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Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, Laura Sells, eds. *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender and Culture.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. xi + 264 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-20978-8; $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-32905-9.

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Although this book seeks to explicate ideology in fifty-five years of Disney films, it is no accident that the word "Disney" is missing from the book's title. The studio discourages authors of third-party books from using the name in their titles, on the grounds that doing so would imply the company's sponsorship or endorsement. No reader will doubt that this book is not a product of the Disney system: its feminist, Marxist, and poststructuralist readings of the Disney canon seek to demystify and deconstruct the Disney "magic" and lay bare the films' messages about gender, race, class, and politics.

The volume's initial section–Disney films as cultural pedagogy– examines the way that the Disney studio has appropriated and transformed classic literary texts and historical events and assimilated them to a distinctive "American" ideology, emphasizing the values of "democracy," "technology," and "modernity." In the first essay, Jack Zipes recounts the literary history of European fairy tales in order to show that Disney was only the latest in a long line of authors, folklorists, playwrights, and illustrators to rework traditional folk tales, retaining and discarding elements that reinforced (or contradicted) key ideological themes.

Henry A. Giroux then turns to the cinematic treatment of Vietnam in American film, describing various strategies filmmakers employed that obscured the war's political and moral meaning (for example, focusing on the plight of individual veterans and reducing the war to a coming-of-age tale). He argues that the Disney version of the war, *Good Morning, Vietnam*, exemplifies the studio's "politics of innocence"–a characteristic approach that reduces history to nostalgia, erases any sense of collective responsibility, and builds its narrative around the heart-rending experiences of an alienated American resister.

Next, Claudia Card looks at how Disney reshaped *Pinocchio*, describing how the studio distorted and tamed the original tale (which dealt with fundamental issues of trust and the nature of humanity), by treating growing up as learning to please others and to follow orders. Robert Haas's essay on *Billy Bathgate* focuses on the "Disneyfication" of the gangster genre–the way the E.L. Doctorow's novel was transformed by the Disney conventions of "innocent protagonists, male oriented mentoring, [and] patronized and objectified women." Susan Miller and Greg Rode explore the conflicting messages about race and gender transmitted by *Song of the South* and *The Jungle Book*.

The volume's second part–on gender construction–begins with Elizabeth Bell's description of the "semiotic layering" in the construction of women's bodies in Disney animation, focusing on the adolescent heroine, the wicked stepmother, and the fairy godmother. Using the lens of ecofeminism, Patrick Murphy seeks to show how *101 Dalmatians*, the "Rescuers" films, and *The Little Mermaid* conflate the subjection of nature and the subjection of women (depicting good women as domesticators and men as civilizers), while David Payne shows how Bambi's emergent masculinity is discovered in heroic combat.

The treatment of masculinity in Disney films is also explored in essays by Brian Attebery and Susan Jeffords. Attebery divides Disney's science fiction films into two distinct types: those featuring a boyish inventor and his quest for romance, and those featuring aliens who help a male adolescent make the passage to adulthood. Susan Jeffords links the shift from the hardened, muscle-bound, domineering action hero of the 1980s to the nurturing new man of 1990s film to a pervasive sense of economic decline.

Part III–on identity politics–continues the focus on gender identity. Laura Sells argues that *The Little Mermaid* successfully assimilates the classic tale of an adolescent girl's coming of age to a contemporary vision of the costs of women's access to the adult world. Lynda Haas examines the representation (and lack of representation) of mothers in Disney films, arguing that (with the

notable exception of *The Joy Luck Club*) these pictures reflect a very narrow range of role possibilities. Chris Cuomo turns to the unmaternal characters in *Mary Poppins* and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, and argues that these women serve as vehicles for validating traditional values and the family. D. Soyini Madison's black feminist interpretation of *Pretty Woman* emphasizes the film's ambivalence concerning women's autonomy and sexuality. Ramona Fernandez's analysis of EPCOT examines the way that it suppresses problematic aspects of American history, minimizing traces of race, gender, and class.

The volume's overarching argument is that Disney's trademarked innocence and magic are not reducible simply to a blend of nostalgia, technological wizardry, gender caricatures, and a sanitized version of reality. Rather, they represent a much more intricate ideology that sends out conflicting messages which defy simple summary–but which serve to mystify power relations and to reinforce traditional gender roles.

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