

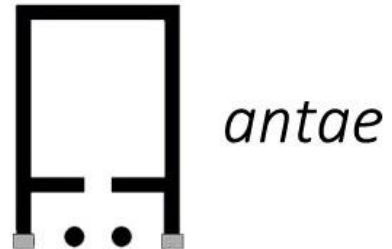
What's all the fuss about Disney?: Narcissistic and Nostalgic Tendencies in Popular Disney Storyworlds

Maria Cremona

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What's All the Fuss About Disney?: Narcissistic and Nostalgic Tendencies in Popular Disney Storyworlds

Maria Cremona

University of Malta

It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not [only] the schoolteachers or university professors but [also] film makers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors. Disney does more than Duke (University), Spielberg outweighs Stanford, (and) MTV trumps MIT.¹

As the camera moves from the second star to the right shining bright, to the colourful fireworks and the majestic castle standing over the still river, the audience settles comfortably into its seat, ready to be transported to the magical world of Disney. Perhaps the viewers' first thought is not that entertainment conglomerates such as Disney use their storyworlds to subtly infiltrate audience mentality with their principles. A dominant entertainment giant such as Disney is also a prominent teaching machine that not only shapes popular culture but also affects the mindset of global audiences through its story franchises. This paper seeks to study the narcissistic and nostalgic desires that cinematic audiences are invited to cultivate through interactive engagement with two Disney story franchises produced in our time: *Brave* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013).² It aims to study how narcissistic and nostalgic tendencies are used to control the audiences' self-understanding and knowledge of past and immediate realities or as means to allow audiences to reach a better understanding of themselves in relation to past and present conditions.

Controlled Narcissism

The rise of online and networked spaces has been celebrated for offering society new opportunities in which to express identity and affiliation through various media platforms. Scholars such as Henry Jenkins analyse and speculate about the freedom of choice enabled by the wealth of online spaces. While Jenkins emphasises how this has endowed the subject with autonomy and agency, other critics such as Jack Zipes and Jean Baudrillard observe and

¹ As cited in Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared*, 2nd edn. (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), p. 57.

² *Brave*, dir. by Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2012), and *Frozen*, dir. by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2013).

criticise the growing media narcissism in consumer culture. Zipes refers to Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, 'The Storyteller', to speak about the influential role of the storyteller in unmasking the myths circulated by political, social and religious institutions which create these myths to justify and enforce their power.³ The myth that needs to be challenged today is not from the domain of Christianity or communism; it is more dangerous and atrocious. Zipes argues:

It is the myth of freedom in societies dominated by a capitalist market system that creates enormous barriers for the free exchange of ideas and experience. We think we speak freely in these societies. We think we are free to exchange ideas. Yet our ideas are often prescribed, and our words are often petrified before we speak them.⁴

Rather than empowering viewers as tellers of their own lives, the capitalist market system pushes them to develop into its established models. Viewers are presented with hundreds of mirrors, in the form of advertisements and commercialised images to admire, but self-discovery and individual empowerment do not feature in the ethos behind the production of these mirrors. Instead, viewers are compelled to consider how to fit their image, personality and story into the moulds provided by capitalist and consumerist myths. This network of production is not aimed at helping the subject recognise or understand himself but at affiliating him or her with the characters and story-worlds created by brands and companies. This has become even more possible with the advent of new technologies and social networks, which provide children and adults alike with the necessary tools to represent themselves freely on the market, or so they are told. These sites become an instrument of surveillance for media conglomerates that follow the users' habits, wishes and ambitions, and generate desires and needs for them. Advertising firms, film and television companies know their audience's needs very well and have learnt to create desires and needs through multimodal texts to engage customers' attention and secure their loyalty to the brand.

This is illustrated further through the example of the current obsession with liberating the body which, according to Baudrillard, is nothing other than 'fetish beauty' because it is not concerned with the authenticity or natural countenance of the body but with stimulating desires which are then materialised in market-driven needs.⁵ Increasingly detailed and sophisticated images serve to imprint the cultural order on the consumer's body, resulting in a collective cultural understanding of the perfect artefact as envisioned by the market-system. This is a 'kind of anti-nature incarnate, bound up in a general stereotype of models of beauty, in a perfectionist vertigo and controlled narcissism'.⁶ Baudrillard draws a sharp contrast between 'having self-worth [*valoir*] by dint of natural qualities and showing oneself off to best

³ Jack Zipes, 'Revisiting Benjamin's 'The Storyteller'', in *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 129-142.

