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Following Her (Father's) Dreams: The Disneyfication of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "The Frog King"[1]

Abstract

Over the decades, Walt Disney Animation Studios have become well-known for adapting various types of texts for the big screen, particularly children's novels and fairy tales. However, regardless of the nature of the source materials and the cultural, historical, and social context in which they originated, their animated adaptations tend to follow the same basic pattern, largely predicated on fairy tales. The films created through this specific process of adaptation – often referred to as Disneyfication – may be described as a mixture of fairy tales, romance, and Broadway musicals, complete with comedic side-kicks and happy endings. The present paper aims to examine the process of Disneyfication by means of a close and comparative reading of Disney's 49th animated feature film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) and its source materials: E.D. Baker's children's fantasy novel *The Frog Princess* (2002), and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's fairy tale "The Frog King" (1857). Although Baker's novel is cited as the inspiration for the film, the paper argues that *The Princess and the Frog* relies much more heavily on the Grimms' fairy tale, from which it borrows (and significantly alters) themes (such as the importance of keeping one's promises and finding a suitable romantic partner), motifs (bargaining, false promises), and character traits. Acknowledging that the process of adaptation can never be a straightforward reproduction of a given story in a different medium, the paper will focus on concrete strategies employed to modify the Grimms' fairy tale (and, to a lesser extent, Baker's novel) and fit it into the recognizable Disney mould.

Keywords: adaptation, animation, Disneyfication, fairy tale, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Frog King," *The Frog Princess*, *The Princess and the Frog*, Walt Disney Animation Studios.

> So shake a stick at those Grimm Brothers, when it comes to princesses and frogs we now have a beautiful, boisterous sister in charge.
>
> (Sharkey)

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Introduction

The animated film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) marked a triple milestone in the history of one of the leading global purveyors of family entertainment, the Walt Disney Animation Studios. Namely, it featured the very first African American princess in the Disney canon; a (short-lived) return to hand-drawn animation, which was abandoned in 2004 after a string of financially under-performing films[2] and replaced by the increasingly popular CGI animation (Adams 2010); and a return to traditional fairy tales,[3] which have long been a staple of Disney animation. Not only was the Studio's first feature-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), based on a fairy tale (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Snow White"), but the same genre also launched (with *The Little Mermaid*) and for the most part sustained (with *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*) the so-called Disney Renaissance, when fairy-tale-based films saved the company from financial ruin, brought about by underwhelming box-office performances of *The Fox and the Hound*, *Oliver & Company*, and especially *The Black Cauldron*.[4]

Set in the vibrant 1920s New Orleans, the movie centres around Tiana, a hard-working African American waitress who dreams of one day opening her own restaurant. Following an unsuccessful attempt to purchase a run-down sugar mill and turn it into "Tiana's Place," the desperate girl kisses a talking frog who promises her financial compensation in return. The frog is actually the disinherited (and equally desperate) Prince Naveen, whose attempts to marry Tiana's rich friend Charlotte had been thwarted by the mysterious voodoo sorcerer Dr Facilier, who turned him into a frog as part of his elaborate scheme to take over the city. Since Tiana is not a princess, the kiss not only fails to break Facilier's spell, but also causes Tiana to become a frog herself. The unlikely companions set off in search of Mama Odie, "the voodoo queen of the bayou" (*The Princess and the Frog*), falling in love and avoiding Facilier's demonic servants from the spirit realm along the way.

The film is said to be loosely based on *The Frog Princess* (2002), a children's fantasy novel by American author E.D. Baker that was, in turn, inspired by Jacob and

[2] These include *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, *Home on the Range*, and especially *Treasure Planet*, which Jerry Beck describes as "the biggest financial disaster in the history of Disney animation" and decisive factor "in the decision to close the 2-D animation studio that had flourished for 65 years" (290).
[3] Almost two decades had passed since the previous fairy-tale-based Disney film, 1992's *Aladdin*.
[4] See: Maltin, *The Disney Films*, 2000.

Wilhelm Grimm's "The Frog King, Or Iron Heinrich" ("Der Froschkönig oder der eiserne Heinrich"), the first fairy tale in their collection of stories *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*, 1812/15–57). While this may suggest that the Grimms' narrative only has a secondary, indirect influence on the film, the present paper argues that the opposite is true. As the following paragraphs aim to demonstrate, in terms of themes (finding a suitable romantic partner), motifs (false promises, bargaining), as well as characters and their traits (the hero, the heroine, and her father), *The Princess and the Frog* draws much more heavily on the Grimms' fairy tale. The film will therefore be examined as an adaptation of "The Frog King," partly influenced by *The Frog Princess*.

