



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

From Snow White to Tangled

Gender and Genre Fiction in Disney's "Princess" Animations

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í Ensku

Íris Alda Ísleifsdóttir

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ABSTRACT

It is hard to ignore the popularity of the Disney Princess franchise these days. Beginning with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarf* in 1937, it now includes Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana and Rapunzel. This essay attempts to show how gender identity in the Disney princess animations still conforms to outmoded patriarchal values. To critique the franchise and its ideology, this essay employs H  l  ne Cixous's concept of 'patriarchal binary' to reveal how often Disney animations simplify and/or disempower the above-mentioned heroines. It examines how the Brothers Grimm and then Disney adapted the fairy tales so to conform better into the patriarchal society of their times and in what ways the Snow White model has persisted in spite of seventy years of rethinking gender roles and models. The essay then delves deeper into the gender identity of the princesses, witches, and heroes in these tales and shows how they are stereotyped in all Disney princess animations. Lastly, it turns to the film *Tangled*, which tells the story of Rapunzel, the latest Disney Princess animation, and compares it to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in an attempt to assess what changes, if any, have taken place. In conclusion, it shows that while the portrayal of princesses has improved in some respects and that male characters have become more prominent in the Disney princess animations, the overall view of women is still largely patriarchal. The portrayal of the witch together with the absences of a mother figure in the animations still underlines the central premise that women are discouraged from being in the positions of power.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Binary oppositions and the feminist fiction	6
Fixing the Fairy Tales	10
Princesses.....	13
Evil witches	15
Heroes	18
Elements of Snow White in Tangled	21
Conclusion	25
Work Cited.....	27

INTRODUCTION

Snow White, with its dramatic portrayal of resurrection and love reborn, ranks as one of the most memorable fairy tales of all time. Not only is the story the centrepiece of the Grimm collection, it also marks the beginning of Walt Disney's career as an animator of feature-length cartoons.

(Cashdan 40)

There is little doubt that *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) had a great impact on all Walt Disney's subsequent animated movies, especially those involving a princess character. In almost all instances this character lacks any real power and is mainly a pawn in a patriarchal world. Disney's latest fairy tale adaptation, the Grimms' story of "Rapunzel" illustrates how little change has taken place in Disney ideology.

This thesis begins by looking at the Disney princess animations and their patriarchal ideas. Next it will look at how the Brothers Grimm, and then Disney, have diluted the stories for public consumption and thereby drawn up the limits of what should be portrayed as correct behaviour in young women. It will then focus on gender identity in the Disney Princess movies, and what impact the portrayals of the princess, the evil witches and the hero have had on a predominantly young audience. Its main focus, however, is the ways in which the Disney movie *Tangled*, released in 2010, resembles and or diverges from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and other Disney princess franchise movies.

The aim of this thesis is to show that while the story of Rapunzel has changed significantly with regards to gender roles and gender equality from earlier works by Walt Disney, it is still firmly grounded in patriarchal, misogynistic values that do not coincide with current ideas feminists have about gender equality.

BINARY OPPOSITIONS AND THE FEMINIST FICTION

‘Patriarchal binary thought,’ coined by the feminist literary critic Hélène Cixous is the concept used in the following chapter to look at how the princess franchise employs binary opposites to uphold patriarchal values. Tori Moi summarized Cixous’s comments on the ‘patriarchal binary’ as “a hierarchy where the ‘feminine’ side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance” and as a constant battle between the two binary opposites, where “victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity.” She adds that within the patriarchal system “the male is always the victor” (104-105). Examples of such ‘patriarchal binary thought’ in this thesis will be referenced from the entire collection of Disney princess animations and begin by making some general observations about the binary oppositions that are found most frequently. The Disney princess animation that will be referred to throughout are *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) and *Tangled* (2010). However the main focus will be on the first and the last animations: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Tangled*.