⁴ Zipes, 'Revisiting Benjamin's 'The Storyteller'', p. 137.

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (New York: Telos Press Ltd., 1981), p. 94.

⁶ *ibid.*

advantage [*se faire valoir*] by subscribing to a model and conforming to a ready-made code'.⁷ This form of narcissism is presented in advance by models which are produced by the mass media: in following the lives of characters such as Merida, Elsa, and Anna, the subject discovers his or her personality and is enabled to reach full potential. The lives of these characters reinforce the viewers' dreams and fears, and assure them that they are not alone in what they think or feel. Thus audiences are invited to join the protagonists in a journey of self-discovery and identity formation. However, this narcissistic reinvestment, showcased as a spectacle of liberation and achievement, may simultaneously be an economic investment.

In the next section, this analysis will be applied to a film text by Disney, *Brave*. The narcissistic desire instilled through the central character, Merida, and her journey of self-discovery and identity formation, invites audiences to critically reflect and improve their self-understanding and development. Merida was hailed as a modern female role model for young audiences, the first from the Disney princess line-up who does not share a love story with a male counterpart.⁸ In this context, *Brave* is an interesting case-study in that it demonstrates to its audience how an individual may refuse controlled narcissism by diverging from a ready-made and recyclable pattern to determine her own future. However, this becomes highly ironic when considering the model of appearance and behaviour suggested by Princess Merida's makeover that followed a year later. The princess known for her successful fight against being made to fit into a model envisioned by society, who encouraged audiences to develop their individual image and personality and explore different alternatives to the established status quo, had later become another 'general stereotype of models of beauty'.⁹ Following the film, Merida became another tool through which the conglomerate could affirm its control over the consumers' mindset and self-identification, as will become evident further on in this paper.

***Brave* Feature Film**

Merida, Pixar's first female protagonist, is a new sort of princess in various ways, and most strikingly due to her untameable red hair that stands in sharp contrast to Snow White's or Cinderella's perfectly styled hair. Merida's visual representation is an important factor to consider when comparing her to her sister princesses. Co-director Brenda Chapman shared her goals while designing Merida:

I wanted a real girl... not one that very few could live up to with tiny, skinny arms, waist and legs. I wanted an athletic girl. I wanted a wildness about her, so that's where the hair came in,

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1998), p. 96.

⁸ This pattern is further developed in other Disney princess narratives as seen further on in this paper, with *Frozen*. One can also include *Maleficent* (2014) as a film text which subverts the traditional Disney romantic story and debunks previous texts from the Disney canon.

⁹ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 94.

to underscore the free spirit. But mainly I wanted to give girls something to look at and not feel inadequate.¹⁰

This quotation points to the narcissistic element that celebrities and characters on screen instil in the audience. Interestingly, in this case, Disney breaks from past models and codes and introduces a new character who is also a paradox; her refusal to conform to the established model of princess behaviour is precisely what makes her an admirable figure. Here is a princess with an hour-glass figure, quirky freckles, frizzy and uncontrollable hair, an awkward walk, and who feels uncomfortable in a headdress and tight corset. Instead, she prefers a 'long functional dark green dress, reminiscent of the colours of nature, for which she has an obvious affinity'.¹¹ This gown allows her to practise archery, go horse-riding, and move comfortably and flexibly. Moreover, '[w]hen dressed in the typical princess garb before the three suitors, Merida wriggles with discomfort and subversively displays a lock of her hair from the white headdress that attempts to conceal her uniqueness'.¹² The rebellious Merida cannot be contained by this dress. During the archery contest, she literally breaks out of the tight dress to shoot for her own hand in marriage. Ironically, Disney—a cultural machine which has created numerous characters and figures with whom audiences identify—has created a princess who refuses to emulate established role-models. She exclaims to the Queen Mother:

This whole marriage is what you want! Do you ever bother to ask what I want? No! You walk around telling me what to do! What not to do! Trying to make me be like you! Well, I'm not going to be like you!¹³

