

Partnership in the Japanese and American Imaginary: Gender and the Mediation of Difference in Hayao Miyazaki's and Walt Disney Studio's Animated Movies

Abstract

This paper compares two animated movies made by Hayao Miyazaki, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and two movies made by Disney Studios: *Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Pocahontas* (1995). The argument focuses on the mediating role played by female characters in these movies. They build the bridge between opposite worlds, creating models of partnerships. Miyazaki's movies show the difficulties involved in creating partnership despite difference, whereas Disney's movies idealize marriage as the ultimate model of a partnership that glosses over issues of differential power.

Introduction

Animated movies have become the bedrock of childhood imaginary for many generations of children. Some visually reconstructing older myths and stories, some articulating new myths, they enchant millions of children (and adults) with a magic world. They reenact archetypal themes such as the fight between good and evil, the emergence of the hero, the quest, the encounter with the unknown, etc. This last theme is one of the most recurrent in animated movies, appearing alongside the theme of identity construction. Typically, male identity is predicated upon overcoming the monster (difference), while female identity is predicated on forging a relationship with that which is different. In this paper I will analyze two animated movies by Hayao Miyazaki and two animated movies made at Disney Studios that have female main characters. They all portray a clash between different worlds with the young female characters acting as mediators. I will argue that Miyazaki's movies construct a model of negotiating partnership through mutual loss and renunciation, whereas Disney's animated movies transfer the complicated issue of difference and otherness to the myth of marriage. The myth of marriage subsumes differences of class and race to gender differences, glossing over issues of power, exclusion and abjection. The four works I will analyze are: *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) by Hayao Miyazaki; and *Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Pocahontas* (1995) by Disney Studios.¹ Each of these movies depicts the clash between contrasting worlds, between human civilization and nature as the Other, the colonizer and the Other, with a young female character acting as a mediator allowing two opposing and sometimes deadly rival worlds to communicate and establish a partnership.

Difference, Otherness and the Female as Mediator

Young women and children, with their seemingly fluid and unstable identities, embody the potential for interchange between the same and the different. They are signified in the narratives of animations as mediators between rival worlds that try to annihilate each other. Identity presupposes belonging and boundaries, but the lack of a

¹ Although I use the names "Miyazaki" and "Disney," Miyazaki refers to the creator himself, whereas "Disney" in this case is metonymic for the studio which bears the creator's mark. Hayao Miyazaki is the cofounder of the Japanese anime film company Studio Ghibli, but I refer to films specifically directed by Miyazaki.

fixed identity allows girls—and children in general—to cross boundaries back and forth, enabling a great potential for change.

The female figures in the movies I will analyze provide potential for change, redemption and growth through their ability to mediate between worlds. As a Japanese scholar has remarked, “because *shojo* (young females) are not adults, they can perceive things that those in control of society cannot.”² Their ability to connect to the Other is a sign of inner strength and mental health. This ability comes from a lack of identity boundaries, from a sensibility that perceives the supernatural or the unconscious.³ Their identity is fluid, allowing for the incorporation of the Other. This possibility of redemption through young female figures is more extensively explored by Miyazaki, who does not see heterosexual love and marriage as the answer to the problem of violence and rivalry between different worlds.

Otherness is an idea that informs philosophy, psychoanalysis, feminist and postcolonial theory. It refers to that which is different from oneself, different from a hegemonic system that has established itself as the norm. Otherness is created through a process of exclusion, opposition and hierarchization as the excluded, opposed, lower part.⁴ In a patriarchal system, woman is the Other; in a technological system, nature is the Other; and in an imperialist system, the colonized nation becomes the Other. Jacques Lacan has identified the process of Otherness through the mirror stage, in which the child realizes that s/he is different from the rest of the world and has the illusion of being self-sufficient.⁵ What he defined was the formation of male identity predicated on the rejection of the mother and thus the rejection of feminine traits. Simone de Beauvoir has argued in *The Second Sex* (1989) that the female has been turned into the Other with relation to man, seen as either abjected and despised or worshipped. In her investigation of woman's situation, Beauvoir demonstrated that woman is consistently defined as the Other by man, who takes on the role of the Self. The perception of the Other is connected to that which is rejected in the self. When the role of self is taken by the Western white male, a power relationship is created between man and woman, white race and other races, between the West and the “Oriental.”⁶ Like feminist theories, postcolonial theories have pointed out the process of Otherness as occurring through the establishment of Western values as the norm and non-Western values as deviation from the norm.⁷

