From Mouse

The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture

to Mermaid

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EDITORS

Indiana University Press

BLOOMINGTON AND INDIANAPOLIS

Six

Somatexts at the Disney Shop

Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies

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> Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called pentimento because the painter "repented," changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again. (Hellman, 1973)

The early Disney shop, not unlike other organizations in the 1930s, strictly divided labor into that performed by men and that relegated to women. From "storymen," "gagmen," art directors, lyricists, animators, and "in-betweeners," to background artists, layout artists, and camera operators, the production staff was overwhelmingly male except for 200 women in the Painting and Inking Department. These women applied paint to the artists' tracings on each individual "cel" of film, yielding, on the average, 250,000 paintings for each animated feature film.[1] When the company became so large that direct communication among all the production facets was difficult, a second gendered labor practice began. In "sweatbox" sessions (reviews of works in progress in a small, windowless screening room), a woman stenographer recorded the conversations and produced typed transcripts for distribution to all departments. The hands of women, painting and transcribing the creative efforts of men, performed the tedious, repetitive, labor-intensive housework of the Disney enterprise.

Those collective, creative efforts resulted in the nest eggs of Disney's empire—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)—the transformations of western folktales into animated films. Thirty years later, under the creative auspices of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, Disney returned to these folk roots with *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992). These six tales, out

of thirty-five full-length animated features, are the signatures and legacy of Walt Disney. With the logo "Walt Disney Pictures," Disney wrote his name and ownership on the folk stories of women, creating indelible images of the feminine:

> Cinema has a way of leaving the images of certain faces and bodies permanently inscribed in our memories. . . . Perhaps no aspect of the cinema is more powerful—or more potentially troubling—than its capacity to confront viewers with such moving bodies and faces, larger than life, images projected in motion and in time. (Pyle 1993, 227)

Although Pyle is describing the cyborg futurism of *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, his observation is equally applicable to the images of women created by the Disney shop. Kay Stone's 1975 survey of British and American women for their recollections of fairy-tale girls found that Disney's versions of Snow White, Cinderella, and the Sleeping Beauty were the indelibly inscribed memories. But long before cyborgs dreamed of electric sheep, Disney artists created "cyborg" women composed of the language and bodies of others, rendered "larger than life" only when their images were "projected in motion and in time."

Animation, perhaps more than any other graphic art form, relies on motion and time to give life and efficacy to its images. Despite its popular association with children's cartoons, Disney animation is not an innocent art form: nothing accidental or serendipitous occurs in animation as each *second* of action on screen is rendered in twenty-four different still paintings. The exacting, communally created images of women by men are consistently rendered in a somatic triumvirate of bodily forms and snapshots of the aging process. 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 in pear-shaped, old women past menopause, spry and comical, as the good fairies, godmothers, and servants in the tales.

More than a somatic time-line of physical changes, Disney's animated women are pentimentos, paintings layered upon paintings, images drawn on images, in a cultural accumulation of representations of good girls, bad women, and doting servants. The first layer of the pentimento, the folktale templates of Perrault, the Grimms, and Andersen, can be punned and dismissed as painted ciphers—characters with no weight or influence. But as the painting accrues, with layers of contemporaneous film and popular images of women, live-action models for the characters, and cinematic conventions of representing women, the levels become increasingly coded and complex. Disney's drawn women are transformed from weightless ciphers, drawn in black and white by men, into a second definition of cipher, texts encoded to conceal their meaning, when the women of the Painting and Inking Department add the palette of hues.

This essay explores the "semiotic layering" in the construction of women's bodies in Disney animation.[2] As cultural artifacts, their meanings are not fixed, but invite a diagnosis of the encoded possibilities of multitextual iconographies in animation. Within the language of Disney animation, the constructed bodies of women are somatic, cinematic and cultural codes that attempt to align audience sympathies and allegiance with the beginning and end of the feminine life cycle, marking the middle as a dangerous, consumptive, and transgressive realm.

Disney's Dancing Girls

The bodies of Disney's teenaged heroines begin as thumbnail sketches for kind and beautiful young girls in the literary tales. Snow White in the Grimms' tale is "white as snow, and as red as blood, and her hair was as black as ebony. . . . When she was seven years old she was as beautiful as the day" (1972, 249, 250). Charles Perrault first describes Cinderella with an "exceptionally sweet and gentle nature" who was "a hundred times more beautiful than her sisters" (1961, 58, 60). Under the bad fairy's spell, the princess in *Sleeping Beauty* seems to be dead, but "the trance had not taken away the lovely colour of her complexion. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips like coral" (p. 4). Andersen describes the little mermaid, the youngest of six sisters, as "the prettiest of all, her skin was soft and delicate as a rose-leaf, her eyes as blue as the deepest sea" (1945, 87).

