

# **Magic Mirror on the Wall, is Walt the Author of Them All? Walt Disney as a Posthumous Author**

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# SUMMARY

The Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio was founded in 1923 by brothers Roy and Walt Disney, and although it has undergone many changes over its nearly 100-year transformation into the media conglomerate The Walt Disney Company, animation still remains an important part of its business. The influence Walt Disney had as a producer on his studio's early films has resulted in some theorists considering him to be their author using auteur theory, which is most frequently applied to live-action film directors. The use of Disney's name in the branding of these films has also been used to construct him as an auteur during his lifetime, with it also noted that this is as equally applicable to the films released after his death in 1966. However, rarely in literature has the continued influence of Walt Disney on the feature-length animated films released by his studio after his death been investigated beyond the use of his name in their branding. Consequently, this thesis will use auteur theory in combination with other film studies approaches to explore Walt Disney as a posthumous author of *Robin Hood* (1973), *The Lion King* (1994), *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001) and *Frozen II* (2019). By looking at the production of these films and their contents, including their story, animation, music, production design and use of technology, it will be shown the filmmaking practices shaped by Walt Disney during his lifetime have been adhered to in various ways by Walt Disney Animation Studios after 1966. As a result, a new framework for posthumous authorship in film will be proposed which suggests the adherence to a filmmaker's approach after they have died situates them as a posthumous auteur, having implications for current conceptions of posthumous authorship in cinema as the completion of a film after its originator has died.

# STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

*This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.*

*To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.*

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 11/11/2020

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# INTRODUCTION

If you know any young children, having to watch *Frozen* (Buck and Lee 2013) over and over again is likely very familiar to you. My own experience with this was watching the film every Monday, frequently multiple times, with my three-year-old nephew and one-year-old niece for a period of around a year. One day, around the time when they were becoming acquainted with Mickey Mouse through shows like *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, my nephew asked me why Mickey Mouse was in *Frozen* when he appeared in the clip from *Steamboat Willie* which is displayed on the Walt Disney Animation Studios title card at the start of the film. This question prompted me to consider two things; firstly, how I could respond to my nephew's question (which was actually quite a complex thing to explain to a three-year-old); and secondly, what were the implications of not only Mickey Mouse being there, but the name of a man who had been dead for nearly fifty years appearing on the screen as if it were being signed.

In relation to the second problem, at the most basic level, the inclusion of Disney's signature designates him as the film's author which appears to be a counterintuitive idea given that he died in 1966 and *Frozen* was released in 2013. Currently, conceptions of posthumous authorship are predicated on an individual beginning a work during their life and that work being completed after their death. Although *Frozen* partially fits within these frameworks, as Walt Disney also tried to adapt the film's inspiration, Han Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, during his life, this approach to authorship is too restrictive. Looking at only projects with direct connections to Disney cannot account for the majority of the forty animated features which have thus far been released after 1966 by what is today known as Walt Disney Animation Studios. However, in light of the way the studio continues to draw attention

to their founder in the paratexts, supplementary material and promotion for these films, a new perspective on authorship after death is needed to examine how Disney can be seen in their production. To say Walt Disney is their sole author would be too dismissive of the agency of those working at the studio after 1966. However, by constructing Walt Disney as one authorial presence in the animated features created by the studio he founded following his death, in this thesis I will propose a new way of looking at posthumous authorship and authorship more generally.

The strong association between Walt and the output of the studio he founded in 1923 with his brother Roy O. Disney which is evident in the opening of *Frozen* existed from the company's earliest days.<sup>1</sup> Although Disney admitted that he relinquished his animating duties around the 'time of Mickey Mouse', he 'so successfully performed authorship of his studio's output during his lifetime that many customers thought Walt drew all the cartoons himself' (Wells 2002a, 78; Griffin 2000, 141). Benshoff (2015) highlights in the context of the 1920s and 1930s, Walt Disney was one of the few 'names from behind the screen [which became] common knowledge to the movie-going public' (65).<sup>2</sup> While the limited 'screen credit' given to other individuals working at the studio in its films contributed to the public's recognition of Walt Disney, a vital aspect of this identification was the name of the studio itself (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 283).<sup>3</sup> Although it was founded as the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio, in 1926 its name was changed to the Walt Disney Studio, with historian Steven

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<sup>1</sup> Disney had previously founded another company, Laugh-O-gram Films, where he produced a number of shorts, but this was bankrupted in 1923 (Smith 2016, 436).

<sup>2</sup> A stimulant for Walt achieving this was an encounter he had when trying to find a distributor for his first Mickey Mouse shorts. One individual he approached held up 'a package of Life Saver candies and said to Walt, "the public knows Life Savers . . . They don't know you. They don't know your mouse"' (Gabler 2007, 130).

<sup>3</sup> In the studio's early work, 'no one got screen credit' beside Walt, and while 'precedent . . . set [by] . . . live action films . . . justified the naming of his key people' in the studio's features, a vast number of individuals remained unidentified (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 283; Benshoff 2015, 65–66).

Watts explaining ‘Walt Disney believed that it was his vision of creativity and entertainment that was the engine of this enterprise and that’s what was being sold’ (Colt 2015a).<sup>4</sup>

This was validated in Walt Disney’s extensive shaping of the studio’s early shorts, such as the Alice Comedies, Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony series. His influence continued into its features, acting as a ‘lodestone’ on the first which was released in 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Gabler 2007, 233). In addition to Disney’s position as the president of the company, the authoritative creative role he occupied was codified in 1938 when he received the title of Executive Producer, ‘exercising complete jurisdiction over [all story work] throughout all stages of production’ (Holliss and Sibley 1988, 34). Despite the fact that he did not direct or animate his films, with it to be later discussed in the literature review how Disney’s authorship can be handled in light of this, his contributions to these works is most clearly illustrated by animator Ward Kimball who summarises, ‘Walt was the secret . . . People don’t realize the importance he had – down to should a character look left or right or roll his eyes. Walt was the final editor on every damned scene’ (Solomon 2016a, 33).

While as time progressed Walt Disney did not maintain the same high level of input into the studio’s animated films, he retained his prominent place in their branding and promotion, each feature having ‘Walt Disney’s’ above its title on promotional posters

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<sup>4</sup> After the amendment of the company’s name to the Walt Disney Studio, it was changed to Walt Disney Productions in 1929, and The Walt Disney Company in 1986 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). The animation division, which received its own separate name in the 1980s, was firstly Walt Disney Feature Animation and then renamed Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2007 which it will be referred to as henceforth for clarity (Smith 2016, 268, 802).

and opening with a title card that said ‘Walt Disney presents’.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as the company diversified from the 1940s, moving into live-action films, television and theme parks among other ventures, he still was required as a central figure across all of its branches (Bendazzi 2015a, 105). This is highlighted in the declaration by the man himself that, ‘Disney is a thing, an image in the public mind. . . if we start pulling that apart by calling it “A Bill Walsh Production for Walt Disney” . . . then the name Disney won’t mean as much any more’ (Wasko 2020, 263).<sup>6</sup> In addition to the public’s strong awareness of Disney’s name, recognition of Walt shifted to his face a result of his frequent appearances on television shows such as *Walt Disney’s Disneyland*, which first aired in 1954 and where he fostered his image as ‘Uncle Walt’ (Gabler 2007, 512–13).<sup>7</sup>

When Walt Disney suddenly died on 15 December 1966 from lung cancer, the studio was left in disarray, particularly the animation division. As highlighted by Solomon (1995), the issue they faced was that ‘during his lifetime, Disney had developed a[n] . . . ultimately centralized method of developing animated films . . . that . . . required Walt . . . to oversee every aspect of production’ (28). As the studio latched on to trying to

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<sup>5</sup> Disney’s declining influence at his animation studio in the later years of his life does not negatively affect the argument presented here as it is not predicated on Walt having an equal influence over his studio throughout his life, nor is the aim of this thesis to measure this impact. In exploring posthumous authorship, influence is not being considered in the conventional sense in this discussion. The extensive impact Walt Disney had in the early days of his studio, which has been described, can be thought of as allowing his staff to continue working in a manner that aligned with his filmmaking style in the later years of his life, even without his direct guidance, setting a precedent for the influence he is being argued here to have had after his death. Furthermore, although Disney may have been involved in animation in a limited way towards the end of his life, the major interventions he did make in the studio’s films can still prove instructive, as will be discussed in relation to *Sleeping Beauty* in Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> The Walt Disney name became so ‘valuable’ to the company that he licensed it to them in 1953 (Gabler 2007, 492–93). Walt Disney Productions ‘acquired full rights to the name for \$46.2 million’ in 1981, after previously paying royalties to Retlaw, a company Walt ‘formed . . . to handle his personal business’, for its use (Associated Press 1981; Gabler 2007, 629).

<sup>7</sup> Gabler (2007) describes that Disney became ‘one of [the studio’s] stars, like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck’ through these appearances (512–513).

do what they thought their deceased founder would have wanted, it entered into a financial and critical ‘slump’, ‘[accused of] . . . just doling out the same old stuff’ in films like *The Fox and the Hound* (Catmull and Wallace 2014, 123; Pallant 2011, 74). In the classification of Disney animated films into eras which have gained popularity on fan sites such as Disney Avenue, this time is referred to as the Bronze Age (B. Bell 2015).<sup>8</sup> It was a change in leadership at the company that ushered in the next era, the Disney Renaissance, which spanned from 1989 to 1999. Including features such as *Beauty and the Beast* which was the first animated film nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards, the success of this era was indicative of the wider health of the company during “the Disney decade” where the company adopted ‘strategies’ that it ‘still adheres to’ today, including corporate synergy (Smith 2016, 65; Wasko 2020, 35–36, 37).

Subsequently, the cycle of an overall financially unsuccessful period, in which there was a transition in the studio’s leadership, being followed by a successful era was repeated, which can be seen in Figure 1. As will be explained throughout this thesis, this was generally mirrored in the critical response to the films, with the Post Renaissance Era comprised of features like the ‘disappointment’ *Treasure Planet* (Finch 2011, 312). During this period which lasted between 2000 and 2008, the ‘strategic priorities’ adopted by the company’s new leadership resulted in the acquisition of ‘several well-known companies’ including Pixar (Wasko 2020, 39–40). This directly impacted the final identified phase, the Revival Era, which Haswell

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<sup>8</sup> As noted by Wasko (2020) ‘there are many versions of these eras’ (129). The names and dates for the eras for this discussion have been taken from Disney Avenue, with the exception of the date for the end of the Post Renaissance Era and the beginning of the Revival Era which have been adjusted to 2008 and 2009 respectively. This is because although the site lists the start of the Revival Era as 2010, it states its first film was *The Princess and the Frog* which was released in 2009.



(2019) labels “the Post-Pixar Period” as Pixar’s key personnel were able to give ‘Disney Animation . . . a new lease of life’ (117). Encapsulating the films released from 2009 to the present day, such as *Frozen*, a timeline of the features from the Revival Era as well as all the preceding ones until 1966 can be seen in Figure 2.<sup>9</sup>

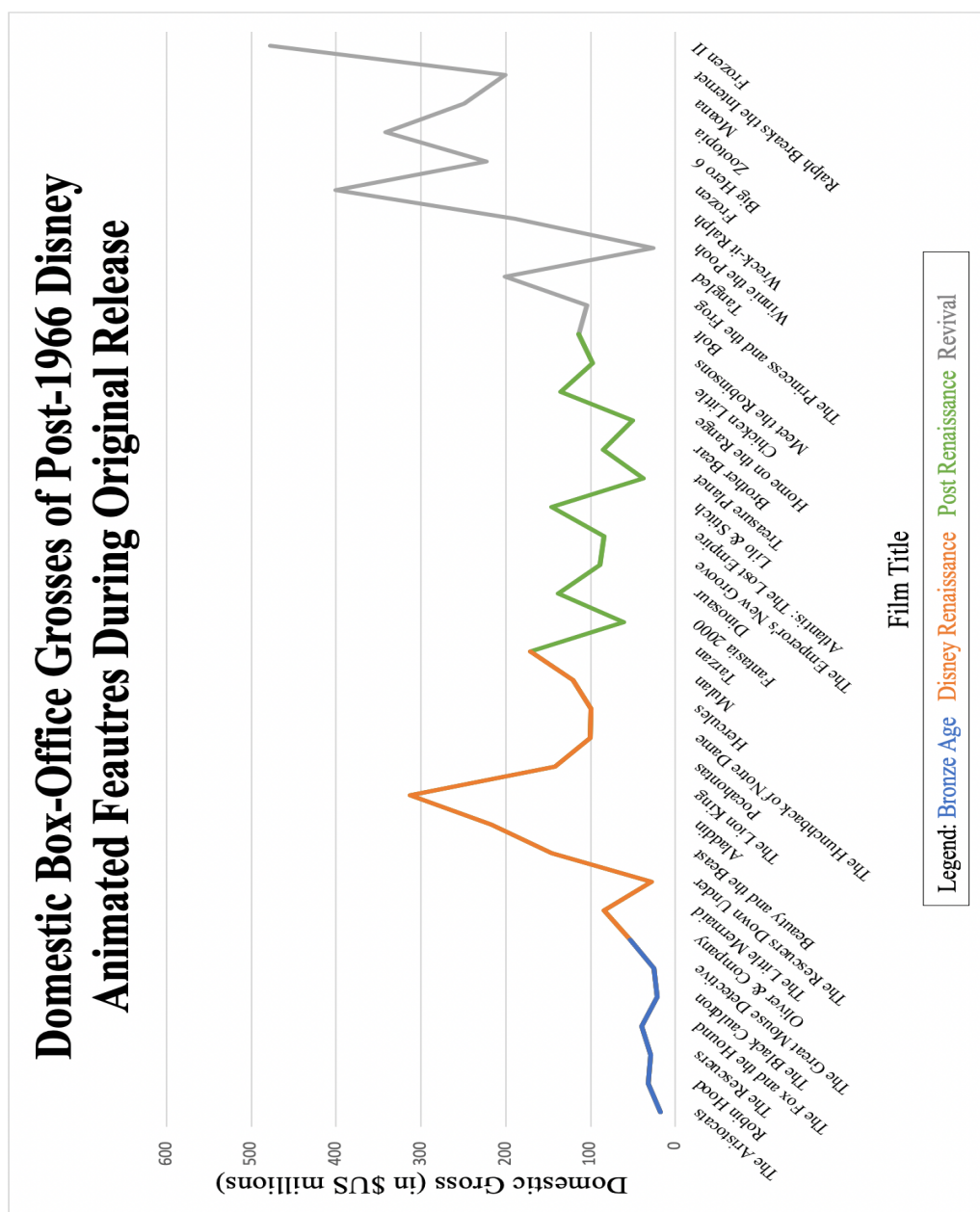


Figure 1 Domestic Box Office Grosses of Post-1966 Disney Animated Features During Original Release. Data obtained from Box Office Mojo (2020) and Nash Information Services (2020). Data for The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh was unavailable.

<sup>9</sup> The eras throughout Disney’s lifetime were the Golden Age (1937 – 1942), Wartime Era (1943 – 1949) and Silver Age (1950 – 1969)(B. Bell 2015). Although the end of the Silver Age is listed as 1969, placing this after the death of Walt Disney, the only film released in between 1966 and the start of the next era was *The Jungle Book*, which he heavily influenced before he died.

## Timeline of the Eras of Disney Animated Filmmaking Post-1966



Figure 2 Timeline of the Eras of Disney Animated Filmmaking Post-1966 (B. Bell 2015).  
The Jungle Book is classified as belonging to the Silver Age.

As can be seen in this extremely brief outline of the trajectory of the company after Disney's death, it has existed under a number of leadership styles and produced distinct animated films across varying points in its history. However, an ever-present question has remained; 'Who's the next Walt Disney?' (Hahn 2010). A number of individuals have been offered in response to this, including Michael Eisner, who led The Walt Disney Company from the mid-80s to the early 2000s, and John Lasseter, who had leadership roles at both Disney Animation and Pixar (Hahn 2010; Smith 2016, 434–35; Iwerks 2007).

In contrast to this enduring search, the argument I will present in this thesis is that the studio has never needed *another* Walt Disney because the original has continued to influence films after his death. Perhaps the clearest example of this is *Meet the Robinsons* (S. Anderson 2007b), the first animated feature to include the title card featuring Mickey Mouse as Steamboat Willie. Throughout the film, the phrase 'keep moving forward' is frequently repeated and is revealed immediately before the closing credits to have been originally spoken by the studio's founder (Figure 3).<sup>10</sup> Although this is a very literal example of Disney's voice being present in the studio's films after 1966, its core suggestion that Walt remains an influence at his company will be expanded in this thesis to construct Walt Disney as an entity within films across the Eras of Disney Animated filmmaking after his death.

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<sup>10</sup> Additionally, *Meet the Robinsons* features a 'homage' to Tomorrowland from the Disney theme parks in Todayland, with director Stephen Anderson stating in the film's audio commentary during its appearance that 'the hope and optimism that Walt Disney had about the future is directly in line with' that of the film's protagonist (S. Anderson 2007a).

Image has been removed as it contains copyright material.

*Figure 3 Text which appears immediately prior to the concluding credits of Meet the Robinsons (S. Anderson 2007b).*

Critic Leonard Maltin once declared that ‘the Walt Disney Studio is unique in Hollywood for many reasons, but the one that concerns me the most is a sense of continuity’ (Kurtti 2000). Unlike other Hollywood studios which have been periodically known for particular styles of films throughout their history, such as MGM’s musicals or Warner Brothers gangster movies, The Walt Disney Company has continually produced animations. This has been one stable aspect of a company which has undergone constant change throughout its nearly 100-year evolution into the media conglomerate, The Walt Disney Company, currently the world’s second-largest media company and seventh-most valuable brand (Shapiro 2020; Swant 2020). Another stable aspect has been the continual branding of these films with the name Walt Disney. Again differentiating the company from others, in contrast to the ‘Big Five’ studios of Hollywood’s Golden Age, whose leaders were ‘hidden behind acronyms (MGM), partnerships (Warner Brothers) or romantic names like Universal and Paramount)’, Walt Disney was able to become ‘entirely and indissolubly

associated with the products . . . that bore his name' throughout his life (Sibley 1988, 6). The perpetuation of this connection after his death, as demonstrated by the Steamboat Willie title card, establishes Disney as a good case study to use to explore posthumous authorship. As will now be shown in a review of existing literature, current conceptions are unsatisfactory for accounting for the continued influence Disney has had on the studio's animated features released after 1966, and therefore, a new framework of posthumous authorship is required.

## **Literature Review**

The topic of the project exists within the intersection of scholarship relating to a variety of ideas including the authorship of film, animation and posthumous works, as well as the history of The Walt Disney Company and its animated films. I will demonstrate that a combination of the scholarship related to Walt Disney, authorship and consistencies across the films of Walt Disney Animation Studios will allow current ideas of posthumous authorship to be redefined, filling a gap in this literature.

### **Authorship, Auteur Theory and Animation**

Film authorship has been a key site of debate throughout the development of film studies, with perspectives ranging from collective authorship (Sellors 2007) to single individuals. Auteur theory has been the most pervasive approach to film authorship, and while its origins have been frequently recounted, its founding texts are valuable to highlight here as a result of the foundational role they play in this project. Alexandre Astruc (1948) introduced the theory's central tenet that a director of a film is its author in 'La Camera Stylo', where he proposed that 'the film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen' (606). This idea subsequently permeated numerous articles in the French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* throughout the 1950s, such

as François Truffaut's (1954) 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema'. Truffaut's view that the director is the ultimate authority in the creation of a film was echoed by Andrew Sarris (1962) in 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962'. Introducing the theory to the United States, Sarris argued that 'over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature' (43).

However, although auteur theory has endured both within academia and amongst the 'general public', it has been heavily criticised throughout its existence (Hodsdon 2017, 283).<sup>11</sup> For example, Pauline Kael (1963), one of its foremost opponents, deconstructed the three premises of the theory outlined by Sarris (1962) in her article 'Circles and Squares', and elsewhere undermined the theory's focus on directors by highlighting the contributions of others beyond this role in film production. Doing this specifically in relation to *Bonnie and Clyde* in her review of the film (1967), and *Citizen Kane* in 'Raising Kane' (1971), a similar endeavour to Kael's emerges in research, such as Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell's (2009) which unearths the role played by those typically considered as 'below the line' workers. Overall, as summarised by Kevin Moist and Michael Bartholow (2007), while auteur theory achieved critical mass in the 1960s, it 'fell out of favour after the 1970s in the wake of post-structuralist critiques of authorship, and cultural theories that advocated broader contextual approaches' (31).