Why is the young female character's identity fluid, and how can she overcome Otherness? Nancy Chodorow has shown in *Reproduction of Mothering* (1999) that the

² Quoted in Ann Sheriff, “Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing” in *Oe and Beyond*, ed. by Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 282.

³ It is important to note that young males also act as mediators in Miyazaki's films; Ashitaka and Ashbel are the only ones who understand the need for a reconciliation of opposite worlds.

⁴ Rosemarie Putnam Tong. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, (Colorado Westview Press, 1998)

⁵ <http://faculty.wiu.edu/D-Banash/eng299/LacanMirrorPhase.pdf>

⁶ Edward Said has demonstrated brilliantly how Western culture has created the Other, the incomprehensible Oriental ranging between attractive exoticism and threatening difference.

⁷ Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, eds. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. (London: Routledge, 1994)

nuclear family structure with the woman's almost exclusive mothering has an important role in creating gender difference. However, she poses the gender difference in contrast to Freud: "The main importance of Oedipus complex is not in the development of gender identity and socially heterosexual identity but in 'relational potential.' Mothers tend to experience girls as continuous with themselves, and they experience boys as male opposites. Boys are engaged in more emphatic individuation and more defensive firming of experienced ego boundaries. Girls have a stronger basis for experiencing another person's feelings or needs as one's own."⁸ According to Chodorow, girls' identification with sameness, with the mother, gives them more relational potential than boys, who identify themselves as males through difference from the mother. This creates women's potential for mothering once they enter the nuclear family, and this structure reproduces itself as long as women are the primary caretakers. The nuclear family with the mother having the primary responsibility for mothering infants is a characteristic of both postwar Japan and postwar U.S., although the gender roles are more clearly defined in Japan.⁹

Female Characters as Bridges between Opposite Worlds

In Miyazaki's two works, the Other for humans is nature and its living creatures, which are further grouped into various factions with opposing interests. On the other hand, for nature, humans are the dangerous Other that must be kept at distance. The process of Otherness is highly diversified, and through the mediation of female characters, spectators are allowed to see the good and the evil in each side. The sense of loss pervading Miyazaki's works decentralizes the privileged point of view of a certain group, representing evil as the failure to understand and communicate with the Other, the failure of generosity and acceptance of difference. Although they likewise introduce a dual point of view of Otherness, Disney's two works maintain the privileged position of power held by the human male in *Little Mermaid* and the white male as the "civilizing" colonizer in *Pocahontas*. In Miyazaki's films, the rival worlds are portrayed without idealization, although there is an underlying sense of loss and nostalgia for a disappearing nature. In Disney's two works, the world of the colonizer in *Pocahontas* and the human world in *Little Mermaid* are idealized through the female characters' desire for them.

Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* and *Nausicaa* portray highly heterogeneous worlds: one situated in ancient Japan and one in a post-apocalyptic time. He turns the relationship with the Other into a metaphysical meditation on humankind's relationship with the numinous of nature, whereas Disney's *Pocahontas* and *Little Mermaid* build an imaginary myth of the love that conquers all, which replaces a history of colonization and human exploitation of nature. Miyazaki's *shojo* (young female) characters offer blueprints for an identity that seems to combine the nurturing aspects of the feminine and the strength associated with the masculine. This identity blurs not only gender boundaries but also the boundaries between the human world and nature. Princess Mononoke (San), half-wolf, half-human, wants to help the wolf clan get rid of the

⁸ Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 165

⁹ The reason for gender difference is by no means restricted to the family structure, since both American and Japanese society have institutional norms that create gender difference.

