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Unmasking the quillain: queerness and villainy in animated Disney films

Dion Sheridan McLeod
University of Wollongong

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UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

UNMASKING THE QUILLAIN:
QUEERNESS AND VILLAINY IN ANIMATED DISNEY FILMS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Dion Sheridan McLeod, BSc, BA (Hons)

Supervisors: Dr Debra Dudek

Dr Ika Willis

School of The Arts, English and Media

2016

Certification

I, Dion S. McLeod, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the school of the Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Abstract

Utterances of the term “Disney” are likely to bring to mind images of princesses and princes, evil stepmothers, and wicked sorcerers. One image most associated with Disney, however, is “happily ever after,” a happy ending almost always synonymous with a heterosexual union between the princess and prince. My dissertation flips the analysis from the “good” heterosexual characters to examine their narrative nemeses: the queer villains (“quillains”). The villain is more than just a narratological necessity to push the films’ drives towards heterosexual happy endings, yet their narrative significance becomes overshadowed when they are eliminated.

My dissertation first explores how the villains are coded as queer, before analysing three ways that queerness is embedded in the actual narrative structure of Disney animated films. The first is through the standardisation of a heteronormative plot structure dependent upon the elimination of the quillain. The second is through the heroines’ and quillains’ musical solos, which function to associate the heroines with forward plot momentum and establish the villains as antagonists. The third and final way I explore the narratively embedded queerness is through a spatiotemporal structure which separates the hero/ines’ “ordinary” or “straight” times/spaces from the “special” or “queer” times/spaces of the villains. Finally, I examine the 2013 film *Frozen* to show how even when Disney consciously refers to its own narrative conventions, ultimately it falls back to its static negative representation of the villain-as-queer. I argue that Disney films perpetuate heterosexism because of the way the films are narratively structured around the achievement of heterosexuality via the elimination of a queered villain.

Acknowledgments

Undertaking a project of this size was, well, indescribable. I am thankful to be able to walk away still in love with Disney as much as I was the day I started many, many years ago. This project has taken me across the world, and there are so many people to thank and I know I will inevitably leave people out. The hundreds of conversations about Disney I have had over the past three and a half years have really fuelled my passion for this project. So my first dedication goes to you, the person whose name may not appear in the list below.

My first named thanks go to my fellow PhD candidates here at UOW who have provided so much support over the past three and a half years. Your physical, mental, and emotional support has helped keep me afloat during the harder times. Special thanks are due to my office mates of the past year and a bit who have made the final stages of this PhD remarkably fun. Thank you Kristina and Travis! Never again will a PhD office be as memed or as fun as ours. I now pass #finishyourthesis to you, and I'll Hodor for you two on my way out. I'm done!

Thank you also to the Ikoven members, Alison, Elise, and Evan for the fun times and distractions from the dissertation. Another special thanks is due to Raewyn Campbell for really keeping my passion alive, and perhaps more importantly for introducing me to *Dr. Who* and keeping your Friday nights free for us to watch it together. Never again will I be able to hear the words "Captain Jack" without tearing up a little.

My PhD took me to Boston University for a year as a visiting scholar, and this would not have been possible without the amazing assistance from Professor Leland Monk and the English department at BU. Thank you also to the graduate students at BU who provided amazing conversations for my year abroad. Thank you especially to Pardis for our talk on *Peter Pan* that helped me break through a 5 month conceptual slump.

Very big thanks are due to those who have volunteered to read my dissertation and provide me with feedback to get the final kinks out. Thank you Gillian, Jamie, Justin, Kate, Katie, Ryan, and Tina!

Thank you to my family for keeping me housed and fed for the past few years, and a very special thanks to my fiancé, Andrew. Getting to live together for a year while I was in Boston was just amazing. Because of that trip I was able to finally visit Disneyworld! The physical distance we have had while we both complete our PhDs will be worth it when we

finally get to settle down together in the same place. Thank you for all your love and support.

My final thanks belong to my two absolutely amazing supervisors, Debra Dudek and Ika Willis, who have been there for me for the past three and a half years. This PhD would not be what it is today if it were not for you, and I can honestly say that I won the supervisor lottery. Because of your amazing support, there has not been a single moment in this PhD where I felt like throwing in the towel, even when I was stuck on certain chapters for longer than I would have liked. I can only hope that one day I am able to be half as good as you as a supervisor and academic.

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In many ways the work of a critic is easy. We risk very little, yet enjoy a position over those who offer up their work and their selves to our judgement. We thrive on negative criticism,¹ which is fun to write and to read. But the bitter truth we critics must face is that in the grand scheme of things the average piece of junk is probably more meaningful than our criticism designating it so. But there *are* times when a critic truly risks something, and that is in the discovery and defence of the new.
Ego, Ratatouille

Any lesbian or gay [man] . . . poses the dangerous knowledge that the heterosexual norm is arbitrary. So long as heteronormativity remains unquestioned, it is sacred. And exposing the arbitrariness of the sacred . . . is always potentially fraught with risk.

Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, qtd in Brickell 103.

¹ Ego's views on this one matter do not represent those of graduate students.

Introduction

Beginning a discussion about Disney is likely to conjure up images of princes and princesses, dragons and knights, heroes and villains, and most importantly royal weddings. Simultaneously with the wedding comes a celebration that an evildoer—generally someone with a thirst for power—has been vanquished, allowing happiness and order to return to the world. While these discussions inevitably turn to happy endings, what is often omitted is an acknowledgement that heteronormativity is frequently the driving force of the plot. Throughout this dissertation, I explore full-length, animated Disney films² and their characterisation of the villains as queer. My research discusses the function of queerness in Disney films, and argues that Disney films perpetuate heterosexist³ ideologies through the repeated representation of the queer villain as a threat to the heteronormative trajectory of “happily ever after.”

In order to explore this function fully, throughout my dissertation I deploy the neologism “quillain” to discuss the queer villain. I have created this term because it functions as a tool to (a) understand the intersection of queerness and villainy, (b) examine *how* and *why* the queer villain exists, and (c) explore the implications of this character archetype within the Disney universe.

The major areas of scholarship I draw on, both to develop the theory behind, and to begin an examination of, the quillain, are the fields of Disney studies, narratology, and queer theory. My research also leads me to theory about social justice and children’s literature, reception theory, musicology, and gender theory. While my dissertation is informed by and draws upon many of these different (interrelated) fields of study, particularly scholarship from narratology and queer studies, I see the main contribution of my work, and situate this dissertation, in the fields of children’s literature, children’s cinema, and Disney studies.

This PhD has its beginning in my Honours research project exploring Scar (*The Lion King*) and Gaston and the Beast (*Beauty and the Beast*) as queer characters. I decided to build

² My study is limited to films released and created solely by Disney, so Disney/Pixar films are excluded from this examination because they are a different company with a different method of storytelling. An examination of queerness in Pixar requires its own study.

³ James T. Sears in “Thinking Critically About/Intervening Effectively About Heterosexism and Homophobia: A Twenty-Five-Year Research Retrospective,” defines heterosexism as “a belief in the superiority of heterosexuals or heterosexuality evidenced in the exclusion, by omission or design, of non-heterosexual persons in policies, procedures, events, or activities” (16).

upon these ideas for my PhD, exploring how all the villains are queered in Disney. Within the first few weeks of my PhD, a video was released on YouTube by Nostalgia Chick and Rantasmø, titled “Disney Needs More Gay,” in which they discuss the way Disney villains can be read as queer. Immediately I contacted my PhD supervisors with an email titled “A video stole my thesis.” Panic ensued, and my PhD was basically over before it began.

Thankfully I received two replies from my advisors: Debra replied with a very logical, “Remember, a 4 minute video is not the equivalent of an 80,000 word PhD dissertation,” and Ika with, “It doesn’t ‘steal your thesis’ any more than drag queen performances as Disney villainesses or the existence of Disney slash does – like them, it’s evidence of the *queer reception* of Disney.” With some time to reflect, I realised it was positive that fans *were* and *are* reading the films in a very similar way to myself. As my research progressed I realised the importance of fan readings and fan theory, and this theory has become incorporated in my dissertation, especially in Chapter Six.

My dissertation deconstructs Disney films and relies on decoded readings of specific characters (I explain these decoded readings in greater detail shortly). While I argue Disney films perpetuate heterosexism, I also acknowledge this view is not necessarily one with universal agreement. As Martin Barker and Thomas Austin explain in *From Antz to Titanic: Reinventing Film Analysis*:

We can’t deduce ‘harm’ (or ‘good’ for that matter) from analysis of films. We can’t place films along some supposed dimension of political or ideological acceptability, from conservative/reactionary to radical/subversive. Most importantly, we cannot read off possible influences upon an unnamed, ‘vulnerable’ audience. And part of the reason for that is that films don’t contain ‘messages’ plus message-launching devices in the way that much analysis has supposed. (174)

Disney films do not contain “message launching devices,” but they do have a repeated coding of certain character types across films spanning almost eight decades. While my dissertation cannot deduce “harm” from these films, it *can* and *does* make a judgement based on textual analysis; the films perpetuate heterosexism because of the alignment of villainy with queerness and the narrative elimination of the quillain. As Janet Staiger notes in *Media Reception Studies*, “[n]o natural, universally ‘worthwhile’ texts exist. All interpretations are subjective, and all texts have political and social meanings and values—‘positive’ or ‘negative,’ ‘reinforcing’ or contrary to the beliefs of their various readers” (3). While I may not be able to deduce harm from the films, I can critique the negative “political and social meanings” ascribed to the queer coding of the villains.

My dissertation is of course not the first academic work to examine the role of the “murderous gay.” Exploring the Hitchcock film by the same name in his book *Strangers on a Train*, Johnathan Goldberg discusses the idea of the queer antagonist. He explains how in the Hollywood film tradition, “undercurrents [of homosexuality] so often attach themselves to murderous desires, a doubling of forbidden desire and the criminal act of taking a life” (85). What my dissertation does do, however, is name this character trope in Disney films and provide a means by which to analyse its presence across the Disney canon.

Deconstructing Disney

Disney is often discussed as though it is an exact entity, something with a universal definition. However, in the introduction to their book *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells outline the five major representations of Disney. The first is the founder, Walt Disney; the second is the studio that manufactures Disney’s films; the third is the canon of popular film; and the fourth is the “multinational corporation that in part manufactures and distributes countless merchandise based on the films and animations.” The final face of Disney is an ideology, “a sign whose mythology and cultural capital is dependent on, and imbricated in all the above manifestations of the name ‘Disney’” (2). The term “Disney” is just as complex as the films produced by this company; there are numerous layers present in understanding both the content of the films (such as the plot and other narrative elements) and the ideological messages being presented to the audiences (such as messages about gender, race, sexuality, age, and so on).

Janet Wasko further explores myths associated with the production and consumption of Disney films. In “A Less Than Wonderful ‘World’: Challenging Disney Myths” she discusses

[a]nother set of myths based on widespread assumptions about the company and its founder [that] protects Disney from critical scrutiny by the general public, as well as scholars who have studied its products. Five assumptions are typically made about Disney: (1) Walt Disney was a creative genius responsible for the company’s success; (2) WDC [Walt Disney Corporation] is somehow special and unique, not like other corporations; (3) Disney is only for kids; (4) Disney’s products are harmless, safe, and unbiased; and (5) everyone adores Disney. (1)

Like Bell, Haas, and Sells, Wasko deconstructs myths surrounding the seemingly “untouchable” Disney, making way for scholars and wider society to be able to critique Disney’s products freely.

While criticism of Disney has been gaining traction academically in recent years, nostalgia is often used as an excuse to deflect criticism from Disney films both within, but also beyond, the academy. Bell, Haas, and Sells explain how “the naturalised Disney text is [seen as] ‘pure entertainment,’ somehow centrifuged from ideological forces.” On top of this assumption of the films as “pure entertainment,” Bell, Haas, and Sells identify four common pardons used to circumvent criticism of children’s texts broadly, and Disney films specifically: “it’s only for children; it’s only fantasy; it’s only a cartoon; and it’s just good business” (4).

One of the earliest books on Disney is Richard Schickel’s *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney*. Critiquing this book, David Kunzle notes, “even this analysis, penetrating and caustic as it is, in many respects remains prey to the illusion that Disney productions, even at their worst, are somehow redeemed by the fact that, made in ‘innocent fun’ they are socially harmless” (11). Criticising Disney, particularly from a social justice viewpoint, uncovers alibis used which render invisible Disney’s perpetuation of negative representations of marginalised groups. My research arises from a necessity to address these alibis.

Wasko addresses the problems with the critical analysis of Disney in the first pages of her book *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy*. She notes:

studying Disney can be a challenge. When it is introduced as a topic for discussion, Disney is most often accepted with unqualified approval, and even reverence, by the American public. Many feel that the Disney company is somehow unique and different from other corporations, and its products are seen as innocent and pleasurable. . . . Nevertheless, it is important to consider the Disney phenomenon seriously and to insist that it is a legitimate focal point for cultural and social analysis. It is appropriate not only to look more closely at the Disney company and its products, but also to critique their role in our culture. (3)

The term “Disney” is, arguably, a term synonymous with “American culture” and with it “popular culture” more generally. Disney’s reach extends across national, cultural, and linguistic borders, and this pervasiveness calls for its critique. Feelings of nostalgia and innocence need to be pushed aside so a company that is so influential can receive the critical engagement it deserves. Regardless of the medium or target audience, the fact Disney films

negatively portray already marginalised groups in society warrants continued study.

The fact that Disney films are marketed towards children in no way diminishes the importance of understanding the messages being portrayed. As Henry Giroux explains in “Are Disney Movies Good For Your Kids?” “[a]nimated films operate on many registers; one of the most persuasive is the role they play as the new ‘teaching machines’” (164). Because Disney films are widely accessible, the ideological messages presented have the potential to become pedagogically influential.

An important early criticism of Disney is Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart’s 1971 book *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*. Though it is one of the first staunch criticisms of the Disney corporation, Dorfman and Mattelart make it clear that writing the book “was *not* an academic exercise” and in the preface speak directly to Walt, saying, “Mr. Disney, we are returning your Duck. Feathers plucked and well-roasted. Look inside, you can see the handwriting on the wall: Donald, Go Home!” (10). This book was written during a time of intense political turmoil between the US and Chile, and the authors make it known in their preface that they wrote the book in “January 1975, in exile” (10) while fleeing from Chilean armed forces. This context is important because it shows how even during times when there are very real risks to those critiquing accepted ideological positions, there exist scholars willing to take the chance to disseminate their own opinions. Critical and scholarly attacks on Disney have been around for a few decades, but it is only more recently that they are beginning to multiply in great numbers.

We need to understand the history of criticism towards Disney, because we need to know what has been done, and what is still necessary, in order to expand this area of scholarship. In “The Wonderful World of the Depression: Disney, Despotism, and the 1930s. Or, Why Disney Scares Us,” Kevin Shortsleeve notes “the ur-text of Disney criticism is Frances Clarke Sayers’s ‘Walt Disney Accused,’ which appeared in *Horn Book* in 1965” (1). Shortsleeve explains how this interview, while presumably not the first criticism against Disney, “inflame[d] the first controversy” (1). Sayers’ interview is based predominantly on the criticism of Disney’s⁴ mass production of books that both misappropriate original folklore and falsify life.

When reading Sayers’ interview, it becomes apparent that, as of 1965, Disney had not received much criticism. Sayers bluntly states, “I find almost everything objectionable,” and continues by explaining how,

⁴ In this interview Disney refers to the man, Walt Disney, rather than the corporation more generally.

[Walt Disney] leaves nothing to the imagination of the child . . . Disney takes a great masterpiece and telescopes it. He reduces it to ridiculous lengths, and in order to do this he has to make everything very obvious. It all happens very quickly and is expressed in very ordinary language. There is nothing to make a child think or feel or imagine. (n.p.)

Sayers' main criticisms of Disney stem from the fact that Walt Disney specifically markets his products to children, while at the same time dilutes original tales to the point where creativity and imagination are lost.

The criticism directed towards Disney of telescoping "great masterpiece[s]" has permeated society, both inside and outside of academia. Sayers is discussing something that has become known as "Disneyfication," a process of taking something and expressing it "in very ordinary language." This language has also entered academia; Cornel Sandvoss, in "The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture" explains how, "[t]he relative neglect of the question of aesthetic value has made the field of media and cultural studies a popular target as a 'Mickey Mouse' subject." This term is, Sandvoss explains, one implying "a lack of depth and theoretical rigour" (19). Immediately arising from this statement is the question of why Disney is aligned with a lack of "depth and theoretical rigour."

While Disney *does* take often dark tales and transform them into palatable and child-friendly stories, the terms "Disneyfication" and "Mickey Mouse subject" have become somewhat of a pejorative to discredit and delegitimise the value inherent in the consumption and critique of the films. Wasko also recognises this issue when she explains, "in some academic circles, the study of Disney in particular, and popular culture in general, has been perceived as an irrelevant, frivolous, 'Mickey Mouse' occupation. Nevertheless, Disney has been the focus of study in a wide variety of disciplines" (*Understanding* 4). The more scholars begin to speak out about these texts, whether in a positive or negative critical light, the more the idea that the study of Disney lacks legitimacy and academic rigour will be dismantled.

Queer readings of mainstream film have also been seen as lacking rigour, although for a different reason. Alexander Doty, in *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* explains, "[i]t's as if showing too much interest in what we are writing about somehow undermines our credibility as intellectuals" (11). Doty's position is one I take up throughout my dissertation, and return to in much more detail in Chapter Six when I discuss the legitimacy of fan

readings of Disney's *Frozen*. In case it is not clear already, I am a Disney aca-fan,⁵ and my position bridging the roles of academic and fan is what has enabled my analysis of these films in my dissertation.

These criticisms about Disney do not negate the positive aspects of the man and the company. Sayers concludes her interview with a clarification about her particular criticisms: "Just let me say that I am attacking Walt Disney in relation to children's literature, not in relation to many other things that he has done" (n.p.). This attack on Disney in relation to children's literature is vital to remember when analysing the films. Disney—both the man and the other faces of the term—does produce films providing enjoyment for adults and children alike. The continued and repeated misrepresentation of marginalised groups by Disney becomes even more important, however, when acknowledging that the films are marketed towards children.

Sayers can be seen as the pioneer of Disney studies, and she understood very well the troubles faced when studying in this field. She states in her interview, "I would say that before you condemn anyone who attacks Disney, read the original classics and compare" (n.p.). Sayers' urging of people to understand how Disney misappropriates texts, and I would also include social groups, before condemning criticism towards Disney is something that needs more critical attention.

Though scholars like Sayers, Dorfman, and Mattelart have spoken out against Disney and supported the critical analysis of Disney films since the 1960s, fears about criticising Disney have not dissipated. As Shortsleeve notes, "[m]any critics appear frightened of Disney on some level. They sense a threat, and though specific complaints are voiced, there is no agreement on the origins of this collective anxiety" (1). Shortsleeve acknowledges the anxiety often associated with critically studying Disney films, and more importantly, highlights the ongoing debate about what causes this anxiety; roughly half of the academic sources I cite about Disney occur after Shortsleeve's 2004 article. I join the growing number of scholars who have been critically analysing Disney films for over 50 years, and having already attempted communication with Disney in seeking permission to reproduce some images, I understand the anxiety.⁶

⁵ On his blog, fan studies theorist Henry Jenkins notes that an aca-fan is "a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic" (n.p.).

⁶ After contacting a legal representative for Disney in early 2013 and explaining what images I wanted to reproduce in a journal article and for what purpose, I waited weeks without hearing anything. Further attempts to communicate with the representative went unanswered.

My own criticism of Disney centres on three distinct aspects of the films that work to establish a strong narrative of heterosexual necessity. The first is the way Disney films separate heterosexuality from queerness, both spatially (through a separation of “ordinary” spaces coded heterosexually and “special” spaces coded queerly—as discussed in chapters three and four) and through distinct visual coding (the quillain as gender deviant and the hero/ine as gender normative). The second is through the presence of a heterosexual trajectory as an aspirational norm, presenting linear stories concluding with happy endings being synonymous with heterosexually oriented happiness.⁷ The final way Disney establishes this necessity is by showing queerness as a disruption to the happily ever after; one narrative function of the quillains, as I discuss in Chapter One, is to keep the heroine and hero apart from one another.

My main focus and largest criticism of Disney is the representation of the queer as villainous. In his book *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out*, Sean Griffin explains how,

Disney has made the vision of sexuality seem such a given fact of life that most consumers are incapable of consciously acknowledging its construction. Disney consequently posits heterosexual courtship as the only ‘true’ (if not the ‘only’) method by which individuals may conceive of sexuality. (4)

By *consciously* acknowledging the construction of both queerness and heterosexuality in Disney films, my dissertation seeks to dismantle Disney’s conception of heterosexuality as the “true” sexuality.

I analyse Disney films to problematise their representation of queerness in two ways: (a) the character representations (the frequent alignment of the queer, often gender deviant, individual with villainy) and (b) the narrative structure, the utopian visions of heteronormativity often ending the films. Amy Pattee, in “Sexual Fantasy: The Queer Utopia of David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy*,” argues, “through the absence of discussion about homosexual love . . . the traditional utopia invalidates the experiences of gays and lesbians as it reifies and glorifies heterosexual romance” (156). This glorification is seen during the weddings and birth of progeny shown at the end of almost every film. Disney released its first full-length animated film almost over 80 years ago, and there is still yet to be one same-sex

⁷ As Jack Zipes explains in *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry*, each Disney film “follows the same prescribed plot: The disenfranchised or oppressed heroine *must* be rescued by a daring prince. Heterosexual happiness and marriage are always the ultimate goal of the story” (93, italics original).

romantic relationship established in a film.⁸ Not only is there an absence of same-sex romantic relationships, but there is also an almost complete absence of scholarship on the topic, and it is this discussion to which I contribute throughout my dissertation.

An existing framework to identify gender deviant characters in Disney, or those who do not follow the expectations of traditional heterosexuality, is found in Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark LaPointe's "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film." Li-Vollmer and LaPointe examine the ways in which male characters deviate from expected gender norms, and use this deviation to account for the "villain-as-sissy" archetype (89). In order to unpack this archetype, Li-Vollmer and LaPointe discuss patterns of characterisation occurring across their selected films including physical characteristics, costuming and props, nonverbal gestures and body position, activities, and dialogue.

Their aim in identifying this archetype is to show how "many of these forms of gender transgression . . . create caricatures of the villains that not only present the bad guys as 'girly,' but also invoke the stereotypical queer" (103). While my research utilises the basic tools of analysis provided by Li-Vollmer and LaPointe, it expands upon it by moving beyond an examination of the feminised male villains to study female villains who are masculinised. I examine both female and male gender deviant characters in order to demonstrate how this deviation from gender norms does not *invoke* queer stereotypes, as suggested by Li-Vollmer and LaPointe, but rather portrays the villains *as* queer characters.

Alongside Griffin's examination of Disney from a sociological viewpoint, Bell, Haas, and Sells' collection of essays problematising various aspects of Disney films, and Li-Vollmer and LaPointe's paper on gender transgression, there are many books and even more journal articles dedicated to the literary analysis and criticism of Disney films. One of the most notable journals in regards to the study of gender in Disney is *Women's Studies in Communication*. Aside from publishing articles on Disney in general issues, a 1996 issue is dedicated solely to "gender and the World of Disney." As with many studies analysing gender, this special edition focusses mostly on the representation of women. Three papers from this issue demonstrating the importance of studying the representation of gender in Disney films are "Feminine Empowerment in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*" by Sharon

⁸ Fans have read queer characters across Disney's history, but perhaps the most plausible to date occurs in the 2016 film *Zootopia*. This film contains two characters, Bucky and Pronk, an oryx and antelope who live together. As Nick Duffy notes in "There's a married gay couple in Disney's *Zootopia* but nearly everyone missed it," "The film's credits list them as Bucky Oryx-Antlerson and Pronk Oryx-Antlerson – with their double-barrelled last name appearing to suggest that the pair tied the knot to live unhappily ever after" (n.p.). This suggestion, however, is still not representation, but is a (very) small step in the right direction.

Downey; “Gender Roles in Disney Films: Analysing Behaviours from Snow White to Simba” by Keisha Hoerrner; and “Construction of the Female Self: Feminist Readings of the Disney Heroine” by Jill Henke, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Nancy Smith.

While gender is perhaps the most common topic in the world of Disney studies, it is far from the only critical discussion. Other analyses range from substance (mis)use in “Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide: Smoking and Drinking in Disney’s Animated Classics” by Erin Ryan and Keisha Hoerrner; to age in “The Portrayal of Older Characters in Disney Animated Films” by Tom Robinson et al.; to the resistance of students to criticise Disney films in “Staying True to Disney: College Students’ Resistance to Criticism of *The Little Mermaid*” by Chyng Feng Sun and Erica Scharrer. What becomes apparent when researching Disney is that there are many scholars who are willing to look past childhood nostalgia and examine the real issues that are paramount in these films, despite the anxiety associated with criticising them noted by Kevin Shortsleeve.

There have been a few other important books contributing to the field of Disney studies in recent years.⁹ Two significant books examining the role and function of gender in the portrayal of both the hero/ines and villains are Amy Davis’ *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney’s Feature Animation* (2006) and *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains: Men in Disney’s Feature Animation* (2013). In her two books, Davis historically analyses the primary protagonists and antagonists from *Snow White* (1937) through *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012). By exploring the ways in which gender functions in the creation and portrayal of hero/ines and villains, Davis provides a very useful framework from which to undertake a character analysis with characters from the Disney genre.

The most recent critical work on Disney is Douglas Brode and Shae T. Brode’s edited collection *Debating Disney: Pedagogical Perspectives on Commercial Cinema* (2016). Douglas Brode explains how

[p]erhaps Disney films are less ‘good’ or ‘bad’ than, as reception theory would have it, items existing in the objective world that can be understood as either good or bad in the subjective mind of diverse observers. Here, then, is this anthology’s concept. No other book filled with readings on Disney has attempted to alternate negative and positive essays, as well as many others that are balanced or neutral. (xvii)

Brode and Brode’s collection explore issues including race, gender, and sexuality in Disney

⁹ Seán J. Harrington’s *The Disney Fetish* (2014) is one of the more recent books, but like much criticism it focuses heavily on the production of the films, rather than an close reading of the films (though there are moments of close reading). He uses a psychoanalytic framework to discuss the way consumers buy into the capitalistic Disney model.

films. Forthcoming (during the time of my dissertation's examination) is Douglas Brode and Shae T. Brode's companion edited collection, *It's the Disney Version: Popular Cinema and Literary Classics*, which promises to explore the way Disney adapts and alters earlier tales from which they draw.

One final noteworthy book analysing Disney from a social justice perspective is Johnson Cheu's 2013 edited collection *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*. While this collection does pay some focus to sexuality, there is one chapter especially warranting attention: Amanda Putnam's "Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films." Putnam notes that "[i]n contrast to the heterosexist leads, many of the villains display transgendered attributes—depicted as women with either strong masculine qualities or as strangely de-feminized, while the male bad guys are portrayed as effeminate, often complete with stereotypical limp-wristed affectation" (147-48). While Putnam approaches reading the villains queerly from a similar position as myself, her position relies on a problematic conflation of gender non-conformity *with* transgender identity.

In her analysis, Putnam explores many of the villains I refer to throughout my dissertation. For example, she notes, "*The Lion King's* Scar, *Aladdin's* Jafar, and *Pocahontas's* Ratcliffe also become transgendered villains" and justifies this reading in part because her "daughter grouped these characters as 'mean ladies' too" (148). She later contradicts herself when she repeats almost verbatim the quote about the three villains, adding how their representation is "even bordering on overtly homosexual characterizations" (155) and claims "Scar looks only vaguely feminine in his appearance . . . and the lack of a female mate mark his character as crossing into transgendered territory . . . Like Scar, Jafar's lack of interest in a female partner also suggests his transgenderism" (156-57). Putnam's overall argument comes from a similar position to mine, but her problematic and repeated conflation of gender presentation, sexuality, and gender identity requires a rethinking of some of her foundational analyses. My dissertation addresses the problems I have with her argument by approaching the Disney villain as a *queer* character, rather than as a *gay*, *lesbian*, or *transgender* character.

Queering the Theory

The term “queer” has a multitude of meanings and is often used slightly differently by different scholars. In my research, I combine many of the works I discuss below to understand how Disney, specifically, constructs a set of conventions for representing queerness. When using the term “queer,” I am talking about an identity more complex than simply “lesbian,” “gay,” or “bisexual”; “queer” refers to someone who deviates from expected norms of gender and sexuality.

Although a definition of “queer” is significant for an understanding of the quillain, there is some contention about the necessity of “labels.” Kate Bornstein, in *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, explains how, “[d]efinitions have their uses in much the same way that road signs make it easy to travel: they point out the directions. But you don’t get where you’re going when you just stand underneath some sign, waiting for it to tell you what to do” (22). This statement is especially important when attempting to understand Disney queerness. As with any fictional text, interpreting the representation of Disney’s villains who deviate from gender and sexual norms, and labelling them as queer, relies on stereotypes and assumptions about gender and sexual identity. These assumptions are problematic and can themselves potentially perpetuate heterosexism. However, while it is important to be conscious of the problems with labelling someone or something as queer based on specific visual cues, in order to analyse and criticise the repeated representation of the villain as Other to the hero, a definition of queer needs to be formulated.

I do not want to fall in to the trap of conflating numerous identities, named or unnamed, under the category of “queer.” Exploring this precarious positioning in *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, Alexander Doty notes:

I find myself working with sexual identity terms in the service of not-quite-compatible goals. I want to construct ‘queer’ as something other than ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ or ‘bisexual’; but I can’t say that ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ or ‘bisexual’ *aren’t* also ‘queer.’ I would like to maintain the integrity of ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘bisexual’ as concepts that have specific historical, cultural, and personal meanings; but I would also like ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘bisexual’ culture, history, theory, and politics to have some bearing on the articulation of queerness. (xvii)

“Queer” is a loaded term with a long history of pathologisation and reclamation. In my research, queer necessarily needs to mean “something other than ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ or ‘bisexual,’” due in large part to the fact there are no *out* Disney characters. I deploy queer in

this “other” way to discuss characters whose physical characterisation and narrative function intersect in a way threatening the heteronormativity of the films.

While I mostly use the term “queer” in a manner criticising its pejorative deployment through the characterisation of the villains, my use of it also functions as a form of reclamation; the villains are coded queer and eliminated, which is negative, but these characters are also the ones who (arguably) provide the action and enjoyment to the films. Jodie Taylor, in “Scenes and Sexualities: Queerly Reframing the Music Scenes Perspective,” also explores this terrain, noting:

The reclamation of this once pejorative term indicates an ontological challenge to the medicalization of gender and sexual non-normativities and to distinct and hierarchical gender and sexual categorizations. Queer now embodies a highly fruitful anti-essentializing ambiguity that produces a complex and ever shifting set of relationships to the perceived norm for not only gender and sexuality but to all normalizing regimes. (144)

For my dissertation, when I make reference to the quillain, I refer to a specific set of characteristics repeated across Disney films that destabilise “normalizing regimes” of heteronormativity in the films. In the Disney universe *queer* is someone pathologised and ostracised, and someone who does not “stand beneath some sign” waiting to be told what to do. In my dissertation *queer* is used as a resistive, anti-essentialising tool.

The use of pejorative terms towards queer individuals is one with a long history. Vito Russo begins his book *The Celluloid Closet* with the lines, “Nobody likes a sissy. That includes dykes, faggots and feminists of both sexes. Even in a time of sexual revolution, when traditional roles are being examined and challenged every day, there is something about a man who acts like a woman that people find fundamentally distasteful” (4). Russo’s commentary, when applied to Disney films, provides one reason to account for the frequent feminisation of male villains. By feminising these villains and presenting them as “less than” male, the films value the hero, who is often a symbol of hegemonic masculinity. Simultaneously, the female villains who deviate from traditionally feminine gender roles are less valued than their “properly” feminine heroines.

One idea running throughout my dissertation is the “percolating binary,” a term Richard Twine describes in his paper “Ma(r)king Essence: Ecofeminism and Embodiment.” These binaries work by contrasting each pair of dualisms horizontally, while simultaneously adding meaning to each individual column when they are examined in relation to each other vertically. Twine explains how the “important point . . . is the way in which meaning percolates vertically through the structures of dualisms, with each pair obtaining

reinforcement in alliance with others” (32). The percolating that occurs within these vertical structures intensifies the meaning of any single trait in each set of binaries.

In Disney films, what is reinforced is the representation of specific character types—the heterosexual hero/ine and the queer villain.¹⁰ In terms of the Disney films I examine, some of these binaries are: heroine/villain; heterosexual/queer; good/evil; gender normative/gender deviant (Table 1). Through the operation of the percolating binary structure that Twine describes, individual qualities like these are intensified to develop a position where the *hero/ine* as *heterosexual* and *good* is intensified and contrasted to the *queer evil villain*.

Table 1: Percolating Binaries in Disney Films

Hero/ine	Villain
Heterosexual	Queer
Good	Evil
Gender Normative	Gender Deviant
Moral	Immoral

As this binary structure suggests, the flip side to the complexities of the term “queer” is the similar complexities of “heterosexual.” Various scholars have theorised heterosexuality. As Chrys Ingraham notes in her introduction to *Thinking Straight: The Power, Promise and Paradox of Heterosexuality*, “In American society, we frequently refer to heterosexuality as something that is naturally occurring, overlooking the myriad of ways we have *learned* how to practice heterosexuality, having given meaning to it” (1). While my dissertation is not focused on the heterosexual hero/ines specifically, they play a vital role in the quillians’ existence.

Therefore, combined with my criticism of the villain-as-queer, my dissertation marks the “unmarked” to examine the norms, and problematises the recurrence of these norms. As Chris Brickell explains in “The Transformation of Heterosexism and its Paradoxes,” “[h]eterosexuality is constructed as a general, unmarked category. Those who identify and are identified as heterosexual are not positioned within discourses as heterosexuals so much as

¹⁰ As I explain in more detail in the Chapter Six “I acknowledge that in most Disney films, and in my own writing on these characters thus far, heroine and hero have been gendered terms referring to female and male characters respectively.” “Heroine” is a narrative function in which the character requires saving from the quillain by the male “hero.”

‘people,’ and heterosexuality is merely ‘sexuality’” (97). Chapter One of my dissertation most overtly marks the unmarked, by examining Disney narrative norms and how queerness exists, and is removed as a result of, heterosexuality.

At this juncture an important terminological clarification is necessary. Throughout my dissertation I refer to the way “straight happy endings” are the end goal of the films. While on one hand these words seem relatively straightforward, there is a level of complexity to unpack. Just as I use “queer” as an umbrella term, in order to examine heterosexuality and the significance of heteronormative endings, in my dissertation I use the term “straightness.”

My deployment of “straightness” encompasses heterosexuality (and with it heterosexual happy endings—i.e. the uniting of a romantically involved heterosexual couple), and the way heterosexuality encompasses and structures other hetero/normative elements such as familial units. Eve Sedgwick, in *Tendencies*, explores the way society values specific meanings and institutions to the extent that they line up neatly as expected. She begins by asking the reader to “[t]hink of that entity, ‘the family,’ an impacted social space in which all of the following are meant to line up perfectly with each other” and continues by listing multiple aspects:

- a surname
- a sexual dyad
- a legal unit based on state-regulated marriage
- a circuit of blood relationships
- a system of companionship and succor
- a building
- a proscenium between ‘private’ and ‘public’
- an economic unit of earning and taxation
- the prime site of economic consumption
- a mechanism to produce, care for, and acculturate children
- a mechanism for accumulating material goods over several generations
- a daily routine
- a unit in a community of worship
- a site of patriotic formation. (6)

When examining the above (by no means complete) list, it becomes clear that what Disney is attempting to do is to bring as many of these elements in line to create an ending where heterosexual happiness becomes synonymous with a romantic heterosexual union and/or the (re)uniting of a family: in essence, the encapsulation of heteronormativity. These endings can be seen in Appendix One, where I have separated Disney endings into three primary categories: those with a heterosexual romantic union (e.g. *Snow White*); those with the (re)uniting of a family (e.g. *Tarzan*); and those that contain both of these elements (e.g.

Treasure Planet).

Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen, in their introduction to *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays*, also explore the aspects of heterosexuality expected to line up when they note, “[r]omance is central not only to the conventional romance genre—in which a heterosexual couple navigates various barriers to love and eventually reaches a happy, monogamous union—but also to less generic explorations of love, within couples, marriages, and families, in which closure restores the couple or family unit (in the ‘happy ending’)” (1). The romance in Disney is one leading to a closure restoring the couple/family unit, coded in very heteronormative terms.

The binary of heterosexual/queer can itself be aligned with reproduction/non-reproduction. Judith Roof, in *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*, explains how

[t]he reduction of a larger field of sexuality to two categories is partly an effect of narrative’s binary operation within a reproductive logic; in this sense there are really only two sexualities: reproductive sexuality, which is associated with difference and becomes metaphorically heterosexual, and nonreproductive sexuality associated with sameness, which becomes metaphorically homosexual. (xxix)

Disney villains clearly represent the latter association. The non-reproductive aspects of the quillains are significant, as I will show, because of the way they go against the very nature of Disney endings.

Ultimately, Disney endings are shown as beginnings for heterosexuality. The queer is gone, they will not be mourned, and in many cases it is almost as though they never existed. Roof, exploring the function of queerness in literature, explains: “[o]n the surface, our comfort in the end is produced by a cause/effect logic where the end promises an ultimate result. Our very idea of an end is dependent upon a concept of chronological, linear, unidirectional time that positions the end as the cumulative locus of completed knowledge” (7). The Disney narrative flows in such a manner as to position the end as “the cumulative locus of completed knowledge.” This locus in the Disney universe is the knowledge that the heteronormative familial unit is still intact and the force behind its attempted disruption is removed.

Some quillains such as Cruella De Vil (*101 Dalmatians*) and Edgar (*The Aristocats*) are removed from their positions of power and do not resist their fate, and as a result are allowed to live. More often than not, however, the quillains are offered one final chance for redemption, one final offer to leave the vicinity and escape with their lives, but disregard this offer. As a result of this defiance, the quillains are killed. Death, or presumed death, is the

case in 20 Disney films (Appendix Two). The most prominent deaths, all in relation to political disloyalty, are Scar (*The Lion King*), the Evil Queen (*Snow White*), and Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*). Death is the most extreme case of elimination in Disney films, but accounts for more than half of the quillains' fates. Not only does this extreme form of elimination represent the films' political needs for the characters to be removed, but it reflects both wider social beliefs and the prevalence of heteronormativity.

Disney is not alone, however, in the portrayal of the death of the queer. As Kenneth Chan explains in "Bad Boys Need Love, Too: The Cinematic Negativity of Gay Romance in *I Love You Phillip Morris*," there exists "generic conventions of cinematic queer death: the queer subject, villainous or otherwise, must die" (30). Disney works with this convention with the queer villain, but they do allow one type of queer character to survive. The queer helper (such as Timon and Pumbaa [*The Lion King*], Genie [*Aladdin*], and Olaf [*Frozen*]) are allowed to exist close to the hero/ine, but are still removed from the narratives at the conclusion of the films. While an examination of this second character type is beyond the scope of my dissertation, I will return to it in the conclusion.

Before continuing my discussion of the negative history of the portrayal of queerness, it needs to be noted that there is a history of positive queer readings of texts, particularly in fan-readings and appropriations of characters. Henry Jenkins begins his chapter, "'Out of the Closet and into the Universe': Queers and *Star Trek*" with an exploration of the issues of queer reception:

'2, 4, 6, 8, how do you know Kirk is straight' the Gaylaxians chanted as they marched down the streets of Boston on Gay Pride day. '3, 5, 7, 9, he and Spock have a real fine time!' The chant encapsulates central issues of concern . . . How do texts determine the sexual orientation of their characters and how might queer spectators gain a foothold for self-representation in dominant media narratives? . . . The chant captures the play between visibility and invisibility which . . . [has] been a central theme in the struggle against homophobia in contemporary society. (189)

The issues of visibility and invisibility become particularly important when talking about queer reception. While many films that have portrayed queerness have done so on a subtextual level, this subtext is something audiences, particularly queer audiences, understand. Current representations of queerness in Disney films balance this fine line between visibility and invisibility—audiences have been reading the villains as queer, but this portrayal is not satisfactory and an overtly queer character is essential for social justice,

preferably a queer who is not killed.¹¹

There has been a long debate over whether the representation of queerness is permissible in both children's and adult literature and film. Victoria Munro, in "Personal Space and Identity: Hate and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community," explores this debate. She explains how children's literature, representing "what it means to be LGBT has been problematic on two accounts: content and access. . . . The portrayal of homosexuality in literature for children and young adults has been a topic of contestation; debate between those who favor limiting topics for youth and those who favor a more open presentation of issues and ideas is ongoing" (182). While this debate is beginning to change and there are positive representations of queers in children's and young adult literature and film, this change comes only after decades of negative representations.

The history of censorship and the relegation of the queer to the subtext in film specifically can be traced back to the 1930s with the introduction of the Motion Picture Production Code, otherwise known as the Hays Code. David M. Lugowski, in "Queering the (New) Deal: Lesbian and Gay Representation and the Depression-Era Cultural Politics of Hollywood's Production Code" explains how this code was "notable, for, among other things, the sometimes remarkable ways it attempted to regulate discourse in American film without baldly stating that certain textual elements were absolutely forbidden" (9). This code "listed 'any inference of sexual perversion' as a 'Don't,' and homosexuality was included under this edict" (Munro 184). During this time, and beyond, the queer began to rise to the forefront of texts and was often associated with villainy.

Vito Russo explores this history throughout *The Celluloid Closet*, and briefly mentions Disney: "There is a cartoon gay villain in *The Great Mouse Detective*" (251). Though he does not expand on this detail, his reference to Professor Ratigan as gay is one of the very few readings of a Disney villain as a queer character. He continues his discussion by moving away from Disney to explore films made for an adult audience and the explicit pejoratives directed at these characters: "The use of the word *faggot* has become almost mandatory. Outright slurs that would never be tolerated in reference to any other group of people are commonly used onscreen against homosexuals . . . Scores of films use fag jokes and gay villains in venomous and gratuitous ways" (251). In no Disney film are these slurs

¹¹ Website Tv Tropes examines this trope, known as "Bury your gays": "Often, especially in older works (to the extent that they *are* found in older works, of course), gay characters just aren't allowed happy endings. Even if they do end up having some kind of relationship, at least one half of the couple, often the one who was more aggressive in pursuing a relationship, thus "perverting" the other one, has to die at the end" (n.p.).

used outright against the villains, but the villains are presented in venomous ways—venomous especially in their attempted disruption of heterosexuality.

This history of representing the queer in a negative light can be explained through the historical “language of monstrosity” often associated with queerness. In *The Culture of Queers*, Richard Dyer provides an account of this language, explaining how “notions and feelings of immorality, deviance, weakness, illness, inadequacy, shame, degeneracy, sordidness, disgust and pathos were all part of the notion of Queerdom” (6). The quillains in Disney films embody these terms: most are gender deviant; many are represented as immoral in their willingness to sacrifice the health and safety of others for their own goals; and they often encounter disgust when interacting with others.

The representation of the villain-as-queer in Disney films is part of a larger problem in the characterisation of villains. This problem stems from the way intersections of identity used to create these characters originate from stereotypical characteristics commonly associated with marginalised groups.¹² These characteristics form another percolating binary in the films. While the quillain is weak, deviant, and immoral, the hero in Disney films usually possesses such qualities as strength, heterosexuality, health, ability, and morality. The hero as an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity can be seen in characters such as Aladdin, Hercules, and Mufasa. Like many heroes, Hercules, through vigorous workouts gains both the body, and the *girl*, necessary to save the world.

Disney films are all about a heteronormative ending, yet paradoxically, the queer villains are allowed to exist in these films. Roof explores this phenomenon in literature broadly, explaining how, “[h]omosexuality, of all the perversions, is permitted as narratively useful, necessary to stir up the middle, to sustain [a reader’s] consumptive desire, to make us believe that the hetero no longer holds sway” (39). While Roof refers to homosexuality explicitly and specifically, substituting “homosexuality” with “queerness” allows for inclusiveness of both non-normative characters and those present in the texts who are not explicitly labelled as homosexual, but whose function is also to “stir up the middle.” In Disney films, the quillain reigns over the middle of the films—precisely where Roof locates homosexuality, or, more broadly, a queer site where the “hetero no longer holds sway.”

The quillains are allowed these moments to thrive and experience the happiness and pleasure that comes with causing havoc and unhappiness to their nemeses. This happiness

¹² Towbin *et al.* explore some of these characteristics in “Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films.”

however is only momentary and quickly replaced in the film with heterosexual (straight) happiness. Throughout her book, *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed discusses how heterosexual happiness often overshadows queer happiness. She explains, “There is also no doubt that heterosexual happiness is overrepresented in public culture, often through an *anxious repetition* of threats and obstacles to its *proper* achievement. Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life direction or purpose, or as what drives a story” (90, italics mine). Ahmed argues that heterosexual love is equated with happy endings, life, and a complete story. If heterosexual love is what gives life purpose, then disrupting heterosexual marriage *is* the equivalent of denying life.

What I want to emphasise from Ahmed’s argument, however, is the anxious repetition of threats and obstacles. Because of the good/bad, heterosexual/queer dichotomy, the characters left to fulfil the role of obstacle to the story, happiness, and life (of both the heterosexual hero/ines and their assumed progeny) are the queer villains. As a genre, Disney anxiously repeats the villain-as-queer trope, as witnessed by the number of films relying on these characters as the threat to the proper achievement of heterosexual happiness. As a result, films that lack a visible quillain, such as *Bambi*, rely on different obstacles and threats to the achievement of heterosexual happiness.¹³ More than just being (aural and visual) signifiers decoded by audiences, the heterosexual/queer, good/evil dichotomy is coded *into* the narrative structure itself. It is narratively impossible for a villain within the Disney universe to be *convincingly* heterosexual, because their very role is to disrupt heterosexual happiness and act as a threat to what Lee Edelman calls reproductive futurism.¹⁴

The term “reproductive futurism” is one coined by Lee Edelman and explains the way that queerness acts as a threat to the future of society by its disruption to heteronormative, reproductive norms. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, he introduces the way “children literally embody the promise of futurity” (Stephen 105). Edelman explains how,

queerness names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. The ups and downs of political fortune may measure the social order’s pulse, but *queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and

¹³ These threats, however, have implicit connections to queerness. For example, the hunter in *Bambi*, while unseen, has characteristics that align them with other quillains. These characteristics are derived from the percolating binaries in which the natural is associated with heterosexuality and goodness, while the urban/industrial is associated with queerness, evil and destruction.

¹⁴ One seeming contradiction to this assertion is Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*, but as I discuss in Chapter Four, Gaston’s seeming heterosexuality can be questioned when examining his representation in more detail.

beyond its political symptoms, the place of social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally, and hence a place from which liberal politics strives—and strives quite reasonably, given its unlimited faith in reason—to disassociate the queer. (3)

Contrasting the side “not fighting for the children,” then, is the side fighting for the children. Another aspect tying many of the Disney quillains together, that I briefly mention above, is their threat to reproductive futurism. This threat occurs in two primary ways: first through the way their non-reproductivity means they will not have their own children, and second through the attempted murder of the hero/ines, preventing future children. Disrupting marriage means denying future progeny. Here, Disney really is “thinking of the children.”

Sedgwick's idea of the familial unit, Ahmed's queer happiness, and Edelman's reproductive futurism can all be combined to elucidate further the necessity for the queers to be eliminated in order for the happiness of the heterosexuals. Disney does not represent queer happy endings, and this absence is necessary in order for the straight happy ending to be achieved—for if the queer is still active, then the threat to reproductive futurity is still present. When I refer to queer happiness existing at times, I draw upon Michael D. Snediker's conception of it in *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*. Snediker notes:

Queer optimism, immanently rather than futurally oriented, does not entail predisposition in the way that conventional optimism entails predisposition . . . Queer optimism doesn't aspire to happiness, but instead finds happiness *interesting*. Queer optimism, in this sense, can be considered a form of meta-optimism: it wants to *think* about feeling good, to make disparate aspects of feeling good thinkable. (3)

The idea of queer optimism is a good starting point in my discussion of “queer happiness” in the Disney universe. Happiness for the quillains in Disney films is in one sense “futurally oriented”: their happiness often comes from an act usually at the expense of the heterosexual hero/ine (such as Ursula taking Ariel's voice in *The Little Mermaid*, or Edgar attempting to kill Duchess and her kittens to gain Madame Adelaide Bonfamille's wealth in *The Aristocats*). Because the attainment of queer happiness is a threat to reproductive futurity, queer optimism is the best they can hope for: “they want to *think* about feeling good” in the moment, because in the Disney universe the queer villain will never actually be able to feel good by the conclusion of their story.

Queer Eye for the Bad Guy

While I suggested earlier in the introduction that this dissertation will problematise Disney's representation of queerness by means of the character representations and the narrative structure, in the main body of my dissertation I will focus specifically on queerness in terms of narrative, not representation; that is, I argue that queerness is embedded *in* the narrative structure itself, as opposed to simply reading specific characters *as* queer. The focus on narrative is important because previous discussions of queerness have focussed on these characters' coding rather than the narratological significance of this coding. To undertake this argument I closely analyse eight films containing ten quillains, while drawing on other films for comparison where necessary. The quillains being examined in my dissertation are: Maleficent (*Sleeping Beauty*); Jafar (*Aladdin*); Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*); Mother Gothel (*Tangled*); Captain Hook (*Peter Pan*); Gaston and the Beast (*Beauty and the Beast*); Yzma (*The Emperor's New Groove*); and Hans and Elsa (*Frozen*). These films represent the spread of villains across the Disney canon, including four female and five male quillains; covering a time period of 62 years from 1951 to 2013; and representing the different straight happy endings—including both the romantic (re)union of a heterosexual couple and the (re)union of a family. In this section, I break down how each of the villains I discuss is coded as queer, and examine the significance of this coding.¹⁵ I decode the quillains in this section, rather than in each chapter, because it is foundational to my argument and I do not want the individual chapters to become clouded with a side analysis of *how* Ursula or Jafar are queer.

Though I am reading villains as queer characters in Disney films, one very important point to address is that an argument does exist that every character in the Disney universe *could* be queer. Alexander Doty explores the way that audiences default to straight readings: “just because a character mentions he has a girlfriend doesn't rule out the possibility that he could be understood as bisexual. . . . It is arrogant to insist that all non-blatantly queer-coded characters must be read as straight . . . It is also a mistake to decide which characters are straight and which are queer solely with reference to common (stereo)typing” (*Flaming Classis* 3). This statement plays two roles in my dissertation: first it raises the suggestion that *all* Disney characters *could* be bisexual because there are no characters who *explicitly* out themselves as heterosexual. There is of course a very heteronormative ending, but a different dissertation could examine the function of bisexuality in the Disney canon. Second, just

¹⁵ While the dissertation as a whole is about the ways queerness is embedded in the narrative, I first need to explain how the villains are coded queer in the more traditional sense.

because the Disney villains are coded queer, does not necessarily make them gay or lesbian. It is important to clarify that I am not claiming that all Disney villains “are” gay or lesbian, or that no other characters could be: I am talking about the way that characters are coded as “queer,” in light of my definition above. “Queer” relates to someone who deviates from expected norms of gender and sexuality. It is someone pathologised and ostracised because of their sexuality and/or gender performance/presentation.

