Happily Ever After? A critical examination of the Gothic in Disney Fairy Tale films.

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines four Disney fairy tale films across the 20th and 21st centuries to assess the changes in the representation of Gothic tone and intent. I have taken a qualitative approach and deployed a close textual analysis of the films, finding that there are four main themes: magic and the supernatural; monsters and villains; body modification and identity; and the gendered, patriarchal systems.

The films that comprise my sample are *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Maleficent* (2014), and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), and span a period of almost sixty years in Disney film-making history. Although there are four films in my sample, there are only two stories and these stories are established and well-known. The Disney versions are comparable to both the earliest forms and later literary forms of the fairy stories.

Disney fairy films have entertained audiences for decades, and on the surface the stories appear to be innocuous entertainment, but something has changed. The later version of these films continue to appear benign, yet on close inspection, contain a substantial growth in the volume, tone and intent of the dark, horrific aspects of Gothic narrative. By considering the socio-political and cultural context of the times when these films were produced, I discuss the differences that can be found within the films: the messages that the films individually and collectively present; and how the Disney films have been utilised to promote the company's conservative worldview.

I have found there is a marked increase in the Gothic representation in three of the four themes I isolated. There are fewer differences in the treatment of gender and patriarchy than there are in the other themes. At times the films of the 21st century appear to be transgressive, but the rhetoric and tropes presented ultimately remain the same, with constant representation of patriarchal systems of power over women; the stereotypical heterosexual relationship between male and female dominating all other relationships;

where love conquers all (if you are white and heterosexual); and that good, (a nebulous ideal) will always prevail over evil. In concluding, the Gothic mode serves to assess the cultural anxieties and normative messages that the Disney fairy tale films contain, and show that the Disney films of the 21st century represent an ever-darkening, increasingly tangled world of Gothic horror and gender stereotypes.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Dated: 18 September 2020.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The focus of this research is the fairy story, with specific attention to Disney's early telling, and subsequent re-telling, of two well-known tales: *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Beauty and the Beast*. Fairy tales are an ancient folk form which began as oral stories and were eventually written down so that they could be read aloud as entertainment in the literary salons of the aristocracy (Zipes, 1989; Zipes, 2012). For instance, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, authors such as Giovanni Francesco Straparola, Giovan Battista Basile, Charles Perrault and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy collected and narrated several of the tales still known today, and the practice of sourcing and re-telling folklore continued. Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve, in the 1700s, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, Joseph Jacobs and Andrew Lang are just a few of those who sought to popularise the fairy story genre. Over time, these tales were re-written and reformed, perhaps so that the imaginary worlds depicted in the stories, filled with magic and fantastical beings, would appeal to younger audiences and thus become useful vehicles for teaching the value of orthodox behaviour, traditional values and morals[1]. In this way, fairy stories became coded messages that taught people how to navigate happiness and love, and the darker issues of loneliness, despair and death. These "life themes" that were the material of fairy stories were common to all people, and the stories thus allowed people of all ages and cultures to connect to the enjoyment and escapism while simultaneously imbibing instructive guidelines on how to steer through the trials of life.

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[1]Here, by "orthodox", I mean the mainstream values of staying home and staying safe; of not trusting strangers; of being a "good girl"; of being kind. Fairy stories often juxtapose infringement of these values with horrible consequences.

The narratives eventually found their way into mass entertainment in the 20th century through the work of companies such as The Walt Disney Company (Disney), who further customised the fairy story for consumption. The tales were presented for ever-younger viewers, which required far more sanitized versions than the originals that had been orated in salons and captured in early literary texts. An example of such sanitisation can be seen in Disney's production of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), a storyline which was recently determined to be more than 4000 years old (da Silva & Tehrani, 2016). *Beauty and the Beast* was produced by Disney in 1991 and again in 2017, with several direct-to-video variations, musicals and television series. This particular story is so familiar that it imparts a sense of universal understanding in audiences, which perhaps made it an entirely logical choice to progress from early oral and written texts into the multiple forms of mass entertainment. Pinksy (2004) suggests that Disney deliberately selected the fairy tale genre because the underlying messages and values attached to the narratives meant that he was able to use the fairy tale rubric to entertain while also teaching morals and values that were particular to the American ideology at the time, a strategy that turned Disney into a highly trusted source of material suitable for younger viewers. Similarly, Zipes (2012) suggests that for Walt Disney, the lure of fairy tales was that they were so versatile that he could mould them into any form he desired.

1.1 The development of my research concept

This research came about, in part, because of my keen interest in the fairy tale genre. As a child, I delighted in reading fairy tale literature, hearing the oral versions and watching the films. Disney provided me with loveable visual depictions of the classic tales and made them both comfortable and familiar. These days, my personal collection of Disney's versions of the fairy stories is noteworthy, as is the number of times I have watched each film, particularly when entertaining my three children over the years. In the past couple

of years, my intense viewership eventuated in an observation: I began to notice that from around the beginning of the 21st century, changes have come over the way Disney has been presenting the familiar plot lines. Most noticeably, there seems to be a marked darkness hanging over the tone and basic message. The films have continued to utilise the traditional fairy tale formula: heroes and heroines have lessons to learn before a 'happy ever after' can be achieved, but lately, the seemingly simple 'promise-of-happiness' stories are darkened by messages of sadness, pain and random acts of evil. The villains and monsters seem more sinister, to a degree I had not previously noticed in earlier films. Fairy stories have always contained the horrific tropes and themes that were subsequently adopted into the Gothic canon (Zipes, 2006), but I have been wondering whether the Disney door has been darkened by the exaggeration of those Gothic notions intended to create fear about the uncertainty of the world and the times. I gradually began, therefore, to develop a hypothesis, which began as a simple sense that 'Something dark is going on at Disney'. That hunch gradually crystallised into a more formal concept: that Disney's telling of fairy stories in the 20th century was informed throughout with lightness and joy, and mere lip service was paid to the presence of evil, whereas in the 21st century, the pattern is reversed. Thus, in the later versions of the stories, lightness and joy are used more as decorative motifs than essential to the plot and the characters are merely decorated with the happiness that prevailed previously, instead, allowing Gothic themes such as violence, desolation and alienation to dominate the story-telling.

To investigate this hypothesis, I have decided to carry out a comparison of Disney's 20th and 21st century tellings of two fairy tales. Using close textual analysis, I will examine the four films to establish whether Disney has indeed re-presented these familiar tales by emphasising horror, evil and the gruesome aspects of the Gothic. The films were selected according to a simple criterion: they had to include frequently-used tropes that are

archetypal in the fairy tale genre. One of the questions I have about the change in tone is whether or not Disney, having moved away from the over-arching happy mood of the 20th century story-telling, has approached the more terrifying mood of the original folk lore versions of the tales. One of the significant aspects of Disney's shift in focus is that, although the audience for these fairy stories is nominally the family, (Abbruscato, 2014), the films are no longer the unambiguously light-hearted, innocent and innocuous entertainment that parents might assume them to be. In 2001, Wasko argued that Disney still held a very high reputation globally as the producer of "family entertainment that is safe, wholesome, and entertaining" (p. 2), and maybe that reputation should be examined critically for its ongoing validity. This research will take a small step towards that examination.

The films I selected for this analysis are *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and its 21st century retelling, *Maleficent* (2014), and *Beauty and the Beast* from 1991 and 2017. Although I could have selected many other films for this study, the pairs have similar plot lines, and their time ranges in production from 1959 to 2017, and, given the span of almost sixty years, they convincingly cover the timeline I am interested in. *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) is an updated version of the 1991 animated film of the same name, and *Maleficent* (2014) is a re-shaped and re-modelled depiction of the 1959 animation of *Sleeping Beauty* told from the altered viewpoint of the villain instead of the stereotypical princess-in-distress. The four films are the texts that provide the raw data for this study, and the data will be examined by textual analysis. McKee (2003) suggests that textual analysis can build understanding of the mores that prevailed at the time a particular text was produced. Following McKee (2003), each film I have chosen will be "read" closely for the style and tone of the Gothic motifs and tropes that are present, and these findings will be mapped back to existing Gothic studies to ascertain similarities and differences. As the Gothic uses extreme dread to address urban social anxieties and despairs, I may find that Disney is underpinning

modern narratives with heightened tension and evil to be more relevant and popular in modern society. Through close analysis it will become clear if these narratives are rich in what Botting (2013, p. xix) calls "Gothic symbolism" yet still encapsulating traditional morals and virtues.

As I mentioned earlier, the story of *The Beauty and the Beast* has been found to have existed in various iterations for at least four thousand years, which places it solidly in the realm of folklore (da Silva & Tehrani, 2016). At the same time, however, it clearly fits the modern definition of the fairy story. The fairy tale canon is made up of stories that use magic as a plot device and imaginary settings which are often 'long ago and far away', in a location introduced with the words, 'Once Upon a Time'. These locations are filled with enchantment and magic, and are typically inhabited by a few beloved characters, a charming prince, a beautiful princess (or some other form of royal presence), and folkloric creatures (Maggi, 2015). The plots often involve castles and towers, impossibly wicked villains and improbably virtuous heroes who must achieve an overwhelmingly difficult task, overcoming curses and magical spells, in order to restore the peace or reinstate the desirable *status quo.* Pinsky (2004) argues that there are three essential elements to a fairy tale: first, characters will always be rewarded for good behaviour, and punished for being evil; second, that faith in self and a higher being is paramount; and third, that optimism is imperative, no matter how bad the situation is. These tales have a single goal, which is to teach that good overcomes evil, and that love and compliance with the orthodox bring success. They also tend to be short, allowing the powerful articulation of themes that are relevant to both the teller of the tale, and to the audience.

Early texts in the fairy tale genre told tales of matters dark and mysterious, designed to jar the imagination and create dread. These early tales were truly terrifying, stories that taught life lessons through violence, murder and chilling experiences. They wielded the

power of fear and were an ideal way to impress established values on the members of the communities where the stories were told. Their power derived from the explicit way in which details were given for the gruesome cost of non-compliance. In early societies, therefore, fairy stories operated as a specific form of social control: they narrowed choices and taught that there was no alternative but to follow the accepted designated paths, or suffer the consequences (Maggi, 2015). Penalties were proposed in the form of gross punishments such as encounters with formidable creatures, monsters and monstrous behaviour, with metamorphosis and inexplicable magical transformations of both natural and unnatural characters or places. For example, in the 1812 tale of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, put to paper by the Grimm Brothers, Snow White finally became queen and promptly punished her (admittedly) evil step-mother to dance in a pair of red-hot glowing iron shoes until she died (Grimm & Grimm, 1812). This rather extreme act of revenge sits at odds with Snow White's depiction as a beautiful person with a loving and gentle soul, but the teaching in the 1812 story was vivid and immediate: the penalty for the stepmother's crimes was calculated and brutal, and revealed that prolonged and agonising torture until death could be a normal outcome for crimes committed upon others.

The Gothic was shaped and formed through emphasising and twisting elements from within the early fairy tales (Abbruscato, 2014). Botting (1999) explains that the Gothic genre follows dark themes associated with horror, the uncanny, instilling fear and creating uncertainty. Early fairy tales depicting terror, torture and sometimes death provided a rich resource for the Gothic imagination, but they became two distinct genres which developed their own distinct styles over time. Mullan (2014) argues that Gothic literature began with Horace Walpole's 1764 book, *The Castle of Otranto, a Story*. In this work, the word "Gothic" described something barbaric and also, something that derived from the Middle Ages. This label "Gothic" therefore conforms to Walpole's fictitious

backstory. He had dated the story to 1529, to increase its market value. Although he attempted to dupe the readers with the false date, ironically his book nevertheless established the link between brutality, horror and the Gothic, and is widely acknowledged as the beginning of the Gothic genre, and thus proved to become a highly valued publication.

1.2 The structure of this thesis

This first chapter has served to lay out the idea that is the focus of the research: namely, that Disney's treatment of fairy tales has turned to the darker side of the Gothic. It also touched on the history of fairy stories and their shift from folklore to the salons of the aristocracy. Chapter two contextualises Disney history, and in doing so, attempts to account for the company's story-telling ethos, with a focus on the moral position it adopted and then promulgated in its films. Chapter three covers previous scholarship on fairy stories and concepts of the Gothic, both of which are useful to my reading of the movies. Chapters two and three allow me to draw on ideas that assist my analysis of the movies and enrich the insights I gained from my textual analysis. In chapter four, I discuss the theoretical orientation of my research, outlining both my methodological approach and also the way in which I operationalised my study, followed by chapter five, in which I set out the findings of my study. My findings are then conferred in the discussion and conclusion in chapter six. The discussion in chapter six is focused on the hunch that stimulated this research and leads to the answer to my research question.

Chapter 2

Background: The Political Economy of Disney

2.2 Introduction

The focus of this study is Disney's treatment of two well-known fairy stories over a period of some sixty years. Disney's connection with fairy tales is long-standing, and indeed, by re-formatting the early versions of the stories, the company has built a solid reputation for making trustworthy products for educating and entertaining children (Wasko, 2001). Disney won acclaim and commercial success by retrofitting violent fairy stories for modern sensibilities (Abbruscato, 2014), and some of that success derived from the reputation for patriotism that it earned during World War II. To contextualise Disney in my study, in this chapter I have taken broad aspects of a political economy approach to ascertain how this trust was developed over time and the company's relevance -- not to say its dominance -- in contemporary popular culture.

Baker (2012) defines the political economy approach to studying media as a focus on the ways that media are produced, distributed and consumed, separating it from the analysis of the signs and symbols found within texts. According to Baker (2012), a political economy analysis allows understanding of the ways that media organisations create and distribute, sometimes for agendas quite separate from merely providing entertainment, a substantial amount of the symbolic resources and content found across the world. This effectively means that companies such as Disney might use carefully crafted productions to direct particular points of view for audiences to absorb unwittingly. This possibility makes a study such as mine important, because it might shine a light, albeit a small one, on the impact of changes in popular entertainment.

2.2 *The makings of Disney*

Wasko (2001, p. 28) suggests that the importance of applying a political economy approach to Disney is to analyse the effects of the company "in terms of the policies by which they are organised and operated, and to study the structure and policies of communications institutions in their social settings" (Wasko, 2001, p. 28). Disney began as Laugh-O-Gram in the early 1920s, and had moved into the back of a small office in Los Angeles by 1923. Disney's policies of tight control has successfully led the two-man operation into a multi-billion-dollar corporation that is a world leader in media communications. When the company was established, Walt and Roy Disney were equal shareholders in the company, which soon changed its name to The Walt Disney Company. The company followed Walt Disney's vision for wholesome, family entertainment, making light-hearted, comical and family-friendly shorts and films. Operations began with the production of *Little Red Riding Hood* (1922), *Puss in Boots* (1922), and *Cinderella* (1922), that exploited the cheerful elements found within the literary fairy tales of Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers. Following this, a series of short films were produced known as the 'Alice Comedies', starting with *Alice's Wonderland* (1923). In 1927, the company tightened its grip on the fairy tale film market by producing *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit,* the first animated film with a soundtrack that spoke to Disney's technological superiority. This film set Disney apart from their competitors, making their work highly desired within the industry (Eliot, 1993). Ten years later, Disney used its advanced technology in the production of the first full-length animated feature film called *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937)*.* The technology was Disney's own, but the material was adapted from folklore and fairy tales, re-visioned for the screen and the sensitivities of modern audiences by the removal of violence and horror (Abbruscato, 2014). This sanitisation was a deliberate effort to fit in with the cultural milieu of the times by aligning the product,

and thereby the company, with traditional American values in order to garner the respect and trust of the American people.

Walt Disney was a social conservative who believed in family values. He placed a high importance on traditional morality and patriotism, and opposed communism (Wasko, 2001a). It is logical that he would seek to promote his own patriarchal ideals in the films his company made, and that he would not support legislative changes that would allow more liberal social policies. His conservatism pervades Disney movies. For example, Stone (1975) says that Disney's adaptations of heroines from the Grimm Brothers tales were far less inspiring than the originals. In some cases, the women could "hardly manage to stay awake" (p. 44), whereas the men were presented as heroes because of their deeds and accomplishments (May, 1981). Studies have shown that the un-achieving, helpless women is a recurrent theme in the Disney oeuvre (Reilly, 2016), and positions women as the weaker sex, unable to make independent decisions or act when required (Hoerrner, 1996), while the men are considerably more active and decisive. This gender positioning in Disney is so marked as to be an over-arching ideology, and is now deeply entrenched. Inevitably, it has an impact on consumer culture (Wasko, 2001a), because Disney productions are rife with gender bias and exclusions.

The Disney company began in the turmoil of the early 20th century, but its major growth occurred during the middle years of the century, a period of emerging corporate liberalism and autonomy, and bureaucratic governmental ideals. Consumerism increased throughout this period too (Watts, 1998), and these factors effectively combined to redefine entertainment and how to succeed in the field (Watts, 1998). Walt Disney understood the entertainment market, and re-organised the company into revenue-generating divisions concentrating on "production, film recording, real estate, and licencing and merchandising" (Heide & Gilman, 1995, p. 38). Merchandising included items

like toys, dolls, clocks and watches—affordable objects that were associated with the films and therefore desirable to consumers, because they could own a little bit of the movie they had seen. Mickey Mouse was popularised, appearing on magazine covers and in comic strips, and colonised other countries. Mickey Mouse clubs were established around America, and by 1932, there were more than a million members (deCordova, 1994). The clubs were an ingenious marketing tactic because those children who were members of the clubs also promoted ticket and merchandise sales. Disney's popularity was "instantaneous and unmistakable" and "a global phenomenon by the mid-1930s" (Wasko, 2001, p. 2), driven by international distribution and merchandising efforts. The animated fairy tales became famous, and the introduction of each new Disney character (Donald Duck, Pluto, Minnie Mouse, and Goofy) in turn brought new merchandising opportunities and income for the company.