Adaptations constitute a large majority of Disney's animated canon (which, at the time of writing, encompasses 57 feature-length films). However, while the source materials differ significantly in terms of genre (legends, myths, fairy tales, children's novels, and so on), intended audience, and the cultural, social, and historical context in which they originated, they typically undergo the same adaptation process, which film critic Richard Schickel terms "Disneyfication" (225). In terms of both form and content, the end result presents a combination of the fairy tale, Broadway musical, and romantic comedy: a romantic adventure story in which good triumphs over evil, earning a happy ending (Zipes, *Art of Subversion* 209).[5] Leaving aside a critical and aesthetic evaluation of Disneyfication, as well as the contested issue of (in)fidelity[6] to the source material, the paper draws on existing adaptation, Disney, and fairy-tale studies (most notably the writings of Jack Zipes and other scholars whose research focuses on cinematic fairy-tale adaptations) in order to examine the concrete strategies utilized in the process of adaptation, the (inevitable) alterations of the source material, and the way its meaning is interpreted and reshaped in the film. In other words, the paper is not concerned with the question of "how successfully a film translates the tale into a new medium," but rather "what new and old meanings and uses" the Disney version brings to the table (Greenhill

[5] For a more in-depth description of "the Disney recipe," see: Zipes, *Enchanted Screen*, 88.

[6] According to Linda Hutcheon, the transposition of a given narrative from one semiotic system (e.g. literature) to another (e.g. film) by its very nature demands alterations of the source material, not only because of the different nature of the semiotic systems (16), but also because, she claims, the process of adaptation is one of creation and (more importantly) interpretation (8). For Zipes, the issue of fidelity is irrelevant since it can never be truly achieved and contradicts the very purpose of an adaptation as a new interpretation and presentation of an existing story (*Enchanted Screen*, 11; for more on the issue of fidelity see, among others: Hermansson; MacCabe, Murray, and Warner; Stam).

and Matrix 4). A close reading of the select film and its source material will occasionally be expanded to include other Disney (fairy-tale) adaptations, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Disneyfication process.

An Overview of Literature

Considering Disney's status as "a globally dominant producer of cultural constructs related to gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality" (Lester 294) and Tiana's high-profile status as the first African American Disney heroine, it was inevitable that "she and the movie [would] inherently come with much historical baggage to unpack and a barrel of critical concerns, high expectations, and pressing questions" (297). Unsurprisingly, the majority of existing scholarly writings and critical responses to the film are concerned with the issue of race.

For many, the mere existence of an African American princess[7] was ample cause for celebration (Lester 297). In calling Tiana "the princess [she] didn't know [she] had been waiting for [her] whole life," Sara Sarasohn effectively summarizes the sentiment and cultural relevance of the moment by admitting that seeing "a black woman wearing a tiara and running her own business" in a Disney movie brought tears to her eyes. The hard-working Tiana who dreams of entrepreneurship rather than romance and is determined to shape her own destiny (Terry) was hailed as a positive role model for young audiences (Stephens 98). The film in which African American characters are voiced by and modelled after African American actors (492) was greeted as a long-overdue and most welcome antidote to the highly problematic representation of non-white characters in previous Disney films, such as *Dumbo* (cf. Wainer), *Lady and the Tramp* (Akita and Kenney), *The Jungle Book* (Ciha, Joseph, and Martin), and especially the controversial *Song of the South* (Sperb).

However, the same things that some celebrated as progressive features of the film, others perceived as examples of what King, Lugo-Lugo, and Bloodworth-Lugo term "false positivity" – seemingly positive images that in actuality denigrate difference (157). Many deemed the fact that the first African American princess is also the first Disney heroine to work for a living as highly problematic. For McCoy Gregory, Tiana's dependence on manual labour serves to perpetuate the stereotype of the black woman as

[7] Jena Stephens hails her as "a symbol of progression for the Disney franchise" (98).

"invisible or as solely attached to labor" (433), while Lester believes it is likely to diminish her "royal aura for those rightfully expecting the first black princess to live in the same world of fantasy and (im)possibility as do her other sister princesses" (297). England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek express concern over the fact that the re-emergence of domestic work in Disney princess films, absent since the days of Snow White and Cinderella, is associated with a black heroine (564). Furthermore, the fact that the first black princess spends the majority of the film in frog form,[8] making the supposedly central issue of race a moot point, was a source of much disappointment (cf. Barnes; Libby). Given the amount of time Tiana spends in what he terms "greenface" (425), Ajay Gehlawat challenges the possibility of calling *The Princess and the Frog* a black princess narrative, proposing instead that it is "the first Disney princess narrative in which the princess is absent from most of the film and instead takes the form of a slimy amphibian" (429). Not everyone agreed that the assuming of an amphibian form negated Tiana's race; Esther Terry, for instance, points out that the heroine's voice (provided by African American actress Anika Noni Rose) serves as a constant reminder of her human identity (477).