When I refer to (de)coding in my dissertation, I do so drawing upon Stuart Hall’s influential “Encoding/decoding.” Hall’s diagram effectively illustrates the process of reception (130) (Fig. 1):

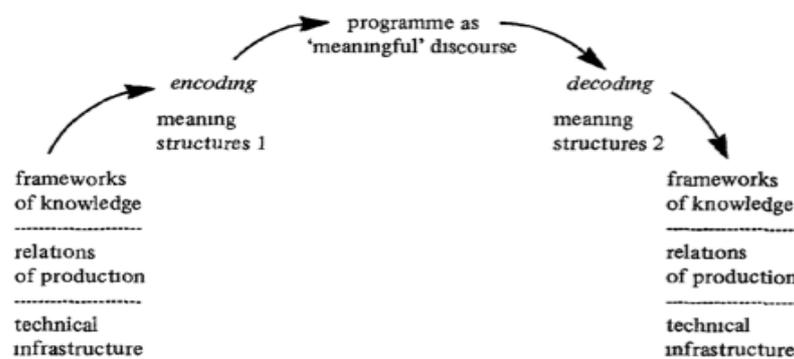


Figure 1: Stuart Hall’s coding/encoding

On the left side of the figure is what Hall refers to as the “encoder-producer” (131). This encoder is the source of the original text or idea, and the place where specific codes or signifiers are developed. The right side is what Hall calls the “decoder-receiver” (131), and is the audience of the text. Viewers often interpret different codes for themselves, and this idea is the foundation of Hall’s theory. He explains,

Clearly, what we have labelled in the diagram ‘meaning structures 1’ and ‘meaning structures 2’ may not be the same. They do not constitute an ‘immediate identity.’ The codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. The degrees of symmetry – that is, the degrees of ‘understanding’ and ‘misunderstanding’ in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the ‘personifications’, encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. (131)

The important part of Hall’s theory is that meanings “intended” by the producers are not always going to be symmetrical and align with the messages received and understood by the viewers. It is at this location that alternative or resistant readings can take place.

Sarah E. Turner, in “Blackness, Bayous and Gumbo: Encoding and Decoding Race in

a Colorblind World,” explores the process of decoding in Disney films. She notes that

while the creators of the message ‘encode’ a particular ideology or reading into a text, an ideology that serves to reify the discourse of the hegemonic culture, there is a moment, the moment of ‘decoding,’ that enables an alternate reading (either negotiated or oppositional) in opposition to the dominant reading embedded within the discourse of the text. Dominant readings and readers fully share in the ideological codes of the text; negotiated readings and readers partly share the text’s code but have some questions or reservations, while oppositional or counter-hegemonic readings and readers understand the intended or dominant reading but reject it. (84)¹⁶

This idea can easily be applied to reading sexuality in Disney films, though with a little clarification. Turner argues that oppositional readings/readers understand the intended or dominant reading, though I would argue that this understanding is not always the case; for instance, while we know Jafar’s characterisation is based on a gay man (as I discuss shortly), reading the villains as queer does not and should not rely on an intended meaning. It does not matter what the encoder “meant,” but rather what the decoder reads.

Visual coding of the villains is the most prominent way their queerness is represented; the men are often effeminate and the women post-menopausal and/or draggy. The foundation of much of my decoding in this section comes from Li-Vollmer and LaPointe’s study on gender transgression in animated films. My analysis also relies on the work of Judith Butler, particularly her theory of performativity. As Butler establishes in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,”

Gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. It is a compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention that transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions. (130)

Butler’s theory of performativity can be used to understand the representation of the “villain-as-sissy” archetype mentioned by Li-Vollmer and LaPointe. This archetype is perhaps most prominent in the character of Scar in *The Lion King*. Brett Farmer, in *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships*, also discusses the notion of performativity when he notes, “Within the context of performativity theory, one does not so much *have* an identity

¹⁶ Turner’s use of the terms “dominant,” “negotiated,” and “oppositional” come from David Morley’s *The “NationWide” Audience*.

as one *does* identity – a process of doing that is reiterative, multiple, and constant” (41-42, italics original). The repetition and reiterative process in Disney quillains is not so much *within* each film, but rather it is the repetition *across* films. Butler’s theory and her examination of gender—as a continual, growing, fluid practice—and Farmer’s contribution to expanding Butler’s work, reveals how the repetition of actions and performances, and the changing of behaviours, are significant to the production of the quillains’ identities. While Scar, for example, is initially ostracised and punished, and ultimately eradicated through violence, the ways in which he assumes his gendered performance ensure his ability to thrive, if only momentarily. This portrayal would not be significant if Scar was the only quillain to be represented in this capacity, but the fact it happens across dozens of films spanning almost eight decades reveals how the quillains’ performances of gender work to expose gender as artificial.

Another aspect connected to the gender performances and one of the most prominent and repeated visual codes of queerness, particularly for the male quillains, is the appearance of makeup. As Li-Vollmer and LaPointe note, the facial features are “emphasized through color and shading giving them the appearance of wearing cosmetics” (98). Li-Vollmer and LaPointe discuss how male villains’ appearances are feminised, particularly through the appearance of eye shadow, as seen in Jafar, as well as Ratigan, Scar, and Hades to name a few (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Disney male quillains’ appearance of makeup. Clockwise from top left: Professor Ratigan (*The Great Mouse*

Detective), Jafar (*Aladdin*), Scar (*The Lion King*), and Hades (*Hercules*)

Also working to feminise the male quillains is the way they use their hands. Li-Vollmer and LaPointe explain how “Villains have long, slender hands on thin wrists, usually with pointed fingertips resembling long fingernails” (98). Combined with thin hands, the male villains usually keep their movements constrained and delicate. The raising of their little finger is seen with many of the male quillains, including those above as well as Hook (Fig 4). This act provides the quillains with an element of delicacy, which works to undermine their masculinity, especially when they are compared with their male heroic counterparts (Fig 3).



Figure 3: Masculine representation of Disney’s male heroes. Clockwise from top left: Basil, Aladdin, Simba, and Hercules

Connected to body language is the quillains’ choice of clothing, further working to queer them. As Li-Vollmer and LaPointe note, “many villains are presented as the dandy, clothed in markedly finer dress than the other male (and sometimes female) characters . . . the other reoccurring pattern in the costuming of villains is the flowing gown, which is often shown in juxtaposition to the heroes’ garb that clearly marks them as masculine” (99). This dandy appearance is one of the more common codes of queerness for the male villains (Fig. 4). As well as the men in Figure Four, this physical appearance is seen with Judge Frollo, Hades, Jafar, and many more men. Significant in these images are the way three of these men (all bar Hook) are at their most flamboyant, both in dress and mannerisms, when they are

performing a musical number.



Figure 4: Male quillains' elegant clothing (as compared to the films' hero/ines). Clockwise from top left: Governor Ratcliffe (*Pocahontas*), Captain Hook (*Peter Pan*), Stromboli (*Pinocchio*), and Alameda Slim (*Home on the Range*)

The female quillains have similar codes of queerness to the males, but there are some additional factors presenting them as a threat to reproductive futurism, particularly their age. The female quillains' use of makeup is over-exaggerated, giving the illusion of a drag queen. I come back to this idea in relation to Gothel and Ursula in more detail in Chapter Two, but for now the important distinction between the male and female quillains' use of makeup is that whereas the male quillains' use of makeup feminises them, the female quillains' application of makeup first masculinises them, and then attempts to feminise them. Rather than appearing as drag kings, the female quillains are given the appearance of a female attempting to drag as male attempting to drag as female. This illusion can be seen when they are contrasted to the heroines and their use of makeup,¹⁷ which appears more natural, or non-existent (Fig. 5).

¹⁷ When Ursula transforms her body and pretends to be Vanessa, she loses the exaggerated makeup and looks much more in line with a Disney princess.



Figure 5: The drag quality of the female quillains’ makeup as compared to the heroines “natural” appearance. Clockwise from top left: Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*), Maleficent (*Sleeping Beauty*), Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty*), and Ariel (*The Little Mermaid*)

One factor distinguishing the female from the male quillains is the way the female quillains are represented as hypersexual. Despite their somewhat masculine appearances, “the majority of Disney’s female villains,” notes Rebecca Rabison in “Deviance in Disney: Of Crime and the Magic Kingdom,”

are highly sexualised in dress, body language, speech, manners, and motives. All wear low-cut, revealing dresses and heavy makeup; have seductive, strong voices; and flaunt their sexuality in ways that are menacing, which highly contrasts with the virtuous younger and older females in their respective films. (202)

The female quillains I examine are sexualised in the ways discussed by Rabison. As seen in Figure 6, Gothel, Elsa, and Ursula all wear revealing dresses and own their sexuality, which in Disney’s terms is bad. In these images, Gothel uses her sexuality in order to convince two thugs to kidnap Flynn Rider and Rapunzel, Elsa discards her more modest coronation outfit and creates her own dress, complete with leg split as she owns her identity, and Ursula teaches Ariel the importance of using her body to gain a man.



Figure 6: Female quillains owning their sexuality

Disney’s female quillains often alter themselves into non-human forms in order to gain the upper hand in their battles. Examining Disney women, Davis explains how the villainesses “change themselves into other things when functioning in their usual form is not working for them. They actively seek to control not only their lives but also their circumstances. They are strong, fearless, and often very creative. They are mature, powerful, and independent. In short, they are everything that their female victims are not” (*Good Girls* 107). Their ability to alter their form is seen not only with the more obvious Maleficent and Ursula, who change their bodies into those of monsters, but also Gothel and Elsa. Gothel actively controls her appearance, repeatedly changing from old and withered to young and strong. During her musical number “Let It Go”—which I read as her coming out song—Elsa realises her current form is not functioning, so she uses her magical ice making abilities to transform her outfit from one tying her to life in her kingdom to one she is able to create by and for herself.

As I indicate above, one of the greatest threats the female quillains provide arises from their non-reproductivity. Two Disney female quillains who best represent this threat are Mother Gothel (*Tangled*) and Yzma (*The Emperor’s New Groove*) (Fig. 7). Gothel’s natural form is an aged witch, hundreds of years old. She is incapable of having her own children, and the only way for her to have a child in the film is for her to steal Rapunzel from the King and Queen. Yzma, similarly, is described as “living proof that dinosaurs once walked the

Earth.” These post-menopausal women not only cannot have their own children (as with Maleficent [*Sleeping Beauty*]), but they actively try and prevent future reproduction—Gothel by keeping Rapunzel trapped in a tower, Yzma by trying to kill Kuzco, and Maleficent by trying to kill Aurora.



Figure 7: Female quillains as a threat to non-reproductivity: Gothel (left) and Yzma (right)

Male quillains can also be read in a similar manner; though while they may not be represented as non-reproductive, the way they attempt to undermine the institutions of heterosexuality and marriage also blocks the potential reproductivity of the heroines and their heroes. Three quillains I examine who undermine marriage are Jafar, Gaston, and Hans. Whereas Jafar and Gaston can be decoded as queer in other ways, this undermining is the primary way Hans is coded queer. One reason behind Hans' more ambiguous (non)-queer coding could be the fact that Hans is meant to appear as the hero, not villain, until the final moments of the film. By avoiding coding Hans with queer signifiers common across the Disney universe, *Frozen* (as I will discuss) is able to keep his villainy withheld from the audience until it is necessary.

These men all attempt to enter into a heterosexual relationship throughout their narratives—Jafar with Jasmine, Gaston with Belle, and Hans with Anna. In all these cases, these men want to marry the women not because of love, but rather because of the power that will come with becoming their husbands. Jafar wants to marry Jasmine to become the new Sultan and Hans wants to marry Anna as part of his plan to become King of Arendelle.

By attempting to enter into a relationship with the princesses, the male quillains are not only trying to gain power (political for Jafar and Hans, social for Gaston), but are also trying to prevent a union between these women and their “true loves”: Aladdin, the Beast, and Kristoff, respectively. In this way, the male quillains are doubly interfering and undermining the institution of marriage and heterosexual romance, a romance Jeffery P. Dennis notes is “the meaning of life” in Disney animation (136). Similarly, Ursula, disguised

as Vanessa and using Ariel's voice, almost succeeds in her attempt to marry Eric in order to gain control over the ocean.

This queer coding matters, because queerness is being repeatedly aligned with villainy and removed from the films by the conclusions. However there is an issue in relation to audience reception arising from this queer coding. As Davis notes, "[a]udiences learn, over the course of their movie-going lives, how to identify with not just the character that is most like them (i.e. women with female characters, men with male characters), but also with the protagonist of the film, regardless of his/her/its physical similarity to the spectator" (*Good Girls* 91). There needs to be a critique about the way that Disney films do not provide any out queer characters with whom their queer audiences can identify, and then further encourage an identification with the heterosexual protagonists (as the root of all "good" in the Disney universe). This section has detailed how some of the villains are coded queer, and the chapters of my dissertation will build upon these codes to examine how queerness is embedded into the narrative structure itself.

Although I rely on textual analysis to illustrate how the quillains defy social norms, understanding the background of the animators designated to design the characters in the first place provides another way to read the queer subtext of the films. Sean Griffin explores the relationship between queerness and the Disney Corporation, and while he does examine some of the films, he also examines the theme parks and other aspects more suited to a sociological understanding of the corporation, rather than a literary analysis of the films. On the topic of authorship, Griffin explains how

[a]n analysis of lead animator Andreas Deja serves as a case in point [of the overt representation of homosexuality in Disney films]. Openly gay, Deja has announced in various interviews that his sexual orientation has had its effect on the characters he draws. In drawing the villainous Jafar for *Aladdin* (1992), Deja admits to conceiving of the character as a gay man 'to give him his theatrical quality, his elegance.' Although Deja has worked on a number of different types of characters, he has most been assigned to two types of role: male villains and hyper masculine men. In the first category, Deja has worked as lead animator for Jafar, and for Scar in *The Lion King* (1994) . . . In the second . . . the boorish Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*. (141-42)

Once again the notions of both performativity and theatricality have been used to align male characters with queerness. Reading Deja's sexual orientation can be used to bring the queer subtext of the films to the surface. Although it is not problematic to represent a male character in an elegant manner, it becomes problematic when these characters are repeatedly

villainised.

Another paper justifying an examination of an author's (or animator's in the case of animated films) sexuality is Andy Medhurst's "That Special Thrill: Brief Encounter, Homosexuality, and Authorship." Medhurst acknowledges that "combing through the textual evidence to find traces of what the author 'really thought'" is "unreconstituted literary criticism of the most discredited kind" (202). He justifies this method of analysis, however, by explaining how a "biographical approach has more political justification if the project being undertaken is one concerned with the cultural history of a marginalised group" (203). Following Medhurst's argument, an acknowledgment of the sexuality of the animators and viewers of Disney films does not automatically lay this analysis open to the charge of "unreconstituted literary criticism," because despite the change in cultural acceptance of queerness, Disney films continue to marginalise and perpetuate outdated notions of queerness. As a result, it is important to recognise and understand how and why representations of queerness are both portrayed and received.

Chapter Breakdown

In my dissertation I examine the Disney archive of full-length animated films, from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937) to *Frozen* (2013) in order to understand how the quillain is represented in the Disney universe. An examination of Disney's 42 full length animated films has revealed that 31 of these films have a plot driven by a villain,¹⁸ and in each of these movies the villain can be read as a queer character. The remaining eleven films do not have a plot driven by a villain; however, three of these films do contain a queer villain as a minor character. For my research, this means I have a total of 34 films demonstrating queer villainy, and it is from these films I undertake a literary analysis to establish the archetype of the quillain. As noted, this analysis also involves examining their relationship with the heterosexual hero/ine. This dual study of both character types' sexualities is important because of the defaulting to heterosexuality as the norm. At the start of my dissertation I establish some of the "illusions surrounding heterosexuality" in the films that make a straight ending not only possible, but expected.

Carrie Cokely ends her book chapter, "'Someday My Prince Will Come': Disney, the Heterosexual Imaginary, and Animated Film," with a statement exploring the need to critique

¹⁸ Films whose obstacles are introduced by the quillain.

heterosexuality more deeply in Disney:

In closing this is only the beginning of the work that needs to be done to interrogate the institution of heterosexuality and its operation within the realm of the magical world called Disney. While Disney holds a prominent place within the ideologies and illusions surrounding heterosexuality, patriarchy, and capitalism, securing this place does not come without resistance. Increasingly, there are more ‘campy’ readings of the films coming out of the gay and lesbian community. (179)

While this dissertation is not so much a “campy” reading, it is a reading whose very foundations do arise from my place in the queer community.

My dissertation is broken into three sections comprising six chapters in total. Chapter One, “Narratemes, Normativity, and the Disney Narrative,” uses a narratological framework and borrows Vladímir Propp’s term, *narratemes*, to explore the individual narrative elements that form the basis of each Disney film. I analyse *Sleeping Beauty* and *Aladdin* to explore the developmental narrative underlying the adventure narrative present in almost every Disney film, and show how Disney animated films are narratively structured around the achievement of straight happiness via the elimination of the queered villain.

Chapter Two, “Music, Melodrama, and Maternalism,” builds upon my argument in Chapter One to explore a narrative element unique to the Disney musical (in the Disney canon)—musical solos by both the heroines and the quillains. In this chapter I analyse *The Little Mermaid* and *Tangled* and explore the heroine/princess songs, or what I refer to as “Songs of Desire,” and the quillain songs, “Songs of Disruption.” Through an examination of these songs, I show how this aspect of the films provides a unique contribution to the queering of these quillains, particularly through the quillains’ ongoing imitation of femininity as a means to disrupt the heroines’ narrative trajectories.

Chapters Three and Four analyse two further, but connected, narrative elements, spatiality and temporality, and how the intersection and combination of these elements, spatiotemporality, queers the villains. Space and time are important to examine when establishing an ontology of queerness in Disney because, as Teresa Bridgeman explains in “Time and Space,” “[t]ime and space are . . . more than background elements in narrative; they are part of its fabric, affecting our basic understanding of a narrative text and of the protocols of different narrative genres” (52-53). Just as space and time are part of narrative’s fabric, so too is the way certain spaces and times are coded queer. This coding *is* part of the narrative’s foundation making it almost impossible to disassociate the two from one another.

Peter Pan and *Beauty and the Beast* represent two ways space (and time) are

represented in the Disney universe. Both films have a clear distinction between a heterosexual world where the hero/ines are introduced and where they must return, and a queer world where time does not pass, but which the hero/ines pass through on their way to adult heterosexuality.

Chapter Three, “Pan, Pirates, and Perpetual Childhoods,” examines *Peter Pan* and the world of Neverland. This site is a queer world whose existence is questioned throughout the film by the heterosexual characters. In this chapter I argue that because Neverland exists as a spatiotemporal abnormality, the narrative path present in many other Disney films—a linear progression of the hero and heroine’s heterosexual romantic trajectory—is necessarily absent, resulting in a set of disparate episodic happenings. This entire film is in essence, a queer middle (cf. Roof).

Chapter Four, “Beasts, Beauties, and Buffoons,” analyses how *Beauty and the Beast* portrays the queer world of the Beast’s castle as a place whose existence is unknown to those in the heterosexual space of Belle’s village. By exploring the spatiotemporal abnormality of the Beast’s castle in this chapter, I argue that this site is necessary to facilitate Belle and the Beast’s passages to reproductive heterosexuality.

The fifth and six chapters of my dissertation explore two outliers in the Disney canon in regards to queerness: *The Emperor’s New Groove* and *Frozen*. Chapter Five, “Parody, Poison, and Ponchos,” looks at the first Disney film to contain an almost complete queer cast of characters. By examining three aspects of the film working together to destabilise what a Disney film *can* and *should* do, this chapter will demonstrate that Disney can do queerness, but as a result of this exaggerated queerness *TENG* does not feel like a Disney film.

The sixth and final chapter of my dissertation, “Identity, Ice/olation, and Inverted Ideology,” explores *Frozen* and the way this film plays with the various aspects Disney previously uses to further code the villains as queer (the elements I explore in the first four chapters). In *Frozen*, Disney consciously inverts conventions that have been established throughout the Disney Princess genre specifically. This film is distinct from other Disney films because it contains two parallel plots, the second of which is not revealed or understood by the audience until the final minutes when an act occurs that causes the viewer to rethink everything previously occurring in the film. Despite this multi-levelled reading of the film, one characterisation that remains present is a representation of the villain-as-queer. What makes this film different is that it provides a *sympathetic* queer villain-turned-hero.¹⁹

¹⁹ While *Beauty and the Beast* also has a sympathetic villain, *Frozen* plays with this idea very differently as will

The final part of this chapter analyses fan responses to the film and uses fans' "vernacular theories,"²⁰ to provide an innovative way of responding to the films from an academic perspective, bringing the dissertation to a stage where my status as aca-fan helps to structure an argument around Disney's most self-conscious/reflexive film to date.

be explored later in the dissertation.

²⁰ This term, as I explain in much greater detail in Chapter Six, comes from Thomas McLaughlin's *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular*.

Section One

Structural Elements of Queerness

The first section of my dissertation explores two of the primary ways queerness is embedded in Disney narratives: the narratemes that work to structure Disney films *as* Disney films, and the songs of desire and songs of disruption that draw upon a musical tradition to visually and aurally differentiate the heroines from the quillains. These two embedded queer aspects are the structural elements of queerness in Disney films.

By exploring the normative Disney narrative in Chapter One, I explain why it is necessary for queerness to be eliminated at the films' conclusions. Chapter One examines *Sleeping Beauty* and *Aladdin* in light of Lee Edelman's ideas about the necessity of heterosexual reproductivity for the continuation (and future) of society as we know it—a society in which queerness “is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end” (*No Future* 19). By perpetuating the rhetoric ironised, popularised, and reinforced in contemporary times by figures such as Helen Lovejoy (of *The Simpsons*)—“won't somebody think of the children”—Disney is able to ensure there *will* be a future for the children, if only on screen.

Chapter Two takes this idea of the innocence of children (in Disney films the adolescent heterosexual heroines and heroes) and applies it to the second queer aspect, the use of music—specifically musical solos by the films' heroines and quillains—demonstrating how the films use this element in order to further differentiate between heterosexuality and queerness, establishing the former as normative and the latter as disruptive. Both Mother Gothel (*Tangled*) and Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*) threaten the future (reproductivity) of their respective heroines Rapunzel and Ariel by keeping them hostage and appropriating the very qualities necessary for them to (re)unite with their one true love.

These two embedded queer elements work together to form what I call the structural elements of queerness as they both construct the queer as a dangerous figure in the Disney universe. This danger can be reduced to two key aspects: the queer is a threat to the future, in Edelman's terms, because a) they will not have their own children and b) they will inhibit the heterosexuals from having their own. Because this attack is two-fold, it becomes narratively necessary to make sure this threat is contained, and this containment more often than not comes in the form of the eradication of the queer from the narrative at the end of the films.

Chapter One

Narratemes, Normativity, and the Disney Narrative²¹

“Oh, I just love happy endings.” This line, spoken by the good fairy Flora at the conclusion of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), could belong in any Disney film. Flora says these words as she wipes a tear from her eye, watching Prince Phillip and Princess Aurora dance in each other’s arms around a ballroom after being reunited. Flora’s statement encapsulates the 79-year history of animated Disney films in which happy endings are synonymous with heterosexual unions. But when these happy endings come to fruition, there is one character notably and necessarily absent from the celebration: the queer villain. In this chapter I examine the first embedded code and structural element of queerness—the normative narrative—and have picked the two most representative examples of this narrative: *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty*. By analysing quillains Jafar (*Aladdin*) and Maleficent (*Sleeping Beauty*), I show how Disney animated films are narratively structured around the achievement of straight happiness via the elimination of the queered villain.

Disney films, like most narrative texts, encompass three distinct phases: the beginning, middle, and end. The beginnings are neutral ground, in which both the queer villains and the heterosexual hero/ines are introduced in the safety of their respective spaces. The middles belong to the queer; here the quillains’ actions drive the plots, and they achieve most of their happiness, usually derived from the temporary destruction of heterosexual happiness. The final phase of the films, the endings, belongs to the heterosexuals. In this final phase three main events unfold: a) social (heterosexual) order is restored, because b) the queer is removed, so c) straight happiness is once more able to flourish. This straight ending reflects both historical and contemporary ideas about “proper” ways of living. As James Joseph Dean explains in *Straights: Heterosexuality in Post-Closeted Culture*, “heterosexuality is viewed as superior because it is assumed to be normal and natural, while homosexuality is marked inferior . . . [this political and ideological position] aim[s] to return American society to a social order where heterosexuality is repressively dominant and

²¹ Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five all contain plot summaries for the films being examined at the beginning of the chapters. I have omitted plot summaries for this chapter because the entire chapter is a detailed narrative analysis about the two films I examine. A plot summary here would be repetitive.

homosexuality is emphatically subordinate” (254). Because Disney heteronormatively aligns the villains with queerness and the hero/ines with heterosexuality, the queer is required to be not only subordinate at the film’s conclusion, in cases such as *The Emperor’s New Groove* and *Frozen*, but often eliminated altogether, as it is in the two films discussed in this chapter.

Exploring the connection between narrative and sexuality in *Come as You Are*, Judith Roof provides an account for why this middle section of the text exists and can be read queerly. She explains, “Without the possibility that something might go wrong, the saving force of heterosexual attraction means nothing” (xix). In one regard, readers and viewers approach texts, especially true in the case of Disney, with an expectation that something will go wrong, something that can be fixed only as a result of heterosexual attraction.²² In Disney, the heterosexual saving force is the hero rescuing the heroine, before the two live happily ever after.

The normative Disney narrative, as will be examined in this chapter, follows the classic boy-meets-girl romance plot²³: the heroines meet their heroes; the two become separated as a result of the villain; and the pair is reunited at the end and live happily ever after. In essence, Disney films follow a structure identified by critics in which “*plot equals heterosexual* [and] rests in a tradition of narrative theory that sees narration as a system of codes that replicate dominant social structures” (Juhasz 66, italics original). This replication occurs not only within each individual Disney film, but across the canon from *Snow White* to *Frozen*.

As well as following the (obvious) romance trope, the Disney narrative structure can also be read in terms of the home-away-home narrative pattern described by Perry Nodelman in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*. Nodelman explains how many stories for children contain a “child or childlike creature, bored by home, [who] wants the excitement of adventure, but since the excitement is dangerous, the child wants the safety of home—which is boring, and so the child wants the excitement of danger—and so on” (157). This pattern provides two choices for children: stay home, which is “safe BUT boring,” or go away from home which is “exciting BUT dangerous” (158). The beginning and end of the films—both places where straight happiness exists—take place in the “home” areas, while the queer-controlled middle of the films take place “away” from home. In most Disney films the excitement and danger of the “away” phase is as a result of the same character—the villain.

²² As I discuss shortly, this process reflects Tzvetan Todorov’s notion of narrative equilibrium.

²³ This trope is the conventional narrative arc of the heteronormative love story: “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl” (Juhasz 65).

Throughout my analysis of the dozens of Disney films released, I have identified ten different elements, or to borrow from Vladímir Propp, *narratemes*, which, when combined, form a “Disney” film. The narratives within Disney films are all propelled by two simultaneous ambitions: one from the hero/ines (often to find their true love and/or find acceptance) and a second from the quillains (often to gain some sort of power—whether social, political, or economic). Peter Brooks, in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, explores the role of ambition in narrative, explaining how “[s]omewhat in the manner of the traditional sequence of functions in the folktale analyzed by Propp, ambition provides an armature of plot which the reader recognizes, and which constitutes the very ‘readability’ of the narrative text, what enables the reader to go about the construction of the text’s specific meanings” (39). Because of the repetition of ambitions providing the narrative structure, or “armature of plot,” across the Disney canon, the Disney reader (viewer) is able to construct an understanding of the texts’ meanings—meanings which usually begin with a once upon a time and end with a happily ever after. One meaning the viewer is encouraged to infer is that true love can conquer all. Throughout this chapter, and dissertation more broadly, I refer to the collection of the Disney *narratemes* as the “Quillain Narrative Structure” (Table 2).²⁴

Table 2: Quillain Narrative Structure – Blue = Film beginning, Red = Film middle, Green = Film ending

1. The quillain (and their motivation) is introduced
2. The hero is introduced in his element
3. The heroine is introduced in the safety of the space in which she was raised
4. The hero meets the heroine for the first time
5. An obstacle is introduced to separate the hero and heroine
6. The hero and heroine become separated (sometimes multiple times)
7. Initial battle/conflict between hero/ine and quillain in which the quillain wins
8. Final battle/conflict between hero/ine and quillain in which the quillain is defeated
9. Hero and heroine reunited
10. Straight happiness returns

I have chosen the term “Quillain Narrative Structure” to describe this table because of the way it represents each of the narrative elements comprising Disney films. While they are not

²⁴ This table is also attached as Appendix Three.

all always present,²⁵ or necessarily in the order laid out above, they are by and large uniform across the Disney archive. These ten narratemes are combined and *essential* to make a Disney film feel like a Disney film.

The table is broken into three sections because the films are also broken into three sections: the beginnings, middles, and endings. This table shows the way “the moralism [of the films] is clear and overt. Good is rewarded, evil is punished. Characters are clearly either good or evil, with little ambiguity or complexity. And good always triumphs; dealing with defeat, failure, or injustice is typically not explored in the Disney world. Everything always works out for the good guys. Always” (Wasko *Understanding* 119).²⁶ Disney films are structured around things “working out for the good guys,” and this straightening out of the narrative—after the interruption in the middle of the film—always occurs at the end with the elimination of the quillain and the happy ending(s) of the heterosexual hero/ine.

The significance of heterosexual attraction as the “saving force” in Disney is reinforced with the release of each successive Disney film. Each animated Disney film, including those not being used in this dissertation due to the absence of a quillain, contains a straight relationship that ultimately saves the day. While most films have a romantic heterosexual pairing, there are a very small number of films in which this pairing is solely a parent/child relationship. In either case, however, it is the reuniting of the “proper” familial units at the films’ conclusions that allow for narrative closure.

Examining the role and significance of narrative in Disney films, particularly in relation to an audience’s meaning creation and interpretation, is vital for understanding the function and role of sexuality in these texts, specifically understanding why heterosexuality has been so prevalent over the 79-year history of Disney’s feature-length film production. As I mentioned in the Introduction, despite the existence of multiple homosocial relationships and queer-coded characters (both quillains and non-villainous characters, such as Timon and Pumbaa²⁷ [*The Lion King*], Genie [*Aladdin*], Hermes [*Hercules*], and Olaf [*Frozen*], as I discuss further in the Conclusion), to date there has not been a single out queer character in a Disney film.

²⁵ In the few cases where some of these elements are absent, I will make note of it in the chapter.

²⁶ Similarly, Zipes notes that “Good cannot become evil, nor can evil become good” (93).

²⁷ An article by Gael Sweeney exploring Timon and Pumbaa notes that they “are certainly the first openly gay animated characters in the Disney canon” (130) and are “are obviously a same-sex couple” (131). Later, however, she explains that they “can be read as gay-identified characters” (132). The first of these two claims are large generalisations without any further support. The third, however, is one that can be justified; while queer audiences in particular may see Timon and Pumbaa as “obviously gay,” it is more the case that these characters can be *read* as queer.

Once Upon a Dream

Combined with an absence of explicitly queer characters in Disney films is the frequent representation and importance of heterosexual happiness. In this chapter, I analyse *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty* in order to understand how closure in Disney films is synonymous with straight happiness. I have selected these films because their quillains encapsulate Disney evil by disrupting the happy endings of the heterosexual hero/ines. This disruption is a queer act because it blocks the heterosexual union necessary for the happily ever after. While both films share a common element of disruption to heterosexual unions, it occurs in different ways: *Aladdin*'s Jafar aims to interrupt a heterosexual union (Jasmine and Aladdin's wedding), and *Sleeping Beauty*'s Maleficent tries to kill Aurora before she can marry Phillip. These two acts are a result of different intentions—one to disrupt a wedding by means of killing the hero, and one to kill a child—but both can be understood in relation to reproductive futurity as the destruction of (future) progeny.

Before analysing happiness in these films, I want to explore the broader social prescriptions for happiness upon which Disney draws. As I explained in the Introduction, Sara Ahmed discusses how heterosexual happiness often overshadows queer happiness. She explains, “[t]here is also no doubt that heterosexual happiness is overrepresented in public culture, often through an *anxious repetition* of threats and obstacles to its *proper* achievement. Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life direction or purpose, or as what drives a story” (90, italics mine). Ahmed argues that heterosexual love is equated with happy endings, life, and a complete story.

If heterosexual love is what gives life purpose, then disrupting heterosexual marriage *is* the equivalent of denying life. This sentiment can further be explicated through Edelman's argument that “*queerness* names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children’” (3, italics original). Disrupting heterosexual marriage will deny potential future progeny. Here, Disney really is “thinking of the children.” Alexander Wilson, in *The Culture of Nature*, implicitly uses the concept of reproductive futurism in Disney as he notes, “[t]he Disney movies always told stories, and the stories always began at the beginning – the spring, the dawn, the birth of a bear cub or otter. They ended at the beginning too, with words like new life, rebirth, hope” (118). Disney films are about beginnings and ends, but the beginnings and ends, as Wilson

notes, are both just beginnings associated with (new) heterosexual reproductivity.²⁸

In order to appreciate fully the significance of heterosexual happy endings, we must start at the beginning. Before the opening credits begin to roll, a viewer who is aware of the Disney conventions can be fairly certain that within the first dozen minutes or so the film will introduce a hero/ine who desires change and/or a romantic partner. Peter Brooks explains how “[d]esire is always there at the start of a narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun” (38). The two desires propelling the narratives in Disney films are revealed during the films’ beginnings. These desires are those of the hero/ine and the quillain, with the quillains’ desires providing the narrative push. As I mentioned earlier, the beginning of the films are frequently neutral ground, in which both the heterosexual and the queer co-exist, if only momentarily. During these beginnings, the hero/ines and quillains are often introduced in their own domains. While I touch upon these spaces briefly in this chapter, I go into a deeper analysis of the importance and implications of these spaces in Chapters Three and Four.

Upon first being introduced to the quillains, viewers are provided with the motivations (desires) of these characters that will ultimately drive the plots. In the two films closely analysed in this chapter, and typically for Disney, these initial motivations align the quillains with immorality. In *Aladdin*, Jafar’s motivation is the desire for power. Jafar is introduced in the desert beyond Agrabah in his quest for a magical lamp, which he ultimately wishes to use to gain unrivalled power (Fig. 8). His first appearance is during the night, with a low angle shot highlighting his mouth and eyes—both of which are contorted in such a way as to illustrate his anger and determination—against the darkened silhouette of his torso. Jafar spends most of the film within the boundary of the palace walls, a site coded as heterosexual in not only *Aladdin*, but most Disney films containing a palace.²⁹ Because Jafar is introduced in the film outside this main site of heterosexuality, and in a place that the film’s opening song refers to as “barbaric,” he is aligned with Otherness from the beginning of the narrative. As a result of this alignment, viewers are encouraged to be cautious of and pay attention to his actions.

²⁸ It is interesting to note how the connection between heterosexual reproduction mentioned by Wilson is an example of the “anxious repetition” discussed by Ahmed. Reproductive futurism makes sense only in cycles; these narratives mirror the need to imagine birth as a beginning and heterosexual happiness as the end.

²⁹ A few others include *Tangled*, *Cinderella*, and *Snow White*. One exception is *The Emperor’s New Groove*, a film that queers the palace while still attempting to code it heterosexual with scenes including the beginning scene with Emperor Kuzco attempting to select a bride, but dismissing them all based on their looks.

The image of Jafar contrasts that of Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* (Fig. 9). Maleficent's first appearance in the film is as an interloper at the christening of Princess Aurora. There are some similarities between Jafar and Maleficent including the darkened silhouette of their bodies and the avian sidekicks perched upon them. One of the main differences between these two quillains, however, is the place in which they are introduced. While the audience is first shown Jafar outside the heterosexuality and order of the palace, Maleficent is introduced as she forces herself into this space. This contrast is significant because it shows that quillains cannot be introduced while *welcome* in a site of heterosexuality.



Figure 8: First image of Jafar



Figure 9: First image of Maleficent

Maleficent's body language in this image and throughout the scene that follows is calm, contrasting her dramatic entry in the midst of green flames. Her equanimity continues as she is told her invitation to the christening did not in fact get lost, but that she was not wanted at the celebration:

Maleficent: I really felt quite distressed at not receiving an invitation.

Merryweather [a good fairy]: You weren't wanted.

Maleficent: Not wan...? Oh dear, what an awkward situation. I had hoped it was merely due to some oversight. Well, in that event I'd best be on my way.

Queen: And you're not offended, Your Excellency?

Maleficent: Why no, Your Majesty. And to show I bear no ill will, I, too, shall bestow a gift on the child. Listen well, all of you. The princess shall indeed grow in grace and beauty, beloved by all who know her. But, before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, she shall prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel. And die.

Queen: Oh no!

Maleficent: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

King Stefan: Seize that creature!

Before Maleficent is captured, however, she disappears in the same green flames in which she arrived.

Sleeping Beauty portrays the second way the quillain is introduced—in the sanctity of a straight space. The film shows the monstrosity of this invasion through the language used by King Stefan towards Maleficent. By calling her “creature,” when only moments before the Queen refers to her as “Your Excellency,” Maleficent is dehumanised. The language associated with Maleficent (and other quillains) can be explicated through Richard Dyer’s work on the association between queerness and monstrosity, mentioned in my introduction: “notions and feelings of immorality, deviance, weakness, illness, inadequacy, shame, degeneracy, sordidness, disgust and pathos were [historically] all part of the notion of Queerdom (6). The moment when Maleficent is called a “creature” represents a discursive shift from human to monster, and can be pinpointed as the moment in the film when Maleficent *becomes* the queer villain. In a matter of 90 seconds, the rhetoric shifts from a discomfort with Maleficent’s presence to her threatening Aurora with harm. This *threatened* harm is the moment she is seen *as* evil, and the film recognises this evil by immediately aligning the villain with queerness through King Stefan’s use of the language of monstrosity.

Aladdin and *Sleeping Beauty* represent the two ways quillains are introduced within Disney films: inside or outside the heterosexually coded space of the film. In either scenario however the queer is shown as not belonging, and the same narrateme is occurring (narrateme one): the ambitions, desires, and motivations of the quillains are revealed. While the ambitions of the hero/ines may shift slightly throughout the film—due in part to their plasticity and willingness to adapt to the instability caused by the quillains—ambition for the quillains takes control of their every action. Brooks notes that “[a]mbition is inherently totalizing, figuring the self’s tendency to appropriation and aggrandizement, moving forward through the encompassment of more, striving to have, to do, and to be more” (39). In most films this ambition for the quillain is either the desire for money, power, or revenge. The quillains want to *have* more, to *be* more, and to *control* more.

Before the destruction of the queer comes into effect, they are allowed moments of freedom, because the beginnings of the films are neutral ground in relation to sexuality. Happiness exists in this brief time period for the queer in the form of the potential achievement of their desires. For Jafar this drive is the likelihood of finding the magical lamp to gain unrivalled power, and for Maleficent this happiness is the creation of the curse as revenge towards the king(dom). At the same time the queers are joyous, happiness exists for the heterosexuals. Although films such as *Sleeping Beauty* have a curse set in place for future destruction, there is still time for celebration and safety before the consequences arise as a result of the quillains’ actions.

Narratemes two and three also occur during the beginning of the films: the introduction of the hero and the introduction of the heroine. *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty* once again illustrate two of the ways in which these introductions occur. The hero is generally introduced in his own domain, whether it is in the process of stealing, in the case of those not born into royalty (*Aladdin*, *Tangled*) or during a formal affair for those born into royalty (*Sleeping Beauty*, *The Princess and the Frog*). The first images of heroes Aladdin (*Aladdin*) and Prince Phillip (*Sleeping Beauty*) reveal the differences between them and the quillains (Figs. 10 & 11).

The most noticeable difference between the introduction of the heroes and quillains is the use of colours associated with them. Whereas the quillains often wear dark colours and have dark backgrounds framing them, the heroes are surrounded by light and wear lighter coloured clothing. This visual distinction works to portray another aspect of the percolating binaries in which darkness is aligned with evil/villainy, and light with purity/heroism. *Aladdin*'s eponymous hero is first shown in the film as he tries to escape from palace guards threatening to cut off his hands for stealing a loaf of bread (Fig. 10). His eyes and mouth are in similar positions to Jafar's, and this similarity suggests a parallel between these two characters, particularly through their determination and criminal actions.



Figure 10: First image of Aladdin



Figure 11: First image of Phillip

Unlike Jafar's, however, the position of Aladdin's eyebrows reveals a sense of uncertainty and confusion. Rather than aggressively trying to steal an object to gain power, Aladdin is stealing a loaf of bread in order to survive. The film's validation of his actions is further illustrated through the eye-level camera angle. Whereas Jafar is shown from a low angle shot demonstrating his power, the eye-level angle with Aladdin shows his neutrality/innocence, despite having actually stolen the bread and being chased by sword-wielding palace guards as a result.

Prince Phillip, conversely, is introduced in *Sleeping Beauty* as a young child as he first meets Aurora (Fig. 11). As Phillip looks down at Aurora in her crib, the narrator informs

the audience that “he [Phillip] looked unknowing on his future bride.” Here, the film is ascribing a future (and present) heterosexuality to both Phillip and Aurora. Neither is given the opportunity to grow up into anything other than adult heterosexuality. Phillip’s face shows the same markers of confusion and uncertainty as Aladdin’s, only this time it is a child presumably questioning the importance of the royal celebration.³⁰

The intersection of gender and ambition in literature has previously been explored by scholars such as Brooks. He notes, “[t]he ambitious hero . . . stands as a figure of the reader’s efforts to construct meaning in ever-larger wholes, to totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in significant shape. This description, of course, most obviously concerns male plots of ambition” (39). In terms of Disney, the hero as a character is elevated in part because his ambitions and desires are seen as something that will benefit the society of which he is a part. His ambitions, however, are often about winning the girl (as in *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty*—with adolescent Phillip), and when they are not, as with Flynn Rider in *Tangled* wanting to be rich by any means, his ambitions and desires alter over the course of the film to focus on helping and winning the heroine.



Figure 12: First image of Jasmine



Figure 13: First image of Aurora

Alongside the introduction of the heroes (narrateme two) is the introduction of the heroines (narrateme three). As with the hero, the heroine is introduced in the environment in which she has been raised. What differentiates these two characters, however, is that the heroines are often shown as being displeased with their confinement. Princess Jasmine (*Aladdin*) is introduced having a discussion with her father, the Sultan, about her obligation to marry a prince within three days, so she is engaged before her birthday (Fig. 12). Jasmine sits by a fountain telling her father, “I’ve never done a thing on my own . . . I’ve never even been outside the palace walls.” There is desperation in Jasmine’s voice as she tells her father of her

³⁰ A similar questioning is shown in the film *Frozen* with a conversation between a mother and young son about wearing elegant attire in which the mother says “the Queen has come of age, it’s coronation day!” to which the son replies “that’s not my fault!”

desire to be free and to marry a man she wants for love, instead of an obligation to the law. Her desperation is also represented visually through a high camera angle looking down on her, effectively taking away her power and autonomy.

In contrast to Jasmine, the first time the audience sees Princess Aurora as an adult rather than a baby, 16 years have passed since the film's beginning (Fig. 13). Her name has been changed to Briar Rose for her own safety, and she happily cleans the cottage in the forest in which she has been hidden. In Aurora's case, not only has her autonomy been stripped away—symbolised by the removal of her name—but she has been raised away from the kingdom, her family, and interaction with humans. Although Aurora is smiling with her arms outstretched, her first image occurs within the confines of her cottage and is as a result of her being denied access to the knowledge of her past.

Ambition and desire for the heroines, while similar to the heroes, plays a different role in establishing key characters in the films. Brooks also elaborates on the ambition of female characters, noting, “[t]he female plot is not unrelated [to the male plot], but it takes a more complex stance toward ambition, the formation of an inner drive toward the assertion of selfhood in resistance to the overt and violating male plots of ambition, a counter-dynamic which . . . is only superficially passive” (39). These two Princesses are connected through captivity: Jasmine because she is required to marry a prince and forced to remain within the palace walls, and Aurora because she has been raised under an alternative identity away from her home in order to avoid the curse enacted by Maleficent. The “inner drive . . . toward . . . selfhood” that Brooks refers to forms the very basis of their narrative pushes—their desires—an element I discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

For many of the heroes and heroines, heterosexuality is introduced as the ultimate foundation for happiness. The films' beginnings establish how the happiness will be reached if a heterosexual union is achieved. For Phillip this happiness is marrying Aurora, and for Jasmine happiness means marrying a prince for *love* in time for her birthday. Although the prospect of marriage is shown as a form of contention or confusion for Phillip and Jasmine, neither contest heterosexuality, or monogamy, or any of the other factors that Sedgwick argues must “all line up” in the heteronormative family, as discussed in the Introduction, but rather they oppose the circumstances by which they are being told they must achieve the heterosexual union.

The final narrateme that occurs in the beginning of Disney films is the hero meeting the heroine for the first time (narrateme four). In *Aladdin*, Princess Jasmine escapes from the palace soon after the conversation with her father regarding marriage and is unfamiliar with

her new surroundings. After she takes an apple from a vendor without paying for it, the vendor attempts to cut her hand off—the penalty for stealing. Aladdin witnesses this event and quickly comes to the rescue, telling the vendor that she is his sister, and that “she is a little crazy.” Jasmine realises what is happening and begins to play the role Aladdin has set out. After getting her to safety, the pair discusses why she is running away from home, although Jasmine conceals the fact she is the princess from the palace.

As this conversation unwinds, a connection forms between Aladdin and Jasmine and they move in to kiss (Fig. 14). When this scenario occurs in a Disney film there is an instant connection and the pair stare into each other’s eyes as they move in to kiss. Once this connection is made (satisfying narrateme four of the Quillain Narrative Structure), the two begin to work on a plan to overcome an initial obstacle, an obstacle that is often set out by the quillain. For instance, Aladdin will help Jasmine find a compromise with her father (non-quillain driven obstacle), while Flynn Ryder (*Tangled*) will help Rapunzel see the floating lights forbidden by Mother Gothel (quillain driven obstacle).



Figure 14: The first connection between Aladdin and Jasmine

Ultimately the beginnings of the films have three main functions: to introduce the quillains, heroes, and heroines; to introduce the motivations and desires that will become the driving force of the films; and to introduce the main obstacle towards the achievement of these goals. These narratemes once more reiterate Ahmed’s notion that the achievement of (heterosexual) happiness is what “life is aimed towards” (90). The third aspect, the introduction of the obstacle, is what becomes the central focus of the middle of the films and is associated almost exclusively with the quillains.³¹

³¹ During this stage of the films the relationship between the hero/ine and the quillain is generally in a positive state. The audience is aware of the true motivations of the quillians, but the hero/ine still think they are mostly good (Jasmine/Jafar, Rapunzel/Gothel, Ariel/Ursula, Kuzco/Yzma, Simba/Scar, Anna/Hans etc).

Stirring up the Middle

After introducing the three main characters and (in many cases) the love story that will ultimately conclude with a heterosexual union, the films move into the second phase. The middle of the film is where the blossoming heterosexual love is interrupted by the quillain, whose actions try to prevent the happily ever after. An examination of the middle of the films reveals the importance of queerness in the narrative structure. Roof's model of the middle of texts provides some reasons why deviance is allowed to thrive, if only momentarily, during this point. As I quoted in the introduction, "[h]omosexuality, of all the perversions, is permitted as narratively useful, necessary to stir up the middle, to sustain [a reader's] consumptive desire, to make us believe that the hetero no longer holds sway" (39).

It is during the queer middle of the films that the beliefs Disney establishes, beliefs encouraging the audience to believe heterosexual love can conquer all, are questioned. Heterosexual ("true") love is often represented as the most powerful force, capable of breaking all manner of curses, seen in films such as *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beauty and the Beast*.³² This force is what ultimately denies quillains their happiness and vanquishes them, because with the Disney universe it becomes apparent that there is no force more powerful than heterosexual love.

One narrateme occurring in the middle of the films is the separation of the hero and heroine after an initial union (narrateme six). This separation occurs via force or manipulation from an outside source, generally at the hands of the quillain. The reasons for this separation vary depending on the specific needs of the quillains, and in some films this separation occurs more than once. Figure 15 shows the aftermath of the first separation of the hero and heroine in *Aladdin*. Jasmine and Jafar are having a conversation after she is captured with Aladdin in the marketplace. This scene is the moment in the film when Jafar realises that Jasmine has fallen in love with a "street rat." When Jasmine demands that Jafar release Aladdin from prison, the following conversation takes place:

Jasmine: He didn't kidnap me. I ran away!

Jafar: How frightfully upsetting. Had I but known.

Jasmine: What do you mean?

Jafar: Sadly the boy's sentence has already been carried out.

Jasmine: What sentence?

Jafar: Death. By beheading. I am exceedingly sorry princess.

³² As I discuss in Chapter Six, the notion of "true love" being synonymous with heterosexuality is self-reflexively challenged in *Frozen*.



Figure 15: Jasmine’s response to finding out about Aladdin’s alleged death

This image occurs as Jafar tells Jasmine that he is “exceedingly sorry,” but Jafar’s actions and posture contradicts the words he expresses. The sibilant “s” sound in these two words foreshadows his later transformation into an oversized snake. His use of this consonant in the film during moments of dishonesty emphasises his sneaky and deceptive manner, attributes often associated with snakes.³³ Jafar has a large smile on his face, and he is clearly happy at the distress that he is causing. The way Jafar further revels in his triumph is shown by the placement of his hands on Jasmine’s shoulders, which act to control and contain her. Jafar is well aware he now has Jasmine under his control, and knows he can use her love for Aladdin to manipulate her further. Jafar lies in order to ensure that Jasmine and Aladdin are not united.³⁴

Just as Jafar is happy, despite being “exceedingly sorry,” so too is Maleficent happy when she causes heterosexual distress. Shortly before Aurora’s sixteenth birthday, the day she will be put in an eternal slumber, Aurora meets Prince Phillip once more, this time in the woods, and the pair fall instantly in love. Knowing that Maleficent is aware of her location, the good fairies take Aurora to the kingdom. However, Maleficent learns of the plan and leads Aurora up a flight of stairs where she ultimately pricks her finger on a spindle, falling into an eternal slumber. The good fairies arrive, and Maleficent revels in their unhappiness, exclaiming, “You poor simple fools. Thinking you could defeat me, ME, the Mistress of all Evil. Well here’s your precious princess.” Once more, self-identified evil is happy at the expense of heterosexual happiness. As Roof would state, it is at this point in the film that “the hetero no longer holds sway” (39).

Aurora falling into an eternal slumber at the hands of Maleficent is the second

³³ This snake-quality relates back in Disney to the quillainous snake Kaa in *The Jungle Book*, and as far back as the Bible.

³⁴ This tactic is one of the more common used by the quillains and seen in other films including *Tangled* with Mother Gothel exaggerating the dangers of the outside world and *The Lion King* with Scar telling Simba that he was responsible for his father’s death.

instance in *Sleeping Beauty* when the hero and heroine are separated (the first being when she is hidden in the forest for sixteen years). *Aladdin* too has two separations of the hero and heroine. Following the exchange between Jasmine and Jafar, Aladdin is shown alive in a jail cell, and the audience learns Jafar lied to Jasmine because he needs Aladdin to enter a cave and retrieve a magical lamp for him. By telling Jasmine that Aladdin is dead, Jafar ensures his own desire of ultimate control and power can be achieved. As a result of this plan Aladdin becomes trapped in the cave with the magical lamp.

After Aladdin frees himself and finds his way back to Jasmine, this time disguised as Prince Ali, Jafar learns the truth behind his identity and orders his guards to kill Aladdin. After trying to eliminate Aladdin this second time and accepting the magical lamp will not be his, Jafar uses his magical staff to control the Sultan and order Jasmine to marry him; this control is a last resort as he realises it will be his only way to become Sultan himself and gain complete control over the Kingdom. Though Jafar, at least superficially, attempts to enter into a heterosexual union, he does so for his own ends. By trying to marry Jasmine through the use of magic, Jafar is undermining the institution of marriage for his own ends. Rather than trying to marry her for love, the basis of a “true” heterosexual marriage in the Disney universe (and indeed Western society), his attempt to force her to marry him is a perversion of the institution.