By 1938, America was experiencing blackout periods which had a negative effect on Disney's ability to release new feature films and at the same time, product distribution, which had previously had a global scope, was restricted to three countries only (Lesjak, 2014). Thus, Disney profits declined rapidly. The Disney studio was temporarily claimed for the war effort by the United States (US) Army, and approximately five hundred soldiers were moved into their studio (Lesjak, 2014), turning the property into a "war plant" (Lesjak, 2014, p. 7). To overcome the severe financial straits the company found itself in, Walt Disney sought and won a contract to produce short films on behalf of the government. This contract was perhaps a defining event for the Disney company, because the publicity it engendered was overwhelmingly positive. For instance, newspapers of the time ran stories about Disney's commitment to the war effort, witnessed by the devotion of "75 percent of their facilities to Government films" (Disney Devoting, 1942). Favourite Disney characters were now used for patriotic purposes, to train, educate, and raise funds for the US war effort. In 1941, the American Treasury Department adjusted revenue laws

to add an additional seven million new taxpayers to the economy, and Disney was tasked with using their popular, jovial characters to make this seem not only acceptable, but desirable (Wechsberg, 1943). Disney characters were used by several government departments to promote "rationing, good nutrition, bond and saving drives, and the payment of income tax (Lesjak, 2014, p. 26). Unfortunately for Disney's revenues, however, the US Treasury distributed 1100 copies of these cartoons free into theatres, and caused a crash in the sales of the regular cartoons that Disney produced (Lesjak, 2014).

Fortunately for the company, the government fundraising cartoons ensured that the characters remained highly visible to the American people, and by adapting existing material previously produced, Disney could produce high quantities of shorts at a lower cost. For example, the 1941 short called *The Thrifty Pig* was an adaptation of the Disney *Three Little Pigs* which had been successful in 1933. In this version, however, the Big Bad Wolf was a Nazi with a swastika armband, and the little pigs were loyal citizens under threat (Lesjak, 2014). The shorts always delivered a patriotic message, and in this example, it was the promotion of saving stamps and certificates that would enable the building of a big strong house that would keep America safe from the Big Bad German Wolf. As well as making training films for US military operations, Disney began to manufacture insignia for submarines, planes, ships and tanks. The children's books Disney published pushed thriftiness and the need to buy saving stamps (Disney Devoting, 1942). Savings bonds were introduced for babies, drives took place for children to collect reusable scrap materials and military insignia. In 1943, Disney produced five anti-Nazi propaganda films, more than 75 military training films and later diversified into a series of educational health films on topics such as diseases, parasites, keeping clean, insect invasion, the human body and child and infant care (Lesjak, 2014, p. 189). All these endeavours were identified with Disney characters, ensuring that the company was constantly associated with national

loyalty and the public good. Disney in fact constituted itself as the voice of America's wholesome needs and desires, and because its work was endorsed and trusted by the government, the company was inseparably part of the mass culture of America.

In effect, what Disney achieved through this period was not only important as a survival story for the company but also as a demonstration that their films had a potent influence on their audience. Walt Disney himself framed the company's efforts as service to America and the war effort (Disney Devoting, 1942). However the greatest achievement was the indelible connection that was forged between Disney characters and the public imagination. That connection increased the value of the company and built the confidence of the American people in Disney products. Essentially, Walt Disney successfully re-invented the company to promote American patriotic views, while managing the company's survival in both film production and merchandise. He also ensured that the company maintained its hegemonic influence within the society by tying in the Disney characters and symbols with positive war efforts.

Disney's successes during the war years (Lesjak, 2014) encouraged the company to pursue an aggressive post-war policy of further diversification. Disney therefore branched into non-fictional short films[2],opened an instantly successful theme park[3](Wasko, 2001) and entered the new medium of television (Jackson, 1993). Moving into television allowed existing films to be re-run, which both established a risk-free income stream (Grazian, 2010) and increased Disney's audience. The company further diversified into live action films, and then into audio-animatronics, and embraced the positive publicity that could be garnered from sponsorship deals (Wasko, 2001). Capitalising on its strong position in production, Disney then opened Buena Vista Distribution in order to control the

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[2] For example, A*mazon Awakens* (1944) and *The Living Desert* (1953), (Cinema: Father Goose, 1954)

[3] Disneyland opened in 1952.

distribution of their films, and with this monopolistic move, established itself as a part of the mass media. Murdock and Golding (1973) argue that the mass media should be understood as organisations which, by controlling both production and distribution, are able to suppress competition and command what is released for consumption.

Disney's position in the mass media turned Walt Disney into, arguably, "one of the most influential men alive" (Cinema: Father Goose, 1954). During the war years, the American people had come to accept and even rely on the company's offerings, and the Disney culture derived in large part from Walt Disney's personal beliefs, was entrenched in and dominated the entertainment media marketplace. Disney's films promoted a particular form of pseudo-individualism and the illusion of personal choice[4], and met the mood of audiences, who avidly consumed the escapism offered by Disney's products. Disney's fairy tale films, for instance, offered calculated fantasies that were full of light-hearted fun (Grimes, 2004). There is no doubt that the public delighted in these offerings, accepting the content at face value, unworried by arguments about what Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) refer to as the mass deception of the culture industries.

After the death of Walt Disney in 1966, Disney continued to expand. A second theme park was opened, films with more adult content were made under the Touchstone brand, and improvements were made to production technologies (Knowlton, 1989). The company entered into a promotional and advertising agreement with EPCOT – AT&T, Exxon, and General Motors to the value of $100 million per year, and agreed to the licensing of their characters to other companies. In 2004, Disney films were responsible for 63% of all Hollywood studio motion picture revenues in the United States (Lesjak, 2014). Profits and stock value rose, assets were valued at more than $41 billion and the company's net

[4]Here I would argue that any true choice was limited by the impositions of the patriarchy and social orthodoxy.

income was $1.85 billion (Walt Disney Company, as cited in Wasko, 2001). The company owned some of the best-known companies in the United States and around the world, including ABC, ESPN, Disneyland, Lucasfilm, Pixar and Marvel. In other words, the strengthened financial position of the company was due to a variety of business acquisitions. The core values of conservatist ideology, however, did not change.

Disney is, by any definition, an entertainment conglomerate, and according to Baker (2012), entertainment conglomerates aim to control all areas of production and distribution to reduce competition. Since 1984, Disney has pursued policies of both horizontal and vertical diversification, and the elimination of competition has not altered the public's perception that Disney is one of the best media and entertainment companies in the world (Wasko, 2001). Disney's output is huge, and the result is that Disney's products are now embedded into popular culture not just in America, but globally. Essentially, Disney continues to perpetuate the notion that a happy and fulfilling life will come to those who obey the rules of an ideal patriarchal society. For example, the Disney film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) places Snow White as a domestic slave, first to her wicked stepmother, and then to the dwarves who go out to do 'real' work each day and return expecting a clean house and a prepared meal. Snow White conforms to the social norms that position her as a slave, and remains patient and kind despite the situation she has to endure. When she is poisoned by the apple and lies asleep at the end of the tale, she is rescued from her fate by a handsome young prince who is (no coincidence) white. Her reward for enduring hardship is his love and assimilation into his life for a 'happy ever after': the prince whisks Snow White off to his castle, while her stepmother lies dead after literally falling off a cliff.

The Disney version of the story is very different from the original, which was more gruesome as told in folklore, and demonstrates the way Disney has sanitised horror out

of the tale for modern "family" audiences while simultaneously promulgating gendered stereotyping (Bettelheim, 1976; Hoerrner, 1996), but despite their firm attachment to patriarchal ideals, there is no doubt that Disney's stories are widely loved. In fact, Disney's status in American culture borders on reverence (Wasko, 2001), and Disney films closely align with Marcuse's (1964) view of escapist entertainment. The films are straightforward for audiences: they do not require intellectual preparation before they can be appreciated, nor do they urge viewers to some form of social action. Disney produces "family entertainment that is safe, wholesome, and entertaining" (Wasko, 2001, p. 2). Above all, Disney productions are comfortable for viewers, probably because they confirm audiences' views of the 'rightness' of the social *status quo.* The "almost sacred place" (Wasko, 2001, p. 2) that Disney holds in American culture has been built on its reputation for wholesomeness, and the company therefore cannot afford to lose public trust. Disney's ownership of companies such as the ABC network means that it has the power to withhold any negative publicity and so protect its reputation, and although this situation generates scholarly commentary (Giroux, 1999; Wasko, 2001; Butler, 2008), in fact, mass audiences do not seek out Disney movies for social critique but, rather, for escapism (Marcuse, 1964). The viewing public, it seems, will unconditionally accept what the company offers. Unexamined acceptance of all things Disney, however, tends to promote and reinforce the company's values as the expression of America's societal values, and the worldwide popularity of Disney's characters has given Disney values a global reach. The company therefore has considerable power to both inculcate new ideas and perpetuate old (and possibly outdated) values. Similarly, Disney can choose to ignore or 'tokenise' indigenous and minority cultures, and indeed, many scholars (Henke et al., 1996; Holmes, 2009; Laemle, 2018) argue that the company does exactly that.

Butler (2008) says that a global omnipresence such as Disney's is something which requires time to achieve, and certainly, it is possible to consider Disney's output across all

media platforms as a barrage rather than a catalogue. Disney's success as a capitalist corporation has come about because of its aggressive self-advertising as the sure and safe hands of America (Wasko, 2001a; Wasko et al. , 2001). The company has created an avenue of almost ritual attachment to itself: audiences may identify strongly with Disney characters and may begin to define themselves accordingly (Giroux, 1999), and that creates a cycle of consumerism that both reinforces Disney's dominant market position (Knowlton, 1989) and limits the ability of small or new companies to emerge and obtain viable market share (Wasko, 2001a). As a case study in company growth, Disney's story is truly impressive, but that achievement begs a question about the cost of success in terms of audience conditioning and the spread of hegemonic ideals deriving from the single viewpoint: the world of Disney.

Although Disney is a huge multi-national company, its structure and organisation are both fairly simple: horizontal and vertical diversification facilitate the design and production of works and subsequent branding, advertising and distribution. This system has not only created a highly successful brand in the fairy tale genre, but has also flooded the market with related merchandise and theme parks 'experiences', and further, has employed their publishing and retail outlets and large media networks to develop awareness of, and desire for, their products. Although some of Disney's business strategies were put in place after Walt Disney's death in 1966, it is fair to say that it was he who first understood the importance of connecting with the audience in multiple ways, and it is his original vision that pushed Disney at audiences through the innovative technology in film and animation, through television screenings and through both advertising and merchandising.

The company's reputation was built on sanitised stories of magic and fantasy that pushed Walt Disney's personal conservative morals (Wasko, 2001), and it was his ingenuity that

turned fairy stories into places of happiness and joy that provided escape from the economic depression, high unemployment and extreme poverty after World War I. Given the times, it is easy to see why happy endings would have wide appeal, and Walt Disney created variations on a simple message that evil and misfortune could be overcome by following prevailing social norms. In fact, Disney's power to capture the world imagination may have resided not only in escape from the present the stories offered, but also in hope for the future: the stories projected what the future might look like, when a peaceful and harmonious world was restored. Disney's fairy tales created the sense that faith, endurance and strong values will lead to a well-regulated society and a 'happily ever after' world.

This chapter has interwoven the development of Disney as a major corporation with discussion of the promulgation of a single and singular view of social norms. The discussion has traced the effect of the trust and respect afforded to Disney on its audiences, and it is in light of the discussion in this chapter that I believe it is important to consider Disney's production of fairy tales to assess changes in mood and message. Although this research will not set out to determine viewer response, it will perhaps go some way towards answering the question, "Is something dark going on at Disney?" Although I suspect that the lightness and joy synonymous with Disney's fairy stories has been altered, in fact, a strong strand of horror has always wound through the genre, and indeed, there is an argument to be made that the Gothic literary tradition adopted many of its dark tropes from the earlier folklore. The following chapter will thus move onto a discussion which explores the origins of fairy tales then examines what is meant by the term "Gothic", and how the Gothic acts as a mirror of societal concerns. Given the adulation and largely uncritical acceptance of Disney globally, I think it is important to determine whether the Gothic elements are indeed heightened and unrelieved in the latest versions of the fairy stories. Modifications to the representation of fear and evil

may go largely unnoticed by parents who trust the material to be the child-friendly entertainment that it has always been in the past. Indeed, if the Disney ethos has darkened so much that the telling of the tales now resembles the more horrific tales of early folklore, the productions of the 21st century may need further research into the effects of such visual representation on young audiences.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss the history and development of fairy tales, the purpose they served in society, and most importantly, how the fear-inspiring themes in these powerful stories were presented. Fairy stories are not a static form: they have been adapted over time and across different cultural groups (Zipes, 1989). The second section of the chapter connects fairy stories with the Gothic tradition and traces the way in which Gothic tales drew on the motifs of horror in the earlier folk form. Mapping the changes will reveal the evolution of Disney's fairy stories through the 20th and into the 21st centuries.

3.2 Fairy Stories

Teverson (2009) points out that since no fairy story can be confidently attributed to a single source, it is therefore difficult to determine an exact timeline of their history, or even to decide which was the original version of a tale among what is often many local variations. There is wide acceptance, however, that fairy tales have existed for centuries, and some cases, millennia[5] (da Silva & Tehrani, 2016). Given the findings of scholars like Teverson (2009) and da Silva & Tehrani, (2016), it is clearly not possible to establish an accurate age for the fairy stories Disney has made so popular, but nevertheless, it is

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[5] The 'Tales of Magic' section of Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU Index) provided phylogenetic evidence that some 75 fairy stories pre-dated certain modern European languages and that some particularly popular fairy tales were thousands of years old. For example, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Rumpelstiltskin* (The Name of the Supernatural Helper) were found to be approximately 4000 years old, and *Jack and the Beanstalk* (The boy who Stole the Ogre's Treasure) is about 5000 years of age. The oldest fairy tale in the study is the tale of *The Smith and the Devil*, which was found to be approximately 6000 years old (daSilva & Tehrani, 2016).

relevant to this study to understand that the folkloric versions of the stories were modified and re-modified in the various iterations that emerged over time.

In 1697, Charles Perrault captured the oral tradition of fairy stores in writing, producing *Histoires ou contes du temps passé,* which is one of earliest collections of 'literary' or 'artistic' fairy tales (Zipes, 1989; Warner, 2014; Flood, 2016). Possibly more famous than Perrault's book, however, is the work of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, whose collection of fairy stories[6] contained tales of magic and horror with a strong moral message about rewards for good behaviour and, likewise, punishment for bad behaviour. According to Warner (2014), early fairy tales were short, direct and delivered in a matter-of-fact style that in no way belied the lesson that was taught through fear of the dark and the unknown entities that dwelt outside the margins of safe communities.

Although fairy stories in the contemporary world are generally aimed at children, both Perrault and the Grimm brothers wrote for older audiences (Zipes, 1989; Warner, 2014). These literary fairy tales were marked by similar characteristics: characters were exaggerated in their goodness, their beauty or their evil; settings were far off fantasy worlds filled with magic and its possibilities (Oring, 1986); events excited audiences because they defied common sense understandings of the world and its physical laws. For instance, the stories related occurrences that could be explained only using magic (Maggi, 2015); and the plots blurred the boundaries of reality. It was not uncommon for the stories to surprise audiences by using the device of, for instance, a talking animal that delivered essential information or advice, or for characters to be able to shape-shift into new versions of themselves; there might be witches or fairies, and all sorts of monsters

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[6] *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children and Household Tales, 1812), later known as the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1903)

that might be encountered. Although fairy stories evolved over time, the new versions were informed and inflected by the earlier versions, with the result that they acquired some features in common: they favoured happy endings for good people and particularly nasty fates for bad ones, and often the moral lessons were taught by fear of the unknown. Like most folklore, the original versions of fairy stories were anonymous, but audiences did not need attributed authorship to recognise the stories: the familiar motifs and characters were enough for identification (Zipes, 1989).

The purpose of fairy stories has been debated, as some scholars believe that the content was valuable to the development and learning of children (Bettelheim, 1998; Coats, 2008). Herder (in Arnold, 1984, p. 101) for instance, argued that because the tales had morally instructive content, they should be intentionally directed towards nourishing "the spirit and heart of children". Scholars including Wilhelm Grimm disagree, because they considered that the stories were too dark for children. The stories carried representations of violence, rape, sex and incest (Grimm, 1884; Zipes, 1989; Warner, 1998) that were not appropriate for younger readers. In fact, it is the "adult" content that informs Zipes' (1989) argument that fairy stories were not originally intended for children: when Perrault was collecting and writing fairy stories in the 17th century, there was no literature produced for children. The dark subject matter was only safe to present to adult peers in the literary salons of the time (Campbell, 1944; Zipes, 1989).

Campbell (1944) argues that in fairy stories, horror is manifested as acts of extreme violence and even torture leading to the death of some characters. For example, in the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Grimm & Grimm, 1812) the queen is forced to wear a pair of red-hot iron shoes and has to dance in them until she dies. Campbell makes a valid point when he suggests that most fairy tales dwell on unnatural and even monstrous acts, as it is not only the event of a death that darkens the narrative, but also

that monsters exist and commit random acts of evil. This research, then, aligns itself to Hunt (2001) and McCort (2016), who argue that fairy tales traditionally employed themes of terror to create the desired impact on audiences, and thus have had to undergo major changes in their narratives to be thought suitable for younger audiences.