Naveen's lighter-toned skin and unspecified ethnicity[9] provoked similar contrasting interpretations: on the one hand, his ambiguity is viewed in a positive light, "as a destabilizing force" that "subverts notions of race and ethnicity" (Barker 494, 495). On the other hand, the notable absence of positive male African American characters in the film (the only significant dark-skinned character is the antagonist) problematizes the issue of Naveen's skin and the overall construction of African American maleness in the film (Lester 301).

A number of scholars claim that by refusing to engage with complex issues and realities of the early-twentieth-century American South – marked by segregation and the infamous Jim Crow laws (Breaux; Hebert-Leiter; Rizov) – the film generates a harmful image of a "fantasy color-blind, merit-based society" (Charania and Simonds 70), "a 'Disneyfied' postrace world" (Moffitt and Harris 73) in which "African Americans are present yet absent and race is implicit yet unaddressed" (Gehlawat 429; see also King et

[8] Depending on who is timing it, Tiana spends from 57 (Breaux 405) to 80 minutes (Moffitt and Harris 65) of a 95-minute film in frog form.

[9] "[H]is name is Indian (and his mother appears to be wearing a sari), his accent is Brazilian (voiced by Bruno Campos), he comes from Maldonia, which sounds European, and he has a British butler" (Barker 494).

al.).[10] For Turner, the fact that material circumstances and work, rather than race, are presented as the point of difference between Tiana (who works two jobs) and her Caucasian friend Charlotte (who, thanks to her father's fortune, never has to work; cf. Dargis), is a reflection of the film's "color-blind ideology" which "exonerat[es] the hegemonic culture" by implying that "race has nothing to do with success or failure" (91). While the majority of critics acknowledge the absence of a direct engagement with sensitive issues such as race, not all of them see this as problematic or surprising. Sarasohn, for instance, notes that one cannot expect a "deep and meaningful exploration of race" in a Disney movie, while Barker deems any expectations of an in-depth (or any, for that matter) engagement with problematic issues on Disney's part unrealistic, as this would be incompatible with the Studio's "sanitized aesthetic" and efforts to appeal to the broadest possible market (483).

In addition to the widely-discussed issue of race and historical (in)accuracy, scholars have also addressed the film's representation of ethnic minorities, as exemplified by the Cajun firefly Ray (Hebert-Leiter). Moffitt and Harris present the results of their audience reception study, conducted among African American mothers who watched *The Princess and the Frog* with their daughters, while Parasecoli analyses the importance and symbolism of food and cooking in the film, which, he claims, serve as "visual markers and decontextualized signifiers for race and ethnicity" (451). Assuming a feminist approach, Jena Stephens views Tiana – along with other "third generation Disney princesses" (*Brave*'s Merida and *Tangled*'s Rapunzel; 97) – as a departure from the "weak female" Disney princess archetype (97) and a symbol of the new, "independent, strong, self-sufficient female character" (106).

While a significant portion of Disney scholarship consists of analyses of Disney adaptations and their relationship to their source material (e.g. Brode and Brode; Inge; Trites; Wright), few authors have explored *The Princess and the Frog* as an adaptation (e.g. Kujundžić's feminist reading of the film occasionally refers to the Grimms' fairy tale). The present paper proposes to fill this gap, thus contributing to Disney, adaptation, and fairy-tale studies.

[10] Other Disney films have been similarly criticized for their tendency to "airbrush" (Lester 301) or ignore select (unpleasant, problematic) aspects of the historical, social, cultural, and geographic context they are portraying (e.g. the simplification and re-writing of colonial history in *Pocahontas*, the absence of black characters in *Tarzan*, etc.; cf. Byrne and McQuillan; Galloway; Ward; see also Wallace).

Amphibian Royalty: "The Frog King" and *The Frog Princess*

Initially published in the first edition (1812) of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimms' "The Frog King"[11] is strikingly different from other (Grimms') fairy tales that constitute the popular (Western) canon, such as "Snow White," "Cinderella," or "Sleeping Beauty." While it does contain many traits typically associated with the fairy-tale genre, such as the presence of a magical and non-magical world (Messerli 274), wondrous transformation (Zipes, "Introduction" xvii), and the confronting and successful resolution of a problem which leads to a happy ending (Swann Jones xiv), it also features a rather atypical heroine and gender dynamics. The story follows a haughty princess who loses her favourite play-thing: a golden ball. To get it back, she promises to become a friend and companion to a talking frog, convinced she would never be called upon to actually fulfil it. However, when the frog suddenly appears at her doorstep, her father forces her to play hostess to the unwanted guest. She unwillingly offers him a seat at her table and food from her plate, but when the frog tries to sleep in her bed, she throws him against the wall. The vile amphibian is instantly transformed into a handsome prince who immediately proposes marriage.

