

# DARK AND MAGIC KINGDOM OF DISNEY

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From the Baby Boom to the Millennium generation almost everywhere in the world children grow up with Disney's fairytales. Rare are those not familiar with the creatures that came out from the imagination and pen of Walt Disney. Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Pinocchio, Dumbo, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Winnie the Pooh, Peter Pan... All of them are the well-known friends from our childhood who, even with adults, bring out a joyful smile and warmth in their hearts. A fairy tale feeling is identified with the narration that inevitably ends with a happy ending and riches for the main characters till the end of their lives and with the rightfully punished villains. Truly, this is a concept of justice which exists only in fairy tales, better to say in Disney's tales. Original Grimm and Andersen's or folk tales (from where the stories for children about the supernatural have originated), of which Disney made adaptations, do not inherently possess the narrative of a fairy tale we consider as such based on Disney interpretation. Taking into consideration some fairy tale elements one can draw the conclusion that the original good-night stories are by no means for children<sup>1</sup>.

## Good-Night Horror

The sisters in *Cinderella* cut their heels and toes to fit their foot in the small shoe and in the end of the story the birds peck out their eyes. These details are visible in the Disney's feature movie from 2014. The Red Riding Hood eats her grandma's meat and drinks her blood after the wolf persuaded her to do so, which is an obvious connotation with folk tales on werewolves and vampires. In the original version, Rapunzel got pregnant in a tower. *Hansel and Gretel* is about abandoned and abused children. The mother, not a stepmother, wants to kill her children in the woods. The Sleeping Beauty makes up because the Prince rapes her, not kisses her. Magic Piper is inspired by the folk story about missing children from Hamelin in Lower Saxony. The queen's death in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is more than bizarre and cruel. The queen is invited to the wedding party and forced to put on the iron shoes that make her dance to death. The Frog Prince will be beaten by the Princess until his complete distortion. The Little Mermaid does not want to kill the Prince and because of the pain in her legs she decides to drown and disappear in the sea foam.

These vivid horror-like details from the popular fairy tales are something that for sure we did not see in the wonderful cartoon musicals produced by the Disney Company. But, also widely unknown are the facts of their creator. As it turns out, it is rarely known and unbelievable that Disney himself visited the Nazi Party meetings, that he worked as an FBI agent during the McCartney era, that he voted for censorship, that he was against unions and that he had a paranoid fear of communism. Who is that controversial Dark Prince of Hollywood named by Marc Eliot in his biography?

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<sup>1</sup> References: Eliot, Marc. *Walt Disney Hollywood's Dark Prince*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1995. Print. Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. First published 1987. 2 ed. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print. Roth, Matt. *The Lion King: A short history of Disney-fascism*. *Jump Cut A Review of Contemporary Media*, nr. 40, March 1996, p. 15–20. Retrieved from: <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC40folder/LionKing.html>.

## The Dark Prince of Children's Fairy Tales

Different conspiracy theories may be found on internet pages and the most incredible (and funniest) is the one about sexual symbols interpolated within the small pictures of cartoons which allegedly influence the child's mind, "programming" children in their early age for sexuality.

Popularising such marginalities sidetracks people from the important controversies connected to the life and mission of *disneyism*. The leading man in the history of film according to the number of Oscars (22 awards, 4 honorary awards and 59 nominations) and his company (one of the most influential and profitable Hollywood productions, with franchises and conglomerates such as the two popular amusement parks in the USA and Disneyland in Paris, Tokyo and Hong Kong) are being targeted by conspiracy theories that do little to discredit his legacy. The real truth on his fascistic tendencies can be seen in his films even today, but it is not popular as the simplified version of his dark intentions in the conspiracy theories. Can one's multifaceted personality and life challenges be ever so simple to side his life and works to the right or left? Dark and Light? Good and Bad?

Walter Elias Disney was born in 1901 in Chicago. His parents were of German-English and Irish-Canadian origin. He was raised on a farm in Missouri in an idyllic American atmosphere which through scenography he presented in his films and in the streets of Disneyland. His entire life he was religious. As soon as he learned how to hold a pencil he started to draw farm animals. He said goodbye to the farm when his father bought a newspaper delivery firm. His brother and he at the age of six had to make a living delivering newspapers and milk and making jams. At the age of fourteen he enrolled an art school and when he was sixteen he drove the Red Cross ambulance car as a volunteer in France during the First World War. When he was nineteen he got a job as a draftsman in an advertising agency earning 50\$ (at that time it was a real fortune). Among the advertisements in the newspaper he used to place his drawings. As the audience liked that very much, he bought a camera and the drawing tools... That is how Rabbit Oswald, Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Three Pigs and other anthropomorphic animals were born. Later the vivid colours, sound and songs, incredible slapstick scenes were added and that is how the main trademark of *disneyism* was born.

