Animated Adaptations: A Study of Disney Animation as Modern Mythology & Folklore

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Declaration

I declare that the work described in this research Paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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Note on the Text

Some of the authors referenced in this paper have used American spellings for certain words. When I am referencing them in a direct quotation I have used the spelling as it appears in the text. In my own work I have continued to use the British spelling of these words. Similarly with Greek names that have been Latinised in different ways. I have used conventional spellings in my own commentary, but left different quoted spellings unaltered.

Introduction

Disney Animation has become synonymous with modern fairytales the world over. Since it's first feature length film in 1937, Disney's films have remained at the forefront of family entertainment. Nowhere is this more true than in America, the home of Disney Studios, Disneyland, Disneyworld, and many other film studios which have been collected by the Walt Disney Company over the years. Jack Zipes, in his book *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry,* even goes so far as to say that "Without question, Walt Disney set the standards for feature length fairy-tale films in the world of cinema." (Zipes, 1997, p.89).

It is this undisputed devotion of generations of Disney movie-goers that is interesting. Most of the stories told in these films are adaptations or remakes of pre-existing material. This material, as I will examine in my paper, is grounded in ancient mythology and folklore, much of which never travelled to America. In her book *Classic to Pop Icon: Popularizing Hugo* Kathryn Grossman relates a complaint against the Disney company for excluding Victor Hugo's name from their 1996 adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, to which the response was: "A company spokesperson replied, 'The movie introduced millions of children to a great work. For Disney, culture isn't something to be mummified'." (Grossman, 2001, p.482). Despite the changes and additions to the folkloric tales retold by Disney, audiences are growing even more, especially in its home country of America, where the changes to archaic stories don't bother their audiences. So the question then arises: is Disney animation America's folklore?

To investigate this in my paper, I have chosen to perform a close examination of three films from Disney Animation Studios: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Hercules* (1997), and *Tangled* (2010). In conjunction with these films, I will also be examining the mythology and folklore these adaptations are based upon, with many close readings. As a result I will be primarily studying of European folklore from Ancient Greece and from Central Europe around the 18th-19th Centuries. While the studio has created many adaptations of European folklore, the length of this

paper limited the number of films which could be examined. As a result, I have chosen the very first film that Disney made, and which launched the Studio into feature length production: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*; The most recent adaptation of a Grimm Fairytale: *Tangled* (2010); and *Hercules* (1997), Disney's adaptation of the mythology surrounding the ancient hero Heracles.

Chapter 1: On the Origin of Myth

Chapter 1.1:

The Origin of Myth: Why does folklore exist?

Myth and folklore are found in every culture in the world with many parallels in the stories between each culture. They serve as both aetiological explanations for the physical world and moral lessons for societal structures. When scientific knowledge was basic, people conceived stories to explain the world around them. They attributed natural phenomena, from the weather to the movements of the celestial bodies, to sentient beings more powerful than humans. They created origins for the world around them: aetiological explanations for why everything in the world worked and appeared as it did.

J. G. Frazer discusses the 'The Principles of Magic' in *The Golden Bough*, his book examining the evolution of particular myths. He explains that this magic was logical and bound by natural laws. At a time when physics was so little understood, magic and physics, as we know them today, were almost inseparable. "In short, magic is a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct." (Frazer, 1960, p.14). So Frazer also acknowledges the relationship between magic and the "guide of conduct" as well as having aetiological meaning. Ultimately, myth is a delicate balance of the two.

In *The Oral and Literary Fairy Tales* in *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Jack Zipes emphasizes that the stories "were first *told* by gifted tellers and were based on rituals intended to endow with meaning the daily lives of members of a tribe." (Zipes, 1999, p.333). Here we see both the oral beginnings of these tales as well as their importance for forming a code of conduct: a way of incorporating meaning of the world around us into daily life. Zipes also stipulates that "as oral folk tales, they were intended to explain natural occurrences such as the change of seasons and shifts in the weather" (Zipes, 1999, p.333). An example of this is the Greek myth of Demeter & Persephone (or Ceres and Proserpine in Latin). Demeter, goddess of the harvest, lets all things

die when her daughter Persephone descends to the Underworld in Autumn, but when she returns in Spring Demeter brings life back to the world because she is happy to be reunited once again:

> Now Proserpine, of two empires alike,
> Great deity, spends with her mother half
> The year's twelve months and with her husband half.
> (Ovid, 1998, p.116).

Christopher Booker also explains in his book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* how these same ideas and rituals are universal, found in cultures the world over:

> One of the deepest human needs met by our faculty for imagining stories is our desire for an explanatory and descriptive picture of how the world began and how we came to be in it. There is no culture in the world which does not possess at least one great story to account for how the world came into being. (Booker, 2004, p.544).

Booker, like Frazer, shows us the need for ancient peoples to give meaning and understanding to that which was inexplicable: the creation of the world and the meaning of life itself. With each new generation, the myths are twisted and distorted, but always there. And indeed, as Booker points out, every culture in the world has they own version of what is essentially the same story. As they come down through the ages, the stories shift and bend to other cultural and societal norms. In the introduction to *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar tells us that "as we read fairy tales, we simultaneously evoke the cultural experience of the past and allow it to work on our consciousness even as we reinterpret and reshape that experience." (Tatar, 1999, p.xii). So through reading and participating in the conveyance of myth, we ourselves shape it.

John Arnott MacCulloch states in his book on *The Harrowing of Hell* that throughout the histories of all cultures, narratives involving descent to some kind of 'Underworld' appear as some of the earliest and most basic myths, and they can be traced to the same or similar origins. And all origins culminate in the perceived existence of another world, subject to supernatural laws: a 'world of the dead'. He places the initial conception of this 'world of the dead' with an emotional

attachment to those who have died. Once he has established why we have these conceptions, he then traces the idea through four different stages:

> First, genuine dreams of the other world; then literary versions of these, often with a didactic purpose; then artistic or scenic representations or the inducing of visions by artificial means; and lastly burlesques and parodies. (MacCulloch, 1930, p.12).

While the initial dreams may be influenced by an attachment to the dead, they are often assumed to be truthful and thus lead to the next stages: Literary versions, based on these dreams or visions also deemed to be truthful, and so on.

After the initial conception of such a world it is natural that the idea of transgressions between these worlds may come about. This primitive awareness of another world is due to the living witnessing the dead in their dreams, and the vividness of dreams led them to believe in the verity of their visions. The earliest idea of this movement between the worlds is an understanding that dead souls could travel back to the living, but only visit them in dreams. MacCulloch also suggests that people may have believed a living person visits this world of the dead when they are in any state of unconsciousness such as sleep, coma, and even when they faint. Just as the initial conception of this world in dreams leads to a more concrete idea of such a world in literature, a more concrete means of passage is formulated as well. We even see this with the myth of Demeter and Persephone: the girl descends to the underworld at a time of death and decay – Autumn into Winter, and then returns at a time of new birth – Spring and into Summer (Ovid, 1998, p.116).

This is why death plays such a large role in myth and folklore: it is central to the existence of supernatural powers, where ancient knowledge is founded. And as all other natural phenomena were personified, so was the mysterious afterlife. Gods, goddesses, demons and monsters were all attributed to the concepts of “sleep”, “ darkness”, “death” and so on. And the gods, to whom so much was attributed, were immortal and not subject to the realm of the dead, but masters of it.