humans, but she listens to Ashitaka and finally helps him in the endeavor to stop the fighting and restore the head of the Spirit of the forest (*shishigami*). Nausicaa understands that nature, poisoned by mankind, is actually healing the world. She understands the needs of other living creatures and tries to save a baby Ohmu from the hostile Tolmekians. She even offers herself up in a gesture of messianic self-sacrifice to be trampled by the enraged stampede of giant Ohmus, in order to stop the anger which destroys both humans and nature. In a similar gesture, Pocahontas offers herself to be killed instead of John Smith, and she tries to convince the settlers and Indians to stop fighting. In *Little Mermaid*, Ariel, her body a clear portrait of the intermediary between the human and the animal realms, saves the prince from the fury of the sea. She pleads for her love, trying to counteract the wrath of her father, who believes that the two worlds should stay separate. However, Pocahontas' and Ariel's transgression into the different world of the Other is turned into the quest for a different man.

The young female characters in the four works can relate to the Other because their identity is defined through relationships with the world surrounding them. They come into contact with an unknown and distinctive world, but instead of rejecting it, they try to bridge the gap between rival factions. All four female characters in these films have an animal companion: San has Moro, the wolf, Nausicaa has Teto, Pocahontas has Meeko and Flit, while Ariel has Flounder and Sebastian. The fact that they do not succeed alone in their adventures but are helped by an animal friend suggests the relational nature of the female identity. Moreover, they show openness and curiosity for the Other, the desire to know that which is different. Their curiosity tempers the mutual animosity that dissimilar worlds display.

In Miyazaki's works the young female's fluid identity is used as a potential for change, revitalization and peace between rival sides—as a signifier of reconciliation—whereas in Disney's works, it is used to romanticize colonization and to create the myth of a heterosexual love that conquers all. Steven Watts argues that Disney promotes American values through its focus on the domestic issues at the core of society's ideals and anxieties.¹⁰ All Disney's animated features portraying young female characters show marriage as the ultimate happy ending, thus acting as an ideological proponent of the nuclear family. Young female characters, starting with Snow White and continuing with Cinderella, Little Mermaid, Pocahontas, and Mulan, all have marriage as the key point of reconciling difference.¹¹ The movies typically conclude with a happy marriage and the female entering the world of the male. Difference is solved through the entrance of the female into a patriarchal system.

Riane Eisler has identified two major ways in which cultures deal with difference: the partnership model and the domination model. The former relies on negotiation, mutuality and coexistence whereas the latter relies on power, with the hegemonic system dominating or destroying that which is different.¹² In her words, "the partnership model supports mutually respectful and caring relations...Because there is no need to maintain rigid rankings of control, there is also no built-in need for abuse or

¹⁰ Steven Watts. *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (N.Y: Houghton Mifflin, 1997)

¹¹ More than that, Pocahontas and Ariel are highly sexualized, being drawn as models of male desire, whereas Princess Mononoke and Nausicaa suggest independence and self-sufficiency both in the way they act and in their rather androgynous look.

¹² Riane Eisler. *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995)

violence...Conflict is an opportunity to learn and be creative, and power is exercised in ways that empower rather than disempower others.”¹³ Both Miyazaki’s and Disney’s movies show the difficulties of partnership, but I will argue that Disney’s movies presents marriage as the ultimate happy ending model of partnership, whereas Miyazaki’s movies present partnership without idealization. In the following pages I will consider each work in particular, questioning the construction of the Other and the role played by the female mediator between different worlds. Will her mediation create a partnership model or a domination model?

Partnership as Acceptance of Difference through Mutual Loss

Princess Mononoke (1997) is the 6th highest-grossing Japanese film and has become iconic of Japanese animation in the West. Susan Napier accounts for its popularity in terms of its deconstruction of major myths of the Japanese past and of Japanese identity itself. The film offers a counter-narrative to a homogeneous Japanese identity living in harmony with nature, constructing a discourse of “cultural dissonance, spiritual loss and environmental apocalypse.”¹⁴ The Muromachi period presented in the film is generally considered to be an apex of Japanese culture, a period of peaceful flourishing of arts and crafts. However, *Princess Mononoke* takes place in a mythical space removed from the capital, a space occupied by the marginal groups of history. These include a group of women prostitutes and lepers, the non-Yamato group, and nature, represented by *kami* (spirits of nature in the Shinto belief system). The fortress of Tataru, ruled by lady Eboshi, manufactures weapons to conquer nature and the forest spirits that try to protect their territory.

