Villainous or Vilified?: Exploring the Representation of Witches as Female Villains in Animated Disney Films

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Abstract

Visual representation of women in media is a widely discussed topic as it propagates a variety of stereotypes. From the textual to the visual format, these narratives followed by the visual representation have the ability to influence the viewers and ingrain certain ideologies in the mind. Disney, one of the biggest entertainment mediums, has a significant role in the creation of stereotypes and ideologies in people through their method of narration and presentation. Women, especially witches are one of the most targeted and villainised people from the history of witch hunts to fairy tales and later in Disney films. This extreme vilification leading to stereotyping happens through the exaggerated visual representation of these witches. This study therefore aims to study and analyse the visual representation of witches, the selective visual alterations and exaggerations done by Disney in select Animated Disney films in terms of the visual representation of witches from fairy tales to Disney films, a less explored aspect in the study of Disney female villains. The study utilises close reading of these visual texts through visual semiotics and Monstrous Feminine Theory by Barbara Creed to analyse these alterations and exaggerations.

Keywords: Witches, Visual Representation, Disney, Female Villains, Fairy Tales

1. Introduction

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, show me the fairest of them all." This line by the evil Queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is one of Disney's most used and reused ideas in princess films. The Grimms brothers' age-old fairy tales about princesses, witches and evil stepmothers, which later turned into Disney animated movie adaptations, conveyed something more than morals to its viewers. Disney conveys the construction of the female body according to its characteristic traits through its conscious portrayal of villains' bodies. There have been various ideas and representations of witches through the years, which indirectly reflect society's perception of them. The character construction and the visual representation of the witches as villains, stepmothers, foster mothers, and finally, a sister have been altered in their approach with the corresponding socio-cultural changes. Body and the character construction around their entire gender and bodily features lead to their labelling as villains. This, in turn, directly affected society's perception of villains. This is a fact that many have forgotten or have conveniently ignored.

The images of villains curated by Disney involve several factors, one among those being the aspect of age. The villains chosen for the research, such as the evil queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, and Mother Gothel from *Tangled*, are all portrayed as feared witches or women with magical agents. However, in the older Disney movies like the former two, the villains are

described as 'ugly', 'old', and 'scary' women living in solitude. By the time Disney had reached the latter two movies, there were several changes in the villains' presentation, even though there still needed to be more elements of the conventional representation of witches as villains. As mentioned earlier, several aspects are devoted to creating the image of female witches in these animated films. A point to be noticed is that this representation of female villains, in terms of their appearance and character, is directed towards their target audience, primarily girls of all age groups. Although boys are exposed to Disney princesses and villains, girls are mostly the target audience. Such representations of being overweight or too skinny, wearing black clothing, and having sharp facial features and associating it with 'being evil' vastly affect the children's perception of people with such features in the real world. The portrayal and presence of witches in Disney films also act as a catalyst towards creating the idea of femininity and the beauty standards of princesses.

Fig. 1. "Mother Gothel's original form," Nathan Greno, *Tangled*, 2010.

Women and Villainy

The witches in the Disney films are always associated with having the freedom and voice for themselves, which the princesses lack. This lack found in the princesses is being substituted by unattainable and impractical beauty standards, which are foiled by the portrayal of an unconventional body and features of the witches. As Barbara Creed states in her *Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Creed 28)*,* women are terrifying due to the vagina dentata or vaginal teeth, and this must be tamed and is usually done by a man. This creates a sense of terror and disgust, as witches are primarily associated with these characteristics as they are old, ugly, accused of cannibalism, castration of males, etc. Disney films use this idea to build on their creation of female villains who are more than horrifying but also disgusting. Julia Kristeva clearly states this as an 'abjection'. She says that humans tend to get horrified by things that they find have lost the distinction between the subject and the object. Here, the villains are distinct from the princesses, who have created a familiarised beauty standard for their viewers. Thus, the portrayal of witches as villains with scars, blemishes, and disfigured body parts tends to horrify the viewers, creating a distinct binary between these two characters. Disney also very clearly portrays witches in such a conventional manner, which is not very different from the Grimms and Hans Christian fairy tales, except that the description of the characteristics of witches is exaggerated to the extent that it is made horrifying to its viewers. This exaggeration also stems from the history of witches and witch hunts and the simple fact that the women who were termed witches were those who did not abide by the norms constructed by society.

Disney and Witches

The Disney films chosen for this study, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The Little Mermaid,* and *Tangled*, contain the character of witches working as obstacles to achieving the princesses' perfect life. These female villains are assigned certain common traits, such as being the foil to the princesses, from their beauty to the behaviour they possess. This creates a visible contrast to their entire character from the princesses, who are portrayed as the perfect woman everyone accepts and requires to be in a patriarchal society. Meanwhile, the witches subtly convey how a woman is not expected to be in a male-dominant community. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* portrays the evil queen as a lonely woman who is jealous of a teenage girl for her beauty and tortures her. Similarly, Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* is abandoned from the Sea Kingdom due to her use of magic. However, she ultimately was also aiming for the beauty of Ariel and her voice to achieve the prince and also conquer the Sea Kingdom. Mother Gother in *Tangled*, unlike the fairytale, where she tries to maintain eternal youth using Rapunzel's magical hair. Despite the common idea of witches even today, all these witches, who were once considered herbalists and later labelled Devil's people, are portrayed in Disney films merely as women who use their magical agents to attain beauty, which, according to the patriarchal society, is a significant lack. Thus, the creators of these films have cleverly created a binary through the representation and motive of the witches in the Disney films, deviating from the actual fairy tales and moving away from the history of the witches and reducing them to women trying to fix their lack of beauty.