Both *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty* show two of the ways that the heroes and heroines are separated: first through lies and manipulation, and second through force. These two methods are significant because they show how the quillains are willing to exert both physical and psychological manipulation to achieve their goals. In both films the separation of the hero and the heroine occurs in a space different to where heterosexuality is first introduced.³⁵ This separation is a success of the quillain and narratively blocks the fulfilment of a heterosexual union, and therefore heterosexual happiness.

The other narrateme to occur in the middle of the films (narrateme seven) is an initial battle or confrontation between the hero/ine and the quillain in which the quillain appears to triumph. This point is related to the separation of the hero and heroine, but differs in its narrative function because this initial battle is one of the greatest sources of queer happiness in the film. When there are two battles between the hero/ine and the quillain, the quillain always wins this initial battle. In *Aladdin* the initial battle results in Aladdin being bound and thrown into the sea, and in *Sleeping Beauty* the initial battle occurs as Maleficent locates

³⁵ In some films, such as *Peter Pan*, this space is a different world, while for others, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, this space is a distinct castle (I discuss these spaces further in chapters three and four).

Aurora and fulfils her initial curse (the effects of which were diminished from death to eternal slumber by the good fairies).

As a result of this success, the quillains receive their happiness, and the films present the quillains as appearing to fulfil their initial motivations and desires for power and control. However, with the narrative stirred up as a result of the quillain, and the hero and heroine separated so that a heterosexual union cannot be completed, the narrative usefulness of the quillains diminishes. Once the disruption to straight happiness—the separation of the hero and the heroine—is achieved and with the apparent success of the quillains, the narrative begins to right the wrongs perpetrated by the quillains. At this point the film shifts into the third phase—the ending.

Happily (N)ever After

By this stage of the film the audience, the hero, and the heroine are all aware of the quillain's intentions. The narratemes occurring during this phase include a final conflict between the hero/ine and the quillain in which the quillain is vanquished (narrateme eight); the reuniting of the hero and heroine (narrateme nine); and the return of heterosexual happiness in the form of marriage or the reuniting of a family (narrateme ten). Each of these three narratemes work together to reinforce the strength and power of heterosexuality, and although heterosexism is encoded into the *whole* narrative structure, it is at this stage of the films when the perpetuation of heterosexism is most noticeable.

Disney films generally conclude with a final conflict between the hero/ine and the quillain, usually a physical battle. During this final battle the quillain is pushed to the edge (often literally) and is forced to make a decision between redeeming themselves and being allowed to go free, or taking the chance for one final villainous act and risking complete elimination. In both *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the quillains' physical appearances are altered in order to intimidate and destroy the hero/ines.³⁶

These transformations are part of the dehumanisation projected only onto the quillains, verbally by characters such as King Stefan, but also in the animation process as a narrative device during battle scenes (Fig. 16). In this moment, the quillains literally become monsters, and the quillains are often at their most evil as they attempt to kill the films' hero/ines. It is in these films with the monstrous quillains whose appearances match their

³⁶ This alteration also occurs in other films including *The Little Mermaid* and *Wreck-It Ralph*.

personalities that the audience is encouraged to hope for the demise of the quillain: Maleficent *should* get a sword through her heart. Ursula *should* have a boat steered into her body until she explodes. Jafar *should* be imprisoned in a magic lamp for all eternity.



Figure 16: Alteration of quillains' bodies. Clockwise from top left: Maleficent, Jafar, Ursula, and Yzma

The final battle in *Sleeping Beauty* takes place after the three good fairies locate and rescue Prince Phillip from his imprisonment in Maleficent's castle. With the fairies by his side for protection, Phillip races towards the kingdom in order to find Aurora and break the curse. Upon reaching the castle, Phillip comes face to face with Maleficent where she proclaims, "Now shall you deal with me, oh Prince Phillip, and all the powers of hell," before transforming herself into an enormous dragon in an attempt to defeat him (Fig. 16). In the final moments, when it becomes clear Maleficent will not redeem herself, the good fairies enchant Phillip's sword with the incantation, "Sword of truth fly swift and sure / that evil die and good endure." After earlier proclaiming herself the "Mistress of all Evil" it becomes clear that Maleficent, as both queer and villain, must *die* in order for the heterosexual heroine and hero to survive and thrive. With the fairies' incantation, Phillip throws the sword towards Maleficent, piercing her heart and sending her falling over a cliff to her death.

A similar battle takes place in *Aladdin*, with the quillain shifting his physical form into a reptilian body before having his plan unravelled with magic from an external party. After Jafar first alters his body to a giant snake, Aladdin, now diminished in physical proportions to Jafar, is forced to rely on wit rather than strength in order to outsmart and

defeat Jafar. Aladdin mocks Jafar's strength, telling him he will never be more powerful than Genie. Enraged at not being the most powerful being in existence, Jafar uses his final wish acquired from Genie and turns himself into an all-powerful genie (Fig. 16).

While once standing tall and slender, wearing elegant attire, Jafar is now heavily muscled and appears physically intimidating. Remaining the same in his appearance, however, are his twisted beard, and the look of anger in his eyes and mouth with which he was introduced. Jafar's final elimination follows moments after his transformation as Aladdin reveals that because he is now a genie, Jafar also gets everything that goes along with it. Aladdin picks up what will soon be Jafar's magical lamp, and Jafar is pulled inside to a life of containment as a genie.

What this narrateme (narrateme eight) represents, not only in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Aladdin*, but also in the Disney genre more generally, is the resumption of heterosexual happiness. It is the final battle between good and evil, between heterosexuality and queerness. This point is also the manifestation of the trials and tribulations of heterosexual love throughout the film, and the final way to show that true (heterosexual) love conquers all. Although defeating the villain is not synonymous with heterosexual attraction, the queer *needs* to be eliminated so heterosexual (straight) happiness can return. Both Phillip and Aladdin fight the quillains in order to reunite once more with their princesses.

The reuniting of the hero and heroine occurs shortly after the final battle with the quillain.³⁷ While in *Aladdin*, both Jasmine and Aladdin work together to defeat Jafar, the two are not physically reunited until after the battle. After his third time surviving attempted murder at the hands of Jafar, Aladdin sneaks into the palace, which is now under the control of Jafar, and signals for Jasmine to keep quiet. The two work together until Jasmine becomes imprisoned in an oversized hourglass full of sand and left for dead by Jafar, at which point Aladdin saves the day. Although the two are once again in the same location, Jafar repeatedly physically separates them.

When Aladdin and Jasmine are finally reunited, the pair confesses their love for each other, acknowledging that they cannot be together because Jasmine must wed a prince. Genie points out to Aladdin that he has a final wish and can become a prince, but Aladdin turns down this offer by explaining that he cannot pretend to be something he is not. Aladdin uses his final wish for Genie's freedom, effectively destroying his own last chance to marry Jasmine. With this realisation, the Sultan steps forward and proclaims, "From this day forth,

³⁷ In other films such as *Tangled*, the hero and heroine are reunited in time to fight the quillain together.

the Princess shall marry whomever she deems worthy.” With her initial desires for being able to choose who she marries finally fulfilled, Jasmine rushes to Aladdin and the two embrace.

This narrateme (narrateme ten) produces straight happiness and happily ever after in the form of a heterosexual union and/or reuniting of a family. While *Aladdin* represents the former of these, *Sleeping Beauty* is one film containing both endings simultaneously. After defeating Maleficent, Phillip rushes to the tower Aurora is kept in during her eternal slumber and kisses her, breaking the curse set in place sixteen years earlier. The two share a smile of thanks and understanding at their reunion and make their way to the grand hall containing both of their parents, as well as many members of the nobility. Aurora is then reunited with her parents after sixteen years apart and the pair announces their engagement to everyone in the form of a dance around the grand hall. In this film, social order has finally been restored and the kingdom can continue with its heteronormative traditions. Missing at the films’ conclusions, however, are the queers. As illustrated in Appendix Two, the villains are all narratively eliminated, mostly by death or jailing. The significance of their absences is that there can be no happy endings if the queers are present; the endings are all about heterosexuality and the celebration of future heterosexual reproduction.

Heterosexual happiness is the ultimate goal to be achieved in the Disney narrative. Any number of variants can take place that separate the heroine from her hero, but in the end the two find their way back to each other in time to live happily ever after. Disney films do show queer happiness at times, but it is at these times that the happiness is aligned with villainy and is obtained at the expense of the happiness of the heterosexual. Queer happiness represents evil, and as a result cannot narratively exist at the conclusion of a genre that prides itself on heterosexual happy endings. Ultimately, these films are perpetuating heterosexism because of the way Disney narratively codes and equates heterosexuality with goodness and happiness, and queerness with evil and unhappiness. As long as queer happiness remains synonymous with evil within the Disney genre, it remains impossible for explicitly or implicitly queer characters to achieve a happy ending.

Chapter Two

Music, Melodrama, and Maternalism

The Little Mermaid begins as mermaid Ariel lives a life of dissatisfaction under the sea, collecting human objects from shipwrecks. One stormy day, human Prince Eric's ship gets caught in a storm and he almost drowns. Ariel saves his life by taking him back to land, and immediately falls in love with him. Her father, King Triton, learns of her secret collection of human objects and forbids her from ever going to the land. Meanwhile, the quillainous sea witch Ursula has learned of Ariel's love for Eric and agrees to give Ariel legs in exchange for her voice. Ariel is told she has three days to make Eric fall in love with her, or else her soul will belong to Ursula. Eric does not immediately recognise Ariel because she no longer has the voice he remembers from the day he was saved. The two, however, begin to grow closer. Ursula realises that she is about to lose her end of the bargain, and transforms herself into a human and uses Ariel's voice to win Eric's love. Eric and Vanessa (Ursula's human name) almost wed, but the wedding is interrupted at the last minute by Ariel, who regains her voice. However, three days have passed, so Ariel transforms back into a mermaid and Eric realises who she is. They team up to battle Ursula, and once she is killed Triton sees what Eric did for Ariel, blesses their union, and turns Ariel into a human. Eric and Ariel live happily ever after.

Tangled begins with the story of an old witch, Gothel, who needs a magical flower to remain young. Meanwhile, the Queen of the kingdom is pregnant with Rapunzel, and falls ill. The only way to save her is the magical flower Gothel uses to stay young. The king's army finds the flower and the Queen is saved, safely giving birth to Rapunzel. Gothel breaks into the kingdom and kidnaps Rapunzel, so she can use the magical properties of the flower, now residing in Rapunzel's hair. Rapunzel grows up isolated in a tower, believing Gothel to be her mother. One day Rapunzel asks Gothel to leave the tower to visit the floating lights that appear on her birthday each year. Gothel forbids her to leave and Rapunzel is left alone once more. At this time, a thief, Flynn Rider, scales Rapunzel's tower in an effort to flee the king's guards, and is knocked unconscious by Rapunzel. When he regains consciousness Rapunzel tells Flynn that he must take her to see the lights, and only then will she return the goods he stole from the kingdom. The two set out on their adventure, and Gothel returns home to find Rapunzel missing. She tracks them down and captures Rapunzel while having Flynn sent for execution in the kingdom. Flynn manages to escape and races back to Rapunzel's tower to save her. When he arrives he finds her tied up. Gothel then stabs Flynn, leaving him to die. In his last moments, he grabs a shard of glass and cuts off Rapunzel's hair, removing its magical properties for good. The years Gothel stole as a result of the magic come back to her immediately and she ages hundreds of years in seconds, dying. Flynn dies, and a single tear falls from Rapunzel onto him. The magical properties she had exist in that tear, and Flynn is revived. Rapunzel is taken to the kingdom where she is reunited with her parents. Flynn's voiceover at the conclusion reveals after a lot of begging from him, Rapunzel agreed to marry him.

While the broader plot structure is perhaps the most important element of the Disney film, one aspect of the films that are arguably as important is the music. In his book *Disney's Animation Magic*, Disney producer Don Hahn explains how “songs are important because they express the major turning points in the story” (13). As Hahn argues, music is a crucial aspect of the narrative in many Disney films, particularly the Disney Princess films. Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, discussing Disney songs in *Deconstructing Disney*, explain how “[f]ar from being mere adjuncts to the animated narrative . . . these songs represent some of the decisive indices in which the Disney ideology is most securely embedded. They structure the films and carry the weight of the Disney signature” (8). That is, one of the most recognisable and defining characteristics of classic Disney is the music that plays an integral role in many films.

The different songs in these films can be separated into various categories which have been differentiated in fan circles.³⁸ Some of these categories include hero songs, villain songs, and love songs. Songs in the same category have the same function across films: the hero/ine songs establish the desires of these characters; villain songs either establish the desires of the villains or alternatively reveal their plans to destroy the hero/ine (sometimes these are the one and the same); and love songs work to develop a romantic connection between two characters.

The hero/ine and villain songs are some of the most noticeable of any Disney songs; they can usually be found on compilation soundtracks of Disney music, they are often the songs for which specific Disney films are known, and they are the songs responsible for “expressing the major turning points in the story,” or establishing the films’ events.

In this chapter I analyse two song categories that play a role in the formation and disruption of straight happiness. The first are songs sung by Disney heroines towards the beginning of the films, which reveal the motivations and desires of these characters. While not having an official name, these songs are sometimes referred to in fan circles and the media as the “I Want Song.” I refer to them as “songs of desire,” because these songs are all about the changes needed in the heroines’ lives in order for them to fulfil their ultimate desires. I also chose this name in light of Brooks’ discussion of narrative desire. As quoted in the previous chapter, he explains how desire “is always there at the start of the narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun” (38). The heroines’ songs are about an

³⁸ As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Six, this fan reading is significant because, following from Henry Jenkins, vernacular theories of fans provide critical readings of texts equivalent to scholarly academic readings.

initial desire to see the world, to achieve more from life, and these songs are the moment in the films where the movement, action and change that will take place are revealed.

The counterparts to these songs are those sung by the quillains, and these songs can be read as adjuncts to the animated narrative, although they do also have a function in driving the narrative. These songs, which I call “songs of disruption,” are about the quillains’ happiness, which as I discuss Chapter One, is closely associated with the heterosexual hero/ines’ unhappiness. While these songs purport to be in the best interest of the heterosexual, they are undeniably about causing unhappiness and disrupting the hero/ines’ narrative trajectory towards a heterosexual union. Primarily sung by male quillains, songs of disruption often involve physically or emotionally manipulating the hero/ines (Table 3).³⁹ Of the fifteen songs in this list, only four are sung by female quillains, and in these instances the quillains at one stage play a maternal role to the films’ hero/ines.

The two quillain songs I examine in this chapter are Ursula’s (*The Little Mermaid*) “Poor Unfortunate Souls” and Mother Gothel’s (*Tangled*) “Mother Knows Best.” In both of these films, the quillains are strong witches who imitate and appropriate femininity, while the heroines are young, sheltered princesses. Despite an overwhelming number of male quillain songs, I have chosen these two because they best illustrate the “song of disruption”; both the heroines’ trajectories towards a heterosexual union and the audiences’ viewing process are disrupted by the quillain. One aspect of these two songs making them unique, and therefore especially worthy of examination, is the way the musical number is sung directly *to* the heroine. In other songs such as “Be Prepared” and “The World’s Greatest Criminal Mind” the song is sung to a group, while in “Hellfire” Frollo sings to himself. The only other songs sung directly *and* solely by the quillain to a *single* hero/ine are “Trust in Me,” “Mad Madam Mim,” and “Love is an Open Door,” the first being sung by a secondary antagonist, the second by a female quillain, and the third by a male quillain whose quillainy is realised retroactively and whose song is initially read as a love song.

Songs of desire and disruption arise from similar desires, but pull against one another—i.e. Ursula and Ariel both want Ariel to go to the land, but for opposing reasons. Throughout this chapter I examine the narrative significance and function of both the songs of desire and songs of disruption, and suggest the songs of disruption are necessary for the quillains’ ongoing imitation of femininity as a means to disrupt the heroines’ narrative trajectories.

³⁹ As seen in the table, *Frozen* has two songs of disruption because of the way the film plays with ambiguous character roles. I explore this ambiguity in Chapter Six.

Table 3: Quillains' Songs of Disruption

<i>Film</i>	<i>Character(s)</i>	<i>Song</i>
<i>Peter Pan</i>	Captain Hook and Crew	"The Elegant Captain Hook"
<i>The Sword in the Stone</i>	Madam Mim	"Mad Madam Mim"
<i>The Jungle Book</i>	Kaa	"Trust in Me"
<i>The Great Mouse Detective</i>	Professor Ratigan and Crew	"World's Greatest Criminal Mind"
<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	Ursula	"Poor Unfortunate Souls"
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	Gaston and Crew	"Gaston"
<i>Aladdin</i>	Jafar	"Prince Ali (Reprise)"
<i>The Lion King</i>	Scar	"Be Prepared"
<i>Pocahontas</i>	Governor Ratcliffe and Crew	"Mine, Mine, Mine"
<i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>	Judge Frollo	"Hellfire"
<i>Home on the Range</i>	Alameda Slim	"Yodel-Adle-Eedle-Idle-O"
<i>The Princess and the Frog</i>	Dr. Facilier	"Friends on the Other Side"
<i>Tangled</i>	Mother Gothel	"Mother Knows Best"
<i>Frozen</i>	Hans	"Love is an Open Door"
<i>Frozen</i>	Elsa	"Let It Go"

My analysis in this chapter draws upon the idea of audience reception, specifically the gay spectator. Brett Farmer provides the clearest understanding of this specific reception in the musical tradition:

The spectacular moments of queer excess in the musical function as ideal bases for gay receptions and readings, providing powerful 'gaps' in the heteronormative text through which to insert gay desires and weave gay fantasies.

However, this assumption of the musical number as [a] disruptive point of (queer) excess is but part of the negotiational process. These moments of excess need to be extended and amplified to combat dominant textual attempts to recontain and redomesticate the disruptions they pose. As any number of critics have pointed out, one defining feature of the carnivalesque moment of excess is its transience. It is by definition 'momentary'; it never lasts, it comes to an end, and then order and stability is reasserted. (95)

Songs of desire and songs of disruption are both momentary because they occur in the film for only a few minutes and then the narrative must progress. However, the songs of disruption are also momentary because they provide a brief safe(r) space for the quillains to be as excessive as they want without immediate repercussions. These songs disrupt the

heroines' trajectories towards happily ever after, so the films *do* ultimately reassert order and stability by (re)domesticating the heroines and undoing the teachings of the quillains.

Another binary exists here with the quillain songs full of excess and their performances over the top (in contrast to the subdued princesses). In Farmer's terms, the quillain songs can be read as "carnavalesque" because the excess they provide are only "momentary." The disruptions they pose to the heterosexual heroines' trajectories are corrected by the films not long after the songs, allowing the hero/ines to continue on the path towards their straight endings.

Relying on reception study in this chapter is important because of the way the films portray the quillains' songs as spectacular and fantastic, as compared to the heroines' songs. The characters we are narratively encouraged to dislike are those provided with the most theatrical moments in the films. Kathryn Kalinak, in *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*, explores the affective use of film music: "Film music can also create and resonate emotion between the screen and the audience. When we recognise an emotion attributed to characters or events, we become more invested in them . . . Music is one of the most powerful emotion prompts in film, encouraging us to empathise with onscreen characters" (4-5). Both the heroines' songs of desire and the quillains' songs of disruption encourage the audience to empathise with the heroine through the use of music. Songs of desire often contain melodious music, whereas the songs of disruption contain darker music—music in minor key—and lyrics that threaten to disrupt the path of the heroines.

Music in these films is also vital to the drive towards the straight ending. Farmer explains the importance of music in relation to "textual closure in determining the musical film's dominant heteronormative agenda," noting,

the most effective strategy for any proposed practice of queer negotiation would be to refuse and undermine the musical's push towards closure. If the musical is structured to build up to a final, all-embracing moment of heterosexual union as utopian ideal, then a disruption of its linear trajectory toward closure would, perforce, also disrupt its textual path to heterosexual utopianisation. (79)

If the Disney musical lacked a quillain, then the film would just build to the "all-embracing moment of heterosexual union." The songs of disruption are the attempt to refuse and undermine the push to closure. Because Disney films are about "heterosexual utopianisation" the best the quillains can hope for is a single song, a single moment of excess, to suppress and disrupt the trajectory of the heroines before they are themselves contained.

While songs of desire and songs of disruption often reference complementary themes, they have different functions within the wider narratives. Despite my separation of songs of desire and songs of disruption, both types of songs can be read as songs of desire. Both establish motivations and desires of the respective characters, but the quillains’ songs have the added function of being an overt disruption to the heroines’ heterosexual trajectories, which contrasts the heroines’ songs of desire which establish how this path will be found and followed.

Table 4: Percolating binaries in *The Little Mermaid* and *Tangled*

<i>Songs of Desire</i>	<i>Songs of Disruption</i>
Heroine	Villain
Heterosexual	Queer
“Natural” Femininity	“Artificial” Femininity
Captive	Captor
Non-Theatrical	Theatrical
Light	Darkness

In addition to these narrative functions, these two sets of songs establish another percolating binary (Table 4). When examining the dualisms in Disney musical solos, key moments within the songs become more significant to the narrative as a whole. As Table Four shows, each column of binaries becomes stronger (vertically) when a single trait is examined in relation to those above and below it. For example, looking at the terms in the songs of desire column, it is apparent the heroine is heterosexual and possesses “natural” femininity. The association of the heroines with these specific binary traits is significant to the overall narratives because when one of these individual traits becomes interrupted, or removed, which generally occurs at the hands of the queer, artificially feminine villains, the narrative trajectories change paths to accommodate and re-establish the binaries set forth by the films. The songs’ binary traits are significant in relation to the overall narratives because the films’ containing them visually and aurally differentiate the quillains from the hero/ines.

In order to undertake an analysis of the function of the music in Disney films as my second embedded queer element, my discussion is broken down into five main sections: the desire for knowledge; the occupation of space; the *femme fatale*; the teaching of bad/disruptive sexualities; and the imitation and appropriation of femininity. The chapter begins with an analysis of songs of desire to illustrate how the desires and motivations of these

characters initially propel the narrative.

The second section moves to a discussion of the way the heroines and quillains occupy space within their musical numbers, and the implications of this spatial occupation. The third section more fully establishes the notion of the Disney *femme fatale* in order to understand the way these women teach a bad model of sexuality to the heroines. The chapter ends with an analysis of the ways Ursula and Gothel rely on an imitation and appropriation of the “natural” femininity of Ariel and Rapunzel—specifically their voice and hair respectively—in order to lead the princesses down a path away from their inevitable heterosexual union.

The Desire for Knowledge

The first set of binaries established in the films in relation to the music are those introduced during the songs of desire. I characterise these songs by four qualities: they are generally the first song to occur in the film; they are sung by the hero/ine; they are a reflection of the hero/ine’s current life (sung to themselves or an anthropomorphised animal companion); and most obviously they are about a longing or desire. These songs illustrate a life of captivity, and an underlying theme is a desire for knowledge.

While these are four qualities I recognise in the songs, I am not the only person to do so. Fans have picked up on these qualities, and one fan in particular, Rebecca Humphries, has written a song titled “My Disney Princess Song” in which she satirically critiques the structure and themes of songs of desire in the form of a song of desire (Appendix Four). Humphries identifies characteristics I discuss momentarily including “books . . . looks . . . [and] animal friends” and the way the princesses are “deeply unsatisfied.” This comedic take on songs of desire illustrates fans’ recognition of consistent elements to these songs across the various films.

Songs of desire express the underlying reasons for the princesses’ adventures towards heterosexual unions. Exploring the impact heterosexuality and the drive for marriage has on Disney Princesses, Carrie Cokely explains how in Disney films,

it is the females who are hoping and dreaming of their one true love, who they have not yet met. The belief is that if you wait just long enough, wish hard enough, and keep on dreaming eventually he will come for you. This puts forth the notion that it is so ‘natural’ for women to want to be married that it consumes not only their dreams, but that it also spills over into their waking thoughts as well. (170)

These hopes and dreams are what often form the basis of the songs of desire. These songs are not only a visual and aural expression of the princesses' dreaming of their Prince Charmings, but they are also one way the narratives firmly establish heterosexuality from the outset of the films.⁴⁰ Cokely's use of the term "natural" re-establishes one of the dualisms in relation to the percolating binaries present in Disney films. If the princesses' desire for marriage is seen as natural, then the quillains' interference with this marriage process is clearly unnatural.

Many songs of desire contain books or artefacts that the princesses use to gain knowledge. Here the films construct a link between knowledge and heterosexual love. This link is vital in the films because the desire for knowledge is presented as the catalyst for the princesses' adventures to find a prince. The desire for a prince is overt in many films, because there can be no error in the audience's mind that the heroine *is* heterosexual. After all, a desire for a heterosexual partner is one way the films separate the hero/ines from the quillains.



Figure 17: Ariel's captivation with the human world and knowledge

In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel sings "Part of Your World," a song reflecting her desire to live on land with humans. As Byrne and McQuillan note, "[c]ompared to the human world, [Ariel's] is only a mere world" (24). Her longing to move beyond the "mere" merworld is seen throughout the song, particularly through the repetition of the phrase, "I wanna be where the people are." As Ariel sings a variation of the phrase, "I'm ready to know what the people know," she reads a book excitedly while her friend Flounder looks over her shoulder (Fig. 17). Her excitement is seen through both her eyes and mouth, as she points out something interesting to Flounder, who is equally as excited. The image of reading a book in an attempt to gain knowledge about a different place, while simultaneously wishing to be in a different place, is echoed not only by Rapunzel in *Tangled*, but also by Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*.

⁴⁰ Early Disney songs of desire are specifically about *actual* princes: iconically *Snow White*'s "Someday My Prince Will Come." Later songs, however, are about desire for a new life; although, despite being put in these terms for a different life, their desires always ends up being a prince *in practice*.

Ariel's longing is a dream to visit the land and see the people, specifically Eric, a man she saves from drowning but to whom has not yet spoken.⁴¹ In order to achieve this goal, she uses books as a source to understand the language and culture of the human world. Her lack of comprehension of the human world is emphasised throughout the song as Ariel repeats variants of the phrase "what do you call [it]?" when attempting to remember words including "feet," "street," and "burn." Ariel uses books salvaged from shipwrecks, as well her wider collection of human objects such as forks and ornaments, in an attempt to assimilate herself into the human culture.

Rapunzel also relies on books; however, reading for her is primarily a means of passing time rather than gaining new knowledge. Throughout her song, "When Will My Life Begin," Rapunzel sings of her daily routine, which involves menial chores including mopping, polishing, and sweeping. Intermittent with these chores are leisurely activities including "read[ing] a book, or maybe two or three" before lunch, and "reread[ing] the books, if [she] ha[s] time to spare" after lunch (Fig. 18). The three books Rapunzel owns are titled "Botany," "Geology," and "Cooking," and while these books will have once provided her with new knowledge, the song suggests that because she reads them twice a day, her primary reason for reading is to pass time.

As Rapunzel reads the books for the first time in the day, her and her companion Pascal's eyes display the same level of excitement as Ariel and Flounder. Pascal's positioning over Rapunzel's left shoulder further mirrors Ariel's animal companion. Rapunzel's rereading of the books after lunch, however, provides a stark contrast to the excitement she shows earlier in the day. This time Rapunzel looks bored with the same limited reading material in her house. Her eyes lack the excitement seen earlier and her body language suggests reading for the second time is a chore, rather than a pleasure.⁴² For Ariel, reading represents the adventure for knowledge, learning, and potential freedom, whereas for Rapunzel and her limited (text)book selection, reading emphasises her captivity.

⁴¹ As I discuss in Chapter Six, Disney takes this trope and plays with it in *Frozen* with Anna's song "For the First Time in Forever" when she sings "I can't wait to meet everyone! *gasp* What if I meet... the one? / . . . I suddenly see him standing there / A beautiful stranger, tall and fair."

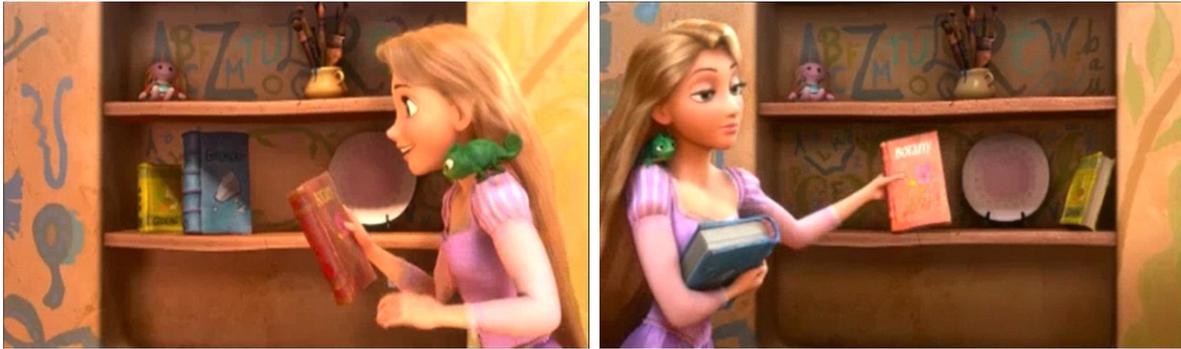


Figure 18: Rapunzel reading her books for the first time (left) and second time (right) in the day

The objects signifying knowledge and escape for Rapunzel are not books, as they are for Ariel (and Belle), but rather the mysterious floating lanterns she sees each year: “And tomorrow night lights will appear / Just like they do on my birthday each year / What is it like out there where they glow? / Now that I’m older, Mother might just let me go.” The audience is aware of the connection between Rapunzel and the floating lanterns from information provided during the film’s prologue. We know the desire for knowledge Rapunzel has will likely lead her back to her parents, the King and Queen of the kingdom, from whom she was stolen as a baby. To the audience, Rapunzel finding out the meaning behind the lanterns signifies her inevitable journey back to and reunion with her parents—one of the heteronormative unions the audience comes to expect from this film.

Occupation of Space

Songs of desire and songs of disruption have different functions in Disney films based on the similar motivations. The heroine’s motivation is revealed during her song of desire. As mentioned above, in the films I examine these desires are behind the wish to see the floating lanterns (*Tangled*) and the wish to live amongst the humans (*The Little Mermaid*). One function of the songs of desire is to reveal to the audience the driving force of the film: the desire for knowledge, freedom, and self-fulfilment. However, somewhere along the way the films reframe these desires and provide the heroines with a heterosexual partner (husband) as a means to fulfil the desires. These wishes are once again revealed during the quillains’ songs of disruption. The parallel between the two types of songs reveals how one main function of the quillains’ songs is to block the fulfilment of not only the heroines’ plan revealed in their

⁴² Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*) is a third heroine to read during her song of desire. In Belle’s case, reading is not a hobby to pass time, but rather as an escape from her mundane, repetitive life.

songs of desire, but also to interrupt the narratives and block heterosexuality itself.⁴³



Figure 19: Rapunzel's occupation of space during "When Will My Life Begin?"

Rapunzel and Ariel's songs of desire are very similar in the way in which the princesses occupy the space on screen. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the heroines are often introduced in sites of heterosexuality, even though they do on occasion feel trapped or confined in these spaces. Figures 19-21 illustrate Rapunzel's occupation of space during "When Will My Life Begin." Figure 19 mirrors the repetition of the lyrics occurring as she completes her daily chores: sweeping, mopping, and sweeping again. In these two frames, there are two or three copies of Rapunzel, illustrating the confinement of the space. These images also encapsulate the way Rapunzel's performance of her "natural" femininity is tightly aligned with her domesticity. These two frames perhaps best illustrate the effect of percolating binaries in the film: Rapunzel's a) femininity as b) "natural" is aligned with her c) domesticity, in turn becoming aligned with, and strengthened by, her d) heterosexuality.

Figures 20 and 21 provide a reflection of the size of the space Rapunzel occupies. Figure 20 shows the expanse of the room as she paints her mural on the wall. The low angle and wide shot minimises Rapunzel's body, reducing the space she appears to occupy. Contrasted to Figure 19 which makes the room appear crowded with the duplicates of Rapunzel, this image emphasises the loneliness that comes with her isolation.

⁴³ The blocking of heterosexuality I refer to here is what I analyse in Chapter One. As I argued throughout the chapter, one of the primary functions of the quillain in Disney films is to interrupt the heterosexual union of the heroine and hero.



Figure 20: The size of Rapunzel's space in "When Will My Life Begin?"



Figure 21: Rapunzel's entrapment

One of the most poignant moments in "When Will My Life Begin" is towards the conclusion of the song when Rapunzel's frustration at being trapped in not only the same place, but the same routine, becomes apparent. Rapunzel sings "And I'll keep wonderin' and wonderin,' / And wonderin' and wonderin' / When will my life begin?" Rapunzel's uncertainty of her current situation and desire for something new and exciting is seen in these lines through the repetition of the word "wonderin'" immediately before the rhetorical question "when will my life begin?" As the narrative progresses it becomes apparent that her life will begin only when she meets the man who later becomes her romantic interest. Her adventure happens *only* because Flynn Rider breaks into her house, which provides her with an opportunity for blackmail to achieve her goal of seeing the floating lanterns.

As Rapunzel wonders repeatedly, her hair encircles her, trapping her in the centre of the room (Fig. 21). This metaphoric containment *by* her hair reflects her actual containment *because of* her hair—without the magical properties of her hair, Mother Gothel would have no reason to keep Rapunzel captive. This image reflects how Rapunzel's longing and wish to be free is restricted because of her own hair.

Like Rapunzel, Ariel has a room over which she appears to have control and which she uses to store her collection of human objects—Rapunzel can be seen to "collect" the numerous pieces of art with which she has decorated her room. Ariel sings her song of desire, "Part of Your World," while moving about her room. Like Rapunzel, Ariel has limited space in which to move (Fig. 22). As Ariel concludes her song, the use of the high camera angle illustrates the way that, ultimately, the room has control over her, and functions to contain her in the one space she has to herself (Fig. 23). This image is reminiscent of, and plays a similar function to, Figure 21, which occurs at the conclusion of Rapunzel's "When Will My Life Begin." Both princesses have a look of despondency on their faces as they stare into the distance dreaming of a new life. They are both isolated, apart from their animal companion,

and trapped by the things they care about most: Rapunzel by her hair and Ariel by her collection of human artefacts.



Figure 22: Ariel's occupation of space in "Part of Your World"



Figure 23: Ariel's entrapment

Staging the Songs of Desire

In order to understand how the songs of desire and songs of disruption contribute to the narratives of heterosexuality and queerness, I examine three main aspects of the quillains' songs: their solos as queer performances; the songs as a method of queering the quillain; and the songs as a means to disrupt the heterosexual trajectory of the narrative.⁴⁴ These factors contrast the mechanism of the heroines' songs as a means to establish the heroines' heterosexuality and the heterosexual trajectory of the narrative.

One way the heterosexual trajectory is established by the films during the songs of desire is the way in which the films invite a specific reception from the audience. As the heroines perform their musical solos, the audience's viewing practice is not interrupted because these songs fit seamlessly into the narrative—the audience is not made aware that they are watching a performance. In contrast, the quillains' songs momentarily disrupt the viewing process inviting the audience to recognise the theatrical nature of the quillains.

In films with a song of desire, the princesses sing as they go about their daily routine without any real spectacle to their performance. This fit can be attributed narratively to the fact these songs are *about* the attainment of heterosexual fulfilment, rather than the blocking of it. This interruption is a major difference between the solo of the hero/ine and the solo of

⁴⁴ This trajectory as I discuss throughout my dissertation does not always conclude with a romantic union. Rather some hero/ines who are the focus on the quillain song end up with family (*Hunchback of Notre Dame*) while other quillain songs build up the ego of quillain ("Gaston" in *Beauty and the Beast* and "The World's Greatest Criminal Mind" in *The Great Mouse Detective*). All the songs, however, do disrupt a heterosexual union in one way or another.

the quillain: the quillains' songs disrupt *both* the drive towards the achievement of heterosexual happiness *and* the audience's reception/viewing practice.

The most prominent difference between these two types of solos arises from the way in which the films present them: the heroines' songs of desire are subdued and personal, while the quillains' songs of disruption are theatrical. By making the quillains' songs theatrical, the films encourage the audience to become momentarily invested in the drama unfolding, a drama often involving seeing the heroine placed in a precarious situation. Comparing the quillains' songs of disruption and the heroines' songs of desire reveals a stark difference between the levels of theatricality in these two types of performances.

Staging the Songs of Disruption

Throughout the songs of disruption the plots become momentarily suspended as different (theatrical) spaces in which the quillains can occupy are opened. One way Ursula and Mother Gothel make use of this new and temporary space in their performance is the way they sing their songs *to* the heroines, contrasting the way the heroines sing the songs *to* and *for* themselves. An explanation for the way these quillains situate the heroines as their spectators is provided by Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario, who in "The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess," discusses the way Ursula "coincides with the return of the Disney musical"⁴⁵ and is "the only *femme fatale* who takes on [in an attempt to subdue and control] the princess in song and dance" (45). Do Rozario's article was published in 2004, and since then there has been only one other quillainous *femme fatale* who takes on the princess in this way: Mother Gothel. Important in my expansion of Do Rozario's statement is the fact that there are only two female quillains who directly take on the princesses in song and dance, and it is through these very performances that the films *celebrate* disruptive sexualities by providing the quillains a space in which to perform without any immediate repercussions.

When compared to the quillains' songs of disruption, the heroines' songs of desire are fairly vapid: the films appear to invest more in the theatrical performances of the quillains. In their songs both Gothel and Ursula have a dramatic flamboyance to their performance (Fig 24). These images encapsulate the way the songs of disruption in *Tangled* and *The Little Mermaid* celebrate deviant sexualities, by representing Gothel and Ursula as fun, theatrical,

⁴⁵ The previous Disney musical being *Sleeping Beauty* thirty years earlier.

and over-the-top.



Figure 24: Gothel (left) and Ursula's (right) dramatic and staged performances

When I refer to theatricality here, I mean the staging of Gothel and Ursula in relation to their surroundings. Both women perform in theatrically lit spaces within a larger, darkened space, reminiscent of a theatre stage within an auditorium. Gothel walks down a staircase lit by candles, a motif echoing Broadway musicals such as *Phantom of the Opera*. The use of a low camera angle also leads the audience to view both women from below, like an audience looking up to a proscenium-arch stage. In the image from *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel is even positioned as a theatre spectator herself, and at times throughout “Mother Knows Best,” Rapunzel too is shown as a spectator to Gothel’s performance. This positioning is echoed in other quillain songs that are not being discussed in detail in this chapter (See Fig. 25 for a visual comparison with other quillains).

The most dramatic example of Gothel’s performance occurs as she sings the lines “Skip the drama / Stay with mama / Mother knows best” (Fig. 24). These lines are followed immediately by a cackle as she twirls in a circle, extinguishing every candle with her cape in the process. Ironic in these sentences is her use of the word “drama”; these lines and the *mise-en-scène* are perhaps the most theatrical moment in her song. The words within these sentences are sung with great power and intensity as the villainous witch stands in the centre of the stage before all the lighting is extinguished; via these two specific factors, this scene alludes to the 2003 Broadway musical *Wicked*. Gothel’s powerful ballad resembles the climax of the song “Defying Gravity,” arguably *Wicked*’s most iconic number.



Figure 25: Male quillains, artificial lighting, stage spaces, and their dramatised songs of disruption. Clockwise from top left: Governor Ratcliffe, Professor Ratigan, and Dr. Facilier, and Scar

Wicked was first a series of books by Gregory Mcguire⁴⁶ before being adapted to a musical. The musical, the text to which I refer, follows the backstory of Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, and Glinda, the Good Witch. *Wicked*, as Stacy Wolf notes in “‘Defying Gravity’: Queer Conventions in the Musical *Wicked*,” “does more than portray women as powerful and as friends; it presents the story of a queer romance between Elphaba and Glinda” (5). *Wicked* is readable as a queer appropriation of *The Wizard of Oz* (the film from which *Wicked* originates).

The resemblance between the ambiguously wicked witch Elphaba (*Wicked*) and Gothel not only adds complexity to Gothel’s character, but brings with it an element of queerness often associated with the Broadway (and wider cinematic) musical tradition, specifically *The Wizard of Oz*. The association with *Wicked* places *Tangled* and Mother Gothel not only in the tradition of children’s fairytale films, but also in the tradition of queer appropriation and resignification. Hence if Gothel is invoking Elphaba, *Tangled* does not just hark back to the *Wizard of Oz*, but to the queer viewing history of the *Wizard of Oz*, and very

⁴⁶ Mcguire is also a gay man, and as with my brief discussion of Andreas Deja, his sexuality can be suggested to have influenced the queer creation of the story.

specifically to the possibility of sympathising with the villain.⁴⁷

Moving from these witches to another who thrives on drama, one of Ursula's more theatrical moments occurs as she makes a concoction to give Ariel legs in exchange for her voice (Fig. 24). Ursula brings the same theatricality to this song as Gothel does to "Mother Knows Best," and the parallel between these two witches is seen in the contrasting images of Figure 24. Ursula has her arms raised and spread, looking down on Ariel who remains on the sea floor for the duration of the song.

Contrasting the earlier images of Ariel and Rapunzel during their musical solos, the images of Ursula and Gothel are one instance within each song when the films prompt the audience to become momentarily distracted from the narrative progression towards a heterosexual union and focus solely on the theatricality of the musical numbers. Songs of desire, are reflections of the princesses' dreams, and act as one of the catalysts for the films' developments. Songs of disruption, by contrast, are extravagant musical numbers interrupting the plot while putting on a performance, not only for the princesses, but also for the audience.

Distraction from narrative progression during Ursula and Gothel's songs of disruption is achieved by the quillains' use of space and lighting, which starkly contrasts Ariel and Rapunzel's solos. Both Gothel and Ursula occupy the entire space on screen, dancing, moving, swimming, and turning their respective environments into a stage from which they perform their songs. These images also show the way these two women are presented as using "artificial" sources of light—one from candles and the other from chemical reactions from potions—to illuminate their surroundings at times of dramatisation. This artificiality is important when comparing these songs to the song of desire, because in the latter the heroines' rooms are represented with natural sunlight filtering into their respective rooms. This artificial/natural binary relates back to the percolating binaries where the heroines are aligned with a natural femininity and the quillains with an artificial femininity.

The use of lighting and staging in the songs of disruption is one way the films encourage an alignment of the audience with the princesses. A shift occurs in the quillains' musical solos by the way the film positions the audience. During these numbers, the audience is still aligned with both Ariel and Rapunzel, who, rather than as active participants in the songs, are both situated at times as passive spectators themselves. At these moments, the films no longer encourage the audience to see Ariel or Rapunzel as characters, but rather use

⁴⁷ The possibility of a sympathetic villain, first played by with Disney in *Beauty and the Beast*, was realised in the 2013 Disney Princess movie *Frozen*, a film whose lead character is voiced by Idina Menzel, the performer who first played Elphaba on Broadway.

our identification with them to position *us* as spectators *within* the film alongside the heroines. The fact that the audience is aware of these musical numbers *as* staged performances—staged in the sense of artificiality—adds to the interruption of the narrative flow as we are encouraged to enjoy the excess of the solo as a spectacle, as aberrant, perverse, and queer.

The *Femme Fatale*

The previous section examined the way songs of disruption are staged as an interruption to both the narrative and audience's viewing process. The theatricality is the reason behind these interruptions, and is linked to an "artificial" femininity through (a) the *femme fatale* and (b) Butlerian exposure of femininity *as* artifice through notion of gender as drag. This section on explores the *femme fatale* and the next section explores drag.

Talking about the *femme fatale* in her 1918 work "A Short Manual for the Aspiring Scenario Writer," Colette explains, "the femme fatale is a shattering revelation, and from the very first minute we know what we can expect from her . . . [we know the femme fatale's] weapons—I have already mentioned poison and drugs—such as the dagger, the revolver, the anonymous letter, and finally, elegance ['a clingy black dress']" (47). It only requires a brief examination of Ursula and Mother Gothel to see how these women are ideal examples of the *femme fatale* described by Colette. Most notable is their elegance⁴⁸; both of these women have clingy black dresses and use this clothing to contain (Ursula) and disguise (Gothel) their own monstrosity and gender deviance.

While Colette describes the way the *femme fatale* is understood broadly as a trope, one scholar to specifically examine the Disney *femme fatale* is Elizabeth Bell. In "Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies," Bell discusses the way femininity is used to create "Disney evil." She explains how "the *femme fatale* construction of feminine excess begins the wicked pentimento of Disney evil; the layers of rapacious animal imagery align women's powers with predatory nature" (117). The predatory nature Bell refers to characterises many of Disney's female quillains. There are eleven female quillains, and six have the ability to change their physical appearance or form

⁴⁸ A term used by many including Andreas Deja when he refers to envisioning a "gay male[s] elegance" as he designed Jafar (Griffin 142)

through magic; four of these six change their appearance to a predatory creature.⁴⁹ When this predatory nature is combined with feminine excess we are provided with a *femme fatale* who “cheats” femininity by performing it outside of a manner expected of women—contrasting the Disney Princesses who perform it “appropriately.”

Ursula embodies the Disney *femme fatale*. She is also one of the few *femme fatales* given a musical solo. The film uses this song to highlight Ursula’s deviant nature, and allows the queerness of the musical tradition to consume her. The way she is consumed by queerness, which I explain in more detail shortly, originates from the ways in which Ursula performs drag while imitating both masculine and feminine characteristics, making it difficult to locate her performance as conforming to expectations of a single gender. Laura Sells, in “Where Do Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid*,” analyses the ways in which Ursula’s excess situates her as an outsider. She explains:

Just as Ursula’s drag performance destabilizes and deconstructs gender, her excessive figure provides the site upon which we can reconstruct the image of the mermaid. It is no accident that Ursula is an octopus, an inverted medusa. Very early in the film we learn that she is exiled by King Triton from the world of the merpeople. She represents that which is outside even the patriarchally domesticated outside, and hence, outside patriarchal language. Ariel’s outside, the undersea world, is a colonized outside ruled by the patriarchal father, King Triton, who has the power to name his daughters. Ursula, who is banished from Triton’s real, it outside the outside. . . . Ursula is a double voiced, multiple character. (184)

Although Sells is referring to the reconstruction of the image of a mermaid, it can also be argued that Ursula allows us to deconstruct and reconstruct the image of gender. Ursula reveals the artificiality of gender through her ability to embody different forms of femininity, as well as through her links with “drag,” which will be explored in the next section.

Encouraging Disruptive Sexualities

Both songs of disruption I examine celebrate the quillains’ deviant sexualities while interrupting the narratives. Ursula uses “Poor Unfortunate Souls” as a direct means of encouraging Ariel to perform a version of femininity foreign to her in order to prevent a union between Ariel and Prince Eric. By the conclusion of the song Ariel signs a contract

⁴⁹ Lady Tremaine, Queen of Hearts, Cruella De Vil, Medusa, and Elsa are unable to change their form; the Evil Queen and Mother Gothel have the ability to change their physical appearance; and Maleficent, Madam Mim, Ursula, and Yzma can change their appearance to a predatory creature (such as a dragon).

relinquishing her voice in order to be transformed into a human. In contrast, Gothel's "Mother Knows Best" does not contain this overt encouragement of deviant sexuality. Instead, it is Rapunzel's decision to challenge the gender expectations set forth by Gothel that causes her to deviate from gender norms.

In order to understand how this difference works, it is first necessary to examine the history of the musical tradition, specifically how musicals have historically contained deviant sexualities. Within the Disney universe the films collectively contain and/or eliminate deviant sexualities in the wider narratives (as I argued throughout Chapter One). Quillain musical solos, however, allow the quillains a space in which to momentarily deviate from norms of gender and sexuality, norms which are upheld throughout the remainder of the films. Patricia Mellencamp, in "Spectacle and Spectator," explains "Musicals virtually re-enact the ritual of re-creation/pro-creation of the privileged heterosexual couple, the nucleus of patriarchal society. As in classical narrative, the work of musicals is the containment of potentially disruptive sexuality, *a threat to the sanctity of marriage and the family*" (5, italics mine). This ritual of pro/re-creation forms the very basis of the Disney narrative, and the Disney musical film is predicated on re-enacting this ritual. When examining Mellencamp's understanding of the function of containment in the musical tradition and applying this idea to the Disney musical, an apparent contradiction appears. This contradiction exists in the way Disney musicals as a whole do *contain* the disruptive sexuality, but individual musical numbers *celebrate* and *encourage* disruptive sexualities. An examination of the ways the quillains' musical solos celebrate and encourage disruptive sexualities reveals how one function of these songs is the disruption to the overall heterosexual trajectory of the films.

In *Spectacular Passions*, as mentioned above, Brett Farmer discusses the way queer audiences, specifically the gay male spectator, decode and interpret musical texts. The musical, as understood through Farmer, contains two forces: "disruptive, centrifugal dimensions of spectacle and excess" and "homogenizing, centripetal forces of narrative [which are] ordinarily prioritized in and by convention, straight (in both senses of the word) reading practices" (96). While Farmer's discussion is oriented around two main factors, the text and the (queer) audience's reception, my analysis is primarily concerned with the former—what the text itself is doing. In *The Little Mermaid* and *Tangled* there are both a) "disruptive, centrifugal dimensions of spectacle and excess" and b) "homogenising, centripetal forces of narrative" which at times compete with one another for dominance. The centripetal forces are those that drive the plot towards closure, while the centrifugal forces work to interrupt a linear flow in the films.

Each of the forces Farmer discusses can be aligned with the types of songs I analyse in this chapter: the centripetal force is aligned with the narrative (specifically bringing about narrative closure), which is in turn aligned with heterosexuality and songs of desire. The centrifugal force is aligned with spectacle, queerness, and songs of disruption. Farmer provides a further way of reading *how* and *why* the Disney musical solos narratively align the hero/ines with heterosexuality and the villains with queerness.

There is something queer about the quillains' solos, because there is something queer about all performances within a musical. Disney uses a binary between heroine/desire and quillain/disruption to amp up the queerness of the quillains' solo, making them *more* spectacular, *more* excessive, and *less* narratively focused as compared to the relatively non-spectacular and narratively integrated heroines' songs. On top of these oppositions, Disney associates the quillains' spectacular/excessive/non-narrative elements with artificial, non-reproductive (old or drag) forms of femininity, adding further traits to the percolating binary which situates the heroine as heteroreproductive/natural/with narrative-closure and the quillain as queer/artificial/excess/responsible for narrative disruption.

As I will show in the next section, it is precisely through the way the films emphasise excess and spectacle in the songs of disruption that disruptive sexualities can be read as being celebrated. It is only during these songs that the artifice and deviance of Ursula and Gothel becomes the centre of attention in a relatively positive manner. When analysing how the quillains' solos celebrate disruptive sexualities, the musical numbers need to be understood as queer performances that are part of, but also independent from, the queerness of the villains' character.

The Performance and Artifice of Femininity – Ursula

During Ursula and Gothel's solos, the women perform femininity throughout their theatrical performances, encouraging the audience to embrace disruptive sexualities primarily through the way these women teach Ariel and Rapunzel "bad" sexuality. By this I mean that throughout their songs Ursula and Gothel attempt to teach the princesses, both of whom were raised without biological mothers, what it means to be a "real" woman. Ursula does this teaching through her musical monologue on the importance of body language, while Gothel relies on stereotypical representations of femininity to subdue Rapunzel.

In addition to this technique, both Ursula and Gothel use the young princesses to make themselves more beautiful. Ursula in particular appears to help Ariel achieve her ultimate goal of heteroreproductive bliss with Prince Eric by encouraging Ariel's use of her body as a means to entice Eric. This act is a paradoxical moment in the film because Ursula does not really want Ariel to fall in love with Eric and live happily ever, but rather wants Ariel's voice and has little concern about Ariel's future. Ursula is appropriating Ariel's femininity, through the coerced acquisition of Ariel's voice, in order to ensure her own desires are met.