Patriarchal binary revolves around male/female opposition where the former is always seen as superior to the latter. The male characters in Disney movies are strong, heroic saviours and figures of authority. In contrast, the princesses are timid, weak,

powerless and victimized. However the other main female figure, the evil witch, often resembles the male characters in many ways but since they are generally opposed to the patriarchal norm, they need to be destroyed. The binary oppositions between these two women are usually beautiful/ugly, evil/nice, naïve/mature and young/old. The witches in the animations are in no way redeemable characters and it has been argued that they are embedded in the animation as a warning of what happens if young women stray from the predetermined image of the perfect woman. In this way the patriarchy is protected.

These patriarchal binary oppositions have not gone unnoticed and many feminist have taken it upon themselves to rewrite the stories in the way that they feel to be acceptable. The stories by Grimm, Perrault and a few other renowned authors had a great effect on the Disney Company and have been adapted with considerable commercial success. These princess animations have become popular throughout the world, a popularity that led to further adaptations. In contrast to the ideology of the Disney princess franchise, there has been a large number of adaptations of fairy tales that have stood against the patriarchal tide. In ‘feminine genre fiction,’ such adaptations have generally privileged the status of women. Anne Cranny-Francis has defined ‘feminine genre fiction’ as follows:

genre fiction written from a self-consciously feminist perspective,
consciously encoding an ideology which is in direct opposition to the
dominant gender ideology of the Western Society, patriarchal ideology.

(cited in Eagleton 91)

Many people have written other genre fictions from the same fairy tales that Disney used in their animations and altered them so that they are more in tune with current ideas and values and therefore more feminist-oriented than before.

Examples of 'feminine genre fiction' can be seen in *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* by Emma Donoghue. As Martine de la Rochère says, Donoghue puts a new twist on the old tales with a "lesbian feminist perspective" and rewrites stories of *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Rapunzel*, *Sleeping Beauty* and the *Little Mermaid* (14). Another feminist critic, Christa Mastrangelo Joyce, points out that poets such as Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Olga Broumas, Sara DeFord, and Sara Henderson have all written poems about the fairy tales featured in the Disney Princess Films, "reversing or highlighting many of the perverse misogynistic views" (31).

However there are many other adaptations of the stories that are not necessarily written 'from a self-consciously feminist perspective,' even though they have made other changes to the original source as well adapting Disney animations. Often these can be construed as tending to support patriarchal ideas. For example, *Snow White a Tale of Terror* (1997) is a movie that keeps to the horror genre that underlies the original tale but differs in the way that it gives the evil step mother a voice. In this version, Snow White is not depicted as saint-like and is disliked by her stepmother not because of her beauty but because of her personality. The evil entity in the movie is the spirit in the mirror rather than the stepmother.

Snow White and the Huntsman (2012) shows how the evil queen keeps herself young and beautiful by consuming beauty from other women. As Snow White is "the fairest of them all," she needs to find her and consume her beauty. This movies still focuses on the importance of beauty in accordance to the animation but instead of Snow White

sitting by waiting for a man to save her she becomes a fighter. *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (1998) differs from Disney's adaptation, showing Cinderella as a feisty young woman who stands up for herself and what she believes in. Some novelists have also adapted fairy tales. A few examples include Anne Rice's *Sleeping Beauty Trilogy*, erotic novels about a character called Beauty. *Beastly*, a novel by Alex Finn, is set in modern-day New York and shows Belle's father to be more of a beast than the Beast himself. Lastly, *Roses & thorns: Beauty and the Beast Retold* is a novel by Chris Anne Wolfe where Beauty and the Beast are both women, thus radically altering the original version

There have also been a few television series which take on almost all of the fairy tale characters. *Once Upon a Time* is a television series which began broadcasting in 2011. It incorporates most of the Disney princesses or their original stories into its plot. The main character is Snow and she is married to Charming, but all the other princesses are involved even though some of them are only seen in one episode. Every story is changed drastically around and even though there is an evil witch who seeks to hurt Snow she is given characteristics other than pure evil. She feels love, sorrow; she has a backstory and therefore has a reason for wanting to hurt Snow. Snow is also a very independent character, the hero who saves others with a bow and arrow including Charming. *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child* was a television show which ran from 1995-2000. In each episode they showed a new fairy tale character and their story including Snow White and Rapunzel who are both from different ethnicities, Rapunzel is an African American and Snow White is Native American. Additionally people have also written about fairy tales that Disney has not yet adapted, for example fairy tales that the Brothers Grimm collected. According to Susan Redington Bobby Angela Carter was one of the revolutionaries of these contemporary rewritings of the

fairytales. She wrote a collection of short stories in *The Bloody Chamber* which were rewritings of the famous fairy tales.