In *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812 & 1815), the Grimm Brothers transcribed the folk forms of the fairy tales to preserve them (Zipes, 2012), and indeed, the tales in these two early editions are considered by many scholars to be the purest forms of the stories. Some of the narratives were extremely dark: for example, they recorded the tale known as *The Children of Famine* (Grim & Grim, 1815), which may have originated during the Great Famine (1314-1322) when mothers ate their children (Rosen, 2014). This tale of suffering and starvation was horrifying, because it speaks of a time when having something to eat was of great concern (Darnton, 2001). This story and several others were omitted from the later editions of the book because their plots were based on particularly gruesome ideas. Other early stories were 'lightened' by the removal of their darker elements, to become more acceptable (Zipes, 2014). The later editions, in fact, began to reflect the Grimm brothers' personal Christian principles and their puritanical ideology to such an extent that according to Zipes (2014, p. 16), the last edition in 1857 had "relatively little in common with the first edition".

The changes that the Grimm Brothers made to the stories were certainly consistent with their Christian beliefs and puritanical ideology, but they were instigated by a practical concern. The first books were criticised because although the title suggested the books were for children, the content was clearly not intended for young readers. In fact, the title was meant to signal that many of the tales were *about* children, not *for* them (Zipes, 2014) and in the preface of the 1815 edition, the Grimm brothers pointed out that the stories were actually intended for adults (Grimm & Grimm, 1815). Despite this disclaimer,

however, over time the tales were transformed to make them more suitable for children. Hunt (2001) found that the tropes of "murder, dismemberment, death and sexual violence" (p. 15) were removed from the later editions, and Tatar (2003, p. xvi) points out that the books migrated "in the course of the nineteenth century, into the nursery", becoming increasingly 'watered-down' through the decades.

Identifying the dark themes and horrific motifs carried in the earliest versions of the tales allows a comparison to be drawn between the tone of the original tales and that of the Disney movies, for it was the sanitised versions that were used in the film adaptations that became part of contemporary popular culture. Disney perceived the value of the stories but tempered their approach so that the films would only be mildly scary, and not tales to induce nightmares. McCort (2016) says that tropes that create a subtle sense of fear in the fairy tales build courage and moral fortitude which are important for children's development, and the horror is still present in the stories, but is largely understated. The perfect formula for child-friendly, instructive narrative seems to be a balance between facing tribulation and finding happiness. However, Bernheimer (2010) takes a different view of the violence, death and loss in the stories, arguing that without them, the fairy tale world would not be relatable to the real world. Bernheimer argues that the atrocities in early fairy tales resound with the modern world, which implies that the darker themes are a necessary component of the instructive element of the stories, thus necessary to return the stories to their darker, more Gothic roots.

Maggi (2015) believes that in their contemporary form, fairy tales have already been smudged "with the mud of reality" (p. 9). He argues that their connection to the horror of the traditional stories is tenuous because the sense of surprise they offer is "tame" (p. 3): outcomes are predictable from the start and the elements of horror have been diluted. Abbruscato (2014) agrees with this theory, and makes the point that in an effort to protect

children, evil characters have been replaced with "likeable creatures" who are "deemed less traumatic for impressionable children" (p. 4). He argues that this 'cleansing' process has rendered the modern versions "devoid of their former educational value" (p. 4) specifically because they no longer offer an imaginative space for children to escape into. Coats (2008) feels that the modern sanitised fairy tale is a degradation of the psychically useful older versions, arguing that the removal of violence and terror alters the whole premise of an instructional story. Now that the main function of the monsters is to provide amusement; that the hero no longer has to kill dragons; and that girls can win a prince by dressing well and walking properly, the fairy tales cannot properly teach the moral messages, making them "less able to do their work" (Coats, 2008, p. 79).

Discussion of the effect of fairy tales on children continues among academics, but the intent of the stories is agreed by everyone (Bettelheim, 1989; Warner, 1998; Zipes, 2006; Bernheimer, 2010; Abbruscato, 2014; Maggi, 2015; McCort, 2016): fairy tales are multi-layered, and contain messages designed to deliver moral lessons. The early fairy stories showed that humans are capable of committing horrific acts, and it is true that the modern versions use magic and comic monsters to dilute that message. In fact, it may be that in the modern versions, evil has been relegated to nothing more than "a couple of rodents looking for a theme park", as Hercules (as cited in Coats, 2008) says. However, no matter how attenuated, the themes of evil are still present and are still explored in the 'once upon a time' place in a 'land far, far away', and they do have appeal to younger audiences. Teverson (2009) argues that the appeal of the tales has lasted through many generations and that they need to be contextualised to the times and cultures that produced them because the tales have not remained in location. These stories are fluid and adaptable and have crossed both geographic and ethnic boundaries (Hames, 2016). For example, the story of *Cinderella* has been re-produced and adapted across the globe, and each rendition expresses the particular culture from which it is 'born', but the themes

of overcoming adversity, of love and of divine intervention have remained constant in all versions (Anderson-Holmes, 2017). The adaptability of these tales has allowed them to be used as tools of social control, because the surface veneer of innocence and nonsensical entertainment conceals deeper values and norms. The stories are persuasive: they have left imprints on young minds who have engaged with them over many generations (Abbruscato, 2014). Indeed, because of the highly imaginative motifs that characterise fairy stories, it is easy to dismiss them as mere fiction, but Da Silva says that the stories are invaluable "sources of information on cultural history" (as cited in Yong 2016, n.p).

Fairy tales have moved from folklore into what Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) refer to as the Culture Industries, where the content is mass produced and so highly recognisable as a genre of its own that as soon as the telling begins, in any format, it is easily recognised, and the elements of "how it will end, and who will be rewarded, punished, or forgotten" are immediately established (p. 353). The fairy tales function as escapism from modern-day problems or the boredom of the real world. Marcuse (1964) suggests that the need audiences have to escape their reality, allows them to be unknowingly manipulated. Abbruscato (2014) believes that the manipulative power of the fairy tales raises the need to examine the source of their power, for the fairy tale world has become a tool to form the ideas that children might take into adult life.

Thus, though contemporary fairy stories are heavily commodified and commercialised, they are also aptly used to present audiences with difficult scenarios that can be analysed and interpreted to find solutions to everyday concerns. Bettelheim (1989) says that witnessing events that require a range of emotional reactions enables young audiences to cope in the real world. Indeed, according to Bettelheim, without the representation of intense emotions, children lack worldly experiences. In the light of Bettelheim's argument, it seems there is a fine line to walk in deciding how much terror and horror

should be displayed in these narratives. Real life is not unvaryingly happy, unmarred by only a few experiences of fear or grief, but this has become the regular portrayal in many contemporary versions of these tales. The sanitised fairy tales create an illusion that any problems (including escape from pain or even death) can be resolved if people follow the rules, and thus teach that obstacles can always be overcome (Abbruscato, 2014).

The 'happy ending' of the fairy tale narrative creates what can be deemed as a belief in miracles (Warner, 2014): disasters encountered in the magical world of 'elsewhere' seem unsurmountable, but the miracle occurs through hope, endurance and determination. It is the miracle that occurs because of the noble behaviour that makes the fairy tale appealing. When a direct lesson might be rejected, the fun of the story somewhat masks the purposeful guiding that shows young audiences rewards for conformity, and punishment for non-conformity. These tales deal with universal issues like adolescence, the coming of age, marriage and patriarchal systems, hopes for the future, an end to poverty and despair. They explore human weaknesses, such as pride, or laziness; or strengths like being kind and forgiving, and they show the connections between actions and consequences. Their didactism is limited, however: the narratives offer no advice about what life looks like after the happy ending, or about how to grow and mature. As Abbruscato (2014, p. 3) says, these "safe stories mention neither death nor aging, the limits of our existence, nor the wish for eternal life".

Maggi (2015) points out that because fairy tales have such longevity and have been passed through generations, they have become an intrinsic part of many people's upbringing, part of a kind of universal imaginary and repository of cultural values. The stories are therefore unlikely to ever be discarded because they possess both a sentimental value and a moral 'soundness'. A widely held perception exists, therefore, that denying children these "charming and undying stories" (Maggi, 2015, p. 2) would disadvantage them. On

one level, the tales can be viewed as pure escapism, but their real worth is in watching the way the characters negotiate their adventures and resolve conflict (Tatar, 1992). Zipes (1997) points out that fairy tales demonstrate how to achieve social status through beauty and heroic deeds, which tempts individuals to believe that emulating the behaviour in these narratives is a way to happiness. Both theories suggest that the stories could hold a worrying degree of power to mould notions about how to be successful and achieve happiness.

3.3 The Gothic

The previous section of this chapter covered the origin of fairy tales and outlined how the tone of the genre shifted away from dark horror to the lighter versions that were modified to accommodate younger audiences. The themes of these early fairy tales are in many instances similar to, and inter-connected, with Gothic narrative. Reyes (2020) places Gothic as evolving from "common superstition, folklore, fairy tales and legends" (p. 4), stating that the genre drew on these traditions to form a solid base. The word 'Gothic' means medieval, supernatural and barbarous (Longueil, 1923), and in very general terms, that is still an accurate description of the genre today. A single authoritative definition is difficult to find, because the genre is constantly morphing (Round, 2014; Spooner, 2017), expanding from its original market into new hybrid forms in which it allows "the expression of cultural and social anxiety" (Spooner, 2017, p. 11) and offers a platform for reflection on, and processing of, real-world suffering and concerns.

Gothic is a very large field of study and is one of the oldest genres in horror. Its tropes are rich in symbolism, with mystery and superstition, and a dark foreboding history that includes themes of romanticism, isolation and despair (Botting, 2013). The objective of the Gothic is to create uncertainty, twists in the texts, and a multi-dimensional quality which refuses to conform to the 'norms' of contemporary culture. In the Gothic genre,

seemingly predictable stories might suddenly erupt into tempests of horror or descend into sorrow and gloom. The Gothic encompasses humans' innermost anxieties and can awaken deep fears, creating a play between anticipation and trepidation through the terror of being haunted or haunting (Warwick, 2007). The Gothic has too many facets to cover in the discussion of a single chapter, so I have chosen to cover the specific motifs that my data analysis revealed: the presentation of the monster and the villain, the representation of the body, supernatural occurrences, and the patriarchal systems and the representation of the child.

When evil is examined through the Gothic lens, it tends to take the form of indisputably wicked monsters and villains who facilitate various forms of wickedness and express the direness of contemporary society in which elements of moral disintegration, perversion, and torture are rife (Grunenberg, 1997). The tropes are filled with immorality, evil and corruption (Botting, 1999), portraying the iniquity of the human condition. However, evil actions are not always undertaken by the characters who occupy monstrous bodies. As Jackson, McGillis and Coats (2007) suggest, the Gothic tradition demands that "evil is undeniably evil" (p. 6) irrespective of the form it takes: malevolent intent and the way it serves to terrify are what is paramount in defining evil.

From the Latin word 'monstrum', meaning 'show', the monster is an unnatural occurrence or being whose presence in the story is designed to show impending danger, like an omen or prophecy of threat and peril. Gilmore (2009) says that monsters conjure horrific thoughts and personify everything that is deemed dangerous, and this association with the monster thus induces a heightened sense of fear and exaggerates the terror caused by the monster's physical form. It is, then, the "quality of inherent evil, that is, unmotivated wickedness toward humans" (Waterhouse, 1996, p. 29) which becomes

truly terrifying. The combination of both "mystery and menace" (Cohen, 1970, p. 1) make the monster a Gothic character, an unpredictable entity that invokes panic and fear.

Heiland (2008) argues that the monster simultaneously serves to provoke confrontation of, and reflection on, undesirable and threatening issues, and brings to the fore topics that "we would prefer to leave hidden" (p. 100). They are the "embodied projections escaping from deep caverns within our individual and collective unconscious" (Friedman & Kavey, 2016, p. 4) which form the "basis of all psychological analysis of the horror/monster tale" (Friedman & Kavey, 2016, p. 4). Andriano (1999) maintains that the physical form of monsters will always make them seem dangerous, but that the primal fear they invoke in humans is the fear of being eaten. Indeed, the human-eating monster is often present in early fairy tales. For example, in the tale of *Little Red Cap* (Grimm & Grimm, 1812), the little girl meets a wolf in the woods, but her naivety prevents her from seeing him for who he really is. Because she is not at first scared by his appearance, he is able to obtain information from her, but later, when she sees him dressed in grandma's clothing, she is suddenly alarmed. The wolf has now been charged with the mystery and threat discussed by Cohen (1970), and true to the form of the Gothic monster, he leaps out of bed and eats her. Macfarlane (2012) explains that the tale of *Little Red Cap* (Grimm & Grimm, 1812) was used in its time and place to teach the dangers of talking to strangers or straying from the correct path, but essentially it is the ability to generate multiple meanings within a single narrative that makes the monster most effective, through condensing "as many fear-producing traits as possible onto one body" (Halberstam, 1995, p. 21).

By delving into the most unspeakable forms of violence and horror the monster in early fairy tale represented boundless evil and was the character that was filled with a reprehensible darkness of soul or sadistic intent. For example, in the 1812 Grimm brothers

account of *How Some Children Played at Slaughtering,* a young child butchers his friend, who had agreed to play the pig in their game. Georgieva (2013) suggests that the Gothic structure often blends numerous layers of horror, including using children as contributors to, or participants in, evil acts. In this story, one child slices the throat of another, while a third youngster collects the flowing blood. The children intend to turn their 'pig' into sausages. Here the monsters are somehow inconceivable: they are young and therefore presumed to be innocent of evil, yet the act they perform, and the intent behind it, is truly horrifying. Other early fairy tales include *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Snow White* (Grimm & Grimm, 1812), in which biological mothers are constructed as monsters because they show great wickedness towards their children. Zipes (2014) explains that in later editions of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen,* these tales were altered because the notion of a mother harming her own child was so offensive. In fact, the mothers in these tales were changed to stepmothers, as the original implication was unthinkably evil (Hubner, 2016).

The early fairy tales embodied the Gothic motif of the "dangerous and horrible" monster (Gilmore, 2009, p. 1), but there is also a conceptualisation of the monster who is "only a monster as the result of a traumatic history" (Macfarlane, 2012, p. 114). This view is not universally accepted, however. Waterhouse (1996), for instance, states that a defining characteristic of the monster must be that it possesses an inherent evil which will express as unmotivated wickedness. For Jackson, McGillis and Coats (2007), the point of the monster is that, fundamentally, "evil is undeniably evil" (p. 6), not whether the monster was born or made. Evil may indeed be evil (Jackson, McGillis & Coats, 2007), but over the long history of the Gothic, ideas of what constitutes "monstrous" have changed, and the concept of the quintessential 'monster' depends on individual perspectives (Boyer, 2013). Individual definitions of the monster may vary, but one function of monsters is clear: they generate fear trepidation and are therefore easily identifiable through the disruption of "harmony, order and ethical conduct" (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 278).

Another trope common to both fairy tale and Gothic is around identity and body modification. Sweetman (2000) states that body modification is often seen as merely the changes to the exterior form, but Featherstone (2000) argues that there are sociological aspects pertaining to these transformations, where the individuals artificially form and shape their own bodies, in order to fulfil their personal ideas of self-value and worth. The attraction for these individuals to modify stems from a desire to break conventions, and to deny the natural order of their bodies. It is also performed because it is an absolute and irreversible change, a construction of a new and perceivably more viable individual identity (Sweetman, 2000). These transformations are not free from physical pain to the body but are deemed a requirement for the achievement of the symbolism and representation sought for the outward self, or to contain and hide the inner unacceptable self. The ideology and justifications made are very much a part of the Gothic mode where the disguising or veiling through masks, costumes or other transformation "are ubiquitous features of Gothic" (Spooner, 2004, p. 1), and the re-creation of identity. The Gothic mode is utilised to reveal the hidden and troubling aspects of the self, and includes its unsettling ability to show the body as defunct or lacking, and thus "a surface which can be modified or transformed" (Spooner, 2004, p. 9). The morphed body thus becomes a means of expression and representation of the innermost fears of the individual, now manifest as an outward projection of the self, and gives voice to the deep-rooted anxieties, oppression or disturbances which have been created from within the individual.

In addition, Wagner (2014) explains that the "body is inseparable from mind" (2014, p. xi), thus modification or transformation is a large part of Gothic narrative because it explores the anxieties and traumas associated with the need to modify, as well as the creation in some instances, of a new physical, monstrous form. The Gothic body is frequently presented as a reproduction of the real (Spooner, 2012), and modification includes various types of plastic surgery as well as body tattooing, piercings, scarification, removal

of body parts and implanting of others, 'flesh tunnels', body etching, neck, ear and lip stretching. According to Spooner, "Contemporary Gothic is more obsessed with bodies than in any of its previous phases: bodies become spectacle, provoking disgust, modified, reconstructed and artificially augmented (2012, p. 63). The popularity however has grown over time, and whether conducted as a decorative self enhancement or as a manifestation from within, these bodies become uncanny representations of the self and individual identity , and challenge the idea of the body as being "fixed or stable" (Beville, 2014, p. 52). It is the alteration of the body to re-present the self in a new form or disguise (Spooner, 2004; Rojek, 2011) which is Gothic as these bodies, and the "spectres that haunt us are also images of ourselves as we might be" (Wagner, 2014, p. xi). Furthermore, according to Spooner, modern Gothic's preoccupation "with freaks, scars, diseased flesh, monstrous births and, above all, blood, is an attempt to reinstate the physicality of the body in an increasingly decorporealized information society" (2012, p. 65) and is demonstrated by the focus on subjects like "the 'folk' grotesque of the circus, with freakish heroes and heroines and with celebration of bodily excess" (Spooner, 2012, p. 68).