Fig. 2 "Ursula and Ariel," John Musker, *The Little Mermaid*, 1989.

Fig. 3 "The Evil Queen," *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, David Hand, 1937.

History of Witches

The history of witches dates back to 15th century England, and various fairy tales were inspired by this history of witches and witch hunts in Europe, which now is altered, exaggerated and made horrifying. Women in the 1600s England who were rumoured to be witches were executed by the lead of the English witch hunter Matthew Hopkins. These alleged victims of this execution of practising witchcraft were

found guilty since they had body marks such as skin blemishes, moles or even scars, which the people believed to be the sign of the devil marking the witches as a result of signing a pact with him. As mentioned above, these marks were natural and sometimes a sign of old age. Hence, many older women were accused of being witches. This continued, and later, the fairy tales started portraying witches or "die böse Hexe", as the Grimm brothers call it, as old women with wrinkles, blemishes, and an evil outlook. These markers of identification and association with witches can be seen in Disney films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *The Little Mermaid.* In this research, the witches are closely analysed and interpreted from the perspective of their representation in the films and the socio-cultural influence on their appearance and features.

Fig. 4 "Book Illustration, Old fashioned witch on broom with black cat, C. 1800s." 2010, *Vintage Ephemera,* http://vintageephemera.blogspot.com/2010/10/book-illustration-old-fashioned-witch.html

Literature Review

Witches and witchcraft have been prevalent elements in many fairytales and folktales, as these are considered magical elements that are placed to foil the good magic in the tales. The documentary on the European witch hunt in the 1600s uploaded by Timeline-World History Documentaries vividly narrates the history of the same. The portrayal of witches in these stories and later in the visual texts has an influence that can be traced to the 1600s European witch hunt, one of the bloodiest years in history. The description of the women accused of witchcraft, the details of the scars and marks on the witches that indicated the pact they signed with the devil, their actions and confessions have aided the writers in the creation of a cruel and evil witch who is as powerful as the protagonist and thus is perfect to be a foil for the protagonist. Through this documentary, the researcher also aims to analyse selective alterations done by Disney while adapting the fairytales to films.

The article "Feminist Redemption of the Witch: Grimm and Michelet as Nineteenth-Century Models" by Qinna Shen provides a deep insight into the origin of witches and witchcraft and the connection of this legend about witches to the narration and details of witches as seen in the Grimm brothers' fairy tales. The socio-cultural factor for using the conventional idea about the witches in the Grimm's fairy tales, the influence of the Catholic church and later the Protestant church in describing the German Heathen worship as devil worship is discussed here. Grimm vividly describes his take on witches and concludes that witches are often wise women who break the binaries. Thus, this becomes a critical reason for creating witches, who are unconventional women as evil beings. This article aids the research by analysing the alterations made in Disney films from fairytales.

The article on the ageing factor in the context of Walt Disney's female villains by Nada Ramadan Elnahla conveys ideas about the conventional stereotypes and characters assigned to older women. The article discusses the physical and character portrayal of the Disney villains compared to the original fairy tales.

The significant ideas in this article include the fact that socio-cultural influence is a notable factor in designing and curating the villains and the concept of age itself as a demeaning element that makes a woman a villain. The idea of old age and witches always being the villains is a common element in films chosen for this study. This article also becomes a guide to establish the researcher's intention to trace the trajectory of the visual representation of Disney female villains throughout the years through the lens of age, beauty, features, and the period in which they are set.

The book *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* by Barbara Creed discusses the term' monstrous feminine' and how it differs from the conventional idea of monstrous males. The book vividly discusses the role of witches, vampires, female psychopaths, and ghosts in films and their entire representation itself. The book talks about how women are generally looked at as weak beings but, indeed, are powerful beings, and it is due to the fear of getting overpowered that men turn these women into villains and monsters. Witches, in general, are discussed throughout an entire chapter. These facts result in the culture and society creating visual texts on such female villains, making them as horrific as possible.

The article " The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales " by Lori Baker Sperry and Liz Grauerholz discusses the social construction of beauty around the female characters in children's fairy tales and how these representations are far more than the binary of beauty and ugly. The article details the influence of these children's fairy tales on young readers and the consequences and stereotyping encouraged through these mediums. The article takes the example of the Grimme Brothers' fairy tales and foregrounds the representation of princesses and villains. The distinguishing features between these two characters in these tales concerning their body image add to the creation of binaries between beautiful and ugly.

