeing his face in person and in representation, as discussed earlier. This makes his body a less obvious sexual object, especially in contrast to Ariel's bare body. Neale explains that explicitly erotic images of the male form are rare due to the assumed male spectator and necessarily consequent repression of homosexuality (281). Eric's body, according to Neale, is kept covered for fear of homosexual readings or identifications, not because he is not an erotic object to Ariel. Another explanation for Eric's modest attire is that he does not need to be naked to be sexual, since Ariel objectifies his face, not his body. Even if he were more scantily clad, her obsession with his facial beauty would remain, making his clothing or lack thereof inconsequential. Eric's covered body discourages recognition of his sexual objectivity since the typical object is more often bare, but his passivity is consistent with the traditionally female object.

Like the typically passive female and first two Disney princes, Eric lacks agency and initiative. His movements, when compared to Ariel's, exemplify his static nature. While Ariel is often shown in motion, swimming or spinning through the water, Eric is still. Ariel often swims off-screen, as if the camera cannot contain her or match her speed and agility. Ariel propels herself through the water, Eric must rely on the ship to carry

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him, and although he is a sailor, he is rarely shown doing anything to command the boat. In fact, Eric is more often than not in repose when he is on screen: seated on the edge of his ship, leaning against a supportive wall, and brooding around his kingdom.

One striking example of the disparity between Ariel's and Eric's levels of activity is their carriage ride. Eric (at the suggestion of his stolid advisor) takes Ariel on a tour of his kingdom, during which he generally maintains a placid, almost neutral expression. In contrast, Ariel is ecstatic and grabs Eric's hand, pulling him forward, as if to lead the way on their shared adventure. Eric, bewildered by the sudden movement, follows mildly. Her eagerness once again outshines his reluctance when Eric makes the mistake of letting Ariel hold the reins of the carriage. She immediately urges the horses to go faster, thrilled by the speed and movement. Eric is decidedly not thrilled; he looks worried and afraid and his displeasure is highlighted by the contrast to Ariel's delighted grin.

During their entire carriage ride, Ariel can barely stay still while Eric moves at a much slower pace, if at all. The first shot of them in the carriage shows the two from behind, then cuts to show them from the front at an angle. Here, Ariel's constant activity is instantly noticeable as she twists and turns in her seat, looking avidly at her off-screen surroundings. Eric, in contrast, sits perfectly still, only glancing towards her occasionally while stolidly holding the reins. His focus mostly stays in the shot, since he directs his eyes at Ariel who sits next to him, and only ventures off-screen when the camera shows him alone to highlight his shocked and fearful facial expression. Once again, Ariel is not contained by the confines of the animation, but Eric is.

Eric's tame gaze echoes his tame behavior. Ariel unexpectedly spins around and looks under the carriage—hanging upside-down over the back of it; Eric's face shows a

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perturbed expression when he notices her position, but he still barely moves – only leaning over a few degrees. This shot, like many others during this sequence, shows Eric alone since Ariel's activity takes her outside of the frame that includes Eric. These views are the only ones in which Eric looks beyond the boundary of the shot, which is necessitated by Ariel's energetic movements. Since Ariel and Eric move at such different speeds, they are often shown separately. However, even when Ariel and Eric are on screen together, Ariel out-moves Eric by constantly turning and exploring her surroundings while Eric stays moored like an anchor. These scenes highlight the fact that Eric does not possess the same kinesthetic physicality that Ariel does, and confirm that he is more passive than Ariel.

Ariel's energy and action, as characterized by her recklessness and changing positions during the carriage ride, corresponds to her rebellious nature. Although some feminist scholars criticize Ariel for what they consider a lack of agency and independence, they do not deny that Ariel rebels against her father and stands by her own convictions. This rebellion is found in her various forbidden interests, such as collecting human artifacts, going to the surface, and pursuing Eric (Trites 2;Dundes 120; Sells 179). By engaging in these activities, Ariel defies her father's rules and asserts her own independence. Although Ariel loves her father, she is unconcerned with obeying his orders, choosing to follow her personal whims instead. Although Trites goes on to critique Ariel for depending on a male figure, she  first describes her as "intelligent, resourceful, and courageous," which illustrates Ariel's spirited personality and capriciousness (2).

