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“Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the mightiest of them
all?”

An analysis of the changing concept of femininity in
Disney animation with regard to Western gender rules”

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1. General introduction

The following thesis is going to deal with notions of femininity in Disney animations, examining both the good girls, and their opponents, the wicked women.

Throughout the years, Disney has managed to tell fairy tales and folk stories by adding their own social and cultural background to the plot and have thereby exerted their influence on young viewers worldwide. The young audience is hence taught Disney's cultural beliefs and with respect to the company's views on women, they are extradited to rules of gender and learn how women are supposed to behave within society.

These notions on gender, including expected female behaviour and performance, that Disney so successfully spreads, are going to be analysed in this thesis. The ultimate focus, however, is especially on the wicked women, who embody everything that a woman is not supposed to be. Hence, the way in which female Disney villains neglect Western gender rules and in what way they behave inappropriately, is going to be examined in the following lines.

For the examination, two notable analysts will be taken into notice; firstly, there is de Lauretis' work on gender studies, which focuses on the cultural representation of women in modern cinema and modern fiction, and secondly, there is Judith Butler's idea of gender as a performance, which relates conceptions on femininity, together with notions on queer thinking, to gender identity and gender acting. Both works are of great importance in the world of studies, and are going to be considered the major basis of gender concepts for this thesis. In addition, Andreea Coca's paper on Disney, in which she includes Butler's and de Lauretis' point of views, will serve as a guideline to this analysis.

In her book *Technologies of Gender* de Lauretis proposes the idea that gender is a product of society, culture and of "various social technologies, such as cinema" (de Lauretis ix), which will be the basic principle of this work on Disney. As per de Lauretis, as well as Glover and Kaplan, Cranny-Francis et al., and Robinson and Richardson, who all partly focused on de Lauretis' work, the concept of gender does not merely distinguish between male and female, but favours and thereby empowers men, forming a hierarchy of the sexes. This gender concept becomes evident in most fairy tales, hence also in Disney films, which promote the idea of a patriarchal society and describe femininities within the stories accordingly.

After taking a closer look at these analysts' concepts on gender ideas, the conclusion that I seek to enquire is in how far the Americans' changing perception of society, class, etc. throughout the years, influences a change of tone with regard to gender issues in Disney animation films. Therefore, I am going to examine the depiction of these varying gender aspects and opinions on the part of good and bad female characters in six selected animated Disney films.

This analysis will be guided by the works of Bell et al., Amy M. Davis, and Douglas Brode, who all contributed their works to the world of Disney under different perspectives. While Brode considers the portrayal of different races and their cultural background in Disney films, Bell et al. concentrate on feminist and cultural gender issues, an idea that Davis also touches on by examining the changing role of women in Disney animation through time.

Hence, it is my goal to combine all these points of view by taking a closer look at general gender ideas and to come up with a concept of how women are supposed to be, or rather how they are not allowed to be according to the Disney company, and in how far these concepts have varied throughout the years.

Ultimately, my thesis will concentrate on the evil women, something that none of these aforementioned books have done thoroughly, and, in accordance to the change in feminist gender structures, I hope to find an evolution of madness on their parts as well.

2. Femininities in Disney Films based on the analysis on Gender Studies

2.1. Introduction and Overview

The company Disney is one of the most powerful and thus influencing mediators since the early 20th century. Over the last decades it has provided its predominantly young viewers with stories about love, courage and family and has therewith promoted its concepts of femininity. Hence, Disney's beliefs on gender are imposed upon the young audience; however, as Walt Disney is an American corporation, founded by a U.S. American film producer and therefore deeply rooted in U.S. American ways of thinking, the films advertise ideal images of gender roles according to the Northern American model (see Krasniewicz xvii-xviii).

The term *gender* describes various meanings that have changed and grown vastly over the last decades. Basically, it was introduced to draw attention to the difference between men and women in society, however, as the areas where women have started to take part in have expanded, so has the term itself. We talk about gender gaps, gender roles, etc., which can all be included into the concept of *gender studies*. This field can be described in diverse ways; on the one hand it might be pictured as dealing with "the social and cultural aspects of sexual difference" (Glover, Kaplan xix), as well as the "tremendous areas of behaviour, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations" on the other hand (Stoller ix). As pursuant to Glover and Kaplan, gender studies are influenced by social and cultural factors, the field is extradited to the various parameters that characterise social rules within a society. With regard to the analysis of femininities in Disney films, the notion of gender constructions and of what is *typically* female according to society needs to be elaborated.

The answer to why we seek to define roles in society can be found in our never-ending query about *normal* behaviour for both sexes. We demand to know what is considered as regular, ordinary, and natural and try to fit into these definitions. All the same, those determinations had to face numerous changes in the past as concerns a person's place in society and work, as well as one's sexual psychology, as the immense diversity of sexual expression and behaviour contrasts the definitions of what is *normal* (see Glover, Kaplan xvii). Hence, what a person desires to be might emerge the natural gender concept and – in the course of time – might force the theory itself to rethink its definitions and enlarge the interpretation of gender roles.

Glover and Kaplan consider this “area of overlap between sexology and psychoanalysis [...] the first late modern concept of gender beginning to emerge” (xviii).

But not only did the concept change over the course of time; there are also differences among countries, cultures and societies. Hence, the definition of how a person has to act concerning to its gender, varies considerably and determines one’s personality within a culture from the beginning. Comfort argues that “the ‘gender role’ which an individual adopts – ‘manly’ or ‘womanly’ – according to the standards of his culture, is oddly enough almost wholly learned, and little if at all built in; in fact, the gender role learned by the age of two years is for most individuals almost irreversible, even if it runs counter to the physical sex of the subject” (42).

According to Comfort, it can be stated that the gender role that an individual plays within society, is not aligned to his inner feelings; a fact that is also mentioned by Stoller, who calls this phenomenon “gender identity” (Stoller 10). Whether a man sometimes feels like crying, or a woman carries a dominant, strong and powerful character might not be accepted by the gender role they have to incorporate within their culture, but can still be present inside them; it only depends on the society they live in whether they can play it out or not. Any individual can hence be regarded as a permanent actor who tries to fit into a specific role society offers to him; de Lauretis notes accordingly that the “construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation” (9).

2.2. The reciprocal interaction of cinematic gender and society

Since Disney films are popular around the globe, children from diverse cultures watch them and learn and accept the portrayed gender roles in the movies. Andreea Coca, who deals with Disney and hidden gender messages and is therefore a valuable source for this analysis, talks about Disney’s role as to “what gender messages Disney features convey and to what extent the fantasy world presented reflects the social and ideological ‘reality’ in which they are embedded” (Coca 6).

In her article she talks about Disney’s enormous impact on children as a teaching material of “learning about societal constructions and of shaping adult identities, expectations and values” (Coca 5) and further mentions that the company’s animated films attract audiences across all generations, letting adults escape to a world of colourful fairy tales for a moment, but also generating children’s interests and goals in life (see Coca 5). Therefore it

can be stated that Disney does not merely promote typical U.S. American role models, but effectively teaches those roles to children who accept the social models presented in the film as the universal truth. However, as within all cultures and societies, also the “cultural images of American women have changed considerably in the last two decades” (Davis 6) and so have their gender attributes.

Coca mentions that the portrayal of gender in the arts has always been bound to the time being made; it is and ever was a representation of a gendered community. With Disney, the case is slightly different, as their stories do not necessarily reflect the time in which a film is being made, but rather tell an old fairy tale, which is often set not only decades, but many centuries ago. Hence, when cinematically telling such a tale, the filmmakers have to account for social rules and boundaries of the time the story takes place and was written in and adapt the contents to their present time accordingly. The influence of the present time while writing a fictional story is important as regards the way women are depicted within society and hence also in media (see Coca 5-6).

The fairy tales that Disney’s stories originate from descend from great authors from the past, or as Bell et al. put it: „Disney artists have captured the characterology of beautiful victims, active wickedness, and feminine goodness sketched in the tales of the Grimms, Perrault, and Andersen“ (120). The fact that these stories are ancient and rather outdated becomes evident in the way that women are mostly depicted in the way the authors’ contemporary society wanted them to be, not paying attention to feminist interventions; in other words, the portrayal of female characters was ever bound to the way men wanted to see them at a given point of time, for they were the dominating gender in society. With regard to Disney animations, this means that the company had to focus on the “evolving understanding of the ways in which marriage, career, and family are/should be prioritised amongst middle-class Western women” (Davis 17-18) in their animations.

As a result, Disney films reflect the gender roles of both the time the fairy tales were written in and the time the film was made in, within the social construct of North American culture. What all afore mentioned analysts, Glover and Kaplan, Marshment, Cranny-Francis et al., and de Lauretis seem to agree on, is the fact that gender is a social construct; ergo gender stereotypes in film are constructed and bound to society, in the case of Disney animations, to American culture and its social beliefs. Amy M. Davis states that “Disney’s role as cultural mirror is an examination of the individual characterisations within the stories themselves [...]

with easily-defined concepts of good and evil” (Davis 19), hence what is described as good or evil in Disney films, depends on the interpretation of what is morally and ethically acceptable within Western society. Davis further notes that Disney’s influence on Western popular culture in the twentieth century is immense, stating that “Disney became an inseparable aspect of American popular culture, as well as an integral part of the American social fabric” (222).

It can therefrom be stated that the relation between gender in society and gender in film or literature is a reciprocally dependent system; filmmakers are influenced by their social surroundings when making and thus influencing their movie, however, the film is shown to an audience which is biased by it and accepts its social construct and ultimately projects these rules onto their personal perspective on gender roles. De Lauretis argues:

The construction of gender goes on through the various technologies of gender (e.g., cinema) and institutional discourses (e.g., theory) with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote and ‘implant’ representations of gender. But the terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are at the ‘local’ level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation. (18)

Davis’ opinion on the way films mirror society within which they are made is congruent to de Lauretis’ argument, as she points out that with respect to Disney, the films are “just a reflection of American society’s overriding values” respective the way the company “has represented certain ideas, themes, morals, and attitudes in its films”, which is “especially true in their depictions of femininity through their human female characters” (Davis 222).

She further mentions Disney’s relation to American society of the twentieth century and its “tendency to separate and define the sexes, doing so through economic, political, and cultural means, as well as by fostering the development of strict social roles and hierarchies” (Davis 116). Also, she points out that after the time of Industrial Revolution, women’s roles in society were suddenly limited to keeping the house, while men were in position to earn money, which reflects the way a woman’s value was perceived within society. This resulted in women being reliant on men in life, which meant only one thing for them: they had to make it their goal in life to find a husband, which, however, they could only achieve by being beautiful, or via their skills in arts and in the household (see 116).

Davis moreover mentions that “the idea that a woman’s major function within society was as a consumer and the notion that a woman could be judged (and, most crucially, judge herself), on the basis of her physical appearance” (117) was basically the role that women were

restricted to in Western society. However, her critical view on this issue results in her statement that “although most of the heroines of the Disney studio’s films offer, at best, imperfect mirrors of what was expected of women by American society at various moments of the twentieth century, [...] Disney helped to create an important reflection of American society’s rapidly changing attitudes and beliefs about women, gender, and femininity” (222-223).

Cranny-Francis et al. note that as well as a real-life individual is constantly playing a role in gendered society, referring to de Lauretis’ model of self-representation, so do the characters in a film, however, as spectators, people tend to take filmic representations as the universal truth. Davis mentions that “spectators can and do view films in an active way” (27), in the case of children, who have not gotten straight yet that films are only a reflection of reality and not actually real life, are “very likely to incorporate the things they see in movies into their play, thereby repeating, analysing, and incorporating into their subconscious ideas and themes they take away from films” (27). This means that children watch the colourful images of Disney animations, accept and take in the beliefs and values of the film and adapt and conform their behaviour to it. Davis quotes David Cohan, who states that “even very young children are able to understand ideas as complex as gender roles at a surprisingly early age”, as they are “completely aware of the differences between masculine and feminine”, in other words, “able to fulfil very definite social roles” (qtd. in Davis 29). Yet further, Davis points out that children have “shown to be aware of what is inappropriate – as well as appropriate – behaviour within these roles”, as children quickly “develop a definite sense of gender-appropriate roles at comparatively young ages” (Davis 30).

Thus, considering that Disney animations, which send out clear gender roles, including their boundaries and duties, are shown to children during this responsive age, films can definitely generate a patriarchal reality onto a viewer’s subjective viewpoint and redefine his conventional position (see Cranny-Francis et al. 101-105). Davis argues that the phenomenon of identification with a character in a film is usually a female one, still, on a general basis it can be said that spectators are likely to identify with either the character that appears to be most like them, or the protagonist of the story, notwithstanding their bodily resemblance to the character (see Davis 91).

However, it is possible for a viewer or reader to neglect the gendered world, including gender roles and social rules, within a tale; Cranny-Francis et al. comment that “texts are engendering

practices to the extent that they position readers or viewers to accept a particular view about gender in order to read or view the text. However, readers may engage with the text in ways that do not comply with that positioning, and so may resist that engendering practice” (105).

In other words, a female reader or viewer, being confronted with the male gazed text, might not harmonize with the way a woman is represented in the story, as it might not conform to her own background and vision of what being a woman means. With regard to Disney, where the heroine usually searches for love, which is basically her main challenge in life, such a devotion to finding a husband might not meet an ordinary female spectator’s expectations on life, as to her, being good at sports or having success in her job life might be the central everyday issue. However, as such qualities are not exactly what men picture women having within a patriarchal society, hardly any females in Disney tales are depicted in this manner and thus, such women viewers tend to neglect the gender reality in the film and its engendering practices.

As already noted, apart from the viewer’s gender and background, Cranny-Francis et al. mention another important aspect, namely the relation of a text to social transformation, as gender is part of society and therefore engendering qualities in a text are regulated by sociohistorical changes (see 106). Gender conventions have changed over the past decades and so has their representation within media texts and only by “identifying how the discourses generated textually relate to the discourses circulating in society” (Cranny-Francis et al. 108), particularly at a specific point of time, one can gather the message it delivers. A contemporary reader or viewer might consider a text or film and its engendering strategies irritating or even confusing, while at the time being released, it reflected on society and was therefore accepted as fitting the social norm. Hence the reading and comprehension of a text or film might differ from the understanding of the audience for which it was first shaped and formulated, and lived in a different time and society (see 108).

Also, the representation of characters in a story is exposed to a large community of viewers, however, the interpretation of what a person reads into a film and a characterised person is principally individual. To this effect, Glover and Kaplan mention that the meaning that is derived by the audience from a film can not only vary diachronically, which refers to the change over a course of time, but also synchronically, among the different sexes, social statuses, age of the audience, etc. (see 136-138). Likewise, while Disney’s portrayal of a woman whose mere goal in life is marriage and a clean household was regarded as being a *normal, everyday* woman, such female characters are considered as being above the ordinary

by the contemporary audience. Such thinking can be explained psychoanalytically, as the reader unknowingly and unconsciously identifies with a character in the story and projects his own desires and wishes onto the character. Hence, a modern woman's thinking does not align with an early 20th century woman's way of life, causing a diachronic crossing of gender limitations (see Glover and Kaplan 145).

The problem with Disney in this case is the fact that the company keeps on republishing its old animations (see Davis 1), providing the films for new and more modern audiences without minding the old-fashioned gender models within the tales. Actually, although some Disney films appear out-dated to the audience, the animations from the time when the film was made cannot take all the blame, as the stories that the films deal with were even “decades or centuries old by the time they were put on film” (Davis 21). Disney base most of their stories on fairy tales or myths which also reflect the cultural and social problems of the time they were written, thus it is no surprise that the primarily female audience does not always associate with the portrayal of women, love, and marriage presented in the animations.

Davis quotes Walter Disney who once said: “After all 80 per cent of our audience are women. ...We don't cater to the child but to the child in the adult – what we all imagined as kids is what we'd like to see pictured” (qtd. in Davis 128). The fact that he considers the films to be made for women makes Davis critically question some scenes of Disney's *Snow White* with regard to what female spectators were obviously supposed to want to see. She notes that from a story memo of the film, there was a scene that was meant to be part of the film, however, ultimately not included in the story, that showed a “dream sequence which would feature, amongst other things, a wedding amongst fluffy white clouds with an escort of babies” (129). Davis' analysis of this scene make her assume that Disney obviously appeals to the soft and emotional side that he expects to find in every women by implying that all women want to marry and have babies and that this is precisely what all of them dream about all day, as it appeals “to their specifically ‘feminine’ instincts of maternalism and emotionalism” (130).

However, while those emotional yet grown-up women are capable of regarding the female roles presented in the films as entertainment and do not necessarily adapt those heroines' features onto their lives, children have a different approach to watching those films. Children, being the actual predominant audience of Disney films, are spectators who do not have fixed gender systems in mind when watching a movie, and who are willing and open to learn from

the films they watch and thereby learn that girls are emotional and caring, at least if they are good (see Coca 5-6).

Children are unobservable of what they are secretly being taught, since the way in which the teaching material is presented to them appears colourful, bright and shiny and all too cute to be comprehended as something other than a fairy tale. Thereby, without noticing, the young audience takes in the underlying messages of those stories, understands the rules and requirements of e.g. what it means to be a growing woman, and internalises these concepts and manners (see Coca 5-6).

Bell et al. mention a similar point in their book *From Mouse to Mermaid*, where they note that via “insouciant playfulness” Disney manages to make “childhood dreams come true with strict gender roles” (Bell 47). Having regard of this issue, they further touch on Teresa de Lauretis’ work and the way she thinks the construction of gender is influenced by the cinema by stating that all notions of gender are “largely determined by the gender roles we have been taught to inhabit, and one of the primary teachers is the cinema” (Bell 149). Davis also mentions that it is “with the images of women in popular culture that all of the aspects of American society’s changing attitudes towards women were mapped” (Davis 1).

However, children do not only take in American social gender notions of the given time, but as Disney films reflect the social constructs of the time being made, the young spectators also face concepts of older films which portray rather outdated models of family and femininity; Coca notes thus that in many films, Disney fails “to adapt to social changes in gender (in)equality” (6). This failure to reflect social changes in Disney films is also touched on by Davis, who states that “in their representations of femininity, Disney films reflected the attitudes of the wider society from which they emerged, and their enduring popularity is evidence that the depictions they contain would continue to resonate as the films were re-released in later decades” (Davis 1).

2.3. Gender stereotypes in Disney

Fairy tales are produced to teach children important lessons in life, e.g. that it is important to be good and caring, or how to deal with tragic events, etc. Disney animations convey those messages and put an extra emphasis on the delivery of gender rules and models by exaggerating gender expectations (see Coca 6-7). The clichéd filmic outcome hence serves as a stereotypical product of character representations on the surface (the characters’

appearance), their self-representation and gender performance (what the characters are supposed to expect from life), which will both be discussed in later chapters, as well as the representative division of power among the sexes with regard to work, sexuality, intelligence and passivity and activity, which this chapter is going to deal with.

In most Disney films, especially those from the earlier period, like *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, or *Sleeping Beauty*, the differences between men and women within society are highly stressed, pointing out the gender rules both have to obey to. De Lauretis states that the social imbalance between the two sexes as an effect from the obvious biological differences is an outcome that rather results from cultural signification than from society itself (see 1). As per her, gender is a representation of the self, which influences its construction on a social level. She notes:

The term *gender* is, actually, the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category. Gender is the representation of the relation, or [...] gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging; thus, gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-à-vis other preconstituted classes. (4)

In other words, gender does not describe an individual, but the social and cultural aspects of gender relations, which the individual represents; each culture has its own gender system, “a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies” (de Lauretis 5). Thus, a common female represents herself individually within a society that is characterised with differing gender meanings that assigns to the female individuals; it is a concept of both influencing and being influenced in a systematic circle of gender meaning. Within a culture that favours men, women are bound to their socialised gender role and need to act passively (see 8-9); those among them who want to escape these boundaries are found to not fitting their gender role. Within the Disney world, this equals the system of good girls versus bad women, or in other words, the favour of those who obey the social rules of patriarchal power and the disdain of those who neglect them.

2.3.1. Sexuality and Power dispersion among the sexes

All the cultural books on Disney animations considered for this thesis seem to share one belief, namely the fact that the division of power comes down to the imbalance of sexual potency among the two sexes. In their analysis, Cranny-Francis et al. talk about such sexual

differences and in how far they result in gender inequalities. Within a patriarchal system, men are the more powerful sex, which connotes them with having control over women in all fields, like economy, society, work, and sex. Men have a more potent sexual desire than women and have hence used women as tools to assuage their lust by suppressing women (see 14-15). However, a woman portrayed as not fitting into this sexually oppressed image, as Disney does with its villainesses, is soon regarded as atypical, unfeminine, or even as having a wicked nature.

In the 1960s and 1970s feminist debates, the concept of patriarchy evolved, exploring gender suppression and examining society “in which maleness and masculinity confer a privileged position of power and authority; where man is the Self and woman is Other” (Cranny-Francis et al. 14). The term is used to describe men’s authority and power over women, referring to different structures in cultural, economic and social spheres (see 15). Cranny-Francis et al. introduce David Buchbinder, noting that feminists investigated the merits and beliefs of patriarchy that set the rules for masculine dominance that affects the whole system of culture and society (see Cranny-Francis et al. 16-17). Buchbinder accordingly states that the amount of intensity of a man’s authority is dependent on various factors, like “physical build, and strength, age, (official) sexual orientation and prowess (even if only rumoured), social class and advantage, economic power, race of the individual, and so on” (qtd. in Cranny-Francis et al. 17). The stronger and more powerful a man is, the more he is able to suppress a woman. Accordingly, male domination results from masculine power, which, in this bi-polar gender system, would mean that women are supposed to be weak and powerless, which is precisely the way most Disney princesses are depicted. Their soft and sweet tenderness harshly contrasts the female villain’s powerful appearance that shows having typical male, ergo dominating characteristics. However, this leads us back to the afore mentioned problem that not every female spectator can relate to the weak, love drunk princess and might see such standards as an oppression of her own desires, since not every woman necessarily agrees to being the typical powerless girl.

Still, according to Richardson and Robinson, dissimilar power standards in society establish sexual relations and vice versa, as they both reflect and influence each other, serving to “maintain women’s subordination” (75). Ergo, they state that the feminists’ concern is about how male dominance in sex restrains and inhibits women from gaining power and control in all social and work-related fields in life (see Richardson, Robinson 75). In Disney, this

concern is affirmed by the fact that in their animations, all women who seek to gain power, like Cruella de Vil, Ursula the sea witch, or *Snow White's* stepmother, the Queen, are portrayed as being evil because of their unfemale-like desire to be more powerful than men.

Richardson and Robinson examined the way in which a woman's life can be socially impacted by male dominance through sexuality and conclude that this impact varies among different cultures, as well as diachronically through history (see 75). Even so, the basic principle in a woman's life is to *give* to her man and to others.

They note that feminists have dealt with female suppression due to male sexual dominance since the nineteenth century, seeking to shift sexual power relations between men and women (see 76). Since according to them, sexual power is the key to male dominance over women, they think that a shift in performing sexuality equals a rearrangement of power. Female Disney villains show a great deal of self-confidence and some of them like to extensively show their sexual side, like Ursula the sea-witch from *The Little Mermaid*. In other words, Ursula succeeded in overpowering men and therefore is allowed to show as much cleavage as she likes, not needing to pay attention to any social gender rule that says that she as a woman is not supposed to act like that.

However, the acceptability of female sexuality and to what degree it can be tolerated has changed a lot over the centuries, and is furthermore also culturally diverging, since different societies have different rules about gender and sexuality. The social construct of sexuality determines the rules and limits of a sexual individual at a given historical period within a certain culture; male and female "sexual identities [...] are the product of social and historical forces" (Richardson, Robinson 78). In this social construct, diverse factors play important roles that help define it; according to Robinson and Richardson, a person's sexuality is little influenced by biology, but mainly determined by the culture an individual lives in:

Religious teachings, laws, psychological theories, medical definitions, social policies, psychiatry and popular culture all inform us of its meanings. Even though our sexual desires may seem to be 'natural', our sexual responses are actually learnt, in the same way as are other likes and dislikes. We learn not just patterns of behaviour, but also the meanings attached to such behaviour. (78)

Sexual behaviour is therefore bound to time and culture as regards what is considered as being *normal*. Carole Vance furthermore argues that "physically identical sexual acts may have varying social significance and subjective meaning depending on how they are defined and understood in different cultures and historical periods" (19). While nowadays, a woman

walking down the street, showing her belly button in a short shirt would merely draw the attention of some men, such openly performed sexuality would have been disastrous in the nineteenth century; or as Richardson and Robinson put it, “a kiss is not just a kiss, as time goes by” (79). Furthermore, such a kiss has different connotations among different cultures at a given point of time as well, and so does sexual behaviour.

According to Richardson and Robinson, socialisation can be regarded as the taming of the human and his inner wishes and desires, one of which being the sexual drive. Whereas in cultures, where people live closer to nature and therefore are less civilised, it is normal to perform a sexual act while being in a group of people, a more civilised individual, who has learnt the complex sexual rules and models of society, would refuse, yet disapprove of such wild behaviour (see 79). One could state that Ursula the sea-witch lives close to nature, as she lives under the sea, and is therefore allowed to act animal-like, especially considering that she *is* partly an animal, however, she also lives in a civilized and socially constructed world, where a king rules over his mer-people and standards and norms have to be stuck to. Ergo, her striving for being queen of the sea, and hence overpowering the almost-naked mer-people, results appearance-wise in her desire to dress voluptuously and sexually powerful. Again, Disney compares her pursuit for power with an ambition for living out her strong inner sexuality and exaggerates this representation with an almost transvestite-like appearance in order to accentuate her evilness. Within their patriarchal world, a good girl would have to let the man be the sexually more dominant part and hence also more powerful on an overall basis, in order not to derange the system of power among the sexes.

Davis notes accordingly:

When strong, sexually-mature women are portrayed as frustrated, maniacal, blood-thirsty demons and witches, what are these portrayals saying about perceptions on the part of the film-makers of women’s sexuality? Most of all, perhaps, how large a role do these portrayals play in perpetuating or, in some cases, challenging certain sub-consciously held attitudes within society? (Davis 22)

According to Richardson and Robinson, John H. Gagnon and William Simon suggest that “sex is a vehicle for expressing non-sexual ‘needs’; in particular needs, that are linked to gender roles” (qtd. in Richardson, Robinson 80). Hence, a man, who needs to feel manly and act in a masculine way, expresses it through his sexuality in order to demonstrate his power over a woman. Therefore gender inequality is principally “the result of the power men have over women” (80). Having sex, hence being active, is regarded as a male feature; accordingly potency and power are central to male sexuality. Female sexuality even so correlates with

male sexuality, yet it is bound to a different concept. Being counterparts, women are submissive to dominant men, they give while men take (see Richardson, Robinson 80). Although this concept might not be universally true for every individual, the theory is proven right when looking at the opposite case, considering a woman taking action in a sexual way is easily designated as her being wild and untamed, and her taking action being unfeminine and manly. Once more, Disney's Ursula's performance of taking action is displayed on her body with her overly wild and sexual looks and thereby provokes an evil, unfeminine (as it is not passive and powerless) image.

This relationship between male dominance in sexuality and gender inequality is central to feminist theories. Richardson and Robinson introduce the more radical feminist theorists Rosalind Brunt, who argues that "the sexual division between men and women" are unchangeable and bound to nature, and "it is a fact of nature that they are oppressor and oppressed" (qtd. in Richardson, Robinson 82). However, the more common belief is that, if sexuality is a social construct, there are ways to redefine its scripts and rules and therefore to equalise gender differences. In order to enable such progress, feminists decided to concentrate on examining *how* sexuality is affiliated with women's powerlessness (see Richardson, Robinson 83).

In the 1970s, feminists focused on the relation between male sexual dominance and female social oppression and in what way male sexuality affects women (see 86). Sheila Jeffreys sheds light on the fact that "feminist thinkers saw sex as something that women had been shut out of. Women had not been allowed the delights that men had taken for granted. Sex was an equal rights issue" (qtd. in Richardson, Robinson 86). If, by gaining more confidence via taking sexual action, women would gain more power and strength on a general basis, gender inequality would lessen. For both the real world and the world of Disney and fairy tales in general, this would mean that a strong woman, or one who wants to become more powerful than a man, would not have to look excessively sexual in order to emphasize her power over men, but could, if she wanted to, act sexually and powerfully on an every-day-basis without the fear of being regarded as having masculine features.

Although, as pointed out by Richardson and Robinson, feminists succeeded in severely questioning the traditional, social and political scripts and models of sexuality, the process is still ongoing. Western women have managed to question the social construct of sexual

identity in order to redefine male and female sexuality as a form of control and power and have thereby found their way to better positions in jobs and in society (see 86).