The imitation and appropriation of femininity by these quillains can be read through a camp framework. In "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag explains how "Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's . . . not a woman, but a 'woman.' To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand being as playing a role" (n.p.). Ursula plays the role of "female," "advisor," and "saint." All three of these roles are best understood describing Ursula when they are presented in quotation marks. This idea about camp has been further explored by Jack Babuscio in "Camp and the Gay Sensibility" who explains how "Camp, by focusing on the outward appearances of role, implies that roles, and, in particular, sex roles, are superficial—a matter of style" (24). Ursula imitates femininity, provides bad advice on femininity, and calls herself a saint and a witch. Similarly, Gothel plays the role of the caring maternal figure, all while using magic to retain her youth and beauty.

The model of heterosexuality Ursula teaches Ariel is explored by Sells, who explains how in "Ursula's drag scene, Ariel learns that gender is a performance; Ursula doesn't simply symbolize woman, she *performs* woman . . . Ariel learns gender, not as a natural category, but as a performed construct" (182, italics original). Ursula queers the constructs of gender and sexuality by *performing* rather than *symbolising* what it means to be a woman. It is these lessons which she passes along to Ariel, concealing them as an attempt to help Ariel win Prince Eric, when in reality Ursula attempts to teach Ariel an imitation of femininity in order to ensure a union does not eventuate.

Ursula's body language monologue is one of the most significant parts of her solo and exemplifies how she perceives gender and gender performativity. Throughout this part of the song, Ursula attempts to justify the desire to remove Ariel's voice:

The men up there don't like a lot of blather,
They think a girl who gossips is a bore!
Yet on land it's much preferred for ladies not to say a word,
And after all dear, what is idle prattle for?
Come on, they're not all that impressed with conversation,

True gentlemen avoid it when they can.
But they dote and swoon and fawn,
On a lady who's withdrawn.
It's she who holds her tongue who gets a man.

This portion of the song is focused on female subservience and the silencing of female speech. Not only does Ursula perpetuate and manipulate expectations of women (“a girl who gossips is a bore”), but she also does so for men: “true gentleman avoid [conversation] when they can.” This particular line stands out because the audience has been previously alerted to the fact that Ariel’s human love, Prince Eric, has fallen in love with Ariel’s voice. Throughout this song broadly, and monologue specifically, Ursula justifies taking Ariel’s voice while also establishing, teaching, and encouraging a bad model of heterosexuality for Ariel to follow.

The model Ursula teaches is bad because she is setting up Ariel for failure; Ursula is skewing the odds towards herself by ensuring Ariel does not hold up her end of the contract. Examining the process and performance of femininity, Butler notes, “Heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmic idealization of itself—and *failing*” (21, italics original). Because of the way Ursula relies on a model of heterosexuality different from what Disney has spent decades establishing, Ursula is, in essence, revealing to Ariel that heterosexuality, through its own self-imitation and fantasy, never really succeeds. This act is Ursula’s first attempt at ensuring Ariel is not able to achieve her dream of marrying Eric; Ursula knows the form of femininity Ariel will be performing will fail.

Ursula begins her performance during the prologue of the song when she welcomes Ariel into her lair. In this scene Ursula is introduced as she applies make up and prepares herself for the musical number about to begin. This initial preparation is reminiscent of a drag queen preparing for a show, and has both inter- and extra-textual indicators of this connection. Another way to examine these queer factors is through Gérard Genette’s idea of the paratext. As he explains in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, the “text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions . . . [productions which] surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it” (1, italics original). An informed audience is able to use paratextual information to read further layers of queerness to the character of Ursula.

Sells explores some of these paratextual connections explaining how “according to the directing animator, Ruben Acquine, Ursula was modelled on the drag queen Divine, while

the voice and ethos behind Ursula belong to Pat Carroll. Both of these character actors are known for their cross-dressing” (182). The inspiration of a drag queen for Ursula plays an important role in the aforementioned scene as Ursula prepares her makeup (Fig. 26). In this image, Ursula’s body language mirrors codes of campness that are seen in later Disney villains.⁵⁰



Figure 26: Ursula’s preparation for “Poor Unfortunate Souls” (left) and Divine, the drag queen on whom Ursula is modelled (right).

Sells also discusses this scene and its relation to both campness and Ursula’s “advice” to Ariel about what it means to be a woman, explaining:

The lessons that Ursula gives Ariel about womanhood offer an important position from which to resist narrowly drawn patriarchal images of women, a position absent in Disney’s previous fairy tales. During her song about body language, Ursula stages a camp drag show about being a woman in the white male system, beginning ‘backstage’ with hair mousse and lipstick. She shimmies and wiggles in an exaggerated style while her eels swirl around her, forming a feather boa. This performance is a masquerade, a drag show starring Ursula as an iconic figure. (182)

Sells situates Ursula’s camp performance and teaching of femininity in terms of being a woman in the “white male system,” and while this is important to recognise, my analysis of this scene will focus more on what it means to be queer in a heterosexual system. This teaching of resistance is paradoxical because these lessons do not come from a place of care, but rather from a place of malice. She is *hoping* that Ariel’s resistance will see her *fail* to win the prince, because failure means the acquisition of Ariel’s soul.

Ursula’s entire song can be read as a queering of sexuality itself—it is a masquerade of femininity and heterosexuality. Ursula performs “feminine” acts, such as using a feather boa while shimmying, and stresses the importance of using the female body to garner male attention. Ursula’s use of the line “I’m a very busy woman” is also important because it is

⁵⁰ For instance, the raising of her little finger is performed by *The Lion King*’s Scar.

one of the few instances in the song (and film) where she insists on her gender identity, on her “femaleness.” Ursula’s actions and gender performance throughout the song work to block heterosexuality *by* camping it.

Ursula gains the ultimate symbol of femininity when she acquires Ariel’s voice at the song’s conclusion. This symbol of the voice becomes important towards the conclusion of the film when Ursula realises that Ariel is going to kiss Eric and fulfil the terms of their agreement. Ursula becomes exasperated, saying “the little tramp. She’s better than I thought.” The normative Disney storyline—the union of the heterosexual couple—is about to come to fruition without further obstacle and needs to be disrupted, so Ursula transforms herself into a human and uses Ariel’s voice, which she wears in a shell around her neck, to win Eric’s love for herself (Fig. 27). Do Rozario explores Ursula’s transformation from witch to human and explains how

[t]he significance of Ursula’s larger-than-life shape . . . and heavy make-up is that she has it within her power to be a lithe, brunette princess. She assumes this form in order to foil Ariel’s courtship of Eric by bewitching herself. That Ursula has the power to be a stereotypical vixen and yet remains gloriously rapt in her larger-than-life guise is part of the particular parody [of grotesqueness]: the *femme fatale* turned camp diva. (44-45)

Ursula’s juxtaposition as sea witch and soon-to-be princess Vanessa reveals both the grotesqueness and the *femme fatale* qualities to which Do Rozario refers (Fig. 27). This image is a high angle shot of Vanessa overlooking Ursula in her mirrored reflection. While they are one and the same person, this image reveals the way that the film values traditional beauty because of the elevation of Vanessa over Ursula.



Figure 27: Ursula’s transformation as Vanessa

This image, however, also illustrates another moment of the film providing a resistant or alternative point of view; on the one hand the image (representative of the narrative) suggests that traditional (Western) ideals of beauty are paramount, but on the other, Ursula,

as a character, refutes these ideals or values. Ursula has the ability to alter her form in any way she wants, but she chooses to spend her life in the form of the “sea witch,” performing femininity and beauty in a way not conforming to ideals of normative beauty or gender presentation. Ursula’s choice to spend her time in her “larger-than-life shape” is also interesting when contrasting her personal choices and the way she attempts to teach Ariel to “resist narrowly drawn patriarchal images of women” (Sells 182). This alternative point of view/resistant reading, albeit risky, is necessary in a film when a quillain is incorporated because there needs to exist a character who *can* conform to, or exhibit, traditional femininity (or masculinity for male villains), but who *consciously* chooses to disregard these notions.⁵¹ As Do Rozario notes, Ursula has it within her capacity to assume the form of a “stereotypical vixen” who truly embodies femininity. Instead, she spends her time in a body that works to parody femininity through the grotesque.

The Performance and Artifice of Femininity – Gothel Reprise

The other *femme fatale* turned camp diva quillain is Mother Gothel. As with Ursula, Gothel’s “natural” appearance, one that exists without magical aid, is grotesque by Disney’s standards. Unlike Ursula, however, Gothel’s grotesqueness is due to age, much like the Evil Queen (*Snow White*), Lady Tremaine (*Cinderella*), Cruella de Vil (*101 Dalmatians*), and Medusa (*The Rescuers*). Gothel is several hundred years old and relies on the power of a magic flower (and later Rapunzel’s hair) to remain young. Also unlike Ursula, Gothel actively chooses to maintain the image of a “stereotypical vixen,” an image of a classic *femme fatale*—sexy, seductive, and deadly—and avoids her grotesque appearance whenever possible. The avoidance of this appearance is in fact the motivating factor and catalyst for *Tangled*’s separation of the heterosexual couple.

While “Mother Knows Best” appears, at least superficially, to be about protecting Rapunzel, the audience is aware from information provided during the prologue that Gothel is really using Rapunzel’s hair to extend her own life and retain her youth and femininity. Figure 28 depicts the contrast between the old and the young Gothel as she uses the power of the magic flower to rewind time. These images exemplify the grotesque and the standards for

⁵¹ This deliberate and conscious resistance is also seen with *The Sword in the Stone*’s Madam Mim. During her song, “Mad Madam Mim,” Mim transforms from a haggard old witch to a young, beautiful woman, while singing “I can be beautiful, lovely, and fair/ Silvery voice, long purple hair / . . . / But it’s only skin deep / . . . / I’m an ugly old creep / The magnificent, marvellous, mad, mad, mad, mad, Madam Mim.”

feminine appearance that *should* be upheld. To Gothel (and Disney), youth and beauty appear to be two of the most important factors. Gothel's grotesque appearance, old and withered, is clearly something she detests. Her eyes are sunken and the positioning of her mouth reveals a level of disdain at being in her aged body. This image contrasts the happiness and look of relief on her face when her youth and beauty have been restored.



Figure 28: Aged Gothel before the flower's magic (left) and Young Gothel after the using the flower's magic (right)

Unlike Ursula who overtly teaches Ariel a bad model of sexuality through the reliance on body language, Gothel achieves this teaching by relying on stereotypes of women as helpless, and more prominently, by attempting to remove sexuality and autonomy from Rapunzel through infantilisation. Throughout the song, Gothel's tone is not only patronising and condescending, but also infantilises Rapunzel. Gothel first insults Rapunzel's appearance then follows it up with what can be read as a mocking confession of her love: "Plus, I believe / [you're] getting kinda chubby / I'm just saying / 'cause I wuv you" (Fig. 29). The use of the word "wuv" in place of "love" is the term within this song, that when coupled with Gothel's tone and physical actions of pulling Rapunzel in, acts to further infantilise Rapunzel to the point where she becomes submissive. By speaking to Rapunzel as if she were a baby, Gothel is able to suppress Rapunzel's own desires to leave the tower.



Figure 29: Gothel's infantilisation of Rapunzel

As Gothel sings the word “wuv” she squeezes Rapunzel’s cheeks together—just as one would do to a child as one plays with them. This act is the key moment in the song illustrating Gothel’s infantilisation of Rapunzel. Gothel’s lowered head and hunched shoulders, coupled with the angle of her arms reaching to Rapunzel’s head and the way she looks at Rapunzel also produce an image of an adult playing with an infant. While it may be a non-threatening pose for a child, when used to interact with an adolescent on the verge of adulthood, it becomes patronising. The negative impact of Gothel’s infantilisation of Rapunzel is further seen through Rapunzel’s closed body language, specifically the way her elbows are tucked closely by her side and look of discomfort on her face illustrated through her wide eyes and closed mouth.

In conjunction with her use of language often associated with young children, throughout this song Gothel tells Rapunzel that if she were to leave the tower and “safety” of Gothel’s protection, she “won’t survive,” because the ruffians and thugs will “eat [her] up alive” and “something will go wrong, [Gothel] swear[s].” By referencing an inability of Rapunzel to protect herself, Gothel minimises (while trying to eliminate) Rapunzel’s autonomy and capability of surviving alone. In essence, Gothel is attempting to stop Rapunzel growing up into adult heterosexuality in order to ensure her own youth and femininity.

Gothel’s tactics and attempts to contain Rapunzel also include emotional subordination. After interrupting and silencing Rapunzel’s attempts to speak on four occasions, Gothel continues with her verbal assault about things in the outside world that will allegedly harm Rapunzel: “poison ivy / quicksand . . . also large bugs / men with pointy teeth.” Gothel then dramatically collapses on the ground (Fig. 30), raises her hand to her forehead, distorts her voice to a faux sadness, and says, “Stop, no more, you’ll just upset me.” Gothel’s use of the word “stop” in this instance casts Rapunzel as the active cause of distress; Gothel implicates Rapunzel as the conscious cause of drama, but this implication contradicts the ways in which Gothel actively silences Rapunzel moments earlier. Here Gothel inverts the actual positions of Rapunzel and herself; Gothel is upsetting Rapunzel and there is nothing for Rapunzel to “stop.” By casting Rapunzel as the cause of distress, Gothel is protecting *her own* youth and beauty while keeping *herself* “safe and sound,” masquerading under the implication it is Rapunzel being kept safe.



Figure 30: Gothel's dramatisation of her emotions

Gothel's frequent interruption and silencing of Rapunzel is reminiscent of Ursula's monologue about body language. One major difference exists, however, in the way in which Ursula and Gothel silence the heroines. Ursula suggests that a woman's voice is an inhibiting factor to finding a man—she explicitly tells Ariel “it's she who holds her tongue that gets the man,” before eventually removing Ariel's voice completely. Gothel, however, does not explicitly tell Rapunzel *why* she should refrain from talking; rather her verbal silencing of Rapunzel throughout the song, mostly by cutting off Rapunzel before she can say more than a monosyllabic word, is a means of teaching Rapunzel not to talk unless asked.

This lesson to remain silent until told to do otherwise also occurs towards the conclusion of the song when Gothel asks, “All I have is one request?” At this time Rapunzel is provided the opportunity to speak freely, only to reply “yes.” Satisfied that Rapunzel's spirit is broken, Gothel places her hands on Rapunzel's shoulders and says: “don't ever ask to leave this tower again” (Fig. 31). As Gothel “requests” that Rapunzel stay in the tower forever, the music shifts from a melodious to ominous tone and Gothel closes her fingers on Rapunzel's shoulder, narrows her eyes, and grits her teeth. These three movements in Gothel's body language work to control and subdue Rapunzel, starkly contrasting the previous “All I have is one *request*,” illustrating that it is a demand, not a request.



Figure 31: Gothel requesting that Rapunzel not leave the tower

Appropriating Femininity

Both quillains I discuss in this chapter attempt to control the femininity of the heroines by suggesting their physical appearance is not sufficient in its current state to gain the love of a man. Ursula makes explicit references about using body language over verbal language to win the man, and encourages Ariel to use her physical assets. However, Ariel's use of body language to win Eric can only be achieved when she trades one symbol of femininity for another—when she willingly gives up her voice to gain legs. Gothel on the other hand insults Rapunzel's physical appearance as a means to dissuade her from leaving the tower. Rapunzel is referred to as “sloppy,” “underdressed,” “positively grubby,” and “kinda chubby,” all words implying she is already failing at performing “true” femininity. After all, the Disney princess as a symbol of natural femininity is well kept, slender, and beautiful. Gothel may differ from Ursula in the method used to contain the heroine—she blatantly insults Rapunzel as a means to oppress her—but both quillains inevitably rely on focusing on the female body as a means of performing “correct” femininity.

To elaborate on this idea in relation to *Tangled*, Gothel's insults towards Rapunzel suggest that a “successful” performance of femininity will protect her. The line “they'll eat you up” used with Gothel's tonal inflection suggests that Rapunzel's life is in danger because of her “sloppy, underdressed” appearance. Men will resort to harm to get what they want from her. This line can also be read in terms of her *actual* physical attraction—men will metaphorically “eat her up” and provide her with positive attention. Gothel's tactical verbal assault of Rapunzel can further be read as a camp moment; Gothel suggests that any harm that comes to Rapunzel will be as a result of her sloppy appearance. The converse is the suggestion that dressing well and looking “beautiful” will keep her safe; after all, Gothel is able to leave the tower freely when she embodies stereotypical femininity and remains safe herself. These ideas can be explicated through Butler, who notes:

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group . . . Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*. (“Imitation” 127, italics original)

Gothel and Ursula teach the heroines that there is a “proper” way by which to perform femininity as well as “femaleness” which is ironic, not only because these witches themselves fail to perform it “properly,” but because *all* gendered performance is an imitation; all

gendered performance is drag. While the witches imitate and appropriate one form of femininity, they are in fact teaching the heroines that there is an essential notion of “femaleness.” Viewers are encouraged to see Gothel and Ursula as failing to appropriately perform femaleness, because of the way the songs show hair and voice as being essential to a successful performance of femininity.

Ursula’s use of drag in the song can be understood through Butler’s work, and while Ursula uses “Poor Unfortunate Souls” as a necessary means to contain Ariel, and as a means to continue an imitation of femininity, the song also works to reveal how Ursula disrupts the gender binary. As I discussed earlier Sells explains how Ursula “represents that which is outside even the patriarchally domesticated outside, and hence, outside patriarchal language” (184). In “Poor Unfortunate Souls” Ursula uses gender neutral language while singing to Ariel, and apart from her monologue on body language in which she relies on the terms “men” and “girl,” Ursula uses gender neutral terms when speaking about those who have sought her help previously. The entire song almost completely lacks the words “he” and “she,”⁵² with Ursula instead relying on “merfolk,” “they,” “those,” “this one,” and “someone” when making reference to others. Ursula’s use of gender neutral language during her musical solo she spends time preparing for places the “poor unfortunate souls” about whom she sings outside of heteronormativity by not positioning them as male or female.⁵³ Paradoxically, during this time she simultaneously insists on a highly normative form of heterosexuality for Ariel.

Ursula relies on a feminine symbol—voice—to imitate femininity; similarly, Gothel herself relies on a feminine symbol—hair—to imitate an idealised femininity. In *Tangled* hair is the most significant motif, driving the plot from beginning to end. The symbol of hair is intertwined with femininity from the film’s outset, where hair represents containment, to its end where hair represents freedom, albeit at a cost. Hair in this film also connects the heroine to the quillain, just as voice does in *The Little Mermaid*. As explored above, Rapunzel’s “When Will My Life Begin?” represents her internal struggle to break free of her captivity (as a result) of her hair, and Gothel’s “Mother Knows Best” represents Rapunzel’s external and symbolic captivity. Rapunzel’s “wonderin’ and wonderin’” while being surrounded by her hair is important in revealing how hair as a symbol of femininity acts to inhibit Rapunzel. More important, however, is the way Gothel attempts to contain Rapunzel and control her

⁵² “She” is used once in the song during Ursula’s monologue: “It’s she who holds her tongue who gets a man.”

⁵³ There is one instance of Ursula visually conjuring up an image of both a male and female during this scene, but apart from this moment all of the trapped souls Ursula has taken over time are agender polyps in her cave.

hair, and by extension, femininity, in “Mother Knows Best.”

In “Mother Knows Best,” Rapunzel’s hair works as an object that both protects and contains her. Shortly after being warned by Gothel of some of the “dangers” existing in the outside world, “cannibals and snakes / the plague,” Rapunzel uses her hair as a fortress to protect herself (Fig. 32). This image illustrates Rapunzel’s fear she has about the horrors of the outside world. Her eyes are wide open, her eyebrows angled outwards, and her hands are grasping firmly onto her hair for protection. To the left of Rapunzel, in the shadows, the silhouette of Mother Gothel can be seen as she sneaks up on Rapunzel to remove her from her hair. This image, and the moments of the film that follow as Gothel brings Rapunzel to her feet, show how Gothel does not want Rapunzel to feel safe or secure. By forcibly removing her from her safety, Gothel ensures she is successful in containing Rapunzel through her manipulation and control of Rapunzel’s hair and femininity.



Figure 32: (top left): Rapunzel using her hair as shelter

Figure 33: (top right): Gothel removing Rapunzel from her shelter

Figure 34: (bottom): Gothel attempting to intimidate Rapunzel

Thirty seconds after removing Rapunzel from her shelter, Gothel sings how Rapunzel is “Sloppy, underdressed / Immature, clumsy.” On the word “clumsy,” Gothel pulls the rug Rapunzel is standing on out from underneath her, causing her to fall onto her back. Gothel then continues with “Please, they’ll eat you up alive” as she rolls Rapunzel up in her hair (Fig. 33). After rolling Rapunzel up in a cocoon/burrito of her own hair, Gothel tells her how she is “Gullible [and] naïve.” The expressions of both characters in Figures 33 and 34 reveal

the pleasure/fear dichotomy present throughout the song. Gothel is happily singing and smiling, almost ecstatic as she begins to physically contain Rapunzel within her own hair. Moments later, Gothel's look becomes more dark and angry as she demeans her "daughter," while Rapunzel looks both scared and confused (Fig. 34).

The way Gothel controls when and how Rapunzel will be contained by her hair, and for what reason this entrapment will occur (as a source of protection versus a source of imprisonment), is emphasised throughout this song, in particular the instances that form Figures 32-34. When examined in relation to hair as symbolic of femininity, these images show how Gothel is distorting Rapunzel's inclinations about how to perform "natural" femininity, as opposed to Gothel's "artificial" femininity, as well as how to use her hair. Gothel is teaching Rapunzel that her hair is not something she has control over; rather it is something there to control her. Just as Ursula teaches Ariel bad femininity by distorting her view on the importance of voice, so too does Gothel teach this bad model of femininity by distorting Rapunzel's view on the importance of hair.

"Mother Knows Best" is about ensuring Gothel remains in a state of happiness and beauty, seen by her emotional manipulation of Rapunzel: not only the way Gothel degrades Rapunzel's appearance and competence, but also through the anger in her voice when she forbids Rapunzel from ever leaving the tower. Rapunzel is told she will not survive in the outside world, so when Gothel leaves and Rapunzel is provided with an opportunity to leave the tower and see the floating lights, albeit with the help of the film's hero Flynn Rider, Rapunzel faces situations which allow her to prove Gothel wrong about "being eaten up alive" by relying on characteristics and actions associated with femininity. Most notably, although Rapunzel engages in physical fights, she does with the aid of a frying pan as a weapon—a stereotypically female weapon⁵⁴—and does not allow herself to be captured before she achieves her dream of seeing the floating lanterns.

⁵⁴ The female badass using stereotypically feminine weapons is also seen in *The Emperor's New Groove* by Chicha who knocks out Kuzco with a frying pan, and more notably *Mulan* (*Mulan*) who uses a fan in her fight against Shan Yu. Gwendolyn Limbach explores the latter explaining, "Mulan's only weapon is her fan, the oft-used symbol of femininity . . . the winning strategy here, in Disney's approximation, is to rely on feminine accoutrements rather than masculine war munitions" (124). Disney revived this reliance on feminine accoutrements with Rapunzel.

Curtain Call

Ursula uses her musical solo as a means of teaching Ariel what it means to be a woman, while also taking from her one of the main signifiers of femininity. Likewise, Gothel reinforces gender stereotypes in “Mother Knows Best” in order to subdue Rapunzel and remain able to exploit her for the magical properties of her hair. Throughout their musical solos, both women use similar tactics to contain the princesses so they can continue their own imitation of femininity. Gothel and Ursula use their musical solos to contain the princesses and disrupt their trajectories towards heterosexual coupledness. The performances of Gothel and Ursula work with their power as maternal figures, at least in the case of Gothel, to act as a voice of authority.

By framing the demand that Rapunzel never leave the tower as a request, Gothel is able to manipulate Rapunzel emotionally while exercising a binding power, an utterance ensuring she will be able to continue appropriating the qualities of Rapunzel’s hair for her own use. The binding power represents one the princesses cannot fight: it is both authoritative and constricting. Both Ariel and Rapunzel are encouraged by Ursula and Gothel to deviate from gendered expectations while simultaneously being pulled towards them by the narrative itself—if the princesses deviate too far then they risk becoming social outcasts and will fail to win their princes, because of the way Disney heteronormativity is heavily predicated on stereotypes and expectations of femininity.

Both Gothel and Ursula rely on a symbol of femininity from their heroine counterparts in order to replicate a form of femininity for themselves. This imitation of femininity itself is a queering of gender, and ultimately both women are punished for appropriating and teaching a bad model of femininity in order to disrupt the heterosexual union of the heroines. For Ursula, the punishment is death, also a symbolic punishment for her attempt to imitate reproductive femininity, while for Gothel the time she stole as a result of the magical flower, and later Rapunzel’s hair, returns suddenly to her body and she ages hundreds of years in a matter of seconds as she falls from a window, leaving behind nothing but the dust of her former self as her cloak reaches the base of the tower.

The songs of disruption allow the quillains an opportunity and space to deviate from gender norms momentarily without facing repercussions. As a result, Ursula gains Ariel’s voice which she herself uses later in the film to almost marry Prince Eric, and Gothel manipulates Rapunzel into believing the outside world is a dangerous place, thereby allowing herself more time to exploit the power of Rapunzel’s hair. It is because of their musical solos

that these quillains are provided a space in which to contain the princesses and gain the qualities of “true” femininity needed for their own imitation of femininity.

Music in Disney is an aural representation used to distinguish the heterosexual hero/ines from the queer villains. Songs of desire establish the heterosexual trajectory forming the basis of most Disney films. These melodic songs encourage the audience to identify with the princesses, cheering them on while their story unfolds. Songs of disruption portray the queer threat to the heterosexual narrative. During these songs the quillains do whatever they can to ensure that a straight ending will not come to fruition. Ultimately, while the songs of disruption do disrupt the desires of the hero/ines, the prevailing power of heterosexuality ensures the quillains’ disruptions are nothing more than a fleeting moment of excess.

Section Two

Spatiotemporality

This dissertation has already examined the structural elements of narrative and music, and this section explores the third and final embedded queer element contributing to the construction of the Disney quillains: spatiotemporality. In *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature*, Elena Gomel discusses the literary study of spatiality. She explains, “Most studies of space concentrate on what [Henri] Lefebvre called ‘spatial practice’: that is the way in which physical space is parceled into cultural and social sites . . . *Space is reduced to place*” (2, italics in original). In my dissertation I attempt to move beyond the reduction of space to place, and I do so by looking at the way space intersects with time. In my analysis of the spaces examined in this section, it is impossible to untangle the individual roles of spatiality and temporality, so to counter this complexity I examine spatiotemporality, the intersection of these narrative aspects.

In this section I analyse *Peter Pan* and *Beauty and the Beast* and the two parallel yet distinct worlds in each film: Neverland and London in the former, and the Beast’s Castle and the village in the latter. I examine spatiotemporality by drawing upon the spatial framework of the Hero’s Journey (the “special” and “ordinary” worlds) and the temporal framework of queerness as a “phase.” Spatiotemporality functions in these films to create a world existing as a spatiotemporal abnormality, as a site where queerness exists separately from heterosexuality. By spatiotemporal abnormality, I mean a “special” world existing on the margins of (the Beast’s castle) or outside of (Neverland) the “ordinary” worlds in each film; contrasting these special (queer) spaces are the ordinary (straight) spaces where the heterosexual romantic trajectory is most apparent (Belle’s village and London respectively). For instance, in *Peter Pan*, Neverland is not simply a place that remains available to be visited, but rather is an embodiment of queerness—that is, Neverland is a space and time through which a child moves on the way to adult heterosexuality.

Christopher Vogler’s “A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*” is perhaps one of the most practical texts in understanding how space works in films. Vogler, who worked as a story consultant for Walt Disney Pictures in the

mid-1980s (right before the “Disney Renaissance”),⁵⁵ produced a seven-page memo summarising the pattern of narrative identified by Campbell. This memo, which Vogler explains “became the ‘I have to have it’ document of the season at talent agencies and in studio executive suites” (n.p.), details the very foundation of many of the later Disney films, especially in the “Renaissance.” The feature most significant to my research is the distinction between two worlds. Vogler’s diagram of the twelve narrative points illustrates the separation between the ordinary and special worlds (Fig. 35).

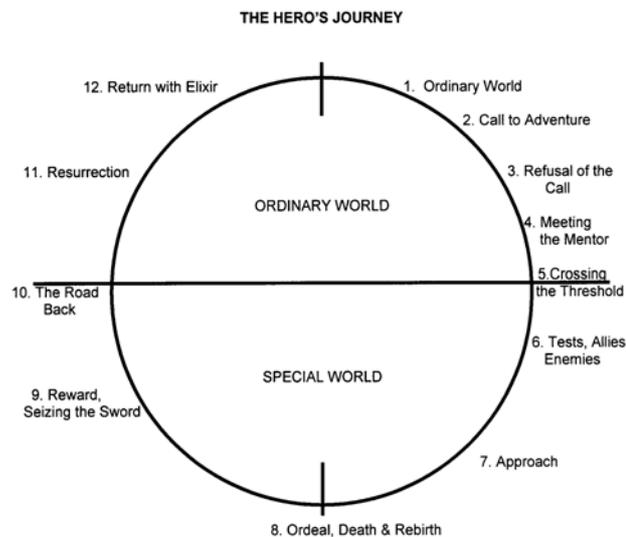


Figure 35: “The Hero's Journey” illustration

Disney movies distinguish between the ordinary and the special world and, I argue, align the ordinary with the heterosexual and the special with the queer. As can be seen in the image, approximately half of the story is set in the ordinary (heterosexual) world, while the other half is set in the special (queer) world. Vogler states, “The hero is introduced in his/her ordinary world,” (narrative point one). Each of the heroes in Disney films is heterosexual, and most end up in a committed, heterosexual, monogamous relationship at the conclusion of the film. This immediate alignment of heterosexuality with “ordinary” aligns the queer with the “special.” Upon entering the special world, “a world that is new and alien to the hero,” the heroes finds themselves “committed to his/her journey and there’s no turning back” (narrative point five). The language used to describe hero/ines’ experiences of entering the special world is ominous; the words “committed” and “no turning back” emphasise the foreboding nature of the special world.

⁵⁵ The period between 1989-1999 that marked the return of Disney’s commercial and popular success after an almost thirty year gap. Chris Pallant notes that this period “reflect[s] a phase of aesthetic and industrial growth at the studio” (90).

The final main characteristic for my interpretation of the special world as the queer world involves narrative points eight and eleven. The special world is one that is not only dark, but involves trials, tribulations, and death. Vogler describes the hero as being “brought to the brink in a fight with a mythical beast” (narrative point eight). The phrasing by Vogler reflects the ideas of both Cynthia Erb and Richard Dyer; the “mythical beast” can be seen to be a combination of the fantasy aspect of the queer described by Erb, and the language of monstrosity which Dyer argues is associated with queerness. For example, towards the conclusion of *Sleeping Beauty*, Prince Phillip participates in the climactic battle scene with the quillain Maleficent who has transformed herself into a dragon. Prince Phillip almost loses this battle, but at the last minute is able to kill Maleficent with an enchanted sword. The heroes confront death, and survive the ordeal, and are rewarded as they “emerge from the special world, transformed by his/her experience” (narrative point eleven). The heroes win the heroines and the two live happily ever after.

Vogler’s version of the Hero’s Journey and Twine’s “percolating binaries” can be brought together and further explicated through Perry Nodelman’s home/away/home structure. This structure is another percolating binary where “home” is straight and “away” is queer. Nodelman breaks down various themes found in children’s texts, some of which I have recreated in Table 5. Nodelman explains how “[a]s well as being connected to either home or away, the ideas on these lists also have other relationships to each other, to be discovered if you read the lists horizontally as well as vertically. Each horizontal line represents values that are usually found in texts together and in opposition to each other” (155-56).

Table 5: Nodelman’s percolating binaries

<i>Home</i>	<i>Away</i>
Adult	Child
Maturity	Childishness
Human	Animal
Safety	Danger
Non-Boredom	Adventure
Citizenship	Exile

The above is a percolating binary, and we could add to Nodelman's table "ordinary" and "heterosexual" for *home*, and "special" and "queer" for *away*, indicating how the home sections of the films are associated not only with the ordinary world, but with the "safety" of heterosexuality, and the away with the special world and the "danger" of queerness.

The danger of the special world is significant because it shows how queerness is spatially aligned with negative connotations. Exploring the way queerness and space intersect in children's literature in "'There lived in the Land of Oz two queerly made men': Queer Utopianism and Antisocial Eroticism in L. Frank Baum's Oz Series," Tison Pugh explains:

Queerness bears a double meaning in studies of children's literature, in that these fictions often depict a world where oddness—which can be understood as asexual queerness—is embraced as a chief narrative value. In other usages queerness carries a sexual denotation referring to sexual identities resistant to ideological normativity. (218)

Certain realms within the Disney universe make an association between asexual oddness and sexual deviancy. *Peter Pan's* Neverland and *Alice in Wonderland's* Wonderland are both spaces in which the odd and the marvellous are embraced as narratologically vital. These worlds, while carrying a level of asexual queerness, also contain gender deviant villains who resist heteronormative ideologies. As I explore in Chapters Three and Four, these two worlds are significant within the wider Disney universe because they are the only two worlds whose level of fantasy draws into question the reality of their very existence.

This section draws on theories present in previous chapters to examine not only how spatiotemporal aspects map onto the Hero's Journey,⁵⁶ but also how Roof's notion of the queer middle, Freud's notion of unconscious desires, and Freudian/psychological developmental narratives combine to create two spaces (Neverland and the Beast's Castle) existing simultaneously with/parallel to the linear heterosexual worlds that develop the heterosexual trajectory of the films overall narrative. Through an examination of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Peter Pan*, I argue that the queer worlds exist only as sites of passage for the heterosexual hero/ines on their way to adult heterosexuality.

The fantasy genre can be separated into various sub-genres, each of which presents a different portrayal of spatiality. Farah Mendlesohn, in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, separates the

⁵⁶ The first chapter in this section analyses *Peter Pan*, a film released a few decades before the Hero's Journey became a conscious template for Disney films. The fact that *Peter Pan* was released before the Hero's Journey narrative template was used consciously by Disney does not negate the significance of the Hero's Journey in the role of space and time in *Peter Pan*. Rather it suggests that when Vogler joined the Disney animation team, he used Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to legitimate and make more formulaic a narrative structure Disney was already using.

fantasy genre into four sub-genres and provides a way to analyse these texts. These sub-genres include the liminal, the immersive, the intrusive, and the portal-quest, and it is the final sub-genre under which *Peter Pan* falls. Mendlesohn explains how “the portal-quest fantasies are structured around reward and the straight and narrow path” (5). In Disney films, the reward for those who follow the straight and narrow path, despite efforts by external forces to make them stray or leave by force, is a straight, and often heterosexual, (re)union.

The “straight and narrow” path Mendelsohn describes can also be read through the Hero’s Journey. The path begins in the ordinary, heterosexual world and passes through the queer world on the way to adult heterosexual domesticity. Mendelsohn explains how the portal quest generally comprises three phases: entry, transition, and exploration. She explains, “[c]haracteristically the quest fantasy protagonist goes from a mundane life, in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown . . . to direct contact with the fantastic through which she transitions, exploring the world until she or those around her are knowledgeable enough to negotiate with the world” (2). For Wendy (*Peter Pan*), the fantastic initially exists only in stories told to her younger brothers. To her, the existence of Neverland is simply a fable. However, after her entry to, and exploration of, Neverland, with the help of Peter Pan, Tinker Bell, and some fairy dust, the stories she once told come to life. It is during Wendy’s deviation from the straight and narrow path on her journey in and through Neverland that her development is momentarily halted as she experiences the queerness of the fantastic, and it is only upon her exit that she is able to resume her journey towards heterosexual adulthood.

Similarly, when Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*) lives in the provinces she has no interaction with the fantastic. However, once she crosses the threshold of the Beast’s castle, the fantastic begins to come alive as she is greeted by enchanted furniture. Wendy and Belle escape their mundane lives and explore, negotiate, and navigate the new realms as they follow the “straight and narrow path”—their narratives follow a linear (straight) path with a momentary deviation to and through a queer (non-straight, fantastic) world. The stories both begin and conclude in a heterosexual space, and as Cynthia Erb notes of the provinces in *Beauty and the Beast*, but which I extend to London in *Peter Pan*, available to the girls is “no future beyond marriage and children” (62).

Both of the films I examine contain queer spaces, but they also queer time. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, explores the way time functions in both narratives, but also wider society. She notes, “[o]ur civilization tends to think of time as an uni-directional and irreversible flow, a sort of one-way street . . . It can

become measurable only when a repetitive pattern is discerned within it . . . Time 'is', paradoxically, repetition within irreversible change" (44). Neverland (*Peter Pan*) and the Beast's castle (*Beauty and the Beast*) are both queer spaces where time functions queerly. Time in these spaces is not "uni-directional" but rather stagnant. In both of these spaces time is also "repetition," especially in *Peter Pan*, whose narrator notes, "All this has happened before, and it will all happen again."

Spatial theory has previously been applied to Disney films in a few papers, and is best understood in Cynthia Erb's "Another World or the World of an Other: The Space of Romance in Recent Versions of 'Beauty and the Beast.'" Undertaking an examination of spaces that can be read as heterosexual or queer, Erb notes that in contrast to the provinces, which as mentioned above "offers no future beyond marriage and children,"

The world of the Beast is an enchanted one, offering a fantasy of flight into romance that, if not explicitly marked as gay, is certainly envisioned as an alternative to the predictable destiny of heterosexual romance. As was the case with the character Ariel [*The Little Mermaid*], Belle's singing voice is momentarily deployed to express both straight feminine and gay desires of shrugging off social expectations of conventional marriage. (62)

Erb begins to distinguish not only between straight and queer worlds, but also to highlight the heterosexuals' view of queerness in the films. To the queer characters, life contains ostracism and isolation, but to heterosexual characters, it appears to be a fantasy world. The Beast's castle illustrates this romantic fantasy; to the Beast and all of the inhabitants of the castle, daily life is one trapped under a curse, but to the heterosexual outsider, it is magical and unpredictable.

Ultimately, this section explores the third embedded element of queerness by exploring the intersection of space and time. These two elements are used in Disney films to establish a clear divide between heterosexual sites and queer sites in the film. Queerness is something that needs to be separated in Disney films, so the quillains are provided distinct places to occupy, places where time does not progress linearly. *Peter Pan* and *Beauty and the Beast* illustrate the dangers for the hero/ines as they enter these queer spaces and times on their journeys to adult heterosexuality.

Chapter Three

Pan, Pirates, and Perpetual Childhoods

Peter Pan begins in England in the home of the Darlings. The Darling children, Wendy, Michael, and John, recount and play characters from stories about an apparently fictional character, Peter Pan. One night, the night before Wendy will be moved to her own bedroom and made to grow up, Peter enters their room to retrieve his previously lost shadow and takes the trio to Neverland. In this world, where time does not pass, the Darling children and Peter and his gang of Lost Boys battle the evil Captain Hook who is attempting to kill Peter for previously cutting off his hand and feeding it to a crocodile. The film ends as Hook falls off his own ship and is chased across the waters of Neverland by the crocodile that once ate his hand. Pan commandeers Hook's ship and takes the Darlings back to London. The family is reunited, and after experiencing the queerness of Neverland, Wendy tells her father she is ready to grow up.

In this chapter I explore Neverland as a queer world whose existence is both celebrated and questioned. In order to demonstrate how queerness functions in *Peter Pan* and its narratological significance, I examine how spatiality and temporality intersect in this film in a way that differs from other Disney adventure films. I examine spatiotemporality in *Peter Pan*, because unlike other films (including *Beauty and the Beast*), the existence of the queer space (the “special world,” in the terms of the Hero's Journey) is called into question at both the beginning and conclusion of the film; the only other Disney film with this questioning is *Alice in Wonderland*. Because space and time interweave and exist almost outside of the heterosexual trajectory/narrative of the film, queerness is able to be simultaneously real and imaginary, to exist and be non-existent.

Peter Pan is not only the story of Peter Pan or his triumphs and adventures, but rather is also the story of Wendy's development through childhood to adult heterosexuality. The story the narrator describes is one that takes the hero/ines through Neverland (with its non-linear temporality), and eventually back to their ordinary lives so they can complete their appropriate development. The film is thus narratively structured around movement from one space to another and back, and in this chapter I will use the Hero's Journey as a template to analyse how these spaces are characterised as special or ordinary, queer or straight.

Perhaps the most significant part of the Hero's Journey is the crossing from one world to another. Narrative point five of the Hero's Journey is the “crossing [of] the threshold” (n.p.) from the ordinary to the special world, and narrative point ten is “the road back” (n.p.).

In no other film are these crossings more visually apparent than *Peter Pan* (Fig. 36). These two images, the first and last images presented to the viewer, represent the effect and existence of queerness in Neverland. Most significant is the absence of the rainbows in the final image; with the children leaving Neverland to grow up, the world becomes dull. It is as though without the children present, the magic/fantasy once there exists no more.



Figure 36: Neverland at the film's beginning (left) and conclusion (right)

Throughout this chapter as I explore quillain Captain Hook, hero Peter Pan, and heroine Wendy Darling, the implications of this stark visual difference in the two images of Neverland will become more apparent. For the moment, the important aspect to note is how reading *Peter Pan* as a developmental narrative provides the clearest understanding that when one leaves Neverland and the queerness it contains, as Peter says, “[one] can never come back.” In this film, and as Figure 36 suggests, queerness is quite literally a phase through which Wendy, John, and Michael Darling pass through on their way from childhood to adulthood. The queer middle in this film contrasts other films; *Peter Pan* contains an episodic middle, while the middle of other films are comprised of a strong, unidirectional, developmental narrative—the “straight and narrow path” to which Mendlesohn refers (5, cited above)

Peter Pan is an hour and fourteen minutes long; the Darling children cross into the special world (Neverland) twenty minutes into the film, and return to the ordinary world (London) at an hour and eleven minutes. For most of their time in Neverland, Wendy, John, Michael, and Hook are spatially separated, and the narrative progression towards a straight ending becomes episodic: Tiger Lily is kidnapped by Hook, then saved by Peter; the Lost Boys are captured by the Indians, then freed; and the Lost Boys and Wendy are captured by the pirates, then saved by Peter. In this chapter I argue that because these events take place in Neverland, a spatiotemporal abnormality, the narrative path present in many other Disney films—a linear progression of the hero and heroine’s heterosexual romantic trajectory—is

necessarily absent, resulting in a set of disparate episodic happenings.

As this chapter will demonstrate, *Peter Pan*, perhaps more than any other Disney film, is narratively structured around arrested development. This structure connects to the questioning of the existence of (adult) queerness at the film's conclusion. In "The Neverland of Id: Barrie, *Peter Pan*, and Freud," Michael Egan, referring to Barrie's *Peter Pan*, explains how "*Peter Pan* is evidently a childish dream, a psychodrama of the unconscious . . . What transpires on the island is [a] dream, the fulfilment of a range of childish wishes, including Oedipal sex, lust, flight, murder, and the capacity to transcend both Death and Time" (40-41). "Dream" and "wishes" are two terms used by Egan which call into question the existence of Neverland. By connecting the Freudian narrative to the Hero's Journey, I suggest queerness, in this case, is a wish children have that can only be safely fulfilled by/in Neverland.

In *Peter Pan*, the adventure which will unfold is foreshadowed in the opening lines. These lines, which are sung as the opening credits take place, introduce the viewers to the idea of Neverland as a special world: "The second star to the right / Shines in the night for you / To tell you that the dreams you plan / Really can come true." In these lines, not only is the notion of the dream highlighted, but the star, which we soon learn is Neverland, is anthropomorphised. The second star to the right being able to "tell you" that your dreams can come true immediately aligns this world with fantasy, with something truly special.

Following this musical introduction to the film, the camera zooms in on a London house as the narrator describes the story about to take place:

All this has happened before, and it will all happen again. But this time it happened in London. It happened on a quiet street in Bloomsbury. That corner house over there is the home of the Darling family, and Peter Pan chose this particular house because there are people here who believed in him.

Here, the narrator establishes one of the paradoxes working throughout this film to question the existence of Neverland, and with it queerness itself. The first line of the film is spoken with certainty and introduces temporality—the events *have* happened in the past and *will* happen again in the future. This sentence, spoken with the authority of an omniscient narrator, encourages the viewer to believe the story about to unfold is true, and more importantly, *real*. The narrator establishes the timelessness of the story unfolding, by suggesting the story about to be told to the viewer is one which has been told in the past and will extend into the future.

The film's introduction establishes a cyclical temporality whereby the *same* linear

story is repeated in *every* generation. This repetition, in the case of the Darlings, and as I discuss shortly, is made apparent in the film when Mr. Darling, despite his initial staunch belief that Neverland does not exist, has a faint memory of Hook's pirate ship from a long time ago. While the story remains unchanging, the characters within the story are substitutable.

While the narrator provides a certainty this story has occurred before *and* will occur again, there is uncertainty introduced in the final sentence with the phrase "who believed in him." That the events can only take place because of belief in Peter suggests a belief in the fantasy and requires an acceptance of the truth concerning the forthcoming events. The use of the past tense "believed" further implies the belief in the existence of Peter, the existence of Neverland, and the existence of queerness may be different by the end of the story. The narrator repeats this term as the characters are introduced:

There was Mrs. Darling . . . Mrs. Darling believed that Peter Pan was the spirit of youth. But Mr. Darling . . . Well, Mr. Darling was a practical man. The boys, however, John and Michael, believed Peter Pan was a real person and made him the hero of all their nursery games. Wendy, the eldest, not only *believed* . . . she was *the* supreme authority on Peter Pan and all his marvellous adventures. Nana, the nursemaid, being a dog, kept her opinions to herself and viewed the whole affair with a certain tolerance. (Italics mine)

Present in the description of the Darling family are three different viewpoints: Peter as a metaphor (Mrs. Darling), Peter as imaginary (Mr. Darling), and Peter as real (John, Michael, and Wendy). During this scene the film aligns the audience with the children, because authority is given *to* the children; Peter *must* be real because Wendy not only believes in him, but because she is the "supreme authority." This statement by the narrator adds an element of doubt to the existence of Neverland (and Peter himself), and irony exists in the fact Wendy, a child who has never met Peter, could be not only *a*, but *the*, supreme authority on a person/story deeply believed by adults to be fantasy.

The scene following this description of the Darlings' beliefs in Peter works to further question his existence. As Mr. Darling gets dressed to go to a formal affair, his efforts are hampered as a result of John and Michael playing a game as Captain Hook and Peter Pan respectively. In the process of the game, the boys draw a treasure map on Mr. Darling's last clean shirt front (Fig. 37). This act pushes Mr. Darling over the edge into a fit of rage where he exclaims that Peter Pan does not exist:

Mr. Darling: Wendy, haven't I warned you? Stuffing the boys' heads with a lot of silly stories.

Wendy: Oh, but they aren't.

Mr. Darling: I say they are. Captain Crook! Peter Pirate! . . . Absolute poppycock.



Figure 37: Mr. Darling's defaced shirt-front



Figure 38: The Darling's London House

Mr. Darling's choice of words all indicate that Peter Pan, and with him Neverland, does not exist—to him it is all fiction. Darling begins by using the word “stuffing,” with the implication that the “silly stories” are being forced upon John and Michael. Mr. Darling then continues his tirade by asserting the stories are fictional simply because he says so. His certainty of Neverland's fictionality is then amplified by his creation of the nonsensical “Captain Crook” and “Peter Pirate.” By refusing to refer correctly to Hook and Pan by their actual names, Darling moves beyond questioning their existence and identity, and states with certainty that they are “absolute poppycock.” The definitive “absolute” here leaves no doubt, in his mind, that Pan, Hook, and Neverland are fictional.

The introduction of Neverland through both the narrator and the discussion between Mr. Darling and Wendy works to establish the first point in the Hero's Journey schema—the introduction of, and to, the “ordinary world.” London is presented as just that—ordinary, bland, and generic (Fig. 38). The Darling's house is identical to the one next to it, as well as the other half dozen houses present in this image. Whereas Neverland, when it is first shown, is vibrant and full of life, London is lacking this life and vibrancy. The small cluster of trees in front of the Darling's house is the only indication of natural life, and this image juxtaposes the many identical small houses, creating a picture of a generic, nondescript neighbourhood.

In his summary of the Hero's Journey Vogel explains, “[t]he hero is shown against a background of environment, heredity, and personal history. Some kind of polarity in the hero's life is pulling in different directions and causing stress” (n.p.). Darling's statement then becomes pivotal in relation to the Hero's Journey narrative because the polarity of Wendy's belief and her father's denial creates a narrative tension that invites the viewer to become sympathetic with the hero/ine.

Just as the neighbourhood presents an image of normalcy, so too does Mr. Darling's actions. The admonishment of Wendy and her "stories" about Neverland establishes an underlying message in the film about the power of children's beliefs. Neverland, as a spatiotemporal embodiment of queerness, exists for children to pass through, and the Darling children's adventure is set in motion with Mr. Darling's insistence that Neverland does not exist.

As Mr. and Mrs. Darling depart for their party, the conversation about Peter continues between the pair with Mrs. Darling noting Wendy's mention of Peter's shadow. Mr. Darling responds with a raised inflection, emphasising his sarcasm:

Mrs. Darling: But, George, do you think the children will be safe without Nana?

Mr. Darling: Safe? Of course they'll be safe. Why not?

Mrs. Darling: Well, Wendy said something about a shadow, and I . . .

Mr. Darling: Shadow? Whose shadow?

Mrs. Darling: Peter Pan's

Mr. Darling: Peter Pan! You don't say. Goodness gracious, whatever shall we do? . . . Sound the alarm! Call Scotland Yard! . . . Oh Mary, of all the impossible childish fiddle-faddle. Peter Pan indeed. How can we expect the children to *grow up* and be *practical* when you're as bad as they are. No wonder Wendy gets these *idiotic* ideas. (Italics mine)

Mr. Darling asks his wife how they can expect the children to grow up, and the camera pans up to the roof of the Darlings' home and reveals the shadowy⁵⁷ figure of Peter Pan (Fig. 39).

Peter's silhouette first proves Darling is wrong, for if there *is* a shadow then there is something casting the shadow; but the crouching position of Peter's shadow in front of moon—itself a metaphor for illusion—contradicts the visibility of the shadow. Combined with Peter's silhouette is Mr. Darling's choice of words including "practical," "idiotic," and "childish fiddle-faddle," which work together to cast further doubt about the existence of Neverland. This doubt is a reoccurring theme throughout *Peter Pan* (as well as *Alice in Wonderland*) and works narratively to question the existence of the queerness in these worlds.

⁵⁷ The independently functioning shadow is repeated with *The Princess and the Frog's* quillain Dr. Facilier, whose shadow moves by itself during Facilier's song "Friends on the Other Side." Reading Peter in relation to Facilier further complicates his own queerness.



Figure 39: Peter’s silhouette as he waits for Mr. and Mrs. Darling to leave their house.

The combination of Mr. Darling’s rant and the image of Peter’s silhouette works to fulfil the second point of the Hero’s Journey—the call to adventure. Vogler notes that during this stage “[s]omething shakes up the situation, either from external pressures or from something rising up from deep within” (n.p.). Mr. Darling’s use of the battle cries “sound the alarm” and “call Scotland Yard” are a literally a call to action, albeit an insincere, sarcastic one. However, during the scene following Darling’s sarcastic remark, an actual call to adventure occurs for the Darling children. When the adult Darlings leave the screen as Peter is introduced, the story shifts from Mr. Darling and the expectations of the ordinary world he upholds, to Peter and the Darling children, and their voyage to and through the special world of Neverland.

The Darling children meet Peter as he sneaks in their bedroom to retrieve his shadow that Wendy had previously locked away in a drawer for safe keeping until his return. As Peter tries to reattach his shadow with a bar of soap, Wendy is woken up and immediately explains that the shadow needs to be sewn on. She takes a needle and thread and begins attaching his shadow back to his foot. At this moment Wendy meets the mentor (the Hero’s Journey point four), and explains how it will be the last night she sees him, as she needs to grow up the following day:

Wendy: I’m so glad you came back tonight. I might never have seen you.

Peter: Why?