Strikingly absent from this plot description is the magical kiss which seems inextricably linked with the story in popular imagination, and prominently featured in both *The Frog Princess* and *The Princess and the Frog* (for a discussion of the origin, dissemination, and ultimate superimposition of the kiss motif onto the Grimms' fairy tale, see Mieder). Rather, it is an act of violence (which takes even more extreme forms, such as decapitation in other versions of the tale; cf. Röhrich; Zipes, *Golden Age* 276-8) that triggers the central transformation from a pesky frog to desirable partner.

As may be deduced from the brief summary presented above, the unnamed heroine of "The Frog King" is a far cry from the likes of Snow White or Rapunzel, who patiently accept their fate and endure hardship until the arrival of a male saviour. Unlike the demure, self-sacrificing, and, for the most part, passive heroines of traditional fairy tales, the "selfish, greedy, ungrateful, and cruel" princess in "The Frog King" is, in the

[11] In the Anglophone world, the story is better known as "The Frog Prince," possibly because the title was selected by Edgar Taylor for his English translation (although, given the liberties he took with the text, the term "loose adaptation" may be more appropriate; Zipes, *Grimm Legacies* 34) of the tale, published in the 1823 collection *German Popular Stories* (Zipes, "Repulsive Frog" 121).

words of Maria Tatar, almost a model of "bad breeding" (*Off with Their Heads!* 11). However, despite bearing traits that are typically attributed to fairy-tale antagonists, the princess not only avoids punishment, but also ultimately receives the genre's highest prize: a happy ending manifested as marriage to a prince. Another departure from the usual fairy-tale pattern (at least the type of pattern most frequently utilized in the Grimms' oeuvre) is evident in the unusual gender dynamics: while this by no means implies a simple reversal of gender roles whereby the princess would be given an active and the frog a passive part in the story, the male character (who still demonstrates a lot of initiative as he demands something in return for his assistance and makes his way to the castle all by himself) spends the majority of the story "in a subordinate position, forced into the role of supplicant" (Tatar, *Annotated* 8, n. 6) and dependent on the princess to put an end to his predicament. As the analytical part of the paper will demonstrate, both the characterization of main protagonists and their relationship will undergo significant and interesting alterations in the Disney adaptation.

The "Frog King"-inspired fantasy novel by E.D. Baker is told from the perspective of the heroine, Princess Emeralda ("Emma"). Hiding in the swamp from her mother who demands that she marry the conceited Prince Jorge, Emma comes across a talking frog who claims to be Prince Eadric. Initially sceptical, Emma eventually kisses Eadric in an attempt to break the spell, yet (due to a spell-reversing bracelet given to her by her aunt, the Green Witch Grassina) ends up turning into a frog. The two royals-turned-frogs set out on a journey to find the witch who cursed Eadric and ask her to turn them back into humans. After a series of encounters with dangerous inhabitants of the swamp (the wannabe witch Vannabe, and various animals), they regain their human forms, thanks to Grassina's advice.

The Princess and the Frog borrows many elements from Baker's novel (the first in what would later become a series following the adventures of Emma and Eadric), most notably the overall plot structure built around an adventurous journey through the swamp, as well as the humorous twist whereby the kiss leads not to the frog being turned into a prince, but the princess becoming a frog. Both the book and film feature a benevolent older woman versed in the magic arts and accompanied by a green pet snake (aunt Grassina and Mama Odie, respectively), whose advice helps bring about the protagonists' transformation and happy ending. Certain character traits of the book's

protagonists are transferred to their cinematic counterparts: thus, Tiana bears traces of Emma's social awkwardness, resourcefulness, self-reliance, and determination, while the conceited Naveen is something of a composite of Prince Eadric and Prince Jorge. Once they become aware of their mutual feelings, both the cinematic and literary couple seem accepting of the possibility that they may have to permanently remain frogs, as long as they can stay together ("As far as I'm concerned, it wouldn't be so awful if we had to stay frogs, not if we were together;" Baker[12]). Finally, the film borrows minor motifs from the book, such as the comic mishaps related to the heroine's attempts to use her tongue to catch food.

(In)Appropriate Character Traits

As previously stated, the strong-willed and self-absorbed princess in "The Frog King" is quite unique among the Grimms' fairy-tale heroines. Making her characterization even more remarkable is the fact that she retains her assertiveness, self-centredness, and strong will amidst the numerous changes the Grimms introduced to the narrative throughout the different editions of their collection (Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 8; Zipes, *Grimm Legacies* 18-20),[13] many of which were intended to silence the heroine (Bottigheimer 52, 56) and tame her sexual desire. As Bottigheimer writes, in the 1810 manuscript version, she is "altogether too eager to jump into bed with the frog once he is shown to be a handsome prince" (160). What is especially striking is perhaps not so much the set of character traits itself (featured in many other tales), but the fact that their bearer is the story's protagonist who, despite being wilful and disobedient, is ultimately rewarded.