It is for this reason that gods and goddesses are so often seen as either the patrons or the tormentors of legendary heroes. More often than not, a hero will have one god or goddess on his side, acting as a supernatural guardian. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Joseph Campbell explains the role and function of the supernatural guardian as someone to guide and aid him, as the hero goes forward in his journey: “a protective figure […] who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass.” (Campbell, 1975, p.65).

Campbell, like Booker, believes that all stories can be reduced down to the most basic plotlines. While he believes there are *Seven Basic Plots*, Campbell discusses the ‘Departure, Initiation, Return’ theme that he believes is the kernel of all hero-myths, or as he dubs it, the ‘Monomyth’.

The first part of the hero’s journey is the departure, initiated whereby the hero is singled out and receives a ‘Call to Adventure’. Sometimes the call can be of the hero's own volition, sometimes it is a chance encounter and sometimes the hero is carried or sent. The departure segment of Campbell's theory is marked by the hero's acceptance of the adventure and the crossing of the first threshold. This threshold usually signifies “the entrance to the zone of magnified power.” (Campbell, 1975, p.71). In the departure segment, the hero’s supernatural help is also usually established sometime between the acceptance of the adventure and the crossing of this initial threshold. This guardian can help to guide the hero throughout his journey and “to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian'.”(Campbell, 1975, p.71). Campbell also endeavors to emphasise the significance of the threshold and what it symbolises for the hero: “the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth [...]. The Hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.” (Campbell, 1975, p.79).

The next segment of the hero's adventure after his crossing of the threshold is the “Initiation”. In this segment the hero encounters a series of trials and it is this place

that “has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals.” (Campbell, 1975, p.90). The supernatural helper once again plays a part in aiding the hero in this section of his quest.

The last segment of the hero's voyage is the “Return”. This part only comes about after the hero has gained the “trophy” of his trials of initiation, whether it be symbolic or physical. Campbell states that in accordance with the Monomyth:

> The hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back to the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds. (Campbell, 1975, p.170).

The “Magic Flight” in the final stage of the hero's adventure is either “supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron” or “if the hero's wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of mythological round becomes a comical pursuit.” (Campbell, 1975, p.173). Frequently, but not always, this flight and chase is countered by leaving objects behind in order to delay the pursuer. The hero may even sometimes need to be rescued from this other world by someone from “without”, usually someone from the world he had left behind.

Finally he must cross the 'Return Threshold' and then the hero becomes 'Master of the two worlds'. Only those who have followed their destiny without hesitation make it back to their own worlds. The hero who desires to return is the hero of Campbell’s ‘Monomyth’ and it becomes his requirement to “knit together his two worlds” upon his return (Campbell, 1975, p.197). By the initiation process of his journey the hero is now capable of saving or teaching the world he returns to with his boon.

So we see that interaction with the supernatural, whether it is a supernatural being or a parallel supernatural realm, is key to any hero-story and that this theory can be

successfully applied to any narrative. Campbell gives examples from many different world cultures to show that this is the case and it is also a theory applicable to every narrative that will be discussed in this paper.

Chapter 1.2:

(a) An Examination of Ancient Greek thought

In Plato's *Republic* he doesn't discuss "technology" as we know the word today, but he uses parables to raise the question of transhuman powers and how humans use them. The story of the Ring of Gyges is, on the face of it, a story about a magic ring, but the parable is used to discuss the morality of humans faced with a technology that puts them above other humans. In the *Republic* the character Glaucon argues that, when granted legal immunity and, most significantly, anonymity, any man, just or unjust, "will always do wrong when he gets the chance." (Plato, 2003, p.44). Further on in the work, the character of Socrates concludes that it is not all men, but men who give in to their passions, who would abuse the power the ring gives them. Rational men, who keep their passions restrained, as in Plato's simile of the wild horses, use reason and will "act justly whether or not [he has] Gyges' ring, and a cap of invisibility into the bargain." (Plato, 2003, p.359).

Ancient Greek culture, unlike the Judeo-Christian tradition, was based upon millennia of myths of the uneasy relationship between mankind and the gods. *Prometheus Bound*, a play attributed to the Athenian playwright Aeschylus, was first performed in the late 5th century BCE, around which time Plato was born. It is the first play in a trilogy known as the *Prometheia*, but unfortunately it is the only extant full play. In *Prometheus Bound* we see one of many examples of the existence of the human race in defiance of the king of the gods, Zeus. Prometheus has stolen the secret of fire and given it to mankind, against Zeus' orders, who hated and wished to exterminate the human race. The character of Prometheus says:

> Of wretched humans he [Zeus] took no account, resolved
> To annihilate them and create another race.
> This purpose there was no one to oppose but I.
> I dared. I saved the human race from being ground
> To dust, from total death.
> (Aeschylus 1961, p.27).

Many other Greek & pre-Christian Roman writers, from poets to playwrights to philosophers, recount tales of men and women who outsmart, trick and anger gods. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tells the tales of Lycaon tricking and mocking Zeus (Ovid, 1998, p.7), Aracne outperforming and angering Minerva (Ovid, 1998, p.121), Actaeon insulting and angering Diana (Ovid, 1998, p.55). In addition, there are also many tales of mortals shunning advances from the gods: Daphne and Apollo (Ovid, 1998, p.14), Zeus and Alcmene (Ovid, 1998, p.207), Odysseus and Calypso (*Odyssey*, Book 3) are some examples of this. This uneasy struggle of power between gods and men is in direct contrast to the stories from the Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In Abrahamic tradition, God creates man with the specific intention that he will rule over the domain of earth. Mankind is created and God grants him the right to enslave nature.

As Umberto Galimberti says in *Man in the Age of Technology*: "In the Greek world men contemplated nature in order to understand its immutable and constant laws" (Galimberti 2009, p.5). There was always an awareness of the need for balance between the natural and that which man created to tame nature: the technological. This view is deeply reflected in the entire mythological history of Greece. Likewise, the Platonic view of the world is one where mankind must always be aware and conscious of the delicate balance we have struck with life and the world and it cannot be upset.

Plato's parallels between the internal equilibrium of the individual and that of the state, show how he believes society must replicate the balance between what is wild with what is tamed. In the *Republic*, he describes the best 'Guardian' or 'Ruler' in society as exhibiting "the principles of balance and harmony they learned in their education" (Plato, 2003, p.115): this is representative of the rational part of the soul. Next he describes the 'Auxiliaries' in society as "brave men living under military training and discipline" (Plato, 2003, p.119): this is the spirited part of the soul. And last, he describes the 'Third Class', who, a wise man "flatters them agreeably and gives them pleasure by running their errands, or is clever at anticipating and fulfilling

their wishes." (Plato, 2003, p.128): this is the appetite of the soul, which must be kept in equilibrium with the other two parts, or any one of them could take over and destroy the whole soul. Plato uses the parallel between the soul and the city to show how man must keep the delicate balance internally, as well as in his environment: natural & physical, or social & political.

Thus, between the Platonic view on nature and the man-made technologies created to overpower it, one must never completely overcome and/or destroy the other. Galimberti goes on to describe the differences between the idea of technology vs. nature in the Judeo-Christian and Greek traditions:

> In the Judeo-Christian world, there was no contradiction between technology and nature, for nature had been entrusted to man so that he could dominate it. In the Greek world on the other hand, this contradiction was present in all its force for if nature was immutable what would be the consequences if technology were to succeed in bringing about change? The answer of Prometheus to the Chorus is lapidary: 'techne d'anankes asthenestera makro'; technology will always be less powerful than necessity which binds nature to immutability and to the regularity of its laws. (Galimberti 2009, p.6).