Like the Gothic, fairy tales also rely on the transformation and modification of the body and characters. Warner (1995) believes that metamorphosis is a defining feature of the genre because creation and re-creation of characters adds necessary depth and development to the plots. For example, in *Cinderella* (Grimm & Grimm, 1812), Cinderella's stepmother instructs her daughters to cut their feet to make the glass slipper fit. The "metaphors of masking and disguise seem to indicate an 'authentic' self hidden beneath, but in Gothic texts they consistently work to problematise that authenticity" (Spooner, 2004, p. 5). The self-amputation involved in the ugly sisters' body modification emphasises the mother's desperation in a time when marrying into wealth was so vital that no sacrifice was too great. Botting (1996) says that hidden secrets and fears in the

unconscious mind tend to materialise in twisted forms. Certainly, the self-mutilation in the body modification in *Cinderella* demonstrates the Gothic ethos that suffering is justified if it leads to happiness (Zipes, 2014) and prosperity (Shilling, 2016). The characters in *Cinderella* represented irrepressible desire for wealth and security, teaching that there can be 'value' in the manipulation of the body to fit the arbitrary and often unreasonable conditions imposed on society's disadvantaged and disempowered. The transformation was predicated on the premise that making Cinderella's stepsisters become more appealing and 'saleable', the mother's position will be secured. However, it is through the ultimate power of her hidden identity that Cinderella catches the prince. Her beauty is revealed by the dresses given to her by the fairy godmother, as is the norm with princess narratives in the Disney fairy tale genre. Modern fairy tale films have continued the tradition of body modification, and Do Rozario (2004, p. 164) maintains that transformations are a "cornerstone of Disney animation".

Gothic texts are used to reflect and remember the past, but also as a means to bring history forward in a trans-temporal communication between two different time periods. Beville (2014) contends that memories are "a significant influence on the construction of identity" (p. 58) and it becomes an invaluable tool to link the relevance of identity and meaning found between early fairy tale, the Gothic and contemporary Disney fairy tale film. The re-location of the past within the present brings themes of spirits and hauntings, an uncanny collection of past places and characters into one liminal space where the dead are 'alive' alongside the living, creating a 'real' world intertwined with a 'living' past (Baker & Rutherford, 2020). The ambiguity created by blending past and present, familiar and unfamiliar, creates liminal spaces abundant with "the uncanny" (Royle, 2003), intensifying anxiety and uncertainty for "real" world individuals who may begin to confuse their place in time to the point of doubting "the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (Royle, 2003, p. 1). Characters and hauntings from the past do not

necessarily intend good, and can manifest themselves as creatures of "an extremely dark and menacing presence" (Nelson, 1978, p. 101).Therefore, the Gothic is often a space where the blurred boundaries between past and present become Gothic because of the "trepidation and horror experienced within these events" (Baker & Rutherford, 2020, p. 33). Individuals within the space are "literally or figuratively haunted" (Heiland, 2008, p. 6) with no means of escape.

Spooner (2006) says that in contemporary popular culture, the Gothic can be found in surprising places. In Disney fairy tale films, for instance, the characters and events often use liminal spaces, ghosts and hauntings to represent the supernatural and the magical and so can be treated as Gothic texts. The intent of Gothic narrative is to provide experiences of the supernatural and sublime, bringing forward those things which are beyond ordinary reason or explanation (Bowen, 2014). This is done to push the boundaries of everyday life through inexplicable events and terrifying characters, and effectively creates an interference or upsetting of the natural order of things (Deibler, 2017), which raises anxieties and invokes fear. Warner (2002) contends that magic is an essential part of the fairy tale genre, creating necessary surprises in the plots. Many of the filmic re-tellings of the stories include mystical characters that are ghosts of the dead, like The Great Spirits in *Brother Bear* (2003) or the ghost of Mufasa in *Lion King* (1994; 2019), but also the more friendly fairies and fairy godmothers seen in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) or *Cinderella* (1950; 2015). Magic is also used for the transformation of characters (Warner, 2002), as happens in the tale of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), when the queen becomes a witch, or the transformation of the prince into Mor'du and Queen Elinor into a bear in *Brave* (2012). Essentially, it is the liminal spaces in conjunction with the magical transformations, uniting the past and present, that make these fairy tale stories timeless, surviving through their ability to adapt across both history and cultures (Tatar, 2013).

Another aspect of the Gothic found in both Gothic texts and in Disney fairy tale films is the use of artefacts and gadgetry. In the Gothic, magical gadgets are objects which create fear because of the way they come to life within the text (Frank, 1987). In his book *The Uncanny,* Freud (1919) posits that animated objects and ghosts create what he terms as the negative aspects of pleasure, as objects which are ordinarily dead are given life and create fear. Gothic text is inherently exaggerated and dramatic (Spooner, 2004), and the objects or apparitions in the Gothic mode therefore frame the supernatural almost like a powerful hallucinogenic in a bid to emphasise that "strangeness lies within as much as without" (Botting, 2013, p. 8). Disney fairy tale films breathe life into common gadgets and items to evoke fear, producing an uncanny version of the original innate object. The Gothic is situated in the dark margins of supernatural imagining, suggesting the presence of powers beyond human comprehension or control, and the magical objects become plot devices that help shape the resolution of the story (Frank, 1987). The fairy stories are crisscrossed with magic and other Gothic themes, and there is delight in the disruption of "reality" in the texts. Hogle (2002) identifies these themes as "opposed conditions", stating that pleasure exists in unsettling the division between concepts such as life and death, or the natural and supernatural, resulting in a narrative which resides in a state of confusion between what is deemed good and what is evil (Baker & Rutherford, 2018). Crow (2012, p. 1) says that as reality is unclear, "we may be asked to suspend our usual patterns of judgment".

Baldick (1992) suggests that the Gothic raises fears of a tyrannical past reappearing in and stifling the present. The Gothic features scenes of decay and ruin, in which, according to Spooner (2012), injustices and horrors of the past must be resolved before harmony can be restored. Although the dark characters elicit fear (McCort, 2016), the settings also

allow glimpses of the great architecture of the past including ancient castles and villages. Disney has copied Gothic themes by incorporating similar "historical" scenery as backdrops of the tales. For example, in *Brave* (2012), the landscape resembles that of the 5000-year-old Sottish Calanais standing stones and the medieval Dunnottar Castle, spaces which are both rich in history and are also previous sites of terror (Armit, 1996). In Disney's *Brave* (2012), the past is shown exercising evil power in the present. Animals have an instinctive fear of crossing the stone circle, and Merida is tossed over her horse's head when she inadvertently tries to ride through it. The stone circle is also the place of wisps, which feature in Scottish folk tales as beings who would lead living people into the bogs where they would be stuck or drowned (Mark Andrews, Director). In *Brave,* the last wisp is the ghost of the ancient prince who is finally released from a curse.

According to Arnold, Seidl and Deloney (2015), "gender roles are a set of behavioral and social norms that are generally understood to be what is appropriate for males and females in a social or interpersonal relationship" (p. 3). For instance, men are generally expected to be the confident and competitive gender, while women are expected to be more sensitive, supporting and passive, although of course, there are variations to these expectations across different cultures (Burgess, 1994). In Gothic texts, the underbelly of gender roles is exposed. Crow (2012) explains that although there is a prevailing belief in healthy, well-functioning families and the portrayal of this ideal, the reality of relationships and families is that love is intertwined with unacknowledged hatred and problems up to including child abuse and incest (Crow, 2012). Heiland (2008) states that the core of Gothic fiction is transgression and disobedience that crosses social and sexual boundaries as well as the "boundaries of one's own identity" (2008, p. 3). Thus, whilst the genre promotes romanticised pictures of patriarchal heterosexual relationships, there is also a lingering threat of capture, sexual abuse and the neglect of former loved ones, "frequently espouse[ing] a characteristically conservative morality, and frequently a

conventional and rather public heterosexuality" (Hughes & Smith, 2009, p. 1). The main male and female characters in the stories, for instance, are almost certain to fall into a love which is doomed by events from the mysterious past. Stories that include princes and princesses are "classic elements of Gothic literature" (Abbruscato, 2014, p. 7), yet the princesses displayed none of the personal power and autonomy that being royal might be thought to bestow. Instead, the princess heroines within these narratives are often in positions of "powerlessness and persecution" (Botting, 1999, p. 5), and in this respect, nothing much has changed for Disney's princesses. The Gothic ethos celebrates male power over women, and shows that to be female means suppression, violence and sacrifice (Heiland, 2008).

In early fairy tales, themes of the dominance of the patriarchy prevail. For instance, in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Grimm & Grimm, 1812), Rapunzel has been abandoned by her family and imprisoned in an isolated tower where she is later discovered by a prince who tricks her into pulling him up so he can seduce her. When it is apparent that she is pregnant, the evil fairy banishes her to a desolate place where she has twins and leads a wretched life. In the time the story was set, sex outside of sanctified heterosexual marriage was ungodly, so Rapunzel's exiled and desperate life are just punishments for her sin. The tale is horrifying on two further counts: that Rapunzel's parents agreed to abandon her, and that she is subjected to a life of imprisonment. This horror occurs in a fairy story, but it is not unlike the horror in the Gothic. Coykendall (2005) argues that authors such as Walpole[7] put "stark emphasis on the violent detours that the homosocial order must take through the bodies of women" (p. 450), emphasising the gender issues that prevailed in this period of history. Men were considered superior to women and possessed rights over women's decisions, including who to give them to in marriage. The

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[7] Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

society of the times did not equate a man's lust with sin, and arranged marriages were common. Giroux (2012), however, thinks that society still suffers from a "virulent notion of hardness and aggressive masculinity, a culture of depravity [which] has become commonplace" (p. 259), and that in modern society these become violent spectacles of "pain, humiliation and abuse" (p. 259).

Heise (2012) explains that discourses of love and marriage create "bridal fictions" through which society learns compulsory heteronormativity. That is, the discourses teach the "right" way to do (heterosexual) relationships, as "weddings, marriage, romance, and heterosexuality become naturalised to the point where we consent to the belief that marriage is necessary to achieve a sense of well-being, belonging, passion, morality and love" (Ingraham, 1999, p. 120). In the stereotypical Disney princess narratives like *Cinderella* (1950; 2015), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991; 2017), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Aladdin* (1992; 2019), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), or *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) for example, Disney clearly promotes heteronormativity within the stories (Coats, 2008; Stover, 2013; Maggi, 2015; Reilly, 2016; Garlena & Sandin, 2017).

The principal aim in Gothic romance is to bring a series of challenging events into a love relationship so that fear and panic ensue, often followed by a tragic ending. So prevalent is the heteronormative ideology that the concept of "homosexuality…becomes equivalent to the unspeakable in Gothic Romance" (Halberstam, 2014, p. 65). This creates a contradiction, as the very nature of the Gothic seeks and plays with all things that are mysterious, abnormal or inexplicable, including love shared between ghosts and monsters, the un-dead and the insane, making the very concept of exclusion on the basis of gender preferences particularly un-Gothic. Townshend (2009) however, maintains that homosexuality was represented in some of the earliest Gothic texts. He writes (p. 11) that "Gothic is more in need of a straightening out than a queering up", with "a range of

teasing, heavily encoded references to same-sex female desire" (p. 13) in work such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), and notes that in *The Monk* (1796), "fathers…who embark rather upon a programme of perverse, queer desiring with passionate abandon" (p. 15).

Reilly (2016) observes that Disney princesses do not attempt to overcome their terrible situations, but rather, wait to be rescued by a fairy godmother or a man. In some cases, like Snow White in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) or Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the women are in the ultimate form of passivity: a deep sleep awaiting their male saviour. These situations are typically Gothic, and although Disney fairy tale princesses have progressed in both actions and appearance over time to accommodate shifting gender standards (Stover, 2013), the Gothic ideal of heterosexual romance, love and marriage has not changed. These themes remain "consistent and prominent" (Garlena & Sandlin, 2017, p. 957), and by framing heterosexual romance and love as the principal means to obtain happiness, there is a continuous reinforcement of gender norms and a "heteropatriarchal family ideal" (Garlena & Sandlin, 2017, p. 958). The cultural prioritisation of the heterosexual union creates the view that it is morally imperative for lifelong relationships (Coontz, 2005), and creates what Steinberg (2011) refers to as a "hegemonic hold on children's culture" (p. 18). Such viewpoints thus place pressure on those who position themselves outside the 'normal' acceptable parameters, creating an 'othering' effect for those who do not conform (Hall, 2003). The romantic ideal in Disney fairy tale films projects itself as the key source to a woman's happiness and ultimately serves to "limit female agency" (Garlena & Sandlin, 2017, p. 961), with the 'love at first sight' trope appearing in 78.3 percent of the Disney films studied by Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman and Lund in (2003).

The Gothic cannot be easily defined or confined within neat borders (Reyes, 2015), but essentially it takes and gives pleasure through distress caused to self and others (Novak, 1979). Gothic texts therefore "create a platform to address social issues and concerns because the shifting and adapting emotions and responses to unexplainable events resonate with everyday life" (Baker & Rutherford, 2020, p. 33).

Chapter 4

Methodology and Method

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the scholarship covering the evolution and social function of fairy tales, the theory of the Gothic and how Gothic themes can be traced back to the early folk forms of fairy stories. The chapter also covered the way in which Disney repurposed and "cleansed" early fairy tale content for young audiences. In this chapter, I will set out my methodological orientation and record the process I used to select and analyse two Disney fairy tale films from the 20th century and two from the 21st first century.

4.2 *Research Question*

As an avid fan of both the early and modern versions of fairy tales, I have noticed that certain elements of representation in contemporary Disney fairy tale films appear to have changed, and this observation has crystallised into an hypothesis: that Disney's telling of fairy tales departed from the joyful tone that prevailed in the 20th century and, in the 21st century, has strongly embraced tropes from the dark side of the Gothic genre. I used this hypothesis to develop a research question which would guide my investigation. Research questions need to not only permit, but also promote, detailed examination of the topic, and on this matter, Agee (2009) argues that research questions have bearing on the quality of analysis. Koro-Ljungberg and Hayes (2010) maintain that research questions need to specify both the intention and the direction of the work. With these ideas in mind, I sought to build a question that not only related to my hypothesis but also showed what I wanted my research to achieve and where my research would focus. The question that guides this research, therefore, is: In what way have 21st Century Disney Fairy-tale films altered the level of Gothic representation?

4.3 Methodology

McKee (2003) points out that there is no one right research method: the nature of the object of study should guide researchers' approach to their data collection and analysis. The methodological approach I adopted for this study is qualitative. Qualitative research does not set out to produce generalisable laws derived from a large, numbers-based data set (Punch, 1998), but instead, aims to capture in detail the qualities of a small field of enquiry (Ritchie, 2003; Stake, 2010) and thereby provide a rich description of a particular phenomenon (Elo & Kynga, 2008). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation is the change I have perceived in the tone and ethos of Disney's fairy tale films, and it is perhaps unsurprising that I have therefore oriented my research to the qualitative paradigm, given that qualitative research is often used in the analysis of data derived from direct observation, and is common in visual and cultural research (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2001; Elo & Kynga, 2008). Following Corbin and Strauss (2008), I have employed inductive logic to produce deep insights out of close readings (Belleamy, 2011; Cresswell & Poth, 2017) of the four films that comprise my data set. The philosophical orientation of the qualitative paradigm allows me to interpret the films and draw conclusions that will both stand on their own and also feed into a wider picture of similar academic research (Thomas, 2006).

Qualitative research proposes that reality is subjective and constructed (Sarantakos, 2012), and therefore, is an attempt by researchers to interpret their observations and generate meaning from them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Data collection and the conclusions drawn from the data must be demonstrably valid and reliable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), but the results of a study must be understood as coming from a subjective process: other researchers considering the same data set might well form a different perspective. Thus, the "truth" of the research should be tempered by the possibility that

there may other valid points of view about the same phenomenon. There are those in the research community who argue that the subjectiveness of qualitative research is a weakness (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), but despite that criticism, qualitative research permits a deep exploration of the possible meanings and insights in each situation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

4.4 Method, text selection and research process

As I began my research, I evaluated both textual and content analysis to determine which would be more appropriate for my study of Disney's fairy tale films. Both methods focus directly on the media texts themselves rather than on societal responses to them, and in this sense, each had strengths for my research. However, unlike content analysis, textual analysis does not rely on the collection and counting of specific codes, but rather, focuses on manifest and covert meanings and implicit and explicit messages. Textual analysis also provides for the researcher's pre-understanding (Bainbridge, 2011) of the study, offering wide scope to highlight, examine, delve into and explain patterns, tropes and trends emerging within the texts (McKee, 2003). In fact, textual analysis provides a "toolkit" (Bainbridge, 2011, p. 224) for examining media texts, and, by extension, the meanings that might be taken from them. It is a particularly suitable method for close readings because of its capacity to allow decoding of signs and overall, is a strong system for arriving at "most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (McKee, 2011, p. 140).

