Animated Art History: A Look into Disney’s Representation of Artwork in Film

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the representation of artworks in Disney films. It is an innovative study of Disney’s films through an art historical lens. The first chapter considers how representations of art convey Disney’s messages, specifically through medieval art, architecture, and literature. The second chapter examines art’s role in character development with respect to gender and sexuality. The last chapter criticizes the process by which Disney characters shift from childhood to adulthood. The entire thesis examines the relationship between art and the characters, plot, and setting of the film. All in all, this thesis considers the implications of representing artwork in animated films, unpacking the significance of their contributions.

Keywords:

Disney, Art History, Representation, Medieval Art History, Aura, Film, Gender, Identity.
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Introduction

There are films that depend on artworks to develop their stories. Mystery films like *The DaVinci Code* (2006) and *Angel and Demons* (2009) may not have been as believable if the art in the film did not actually exist. Indeed, if the artwork resembles canonical artworks, the world of the film has the potential to be more believable because it shares artifacts in common with our own; even characters can depend on the iconography of paintings or sculptures. In Dan Brown adaptations, for instance, such iconography leads Professor Langdon (Tom Hanks) to solve a crime. Regardless of creative interpretation, the influence of art and art history is not felt solely in films that are grounded in art historical scholarship. Although research on representations of art in film focuses mostly on live action dramas and thrillers, many of the arguments and observations applied in these studies are also relevant for my corpus: animated Disney films.¹ In this thesis, I will analyze the artworks that appear in a series of Disney films in order to evaluate their role and contributions to the narrative and character development. Specifically, I will examine *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1996), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Mulan* (1998), *Frozen* (2013), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Tangled* (2010).

Many of the Disney films I consider here have created or recreated a past world. These worlds are often part fantasy and partly based on visual and literary historical records. As such, there is an important distinction between historiography and historiophoty that should first be briefly addressed. This dichotomy stands no matter who the intended audience may be. Hayden White defines historiography as "the representation of history in verbal images and written

¹ N.B: When I say “Disney” I am referring to the Walt Disney Animation Studios as a whole; as a franchise.
discourse.” This is accepted by historians as the superior method of representing history. On the other hand, historiophoty is “the representation of history in visual images and filmic discourse.” Filmic representations of history are not necessarily or inherently invalid ways of describing the past. However, images are typically seen as supports for written facts. History on film is perceived as having less authority over its subject. Yet, as White reminds us, historiography and historiophoty are both constructions of historical facts. Both are merely interpreted representations of historical data by writers or directors. The schism between the two modes of representing history is subjective.

The fear for historians in regards to using film as an authority stems from the use of anachronisms in these films. When watching a history film, the viewer must be aware of the nature of representation. However, in a fiction film, this becomes slightly more contentious due to the required suspension of disbelief. As such, they must re-evaluate what they believe to be true. Films create a preconceived notion of history that is supported by written facts, and vice-versa. To understand the history in the film, the viewer must first identify the characters and plot. Then, they must associate them with a familiar period or era. When history is shown on film it becomes a part of an accumulation of imagery associated with a specific time period. This accumulation creates narratives that reference history while drawing upon other portrayals.

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4 White, “Historiography and Historiophoty.” p.1193

5 Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*. p.114


7 Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*. p.6
Once a period's appearance is visually recognizable, filmmakers can adapt it for their stories. When a film is created, the look of the film will determine if it is believable as a construction of that time period. In turn, this will support the preconceived notions of history that are true to the viewer. History is a construct made up of different interpretations of surviving data and images. Films that display history simulate these constructions by re-creating historical events and adapting them for their stories. This does not make them any less historical, yet they are more open to speculation than scholarly books or journals. In a similar fashion, Disney Studios takes original stories that have been perpetuated for years and adapts them for a different time period than the one established by the original. They then adopt accepted tropes for the settings of the films, and imitate history and art history to advance their plots and characters.

When art is displayed on screen it helps connect the story of the film with a historical reality. While it is hard to accept films as beacons of truth, art amplifies the sense of reality in the viewing process. The process of viewing a film requires the viewer to suspend their disbelief. To fully appreciate a film the viewer must immerse themselves in the world of the story, and in the short running time of the film, it becomes a new reality. So, by using recognizable artworks as part of the props, films become anchored in a visual reality.
This is particularly evident in some Disney films as well. The success of these films stems from their ability to involve most viewers in their worlds. While many Disney films are geared toward children or younger audiences, they also often deal with history. They encourage audiences to suspend their disbelief so much so that they may believe in magic. Nevertheless, they include objects, locations, and architecture from the “real” world. In turn, the real and the fictional become intertwined with one another. Thus, Disney creates a culture that broaches both. Which allows their fans to live somewhere between the two, which is sometimes more appealing because of the draw of the fictional. Disney’s ability to convince their viewers that what they are seeing on screen is real encourages them to question their own history, thus creating a mediated view of the past.

Art can be used in films as a symbol or metaphor because of the way it too, tells stories. While time in artwork is stagnant or frozen, time in film moves and changes. So, in combining the two, production designers create an ebb and flow in time. When progressing through the short time-line of a film, the artworks shown create an option for the viewer to pause and examine them. If the viewer slows down and notices the artwork in the background, it can have two effects: either it reinforces the interests and desires of the film, or it creates a challenge for the viewer to immerse themselves fully within the narrative. Recognizable artworks also create an opportunity for their aura to inflect the film. However, the reproduced artwork gets separated from its original aura which then becomes mediated by the film.

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14 Wills, *Disney Culture*. p.37
15 Wills, *Disney Culture*.p.40
It is important to note that some artworks in film are not “real” or part of art history, but created specifically for a film. Some simply borrow from styles and techniques that are familiar. In these instances, the aura of a newly made work is not the product of its history, but manufactured anew to advance the narrative of the film. However, this does not mean that it cannot bring to mind specific moments of the past. After all, while history is accessible through artworks and objects, there are gaps in history that are open to interpretation. The contrast between the filmic representation and the real artwork engenders a desire to believe in and to accept falsified impressions of the past. These objects and artworks are all representations of history in some way.\(^\text{17}\) By using artworks and other real objects, production companies create a bridge between the reality of the film and our own reality. As such, the two function together to support the narrative.

I would be remiss if I did not explain why I chose Disney for the corpus of films I am examining in this thesis. As I mentioned above, Disney excels at creating compelling films. Thus, they make their viewers want to believe in magic. In the next three chapters, I will outline how Disney makes use of the representation of artworks. When Walt Disney started the company he wanted to teach children while reconnecting adults to their innocence.\(^\text{18}\) He did not want to come across as an intellectual or a political man, but Disney’s films are acclaimed for showing children the world around them in a fantasy format. They teach children about adult themes: sorrow, death, conflict, etc. But, they also teach their audiences about history.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{17}\) Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*. p.54  
\(^{18}\) Wills, *Disney Culture*. p.105  
\(^{19}\) Ibid. p.106
These films can be analyzed in a similar way to how Susan Felleman approaches her work on the representation of art in film. Felleman's work has served as a template to develop the arguments and questions I apply to the films in the following chapters. It is easy to assume that the princess and pirate adventures shown by Disney are for children. However, this does not mean that they do not also include a number of historical references, many of which are unlikely to be understood by younger audiences. There is doubt that Disney history and “real” history will become synonymous. This is because of the sources that influenced the production of Disney films.

The following three chapters will show that Disney uses art to shape and form their narratives. The first chapter examines medievalism in Disney films. The second chapter discusses gender representation and its relation to the artwork portrayed. And the third evaluates the process of understanding a character’s identity through artwork. All three chapters will present two key arguments. Firstly, the aura of the artwork itself is affected by and affects the film. The portrayal of an object on film brings with it its aura. In this case, the aura encompasses the context of the original artwork's creation. The politics, the narrative perpetuated, and the impression left behind by the artwork all feed into the aura. Yet, as Walter Benjamin’s definition of the aura posits, a technological — or filmic — representation of art changes the aura of the artwork. This new aura feeds into the artwork and into the film’s storyline because the

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20 Ibid.

21 Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, p.149

22 Bruno Girveau, “Walt Disney at The Museum?,” in *Once upon a Time: Walt Disney, the Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios* (Munich ; New York: Prestel, 2006). p.34.; Disney used sources such as Shakespeare, Vaudeville, avant-garde, other popular films, classical paintings and children’s illustration to influence their work.

“political signifiers” of the artwork are subverted. Paul Schrader underlines the implication of Walter Benjamin’s work and explains that:

Benjamin’s writings reveal a deep ambivalence about cinema. Movies returned storytelling to the masses (a positive thing); on the other hand, cinema’s industrial status made it susceptible to manipulation for political purposes (problematic). Movies freed images from their literary masters, but mass replication of images thrust them beyond anyone’s control. Movies stripped art of its aura, but dispersed the aura in the mass culture of capitalism. Over and over Benjamin simultaneously holds out then retracts the value of technologically produced images.

We must remember that Disney films are not without political or historical influence simply because they are made for children. This influence extends to the artworks represented. The effect of recognizable artworks in film can compare to the associations viewers will make to an actor’s work. Artworks are expressions of their time of creation. They bear the traces of their eras, ones that may expand the information within the film by “preserving...[the art object’s] capacity to affect the unreal situation.” Many Disney films may be geared toward children or crafted to satisfy a desire for escapism while engaging history. When a film uses art and props it becomes imbued with the aura of those images and objects.

By using history — even through vague allusions — Disney is contributing to understandings of history. As Hughes Warrington reminds us: “the language of films implies that

24 Felleman, Real Objects. p.104
25 Schrader, “Canon Fodder.” p.41
26 Wills, Disney Culture. pp.5-6
27 Hughes-Warrington, History Goes to the Movies. p.72
28 Felleman, Real Objects. pp.176-177
the historical activities we engage in are *instantiations* of, are united by, and can be traced back to something called “history.”” History is not as simple as grouping objects from similar time periods, nor is it about associating with individual events to individual encounters. History is non-linear even in its chronology. It is influenced by a range of socio-cultural events that interweave with each other. Since a film is short, its portrayal of history is fragmented in order to serve its main narrative. But, all the historical images seen in a film create a “database” of sorts for the viewers. This “database” changes based on the viewer and what they have previously seen or read.

Disney films are influenced by multiple things. Walt Disney was inspired by his travels and made his films with certain ideals in mind such as true love, family values, etc. He hired artists from Europe and America to work in his studio that brought with them different cultures and styles. His relationship with artwork became a source of inspiration for the artists on his team, and the political developments of the time influenced and helped generate imagery that could be used in films. Shifting political circumstances also impacted the contexts in which his films were made.

The art historical references in Walt Disney Animation Studio’s film generate a range of meanings with which viewers can engage. By using props, artwork, and architecture, Disney is staking out its own position in the broader cinematic tendency to propagate historical

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30 Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*. p.31-32

31 Ibid. p.55

32 Bruno Girveau, “Walt Disney at The Museum?,” in *Once upon a Time: Walt Disney, the Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios* (Munich ; New York: Prestel, 2006).p.26.; Even though Walt Disney did not want to be an “intellectual” he created his works while showing his impressions of the world around him in his films.
information. They are trying to convince the public that they are partially re-telling history. Disney appeals to things that viewers have already seen and to their preconceived impressions of artworks or previous encounters with the historical information in the film. In addition, they are adding new information to the viewers’ “databases.” This is why a Disney history is already associated with the understanding of certain eras. And, to top it all off, they do it in an engaging way. A way that makes you think that, even though the magic is not real, it is more fun to believe in than the actual events.

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33 Tashiro, “When History Films (Try to) Become Paintings.” p.19


36 Wills, Disney Culture. p.40

37 Wills, Disney Culture. p.64
Chapter 1: Embracing Modernity in Disney’s Middle Ages

The middle ages are a popular subject within cinema and media. The filmic middle ages combine fantasy with reality, thus engaging in various ways with the medieval. Audiences can confront their knowledge of the middle age as it converges with the magic on screen. These films have the capacity to affect the viewers' conception of history due to the displayed imagery. When watching history on film, the viewer faces the challenges associated with historiophoty. As defined in the introduction, historiophoty involves the visual representation of history. Since cinema is a representational practice, it is challenging to accept the facts shown as true. A viewer can decide if a film has authority with respect to the history it represents by evaluating whether or not it alters or reinforces their understanding of the past. This is undoubtedly challenging when watching an animated film. Romantic storylines, “swashbuckling” adventures, and magic all become tropes in the animated medieval film. As such, films that depict the middle ages become sources for misreading this era. They also become a visual representation of the “medieval” interspersed with “modern” themes.

39 White, “Historiography and Historiophoty.”
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.p.1196
42 Williams, “Medieval Movies.” pp.7-8
43 Ibid. pp.7-8; When I use the terms modern and modernity I am referring to the time period when the films were produced. I acknowledge that the ideals of the time varied with socio-cultural determinants. I apply this term to express an age of innovation and industrialization. I apply this term to encompass the admittedly broad and complex time period and do not presume to think that all of the ideals discussed from here apply to everyone and everything within this time period. Modern and modernity are contentious terms that apply to a long time period. They are complex and contradicting terms that I apply here to America at the time of production for these films.
The modern ideals of Disney animation, as addressed further, unite with European medieval history. They portray ideals of beauty, education, and good versus bad, but they also address a new found hope for the future. Disney was not merely an entertainment company, they seemed to aim to teach their public.\footnote{In 1935, Walt Disney toured Europe and upon his return founded the Animated Research Library (ARL). The European artists on the team brought with them their styles and stories. The ARL contains books, manuscripts, and prints which was to serve as inspiration for the animators and writers on the Disney team; Bruno Girveau, “Walt Disney at The Museum?,” in Once upon a Time: Walt Disney, the Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios (Munich ; New York: Prestel, 2006), p.20; Lella Smith, “The Collections and Origins of the ARL,” in Once Upon A Time: p.38} The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1996) and The Sword in the Stone (1963) demonstrate this amalgamation of European stories and American ideologies, such as the innovation of factories.\footnote{Robin Allan, Walt Disney and Europe: European Influences on the Animated Feature Films of Walt Disney (London: John Libbey, 1999). p.7} The result of this is a combination of influences from European art history that are interpreted through an American filter. Additionally, the team of European artists fluctuated and changed through time because of the two World Wars which called many of them back home.\footnote{Noel Brown, The Children’s Film: Genre, Nation, and Narrative, vol. 63, Short Cuts (London: Wallflower Press, 2017). p.45} However, their influence was still felt, even if relayed through American artists. Thus, a mediated view of European artworks, histories, and folklore became common place. Before they made their feature-length films, Disney released The Silly Symphonies (1929-1939). These shorts aimed to teach lessons to their audience in short and humorous clips.\footnote{Gustave Doré was a nineteenth-century French painter who illustrated works by Edgar Allan Poe, Dante, and other various fairy-tales and landscapes. His modern depictions often contained dark imagery and medieval settings.} The Skeleton Dance (1929) [Fig. 1.1] portrays gothic illustrative traditions like those of Gustave Doré (1832-1893). While Doré was a French painter, his illustrations were popular amongst other great story tellers like Edgar Allan Poe.

\footnote{This applies to all of their films even if they are set in the medieval era. Including “princess” films.}
In this chapter, I will discuss films that provide an opportunity to explore the dialogue between “medieval” and “modern.” Due to these films’ intended audiences, — children — this analysis is often overlooked. Sturtevant outlines the implications of this in a study that produced the following findings:

When children are exposed to the middle ages through children’s pop culture, they become accustomed to seeing the elements of the fantastical middle ages (like wizards and dragons) alongside elements of the historical middle ages (such as knights and castles). As children age, these fantastical elements eventually become understood as not existing in reality for having existed in history … Although they become understood not the be real, they remain understood to be medieval.

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This suggests that our impression of the past is socially constructed. Whether through historiographical or historiophotical tellings, we edit our view of history based on the images of it that we experience throughout our lives. The medieval is now, after many retellings of this time period, fantastical by association.\textsuperscript{51} The material that makes architecture, objects, and artworks on screen is assumed to be actual. When watching a film the viewer assumes that a marble sculpture is made of actual sculpture materials and that an animated painting is in fact made of paint. The suspension of disbelief required to watch movies demands that the viewer sees these as real.\textsuperscript{52} As such, the materiality of the piece becomes material through this suspension of disbelief. The three-dimensionality of a sculpture becomes palpable and the height of a cathedral becomes monumental. The viewer accepts that the context in which they are viewing these objects, as well as their material, are based on material facticity: even if only by trusting their imagination.\textsuperscript{53} Disney creates in their films a time period that cannot be given a date. Yet, their films are understood as medieval despite their modern American hope for the future.\textsuperscript{54} Sturtevant’s study concluded that Disney films shaped the British population's beliefs about the middle ages. There is a clear correlation then between history and Disney films.\textsuperscript{55} In the following chapter I will outline the historical moments shown in \textit{The Hunchback of Notre-Dame} (1996), \textit{The Sword in the Stone} (1963), and \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs} (1937).