In *The Informational Nature of Personal Identity* Luciano Floridi takes Plato's metaphor of the city for the "self" from the *Republic* and goes on to show how "ICTs [Information and Communications Technologies, (of which we may consider Animation to be)] may be interpreted as technologies of the self." (Floridi 2011, p.2). Floridi points out that "ICTs have made possible unprecedented phenomena in the construction of the self" and "Already Plato, for example, acknowledged that humanity had changed because of the invention of writing. Now, ICTs are the most powerful technologies to which selves have ever been exposed." (Floridi 2011, p.16). And so we recognize the awesome power that communications technology has given humanity, not just in the 19th-21st centuries, but for thousands of years, and even millions of years if we look at prehistoric art as a mode of communication technology.

For the Greeks, the delicate balance between man's power over nature and his helplessness under the gods – to whom nature belonged – was ever-present. Aristotle, in his work the Poetics, gives two reasons for the existence of poetry, which for Aristotle encompasses Epic Poetry, as well as the Theatre- Tragedy & Comedy, and even music and Dithyramb (a ritual mix of poetry, music and dance). According to Aristotle "poetry was due to two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, Imitation is natural to man from childhood" (Aristotle, 1962, p.24). Like MacCulloch, who we examined in Chapter 1.1, explained the relationship between genuine dreams and belief in imagined worlds, leading to "literary versions of these, often with a didactic purpose; then artistic or scenic representations" (MacCulloch, 1930, p.12). Aristotle's goes on to give his second explanation for poetry: "Imitation, then, bring instinct of our nature – Next, there is the instinct for 'harmony' and rhythm, meters being manifestly sections of rhythm." (Aristotle, 1962, p.24). Man's need to understand and to see patterns in the world around them is seen from the existence of music and poetry all the way up to the balance and harmony of the natural and the supernatural – not only the gods, but also the use of supernatural powers available to humans: technology.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is still studied today as a dramatist's handbook. For centuries after his death, Aristotle's opinions on Tragedy and Comedy were revered as gospel and his guidelines on writing for the theatre were largely adhered to. For example, one such guideline was that "Tragedy endeavors to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that." (Aristotle, 1962, p.26). We see this adhered to most famously is many (but by no means all) of Shakespeare's plays, for example *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Comedy of Errors*, both of which are also incidentally set in Greece.

For Aristotle, the story itself is the most important part of Tragedy, even more so than Characters:

> The first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot; and that the Characters come second. [...] Third comes the element of

> Thought, i.e. the power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate […].Fourth among the elements is Diction […]. For the two remaining parts, the Melody is the greatest […]. The Spectacle, though an attraction, is the least artistic of all. (Aristotle, 1962, p.32-33).

While Joseph Campbell talks of the hero in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, it is his journey and the plot which is the main focus of the book. The titular character could be anyone, but the plot is what makes him the hero. So we can even see Campbell adhering to Aristotle's theory of storytelling. In much the same way that Campbell lays out the different stages of the hero's journey (which can be physical or mental), Aristotle also plays out stages for the plot: from the time limit (sunrise to sunset) to the fatal flaw (hamartia), Aristotle's Tragic hero adheres.

Chapter 1.2:

(b) The Heracles Myth

The earliest extant reference to Heracles is in Homer's *Odyssey*, when Odysseus briefly sees the shade of Heracles in the underworld (*Odyssey*, Book 11), written circa 8th Century BCE. However, some of the most prevalent Greek stories about Heracles come from the 4th Century Athenian drama of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. This era, known as the Classical period of Athens, was also home to many sophists and philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who we looked at in Chapter 1.2(a). As a result of this prosperous period, much of our knowledge of Ancient Greece comes from these writers and their contemporaries.

In the second play of the *Prometheia* (the now lost *Prometheus Unbound*) our hero Heracles is the one who frees Prometheus, the defender of humans against Zeus. Prometheus, whose name means "the foreseer", tells Heracles of the twelve labours he will have to endure in the future. Most of *Prometheus Unbound* is lost, but both Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays on the life and labours of Heracles, which are extant. The earlier traditions that we know of today write of Heracles killing his sons because he has been driven mad by the goddess Hera. Upon awakening from his madness, he is distraught and must atone for his crimes by performing the famous twelve labours: "Returning to sanity, he went back to Thespius for purification […] and was told to go to Tiryns and serve its king Eurystheus for twelve years" (March, 2001, p.378) and Thus began the Twelve Labours of Heracles. However, Euripides changes this well-known story. In his play *Heracles*, our hero has already performed his labours when he is driven mad and kills, not only his children, but also his wife Megara. Greek tragedy was a medium through which to relay well-known stories in the best dramatic way possible. The audience at the first performance of Euripides' *Heracles* would have knows the elements of Heracles' story and did not go to see the ending, but how the playwright takes the audience there. This is in stark contrast to today's audience who hate to have and ending "ruined". None of the greatest

Athenian playwrights wrote novel stories or created new heroes, they only retold existing stories about well-known characters in new and inventive ways. Euripides' Heracles atones for his crimes, not by performing the great twelve labours, but by following the King of Athens, Theseus and becoming an Athenian:

> I, who have shamefully made destitute my house,
> Will follow Theseus like a helpless wreck in tow.
> If any man thinks wealth or power of greater worth
> To him who has them, than a good friend – he is mad.
> (Euripides 1963, p.199).

And so Euripides claims Heracles, the greatest hero in all of Greece, for Athens. He, like many of the playwrights of his day, makes Thebes an anti-Athens, where all the horrors of myth take place, and cements Athens' status as the true leader of Greece. The myths might be ancient, but they are always told with a political agenda and as a commentary on current social trends.

The Heracles myth fits Joseph Campbell's Monomyth cycle very well. In fact, he is given as an example by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* chapter on 'The Belly of the Whale', part of the initiation section in the overall 'Departure, Initiation, Return' cycle. We can see how this is the case if we closely examine the Heracles myth. The first part of the hero's journey is the departure, initiated whereby the hero is singled out and receives a "Call to Adventure", which can be desired or undesired by the hero. For Heracles, there are actually many of these callings that single him out as different. The earliest of these is when he is still a baby: "when two snakes crawled into their bed, Iphicles [Heracles' mortal half-brother] cried out in terror, while Heracles seized the snakes and strangled them." (March, 2001, p.377). This episode singles Heracles out as the son of the god Zeus and not the mortal Amphitryon, who was the father of Iphicles, Heracles' half-brother by the mortal Alcmene. After this episode Zeus' jealous wife Hera can identify Heracles, and so persecutes him. It is she who is ultimately responsible for his twelve labours, or as Campbell would call it "The Road of Trials" (Campbell, 1975, p.90). While in earlier versions of the Heracles myth, and indeed some later versions, he must perform the

twelve labours as atonement for the murder of his wife and children, in Euripides it is not fully explained why Heracles must perform the tasks. As in his play *Heracles* the eponymous hero cannot help his wife and father from the tyrant Lycus because he is away performing his labours, we can see that Euripides has switched the normal order of things. Heracles performs his labours, then commits the murders and his atonement is to humbly follow Theseus to Athens.

After The 'Departure', Campbell's hero reaches the 'First Threshold'. The hero leaves behind the normality of their everyday, domestic (often rustic) life and enters a world of 'Magnified Power'. Often in Greek mythology, the hero's hometown is a space of normality, where the existence of magic is either toned down or non-existent. For example in the *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus only encounters monsters and mythical beasts in between two storms. After the first storm of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his crewmen encounter Cyclopes, Sirens, Harpies, Enchantresses, and witches. However, after the second storm of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters nothing but mortal humans, living their everyday lives. His home island of Ithaca never witnesses the mythological beasts he encounters elsewhere. Instead, the threat comes from the mortal men who would usurp his throne. Where on his journey Odysseus faces the threat of the mythological, the Ithacan threat is not magical, but only having overcome his magical threats can Odysseus return to face his real ones. In the *Odyssey*, we see the 'Threshold' is the storm, beyond which is the "zone of magnified power".