The movie starts with the invasion of the human world by a wild boar possessed by the demon of anger. He attacks a young man, Ashitaka, who is left with a permanent magical scar on his arms that acts against his will, attacking others. He leaves on a quest to find the source of the demon of anger and to heal his wound. He reaches an ancient forest inhabited by animal spirits ruled by the almighty god of the forest. A group of human outcasts has established a base in this forest, and they make weapons in order to protect themselves from the forest animals. The emperor commissions them to kill the almighty forest god in order to get his power. Ashitaka arrives at the fortress during a tumultuous time when humans and animals start an open conflict caused by animal spirits being hurt by the iron from human weapons and becoming possessed by the demon of anger.

The battles in the film are between the spirits of the forest and humans. Nature is portrayed as a victim of human greed but also as a threatening Other that can both take and give life. It is beautiful and sacred but also vengeful and brutal. The *shishigami*, the almighty god of the ancient forest, has a deer-like appearance, but he turns into a supernatural frightening creature, into *detarabochi*, when his head is taken away. The humans are also victims since they need to take the space from nature in order to forge a place for themselves. However, the animals don’t understand their reasons; they are the feared Other whom they are trying to chase down and kill. Although the film inclines towards a nostalgic representation of nature, it refuses to sentimentalize it, both by avoiding the presentation of industrialization as fundamentally evil and by showing nature’s brutal side.

¹³ Ibid. chapter 1 Kindle ed.

¹⁴ Susan Napier, J. *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*. (N.Y: Palgrave, 2000)

San, the female character, is the ally of the fearsome spirits of nature. She has been raised by a wolf, and in the beginning of the movie she allies with the animals and tries to destroy her human enemies. She embodies the duality of human and animal, belonging to both sides and mediating between worlds. Although initially bent on destroying humans, she saves Ashitaka when he is hurt and helps him to return the *shishigami*'s head, though she believes it is too late. The film ends with the apparent restoration of nature after the *shishigami*'s death has destroyed everything. In Napier's view, San's appearance undermines many stereotypes from conventional Japanese culture: "Although she has moments of softness, as when she takes care of the injured Ashitaka in the forest, the viewer is most likely to remember her first appearance in the film, clad in a costume of fur and bone, her face bloody from sucking out blood from a wound in Moro's side."¹⁵ Her ability to bond with the nonhuman is similar to Nausicaa's, but, unlike Nausicaa, she herself is the Other.

In her interesting comparison of *Princess Mononoke* and *Blade Runner* (1982), Junko Saeki asks a fundamental question: "How do we accept the existence of the Other or reach a mutual understanding in a society in which different worlds cannot fuse together but will eternally maintain their separate territories?"¹⁶ She argues that Western films operate on dichotomies between self/other, West/East, man/woman, where the self=West=Man=human verifies its superiority through the establishment of difference. Protestant America solves these dichotomies through heterosexual love that conquers all. Miyazaki's film, however, allows the existence of an independent Other, posing the problem of living both together (through the love between San and Ashitaka), and separately: San with the nature that she loves, and Ashitaka with the humans he is comfortable with. Instead of closing the narrative through marriage, as in Disney's works, *Princess Mononoke* opens the dialogue with the Other, showing the importance not of a love that conquers all, but of the acceptance of difference through mutual loss.