Disney artists sketched the flesh and blood on these folktale templates with contemporaneous popular images of feminine beauty and youth, their sources ranging from the silent screen to glossy pin-ups. The 1937 Snow White, with large expressive eyes, pouty mouth, and broadly drawn features, is reminiscent of the *ingenue* of silent movies.[3] In the animators' earliest renderings in 1934, Disney "had to decree that their Snow White figure was really too young for the tempests of love (she must have looked about 8!), and that they should add a few years to her age. . . . Disney opted for girl-next-door prettiness" (Grant 1993, 151). Later production notes describe her as "Janet Gaynor type—14 years old" (Finch 1975, 66).[4] The 1950 Cinderella, cultured and stately even in her work clothes, is reminiscent of the sophis-

ticated elegance of Grace Kelly, another girl next door destined for royalty. Roger Ebert claims Cinderella, like "the bland post-war 1950s . . . looks like the 'Draw Me Girl' " (1989, 115). Princess Aurora, the sixteen-year-old of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), has been described as Disney's most beautiful heroine (Solomon 1989, 198). Comparisons of this statuesque blonde to the contemporaneous Barbie doll are difficult to avoid. Production work for *The Little Mermaid* began in 1985. Ariel, too, is sixteen years old. Her huge blue eyes, upturned nose, and excessive bangs recall the '70s wholesomely lithe pin-up girl, Farrah Fawcett.

The constructed bodies of the young women in Disney's three earliest tales, however, are not drawn in prosaic strokes of cartoon corporeality, but in the formal and poetic lines of classical ballet. Although the actresses and singers who voiced the characters are given screen credits in the latter films, the live-action models for the teenaged heroines are lesser known and remain largely unacknowledged outside Disney histories. Marjorie (Belcher) Champion at 18 years old modeled for Snow White, and Helene Stanley for Cinderella; the entire film of *Sleeping Beauty* was filmed in live action before drawn (Maltin 1980, 74). Disney's early teenaged heroines were constructed on the bodies of professional dancers.

The transformation of dancers into whimsical characters and animated choreography was an early motif in the Disney repertoire. Films of classical ballet dancers, actual choreography, and Jules Engles's familiarity with the world of dance were translated in the lyric *Nutcracker Suite* and comic *Dance of the Hours* in Disney's third full-length feature *Fantasia* (1940) (Maltin 1980, 62). Feild innocently relates that Hyacinth, the prima ballerina hippopotamus in *Dance of the Hours*, was troublesome to animate until

> a Negress weighing more than two hundred pounds was found who tripped with lumbering grace over the live-action stage while the cameramen recorded the least quiver of her flesh, noticing those parts of her anatomy that were subjected to the greatest stress and strain. (1942, 214)

While Disney historiographer John Grant describes the *Dance of the Hours* as "an affectionate parody of the pretensions of classical ballet" (1993, 177), the ciphers of folktales are transformed into conflicting codes of race, class, and gendered performance in Disney's dancing girls.

The animation of race and ethnicity was unproblematic in the early Disney shop. Animated heroines were individuated in fair-skinned, fair-eyed, anglo-saxon features of eurocentric loveliness, both conforming to and perfecting Hollywood's beauty boundaries.[5] The markers of class, however, are covertly embodied in the metaphors of classical dance. Royal lineage and

bearing are personified in the erect, ceremonial carriage of ballet and manifested not only in the dance sequences, but in the heroines' graceful solitude and poised interactions with others. Classical dance carriage and royal bearing are interchangeable in Disney animation; once a body is drawn in those lines, the form is inescapable. Prima ballerina Gelsey Kirkland, for example, relates that in one rehearsal of Jerome Robbins's *Scherzo Fantastique*, Robbins stopped the rehearsal,

> blaring over the theatre microphone: "Miss Kirkland, will you take that goddamn tiara off your head!" I had nothing on my head. What he was complaining about was the overly proper way I was carrying myself. I was too stiff, too much of a "princess." (1986, 78)

Disney's early heroines cannot escape from the pentimento of their constructions, their rendering as "too much of a princess." Even Briar Rose, unaware of her royal status as princess Aurora, and Cinderella, before marriage/ascension, move through their worlds seemingly *en pointe* and turned out. Dance physician L. M. Vincent notes that even if one "takes away the dance bag and the chignon, the walk is still a dead giveaway. The walking apparatus of the ballet dancer is not mutated; rather the peculiar stride results from external rotation of the hips" (1979, 3). This "peculiar stride" captured on film is then translated into pencil drawings by Disney animators. The language of ballet, and its coded conventions for spectatorship of "high" art, are embedded in the bodies of young Disney women.