\textsuperscript{51} White, “Historiography and Historiophoty.” p.1198

\textsuperscript{52} Susan Felleman, \textit{Real Objects in Unreal Situations: Modern Art in Fiction Films} (Bristol, UK ; Chicago: Intellect, 2014). p.26

\textsuperscript{53} Felleman, \textit{Real Objects}. pp.26-39

\textsuperscript{54} Sturtevant, “You Don’t Learn It Deliberately.” p.5

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. pp.78-80; This study focuses on the films that centre around princess narrative rather than those who are meant to depict the middle ages and its narrative or history. The films still evoke a feeling of the medieval.
will also explore how the artwork and architecture shown in these films plays a key role in reinforcing the dialogue between the “medieval” and “modern.”

*The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1996)*

“You’re human, with the flesh, and the hair, and the navel lint. We’re just part of the architecture.” — Hugo

*The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* is the tale of Quasimodo and his quest for acceptance. Quasimodo lives in the Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral amongst the bells. As a baby, Quasimodo's mother was killed on the steps of the cathedral while seeking sanctuary from the Gypsy hunt. He gets sanctuary, and at the bequest of the priest in charge, the man who hunted the mother must now be his guardian. So, the archdeacon Frollo is forced to take care of this child,
whom he believes is a demon. Frollo raises Quasimodo in an isolated room because of his appearance. When the Festival of Fools begins, Quasimodo wants to participate. The gargoyles perched on the cathedral are Quasimodo's friends, and they convince him to disguise himself and go. This is where he meets Esmerelda, a dancing gypsy, and gets crowned the King of the Fools. The people he thought would be considerate of his appearance reject him though, and he winds up ridiculed by the crowd. Esmerelda frees him, and they become close. The film continues with Frollo chasing the gypsies and Quasimodo.

Disney's rendition of Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) is a romanticized version of the tale. This film exhibits a combination of nostalgia for Europe with the dark works
As mentioned above, Doré's renowned influence is familiar to the Disney audience. Here, Doré's illustrations of the Parisian streets inspired the sombre opening scene. The urgency of the woman in *Sister of Charity Saving a Child: An Incident During the Siege of Paris* [Fig. 1.3] asserts the desperation in the situation. The empty street and the shadow filled scene speak of the danger allegedly following her and the child. The opening scene's atmosphere directs the viewers to suspect the despair of Quasimodo's past. It mimics the narrative of the paintings. The mother runs to the cathedral away from the danger in the streets of Paris. Her goal is to save the baby she is carrying.

This dark scene renders the cathedral as a state in itself with its own laws. By establishing the cathedral as a space of sanctuary, it becomes evident that the walls of the cathedral are ultimately the borders of a different territory. This allows for Quasimodo's childhood sanctuary and, also, Esmerelda's refuge later in the film. Yet, this film displaces Notre-Dame de Paris from its original location and redefines it. Film recreates and re-orient stories, so the traditional associations between them and history are disorienting. This is apparent in the portrayal of Notre-Dame de Paris in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. In the film, the cathedral resembles the one in Paris today [Fig. 1.4], but it is not true to the medieval appearance of the structure. This begs the question: why depict the modern version of a medieval architectural structure as the main cathedral shown, while still including the medieval one as a model? In the following analysis I will examine the differences between the medieval and modern iterations of the

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57 Felleman, *Real Objects*. p.8
cathedral. I will also consider the implications of portraying the different versions of the structure within the film. After all, as Williams explains, all representations of the past are open to challenge because of their nature as recreations.\footnote{Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.4}

The characters of Laverne, Victor, and Hugo, \[Fig. 1.5\] provide comic relief in a film laden with impending tragedy. But, this medieval story should not include gargoyles. Notre-Dame de Paris was built between the years of 1163 and 1250 \textit{sans} gargoyles. It was restored between 1843 and 1864, and this is when the gargoyles were added. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and Jean-Baptiste Lassus identified themselves as “restorers.”\footnote{Camille, \textit{The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame}. p.5} The Committee of Arts

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{screen_shot_laverne_victor_hugo_hunchback_of_notre-dame_1996_walt_disney_animation_studios.png}
\caption{SCREEN SHOT “LAVERNE, VICTOR, HUGO” \textit{HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE-DAME}, (1996), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS}
\end{figure}
and Monuments was apprehensive about the additions planned by the architects but ultimately, they agreed to the changes.\textsuperscript{60}

“Restorations” as defined in Viollet-le-Duc's \textit{Dictionnaires} are about reinstating the architectural authenticity. This can be done by adding structural elements that were not originally there. Medieval buildings took a long time to complete, so he questioned whether they were historically accurate in themselves.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, the role of the restorer is to return the building to its original character and style. This definition led to the successful appeal to the Committee for the addition of fifty-four gargoyles and chimeras.\textsuperscript{62} The Committee deemed their restoration appropriate because the architects described their visions of sculptural birds that fell from the cathedral over time.\textsuperscript{63} Their appeal quoted Victor Hugo and contained designs for gargoyles.\textsuperscript{64} The restorers' consideration of the cathedral's history is apparent. This restored version of the cathedral is the one Disney portrays in their film. Disney portrays a mediated view of the medieval once again with modern sculptures. Sculptures, no matter if they are modern, emulate permanence. As such they are, more than painting, appropriate in relation with a distant past because they evoke the stability of old sculptures.\textsuperscript{65} Laverne, Victor, and Hugo do not belong to

\textsuperscript{60} Camille, \textit{The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame}. p.5.; This was the committee in charge of changes to the cathedral.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{63} Camille, \textit{The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame}. p.8

\textsuperscript{64} Victor Hugo sat on the Committee of Arts and Monuments.

the medieval era. They belong to the made-up medieval image that Disney portrays. They are modern sculptures meant to evoke a past long gone. By adding the gargoyles to the film, Disney appeals to the enduring nature of sculpture that Viollet-le-Duc and Lassus also believed in.

The different stages of construction and restorations of Notre-Dame de Paris are shown in the film. While the cathedral that is the centre of the film is the modern one, we also quickly see the medieval version of it as well. Quasimodo's model city is built around a model of Notre-Dame, a central part of Parisian life. The model is a replica of Notre-Dame [Fig. 1.6], pre-restoration. So, once again, the choice to use the mediated medieval image is apparent. This is a deliberate decision that Disney makes in order to insert modern imagery into their vision of the


66Klein, “Ancien et Nouveau.” p.20
medieval. This demonstrates that the model city is the representation of Quasimodo's imagination. The gargoyles he befriends recreate those perched on the restored Notre-Dame de Paris. As such, they are creations of modernity that reinforce the narrative of medieval imagery. They challenge the authority of the film by blurring the line between history and fantasy. While the gargoyles are not a Disney invention, they do not belong in the medieval story. This creates a fantastical representation of the medieval. The middle ages are often represented as inherently magical, but instead of knights or druids, Disney added gargoyles to this film. These characters take on the role of advisors for Quasimodo. Here, history is slightly altered in order to better the main character’s environment.

In Hugo’s novel, Quasimodo’s character protects the cathedral. He is a metaphorical gargoyle. He is the inspiration for the gargoyles in the restoration and a hero for the "monsters" (or fools) in the streets of Paris. Michel Foucault states that the monster is one that breaks the laws. The human monster (monstre humain) is one who violates both societal laws and natural laws. Thus, Quasimodo, child of a gypsy breaks societal laws that restrict those deemed monstrous from living in Paris due to his residence within the cathedral. Moreover, Quasimodo’s hunchback and disfigured face breaks the natural laws of beauty: Quasimodo is a monster. Frollo makes it obvious that Quasimodo should not expect love due to the way he looks.


68 Sturtevant, “You Don’t Learn It Deliberately.”p.80

69 Zarifopol-Johnston, “The Cathedral in the Book.” p.28


71 Ibid. n.p.
When Frollo pulls Quasimodo from his mother's arms and unveils him he yells: “monster!” Quasimodo should hide his appearance, if even from the “fools” at the festival. Frollo deems the gypsies in the film as monstrous because of their lifestyle. His position of power within the church allows him to control society's values because of the importance of the church in Parisian life. Thus, as archdeacon, he can decide what makes for proper societal behaviour. In prosecuting the gypsies, he determines that they are breaking societal laws. Quasimodo's appearance and his lineage break all the laws. He is a human monster by Foucault's definition: he breaks both natural (beauty) and societal laws (that persecuted gypsies).

Foucault’s definition of monstrosity does not only apply to Quasimodo. Foucault elaborates on this concept and says that the monster who breaks societal law does so deliberately.
They want to trap the law in itself by breaking the law to respond to their own poverty.\textsuperscript{72} This is a person who knows that what they are doing is breaking the law, but continues to do so as a means of survival. In this way, Esmerelda is a monster as well. However, Disney’s portrayal of her is informed by an Orientalist framework.\textsuperscript{73} Esmerelda’s portrayal as a burlesque dancing gypsy is directly informed from the practices of Orientalism that were popular in Western art at the time of publication. Disney depicted her as she would have been depicted by Hugo and his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{74} In nineteenth century France, Esmerelda was portrayed as an exotic and sensual woman. In \textit{Esmérelda} [Fig. 1.7] by Antoine Weirtz she is clad in red and accompanied by

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig1.png}
\caption{SCREEN SHOT “ESMERELDA” \textit{HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE-DAME}, (1996), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid. n.p.


\textsuperscript{74} Craven, “Esmerelda of Notre Dame.” p.226
a goat to emphasize her sensuality. In Disney’s film Esmerelda does not appear to be from France. But, when she dances in the Festival of the Fools, she too is clad in red, an embodiment of mystery on stage [Fig. 1.8]. Her monstrosity is attributed to her position in society and is reinforced by Frollo’s constant chase (both intentional and not). Disney kept the sidekick goat, and emphasized its symbolism by making a gargoyle fall in love with it. We are expected to believe that this story is in fact set in the middle ages. Yet, here the character of Esmerelda was created by a modern author. She is inspired in Disney's film by a painting from the Romantic era. The implied medievalism in this film is informed by modernity yet again.

The view of Esmerelda as exotic, sensuous, and desirable reflects the portrayal of Eastern cultures by white Western artists. Artists would paint and write about countries for people who could not travel there for themselves. Such a portrayal emphasizes Esmerelda’s monstrosity, in Foucault’s terms. She receives sanctuary at Notre-Dame, and this gives her the time to reflect on the treatment of “monsters”. So, she prays and sings for God to help the outcasts. The ballad acknowledges that she should not be speaking to God due to her societal status. This emphasizes the plight of the outcasts who question their position in Paris at the time. She prays for a change. She knows that her gypsy lifestyle breaks societal rules, but she continues to survive.

Foucault's definition of monstrosity is slightly more complex. He says that the most cruel monster is the one who takes advantage of their power. They assume that any broken law requires the same punishment, regardless of motive. In this film, the embodiment of this sort of monstrosity is Frollo. His heinousness is the cause of his demise. This demonstrates Disney's view of monstrosity. The monster whose monstrosity allows them to hurt others is bad. Monsters

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whose monstrosity is a result of circumstance or survival are not to be sentenced. Frollo's peril comes at the hands of visual representations of monstrosity. He falls off the church buttresses as the gargoyle crumbles under him. During the whole film, Frollo condemns everyone else's monstrous ways. But he also struggles with his own. He believes he is purer than the common folk, so he blames Esmerelda for teasing him. He claims that she works for the devil and likens her to hellfire because she awakens his lust. He pleads to the Virgin Mary to protect him from this seduction. Disney's depiction demonstrates the separation of the difference between monstrous and villainous. Quasimodo and Esmerelda are not casualties to their monstrosity and are exempt from the punishment. “Notre-Dame de Paris” by Victor Hugo was a modern creation of a medieval perception to begin with.76 Disney added a modern filter to this amalgamation of historic, exotic and monstrous; all while shaping medieval looking stories with modern ways.

The view of monstrosity in this film does not differ entirely from Victor Hugo’s depiction of the cathedral in the book. After all, he had described it as monstrous in itself after facing the atrocities in the eighteenth century.77 The monsters portrayed by gargoyles in the architecture mimic the description of Quasimodo written by Hugo. As such, Hugo allowed for monstrosity to become a possibility in the “form of thought” presented to his audience.78 This form of thought was adopted by Disney in their portrayal of the film.

In The Hunchback of Notre-Dame Disney emphasizes the use of modern creations to inform the medieval story they are trying to portray. The “middle ages” in Disney look the part,

76 Craven, “Esmerelda of Notre Dame.” p.231
77 Camille, The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame. p.74
78 Ibid.
therefore viewers are likely to believe it to be so. Yet, though the setting seems medieval, the sources are not. Moreover, the ideas of monstrosity and the morals presented here are Disney's way of teaching their audience. As such, viewers learn from the film what is wrong and what is right according to Disney. The audience is not being presented with an accurate glimpse of medieval Paris, but a medieval world filtered through a modern sensibility.

_Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs (1937)_

“The Queen, She’s wicked! She’s bad! She’s mighty mean! She’s an old witch! And I’m warnin’ ya, if that Queen finds her here, she’ll swoop down and wreak her vengeance on us!” — The Dwarfs
Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs also makes use of real statues and architecture. This was the first feature-length film produced by Disney. After the release of their shorts Disney's success was amplified when Snow White came out in 1937. The film displays medieval sculptures, literature, and architecture. In this Grimm Brothers adaptation, Disney inflects the fairy tale with some modern influences, thus contributing to the discussion between the two eras.

The Evil Queen character [Fig. 1.9] is the villain. She is “both a thirties’ femme fatale and a genuinely disturbing figure from an older world.” The Queen terrifies her public with threatening glares and witchcraft. The setting of the film makes the viewer believe that she is from the medieval era, which coincides with the inspiration for her character. The sculpture of Uta stands in the Naumburg Cathedral in Germany [Fig. 1.10]. Uta was a donor for the

79 Robin Allan, Walt Disney and Europe: European Influences on the Animated Feature Films of Walt Disney (London: John Libbey, 1999). p.55
construction of this cathedral in the thirteenth century. Since the medieval period, Naumberg has retained most of its original statuary.\textsuperscript{80} However, Uta's aura of pride for the German "robust and perseverant peasant inextricably bound to the native soil" was changed during World War One.\textsuperscript{81} Then, Uta’s sculpture became propaganda in Germany as the "embodiment of Germanic essence."\textsuperscript{82} The Evil Queen reflects the propagandist aura of Uta's image. Conversely, the Evil Queen's character constructs a new aura for Uta's sculpture. Disney's portrayal emphasizes America's impression of the "Germanic essence" in the 1930s. No matter how a piece is shown in film, the reception of the piece will alter the viewers' reception of the "original."\textsuperscript{83} The propagandized image of Uta had an aura of pride for the Germans who circulated it during World War One.\textsuperscript{84} She is the embodiment of evil attributed to Germany in World War One for contemporaneous Americans.\textsuperscript{85} Modern sociocultural events are impressed on the Queen's character. Medieval imagery in \textit{Snow White} is thus imbued with modern influences.

The setting of the film provides insight into the discussion between medieval and modern as well. European architecture inspired \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs}. The castle in the film [Fig. 1.11] is Segovia in Spain. [Fig. 1.12]\textsuperscript{86} This castle was the home of The Queen of Castille


\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.p.44

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Felleman, \textit{Real Objects}. pp.5-6

\textsuperscript{84} Jung, “Peasant Meal or Lord’s Feast.”p.40

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. p.41

\textsuperscript{86} Allan, \textit{Walt Disney and Europe}. p.47
FIG. 1.11: SCREEN SHOT “QUEEN’S CASTLE,” SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1937), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

FIG. 1.12: ALCÁZAR SEGOVIA CASTLE, SEGOVIA, SPAIN, HTTPS://WWW.THOUSANDWONDERS.NET/SEGOVIA+CASTLE (WEB: ACCESSED JULY 26, 2018)
who funded Columbus' voyages. She massacred and expelled Jews and Muslims from her kingdom. She is not cited as a direct source for the Evil Queen, but she proves as a proper motivation for the character.

Snow White meets the prince by a well that was inspired by MGM Production's *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) [Fig. 1.13]. Disney was informed about other modern depictions of medieval-set stories. Additionally, the film is set in a forest — which has become an identifier for the medieval, even without a date-stamp. These architectural sites and other productions helps to

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88 Ibid.