The focus on the mother-daughter relationship may also be considered from the perspective of nostalgia: in earlier princess movies, the princess's mother is either deceased or absent but the attempt at repairing the relationship between mother and daughter drives the plot of this film. This move on Disney's behalf can almost be interpreted as a gesture which demonstrates that the company is diverging from its own tradition, as discussed further on in the paper. More broadly, the study of relationship dynamics between two close females is slowly gaining force in the animation field, and in *Brave*, the fact that it is brought to the forefront is significant because it underlines an important struggle that women continually encounter.¹⁴ When preparing what to say to her mother, Merida states that she may be never ready for marriage, sending an important feminist message that girls are free to pursue their ambitions rather than be bound solely by love and marriage.

Unlike her other sister princesses, Merida is happy in her own company and thinks that she is more than capable of taking care of herself. Ultimately, it is she who solves her own problems

¹⁰ Cited in Chris Muir, 'Brave—A Princess Unbridled', *Screen Education*, 67 (2012), pp. 9-15 (p. 13).

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹² Muir, 'Brave—A Princess Unbridled', pp. 13-14.

¹³ *Brave*.

¹⁴ Since 2012, Disney has released two animated features which explore the relationship between two close females: *Brave* and *Frozen*. In the field of live-action, *Maleficent* focuses on the friendship between Aurora and Maleficent.

rather than waiting for a gallivanting prince to rescue her. When her spell goes awry, she assumes responsibility for the mayhem and trouble that dominates the narrative. Although Merida's determination to uphold her individual autonomy strains her relationship with her mother, she does not forfeit her personal freedom. She refuses to be 'bound up in [...] perfectionist vertigo and controlled narcissism'.¹⁵ Throughout the film, she repeatedly asserts her freedom and personal will; for instance, an early scene of the film in which she narrates her adventures of the day is exemplary of a form of narcissism that is a celebration of freedom and natural (rather than prescribed) qualities. *Brave* introduces audiences to a new generation of Disney princesses whose worth or self-value are not to be determined by the possibility of romance or marriage in their lives.

Drawing from personal experience and their own relationships with their children, the creators of *Brave* managed to bring to life characters and situations that resonated with audiences. As Chris Muir observes, however, it is essential that the personality and aesthetic of the animated character be transferred onto a lavish doll or video-game avatar. Although *Brave*'s production design team stressed how it wanted to avoid making Merida look like a plush toy, a visit to the nearest shopping mall will prove otherwise. The doll of Merida is a far cry from the wild and fierce princess the audience sees on screen. She is more similar to the glamorous and sexier Merida who was launched for her official introduction into the Disney Princess Collection in 2013. The red-headed tomboy now had a skinnier and sexier figure, with shiny, cascading curls, while the bow and arrow had been replaced by a low-slung belt.

Merida's glamorous makeover personifies controlled narcissism and it is rather ironic that the princess who initially symbolised independence and singularity was turned into another subject of the fixed formula of controlled narcissism. Merida's distinctiveness has faded, her fiery and unique spirit tamed as she is further integrated into the 'code of a society of production and managed consumption'.¹⁶ Peggy Orenstein, author of *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, wrote on her blog: 'Because in the end, it wasn't about being brave after all. It was about being pretty.'¹⁷ Co-director and writer of *Brave* Brenda Chapman also participated in the conversation, describing Merida's sexy transformation as 'a blatantly sexist marketing move based on money'.¹⁸ She adds:

Merida is a character that young girls look to and say, "I can be like her- she's not that different from me!" Or even better, they look at Merida and say, "Merida is like me!" So now when they see what Disney Consumer Products has done to Merida, it tells them that they

¹⁵ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 94.

¹⁶ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, p. 96.

¹⁷ 'Seriously, Disney, I'm Trying to Take a Little Break Here—MUST YOU?', *Peggy Orenstein.com*, Peggy Orenstein (2013). <<http://peggyorenstein.com/blog/seriously-disney-im-trying-to-take-a-little-break-here-must-you>> [accessed 6th May 2015].