To mark class and privilege with the studied, tensive grace of classical dance is further problematized when the teenage years of sexual maturation are marked by the same metaphors. The formal carriage of the animated heroines is constructed on the bodies of actual women, shaped by the strenuous rigors and artful artificiality of classical ballet. Classical dance has always maneuvered natural body positions into unnatural ones; only the culturally coded ways of looking at ballet transform and render these stances and movements as "natural" grace, form, and line. Borrowing the forms of classical dance and grafting them onto teenaged fairy-tale heroines, Disney artists ask viewers to elide from established and elitist conventions for spectatorship to the animated, politically "innocent," and popular conventions of song and dance. Indeed, the Disney apparatus buys into and then sells the twofold fantasy of little girls who want to grow up to be princesses *and* ballerinas.

While musicals have always broken the narrative conventions of film, the bodies of Disney's classical dancers are troublesome in that they argue with the formulaic characterization of girls in folktales. Marcia Lieberman (1987)

sketches a composite drawing of young femininity in western tales: beauty, helplessness, and passivity are the catalysts and rewards for destined marriage and money. Goodness is linked to victimage and martyrdom. For Ruth Bottigheimer, the bodies of Grimms' heroines are voiceless ones: "the pattern of discourse in *Grimms' Tales* discriminates against 'good' girls and produces functionally silent heroines" (1977, 53). Carol Gilligan's work with adolescent girls (1991) finds behavioral parallels to these folktale motifs, as the onset of puberty finds active, verbal, and confident girls suddenly quiet and reticent, internalizing and enacting newly realized cultural cues for womanhood.

The young Disney women, at the rate of twenty-four still drawings a second, undergo these same plot and personality requisites. Their bodies, however, built on the disciplined, expressive "naturalness" of dancers, have backbone. In animating Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, Disney artists have created a somatic mixed message. While the characterizations of Disney heroines adhere to the fairy-tale templates of passivity and victimage, their bodies are portraits of strength, discipline, and control, performing the dancing roles of princesses.

On the other hand, the ugly stepsisters, attitudinal counterpoints to Cinderella, are animated as antitheses to correct dance carriage and movement. Their strides are always heel first, bent knee exaggerations of incorrect ballet postures and movements. Indeed, in most ballet productions of *Cinderella*, the dancing roles of the wicked stepsisters are performed by men in drag, parodying and disrupting gendered constructions of classical dance roles. Disney's Anastasia and Drizella, with their flat chests, huge bustles, and awkward curtsies, could as well be read as comic drag acts in this balletic fantasy. The stepsisters serve as animated commoners to Cinderella's royal body, gender benders to Cinderella's enactment of ballerina.

In the Disney landscape, the dancing heroines are partnered by the silent ciphers of nineteenth-century classical ballet. The art of *pas de deux* is drawn in its technical and aesthetic contours: the dancers are "suitably matched for height and weight . . . to convey the truth of the partnership between boy and girl" (Serrebrenikov and Lawson 1989, 5). Indeed, Disney is reported to have chosen dancer Louis Hightower to model for Prince Charming because "Disney liked his sturdy legs" (Grant 1993, 150). Dressed in tights and tunics, Disney princes fulfill the gendered expectations taught in partnering class:

> Girls learn to trust that their partners will be there when they need them, and boys learn to live up to that trust. They learn how to support an arabesque, how to lift and catch a girl, how to stop a pirouetting princess so that she faces the audience, and how to present her to their public

> as though she is the most important jewel in his collection. Adagio class is where the boys get experience in handling girls, and where girls get used to being handled. (Hurford 1987, 69)

If Disney animators draw teenaged heroines that are "too much of a princess," then Disney princes enact their ballet roles with equally accurate excess, an excess that renders them silent, dramatic "cardboard" (Grant 1993, 253).

In the *pas de deux*, the romantic centerpiece in the Disney repertoire of fairy tale turned ballet, the physical requirements of classical dance are accurately rendered, but the encoded asexuality of performance creeps through the layered construction. The "classic embrace" of the waltz, featured in *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, conveys "elegance and regal bearing, giving a balletic quality to glamour and beauty. . . . Here the upper body is stressed, accomplished through elongated necks and accentuated backs, his militarily straight, [hers] arched" (Peters 1991, 149). The elegant tensiveness of the *pas de deux* is carefully constructed, but always couched as the "natural" expression of love—the seamless quality of the dance at once representing and replacing the sexual act. The carefully encoded and constructed aesthetic of eroticism is transformed ultimately into (an)aesthetic asexuality:

> Dancing represents sex in its least costly form, free from imprisonment and free to a great extent from the emotional responsibility and, above all, as a sure thing, independent of someone else's pleasure. In other words, it means freedom from sex. . . . In a strange transmutation dancing is a form of asceticism—almost a form of celibacy. (Agnes de Mille qtd. in Vincent 1979, 150)

The *drawing* of dance would seem to cost even less. The pains and politics of partnering, lifted from their real world enactment and captured on film, are replaced by two-dimensional paintings. The aesthetic conventions for viewing classical dance and the (an)aesthetic conventions of dance asexuality are both encoded in the Disney dance sequences.