89 This further expresses the influence that Walt Disney’s European trip had on his film.

90 Robin Allan, “Disney’s European Sources,” in *Once upon a Time: Walt Disney, the Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2006), p. 125

91 Sturtevant, “You Don’t Learn It Deliberately.” p. 84
understand *Snow White*. All the choices made by a studio shape the viewer's reception of history from the moment they view the film. Films are not only spaces for escape.\textsuperscript{92} *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* provides a fun fairy tale and—with some research—a glimpse into the tension between modern and medieval. While the film does not claim to be historical, it makes use of recognizable medieval imagery. This is significant because though the setting is assumed to be medieval, the representation of it through modern determinants is done so in order to make the present audience relate to it.\textsuperscript{93}

*The Sword in the Stone (1963)*

*And below the hilt, in letters of gold, were written these words: "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is rightwise king, born of England." Though many tried for the sword with all their strength, none could move the sword nor stir it; so, the miracle had not worked, and England was still without a king. And in time, the marvelous sword was forgotten. This was a Dark Age, without law and without order. Men lived in fear of one another, for the strong preyed upon the weak. — Narrator*

Disney also draws inspiration from literature from the middle ages. Poison apples are recognizable to Disney fans because of *Snow White*. Yet, the symbolism of a poison apple alludes to biblical and mythological texts, popular in the Middle Ages including stories about Merlin.\textsuperscript{94} A symbol of druidism and medieval magic himself, Merlin was the centre of many medieval stories.

\textsuperscript{92} David Riesman and Evelyn T. Riesman, “Movies and Audiences,” *American Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1952). p.195

\textsuperscript{93} Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.4

From there the legends spread. So, the introduction of The Sword in the Stone with an illuminated manuscript [Fig. 1.14] is appropriate. It is meant to make the viewer feel as though they are reading a legend from the middle ages. The introduction of a film with a manuscript identifies it as medieval. By opening with a manuscript these films are identifying themselves as proper sources with “textual authority,” thereby delineating their significance within the medieval framework. Illuminated manuscripts are popular art objects that have survived since the middle ages. There were different types of manuscripts: liturgical, gradualls, books of hours, medical and law documents, almanacs, etc. Each different type had a different purpose. Disney

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95 Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.17

96 Sturtevant, “You Don’t Learn It Deliberately.”p.86

97 Jeffrey F. Hamburger et al., eds., Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections (Boston, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2016).
demonstrates their knowledge of medieval manuscripts and the importance of such texts as textual sources.\textsuperscript{98} The manuscript in the opening sequence is a narrative device to introduce the film. At the outset of the film, the viewer knows to suspend their disbelief, and expect a medieval narrative. Yet, we cannot precisely identify the time period of this film.\textsuperscript{99}

*The Sword in the Stone* is an Arthurian story adapted from T.H White’s novel of the same name. Its common images of heroism are meant to emphasize the setting as medieval. This film reveals Disney's ability to exploit the public's nostalgia for romantic adventures, all the while combining the present and the past, thus, creating an unidentifiable time period that resembles the medieval.\textsuperscript{100} Merlin is Arthur's prophetic teacher, but he is the source of some of the film’s references to modernity. For instance, he says: “Let’s assembly line it!” Merlin appeals to the audience's knowledge of factories after the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution and factory settings are very much modern products. This reinforces the impression Merlin gives of medievalism. He demonstrates that he believes that the industrial modern is more effective than the medieval method and makes use of the modern invention to make the audience identify with the narrative presented to them.\textsuperscript{101}

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98 Bruno Girveau, “The Nostalgic Builder: Walt Disney, Architecture and Design,” in *Once upon a Time: Walt Disney, the Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios* (Munich ; New York: Prestel, 2006). p.232; Disney identifies *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* as a source for films such as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty; One of the most popular book of letters, The Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry has also been cited as one of the visual influences for many of Disney's films.

99 Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.6

100 Pugh, “Disney’s Retroprogressive Medievalism.”p.5

101 Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.4
\end{flushright}
Geoffrey of Monmouth is the medieval author most responsible for imbuing Merlin with prophetic abilities.¹⁰² Most of Merlin's prophecies used animals whose symbolism remains ambiguous in meaning. Monmouth exploited the multiplicity of meaning in these prophecies because they apply to different cultures, histories, and people. They are universal.¹⁰³ In the film, Merlin shape-shifts into different animals with Arthur in order to teach him various lessons, something often seen in Medieval literature.¹⁰⁴ Disney's characterization of Merlin and Arthur's

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¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 61-64

story also includes such shape-shifting. These lessons about danger, humour, and love direct Arthur's education. They are meant to educate Arthur in a more modern way to add to his “traditional” squire's education. Merlin's opinion of medieval education is clear throughout the film. He expresses disappointment with the lack of adequate medieval modes of learning. In turn, he implies that modern approaches are better. This supports the common (mis)conception of the medieval period as the “Dark Ages”, an “age of inconvenience” as Merlin says, “a medieval mess” that leads him to live as a recluse in a forest hut. So, as Monmouth did in his literature, Disney makes use of Merlin’s shape-shifting in order to educate Arthur.

Merlin lives alone with wild animals, which perpetuates the “wild man” image attributed to him. In different versions of his story, Merlin adopts the attributes of wild man lore. This wild man lifestyle was often portrayed in literature as a method of disguise for Merlin: another shape-shift of sorts. Merlin appeared as a wild man when it was amusing to the public, or when his actions could not be explained. But his portrayal as such was strategic. He was magical and thus could make inexplicable things happen. In medieval manuscripts, wild men [Fig. 1.15] were images of monstrosity that explained inexplicable events. Wild men were responsible for anything that gave cause to worry. They presented a certain archetype of masculinity: brute, wild, untamed, and erotic. Their abnormally long hair separated them from

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106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

civilized men. A female's victory over a male's sexuality is the only way to challenge such an inherent masculinity. The depiction of Merlin by Disney seems to separate him from this aspect of his wild man lifestyle, while emphasizing the solitary aspect.

Madam Mim [Fig. 1.16] serves as the image of — vile — female triumph. She embodies the opposite of Merlin: the evil counterpart to his goals. She has the power of shape-shifting as

FIG. 1.16: SCREEN SHOTS “MADAM MIM,” THE SWORD IN THE STONE (1963), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

109 Ibid. p.1

110 Ibid. p.60
well, but her powers are weaponized instead of used to teach. When she competes in a wizard's
duel with Merlin, she demonstrates her abilities to Arthur. She transforms into an array of pink
and purple creatures. Her shape-shifting abilities are also at the forefront of her introductory
song: “Mad Madam Mim.” When she introduces herself to Arthur, she shifts into a pretty woman
fit to seduce men. She warns that this is “only skin deep [because] she’s an ugly old creep.” She
is the embodiment of evil that uses her femininity to win.\textsuperscript{111} Yet, she appeals to this appearance to
fool a wild man through sexuality. This perpetuates the image of the strong man's success
disrupted by feminine wiles.

But Merlin infects Mim by shape-shifting into a disease. By doing so, he wins with wit.
This re-emphasizes the male's ability to triumph over a woman's wiles with intelligence. It also
implies that Merlin reflects a modern education regardless of his portrayal as a medieval man.
These disjunctions between medieval and modern express the difference between the two eras.\textsuperscript{112}
Merlin continuously defines the advantages of modernity over the middle ages. Arthur's
crowning as king is the conclusion of the film, so it differs from other Arthurian lore.\textsuperscript{113} This film
dedicates itself to the education of a child that is superior to the education of a squire.

The dichotomy between Arthur and the other characters is strengthened further. The
characters that aim to evoke the medieval have British accents whereas Arthur has an American
accent. This is meant to emphasize his right to power. Americans were portrayed as strong, new
leaders in comparison with the monarchies of medieval England. Superimposing American

\textsuperscript{111} Pugh, “Disney’s Retroprogressive Medievalism.” p.5

\textsuperscript{112} Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.6

\textsuperscript{113} Rob Gossedge, “Chapter 7: The Sword in the Stone: American Translatio And Disney’s Anti-Medievalism,” in
The Disney middle ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past, 1st ed., The New middle ages (New York: Palgrave
voices onto European heroes became a filmic tradition after World War Two. This practice reiterates the contrast between the magical medieval and the ideal modern. Merlin idealizes the modern era of industrialization. He also describes the medieval era as a mess. The only time he changes his mind on this is when he returns from Bermuda.

The image of the enchanter (or Merlin) had begun to be explored in Disney’s *Fantasia* (1940). “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” segment of the film animates a scene to the music of Dukas. Dukas’ music was a modern piece of music that romanticized the medieval. The image of the reclusive mage, enthralled with his own magic is at the heart of this story. He only speaks to his apprentice (Mickey Mouse) and furthers the wild man image. The comical drama of the

FIG. 1.17: SCREEN SHOTS “THE SORCERER’S APPRENTICE” *FANTASIA* (1940), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

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114 Ibid. p.127

115 This alludes to the conflicts that resulted from the involvement of the British Army in Bermuda in the mid-twentieth century; “British Army in Bermuda from 1701 to 1977,” accessed November 30, 2017, [http://bermuda-online.org/britarmy.htm](http://bermuda-online.org/britarmy.htm).

independant working brooms [Fig. 1.17] introduces the future possibility for Merlin to do Arthur's chores. “The Sorcerer's Apprentice” portrays childish impatience and the repercussions of relying on magic. It whimsically plays with a scenario that is implied to be medieval. Mickey Mouse's character displays the troubles associated with the barbaric alchemy of the middle ages.

Tison Pugh addresses the Disney tradition that involves The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The Sword in the Stone, and Fantasia:

Disney animates fairy-tales in the literal sense of the verb, in the many cartoon-short and feature-length films of these narratives, but history in all of its incarnations is ready for Disney animation in a more fluid sense, of rewriting history so that it comes alive in telling an untrue tale that nonetheless speaks Disney truth.

This Disney truth relies on a representation of sources that are medieval — or that emulate medievalism — to identify commentary on the middle ages. These stories are set in a medieval time without a date. They are set in a made-up time period that Disney has approached as a method to reiterate lessons and ideologies that Disney thought were important to share.

This representation of a fictitious middle ages entices audiences to embrace modernity. The viewers' understanding of the middle ages is altered by sculpture, architecture, and literature

117 Ibid. p.98
119 Ibid. pp. 107-108
120 Pugh, “Disney’s Retroprogressive Medievalism.” pp.11-12
121 Labbie, “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice.”p.110
122 Williams, “Medieval Movies.” p.9
as it is portrayed in the films. Studies observe Disney's influence on the understanding of history.\(^\text{123}\) Thus, the rhetoric presented in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and The Sword in the Stone* affects the audience's impression of medievalism. The historical discrepancies in these films can be attributed to whimsy. Yet, they are part of Disney's integration into the public's understanding of Art History. The challenges of historiophoty in these films is still apparent, but it is better observed when the viewer suspends their disbelief. The audience can question the historical information presented to them. As argued above, Disney adapts familiar European folklore and imbues it with modern ideas. This time period looks the part, sounds familiar, and informs the viewer's understanding of the middle ages, no matter how fantastical that understanding becomes.\(^\text{124}\)

\(^{123}\) Sturtevant, “You Don’t Learn It Deliberately.” p.80  
\(^{124}\) Wills, *Disney Culture*. pp.10-11
Chapter 2: Gendered Heroes: Portraying and Breaking Archetypal Genders in Disney Films

Disney’s princesses are a popular franchise. The princes, pirates, and heroes they oppose on screen are just as desirable. The characters in Disney films tend to portray archetypical genders, something Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity and gender as a social construct effectively challenge. For Butler, individuals identify with an array of different genders. However, in certain instances and spaces, they are expected to perform in a way that reinforce the binaries of female/male, woman/man. Archetypical gender, a concept grounded in psychology, accounts for the prescription of certain traits to each sex, ones that entrench a hierarchy that esteems the male over the female. In princess films, the archetypal female is typically passive and submissive, a beauty in search of love. Gender is a marker of identity, whereas, sex is predicated upon physical anatomy and constricting medical rules. Still, sex and gender are both employed to determine gender roles. In this chapter I will unpack art historical references that inform the characters’ gender identities within Beauty and the Beast (1991) and Mulan (1998). In accordance with Butler’s argument of gender these films demonstrate that the “rules” of gender roles do not necessarily adhere to the gender binary as much as the dichotomy suggests. Yet, they are still very much at the base of these narratives. In an attempt to question these rules and predispositions I hope to challenge the cis-gendered binary. A cis-gendered person is someone who identifies with the gender that “matches” their physical sex. As such,


127 Ibid.
their gender performativity is also affected by gender norms. While I do not aim to critique those who identify as cis-gender, representation of diverse gender identities in film is important. Representation ensures that the impression of characters on screens is not created to perpetuate stereotypes.\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Beauty and the Beast} breaks these boundaries in a way that begins Disney's depiction of an alternate gender role dispersal.

Disney films still subscribe to princess versus pirate depictions of women and men in their animated films.\textsuperscript{129} In short, they are heteronormative narratives. However, there is some self-reflexive critique as demonstrated by Disney/Pixar’s construction of the “New Man.”\textsuperscript{130} The “New Man” of Disney/Pixar examines the archetypal masculinity of men in Disney films and explains that this extreme masculinity was the reason for these characters’ failure to achieve their goals.\textsuperscript{131} The concept of the “New Man” describes male characters in newer films who are rewarded by accepting more “feminine” traits.\textsuperscript{132} They become more caring, less macho, and more approachable. This “New Man” still abides by heteronormative relationship practices, but embraces the “homosocial desire” in their platonic relationships.\textsuperscript{133} This leads to the negation of the alpha-male traits they first embodied at the beginning of a film, and opens up the possibility of genuine friendship and respect between two male characters. The “New Man” theory bhas explanatory power for the films examined here and made by Disney/Pixar. However, what of the


\textsuperscript{129} Sturtevant, “You Don’t Learn It Deliberately.” p.80

\textsuperscript{130} Ken Gillam and Shannon R. Wooden, “Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar,” \textit{Journal of Popular Film and Television} 36, no. 1 (August 7, 2008).

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid. p.3

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. p.2

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid. p.3
films made before the 2006 merger?134 While *Toy Story* (1995) and *Cars* (2006) provide critiques of gender roles and the development of male characters, Disney attempted to break this binary before their merger with Pixar.135

Though some progress has been made in Disney films with regard to their portrayal of princesses, certain characterizations of princesses such as Merida, in *Brave* (2012), still prove problematic. Whereas Merida is less submissive than princesses of the past — ahem *Cinderella* — she is still constrained by her royal status.136 She is still expected to perform in a certain way, regardless of her strong will. When she breaks the rules and finds the witch that gives her the spell to quiet down her mother she gets punished. As a result, while constricting gender roles may be identified as such by the film, they are not fully challenged. So, this narrative becomes a woman’s foray into “rebellion”, that ends when she embraces her role in society. Moreover, in *Frozen*, while it is admirable that Queen Elsa’s love is familial, her sister Anna is desperate for heteronormative romance. Anna blindly gets engaged to the first man who pays her any attention; even against Elsa’s insistence that marrying someone you just met is foolish. Disney still insists on portraying entrenched gender roles and heteronormative behaviour, even in films that claim to be above the true love’s kiss trope. There is a predisposition in these films to appeal to cis-gender and heteronormative identities in order to achieve *happily ever after*. While some of the artwork in these films confirm these archetypical gender norms, others have the potential to disrupt them. As such, the artworks in these films hint at the development of more complex

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135 Gillam and Wooden, “Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar.” pp.6-7

gender identities for some characters. Also, some of the artworks discussed in the Mulan case study aim to problematize the representation of her character as a heteronormative cis-gendered woman. While sexuality can only be evaluated on a case by case basis, the following analysis will critique Mulan’s heteronormative narrative.

*Beauty and the Beast (1991)*

“Here, picture this: a rustic hunting lodge, my latest kill roasting on the fire, and my little wife massaging my feet, while the little ones play on the floor with the dogs. We’ll have six or seven!” — Gaston

*Beauty and the Beast* is the story of a French girl, Belle, from a provincial town who falls in love with her captor. Bored with life, Belle searches for adventure in the books she reads. As an inventor’s daughter, and as someone who does not identify with anyone else in the village, Belle questions her place in the small town. The local heartthrob, Gaston, sets his sights on her and attempts to woo her. Annoyed with his attempts, Belle continuously denies him, which only makes Gaston try harder. When her father finds himself trapped in a castle in a forest, Belle rescues him. She takes his place as the castle’s prisoner. Here, she discovers that the castle is under a curse which turned the servants into objects, and the master into a Beast. To break the curse, the Beast must learn to love and convince someone to love him, as he is, before the last petal falls from the enchanted rose. Since the rose is wilting quickly, the servants attempt to make Belle’s stay more comfortable. Eventually, Belle and the Beast become friends and begin to co-exist in the castle. When Gaston threatens to lock up Belle’s father, Maurice, in an asylum, the Beast lets her go save him. Now, she is free. While Maurice was raving about the Beast who
took his daughter, Gaston comes up with the plan to attack the Beast, “rescue” Belle, and keep her for himself. When he gets to the castle, he finds the Beast, no longer in a fighting mood, ready to accept the consequences of his past. When Belle finds the wounded Beast, they admit to the love they have for one another. The curse is lifted.