As per Disney, this new found sexuality is illustrated by the heroines' shift from being shy and properly clothed teenagers, like Snow White, Cinderella, or Aurora, to being sexually more daring and basically half-naked, like Ariel, Jasmine, or Pocahontas. Although those girls' clothing styles are mainly bound to their cultural background, they are still presented as very sexy, especially compared to the earlier heroines, as per example Esmeralda in *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, who shows her belly and dances erotically (see Coca 12).

While children do not *see* nakedness and sexual allusions, says Coca, it is clear that those films send "explicit signals" (15) and are clearly oriented towards the male gaze. That is why Douglas Brode criticizes Walt Disney's "supposed brand of 'innocent' family entertainment", while he figured that the company "openly embraced a daring sexuality" (Brode 125), at least in its later productions. According to him, the more modern Disney princesses only appear to be helpless girls, waiting for a saviour, while in fact they actively use their sexuality to lure them in. He is therefore suspicious of "Disney's portrayal of women as superficial images of helpless princesses, subserviently trusting males to carry them off and live 'happily ever after' in a retro world of postmarital bliss" (Brode 171), as he believes the heroines to be, sexually speaking, more refined than their innocent appearance makes everyone assume.

Considering the difference between the portrayal of earlier Disney princesses and the later ones, the shift of sexual power within society that is mirrored in Disney animations becomes clear and shows the drastic changes that have occurred over those forty to fifty years. With the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s (see Richardson, Robinson 3), new concepts of femininities displaced old views on female sexuality and made way for *good* sexuality, portrayed on the part of Disney heroines. Up until then, all female Disney characters that showed a form of active sexuality were depicted as evil creatures, or at least they had to be animals in one of Disney's animal character productions. With respect to Disney's animals, Davis explains that "stories about animal characters have a greater emphasis on the characters' sensuality and sexuality than do stories about humans" (172), as they are untamed, for they are not members of a socialised culture. She exemplifies this statement with the girl rabbit in *Bambi*, who is both vain and voluptuous in her behaviour, which are both personality traits that would be evil in a human female character, however, as a rabbit that wants to tease a the male rabbit Thumper, her comportment is regarded as funny and comical by the

audience who does not question the rabbit's moral standards and integrity (see Davis 172-173). On the part of humans who embrace their sexuality Davis notes:

The idea of a fairy tale princess sauntering up to her intended, preening, hips swaying, and flirting, is impossible to imagine in the earlier Disney films. The only human characters who do such things are generally depicted as being not very nice, and in fact as being vain and over-sexed (as is the case with the ugly step-sisters, Anastasia and Drusela, in *Cinderella*). (172)

Thus it can be stated that in earlier Disney films, the performance of sexuality, e.g. via teasing or bantering, was either depicted as comical on the part of animals, or as aggressive and evil on the part of human females. Davis mentions that the “girl rabbit who so sassily and sensually seduces Thumper in *Bambi* is, more so than perhaps any other Disney character in the fifty years between *Bambi*'s release and that of *Aladdin* in 1992, truly sexy, and even a bit of a vamp” (173). At that time, in 1942, this exact behaviour performed by a grown woman, however, would have had entirely different connotations than the girl rabbit's teasing did, actually a solely negative one, while the rabbit's actions were merely regarded as cute.

Davis continues this thought and points out that the nearest a human action gets to the rabbit's performance is Aurora's dance in *Sleeping Beauty*, when she sings “Once Upon a Dream” about a man she dreamed about. Davis mentions that this flirtatious dance that Aurora performs with the animals, however imagining that she was in fact dancing with the prince, shows a great deal of self-confidence and activity, although it still “does not exude the confident sexuality of characters such as [...] the unnamed rabbit in *Bambi*” (173). This is proven in the instant when her prince charming appears and she is confronted with a real, flesh and blood man, which is when “her flirtatious demeanour immediately dissolves and she is shown to be shy, awkward, and inexperienced” (173). However, her abrupt break with the song and her plucky performance the moment Prince Philip occurs is not caused by social rules on gender that she has to obey to, but merely by her shy and actually not very daring personality, which reveals to the audience that she is generally not a sensual being, which, at the time the film was made, marked her as a good and sound character.

However, as the women's movement influenced the social status of women in the Western world, the image of the shy, inactive girl slowly vanished and gave way to new definitions of femininities. Davis argues that by the 1990s, “the notion that a woman could be both good and sexy had ceased to be such an unimaginable concept in representations of femininity in much of America's popular culture” (173). Good Disney women hence no longer needed to fit

the old bi-polar system that propagated the image of the prudish, passive girl and her evil cross character that was driven by sex and power. These oppositional traits started to become indistinct, as the good heroine no longer needed to veer away from her sexuality, which comes along with power. Davis notes accordingly that “women characters were beginning to exude a confident sexuality which in no way detracted from their portrayals as good, honourable individuals” (173); during their movement, women had gained so much more power that an exaggerated, good fairy tale character who behaved sensually no longer stood out as having a dark, evil side, but was perceived as normal by the audience.

That shift from what Disney characterised as “a ‘good’ woman, and what makes an individual ‘evil’ or ‘bad’” (175) absolutely dominated the company’s animations during the 1990s; Davis notes that it “is not just the ways the stories are told in these films, however, but also that the stories themselves, containing as they all do strong, independent, intelligent female characters, are potentially indicative of just how much feminist ideology had entered into mainstream American middleclass values” (175).

2.3.2. Passivity vs. Activity

As it has already been discussed in the chapter on sexuality, the bi-polar gender system is central to gender representation, especially in fairy tales and Disney animations, where gender models are exaggerated, in order to emphasize the difference between men and women. The model states that within a patriarchal society, the expectations of both genders are oppositional, like e.g. the notion of activeness and passiveness (see Cranny-Francis et al. 17).

Glover and Kaplan discuss this issue and find a woman to be assumed to let the man do the work and helpfully stand behind him by supporting his decisions and acts; she has inherited a passive role by society (see 2). However, they further introduce Freud, who promoted his idea of femininity differently, “how inadequate it is to make masculine behaviour coincide with activity and feminine with passivity. [...] Women can display great activity in various directions.” (qtd. in Glover, Kaplan 2). Being a woman is usually aligned to being feminine, as concerns a female’s attributes or gendered characteristics. However, feminism challenges this concept and debates and severely criticises the roots of what these *normal* characteristics are; Glover and Kaplan note: “Feminism continues to argue about what is natural or

biologically given and what is culturally constructed; it remains divided, although perhaps less absolutely so than in the past, about how to analyse the psychic and the social components of female subjectivity” (5).

A typical woman is hence supposed to be and do a lot of things according to the rules of the society she lives in. However, as regards Disney, the depiction of such *normal* women rather turns into a *stereotypical* depiction of the sexes, as it is the case in all fairy tales. Davis argues that Disney’s habit of stereotyping almost exclusively focuses on female characters (see 223), which can be best explained through Cranny-Francis et al., who state that, with respect to gender, stereotyping is framed by power relations, because “stereotypes inscribe different levels of access to power and prestige” (Cranny-Francis et al. 148). Stereotyping is applied to all groups, describing their function in life and society. There are various types of men; to mention only some we have e.g. the macho man, who is sexually, but not emotionally interesting to women, the softie, who does actually care about a woman’s feelings, the good buddy, who has no sexual charisma for women, but a shoulder to lean on, the family guy, who needs stability and love, etc. These unprofessional classifications show that the division of male stereotypes help everyday women with choosing the right partner in life, so they know what to expect. However, the stereotypical depiction of women does not only serve the goal of who-will-make-me-happy and who-fits-me, but includes relations of power, as according to Cranny-Francis et al. (see 148).

Cranny-Francis et al. cite Meaghan Morris, who concentrates on the issue of stereotyping in her book *Sticks and Stones and Stereotypes*, noting that typifying “enables the dominant group to reaffirm rather than rethink its stereotypes about the oppressed group” (qtd. in Cranny-Francis et al. 149), which can be regarded as an “attempt by a dominant group to silence an oppressed group’s attempt to change its social status and counter the negative stereotypes which contribute to its oppression – the name-calling, stereotyping, shunning and moral pressure that kept women, wogs and weirdos in their place” (149).

This rather harsh and feminist statement describes female oppression by men via stereotyping and can be explained by the way men react to women; accordingly, men picture women as either strong or weak, outgoing or introvert, active or passive, etc., describing their features not necessarily with the ulterior motive of what kind of girl is right for them, but in how far those characteristics are threatening to men’s power within society. Correspondingly, active women who desire a successful job are described as career-oriented, unwomanly and hence

undesirable, whereas good-looking women, especially blondes, are simplified to being dumb, but innocuous for men's position in society, etc.

Various films and books play with not fulfilling gender expectations and portray women as successful in their working positions, as well as vamps who use men as sexual toys to please and satisfy their lust (see Cranny-Francis et al. 148). Men describe such masculine and career-oriented women as manipulating, because they feel overwhelmed and overpowered by them. Cranny-Francis et al. describe the dilemma accordingly:

Each positive stereotype carries with it complementary stereotypes which are dependent on essential characteristics. If someone tries to break one stereotype, another related stereotype quickly becomes available. [...] So, in this example, a woman should be nurturing. Instead she is ruthless. When she acquires the positive characteristic of the businessman (after all, when applied to him, it permits him access to wealth and power), it becomes negative. Moreover, she no longer has access to the limited benefits of her positive stereotype as nurturing female. She is doubly damned. (149)

This is precisely the case in Disney films, where the nice, neat and nurturing women are depicted as good, young and honest females, whereas the ones who neglect their mothering role and seek power instead, be it in the working field, like becoming queen, or in the domain of witchcraft, are depicted as mean, vicious, and evil women.

It appears that most female stereotypes apply to limiting a woman's power and credibility; men regard women as the weaker sex and therefore limit their duties in life to being a nurturer and leave the active things to them. Davis notes that this "typing of 'feminine' women as being passive, sweet, emotional" (127) is hence present in patriarchal films; Cranny-Francis et al introduce further typical traits that describe women as fragile, sensitive, vulnerable, emotional, motherly, patient, soft, affectionate, etc., which are all linked to women as having nurturing and mothering characteristics (see 144). However, the "heightened emotional nature" that women apply to, is stereotypically related to being hysterical, which "can turn to madness" (Cranny-Francis et al. 144). Anew, a typical female trait is being narrowed down to something negative and limits her power, in this case the power over her psychological self. Naturally, such characteristics find favour with Disney animations, where evil women are depicted as wicked, maliciously laughing women who seem to have lost their marbles, considering the way they act.

Such stereotypical features are, however, not only propagated via films, but also in literature, posters, or newspapers and are thereby implanted into the public's heads (see 145). In an earlier chapter we have learned that media and society are interactive in their beliefs and rules on gender performance, ergo the conception of stereotypes is reciprocal as well. Films are hence very capable generators of stereotypes, as their gender representations spread quickly and influence society.

Over the last decades, various attempts to change the negative image of certain stereotypes, like working women and nurturing men, have been conducted with the help of television and advertising, as feminist movements have managed to overhaul stereotypical women roles in society. Films have the potential to generate and endorse social constructions in the viewer's psyche and implement new general standards in the public's minds (see Cranny-Francis et al. 145-149). Accordingly, Margaret Marshment argues that films started revising society's assumption of how or what women were *supposed to be*, have, or do in order to be regarded as a whole and typical woman (see 124).

Storytellers were aware of women's struggle with powerlessness and dealt with it:

This was [...] an awareness of the 'over-determined' nature of women's oppression in society: the way in which their subordinate position in a multiplicity of structures, institutions and value systems interacted with each other to lock women into an overall subordination. Among these structures are those concerned with producing representations of women: from primary school reading schemes to Hollywood films, from advertising to opera, from game shows to art galleries, women are depicted in ways that define what it meant to be a woman in this society: what women are like (naturally), what they ought to be like, what they are capable of, and incapable of, what roles they play in society, and how they differ from men. (Marshment 124)

Marshment states that it became more important to convey an objective and most importantly an unprejudiced demonstration of women, free from stereotypes (see 124). Media helps in the process of challenging general expectations and assumptions towards a stereotypical group by not only talking about the issue, but by implanting the new and primarily strange images into the public's mind.

As regards female activeness, this can be best seen in the way heroines pursue their goals; whereas Snow White just sits around, waiting for her prince to find her, being the most passive female character of all, later Disney girls like Jasmine, Pocahontas, or Mulan actively do something about their life and escape the boundaries that society puts on each and every one of them. Active women are thus no longer limited to the stereotypical image of changing power identity and hierarchy in society, but prove that those female characters who share such

a pursuit for power are not to be accredited with masculine qualities because of their willingness to change such afore-mentioned power identities in society and are hence to be regarded as evil, but that their activeness is part of their nature, without intentionally trying to overpower men in the process. This comports with Marshment's statement that only when the presentation of an active woman is free from stereotypes that are bound to patriarchal rules (see 124), a change of the public's mind can occur and accept active, fighting, and strong women in films, like i.e. Jasmine, Pocahontas, or Mulan. Naturally, this change took several decades to manifest itself within Disney films, which is why the gender difference between earlier and later animations is obvious.

One area where the difference between activeness and passiveness is most evident in Disney films is the domain of work. As already criticised by Cranny-Francis et al., men, being the stronger sex, oppress women, the weaker sex, in order to keep society in balance. Margaret Marshment agrees with this statement and notes that within a patriarchal culture, women are "defined by those who subordinate them" (125), ergo by men.

In history, a woman's role has hence been restricted to the domestic field, as the limitation to this sphere "reduces competition in the workplace and ensures a servicing of men at home to facilitate their work and leisure activities" (126). Although women are obliged by nature to mother a child and stay at home with it to nurture it, the household itself is a domain that was projected onto a woman's field of work by society, which was dominated by men. Davis mentions that the image of the "happy homemaker" was very present in the 1950s, as "it was the perceived ability of the good housewife to economise in terms both of money and material resources which was credited with helping stretch her family's income during the lean times of the Depression" (Davis 118). She further mentions that women that restrict themselves to the domestic sphere are found to be "good, strong women who can achieve goals of their own but not do so as a means of destroying men" (127), thus they are important and helpful, however, not in the way of men and their field of power.

Disney characters like Cinderella or Snow White, who prove to be hard workers within the household, thereby adapt to this social model and are hence depicted as pure and good females. Again, we can monitor a change in activeness on the part of Disney heroines; while Snow White and Cinderella dedicate their lives to housework, and Aurora, though not really working, is still a very home-bound, and passive girl, later female protagonists like Jasmine or

Mulan break out of their houses and experience a world outside of their safe environment at home.

Coca points out that their eagerness to break free from their lives marks a clear difference to the gender model that dominated society while producing *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, or *Sleeping Beauty*. She states that all princesses are “restricted to the domestic tasks of keeping house – sweeping, cooking and washing” (Coca 8), or at least geographically confined to staying at home, like e.g. Jasmine. In accordance with Coca, the reason for those girls’ limitations to a certain place or domestic sphere lies in the field of gender expectations and gender roles within society that are passed on across generations and pay no attention to revised and modernised standards. Bell et al. also mention that “the house for the Grimms and Disney was the place where good girls remained” (Bell 37). Hence, in order to make a change, the young heroines have to oppose their fathers’ plans and beliefs, which, speaking in terms of gender, means that they have to fight a patriarchal symbol, and by doing so, get active and change the rules of gender within their story; a moment which usually kicks off the plot of the tale (see 8). However, as Coca continues, it appears that all the heroines want is a little adventure and to fight for their rights, or a new understanding of culture, as Pocahontas does, but when they are offered the possibility to sustainably change their lives, they decide against those opportunities, which becomes evident with Mulan returning home to her family and Pocahontas staying with her tribe (which is precisely what both women do at the end of the film; not paying attention to the sequels of both films). It seems that the love and devotion those characters share for their families prevents them from living out their dreams, however, they seem to be happily satisfied with those decisions, even though their independences are restricted (see Coca 9). Hence, one might conclude that no matter how courageous, daring and active the girls are, the heroine’s truthfully good inner quality shows itself by being bound to staying at home where she can be surrounded by her loved ones and where her actual place as a woman is.

Alongside with women’s restriction to the domestic sphere, which excludes active involvement in the working field, is their limitation to education. Hence, another dominant area where men are regarded as superior within a patriarchal society, is their intellectual ability, or rather the way they view women and their capability of having and using their brains. Andreea Coca reveals that with respect to this field, Disney shows itself being “double bind”; within the fairy tale features, intelligence in a woman is “dismissed as superfluous and

possibly a dangerous quality” (Coca 10), which is probably why most of them do not get a proper school education, but learn the more important *female* things in life; Cinderella’s stepmother teaches her daughters singing, playing an instrument and reciting selected poems, although she certainly has enough money to educate them properly, however, as this is not necessarily a quality that men search for, it is sufficient for them to know how to humour a man. Aurora, Snow White, Cinderella and Belle all know how to keep a household, and whenever Ariel wants to know more about the humans, she is told to focus her interest on life under the sea, putting an end to her eagerness to learn about another culture.

With regard to Cinderella’s and Snow White’s working skills, which do not actively help them get a man, but still mark them as good housewives, their qualification in the household mirrors the importance of women’s life at home during the time the film was made, in 1937. The fact that during that time women were not supposed to have a job, or be in hold of any important public situation, but to stay at home and watch the house or/and the children, reflects the passive role that women have been accredited with in the past. Getting active and having a job was associated with having power; a woman who was successful in her job was therefore too powerful and regarded as something undesirable for men.

In compliance with the double-bind Coca talks about, she mentions various examples; first of all there is Belle, whose interest in literature is taunted by the town inhabitants. Coca recites Gaston, who declares in the film that “It’s not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas, thinking” (10), which obviously marks the overall opinion on intelligent women among the villagers. Akin to this position is Mulan’s experience when she talks to her male friends and asks if they liked, as Coca notes, “a girl who’s got brains / who always speaks her mind”, which they respond with a simple “Nah!” (10). Nevertheless, both protagonists end up with a man who appreciates their mind, as well as their wild and active nature, which, in Mulan’s case, helps defeat the Huns and brings peace over China. The third example Coca points out is Pocahontas, whose father tells her that she proved to have “wisdom beyond her years” (10), as she is the key feature to overbear the conflicts between the her tribe and the English men (see Coca 10).

All those examples demonstrate that an intelligent girl is regarded as an unusual phenomenon within a patriarchal society, and as people tend to neglect the things they cannot grasp, she is easily labelled as weird and atypical. However, in the end it appears that all those features are in fact desirable and interesting in a girl, which ultimately does not leave the young audience

with the message that patriarchal rules have to be accepted and that she has to become a good housewife, but to actively fight for what they desire in life.

2.4. Character representation and appearance

The previous chapters highlighted the representation of gender in media as far as social rules and stereotypical gender traits are concerned; this chapter will concentrate on the depiction of character features and their alliance with bodily features.

Again, the representation of good, evil, typically male or female characteristics is bound to stereotypical conventions. Cranny-Francis et al. help shed light on this issue by concentrating on stereotypes within society; they state:

The word 'stereotype' comes to us from the technology of printing presses, where it refers to the metal plates used to make exact and multiple copies. Before stereotyping was used, printers had to set each letter one at a time, line by line, in big wooden frames. These forms could be changed, and the letters reused for other publications. A stereotype is a poured metal plate, and once the metal is poured, the plate can't be changed. (Cranny-Francis et al. 140)

Cranny-Francis et al.'s introduction to the term helps us with understanding the derivation of the word, as one can extract the metaphorical meaning it carries when used to characterise people. Visually speaking, it refers to the lifestyle of thousands who accept the rules and beliefs of society by adapting their individuality to a commonly accepted look. Fashion novelties or new hairstyles, frequently introduced by popular people, are copied by everyone who wants to be part of a certain culture and hence form style groups. Nowadays we know categories like *Punks*, *Goths*, *Chavvy*, *Skaters*, etc., which help us define and identify the looks of these groups, as well as their expected behaviour. Members of the same group are assumed to having certain characteristic notions that stand in relation to these people's looks.

Stereotyping can be described as reducing a person to his most obvious characteristic traits by which he is recognisable and determinable, which is then associated with his behaviouristic profile (see 141). Hence, the young Disney heroine can only be perceived as *good* if she fits the stereotypical principles that are aligned to being good, which, naturally, are bound to contemporary beliefs and accordingly underlie diachronic changes.

However, a person found not to fit entirely into the characteristics of a group, yet belonging to it, is felt to be atypical and not applying to the community. Disney's first *modern* princess, Ariel, who started a new era of heroines that were more active and self-dependent, was then found to be atypical, as she did not fulfil the expected, good old gender rules of being a female Disney character, Amy M. Davis refers to Ariel's characterisation as "a definite shift" that "had occurred at Disney" (Davis 177).

The reason for such judgmental identifying lies in the fact that a group's stereotype is formed by people outside the circle of group members. A group is classified by others, who search for definite and unequivocal key characteristics in the group's lifestyle, however, these assumptions are often misleading and unproven, because "limited knowledge and restricted contact enable the extremely simple character profiles" that are being produced (Cranny-Francis et al. 141). In other words, it depends on the whole society's receptivity and amenability to accept these stereotypical depictions how fast such simplified conceptions travel and spread among cultures. On the part of Disney princesses, who represent average proper and young girls, society does not expect them to be acting atypically, as they are supposed to be passive, devoted, good girls who obey the rules of femaleness within a patriarchal society (see Davis 19).

2.4.1. Looks and personality

Coca mentions that the Disney company appears to be continuously promoting designed values with certain characters, which she calls "gendered bodies" (Coca 10), which is a phenomenon that describes the mutual influence between the embodiment of a character's values and beliefs in his looks; good girls look nice, while bad women are represented as harshly as their personalities.

Ben Leach, who writes for *The Telegraph*, concentrated on this issue and talks about the question why beauty is always aligned with being good in Disney films. He found that in almost every movie, "the good characters were more attractive, more intelligent and less aggressive. They were also more likely to live 'happily ever after' and to find romance" (Leach, telegraph.co.uk), which can be seen in all Disney films, however according to Leach's quote, mostly in Cinderella (attractiveness), Beauty and the Beast (intelligence), Snow White, or Sleeping Beauty (both not aggressive, but very passive). Accordingly, vicious

characters have to be represented as the exact contrary to that, however, as it is a fairy tale, in a rather overstated way.

Still, the depiction of fairy tale characters is bound to stereotypes, which requires a fair portion of overstatement. For example, what Marshment talks about with regard to a character's personality and its comical depiction, namely that "slim women are desirable, fat women are funny" (130). Although it is commonly true that a woman's behaviour is linked to the way she looks and hence to her self-confidence, one cannot draw a universal truth upon this comportment. Still, fictional characterisation is immensely bound to stereotypes and consequently *reality* can never be completely and thoroughly represented. With respect to Disney, the characterisation of good characters is bound to those stereotypical rules, as all of them are slim and, according to Marshment, therefore desirable.

Basically, says Coca, fairy tales tend to exaggerate in "commodifying the biological attributes" (10) of all characters, especially when it comes to dividing between good and evil, as well as male and female characters. She further notes that generally, Disney puts more emphasis on the importance of bodily performance of women than of men by stating that "physical appearance is moreover emphasised in females, as well as valued over and above their intellect or abilities" (11). The reason for this lies in the fact that, as already mentioned, given the patriarchal society and the predominately male filmmakers, female beauty on screen, which represents *good* women, is constructed from a male point of view, or as Coca herself remarks, the "construction of femininity is done from a male standard, appreciative of obedience and beauty" (11). Disney praises models of typical masculinity and femininity, giving way to stereotypical Western (male) beliefs in their depiction of characters of both sexes.

Cranny-Francis et al. state that Disney films, which originate in fairy tales, "can also be examined for the kinds of gender identities they project for male readers. Again the predominance of patriarchal gendering is most apparent." (Cranny-Francis et al. 121). Young boys are presented with the image of the hero, usually a prince, who has to save a girl or win a girl's love and be courageous and strong on the one hand, but soft and tender towards his lady on the other hand. As boys do not spend much time thinking about love or girls at an early stage, they are pretty much mostly impressed by the prince's sword and start exercising their weapon fighting skills. However, the male protagonist's journey through life seems to be basically the same in all Disney stories; a young man who falls in love with the princess and

wants to win her heart. Bell et al. mention that the hero wants to “succeed at all costs” (Bell 32), e.g. Aladdin, who even uses magic in order to impress the girl.

However, apart from those heroic personality traits, there are other typical masculine features, which Coca mentions in her article. On the one hand she mentions “male’s unnecessary display of physical force”, which sure comes in handy when trying to save the girl, however, on the other hand their “disgusting habits”, as well as their “untidiness and lack of proper hygiene” (Coca 10). She further gives examples on these issues; Mulan, who observes her fellow comrades whose washing techniques she finds “disgusting”, or Snow White, who brings new customs into the house when she teaches the dwarfs to properly wash their hands (see 10). Still, those features are not regarded as vile, truly gross or horrid, but accepted as being typically male, i.e. when Mushu tells Mulan to relax, since “They’re [just] men!” (Coca 10).

With respect to the portrayal of male force and strength, Coca refers to the characters in *Beauty and the Beast*, where physical power is depicted in two very different men. On the one hand, there is the Beast, who was turned into a monstrous, strong animal by an enchantress, who decided that his cold heart was to be mirrored in an ugly appearance. Thereby, his newly found physical strength goes along with being mean, however, as the plot continues and the audience discovers his inner beauty and friendly soul, this same strength underlines these good features, making him appear like the so-called bull in a china shop. Opposed to this *good* powerful appearance stands Gaston, the town’s beau, who Coca describes as an “intimidating specimen of ‘a man among men’” (11). All about him screams *man*, Coca points out that “Gaston takes pride in his huge size, thick neck, biceps ‘to spare’, cleft chin and his ‘every last inch covered with hair’ as well as fighting, wrestling, shooting and expectorating skills” (Coca 11), in short, he is one manly man. Still, his strength, mixed with his patriarchal thinking and vicious perspective on things, is intimidating and marks his position as the villain of the story. Although the girls in town love him for his manly complexion, Belle refuses him for his “patriarchal inspired advances” (11), as she does not conform to his sexist visions. Therefore, being the good girl of the story, she hence has, as according to Leach, the right for a happily-ever-after-ending and refuses the bad boy, fulfilling her stereotypical *good* journey through life.

In Disney, the depiction of the typical good girls underlies Western gender constructions, as it reflects the beliefs of the American filmmakers that work on the animations. Davis mentions that “the definitions of female beauty altered considerably over the course of the twentieth century” (117), however, all of them are outstandingly good-looking, applying to their contemporary beliefs on beauty, which sums up Naomi Wolf’s statement that “The qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behaviour that that period considers desirable” (qtd. in Davis 117).

Still, what Coca further mentions and what seems to be universally true in all Disney films, is that all women protagonists are younger, sometimes even a lot younger, than their chosen husbands, a fact that Coca bases on youth being more “aesthetic” (11). Coca points out that Snow White, Ariel and Jasmine are known to be 16 years old, while the other female heroines are merely guessed to be at approximately the same age. In contrast to that, the female villains, who oppose the young girls, are clearly older and depicted as “haggard peddlers” (Coca 12).

Thus, the conveyed message is clear: youth is desirable and good, while seniority envies the young, which leads it to vile actions, marking it as bad. Youth implies a lot of other things, i.e. being innocent and passive, and needing someone to help them, if possible, a heroic man. Men, however, according to Disney, only choose to help and protect the beautiful girls, which sends out a clear message to the young audience: as long as you look good, you will find a husband.

2.4.2. The importance of the male gaze

A woman’s sexuality serves her as a winning tool in her query and fight for love, however, this sexuality is not only appreciated by men, but also described by them, as Coca points out by mentioning the “male gaze on women’s bodies” (15); in other words, men set the rules for what is beautiful and act upon attractiveness accordingly, while a woman needs to fit those descriptions in order to get what she wants and hence has to stand out by her looks in order to get a man’s attention. Therefore, the lesson that the young audience learns is that a girl mainly has to be pretty in order to make her win a man’s heart; her physical appearance has to be

striking to make the prince choose her over other women, which puts women in the place of competing with other women of who is more beautiful than the others.

Bell et al. further point out that this restriction “pits women against women in competition for male approval (the mirror) of their beauty that is short-lived” (36) and sends the message to the young audience of beauty being the only important factor in life. Various Disney films teach exactly that, i.e. when in town everyone thinks that Belle is the most beautiful, yet strange because of her interest in books, which propagates the idea that a girl does not need to be smart, she only has to be beautiful, or in Snow White, where a middle-aged woman wants to kill a young girl merely because she cannot stand the fact that someone else is more beautiful than her. Such examples prove yet again that women are subject to the male look, positioning themselves on the passive side of the two sexes, but forcing them to actively fight for their good looks.