In contrast to Ariel's rebelliousness, Eric appears compliant and submissive. He is not dynamic and depends on others to tell him or show him what to do, the antithesis of Victorian masculinity. Eric requires coaching from other characters in order to take action; for example, his advisor Grimsby suggests taking Ariel on the carriage tour. Grimsby is only one of many characters that attempt to coach Eric into action: Scuttle the seagull tries to get him to kiss Ariel by warbling, until Sebastian takes over and sets the mood with music imploring Eric to "kiss the girl." Despite the song, the commanding lyrics, and the multitudes of animals encouraging Eric to kiss Ariel, he never actually does; they are interrupted just before their lips can meet.

It is important that even though the plot of the film relies on Eric kissing Ariel and not the other way around, their almost-kiss is facilitated by both of them, not just Eric, moving slowly toward each other.  The first close shots of the two show them separately: first Eric, staring motionlessly, and then Ariel, fidgeting around and taking in her surroundings. The shot cuts from one to the other to show both positions and postures, until they start to come together. As their faces come towards each other on the screen, they are shown together. Ariel appears more prepared than Eric, readily closing her eyes as they lean in, while Eric looks stupidly at her and only barely manages to shut his own eyes before they are interrupted. Ariel moves as much as he does, which is less than she is used to, and going at his speed is so slow that they lose their opportunity to kiss.

It is clear that if Ariel could kiss Eric, she would do so and the problem would be avoided. Unfortunately for Ariel, Ursula's spell depends on Eric initiating the kiss and he is not the type to take initiative. The kiss is the one thing that Ariel cannot accomplish herself, which is why it causes such a problem for her. To borrow Mulvey's terms, Ariel

is the main controlling figure of the film and she is the one that makes thing happen. She swims to the surface, which is how she first sees him, and then saves him from drowning, which is how they meet. This reversal of the damsel in distress cliché characterizes their entire relationship throughout the film: Ariel plays the active, traditionally male role and Eric plays the passive feminine. This inversion is maintained as the film progresses and Ariel pursues Eric via drastic measures, without which they would never have a chance at a relationship. Ariel takes initiative and goes after her desired object. There is no question that it is Ariel's actions that drive the narrative forward.

It is important to note that while Ariel controls the events of the film, this control is not pronounced. Rather than asserting her active role, Ariel couches it in feminine performances that she uses to manipulate others to do her bidding. For example, Trites points out Ariel's display of manipulative abilities "after she has landed on the shore in human form, she clings dependently to Eric while grinning and winking back at her friends in the sea to show that she is faking weakness for the sake of her prince's ego"(3). Ariel facilitates this 'rescue' by feigning fear of Eric's dog Max, who she has already encountered, received some harmless canine licking from, and is clearly not afraid of. Pretending to be scared of Max gives Ariel a reason to be rescued, so that she can perform the damsel in distress role, which allows Eric to play the hero.

Eric may appear more empowered than he really is because of Ariel's play-acting, but throughout the film he is continually objectified. He looks like a hero, but only because Ariel's strategy allows this reading, and he only really functions as an object of Ariel's desire. Eric's sex-object status and passivity mark him as a less authoritative

figure, especially in comparison to Ariel. Ariel's narrative control and subjectivity overpower any claim of Eric's to a position of traditional patriarchal power.

This step back for Disney's princes is superficially camouflaged, but the subterfuge fails upon scrutiny of power relations between Ariel and Eric. The efforts to disguise Eric's subordination suggest a more complicated attitude towards masculinity than the earlier films. Although he is less empowered than Phillip, he is presented as though he is an equal, if not better, to Ariel. This conceit cannot withstand examination, and Eric proves to be passive, weak, and objectified, once again contradicting the claim for Disney's patriarchal Victorianism.