¹⁸ Cited in Paul Libertone, 'Brave' creator blasts Disney for 'blatant sexism' in princess makeover', *marinij.com-Marin Independent Journal*, (2013). <http://www.marinij.com/ci_23224741/brave-creator-blasts-disney-blatant-sexism-princess-makeover> [accessed 6th May 2015].

aren't good enough unless they lose weight, wear tighter, sexier, "girlier" clothes, wear lots of makeup and coif their hair.¹⁹

Many fans criticised this move by Disney and soon after an online petition started, which slowly turned into a campaign, urging the conglomerate to restore Merida her original look. Around 260,000 signatures were collected. The newer version of Merida was removed from Disney and Pixar's official websites but *Brave* merchandise, which continues to be manufactured, does not reflect the on-screen Merida that captivated the hearts of parents and children. This example is only one of the many bi-products of the culture industry's complex mechanisms that limit the viewers' critical thinking and development. When creating characters such as Merida, media conglomerates focus on how audiences may identify with these figures, not to enrich the viewers' self-understanding or intellectual growth, but to urge them to develop into the model as envisaged by the capitalist system and confirm the conglomerate's control over the consumers' mindset and self-identification. This point is explored in greater detail in the following section which looks at the role of nostalgic desires in the viewers' understanding of past and present realities.

Nostalgia

Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia as a 'symptom of our age, a historical emotion.'²⁰ This longing becomes more apparent in times of swift and revolutionary changes that shake one's understanding of the world around him. Boym identifies two major tendencies of nostalgic desires: 'restorative nostalgia' and 'reflective nostalgia'.²¹ Restorative nostalgia is determined to re-establish the original, static past. However, the discourse of restorative nostalgia does not concentrate on the actual past; it glorifies a saccharine version of the past, devoid of complexities or ambiguities, but characterised by values that act in benefit to the creators of this portrait of the past. Restorative nostalgia reconstructs emblems and signs of home to conquer space and time, to comfort one's feeling of loss and to offer a safe and comforting collective framework for individual longing, 'with the aim of re-establishing social cohesion, a sense of security, and an obedient relationship to authority.'²² In this context, nostalgia becomes 'another object of commercialized consumption' that lulls the audience's critical awareness and response and strengthens the conglomerate's control over time and space, as well as the audience's perception of the past.²³

¹⁹ Cited in 'Disney: Say No to the Merida Makeover, Keep Our Hero Brave!', *change.org*, A Mighty Girl (2013). <<http://www.change.org/p/disney-say-no-to-the-merida-makeover-keep-our-hero-brave>> [accessed 6th May 2015].

²⁰ Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 9 (2007), 7-18 (p.18).

²¹ From here on these terms, originally coined by Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), will be used consistently throughout this paper and will not be enclosed in quotation marks.

²² Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', p. 13.

²³ As cited in Linda Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern'. <<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>> [accessed 19th March 2015].

The commercialisation of nostalgia is a crucial point in Linda Hutcheon's article, "Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern".²⁴ Hutcheon writes on the manufacturing of a pre-packaged past whose value is solely determined by the market. More importantly, this version of the past has never existed before: this is a past as imaged by industries which 'teaches us to miss things we have never lost', "'armchair nostalgia'" which 'exists without any lived experience of the yearned-for time.'²⁵ For Hutcheon the 'aesthetics of nostalgia might [...] be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the invocation of a partial idealized history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present.'²⁶ The presentation of a simple and harmonious past is often found in what Fredric Jameson calls the 'nostalgia film' which does not reconstruct the past in its totality or authenticity but rather in the reconstruction of objects specific to an earlier period.²⁷ The nostalgia promoted by the entertainment industry is not concerned with loss, only with a usable past which costs only what the market decides to charge for it.

Through its animated feature films, Disney reinvents history as an ideal and fun environment that secures the interests and authority of corporate and commodity culture. The various narratives and commodities bearing the Disney logo induce nostalgic desires for a magical and idealistic universe which only serves to rewrite the collective history and identity of past generations, which in turn strengthens the company's influence over memory and narratives of national and individual identity.