Disney’s audience hence learns that what men think of a girl’s looks is important, or else she might not be lucky enough to find love, and therefore tries to fit the demands of appearance that society describes. However, Cranny-Francis et al. criticises the fact that hence, every individual constantly has to question his identification with society as regards the rules of how someone is *supposed* to be or look like; they state that it is a recurrent “process of constant negotiation between self and other, inside and outside, between our unconscious desires for Others (to have and be like them) and cultural and social demands; it threatens to unseat our stable sense of self” (Cranny-Francis et al. 151).

As regards our desire for Others, we are likely to project expectations that the public has towards us onto ourselves by “modelling their behaviour, incorporating them, or identifying with them” (Cranny-Francis et al. 154). That process is consequently dependent on the people we surround ourselves with, who we want to please and who we can identify with the most, etc. The *Other* equals the object an individual desires to be; it is a “fantasised idea about the self” (Cranny-Francis et al. 155). Hence, people already learn during infancy that there is a difference in the way an individual sees himself and what he wants to become and the way he is being looked at and hence stereotypically positioned in society. Cranny-Francis et al. introduce Lacan’s idea of this struggle, which de Lauretis also deals with, and in how far the *gaze* is important for that matter, as “all of us depend on being looked at and acknowledged in

order to exist. The gaze involves power and the contesting of positions to determine who has the right to look [...] and who is to be looked at” (155).

Like de Lauretis, Cranny-Francis et al. point out that in relation to gender studies, the gaze is always pointed towards women, being looked at by men, in Western cultures. Women are more likely to be judged for the way they dress and behave, or their scheme of life, as to whether they put their career over children. Hence, the gaze is on them and being aware of that fact, women find themselves in a constant struggle of fighting the gendered model they should apply to, or learning to adapt to the demands of society. Ergo the gaze, including an individual looking at another one, as well as being looked at, and a person’s self-representation are closely related.

This moreover includes the notion of film, because spectators look at constructed Others who they might identify with and adapt to. However, the representation of women within a film is dependent on society, which, once again, is largely formed by the male gaze (see 156-157). This vicious circle hence evokes the same outcome as women adapting to the male gaze or social beliefs and values, with the film and its main female character as bearers of identification. In other words it can be stated that the film operates on various levels: it constructs a female protagonist that women viewers can relate to and identify with, it adapts to social values by showing the public different kinds of women, often in a stereotypical way, and, as society is primarily dominated by men, serves as a link between male and female conception of representation of the inner self.

With respect to the male gaze, women are not only dependent on cultural beliefs with respect to the representation of her character, desires and values, but also as regards her degree of femininity according to the portrayal of her body, the way she dresses and looks; “cultural definitions identifying femininity with physical ‘attractiveness’ compound this identification” (Marshment 143). Accordingly, the male gaze, towards which a film is generally pointed, influences the manner of portraying femaleness. Marshment quotes Laura Mulvey, who concentrates on analysing the structural configuration of gender representation in films and, like most theorists who worked on the ‘gaze’, found women to be “subjected” to the male gaze (qtd. in Marshment 146).

Therefore, the system of beauty is a patriarchal one, as women have tried for centuries to allure men with their physical appeal. Men decide what is attractive and desirable and women

attempt to live up to those measures and conceptions (see 146-147). Hence, women within a film are frequently presented like super-women, as sexual symbols and every man's dream come true. Naturally, the average woman does not conform to this beauty system, which is why with the global spreading of media, the number of women desperately trying to meet the expectation of the male gaze via surgery, or nutritional disturbance is increasing. Still, films propagate the beauty model of the Western world and thereby frame the ideal concept of beauty, regulated by the cultural and social models imposed on both genders. Cranny-Francis et al. note accordingly:

Beauty culture's successful operation depends on a discourse of femininity. Popular ideas of femininity circulate, are maintained and are renewed through texts which give instructions on how to be a proper woman. The discourse of femininity tells women and girls, sometimes directly but usually covertly, what is a beautiful woman. Its instruction manuals come in myriad forms: popular magazines, advertisements, icons, films, window displays, toys and so on. (198)

Margaret Marshment elucidates that although the image of beauty changed over centuries, its implied meaning did not, namely the power relations hidden underneath. Although films also divulge concepts of perfect men, women are usually more willing to adjust to those notions of appeal and attractiveness, accordingly a general "interest in appearance has become defined as a specifically feminine one" (Marshment 143). Hence, the concept of beauty is closely connected to power relations between men and women and further demonstrates the influential power of both media and the men that influence the spread assumptions on beauty.

Cranny-Francis et al. also deal with this issue and point out that women have an inner strive to be pretty, particularly prettier than others, and that is why feminist theories concentrate on the male dominated social structure that influences women and unconsciously forces them to adapt to male visions of beauty (see Cranny-Francis et al. 200). Both Marshment and Cranny-Francis et al. seem to share the common belief that women are born with an inner impulse to be desirable, however, that this urge is reinforced by images on screen, which are influenced by men. Marshment further mentions that feminists, who "concentrated on identifying the reproduction of gender ideologies in representation of women" (Marshment 145), have challenged the beauty system, deliberately not paying attention to male perception of attractiveness by cutting their hair short, refusing to wear make-up, neglecting high heels and dressing in a manly manner. The way an individual dresses reflects and represents his identity, as clothing conducts "a meaning to others, which is socially constructed and understood, about such factors as age, class, fashionability and so on, and about our attitudes towards these factors" (Marshment 143). Marshment additionally

indicates that “we decide how to represent ourselves. We are all, therefore, practically and intimately involved in debates about the relations between ideology and pleasure, about defining sexuality, about the ethics of consumerism, and, above all perhaps, about whether, and how, to reject or re-evaluate the ‘feminine’” (144).

Ergo, a woman can decide whether or not to fit into male influenced social concepts of beauty, as her own vision of what is desirable might not conform to the common opinion of how to look or what to wear. Still, such a refusal may be misunderstood by her social environment, which tends to read abnormalities and other negative assumptions into a woman’s rejection of common laws. Disney films have proven to abide by this concept and most times connote evil women with an undesirable body and face in order to emphasize those women’s veering away from patriarchal rules and the male gaze.

2.4.3. Beauty - variation and varieties

In film, the feminine hero is usually bound to beauty concepts, because she is “complying with cultural definitions of feminine beauty” (Cranny-Francis et al. 204) in order to perform ideas and concepts of femininity that the audience can agree with.

Nowadays’ concept of beauty includes bodies that are healthy, slim, bronze, with big and bright eyes, and long hair, impersonated by the Victoria Secret angels. Popular media broadcasts these women everywhere, portraying them as the utmost beauty-goal that needs to be met and that filmmakers are geared to. Interestingly, those models and actresses look a lot like Disney princesses, which proves the impacting degree of these films, however, those charming characters were in turn influenced by images of real beautiful women, which once more proves the circle of interactional propaganda which films serve as. Cranny-Francis et al. also touch on the fact that films have the possibility to play with social and cultural assumptions on beauty and gender in general.

Directors exaggerate concepts of femininity and masculinity, depicting super-male and super-female fictional characters in order to emphasise gender diverseness, as well as the difference between good and female, beauty and ugliness (see 243-244). Those overstated personifications appeal to fairy tales, like Disney films, where “dichotomies and associated connotations of (active) masculinity and (passive) femininity, (good) beauty and (evil)

ugliness, and (pure) whiteness and (corrupt, contaminated) blackness recur as potent archetypes within a range of favourite children's stories" (244). Like other films or books, these stories are influenced by society and hence reflect the common image and concept of stereotypes, however, by doing so in a children's film, those assumptions on gender, beauty or race are unconsciously implemented into the young viewers' minds, influencing and modifying their beliefs about gender and stereotypes from an early stage onwards.

Still, what is regarded as beautiful by society is dependent on the time being; whereas in the 1930s, Snow White was pictured as a young woman, not too thin and with a girlish and almost child-like girl-next-door-look, Disney women of the 1990s looked thinner, or sexier and more voluptuous, like Jasmine from *Aladdin*. Coca mentions correspondingly that "women's image turns erotic" (Coca 12), from Ariel's almost naked upper part of the body, over Jasmine's "belly dancer pantaloone outfit" (13), or Pocahontas' clothing which does not cover the body much, which are both bound to cultural background, however, are very sexy, to Esmeralda, a gypsy who shows belly and dances erotically (see 12).

While children do not *see* nakedness and sexual allusions, says Coca, it is clear that those films send "explicit signals" (15) and are clearly oriented towards the male gaze. That is why Douglas Brode criticizes Walt Disney's "supposed brand of 'innocent' family entertainment", while he figured that the company "openly embraced a daring sexuality" (Brode 125). According to him, Disney princesses only appear to be helpless girls, waiting for a saviour, while in fact they actively use their sexuality to lure them in. He is therefore suspicious of "Disney's portrayal of women as superficial images of helpless princesses, subserviently trusting males to carry them off and live 'happily ever after' in a retro world of postmarital bliss" (Brode 171), as he believes the heroines to be, sexually speaking, more refined than their innocent appearance makes everyone assume. Still, as per Bell et al., such signals carry a rather positive "semiotic layering" as regards the "construction of women's bodies in Disney animation" (Bell 109). According to them, the portrayal of female heroines is an "attempt to align audience sympathies" (109) in the way they are depicted, as everything about them appears beautiful, kind and inviting, both sexually and sympathetically.

Bell et al. further note that although some of those female protagonists are already described as being extraordinary gorgeous in the original fairy tales by Grimm, Perrault or Andersen, "Disney artists sketched the flesh and blood on these folktale templates with

contemporaneous popular images of feminine beauty and youth, their sources ranging from the silent screen to glossy pin-ups.” (109). Bell et al. describe Snow White as having “large expressive eyes, pouty mouth, and broadly drawn features” (109), which is probably not the kind of image that the brothers Grimm had in mind over a hundred years earlier. 1950’s Cinderella, say Bell et al., was painted to the pictures of Grace Kelly, Sleeping Beauty Aurora, who, according to Solomon, has been described as “Disney’s most beautiful heroine” (qtd. in Bell et al. 110), was depicted after contemporary Barbie dolls (see Bell et al. 110), and Ariel’s “huge blue eyes, upturned nose and excessive bangs recall the ‘70s wholesomely lithe pin-up girl, Farrah Fawcett” (110).

Davis argues that Disney seemingly prefers the “blonde-haired, blue-eyed ‘all-American’” type of girl, best pictured in Cinderella, who is “‘the typical American girl’. She is cute, lively, of medium build, weighing about 120 pounds – and with a tender heart for boys and animals” (92). According to Disney’s good versus bad world, where the good ones are beautiful and the bad ones are ugly, both embodying their inner personalities, Cinderella’s sisters are depicted as the heroine’s counterpart and hence portrayed as nasty girls.

However, with respect to the original versions, Douglas Brode claims that Cinderella and her stepsisters were depicted entirely differently in the Grimm’s edition. Whereas Grimm describes the stepsisters as “beautiful and fair in appearance” (qtd. in Brode 184), they are ugly and “bitterly jealous” (184) of their charming stepsister. While in the Grimm’s tale, Cinderella turns into a desirable woman through a “gold gown” (184) and is hence magically made into a stunning girl, Disney describes her as a natural beauty and thereby emphasizes the exaggerated difference between good and evil characters as regards the reflection of their soul in their physical appearance (see Brode 184).

The concept of beauty in *Cinderella* is taken to its peak, however only in the Grimm’s version, where the invitations for the ball go out to only “*beautiful* young women” that were allowed at the castle, so the prince “might choose between them” (qtd. in Brode 185); Disney decided to change this line into inviting all “available maidens” (185), which hence includes Cinderella’s ugly stepsisters. In both versions the stepsisters attend the ball, however, in the original version as beautiful women; but as Disney puts an emphasis on the direct alliance between evil nature and an unsightly appearance, but did not want to change the plot, they had to allow all women, both good-looking and ugly, to the ball in order to not exclude the mean and hence nasty stepsisters from it.

Brode continues by pointing out that the basic concept in *Cinderella* is comparable to the one in *Snow White*, as he believes that both stories criticize the way society views women and how they are only judged by their looks instead of their talents or dedication to be hard workers (see 184). In both films, the central matter is the attraction of a man which, in both cases, is achieved through the girls' beauty; in *Snow White* the question of attractiveness is actually the main issue of the story, as the queen seeks to be more beautiful than everyone else and is willing to kill her stepdaughter in order to reach her goal. While men mostly strive for being stronger, bigger and better than other men, Snow White's stepmother proves that beauty is a woman's central matter, at least according to this stereotypically gendered fairy tale. She keeps on re-asking the magic mirror the same question, namely the famous and often recited words *mirror mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all*, and always gets the answer that a younger woman is more beautiful than her. However, as she cannot impede her aging, she is willing to kill this woman in order to be desirable, yet the most desirable, probably for all the men in the whole wide world. Although presented in an overly exaggerated and maniac way, Disney proves with this story how important appearances are for women and how essential it is to be perceived as beautiful by the male gaze.

As already mentioned, the one feature that all good Disney heroines seem to have in common, apart from their good and sound personality, is their age. They are all younger than their princes charming, incorporating ideas of innocence and natural beauty. Davis also touches on this issue and notices that "the waif, whose thin, underdeveloped body, typically found amongst pre- or early pubescent girls, is promoted as an ideal for adult woman" (117) during the 1920s, which served as the basis for Disney's portrayal of women which are young and have soft bodies that emphasize good virtue and, on a more profound level, their readiness to get married and thereby take their righteous position in society (see 117).

Basically, says Davis, the heroines Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora all belong to the same beauty model that dominated the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, namely the "soft, physically comforting, inviting (although not *too* inviting; anything too overtly sexual was hinting that a woman might be more sexually experienced than society's emphasis on female chastity outside of marriage would permit), mature body of a young woman" (Davis 118). They all share beauty and integrity which, although it does not protect them from evil, promises them a good and happy ending (see Davis 135).

Bell et al. further mention that the bodies of Disney heroines are shaped on the bodies of ballet dancers in order to emphasize the girls' soft and tender movements that are indicators to their royal heritage. Their walk is a kind of code for their real origin, even if they have been raised differently, like Aurora or Snow White, their walk still tells the audience that those girls are highborn (see 110-111). Furthermore, their natural grace stands in opposition to evil female characters, e.g. Cinderella's stepsisters, who Bell et al. describe as "antitheses to correct dance carriage and movement" (112), who are exaggeratedly painted with anaesthetic features and, ballet-wise, incorrect body design.

Davis states that Disney is "largely static" with respect to changes of beauty images in women that took place between the 1930s and the 1960s, as most female characters that belong to this time span have very similar features (see 121). The only aspect that changed over the course of time is the way a woman's sexuality was portrayed; while in earlier films the princesses were uptight and had clothes that reflected their personalities, later heroines show that "female sexuality is portrayed not as a weapon or a source of evil power or deception, but instead as a normal thing that happens when 'boy meets girl' (122).

Over the years, Disney also tried to serve the audience a great variety of different types of beautiful women: blondes, brunettes, redheaded and black-haired girls all had their appearance in films as the beautiful, young heroine. Although they are all stunningly beautiful and set the rules for beauty standards the average audience cannot live up to, they make it easier for young girls to identify with a character in a film by the colour of their hair. Although the Northern American model of beauty standards rather favours tall, blonde, Barbie doll kind of women, very few Disney heroines are blondes: Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* is blonde, which adds to her innocent, childlike character, however, among the princesses, only Cinderella and Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty*, as well as Disney's latest filmic success *Tangled*'s Rapunzel, are blondes.

Ariel from *The little Mermaid* and Megara from *Hercules* have shiny red hair, however, the most dominant hair colour is dark: Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jane Porter from *Tarzan* and Wendy from *Peter Pan* are brunettes; Snow White, Mulan, Pocahontas and Jasmine have black hair. Still, among those dark-haired women, only Snow White and Jane are portrayed as being American, while Belle is French, Wendy is British, Mulan is Chinese, Pocahontas an Indian beauty and Jasmine is Arabian. Hence, those non-blondes embody beauties from different countries and cultures and are therefore depicted as being different from the typical

U.S. beauty. Still, all those women have one thing in common: their beautiful appearance which helps them win a man's love with sexuality being their key to happiness.

Apart from literature, many internet sites deal with gender studies, especially with women images. One of those is the site *mädchenmannschaft.net*, a weblog where various issues on feminism are being discussed and online users are free to leave comments, reviews and criticism. They further deal with clichés on women in advertising and film and since Disney women serve a lot of feminine stereotypes, these bloggers touch on the subject as well and cite the following figure:

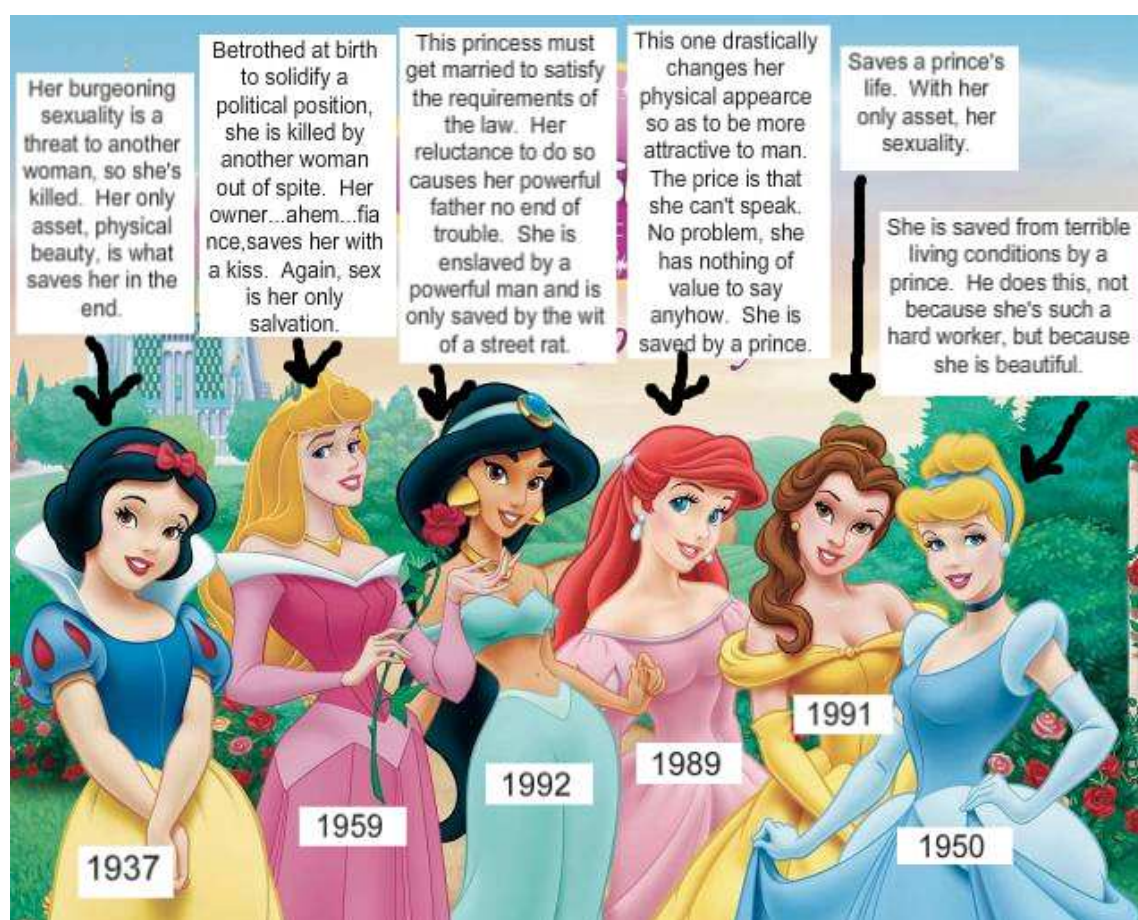


Figure 1

Although presented in a fairly sarcastic way, this picture can be regarded as a feminist analysis of all these princesses' love stories. The girls' characters are indeed left out in this approach, as the analysis is merely pointed towards the heroines' physical appearances, or as the figure refers to it, their sexuality. According to the interpretation given, all these women actively use their attractiveness in order to reach their goal, assuming that they know that they

can only rely on being beautiful. However, as regards the women's activeness, one can monitor a slight change during the course of time, as the bubbles in the picture point out.

Snow White is entirely passive and extradited to the wicked plans of her evil stepmother, the queen, and has to fully count on someone to come and save her; there is zero activeness in her story of salvation. Thirteen years later, Cinderella is also trapped in a miserable situation, enslaved to be her stepmother's and her stepsisters' servant, which she passively accepts, until she receives help from a fairy godmother, who enables her to meet the prince. However, she runs from him and lets him do the active part of finding her until they can live happily ever after. Sleeping beauty Aurora also suffers under the evil plans of a witch, who puts a spell of one hundred years of sleep on her, which can only be broken with the kiss of true love. Her saviour, the prince, whom she once danced with without knowing that those two were promised to each other in childhood by an arranged marriage, has to fight the diabolic witch and kiss the sleeping beauty, which puts her in a completely passive role.

As regards their sexuality, those three women seem to be desirable to their princes, merely because of their beauty. All of them have met their future husband only once, very shortly, in the past, which probably is not enough time for them to get to know each other and fall in love with the person's character or inner beauty, which leads back to Andreea Coca's statement, as she mentions that "Disney animated characters fall in love at first sight and between the first meeting and contracting marriage learn very little about each other" (14).

The princes fall in love with the women's good looks and, mesmerized by their appearance, want to be with them for their outstanding sexuality, not because of e.g. their working skills, like Snow White or Cinderella show having. However, with the uprising of the new Disney heroines, almost forty years later, it was time for a revised version of the young princess, which was introduced with Ariel's appearance on the screen. Fascinated by the human world, the young mermaid is willing to give up her mermaid-fishtail in order to be with the man she loves. Although her plan is thwarted by the evil sea-witch, and she has to be saved by her prince in the end, it is *her* who takes an active role in the beginning.

With this story, Disney turns the tables on gender roles, as this time it is the woman who falls in love with a man due to his attractive appearance and not vice versa. Furthermore, her willingness to sacrifice her whole old life for him shows her preparedness for getting active and to actually *do* something about her future. This notion of self-abandonment can

also be viewed in the further works of Disney, with Belle and princess Jasmine, who both decide to leave their home in order to escape the boundaries of their lives.

Both are not interested in marrying the next best man, in Belle's case it is the town's beau Gaston, whereas Jasmine is supposed to be married to a prince without even knowing him, in order to save her political situation. Belle eventually sacrifices her freedom in order to save her father, willing to live imprisoned in a Beast's castle. She is the first Disney character to prove that also inner beauty can be attractive when she falls in love with the Beast and thereby saves him. Moreover, she is also the first one to be the female saviour who gets active and manages to break the spell of an enchantress; thereby she is probably the strongest female character of all. Princess Jasmine, however, is saved by a man, but proves another lesson in life, namely that money, status and power are not important, but that a person's high-mindedness counts. It accordingly seems that she searches for inner beauty, whereas her saviour, Aladdin, is primarily interested in the princess' good looks. However, she gets active as well and thereby satisfies feminists like e.g. bloggers from that internet site, or women from all over the globe who, impressed by Jasmine's courageous journey, might be willing to overlook her accentuating clothes and bare belly.

Recapping all this information on gendered portrayal of women, it can be said that a character's personality is best reflected in his or her looks. Furthermore, the beauty standards in Disney films and the fact that the most beautiful girl always gets the man in the end is a very clichéd and stereotypical reflection on reality and the way how men *choose* women within a society. Beauty as the essential concept of a story can be viewed in several Disney films, the most striking example being *Snow White*, where the question of beauty is the actual central matter. As per Ben Leach beauty is aligned to being good, it makes it fairy-tale-wise impossible for the evil queen to become more beautiful than her good-hearted foe. Beauty, says Leach, goes hand in hand with "friendliness, goodness, intelligence", and is basically a guarantor for a good and romantic outcome (Leach, telegraph.co.uk).

However, though it is merely a fairy tale which Disney propagates, this concept of being the prettiest and fairest girl is thereby imposed upon girls by society and of course also by Disney films, which children watch and hence seek nothing else but to be as beautiful as a princess, as they realize that not being intelligent, but being gorgeous and swell will get them far in life. Or actually, they learn that being a pretty girl means that one is liked by everyone (animals or humans) and really, absolutely, not evil, as Disney apparently says so.

2.5. Gender performance

One of the most impacting authors of feminist studies that concentrated on the issue of gender studies is Judith Butler, whose work on gender performance is still influential in the analysis of gender in society and, as most researchers and authors that are relevant for this thesis focused on Butler's ideas, so is it for the analysis of gender in this chapter.

Cranny-Francis et al. state that Butler “argues that gender is the process of embodiment which results from the repeated performance of acts of gendering” (4), and that “gender and heterosexuality can, therefore, be seen as categories which regulate (and create) individual subjects, according to how they are prepared to perform their sexuality” (19), proving that “these are not categories to *be*, but to perform” (19). In other words, one is born with a gender, but it is up to him or her to what extent he wants to perform his gender with reference to social rules, expectations, duties and limitations.

As already pointed out, gender constructions are portrayed as a product of “bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds” (Butler 140), but which are “only as solid as the social and cultural practices that constitute it over time”, hence it is only a performance that is “open to disruption, unexpected variation and transformation” (Glover, Kaplan 157). Every society and culture has its model of how the two sexes should behave and propagate stereotypical role-models in order to promote a certain lifestyle. This issue is ever-present and has already been analysed in ancient Greece, where, according to Cranny-Francis et al., Aristotle stated once that “men were stronger, women weaker; men courageous, women cautious; men the outdoors type, women domestic; men educate children, women nurture them” (qtd. in Cranny-Francis et al. 2).

In the contemporary Western world, women are supposed to have a lot of characteristics, like being motherlike, generous, pleasant, calm, not to mention their numerous abilities in the household. Good and neat Disney characters show having all those typically Western characteristics, plus some extra outstanding features, like being stunningly beautiful, wonderful singers and remarkable dancers. Cranny-Francis et al. note that “Western culture has privileged and institutionalised the masculine ideal of separation, autonomy, self-reliance and individualism as the model for subjectivity, and relegated the qualities associated with the feminine, such as connection, relation and nurturance, to the private sphere” (Cranny-Francis et al. 61). Accordingly, images of women are “almost invariably constituted in terms of

patriarchal stereotypes – women as weak, helpless, caring and nurturing, or alternatively as betraying, vicious and corrupt.” (Cranny-Francis et al. 120).

2.5.1. Disney heroines - the marrying kind

With regard to Disney animations, the young heroines’ lives are fairly impacted by society and its patriarchal rules that expect her to find a husband and to be the passive and obeying part in this family concept. In most fairy tales and therefore also in Disney films, the young heroine wants nothing but to get married and live happily ever after, as she has learned that this is what society expects from her gender. Davis mentions accordingly that the “traditional interpretation of the roles of love and marriage is without question the most prevalent” (20) in Disney animations and that the film has only successfully ended, when the lovers “are reunited, marry, and live happily ever after” (21). However, she proceeds by claiming that we, as spectators, do not actually know what precisely “that ‘happily ever after’ entails”, as we are merely “led to believe that it will be simply a continuation of their love and happiness” (21).

As per Disney, the representative that can be exemplified is the film *Sleeping Beauty*; this fairy tale introduces the story of a young female protagonist who has, from early childhood onwards, always dreamt of the man who would come one day and marry her, not considering the fact that within the patriarchal system she lives in, she thereby gives up her freedom and has to obey her husband. Although we do not know the exact time in which the story of the film is told, it appears to be the Middle Ages, which means that marriage most probably equalled female oppression. In this matter Douglas Brode points out that for most Disney heroines, “marriage is the end-all, suggesting there are indeed limitations to any feminist interpretation”, as according to him, contemporary feminists think that “marriage had been the invention of men to ... take control of [women’s] capacity for reproduction” (Brode 185). However, despite all the societal boundaries a girl has to face, Disney still implies in its early animations that marriage is the ultimate goal for a girl and builds the plots around this central issue, sending out the message to the young audience, that, if a girl wants to play by social rules, this is what she can expect from life.

Such social restrictions were the trigger point for the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which Richardson and Robinson talk about as *the* women’s movement (see 3). Women

developed a new feminist consciousness that led to a social movement “which was broadly defined as the recognition and analysis of women’s oppression, and therefore how to end their subordination in patriarchal and capitalist societies” (Richardson, Robinson 3). Women sought to operate on the social model of power by trying to change the inequality that women had to face ever since (see 3). Hence, they started to question the relationship between womanhood and the concepts of society and culture, demanding a “total intellectual revolution in the concepts, perspectives and methodologies of the subject areas” (Richardson, Robinson 6). Davis talks about this era as a protest against “glorifications of female objectification” and “the role of woman as subordinated helpmate to her husband” (Davis 164) as the central matter of this time.