CHAPTER VI

*BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* AND *ALADDIN*

Perhaps Disney's hollow efforts to make Eric *appear* to be more empowered stem

from rising awareness and criticism of cultural representations of masculinity. Eric fails

to embody the complex masculinity that this heightened sensitivity to maleness called

for, and so Disney ramped up its efforts with 1991's *Beauty and the Beas*t. Susan Jeffords

attributes Disney's decision to make *Beauty and the Beast* as a response to the

masculinity of the 1980s which ushered in a "male transformation of the 90s" (Jeffords

163). Susan Faludi's 1991book *Backlash* charges the media with vilifying empowered

women for stealing men's roles in the 1980s. This backlash, Faludi argues, was

accompanied by a return to Victorian gender roles which define masculinity as being the

provider for a family, and "If establishing masculinity depends most of all on succeeding

as the prime breadwinner, then it is hard to imagine a force more directly threatening to

fragile American manhood than the feminist drive for economic equality" (65). In order

to legitimize masculinity in the face of threatening female encroachment, the media

portrayed men as violent, brutal, and unfeeling in the 1980s. This stereotypical portrayal

triggered a response that blamed society for pressuring men to be hardcore action heroes

and demanded recognition of alternate modes of masculinity. This new wave of maleness

explained male brutality as a reaction to societal expectations, not as an intrinsic male quality, and represented more sensitive males who needed to be treated kindly and affectionately in order to leave behind the brutish caricature of the 1980s (Jeffords 164).

Thus, *Beauty and the Beast* presents a much more developed male lead and more empowered representations of masculinity that come closer to placing masculinity on par with femininity as seen before only in *Sleeping Beauty*. Following in quick succession, 1992's *Aladdin* picks up where *Beauty and the Beast* drops off to depict an even more empowered, capable, and central male figure. These two films improve male authority and agency, showing masculinity as first interdependent competitive with the feminine, in *Beauty and the Beast*, and then matching and perhaps even surpassing it with the first truly positive male character, *Aladdin*. The addition of a new archetype for male characters, the *homme fatale*, which appears in both *Beauty* and *Aladdin* evidences a freshly liberated masculinity within Disney.

Critics hotly debate whether *Beauty and the Beast* is Belle's story or the Beast's story when the obvious answer is that it is *their* story. As the title suggests, this film tells the narrative of both Belle and the Beast. Sharon Downey notes the interdependence and reciprocity of Belle and the Beast's relationship, which lead to a novel "authentication of the individual" (206). Although Downey claims that the story is masculine—a conflict between two males, Beast and Gaston—she points out that Belle subverts patriarchal dominance throughout the film (190, 197). Downey's confliction over the matter is bizarre considering her own observation of the reciprocal nature of the male/female relationship in *Beauty and the Beast* suggests that both characters can share the narrative. Their mutual centrality is reinforced by the ending of the film – which fulfills both of

their needs, as Lara Sumera points out (46). The Beast's curse is reversed because of Belle, and Belle can escape the provincial life she so deplores, so both of them get their happy ending, unlike earlier films which center on the resolution of the female's problem.

The Beast's shared centrality in this narrative is evident from the very beginning – when his story opens the film. After the story of the curse, the film moves on to introducing Belle and the actual Beast is not seen until seventeen minutes into the film. However, once he makes his appearance, he appears consistently on screen. The Beast is first seen in shadow, but when Belle asks him to step into the light so she can see him, he raises his head proudly, staring at her defiantly. AS the screen first shows Belle's face in close up as she reacts to this display, but quickly switches to her perspective to show the Beast in all his terrifying glory. He takes up the entire screen and his blue eyes face Belle, or the camera, dead-on. This shot mimics a low-angle shot, which increases the Beast's apparent power by showing him towering over the viewer. Despite his gruesome appearance, the Beast is often in the spotlight and his face is not hidden from view unnecessarily. As Downey points out, as the story and the relationship between Belle and the Beast progesses, the lighting of the film changes (201). The initial gloominess and shadows are replaced with brighter, more inviting backgrounds that ensure that both characters are equally viewable.