In her comparison of *Princess Mononoke* with Disney's *Tarzan*, Susan Napier argues that the "vision of a Garden of Eden (in *Tarzan*), in which all species live together in contentment, ...ignores the steady march of history, technology, and progress that ultimately destroy any hope of such an Eden in the contemporary world." In contrast, *Princess Mononoke*'s world is one in which "nature, emblemized by the inhuman *shishigami*, remains beautiful but threateningly and insistently Other."¹⁷ San and Ashitaka momentarily stop the fighting and the hate, but they understand that the two worlds will continue to clash. They have both tried without success to convince people not to kill the animal spirits and convince animals not to kill humans. Their intervention created a momentary peace by stealing the head of the forest god back from people and returning it to its body, which had started to destroy everything in its wrathful search for its head. Partnership, in this case, means establishing boundaries between humans and animals and accepting that encroaching on the space of the Other entails loss and suffering. Both Ashitaka and San suffered deadly wounds that could only be healed when the two worlds stopped experiencing blinding anger.

Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind (1984) has an even more intricate plot depicting a post-apocalyptic world in which the poisonous, threatening nature

¹⁵ Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 183

¹⁶ Junko Saeki "Nijuseiki no Onnagami, saibogu-goddesu" in *Hayao Miyazaki (Filmmakers 6)*, ed. Yoro Takeshi (Tokyo: Kinema Junposha, 1999), 143

¹⁷ Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 191

represents the Other, while the human world is also portrayed as diverse and following different interests. Nausicaa lives with her father in the Valley of the Wind, and she ventures without fear into the poisonous forests. The poisons used in wars have destroyed nature, turning it into a deadly presence, and the film begins with the story of the technology that destroyed the world. The villagers' peaceful way of life is interrupted by the crash of a Tolmekian battleship and by the ensuing Tolmekian invasion. The Tolmekians represent humans who only think of their own benefit and who turn everything different into an Other that must be either destroyed or subjugated. They kill Nausicaa's father because he refuses to join them in the effort of destroying the poisonous nature using the same giant warrior that had caused the end of the world. The other group are the Pejiteians who want revenge both against the Tolmekians who attacked them and against the poisonous nature that invaded their land. The Tolmekians and Pejiteians want to obtain power by taking possession of the God Warrior, and they use whatever means necessary to achieve this. Nausicaa and her villagers alone understand that the will to power and the rejection of the Other will only bring doom on humankind.

Nausicaa's brave spirit and her tender attention to the creatures of the forest is shown long before the beginning of the battle: she can calm down enraged Ohmus with her whistle, and she can communicate with them. She does not flinch when her companion Teto bites her, and she does not get mad since she understands that he did that out of fear. In a flashback to her childhood, Nausicaa remembers how she tried to protect a baby Ohmu from her father and his warriors. She feels that fear and anger can lead both the humans and the animals to be cruel and destructive. All warring sides are animated by anger and the desire for revenge, but in spite of the pain caused by the death of her father, Nausicaa overcomes her own desire for revenge. The only time she flies into murderous rage and kills a warrior is when she discovers her father's murder, but she acknowledges her own contrition: "I'm even frightened at myself. I lost my temper and killed. I don't want to kill anyone else." Her loss connects her with the pain of loss in general, and she understands the losses suffered by humans and by creatures of nature.

In an interview with *Young* magazine, Miyazaki explained his choice of a female character: "Nausicaa is not a protagonist who defeats an opponent, but a protagonist who understands and accepts. She is someone who lives in different dimension. That kind of character should be female rather than male."¹⁸ She can give herself to the needs of the others, and her brave, fighting spirit serves to bring peace even at the price of her life. Susan Napier mentions that Miyazaki's vision incorporates not only "what is lost" but also "what could be", and I would argue that Nausicaa's personality is an example of what could be: a generous and understanding human being who accepts the Other. "Miyazaki is not only attempting to break down the conventional image of femininity but also to break down the viewer's conventional notion of the world in general. He is forcing us to become estranged from what we take for granted and to open up to new possibilities of what the world could be."¹⁹

Nausicaa's skill at flying suggests limitless possibility, a sense of power and freedom. She can feel beyond the limits of her identity, since she communicates at an extrasensory level with the giant Ohmus. She is wise because her vision extends beyond her own need, her own fear and rage, incorporating and trying to bring together rival

¹⁸ "Interview with Hayao Miyazaki," *Young*, 20 February 1984

¹⁹ Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 126.