Irrespective of these criticisms, auteur theory retains value as a means of highlighting filmmakers and forms which have previously been marginalised. As Moist and

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<sup>11</sup> In *Cahiers du cinema* Hollywood directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, Nicholas Ray, Vincente Minnelli and John Ford were identified as auteurs, and more recently, those who have been viewed in the same terms include 'Steven Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese, James Cameron, (and) David Fincher' (Hodsdon 2017, 25, 283).

Bartholow further note, this is especially the case within animation studies in light of ‘persistent views that animation is merely children’s entertainment’ (31). Moist and Bartholow explicitly state their intention to ‘[approach] anime as a significant contemporary cultural form’ in their application of auteur theory to Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki (31). Mirroring the efforts of ‘early advocates of auteurism [who] sought to elevate the status of certain directors in order to advance the causes of film and film criticism’, this use of the theory is also indicative of its continued relevance in animation studies as a result of the limited amount of literature on auteurs within the field (Meskin 2008, 31). As Jayne Pilling (1998) describes in the introduction to *A Reader in Animation Studies*, this stemmed from the failure of early auteur theorists to consider the existence of auteurs in animation, which ‘seems all the more paradoxical since animation is often a form of cinema that often fulfils the criteria of art and *auteur*-ism in the most literal sense: a ‘camera-stylo’ *avant la lettre*’ (xi-xii).

Although Walt Disney did not personally animate the majority of his films, in direct contrast to this lack of attention given to animation auteurs there is an array of literature which establishes him as the author of the films he produced. Langer (1998) describes this trend first emerged in the 1970s in texts such as ‘the ground breaking *The Hollywood Cartoon* issue of *Film Comment*’, where the designation of individuals such as Disney as artists ‘parallel[ed] *auteur* methodology in the study of live action film’ (148).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This perception also exists in work outside of scholarly literature which may not explicitly use the terminology of the theory, such as Neal Gabler’s (2007) biography *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. Auteur theory’s fundamental idea that an auteur has ultimate control over their films is implicit in Gabler’s conclusion, in relation to *Snow White*, that Walt ‘was visualising the entire movie . . . as if there were a projector in his head. And that is why, for all the talk of collaboration, no one at the studio doubted that the job was . . . to realise on screen what Walt was visualising’ (246).

In *Animation: Genre and Authorship* Paul Wells (2002a) addresses the limited attention given to auteurs in animation by applying the theory to a number of individuals, such as stop-motion special effects animator Ray Harryhausen (73-74, 90-101). Disney is the only figure examined who, for the vast majority of his career, did not personally animate his films. However, Wells offers a valuable means to overcome this by examining how he was still able to shape his studio's early shorts and features through his role as their producer, framing Disney as 'a person who prompt[ed] and execute[d] the core themes, techniques and expressive agendas of [his] film[s]' (79).

Walt Disney is not an isolated example of a producer who exerted influence over his films in this way. For example, in *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*, Thomas Schatz (1988) highlights the contributions to live-action films by producers such as Irving Thalberg, who during story conferences for *Grand Hotel* (1932), 'would launch into detailed analysis' (126-127). Despite such involvement, Schatz identifies producers as among 'the most misunderstood and undervalued figures in American film history' (8). While the attention given to Disney distinguishes him from these other cases, with Schatz writing in the decade following *The Hollywood Cartoon* issue of *Film Comment*, the further role Disney still occupies in the public's consciousness today is what establishes him as deserving of further study.

However, reflecting the turn away from auteur theory through the examination of the contributions of 'below the line' workers, there have been numerous recent attempts to highlight the identity and work of those previously obscured by Walt Disney. These include books by Mindy Johnson (2017) and Nathalia Holt (2019) who elevate the



names of women throughout the history of Walt Disney Animation Studios, a group that has been particularly impacted by auteur theory which has historically privileged white men. The reaction against views of Disney as the ultimate authority at the studio is most clearly seen in Janet Wasko's (2020) dissection of the 'Disney Multiverse' in *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy*. Wasko allocates an early chapter of the book to 'seperat[ing]' histories of Disney the individual and Disney the company, arguing the latter often 'emerges from inflated and mythical depictions' of the former (10, 29). Despite stating Disney 'clearly controlled the company during his life' (10), Wasko ultimately concurs with Douglas Gomery's statement that, 'in the end we need to abandon the "great man" version of history . . . We are the fools if we ascribe all the actions and strategies of a company to one man or woman' (quoted in Wasko 2020, 29).

However, while Disney may not have been solely responsible for the entirety of the company's actions and it is important to recognise the substantial contributions made by others in the company's films, the influence he did have should not be dismissed. In *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*, Disney animators, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1995) detail the development of the Disney animation style and approach to storytelling. Thomas and Johnston describe the opinion shared amongst some of the studio's directors and animators that 'if Walt had started at some different place at the same time with a different bunch of guys, the result would have been more or less along the same lines' (97). This sentiment demonstrates that although an immense number of individuals worked to create the early films of Walt Disney Animation Studios, the main determinant of what appeared on the screen and overriding author was still Walt Disney.

As can be seen in both the extensive literature on Walt Disney and the resistance to the views espoused in some of these works, applying auteur theory to Disney is neither new nor required to elevate his status as it is for other underappreciated figures within animation. However, given the pervasiveness of the view of Disney as the author of the studio's films during his lifetime, if taken as a basic assumption, this can be built upon to offer a new use of the theory by extending current conceptions of posthumous authorship. Given the extensive amount of literature on Walt Disney and the Disney Company, with 'a boom in "Disney studies"' occurring in the 1990s, this case provides a valuable entry point to not only explore understandings of posthumous authorship in film but approaches to Walt Disney specifically (Wasko 2020, 5).

## **Posthumous Authorship**

The previously discussed prominence of Walt Disney's name in the branding of the studio's films during his lifetime has also been used to construct him as an auteur.<sup>13</sup> In light of the continued use of Walt Disney's name after his death in 1966, such classifications of Disney as an auteur are as equally valid in relation to films released after 1966. Wells (2002a) concludes, 'it is clearly the case that throughout his career and ironically, even after his death, Walt Disney is an auteur by virtue of fundamentally denying inscription to anyone else' (90). However, while this statement may be a valuable starting point for formulating how Disney could be considered a posthumous auteur, Wells does not develop this argument, treating it as an aside. This is similarly the case in other literature, where Disney's 'authorship after death' is

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<sup>13</sup> 'Although he did not write or direct any of these features . . . Disney maintained his status as their auteur by simple expedient of claiming their most prominent credits' (Leitch 2005, 117).

regarded as a basic assumption, leaving the details of Walt Disney's posthumous authorship largely unexplored (Hernández-Pérez 2016, 310).

Currently, conceptions of posthumous cinema predominately concern films which were started by individuals who died and later finished by others. Monika Kin Gagnon (2014) explains 'the term *posthumous* originated in 1668 to describe a book publication subsequent to an author's death. Posthumous cinema thereby involves unfinished films that are conditionally completed after a film-maker's death' (138). While a variety of conceptions of authorship and collaboration have been applied to cases of artworks being completed after their original creator's death, which will be detailed in chapter one, Sondra Bacharach and Deborah Tollefsen (2015a) suggest 'posthumous authorship' should be recognised as a distinct 'category' (334). In their article 'You Complete Me: Posthumous Works and Secondary Agency', Bacharach and Tollefsen (2015b) propose 'completers engaging in secondary agency do so with the intention of . . . completing the work as the creator would have wanted it. Even when completers contribute significant ideas . . . because [they] are doing so only on the creator's behalf and with the intention [of] fulfilling the interests of the creator as best they can, the deceased author remains author' (81).

Although there are some examples of projects Walt Disney began being later finished by those at the studio after his death which will be highlighted throughout this thesis, these views of posthumous authorship are unable to directly account for Disney's influence on the studio's other films released after 1966. Bacharach and Tollefsen overlook the potential for artists to similarly fulfil the interests of a deceased individual, and thus establish that person as an author, in works which they did not

begin during their lifetime. An issue with transferring their ideas in this way does arise in the artist being unable to authorise secondary agents to create a work they had no awareness of before their death, which Bacharach and Tollefsen state is necessary for posthumous authorship (77-78). However, as they explain the ‘authorisation process’ can occur ‘loosely and informally’ (80), this can be overcome in a discussion of Walt Disney by viewing the employees of Disney Animation over the course of its history as authorised secondary agents (77-80).

While Gagnon discusses film and Bacharach and Tollefsen address art even more broadly, a variety of means to connect Disney specifically to the animated features released after his death is offered in existing literature based on whether ‘Walt Disney’ is defined as the individual or the name of the studio. However, exploring these avenues reveals how examples of the former are impeded from providing a strong framework of posthumous authorship by their removal of Walt from their discussions of ‘Disney’, while the latter are too reliant on biographical information.

Firstly, at the studio level, Jerome Christensen (2012) designates the corporate studio as the ‘intending author’ of films in *America’s Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures* (13). Christensen proposes films are a reflection of the ‘corporate strategy [which] is intended by the artificial person who the corporation is’ and there ‘must be agents who can consciously interpret corporate objectives’ (2-3). This view is valuable for understanding how a company’s employees can act in accordance with strategies which are formulated by an entity beyond them. However, using the ‘artificial person named Disney’ as one of his examples, Christensen’s own expression highlights how the door remains ajar for further exploration by considering

how the real Walt Disney's strategies continue to impact the company (23). John Wills (2017) approaches such a discussion in *Disney Culture*, arguing the 'philosophy' of the entire company, although has 'developed over time', was created by Walt Disney (4-5). However, in addition to leaving the authorial implications of this unexplored, the limitations of Wills' demonstration of Walt Disney's philosophies in the studio's animated features will be later highlighted.

In a comparable manner to Christensen, Paul Wells (2002b) does not discuss 'Disney' as the individual. After noting the various identifications of 'Disney' as the man, the studio and the brand, Wells redefines the term 'as a metonym for *an authorially complex, hierarchical industrial process, which organises and executes selective practices within the vocabularies of animated film*' (139-140, emphasis in original). While identifying continuities across the company's history through the existence of an 'industrialised aesthetic tradition at Disney', there is limited attention given to how this developed and Walt's role in its creation (140). Overlooking the influence of the namesake of the term he is defining prevents Wells from providing a complete picture of the studio's operation and how Walt may exist in the authorially complex animation process even after his death.

Alternatively, by unpacking the authorial workings of the Disney brand, Manuel Hernández-Pérez (2016) provides a path toward understanding Disney the individual as a posthumous author in 'Animation, Branding and Authorship in the Construction of the 'Anti-Disney' Ethos: Hayao Miyazaki's Works and Persona through Disney Film Criticism'. By exploring auteur theory through the similarities and differences between analyses of Walt Disney's and Hayao Miyazaki's films, Hernández-Pérez

notes the potential for authorship to ‘survive the author’ if it is treated as an ‘exercise of style’, discussing ‘a discourse of authorship that is based on the creation of a brand that originated from an individual style’ (301-302, 309). While Hernández-Pérez determines that consequently, ‘‘Disney’ is no longer only Walt Disney himself but . . . may just be the disembodied essence of an author’, he diagnoses that ‘despite being an immaterial version of the author, criticism of Disney is unable to avoid the human origin of the work’, by being overwhelming informed by biographical information about Walt Disney (300, 301-302).

This general tendency can be seen in Wills’ *Disney Culture*. For instance, Wills draws a tenuous biographical connection to Disney’s rural upbringing to account for the studio’s ‘[consistent promotion of a] nature-friendly gaze’, providing no examples of specific interventions he made into the studio’s films to shape this concern (154). However, the ‘human origin’ of Disney films can still be considered without reverting to biographical information about Walt Disney. Hernández-Pérez explains that ‘Disney is the main example of a chief producer who is perceived in nearly all of his production components, such as character design [and] musical score composition’ (301). By reframing how ‘Walt’ is inserted into the immaterial version of Disney through considering specific ways he shaped elements of his films such as these which continue to permeate the studio’s works, a fresh way to approach posthumous authorship can be produced.

The most efficient way of establishing links in this way between Disney and the films released after his death would seemingly be to outline his contributions to the ‘Disney Formula’. In the previously mentioned book *Understanding Disney*, Wasko (2020)

outlines the elements of the Classic Disney formula which are the ‘types of stories, characters, themes and values that have been continually represented’ by the studio (124-125).<sup>14</sup> Disney could therefore be linked to films released after his death by simply expanding on Wasko’s brief statement, ‘there is no doubt that Classic Disney was influenced in its early years by Walt Disney’ (123).

However, there are a number of shortcomings with this approach. Firstly, as a number of the themes and values delineated by Wasko, such as ‘Mainstream American values’, are closely tied to the ideology present in the studio’s films, the assumption that these have remained consistent are unsound (125). In Wells’ (2002b) consideration of Disney as a metonym, he notes the frequent identification of Disney films as having ‘a highly charged right-wing perspective’ (139).<sup>15</sup> However, he contends ‘that there has been less ideological coherence in the Disney agenda than is frequently suggested, on the basis that the very process of creating a Disney text militates against such coherence’ (140).<sup>16</sup> As the endeavour of connecting Walt Disney to these values is also heavily reliant on biographical information, such as his ‘Midwest Conservatism’, these two approaches which have dominated studies of Disney need to be moved past to more deeply explore authorship (Wasko 2020, 127; Wells 2002b, 85–86).

Secondly, looking at posthumous authorship through the repetition of a formula is too reductive. In addition to oversimplifying the nature of film production, simply stating

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<sup>14</sup> Although Wasko (2020) observes a potential shift in these, which is termed Revised Classic Disney, she ultimately concludes that many of its ‘characteristics still prevail for Disney’s animated films’ (129-131).

<sup>15</sup> Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan (1999) also note the prevalence of examinations of the ‘right-wing agenda’ in Disney films in the introduction to their book *Deconstructing Disney* (1).

<sup>16</sup> Wells (2002b) further explains, the ‘socio-political orientation’ of Disney texts are ‘determined more by the industrialised aesthetic tradition at Disney, and its stylistic inhibitions, than political sensitivities’ (140).

that the studio has adhered to the strict guidelines of a formula places too much power with the deceased individual, rather than those working after their death, demonstrating the need for a more flexible approach.

From assessing the existing work on both Walt Disney and authorship, it is clear a gap exists in accounting for how he continues to influence the content and production of Walt Disney Animation Studios' films, beyond viewing them through the lens of his biography. However, these current approaches can be adapted to create a new way of understanding posthumous authorship which is not dependent on a work an individual began during their lives being completed after their death.

## **Methodology**

By narrowing Christensen's (2012) idea of corporate strategy to those specific to filmmaking and reframing the 'artificial person named Disney' as Walt himself, I will use the core idea of *America's Corporate Art* as the basic premise of this thesis; as Walt Disney's animated filmmaking strategies have been upheld by those working at the studio after his death, he can be seen as a posthumous author.

Inspired by the gaps existent in current literature, this thesis has two aims. The first is to explore different connections between Walt Disney and Walt Disney Animation Studios' films released after his death than the biographical or formulaic ones which permeate current literature. This will involve relating specific examples of ways Disney shaped the films he produced, which are overlooked in works such as Wills' (2017) *Disney Culture*, to the practices used to create the studio's films post-1966 and their content. A large component of this will be unpacking the links which are drawn



to Disney by those who worked on these films in their supplementary material.<sup>17</sup> Additional connections will also be drawn by deriving his filmmaking strategies from the material discussed in the literature review which cements Disney as an auteur.

The second aim of this thesis is to propose a new theorisation of posthumous authorship that can account for the array of ways an individual can influence a film created after their death as is seen in the case of Walt Disney. To achieve this, the various accounts of authorship discussed in the literature review, such as Wells' (2002b) idea of Disney as a metonym and Bacharach and Tollefsen's (2015b) framework, will be tested against the forms of posthumous influence Disney is argued to have had on the studio's films and expanded to accommodate these. Although the status of Disney as an auteur during his lifetime will be treated as an assumption throughout this discussion, no specific account of authorship will be followed in inserting him as an author in the studio's films after his death. However, collaborative authorship will be alluded to as although Disney is being proposed as an author, he is not being argued to be the sole author of these films.

While *Disney Culture* has been noted as an example of literature which fails to make concrete connections to Disney, this may have been a result of the extensive breadth of Wills' (2017) study which looks at the entirety of The Walt Disney Company. To allow a more detailed analysis, this discussion has been limited to not only Walt Disney Animation Studios' features, but four case studies. Each of these have been

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<sup>17</sup> References to Walt Disney in comments made by studio staff post-1966 may be perceived as solely serving the Disney brand. However, irrespective of whether these statements are fabricated or biased, they remain valuable to the argument presented here as they demonstrate the company's willingness to continually draw attention to their founder and provide a starting off point for investigating how Disney's posthumous authorship may operate.

drawn from a separate Era of Disney Animated Filmmaking after 1966 to provide a wide picture of how Disney's posthumous authorship may have worked at various points across the studio's history. These are *Robin Hood* (Reitherman 1973) from the Bronze Age, *The Lion King* (Allers and Minkoff 1994) from the Disney Renaissance, *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (Trousdale and Wise 2001) from the Post Renaissance Era, and *Frozen II* (Buck and Lee 2019) from the Revival Era. The discussion of each of these films will be prefaced by an outline of their context and how Disney is established as their author in the films' paratexts.<sup>18</sup>

In chapter one, I will explore posthumous authorship through the idea of responsibility, beginning with an examination of *Robin Hood*. I will use the utilisation of previously abandoned projects to develop the film's story and *Robin Hood's* heavy reliance on strong character animation to explore how Disney was responsible for aspects of the first feature he had not chosen for production prior to his death. I will then extend this to the financial peak of an era which occurred decades later, *The Lion King*, which was guided by the same animation principles. Although the studio's first 'original' narrative, I will show that the film which was conceived as 'Bambi in Africa' replicated the studio's approach to achieving realism and use of music in its early films, which were also originally shaped by Walt Disney (Chandler 2018, 6).

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<sup>18</sup> In relation to these paratexts, as a result of the dual existence of Disney as an individual and a brand, which was discussed in the literature review, a tension is created between signs of authorship and branding, which could be fully explored in a work of greater length. While these two identifications of Disney cannot be entirely separated from one another, henceforth, the focus of this discussion will remain on Disney as an individual and authorship. This is not a naïve dismissal of Disney as a brand or theories of branding, rather, this approach is undertaken to test a thesis of posthumous authorship in relation to a man who has persisted in the discourse surrounding the studio he founded years after his death.

In chapter two, I will then reframe what constitutes an author's control by inserting Disney into films released in the Post Renaissance Era and Revival Era. I will link Walt's management of his animation studio during his lifetime to the production design of *Atlantis* and the use of technology to create the film which was widely labelled as breaking with the studio's tradition as a result of its comic book influenced style and lack of musical numbers (Mitchell 2001; Robertson 2001, 32). Finally, following an investigation of how the development of *Frozen II*'s story aligns with Disney's method of adapting fairy tales, I will connect Walt to the 3D animation of the studio's current most recent release, and thus the feature most temporally distant from him.

By using the four case studies to collectively demonstrate how Disney's ideas surrounding story development, character animation, music, production design and technology have continued to influence films released after his death, I will construct him as an author of these films. Consequently, I will carry forward the baton taken up by Bacharach and Tollefsen (2015b) in 'reconsider[ing] the ways in which control over one's own work can be exerted from the grave', by broadening conceptions of posthumous authorship in film from the completion of an established project, to the adherence to a filmmaking approach exhibited by an individual after their death (77). So now, as Walt Disney said, 'the way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing' (The Walt Disney Archives n.d. c).

# CHAPTER ONE: THE BRONZE AGE AND THE DISNEY RENAISSANCE

## *Robin Hood (1973)*

After Walt Disney's passing at the end of 1966, his brother Roy O. Disney remained in his positions as the company's chairman and president, leading a 'management team' collectively labelled the 'Disney troika' (Pallant 2011, 71).<sup>19</sup> Pallant (2011) relates that in the years immediately following Disney's death, this team 'acted merely as custodians' of the company (71), with 'many 'of the successes of the period derived directly or indirectly from projects which Walt had put in train before his death' (citing Bryman 1995, 36).