Wendy: Because I have to grow up tomorrow.

Peter: Grow up?!

Wendy: Tonight’s my last night in the nursery.

Peter: But that means no more stories. No! I won’t have it. Come on!

Wendy: Bu-bu-but where are we going?

Peter: To Neverland.

Wendy: Neverland!

Peter: You’ll never grow up there.

This scene is crucial in understanding how Neverland, and its spatiotemporal construction, represent everything London and the ordinary world do not. Wendy explains to Peter how her father has had enough of her telling stories about Peter and Neverland to her brothers, and how it is time for her to leave her childhood behind—she will be segregated from her brothers because she is too old to believe the “stories.”

Once more the term “stories” raises doubts about the physical existence of Neverland because of the implication of fictionality associated with the term. Peter knows Wendy is on the cusp of adulthood, and in the heteronormative expectations of the Disney universe, this cusp also means domesticity. This knowledge is seen when he tells Wendy that he listens to her stories so he can relay them to the Lost Boys. The only chance Peter has to prevent Wendy from growing up—into adult heterosexuality—is to take her to a world where time is static. His solution is to take Wendy to Neverland, where she will never grow up. This solution, and the escape into timelessness it brings Wendy, also ensures the continuation of his stories.

Wendy agrees to this journey on the condition that John and Michael can come too, and the quartet make their way to Neverland with the help of Tinker Bell’s pixie dust. The adventure into the queer world begins with narrative point five of the Hero’s Journey, “crossing the threshold”; this point is also connected most clearly with the Freudian narrative. Here, “the hero commits to leaving the ordinary world and entering a new region or condition with unfamiliar rules and values” (Vogler n.p.). Narrative point five occurs as Wendy, Peter, and Michael enter Neverland (or the realm of unconscious desire) to work through their development. The “unfamiliar rules and values” in Neverland involve the queerness present in the land. The children need to learn to adapt to these values in order to survive their adventure.

As the children get closer to their destination, Neverland is shown on screen for the first time. This image is the aforementioned picture of an island with a pirate ship in the cove and multiple rainbows overhead (Fig. 36). In this image the island is green and full of life, and there is a ring of rainbows surrounding the island. It is at this stage in the film the Darling children, and the audience themselves, cross from the ordinary world of London into the special world of Neverland. The fantastic element of the colourful land and rainbows is a stark contrast to the monotone brick buildings the children leave behind in London. Immediately following this image, the camera zooms in and stops when the pirate ship is fully revealed. At this moment the queer middle of the film begins, a middle comprised of disparate episodic happenings.

Episode One: The Protagonists

Much of my following analysis will focus on seemingly disparate events without an overt connection between them. This choice in presentation mirrors the way this film functions. One connecting thread between my discussion of different groups of individuals in Neverland and their respective queerness is Freud's notion of arrested development. Reading the film through this lens is crucial to my argument, because not only are the individual groups in Neverland stuck in an arrested state of development, but when viewing the film, it appears to be stuck in an arrested state while the elements of the queer middle take place. As I mention earlier, one aspect of this film making it different from other Disney films is the lack of a linear progression towards heterosexual reproductive adulthood. The events that take place in Neverland are a seemingly unconnected set of events without any real logical/linear progression towards a normative Disney straight ending.⁵⁸

The developmental narrative can be connected to the Freudian idea that homosexuality is a case of arrested development.⁵⁹ The idea behind arrested development is that children fail to pass successfully through all stages of their development, becoming stuck in phases such as homosexuality. In "Untimely Forgetting: Melancholia, Sexual Disposition, and Queer Femininity," Cathy Hannabach discusses queerness and arrested development:

As some psychoanalysis understands queerness as a mere developmental stage on the path to *properly* reproductive heterosexuality . . . we might see queerness as disrupting that temporality by refusing to move on and grow out of this 'phase' . . . [Q]ueerness 'forgets' to grow up into heterosexual domesticity and reproduction. (7, italics mine)

The inhabitants of Neverland embody this idea of refusing, or forgetting how, to grow up into heterosexual domestic roles. While London is inhabited by the straight family, Neverland is inhabited by tribes (the Lost Boys, the Pirates, the Piccaninnies). Although Peter enters a pseudo-relationship with Wendy, he does not abide by any singular generational role; rather, he plays both husband and child simultaneously. While failing to take the path to *proper* reproductive heterosexuality, Peter takes on a paternal role and acts as mentor and leader to

⁵⁸ This world is very much like the worlds in other children's texts where time does not pass such as C.S Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.

⁵⁹ Ideas about arrested development are further explored by Eric de Kuyper, who explains how "[Freud's] theory of the Oedipal complex . . . held that the heterosexual outcome was the 'normal' resolution, while the homosexual outcome represented arrested development" (137). The idea here is that homosexuality is an irregular resolution to growing up; rather than growing up successfully—desiring the mother at a young age and later substituting her with another woman—boys are stuck, or arrested, in this phase of homosexuality.

the Lost Boys, ensuring their safety to the best of his ability. However, when he meets Wendy and (re)learns what a mother is, he tells her “Good! You can be our mother.” Peter’s ability to slip between different roles illustrates how he is unaware of, or unable to determine, which role is appropriate for him. Queerness, for Peter, arises in part from this mutability.

While Peter may not be “growing up,” he still learns and develops as a person, and at times he shows the wisdom and comprehension of an adult. It is best, then, to think of Peter’s growth (and indeed the growth of children while inhabiting worlds like Neverland and Wonderland) as a sideways growth, a term used by Kathryn Bond Stockton in “Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal.” Stockton addresses two issues pertinent to the understanding of queerness and its intersection with spatiotemporality. The first is the infantilisation of the queer adult, and the second is the way in which the child itself is always *and* necessarily queer.

In Neverland (as in Wonderland), the adult figures are often reduced to a childlike state. Stockton, though referring specifically to the novel *Nightwood*, states “[h]ere, as we shall see, we find a grown ‘homosexual’ woman relentlessly metaphorized as a child . . . Now she is a queer child when she is not a child. We seem to be watching her tunnel back in time to when she is suspended in a sideways growth” (281). Though Stockton is referring to a novel, this idea can be applied to the quillainous Captain Hook (*Peter Pan*).⁶⁰ As I discuss later in this chapter, Hook’s queerness and function as a quillain is largely dependent upon his childlike representation. This childlikeness is seen in the film both in his fear of the crocodile, and with it the fear of time, and in his feud with Peter.

With Hook representative of the queer adult as queer child, the other character in Stockton’s model is one who disrupts “temporality by refusing to move on and grow out of this ‘phase’” (Hannabach 7). Peter Pan, throughout the film, acts as the second source of queer disruption. Generally, the disruption to heterosexuality in Disney films results directly from the actions of the quillain, and establishes a narrative disturbance that interrupts and threatens the straight and narrow path of heterosexual development, or the normative Disney narrative trajectory. What makes the disturbances unique in this film is that one is caused by the film’s hero, Peter.⁶¹

⁶⁰ This idea can also be applied to the Queen of Hearts (*Alice in Wonderland*).

⁶¹ While Peter fulfils the role of hero in the binary and gendered sense (he is the hero, Wendy the heroine), he also commits non-heroic acts—most notably cutting off Hook’s hand (occurring at a time before the events of the film). These actions are possible because of the way he is still a child—so “does not know any better” and also by the way the film is focalised through Wendy not Peter. This focalisation is one way the film excuses his

While Hook's disruption in part relies on intervening in the formation of the heterosexual reproductive adult—by attempting to kill Wendy—Peter's disruption involves convincing children to enter Neverland and remain in a place where they will never grow up. By bringing the children to Neverland, Peter literally disrupts temporality by allowing them to exist in a state of perpetual (queer) childhood. Stockton discusses the child as necessarily queer when she says, "[T]he child, from the standpoint of 'normal' adults is always queer: either 'homosexual' (an interesting problem in itself) or 'not-yet-straight,' merely approaching the official destination of straight coupledness (and therefore estranged from what it 'should' approach)" (283). *Peter Pan* once again illustrates the two sides to this story. First is Wendy, who, while not-yet-straight, is on her way to straight coupledness. Wendy's progression to straight coupledness is first introduced in the beginning of the film when Mr. Darling tells her that she will be leaving the bedroom she shares with her brothers in order to grow up.⁶²

Wendy is not yet ready to grow up, and her escape to Neverland provides her the space, and time, to navigate her development. For Wendy, Neverland is a pit-stop on her way to proper adult heterosexuality; but for the time she is in Neverland with her brothers, she is queer, as is Peter, not through an overt identification, but through the absence of heterosexuality that Neverland produces. As Wendy returns to London at the conclusion of the film, she notes to her father that she is ready to grow up (and with it fulfil the expectations following this development). Though absent from London for only a few hours, her transition through Neverland provides her with the knowledge she needs to complete her journey to adult heterosexuality.

One aspect of Neverland revealed to the viewer in regards to Wendy's transition through Neverland is how the very space of Neverland disrupts temporality. While the Darling children remain in Neverland for several days, by the time they arrive home to London only a few hours have passed. In this way, and following Hannabach's discussion, the "special" world which the children enter remains a site of queerness by acting as an obstacle on the path to heterosexual coupledness and reproduction.⁶³ In this way, the very

non-heroic/villainous actions.

⁶² Stockton also examines arrested development when she says it is the "official sounding phrase that has often cropped up to describe the supposed sexual immaturity of homosexuals: their presumed status as dangerous children, who remain children in part by failing to have their own" (289). The idea of homosexuality being connected with the idea of "dangerous children" is seen in both the pirates and the Lost Boys, with the former metaphorically, and the latter literally, embodying the idea of the dangerous child.

⁶³ This seeming contradiction exists because of the paradox in which queerness is both *necessary* and a *threat*. The problem here lies not in Disney's portrayal of Neverland or queerness, but in the broader social construction of sexuality itself.

world of Neverland almost fulfils the narrative function of the quillain in terms of disrupting potential heterosexual unions.

While it becomes apparent the children in Neverland never grow up, they are protected from any long-term effects of queerness because of the fact they are children. As long as they remain as such, queerness will simply be a phase through which they *can* pass on the way to adulthood and heterosexuality. There are, however, two adult communities present in Neverland: the pirates and the native inhabitants,⁶⁴ known as the Piccaninny Tribe and also referred to throughout the film as “Indians,” “Injuns,” and “Redskins.” With full recognition of the blatant racism involved in both the visual and verbal characterisation of the Piccaninny Tribe, throughout this chapter I refer to the group with the language used in the film. While I will not undertake a full analysis of race in this chapter, it is important to examine the Piccaninny Tribe and how race, childhood, and sexuality intersect to create racial caricatures that further illustrate the effect of spatiotemporality in the film.⁶⁵

Episode Two: The Piccaninnies

As with Peter and the Lost Boys, Great Big Little Panther, Chief of the Piccaninny Tribe, and the community in which he lives embody the queerness of Neverland. I have already explained Stockton’s assertion that children are necessarily queer, and in *Peter Pan* the Indians, perhaps more than any other group present on the island, are infantilised. Their infantilisation first and foremost stems from the racist history involved in the term “Piccaninny,” one used to describe black children.⁶⁶ The Piccaninny Tribe is further infantilised through their relationship with the Lost Boys. Upon being given instructions from Peter to “go out and catch a few Indians,” John, Michael, and the Lost Boys begin their

⁶⁴ John Darling notes upon meeting the Lost Boys that he “should prefer to see the Aborigines,” and it is for this reason that I use the term “native inhabitants,” though this status is not specified elsewhere in the film. Though, as Anne McClintock notes in *Imperial Leather*, “The generic category ‘native’ does not include women; women are merely possessed by the (male) native as an appendage” (362). Likewise in the film the native women are merely props to further the action of the men.

⁶⁵ For instance, see Myles Russel-Cook’s “‘Savages, Savages, Barely Even Human’: Native American Representations in Disney Films” and Prajna Parasher’s “Mapping the Imaginary: The *Neverland* of Disney’s Indians,” the latter of who explains how “The lost boys live underground and are dressed as animals. If the English children are reduced to animal forms, then hierarchy demands that the Indians be something less; they make their first appearance as marauding trees” (44).

⁶⁶ David Pilgram, in his book, explains how “piccaninny” is the “dominant racial caricature of black children for most of [the United States’] history” (qtd. in Bailin 92). Clay Kinchen Smith expands this notion by explaining how “his [Barrie’s] specific productions and his pointed use of the term ‘Piccaninny’ collapse categories of racial, spatial, and national difference (red/black/African American/Aboriginal Peoples)” as well as the larger productions of such categories” (109).

search. During this time, however, they are ambushed by the Piccaninny Tribe and held captive. When the Chief addresses the Lost Boys, his childlike state becomes clear:

Chief: For many moons Red Man fight paleface Lost Boys. Sometime you win. Sometime we win.

Cubby: Okay, Chief. Uh, you win this time. Now, turn us loose.

John: ‘Turn us loose’? You mean this is only a game?

Slightly: Sure! When we win, we turn them loose.

Twins: When they win, they turn us loose.

The Piccaninny Tribe offers no real threat to the Lost Boys. Being captured by, or capturing them, is simply a childhood game of “Cowboys and Indians.” The other aspect of significance in this dialogue is the way the Chief speaks. As opposed to the Lost Boys who use complete sentences, the Chief has short, abrupt sentences, and this language, combined with his tone, mimics a child learning to speak.

One of the major differences between the children (the Darlings and the Lost Boys) and the infantilised Piccaninny Tribe is that the former will grow up into heterosexuality, specifically a *white* heterosexuality,⁶⁷ while the latter will remain in a perpetual childlike (and therefore queer) state. Wendy and the Lost Boys are simply passing through Neverland, and with it, this queer phase. Not only does spatiotemporality define Neverland’s queerness, but race and childhood and race and sexuality intertwine to strengthen this portrayal.

Another instance highlighting the intersection of race and childhood, contributing to the queering of the Piccaninny Tribe, is the song “What Makes the Red Man Red?”⁶⁸ In this song, the Lost Boys and Piccaninny Tribe celebrate the return of Princess Tiger Lily and the naming of Peter as an honorary “heap big chief” named “Little Flying Eagle.” Big Chief Flying Eagle addresses the Lost Boys and says, “Teach em paleface brother all about Red Man.” Throughout the song that follows, the story is told of why the “Red Man is red”: “Let’s go back a million years / To the very first Injun Prince / He kissed a maid and start to blush / And we’ve all been blushin’ since.” In these couple of lines, it is suggested the Piccaninny Tribe is “red” because an ancestor kissed a girl and blushed, which has been

⁶⁷Anne McClintock explores this intersection of age, race, and sexuality when she notes, “adult racial degeneration to the primitive state of ‘Hottentot’ is accompanied by sexual degeneration to the ‘female’ condition, and both states are attended by linguistic degeneration to an infantile state of preverbal impotence” (242). In the above, “Hottentot” could be replaced with “Piccaninny,” and this would provide a means of reading the intersection of race, sexuality, and age in *Peter Pan*.

⁶⁸The ascription of “redness” to Native Americans was later repeated in *Pocahontas* with Governor Ratcliffe. Russel-Cook explains how “[t]he ‘savages’ Ratcliffe describes [in his song ‘Savages’] are nearly indistinguishable from the ‘Injuns’ of *Peter Pan*: ‘What can you expect / From filthy little heathens? / Their whole disgusting race is a curse / Their skin’s a hellish red / They’re only good when they’re dead / They’re vermin, as I said / And worse! They’re savages! Savages!’” (107). In this latter film, however, the audience is encouraged to identify with the Native Americans rather than the white characters.

passed on through the generations. That their skin colour is a result of a blush suggests an infantile or childlike quality. As the Piccaninny Tribe sings these few lines, Tiger Lily moves towards Peter, before kissing him. As the words “we’ve all been blushin’ since” are sung, Peter’s own face turns bright red, mirroring the colour of the tribe (Fig. 40). A similar response to a kiss is seen in *Bambi*’s Flower, who, after being kissed blushes while his body becomes stiff, before falling to the ground (Fig. 41).⁶⁹ The mirroring of Peter’s skin colour further aligns him with the tribe, and with them perpetual childhood.



Figure 40: Peter’s post-kiss blush



Figure 41: Flower’s post-kiss blush

Occurring in the above scene with Peter and Tiger Lily is queerness acting as a resistance to heterosexuality. While calling the only heterosexual kiss in the film “queer” may appear peculiar, an analysis of this moment through the lens of shame brings to light the blush as an act of heterosexual resistance. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*” explores the notion of shame not only as it is represented in literature, but also as a communicative act. She explains, “[s]hame, as opposed to guilt, is a bad feeling that does not attach to what one does, but to what one is” (12). Sedgwick continues her discussion by linking shame and shyness to the queer child: “[s]ome of the infants, children, and adults in whom shame remains the most available mediator of identity are the ones called . . . shy . . . Queer, I’d suggest, might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to this group . . . those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame” (13). Sedgwick aligns the term “queer” with individuals, particularly children, who are labelled shy. While Peter Pan is not a shy character generally, the kiss scene in *Peter Pan* illustrates another side where he becomes overwhelmed by Tiger Lily’s kiss—seen from his immediate blush.

Further to Sedgwick, Elspeth Probyn, in *Blush: Faces of Shame*, explores the connection between shame and blushing. She explains, “Blushing feels bad, and it’s a

⁶⁹ The blush is also seen with an (infantilised) adult in *Cinderella*. At the conclusion, Cinderella kisses the king, who blushes and waves her off as she departs from her wedding.

reaction that can't be faked or brought on without experiencing or remembering the feeling of shame" (2). Peter's blush, then, can be read in a few different ways. First, he may be embarrassed he was kissed in front of Wendy, whose reaction to the kiss is to drop the firewood she is carrying and throw her hands on her hips in anger. Second, Peter may be ashamed he has kissed a girl, when at the beginning of the film after asking what a kiss is and Wendy offers to show him, he backs away with a look of shock and horror on his face. Reading the blush through both Sedgwick and Probyn, however, demonstrates how the kiss between Tiger Lily and Peter is an act of resistance to heterosexuality because Peter as a character and a figure of eternal and perpetual childhood and innocence is already queer.

Many Disney films conclude with an image of the hero and heroine kissing. In these films, as opposed to *Peter Pan*, the kiss does not bring about feelings of shame (represented by a blush), because the act of kissing aligns with Disney's expectations and representations of heterosexuality as the appropriate narrative trajectory. For Peter, as the queer child, kissing Tiger Lily is not an act of romance as are kisses in other films, but rather an exploitation of an act that in Disney films is symbolically representative of eternal heterosexuality.

Peter's blush during "What Makes the Red Man Red?" illustrates the intersection of race, childhood, and queerness. This intersection is encapsulated at the film's conclusion with the departure of the pirate ship from Neverland. Once this ship (and with it the remaining *white* children of Neverland) leave the world, they "move on" and "grow out" of the phase of queerness as they cross the threshold to (re)enter the "real" or "ordinary" world, therefore fulfilling their destiny to grow up into heterosexual domesticity. The Piccaninny Tribe will (presumably) forever inhabit the special world of Neverland, a site of queerness. They are not provided the opportunity afforded to the white children who pass through Neverland to return to an ordinary world to fulfil expectations of white adult heterosexuality.

Episode Three: The Pirates

There exists a tension between the way temporality and queerness intersect and operate in the special and ordinary worlds (Neverland/London) of the film. For the Darlings (as well those who came before, and will come after, these children), Neverland is a site whose non-linear temporality acts as an *interruption* to their personal developmental narratives. Unlike Peter, the Lost Boys, the pirates, and the Piccaninny Tribe, there exists for the Darling children (and indeed the hero/ines of other Disney films) a strongly *linear*

temporality of heterosexual development. Although Neverland exists as a space in which queerness is timeless, for the children who visit Neverland on their journey to adulthood, queerness is not meant to be permanent. Conversely, for the permanent inhabitants of Neverland, queerness is not a phase through which they pass, but is rather a repetitious, perpetual way of life; being queer adults, they do not have a linear, heterosexual narrative available to them.

Having examined both the Lost Boys and the Piccaninny Tribe, there remains one final human population in Neverland to examine: the pirates. Captain Hook and his crew represent the dangers of not growing up aligned with heteronormative expectations (cf. Sedgwick), and more than in any other Disney film, this group of antagonists are overtly queered (Fig. 42). This group is the only single-sex *adult* group on the island, and apparent in these images are many of the codes used to align other villains in the Disney canon with gender deviance. Most noticeable is the very colourful attire of the pirates. While Peter and the Lost Boys dress in dull and neutral tones, the pirates wear pinks, purples, blues, and greens. This colourful attire is seen in many other villains including Governor Ratcliffe and Medusa (Fig. 43). Another code present in these images is the pirates' body positioning, which mirrors stereotypically feminine postures, depicting gender deviance. The pirates' hands overlap as they kick their legs out, their heads held high (Fig. 47). Similarly having their right knees crossing their left knees as they jump, with their left arms contorted on their hips, presents an image of stereotypically flamboyant males. These two images form two moments in the dance routine where the pirates break many conventions of hegemonic masculinity.



Figure 42: Pirates (queer) dancing during “Elegant Captain Hook”



Figure 43: Colourful attire of other quillains. Clockwise from top left: Medusa, Governor Ratcliffe, Madam Mim, Alameda Slim.

During the time these scenes occur, the pirates sing a song called “The Elegant Captain Hook.” This title itself works to queer Hook by aligning him with the feminine term “elegant.”⁷⁰ Clearly, Hook does not conform to expectations of hegemonic masculinity, and the alignment of him with the term “elegant” further works to shift his masculinity towards a queer or “foppish” masculinity. In their book *The Disney Villain*, Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas, two of the group referred to as “The Nine Old Men,”⁷¹ discuss the original description of Hook by the story department. They say, “He is a fop . . . Yet very mean, to the point of being murderous” (109). From the outset, Hook’s portrayal as a fop was an intentional characterisation to establish his Othered masculinity.

Also significant in Johnston and Thomas’ description of Hook is the term “murderous,” one which itself has a queer history. Jonathan Goldberg discusses this history in “Critical Interludes.” Goldberg discusses the films of Hitchcock specifically, and though this is a contemporary paper (2012), his argument can be applied to *Peter Pan*—a film that was made right in the middle of Hitchcock’s golden age. Goldberg first notes criticism by Alexander Doty directed towards Hitchcock, suggesting that Hitchcock portrays “the kinds of

⁷⁰ This term once more relates to DeJa’s description when characterising Jafar (Griffin 142).

⁷¹ A “reference to President Roosevelt’s Supreme Court in the late 1930s. When they had declared F.D.R.’s new ideas for ending the Depression unconstitutional, he had called the justices ‘his nine old men, all too aged to recognise a new idea.’ Ten years later, Walt Disney, looking for a way to needle the nine members of his animation board, adopted the phrase, claiming that we were all ‘over the hill’” (Johnston and Thomas 105).

negative stereotypes readily found in the media that represent homosexuals as murderers” (66). The stereotypes being referred to are gay men being feminised, and represented as sadistic and evil.

Hook himself embodies all these stereotypes: He is coded feminine (and indeed queer); he is sadistic—he enjoys watching children walk the plank; and he is evil—his ultimate plan is to kill Peter Pan. Goldberg continues with an assessment that “these undercurrents [of homosexuality] so often attach themselves to murderous desires, a doubling of forbidden desire and the criminal act of taking a life” (85). This notion can once more be seen in the pirates generally, and Hook specifically (as well as more broadly in Hook’s quillainous counterparts); there is a strong connection between homosexuality and murder in Disney films, because the quillains often attempt to kill one or more of their heroic rivals. Ironically, though, it is the hero/ines who *actually* kill their rivals in many films.

The relationship between queerness (a foppish masculinity) and villainy (murderous desires) becomes more apparent with an examination of “The Elegant Captain Hook.” This song in part functions to boost the ego of Hook in front of the captured Lost Boys, and when Hook joins in, the song becomes a narcissistic indulgence of his *perceived* strength.⁷² The signifiers of queerness used in the characterisation of the pirates during this scene in particular serve as a foreboding warning of the future of the Lost Boys if they join Hook: their development will be “arrested” and they will remain in the queer middle, not progressing to adult heterosexuality.

Hook, more so than any of the other pirates, can be read as a child. Not only does he have an immense fear of the crocodile, and with it the alarm clock, but he is often reduced to an infantile state, crying for his sidekick Smee to help him. Because Hook, as a queer villain, is *metaphorically* rather than *literally* a child, he faces a danger the Lost Boys do not: he risks elimination by remaining in Neverland as an adult. Although the Piccaninny Tribe also live in Neverland as adults the difference is Hook, living as an adult in Neverland, is surrounded *only* by the company of other men, so he fails to have his own children. The Lost Boys (and Darling children) on the other hand still have the opportunity to grow up into heterosexuality, so they do not face the same risks inhabiting Neverland as Hook and the pirates.

⁷² This song has a similar narrative role to the eponymously named “Gaston” in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Episode Four: The Principal Pirate

The pirates are the first inhabitants of Neverland shown in the film with their introduction on the pirate ship, and this ship is the site where Neverland's queerness is most intensely visually represented. Hook and his crew of pirates spend their days on their ship singing, dancing, and plotting the death of Peter Pan as a revenge for him cutting off Hook's left hand and feeding it to a crocodile years earlier.

Hook, as the captain of the pirates, is *Peter Pan's* quillain. Not only is Hook Disney's first male villain, but, as noted, he is arguably the most flamboyant to date. Hook's elegance incorporates a scarlet robe and collection of interchangeable gold hook pieces (Fig. 44). Though his physical appearance establishes his queerness through the foppish qualities, his relationship with Smee provides the greatest narrative queer coding. The relationship between Hook and Smee is reminiscent of Gaston and LeFou's in *Beauty and the Beast*. The profoundly homosocial, bordering on homoerotic, relationship between these men moves beyond mere admiration and loyalty.



Figure 44: Hook's collection of phallic hook pieces



Figure 45: Hook's reliance on Smee for emotional (and physical) support

Johnston and Thomas explain how Smee “was always there for Hook to play to, to explain things to and to display the subtleties of personality that made the captain such an interesting villain” (111). Smee is not only Hook's assistant, but also his caretaker. The intimate nature of their relationship is suggested when Smee shaves Hook's face. As Smee begins this process, Hook hears the ticking of the crocodile and immediately cowers. Smee proceeds to calm Hook down before sitting him in a chair. During this time, he remarks “I can't help noticin' you just ain't been your usual jolly self of late . . . Now, why don't we put to sea, see? Leave Neverland, forget Peter Pan . . . We'd all be a lot happier, not to mention a lot healthier.” Smee's concern for Hook moves beyond that of a subordinate pirate for his

superior, to a deep care for Hook's physical and mental wellbeing. Throughout the film, Smee always arrives to protect Hook, and Hook himself is not shy about jumping into the arms of Smee for protection (Fig. 45).

The largest contributor to Hook's identity, and a key factor in his queering, is his missing hand. This aspect of Hook's identity is so important to him that he takes on "hook" as a fierce name. Narratively, this aspect of his identity is crucial to Hook's queering and existence in the special world. His castration is crucial for two main reasons, one to do with temporality, one to do with masculinity, both contributing to his queering.

The first has to do with the crocodile, who as I discuss momentarily, ate Hook's hand during a fight between Hook and Peter. This crocodile, with a taste for Hook, follows him around Neverland as a constant reminder that time is not on his side: metaphorically because Hook's life is in danger, and literally because the crocodile has also swallowed a clock and the ticking of this clock is the only indication alerting Hook to the crocodile's presence.

The other symbolic function of Hook's missing hand, impaired masculinity, becomes important when examining how Hook presents his authority. This implication stems from another paradox in the film, one which arises from the fact that Hook attempts to display dominance through his strong will to fight and kill, while simultaneously failing to achieve masculinity (and thereby heterosexuality) because of his castration—both literally failing because his masculinity is questioned as a result of a defeat by Peter (a child), and symbolically failing because his limb has been excised, to be replaced with a curved (non-straight) object. As I mentioned above, strongly intertwined with Hook's queerness and his castration is one of the major symbols in this film representing the eventual and inevitable demise of the queer: the crocodile and alarm clock within it.

Running Out of Time

One character in the film threatening the quillain's life, and who ultimately brings about the film's conclusion is the crocodile. This unnamed crocodile represents the threat of linear time. Hook has a conversation with Smee in which he laments the loss of his hand and Peter's culpability by throwing the hand to the crocodile. Smee tries to calm the captain by explaining, "He'd have had you by now, Captain, if he hadn't swallowed that alarm clock. But now when he's about, he warns ya, as ya might say with his tick-tock." As has been discussed throughout this chapter, time in Neverland is halted, in part to act a site where

children can experience queerness without interrupting their linear path to adult heterosexuality. The crocodile and his alarm clock signal this halt to time. Though there is a constant “tick-tocking” following Hook around, time is static as the passage of time is arrested (especially when compared to the passage of time in London), and queerness remains as eternal repetition. This safety, however, is only in place as long as the alarm clock remains within the crocodile’s stomach.

When Hook is not actively fleeing the crocodile, he spends much of his time on his ship plotting the death of Peter. While this plotting takes place, the Darling children, on the relative safety of the island, are encouraged to explore all it contains. Once the Darlings have crossed the threshold into the queer world of Neverland, they are allowed to immerse themselves in the queerness without any repercussions; as children they are able explore queerness unscathed on their way to adulthood. John and Michael join the Lost Boys to “fight the Injuns,” a game they play often, while Peter gives Wendy a personal tour of the island.

The most significant scene in the film occurs on the pirate ship during the climactic battle between Hook and Pan, near the end of this non-linear progression. As I mention earlier, it is during this battle that Hook presents the Lost Boys with the “option” of joining his crew. Hook, however, makes the decision on behalf of the Lost Boys by offering only the alternative of walking the plank to their presumed deaths. After the pirates sing the words, “There isn’t a boy / Who won’t enjoy / Working for Captain Hook,” Hook adds “C’mon, join up, and I’ll be frank / Unless you do, you’ll walk the plank!” While the Lost Boys, as children, are *supposed* to be queer in Neverland as it is a normal part of development, this scene illustrates that being a pirate is also code for being an *adult* queer, someone who remains *in* and identifies *with* the queer community.

The idea of the pirates trying to recruit the Lost Boys corresponds to actual fears surrounding gay men. In *American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us and Why*, Mark Stein discusses anti-gay activist Anita Bryant and her now (in)famous quote regarding queer persons: “As a mother, I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must *recruit* our children” (188, italics mine). Though Bryant made this statement two decades after the release of *Peter Pan*, a contemporary reading of the film can see these sentiments echoed. While Bryant was one of the first people to explicitly state that homosexuals would try and “recruit” children into their “lifestyle,” this sentiment has been around for decades, most predominantly in the “Mental Hygiene” films from the 1940s

onwards.⁷³ These films presented similar moral panics in which children were warned about the dangers of homosexual men. In these films, homosexuality was also associated with paedophilia and used as forewarning of what could happen if children interacted with gay men.⁷⁴

The above scene in *Peter Pan* appears to work through the inherent contradiction present because the Lost Boys have the opportunity to experience the queer life of a pirate and live this life until they leave Neverland, and with this departure, leave the queerness behind. Wendy, however, who is on the cusp of adulthood, chastises the boys for wanting to join the pirates: “Boys! Aren’t you ashamed of yourselves?” With these words the Lost Boys are placed in a position where they are both encouraged and chastised for wanting to join the pirate crew.

During this pivotal moment, the film plays with the notion of the children embracing the queer life of the pirates. Wendy’s admonishment of the Lost Boys, however, steers them back towards the appropriate (straight) path of heterosexuality. Having instigated the refusal to join the pirates, Wendy is forced to walk the plank first. As she steps off the ship, the pirates eagerly await a splash, which does not come. Moments later Peter is revealed to have caught her at the final moment and brings her aboard the ship.

One final battle ensues in which the Lost Boys fight the pirates (the Hero’s Journey point eight: “the hero enters a central space in the special world and confronts death” (n.p.)) and Peter fights Hook. Peter corners Hook high above on the ship’s mast and prepares to deliver the final blow. Hook, unlike most other quillains, takes this opportunity to beg for his life:

Hook: You wouldn’t do old Hook in now, would you, lad? I’ll go away forever. I’ll do anything you say.

Peter: Well, alright. If ya say you’re a codfish.

Hook: I’m a codfish.

Peter: Louder.

Hook: I’m a codfish!

During this exchange the power dynamic is completely inverted and Hook is reduced, once more, to a cowardly, snivelling heap (Fig. 46). This scene is important in the body of Disney

⁷³ Andres Rios Molina discusses how “During the 1920s, a new area of social action arose aimed at the fight to prevent mental illness.” This purpose of this field, Molina continues, was “to teach the population what mental illness was and how to treat it or to prevent it in time; however, it was also necessary for different governmental agencies to take measures and create new institutions that would make it possible to achieve the ideals of mental hygiene” (142).

⁷⁴ Word Press user Propaganda Critic discusses Sid Davis’ 1961 film *Boys Beware*, a short film echoing the moral panic of the early 1950s.

films because Hook is the only villain to be shown crying on screen, and is one of the only quillains to beg for his life and redemption.⁷⁵ The act of Hook begging for his life is yet another moment in the film adding to his queer characterisation: rather than fighting for his life, as is the “masculine” thing to do (and the act performed by Hook’s later male quillain counterparts), Hook simply cries and begs to be released.



Figure 46: Hook begging for his life (while having a phallic object threateningly pointed towards his face...)

At the last moment, however, Hook acts as other quillains do, and makes one final lunge at Peter when his back is turned. As a result of failing to take his chance for redemption, Hook falls into the mouth of the crocodile waiting at the bottom of the ship. Hook quickly escapes the body of the crocodile, carrying with him the alarm clock that for years has warned him of the crocodile’s approach. The clock begins to ring and Hook frantically swims across the water of Neverland, chased by the crocodile and crying out for Smee who follows him in a rowboat. At this moment, *linear* time, through the alarm clock, momentarily enters Neverland, cutting off the eternal repetition/timelessness of the queer. It does so by providing a very real threat to Hook’s life. Just as the last falling rose petal in *Beauty and the Beast* represents the Beast’s final breath (as I discuss in the next chapter), so too does the final tick of the clock represent the potential demise of Hook.

With the pirate ship free from Hook and his crew, Peter dresses in Hook’s robes and commandeers the ship’s return to London. As the ship takes flight, with the help of pixie dust from Tinker Bell, a final image of Neverland is shown (Fig. 36). This final image is aligned with narrative point ten of the Hero’s Journey—the Road Back. Vogler notes that during this stage the hero “leav[es] the special world to be sure the treasure is brought home” (n.p.). Wendy is free to return to the ordinary world, and with this return brings the treasure of heterosexuality; now she is back home she can finally “grow up” and become heterosexually reproductive, ensuring there is another generation of children to whom she can pass on the

⁷⁵ The other main quillain to beg for his life is *Beauty and the Beast*’s Gaston.

tales of Neverland. As the pirate ship leaves Neverland and enters the ordinary world of London, the queerness once inhabiting Neverland is gone. The colour and rainbows once covering the world is absent, leaving behind a bleak image of the fantastic world.

The juxtaposition of this image to the first image of Neverland suggests the children have successfully passed through the arrested phase of queerness that Neverland represents. The children are allowed to experience queerness, on the condition it is a place they enter, and, more importantly, *leave*. With the Darling children's departure from Neverland is the assumption they will not return; Peter explicitly warns that once you have left you "can never come back." With their return to the ordinary world comes the resumption of linear time, and though they have been gone for a few days, the Darling children arrive home shortly before their parents. When Mrs. Darling enters Wendy's room she finds her asleep on the windowsill. Mr. Darling wakes Wendy, prompting a conversation about her absence:

Wendy: Oh Mother, we're back!

Mr. Darling: Back?

Wendy: All except the Lost Boys. They weren't quite ready . . . to grow up. That's why they went back to Neverland. But don't worry, I am.

Mr. Darling: Uh, am?

Wendy: Uh, am ready to grow up.

This conversation takes place moments after Wendy wakes up, and is parallel to the introductory scene in the same bedroom in which Mr. Darling questions the existence of Neverland. This time, however, it is the film that calls into question Neverland's reality. As with *Alice in Wonderland*, the question arising at the end of this film is whether Wendy (and Alice) simply dreamed the previous adventure. Mr. Darling's confusion during this scene, emphasised through his repetition of "uh" furthers this question.

The final moments of the film show Mr. and Mrs. Darling and Wendy (the three grown members of the family) looking out the window at a cloud that closely resembles the pirate ship (Fig. 47). Wendy is excited to see this ship, while Mr. and Mrs. Darling are shocked. Upon seeing the ship, Mr. Darling has a moment of recollection and says, "You know, I have the strangest feeling that I've seen that ship before. A long time ago . . . when I was very young." This sentence is the antepenultimate line of dialogue in the film, and it works to complicate and reaffirm Neverland's existence. This complication exists because if Mr. Darling saw the ship when he was younger, it suggests Neverland *must* exist. If Neverland does exist, then Mr. Darling, as a child, was allowed to experience its queerness before returning back to London, growing up, and fulfilling the expectations of adult heterosexuality. Temporality is once more introduced in the film to construct Neverland as a

world where children can safely experience queerness.



Figure 47: The Darlings' responses to the pirate ship. Clockwise from top left: The ship, Wendy's reaction, Mr. Darling's reaction, and Mrs. Darling's reaction

With the Darling children's successful navigation of values foreign to them, they are able to leave the special world and return home. For John and Michael it is a return to their normal life in the ordinary world; but for Wendy, like her father, this means coming home to adult heterosexuality. The portal to the queer world is closed and will no longer be available to her. She has been able to navigate successfully the realm of unconscious desire, and by leaving Neverland behind ensures her development into adult heterosexuality.

Chapter Four

Beasts, Beauties, and Buffoons

Beauty and the Beast follows the film's beauty, Belle, the film's beast, the Beast, and the pair's battle with the film's other beauty *and* beast, Gaston. The film's prologue explains the curse enveloping the Beast's castle, one that can only be broken by true love. One day Belle's father, Maurice, leaves home to attend an invention workshop. He gets lost in a forest and winds up at the Beast's castle where he is promptly taken prisoner. Belle learns of her father's captivity and races to the castle, only to replace him as the Beast's prisoner. The Beast, assuming Belle will be able to help him break the curse, attempts to make her feel at home. Nonetheless Belle still feels like a prisoner. The two grow closer over time, with the Beast learning to act more like a prince. Maurice reaches the town and pleads for help from Gaston to save Belle, but the townsfolk throw Maurice in the snow. Maurice makes his way back, only to collapse in the forest near the Beast's castle. The Beast gives Belle a magic mirror and she sees her father, and races to save him. The Beast releases Belle from captivity and Belle takes Maurice home. Gaston learns of Belle's love for the Beast and rallies a mob to kill the Beast. A battle ensues and the Beast is injured by Gaston. Belle arrives at the castle and the Beast makes his way to her. Gaston lunges at the Beast, stabbing him before falling to his own death. The Beast dies of his stab wound, but at the last moment is brought back to life because of Belle's love. The curse is broken, the Beast regains his human body, and Belle and her father are reunited. The film ends with Belle and the Beast dancing around the Beast's ballroom, about to live happily ever after.

In *Beauty and the Beast*, as in *Peter Pan*, there is a separation of the special (queer) world from the ordinary (heterosexual) world. Unlike Neverland in *Peter Pan*, however, the existence of the queer space, the Beast's castle, is never questioned throughout the film. This aspect aligns the Beast's castle with other quillains' lairs such as Maleficent's castle and Frodo's church. What distinguishes the Beast's castle, therefore making it worthy of analysis alongside Neverland, is the added element of the fantastic as a result of the spell explained to the audience in the film's prologue.

Beauty and the Beast, a "tale as old as time," presents a passage from childhood to adulthood similar to *Peter Pan*. In the latter film, Wendy successfully navigates the spatiotemporal abnormality that is Neverland and returns to London, to a place where linear time functions to facilitate the passage from childhood to adulthood. In *Beauty and the Beast*, by contrast, the castle's queer space and time is the site for a rite of passage, from queer childhood to heterosexual adulthood, for both the heterosexual heroine, Belle, and the queer villain-turned-hero, the Beast. Throughout this chapter I explore the spatiotemporal

abnormality of the Beast's castle to argue that this site is necessary to facilitate Belle and the Beast's passages to reproductive heterosexuality.

My theoretical approach to discussing *Beauty and the Beast's* spatiotemporal aspects arises from the intersection of four theories discussed throughout my dissertation: Judith Roof's "queer middle," Perry Nodelman's "home-away-home" narrative, Christopher Vogler's summary of the Hero's Journey, and Tzvetan Todorov's notion of equilibrium. *Beauty and the Beast* begins in a state of balance, set in the ordinary world, where things remain normal and stable, even if this stability is tiring and repetitive for Belle. The film concludes with the breaking of the curse and the subsequent heterosexual union of Belle and the Beast (in his human form)—the second stable state of equilibrium in the film and the return to the "ordinary world." Between these two moments, however, is where the action of the film takes place: the "away" portion of the film or the "special world" containing the space (and time) when Belle navigates the "imbalanced" queer middle of the film.

Alongside the main narrative of the film, Belle's journey to heterosexual adulthood, exists a second developmental narrative undertaken by the Beast. *Beauty and the Beast*, perhaps more than any other Disney film, encapsulates both the Hero's Journey and the home-away-home narrative. Belle's journey takes her away from the town (home/ordinary world/stable equilibrium/heterosexuality), to the Beast's enchanted castle (away/special world/imbalance and disorder/queerness), and finally to the Beast's unenchanted castle (home/ordinary world/stable equilibrium/heterosexuality). Whereas Wendy and her brothers return to their London home, Belle (re)claims the once queer site of her imprisonment as her own, heterosexual home. Though Belle's "away" and final "home" are in the same geographical *place*, they are in fact different *spaces*. The castle, once a special world, loses its magic and returns to an ordinary (non-magical), and simultaneously heterosexual (seen through the final dance between Belle and the now-human Beast/Prince) space.

This film best typifies Nodelman's assertion that "the most typical storyline in children's literature is not so much a home/away/home pattern as it is a home/away/new home pattern" (198), particularly with the three main characters: the Beast, Belle, and Gaston. Belle is the primary heterosexual heroine who undertakes the home/away/new home pattern; Gaston is the primary queer villain, who in part drives the push from home to away for Belle; and the Beast is a queer villain who experiences a transformation to heterosexual hero.⁷⁶ In his case, through the transformation and retransformation of his castle, the move

⁷⁶ A similar transformation is seen in *Frozen's* Elsa, and I discuss this film in more detail in Chapter Six.

from home to away to new home occurs in the same geographical location.

Beauty and the Beast begins where the original fairytale ends,⁷⁷ with a prologue discussing a heartless prince,

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, a young prince lived in a shining castle. Although he had everything his heart desired, the prince was spoiled, selfish, and unkind. But then, one winter's night, an old beggar woman came to the castle and offered him a single rose in return for shelter from the bitter cold . . . [After the prince rejects her twice, she turns into her true form, a beautiful enchantress]. The prince tried to apologise, but it was too late, for she had seen that there was no love in his heart, and as *punishment*, she transformed him into a hideous beast, and placed a powerful spell on the castle, and all who lived there. Ashamed of his monstrous form, the beast concealed himself inside his castle, with a magic mirror as his only window to the outside world. (Italics mine)

The film's introduction of the Beast/Prince aligns him with other Disney quillains through language such as "spoiled, selfish, and unkind." This cursed body is further described as "monstrous" and "hideous," terms drawn from what Dyer terms the "language of monstrosity" (6), and aligns the Beast with quillains such as Maleficent, Ursula, and Jafar, all of whom transform into a monstrous body in their films.⁷⁸ The Beast's monstrous body is specifically a *punishment* for failing to reproduce traits expected of heroes in Disney's version of adult heterosexuality: charity, selflessness, and kindness. For instance, at the beginning of *Aladdin*, Aladdin steals a loaf of bread only to give it to children who are hungry. He sacrifices his own immediate needs for others who are unable to help themselves. The Beast's selfishness initially establishes him as different from other Disney heroes, and this distinction is used throughout the narrative to align him more closely with Disney quillains.

The first half of the prologue in *Beauty and the Beast* introduces the spatial aspect of the curse—the Prince/Beast's castle as a site of queerness. In the prologue, it is stated the enchantress "placed a powerful spell on the castle, and all who lived there." The castle, then, is designated as an enchanted space, and as we will see this enchanted space functions narratively as a queer space. After introducing the spatial aspect, the prologue introduces the temporal, once more revealing how intertwined these two factors are. The temporal aspect is

⁷⁷ Disney's film most heavily draws upon the version by Madame Leprince de Beaumont, which concludes with the lines "a wicked fairy condemned [him] to retain that form until some beautiful girl should consent to marry [him], and she forbade [him] to betray any sign of intelligence" (Griswold 181).

⁷⁸ The queered/monstrous body of the child is something Disney reproduces in other films to varying extents. For example, in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, it is the heterosexual hero Quasimodo who is portrayed with a monstrous body, and most recently, Disney portrays the monstrous body with Elsa in *Frozen*.

introduced through the rose given to the Prince.⁷⁹ As *Beauty and the Beast*'s narrator notes,

The rose [the enchantress] had offered was truly an enchanted rose, which would bloom until his 21st year. If he could learn to love another and earn *her* love in return before the last petal fell, then the spell would be broken. If not he would be doomed to remain a beast for all time.

This prologue establishes a narrative in which linear time within the Beast's castle is halted. The one exception to this deferral of time, however, is the rose, whose falling petals act as the only indication of the passage of time, with each falling petal signifying the impending elimination of the queer. While both Neverland and the Beast's castle exist as timeless/repetitive places, *Beauty and the Beast*, through the enchantress' spell, offers a solution to this timelessness—heterosexuality. Written into the spell is the warning that failure to find a woman will result in the Prince/Beast being “doomed” to remain in a cursed/queer body for eternity. When the curse begins, the castle becomes a site where time moves at a non-linear rate—exactly the same as other worlds in “portal-quest” fantasies such as Neverland, Wonderland, and Narnia.

The Home/Ordinary World

After the prologue introducing spatiotemporality and the importance of the rose, as well as the need for the Prince/Beast to find a woman, the film segues to the woman who the audience assumes will break the spell. Belle's first appearance on screen begins, as with many Disney Princesses, with a song of desire. Within the first few lines of “Belle,” a sense of time is introduced as she discusses her repetitive life: “Little town, it's a quiet village / Every day, like the one before . . . / Every morning just the same / Since the morning that we came / To this poor provincial town.” This song marks the beginning of Belle's developmental journey—growing out of a queer childhood and into heterosexual adulthood—and highlights her frustration with a repetitive life. The language used by Belle is very similar to the language used by the narrator in *Peter Pan* when discussing an eternal repetition of the same story and Rapunzel in *Tangled* when discussing her own life.

⁷⁹ CBS anchorman Dan Rather wrote an article for the *Los Angeles Times* titled “The AIDS Metaphor in ‘Beauty and the Beast,’” in which he prompts the reader to “think of the spell as AIDS, with the same arbitrary and harshly abbreviated limitations on time, and [by doing so] you feel the Beast's loneliness and desperation a little more deeply. He's just a guy trying as hard as he can to find a little meaning—a little love, a little beauty—while he's still got a little life left. (n.p.)” While an important reading, which has been taken up by scholars such as Sean Griffin who notes a, “general acceptance of an AIDS analogy in *Beauty and the Beast*” (138), it is beyond the scope of my argument.

Belle's frustration with being stuck in the town is further seen through a conversation with her father:

Belle: Papa, do you think I'm odd?

Maurice: My daughter? Odd? Where would you get an idea like that?

Belle: Oh, I don't know. It's just I'm not sure I fit in here. There's no one I can really talk to.

Maurice: What about that Gaston? He's a handsome fellow!

Belle: He's handsome all right, and rude and conceited and . . . Oh Papa, he's not for me!

Most notable in the above passage is the repetition of the word "odd," a term also used during the song "Belle."⁸⁰ The term "odd" being used to describe Belle's Otherness in the town, as well as her indifference to and rejection of Gaston's advances, draws upon a historical alignment of the term with lesbians.

The history of the term "odd" in US lesbian life is explored by Lillian Faderman in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*. Faderman notes that throughout much of the 20th century in particular there existed a "general ambivalence" towards "the presence of 'oddities' such as women who called themselves lesbians" (85).⁸¹ Byrne and McQuillan also examine the notion of oddness and queerness, specifically in relation to Belle. They note, "The tragedy of the beautiful and clever girl who does not have an interest in men, her tragedy being all the greater because of it, is precisely how Freud begins his description of a lesbian in 1920. Belle asks her father, 'Do you think I'm odd?' but he, as an asexual, eccentric inventor, is unable to offer reassurance about normality" (142). Though Belle does not explicitly call herself a lesbian in the film, both her questioning of her "oddness" as well as the designation of Belle by the townspeople as being odd, being "very different from the rest," align her closely with Wendy; she is a young woman on the cusp of adulthood and "not-yet-straight" (Stockton 283), who simply needs a journey through the fantastic to realise that a straight life with a heterosexual partner is all she really desires, even if this life is the exact life from which she initially desires an escape.⁸²

⁸⁰ During this song the townspeople note that "it's a pity and a *sin* / that she doesn't quite fit in," and specifically mention "behind that fair façade / I'm afraid she's rather *odd* / very different from the rest of us is Belle."

⁸¹ Faderman does note, however, that "[l]ove between women is no longer as 'odd' . . . as it had been for so long in [the 20th] century" (29).

⁸² A second way of queerly reading the term "odd" is provided by Tison Pugh in a passage quoted above who explains how "[q]ueerness bears a double meaning in studies of children's literature, in that these fictions often depict a world where oddness—which can be understood as asexual queerness—is embraced as a chief narrative value. In other usages *queerness* carries a sexual denotation referring to sexual identities resistant to ideological normativity" (218).

As well as a background to the Beast's curse, the first few scenes of *Beauty and the Beast* establish the motivations and desires of the three main characters and the developmental narratives about to unfold: Belle desires adventure, a life beyond the "small provincial town"; Gaston desires Belle's hand in marriage, for no other reason than because she is "the most beautiful girl in town" and, as Gaston tells his lackey Lefou, he "deserves the best"; and finally, the Beast desires to break the spell and be free from his cursed body.

Character roles and functions in *Beauty and the Beast* are complicated in the first few scenes of the film. Both Belle, through spatiality and temporality (being trapped in a place and time where nothing changes), and Gaston, through language such as "conceited" and "rude," are aligned with the Beast. One explanation for this ambiguity and complexity is provided by Cynthia Erb, who examines the film's title, *Beauty and the Beast*, not only in relation to Belle and the Beast, but also the narcissistic and "beautiful" Gaston and the enchanted Beast.

Erb's second reading of the title is a useful way to unravel the complexities involved with queerness and villainy in the film. Both Gaston (the "beauty") and the Beast (the "beast") have ferocious tempers, and there is, as Erb explains, "a visual parallel between these two male characters, each drawn as a comically 'phallic,' top-heavy figure who rises and swells when he is angered" (63). The parallels and homosocial relationship between the Beast and Gaston means that the queerness of one reinforces the queerness of the other in a circular fashion.

While Gaston has similar qualities to the Beast he also shares a narrative function and fate with his quillainous counterparts. Gaston tries to halt the heterosexual union of the hero (the Beast) and heroine (Belle) only to be killed at the conclusion of the film. Gaston first appears during the opening musical number "Belle," which connects him to the "Beauty" of the film's title, as he boasts both about his attractiveness and how he will win Belle's hand in marriage. During this scene, Gaston is portrayed as a narcissistic, arrogant man who believes that whatever he desires, he should rightfully receive. The following passage from the song illustrates Gaston's feelings of superiority:

Lefou: Wow! You didn't miss a shot Gaston! You're the greatest hunter in the whole world.

Gaston: I know.

Lefou: No beast alive stands a chance against you, ha ha ha! And no girl for that matter.

Gaston: It's true Lefou. And I've got my sights set on that one.