*Beauty and the Beast* provides an opportunity to perform an analysis of gender identities. Gaston, the disgustingly brutish man who pines for Belle is the ultimate alpha-male. He assumes that Belle will want to marry him based on her own good looks which is comical because it seems illogical. The public fawns over him, three love blind women follow his every move, and his sidekick, LeFou, boosts his ego. He intimidates the town but is nevertheless met with a large following. In his introductory song “Gaston”, the public’s admiration is apparent.
The crowded pub seems to be a typical city — public — gathering place. Yet, Gaston has his own man-cave area by the fireplace. His importance in the community is emphasized. His hunting prowess is displayed on the walls by his many hunting trophies, and his portrait. This hunting portrait [Fig. 2.1], surrounded by an ornate frame of antlers and bones, hangs above the fireplace. The frame signifies Gaston’s awareness of the presentation practices involving self-portraiture. However, this frame borders on kitsch and only manages to poorly mimic the type of ornate frames of traditional portraiture. Furthermore, the nondescript background of his portrait does not offer any hints about where Gaston might hunt, rending context unimportant. Instead, the main focus of the painting remains on Gaston, who holds his blunderbuss upwards against his hips and in a position reminiscent of an erect phallus. Gaston’s macho personality and masculinity is thus clearly on display.

While LeFou sings about Gaston’s many exploits and the qualities that separate him from the average man, the shot pans back to Gaston sitting in his chair, under his portrait, for all to admire. He holds himself in such high regard that he carves out for himself a personal space in an otherwise public setting. When seeing just how much LeFou admires Gaston, it is impossible not to question the motive of his admiration. It is possible that LeFou has feelings for Gaston.137 The entire song progresses as a semi-love song conducted by LeFou to boost Gaston’s ego after he gets rejected by Belle. This song plays out as LeFou boasts about Gaston’s many archetypal masculine traits — like fighting — in order to appeal to his self-importance. If a character means to adhere to the “New Man” theory, then their relationship with their sidekick holds some

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137 A theory that has been re-addressed in the 2017 live-action version of Beauty and the Beast where LeFou’s character is portrayed in a more obvious way. It is obvious that he pines for Gaston in this version, while it is only suggested in the animated tale.
importance.\textsuperscript{138} Posited as the method through which the male character achieves his rediscovered self, the male to male relationship constitutes a development.\textsuperscript{139} LeFou’s admiration suggests that Gaston is unlikely to change because LeFou is ridiculed throughout the film. His name means “The Crazy One” in French, which makes the viewer question his sanity, and he endures endless abuse from Gaston, which he seems to accept. His obeisant relationship with Gaston reflects the laughable love of the three blonde maids. They are slaves to the archetypal masculinity. Here, Gaston is clearly not a “New Man” but an alpha-male. His excessive displays of masculinity are parodic in some cases, but they embody the macho character that villainizes him at the conclusion of the film. When he fights Beast in a battle for dominance, Gaston gets so caught up in wanting to be the strongest, that he loses: he falls off the castle. His archetypal masculinity leads to the fall of his self-made power. Where Gaston is the extreme archetypical male, Belle challenges the femininity expected from Disney heroines. His masculinity counters Belle’s femininity.

In the song “Belle”, it becomes obvious that she is isolated from others in her provincial town. She wanders to the bookstore where she selects her favourite book in the hopes of some entertainment and adventure in her otherwise provincial life. Dazed and distracted she walks through the town while reading her book, and right when the viewers worry that she will be drenched in water, she tips a store sign to protect herself. She demonstrates that she might not be as distracted as the townspeople might think. On this sign there is a singular pipe. This image of a pipe is reminiscent of Magritte’s \textit{The Treachery of Images} (1929-1930). [Fig 2.2] Magritte

\textsuperscript{138} Gillam and Wooden, “Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar.” p.5

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
invites you to question your beliefs about what you are seeing through text “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” below an image of a pipe.


René Magritte (1898-1967) was a Belgian surrealist painter who painted *mystère*. In *The Treachery of Images* he invites you to question the linguistic attachments between signifier and signified. By contradicting in words the visual image, he makes the viewer question what they are looking at. In this painting it is undeniable that what we are looking at is a pipe. Why would you question it? What Magritte does is re-align the viewer’s belief system, not unlike the process of suspending your disbelief when watching a movie. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle invites you to question what you are expecting of her. She is not like the other girls in town: searching for true love or to become someone’s little wife. Or is she? She claims that her favourite book is about adventure, yet the part she explained in most detail is about prince

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141 Ibid. p.30
charming — her favourite part. Belle’s motives for true love are still part of this film’s story. She wants true love; one that is not provincial, but full of adventure. The addition of Magritte’s work is here a visual representation of the complexities of Belle’s character. She still identifies with heteronormative desires, yet she challenges the role imposed onto women in this film. She is not anyone’s wife, nor is she looking to be. She fantasizes about the different adventures and discoveries she could make before falling in love. She identifies as cis-gender, but she wants more from life than an archetypal series of events because of her gender and her social circumstances.

Beast’s character is the one that develops the most in regards to the “New Man” theory. His evolution story does begin with his change from man to Beast when an enchantress curses him and his castle for his lack of empathy and absolute arrogance. This iteration of Beast’s character draws the parallel between him and Gaston. This powerful figure, whom we assume is attractive based on the painting in the West Wing, was punished for his garish egotism. His alpha-male method of ruling led to a witch’s curse that was meant to make him embrace more than his power and his looks. However, Beast is forced to evolve, whereas Gaston does not change. This leads to his punishment at the end of the film. Both of these men were in positions of power, yet Beast’s power is returned to him once he accepts his new self. These positions of power are different in nature as well. Beast is a member of the aristocracy. He is powerful because of his lineage and his upbringing. This bred in him an egotism that was based on material possession and power over the staff that lives to serve him. Gaston’s power is bred through popularity. He is a hunter and a fighter, and every one in town wants to be like him. It is
not a power that will change the nation, but Gaston has the power to change the world around him.

The portrait in the West Wing [Fig. 2.3] depicts a young adult Adam (Beast’s name before transformation) in an ornate frame, presumably shredded by Beast’s paws in an outburst of anger. As a Beast he lives in a state of frozen time, forever losing his temper and giving in to the violent creature he has become. The destruction of Adam’s portrait appeals to the facticity of his change from man to Beast which emphasizes his descent into the temper-filled Beast. This portrait also serves as a visual cue for Belle to recognize Adam later when he transforms back. This painting is how Belle understands Beast’s story. In viewing the portrait in the forbidden West Wing the audience views in a time-based action the development of Beast’s character as described above. As time passes around the painting, interaction with the painting inflates its aura.¹⁴² This portrait of Adam serves as a window to the past, not unlike the use of other artworks and sculptures. These personal histories are shaped by the mediums displayed. Adam was important enough to have a portrait of himself commissioned. This portrait became the identifier of the patron. He is not portrayed with any attributes, nor with any distinguishing traits. There is no indication at hobbies, or interests, or careers in this painting. Only his bust is portrayed. His hair is clean and perfectly placed, his expression is fairly neutral, and his clothing suggests royal dress. The frame is ornate, gilded, and proper. Adam was defined by his power and his looks, but once he transforms into a “New Man” he is defined by his caring and studious behaviour.

Beast’s castle is strewn with intimidating sculptures that cast shadows while making you wonder if there were sculptures before the curse or if they are people who perished in the curse.

¹⁴² Ibid.
These sculptures find themselves in the halls and perched around the castle’s exterior architecture as well. Sculptures were objects of power and status. Adam was a man hungry for power, thus he would have surrounded himself with objects that emphasized his status. The aura of an old sculpture comes through on screen and expresses the material facticity of the space it occupies as a three-dimensional form. Sculpture in itself — due to its nature as a representational artwork often found on tombs or a reproduction of a past long gone — can elicit fear in the viewer. These seem to be forgotten people forever trapped in the dark hallways of Beast’s castle. The Beast, pre-“New Man” transformation, lived a lavish lifestyle. The sculptures

144 Ibid.
are there as an expression of status, as objects that demonstrate taste and induce desire.\textsuperscript{146} Yet, these sculptures also represent death, they signify Disney’s relationship with death where, death equals regeneration.\textsuperscript{147} They foreshadow Beast’s resuscitation. During his battle with Gaston at the end of the film, Beast disguises himself as one of the chimeras on the castle’s buttresses. As such, he identifies himself with the monsters portrayed by the sculptures. When he grabs hold of Gaston and threatens to drop him off the castle there is a moment of change observed in Beast. He sees that killing Gaston, no matter what he is doing, is not the answer. Between the moment he acts as a terrifying sculpture and the moment he spares Gaston’s life, Beast exhibits change. He does not only learn to love Belle, he learns to care for other people.

The castle in \textit{Beauty and the Beast} also serves to develop Beast’s masculinity in an interesting way. It is based on Château de Chambord which was built in the sixteenth century and commissioned by King François I.\textsuperscript{148} Though we can only speculate as to who was the architect of the castle, the different uses of this castle have been documented.\textsuperscript{149} This castle was first built as a glorified hunting lodge, not to be used as a permanent residence by anyone, but to house the strongest of men who were willing to \textit{brave} the wilderness to go hunting.\textsuperscript{150} This hyper-masculine aspect of the architecture’s past inflects a similar strength of character on the animated. Although Beast is not portrayed as a hunter like Gaston, he is a strong and brutish man. He does not waver when he needs to protect Belle from the wolves. Beast is brave enough

\textsuperscript{146} Susan Felleman, \textit{Art in the Cinematic Imagination}, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006). p.3


\textsuperscript{148} “Brief History of Château de Chambord,” accessed April 21, 2018, \url{https://www.european-traveler.com/france/brief-history-chateau-de-chambord/}. WEB


\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
to survive in the wild forest. This relationship with hunting explains the location of the castle in the film since it is sequestered deep in the forest. The castle was built just before the Baroque Period began. So, when Cogsworth, one of the servants, makes the pun “If it’s not Baroque, don’t fix it” he demonstrates that the only artworks in the castle that should be there are the Baroque ones. The only ones that need fixing when the castle’s curse is lifted should be the Baroque artworks.

The original story of Beauty and the Beast by Gabrielle Suzanne de Villeneuve is set in 1740 France, during the Baroque period. Yet, there is an interesting anachronism in this film. As mentioned in chapter one, if a film resembles a certain time period, the viewer will accept the setting as true. So, here, Disney strategically imbues the modern allusions. During the song sequence “Be Our Guest” Lumière and the rest of the objects come-servants perform a dinner cabaret for Belle to entice her to eat and enjoy her time in the castle. When Lumière exclaims that after all, this is France, the silverware and plates form into a makeshift Eiffel Tower [Fig. 2.4]. This structure, built in 1889 for the Paris World Fair, predates the historical moment depicted.151 This anachronism might signify two things. First, the Eiffel Tower has become a symbol of Paris and of France, so Disney may have wanted to reinforce this connection. Second, in this film, the Eiffel Tower serves as another phallic symbol to allude to the masculine prowess of either Lumière, whose sexuality is no secret in the film, or to Beast’s.152 This Eiffel Tower, as well as the “Be Our Guest” sequence, is a mating dance of sorts to seduce Belle into staying in

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151 William Thompson, “‘The Symbol of Paris’: Writing the Eiffel Tower,” The French Review 73, no. 6 (2000). p. 1136

152 Ibid.
the castle and then fall in love with Beast as he undergoes his transformation. This phallic symbolism supports a heteronormative portrayal of seduction with a display of masculinity.

Beast’s ability to transform himself is also symbolized by the rose at the centre of the curse. This symbol of fertility and new love offers a glimmer of hope for him that he might one day be returned to the man he once was. Beast almost learns to care for this symbol of femininity before he learns to care for Belle, albeit with a self-serving motive. The key to breaking the curse is his evolution from an archetypal male into a “New Man.” He must accept qualities that have historically been defined as feminine: nurturing, caring, respect, etc. Belle remains surprised by Beast’s temper and only stands up to him once he demonstrates his ability to care for her. She tells him that he needs to control his temper. This begins the story of Beast’s acceptance of a more caring version of himself. This demonstrates the kind of man Beast can be, or who he might want to be. When he sees the rose wilting, but chooses to let Belle leave regardless, he accepts his fate. As such, he demonstrates that he would rather love as he is than be returned to who he once was.

Earlier in the film Beast storms off after demanding for Belle’s company at dinner. Lumière, Cogsworth, and Mrs. Potts are all standing looking down the hall at him. Behind them is a diptych of paintings that displays the two main characters’ personalities and wishes for their respective future. [Fig. 2.5] The first of the two paintings is *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* (1665) [Fig. 2.6] by Johannes Vermeer. Regardless of what the novel and film suggest about this painting, nothing is really known about this tronie. Vermeer was a Dutch Baroque painter and was known for his meticulous details and use of chiaroscuro. But, the identity of the girl in the painting remains a mystery. The features of her face resemble those of Vermeer’s daughter,
Maria, yet the dress and the details are ambiguous. The headdress she is wearing and the pearl earring the painting is famous for alluding to the exotic, but the girl wearing them is white, so likely of European descent. This exotically dressed woman represents Belle and what she is looking for. She is looking for “adventure in the great wide somewhere,” a nondescript plea for a place other than provincial France. Belle wants to be the kind of woman who can be defined by her sense of travel and adventure, and her need to escape provincial life informs us about the lavish lifestyle that she yearns for. This portrait of an anonymous European girl is the visual representation of what Belle will become if the relationship with Beast pans out. The lavish lifestyle of the castle, the fortunes of an aristocrat to travel, the Prince Charming from her favourite part of the book. *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* is the romantic, lavish, adventurous girl Belle strives to be.
Belle’s relationship with her father is also suggested by this painting. There is speculation that Maria Vermeer was one of her father’s apprentices.\textsuperscript{153} When Belle enters her father’s workshop and employs her father’s inventions, it becomes clear that she is familiar with their uses and functions.\textsuperscript{154} Her love of reading, and the encouragement from Maurice to do so, emphasizes her search for knowledge. But, like Gaston points out in the film, women should not read because that leads to them having ideas. The inventor’s apprentice could not be appreciated as such. So, much like Maria Vermeer, Belle had to hide her involvement in the field she learned from her father.


\textsuperscript{154} This aspect of Belle’s personality is re-examined in the live action film. She is more involved in her father’s shop and she can be seen with an engineered washing machine that make her chores easier.
The second painting in the diptych is a portrait of a man. This portrait is not identifiable as a specific painting, but it is painted in the style of Rembrandt (1606-1669) or Frank Hals (1582-1666) [Fig. 2.7]. Both of these painters were Dutch Baroque painters, so the time period is in keeping with Vermeer’s. This demonstrates a synchronicity between the two works, as well as a relationship in this film with the Baroque Period even though they are stylistically very different. The Baroque Period is recognizable for its decadent and ornate style which is reflected in the remainder of this film. The statues are monumental, the architecture impressive, and the details are remarkable. But, in this portrait, a more subdued side of the Baroque is shown. This is a portrait of a man dressed in a nobleman’s black gown, black hat, and lace collar. This was the fashion reserved for men of good standing in the seventeenth century.\footnote{Luba Freedman, “Rembrandt’s ‘Portrait of Jan Six,’” *Artibus et Historiae* 6, no. 12 (1985). n.p.} He is still regal, but his is a muted decadence. It is clear in the film that Beast was not a ruler, but he was an aristocrat in
raised around noblemen. Yet, based on the constant reminder that he must control his temper, he
seemed to have been more feared than respected. This painting demonstrates Beast’s desire to be
respected. The use of a non-identifiable portrait requires more of the audience in order to make it
a believable object. Where paintings that exist in the “real” world have an aura that follows them
into the film world, paintings that merely mimic those from the “real” world simulate an aura
that is constructed for the film. As such, the outcome of Beast’s future is still speculative rather
than foreshadowed. At this moment in the film Belle has made her objectives clear, yet all the
audience knows of the Beast is that he is a cursed, temper-filled archetypal male who needs to
change to get the future he wants. The viewer does not yet know if Beast will be capable of
change. The man in the portrait is also older than Adam is in the shredded West Wing portrait.
Beast wants to grow old in a respectable manner. It is by combining those desires that they will
be able to achieve them. By nurturing his own love for Belle and accepting hers Beast’s curse
will be lifted and life in the castle will return to normal. As such, he can return to his role in the
aristocracy, but with a personality that will command respect rather than fear. In marrying Adam,
Belle marries into a lavish lifestyle. She will be in a new position of power that will allow her to
go on adventures, travel, and read. She achieves both her heteronormative desires and her
aspirations for adventure. The version of femininity presented by Belle does not presume to
change gender roles completely, nor does she identify as anything but cis-gendered. Yet, she is
determined to be a little bit more than someone’s wife. She still dreams of marrying her prince
charming and achieving happily ever after, but she does so in a way that allows girls and women

156 Felleman, Real Objects. p.5
to want to read and go on adventures. She breaks down the barrier of the housewife and opens up
the world for herself.