In the process of Disneyfication, the negative traits of the princess are, for the most part, either completely eradicated (defiance, rebelliousness, self-assertiveness), substituted with more acceptable alternatives, or transferred onto the male character (deceitfulness, selfishness). Substitution is most evident in the way the Grimms' princess and Tiana initiate the transformations of their future partners. Tatar distinguishes between two basic types of stories featuring animal bridegrooms,

[12] All quotations from *The Frog Princess* are taken from an unpaginated e-book edition.
[13] For more on the Grimms' editorial strategies and changes made to the different editions of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, see, among others: Bottigheimer; Rölleke; Tatar, *Hard Facts*; Uther 485-526; Zipes, *Art of Subversion*.

depending on the means of their transformation into human form, which, in turn, is linked to the character of the heroine. On one end of the spectrum are tales like "Beauty and the Beast" in which the heroine's patience and compassion result in the Beast regaining his human form; on the other are tales such as "The Frog King" in which compassion is substituted with passion as the transformation is triggered by "a gesture of vehement rage" (Tatar, "Why Fairy Tales Matter" 60). The coupling of "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Frog King" here is symptomatic, given the similarities of their Disney adaptations. Perhaps because both *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Princess and the Frog* portray physical transformations of male protagonists preceded and prompted by transformations of their character, Tiana resembles Belle much more than she does her presumed literary counterpart. Like Belle, she relies on compassion (rather than passion), and other traditionally feminine traits such as her "capacity to nurture" (Cummins 25) and provide emotional support (cf. Murphy 134).

Ultimately, it is not Tiana, but the "spoiled little rich boy" Naveen (*The Princess and the Frog*) who shares character traits with the heroine of "The Frog King," and whom, incidentally, Orrin Robinson calls "a spoiled brat" (112). The similarities are perhaps most notable in the bargaining scene, in which the Grimms' princess is trying to negotiate the retrieval of her golden ball and Disney's prince is soliciting a kiss from a waitress in a princess costume. The brief outline of the scene reveals the underlying gender swap: in the fairy tale, it is the princess who seeks help and promises something in return, and in the film it is the prince. Significantly, they both offer material possessions as a compensation for assistance (princess: clothes, pearls, and jewels; Naveen: money) and make promises they do not intend to keep. As the princess explains to her father, she was willing to promise the frog whatever he wanted in order to get her ball back, not once considering that he would be able to leave his well and crawl up the marble steps of the castle.

The Princess and the Frog ascribes the part of the deceiver to Naveen, who moreover misrepresents himself as being "fabulously wealthy." Once it is established that Tiana is unable to help him, he reveals his attempt to manipulate her in order to get what he wants: "Well, the egg is on your face, alright, because I do not have any riches! … I am completely broke!" Thus, the Disney film re-enacts one of the key episodes in the Grimms' fairy tale (deception is absent from *The Frog Princess*: Eadric is honest

about who he is and what he wants, and does not offer anything in return for Emma's kiss), but alters the gender dynamics in the process and transfers traits deemed unacceptable in female protagonists (duplicitous female characters who lie and manipulate others are always antagonists – consider Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* or *Tangled*'s Mother Gothel) to their male counterparts.

Justification of Negative Traits

Naveen also bears some of the negative traits ascribed to the male characters in *The Frog Princess*, primarily their boastfulness and vanity. His frequent complimentary remarks about his own appearance are reminiscent of the self-absorbed braggart Jorge, whom Emma dismisses as being too in love with himself to ever form a meaningful relationship with someone else. Furthermore, Naveen's rhetoric – most notably his boasting about his romantic conquests (he claims to have dated "thousands of women") and kissing prowess ("All women enjoy the kiss of Prince Naveen;" "Just one [kiss]. Unless you beg for more") – echoes that of Prince Eadric ("I like being kissed by beautiful young ladies"). Furthermore, he is spoiled, idle, irresponsible, and incapable of taking care of himself. While a number of negative traits and behaviour patterns featured in the source materials are transferred to film, this process of transference also includes their significant re-contextualization and justification. Naveen is thus portrayed not as someone who is inherently lazy or unwilling to do things by himself (Davis, *Handsome Heroes* 177), but rather as someone brought up to be entirely reliant on other people (*The Princess and the Frog*):

> When you live in a castle, everything is done for you. All the time. They dress you, they feed you, they drive you, brush your teeth. … I admit, it was a charmed life until the day my parents cut me off and suddenly I realized I don't know how to do anything.

This type of vindication whereby the negative traits of male characters (e.g. the Beast's selfishness and hard-heartedness in *Beauty and the Beast*) are presented as not being inherent, but rather caused by harmful influences in their surroundings (a result of nurture rather than nature), and their morally questionable or even criminal actions (Aladdin and *Tangled*'s Flynn Rider are thieves) somehow justified, is a common strategy of Disneyfication.

Male Transformation, "Male Myth"?