Whereas the whole movement is a profound matter that is not going to be discussed in this thesis, the fact that it took place and profoundly changed the position of women in Western society can be observed examined among the earlier and later Disney films of the twentieth century as regards their portrayal of the good heroine. While earlier female protagonists, like Snow White, Cinderella, or Aurora were presented as characters that happily fulfill their social duties and whose mere goal in life is to marry, the depiction of later Disney heroines was rather determined by the assumption, that women are rather “made, not born” (Glover, Kaplan 49). One very concrete example for this is Mulan, as she proves that it is possible to change one’s path and to change the way society perceives women by demonstrating that even within the strictest boundaries of gender, women can fight their destiny without being regarded as ludicrous or even wicked and mad, but that even when they escape their domestic life, they can be wholly accepted as a woman by society.

Still, the common Disney princess is supposed to follow the path of finding love and getting married, however, all in a very female-like passive way, which is the main plot that each fairy tale revolves around. Notwithstanding, the *passive* part is a vague one; Andreea Coca also refers to Judith Butler in order shed light on this issue, quoting that “gender is understood as a performance” (Coca 13). Therefore, reconsidering the fact that a girl is found to have only one goal in life, that is to find a husband, she has to actively do something about reaching this goal and not lie at home, passively, and see if prince charming will eventually drop by. Hence, if she wants to perform according to her gender, she has to make sure that she actively puts herself *out there*, on the field, where a man will find her and sweep her off her feet. Still, Coca further talks about Judith Butler’s “set of codes, gestures and adornments” (Coca 13) that a girl follows by doing so, and while the willingness to obey these rules is active, the final

decision of what girl is chosen by what man is clearly men's business and therefore puts a girl in a passive role. Coca mentions accordingly that "Disney animated characters fall in love at first sight and between the first meeting and contracting marriage learn very little about each other" (14), which proves that beauty is the key feature to meeting a man.

The depiction of a typically good girl underlies gender constructions and Western patriarchal beliefs, however, not only as concerns her desires and goals in life, but also her looks. Opposed to little boys, who are not necessarily interested in girls at a young age, girls who watch Disney animations seem to easily identify with the female protagonist's journey towards love and romance from a very early stage onwards. Coca has already pointed out that, according to patriarchal Western beliefs, what men search in a woman is "obedience and beauty" (Coca 11). She further notices that some Disney films actually serve as a guidebook as to how to become such a woman; Ariel, for example, loses her voice in order to become more attractive for a man, teaching the audience that a girl is only judged by her looks and not by what she has to say, or Mulan, who is taught by the matchmaker that "Men want girls with good taste / calm / obedient / who work fast-paced / with good breeding / and a tiny waist" (Coca 11).

As already mentioned, Disney makes its audience believe that beauty is the key feature that a girl needs in order to find a husband and that she has to properly follow the rules of gender performance of "gender behaviour and patriarchal norms" (16) in order to succeed; in other words, she has to get active and in order to get what she wants, however, at the same time, has to passively bow to those standards by performing correspondingly. She further notes that everything a girl does when putting herself out on the love market, can be considered as gender performance (see 14-16), which depends on society in its time being, as it involves gendered codes, gestures, etc., which are, however, anew defined by male thinking.

Bell et al. touch on the same issue when they talk about the way male thinking defines and determines a woman's looks and role in society by stating that most Disney films follow "the classic 'sexist' narrative about the framing of women's lives through a male discourse" (36). Basically, this means that a woman's journey through life is entirely based on patriarchal rules and boundaries of the circle in which she can move.

With respect to gender performance, Cranny-Francis et al. investigated how a woman is supposed to behave in society by asking themselves the question where the roots of defining

gender lie and by exploring where gender begins. They shed light on the issue that even before a baby is born, his gender, and thus also the behaviour his surroundings expect from him, are fixed as soon as his sex is discovered. Because of social rules, we know what to expect from a little girl or boy; if a boy acts aggressively or wildly, it is accepted and regarded as *normal*, however, a girl should not behave rudely and is therefore advised against such deportment. With regard to Disney, the same model accounts for marriage; as finding a husband is only the pre-stage to becoming a mother, which basically is the role that society expects from the female gender, it is not acceptable for a woman to not want to be part of this circle of life. The quick and easy conclusion: if a woman does not want to be a nurturer, she cannot be considered a whole woman.

However, Glover and Kaplan refer to Ann Snitow's essay *A Gender Diary*, in which she suggests women to face these claimed gender standards differently; for her, the main question is to see social standards as a free choice about whether to fit in or not. She describes it as "subtle psychological and social negotiations about just how gendered we choose to be" (qtd. in Glover, Kaplan 7). All the same, a female fairy tale villain, who chooses not to blend in by e.g. what she wears, should not stand out negatively to the audience because of her looks, but rather because of her evil actions. Nowadays, a woman's refusal to fit in manifests itself in her desire to be equal to men in work, society and life, which is also an issue that Disney talks about with its powerful, ruling queens. Those women refuse to obey to their gender stereotypes on a mental and social level, e.g. by feeling the need to be queen, or by not wanting to find a husband within a patriarchal society.

Nonetheless, some societies, i.e. the patriarchal ones that are presented in early Disney films, do not allow women to choose the extend of how they want to fit in these rules and hence force them to break out of these conventions that they cannot live up to. Such eruptions from expectations that cannot be met might thus question a woman's identity in society and cause for her being regarded as not sufficiently female to be *normal* (see Glover, Kaplan 8-9). Glover and Kaplan note accordingly: "It is not uncommon, of course, to hear women described as 'unfeminine'; supposed coldness, aggression, ambition, neglect of children or high intelligence can quickly bring this accusation upon them" (3). In other words, if a woman oppresses her desires to choose freely on her lifestyle, she might succeed in only having rare *abnormal*, *unfeminine* scenarios, but if she gives way to those feelings, and feels comfortable living them out, she might display her emotions on the outside as well in the way she dresses,

move or talks and as a result, her sex or her sexuality might be doubted by society, as she does not fit into the model of gendered femaleness. Disney uses this view on gender models in depicting their female villains out of the norm with edgy, hence unfeminine, bodies or overly voluptuous and sexually demanding qualities in order to refer to their inner mischievousness.

2.5.2. Breaking with tradition: Disney's women's movement

The women's movement from the 1960s and 1970s has helped later female characters in Disney films to do the exact same thing: to break out of their lives as they know them, get active and reach a certain goal. While such comportment was only thinkable for evil women in the earlier films, later heroines show having similar desires as Disney's earlier female villains without being degraded to being wicked. Most of them have been basically strapped to one place where they had to work, or restricted to "just... being princesses" (Coca 8), but as they discover that their expectance of life bears more than that, they are eager for an adventure. Interestingly, what they mostly have to fight in their desire to flee from their lives are gender based boundaries; Mulan does not want to learn how to become a proper woman to marry and how to bring *honour to us all*, as she sings in the very beginning of the film, Belle is not satisfied with marrying the town's stud and wants to meet a man on an intellectual basis, Jasmine refuses to be bound by law and marry a prince who only wants to marry her in order to become king, Pocahontas is avid for learning about a new culture, Cinderella dreams of a more glamorous life than being enslaved by her stepfamily, etc., however, in order to succeed, they all have to fight an authority and thereby overcome the social limits of gender.

With regard to Disney animation, the final change of female perception was brought along as a product of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s; on a general basis, Disney heroines were suddenly given a greater freedom of choice as regards their future paths in life after this period. Davis mentions that it this new type of Disney woman is "also very much a departure from previous Disney heroines (Disney princesses in particular) in that she has motivations other than romance and love, and that she has enough spirit and self-confidence to argue and to stand up for herself and her perceived rights" (Davis 159).

Earlier Disney princesses were depicted as those passive, weak girls who could not handle life on their own; with regard to this ever present issue, Davis mentions Snow White's ultimate passive actions as an example of this typical powerlessness of early Disney heroines.

It was simple – and possibly true – to say that such films as *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* might be giving young girls a message about love, self-motivation, and self-worth that were at odds with late-twentieth century feminist ideology. After all, Snow White, although in danger of being murdered by her evil, vengeful step-mother, is more concerned with cooking for, cleaning for, and mothering the dwarfs than she is about protecting herself, and certainly in the end can only be saved by the handsome prince who finds her and awakens her – with 'love's first kiss' – from sleeping death. Furthermore, rather than doing something about taking back her kingdom from the evil queen, Snow White allows herself to be first degraded (by being turned into a scullery maid in what should have been her own castle), then persecuted and banished (when the queen orders Snow White's murder, but the huntsman allows her to flee). Finally, when Snow White falls in love, rather than doing anything to contact the prince herself or seek him out in any way, Snow White simply sits back in her chair and sings 'Some day my prince will come', perfectly content to make do till he finds (and rescues) her. (224)

However, one has to keep in mind that Snow White was Disney's first princess and therefore her portrayal was bound to a time when in American society a woman's prestige was still rather low and her only duties in life were to be a good housewife. In those early Disney animations, it seems that those passive, good girls are constantly exposed to great danger, but are shown to not defend themselves and wait for their male saviour instead. Keeping in mind that Disney films usually teach the audience a lesson, the shared message of these stories seems to be that no matter how hard life can get, a girl still has to recollect her passive nature and lean back, hoping that a man will save her, however, if not, she is doomed, as society does not want to see an active woman fighting for her right or even her life.

On this issue, Davis introduces Jeanine Basinger, who concentrates on the portrayal of women in Hollywood films, stating:

Many of the Disney heroines may be weak, or simple, or incredibly passive, leaving them vulnerable to shaming and criticism by scholars and the media. Many of them may be 'too' good, or 'too' beautiful, or 'too' willing to let others run their lives for them. But have they ever problems! Threatened by evil witches and fairies, betrayed by their stepmothers, pursued by demonic individuals of all descriptions, when all they ever wanted to do was fall in love, get married, and maybe be useful to someone. (qtd. in Davis 223)

As Davis already quotes, this inner strive to "be useful to someone" was the only thing on those early princesses' minds, putting a man's wishes and desires over their own, even when it comes down to fighting for her life.

Up to the women's movement, a woman who was more interested in fighting for her rights and for the fulfilment of her desires was regarded as masculine, except if she was still too young to be perceived as a woman who is ready to marry. We have learned that within the Disney world, being beautiful comes along with being young, however, being a young girl implies not being ready for the dating world and hence the need for following the patriarchal system is not of utmost importance yet. Davis points out that "Disney heroines of the past were generally given much more freedom to be adventurous and argumentative when they were pre-pubescent" (159), however, as soon as they reached a certain age and hit puberty, their right to do the same thing was curtailed. Davis calls it a "use of childhood as an excuse for vivaciousness" (159), giving examples of Wendy from *Peter Pan* and Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*. These 1950s movies point out vividly how Disney conveys its concept of a girl's transition from childhood to adulthood, stating that "their ability to escape from reality and go on grand, exotic adventures will cease" (159).

This transition can be best seen with Wendy, whose parents decide one day she has to move out of the nursery where she used to live with her little brothers, as it is time for her to grow up and leave her playful childhood behind. Even although she manages to escape into one last adventure with Peter Pan, she has a nurturing quality there as well, as she is the one to put the younger ones to bed and keep Peter's house in Neverland. Thus her one last attempt to escape maturity and her duties in life actually brings her closer to this role instead of manifesting her desired status as a young girl (see 159-160).

Interestingly Wendy and Alice are the only two female characters to really enjoy great adventures without experiencing the adventure of love on the way, implying that only when a girl is young, she can be venturesome without the intention of finding a husband. Davis states that in "both films, it is implied that only little girls (as opposed to grown women) go on adventures, and that little girls are still in possession of their imaginations" (105). Such statement, however, implies that grown women are not allowed to be impulsive and active when they are adults, as they have to face reality then which, on the part of women, does not include adventurous imaginations. With regard to Disney, Davis explains this issue as follows:

Alice is shown in the first and last scenes of the film with a woman (possibly her older sister, though in fact her identity is never stated), and this woman, although expressing the fact that there are many good books in this world without pictures, does not imply when saying so that she has an imagination capable of supplying the pictures. The only female characters Alice encounters while in Wonderland are a garden full of terribly snooty, mean-spirited flowers, and the Queen of Hearts, whose main pleasure

in life seems to come from ordering executions and dominating her husband, the king.
(105)

Alice's vivid imagination contrasts her elder sister's comment about good books without pictures, which is strikingly portrayed in Alice's imagined Wonderland. This opposition marks the enormous step that a growing girl has to take when entering puberty as far as her innocence and love of adventure is concerned. Davis hence draws her conclusion of this issue by stating that the "message we get from Wendy and Alice is clear – little girls go on adventures, but as soon as the start to approach womanhood, their adventures have to cease" (106).

However, the women's movement sought to change this perception, trying to find a "link between the coming of maturity and the continuing of adventure" (Davis 160), manifesting itself in characters like Ariel, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, or Esmeralda. The new era of heroines were still young and adorable, however not as passive and devoting as their predecessors. Davis describes the new heroine, stating that she

does not sit passively pining for her lover to find and rescue her, and the hero is not an all-conquering warrior or romantic dream-prince. In this relationship, at last, the boy and girl are equally matched, have strengths which balance the weakness of the other, and are motivated in their quest – and their interactions with one another – by factors other than romantic longings. (160)

The new focus of the story is the adventure of the main characters, with man and woman working side by side without the immediate intention of getting married in the future after having only met once. The idea of being able to actively work together was, according to Davis, brought along by the American social background, as it was set in a time "in the United States when the notion that men and women – and certainly boys and girls – could work together on equal terms was finally entering into mainstream thinking, certainly the portrayal of a girl working equally with a boy would have been seen as both positive to children and non-threatening to the status quo" (161). Hence, the romantic story that seems to be ever present in Disney animations was not the utmost goal of the film anymore, but went alongside with the adventurous experience during which the boy fell in love with the girl's active and jaunty nature instead of her looks after the first time he met her and where the girl learns to trust and finally love the boy for accepting her the way she is.

While Ariel can be regarded as the turning point character that initiated the change that had taken place in Western society, the changes on femininities in film did not cease and hence

kept on influencing the portrayal of women in Disney animations. The on-going progress veered towards the concept of a “respectable” woman that could “have it all” (Davis 169), which, in terms of Disney’s femininities, means that instead of portraying housewives, animators started including images of single mothers, career women, and satisfied and respected wives. Those women who were not dependent on men and hence a slight threat to the afore mentioned status quo that society relied on in order to work, innovated the way in which women were perceived by men. Grown women as leading characters in an adventurous story outnumbered the ones about cheery and devoted housewives, which altered the educational cultural message that the young Disney audience perceived.

The new heroines were strong, independent and as active as, or sometimes even more active than the male protagonists; Davis describes these women as follows:

Going also (though not completely gone) was the image of a woman whose goodness was exemplified by her being innocent and asexual, and beginning to emerge in this period was the women who was kind, virtuous, good, and aware of (as well as able to enjoy) her own sexuality. Television, in particular, began to feature shows about strong, capable women – referred to by some as ‘superwomen’ – who were successful – and balanced – in their careers, with their families, with their love lives, and in any other areas of their lives. (169-170)

Aladdin’s Jasmine is a concrete example of this new type of woman; as a princess she has it all, beauty, health, wealth, but she misses her freedom and therefore goes on an adventure. Hence, instead of searching for a husband, or being found by him, as the old Disney films would have portrayed her, she follows her desire to reach out of the boundaries of her life and decides to take a walk on the wild side together with a street rat. A few years later, *Mulan* takes this concept to the next level, as she does not even need the help of a street rat to show her the world, but decides to go on her adventure all alone and to face armies of men and terrible war. However, both characters still end up with a husband in the end and although that was not their goal from the beginning onwards, the fact that this part of the happy end is shown at the very *end* of the film implies that this is the reason why it is actually a *happy* one and not because e.g. *Mulan* managed to defeat the Huns. On this issue, Davis notes that

examples of women who, instead of being on the hunt for a husband, were on the hunt for everything else, and when (because, in most of these films, a man eventually did come along and sweep the heroine off her feet) she fell in love, finding a husband and starting a family were often portrayed as being not her goal, but rather the last pieces of her life falling into place. (170)

Jasmine is the first marriageable female Disney heroine not to be interested in finding a husband, as she refuses to be a political trophy, but ends up marrying anyways, however, a

man who actually loves her and not the fact that he will be made sultan as a result of their marriage. Mulan has a similar problem; while everyone expects her to learn how to be a good wife and how to serve a man, she is more of a tomboy who, too, finds a man who appreciates this unusual side in her and does not feel repressed by a strong woman, and finds a match in the end. Accordingly, the message that the audience receives is not necessarily that only by finding a husband a girl gets to be happy in the end, but that even though she might not feel like fitting in the rules and requirements of society, she will still find someone who appreciates her for how she is.

Apart from a revised theme of love and courage on the part of women, Disney revised further ideas about equal activities in their animations from the late 1980s onwards, mirroring political changes from that period (see Davis 171). Furthermore, those changes brought along an alteration in the way good and evil was perceived by the audience and depicted in Disney animations, as the active adventures that the female protagonists were taking would have already been considered as evil actions in the old movies. Davis touches on the new concepts of passivity and activity in Disney films by stating:

Unlike the earlier films, in which the heroines' honour was depicted and proven simply through her goodness and acquiescence, the heroines of Disney's animated films of this period show their integrity through their actions, rather than through their inactions. Furthermore, the level of action and independence demonstrated by these heroines grew exponentially with each film, and could still readily be seen even when the main character of the film was male and the leading female character was in a more supporting role. (171)

This new notion of proving one's integrity via being active entirely opposes the old view on women and gives way to new interpretations of Judith Butler's idea of gender performance, as her concept is not bound to a certain time or society, but flexibly adjusts to cultural and social changes. With respect to Disney animations, the gender performance of good females has altered profoundly between the 1930s and 1980s, which allowed the ideas of good and evil to change that thoroughly. Furthermore, the new concepts about integrity, honour and, most importantly, equality, started to cover new political themes like multi-culturalism and tolerance, which can be seen in films like *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Tarzan* (1999), etc. (see Davis 171).

Disney movies of the 1990s, however, did not only mirror political changes in Western society, but were very much influenced by "feminist ideology" and how it "had entered into mainstream American middle-class values" (Davis 175). Hence, the acceptance that not every

woman strives for nothing but love in her life had to be portrayed in the female heroines, which caused a significant change in the way they were characterised by the animators.

According to Davis, there are three categories to which Disney heroines might belong to: the “Princess”, however, a new and revised, far less passive, 1990s version of her; the “Good Daughter”, who is both homebound and adventurous, a character which is common in fairy tales, however not in Disney animations until then; the “Tough Gal”, who represents the tomboy girl that needs to be free from boundaries and can be regarded as the most drastic shift from traditional Disney heroines (see Davis 175).

The new Princesses

For this chapter, three of Disney’s modern princesses will be taken into account: Ariel, Jasmine, and Pocahontas. As Davis has already pointed out, those modern princesses are nothing like their predecessors, in fact, the only actual similarity is that each of them is “a woman who is the daughter of a ruler” (176). What these three heroines have in common is their royal status that all of them achieved through birth and not through marriage, the fact that they have no mother (an aspect which will be discussed later, in the chapter on Disney’s family model), and their “independence, strength of will, determination to engineer their own fates, and insistence on being true to themselves” (176). Davis further argues that with the advancement of time, the princesses’ paths in life, their choices, and what the final denouements revolve around “grow exponentially with each film” (176), and with each new animation veering a bit more away from the princesses in earlier films. However, as opposed to the earlier princesses, they all share one belief, namely that “when the chips are down, they go out and do what they must, and do not sit and wait to be rescued. Most of them even do some of the rescuing themselves.” (Davis 225).

The first new princess, Ariel, has a determined desire to experience the human world and when she falls in love with a human prince, she masters immense handicaps and barriers including witchcraft that helps her become human, however, at the prize of losing her voice, and adapts to this new world. Keeping in mind that she is only 16 years old, her journey is to be considered as outstandingly brave, however, Disney depicts all its heroine teenagers as beyond their age, especially as old enough to realise themselves as sexual beings. Still, in Ariel’s case, says Davis, this awareness of her own sexuality and her “confidence in her

maturity and her feeling it necessary to declare that she is ‘not a child’ demonstrate that, in many ways, she is still a girl” (177).

Ariel is the first Disney heroine to be different from earlier princesses like Snow White, Cinderella, or Aurora. She has a far more active nature and is given the opportunity to experience life and live out her desires; she longs for adventure and knowledge about what she can get a glimpse of through the human stuff she collects, but cannot actually grasp. Davis notes:

Ariel actively seeks adventure and works hard to achieve goals she has set for herself, rather than simply responding to the crises with which she is presented. Even the fact that the film’s first shot of Ariel is on her own, away from home, in the midst of an adventure, serves as a marked contrast to the initial shots of earlier Disney princesses, who are first seen either within their homes or within the grounds of their homes. (178)

Still, the plot that revolves around her marks Ariel as a sort of transitional character from old characteristics to new ones; while her rebellious nature is accepted by the audience who has undergone feminist changes since watching the last Disney princess, Ariel’s own society does not approve of her behaviour. This becomes evident in the theme song that she sings, *Part of your World*, out of which Davis noted a few lines:

Bet ya on land, they understand
Bet they don’t reprimand their daughters. (qtd. in Davis 178)

These lines prove that Ariel feels suppressed in her world, which is part of the reason why she wants to escape, opposes her father’s rules and searches for help from the sea-witch, however, although she does all that, she is still perceived as a good character by the audience. The sea-witch helps her, but she is only willing to give Ariel legs in trade for her voice, singingly arguing that men prefer women who hold their tongue, so she will not need to be able to talk in order to get a man. Davis brings forward the argument that such “a performance points out that there are elements in both the human and ‘mer’ words which trivialise the importance of a woman’s voice, and that such attitudes can be used and played upon by the woman who is willing to make the temporary sacrifice of her voice” (179).

However, under the sea, everybody believes that Ariel has an extraordinarily beautiful voice, which all mer-people compliment and vaunt, which actually means that her voice does in fact have power, but on land she is simply an ordinary woman who cannot speak instead of being

something special, which would mean that it is de facto on land, where Ariel is in a suppressed position and not under the sea. Still, as Davis points out:

Her seeming inability to detect unreliable advice (even when there is substantial evidence that she should be wary), and her willingness to risk her life over the possibility that she *might* find true love” clearly shows “a tendency toward portraying Ariel as being the victimised innocent princess found in earlier films. Yet her willingness to gamble, her determination to make her own choices, and her tenacity in working toward what she wants out of life are all highly positive. Although her ultimate wish – to marry Prince Eric and live as a human – are on the surface very traditional, symbolically this action can be seen as her ultimate assertion of herself thanks to the fact that it actualises goals she set for herself. (180-181)

Thus it has to be acknowledged that Ariel’s courageous and active spirit provides the basis for future daring female characters that, like her, have desires beyond the boundaries of their lives.

Jasmine, for example, seems to follow the same principle as Ariel did; she is supposed to marry a suitor to become sultan, but she wants to break out of her world and experience something else, in her case, life on the street. Same as Ariel, she wishes to gain knowledge about the world she is cut out from, to regain her personal freedom and to experience *something*. What the two heroines share is their refusal to be confined by what they are, be it mermaid or simply a princess who has to fulfil royal duties, both want to break out of those boundaries. However, as has already been pointed out, Disney’s heroines underwent rapid changes within the 1990s with respect to the fundamental shift of their characterisations, which is why Jasmine is portrayed as a little more grown up than Ariel. Davis notes that she is “presented as a strong, intelligent, well-balanced individual who can instantly and accurately judge character. She is also fiercely independent, and, in the end, when Aladdin has proved his worthiness for her, she actively – and verbally – chooses him to be her husband” (182).

The notion that is added to the film and which separates Jasmine’s adventure from Ariel’s is the issue of origin and birthright. While both Ariel and Eric are royal, there is an enormous difference of social class among Jasmine and Aladdin with her being a princess and him being an indigent street rat. As Jasmine’s adventurous journey outside the palace enriched her knowledge as regards her innocence, she has proven to be able to survive in this world, however, Aladdin will never truly adapt to the demands and standards of royal living, which puts her in a superior position. Still, the message that the film tends to send to the audience is that “being a princess does not mean happiness, and that far from being a goal, such status – and the things attendant upon it – are obstacles to be overcome” (183). Also, Davis notes,

Jasmine shows the dangers and difficulties inherent in this idealisation of women, since it robs them of their freedom and keeps them from where they can do the most good – the public sphere” (183).

This issue leads right to the next modern princess, namely Pocahontas, who devotes her life solely to social understanding and political progress and is the only grown up Disney princess who does not have a romantic happy ending. Davis mentions that Pocahontas “thinks for herself, controls her own destiny, and is motivated in her actions not so much by romantic love as she is by the greater wisdom she possesses” (183), which marks her as the most progressive princess of all. Since her characterisation entirely opposed Disney’s first princess Snow White’s character, Davis decided to compare the two heroines in order to shed light on the progressive transformation that female protagonists had undergone.

First, she points out the different life styles that both lead; while Snow White’s ulterior goal in life is to find a husband, Pocahontas has no intention of following the same principle, and in fact she refuses the town’s most promising bachelor in order not to repress her wild side.

Secondly, Davis mentions the notion of power as regards self-defence; Snow White finds herself permanently in danger, however, she has no intention of standing up to the Queen and to actively do something about her happy ending, instead, she just sits around, waiting for a prince to save and marry her. Pocahontas, though, fights for a better understanding among the two diverging cultures in order to bring peace over her tribe; she is actively involved in becoming acquainted with a man, and is politically involved, which illustrates the power she wields without being an evil queen.

Thirdly, Davis points out the two princesses’ sexuality; while Snow White is passive, shy, and seemingly uncomfortable with her when talking to a man, Pocahontas is presented as outgoing, sexually confident and, although assumed to be at the same age as Snow White, a lot more mature than earlier princesses. She is self-reliant, self-confident and self-aware of her sexuality, her wisdom and wants to use her birthright as a princess to make a political change, instead of just sitting around and waiting for a prince to find her, as Snow White did (see Davis 184-185).

Pocahontas does not even need to rely on a man to complete her role with her tribe, as it is the case with Jasmine, who has to find a husband in order to save her political situation; Pocahontas, says Davis, “will gain her power and authority totally through her own skill and determination, and not because she has married” (184-185). While all other Disney princesses

find a romantic solution in the end, Pocahontas objects to an alike ending, although is actually given the opportunity to go to England with John Smith, however, she refuses the offer in order to stay with her people.

Those new princesses all share the new idea that finding love may not be the destined goal in life, however, that “the paths to self-fulfilment, self-confidence, and self-understanding may include finding love to some degree” (189). Still, what the modern royal heroines teach the audience is that “finding out about themselves – and their own personal strengths and weaknesses” (189) should be the ultimate goal, because only if a girl knows what expects from life, she can be open to finding a *prince* and to be respected by him.

The Tough Gals and Good Daughters

The two subdivisions introduced by Amy M. Davis give way to further, more disperse and diverging characterisations for female heroines in Disney animations. The first category, the Tough Gals, is represented through Esmeralda from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Meg from *Hercules*, who are illustrated as strong, confident, independent and self-reliant women who prove over and over that they do not need a man in order to survive. They are the clearest counterpart to Disney princesses, especially the earlier ones, as they neither search for love, nor want it, nor need a man to be happy, as long as they stay true to themselves. Davis notes accordingly that they are “feisty, no-nonsense women who leave audiences in no doubt that, far from needing (or even wanting) a man, these are women who can – and do – take care of themselves” (207).

Esmeralda is a gypsy, living on the street, and makes a living through her dancing skills which she performs on the streets of Paris in return for money. Davis describes her as independent, self-reliant, always yearning for freedom and as having a “strong sense of justice”, depicting her as “highly moral” and with a “strong sexuality” (207). With respect to her sexuality, one can detect another alteration in the way *good* sexuality is perceived by the audience as opposed to evil one in earlier films; Davis notes that, as strong female sexuality is usually evil, such an “attitude towards sexuality is easily detected in early Disney films which show the villainesses as sexually mature, self-possessed, and malevolent, while the heroine is young, naïve, and innocent”, however, “Esmeralda’s self-confidence – which includes

confidence in her beauty and sex-appeal – are also proof of her goodness and strength” (207-208). In other words, Esmeralda manages to change the image of female sexuality, which proves that during the 1990s, Disney animations have made a giant leap from slowly transforming female heroines from a shy Snow White to an adventurous Ariel, to allowing a woman to embrace her sexuality in a positive way, letting it reflect her tough, but good personality.

As much as Esmeralda changed the notion of sexuality in Disney films, as did Meg on female independence from men in *Hercules*. Davis notes that “Meg is portrayed as a wounded, cynical young woman” (208) who was hurt by a man when he left her for another girl, which made her bitter and angry towards all men. She can fight, is tough and basically on her own, however, also gets to find love and a happy ending when Hercules learns to earn her trust and respects her for the fighter she is. Again, the depiction of a tough woman, a strong, self-reliant girl who refuses to be with a man, would have been the characterisation of an evil woman in early Disney films, but with the changes that the women’s movement brought along, Meg was able to be portrayed with these traits and be good all the same.

