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WALT DISNEY: A STUDY OF
HIS LIFE AND FILMS

by 45

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INTRODUCTION

It is the intention of this study to examine some of the questions which concern the life and films of Walt Disney. Was the man original and unique? His development of the methods of animation made him seem so.

What did the film critics have to say about Disney's films and the effects of the pictures on the mass audience? Who was this mass audience that flocked to theatres to see Walt Disney's movies? The film critics objected to the films on the grounds that they were shallow and un-intellectual. Some of them even went so far as to claim that Disney's products were capable of retarding the social development of certain individuals.

The mass audience, both adults and children, that made Disney's films so popular was looking for a "wigggle spot", a release from the tensions and pressures imposed on them by the demands of everyday life. The adults in the audience were looking for an escape, no matter how fantastic the subject matter may have been, from the pressures of the just-past depression and the fear of the coming war in Europe. After the war the onrush of society made people want a release, too. The children in the audience were also looking for a release and escape from the pressures in their lives.

That the film critics panned Disney for making changes in traditional tales made very little difference to the audience. They liked them for what they were. The Disney films were

made only for the story content; anything else in the films, meanings or socially significant messages, were secondary to the picture and of no concern to Walt Disney. This lack of concern prompted the critics to comment as they did on the Disney movies.

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CHAPTER I

DISNEY'S EARLY LIFE

Walter Elias Disney, the man who in 1928 came up with a better mouse, was born in Chicago in December, 1901, the fourth of five children.¹ His parents were Elias Disney, a fanatically religious mixture of socialist and capitalist, and Flora Call Disney, a fun loving former schoolteacher.² Elias Disney, devout and dignified, was "an old-fashioned family martinet" who imposed such strict discipline on his children that Herbert and Raymond, the two oldest boys ran away from home when they were still in their teens.³

If the elder Disney's research into the family name was as competent as he was honest, the family is descended of a Burgundian officer named de Disney who, as a reward for his military service, was given a large tract of land. He settled on this estate and reared a number of children. However, by 1859 when Elias Disney was born, "the 'de' in de Disney had flaked off, and so had much of the family's British Isles real estate."⁴ Diane Disney Miller gives a slightly different

¹ J.P. McEvoy, "Of Mouse and Man," Reader's Digest, XLI (October, 1942), p. 85.

² Don Eddy, "The Amazing Secret of Walt Disney," American Magazine, CLX (July, 1955), p. 113.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jack Alexander, "The Amazing Story of Walt Disney," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXVI (October 31, 1953), pp. 85-86.

version of the Disney ancestry. According to her, family tradition has it that the name is Norman and that the family forefathers came to England with William the Conqueror. There is a D'Isney listed among those who fought for William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings. The name Disney, though, evidently does not appear in its present spelling until the days of Oliver Cromwell when a group of Disneys immigrated to Ireland with Cromwell.⁵

There was also a General Disney who settled near Dublin after the Battle of Boyne. In 1840 three of his descendants came to the United States. Of the three, two stayed in the United States and the third, Walt Disney's grandfather, settled in Goderich, a town near Lake Huron in Canada. It was there on a farm that Elias Disney was born.⁶ The family later moved from Goderich to Ellis, Kansas, where they settled on land purchased from a railroad.⁷

Elias Disney was a strange combination of capitalist and socialist. Part of the time the Disneys lived in Chicago he had been a contractor. To save architect's fees, Mrs. Disney drew functional, durable, and easy-to-sell plans for

⁵Diane Disney Miller and Pete Martin, The Story of Walt Disney (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1957), p. 5.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 6.

the houses he built. As a contractor he had employed workmen; therefore, he was a capitalist. Politically the elder Disney was a strong socialist who voted the Eugene Dobs ticket every time Dobs ran for President.⁸ Anyone who would talk socialism with him became his friend. According to Mrs. Miller, her grandfather insisted on bringing any newly found socialist friends home with him. Had he had his way in matters, all those people would have been seated at the family dinner table; but his wife prevailed and fed them on the back porch where there was more fresh air.⁹

At the time Walt was born in 1901 Elias Disney was an active member of the Congregational Church and a close friend of the minister, Walter Parr. Mrs. Parr and Mrs. Disney were both expecting babies; their husbands decided that if the expected children were boys, each would name his son after his friend. The Parr infant arrived first and was duly named Elias. However, it seems that the elder Disney had an undue affection for his own name, because his son was christened Walter Elias.¹⁰

In 1906 Elias Disney decided that it would benefit his children to grow up in the country, away from the corrupting

⁸Ibid., p. 9.

⁹Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 4-5.

influences of the city. His children ranged in age from two to seventeen. He looked at many places before finally buying a forty-eight acre farm near Marcellino, Missouri. Since this was really too small for real farming, he leased another forty acres nearby.¹¹

Walt Disney remembered the trip from Chicago to Marcellino in flashes;¹² and the Marcellino farm itself as a beautiful place with green lawns, orchards, weeping willows, and many animals.¹³ Disney believed that one reason the farm meant so much to him was that he was very young and impressionable at the time and was very excited about the move from a big, crowded city to the country where there were fields and trees and animals.¹⁴ Stephen Birmingham points out that it was on the Marcellino, Missouri, farm that Walt first showed off his artistic talents. There was a tar barrel outside the house. "And one day, to the distinct surprise and distinct displeasure of the little boy's mother and father, the white walls of the farmhouse were found decorated with large and fanciful drawings of animals - in tar."¹⁵ Walt, like all little boys who paint on walls

¹¹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Stephen Birmingham, "The Greatest One-Man Show on Earth: Walt Disney," McCall's, XCI (July, 1964), p. 98.

with tar, was punished.¹⁶

As are all farmers, Elias Disney's family was dependent upon good crops and high prices for success and survival. Without this combination, disaster is imminent. It was just such a disaster that ended the Marcelline farming venture. Prices fell abruptly and people buried their apple crops in the earth, hoping for a price rise that never came. Walt's brother Roy and his parents went from door to door selling baskets of apples in a desperate attempt to raise money. To make matters worse on the farm, the elder Disney's health began to fail.¹⁷ Times became harder than ever on the farm, and the butter Mrs. Disney made and the eggs she gathered became more valuable for the money they brought in than as food for the family.¹⁸ Adversity still reigned; Elias Disney found that he could not keep a promise he had made to his two oldest sons. He had promised them a share of the crop, but he needed every bit of money he had to make mortgage payments on the farm. There was an argument and Herbert and Raymond abruptly left home for Kansas City.¹⁹

Life on the little farm got steadily worse. Elias Disney's health grew worse, and Mrs. Disney, realizing that his failing health was caused by worry about the farm prevailed

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Miller and Martin, p. 14.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 14-15.

upon him to sell the farm and its stock. The farm was sold at an auction and the Disney family moved into a little house in Marcellino so that the children could finish their school terms.²⁰

Despite the privation the family suffered on the farm, the things Walt later recalled about the farm were happy. Perhaps it was because of these rather humble beginnings in life that Walt never lost his balance or humbleness after he became world famous. It was on the Marcelline farm that he "picked up his Nature lore and his great love for wildlife."²¹

Late in 1910 the Disneys abandoned Marcelline for Kansas City, Missouri, where Elias Disney bought a Kansas City Star paper route with the money he had left from the sale of the farm. He paid three dollars a customer for the two thousand customers that came with the route.²² Walt and Roy were his first delivery boys. Rain, shine, or blizzard²³ they were responsible for delivering both the Morning Times and the Evening and Sunday Star. Walt began with fifty houses, learning his route by memorizing which houses did not subscribe to

²⁰Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²¹Elmer F. Peterson, "At Home with Walt Disney," Better Homes and Gardens, XVII (January, 1940), p. 56.

²²Miller and Martin, p. 19.

²³Peterson, p. 56.

the paper. He served the route for six years, getting up at three-thirty in the morning²⁴ to deliver papers before going to school.²⁵

When Walt's brother Roy finished high school he, too, ran away from home. His plan was to work in the harvest fields.²⁶ This left Walt alone to deliver papers for his father. Although his father hired boys to take Roy's place and paid them three dollars a week, he refused to pay Walt anything, saying, "After all, I clothe and feed you."²⁷ There was a streetcorner to which no other newsboy had laid claim; to make extra pocket money, Walt talked his father into letting him order extra papers to sell on this corner after he finished his regular delivery route. The profits from this venture added up quickly, but to Walt's dismay, his father made him turn over every cent for safe keeping.²⁸

Walt's paper route kept him busy, but occasionally he had time for fun. He was both movie and stage struck. After a teacher told Walt that he showed some acting talent, Walt and a friend, Walt Pfeiffer, organized themselves into an Irish-German comedy team. They worked up skits and jokes, and even managed to win some secondary prizes at movie-theatre

²⁴Miller and Martin, p. 20.

²⁵"Walt Disney, M.A., M.S." (anon.), Newsweek, XII (July 4, 1938), p. 18.

²⁶Miller and Martin, p. 24.

²⁷Ibid., p. 25.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 25-26.

amateur nights.²⁹

Walt recalled one unhappy boyhood experience in his daughter's book. Elias Disney decided that his son was to become a musician. He bought Walt a violin and tried to teach him the scales; but Walt had no feeling for music as well as a tin ear, so they both finally gave up in mutual disgust.³⁰ This experience may have some relation to the criticisms which were leveled at Disney after the release of Fantasia many years later.

Walt was fifteen when the United States got involved in World War I and Elias Disney decided to move his family back to Chicago from Kansas City. He sold his Kansas City Star paper route at a profit - not only had the price per customer increased, but he had increased his route by a thousand customers from the time he bought it³¹ - and invested his money in a Chicago jam factory in which he already had a financial interest. When the family moved to Chicago, Walt stayed behind in Kansas City to finish the school year and help the man who had bought his father's paper route.³² One of Walt's older brothers who had married moved into the family house in Kansas City; Walt lived with his brother while he helped with the change-over on

²⁹Alexander, p. 86.

³⁰Killer and Martin, pp. 32-33.

³¹Ibid., p. 35.

³²Ibid., p. 36.

the paper route. It was this brother who suggested that perhaps Walt could get a job as a news butcher on the Santa Fe Railroad.³³ Walt applied for a job with the Van Noyes Interstate News which ran the concessions. At fifteen Walt was in business selling magazines, popcorn,³⁴ and soft drinks on trains going out of and into Kansas City. The business venture lasted about two months, just long enough for Walt to realize that he was his own best customer and that instead of making money, he was losing it rapidly.³⁵

Late in 1918 Walt went to Chicago to be with his parents. During the one year he went to high school in Chicago³⁶ Walt worked part-time in the family jam factory and attended evening classes in cartooning at the Academy of Fine Arts.³⁷ The jam factory did not pay very well, and Walt was driven by necessity to find other part-time jobs that summer to pay for his art lessons and supplies. He got part-time work with the post office as a mail carrier at forty cents an hour.³⁸ When he applied for the post office job he looked too young to be dependable, "so he made himself up like an

³³Ibid.

³⁴McEvoy, p. 85.

³⁵Miller and Martin, pp. 37-38.

³⁶"Walt Disney, M.A., H.S.," p. 18.

³⁷Alexander, p. 86.

³⁸Miller and Martin, p. 41.

old man with whiskers and wrinkles."³⁹ Walt also "'jerked gates' on the rear car of the Wilson Avenue elevated line"⁴⁰ to make money.

While Walt was only sixteen, the United States plunged headlong into "war with Germany and the resulting manpower shortage opened up many more exciting jobs for youngsters."⁴¹ Walt's older brother Roy had joined the Navy; that coupled with the sounds of brass bands and bugles and flags blowing in the breeze made Walt want to try to get into uniform, too.⁴² He and a friend, Russell Mass, tried to enlist, but since they were only sixteen they were turned down as being too young.⁴³ Finally Mass came up with the information that the two boys could join a Red Cross unit as ambulance drivers even if they were under eighteen. The boys were hired as chauffeurs.⁴⁴ A major hitch developed when the boys had to have their parents' signatures on their passports. Walt was afraid his father would refuse to sign for him. He was quite right. Two of Walt's older brothers were already in the service, and his father did not want to risk the lives of

³⁹McEvoy, p. 85.

⁴⁰Alexander, p. 86.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Miller and Martin, p. 42.

⁴³Eddy, p. 113.

⁴⁴Ibid.

any more of his children. Walt's mother took his side, saying that she would sign the application rather than have Walt run away and join the service under an assumed name. Elias Disney finally gave in part way: he would not sign the passport application, but Mrs. Disney could sign for him.⁴⁵

Walt was still in the United States in November, 1918, when the Armistice was signed. He had just recovered from a bout with the flu epidemic that was sweeping the nation; during the time he was recovering his unit had left Chicago, and Walt had been assigned to another company. Even though the Armistice had been signed there were still many sick and wounded soldiers to be cared for in France. Walt was among fifty young men sent to France as ambulance drivers who landed at Le Havre on the last day of November, 1918. He celebrated his seventeenth birthday at Saint Cyr on December 5, 1918.⁴⁶

A little later Walt was transferred to a canteen at Neufchateau, a stop for troop trains headed for Germany, where he and an enterprising young man from Georgia who was known as The Cracker set themselves up in a souvenir business. When The Cracker drove through areas where battles had been fought, he gathered up as many German helmets as he could find. Walt, to ward off boredom at Neufchateau, had been drawing cartoons which Life and Judge rejected as

⁴⁵Miller and Martin, p. 44.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 46.

soon as they received them. Some of his drawings on wind-breakers and footlockers gave The Cracker an idea. He brought Walt some German helmets to camouflage and age. After Walt did what he could with the helmets, The Cracker took them out and shot holes in them. He even begged human hair from a barber to stick in the holes. Every time a troop train came through Neufchateau, The Cracker took one of his souvenirs to the train and sold it. If he sold the first one, he would run back to the barracks for another one.⁴⁷

Walt even went so far at one time as to paint cartoons on the canvass covering of his ambulance. He was severely "bawled out" by his superiors for his misdeeds. However, if that vehicle could be found now, it would be priceless.⁴⁸

While Walt was with the Red Cross he sent half of all his pay home to his mother to bank for him; he lived on the other half. Walt also did a little gambling on the side, and this money combined with the money he got for his various art work and other sums he saved, his parents saved "five or six hundred dollars for him. That sum plays an important part in his story. The time was to come when it would help him get his start as a cartoonist."⁴⁹

When Walt returned to the United States from France he

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 48-52, *passim*.

⁴⁸Eddy, p. 113.

⁴⁹Miller and Martin, p. 53.

went home to Chicago. However, it soon became evident that Walt and his father did not see eye to eye about Walt's future. Elias Disney wanted his son to go back to work at the jam factory; Walt wanted to be an artist, an occupation his father thought shiftless.⁵⁰ When it was obvious that the two were never going to agree, Walt moved to Kansas City. Kansas City was smaller than Chicago and Walt knew some other beginning artists there.⁵¹

At first he tried the Kansas City Star offices in answer to an advertisement for an office boy. Walt considered the Star his newspaper because of his experience delivering the paper as a child. His ambition was to work in the art department, but he was willing to start anywhere the Star had an opening he could fill. The man behind the desk refused even to consider Walt because he looked much older than his seventeen years. Even Walt's determined desire to work for the Star could not land him a job.

It was Walt's older brother Roy who actually put him on the track of his first job - an apprenticeship with Gray Advertising Company at fifty dollars a month.⁵² It was at Gray Advertising that Walt met Ub Iwerks, who was to become a mainstay at the later Disney Studios in Hollywood. Using half the money Walt had saved during his service in France,

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁵¹Alexander, p. 90.

⁵²Miller and Martin, pp. 59-60.

he and Iwerks set themselves up in the advertising business. Their partnership dissolved in 1920 when Walt turned everything over to Iwerks and went to work for Kansas City Film Ad Company as a cartoonist. This was his introduction to animation. These early animations were not done with drawings, but with little paper cut-outs with moveable arms and legs.⁵³ Walt and Iwerks, who was hired by Kansas City Film Ad Company soon after Disney, were so fascinated with animated cartoons and films that they spent hours in the public library studying all the books they could find on the subject of animation.⁵⁴

It was not long afterward that Walt built his own camera in a vacant garage and began to experiment on his own. "Being a movie fan, he drew animated - that is to say, moving - cartoons of local Kansas City celebrities and comments on the local events."⁵⁵ He called these films Newman Laugh-O-Grans⁵⁶ and "managed to sell the idea to Frank Newman, a Kansas City theatre magnate."⁵⁷

Walt continued to work for the Film Ad Company and work

⁵³Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Harry Carr, "The Only Unpaid Movie Star," American Magazine, CXI (March, 1931), p. 56.

⁵⁶Killer and Martin, p. 69.