The four films that constitute the texts in this study are *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Maleficent* (2014), *and Beauty and the Beast* (2017). These four films fit the parameters of my study: on one hand, they are told for contemporary audiences but are also representations of early fairy stories. Furthermore, the films make two 'sets' of tales, making interesting contrasts between the early and later versions. *Maleficent* (2014) is a re-telling of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), but from a different viewpoint, and the two *Beauty*

and the Beast (1991; 2017) films tell the identical story. The production dates of these four films span sixty years, which is a convincing length of time over which to track the changes suggested in my hypothesis. In other words, the two pairs of films contain enough similarities of plot to one another, they are re-presentations of original fairy tale, and, they all contain elements of Gothic tropes. They also show differences in tone and style to warrant close study.

The research began with watching and re-watching each film as a definitive unit separate from the other in its pair, a process that was intended to avoid the narrow focus or limited viewpoint that Cedro (2019) warns against. My hypothesis makes it obvious that I knew the films already, and it is fair to say I had considerable pre-understanding, but I treated the research process differently from my previous 'hobby' viewing. I began with a first viewing of the four films in succession to re-familiarise myself with the details of setting, the characters, and the overall aesthetic. I immediately noticed that the films made in the 21st century showed a vast and understandable improvement in their animation technique and production values over the time period, and it was also clear from this first viewing that in the later films, the representation of darkness and evil was more intense and intimidating than in their predecessors. This led me to think about ways to analyse the films in terms of representations of purpose and intent, so I then undertook a second successive viewing of the films to categorise the characters by way of their intentions towards others. This was an interesting review, because I discovered some characters cannot be categorised as either wholly bad or wholly good. Just as in real life, their behaviour was dependent on the circumstances depicted in the stories.

I then re-watched each film twice to assess what made the behaviour of the characters so changeable, and I made notes of environmental details such the colours, settings, architecture, and clothes in which different themes would occur, and it became clear that

the music indicated a lead-up to heightened fear and increasing tension in the stories. Intense and eerie music seemed to signal the evil events or the imminent arrival of dark characters, and often occurred with changes to the colour palette. Backgrounds, for instance, might turn dark and the landscape might tend toward colours of dark grey, green, brown and black.

In the fifth viewing, I noted every element of darkness in each of the films, noting the phrases, words and actions that were associated with the dark, and recorded how the other characters were relating to these events. At this point, I noticed that there were recurring themes across all the films: first, monsters and evil villains; second, transformations of identities through body modifications; and third, the use of magical and supernatural occurrences in the story lines. It was also impossible to ignore the highly gendered system of patriarchal ideals and values that prevailed across all the films, from the earliest in 1959 to the latest in 2017. The emergence of these clear themes led me to watch each film at least twice more so that I could note the recurring tropes separately, and when I reviewed them, I realised that the four themes I had identified in the films were also elements found in the Gothic genre.

McKee (2003) says that texts should be categorised into sections to assist understanding and full appreciation of the material, so during my eighth viewing of the films, I made a full transcript of the texts. I then meticulously read through the transcripts, highlighting every instance of Gothic referencing so that I could be sure I did not miss any. The highlighted sections were then mapped against my first four categories, and I found that almost every time a dark or scary event took place, one or more of these Gothic themes was also present. Additional Gothic elements were found mostly in the architecture, art and themes of excess, and I then re-assessed these extra Gothic devices, and found them to be part of the setting the scene for events which included the monsters or villains, body

transformations, or the creation of magic. They served as enhancements to the main action, Gothic embellishments, if you will, relevant to the mood of the story, but not key to the action. Grouping all this data began to allow "reasonable interpretations of how [the] text is likely to be read by an audience" (McKee, 2003, p. 13).

When I considered my analysis, I could see it would be all too easy for the study to fragment into small groups that would not necessarily permit a coherent and cohesive overview of the texts, and I therefore elected to confine my handling of the data to the following four main areas of discussion: the presence of evil, expressed through villains and monsters; identity and the modification of the body; the magical, supernatural and uncanny, and finally, gendered, patriarchal systems of social organisation. Gendered studies have been applied to previous Disney studies, so I decided to discuss this theme only in relation the Gothic. I also had to be aware that the topic of gender and Disney is so potentially huge that a master's thesis cannot practically contain it.

Once these four categories had been determined, I carried out a ninth viewing to be sure that I had identified all the relevant themes. Finally, I created a table that captured all the details of each film, noting which characters featured in what categories, and I also allocated key words for specifying each character or item. Hartley (1996) and McKee (2003) both say that research such as mine should fit how the texts fit into the wider context, so in this study, I have also analysed early variations of the two fairy tales that comprise my data set.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I sketched the methodological approach I took to this study and gave details of the way I operationalised the research. In this chapter, I will set out the results of my close readings of the four movies. I identified four main Gothic tropes in the films, and they provide the broad structure of this chapter. The data are presented as compare-and-contrast: that is, each pair of fairy tale films is examined for the presence of the Gothic trope specified in that section of the chapter. The data chapter closes with a brief general conclusion about the findings.

5.2 *Magic and the supernatural*

Any film script that derives its plots from fairy stories is likely to depend on magic as a device to move the plot along or to enhance its appeal to the imagination of its audiences. Certainly, Disney has employed magic to engage audiences, ensuring surprise after surprise. In the pre-2000 productions, magic is fun: it is used to spread happiness and joy and to overcome evil or dark forces that might seek to destroy the worlds that Disney has built. Indeed, the storytellers use magic to suggest that somewhere, somehow, supernatural powers could construct utopia. In the opening scene of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), for instance, the narrator tells the story of an enchantress who curses a spoilt prince, his castle and all its inhabitants. The curse turns the prince into a beast and his guests and servants into anthropomorphic and humorous furniture. Evil is present in the story in the form of the curse, but it is tempered by the amusement created by the furniture that talks. The darkness here is lightened to the point that it seems mere lip

service to Gothic tropes: for example, the story of the curse and the transformation of the prince is contained within the abstract images of a stained-glass window. The impact of evil is minimised by the distance thus created between the event and the audience. A curse should incite fear, and its removal marks the 1991 movie as a tamed version of the original fairy tale. Its Gothic base is all but lost, and the real message is joy. Evil does its best to interfere with the journey to the 'happily ever after' ending but is defeated by love and pureness of heart.

By contrast, the same scene in the 2017 telling of *Beauty and the Beast* is not narrated through a series of caricatured stained windows, but instead, presents each action visually. There is a ball at the castle, but celebration and dancing ceases, the ballroom darkens, and the guests become apprehensive. Just as a raging thunderstorm begins outside, a withered old woman knocks on the door begging the prince for shelter, but he ignores her pleas and makes fun of her appearance. When she transforms into a floating enchantress, he realises that she is far mightier than he is, and collapses on the ground asking for mercy. Undeterred, however, she curses him, and while the staff and guests flee screaming, the prince stares in disbelief at the sublime vision before him. At this point, the curse transforms the prince into the beast, and the transformation is presented in an extreme close-up visual of his eyes, brows and nose. It is graphic and intended to horrify, and the contrast between the two versions of the films could not be more stark. In the 2017 re-telling, Gothic horror is powerfully and immediately close to the audience. The two movies tell the same story, but the markedly different opening scenes set completely different tones for the following events.

Magic is used in the films to alter individuals and events for both good and bad. Curses, a strong form of evil magic, sometimes wreak undeserved misfortune, but at other times, are imposed as punishments for bad behaviour. In the Gothic, the 'deserved' curse is often

a call for repentance and redemption, and so carries religious overtones. In both versions of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991; 2017) for example, the curse on the prince will be lifted only when the lesson about kindness has been learnt, so it forces the prince to seek change, via manipulation, towards atonement -- and in turn, towards a happy ending. In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the magic abilities of the three good fairies Flora, Fauna and Merryweather can be used only for righteous causes, and their commitment to good works has more than slight religious undertones. The fairies earn earthly respect for their powers and good deeds. They are introduced to the court as "most honoured and exalted", and later called "excellencies", but perhaps the most telling connection with religion is that the good fairies are expected to give Aurora "blessings", prayers that call for God's protection and sanctification (McDonald, 2018).

Magic is an idea whose appeal lies in being able to change life without effort, but Disney has guaranteed that there is no megalomania involved in the endless power the good fairies have access to. Instead, the four perform deeds that are not only intended to create joy for the recipient, but are also performed *in* joy. For instance, the fairies produce a beautiful cake and dress for Aurora's (now called Briar-Rose) sixteenth birthday. The ingredients dance into the bowl of their own accord, and lovely fabric forms itself into a dress. The broom, mop and bucket are alive and do their work while happily dancing. The fairies are always presented as happy and light-hearted. Even disputes among them are settled by pretty magic. For example, a disagreement about the colour of Aurora's dress is settled by a comical spell fight between Merryweather and Flora. The spells often miss the dress entirely and instead change the colour of most things in the room. The scene produces a comic effect, but more importantly, the fairies' magic is firmly associated with kindness and the service of others.

In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Maleficent is the opposing supernatural force to the goodness of the three fairies. She uses her magic to do only evil, and curses baby Aurora as revenge for not being invited to the celebration of her birth. Where the magic of good fairies consistently serves others, Maleficent's magic is capricious and self-serving. The good fairies' wands scatter fairy dust and sparkles, whereas Maleficent's staff spews a green fog full of images of bats, mystical creatures and ominous visions of the future. The hazy images of the spinning wheel and Aurora lying as though dead, and the whirling movement of the fog, are all intended to create fear, turmoil and premonition. Following the Gothic tradition, Maleficent is monstrous, evil for the sake of being evil, unkind even to her own army-slaves, whom she punishes for disgracing 'the forces of evil', and thus can be likened to holding some form of a demonic power.

The film explores an uncomplicated dichotomy between good and evil. Maleficent represents unalloyed evil, and Aurora pure good. When Maleficent (whose name means "evil doer") lures Aurora into the hidden passageways beyond the fireplace and takes her to the top of the tower, her temptation somewhat echoes Eve's trial in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3: 4-5). Like Eve, Aurora yields to the temptation, and like Eve, she pays a high price for her actions. In the movie, the princess is in a trance, hypnotised by Maleficent's magic, and unaware of her surroundings. She follows the glowing green ball while the good fairies call desperately to her, but she cannot resist the blandishments of Maleficent's disembodied voice. Maleficent uses her magical staff to show Prince Phillip Aurora's fate. The vision into the future shows events that typify Gothic concerns about isolation, victimisation and loss of identity, although the darkness is somewhat mitigated by the humour of an ancient Phillip, and his decrepit horse, finally released from her imprisonment, riding off on a rescue mission. Again, the fear factor has been softened, and shows that the main purpose of the movie is not to scare, but to provide amusing, light-hearted escapism for a young audience.

Beauty and the Beast (1991) emphasises magical items like the mirror that enables the user to see other people. The Beast uses the mirror to watch Belle. Modern sensibilities are alert to an array of questions about privacy and intrusion, but these issues are lost because of the humorous discussion Belle is having with a plump, smiley wardrobe who is trying to convince her that despite his looks, the Beast is not a bad creature. Another magical object is the enchanted rose which will continue blooming until his 21st birthday. This rose is the timepiece of the tale, and the Beast protects it to ensure continuation of his life. However, it is also the representation of the hated curse that binds him in monster form. In Gothic texts there is often a play on identity, and the rose is therefore the symbol of his duality. The third magical item is the old carriage that takes Maurice back to the village. It has no wheels, but when Maurice is pushed inside, it breaks the vines which surround it, springs to life and walks off on its struts, looking like some sort of spider-creature that has swallowed him alive. The appearance of the carriage raises doubts about whether Maurice will make it back home after all. Magical animation makes the carriage a deeply ambiguous object: it carries its passenger safely but looks threatening and dangerous.

The anxiety invoked by this scene makes it one of the few in the film that is genuinely Gothic, employing the tropes of imprisonment and isolation. Maurice suffers a high amount of anxiety because he leaves his daughter, trapped within the castle of the Beast, while he too is imprisoned, in the belly of another beast. Belle, too, is distraught as she watches him leave. Imprisonment is a dark theme, but it does not last long in the 1991 movie. The Beast returns to Belle after this event, and immediately offers her a room in the castle so that she does not need to be uncomfortable or feel like a prisoner. The darkness that surrounds the castle is relieved by the enchanted, anthropomorphic furniture that Belle quickly accepts without question, and finds joy in their presence. The furniture 'creatures' entertain Belle with their comedic antics. For example, Lumière (the

candelabra) and Cogsworth (the clock) constantly disagree with one another, blaming each other for almost every incident that occurs in the castle. These 'magicked' characters are simple and uncomplicated, but they lighten the sinister atmosphere. By any measure, there is wickedness at work at the castle, but humour is used to negate the feeling of the evil that is present. The talking furniture is surprising but not frightening for either Maurice or Belle. Indeed, the personalities of the chatty furniture provide comic relief and the humour lessens the potential the film has to create fear. The plot deals with imprisonment, but there is little terror accompanying the narrative. A pattern, then, emerges in the 20th century films that potentially terrifying circumstances surrounded in Gothic themes were set up, but humour and human bungling were quickly deployed to diminish any fear the audience might feel.

The 2017 version of the film both retains the anthropomorphised furniture, and likewise, uses it to introduce humour that lightens the atmosphere. As in the earlier movie, the furniture serves and comforts Belle, but there are considerable differences in their actions. For instance, it is Lumière, not the Beast, who moves Belle into a lavish bedroom. His motivation for this deed might well be self-interest, because, as Lumière explains, unless the Beast can overcome the curse, they will all lose their sentience and dwindle into inanimate objects. Lumière 'needs' Belle to fall in love with the Beast, so it is imperative for him to make her comfortable, and hopefully filled with happiness. Another difference between the two versions is the way that the furniture in the 2017 film speaks to Belle and Beast. For example, Mrs Potts praises Belle for her bravery in taking the place of her father, is understanding and gives her good counsel, whereas the 1991 movie uses the furniture primarily for comic relief.

The 2017 film also intensifies some very relatable human traits into the anthropomorphic furniture, which emphasises the peril of their situation. For instance, 'real-world humans'

Lumière and Plumette share a deep love, and Maestro Cadenza shows how alienated he feels without his wife, Madame de Garderobe, by his side. The song *Days in the Sun*[8] is a new addition to the previous film of 1991, and it serves to further emphasise the 'humanness' by presenting the sadness and remorse that these characters feel for their part in creating the Beast, and how they long for a normal life. There is pathos in Lumière's explanation to Belle that when the last rose petal falls, the Beast will be cursed forever, and 'they', the furniture, will descend into "rubbish". The deep emotions, including grief, exhibited by these characters lends the narrative a sombre tone that was not present in the 1991 version.

A mirror and a rose feature among the magical objects in both versions of the films, but B*eauty and the Beast* (2017) includes an enchanted book as well. In both the 1991 and the 2017 movies, the mirror allows brief glimpses of other characters, but in the later version, the tone of what it shows has changed from a cheerfulness to sadness, distress and isolation which align with Gothic themes. Beast watches Belle as she sits upon the floor in her room alone, and the sadness in her entrapment and sense of isolation are seen. Attitudes towards the magical rose, however, seem to retain both the reverence and the hatred that were clear in the 1991 film, and its role as the timer for fulfilment of the curse remains unchanged. The rose enhances the tensions in the narrative, as viewers' imaginations conjure the different scenarios that might eventuate if the conditions of the curse are not met. In the 2017 film, the enchanted book allows travel to different times and locations. Belle and the Beast use it to travel back to her birthplace in Paris where they witness the death of her mother from the Bubonic plague. It also shows her father's sorrow when he takes Belle to safety and leaves his wife to die alone. These scenes are

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[8] Score by Alan Menken; lyrics by Tim Rice

dark, both in colour palette and in the uncanny and haunted content, adding deep sadness to the story that is not present in the earlier version. Belle wanted to know what happened to her mother, but the information fills her with grief. She brings back a token of her mother, a plastic rose which her mother cherished as a reminder of her home.

It is not just objects and characters that demonstrate magic, but also landscapes and buildings. In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Maleficent's castle is ominous and threatening, permanently in the dark on the top of the 'Forbidden Mountain', surrounded by lightning and swirling black clouds. The castle is aesthetically Gothic, not only in its architecture but also in its general disintegration. The location and the dilapidation work together to raise terror, but the impact of the place is diminished by the humorous antics that take place. For example, the attempts of Maleficent's creatures to push boulders off the walls to crush Phillip are thwarted by the good fairies, who turn the stones into bubbles. Arrows are made into flowers and the fairies create a rainbow that protects Phillip from cauldrons of boiling liquid that are tipped off the wall. These scenes could have been used to instil deep fear, but the impact of the Gothic mode is reduced by good and humorous deeds. In comparison, the castle of the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) is imposing and Gothic, set deep within the forest. The Gothic style is depicted in the high pointed arches, cavernous ribbed vaults and the abundance of gargoyles and other ornate decorations. This castle is covered in vines, and following the tradition of places where horror occurs, it is surrounded by darkness, mist and lightning. However, contrasting the castle of Maleficent in 1959, the castle is not dilapidated, and though it is dark, it is clean and shows great opulence.

In a further example of the nature of the landscapes, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Maurice takes a wrong turn in the forest and ends up in a dark and unknown space. His horse Philippe backs away from the sound of howling wolves, and banging into a tree,

sends countless shrieking bats into the air. Panicking, Philippe bolts, Maurice falls to the ground and the wolves chase him. Although this scene can be argued as Gothic due to the setting and way it raises tensions, it is also comical because of the absent and confused demeanor of Maurice, who blames the horse for getting lost. Philippe's anthropomorphic antics are also amusing, with his wide eyes and the scared expressions on his face, he deflects the magnitude of the events taking place. The terror is thus mitigated during this wolf chase and ends when Maurice enters the grounds of the Beast, slamming the castle gates in the faces of the wolves.