The second category that Davis introduced, the good daughters, usually picture a young woman who is so loyal to her family (which, in Disney’s mother-absent-settings only leaves the father as the attachment family figure) that she risks her life going on an adventure in order to save her father. Davis points out that “stories which contain the archetype of the good daughter are a very old and traditional element in fairy tales which continue to resonate in Western culture as important tales with which audiences can easily identify and from which they can benefit” (190). Disney’s exemplify this category with Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Mulan, and Jane from *Tarzan*.

Each of these heroines struggles with the same issues: all of them are intelligent women who, within the society they live in, stand out for being different, for not considering finding love their ultimate destiny, for actively following a dream, and for striving a life on their own, free from boundaries, yet being close to the loved father who they care about.

Belle is Disney’s first *good daughter* who does not fit into her social surroundings; people in the village describe her as beautiful, but odd, because she is prone towards cultural and educational aspiration instead of focusing her intention on men. Davis argues that within her

surroundings, “Belle is the only one whose beautiful looks reflect her soul” (192) and while her beauty is appreciated and valued by the villagers, they frown upon her intellect. Basically, it can be said that Belle’s pursuit for knowledge can be compared to a woman’s striving for power, as an advanced education puts her in a superior position as compared to the villagers’ rather simple, low educational way of living. Thus, as compared to old Disney animations, the villagers represent the *good old* way of thinking and consider Belle’s desires and wishes as unusual, however, as the film was released in the 1990s, only as abnormal and particular and not as an evil attempt to be independent from men.

Davis continues by stating that the only element in Belle’s characterisation that shakes her image of an atypical, intellectual girl is the fact that her favourite book is a fairy love story that she dreams about and shall soon be actually reliving (see 194). During the whole film, she is shown as a generous and unselfish person who always puts everyone else’s needs over hers, which proves the audience that she is a good person and, following Disney principles, deserves a happy ending. Davis notes accordingly that the “portrayal of Belle effectively shows that the woman who is selfless, giving, and uses her wisdom only to support others is the good woman deserving a reward, rather than showing that it is okay for women to think first of themselves and secondly of others” (194).

Mulan shares this belief of putting everyone else’s problems or wishes over her own; although she does not fit into the category of the typical Chinese girl who has to learn how to please a man, she still studies those standards and rules in order to fulfil her mother’s wish and to *bring honour* to the family, as she sings in the beginning of the film. Davis mentions that “*Mulan* was released in 1998, seven years after *Beauty and the Beast*” and that during that time “a number of changes had occurred in the studio’s characterisations of women” (194). Disney’s new focus was the positive portrayal of strong, independent, tough women, depicting them as the leading figure in a usually typically male role.

Mulan is illustrated in this exact way, as a “good, honest, forthright, intelligent, lively person with a kind heart and a strong sense of justice” (195), however, as she lives in a society that does not approve of alike women, her personality is not valued. When Mulan’s father is enlisted to fight for China in a war against the Huns, which would equal this old man’s death sentence, Mulan, as a caring daughter who puts the value of her father’s survival over hers, pretends to be a man and joins the army instead of him, where she is trained how to fight and behave like a man. Her female intuition helps defeating the Huns and, although being a

woman and therefore the inferior sex, is celebrated as a heroine in China, which finally enables her to actually bring honour to the family. Mulan is a typical tomboy character who is not interested in being “a perfect bride” (Davis 198), but in finding her own destiny, which is precisely the way Davis sums up the film, defining its “predominant issues – self-identity and the notion of gender as performance” (199).

With regard to Judith Butler’s idea of gender as performance, *Mulan* shows that with the right clothes, a tomboy girl can be perceived as a man by society which, within the rules of a patriarchal society that Mulan faces, opens her new doors with respect to her rights and boundaries in daily life. Davis notes that “cross-class dressing is similar in intention to cross-gender dressing [...] because both are about social advancement: men have more power than women” (199). Such transgression of *typical* gender dressing can be viewed in most newer Disney females, for example with Jasmine, who wears a bare belly and thereby accentuates her power and sexuality; the way a person dresses mirrors his inner desires and strives, which is why Disney’s heroines of the 1990s are way more daring than earlier ones. As in case of Mulan, the transgression of typical female dressing was applied as a necessary masquerade. Davis alludes to this notion as follows:

In cross-gender dressing, however, the issues involved tend to be different. In films in which women dress and live as men, there is almost always a sense of desperation behind their transformation: their existence is threatened [...], or their personalities do not allow them to function successfully as a woman within the strictures of their society [...]. As men, such women are able to obtain a success and freedom which eluded them as young women within the societies in which they function. (199)

Davis further quotes Yvonne Tasker, who notices that “images of women cross-dressing relate to opportunity and achievement in different, though related ways. Both gendered and class cross-dressing is explicitly presented as allowing female protagonists an opportunity and a *freedom* (of both physical movement and behaviour) that they would not otherwise achieve” (qtd. in Davis 200).

As in case of Mulan, however, the situation is slightly different, as she is in fact successful as her male alter-ego Ping, however, the experience she has gained from this transformation helps her in the end, when, as her own female self, she is able to attain her grandest success (see Davis 200). Hence it can be said that the masculine masquerade on the outside affected her personality, adding male traits like courage, strength, strategic thinking, etc. to her female self, however, in a positive way. Her cross-gender dressing thus influenced her identity and made her break with the conventional and *normal* gender model within her society.

Literature on Gender Studies deals with transgressional gender performance as a person's neglect of social rules; according to Cranny-Francis et al., the key to how an individual acts is aligned to the degree of how socially gendered he or she feels. If within a patriarchal society, a woman wants to be part of social life, she has to follow certain gender rules; if she refuses to do so, she transgresses her gender (see Cranny-Francis et al. 74). What in one society is marked as feminine behaviour can be regarded as typically masculine in another one, therefore the gender role that an individual plays in a society can thereby be construed diversely among different cultures. According to Richardson and Robinson, gender divisions are "socially constructed, and therefore liable to change" (23); therefore, these new standards given, the limits of gender are generally free to be remodelled, which is why culture also plays a "decisive role in redefining the acceptable boundaries of gendered identity" (Glover, Kaplan 87-88). Hence, the contrast between the two sexes is steadily revolutionised, which is why one outstanding action by a female, as e.g. Mulan did, can affect the social status of women within society and change the view on women sustainably.

Cranny-Francis et al. introduce the concept *queer*, which can be defined as the break with conventions of what is regarded as *natural*, as well as the importance to fit into a socialised gender model:

In other words, queer was one response to the restrictions which attend the naturalisation of any notion of identity, whereby the identity is no longer recognised as a strategy or political practice, but is naturalised as an attribute of individuals themselves. When this happens, individuals are positioned by the discourse which supports and reinforces that identity to be judged and regulated. Queer was/is used to challenge that naturalisation or essentialising of identity. (74)

Queer is the representation of a life style that does not want to be restricted to social boundaries; with respect to Disney, such thinking can be detected in the way they characterize female villains as women who do not want to fit social gender models and who question the rules of femininity. Cranny-Francis et al further note that the term *queer* "challenges the concept of identity and the binaristic (self/other) thinking it encodes. It rejects the binaristic definitions of gender and sexuality that construct heteronormative descriptions of male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual." (see 76).

Accordingly, women could be described with features like *strong*, *independent*, *daring*, etc., without risking not being regarded as a *full* woman, although they might have discovered a sudden drive for power inside them. With reference to the portrayal of such inner

feelings, men and women felt the need to emphasize their struggle on the outside as well. Disney artists, who have the possibility to literally draw attention to such bodily expressions, very much use this tool of provocative looks in order to emphasize a woman's evilness or goodness.

In other words, *queer* identifies behaviour, performance and comportment which neglect standard conservative models of sex and gender. It is a demand to transgress regular boundaries and "invites one to break free from the stigmatizing logic of gender differences, to stop thinking of one's gender as some sort of fixed core or essence" (Glover, Kaplan 114).

With regard to *Mulan*, Disney managed to give the film a gender-wise happy solution, as Mulan decides not to embrace her new status as a powerful woman and returns home to her family, where will still be a tomboy who does not manage to live up to social gender expectations. Davis describes this process as follows:

In the end, however, Mulan willingly gives up all the power she has gained, rejecting the offer of a seat on the Emperor's council, and returns home, where her first act is to bow to her father and present him with the sword and crest, saying that they are 'gifts to honour the Fa family'. It is also implied, shortly thereafter, that Mulan and Shang will be married, which means that Mulan will, in the end, follow the traditionally prescribed right of passage for a women of her society, moving from ther father's house to her husband's. (Davis 201)

Thus, Disney managed once again to illustrate the interplay between a woman's adventurous journey of self-definition and society's expected path of love that results in marriage, keeping in mind remodelled and progressive gender models, yet returning to *good old* romantic denouements that promise a future generation of typical Disney family models.

2.5.3. Disney's family model

As we have learned, Disney heroines are expected to marry their prince charming in the end, as such development is considered as normal and typical for a woman within Western society. However, the concepts of families in Disney animations are rather unusual.

To begin with, Coca mentions most of the Disney heroines, except for Mulan, have one crucial thing in common, namely the absence of a mother (see 7); Jasmine, Ariel, Pocahontas and Belle only have loving fathers, but no mother, Snow White and Cinderella have no father figure at all, but share having evil stepmothers who want to get rid of them, and Aurora had to

leave her parents when she was a little girl to be raised by three fairies, in short, they all live in a “man’s world” (Coca 7).

Bell et al. also allude to the concept of the missing mother and explain that the lack of a mother-figure results in a “lack of identity” (196); according to them, a mother serves as a mirror into which children look in order to find and form their identity, a kind of role-model that they need to represent themselves within society. However, if such a mother-figure is missing, they are “either sentimentalized or disdained; in either case, their identity and their work are simultaneously erased, naturalized, and devalued.” (Bell 196) and so would, accordingly, be the child’s identity. This explains why many Disney heroines, like Ariel, or Jasmine, etc., do not act upon their gender the way that society expects them to, but struggle with the boundaries of being female, as they have never had a mother to show them how to behave properly.

In reality, children often have to face ripped family structures, however, predominantly because of different reasons. Considering the statistics from the internet site *Divorce Magazine*, we have to believe that in the Western World nearly every second marriage is divorced, among which circa every second person remarries (see divorcemag.com), and that is why single mothers and fathers who have to work and parent their child at the same time, or huge patchwork families are the new actuality.

Although divorces are hard on the child, who has to deal with separation, loss, and, generally put, a situation it does not understand and cannot cope with, the learnt family structures of Disney might be a helpful guide as to how to live and still be happy without having a mother. However, in most Disney films, the absent mother is replaced by a vicious stepmother whose mere goal in life is to make her stepdaughter’s life miserable and as in reality, most children of broken family units face replacement and accepting a new, unwanted person in their life, namely a stepmother or stepfather, the Disney role model only frightens them instead of teaching them a valuable lesson in life.

Fairy tales are meant to teach values and prepare children for their future life, but as most fairy tales were written at a time where divorce was unthinkable, the only possibility for a child to end up without a mother was via death. In such a drastic situation, the replacing stepmother is an unwanted person and therefore depicted as evil, however, within modern-day Western society, where stepparents belong to the common family model, children would need a guide as to how to accept such a situation.

Naturally, the company Disney did not turn away from this issue and deals with it in its modern TV films or series, the main source that a child learns from, are the good old Disney animations that are being republished for a new audience every decade (see Davis 1). It is therefore no surprise that children have difficulties with accepting the new woman on their father's side, as this woman is basically expected to be vicious. Accordingly, within the fairy tale, this wicked woman is portrayed as unsightly and abrasive in order to underline her personality and her frightening effect on the child, who accepts the evil image of the fairy tale stepmother and projects it onto reality.

Aside from the mother issues that Disney promote, the company teaches its young viewers that the concept of family includes everyone that one feels close to, involving friends and friendly animal companions. All Disney heroines, who have to face tremendous evil, also get the help from fellow comrades, human or animal; interestingly, though, those companions are mostly male.

As per Coca, this fact has its roots in the inhomogeneity of how female and male characters are perceived, which is why the female protagonist's environment is dominated by men. Davis notes on this issue that in Disney films, women are presented "as being largely in isolation from other women. They are surrounded by men, their friends and enemies are men, and they seem to function solely as women alone in a man's world" (228).

Coca mentions two examples, first of which being Mulan and Pocahontas, who both share the company of gun-toting men whose raw masculinity contrasts the heroines' soft appearance, but who are still friendly and non-threatening to the girls (see 7). The second example is Snow White, who lives in a cottage within the woods with only male dwarfs whom she mothers and nurtures and has both a sister, - and mother-like status around them (see 7). Notwithstanding, Bell et al. interpret the role of the dwarfs differently. According to them, they represent "humble American workers" who prove to work hard and "that they are able to maintain a world of justice and restore harmony to the world [...] who pull together during a depression" (37). Since the film came out in 1937, which was a time when the world still had to recover from World War 1, it was important to send this sort of message to the audience: as long as everyone played his part within society, everything was going to be fine. Bell et al. mention accordingly, "their determination is the determination of every worker, who will succeed just as long as he does his share while women stay at home and keep the house clean" (Bell et al. 37), which clearly sets the rules for both genders within society.

Still, apart from human companions, Disney heroines are found to have a huge number of animal friends that guide them and help them conquer the opposed evil. Disney teaches its audience that friends help get through crises and prove, within society, that one is capable of aligning with others. There are for example Ariel's fish friend Flounder, Pocahontas' pet friends Meeko and Flit, Mulan's helpful mini-dragon Mushu (see Coca 7), or Cinderella and her mostly masculine mice and her dog Bruno, Jasmine and her pet tiger Rajah, or Belle and her horse Philippe. Furthermore, all those animals speak human language, which enables the heroines to talk to them and help them whenever they are in need. The heroines' connectivity with their animal friends seems to prove having a good heart within the Disney world, as all good females seem to be able to communicate with animals.

However, with regard to a character's friendly environment, Bell et al. also allude to the importance of nature in Disney animation. All Disney heroines are portrayed as living close to and entirely in harmonic peace with nature; Snow White lives in a little cottage in the middle of the woods, Cinderella likes to go out and play with her animal friends, Aurora is raised far away from her parent's castle in the middle of the woods, Ariel lives under the sea, in harmony with all animals, Belle enjoys a nature-based provincial life and Jasmine does not veer off the sandy nature, but embraces the adventures it brings along, etc.

Bell et al. comment that "women and nature are in many historical periods simultaneously portrayed as identical and oppositional, just as the 'virgin/whore' dichotomy is a mainstay of dominant American culture" (126). Hence, if a girl likes being out in the nature, it accounts for her natural and good personality, or as Bell et al. state, "Disney consistently attempts to reflect a sense of 'virginal' innocence, promoting the 'magic' of childhood often through characters' friendships or ability to communicate with animals" (126). Therefore it can be said that the heroines' friendly alliance with nature and with their animal friends proves to the audience their good-hearted spirit and friendly intentions.

3. Evil femininities – Disney’s wicked women

3.1. The counterparts of good

In almost all Disney animations, where a female heroine serves as the protagonist of the story, the good, innocent and charming girl has a feminine foe in form of a vicious, demonic character. Subsequent to the hypothesis that those wicked women are portrayed as the good females’ exact opposites, and to that effect as having male features, this chapter will deal with the actual depiction of those ladies. Plenty of professors, novelists, lecturers, and cultural analysts have concentrated on this issue and dedicated their research to underlying cultural, sex and gender meaning in Disney films. Three of those works, *From Mouse to Mermaid* by Elizabeth Bell et al., *Multiculturalism and the Mouse* by Douglas Brode, and *Good Girls and Wicked Witches* by Amy M. Davis, serve as the main source for the following analysis of evil females in Disney animations. What those books share is their common interest in Judith Butler’s question of gender performance, as well as Teresa de Lauretis’ work on gender studies and cinema, which is why they all carry on and cinematically analyse the gender ideas explored in the first chapter of this thesis.

The analysis on femininities in Disney films in the prior section of this thesis was divided into several sections as regards the female characters’ stereotypical behaviour, appearance, gender performance, and family structures and those features are precisely what the examination of evil women will focus on in order to survey the “easily-defined concepts of good and evil” (Davis 19).

We have learned that Disney films are largely influenced by American society and culture, which is mirrored in the expected gender qualities on the part of Disney’s good females. Despite the fact that those films are rooted in folk,- and fairy tales, where characters and even the plot are slightly different than in the Disney version, the films portray their evil women as the complete opposite of the young heroines, not necessarily paying attention to the actual personality and visual depiction of those women in the original versions. However, it is not sufficient to state that those bad women are merely exact antidotes to the princesses; their representation is far more complex and gives way to various interpretations of underlying meaning underneath the vile surface.

Still, Davis mentions that the stereotypical depiction of women is “highly archetypal” (19), signifying that while the princesses are portrayed as heaven-like creatures, there was the need to compensate this good, which is why most of those female characters “are counterbalanced within each one’s story by some evil, obsessive, and (most likely) sexually-unfulfilled older woman” (19-20). Fairy tales teach important morals, values, and beliefs on various topics and issues, and on gender debates, hence Davis asks herself:

When strong, sexually-mature women are portrayed as frustrated, maniacal, blood-thirsty demons and witches, what are these portrayals saying about perceptions on the part of the film-makers of women’s sexuality? Most of all, perhaps, how large a role do these portrayals play in perpetuating or, in some cases, challenging certain sub-consciously held attitudes within society? (22)

All the same, the more innocent, introvert, passive, and prudish a good girl is, the more diabolic her counterpart has to be depicted so as to maintain the balance between them and in order to exaggeratedly portray notions of good and bad to teach the young audience a valuable lesson. Davis mentions that Disney deals with “notions about what are (and what are not) appropriate gender roles”, dealing “again and again, at least on an underlying level, with such themes as what is proper/improper behaviour for women, what is/is not the ‘natural order’, issues of coming of age and sexuality, and other gender-based concepts” (24). The fact that evil women mostly have a young female counterpart stands in opposition to one specific typical female trait: motherhood. “One recurring strand of feminist analysis of femininity has highlighted the supposed female virtues of social sympathy and nurturance, seeing in femininity an enlarged capacity for supportive human relations with caring motherhood at its centre.” (Glover, Kaplan 5). Disney portrays evil women as attacking a girl that could be their daughter, clearly proving that if a girl does not have mothering qualities, she is evil; a lesson that is thereby taught to young girls as to how to behave appropriately as a girl or woman within society.

Hence, what can be drawn from these quotes is that Disney films basically deal with the subject of in what way a female’s life is biased by the paths she chooses in life and how she reacts to certain events. Based on her behaviour, one can then classify her as good or evil, distinguishing between typically *good* and *bad*, or typically *female* or *male* traits. Davis quotes Hollinger, who states that “the good woman’s traits are aligned with conventional femininity (passivity, sweetness, emotionality, asexuality), and the bad one’s personality is associated with masculinity (assertiveness, acerbity, intelligence, eroticism)”, pointing out that those evil, manly women are pictured as being “‘typically treacherous, deceptive, and jealous’, as well as being involved with something immoral” (qtd. in Davis 124).

The form in which they ensure the audience will absolutely understand the lesson is the way the female villains ultimately end up: dead. The underlying message is clear: if, a woman does not fit into the concept of gender within a social construct, but actively works against it via vile actions, destruction will follow, and generally, “this demise is brought on by their own actions” (Davis 107). Very often the mere goal of a Disney film, where a female villain shatters the gender balance, is to finally bring the woman to her senses, or to kill her; Davis quotes Kaplan’s work *Women in Film* and notes that “the work of the film is the attempted restoration of order through the exposure and then destruction of the sexual, manipulating woman” (qtd. in Davis 121). In other words, if a woman does not perform according to the standards and demands of her gender, she has it coming.

3.2. Challenging female stereotypes

The chapter on female stereotypes comprised ideas about female (lack of) power with a focus on sexuality, passivity and activity, intelligence, and work, and gave an insight on the general assumption on how women are supposed to be and behave at a certain point of time within society. This section will deal with the depiction of women who neglect this kind of thinking and whose behaviour strikes them as atypical females, yet as having male features.

Bell et al. start by ascertaining the thematic dimension of being evil, which is directly linked to atypical gender performance; while Disney propagates good women with the “thematic emphasis on cleanliness, control, and organized industry” and a reference to “one-dimensional portrayal and thinking, for it is adorable, easy, and comforting in its simplicity” (Bell et al. 40), even sometimes “pale and pathetic” (37), their dark antagonists are far more active, and “represent erotic and subversive forces that are more appealing both for the artists who drew them and the audiences” (37). Davis also notes that the actual difference between the good and evil female characters lies in the fact that the fatal femmes “demonstrate a definite sense of agency” as regards their high “level of activity” (109).

Their activeness derives from their strong and mature sexuality, which marks them as sex symbols who take what they want. Whereas, as Douglas Brode points out, good girls have a subtle, hidden sexuality that is supposed to attract the audience (see Brode 125), evil women aggressively and openly wear their sexuality on the surface and thereby emphasize female

authority. Brode further points out that feminists actually prefer those women, since they were not dependent on men in order to survive; he states that “the feminist consensus has always been to dismiss Disney’s portrayals of women as superficial images of helpless princesses, subserviently trusting males to carry them off and live ‘happily ever after’ in a retro world of postmarital bliss” (171).

The growing demand for sexuality of these evil women is basically what their wickedness comes down to; while men become, sexually speaking, weaker by the age, the sexuality between the two sexes becomes more balanced, hence, women are empowered. Brode mentions that such strong female sexuality was “unimaginable by most Americans during the 1940s and ‘50s” and furthermore states that “we must recall that this was an era when sexuality was still viewed by solid suburban types with ‘ignorance, fear, guilt...Of all the secrets of coming of age in the fifties, sex was the darkest and dirtiest” (Brode 119-120). He further observes that “Disney openly embraced a daring sexuality”, however, only on the part of evil women who are presented as “cunning and destructive”; still, the company wants to keep in mind that within a patriarchal society, this sexuality is not acceptable and “portrays sexual attraction as socially curative (125).

Bell et al. point out that Disney’s portrayal of these women is “iconic” and that they are depicted with “congruous cinematic codes that inscribe middle age as a time of treachery, consumption and danger in the feminine life cycle” (116). The “treachery” they talk about can be interpreted as those women’s betrayal of their femininity, which is ought to be passive within a patriarchal society, the “consumption” refers to their direct demand for (sexual) power, a behaviour which poses “danger” for men, who feel overpowered, and therefore also for society itself. Bell et al. sarcastically note on this issue: “Of course, within Disney’s patriarchal ideology, any woman with power has to be represented as a castrating bitch” (181). For all those reasons, women who find themselves within this life cycle are regarded as tenuous and unsafe, which explains why all female Disney villains are portrayed at approximately the same age, namely their middle age.

As Disney films are rooted in fairy tales, they tend to exaggerate bodily features; with respect to the fatal force of female villains, whose overpowering features have to be overwhelming, Disney animators help themselves by contrasting their bodies to the bodies of their male antagonists, mostly a king or prince. As per Bell et al., this “performative scandal is

heightened by the contrasted construction of the bodies of kings in the Disney iconography. The typical Disney king is a short, stout, balding, blustering ‘hollow crown’” (117). The kings are feeble men, who are loving and caring, yet almost childish characters, they “exert no control over their children, their lackeys, their castles, or their kingdoms” (117); yet their weakness marks them as adorable rather than pitiful, since they mean well and have a good heart, like e.g. in *Aladdin* or in *Sleeping Beauty*. Brode refers to the king in *Cinderella*, who is “broadly caricatured as a well-intentioned yet foolish old king” (185) and who clearly does not radiate the power he actually possesses. Bell et al. note that “in middle age, they are drawn as physically and symbolically impotent in contrast to the evil women’s sexual potency and powers” (117), which once more emphasizes the female villains’ enormous wickedness.

With the use of such exaggerated fairy tales, Disney animators have succeeded in criticising patriarchal discourses; Bell et al. mention that “the inefficacy of divine right of kings is both drawn and storied in contrast to the potency of women’s evil and their dangerous and carnivorous threats to order” (117). Thereby, Disney questions the lawful rights of men, even those of powerful men as opposed to potent women within a patriarchal society; those portrayed fairy tale women are evil, however, they become even the more evil as soon as they overpower a man in this process, which obviously is the ultimate bad a woman can do. Hence, they are accredited with predatory forces that are related to their possessive and raptorial nature and describe their “power beyond comprehension” (Bell et al. 118); their power is not understandable for members of a patriarchal society and is therefore explained with evil, inhuman, and hence animalistic drives.

Bell et al. describe Disney’s female villains as “somatic congruities” (118) as opposed to the contradictory somatic layers of the protagonists: “Each layer of their construction – from the cosmetics of their vanity, the affectations of their movement, and the confrontation of their gaze to the animals that define their ‘natural’ predatory natures – the accumulative paintings mark feminine sexuality ‘as terrifying; it is an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a tidal wave’” (Bell et al. 118).

Hence, they once more state that female evilness derives from powerful female sexuality; the eruption of this sexuality can, however, not be tolerated within society, which is why the female villains always lose in the end and have to give way to harmonic societal gender models. Still, the woman’s erupted sexuality is accredited with as much power that it takes “the collective and unified efforts of all other characters in the film, and the upheaval of

natural forces – rock slides, ocean storms, and cliff precipices” (117) to succeed over her. A sexually, active, daring, and thus powerful woman is a rare occurrence within a patriarchal society, which is why if a woman actually achieves this goal, she is feared by society and therefore difficult to be tamed. Still, only if she can be subdued and her sexuality repressed, the “control and stability of the cultural and natural order in the destruction of the transgressive feminine” (117) can be rearranged.

3.3. Evil appearance and performance

As of Judith Butler, according to whom “gender is understood as a performance” (qtd. in Coca 13), it has been pointed out that in Disney films, good girls are depicted with bodies of ballet dancers in order to accentuate their grace and tenderness; evil women, however, are neither graceful nor tender, they are voluptuous and sexually demanding, which is why their “metaphors are not borrowed from the bodies of classical dancers” (Bell et al. 115). “Instead”, say Bell et al., “Disney transforms the vain, active and wicked woman of folktales into the *femme fatale*”, describing her according to Virmaux and Virmaux’s cinematic analysis as “a ‘shattering revelation’ characterized by décolleté, a ‘clinging black velvet dress’ and weaponry” (qtd. in Bell et al. 115). The *femme fatale* is sinuous, a sexually aggressive diva and behaves like a vamp, which is not exactly a feature that enjoys good standing with the average religious American. Bell et al. mention further analysts, e.g. Molly Haskell, who states that all those personality traits of “the treacherous feminine are ‘meant to represent demonic natural forces that, like a cyclone, threaten to uproot man from himself’” (qtd. in Bell 115). Ultimately, Bell et al. mention Mary Ann Doane, who “summarizes the *femme fatale*’s most striking characteristic as ‘the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable” (qtd. in Bell 115). As mentioned earlier, it lies in the human nature to reject what one cannot understand, which explains why those *femme fatales* are repudiated by men and society in general, for they are delusive and treacherous while they appear sensuously inviting.

Bell et al. analyse the depiction of those *femme fatales* and classify and group Disney’s vicious females into witches, queens, and stepmothers (see 115). First, they take a closer look at those women’s appearance as regards the “careful cosmetics of paint, cowls, jewelry, and ‘clinging black dresses’” (115). Once more, Bell et al. refer to various analysts who

concentrated on Disney characters in their works in order to point out those *femme fatales*' evil traits. Christopher Finch, for example, describes *Snow White*'s vicious queen by pointing out her "beauty [as] sinister, mature, plenty of curves" (qtd. in Bell et al. 116).

Bell et al. consequently ask themselves, whether not only the beautiful and innocent heroines were painted after real-life role models, but if those bad women's voluptuous appearances have been modelled after celebrity bodies as well. In their research, they discovered that "live-action models for the wicked women are not noted in Disney historiographies", however, that the voices attached to those females are have become "interchangeable auralities" (116). Some real-life women's voices were thereby ascribed to those vile characters; Lucille LaVerne was henceforth known as the voice of *Snow White*'s evil queen and witch, Pat Carroll added some of her wickedness to Ursula's character in *The Little Mermaid* and Eleanor Audley even voiced both Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* and the wicked stepmother in *Cinderella* (see Bell et al. 116).