The article "Learning to Live as a Disney Villain" by Jessica L. Kirker provides a detailed account of the stereotypes and notions that revolve around Disney villains. The article puts forth the central argument that women who defy the beauty standards of society and do not abide by the conventional characteristics assigned to them, such as being dependent, obedient and damsel in distress attitude, instead are independent and courageous to voice their opinions are termed as villains. The recurring pattern followed by Disney got ingrained in the viewers' minds that the villains are primarily female due to their defiance of patriarchal ideologies and that women who are independent are indeed cruel and arrogant. This is the most widespread belief circulated through the media, which society believes and blindly follows.

The article "How lucky you are never to know what it is to grow old" — Witch as a fourth wave feminist monster in Contemporary Fantasy Films" by Rikke Schubar discusses the feminist waves and their central focus regarding women, their age and their goals. The article states that ageism has always been discussed, and it is a form of sexism that not many find very evidently. This notion and ideology are what is reflected in princess films. The trajectory of the witches' portrayal and their status in society is also discussed to bring the readers to an understanding of the change in the socio-political set-up that resulted in the mass murder of women who were denied the norms in the name of practising witchcraft. This article will aid the research in analysing the primary texts of ageism and sexism in films.

The article "Disney's Female Gender Roles: The Change of Modern Culture" by McKenzie Barber discusses the evolution of Disney films by connecting it to the socio-political and cultural changes that occurred in each decade. The article includes aspects such as the influence of the waves of feminism on Disney's portrayal of its females, the impact Disney has created on the masses and the changes that Disney has made to ensure the sustenance of societal stereotypes despite portraying the progress in the character portrayal. The Disney women are categorised according to each era, and each is part of the waves of

feminism. Through this, the reader can get a clear idea about the socio-political and cultural influence that results in the creation of a character.

The book *Visual Methodologies* by Gillian Rose discusses how images can be used to interpret the changes around them. Each chapter in the book provides a deep insight into the significance of images and visuals and their underlying meanings. The visual semiology, a chapter in this book, mainly discusses and instructs the readers in reading a visual or an image by understanding its socio-cultural environment, the denotative and connotative meanings and so on. The idea of visual pleasure, voyeurism and gaze is also discussed in this book, which will aid in the analysis of this paper.

Research Gap

The representation of old women as villains in Disney films is an area that is often studied in the field of research on Disney films. However, the selective alterations from narratives in the fairytales to the visual representation of the witches in Disney animated films resulting in their vilification is an aspect less explored in the study of villains in Disney princess films. This selective alteration from the visual representation through narration to the onscreen visual representation of these witches is considered the focus of this study on the visual representation of witches in select Disney films. Therefore, this study argues and analyses the selective visual alterations Disney makes in fairytales to make witches reprehensible, an aspect less explored while studying villains in Disney princess movies.

Research Objectives

- To analyse the politics of representation of witches in Disney princess films. ● To trace the evolution of the visual representation and narratives of witches from fairy tales to animated Disney princess films.
- To analyse the construction of monstrous femininity and abject horror through the character portrayal of witches in Disney animated princess movies.
- To identify and analyse the notions of aesthetics and morality attached to the princesses and witches that result in the construction of femininity.

Research Questions

- What are the archetypes that define the representation of witches?
- How has the politics of representation of witches changed from fairytale narrative to the princesses in Disney films?
- How do notions of normativity, morality, and beauty influence the embodiment of the monstrous feminine in the characterisation of witches?

Method and Methodology

The research will make use of the method of close reading of the primary texts using visual semiotics. Furthermore, the methodology implemented in the research consists of the theory of monstrous feminine by Barbara Creed.

2. Analysis

2.1 Who is a villain?

It is always crucial in a narrative to appoint certain characters to complete the story. Two of the most

significant characters are the hero and the villain. The construction of the villains, especially in visual mediums like animations and films, is crucial in understanding and developing the hero's character. The villains, to a large extent, differ from anti-heroes(Schafer 11). Many confuse these two terms and use them interchangeably. However, the anti-heroes bring a sense of sympathy to the audience by the end of the story, while villains persist in sustaining the detest in the viewers. The villains are often constructed as stark opposites to the heroes. Disney, especially, employs this by gendering the villains as well. The Disney villains are constructed based on how much they rebel or resist the patriarchy. Their role is simple. They go against the good and act as a representation of the contrast of good. Here, the female villains, especially the witches, are regarded as evil due to their resistance against oppression and being symbols of empowerment, which is frowned upon and thus portrayed as unappealing in the animated Disney princess movies.

2.2 Body and Age of the Villains

The body plays a crucial role in differentiating the female villains from the princesses. The villains chosen for this study especially carry certain bodily features that direct them not only towards the label of female villains but also to witches. In the selected movies, the body also acts as a symbol to create a binary between the villain and the princess, thus conveying specific standards and stereotypes to its viewers on judging people based on their appearances.

The distorted body is one of the critical elements that is often included while portraying these villains. Since most of these female villains are witches, it is often believed that witches are unappealing, ugly, older women who serve Satan to gain power. These witches in the 1600s were usually widowed older women who were bold enough to stand up for themselves or women who had been afflicted with fever (Qinna 20). The portrayal of witches in Disney includes exaggerated body features that grab the viewers' attention, horrific facial features and bodily parts that evoke a sense of disgust or fear, and often excessive flaws in conventional beauty.