According to Zipes, "The Frog King" is a male-driven narrative, moved forward by "the frog, desperate to be released from a magic spell, and the authoritarian king/father, who insists that the princess behave correctly and keep her word" (*Grimm Legacies* 20). The same can be said about *The Princess and the Frog* in which Tiana's story, meant to take the centre stage, is shaped by male characters: her father (who instils his dreams and work ethics into her), the Fenner brothers (who prevent her from fulfilling her dreams by hard work alone), Dr Facilier (who turns Naveen into a frog), and Naveen (who tricks her into kissing him). In this respect also, *The Princess and the Frog* is closer to the Grimms' fairy tale than Baker's novel, which is predominantly populated and driven by female characters, told from a female perspective, and features only one major male character Eadric.

Despite the above mentioned role of male characters and the fact that it is named after its male protagonist, "The Frog King" is often interpreted as a narrative about female (sexual) maturation and abandonment of childish pursuits (playing with a golden ball) in favour of adult preoccupations (finding a suitable partner), overcoming of aversions towards sexual intimacy in general and the male sexual organ (symbolized by the frog) in particular (Bettelheim 286–291; Jones 16), and addressing young girls' anxieties about marriage (Tatar, *Annotated* 10, n. 8). In other words, it is a female story. The princess is the first character introduced into the story, while the frog appears later, initially acting as a fairy-tale helper and gradually becoming as a protagonist in his own right. While the transformation of the frog into the prince is one of the main narrative goals, the central focus remains on the princess. Baker's novel is even more explicitly and thoroughly a female-centred narrative, as evidenced by the title and choice of female protagonist as the narrator. The story of *The Frog Princess* is Emma's story, in the sense that she is both the one who tells it, and the one the story is about. Her journey from princess to frog and back to princess is one of self-discovery in which she proves resourceful and courageous, and discovers some hidden talents she decides to pursue further at the end of the story.

As already evidenced by the title (which, significantly, was initially meant to be *The Frog Princess*; Breaux 398), the Disney adaptation abandons a female-centred

narrative in favour of one in which the male story is at least as important (if not – as previous examples of Disney adaptations would suggest – more important; Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 37) as the female one. Davis' claim that Naveen's role in the story "take[s] a back seat to Tiana's" (*Handsome Heroes* 175) seems questionable given how instrumental he is to the realization of her dream and, by extension, a satisfactory ending to her narrative. Rather than a character who exists only in relation to Tiana (which is the case with her father; see below), Naveen is given an independent plot line and full-fledged character transformation. Much like Disney's Beast, Naveen undergoes the said transformation upon establishing a romantic connection with a caring and supportive female (cf. Cummins; Jeffords).

Naveen's transformation from "a no-count, philandering, lazy bump on a log" (*The Princess and the Frog*) to a caring, capable, and self-sufficient suitor is first revealed as his willingness to assume responsibility and put the needs of others before his own. Not only is he prepared to do "whatever it takes to make [Tiana's] dreams come true," including getting one or more jobs, but he also (temporarily) abandons his own pursuit of happiness (asking Tiana to marry him) in order to help the woman he loves achieve her goal of opening a restaurant (he is willing to marry the rich Charlotte Le Bouff to be able to financially assist Tiana). In addition to being the receiver of positive influence, Naveen attempts to exert it as well, challenging her single-minded focus on work and teaching her how to be less of a "stick in the mud" (*The Princess and the Frog*). At first glance, it may seem that this two-way relationship poses a challenge to Zipes' claim that Disney films are solely concerned with male transformations, generating and perpetuating what he terms the "male myth" ("Breaking the Magic Spell" 37). However, the concrete transformations experienced by Naveen and Tiana may be seen as significantly differing in extent and degree. As Davis notes, his relationship with Tiana prompts Naveen to leave his selfish, irresponsible ways behind and "become a better man" (*Handsome Heroes* 177). In contrast, the kind, caring, and responsible Tiana is already a paragon of virtue and therefore does not require an in-depth character transformation the way Naveen does. Rather, she is prompted to re-evaluate her priorities, revise her beliefs and attitudes, and acknowledge that there is more to life than work (cf. Kujundžić 270).

Daddy's Girl

The only notable character in "The Frog King," apart from the hero and heroine is the heroine's father, the king. As his role was gradually expanded through the different editions of the story, he became crucial in the Grimms' agenda to turn the story into "a miniature behavioural lesson" (Tatar, *Annotated* 3) as a mouthpiece for morals about the importance of gratitude ("It's not proper to scorn someone who helped you when you were in trouble!" Grimm and Grimm 4) and keeping one's promises ("If you've made a promise, you must keep it", 3). Assuming the form of orders to be obeyed, these morals also serve to promote paternal and patriarchal authority (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 121). In contrast, the father is notably absent from *The Frog Princess*. Rather, it is Emma's mother who embodies parental authority, demanding that the ungraceful girl start behaving like a princess and marry the self-absorbed Prince Jorge.

