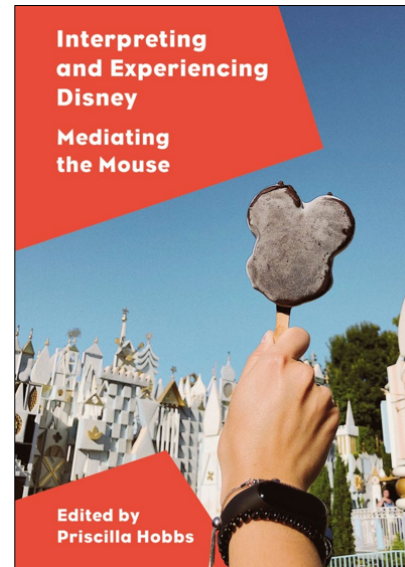


Priscilla Hobbs (Ed.), **Interpreting and Experiencing Disney: Mediating the Mouse**, Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2022, 248 pp., \$113.50 (hardcover), \$56.26 (Kindle), \$39.25 (paperback).

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“I don’t pretend to know anything about art. I make pictures for entertainment, and then the professors tell me what they mean.”
—Walt Disney (as cited in Stuever, 2001, para. 41)

The field of Disney studies is an intimidatingly vast arena whose canon continues to grow (Sperb, 2018). And as the above quotation indicates, the entrepreneur himself welcomed all kinds of academic inquiry into his endeavors. Since its inception in 1923, the Disney Company has indelibly shaped the American and global imagination. In its first decades, Disney pioneered film animation. In the 1950s, the mouse empire helped forge the emergent medium of television and opened its first theme park. By the time of Disney’s death in 1966, the corporate behemoth had established an imprint left by its founder, which Tiffin (2008) characterizes as “the cleanness of image, family, and work ethics and the assumption of a moral high ground (. . .) whose ideological underpinnings conform to a somewhat conservative middle-class morality that strongly reinforces the more reactionary aspects of fairy tale” (p. 1020). Despite the brand’s conservative character, as much of the scholarship demonstrates, Disney comprises a contested space where different meanings are formed.



What makes Disney especially ripe for ongoing academic work can be found in another remark by its founder that his company should be approached heuristically, as he commented in 1956 that Disneyland was something living and breathing and in need of constant renovation (Walt Disney Museum, 2014). This idea that the brand should continually renew itself to be in dialogue with the vagaries and vicissitudes of contemporary society is a throughline in the chapters that comprise **Interpreting and Experiencing Disney: Mediating the Mouse**, edited by Priscilla Hobbs. The volume is a welcome addition to this corpus, as many of its essays feel specific to 2020s America, a period of enormous flux and introspection characterized by popular protests and the removal of outdated statues. The book will interest scholars in the humanities and social sciences and the general public. One of the virtues of Hobbs’ volume is its concentrated focus, as many of the chapters feel connected. However, all of the contributors are in North America and Europe. Having voices from the Global South would have been welcome to give the reader perspectives from elsewhere.

The volume is divided into two sections: “Interpreting Disney” (chapters 1–7), consisting of analyses from media theory, nation studies, audience studies, textual analysis, gender and class analysis; and “Experiencing Disney” (chapters 8–13), comprised of ideological critiques of Disneyland and Disneyworld, as well as audience studies and studies of fan communities, both on- and offline.

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In the first chapter of Part One, "Abbreviating Mickey Mouse: The Art of Remediation in Disney Cartoons," Brent Cowley draws on Bolter and Grusin's (2000) concept of remediation, that insofar as media comprise complex ecosystems, "new" media often rework "older" media to recreate them with a new spin, making them palatable for contemporary audiences. Cowley analyzes the 2000s work of the company's "imagineers" who edited content from Disney's animated short films produced between 1935 and 1953.

In the second chapter, titled "'You Grow Up to Be a Duck Fan in Your Mother's Womb': The Bond Between Finnish People and Donald Duck," Katja Kontturi considers the massive popularity of that beloved bird in Finland, arguing that this fascination has to do with questions of national identity. Inasmuch as Finns feel dwarfed by Sweden and Russia, they find a kindred spirit with Donald, an eternal underdog.

In the third chapter, "Toad, Alice and Peter: From England to Disney-Land and Back Again," Robert Neuman examines primary recourses to consider original reactions of UK audiences to Disney's film adaptations of beloved British novels from the 1950s. With his extensive quotations from these reviews, whose assessments of these films were mixed, Neuman entertainingly gives us a flavor of trademark British wit.

