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"THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN WALT DISNEY'S PRODUCTIONS IN THE STUDIO ERA" BY EMMA BÁLINT

Emma Bálint is an MA student at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged. Email: emma.balint@ieas-szeged.hu

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I will discuss a number of the Walt Disney Productions' animated cartoons made during the studio era between 1922 and 1948, especially their portrayal of female characters. I approach these cartoons intended for audiences of all ages mostly through the perspective of feminist film theory, asserting that the central women characters are actually reinforced stereotypes, who fulfill petty roles. By examining the early development of these characters, I am going to shed light on the images that were and still are disturbing for the young audiences since they present less acceptable roles. In my analysis, I will use relevant cartoons with episodes from the *Silly Symphonies* series (1929-1939), which were the earliest notable venture of the studio and will scrutinize four feature films produced during the above-mentioned period: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941), and *Bambi* (1942). None of these stories seem to be authentic representation of women; they rather depict issues of male domination and images of women characteristic of the given period. As a result, even the strong women characters in the animations created by Disney during the studio era fall into the category of the stereotyped ones with the figures accepting their passive, submissive roles, all nested in the heteronormative, male-dominated model of the time.

THE CINEMA INDUSTRY AND THE STUDIO ERA

Walter Elias Disney had been engaged in the animated motion picture business for years before he opened the Disney Brothers Studio with his brother Roy Oliver Disney, on October 16, 1923 (Barrier 42). "[F]or a long time, Disney did not give credit to the artists and technicians who worked on his cartoons, though he merely coordinated their work (Zipes 197); and in 1926, the studio's name was changed to Walt Disney Productions, as a means to show that Disney alone was in charge (Barrier 50). Even though "[Disney] did not invent the medium, [...] he defined it," (Maltin 29) and thanks to his productions have become one of the most influential products ever created in the animated realm. Along with the Hollywood dream factory, in times of war and economic crisis, Disney soothed his audiences by presenting them a safe, enchanted place. Film, however, not only reflected "social conditions but also shaped "cultural attitudes" (Thornham 10). According to Jack Zipes, although Disney did not redeem the world, he actually managed to play a crucial role in the visual education of children and adults (193).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, fairy tales "reinforced the patriarchal symbolical order based on rigid notions of sexuality and gender" (Maltin 29). This did then all of Disney's productions. This can be observed in the company's earliest works, the so-called Newman Laugh-O-Grams, in which Disney adapted well-known fairy tales that he replaced into a modern setting. One of such fairy tales was *Cinderella* (1922), where a flapper princess par-

passively waits for her Prince Charming. Since Disney's primary goal was to sell his products, he needed to flatter not only children, but their parents (Booker xxi), so he and his crew often chose to adapt the mainstream societal rules in their films. However, he also scattered his productions "with images, humorous figures, and erotic signs" (Zipes 200) which helped him commercialize the final product. Ultimately, as Zipes wrote, Disney gave to the social constraints, managing 'to domesticate' stories and fairy tales up to the point that they lost their subversive character (193). In other words, he invented and put into motion a commercial scheme that he and his successors could reuse in their cartoons for years to come.

Disney's most innovative animated films were made between the 1930s and 1940s (Barrier X), during the golden age of film studios which was the cinema industry (Cristian and Dragon 17). During this period the studio system was at its peak of development with eight film studios dominating American motion picture industry, including the distributors of Disney's cartoons as well (Belton 69). At this time, through the practice of vertical integration, studios controlled "the modes of production, distribution and exhibition" as well (Hayward 363). At the end of the 1940s, the financial difficulties caused by the Hollywood Antitrust Case (1948) put an end to the studio era (Belton 84). During the studio era another restrictive step was taken, the scope of which was the studio system itself. The Production Code Administration (PCA), established in 1922, created the Motion Picture Production Code (Shurlock 14) a strict "list of 'don'ts' and 'be carefuls'" concerning film productions and filmmakers alike (Cristian and Dragon 73). The Production Code, first drafted in 1929, represented moral principles and "ideals of the highest type" (Shurlock 141), which were brought into practice "with the aim to ban indecent and immoral scenes" (Cristian and Dragon 73), and thus 'clean' motion pictures from inappropriate contents. Accepted movies were issued the Seal of Approval upon which had to be exhibited in the film's credit title (Shurlock 142-143). The provisions of the code bound the activity of all member studios, including Disney Productions. To comply with the moral rules of the PCA, during the making of *Fantasia* (1940), for example, Disney's animators were asked to remove brassieres to the originally half-naked centaurette figures in the sequence titled *The Pastoral Symphony* (Maltin 61). Sadly, as M. Keith Booker observes, "makers of children's films have all too often assumed that the innocence of their audiences will somehow protect them from any potentially harmful images in the films;" and in many cases, Disney artists as well were ignorant to the fact that certain images may carry racist or sexist implications (30-32). Nevertheless, the restrictions of the PCA had a significant role in shaping all kinds of films, including the Disney animations.