As an example, one can consider the vast franchise built around *Frozen*. Before the DVD release in March 2014:

Disney had sold half a million Anna and Elsa dolls. In the Disney Store, parents have to enter a lottery just for the chance to buy the most desirable item, an Elsa costume. Limited-edition dolls and dresses have been selling on eBay for more than £1,000 pounds.²⁸

The animated feature became the highest-grossing animated feature in history and a cultural touchstone. In the first half of 2014, the film soundtrack was the top-selling album in the United States, signalling the ubiquity of the film's anthem 'Let it Go'.²⁹ The mania affected older fans too: for instance, bridal designer Alfred Angelo collaborated with Disney to create a

²⁴ Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern'.

<<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>> [accessed 19th March 2015].

²⁵ *ibid.*, [par. 24 of 27].

²⁶ Adam Muller, 'Notes toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the Past in Two European 'Heritage' Films', in *New Literary History* Vol. 37 (2006), 739-760 (pp. 748-749).

²⁷ Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern', para. 19 of 27.

²⁸ Dorian Lynskey, 'Frozen-mania: how Elsa, Anna and Olaf conquered the world', *theguardian.co.uk*, The Guardian (13th May 2014). <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/may/13/frozen-mania-elsa-anna-olaf-disney-emo-princess-let-it-go>> [accessed 19th November 2014] (para. 7 of 22).

²⁹ Cecilia Kang, 'Walt Disney's profit rises 27 percent on strength of 'Frozen' movie franchise', *washingtonpost.com*, The Washington Post (6th May 2014).

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/walt-disneys-profits-rose-27-percents-on-strength-of-frozen-movie-franchise/2014/05/06/7ce81df2-d56b-11e3-95d3-3bcd77cd4e11_story.html> [accessed 19th November 2015] (para. 7 of 11).

Princess Elsa inspired wedding gown. These products are the collective pictorial symbols of restorative nostalgia, the emblems and signs that restore and reconstruct the lost home; in this case to broaden and solidify the Disney realm and its control over time and space. The emphasis here is on the commodities guaranteeing to transport audiences to the magical world of Disney. This is reminiscent of the object pathways created by media and entertainment conglomerates that promise consumers to be transported to the storyworlds of the characters with whom they identify. Elsa and Anna's history and universe is devoid of any complexities, ambiguities or conflicts; in its place is a fun-loving and innocent realm, which can be accessed through object pathways of the merchandise. The transformative and crucial journeys of the complex, fascinating and flawed characters are threatened to be overtaken by the Disney spectacle of an idealised past.

The second tendency that Boym identifies is reflective nostalgia which shows that 'longing and critical thinking can be complimentary and affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection.'³⁰ It detains homecoming and scrutinises truth and tradition. While restorative nostalgia attempts to recreate the lost home, "reflective nostalgia can foster the creation of aesthetic individuality."³¹ In reflective nostalgia, the past is perceived as an opportunity to reflect on the present and the passage of time not as a determined inevitability but as a powerful chance to contemplate on one's self, hopes, fears and regrets. Nostalgia of the first kind reconstructs signs and emblems of home to conquer time while this kind of nostalgia dwells on fragments of individual memory, contradictions of longing and belonging and the passage of time. Rather than the re-establishment of an imaginary homeland, reflective nostalgia 'suggests a new flexibility', where the 'past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, non-teleological possibilities of historic development.'³² Nostalgia of this kind is prospective rather than retrospective; nostalgia for a better time.

Boym explains that nostalgia 'appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.'³³ The longing is for a better time which arises at times of change, instability and anxiety. Hutcheon discusses the 'generalization' of nostalgia 'in terms of Immanuel Kant's recognition that in desiring to return home the nostalgia sufferer desires not to return to a particular place but to a particular time, a time which for Kant is a time of youth.'³⁴ However, Boym argues that although the nostalgia sufferer turns back to the days of their childhood and youth, this does not mean that nostalgia is always retrospective; it can be prospective as well.

³⁰ Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', p. 15.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xv.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Adam Muller, 'Notes toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the past in two European 'Heritage' Films', in *New Literary History*, Vol. 37 (2006), 739-760 (p. 748).

‘The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future.’³⁵ In this context, nostalgic desires do not signal a stagnant mindset or a preoccupation with a glorified portrait of the past; instead, they urge the viewer to consider both past and present worlds and explore an alternative psychology to existing realities. This definition of nostalgia becomes more relevant because it encompasses the possibility of profound questions and significant change of the established status quo.