It is obvious that people are not quite satisfied with the way Disney decided to adapt the fairy tales. *Shrek* was a movie released in 2001 from DreamWorks which satirized how princesses have been portrayed in recent years. The princess of that story, Fiona, was reluctantly saved by Shrek. She is in fact quite capable of taking care of herself yet she sits in the tower waiting to be saved by her prince charming. He is not the most obvious hero though as he only saves her to get his swamp back. They are both ogres and fall in love, thus the beauty ideal of Disney is shattered. Throughout the animation and its subsequent movies the Disney Princess movies are continually referenced and criticized. With these vast amounts of ‘politically correct’ retellings of the fairy tales it is that much more surprising that Disney has not changed more with the times.

FIXING THE FAIRY TALES

The changing and ‘fixing’ of fairy tales has continued ever since the fairy tales were collected and put into written form and in fact the well-known fairy tale collectors, the Brothers Grimm, changed a large amount of these fairy tales while collecting them (Greenhill and Matrix). Jack Zipes states that fairy tales were originally regarded as dangerous because they could be exciting and “polymorphously meaningful” as well as the fact that they lacked a clear Christian message (cited in Greenhill and Matrix 6). However, following the nineteenth century, writers embodied “Christian and patriarchal messages into the narratives to satisfy middle-class and aristocratic adults” (cited in Greenhill and Matrix 6). This was the start of a new fairy tale that was deemed socially

acceptable. Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix mention that years later when Walt Disney decided to make animations from these well-known fairy tales he continued the process of adapting the folk and fairy tales and today the changes that Disney made have become “the referent for most well-known fairy tales in the Euro-North American popular imagination” (6). But how do these representations of gender and the notion of outdated correct behaviour in films affect children today?

According to Zipes, the changes that Disney has made from the classic fairy tales once told are “dangerous [...] because the deeply conservative ideology of Disney productions [...] puts spectators into a deep sleep of political apathy and acceptance of the status quo” (cited in Greenhill and Matrix 7). That is to say the pretty princess and beautiful animations nullify the fact that the women in the animations are based on patriarchal values. Greenhill and Matrix also mention that ever since Disney released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* he cleansed the fairy tales “to achieve his goal to create visually spectacular cinema that reinforced and reflected patriarchal, capitalist American family values” (6). But the fact is children are still watching animations that were made, as Zipes puts it, with the view of satisfying “the middle-class aristocratic adults” of the 1930s (cited in Greenhill and Matrix 6). And with that in view the messages that *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* sent children suggest that young women should look after the household and that their lives should depend on or begin when they meet the love of their life. The rereleased Disney films then continue to send the same messages to children today.

According to Myra Marc Ferree, when the first Disney princess animations were produced gender expectations were much simpler than they are today and “with the rise of feminism in the 1970s [...] they have become more complicated” (cited in England et

al.). Yet as Campbell Leaper states children develop their gender norms from their surroundings and that includes books and television. It is therefore very clear that these patriarchal values do have an effect on children. Accordingly after continual debate and “social pressure, Disney [has] made minimal effort in the recent past to incorporate moderately feminist elements into its fairy tale films” (Pershing and Gablehouse 153). But were these changes enough? There are obvious differences between the princess in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and her counterpart in *Beauty and The Beast* but the messages they send are still the same. The values of the aristocratic adults of the 1940s should not be prevalent in today’s society. As Maria Tatar cleverly points out:

[A]ll printed fairy tales are colored by the facts of the time and place in which they were recorded. For this reason, it is especially odd that we continue to read to our children-often without the slightest degree of critical reflection-unrevised versions of stories that are imbued with the values of a different time and place. (19)