This is also the case for *Heracles*: while he is away fighting the mythical monster Cerberus, his hometown of Thebes is under threat from a mortal Tyrant, Lycus. By leaving Thebes, Heracles crosses the threshold into the "zone of magnified power", where he encounters magical threats, just like Odysseus and the storms away from Ithaca.

Campbell also endeavors to emphasise the significance of the threshold and what it symbolises for the hero: "the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth [...]. The Hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of

the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died." (Campbell, 1975, p.79). This part of Campbell's hero's journey is called the 'Belly of the whale' (from the biblical story of Jonah). Campbell also uses the Heracles myth as an example of how the hero "is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died", only to resurface, symbolically reborn. Here Campbell (using the more antiquated spelling Herakles) recalls the hero's defeat of the sea-monster at Troy:

> The monster, in due time, broke to the surface of the water and opened its enormous maw. Herakles took a dive into the throat, cut his way out through the belly, and left the monster dead. (Campbell, 1975, p.80).

So Heracles "is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died", just as Campbell stipulates (p.79). This part of the journey can be a physical rebirth, like Jonah or Heracles emerging from the belly of the beast, or symbolic like Odysseus or Aeneas emerging from their journey to the underworld. Heracles also descends to the underworld and returns as master of Cerberus, the three-headed beast dog. So Heracles becomes master of the threshold guardian of hell, and emerges as symbolic defeater of death. As we saw in Chapter 1.1, death and the world of the dead are integral to the origins of myth, so stories of a hero's descent to the underworld and return to the world of the living are plentiful throughout cultures the world over. Even when we look at renaissance literature, this theme is still present: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, written in the early 14th Century, is a direct homage to Aeneas' descent to the underworld, which is itself an imitation of Odysseus' descent. Orpheus, Polydeuces, and Theseus are just a few of the other Greek heroes who have also descended to the underworld and returned.

Campbell dedicates the third and final section of the 'Hero's Adventure' to the 'Return'. For Heracles, there are many returns within different cycles, for there are many retellings of the Heracles myth. The last of the twelve labours of Heracles is the retrieval of Cerberus from the underworld. As such, this is a very clear return at the end of a "Road of Trials" (Campbell, 1975, p.90). In Euripides' version of the story, Heracles returns to Thebes, but doesn't stay. Instead he abandons his home and accompanies Theseus to Athens where he atones for his crimes. This refusal of

the return is not unusual for hero-myths, as Joseph Campbell points out in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: “the responsibility has been frequently refused. [...] Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being.” (Campbell, 1975, p.170). Of course, Heracles here is not taking up residence “in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess”, but atoning as a broken man. However, as he is the son of Zeus, when Heracles dies he is given a place on Olympus amongst his immortal brethren: “Heracles was taken to Olympus and made immortal among the gods. Reconciled with Hera, he married her daughter Hebe, the goddess of youth.” (March, 2001, p.386). And so ultimately Heracles does return to live with his true father on Olympus and takes “up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being.” (Campbell, 1975, p.170).

Chapter 1.3:

(a) The Evolution of European Myth and Folklore

Within *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Donald Haase describes the importance of fairytales in society in his chapter 'Yours, Mine. Or Ours? Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and the Ownership of Fairy Tales':

> Like the bible, fairy tales – especially the classic tales of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm – hold a revered if not sacred place in modern Western culture. Often thought to reach back like sacred works to "times past," to some ancient, pristine age in which their original tellers spoke mythic words of revelation, folk tales and fairy tales are endowed by many readers with unassailable moral and even spiritual authenticity. (Haase, 1999, p.353)

Like the ancient Greeks, the peoples of central and northern Europe also had oral traditions which carry mythical qualities and reverence. In Chapter 1.1, we saw that Zipes describes the origin of fairytales as being told by "gifted tellers and were based on rituals" (Zipes, 1999, p.333). The intention was to instill members of the tribe with meaning in their everyday lives. The memory of oral tradition was as strong here as in Ancient Greece, up until the 19th Century when authors like the Brother's Grimm began to gather together collections of them and write them down.

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, mentioned briefly in Chapter 1.2(b), is one of the earliest vernacular works we know of. It was written in the early 14th Century, at a time when Latin was the official language all over Europe. Interestingly, Dante's tale is a retelling of a pagan Roman story, the *Aeneid* of Virgil. Yet it is written, not in the tongue of his hero Virgil, but in 14th Century Italian. The subject matter is also altered to reflect Dante's own devout Christianity: Dante the author writes a story of Dante the hero who journeys through 'Hell', 'Purgatory', and 'Heaven' and returns to the world of the living, a man reborn. This is in direct contrast to the underworld of the *Odyssey*, where good and bad souls alike congregate after death, even Achilles,

the greatest warrior of all the Greeks, whose shade Odysseus "tries to console him for his death by speaking of the authority he holds among the dead" (March, 2001, p.343). Later writers, like Virgil included in the Underworld 'Tartarus', "a place of punishment for wrongdoers" (March, 2001, p.343) and Elysium, "where a few blessed mortals […] live" (March, 2001, p.343). However, Tartarus was still not like the Christian "hell" we know: it was where Zeus locked up his immortal enemies, the Titans, in what was effectively a supernatural prison. Dante drew on Virgil's descriptions of Tartarus to create his *Inferno*. Dante's work carefully and subtly criticizes the work to which it pays homage. Virgil, Dante's idol, cannot enter *Paradiso* due to his lack of Christianity. He falls short where Dante can fulfill. Dante can enter heaven and he emerges greater than Virgil, just as Christianity admires but is still greater than the old, outdated pagan traditions.

Just like Dante's tale, Fairytales are a mix of the Christian and the pagan: where God, angels, and Christian values are celebrated, but there is also the undisputed existence of fairies and witches, pagan magic and ritual, metamorphoses and magical objects. The stories which are used to tell Christian morals, are grounded in the pagan. Bruno Bettelheim explains why certain fairytales are retold and others not in his book *The Uses of Enchantment*: "only if a fairy tale met the conscious and unconscious requirements of many people was it repeatedly retold, and listened to with great interest." (Bettelheim, 1978, p.36). And so tales which could be adapted into Christian morality tales became popular. However, in her book *Wonder Tales* Marina Warner introduces six stories by female authors from the 17th and 18th Centuries which exhibit feminist comment on contemporary society. All the stories in *Wonder Tales* contain a strong heroine, which Warner emphasizes in her introduction: "Hidessa is clever, and spirited and brave and persevering" (Warner, 1996, p.5), "Finessa is full of schemes to fight adversity in whatever shape" (Warner, 1996, p.6).

Warner goes on to explain what these feminist writers, most of whom were French, were attempting to achieve:

> Above all, however, they wanted to decide for themselves on the husband of their choice, not accept an arrangement with a stranger. They also sued for the opportunity to learn, and to travel. These demands are buried in the tales; they were driven into the coded language of enchantment by the most penetrative state censorship on the one hand, and fervent religious revivalism on the other. (Warner, 1996, p.7).

