The New Man/Men as Mothers

*Finding Nemo* (Stanton & Unkrich, 2003)

FLMS2002 – REPRESENTATION OF GENDER, SEXUALITY AND ‘RACE’ IN FILM
The Development of Animation

- Disney created 100 cartoons starring Mickey Mouse between 1928 and 1937.
- From the first, used *anthropomorphised* characters.
- **Anthropomorphism** = giving human attributes to the non-human.
- Competitors included the Fleischers, who often used *metacinematic* techniques.
- **Metacinema** = a film that draws attention to its own production.
- Other important early animation studios: Warner Bros.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucbtO3ArqM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucbtO3ArqM)
Animated Film: Innovation and Popularity Rise/Fall/Rise

- *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) – often credited as first animated full-length feature film.

- But *Prince Ahmed* (Reininger, 1926); *The Tale of the Fox* (Starewitch, 1930) appeared earlier.

- Disney’s *Flowers and Trees* (1932) the first colour cartoon and first to synchronise lip movement with soundtrack.

- Immediate popularity short-lived:
  - Disney made 10 animated films in the 1940s
  - But only 5 in the 1950s, and only 3 in the 1960s

- From the 1980s, popularity restored

- Disney and subsidiaries (Pixar, Studio Ghibli, Tim Burton films, etc.) have produced 52 feature films since 2000.
Academia and Animation

- Animated films not originally of interest to Film Studies
- Rise of Media and Cultural Studies initiates beginning of study of animation from the 1990s
- Increasing diversification of animated films = idea that animation is not just for children
- Rise of Japanese anime from 1970s
- *Heidi of the Alps* (1974) – both a prototype and a classic: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hKi1VIE94A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hKi1VIE94A)
  - 1) Features orphaned hero/heroine
  - 2) Follows story by a European author
  - 3) Hero/heroine learns rules of adult world; how to hide their true feelings
Adaptations Reveal Cultural Differences

- The recognition of cultural differences between original and adapted versions fuelled the interest of critics.

- Promotion of Japanese cultural values:
  - ‘Trust in yourself’ rather than ‘trust in God’
  - Do not be overcome by depression
  - Result = a better life for you and those around you
  - Children able to triumph over adults

- At the same time, appeal to global market (religious elements removed; message becomes universally applicable)

- Other important *anime* films: Hayao Miyazaki/Studio Ghibli’s *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl’s Moving Castle* (2004)
Fairy Tales:

- Form the basis of many animated films for children

  - Hans Christian Andersen (1801-1875):
    - *Frozen* (2013) (‘The Snow Queen’)

  - Brothers Grimm – Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859):
    - *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) (‘Snow White’)
    - *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) (‘Briar Rose’)
    - *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) (‘The Frog Prince’)

  - Charles Perrault (1628-1703):
    - *Cinderella* (1950)

  - Jean-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780)
    - *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)
Features of the Fairy Tale (Zipes 2006)

Repeated ideas in 17th to 19th century fairy tales:

1) Protagonist is a gifted individual who owes their rise to God or miracles performed by fairies/other magical creatures

2) Reinforces gender stereotypes and patriarchal symbolic order:

   ‘Most of the heroes are cunning, fortunate, adventurous, handsome, and daring; the heroines are beautiful, passive, obedient, industrious, and self-sacrificial’ (194)

3) Characters from the lower classes:

   ‘learn a certain Habitus, what Pierre Bourdieu describes as a set of manners, customs, normative behaviour, and thinking that enables them […] to rise in social status’ (195)
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) – What Disney Changed

Original story by the Brothers Grimm (early 19th c.) changed in the following ways by Disney:

1) Snow White is an orphan in Disney’s version. In Grimms’ version mother dies but father remains alive.
2) The prince is in love with Snow White from the first in Disney’s version. In the Grimms’ tale, he only shows up at the end.
3) Animals help Snow White with her household chores in Disney’s version. They are all degendered and anthropomorphised.
4) The dwarfs are hardworking and rich miners in Disney’s version. Not so in the Grimms’, where we find out little about them – they don’t even have names!
5) In Disney’s tale, the queen dies when she tries to kill the dwarfs by rolling a big stone down a mountainside to crush them. In the Grimms’ story, she is found out and forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes until she drops dead.
6) In the Grimms’ tale, Snow White comes back to life when a dwarf stumbles while carrying her glass coffin. In Disney she comes back to life when the prince kisses her.

