

**An eternal return of the same? Have gender depictions changed  
in Disney's 2015 *Cinderella* live remake?**

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Master of Research  
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2018

## **Dedication**

As with all things that I do, I dedicate this thesis to my parents for the love, guidance and support that they have given me during my journey of starting, writing and finally completing this thesis. I also dedicate this thesis to my fiancé who has acted as a proof-reader, fourth supervisor and pillar of support for me during the most turbulent periods of my writing journey.

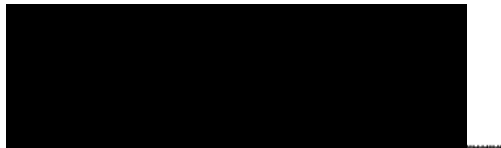
## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to specially thank my supervisors Di Dickenson, Helen Basides and Helen Koukoutsis, who have all had to review countless drafts of this thesis before its completion. Without their guidance and brilliant feedback, I would have never finished off this thesis, nor would I have ever been able to dedicate this special acknowledgment page to them.

Thank you, Di, Helen B. and Helen K., for all your support during this (long) journey of completing my master's thesis. You all deserve a long break from editing and reviewing my sometimes arduous and hard-to-follow logic, while also remaining supportive and providing me with extra guidance during my most trying times.

## Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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(Signature)

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## **Abbreviations**

**“US”**: The United States of America.

**“SFX”**: Sound effects used in film.

**“CGI”**: Computer Generation Imagery that are used by film studios to create special visual effects in film.

## Abstract

Disney's Princess fairy tale films have retained their popularity in contemporary popular culture. However, criticisms continue to be made about the films' propensity to propagate and reinforce patriarchal ideologies. In consideration of these criticisms, this study uses the concept of cultural memory to facilitate a reconsideration of gender in Disney's 2015 *Cinderella* live remake. Viewing the film as a medium of cultural memory, this study argues that while certain 'outdated' gender depictions from the 1950 film have been remembered in the live remake in order to culturally connect both *Cinderella* films, there is also evidence of a heavy remediation of other gender depictions that contests these outdated ideologies and instead reflect contemporary views of gender. Thus, while the live remake culturally connects to the 1950s film through its remembrance of key depictions of gender, it also engages with contemporary views of gender.

# Chapter 1: Introduction.

## 1.1 Introduction

Within Disney's Princess Fairy Tale film franchise, the commercial and financial success<sup>1</sup> of the company's highly popular 1950 *Cinderella* film helped to cement the company's status as "the referent for most well-known fairy tales in the Euro-North American popular imagination".<sup>2</sup> In 2015, Disney's *Cinderella* live remake continued the legacy of the 1950 film into contemporary popular culture, with Disney effectively monopolising and controlling the fairy tale genre.<sup>3</sup> Marketed as a contemporary adaptation of the 1950 film, the live remake maintains a cultural connection to its predecessor by retaining certain memorable features from the 1950 film, such as key gender depictions. Consequently, this retention has reignited criticism that gender depictions in the live remake continue to reinforce "outdated, patriarchal ideologies"<sup>4</sup> of gender. Scholars such as Zipes,<sup>5</sup> Wasko,<sup>6</sup> Giroux,<sup>7</sup> and De La Rochere,

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<sup>1</sup> During the production of *Cinderella*, the animation studio was desperate to try and produce a film that would allow the studio to find success again. With the frequent absence of Walt, and the studio's lack of motivation in producing the new animation, *Cinderella* was under production for two years before its release. Despite the studio's internal issues, *Cinderella* became Disney's greatest box-office success since *Snow White*, being hailed almost universally as Disney's return to form. Disney's *Cinderella* helped to balance the new modern American society with old traditional democratic values that resonated with audiences uncertain of the future. The success of *Cinderella* helped to carry on the trend of the Classic Disney style that ensured the studio survived during periods of stagnation and financial issues. To read further on the importance of the film's success, refer to Gabler, *Walt Disney: Triumph of the American Imagination*, 481; Tobias, "Film and the American Vision of Moral Nature," 189; Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 293; Smoodin, *Disney Discourse*, 74-75; Wasko, *Understanding Disney*, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Greenhill and Matrix, *Fairy Tale Films*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Baker-Sperry, "The Production of Meaning," 721.

<sup>4</sup> Pershing and Gablehouse argue that the "Disneyfication" of the literary tale has resulted in the continuous promotion of out-dated, patriarchal ideologies of gender and sex, whereby women are subordinated to men and are confined within the domestic sphere. Zipes also states that Walt Disney had retained many of the Grimms's ideological content from their tales in the Disney Princess Fairy Tale films as the Grimms's 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions aligned with Walt Disney's own mid-western American values. Byrne and McQuillan also argue that Disney made use of the theme of 'domesticity', which confined women to the domestic space, whereas men were delegated into the public sphere. See more in Pershing and Gablehouse, "Disney's Enchanted," 99; Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," 348; Byrne and McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney*, 60-61.

<sup>5</sup> Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," 40. In a recent interview, Zipes revealed his thoughts about Disney's 2015 *Cinderella* live remake, labelling it as an "already trivial, somewhat sexist interpretation of Perrault's fairy tale". To read further, refer to Merriam, "The Unvarnished Tales"; Zipes, "The Triumph of The Underdog," 388.

<sup>6</sup> Wasko, *Understanding Disney*, 102.

<sup>7</sup> Giroux argues that the Utopian dreams that Disney's films offer influence the way America's cultural landscape is imagined. Giroux further argues that Disney has further influenced the way in which the American population shape their national identity, gender roles and childhood values. To read further, refer to Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared*, 88.