This was particularly true of the animation division. Under the guidance of its 'defacto . . . leader', Wolfgang Reitherman, the first feature film released by Disney Animation after 1966 was *The Jungle Book* which Walt had been heavily involved in prior to his death (Ghez 2019, 12; "The Bare Necessities: The Making Of The Jungle Book" 2007).<sup>20, 21</sup> Additionally, this was followed by *The Aristocats* in 1970, which had previously been chosen by Walt as the next feature to be produced (Ghez 2019, 13). Although little was known by the staff about what Walt specifically wanted for this film, its creation was guided by the question which pervaded the studio after his death; '*What would Walt do?*' (Ghez 2019, 44; Holliss and Sibley 1988, 93; Clark 2019, 129). However, the film was representative of the issue which plagued the early features of

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<sup>19</sup> Walt had earlier abandoned both of these roles prior to his death.

<sup>20</sup> After Disney's death staff had voted to leave key individuals at the studio in the positions they already occupied (Ghez 2019, 12).

<sup>21</sup> Will Finn, an animator who later worked at the studio from the late 1980s, described it as 'Disney's . . . posthumous Christmas gift to the kids of the world' ("The Bare Necessities" 2007).

the Bronze Age which was that they were ‘predictable and repetitive’ (Bendazzi 2015b, 103; Solomon 1995, 26).

One of the films included in this assessment is the studio’s 1973 release, *Robin Hood*, which was ‘exceptionally’ successful at the box-office but, like *The Aristocats*, had a ‘lukewarm to cold’ critical response (Holliss and Sibley 1988, 95). During its production members of the aforementioned Disney Troika assumed the leadership roles previously held by Roy O. Disney after his death in December 1971, and were joined on the company’s ‘executive committee’ by Ron Miller (Walt’s son in law) and Roy E. Disney (Walt’s nephew)(Pallant 2011, 71).<sup>22</sup>

In Disney’s ‘retelling of the famous legend’ directed by Wolfgang Reitherman, ‘the well-known figures . . . are “performed” by a cast of delightfully caricatured animals’ which the audience is introduced to in the opening credits (Fanning 2017, 73; Reitherman 1973). The story follows Robin Hood (a fox) and one merry man, Little John (a bear), as the protagonist wins the affections of Maid Marian (a vixen) and saves Nottingham from the tyrannical Prince John (a lion) and his sidekick, Sir Hiss (a snake). Although this was the first feature which had not been explicitly predetermined by Walt Disney, a number of critics identified similarities between *Robin Hood* and other Disney films (Holliss and Sibley 1988, 95).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Donn Tatum became the company’s chairman and Card Walker became its president (Pallant 2011, 71).

<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Bendazzi (2015b) notes that ‘the filmmakers at Disney remembered *Robin Hoodlum*’, a short film from another animation studio, United Productions of America, when creating *Robin Hood* (8). Extensive external influences such as these have impacted the entirety of the films from Walt Disney Animation Studios, both during its founder’s life and after his death. However, as a result of the scope of this discussion, these are unable to be looked at here in detail in relation to the films discussed or otherwise.

*Robin Hood* foregrounds its connection to previous features from the studio from the start of the film, beginning with a ‘storybook opening’ the same way that *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Sword in the Stone* and *The Jungle Book* previously had (Kothenschulte 2016b, 95)(Figure 4). In the film’s credits which appear after this opening, in contrast to the mere listing of voice actors under the title ‘with the talents of’ in earlier films, each principal voice actor is attached to the character they play. As this had only occurred in the studio’s films since *The Jungle Book*, it appears the absence of Walt Disney allowed a greater attribution of credit and suggests that the company were distancing themselves from their founder after his death.<sup>24</sup>

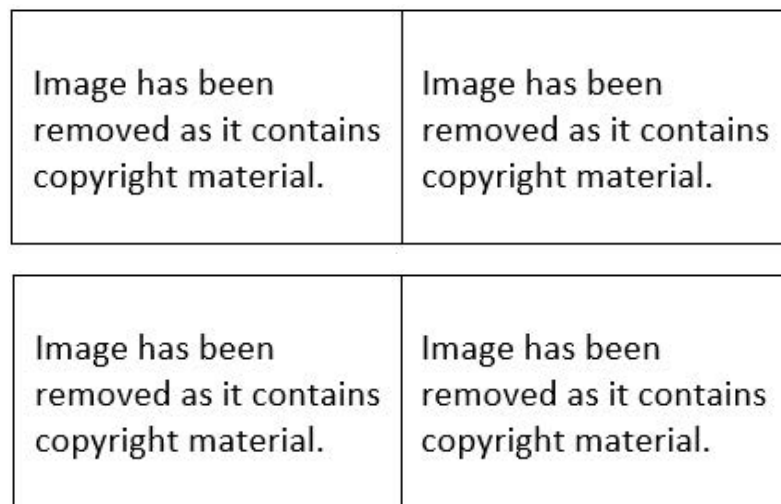


Figure 4 The storybook openings of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand 1937)(above left), *Cinderella* (Jackson, Luske, and Geronimi 1950)(above right), *The Sword in the Stone* (Reitherman 1963)(below left) and *Robin Hood* (Reitherman 1973)(below right).

<sup>24</sup> This greater attribution of credit extended to the film’s poster on which the voice actor for each character was also identified and in a ‘significant departure from Disney tradition’, the director and directing animators of *Robin Hood* also were recognised (Holliss and Sibley 1988, 95). The posters for *The Jungle Book* and *The Aristocats* (see Oh My Disney 2014) also listed each character and their respective voice actors.

This is exacerbated by the replacement of the definitive authorial claim ‘Walt Disney presents’, which had appeared on the title cards of the studio’s features released between 1940 and 1967, with ‘Walt Disney Productions presents’ in later films. However, as a result of sharing his name with the company, Walt Disney remained the name seen before anyone else’s in the studio’s films. Furthermore, in *Robin Hood*, this is foregrounded by ‘Walt Disney’ appearing in a font replicating his signature which had previously appeared in *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Reitherman, Luske, and Geronimi 1961) and *The Jungle Book* (Reitherman 1967)(Figure 5).<sup>25</sup> This mirrors a practice from ‘cinema’s second decade’ which saw some ‘film directors (such as D.W. Griffith) (start) to “sign” their names or initials on their films – primarily on title and intertitle cards – as a way of claiming ownership’ (Benshoff 2015, 64–65). While Disney’s ownership of his studio’s film may have been nullified by his death, the return of this signature in the title cards of *Robin Hood* establishes it as an ideal case to examine the continued authorial influence he had over them.

Image has been removed as it contains copyright material.

*Figure 5 Walt Disney’s signature in the opening titles of Robin Hood (Reitherman 1973).*

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<sup>25</sup> In films before *Robin Hood*, other than *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* and *The Jungle Book*, ‘Walt Disney presents’ had appeared in a typeface appropriate for the film. Although ‘Walt Disney’ appears in a cursive font at the start of *Saludos Amigos* (Roberts, Kinney, and Luske 1943), it does not appear to be the same as the signature in *Robin Hood*.

Having lost its leader, rather than reimagining itself, Disney Animation's path forward was dictated by what those working there thought Walt would have done. Made at the time when this ethos dominated the studio, simply looking at the elements of *Robin Hood* which critics cited as repetitive at a surface level would not provide an adequate picture of Disney's influence on the film. Therefore, after first looking at direct connections between Walt and the film's story, I will use the aspects of its animation which reflected the studio's earlier features to springboard into more obscure ways Disney influenced the film and demonstrate how posthumous authorship can be reconceptualised.

## Story Development

While *Robin Hood* was the first feature which had not been approved by Disney prior to his death, it can be considered one of the previously mentioned works which were indirectly derived from projects he was involved with during his lifetime. A number of scholars propose varying ways of handling collaboration and authorship in works completed after their originator's death. Although analyses focusing on literary examples of this phenomenon appear to be transferable to the story development of *Robin Hood*, applying these to this specific case exposes their rigidity, but also how elements of them can be repurposed to approach a more comprehensive view of posthumous authorship.

Ken Anderson recounts the idea to adapt *Robin Hood* occurred to him on a fishing trip in 1968 when *The Aristocats* was in production and the studio was looking for 'a classic story' where humans could be replaced with animals (Ghez 2019, 46). However, although the decision to animate *Robin Hood* was arrived at without the direct input of Walt, Anderson stated, 'I had always been close enough to him to make



this sort of thing . . . so the feeling [was that Robin Hood] did come from Walt' (Johnson 2017, 308). With Disney clearly at the forefront of the minds of those at the studio, evidence of his posthumous contributions to *Robin Hood* emerges in the inspiration those working on it drew from projects he developed but ultimately abandoned during his lifetime. These included adaptations of *Chanticleer* and the *Roman de Reynard*, which were 'developed separately' and as a film which would 'combine (both) stories' at various points from the late 1930s to the early 1960s (Solomon 1995, 77–87). Animator Ollie Johnston explains 'a lot of the story and character designs from Reynard [were used] in formulating *Robin Hood*' which also featured a fox as the titular character (Cawley Jr. 2010, 246). For example, incorporated into *Robin Hood* were 'Reynard in his many disguises (a blind man, a woman), tricks (stealing rings by kissing the king's hand, outwitting the Wolf), and adversaries (an egotistical and greedy Lion)' (Cawley Jr. 2010, 246).<sup>26</sup> As Solomon (1995) relates, one of the main issues Disney had with the planned adaptation of *Reynard*, was 'the personality of the title character', stating 'our main character is a crook, and there's nothing about him having the 'Robin Hood' angle' (81). With this concern clearly addressed in directly adapting *Robin Hood*, even though after Disney's death the studio had lost their 'ultimate guiding light' who had 'shaped . . . [each story] before [it moved] to production', it is evident those working there continued to be instructed by projects Disney had previously worked on (Ghez 2019, 12).

Consequently, in light of the use of artwork and story elements from Disney's development of *Reynard/Chanticleer* as a 'jumping-off point for . . . [for] *Robin Hood*', the 1973 film could be viewed as a form of completion of these earlier projects

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<sup>26</sup> Also used were 'designs of a fox princess in a wimple . . . and rhinoceros guards in hooded liveries' (Solomon 1995, 82).

(Solomon 1995, 82). As a result of the distinct separation between the two works, this case could be viewed as the furthest extension of an idea which arises in numerous accounts of authorship/collaboration; when a project is “completed” after its original creator’s death there exists two works, the forever incomplete original (Reynard/Chanticleer) and the ‘new derivative artwork’ (*Robin Hood*)(Trogon and Livingston 2014, 231; Hick 2008).

If Trogon and Livingston’s (2014) argument surrounding completion is applied to this case, Disney would not be considered an author of *Robin Hood* because as he had passed away before the commencement of this second project, he was unable to have ‘shared and mutually recognized plans or intentions’ with those working on it, ‘function[ing] not as a collaborator, but a source’ (231).<sup>27</sup> While this could potentially be overcome by recognising some of Disney’s collaborators on *Reynard/Chanticleer*, such as Ken Anderson, later worked on *Robin Hood*, which may qualify as these shared plans/intentions, Hick provides an alternate view which may prove conducive to discussing Disney as an author of *Robin Hood*.

While Hick (2008) similarly proposes in ‘When is a Work of Art Finished?’ that individuals who complete a work contribute to one separate from the original, he revises this in ‘Authorship, Co-Authorship and Multiple Authorship’ (2014). Discussing the case of the novel *Micro*, Hick (2014) advances that the work, which is a ‘unified whole’, was co-authored by Michael Crichton (who wrote its original manuscript) and Richard Preston (who completed the book after Crichton’s death) as both ‘retained his power to select and arrange elements as constitutive of the . . . work’

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<sup>27</sup> Trogon and Livingston (2014) present this argument in discussing ‘Anthony Payne’s putative completion of Elgar’s Symphony No. 3’ (231).

(151, 153). If this reasoning is applied to *Robin Hood*, it appears that Disney can be seen as a co-author of the film as his story ideas and concerns about *Reynard/Chanticleer* were upheld.

Impeding this argument is the absence of an entity such as the John Michael Crichton Trust from *Robin Hood*, which Hick describes was central to the co-authorship of *Micro* as it both gave Preston the ‘power to complete the work’ as well as ensured Crichton’s power was not ‘eradicated’ (151, 153). However, in contrast to Hick’s claims, such an authority is not necessary.<sup>28</sup> In the article, it is determined that the defining characteristic of an author is that they have ‘ultimate responsibility for the form and content of the work’ (151). While character designs, story sketches and story elements from the development of *Reynard/Chanticleer* have been the focus of the discussion thus far, looking at how Walt was ultimately responsible for how these characters, as well as others, were animated in *Robin Hood* will reveal how even though there was no Trust equivalent, his authorial power was still preserved.<sup>29</sup>

## Character Animation

If the notion of an author as someone who is responsible for the form of a work is applied to the characters of *Robin Hood*, Walt Disney can be seen as the author of all of them. While this may seem like a bold claim to make given intuition would suggest this lies with the animators, broadening the notion of what constitutes authorship by investigating the principles which informed *Robin Hood*’s characters can reveal how this is the case.

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<sup>28</sup> Killin (2015) also challenges Hick’s use of the John Michael Crichton Trust in his argument (336).

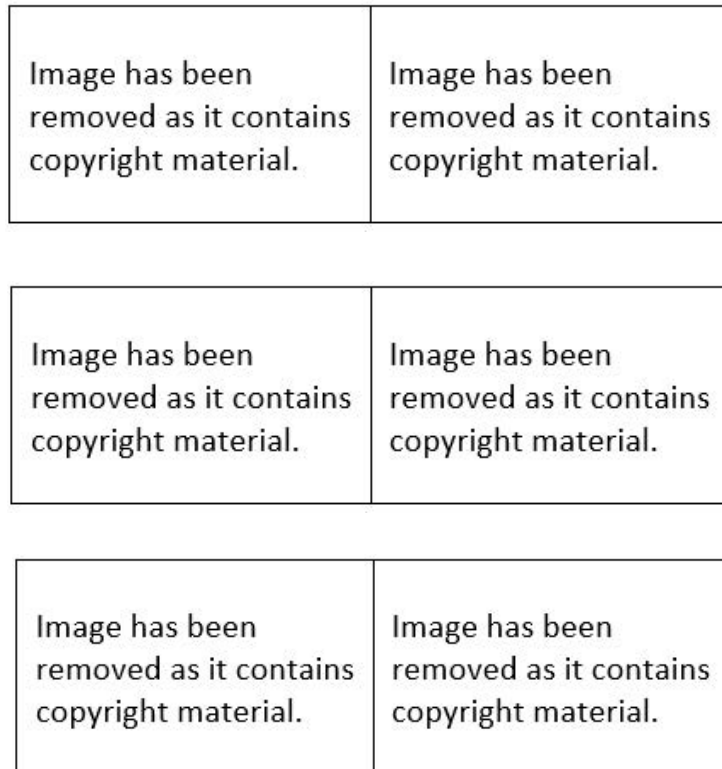
<sup>29</sup> This also allows any issues which may have arisen in the character and story sketches being more closely aligned with their illustrators, which in many instances was Marc Davis, rather than Walt Disney, to be overcome (Solomon 1995, 80–85).

Firstly, the clearest example of a character in the film shaped by Walt Disney is Little John. Although not one of the character designs from the development of *Reynard/Chanticleer*, as reviewers noted at the time of the film's release, Little John was very similar to Baloo from *The Jungle Book*, who was also a bear and also voiced by Phil Harris (Holliss and Sibley 1988, 95). Beyond the similarities in their designs, portions of the actual animation of Baloo were reused in *Robin Hood*, such as in 'the "Phony King of England" song' which has been broken down by fans in YouTube videos (Solomon 2017, 147; A fox 2018)(Figure 6).<sup>30, 31</sup> While Pallant (2011) uses Wolfgang Reitherman's frequent reuse of animation in the films he directed, such as *Robin Hood*, to establish his claims to authorship, examining the creation of Baloo and the specific movements which reappeared in *Robin Hood* can reveal Disney's influence over Little John (11-12).

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<sup>30</sup> Pallant (2011) defines the practice of animation reuse as the '[adaptation] of images, animation cycles, and movement timings . . . from an earlier production for use in a new one' (11 -12).

<sup>31</sup> This scene in the film features multiple instances of "repurposed" animation from *Snow White*, *The Jungle Book*, and *The Aristocats*' (Solomon 2017, 147).



*Figure 6 Recycled animation of Baloo from The Jungle Book (Reitherman 1967)(left) for Little John in Robin Hood (Reitherman 1973)(right).*

Prior to *The Jungle Book*, radio and vaudeville performers who were identifiable to audiences as character actors had provided the voices for Disney characters. However, the studio's 1967 release featured widely recognisable individuals such as Phil Harris, Louis Prima and George Sanders ("The Bare Necessities" 2007). Furthermore, this film represented the first time at Disney that 'characters [were] shaped around' their voice actors, with these well-known performers informing both their 'appearance' and personality ("The Bare Necessities" 2007; Solomon 2016c, 584).<sup>32</sup> With Harris' 'tipsy swinger persona suggest[ing] a model for Baloo', not only was the suggestion to cast him Walt Disney's most 'dramatic' intervention into *The Jungle Book*, but he actively

<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Eric Goldberg highlights there was 'precedent' to Phil Harris' influence on Baloo, stating 'you can certainly see bits of Ed Wynn and Jerry Colonna in the Mad Hatter and March Hare in *Alice in Wonderland*' (Solomon 2016c, 584).

encouraged his artists to incorporate Harris' mannerisms into the film, 'demonstrating how Baloo would move in a studio hallway' to Ollie Johnston who was animating his entrance (Solomon 2016c, 584, 586; "The Bare Necessities" 2007).<sup>33</sup> Portions of the animation from *The Jungle Book* which were reused for Little John in *Robin Hood* include dance movements and a head motion from the song "I Wan'na Be like You". As this would have been influenced by Harris' own style, bearing similarities to Baloo's demeanour in his introductory scene, and Disney promoted this approach, he can be seen as responsible for not only these specific sections of *Robin Hood*, but also the character of Little John who retained elements of Baloo's design and persona, and therefore one of the authors of the film.

The same aspects of Little John which directly connect him to Walt Disney also exist in numerous other characters in *Robin Hood*. For example, Sir Hiss combined a number of these approaches as a character who had similarities to Kaa in *The Jungle Book* (a snake who also had the 'ability to hypnotise') and had a design influenced by his voice, Terry-Thomas, sharing the same 'gap between [their] teeth' (Bailey 1982, 231, 234). However, regardless of whether they were informed by these specific strategies, there exists an even broader approach to animation which tethers the characters in *Robin Hood* to Disney. As one of 'the films of the . . . seventies . . . predicated, almost exclusively, upon the character animator's ability to breathe life into' characters, *Robin Hood* demonstrates how an animation style Disney helped create became the entire driving force behind the studio's features after his death (Finch 2011, 234).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> When his staff questioned Harris' suitability for the role, Disney asserted 'we're gonna make our own Jungle Book. We'll do it our way' ("The Bare Necessities" 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Finch (2011) states the studio's films in the fifties and sixties were also dependent on the skill of the animators (234).

When crafting *The Jungle Book*, Walt Disney's primary mandate was to create character's with strong personalities, with the film's writer Vance Gerry recalling, 'he wanted to get in closer on the characters, the story . . . was of secondary importance to him' ("The Bare Necessities" 2007). In the films following Disney's death, Wolfgang Reitherman continued to adhere to this framework, stating that he aimed, above all, for 'personality (and) strong characterizations' (Solomon 2016c, 586).<sup>35</sup> As *Robin Hood* was one of the films guided by this approach, a fundamental element of creating its strong characters was the way they were brought to life through "personality animation"; 'the idea of a thinking, feeling cartoon character, a character with psychology and emotional range' (Gabler 2007, 172–73).<sup>36</sup>

Gabler (2007) states that 'of all the numerous contributions and innovations that Walt Disney bequeathed to animation, ["personality animation"] may very well have been the single most important' (172) This is echoed by animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1995) who discuss how 'anyone could claim credit' for a scene in the 1934 short *Playful Pluto* which was a key moment in the development of personality animation (99-104, 506).<sup>37</sup> Wells (2002a) uses this short as an example of an instance where 'Disney's 'authorship' is most under question . . . because what was achieved was a direct result of those who actually made it, and not the imposition of editorial control' (506). In contrast, Thomas and Johnston concede 'without Walt . . . [the animator, Norm Ferguson], on his own, would never have conceived of these scenes

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<sup>35</sup> The consequent 'reduct[ion]' of the 'plot . . . to a device linking superbly animated sequences' was suited to the nature of *Robin Hood* as an 'episodic legend' (Solomon 2016c, 586; Lynch 2012, 36–37).