Beast's visibility also highlights his extreme activity throughout the film. He storms onto the screen, stomping his clawed feet with his cloak swirling around him to enhance the impression of movement. His animal stature imbues him with instantly recognizable strength and physical power, which he does not hesitate to exhibit. Although earlier males may have also had a fine physique, they rarely if ever use it. In contrast, the

Beast's physicality and activity are undeniable as he smashes furniture instantaneously in frustration with Belle, and then saves her from vicious wolves. The final battle between the Beast and Gaston also showcases the Beast's superior strength: Gaston only dominates the Beast while the Beast is resigned to death. When Belle appears and the Beast is compelled to fight back and live, Gaston's domination is easily reversed, even though Gaston himself is an exaggeratedly large male. Active and powerful, the Beast is a dynamic male whose physical strength demands recognition.

Beyond his bodily power and agency, the Beast also presents a much more individuated personality than other princes. First remarkable for his temper and violence, the Beast changes over the course of the film to become more in touch with his sensitive side which he has tried to deny. The key to seeing past the Beast's violent outbursts is his facial expressions, which are more dynamic and telling than any male lead before him. The movement of his eyes, eyebrows, and mouth correspond to his emotions and allow the audience to understand him better. In one scene, as he leads Belle to her room, the screen alternates between showing the Beast's timid, nervous expression as he consults with his servant, Lumiere, from the front, and the perspective that Belle sees as he turns around to growl his answers at her. Facing forward, he drops his snarl and listens attentively to his confidant, but when he turns around he adopts a feral sneer. The audience sees both sides, so they are privy to the Beast's sensitivity in a way that Belle is not until later in the film, making him more relatable to the audience. This sensitivity that he initially tries to hide from Belle eventually comes out, along with his personality. The Beast's plentiful screen time, emotional expressions, and animal earnestness make him endearing to the audience, as well as to Belle. As he learns how to control his temper and

interact with others, his gruffness subsides and a more enlightened male emerges, and he becomes the most relatable, autonomous male yet.

However, this seemingly empowering representation of the Beast is not without caveats. The Beast relies on Belle for his transformation from uncouth brute to sensitive lover, which casts her as a civilizing force, and empowers Belle, not the Beast. The Beast's dependence on others' counteracts his agency and autonomy. As Jeffords states, "Belle is constantly cast as the Beast's teacher, positioning him again as powerless" (169). Downey notes how even the servants have to instruct him on how to behave with Belle (200). Without the servants, the Beast would scare away Belle, and without Belle, the Beast would be hopeless. The servants and Belle also subvert the Beast's power by disobeying his orders. Instructed not to enter the west wing, Belle does anyway; ordered to come to dinner, Belle refuses. The servants are equally as dismissive of their master's wishes, first welcoming Maurice into the castle and then preparing an extravagant dinner for Belle when the Beast has strictly forbade it. Despite his physical power and position of authority, neither Belle nor the servants are threatened enough to obey his orders.

Although the dual-centrality of the male and female characters and increased individuality of the Beast signal that *Beauty and the Beast* is less misandristic than earlier features in Disney's fairy tale franchise, this depiction could certainly be more empowering than it ultimately is. The Beast brings masculine autonomy back to the level Prince Philip exhibits in *Sleeping Beauty*, which is still less than that of regularly found in the princesses. However, the next male lead, Aladdin, finally achieves the powerful centrality and agency that eluded his predecessors.