*Beauty and the Beast* concludes with Beast returning to his form as Adam, but transformed into a “New Man.” Adam is able to love and accept love, accepts his community as a support system, and re-defines the idea of masculinity in film.\(^{157}\) Thus far Beast was a brutish wild tempered man who could not control his raging temper. After he accepts the “feminine” influence of Belle, he becomes a better-rounded character who embraces the fact that his

\(^{157}\) Gillam and Wooden, “Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar.” p.7
archetypal masculinity will be what causes him to fail. He conquers Gaston, who has not come to the same conclusion about his masculinity; he is still fighting to be the "best" man. Once Beast dies, and is resuscitated as the last rose petal falls, he is a “New Man”. He becomes the man we recognize from the painting. This transformation demonstrates that Disney created new forms of masculinity before their merger with Pixar. Yet, they still chose to create archetypal males like Gaston to act as a comparison point between the two.

Another piece of art of significance in Beauty and the Beast is a quick tableau vivant of American Gothic (1930) [Fig.2.8] by Grant Wood. In the song “Human Again” the servants sing about breaking the curse and becoming human again: they are singing about going back to a simpler way of life. Mrs Potts and Cogsworth [Fig. 2.9] stand in for the father and the daughter from Wood’s painting which is appropriate due to their respective roles in the castle as caretakers. They maintain the house in a similar way as the farmer and his daughter would. They want the world to make sense again and want to retire from their arduous careers as caretakers. Disney incorporated a modern American painting in the film for a similar reason that they gave Arthur an American voice. Felleman explains that

When [art] is cast in fiction films, whether to perform as ideological punching bags or aesthetic diversions, such object — dematerialized and removed from not only the space, but also the cultural context of the studio or gallery — become players rather than objects.159

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158 Ibid. p.4

159 Felleman, Real Objects. p.103
American Gothic in this context characterizes Cogsworth and Mrs Potts as actors not only in the film, but in this painting. The painting was not displayed on the walls as a decoration, it was re-enacted. So, the original context of creation for American Gothic is re-mastered as well. As such, Mrs Potts and Cogsworth are players of the ideal American household caretakers. They are taken out of the American context of farmlands and applied to a problem-solving couple in a castle. They are the embodiment of growth and American hope. They are the portrayal of a heteronormative couple solving the castle’s problems by nurturing and encouraging Beast to become a better version of himself. This version of American Gothic plays into the assumed relationship of the man and woman portrayed. While we have been informed that the models for

FIG. 2.8: GRANT WOOD (1891-1942), AMERICAN GOTHIC, 1930, OIL ON BEAVERBOARD, 30 3/4” X 25 3/4” ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO.
this painting were in fact father and daughter, the visual assumption when looking at the painting is that this is a heteronormative setting that applies to this film.

Mulan (1998)

“*A flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all ... You don’t meet a girl like that every dynasty.*” — The Emperor of China

*Mulan*, Disney’s adaptation of the traditional Chinese legend, is about a young girl who, at the beginning of the film, meets a matchmaker to gain honour as a bride for her family. Upon failing this test, Mulan is left with a fear of disappointing her family. She feels as though she is an inadequate woman and thus, that she will be dishonourable and never betrothed. When the Huns declare war on China, her father is called to the front to defend his country. Appalled that
her wounded father should need to fight in his state, Mulan asks for help from her ancestors and aims to take his place. She slices off her long hair, dresses in her father’s army uniform, and leaves in the dead of night with her horse. The ancestors provide her with a protective dragon, Mushu, to ensure a safe journey to war. While at the camp, her femininity poses challenges as she begins her training. But, with time, Mulan embraces her masculine traits and becomes a strong warrior. When sent to the front, Mulan must use her wits to save herself and the captain, Li Shan, from danger. After suffering a wound, her identity is discovered and her life spared, but she is sent home. When she sees that the Huns are heading to the imperial city, she tries to warn everyone, but no-one will believe her, a woman, because it is not her place to speak out of turn. So, she takes matters into her own hands and eventually saves China from the Huns.

*Beauty and the Beast* is not the only Disney film to incorporate *American Gothic* into its narrative. This painting also makes an appearance in *Mulan* [Fig.2.10]. In a scene set in the ancestral hall, two ancestors — positioned as the father and daughter in Wood’s painting — worry that she is going to lose the farm. Here too, familial honour is at issue. Mulan’s ancestors are concerned for the family's reputation when she fails to impress the matchmaker as a perfect bride and chooses instead to take her father’s place in the war. They fear that Mulan’s actions will destroy the household, a fear based on their archaic gender role expectations. By including the American painting in *Mulan*, Disney is incorporating a visual source of Western art in an otherwise Chinese narrative. As noted above, whereas this painting is often seen as a depiction of husband and wife, here, in *Mulan*, its father-daughter history is activated in a way that highlights this relationship. The patrilineal tradition of marrying a daughter for honour or wealth becomes apparent. Since the ancestors are scared that Mulan will lose the farm, they are alluding that
Mulan’s father’s household will fail because there is no man to offer them honour. Thus, the household will not survive. This is not very different from the farmer and his daughter. She would have been married to another farmer in order to benefit the family’s survival and wealth.

_Mulan_ acts as more of a tableau vivant that adopts symbolism from artworks that depict the legend of Mulan than it is a filmic collection of paintings. Tableau vivant is the practice of recreating a work of art with living people. This can apply to visual representations of paintings and sculptures and it creates a visual symbiosis between the actors and the original, like _American Gothic_ in _Beauty and the Beast_.

The term also applies to visualizations of pieces of music, ones staged to demonstrate the images that can emerge when listening to a piece of music,

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but for the purpose of this work I will focus on the former.¹⁶¹ In Mulan, Disney appeals to both of these traditions by referencing ink drawings and prints of the Mulan legend. Mulan contains symbolism from Chinese Art History that references the plot and illustrations of the original “Mulan” legend. This symbolism also reinforces the reconstruction of archetypal gender roles Disney films. Mulan is expected to bring honour to her family by becoming an archetypal female — passive and subservient. In the end, this story is about a girl who, in looking to find honour for her family, will do anything, and in the process, finds her authentic self.

The depiction of Mulan in traditional Chinese illustration changes depending on the artist. However, one constant in the imagery is her horse. [Fig.2.11]¹⁶² For instance, in the two examples shown above, she is portrayed accompanied by an army general, standing beside her horse on a hillside holding a quiver and sword and alone on horseback with her weapons.¹⁶³ In the second image, Mulan has taken on the role of a soldier. While horses are a popular sidekick animal in a number of Disney films, the horse in Mulan plays a different role. In other Disney films, depicting Western legends and fables, the charisma and animation of the horses are a direct nod to Eadward Muybridge and his motions of studies. Muybridge created motion studies of a horse to settle a bet about whether all four legs of a horse were off the ground at once while trotting [Fig.2.12]. Disney consulted these images when determining how best to animate animals. After all, Walt Disney was renowned for wanting his animations to have a certain

¹⁶² Ibid.
¹⁶³ Ibid.
realism.\textsuperscript{164} However, in this story, the horse holds an additional symbolic importance. Mulan’s horse is one of the symbols of her choice to become “male.” Her horse is the reason she was able to leave and join the army.\textsuperscript{165} The horse was also responsible for her return home — for her return to the feminine.\textsuperscript{166} This can signify Mulan’s gender identity. In this way, the horse’s presence helps indicate the shift between female and male. In Disney’s film, Mulan’s relationship with her horse is still central [Fig.2.13]. She is only able to make it to the emperor on time because of her horse. After she saves the empire, it is this horse that brings her home.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
There are a number of recurring symbolic motifs in this film. For instance, there are multiple dragon symbols in this film. While the design and symbolism for dragons differ depending on the dynasty, some of the symbolism remains the same. The hardware in Mulan’s house, the sculptures in Mulan’s yard, and the incense burner in the ancestral hall [Fig.2.14] are all examples of these. Dragons symbolize transformation: a central theme in Mulan, as explored above in terms of gender.\textsuperscript{167} The dragons shown on the door to Mulan’s father’s armour cabinet is \textit{Qiao Tu} a traditional Chinese dragon that normally appears on doors.\textsuperscript{168} The \textit{Qiao Tu} was known to have liked to close things, thus, he was portrayed often on doorhandles.\textsuperscript{169} Metaphorically, it is interesting that this design is carved specifically on that set of doors, but it is not recognizable anywhere else in the film. Mulan’s father had already fought in a war for China,

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{horse_in_motion_studies.png}
\caption{EADWARD MUYBRIDGE (1830-1904), \textit{THE HORSE IN MOTION, MOTION STUDIES, 1878, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION}}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{168} Roy Bates, All About Chinese Dragons (Lulu.com, 2007). pp.59-60 WEB

\textsuperscript{169} Williams, \textit{Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs}. 
and presumably, he was wounded. When he returned from the war he put his armour away for good. When he accepts to be in this new war and tries out his sword he puts it back and closes the door: he has accepted his fate. But, when Mulan leaves for the war after stealing her father’s armour, she leaves the doors open signifying that this is a new beginning for her. In a sense, she is letting her father know that she will be back.

In this same scene of transformation Mulan is seen cutting off her hair with her father’s sword. The hilt of the sword is a dragon’s face as well. This is the object that begins her transformation from female to male. As such, she assumes the role of a son, taking his father’s place in the war. Li Shan, her captain, responds with awe when she announces that she is Fa Zhou’s son. She leaves her father’s household on the horse because she has made the choice to take her father’s place on the steed. The sword she holds up against her face creates a reflection that calls into question Mulan’s feelings of inadequacy as a woman. This is also conveyed

![Image](image_url)

**FIG. 2.13: SCREEN SHOT, “WITH HER HORSE,” MULAN (1998), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS**
through the song “Reflections,” in which Mulan states that she does not know if she can play the part of the perfect bride or perfect daughter. In a way, this recalls Lacan’s account of the mirror stage. Although this theory is concerned with a different moment of development, he suggests that when looking into a mirror, the true nature of the person comes to the surface and changes
from “insufficiency to anticipation.”

In the reflection in her father’s sword, Mulan sees who she can be. If she was forced to “act” as a perfect daughter, why can she not “act” as the perfect son and still receive honour? At this stage of the story, Mulan is at a loss for who she might be. She is looking to the sword for confirmation of her path. As such, she is exhibiting the process of projecting her current self into her “ideal-self.” She is anticipating the development of herself that will allow her to fulfill her destiny. When compared to the anguish of the “Reflections” song and the reflection of Mulan in the ancestral plaques, this signifies that Mulan will only understand her identity once she transforms into a man. The dragon on this sword supports Mulan’s process. As such, the depiction of the dragon juxtaposed with the reflection of Mulan’s face validates the subsequent transformation.

This transformation of character also applies to Mushu. While the ancestors originally called for the great stone dragon to be her protector, Mushu — following the destruction of the stone dragon — transforms from incense burner to sidekick and protector. He was once a guardian spirit for the ancestors, but after one of them died on his watch, he was demoted to incense burner. Mushu is bound to serve the family in the ancestral hall. He seems weak in comparison to the statue central to Mulan’s yard. Mulan sits in this statue's paws when she needs to feel protected. So, when Mushu first demands to be Mulan’s protector, he does so in order to be respected again. The ancestors expect him to fail, but give him a chance, and Mushu transforms in his own way from self-serving to caring. Mushu aids Mulan’s transformation. In

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171 Ibid,

order to protect her properly, Mushu must teach her how to be a man. Mulan’s transformation is
dangerous to her well-being. She is living in a patriarchal society that rewards women for being
proper wives; not for being soldiers. The decision to perform as male to save her father from the
war may seem honourable, but as her father warns, it could kill her. So, Mushu, the dragon
companion, gives Mulan a tutorial on gender performance. He is pre-emptively protecting her
from the dangers that await a woman impersonating a soldier.

The imperial dragons are symbolically different. The longer, five limbed dragon can only
be worn by the emperor as the emperor embodies the dragon. On the one hand when Mulan
saves China from the Huns, the emperor gives her a medallion that is gilded and adorned by one
of those dragons [Fig.2.15]. Why is it that the girl who was supposed to be punished for
impersonating a soldier is rewarded with the highest honour? The emperor realizes that her
gender does not predict her achievements as a soldier. This imperial symbol protects Mulan from
the punishment that should be waiting for her.

On the other hand, the imperial dragon and its direct representation of the emperor
symbolizes the penetration of the Huns into the imperial city. By hiding themselves within the
celebratory dragon dance, they are attacking the sanctity of the Emperor, his household, and
China. Thus, the presentation of the imperial dragon to Mulan rewards her bravery and validates
her choice to join the army. She defeats the Huns and protects the emperor’s honour.

Disney’s symbolism for transformation extends beyond dragons. In this film, the
blossoming tree is another symbol to emphasize Mulan’s development. In Chinese depictions of

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173 Brocklebank, “Disney’s ‘Mulan’ — the ‘True’ Deconstructed Heroine?” p.275

174 Williams, Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs.
Mulan she is often portrayed next to a willow tree. This willow tree symbolizes leaving something behind, as Mulan does with her family. In Disney’s film, the tree is blossoming. We see Mulan meeting with her father under the tree twice, [Fig.2.16], first when she returns from the matchmaker, then again when she returns from war. These are both instances in which Mulan’s femininity is put into question. In the first instance, Mulan is worried that her honour will be lost because of her inadequacy at performing proper female gender roles. When her mother and her team attempt to prepare her for the matchmaker, Mulan’s clumsiness and lack of feminine manners are obvious. She storms into town on her horse, hair covered in hay, and arms covered in notes on how to be a proper wife. Her mother puts a floral head-comb into her hair to symbolize the end of the physical transformation of Mulan’s authentic self to a bride for the matchmaker. Yet, as mentioned, Mulan fails her test with the matchmaker. When she returns home, her father finds her underneath the blossoming tree. He admits that some blossoms are late and that he has faith that his daughter will find honour eventually.

175 Johnston Lang, “Depictions of Mulan.” p.199

176 Ibid.
The second time they interact underneath this tree, Mulan returns from the war, sword and medallion in hand. The blossoms are falling off the tree in a visual clue that time is passing, and as one blossom falls onto Fa Zhou’s lap, he sees his daughter. She is here to honour him with the sword of the enemy, and the medallion from the emperor. Fa Zhou embraces her and says that there is no bigger honour than having her as a daughter. Thus, he accepts the transformation that Mulan has undertaken. He sees the honour of her fight in the army, regardless of her gender. So, it would not be presumptuous to assume that the tree is an apple blossom. In traditional Chinese motifs the apple blossom signifies feminine beauty. This seems contradictory because we only see Mulan and the tree when her femininity is presumably flawed based on the paradigms of female behaviour in the film. Yet, the name Mulan picks for her male alter-ego suggests otherwise. “Ping” is the Chinese word for apple. When Mushu and Mulan pick this name they are identifying her as the soldier with feminine beauty.

The images that Disney makes use of here celebrate the apparent binary opposition between Mulan’s genders. She does not permanently renounce her femininity, but chooses to transform into a male to protect family. She occupies a space in between the two genders in a way that is more progressive than Disney’s usual tendency to embrace archetypal gender performances and heteronormative relationships. When Mulan is in the process of transforming herself from female to male, she does so against the backdrop of a stormy night. As she trades in her mother’s floral hair comb for her father’s sword and leaves on horseback, the sky is dark with clouds and rain. In Chinese symbolism, clouds and rain indicate the unification of male and

177 Williams, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs*. WEB
female.\textsuperscript{178} Here, Disney is emphasizing Mulan’s transformation from male to female with an inky storm that indicates the development of the film. The storm emphasizes the conflict of identity earlier described by Mulan. Here, she is beginning her journey as the ideal version of herself. When Mulan returns home, she does so as a daughter, no longer a soldier. She gifts her war trophies to her father, and thus re-attributes the honour of her actions to her father’s household.