Lefou: Hah! The inventor's daughter?

Gaston: She's the one! The lucky girl I'm going to marry!

Lefou: But she's . . .

Gaston: The most beautiful girl in town.

Lefou: I know but . . .

Gaston: That makes her the best! And don't I deserve the best?

This song establishes Gaston as a hunter both of the beast and of the belle. The phrase “I've got my sights set on that one” adds to the notion that Belle is just a part of the hunt—a trophy to win. “Marrying” is a quillain motive when it's undertaken for power or self-promotion, as I established with Jafar in Chapter One. While Gaston wants to marry Belle for a social gain, the Beast initially wants to marry Belle to break the curse, before eventually falling in love with her.

The Beast undertakes his own journey from queerness to heterosexuality, though his is literally a journey from beast to human. The story of the adult Beast begins when his castle is stumbled upon by Belle's father Maurice, who becomes lost in the woods on a stormy night. The Beast, angered by the intruder, locks Maurice in a dungeon. The Beast's first actions in the film result in the destruction of a straight familial unit: Belle and Maurice are separated as a direct result of the Beast's actions.

When Belle learns her father is missing and finds him locked in the castle, she volunteers to take the place of her father as the Beast's prisoner. During the scenes that follow, the Beast's actions begin to reflect his monstrous appearance—he literally acts like a beast towards Belle. For instance, after learning Belle will not join him for dinner on the first night of her captivity, the Beast loses his temper—something noted by various characters throughout the film as an obstacle to his chances of breaking the spell—and shouts, “If she doesn't eat with me, then she doesn't eat at all.” Belle's selfless act of saving her father marks the end of the beginning of the film. The ordinary world of the village is behind her and the queerness of the Beast's castle comes to life as the film progresses into the queer middle.

Queer Middle/Away

The Beast's Castle is the primary site of queerness in *Beauty and the Beast* and is analogous to Neverland in *Peter Pan*. While there are many similarities between the two, there are also a few notable differences. The main similarities between these two worlds are their function as a spatiotemporal abnormality, their existence as a magical/fantastic site, and their existence as the space in the film most heavily coded queer. Both of these films also

have a liminal space—the “threshold” which is “crossed” in Vogler’s account of the Hero’s Journey. In *Peter Pan* this space is the air on the way to Neverland, and in *Beauty and the Beast* it is the forest separating the village from the Beast’s castle. The significance of this similarity is that Neverland is a place accessible only to children and only with the help of Peter Pan and Tinker Bell. The liminal space in *Peter Pan* cannot be accidentally stumbled upon, so ensures more fully that only children will be able to enter the special queer world and undergo their necessary developmental narrative. Conversely, the Beast’s castle, while unknown to the adult townspeople for most of the film, is a place not only *accessed*, but also *attacked* by them at the conclusion. This violation of the queer space by the heterosexual mob is something I will come back to shortly.

The Beast’s castle is the primary site of queerness in the film, and is aligned with the “away,” “imbalanced,” and “special world” part of the film’s narrative. Contrasting this “special” queer world is the heterosexual space of the town in which Belle resides. Separating these two spaces is the other vital space of the film: the forest Maurice fails to navigate successfully, resulting in his arrival at the Beast’s castle. The forest exists as a liminal space in the film between heterosexuality and queerness, and is shown during four pivotal moments in the film: first, as I mentioned, when Maurice loses his horse Philippe and stumbles upon the Beast’s castle; second when Belle runs away from the castle and is attacked by wolves; third when Belle finds Maurice lying in the snow, almost unconscious; and finally when the mob passes through it towards the film’s conclusion in order to kill the Beast.

The beginning of Belle’s “away” narrative—and the queer middle of the film—is marked by her journey through the forest after she learns of her father’s disappearance. After successfully navigating the forest, she comes upon the Beast’s castle and eventually takes her father’s place as the Beast’s prisoner, opening the proper middle of the film.

It is during the middle of the film that the queerness and fantastic element of the Beast’s castle and the spell are most prominent. Also occurring during this moment of the film are the simultaneous and parallel coming-of-age stories of Belle and the Beast. Both of these characters experience traumatic events leading to their imprisonment in the castle. Here, the film encourages the affective responses of viewers to create a stronger empathy towards the Beast, despite his villainous actions. As Clare Hemmings notes in “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,” affect “is transferred to others and doubles back, increasing its original intensity. Affect can . . . place the individual in a circuit of feeling and response, rather than [in] opposition to others” (552, italics original). The viewer becomes positioned in a circuit where the happiness (or sorrow) towards Belle (or the Beast) passes

through them and is projected onto the other character.



Figure 48: The Beast's anger (left) and contrition (right)

The first time this projection occurs is when Belle begins to understand the ramifications of her actions in becoming the Beast's prisoner. As Belle becomes increasingly distressed at the realisation she will never see her father again, she faces the Beast and weeps as she tells him, "You didn't even let me say goodbye. I'll never see him again. I didn't get to say goodbye." At this moment the Beast lowers his ears and the back of his hair is flattened, a stark contrast to his moment of confrontation with Maurice only moments earlier (Fig. 48). During this scene, the viewer is encouraged to have sympathy for Belle, primarily because she has lost her father and her freedom. Although the Beast's actions have torn a family apart, this image, showing the apparent guilt and contrition of the Beast, further projects the sympathy towards Belle back onto the Beast. This projection occurs as the viewer recognises that the Beast's decision to keep Belle prisoner is not coming from a malicious place, though it is a selfish one—we can empathise with his desire to be freed from the curse that consumes himself, his castle, and his servants. During her captivity Belle is understandably frightened and depressed. The Beast and his enchanted servants are aware of her feelings; however, they also realise that if there will be any chance of her being the woman to break the spell then they need to make her feel welcome.

Although Belle does not yet know it, her captivity in the castle will shortly become the escape she earlier desires. The first moment Belle experiences the enchantment, fantasy, and unpredictability of the castle is during her first night as prisoner, when the Beast's servants treat her to dinner and a show. During her meal, set amongst the musical song "Be Our Guest," Belle momentarily forgets she is captive in the castle.

This song perhaps best represents the "exciting but dangerous" aspect of Nodelman's home-away-home narrative description. Nodelman explains how "a child or childlike

creature, bored by home, wants the excitement of adventure. But since the excitement is dangerous, the child wants the safety of home—which is boring, and so the child wants the excitement of danger—and so on” (201). Belle becomes bored by the monotony of provincial life and desires adventure. When her adventure begins, however, she becomes alone and frightened and wants nothing more than to return home to her father. “Be Our Guest” is the point in the film moving Belle, at least in the eyes of the viewer, from prisoner to guest.

Immediately before the song begins, two of the Beast’s servants, Lumiere and Cogsworth, have a conversation during which Cogsworth expresses his hesitation at providing Belle more than “a glass of water [and] crust of bread.” Lumiere, however, dismisses the idea of letting Belle go hungry:

Lumiere: Cogsworth, I am surprised at you. She is not a prisoner, she’s our guest. We must make her feel welcome here. Right this way, mademoiselle.

Cogsworth: Well keep it down. If the master finds out about this, it’ll be our neck.

Lumiere: Of course, of course. But what is dinner, without a little . . . music?

Although the castle is an exciting space, Lumiere is aware that it can also be unpleasant, an idea reinforced for the audience by Cogsworth’s insistence that if the Beast were to find out they disobeyed orders, their lives would be in danger. Despite this danger, Lumiere is aware that making Belle feel like a guest is his only chance to return to his human form.

As the song begins, Lumiere recognises Belle’s isolation and, in order to do what he can to ensure the spell is broken, attempts to make her feel at home so she will not leave the castle. He sings, “you’re alone, and you’re scared” and attempts to divert her attention to something else, “But the banquet’s all prepared / No one’s gloomy or complaining / While the flatware’s entertaining.” Throughout the song Lumiere continues to welcome Belle to the castle by attempting to help her forget the trauma of being separated from her father. Lumiere’s initial tactic in the song is to distract Belle from the realisation she will no longer return to her home, her father, or her previous life; she will not return to her “straight and narrow path” (Mendlesohn 5). By diverting her attention to the entertainment and excitement of the meal, Lumiere hopes to make her feel comfortable. As well as asking her how anyone could be depressed in a fantastic space, Lumiere and the other servants repeat the phrase “be our guest” over twenty times throughout the song. The repetition of these words begins to lift Belle’s spirits, and by the conclusion of the song she is smiling and clapping along with the performance.

The main function of this song, alongside shifting Belle from prisoner to guest, is to

provide the catalyst for Belle's passage to heterosexual adulthood. Lumiere and the other servants are aware Belle is necessary to break the spell, so by trying to reduce her discomfort with being held hostage, they are directing Belle to the necessary path of heterosexuality. Much like Wendy, as a child, specifically a child within a queer space, Belle is allowed to be entertained with the notion of non-heterosexuality. However, Lumiere knows Belle needs to become happy and feel safe within the castle in order for there to be any chance of her falling in love with the Beast and breaking the spell.

"Be Our Guest" in some ways mirrors the quillain songs I discussed in Chapter Two as it takes place in the special (queer) space with the heroine as spectator. Contrasted to other films such as *The Little Mermaid* ("Poor Unfortunate Souls") and *Tangled* ("Mother Knows Best"), though, in "Be Our Guest" Belle's path towards heterosexual coupledness is not being disrupted, but rather encouraged.

Displaying some signs of childish rebellion, Belle attempts to find the areas of the castle she is explicitly forbidden from entering. After the above dinner, Belle tricks Cogsworth into giving her a tour of the castle, during which time she learns the location of the West Wing, the one area of the castle the Beast explicitly forbids her from entering. As Belle sneaks into this wing, the film's music changes from harmonic to ominous as she walks past furniture and decorations that have been torn from the walls and strewn across the ground. The change in music during this scene is significant because Belle is entering a place within the queer space of the castle containing the symbolic heart of heterosexuality in the film. She enters a room at the end of the hall where she notices the torn portrait of the Beast in his human form—though she is unaware of the identity of the man in the painting—and makes her way to the magical rose sitting in the centre of the room. The Beast stops Belle immediately before she touches the rose, placing the protective dome back over the rose and shouting "I told you never to come here" (Fig. 49). Though the Beast is justifiably angry—the destruction of the rose would result in him forever remaining a beast—his posture contrasts with his earlier approach to confrontation.



Figure 49: The Beast's reaction to Belle almost touching the rose

This moment of confrontation reveals the progress the Beast is making on his own passage to adult (human) heterosexuality. Whereas the Beast earlier shows his anger through the piloerection of his fur, clenching of his fists, and baring of his teeth, in this image he simply squints his eyes at Belle as he attempts to understand what is happening. In this regard, the Beast is aligned with the expectation of a Disney hero—he is performing masculinity in a way opposite to the beginning of the film when the curse is placed upon him and the castle. Despite his new approach, the look of fear in Belle's eyes contrasts with the protective and nurturing position of the Beast's arms around the rose. By this stage in the film the Beast has been repeatedly warned about controlling his anger, and though he is visibly distressed at the presence of Belle in the West Wing, he does not rely on his previous "monstrous" or non-human approach to confrontation.

This scene also represents the beginning of narrative point eight of the Hero's Journey for both Belle and the Beast. The Ordeal, as described by Vogler, occurs "near the middle of the story, [when] the hero enters a central space in the Special World and confronts death or faces his or her greatest fear. Out of the moment of death comes a new life" (n.p.). For Belle, the central space is the West Wing, a site literally containing the life of the castle. Here, she faces her greatest fear, the Beast, and as a result quickly escapes the boundaries of the castle in an attempt to get away from him.

Belle's escape takes her into the forest, but because the forest is a liminal space, as discussed, it is neither part of, nor distinct from, either the ordinary or special world. The forest becomes a second "central space" in the film—not only is it the entryway to the Beast's castle, but it is also where death is confronted on numerous occasions. It is within these woods that the Beast faces his greatest fear—losing Belle and being trapped in his cursed body. While escaping through the woods, Belle faces a second and even more dangerous ordeal than the Beast when she is attacked by a pack of wolves. Belle faces certain

death, and is saved only because the Beast arrives in time to fight off the wolves. Though he saves Belle's life, the Beast is greatly injured during this battle, and falls unconscious to the forest floor.



Figure 50: Belle tending to the Beast's wounds

Both Belle and the Beast face (un)certain death in these woods, but out of the moment of near death comes a new life; this new life is the beginning of the romantic relationship between the pair. Rather than leaving the Beast to die, Belle takes him back to the castle and tends to his wounds (Fig. 50). This image reveals Belle's servitude. Though she is not a prisoner, she falls back to the domestic role of caretaker as the enchanted servants watch from the background. In this moment Belle is balancing the line between romantic interest and servant/prisoner. Nonetheless, the Beast is cursed to remain in the enchanted (queer) space of the castle until he is able to find reciprocated true love. While he *can* leave the boundaries and safety of the castle, there are repercussions. Because the forest is located close to the ordinary world, there are consequences for the queer villain nearing the heterosexual space of the town.

In this section of the film, though she is still technically the Beast's prisoner, Belle begins to feel at home, due in part to the Beast's own actions; rather than treating her like a prisoner, he welcomes her into the castle spends more time with her, even giving her his whole library, an act that wins her heart. In the scenes that follow, the Beast and Belle grow closer together. There exists here, however, a paradox in that Belle escapes into a queer world to avoid a heterosexual romance, but in the end her story gets turned back into a heterosexual romance as she falls in love with the Beast, something that would be impossible in Neverland as I discuss with Peter Pan/Tiger Lily.

The castle provides Belle an escape into fantasy where her daily life is full of mystery (and enchanted furniture, crockery, and housewares at every turn). As the Beast recovers from the wolf attack he spends more time with Belle, and the two ultimately engage in a

musical number, the only one they sing together, “Something There.” This song coincides with narrative point nine of the hero’s journey, the reward, in which “The hero takes possession of the treasure won by facing death. There may be celebration, but there is also danger of losing the treasure again” (n.p.). For Belle, the treasure she gains is the Beast’s library, containing more books than she will ever be able to read, which the Beast gives her immediately before “Something There.” For the Beast, his reward is the love of Belle, which will allow him to break the curse.

In this song Belle and the Beast both have moments of realisation about their feelings for one another. For the Beast, this moment signals a change in his relationship with Belle: “She glanced this way, I thought I saw / And when we touched she didn’t shudder at my paw / No it can’t be, I’ll just ignore / But then she’s never looked at me that way before.” The Beast, along with his servants, are moving ever closer to the reward that accompanies a heterosexual union between him and a woman. However, his realisation is complicated by his recurring fear that nobody could love a monster, so when Belle does not shudder at the touch of his paw, he decides (in an almost childish way) to ignore the feelings, noted by his decision to “just ignore” the signs she was giving him.⁸³

Table 6: Comparison of Belle’s songs

“Belle”	“Something There”
Oooh isn’t this amazing?	New and a bit alarming
It’s my favourite part because you’ll see	Who’d have thought that this could be?
Here’s where she meets Prince Charming	True that he’s no Prince Charming
But she won’t discover that it’s him til chapter three	But there’s something in him that I simply didn’t see

Belle’s verse during “Something There” is perhaps even more important to the narrative because it has a direct connection to her song of desire. Table 6 shows her opening number “Belle” and her verse in “Something There”: Apart from rhyming and sharing similar lyrics and metrical feet, both of these songs contain the exact same melody. In both songs, these lines form the bridge; as such the music accompanying them is different from the rest of the song and is used as a moment of contemplation for Belle. In “Belle,” she sings to a group of sheep while reading her favourite book to them; Prince Charming in this instance is a

⁸³ This idea of ignoring feelings also relates to the experiences of queer people as they begin the process of identification—choosing to ignore “new” and “foreign” feelings. This idea is brought back in *Frozen* with the mantra given to Elsa, “conceal, don’t feel.” I discuss the latter more in Chapter Six.

fictional character in a novel. “Belle,” while initially seeming to tell a fictional story, narratively works to foreshadow her own future relationship with the Beast. By the time “Something There” occurs, Belle has met her own Prince Charming—the Beast—though she has not yet come to this realisation herself. Rather, “Something There” signals Belle’s realisation that the fear and animosity she once held towards the Beast is dissipating, and she is beginning to see him as a possible romantic partner, even if it is “a bit alarming.”

Queer Diversion in the Queer Middle

While Belle and the Beast’s love story is beginning to flourish, a second narrative is unfolding in the town. Gaston sits in his bar, a site that can be read as a secondary queer space in the film. With his ego wounded by Belle’s rejection of his marriage proposal, Gaston, as well as Lefou and the bar patrons, sing a song titled “Gaston.” Erb describes this song as “yet another queer homage, this time to the male chorus number from the musical tradition” (64). The juxtaposition between the verbal and visual aspects of this song reveals not only a queer homage to the male chorus number, but also a queering of Gaston’s character.

This song has a similar narrative function to other quillain songs such as “The World’s Greatest Criminal Mind” (*The Great Mouse Detective*) and “The Elegant Captain Hook” (*Peter Pan*), in that the (male) quillains have found themselves feeling upset, and their sidekicks, through a homosocial, queer performance, are needed to bring them back to their regular state. Throughout “Gaston,” Gaston boasts about embodying all things masculine. He first asks Lefou, “Who does she [Belle] think she is?” then states, “No one says ‘no’ to Gaston!” It is at this moment the song becomes a chorus number as Lefou rallies the patrons of the bar to pay homage to Gaston’s manliness.

Lefou’s admiration of Gaston shines through as he sings, “For there’s no man in town half as manly / Perfect, a pure paragon! / You can ask any Tom, Dick, or Stanley / And they’ll tell you whose team they prefer to be on.” The final sentence of these lyrics act as a signifier of Gaston’s queerness; the admiration of Lefou and the bar patrons illustrates homosexual desire and admiration. The word “team” has connotations of sexuality, specifically the colloquial phrase about “playing for the same team” as a way of referring to same-sex attracted people; Gaston is represented as so desirable that anyone (male or female) would want to date him.

After being serenaded by Lefou, Gaston begins to cheer up and join in the musical number. After he boasts, “As you see I’ve got biceps to spare . . . and every last inch of me’s covered with hair,” Gaston turns his attention to the way he is “especially good at expectorating.” The number continues with Gaston both listing and being reminded of his achievements, before he concludes his performance with “I use antlers in all of my decorating!” As he says these words, he reclines across his seat, extends his leg into the air, and places his arm behind his head (Fig. 51). In this scene, the word “antlers” represents his masculinity, and contrasts the term “decorating,” which represents a traditionally non-masculine activity.

While the lyrics are significant in situating both this song and Gaston’s character as a queer reference point, the visual representation does this positioning most effectively. Lefou initially twirls and spins as he attempts to obtain the attention of Gaston. Once Gaston is roused from his chair, he asserts his dominance and masculinity by beginning a brawl with the patrons, shooting his gun, and expectorating.



Figure 51: Gaston showing off all his antlers

Figure 52: Gaston and LeFou walking arm-in-arm out of Gaston’s bar

Figure 53: Gaston hunting with LeFou

Figure 52 shows the conclusion of the song as Gaston waltzes around the bar with Lefou, before leaving the bar with him, arm in arm. This image is reminiscent of a wedding, with the couple walking down an aisle towards the exit, surrounded by cheering guests.

Gaston's posture is very similar to the opening number in which his chest is out and head held high (Fig. 53), while his left arm is offered to Lefou shows Gaston's pride in walking down the aisle with Lefou. Interestingly, the background of this image is also decorated with the antlers Gaston likes to use so often, and on the wall to the right there is a portrait of Gaston with his gun in an erect position, much like Figure 51; both of these images of masculinity contrast the central image of the two men walking arm in arm.

The Liminal Space: Between Home and Away

As the men in the bar are serenading Gaston, Maurice arrives back in the town and attempts to form a rescue party to save Belle. He enters Gaston's bar pleading for help, only to be called crazy and thrown out in the snow. After being ejected from the bar and still determined to save Belle, Maurice makes his way back into the forest, undertaking his own (hero's) journey. Narratively, Maurice is allowed to enter the liminal space of the forest (twice) as he is on a hero's journey to save Belle.

As I mentioned earlier, the first time Maurice passes through the forest, he stumbles into the Beast's castle begging for shelter and safety. Lumiere sees him enter the castle and whispers to Cogsworth, "he must have lost his way in the woods." This remark suggests Maurice's arrival to the castle is by accident. During this first visit he is not playing the role of the hero, therefore he should not be "cross[ing] the threshold." As a consequence of crossing the liminal space of the forest while not on a hero's journey, Maurice is punished by becoming the Beast's prisoner.

The second time Maurice passes through the forest, however, he *is* on a hero's journey to save Belle from the Beast, so he is allowed passage through the liminal space of the forest. On this second occasion, though, Maurice is severely weakened due to a progressive illness which has occurred throughout the film, and consequently collapses in the middle of the forest, facing certain death (by hypothermia) until Belle saves him at the last minute. When Belle saves her father from the forest, she takes him back to their home in the town. Belle returns to the ordinary world before she completes her developmental narrative—due to the interruption caused by her father's imminent death—so there needs to be a consequence. Shortly after arriving home, Belle and her father are interrupted by Gaston and the townspeople.

Stop! Panic Time!

It is at this moment in the film that the significance of Howard Ashman as the film's lyricist arises, particularly when his life (and death) is examined. Ashman died as a result of AIDS in March 1991, shortly before the release of the film, and *Beauty and the Beast* was dedicated "To our friend Howard, who gave a mermaid her voice and a beast his soul." All of Ashman's films can be seen to be connected, and as Sean Griffin explains

the three animated features that Ashman worked on bear a stamp of reconciliation and acceptance: Ariel [in *The Little Mermaid*] is accepted into the human world, Beauty and the Beast reconcile their differences and Aladdin and Princess Jasmine [*Aladdin*] are able to deconstruct the class boundaries that separate them. In all three, Ashman's vision acknowledges the fears and misdirected anger that both sides feel. (151)

Ashman joined the *Beauty and the Beast* production team and wrote most of the songs, many of which promote the acceptance of difference. Following Ashman's death, his partner was interviewed, and in the interview his partner explained how "gay people will always identify with someone who's on the outside, who is feared and misunderstood. . . . We respond to being perceived as ugly, as a monster. People are afraid of what they don't understand—that's actually in the lyrics of one of the songs" (Griswold 243). Having this fear represented in the lyrics of "The Mob Song" reiterates the Beast's difference. Griswold's reading of the song points to the availability of a "decoding" practice which aligns monstrosity, outsider status, and queerness.

"The Mob Song" occurs just before the climactic battle scene at the Beast's castle after Gaston learns Belle loves the Beast. Jealous and enraged because he cannot win the love of Belle himself, Gaston rallies the townspeople in a mob, complete with torches and pitchforks. This song establishes the Beast as a dangerous creature who acts as a threat to children (and therefore, in Edelman's terms, to heterosexuality as reproductive futurity): "The Beast will make off with your children. He'll come after them in the night . . . We're not safe until he's dead / He'll come stalking us at night / Said to sacrifice our children to his monstrous appetite." The feelings of fear Gaston stirs up throughout the song are reminiscent of those I discussed previously in relation to moral panics and *Peter Pan*.

Erb describes this song as a "lynch mob-type number that functions as the film's most explicit reference to the AIDS panic" (65). Moving one step further, this song once more complicates the film's portrayal of queerness because both the subject and the singer of the song are quillains throughout the film. While the fears represented in the song can be read as

those that have historically been, and still are, associated with people with AIDS, they are also associated with gay men, as Ashman's partner suggests. As the song progresses, the townspeople unwittingly show their own prejudice when they sing, "We don't like what we don't understand / In fact it scares us, and this monster is mysterious at least." Because the townspeople do not understand the Beast and his difference, they are immediately frightened. Meanwhile, Gaston, the film's other queer villain, is leading the way to hunt the Beast. However, because he is both hyper-masculine and courts Belle, he is able to "pass" as heterosexual, so is not seen as a threat to the townspeople or their children.

"The Mob Song" is itself a miniature (*faux*) "hero's journey" for Gaston and the townspeople. The song begins in the ordinary world at Belle and Maurice's home and concludes in the special world of the Beast's castle. The majority of the song, however, takes place in the liminal space of the forest. The forest is presented as a dangerous and ominous place, not only because of the visual depiction as a haunted, desolate space, but because it is the space in which Belle, the Beast, and Maurice almost die. With this image of the forest established, when the townspeople begin their march to the Beast's castle during "The Mob Song," a connection is made between the forest, the Beast, and danger.

As the mob makes its way through the forest, they cut down a massive tree to use later as a battering ram. The mob believe they are on a journey to save their families, so because they appear to be on a hero's journey, this group can pass through the liminal space of the forest until they reach the queer space of the castle. However, one final obstacle stands in their way—the castle doors protecting the fortress. Whereas Belle and Maurice were granted entry to this magical world because they were narratively "true" heroes on a journey, the mob is denied entry. This obstruction can also be read through my earlier discussion of both Belle and Maurice as queer characters in their own ways. Because of their queerness, they are able to enter the castle, but the heterosexual mob have to forcibly enter the space.



Figure 54: Gaston forcing his way into the Beast's castle

When the mob gains entry to the castle it is because the film's other queer character, Gaston, stands at the front of the battering ram. As they begin to ram the door Gaston shouts, "Take whatever booty you can find, but remember the Beast is mine!" (Fig. 54). True to his villainous role, Gaston penetrates the castle walls with the battering ram, physically entering the space and sanctity of the Beast's castle without invitation. This physical action leads to the climactic battle scene in which the mob attacks the enchanted servants and Gaston goes in search for his reward—the Beast. Gaston failed as hunter of the belle, so he is determined to succeed as hunter of the beast.



Figure 55: The Beast upon seeing Gaston (left) and Gaston throwing the Beast through a window (right)

Gaston, truly believing himself to be a hero, finds the Beast sitting alone in the West Wing; once more an ordeal is taking place in the central space of the special world, and once more the Beast is facing certain death. The Beast, forlorn from losing Belle, sees Gaston enter, but does not stir from his sadness (Fig. 55). Though he knows the Beast is not going to attack, Gaston draws his bow and arrow and fires at him. Injured, the Beast screams in pain and Gaston laughs as he throws him through the window (Fig. 55). During this moment in the film, and those that follow, the Beast is no longer positioned as a monster; though he has the body of a Beast, the audience is aware that the *real* (i.e. human, heterosexual) prince is trapped inside the body.

The Beast's actions in response to Gaston's hostility and violence mirror his internal transformation. Gaston continues to fight the Beast, attempting to kill him. At the last moment, right before Gaston uses a gargoyle to hit the Beast, Belle arrives and breaks the Beast from his feeling of hopelessness. The battle continues until the Beast holds Gaston by the throat and dangles him over the edge of the castle (Fig. 56). Gaston, much like Hook (though without the tears), reverts to a childlike helpless state as he cries for his life: "Let me go. Let me go. Please, don't hurt me. I'll do anything. Anything!"



Figure 56: The Beast threatening Gaston's life (left) and showing compassion, letting Gaston live (right)

The Beast, once more showing compassion, releases Gaston and simply utters “get out” (Fig. 56)—much like Pan’s “you’re free to go and never return.” The Beast’s facial expression in this moment starkly contrasts the initial images of him; the Beast closes his jaw, and opens his eyes wider as he realises what he is about to do. Though angry and injured, the Beast offers Gaston a chance for redemption, showing he truly is a Disney Prince. The Beast makes his way back towards Belle, only to be stabbed in the side with a dagger by Gaston right before he reaches her. Having lunged towards the Beast, Gaston discards his chance for redemption and, as with many of his quillain counterparts, falls to his death.

The New Home

Perhaps more than any other film, *Beauty and the Beast* exemplifies narrative point eleven of the Hero’s Journey: The Resurrection. Vogler explains that by this stage in the journey, “[the hero/ine] is purified by a last sacrifice, another moment of death and rebirth, but on a higher and *more complete* level. By the hero’s action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved” (n.p. italics mine). This narrative point begins shortly before the mob enters the castle, when the Beast makes the decision to release Belle so she can save her father’s life. This sacrifice is, for the Beast, the ultimate act of selflessness, kindness, and love. By sacrificing his chance to become human, the Beast exemplifies the qualities he was lacking when the enchantress cursed him ten years earlier. Following the battle with Gaston, the Beast is critically wounded and appears to die moments before the final rose petal falls (Fig. 57). As he dies, Belle confesses her love for him and in the manner of Disney films and true love conquering all, the spell is lifted, magically transforming the Beast back to his human, heterosexual body (Fig. 57).



Figure 57: The Beast's death (left) and rebirth (right)

At this moment, the Beast is reborn on a “higher and *more complete* level.” He is no longer in a cursed, queer body, but rather in a body that will allow him to fulfil the Disney destiny of reproductive coupledness. With the breaking of the spell, the uniting of Belle and the Beast, and the death of Gaston, the binaries existing at the beginning of the film no longer exist: there is no longer the heterosexual hero versus the queer villain; no longer Gaston and the Beast (*Beauty and the Beast*) pining after the love of Belle; and no longer an ordinary world and a special world.

With the breaking of the curse also comes the film's final transition: the return to the ordinary world. This film, as mentioned, perfectly encapsulates Nodelman's “home/away/new home” structure because both Belle *and* the Beast gain a new home at the film's conclusion. Though the Disney princess moving to a new home with her newfound prince is a trope that has occurred since *Snow White* (with the most notable exception to date being *Frozen*), *Beauty and the Beast* plays with this new home structure because the new home is in the *same* geographic location. For the Beast the new home becomes his old one, the one he lived in before the curse. For Belle, however, her new home becomes the home in which she was initially kept prisoner.

This new home is significant because not only does it represent Belle and the Beast's successful passages from queer childhood to heterosexual adulthood, but also the power of heterosexuality in Disney films. Whereas Neverland still exists at the conclusion of *Peter Pan*, with the Lost Boys returning there to continue living their perpetual childhoods, and Ursula's lair will presumably forever exist under the sea, the queer space of the Beast's castle has literally been eliminated from the film as a result of the triumph of heterosexuality.



Figure 58: Belle and the Beast celebrating their reunion

Ultimately, *Beauty and the Beast* contains some parallels to *Peter Pan*, most noticeably the way the Beast's castle functions as a spatiotemporal anomaly in the wider space of the film. Wendy and Belle are able to pass through queer worlds before taking their place on the path to heterosexual adulthood. Though Belle, unlike Wendy, has a more explicit heterosexual trajectory. Belle finds her true love in the Beast/Prince, and the two dance in the same ballroom as they did earlier in the film when their love began to blossom (Fig. 58). This final dance symbolises the return to heterosexuality, and despite the loss of the fantastic, the audience is encouraged to see the removal of this queer world as a positive because it brings together the hero and heroine. As if to echo this sentiment, as Belle and the Beast begin their dance to the song "Tale as Old as Time," Chip, Mrs. Potts' child, asks his mother "Are they going to live happily ever after, mama?" to which she replies "Of course my dear. Of course." The castle, and more specifically the enchanted servants within, facilitate both Belle and the Beast's passages to adulthood. Belle longs for a life beyond the provinces, and by the end of the film and her presumed marriage to the prince, she gains her wish and becomes a princess—entering the very life of heterosexual domesticity she once wanted to avoid.

Section Three

The Outliers

My dissertation has so far examined three ways queerness is embedded into Disney narratives. These three factors—the narratemes working to code Disney films *as* Disney films; the songs of desire and songs of disruption drawing upon a musical tradition to visually and aurally differentiate the heroines from the quillains; and the spatiotemporal components of the film drawing upon notions of the fantastic, providing queer time and spaces in the films in which the villains can thrive—provide nuanced and narratively significant ways of reading the villain-as-queer. The final section of my dissertation explores two films that deviate from this normative narrative: the 2000 film *The Emperor's New Groove* and the most recent Disney Princess film, *Frozen* (2013).

The Emperor's New Groove is the queerest Disney film to date. Alongside an almost complete queer cast of characters, this film parodies Disney's own conventions to the extent that the film no longer *feels* like a Disney film. *The Emperor's New Groove* is a film at the beginning of what Chris Pallant calls the “neo-Disney” period,⁸⁴ a period post-renaissance from 1999-2004, in which films “diverged, both artistically and narratologically, from the style traditionally associated with the Studio” (111).

TENG can be seen as a precursor to *Frozen* in regards to the deployment of queerness, but after the lack of commercial success of the former, Disney pulled back on the overtness of the queerness in the latter. Pallant notes, “The Neo-Disney period also sees the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ binary that proliferates in much of Disney’s earlier animation replaced with characters exhibiting both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ qualities (123). These ambiguous character roles began in the Neo-Disney period, but also carry through with *Frozen*, connecting *TENG* and *Frozen* in additional ways.

The final chapter of my dissertation explores *Frozen*, a film that more successfully (in popular, financial, and commercial terms) deviates from Disney’s rigid conventions. *Frozen* was released in late 2013 and was extremely popular. It won a Golden Globe for Best Animated Picture in January 2014, and an Oscar for Best Animated Feature at the Oscars in 2014—this Oscar win marks the first time a Disney film has won this award since it was

⁸⁴ Also discussed in fan circles as Disney’s “Experimental Era.”

introduced in 2001.⁸⁵ At the same awards ceremony *Frozen* also won Best Original song for “Let It Go.” In a news article from *broadway.com* titled, “Dreams Do Come True!” Ryan Gilbert explains how by early January 2014, two months after its release, Disney had confirmed *Frozen* would become a Broadway musical. Perhaps most impressive is that *Frozen* reached one billion dollars in ticket sales in early March 2014 making it Disney’s most successful animated film ever, and the highest-grossing animated film of all time.

Fans have read, and are continuing to read, this film queerly. Throughout this chapter I draw upon some of these fan responses from social media platforms including Tumblr, Twitter, and YouTube. My own critical examination of this film’s self-reflexive approach to the traditional Disney narrative shows even when a Disney film comments upon and parodies its own romantic/narrative conventions, it ultimately continues to reinforce heteronormativity.

The final two chapters, particularly Chapter Six, are more plot driven than the previous chapters; the reason for this different methodological approach is that *The Emperor’s New Groove* and *Frozen* are different from other Disney films and therefore require a different form of analysis.

⁸⁵ Disney’s partner company, Pixar, however has won this award eight out of the fifteen years: *Finding Nemo* (2003); *The Incredibles* (2004); *Ratatouille* (2007); *WALL-E* (2008); *Up* (2009); *Toy Story 3* (2010); *Brave* (2012); and *Inside Out* (2015). Disney’s only other win as a sole company is *Big Hero 6* (2014).

Chapter Five

Parody, Poison, and Ponchos

The Emperor's New Groove follows Emperor Kuzco as he is deposed by his advisor Yzma in her quest for power. Rather than poisoning him as planned, Yzma accidentally turns him into a llama and orders her sidekick Kronk to get rid of the body. Kronk loses llama-Kuzco, who ends up on a cart and taken to villager Pacha's house. Kuzco and Pacha team up, in a love-hate relationship, and make their way back to the kingdom to restore Kuzco to his human form. Yzma and Kronk set out on their own adventure to locate and kill Kuzco and the four characters end up in Yzma's secret lair where a final battle ensues, restoring Kuzco to his human body and transforming Yzma into a (harmless) kitten.

The Emperor's New Groove (*TENG*) is, arguably, the queerest Disney film released to date. This film, much like *Frozen*, is self-reflexive in relation to Disney's conventions, but unlike *Frozen*, the parody and self-reflexivity in *TENG* is exaggerated to the point of hyperbole. Disney has strayed from its own rigid conventions to produce a film that is almost the antithesis of a genre necessitated on, and defined by, heteronormativity. Pallant explains that *TENG*, "due to its intermittent use of cartoonal discontinuity, is perhaps the most progressive of all the Neo-Disney features" (121). This progressive aspect carries into the representation of queerness throughout the entire film. By examining three aspects of the film working together to destabilise what a Disney film *can* and *should* do, this chapter will demonstrate that Disney can do queerness, but as a result of this exaggerated queerness *TENG* does not feel like a Disney film.

TENG has become somewhat of a cult classic in online Disney fandom, particularly on platforms such as Tumblr. New posts exclaiming love for the movie, or turning specific scenes or moments into memes, are constantly created. *TENG*'s status as one of the more popular films in the fandom is interesting because of its lack of initial commercial success. The film was released in late 2000, and an article by Danny Leigh titled "Llama drama," in February 2001 reveals the film's initial struggles:

Despite a release date of December 17 - with the promise of repeat visits by fractious kids during the school holidays - *The Emperor's New Groove* had, by Christmas day, already bombed. And then it bombed some more. And now, two months later, there is a \$20m shortfall on its \$100m budget, cementing the film's status as the present the American public didn't bother

opening. This has a particular bathos, for the film was in development for six years, during which executives dithered, directors broke down, pop stars fumed, and a work-in-progress lay discarded in the cutting room, leaving observers wondering if Disney had finally lost the plot. (n.p.)

The film “bombed,” then “bombed some more,” yet despite its slow start, spawned a sequel—*The Emperor’s New Groove 2: Kronk’s New Groove* (2005), two seasons of a spin-off show—*The Emperor’s New School* (52 episodes from 2006-2008), and according to website BoxOfficeMojo, has made \$169 million to date. There is something about this film that prevented it from taking off in its initial release, but that has since exploded it to one of the most popular (non-princess) Disney films amongst fans.

My exploration of *TENG* shows what it is about the film that could account for its lack of commercial success, but overwhelming fan reception. While I argue *TENG* is doing something different from other Disney films, the analysis does rely on, and build upon, my analysis of the way villains are coded queer in Disney films through their use of narrative conventions (Ch. 1), music (Ch. 2), space and time (Ch. 3 & 4), and self-reflexivity of their own narrative conventions (explored more in Ch. 6). This chapter brings many of these elements together through an exploration of *The Emperor’s New Groove*. Three aspects of the film I examine in this chapter are the ambiguous character functions, the narrative structure, and the “meta-ness” and genre-fucking (to adapt Kate Bornstein’s term “genderfuck”⁸⁶) of the film. Because of the way the “meta-ness” is so intertwined with the narrative, rather than analysing it in its own section I will address specific instances as they occur in the film.

TENG contains an almost complete queer cast of characters, who, like I will explore with the cast of *Frozen*, have ambiguous character roles. There is the queer hero(ine)-but-also-quillain Kuzco, his heterosexual hero/homosocial man-love Pacha, their nemesis the quillainous Yzma, and her campy henchman Kronk. Three of the four primary characters of the film all slightly conform to, but also subvert and parody, these roles as they appear in the normative Disney narrative.⁸⁷ Whereas *Frozen* is self-reflexive in its subversion of character roles and almost has a more nuanced approach—by this, I mean that on the surface they still *feel* like Disney characters—*TENG* draws much more broadly from earlier animated characters, particularly the slapstick humour popularised in/by *The Looney Tunes* characters.

The key character in *TENG* is Kuzco, a royal orphan spoiled from birth, whom the film is focalised through. I say Kuzco is the queer hero(ine)-but-also-quillain because Kuzco

⁸⁶ Bornstein describes “genderfuck[ing]” as “the intentional crossing, mixing, and blending of gender-specific signals all at once” (*Workbook* 19). Adapted, this term can be applied to the ways *TENG* intentionally crosses, mixes, and blends (Disney) genre specific signals all at once.

⁸⁷ Kronk, more than any character, conforms to his character role, so I will not discuss him in detail.

fills the role of quillain (in a similar manner to Elsa [*Frozen*] and the Beast [*Beauty and the Beast*]), but he also fills the narrative function of heroine (in a way I expand upon in the next chapter).⁸⁸ Kuzco is also referred to as a Disney Princess in the Disney fandom.⁸⁹ Kuzco is a heroine because he repeatedly needs to be saved by the film's hero Pacha; he is the hero because he saves Pacha's life at the conclusion of the film, at the risk of his own life; and he is the quillain because he wants to destroy Pacha's village so he can have his own summer home.

The first image the audience receives of Kuzco is of him in llama's body during the film's prologue. This prologue begins with the words "long ago, somewhere deep in a jungle" on a black screen, before revealing a lone llama sleeping in a dark jungle. A sudden flash of lightning frightens the llama awake, just as rain begins to pour from the sky. As the llama wakes up, a voiceover begins explaining what is occurring:

Will you take a look at that. Pretty pathetic, huh. Well you'll never believe this, but that llama you're looking at was once a human being. And not just any human being, that guy was an emperor. A rich powerful ball of charisma. Oh yeah. This is his story . . . well, actually, my story. That's right, I'm that llama. The name is Kuzco. Emperor Kuzco. I was the world's nicest guy and they ruined my life for no reason. Oh, is that hard to believe? Look I tell you what. You go back away, you know, before I was a llama, and this will all make sense.

During Kuzco's build-up to the film's events, the audience is faced with, as will become quickly apparent, an unreliable narrator. Kuzco's soliloquy-esque discussion parodies the fairy tale notion of "once upon a time." In particular, this introduction connects to *Beauty and the Beast*; as I note in Chapter Four, the monologue of *Beauty and the Beast* "discuss[es] a heartless prince." The prologue to *Beauty and the Beast* explains the actions that lead to the Beast's imprisonment in a cursed body; similarly, Kuzco's narration and guidance takes the audience back to the events leading to his imprisonment in a beast's body. In Disney conventions, the opening voice over would usually be by an omniscient narrator, as in the case of *Beauty and the Beast*, but in this film it is first person *and* unreliable.

Scholars have picked up on the connection between *TENG* and *Beauty and the Beast*. For example, Davis notes how "[i]n a thematic construction which has much in common with

⁸⁸ As I explain in more detail in the Chapter Six "I acknowledge that in most Disney films, and in my own writing on these characters thus far, heroine and hero have been gendered terms referring to female and male characters respectively." "Heroine" is a narrative function in which the character requires saving from the quillain by the male "hero."

⁸⁹ For instance, Tumblr user smoresmordre notes in the tags of one of their posts, "kuzco is my favorite disney princess."

Beauty and the Beast before it and *The Princess and the Frog* which would follow it, *The Emperor's New Groove* is a literalization of the symbolic 'beastliness' of the selfish, spoiled man of power who must be brought low – lower than even the lowliest humans" (*Handsome Heroes* 178-79). This connection is one of the intratextual references in the film and in this case works to cast some ambiguity on Kuzco's characterisation. His voiceover informs the audience that an unnamed "they" "ruined his life for no reason" but the connection to the Beast invites some suspicion as to the accuracy of this statement.

Following the ambiguity of the opening soliloquy, the film shifts to the beginning of Kuzco's tale, using imagery previously seen in Disney films to code the villains queer. After showing Kuzco as an infant, narrator-Kuzco informs an unspecified editor they have "gone back too far," and the narrative shifts to pre-llama adult Kuzco as he gets dressed for the day—much like Ursula prepares for "Poor Unfortunate Souls." This preparation, right before a musical number, once more contributes to the ambiguity of Kuzco's characterisation; this act raises the question of whether the musical song about to occur is his song of desire (as heroine), or his song of disruption (as quillain). As Kuzco begins to move, music begins to play non-diegetically in the background. This moment represents one of the first ways the film play with metaness, by blending and blurring different diegetic levels:

There are despots and dictators
 Political manipulators
 There are bluebloods with the intellect of fleas
 There are kings and petty tyrants
 Who are so lacking in refinements
 They'd be better suited swinging from the trees
 He was born and raised to rule
 No one has ever been this cool
 In a thousand years of aristocracy
 An enigma and a mystery
 In Meso-American history
 The quintessence of perfection that is he

This theme song begins off-screen and is non-diegetic as Kuzco goes about his day running the kingdom. He cuts a ribbon, "kisses" babies with a stamp, and christens a ship before it sets sail, all the while looking bored (Fig. 59). The lyrics in this off-screen narration mimic the unreliable narration provided by Kuzco himself during the film's prologue, and which continues immediately following this musical introduction.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Pallant notes, "The self-reflexivity of this admission [of the 'theme song guy'] is further consolidated by the 'theme song guy' bearing a resemblance to Tom Jones – the song's real-life singer. It is this self-reflexivity and foregrounding of the song's construction, which . . . limits the performance and establishes boundaries for the



Figure 59: Kuzco fulfilling his duties as Emperor

As the music continues to play in the background without any words, character-Kuzco relaxes on his throne as narrator-Kuzco provides more information about who he is. The image switches between human-Kuzco and llama-Kuzco (Fig. 60) as non-diegetic (and unseen) narrator-Kuzco notes,

Narrator Kuzco: (Shows human) Okay, this is the real me. (Shows llama) Not this. (Shows human) This! (Shows llama) Not this. (Shows human) Winner. (Shows llama) Loser! (Shows human) Okay, see this palace? Everyone in it is at my command. Check this out.

Human Kuzco: Butler! (Butler arrives with napkin) Chef! (Chef arrives with feast) Theme song guy! (Theme song guy bursts from cake and continues singing).

Because of the alternation between narrator-Kuzco, human-Kuzco, and llama-Kuzco, the relationship between them is expressed to the viewers; in this moment it is made explicit that human-Kuzco, llama-Kuzco, and narrator-Kuzco are all the same person. As a result, the reliability of a narrator who is also the protagonist becomes questioned because viewers are placed in a position (partly by narrator-Kuzco) where they are encouraged to believe the events being told by the narrator. As the story progresses it becomes apparent that he has a very distorted view of his own story.

The above song, while not one performed *by* Kuzco, but rather *for* him, functions similarly to other quillain songs in that it disrupts the narrative, and viewing process, as narrator-Kuzco informs the audience to whom we should be paying attention. After the song's conclusion, narrator-Kuzco continues his monologue, directly asking the audience a rhetorical question: "Anyway, still wondering about that llama in the opening? Well, let me show you the people responsible for ruining my life."

song and dance" (121).



Figure 60: Kuzco as human (left) and llama (right)

Kuzco then introduces Yzma, a female quillain significant in the Disney canon because she “is the first female villain to oppose a main character who is male” (Davis *Good Girls* 215). Yzma’s introduction to the film occurs at the same time as Kronk’s (Fig. 61) and is provided through a voiceover by narrator-Kuzco:

Ok gang, check out this piece of work. This is Yzma, the Emperor’s Advisor. Living proof that dinosaurs once roamed the Earth. And let’s not forget Yzma’s right-hand man. Every decade or so she gets a new one. This year’s model is called Kronk. Now, lately, Yzma’s gotten this bad habit of trying to run the country behind my back, and I’m thinkin’, that’s gotta stop.

Unlike other Disney films, Yzma (as quillain) is introduced within the “safety” of the palace walls, because in this film the palace is *not* a site of heterosexuality. Whereas Maleficent forces herself into the sanctity of the palace, Yzma is narratively welcomed into this space because of the way the film codes the palace as queer, not heterosexual.⁹¹ Yzma’s queerness comes in part from her very real threat to reproductive futurity; her age—“living proof dinosaurs roamed the Earth”—aligns her with the post-menopausal dangerous women Disney establishes as quillains (Ursula, Gothel, Madam Mim, Medusa, and so on). She is a threat to the future because she is incapable of procreation.



Figure 61: Yzma and Kronk’s introductions to the film

⁹¹ Another quillain living inside palace walls is Jafar (*Aladdin*), though he is introduced in the film in the deserts of Agrabah, conforming to the narrateme aligned with the introduction of the quillain.

Kronk's queerness comes in part from his very camp characterisation. In other Disney films, Kronk would likely be aligned with the hero/ine but in this film he is Yzma's "right-hand man." Kronk at first appears to conform to the image of the hegemonic male (Fig. 61); he is tall, tanned, and muscly. As the film progresses, however, it becomes clear he too is a queer character. Kronk, perhaps more than any other character in this film, can be read through Stockton's notion of the queer child discussed throughout Chapter Three.⁹² For instance, as Kuzco is introducing him, Yzma throws him a cookie which he fumbles with before falling down a staircase. His childlike (or pet-like) reaction to receiving a treat, and his ongoing need for reassurance from Yzma (both his mother figure and intergenerational pseudo-partner) contrasts his "masculine" appearance.

One scene best illustrating this tension between his masculine physical appearance and his non-masculine interests is when Kronk and Yzma enter a restaurant looking for Kuzco, who also happens to be in that restaurant with Pacha. Kronk and Yzma sit behind Pacha, and discuss their failed assassination attempt:

Yzma: We've been walking around in circles for who knows how long. That is the last time we take directions from a squirrel. I should have done away with Kuzco myself when I had the chance.

Kronk: Oh, you really gotta stop beating yourself up about that. (Yzma drops her fork) Uh-oh. I'll get you another one there, Yzma. (To Pacha) You using that fork there, pal? (Pacha hands him the fork) Hey, don't I know you?

Pacha: I don't think so.

Kronk: Wrestled you in high school?

Pacha: Don't remember that.

Kronk: Metal shop? I got it! Miss Narca's interpretive dance—two semesters. I was usually in the back because of my weak ankles. Come on, pal. You gotta help me out here.

Pacha: I don't think we've ever met, but I've gotta go. (Gets up and begins walking away towards the kitchen)

Kronk: Don't worry, I'll think of it.

As Kronk tries to work out where he knows Pacha from, his first three guesses contain a "masculine" activity (metal shop), a "feminine" activity (interpretive dance), and an activity coded "masculine," but also queer (wrestling—the queerness of which comes from two males in singlets attempting to pin the other to the ground). These three acts further queer Kronk by blending together markers used to code heterosexuality, queerness, masculinity, and femininity.

⁹² Unlike the pirates in *Peter Pan*, however, Kronk's childlikeness is not something to be feared, but is rather used as a way to make his villainous actions excusable as he is represented more like an innocent or naïve child.

As with the blended character roles, and similarly to *Frozen*, *TENG*'s narrative plays with many of the narratemes that have been discussed in the previous chapters (Table 7). One important point to note about this table is that because the text “genre-fucks” there is a difference in the order of events between story and text, one not present in other Disney films. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan explains:

‘Story’ designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events.

Whereas ‘story’ is a succession of events, ‘text’ is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order . . . and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective (‘focalizer’). (3)

In this chapter *text* refers to the film as a whole, and *story* refers to the events taking place; therefore the narratemes of the story occur in a chronological order, but the narratemes of the text do not.

Table 7: Disney narratemes with their placement in *TENG*

1. The quillain and their motivation is introduced 1b. Yes - Yzma wants power; Kuzco wants a summer home
2. The hero is introduced in his element 2b. No – Kuzco is in the jungle; Pacha is in the kingdom
3. The heroine is introduced in the safety of the space in which she raised 3b. No – No defined heroine, but Kuzco is in the jungle
4. The hero meets the heroine for the first time 4b. Yes - Pacha meets Kuzco, but no love at first sight.
5. An obstacle is introduced to separate the hero and heroine 5b. Not really – an obstacle keeps Kuzco from his desire, but this actually brings the hero and heroine together
6. The hero and heroine become separated (sometimes this occurs multiple times) 6b. Twice – First when Kuzco walks away from Pacha’s home, then when Kuzco ignores Pacha’s warnings about Yzma at Mudka’s.
7. Initial battle/confrontation between hero/ine and quillain in which quillain wins 7b. Yes - Kuzco becomes a llama. But he wasn’t really aware of the battle.
8. Final conflict/battle between hero/ine and quillain in which quillain defeated 8b. Yzma becomes a kitten
9. Hero and heroine reunited 9b. This occurs in the middle of the film.
10. Heterosexual happiness returns 10b. Kuzco gets his happy ending.

One other way the text plays with the idea of “genre-fucking” is through its use of humour as a foundation to develop the story. Davis describes this film as the “silliest and most slapstick of Disney’s animated features” (*Good Girls* 216), and I suggest this silliness and humour is often used within the film to undercut the seriousness of many moments, transforming possible moments of drama into instant comedy; it is this transformation that functions in part to “genre-fuck” the film, differentiating it from other Disney films.