Still, although among evil characters one might not find such precise similarities as e.g. between Aurora and the Barbie doll, there are in fact some visual aspects that can be linked to real-life, contemporary women that were copied onto the evil women's bodies. Bell et al. and Brode both agree that two of the most famous examples are Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, who influenced their contemporary fashion with their liability to masculine clothing style, and edgy and pointedly facial features and, according to Bell et al., were hence "inscribed on the drawn bodies of Disney's evil women" (116). Brode notices a resemblance between *Snow White*'s queen and those two European actresses, noting that they started a revolution of femininity with their harsh fashion by turning it into a symbol for glamorous, self-confident, sexually progressive women (see 172). Garbo and Dietrich, both sex symbols during the 1930s and 1940s, appeared to the audience as both "pleasurable and duplicitous" (116) due to their unusual and extravagant looks.

This "pleasure", state Bell et al., "derives from their power and authority as *femme fatales*, living and thinking only for themselves as sexual subjects, not sexual objects" (116); those women are sexually demanding, which equalizes a call for power, which gender studies interpret as a masculine comportment, which is, on the part of those women, underlined by their manly fashion, and dark voice. The previously mentioned "duplicity", say Bell et al., "derives from the animated perfection that subverts their authority even while fetishizing it – these deadly women are also doomed women" (116); that is, in other words, the fact that all

those women are either depicted as extremely thin, like Maleficent, Cruella de Vil, or Cinderella's stepmother, which visually would indicate weakness, or slim and beautiful, like the queen in *Snow White*, which emphasizes her femininity and thereby questions her actual power, since women are considered as being the weaker sex in gender studies, or, like *The Little Mermaid's* Ursula and *Alice in Wonderland's* Queen of Hearts, who are rather plump and bulky, which is an indicator for being strong, but who are painted like transvestites with their overly use of make-up, which makes their femininity appear absurd. However, the fetishizing factor that all those women have in common once more points to their claiming sexuality which they use to seduce and overpower and thereby evoke a duplicitous effect.

Disney applies numerous ways to enhance those women's dangerous appearance, one of which is the use of extreme close-ups. Bell et al. introduce Mary Ann Doane's summary of the significance of this special effect of emphasizing the "female face", which, according to her is

that bodily part not accessible to the subject's own gaze (or accessible only as a virtual image in a mirror) – hence its over-representation as *the* instance of subjectivity. But the face is not taken in at a glance – it already problematizes the motion of a pure surface since it points to an interior, a depth. The face is the most *readable* space of the body. (qtd. in Bell et al. 116)

According to Doane it can thereby be interpreted that a close-up on an evil woman's face emphasizes the fact that she has power over everything, even the audience's gaze, as viewers have no other possibility than to look directly at her and no one else. She dominates both her world and the TV screen, making her the centre of attention and thereby forces the audience to meet her stare, in other words, the female gaze, which thus gains more importance, as compared to the usually predominant male gaze.

Bell et al. mention that the "evil women of Disney films are the only female characters rendered in close-ups" and are furthermore the "only characters who address the camera directly, both advancing the narrative diegesis and confronting the spectator's gaze with their own" (116). This fact enhances the powerful meaning that underlies the use of close-ups, as they accredit the female villains with an exclusive force that only they inhabit.

In accordance to Bell et al.'s mentioned advancing of the narrative diegesis they further mention that Disney stresses the "cinematic code for the face of the *femme fatale*" by a unique technique: "the face and background fade into black and the eyes are painted as gold, glowing orbs, narrowing tightly on the intended victim/heroine" (116). This special effect is

meant to increase the vicious aura around the villain and builds up the tension for the audience who, by looking into the evil woman's eyes, seems to know that very soon she is going to conduct a nasty plan on the young heroine. Bell et al. talk about this special effect as "an intensification of not only the women's evil natures – their unknowable interiors – but it recalls primal fears and animal phobias, transforming their faces to the exterior icons of wolves and cats whose eyes glow in the dark" (116-117). Everything about those women is menacing and gives both the protagonist and the audience a chilly shudder due to Bell et al.'s mentioned "primal fears" that the *femme fatales* evoke. When they look directly into the camera, there seems to be nothing human about them, as they are merely driven by primal, evil urges that ensures their counterparts that they would be able to do anything in order to reach their goal.

The use of predatory powers that are ascribed to the female villain are, however, not only observable in the women's menacing eyes, but also in their bodies, as "the construction of their bodies on predatory animals heightens the dangerous consumptive powers of the *femme fatale* (117). Bell et al. cite Charles Solomon who introduces Marc Davis, who was in position of chief animator of the character Maleficent in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and said that "she was designed like a giant vampire bat to create a feeling of menace" (qtd. in Bell et al. 117). Every animal-like trait enhances the villain's abnormal and inhuman appearance and creates a mystical and thus, as it is not comprehensible for a normal being, threatening effect.

The utmost drastic effect that the villainesses evoke is when they actually change into an animal in order to become more powerful, more threatening and more intimidating for their counterpart. Davis notes that they "change themselves into other things when functioning in their usual form is not working for them" (107). Disney's best example on this issue is Maleficent, who magically transforms into a dragon when fighting Prince Philip, so she becomes visually more powerful "in a way which, despite all her evil actions before, is nonetheless even more intense and menacing" (107).

Apart from actually turning into an animal, we can observe various animalistic features among the famous female villains; Cinderella's stepmother walks very slowly and gracefully, but sometimes snaps out of her control, which gives her a snake-like personality; Cruella de Vil actually wears animal fur to underline her menacing appearance and the way she wears her hair, half white, half black, makes her look like a white tiger, ready to hunt for its prey.

Ursula the sea-witch is, as she lives under the sea, an average half-animal-half-human creature and therefore fairly normal within her society, however, to the audience, who do not consider such a body as typical or normal, her squid-like lower half of the body is threatening and evokes Bell et al.'s mentioned primal fears, as, according to them, she "captures the melodramatic, languorous, and rapacious movement of the *diva*, but her octopus tentacles physically manifest the enveloping, consumptive sexuality of the deadly woman" (117). *Snow White*'s queen appears to be least animal-like, even so, Bell et al. describe her according to Christopher Finch as "a mixture of Lady Macbeth and the Big Bad Wolf" (qtd. in Bell et al. 117), as she is in fact using predatory powers in order to succeed. Last but not least Bell et al. mention Maleficent who, while fighting Prince Phillip, turns into a huge dragon; the animator Eric Cleworth talks about her depiction: "The dragon's motions have a ponderous, reptilian grace that suggests powerful muscles moving a bulky body over the rocky terrain. The long neck and narrow head dart with serpentine fluidity" (qtd. in Bell et al. 117).

Animalistic features in women are hence, when superficially depicted in fairy tales, expressed in the way they walk, talk and use vicious forces. However, gender studies-wise, it refers to a woman who does not behave properly within society, especially as regards her personality, as Bell et al. already mentioned with Ursula, whose tentacles refer to "consumptive sexuality" (117). They further state that "whether societies or merpeople or kingdoms, [the female villain's] excess of sexuality and agency is drawn as evil" (117) and in this regard mention Montrelay, who states that "it is this evil which scandalizes whenever woman plays out her sex in order to evade the word and the law" (qtd. in Bell et al. 117).

Those women are sexually potent and fatally forceful, which is a menacing feature in a female and makes society question their personality in general. On account of this, Disney animators portray the femme fatale as universally evil, which means that she does not only aim her "catastrophic powers at a man who is powerless under her fatal force", but that "Disney's deadly women cast their spells, not only on their young women victims, but on the entire society from which they are excluded" (117). In other words, those females take revenge on society that excluded them for being atypical women who embrace their sexuality, by beating society with namely this fault, by being overpowering and men-threatening.

Next to their thirst for revenge, Disney's evil femmes are generally driven by jealousy; Davis notes that "these women seem to be particularly sensitive and easily offended (Maleficent, for example, is initially thrown into a fury against Princess Aurora and spends sixteen years

trying to destroy the young princess because she was not invited to Aurora's christening, despite the fact that this is in no way Aurora's fault)" (107-108). Maleficent is jealous of everyone else who was invited to the party, especially as regards her good-hearted witch colleagues, since that means that magic was indeed welcomed at the royal christening, but focuses her anger onto the child immediately. The fact that the royal family then tries to save their daughter by hiding her in the woods, which consequently makes Maleficent's revenge on the child unfeasible, only incites the evil witch more and more, which ultimately makes her plot her revenge for sixteen years.

Davis notes that these women's "activity is forced upon them by their own jealousy and unhappiness", marking the villainesses' emotional imbalance as the basic source of evil actions. *Snow White's* wicked Queen is another example of how jealousy can drive a woman to fatal engagement, Davis notes that "after all, the evil Queen is second in beauty only to Snow white, and yet she is very unhappy and frustrated" (108). The Queen's innate rivalry, enforced by her mad nature, makes her jealousy over not being the most beautiful woman rocket, which leads her to her vile actions. Keeping in mind that evil women are assumed to behave rather manly, as it reflects their strive for power, they should hence also respond to typical male features, like being rational, reasoned, calm, cool, authoritative, and emotionless, however, her still existent female-like emotional side is depicted exaggeratedly, she almost explodes.

On this issue, Davis talks about those women's "obsessiveness akin to madness", describing the Queen as "not just jealous, she is *insanely* jealous" (109), as her first thought is to murder her rivalling competitor in this beauty contest. This tendency to obsessive behaviour can be analysed in Maleficent's sixteen years of plotting for revenge, and also in Cinderella's step-mother, whose only interest is her daughters' reputation within society and is willing to "stop at nothing to forward the interest of her own daughters, even though, as an intelligent woman, some part of her must acknowledge that her hopes for them are completely unrealistic (if this were not the case, she would not find Cinderella so threatening)" (109). Those women focus all their hatred to one person, usually the weak heroine of the story, and do not shy away from any dangerous methods by finally achieving their goal. Davis states that "Evil in Disney is not just meanness – it is a symptom of madness, embodying as it does various levels of paranoia" (109), which is without any doubt a dreadful combination.

3.4. The female circle of life in Disney animation

According to Bell et al., there are three types of women to be found in Disney animation; first of all, and in the centre of the story, is the teenage heroine, a good girl who is “at the idealized height of puberty’s graceful promenade”, secondly, her counterpart and frenzied foe, is represented in female wickedness, who is “rendered as [a] middle-aged beauty at its peak of sexuality and authority”, and ultimately, there is the nurturing godmother, the “feminine sacrifice”, an “old woman past menopause, spry and comical, as the good fairies, godmothers, and servants in the tales” (Bell et al. 108).

As opposed to the femme fatales, Disney’s godmother-characters are depicted as neutral women, yet almost gender-neutral beings that aid and assist the good heroines. While both the good girl and the progressive, sexually demanding *evil* women are representations of social gender models, Disney animators “fill a relatively empty cultural category with their depictions of feminine nurturing and sacrifice in their depictions of good fairies, godmothers, and servants in the fairy-tale films” (Bell et al. 118). Joseph Campbell describes them as a “protective power [that] is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart” (qtd. in Bell et al. 118). Good godmothers appear in various Disney films, e.g. in *Sleeping Beauty* as Flora, Fauna and Merriweather, in *Beauty and the Beast* as Mrs. Potts, or, Cinderella’s fairy godmother and they all have one thing in common, namely that they are “never needful in their own rights, but consistently helpful and protective of their charges” (118).

However, they are not only protective of their charges, but are in some cases crucial for the plot, as e.g. in *Sleeping Beauty*, at least in the Disney version of the story. While in Grimm’s tale the prince discovers the castle where Aurora sleeps in by luck and has no problem entering it to kiss the girl, the Disney story turns gender roles around; in their version, the prince is locked in a dungeon by the evil women, Maleficent, and can only achieve his goal with the help of the three fairies who help him magically escape his prison and who transform his sword into a magic device that allows him to kill Maleficent who has turned into a huge, powerful dragon. With no doubt, he is a brave character who is willing to fight for his love, but in Disney’s model he would not have succeeded without the brave fairies by his side (see Brode 189-190).

Physically, the godmothers are painted in opposition to the female villains; while the wicked women radiate sex and sensuality in form of “shapely and mature curves of wickedness”, the

good fairies are asexual and therefore depicted with “pear-shaped or apple-shaped” figures, evoking “affable, warm, forgiving, sympathetic, soft-hearted, generous, affectionate, and kind” feelings on the side of the audience (118). They are past their “peak of sexuality and authority” (118) and hence pose no threat to society; they protect and guide and embody nurturing mother figures, which once more contrasts the femme fatales whose bodies are “sterile or barren”, in other words they produce “nothing in a society which fetishizes production” (118). Even the good fairies’ magic opposes to the evil women’s witchcraft; while the witches use their power to shatter the gendered order within society, the good godmothers use their fairy dust to get control back. Still, the godmothers are not *real* women, as all of them are to some extent supernatural beings; however, while they are, though unknowable, regarded as protective, generous and kind, the femme fatales’ mysterious aura and their unnameable gaze are received as evil.

Bell et al. explain this fact with the “performative enactments of gender and cultural codes for feminine sexuality and agency” (120). While Disney’s pretty heroines are depicted as perfect girls, constructed on the bodies of actual women, the femme fatales object to the ideal image of women and thereby “bespeak a cultural trepidation for unchecked femininity” (121). Bell et al. further note that the fact that “Disney artists resorted to the coded cinematic representations of the *femme fatale* for feminine agency speaks to the lack of conventions for encompassing such incomprehensible power” (121). Once again, the female villains are limited to their sexuality, however, in Disney films, that is precisely what the social performance of women’s representation of powers comes down to; the animated films embrace the diversity of this power among the different types of women and mirror it in the force of feminine the women’s bodies.

However, Disney keeps in mind that those bodies are extradited to change due to aging; Bell et al. state accordingly that “these constructed performances are rooted in a physical timeline that decrees that these bodies will change: from the tentative strength of youth, to the confident carriage of middle age, to the aplomb of old age” (121). It is therefore implied that the perfect girls will not stay young and adorable, but will eventually grow older and turn into wicked women, only to end up as old ladies, past menopause and their peak of sexuality, ready to accept their age and to convey their knowledge to a new generation of young heroines. Bell et al. notice that “on the Disney cultural and somatic timeline, the young heroines will become their stepmothers; the stepmothers, too, will become the good fairies

and godmothers” (121-122). For example in *Snow White*, where the Wicked Queen and Snow White share a lot of bodily resemblance; the dark hair, the red lips, the pale skin, as well as their similar physique, except for the generation of age that separates them, they are practically the same, which proves this existing timeline in Disney animation and furthermore questions whether “bold beauty and inner badness do *not* necessarily go together – at least not in Disney films” (Brode 119). According to Brode, it is necessary for Disney to “bridge the gap between primitive and pagan females and a future generation of normal though sexually liberated women” (129), for it is not easily explainable how the good young heroines will turn into wicked women once they start aging, simply because they are more sexually experienced then.

Brode sheds light on this issue by exploring the connection between a woman’s sexuality and nature. He states that as a young and innocent girl, the heroine lives close to nature, leaving her civilised world at puberty in order to explore life within nature; after having learnt enough over the years, the woman is ready to rise from only learning about it into sensually experiencing it, e.g. via their first kiss, which usually takes place within nature. Increasing age and further sexual research make the girl into an experienced woman, or as in Disney, a sexually powerful woman who is symbolized as an evil creature due to her new-found potency, who remains close to nature, however, as she has mastered the demands of nature, usually “high up on a hill, in a dark castle” (Brode 210), ruling over the natural space that she used to live in as a girl. All this finally leads to the last stage of womanhood, the stage that Brode calls “the crone” (214), which represents an old woman, who has gained a lot of wisdom and is one with nature. In Disney, this woman has transgressed nature and has therefore transformed into a fairy creature, a good godmother whose duty it is to guide a new generation of young heroines to complete the circle of femininity (see Brode 209-215).

3.5. A close analysis of Disney’s evil femmes

As the depiction of good heroines has changed drastically over the decades with respect to appropriate gender performance, so has the portrayal of their antagonists, the bad women. First of all, to provide an overview, the following table illustrates each female villain and her good counterpart(s) in progression of time (see Davis 23):

<i>Film</i>	Heroine/Heroes	Villainess	Year
<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>	Snow White	The Wicked Queen	1937
<i>Cinderella</i>	Cinderella	The Wicked Stepmother	1950
<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	Alice	The Queen of Hearts	1951
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	Aurora	Maleficent	1959
<i>101 Dalmatians</i>	Dalmatian Puppies	Cruella de Vil	1961
<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	Ariel	Ursula the Sea-witch	1989

However, Bell et al. divide Disney's wicked ladies into witches, queens, and stepmothers (see 115), and as this is precisely how those women will be classified for this chapter, the table can be subdivided accordingly:

1. Witches	
Maleficent	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>
Ursula the Sea-witch	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>
2. Queens or powerful Ladies	
The Wicked Queen	<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>
The Queen of Hearts	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>
Cruella de Vil	<i>101 Dalmatians</i>
3. Stepmothers	
The Wicked Stepmother	<i>Cinderella</i>

All these villains incorporate evil, immoral and often sinful human traits like hatred, death or corruption, however, the most significant thing that drives them is their demand for domination. In their attempts to gain control over their opposed heroine or hero, they prove to be "strong, fearless, and often very creative. They are mature, powerful, and independent. In short, they are everything that their female victims are not" (Davis 107).

It is the traditional evil women in Disney – the Evil Queen/Hag, the Evil Step-mother, the Queen of Hearts, Maleficent, Madame Medusa, and Ursula the Sea Witch – who are portrayed in nightmare-ish seriousness, and as not being simply bad, mean, or evil, but also insane. The villains have goals to achieve in the world which the hero/ine stands in the way of; the evil woman has goals, but they are usually more personal, and are portrayed as sinister in comparison: they seek to be the fairest, to marry off their daughters, to rule with absolute authority. (Davis 233)

3.5.1. Disney's Wicked Witches

“Disney female protagonists typically embody an array of feminine ideals and warnings. Counterposed against the bright faces, adoring glances, and micro-waists of Cinderella, Snow White, Bell, and Ariel the Mermaid stands a lineup of ugly, evil, female characters: the witches” (Bell et al. 217).

The two witches that are going to be analysed in this section are Maleficent and Ursula, who could not be any more unlike, which most probably originates in the fact that they were illustrated thirty years apart, a time in which the image on woman drastically changed due to the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. *Snow White's* Queen can, in fact, also be regarded as a witch, as she uses witchcraft consistently, however, due to her royal status, she is going to be analysed in the section about queens and powerful women.

The image of Disney's witches changed rigorously; while in the early films, witches were regarded as dreadful, dangerous and menacing, their image improved and ameliorated over the years. Davis notes that new witch TV series like *Charmed* (1998 to 2006), or *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996 to 2003), or films like *Hocus Pocus* (1993) provide good and bad versions of wiccan traditions, shedding new light on the concept of witches in media (see Davis 231). As already pointed out, the feminist movement reformed women's place in society, broadening their limits and all the things they were *supposed* to do and be before, which is why a woman's controversial behaviour did not mark her as an evil being, e.g. a witch, anymore, hence the image of the witch in itself experienced a change of attitude and prestige as well. Davis notes accordingly:

Although the older image of the witch continues to resonate within American cultural representations, it is increasingly blended with the feminist reinterpretations of the witch as both a phenomenon of history and an archetypal image of an aspect of Womanhood. Particularly in the first period of Disney films [...], the role of the witch/evil woman is vital, since it is on her actions that the films' plot turn. Over the course of the century, however, as feminist interpretations of witches evolved, this change in conceptions of the witch has been reflected in the Disney animated films. (231-232)

New interpretations of wiccan practitioners were included in Disney animations, e.g. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame's* Esmeralda, who is accused of being a witch, however, the way she is represented is sensual (and thus powerful), yet attractive and, most importantly, good (see 232). Witches were no longer regarded as evil, unless of course they conducted vile actions, but still, their image had been remodelled and modernised. However, the image of a

witch is very much dependent on her lifestyle; if she fulfils the typical child-less, unmarried, frustrated image that Disney's evil witches share, they are regarded as wicked, although, even in the earlier films, good witches existed, e.g. Mary Poppins. Such good witches are "autonomous females who care for children while resisting becoming mothers" and thereby are "effective not at disrupting social order but re-establishing it" (Bell et al. 213). However, in the earlier films, such good witches were rare, as usually a witch embodied vile thoughts, atypical female behaviour, and willingness for doing evil.

Davis notes that in most of Disney's "film history, the witch has been shown as – ultimately (as in the case with the evil queen in *Snow White*, who starts out as a beauty but ends up ugly) – being ugly, old, and repulsive, and she has always been punished in the end. In this way she has been contrasted with the beautiful, young, and attractive heroines" (232). The fact that modern female practitioners of magic were allowed to be stunningly beautiful opposes the depiction of witches in old fairy tales; in Disney films, a woman's soul and inner beauty is usually reflected in her looks (in case of *Snow White*'s stepmother, the Queen, as Davis points out, her inner ugliness is also to be presented on an outward level in the end in order not to break with this tradition), and as witchcraft was ever regarded as bad and evil in fairy tales, it was a common rule to depict women with a black soul as physically unattractive (see Davis 232). Davis points out:

In fairy tales, the heroine is almost always depicted as beautiful, and in only the rarest of circumstances is beauty granted to the wicked or impure at heart. In those instances where it is, however, something in the story usually causes the true ugliness of the wicked woman to be revealed, such as in *Snow White*'s stepmother's transformation of herself into a hag. This message that good equals beauty is very much alive, and is continuously conveyed through the media to remind women that, if they want to be beloved, they must also be beautiful. The irony present in advertisements with this message, i.e. that all women, just like the evil women in stories, must use artifice if they want to preserve their beauty, seems lost upon those who use this message. (232)

In her statement, Davis addresses the issue of female aging that has already been touched on earlier; women are beautiful, desirable, and sexually attractive to men during their peak of beauty, their youth. Youth symbolises a healthy body that is capable of bearing children, innocence, naiveté, and a pure heart, which is basically the exact antipode to how evil women are depicted. Davis describes them as "women in their 30s, 40s, or 50s, single or widowed, and very angry with the world around them" (233). The fact that Davis also keeps in mind that they might be widowed, ergo that they once were young (and hence good) and found a husband, which means that actually they did follow the path of life that society expected them

to as women, but that by deathly fate they are now alone, angry and have no-one to love, which might be the genesis for their transformation into evil women, conforms to Bell et al.'s comment on Disney's female circle of life (see Bell et al. 108-122).

This fact also underlines Davis' next argument, namely that the evil ladies "are aware of the importance of artifice in maintaining their feminine status" (233). They are single women who are excluded from society due to their abnormal behaviour, however, as mentioned above, this atypical comportment might result from suddenly being widowed, which means that those women seek the same things as the young heroines: love. Driven by jealousy over not being as young and beautiful anymore, and hence not having a great chance of meeting another man who will love them back, they are driven into madness and vile actions, however, only because of cultural and social demands and standards that they cannot meet anymore, at their age. That is why they terrorise their young female counterparts with the help of their acquired knowledge and intelligence that proceeding age brings along. Davis comments on this as follows:

They keep the young heroines in rags in order to prevent the beauty that comes from the heroine's goodness from overshadowing the beauty they have achieved through artifice. They are always shown to be aware of how much work it takes to achieve the currently standard form of femininity, and are vain, obsessive creatures. When they have magical powers (as most of them do) they use their speech – their words – to cast spells. When they cannot work magic, they nonetheless have the power to use their voices – by giving commands and telling lies – to work against their young, less verbally-gifted victims. (233)

Maleficent

Apart from *Snow White's* Queen, who is accustomed to using witchcraft, however, is not a real sorceress, Maleficent is Disney's first actual witch, starring in the film *Sleeping Beauty* from 1959. Being the leading antagonist in the film, she is portrayed as an evil being, using her witchcraft for implementing bad things, especially for taking revenge on the royal family for not inviting her to their daughter's christening. Still, before this incident, her actual and main counterparts were "the three good fairies Flora, Fauna and Merryweather, her polar opposites, who do all in their power to keep Maleficent's overwhelming evil magic at bay" (Maleficent, Disney.wikia.com). So, when Maleficent is not invited to the royal party, she curses the child to die within the next 16 years by pricking one of her fingers on a spinning wheel.

Maleficent is depicted as sheer wickedness; her actions leave no doubt that her only goal in life is to spread fear, destruction, and disaster; Disney.wikia.com notes on Maleficent that she “represents pure, deliberate, evil. She is ruthless and devious, and will do whatever it takes to achieve her (evil) goals”. Basically, her evil nature comes to no surprise by the look of her name, as Maleficent can be derived from the latin words *male facere*, which can be translated as *doing bad things*. This great level of activity on the part of a woman is one of the major indicators that she has to be an evil being, considering the social gender rules at the time when the film was made. Her activeness is conveyed through her desire for revenge and the way she focuses her irrational anger on the child and cannot let go of it for sixteen years; her whole life revolves around nothing but evil thoughts towards the princess which she would love to conduct.

As well as the heroines usually have a friendly animal companion that helps them through crises and adventures, so do Disney’s evil women, in case of Maleficent, it is her raven Diablo. In many ways she is dependent on him and his ability to fly around, inconspicuously spy on people and gathering information on people which he quickly reports back to his master, the sorceress. Hence, it is also this ability of his that allows Maleficent to finally find Aurora’s abode after sixteen years of plotting her revenge. However, one might say that the bond between her and her raven is not as tight as the one that heroines and their pets share; while the good characters are connected in a friendly and caring way, evil characters respect and slightly fear each other, both in need of the other one’s abilities, but still, one can detect a certain bond between Maleficent and her raven, who is always by her side, as can be observed in the following figure:



Figure 2

Although the way she treats her pet is often very rough and harsh, she is dependent on him, both on his abilities and on his company; being an evil witch, she lives alone in a huge, dark castle and has no-one to share her life, desires, and dreams with. Following the aforementioned theory that evil women only turn into what they are because society rejects them, or because they never found a husband, or he died and she suddenly was an old widow, wanted by nobody, it does not seem surprisingly at all to find her caring for another being, in this case, her pet raven Diablo. Their bond becomes all too clear in the end, when the fairies turn Diablo into stone and Maleficent, who cannot prevent this from happening, cries out in agony, as her only friend has just left her.

A feature that Maleficent and her fellow evil ladies share is their tendency towards mischievous behaviour. The audience feels that they actually enjoy their vile actions, which, in case of Maleficent, can be observed in the way she mocks and ridicules Prince Phillip when he is captured in her dungeon (see Maleficent Disney.wikia.com). Hence, her actions are not only triggered by an inner desire for revenge, but also because she relishes being evil and loves living out this side of her personality. Yet further, she adores her evil side so much, she has a tendency towards narcissism, as Disney.wikia.com mentions, when they quote one of her lines in the film: “You poor simple fools, thinking you could defeat me. Me, the mistress of all evil” (qtd. in Maleficent, Disney.wikia.com), which indicates her high level of self-confidence and narcissistic nature. Such a strong belief in her own power makes her, on the one hand, even more powerful, as her arrogance gives her enough confidence to take on any battle, however, seen from a gender studies perspective, one might say that on the other hand, this trait is an indicator for madness, which, again, marks her as an evil, because mad, woman.

Interestingly, although she is powerful, certainly mightier than men, and can magically turn into anything, she is ultimately defeated by a man who is way less powerful than she. During the final battle, where she fights with Prince Phillip and the three fairies, she turns into a huge dragon, which emphasizes her enormous power. Phillip manages to stab her with a magic sword, which, however, proves that on his own, without the help of magic, he would not have stood a chance against her; it takes good magic and a heroic man to finally restore the balance that she disrupted.

With regard to her bodily appearance, the analysis will keep in mind the aforementioned definitions of what was ever regarded as beautiful and pleasing within American society, assuming that she does not fulfill these standards of femininity.

Figure 2 and the following figure 3 will serve as a visual aid for the analysis of her looks:



Figure 3

Although evil women are generally described as being in their forties, Maleficent's look does not really reveal her actual age; the sixteen years between the beginning of the film and the time when she finally gets her revenge seem to have passed without leaving traits of aging on her face or hands, which is basically everything that the audience ever sees from her body (see Maleficent Disney.wikia.com). The rest is covered in black and purple cloaks that embrace her slim figure and add to her menacing aura. Disney.wikia.com describes her as "a tall, slender, beautiful, pale green skinned woman with a narrow face and a prominent chin". Being tall and slender actually fits the description of what was regarded as beautiful at that time in Western society, as both are model-like features that entail elegance and beauty.

However, Maleficent's body appears to be a little too thin, which makes it edgy and pointy, which is not necessarily an inviting effect on the part of a woman who is supposed to be soft and tender (at least if she is good with respect to Disney's animated world). Her "prominent chin" that Disney.wikia.com points out is prove for that, as it sharply sticks out of her bony face and gives her a prominent look which is generally only common with male characters. With regard to her skin, which has a greenish touch, she looks unhealthy and abnormal; natural skin is supposed to be rose, soft, with a shimmering effect in the face, but Maleficent's skin reminds the audience of an animal, a reptile that is ready for the hunt. Moreover, it gives her an artificial look that makes her seem *unreal*, which adds to the effect that the wicked lady is not to be perceived as a *real* woman, as she does not fulfil the social idea of femininity. Sticking to the interpretation of the greenish skin looking like snake skin, this animalistic feature is enhanced by her yellow eyes that menacingly focus on their prey, the virtuous heroine. Bell et al. touched on these predatory powers that evil women have and which are portrayed on their bodies by Disney animators (see 117); directing the audience's attention to the female villain's dangerous side amplifies her threatening effect and also

proves once more that she is not a real woman anymore, as she has given way to these powers.