Symbols of masculinity follow Mulan’s transformation in the film. Once Mulan successfully is “made into a man” Disney employs iconography that means to emphasize her masculinity. For instance, canons are a phallic symbol. So, they are appropriate for the manly acts of war. Yet, the battle is not won until Mulan takes it upon herself to steal the canon from the

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
men and uses her wit to start an avalanche. This outlines her feminine grasp of masculinity. The imperial city is not saved until Mulan aims the cannon, in her feminine form, at the Huns on the roof. Also, the abduction of the Emperor by the Huns would not have been thwarted if Mulan had followed the orders of going back where she belongs. She protected the emperor as was her duty as a soldier regardless of her gender. She rode her horse up the imperial steps. In both the battle scene and the imperial city, Mulan literally takes her masculinity into her own hands and adapts it in order to save the day. Once Mulan unifies her masculinity with her femininity, she becomes the honourable person she wanted to be: she is now a hero. Mulan demonstrates that even though she seems to have accepted her femininity she cannot fully return to the woman she was before the war.

In the original telling of Mulan, there is no mention of her returning from the war with a love interest, nor is there a happily ever after romance. Yet, in the Disney telling there is. When Mulan says that she does not want to see another naked man again after bathing in a lake the assumption is that she does not want a heteronormative relationship. Yet Li Shan is there when she returns home. When the other soldiers are singing about finding a “Girl Worth Fighting For,” Mulan makes it clear that she thinks a woman’s ability to speak her mind and fight for what she wants should be what makes men interested in her. Maybe she was foreshadowing to the end of the film, when she does not listen to the captain, fights for what she believes in, and ultimately wins the war: and his heart. But, it is possible that Disney gives her a romantic ending because they want her to regain her honour in an archetypically feminine sense. When Mulan sings

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Roland Altenburger, “Is It Clothes That Make the Man? Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Sex in Pre-Twentieth-Century Zhu Yingtai Lore,”} \textit{Asian Folklore Studies} 64, no. 2 (2005). p181\]
“Reflection” and worries about not being an honourable wife, she is mourning her position within the ancestral hall. In traditional Chinese ancestral halls women’s tablets could not remain with their families, they needed to be with their husband's family.\textsuperscript{181} If a woman were to remain unmarried she was either married off post-mortem or buried alone.\textsuperscript{182} Disney gave Mulan a heteronormative happy ending so she can be honourably buried when she dies. Now, she has a place in Li Shan’s ancestral hall. Her standing as a war hero is not enough to give her an honourable burying place because she is a woman. In the original Mulan narrative she returns to her “feminine” way of life, but nowhere is there mention of marriage. In Disney she is considered a princess, so, she needs to be 1) a woman and 2) seemingly heteronormative for the ending to work. Additionally, heteronormative relationships do have more societal power. As such, the relationship portrayed by Disney between Mulan in her feminine garb and Li Shan as the captain of the army may have been meant to emphasize his power within the army.

There is a shift in the relationship between Li Shan and Mulan that should be noted. While at the camp, Li Shan befriends “Ping” and develops a friendship that is based on respect. Mulan saves his life during the battle, and he is grateful for her presence. Yet, he is disgraced when he discovers that she is an imposter. Once in the imperial city, he comes to terms with the idea of Mulan as a woman, and helps fight the Huns, but here, he begins to see her as more than a soldier. When the emperor tells him that women like that do not come too often, Li Shan agrees and follows Mulan home, where he is invited for dinner. However, Li Shan truly gets to know Mulan when she is “Ping.” He only accepted the feelings he had for her when she was a woman,

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
but when did they originate? After all “the phenomena of sexuality requires philosophical engagement with the complex role played by bodily experience and the life of the mind.” The heteronormative desire that Li Shan has for Mulan is a bodily experience once he discovers that she is a woman, but the intellectual and emotional connection had by the two was established when he believed she was a man. What is demonstrated here is partially reminiscent of the “New Man” theory mentioned above. The relationship between the captain and his solider demonstrates the homosocial desires explained by this theory. In Disney/Pixar films, the “New Man” develops a platonic but dependant relationship with another man, and as such drops the guards associated with being the alpha-male. Li Shan struggles with his position of power, and thus, spares Mulan because of his relationship with Ping. At the end of the film, he swallows his pride and admits to the relationship.

In this film, the possibility of a queer reading of the characters should be considered. Li Shan’s relationship with Mulan demonstrates that the notion of heteronormative behaviour is here at the very least questionable. Mulan identifies with both genders, and performs both archetypal genders at different moments in the film. For instance, she dresses up as the ideal bride and she practices being a man before she can join the army. She fulfills all of the requirements of the “Make a Man Out of You” song, even though Li Shan quips at the fragility of his troops (and therefore their femininity). This allows her to redefine how to gain honour for her


\[\text{184 N.B: I use the word Queer in this chapter to describe as Michael Green does in his article: Michael Green, “Screenwriting Representation: Teaching Approaches to Writing Queer Characters,” Journal of Film and Video 65, no. 1–2 (2013): 30–42. In short, queer is used as a term to identify the largely diverse identities that do not adhere to the gender and sexuality binaries otherwise accepted. The multiplicity of sexuality does not belong in a dichotomized situation, so, it is hard to adhere to a specific term. This does not necessarily mean the use of homosexuality as the opposition to heteronormativity, but alludes to the spectrum that is sexuality.}\]
family. But, Disney romanticized the original story and Mulan could not be a war hero in her own right. The heteronormative ending in *Mulan* implies that as a female she could not have won without the man by her side.

*Mulan* does not serve as a perfect example of how Disney could describe a queer character, but it is empowering that the seemingly queer character in this film is not the villain — like Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*. Mulan’s switch of genders is made a joking matter in the film (“Miss Man”, and “Taking your drag show on the road”) but, it is not an act of defiance like Timon’s in the *Lion King* (1994). While some characters in Disney have been identified as queer before, they tend to be the villains of their films.¹⁸⁵ Hades’ *flaming* hair and Ursula’s inspiration being a drag-queen named Divine give some room for queer people to identify with the films. Queer characters offer supporting roles and are very rarely protagonists for major films.¹⁸⁶ Disney gave Mulan a heteronormative story when they had the opportunity to diversity their character base. Especially in a story such as this.

Disney seems to be progressing in their development of male characters, such as Beast, by moving them away from the archetypal brutish man. Similarly, their princesses seem to have more opportunities. Disney has demonstrated support for the LGBTQ+ community in the past, but they have yet to move past the heteronormative cis-gendered characters.¹⁸⁷ Mulan is integrated into her army camp and fulfills all of the “demands” to being a man, as posited by Li Shan. Yet, when they are discussing their ideal mates, the other men in the camp still state that

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¹⁸⁵ Mark Helmsing, “Chapter 4: ‘This Is No Ordinary Apple!’: Learning to Fail Spectacularly from the Queer Pedagogies of Disney’s Diva Villains,” in *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, 1st edition (Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸⁶ Green, “Screenwriting Representation.” p.35

they want submissive wives who will cook and keep house for them, while the men are out fighting to protect these wives. They do not want a girl with a brain who speaks her mind, they want a girl who will fawn over their strength. While Mulan’s gender identity is “accepted” when they are off fighting the war, as soon as her femininity is noticed, she is persecuted, regardless of her past achievements. Not to mention that, when femininity is finally accepted in their fight against the Huns, drag culture becomes a joke. This shows that Disney seems to be accepting of dressing male soldiers as women, but still does so to provide humour at the expense of those who would choose to do so, or those who are attracted to them.\textsuperscript{188} However, the question of representation remains important. As Green states, once there is more representation and more diversity, there is more acceptance for it.\textsuperscript{189} While there is no queer protagonist advertised as such by Disney yet, less typical gender representation would allow for a diversity in gender representation. Currently Disney’s films still normalize heteronormative relationship and archetypal genders. Queer people are left with villains to identify with, suggesting that their identification is inherently bad.\textsuperscript{190} Therefore, the development of characters’ gender identities and sexuality have yet to be represented in a more progressive way.

\textsuperscript{188} Green, “Screenwriting Representation.” p.35
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid. p.41
\textsuperscript{190} Helmsing, “This Is No Ordinary Apple!”
Chapter 3: Identity through Art: Becoming Adults Through the Mirroring or Destruction of Artworks

In some films, art is integrated into the mise-en-scène in order to advance the plot or help define the identity of characters. However, the plot and character with which the artwork is associated can, in turn, inflect the meaning of the art in the context of the film. Whereas some of the artworks considered here are representations of actual historical pieces, others are imagined and created specifically for the films in which they appear. Although the artwork and narrative inform one another, knowledge of the origins of a particular painting or sculpture can affect how the story is received. For fairy tales and historical films alike, art can do much to shape our perception of the time period represented and impact the development of the plot and characters’ identities.

Anastasia (1997) tells the story of the young, princess missing from the execution site of the fabled Romanov family. The Romanov family met a gruesome end and their downfall is part of the well-known story of revolution against the Russian monarchy. Rumours that Anastasia survived were quickly turned into plays and stories, including the animated version I consider here. This film portrays a representation of the ideal family that recalls the propaganda style images that were made for and by the Tsar. One specific portrait of the family appears [Fig. 3.1] in many scenes of the movie, but it is not a recreation of a specific portrait. It is painted in the style that Tsar Nicholas II — Anastasia’s father — would have commissioned. For royalty,

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192 Wendy Slater, The Many Deaths of Tsar Nicholas II: Relics, Remains and the Romanovs (Routledge, 2007).p.128
193 Ibid.
portraiture was used not only as a symbol of their wealth or a show of power, but to also craft a specific image of themselves. In this case, we see a perfect family with powerful parents that protected both the children depicted, and Russia itself. When Anastasia stumbles upon this painting in the film, she is not aware of who she is but the portrait invokes ideas of herself as a member of the family. The glimpse into the royals’ lives provided by the real Romanov portraits invited viewers in. This allowed the general public to view themselves as children of the royal family.

The narrative of *Anastasia* follows the themes of dystopian young adult literature in which dark themes like death, and loneliness are portrayed. This film demonstrates the “coming of age” of Anastasia where she fulfills her destiny and, in this case literally, finds out who she is. The aforementioned portrait is full of hope for Anastasia, but at the same time it is relatively sad. This previously cheerful and inviting family portrait reminds the viewer of the loss incurred in the Revolution. Thus, the loss suffered by Anastasia.

Audiences with knowledge of the historical events that inspired a film may respond differently than those without such knowledge. Understanding the film does not require a previous knowledge of these historical events. They may use this knowledge to more deeply engage with the representation of architecture and art that are employed to convey parts of this story. As demonstrated in *Anastasia*, the artworks helps to connect history and the world of film for both audiences and characters. Without the family portrait, Anastasia could not relate to

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194 Ibid. p.137
196 Ibid.
the royal family or understand her own origins. When historical stories are made into films, they become easier to understand when they are paired with historical information or artifacts from a similar time period. As such, within the limited running time of a movie, these references increase the amount of information given to the audience. The artwork’s location in the mise-en-scène and characters’ interactions with the piece are important factors in determining the work’s meaning. Context inflects the function and meaning of the art, but the art is also often used to shape the identity of the characters who are aligned with it. The identity of the characters is partially dependant on the objects with which they are shown and the connections the viewer is able to draw from that relationship. This is the subject of the analysis that follows. The films examined in this chapter are all fictional and all attempt to exemplify characters’ identities through artwork. As such, through an analysis of Frozen (2013), The Little Mermaid (1989), and

FIG. 3.1: SCREEN SHOT, “FAMILY PORTRAIT,” ANASTASIA, (1997), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

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197 Ibid. p.80-82
*Tangled* (2010), I will examine how characters’ identities are developed through the representation of artworks and, therefore, are in part shaped by the histories of these artworks. These films support the young women portrayed and their coming of age stories.

*Frozen* (2013)

“I think some company is overdue, I’ve started talking to the pictures on the walls.” — Anna

*Frozen* is a film that follows two sisters on their quest for love. Whereas the youngest, Anna, searches for a more typical love, the eldest, Elsa, does not. At the beginning of the film the two girls are seen playing with Elsa’s magic and, after an accident that freezes Anna’s head, she is rushed to a group of rock trolls who save her. When they arrive, the troll warns that if it was her heart that had been frozen, it would have been much harder to heal. In healing her, the troll also erases the memory of the accident. After this accident, we see both girls grow up separately. Their parents encourage Elsa to conceal her powers. While Elsa grows up in fear, Anna wonders why her relationship with her sister has deteriorated. Anna is no longer aware that her sister even has magical abilities, because Elsa keeps them hidden. After the death of their parents Elsa is crowned queen and a coronation ball is thrown in her honour. While Anna hopes that this is where she will meet her prince, Elsa hopes that the event goes by quickly. After a confrontation with Hans (Anna’s prince to be) causes Elsa to use her powers, she freezes the country, causes an eternal winter, and runs into the forest. While running after her, Anna finds true love, with someone else. But, Elsa’s happily ever after is not reached until after she realizes that it is her love for her sister that will save them. *Frozen* is a tale of true love between sisters.
In *Frozen*, both main characters — Anna and Elsa — interact with various paintings that allude to their behaviour throughout the film. These paintings reflect the characters' narrative and speak to their dreams and desires. As previously discussed, art in film becomes dependant upon the previous impressions of the work, which transfers this aura to the film. Once a character interacts with an artwork, it leaves its mark on that character's identity. In the majority of these artworks the characters’ desires are shown as they are growing up into adulthood. Both children grew up isolated so their character development demonstrates a need to find belonging. The use of artworks in these films creates a rapport with the viewer as they themselves are being integrated into the film’s narrative.

Anna and Elsa first interact with a series of artworks in the song sequence “Do You Want to Build a Snowman?” The accompanying imagery alludes to Anna's lonely childhood, as well as different periods throughout her life. This scene begins with a young Anna pleading for her sister to build a snowman, the same line that started their problems, eventually leading to the isolation of both sisters. Confused because her sister is locked away, Anna is left to entertain herself in the abandoned halls of the castle. As the song progresses, charting their lives from childhood through adolescence, a desperate Anna still remains loyal to the relationship she once had with Elsa as a child. Here, Anna reveals that she is so lonely that she has started talking to the pictures on the walls.

One encounter involved an equestrian painting of Joan of Arc [Fig. 3.2], where Anna greeted the portrait as a friend. Joan of Arc was a fifteenth-century warrior turned martyr, often

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198 Felleman, Real Objects. p.7

199 Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall, “Trauma and Young adult Literature: Representing Adolescence and Knowledge in David Small’s Stitches: A Memoir,” *Prose Studies* 35, no. 1 (April 1, 2013). p. 21
symbolizing female heroism. The painting of Joan of Arc functions narratively alluding to Anna's relationship with her sister. Joan of Arc's trial included accusations of sorcery. This foreshadows Elsa's trials after Hans villainizes her. Anna replaces her relationship with her sister with the paintings in the castle. As such, she has found in Joan of Arc a role model to interact with. While Elsa’s magical powers breed fear in her public, which is exploited by Hans, Anna believes in her sister’s capacity for good.

Later in the song, a painting of the royal couple — Anna and Elsa's parents— is veiled with black fabric [Fig.3.3], signifying their death. The portrait shown in Frozen serves as a link to a past that will be forgotten. When Anna recovers from the accident with her sister, a troll erases her memory. With the death of the parents, Elsa is the only one who will remember her powers. In Disney films the death of a character serves to encourage other characters to learn from their deaths. The death of the royal parents establishes the foundation for a new bond to be forged between the sisters. The song ends with both sisters sitting alone on either side of a door. The painting of the parents signifies how they were a powerful and happy couple, but now it serves as a memory to the two sisters, reminding them of how lonely they are without their guidance. Anna and Elsa are teenagers when their parents die. Before they embarked on their fatal journey, Elsa pleads that they do not leave because she is not ready to be alone without them. This leads to a traumatic experience for the two young women that will shape the way they deal with their transformation into adulthood. The veiling of the parents’ portraits visually

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201 Ibid. p.128
202 Cox, Garrett, and Graham, “Death in Disney Films: Implications for Children’s Understanding of Death.” p.38
suggests to the viewer that there has been a trauma that will alter the path of the characters who are affected by this death. The loss of their parents deepened the loneliness felt by both sisters.