Sherri Stoner, the live-action model for both Ariel and Belle of *Beauty and the Beast*, is a departure from the classical ballerina template for teen body.[6] Instead, Stoner was a member of the Los Angeles improvisational group, the Groundlings (Jackson 1991, 50). Chosen from the group for her expressive face and small frame (she stands 5′2″ and weighs ninety-two pounds), Stoner worked with Disney animators twice a week for two years in the ongoing construction of Ariel. For both Ariel and Belle, Disney storymen departed from the gendered stereotypes of the tales. Both are active,

intelligent young women in pursuit of their dreams against the wishes of the parent figures in the films. The Disney Studio, too, changed tactics, employing Linda Woolverton for *Beauty and the Beast*, the first Disney tale/film screenplay written by a woman.

While critics applauded both films for their accurate portrayals of teenage petulance, the teenaged bodies moved from the realms of classic dance aesthetics to popular conventions of cheesecake. For Pauline Kael, Ariel is "a teen-age tootsie in a flirty seashell bra" (1981, 140). Like its live-action Touchstone predecessor, *Splash* (1984), the costuming of a mermaid is problematic. "Disney as Corporation" was not quite ready for a bare-breasted Darryl Hannah; costumers taped her hair strategically to her breasts (Grover 1991, 16). Disney artists, too, played with the costuming conventions of mermaidhood. The first frame of Ariel finds her peering over the broken mast of a shipwreck, her breasts covered by the horizontal mast. This coquettish striptease pose, both postponing the discovery and heightening the audience's curiosity, is quickly resolved, but later recalled. When Ariel finds herself with legs and no clothes, she dresses and poses in a sailcloth rag to the omniscient soundtrack's accompanying wolf whistle.

While the earliest folk heroines move in the stilted lines of classical dance, the latest folk heroines tease with the conventions of burlesque. While the first approach distances the audience in the guise of artificiality and elitism, the second approach entices with the implicit warning, "look, but don't touch." Instead of the lush soundtracks of classical music and their accompanying balletic *pas de deux*, both *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* recall and reenact the elaborate filmed fantasies of Busby Berkeley. Sea creatures and household objects take the place of women in Ashman/Menken Berkeley-esque numbers, but the spirit of display remains:

> American eroticism has always been a different provenance and complexion than the European variety, an enjoyment both furtive and bland that is closer to a blushing cartoon than sensual celebration. There is a titillation in the *faux-innocence* of Busby Berkeley's banana'd bathing beauties. . . . His was a vision of women as sex objects raised to a kind of comic sublimity, a state of formal grace. (Haskell 1987, 21, 146)

Both Belle and Ariel are positioned as the viewers of these fantastic spectacles, distancing themselves as commodities in the Disney burlesque economy. The tales, however, still narrate and fulfill their destiny as marriage/reward for the prince/beast; their commodification in the marriage plot overwhelms the animated *jouissance* of the musical numbers.

As Disney artists draw dancers' bodies onto folktale templates, the results

are fissured gaps in the paintings, images leaking through the surface, confusing the ways of seeing folk heroines, dancers, and sexuality. The "backbone" of dance argues with the weakness of the narratized girls; romantic interludes are ultimately asexual and (an)aesthetized; the titillation of burlesque underscores the commodification of the heroines in the marriage plot, while distancing them from complicit participation in those plots. These semiotic layers result in a formal unreadability in these teenaged bodies: dancers assuming roles of princesses and strippers working with props and costumes. Disney artists have rendered a paradoxical level of performance affectation. Like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*'s Jessica who claims "I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way," the bodies of Disney teenagers make a similar, if unspoken, self-reflexive claim: "I'm not weak, I just talk that way."