<sup>36</sup> In contrast, in early animations 'figures . . . were . . . simply functional to the gag' (Gabler 2007, 172–73).

<sup>37</sup> The scene involves a piece of flypaper getting stuck to Pluto and the dog trying to remove it (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 99–104).

or this personality. . . Without Walt . . . there would have been very little improvement in the quality of the films' (104, 506). Returning to Hick's discussion of *Micro*, he designates the case to be an example of co-authorship as neither 'Crichton's nor Preston's contributions could be removed leaving a cohesive whole' (153). As Walt can clearly not be separated from the development of personality animation, and consequently, its use in every film thereafter, he is responsible for and an author of the characters in *Robin Hood*.

A key insight into the personality animation of *Robin Hood* is the 'tour de force performances' of Prince John and Sir Hiss created by Ollie Johnston, with their relationship supporting the film in light of its lack of story (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 433). As 'an egotistical and greedy Lion', which was one of the aforementioned aspects of the *Robin Hood* drawn from the development of *Reynard*, Prince John's introduction to the film provides a clear example of how the character was made to appear to think, which Ollie Johnston recalls was what 'Walt always asked for' ('From Walt's Table: A Tribute to Disney's Nine Old Men' 2012). Riding in his carriage with Sir Hiss to Nottingham, Prince John relishes in the 'feeling of power' he proclaims is given to him by his brother, King Richard's, crown (Reitherman 1973). Shown in close-up, the lion asks to be forgiven a 'cruel chuckle' after which his face settles into a spiteful glare. Thomas and Johnston (1995) explain Prince John was a '(schemer) who took time to show his evil thoughts' (467). As can be seen in Figure 7, the maintenance of the same expression on his face into the next shot, where he rubs his paws together maliciously, allows the audience to understand his devious nature.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This was similarly the case with 'the stepmother in *Cinderella* . . . and Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*' (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 467).



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*Figure 7 Prince John's scheming nature is revealed in his introduction in Robin Hood (Reitherman 1973).*

The personality animation evident in this scene with Prince John was typical of all the characters in *Robin Hood*, such as the Sheriff of Nottingham. This demonstrates how in the same way the titular character maintains his allegiance to King Richard in the film even though he is absent for the majority of it, those at the studio remained loyal to Walt Disney's ideas about animation after he had passed away. Another feature from the studio featuring a feline ruler is *The Lion King*, the first film after *Robin Hood* to feature only animals. *Bambi* (Hand 1942) was the only other feature to show solely animals between the studio's first feature and the end of the Renaissance.<sup>39</sup> In contrast

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<sup>39</sup> *The Great Mouse Detective* (Musker, Clements, and Michener 1986), would also seemingly qualify as an entirely animal film but although not viewed completely, humans are partially seen in this film which takes place in London.

to *Robin Hood*, the studio's 1942 and 1994 releases both depicted animals in a more naturalistic way. However, by examining how the same personality animation was able to permeate *The Lion King*, Disney's responsibility can be extended to the animation of a film which does not have the same concrete connections that *Robin Hood* had with *Reynard/Chanticleer*.

## ***The Lion King* (1994)**

In 1984, *Robin Hood* was the studio's first film released on VHS 'under 'The Classics' label' (Pallant 2011, 36). In the same year, the company underwent a change in leadership, having 'stagnate[d], both creatively and as a corporate entity' under the previously noted committee who took over after the death of Roy O. Disney (Pallant 2011, 71). The company was subsequently 're-founded' by the leaders of "Team Disney", Michael Eisner and Frank Wells who 'mirrored the original Walt/Roy team'(Iger 2019, 69; Wasko 2020, 34; Bendazzi 2015b, 104).<sup>40</sup>

This rejuvenation extended to Disney animation where Roy E. Disney was among the key personnel enlisted to help 'save [the studio] 'from possible extinction' (Finch 2011, 242).<sup>41</sup> Under their stewardship, the studio embarked on the next era of Disney filmmaking, the Disney Renaissance which was 'a phase of aesthetic and industrial growth at the Studio' (Pallant 2011, 89).<sup>42</sup> Inspired by the success of the line of VHSs which was launched with *Robin Hood*, the studio tried 'to make new Disney classics

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Eisner fulfilled the roles of chairman and CEO of the Walt Disney Company, and Frank Wells was its president and chief operating officer until his death in 1994 (Smith 2016, 235, 815).

<sup>41</sup> Shortly before this, Roy E. Disney had resigned from the company's board of directors (Smith 2016, 187-188). Other key individuals at this time include Jeffrey Katzenberg, the chairman of Walt Disney Studios, and Peter Schneider, who was hired as vice president of the animation division (Smith 2016, 416, 662).

<sup>42</sup> The 'recovery' of the studio had begun with the final films of the Bronze Age, *The Great Mouse Detective* and *Oliver & Company* (B. Thomas 1991, 117).

to replenish the old ones’, with the era beginning in 1989 with the release of *The Little Mermaid*, the ‘first animated feature based on a classic fairy tale in 3 decades (since *Sleeping Beauty*)’ at Disney (Wasser 2001, 165; Smith 2016, 451).<sup>43</sup>

Through the early films of the Renaissance, animation became ‘the heart and soul once again of the Walt Disney Company’ (Hahn 2010). The financial peak of this era was *The Lion King*, which was released in 1994 and directed by Rob Minkoff and Roger Allers (Pallant 2011, 94). This film was the ‘first . . . animated feature ever to be based on a completely original story’ at the studio (Finch 2011, 279).<sup>44</sup> *The Lion King* follows Simba, a young lion who runs away from his pride with the belief he was responsible for the death of his father, Mufasa, the King of the Pride Lands. Cared for by Timon (a meerkat) and Pumbaa (a warthog), after reaching adulthood, Simba returns home at the behest of childhood friend Nala to challenge his uncle, Scar, who has destroyed the Pride Lands and was the true culprit behind the death of Mufasa.

In the documentary *Waking Sleeping Beauty* (Hahn 2010), Roy E. Disney says of *The Lion King*, ‘it’s allegorically a young person born with a future that’s to be fulfilled’, which is insinuated to be biographical through an overlay of an image of Roy E. Disney with his father, Roy O. Disney.<sup>45</sup> While Roy E. Disney and Disney Animation’s management ‘succeeded in revitalizing the struggling division’ throughout the Disney Renaissance, in direct opposition to the studio’s approach when the company was led

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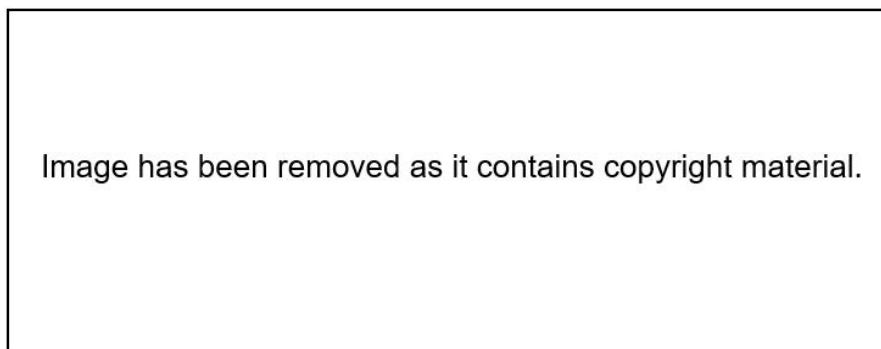
<sup>43</sup> At this time, the studio followed a consistent release schedule ‘similar to one Walt Disney had envisioned during the late 1930s: . . . [producing] a new feature every eighteen months to two years’ (Solomon 2017, 27–29).

<sup>44</sup> Although the studio’s first original story, *The Lion King* was inspired by material as varied as ‘Joseph and Moses of the Old Testament’ and *Hamlet* (Fanning 2017, 88; “Story Origins” 2004).

<sup>45</sup> The documentary also draws ‘biographical’ links between *The Lion King* and the ‘competitive male environment’ of the studio (Hahn 2010).

by his father, this was achieved with the intention of ‘break[ing the] cycle’ of being guided by ‘what Walt would have done’ (Clark 2019, 142; Hahn 2010). However, a strong tension exists between this narrative of the studio trying to reinvent themselves and the continued role Disney occupied in their consciousness.

In addition to the aforementioned goal of the studio to create new classics, its staff also remained inspired by the ‘quality’ of the studio’s early films (Solomon 1995, 206).<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, a new ‘stylized version’ of Walt’s signature continued to grace the Walt Disney Pictures title card which had appeared in the studio’s animated features since *The Black Cauldron* (Berman and Rich 1985) and opened the theatrical trailer for *The Lion King* (Fanning 2013; Disney Plus 2019)(Figure 8). This signature, which has been extensively used by the company in the decades after its debut, has continued to remind the public of the individual years after his death.<sup>47</sup>



*Figure 8 Walt Disney Pictures title card in the original theatrical trailer for The Lion King (Disney Plus 2019).*

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<sup>46</sup> Roy E. Disney explained ‘what I’ve always said about Walt is not that he’s looking over our shoulder but that he’s just ahead of us’ (Solomon 1995, 206).

<sup>47</sup> An article on the site of the Official Disney Fan Club declares, ‘everyone knows the name “Disney,” especially in its form as the logo of The Walt Disney Company’ (Fanning 2013).

As this sustained use of Disney's signature suggests, remnants of his authorship continued to manifest in the studio's films even despite the determination of those working there that they would no longer intentionally try to do what they believed Walt Disney would. The production and contents of *The Lion King* provide insight into how they continued to adhere to his filmmaking approaches, including the same ideas of animation which informed *Robin Hood*. Consequently, the same theorisation of Disney's responsibility for the studio's 1973 release can be extended to *The Lion King*. Overcoming the shortcomings existent in current views on posthumous authorship which are predicated on material being available to be completed, I will paint a more comprehensive picture of Disney's influence on the animation of *The Lion King* by looking at how personality animation was combined with realistic animal movements through the same environment of study which contributed to *Bambi*. I will then further expand the elements of a film which are able to be posthumously impacted by examining the music of *The Lion King*.

## **Character Animation**

Throughout *The Lion King*, movements that contribute to personality animation are exceedingly similar to those in *Robin Hood*, for which Walt Disney was shown to be responsible. The supervising animator of Scar, Andreas Deja, used the villain's paws to convey his thoughts in a similar manner to how Prince John was made to appear to think. For example, Deja discusses the scene before the stampede when Simba questions Scar about the surprise awaiting him and Scar says he cannot tell Simba on account of it being a 'sort of father-son . . . thing' (Deja 2019). Deja outlines how during this line of dialogue, he 'animated his left paw rotating as if Scar was looking for a certain word', and when he finds it ("thing"), 'he flicks his paw, to show a sense of banality and slight disgust' (Deja 2019)(Figure 9).

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*Figure 9 Personality Animation in The Lion King (Allers and Minkoff 1994) – ‘It’s a sort of father-son (above) . . . thing’ (below).*

This particular moment also reveals that in the same way *The Jungle Book* served as an inspiration for *Robin Hood*, it was also a major touchpoint for those working on *The Lion King*. Deja drew upon the staging of scenes where Shere Khan similarly used his paws to gesticulate, replicating the predominant use of medium close-ups to show these for Scar in *The Lion King* in order to maintain believability (Deja 2019)(Figure 10).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Scar’s ‘famous voice’ which was provided by Jeremy Irons was also handled similarly to George Sanders’ in *The Jungle Book*, with Deja ‘arrang[ing]’ Scar’s facial features to resemble Irons’ in the same way Shere Khan had Sanders’ large jaw (Sherman, Deja, and Reitherman 2007).

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*Figure 10 Animator Andreas Deja referred to the framing of this shot of Shere Khan in The Jungle Book (Reitherman 1967) for Scar in The Lion King.*

The limited use of such actions offers a distinct contrast to *Robin Hood* where, as a result of the ‘story parod[ying] human activities’, the characters moved consistently like humans, ‘[un]restricted by the limitations of [their] animal bodies’ (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 331).<sup>49, 50</sup> This aligns more with the ‘principle of “funny animals”’ which informed the studio’s early shorts, such as those featuring Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck (Platthaus 2016, 472). As such, *The Lion King* reflects Disney’s other features such as *Lady and the Tramp* which depicted “‘serious animals” insofar as they were illustrated naturalistically’ (Platthaus 2016, 472). While fitting with this tradition, Finch (2011) identifies that *The Lion King* was the studio’s first feature ‘since Bambi to present naturalistic animals in an environment that closely approximates their true habitat’ (279). This is an unsurprising connection given in one account of the creation of the 1994 film it was originally conceived as ‘Bambi in Africa’ (Chandler 2018, 335).<sup>51</sup> However, although the movements of the characters in *The Lion King* were

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<sup>49</sup> This was later repeated in *Chicken Little* (Dindal 2005) and *Zootopia* (Howard and Moore 2016), for which *Robin Hood* was cited as an inspiration (Nugent 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Ken Anderson explained that the decision to depict the characters in this way was influenced by the ‘enjoy[ment]’ the animators experienced working in this style for the live-action/animation hybrid *Song of the South* (Ghez 2019, 46). While this film also heavily featured a fox, Andreas Deja (2015) identifies that the acting of Robin Hood was more ‘subtle’ than Brer Fox’s in *Song of the South* (175).

<sup>51</sup> In Chandler’s (2018) article outlining the ‘complex creative genesis’ of *The Lion King*, he describes that Charlie Fink, one of the film’s early writers, insists the idea for “‘Bambi in Africa’ came to him as

more heavily predicated on the movement of real animals than those in *Robin Hood*, within these boundaries, their animation still exhibits the same level of personality which Disney sought.

In light of the parallels between *Bambi* and *The Lion King*, the studio's 1942 release offers a good comparison point to assess how the same marriage of personality animation and realistic animal movement evident in the films produced by Walt appeared in the Disney Renaissance (Kaufman 2016, 319). In addition to the development of personality animation, Disney also had a large amount of input into the studio's approach to realism in its films. Pallant (2011) highlights it was Disney's 'insistence on 'verisimilitude . . .' during the production of *Snow White*' that created the blueprint for what he refers to as Disney-Formalism (6).<sup>52</sup> Defining this as the 'aesthetic style forged in' *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*, Pallant discusses at length the idea of Disney-Formalist hyperrealism, which he determines reached a 'peak' in *Bambi* and of which 'the most significant element . . . (is) the lifelike movement . . . of the animation' (35, 41, 49). However, Disney's 'emphasis on "realism" has often been misunderstood' (Kaufman 2016, 226). As further explained by Pallant, the goal of Disney-Formalist hyperrealism was not 'absolute realism' but rather 'believability' (42).

While Pallant explains that the Disney Renaissance signalled a 'return to the (visual) artistic ideologies of the Disney-Formalist period', he leaves the authorial implications

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he worked through Disney's back catalogue', with Fink stating in relation to the final scene of the film, 'we took . . . straight from the older studio classic' (330, 334-335).

<sup>52</sup> Pallant (2011) offers Disney-Formalism as 'an alternative to 'Classic Disney'' and explains 'fundamentally, the Disney-Formalist ideology prioritized artistic sophistication, 'realism' in characters and contexts, and, above all, believability' (35).



of this unexplored (89). However, the same way of thinking about authorship through the wider goal to produce realism can be transferred to *The Lion King*. Animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1995) recount that ‘when Walt asked for realism, he wanted a caricature of realism’, explaining ‘he believed in going to the heart of anything and developing the essence of what he found. If a character was to be sad, make him sadder’ (65). This language is mirrored by Andreas Deja in a character design featurette where he discusses how Scar, who did not move like a human, required him to ‘concentrate much more on the overall body attitude. Is the character sad? Is it suspicious?’ (“Scar” 2004). By using the physicality of a lion to reveal the emotions of his character, it is evident Deja has followed the same strategy as the animators of *Bambi*, who ‘imbu[ed the] the lifelike movements [of the deer] with attitudes that might be instantly understood by human spectators’ (Kaufman 2016, 226).

This is exemplified in a piece of rough animation shown in the same featurette of Scar stalking along a ridge, over which Deja says the characters were animated like ‘real lions who walk with lion weight’ (“Scar” 2004). Appearing in the final film during the stampede scene, even though Scar is moving like a “real lion” unlike Prince John in the previously discussed carriage scene, the same sinister attitude can be perceived (Figure 11). The way his steps are exaggerated, but in a believable way, to impart his intensity as he watches his nefarious plan unfold demonstrates how Disney’s same ideas about realism have been maintained in a film completed by hundreds of individuals who may not have personally known him.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Also like *Bambi* where the animals were given ‘expressive faces’, those in *The Lion King* had ‘real facial expressions that a human has’ (Kaufman 2016, 226; “Scar” 2004). As noted by Thomas and Johnston (1995), animated animals cannot be made too “real” as ‘a real animal cannot act or emote as

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*Figure 11 Scar during the stampede scene in The Lion King (Allers and Minkoff 1994). His sinister attitude can still be perceived in his “real lion” walk.*

Thus far, a new understanding of posthumous authorship has been explored which centres on Disney’s responsibility for the personality animation in *Robin Hood* and *The Lion King*, as well as the approach to realism in the latter. However, looking more deeply at how Disney contributed to the studio’s depiction of realistic animals through his shaping of the organisation as its leader can reveal how ideas surrounding authorship after death can be further broadened.

Ollie Johnston recalls that to be able to animate characters realistically in the style described, ‘Walt Disney always said, “you have to know what the real thing looks

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broadly as animators require’ (332). This was an issue noted in numerous reviews with the 2019 photorealistic remake of *The Lion King* (Mendelson 2019; Acuna 2020).

like” (“Frank & Ollie: Frank Thomas & Ollie Johnston Discuss Character Animation” 2007).<sup>54</sup> Davis (2019) describes ‘Disney was the first animation studio to encourage and support better art education for its staff’ (13), with Hahn and Miller-Zarneke (2015) explaining ‘Walt quite literally built an in-house art school’ for *Snow White* (7).<sup>55</sup> During the production of *Bambi*, the animators frequently visited the zoo and ‘watched specially filmed nature footage’, activities which were both repeated in the preparation for *The Lion King* (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2020a; Hahn, Allers, and Minkoff 2004; “Mufasa” 2004).<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, throughout the creation of *Bambi*, Disney ‘made arrangements for real deer to be kept’ at the studio (Pallant 2011, 50). The repeated use of this approach throughout the studio’s history up to *The Lion King*, where lions and other animals were brought in for animators to study, is noted in the “Disney & Animals” (2004) featurette on *The Lion King* Special Edition DVD released in 2004.<sup>57</sup> Tom Brown (2007) explores this specific edition of *The Lion King*, explaining the intratext of the DVD allows Disney to employ the same promotional ‘strategies’ it used in ‘television shows such as NBC’S *The Wonderful World of Disney*’ (171-172).<sup>58</sup> While Brown is predominantly referencing the strategies used to promote the studio’s products, the same is also true of the studio’s founder, who became ‘Uncle Walt’ on such shows as

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<sup>54</sup> Disney also expressed this sentiment in a memo he sent to Don Graham, who taught classes at the studio, on 23 December 1935. He said, ‘I definitely feel we cannot do the fantastic things based on the real, unless we first know the real’ (Hahn and Miller-Zarneke 2015, 65).

<sup>55</sup> Animator Bill Tytla said of the ‘training and opportunities’ at the studio, ‘I really can’t compliment Walt and the organization enough for handing out the stuff. There is no other fellow who will do it’ (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 135).

<sup>56</sup> The research for *Bambi* went as far as Rico Lebrun leading ‘lessons on animal anatomy’ which involved the dissection of dead fawns which had been found by rangers in a forest, to explore the joint and muscle movement of the animal (Hahn and Miller-Zarneke 2015, 294).

<sup>57</sup> Although this featurette does not show the footage of lions being brought into the studio, this can be seen in the character design featurettes “Mufasa” (2004), “Simba” (2004) and “Scar” (2004).

<sup>58</sup> Brown (2007) discusses navigating the Special Edition DVD of *The Lion King* as ‘circulat[ing] through ‘an enclosed environmental artwork’ akin to the Disney theme park itself’ (179).