The landscapes in the post-2000 films reveal changes in the handling of Gothic subtexts and the tone of the movies. For example, in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), the forest surrounding the Beast's castle is a dark, treacherous environment. When Maurice ventures down the foggy pathway, he finds that although it is summer in the 'real' world, here, it is cold and snowing. He is also chased by a pack of snow wolves who are trying to kill him, as seen in the 1991 version, but these creatures are ferocious and truly chilling, and there is no form of comic relief. Here, in a temporal shift that is typical of the Gothic, the forest becomes a subliminal space -- a single place existing in two time frames. Shaw (2017) says that sublimity is that moment "when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated" (p. 3), and while Maurice is terrified because he is facing certain death, he is also bewildered and in awe of the strangeness of his surroundings. His horse Philippe miraculously rescues him, and they gallop through the castle gates, but his confusion persists. The castle too is a mysterious and enchanted Gothic space that the snow wolves are afraid to enter, where the sublime space produces a mixture of excitement and fear (Woodford, 2016). Maurice's fear of being eaten by the wolves has passed, but the tone of the film does not change as he now faces the Beast's castle.

The castle of the Beast in the 2017 version is lost to the outside world and has become a permanent wintry space of gloom and darkness surrounded by a thick fog. The depiction of the castle continues the Gothic trope in its visual architectural presentation, it includes pointed turrets and gargoyles and it is covered over with thick vines that strangle the columns, that have now turned into concrete, creating a vivid image of the strangling curse upon all within it. The Beast's castle is a powerful Gothic image intended to raise the level of terror (Clery, 1995). It also offers an immediate and rich contrast to the end of the movie, where once the curse has been broken, the evil surrounding the castle has been removed and the original beauty is restored.

Similarly, in *Maleficent* (2014), the Moors is another example of a Disney sublime Gothic space. The Moors, a magical kingdom in an enchanted forest surrounded by large, protruding standing stones, is home to fairies and other strange and beautiful supernatural creatures. The Moors are known to be filled with treasures far beyond human comprehension, but it is also an impregnable fortress guarded by terrifying mythical beasts. The splendour and serenity of the space can alter in an instant according to necessity, and when the Moors are under attack, the trees turn into a mesh of gnarled branches and impenetrable thorns. Also, when Maleficent loses faith in humans, the space darkens to reflect her mood, transforming into a menacing Gothic space full of pervasive, unrelieved gloom. This permeating darkness is not present in the older *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) film. Here, Maleficent's anger is expressed through the objects surrounding her. Her wooden throne-type seat, for instance, mutates into something that can be likened only to an open chest cavity with the spine in full view. When Maleficent steps into the cavity and sits within the 'skeleton', she is effectively being swallowed, and her throne has become a Gothic representation. There is a depiction of life given to the chair that is particularly dark and creepy, and further signals the ominous mood of Maleficent while emphasizing how the supernatural world around her feeds off her given frame of

mind. Botting (2013) says that in the Gothic framework, natural objects evoke the sublime, and in *Maleficent* (2014), the natural world moves towards the dark side of the supernatural. The Gothic tropes in these two examples are used in the film to create and prolong anxiety by constructing an altered reality within the depicted space, and there is no comic relief running alongside the Gothic themes.

5.3 Monsters and villains

Another Gothic element that forms a large component of the Disney fairy tales are the villains and monsters, expressed either in the physical form of a beast or in monstrous behaviour and character. For reference, the monster is an individual who embodies menace, mystery and jeopardy (Cohen, 1970). Shildrick (2000) says that the actions of monsters fall outside the standard rules of normally accepted behaviour, and so challenge societal norms and values. A villain is accepted as the evil character within a text, continually trying to upend plans and entertaining diabolical thoughts about how to harm others and ruin their chances of happiness. In Disney fairy tale films, the villain and the monster are often the same character, and their presence is used to invoke terror. In some instances, the evil of the villains is diffused with humour that reduces the level of fear they can create. These 'cleaned up' villains and monsters indicate that the films are paying mere lip-service to the existence of 'real' malevolence and evil.

Beauty and the Beast (1991) offers examples of the physical and the psychological monster. The Beast's grotesque appearance, animalistic abilities and fearsome, unpredictable behaviour all identify him as monstrous. In all obvious respects, he fits the Gothic image of a monster, yet he has earned loyalty from his staff, and although Belle is afraid at first, she will often defy his instructions. On the one hand he is the creature who will display real rage and abusive, unacceptable behaviour; on the other hand, he is the softer being who saves Belle from certain death in the forest and acts like a needy child

when she tends to his wounds. The monster in the 1991 film is educated, funny and kind, and becomes more likeable when in response to kindness and understanding. The disjoin between the thoroughly monstrous exterior and the gentlemanly interior becomes more marked as the film progresses, and in this respect the Beast offers insight into the anger felt by those who reside beyond the margins of society, who are disadvantaged and often misunderstood.

The 1991 film also features another type of monster, one whose monstrousness lies in his psychology rather than his physiology. Gaston is the hero of the village and the villain of the tale, adored for his striking good looks. In a reversal of the Beast's situation, his appearance is a gift to the eye, but his behaviour is crass: he is a vain, selfish, uneducated, narcissistic buffoon, and he constantly inflicts extreme physical force on his friend LeFou. LeFou, whose name translates as 'the fool', is Gaston's most devoted friend yet he often suffers being punched in the face, thrown across the room, throttled and shaken. Gaston is the monster who commits these awful acts, but the concept of monstrousness is extended to the villagers, who are complicit in Gaston's actions because they encourage his displays with laughter and applause. Here, the film presents a deeply disturbing message about abuse being somehow acceptable if it makes people laugh. In this respect, LeFou's reactions to Gaston's behaviour downplay the fact that one man is using his superior physical strength to abuse another. Despite his physical attractiveness, Gaston is a monster and he becomes more monstrous as the film progresses. The culmination of his monstrousness is shooting the Beast in the back regardless of Belle's assurances that the Beast is no monster at all. In the 1991 *Beauty and the Beast*, the character of Gaston is a simple reminder of the old proverb that "all that glistens is not gold", but the villagers, with their careless acceptance of evil taking place among them every day, offer a more complex insight into monstrousness.

Sleeping Beauty (1959) offers a collection of monsters whose evil is mostly confined to their appearance. Maleficent keeps an armed militia of creatures to aid her mischief, and these monsters take the form of anthropomorphised animals such as pigs, hyenas and crocodiles, and birds such as parrots, toucans and shoebills. The 'monsters' are cute rather than frightening, and their function is to amuse and counterbalance Maleficent's evil intentions. Maleficent is a more convincingly Gothic monster than her militia. There is no explanation of her origins as a wicked fairy, but she is filled with hatred and has proclaimed herself as the 'Mistress of Evil'. As 'mistress', she is the woman in control of her house, which in this case is evil or hell, and here again is the religious connotation I discussed earlier. Maleficent is interesting because she lacks the wings that are the signifier of all fairies, so she cannot fly, but instead she is adorned with horns. Perhaps labelling her as 'Wicked Fairy' is a deliberate action by Disney to deflect from her true identity, which looks closer to that of a demon than to a fairy, and less frightening for younger audiences.

Maleficent in the 1959 version is wicked for the sake of wickedness, after not receiving an invitation to the celebrations, the magnitude of her curse on the innocent baby Aurora shows a punishment that far exceeds the 'crime'. She possesses the ability to call on supernatural forces which give her great power, including the ability to disappear from one place and instantly reappear at another. Her presence creates violent and foreboding disturbances in the weather, as seen, for instance, when she arrives at the castle. A spectacular storm surrounds the castle, and in a piece of obvious but effective symbolism, Maleficent materialises from below ground, where evil is traditionally thought to dwell. Maleficent is capricious, and continuing the connection to the demonic, she seeks to perform evil for its own sake. According to the three good fairies, she has no love or kindness in her heart at all. One example of her cruelty is imprisoning Prince Phillip for one hundred years in the hope that he will never achieve happiness with Aurora. When her

first plan fails, and he escapes, in truly evil fashion she tries to kill him with lightning. Maleficent's deeds position her as a Gothic monster who creates sadness for entertainment, but her evil never prevails for more than a few moments. She is continuously usurped by others, and her evil intent is portrayed as something that easily can be overcome by good. The Gothic impact of the 1959 film is therefore weakened by Disney's constant turning to the light-heartedness and sugary humour.

A different approach is evident in *Maleficent* (2014). The Gothic tone is set by characters like the forest dragon and the tree warriors that appear from beneath the tree line of the Moors. The tree creatures are large, dark, disfigured and terrifying. Their roots reform into skulls and rib cages, they shake the ground and transform into monsters when they become visible. Their terrifying appearance is emphasised by a portentous soundtrack. The king and his men are, very sensibly, frightened by the monsters they see, but in a classic Gothic opposition of good and evil, they must fight. When the forest dragon erupts from the soil, the battle begins, and in this version, there is no humorous bungling or lightening of the action. The battle scene shows men flung to their death, ripped apart, trampled and eaten. The monsters have one intention, which is to destroy any threat to the Moors.

Twenty-first century monsters are the characters of Maleficent and Diaval from *Maleficent* (2014), and Beast from *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). These characters present themselves with humanlike traits and characteristics in varying degrees, like that of the anthropomorphic Beast, or through time spent in human form during shapeshifting like that of Diaval. Maleficent appears very similar to her form in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), as she is also a fairy but, in this film, she has wings to accompany the horns. Her body and features are humanlike, as are many of her actions and movements, but she spends most of her time flying in this film, which emphasizes that she is indeed not a human. In this

sense, these monsters re-confirm the overarching Gothic themes by tapping into the notion of uncanny, where they are abnormal or 'other', yet familiar in action and mannerisms to that of human characteristics and behaviours (Royle, 2003). This uncanny effect given to the creatures portrayed is because of the eroding of the "distinction between imagination and reality" (Freud, 1919, p. 367), and thus it can be argued that the characters within the tale, as well as the audience, may be viewing these monsters as a Gothic text, representing their own dark and hidden innermost self, through the lens of the 'other'.

In *Maleficent* (2014), the main character has a back story that accounts for her evil disposition. She begins the story as a positive, happy young girl whose outlook is permanently altered by attacks made upon her and her home. The assaults position humans as both evil and greedy and, in some measure, absolve Maleficent's anger at the injustices directed at her and her kind. The humans have always felt threatened by the magical Moors and its creatures, and because Maleficent adopts the role of protector of the Moors, she is considered an enemy to humankind. Although fairies are often found living lives that are quite like those of humans, their feelings are depicted as more intense than humans. Thus, "good" emotions such as happiness or generosity are heightened, but so too are anger, jealousy and malice (Hulse, 2020). In the 2014 version of the film, Maleficent's unrelieved fury is given its full Gothic power. For example, when the king attacks the Moors, Maleficent fights back with no mercy, directing her creatures to kill the king's soldiers violently and relentlessly. Maleficent and her army are far more powerful than the humans, and her ferocious anger forces the surviving human soldiers to flee. The battle is presented with none of the humorous relief that characterised the earlier film, but a form of mitigation is offered, in that the audience knows why Maleficent is performing harm, they know her backstory. Compared with the earlier film, the mitigation is dark, but it is there, and it shows that her actions have their own internal

logic: she is defending her home and loved ones. Maleficent embodies contemporary feelings about loss and grief and, by responding swiftly and harshly, she maintains her position as protector, albeit by tactics that are questionable in contemporary sensibilities.

Rosenberger (2013) says that in Gothic text the monster is birthed from questionable or highly flawed creators, and in this 2014 film the depiction of Maleficent as the monster is seen in contrast to the human who is the real monster. She is the monster according to the humans for her actions against the king and his soldiers creating the human and creature dichotomy between them, but also for seeking revenge on Stefan through his child after he tricks and drugs her, brutally cutting off her wings. This play between what appears as the monster within the film and the reality of who the monster is speaks to what Skal (2012) discusses, as the nature of monsters being "slippery, ever-adaptive metaphors" (p. xi), placed to demonstrate and teach valuable lessons. The backstory between Stefan and Maleficent is simple: They are inseparable as children, and it seems that the old and broken ties between the humans and the creatures of the Moors may dissolve.

Maleficent feels a great love for Stefan, yet his inner demon or monster is the desire to become a king. When the opportunity arises, he drugs Maleficent and cuts off her powerful wings in order to offer them to the king on his death bed as proof that Maleficent is dead and claim the throne. The monstrous behaviour of Stefan is represented through the Gothic framework of deceit and depicts the lengths he will succumb to in the pursuit of power. These themes express modern cultural anxieties of manipulation and show how people can be transformed into evil sadistic monsters, altering the lives of their victims forever. This Disney film resurrects notions of what it is to be labelled a human monster and intersects the actions of Stefan with the wretched and dark desire for power seen in a Gothic atmosphere, which can, through presentation

to a young audience, "feed freely on childhood night-time fears and daytime phobias" (Georgieva, 2013, p. 175). Here, the Gothic continues to layer the text, where anxieties and fears are dragged to the fore using terror and horror, which Botting (1996) says are always inextricably linked. The dark supernatural forces, huge wings and horns of Maleficent for example, create terror not only for the other characters in the story, but also for viewers, who can discern that this fairy is very angry, dangerous, and has just cause.

Diaval is another monster in the 2014 film. He is a raven rescued from death by Maleficent and thereby indebted to her. He becomes Maleficent's shape shifter servant, compelled to transform into any animal she requires to aid her plans, and is significant as a sort of lesser monster created to serve the master monster. Maleficent transforms Diaval from his raven self to human, horse, wolf and dragon at will, and thus his lack of control and consent create the Gothic trope of entrapment, where in his form as a wolf and dragon, Diaval becomes the monster. His gradual appearance matches Cohen's (1970) assertion that monsters exude mystery and threat. At first, he is invisible in the darkness except for his luminous yellow eyes, and then he reveals himself as bigger than an ordinary wolf, deep black, and intelligently threatening. Botting (1996, p. 2) says that Gothic monsters are "desolate, alienating and full of menace", which matches the Diaval in his wolf form. The soldiers and their horses are terrified by what Andriano (1999, p. 91) describes as "the primal fear of being eaten". The scene raises the question of who precisely the monster is because the wolf does not take this role willingly. Diaval's natural form is a crow; he serves Maleficent in gratitude for saving his life, but this transformation is by duty, not choice. Maleficent, who is the notional villain in the film, controls him as she would any other weapon. When Diaval is later transformed into the dragon in King Stefan's castle, he lacks nothing in ferocity. His power is palpable, as is the fear of death he inspires, yet there is a certain pathos to Diaval's actions. Transformation into a monster creates a sense

of a claustrophobic imprisonment within the body of a beast, and Diaval therefore represents the Gothic prisoner.

In a marked departure from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Maleficent* (2014) showcases prolonged scenes of threats and violence. In fact, the film is the recreation of various literary adaptations of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty. Magnus-Johnson et al. (2016) explain that "fairy-tale films do not simply repeat the content of an oral/traditional or literary original; they are adaptations that create new versions in a significant intertextual relationship in which each version informs the other" (p xiv). Similarly, Gothic narratives are adaptations and snatches of earlier stories interwoven over time, playing on the memories of past fears. When Diaval becomes the dragon, he splices Gothic and fairy tale together by leaning on early stories of the Gothic serpent-like creature with all the terrors that attach to it, and becoming this monster in a Disney fairy tale. The monster in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) is depicted through the character the 'Beast'. According to Bowen (2014), Gothic narratives include tropes of extreme isolation, and in this film, the Beast takes Maurice prisoner for stealing a rose from the garden. The injustice of Maurice's imprisonment without trial resonates with contemporary anxieties about abduction and could certainly raise anxieties for the 'stranger danger' generation. Putting aside any affront to contemporary sensibilities, the scene is vivid and brings a realness to the narrative: Maurice has been captured and is kept alone, caged high in a tower in a dismal stone room, and no one knows where he is. The room is empty of furniture, and he is ill and suffering from the cold. The punishment is grossly disproportionate to the relatively harmless crime, and Maurice's situation sparks both sympathy and indignation.

5.4 Body modification and hidden identities

The modification of the body and hidden identities is another large component of Disney fairy tales that also carries Gothic connotations. Spooner (2004) contends that one

element of the Gothic is the deliberate practice of disguise, and there are several examples of this in Disney fairy tale narratives when the body-real is juxtaposed with against the body-unreal. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), the modification of the prince's body into beast form is not part of the animation, and instead, the film concentrates on the transformation at the end when the Beast reverts back to his princely form. This modification signals that the monster has changed both internally and externally and can cast off his outer 'skin'. The transformation is a beautiful and joyous event: The Beast is lifted into the air on pastel raindrops, turning slowly in mid-air as his form is altered. This scene is beautiful: streams of bright light flow from his fingers, feet and face as he transforms, and there are overtones of medieval religious paintings of the transfiguration of saints. The Beast ascends as a monster, and in a physical representation of the inner transformation, descends like a heavenly figure, perfect in every way. Body modification is a Gothic trope, but here any horror associated with the morphing of a body is over-written to resemble an angelic event. Any Gothic terror is nullified and nothing sinister remains.