Mickey Mouse is the most famous mouse in the world. His debut was in the *Steamship Willie* in 1928 and he won ten Oscars. He is present in 130 films and is the first animated character that got his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1978. Mickey's first voice was borrowed from Disney. Slowly Mickey got sound and colour and endured the changes through generations that moulded him and enjoyed him in comics and films.

### Innovation, creation and fascism?

All innovations in the field of technology, animation as well as film experiments, Disney accepted heartily and as a real visionary he interpolated them into his own ideas. As a result in 1933 he made the first colour feature-length animated musical. The Oscar winner, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, was made over the course of two years. It cost a million and a half dollars and was composed of 250.000 drawings coloured with 1.500 colours. The success of *Snow White* was enormous. When Disney showed his next film, *Pinocchio*, to the owners of movie halls they sadly asked him why there were no dwarves. Although he constantly had problems with bad box-office during the pre-war years and with the strikes of employees, Disney did not give up his vision. In 1940 he made a financial debacle but also aesthetical masterpiece with his abstract feature-length film *Fantasia*. In this film an orchestra follows the evolution of the Earth, mankind, dinosaur wars, the first ideas about evolution theory (created by the man who according to conspiracies was extremely religious?), and also visual etudes of crocodiles, flying horses, hippopotamuses, ostriches together with a comic broom and Mickey Mouse's laziness (a strong educational message about the respect of authority). All these we find in one film as an experiment of possibility and creativity of imagination.

How is it that in 1943 the man who attended the Nazi Party meetings was engaged in the propaganda production during the Second World War making the Oscar winner *Der Fuehrer's Face* (Donald Duck dreams that he is Hitler's soldier and he awakes from that nightmare in front of the Liberty Statue) or the feature-length animated film *Victory Through Air Power*? Controversies in Disney's life are evident without succumbing to the simplicity of the sweet conspiracy theories. This was a man of flesh and blood with many mistakes, flaws, fears in between the two wars and contradictory life decisions and beliefs that lead to some controversial consequences in his life and work.

Fascism, racism, chauvinism and Puritanism follow the dark side of Disney's artistic endeavours. In his essay from 1996 *The Lion King: A short history of Disney-fascism* Matt Roth deals in the controversies of Disney's stories. According to him, along with obvious Freud disorders, the narration of Disney fairytales is accompanied with a conservatively organized system. Roth compares the characters and plots with the fascistic platforms of thinking and white race supremacy in the struggle to maintain of patriarchy and exterminate homosexuality, liberalism and socialism. Biological need to serve the aristocracy is visible in the Hamlet-like story *The Lion King* (1994) and it is only the tool for capitalism and democracy to preserve their ideals. *Pinocchio*, *Aladdin*, *Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* all promote masculinity, patriarchy and gender classifications with a strict aversion against homosexuality. Ever since 1966 Disney has been dead, and yet his fascistic inclinations are vivid in a film created in 1994.

Roth rightly draws the conclusion that mothering conservative ideals at the beginning of the last century is still vivid in *disneyism*. Not necessarily because of Disney's moral stands but because of the "American reality – a reality whose ugliness is not hard to discern below the slick surface of bland music and cute, fuzzy animals." According to Roth, *Pinocchio* – created only by Disney – contains anti-Semitic metaphors. However, *Lion King* is created by a Jewish production company. The music is written by homosexuals and script writers are liberals. Still, if one makes a semantic analysis through metaphors in the narration of *The Lion King* can be interpreted as a fascistic pamphlet. Roth simply argues that fascism is not the creation of a demonic individual but is the consequence of the values of the whole American society, which is basically still undeveloped and wrapped in conservatism, xenophobia and patriarchy. That is in fact the other side of the bewitched mirror of Disney fairytales that we grew up with. The horror reality of the true nature of the daylight tale of our lifetime.