With the huge success of Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and the following animations made by him, other film makers have followed in his footsteps by imitating a simple model established by Walt Disney which seems to be prevalent in some way or another in every Disney princess animation up until today (Zipes “Foreword”, xi). Zipes assembled these prevalent factors in the following way. It all begins with a girl who either falls in love with a man or “wants to pursue her dreams” (“Foreword”, xi). There is always an evil force who wants to kill the girl; the evil force is most often a wicked witch or the girl’s stepmother. She is then “abducted or knocked out of commission” but is then saved “either by a prince or masculine helpers” (“Foreword”, xi). The animation then concludes with a “happy ending in the form of wedding, wealth, and rise in social

status or reaffirmation of royalty” (“Foreword”, xi). This same model is in fact still prevalent in *Tangled* and as Pamela Colby O’Brien correctly observes “as long as audiences approve of Disney’s films and characters, the company has little incentive to reevaluate Walt’s formula” (cited in Pershing and Gablehouse 155).

PRINCESSES

Christa Mastrangelo Joyce points out that since fairy tales were gathered into written form they have been “revised to reflect a more pious story to teach children, particularly young girls, morals [and t]his trend became that much more obvious [with] the advent of Disney films” and thus with the arrival of the well-known Disney princess (32).

Almost every young girl wants to be a princess and princesses have in fact become “big moneymakers for Disney” (Pershing and Gablehouse 153). There are Disney stores where girls can walk in and get a princess makeover and not to mention the vast tourist attraction of their various parks and resorts. Disney has in fact recently incorporated a Disney consumer product which, according to Disney, accounts “for more than 4 billion in global retail sales” (Disney Princess Franchise Overview). Disney has created a world for children from the ages three and up “where a girl can feel as special as a princess”; the products sold range from dolls to beauty merchandise and even personal DVD players (Disney Princess Franchise Overview). Mulan and Pocahontas are one of the strongest woman characters in the Disney princess franchise yet for whatever reason it seems that they are not depicted as much as the other princesses on the Disney merchandise. This could be because in the animations they are never shown as the typical princesses. Perhaps this is due to an attempt to reduce the positive effect that they could have on young girls. The vast popularity of Disney has the effect that

children who aren't even old enough to watch the movies are still familiar with the product. As Dawn Elizabeth England et al. state "Disney and its princess phenomenon have been identified as a powerful influence on children's media and product consumerism" (555). With Disney's huge popularity people can forget that these movies often send outdated messages of patriarchal ideologies to the children and at the same time "reinforces oppressive value systems in older generations" (Pershing and Gablehouse 153). To uphold their success Disney encourages the consumers to "internalize the message about social relation, love, and power that are embedded in Disney fairy tale films" (Pershing and Gablehouse 153). Their popularity has been fairly controversial through the years and for good reason; the princesses conveyed in Disney's animations are children's, mainly girls', idols and what they learn from the Disney movies is that they should be pretty, good at doing their housework, and should wait for their prince to save them from the lives they are living.

The way that women are portrayed is not as surprising when we note that the stories and animations were all created by men, men of different and outdated values who according to Joyce "created female characters who sleep through their lives: [... and] are commonly flat, one-dimensional characters who come to life only through the action of a male character" (31). Because of the way the princesses are presented, young girls might believe that the only reason for their existence is to find true love and only then can they get their 'happily ever after'. As Ming-Hsun Lin puts it "the female protagonist as romantic heroine and damsel in distress in Disney's films has become the stereotyped model for the fairy tale princess into the twenty-first century" (83).

As Joyce further points out, it is not only the princesses who are represented by patriarchal values, women are represented as "fearful witches if they are old" where

they are then pitted against the young princess “showing a vile interpretation of women’s relationships as competitive in nature” (32). In almost every Disney Princess movie we find an evil women pitted against the beautiful girl. But why are women shown in this light? According to Margery Hourihan this strife is “the nature of patriarchy itself” and the most obvious reason for it is the fact that “status, comfort and security, perhaps survival itself, depend upon being chosen and valued by men, women’s natural enemies are each other” (201). This could possibly have been true in the nineteenth century where women had to find a husband or die as spinsters but this is certainly not true for women today. Yet this strife is still apparent in the latest Disney Princess movie, *Tangled*. There is no reason that this animosity between women should still be prevalent in today’s animations. But these are the role models for young girls today; you have to be young and beautiful to live happily ever after when you find your husband but watch out for the old woman who wants to kill you because of the beauty you possess.