Lathey and Wozniak<sup>8</sup> all argue that Disney's Princess Fairy Tale films continue to promote the company's ideological agenda by encouraging the audience to long for a nostalgic past that returns them to a patriarchal society in which women were subordinate to men.<sup>9</sup> While these arguments have raised concerns about the films' potential to reinforce patriarchal ideologies, recent studies aimed at shedding light on these issues have revealed the impossibility of measuring the actual influence and impact of these gender depictions on the general population.<sup>10</sup>

While the live remake does remember certain gender depictions which reinforce "outdated, patriarchal ideologies"<sup>11</sup>, this study utilises the idea of cultural memory in order to reconsider and critically analyse gender depictions in the live remake. Here, the idea of cultural memory can be defined as an ongoing process between individuals and groups through remembering and forgetting, as well as sharing and contesting their relationship to the past.<sup>12</sup> This definition is employed in this study to critically analyse gender depictions in the live remake, which is viewed as a medium of cultural memory that mediates between gender depictions in the 1950 film with contemporary views of gender. The live remake therefore 'remembers' and 'shares' key gender depictions from the 1950 film, which mirror 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal

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<sup>8</sup> De La Rochere, Lathey and Wozniak are doubtful of Disney's attempt with the live remake to "renew the magic", commenting that it was Disney's way to re-assert the company's interpretation of the *Cinderella* tale as a "capitalist-patriarchal consumer fantasy". Refer to De La Rochere, Lathey and Wozniak, *Cinderella Across Cultures*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 206.

<sup>10</sup> Baker-Sperry conducted an ethnographic study on eight first-grade classrooms and sought to understand how the 148 students in the study perceived gender based on Disney's 1950 *Cinderella* film. The results of Baker-Sperry's study suggest that many of the students were highly influenced by gender depictions in the film, especially when they attempted to demonstrate their own perceptions of gender roles with each other. Furthermore, as Baker-Sperry read the novel variant of Disney's 1950 *Cinderella* film, students were shown to be so familiar with the film that they were able to read along with Baker-Sperry and even finish off her sentences. Many of the students also identified Disney's *Cinderella* film as the 'classic' variant of the tale. Refer to Baker-Sperry, "The Production of Meaning," 721. Stone also conducted a survey with 40 women, where the results revealed that a majority of the women identified Disney's films as their referent of the classic fairy tale. To read further, refer to Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us," 48-49.

<sup>11</sup> Pershing and Gablehouse, "Disney's Enchanted," 99

<sup>12</sup> Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5; Stephens, "Cultural Memory, Remembering and Motherhood," 70.

notions of gender,<sup>13</sup> in order to culturally connect both *Cinderella* films. Meanwhile, these key gender depictions are also ‘forgotten’ and remediated in order to reflect contemporary views of gender.<sup>14</sup> For example, the live remake presents depictions of masculinity that reflect contemporary depictions of masculinity in cinema, such as the ‘feminized’ masculinity image, homosocial relationships and the ‘missing phallus’ of the secondary male lead. Therefore, the aim of this study is to demonstrate that the live remake mediates between past gender depictions from the 1950 film with contemporary views of gender in order to create new cultural memories of gender that reflect both views as they contest and intersect with one another. In order to demonstrate this, this study raises two questions. Firstly, how does the idea of cultural memory facilitate a reconsideration of gender in Disney’s 2015 *Cinderella* film when compared with the company’s 1950 *Cinderella* film, given that cultural memory recalls a past that is both shared and contested? And secondly, how does cultural memory help us to understand the changes made to depictions of gender in the 2015 film?

### 1.2 Recent Fairy Tale Scholarship

A majority of fairy tale scholarship is focused on the idea that fairy tale variants are specific to their social, historical and cultural context. For example, Rudy and Greenhill have expanded on Bacchilegga’s concept of the inter-textual fairy tale web in order to focus on the “transcultural and intermedial”<sup>15</sup> qualities of fairy tales in film and television. In particular, Rudy and Greenhill examine how the fairy tale continues to literally and figuratively speak and move in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, Rudy and Greenhill focus on how certain themes

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<sup>13</sup> While many scholars argue that Disney’s fairy tale films continue to be used as vehicles in which to further reinforce Walt’s “message about proper sex roles, behaviour, manners and customs,” some of these ideologies have instead been remediated in the live remake in order to reflect contemporary views of gender. Refer to Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch and Smith discuss how the dynamics of cultural memory is a process of remembering and forgetting, as well as sharing and contesting the past and the present. As cultural memory is always mediated, past memories will inevitably be contested by the present. Read more in Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory,” 5.

<sup>15</sup> Rudy and Greenhill argue that new media such as film and television have allowed for more ways in which to transmit fairy tales in popular culture. Rudy And Greenhill’s recent study is featured in the 31<sup>st</sup> volume of *Marvel and Tales*. For a more detailed explanation, see Rudy and Greenhill, “Introduction,” 16.

of fairy tales have been retained and remediated in contemporary popular culture, as well as how fairy tales in television and film can be used to “explore how fairy-tale characters and plots evoke audience memories, nostalgia, and attachment”.<sup>16</sup> In addition to Rudy and Greenhill’s study, other contemporary fairy tale scholars such as Justice<sup>17</sup>, Rollin,<sup>18</sup> Shortsleeve,<sup>19</sup> Crowley and Pennington,<sup>20</sup> and Fleming<sup>21</sup> have also focused on the issue of how fairy tale films are received and understood, based on their specific social, cultural and historical contexts.<sup>22</sup> For example, both Brode and Fleming argue that Disney has appropriated the fairy tale for a contemporary audience,<sup>23</sup> and has therefore brought fairy tales back into mass culture by altering its fairy tale films to the current socio-cultural climate.<sup>24</sup> Pinsky furthers Brode’s argument asserting that changes made to each Disney animated film depends on the current socio-cultural context.<sup>25</sup>

In consideration of the focus of current fairy tale scholarship on the idea that fairy tale variants are specific to their socio-cultural and historical contexts, this study extends on this idea by utilising the idea of cultural memory to demonstrate that gender depictions in both *Cinderella* films are reflective of their socio-cultural context. In viewing these depictions through a cultural memory lens, this study critically analyses gender depictions in the film and provides an identity marker that “provides a means by which cultural memory is located in a specific context rather than subsumed into monolithic and essentialist categories”.<sup>26</sup> For example, gender depictions from the 1950 film appear to reflect a post-WWII era where

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>17</sup> Justice, “Maleficent Reborn,” 194.

<sup>18</sup> Rollin, “Fear of Faerie,” 90.