The previous section demonstrated how narcissistic desires invite audiences to challenge the fixed formula propagated by controlled narcissism and develop their individual voice; similarly prospective nostalgia allows audiences to reflect on past and present conditions and to use past experiences to improve the immediate reality. Film texts may provide a space for reflective and prospective nostalgia, where the nostalgic is allowed to contemplate on the past, use it to develop his individual narrative and apply lessons derived from the past to the immediate reality. And at the centre of this narrative is not the restoration of the prelapsarian homeland, but the journey of the character himself.

The following section applies this analysis to a recent text from Disney’s corpus, *Frozen*, which evokes memories from the audience’s childhood days and presents scenes, issues and themes to ponder upon. The extraordinary and critical journey and transformation of protagonists and heroes such as Elsa are examples of reflective and prospective nostalgia as they can be read as showing how ‘affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection.’ Rather than solidifying and adding up to the Disney narrative canon, this text highlights alternative possibilities in the past, such as for instance Anna saving Elsa and Arendelle, rather than a dashing prince. The use of reflective and prospective nostalgia allows for the consideration of personal narratives that diverge from the official discourse of history and points to other interpretations that existed in the past and which continue to prosper in contemporary times.

***Frozen* Feature Film**

The film is based on the fracturing and re-establishing of the familial bond between two princesses who also happen to be sisters: Elsa and Anna. ‘They are princesses, but they are also human, and therefore possess real and relatable flaws. Elsa is cold, proud and stubborn, and Anna is goofy and socially awkward.’³⁶ The sister relationship reinvigorated the text which had been in discussion since the 1930s: from the cold-hearted snow queen in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale, Elsa is metamorphosed into a misunderstood outsider who personifies the topic of identity and social stigma. In order to make the relationship between Elsa and Anna more credible and real, a Sister-Summit was organized where employees were asked to reflect on their relationship with their siblings. Directors, animators, actresses and

³⁵ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xvi.

³⁶ Michelle Law, ‘Sisters Doin’ It Themselves: Evolution of the Disney Heroine’, in *Screen Education*, 74 (2014), 16-25, (p. 20).

designers shared anecdotes and memories from their childhood as well as their experiences with their own children. Writer and co-director of *Frozen*, Jennifer Lee explained how Anna and Elsa are meant to capture the authenticity of children. There is a 'pure naïveté and vulnerability that we wanted to capture in these characters. Our kids inspire these characters a lot', also hinting at the inherent narcissistic element.³⁷ 'It brings the audience back to a place they may long to return to: childhood.'³⁸ More importantly, it pushes them to reflect on the passage of time and the changes that come along with it.

The opening scene of the film evokes the playful and imaginative spirit of childhood: the persistent little sister who wakes up the elder sister, midnight games and snowball fights... these are all relatable situations which take audiences back into a time when they were young too. It also stimulates nostalgic feelings because it evokes the stories and characters viewers may have created during their playtime, just like Anna and Elsa. The song "Do you want to build a snowman?" expresses the nostalgic sense of loss felt by both sisters as they reminisce on the good times and fun activities of their childhood days. The dichotomy between the two sisters is encapsulated in the song, "For the first time in forever" which reveals the princesses' expectations: Elsa, worried about the future but determined to keep her emotions in check, while Anna revels in the joy of meeting new people and possibly the one. Nevertheless, despite these differences, Anna never loses faith in Elsa and remains hopeful and optimistic about her elder sister. When Elsa's powers are revealed and the lords and nobles scorn at her and think that she is dangerous, Anna only sees her sister's confusion. Anna's nostalgia is her driving force throughout the narrative: she knows who the real Elsa is, the Elsa of her childhood days who creates beautiful artefacts with her powers, and she is determined to bring her back. Isn't this an example of how nostalgia can be prospective, how "the fantasies of the past determined by the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future?"³⁹

The concept of restorative nostalgia is further debunked as the film challenges the concept of love at first sight and introduces another definition of true love. Hans and Anna's engagement self-reflexively mirrors the romantic stories of Disney princesses like Ariel, Snow White and Cinderella who fall head over heels after a glance or a waltz, rather than a conversation. Elsa refuses to give Anna and Hans her blessing and later Kristoff 'mocks Anna about her speedy engagement, grilling her about how she could commit herself to someone else she knows nothing about.'⁴⁰ Anna and Kristoff's relationship provides a different model, one that is based on reason and friendship. Platonic and familial relationships are the pivotal point. For instance, in the climactic scene, Anna realises that the act of true love must come from within

³⁷ 'The Story of *Frozen*: Making a Disney Animated Classic', *abc.com*, ABC (2nd September 2014). <<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/fullpage/story-frozen-making-disney-animated-classic-movie-25150046>> [accessed 22nd November 2014].