Disney's *Femmes Fatales*

Disney's evil women, the beautiful witches, queens, and stepmothers, evidence a similar performance affection, but the metaphors are not borrowed from the bodies of classical dancers. Instead, Disney transforms the vain, active, and wicked woman of folktales into the *femme fatale*, the "deadly woman" of silent film and of Hollywood classic film. Colette, writing in 1918 "A Short Manual for the Aspiring Scenario Writer," describes the *femme fatale* as a "shattering revelation" characterized by decolleté, a "clinging black velvet dress," and weaponry. She catches the spectator in her gaze, "sinuously turns her serpent's neck . . . and—having first revealed enormously wide eyes, she slowly veils them with soft lids" (Virmaux and Virmaux 1980, 47). In silent film, the *diva* is characterized by "exaggerated movements of the hips and arms, with the head thrown back, her hair suddenly spilling down her back, contortions, rolling eyes" (Sadoul qtd. in Doane 1991, 124–25). Describing the "vamp" of American films in the 1930s, Molly Haskell claims these representations of the treacherous feminine are "meant to represent demonic natural forces that, like a cyclone, threaten to uproot man from himself" (1987, 103). Mary Ann Doane summarizes the *femme fatale*'s most striking characteristic as "the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable" (1991, 1).

The *readability* of the *femme fatale*, painted in beautiful and shapely strokes on the bodies of Disney's Wicked Queen, Lady Trumain, Maleficent, and Ursula, is evident in the careful cosmetics of paint, cowls, jewelry, and "clinging black dresses." The deliberateness of these choices is apparent in Disney historiographies. Grant relates that one essay in *Photoplay* maintains

that "experiments on [*Snow White*'s wicked Queen's] lovely cruel mouth and eyes alone represent drawings enough to paper a house" (1993, 152). Production notes describe her "beauty [as] sinister, mature, plenty of curves" (Finch 1975, 66). The Disney official account of Ursula's creation for *The Little Mermaid* is that she was modeled on *Sunset Boulevard*'s *femme fatale*, Norma Desmond.[7] Live-action models for the wicked women are not noted in Disney historiographies, but their voices become interchangeable auralities in the Disney lexicon. Lucille LaVerne voiced both Snow White's Stepmother Queen and her alter ego the Witch.[8] Eleanor Audley voiced both *Sleeping Beauty*'s Maleficent and *Cinderella*'s wicked Stepmother. Pat Carroll's Ursula is a contemporary shift to well-known performers as voice talent in Disney animation.[9]

More than aural and visual similarities among the animated characters, the pleasurable and duplicitous ways of looking at Garbo and Dietrich are inscribed on the drawn bodies of Disney's evil women. The pleasure derives from their power and authority as *femmes fatales*, living and thinking only for themselves as sexual subjects, not sexual objects; the duplicity derives from the animated perfection that subverts their authority even while fetishizing it—these deadly women are also doomed women. But unlike the conflicting somatexts of Disney's heroines, the caricature and melodramatics of the *femme fatale* are iconic and congruous cinematic codes that inscribe middle age as a time of treachery, consumption, and danger in the feminine life cycle.

Disney artists appropriate and enlarge a common convention in cinema, the extreme close-up of the *femme fatale*. Doane summarizes the significance of the close-up, especially of the female face, as

> that bodily part not accessible to the subject's own gaze (or accessible only as a virtual image in a mirror)—hence its over-representation as *the* instance of subjectivity. But the face is not taken in at a glance—it already problematizes the motion of a pure surface since it points to an interior, a depth. The face is the most *readable* space of the body. (1991, 47)

The evil women of Disney films are the only female characters rendered in close-ups. Moreover, they are the only characters who address the camera directly, both advancing the narrative diegesis and confronting the spectator's gaze with their own. But Disney enlarges the cinematic code for the face of the *femme fatale* with a special effect: the face and background fade to black and the eyes are painted as gold, glowing orbs, narrowing tightly on the intended victim/heroine. This special effect is an intensification of not only the women's evil natures—their unknowable interiors—but it recalls primal fears and animal phobias, transforming their faces to the exterior icons of wolves and cats whose eyes glow in the dark.

While the signatures of a witch are clearly written on Disney evil women—their familiars, caldrons, and spells—the construction of their bodies on predatory animals heightens the dangerous consumptive powers of the *femme fatale*. Marc Davis, chief animator of Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, explains that "she was designed like a giant vampire bat to create a feeling of menace" (qtd. in Solomon 1989, 182). For the climactic battle scene with Prince Phillip, animator Eric Cleworth modeled their encounter on a striking rattlesnake: "The dragon's motions have a ponderous, reptilian grace that suggests powerful muscles moving a bulky body over the rocky terrain. The long neck and narrow head dart with serpentine fluidity" (Solomon 1989, 200). Disney's famous decree for *Snow White*'s wicked queen, that she be "a mixture of Lady Macbeth and the Big Bad Wolf" (Finch 1975, 66), not only crosses literary and folk genres, but enlarges her *femme fatale* iconography with predatory powers. Ursula, originally envisioned as a "scorpion fish" (Sanez 1989, 124), not only captures the melodramatic, languorous, and rapacious movement of the *diva*, but her octopus tentacles physically manifest the enveloping, consumptive sexuality of the deadly woman.