<sup>19</sup> Shortsleeve, “The Wonderful World of the Depression,” 1.

<sup>20</sup> Crowley and Pennington, “Feminist Frauds on the Fairies,” 297.

<sup>21</sup> Fleming, “Dickens, Disney, Oliver,” 182

<sup>22</sup> Smoodin, *Disney Discourse*, 214.

<sup>23</sup> Brode, *It’s the Disney Version!*, 9. Fleming, “Dickens, Disney, Oliver,” 185.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory,” 6.

sudden changes in the socio-cultural climate of the US meant that the general population were left feeling uncertain of these changes. Instead they longed for an era that was more reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America, where 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal ideologies distinctly separated men and women to different spheres. Thus, the 1950 film addresses these issues by presenting gender depictions reflecting on nostalgia from the past. Further, this critical analysis demonstrates that the film functions as a medium of cultural memory that mediates between gender depictions from the 1950 film with contemporary views of gender in order to reconfigure and present new cultural memories of gender that reflects both views in the film.<sup>27</sup> Here, the critical analysis aims to reveal ways in which past depictions from the 1950 film intersect and contest with contemporary views of gender by both past and present depictions of gender colliding and merging together to create new cultural memories of gender. Before examining the live remake and its function as a medium of cultural memory, this study will provide a brief overview of the historical context of cultural memory studies, as well as the relationship between cultural memory studies and gender.

### 1.3 *What is Cultural Memory?*

In the humanities, scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds have sought to understand the relationship between culture and memory.<sup>28</sup> The term “cultural memory” has been widely accepted to be defined as the juncture where the individual and the social “constitute their identities by recalling a shared past on the basis of common, and therefore often contested, norms, conventions and practices”.<sup>29</sup> It is an ongoing process of remembering and forgetting, “in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Erll, *A Companion to Cultural Memory*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory,” 5; Stephens, “Cultural Memory, Remembering and Motherhood,” 70. Radstone and Hodgkin also coin the term “cultural formation”, which refers to the norms, conventions and practices of a society that shapes an individual’s identity and memory. See more in Radstone and Hodgkin, “Theories of Social Remembering,” 2.

past.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as cultural memory is always mediated, these shared versions of the past are “generated by means of medial externalizations,”<sup>31</sup> such as oral speech, music, religious texts, TV documentaries and film, which “shape even as they transmit memory”.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the live remake can also be defined as a medial externalization, or as a ‘medium of cultural memory’ that shapes and transmits memory. A medium of cultural memory in this study refers to any form or tool that can communicate to the audience of the past, such as oral telling, books, photos, films and letters. Mediums of cultural memory are “more than passive and transparent conveyors of information”<sup>33</sup> and act as agents of networking that play an active role in mediating between the past and present. In this sense, gender depictions from the 1950 film, which are a re-assertion of 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions of gender, are a narrative or retelling that intersects with and contests contemporary views of gender.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, as both past and present depictions of gender collide and contest with each other, they consequently merge and create a new cultural memory of gender.

#### 1.4 *Cultural Memory Studies and Gender*

When considering the relationship between cultural memory and gender, this study is indebted to Hirsch and Smith’s conceptualisation of the relationship between cultural memory and gender in their 2002 introductory article for the special issue of SIGNS. Hirsch and Smith argue that the cultural memory of an individual or groups is dependent on a variety of identity-markers, such as their gender, race and class. In connecting cultural memory with gender representation, Hirsch and Smith’s 2002 article on cultural memory focused on relationships between feminism and cultural memory being seminal and that “gender, along

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<sup>30</sup> Erll and Rigney, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>31</sup> Erll, “Literature, Film,” 389.

<sup>32</sup> Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory,” 5.

<sup>33</sup> Erll and Rigney, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>34</sup> Stephens, “Cultural Memory,” 71.

with race and class, marks identities in specific ways and provides a means by which cultural memory is located in a specific context rather than subsumed into monolithic and essentialist categories".<sup>35</sup> Stephens also relates cultural memory and gender as a co-constitutive process of remembering and forgetting and suggests that memory is a form of narrative or retelling of the past, which reveals how the past affects the present.<sup>36</sup> The arguments presented by Stephens and Hirsch and Smith provide us with an explanation of the ways in which the past and present cultural memories of gender intersect, and whose perspective or voice of the past is being reclaimed.

In relation to this project, gender depictions from the 1950 film, which have been shared and remembered in the live remake, intersect with and contest contemporary views of gender. In the live remake, some of Walt's cultural memories have been 'forgotten' and remediated in the live remake in order to better reflect contemporary views of gender. As a result of this mediation, gender depictions from the 1950 film and contemporary depictions of gender are merged together in order to create new cultural memories of gender that are not reflective of a single perspective or voice.<sup>37</sup> Thus, this ongoing process of remembering and forgetting, as well as sharing and contesting depictions of gender also culturally connects and differentiates both of Disney's *Cinderella* films.

While there is a substantial amount of research conducted on cultural memory and how it can be used in different disciplines, the relationship between cultural memory and gender is yet to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>36</sup> Stephens, "Cultural Memory," 71.

<sup>37</sup> While Hirsch and Smith argue that cultural memory is an act in which the individual identity is shaped by membership to one or more groups in society, the essays featured in the special issue of SIGNS also reflect on the ways in which performance practice, representational media, and cultural frames of interpretation might be gendered. Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 6.

be completely theorised.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, much of the scholarship that is available on the relationship between cultural memory and gender draws from feminist research. In addition, Reading states that most studies that focus on the relationship between cultural memory and gender tends to be “framed within a paradigm in which questions of gender are reduced to focusing on women’s memories”.<sup>39</sup> This is also reflected in Hirsch and Smith’s special issue for SIGNS, where the essays included in the issue sought to redefine culture from a woman’s perspective by collecting and re-examining women’s works, stories and artefacts of the past. This pre-occupation with women’s memories, has tended to ignore men’s personal memories of gender. For this reason, this study critically analyses depictions of both femininity and masculinity in the live remake in order to demonstrate the ongoing process of remembering and forgetting, as well as sharing and contesting in relation to both depictions of both genders in the live remake.