EVIL WITCHES

As mentioned above there are two kinds of women in Disney animations: the beautiful young princess and the evil, often ugly witch. These witches are intent on destroying the beautiful princess, often because of vanity and jealousy but also because of their hunger for power. Therefore they will stop at nothing to see the young princess destroyed. There is no such thing as redemption or forgiveness in the fairy tale and as Sylvia Henneberg remarks “doing away with important female characters reveals a deeply entrenched sexism” (126).

The evil women of these princess animations are strong and confident, they hunger for power. Often than not what bothers them is that they are jealous of the beautiful princess. This depicts them as small minded and their need for power is diminished to something conceited. But in the case of the evil witch in *The Little Mermaid* she seeks to kill the mermaid not out of vanity but for the power of the sea. She is a voluptuous seemingly sexual being, the clear opposite of the princess. Yet these power hungry witches all end up being killed in the end. This is a further indication of the fact that women should act like the princess who more often than not is calm, weak and demure.

There are evil women depicted in *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella* and now in the newest addition, *Tangled* but in most of the other princess movies there is in fact no significant woman other than the princess. The only animation which shows a mother, who actually speaks, even though it is just for a little while, is *Mulan*. *The Princess Frog* shows a mother quite involved in her daughters' life even though the princesses father is her clear role model. In *Pocahontas* her mother is said to be the wind and in *Beauty and the Beast* there is no mention of a mother at all. In *Sleeping Beauty* and *Tangled* the mothers are present but either say nothing or only two sentences at the most. And of course there are the infamous step mothers in *Cinderella* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

So young girls can either look up to the pretty young princess or the evil witch, there is not much to choose from. Fairy tales are not any better than Disney animations, in the Grimms' fairy tale version of Rapunzel the eponymous heroine is sold in exchange for a plant from old Mother Gothels' garden and condemned to isolation in a

tower until she meets a prince who in fact impregnates her (Henneberg 129). Sylvia

Henneberg comments

Her [biological] mother, depicted as a self-indulgent Eve-like figure who is tempted by the fruit, is never granted the right to evolve as a parent or a woman... Old Mother Gothel, on the other hand, is given the opportunity to cement the familiar role that casts her, like so many other wicked old witch figures, as ugly, bitter, and dangerous. (129)

Conversely, in the fairy tale, Old mother Gothel loves her adopted daughter and wants to protect her for selfless reasons. She is a good 'witch' who becomes evil after Rapunzel's deception. But from the very start of the animation Gothel is depicted as the core evil of the movie. Sheldon Cashdan has another view in stating that even though some fairy tales regularly show woman as cruel and malicious, there is "danger in attributing too much significance to this notion since it implies that fairy tales are faithful representations of reality" (18). It is true that fairy tales are not representing reality in any way but that does not mean that the way women are portrayed doesn't have any impact on children, the core demographic of these movies. It might be construed that the reason that the only other female character is ugly, mean and relentless is so young girls will rather choose to look up to the princess, who rather than seeking power like the witch does, conforms to the ideal values of how a woman should act. Cashdan then continues to say that the character of the witch is not to be taken too literally because she is "a representation of psychological forces operating in the child's psyche." (18). He believes that in order for a fairy tale to achieve its "psychological purpose-the witch must die because it is the witch who embodies the sinful parts of the self" (Cashdan 30). But it seems to be quite far-fetched to think that children truly think

of the evil witch as the sinful part of their selves. It is far more likely that this continual negative portrayal of all other women in the tales further influences girls to want to be like the princess and persuades boys to seek those princess-like qualities in the opposite sex.