While the *femme fatale* of *film noir* directs her catastrophic powers at a man who is powerless under her fatal force, Disney's deadly women cast their spells, not only on their young women victims, but on the entire society from which they are excluded. Whether societies of merpeople or kingdoms, their excess of sexuality and agency is drawn as evil: "It is this evil which scandalizes whenever woman plays out her sex in order to evade the word and the law" (Montrelay 1978, 93). This performative scandal is heightened by the contrasted construction of the bodies of kings in the Disney iconography. The typical Disney king is a short, stout, balding, blustering "hollow crown," encapsulized in the admonition used in both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Jungle Book* (1967): "You pompous old wind-bag!" The narrative diegesis constantly points to the fact that they exert no control over their children, their lackeys, their castles, or their kingdoms. In middle age, they are drawn as physically and symbolically impotent in contrast to the evil women's sexual potency and powers.

Through animation, Disney artists have constructed a powerful critique of patriarchial discourses: the inefficacy of divine right of kings is both drawn and storied in contrast to the potency of women's evil and their dangerous and carnivorous threats to order. The *femme fatale* construction of feminine excess begins the wicked pentimento of Disney evil; the layers of rapacious animal imagery align women's powers with predatory nature,

marking the *femme fatale*'s gaze as not just interiority, but as a well of power beyond comprehension. If Disney heroines are somatic contradictions, then Disney's evil women are somatic congruities. Each layer of their construction—from the cosmetics of their vanity, the affectations of their movement, and the confrontation of their gaze to the animals that define their "natural" predatory natures—the accumulative paintings mark feminine sexuality "as terrifying; it is an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a tidal wave" (Gauthier 1981, 202). The fated doom of the predatory, animated *femme fatale* is always marked by two events: the collective and unified efforts of all other characters in the films, and the upheaval of natural forces—rock slides, ocean storms, and cliff precipices. Together they reestablish the control and stability of the cultural and natural order in the destruction of the transgressive feminine.

Disney's Grandmothers

While the dancing *ingenue* of the stage and the *femme fatale* of the cinema are familiar representations of women, Disney artists fill a relatively empty cultural category with their depictions of feminine nurturing and sacrifice in their depictions of good fairies, godmothers, and servants in the fairy-tale films. In the depiction of supernatural feminine goodness, Disney artists adhere to the fairy-tale templates of physical and temporal separation. That is, the "helpful crone and fairy godmother" appear and disappear at whim, evidencing a "protective power [that] is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart" (Campbell 1968, 71–72). Flora, Fauna, and Merriweather of *Sleeping Beauty*, Cinderella's fairy godmother, Carlotta of *The Little Mermaid,* and Mrs. Potts of *Beauty and the Beast* all are narrated with dutiful servant's capacity to be on call without being underfoot, never needful in their own rights, but consistently helpful and protective of their charges.

On the blank sketch pads of Disney artists, feminine nurturing and sacrifice are consistently drawn in contrast to the *femme fatale.* Unlike the shapely and mature curves of wickedness, Disney grandmothers are pear-shaped or apple-shaped. As endomorphs, they fulfill the physical somatype/stereotype as calm, relaxed, cooperative, affable, warm, forgiving, sympathetic, soft-hearted, generous, affectionate, and kind (Cortex and Gotti 1965). With none of the painted vanities of evil, they wear no cosmetics, jewelry, or adornment; indeed, they have no lips. Their hair, gray, silver or white, is covered. Their bountiful arms and torsos cradle, bathe, and dress the heroines of the tales. Feminine sacrifice is drawn not in the middle-aged

peak of sexuality and authority, but in the postmenopausal script of asexuality. In the cultural biologic timeline, they are grandmothers whose bodies are nonthreatening, unavailable, and harmless. They reestablish and maintain the order that the *femme fatale* destroys.

Many comic moments in the films center on the initial ineptness of their maintenance: the fairy godmother forgets where she put her magic wand; the good fairies fumble through Princess Aurora's birthday cake and dress; Carlotta serves the horrified Ariel crab for lunch. The comedic value of the bodies of old women is evident in Frank Thomas's description of the attention he gave to animating the good fairies of *Sleeping Beauty*:

> I found that when old ladies move, they bounce like mechanical toys. They paddle, paddle, paddle on their way. They stand straight, and their arm movements are jerky. Their hands fly out from the body. The reason for this is that they're afraid to get off-balance, afraid they will fall. (Qtd. in Thomas 1991, 105)

Solomon describes the good fairies of *Sleeping Beauty* as "dear, if slightly befuddled, spinster aunts" (1989, 198). Solomon's observation is well placed; animator Thomas found models for Flora, Fauna, and Merriweather while spending time "at the supermarket observing rotund old ladies, usually at the dog-food counter" (Thomas 1991, 105).