*The Wonderful World of Disney* and is heavily featured in “Disney & Animals”, which includes numerous photographs and film clips of him (172).<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Matt Stahl (2005) notes that in ‘*A Trip through the Disney Studio*, a behind-the-scenes promotional short (and ancestor to today’s DVD value-adding “special features”)’ released in 1937, ‘authorship and ownership were firmly established as the province of the studio head’ as a result of its depiction of Disney’s ‘tight control’ over the ‘regimented’ ‘creative labour’ at his studio (94). This image is replicated on *The Lion King* DVD where animators are shown in organised rows sketching live lions, such as in the aforementioned “Scar” (2004) character design featurette (Figure 12). Combining the perspectives of both Stahl and Brown can reveal the authorial implications of the coexistence of the “Disney and Animals” and “Scar” featurettes on *The Lion King* Special Edition DVD. The same depiction of the studio as a highly controlled environment in the “Scar” featurette as in the 1937 promotional short suggests that authorship remains the domain of the studio head. While some of the key individuals at the studio during the production of *The Lion King* are seen in these featurettes, none are explicitly foregrounded. In contrast, Walt Disney is heavily featured and “promoted” in “Disney and Animals” which discusses the studio’s history of studying live animals. As this is what the animators are doing in a regimented manner in “Scar”, when these two featurettes are viewed alongside one another, Walt Disney is established as an authorial influence at the studio, even in the mid-90s.

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<sup>59</sup> In the “Disney & Animals” (2004) featurette, it is noted that Disney ‘inspired his artists to make their drawings of animals . . . more realistic with every film’.

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*Figure 12 Vision of animators in organised rows sketching live lions in the featurettes “Mufasa” (2004)(above), “Simba” (2004)(middle) and “Scar” (2004)(below) on The Lion King Special Edition DVD. Andreas Deja can be seen in the bottom image on the far left.*

## Music

The explicit foregrounding of continuities at Disney Animation by the studio is demonstrated in the music featurettes which are also included on *The Lion King* Special Edition DVD. For example, in one entitled “Music Inspiration” (2004), Roy E. Disney recalls ‘I used to take tours around the studio . . . and I always used to say that these films really started with music as much as they started with the idea of a story’, which is accompanied by visuals of the ‘Silly Song’ from *Snow White*.<sup>60</sup> This connection with the studio’s past is unnecessary in a discussion of music which was very successful in its own right.<sup>61</sup> However, the inclusion of Roy E. Disney’s statement not only reveals how those at the company imagined their own work in relation to the studio’s previous features, but the parallel drawn to *Snow White* specifically presents an avenue to investigate how Walt Disney figured in this.

While the studio had used sound innovatively in its early shorts, in its first feature Walt Disney stated that he wanted to find ‘a new way to use music’, telling the staff to ‘weave it into the story so somebody doesn’t just bust . . . into song’ (Gabler 2007, 254).<sup>62</sup> Consequently, in contrast to other contemporary musicals where ‘songs and choreographies [froze] the action’, those in *Snow White* were ‘fully integrat[ed] . . . into the film’ (Bendazzi 2015a, 102; Gabler 2007, 254). This approach retained its importance to Walt throughout his lifetime, with the Sherman Brothers who worked

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<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the featurette “Full Circle” (2004) concludes with the composer of *The Lion King*’s score, Hans Zimmer, saying, ‘you know that you’re following in a line of people having done fantastic work’. This is played over a montage of the studio’s early features and behind the scenes archival footage, including footage of Walt Disney.

<sup>61</sup> Three songs from *The Lion King* were nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Song (‘Can You Feel the Love Tonight’, ‘Circle of Life’ and ‘Hakuna Matata’), with ‘Can You Feel the Love Tonight’ ultimately winning (“Full Circle” 2004). Hans Zimmer also received the Academy Award for Best Original Score (Smith 2016, 448).

<sup>62</sup> Davis (2019) highlights that although *Steamboat Willie* (1928) was not the first animation to feature sound, it was the first to ‘use fully-synchronised sound that was essential to conveying the film’s narrative’ (12).

on projects with Disney towards the end of his life, such as *The Jungle Book*, recalling that '[Walt] never ever wanted us to . . . just write a song to be sung, he wanted a song to move the story forward' (Arends 2016). For example, returning to the 'Silly Song' in *Snow White*, as Disney wanted, the 'personalities' of each of the dwarfs is further revealed to the audience during the number through their singing styles, and the relationship between the dwarfs and new acquaintance Snow White is deepened (Gabler 2007, 254).<sup>63</sup>

In finding a comparable song in *The Lion King*, the links drawn by those who made the film to the studio's history can again suggest where to look. In the audio commentary accompanying the film's 2004 release, its creators outline that although 'Hakuna Matata' is a real phrase, the song of this name refers back to others with made-up words like 'Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo' (*Cinderella*) and 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious' (*Mary Poppins*) (Hahn, Allers, and Minkoff 2004). Beyond this superficial similarity, 'Hakuna Matata' advances the story in a similar manner to songs such as 'Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo' in *Cinderella* (Jackson, Luske, and Geronimi 1950) in which the titular character goes from being dressed in rags to being ready for a ball. The specific function 'Hakuna Matata' fulfils within the story strongly parallels 'The Silly Song', illuminating the dynamic between and individual character traits of the protagonist's new friends, Timon and Pumbaa, particularly the latter's 'aroma lack[ing] a certain appeal' (Allers and Minkoff 1994). Additionally, throughout 'Hakuna Matata', the story is substantially progressed as by its completion, Simba has assimilated into Timon and Pumbaa's laid back lifestyle, having only met them at the start of the song, and grown from a child into an adult.

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<sup>63</sup> In relation to the singing styles of the Dwarfs, Disney suggested to his staff that 'Bashful could half talk and half sing' (Gabler 2007, 254).

John Musker recognises that the ‘return’ in the studio’s films to the same integration of songs as in ‘*Snow White* and *Pinocchio*’ was instigated by the songwriters of the Renaissance’s first feature, *The Little Mermaid* (“A Diamond In The Rough: The Making of Aladdin” 2004). These were composer Alan Menken and lyricist Howard Ashman, with the former stating ‘our goal certainly was to do “Disney”’ (“A Diamond In The Rough” 2004). While the use of music to advance the plot had been abandoned in the Bronze Age, whose films included a large number of ‘incongruous and/or unnecessary musical numbers’, examining the reappearance of a specific *type* of song during the Renaissance offers particular insight into how the same thing Rafiki tells Simba in *The Lion King* about his deceased father was true of Walt Disney and his staff after his death; ‘he lives in you’ (Solomon 2017, 79; Allers and Minkoff 1994).

In *Snow White*, the ‘Silly Song’ very quickly transitions into another number, ‘Someday My Prince Will Come’. In accordance with Disney’s goal of ‘integrat[ing] story content with song lyrics’, the song involves Snow White singing to the dwarfs about how she hopes she will be able to reunite with a Prince she met earlier, telling them ‘away to his castle we’ll go, to be happy forever I know’ (“Disney’s First Feature: The Making of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” 2017; Hand 1937).<sup>64</sup> Menken recounts that Ashman recognised this as an example of an ‘I want’ song, which he described as the point in a musical ‘at which your essential character, the protagonist, sits down . . . and says this is what I dream of’ (Clements, Musker, and Menken

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<sup>64</sup> Disney was ‘the first to really try’ to integrate story content with song lyrics, even though this credit is usually given to the musical *Oklahoma!* (“Disney’s First Feature” 2017).



2006).<sup>65</sup> In addition to reintroducing the idea that music should ‘[advance] the plot’, the pair also revived this type of song in *The Little Mermaid* (Clements and Musker 1989) through ‘Part of Your World’, where the protagonist sings of her desire to live on land, continuing this pattern in the subsequent films they worked on together, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* (Solomon 2017, 79–80; Clements, Musker, and Menken 2006; “A Diamond In The Rough” 2004).<sup>66</sup>

Although neither Ashman nor Menken contributed to *The Lion King*, its composer, Elton John, and lyricist, Tim Rice, still followed the same model by including an ‘I want’ song in the form of ‘I Just Can’t Wait to be King’.<sup>67, 68</sup> Although not a typical princess version of this number in the same sense as ‘Someday My Prince Will Come’ or ‘Part of Your World’, Simba’s song in *The Lion King* still fulfils the same function by conveying the desires of the protagonist. Throughout the number, Simba’s wish to be free of the strict rules placed on him as the Prince is conveyed throughout lyrics such as ‘no one saying do this . . . no one saying stop that . . . free to run around all day, free to do it all my way’ (Allers and Minkoff 1994). The ‘bold’ visuals of this song inspired by African tribal art distinguishes this scene from not only *The Lion King*’s other musical numbers, but the remainder of the film, concluding with a grand

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<sup>65</sup> In a lecture Howard Ashman presented during the production of *The Little Mermaid*, he identified ‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’ as one of two ‘I want’ songs in *Snow White*, the other being ‘I’m Wishing’ where Snow White first meets the Prince (“Howard’s Lecture” 2014).

<sup>66</sup> Consider, for instance, the difference between ‘Love’ in *Robin Hood*, where Robin Hood and Maid Marian begin and end the scene as an engaged couple, with the only change being the latter is gifted a ring made of flowers, and ‘Can You Feel the Love Tonight’ in *The Lion King*, in which Simba and Nala begin as recently reunited childhood friends and finish in love.

<sup>67</sup> Howard Ashman passed away in 1991, and during the production of *The Lion King*, Alan Menken was working another project (Smith 2016, 44; Hahn 2011b). Tim Rice had previously collaborated with Alan Menken on *Aladdin* after Howard Ashman’s passing (Hahn 2011b).

<sup>68</sup> Bohn (2017) explains *The Lion King* was not first-time songs in a Disney animated feature had been ‘contracted out to a popular artist’, identifying *Lady and the Tramp* as the ‘first of several Disney films where’ this had been done (n.p). An additional example of this provided by Bohn is *Robin Hood*, which had songs written by Roger Miller (n.p). Walt Disney set a type of earlier precedent for this in his hiring of ‘pure songwriters who wrote for the commercial market’ from Tin Pan Alley for *Cinderella* (“From Rags to Riches: The Making of Cinderella” 2012).

finale that evokes the choreographies of Busby Berkeley (“Art: African Influence” 2004; Hahn, Allers, and Minkoff 2004)(Figure 13).

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*Figure 13 Finale of 'I Just Can't Wait to be King' from The Lion King (Allers and Minkoff 1994) which evokes the choreographies of Busby Berkeley.*

In light of the spectacular nature of ‘I Just Can’t Wait to be King’ it is useful to draw upon Paul Wells’ (2002b) redefinition of ‘Disney’ as a metonym which was noted in the literature review. Wells identifies one of the three ‘dominant aspects’ of the Disney ‘production paradigm’ as ‘the use of songs and choreography, drawn from utopian musical tradition, which in their execution prioritise the use of *spectacle as narrative* . . .’ (140-141). Additionally, in Wells’ redefinition of ‘Disney’, the animation process enabling this consistent use of music is described as hierarchical and industrial, which is supported by an outline of how animated films are developed ‘within the quasi-Fordist industrial paradigm created by the Disney organisation’ (144-145).<sup>69</sup> As a result of the studio’s construction of Walt in the previously noted promotional short as

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<sup>69</sup> Stahl (2005) alternatively attributes the incorporation of the principles of ‘mass production’ into animation to ‘J. R. Bray, the “Henry Ford of animation’ (89-90). However, whether the Disney studio developed this paradigm does not impact the argument presented here, as the emphasis is on the use of music within this.

the individual who originally controlled the highly regimented studio, the company creates a basis to reclaim ‘Disney’ as the person within Wells’ framework. Examining Walt Disney’s influence over his studio in films such as *Snow White*, has shown how he was able to shape one of the enduring aspects of its production paradigm.

Therefore, reframing Wells’ definition of ‘Disney’ by considering the role of the individual whose name it shares at his studio opens up a new way of thinking about how Walt has posthumously influenced his studio’s films. Shedding a different light on Menken’s statement that his and Ashman’s goal was to do ‘Disney’, connecting Walt Disney the individual with music that progresses the narratives of the studio’s films allows him to be seen as an authorial entity in the features after his death. Consequently, ideas surrounding what constitutes posthumous authorship can be widened to include the general adherence to a filmmaker’s approach by individuals working after their death. As will be expanded upon in the next chapter, this notion of posthumous authorship is versatile enough to accommodate varying styles and perspectives as while the music in the films of the Renaissance were aurally distinct, with Elton John distinguishing the ‘pop songs’ of *The Lion King* from the ‘Broadway-style’ music of preceding films, they still shared the same indicators of Disney’s influence; they still ‘had to tell a story’ (John 2019, 248).<sup>70</sup>

The stamping of *The Lion King* with Disney’s signature when it was released in The Walt Disney Signature Collection in 2017 has been shown to have its basis in the responsibility he holds for a number of its elements. These include its music, as well

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<sup>70</sup> Elton John’s own personal working style appears suited for the large emphasis placed on narrative within songs in Disney feature films, as he explains that he read the lyrics to a song and tries to match ‘aurally . . . what [he] see[s] visually’, essentially infusing the story into the melody (“Landmark Songwriting” 2004).

as its ‘realistic’ animation which was able to be achieved through the replication of the same culture of study Disney created for *Bambi* where this style was developed.<sup>71</sup> The fact that animators not only studied live animals but the studio’s earlier features which Disney heavily influenced demonstrates his continued presence in the creation of the studio’s films after his death.<sup>72</sup> Although *The Lion King* was not based on the studio’s unfinished material like *Robin Hood*, Walt can be seen as an authorial presence in both of these films which were released decades apart as a result of their use of personality animation which he helped develop. By now turning our attention to the next two Eras of Disney Animated Filmmaking, by recasting what constitutes the control of an author, I will show how the studio remained tethered to Walt Disney even as it moved further away from his death, beginning with a film that had no musical numbers.

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<sup>71</sup> The atmosphere of study Walt Disney created in the studio’s early days was more broadly recaptured in the Renaissance through the research trips which were taken for numerous films including *The Lion King*, *The Rescuers Down Under*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Mulan* (“Production Research Trip” 2004; Baren 2013; Solomon 2017, 57; Coats, Bancroft, and Cook 2013)

<sup>72</sup> James Baxter, who was one of the animators who worked on *The Lion King*, once said ‘anyone that worked on *The Lion King* . . . went to *Jungle Book*’ (“The Lure of The Jungle Book” 2007).

## CHAPTER TWO: THE POST RENAISSANCE ERA AND THE REVIVAL ERA

### *Atlantis: The Lost Empire (2001)*

Giannalberto Bendazzi (2015c) explains ‘after *The Lion King*, the quality of Disney’s feature animation went downhill’ at the end of the Renaissance (12). This decline continued into the next era known as the Post Renaissance, where the films both ‘underperformed at the box office and . . . received generally negative critical reviews’ (Haswell 2019, 117). From this time, Robert Iger (2019), who eventually became the CEO of The Walt Disney Company in 2005, cites ‘*Atlantis*, *Treasure Planet*, *Fantasia 2000*, *Brother Bear*, *Home on the Range*, and *Chicken Little*’ as ‘expensive failures’ within a ten-year period where ‘Animation . . . lost nearly \$400 million’ (59, 131).<sup>73</sup>

While Iger’s management will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, a fascinating aspect of this period of the company’s history is how Walt Disney can be seen at the forefront of its consciousness. In terms of the company more broadly, Koehler (2019) situates the opening of ‘an attraction devoted to the history of Walt’s life, *One Man’s Dream*’ in 2001 as the ‘beginning of a reinvestment by the Walt Disney Company in Walt’s image’ (29). At a deeper level, Walt Disney was also influencing the animation division’s decision making at this time, with *Fantasia 2000* fulfilling his vision for the original *Fantasia* to have ‘new selections regularly

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<sup>73</sup> Ed Catmull, a co-founder of Pixar, attributes this degeneration of the studio to the ‘pressure to create – and quickly!’, or what he calls ‘feed the Beast’, which ‘lessens quality across the board’ (Catmull and Wallace 2014, 130–31).

replacing existing segments’, with Leonard Maltin musing, ‘what could be more natural than reviving an idea of Walt’s?’ (Kurtti 2000).<sup>74</sup>

*Atlantis: The Lost Empire* was released in 2001, the same year as the opening of *One Man’s Dream*. This film was also linked to Walt Disney, as Kirk Wise, who directed the film with Gary Trousdale, describes it was inspired by the live-action ‘widescreen adventure films’ which were a ‘great part of Disney’s tradition in the 50s and 60s’, such as *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Swiss Family Robinson* (Pellerin 2002). As such, the film follows academic Milo Thatch who embarks on a mission to find the lost city of Atlantis, following in the footsteps of his late grandfather. Led by Commander Rourke, the expedition is successful, but unexpectedly, the sunken island is still inhabited by Atlanteans, including princess Kida. Rourke betrays Milo when he attempts to take the Heart of Atlantis, a crystal which is the city’s life force. Ultimately, Milo and the rest of the crew prevail over Rourke, returning the crystal to Atlantis.

Finch (2011) designates *Atlantis* as ‘one of the most disappointing Disney animated releases of any period’ (311). The response to the film and state of the studio seemingly justifies the specific presentation of the Walt Disney Pictures logo at the start of *Atlantis*, where it is bathed in rippling light, placing it underwater (Figure 14).

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<sup>74</sup> Roy E. Disney championed the project, stating Walt’s plans for *Fantasia* ‘always stuck with [him]’ (Kurtti 2000). A short film Walt began with Salvador Dali, *Destino*, was also completed at the behest of Roy E. Disney in 2003 (Finch 2011, 309–11).

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*Figure 14 Walt Disney Pictures Title Card in Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001).*

However, the distinctive signature of Walt Disney retains its prominent place. This seems baseless in a film that differed so greatly from the studio's preceding animated features through its genre, neglect of Disney 'conventions' like an 'animal sidekick' and musical numbers, and visual style based on comic books (Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002; Robertson 2001, 32).<sup>75</sup> Conversely, it will be shown that the aim to make *Atlantis* visually distinct from the studio's other films not only reveals Disney's posthumous influence, but demonstrates how current understandings of authorship which rely on a single visual style being repeated throughout an individual's works are incomplete. I will then apply this more flexible account of authorship to the extensive utilisation of digital technology to create the film, as while it 'looks like a traditional cel animation . . . it has more 3D elements in more shots than any "traditional" animation created at Disney Feature Animation before it' (Robertson 2001, 32).

Koehler (2019) proposes that the previously highlighted reinvestment of the company in Disney's image 'might suggest that after decades of mourning his death and

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<sup>75</sup> The film's directors most succinctly explain their attempt to 'push Disney in a new direction' with *Atlantis* using the layout of Disneyland; they had directed two Fantasyland movies, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and now they wanted to turn left into Adventureland (Pellerin 2002).

attempting to inject the company with new energy, those in charge of running The Walt Disney Company recognized the void Walt's absence created in their actual process of storytelling' (29). *Atlantis* was produced at this key juncture in the studio's history, released the same year Koehler suggests Disney's image 'emerged stronger and more prevalent than ever' (29). The question the studio faced was essentially the same as the one Preston B. Whitmore, the character who finances the expedition to Atlantis in the film, proposes to Milo; 'you can build on the foundation your grandfather left you, or you can go back to your boiler room'. *Atlantis* reveals how not only Milo choose the former, but the studio did as well.

## Production Design

John Pomeroy, the supervising animator of Milo, explicitly speaks about Walt Disney's impact on *Atlantis* in the documentary, *The Making of 'Atlantis: The Lost Empire'* (Pellerin 2002). Pomeroy states, 'it's part of the legacy of our great boss Walt . . . that was the type of thing he set into motion; experimentation, never duplicating what you've done in the past, trying out new things'.<sup>76</sup>

This observation about Disney can be traced directly to his statement, 'I do not like to repeat successes, I like to go on to other things', a perspective he articulated repeatedly throughout his career (Johnson 2017, 286).<sup>77</sup> Specifically in relation to the studio's animated feature films, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1995) recall 'Walt wanted each of our features to have an individual style that would be different from any of the

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<sup>76</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss, Christensen's (2012) idea of corporate authorship could be valuable in illuminating the relationship between continual innovation as a neoliberal corporate strategy, the use of the Disney's signature in branding and authorship.