⁵⁷Carr, p. 56.

on his Laugh-O-Gram projects at night until, at last, he was forced to resign from Film Ad and devote all his time to the newly formed Laugh-O-Gram Corporation. Walt was still under twenty-one when he assumed the soon-to-be empty title of president of the Laugh-O-Gram Corporation. The distributor who had made an Eastern deal for Walt's films ran into financial difficulty, and Walt's Kansas City backers began to shy away from him.⁵⁸ Eventually, after trying in vain to save what was left of the Laugh-O-Gram Corporation, Walt suffered the bankruptcy that eventually sent him to Hollywood and a partnership with his brother Roy.⁵⁹

After the demise of the Laugh-O-Gram Corporation, Walt decided to take what little was left and make the best of it. He decided to reverse the idea of adding cartoon figures to live action motion pictures with live actors.⁶⁰ "His idea was to start a motion picture series which should be partly pen-and-ink drawings and partly a motion picture of a real little girl playing with the fairies. This was the 'Alice' of the films."⁶¹ The first film was called Alice in Cartoonland; 'Alice' was a little girl with long blond corkscrew curls who had posed for photographs at Film Ad.⁶² These films,

⁵⁸ Miller and Martin, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Alexander, p. 90.

⁶⁰ Miller and Martin, p. 74.

⁶¹ Carr, p. 56.

⁶² Miller and Martin, p. 74.

sadly enough, interested nearly everyone except the public. "The modern young lady and gentleman in rompers had become too sophisticated. They said 'Aw, that's hoopy' when they saw Disney's fairy stories in animated drawings."⁶³ Alice was very short-lived. Disney himself said she was terrible and the public agreed with him.⁶⁴ In 1923 Walt Disney found himself broke and out on the streets again. He decided to take his brother's advice and "storm the citadel of the movies. He set out for Hollywood."⁶⁵

⁶³Carr, p. 56.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 75.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 56.

CHAPTER II

DISNEY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

Before the brash young cartoonist could strike out for Hollywood, where he was sure producers would welcome his innovations in the art of entertainment with "unlatched wallets,"⁶⁶ he had to have money. Walt had never valued his own drawing talents very highly; therefore, the collapse of his garage studio did not disillusion him nor cloud his judgment. He was proud of the products of his little studio which had embodied all the tricks he had learned from his intensive reading at the public library.⁶⁷ Walt went back into the cartoon business to make enough money to take him to California. He made "song-lyric cartoons for a movie-palace organist. The organist, seated at his console, rose from... the orchestra pit by the grace of hydraulic pressure and, grandly spotlighted, tried to cozen the audience into chanting some of the current mistakes of Tin Pan Alley's."⁶⁸ Walt used the money the organist paid him to buy an old movie camera. Armed with his camera, he invaded the better sections of Kansas City, going from door to door filming innumerable crawling infants. He sold the developed film strips to the

⁶⁶Alexander, p. 80.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 24.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 80.

proud parents.⁶⁹ Two months later Walt was on route to California with forty dollars in his pocket and his worldly possessions, including some salvaged drawing materials⁷⁰ and, by special permission of his Kansas City creditors, one of his animated cartoons, in a cardboard suitcase.⁷¹ The two traveled first class, in accordance with Disney's philosophy of always going first class regardless of how little was in his pocket.⁷² There were no cheers or accolades to greet the young nobody from Missouri when he stepped off the train in Hollywood in August, 1923.⁷³

Disney made the rounds of the movie studios hoping to be hired as a director. He felt that he should have entered the cartoon business several years earlier in order to compete with Paul Terry's Aesop's Fables and Windsor McKay's Felix the Cat.⁷⁴ Walt also took the animated cartoon he had brought from Kansas City to several studios. Time and again his hopes were dampened by vice-presidents who refused to screen the film. They all gave him the same piece of advice: New York was the stronghold of the really important distributors, and if Disney were really smart he would be on the

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Miller and Martin, p. 82.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Paul Hollister, "Walt Disney: Genius at Work," Atlantic Monthly, CLXVI (December, 1940), p. 690.

⁷⁴Miller and Martin, pp. 83-84.

first New York-bound train. Of course, Walt was financially in no position to take that kind of advice.⁷⁵ Finally, necessity drove Walt back to his drawing board and cartoons; the forty dollars he had arrived in Hollywood with had long ago run out. Subsidized by his brother Roy, Walt set up shop in a garage and ground out enough drawings to add up to a complete short film.⁷⁶ Using the same strategy he had used in selling his Laugh-O-Grams to Frank Newman in Kansas City, Walt invaded the offices of Alexander Pantages, owner of a large chain of West Coast movie theatres. After some urging and discussion, Pantages agreed to show the film after regular movie hours. Paul Hollister says that when Disney saw his film on the screen he "leapt from his seat, scuttled down the aisle, and announced to the rather frightened audience that the film on the screen was his own. That was the first public showing of the Disney Production."⁷⁷

About this same time, a New York distributor, through the representative of Lloyd's Film Storage Company, made Walt an offer for twelve Alice in Cartoonland reels at \$1,500 a cartoon. Walt and Roy borrowed five hundred dollars from their Great-Uncle Robert and rented office space in the back room of a real estate company.⁷⁸ It took a month to make each Alice in Cartoonland film; finances ran short several

⁷⁵Alexander, p. 80.

⁷⁶Hollister, p. 690.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Miller and Martin, pp. 86-88, *passim*.

times and the brothers were forced to borrow money from anyone who would loan it to them, including Roy's fiancée in Kansas City and the organist at the Isis Theatre for whom Walt had made song-lyric films.⁷⁹ Walt animated the first six Alice films himself. After that he sent for Ub Iwerks, who was still in Kansas City, to come to Hollywood and help him with the animation. The first six Alice films were failures. The distributors had a hard time selling them and nearly cancelled the second half of the twelve-reel deal when the seventh film caught on. Alice lasted about three years, long enough for Walt and Roy to acquire some solid assets and for Walt to marry Lillian Bounds, the secretary whom he paid the grand sum of fifteen dollars a week.⁸⁰

About two years after the Disneys were married the Alice in Cartoonland series began to lose its appeal. The Eastern distributor demanded a new character and a new series. So Alice was chased back to fairyland, and Oswald the Rabbit was born.⁸¹ Oswald, a descendant of Br'er Rabbit and Uncle Remus,⁸² was more successful than Alice had been; he even acquired some celebrity. The series enabled the Disney brothers to save about \$15,000 and hire some other artists to help

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 92.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 94-95.

⁸¹Carr, p. 57.

⁸²Marshall Fishwick, "Aesop in Hollywood," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVII (July 10, 1954), p. 38.

with the animation.⁸³ Paul Hollister attributes the success of the Oswald series to the fact that the character was a familiar animal; "animals are anonymous and therefore out of reach of controversial prejudices..., and animals are highly animate."⁸⁴

With the success of Oswald the Rabbit, Disney wanted to expand his studio. He kept trying to persuade his distributor that he needed more money, but the distributor refused⁸⁵ to go above the \$2,250 a reel that he was already paying. Walt was still riding high, however, when he opened negotiations with his distributor for a new contract at \$2,500 a reel. When the distributor announced that \$1,800 was his top offer, Disney knew there was trouble. He did not have to wait long to find out that the buyer was making secret deals for Oswald the Rabbit and secret arrangements to hire most of the cartoonists that he, Disney, had trained and trusted out from under him en masse.⁸⁶ Refusing to believe what he thought were wild rumors, Walt and Mrs. Disney hurried to New York. "The rumors proved true. All his dreams came crashing down around his ears."⁸⁷

⁸³Carr, p. 57.

⁸⁴Hollister, p. 690.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Eddy, p. 113.

⁸⁷Ibid.

After the interview with the distributor, Disney, with more bravado than he really felt, wired his brother Roy that all was well, he had a new idea, and he was coming home. He did not tell Roy that the whole organization had been sabotaged. Disney had the time-length of a train ride from New York to Hollywood to come up with the new idea he had told Roy he had.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Alexander, p. 92.

CHAPTER III

MICKEY MOUSE

Walt still had not had an idea by the time they reached Chicago. Somewhere west of Chicago, when "he was ankle-deep in rejected drawings and getting mighty tired of it all, he began for no explainable reason, to sketch mice."⁸⁹ He was amused by the little rodents taking shape on his tablet - why not a mouse? Walt, using railroad stationery, "roughed out a scenario for a cartoon to be called Plane Crazy. (Lindbergh's flight had just electrified the world.) Its star was to be a mouse...and its name was to be Mortimer."⁹⁰ Mrs. Disney was amused by the mouse, but she did not like the name Mortimer. She remembers that Walt read the script to her, but she was too upset by the events in New York to comprehend anything except "that horrible name Mortimer - horrible for a mouse, at least - and I'm afraid I made quite a scene about it."⁹¹ Mrs. Disney insisted that Mickey was a better name for a mouse,⁹² even one who was an "instantaneous idea born of an emergency."⁹³

There seems, however, to be some dissension about where the idea of a cartoon series about a mouse came from. Richard

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Eddy, p. 113.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Alexander, p. 92.

⁹³Eddy, p. 114.

Schickel⁹⁴ and Elmer T. Peterson⁹⁵ play down the notion that Mickey Mouse was a lucky accident. Schickel says of the original mouse opera:

One is impressed, too, by the fact that faced with the need to create an original cartoon, Disney had the wit to draw upon his own experience for subject matter. His recollections of the mice in his Kansas City workshop inspired the main character, his rural boyhood supplied the barnyard setting for background and his understanding of the typically American urge to tinker and invent provided the film's psychological motivation.⁹⁶

Peterson, too, credits the Kansas City workshop with the inspiration for Mickey. He says that one mouse in the workshop even got so tame that he would play along the top of Disney's drawing board; this mouse was originally called Mortimer, but the name was eventually changed to Mickey.⁹⁷

Don Eddy calls the whole idea of Mickey being "inspired by a real live mouse which lived in Disney's attic studio when he was a starving young artist" apocryphal.⁹⁸ There was never any such attic studio: the Kansas City studio was in a garage, and the Hollywood workshop was a room behind a real estate office. Mickey Mouse, says Eddy,

was an invention of necessity, dreamed up out

⁹⁴Richard Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," American Heritage, XIX (April, 1968), p. 91.

⁹⁵Peterson, p. 13.

⁹⁶Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," p. 91.

⁹⁷Peterson, p. 15.

⁹⁸Eddy, p. 113.

of thin air on a railroad train carrying...
Disney...to California from New York after a
crushing, disillusioning defeat in his first
hand-to-hand encounter with Big Business.⁹⁹

Harry Carr quotes Disney himself as saying,

I can't say just how the idea came....We felt
that the public - especially children - like
animals that are 'cute' and little.

I think we were rather indebted to Charlie
Chaplin for the idea. We wanted something
appealing, and we thought of a tiny bit of a
mouse that would have something of the wistful-
ness of Chaplin...a little fellow trying to do
the best he could.¹⁰⁰

Back in Hollywood, Walt, Roy, and Ub Iwerks went to
work on the first Mickey Mouse cartoon, Plane Crazy. The
animators who were abandoning the Disney ship were still at
the studio finishing the Oswald the Rabbit series, and Walt
wanted to keep the new series a secret. To do so, they
closeted Ub Iwerks in a locked office where he labored for
four frantic weeks to animate the entire first Mickey Mouse
cartoon,¹⁰¹ Plane Crazy. In Plane Crazy, inspired by Charles
Lindbergh's flight, a little automobile is changed into an
"airplane which takes flight with Mickey at the controls."¹⁰²

The first Mickey Mouse that Iwerks created was functional

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Carr, p. 57.

¹⁰¹Robert de Roos, "The Magic Worlds of Walt Disney,"
National Geographic, CXXIV (August, 1963), p. 164.

¹⁰²Siegfried Kracauer, "Dumbo," The Nation, CLIII
(November 8, 1941), p. 463.

rather than handsome. He had tiny black-dot eyes, "pencil logs, three fingers per hand, a string-bean body and a jerky walk."¹⁰³

The second Mickey Mouse cartoon was called Gallonin' Gaucho. Along with Plane Crazy, Gallonin' Gaucho was a dismal failure. No exhibitor would touch them; they were silent films, and by the time the first picture made its appearance in 1928, Al Jolson's The Jazz Singer had brought song to the movies forever.¹⁰⁴ The third Mickey Mouse film, Steamboat Willie, was in production when Disney decided to scrap the first two productions and add sound effects to Steamboat Willie. Walt himself became the squeaky, piping voice of Mickey; he remained so for many years afterward.¹⁰⁵ Within a year, everyone who had "turned thumbs down on 'Mickey' was wildly bidding for him."¹⁰⁶

Mickey Mouse made his screen debut on September 28, 1928, at New York's Colony Theatre. The main feature was Lonesome, starring Barbara Kent and Glenn Tryon. "As a filler, the management ran a short animated cartoon bearing the title

¹⁰³Fishwick, p. 38.

¹⁰⁴"Mickey Mouse is Eight Years Old" (anon.), Literary Digest, CXXIII (October 3, 1936), p. 18.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Carr, p. 57.

Steamboat Willie.... The audience expressed restrained approval, unaware that it was witnessing the beginning of a success story unparalleled in Hollywood history."¹⁰⁷

From the standpoint of technique, Alexander calls Steamboat Willie as revolutionary a production as Jolson's The Jazz Singer. "Primitive, though it was, it showed what could be done in the way of combining action and sound into an integrated unity, instead of using sound as a haphazard background for the action."¹⁰⁸ The sound effects were made by means of gadgets from the dime store - cowbells, noise makers, "plumbers' friends" and anything else that would produce music or an unusual sound. After Disney, Iwerks, and their helper, a youngster named Jackson, worked out the sound effects, they synchronized them to the movements on the film.¹⁰⁹ Schickel notes that it would be "preposterous to assume" that Disney knew what he was doing when he made Steamboat Willie. "He simply liked things to come out right. ...Disney realized that it was technique, not personality, that drew audiences."¹¹⁰

It may be technique rather than personality that draws audiences, but certainly Mickey's personality and disposition

¹⁰⁷"Mickey Mouse is Eight Years Old," pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁸Alexander, p. 92.

¹⁰⁹Miller and Martin, p. 106.

¹¹⁰Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," p. 92.

helped to draw the audiences who flocked to theatres to watch his antics. Mickey Mouse's quick and cocky disposition matched his match-stick appearance. Schickel says that at best Mickey was "a fresh and bratty kid, at worst a diminutive and sadistic monster - like most of the other inhabitants of that primitive theatre of cruelty that was the animated cartoon...."¹¹¹ Gradually, Mickey lost the stark two-dimensional quality he had had in the first three cartoons. A now streamlined body, better perspective, and the eventual use of Technicolor did more to harm the mouse than to help him.¹¹²

As a comic, Mickey Mouse rates with the best. However, his popularity does not rest entirely on artistic merit; Gilbert Seldes calls it something of a fad, and attributes it to a combination of kewpie doll and Teddy Bear.¹¹³ Mickey was the first situation comic,¹¹⁴ and although he actually achieved greater national and international fame than most United States senators,¹¹⁵ he remained perfectly sensible and and cheerful as he scampered in and out of trouble.¹¹⁶

It is interesting to note in passing the resemblance of

¹¹¹Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," p. 91.

¹¹²Fishwick, p. 39.

¹¹³Gilbert Seldes, "Disney and Others," New Republic, LXXI (June 8, 1932), p. 101.

¹¹⁴"Walt Disney: Images of Innocence" (anon.), Time, LXXXVIII (December 23, 1966), p. 71.

¹¹⁵Peterson, p. 13.

¹¹⁶"Walt Disney: Images of Innocence," p. 71.

Mickey Mouse to both Walt Disney, his creator, and Douglas Fairbanks, the all-American hero of the late 1920's and early 1930's. Mickey has the same soulful eyes, pointed face, and gift of pantomime that distinguish his creator.¹¹⁷ He also appears to be a parody on Fairbanks, cavorting in a world of fantasy. Both Mickey and Fairbanks "go about righting wrongs and foiling villains."¹¹⁸ According to Marshall Fishwick, the basis of Mickey's humor is the satire on the things which Fairbanks did in earnest.¹¹⁹

Walt Disney deliberately set out to parody the Fairbanks techniques. His mouse took the drama out of the rescue scenes and substituted pathos. With only his spindly legs and freedom from gravity to save him from a hostile world, Mickey somehow got along. Deeds that caused Doug's well-toned muscles to quiver were disposed of by Mickey with a flick of one of his three fingers. In ridiculing the cult of masculine pushups, Mickey won his own fame.¹²⁰

Mickey, cast in the Aesop genre, is a moralist. Like the characters found in Sophocles, Moliere, or Shakespeare, Mickey depends on oversimplification to make his points.¹²¹ He also "abhors tobacco, uses no expletives, shuns liquor, comports himself with Algeresque probity."¹²²

¹¹⁷Fishwick, p. 40.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 38.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 40.

¹²²"Mickey Mouse is Eight Years Old," p. 18.