DISNEY'S EDUCATIONAL AND PROPAGANDA SHORT FILMS

The Disney strike of 1941, which severely shattered the unity of the studio's workforce (Barrier 170), was a light blow that hit the company — coming at a time of mounting war which was in vogue that year in Europe and throughout the world. As a result, the European film markets had almost been "wiped out" (Barrier 176). Although Disney, at first, was not entirely keen on making educational and war-related technical movies, he could not afford to decline the requests (Barrier 189) that reached him because these types of films did not only allow Disney to show his patriotic support for the United States in the midst of a global conflict but were also a good source of income; they were created upon request and amply paid for, primarily by the U.S. and Canadian governments, but also by other companies (Griffin 30-31).

The primary aim of these educational and propaganda animations and live-action productions was to promote political issues; later, these were also related to health and hygiene, too. Since these were all instructional films, they aimed to depict the then typical society, the nuclear family with its heteronormative roles: therefore, the women in the educational productions were primarily expected to learn how to clean the house — as in *Cleanliness Brings Health* (1944) —, how to cook for the family — as in *Planning for Good Eating* (1945) — and how to attend to their children — as in *The Story of Men: Cleanliness Brings Health* and *Planning for Good Eating* are actual episodes of the *Health for the Americas* theatrical cartoon series, created upon request by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. The shorts (among them *How Disease Travels*, *The Unseen Enemy*, *Insects as Carriers of Disease*, *Proper Infant Care*, *Tuberculosis*, *Hookworm*, *Environmental Sanitation*) were intended primarily for the audiences of South America with the aim of teaching them the North American standard of living (Griffin 35). The drawings of these cartoons are not elaborate, but they are illustrative, so that even those who do not speak English may get the message Disney is communicating. A negative attitude towards the natives' traditions pervades many shorts, for instance by the use of a foreigner language. In *Cleanliness Brings Health*, the Clean family is compared to the Careless family, while in *Planning for Good Eating*, the Careless family is instructed how to live a better life. In both cases the Clean family is happy, healthy, and lives in a colorful, nice home, while the Careless family lives in poor conditions. The Clean mother in *Planning for Good Eating* wears make-up, ear-rings, a shirt with a big cleavage, and even her hair bun is styled, while the poorly dressed, malnourished counterpart in the Careless family; moreover, the Clean mother in *Cleanliness Brings Health* keeps the house clean, often sweeps the house, bathes her son, and washes clothes with soap, indicating that these are the activities a South American mother should do with, too. However, the comparison is unjust in both cases, because in the former the financial stability and economic prosperity allows the Clean family to live healthily, while the meager backgrounds of the Carelesses show an obvious poverty that does not allow such daily luxuries. What is more, the Clean family in both animations are virtually degraded to the level of a cook or a maid, a domestic stereotype serving "to reinforce and/or create the prejudices of the audiences, and to damage the self-perceptions and limit the social aspirations of women" (Thornham 10).

Additionally, *The Story of Menstruation*, tackles a taboo topic that has not really been present on screen before. The short was made for a private c Kimberly-Clark Corporation, who produced women's hygiene products. Being an educational animation, it contravenes some of the rules of the P which prohibit the portrayal of sexual contents, including "sex hygiene." In the context of the moral atmosphere of the time, this cartoon is a sym unwillingness to openly claim certain productions; on purpose, he omits the name of the director and even of the animators from the title scene available sources. Moreover, the subject in the short is explained in a sterile and mystifying manner: the flow of menstruation itself is visually tab completely white), while impregnation is vaguely described as a tautology of "which happens when a woman is going to have a child." *The Story of* most likely the first occasion when the word 'vagina' was used on screen; yet, the female sex organ itself is misrepresented (a long white tube wit it appears more of a fiction itself. During the first half of the movie, there is a lot of attention paid to differences between the looks of women; bu half, hastily drawn female characters with oversized heads, curvy figures, lots of make-up, and with virtually no feet demonstrate how young girls 'that' specific time of the month. These women, who look very much alike, shower, ride a horse and bicycle without feet, and even lift a couch whi housework, all demonstrating that girls can do whatever they want (or, what was expected of them to do generally) during their period. By masq women characters in an overtly sexualized femininity, the short loses track of its original purpose: sex instruction for young girls. Moreover, wom defined as reproductive objects. The anonymous narrator (female voice) plainly concludes, that "there's nothing strange, nor mysterious about m yet she makes no reference to sexual activities in her didactic monologue, even when describing the process of conception. This short is among t Disney's implications into a utopian, fairytale-like life, suggesting that from the stage of a babies, girls grow into toddlers (naturally, dressed in pin toe), then directly into young women smartly experiencing menstruation, only to then get married, and have similar daughters of their own, who their place in an endless stereotyped cycle.

Between 1942 and 1945, when the U.S. was involved in the Second World War, the Disney studio was involved in making a number of short and f war propaganda films. Such were *Education for Death: The Making of a Nazi* (1943) and *Reason and Emotion* (1943), both produced in 1943, in the s; the notorious *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943). Interestingly, the first two cartoons were immediately approved by the PCA, despite their problematic por and other nations. During these years, the war propaganda prevailed over the strict rules of the PCA, which prescribed that "[t]he history, instituti people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly." *Education for Death*, in this context, is unsurprisingly openly offensive to Germar narrative, *Sleeping Beauty* seduces her Prince Charming (aka Hitler) by showing him her breasts, proving that sexuality can be openly exhibited o designed for the right purpose. *Reason and Emotion* is on the human mind, consisting of constantly warring representations of reason and emotio on how the German nation could be hypnotized and controlled by Hitler.