By alternating continuously between seriousness and comedy, *TENG* almost reads as a parody of the Disney genre; it does not take itself too seriously, so this film challenges what it means to be a Disney film. Discussing the politics of parody in “Taking Out the Trash: Camp and the Politics of Parody,” Chuck Kleinhaus notes, “Rather than ‘talking down’ to the audience, makers of self-aware kitsch are ‘talking across’ to that audience. The implicit assumption is: We all know this is fun, just a good piece of entertainment” (185). This “talking across” is exactly what is happening in *TENG*: the film subverts many of the expectations of both Disney (and wider animation traditions), and in the process acknowledges the way it parodies the very tradition of which it is a part.

Most Disney films have a fairly linear chronological progression from once upon a time to happily ever after, with a queer disruption occurring somewhere in between, or as I referred to it in Chapter Three, a “unidirectional, developmental narrative.” However, the narrative of *TENG* begins during this “somewhere in between” before rewinding to once upon a time (“a long time ago”), and eventually following the generic linear path. This irregular linearity, combined with the way the text’s narratemes do not occur in a chronological order (with some missing altogether), can be explained by the fact the film does not really contain a queer middle. Rather, the entire film *is* the queer middle. As Roof states, queerness “is permitted as narratively useful, necessary to stir up the middle” (39). In regards to *TENG*, I question whether queerness is actually narratively useful; rather, I think it is perhaps more a case that a film *not* requiring “the saving force of heterosexual attraction” (Roof xix), needs to be understood differently.

When examining the opening scene/prologue in relation to the film’s narratemes, further support can be drawn for my suggestion the entire film *is* a queer middle. While the film *appears* to begin with narrateme three (the heroine introduced in her own domain), Kuzco’s introduction is in fact associated with narrateme six (the hero and heroine separated). Because of the way the film/text begins in the middle of his story, we need to examine the narrateme associated with the events in his story. In this regard, the text begins in the middle of the story.

The film then appears to conform to the unfolding of narratemes/narrative events as it introduces the film's hero. Narrator-Kuzco introduces Pacha, the peasant whose village he plans to bulldoze to build a summer home known as "Kuzcotopia." Pacha makes his way into palace, helping another peasant who was thrown out the window by Kuzco earlier. Disney once more bends its traditions here by introducing Pacha (as hero) in a space that is not his own. Following Pacha's kind actions, narrator-Kuzco informs the audience, "This guy's trouble. But as bad as he is, he is nothing compared to what's coming up next." The film then cuts to the throne room with Yzma sitting on Kuzco's throne looking menacing, and her campy sidekick Kronk to the side looking proud (Fig. 61).

The final narrateme to occur during the beginning of the film is the hero meeting the heroine. As I have mentioned, this film contains no heroine (as a gendered term), but it does as a narrative function. Rather, the meeting of the hero (Pacha) and not-heroine-almost quillain-but-not-hero (Kuzco) occurs in a short scene as Kuzco tells Pacha that his village will be destroyed to make way for Kuzcotopia. Because of Kuzco's ambiguous character functions, this scene does not initially appear to conform to his status as heroine. However, Kuzco acts as heroine in this scene because he is the object of the quillain's (Yzma's) murderous desires, and because he is later rescued by Pacha (fulfilling the role of heroine to Pacha's hero). As a result of this immediate ambiguity, the film resists the narratemes that form the basis of every other Disney narrative, and in doing so disrupts the normative Disney narrative by leaving many character functions ambiguous.

TENG does not really comply with many of the narratemes, so the remainder of this analysis—the "middle" and "end" according to the remaining narratemes—will leave some of the plot undiscussed. I have the words "middle" and "end" in quotation marks because as has been explored briefly, the film does not contain the clearly divided "beginning-middle-end" narrative found in most other Disney films. The "middle" section⁹³ of the film begins in Yzma's "secret" lab, where she and Kronk devise a plan to eliminate Kuzco:

I'll turn him into a flea. A harmless little flea. And then I'll put that flea in a box, and I'll put that box inside another box, and then I'll mail that box to myself, and when it arrives—ahahahaha—I'll smash it with a hammer! It's brilliant, brilliant, brilliant, I tell you! Genius, I say! (Knocks a potion onto a potted plant, which then dies) Or, to save on postage, I'll just poison him with this!

This scene functions as a precursor to narratemes five and seven—the introduction of an

⁹³ For the following discussion, "middle" and "end" refer to the portion of the film that exists for the final two thirds of the audience's viewing time rather than the narrative position of narratemes, unless otherwise specified.

obstacle and an initial battle between the hero/ine and the quillain in which the quillain wins. Unlike many other films, the audience of this film is privy from the outset as to *how* the quillain plans on destroying her foe. To carry out their plan, Yzma and Kronk prepare a dinner as a means to get Kuzco in their presence to poison him. Kronk pours the poison in a wine goblet, keeping it separated from the other two. Upon realising his spinach puffs are burning, Kronk runs to the off-screen kitchen. When he returns he forgets which goblet contains the poison so proceeds to mix the three together. He warns Yzma not to drink hers and proceeds to discard his own. Kuzco consumes his beverage, falls unconscious on the table, and shortly after sits upright while slowly transforming into a llama.⁹⁴

Queerness in this film is a cause of conflict (between Kuzco and Yzma), but also a result of it (Kuzco is transformed into a llama, providing him with a queer body analogous to the Beast's in *Beauty and the Beast*). In this initial battle between (perceived) heroine and quillain, the odds are stacked heavily in Yzma's favour⁹⁵; Kuzco is unaware there is a battle, so the ambush does not allow him a chance to fight back. While this transformation does act as an obstacle, it is not so much an obstacle separating the hero and heroine as it is an obstacle keeping Kuzco away from his throne and plan to destroy Pacha's village; the film's ambiguity comes into play once more here as this scene does function to prevent Kuzco (as heroine) from fulfilling his desire. As opposed to keeping Ariel from winning Eric, or Rapunzel from seeing the floating lanterns, Yzma's disruption has the benefit of keeping Kuzco (as quillain) from fulfilling his desire.

When Yzma realises Kuzco is still alive, she has Kronk knock him out and dispose of the body. Unfortunately for her, Kronk, true to his character—his character being an inept villain sidekick—loses Kuzco after a series of mishaps. Meanwhile, after learning that Kuzco plans on destroying his village, Pacha makes his way back home, unknowingly transporting unconscious llama-Kuzco. Pacha opens a bundle on his cart and finds a talking llama. A conversation ensues in which Kuzco tries to order Pacha to take him back to Yzma's "secret" lab so he can be turned back to a human. Pacha refuses and Kuzco decides to go back alone, despite Pacha's warnings about the dangers of the jungle.

Kuzco leaves Pacha behind and makes his way through the jungle. After turning down the kindness of a squirrel (who offers him a nut to eat), Kuzco falls off a cliff and finds himself face-to-face with a pack of sleeping jaguars. His arrogance once more gets in the

⁹⁴ This transformation to llama is reminiscent of Pinocchio's (*Pinocchio*) transformation into a donkey.

⁹⁵ This battle is similar to the initial battles that occur in *Snow White* (Snow is also unaware of the battle and a poison/potion knocks her out) and *Sleeping Beauty* (Aurora pricks her finger on the spindle). It is interesting here that Kuzco is aligned with two of the classic princesses in the way the initial battle unfolds.

way, and after waking the jaguars, he finds himself being chased through the jungle. He reaches a cliff and balances precariously on the edge. The scene that follows is another use of intratextuality⁹⁶ in the film, and draws upon *Tarzan* as source of parody.

Kuzco's precarious position on the cliff's edge is one of the climactic moments of suspense to occur in the middle of the film. In this film, it is not the "saving force of heterosexual attraction" (Roof xix) resulting in resolution to narrative tensions, but simply a heterosexual, who quite literally becomes a saving force. Kuzco is pushed ever closer to the edge of a cliff with a pack of jaguars surrounding him. The music during this time contains low sustained notes, adding a level of suspense and tension to the scene. As Pacha swings from a vine towards him—he is, in this moment, King of the Jungle—the music becomes *Indiana Jones*-esque, music that mirrors the action and adventure qualities of the heroic act. As Pacha swings by to save the day, he heroically exclaims, "Don't worry, Your Highness. I got ya. You're safe now!"

Pacha, however, is not Tarzan. Rather Pacha is *TENG's imitation* of Tarzan, and as a result he cannot pull off the heroic act in the same manner as Tarzan. Instead of swinging Kuzco to safety after heroically stating that he is "safe now," Pacha and Kuzco slam into a horizontal tree branch with the vines wrapped around their bodies. Kuzco may be safe from the jaguars, but his life is still in danger. At this moment the comedy comes into play as Kuzco replies in his typical sassy fashion: "Maybe I'm just new to this whole rescuing thing, but this, to me, might be considered kinda of a step backwards, wouldn't you say?"

The seriousness of the film is once more undercut and the two, tied to the tree, fall into the water before careening off a waterfall. After dragging Kuzco's unconscious body from the water, Pacha begins to administer CPR. Kuzco wakes up right as Pacha's lips reach his own, and the two begin to violently cough and spit, in a "no homo"⁹⁷ moment. Helaine Silverman also explores this scene in her article "Groovin' to ancient Peru: A critical analysis of Disney's *The Emperor's New Groove*." She notes,

Disney [cannot] resist expressing an undercurrent of homophobia. The scene where Pacha gives Kuzco-cum-llama mouth-to-mouth resuscitation can be read on two levels: Pacha's dismay at the llama mouth, replete with flapped out tongue ('Oh gross!' moaned children in the audience when I saw the movie), and the mutual distress of Pacha and Kuzco-as-cognizant male-despite-llama-appearance at the same sex intimacy. (314)

⁹⁶ I deploy the prefix "intra" to refer to those films within the Disney canon.

⁹⁷ Current slang used (predominantly) by straight males when they show any form of affection towards another male. Its use is to cement their heterosexuality while performing an act that may deviate from hegemonic masculinity, such as complementing another's clothes, hair, etc.

This scene and the over the top reaction of both Kuzco and Pacha is important in the film because it is a disavowal of the homoeroticism coded by Kuzco and Pacha being the central pairing. Despite the film being over the top in its sheer quantity of queerness, this one moment is an example of how, even when at their most queer, Disney still cannot “resist an undercurrent of homophobia.”

Following their traumatic near male-on-male kiss, Kuzco and Pacha reconcile their differences and head towards the palace, stopping by Mudka’s Meat Hut on the way for lunch. Due to the “no llamas” sign hanging on the door, Kuzco is dressed in drag⁹⁸ (doubly—both as a human, and as a woman) and the two inform their waitress that they are on their honeymoon. This scene of cross-dressing is also interesting as it is a moment of heightened queerness following the near same-sex kiss. When only minutes earlier they were repulsed at the thought of intimacy, they now gladly share the news of their “marriage” with their waitress, who simply says “bless you for coming out in public,” with her word choice of “coming out” further implicating Kuzco as queer.

This act also moves beyond Disney traditions into the broader comic traditions I mention earlier in the chapter. As Richard D. Reitsma notes, “The original [*Emperor’s*] film played with transvestism in much the way Bugs Bunny did in Loony Toons Cartoons, in which a ‘male’ animal character dresses in drag to pass (or not) as a woman” (133). The serious suggestion that the two *could* potentially be a couple needs to be undercut, and the film does this by drawing upon previous codes of an anthropomorphised male animal badly passing as a female human without the other characters appearing to recognise the act as such.

It is in this restaurant that Pacha overhears Yzma and Kronk discussing plans to kill Kuzco, and he immediately tries to get Kuzco’s attention so the two can flee. After disclosing what he hears to Kuzco, Pacha is shut down while being told, “You don’t want to take me back to the palace. You want to keep me stranded out here forever.” Kuzco, after abandoning Pacha, hears Yzma say “Kuzco must be eliminated. The empire will finally be rid of that useless slug” and is left by himself in the jungle. This moment is the second occurrence of narrateme six (separation of hero and heroine), and pushes the narrative towards the “end” portion of the film.

The beginning of the end opens where the film begins, with a lone llama sleeping in a dark jungle. A sudden flash of lightning frightens him awake, just as rain begins to pour from

⁹⁸ This act is another use of parody in the film. As Kleinhans explains, drag is a “form of gender parody” (189).

the sky:

Narrator-Kuzco: So this is where you came in. See, just like I said, I'm the victim here. I didn't do anything, and they ruined my life and took everything I had.

Kuzco: Hey, give it a rest up there, will you?

Narrator-Kuzco: What? I'm just telling them what happened.

Kuzco: Who you kidding, pal? They saw the whole thing, they know what happened.

Narrator-Kuzco: Well, yeah, but . . .

Kuzco: Just leave me alone.

This discussion brings the audience into alignment with the film's "backstory"; metalepsis brings the viewers back to the same location. Kuzco's despondence in this scene invites the viewer to feel sympathy for him, sympathy that was lacking due to his arrogance in the film's beginning. The creation of sympathy arises from narrator-Kuzco's use of monosyllabic words "well, yeah, but." Narrator-Kuzco cannot argue back, and thus implicitly concedes the argument to llama-Kuzco. It is at this point in the film that the audience is encouraged to feel hopeful that Kuzco will find his way back to happiness and that the wrongs perpetrated by Yzma are corrected.

The first of the final three narratemes (narrateme nine—the reunion of the hero and heroine) occurs as Kuzco walks aimlessly through the jungle. He comes across a paddock with llamas and makes his way over to them. He is promptly ignored as they walk away from him to eat grass in a different patch. Kuzco hears a voice telling a tale to some llamas and they part to reveal Pacha. At this stage narrateme nine occurs as Pacha and Kuzco finally reconcile their differences and decide to work together to defeat Yzma.

The pair makes their way back to the palace, via Pacha's house, and arrive at Yzma's secret lab. After briefly searching through her potion cabinet for a vial marked "human" they are interrupted by Yzma, who asks, "looking for this?" Yzma orders Kronk to kill Kuzco, but at the last minute insults him by saying, "I never liked your spinach puffs anyway." Offended at this outburst, Kronk cuts the rope holding the chandelier up and it comes crashing down, completely encircling Yzma. Here, narrateme eight—a final conflict between the hero/ine and the quillain—begins to take place between Yzma and Kuzco, and much like the rest of the film, deviates from the normative unfolding of this narrateme in other Disney films.

In an attempt to thwart Kuzco, Yzma pushes a cabinet of potion vials on the ground and calls the guards under the pretence that Pacha and llama-Kuzco are responsible for the Emperor's death. Pacha gathers all the vials he can hold and begins to run away with Kuzco, occasionally giving him a new vial. During this chase scene (from which Yzma is mostly

absent) with the guards who have been turned into various animals, Kuzco is turned into a turtle, parrot, whale, and llama (again).⁹⁹ This battle scene differs from other Disney battles because apart from initiating it, the quillain is mostly absent until the end. This absence is important because it might account for why Yzma is not narratively eliminated at the film's conclusion; perhaps because she is technically not fully involved in the battle, her existence at the end is allowable.

After getting away from the palace guards, Kuzco is left with two vials—one human and one animal. Yzma and Kuzco both pounce on the vials simultaneously and there is a puff of pink smoke indicating a transformation. The smoke begins to clear as an evil cackling can be heard from behind a menacing silhouette. This silhouette and transformation are reminiscent of previous quillain transformations including Maleficent, Jafar, and Ursula. The camera then zooms out quickly to reveal Yzma in the body of a kitten, with Yzma, Kuzco, and Pacha confused (Fig. 62). The seriousness and momentary threat is undercut once more as Yzma fails to open the stopper on the final vial to transform herself into a human. Llama-Kuzco and kitten-Yzma have a physical fight before she falls off the palace towards the ground (as with many of her quillainous counterparts). As Yzma falls towards the ground, Kuzco reaches for the final vial as Pacha begins to lose his grip on the palace wall. Kuzco redeems himself—much like the Beast, Elsa, and other quillain-hero/ines—and sacrifices his final chance to become a human in order to save Pacha's life. Just as he gets hold of Pacha, the vial falls towards the ground.



Figure 62: Yzma's transformation into monster (left) and revelation of her new form (right)

Moments later, rather than hitting the ground Yzma bounces off a trampoline that had accidentally been delivered to the palace and assembled, catching the vial which had fallen moments after her. Kuzco and Pacha reach the safety of a ledge as Yzma flies above them, only to watch her get crushed behind a hidden door Kronk opens. Kuzco regains hold of the

⁹⁹ His parrot appearance is reminiscent of Iago (*Aladdin*) and his whale the whale from *Pinocchio*.

vial and, because he redeems himself, is rewarded with a human body. Though, unlike the Beast's, Kuzco's human body is not coded heterosexual. Straight happiness returns in this film with the union of a family in this film (as with Elsa in *Frozen*).

The film concludes with a shot of Kuzcotopia as the camera pans out to reveal it is a bird bath. Kuzco kicks open the door of a hut wearing his swimmers, followed immediately by Pacha doing the same. The pair run down their respective hills before jumping into a lake. Kuzco exits the lake, receives a poncho from Chicha (Pacha's wife), and joins Pacha's family for a group hug. The film then cuts to the final scene: Kronk leading the Junior Chipmunks (a club like the boy/girl scouts) in squirrel language training. The children translate various phrases from English to chipmunk, with the final word of translation offered by kitten-Yzma.

This film is once more unique in that the quillain is present at the conclusion of the film, and also speaks the penultimate line.¹⁰⁰ It is interesting that although she is present, she remains in the body of a kitten. This film can be compared to the previous (and later) Disney films, but does not quite feel like a Disney film. This disjunction is because there is so much queerness within the film, because the narratemes are subverted or absent, and because the form, content, and style are queered.

Why does it matter that Yzma is present at the film's conclusion? To understand the significance we need to understand Kuzco's ending. Kuzco's story ends as he finds a place amongst a family—for him, happiness comes in the form of a reversion to childhood. Only this time around he has a family from which he is not isolated—contrasting this community is his early life when it is simply a crowd of faceless hands “caring” for him. This same ending and reversion to childhood occurs, as I will discuss in the next chapter, for Elsa—she gets to have the magical childhood that was wiped from her sister's memory. In both of these cases their queerness is allowable only because of this return to childhood.

Yzma, however, is a quillain who does not redeem herself. How does her ending work? It is a combination of a few other endings, only parodied. First, she is imprisoned like others such as Edgar (*The Aristocats*), Madam Medusa (*The Rescuers*), and Cruella De Vil (*101 Dalmatians*). Only her imprisonment is not within the confines of a jail cell or a suitcase, but rather in the body of a cat. She lacks the ability to transform herself back into a human and as a result is imprisoned in a cat's body. Her imprisonment can also be read in terms of becoming Kronk's assumed pet. Second, she is killed. Unlike Maleficent, Gaston, or Sykes (*Oliver and Company*), however, her death is metaphorical. This death is more an

¹⁰⁰ Though, significantly, a queer character speaks the final line: Kronk.

inversion of the Beast's, who loses a non-reproductive queer body and gains a human heterosexually reproductive body. For Yzma, however, both her old and new body are non-reproductive. Yzma, the Emperor's Advisor is dead. Yzma, the Junior Chipmunk is all who remains. Finally, she reverts to childhood. Much like Kuzco and Elsa, Yzma finds herself returned to an infantilised, infantile body of a kitten.

Why does this narrative with intratextual references, a blurring and crossing of diegetic levels, and an almost complete queer cast matter? The answer is that it matters because Disney, in 2000, showed they *could* do something relatively queer. But the queerness did not immediately transfer into a monetary gain, and it also resulted in a Disney film without the Disney feel. Despite these aspects though, fans have taken up the task to keep the discussions about the film continuing. Perhaps in time Disney will release a queer-positive film that does *feel* like Disney.

Chapter Six

Identity, Ice/olation, and Inverted Ideology¹⁰¹

Is *Frozen* a queer-positive Disney film that does *feel* like Disney? As I have shown throughout my dissertation, heterosexual (straight) happiness is represented as the ultimate goal in the Disney universe. The Disney narrative progresses towards this goal in three distinct phases—the beginning, middle, and end—with the middle of the films characterised by entropy caused by the quillain. My final chapter discusses one of Disney’s most recent animated films, *Frozen*, and the ways this film acknowledges and follows the normative conventions established throughout Disney’s history while simultaneously resisting these conventions. *Frozen*, more than any other animated Disney film, contains scenes and dialogue which assume an informed viewer who is aware of the conventions of Disney films (specifically the Disney Princess film) and has viewing expectations based on these conventions. As YouTube channel PBS Idea Channel notes in “Why Were People & Critics So Infatuated with Frozen?” “Frozen is, in essence, something of a fairytale about fairytales, or at the very least a fairytale that critiques fairytales through its use of the usual fairytale tropes.”

In order to understand how *Frozen* achieves this self-reflexivity, this chapter will first explore Elsa and Anna and how the film follows and defies the narrative conventions (narratemes) established in Chapter One, specifically looking at instances in the film that have previously been un(der)represented in Disney films, before examining fans’ critically aware receptions of film. As will be explored throughout this chapter, *Frozen* contains two simultaneous plots—which I refer to as the pseudo-driving plot and the post-revelation plot—representing YouTube PBS Idea Channel’s assertion that the film contains “fairy tale parts in different places.”

The pseudo-driving plot is the plot best conforming to Disney’s norms and viewers’ expectations and has Anna as heroine, Hans as hero, and Elsa as villain. This plot follows the budding relationship between Anna and Hans, with Elsa acting as the obstacle to the heterosexual trajectory of the film by refusing to bless their marriage. Elsa’s actions then set in motion an eternal winter, threatening everyone in the kingdom that she abandons. Elsa’s

¹⁰¹ This chapter does not contain an initial plot summary because the chapter is a detailed narrative analysis and relies on *Frozen*’s plot twist towards the end of the film to demonstrate my argument.

actions put Anna's life in danger, and Anna realises a kiss from Hans is all that will save her. This narrative comes to an abrupt end when Anna reaches Hans and he pulls away right before kissing her, cruelly saying, "Oh Anna, if only there were someone out there who loved you."

The post-revelation plot is the plot the audience is invited to recognise after this moment of revelation, rethinking all the events that have taken place so far. In this latter plot Elsa is revealed to be the heroine—in the Disney sense, the character who needs saving—and Anna is the hero, with Hans fulfilling the role of villain. After Hans villainously leaves Anna to die and goes off in search of Elsa to kill her, Anna begins to race to Kristoff, another heroic character in this narrative, for true love's kiss. In the final moments Anna sees her sister in danger of being killed by Hans and sacrifices her own life, thereby fulfilling the role of hero and saving the day. These two narratives, and the interplay between them, will be explored more fully below.

While it is easy to see how Hans and Elsa both play the roles of hero/ine and villain, Anna's roles of hero *and* heroine requires a brief explanation. Anna plays both hero and heroine because throughout the film and her interactions with Elsa, Hans, and Kristoff, Anna's narrative function changes from the "damsel in distress" (heroine) as she clumsily tries to save her sister, to the "knight in shining armour" (hero) as she sacrifices herself to save her sister. I acknowledge that in most Disney films, and in my own writing on these characters thus far, heroine and hero have been gendered terms referring to female and male characters respectively. In the discussion of Anna, it does need to be understood that these terms are gendered, and I approach my analysis with this understanding along with the question of how this gendering reflects specific character traits and actions.

Anna and Elsa's Character Function/s

Frozen begins with a song sung by Indigenous Saami men as they work to harvest ice, with a young Kristoff providing help (Fig. 63). As with Phillip in *Sleeping Beauty*, the significance of Kristoff is not revealed at this stage, but almost two decades later when he is an adult. Nevertheless as with most Disney heroes he is introduced in his own element (narrateme two):¹⁰² harvesting ice to sell to the kingdom and townspeople. The eye-level camera angle highlights Kristoff's neutrality and innocence, and behind Kristoff and Sven

¹⁰² In this chapter there are some repeat uses of narratemes because of the film's dual plots.

(his reindeer companion) is a coloured background with light shades of pink and purple, which further work to align Kristoff with innocence and to foreshadow his role as a hero.

Following this musical introduction, the film cuts from the wilderness to the kingdom of Arendelle, showing the two heroines as the sun rises. Anna and Elsa sneak through the house finding the right room to build a snowman (narrateme three). During this adventure Elsa plays with her sister, using her magic ability to create snow to transform the castle's ballroom into a winter wonderland. Tragedy strikes when Elsa slips and accidentally strikes Anna's head with a burst of ice. After their parents rush into the room, they take Anna to magical trolls who are able to save her life, but at the cost of her losing all of her memories about magic. As a result of this incident, Elsa becomes isolated, both emotionally and physically, from her sister. As the years pass, witnessed through Anna's song "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" Elsa becomes increasingly scared of her powers.



Figure 63: Kristoff harvesting ice as a child



Figure 64: Elsa's isolation and despair

This song takes place over a period of ten years, with each verse sung by a progressively older Anna, all asking the same question to her isolated sister in an attempt to coax her out of her room: "Do you want to build a snowman?" Throughout the song, and as a result of her powers, Elsa becomes more scared and anxious, culminating in an image of intense fear and anxiety (Fig. 64). The darkness and chaos of this image, combined with the coldness as a result of the ice, conveys Elsa's isolation, despair, and depression. The low camera angle reflects Elsa's feeling of helplessness and also mirrors her feelings of fear.

One of Elsa's roles in the film is heroine, but unlike her role as villain, this role relies on her status as Queen and is only made clear retrospectively, when we understand the significance of subtle indicators in the first section of the film. As a heroine in the Disney universe, Elsa faces an obstacle needing to be overcome with the help of true love. Elsa's primary obstacle is the fear of her powers and learning how to control them. Since the moment in her childhood when Elsa harms Anna, albeit unintentionally, she learns to fear her powers, despite being told by the magical trolls that she "must learn to control it [her magical

powers, because] fear will be [her] enemy.” As a result, a mantra “conceal, don’t feel” is taught to Elsa by her father, and is referred to later in two of the film’s songs: “For the First Time in Forever” and “Let It Go.” However, despite the warning from the trolls, Elsa becomes progressively withdrawn and, following the death of her parents, completely retreats from all contact with others in fear of hurting them. After this time she also wears gloves in an attempt to contain her magical powers.

Following “Do you want to build a snowman?” *Frozen* shifts forward three years to the day of Elsa’s coronation as Queen of Arendelle. After this time shift, Anna is also introduced in the film as a more developed character. As an adult, Anna appears to be a typical Disney Princess—beautiful, clumsy, and in desperate search of her prince. Like other Disney Princesses, Anna has a song of desire, “For the First Time in Forever.” In this song she sings, “And I know it is totally crazy / To dream I’d find romance / But for the first time in forever / At least I’ve got a chance.” Because she is now an adult, because the castle will be full of royal dignitaries, and because there will be a coronation ball, Anna dreams of finding a man. Anna does have a “chance” to find “romance,” so she spends much of the song fantasising how she will first meet her future partner and how he will look. During the song Anna’s body language aligns her with previous Disney Princesses desiring a different life (Fig. 65). The position of Anna’s eyes illustrates her hope of finding her true love, as well as the feeling of joy of being surrounded by company for the first time since the palace closed its doors after the accident with Elsa as a child. At the song’s conclusion, while singing the lines “For the first time in forever / Nothing’s in my way,” Anna clumsily runs into a Hans, a prince riding his horse (narrateme four).



Figure 65: Anna’s song of desire



Figure 66: Hans’ introduction in the film

In keeping with the Disney norm, the meeting and subsequent uniting of hero and heroine occurs after a song of desire. After Anna stumbles into Hans’ horse, she lands in a boat and almost falls into a lake. Hans quickly balances the boat, preventing her inevitable

accident. He introduces himself as “Prince Hans of the Southern Isles,” places his hand in front of his chest, and bows (Fig. 66). The eye-level camera angle and brightly coloured background work together with Hans’ body language to create an image of a typical Disney hero. Hans’ diction and tone throughout this time also exemplifies what it means to be a prince. An awkward, albeit brief, conversation ensues and Hans apologises for the accident, to which Anna responds by informing Hans he is gorgeous. Following this conversation Anna races away in order to get to her sister’s coronation.

As guests begin making their way into the castle, the film introduces the Duke of Weselton (pronounced Wessel-ton, not Weasel-town). Though he has minimal dialogue and does not play a large role throughout the film, his opening conversation and actions during his subsequent appearances allow him to assume a role of (suspected) quillain. As the Duke makes his way into the castle, he exclaims out loud, “Ah, Arendelle, our most mysterious trade partner. Open those gates so I may unlock your secrets and exploit your riches . . . Did I just say that out loud?” The line “unlock your secrets and exploit your riches” is a highly sexualised sentence and one moment in this film when Disney intensifies a quillain convention—the introduction of a quillain’s motivations. This sentence further provides an indication that the Duke is going to perform villainous actions and, as a result, his other appearances in the film are informed by this opening piece of information. The humour in the final words “did I just say that out loud?” is one way the film aligns a specific character with a specific role, only to question that role later in the film.¹⁰³ The Duke of Weselton is a red herring who does commit some villainous actions, but who is not one of the film’s primary antagonists.

During the ball following the coronation, Anna and Hans once more (literally) run into each other, with Hans catching Anna (again) before she falls. The pair leaves the ball and sings a duet, “Love is an Open Door,” during which time they fall in love. Throughout this song the two characters fulfil the roles of Disney Prince and Disney Princess as they serenade one another.¹⁰⁴ The song concludes with Hans asking, “Can I say something crazy. Will you marry me?” and Anna replying, “Can I say something crazier. Yes!” This song is the moment when Hans is established as the film’s hero and Anna as the heroine. The two are perfectly suited for one another, and “crazily” get engaged after knowing each other for less than a day. Their engagement is another instance where the film both establishes and critiques Disney

¹⁰³ The other main instance of a verbal cue is the use of the words “what, what?” These words are spoken by various characters five times in the course of the film, often after they have said something that defies Disney conventions.

¹⁰⁴ Much like Aladdin and Jasmine, in their duet, “A Whole New World.”

norms related to love, which I discuss in more detail shortly.

Frozen challenges the normative Disney narrative through the use of the word “crazy” during the film’s songs. The first time this word is used is during Anna’s song of desire, “For the First Time in Forever.” During this song Anna sings about what she imagines life will be like once the castle gates are opened for her sister’s coronation. As I mention above, she sings, “For the first time in forever / I could be noticed by someone / And I know it is totally crazy / To dream I’d find romance / But for the first time in forever / At least I’ve got a chance!” Throughout this verse, Anna expresses the desires mirrored in other Disney Princesses—the desire to “find romance.” What differentiates Anna from the line of princesses before her, however, is her awareness that this desire is “totally crazy.”

Anna’s self-recognition of what appears crazy is one way *Frozen* is self-referential in relation to the normative Disney conventions. Although she does conform to the expectations Disney has established over the history of its animated film production, specifically the Disney Princess genre, she simultaneously defies them through her self-awareness. The other time that the word “crazy” is repeated is during the song leading to her engagement, “Love is an Open Door.” This song makes reference to “crazy” on three separate occasions—it both opens and closes with dialogue containing the word, and is used once in the middle:

Anna: Ok, can I just say something crazy?

Hans: I love crazy

Hans: I mean it’s crazy.

Anna: What?

Hans: We finish each other’s—

Anna: Sandwiches

Hans: That’s what I was gonna say!

Hans: Can I say something crazy...? Will you marry me?

Anna: Can I just say something even crazier? Yes.

This song is framed by parallel rhetorical questions posed by Anna and Hans in which they ask one another whether they can “say something crazy.” When Anna asks this question it leads to the words, “All my life has been a series of doors in my face / Until suddenly I bumped into you.”¹⁰⁵ When Hans asks his crazy question, it is a marriage proposal. This acknowledgement by Hans, and then again by Anna when she responds with “something

¹⁰⁵ For Anna, love is not in fact an open door with Hans. Rather, it is a closed door with Anna locked inside; her life is still a “series of doors in her face.” This alternative meaning, however, is one that is not read until after the revelation at the conclusion.

crazier” is another instance when the film appears to follow the normative conventions while simultaneously calling them into question. The very act of referring to a marriage proposal as “crazy” recognises it as something that should probably not be occurring after such a short period of time. The final use of crazy in this song is another instance of humour in the film reflecting the fact the two do not really know one another—typically an audience would expect the word “sentences” rather than “sandwiches,” but by using the latter followed by Hans’ response, “that’s what I was gonna say,” the film is once again able to present the pair as being connected and in “love.”

This scene introduces another Disney narrative convention with which *Frozen* plays: the engagement of the heroine and hero after a short courtship. However, rather than simply defying the audience’s expectations of what *should* occur, *Frozen* acknowledges and refers back to this convention throughout the film. The first instance of this self-acknowledgement is during a conversation between Elsa, Anna and Hans:

Anna: We would like—
Hans: —your blessing—
Anna: —of—
Anna / Hans: —our marriage!
Elsa: Marriage . . . ?
Anna: Yes!
Elsa: I’m sorry, I’m confused.
. . .
Elsa: You can’t marry a man you just met.
Anna: You can if it’s true love.
Elsa: Anna, what do you know about true love?
Anna: More than you. All you know is how to shut people out.
Elsa: You asked for my blessing, but my answer is no.

While Disney films do not usually contain an overt congratulating of engagements, this scene represents the first time a Disney character actively refuses to congratulate an engagement of other characters, specifically a family member,¹⁰⁶ and shows how *Frozen* cleverly acknowledges and responds to the convention of being able to marry someone you just met—if it is true love. While Anna represents the Disney tradition of marrying someone after a matter of hours, Elsa represents a contemporary audience’s response: that marrying a stranger is foolish, and she shows confusion when learning of her sister’s engagement (Fig. 67). This image echoes Elsa’s verbal admission of confusion: “Marriage? . . . I’m sorry, I’m confused.”

¹⁰⁶ A similar reaction is seen with Jasmine’s father in *Aladdin*, but rather than him actively refusing Jasmine’s marriage to Aladdin, he is insistent Jasmine marry a prince. By the end of the film, however, he comes around and changes the law so Jasmine can choose who she wants to marry.

The combination of a close up and shallow depth of field in this image highlight Elsa’s feelings of confusion. The angle of her eyebrows, her wide eyes, and the positioning of her mouth further emphasise Elsa’s shock at the news of her sister’s engagement.

Figure 68 mirrors the reaction of an audience who knows the Disney conventions and expects an engagement after a very short courtship—usually one musical number together. In this image Anna and Hans look longingly into each other eyes as they plan their wedding, reiterating the perceived strength of their relationship seen earlier when the two finish each other’s sentences: “We would like your blessing of our marriage.” This image also shows Elsa’s back and hands, which contrasts the happiness and excitement of Anna and Hans. During this scene Elsa nervously fidgets with her hands; here Elsa represents an audience that does not understand how two people who just met can become engaged. Her nervous hand movements, combined with her actions and speech in this scene highlight the anxiety that comes with speaking out against a (heterosexual) romantic partnership.



Figure 67: Elsa’s confusion with Anna’s engagement



Figure 68: Anna and Hans’ happiness

The first time the film suggests Elsa is villainous is when she refuses to bless the marriage of Anna and Hans (narrateme five). Her refusal is the film’s immediate obstacle to heterosexual happiness, and as I mentioned in Chapter One, is the ultimate act of evil in the Disney universe. Following Elsa’s refusal, Anna confronts her, demanding explanations for why she will not bless the marriage, as well as an explanation for her withdrawal as they were growing up. Elsa, unable to control her emotions, tries to escape from the ballroom only to be stopped by Anna, resulting in Elsa projecting ice in the direction of her sister. The Duke of Weselton, seeing this act, declares that Elsa is a monster and attempts to have her detained. Elsa manages to escape from the castle and flees into the safety of the mountains. During her escape, however, she unknowingly and unintentionally causes the kingdom of Arendelle to become covered in ice and snow.

The Duke of Weselton once more calls Elsa a monster when he faces Anna and asks,

“Is there sorcery in you too, are you a monster too?” Anna responds to this accusation with the statement, “No, I’m completely ordinary.” This conversation provides a subtle instance of the ambiguity and fluidity of character roles in this film. The fact Anna calls herself “ordinary” instead of “normal” reveals that she does not see her sister’s powers as “abnormal,” but extraordinary.¹⁰⁷ This scene also represents the moment Elsa leaves the “ordinary” world and flees to the “special” world of the mountains where she makes her own castle.

Letting it All Go

The major shift in Elsa’s portrayal from presumed villain to heroine-in-despair occurs during her song “Let It Go.” This song is the pivotal moment in the film when Elsa accepts her powers for what they are and makes the decision to live her life freely. This song occurs directly following the revelation of Elsa’s powers and her subsequent departure from Arendelle. As Elsa makes her way up the mountainside, she begins to sing a song that can be read as a variation to the song of desire sung by Disney Princesses. I read “Let It Go” as Elsa’s coming out song—as the pivotal moment in the film shifting Elsa from presumed villain to heroine, and the moment in the film most heavily and unambiguously coding her as queer.

I am not alone in my reading of this song as a coming out anthem, or in reading Elsa as queer. Fans have picked up on the inherent queerness of *Frozen*, and pushed for an overt recognition of Elsa’s non-heterosexuality in any subsequent appearances in Disney. In May 2016, Twitter user Alexis Isabel (@lexi4prez) started a hashtag campaign, #GiveElsaAGirlfriend, sparking hundreds of users to tweet and retweet thousands of posts urging Disney to give Elsa a girlfriend in the sequel to *Frozen*. The series of four tweets starting this campaign are: “I hope Disney makes Elsa a lesbian princess imagine how iconic that would be”; “Fav this if @Disney should make Elsa from @FrozenBroadway an iconic lesbian queen 🍷”; “Dear @Disney, #GiveElsaAGirlfriend”; and “Everyone tweet @Disney to #GiveElsaAGirlfriend.” Twitter users such as Kenneth Sergienko (@KenSergienko) joined the hashtag campaign, writing “Given that Frozen was one giant metaphor for the closet, to #GiveElsaAGirlfriend is just logical. More LGBT

¹⁰⁷ The word “ordinary” as opposed to “normal” is also one way Elsa’s queerness can be read. Anna does not see Elsa as a monster or abnormal (terms used by Dyer when describing the language of monstrosity). In this regard, the film does present a more positive image of a queer character.

representation is a great idea.” It is not just everyday fans, but also popular social media personas joining the campaign; for instance genderqueer author and Vine¹⁰⁸ star Jeffrey Marsh (@thejeffreymarsh) joined the campaign, tweeting, “#GiveElsaAGirlfriend because LGBT kids deserve to know that there is nothing wrong with them❤️❤️❤️❤️.”

One key reason, as seen below, that everyone thinks Elsa is gay is because of “Let It Go” specifically. In Linda Holmes’ NPR podcast, “Pop Culture Happy Hour: ‘Frozen’ Princesses and Character Deaths,” Glen Weldon discusses how “Let It Go” can be read as a gay anthem. He notes,

Queen Elsa sang the song ‘Let It Go’—that’s when things changed for me, because that, that song, the song is sung as she exiles herself to the mountain top because she has these magical ice powers that are putting others in danger because she cannot control them—she’s basically an X-Man—and she must go and be by herself and she busts out a song—even if this song were not sung by Idina Menzel, uh this song would be the song in which Queen Elsa comes out as a gay man. Am I reading too much into it? Am I seeing something that’s not there? I don’t know . . . Ok, drag anthem, let’s just admit it.

One of the most noticeable parts of Weldon’s discussion is “Queen Elsa comes out as a gay man.” In this instance, the term “Queen” means royalty, but also has a queer connection with the notion of drag queens. This connection then links Elsa to other Disney female quillains whose appearance and actions are reminiscent of drag queens.

“Let It Go” is the moment in *Frozen* when Disney begins to dismantle what is meant to be the “queer” and the “villain.” Elsa escapes into the mountains because she is perceived as a threat to the safety of Arendelle. When the lyrical and visual qualities of this song are combined with the fact Idina Menzel—famous for playing the wicked (queer) witch Elphaba in *Wicked* on Broadway—voices Elsa, it is apparent how viewers *are* reading this song as a coming out song.¹⁰⁹ This connection is significant because Elphaba’s ballad “Defying

¹⁰⁸ Vine is a social media platform where people make videos that are all six seconds or less.

¹⁰⁹ Other readings across various media platforms include Dorian Lynske, who in his article, “Why Frozen’s Let It Go is more than a Disney hit – it’s an adolescent aperitif,” notes, “Outside the film, Let It Go is also a coming-out anthem for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people: ‘Conceal don’t feel, don’t let them know/ Well now they know!’ The lines ‘It’s funny how some distance/ Makes everything seem small/ And the fears that once controlled me/ Can’t get to me at all’ could almost be from an It Gets Better [a campaign attempting to prevent queer youth suicide] video”; Tumblr user genjustin, saying, “Elsa sings the song that is sure to be an LGBT anthem for years to come”; Shawn Robbins, who in the notes to his YouTube video, “Let it go (Gay pride version),” explains, “All my life, iv [sic] been told who to be, what is right, and what is wrong. Then frozen came out, and the song let it go inspired me to be myself”; and blog post by Valerie Anne, “What gay girls can get out of ‘Frozen,’” in which she explains, “This song, you guys. I came out to my parents in a car on the highway on the way from Boston to New York because I literally could not ‘hold it back anymore.’ As Elsa sings, I ‘couldn’t keep it in; heaven knows I tried.’ If I had known this song, immediately afterward, I would have hung out the window and sang it at the top of my lungs. (Or possibly just performed it for them in

Gravity”¹¹⁰ shifts the play in a new way—and “Let It Go” does something similar.

Glen’s discussion of the gay male investment in Idina Menzel *as* a queer figure then provides a further way of reading Elsa as a queer figure.¹¹¹ As Elsa walks up the mountain she sings, “A kingdom of isolation, and it looks like I’m the Queen.” The word “isolation” is sung as an extended note in this line, emphasising the feeling of loneliness Elsa is experiencing. During this period, a long camera angle is used to emphasise the sole figure of Elsa amidst the mountainous region to which she has escaped (Fig. 69). Elsa’s hands are held in front of her body in a closed posture, highlighting her anxiety at being alone. These first lines sung by Elsa, and the corresponding images on screen, mirror the image of Elsa during the song “Do You Want to Build a Snowman” in which she sits shut in her room, surrounded by ice and appearing anxious.



Figure 69: Elsa’s despair and isolation as she flees Arendelle

lieu of the awkward bumbling confession that really happened.)” All these readings highlight the way that multiple fans across all different media platforms are recognising *and* reading “Let It Go” queerly.

¹¹⁰ Stacy Wolf notes how “The song’s placement at the end of the act reveals how the musical privileges Elphaba’s values: her independence [and] determination” (15). Wolf also explains how Elphaba “possesses magic powers . . . Over and again, the musical stresses how unique she is by using other characters to bracket what she is not. The musical wants the audience to recognize and sympathize with Elphaba” (9). In this way, Elphaba and Elsa are similarly connected.

¹¹¹ Richard Dyer’s “Judy Garland and Gay Men” explores gay male investment in another queer icon, Judy Garland. His analysis can be applied to Menzel: “There is nothing arbitrary about the gay reading of Garland, it is a product of the way homosexuality is socially constructed, without and within the gay subculture itself . . . Looking at, listening to Garland may get us inside how gay men have lived their experience and situation, have *made* sense of them” (194, italics original).

This feeling of anxiety is then repeated in the following line, “the wind is howling like this swirling storm inside / Couldn’t keep it in heaven knows I’ve tried.” The camera zooms in to Elsa’s torso and head, illustrating the feeling of despair she is experiencing (Fig. 69). During these lines, Elsa makes small, constrained movements, with her eyes closed reflecting an image of contemplation. Elsa’s powers have just been revealed to the world, she has been labelled a monster, and she is trying to negotiate the secret she held for almost two decades.

At this stage in the song Elsa’s coming out story begins to rise to the surface. Following the realisation that the storm cannot be held inside anymore, Elsa recalls a mantra spoken to her parents as she was attempting to learn to control her powers as a child: “Don’t let them in, don’t let them see / Be the good girl you always have to be / Conceal, don’t feel, don’t let them know / Well, now they know.” During this verse Elsa’s body movements alternate between uncertainty and defiance: she has both constrained movements and broader movements as she accepts her secret is out. On the words, “well, now they know,” Elsa removes her remaining glove (the other having been pulled off by Anna in the castle) and throws it into the wind (Fig. 70). The words “conceal, don’t feel” are the specific words told to Elsa by her parents as a child, and are very similar to phrases society dictates queer youth follow—do not feel same-sex attraction, and if that fails conceal your true identity.



Figure 70: Elsa releasing her glove to the wind (top) and letting it all go as she creates snow (bottom)

The song then moves into a verse with the repetition of the lines “let it go.” By this point in the song Elsa has begun to accept her Otherness and begins to create snowflakes with her hands (Fig. 70). This act is the first time Elsa is shown willingly and happily using her powers as an adult. The smile on her face and outstretched arms contrast the image of fear and sadness she has when locked inside the castle. The feeling of acceptance is then repeated with the line, “can’t hold it back anymore”; while singing these lines Elsa creates Olaf, a snowman she made with her sister as a child. At the conclusion of this verse Elsa fully embraces her Otherness: “I don’t care / What they’re going to say / Let the storm rage on / The cold never bothered me anyway.” For the first time in her life Elsa accepts she is not who everyone assumes and expects her to be—“ordinary,” without magical powers and heterosexuality—and is able to move forward happily. As she sings that the cold never bothered her, Elsa undoes her coronation cape and releases it into the wind (Fig. 71). By performing this act, Elsa rejects both her life in the kingdom and the expectations of heterosexuality that would have inevitably required her to marry a man.



Figure 71: Elsa releasing her cape into the wind because the cold never bothered her anyway

Elsa begins climbing further up the mountain as she uses her powers to create more snow while singing, “And the fears that once controlled me / Can’t get to me at all / It’s time to see what I can do / To test the limits and break through / No right, no wrong, no rules for me / I’m free!” This verse and a half is one of the most poignant within the song; Elsa realises the time has come to be her own person (“it’s time to see what I can do”), and is ready to move forward with her life and use her powers openly and freely. The feeling of Otherness she has experienced growing up concealing her powers is emphasised through the words, “No right, no wrong.”

Elsa no longer has to worry about being called a monster and Othered because of her magical abilities. She is also free from the language of monstrosity Dyer suggests is often linked to queer individuals and no longer needs to fear being told that who she is is “wrong.”

As Elsa sings the final line, “I’m free,” she creates a frozen staircase over a crevasse. As she steps on the staircase, it turns from splintered and frosted into a polished and elegant passage. Having left her duties as Queen of Arendelle behind, she is finally free to begin her life in the castle she creates moments later.

Elsa reaches the top of the mountain and uses her powers to create her ice castle as she sings the lines, “Here I stand / And here I’ll stay.” Elsa has taken her life into her own hands and begins to build a new home for herself. As I mention earlier, this song is the pivotal moment in the film when Elsa shifts from a perceived villain to a heroine. The film juxtaposes Elsa’s powers in the castle in Arendelle against her creation of her ice castle. During the former she is scared and anxious, and almost injures her sister and guests at her coronation. Although she is scared, the film positions her as the cause of damage and distress. On top of the mountain, however, Elsa reveals the internal struggle she has been experiencing for years, and she becomes a sympathetic character—something that does not occur in any previous villain song.



Figure 72: Elsa discarding the last items from her old life: her tiara (top) and dress (bottom)

As Elsa completes her ice castle, she sings, “I’m never going back / The past is in the past.” These lines mark the moment in the song when Elsa solidifies her desertion of Arendelle and accepts her Otherness. The camera moves into another medium shot of Elsa as she removes her tiara and throws it off into the mountains (Fig. 72). During this time Elsa’s body is poised in a strong position which, when combined with the fierce look of

determination on her face as seen through gritted teeth and wide eyes, illustrates her sense of self-identity.

Now that Elsa accepts she will never return to Arendelle, the final step in erasing her old life is removing her coronation dress. As she sings the lines, “Let it go, let it go / And I’ll rise like the break of dawn / Let it go, let it go / That perfect girl is gone,” Elsa uses her powers to transform her coronation dress into a spectacular ice-gown (Fig. 72). She removes her hair from the tight braid it was in and begins to walk towards the balcony of her new castle. Elsa’s posture during this scene starkly contrasts the closed body language she has at the beginning of the song. Her arms are outstretched as she proudly states, “the perfect girl is gone.” This statement is a final rejection of who society expects her to be. She accepts that her Otherness may make her appear “less than perfect” to others, but she no longer cares.



Figure 73: Elsa’s ice castle (top) and happiness with her new life (bottom)

When Elsa walks out on to the balcony and sings “let the storm rage on,” the camera zooms out to an extreme long shot, emphasising both the grandness of Elsa’s castle, and also the vastness of her isolation (Fig. 73).¹¹² Following this long shot, the film immediately cuts to a close up on Elsa’s face as she defiantly states, “the cold never bothered me anyway” (Fig. 73). In this image, Elsa looks directly into the camera, as though she is speaking to the

¹¹² Elsa’s isolation in a large castle away from the “ordinary world” is similar to the Beast’s isolation in his castle—although the Beast does have company in the form of the enchanted servants.

audience. When reading this song as her coming out song, these final words spoken directly to the audience reinforce her acceptance of her queerness. Elsa's isolation throughout her life is a result of the magical powers with which she is born. These powers are the reason of her forced isolation from her sister and the source of her anxiety and fear. In the mountains she is free to be who she is, and the cold harshness of heteronormativity that exists in the kingdom cannot reach her in the mountains.¹¹³

Elsa was originally written as a villainous character. In the original story, Elsa as villain intentionally causes the eternal winter and is an actual threat to the safety of the kingdom. Gina Luttrell, in "How Disney Nearly Ruined 'Frozen,'" explains how,

Originally, Queen Elsa was intended to be the villain of the story. However, when the character's major song, 'Let it Go,' was played for the producers, they concluded that the song was not only very appealing, but its themes of personal empowerment and self-acceptance were too positive for a villain to express. Thus, the story was rewritten to have Elsa as an isolated innocent who is alarmed upon learning that her powers are inadvertently causing harm and struggles to control her powers with Anna's help. (n.p.)

Directors Jennifer Lee and Chris Buck have acknowledged in several interviews that Elsa was originally the "Snow Queen" and estranged sister of Anna, but that she was less interesting as a one-dimensional villain (Wybrew n.p.; Ivan-Zedeh n.p.). To strengthen both her character and the film they used "Let It Go" as the moment to develop Elsa and provide a sympathetic villain for the first time since *Beauty and the Beast*.

Anna to the Rescue

After Elsa's escape to the mountains, Anna volunteers to go and search for her sister, leaving Hans in charge of Arendelle (narrateme six). During this mission, Anna meets adult Kristoff (narrateme four), who appears imposing and slightly aggressive, in Wandering Oaken's Trading Post & Sauna (Fig. 74). At this stage in the film the eternal winter set off by

¹¹³ The English version of "Let It Go" reveals one interpretation of Elsa as queer. There is one version of this song, however, that is even more explicit in its use of language associating Elsa with queerness. The Japanese version of "Let It Go" reveals more about Elsa's characterisation (Appendix Five). While I will not undertake a close reading of this version of the song, I will address two specific lines: "I'll show you how I truly am / I'll become my true self" and "I'm fine as I am / I'll come to like myself / I'm fine as I am / I believe so myself." These two lines echo feelings often associated with the coming out process. In particular the use of "true self" reveals the identity she hides growing up. The final lines of the song are the repeated "I'm fine / I'll come to like myself." These lines once more echo feelings of internalised homophobia often experienced by queer youth as they navigate a process of self-identification and acceptance.