Disney has also implemented the idea of body image in the process of characters' creation, and this is very evident from their portrayal of the princes and princesses as people who fall into the conventional beauty standards set by society, while the antagonists are often portrayed with distorted bodies. Body image, the term coined by Paul Schilder, is a subcategory of the psychodynamic theory where he states that body image is the perception of one's own body, the feelings and thoughts associated with it (Neagu 30). Body image is not confined only to the aesthetics of one's body but the personality as well. While this body image perceived by a person has a fair share of his or her own thoughts and feelings about themselves and the features they have, other factors such as interpersonal opinions and comments on a person, the societal expectations, the sociological, medical and cultural expectations and norms also play a crucial role in one's perception of their own body. Disney uses this idea of body image and carefully implemented it in the witches in the selected films in order to emphasise on the fact that these women are dissatisfied with their body and are in a need to attain the ideal body and beauty that is ingrained by the society in their minds.

Furthermore, the witches are especially selected and are portrayed with a distorted body in order to achieve the message that the witches, who are often characterised as powerful and old women are dissatisfied with their appearance and have the ability to transform themselves into the figures similar to that of the princesses. This arises mainly due to the fact that the body image of the god characters are always associated with an equally proportioned body while distorted body is associated with evil. The fairytales thus act as a primary source for Disney to create this body image of witches, and Snow White and the

Seven Dwarfs thus become the first film to clearly portray this representation of witches.

In the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the evil queen's body is initially portrayed as a middle-aged woman. However, with magic and witchcraft, Disney categorically conveys that her beauty turns into ugliness. This is shown through the representation of the Evil Queen in disguise as an older woman. Her body turns into an old, wrinkled skin and hunched body. The scars and blemishes on her face also represent the ugliness in her character. Witches were generally considered people with such blemishes, moles, or scars. The witch hunters in the 1600s considered women with such marks as witches who had sealed their deal with the devil by sexual intercourse (Qinna 22). These women who were considered and labelled as witches were the ones who either rebelled against the patriarchal norms of the society that oppressed women. Women, as Barbara Creed mentions in her theory of monstrous feminine, become monsters when they deviate from the norms assigned to women. Women with power or with voice are always a threat to men and thus are monsterized. As seen in Figure 1.1, the Evil Queen is shown with her hair covered, which the viewers are not exposed to. This could be interpreted as the queen having some insecurity or flaw regarding her hair. However, these features, along with the icy look in her eyes, convey and create a character sketch, resulting in stereotyping in the viewers' minds. In the fairytale, the Evil Queen is portrayed to be a beautiful woman who has arrogance and envy. Her features are not mentioned further and are narrated with very few details. Her appearance as an old woman is also very restricted without much detail (Grimm 18). However, Disney's representation of the evil queen changed to a large extent that she is represented as an old witch with blemishes, scars and marks, thus creating a sense of disgust and reiterating the fact that distorted bodies of women always are equated to villainy as they are not perfect according to the society (Hatheway 2). Witches, in general, are already a distorted section in this society. This portrays society's views on witches and women as magical agents. The old woman looks unappealing, creating a sense of disgust and fear. The eyes especially, as seen in Figure 1.2, look more bulged out, with a crooked nose and various marks on her body. This is deliberately portrayed to convey to Disney's viewers, primarily young people, the beauty standards and the aesthetic value of the feminine substantiated with beauty and the body itself.

Throughout the film, the evil queen is also portrayed with exaggerated facial expressions, mostly filled with hatred, anger and jealousy. She is also shown as someone who often frowns and disdains everyone else. These facial expressions which are vividly exaggerated, justifies the idea that though the Evil Queen is initially portrayed as a beautiful lady, her facial expressions justify the exaggeration of the lack of femininity and the idea that witches are ultimately unappealing women in some way. A sense of selfishness is conveyed through this character portrayal. In addition to the body and features of these women, the male-dominant entertainment industry has also made use of the idea of associating masculinity in females as an abnormal phenomenon and normalising the extreme femininity portrayed by princesses. Though the evil queen is a powerful woman with a voice of her own, she is considered a threat or a danger to the male-dominant society, thus resulting in women like her being considered old, ugly, unappealing and evil. This ultimately conveys to the viewers that the normative women are innately beautiful. In contrast, the empowered women who pose a threat to patriarchy are often ugly and unappealing to men. Therefore, witches, who in reality are empowered women, are abject due to this deviance.