In general, cultural memory studies is a rather young, amorphous field that has no definitive theoretical framework or methodology. For this reason, this study employs a widely accepted definition of cultural memory and draws upon the few studies conducted on the relationship between cultural memory studies and gender in order to link cultural memory studies and gender. As the live remake is a contemporary adaptation of the 1950 film, which is informed by 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions, this study will now employ the concept of cultural memory to demonstrate the 1950 film’s function as a medium of cultural memory that transmits and shares Walt Disney’s cultural memories of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America.

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<sup>38</sup> According to a 2011 interview for the *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, Hirsch states that the “relationship of cultural memory and gender has still not been fully theorized even now, almost ten years later.” To read more, refer to Paulesc, "Four Questions or More," 174-77.

<sup>39</sup> Reading, “Making Memory Work,” 201.

### 1.5 Disney's 1950 *Cinderella*

Firstly, the idea of cultural memory is an act of individuals and groups remembering and forgetting, as well as sharing and contesting the past as they continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the release of the 1950 film reflects to a certain degree Walt Disney's cultural memories of growing up in 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America by incorporating mid-western American themes of hard work, community and determination. Walt's fond memories of his childhood seem to contest changes that were occurring in the US post-WWII, which saw the nation welcome an improved economy, higher wages, mass immigration and urbanization of rural towns. It is during this unsettling time that Walt was able to tap into the nostalgia of the audience due to his "profound ambivalence about cultural and social change".<sup>41</sup> The film mediates the socio-cultural context of 1950s USA with familiar themes of nineteenth-century ideals of "self-control, domesticity and a stern work ethic"<sup>42</sup> in order to recall a shared past which includes the values of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America. Therefore, for middle-class American families who were feeling uncertain of these changes, the release of the film was wholly welcomed as the changes to the US socio-cultural landscape left many reeling and seeking to return to a past time and place. Here, Walt's attempt to mediate the present socio-cultural landscape with his cultural memories of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America also seemed to resonate with the audience's longing to return to a nostalgic past. In a sense, Walt has likely re-asserted his cultural memories of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America, by way of contesting with the new American landscape, while also sharing his own ideas of a happier time and place. Thus, the release of Disney's *Cinderella* helped to balance the new modern American society with old traditional democratic values that resonated with audiences uncertain of the future.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>40</sup> Erl and Rigney, "Introduction," 2; Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5.

<sup>41</sup> Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 481.



success of *Cinderella* helped to carry on the trend of the Classic Disney style that ensured the studio survived during periods of stagnation and financial issues.

Walt's aversion to and distrust of Communism following WWII further hardened his resolve to share his own ideal American landscape, which reflected his cultural memories of his childhood in mid-western America. As Tobias observed, the film's success was due to the socio-cultural and political climate of America after the second world war, which left America "struggling with the threat of a world destabilized by the threats of communism, nuclear confrontation, the Korean War, and the birth of Red China".<sup>44</sup> Therefore, as people began to seek familiarity in their surroundings, Disney's *Cinderella* functioned as a medium of cultural memory that enabled the audience to recall and share in the familiar comforts of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western American landscape, where they could remain ignorant, if only for a little while, of the present US landscape. As Walt Disney's mid-western values of hard work, determination and community began to resonate with the general population once more, the film was able to satisfy the people's need for familiarity in their surroundings. This need is highlighted by Chou, who argues that "people growing up in these contexts tend to accept the gendered storylines and representations of children as natural and essential, especially when the plots and character reaffirm their ideologies".<sup>45</sup> Therefore, while there was criticism over the lack of progress in terms of the quality of the animation<sup>46</sup> and the ideological content, the film was well-received by the American population as it mediated the troubled socio-cultural landscape with familiar 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western themes that offered an escape from reality.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Tobias, *Film and the American Vision*, 189.

<sup>45</sup> Chou, "Contamination of Childhood Fairy Tale," 58.

<sup>46</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 222.

<sup>47</sup> Gabler states that Disney animations was now a touchstone, providing comfort in a time of foreboding. See more in Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 481.

In conclusion, as America welcomed the 1950s with a stronger economy, higher wages, a more diversified population and a more forward-looking and child-like confidence in science and technology, Disney's *Cinderella* functioned as a medium of cultural memory which was able to mediate between the new modern American society with Walt's cultural memories of mid-western America, which are viewed as 19<sup>th</sup> century traditional patriarchal notions, that resonated with audiences uncertain of the future. The success of *Cinderella* helped to carry on the trend of the classic Disney animation style that ensured the studio survived during periods of stagnation and financial issues. Disney saw the chance to provide the American population with an escape from reality when morale was low, and people were able to share in and find comfort in Walt's cultural memories in the films, which advocated themes of virtue and endurance during times of hardship.<sup>48</sup> At the time, Walt incorporated his own cultural memories of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mid-western America in order to recall a shared past of mid-western American values with the audience who sought familiarity in their surroundings during a time of turbulent change.

### 1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter two argues that the live remake preserves and remembers key depictions of femininity from the 1950 film that contests contemporary views of femininity that have been used to change certain characteristics of the female characters. As previously stated, a key defining feature of Disney's Princess Fairy Tale films is the re-assertion of 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions of gender.<sup>49</sup> Here, this study also demonstrates that a Disney Princess Fairy Tale film is distinguished from other fairy tale variants by the re-assertion of these

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<sup>48</sup> Pinsky further adds that Disney's films were stories of endurance; they were stories that said virtue does have rewards and it pays to endure. See more in Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

patriarchal notions of gender in the film. This differentiation of Disney's variant of the *Cinderella* tale from other variants therefore continues the historical tradition of authors placing their own distinctive mark upon a long-existing and ever-evolving text.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, in order to signify that the film is Disney's own retelling of the *Cinderella* tale, the live remake has retained depictions of femininity from the 1950 film in order to culturally connect both *Cinderella* films. This cultural connection evokes feelings of nostalgia by returning the audience to the setting of the 1950 film, where scenes depicting the relationship and themes of rivalry between the heroine and the female antagonists are reminiscent of scenes of Cinderella and her stepfamily in the 1950 film. However, as Branagh is the director of the live remake, he also leaves a cultural mark on the film. This is evident through the slight remediations made to these depictions of femininity. Here, these remediations have been made to the characters in order to reflect contemporary views of gender and to therefore signify of the live remake's status as a contemporary adaptation of the 1950 film. Thus, chapter two argues that the retention of depictions of femininity from the 1950 film signals how key depictions of femininity continue to be retained in the film in order to culturally connect both *Cinderella* films. Meanwhile, these key depictions of femininity have also intersected with and contested contemporary views of gender, thereby continuing the dynamics of cultural memory, where individuals and groups are constantly reconfiguring their relationship to the past.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the live remake mediates between depictions of femininity from the 1950 film and contemporary views of femininity in order to reconfigure and present new cultural memories of femininity in the film.