It  is important to note that although Aladdin is the first human prince to have top billing, and the Beast is the first to share top billing, other male characters have had these distinctions before. For example, Bambi premiered in 1942 and Lady and the Tramp premiered in 1955, both of which feature eponymous male leads. However, these films cannot be grouped with the others analyzed here because the male leads are not human, but animal. No matter how anthropomorphized they may be, animals are not humans and always easily distinguishable as such. Disney highlights the dichotomy between human and non-human, as discussed by DoRozario, Murphy, and Pallant. Even when humans are barely represented in or absent from films, such as The Jungle Book or The Lion King (1994), the notion of civilization versus wild nature remains (Murphy 129). Stressing the difference between humans and animals distances human viewers from the animals on screen and this distance makes the animal characters less relatable. Their relationships and social dynamics, including gender roles, are less applicable to reality, which dilutes their influence on real human viewers.

Therefore, animal characters have less gravitas than human characters, which means they are less important or valuable and their problems are less severe than human's problems. The way Disney portrays the most traumatic event that could happen to a child, parent death, illustrates this principle. Cinderella's father's death is the reason for her stepmother and stepsisters' terrible treatment of her, but this seemingly major plot point is only mentioned in passing at the beginning of the story. Glossing over Cinderella's father's death downplays the horror of the event. In contrast, when an animal parent dies, like Mufasa in *The Lion King* or Bambi's mother, dramatic music and extremely tense, life-or-death circumstances highlight the sadness of the event. Although

Bambi's mother is not shown being shot, the ominous gunshot sound and her failure to reappear in the shot make it clear what has happened. Mufasa's death is even more explicit – the screen shows his body flailing off a cliff into a thundering stampede, and even shows his lifeless form lying on the canyon floor after the stampede has passed. These scenes are extremely sad, but they maintain distance from human reality because they involve animals in animal-exclusive circumstances, and those are categorically opposed to the human experience.

This treatment suggests that anything less than human is not to be taken seriously, which complicates the Beast's role in *Beauty and the Beast*. Although he was a human and has some human characteristics, he is still mostly animal. As an animal, he cannot be a serious or legitimate love interest or match for Belle, which is why he must change back to human for the happy ending. Even though Belle falls in love with him as a Beast, he is lesser than her until he turns back into a man. Beast's non-human status for much of the film further marks him as subordinate, according to the Disney dichotomy of human and non-human.

The next prince, Aladdin, enjoys human privilege throughout the film, and is the first Disney prince to have his film named for him, a major step for masculinity in these films. He is undeniably the main character, and although he shares plenty of screen time with Jasmine, he is consistently portrayed as an active, independent, intelligent, and authoritative male. Aladdin is well-rounded and likable, expressing more personality in his very first scene than some of the earlier princes do throughout the whole film. Because of the individualized, empowered, and multi-faceted representation of the title character, *Aladdin* marks a true development for masculinity in Disney's fairy tales. This

treatment affords males a position much closer to the patriarchal superiority that Disney has long been charged with upholding.

Other factors besides being the titular character exponentially increase Aladdin's centrality.  He is on screen for the majority of the film, other characters focus their attention on him, for good and evil, and the musical numbers revolve around him. The villain Jafar seeks Aladdin out since he is "the diamond in the rough," and even when he is absent Jasmine concerns herself with his well-being. While singing in town, many side characters focus their attention on Aladdin, discussing him in such a way that suggests he is often the topic of conversation. During his introductory song, "One Jump Ahead," Aladdin channels Belle during her first song: he is the object of interest for other villagers, like Belle is in her provincial town. While he runs the risk of being objectified by this treatment, since it is clear many of the women appreciate his aesthetic qualities, his central importance and narrative control outshine any objectification.

Likewise, Aladdin's high visibility foregrounds his centrality. Unlike earlier princes, Aladdin's form is not obscured or kept from view. In his first frame on screen, he pops up in broad daylight, facing the camera in mid-range, and the camera retains a position dedicated to representing him accurately throughout the film. Aladdin consistently appears on screen fully lit, in mid or close range, and oriented towards the camera so that his whole face is visible. The high-level of visibility that Aladdin enjoys facilitates his conveyance of emotion through facial expressions, which are many and varied. Unlike the scenery Prince Charming provides, Aladdin is a lively part of the film. If Aladdin were not as regularly and completely shown, this film would run the risk of

marginalizing men as much as *Cinderella*. However, this is not the case, and so *Aladdin* does the opposite.