About 1934, Mickey's character began to present frustrating problems to his creator. Even though E.M. Foster found Mickey's scandalousness restful,¹²³ there were those who were not refreshed by his scandalous style. Mickey had to become softer in manner and more verbal if his character were to last.¹²⁴ Disney transformed Mickey's character to a sweeter, more grown up mouse. Any smart-Alec tendencies he may have are severely suppressed and he is never allowed to become cruel or arrogant. If Mickey should tread on the feelings of another character, "he gets his come-uppance at the end of the reel."¹²⁵ As a result of the changes in his disposition and character, Mickey has been relatively free of censorship troubles. Clarabelle Cow has been the notable exception to this. Canadian authorities were scandalized to find that in one picture the cow was completely nude. Disney promptly drew skirts to cover both the authorities' and the lady's modesty.¹²⁶ In the United States Clarabelle "wore a brassiere in a milking scene, following protests by Ohio censors."¹²⁷ Censors in another state "turned thumbs down"

¹²³Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," pp. 93-94.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵"Mickey Mouse is Eight Years Old," p. 18.

¹²⁶Carr, p. 125.

¹²⁷"Mickey Mouse is Eight Years Old," p. 18.

on a movie because Clarabelle did wear a skirt.¹²⁸ Just before World War II, the German government banned a Mickey Mouse film which showed an army of cats attired in German infantry helmets - "thus heading off any suspicion that Germany might be mobilizing an army."¹²⁹

Harry Carr labeled Mickey as a mirror of the times. He is representative of the modern fairy tale -

a Puss-in-Boots adapted to the flapper jazz age. Old Hans Christian Andersen would turn in his grave if he knew that the one fairy tale capable of seizing the imagination of the whole modern world is being dreamed in a concrete factory where the front gate clicks with an electric clock.¹³⁰

That fairy tale is the only cartoon character in the world to which an entire article has been devoted by the Encyclopedia Britanica.¹³¹

¹²⁸Carr, p. 125.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid., pp. 55-56.

¹³¹Birmingham, p. 100.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE FILMS ARE MADE

The process of getting Mickey Mouse or any other Disney character on the screen begins the same way - with a Friday night story conference.¹³² Walt Disney never professed to being an original story teller;¹³³ the conference technique keeps ideas flowing freely¹³⁴ among the thousands of people employed by the Disney Studios. The source of ideas makes no difference; it is the idea and what can be done with it that counts. A Mickey Mouse adventure does not come full-blown into the world, nor does it lend itself to being "made as you go along."¹³⁵ Mickey's adventures have a definite set of requirements: a clear dramatic story, a hero, a villain, a definite climax, and, many times, a chase scene.¹³⁶ Once the studio has decided to use a certain story, they are no longer dependent upon the original idea. The story idea is interpreted into the language of the animated film. It is possible for the emphasis to be shifted or completely changed

¹³²Carr, p. 122. For the purpose of discussing how Disney films are made, Mickey Mouse will be used to represent any and all the Disney characters and films.

¹³³Robert D. Field, The Art of Walt Disney (London: Collins, 1947), p. 103.

¹³⁴Jay Leyda, "The Dimensions of Disney," Saturday Review of Literature, XXV (June 6, 1942), p. 5.

¹³⁵Carr, p. 122.

¹³⁶Ibid.

in order to improve the story for the screen. Once the characters, in the case of a film based on a non-original fairy tale, are brought from the printed page to the drawing board, they begin to live a new sort of life; "they are free, if need be, to change their very natures."¹³⁷ There is no set moment, no identifiable moment, when the Disney Studio decides to go ahead and make a new picture. The idea comes about by fortuitous circumstances, is released into the story conference for consideration, and is developed into a movie.¹³⁸ All story ideas are "talked" nearly to completion before they are written down.¹³⁹

The story men take over the story idea at this point and make key drawings to suggest the pattern of their ideas.¹⁴⁰ To promote constructive criticisms of their ideas, the artists pin their drawings to a story-board in the sequence they are intended to appear in the film. These story-boards, the sketchbooks of the Disney Studios, are of uniform size, "approximately seven feet by five feet and are hinged on all available wall space throughout the Studio"¹⁴¹ in such a way

¹³⁷Field, p. 103.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 104.

¹³⁹Carr, p. 122.

¹⁴⁰Field, p. 107.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

that there is no problem involved in taking them down or moving them. It is not unusual to find story-boards stacked several deep while they await a survey of an entire sequence.¹⁴² The sketches are usually made on paper provided by the Studio for such purposes, but there is no set size or quality for the drawing paper.¹⁴³ It is on the story-boards that the artists first picture their ideas, first projecting themselves into the situation they are trying to illustrate, then assuming the role of each character to determine exactly how that character would react to any given situation.¹⁴⁴ Even at this stage the camera must be taken into consideration. The camera allows the audience to see and identify with only what the cameraman, or in this case the animator, wants it to see and identify with. "Transubstantiation is a commonplace of the camera, but, in addition, one is freed from time and space; one can be transported instantaneously to wherever one chooses without expenditure of energy."¹⁴⁵

Each character must become an individual within his own right on the screen. There can be no question about the audience knowing the character once he is on the screen for a few minutes: the mouse in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs who resented having dust swept into his hole; the inebriated

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 109.

character carved by Geppetto, who hiccupped when the clocks went haywire in Pinocchio; Jiminy Cricket himself, are all old friends of the audience by the time they have been on the screen for five minutes.¹⁴⁶ However, as each character goes through the metamorphosis of the story, it must be watched carefully to see that it does not take undue privileges. Characters in animated cartoons "must be born free, but unlike men who must have discipline imposed upon them, they must be born disciplined."¹⁴⁷

Very early in the making of an animated cartoon, the Music Room director, as he is called, is brought into the act to decide upon the score. One reason why Mickey Mouse proved successful where others failed is that no attempt was ever made to fit the music to Mickey's actions. The musical theme was decided upon first, then Mickey's antics were made to correspond to the beats of the music.¹⁴⁸ It is a relatively simple process, but an exacting one, to determine how many movements an animated character may make in a given section of film. Every beat of music is timed by an electric metronome; everything else is timed to the metronome beats.¹⁴⁹ The Disney Studio ordinarily uses thirty-five millimeter

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 127-128.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 137-138.

¹⁴⁸ Carr, p. 122.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew R. Boone, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," Popular Science Monthly, CXXXII (January, 1938), pp. 51-52.

film. With this size film there are twenty-four individual frames projected on the screen every second, or sixteen frames per foot of film. The number and timing of beats of music determines the number of frames which may be used for a single movement or sequence of movements.¹⁵⁰ Sound effects are timed the same as music and are later synchronized with the film on the basis of time.¹⁵¹ When the timing has been completed the actual drawings are begun in relation to the music.¹⁵² Because it is so vital that sound and action agree to a fraction of a second, work charts or "Scene Action Checking Charts"¹⁵³ are made for the film. The descriptions of more important gestures or entire scenes are carried on these charts so that the drawings may be spaced to agree with the charts. The artists, cartoonists, and sound men use these charts to build their individual parts of the picture.¹⁵⁴

The Disney films since Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs have been photographed by means of the multiplane camera. This camera can realistically suggest the third dimension to the eye of the movie-goer. The creation of the third dimension illusion creates metaphysical problems for the studio

¹⁵⁰Field, pp. 94-95.

¹⁵¹Boone, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵²"Mickey Mouse" (anon.), Theatre Arts, XVIII (February, 1934), p. 87.

¹⁵³Field, p. 190.

¹⁵⁴Boone, p. 52.

which, if not handled properly, may completely change the relationship between realism and abstraction.¹⁵⁵ The camera itself consists of four vertical posts, each one of which carries a rack along which up to eight carriages may be shifted either horizontally or vertically. Each carriage holds a "cel," a sheet of celluloid on which part of the action or scenery is painted.¹⁵⁶ There are four levels to be considered with the multiplane camera; the camera shoots down through these glass panes, or levels, to create the impression of the third dimension. "The illusion of the third dimension is achieved partly by the feeling for space given by keeping in focus only that section of the picture upon which the eye is concentrating...."¹⁵⁷ Backgrounds for the multiplane camera are painted with water colors on paper "in a manner with the character of the picture and the stylistic treatment of the cels."¹⁵⁸ The Background Department, which handles the planning and execution of all backgrounds, must see to it that not only are the backgrounds constructed so that all action that takes place in front of them can be shown to its best advantage, but that the composition of the background can be broken down into separate pictures that

¹⁵⁵Field, p. 274.

¹⁵⁶Boone, p. 51.

¹⁵⁷Field, p. 274.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 276.

have their own unity.¹⁵⁹

The camera, which can pivot on its axis,¹⁶⁰ photographs cels accurately from two to nine feet away from the camera. If the script should call for the camera to "truck up" for a close up, the lens is not moved, but the various levels with their cels are moved closer to the camera. This method allows houses, trees, the moon, and other background features to maintain their relative size.¹⁶¹

The color process used in the Disney animated cartoons has one distinct advantage over live-action color photography: greater control. Once it is known how a particular tone will be reproduced by the Technicolor process, it is a relatively simple matter to work out the color pattern for a film.¹⁶² Live-action color photography records the primary colors on three negatives in a single exposure. The color process used in cartoon photography makes three separate exposures of each set of cels, recording blue, red, and green separately. Therefore, three times the actual finished length of the film is required to photograph it. After the negatives of each color are developed, the three are put together, one over the other, and printed on a single negative.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Boone, p. 51.

¹⁶²Field, p. 45.

¹⁶³Boone, p. 51.

CHAPTER V

DISNEY FILMS

When Mickey Mouse was firmly established, Walt Disney began another series of cartoons called Silly Symphonies. The films were very much like the Mickey Mouse cartoons, but they were a little more avant-garde, a little wilder. The Silly Symphonies had trees and flowers and birds and animals that danced. These cartoons had just as hard a time getting started as Mickey Mouse did. The first one of the series lay on the shelf for six months before it was finally accepted.¹⁶⁴ Ralph M. Pearson thinks the early days of animated film, particularly the Silly Symphonies, were a true folk art of the American people, in spite of the fact that they were drawn by naturalistic artists and that they had to be exaggerated and simplified.¹⁶⁵ Pearson also says that cartoons have shown a steady regression from the strictly pictorial virtues of the early films to the increased naturalism and lack of drama in the animated cartoons.¹⁶⁶

The earliest Silly Symphony to achieve success was Skeleton Dance, a film reminiscent of Hallowe'en, in which skel-

¹⁶⁴Carr, pp. 57 and 122.

¹⁶⁵Ralph M. Pearson, "The Artist's Point of View," Forum, XCVIII (November, 1937), p. 271.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

ctons arose from their graves and danced.¹⁶⁷ There are no real characters in Skeleton Dance; it is such an innocent movie that it is almost impossible to imagine anyone being scared by it. However, "its grotesque quality must have seemed remarkably advanced to audiences that have seldom seen such sophisticated iconography at the movies."¹⁶⁸ Disney has been criticized for scenes in this and several of the later Silly Symphonies which some mothers felt their children should not be shown - "not on a basis of morality but because they tended to be over-exciting."¹⁶⁹ Not only were the skeletons and ghouls in Skeleton Dance criticized, but also the witches, giants, ogres, and dragons which appeared in later Silly Symphonies. In each case of criticism, Disney has stood solidly behind his convictions that there was nothing wrong with such scenes. The scenes were left alone, and most of the Silly Symphonies were successful.¹⁷⁰

Skeleton Dance is cited by Schickel as being one of the prime examples of Walt Disney's lack of musical knowledge and/or taste. The violin lessons his father gave him made very little impression on him, for as Schickel says, "he had no real musical knowledge, nor indeed, standards. This

¹⁶⁷Carr, p. 122.

¹⁶⁸Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," p. 92.

¹⁶⁹Eddy, p. 114.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

is obvious from his cheerful chopping and bowdlerizing of music, not only in Skeleton Dance but in all of his later work...."171

Flowers and Trees revolutionized the animated cartoon industry. The picture was already completely photographed in black and white when Disney decided to remake it in Technicolor. The gamble with the expensive Technicolor process paid off handsomely. In 1932 Flowers and Trees was the first cartoon ever to take home an Oscar.¹⁷²

In 1932 Disney made a Silly Symphony, "as he too lightly called this masterpiece, entitled Neptune."¹⁷³ According to James Thurber, the film was a "lusty, fearsome, beautiful thing. Here was a god and here were sea adventures in the ancient manner as nobody else has given them to us. The thing cannot be described; it can be rendered into no English."¹⁷⁴

Three Little Pigs, released in 1933, had a slow start; it attracted a moderate amount of favorable attention here and there. The film slowly but surely picked up enough momentum to become "the most discussed, applauded, and gener-

¹⁷¹Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," p. 90.

¹⁷²de Roos, pp. 173-175, passim.

¹⁷³James Thurber, "The 'Odyssey' of Walt Disney," The Nation, CXXXVIII (March 23, 1934), p. 363.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

ally worshiped picture of the season," and then a film classic.¹⁷⁵ Literary Digest says that in the opinion of many film observers, Three Little Pigs does not have the brilliance of Father Noah's Ark, the "most vigorously satiric"¹⁷⁶ of all the Silly Symphonies. It does, though, have an added quality which combines warmth and whimsy.¹⁷⁷ The theme song of Three Little Pigs, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf," was a "haunting"¹⁷⁸ tune; it became an international necessity to have a speaking acquaintance with the Big Bad Wolf - "an attention that is both merited and significant."¹⁷⁹ Abel Green and Joe Laurie, jr., give the wolf himself a further significance: he "became a symbol for the depression that nobody was afraid of any longer."¹⁸⁰ Others of the Silly Symphonies were Wynken, Blynken, and Nod; The Practical Pig; The Ugly Duckling; Farmyard Symphony; and Merbabies.

Alice in Wonderland debuted in New York in July, 1951, to slightly adverse circumstances: two competing versions of

¹⁷⁵Argus, "On the Screen," Literary Digest, CXVI (October 14, 1933), p. 29.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹"Mickey Mouse," p. 84.

¹⁸⁰Abel Green and Joe Laurie, jr., Show Biz: From Vaude to Video (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), p. 405.

the film appeared at the same time. Three theatres showed "Souvaine Selective Pictures Inc.'s release of Lou Bunin's Anglo-French puppet production; the fourth was taken over by RKO Radio for Walt Disney's long-awaited encounter with the magic of Lewis Carroll and his illustrator, Sir John Tenniel."¹⁸¹ Things were tense for a while when the Disney faction tried to get a temporary injunction against the Bunin picture;¹⁸² Disney was convinced that no one but he had the right to put Lewis Carroll on the screen. The verdict of the New York Federal Court, however, said that anyone, including Mr. Bunin, had the right as well as Disney.¹⁸³ John McCarten is of the opinion that "having seen the products involved in the litigation, I am afraid that justice in this instance was singularly strabismic. The judicial finding...should have enjoined both Disney and Bunin from ever laying a hand on the fantasy...."¹⁸⁴ McCarten goes on to say that Disney is incapable of understanding that such a literary masterpiece cannot be improved upon by schmaltzy tunes and extra touches that have no place in such an imaginative effort.¹⁸⁵ Robert Hatch calls the Disney version an abomination. He sees

¹⁸¹"Alices in Wonderlands" (anon.), Newsweek, XXXVIII (August 6, 1951), p. 84.

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³John McCarten, "Alice Everywhere," The New Yorker, XXVII (August 4, 1951), p. 61.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Ibid.

it as a "piece of brassy, empty headed slapstick that makes the same use of Carroll's sentiment and wit that a baby would make of a Dresden shephordoss: bang it about and break it to bits."¹⁸⁶ Disney's Alice is a pale whimsical little creature, and like most of his other attempts at real people, she is flat and jerkey.¹⁸⁷ Bunin's puppets, "too awful to be admitted to a nightmare," reduce the whole thing to the level of a horror story.¹⁸⁸ The whole effect of the Bunin Alice in Wonderland is a "labored and random approximation of everything that Alice found 'curiouser and curiouser' down the rabbit hole." The songs are more Gilbert and Sullivan than they are the White Rabbit and the Red Queen.¹⁸⁹ Hatch further elaborates on his opinion that Disney's Alice in Wonderland is an abomination by saying

You get Tweedledum and Tweedledee as a pair of Pat and Mike comedians. The Do-do has become a yo-ho-ho pirate, and the Walerus is a sort of W.C. Fields, the Caterpillar an elderly qucer. As for the rest of the citizens of Wonderland, Disney seems to have thought that when the Cheshire Cat told Alice that they were all mad he meant they were all feeble-minded. Alice herself is straight out of a cereal ad, a simpering Dy-dee doll.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶Robert Hatch, "Off with Their Heads," New Republic, CXXV (August 13, 1951), p. 21.

¹⁸⁷Philip T. Hartung, "All in a Golden Afternoon," Commonweal, LIV (August 10, 1951), p. 431.