Chapter three contends that the ongoing process of forgetting and remediating is also demonstrated in the depictions of masculinity in the film, where these depictions have been

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<sup>50</sup> Brode, *It's the Disney Version!*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> ErlI and Rigney, "Introduction," 2; Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5; Stephens, "Cultural Memory, Remembering and Motherhood," 70.

completely reconsidered in the live remake in order to reflect contemporary views of gender. While chapter two demonstrates the live remake's function as a medium of cultural memory that continues to culturally connect both Disney films, it is also evident that the live remake differentiates itself from the 1950 film through a remediation of depictions of masculinity in the film. Through the application of the concept of cultural memory, this chapter concludes that depictions of masculinity have been reconfigured and contested in order to better reflect contemporary views of masculinity in the film. Here, past depictions of masculinity from the 1950 film, which were reflective of 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions of gender,<sup>52</sup> have been remediated in the live remake and replaced in order to both reflect contemporary views of masculinity and to signify the live remake's status as contemporary adaptation of the *Cinderella* tale. Thus, as a result of this remediation, the live remake's function as a medium of cultural memory also signifies how the film has imprinted its own cultural mark in Disney's Princess Fairy Tale film franchise. This is demonstrated by the reconfiguring of past depictions of masculinity from the 1950 film with more current views of masculinity in order to present new cultural memories of masculinity in the live remake.

The final chapter concludes that the live remake has effectively mediated between past and present depictions of gender in Disney's *Cinderella* films, merging both views together and subsequently creating new cultural memories of gender. The chapter demonstrates how the concept of cultural memory can be used to argue that depictions of gender in the live remake are the result of a mediation between 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions of gender from the 1950 film with contemporary views of gender. Rather than viewing the live remake as simply a vehicle to reinforce "outdated, patriarchal"<sup>53</sup> ideologies, this study utilises the idea of cultural

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<sup>52</sup> Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," 348; Zipes, "The Triumph of The Underdog," 388; Zipes, *Fairy tales*, 210; Pershing and Gablehouse, "Disney's Enchanted," 99; Wasko, *Understanding Disney*, 102; Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared*, 88.

<sup>53</sup> Pershing and Gablehouse, "Disney's Enchanted," 99.

memory to reconsider these gender depictions. It can be argued that the live remake has ‘remembered’ certain key depictions of gender, such as femininity, in order to culturally connect both Disney *Cinderella* films as well as further re-assert the legacy of Disney’s *Cinderella* films into contemporary popular culture. Meanwhile, the live remake has also remediated many of these depictions, as argued in chapter 3, and ensured that gender depictions in the film reflect contemporary views of gender. This process of remembering and remediating depictions of gender are therefore one way in which Branagh has left a cultural mark on Disney’s *Cinderella* films, thereby creating new cultural memories of gender.

## Chapter 2: Femininity.

### 2.1 Introduction

In their critiques on gender depictions in the live remake, Zipes<sup>54</sup> and De La Rochere, Lathey and Wozniak<sup>55</sup> argue that the film's remembrance of key depictions of femininity from the 1950 film reinforces 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions.<sup>56</sup> While there is evidence of a reinforcement of these ideologies in the live remake, this chapter instead reconsiders these depictions by arguing that a continuity of key depictions of femininity from the 1950 film is an alternate way of viewing the cultural connection that has been maintained between both *Cinderella* films. Furthermore, it can also be argued that the most memorable characters and themes in the 1950 film revolved around the female characters. Therefore, it is no surprise that the roles of the heroine, the stepmother, the stepsisters, the fairy godmother, as well as the 'female' mice friends have been remembered in the live remake. While these roles culturally connect both Disney *Cinderella* films, they also further continue the legacy of Disney's *Cinderella* films into contemporary popular culture. However, as the live remake is marketed as a contemporary adaptation of its 1950 predecessor, the live remake also remediates certain aspects of the main female characters who have been remembered in the live remake. Here, some aspects, such as the heroine's passive personality and the stepmother's cruelty is remediated with more contemporary views of femininity in order to signify the film's status as a contemporary *Cinderella* adaptation. The live remake therefore mediates between both past and present depictions of femininity in order to reconfigure and create new cultural memories of femininity in the film.<sup>57</sup> Here, certain depictions are remembered, while others have been 'forgotten' and remediated in the process. This process

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<sup>54</sup> Zipes, "The Triumph of The Underdog," 388.

<sup>55</sup> De La Rochere, Lathey and Wozniak, *Cinderella Across Cultures*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Zipes argues that Walt's mid-western values resonated with 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions. Refer to Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," 348.