Disney artists distance the good women from the evil women of the tales, not just in their physical construction, but in their divergent productivity. Doane maintains, "It is appropriate that the *femme fatale* is represented as the antithesis of the maternal—sterile or barren, she produces nothing in a society which fetishizes production" (1991, 2). The good Disney women produce, not children, but the perfected enactment of motherhood as fostering grandmotherhood. Removed from a "natural" blood relationship to the child/heroine, their sacrifices are deemed even purer in their selflessness. Sacrifice and nurturing, lifted from the realm of necessity, become a matter of choice.

These grandmothers have potent powers and manifest their magic in "Disney dust," those colorful sparkles that mark good magic in the Disney lexicon. As protectors and guides, Disney grandmothers appear and produce magic and service at crucial moments of transition in the world of women: childbirth, sexual maturation, and marriage. As caretakers and healers, witches employ a white magic drawn not in the material certainty of herbs and plants, but in the immateriality and charm of special effects. This fetishized perfection and mystification of powerful goodness is localized in the somatic timeline of feminine old age. As Gilligan describes one adoles-

cent girl's relationship to her grandmother, she "has taken in, in the name of love, an image of perfection, exemplified by her grandmother . . . the stillness at the center of this frozen image" (1991, 32). The borders surrounding "this frozen image" conscribe codes of sacrificial mothering, of women's magic as mystical and charming (apart from the cold tools of science and medicine), and of goods that transcend materiality.

The power of feminine goodness, rooted in matriarchal healing, comfort, and sacrifice, contrasts well with constructions of Disney bureaucrats: the prim, proper, angular lackeys of kings. The Grand Duke of *Cinderella* and adviser Grimsby of *The Little Mermaid* are painfully thin, rule-bound middle managers, invested with "beyond the throne" power. This institutional empowerment is no match for the magic of Disney women. "Disney dust" and service substantively change matter and lives; the symbolic power of bureaucrats changes nothing. Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe claims that magic has the capacity "to counter the terrors of the symbolic world that man has created and to get some control over it" (1983, 39). Disney artists have drawn the unknowable and unnameable, outside the orders of science and technology, divinity and religion, bureaucracy and hierarchy, not simply in the gaze of the *femme fatale*, but in the bodies of magical grandmothers.

The Disney Magic Recast

The pentimentos of Disney women, like Lillian Hellman's description, ask viewers "to see and to see again" through the layered constructions of the animation process. The tales that prescribe the characters of women are not fixed texts, but are starting points for cultural constructions of the feminine. The ownership and repeatability of the tales—whether as oral art, written texts, or films—not only speak to the parameters of cultural production, but echo the concordance of voices that perpetuate them. Karen Rowe explains that

> in the history of folktale and fairy tale, women as storytellers have woven or spun their yarns, speaking at one level to a total culture, at another to a sisterhood of readers who will understand the language, the secret revelations of the tale. (1986, 57)

While Disney artists have captured the characterology of beautiful victims, active wickedness, and feminine goodness sketched in the tales of the Grimms, Perrault, and Andersen, they have also captured performative enactments of gender and cultural codes for feminine sexuality and agency.

The young heroines are typical of "the perfect girl," whose body, voice,

and destiny are a "mesmerizing presence" through which "girls [enter] the world of the hero legend, and experience the imposition of a framework which seemingly comes out of nowhere—a worldview superimposed on girls but grounded in the psychology of men" (Gilligan 1991, 33). But Disney artists constructed their "perfect" girls on the bodies of real women; bodies that produce cracks in the animated perfection and offer sites of physicality and performance that resist the psychology of men and idealizations of women. The wicked women harbor depths of power that are ultimately unknowable but bespeak a cultural trepidation for unchecked femininity. That Disney artists resorted to the coded cinematic representations of the *femme fatale* for feminine agency speaks to the lack of conventions for encompassing such incomprehensible power. In animation, these filmic conventions are denaturalized; their artificiality and encoding are made visible. Of the good women in fairy tales as consistently aligned with the supernatural, Marcia Lieberman asks an important question: "A girl may hope to become a princess, but can she ever become a fairy?" (1987, 196). In the Disney lexicon of power, the magic of grandmotherhood is possible.

The "secret revelations of the tale" are graphically depicted in the Disney films. It is the worlds of women—worlds of song and power and care—that offer alternatives to institutional hierarchy, science and technology, and divine rights of kings. The women in these films are not bifurcated into good and bad, but represent a continuum of cultural representations of women's powers and performances; the films celebrate the ambiguity, the diversity, and potency of women's bodies, and the multiple sites and sources of their cultural construction. Moreover, these constructed performances are rooted in a physical timeline that decrees that these bodies will change: from the tentative strength of youth, to the confident carriage of middle age, to the aplomb of old age.