The audience knows that Maleficent uses dark magic, however, this fact is underlined by Disney animators in every possible way. Apart from only dressing her in dark clothes and painting her body on the basis of the looks of reptiles, there are other attributes that give away her true inner self. One of these features is mentioned by Disney.wikia.com, where Maleficent's "horned headdress" is alluded to, as it "is symbolic of her dark magic". The two horns obviously refer to the devil's horns and since Maleficent does not have such horns herself, she has to artificially add them to her head by wearing such a headpiece. Interestingly, the headdress is shaped like a V on her forehead, closely framing her pointy eyebrows and thereby drawing more attention to these thin lines, which anew gives her face a sharp and edgy and thus unfeminine look. Her mouth has the same curvy, but thin lines as her eyebrows do, and both of these facial features are highlighted by the make-up she uses; while her eyes are heavily emphasized by the use of purple eye shadow, her lips are blood red, just like her sharp, long fingernails that appear like claws and, again, refer to her animalistic side.

To sum up, everything about her contrasts the beauty and innocence that the film's heroine, Aurora, radiates; her looks, her motifs, her performance, everything about her proves that she is not only evil, but also an atypical example of femininity in the Western world and she is certainly one of Disney's most vicious female characters.

Ursula

As has already been pointed out, the difference between Maleficent and Disney's next witch, Ursula, is primarily based on the thirty years of time that passed between the animations of these two, a time, during which the image of women changed due to the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Accordingly, Davis notes that while "strong heroines are a growing trend in Disney animation of this later period, evil women are becoming an increasingly rare phenomenon" (214); the reason for this is simple: until then, the heroine was merely passive, shy and innocent, which made it easy for the female villain to be the exact opposite, but with the uprising of strong, active, and good female characters, the depiction of the oppositional evil ladies turned out to be more difficult. The more power the good girls gained, the more

demanding was the depiction of the evil women and Disney animators had to find new, more grotesque ways in portraying villainesses, e.g. by adding a certain madness to them, or, as in Ursula's case, by giving her a transvestite look.

Davis points out that among the newer female villains, "Ursula is the only one who easily fits the traditional perimeters of 'Disney Villainess': she is very much a 'monstrous other' who opposes a young heroine" (215). What makes her profile traditional is the fact that she is driven by jealousy, just like earlier female villains did, like e.g. the Queen from *Snow White*, or Maleficent. In Ursula's case, her jealousy is directed towards everything beautiful and powerful; she feels excluded from the mermaid world and envies King Triton for his power and Ariel for her beautiful voice. Her main focus is King Triton though, which becomes clear in her monologue at the beginning of the film, in which she points out that she once lived in Triton's castle, but was banished from there and now seeks revenge on the king, if possible, by becoming queen herself (see Ursula Disney.wikia.com). Her jealousy towards beautiful things, like Ariel's voice, though, is not as active as her desire for revenge; she does not really actively work against Ariel to reach her goal, instead, she lets Ariel come to her, who has a wish to be human and is willing to trade her voice for legs.

Like all female villains, Ursula is extremely clever, and soon figures that Ariel might be the key to hurt Triton and to finally get her revenge, Disney.wikia.com notes: "Ursula is very manipulative and has a talent of making great sense and making great points when trying to strike a deal". Although she does not play fair in her agreement with Ariel, including a transformation of Ursula into a good-looking, brown-haired woman in order to thwart Ariel's plan to win Prince Eric's heart, she finally gets to make King Triton choose between his own and his daughter's freedom. As he surrenders, Ursula becomes queen of the sea and "swells in size in an effort to crush her opponents" (Davis 215), emphasizing her newly gained power by making herself overly mighty and large as a reflection of her inner force. Although she does not transform into an animal (probably because she already is half animal), this turn into a huge creature seems to be common among witches, as already Maleficent turned into an enormous dragon during the battle. Apart from mirroring the villain's great power in that moment, the swelling to such a big size also has a menacing effect for her opponents and gives her a threatening aura.

Ursula's body is, also in normal condition, rather big; she is portrayed as half octopus, half plump human, and in a highly voluptuous way. Bell et al. state that "Ursula was modeled on the drag queen Divine" (182), which explains her portrayal, as everything is always a little bit *too much*. Bell et al. concentrate on Ursula's drag features and note about one of her performances:

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)

The fact that Ursula sings about the position of women in society next to men in a patriarchic system proves that the women's movement has had a great influence on Disney, as no other character before has ever even thought about these issues. Ursula is an intelligent woman and seems to be aware of the fact that as a passive and shy girl she would not stand a chance against dominating men, however, by cross-dressing and by destabilizing gender (see Bell et al. 182), she finds a way to escape the image of typical femininity and thereby allows herself to be powerful. Bell et al. further point to Judith Butler's idea of gender as performance, when they state:

In Ursula's drag scene, Ariel learns that gender is performance; Ursula doesn't simply symbolize woman, she *performs* woman. Ursula uses a camp drag queen performance to teach Ariel to use makeup, to 'never underestimate the importance of body language,' to use the artifices and trappings of gender behavior. Ariel learns gender, not as a natural category, but as a performed construct. (183)

With her song, Ursula questions the social construct of gender and teaches not only Ariel, but most importantly the young audience that gender, whether male or female, is simply a question of performance, and not an established set of rules that are imposed upon a human the day he is born. Bell et al. point out accordingly:

Drag performances such as Ursula's and Ariel's are spectacles that can teach us something important about gender. Gender is composed of repeated, publicly performed, regulated acts that are 'dramatic' and therefore 'contingent' embodiments of meaning. Drag denaturalizes gender by showing us its imitative structure; it operates on the contradiction between anatomical sex and gender identity, a contradiction that is interrupted by the performance itself. Defining gender as a performative production dismantles the illusion of a natural category. (183)

It appears that Ursula knows that mermaids are regarded as sex symbols, whether under the sea, or in the human world; Bell et al. agree on that, as they say that the "ideal woman represented by the mermaid image is immobile, her only power in her sexuality" (184).

However, through Ursula's help, and Triton's help in the end, Ariel escapes from this sexist image; Bell et al. regard her as "a dissolution and rearticulation of this gender ideal: she is a mermaid passing as a human with both legs and voice, or mobility and subjecthood" (184).

Ursula's body is very different from Ariel's, although, as we learn early on in the film, she has once been part of Triton's castle, which indicates that either her unusual body was accepted there, or that she used to look different earlier and that by being kicked out, she transformed into this half octopus creature. Bell et al. point out:

It is no accident that Ursula is an octopus, an inverted Medusa figure. 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 realm, is outside the outside. (184)

Living outside of Triton's patriarchal world, by which Ariel sometimes feels suppressed, Ursula is the living proof that as soon as a woman decides not to obey to social rules any more, she is regarded as and made into an outsider. Bell et al. state:

By vilifying feminine power in the figure of Ursula, Disney simplifies Ariel's choice: in the white male system it is much easier to be silent than to be seen as monstrous. Admittedly, the film is a problematic text for a feminist resistant reading, because it teaches us that we can achieve access and mobility in the white male system if we remain silent, and if we sacrifice our connection to 'the feminine'. We all know the storyline about Ariel sacrificing her voice. Indeed, Ursula tells an ancient story when she convinces Ariel that her voice will be useless in the human world. (181)

This human world was depicted in 1989, at the time after the crucial years of the women's movement, when women were aware of the fact that being oppressed by men was not acceptable any more. Hence, although both Triton, and the royal human, Prince Eric, are depicted as good male characters, they both still believe in a patriarchal society, marking men as the ruling and more powerful gender. However, throughout the story, Ursula "teaches a different lesson about access, mobility, and voice. Ursula can retrieve Ariel from her destined alliance with patriarchy. Not only does she give Ariel legs, she schools her in disruptive reconstructions of gender" (182). Although Ursula does all that with her ulterior goal to destroy Ariel's father, the king, it seems that it is important to her to teach young girls this kind of independent, autonomous thinking, which she actually achieves, considering that most of the film's audience consists of little girls who listen to Ursula's words.

Bell et al. observe that 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" (182). However, one should keep in mind that Disney animators design their evil ladies with a tendency to madness, which means that generally, they always doubt these women's sane credibility. Still, her words impress Ariel and rather certain also the young viewers, although Ariel eventually decides to "enter the white male system with her voice", but after her voice had been possessed by this progressive, strong witch for quite some time, it is not the same anymore and has "erupted amidst patriarchal language" (185), which means that Ursula's world view did in fact change Ariel for her future path as a woman.

The fact that Ursula so willingly teaches Ariel all that, although she is the daughter of her arch nemesis, is proof for her inner maternal instincts. Bell et al. note that "Ursula is a revolting, grotesque image of the smothering maternal figure" (181), embodying absolute female power in her every move and words, however, as she is the villain of the story, in an evil way. Accordingly, Bell et al. describe Ursula's home that mirrors her female force: "The sprawling seascapes of Ursula's home are what Cixous calls 'the dark continent' of the feminine body. To visit Ursula, Ariel must enter through the toothy jaws of a gigantic mouth, and swim through womb-like caves. Ursula is the female symbolic encoded in patriarchal language as grotesque and monstrous; she represents the monstrosity of feminine power" (184). Ursula's strong, feminine force opposes patriarchal power and questions the rules that typical women have to obey to by "disrupting the symbolic system that demands the complementarity of gender and the dual world construction of land and sea" (184-185).

Ursula's quelling femininity is constructed as opposed to masculine phallic power, which is present in diverse ways in the film. First of all, there is King Triton's scepter, or as Bell et al. call it, his "phallic scepter" (185); Ursula's revenge is pointed towards the king and his political and powerful position, which she can claim as soon as she takes over his magic scepter, however, this means that the sea-witch's desire for the scepter can be interpreted as penis envy (see Bell et al. 185). As soon as Ursula gets to hold the scepter in her hand, she transforms; Bell et al. note that she "swells into an enormous monster, exploding, diffusing, overflowing. Her growth is more rupturing than an erection." (185).

The second phallic allusion is presented in the next second, when Prince Eric is able to defeat the sea-witch with "the phallic mast of his ship" (185), symbolizing that even though a woman can, for a minute, be forceful with masculine power, she does not stand a chance against manhood, in this case, a phallic mast. The third phallic allusion can be detected in

Ursula's two phallic pet-eels Flotsam and Jetsam, which she tamed and which she constantly messes around with. They are her closest allies, which proves once more her mothering qualities, as she is persistently surrounded by them, feeding them, talking to them, and petting them, which can be seen in the following figure:



Figure 4

Disney.wikia.com points out that “Ursula treats the eels like children” and every time she talks about them or to them, she calls them “‘babies’ or ‘poopsies’”. They further notice that she puts them “before anything and everyone else” and that the moment when “the eels are killed accidentally by Ursula because of Ariel, she mourns and takes all of her anger and sadness on Ariel and attempts to kill her once and for all” (Ursula, Disney.wikia.com).

Apart from Ursula's unusual mothering features, her looks and appearance are somewhat special as well. Davis points out that every little thing “about her is a caricature of some earlier Disney heroine, to include her tactics. Even her looks borrows elements from classic villainesses: she tries to appear glamorous and sophisticated, but her monstrous form (she has the body of a somewhat humanised octopus) undercuts this attempt” (Davis 215).

As already pointed out, her body was designed to the image of a drag queen, which is precisely how Ursula appears in the way she laughs, talks, and gesticulates; she is loud, dramatic, exuberant, and excessively over the top. Disney.wikia.com furthermore describes her as “a very dark and sinister villain”, but at the same time that “she has a large sense a humor”. Naturally, Disney animators had to adapt her facial and bodily features to such a personality.



Figure 5

Ursula's attempt „to appear glamorous and sophisticated” (Davis 215) can be seen in various details; first of all, she wears a skin-tight black dress that accentuates her large breasts and her voluptuous body, however, does not cover it entirely, as it is in the case of Maleficent, but reveals her shoulders in a strapless design. In fact, compared to Maleficent's cloak-like robe, Ursula's outfit is sexually daring, although it does not actually look like it is a dress, but merely an enhancement of her tentacles to her upper body.

Another detail that reveals Ursula's effort to look fancy and chic is her affection for jewellery; compared to her witch-colleague Maleficent, who mainly cares about looking menacing and evil, Ursula is more interested in her sexual power, which she means to live out with the use of flamboyancy. Disregarding the fact that her conch necklace is actually a magic device that helps Ursula conducting her black magic, it appears to be a golden, theme-oriented (as Ursula lives in a shell) piece of jewellery that anew directs the viewer's glance to her cleavage. Her earrings are also in shape of sea-shells, but in contrary to the shiny golden necklace, they are purple, fitting the lower part of her tentacles, as well as the light purple colour of her skin.

Her fingernails are similar to Maleficent's claw-like ones: pointy and red, punctuating the red tone of her lips. Unlike Maleficent's thin and narrow lips, Ursula's mouth mirrors the shape of

her whole body; it is voluptuous, thick, and big. Going along with her huge mouth is a pair of big, shiny white teeth that have a piercing effect and add a harsh note to her otherwise very soft body. The white of her teeth is also present in Ursula's hair; she wears her hair extremely white, way too white for her assumed age, which means that she must have artificially helped the whitening process. Furthermore, the hair is cut short and worn up high, which gives Ursula a masculine look, since a woman's beauty is generally associated with long hair.

Once more, her desire to be as powerful as a man and her envy towards the other sex is reflected in the way she looks. With regard to her eyes, Ursula also sets herself apart from other villainesses; her eyebrows are very thin, contrasting the rest of her body, and form a high arch over the eyes, giving much place to her eyelids, which are heavily coloured with blue eye-shadow. The blue colour, however, is not only painted to her eyelids, but also under her eyes, and her eyelashes are artificially enhanced, which all together once more underlines the drag queen look that Ursula's animators aspired. Last but not least, however, and in accordance with the pursue of giving her a drag-queen look, Ursula has a Marilyn Monroe-like mole next to the right side of her mouth, underlining once again her attempt to look glamorous.

Being the latest one of all female villains described in this thesis, one can detect that Ursula definitely is different from earlier wicked women; being given a very active heroine as her counterpart, she could not simply be portrayed as an evil witch, but she had to contrast the princess's naiveté by being overly sexually daring, and with a strong feminist attitude. With no doubt, these features introduced a new era of villainesses in 1989, and make Ursula one of the most complex evil female characters in a Disney feature ever.

3.5.2. Disney's Power Women

The women of this category combine the essence of what has been described as typically *bad* in females in earlier chapters of this thesis, namely being powerful, or in fact more powerful than a man. Within a patriarchal society it has ever been unimaginable to accept a forceful woman, as it dissents the concept of gender and its underlying hierarchy, hence, such women who strive for power, are regarded as unwomanly or, in Disney's exaggerated world, as evil.

The Disney women that are part of this group are *Snow White's* Wicked Queen (1937), *Alice in Wonderland's* Queen of Hearts (1951), and last but not least, Cruella de Vil from *101 Dalmatians* (1961). As well as on the part of Disney witches, one can diagnose a clear character difference among these ladies, as the progression of time has left its marks on the depiction of evil female power. This difference is going to be elaborated in the following three chapters.

The Wicked Queen

Being the first evil antagonist in a Disney animation ever, this character needed no frightening name, and no dreadful masquerade, it sufficed to be in power of a whole country while being a woman, and as such ever prone to madness in such a position. She is, in fact, much more than just a queen, she is also the story's protagonist's stepmother, familiar with witchcraft, and actually driven into madness because of her jealousy, combining all the evil traits and positions an evil woman can have within the Disney world.

Her status as queen is never really lived out by her, but only refers to her evil personality that she is accredited with via her social position; it is merely a title that allows her to use money on jewellery and beautiful gowns in order to make her more beautiful and admired by everyone. She strives for beauty and power, the latter one being regarded as a diabolic trait in a woman, and as she already is in hold of great force (being the monarch of the country), she has to find other ways to enlarge her might. As a result she starts using magic, which opens her new possibilities of power and satisfies her desires, as it adds to her self-confidence and strength.

Davis states that this "ability to use black magic, her constant scheming, and her manner of speaking, shows herself to be keenly intelligent" (125), which should actually imply that, being intelligent, she manages to maintain a confident and reflective position, even though she is not admired by everyone in every little detail. Still, it is the same magic that manages to shatter all that strength and confidence, when she starts using a magic mirror that is bewitched to give the person looking into it candid, honest, and straightforward answers. So when the queen seeks to know who the fairest of them all is, it tells her that there is one girl in the land who is more beautiful than she, which immediately releases her jealous and sinister nature. She is filled with anger and seeks to kill the girl, even though this concerns her

stepdaughter, merely to be the most beautiful, and hence most admired, female in the country. This sudden disposition to mad jealousy proves that the queen does not solely embody all kinds of positions among Disney villains (being queen, stepmother, and using witchcraft), but also shares all types of goals that these women desperately want to achieve, as she wants to be the most powerful and the most beautiful woman at the same time. Davis, however, mentions that through “her jealous reaction to seeing the Prince woo Snow White, as well as in her obsession with her own and Snow White’s beauty, she reveals her strong sexual nature” (125), as her sexuality is closely linked to her wickedness, by which the queen is eventually destroyed (see 125).

In her attempt to get rid of beautiful Snow White, the queen uses witchcraft, as it gives her a head start in terms of power over her young opponent. However, her cruelty is at its peak when she does not use magic in order to succeed, but orders the huntsman to kill her stepdaughter and makes him bring her the girl’s heart as evidence for the murder. This proves the actual scope of her dark soul and how far she is willing to go, however, only if someone else does the dirty work; her own methods are far less bloody and barbarous, in short, they are typically female: subtle, yet lethal. Interestingly, what finally makes the conduction of her deathly plan successful in the end is when she hands Snow White a poisoned apple while being magically transformed into an old haggard lady. Hence one can state that only when she gives up one of her flaws, namely her vanity, she can attain her goal, as it reveals her actual inner soul, reflected on her surface, and thereby makes her stronger in terms of evilness. The following figure shows the queen in her disguised witch form:



Figure 8

In this transformed version, the queen's true inner being is reflected by the way she looks: she is an old, vicious lady with haggard features and a diabolic, shaky voice. However, as also Disney.wikia.com points out, she is able to show emotions on her face in this disguise, while being a beautiful queen, she has "an unfeeling look on her face" (see The Queen, Disney.wikia.com). As this old woman, she does not wear a head piece, but wears her long, white hair loose and tangled. She has huge eyes that appear to be yellow, and she wears no make-up, revealing the dark rings and wrinkles around her eyes; apart from not using beauty enhancing equipment (like make-up or even a brush), she furthermore has a big, long, and crooked nose with a wart on it, her eyebrows are thick and bushy, and she appears to be having only one tooth, in short, she is the exact opposite to the queen's natural beautiful looks, which is why her disguise is eventually successful.

Still, the queen's motif is being the fairest of them all, which is why her disguise does not last for long and she turns back into her old self as soon as the job is done and she has reached her goal. Her normal, very feminine looking self, however, can also be analysed with regard to typical female and male traits; like her villainesses colleagues, the wicked Queen is portrayed as having unfeminine features which mark her as an evil person.

First of all, Davis states Hollinger, who describes her as showing "assertiveness, acerbity, intelligence, eroticism" (qtd. in Davis 125), which are described as being either male, or atypical female traits that are unwanted in a lady. Secondly, the queen is abnormally ambitious; despite the fact that she is queen and even knows how to handle magic, she always seeks for more and can never be satisfied. As soon as she notices someone who is better than she, she has to snuff this person out in order to prevail again. Davis mentions on this issue that the queen "rules with an iron hand, forcing those beneath her to do her bidding no matter what their objections" (125), which proves once more her abrasive, never-ending demand for more that can be regarded as the personification of male ambition, which she conducts with great force.

Moreover, she is an incredibly aggressive and violent person who would stick at nothing in order to reach her goal; like most powerful and aggressive women in Disney, she steadily loses her temper and patience, which then has a great effect on her actions. Davis mentions that the queen "is bitter in her attitude toward life, and never smiles or demonstrates love" (125), which, again, is a typical trait for Disney villainesses. However, Bell et al. talk about her as a "femme fatale" (117), explaining that her feminine emotional side mixed with

evil power results in those catastrophic actions, as her typically female emotions are an erratic and unpredictable factor that influences the decree of cruelty of her operations. Another masculine feature that can be observed on part of her is her independence from anyone; if a man (in this case, the huntsman) fails in doing a good job (killing Snow White), she takes action and does it herself.

Still, as has been already mentioned, the queen also owns a number of typically female traits, as for example her lack of self-reliance and self-confidence, which surfaces in the way her whole identity is shattered, merely because she has taken notice of another woman's beauty. Hence it can be stated that she might be one of Bell et al.'s *femme fatales* when it comes to her vile and wicked nature, but she definitely needs self-assurance.



Figure 6

With regard to her bodily appearance, one has to notice her interestingly normal and beautiful female body, considering she is a Disney villain. She is neither extremely fat nor thin; she looks healthy but slender and therefore does not contradict the traditional American beauty ideals. Disney.wikia.com describes her as “an icily beautiful woman with a serene, unfeeling face, and a slender yet voluptuous figure. [...] Her beautiful features and her royal attire create a very stunning and beautiful Queenly image”. The reason for this lies in the plot of the story, as she has to be the second most beautiful woman in the whole country, therefore her

wickedness and inner ugliness are only revealed in her mimics. In figure 6 we can observe a grim look in her face, reflecting her readiness to kill and her true diabolic nature.

However, as opposed to the latest female villain analysed in this thesis, Ursula, the queen's body is not depicted as a portrayal of negative female sexuality, as it does not reveal naked skin. She covers up her curves and is rewarded with being the second most beautiful woman in her country, which proves once more that, in order to be regarded as pretty and fair, a woman cannot overly display her sexuality. Although she wears dark clothes, which most female Disney villains do in order to mirror their inner atrocious nature, the queen is dressed in a purple and white dress, while only her headpiece and cape are black. In fact, the big white collar abates the dark outfit, as it gives her an angel-like look of an empress instead of a menacing touch, as e.g. Maleficent's outfit does. Disney.wikia.com analyses the queen's clothing style, stating that "The color scheme of her attire represents her pride and vanity".

With regard to her face, however, one notices that even when she does not conduct one of her evil plans, she has a permanent arrogant look, which seems to be quite common on the part of Disney animations, as women who have power always look slightly snooty in order to refer to their high position, highlighting the negative implication of female power once more.



Figure 7

Figure 7 shows that in contrary to other female villains, Disney animators have given the Wicked Queen a beautiful face as well, even though the features technically resemble other villainesses' features. She wears a headpiece, which we have already observed with Maleficent, however, the queen's black head decoration gives her face a heart shaped form and is furthermore meant to underlay her crown and not, as it is in Maleficent's case, to be able to wear devil horns in order to look more menacing. Still, as it is regarded as female and very attractive in a woman to have long and full hair, it can be stated that the head piece, entirely covering up her hair, gives her a bold-headed and thus slightly masculine notion as well.

The features in her face that add to her fair femininity are her long, elegant lashes that circle her eyes, her seductive red lips (which, again, are shared by most female villains, but in the queen's case looks sexy and provocative instead of menacing), her small nose, and her smooth skin, which has a soft colour that makes her look healthy and human, as opposed to Maleficent's green snake-like skin and Ursula's purple complexion. Her eyes are rather big, which is usually common with Disney heroines, as big eyes give them a puppet-like look that seems to enhance their beauty, but hers are painted cat-shaped, which, as well as her lips, makes her appear sexy and seductive. Still, her eyes and eyebrows are also the only features in her face that give her a menacing and evil look; her only half-open eyes make her appear arrogant and bossy and are surrounded with purple eye-shadow that adds to her diva-like expression, enhancing the focused stare of her beautifully green, but dangerous looking eyes. However, her eyebrows are very thin and form a high arch, which is typical among female villains, and transform her sexy, yet slightly wicked stare into a menacing gaze that gives the audience a feeling of fear.

Still, it is obvious that although the Wicked Queen embodies all the typical evil characteristic traits a female villain can have in Disney films, her bodily features are the only evil ones that do not mirror her inner malice. Hence, although she embodies all the evil imaginable in a woman, she is depicted as the most beautiful one of them all, which on the one hand does not fit the image of an evil lady, as it contrasts her ugly soul and confuses viewers and the rules of gender studies that have been elaborated in the earlier chapters, but on the other hand is necessary for the story, as being second prettiest in the whole country triggers her mad jealousy and leads her to vile actions, which is why despite her beauty, there can be no doubt about her tremendous evil power, regardless of her visual nature.

The Queen of Hearts

When *Alice in Wonderland* came out in 1951, precisely fourteen years after *Snow White*, the ideas on gender had evolved and already changed the image on women in a slight way, which is why, in comparing the two films, one can observe a huge difference in the depiction between the heroines of each story.

As opposed to Snow White, who practically only sits around, passively waiting for her male saviour, Alice goes on an adventure, actively seeking to find out about a new world. However, as already pointed out in an earlier chapter, the only reason why Alice is – by society – allowed to behave like that without being regarded as an atypical woman, lies in the fact that she is still too young to be perceived as a teenager and hence able to fall for a man, since she is still a child. In short, this means that as soon as a girl grows into being attractive to men, she has to follow the rules of gender within her society, but as long as she is still a girl she can be vivid and adventurous and, basically, behave like a boy.

Therefore, being given a much more active protagonist than Snow White, the female antagonist, contrasting the young heroine, needed to be different than the Wicked Queen; she had to act out her evilness differently and conform to the contemporary thoughts on gender in society.

Interestingly, as already quoted, Davis states that the “only female characters Alice encounters while in Wonderland are a garden full of terribly snooty, mean-spirited flowers, and the Queen of Hearts” (105), which could be interpreted as Alice’s fear of what she has to become like as soon as she grows up. Being a lively child, and knowing of the strict gender rules she has to grow into, it is clear that by only imagining women as evil creatures in her dream, she either has had bad memories of women, which she processes in her slumber (but as her elder sister is nice to her, this theory seems unlikely), or that she dreads losing her vivid nature and the need to turn into what society requires her to be. Hence, females only exist in her world as either being snobbish, spiteful, and mean, or as mad, dominating rulers, who tell everyone else what to do, which most probably resembles the way she encounters women in reality.

Opposed to this innocent, young girl, is the Queen of Hearts, an insane and mean ruling woman “whose main pleasure in life seems to come from ordering executions and dominating her husband, the king” (Davis 105). What strikes the most about her wickedness

is the harsh difference between her power and dominance and the one of her husband, the king's practically non-existing force. When this animated film was produced, the time of Women's movement had not arrived yet, which is why a woman could still be regarded as evil as long as she overpowered a man. However, as already pointed out, a woman's disposition to madness as a side effect to her power was a popular trait among evil characters, likely to be added to a female villain's personality. Disney.wikia.com notes on her as follows: "One word: psychotic. All the residents of Wonderland are mad (insane), but the Queen of Hearts is the most dangerous of them, having the most power. She completely dominates her weak husband, the King of Hearts. She likes to hear the words 'Yes, your majesty' and insists that 'All ways are my ways!'" (The Queen of Hearts, Disney.wikia.com).

This exaggerated depiction of female power and madness becomes most evident in the queen's constant mood swings; she acts like a spoiled child that has too much power and hence always gets what she wants, however, is likely to throw a tantrum whenever things do not go her way. Disney.wikia.com notes: "Like any mad person, she has huge mood swings, from content to enraged at a moment's notice. Her solution to every problem is a beheading, whether her roses have been planted white, she misses a shot in croquet or feels insulted in any way". The fact that as soon as something does not follow her will she is willing to instantly kill the culprit seems to be a demonstration of what can go wrong if a woman is in power. She is entirely moved by her emotions and, as she is a woman in power, those are extradited to mad thoughts and therefore dangerous to everyone near her, especially the young heroine who intrudes her world and starts questioning her government.

Those steady swayings and mood changes make her volatile and unpredictable, as her opponent is in constant danger of being killed by one of her minions. However, since her bad mood mostly leads to killing, Disney.wikia.com states that "she seems to be the Disney villain embodiment of the sin of Wrath", as she permanently gives way to her rage and, being queen, has the power to make her sinister thoughts of slaying people come to life.