Both the Grimms' princess and Tiana are identified through their relationships with their fathers: the princess is referred to as "the king's daughter" (*Königstochter*) and even "the king's child" (*Königskind*) throughout the story (Grimm and Grimm 2-5), while Tiana is repeatedly described as her "daddy's girl" (*The Princess and the Frog*). Although he appears only briefly at the very beginning of the film, his value system, ambitions, and work ethics define Tiana's entire life. From the very beginning, Tiana emulates her father, who was "one hard-working man. Double, sometimes triple shifts. Never letting on how bone tired and beat down he really was." These words could just as easily describe the adult Tiana as she is first introduced in the film: coming home from working a night shift, only to change clothes and head out to her second work place.

Much has been made about the uniqueness of Tiana's dream (when compared to those of other Disney princesses) and the fact that she proclaims that the only way to make it true is to work hard, rather than just wish for it (Barker 494). However, both the dream and the means of its realization come from her father:

> [T]he father writes her name on the restaurant picture, thus putting his project as a man and as a person of color in the hands of his daughter, who lovingly clutches it to her chest and in turn entrusts it to the evening star, only to be reminded by her father that it will also take hard work to achieve what she will set her mind to. (Parasecoli 460)

She frequently speaks about opening her own restaurant not as her own dream, but one that she shares with her father. The dutiful daughter thus makes it her life's goal "to make sure all daddy's hard work means something" (*The Princess and the Frog*).

The lesson Tiana learns in the course of the film and the change she undergoes, while triggered by the appearance of Naveen and the possibility of romance he introduces into her life, are once again derived from her father. While trying hard to make her father's dreams come true, she misinterprets his remark about not losing sight of what is really important and focuses too much on what she wants (the restaurant), ignoring what she needs (love). Ultimately, the way to achieve true happiness is to become even more like her father who may not have gotten "what he wanted, but he had what he needed. He had love! He never lost sight of what was important" (*The Princess and the Frog*). This is in direct contrast with the Grimms' heroine, who achieves her happily ever after and gains a royal spouse by rebelling against parental (and, by extension, patriarchal) authority and refusing to obey her father's explicit orders. While Tiana makes her daddy's wishes and principles her own, the princess ultimately rejects them and expresses her own will in an act of self-assertion and defiance (Zipes, "Repulsive Frog" 115).

In both narratives, the father plays a key role in selecting a suitable partner for the heroine. Once the frog has been transformed into a "prince with kind and beautiful eyes," the heroine, "in keeping with her father's wishes," accepts him "as her dear companion and husband" (Grimm and Grimm 4). Although the marriage hinges on the father's blessing, the suitor must first change in order to win the approval of the future bride. Since the suitor's frog form is firmly rejected as repulsive, it is immediately substituted with a more appealing and acceptable (human) form (Zipes, "Repulsive Frog" 115). Tiana's father may not be called upon to bestow his blessing on his daughter's partner, but he appears to be a model against which that partner is evaluated. In other words, Naveen does not require the approval of Tiana's father, but needs to take on some of his features (most notably, his diligence) and value system in order to appear more suitable. What makes Naveen ultimately worthy of Tiana is his willingness to place her needs first, get a job (maybe even two or three), and work hard just like her father. Thus, what makes this initially repulsive partner (due to his lack of

independence, carelessness, and self-centredness) more appealing is a character (rather than physical) transformation modelled after the future bride's father.

McCoy Gregory makes much of the fact that *The Princess and the Frog*, unlike many other Disney productions, not only gives the heroine both parents, but retains her mother (typically absent; Ward 150, n. 7) throughout the film (445). At the time of the film's release, Eudora was one of the few on-screen mothers of a Disney heroine (others include Aurora's mother in *Sleeping Beauty* and Mulan's mother).[14] However, while Eudora is unique as "a presence and a voice of encouragement for Tiana" (McCoy Gregory 445), her role in the story is minimal (consisting mostly of reminding Tiana of the importance of love), and her influence on Tiana incomparable to that of her father. Although Tiana's mother is also employed (according to Big Daddy, she is "the best seamstress in New Orleans;" *The Princess and the Frog*) and Tiana is seen accompanying her to work, she does not become a role model for her daughter. Ultimately, the late father proves much more important and influential than the living mother (Kujundžić 271).

The Antagonist

Neither the "Frog King" nor *The Frog Princess* features a traditional (fairy-tale) villain; in both cases, the sorceress/witch who transforms the prince into a frog is only talked about, but never actually appears in the story. Unlike "The Frog King," which provides no information on the sorceress or motivation for the spell, *The Frog Princess* has Prince Eadric provide some explanation for his predicament. Namely, he was punished for making inconsiderate remarks about an old witch's "clothes and hygiene" (Baker).