As the educational and propaganda films above show, the discussion of Disney's representation of gender cannot be separated from the issues c and nation; even though most feminist film theories tend to overlook the latter two, and put all emphasis only on issues of gender (Doane 9). In t the studio era, which was also defined by an increased national sentiment, especially during the Second World War, the connection between the i of identity becomes even more crucial, especially in the realm of the Disney films produced in this period. As Booker pointed out, "Disney's treatn [...] has been problematic over the years" (3). The objectification of the female existence observable in Disney's educational and propaganda prod present in the studio's feature-length films (analyzed in the next chapters). As Zipes explains, "[n]o matter what they do, women [in fairy tales] car own lives without male manipulation and intervention" (204). Even more, Disney's female characters are generally simply thrust into a strict and s unchangeable patriarchal realm, where the notions of meritocracy (for men) and fate (for women) are of utmost importance, a celluloid world wh even as main characters of the filmic narrative, are mere exhibitionists without distinctive personalities and goals of their own.

FROM THE SILLY SYMPHONIES TO DUMBO

In the early years of the Walt Disney Productions, Disney saw animation merely as "a caricature of life" (Barrier 128). As a result, women came to l exaggeratedly insignificant and stereotypical, both in their roles and appearances. This tendency can be observed in the *Silly Symphonies'* episode the four feature-length films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*.

According to Doane, a "character is first and foremost a textual mark, a trace, or more accurately, a bundle of such marks onto which the reader c projects a personality, a psychology" (Doane 251). Consequently, it can be seen either as psychoanalytically "analyzable", based on the theory of psychobiography, or as incapable of possessing a personality, based on fantasy theory (Doane 253). Disney's female characters in general fall unc category. The fact that there is "no character development because the characters are stereotypes, arranged according to a credo of domesticatc imagination" (Zipes 207), contrasts with the claim that "[o]ne of Walt's most important pursuits was the development of personality in cartoons" (I case of female characters, in particular, Disney's initial ambition was soon prevailed by the generation of the three classic types of Disney women

The teenaged heroine [is] at the idealized height of puberty's graceful promenade [...]. Female Wickedness [...] is rendered as middle-aged beauty at sexuality and authority. Feminine sacrifice and nurturing is drawn in pear-shaped, old women past menopause, spry and comical [...] (Bell 108).

The most significant young heroine of the studio era, a "helpless [ornament] in need of protection", who "when it comes to the action of the film, was Snow White; the most wicked woman was her stepmother, who is "not only [...] evil but also [represents] erotic and subversive forces" (Zipes most remarkable well-wisher was the Blue Fairy from *Pinocchio* (1940).

Johnston argues that "[w]ithin a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man" (Thornham according to Gledhill, women on screen "do not represent women at all, but are figures cut to the measure of the patriarchal Unconscious" (Thornham is especially true for Disney's early films, as these were animated solely by men (Barrier 130). Mulvey went one step further, and coined the term "male gaze", which refers to women in films being "exhibitionistic erotic objects on display, providing visual pleasure for the heterosexual, male, voyeuristic spectator" (Cristian and Dragon 90).

The women in the above-mentioned animated films of Disney are similarly passive characters, who seldom enhance the development of the story. The most distinguishable goal is finding a good, i.e. dominant and rich, husband. Smith claims that "[t]he role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters" (Thornham 14), and although this motive is rarely explicit in cartoon conventional happy endings and happily ever afters make its presence indubitable.

SILLY SYMPHONIES (1929-1939)

Since the production of the groundbreaking *Steamboat Willie* (1928), synchronizing music to animated images became a trademark of the Disney studio (Maltin 70). A series of 75 cartoons based on music were created in the interwar period, all devised by Carl Stalling, the studio's musical director at the time (Maltin 70). The *Silly Symphonies* were actually a sketchpad for the studio's artists to experiment on music and sound. The shorts "evoked settings, seasons, and characters" (Maltin 70) and were full of "anthropomorphism and personification" (Maltin 40), because Disney believed that animated films "should deal mostly with personalities" (Maltin 106). Paradoxically, female characters seldom have distinctive characteristics in these shorts. The silhouettes of women and anthropomorphized flowers or other similar 'objects' usually depicted as faithful copies of one another were often portrayed dancing, serving mainly as dynamic *mise-en-scène*. Elizabeth Bell gives a rather striking explanation for dancing in Disney's films: "the 'natural' expression of love – the seamless quality of the dance representing and replacing the sexual act" (Bell 113). This idea is especially provoking, given the context of the time, when the Production Code clearly prohibited the portrayal of sexual references, particularly in the form of dance.