¹⁸⁸McCarten, "Alice Everywhere," p. 61.

¹⁸⁹"Alices in Wonderlands," p. 84.

¹⁹⁰Hatch, p. 21.

Margaret Eliason is not quite as adamant as Hatch when she says that even if the tunes are not up to some of the other Disney productions, they are good.¹⁹¹ However, she calls the whole picture something "out of the worst nightmares of Bedlam."¹⁹²

There are others who do not discredit the Disney productions quite as drastically as Hatch and Eliason. Hollis Alpert gives the picture credit for being fun, even though the particular magic of the original book is missing, and whimsy and nonsense are quite different from Lewis Carroll.¹⁹³ Disney may have taken liberties with and added modern touches to the childhood conceptions of Alice, those remarkably like Tenniel's illustrations, but the cartoon adaptation of the story is fresh and imaginative; perhaps "we need just the kind of ribbing that Carroll-avec-Disney gives us."¹⁹⁴

Newsweek finds only one place in the film where Disney's artists have actually improved on the Carroll version: their conception of the hookah-smoking Caterpillar.¹⁹⁵ Otherwise, neither Bunin's puppets nor Disney's cartoon will prove any-

¹⁹¹Margaret Eliason, "Alice in Wonderland," Library Journal, LXXVI (August, 1951), p. 1239.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Hollis Alpert, "Disney against Bunin, or Vice Versa," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIV (August 11, 1951), p. 32.

¹⁹⁴Hartung, "All in a Golden Afternoon," p. 431.

¹⁹⁵"Alices in Wonderlands," p. 85.

thing but disappointing and irritating, even though the Disney version is much the better of the two.¹⁹⁶ "The interpretation should either have been left strictly orthodox, or the book left strictly alone."¹⁹⁷

Late in the 1930's Disney's seven minute cartoon fantasies had been accepted by the public and business was good, when the most reckless of all Disney projects bogged down for lack of money. Disney had put all the money he had plus all he could borrow from the Bank of America into an impractical attempt at stretching a short fantasy into a full length feature.¹⁹⁸ The first full length cartoon, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, was produced in 1938.¹⁹⁹ The film required 362,919 individual frames of color film and over a million and a half hand drawn pen and ink drawings.²⁰⁰ Disney invented the multiplane camera to photograph the movie;²⁰¹ he won Academy Awards in 1938 for both the film²⁰² and the development of the camera.²⁰³ Disney was also honored by the academic world for Snow white and the Seven Dwarfs. In June

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Alexander, p. 84.

¹⁹⁹M. Jackson-Brigley and Eric Loyland, The Cinema (London: Grafton and Company, 1939), pp. 32-33.

²⁰⁰Boono, p. 50.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²Green and Laurie, p. 409.

²⁰³de Roos, p. 175.

of 1938 the University of California awarded him an honorary Master of Science degree and Harvard made him an honorary Master of Arts.²⁰⁴

It takes no great daring to conclude that Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is one of the great achievements of the twentieth century.²⁰⁵ Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is a technical masterpiece, even though exception may be taken on the grounds that, like Alice in Wonderland, it is a warped conception²⁰⁶ of the old fairy tale. The Disney picture is basically the story invented by the Brothers Grimm, but evidently Snow White and her friends had quite a few adventures that the venerable Brothers forgot to include because the "fertile imagination"²⁰⁷ of the Disney artists has supplied many incidents not mentioned in the original tale.

The animal characters in Snow White border on the sublime, are "impossible to put into words,"²⁰⁸ and point to vast new possibilities for the animated cartoon.²⁰⁹ Otis C. Ferguson concurs with this and goes on to say that the

²⁰⁴"Education-Commencement" (anon.), Time, XXI (June 20, 1938), p. 26.

²⁰⁵Otis C. Ferguson, "Walt Disney's Grimm Reality," New Republic, LXXXVIII (January 26, 1938), p. 339.

²⁰⁶Jackson-Wrigley and Leyland, p. 33.

²⁰⁷"Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (anon.), Good House-keeping, CV (November, 1937), p. 35.

²⁰⁸Jackson-Wrigley and Leyland, p. 33.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

princess is exactly the way she should be, each of the little men is a perfectly humanized composite of not quite identifiable types, and the old witch is a "perfect ringer for Lionel Barrymore (not quite by accident, I take it)."²¹⁰

Jean Charlot²¹¹ and John Mason Brown²¹² disagree with the excellence of the human beings, not only in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, but in all of Disney's animated films. "When human shapes - Snow White or the Prince Charming - are seen side by side with Disney shapes on the screen, it is the human that suffers."²¹³

Mr. Disney has never done his best work in the human zoo. His creatures, fur- or feather-bearing, have been his matchless creations - those and such of his masterpieces of grotesquerie as the Seven Dwarfs. His heroes and heroines, in particular, have eluded him. They have tended to be bloodless transparencies cursed with wafer faces. They have not been individuals, they have been vacant lots. His wicked mortals, although more successful, have likewise left something to be desired.²¹⁴

Disney seemingly gave up on the idea of bringing animated fairy tales to the screen when he produced his next important film, Fantasia. Encouraged by Deems Taylor and

²¹⁰Ferguson, "Walt Disney's Grimm Reality," p. 339.

²¹¹Jean Charlot, "But Is It Art?" The American Scholar, VIII (July, 1939), p. 268.

²¹²John Mason Brown, "Recessional," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (June 30, 1950), p. 29.

²¹³Charlot, p. 268.

²¹⁴Brown, p. 29.

Loopold Stokowski, Fantasia was the "biggest boner"²¹⁵ of Disney's career to that time. It was supposed to bring culture into the empty lives of the masses of American moviegoers, but it turned out to be "silly: it had nothing to do with culture and the 'masses' would have nothing to do with it."²¹⁶

The program that guided the audiences through the mazo of Fantasia opened with a statement by Stokowski that

the beauty and inspiration of music must not be restricted to a privileged few but made available to every man, woman, and child. That is why great music associated with motion pictures is so important, because motion pictures reach millions all over our country and all over the world.²¹⁷

B.H. Haggin says this idea was phony ten years before Disney ever released Fantasia.²¹⁸ Fantasia was mainly for the eye,²¹⁹ even though it pioneered in the field of both sight and sound images.²²⁰ Essentially the idea of Fantasia was to use Walt Disney cartoons to accompany and interpret great musical selections. It turned out the other way around,²²¹

²¹⁵"Father Goose" (anon.), Time, LXIV (December 27, 1954), p. 46.

²¹⁶Ibid.

²¹⁷B.H. Haggin, "Music," The Nation, CLII (January 11, 1941), p. 53.

²¹⁸Ibid., p. 54.

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Robert Gessner, "Class in Fantasia," The Nation, CLI (November 30, 1940), p. 543.

²²¹Franz Hoellering, "Films," The Nation, CLI (November 23, 1940), p. 513.

even though the music was used in the film as part of the plot,²²² much as it would be used in a ballet.²²³ This, at least, had never been done before. Hoellering finds that he was more disturbed than helped by Misno's efforts to make him see music as well as hear it via Fantasound. His best reason for this resentment is "the whole idea of adding pictures to music composed to be appreciated best with the eyes closed is fundamentally wrong."²²⁴

Gessner notes that with the "possible exception of unfortunate version of the Pastoral Symphony, Fantasia will live...a long time."²²⁵ The longevity of Fantasia is by now doubtless, but the one exception Gessner points out is only one of many. Haggin claims that the music was used indiscriminately and with no feeling for its essential quality or organic structure.²²⁶ "Disney's Water Ballet may be charming, but Tschaikevsky's music is an Arabian Dance."²²⁷ Hoellering reports only one sequence in Fantasia when the picture illustrates the music as it should: "the moment in 'Night on Bald Mountain' when the Black God reaches down into

²²²Gessner, p. 543.

²²³Haggin, p. 53.

²²⁴Hoellering, p. 513.

²²⁵Gessner, p. 543.

²²⁶Haggin, p. 53.

²²⁷Ibid.

the village."²²⁸ This moment and "the prehistoric sequences ('Ritos of Spring') drive right into the foothills of the New Art of the Future."²²⁹ The rest of the film is a deplorable mish-mash of music and pictures, "especially between the Pastoral and the sweet Olympus of the screen, or between the 'Rito of Spring' and its popular-science illustrations, or between the Ave Maria and the Kitsch landscapes."²³⁰

All of the pieces of music in Fantasia present individual interpretations to everyone who has heard them. Disney's interpretations sometimes coincide with those of the listener, but more often they do not. This is especially true of the classical selections; the comic numbers are based more or less on the statements by the composers as to the meanings. These statements have had as much influence on the audience as they have on Walt Disney.²³¹

No one can accurately say just what cultural influences were driving Disney at the time he made Fantasia. Although he had very briefly studied the violin as a boy, he had no real musical knowledge or standards of music. This is obvious from his holter-skelter chopping of music in all his

²²⁸ Hoellering, p. 513.

²²⁹ David Low, "Leonardo da Disney," New Republic, CVI (January 5, 1942), p. 18.

²³⁰ Hoellering, p. 513.

²³¹ Hermine Rich Isaacs, "Fantasia and Fantasound," Theatre Arts, XXV (January, 1941), p. 58.

earlier films, not to mention his greatest endeavor at culture, Fantasia. Schickel says that while Disney was making Fantasia, he tried to make up for his lack of musical ability by taking a box at the Hollywood Bowl concerts. Disney "invariably fell asleep, lulled by the music and the warmth of the polo coat he liked to wrap around himself."²³² It would seem that Disney's desire to bring good music into areas where it had not previously penetrated was based on four reasons. The first reason was purely commercial: Disney wanted to produce something completely new and different from his competitors. There was also a technical challenge to him and his animators. Disney was also interested in education and the finer things of life; he showed himself to be very much like his father in this respect. The last reason was Disney's belief that sound, as he wished to use it, could make him a new success in the entertainment industry.²³³

Up to the point of Fantasia, Disney was still developing his art form. It was to Disney's credit that he was able to make an "amusing operetta out of some old razor blades, a needle and thread, and perhaps a few soft-shell crabs."²³⁴ The fame and success of the film seemed to arrest any further

²³²Schickel, "Bringing Forth the Mouse," pp. 90-91.

²³³Ibid.

²³⁴Otis C. Ferguson, "Ozop and Walt Disney," New Republic, LXXVII (January 10, 1934), p. 254.

development on Disney's part. Thomas Wiseman says that after Fantasia, his films, while there were flashes of brilliance here and there,

were executed in a debased style. His art diminished into commercial art. He seemed more interested in obtaining lush, chocolate-box effects than purity of line. The fantasy content of his films diminished, and instead he sought to give us his own special beautification of reality, a marzipan world from which reality was sternly excluded.²³⁵

Ferguson sums the whole thing up when he says Fantasia was Disney's first major mistake.

Someone told him about the capital letter in Music, or more specifically someone introduced him to Dr. Leopold Stokowski. ...I do wish that people who are simply swell in their own right would stop discovering about art and stuff and going swish. First Chaplin learns about the class struggle; now Disney meets the performing Pole. And it's worse in Disney's case....²³⁶

²³⁵ Thomas Wiseman, Cinema (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1964), p. 79.

²³⁶ Otis C. Ferguson, "Both Fantasy and Fancy," New Republic, CIII (November 25, 1940), p. 724.

CHAPTER VI

WORLD WAR II

The Japanese had hardly bombed Pearl Harbor during World War II when the Army moved into the Disney Studio. They marched seven hundred soldiers into the studio, posted guards at the gates, and required every one of the Disney employees to undergo a security check to get into the studios.²³⁷ The Army stayed eight months, using the giant sound stage for a machine shop and the garages for storage of three million rounds of ammunition.²³⁸

The day the Army moved into the studios, Disney also had a call from the Navy to make a series of training films for a promised \$80,000.²³⁹ While he was busy turning out this series of films, Disney received several other command-performance government contracts. The Disney Studios were virtually turned over to the war effort; they produced animated films on all aspects of war²⁴⁰ from aircraft identification to Latin-American information to basic English to income taxes.²⁴¹ The Treasury Department balked at first at the idea of using Donald Duck to explain the whys and wherefores of income tax payment, but they came around when Disney ex-

²³⁷ Miller and Martin, p. 190.

²³⁸ Ibid., pp. 190-191.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

²⁴⁰ "Walt Disney: Great Teacher" (anon.), Fortune, XXVI (August, 1942), p. 90.

²⁴¹ Loyda, p. 5.

plained that the Disney Studio giving them Donald Duck was the same as M-G-M loaning out Clark Gable free of charge.²⁴²

Within the first year ninety percent of the studio production was directed toward the war. At least six major branches of the government engaged Disney to help them reach the public, usually with the helpful services of Donald Duck or Pluto the Pup.²⁴³ Among the most popular productions ordered by the government during the war was a series of educational films made for the Office of Inter-American Affairs. Among these films were The Grain that Built a Hemisphere, Winged Scourge, and Water, Friend or Enemy.²⁴⁴

On his own, Disney produced a series of eighteen cartoon shorts, half of which were related to the war. The films, without sacrificing humor or variety, crusaded for a free world where everyone has the same chance to laugh and to learn.²⁴⁵

Disney's most successful anti-Nazi propaganda cartoon starred the belligerent Donald Duck. In the film Donald sang: "We heil, we heil right in der Fuhrer's face." The song became one of the most popular and important tools the propagandists had to work with. It was translated into many different languages, including German, for use by resistance

²⁴²Miller and Martin, p. 196.

²⁴³"Walt Disney Goes to War" (anon.), Life, XIII (August 31, 1942), p. 61.

²⁴⁴Cecile Starr, "Animation: Abstract and Concrete," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIV (December 13, 1952), p. 46.

²⁴⁵"Walt Disney Goes to War," p. 61.

groups.²⁴⁶

All through the war Mickey Mouse retained his status as an international symbol. German patrol cars even sported pictures of him.²⁴⁷ Mickey was worn as sleeve insignie by American troops; he went into battle as the insignie on hundreds of Allied ships and planes; Mickey Mouse was the designation for diagrams of convoy movements toward Normandy's D-Day beaches.²⁴⁸

Walt Disney opened up an entire new area of motion pictures during the war. People were craving any and all information about the war; they wanted to know what was going on.²⁴⁹ Disney decided to do Victory Through Air Power, based on Major Seversky's best-seller. The book emphasized the need for "true strategic air power as opposed to the old idea that planes were merely tactical vehicles to be used in support of the Army and Navy."²⁵⁰ The Navy Department called Disney to a Washington staff meeting to try to talk him out of it. They felt that the movie would destroy their wartime program. The Navy was still trying to stop Disney from making Victory Through Air Power when the Air Corps sent a

²⁴⁶ Miller and Martin, p. 198.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

²⁴⁸ de Roos, p. 159.

²⁴⁹ Walter Wagner, "Mickey Icarus, 1943," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (September 4, 1943), p. 18.

²⁵⁰ Miller and Martin, p. 207.

general to California to persuade him to go ahead and make the film. The general was successful and Disney made the film.

James Agee reviewed Victory Through Air Power and said,

When Disney is attending strictly to mechanics and business, it is good poetry and, barring its overpersuasiveness, good teaching. When, instead, he is being poetic, or cute, or in this case funny, it is neither. Such images as that of the Nazi wheel are vivid and instructive. Such images as that of the bird which nests in a Maginot gunmouth are the defective side of this notably split talent or composite of talents. The human animations like all of Disney's are so bad they become interesting as misanthropic footnotes.²⁵¹

Agee is also of the opinion that Disney, the inspired comic inventor, lost his stride during the war and has regained it only at rare moments since.²⁵²

It took World War II and the new comradeship it developed between the United States and the U.S.S.R. to open the Russian door to Walt Disney's films. In 1942, the door opened wide enough to let Soviet authorities admit Bambi. Bambi is a tender story about a baby deer; there is no hint of political affiliation. Two years later they let in Der Fuhrer's Face, "an irreverent Donald Duck opus with some earthy sound effects. After that the door swung shut, and

²⁵¹ James Agee, Agee on Film (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, Inc., 1958), p. 43.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 18.

it has stayed shut."²⁵³ Walt Disney's films are now standard fare all over the world, except in the Communist and Communist satellite countries. In these countries the overlords view Disney movies as examples of a decayed culture which are not fit for the eyes and ears of their subjects. Once in a great while a crude black and white copy of a Disney cartoon crops up in one of the satellite countries, but it is snatched up by the authorities before it has had many showings. Disney, of course, got nothing from these bootlegged films except the flattery that his product is liked well enough in these countries for some citizen to be willing to take quite a chance.²⁵⁴

²⁵³Alexander, p. 84.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

OTHER DISNEY FILMS

Walt Disney reached one of the high points of his career with the release of Busy Beavers in 1932. In this film he reversed the major device of animated cartoons and, instead of changing steam rollers and telegraph poles into animated shapes, he transformed beavers into virtual machines.²⁵⁵

Bambi was the last picture Disney released privately before his studios were turned over to the government for World War II productions. Manny Farber is of the opinion that this film is interesting because it was the first one that was "entirely unpleasant."²⁵⁶ The cartoon was an attempt to ape the "trumped-up realism of flesh and blood movies" in which Disney gave up "fantasy, which was pretty much the magic element."²⁵⁷ The picture loses its appeal very quickly because the animals behave just as Hollywood wants the American people to believe they do: everything is done with feet flat on the floor and a straight face.