With regard to her portrayal, the difference to the Wicked Queen from *Snow White* could not be greater. Nothing about her represents the elegance and beauty that Disney's first villainess embodied, neither in the way she looks, nor in the way she behaves. The only attribute that combines these two women is their absolute power and their willingness to always get things done their way.

The Queen of Hearts is popular for her rage, which is why she is mostly drawn as can be observed in figure 9, as an angry woman who has no intention of fitting the appropriate image of a civilised lady with good manners. This atypical female behaviour is mirrored in her appearance, as her body and face are not very feminine. While Ursula, the other female villain who obviously weighs a little too much, manages to look voluptuous and to dress sexily, the Queen of Hearts' body looks sturdy, bulky, and strong and resembles the physique of a sumo fighter instead of a corpulent woman. Yes, she does attempt to look more womanly and more like a queen by wearing a dress that accentuates her waistline and her breasts, but the way she wears it and moves in it reminds the audience of a man wearing women's clothes during carnival.



Figure 9

Her dress, aside from trying to make her look feminine, underlies her status as Queen of Hearts, as it is black and red, with gold and white applications; again, it looks more like a costume than a queen's gown, as it does not make her look classy and superior, but like a cartoon version of a Queen of Hearts playing card. However, the part of the dress covering the upper part of her body is cleverly tailored, shaping it in the design of a heart, which anew reflects her character. The only thing that her dress has in common with the Wicked Queen's attire is the white collar, however, while it gives *Snow White*'s antagonist a gracious and angel-like look, it makes the Queen of Hearts look like wearing a dog-collar and makes her head appear even bigger and stuck right onto her torso, since it entirely covers her neck.

Her face looks rather manly too, as it shows no soft lines or any intentions of wanting it to look neat and pretty with the help of make-up or lipstick. In fact, she does not even seem to have any lips at all, giving her huge mouth a male touch, as it there are no soft lips which might give her a sensual look. In this picture she does not seem to have teeth, but she does, in fact, have some, which can be observed in figure 10, and they add to her menacing aura once when she is in rage. Her mouth, however, is so big that most of the time the audience either sees her uvula (see figure 9), or her bare, piercingly white and huge teeth (see figure 10) which both are not a very feminine features about a woman's mouth.

Figure 9 furthermore shows her small but brawny nose, her bushy eyebrows that have probably never seen tweezers, and eyes that do not seem to have eyelashes, or visible eyelids that she could apply make-up on in order to look desirable or more feminine. Even her hair, although one can monitor a slight attempt to look pretty in the way she binds it up with a red bow, does not have a good cut and lankly sticks out of her head in wildly and in all directions. All in all, there is hardly anything about her face that makes her look womanly; even the way she wears her crown and matching earrings rather evokes the afore-mentioned idea of a man wearing women's clothes instead of a gracious queen.



Figure 10

Figure 10 shows that when she is madly in rage, her appearance becomes more of a grotesque mask than resembling a woman; there is nothing graceful or charming about her at all. Her bared and white teeth and her menacing white and black eyes that have no colour, which gives

her the impression of a reptile, focus on her prey and the audience is immediately afraid; everything about this look is threatening and screams *danger*.

It has been mentioned beforehand that the queen's evil side is different from the Wicked Queen's maliciousness, who acts out of spite and jealousy and focuses her anger onto one girl. The Queen of Hearts' wickedness is expressed through her both powerful and maniac behaviour, causing her to be unfeminine, as it was not acceptable for a woman to be this dominating in 1951. Disney animators have excellently captured this unwomanly comportment in her portrayal, causing her bodily features to reflect her inner personality and thereby intensify her menacing appearance.

Cruella de Vil

Among all evil women in this analysis, Cruella is the only character who does not oppose a female protagonist and hence is not necessarily an antipode to a girl's righteous and acceptable gender behaviour. Also, her story is one of the few Disney animations that is set in the film-makers' contemporary society instead of telling an old and gender-wise outdated fairy tale. That being the case, Cruella rather makes a stand against expected female behaviour on a broader level and makes *101 Dalmatians* differ from other Disney film.

Produced in 1961, the film embraces the idea of family and solidarity, which appears to be typical for that time, as during the 1960s, it was acceptable for women to work, however, also to find a husband and have a family. *101 Dalmatians* follows these standards on both a human and animal level, as both the dogs and their human owners fall in love in the beginning of the film, marry, and become pregnant. This concept is precisely what Cruella questions, which becomes clear in the way she keeps on telling Anita, the female human protagonist of the story, not to marry a man, especially one that has no money. To Cruella, who always respected Anita for being a talented and hard working woman in her enterprise, it is not understandable how a woman can put love over her career.

Again, such thinking in a woman was not socially accepted, which is why a female of this opinion could easily be depicted as evil. Similar to the Queen of Hearts, Cruella de Vil acts on impulse, which, as her actions are hence tied to her emotions, comes to surface in dramatic

outbursts that no one is safe from. Disney.wikia.com also notes on this issue: “Unlike previous Disney villainesses such as The Queen, Lady Tremaine, and Maleficent, Cruella is not a schemer. Instead, she acts purely on impulse and is thus prone to reckless behavior” (Cruella de Vil, Disney.wikia.com). She is so self-assured that she does not even consider her reckless actions to possibly have lethal consequences to herself, as she thinks of herself as superior; she is better than all those women whose goal is to get married and she is certainly better than all those other humans who do not have the guts to pursue their goals. Cruella is different, she always gets what she wants, and in her case, this desire comes down to a new coat, made from Dalmatian fur.

Bell et al. note that her “incarnation of evil is typical. Cruella Deville, a powerful, autonomous and ‘wild’ woman, is vain, selfish, and greedy. In his song, Roger identifies her as an ‘inhuman beast,’ so that the human female antagonist, with no interest in animals except for their fur, is identified more strongly with nonhuman nature – apparently predatory and rapacious” (128). Disney animators managed to point out her evil nature with her looks; her constant desire to wear animal coats and the fact that her hair, half white, half black, is meant to match her animalistic outfits, underlies Bell et al.’s comment on Cruella’s rapacious and beastly personality. Especially considering the fact that the protagonists of the story, the dogs, actually appear human in the way they behave, the notion of socialised behaviour comes to the fore. Bell et al. note:

This human/inhuman dichotomy is reinforced in various gender-stereotypic ways. As good females, Perdita and the housekeeper are permitted only to take initiative when doing so in defense of the pups. The other prominent females are the dairy cows who provide milk to the hungry pups. Only as mothers, real or surrogate, are females depicted as doing anything positive in this film, and, of course, they do it instinctively. (129)

In this context, Bell et al. further mention that *101 Dalmatians* “isolates evil as the personification of the independent woman, who resorts not only to cruelty but also theft. While reinforcing patriarchy and androcentrism, the use of the isolated female also enables an escapist, rather than allegorical, viewing of the film” (129). As Cruella’s rejects the life of a good housewife, society immediately also expects her to be prone to other evil thoughts and acts, marking her desire to be alone as the source of her wickedness.

Bell et al. also point out that “Cruella’s wearing furs and blowing smoke are, like her loud, brash voice, symptomatic of her individual excess and aggressiveness rather than a class or cultural problem; [...] Cruella remains a unique and isolated figure” (129). Her smoking is

a disgusting, un-ladylike habit that is hated by everyone, which is underlined by Disney animators in the way they portray her “leaving a trail of green, foul-smelling cigarette smoke” (Cruella de Vil, Disney.wikia.com) no matter where she goes. This smoking habit could be interpreted as a hint to her name, which is a variation of the word *devil*, and as Satan is usually pictured with smoke coming out of his nostrils, leaving a foul, rotten smell behind him, so does Cruella’s smoking.

Her bodily appearance leaves no doubt that her smoking and her diet are anything but healthy, as can be spotted in figure 11.



Figure 11

Cruella is extremely thin, which, again, opposes the image of the healthy, good-looking American type of girl that Disney animators like to picture their heroines in. Her physique is haggard, her hips edgy, as if her pelvic bones were to stick out, and her breasts are small and pointy, which both add to her extreme, and unfeminine look. Her skin looks pale and has a greyish touch to it, although one can monitor an absolute interest in beauty on her part, which is why her complexion most probably is merely a side-effect of her unhealthy lifestyle. Her hands and head appear huge in contrast to her body, which gives her an anorexic look, adding anew to her noxious mode of living.

Just as her body, also her face looks pointy, with sharp edges, which makes her look both ill and dangerous, for it is unusual and scary. Her cheekbones and chin both stick out, her lips are thin, but her mouth is big, and her eyes look hollow, however, she highlights those features by applying make-up to her face; her eyeshadow is green, underlying the colour of her earrings, and her slim lips are painted red, underlying the colour of her long gloves. Her eyebrows form an extremely high arch, accentuating once more the edgy look of her face and giving her a permanent mean look. Her hair, as already mentioned, is half black, half white, which both are technically no colours and add to her unnatural appearance.

As already pointed out, Cruella is extremely prone to furious outbursts, which can come about abruptly, as they are closely tied to her emotions. As soon as that happens, everything about her seems to become inhuman, both her actions and her looks are manic and frantic, as can be viewed in figure 12:



Figure 12

In this scene, Cruella is driving her car, which is why the wind blows through her hair and makes it stick out and lets her resemble Medusa from Greek mythology. Her face looks animalistic; she bared her teeth, as if being ready to sink her teeth into someone, like a predator on the hunt, her nose is similar to a pig's nose, her ears seem as big as a bat's ears and her eyes are huge and orange, with a hypnotising effect, resembling a snake's stare. Cruella thinks herself superior, larger than life, and by focusing the viewer's eye on her predatory nature, one tends to believe that she is right, that she can actually get things done her way and that everything that comes her way is going to be eliminated. In short, her appearance is scary, dangerous, and evokes feelings of fear on the part of the audience, which

is most probably precisely the kind of effect that Disney animators had in mind with her portrayal.

Bell et al. finally note that the film is about the distinction between good and bad, stating that “the conflict is limited to that between individual goodness and individual wickedness” (129), and Cruella de Vil is most definitely one of the most accurate portrayals of a wicked woman.

3.5.3. Disney’s stepmothers

Although only one stepmother is going to be analysed in this section, the chapter is still in plural, for there is another one that has already been mentioned in this thesis, Snow White’s stepmother, the Wicked Queen. However, as this lady is predominantly known for her status as queen, the only real stepmother that is renowned for being simply that is Lady Tremaine, Cinderella’s stepmother in the film *Cinderella* from the year 1950.

In an earlier chapter it has been mentioned that Disney heroines often lack a mother, some of them have no mother anymore, whereas to some of them she is only absent (like it is in Aurora’s case), however, there is this third group of mother figures, namely the stepmother, which can be viewed in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. Davis notes on this issue that “particularly in the cases of Snow White and Cinderella, what is left for the main character is a ‘maternal’ figure in the form of a step-mother who is openly against the young girl in her care, doing everything she can to oppress the girl and keep her from finding love” (103). She further mentions that only stepmothers are considered as evil in Disney animations, whereas the mother, though mostly missing, is a nice and caring one, as a mothering personality is basically regarded as a good character trait in a woman (see Davis 103).

On the issue of the evil stepmother, Davis introduces Jeanine Basinger who describes the figure of the stepmother as a “destructive mother” (103) and quotes:

Mothers who are destructive are either interfering in their children’s love lives or in their careers. Where love is concerned, they are always trying to stop it, and where career is concerned, they are always trying to push it ahead. This further endorses the idea that a woman’s proper choice in life is love. If her mother blocks it, an audience can see she is destructive. If she is trying to push her daughter into a career, she is also blocking love. Bad mothers of men are always trying to block love, since a man is allowed a career, and his mother wants him to have one. (qtd. in Davis 103).

Considering the fact that a mother's role is to teach her offspring a valid lesson about life, especially with regard to proper gender behaviour, an evil stepmother who teaches all the wrong lessons is not only considered as a bad woman, but has a destructive effect on her daughter as well, as she makes her believe in faux gender rules and hence puts her in an antisocial position. Hence, the consequences of an evil stepmother's vicious acts are vast, which makes her even more diabolic and therefore a typical Disney villainess.

Lady Tremaine

In *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, there is much the same parent-child set-up: the heroines' natural parents are dead, and they have each been left in the care of an evil, domineering, jealous woman who has taken over the home and rights that should have been the heroines and usurped them for herself. Furthermore, the evil step-mother actively threatens and thwarts the heroine in the 'care', and will stop at nothing to destroy the heroine and her chances for a happy, independent life. (Davis 104)

This citation basically sums up the plot of *Cinderella* and explains the role of her wicked stepmother, Lady Tremaine, who is going to be analysed in this chapter, and furthermore touches on the similarity between *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, which is also going to be discussed.

On the latter issue, Davis mentions that the two films appear to have various identical features, the most obvious being the plot structure, which is very much alike: "once evil has been suppressed and the more 'feminine' woman rewarded with love and happiness, the world is shown as having been righted and the film can end on a happy note" (125). However, also with regard to characterisation one can detect a similarity to *Snow White*, as Davis further points out:

Cinderella and her Step-Mother [...] are technically the heads of the household, since the Step-Mother is the maternal head and the house is in fact *Cinderella's*, since she *should* have inherited it from her father. Both take care of the running of the household, the Step-Mother in the social and financial sense (albeit not terribly well) and *Cinderella* in the care-taking sense (cleaning, feeding the animals, and so on). (125-126)

Both heroines have lost their parents, have inherited wealth and a high social position, and both are being tortured and wished dead by their stepmothers, as they have taken the heroines' places within the household and intent on keeping it that way. Both girls being good and

sound female protagonists, they behave gender-wise according to social rules and passively endure all the vicious acts that their stepmothers impose upon them instead of fighting for their rights, as they wait for a heroic prince to come and save them.

Hence, Davis mentions that next to Snow White, Cinderella is one of the “least active and least dynamic characters” (102), which is why her opponent, the stepmother, is able to stand out due to her high level of activity which, gender-wise, is naturally regarded as a negative trait in a woman. This disposition to activeness is precisely what Lady Tremaine’s wickedness comes down to; unlike Cinderella, she fights for what she desires and does not veer away from radical methods while doing so.

Her intentions for implementing wicked actions on Cinderella are actually rather good ones, as they come down to her role as a mother; Lady Tremaine wants the best for her own daughters, which basically shows her good, mothering side, however, her way of dealing with those feelings remain questionable. Knowing that her daughters are not as beautiful and gracious as Cinderella, she becomes jealous and focuses all her hatred onto the young heroine and is willing to sacrifice her stepdaughter’s life and happiness for her own. Again, the mad jealousy that is focused on the heroine and that drives the stepmother to wicked actions is a similarity that both *Cinderella* and *Snow White* share.

Douglas Brode points out that both films warn “against the Beauty Trap” (184), elaborating that only because women are extradited to the male gaze, they seek to be the most beautiful one of them all, which is when jealousy and other dark emotions come to surface and allow evil women to behave viciously. Disney.wikia.com also indicates that Lady Tremaine is “motivated by jealousy of Cinderella's beauty, as it serves to accentuate the ugliness and awkwardness of the stepmother's own daughters”. They further mention that next to Lady Tremaine’s high level of activity, her desire for more social power is another indicator of her evilness by stating that “Lady Tremaine is also a socialite, determined to gain higher status by marrying one of her daughters to Prince Charming” (Lady Tremaine, Disney.wikia.com). Her plan basically revolves around getting her daughters to marry a wealthy man, if possible, the prince. Though, knowing that her daughters lack beauty and grace, she hides Cinderella’s charming and pleasant appearance to the royal family, hoping that this shabby lifestyle will conceal her beauty.

However, next to striving for power and being highly active, Lady Tremaine does not, like many other Disney villains, deal with witchcraft. Yet further, her activeness does not even include any sort of factual cruelty, as she never actually touches Cinderella; Disney.wikia.com notes that she “doesn't harm her stepdaughter physically, but seeks to destroy her psychologically”. Lady Tremaine never lays a finger on Cinderella, she merely psychologically exploits her stepchild and plays with her longings and yearnings, for example when she promises her to join the others to the royal ball as soon as she has finished all her work, but then lets her daughters destroy her dress, or when she locks her into her room when the King's captain searches for the girl who fits the glass slippers. Especially this latter scene accentuates her enormous cruelty towards Cinderella; she is “maltreating her stepdaughter even when there is no material gain to be made; she locks Cinderella in her tower room when she knows her own daughters won't fit the glass slipper” (Lady Tremaine, Disney.wikia.com), so basically her only intention is to harm Cinderella in this moment, and not to help her own daughters in the process.

Evil women, whose emotions are usually tied to their wicked actions, are basically not known for strategic thinking which is considered a male trait. The fact that Lady Tremaine has a plan and does not let her feelings control her actions, adds to her unfeminine appearance. Her daughters Anastasia and Drizella, however, are not as self-controlled as their mother; throughout the film, they consistently help their mother and physically abuse Cinderella by hitting and slapping her, or by tearing her dress for the ball into pieces. This scene serves as the peak of cruelty and maltreatment towards the young heroine in the story, as it combines both the stepmother's mental, and the daughters' physical abuse and makes the audience shudder at this huge iniquity, as the antagonists' real emotions and personalities come to surface.

Lady Tremaine's personality can be described as “being very cold, calculated, bitter, and ruthless” (Lady Tremaine, Disney.wikia.com). She is portrayed as a crafty, devious and frosty woman, although her intentions are actually sincere and upright when it comes to her daughters, however, the audience perceives her as a bad stepmother who mentally abuses the female protagonist.

She possesses a lot of male traits, one of which has already been mentioned, namely her ambitious nature that is expressed in her desire for her daughters to marry a rich or royal man, and she refuses her plan to be thwarted by anyone. She furthermore can be considered as

very self-reliant because she has always been the only person responsible for her daughters. What happened to her first husband is unknown, but she marries another man, Cinderella's father, in order to make sure that her daughters have a secure and warm home. After his death, she finds herself looking after three girls and has to manage how to get along with this new situation. There is no doubt that by enslaving her stepdaughter she takes the wrong step, nevertheless we realize that she is well able to survive on her own, which makes her a modern, independent woman.

Also, she can be considered as enormously self-confident. Throughout the film, she hammers out evil plans in order to make Cinderella suffer and almost always gets what she wants and according to her facial expression, she never even assumes that her plans could possibly fail. Another male attribute is her dominance. She is in control of every situation that she manipulates and she clearly wants to be commanding and authoritative. This can be viewed in the way she treats Cinderella, for example every morning, when she orders her what housework has to be done on the day. In a scene, where Cinderella stands at the side of stepmother's bed, we see the young girl in the sunlight that shines through the window, while the evil stepmother's body is still in the shadow and looks dark and intimidating. The only bright item about her are her piercingly white eyes that seem to pester Cinderella while commanding her the daily instructions. This harsh contrast of extreme colours makes the stepmother look evil and unnatural. However, in this situation, she gives her orders in a very calm way, which again refers to her self-confidence, but when Cinderella interrupts her for a moment, Lady Trumaine raises her voice, sharpens her tone, and gives her stepdaughter a wicked look. This scene clearly points out how dominant she is and that she does not allow anyone to interrupt her while speaking.

Ultimately, she is also be described as a very aggressive and violent woman, who loses her temper and is filled with anger and hatred. Although she normally is a calm and self-confident woman who believes she is superior to all others, she takes action against others if required in order to carry out her initial plan.

While all these characteristics make her contemplated as a *male* woman by society and show her superiority over men, her personality is also mirrored in her physical complexion in various ways. Although her body looks healthy because, unlike most villainesses she is neither too slim nor too fat, her face gives away her true vicious nature; her mimics are spiteful, malicious, and miserly, leaving no doubt of her wicked plans.

Disney.wikia.com describes her as follows: “Lady Tremaine appears to be old, but has aged well. She has gray hair shaped like two buns, green earrings and a red gown” (Lady Tremaine, Disney.wikia.com), as can be observed in figure 13. It can be seen that her body has actually aged well and the way she dresses is appropriate for her time and social status, and shows her good taste and the fact that she has a feminine side.



Figure 13

However, the way she wears her hair can be considered as rather masculine; although she has actually long, very feminine hair, she always wears it bound up, however, not into a ponytail, but basically only high up, which makes it look short and stresses her male appearance anew. In addition to all these features, the way she moves can also be considered as very manly; she embodies power and wants to manifest this in her movements. She walks slowly in order to emphasize that the others have to follow her and keep her pace; also her hand gestures are slow and well-thought and draw attention to her power.

Powerful and dominant evil females in Disney films often look like a twisted and crooked version of a woman, however, Lady Tremaine seems to be the exception of this rule. She actually looks like a healthy-nurtured woman, however, the only thing that spoils her rather beautiful appearance is her age which has, naturally, taken away her youthful, radiant shine. As Disney animators tend to exaggerate bodily features in order to make an evil woman look according to her dark personality, Lady Tremaine's age can be viewed in the deep lines of her face, which become obvious in close-ups, as e.g. in figure 14.

Her wrinkles, though they are not that many because, as already mentioned, Lady Tremaine has aged well, seem to be unusually dark, which intensifies her evil appearance, because dark lines and shadows, or basically anything that is obscure and eerie, radiate *evil*, which makes viewers feel uncomfortable. Hence, in situations where she makes evil plans, her face seems even darker than usually, making her facial expressions seem even crueller, which gives her a vile look whenever she has a wicked plan.



Figure 14

Figure 14 is moreover a good example of how extreme close-ups manage to aggravate a villain's evil aura. It has been mentioned before that Bell et al., who quote Mary Ann Doane, touch on this issue, describing the face as being the most open space of the body via which one can see another person's personality, depicting "its over-representation as *the* instance of subjectivity" (qtd. in Bell et al. 116). The viewer has no other choice but to meet Lady Tremaine's gaze, whose face covers the whole screen, making herself the centre of attention and clearly dominating the scene.

With respect to the depiction of her face, it can be said that Disney artists clearly had only one intention, namely to make her look mean. Her eyebrows are especially thin and curvy due to her permanent vicious glances. The mouth, with its thin lips, looks harsh too and is, together with the eyebrows, most responsible for her sinister appearance. Her teeth are unnaturally white, intense and sharp, and contrast the dark, shadowy rest of the face. She wears red lipstick and green earrings, which point to her sense of fashion, as both these colours are featured in her dress and brooch. With respect to the piercingly white eyes and teeth, one can detect a reference to animalistic features, like most other female villains own. The eyes that focus on their prey and the teeth that are ready to figuratively rip apart anything that gets in

their way both have predatory powers and evoke primal fears. Disney also provided Lady Trumaine with an unusually long, thin and edged nose, which as well adds to the angular, shadowy look to her face and, as well as to her predatory look.

Again, Disney animators have beautifully captured this wicked woman's evil personality by underlying her character traits with a menacing look that frightens both the antagonist of the story, and the young audience.

4. Conclusion

The thesis examined the cultural and social background of Disney animations, as well as their influence on children all around the globe with respect to gender thinking. In various chapters I pointed out in what way the company manages to spread their beliefs on appropriate female behaviour and their notions of femininity. It has been further elaborated how evil women, who generally embody femininities gone wrong, act, think, and perform according to Disney and in how far their depiction has changed throughout the years.

My goal was to find a structure and a concept in the way Disney animations portray their female protagonists and antagonists and in how far these concepts have changed throughout the years. I found out that Disney heroines represent the good and pure girl, free of evil thoughts, entirely passive and naïve, in short, they portray the image of the perfect female. Wicked women, however, strive for more than that; they desire power, knowledge, beauty, strength, and are willing to actively fight for their wishes, which is precisely what marks them as evil within the patriarchal Disney world. Hence, due to their unfeminine behaviour, their appearance is adjusted to their malicious personalities, resulting in atypical female bodies, mimics, and gestures.

In spite of the altering evil women's portrayal and visual depiction, I surprisingly found their motives to remain the same through time: they always want something the good girl has and since they are no good girls themselves, they have to come and get it.

Also, although Disney has kept in mind alterations of opinions on this issue within, especially how the women's movement has changed the view on women in society over the last decades, their concept is still the same: as long as a woman does not behave according to the hidden rules on gender, she is portrayed as the evil antagonist of the story, teaching the audience not to desire the things that these women strive for and thereby exerting their influence among generations of viewers.

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5.4. Figures

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Figure 3 : http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/File:Sleeping_beauty_movie_image_walt_disney.jpg

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7. Zusammenfassung

Die Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit Frauenbildern und wie sie im amerikanischen Filmkonzern Disney in deren animierten Filmen dargestellt werden. Zeichentrickfilme in Spielfilmlänge gibt es von Disney seit dem Jahr 1937, als *Schneewittchen und die sieben Zwerge* in den Kinos der westlichen Welt veröffentlicht wurde. Seit damals ist der amerikanische Konzern ein fleißiger Produzent ähnlicher Filme, wo Märchen und Legendengeschichten verschiedenster Kulturen zu animierten Filmen verarbeitet werden. Diese Zeitspanne, von 1937 bis hin zur Veröffentlichung des Films *Arielle – die kleine Meerjungfrau* im Jahre 1989, wurde in dieser Arbeit untersucht und auf die charakterliche Verwendung der guten und bösen Frauenbilder, sowie deren zeichnerische Darstellung, analysiert.

Der erste Teil der Arbeit setzte sich mit dem Begriff *gender studies* an sich auseinander; es wurde versucht eine Art stereotypisches Regelbuch zu entwickeln, wie sich laut einer Kultur oder einer Gesellschaft – in diesem Fall die amerikanische Gesellschaft – eine Frau zu benehmen hat und welche Grundlagen diese Annahmen haben. Diese Klischees wurden außerdem mit dem Medium Film in Verbindung gebracht und es wurde untersucht inwiefern das Kino eine Auswirkung auf die gender-Wahrnehmung der Zuschauer der westlichen Welt hat.

In weiterer Folge wurden verschiedenste weibliche Disneyprotagonistinnen auf ebendiese Stereotypen untersucht und es wurde versucht, für ebendiese Gender-Regeln, wie z.B. Passivität, Gestik, Sexualität, und vor allen Dingen Aussehen, ein Beispiel aus der Disneywelt zu bringen. In diesem Bereich erkennt man außerdem besonders gut die bereits erwähnte Veränderung von diesen Regeln und Annahmen wie eine Frau sich zu benehmen hat und welchen Einfluss die verstreichende Zeit auf neue, moderne Frauenbilder hat.

Der letztlich größte Teil der Arbeit befasst sich mit den Antagonistinnen dieser weiblichen Hauptpersonen, nämlich den bösen Disneyfrauen. Linear zur Weiterentwicklung der guten Frauenbilder ging eine Veränderung der Ansicht was eine Frau böse werden lässt einher, jedoch auf verschiedensten Ebenen.

Es wurde erkannt, dass die Motive der Frauen, die laut westlicher Gesellschaft auf Abwege gekommen sind, durchaus noch dieselben sind wie am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts und dass

es diesbezüglich wenig einschneidende Veränderungen gab. Es sind weiterhin die bösen Stiefmütter, die Kindern Angst einjagen, beziehungsweise die Hexen, die alle Welt einschüchtern, aber trotz aller Entwicklung auch die mächtigen Frauen – wobei hier kein Unterschied gemacht wird ob eine Frau eine Königin ist, oder eine beruflich erfolgreiche Frau, wie Cruella de Vil – die vor allem Männer erzittern lassen.

Dennoch, die Darstellung die Disney diesen Frauen zukommen lässt, zeigt eine Alternierung auf; Frauen werden nicht mehr nur als unweiblich, sondern gar als grotesk weltfremd porträtiert, um zu unterstreichen, dass diese Antagonistinnen durch ihre Handlungen jegliche weibliche, aber auch größtenteils ihre menschlichen Eigenschaften verloren haben.

All diese Untersuchungen zeigen auf, wie sich das westliche Frauenbild im Verlauf des 20. Jahrhunderts verändert hat und welche Ansichten weiterhin bestehen. Die Conclusio erfolgte indes, dass die Ansicht dessen, was von der Gesellschaft akzeptierte, *gute* Frauen machen dürfen, im letzten Jahrhundert eine aktive, feministische Veränderung erfahren hat, während das, was eine Frau *böse* macht, weiterhin besteht und offenbar unverändert universell gültig ist.

8. Curriculum Vitae

Personal Details

Date of Birth: 15 June 1986
Place of Birth: Vienna, Austria

Education

1992-1996	Primary school, Vienna
1996-2004	Grammar school: De La Salle Strebersdorf, Vienna (graduated with distinction)
October 2004-July 2013	Vienna University: English language, literature and culture and French language and literature, teacher's diploma

Work Experience

July 2002 & 2003	Merkur bakery shop
July 2004 – August 2010	Shell Austria GmbH Temporary job in the financial field
July 2008, July 2009, August 2010	Course leader and teacher for EF Language Travel in Brighton
July 2010	Course leader and teacher for EF Language Travel in Sacramento, California, USA
March 2010 – August 2012	Bank Austria Unicredit Group Temporary job in the accounting department