<sup>57</sup> ErlI and Rigney, "Introduction," 2; Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5; Stephens, "Cultural Memory, Remembering and Motherhood," 70.

therefore highlights the live remake's function as a medium of cultural memory that remembers and forgets, as well as shares and contests past depictions of femininity from the 1950 film with contemporary depictions of femininity. In this sense, the live remake reconfigures the cultural memory of certain female characters from the 1950 film and subsequently creates new cultural memories of femininity, which signifies the film's status as a contemporary *Cinderella* adaptation by incorporating more contemporary views of femininity. Therefore, in this chapter, the idea of cultural memory<sup>58</sup> is applied to critically analyse key depictions of gender that have been remembered from the 1950 film. While these depictions have been remembered for the sake of culturally connecting both *Cinderella* films, the live remake also remediates some of these depictions in order to better reflect contemporary depictions of femininity. In this sense, some aspects of these depictions are contested by contemporary depictions of femininity, thereby reconfiguring these depictions and presenting new cultural memories of femininity in the live remake.<sup>59</sup>

## *2.2 Reinforcing Patriarchal Ideologies Through Film Setting*

Before critically analysing depictions of femininity in the live remake, this chapter first provides a brief overview of the reinforcement of the pseudo-medieval setting in Disney's Princess Fairy Tale films. It appears this pseudo-medieval setting is used throughout Disney's Princess Fairy Tale films thereby maintaining a cultural connection between the company's classic Princess Fairy Tale films and their contemporary remakes. The pseudo-medieval context of Disney's Princess Fairy Tale films reinforces patriarchal ideologies that depicts women as being confined to the domestic sphere. This setting is revisited in the opening scenes of the live remake with the establishing shot of Ella's household manor and the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> The term cultural memory is an act recalling a past that is both contested and shared, and in which individuals and groups reconfigure their relationship with the past. Refer to Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5.

surrounding acreage at the beginning of film. This establishing shot invites the audience into a medieval-like landscape, where Ella and her family reside in a sandstone manor situated on a secluded rural farm that is separated from the town square and royal kingdom. The manor is a grand sandstone building surrounded by nature and hidden away by the tall trees and shrubs, giving the impression that it is intentionally hidden away from the rest of the world. In addition to this, the characters are dressed in period clothing and use horse-pulled carriages as their main mode of transport. Here, the use of this perceived medieval setting reinforces heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality under the pretence that the film is set within an unspecified time and place.<sup>60</sup> This reinforcement of the pseudo-medieval setting, resonates in Disney's other Princess Fairy Tale films and appears to be a way in which Disney has reinforced patriarchal ideologies present in many of the company's classic Princess Fairy Tale films. Thus, when comparing these two *Cinderella* films, this reinforcement makes it possible for the live remake to culturally connect with its predecessor through the setting, whilst also remembering key depictions of femininity that are considered a reflection of "outdated patriarchal" ideologies.<sup>61</sup> This becomes more evident in the critical analysis when understanding why the live remake continues to remember key defining characteristics of the main female characters from the 1950 film.

### 2.3 Analysis of Female Characters

The key defining characteristics of the female characters from the 1950 film have been remembered in the live remake, however there is also evidence of remediation with some aspects of the female characters, such as their physical appearance or personality traits. For example, some key defining characteristics that have been remembered are the fairy

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<sup>60</sup> Kelly and Pugh, *Queer Movie Medievalism*, 1-17.

<sup>61</sup> Pershing and Gablehouse, "Disney's Enchanted," 99.



godmother's ditzzy personality; the stepsisters' obnoxious, callous personalities and their colour-coordinated outfits; the cruel, vindictive personality of the stepmother; as well as key defining personality traits of the heroine. Simultaneously, many of the roles of these characters have also been remediated in the live remake and appear to reflect contemporary views of femininity. For example, the heroine's original passive personality is replaced with more pro-active traits demonstrated in scenes where she is able to escape from her abusive situation at home by riding off on her horse and finding comfort in her outside surroundings. Therefore, this critical analysis reveals two aspects of depictions of femininity in the live remake. Firstly, certain female characters with their distinctive personality traits have been remembered in the live remake in order to culturally connect the live remake to the 1950 film reflecting 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions of gender. Secondly, a remediation of the roles of various female characters demonstrate that cultural memory can be applied as an on-going process of reconfiguring the individual and groups' relationship with the past. In this sense, the cultural memory of key female characters of the 1950 film have had certain features remediated in line with more contemporary views of femininity, evident through the company making efforts to incorporate contemporary popular-culture views on femininity. Sperb identifies this by noting that the heroines in Disney's contemporary remakes of their classic Princess Fairy Tale films have maintained some similar physical attributes to their classic counterparts, while also updating their character traits and personality in order to appeal to a new generation of viewers. This new cultural memory of femininity created in the live remake essentially continues the cultural connection of the female characters in both films, while also differentiating these characters through remediated features. The live remake therefore functions as a medium of cultural memory that mediates between depictions of femininity in the 1950 film with contemporary views of femininity. Thus, new cultural

memories of femininity are created through this mediation in the film and also being reflective of both past and present views of femininity.

### *Remembering Ella's 'Female' Mice Friends*

Ella's 'female' mice friends are one example of characters in the live remake whose roles have been remembered for the sake of maintaining a cultural connection to the 1950 film. The remembrance of Ella's 'female' mice friends supports Branagh's claims that he intended to continue the "cultural wagon"<sup>62</sup> of the 1950 film. This 'cultural wagon' can be interpreted as an on-going process of remembering the cultural memory of the 1950 film through certain female characters for the sake of continuing the legacy of Disney's *Cinderella* films in contemporary popular culture. However, the live remake has also remediated some of these depictions in order to reflect the themes of loss and loneliness, as well as humanistic elements that are featured in the film.

The live remake has incidentally 'forgotten' and reconfigured the main roles of the 'female' mice friends from the 1950 film, therefore remediating the roles of the mice to a secondary, non-speaking role in the film. For example, in the scene where Ella is hiding in the hallway of the house as the stepmother throws a party for her friends, Ella saves the mice from Lucifer the cat and comments that "We girls must take care of each other,"<sup>63</sup> winking at the supposed 'female' mice who look up at her curiously but do not appear to actually understand her. Here, Ella's comment appears to further reflect on the humanistic elements of the film, where it is through Ella's own self-strength that allows her to overcome adversities in the film. As the mice themselves are animals that are naturally the prey of cats, it is Ella who

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<sup>62</sup> Radish, C, "CINDERELLA Interview: Kenneth Branagh," *The Telegraph UK*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/cinderella/kenneth-branagh-interview/>