<sup>77</sup> Walt Disney was also quoted as saying, 'the thing I resent the most is people who want to keep me in well worn grooves' (Kothenschulte 2016a, 283).



others' (511). This can be seen primarily in what Tom Sito explains is commonly referred to as "The Big Five", the studio's first five features which 'don't look anything like one another' (*Snow White, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo and Bambi*)(Colt 2015b).<sup>78</sup> It can also be seen in the 'experimentation' in the studio's wartime "package pictures", such as *The Three Caballeros* and *Melody Time* (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 511) as well as *Make Mine Music* which Robin Allan (2016) discusses in-depth (301, 304).<sup>79</sup>

The way *Atlantis* was differentiated from the studio's other animated features was through the attempt to give it the appearance of 'a moving comic book' (Pellerin 2002). This objective informed every aspect of the film's design, from its backgrounds, to its characters, which can be seen in their 'flatness and angularity' (Pallant 2011, 117; Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002).<sup>80</sup> Rather than comic books generally, the style of *Atlantis* was informed by that of Mike Mignola, who along with three other individuals was hired to serve as a production designer on the film (Pellerin 2002). Most well-known for his creation and work on the *Hellboy* comics, director Kirk Wise explains Mignola's 'bold use of light and dark' and 'very flat, very graphic' style was the major influence on the "posterised" design of the film, with its comic book aesthetic able to be seen in Figure 15, Figure 16 and Figure 17 (Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002).

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<sup>78</sup> Previously the similarities between these films were noted in relation to Pallant's (2011) conception of Disney Formalism. However, as 'fundamentally, the Disney-Formalist ideology prioritized artistic sophistication, 'realism' in characters and contexts, and, above all, believability', this does not preclude that the films can be visually distinct from one another while still adhering to this ideology (35).

<sup>79</sup> Kothenschulte (2016c) states that 'although the [assimilation of diverse pictorial traditions] never ceased, it crystallized in the 1940s into a more homogenous aesthetic'. However, differences can still be seen in the studio's films throughout the 1950s, such as the 'modern design' and 'unique colour combinations' in *Alice in Wonderland*, in contrast to the 'nostalgia' of *Lady and the Tramp* (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 511).

<sup>80</sup> Lisa Keene, *Atlantis*' background supervisor, described the background artists had to 'rediscover how important lighting patterns and shadows are to a scene' for the film in contrast to the extensive 'detail' of previous features (Pallant 2011, 117).

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*Figure 15 Frame from Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001).*

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*Figure 16 Frame from Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001).*

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*Figure 17 Frame from Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001)(the image has been brightened).*

In his review of *Atlantis* in *The New York Times*, Elvis Mitchell (2001) classified Mignola's role as a production designer for the film as a 'clear break with Disney's past'. In contrast to this claim, Mignola's hiring has strong parallels to Walt Disney's similar employment of Eyvind Earle to design *Sleeping Beauty* (Geronimi 1959). Although Walt Disney was primarily absent from the production of *Sleeping Beauty* due to his involvement with other projects, his major intervention into the film shaped its entire aesthetic (Lasseter, Deja, and Maltin 2008). While it was 'not his usual method of operation' Disney hired Earle as 'a designer to oversee the entire film', telling his animators, despite their complaints, that 'this time Eyvind Earle is styling *Sleeping Beauty* and that's the way it's going to be!' (Lasseter, Deja, and Maltin 2008; Solomon 2016d, 507).<sup>81</sup>

In a similar manner to *Atlantis* being a moving comic book, Earle's work 'resonated with [Disney's] vision for a "moving illustration"', demonstrating how both films fit within the studio's history of trying to bring to life various artistic mediums, with 'Walt's first mission' in his features being 'to . . . bring a storybook alive' in *Snow White* (Solomon 2016d, 507; Pellerin 2002; "The Story Room: The Making of Lilo & Stitch" 2004).<sup>82</sup> However, *Sleeping Beauty* differed from previous Disney films through its 'total synthesis between the characters and background' ("Picture Perfect: The Making of Sleeping Beauty" 2008; Solomon 2016d, 507).

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<sup>81</sup> As Disney explained, he had become frustrated with the fact that 'for years and years [he had] been hiring artists like Mary Blair to design the styling of a feature, and by the time the picture is finished, there [was] hardly a trace of the original styling left' (Solomon 2016d, 507). For example, John Canemaker notes how 'Walt kept trying to put "Mary" on the screen, in reference to Mary Blair who created concept art for *Cinderella*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* ("The Art of Mary Blair" 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Walt decided upon the idea of a moving illustration after being shown images by John Hench of the Unicorn Tapestries on display at The Cloisters in New York ("Picture Perfect" 2008).

As a result of the inspiration Earle drew from ‘French manuscripts and tapestries’, both the characters and backgrounds were consequently individually distinguished from those in previous films (Solomon 2016d, 507). The backgrounds of *Sleeping Beauty* ‘flew in the face of [the illusion of reality] Walt had laboured so hard to achieve’ by being ‘painted [entirely] in focus’, while the angular designs of its characters conflicted with the roundness of those in the studio’s early films which were ‘what everyone associated with Walt Disney’, and had been continually ‘refine[d]’ from *Steamboat Willie* up until the preceding feature, *Lady and the Tramp* (Lasseter, Deja, and Maltin 2008).<sup>83</sup> However, this was exactly the point. Leonard Maltin highlights how ‘one thing the animators who have talked about this project say over and over again is that Walt said it’s got to be different’, especially in relation to *Snow White*, which manifested in the design of the film ‘which was just what Walt wanted for the picture’ (Lasseter, Deja, and Maltin 2008; F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 512).<sup>84</sup>

*Sleeping Beauty* clearly fits with the goal of Walt Disney to make his films visually distinct from one another. As a result, it can be seen that this principle was carried from the studio’s first five features to the films released towards the end of his lifetime, through the Disney Renaissance as animator Eric Goldberg attests, and into the early 2000s in *Atlantis* (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2009).<sup>85</sup> The way this was achieved in *Atlantis* by creating a moving comic book, on a superficial level, invites the audience

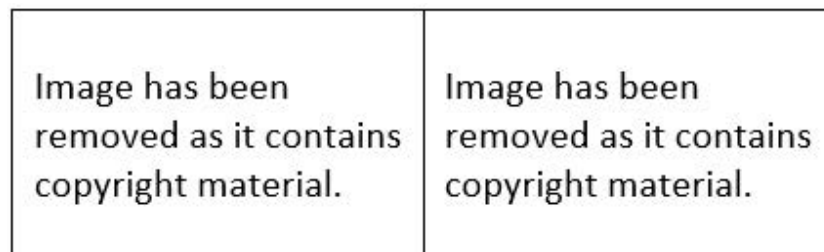
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<sup>83</sup> The design of *Sleeping Beauty* and the other features the studio released in the 1950s have been seen as a response to the prevalent, popular design styles at the time and look of the animations of competing animation studio, United Productions of America (“Picture Perfect” 2008; Solomon 2016d; 2016b) This had also previously been seen at the Disney studio in the short *Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom* (“Picture Perfect” 2008).

<sup>84</sup> Additionally, *Sleeping Beauty* was ‘first full-length animated feature photographed’ in Technorama 70, a ‘super widescreen format’ (Lasseter, Deja, and Maltin 2008).

<sup>85</sup> Eric Goldberg, speaking in 1997, said the design of *Sleeping Beauty* was ‘something that our current generation of animators have taken greatly to heart in trying to make our current films stylistically and graphically different from each other’ (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2009).

to reflect on *Sleeping Beauty* through the flat and angular qualities its characters share, despite the claims those in *Atlantis* present a ‘deviation from standard Disney physiognomy’ (Pallant 2011, 116)(Figure 18). More importantly, at a deeper level, it is a modern reflection of Walt Disney’s ‘unique openness to the diversity of artistic styles’ which was the ‘key to the unique quality of Disney animation’ (Kothenschulte 2016c, 11).



*Figure 18 Angular Character Designs: Maleficent in a frame from Sleeping Beauty (Geronimi 1959)(left) and Milo in a frame from Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001)(right).*

An auteur is defined as a ‘filmmaker whose individual style and complete control over all elements of production give a film its personal and unique stamp’ (Dictionary.com 2020). Over the course of the theory’s existence, the various components of this definition have been thought of in very limited terms. For example, the ‘individual style’ of a filmmaker and the ‘unique stamp’ produced by this in their films have been constructed as factors which are continually ‘recurr[ing]’, as the terminology used by Andrew Sarris (1962) reveals (43). However, examining the design of *Sleeping Beauty*, a film Disney was not the director of but was still able to extensively impact even at a time when he was more concerned with other projects beyond animation, has revealed how this can be advanced. As the ‘unique stamp’ of Disney animation can be

seen as a result of Walt Disney's 'openness to the diversity of artistic styles', a filmmaker's individual style need not be seen as solely comprised of specific visual elements which reoccur, but broader principles they uphold which dictates the appearance of their films. Additionally, as the same principle which informed *Sleeping Beauty* has been shown to have influenced *Atlantis*, released after Disney's death, posthumous authorship can be thought of in a new way by considering how a filmmaker's wider ideas have shaped films they did not begin in their lifetime, an approach which can also be applied to the use of digital technology in the production of *Atlantis*.

## Technology

Mike Mignola's style was also infused into aspects of *Atlantis* beyond its characters and backgrounds. For example, in terms of special effects, the film featured energy zaps which were surrounded by an 'Atlantean crackle' inspired by Mignola's comics (Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002; Pellerin 2002)(Figure 19).<sup>86</sup> What is interesting about the 'Atlantean crackle', is that this, and a myriad of other effects in *Atlantis* were created digitally, as were some characters, vehicle effects and environments (Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002; Pellerin 2002).

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<sup>86</sup> Marlon West, *Atlantis*' artistic supervisor for visual effects, explains that effects in an animated film encapsulate 'everything that moves on the screen except the characters themselves', which includes aspects such as shadows (Pellerin 2002). He further describes that *Atlantis* features a number of effects which would be traditionally understood as special effects within a live-action film such as these energy zaps and explosions (Pellerin 2002).

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*Figure 19 Energy zaps (surrounded by the Atlantean crackle) in the sequence in Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001) where Milo and his companions are attempting to prevent Rourke from escaping with the Heart of Atlantis.*

*Atlantis* was not the first Disney animated film to be made with the assistance of digital technology, rather coming in a long line of them which can all be attributed to Walt Disney. J.P Telotte's (2010) book *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* begins with an epigraph from Richard Schickel stating 'Disney's gift, from the beginning . . . was for the exploitation of technological innovation', which is evidenced in his adoption of new technologies for his animations from the studio's early shorts, including synchronised sound (*Steamboat Willie*) and colour (*Flowers and Trees*)(1, 15-16, 47).<sup>87</sup>

Consequently, Disney's "gift" can be seen at work after his death in the company's use of computers to make its animated films. After Disney was 'one of the first traditional studios to recognise the benefits of the computer' in its live-action films in the 1980s, such as in *The Black Hole* and *Tron*, computer-generated imagery was first employed in its animated features in *The Black Cauldron* in the Bronze Age (Telotte

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<sup>87</sup> These innovations that the studio adopted were among others they developed themselves, such as 'a stereophonic and surround-system that anticipated industry developments in this area by more than two decades' made for the presentation of *Fantasia* (Telotte 2010, 15–16). Beyond animation, the company similarly embraced technology in their other endeavours such as television and theme parks (Telotte 2010, 15–16).

2010, 162; Walt Disney Animation Studios 2020a).<sup>88</sup> Used increasingly in every film thereafter, Don Hahn explicitly equated the ‘tremendous advancements with the use of computer graphics and technology’ in the Renaissance with the animators ‘pick[ing] up’ on the ‘great legacy’ Walt Disney left of ‘technological advancement with every movie’ (Boothe 2002).<sup>89</sup> This was further built upon in *Atlantis* as while the ‘3D elements’ in the features of the Renaissance were ‘largely contained in one sequence’, Kiran Joshi, the digital production head on *Atlantis*, explains the film was the ‘first time [the studio] wanted to make a hybrid movie’ through combining traditional and computer animation (Robertson 2001, 34).<sup>90</sup>

In Bacharach and Tollefsen’s (2015b) discussion of ‘posthumously completed works’, they state ‘the completer acts on behalf of the creator and attempts to fulfill the[ir] desires’, thus allowing the ‘deceased author [to remain the] author’ (81). However, while not in relation to a specific work, Walt Disney’s desires have undoubtedly been met after his death in the continual adoption of new technologies at the studio, such as through the use of computer-generated imagery in films such as *Atlantis*. Therefore, by breaking the ideas of Bacharach and Tollefsen free from their anchoring to works a filmmaker had started before they died, current conceptions of posthumous

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<sup>88</sup> The Walt Disney Animation Studios website details that computer-generated imagery was used to create *The Black Cauldron*’s titular object, bubbles and a boat (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2020a). Interestingly, in “Untangled: The Making of A Fairy Tale” (2011), included with the Blu-ray release of *Tangled*, *The Great Mouse Detective*, which was released after *The Black Cauldron*, is labelled the first of the studio’s animated films to use CGI, with *The Black Cauldron* also not mentioned by Telotte (2010).

<sup>89</sup> Pallant (2011) identifies ‘technological development was a fundamental part of the Renaissance period, but unlike the marketing rhetoric of Disney’s ‘Golden Age’, the centrality of new technology during the period was publicly downplayed’ (102). This does not impact the argument presented here as the focus is the studio’s adoption of the technology, not the way they promoted it.

<sup>90</sup> Joshi elaborates, ‘in Lion King we did the stampede, in Hunchback, we did the crowd, and in Hercules, we did the Hydra’ (Robertson 2001, 34).



authorship can be expanded to account for wider ways a deceased filmmaker may have influenced a film.

In addition to Disney Animation's embrace of computer technology conforming to Walt's wishes for how his studio should operate, the specific ways it was used to complete features like *Atlantis* also fulfilled his desires for aspects of his films' visuals. While it was previously noted *Atlantis* had a number of elements which were created entirely digitally, such as some special effects, the hand-drawn aspects of the film were also touched by computers. A large part of this was the Computer Animation Production System (CAPS), which was first used in the last scene of *The Little Mermaid*, then more extensively in *The Rescuers Down Under* and every subsequent "traditionally" animated feature (Johnson 2017, 352, 357). Developed by 'a then little-known company called Pixar', two of the key features of CAPS align with Disney's visions for his films (Finch 2011, 260).

Firstly, one of CAPS' functions was it allowed hand-drawn characters and special effects to be 'scanned into the computer' and coloured digitally (Robertson 2001, 34). Of interest to this discussion is how CAPS outlined characters, which in the studio's early features had been done by hand on celluloid sheets by women in the Ink and Paint department in a very particular style (Johnson 2017). Ken Anderson described that Walt 'was the one who really pushed us into cel-paint ink lines, where the ink line is the same color as the area it is encompassing' which can be seen in features such as *Pinocchio* (Sharpsteen and Luske 1940)(Barrier 2003, 566).<sup>91</sup> In Figure 20 for

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<sup>91</sup> Additionally in relation to inking, Barrier (2008) quotes Marcellite Garner, who worked in the Ink and Paint department, as saying 'Walt was very particular as to how the inking was done . . . and we had to use [tapered] lines instead of the rather heavy lines used in other studios. He often said that people might not notice all the little details that he required but would miss them if they were left out' (144).

instance, notice how the line surrounding Pinocchio's bowtie is blue, while the line around the button on Jiminy's waistcoat is in a matching red.<sup>92</sup>

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*Figure 20 Still from Pinocchio (Sharpsteen and Luske 1940).*

The same style of colouring characters using CAPS is evident in *Atlantis* in Figure 21, primarily in the lines surrounding Kida's hair, armour and costume which all match the colour of the area they enclose. Therefore, in Don Hahn explaining CAPS could 'complete colour lines which got back to the look of the original inked movies', what he is really saying is that it was able to achieve the style of inking that Walt Disney wanted ("Redefining The Line: The Making Of One Hundred and One Dalmatians" 2012).

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<sup>92</sup> Jiminy Cricket consisted of 'twenty-two different lines [that] were carefully inked in a myriad of colours' (Johnson 2017, 155).

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*Figure 21 Still from Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Trousdale and Wise 2001)(the image has been brightened).*

Secondly, one of the main applications of CAPS was it facilitated the ‘digital assembl[y]’ of the various layers of a film, putting together the ‘2D and 3D elements’ (Hahn 2010; Robertson 2000, 26). The system’s capabilities in creating moving shots using these layers mirrored that of the multiplane camera (Paik 2015, 57; Hahn, Allers, and Minkoff 2004). Developed as part of Walt Disney’s goal to ‘create the illusion of depth’, the multiplane camera achieved this using ‘layers of backgrounds painted on glass’ as ‘it was impossible to get the look Walt wanted with traditional animation cameras’ (Gabler 2007, 257–59; Smith 2016, 528; Hahn and Miller-Zarneke 2015, 412).<sup>93</sup> The results of the multiplane can also be discerned in *Pinocchio*, where it was used to create the complex opening shot of the scene in which the titular character leaves for his first day of school (Pallant 2011, 44–46). Beginning outside of the village at a bell tower, the camera performs a number of successive zooms and pans to travel through the town, amongst animation of doves and townspeople, to reach *Pinocchio*’s home.<sup>94</sup> (Figure 22). The final shot of *Atlantis* illustrates how CAPS was able to emulate the effect of the multiplane, matching the complexity of the *Pinocchio* shot

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<sup>93</sup> For an explanation of how the multiplane camera worked by Walt Disney, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kN-eCBAOw60>.

<sup>94</sup> For an in-depth analysis of how different planes were used to achieve this shot see Pallant (2011, 45–46).

but in reverse; where the one in *Pinocchio* zoomed in, the final shot of *Atlantis* zooms steadily outwards from a long shot of Milo and Kida standing atop a statue to reveal more and more layers of the city, its surrounds and ‘flying fish’ aircraft which were created digitally (Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002)(Figure 22).<sup>95</sup>

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*Figure 22 Multiplane shot in Pinocchio (Sharpsteen and Luske 1940)(left) and final shot of Atlantis (Trousdale and Wise 2001)(right). The direction of the camera movements in Pinocchio have been roughly indicated.*

<sup>95</sup> Gary Trousdale describes the shot in *Atlantis* as ‘perhaps the most complex scene in . . . Disney history’ (Hahn, Wise, and Trousdale 2002).

A modern-day *Pinocchio*, it can be seen in *Atlantis* that a number of Disney's objectives pertaining to the visuals of his animated films were kept alive at the studio by CAPS, with special effects also similarly important to both films.<sup>96</sup> This demonstrates that the approach to authorship being outlined here is both flexible enough to account for filmmaking principles as wide as the embrace of technology or films having visually distinct styles, but also more specific ideas, such as the look of the character's outlines. It also shows that the two are not mutually exclusive, as while *Sleeping Beauty* was used as an example of a film with a unique visual style, it was also the last of the studio's films to have its lines hand-inked in the style described and made use of a version of the multiplane (Johnson 2017, 268; Aragon 2009, 282).

Although it was previously noted that *Atlantis* was the studio's first attempt at a hybrid 2D and 3D film, rather than creating a mix where both forms were able to be differentiated from one another, the 3D elements were made to look hand-drawn (Robertson 2001, 33–34).<sup>97</sup> This intention similarly guided the use of computers in the features prior to *Atlantis* as well as after it which were “traditionally” animated.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, Disney's films offered a distinct counterpoint to the aesthetic of the computer-generated films which were dominating the box office at the time, such as *Shrek* (Sito 2013, 263–65; Holson 2003). However, after the completion of *Home on the Range*, Disney's hand-drawn animation division was shut down as it was believed

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<sup>96</sup> *Pinocchio* is described by studio employee Dave Bossert as the ‘pinnacle of effects animation’ (“No Strings Attached: The Making of Pinocchio” 2009). In a comparable manner, *Atlantis* clean-up artist Marshal Lee Toomey called the 2001 film Marlon West's (the film's artistic supervisor for visual effects) ‘special effects gift to the world’ (Pellerin 2002).

<sup>97</sup> For example, art director David Goetz delineates that software was developed to ‘put a line around the edges of all [of the] vehicles’, as well as a shader to ‘make [the vehicles] look as much like a cel painted object as possible’ (Pellerin 2002).

<sup>98</sup> In relation to computer-generated elements looking traditionally animated, featurettes and audio commentaries for *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Atlantis* and *Home on the Range* all feature someone involved with the film mentioning in some way the audience not being able to tell the difference between the two approaches in the films (“CGI Props” 2001; Pellerin 2002; Dewey, Finn, and Sanford 2005).

they were unable to ‘compete’ with computer-animated films using their “old-fashioned” methods (Finch 2011, 319–20).<sup>99</sup> The studio’s first entirely computer-animated feature was *Chicken Little*, which was promptly followed by the final two films of the Post Renaissance Era, *Meet the Robinsons* and *Bolt* which were in production before a change in leadership at the studio (Catmull and Wallace 2014, 258–59). With the next period of the studio’s filmmaking, the Revival Era, dominated by computer-animated films, its most recent feature, *Frozen II*, offers a window into Disney’s potential relationship to this form which was not around during his lifetime, beyond it being a new technology.