Fig1.1 "The Evil Queen's facial expression," David Hand, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* **1937**

Fig.1.2 "The Evil Queen's Form as a Witch" David Hand, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

Furthermore, moving from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Little Mermaid* is another Disney film that captures and portrays a very stereotypical picture of witches and broken and independent women as villains with distorted features. Assigning unappealing looks to these women, especially when they are women with magical agents, is executed to create a very negative image of such women in a society that only values women for their motherly qualities and disdains anything other than that. Ursula is one of the most villainous females in the Disney films. She is also one of the powerful witches in the Disney films who owns her voice and is ambitious. However, Disney has conventionally portrayed men as ambitious and female villains are stereotyped as beings concerned with acquiring beauty and youth. This arises from the primordial idea that beauty is a significant factor in determining a woman's societal value. Through the portrayal of the witches as unappealing women, unlike the picture-perfect princesses, these films establish a statement that women who have such magical agents or who react against the norms are doomed as unattractive women. Many viewers tend to follow these standards projected in these films, creating a clear-cut binary of female bodies. These binaries and the characters associated with such bodies tend to create further stereotypes, such as overweight or curvy women with blemishes or scars as 'bad women' and slender women as 'good women.'

Ursula is not only portrayed as an old, obese, and scary woman but also shows various peculiar features. As Julia Kristeva proposes, anything apart from object desire is considered an abject and abject is primarily a marginalised section of people. Patriarchy has always considered women who do not fall under the norms as abject (Kristeva 22). However, here in *The Little Mermaid*, Ursula becomes abject and a threat to men. As seen in Figure 1.3, she is also portrayed with masculine characteristics, including her body language, which includes a masculine manner of walking and behaving, her hairstyle and her very non-feminine facial features. The fairytale explains Ursula only as a sea witch to whom Ariel approaches to get advice to attain human form and to find the prince. Though Ursula's space and her pet eels are depicted in a very grotesque manner, her appearance is not mentioned in the original fairytale (Anderson 12). However, Disney alters this by visually presenting Ursula as a grotesque woman with a distorted body and associates her lack of beauty with the environment she is in thus conveying a certain body image she has of herself and the body image she should have in order to be accepted in the society, by placing ariel

beside her. This stark contrast and exaggerated features brought in to highlight the beauty of the princesses also result in the audience's perception of witches and old women in general. Thus, women's beauty is equated to young, flawless features and passivity, which these female villains defy. However, a noticeable shift was seen when Disney created Mother Gothel in *Tangled*.

Fig 1.3 "Ursula," John Musker, *The Little Mermaid,* 1989

Moving on to Mother Gothel from *Tangled*, Disney became quite conscious of the changes and movements happening around women's bodies and the politics and discussion behind them. Furthermore, during the Revival Era of Disney, they focused more on creating iconic villains like the Golden Era by including various animations and character additions to make them villainous. Mother Gothel is portrayed and created as a woman with unusual features distinct from the previous villains who are witches or women with magical agents. In the original fairytale of Rapunzel, Mother Gothel is a powerful witch who is traded with Rapunzel by her parents in return for a fruit from the witch's garden (Grimm 05). However, due to the socio-cultural changes, including the intervention of the church, the wise women who treated patients were considered witches and later portrayed as highly evil in the fairytales and Disney (Qinna 19). The original fairy tale also doesn't emphasise the witch's body or appearance; rather, was only described for her powers and the fear people have towards her. However, in Disney, the visual representation and alteration of the narration to fit in the idea of a witch being evil to attain beauty and youth is done by portraying Gothel as an old woman in the beginning and portraying her as attaining youth due to Rapunzel's powers. This is reflected in Mother Gothel's representation and character sketch itself. As shown in Figure 1.4, she is portrayed as very slender, young, and with a perfect body. However, she always fears losing her beauty if Rapunzel is lost. The possessiveness she has towards her beauty and the reason for its sustenance, Rapunzel, is shown throughout the film. Gothel, in this film, also represents an ordinary woman who practises magic and is considered a witch in the 1600s society.

Furthermore, as in Figure 1.5, the stark difference in the two women's appearance is seen when they stand in front of the mirror. This particular scene conveys to the viewers the visuals of the two essential characters in the film and the contrasting features they possess, which is indeed a reflection of their inner selves. In Figure 1.5, it can be seen that the shape of their eyes is quite different, which can be interpreted as conveying their attitude towards things. While Rapunzel's eyes are shown with enlarged pupils, filled with curiosity and questions, Mother Gothel's eyes give an uncomfortable glare, clearly showing her inner greed for beauty and her control over the princess. The difference in her look in Figures 1.4 and 1.5 shows that her eyes are quite expressive of her mood and attitude towards things and people.
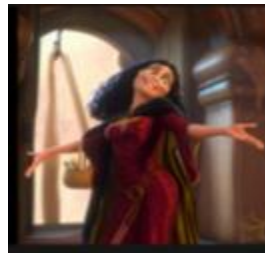
Fig 1.4 "Mother Gothel," Nathan Greno, *Tangled*, 2010

Fig 1.5 "Mother Gothel and Rapunzel," Nathan Greno, *Tangled*, 2010

2.3 Accessories, Outfit, and Makeup

Accessories and makeup play an equally crucial role as the features of the villains. When bodily features are one of the essential elements that contribute towards the creation of the villains, the accessories and makeup become extra additions that enhance the evilness and aid in creating an entirety of the villains. Since most of the female villains chosen for this study are witches, the creators, Disney, have utilised and experimented with every possible style and colour to evidently or subtly portray the evilness of these witches.