In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Maleficent can modify her body and she changes form when she challenges Prince Phillip to battle. She summons "all the powers of hell" to aid her as she rises into the clouds, coming out from above them in the shape of a black dragon. The music score is very dramatic and emphasises the evil taking shape as the prince stares in disbelief at the monster he must overcome. As a dragon, Maleficent is huge and demonic, and seems unstoppable in her modified form. However, in this scene, the three good fairies save the day by enchanting Phillip's sword with a spell that will slay the dragon. The confrontation between the dragon and the prince should have been tense, but it is clear that even the most unpleasant situation can be solved with a little magic from 'the good side'. The fear that body modification should have raised is tamed by the intervention of the good fairies, and the dark Gothic presence in the film is reduced.

Hidden identities are common in Gothic texts, and costumes and body modification are frequently used to disguise either a whole person or particular attributes of a person. In both *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *Maleficent* (2014), three good fairies accept the guardianship of Aurora, and in both movies, the fairies conceal their true identities and magical abilities. Taking on the appearance and behaviour of human peasant women, they bring Aurora up in humble surroundings, and keep her unaware of her royal blood. However, the two films show very different outcomes of the deception: in the earlier film, the fairies protect and nurture Aurora/Briar Rose and she grows up loved and happy. In the later film, the fairies are so inept that ironically, Aurora would not have survived without the intervention of the evil fairy, Maleficent. Setting aside the differences in the way the two groups of fairies nurture Aurora, the plots of both films treat hidden identity in the same way: the fairies eventually resume their magic and status, and in a Gothic flourish, Aurora is revealed as the "lost" princess, a trope that speaks to hidden fantasies of being instantly transformed from humble to grand, from peasant to royal, from lowly to the highest in the land. However, there are other issues at play. In the 1959 version, the good fairies are wholly good: their care of Aurora/Briar Rose is exemplary, but in the later film, the fairies are poor guardians. They are careless and ignorant, and perhaps most importantly, uncaring about their inadequacies. Here, then, is a more nuanced case of hidden identity: the fairies' public reputation for goodness is not matched by their private deeds. Maleficent, too, shows a hidden aspect to her identity: no matter her motivation, she does actually save Aurora from the dangers she is placed in by the cavalier behaviour of the good fairies. In comparison with the unalloyed sweetness of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the mix of good with bad in the later film paints a shadow over good and shines a brighter light on the bad.

In *Maleficent* (2014), Diaval unwillingly suffers many body modifications to suit Maleficent's needs, but he particularly hates the transformation to wolf to terrify the

soldiers in the Moors. He is angry because in his true form as a raven, he considers wolves and dogs to be the worst of all creatures, describing them as dirty and vicious and he is horrified to become a creature that eats birds. Here, there is a reference to cannibalism that conjures up notions of what Brown (2012) calls the "unnatural and monstrous" (p. 4) in the Gothic canon. The transformation raises questions about his state of mind as a wolf. Would his 'wolfness' cause him to crave raven meat in the same way it caused him to relish the prospect of eating humans, and would that meal be "a pleasure accompanied by fear and disgust" (Novak, 1979, p. 65)? Transformations affect more than the exterior being (Sweetman, 2000), and Diaval is affronted to the depths of his psyche by the connotations of becoming the very animal that is most dangerous to ravens. The physical transformation to the wolf creates a psychological transformation, a new identity, that causes him to experience the most unnatural feelings he could ever have imagined.

Beauty and the Beast (2017) uses body modification to teach much-needed lessons. The arrogant, cruel prince is taught humility and compassion by a curse that transforms him into a fearsome beast, a form that he must keep until he has changed enough that someone can truly love him. The appearance of the Beast takes the story into the Gothic space of the uncanny, where, according to Royle (2003) a person may be "double, split, at odds" (p. 6), a single being who is more than one entity and in conflict within their own being. At the point of his transformation, the prince switches instantaneously between begging for mercy and violent rage when he realises he is trapped inside the body of the Beast. From this point, he is more than one being: no longer human, but of sound 'human' mind. He is estranged from himself, and as part of being a displaced person, he is never named, which emphasises his solitude and his isolation both from himself and from other people. Hidden in his castle and known only to his staff who have also been transformed, the Beast lives as a not-human and re-lives his previous existence as a 'deformed' human whose outward appearance made him acceptable. In fact, the Prince was always at odds

with himself, and both his body transformations are the outward expression of his inner state at the time. As a man, he was split between outward attractiveness and inner ugliness; as a beast, the reverse gradually comes to be true. The modification from man to beast speaks of a deep fear that somehow, inner nastiness will be revealed for the whole world to 'read' on the body. The opposite transformation, however, carries intimations of the ineffable and union of outer and inner beauty.

5.5 Gender and the patriarchy

The films made in the 20th century are narratives located in fantasy worlds that brim with patriarchal attitudes based in gendered ideologies that construct the view that happiness can occur only under these conditions. The opening scene of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) for example, depicts King Stefan, the most powerful person in the land, making unilateral decisions for both his family and the kingdom, while his wife sits silently beside him. When he welcomes dignitaries to the celebration of Princess Aurora's birth, he rises to greet King Hubert, but the queen remains seated and is not acknowledged. This places what Steinberg (2011, p. 18) refers to as a "hegemonic hold on children's culture" where a reduced importance on women becomes the preferred narrative for younger audiences. The same approach is evident in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) where the men decide whom they will wed, and permission is granted by the girl's father, not by the girl herself. Gaston, for instance, has nothing in common with Belle, and although she is reluctant to be courted by him, he pursues her relentlessly.

The reduction of women's voice and power makes them objects to be manipulated by men, which typifies the Gothic. In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) the king announces that his new-born daughter Aurora is promised in marriage to Prince Phillip in a bid to unite the two royal families. This trope is not uncommon in Disney fairy tales: in *Aladdin* (1992), Princess Jasmine must marry a prince when she turns sixteen and in *Brave* (2012), Merida's father

intends to choose her a husband who will best suit his family and kingdom. This narrative runs close to early Gothic literature like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), in which families are led by fathers who are rulers or kings (Georgieva, 2013). Marriage has been used throughout history to unite two families (Merali, 2012), but the representation of the practice in Disney's films normalises the attitudes behind it. Perhaps Disney intended to present historically accurate social structures, but it is nevertheless true that the arranged marriages which Disney portrays perpetuate the idea that men can arrange women's lives as they wish. Certainly, Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), believes Belle should be honored by the opportunity to marry him. He makes preparations for their wedding ceremony before he even asks for her hand, and regardless of the fact that Belle has previously indicated she is not interested in the union, he disregards any feedback from her.

Making sure that girls become worthy of love seems central to Disney's fairy tale films. Girls are taught be ladies, to dress to appeal to men, and to do household chores in order to earn the love of a "good man". Patriarchal societies such as the ones depicted in the films construct their women to become domestic and passive individuals (Campenni, 1999), with priority placed on physical and sexual beauty (Dietz, 1998). In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), significantly, the first gift Aurora receives from the fairies is beauty. She grows up with the three good fairies learning 'proper' morals, values and essential housekeeping skills, and when she is reintroduced into the film at almost sixteen, as the epitome of feminine perfection, she has become an 'ideal' candidate for love according to patriarchal ideals. Likewise, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Belle spends her days looking after her father's house. As her names suggests, she is beautiful, well-mannered and gentle, and although she loves to read, her favourite tales are about falling in love. Thus, Belle also conforms to the norms of the patriarchy.

Like Belle, Aurora (Briar-Rose) in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), longs to be loved, and dreams of a tall, handsome, romantic man who will spend time with her and hold her in his arms. She acts out her dreams with her animal friends and they pretend to be her male partner. Fantasies about romance and love are usually synonymous with female stereotypes (Ellemers, 2018), showing women as desiring love and affection. Stereotyped stories are easy to remember, and familiarity makes them easy to relate to (Xu et al., 2019), but they also reinforce the notion that non-conformity is unacceptable. In the 20th century films, ideals for women are continually reestablished, as are the norms that men will be heroic, strong, powerful and in control. Aurora's encounter with the male stranger in the forest brings two specific events to pass. First, simply because he is a well-dressed, handsome and charming man, she abandons all her teachings about stranger-danger, and second, she falls in love with him after just one dance, though she has no idea who he is, where he is from, or even his name. This meeting strengthens the gender norms of the needy woman searching for a man to love her and make her happy.

In fact, the mystery man is Prince Phillip, and his awareness that he is betrothed to the 'soon-returning' Princess Aurora has not stopped him from immediately falling in love with the beautiful and adoring peasant girl with a lovely voice. In this 1959 film, Disney equates love with physical appearance, and confirms the place of the romantic ideal in reproducing the heteronormative relationships and traditional gender roles that Griffin (2000) argues are endemic in American white middle-class ideologies. Subsequent reminders occur to reinforce the white heterosexual union as the height of happiness alone, and it is presented as the primary goal for both the heroine and the hero of the story. Like Aurora, Prince Phillip fits stereotypical gender norms: he is confident, tall and muscular, and almost instantly takes control of Aurora. He shows a strong will when defending his choice of wife, and later displays courage when he is fighting Maleficent and her creatures. His actions are firmly based on the burning love he feels for the girl

who now lies asleep, waiting to be rescued by him, so that her life will be fulfilled. Again, the story embeds the idea that happiness is derived from acquiring love within heteropatriarchal social structures (Garlena & Sandlin, 2017) where female agency is limited and the public display of a wedding endorses the love (Engstrom, 2012). In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), the Beast promises Belle a life of adventure, but even before he is re-transformed, he is an educated partner who owns a massive castle, has servants and a huge library that she loves. When he becomes a handsome prince again, she marries him and thus conforms back to gender norms of the white heterosexual couple who get to live the perfect 'happily ever after' life. To marry the Beast would have been distasteful, even though she had grown to love him.

There are differences in the portrayal of gender between the 20th and 21st century telling of the tales. In *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) Belle is more progressive than she is in the previous Disney adaptation. She teaches a young girl to read and helps her father with his work. She is emotionally and intellectually independent and invents a washing machine to help her with her chores. She also forgoes hats and corsets for more comfortable clothes and does not concern herself with makeup or styled hair. In this respect, she transgresses the gender stereotypes of a typical Disney narrative, and although her choices are her own, she must pay a price. She is labelled 'odd' and shunned by her community, who will not accept her failure to conform to their collective norms. Belle's difference is, it seems, only skin deep, however, because she remains within the same wider framework of stereotypes which connect happiness to being loved by a man. Belle might be able to invent a washing machine, but her favourite stories are about love, and that the best part is when the woman meets her "prince charming". In this film, the patriarchy is unquestioned. Women marry the men their fathers choose, boys go to school while girls stay home to help their mothers, and young women who do not conform are ostracised. *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) shows Belle confined in a world

where the rules of a patriarchal society are upheld. She is expected to marry, have children and tend to the home, but she is different from other girls because she insists on marriage for love, and her actions throughout the film show her as quick-witted, independent and headstrong. Although Belle seems to have adopted some typically masculine tropes, she simultaneously enjoys her femininity, which gives her a less rigid narrative than in the 1991 film.

Young women are expected be attractive to increase their chances of getting married. Throughout *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), three maidens from the village are shown always trying to look their best in the hope of attracting Gaston, who is considered the town's most eligible bachelor. Despite their perfect appearance, flattery and flirting, Gaston shows no interest in them because he is more concerned with his own good looks and is unable to pass a mirror without telling himself how handsome he is. When LeFou points out that Belle is not the right woman for him because she is "so well read" while he is "athletically inclined", Gaston does not understand LeFou's message and will not be persuaded out of his belief that Belle should marry him. In fact, Gaston does not love Belle: he wants to marry her only because she is the prettiest girl in the village, and he does not want to have ugly children. He pursues Belle like a hunter after prey, not like a lover courting a beloved, and the whole sub-plot reinforces the ideal of true love. His 'love' was not true, and it failed, but the Beast's was true, and it succeeded.

With his strength and muscularity, Gaston exudes tropes of hypermasculinity. He enjoys holding the reputation of being a protector to the people, and he continues to hold the villagers' respect despite bad behaviour such as breaking women's hearts, intimidation tactics, biting, spitting and attacking from behind. The character of Gaston is disturbing because it conflates boorish behaviour with masculinity. Gaston is demonstrably stupid, but the villagers place more store on his words than on Belle's, although she is far more

intelligent and educated than he is, emphasising that men will always have more authority even when there is no basis for following them. For instance, though he is operating from a position of ignorance, Gaston easily persuades the villagers to ignore Belle's pleas that the Beast is sweet and kind and he rouses them into a killing frenzy to rid the town of the 'monster'.

LeFou, in the 2017 film is considered to be the first openly gay character in Disney film (Lawler, 2017; Moniuszko, 2017). Walters (2001) contends that "too often, a sympathetic gay character is made somehow 'not gay' in order to be watched by millions of heterosexual viewers" (p. 139). In this film, LeFou is clearly infatuated with Gaston and tries in every way he can to gain Gaston's attention, affection and time. When he is asked why he is not married, LeFou says he is thought to be too "clingy", an adjective often applied to women because they are deemed to be more emotional and desperate to be loved than men. In this statement, LeFou defines his character as feminine, but the acknowledgment is indirect and subtle. References like this are often used as coded messages for queer relations, purposely hiding their identity from the bulk of the audience and "knowable only to the astute (often gay) filmgoer" (Walters, 2001, p. 131). Walters (2001) notes that main-stream Hollywood producers avoid engaging with subjects and characters who are gay, and although LeFou signals in multiple ways that he is queer, his sexuality is never openly named. Instead, his character provides comic relief throughout the film. LeFou is the fool to Gaston the hero; the butt of jokes that Gaston makes; the recipient of Gaston's violent temper.

Gaston is well-aware that LeFou is gay because in the exchange with Maurice in the tavern Gaston plays on LeFou's feelings for him. Gaston looks into his eyes, rubs his hands slowly across LeFou's shoulder and arms and rubs his chin. He makes LeFou look into his gaze when answering the question of whether Gaston was lying, which results in LeFou stating

that it is a "complicated situation". This response resonates with the words used to describe a difficult heterosexual relationship, but also that of closeted gay relations, and judging by the way Gaston takes total control of LeFou it raises the question of the nature of this association between them. Though the movie includes a gay character, it is not as a fully-realised individual, but rather, as a foil to the heteronormative stereotypes that Disney promulgates.

The Beast of 2017 is presented as a fearsome creature, and although he is not a 'man' on the outside, he nevertheless portrays recognisably masculine tropes such as strength and size, a deep voice and the assumption that he controls all the people and activities in his castle. For instance, he tries to order Belle about, treating her with disdain because he sees her as a peasant who is not worthy of his time or energy. The Beast is a product of the patriarchal society into which he was born and demonstrates the 18th century norm that royalty should command the lands and the people within them. However, as the film progresses, the Beast begins to gain respect and affection for Belle and finally, having fallen in love for the first time, begins to act in ways that do not focus on his interests only. His character has begun to absorb some noble characteristics, but he still demonstrates typical masculine tropes.

The closing scene of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) shows the typical fairy tale ending where the white heterosexual couple marries and lives happily ever after in a castle, reinforcing the highly gendered stereotype synonymous with both traditional tales and Disney's re-telling of them. An attempt at some sort of transgression by including the 'gay' character is left to the last moments, when LeFou accidentally finds himself dancing with a man. This scene lasts on screen for two seconds, and bears out Profido's (2001, p. 338) statement that "gay people are allowed to be visible because they are seen as a new and attractive market niche, ripe for being exploited". Here, Disney is trying to tap into the

queer market without including so much 'gayness' that conservative fans would be outraged. Disney has also moved to expand their audiences by embracing multiculturalism (Collins & Rothe, 2017), and have included a few interracial couples such as that of Lumiere and Plumette, and Madame De Garderobe and Cadenza. Here too, however, the relationship is lightly mocking: although Cadenza has a white skin, he has no front teeth and is far from physically appealing.

In *Maleficent* (2014), Maleficent as a young girl follows several feminine stereotypes. She is innocent and happy, spending her time playing, dreaming, creating dancing fairies from sticks and mending broken plants. She meets a human boy called Stefan and falls in love with him because he visits her, pays her attention and compliments her, which repeats the love-and-be-happy trope from the earlier films. In a dazzling display of hyper-feminine naivete, Maleficent forgives Stefan for all his absences and slights, and allows herself to be seduced, falling into an unfounded sense of security and trust. Maleficent's naivety results in her near-death and the loss of her wings. Her story upholds two common tropes: first, that of the all-forgiving, and blindly accepting woman, and second, that of the charming and unreliable 'bad boy'.

In the 2014 film, the adult woman-fairy Maleficent becomes very powerful, and in this regard, she challenges the hegemonic norm for her gender. She is the strongest of all the fairies, is much bigger with huge wings, is so fast and agile that she commands respect from all those living in the Moors. She confronts King Henry alone when he attempts to take control of the Moors, and fearlessly states that she does not acknowledge his authority over her. She then calls her 'army' to stand with her. She is labelled as a villain for defending her home, but she is not actually evil until Stefan hacks off her wings. Bednarek (2015) contends that all the female characters who are 'flawed' by being independent "engage in behavior that would be socially and morally condemned" (p.