Elsa is under way, and Kristoff is annoyed because his ice business is all but worthless. Anna’s uncertainty about Kristoff is seen through the way she arches her back away from him, as well as the way her eyes scan up and down his body, determining whether he is a threat. The pair are able to overcome their initial differences, and Kristoff fulfils the role of hero as he leads Anna (as heroine) to the North Mountain where Elsa has established her new home; this home represents the “away” portion of the Hero’s Journey (as discussed in detail in Section Two) where queerness is able to thrive—though in this film the thriving queerness is *not* at the expense of the heterosexual couple, but rather facilitates their union.¹¹⁴



Figure 74: Anna meeting Kristoff

The second time a conversation about marriage appears in *Frozen* is when Anna and Kristoff are on their way to find Elsa, and Kristoff asks why the winter suddenly occurred. The following conversation is one moment in the film that relies on resignification in order to subvert the normative Disney conventions. Shaobo Xie explains resignification in “Rememory, Reinscription, Resignification: Strategies of Decolonization in Chinese Canadian Literature,” noting,

According to both Derrida and Bakhtin, language is an open-ended process of (re)signification [sic] or a space for dialogue among its users or individual speech acts. Every time a certain word or term is (re)used in a new context its meaning becomes revised and its altered meaning not only recalls all previous or other contexts in which the word or term has been used, but engages individual language users or speech acts in conscious or unconscious dialogue with other users or speech acts. (352)

In the conversation below the previous use of the word “crazy” is used to resignify the events from “Love is an Open Door,” where it was used to show that marrying a stranger is exciting and spontaneous, and applied explicitly to Elsa’s reaction “ice-crazy.” The event of marrying a stranger, then, is resignified to mean unfathomable and strange. In this way, the

¹¹⁴ In the pseudo-driving plot where Hans is the hero this scene does represent the separation of the hero and heroine as Anna goes off in search of Elsa while leaving Hans behind in Arendelle.

resignification is occurring *within* a single film while also relying on an audience's awareness and connection to previous films:

Kristoff: So tell me, what made the Queen go all ice-crazy?

Anna: . . . Oh well, it was all my fault. I got engaged but then she freaked out because I'd only just met him, you know, that day. And she said she wouldn't bless the marriage—

Kristoff: Wait. You got engaged to someone you just met?

Anna: Yeah. Anyway, I got mad and so she got mad and then she tried to walk away, and I grabbed her glove—

Kristoff: Hang on. You mean to tell me you got engaged to someone you just met?!

Anna: Yes. Pay attention. But the thing is she wore the gloves all the time, so I just thought, maybe she has a thing about dirt.

Kristoff: Didn't your parents ever warn you about strangers?

Anna: Yes, they did [slides away from Kristoff]. But Hans is not a stranger.

Kristoff: Oh yeah? What's his last name?

Anna: . . . Of-the-Southern-Isles?

Kristoff: What's his favourite food?

Anna: . . . Sandwiches.

Kristoff: Best friend's name?

Anna: Probably John.

Kristoff: Eye colour.

Anna: Dreamy.

Kristoff: Foot size . . . ?

Anna: Foot size doesn't matter.

Kristoff: Have you had a meal with him yet? What if you hate the way he eats? What if you hate the way he picks his nose?

Anna: Picks his nose?

Kristoff: And eats it.

Anna: Excuse me, sir. He's a prince.

Kristoff: All men do it.

Anna: Ew. Look it doesn't matter. It's true love.

Kristoff: Doesn't sound like true love.

This conversation also speaks to the Disney convention that marrying someone you just met is expected and acceptable. Once again Anna is representative of the normative Disney convention. This representation is illustrated by the way Anna continually dismisses Kristoff's confusion about her engagement with the abrupt replies "Yeah" and "Yes. Pay attention," before moving back into her long story about Elsa being unreasonable. Conversely, Kristoff fulfils a similar role to Elsa in the previous conversation. Kristoff repeatedly cuts Anna off mid-sentence as he tries to understand her engagement: "Wait" and "Hang on." His repetition of the phrase "you got engaged to someone you just met," as he

tries to clarify that Anna did in fact get engaged, highlights and emphasises the absurdity involved in such an act.

Most obvious in this scene, however, is the film's use of humour to highlight the absurdity of Anna's quick engagement. The humour in this scene begins shortly after Kristoff asks Anna whether her parents "warned her about strangers." Following this question, Anna pauses for a moment before answering "yes," and proceeds to slide over in the sled, further away from Kristoff. Following this movement, Kristoff asks Anna arbitrary questions about her fiancé in an attempt to make her understand she cannot marry someone she just met and does not know.

This exchange becomes progressively funnier as the questions move to address a dual audience. "What's his last name?" appears to be a standard question to see whether Anna knows any more about Hans than his first name. Her reply "of the Southern Isles?" shows her uncertainty. Though she frames this response as a question, she says it with such certainty that the audience is placed in a situation where they are encouraged to laugh. By the end of Kristoff's interrogation the questions become seemingly arbitrary that the risky nature of marrying someone you do not know is emphasised: "foot size?" and "what if you hate the way he picks his nose?"¹¹⁵ Whereas Elsa's direct refusal to bless the engagement is a stern and overt reference back to the Disney tradition, Kristoff's questioning of the engagement is a humorous method of calling into question a long held expectation of the princess marrying a prince after a very short courtship. For Anna, however, as with many Disney Princesses, "it doesn't matter" if she knows a man before becoming engaged, because "it's true love."¹¹⁶

This scene represents an instance of transvaluation, a term coined by Gérard Genette. In *Palimpsests*, Genette explains how transvaluation is a process by which "the hypertext [a text referring to or commenting on an earlier text] takes the opposite side of its hypotext [the earlier or source text], giving value to what was devalued and vice versa" (367).¹¹⁷ *Frozen* itself is a hypertext speaking to, and building upon hypotexts (earlier Disney films). In this film, what was once valued—such as marrying someone you just met—is now devalued. I discuss other significant instances of transvaluation in *Frozen* shortly.

¹¹⁵ I say seemingly arbitrary, because the question "foot size" is also a joke about penis size. What this scene is doing is providing a moment of humour for adults, who would laugh at "foot size" followed immediately by making a booger joke, giving children an opportunity to laugh.

¹¹⁶ Interesting to note is that in the criticism of this convention in the Disney genre, no-one ever questions why a prince becomes engaged after a short period; rather the onus is always placed on the princess.

¹¹⁷ In Genetteian terms, hypertextuality is "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (5).

Following Anna’s interrogation by Kristoff, the pair arrives at Elsa’s castle where the film’s first battle (narrateme seven), occurs as Anna asks her sister to come home. Upon reaching the castle, Anna is surprised to see that Elsa has completely changed her appearance and is happy being away from Arendelle. Anna begins singing to Elsa, and Elsa joins in and forms a duet as they sing “For the First Time in Forever (Reprise).”¹¹⁸

During this reprise of their song of desire—“For the First Time in Forever”—Anna pleads with Elsa to return home and end the winter. During the beginning of the song Anna sings, “We can head down this mountain together / You don’t have live in *fear* / ‘Cause for the first time in forever / I will be right here” (Italics mine). Once more, the notion of fear is highlighted in relation to Elsa, but this time Anna is shown to understand why Elsa isolated herself growing up. Knowing this secret, Anna wants to work alongside her sister to restore the land to what it once was. Conversely, Elsa fears and believes she has not yet learned how to control the powers she possesses, despite building her ice-castle during “Let It Go.” The following lyrics from “For the First Time in Forever Reprise” occur simultaneously, with Anna and Elsa singing one line at a time (Table 8).

Table 8: “For the First Time in Forever (Reprise)”

<i>Anna</i>	<i>Elsa</i>
‘Cause for the first time in forever,	I’m such a fool! I can’t be free!
You don’t have to be afraid.	No escape from the storm inside of me!
We can work this out together.	I can’t control the curse!
We’ll reverse the storm you’ve made.	Oh Anna, please, you’ll only make it worse!
Don’t panic.	There’s so much fear!
We’ll make the sun shine bright.	You’re not safe here!
We can face this thing together...	No!
We can change this winter weather,	I
And everything will be . . .	I can’t!

Revealed throughout this song is Anna’s belief that there is an easy solution to the problem—that life in the kingdom can be restored to normal. Elsa, on the other hand, becomes overwhelmed and needs Anna to leave her alone: “I can’t control the curse,” “You’re not safe here.” While Anna is optimistic and uses positive language throughout (“we

¹¹⁸ This song is reminiscent of “For Good” from the musical *Wicked*, where two witches sing a song together about the significance of the other in each other’s lives. This intertextuality with *Wicked*, as similarly discussed in relation to Gothel and “Mother Knows Best,” once more reinforces and invites a queer reception of this scene (and film), aided by the fact Elsa is voiced by Idina Menzel, who played Elphaba in *Wicked*.

can change this winter weather”), Elsa is scared and uses darker language: “storm inside,” “curse.”

Immediately after Elsa screams “I can’t,” the storm that was beginning to form around the sisters crystallises and is projected in every direction outwards from Elsa (Fig. 75). Anna is injured, and although Elsa means no harm to come to her sister, as witnessed from her closed body language—the way her head is looking down, and the look of fear and sadness in her eyes—Elsa wins the battle. Without realising she has struck her sister in the heart with ice, Elsa creates a massive snow monster who throws Anna and Kristoff out of the castle and off a cliff. This scene represents another moment of transvaluation in the film; the events in the narrative stay the same, but by altering the quillain’s motivation, the events become repositioned in relation to the audience’s sympathies. This repositioning then make Elsa a sympathetic character and hence not a quillain anymore.



Figure 75: Elsa’s reactions during her first (left) and second (right) battles in the film

The second battle in the film follows shortly after Anna’s expulsion from Elsa’s castle. During this battle, two guards working for the Duke of Weselton sneak into Elsa’s ice castle in an attempt to kill her. In order to defend herself, Elsa uses her powers to pin one guard against the wall, with ice shards edging ever closer to puncturing his throat, and pushes the other with a large block of ice towards the edge of the castle into a chasm below (Fig. 75). While in this image Elsa lacks the sadness in her eyes present in the previous image, her raised shoulders and lowered neck, combined with the look of fear in her eyes, reveals her actions are not out of anger, but rather in self-defence.

In this situation Elsa is not the perpetrator of violence, but rather the victim of a plot by the Duke of Weselton to have her captured. However, the way she defends herself presents an image of a villain. What differentiates Elsa from other Disney quillains in this situation is that when Hans bursts into the room and shouts, “Queen Elsa, don’t be the monster they fear you are,” Elsa immediately stops using her powers. Unlike other quillains,

she does not *want* to harm anyone. It is her fear and desperation that drives her apparently villainous actions. In this moment, *Disney repositions* the classic quillain, and through an act of transvaluation, alters the value of the quillain as seen in previous films—relentless and willing to harm others no matter what—into one with compassion. The only other quillain displaying this act of compassion is the Beast, but what differentiates Elsa from the Beast is that at the film’s conclusion she is still queer.

In terms of the Quillain Narrative Structure, this battle fulfils narratemes seven and eight, and represents one of the moments most clearly portraying the dual plots taking place. In regards to the pseudo-driving plot, this battle is the final one Elsa has in the film (narrateme eight) in which she (as quillain) is defeated by Hans (as hero). In regards to the post-revelation driving plot, this battle is the initial conflict (narrateme seven) between Elsa (as heroine) and Hans (as quillain) in which Hans succeeds.

At the conclusion of the battle, Elsa runs from beneath a falling ice chandelier, narrowly avoiding it as it crashes to the ground. The film cuts to a black screen, and a high-pitched tone sounds for a few seconds, aurally mirroring the ringing in one’s ears after a dramatic/traumatic accident. When Elsa regains consciousness following this accident, she finds herself locked in the dungeon of her castle in Arendelle, chained to a bed with her hands sealed inside steel cuffs (Fig. 76). Hans comes to visit her and she pleads, “you have to tell them to let me go,” to which he replies, “I will do what I can.” Hans’ previous displays of heroism throughout the film lead the viewer to believe he will do his best to free Elsa.



Figure 76: Elsa trapped in her own dungeon



Figure 77: Hans revealing his villainy

Not long after Elsa and Hans’ conversation, Anna, after being struck in the heart with ice by Elsa and with the knowledge that an “act of true love” will save her, returns to Arendelle with the help of Kristoff. The viewers, and Anna herself, immediately recognise that what she needs is true love’s kiss. Kristoff informs the castle workers that Anna immediately needs to see Hans, and departs from the castle himself (narrateme six).

Upon seeing the weak and injured Anna, Hans carefully places her on a couch, and when hearing the only cure to her illness exclaims, as the viewers and Anna assume, “true love’s kiss.” Hans moves in to kiss Anna, while melodic music, similar to the type often accompanying the first kiss in Disney films, plays softly in the background. Hans gently holds Anna’s chin and the music abruptly stops (Fig. 77). What follows is arguably the biggest revelation in the history of animated Disney films, and occurs with only fifteen minutes remaining in the film. Hans pulls his mouth away from Anna’s just before the kiss, and at this moment his eyes narrow, his eyebrows become stern, and the camera moves upward to place Hans in a position of power. As he begins to stand, Hans calmly looks into Anna’s eyes and says, “Oh Anna, if only there was someone out there who loved you” (narrateme seven). Following this statement, Hans begins to extinguish all the fire in the room, while telling Anna of his plan to kill Elsa and take control of the kingdom himself.

During this moment in the film Hans takes his gloves off to extinguish the fires. His actions in this scene are important to the film, not only because they subvert audience expectations (through the process of transvaluation) but also because of the recurrent imagery of the gloves, which connect Hans with Elsa. Elsa wears gloves in order to hide her true identity, and when one of her gloves is forcibly removed by Anna she is outed (as having magical powers). Elsa then removes her remaining glove during “Let It Go” marking the moment when she accepts and embraces her true identity. As Hans takes his gloves off, he also speaks truthfully for the first time in the film as he reveals his plan to kill Elsa and take the throne for himself. He then puts his gloves back on while saying the words, “I am the hero that’s going to save Arendelle from destruction,” once more assuming a false identity in order to achieve his villainous plan. In this moment the film sets up Hans with a moment of self-reflexivity where he acknowledges that he is a villain, but also that he is *perceived* as a hero, therefore allowing him to get away with his actions. At the end of this scene Hans simply walks from the dark, cold room and locks Anna inside, leaving her to die alone.

This scene is the moment in the film when the second plot—the “post-revelation plot”—is revealed to the audience. In the events following her interaction with Hans, Anna’s character role shifts from heroine to hero. Anna’s snowman sidekick, Olaf, finds her and informs her that Kristoff loves her. Olaf helps Anna to escape the room she is locked in and the pair makes their way to find Kristoff. When Anna sees Kristoff across a frozen lake, she looks down at her hands and realises she is slowly turning into solid ice as a result of her frozen heart. Knowing she only has a short time left to live, she makes her way towards Kristoff for true love’s kiss.

As she slowly stumbles across the ice, however, she sees Hans making his way to attack Elsa with a sword and changes her direction. Right before Hans strikes Elsa with his sword, Anna stands between the two and raises her hand in order to protect her sister (Fig. 78). As Hans' sword makes contact with Anna's frozen hand, it too becomes frozen and completely shatters. In this moment, Anna chooses to actively save her sister instead of passively receiving true love's kiss, and freezes into solid ice (Fig. 78). Both the position of her arms and her look of determination to save her sister reveal the level of sacrifice Anna makes for Elsa; Anna is the actor (of true love's act), not the recipient. Anna fulfils the role generally assigned to the (male) hero, and this twist is made possible by our assumptions based in Disney's conventions—specifically, the convention that the heroine is a “damsel in distress” needing a man to save her (e.g. Aurora and Snow White need kisses from their princes to wake up, Belle is saved from wolves by the Beast, Wendy often needs to be saved by Peter).



Figure 78: Anna saving her sister (left) and being frozen solid (right)

Elsa soon realises what has happened and hugs her frozen sister, in what is the first physical contact between them since they were children. Following a dramatic silence, Anna begins to thaw. In this moment it becomes apparent that her life has been saved because of an “act of true love.” This act of true love then helps Elsa understand how her own powers work; because Anna sacrifices her own life for Elsa, Elsa is able to learn that “love will thaw,” and as a result is able to gain control over her powers and end the eternal winter.

Anna, Elsa, and Kristoff, who are standing on a boat in the middle of the lake as it thaws, celebrate the return of summer. Hans regains consciousness from the recoil of his attack, and Kristoff attempts to fill the role of hero and subdue the villain. Instead Anna holds him back and walks up to Hans, who then asks how it is that she is still alive. Anna responds with the words “the only frozen heart is yours,” and turns her back leaving him confused. Moments later she turns, grabs him by the collar, and punches him in the face, sending him

falling from the boat into the water below to a round of applause and cheering from members of the kingdom who witnessed the events unfold (narrateme eight).

As the boats are boarded to return to their respective countries, a representative from the Southern Isles assures Anna and Elsa that Hans will be dealt with, noting, “we shall see what his twelve big brothers think of his behaviour.” During this scene, the other quillain to appear in the film, the Duke of Weselton, is told that by orders of the queen, “Arendelle will henceforth and forever no longer do business of any sort with *Weaseltown*” (emphasis original). With this conclusion, two of the three quillains throughout the film are banished from Arendelle, while the third, having redeemed herself, is rewarded with life and freedom.

As Elsa and Anna, and Anna and Kristoff are reunited, heterosexual (straight) happiness returns to the kingdom (narrateme nine). *Frozen* illustrates the two types of straight happiness (leading to narrative closure) Disney films portray. The first is through the heterosexual union of Kristoff and Anna, seen through their first kiss. While this kiss appears just like every Disney kiss to come before it, this one is different because of the way it occurs. For the first time in a Disney film, the hero asks for consent from the heroine before kissing her. After seeing his brand new sled and role as the “Official Arendelle Ice Master,” Kristoff picks Anna up and swings her around, before saying “I love it! I could kiss you! . . . I could. I mean I’d like to. I’d . . . may I? We me . . . I mean, may we? Wait, what?” Anna responds with “we may” and the two share their first kiss. The second form of happiness is the reuniting of a family. With the town celebrating Elsa’s powers, she turns the town square into an ice skating rink and joins her sister as they skate around together, just as they did when they were children (narrateme ten).¹¹⁹ This film separates the heterosexual union and the reunion of a family, something that is often combined, seen in films I have discussed such as *Tangled*, *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, and others such as *Treasure Planet* and *The Jungle Book*. Elsa is the second quillain in a Disney film who shifts from (perceived) villain to hero/ine in the middle of the film—the first being the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*. Unlike the Beast, another character explicitly called a monster, Elsa’s reward for redeeming herself is reuniting with her sister (or a return to her childhood) rather than a shift to adult heterosexuality.

¹¹⁹ This same ending and reversion to childhood occurs for Kuzco in *The Emperor’s New Groove*: Elsa gets to have the magical childhood that was wiped from her sister’s memory, while Kuzco gets to assume the role of adopted child. In both of these cases their queerness is placated by this return to childhood.

Fanning *Frozen*: Fans' Resisting Readings

This chapter has taken a different theoretical approach to my previous chapters in that I have drawn more upon fan reception to the films to support my claims—this different methodological approach is necessary for a film that is different from the other films in the Disney canon. In this final section I turn to fan responses to *Frozen* because this film has a particularly rich fan response, and is, arguably, the film that most rewards an informed audience. I use fan readings from digital and social media platforms including Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and NPR to demonstrate how fans have made comparable arguments to mine, only with a different vocabulary.¹²⁰

My decision to incorporate fan readings does have an academic basis. In “Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of the Vampire’s Kiss,” Henry Jenkins discusses the way that fans are critics who themselves create critical readings. In the remaining part of this chapter I think of and discuss fans as vernacular theorists.¹²¹ Artificial boundaries separate the work done by fans (or amateurs) and that by academics (or professionals). As Jenkins notes,

Film studies may still be too uncertain about its status as a discipline to erase fully the line between academic and fan. Erecting such a boundary was the price of its admission into the academy. Yet, new modes of critical writing are more and more drawing upon traditions of fan discourse, making the way for more openly appropriative, playful, autobiographical, and inventive genres of critical analysis. Such changes will not come easily, since they go against many of the rules of conventional critical discourse. (178-79)

Though Jenkins’ chapter was published in 2000, it still holds true today. The “new mode of critical writing” he discusses are no longer “new,” but rather have been replaced by newer modes of critical thinking, newer modes facilitated by the explosion of fan participation on social media sites such as Tumblr. Nevertheless, his mode of critical thinking is exactly what I am doing in this section. The posts I discuss are vernacular versions of the analyses I

¹²⁰ I have selected the fan responses used in this chapter because a) they have tens of thousands (and in some cases hundreds of thousands) of views, b) they illustrate some of the same arguments I am making, and c) they represent a range of different media platforms on which fans share their ideas.

¹²¹ In *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular*, Thomas McLaughlin explains how vernacular theory “would never think of itself as ‘theory,’ that is mostly unaware of the existence of the discipline. I claim that individuals who *do not* come out of a tradition of philosophical critique are capable of raising questions about the dominant cultural assumptions. They do so in ordinary language, and they often suffer from the blindness that unself-conscious language creates. But the fact that vernacular theories therefore do not completely transcend ideologies does not make them different in kind from academic theories. They manage in spite of their complicity to ask fundamental questions about culture” (5).

undertook in the previous sections of the chapter. Fans discuss, without the academic language, resignification, transvaluation, and reading the film’s heteronormativity. Fans have been, and still are, reading two interrelated aspects of *Frozen* pertinent to my own argument: (a) Elsa as queer and (b) the way the film relies on ambiguous character roles to create a resistance to Disney’s own conventions.

One of the most prominent readings of *Frozen* undertaken in the fandom stems from fans’ understandings of the multiple character roles in the film. An image created and circulated on Tumblr by user The Mattress illustrates the way thousands of people are recognising the indeterminate character boundaries in *Frozen* (Fig. 79). In this image, Anna, Elsa, Hans, Kristoff, and Olaf are shown in a portrait labelled with character roles such as “villain,” and “princess.”¹²² The left half of the image contains the description “If Frozen was a ‘normal Disney movie’” and the right, “In actuality.” Most of the characters are assigned different character roles between the left and right side. The very labelling of *Frozen* as a “non-normal” Disney film in this image highlights the way that at least one audience is reading this film with specific narrative conventions in mind. This informed reading by an audience, aided by Disney’s careful manufacturing of *Frozen*, illustrates a shift in Disney’s usually rigid narrative structure.



Figure 79: The Mattress’ fan made image

¹²² In the tags (comments added by the user), The Mattress has noted, “#Not pictured: the Duke of Weselton #A red herring as to who’s the real villain.”

The Mattress shows an awareness of the breaking of Disney conventions through the box in the lower right side of the “In actuality” column, detailing how Hans is evil, but “does actual good things as part of his scheme.” This image is just one of hundreds circulating about fans’ readings of, and responses to, the film.

Fan recognition of the multiple roles of characters in *Frozen* is not limited to text posts on Tumblr. A trailer by the YouTube channel Screen Junkies, titled “Honest Trailers – Frozen” perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the film, and reflects one fan’s response to how *Frozen* works:

It’s been three years since the last Disney musical, and 18 years since the last good Disney musical. Now the big D is back and adjusted for inflation with two princesses, two goofy sidekicks, and three different orphans. . . .

When disaster strikes, watch Anna save the day by teaming up with her sister, a merchant, a hot guy, and a snowman, to defeat villains like her sister, a merchant, a hot guy and a snowman. Experience a clever twist on past Disney films that teaches girls everywhere they don’t need a prince to rescue them because all men are disgusting loners, greedy murderers, or lying, manipulative power-hungry sociopaths! . . . You don’t need true love to thaw a frozen heart.

This summary perfectly encapsulates the way that *Frozen*, on the surface, appears to follow the narrative conventions of the genre as listed previously in the Quillain Narrative Structure. As McLaughlin states, fans undertake these readings “in ordinary language, and they often suffer from the blindness that unself-conscious language creates. But the fact that vernacular theories therefore do not completely transcend ideologies does not make them different in kind from academic theories” (5). The Screen Junkies trailer is a smart, well informed, and theoretically astute reading, and following McLaughlin, they have undertaken this reading in ordinary language, which in turn makes the reading more accessible to a larger number of viewers.

What differentiates *Frozen* from other Disney films is the way some characters—specifically Elsa, Anna, and Hans—fill multiple roles throughout the narrative: Elsa is both the villain and the heroine; Anna both the heroine and the hero; and Hans both the hero and the villain. The dual function of these characters is only revealed towards the conclusion of the film with the plot twist involving Hans, and requires a viewer to rethink the narrative that previously unfolded and recognise the simultaneity of the two plots.

This video also shows how the creators have picked up on the complex character

roles. Figure 80 represents the moment in the trailer when the voice over tells the audience, “When disaster strikes, watch Anna save the day by teaming up with her sister, a merchant, a hot guy, and a snowman, to defeat villains like her sister, a merchant, a hot guy, and a snowman.” The images in the left column align with those Anna teams up with and the images in the right column are the villains they defeat. By humorously stating these character roles, this video represents another audience reading the complexity of *Frozen*’s character roles.



Figure 80: Screen Junkies reading of character roles

Frozen is an interesting Disney film, because on one hand it conforms to the normative Disney narrative (albeit with a reworking of expected character roles), but on the other the film itself resists the Disney genre and the questions audiences have been asking for years (such as why the heroine and hero are marrying after having just met). As the PBS Idea Channel notes,¹²³

¹²³ Brackets in this quote indicate an image superimposed on the video accompanying the words being spoken.

Frozen has all of the fairy tale parts, they're just in different places. There's a love interest [between Anna and Hans], but it's not who you think [it is actually Anna and Kristoff], there is a dastardly force [Duke of Weselton], but whoops, just kidding, it's over here [Hans], there's evil magic but one of the good characters wields it [Elsa], and there's true love but it is between sisters. . . . *Frozen* is a vaguely progressive example of how traditional, fantastical type stories can be told while still maintaining their meaning and intended effect on a modern audience.

The idea of the “meaning and intended effect” is one that is significant when exploring *Frozen*. Jenkins, reading literary critic Stanley Fish, notes how Fish “sees readers as members of interpretive communities, who share common strategies for making meanings. Fish is interested in what makes an interpretation acceptable or unacceptable, plausible or implausible, novel or predictable for particular groups” (“Reception” 176). The interpretive (fan) community of Disney share in their readings and meanings of Disney films, including *Frozen*, about what is “acceptable,” “novel,” and “plausible.”

The second aspect of fan responses is how they are reading resignification and transvaluation. In her NPR podcast Linda Holmes discusses the way *Frozen* plays with these two plots and how the film encourages multiple viewings to fully understand the nuances and subtleties differentiating it from other Disney films:

One of the things I love about this movie is it's incredibly subversive in several major plot ways. . . . This movie makes a big play about true love, and then has a completely different concept of what that might mean than your average Disney Princess movie and goes out of its way to say ‘no, it's not this, it's this.’ The other thing is, there's a song at the beginning of this movie that Anna . . . sings with a prince. And, when they started to do this song I had this moment where I thought ‘wow, this is really pat’ . . . but once you've seen the entire movie you understand that . . . it's too pat on purpose—and when I went back and listened to that song again . . . I thought ‘wow, they have made a lot of really conscious choices about lines in that movie’ . . . they're taking advantage of the way that kids take a movie like this and watch it and re-watch it and re-watch it. And the more that you watch it, the more you notice different things about it.

Most notable in Holmes' discussion is her recognition of the way the film plays with the relationship between Anna and Hans, particularly with their “I love you” song—“Love is an Open Door.” Linda is just one of many viewers who have noticed the way *Frozen* encourages multiple viewings in order to break away from a primary reading in line with a viewing of a conventional Disney Princess film.

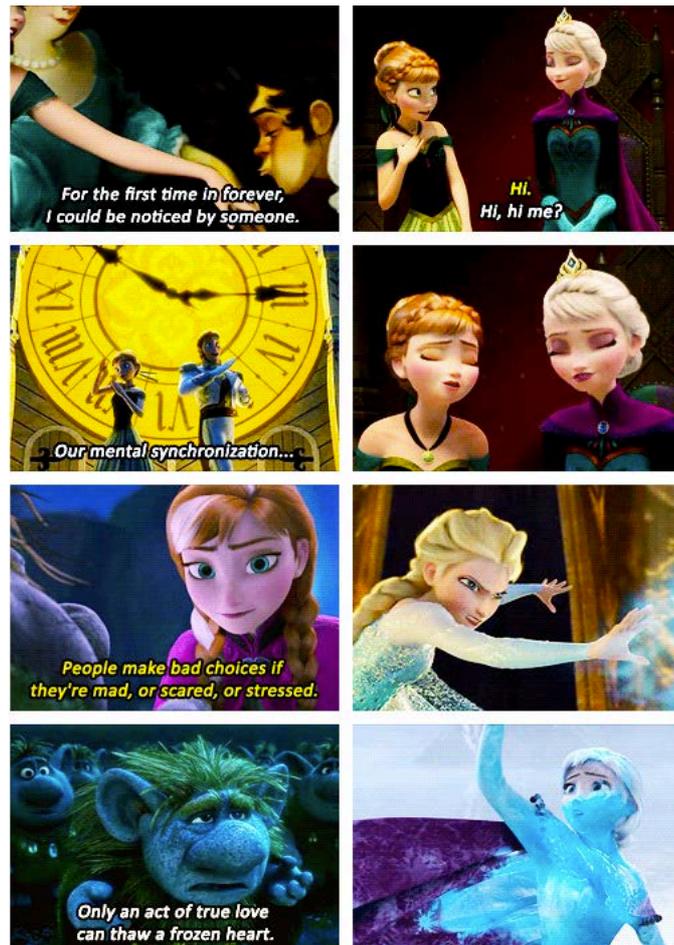


Figure 81: themaidenofthetree’s “Frozen + I bet you thought that was gonna be about a boy”

Fan recognition of *Frozen*’s dual plots is not limited to NPR hosts. A gifset¹²⁴ made by Tumblr user themaidenofthetree titled “Frozen + I bet you thought that was gonna be about a boy” encapsulates the expectations an informed audience has when watching the film, and also explains both the expectations and the way the film subverts these expectations (Fig. 81). This gifset is a slightly more complicated version of Holmes’ discussion, but it also picks up on the most overt way the film works to challenge its previously established conventions by playing on audience expectations established by the Princess genre over the past 79 years. The left column contains images aligned with phrases captioned by the lyrics of the film’s songs. The film associates each of these phrases with a relationship between Anna and Hans. The phrases in the left column are given two meanings in the film: the first in alignment with audience expectations and the second after the revelation of Hans’ motivations has invited a re-reading of the previous narrative. For instance, expectations about what a Disney film *should* contain invites a reading in which “for the first time in forever, I might be noticed by

¹²⁴ A gifset is a collection of gifs, or moving images, each representing in this case about a second of footage of the film.

someone” becomes “for the first time in forever, I might be noticed by a man.” Not long after Anna sings this line she is noticed by Hans. This event is the first satisfaction provided to the audience—the expectations have been fulfilled and the hetero-normative plot is able to begin.

The right column of this gifset shows what the film ultimately refers to in each of the phrases. These meanings challenge the audiences’ expectations, and are not fully understood until the twist at the end of the film invites the audience to question what was just shown. After learning Hans never loved Anna, the audience is encouraged to feel disappointed until the realisation occurs that “for the first time in forever,” Anna was noticed and acknowledged by her sister. Each of these image couplets provides the audience with satisfaction twice in the film. The first satisfaction comes with the normative revelation of the meaning, and the second, arguably stronger, satisfaction is provided when the “true” meaning is revealed.

This gifset is just one example showing how audiences are approaching/entering Disney films with specific horizons of expectations—that is, a specific set of assumed conventions facilitating a specific reading of a text. These readings are determined by prior knowledge that each individual reader (or viewer in the case of films) brings to the text (Jauss 79). This pre-determined reading practice suggests there *are* specific conventions Disney films encourage audiences to understand and expect.

The most apparent of these expectations is that true love metonymically equals heterosexual romantic love. An initial viewing of *Frozen* appears to follow this convention; after Anna’s battle with Elsa, the plot focuses on Anna as she attempts to receive true love’s kiss. The satisfaction that would come with Hans fulfilling this role is abruptly denied to the audience near the very end of the film. After this twist, the film provides a sense of discomfort and Anna begins to search for another act of true love—a kiss from Kristoff. It is not until the final moments of the film that Anna makes the choice to sacrifice herself and save her sister, rather than receiving a kiss from Kristoff. It should be noted while this is not the first Disney film to show sisterly love as a powerful force, this is the first Disney film whose narrative is built upon a façade about the importance of heterosexual romantic love.

It is not just heteronormativity, however, that fans are reading in this film. Despite online fans often making the claim that sisterly love makes this film unique, the first film to show this connection is *Lilo and Stitch*. One fan tackling this false assumption is Tumblr user scrawlers, who in response to the statement “Anna is saved by sisterly love purely which is celebrated to the fullest and is just as strong as any other love. This is what makes this movie stand out,” replies with,

Sisterly love is not celebrated to the fullest in this movie because *Anna and Elsa hardly spend any time together*. If the movie was about them *being together* and standing *strong together* against forces that sought to tear them apart (a la **Lilo and Stitch**, which surprise! is another Disney movie that did it first!), then okay, I could see it. But apart from the scene of their childhood at the beginning of the movie, and the scene at the end where Elsa's [sic] supposed love for her sister saves her, we don't actually get to see them spending time with or loving each other. We're *told* that they love each other, but **telling and not showing is bad writing**. This movie had a mess of problems at the written level, but suffice it to say that the championing love of sisters was not portrayed well at all. Lilo and Stitch did it better, and ergo, Frozen was not the first and thus does not stand out" (emphasis original).

scrawlers' response in relation to *Frozen* represents a fan who is fulfilling the role of critic and engaging deeply with the film. By discussing the way the film appears to show sisterly love as very powerful, but noting that "*Anna and Elsa hardly spend any time together*," in essence growing up without siblings, scrawlers is acknowledging just one way the film manages to encourage one reading (that their sisterly bond *is* really powerful) while enabling an opposing reading (one noted by scrawlers).

Ultimately, fans have provided readings on the same critical level as myself, but the main difference is that fan readings are distributed across social media platforms providing tens of thousands of other fans to read their ideas, whereas my dissertation is more limited in its audience reach. While I have provided a critical, academic reading of *Frozen*, it is important to recognise that fans have and are reading and understanding the way this film is beginning to move away from Disney's conventions surrounding heteronormativity, gender roles, and familial relationships. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, despite its efforts at self-reflexivity, *Frozen* has fallen back on Disney's heteronormative conventions.

Conclusion

Happily ever after in the Disney universe only appears to be the case if you are heterosexual *and* in favour of the idea that children *are* our future. If you step out of line and attempt to kill a child, or attempt to marry and/or kill young adults to usurp the throne, or try to steal and appropriate the femininity of a young princess, or prevent a union between a young woman and a man stuck in a Beast's body by claiming the latter as your own "booty," then chances are you are a quillain and will be imprisoned (at best) or killed (at worst) for interfering with the "proper" trajectory of reproductive heterosexuality. Disney's repeated representation of the queer *as* child murderers opens up a significant point of discussion.

My dissertation has explored, arguably, the most important character in the Disney universe. As Judith Roof says, "Without the possibility that something might go wrong, the saving force of heterosexual attraction means nothing" (xix). The quillain is essential to Disney films; films without this character, such as *Bambi*, instead become stories more in line with the traditional bildungsroman—only in a different medium. The spectacular, often flamboyant villains drive the narrative by making "something go wrong"—most often the separation of the heroine from her hero.

While I have established the quillain as a neologism to critique the function of queerness in Disney, this concept can be expanded to examine the villain-as-queer in other media—for instance the Grinch (*The Grinch*), the Trunchbowl (*Matilda*), Loki (*Thor* and *The Avengers*), and the list could go on. By setting up a framework through which to analyse this character type, I aim to have both created language with which to begin the criticisms and also to have drawn attention to the quillains' characterisation and decoding—naming and raising it from the subtexts of the films to our collective consciousness.

Queer coding is something that has occurred throughout the long history of visual and written media. However, we are reaching a stage in our analytic discourse where we need a new framework to analyse the narratively embedded ways this queer coding is occurring, moving forward from using only "traditional" methods and means of decoding (i.e. the type of decoding I used in my introduction section "Queer Eye for the Bad Guy"). By examining the ways queerness is embedded in the narratives themselves, we are able to more deeply examine the intricacies of queerness that may otherwise be overlooked because a character does not "look gay" (e.g. Gaston). My dissertation has explored three of these embedded elements: the function of a normative narrative in a canon of work; the use of musical

numbers; and spatiotemporality, examining the way texts both queer space *and* time.

My research, while filling in a large gap in the examination of villainous characters in Disney films, has also raised a potential question I am yet to address: what about the good characters who are coded queer? I have not addressed this character type because it requires its own in depth research project. To address the missing character type I propose its examination with its own neologism. The term “quelper,”¹²⁵ much like “quillain,” is an amalgamation of the characters’ roles and representations. The quelpers, borrowing from the archetypes described in “The Hero’s Journey,” are the queer helpers. The role of the quelper in the Disney universe is to provide a balance to the negative queerness of the quillain, and narratively to try to help the hero/ines achieve their goals and desires, specifically to attain their happy endings. As Jeffrey P. Dennis notes of queer characters in cartoons, “sometimes same-sex partners appear as comic relief (e.g., Gus and Jacques in *Cinderella*, Timon and Pumbaa in *The Lion King*)” (136).

Some of the most notable quelpers include Timon and Pumbaa (*The Lion King*), Olaf (*Frozen*), Genie (*Aladdin*), and Tinker Bell (*Peter Pan*). These characters are all present to help their friends find true love by the films’ conclusions—the slight exception being Tinker Bell who first attempts to get Wendy killed before finally coming around to help save the day. A discussion of this character type is necessary at this final stage in the dissertation because it appears to complicate my argument that queerness is aligned with villainy in Disney films.

The quelper has occasionally been discussed in scholarly work, such as in Douglas Brode’s “Beyond the Celluloid Closet: Disney and the Gay Experience.” Brode analyses many of Disney’s early shorts along with a few full-length, animated films in order to suggest that Disney has a positive portrayal of queerness within its canon. He draws attention to the homosocial bonds between same-sex characters including the mice Gus and Jacques in *Cinderella* and the dwarfs in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and argues, “[i]mplying a homoerotic bond between beloved characters, if one that probably goes unconsummated, hints that in Disney, gays are as likely to be good characters as villains” (233).¹²⁶ While this assertion is valid, I feel there is a big and necessary distinction between the coding of the good “gay” helpers and the bad “gay” villains.

The quelper is not represented as the “bad guy” because they often attempt to help, rather than hinder, the formation of a heterosexual union and the facilitation to a straight

¹²⁵ Pronounced “quell-per”

¹²⁶ Yet, problematically, is the notion that these relationships go “unconsummated.”

ending. However, there are often two narrative points aligning them closely with quillain, showing that while viewers may laud Disney for positive representations of queerness, these praises are not well earned. First, the quelper is often trapped or isolated from the hero/ines, and at times allowed to exist only *because* of them. For instance, Genie exists freely—meaning not contained within his lamp—only because Aladdin rubs the magical lamp; yet, despite his “freedom,” Genie is tied to Aladdin and his every demand. Second, the quelper is rarely present at the conclusion of the film. In *Aladdin* for example, Aladdin uses his final wish to free Genie, who then leaves Aladdin, Jasmine, and Agrabah behind. In this case, the freedom of the queer comes *only* when it is wished for by the heterosexual. Similarly, snowman Olaf exists only because Elsa creates him, and by the film’s conclusion requires Elsa to create his own “personal flurries” so he does not melt. Though he skates around with Elsa in the final scene, he is allowed to do so only because the queer has redeemed herself and has reverted to a childlike state.

One film that keeps the quelper near the heterosexual hero/ines at the ending is *The Lion King*. While Timon and Pumbaa are on Pride Rock with Simba and Nala, as the film’s lyrics repeat “it’s the circle, the circle of life” the camera zooms in to show *only* Simba and Nala, cutting Timon and Pumbaa out of the image. Rafiki then walks between Simba and Nala holding their child, with the camera once more zooming in to focus on the lion cub as the music crescendos and the words “circle of life” are repeated one final time. The quelper is allowed to be with the heterosexual hero/ine at the end of this film, but they are still pushed aside to make way for the “circle of life,” which in this case becomes synonymous with heterosexual reproductivity.

While the quelper is celebrated, they are ultimately pushed towards the margins of the film. The quillain is outright pushed beyond the boundary of straight society, but the quelper is allowed to stay close to the heterosexual hero/ines. The reason for the allowable close proximity is, I suggest, because the quelper can be read through a camp lens. For a brief definitional distinction between “queer” and “camp,” I turn to “Between a Frock and a Hard Place: Camp Aesthetic and Children’s Culture” by Kerry Mallan and Roderick McGillis. In this article, they note, “Both queer and camp are outside notions of stability; they are border activities” (1). In my understanding of the two terms, camp can be seen to fall under the queer umbrella, and within Disney films the coding associated with camp characters is often very similar to coding associated with the queer characters. The difference in Disney films is that the campness of the quelper, as opposed to the outright queerness of the quillain, comes from their narrative role; the quillain is the “negative” queer because they are attempting to

block and disrupt the expected and “normal” happily ever after of the heterosexual couples.

Conversely, the quelper, who is also often the site of comic relief, is only allowed to exist narratively and inhabit the same space as the heterosexual heroes because they are a positive force. Their campness comes in part from their comedic representations, which in effect dilutes their threat (that comes from their queerness). As Mallan and McGillis explain, “Camp is perky and self-conscious, self-aware and maybe naïve. Camp is mercurial and difficult to pin down. Camp is polymorphous and perhaps even perverse” (2). The self-aware and naïve nature of the quelpers at times infantilises them (as I discuss in relation to the quillains in Chapter Three), and this infantilisation adds to making them appear non-threatening.

One other reason for the celebration of the quelper could be attributed to their narrative positioning as minor characters. Alex Woloch in *The One Vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, explores the existence and function of minor characters in literature:

[there is the] flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative, and the fragmentary character who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot. These two kinds of minoriness . . . are flip sides of one coin. In one case, the character is smoothly absorbed as a gear within the narrative machine, at the cost of his or her own free interiority; in the other case, the minor character grates against his or her position and is usually, as a consequence, wounded, exiled, expelled, ejected, imprisoned, or killed. (25)

The single functional use character is the quelper. This minor character’s sole function is to make sure the heroine finds her hero so the two can live happily ever after (or in the case of one like Mushu [*Mulan*] reunite with her family). The fragmentary character is the quillain, whose sole function is to disrupt the straight trajectory of the film and one who winds up “wounded, exiled, expelled, ejected, imprisoned, or killed.”

Ultimately, queerness can and does exist in the Disney universe. While not yet overt, the subtextual readings fans and scholars are undertaking demands a new dialogue about how and why queerness exists in the films. Why are the only signs of “overt” queerness in recent years the owner of Wandering Oaken’s in *Frozen*, or the alleged same-sex partnership in *Zootopia* (relying on a viewer to sit through the credits to notice a hyphenated surname)? Until the day that Disney overtly and positively represents non-heterosexual identities, viewers, fans, and scholars alike will have to be satisfied with reading the villain as queer. While this character is likely to be killed, or at the very least removed from the narrative to

make way for the “happily ever after,” we can rest assured knowing that the film was as exciting as it was *because* of the queer interruption in the middle of the film, momentarily disrupting a straight ending.

Appendix One – Disney Endings

Year	Film	Final Scene
1937	<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>	Snow and Charming ride off into sunset
1940	<i>Pinocchio</i>	Pinocchio and his dad dance, Jiminy given his conscience back
1950	<i>Cinderella</i>	Charming and Cinderella kiss
1951	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	Alice wakes up and is reunited with family
1953	<i>Peter Pan</i>	Wendy hugs her mum and dad
1959	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	Aurora and Phillip dancing, ending on a kiss
1961	<i>101 Dalmatians</i>	Pongo + Perdita reunited with Anita and Roger. All sing around a piano.
1963	<i>The Sword in the Stone</i>	Arthur and Merlin reunite
1967	<i>The Jungle Book</i>	Mowgli goes to human village, film ends on Baloo and Bagheera walking with arms around one another
1970	<i>The Aristocats</i>	Family Portrait (all the cats)
1973	<i>Robin Hood</i>	Robin and Marian marry
1977	<i>The Rescuers</i>	Penny interviewed on tv about her family, Bernard and Bianca cuddle on the way to a new mission
1985	<i>The Black Cauldron</i>	Taran and Eilonwy kiss, walk off with (new) family
1986	<i>Basil The Great Mouse Detective</i>	Basil officially makes Dawson his associate (shake hands)
1988	<i>Oliver and Company</i>	Oliver and Jenny reunited
1989	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	Ariel and Eric arm in arm
1991	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	Belle and((human) Beast kiss, then dance
1992	<i>Aladdin</i>	Jasmine and Aladdin kiss
1994	<i>The Lion King</i>	Animals of Pride Rock gather for birth of Simba's child
1995	<i>Pocahontas</i>	Pocahontas standing alone on cliff watching John Smith depart
1996	<i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>	Esmerelsa and Phoebus kiss, Quasimodo finds family in Parisians
1997	<i>Hercules</i>	Hercules turned into a human, kisses Meg
1998	<i>Mulan</i>	Mulan reunited with family, Shang invited for dinner as ghosts of ancestors watch
1999	<i>Tarzan</i>	Tarzan and Jane stand side by side on tree in forest - Tarzan gains human family
2000	<i>The Emperor's New Groove</i>	Kuzco finds a family in Pacha and his village
2001	<i>Atlantis</i>	Milo and Kida holding hands
2002	<i>Lilo and Stitch</i>	Stitch reunites with Nani and Lilo: "This is my family, I found it all on my own"
2002	<i>Treasure Planet</i>	Jim reunited with his mum, Dr Doppler and Amelia shown to have married and had 4 kids
2004	<i>Home on the Range</i>	Farm saved, Maggie's owner and the sheriff dance, the animals are united as a family
2007	<i>Meet the Robinsons</i>	Lewis adopted
2009	<i>The Princess and the Frog</i>	Tiana and Naveen dancing
2010	<i>Tangled</i>	Rapunzel and Flynn kiss
2012	<i>Wreck-It Ralph</i>	Felix and Calhoun marry (kiss), Princess Vaneloppe becomes racer in game
2013	<i>Frozen</i>	Anna and Kristoff kiss, Anna and Elsa skate around an ice rink.

This table represents the final moments of the films. Heterosexual unions are represented in the yellow boxes, the uniting of a family the green, a combination of the two in light blue, and those which do not have any of the above are dark blue.

Appendix Two – Quillain Fates

Year	Film	Queer Villain	Fate
1937	<i>Snow White</i>	Evil Queen	Fall to presumed death
1940	<i>Pinocchio</i>	Honest John/Gideon/Stromboli	Arrested
1950	<i>Cinderella</i>	Lady Tremaine	Unknown at end of film
1951	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	Queen of Hearts	Ceases to exist
1953	<i>Peter Pan</i>	Captain Hook	Sent off in boat
1959	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	Maleficent	Death
1961	<i>101 Dalmatians</i>	Cruella	Arrested
1963	<i>The Sword in the Stone</i>	Madam Mim	Catches Illness
1967	<i>The Jungle Book</i>	Shere Khan	Runs off with tail on fire
1970	<i>The Aristocats</i>	Edgar	Sent to Timbuktu
1973	<i>Robin Hood</i>	Prince John	Arrested
1977	<i>The Rescuers</i>	Medusa	Presumed death
1985	<i>The Black Cauldron</i>	Horned King	Imprisoned in Cauldron
1986	<i>(Basil) The Great Mouse Detective</i>	Prof Rattigan	Fall to presumed death
1988	<i>Oliver and Company</i>	Sykes	Fall to presumed death
1989	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	Ursula	Death
1991	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	Gaston/Beast	Fall to presumed death
1992	<i>Aladdin</i>	Jafar	Imprisoned in lamp
1994	<i>The Lion King</i>	Scar	Presumed death
1995	<i>Pocahontas</i>	Governor Ratcliffe	Sent off in boat
1996	<i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>	Judge Frollo	Fall to presumed death
1997	<i>Hercules</i>	Hades	Sent to Underworld
1998	<i>Mulan</i>	Shan Yu	Death
1999	<i>Tarzan</i>	Clayton	Death
2000	<i>The Emperor's New Groove</i>	Yzma	Turned into cat
2001	<i>Atlantis: The Lost Empire</i>	Rourke	Killed
2002	<i>Lilo and Stitch</i>	Stitch	Redeemed
2002	<i>Treasure Planet</i>	John Silver/Scroop	Death
2004	<i>Home on the Range</i>	Alameda Slim/Wesley	Arrested
2007	<i>Meet the Robinsons</i>	Bowler Hat	Ceases to exist
2009	<i>The Princess and the Frog</i>	Shadow Doctor	Sent to Underworld
2010	<i>Tangled</i>	Mother Gothel	Death
2012	<i>Wreck-It Ralph</i>	King Candy	Presumed death
2013	<i>Frozen</i>	Elsa/Hans	Redeemed/Sent off in boat

Appendix Three – Quillain Narrative Structure

1. The quillain (and their motivation) is introduced
2. The hero is introduced in his element
3. The heroine is introduced in the safety of the space in which she was raised
4. The hero meets the heroine for the first time
5. An obstacle is introduced to separate the hero and heroine
6. The hero and heroine become separated (sometimes multiple times)
7. Initial battle/conflict between hero/ine and quillain in which the quillain wins
8. Final battle/conflict between hero/ine and quillain in which the quillain is defeated
9. Hero and heroine reunited
10. Straight happiness returns

Appendix Four – “My Disney Princess Song”

Lyrics

Picture the scene: I just indulged in a mild act of rebellion and my father doesn't understand me at all. So I've run away to a place where I can be alone, with my accompaniment *music begins* and sing my thoughts aloud for the very first time.

In verse one I explain all my circumstances
I'm a size 6 with fabulous hair
I've got books, I've got looks, I've got animal friends
But the subtext is I just don't care
And at one point I'll speak, for dramatic effect
Then start singing again and then sigh *sighs*
This is where I confess in a slower tempo
That I'm deeply unsatisfied

In verse two I digress why my life is a mess
And you're starting to all ascertain
That my dad is oppressive, of course I'm depressive
My mum's absence is never explained
I can start to relate to how that could be
Coz I'm really sorta kinda just like you but better
You know how it feels to be blue inside
But before we commit suicide

The bridge start to play and I look over there
And suddenly I can see hope
I'm kinda scared of the hope but I'm also embracing the hope
And the music [word] swells

Then the chorus kicks in
And the clichés begin
Believe in yourself, follow your dreams
You can be part of that world
And I'll sing really loud because
I've totally forgotten verse one
And right at the end
I'll slip in the title of
My Disney Princess Song
Quieter *whispers* My Disney Princess Song

This is the music no-one's heard before
It represents my newfound strength
It's vocally hard, it's generally where
I'll indicate wildness by letting down my hair

I'm fucking letting down my hair

Then the key change kicks in
And more clichés begin
Every day is a gift, never give up
Tomorrow is a whole new world
And I'll sing really loud with joy
And at the end, the note I'll prolong
But then I'll stop, and, in a breathy voice
I'll suddenly remember what's wrong

I'm alone
In my room
Or a turret
Or under the sea
Or in China
Or in a pride in Africa and I'm also a lion by the way
Singing my Disney Princess Song
Emotional. My Disney Princess Song

Appendix Five – “Let It Go” – Japanese Translation

The snow has started to fall and erases all footsteps
As I'm all alone in this pure-white world
The wind whispers to my heart,
I can't stay like this

Confusion, hurt
Unable to open up to anyone,
I'd troubled and worried
Let's stop that already

I'll show you how I truly am
I'll become my true self
I'm not afraid of anything
Let the wind blow
I'm not the least bit cold

All of the worries I had
seems like a lie
After all, I'm now free,
I can do anything

How far can I go?
I want to test myself
That's right, I'm going to change

As I truly am, I'll ride the wind into the sky,
As I truly am, I'll try taking flight
I won't shed tears ever again

Cold envelops the earth
I draw my feelings soaring high up into the sky
Like the crystallization of icy flowers blooming,
I want to shine; I've already decided

I'm fine as I am
I'll come to like myself
I'm fine as I am
I believe so myself
As I bask in the light,
I'll begin walking
I'm not the least bit cold

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