The outer appearance of a villain is as important as their entire body. For this, the makeup and accessories contribute significantly to Disney achieving this evil appearance of the villains. Since the significant aspect here is that these women who are vilified as witches, their makeup and accessories also match the traditional assumption of the witches' appearance. The women in 1600s England who were accused of practising witchcraft and labelled witches were old women with shabby appearances. Most belonged to the lowest section of society; thus, their appearance, clothing, and grooming were in terrible condition. Figure 2.1 depicts the appearance and background of the women accused of witchcraft. Most of them were either working-class people or peasants who either had mental illness or physical ailments or did not abide by the social norms, for which they were written off as witches. The fairytale adaptation of this visual representation of witches later became the beginning of Disney's creation of these women's distorted and unappealing appearance. The accessories, makeup, and attire of these witches, as represented by Disney, also emerge from the image created by the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Anderson Fairytales, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Fig 2.1 "Witch Hunters and the Witch" 2009, *Vintage Ephemera***,**
http://vintageephemera.blogspot.com/2010/10/book-illustration-old-fashioned-witch.html

Fig 2.2 "Initial image of a witch in fairytales" 2010, *Vintage Ephemera,*
http://vintageephemera.blogspot.com/2010/10/book-illustration-old-fashioned-witch.html

The initial Disney witch who had a striking resemblance with the image of witches created by the fairytales is the evil queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.* At the film's beginning, the evil queen is shown with very gothic makeup and dark outfits, including black and purple, with a mix of green. All these colours represent evilness, greed and a sense of mourning. In the entire setting of the film, the backgrounds of these two characters match their outfits and overall character, thus conveying a certain undertone of the character itself. The background of the evil queen's place, as seen in Figure 2.3, aligns with her outfit and makeup. The dark background with very little light entering her space and the chemicals and magic potions she is experimenting with convey a very negative message to the viewers about the queen itself. Despite her royal outlook with the crown and the golden pendant she wears, Disney still clearly draws a margin between the evil queen and Snow White in various aspects.

In Figure 2.3, it is evident that the mix of colours in her attire and her head being covered are the characteristics of an evil queen being greedy and apathetic towards Princess Snow White. The scarf that covers her hair also indicates that despite the evil queen being a powerful royal woman, she covers her hair, often considered a symbol of femininity. Thus, her hair is covered by her scarf, and her attempt to become the most beautiful woman in the world conveys her failed attempt to reach femininity, which Disney further emphasises when she completely transforms into the old witch. This transformation and portrayal of the evil queen as the old witch also conveys Disney's opinion on witches being subjected to abjection due to their distinct appearance and rebellious nature, which is seen as a threat to patriarchal society (Kristeva 30).

Fig 2.3 "The Evil Queen making magic potions" David Hand, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* **1937**

Figure 2.4 is a scene from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, where the contrast and a clear-cut binary between Snow White and the evil queen who turned into an old witch is shown. The contrast in their attire and appearance portrays the idea of abjection to the viewers. In her concept of abjection, Julia Kristeva states that humans tend to get horrified by things that they find have lost the distinction between the subject and the object. Here, the villains are distinct from the princesses, who have created a familiarised beauty standard for their viewers (Kristeva 50). Thus, the portrayal of witches as villains with scars, blemishes, and disfigured body parts, along with very shabby or very dark or dull coloured outfits, tends to horrify the viewers, creating a distinct binary between these two characters. The evil queen is thus portrayed in such a manner that stimulated the stereotyping of women as witches based on their bodies, attire, and makeup.

Fig 2.4 "Snow White with the Dwarfs and the witch in the background," David Hand, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* **1937**

Like the evil queen, Ursula also dons a black outfit with wine-purple and black tentacles. Ursula's hairstyle is also more inclined towards a very masculine style, thus contributing to the idea that she, an overweight woman with such short hair and bold makeup, becomes less feminine and more masculine. The use of black in the attires of most villains, including Ursula, as stated by Grzybowski and Kupidura Majewski in their article, represents the absence of colour and a sense of mourning (Grzybowski 395). Unlike the princesses, most women portrayed as evil witches are deprived of all the pleasures and positive outlook on things around them. They are always portrayed as lifeless and emotionless beings who are only filled with greed and envy when, in reality, villains like Ursula are women who talk about the realities of life and the reality of the world itself. However, these are overshadowed by the male-dominant society's idea that women who have such voices and opinions are not fit for society and are marginalised. This is enhanced through their appearance with these dark and dull colours. Additionally, the use of wine purple,

also called evil purple, in the outfits of both the evil queen and Ursula conveys the meaning of evilness, sadness and frustration in the characters.

Ursula's makeup, as seen in figure 2.5, resembles a lot that of drag queens, which Disney also admitted to being inspired by during the creation of the character. This representation of Ursula with bold eye makeup to enhance her evil look, bright red lips, and nail paints completes her as a witch who preys on people's wishes and dreams to attain more power. Though she conveys the realities of the world to Ariel and is an independent and powerful woman who is a threat to even the Sea King, she is portrayed as an evil woman by foregrounding very stereotypical features that create a woman subject to abjection. Ursula's outfit as her human alter ego, Vanessa, is shown to be completely different from her original form.