worlds. She relates to the pain of the stabbed baby Ohmu, and in spite of being hurt herself, she pushes him from the acid water, burning her foot instead. The baby Ohmu responds and tries to heal her pain, but the enraged herd of Ohmus goes over her body offered as a sacrifice for peace. Symbolically, her sacrifice does bring peace, since it calms down the Ohmus. The end of the film shows her final apotheosis in a long shot of her small figure walking upon the golden sea made by Ohmus' feelers, which dissolve into a golden sea of grass during her childhood. She emerges as the legendary blue warrior who was supposed to save the planet, and the Ohmus bring her back to life in a gesture of gratitude. The Otherness of different warring sides is deleted by her willingness to sacrifice herself and the final understanding of various human groups that they depend on nature for their survival.

Miyazaki thinks that the solution for humanity lies in overcoming greed and anger, but more than that, in accepting difference: "I don't like a society that parades its righteousness. The righteousness of USA, the righteousness of this or that ethnic group, the righteousness of Greenpeace, the righteousness of the entrepreneur... They all claim to be righteous but they all try to coerce others into complying with their own standards."²⁰ The righteousness that Miyazaki points out is the process of establishing a group or an ideology as the norm and relegating all that is different into an Other. This belief is reflected in his films, which refuse to take sides, presenting the desire for survival in all different groups and the mutual losses entailed when their relationship is governed by anger, fear and the belief that only one's own group is important. Partnership is established through the intervention of female characters who mediate between worlds, showing them their mutual interests and the mutual losses created by their clash.

Marriage as the Myth of Partnership

Little Mermaid (1989) portrays the love story between a mermaid and a human along the same pattern that we find in *Pocahontas*: the female who longs for a different world and who bridges the gap between worlds through love. Her desire for adventure is translated as her desire for a different kind of man. Love is described as the strongest driving force which solves all the problems of the characters' coming of age. Both Pocahontas and Ariel are their father's daughters; they overcome the model of passive, self-sacrificing mother figure dominating early Disney animations, to show independent, adventurous and sexualized heroines. However, their independence, in spite of its potential for bridging the gap between opposite worlds, is channeled towards heterosexual love. Kelly Bean suggests that "in the Disneyfied world, independence for women functions not as an indication of female power or self-determination, but rather a strategy for seduction.... Embodiments of the male fantasy of strong, beautiful women turned weak by the approach of marriageable men, Disney's ostensibly 'politically correct' female characters in fact reproduce the standard Disney version of female identity: the unconscious beauty who must inevitably be awoken into marriage."²¹ In a post-feminist age, Disney simply poses the arranged marriage over

²⁰ Helen McCarthy. *Hayao Miyazaki-i: Master of Japanese Animation*. (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 185.

²¹ Kellie Beans, "Stripping Beauty: Disney's 'Feminist' Seduction' in *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres (N.Y: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), 54

love marriage as a form of female empowerment, ignoring all the power politics involved in the romanticized love marriage. Faithful to their agenda of building a perfect world of fantasy, Disney Studios construct idealized versions of love relationships, using them as metaphors for colonization, in particular, and for the blurring of boundaries between different worlds in general. Both *Pocahontas* and *Little Mermaid* mediate between contrasting worlds and momentarily bring them together, but they ultimately choose one of the worlds, submitting to the masculine authority in marriage.

Ariel is adventurous and defies her father's interdiction to venture out on the surface where she "could be seen by one of those barbarians." Unlike *Pocahontas*, who simply longs for something she cannot define, Ariel's desire is clearly defined: she wants to live in the world of humans, to lie in the sun and to learn to use the human objects she lovingly collects from the bottom of the sea. She does not share her father's mistrust, saying when she finds a fork that "a world that makes something so wonderful can't be bad."