The *Silly Symphonies* are "[f]reed from the burdens of time and responsibility, events are open-ended, reversible, episodic without obvious point," (Maltin 200). According to Maltin's introduction to the Walt Disney Treasures' *More Silly Symphonies* edition, "they are fresh, spontaneous, and fun to watch" (Maltin 39). They were especially successful among the young audiences, since "strategically inserted musical numbers help to hold the attention of young viewers" (Maltin 39). The emphasis was, as the title suggests, obviously on melodies, on rhythm, and on the movements of the characters. The majority of *Silly*'s shorts are tales filled up with gags and numerous other technical novelties alongside sound; such was as the use of Technicolor for the first time in *Flowers and Trees* (Maltin 39), or the use of the multiplane camera in *The Old Mill* (1937) (Maltin 51). Although the cartoons were originally created as purely visual pieces with no story world, they gradually developed into short stories with narratives (Griffin 16); yet few of them present its characters with strongly identifiable personality traits. The *Silly Symphonies* are simple love stories with certain types of figures: *The China Plate* (1931) and *The Cookie Carnival* (1935) are good examples. In the first example, three types of women with very few powerful female characters — such a character is the fly in *Woodland Café* (1937), who manages to escape alone from the net of a lethal spider. Nevertheless, there are several feisty mothers protecting their children in *Birds of a Feather* (1931) and *Springtime for Helen* (1938) but truly caring mothers rarely appeared in Disney productions then or even today. The majority of the *Silly* shorts, however, portray helpless damsels in distress, waiting to be saved by brave, handsome gentlemen. This is the case in *Cock O' the Walk* (1935), *Music Land* (1935) and *The Silly Symphony* (1932).

El Terrible Torreador (1929) was the first *Silly Symphony* featuring an explicit woman character. The very first picture frame shows a waitress's back as she carries around a mug of beer. She eagerly opens up her cleavage for tips, but starts to blush when a soldier tries to kiss her. The waitress, Carmen, named after the background music, is stereotyping a temperamental, independent Spanish woman at the same time, treated as a trophy of macho men. In *Who Killed Cock Robin?* (1935), Cock Robin is shot by Cupid's arrow caused by the sight of an ever-changing woman — actually a caricature of the notoriously sexually confident Mae West (Griffin 71). This character is a vivid example of the feminine masquerade, "overdoing [of] the gestures of feminine flirtation," or in other words, a "decorative layer which conceals" the "non-identity" (Doane 25) of the woman.

character, consequently, presents “[w]omanliness [as] a mask which can be worn or removed” (25) and Disney’s beauty, Jenny Wren, wears it. Jenny Wren appears in *Toby Tortoise Returns* (1936) as Toby’s girlfriend, demonstrating that the love between her and Cock Robin did not last, thus adding a rather immature quality to her already luscious looks. The hyperbolization of gender subordination in certain movies lead to quite controversial, even bizarre results: in *The Hare* (1935), four little bunnies catch the attention of the hare and its consequent lust causes him to lose ground. It strikes the eye of the viewer, that the girl rabbits he talks to look like toddlers, while he is a fully mature rabbit—bringing the danger of pedophilia into the picture.

There are many other examples of sexist imagery in Disney’s early productions: among them is the *Frolicking Fish* (1932), where a fish playfully yet condescendingly taps a harp-playing mermaid statue’s backside. Another example of problematic portrayal of women is in *King Neptune* (1932), an episode that depicts topless mermaids (Griffin 15). The topless daughters of Neptune sing and dance, or rather swim, at the bottom of the sea, like ghosts, posing confidently as they brush their hair and play the harp on a tall rock in the middle of the sea. In the first scene in which they appear they are shown as the King Neptune’s property, in an environment reminiscent of the harem but this time placed in a clam. Their faces — obvious markers of shallow identity — are less elaborate: two spots for eyes, and a short line for the mouth. However, their curvy, feminine figures are very telling: they are all except for a red-haired mermaid among her black-haired sisters, but none of them has distinct personality. Pirates kidnap the red-haired one and a rescue population rushes to her rescue. She is not capable of moving (in the realm of men, that is, on the surface of the ship) and thus cannot escape with the others. In the end, after Neptune, the savior, had taken revenge on the pirates and liberated the red-haired beauty, they swim around contently playing with pearls as if nothing had happened.

The two versions of *The Ugly Duckling* in the *Silly Symphonies* portray women characters as mothers. The first short, *The Ugly Duckling*, was made in 1931; at its end the ugly little bird is finally taken in by his mother, only because he proved to be brave and unselfish by saving other ducklings. The moral is that looks do not matter; only actions do. The other short entitled *Ugly Duckling* (1939), shot in Technicolor, was more faithful to the Andersen tale. As soon as the little bird’s parents notice the problem with his ugly looks, the father accuses the mother duck of adultery. In the end they abandon the unusual duckling. At the end, he meets other similarly ‘ugly’ ducklings, which turn out to be swans, and the mother happily welcomes them. These films deal openly with a mother leaving her children (Brode 89), a serious subject, but with the animal characters this makes children oblivious to the situation. Out of the three mothers, no one is willing to accept a different type of child, and in this sense, they are definitely bad mothering figures. Apart from the mother in *Father Noah’s Ark* (1933) is a definitely more modern character, declaring that she “wears the pants” in the house. But Mother Noah is a phallic character despite her outlooks reminding one of the Venus of Willendorf, while the other women, the wives of Father Noah’s sons, are such as the usual Disney women, who happily sing while carrying out Father Noah’s orders. Alongside these figures, Disney’s good fairies are usually wise mother-like characters. *The Flying Mouse* (1934), a short that tells the story of a fine young mouse that wants to fly, features such a figure. The fairy who grants the mouse his wish, is a tall, blond woman with big, dreamy eyes and red lips, wearing a blue dress; she is beautiful, yet “stiff and unappealing,” but the animators had difficulty drawing realistic human characters (Maltin 42) for cartoon figures. The fairy looks like her counterpart in *Pinocchio* (1940) the Blue Fairy she also yields to the then fashionable Hollywood ideal of women (Chahine 12). Although she has a good moral sense and is very helpful and sympathetic, she has no will or aims of her own. Besides, the goddess Persephone in *The Goddess of Spring* (1934) is a similar character in the sense that her life is to make others happy, regardless of her contentment. Persephone, in Disney’s adaptation, is completely under the god Pluto’s control; she is not a woman character above were the models setting the road for women’s representation before Snow White and other famous Disney princesses.