This song creates a dichotomy between the characters’ child selves and soon to be adult selves. Because of the death of their parents, the girls had to grow up and, in Elsa’s case, assume power over the family and the kingdom. Both sisters are exhibiting two different character types that are reminiscent of popular dystopian young adult literature. The first type of character is one who remains in a “constant state of childhood” in order for those who are in power to keep their power.203 In this case, while I do not believe that Elsa’s parents did so maliciously, Elsa was told to “conceal and not feel” her magic as a child. As such, she was suppressed by her parents to submit to their ways of ruling. She lived her entire childhood, and early adulthood believing that she was better off suppressing her magic, and her feelings, because of the control exerted by her parents. After all, a child is bound to believe that their parents know best. But, when Elsa is thrown into a position of power following their death, she does not know how to act and realizes that she is in fact powerless without their control. She needs to break free from repressive control in order to find herself, and properly run the country.

The second type of character is one who transitions more easily to adulthood. Because of her parents’ focus on Elsa and the ability to control her powers, Anna was left to fend for herself as far as companionship went. So, Anna had to be relatively independant. Thus, she observed power structures from the outside. Anna understands that she will not be in a position of power, but she feels to need to grow into adulthood by other means.

After their parents’ death, the sisters are expected to move on and deal with their loneliness. The sisters employ different coping mechanisms to ease their loneliness. The next time artwork is viewed and engaged with is in the song “For the First Time in Forever.” In grappling with their solitude, Anna wants to surround herself with more people while Elsa wishes to remain isolated. In this scene, Anna and Elsa express their respective excitement and fear about by the coronation day ball. Enthusiastic for a day that holds a range of possibilities, Anna expresses her joy by singing and running through the castle. Using a makeshift suspended rope platform, she swings back and forth before pulling herself up to admire the fjords and wondering who is coming off the ships. Swinging is a popular art historical motif that signifies women’s “lustful” endeavours. In art, swinging women, normally shown in gardens, signify acts of love. This happens shortly before Anna is shown in a garden, speculating that this could be the day she meets “The One.” This symbolism for swinging gains importance when Anna

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arrives at the gallery in the castle. The iconography of the paintings seen here evoke a romanticized desire appropriate for Anna. Expressing her new objective, Anna is subsequently seen in a ballroom daydreaming of her romance with the bust of a man.[Fig.3.4] As shown in this scene, when Anna is interacting with the bust, she is throwing herself at the idealized depiction of a man. All of these actions demonstrate Anna’s desire for a heteronormative encounter at the coronation ball.

The manner with which the characters interact with these paintings elicits narrative transportation. As such, the viewers are transported into the worlds of the characters through the representations in the artwork. I argue that narrative transportation works best when the viewer has a previous understanding of the subject matter and when the viewer believes that what they are seeing is true. As such, the suspension of disbelief required to view a film allows the viewer to participate in narrative transportation. In turn, the development of the character’s arc is

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Steven Jacobs et al., *Screening Statues: Sculpture in Cinema*, Edinburgh Studies in Film and Intermediality (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).p.12; In film, the interaction of a character with a sculpture shows the hidden romantic or sexual desires of that character.
supported in this case by artworks that belong to the Western canon of high art. This creates an interesting juxtaposition between the medium of film and high art, because methods of reproduction, such as film, created a tension in the definition of high art.\textsuperscript{206} When art is represented technologically the representation of it and its aura become dependant on a large team of people who bring with them their own impression of the work.\textsuperscript{207} Whereas high art as it was previously defined was the work of a single artist.

The first painting in the gallery shows a young woman dancing with a man in a feast scene. This painting is reminiscent of \textit{Peasant's Dance} (1567) [Fig.3.5] by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In \textit{Frozen}, this painting [Fig.3.6] is not an exact replica but a romanticized version. As shown, the people in the background are seen watching a couple rather than enjoying a dance themselves. Since the focus of this painting is on the couple, this painting evokes romance. For Anna, this demonstrates her aforementioned desire to meet “The One” at that night's coronation ball. This painting is the first in a sequence of images that emphasize Anna's romantic desires. By starting with a dancing scene, the viewer can relate to the following paintings as Anna's imagined plans for the rest of the evening.

Delving deeper into Anna's daydream, the next painting is Auguste Serrure's (1825-1903) \textit{The Picnic} [Fig.3.7]. Picnics in Romantic paintings invoked an escape from urban life.\textsuperscript{208} Lush landscapes provided secluded settings for couples to meet.\textsuperscript{209} Anna is young, lonely, and desperate for the perfect match. She lays next to the man in this painting and lovingly looks into

\begin{footnotes}
\item[206] Paul Schrader, “CANON FODDER,” \textit{Film Comment} 42, no. 5 (2006). p.38
\item[207] Ibid.
\item[209] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
his eyes. [Fig.3.8] She embodies the woman in the painting and allows herself to be in that moment. The man looks at her, and she accepts his attention as her daydream progresses.

The following two paintings are, again, dancing scenes. The first is *Dancing Couple* [Fig. 3.9] by Gerard Terborch (1617-1681) and the second is *El Jaleo* [Fig.3.10] by John Singer Sargeant (1856-1925). As in *Peasant's Dance*, these paintings foreshadow the events of the coronation ball. Both paintings reveal Anna's impression of romance. She sees the moments in the paintings as a way to break free from her loneliness. Strategically placed together [Fig. 3.11 & 3.12], these artworks invite the viewer to imagine that Anna has been dreaming of romance for a while. Anna spent her childhood interacting with paintings of supposed romance. In *Frozen*, the paintings portray desire. For Anna, the object of desire is the romance that will lead her to live happily ever after. After interacting with three happy and romantic dancing scenes, Anna expects dancing to lead to this end. In *El Jaleo* a male percussionist encourages a flamenco dancer to
dance, while in *Dancing Couple* a woman gets invited to dance. Anna strives to be the subject of these paintings and they emphasize her need to be the object of someone's attention.

The second to last painting in this scene is *The Swing* [Fig. 3.13 & 3.14] (1767) by Jean-Honoré Fragonard. With the appearance of this painting, the earlier allusions to swinging as symbolic of lust and love-making is all but confirmed. When Anna exclaims that she finally has a chance to find romance, she sits in the swing assuming the same position as the woman in the painting. Although some of the mystery of the original painting has been altered by removing the second man hidden in the bushes, the passion associated with the act of swinging remains. Anna, like the woman in the painting, throws off her shoe to suggest unbridled passion and the loss of innocence. In doing so, Anna suggests that she is willing to commit to this level of romance, enveloping herself in the vertiginous activity that comes with swinging. Here, Anna is demonstrating her desire to move from childhood to adulthood.

The last painting [Fig. 3.15] Anna interacts with in the gallery is not based on a known artwork. This painting consists of six people gathered together around a table. Anna positions herself in the middle, so all of their eyes are fixated on her. Her search for romance is thus a plea for attention. As indicated by the unidentifiable painting, the previous scene was a daydream and the future of Anna's romance is uncertain. Anna wants to be the centre of someone's attention at her sister's coronation event. Since she was a child she was pushed aside to accommodate Elsa's powers. She was left to entertain herself alone in a castle. The paintings in "For the First Time in Forever" emphasize Anna's desire for human attention. They cement the part of her that, above

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211 Ibid. p.549
FIG. 3.5: PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER (1525-1530), *THE PEASANT’S DANCE*, 1567, OIL ON PANEL, 45” X 65”, KUNSHITORICHES MUSEUM, VIENNA

FIG. 3.6: SCREEN SHOT, “PEASANT’S DANCE” *FROZEN*, (2013), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS
all else, wants to be loved.

In “The First Time in Forever,” the list of paintings does not end with those that Anna interacts with. Elsa engages with paintings as well, but her relationship with them is much different. Elsa looks to these paintings as models for her Queenship [Fig. 3.16]. The portrait Elsa looks at when she is preparing for the coronation ball is that of her parents. She looks at them while she confronts these figures of power and attempts to model their methods. As mentioned previously, portraits signify power. Her parents were successful leaders who died in a tragic accident. Elsa is told to hide her powers which breeds a fear — in herself and in the audience — that she might become the villain. This engulfing fear for Elsa may contribute to her possible failure. When she first interacts with the painting she stands in front of it and attempts to mimic
her father’s stance. He stands strong with sceptre in hand, and so does she. Nervous that she will fail, her powers take over and start to freeze the sceptre. This fuels her anxiety but indicates to the viewer that she cannot continue ruling as her father did. Attempting to follow in her father’s footsteps, Elsa tries ruling as he did, but she will not achieve greatness until she accepts her powers and herself.

In both sister’s cases, the representation of artworks delineate who they wish to be. What is reflected in the paintings in these films is an ideation of what the characters think their ideals should be. For Anna, love should look like picnics and dancing and pastel colours. Whereas in Elsa’s case, leadership should be tough, stoic, and concealing. Anna wants to be loved, no matter the cost, and Elsa wants to run the kingdom in the same way her father had. This film demonstrates a development for both characters from constructed images of who they should be as they imagined from interacting with the paintings, to actual, realistic lifestyles that remained true to their authentic selves. Instead of looking at themselves in a mirror and experiencing their
FIG. 3.9: GERARD TERBORCH (1617-1681), *DANCING COUPLE*, 1660, OIL ON CANVAS, 68” X 78”, PRIVATE COLLECTION

FIG. 3.10: JOHN SINGER SERGEANT (1856-1925), *EL JALEO*, 1882, OIL ON CANVAS, 93” X 138”, ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER
FIG. 3.11: SCREEN SHOT, “DANCING COUPLE”*FROZEN*, (2013), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

FIG. 3.12: SCREEN SHOT, “EL JALEO”*FROZEN*, (2013), WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS
true selves, the characters were looking at visual representations of others and projecting themselves into these reflections.

As the film progresses, Anna does find true love, but not in the suitor she expected. When Hans betrays her and leaves her to die, she realizes that her heart belongs to Kristoff, the iceman who helped her in her quest to find Elsa and bring her back. She realizes that love does not need to resemble the paintings. When she met Hans, Anna got caught up in the notion of falling in love, so she jumped in and mimicked behaviours that she had learned by observing the paintings in order to make it work. But, with Kristoff, she was not looking for love, she was pre-occupied

FIG. 3.13: JEAN-HONORÉ FRAGONARD (1732-1806), \textit{THE SWING}, 1767 OIL ON CANVAS, 31 \(\frac{7}{8}\)" X 25 \(\frac{1}{4}\)"

Hans betrays her and leaves her to die, she realizes that her heart belongs to Kristoff, the iceman who helped her in her quest to find Elsa and bring her back. She realizes that love does not need to resemble the paintings. When she met Hans, Anna got caught up in the notion of falling in love, so she jumped in and mimicked behaviours that she had learned by observing the paintings in order to make it work. But, with Kristoff, she was not looking for love, she was pre-occupied
with finding her sister, and as such, she got to know him. While their relationship did not include dancing scenes and picnics, he believed their love to be enough for true love’s kiss. In a last attempt to save herself, Anna runs towards him to thaw her frozen heart. In Elsa’s case, when she escapes the prison where Hans is keeping her, she runs to her sister. When Hans tries to kill Queen Elsa, Anna gives up her true love’s kiss to save her sister. She freezes solid as a result of having her heart frozen. Yet she slowly comes back to life after Elsa embraces her and shows how much she loves her sister. The act of true love said to break the spell was here attributed to true love between sisters, rather than between a man and a woman. Anna’s sacrifice and Elsa’s remorse were the key to breaking the spell. This counters what the two girls experienced in their upbringing. Anna believed in true love as posited by romantic paintings and Elsa believed that demonstrating emotion was dangerous, and inappropriate for ruling.

Elsa learns to control her magic along with her emotions. In the “Let it Go” song from the film she expresses that the constraints associated with her powers — both magical and
monarchical — are too demanding. However, it is not by running away from these powers that she is able to overcome them, it is by accepting love in a different fashion. Much like Anna has to let go of her preconceived notions of true love and fairy tales in order to accept that Kristoff is her actual true love. In order to truly understand the love that they have for each other, and to
break the spell, both sisters let go of the standards they observed in the paintings that defined their childhood.

_The Little Mermaid (1989)_

"I don't see how a world that makes such beautiful things could be bad." — Ariel

_The Little Mermaid_ is the tale of a mermaid who dreams of being a part of the human world. Her father, King Triton, fears the humans and tells his beloved daughter to stay away. But, Ariel’s curiosity gets the better of her and, to her father’s dismay, she falls in love with the prince, Eric. In an attempt to find true love Ariel conspires with the sea witch, Ursula, and her two eels. The contract Ursula draws up requires Ariel to give up her beautiful voice and seduce the prince within a short time. If she fails, her soul will remain in Ursula’s garden forever. Ursula transforms herself into a beautiful young woman with Ariel’s singing voice and seduces Eric convincing him to marry her instead of Ariel. With the help of her friends, Ariel succeeds at earning the prince’s love and, together, they overthrow the sea witch.

The artwork in _The Little Mermaid_ functions similarly to that in _Frozen_. Ariel's character and story are shaped by the artworks and the connections between them. Armed with superior collecting abilities, Ariel accumulates an underwater treasure trove. This grotto holds everyday objects from the human world including artworks. In the song "Part of Your World" the collection is central. She displays kitchenwares, decorations, and other shipwrecked valuables. In this trove the objects are removed from their original context and repurposed in ways explained by Scuttle, Ariel’s seagull friend and connection to the world above water.\(^{212}\) As such, Ariel is

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conflicted between a desire to remain in the underwater world she has always known and to travel to the human world as she imagines it. In a sense, the development of Ariel from a 16 year old teenager to married woman is supported by this collection of fetish objects that amplify her desire to be a part of the human world. She has fallen in love with a human and believes that she will only truly be a woman once she is with him.

In the treasure trove Ariel engages with George de la Tour's (1593-1652) *La Madelaine à la Veilleuse* [Fig.3.17] while pondering unknown concepts of the human world. This painting depicts Mary Magdalene sitting in front of a candle holding a skull. By breaking the two-dimensional plane of the painting, Ariel questions the existence of fire by running her hands over the candle flame in the painting. Both the painting and all of Ariel’s collected treasure reflect her desire to learn more about real human life. *La Madelaine à la Veilleuse* is a display of the ephemeral nature of life. In this vanitas painting Mary Magdalene is seen alone in her grotto. This painting demonstrates who Ariel is. As Triton’s daughter, Ariel lives a constrictive life, so she hides herself and her collectibles in her grotto. Yet, this portrayal of Magdalene serves as a warning to Ariel. She is looking to learn more about humans, but the iconography suggests imminent danger. Both the fleeting message given by the candle, and the symbolism of the skull provide insight into the method Ariel will choose to achieve her goal. The contract with the sea witch Ursula provides Ariel with a limited amount of time to seduce prince Eric.

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213 Aline Warie and Perine Leu, “Georges de La Tour, La Madeleine à la veilleuse, 1642-44” (Université de Paris), accessed February 13, 2018


215 Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid* (Denmark: C.A. Reitzel, 1837); This may also be a nod to the original story where this pursuit ends up killing Ariel.
The development of Ariel’s lust for Eric is amplified when Flounder collects the statue lost in the prince’s shipwreck. [Fig.3.18] This sculpture depicts Eric in a heroic stance, somewhat akin to that of a knight. This heroic image of Eric is all Ariel interacts with before their actual meeting. It is this image of him that gets her to fall in love with him after she saves him from the shipwreck. When King Triton finds Ariel’s grotto and the sculpture, he destroys it in the hopes that this will be the end of her interaction with the humans. But this sparks Ariel’s decision to follow Ursula’s goons. The destruction of sculpture in film is a means to solve a problem.\(^{216}\) King Triton believed that with the destruction of the sculpture he had solved the issue of Ariel seeking knowledge about the humans. In fact, this is what gave Ariel a stronger desire for the real Eric. The eels understand what King Triton’s motives were, which is why they threw the remaining face of the sculpture towards Ariel. [Fig. 3.19] Playing right into the trap the eels have set, Ariel seeks the help of Ursula. Here she makes a contract with the witch, and trades her voice for a pair of legs to find the love she’s lost. Even though this sculpture was created for the film, and was never intended as an actual three-dimensional object, its appearance in the film serves to advance Ariel’s story and to develop her character.

Ursula encourages young Ariel to defy her father and go to the surface where, should she succeed, she can find her prince. In the trade, Ariel loses her voice, and thus loses her agency. As Ursula explains, she will be left to seducing the prince using nothing but her body language. Here, rather than fantasizing about becoming a beautiful and alluring woman as has been associated with mermaids, Ariel chooses to make the transformation to human. Mermaids and sirens in literature are known to be beautiful, seducing creatures that signify “heterosexual

\(^{216}\) Felleman, Real Objects,p.49
Yet, Ariel does the opposite in a regressive attempt to recover the lost freedom of her childhood. When Ariel’s grotto is destroyed, she goes from fantasizing and daydreaming about the love she has for Eric, to needing to fulfill this desire. In the destruction of the sculpture, King Triton emphasizes his daughter’s desire and unknowingly pushes her into the trade for the “vulnerability that comes with having a pair of female legs.” Ursula takes advantage of the urgency of Ariel’s plight and pushes the teenage girl into adulthood.