HEROES

Disney 'princess' animations have always been associated with girls for the obvious reason that there are no role models for boys in them. In most of these fairy tales the young man receives the girl as his reward for his accomplishments and while the young man is a minor character "it is apparent that [...] he arrives on the scene to take over, to govern and control her future" (Zipes *The Brothers Grimm* 64). This most certainly gives the impression for girls that they should wait for a man to save them and for boys that they have to be strong and heroic or are otherwise useless and unloved. As an example we can look at the Grimm's text of *Snow White* where the male hero has a very minor role. He only arrives to take the princess away to his castle at the end of the story. He "is necessary only for the closure, to bring about the salvation of the female and the eventual marriage. He is barely described, and it is obvious that his function, though important, is limited" (Zipes *The Brothers Grimm* 24). The same is true for the Disney movie of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*; the prince and princess do meet each other for a few minutes before he saves her but the audience never gets to know him as a person. Hourihan states that in the fairy tales

the taking of imprisoned, chained, sleeping or enchanted heroine seems close to fantasized rape. The hero does not know his bride. He makes no

attempt to know her. It is as though it is too difficult to conceive any relationship with a woman beyond simple, physical possession.” (200)

But Disney’s animation tries to change this connection by introducing the male character before he needs to save her. Prince charming even though insignificant in the animation, does appear more often than in the fairy tale. Disney obviously took notice of the lack of men in the Disney princess movies but only in *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Princess and the Frog*, are there any male characters portrayed as one of the protagonist of the story. This however changed drastically with the introduction of *Tangled*.

Tangled is one of very few Disney movies where we actually get to know the prince and the princess both personally, and to watch them develop a relationship. But what kind of person is the hero in *Tangled*, he is a thief, a flirt and obsessed with becoming rich, not actually a good role model either. Zipes points out that “theft has something to do with being deft, and the thieves in the Grimms’ tales [...] are generally admired, for thievery is an art form. It involves creating an illusion” (*The Brothers Grimm* 70). Disney obviously seems to think this true as Flynn Rider the male protagonist of *Tangled* is in many ways a duplication of Aladdin. Heroes in the Disney animations and “the hero story naturalizes the powerlessness of women and their domination by men” (Hourihan 198). Women are not active agents in their own lives, they don’t make life changing decisions, but simply react to outside forces and if they are unhappy with their life then “all will be well when, inevitably, their prince appears- no matter who he might be” (Hourihan 198). This is certainly the case in *Beauty and the Beast*. Perhaps the main point of the animations is to say that ‘one should not judge a

book by its cover', but the Beast can also be seen as an ill-tempered dominative male-figure whom Bella falls in love with no matter how disturbingly he treats her.

The Disney animations often have companions for the princesses; these companions are always male figures. They can be seen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Mulan*, *The Princess and the Frog* and *Tangled*. The obvious heroic male companions in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* are the Seven Dwarfs who chase away and kill the evil witch after Snow White bites the apple. *Cinderella* is saved by two male mice when she is locked in by her stepmother. Sebastian is assigned to look after Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*, and her friend Flounder looks after her as well. Chip the little cup in *Beauty and the Beast* helps Belle and her father escape when they are locked in the cellar. Mulan's ancestor assign her a companion to help get her home safe, even though Mushu the dragon was not supposed to be that companion he and the little cricket help Mulan throughout the animation. *The Princess and the Frog* has two faithful companions, the alligator Louis and Ray the firefly. The firefly even gives up his life to save Tiana. In *Tangled* Rapunzel has a lizard companion who is rather asexual, however further on in the movie her companion becomes the horse Maximus who continually help Rapunzel and saves Flynn Rider. The only other male characters are the authority figures of the fathers who even though they are often very incidental characters, they are depicted as strong leaders in every animation except for in *Beauty and the Beast*. These representations teach children that the epitome of a man is being a strong leader who takes care of the weak women.

The portrayal of the princess, witch, and hero show how gender roles are represented in negative ways throughout the Disney princess genre. There are few

animations that go against the grain of the values Walt Disney himself created more than seventy-five years ago. The following chapter examines how the elements and characteristics of patriarchy in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the prototype of all Disney films, can also be seen in *Tangled*, the latest princess Disney movie.

ELEMENTS OF SNOW WHITE IN TANGLED

“*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*... [is] among the most popular films in the world and [has] had a significant impact on cinema up through the present” (Zipes “Foreword” ix). This impact can be found in many of Disney’s subsequent Princess movies and is still prevalent in *Tangled*.