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1937)

After years of producing short films, Disney decided to start making feature-length animated films. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was by far the best-known fairy tale (Bettelheim, Chapter 27, first paragraph), and, as the first feature-length animated film ever created, brought the Disney studio worldwide fame, signaling also a great step in the history of animation (Booker 5). This film evoked a “variety of emotions” (Maltin 57) and resembled a woman’s film of the 1940s, that is, the “weepie” (Cristian and Dragon 87), which is one of the major areas of research for feminist film theories. It was praised the cartoon in 1938 for being “sheer fantasy, delightful, gay, and altogether captivating,” and expressed a special respect for this Disney production. It did virtually all the critics of *The Times* in that year. One of the main attractions of the film is the dwarfs’ “wholly individual personalities, each with characteristics all his own and a point of view to match” (Maltin 53). This was Disney’s trick to make the story more comic, practically shifting “the story away from the lethal rivalry between Snow White and the queen” (Barrier 102). According to Bruno Bettelheim, they are “but foils to set off the developments taking place in Snow White,” embodying a controversial aspect in a story about maturation and growth, as they “have no parents, nor do they marry or have children” (Chapter 27, first paragraph). Their function in Snow White’s life is equally confusing, as they constantly switch between the need of a nurturing mother, and little men desiring sexual interaction. But the dwarfs respect Snow White, not only because she is a woman, but because she has a royal title. All seven of them, even Grumpy, “the woman-hater,” are visibly in love with her (in a twisted Oedipal scenario). However, as s

male prince shows up, the dwarfs sink back into their infantile roles.

The emphasis on the amusing dwarfs, however, is only one of the many changes Disney made to the original Grimms' fairy tale. With this story, Disney made an entertaining story for both children and adults, but the Grimms' version of *Snow White* was, as Michael Barrier wrote, "a serious fable about a girl's transition from youth and age, and sexual maturity, and life and death" (121). Zipes lists seven aspects that Disney changed in the original Grimm's story: the role of the Queen's jealousy of Snow White's suitor and the way Snow White is brought back to life, among others (203-204). Snow White's role as a servant, for example, was borrowed from *Cinderella*, and her awakening with a kiss was inspired by Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* (Barrier 121). Nevertheless, Zipes argues that "Disney retained key ideological features of the Grimms' fairy tale that reinforce nineteenth-century patriarchal notions, which Disney, like the Grimms," hence observed with the Grimms" (204). Indeed, "the image of males in films is often stereotyped as well as that of women but in most cases this is the cliché of the virulent macho male, which, though potentially destructive, is at least a symbol of power and authority" (Thornham 15). It is exactly for this reason that the prince is most often associated with Walt Disney himself (Zipes 205) because the prince is "the only one who can save Snow White" (206), proving Laura Mulvey's point that "[i]t is the film's [male] hero who advances the story, controlling events, the woman, and the erotic gaze" (quoted in Thornham 54). As a matter of fact, the look of the central male character which is privileged, so that we see events largely through his eyes and identify with his gaze" (54). Snow White's view is hardly ever taken up by the camera. She is constantly in the center as a spectacle, and she waits quite passively, until she can finally fulfill her quest for formal closure to the narrative structure" (125), at the end of the prince's journey.

In many Disney films "even when a woman is the central character she is generally shown as confused or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as being" (Thornham 14-15). Snow White, too, is looking for her place in the fairy tale world: after taking up a (rather false) motherly role, she finally fulfills her 'proper' function as woman and princess, to marry the right man/prince. These carefully mixed roles are part of Snow White's masquerade, covering her strong personality. Snow White has fair skin with a bit of healthy blush on her cheeks, white teeth, bright red lips and her make-up is to emphasize her liveliness (Chahine 99); she has a slim, sand clock figure (84) and a Garçon-hairstyle (89) representing the female ideal of the first and second decades of the twentieth century.