The influence of history and art in this film is also apparent in the architecture portrayed. Prince Eric’s castle is based off of Mont St-Michel [Fig. 3.20] in Normandy. Mont St-Michel’s legend is compelling and appropriate for the setting of *The Little Mermaid*. The legend tells the

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217 Barounis, “Special Affects.” p.190
218 Ibid. p.196
219 Ibid.

story of the Archangel Michael, who is tasked with vanquishing the devil using only his wit. While Eric does not face the devil, he does face Ursula, the sea witch. She is understood as evil from her first introduction. Her garden of souls, her affinity with a cauldron and potions, and her deceiving contracts all demonstrate Ursula’s un-ending cruelty. She is evil towards both main characters. Ursula curses Ariel and tricks Eric.

She does not seem to think that she can be outwitted either. Once her plan is set in motion, Ursula takes it upon herself to magically adopt Ariel’s voice, seduce Eric, and assure that Ariel cannot keep her side of the bargain. On the brink of her success and in celebration of her impending nuptials, Ursula throws a pin in the mirror’s adornment — an angel [Fig. 3.21]. This defacement of an angel alludes to the Angel Michael associated with the castle. She believes that she has won. The use of Mont St-Michel foreshadows Eric and Ariel banding together to overthrow the devilish sea witch, clearly showing the similarities between Ursula and the folklore devil. The architecture supports the characters’ representation in this film. Due to his standing as the ruler of Mont St-Michel, Eric becomes the metaphorical embodiment of Michael, so he is expected to vanquish evil.

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When Ariel is trying to convince Eric to marry her, Ursula devises a plan to seduce the Prince. She transforms herself into a beautiful young woman named Vanessa, she dons Ariel’s voice, and walks along the beach where Ariel rescued Eric from the shipwreck. Upon hearing the mermaid’s voice, Eric is taken and vows to marry her because he is cursed to think that the singing girl on the beach must be the woman who saved his life. Heartbroken, and worried that she is going to have to return to the sea as part of Ursula’s garden of souls, Ariel’s friends take it upon themselves to stop the wedding. When Scuttle, the seagull, flies by the porthole on the wedding ship and hears Vanessa singing he stops and sees her reflection in the mirror on the ship. If a mirror reflects the true self from the inside, it is appropriate that here, instead of seeing Vanessa in the mirror, Scuttle sees Ursula. He flies to warn Ariel and the others.
Tangled (2010)
“My entire life I’ve been hiding from people who would use me for my power. ...When I should have been hiding from you.” — Rapunzel

Tangled is Disney’s adaptation of the Brothers Grimm’s tale of Rapunzel. There was once a great kingdom where the King and Queen were expecting a daughter. To the dismay of the public, the Queen falls ill, and in a search to save her and the baby the whole kingdom searches for a magic flower. This magic flower has the power to restore things to the way they once were, so when brewed into a tea for the Queen, it saves them both. The magic of the flower is then transferred to the baby. However, this flower had been the manner by which Mother Gothel, a witch, was keeping herself young and vain. In the middle of the night she attempts to steal a lock of hair from the child in order to harness the flower’s powers. When this does not give her the results she wants, she steals the baby, and hides her in a faraway tower. She raises Rapunzel as her own, never letting her go outside for the fear that someone might recognize the princess and takes away the sources of her powers. In the search for their daughter the King and Queen host a
lantern ceremony every year on her birthday to call her home. However, they do not know that, every year on her birthday, Rapunzel watches the lanterns from her window and wonders what they might be. While Mother Gothel attempts to convince the child that these lanterns are stars, Rapunzel never gives up on her dreams and on her 18th birthday she asks to go see the “floating lights” in person. Obviously, Mother Gothel declines and storms off, leaving Rapunzel alone in the tower. In the meantime a thief, Eugene (using the alias Flynn Ryder), climbs into her tower with a stolen crown from the kingdom. She convinces him to bring her to see the lights, and they go on an adventure that leads Rapunzel into the palace. At the end of the film she sees the lanterns, comes to terms with the fact that she is the lost princess, and lives happily ever after with Eugene.

Mont St-Michel has served as an influence for more than one Disney film, as shown in Tangled by Rapunzel’s parent’s palace [Fig. 3.22]. In Tangled the vanquishing of evil is also a theme. The film’s setting in an isolated tower describes Rapunzel’s story of imprisonment. The time and setting of Rapunzel may be imaginary and the landscape barely recognizable, but the film does make use of familiar historical architecture with the use of Mont St-Michel. Though the original story from the Brothers Grimm is darker, the premise of the story remains the same. Although Rapunzel is not in the castle for the majority of the film, it is where she was born. The conclusion of the film suggests that the only way to find the lost princess is to vanquish Mother Gothel. Without Eugene’s realization that Rapunzel would never be free as long as Mother Gothel had access to her powers, he sacrifices himself to vanquish her.

The tower where Rapunzel grows up is covered in artwork. She paints to pass the time and uses the purchase of new paints as a strategy to get Mother Gothel out of the house, so she
can escape the tower and watch the lantern festival. Although the art in *Tangled* is not based on well-known works as it is in *Frozen* or *The Little Mermaid*, it is still employed to develop her character. The number of paintings on the walls reveal that she has been painting for a long time. Moreover, there is a hierarchy to the works. The pieces closest to the ground are more juvenile representations of animals and flowers [Fig.3.23]. As the camera scans up the inside of the tower, the artworks become more complex. At the pinnacle of the tower the artwork is a star chart [Fig. 3.24]. Rapunzel’s evolution — as a captive and as an artist — is writ largely on the walls. Painting here serves as a tool to immortalize the artist in the time and space the piece was created.²²¹ As a child she painted what she knew, what she could likely see from her tower. As time progressed she began to paint her desires. She proves that her beloved lanterns, which she

²²¹ Felleman, Real Objects. p. 13
can see from her tower, are not stars, but they are star-crossed. In her isolation, what Rapunzel knows of the world is curated by Mother Gothel, so she is left with false descriptions and books. As such, she develops a child-like fear of the world, and when tasked with confronting it she realizes, with time, that this fear was constructed for her by an extremely controlling mother figure. She yearns to know when her life will begin, and to find out who she is. As such, the viewer celebrates her bravery and rebellion while Rapunzel makes friends with ruffians and thieves, finding herself in a bar, and escaping the armed guards searching for Eugene. She transforms from a scared child into a confident adult.

The work on the mantel in the tower is reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh’s (1853-1890) *The Starry Night* [Fig.3.25 & 3.26] (1889). *The Starry Night* is a popular artwork. Felleman explains that:

> When art comes into the aura of film, so to speak: when the object of art enters the space of its own symbolic appropriation — the fiction film — it gains a strange paradoxical sort of invisibility as well.\textsuperscript{222}

So, here Disney adopts the aura surrounding The Starry Night and Van Gogh to inform us about Rapunzel. She is a secluded artist who paints the world around her. Van Gogh painted the stars, and Rapunzel painted her lanterns. In showing the lantern painting rather than *The Starry Night*, *Tangled* evokes an image reminiscent of Van Gogh’s, but simultaneously alters its effect. As such, *The Starry Night* is both present and erased from the film. Where the mad artist is generally male, in *Tangled*, Rapunzel is the secluded artist, abused and lonely, painting madly to solve her problems. The mad, male artist paints to appease his torments while here, Rapunzel

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid. p.103
paints to solve hers. It is by charting the stars and comparing them to her lantern painting that Rapunzel realizes that they are not one in the same. It is through artwork that Rapunzel uncovers her identity.

When Rapunzel makes the realization that she is the lost princess that the lanterns are calling for, she experiences a series of flashbacks that demonstrate to the viewer who her true self is. She realizes that under each of her paintings she has painted the sun that symbolizes her biological parent’s kingdom. She recognizes the symbol from the mobile in her crib painted into the artwork that she has worked on her entire life [Fig.3.27]. Rapunzel remembers her parents, the mosaic with the lost princess and, finally, the time when she tried the stolen crown on in the mirror. When Eugene shows up in Rapunzel’s tower with the crown earlier in the film, she does not know what it is, and is puzzled when she first looks at herself in the mirror with it on. It is in
a flashback to this moment that she realizes that she had been kidnapped. Rapunzel comes to terms with who she really is. If the mirror image of someone represents the inherent self otherwise hidden to the surface self, this moment reconciles the two for Rapunzel. As such, Lacan’s observations have some explanatory power for the conclusion of this film. Without the reflection of herself in the mirror, and in her artworks, she would not have been returned to her biological parents: the lost princess would not have been found. Additionally, when the mirror breaks, the ideal lifestyle created by Mother Gothel is here abolished. She kidnapped Rapunzel in a bout of vanity because of the magic powers held by Rapunzel’s hair. Without these powers, Mother Gothel could not remain young, and thus, her vanity could not be serviced. When Eugene cuts Rapunzel’s hair off with the shard from the mirror rather than letting her save him with her powers, the powers vanish and reverse for Gothel as she visually turns older, and vanishes at the
base of the tower into a cloud of dust. The mirror in *Tangled* is significant for another reason. Throughout the development of the film, the viewer understands that Mother Gothel stole Rapunzel because of her desire for continuous youth. She was going to the flower for the powers long before Rapunzel was born. She raised Rapunzel in isolation in order to keep the powers for herself, and convinces the young girl that the outside world is unsafe, leaving her content with the inside of the tower, her paints, and — once a year on her birthday — the lanterns. But, as Rapunzel grows older she begins to question the lanterns and, when given the chance at rebellion, she leaves with Eugene to fulfill her childhood dream.

Since most of this film centres around the fulfilment of Rapunzel’s childhood dream, it is only natural that once that dream is reached, she begins to question what her next dream will be.
When they are waiting for the lanterns to be launched, Rapunzel expresses the need to move on to another dream and, in the song that follows, the assumption becomes that her new dream will be a life with Eugene. Up until this scene, she is portrayed as an innocent character. Her childhood in isolation — and Mother Gothel’s biased story-telling— has led her to misunderstand the world around her. This leaves Rapunzel in an extended transitional state between childhood and adulthood. She embodies the women of dystopian young adult literature in the sense that she “[straddles] the lines of childhood and adulthood, of individuality and conformity, of empowerment and passivity.”223 Here, Rapunzel changes from the innocent isolated child to the young women ready to take on the world of adults. After the realization that she is the lost princess, she confronts Mother Gothel and demands explanations for the way she

FIG. 3.26: VINCENT VAN GOGH, 1889, “THE STARRY NIGHT”, OIL ON CANVAS, 29” X 36 1/4”, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

223 Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz, *Female Rebellion in Young adult Dystopian Fiction* (Routledge, 2016).p.4
was raised. Before leaving the tower, Rapunzel was not aware of the world around her, but for a curated view given to her by Mother Gothel. Yet, when she sees the outside world for what it is, she becomes suspicious of her adoptive mother’s intentions. In a final attempt to keep her powers, Mother Gothel tricks Rapunzel into thinking that Eugene abandoned her, and convinces Rapunzel that he had conned her. However, when Eugene tries to save her from her tower, Mother Gothel stabs him. Rapunzel offers to trade a lifetime of service to Mother Gothel in exchange for healing Eugene’s stab wound. Mother Gothel cannot bear to lose the powers Rapunzel holds, so in an act of unfiltered vanity and selfishness, she lets Rapunzel save Eugene. But, Eugene cannot condemn Rapunzel to a life of servitude, so he cuts her hair, thus removing her powers. As he lies dying Rapunzel and Eugene express that they have become each other’s new dreams. This demonstrates that their childhood desires have evolved into more adult ones.
While in some cases some Disney animators have discussed in interviews their inspiration for the animation of the film, they also often hide these influences in the background of their films. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Frozen, The Little Mermaid,* and *Tangled* use artworks to exemplify their characters’ motives. The successive narrative of a film from beginning, to crisis point, to end, serves as a linear description of the past. Therefore, by displaying art that is historical Disney is using real history to inform the creation of their fictional characters. This adds to the realism of the character within a world that is both real and unreal. The inclusion of works of art that support the growth of a character aids the development of the film by embellishing the setting with art historical visuals. The inferences that follow the problematizing of the understanding of art historical motifs that the audience may or may not have inflect upon the characters and their respective personalities. The artworks displayed on film assert a similar influence on the understanding of the ideals posited in the narrative as it does on the characters.

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225 Hughes-Warrington, History Goes to the Movies.p.22
Conclusion

While I do not presume to think that I can speak on behalf of all children, the implications expressed above apply to a wide array of audiences that deal with Disney films. As mentioned above, I do not believe that children’s films should be removed from historical study simply because of their target audiences. The case studies in the previous chapters were limited, however, the key arguments from all three chapters can also be applied together.

There are films that were produced by Disney whose historical anachronisms are blatantly obvious. For example, in Hercules (1997), the differences between the Greek legend and the film are easily apparent. Hercules’ character development in the film does not focus on the trials. His story demonstrates a similar development to that of the “New Man” theory posited in the Beauty and the Beast case study. The difference here is that while Hercules grows up physically strong, he does not become macho until his ego comes into play. He is an adopted child trying to find his way into the world. His arrogant behaviour is a result of his coaching to be a “proper” hero. He learns to find a balance between hero and love interest as a result of his impending relationship with Megara.

The setting of the film is understood to be Greek because of the columns and the recognizable architecture. However, all that we know about the time period is that it is “ancient.” Ancient Greece is alluded to in this film through the use of the Greek Gods, the architecture, the Muses, and the pottery works. Yet, the comical allusions to the present are still there. Once Hercules becomes a celebrity, there is an influx of merchandise that is shown in the film that reference the “modern” such as: the “Grecian Express” credit card, the “Air-Herc” sandals, and
“Herculade” to name a few. All of these objects allude to popular culture in the 1990s, when the film was released. The allusions to American Express, Air-Jordans, and Gatorade are all apparent, and at the very least are comical. However, this also reinforces the connection between Disney history and the present. As such, the viewer is made to understand the character slightly better. By including the “Air-Herc” advertisement in the film the viewer is meant to understand the gravity of the celebrity culture following Hercules because it creates a direct relationship with their immediate present. But, by making the ad look like a mosaic, the viewer can also read the advertisement as a product of the ancient world. As such, the audience’s view of this time period is slightly altered while watching the film.

Disney films are not alone in their influence upon children through stories. In *The Woman Warrior* Hong-Kingston demonstrates that the original legend of Fa Mulan influenced her development.\(^{226}\) It was through the legend that she defined her gender identity. In the Disney iteration the representation of Mulan’s character opens up the possibility for a similar reading. The symbolism in the film offers a reading that connects the environment around Mulan to her overall character. This could demonstrate the appeal of children’s stories in the development of identity. Disney creates characters with which audiences can identify.

What is becoming increasingly interesting with Disney films is the way that these worlds entice their audience. While Disney introduces fantasy and teaches lessons to its younger viewers, it integrates “easter-eggs” of sorts to expand the worlds for a wider spectatorship. In doing so, they create diverse settings in which people can fully immerse themselves. The fantasy aspect of the films allows for a looser interpretation of the world, but the ability to include

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familiar objects also makes the film more believable. The historiographical or historiophotical interpretations of the film are not brought into effect until the historicity of the film is in question. However, by attempting to appeal to a wide audience through film — and amusement parks — Disney is encouraging a level of escapism that is worth noting. The full immersion of the audience into the short running time of the film is potentially increased when they can visit these worlds for themselves. The suspension of disbelief required to watch these films is also demanded when visiting the parks. As such, the audience develops a certain level of belief associated with what they are watching. This is what creates the ability for people to create fanfics or fandoms from the films. Or for the possibility to meet your favourite character in a park. As Felleman explains the immersion of fans into the stories creates the possibility for “cult-followings.” So, not only does Disney succeed at making the viewer believe in what they are seeing on screen, they are creating worlds that are sought out by people. They have created a successful bridge between reality and fiction that follow the viewers into their everyday lives. This bridge accounts for the readings of Disney history as moderately accurate.

In the *Once Upon A Time Walt Disney: The Sources of Inspiration for the Disney Studios* exhibition held by the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Montreal and the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, the art of Disney was displayed to demonstrate to the public how the films were created. The accompanying catalogue inserts Walt Disney and his fellow animators within the realm of art history. However, as I have discussed above, the implications of these artworks do not simply

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227 Felleman, Real Objects. p.7

228 Galeries nationales du Grand Palais (France) and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *Once Upon a Time.*
provide a connection to the world of art history. The world of art history enters the realm of film
to inform the viewer about the worlds and characters that comprise a story.
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