<sup>63</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

protects her fellow ‘girls’ by physically removing Lucifer the cat from the ‘female’ mice’s hiding spot. In this sense, while the live remake does reinforce some patriarchal ideologies, there is also an emphasis on the ability of women to protect each other from male oppression, which is symbolised by Lucifer the cat in this particular scene. However, the actual distinction between ‘male’ and ‘female’ is ambiguous, as the mice are depicted uniformly in shape, size and colour, and are no longer wear cute clothing, which had previously distinguished them in the 1950 film. Furthermore, the high angle shot of the mice as they look up at Ella not only highlights their miniscule size, but also symbolises their less important roles in the live remake. By removing the main roles of Ella’s talking mice friends, it appears that Branagh’s claims of releasing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Cinderella adaptation is further supported with the film’s focus on humanistic themes, where the heroine must rely on her own strength to overcome adversities. This is further confirmed in an interview where Branagh explains that he intended for Ella’s transformation in the film to be purely from “inside a human individual rather than through a supernatural agent”.<sup>64</sup> Another example of this is in the scene where the mice join Ella up in the attic after she is forced to give her room to her stepsisters. High shots of the mice demonstrate not only their diminutive size, but also emphasises their diminished roles in the film. Later in the scene the mice sit on top of the chaise lounge and provide company for Ella as she asks if they have joined her to “seek refuge” from her stepmother and stepsisters who reside in the main living quarters.<sup>65</sup> As Ella speaks to the mice, they stare back at her without responding, further reinforcing the fact that they have been remediated in the live remake as non-talking animals. The mice are seen purely as a comforting presence for Ella, rather than actual companions with whom she could consult. Furthermore, Ella’s female servants replace the talking mice, as her confidantes, who

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<sup>64</sup> Brew, S, “Kenneth Branagh interview: Cinderella, Audiences, Statham,” *denofgeek*, March 25, 2015, <http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/kenneth-branagh/34685/kenneth-branagh-interview-cinderella-audiences-statham>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

she is seen bumping into and conversing with whilst shopping for supplies in the town square. Here, the reconfiguration of the main speaking roles of Ella's mice friends in the 1950 film to a non-speaking, minor role in the live remake signifies the film's status as a contemporary *Cinderella* adaptation that now focuses on humanistic and realistic elements rather than the supernatural, magical elements present in the 1950 animated film.

Nevertheless, the cultural memory of Ella's 'female' mice friends are remembered in the live remake in order to highlight their original roles in the 1950 animated film and maintain a cultural connection between both films by re-asserting the "cultural bandwagon"<sup>66</sup> of Disney's *Cinderella* films into contemporary popular culture. Thus, the live remake has effectively remembered the importance of the heroine's mice friends from the 1950 film, but has also remediated the previous main, speaking roles of the 'female' mice characters to an ambiguous, non-speaking role. As a result, the live remake has created a new cultural memory of the 'female mice characters' by mediating between past depictions of the 'female' mice characters in the 1950 film with the new humanistic elements of the live remake, effectively relegating the 'female' mice characters to non-speaking, secondary roles in the film.

#### *Fairy Godmother as Supernatural 'Maternal' Intervention*

The fairy godmother is remembered in the live remake through her supernatural intervention and as a substitute maternal figure. However, the film also remediate the fairy godmother's role in the film by confining her to only one appearance; that being the magical transformation scene. This scene provides a nostalgic reference the same scene in the 1950 film, while at the same time highlighting how the live attributes Ella's transformation to her

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<sup>66</sup> Radish, C, "CINDERELLA Interview: Kenneth Branagh," *The Telegraph UK*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/cinderella/kenneth-branagh-interview/>

own strength rather than through the intervention of supernatural agents. Nevertheless, while her appearance in the live remake is short, the fairy godmother re-asserts two important themes that has been retained from the 1950 film. First, the fairy godmother is a supernatural representative of Ella's deceased mother and helps Ella to re-affirm her belief in her mother's words to be kind and have courage once more. Second, the fairy godmother's appearance in the film is also the only supernatural scene within the film that is reminiscent of the more magical and fantastical elements of the 1950 film. The physical appearance of the fairy godmother in the live remake is a sharp contrast to her 1950 predecessor as she is portrayed as a ditzy, glamorous looking woman, dressed in shimmering colours and with a greater emphasis on her cleavage; there are very frequent close up shots of the fairy godmother's cleavage compared to the rest of her body. In contrast to the grandmotherly, kind, old fairy godmother depicted in the 1950 film, her character has been remediated in the live remake to be now depicted as a very curvaceous and extravagantly dressed woman, with perfectly coiffured hair and a well-defined figure. The fairy godmother's more arrogant tone of voice is also drastically different to her 1950 counterpart, who previously spoke very softly and gently, much like a friendly grandmother speaking to her grandchildren. However, apart from these remediations, her actions and ditzy personality have been remembered in the live remake, as well as her famous incantation of 'bibbidi bobbidi boo'. Here, the fairy godmother's scene is crucial, being the only single magical scene featured in the live remake, that directly references to the magical transformation scene in the 1950 film, therefore culturally connecting both *Cinderella* films. Her incantation of 'bibbidi bobbidi boo', her ditzy personality, as well as her supernatural intervention during the most distressing scene in the film serves to preserve the cultural memory of the fairy godmother in the 1950 film. Therefore, the live remake remembers the importance of the fairy godmother's role during the magical transformation scene from the 1950 film in order to culturally connect both films.

Although the only remediation made to the fairy godmother's character is a change in her physical appearance, where she is depicted to be a much younger woman with a glamorous sense of style, the fairy godmother's role is essential to the plot line of the *Cinderella* tale as her supernatural intervention enables Ella to attend the Royal Ball and reunite with Kit, thereby aiding in the development of Ella and Kit's relationship. By retaining the original maternal role of the fairy godmother, the live remake remembers the symbolic importance of the fairy godmother's scene in the 1950 film. Meanwhile, a remediation of the original grandmother-like appearance of the fairy godmother into a younger, glamorous appearance appears to reflect Branagh's claims that the live remake is intended to be viewed by an audience within the contemporary context we live in today. Thus, the live remake mediates between the role of the fairy godmother from the 1950 film with more a more updated and contemporary character who is much younger than her 1950 counterpart. This mediation therefore creates a new cultural memory of the fairy godmother's character in the film by simultaneously emphasising the importance of her appearance in the magical transformation scene, which culturally connects both films, while also updating her physical appearance, which signifies the film's status as a contemporary *Cinderella* adaptation.