WHY the changes?

What values do these clips promote? Any ideas why? Consider the context...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qG2A9EN5T4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlwa9sPFT5I&list=RDmlwa9sPFT5I
A formula in need of deconstructing?

Zipes’ (2006: 204-5) regarding Disney’s Snow White:
- A ‘classic sexist narrative’ that ‘fram[es] women’s lives through male discourse’
- ‘pits women against women for male approval (the mirror) of their beauty’
- Emphasises the need for the ‘domestication of women’
- Conveys a ‘male myth about perseverance, hard work, dedication, loyalty, and justice’

Follows classic Disney formula:
- Opening song that announces the yearning of the heroine
- Virginal, sweet heroine victimized and captured by evil character(s) – usually a witch, a scheming minister or a dumb brute
- Anthropomorphised, comical animals help the heroine
- A male hero then introduced (with a song)
- Girl cannot save herself (must be saved by a male)
- Evil always associated with selfishness and vanity
Taking Disney Seriously

- Disney and later Pixar began to offer portrayals that challenged earlier Disney messages

- Raffaelli (1997: 116) – Disney films create ‘an animated satire on behaviour’

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGt9jAkWie4

- Thumper fulfils the role of the ‘little tyke, the enterprising youngster who still doesn’t know the rules of polite society and has yet to deny his spontaneous reactions and emotions.’

- Also referenced is an absent figure of paternal authority, which is ‘an exception in Disneyan filmography, in which fathers hardly ever play a determining role’ (116-7)
The Father Figure in Disney Animated Films

The absent or unsatisfactory father figure is a common character type (or ‘trope’) in Disney:

- *Pinocchio* (1940) – failed father
- *Cinderella* (1950) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) – silly father
- *Bambi* (1942) and *The Lion King* (1994) – absent hero father
Mothers in Culture and Disney

Brydon (2008): Western culture associates mothering (not fathering or other types of parenting) with all-consuming nurture of children.

‘Good’ mothers are rare in Disney films.

Step- or adoptive mothers are monstrous; ‘unnatural’ - often jealous, scheming, murderous.

Absent parents facilitate narrative arc in which hero/heroine must fend for him/herself and thus become an adult.

For boy characters, process involves bravery and independence.

For girl characters, process involves becoming dependent on/learning to care for other people.
The ‘New Man’ in Disney and Pixar

- Kramer vs. Kramer (1979): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNLcfJ06y34](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNLcfJ06y34)


- Pixar particularly instrumental in changing the aspect of male characters in films such as Toy Story (1995) & Toy Story 2 (1999); A Bug’s Life (1998); Monsters, Inc. (2001); The Incredibles (2004); Cars (2006); Ratatouille (2007); WALL•E (2008)

- Gillem & Wooden (2008: p. 3):

‘Buzz and Woody from Toy Story, Mr. Incredible from The Incredibles, and Lightning McQueen from Cars – experience a common narrative trajectory, culminating in a common “New Man” model: they all face emasculating failures; they find themselves, in large part, through what Eve Sedgwick refers to as “homosocial desire” and a triangulation of this desire with a feminized object...; and, finally, they achieve (and teach) a kinder, gentler understanding of what it means to be a man.’
Analysing Disney Films

An estimated 200 million people a year watch Disney video or films

(NOTE THAT: Frozen is the highest grossing animated film of all time and the 5th highest grossing FILM of all time)

Giroux (1999: 10): Our interest lies in analysing Disney’s power to shape gender roles and childhood values