By focusing on Aladdin as the central character of this film, Disney presents men as important and valuable. Because Aladdin is a homeless "street rat," he further improves masculine representations in Disney since Jasmine cannot gain any status from him. Although he is, of course, a handsome and physically fit young man and so offers physical beauty, ultimately Aladdin cannot provide the other major princely gift of royalty. Whereas the earlier films all portray a royal-born prince, who either marries a princess or marries a commoner who becomes a princess, Aladdin is of the lowest possible social rank but manages to improve his status through marriage. The notion of improving social ranking through marrying a person of a higher class, or hypergamy, became popular with the eighteenth -century novel. However, this trope occurs in terms of women marring socially superior men, and the few instances of men marrying up were considered revolutionary[4]. With that understanding in mind, the princesses who marry royalty without being royalty themselves (Ariel, Cinderella) are acceptable, according to traditional standards, but men doing the same are subversive. Aladdin's extreme social upgrade is the first of its kind in Disney, which is important because this portrayal shows that men have something to offer society besides improved social rank.

Since Aladdin has no social currency to offer, other attributes make him desirable to Jasmine and also likable to the audience. While Jasmine may also be attracted to him for his looks, Aladdin draws appreciation from her and other characters like the genie and the sultan for his personality. As mentioned before, Aladdin's facial expressions relate his emotions and personal experiences. The variation in expressions—wide-eyed in shock,

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[4] See Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* 1988.

mouth-open staring at Jasmine's beauty, narrow-eyed in determination, smiling slyly in trickery—is an openly visible signifier of Aladdin's multi-faceted personality.

His dynamic personality complements his dynamic physical athleticism. From his first scene to his last, Aladdin moves with agility, strength, and speed, showcasing his activity. Like Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*¸ this constant activity and physical ability represent his autonomy. This translates to him being the main controlling figure, he moves the narrative forward, and even though he is the focus of many musical features, he is not a stagnant spectacle—the songs serve to drive the narrative as well. "One Jump Ahead" shows Aladdin's athleticism and centrality and introduces his social position, "Prince Ali" shows how he gains entrance to the palace and explains Jafar's mistrust of him, and "A Whole New World" validates Jasmine and Aladdin's relationship as they fall in love on their tour of the world. The only song which truly stalls the narrative is the Genie's "You ain't never had a Friend Like Me" which is directed at Aladdin, but the true spectacle of this song is the genie, as he shows off his "infinite cosmic powers" in a fantastic, energetic number reminiscent of "Under the Sea" and "Be Our Guest."All of these songs borrow from musical theatre in the scope of their choreography, and all our sung by side characters as entreaties to the main characters, Ariel, Belle, and Aladdin. Other parallels liken Aladdin to these central female characters, who are rebellious and independent.

Aladdin is brave, intelligent, sensitive, caring, and cunning. He can be tricky and mischievous but also generous and kind, and while he seems driven by conventional morality in some instances, his own morality is more complicated. Aladdin's trickery often exposes his impressive intellect, as his schemes—which work—cleverly get him, or

others out of trouble. The first instance in which Aladdin's triumphs through trickery is when he rescues Jasmine from the vendor who would cut her hand off for stealing. Aladdin has been keenly watching the beautiful Jasmine, and swoops in just at the right moment to save her by telling the vendor that she is his crazy sister. Jasmine plays along wonderfully and the vendor is fooled and lets her go. Aladdin later tricks the genie into releasing him from the cave of wonders without wasting any of his three wishes through clever wordplay, and the genie can do nothing but admit he has been bested. Aladdin's schemes work because he is both smart and brave.