The scenes of this film were first photographed in 1935 live action and were directed by Ham Luske. These were then retraced with the rotoscope order to make them more life-like (Barrier 120). Snow White's looks were based on the photographs of Marjorie Belcher (Marge Champion), a renegade of the 1940s (Barrier 110) and on Grim Natwick's feminine animated characters (118-119). Natwick insisted that Snow White should be "mature and while Luske wanted her to "be presented as a sweet child" (Barrier 120). Ultimately, the compromise of the two animators' opinions created this rather ambiguous woman character, submissive and dominant at the same time. When she sees the dirty house of the dwarfs, she immediately starts to claim that one of the main focuses of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is the "domestication of women" (204) a realm in which Snow White can exhibit her distinctive qualities. But Snow White is also "a take-charge woman" (Brode 179), by the way she gives orders further to her animal friends and to the dwarfs. She even gets the boiling cauldron to quiet down when she wants to taste the soup. At the same time, Snow White's character is particularly of all, she is unaware of the queen's hatred towards her, until the Huntsman clearly tells her. The first time she enters the dwarfs' house, she exclaims "dark inside, but feels no danger at all: she simply fixes her hair, and upon realizing that no one is home, goes right in. Towards the end of the film, the guidance of the dwarfs [Snow White] grows from a child helpless to deal with the difficulties of the world into a girl who learns to work well, and to take charge" (Bettelheim Chapter 27, 32nd paragraph). This time that she spends with the dwarfs is her period of maturation, and her "reawakening or rebirth" is the "reaching of a higher stage of maturity and understanding" (Chapter 27, 53rd paragraph).

Her stepmother, the Evil Queen, is an independent woman and in Disney's version, there is hardly any mention of her husband. The only male figure is the Huntsman, "a male who can be viewed as an unconscious representation of the father" (Bettelheim Chapter 27, 19th paragraph), who "neither fulfills his duty to the queen, nor meets his moral obligation to Snow White to make her safe and secure" (Chapter 27, 23rd paragraph). Disney claimed that Snow White must be protected from any hint of sexuality, up to and including the virtual elimination of parents from the lives of the characters" (Booker 2), with the case in *Snow White*. The Queen's reversed Electra-complex, expressed in her jealousy of her stepdaughter is explained by Bettelheim through the Oedipal drives which rule all her actions (Chapter 27, 12th paragraph). The Evil Queen has green eyes (the color of envy), black hair, dark clothes, and a weary expression on her face. She perfectly fits Mary Ann Doane's description of the femme fatale (2): she is a powerful woman defined by her egoism and her representing "a symptom of male fears about feminism" (2-3). Ironically, she makes herself ugly not only by drinking the aging potion, but also by willing herself to become a wretched villain in order to achieve absolute beauty (Brode 180). In the disguise of the peddler, she has big green eyes framed by thick eyebrows, green skin, and a wart on her crooked nose; however, in the end she remains with this ugly mask forever because she dies in her disguise. Her character was made for the younger audience and her deeds (to bury Snow White alive in a cruel act of murder) are also rather disturbing. In fact, even "Disney expressed

wry satisfaction in censors' occasional classification of *Snow White* as too intense for younger children" (in Barrier 131), admitting that he "didn't m for children" but rather "for adults — for the child that exists in all adults" (131).

Snow White is especially significant in Disney's world of women, since it served as "the prototype for all subsequent fairy-tale films" (Booker 4). However, concentrating on its characters adapted to screen, Disney stripped this highly symbolical and meaningful fairy tale from its moral message (Bette 27, 56th paragraph). As Zipes wrote, "[F]or Disney, the Grimms' tale is [...] a vehicle to spread his message about proper sex roles, behavior, man customs" (206), following "the classic sexist narrative about the framing of women's lives through a male discourse" (204), which was prevalent during the Age of Hollywood. *Snow White* is constructed as a submissive woman, masquerading in then fashionable make-up and hair style that covered her personality.

PINOCCHIO (1940)

The production of *Pinocchio* (1940) started as early as 1937, the year when *Snow White* was released (Barrier 136). As John Canemaker tells in the commentary of *Snow White*, the problem with *Pinocchio* was that it did not feature any dwarfs. According to Barrier "[Disney] had in effect called a growth in the animated films released under his name, locking in place a limited, and limiting, conception of what character animation was capable of. In other words, he started repeating the schemes that had previously proven to be financially and commercially successful.

Although there are no dwarfs in *Pinocchio*, there are two characters who fulfill the roles of previous dwarfs: Figaro, the tomcat and Cleo, the goldfish lady, and she is aware of it. Her large blue eyes and see-through tail, which she uses as a veil to cover her face when she feels embarrassed, lend her a feminine, even oriental look. She makes this sex appeal masquerade quite apparent. Surrounded by male characters, Cleo is the damsel in distress who is unable to save herself or to do anything of (narrative) significance. She is a childish yet sexualized woman figure, who has no other function than to be pretty on the screen, and is a fitting example of what Mulvey defines as "to-be-looked-at-ness" (qtd. in Cristian and Dragon 90). The other woman is the Blue Fairy, who, despite being a crucial figure in the story, is not shown much in the film. She is literally a star, and represents the Hollywood ideal: tall and slim with the fashionable hairstyle of the 1940's and with shoulder-length, curly, blonde hair (Chahine 141). She was also created by rotoscoping; her figure was based on Marge Champion, the dancer model for *Snow White* (Brode 119). The Blue Fairy wears a lot of make-up and is dressed in an elegant, sparkling blue dress with a deep cleavage. As Maltin put it, she is "a beautiful woman, yet ethereal and not a 'glamour girl'" (58). At the end of the film, she is substituted by a blue dove, a symbol of equal grace and purity. Similar to *Snow White*, she is also lost between being an object of sexual desire for Jiminy Cricket (and also for the audience), and a possible mother figure for *Pinocchio*, the protagonist of the movie. This is because both her feminine look and compassionate personality are displayed as masquerade (Thornham 138), in an attempt to distance her from a traditional feminine role that would be attached to her. The Blue Fairy seems to evade these roles nicely: for example, she replaces the practice of giving birth with a swish of her wand. In turning *Pinocchio* into a real boy, she is "fulfilling the dream of [Pinocchio's] loving creator Gepetto to have a son (without, apparently, the inconvenience of dealing with the child's mother)" (Booker 12). The Blue Fairy does become the mother in the end, albeit a covert one. With the Blue Fairy's character, Disney does away with the superstition that women can be "either attractive or serious" (Brode 119). Despite all the subtle subversions she performs, this figure is as submissive as any other female character in the early Disney oeuvre.