Besides, it is moral, starched heavy.... There's no harm in Disney's being righteous, unless as in this picture, the accent is on the cute and pretty rather than on the comedy which produced the righteous Donald.... No more the flat house-

²⁵⁵Manny Farber, "Saccharine Symphony," Now Republic, CVI (June 29, 1942), pp. 893-894.

²⁵⁶Seldes, p. 101.

²⁵⁷Farber, "Saccharine Symphony," pp. 893-894.

paint colors of the early comedies, in which there were no half-tones or dull intensities, with every red the same hot, pure scarlet, every black like coal, and nothing flimsily grayed. The films are now doused in sugary tints...this new development is synthetic reveling in vulgarity.²⁵⁸

In the years since World War II Walt Disney has made a number of full length animated films, most of which have received caustic comment from acid-tongued critics. The first of these was Make Mine Music, a group of "ten shorts designed by Walt Disney for eighty-three minutes of frothy entertainment...."²⁵⁹ Make Mine Music is Disney's challenge to the problems that arise in trying to create a musical film that does not become music interrupted by drama or drama interrupted by music. Newsweek²⁶⁰ says the film is "done with as much simplicity as the basic idea will allow, with...the freshness of the ideas and essential quality of the production which are Disney's long suits."²⁶¹

Farber is of the opinion that Make Mine Music is done in a "boyish spirit that won't sit well even with the cupids on theatre ceilings."²⁶² He goes on to say that the only

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹Manny Farber, "Make Mine Muzak," New Republic, CXIV (May 27, 1946), p. 769.

²⁶⁰"Make Mine Disney" (anon.), Newsweek, XXVII (April 22, 1946), p. 96.

²⁶¹Ibid.

²⁶²Farber, "Make Mine Muzak," p. 679.

people who are satisfied by that sort of movie are the ones who "do the printing on wedding cakes, those who invented Mother's Day, the people who write their names with a flurry ..., those who design theatre interiors...."²⁶³

James Agee almost forgets to mention that there is enough good humor and genuine charm in Make Mine Music to make up a really good Disney short, he is so sickened²⁶⁴ by the whole thing.

I know that much of the best of Disney's films comes from his ruralness, and I respect it. But toward some aspects of rural taste the best I can muster is a polite but nauseated smile.... There is an infinitely insulting animation of a hill-billy ballad.... There is a friendly number about adolescent lovers of corrupted jazz which forces me to suspect that...the best hope of the human race lies in segregation of the sexes up to the age of...ninety. There are 'pretty' numbers.... I realize that Disney and his associates must have aimed for this kind of charm with a good deal of honest affection and I am in part taken in by it, not only as a record and achievement but also through my own less honest affection for the tacky....²⁶⁵

Fun and Fancy Free, another example of Disney's use of alliteration in a title, is a step in the direction of his pre-war animated films. However, after the opening sequences and the "Jack and the Beanstalk" scenes, the picture becomes phony with a note of "nervous hysteria rather than excite-

²⁶³Ibid.

²⁶⁴Agee, pp. 198-199.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

ment about it."²⁶⁶

Like Walt Disney's Alice in Alice in Wonderland, the heroine of Cinderella comes off second best to the animals in the film. The Cinderella of the story was a half-starved, dirty little waif who had very little if anything to offer in the way of physical beauty until her fairy godmother got through with her. Disney's Cinderella is a

blank-faced blond, armed Al Capp-a-pie with the allurements of Daisy Mae. Although she may have to do the dirty work around her stepmother's home, she remains miraculously undirtied. There is nothing of the ill-used waif about her. Plainly she eats well, is delighted with her looks, and from the outset is bound to win the prince. She is in short, a smug little number with a mind as empty as a diary received on Christmas morning.²⁶⁷

The animated cartoon, regardless of its faults, is the best, if not the only feasible medium in which to tell a story that has both human and animal characters; papier-mache headgear or trick photography rarely gives the desired result. Walt Disney's edition of Peter Pan is such a story.²⁶⁸ Parker Tyler, reviewing the film for Theatre Arts, says Disney has grown farther and farther away from the original artistic integrity which dominated all the Mickey Mouse and

²⁶⁶ Shirley O'Hara, "Fun and Fancy," New Republic, CXVII (October 20, 1947), p. 39.

²⁶⁷ Brown, p. 30.

²⁶⁸ Robert Kass, "Film and TV," Catholic World, CLXXI (March, 1953), p. 459.

Donald Duck adventures. There is no doubt that the movement in Peter Pan is an improvement over earlier features, but the style has changed and become so inconsistent that it is no longer beautiful.²⁶⁹ Tyler snips that Peter Pan "encroaches disagreeably on the territory of the comic books."²⁷⁰

Musically, Peter Pan is undistinguished, but according to Robert Kass, the spirit and humor are "as rich as anything found in his classics like Snow White and Pinocchio."²⁷¹

After a lapse of several years in the production of feature length cartoons, Disney released Lady and the Tramp in 1955. This opus, starring Tramp, "a foot-loose and collar-free mongrel from the wrong side of the tracks (who comes as close to being a Chaplin-like character as is possible for a cartoon dog)"²⁷² shows some evidence that Disney became a little rusty during his layoff.²⁷³ Hartung thinks Lady and the Tramp is the best full length cartoon feature to come out of the Disney Studios in a long time because Disney was not bound by set patterns as he was with Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, or any of the other fairy tales.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹Parker Tyler, "All That's Goldwyn Does Not Glitter," Theatre Arts, XXXVII (February, 1953), p. 34.

²⁷⁰Ibid.

²⁷¹Kass, p. 459.

²⁷²Philip T. Hartung, "Just for the Fun of It," Commonweal, LXII (July 8, 1955), p. 354.

²⁷³John McCarten, "Disney's Shaggy Dogs," The New Yorker, XXXI (July 2, 1955), pp. 50-51.

²⁷⁴Hartung, "Just for the Fun of It," p. 354.

CHAPTER VIII

COMBINING ANIMATION WITH LIVE ACTORS

World War II was raging in Europe, the Disney Studios were beset by all sorts of labor troubles, and there was a backlog of projects stacked up waiting to be completed in 1941. It was then that Nelson Rockefeller, the State Department's Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, sent a request to Disney that he tour South America as a goodwill ambassador.²⁷⁵ Rockefeller felt that Disney could help offset a budding Nazi influence if he would only go to South America and find something, anything, to make a picture about.²⁷⁶ The government underwrote Disney's expenses up to \$70,000 and the cost of the negatives to \$50,000 each for four pictures.²⁷⁷ The Disney troupe covered the Argentine, Brazil, and Chile before they returned to Hollywood with enough footage and ideas to complete four pictures.

The distributors all but refused to distribute the films in South America. They were sure that no country would accept a picture about a neighboring country.²⁷⁸ Disney found the answer to the problems of what to do with

²⁷⁵ Miller and Martin, p. 185.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 189.

the films in some sixteen millimeter film he had taken of his crews at work in South America. He blew these films up to thirty-five millimeter size, added some animated segments to tie the whole thing together, and ended with a full length documentary on South America called Saludos Amigos.²⁷⁹

Cecile Starr calls the film "noteworthy for its technique of alternating animation sequences with real life photography."²⁸⁰ The Disney artists labored dilligently to create animation sequences with coloring that would blend as nearly as possible with the real life jungle scenes. With Saludos Amigos Disney showed that the techniques he employed in producing government training films could also be very effectively used in films for the general public.²⁸¹

Agee blasts Saludos Amigos as being filled with bits of slap-stick and kitschy ingenuities with color. He says the whole thing is hard on his stomach.²⁸²

Another surprise popped out of Walt Disney's bag of tricks in 1944. The Three Caballeros debuted Panchito, a Mexican rooster loaded with personality, and combined him

²⁷⁹Ibid.

²⁸⁰Cecile Starr, Ideas on Film (New York: Funk and Wagnals, 1951), p. 235.

²⁸¹Ibid.

²⁸²Agee, p. 29.

with live actors.²⁸³ The combination of live and drawn actors violates the cardinal rule of all arts: keeping to one convention.²⁸⁴ Walt Disney's contribution to the motion picture art itself cannot be challenged, nor can his imagination or invention be questioned, but The Three Caballeros makes it necessary to look very closely at his taste. Brown finds it necessary to class The Three Caballeros and Prohibition together as "unfortunate experiments."²⁸⁵ Agee finds that the "streak of cruelty" he has noticed in all Disney productions is clearly identifiable in The Three Caballeros.²⁸⁶

Walt Disney seems to have redeemed himself somewhat in 1946 with Song of the South. The cartoon-characters-plus-actors film is a tribute to the romantic old South held together by means of a rather sentimental frame story.²⁸⁷ Song of the South, while it shows plantation life as an Eden for happy and lucky slaves, has the distinction of being one of the rare films up to that time in which both Negro and white characters mingle without any undue emphasis or neglect of

²⁸³"How Disney Combines Living Actors with His Cartoon Characters" (anon.), Popular Science, CXXXV (September, 1944), p. 106.

²⁸⁴Claude Bragdon, "Mickey Mouse and What He Means," Scribner's Magazine, XCVI (July, 1934), p. 42.

²⁸⁵Brown, p. 30.

²⁸⁶Agee, p. 141.

²⁸⁷Hermine Rich Isaacs, "A Picture of Our Lives," Theatre Arts, XXXI (January, 1947), p. 42.

either one.²⁸⁹ The best scenes in Song of the South show child-life on a plantation as being one of "unlimited space, dirt roads, and grassy hangouts that are breathtaking and unfortunately long forgotten."²⁹⁰ That the colored boy grins too much and the Easter egg colors²⁹¹ may be forgiven. Farber almost lauds Disney's effort when he gives the cartoons that are used to tell Uncle Remus's story credit for making the movie worth seeing, even if they are not "top-drawer Disney."²⁹² "Br'er Fox is...a fox with a strongly drawn, original personality, a modish skinniness and breathless loquaciousness of a Holy Roller. The rabbit is a watered-down Bugs Bunny and funny in the same way."²⁹³

Melody Time is another Disney concoction of a group of unrelated stories, done in the same vein as Saludos Amigos and Song of the South with live actors and cartoon characters. It has music, bright colors, and a technical excellence. Newsweek says that with the exception of the "Little Toot" tugboat story and the Paul Bunyanish "Pecos Bill," most of Melody Time is pretty uninspired.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹Hanny Farber, "Dixie Corn," New Republic, CXV (December 23, 1946), p. 879.

²⁹⁰Ibid.

²⁹¹Ibid.

²⁹²Ibid.

²⁹³Ibid.

²⁹⁴"Disney Disappointment" (anon.), Newsweek, XXXI (May 31, 1948), pp. 72-73.

CHAPTER IX

NATURE FILMS

After World War II was over Walt Disney decided to branch out and do more of the sort of thing Saludos Amigos was originally intended to be, a true nature documentary with no cartoon characters. The first of these nature films which were billed as A True Life Adventure was Seal Island, featuring the Pribilof Island seals of Alaska.²⁹⁵

Disney constantly denied that he was any kind of educator, but his True Life Adventures brought accolades from educators.²⁹⁶ Beaver Valley, which showed a beaver struggling to get a tree through a hole in the ice, and The Living Desert, which depicted the story of the plants and animals of the desert,²⁹⁷ were pioneering achievements in that they captured the "natural history of the animals with no sign of humans: no fences, cars, tracks, buildings or telephone poles."²⁹⁸ Disney kept a photography crew working in Africa for two years shooting the film for African Lion.²⁹⁹

These nature films opened up a new world of possibilities

²⁹⁵Miller and Martin, pp. 216-217.

²⁹⁶de Roos, p. 162.

²⁹⁷Miller and Martin, pp. 217-218.

²⁹⁸de Roos, p. 162.

²⁹⁹Miller and Martin, p. 218.

and experiences to the film industry. "In them...there is the sense that the camera can take the onlooker into the interior of a vital event - indeed, into the pulse of life-process itself."³⁰⁰ The freshness of spirit that was so apparent in the early Mickey Mouse adventures and Three Little Pigs is very much present in the True Life Adventures.³⁰¹

Educators may have been lavish with their praise of the Disney nature series, but there were a few critics who protested that he added too many gimmicks,³⁰² that he tried to make nature over into a Hollywood glamor girl.³⁰³

³⁰⁰"Father Goose," p. 46.

³⁰¹Starr, "Animation: Abstract and Concrete," p. 46.

³⁰²"Walt Disney: Images of Innocence," p. 71.

³⁰³"Father Goose," p. 46.

CHAPTER X

LIVE-ACTION FILMS

Ever since 1933 when animated films began to become impractical,³⁰⁴ Disney had been gradually shifting the emphasis in his films from the animated cartoons to live-action movies.³⁰⁵ After World War II, the Disney Studio's funds in England were frozen by the blocked-dollar policies of that government.³⁰⁶ To melt some of the money out of the English banks, the Disney crews were sent to England to make Treasure Island,³⁰⁷ the first completely live-action film released by Walt Disney.³⁰⁸ The European films were made against much friendly advice, but Disney was convinced that a good storyteller can function equally well in any medium.³⁰⁹ Treasure Island was released in 1950, followed by such live-action films as The Story of Robin Hood,³¹⁰ Davey Crockett, The Shaggy

³⁰⁴"The Magic Kingdom" (anon.), Time, LXXXVII (April 15, 1966), p. 84.

³⁰⁵"Disney's Live-action Profits" (anon.), Business Week, number 1873, (July 24, 1965), p. 78.

³⁰⁶Alexander, p. 85.

³⁰⁷Miller and Martin, p. 215.

³⁰⁸Alexander, p. 85.

³⁰⁹Ibid.

³¹⁰Ibid.

Doc,³¹¹ The Absent Minded Professor, The Parent Trap, and Mary Poppins, which won five Academy Awards.³¹²

Pauline Kael objects to movies like Disney's The Ugly Dachshund, saying that they are pacifiers, parents' insipid notions of what their children should enjoy because that sort of movie is supposed to be a treat for children.³¹³

³¹¹ de Roos, p. 189.

³¹² "Disney's Live-action Profits," p. 78.

³¹³ Pauline Kael, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), p. 179.

CHAPTER XI

FOURTH DIMENSION

There are certain laws that govern animation just as there are specific laws that govern the static arts. However, the laws of animation are peculiar to the art. In real life things are governed by topography and gravity.³¹⁴ In the world of animation trees, houses, and people move at will, floating in air sans gravity, multiplying themselves, or completely disappearing and then reappearing on the same spot. This freedom from the real forces of life is what makes animated films so popular, what makes people "rejoice when flung into the world...where our moves impose their own elbow room all over creation."³¹⁵

The third dimension is as much a part of animation as height and width. Painters, knowing that for them depth is a lie, must use depth with discretion,³¹⁶ plan their compositions so that they are relatively simple. The camera, especially Walt Disney's multiplane camera, removes the hesitation and allows animators to explore depth legitimately.

The greatest difference between animation and the immobile arts of painting and sculpture lies in the fact that "the

³¹⁴Charlot, p. 266.

³¹⁵Ibid.

³¹⁶Ibid.

animated picture adds another dimension to pictorial art - the time dimension, which is the fourth dimension."³¹⁷ This fourth dimension is alien to pictorial art, but becomes one of the essentials in animation. "In this sense animated drawing partakes of...music, poetry, and the dance. It must be appreciated not only in terms of simultaneous proportion, as in painting, but also in successive tempos that have a beginning and an end."³¹⁸ Charlot says that it is time that takes the great volume of drawings and files them into a coherent whole.³¹⁹ "Far from a free-for-all, this motion art composes not only in the media of surface and depth, but uniquely and rigidly in that of time."³²⁰

In the static arts the sense of proportion comes about when the various volumes are compared with each other. This is true of animation, too, but in animation one volume can be compared with itself in the dimension of time. Disney uses this comparison most successfully in Fantasia when he uses abstract volumes - when the swarm of bees shifts its "strategic attack on Mickey from pyramid to sphere and back to pyramid."³²¹

³¹⁷Bragdon, p. 42.

³¹⁸Charlot, p. 262.

³¹⁹Ibid., p. 270.

³²⁰Ibid.

³²¹Ibid., p. 263.