The film presents the dual process of Otherness: for humans the dangerous sea with its creatures is the Other, whereas they are the Other for king Triton and his realm under the sea. In spite of this dual point of view, the privileged position is clear: the world of humans. The human exploitation of nature and the sea is presented in a humorous way as the battle between the cook and Sebastian the crab. Momentarily, and comically, due to the disparate power positions, Sebastian wins and teaches the cook a lesson. In spite of their mistrust of humans, both King Triton and Sebastian grudgingly agree to Ariel's transformation into a human and her pursuit of love for a human. The two opposite worlds come together at the wedding, but King Triton's sadness suggests that he might not see Ariel again. In the end, she integrates herself within a society where her husband's role supplants her father's. As Betty Friedan has suggested in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the education system in America allows equal opportunities for men and women, but within the family, the woman's role has remained unchanged. After marriage, a woman having the same formal education as her husband will inevitably submit to his economic and social power. Disney's films suspend the narrative at the moment of heterosexual union through marriage, suggesting that everything is well that ends with a wedding.

The connection between opposite worlds is possible only through heterosexual love, but the connection is temporary. Nature will continue to be the exploited Other and the anthropomorphized heroine will be unable to return to her family under the water, but what matters most in the film is that love conquers all adversities. The myth of marriage for love is described as the ideal partnership that glosses over the complex issue of dominating the Other.

The same process happens in *Pocahontas* (1995), but in this case, the issue of mediation is complicated by the special status of the film. Unlike *Little Mermaid*, which retells a story, *Pocahontas* is a retelling of history. As the theorist Parekh notes, "the telling of American history is the narration of cultural contact and conflict, of transplantation and displacement, forged constantly by violence and violation. Powerful myths that emerge out of these narratives, engage, at affective levels, in reinscribing or revising notions of identity and difference within the circumscribed

realms of hegemonic control and authority.”²² The myth glossing over the historical reality is the celebration of Pocahontas as the heroine who bridges the gap between two cultures, her love for John Smith, and later for Rolfe in *Pocahontas II*, stopping the process of colonization. Although her identity clearly places her as a member of the Powhatan tribe, her song, “Colors of the Wind” carries the message of understanding and accepting the diversity of things and people. Her identity is fluid, since she accepts the different, trying to mediate between her tribe and the Other.

Pocahontas is the first Disney attempt to present a sympathetic and respectful view of Native Americans, but even more than that, for the first time in a mainstream American animated feature film, the whites are not necessarily good. The film tries to take an unbiased view of the process of Otherness showing how the British are the rejected Other for the Indians and how the Indians are the “savage” Other for the British. The white civilization’s colonizing of America is portrayed with a high dose of criticism, although I would argue that through the romanticized representation of John Smith and the desire for the adventure type of colonization, the film again constructs white supremacy, thus failing in its intended subversion. In spite of its efforts at cultural relativism, *Pocahontas* has been criticized as a reflection of imperialist ideology that rationalizes the appropriation and, often, the misrepresentation of the history of the Other.

The film succeeds in introducing a distance to the white hegemonizing process by allowing a dual point of view: that of the British and of the Indians. Moreover, Pocahontas’ role as mediator between the two worlds shifts the viewers’ process of identification to the Native. The process of transforming the different into a threatening and incomprehensible Other which must be kept at distance is presented from both sides. The Powhatans regard the British as savages, the dangerous, invading Other: “they prowl the earth like ravenous wolves, consuming everything in their path”. At the same time, the transformation of Indians into the savage Other is already embedded in the British minds prior to any direct contact. Ratcliffe claims possession of the land as soon as he sets foot on it, and there is no attempt to establish contact with the Indians, who are merely a dangerous and uncomfortable presence to be rid of. For Ratcliffe and his crew, both the Indians and nature are to be exploited for profit. The double process of turning the different into the Other and refusing any communication is best shown in the climax of the film as the two sides prepare for war, each referring to the others as “savages”. Ratcliffe calls the Indians “vermin”, whose “whole disgusting race is a curse”, while the Powhatans refer to the British as “demons” guided by greed “beneath that milky hide/ there’s emptiness inside.” Both sides finally sing the refrain together through an accelerated process of cross-cutting: “savages, savages/barely even human/savages, savages/drive them from our shores.” Their unison song shows that the process of turning the different into a rejected and feared Other comes from the claim to the possession of land and the lack of any kind of communication between the two sides.