The fairy-tale-based black-and-white characterization typical of Disney films demands a clearly defined villain. In cases when the source material does not provide one (like in H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid") or contains morally ambiguous characters (e.g. Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), the Disney adaptation typically demonizes the existing characters (Frollo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the sea witch in *The Little Mermaid*) or introduces new characters to fill the role of

[14] The trend of absent mothers, prominent among early Disney heroines (including Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas) has undergone significant changes as more recent films typically feature both parents (e.g. *Tangled*, *Merida*, *Frozen*, *Moana*).

antagonist (Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*). *The Princess and the Frog* presents an interesting case in this respect as it opts for the unconventional route of side-stepping existing characters (sorceress, witch) and introducing a new one – the "shadow man," Dr Facilier. Of particular interest here is the gender shift:[15] while tales belonging to "The Frog King" type typically feature female antagonists ("a witch, female sorceress, or mother-in-law;" Tatar, *Annotated* 12, n. 10), *The Princess and the Frog* opts for a power-hungry Voodoo sorcerer who relies on his "friends on the other side" (the spirit world) in an attempt to take control over New Orleans.

While *The Frog Princess* reveals Eadric as the culprit for his own enchantment, *The Princess and the Frog* shifts the blame on a greedy and malicious villain and Naveen's vengeful and easily manipulated servant, once again exculpating the male protagonist whose only mistake is being too easily deceived by Facilier (whom Davis identifies as a trickster figure; *Handsome Heroes* 220). Interestingly enough, Facilier and Naveen initially seem to (at least partly) share the same goal: getting their hands on Big Daddy Le Bouff's money. While Facilier never explicitly states this, he does voice his dissatisfaction with "living on the margins, while all those fat cats in their fancy cars don't give [him] so much as a sideways glance" (*The Princess and the Frog*). That the "fat cat" in question is primarily the Le Bouff patriarch is made clear during the opening musical number ("Down in New Orleans") in which Facilier angrily compares the pile of bills Big Daddy nonchalantly gives to a newspaper boy to a single coin he himself managed to make (in a dishonest way). The disinherited Naveen, who needs "green" to maintain his lavish life-style, also has his sights set on the Le Bouff family fortune, through marriage to Charlotte. However, his selfishness and willingness to enter a loveless marriage for material gain is presented as somewhat benign, especially since his intended bride is also guided by selfish interests (desire to become a princess) rather than genuine emotion (cf. Davis, *Handsome Heroes* 176). In contrast, Facilier's motives

[15] Amy Davis (*Good Girls*) notes a significant decline in the number of female antagonists during and after the Disney Renaissance, i.e. following *The Little Mermaid*'s formidable sea witch Ursula. Since 1989 (the year *The Little Mermaid* was released) until today, Disney animated films featured only five female antagonists: Yzma in *The Emperor's New Groove*, Helga, the secondary (and eventually repenting) antagonist in *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, Doris in *Meet the Robinsons*, Mother Gothel in *Tangled*, and *Zootopia*'s Bellwether (the status of *Moana*'s TeKā as an antagonist is somewhat problematic). Davis sees these as positive, progressive changes from the earlier, more sexist depictions of female characters, and association between female power and evil.

are unambiguously condemned as they ultimately hurt others (he promises his mysterious friends all the souls in New Orleans once he assumes control over the city).

Concluding Remarks

The aim of the present paper was twofold: to demonstrate that Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* is most heavily influenced by and may therefore be considered as an adaptation of the Grimms' fairy tale "The Frog King," rather than Baker's novel *The Frog Princess*, and to examine the said film within the wider context of Disneyfication.

The analysis has shown that the film borrows a number of themes, motifs, and character traits from the Grimms' narrative, often significantly altering them to fit the Disney mould. Thus, all the negative traits of the Grimms' princess are eliminated, substituted with a more acceptable alternative (rather than demonstrate her will and resort to violence, Tiana brings about Naveen's transformation by showing compassion, care, and support), or simply transferred onto the film's male protagonist. This suggests that character traits are attributed based on gender and that notions of (un)acceptable behaviour differ for male and female protagonists. When it comes to male protagonists, their negative traits and problematic behaviour patterns are re-contextualized and justified, and commonly presented as a result of external influences, rather than inherent flaws.

The analysis highlighted the increased narrative significance and role of the male protagonist for the film adaptation, and explored the role of the father who, while absent from *The Frog Princess*, assumes an important part in "The Frog King," and becomes a central influence in *The Princess and the Frog*. Finally, the analysis revealed a number of similarities between the selected film and other Disney adaptations, thus confirming the persistency and stability of the Disneyfication pattern, established already by the Studio's earliest animated offerings (Hallett and Karasek 117). The elements of Disneyfication include the centrality of (heterosexual) romance, a specific cast of characters including clearly defined protagonists and antagonists, and their helpers, overcoming of obstacles with magical intervention, an adventure shared by the romantic couple, and a happy ending, typically manifested as marriage.

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