So these stories represent the antithesis of religious morality tales and the "fervent religious revivalism" which was at the centre of so many contemporary fairytales. Here in the examples from *Wonder Tales* we can see the social and political importance of fairytales: where ideas about feminism and the role of women, or lack there of, can be aired without the immediate threat of retribution for any of the radical opinions they represent. The veil of a fairytale is a safe medium through which to express ideas.

Chapter 1.3:

(b) The Grimm Fairytales

It is perhaps unsurprising that none of the fairytales from *Wonder Tales* appear in *Nursery and Household Stories* by the Brothers Grimm in the 19th Century (although there are some similarities between the story of *Rapunzel* and the story of *The White Cat*). Maria Tatar, in *The Hard Facts of the Grimm Fairy Tales* recounts the awkwardness of the Brothers with the mention of any kind of sexual relationship: "Any hints of premarital sexual activity must have made Wilhelm Grimm in particular blush with embarrassment" (Tatar, 1987, p.7-8). With each new edition of *Nursery and Household Stories*, Wilhelm edited and tweaked the stories almost beyond recognition of their original state prior to the Grimm intervention:

> Wilhelm Grimm exhibited extraordinary editorial zeal. Over the years, he systematically purged the collection of references to sexuality and masked depictions of incestuous desire. (Tatar, 1987, p.10).

The tales of *Snowdrop* (Snow White) and *Rapunzel* are recounted in *Nursery and Household Stories* by the Brothers Grimm. As stated before, the Grimm fairytales all follow the same story-kernel as the Monomyth described by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Despite the fact that Campbell only uses male heroes in his analysis, the heroines of the Grimm's best known tales also fit the Hero's Adventure.

Sneewittchen, or as she is more commonly known today Snow White (or in the Taylor & Edwards translation, 'Snowdrop') is the princess whose father remarried a beautiful queen, stepmother to Snow White, after the death of her birth mother. Then, as the Grimm story goes "when she was seven years old she was bright as the day, and fairer than the queen herself" (Grimm, 2001, p.193) and the jealous queen resolved to kill Snow White so that she could remain the most beautiful in the land. And so begins the 'departure, initiation, return' of Snow White. She is taken from her home to the forest, where she escapes and wanders while "the wild beasts roared

about her" (Grimm, 2001, p.193) and she eventually comes to the house of the seven dwarves. In the Grimm fairytales Campbell's First Threshold, or "entrance to the zone of magnified power" (Campbell, 1949: 77) is usually signified by an entrance into the forest and this is no exception. The forest acts just as the storms in the *Odyssey*, allowing for magical and fantastical beings and episodes away from the normality of the hero's home village – where the listener of stories resides.

Similarly, the story of Rapunzel fits here as well. There are two departures for Rapunzel: first as a baby, she is taken from her parents by the enchantress Gothel, because they promised their baby girl in exchange for some rampion (Rapunzel) leaves from her garden. Second when Rapunzel is on the verge of puberty at the age of twelve, she is taken by Gothel and locked in a tower without doors in the forest. It is perhaps the second of these departures that fits better with Campbell's departure. It involves entrance to the forest and Rapunzel is actually old enough to be aware of it. In the tower, Rapunzel grows "magnificent long hair, fine as spun gold, and when she heard the voice of the enchantress she unfastened her braided tresses, wound them round one of the hooks of the window above, and the hair fell twenty ells down, and the enchantress climbed up by it." (Grimm, 2001, p.99).

When the prince sees the exchange and imitates it, he enters Rapunzel's tower daily and they become husband and wife (at least in the Grimm version). Rapunzel accidentally tells Gothel about the prince and Gothel angrily cuts all of Rapunzel's hair off and banishes her in the desert. When the prince returns to the tower, Gothel pulls him up with Rapunzel's hair and tells him that Rapunzel is dead. Distraught, the prince "leapt down from the tower. He escaped with his life, but the thorns into which he fell pierced his eyes" (Grimm, 2001, p.101).

Snow White similarly falls afoul of her stepmother, the beautiful queen. She takes from her a too-tight corset, a poisoned comb, and a poisoned apple. On the first two occasions, she is near dead, but saved by the dwarves. On the occasion of the apple, however they cannot revive her. She is dead to the world, but continues to look as perfect as she did in life, so they encase her in glass.

Campbell's theory of "the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth" (Campbell, 1975, p.79) can be applied to both Snow White and Rapunzel: Snow White falls into a death-like sleep, while Rapunzel is banished by the enchantress and thought dead by the prince. After Snow White has been promised to the handsome prince, she awakens from her death-like sleep and is rewarded with the "Ultimate Boon" (Campbell,1975, p.139) of place as the new queen. Similarly Rapunzel, after she suffers in the desert, is rewarded with her place as queen to her husband prince. Rapunzel, while in the desert, gives birth to twins and one day when the wandering blind prince hears her sing. He finds her and they are reunited. Rapunzel cries over him and her tears possess unknown magic: "two of her tears wetted his eyes and they grew clear again, and he could see with them as before" (Grimm, 2001, p.102).

Neither Rapunzel nor Snow White return to their own home. The Brothers Grimm make no mention of the king, Snow White's father, only her stepmother, who "choked with rage, and fell down and died" (Grimm, 2001, p.200) and there is no mention at all of Rapunzel's parents beyond the opening of the story. Both heroines enter the forest as the first threshold and when they exit, it is not to return, but to "take up residence forever", not with an "unaging Goddess of Immortal Being" (Campbell, 1975, p.170), but with a handsome prince charming.

Chapter 2: Disney Animation as Modern Folklore

Chapter 2.1:

Disney Animated Feature Films

Animation is a technology which the Disney Company uses to retell stories from other traditions. Many Disney animations are their own invention, but the majority of their animated feature films are stories from much older myth or folklore. I will use the examples of Disney's films *Hercules* (1997)*, Snow White* (1937) and *Rapunzel* (2010) as case studies to examine Disney Animation as a whole. These stories have a long and rich cultural history and most come ultimately, as we have seen, from oral tradition. Only later were they written down, as poetry, prose or drama. Disney's animated feature films have become synonymous with fairytales and the company has seen the economic success of pairing this ancient tradition with the relatively new technology of animation as a story-telling device.

In his book *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* Jack Zipes examines the value of the storyteller: "Since one had to be artful in the telling of tales, and since most people were not particularly "artful" or articulate in days of old […], the taleteller was highly regarded with a community." (Zipes, 2001, p.63). The story-teller was an artist, revered in society, but by the end of the nineteenth century these stories had become *Nursery and Household Stories* under the Grimm guise. Zipes goes on to mention that the early filmmaker Geoges Méliès "began experimenting as early as 1896 with fantasy & fairy-tale motifs […]. In fact he produced well over a hundred short silent films and often used fairytales such as Cinderella" (Zipes, 2001, p.67). Film was an ideal medium for acting out fairytales. Magic could be illustrated much more easily than in the theatre. However due to lack of sound in film at the time, the stories had to be simplified. What was once a completely oral tradition had to become a completely visual art. The fairy tale was "standardized so that it could transcend particular communities and interests. […] in

short, the fairy-tale film silences the personal and communal voice of the oral magic tales." (Zipes, 2001, p.69).