## ***Frozen II (2019)***

*‘If these outsiders can unlock the secrets of our past, perhaps we can save our future’*

– Princess Kida, *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*

After a battle between Roy E. Disney and Michael Eisner, which culminated in ‘a showdown at the 2004 annual shareholders meeting’, Eisner was ultimately replaced as CEO of the company in 2005 by Robert Iger (Finch 2011, 319; Smith 2016, 235, 380). Declaring at his first board meeting as CEO, ‘as Animation goes, so goes the company’, Iger set about reviving the languishing Disney Animation by acquiring Pixar whose films were overshadowing their own (Iger 2019, 131–33). One of the major factors behind this purchase was that the leaders of Pixar, John Lasseter and Ed Catmull, who ‘had both spent [their] lives trying to live up to Walt Disney’s artistic

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<sup>99</sup> Sito (2013) describes that in making this decision, Disney management failed to identify the underlying problems at the studio such as their ‘top-heavy’ management structure or ‘weak’ ideas (264–265).

ideals', would also become the president and chief creative officer of Disney Animation respectively (Catmull and Wallace 2014, 248,255; Iger 2019, 134, 147).<sup>100</sup>

A number of concrete connections to the studio's history appeared under Catmull and Lasseter's leadership, demonstrating how its past still remained a key part of its identity. This included the employment of Burny Mattinson, 'the last person at the studio to have worked there when Walt Disney was alive', to do the storyboards for *Winnie the Pooh*, the second film after *The Princess and the Frog* which was the product of one of the 'biggest decisions' made by the pair, to reintroduce traditional animation at the studio (Finch 2011, 333; Catmull and Wallace 2014, 267).

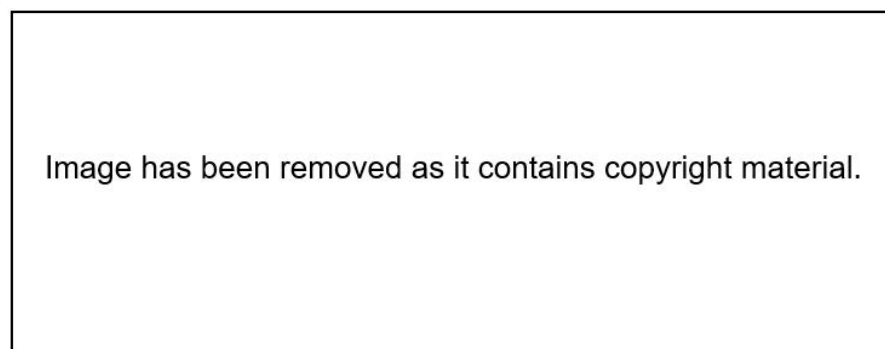
However, it was the production of 3D films such as *Frozen* that led Catmull to diagnose that 'the studio Walt Disney had built had become worthy of him once again' (Catmull and Wallace 2014, 274). Released in 2013, *Frozen*, which was directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, follows princess Anna, and new companions Kristoff, Sven the reindeer and Olaf the snowman, as she tries to save her sister, Queen Elsa, who has frozen the kingdom with her magical ice powers. Becoming the highest-grossing animated film of all time, this feat was only arguably eclipsed by *Frozen II* six years later, after a string of other successful 3D animated films and a change in leadership at Disney Animation, with Lasseter and Catmull replaced by Jennifer Lee and Clark Spencer respectively (Rubin 2020; Chmielewski 2018; D'Alessandro

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<sup>100</sup> As a result, Lasseter was returning to the company he was fired from in the 1980s for pursuing computer animation, which was ironically exactly what 'Walt would have done' (Iwerks 2007; Finch 2011, 348–50). Joining Pixar, he had directed the first-ever completely computer-animated feature film, *Toy Story*, released in 1995 (Iwerks 2007; Finch 2011, 348–50).

2019).<sup>101, 102</sup> Also directed by Buck and Lee, in the studio's first animated musical sequel, the characters from the first *Frozen* venture into the Enchanted Forest inhabited by four elemental spirits who Elsa has accidentally awoken after hearing a mysterious voice (Zee, Anderson-Lopez, and Lopez 2019).<sup>103</sup>

The opening titles of films such as *Frozen II* provide a space for the distinctions between 2D and 3D animation to play out. An additional connection to the studio's past made during Catmull and Lasseter's tenure was the insertion of the separate title card for Walt Disney Animation Studios which was discussed in the introduction. The appearance of pencil lines and a traditionally animated Mickey Mouse, a character that Walt Disney voiced and was known as his 'alter ego', on this title card links Walt Disney to traditional animation for the audience, with his signature confirming this relationship (Gabler 2007, 154)(Figure 23).



*Figure 23 Walt Disney Animation Studios Title Card in Frozen II (Buck and Lee 2019).*

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<sup>101</sup> John Lasseter left both Disney and Pixar in 2019 'after being accused of unwanted physical contact' and Ed Catmull retired in the same year (Chmielewski 2018). Clark Spencer became president of Walt Disney Animation Studios after Andrew Millstein, who had reported to Catmull as the president of Disney Animation since 2014, became the president of Blue Sky Studios when its parent company, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox, was acquired by The Walt Disney Company (D'Alessandro 2019).

<sup>102</sup> The studio's 'entirely computer-generated' 2019 remake of *The Lion King* earned more at the box-office than *Frozen II*, but 'Disney considers it a live-action reboot rather than an animated' film (Rubin 2020).

<sup>103</sup> While there had previously been a number of direct-to-video sequels, these were produced by other divisions of Disney Animation such as DisneyToon Studios (Smith 2016, 213).



This is further strengthened when the Walt Disney Pictures title card shown before this one in *Frozen II* is considered. Previously discussed in relation to *Atlantis*, this title card was redesigned in 2006 to include a ‘CG version’ of a castle, which debuted in the studio’s animated films alongside the new Walt Disney Animation Studios one in *Meet the Robinsons* (The Walt Disney Archives n.d. a).<sup>104</sup> While it originally featured ‘Walt Disney Pictures’ in the same Disney signature stylised font as previous iterations of the logo, in 2011, both ‘Walt’ and ‘Pictures’ were removed for the text on the title card to solely read ‘Disney’ (Figure 24). As ‘Walt’ is absent from this complex, 3D portion of the opening sequence, he is solely situated with the ‘quaint’, traditional animation of the Steamboat Willie Disney Animation title card which bears his name. Consequently, as all of the studio’s features post-2011 which have had only ‘Disney’ on their CG titles cards have been computer-animated, the expectation is created that the film that follows the Steamboat Willie title card will also be divorced from ‘Walt’.

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<sup>104</sup> The CG castle featured in the logo is a ‘hybrid of Disney park castles’ and is topped by a flag featuring ‘the authentic Disney family crest’ (The Walt Disney Archives n.d. a).

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*Figure 24 Walt Disney Pictures Title Cards in Meet the Robinsons (S. Anderson 2007b) and Frozen II (Buck and Lee 2019).*

As a result, it appears the heroine of the *Frozen* franchise's mantra, 'let it go', had also been applied at the studio; the 'it' being Walt Disney. However, rather than letting Walt go as the opening of *Frozen II* suggests, he is still able to be seen in the production of this film. Although it will appear that the *Frozen* films fit within existing ideas of posthumous authorship, after demonstrating how they actually challenge them, I will expand these concepts by considering more innovatively how Walt's influence is evident in the story development and 3D animation of the characters in *Frozen II*.

In 2015, Walt Disney's office was restored by the Walt Disney Archives, about which Robert Iger said 'I thought that this would bring Walt to life a little bit more in more a physical manifestation than he had been in a long time' (Gleim 2020). By looking at

*Frozen II*, it will become evident that even though his physical office presently sits empty, the studio's films still could have reasonably come from his desk.

## Story Development

Although slightly different to the one gracing the title cards of *Frozen II*, a version of Walt Disney's signature also appeared in the opening of the studio's first feature *Snow White*. Jack Zipes (1995) argues it was with this film that Disney 'made his signature into a trademark for the most acceptable type of fairy tale in the twentieth century', declaring the spell Walt Disney cast 'over the fairy tale seems to live on after his death' (21, 34). Writing in 1995, Zipes explicitly mentions a number of the princess films which were dominating the studio at the time and eventually made up half of the films of the Renaissance (40).<sup>105, 106</sup> Following the three princess features Walt Disney produced during his lifetime, *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, these films also later prevailed in the Revival era, which includes features such as *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled* and *Moana* (Tuttle 2019).<sup>107</sup>

While Elsa and Anna have not been included within the official Disney princess franchise at the time of writing, *Frozen* and *Frozen II* still fit within the studio's history of fairy tale adaptations featuring princesses protagonists (Wasko 2020, 86).<sup>108</sup> As previously noted, both of these films had stories 'inspired' by Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* which is identified in their closing credits (Buck and Lee

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<sup>105</sup> The princess films from the Renaissance are *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas* and *Mulan* (Tuttle 2019).

<sup>106</sup> Zipes (1995) states 'there is nothing but the "eternal return of the same" in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*' (40).

<sup>107</sup> All of the features which have been identified as princess films include characters that were on the official list of Disney princesses at the franchise's launch in 2000 or have since been added (Tuttle 2019; Wasko 2020, 86). This list also includes Merida, from the Pixar film *Brave*.

<sup>108</sup> Helen Haswell (2019) described *Frozen* as familiar territory for the studio that has been reimagining traditional stories since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)' (127).

2013; 2019). What it may surprise people to know is Walt Disney had previously tried to adapt *The Snow Queen* during his lifetime, giving it a production number in 1939 (Solomon 2013, 10; “D’Frosted: Disney’s Journey from Hans Christian Andersen to Frozen” 2014).<sup>109</sup> This is foregrounded in “D’Frosted: Disney’s Journey from Hans Christian Andersen to Frozen” (2014), which was released with *Frozen*. Containing archival footage of Disney similarly to the previously discussed *Lion King* featurettes, the use of “D’Frosted” to connect Disney to their most successful film at that point demonstrates how the company still wants the public to think its founder is a large part of its films.<sup>110</sup>

It is valuable here to compare the *Frozens* to other instances of projects Walt Disney began during his lifetime being later finished after his death. One example is *The Little Mermaid*, which was originally developed as an animated portion of a never completed ‘live action/animated biography’ of Hans Christian Andersen which *The Snow Queen* was also to feature in (Solomon 2013, 10).<sup>111</sup> The release of a feature-length version of this story by Disney Animation in 1989 fits comfortably with Monika Kin Gagnon’s (2014) notion of posthumous cinema as ‘unfinished films that [have been] conditionally completed after a filmmaker’s death’ (138), because a number of the same alterations Disney personally made to Andersen’s story were repeated in the 1989 version, without those working on it even knowing it had been previously attempted at the studio (“The Story Behind the Story” 2006).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> It had also been in development at the studio ‘between 2000 and 2002’ (Solomon 2013, 10).

<sup>110</sup> One of the pieces of footage in “D’Frosted” (2004) features Walt Disney amongst his staff saying, ‘how about that one we’ve always wanted to do but never got around to’, which is from a staged meeting for the *Silly Symphonies* short *The Three Little Pigs*.

<sup>111</sup> The live-action aspects of the biography were potentially going to be completed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Solomon 2013, 9–10). An additional animated portion of this film was to be *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, which later became a segment of *Fantasia 2000* (Solomon 2013, 9–10).

<sup>112</sup> For example, both Disney and the filmmakers working on the 1989 film removed the protagonist’s concern for an immortal soul, with one of the directors stating ‘it was as if Walt was looking over our

However, no materials have been found for Walt's version of *The Snow Queen*, meaning it cannot be considered in the same way as *The Little Mermaid* by looking at direct links between Disney's planned adaptation and the eventual film ("D'Frosted" 2014).<sup>113, 114</sup> Leaving nothing to be explicitly 'completed', thinking about Disney as an author of *Frozen II* consequently requires a new way of approaching posthumous authorship.

As noted in the literature review, Disney's connection to his studio's contemporary princess films has been explored most often through biographical information. For instance, Manuel Hernández-Pérez (2016) determines the depiction of 'stereotypical gender roles' is often 'used to represent an ongoing personal style, as if Walt Disney himself would have approved the script of any modern princess film' (305 – 306). In regards to *Frozen*, these connections could be achieved using research such as Streiff and Dundes' (2017) where they assert the film stereotypes its characters, such as through Elsa's 'traditionally feminine need for external validation' (37).<sup>115</sup> However, regardless of whether *Frozen* or *Frozen II* reproduce representations of gender from earlier Disney features, as was discussed in the literature review, this way of looking

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shoulders while we developing this because it seemed like a lot of the things he was thinking we were thinking too' ("The Story Behind the Story" 2006).

<sup>113</sup> This was similarly the case with *Beauty and the Beast* which the studio released in 1991. Although there are no material records of its previous development in the Disney Archives 'Ollie Johnston recalls, "probably before *Cinderella*, Walt asked us to read "Beauty and the Beast" and come up with some ideas for it . . ." (B. Thomas 1991, 144).

<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, a number of similarities were discovered to exist between *Frozen* and an unbuilt ride designed by Marc Davis for Disneyland in the 1970s also based on *The Snow Queen* called *The Enchanted Snow Palace* ("D'Frosted" 2014). These included similarities between the protagonist's cape and braid, and her positioning at the top of steps in her palace ("D'Frosted" 2014).

<sup>115</sup> Their work opposes the wide perception of the film as having broken with the studio's princess past. The juncture that *Frozen* represented was highlighted by those at the studio, with John Lasseter saying he had 'always' referred to the film as 'as the anti-Disney princess movie' (Bednar 2014), as well in reportage on the film, with an article in *The New York Times*, declaring that *Frozen* 'shakes up the hyper-romantic "princess formula" that has stood Disney in good stead for decades and has grown stale' (Holden 2013).

at authorship which necessitates the incorporation of specific ideological perspectives into the studio's films is too prescriptive. Disney's posthumous authorship in relation to story needs to be viewed through a wider lens, such as by looking at how the transformation of *The Snow Queen* into *Frozen II* reflects how Walt approached adapting fairy tales.

The avenue for doing this arises from a statement from Walt Disney himself, explaining in a 1959 interview, 'from years of experience I have learned what could legitimately be added to increase the thrills and delights of a fairy tale without violating the moral and meaning of the original' (Solomon 1995, 62). This suggests that although his films may not have been direct adaptations of literary sources, preserving their message in his animated features was important to Walt Disney. Although both *Frozen* films share very limited elements with Andersen's text, such as a Queen with ice powers, similarly to Disney's description of his approach to adaptation, one main consistency is their core theme (Solomon 2013, 11).<sup>116</sup> Chris Buck explains *Frozen's* central theme of 'love conquers negativity' was extracted from 'the original *Snow Queen*', which Jennifer Lee describes was investigated through the lens of change in the film ('D'Frosted' 2014; Zee and Lee 2019).<sup>117</sup> Additionally, Lee further relates that this theme was preserved in the sequel where it was explored through transformation, revealing how the studio's films continue to follow the approach outlined by Walt (Zee and Lee 2019).

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<sup>116</sup> John Lasseter describes *Frozen* as 'really an original story loosely based on 'The Snow Queen'', which is even more true of the sequel (Solomon 2013, 11).

<sup>117</sup> Magic in nature which is a key aspect of *Frozen II*, was also a theme of *The Snow Queen* (Buck, Lee, and Del Vecchio 2019, 7).

In the same interview where Disney spoke about what could be added to fairy tales in his films ‘without violating the moral and meaning of the original’, he also explicitly mentioned that the studio would ‘define the heroines and heroes more vividly’ (Solomon 1995, 61). Beyond this being achieved in *Frozen II*, Elsa’s vivid definition intersects with the film’s investigation of transformation.<sup>118</sup> While the characters of *The Snow Queen* were defined more thoroughly in *Frozen* in a number of ways, such as by making the two female protagonists sisters ‘with a shared past’, this was further built on in *Frozen II* (Solomon 2013, 11). For the sequel, the filmmakers completed ‘character assessments and personality tests’ on Elsa and Anna which served as ‘the road map’ for where they ‘could end up in the next chapter of their story’ (Buck, Lee, and Del Vecho 2019, 6).

A key scene in Elsa’s journey to becoming the Enchanted Forest’s ‘protector’, a personality type the tests showed she had ‘many of the characteristics of’, is the song ‘Show Yourself’ (Buck, Lee, and Del Vecho 2019, 6). At the climax of the song, overcome with emotion after realising the voice she has been hearing is her mothers, she undergoes an emotional transformation, realising she is the fifth spirit and will ‘step into [her] power’ (Buck and Lee 2019). With this reflecting *The Snow Queen*’s theme of negativity being overcome by love, Elsa’s change is also shown physically through her dress transforming into one featuring crystals representing the other spirits, which, like her similar moment in the first film, has parallels with Cinderella’s transformation into her ballgown in *Cinderella* (Vanity Fair 2019)(Figure 25).<sup>119</sup> This

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<sup>118</sup> This is also the case with the further statement by Disney that the studio ‘add[s] minor characters to help carry the storyline’ (Solomon 1995, 61). In the *Frozen* films this role is performed by Olaf, who mentions transformation explicitly a number of times in the film, saying for example ‘did you know that an Enchanted Forest is a place of transformation?’ (Zee and Lee 2019; Buck and Lee 2019).

<sup>119</sup> John Culhane claims of Cinderella’s transformation scene that ‘Walt Disney said [this] was his favourite piece of animation’ (“From Rags to Riches” 2012).

reoccurrence of the idea of transformation in the studio's films may seemingly suggest an adherence to a formula. However, rather than being blindly repeated, the origin of these themes is the texts the films are based on, with their appearance in the films authorially tied to Disney's broader approach to adaptation.<sup>120</sup>

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*Figure 25 Walt Disney Animation Studios highlight the similarities between the dress transformation scenes in Cinderella (Jackson, Luske, and Geronimi 1950) and Frozen II (Buck and Lee 2019) in an 'animontage' video uploaded to their YouTube video where clips of the scenes are placed next to each other (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2020b).*

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<sup>120</sup> For example, animator Glen Keane recognises 'at the heart of all the classic Disney films is transformation' ("From Rags to Riches" 2012). This theme is evident in the source material of the two films he cites which are *Cinderella* and *Pinocchio*.



The intense deliberation over who the voice calling to Elsa was and ‘Show Yourself’ overall forms a major part of the documentary series *Into the Unknown: The Making of Frozen II* (Harding 2020e) on the streaming platform Disney+. A major part of this were Story Trust meetings. Introduced to the studio by Pixar’s leadership as a version of their Braintrust, Story Trust meetings involve a select group from across the studio gathering to provide feedback on rough versions of a film multiple times throughout its creation (Catmull and Wallace 2014, 258; Harding 2020a).

In light of the intense collaboration this series reveals in the Story Trust meetings and the production of *Frozen II* more broadly, it seems almost counterintuitive to construct Walt Disney as an author in relation to this film. However, Paul Wells (2002a) explains that the animation ‘process, even when at its most collaborative, insists upon the cohesive intervention of an authorial presence’ (73). As a result of the fact that even after all the collaboration involved in creating *Frozen II*, the overall final film still featured a story which contained a number of elements which Walt Disney ensured were in the fairy tale adaptations he produced, he can be seen as that authorial presence. Rather than dictating the exact story, as current understandings of authorship would suggest, Walt Disney has more acted as a guiding hand for the story of *Frozen II*, whether this was known by those working on it or not. Furthermore, the collaboration evident in the film’s production can be connected to Walt Disney which I will now explore through *Frozen II*’s 3D animation.

## Technology

In the documentary “Hatching Chicken Little” (2016) which details the production of the studio’s first entirely computer-generated animated film, animation supervisor Eamonn Butler states, ‘I think if Walt Disney were alive today he’d absolutely embrace this medium’, in reference to 3D animation. While this statement has a basis in Disney’s utilisation of new technologies in his films throughout his lifetime, the computer-generated elements which appeared in *Atlantis* were previously linked to Disney through their reflection of specific animation techniques which he endorsed, such as cel-paint ink lines. In considering 3D animation, which Walt had no contact with, although it would be a straightforward exercise to simply look at how those at the studio working in this medium have attempted to replicate aspects of 2D animation, it is more informative to explore how wider principles Disney espoused throughout his career are embedded within it.<sup>121</sup> Using Gale and Elsa from *Frozen II* to examine the methods specific to 3D animation which are involved in creating characters and then animating them reveals how Walt Disney can be seen in this process, primarily as a result of the extensive collaboration it requires.