Aladdin's daring courage—without which his plans would fail—allows him to protect others and stand up for what he believes is right. For example, Aladdin confronts a snobbish, whip-wielding prince Akhmed to protect two young children in the street. He also risks his own safety to protect his sidekick, Abu, when Jafar banishes them to snowy wilderness. Aladdin's sense of morality shines through in many scenes, such as when he sits down to enjoy his hard-earned bread but generously gives it to needy children instead, and admonishes Abu to do the same. Aladdin also promises to set genie free with his last wish, which becomes problematic, but ultimately happens. Aladdin's concern for others shows that he is sensitive and caring.

However, he is not so perfect as to seem unrealistic, since he does have some moral dilemmas and transgressions of his own. Most notably, Aladdin is a criminal. His introductory scene involves him running for his life for stealing bread, but as he says in his song "gotta eat to live, gotta steal to eat" proving that he only steals out of necessity. Therefore, Aladdin appears to understand that stealing is morally wrong, and he only does it only because he has no other way to stay alive. Aladdin's other ethical dilemma

involves Princess Jasmine: he poses as Prince Ali and lies to her about his identity. Even when Jasmine guesses his real identity, Aladdin continues to insist that he actually is a prince for the majority of the film. Eventually Jafar unmasks Prince Ali and shows Jasmine that it really is the street-rat Aladdin, and Aladdin apologizes for lying. He explains that he only lied because he thought he had to be a prince for them to be a future, which does not excuse his moral transgressions but does offer some logical reasoning for them. Aladdin is not perfect, but that makes him human—and acknowledges his individuality.

Disney portrays Aladdin as a realistic human, so is as much of a central character as earlier princesses and picks up where the Beast left off in terms of showing male agency and autonomy. No longer does the prince wait in the wings for his cue to enter the princess' story—the advent of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* ushers in a more individualized, active, and relatable male lead. This empowered male is notably unlike the Victorian ideal, however, as he is sensitive and flawed. The power of this male is derived from his personal autonomy and agency, not just from patriarchal position. Although *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast* are not impeccably empowering (of either men or women), they do not degrade men like many earlier Disney films, and they offer examples of real male power. The romantic leads—the Beast and Aladdin—represent multi-faceted masculinity, which alone destabilizes the pattern of Disney relegating men to marginalized positions. However, another character within both of these films further widens scope of masculinity by showing male power in a way that, until the 1990s, only females held in Disney. This revolutionary archetype is the *homme fatale*—an answer to the ubiquitous *femme fatale*, the ultimate trope of female power.

CHAPTER VII

*HOMMES FATALES*


This new option for men finally expands Disney's repertoire of male typing, allowing an option besides the young stud or fussy old man. Even though the stereotype of the *femme fatale* equates feminine sexuality and power with evilness, this evil power is the most fearsome, and thus most authoritative, to be found in the realm of Disney's fairy tales. Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* and Jafar in *Aladdin* exert this same evil power. Clues in the film suggest this correlation, like Jafar's costume, which echoes that of *Snow White's* Evil Queen, and Gaston quoting the classic literary *femme fatale*, Lady MacBeth, in his dark musical number "Kill the Beast:" "screw your courage to the sticking place." Like the *femmes fatales*, these male characters must be defeated by the end of the film to ensure a fairytale ending, but until that point they regularly display their evil, sexual, power.

Gaston's strength and good looks make him a sex symbol, which in turn gives him authority in his town. All the girls (besides Belle) swoon over him, and even Belle's father seems taken with him. However, he is as impressed with his strength and manly good looks as the townspeople, as evidenced in his many comments and eponymous

song. Gaston is arrogant, boorish, pig-headed, and misogynistic, but he does have power. He exerts control over the townspeople, getting them to help him orchestrate his surprise wedding to Belle, and rallying them to attack the Beast. He is also clever enough to hatch an evil plan to get Belle to marry him when his guerilla-marriage does not work out. He even puts up an impressive fight against the enormous Beast. However, since Gaston's masculinity is defined by his strength and size, he represents past ideals of masculinity, namely the vilified uber-male that the backlash of the 1980s protested. He is the foil to the new sensitive male that the Beast represents.