CHAPTER XII

ANIMATED FILMS

It would be impossible to make any kind of complete survey of animated film without considering the work done by Walt Disney. However, Disney was by no means the originator of the art. People had seen animated pictures long before the days of film by flipping the pages of booklets in their hands.³²² The true predecessor of the animated cartoon came out of the cafe Chat Noir in Paris in the 1890's³²³ when pages were flipped in story sequence and projected upon a screen. Prior to 1900, the astronomer Herschel had done some work on animated film, and George Melies, whose Trip to the Moon was released in 1902, had set up a studio for animated film in France. In Russia Ladislas Starevitch released the full length Adventures of Reynard before World War I.³²⁴ Winsor McCay, who is probably best remembered for his Little Nemo in Slumberland, is given credit for making the first animated picture in America. "In pure line, on a white ground, a plant is seen to grow up and unfold into a flower; a young man turns and plucks it and hands it to a girl."³²⁵ McCay

³²²Fishwick, p. 33.

³²³Bragdon, p. 40.

³²⁴Fishwick, p. 30.

³²⁵Bragdon, p. 40.

turned out Gertie the Dinosaur in 1909 and amused people with Felix the Cat³²⁶ before Walt Disney even began to produce animated cartoons.

The earliest animated films were severely black and white; the stories were jammed with gags for no other purpose than the presence of gags. The backgrounds of these early cartoons were quickly developed for the simple reason that the backgrounds presented less in the way of technical difficulties than animated shapes. The backgrounds ended their metamorphosis, finally, in a relatively photographic style. "Personages, which labored under the handicap of more involved technicalities, made slower progress."³²⁷

Charlot reports that it has been suggested that animation in the hands of Michelangelo would produce Sistine Chapels on film; that this, if it should come about, would render everything painted before Disney came on the scene as hopelessly outdated as the stereopticon in the present day of talkies.³²⁸ But the use to which animation has been put by Disney and his colleagues shows that animated film has gone beyond that. Michelangelo's figures in the Sistine Chapel are beautiful because of their arrested motion; they

³²⁶Fishwick, p. 38.

³²⁷Charlot, pp. 268-269.

³²⁸Ibid., p. 267.

would gain nothing, in fact they would lose most of their beauty, by being placed on film. On the other hand, Donald Duck's very charm lies in the fact that he is constantly in a fit of motion. Animation needs to treat a movement as something continuous, something comically low and muscular.³²⁹

Charlot also says that animated film has done away with the idea of a work of art being original. Animated cartoons, if they may be called works of art, are handled by so many people from the birth of the plot to the final inking that they are propelled into being more by communal machinery than by the hands of any human being.³³⁰

The drawn film was developed to its full extent by Walt Disney's Studios after 1928; this development has propelled the organization into more than twenty countries for every purpose from entertainment to education to advertising.³³¹ David Low assumes that the Disney Studio is something constantly striving for new improvements and having aspirations over and above the commercial success it usually enjoys. He suggests that this is the direction of the real artist and, perhaps, Disney is the most significant figure since Leonardo da Vinci.³³²

³²⁹Ibid.

³³⁰Ibid., p. 269.

³³¹Roger Manvell, The Living Screen (London: George G. Harrap and Company, Limited, 1961), p. 47.

³³²Low, p. 18.

There are basic elements in which all animated cartoons are alike. First there is the hero or protagonist; all action revolves around him. Next there is a villain - he is constantly in conflict with the hero, but in the end, is overcome by the hero. The third element present in animated cartoons is a character known in vaudeville as a stooge. This character boosts the hero into a better light than he would otherwise appear. There are several other characters in each animated film; these vary from one film to another, but they have a way of melting together into the equivalent of a chorus that provides a background for the main action.³³³

The heroes of animated cartoons are usually similar to Mickey Mouse: a weakling who provides a parody of the strongmen heroes of live-action movies and carries out a role that emphasizes cleverness rather than brute strength.³³⁴ The hero of cartoon films is very much like the hero of the old-style Western movies. Justice always prevails; the hero does not smoke or drink; he does not lose his temper unless justly provoked; he fights fair; and he is a paragon of democracy in his social attitudes.³³⁵

The moral values expressed in animated cartoons,

³³³Bragdon, pp. 41-42.

³³⁴Orrin H. Klapp, "The Creation of Popular Heroes," American Journal of Sociology, LIV (September, 1948), p. 136.

³³⁵Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 170-171.

particularly Walt Disney's, are those of the American Christian society. Good and evil may battle, but good is always victorious. Frederick Elkin lines up the components of good and evil as follows:

On the side of good are honesty, loyalty, sympathy for the oppressed, respect for just law and if it is occasioned in the story, love of children and respect for religion. On the side of evil are treachery, callousness, ruthlessness, contempt for the underdog, and disdain for civil rights.³³⁶

There is a suggestion that there should always be sympathy toward any characters who appear ludicrous, but are basically good.³³⁷ Justice and morality are always worth fighting for and are worthy of great risks on the part of the hero. If love should appear in one of Walt Disney's animated cartoons, it is of the purest sort. Stephen Birmingham is sure that sex never rears its ugly head,³³⁸ but Agee finds a "sexless sexiness"³³⁹ to all of Disney's films. Disney takes what Birmingham calls his "one-man league of decency" seriously: "There's enough ugliness and cynicism in the world without me adding to it."³⁴⁰

There seems to be no real consensus as to what con-

³³⁶ Frederick Elkin, "The Psychological Appeal of the Hollywood Western," Journal of Educational Sociology, XXVI (October, 1950), p. 73.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

³³⁸ Birmingham, p. 121.

³³⁹ Agee, p. 44.

³⁴⁰ Birmingham, p. 121.

stitutes good taste in films. There is some confidence in good in films, but there is even more evidence that the bad and the vulgar are the major yardsticks of aesthetic satisfaction. There is a definite relationship between the themes of American movies and the psychological lives of the people who go to see them. The makers of Hollywood films have their fingers on the pulse of American life; their films play up whatever gets the most response. It is unfortunate that while the films, including animated cartoons to a certain extent, mirror the times in which they are made, they do so with only a surface fidelity. The whole culture is represented at one time or another, but the traits of the culture are so disguised as to be almost unrecognizable.³⁴¹

What there does seem to be agreement on, though, is that all media, especially animated cartoons, have nothing to offer except distraction, entertainment, and eventual escape from reality which has become unbearable.³⁴² This is what the majority of all Walt Disney's films do offer. Christopher LaFarge believes that Disney's work does have

³⁴¹Max Lerner, "The Movies: Role and Performance," in Reo M. Christenson and Robert O. McWilliams, eds., Voice of the People: Readings in Public Opinion and Propaganda (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1957), p. 217.

³⁴²Leo Lowenthal, "Historical Perspective of Popular Culture," in Bernard Rosneberg and David Manning White, eds., Mass Culture (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 55.

taste, "that almost indefinable quality that lifts a conception above the level of merely common appeal and gives it the greater (and inclusive) universal touch."³⁴³ Barbara Deming finds that Disney's films do reflect the American society. Disney is a dream-maker; the fact that they reflect the American society sometimes makes the dreams monstrous, but it also gives them a wide frame of reference.³⁴⁴ She says that

If the values by which the society lives are still serving, if the prevailing outlook is relatively bright-faced and aggressive, he will improvise from that - and give us Mickey Mouse. If the time is one of crisis, and those values will no longer serve but are in conflict and question, if the prevailing state of mind is a deep bewilderment, he will improvise with equal lack of inhibition.³⁴⁵

The motive and shape of the movement pull the screen personage or character out of the realm of the permanent into the realm of the impermanent. Walt Disney's pictures do not deviate from this. They are modeled after the lines of their functions; thus, their beauty.³⁴⁶

What quality is present in the animated cartoon that distinguishes it from all other art forms? LaFarge says that

³⁴³Christopher LaFarge, "Walt Disney and the Art Form," Theatre Arts, XLV (September, 1941), p. 673.

³⁴⁴Barbara Deming, "The Artlessness of Walt Disney," Partisan Review (Spring, 1954), p. 226, in Leo Lowenthal, "Historical Perspectives of Popular Culture," in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., Mass Culture, (New York: The Free Press, 1957), pp. 50-51.

³⁴⁵Ibid.

³⁴⁶Charlot, p. 268.

it is "the quality of abstraction, which I shall define as the stripping of action and mood until the point is reached where all that remains is concentrated essence."³⁴⁷

There is something, perhaps LaFarge's concentrated essence, that is inherent in all animated films, even the bad ones, that gives pleasure. That satisfaction is the childish one of delighting in seeing the impossible happen before our very eyes. The animated cartoon shows us in action "something naturally inert, and it is essentially the satisfaction of magic that we get out of it."³⁴⁸

Childish delight: the thing animated films are meant to satisfy by means of magic and impossibility. The advance of motion picture techniques has brought the animated cartoon closer and closer to the brink of naturalism. Realism is the very thing which animated cartoons should avoid at all costs. The closer animation comes to realism, the more it destroys the magic element of impossibility that is its very nature.³⁴⁹ If color must be made an element of the cartoon, it should be treated in large, flat masses as the very earliest color cartoons were. Bragdon emphatically calls the delicately shaded color cartoon, for example Bambi or Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, inferior to the stark black and white

³⁴⁷LaFarge, p. 678.

³⁴⁸Seldes, p. 102.

³⁴⁹Bragdon, p. 42.

ono.³⁵⁰

There have been several previous references to the fact that Walt Disney's films have an element of kitsch about them. Kitsch is a rather vague combination of many things:

Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money - not even their time.³⁵¹

That is not to say that everything that can be classified as being kitsch is worthless; this does not mean that all of Disney's films are worthless. Now and then there is something of merit produced that has an authentic folk art flavor to it:³⁵² Disney has been given credit for inventing a new folk art. The concept of kitsch is not new, although the name may be relatively recent. It derives from the Middle Ages when the artist paid lip service, if nothing else, to the lowest common denominators of human experience. The only thing available for artistic imitation was a universally valid reality that the artist could not tamper with. The subject matter of all art was dictated by those who commis-

³⁵⁰Ibid.

³⁵¹ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Bernard Rosenberg and David Fanning White, eds., Mass Culture (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 102.

³⁵²Ibid., p. 103.

sioned art.³⁵³ Things have come the full circle today and, instead of concentrating only on the medium, the artist is free to become a philosopher or visionary as well as an artist. Thus Walt Disney and other film makers are free to speculate as to what is art and what the public will accept as art. The two do not always coincide.

³⁵³Ibid., p. 106.

CHAPTER XIII

ESCAPES

In 1939 the world had had enough: the great depression had been survived only to find the cloud of World War II hanging over Europe. The trend was for frothier screen fare of all kinds, as a deliberate counter to the grim newspaper headlines of the day. There was strong emphasis on escapist films.³⁵⁴ None of the top grossing films of 1940 "was an accurate or vital reflection of the world then in flames."³⁵⁵ This fact lent weight to the Hollywood claim that Americans wanted escapism and not realism.³⁵⁶ The American people saw that they could never recall the pre-depression years and the life that was free from rebellion and tyranny. There are strong parallels between the man Walt Disney and the American people as a whole. Disney had been a "Midwestern go-getter with a prodigious capacity for work."³⁵⁷ The American audience took him - and his animated films - "to themselves because he was in fact one of them, because his juvenile nature was theirs, his search for a past and a tradition was theirs, his nostalgia for a simpler, safer way of life was

³⁵⁴Green and Laurie, p. 409.

³⁵⁵Ibid.

³⁵⁶Ibid.

³⁵⁷Joseph Morganstern, "Citizen Disney," Newsweek, LXXI (May 27, 1968), p. 94.

theirs."³⁵⁸ Disney wanted to escape and so did his audience. Christian Century held the opinion that the popularity of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was a signal that the morale of the American people, and the world at large, was shattered. "Unable to face up to the fact that civilization is threatened by disaster that can be neither prevented nor survived, they turn away their eyes and seek in a world of pure fantasy an escape from reality."³⁵⁹

G.W. Grauer finds social significance in the theme songs of several Walt Disney movies. "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" became the theme song of the depression. Adults sought escape in things meant for children if there was no adult escape fare near at hand. In the years following the depression song writers

escort us back to the fairyland and sing 'I'm wishing, I'm wishing'. Is one loading the dice to say that a song of optimism is an escape from reality? Or...another beautiful song Snow White sings: 'Someday my prince will come'. Isn't that a political philosophy and attitude of most people today? ... Perhaps we go too far when...even the song 'Whistle while you work' expresses a philosophy concerning work.³⁶⁰

Young children, not at all concerned with the possible imminence of Armageddon loved Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ "Snow White and Escape from Reality" (anon.), Christian Century, LV (July 20, 1938), p. 886.

³⁶⁰ G.W. Grauer, "The Snow White Debate Continues," Christian Century, LV (August 17, 1938), p. 993.

possibly for no other reason than it was an escape route from "the safe but unexciting domesticity of their normal surroundings, certainly not from the impending woe of a war-ridden world."³⁶¹

Recently critics and social researchers have been concerned with the amount of escapist material being produced for the mass media. This fare has been accused of promoting an unreal picture of the world, of distracting the audience from the real problems of the world so that they cannot face life and of promoting social apathy. On the other hand, this same fare has been given credit for providing relaxation that can be, at its best, therapeutic. Its champions believe that it can bolster the whole social system by making the problems of life more bearable and reinforcing the self-image of the average person.³⁶² The relaxation provided by films is an escape from reality but not an indication of social pathology.³⁶³ According to Christian Century, it is an illustration of the normal rhythm of life, in which there is an alternation of tension and release, of seriousness and gaiety, and of complexity and simplicity.³⁶⁴ Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and films like it are escapes of different degrees from "banality, from tyranny of things, from the inhumanity of

³⁶¹"Snow White and Escape from Reality," p. 886.

³⁶²Klapper, p. 116.

³⁶³"Snow White and Escape from Reality," p. 887.

³⁶⁴Ibid.

routine without meaning, from the cramping concentration of life as nothing more than a biological process."³⁶⁵

Cecile Starr agrees that the trend toward escapism in films is desirable and part of the nature of life. In her opinion, sometimes people enjoy taking a serious look at life, sometimes they enjoy looking and laughing, and at other times they just want to look.³⁶⁶ Sophisticated societies such as the current American society eventually become too complex and the members desire a return to a simpler life. The genre of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs provides a temporary escape hatch to that simpler life.³⁶⁷

There can be no doubt that if adults find life too complex and confusing, children are doubly confused by it. There is so much that a young child does not understand and cannot predict about the world around him that it is very easy for him to regress to an imaginary world that is simple, well ordered, and clear cut.³⁶⁸ There is nothing unnecessary irrelevant, or complex in a child's imaginary world. The child can emotionally participate in such a world.³⁶⁹ For a young child, it is psychologically satisfying to see, if only on a movie screen, a world which he can understand and

³⁶⁵Ibid.

³⁶⁶Starr, "Animation: Abstract and Concrete," p. 46.

³⁶⁷"Snow White and Escape From Reality," p. 887.

³⁶⁸Elkin, p. 80.

³⁶⁹Ibid., p. 79.

identify with.³⁷⁰ Max Lerner says children like movies because they provide a "surrogate for what they have not yet achieved but know to be possible in their world."³⁷¹ Thus, movies are dreams not only for escape but for "ambition-and-attainment."³⁷²

It is also characteristic of young children to demand some sort of imaginative activity in their lives. Children are constantly hemmed in by the society in which they live - the small confines of an apartment, the demands of school and family, not to mention their own weaknesses.³⁷³ Movies, especially those of Disney's style, provide children with imaginative activity and escape from the demands of reality. In this way children can give rein to their basic desire for freedom.

Some social observers have alleged that, regardless of whether it is good or bad, this escapist fare has a tendency to turn its child devotees into addicts of escapism. Himmelweit, Oppenheim, and Vince classified the one-third of each age group of children studied who spent the longest time viewing as addicts.³⁷⁴ These children are likely to

³⁷⁰Ibid., p. 80.

³⁷¹Lerner, p. 217.

³⁷²Ibid.

³⁷³Elkin, pp. 80-81.

³⁷⁴Hilde T. Himmelweit, A.W. Oppenheim, and Pamela Vince, Television and the Child (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), in Klapper, pp. 193-194.

be the less intelligent group. They were also found to worry more, to have less contact with other children, and to have things done for them rather than to do or explore things on their own.³⁷⁵ Riley and Riley found that movies and other escapist materials are more popular among children who seem to have a high level of frustration, children who use them as a mode of escape by identification and as a source of advice.³⁷⁶ Paul I. Lyness reports that as far as escapism is concerned, preference levels of normal boys and girls drop from the fifth grade age group to the eleventh grade age group.³⁷⁷

Not only do movies provide escapism for children, but they can help as teaching aids. Sarah I. Roody has found that animated cartoons like Alice in Wonderland and Snow White can pave the way for the teaching of such fantasies as Shakespeare's The Tempest and Midsummer Night's Dream.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Mathilda White Riley and John W. Riley, jr., "A Sociological Approach to Communication Research," Public Opinion Quarterly, XV (1951), pp. 444-460, in Klapper, p. 191.