Pinocchio is also one of the best examples of a Disney film concerned directly with the issue of masculinity. *Pinocchio* has to become brave, truthful, and responsible in order to become a real human being. In fact these are the terms he has to meet in order to be good enough to be adopted by Gepetto, and even Zipes wrote, "to be accepted into a so-called civilized society" (208). Until the end of the film, *Pinocchio*, much like the typical female character, is repressed because similar to the stereotypical role of women, children also fulfill a submissive role in Disney's films, regardless of their gender. Apart from Jiminy Cricket is a controversial character, embodying *Pinocchio*'s strictly guiding conscience and, in the same time, flirting with everything around him.

Pinocchio does not do away with the original moral of Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* simply for the benefit of humor and sympathy, as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. This may be the reason why Disney was not fully content with what his studio made of the original story of *Pinocchio* (Barrier's emphasis is on masculinity, and the male figure's struggle to become accepted in a family (and society as well), all the female characters are made less and less relevant. Ultimately, both the Blue Fairy and Cleo, the two notable female characters conceal their objectification and insignificance in a more overt femininity.

DUMBO (1941)

Dumbo (1941) may have been one of the simplest (Maltin 65) and cheapest (Booker 15) cartoons made by Disney, but turned out to be a remarkable

for its technical innovation and emotional richness (Barrier 190). As opposed to the original tale, which expressed “universal human truths in anir (Maltin 66), Disney’s adaptation turned out to be more of a simple means to portray cute characters and generate sympathy fused with American *Dumbo* also presented one of the best examples of the studio’s most clichéd attempts “to efface the sexual realities of reproduction” (Booker 15) stereotypical portrayal of women. This clichéd attempt is materialized in the reinterpretation of the well-known anecdote according to which stor In Disney’s version, however, the birds simply drop the newborns into the animals’ circus cages with the help of parachutes thus alienating from t newborns from their mothers, who, except for the tigers and giraffes, are single mothers. The viewers never see Dumbo’s father, despite the fact offspring is named Jumbo Junior after him. The father is finally excluded when the other elephants, who presume that his unusual looks cover a c nickname him Dumbo. Moreover, the relationship between Dumbo and Mrs. Jumbo is a special one, culminating in “[t]he mother’s excessive and attachment to her [son]” (Thornham 28).

Dumbo is one of the few films in the Disney oeuvre without a conventional love story. The protagonist is an infant, who cannot yet talk, and whose based on the animator’s own two-year-old boy (Barrier 178-179). He is obviously still in the pre-Oedipal phase of his development and, therefore, yet a distinct personality. Mrs. Jumbo is a simple mother, who is “ever-understanding, ever-tolerant of the weaknesses and foibles of others” but ; quite passive (Thornham 152) and uneducated (demonstrated by her inability to sign her name). She is oppressed and misunderstood by all othe being also segregated as “a rogue elephant” upon trying to “protect her son from a thuggish, red-haired, freckled youth who looks like a refugee f Pleasure Island” (Booker 17-18) — her only active deed throughout the film. Her main narrative function is to leave her son an orphan, and thus e advancement of the plot. Furthermore, the other elephants, who are without exception all females, are spiteful, judging spinsters. They act as if tl superior to Mrs. Jumbo despite the fact that the latter are just as underprivileged as the former. Although the animals in the circus are visibly exp cooperate obediently with their owners. The abuse is made explicit when the clown attempts to earn a salary raise by risking Dumbo’s life and ex “elephants have no feelings.” Since the portrayal of animal abuse was prohibited by the PCA, the abuse itself cannot appear in *Dumbo* but it is ind In the scene when the circus arrives to their base camp, the elephants and the black workers are setting up tents in the midst of a rainstorm with perceptible between them. Moreover, the film shows a crow named Jim Crow, a clear reference to the Jim Crow laws (mandating racial segregatio Americans up until the sixties).

Dumbo allegorically presents a child’s emotional need for his mother and the ability to succeed without her. This orphan’s quest objectifies Mrs. Ju reduces her narrative function in the film. The animation has primarily been criticized for its racist portrayal of characters but considering notions: theory on black women, Mrs. Jumbo is not simply passive and submissive, as most of Disney’s women, she is a feminine figure under double opp and racial alike.