Jafar, the evil royal advisor to the sultan in *Aladdin*, presents a more interesting case because he is neither uber-masculine nor sensitive. If Gaston represents the old standard of masculinity and the Beast the modern, then Jafar is something else entirely. He is the postmodern male, who Thomas Byers explains is threatening to traditional order. Jafar is devious and intelligent, managing to manipulate the other characters with his cunning and magical powers. He lies expertly and can disguise himself beyond recognition. Disney's fairy tales almost exclusively attribute these two modes of control—manipulation and magic—to females. Jafar's reliance on these "feminine wiles" to further his evil plan mark him as feminized. Even Jafar's appearance recalls that of the Evil Queen and Maleficent: tall and dramatically costumed with expressive features. The camera also closes in on his eyes, the trademark shot of the *femme fatale*. These feminizations complicate Jafar's sexuality. He imprisons Jasmine, who uses her own sexuality to distract him with seduction and a kiss, which suggests sexual attraction to her. However, earlier in the film, his contempt for her is obvious and he only attempts to trick her father into letting him marry her for personal, not sexual, gain.

Jafar's correlation to *femmes fatales* may be more obvious than Gaston's, since Jafar is more feminized. However, both characters serve the same purpose heretofore relegated to females: they are the villains, the ultimate evil power. The emergence of this archetype levels the playing field, bringing the range of possible male characters even with that range of females. Therefore, the assumption that women are more disenfranchised by Disney is not warranted. Yes, misogyny is rampant, but focusing on this slight to women means Disney's misandry has been overlooked for decades. Historically, Disney presents men as just as or even more passive and limited than women. Depicting men in this way suggests that they have no individual power or importance, and delivers the message that men are valuable for what they can offer others, not for their own identities. Over time, Disney eventually came to acknowledge male autonomy as much as female, but this development did not ultimately occur until the 1990s. Whereas Disney is often accused of presenting Victorian gender ideals of male superiority, in actuality the Disney canon of fairy tale films is completely devoid of Victorian masculinity. Furthermore, the films that do portray males as capable and powerful only bring male representations up to the standard already established for females, decades earlier.

Acknowledging the misandry interwoven with Disney's misogyny has implications on twentieth century American culture, since Disney's films influence culture but they also transmit information about the cultural ideals of their time periods. The presence of Disney's misandry suggests a society that undervalues males. Coupled with the long-decried Disney misogyny, this misandry hints at undervaluing not just males or females, but any individuality. This message is perturbing, considering Disney's

extreme and enduring popularity with children; multiple generations of children have learned gender roles from these films, and a new generation is currently doing the same. Fairy tales and Disney are almost synonymous in American culture; Disney princess merchandise is inescapable in toy stores, and other media, such as television shows (ABC's *Once Upon a Time* and NBC's *Grimm*) and new films (*Mirror, Mirror* and *Snow White and the Huntsman)* that refashion the same old stories prove the staying power of Disney fairy tales over almost a century, and even though some of these films are decades old, they are still relevant for both children and their parents. While the misogyny in these films has long been the subject of critique, my research shows that degradation of females does not translate to male empowerment, and in fact misogyny can exist in tandem which misandry, which has been operating in contemporary American culture for years and continues to influence new generations. The presence of misandry in Disney provokes the question: if neither women nor men are empowered, who, or what, is? What does this teach children about society, in terms of both gender and individuality? The didactics of these films has evolved over the years, but rather than working toward male empowerment equaling female empowerment, the development of gender dynamics has been the opposite. Disney's status as cultural influence and barometer implies that the assumed evolution of societal gender dynamics is as misguided as the assumption that Disney has always presented men as superior to women, which I have shown to be inaccurate.

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