³⁷⁷ Paul I. Lyness, "Patterns in the Mass Communications Tastes of the Young Audience," Journal of Educational Psychology, XLII (December, 1951), p. 458.

³⁷⁸ Sarah I. Roody, "Effect of Radio, Television, and Motion Pictures on the Development of Maturity," English Journal, XLI (May, 1952), p. 246.

CHAPTER XIV

DISNEY IMAGE

The image which Disney liked to keep before the public was, in many ways, contrary to the real man Disney. The studio press agents presented the American public with a carefully nurtured image of a Heratio Alger character whose tastes and character reflected the comfortable, middle-class American family group. In fact, however, Walt Disney was a quiet, withdrawn man. Groon Zimmerman finds that Disney, when he spoke, made it all too easy to create a mental picture of a Missouri farmer wearing blue coveralls and brass hardware.³⁷⁹ The simplicity presented to the public was deceptive. Disney may never have grown up emotionally or intellectually, but he was completely adult when it came to running his business.³⁸⁰ That Disney tended toward moodiness was passed over as being trifling in the super-charged atmosphere of Hollywood. For many years Walt Disney was known as a ruthless molder of talent who paid his animators as little as possible. Virgil Partch, one of Disney's former animators, dubbed him "the deGaulle of the cartoon world."³⁸¹

The creator of Mickey Mouse was much less well known than his brain-child. From the beginning Walt Disney was

³⁷⁹ Groon Zimmerman, "Walt Disney: Giant at the Fair," Look, XXVIII (February 11, 1964), p. 28.

³⁸⁰ Richard Schickel, "Walt Disney: Myth and Reality," American Heritage, XIX (April, 1968), p. 94.

³⁸¹ "The Wide World of Walt Disney" (anon.), Newsweek, LX (December 31, 1962), pp. 50-51.

something of a legend in Hollywood, probably because he rarely attended movie parties and was not well known by the members of the movie colony.³⁸² Eddy reports that most of the members of the small circle of Disney friends were cultivated by Lillian Disney.³⁸³

The name Walt Disney is a household word synonymous with genius in nearly every civilized part of the world. However, Disney disliked the label because it was "a lazy way of saying a man enjoys his work."³⁸⁴

The most common misconception about Disney over the years was that he was a sentimental softy. He may have been sentimental, and, perhaps, at times he seemed to strangers to be soft, bashful, or bewildered, but he never lost command of any situation;³⁸⁵ behind the unprepossessing facade there was a tough realist with a will as inflexible as oak.³⁸⁶ Disney was described by a long-time associate as being "steel springs inside a silk pillow," a statement which Eddy says sums the man up very well.³⁸⁷

The dominant Disney trait was impatience, not only

³⁸²"Mickey Mouse is Eight Years Old," p. 18.

³⁸³Eddy, p. 112.

³⁸⁴Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸⁵Ibid., p. 111.

³⁸⁶Ibid.

³⁸⁷Ibid.

with himself but with co-workers who failed to produce what he wanted when he wanted it. One of the reasons for his success may have been that he saw fate as a cruel monster that perversely prevented things scheduled for tomorrow from being done yesterday.³⁸⁸

Walt Disney refused to accept any disclaimers to culture. In his opinion, "a person's culture represents his appraisal of the things that make up life. And a fellow becomes cultured...by selecting that which is fine and beautiful in life, and throwing aside that which is mediocre or phony...".³⁸⁹ Disney detested any label that had to do with artiness or psychological motive. "Art:...I looked up the definition once, but I've forgotten what it is...you got to watch out for the boys with the dramatic sense and no sense of humor or they'll go arty on you...we just make a picture and then you professors come along and tell us what we did".³⁹⁰ Walt Disney was not a well-read person, nor was he particularly a student of society. There was a time when he thought there was something slightly un-American about the word culture; when he decided to make the acquaintance of some people who could be called intellectuals, he did not know

³⁸⁸Ibid.

³⁸⁹"Walt and the Professors" (anon.), Time, LXXIX (June 8, 1942), p. 60.

³⁹⁰Ibid., p. 58.

where to find them.³⁹¹

Disney seemed to be determined to conduct his private life according to his image and the way the public wanted his life to be. He never allowed anyone to photograph him with a drink in his hand; he never allowed anyone to drink anything more than vegetable juice in his offices at the Disney Studio. Hedda Hopper was once rebuffed for asking for vodka in her tomato juice.³⁹² When Disney's two daughters were growing up, he sent them to private schools and refused to let anyone photograph them or write about them.³⁹³ Sharon and Diane Disney were secretly rather ashamed that their father made his living doing things with movie cartoons. It was years after they found out that he was the real Walt Disney before they stopped regretting that he did not make pictures with super-stars like Spencer Tracy or Clark Gable.³⁹⁴

The man who Low described as "the most significant figure in graphic arts since Leonardo"³⁹⁵ da Vinci constantly prowled the studios to make sure he was fully aware of every thing that was going on in his dream factory down to the last technical detail.³⁹⁶ Yet the details of running the business

³⁹¹Morganstern, p. 94.

³⁹²Birmingham, p. 121.

³⁹³Ibid.

³⁹⁴Eddy, p. 115.

³⁹⁵"Walt Disney: Images of Innocence," p. 71.

³⁹⁶Eddy, p. 111.

borod Disney, according to Zimmerman. "You need the sharp-pencil boys, but you can't let them run the joint!"³⁹⁷

Even so, Disney knew the special secret of making dreams come to life, a secret which can be summarized in four words: curiosity, confidence, courage, and constancy. The key word here is courage; when Walt Disney believed in a thing, he believed in it completely and unquestioningly.³⁹⁸

Walt Disney died of cancer December 15, 1966, at the age of sixty-five.³⁹⁹ He was no longer the fundamentally primitive imagist whose success provided him with an income to release his imagination to entertain the whole world;⁴⁰⁰ instead, he was a vast corporation whose assembly lines produced dreams⁴⁰¹ and a personal fortune of more than twenty million dollars.⁴⁰² As Disney grew older he became less approachable and more of an enigma.

He remained suspicious of outsiders, strangely small minded on questions of aesthetics and narrow minded on morals, and deeply wedded to the propagation of the happy myth of small-town, turn-of-the-century virtue.... His real nature remained a well-kept secret, and the public were as content with folksy persona that Disney and his press agents gave them as they were with the studio's products.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷Zimmerman, p. 32.

³⁹⁸Liddy, p. 115.

³⁹⁹John Willis, Screen World, vol 18, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 234.

⁴⁰⁰Ibid.

⁴⁰¹"Walt Disney: Images of Innocence," p. 71.

⁴⁰²Schickel, "Walt Disney: Myth and Reality," p. 95.

⁴⁰³Ibid.

CHAPTER XV

CRITICISMS

It would seem, according to critics of the Disney art, that over the years Walt Disney progressed from cartoon illustrations and animal allegories to situation comedies⁴⁰⁴ and other excursions down blind alleys that sent his admirers into constant flurries of dismay that Disney was betraying his own art.⁴⁰⁵ Many critics felt that when Disney left fantasy behind, he also left being a good artist behind and became, instead, a bad poet⁴⁰⁶ who produced middle-class, shallow, non-intellectual pap.⁴⁰⁷ The major quality of Disney's later products seems to be complete optimism that if things are already good, they are going to get even better.⁴⁰⁸ Brown can find no satisfactory explanation as to why he no longer finds pleasure in any of Walt Disney's products. Technically excellent, the films continually demonstrated that Disney, whether he liked it or not, was a genius; however, Brown finds that somewhere in their development the films lost some of

⁴⁰⁴

Peter Michelson, "What Disney Teaches," New Republic, CLIX (July 6, 1968), p. 31.

⁴⁰⁵ Hermine Rich Isaacs, "The Dark Brown Taste," Theatre Arts, XXX (June, 1946), p. 314.

⁴⁰⁶ Michelson, p. 31.

⁴⁰⁷ John Bright, "Disney's Fantasy Empire," The Nation, CCIV (March 6, 1967), p. 301.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

their audience appeal.⁴⁰⁹

Frances Clarke Sayers seems to be the most outspoken of the critics of Disney's treatment of well-known fairy tales. In an interview with Charles H. Wizenberg, Miss Sayers denies that there is any need to introduce an element of sophistication into stories like Pinocchio to make them palatable to twentieth century audiences.⁴¹⁰ Miss Sayers is of the opinion that there are enough terms in the stories that today's children do know to make up for the few they do not know.

I think the truth is that Walt Disney has never addressed himself to children once in his life - never. This material is made to reach an adult audience. This is the whole trouble. Everything is made to reach everyone, and in order to reach everyone, he must introduce the Hollywood touch.⁴¹¹

Walt Disney countered this with his credo that "you can't live on things made for children - or for critics. I've never made films for either of them." He aimed at "honest adults."⁴¹²

Max Rafferty, Superintendent of Public Instruction in

⁴⁰⁹Brown, p. 30.

⁴¹⁰"Disney Accused" (anon.), Horn Book Magazine, XLI (December, 1965), p. 607; reprinted from F.H. and Fine Arts (August, 1965), Charles H. Wizenberg interviewing Dr. Frances Clarke Sayers.

⁴¹¹Ibid.

⁴¹²"The Magic Kingdom," p. 84.

California, thinks Disney is "wonderful." He says Disney's movies have "become lone sanctuaries of decency and health in the jungle of sex, sadism, and pornography"⁴¹³ which Hollywood has created.

Remembering Three Little Pigs and the early Mickey Mouse stories which she found enchanting, Miss Sayers is eager for people to "realize that in his own medium Walt Disney has made a great contribution to the humor of the world." She wants the Disney Studios to leave traditional children's literature alone⁴¹⁴ and stop trying to pretend to children who know better, that things are all non-violent sweetness: a soap opera in which there is no relation whatever to life.⁴¹⁵ Miss Sayers, who won the 1956 Lippincott Award, also takes Disney to task for showing scant respect for the original creations of authors and for manipulating everything to meet his own ends. "Every story is sacrificed to the 'gimmick' of animation."⁴¹⁶ Whatever material Disney took from the literary classics, he made it completely his. There were twenty-seven separate editions of Walt Disney's Mary Poppins. The original author, Pamela Travers, was given credit in very

⁴¹³"Walt Disney Accused," p. 609.

⁴¹⁴Ibid., p. 610.

⁴¹⁵Bright, p. 301.

⁴¹⁶"'Too Long at the Sugar Bowls': Frances C. Sayers Raps Disney," (anon.), Library Journal, XC (October 15, 1965), p. 4538.

small print inside the covers of the books. The Disney editions of Mary Poppins were so geared to the movie that one insensed California library installed a sign inviting the public to "Come in and meet the original Mary Poppins."⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁷"The Magic Kingdom," p. 84.

CHAPTER XVI

DISNEY CORPORATIONS

Walt Disney Productions was watched over by the Disney brothers, Roy, president and chairman of the board, and Walt, who called himself executive producer. As long as Walt lived the studios remained a one-man operation.⁴¹⁸ Walt Disney was one of the few remnants of the early days in Hollywood when producers controlled everything that went on on studio lots. Nothing was released from the Disney Studios without Walt's stamp of approval, and no stars, producers, or directors took home shares of the Disney profits.⁴¹⁹ Contrary to Walt's volatile nature and the fact that nearly all the credit for his pictures went to him, the Disney Studios seem to have little trouble keeping creative people.⁴²⁰

As a producer Walt Disney must be regarded as one of the greatest innovators of film history.⁴²¹ The traditional style adopted by the Disney Studios is just one of many in the cartoon industry, but it has tended to be the basic style.⁴²² Each of Disney's animated cartoons was an improvement on the

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ "Disney's Live-action Profits," p. 81.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴²¹ Wiseman, p. 79.

⁴²² Manvoll, The Living Screen, p. 65.

ones before it, not only technically but in revealing understanding of movement. Low compares the expressions on the human faces in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs to the faces in Fantasia, and finds striking improvement in the latter.⁴²³ Many of Disney's experiments have been accepted as fact by the entire film industry. The recording process used to produce stereophonic sound for Fantasia and the development of the multiplane camera for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs are fully accepted by today's producers and audiences.⁴²⁴

It is necessary to remember that in the light of the enormous costs of producing a motion picture, so far as the physical side of production is concerned, very little money is ever wasted. Walt Disney was one of the few producers who has never bothered with how much a film costs or whether it will be a financial success.⁴²⁵ Disney was not a very profitable producer; the bankers called him a "spender."⁴²⁶ It was not until the early 1950's that Disney was able to transform his talent into more than a small business; very often in the early years the company finished the fiscal year in

⁴²³Low, p. 17.

⁴²⁴Isaacs, "The Dark Brown Taste," p. 344.

⁴²⁵Harry Alan Towers and Leslie Mitchell, The March of the Movies (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, Limited, 1947), p. 81.

⁴²⁶John McDonald, "How the Bankers Come to Disney," Fortune, LXXIII (May, 1966), p. 139.

the red.⁴²⁷ Very simply, Walt Disney was more interested in the quality of the films he produced than he was in the profits they would reap.⁴²⁸ In order to make Mickey Mouse profitable in his early years, it was necessary for Walt to lease Mickey's name to everything from breakfast cereal to sweat-shirts. Twice before World War II Walt nearly went bankrupt with a movie - once with the expensive (\$1.5 million) Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and again with the premature development and use of stereophonic sound in Fantasia.⁴²⁹

The physical plant which the Disney Studios have occupied since 1940 is in Burbank, California, in the San Fernando Valley, several miles from the other huge film factories. At first sight it looks like a college campus;⁴³⁰ the brick and metal buildings, painted pink, cream, or gray, are clear-cut, with a horizontal emphasis of modern functional style.⁴³¹ The illusion that the Disney Studios are a college campus is further increased by the fact that most of the employees appear to be extremely young. There are several reasons for this seeming emphasis on youth; primarily much of the semi-mechanical aspect of so much of the work that goes into a completed cartoon film demands young people.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ "A Silver Anniversary for Walt and Mickey" (anon.), Life, XXXV (November 2, 1953), p. 63.

⁴³⁰ Towers and Mitchell, p. 81.

⁴³¹ Field, p. 80.

They still have the enthusiasm to do routine jobs like inking and painting without getting too bored. The young student labor used by the Disney Studios is relatively cheap. However, Walt Disney used the best labor available without respect for cost.⁴³²

The buildings in the Disney compound take their names from their functions. The Animation Building dominates the group. The chief concern here is animation, but the building houses the entire Creative Group: the Animation, Music, Production, and Test Camera Departments.⁴³³ The Traffic Department also has offices on each of the three floors of the Animation Building.⁴³⁴ The Test Camera Department, located in the basement, is the connecting link between the animators and the Camera Department across the street⁴³⁵ where the actual photography is done.

The Processing Group's buildings are across the street east from the Animation Department. The Processing Laboratory is basically a chemistry laboratory where film, paint, and developing solutions are experimented with in the hope of finding better and more economical methods of doing things. The Inking and Painting Department next door is in charge of making cels which will eventually be photographed. Some two

⁴³²Towers and Mitchell, pp. 81-82.

⁴³³Field, p. 80.

⁴³⁴Ibid., pp. 80-81, passim.

⁴³⁵Ibid., p. 88.

hundred people, mostly highly skilled young girls, trace the animation drawings on the cels and paint them.⁴³⁶

Next in order of the main buildings is the Camera Department. There are three main divisions of the Camera Department - the Test Camera Department, the Multiplane Department, and the Production Camera Department. The Test Camera Department checks the animation drawings to make sure they will achieve the desired effect when they are finally photographed by the Multiplane or Production Camera Departments. The three multiplane cameras are used sparingly because of the cost involved. They serve the same purpose as the ordinary production cameras except that they provide a greater illusion of depth and the third dimension. The primary function of this department is to photograph the cels on the final Technicolor film strips. The final Disney product eventually emerges from this group.⁴³⁷

The Cutting Department is housed in the last building in this block. The term "Cutting Department" is so vague that it hardly describes what actually happens in this building; however, in the broadest sense, this department handles all the cutting and joining of the various phases of the films.⁴³⁸ Across the street south from the Animation Building are the

⁴³⁶Ibid., p. 89.

⁴³⁷Ibid.

⁴³⁸Ibid., p. 90.