BAMBI (1942)

Bambi (1942), one of the first environmentally aware films, is undoubtedly a spectacular “visual poem extolling the glory of nature, as seen in the seasons, and the unchanging pattern of life for the forest animals, from birth to maturity” (Maltin 66). Disney and his animators create this highly environment, which has been renowned as one of the wonders of animation ever since (Bell 138), primarily because of its highly anthropomorph This special focus on portrayal led to the virtual absence of action scenes, especially in the first half of the film. Dynamism, however, is overtaken of character sketches: this sometimes exaggerated idyllic scenery and the evasively charming characters skillfully conceal the hierarchy of the po patriarchal family structure.

In most animal families in this motion picture, mothers affectionately raise their offspring while the fathers are away. Feminist theory sees this ki domination in the family a result of the division between the roles of the male and female, father and mother (Thornham 295). This division beco more apparent among the animals in *Bambi*; the purpose with this was to teach the young audience the ways in which the heteronormative, mai of the era worked. Similar to most of Disney’s female characters, the mothers in *Bambi* do not have distinctive personality traits; they are portray stereotypically as caring mothers. As opposed to bucks, does in *Bambi* have no authoritative power. The same goes for all animals. Thumper’s rak example, disciplines her children only according to her husband’s credo, even in his absence: “Thumper! What did your father tell you?” Claire Joh that “woman functions within film as a sign within a patriarchal discourse, not as a reflection of reality” (qtd. in Thornham 53); and, apparently, th cartoons as well. Female characters in *Bambi* fulfill the roles of toddlers, young maidens ready to procreate, or loving and feeble mothers.

The focus in *Bambi*, similarly to the previously discussed productions, is once again on the younger generation; adults are only rarely shown and t have proper names. As opposed to the adult figures, among children the girl figures seem to be more dominant than the boy figures. Even as a tr

"kind of bashful," while Feline is brave and mischievous. The film ends with little Thumpers, Flower's son Bambi, and the rest of the forest animals the babies of Bambi and Feline, who look exactly like their parents. At this point, Bambi is given the hereditary title of the Great Prince of the Forest. The circle of life and proper socialization among forest beings goes on as the new prince watches the new mother and their fawns from afar, rendering passionate love slightly irrelevant. Besides the human-nature conflict in Bambi – rendered with the hunter as active, masculine and the forest as feminine –, the film depicts also the tension between the genders of the forest animals. Although the Disney studio shrewdly tried to conceal its sexism behind the emphasis on the realism of the background and the cuddlesome, pretty characters, the simplified stereotypical representations play a central role in the story of this mainstream classical Hollywood narrative. The most basic incentive behind the narrative of *Bambi* is thus the dichotomic conflict between the feminine and masculine, let them be embodied as two fawns of different genders, a doe versus a buck or nature against a group of hunters. The sexism, however, is marked by the fact that the female character always loses ground in the battle: nature remains subjected to humans, Bambi to the hunters, and Feline is left alone by Bambi.

CONCLUSION

During the studio era, Walt Disney's productions included among their charmingly entertaining visual imagery some quite disturbing images (which were adapted mostly from fairy tales), including animal abuse, discrimination based on various differences, racist stereotypes, nudity and explicit scenes of violence, cold-blooded acts of murder, and even a necrophilic act of love. Despite Disney's obvious focus on masculinity and the predominance of male characters, female characters are always present in the narrative's significant parts, signaling their important role, a role that had been denied in most part in the allegorical worlds present in the *Silly Symphonies*, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in *Pinocchio*, in *Dumbo* and in *Bambi*. Disney's female characters during the studio era were created according to specific stereotypes defined and interpreted in a strict patriarchal hierarchy (Thornham 54). These were, based on Bell's classification (108), the following: young girls, who are innocent, beautiful and so submissive that they lose their significance in the narratives; the fairies and well-wishers, who, in the process of helping others, lose sight of personal goals or aims; and evil stepmothers and jealous women who are capable of carrying out crimes as typical femme fatales because they are independent, sexually charged and revengeful (Doane 2). Even when female characters are often masquerading in overt femininity, in order to conceal the lack of their personality traits (Thornham 138), they are not defined by sexuality in their appearance but rather by the passivity of their roles irrefutably accepted (23). As Molly Haskell wrote, women in the early 20th-century moving pictures were "exiled [...] back into patriarchal stereotypes" (qtd. in Cristian and Dragon 87). A more extensive research and analysis could shed light on how these women characters were transformed into more independent figures half a century later in the early 1990s.

The above-analyzed cartoons were primarily driven by a struggle for commercial and financial success. In an era when terrible disasters (the Great Depression and the Second World War) struck one after the other, Disney needed his productions to appeal to adults and children alike in order to be a profitable form of entertainment and a proper educational tool. To obtain a successful cinematic production, the producer had to mix the level of the messages to different target audiences, relying on the notion that children would not notice the disturbing images, because they are innocent (Booker 30-31). Thus, "[i]n their desire to make the plot clear and get the message across, writers and directors often use shorthand expressions of characterization" (Smith in Thornham 15), resulting in easily communicable, one-dimensional characters. Furthermore, Disney as a successful businessman gained considerable influence and was able to shape the way cartoons were produced the way he found it most convenient.

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