While Disney consciously portrayed Ursula as a disgusting evil witch disdained and marginalised by the entire sea kingdom, Vanessa, her human alter ego, is represented with a very close resemblance to Ariel and other princesses, with all the beauty standards being attained. When Ursula turns into Vanessa (Figure 2.6), she is accepted by people and is not marginalised. Disney deliberately placed this contrast in her appearance to convey that these old women who have magic agents and claim to be independent ultimately crave validation of their youth and beauty, just like any other woman. Thus, through the representation of these villains by altering their appearance and outfits and matching them with gloomy backdrops, Disney establishes a connection between women with power and beauty in the creation of villains, which is very unlike in the case of male villains

Fig 2.5 "Ursula's true form" John Musker, *The Little Mermaid,* **1989**

Fig 2.6 "Ursula's disguise as Vanessa," John Musker, *The Little Mermaid,* **1989**

Moving on to Mother Gothel, *Tangled* has used various styles in terms of the appearance and styles of each character. From the costume that closely resembles the Renaissance style of clothing to the subtle yet sharp features to enhance the manipulative and over-possessive nature Gothel has towards Rapunzel, Disney has carefully crafted her as a theatrical villain. While Ursula and the evil queen created a sense of disgust among the viewers, with Mother Gothel, Disney had a paradigm shift in creating a villain who provoked a sense of fear more than disgust. Figure 2.7 shows the Renaissance crimson dress with long

sleeves, her black hood to cover herself while going out, and the wine-red nails and lips; Mother Gothel appears to be a more authoritative woman with magic power. Her golden earrings, subtle makeup, and bold eye makeup make her look very mysterious and fearsome at the same time.

Fig 2.7 "Mother Gothel's entire appearance," Nathan Greno, *Tangled*, 2010

2.4 Elements indicative of the acquiring beauty

Disney has concentrated and generalised the female villains' common motif to acquire beauty. Women are always associated with beauty rather than power, and although these witches are women with power and agency, their ultimate goal is yet again generalised as to attain beauty and youth. Certain elements contribute to or indicate the acquisition of beauty for all these witches. Firstly, the mirror present *in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* acts as a significant element that contributes to the creation of society's voice to the evil queen about her appearance and the ideal beauty that is present in society. The mirror, as seen in Figure 3.1, constantly reminds the evil queen that Snow White is the most beautiful woman in the world, thereby provoking the evil queen to threaten Snow White's life. Though the evil queen is portrayed as a witch with an appealing appearance, it is through this use of the mirror that they convey the fact that the ultimate goal of these female witches is to attain something as insignificant as beauty. The message that Disney constantly gives is that female villains, in this case, women with magic agents and agency, despite being powerful, aim for things like beauty, which they are more concerned about, while the male villains are shown to have more important goals, such as gaining power. Here, the mirror becomes a voice of the patriarchal society, constantly reiterating that even though these women are powerful witches, they need society's validation in terms of beauty and youth to escape alterity.

Fig 3.1 "The Evil Queen and the Magic Mirror," David Hand, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937

Next is Ursula and the glass globe she possesses in *The Little Mermaid*. The glass globe shows a combination of Ursula's desires and other visions. The glass globe becomes a channel through which she

monitors and does surveillance. Her desire to conquer the sea kingdom is initially implemented by luring Ariel to her place. However, gradually, Ursula too shifts towards attaining Eric by gaining beauty. Her plan slowly deviates and moves again to beauty. Though Ursula is seen as one of the most ambitious, bold and most powerful witches, she is still generalised into a woman aiming to attain beauty. The entire idea of witches and their aim to attain beauty by portraying their lack of the same is established to re-emphasise and impose the beauty norms that are present in society and to convey the message that women with power are insignificant if she is not women with beauty. Figure 3.2 is the scene where Ursula monitors Ariel's moves through the glass globe.

The expressions on her face in this scene portray the elevation of her greed and evilness and the joy in reaching her goal of attaining power and beauty. This particular scene could be interpreted as the peak of Disney's usage of Barbara Creed's monstrous feminine theory, where she argues that women were usually portrayed as victims by the patriarchal society due to castration. However, she states that they are the prototype of what is monstrous itself. (Creed 50). Here, Ursula becomes a complete version of one of the seven archetypes under the monstrous feminine, the witch, through the glass globe acting as a medium that elevates this evil and greed in her to attain beauty.