The animation, *Tangled*, is introduced with the voice of Flynn Rider, it seems possible that Disney was trying to haul in more viewers by inviting a man to be one of the protagonists of the story. According to Kendra Magnusson however the title “*Tangled* emphasizes that the protagonist is not Rapunzel herself but instead the story of her ‘tangled’ hair” (296). More likely as reported by Dawn Chmielewski and Claudia Eller the title was changed from Rapunzel to *Tangled* for a more gender-neutral title. Seeing as the former Disney movies were all female oriented, the newest addition seems to be trying to capture the attention of male viewers in many ways.

The film begins with the queen of the land falling sick and being healed by a magic flower which grew from a single drop of sunlight. Gothel had been using the same flower for centuries to keep herself from growing old. Therefore when Rapunzel was born with magic abilities in her hair Gothel decides to kidnap her. “Snow White’s stepmother, whose vanity is all consuming” can be seen in Mother Gothel whose vanity is “more than just a harmless preoccupation, [and] it affects everything she says and

does, ranging from how she spends her time (peering in a mirror) to contemplating murder” (Cashdan 45). Unlike in the Grimm’s version of the story where the witch has made a pact with the parents that she will get their first born child in exchange for a ransom that grows in her garden, the witch in the Disney version steals the child for selfish reasons. This again casts the only other female character as heartless monster who has no love for her adopted child. Granted she does try to cut a bit of hair to take with her but the hair then loses its magic ability. This is a clear sign that the witch of this Disney story will do anything to keep herself young and beautiful and that is the key indication that she is spun from the same witch as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Gothel is very mean to Rapunzel, teases her in a passive aggressive way. As an example whilst holding onto Rapunzel in front of a mirror she says: “I see a strong, confident, beautiful young lady, oh look you’re here too”. After laughing she continues to gaze at herself in the mirror looking to see if she has any new wrinkles and then asks to be sung to, as singing while brushing Rapunzel’s hair rejuvenates her. The viewer is from the very beginning instructed to not like this woman and throughout the movie we see that she has no redeeming qualities to herself.

Rapunzel has one friend in the tower whom she keeps secret from her mother, Pascal a lively cute little lizard, a mandatory in the Disney films. She talks to him a lot and when Flynn Rider arrives it makes for a comical scene, as people in the real world do not tend to talk to animals and get answers. The other animal in this animation is Maximus a horse portrayed with humanly as well as doglike attributes. He is clearly put in for comic relief and is chasing Flynn Rider through half the film.

Throughout the film Rapunzel’s hair and a frying pan are her defence mechanisms, not to mention the hair being able to glow and heal when she sings. There

are only a few other princesses that are able to defend themselves like Rapunzel can and that is in fact the biggest difference between her and Snow White. Kendra Magnusson points out that “the film cleverly obfuscates Rapunzel’s sexual maturity by fashioning her with something more valuable to safeguard than her virginity: 70 feet of magical hair.” (296-297). The Grimm’s story is obviously about safeguarding virginity and as Lin points out, Disney films have a tendency to “omit many potentially disturbing or incongruous story elements” (83). As an example, in the Grimm fairy tale a stranger climbs into an adolescents’ window, sleeps with her and gets her pregnant, pokes his eyes out while fleeing from the wrath of the witch who has banished her adoptive daughter and her twin children into the woods.

In the beginning of the film Rapunzel sing the song “When will my life begin” very similar to Snow Whites’ first song “I’m wishing”. Although Rapunzel is not singing directly for a man to love her as Snow White does, her life coincidentally only begins when a man who happens to be the love of her life climbs into her tower. So, identical to Snow White, Rapunzel, in many ways “is depicted as a damsel in distress yearning for romance from the start” (Lin 83).

In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* “the male protagonist’s heroic rescue and masculinity are enhanced in the film” from what it was in the Grimm’s version (Lin 83). This is also true for *Tangled* as in the story of “Rapunzel” he doesn’t save her at all. Flynn Rider is a thief; he is cool, calm, and humorous. He is a man that young boys might easily look up to. He is also quite selfish and greedy, so he is no prince charming but he does end up sacrificing himself for Rapunzel and therefore redeeming his bad qualities. The character of Flynn Rider can be seen to have many similarities with

Aladdin, both were orphaned thieves whose only wish is to become rich and own their own castle which they subsequently get for marrying the princess.