During the 1993 summer re-release of *Snow White*, movie theatre lobbies blossomed with point-of-sale advertising for the film. The six-foot-tall, free-standing "billboard" was dominated by the beautiful wicked Queen. Her cold, stately beauty and her direct gaze confronted the audience members waiting in line; her black cloak spread to encompass and to backdrop the figures beneath her. Below her, Snow White beamed lovingly at the dwarfs at her feet. The composition and arrangement of these figures was new. The film contains no such physically direct juxtaposition between Snow White and her stepmother, but their physical similarities were remarkable. The coloring of their hair, lips, and skin, and the construction of their bodies, were identical—with the exception of twenty-five or so years. On the Disney cultural and somatic timeline, the young heroines will become their stepmoth-

ers; the stepmothers, too, will become the good fairies and godmothers. They in turn will care for the next generation of young heroines, lovingly and carefully, telling their tales to the "sisterhood of readers who will understand the language. . . because only for women does the thread, which spins out the lore itself, create a tapestry to be fully read and understood" (Rowe 1986, 68–71). The Disney film fabric is not made of threads, but of celluloid. The women of the Painting and Inking Department, lovingly and carefully, paint the pentimentos.

Notes

1. The Disney Studio was not alone in this gendered labor practice. In one fanciful chart of the animation process, Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters mark the production stages: Huckleberry Hound writes the script; Barney Rubble creates the storyboards; Yogi Bear reads the track; Fred Flintstone directs. Betty Rubble, brush in hand, paints the cels (Madsen 1990, 356).

2. Maureen Turim defines "semiotic layering" as "the accrual and transformations of meanings associated with an artifact as it passes through history, or as it is presented in different versions" (in Erens 1990, 109).

3. In 1932, Disney hired Don Graham to conduct art classes at the Hyperion studio. Part of this training included watching live-action films, especially the silent-screen films of Charlie Chaplin and other silent comedians (Maltin 1980, 43).

4. Molly Haskell describes Janet Gaynor as "one of the most ethereal of the angel-heroines" of the silent films of the 1920s (1987, 50).

5. 1992's *Aladdin*, however, was problematic. The length of noses, color of skin, and shape of eyes for the two young protagonists, Jasmine and Aladdin, were all hotly debated in the Disney shop (Avins 1992, 11).

6. Bob Thomas in *Disney's Art of Animation* spells her name as Shari.

7. "The Making of the Little Mermaid," aired on the Disney Channel in 1991.

8. Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas relate that Ms. LaVerne achieved the "rough" quality of the crone's voice by removing her false teeth (1993, 56).

9. Roger Ebert, in a review of *Cinderella*, claims he much prefers "Disney's policy of using unfamiliar voices for the dubbing, instead of the studio's guess-that-voice derbies of recent years" (1989, 115). Pat Carroll, however, is an interesting example of intertextuality. In 1965, she performed the role of wicked stepsister Prunella in Rodgers and Hammerstein's televised production of *Cinderella*.

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Seven

"The Whole Wide World Was Scrubbed Clean"

The Androcentric Animation of Denatured Disney

Patrick D. Murphy

A May 25th, 1993, *Chicago Tribune* column by Anna Quindlen on the recent royal marriage in Japan was titled " '90s Princesshood: What Happened to Happily Ever After?" The notion that marrying a prince ought to be a woman's highest ambition has recently been dashed on the gems of British and other royalty. Yet, the Walt Disney Company has attempted to persuade us otherwise in its most recent animated films. Despite Disney's recent corporate changes, the motto for the animation division should be: "The more things change the more we stay the same." The trailer for the videocassette edition of *The Jungle Book* (1967) evidences such an implicit motto. Jeffrey Katzenberg, chairman of movie and television operations, introduces clips from the production of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and promises that it is "pure Disney imagination." Architect of the Touchstone R-rated repertoire, Katzenberg seems to be assuring parents that even if the live-action films are a departure, the animated ones remain true to the Disney ethos (see Taylor 1987, 217–18, 239–43).

But is that ethos worth maintaining? From the 1930s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* through the 1960s *101 Dalmatians* and *The Jungle Book*, the 1980s *Rescuers* films, and the very recent *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney's full-length animated films reveal a consistent, although incoherent, worldview on nature and women that is escapist and androcentric. The escapism is based on denying wild nature as an integral part of the biosphere at the world level and as part of individual character at the personal level. The denial of *wild* nature serves the fabrication of a timeless, universal, and unchanging order articulated in part by means of cultural values and generalizations. The cyclical re-release strategy for key Disney animations is