By the 1930s however, sound and colour have been introduced to film and it is at this time that Walt Disney is beginning his career in Hollywood. Disney had been creating shorts throughout the 1920s: "such as *Puss in Boots, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood*" (Zipes, 2001, p.89). J.B. Kaufman in his article 'Before Snow White' in *Film History* details the fact that many of Disney's animations were reused and given cameos in various other films in the early 30s, such as *Ye Olden Days* (1933), *Playful Pluto* (1934) and *Who killed Cock Robin? (*1935) (Kaufman, 1993, p.162). However, Disney had set his sights higher than this and "by 1934 he was finally ready to produce the film that would institutionalize the fairy-tale genre in the cinema industry in a manner that was just as revolutionary as the collecting and editing of the Brothers Grimm." (Zipes, 2001, p.89). Three years later, in 1937, Disney released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It was the "first animated feature in history based on a fairy tale and made in color with music" (Zipes, 2001, p.89) and cemented Disney animation as the number one modern medium through which fairytales would be told throughout the twentieth century. As J.B. Kaufman puts it in 'Before Snow White', Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* "established a precedent for much of the subsequent production, not only of Disney films, but of all animated features." (Kaufman, 1993, p.158). And so Disney's award winning formula proved to be successful with audiences and critics alike. After *Snow White*, Disney released the feature lengths *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Bambi* (1942), along with other collections of short films. However, when Disney returned to the traditional Fairytales and released his fourth feature length, *Cinderella* in 1950, according to Susan Ohmer in her article *'That Rags to Riches Stuff': Disney's Cinderella and the Cultural Space of Animation*, it "marked a financial turning point for the studio financially [sic] as well, earning more money on its initial release than any Disney feature since *Snow White.*" (Ohmer, 1993, p.232).

Over the next 4 decades, Disney studios only released three films based on European

folklore and fairytales: *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, based on the Grimm Fairytale of Briar Rose, *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), loosely based on the British legend of King Arthur, and The Black Cauldron (1985), loosely based on Welsh mythology. By the 1980s, other animation studios were releasing more commercially successful films, such as "*An American Tale* (1986) produced and directed by Don Bluth shortly after he left The Disney Company." (Francaviglia, 1999, p.159).

Don Bluth Studios, set up by the ex-Disney animator Bluth after his departure, created a number of other popular films throughout the 80s: *The Secret of NIMH* (1982), *The Land Before Time* (1988) and *All Dogs go to Heaven* (1989). By the late 80s however, Disney studios had returned to popular European children's fairytales and lined up a number for production beginning with "the release of *The Little Mermaid* in 1989 [which] sparked a renaissance" (Jackson, 2010, p.324). Then we see films such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), based on Charles Perrault's fairytale's collection, and *Hercules* (1997), based on Greek and Roman mythology. Again, there is a break in the folkloric tales being retold by Disney until 2009 when they released *The Princess and the Frog*, which is a modern interpretation of the Grimm fairytale *The Frog Prince*, and *Tangled* in 2010, a retelling of the Grimm story of *Rapunzel*, showing that the Disney company has successfully returned yet again to European folklore as a theme. The Disney Company also recently announced another film in their 'Fiscal Year 2012 Annual Financial Report And Shareholder Letter': "*Frozen*, based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* […] will be in theaters in November." (Disney Co., 2012, p.2).

Chapter 2.2:

From Grimm to Disney, and Snow White to Rapunzel

As examined in Chapter 1.3, the Grimm versions of fairytales were devoid of any sexual connotations due to the sensitivity of Wilhelm Grimm. In *The Classic Fairy Tales'* introduction to *Snow White*, Tatar explains how some early versions of the tale, such as 'The Young Slave' mention the concept of sexual and even, in this case, incestuous relationships. The evil witch in this case is played by the girl's uncle's wife, who assumes that her husband is having an affair with his beautiful niece. As it turns out, she is incorrect in her assumption, but nevertheless, even a suggestion of such a relationship would be out of the question for Grimm and so is removed. The brothers, who had originally intended to collect the tales as an effort to "capture German folk traditions in print before they died out" (Tatar, 1987, p.11). However, by their second edition, the brothers (Wilhelm in particular) had taken criticism for their lack of censorship, despite the changes they had already made and now they "no longer insisted on literal fidelity or oral traditions, but openly admitted that they had taken pains to delete 'every phrase unsuitable to children'." (Tatar, 1987, p.19). In the first edition of *Rapunzel* for instance, after the young prince has taken to visiting daily, Rapunzel does not realize that she has become pregnant and asks the enchantress: "Tell me, Godmother, why my clothes are so tight and why they don't fit me any longer." (Tatar, 1987, p.18). In the second edition reference to the pregnancy is removed and the line is changed to "Tell me, Godmother, why it is that you are much harder to pull up than the young prince?" (Tatar, 1987, p.18). Rapunzel is then cast out in both versions of the story.

Like Grimm, Disney was making stories for a particular audience and had no problem with editing or changing them in order to suit the end product:

> "We just try to make a good picture," Walt Disney once observed in connection with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. "And then the professors come along and tell us what we do." (Tatar, 1999, p.79).

As Zipes puts it in *Happily Ever After*, Disney is, and before him the Brothers Grimm were, in the 'Culture Industry'. So naturally if stories are shipped around the world to different cultures as commercial products, they will be required to change as the industry demands. Tatar makes mention of the fact that the Grimm stories, while extremely popular in their place of origin, not just in Germany, but all over Europe, they never travelled to America: "the Grimm's *Snow White* may never have fared particularly well in the United States, but its cinematic reincarnation continues to fill the coffers of its corporate producer" (Tatar, 1999, p.77).

Disney studios, which is now known for its conservative cartoons in which the stories are devoid of sexual relationships, is in the same business as the Brothers Grimm, who were writing, as the name states, *Nursery and Household Stories*. Grimm showed an obvious preference for stories or versions of stories with "Christian cast of characters over their pagan counterparts, although there was no compelling folkloric reason for them to do so" (Tatar, 1987, p.10). Despite the labels we attach today to the Disney studio, it was working in a relatively new genre back in the 1930s where "animation was not produced within a system of fixed institutions and social practices" (Zipes, 2001, p.90). However, in making the choices he did back in the 1930s with *Snow White*, Disney "would institutionalize the fairy-tale genre in the cinema industry" (Zipes, 2001, p.89).

Like the Grimm fairytales, Disney films do not make any reference to extramarital sexual relationships. Interestingly though, where the Grimm tales preference good characters such as angels and the Christian god and bad characters like the devil, Disney has very little references to Christianity or any other monotheistic religion. The Judeo-Christian supernatural presence played down in Disney and the ancient, pagan, magical aspects are brought to the fore. In Disney's *Snow White* the wicked step-mother does not just disguise herself as she does in the Grimm tale, but magically transforms herself into a hag using her supernatural pagan powers.

Similarly in *Tangled* Mother Gothel keeps herself young through the magic flower that grew from a drop on sunlight. Rapunzel, who herself receives the flower's magical healing and rejuvenating powers, is also used by Gothel in her eternal pursuit of youthful transformation. There is no such power-and-abuse connection in the Grimm version of the story and, even though the Gothel is referred to as an enchantress, there is no magic in the story at all until the end when Rapunzel's tears restore the prince's eyesight. Rapunzel's healing powers are not mentioned elsewhere in the story and both Gothel and Rapunzel appear to be unaware of them. This tiny fact about Rapunzel in the Grimm tale is picked up and becomes the main focus of the Disney film. In *Tangled* Rapunzel's magic hair is the reason that Gothel kidnaps her, whereas in the Grimm's *Rapunzel* the baby girl is handed over as punishment, and in payment for her parents' theft of plants from Gothel's garden: "You must give me the child which your wife will bring into the world; it shall be well treated and I will care for it like a mother." (Grimm, 2001, p.98).