Rapunzel's sole dream is to be shown the lights that only arrive on her birthday; the lights are in fact lanterns being sent up by her parents each year. On her eighteenth birthday she asks her mother to take her to see the light. Gothel always refers to her as her flower and sings the song "mother knows best", to try to frighten her so she will not want to go out. She sings about the plague, cannibals, men with pointy teeth and so on and says that only she can protect her "skip the drama stay with mama". She calls her stupid and chubby, and completely refuses to allow her to see the lights, and in fact threatens her "don't ever ask to leave this tower again". The pun about Rapunzel being chubby shows that the animation is very obsessed with looks, in fact Flynn Rider is also very preoccupied with the way his nose is portrayed in the wanted posters and he certainly knows he is handsome when he tries to smoulder Rapunzel into letting him go.

Flynn Rider escapes to the tower with the crown that he stole from the castle. Following his arrival there is a comical scene where Rapunzel sees another human for the first time; she hits him over the head several times and ties him in her hair until he agrees to go with her to see the lights. This meet cute is certainly very different from *Snow White* and there is no love at first sight although there is some attraction. These characters get a longer time to get to know each other and there is no 'Romeo and Juliet' love for them like in most other Disney films. Disney seems to be trying to adapt to a more realistic notion of love, rightly so as many young girls grow up waiting for their prince to arrive and sweep them of their feet. In fact Flynn Rider tries to frighten her into giving her the crown and returning back home, so there is clearly no love at first sight.

Throughout the animation Rapunzel and Flynn take turns in saving each other from harm but at the end of the movie Gothel stabs Flynn when he tries to save Rapunzel, who has by then realized that she was the lost princess. Rapunzel swears that if Gothel will let her save him she will go with her willingly, which is very heroic for a Disney princess, but Flynn gives up his life when cutting of her hair which leads to the gruesome death of mother Gothel. But all is well that ends well and her tears bring him back to life. They are reunited with her parents and live happily ever after. So in contrast with other Disney movies, especially *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Rapunzel and Flynn are equally grounded in the heroic department even though he does end up saving her life as prince charming saves Snow White.

Even though there are many similarities amongst *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Tangled* there are also dissimilarities. The prevalent thoughts that have stuck with the Disney films throughout the years is that women are evil, your life begins when a man walks into it and looks matter, a lot. But Rapunzel is one of the few princesses who can take care of herself only with a little bit of help from a man. She knows what she wants and goes for it.

CONCLUSION

The rewriting of fairy tales to comprise new ideologies has been going on since the fairy tales were first collected. Stories have been changed and adapted to fit the values of the then prevalent times. It is apparent that *Tangled* still follows the same model of how these princess movies should be like, the model that Walt Disney made himself. In most of Disney's princess animations the princesses are to be beautiful, dutiful and yearn to be loved. Witches are ugly, consumed by vanity, unredeemable and they must die for

there to be a happily ever after. Heroes are there to protect the helpless princess and save her from her evil, step-mother, witch, and often have no characteristic traits of a human being. There are no other role models than the beautiful princess and there are hardly any identifiable characters for young boys to look up to. Even though there are seventy-five years since the first Disney Princess movie was published, *Tangled* has many similarities to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. The princess herself has changed the most drastically in being able to fend for herself and on many occasions saves the hero from harm, even though she is a bit ditsy. The hero has gained a bigger role and humanly characteristics; he is handsome and knows it, a thief who longs for glory. The evil witch however has changed the least and is still mean and obsessed with looks, the biggest difference is that she holds the princess captive out of vanity not jealousy, she does not want to kill her but will still kill others to keep her to herself. The need to portray strife between the young and old or the ugly and beautiful women shows that the misogynistic values once prevalent still exist today. But even though patriarchal values can still be found in today's princess animations, Disney has clearly changed somewhat from their first animation *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. However the vast popularity of the Disney corporation and the rerelease of the old princess movies is bound to have a negative effect on how young girls develop their gender identity.

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