The choice of Pocahontas as the protagonist of the story and especially the changes made to the original story make the film recover a highly idealized founding history represented through the metaphor of love and union (in spite of the taboo on miscegenation). Pocahontas acts as mediator between the British and the Powhatans, but even more than that, she mediates the ambivalent view of colonization verging

²² Pushpa Naidu Parekh. “*Pocahontas*: The Disney Imaginary” in *The Emperor’s Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres (N.Y: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), p. 169

between criticism and idealization. She criticizes the British through an angry response to Smith's racist assumptions through three strategies suggested by Jhappan and Stasiulis: "first, of the Europeans' presumption of their inalienable right to the land of others ("You think you own whatever land you land in"); second, the presumption of European superiority/Native inferiority ("You think the only people who are people, are the people who look and think like you"); and third, his/their alienation from nature ("The earth is just a dead thing you can tame").²³ She teaches John Smith to "listen with his heart," and as a result he becomes able to hear nature and to understand the Indians. She criticizes colonization, but at the same time, her longing for something "just around the river bend" and her dissatisfaction with her planned marriage places her into an idealized version of colonization, representing the desire to be colonized. Her attraction to Smith is fated, helped by the forces of nature: the wind as her guiding spirit brings them together, the willow advises her to choose Smith, and Meeko, her companion, is completely taken with Smith's biscuits.

Pocahontas moves from her subordination to the kind authority of the father to the seemingly liberating authority of the white male, who will "civilize" her as *Pocahontas II* shows. Her criticism of the British alienation from nature, their greed and exploitation is only momentarily effective. Pocahontas makes her father understand that the peaceful way is better when she offers herself to be killed together with Smith. Just as the film ends the love story before it turns into the family romance governed by power relationships, so it suspends the narrative at the seemingly solved enmity between the colonizers and the natives, building the myth of peaceful colonization and of female liberated heterosexual love.

Most of the critics of *Pocahontas* expressed their concern with the outrageous sanitization of historical data on her story. The Disney Studios changed a bald (according to the record, young Powhatan girls had their heads shaved), Indian ten-to-twelve-year-old child into a sexualized hybrid beauty. More than that, both *Pocahontas* and *Pocahontas II* imply that the colonization was suspended due to Pocahontas' intervention, denying a long history of genocide and focusing both stories on self-discovery and heterosexual bliss. As Jhappan and Stasiulis argue, "it keeps alive the romantic notion, as expressed by the closing song of *Pocahontas II*, that the colonizing encounter was one of "Building a Bridge of Love between Two Worlds".²⁴

Pocahontas' mediation between the whites and the Indians is placed within the discourse of mutual desire of the colonizer and of the colonized. Her ability to "listen with her heart" and her perception of the connection between humans and nature, between her tribe and the Other is put in the service of heterosexual romance as a metaphor for colonization. As in *Little Mermaid*, the colonization of nature by humans and the colonization of the Americas by the British is transformed in the partnership of loving marriage. What both films hide is the patriarchal power implied by the marriage system, and they metaphorically transfer technological and colonizing domination to gender domination.

Conclusion

²³ Radha Jhappan, and Daiva Stasiulis, "Anglophilia and the Discreet Charm of the English Voice in Disney's Pocahontas Films," in *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 157.

²⁴ Jhappan, Stasiulis, "Anglophilia and the Discreet Charm," 171.

The female figures in both Miyazaki's and Disney's films provide potential for change, redemption and growth through their ability to mediate between worlds. Their identity is fluid, characterized by the acceptance of difference and the ability to communicate with the Other. This possibility of redemption through young female figures is more largely explored by Miyazaki, who questions the possibility of accepting difference in a century when nature is about to be completely transformed by humans. Disney's films, on the other hand, build a world of fantasy which glosses over power relationships through the construct of an ideal heterosexual love that conquers all. The Other must be either kept at distance or incorporated into a patriarchal hegemonic system. Partnership in Miyazaki's imaginary world means continuous negotiation to minimize loss and find commonalities, whereas for the American imaginary, partnership means marriage.

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