433). In this film, Maleficent curses the child to a terrible ending, and then surveils every aspect of her life leading up to the event. Without wings Maleficent is still all-powerful and by placing this curse upon baby Aurora she sees the new King Stefan on his knees before the entire court begging Maleficent to stop. She revels in his loss of dignity and adds an 'escape' clause to the curse, "true love's kiss", convinced that such an idea does not really exist. Her hatred for the child is dominated by her rage and anger for Stefan and resembling the old adage that 'hell has no fury like a woman scorned'. She tries to terrify Aurora in her bed at night, but the baby is fascinated with her and smiles back instead. As much as she dislikes the little "Beastie", Maleficent becomes her silent guardian, watching her grow from a distance and ensuring that she has her needs met. However, it seems that her motivation for doing so is merely to prolong the torture that Stefan is bearing. Her control of his dwindling sanity and emotions gives her pleasure, easing the pain that he has caused her.

In *Maleficent* (2014) Disney has created a narrative for Aurora as highly feminine, and although the three fairy-aunties raising her are particularly ignorant, she is happy. When she is taken to the Moors Aurora is delighted, giggling and squealing with delight watching the fairies and other creatures. Maleficent is very curious about Aurora, whose kind mannerisms begin to soften the heart of the wickedest fairy of them all. Eventually, she tries to revoke the curse placed on Aurora, and is filled with despair when she fails, The twist in this tale of the Sleeping Beauty is that it is not the prince who manages to revive the princess, but the villain: Maleficent proves to be the only one capable of true love and her farewell kiss on Aurora's forehead wakes the girl, reversing the predicted ending. Maleficent reclaims her wings and in the ensuing battle, Stefan and many of his men die, slain by a woman before she returns as victor to the Moors. Aurora's presence fills the Moors with sunshine and happiness where once there was darkness and terror. Aurora, Queen of the land, is now crowned Queen of the Moors as well, uniting both

creatures and humans together. Thus, although the typical Disney rubric has been considerably altered by the empowerment of a woman to save the princess and defeat the men in battle, the path to joy remains constant in that the pretty white heterosexual girl achieves great wealth and happiness through being beautiful, innocent and kind.

In this chapter, I have recorded my analysis of the two pairs of films and organised my observations under four distinct headings. In the next chapter, I will set out my interpretation of the findings, explaining how they are significant.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Discussion

6.1Introduction

This research set out to examine certain changes to the tone and narration of the Gothic in Disney fairy tale films between the tellings in the 20th century and the re-tellings in the 21st century. Close textual analysis of the two pairs of movies identified four themes, which were then compared to establish differences in their treatment over the time frame of the research period. The purpose of my research was to follow through on my hunch that Disney has made changes to the manner and tone of the Gothic represented in its 21st century fairy tale films. The results of the interrogation of the four films were set out in the data chapter as commentary on the action, aesthetics and tone of the movies, and showed that the pre- and post-2000 films show substantial differences in the handling of Gothic themes. An early and simple statement of my findings is that both the earlier and later bodies of work employ the Gothic to explore evil, but the 20th century films have a high comic content and an overall sense of joy running through their Gothic elements. In contrast, the 21st century Disney has been painted in a darker Gothic tone and increased and heightened the elements that build terror. Despite the amplified Gothic tropes in the post-2000 films, the endings are still 'happy ever after', but happiness is achieved only through the redemption of evil.

To elaborate on this finding, concepts of paranormal and supernatural events are commonplace in Gothic narrative (Botting, 2013) and there are similarities which can be drawn between the Gothic and all four of Disney fairy tale films I used for this study. Both sets of movies often include strange or mysterious apparitions, uncanny and sublime events, evil villains and monsters, and those who bring darkness and despair into the storyline. In the post-2000 films, however, malice is stronger, and the development of evil

occurs over a prolonged period instead of being present only fleetingly. McCort (2016) says that "today's literary fairy tales rely heavily upon the powers of horror" (p. 121) and the later films match McCort's definition.

6.2 The turn to the dark side

I gave considerable thought to applying the label "Gothic" to Disney fairy tale film, because the term might be confusing in that one of the distinguishing features of Gothic horror lies in its ability to create feelings of dread and primordial fear (Goho, 2014). At first glance, Disney fairy tale films must be considered the opposite of Goho's (2014) view: the Disney name is synonymous with wholesome family entertainment, and even in the 21st century re-tellings, the fairy stories focus on themes of romance, love, and a euphoric world of "happy every after". However, in 1944 Joseph Campbell wrote that fairy tales tend to dwell on the "monstrous, irrational and unnatural" (p. 857), and I conclude that these themes have indeed continued into the contemporary Disney film productions albeit in an altered form, where the supernatural and magical have formed a solid platform to create an effect of the unaccountable. The depiction of evil and the monstrous in the post-2000 films has been altered, increasing their potential for raising terror, anxieties and fears, whereas the pre-2000 films were created with a Gothic 'dusting', a cleansed version of the original stories which were presented to the young target audience. All Disney films are Gothic in that they are filled with alternate and important tropes of the genre such as the 'living' and treacherous landscapes, period artwork or furnishings, and classic Gothic architecture. Characters often encounter dark forces and curses, or disfigured creatures and supernatural events where the uncanny and unexplained is utilised to raise tension and fear within the tale, and these are essentially staples of Gothic narrative. Therefore, I contend that it would be hard to state that Disney is not Gothic, or the anti-Gothic re-production, since it is in several ways.

Disney has always in fact been creating Gothic works, but it is the degree to which themes of darkness and fear have been used that differ between the two periods.

My study shows that although Disney films in the 20th century do contain Gothic themes; they do not concentrate on the horrific in such a way that the content will stimulate deep-set fears. Gothic tropes are certainly present in the films, but they are merely aesthetic devices, devoid of the terror and darkness synonymous with the genre. Botting (1999) argues that the Gothic is filled with corruption, immorality, evil intent, and the open depravity of mankind, much as was found in early Gothic tales such as those told by Walpole (1764). However, the Disney films of the 20th century are 'cleansed' of this true darkness, and instead are much lightened versions of the original stories. I argue, therefore, that the 20th century films are so sanitised that the Gothic appears as a light 'dusting', a mere lip service paid to the themes of despair and evil that existed in the original fairy tales on which the films are based. Moreover, I contend that the reduction of Gothic intent was the foundation of the Disney fairy tale brand, because the Disney films modified and tamed the elements of horror even more than the 'modernised' versions in, for example, the later editions (1812 –1858) of the Grimm Brothers' collections. Purging the horror and deep-rooted tropes of evil was achieved by including humorous characters and comic action, creating child-friendly entertainment filled with light-heartedness, promises of utopia and conservative values.

The post-2000 films, however, show an increase in both the visual and psychological darkness, and contain layers of disturbing undertones which are artfully placed to create terror. The 21st century 'dance with the dark' therefore marks a departure from Disney's normal style of telling fairy stories and brings to the fore such Gothic themes as excess, modification, violence, desolation, alienation, loneliness and victimisation. Disney has not disclosed the reason for these changes, but as my examination of the political economy

of Disney showed in Chapter 2, the rationale may be purely commercial: the change may have been wrought by a direct effort to extend their market by retaining and increasing teenage and adult viewership. Walt Disney once stated that the only way to survive in their business was by appealing to adult audiences (Walt Disney quotes, n.d.), and the alteration to content shows the company's capacity to evolve into new dimensions. It may also be that as Spooner (2017) suggests, the Gothic is moving beyond its previous boundaries and is mapping into new territories and that these films are simply keeping pace with the natural progression of the genre. Probably both arguments contain some truth about the development of the Disney fairy tale films.

It does seem clear that the tone of the 20th century films was a deliberate choice to match the sensibilities of post-war middle-America rather than to tell a Gothic tale. Conservative ideology places confidence in "time, authority, institutions, religions and traditions" (Baradat & Phillips, 2016, p.25) to deal with problems within society, and Walt Disney had, through years of working with the American government during the war, built a brand name that was trusted to the point that their offerings were an unequivocally accepted, almost revered, part of American culture (Wasko, 2001). Some of Disney's power came from the position the company had built for providing the sort of entertainment that taught strong family values and conservative morals. A conservative view opposes change because of doubts that anything new will be better (Baradat & Phillips, 2016), and once the "Dusted Gothic" mode was established at Disney, and was demonstrably successful, there was little reason to change it. Disney kept violence and horror at a low level so that they could deliver selected values and beliefs to their audiences. Their fairy tale films were deliberately constructed as a conduit for a narrow range of social opinion and cultural representation and offered to audiences that were young, malleable, captivated by the undoubted prettiness of the stories, and unlikely to encounter anything to dismay them or contradict the conservative American values of the time.

The newer versions of the films, however, are richer in their intertextual connections to early Gothic literature, and thus closer to their original stories. They abound with strongly articulated curses and horrible prophecies, high levels of distress and horror, and a consequent increase in emotion and fear among viewers. The post 2000 films show death, torture and other gruesome acts upon humans which was not in the earlier films. The increasing popularity of the horror genre (Hudson et al., 2020) might also account for Disney's move towards a heightened Gothic experience in the later films.

The original oral and written fairy tales were, as previously discussed, particularly horrific and were the foundation of what is known as the Gothic today. Disney already produced fairy tale films, and at first glance, the move towards darker themes was not difficult: on one hand, it could be read as a straightforward outcome of improved cinematic production and advances in technology that enhanced both animation and live-action filming. There is certainly some truth to this view, but Disney's reach into the dark underbelly of dread and terror was perhaps more carefully considered than being a simple response to technological possibilities. Hudson et al. (2020) found that over 90% of movie-goers watch at least one film per month, and almost 80% of them watch horror films. The box-office, then, began to demand horror films, and Disney's sanitised fairy tale films were not meeting this sector of the market. A basic criterion for good business is to increase market share, and I argue that no matter how devoted the company is to family values, business sense dictated an active change in the style of Disney's fairy tale films (as seen in Chapter 2). The redirection of the stories towards the horror of the original fairy stories has widened Disney's market. The new films create anxiety and terror without stepping into other 'adult' themes such as pornography, sex, injurious or graphic violence and explicit language. By pushing the 'Disney' boundaries a little, Disney's 21st century films have produced a form of Gothic horror without alienating audiences.

All four of the films use body modification to manipulate identity, and physical affliction is imposed on characters as both a form of punishment for social transgressions, and also as a manifestation of the inner self. Featherstone (2000) states that some individuals embrace opportunities to artificially shape their own bodies in order to fulfil their personal ideas of self-value and worth, and I feel that there is some merit in pointing out that in some regard this is much like Disney at present, where they are shaping their own 'body' for an increase in value and profit. However, historically, Disney's film alterations are performed to break conventions and deny the natural order of the body. The overwriting of the body suggests that lives can be re-fabricated by these deliberate transformations. The 21st century films heighten the emphasis on lost or hidden identities and the concomitant loss of a sense of self using dark themes and tones. In on-line life, it is not uncommon for individuals to use social media to project an exterior self that connects far more closely to a desired identity than to a 'real' one, and the gap between the two can lead to insecurities created by both the continuous need to 'perform' themselves and by the fear of exposure. In other words, enacting a 'self' who is not authentic may be one of the true contemporary anxieties causing people to feel at odds with their bodies, thoughts or actions. I maintain that the body modification in the films of the 21st century reflect this identity anxiety: the Beast's hideous body hides the mind of a man, albeit initially, a flawed and immature man; Diaval's constant shape-shifting conceals both his true identity and his true wishes. The body modifications in the later films are highly visual, closely detailed and imagined in horror. They have the capacity to either increase or destroy individual's' sense of self and personal worth, and the emphasis moves body modification closer to the Gothic, which finds its place to terrify.

The films of the 21st century further elevate Gothic themes through their use of locations as liminal spaces. The Moors in *Maleficent* (2014) is haunted by the past, guarded by the magical, and is presented as a site of terror. This is a complete opposite of the tone set in

the forest in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) where animals sing and dance in unending happiness. Arguably, by darkening the tone of the narrative Disney builds a more believable world, making it more relatable, because even relatively unsophisticated audiences know that life is not always easy and happy. The new mood smacks of impending gloom, and freedom may be realised only through acts of redemption. The worlds of the later films are scary because they are uncertain, and yet they seem so real and familiar, but they do suggest that even in the direst of times, there are ways to combat adversity, to redeem faith or value in lost or broken things. However, the opposite is also true, and contentment and peace can be inverted to become wickedness or fear, much like real life. Clery (1995) suggests that the creation of the dark places is to develop terror. The darker worlds do provide further evidence that Disney has changed and is transforming their post 2000 fairy tale films using Gothic themes of horror and terror, to emphasise evil on a scale not seen before. These changes are significant as the post 2000 films, with their 'darkened Disney door', are more characteristic of the ancient folklore roots than ever before.

In this research I have also found an interesting development in the more recent Disney fairy tale films: they twist together good and evil and blur the roles of hero and villain. Disney had previously used villains to distinguish a clear binary opposition of good and evil: antagonists craved power, control and destruction above all else, and protagonists sought peace, joy and the destruction of wickedness. Such evil as was depicted as 'Disney evil', presented as one-dimensional, superficial behaviour that was immediately recognisable as unacceptable and was carefully mapped across the screen to serve as a caution to viewers who might contemplate contesting social rules. Yet, the post-2000 villain has changed, remaining true to Gothic form. In *Maleficent* (2014) for example, the villain was made at the hands of the monster. This portrays a reversal of the narrative of the famous Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) written by Mary

Shelley, where now the monster has become the creator. Maleficent, the pure, innocent, naïve young fairy descends into villainy only after suffering abuse, and, as a constructed monster, her behaviour stems from her disturbing past (Macfarlane, 2012). Disney has thus created something new, a complicated backstory and multi-dimensional layering which more closely resembles issues experienced in the real world. Maleficent has become more 'human', and gains sympathy; her desire for revenge is validated; audiences see a vivid demonstration of the impact of her abuse. The inclusion of additional information in this film explains Maleficent's pain, and renders her realistic, whereas in the earlier version of the story, Maleficent, though less frightening, was simply an abstract character doing evil. Maleficent of 2014 is understood, and she represents notions of a duality of identity (Royle, 2003) as she moves from innocence to pain, anger to vengeance, and then to a matured maternal figure who has become so attached to the 'despised' child Aurora that her love resembles the 'true love' of a mother. She is redeemed through the breaking of her own curse and ends as the hero in the tale.

This type of plot twist is a new development in Disney fairy tale films. The backstory of the villains engages the audience on a personal level, and the narratives are likely to 'speak' to viewers because the villains have become more human. Maleficent has magic and power, but she is like the audience: imperfect and caught up in her suffering. In a striking analogy to religious re-birth, both Maleficent and the Beast are 'purified' of their sins of violence and wickedness, and both are returned to a state of grace. The Beast is given a physical form that is angelically beautiful and lives happily ever after; Maleficent receives a 'slice' of heaven in the paradise of the Moors. Therefore, although evil is real, salvation is an available option, and speaks to religious ideologies of forgiveness through the dark Gothic themes.

However, in terms of the Disney patriarchal ideology, I argue that although Disney films appear on the surface to be transgressive, ultimately the tales reveal that the stereotypical tropes remain, where good overcomes evil, love conquers all, and that the white, heterosexual relationships are the most preferred, and will be rewarded with the 'happily ever after' conservative fairy tale ending. Disney has always presented their fairy tale films within conservative views regarding race, gender and sexuality. This has not altered between the decades, and their films continue to display an "overarching system of male dominance" (Milestone & Meyer, 2012, p.10). Women are consistently portrayed as inferior, and there are rare spaces afforded for non-white characters within their films, with *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) being the most transgressive of the films studied. Le Fou is 'almost' tolerated as a 'potentially' gay man, and multiracial relationships are only exposed in the closing minutes of the film. The notion that young ladies should be naïve to the point of stupidity is never investigated, nor is the giving of complete trust to strangers, or the idea that a person can fall in love within minutes. The ideology of the heteronormative patriarchal Disney remains, and the extent of Gothic representation in this theme has mostly gone unchanged.

6.3 Conclusion

I began this research with a hunch, that Disney was 'up to something' with its fairy story films, making them darker and introducing themes and characters that would have seemed transgressive in the 20th century, and my finding was that this is indeed the case. The films of the 21st century show an increased period of exposure , they are more intense and visually compelling with their use of Gothic elements and capacity for building fear than before. In the 20th century the encounters with the dark are very brief and immediately introduce the comedic and the good to counter the effects of evil. In neither century did Disney produce fairy story movies that concluded with truly transgressive

themes, although, by the end of all the movies, the social status quo has been re-established, and everyone, one way or another, lives "happily ever after.

In conclusion, Disney took the early fairy tale stories with their Gothic themes and re-produced the stories in a form suitable for young audiences (Zipes, 2006). In order to do this, the company removed the violence and the elements that create horror but kept the tales exciting by heightening the visual spectacle of the films. The company accepted the high production costs required and invested heavily in marketing and merchandising. In fact, Disney has spent enormous amounts of money on re-purposing the tales in their bid to brand the fairy tale genre as 'Disney-made', but the films themselves are "stunningly inane" (Zipes, 2006, p. 279). Despite Zipes's (2006) harsh judgment, there is little doubt that the films exercise powerful influence over young and impressionable audiences who hold an unquestioning acceptance of, and reverence for, Disney products (Wasko, 2001). The belief that the company produces innocent and innocuous entertainment therefore needs to be addressed, because the changes to the themes and messages presented in 21st century Disney fairy tale film, in the form of an increased use of Gothic narrative and intent, surely results in an altered landscape of meaning generated by the young audience viewership. However, Disney has been able to incorporate and produce the Gothic narrative as "a tool for a new kind of self-expression and exploration, rather than a reflection for society's deepest fears and anxieties" (Nixon, 2017, np). While this research does not aim to address these implications here, it has certainly answered my research question, and is highly relevant for future research into the ramifications of such changes.

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