³⁸ Paige Burnett, 'To Infinity and Beyond: How the Evocation of Childhood Nostalgia in 'Toy Story 3' Facilitates the Journey Into Adulthood', in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research*, 6 (2014), 1-11 (p. 5).

³⁹ Boym, 'Nostalgia and its Discontents', p. 8.

⁴⁰ Law, 'Sisters Doin' It Themselves: Evolution of the Disney Heroine', p. 22.

her and decides to save Elsa from being killed by Hans rather than kiss Kristoff to save herself. The ending of the film introduces a new understanding of ‘happily ever after’ not found in earlier Disney narratives, showing ‘that romantic love is not the only or the most valid kind of love.’⁴¹

The positive effects of nostalgia are also emphasised in Linda Hutcheon’s notion of ‘ironized nostalgia’ which simultaneously invokes and undermines nostalgia such as in, for instance, the scene where Anna and Kristoff meet Olaf, the anthropomorphic snowman.⁴² Olaf shares his dreams with the humans, ‘A drink in my hand, my snow up against the burning sand | Prob’ly getting gorgeously tanned in summer.’⁴³ The very image of a snowman dreaming about relaxing underneath the summer sun is hilarious but this is counterbalanced by Kristoff, the critical observer, who threatens to disrupt Olaf’s daydreams. Kristoff’s comment, ‘I’m going to tell him’, is a reminder of reality as Olaf imagines himself enjoying a drink on a warm beach; the audience is not allowed to be completely absorbed in Olaf’s dreams. As Hutcheon writes, ‘Pairing nostalgia with irony allows for the kind of critical distance that is necessary in order for nostalgia to be understood as commentary not only about the past, but also about the present.’⁴⁴ This is exemplified in the juxtaposition of Olaf’s innocent and fanciful dreams with Kristoff’s vision of reality. Olaf’s dreams are indeed hilarious and, to a certain point, absurd, but his lines are precisely striking because they debunk the concept of snow melting in summer. By imagining life for a snowman in summer, the child-like Olaf pushes the viewer to question truth and tradition. Similarly, Anna defies popular opinion and continues to believe in the loving and caring nature of Elsa. To the common eye, she is a monster; to Anna she is a misunderstood and frightened character. Here, the past is used to engage with the present. Nostalgia is re-imagined as an effective tool to change the present and propose a different future: Anna and Elsa’s fragments of memories encourage them to build a better kingdom and a future, different from their troubled and repressive past.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate how the relevance of these storyworlds exceeds the boundaries of entertainment. It has sought to present a full-rounded analysis of the narcissistic and nostalgic desires nurtured in cinematic audiences by modern Disney story franchises. It has also attempted to study how nostalgic and narcissistic longings may be used as means of corporate strategy and control or as spaces of critical reflection and questioning about one’s understanding of the self and past and present realities. The storyworlds presented in these two franchises provide a focal point which encourages audiences to formulate their own

⁴¹ Law, ‘Sisters Doin’ It Themselves: Evolution of the Disney Heroine’, p. 24.

⁴² Hutcheon, ‘Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern’, in *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, ed. by Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Estor (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 189-207.

⁴³ *Frozen*, ‘In Summer’, <<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/joshgad/insummer.html>>, *A-Z Lyrics* (Web) [accessed 22nd November 2014]

⁴⁴ Hutcheon, ‘Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern’, in *Methods*, p. 207.

interpretations of themselves, past events and present realities. Just as the protagonists challenge and debunk tradition, established formulas and models, so are the viewers invited to identify with and appropriate the storyworld ideology. Instead of a means to promote the model envisaged and controlled by conglomerate culture, narcissistic and nostalgic desires become a means for cultural development, internal and external change for our time.

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