In contrast to a ‘Disney formula’ which has been frequently discussed (see Holliday 2019, 145–51), Walt Disney described it in this way; ‘each film, no matter how many people worked on it, has what is called the “Disney Touch.” The secret is teamwork. Each character is arrived at by group effort’ (Solomon 1995, 157). While Disney is referring here to the design of traditionally animated characters, his statement is equally applicable to the construction of computer-generated characters. This process

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<sup>121</sup> For examples of works which look at the influence of 2D animation on 3D animation and how the studio has attempted to integrate 2D animation into their 3D films, see Lasseter (1987), Carter (2013) Haswell (2014) and Keech, Bibb, Whited and Achorn (2017).

requires a modeller, who creates a digital model of the character, and then a character technical director who creates a rig for this model and the controls used by the animator to ‘articulate’ the character’s body and face which can be seen in Figure 26 (Hahn 2011a, 50; Harding 2020b; Zee, Bresee, and Unten 2019).<sup>122</sup>

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*Figure 26 Controls used by animators in the creation of Frozen II (Harding 2020a; 2020c).*

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<sup>122</sup> These digital models have precedent in the physical models, or maquettes, which have been used throughout the company’s history, including the present day, to ‘inspire the acting’ of animators and as ‘reference for mass and form and complicated camera angles’ (“Maquettes” 2003; Nguyen 2020; Pellerin 2002). The use of these ‘really came into its own’ during the production of *Pinocchio* (“No Strings Attached” 2009).

While this general procedure for the creation of characters demonstrates the collaboration involved in 3D animation, the development of Gale, the Wind Spirit, for *Frozen II* provides a clear case study to explore in more depth how the work completed on the film strongly resonates with Disney's own idea of the "Disney Touch". The first step in the realisation of the Gale reveals how the character was clearly 'arrived at by group effort' as Steve Goldberg, the film's visual effects supervisor, recounts this involved tests conducted by a team of 'representatives from all the departments' (Fails 2019). The result was that the studio's technology department created a new software called Swoop, which allowed the animators to 'control the movement and timing of performances along a path' which they were able to draw in VR and interact with in real-time (The Walt Disney Company 2019; Fails 2019).<sup>123</sup>

Not only does Gale bear the hallmarks of the "Disney Touch", but the act of creating Swoop in order for the character to be realised on screen is indicative of another aspect of 3D animation which has connections to Walt Disney; it requires constant innovation. During Walt Disney's lifetime, one of the group of engineers at the studio said, 'the two questions Walt asked most were 'Can you do it?' and 'What can you do here?'' (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 262). In reference to Swoop, the declaration by Gregory Smith, *Frozen II*'s head of characters and technical animation, that they 'always find a way' to achieve 'anything [Visual Development] can dream up, no one wants to be the one to say we can't do that' can almost be imagined as a dialogue with Walt Disney's questions (The Walt Disney Company 2019). With Swoop only a single example of the technological advances made for the creation of *Frozen II*, the continual

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<sup>123</sup> Golberg's assessment that Swoop 'was really easy and intuitive to edit' fulfils Disney's further explanation of the "Disney Touch", that '[if] the character cannot be adapted and worked with by the group, we discard it' (Fails 2019; Solomon 1995, 157).

development of new software at Disney Animation to depict new phenomena in their 3D animated films when existing tools ‘can’t give the desired artistic effect’, repeats the consistent technological developments in the studio’s early features which Walt Disney produced (Julius 2019, 132). With each 3D film building on the developments of the previous and the collaboration involved in their creation only increasing as the films become ‘more complex’, the continued presence of the principles of collaboration and technological advancement Walt Disney fostered at his studio are both ensured by one another through the studios use of 3D animation (Mithaiwala 2019).<sup>124</sup>

Earlier in this chapter, the definition of auteur was expanded in terms of what should be considered a filmmaker’s individual style. In light of this discussion of Gale in *Frozen II*, the same can also be done to the understanding of an auteur’s ‘complete control over all elements of production’. In existing scholarship, this creative control has been overwhelming framed as the authority of a director to make specific choices in their films. Disney clearly controlled his studio in a manner of ways, including making these minute decisions about the contents of its films, but also at a higher level, overseeing the entire studio environment in which he made sure collaboration amongst his staff was encouraged.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, when the idea of control is broadened to all levels of production, Disney can be seen as one of the posthumous authors of *Frozen*

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<sup>124</sup> An example of how *Frozen II* built on previous films is conveyed by its visual effects supervisor Erin Ramos who describes the film’s ‘huge, breaking waves’ which involved ‘large-scale simulations that [took] days to compute’, as a ‘step above’ *Moana*’s ‘gentle’ water (Mithaiwala 2019; Harding 2020d). Previously, *Moana*’s visual effects supervisor, Kyle Odermatt, had said about the waves in *Moana*, which required a host of new developments including a software called Splash, ‘we never shy away from a challenge. Walt Disney was always trying to push the boundaries’ (“The Elements of: Water” 2017).

<sup>125</sup> An example of Disney making these minute decisions can be seen in the extensive input he had into the sequence in *Snow White* where the Huntsman prepares to kill the protagonist (F. Thomas and Johnston 1995, 384–85).

*II* as his views surrounding how his studio should operate have extended after his death, with the creation of 3D characters only one small aspect of the collaboration involved in making a 3D animated film.<sup>126</sup>

This connection of 3D animation to Disney may seem too general, as the principles which have been noted could reasonably be applied to any 3D animated film. However, having explored the process of creating 3D characters, looking at how these are animated can reveal how they further align with Walt's filmmaking approach. Characters like Elsa are brought to life by animators through the manipulation of the 'multitude of body control points' which have been added by the character technical director (Hewitt 2019).<sup>127</sup> Becky Bresee, one of the heads of animation for *Frozen II*, explains that an animator's 'most important job is to make a character think and feel . . . a simple [dart of the eye] can mean something. It's all those subtleties that really bring the characters to life', which resonates with Walt's previously discussed ideas concerning character animation (Hewitt 2019).<sup>128</sup> Bresee's statement is evidenced in the scene after Anna and Elsa discover the remains of their parent's shipwreck. Elsa's subtle eye movements reveal her despair as she searches her sisters face while being reassured that their parent's death was not her fault, and then her growing certainty as she determines her solo path forward (Figure 27).

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<sup>126</sup> Extensive collaboration across departments is required for the creation of a 3D film. For example, in *Frozen II*, the scene where Elsa runs across the North Sea required water simulations to be rerun by the effects department after character animation had been completed to account for Elsa displacing the water (Zee, Bresee, and Unten 2019; Mithaiwala 2019).

<sup>127</sup> Tony Smeed, one of the heads of animation for *Frozen II*, details there can be as many as 'three to four different controls for each individual finger' (Hewitt 2019).

<sup>128</sup> Elsewhere Bresee explains that in order 'to push the emotion into these characters', contrary to popular belief, 3D animators '[touch] almost every frame of the movie' in a similar manner to the frame by frame construction of traditional animation (Zee, Bresee, and Unten 2019).

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*Figure 27 The subtle eye movements of Elsa in Frozen II (Buck and Lee 2019).*

This reveals how the same character animation that Disney championed during his lifetime has been maintained in *Frozen II*, demonstrating how rather than being excluded from the production of 3D animated films, as its opening titles suggest, his guiding beliefs still inform the features produced using this technique. When an auteur's 'control' is viewed more widely, Walt's posthumous authorial influence can also be seen in 3D animations through their reproduction of the "Disney Touch" and their perpetuation of his embrace of new technology as a result of the continual innovation this form of animation requires.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, Disney's affinity for

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<sup>129</sup> As pointed out earlier, the connections which have been drawn here between the collaboration necessitated by 3D animation and that involved in 2D animation may seem too general a way to think about Disney's posthumous authorship, given this collaboration would exist at all animation studios. Additionally, concerning the presence of character animation in *Frozen II*, as a result of the immense impact of Disney Animation and movement of staff across the industry, personality animation and other aspects of filmmaking which have been discussed have been adopted by other studios, both throughout Walt Disney's lifetime and after his death. However, in line with the argument which has been presented throughout this thesis, what differentiates the films produced by other studios and prevents Walt Disney from being seen as one of their authors is that he is not constructed as such in the paratexts of these films, nor is he discussed as readily by those who made the films.

technology was also reflected in films which integrated both 2D and 3D animation, such as *Atlantis*. As this film from 2001 was also guided by Disney's goal to have all his films be visually distinct from one another, in the same way Elsa must discover who is calling to her in *Frozen II*, it is evident that the voice which guided those working at the studio in both the Post Renaissance and Revival Era was Walt Disney's.



# CONCLUSION

From examining four films released by Walt Disney Animation Studio after 1966, it is clear Walt Disney has remained at the forefront of the minds of those who have worked at the company after his death. In a similar manner to Ken Anderson's feeling that *Robin Hood* came from Disney, decades later, the creators of *Atlantis* were trying to live up to his legacy of experimentation. The inspiration Walt continues to serve for the company has also been revealed in the inclusion of his image in supplementary material made for *The Lion King* and the *Frozen* films, on subjects as varied as animation, music and story development.

The way the company suggests Disney has posthumously influenced the studio's animated films by drawing attention to him in these ways and in the paratexts of its films have been used to create different types of authorial connections to him than current views of authorship permit. Firstly, I used Disney's fundamental role in the development of personality animation to demonstrate his responsibility for the animation in *Robin Hood* and *The Lion King*. Disney's ideas regarding what constitutes realism in animation and the importance of study to achieving this were also shown to be evident in the production of *The Lion King*, as was his belief that music should be used to move the story forward.

Furthermore, dominant understandings of authorship rest on the repetition of specific styles and themes. In contrast, I linked Disney to *Atlantis* through his goal to have all of his studio's films look different from one another and to *Frozen II* through its reflection of the studio's method of adapting fairy tales under his leadership. Additionally, I related the use of computers to create both of these films to the embrace

of technology Disney championed throughout his life. Although Disney never knew 3D animation would exist, it produces the same collaboration he encouraged as well as facilitates personality animation, illustrating that consistencies exist between the films across the two chapters.<sup>130</sup> The guiding principles discussed here are not individually unique to Walt Disney, but I have used their repeated appearance in varying combinations in the creations of the studio's films across its history to create a different picture of how Disney has posthumously influenced his studio's films.

Through the establishment of these broader connections between Walt Disney and the animated films created by the studio he founded after his death, a new perspective on posthumous authorship has been proposed. As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, current conceptions of posthumous authorship in cinema focus on films which are completed after their original creator's death. Although *Robin Hood* and *Frozen* had links to projects Walt Disney began during his lifetime, these understandings of authorship were unable to account for these specific cases and more broadly, the films beyond these which did not share the same concrete connections to Disney. By reframing ideas related to posthumous authorship, such as Bacharach and Tollefsen's (2015b), as well as approaches specific to Disney, such as Wells' (2002b) definition of Disney as a metonym, I have formulated a view of posthumous authorship which is reliant on the general adherence to a filmmaker's wider approach beyond the formulaic repetition of select elements. This more comprehensive view allows the reliance on biographical information about Disney to connect him to Disney Animation's films to be overcome and is also able to account for films which had varying financial and

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<sup>130</sup> Further examples of this include the song 'Show Yourself' moving the story forward by revealing Elsa is the fifth spirit and the voice which has been calling to her is her mothers, and the use of CAPS in *The Lion King*, with 3D animation also used in the wildebeest stampede scene (Hahn, Allers, and Minkoff 2004; "Computer Animation" 2004).

critical success. However, more importantly, this framework is able to accommodate films that vary in subject matter, design, style and theme, demonstrating how even though Disney is seen as a posthumous author, those working after his death retain the agency to shape their films.

This could have large implications for film studies, allowing individuals who have had a substantial impact on the production and content of films which were begun after their death, but have thus far been excluded from understandings of posthumous cinema, to be recognised. Does this mean that every time a filmmaker is inspired by a deceased individual that they are a posthumous auteur? No, there must be a sustained and extensive engagement with the working practices of the deceased filmmaker, but this does not mean Walt Disney is the only example.

In order to replicate this study and form of analysis, information is required regarding how the key individual worked during their lifetime and their filmmaking perspectives. This should then be linked to evidence showing how these have continued to inform films completed after their death, including where this is explicitly stated by the individuals who are involved in the films' production. As a result of the broadness of these criteria, this idea of posthumous authorship could also be applied to figures in other creative fields, as well as beyond, as long as evidence exists of a continued engagement with their methods of working after their death. Although not essential, it is useful for a subject for this type of research to occupy a central place in the branding or marketing of the product being studied. Walt Disney and his animation studio represented an ideal case to explore the form of posthumous authorship being proposed

here as the company's overt drawing of connections to their founder created a solid foundation on which to build further links.<sup>131</sup>

In the introduction, a number of individuals who were identified as the 'next Walt Disney' were noted. While not one of those who were mentioned, using Robert Iger as a brief case study can reveal how no one will be able to diminish Disney's posthumous authorial influence. During his tenure as The Walt Disney Company's CEO and chairman of the board, Iger has had a substantial impact on the company, responsible for the acquisitions of Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox, as well as the launch of the streaming service, Disney+, in 2019 (Wasko 2020, 40–45).<sup>132</sup> There are a number of similarities between the activities of Iger and the company's founder. For example, in a comparable manner to the influence of Walt Disney in his studio's animations, Iger designates his 'involvement with story development' across the company's studios as 'probably the most important part of [his] job' (Steele 2019, 108).<sup>133</sup> Consequently, the question is raised as to whether Iger could be seen as an author of the studio's films, and whether years after his death he will be thought of in the same way as Disney.

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<sup>131</sup> While Walt Disney offered an ideal case study through which to explore the new view of posthumous authorship being proposed here, applying this conception to other filmmakers or individuals in other fields may reveal it is not a widely applicable concept.

<sup>132</sup> In 2020, Iger gave up his position as CEO of The Walt Disney Company to become the company's Executive Chairman, with the responsibility of 'direct[ing] the Company's creative endeavors', which bears similarities to Walt Disney's previously discussed role as Executive Producer (The Walt Disney Company 2020b).

<sup>133</sup> In terms of his creative role at the company, *The New York Times* reported when Iger stepped down as CEO, 'in the past, he has been more involved in creative decisions than people might realise. He personally pushed ahead "Black Panther" and "Captain Marvel". He tasted all of the food planned for Shanghai Disneyland, gave feedback on ride-operator costumes and personally chose the spot where a statue of Walt Disney would be placed' (Barnes 2020).

In response to the first question, this may be impeded by the recognition that while Iger has extensively shaped the company, he has been guided in many ways by Walt Disney. For example, in relation to his contributions to story development, he explains, ‘the whole notion of telling stories and setting as the primary goal touching people’s hearts – that’s definitely a lesson I’ve learnt learning as much as I can about Walt’ (Steele 2019, 108).<sup>134</sup> However, most crucially, Iger perhaps answers both questions himself in his episode of the series *One Day at Disney*, which is released on Disney+ (“Bob Iger: CEO” 2019). In the short Iger states ‘Walt Disney’s name is the company’s name. I’m reminded every day that I come to work of the company’s heritage’, which is intercut with footage of Walt Disney. The continual use of Disney’s image reveals how he remains a key aspect of how the studio imagines itself, even on a program created for its newest venture. In contrast, it is unlikely a future performance of Disney on Ice will begin with archival footage of Iger welcoming the audience, as was the case with Walt Disney in *Disney on Ice Celebrates Mickey and Friends* which toured Australia in 2019.<sup>135</sup> Later in the *One Day at Disney* short when Iger speaks about his grandparents taking him to see his first film, *Cinderella*, an image is shown of a theatre with signage that reads ‘Walt Disney’s Cinderella’ (Figure 28). With this surname also now a part of the platform on which this video appears, the continued use of Walt Disney’s name as that of the company and in the branding of its products establishes his authorship of its output in perpetuity.

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<sup>134</sup> Additionally, Iger formulated ‘three clear strategic priorities’, that he states in his biography ‘have guided the company since the moment I was named CEO’ (Iger 2019, 101). One of these was the need ‘to embrace technology to the fullest extent’, about which he says ‘from the earliest Disney years under Walt, technology was always viewed as a powerful storytelling tool; now it was time to double down on our commitment to doing the same thing’ (Iger 2019, 101). Wasko (2020) also identifies that ‘one might argue that none of these strategies was necessarily new for Disney’ (39).

<sup>135</sup> This footage was from the premiere episode of *Disneyland* in 1954. The clip used begins in a close-up of John Hench’s 25th anniversary portrait of Mickey Mouse and zooms out to reveal Walt Disney who says to the audience, ‘Welcome. I guess you all know this little fella here. Mickey and I started out for the first time many, many years ago’.

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*Figure 28 Cinderella signage in Robert Iger's One Day at Disney short ("Bob Iger: CEO" 2019).*

However, this does not mean there is no room for further exploration of The Walt Disney Company. As the company grew from an animation studio, the argument presented here could also be expanded in the same way by examining Disney's posthumous influence in the company's other endeavours. While one avenue of investigation could be the Disney theme parks, where, for instance, Disney's embrace of new technologies can be seen in innovations such as audio-animatronics, the company's animated films should still not be moved on from so swiftly (Telotte 2010, 121–23).<sup>136</sup>

For example, while it has been alluded to at various points throughout this thesis how the ideas of Walt Disney which have been connected to his authorship have manifested in the studio's other animated features, this could be explored further in a work of

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<sup>136</sup> There is also a variety of work in existence on narrative within the Disney theme parks, with Telotte (2010) citing sources such as Anderson (1994) and Fjellman (1992) to discuss the parks as an 'inhabitable text' that replicates a cinematic experience (118 – 120), and Wakso (2020) referencing the same research to discuss how the Classic Disney themes present in the company's films manifest in the parks (188-189).

greater length which examines films beyond the case studies discussed here, such as future releases like the studio's next film, *Raya and the Last Dragon* (The Walt Disney Company 2020a). Additionally, while these cases have provided a window into how Disney's posthumous authorship may function, further research could investigate other aspects of Disney's filmmaking approach which have been preserved in the studio's animations.<sup>137</sup>

Furthermore, since its days as the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio, the company has moved into live-action film and acquired a number of other studios. This expansion is visually represented on the homepage of Disney+, where users are presented with five buttons which each link to the content of a different studio, as can be seen in Figure 29. The platform is a melting pot of authorship, containing films and television series created both before and after the companies shown in these buttons, other than 'Disney', were acquired by The Walt Disney Company. Also included are select works from the library of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox which also carry their own authorial influences. For example, *The Peanuts Movie* has artwork on Disney+ which features 'by Schulz', the Peanuts comic strip creator who passed away in 2000. Extending to the central idea of this thesis and the form of analysis used here to Disney+ to investigate its tangled web of authorship could be a potentially fruitful avenue for future study.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> For example, the casting of Broadway performers for films such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Frozen* parallels Walt Disney's tendency to cast radio actors 'because of their experience creating characters based on sound alone' (Canemaker 2007).

<sup>138</sup> Two questions which immediately emerge are whether Disney becomes a posthumous influence in the films of companies such as Marvel and Star Wars after they are acquired by Disney, or conversely, does the introduction of such companies impact the authorship of the works from divisions which have always been a part of the company, such as Walt Disney Animation Studios.

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*Figure 29 Disney+ homepage on 22 September 2020. The film featured on the page's header, Spies in Disguise, is from Blue Sky Studios which Disney acquired when it purchased 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox.*

The webpage for the Walt Disney Archives challenges visitors to ‘try to think of a company that looks to its past more than The Walt Disney Company’ (The Walt Disney Archives n.d. b). This is evidenced in the company’s continued utilisation of the image and signature of Walt Disney after his death in 1966, and with the company celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2023, it appears these connections will continue into the future. Beyond this, I have shown how Walt Disney Animation Studios looks to its past by adhering to filmmaking practices that Disney shaped during his life to create its features. By presenting a new perspective on posthumous authorship, Disney has been constructed as an author of the films released by the studio he founded after his death, and so, to answer my nephew’s question, that is why Mickey Mouse and Disney’s signature is in *Frozen*.



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