Fig 3.2 "Ursula and the Glass Globe," John Musker, *The Little Mermaid,* 1989

Moving on to *Tangled*, Mother Gothel has been eyeing the magical flower, which later was used by Rapunzel, thus leaving her with magical hair to last her youth and beauty. Though this film was released during the major visual alterations and progress in Disney in terms of its portrayal of each character, this particular aspect of the definition of a woman's achievement or success with beauty persisted. The magic flower in *Tangled* is the major element that drives and elevates the greed in Mother Gothel. As seen in Figures 3.3 and 3.4, Mother Gothel's expressions and gestures towards these two elements give her beauty and reverse her age, clearly expressing her possessiveness towards these elements and a sense of fulfilment when she attains her goal. Though the original fairytale states that Rapunzel was given to Gothel in return for a fruit from her garden, asked by Rapunzel's mother,

Disney carefully altered this entire narrative to make it a very stereotypical story which makes women with power an evil one who is in chase for beauty and youth (Grimm 04)..Through this, Disney has also re-established the fact that though there is progress in the visual representation of the characters, the ultimate goal that a woman should be concerned about is beauty and youth, as ageing or old age is regarded as a disdained concept in this society that values only outer appearance of a woman than her power or agency.

Fig.3.3 "Mother Gothel and the Magical Flower" Nathan Greno, *Tangled*, 2010

Fig 3.4 "Gothel with Rapunzel's Magical Hair," Nathan Greno, *Tangled*,2010 3.

Conclusion

Beauty and age have always been crucial elements in Disney films throughout the years. From the first Disney film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the element of age and beauty has been a persistent theme. The characters, especially women, are often judged by the viewers with their beauty and through their visual representation. In the select texts, the Disney witches are portrayed in a very unconventional way with masculine features, exaggerated body features, overly done bold makeup, and agents that direct them to the fact that beauty and age is prioritised. The primary reason for this is the 15th-century European witch hunt, followed by a series of portrayals of witches in fairy tales and later in the visual form. The witch hunt was primarily based on the claims that women with such marks, scars and blemishes had sealed a deal with the devil and, therefore, were a threat to society. They were deemed to death, and their representation was associated with their appearance and their lack of beauty and youth. These historical narratives on witches were later adapted into fairytales, which were further exaggerated in visual forms like Disney.

The association of specific beauty markers assigned by society with princesses, contrasted with the lack of these markers equating to witches, reflects deeply ingrained societal norms regarding femininity and beauty standards. In fairy tales and subsequent film adaptations, witches are often depicted as older women, embodying their desire to regain youth and beauty. This portrayal conveys that old age is undesirable for women, reinforcing the societal expectation that beauty is essential for virtuous character. This exaggeration also depicts the clear manipulation of the narrative to fit it into the idea of segregating the women in Disney into the binaries of good and bad based on their beauty. Therefore, the depiction of witches in the select Disney films reflects the deeply ingrained societal norms and beauty standards, and this message is perpetuated by representing witches as characters who crave beauty, thereby aligning beauty with goodness.

Moreover, deviation from patriarchal norms, through their independence, agency and boldness, is equated with the visual representation of witches as unappealing or monstrous. The idea of witches being anxieties to the patriarchal society and the position of women being placed in a point of villainy through them, as untamed women continue through these animated films. Despite their agency and power, witches are

portrayed as visually unattractive, reinforcing the notion that beauty and power are mutually exclusive for women. This suggests that women who challenge patriarchal norms are inherently villainous, further marginalising those who do not conform to societal beauty standards.

Though the witches are symbols of empowerment to some extent, their morals are put in question through the portrayal of their bodies and attire in what Disney considers and has ingrained in the viewers' minds as unappealing or unfeminine. Disney's depiction of witches with distorted features and unfeminine attire emphasises the association between beauty and villainy. Disney's portrayal of witches as symbols of old age and lack of beauty therefore clearly perpetuates stereotypes that marginalise women who do not conform to patriarchal standards. The exaggeration of witches' features reinforces the idea that beauty is essential for society's validation, pushing older women or those with unconventional features to the margins.

Furthermore, the church's definition of witches, later adopted in the fairy tales to portray them as villains, persists through Disney's portrayal of most of the witches as visually unappealing and hateful characters. The fact that they deemed all women who opposed or challenged the norms as witches continues in society, where women who stand against the norm are termed witches in different cultures. As a result, a binary of princesses and witches is created based on physical appearance. The influence of media and the portrayal of specific visuals to curate certain societal stereotypes, especially of women who deviate from the norms, is heightened with such exaggerated visual representations, especially from a highly influential platform like Disney.

When this visual representation reaches the viewers, it is automatically reflected in society and their daily lives where people casually use the term "witch" on women who are bold or voice out or have features as presented in the films where witches are shown as old women with, distorted, crooked and asymmetrical body. Ultimately, witches are given as a brand to those women who, in real life, are quite similar to the visual representations portrayed by Disney. This ultimately gives rise to a binary of princesses and witches in real life, with these features becoming a tag for the stereotype of witches.

In conclusion, Disney's portrayal of witches reinforces harmful stereotypes about beauty and femininity, equating villainy with the loss or lack of beauty. By perpetuating these stereotypes, Disney contributes to the creation of stereotypes and subsequent marginalisation of women who do not conform to patriarchal and societal beauty standards, reinforcing the notion that beauty is the ultimate goal for female characters in general, whether they are the antagonists or protagonists. The research paper therefore analyses this visual representation of the witches as visually unappealing, old, and disfigured female villains and the consequent influence of this stereotype in a larger society. These stereotypes result in the exaggerated vilification of these witches in select Disney animated films.

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