Dialogue Studios, the Sound Effects Department, the Sound Stage, and the Theatre.⁴³⁹ These three groups need no special description; their names give a reasonably correct description of their functions. Behind this group of buildings is the Animation School where young artists are taught the art of animation a la Walt Disney. There are various other buildings at the Disney Studios, each of which has a definite function. Among these buildings are film vaults, a warehouse, restaurant, and a service station, as well as several garages and adjacent parking lots.⁴⁴⁰

The climax of Walt Disney's commercial career was the creation of Disneyland, a children's Mecca that contains such absurdities as life-size mechanical elephants.⁴⁴¹ The history of Disneyland began as one of what Roy Disney labeled "Walt's screwy ideas."⁴⁴² It began several years before Walt ever did anything more than talk about his idea. That idea began to take shape when his two daughters were little girls. The girls liked amusement parks, but Walt found them to be dirty, phony places run by tough-looking people. No one seemed to

⁴³⁹Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴⁴¹Wiseman, p. 79.

⁴⁴²Birmingham, p. 101.

really have fun at the dreary attractions or on the rides. Disney saw the need for a new form of entertainment, but for a long time he did not know exactly what it was.⁴⁴³

Disneyland was originally conceived as an amusement park covering one single city block, but the idea began to grow like Jack's beanstalk. As it grew Walt's conversation on the subject became so sweeping that no one took him seriously about it.⁴⁴⁴ Eddy says that Walt's banker "used to hide under the desk when Walt started talking about that park."⁴⁴⁵ In the end Walt hocked his life insurance to raise the first \$100,000 to finance Disneyland.⁴⁴⁶ The park, located in Anaheim, California, was originally scheduled to cost \$3.5 million.⁴⁴⁷ By the time it opened its gates in 1955, the "170-acre Pollyanna version of carnival"⁴⁴⁸ represented an investment of some \$17 million.⁴⁴⁹ In 1964 it was estimated that nearly twice that amount is poured into the project every year.⁴⁵⁰ Walt Disney's screwy idea turned into a gold mine. During the 1963 fiscal year

Disneyland receipts amounted to well over \$24,000,000 (indicating that the average

⁴⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴Miller and Martin, p. 221.

⁴⁴⁵Eddy, p. 114.

⁴⁴⁶Miller and Martin, p. 226.

⁴⁴⁷Eddy, p. 114.

⁴⁴⁸Zimmorman, p. 31.

⁴⁴⁹Birmingham, p. 101.

⁴⁵⁰Ibid.

visitor spends at least \$4 a visit), and this represented a gain of more than \$4,000,000 over the year before.⁴⁵¹

Kings, queens, and dictators, including former Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev, have been among the millions of people who have flocked to Disneyland in its thirteen-year history.

The week after Disney died in 1966, thousands of visitors tramped through the gates of Disneyland, intent on seeing first hand the fantasy world Walt Disney had created in Frontierland, Fantasyland, Adventureland, and Tomorrowland. There was only one reminder that the man who had created it all was no longer among them: the flag was at half-mast.⁴⁵²

When television appeared on the scene after World War II, most Hollywood movie makers viewed it with as much enthusiasm as they would an epidemic of plague. Walt Disney saw television differently. To him it represented a way to acquaint millions with his park.⁴⁵³ This was not the first time Walt and his brother Roy had shown foresight where television was concerned. In 1936 when there was no such thing as commercial television, the Disney's had insisted on future television rights to their productions.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² "Walt Disney: Images of Innocence," p. 71.

⁴⁵³ Birmingham, p. 101.

⁴⁵⁴ Morganstern, p. 94.

Of all the Hollywood producers, Walt was the only one who believed that a picture first shown on television would "earn a three-dollar bill at theatres."⁴⁵⁵ Disney saw television as an advertising medium, that after seeing tantalizing parts of a picture on the small black and white home screen, people would rush out to theatres to see the whole movie in color on a wide screen.⁴⁵⁶ It was a tremendous gamble, but Disney took a chance and made his debut with a one-hour show for Coca-Cola on December 25, 1950.⁴⁵⁷ The show was a success; the following year Johnson and Johnson asked Walt to do a holiday show. In this show he took viewers behind the scenes of movie making.⁴⁵⁸ In October of 1954, Walt Disney began his long association with American Broadcasting Company Television.⁴⁵⁹ He catapulted into television

with a bang that blew Wednesday night to kingdom come for the two major networks.... Disney's first program, an hour-long...flight on electronic wings over the panorama of Disneyland's coming attractions, won a phenomenal Nielson rating of 41, was watched by some 30.8 million people, and, as ABC's President Bob Kintner put it, 'cut Godfrey, the best in the business, down to size.' In the next two months Disney was never out of the 'first ten'.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁵Eddy, p. 114.

⁴⁵⁶Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷Miller and Martin, p. 228.

⁴⁵⁸Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹Roger Manvell, New Cinema in the U.S.A. (London: Studio Vista Limited, 1968), p. 26.

⁴⁶⁰"Father Goose," p. 42.

During the depression the Disney Studios were relatively prosperous. But as the 1940's approached, they expanded too fast. By the time the European third of the cartoon market was closed by World War II, the Disney's had built a three million dollar studio complex, paid off a series of loans, and had four completed pictures on hand. By the end of the war the Disney Studios were \$4.5 million in debt.⁴⁶¹

In order to raise money the Disney's were forced to go public. In 1940 Walt Disney Productions issued 155,000 shares of six percent convertible preferred stock at \$25 a share. Both Walt and Roy signed employment contracts with the company. The failure of Fantasia at the box office, the jurisdictional strike at the studio in 1941 (Disney was said to be so upset by the strike that he wept), coupled with other less catastrophic incidents dropped the Disney stock to \$3 a share.⁴⁶² At the time of his death Walt and his wife together owned 309,000 shares of stock, or approximately sixteen percent. Roy Disney and his wife own another five percent. The collective Disney children bring the family total to thirty-eight percent. Thirteen percent of the remaining stock is in the hands of investment trusts; the public owns an approximate forty-nine percent. According to John McDonald's figures a majority of the public stockholders is a "callow one, for Walt Disney is

⁴⁶¹"Disney's Live-action Profits," p. 81.

⁴⁶²McDonald, p. 223.

a kind of Pied Piper of the stock market: about one-third of the public shareholders are children."⁴⁶³

That Walt Disney was a financial success is borne out by the profits his empire produced. In 1961 there was a \$4.4 million profit on a gross income of \$70.2 million.⁴⁶⁴ The 1965 fiscal revenues of Walt Disney Productions were up eight hundred percent over 1954 to \$110 million. Profits for the same period were up fourteen hundred percent to \$11 million.⁴⁶⁵

About half of the Disney Studios revenue from film rentals comes from outside the United States. To be sure this market is retained the producers at Walt Disney Productions must make sure their films will have universal appeal and amusement. They must also be sure that gestures which are innocent enough in one country are not insulting or obscene in another country.⁴⁶⁶

One of the great legacies Walt Disney left the American people when he died was the Disney film library which he refused to sell to television. The library includes 493 short subject films, forty-seven live-action features which include Mary Poppins and Davey Crockett, twenty-one feature length

⁴⁶³Ibid., p. 139

⁴⁶⁴Wiseman, p. 79.

⁴⁶⁵McDonald, p. 139.

⁴⁶⁶Alexander, p. 84.

cartoons such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Bambi, and Pinocchio; and seven full length nature films.⁴⁶⁷ It has been estimated that the Disney film library would bring \$300 million from television, a nice cushion if any of the company's future projects should ever turn sour.⁴⁶⁸

The financial crisis produced by World War II called for severe reductions in studio overhead. Walt Disney's behavior during this time was in direct contrast to the benevolent paternalism that his carefully nurtured image would lead people to believe. John Bright says that like George Washington's false teeth, this information is excluded from the folio of Disneyana.⁴⁶⁹

Disney's first move in the 1941 crisis was a plea to his employees in a mixture of passion, anguish, and charm, that they voluntarily take a wage cut or face wholesale firings. The employees chose the wage cut. However, it was not long, only a matter of days, until Walt fired thirteen men, twelve of whom were members of the Communist-infiltrated Screen Cartoonists Guild. The Guild was then seeking recognition as the bargaining agent for the cartoon industry.⁴⁷⁰ A

⁴⁶⁷"Disney's Legacy" (anon.), Newsweek, LXIX (January 2, 1967), p. 59.

⁴⁶⁸Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹Bright, p. 302.

⁴⁷⁰Ibid.

strike followed, during which the Screen Cartoonists Guild tried to launch a world-wide boycott of all Disney films. The boycott failed and the union was eventually ridded of its pro-Communist leadership.⁴⁷¹

Fortune calls the strike "jurisdictional" and says that Disney was "so moved...that he wept."⁴⁷² Bright says that Disney's tears were probably a symptom of rage more than dismay. "Filmed interviews of his confrontation of the picket line show him in appoplectic fury."⁴⁷³

Walt Disney's specialty was the exploitation of illusion; he used this as a strike-breaking weapon. The studio was about fifty percent struck. To convey the impression that only a few mavericks had walked out, Walt had pictures taken from the air by the Los Angeles Times; he ordered that all the cars of the employees who were still on the job and all the studio cars and trucks be taken out of their sheds and garages and posed for the cameras.⁴⁷⁴

Walt Disney Productions is now completely unionized, down to the gardners.⁴⁷⁵ At Disneyland alone there are some forty-two unions and councils.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷¹Roy Brewer, "Walt Disney: RIP," National Review, XIX (January 10, 1967), p. 17.

⁴⁷²Bright, p. 302.

⁴⁷³Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵Miller and Martin, p. 190.

⁴⁷⁶Zimmerman, p. 32.

At the time Disney died in 1966, his corporations had several projects in the works. Two of these projects are Mineral King and Disney World. Mineral King, located in California's High Sierra, is scheduled to open in 1976. When completed it will be one of the world's largest ski centers. Disney World will be a forty-three square mile vacation area in central Florida, 170 times the size of Disneyland.⁴⁷⁷ Disneyland was in the middle of a five-year expansion program and plans were well under way for Disneyland East, an amusement center outside Orlando, Florida.⁴⁷⁸

The death of Walt Disney cast a pall over the studios. There was, however, due to Walt's foresight, little trouble changing the management of Walt Disney Productions, Inc. Several years ago Disney began grooming a troika of young executives to take over for him. The three executives who have taken over the reins are William Anderson, 57, who is now in charge of creative supervision; Donn B. Tatum, 55, who is responsible for finances and administration; and E. Cardon Walker, 52, who heads the sales division.⁴⁷⁹

Hollister says that Walt Disney was "the Pied Piper of our time, 'I'm able,' said Robert Browning's Piper, 'By

⁴⁷⁷"The Magic Kingdom," p. 84.

⁴⁷⁸"Disney's Legacy," pp. 59-60.

⁴⁷⁹Ibid.

means of a secret charm, to draw All living creatures beneath
the sun, That swim or fly or run, After me so as you never
saw'.⁴⁸⁰ The American Pied Piper had only just begun.

Walt Disney's development of a garage studio and a
cartoon mouse into one of the world's biggest business empires
is a typical American rags-to-riches success story. Disney
fought for both money and his art against distributors who
could see no profit for anyone in animated short subjects.

He preached quality and proved that quality and
nothing else would produce advancing profits.
The demonstration began with hastily sound-dubbed
Steamboat Willie - the first successful Mickey
Mouse.... But Disney never rested.... In the full
length surprise triumphs of recent years he taught
Hollywood what it had once almost known and then
forgotten - that quality pays.⁴⁸¹

We live in an age of reality, an age in which the primitive
mythmaker is a rarity. Such a man as Walt Disney who
possesses an innocence which molds myths and spins fantasies
is something of a misanthrope; he does not mix well with
these times.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰Hollister, p. 689.

⁴⁸¹"Walt and the Professors," pp. 58-60, passim.

⁴⁸²"Walt Disney: Images of Innocence," p. 71.

CONCLUSIONS

ANALYSIS OF THE DISNEY CRITICS

The basic difference between the critics who panned Walt Disney's movies and the mass audience who made them popular was one of intellect. Walt Disney himself never claimed to be a great teacher or intellectual. The image his press agents presented to the people was one of a middle class American husband and father whose aims and goals were mirrored in all of suburbia. He was a born story-teller who chose films as the medium through which he would tell his stories. The stories he told were flights of fantasy: old fairy tales, original mouse operas, sorties of fun and color into impossible worlds where the audience could escape from the confines of everyday life.

The escapism in Disney's films was probably the main thing which made them popular. To be certain some of Disney's products did develop a kind of social significance. The Big Bad Wolf became a symbol of the depression, as did "Whistle While You Work" from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs; but the majority of his work appealed to the public because it offered nothing but entertainment and fun.

The critics who looked down their noses at Walt Disney's animated cartoons presupposed themselves to be intellectuals. Perhaps they were. Their major criticism of the Disney films was that they were shallow and un-intellectual. The majority

of Walt Disney's best work was done during the years between the depression and the end of World War II. The events going on in the world separated the critics - the intellectuals - and the mass audience.

The mass audience looked around and saw a world being plunged into a world war just as it was recovering from a devastating depression. These people wanted an escape route away from these fearsome events.

In all possibility the Disney critics were effected by these same forces. The majority of the film critics of the 1930's and 1940's had been schooled in their occupation before animated film had been so widely accepted and used. Their standards were those of the 1920's when there had been very little if anything that compared to the Disney art. They refused to relinquish their principles as to what constituted good theatre, or in this case, movies. Instead of accepting Walt Disney's productions and experiments for what they were and judging them on their own merits, the critics tried to fit them into the molds set by Aristotle for ancient Greek drama. The things which Aristotle considered necessary parts of a good production, the same ones which became the traditional scales for deciding the worth of a production, were not necessarily incorporated into a Walt Disney feature. For instance, Fantasia and Make Mine Music could never be accurately judged by the Aristotelian criteria. Therefore, the critics could find very little that was intellectual in a

Disney film.

The vast majority of the films carried no message of social significance. A "good" production was not only expected to maintain the various unities, characters, plot structures, et cetera, proscribed by Aristotle, but to say something to its viewers. Many times Disney overlooked, very much on purpose, the social messages to bring his audiences films which were entertaining just for the sake of entertainment. Whether the films were or were not shallow was of little importance to him. Disney himself said that he did not make films for children or critics, nor could he make a living off the income from films made for these audiences. He admitted that he was selling corn because he liked corn.⁴⁸³ Evidently the mass audience shared his enthusiasm for corn because they bought it in mass quantities.

⁴⁸³"The Magic Kingdom," p. 84.

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WALT DISNEY: A STUDY OF
HIS LIFE AND FILMS

by

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Walt Disney, the twentieth century Pied Piper who invented a better mouse, spent his childhood in Illinois and Missouri where he held several part-time jobs to make enough money for art lessons and supplies and spending cash. After serving as a Red Cross ambulance driver in France during World War I, Disney returned to Kansas City to work. In Kansas City he progressed from commercial art to moving pictures. The failure of his Alice in Cartoonland series sent Disney to Hollywood where he produced the ill-fated Oswald the Rabbit films.

Oswald achieved some success, but was short-lived; Disney discovered that his distributor was sabotaging the whole operation. Out of the shambles of the Oswald the Rabbit series came Mickey Mouse, the most famous of all Walt Disney creations. The third Mickey Mouse picture, Steamboat Willie, brought sound permanently to cartoon films.

All Disney films are made according to a general pattern. The story conference comes first. Here the ideas are discussed and the stories are planned to completion. Key drawings are then made by animators to give a general idea of how the final product will look in final form. Before the final animation drawings are made, the music and sound effects are decided upon and recorded. The animation is then made to fit the sound to a fraction of a second. After the drawings are photographed the film and sound track are joined together. Prior to World War II when the Disney Studios were turned

over to government productions, Walt Disney produced a series of Silly Symphonies; these animated cartoons were in the same vein as the Mickey Mouse pictures but a little wilder. Following these cartoons came Alice in Wonderland, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Fantasia.

The decline in the market for animated cartoons prompted Disney to begin, in conjunction with the animated films, a series of films which combined live actors with animation. Film made in South America that eventually became Saludos Amigos gave Disney the idea for the True Life Adventures series, a group of nature films with no human element in any of them. Following these, the first completely live-action films were made to help free studio funds that were frozen in European banks after World War II.

Animated film is governed by all the same laws of static art. However, it goes one step farther and presents the fourth dimension: time.

Animated film was invented many years before Walt Disney perfected it. The Disney methods of animation are not the only ones, but they have tended to be the most commonly used. There are several elements common to all animated films.

There is a strong case for animated film, although its detractors claim it to be an escape from reality that can retard the development of certain individuals in their ability to face life as it really is. One of the factors in favor of animated pictures is that they can be used for educa-

tional purposes.

The sentimental, emotionally soft image of Walt Disney presented to the public is quite contrary to the real man who has been severely criticized for making modernizing changes in old childhood literary standards.

The Disney corporations range from the film studios to Disneyland to television productions. Much of the stock in the Disney corporations not held by the Disney family is owned by children. The corporations are completely unionized to prevent a recurrence of the 1941 strike.

Future projects of the Disney empire include a ski resort, a vacation resort, a Florida amusement center, and continuing improvements to Disneyland.