In the fourth chapter, "Egalitarian or Stereotypical? Gender Representation in Disney Feature Fairy Tales of the Twenty-First Century," Irena Sever Globan and Vuk Vuković draw on studies of stereotypes to consider how female characters fare in eighteen 21st-century modern princess Disney films. The authors conclude that while these female protagonists have more agency than their 20th-century precursors, problematically their fathers are more patriarchal than what was seen in the earlier fairytale movies.

In the fifth chapter, "Father Still Knows Best: Exploring the Construction of Traditional Masculinity as Depicted in Portrayals of Fatherhood in Disney Princess Movies," Elizabeth A. Mansley and Katie N. Mirance use feminist studies and quantitative analysis to look at 13 contemporary and classic princess movies. Their argument dovetails with Globan and Vuković's: While these female leads increasingly embrace feminist ideas, the father characters become increasingly authoritarian.

In chapter 6, entitled "Poisoned Apples: Womanhood in Disney's *Snow White*," Dakota Robertson-Schüle draws on gender studies and Jungian theory to analyze the portrayal of that iconic character in the Disney film (1937) versus how she fares in the original text by the Brothers Grimm (1812). Robertson-Schüle concludes that the source material articulated issues of womanhood in a way that was ahead of its time. Whereas in the original *Snow White*, it is the titular character who defeats the Evil Queen, in the Disney film, the dwarves vanquish the antagonist while the young girl is asleep.

In the seventh chapter, "A Rhetoric of Classicism and Reading Cultures in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*," Deidre Anne Evans Garriott considers the protagonist's love of reading from that 1991 film and what that means from a feminist and class analysis. In the trajectory of the film, Belle goes from having a disdainful, elitist attitude towards the "provincial" members of the community to becoming increasingly like the townsfolk.

The second part opens with the eighth chapter, "'Our Cartoon City upon a Hill': Disneyland, Disney World and American Identity" by Bethanee Bemis. The author does an elegant sociospatial analysis of

Disney World and Disneyland, situating both as iterations of the "national narrative," which is to be understood as in constant fluctuation mainly due to pressure from below. These twin theme parks become loci of "historical mediation" in which complex negotiations occur. This is one of the standout chapters of the volume.

In chapter 9, "Can Small World Ever Be Politically Correct?" Rebekah Lovejoy reflects on her own experience as an avid theme park goer to mount a critique of the It's a Small World attraction. Lovejoy observes that this ride could be read as a microcosm of the United States as a nation: at once a brutal colonialist entity and a radical utopian experiment in statecraft.

In the tenth chapter, "Reading the Disney Princess Attractions: Narrative Adaptation, Immersion and Control in the Magic Kingdom's Expanded Fantasyland," Alaine Martaus considers the 2009 overhaul of Disney World's Fantasyland as remediation. Working with narratology and adaptation theory, Martaus argues that the new Fantasyland gives the illusion of audience participation, when, in reality, it is just consumption.

In the eleventh chapter, "Online Brand Communities: A Case Study of Disney," Elizabeth A. Whalen analyzes fandom in the digital sphere, particularly DIS, the online community that discusses Disney theme park tourism. Using the seminal work of Albert Muniz and Thomas O'Guinn (2001), Whalen situates DIS as a "brand community," a group of people not geographically bound who, governed by a specific set of social relations, are united in their passion for a brand.

In chapter 12, "I Am Disney Bound: Costuming as Psycho-Spiritual Practice," Dori S. Koehler combines Joseph Campbell's theory of rituals with Jungian notions of archetypes to analyze the phenomenon of DisneyBounding or "Disney's mythic connection." This practice consists of dressing up like Disney characters but using normal clothing, evoking rather than imitating.

Finally, in the thirteenth chapter, "A Journey from Girl-to-Womanhood: The Influence of Disney Princess Fashion on the Female Gender," Bianca van Dam presents her research on how young Swedish girls respond to portrayals of the female protagonists in Disney Princess movies. Van Dam concludes that these symbols influence the subjectivities of these girls, and thus calls for Disney to restructure how it frames its women characters.

In sum, this book is a significant contribution to Disney studies in that its authors point to the dialogical relationship Disney has historically had with American and European society. Like the Disney Company itself, Disney studies is presented as in constant evolution.

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