Campbell's hero cycle is still applicable to both *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Tangled*. Both films still use the Grimm device of the forest as the threshold and zone of magnified power. Snow White escapes into the forest after the huntsman tells her to run away and never return, lest the queen kill her. She runs from an open meadow full of wildflowers into a dark forest, dense trees. As she runs, the forest around her comes to life, branches turn into claws, logs transform into monsters that grab and snap at her as she runs. Eventually, overcome by fear, Snow White collapses and the magic recedes. The rest of Snow White's story is played out in the forest, up until she is kissed by the prince, awakened from her "sleeping death" and leaves the forest to live "happily ever after". The same departure, initiation, return cycle is present here in the Disney adaptation as in the Grimm version, but with the addition of required magic to break the witches spell. In the Grimm tale, Snow White and the prince have never met, but he falls in love with her sleeping body. When he picks up the glass coffin to move her, the poisoned piece of apple is dislodged and "the piece of apple fell from between her lips, and Snowdrop awoke" (Grimm, 2001, p.199). In Disney's *Snow White*, there is a condition to the "sleeping death" spell that

the witch casts on the apple: that it can be broken by “love’s first kiss”. So magic can be both good and bad in the Disney and ultimately it is required for a happy ending.

Tangled also follows Campbell’s Monomyth cycle, but it differs far more from the Grimm tale than *Snow White* does. In Disney, Rapunzel is a princess, who is taken by her kidnapper into the forest and raised in a tower from a baby. While in the Grimm tale, only “when she was twelve years old, the enchantress shut her in a tower, which lay in a forest” (Grimm, 2001, p.98). In the Grimm tale, there is a definite symbolic element to Rapunzel’s imprisonment in the tower: a girl of twelve is on the verge of puberty and needs to be kept away from the world. In *Tangled*, Rapunzel has spent her whole life in the tower, not to hide her transformation to womanhood, but in order to keep her magical powers hidden from the world. Conversely, in Disney, it is Rapunzel’s love interest who is a thief, not her parents, as it is in the Grimm version. *Tangled* also gives Rapunzel a ‘call to adventure’, as Campbell describes it, in the form of the Chinese lanterns that the King and Queen release every year on her birthday. Rapunzel is determined to travel to the kingdom to see the “floating lights” for herself.

At the end, it is not in fact Rapunzel who “appears to have died” (Campbell, 1975, p.79), but Eugene. Rapunzel’s magical hair has been cut off, rendering it useless and it cannot heal him. In grief, Rapunzel cries over his body, and her tears heal him instead. This is a reverse of gender-roles: even though Rapunzel heals the prince’s sight in the Grimm tale, the prince believes Rapunzel to be dead prior to this. Eugene never believes Rapunzel to be dead in *Tangled* because she is there to witness his encounter with Gothel. In the end, Rapunzel takes him back to her kingdom, where she is the rightful heir, not the other way around. This is a departure from the traditional telling of the *Rapunzel* tale, but has happened in one other ‘Disney Princess’ film: *Aladdin* (1992) where Princess Jasmine marries the eponymous hero despite his lowly status as a “street rat”.

There is a definite shift in the way women are portrayed in Disney’s first fairytale film *Snow White* in 1937, and in *Tangled* in 2010. There is also a further separation of

fairytale from Christianity. In *Snow White*, while the religious is played down in favour of the pagan and the magical, Snow White still says her prayers before bed. We do not hear to whom she addresses her prayers, but she says “Amen”, which is the traditional Judeo-Christian conclusion to a prayer. By the 21st century, Disney has systematically removed any references to modern religion. There are no references in *Tangled* and, like *Snow White*, magic is brought to the fore and used much more even than in the Grimm Tale.

Chapter 2.3:

Ancient Greek Heracles to Modern Hercules

Disney's *Hercules* is based on the stories of the hero Heracles (Latin: Hercules) from Ancient Greek and Roman mythology, whose popular adventures were examined in Chapter 1.2(b). *Hercules* is Disney's second attempt at depicting the mythology of Ancient Greece; The first was a 25 minute segment within *Fantasia* (1940). Set to the music of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, the gods, goddesses and mythical creatures of Ancient Greece were brought to life by Disney animation. 57 years later they would be animated again.

Hercules, released in 1997 in the midst of what is referred to as the "Disney Renaissance" (Jackson, 2010, p.324), is a modern retelling of this ancient hero's story. Disney have used the Latinised version of Heracles' name: Hercules, but elected to keep the original Greek names of the gods. Like the Grimm tales and Disney films we have already examined, all references to extramarital sexual relationships have been removed from *Hercules*. This means that Hercules is no longer the half mortal son of Zeus and Alcmene, but the son of Zeus with his wife, the queen of the gods: Hera. Despite the change in Hercules' lineage, Disney still have Hercules grow up on earth with Alcmene and her husband Amphitrion. Amphitrion is preserved as Hercules' adoptive father, and Alcmene becomes his adoptive mother instead of his biological one. However Iphicles (Hercules' twin half-brother) is absent from the film, as Disney's childless Amphitrion and Alcmene pray to the gods to bless them with a child. As a result of his birth, Hera is not Hercules' tormentor, but his adoring mother. Instead the jealousy is transplanted onto Hades, god of the Underworld. Hades is Zeus' brother and in Disney he is jealous of Zeus' position as king of the gods and he resents his own domain over the underworld. He plots to overthrow Zeus and return to Olympus as King himself. He kidnaps Hercules and gives him a potion to make him mortal. This is remarkably different from Hades' depiction in ancient myth, where he is "in no sense evil or Satanic, just as his

kingdom bore no resemblance to the Christian Hell" (March, 2001, p.341), which we also saw in Chapter 1.3. For the Ancient Greeks, death was natural and expected and there was no distinction after death. The later Romans had 'Elysium' for a select few kings and heroes, but this was not for the average person. Interestingly, despite Disney introducing undertones of God versus Satan in the relationship between Zeus and Hades, the underworld is shown as completely devoid of segregation: there is no indication of a 'hell' or a 'heaven', it is as universal as it was for Homer.

There are other traces of the Christian in *Hercules*, such as the chorus of Muses. The Chorus was an integral element of ancient theatre, where, according to Aristotle, "The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole." (Aristotle, 1962, p.62). Traditionally they sang songs on stage and were regarded as an 'onstage audience', who could speak to both to the real audience and the actors. The Muses in ancient culture were "goddesses on whom poets and other creative artists, thinkers and philosophers depended for their inspiration." (March, 2001, p.514). *Hercules'* Muses act in the very same way as Aristotle's Chorus – they speak to the audience and explain the story via song. However, there are definite Christian undertones: they are a modern American gospel choir. Even the title of their first song "The Gospel Truth", speaks of Zeus' supremacy as King of the gods. This kind of Christianity is a far cry from Dante's draconian *Divine Comedy* or the modest Calvinistic religion of the Brothers Grimm: it is showy, loud, and celebratory with the Muses frequently breaking into song and even turning up in other characters' songs to spur them on.

Overall in the story of *Hercules*, the hero's quest, his motivations, and ultimately his personality, are different from the ancient myths. However, Disney has included many subtle references to the ancient stories. At the beginning of the film, Hades' two minions transform themselves into snakes and attack the baby Hercules. Hercules promptly strangles them, just as he does with the real snakes in the traditional myth. Throughout Hercules' quest to become a hero, he fulfills Campbell's Monomyth as well. When he is still young he feels awkward and like he doesn't belong, something that never happened to the strong, brave, confident

Heracles we see in myth. When his adoptive parents give him a medallion with Zeus' lightening bolt on it, Hercules is inspired to journey to the temple and claims we will: "find where I belong". On entering the temple, Hercules passes the first threshold. From here on, he encounters 'Supernatural Aid' in Zeus himself, who is also a source of 'Magnified Power', along with his flying horse Pegasus, the satyr Philoctetes and many of the monsters and beasts that come from Heracles' Twelve Labours. Ancient Heracles proves his hero-status by the great tasks he performs, but the message given by Zeus to Disney's Hercules is that "a true hero isn't measured by the size of his strength, but by the strength of his heart" – the converse of Greek ideas of heroism. For instance in Book 9 of the *Iliad,* when Achilles speaks to his comrades of the prophecy his mother Thetis had given him, he explains the choice he is faced with:

> If I stay here and fight on round the Trojans' city, then gone is my homecoming, but my glory will never die: and if I come back to my dear native land, then gone is my great glory, but my life stretch long and the end of death will not overtake me quickly. (Homer, *Iliad*, 9:410– 414).

Faced with the prospect of an early death but eternal glory, or a long peaceful life, after which his memory will be forgotten, Achilles chooses eternal glory. Thetis tells him of the woman he would meet and marry if he were to return. She tells him that he would be loved and revered by his children and grandchildren, but that, after this, he would be forgotten. This message of glory and infamousness over love and contentment is turned around for Disney's *Hercules*: in the end, Hercules declines to take "up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess". He gives back his immortality and chooses instead to stay on earth with his mortal lover. This does, however, fulfill Campbell's 'Return' as he becomes the 'Master of Two Worlds' (Campbell, 1975, p.197). Hercules descends to the underworld, proves his worth, regains his immortality and defeats death in order to return to the surface. He, like Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, then rejects this life of immortality and returns to his rustic home, where he is greeted by his pastoral adoptive parents. Also like Odysseus, he brings with him skills he has learnt on his journey in places of magnified power. In the Ancient myth however, at the end of his life, as we saw in Chapter 1.2, he is

taken by Zeus to Olympus and made immortal.

In her book *Mouse Morality*, Annalee R. Ward conveys the negative criticism's of *Hercules* the 1997 Disney film in comparison with the mythology it is based on: "Hall: 'this pastel version desecrates the substance and spirit of mythology itself. […] *Hercules* insults us and violates the roots of our intellectual and spiritual heritage'." (Ward, 2002 p.80) and "Kempley: 'Chock-full of celeb cameos, puns and contemporary camp, the movie is annoyingly hip'." (Ward, 2002, p.80). Critics compare and contrast the film with unnamed ancient sources, most likely the popular Athenian tragedies examined in Chapter 1.2(b), though they do not give specific references. What many critics fail to see is just how very Sophoclean and Euripidean the ideas embedded in their criticisms are. Fourth century BCE Athenian Tragedy perfectly fit these descriptions of "celeb cameos and contemporary hip": Theseus was never a part of the Heracles myth, he is merely added by Euripides to the end of his play to appease the contemporary trend of 'Athenising' myth. In the same way, Pegasus, while a creature in classical mythology, was never part of the Heracles myth, but added by Disney in lieu of a sidekick or best friend character. The very fact that myth was flexible and adjustable was part of the culture. The culture which Hall claims Disney's *Hercules* "desecrates" and "violates". Ward goes on to replay Matt Stamper's criticisms of *Hercules* as a " 'mixed-up version of paganism- he is represented as an almost messianic son of a god'." (Ward, 2002, p.80) and she herself examines how "Disney's version of myth supports the social order that teaches life's lessons." (Ward, 2002, p.82). So *Hercules* can be seen as a hybrid of its pagan roots and its Christian medium: the "social order" and "life lessons" to which Ward refers are of course that of a modern western Christian society, not an ancient Greek one. However, adapting the myth to the medium has been the way of myth since its inception. The medium here is Disney's particular brand of animation and Ward aptly describes certain themes as being "routine to the Disney formula" (Ward, 2002, p.82).

Like *Snow White* and *Tangled*, *Hercules* uses the "Disney Formula" (Ward, 2002, p.80), where an audience possesses an innate knowledge as to the nature of the

medium that is Disney animation: The hero or heroine will go on a Campbell Monomyth adventure: they will receive a 'Call to Adventure', either from without or within; they will receive 'Supernatural Aid', whether it is from a sentient being or from a mystic karmic source; they will pass through a 'First Threshold' into a 'Zone of Magnified Power'; they will be swallowed, either symbolically or literally into the unknown and reborn anew; they will be tried and tested in their 'Initiation' all to receive a boon; and in the end they will either return, 'Master of Two Worlds' to share their wisdom, or live "forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess". These films represent Disney's multi-cultural mix of Christian 'morality', humanistic aeteological stories, and ancient paganism.

Conclusion

In the preceding two chapters, I have reviewed Disney adaptation of European myth and folklore with close examination of three selected case-studies. We have seen the origin of myth as having a grounding, at its most primal level, in questions of death and the underworld. Art forms of this, oral and pictorial, were the stage after acknowledgement of the existence of such other worlds. From these art forms we developed standardized mythologies and folklores specific to different regions.

As we have seen, Disney's adaptation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was immensely more popular in the United States than the Grimm fairytales ever were. Zipes says of Disney that he was "more in touch with the American spirit of the times than his competitors, who also sought to animate the classical fairy tale for the screen." (Zipes, 1999, p.333). He goes on to explain how Disney was:

> A radical filmmaker who changed our way of viewing fairy tales, and that his revolutionary technical means capitalized on American innocence and utopianism to reinforce the social and political status quo. (Zipes, 1999, p.333).

In more recent years, films like *Hercules* and *Tangled* have attempted to divest themselves of things like religious references, which were actually quite prevalent in the original tales.

As for Disney's reasoning for retelling a story that did not have the same popularity in America as it did in Europe: Disney has been quoted as stating "we just try to make a good picture" (Tatar, 1999, p.79), so perhaps taking a story that was not as sacred gave him the flexibility and artistic license to exert his own ideas on the story and make the film as he would choose to, cinematically. Speaking about his medium, Disney also said in his article *Mickey as Professor* that film, and in particular animation, was "an essential tool in the labour of enlightenment, civilization, and peace." (Disney, 1945, p.125). Although, the context of this article was to promote

the idea of using film as a medium of education, rather than to use pre-existing films that had been simply created as entertainment.

Myth and folklore were originally intended to be told in communal gatherings, whether it be sung by a bard or performed in a theatre, but "unlike the oral tradition, the literary tale was written down to be read in private." (Zipes, 1999, p.335). However, Disney reverts to the ancient idea of the telling of myth as communal. In 1937 there were no televisions: the only way to watch *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was to attend a communal gathering at a cinema. Zipes attributes *Snow White*'s success to the audience of "desperate Americans who sought hope and solidarity in their fight for survival during the depression of the 1930s" (Zipes, 1999, p.346).

So Disney animation is responsible for establishing an 'American folklore' where no such genre existed before. It has inspired phrases such as 'Disney Renaissance' exhibiting the reverence that audiences hold for the original films that are later reborn in this period. It also created and maintains what Ward calls the 'Disney Formula'. However, as I have argued in my paper, this adapting of culture to the modern is in the spirit of the origin of the myths. Booker maintains that there are seven basic plots into which all stories fit, Campbell maintains that there is only one Monomyth, with variations. I have used Campbell's theory on each of my case-studies to show that this is so. There seems to be more variation than *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* initially suggests, but ultimately these are superficial or material variations, but the characteristics remain. So from aeteological beginnings, to morality tales, to entertainment, adaptability is the nature of myth and folklore.

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