### *The Stepsisters as Comedic Relief*

The roles of the heroine's stepsisters, Drizella and Anastasia have also been remembered in the live remake, where their antics and childish temperament provide comedic relief throughout the film. Here, the characteristics and personality traits of the characters of the stepsisters are eerily reminiscent to their 1950 counterparts. Some key defining features include their colour-coordinated outfits, ditzy personalities and childish behaviour that the stepsisters display throughout the film. In their first appearance in the film, Anastasia and

Drizella are dressed in matching bonnets and dresses in shades of bright yellow and pink, which reflect their bold, obnoxious personalities. While the stepsisters continue to act as obnoxious and brash as their 1950 counterparts, the live remake also includes an additional element that depicts the stepsisters as twins. Although it is not stated in the film that the characters of the stepsisters are now being portrayed as twins, this remediation appears to be a deliberate choice and intended to greatly reduce the importance of the stepsisters' role in the live remake. This is evident in scenes where the stepsisters are depicted to be constantly oblivious to the action unfolding between the stepmother and Ella. For example, in their first appearance in the film, the stepsisters demonstrate their air-headed and obnoxious personalities when they liken the manor to a farmhouse, and demand of Ella's father that the interior of the house be re-designed to suit current interior trends.

Perhaps as a result of their sheltered life and the stepmother's coddling, the characters of Anastasia and Drizella remain ditzy, obnoxious and completely ignorant of their surroundings. This becomes more obvious as the film progresses, especially in the scene where the stepsisters are sleeping in, which is reminiscent of a similar scene in the 1950 film, where the stepsisters are depicted to be completely engulfed by their quilts as Cinderella gently tries to coax them to wake up. Meanwhile, in the live remake, an over-head shot of the stepsisters' bedroom depicts the room as being in a state of disarray, with clothes, blankets and items strewn all over the floor. The stepsisters are seen heavily snoring and sleeping on top of a mountain of clothes that cover the bed, which further emphasises their extremely lazy personalities. This contrasts to the room of the stepsisters from the 1950 film, where their rooms are depicted to be kept in a pristine and clean condition, although this is due to their rooms being regularly cleaned by Cinderella. However, while these two scenes continue to demonstrate the stepsisters' lazy personalities, the live remake provides some

justification to their behaviour in individual scenes where the stepmother is seen to encourage their behaviour and find their taunting of Ella to be humorous, evident in the scene where the stepsisters had created a new nickname for Ella, changing her name to “Cinderella” upon seeing her completely covered in soot from sleeping by the fireplace. A close-up shot of the stepmother’s face depicts an amused face as she comments that the stepsisters were “too clever”.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the stepsisters’ materialistic, selfish attitudes towards marriage and love is also explained to be a consequence of the stepmother’s teachings that they should only strive to marry rich and successful men. Here, Jeanne Dubino’s concept of the “Cinderella Complex” is relevant when understanding how depictions of femininity in Cinderella films have had an effect on the mentality of young women’s expectations on love and self-identity. Dubino argues that Disney continues to hold an unwavering influence over the way in which women perceive themselves<sup>68</sup>. Dubino further explains that young women relate to domesticity and beauty as ideals for femininity, even if they seek it by any means possible to marry a rich, handsome man. This is evident in the scene where Ella is preparing the stepsisters for the royal ball. As Ella stands between both stepsisters who are jumping on their beds, the stepsisters reveal that they do not care for love as they were taught to believe that “all men are fools”<sup>69</sup> and that they should only strive to achieve wealth and a higher-class status. This attitude is extremely reminiscent of the 1950 film, where the stepmother also encourages her daughters to marry the prince in order to ensure that they would be financially stable and gain higher social standing. However, these values that the stepmother teaches her daughters, in which they should aspire to marry a wealthy rich man appears to also reflect traditional, patriarchal ideologies of class and sex, where women were confined to the domestic sphere and had to solely rely on their husbands for financial stability. As a result,

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<sup>67</sup> Cinderella, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

<sup>68</sup> Dubino, “The Cinderella Complex,” 103.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



women under patriarchal ideology remained subordinate to men, who held the power in society.<sup>70</sup> In this sense, while the stepsisters' roles in the live remake have only been slightly remediated, the live remake reconsiders their roles in reflection of the *Cinderella* complex held by young women and adopted in contemporary popular culture. Thus, the stepsisters' expectations of marrying a rich, handsome man are justified in the film as the effects of the influence of Disney's *Cinderella* films over young women in contemporary popular culture.

Another key defining feature of the stepsisters that is remembered in the live remake is the positioning of the stepsisters as the stepmother's ditzy lackeys, although their roles remain secondary to the building rivalry between Ella and the stepmother. Here, by relegating the stepsisters to secondary roles, the live remake has remediated the cultural memory of the stepsisters' roles from the 1950 film by making the stepsisters less malicious and depicting them as merely young, childish twin girls who have been severely spoiled by their mother. In scenes that feature the stepsisters, Ella and the stepmother, the stepsisters are mainly positioned in the background, where they are usually seen to encourage the stepmother's taunts and abuse towards Ella or are seen making off-hand comments at the end of each scene that features the stepsisters in order to further emphasise their obnoxious and ditzy personalities. However, as the film progresses, the stepsisters' roles are further pushed back as the tension between the stepmother and Ella builds, therefore positioning the stepsisters in the background of the scenes where they are seen dawdling around whilst watching the drama unfold between the stepmother and Ella. For example, when the stepmother 'accidentally' drops her tea cup onto the floor of the salon, the camera focuses on Ella's and

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<sup>70</sup> Zipes argues that Walt Disney was a very traditional, patriarchal man whose beliefs resonated with the Grimms' 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions. Hence, the Disney films tended to be based on tales by the Grimms or Perrault, whose tales were also very patriarchal in nature. Here, Zipes furthers his argument and states that Disney has therefore appropriated the fairy tale genre in a way where he could 'civilise' his viewers by spreading his own message about proper "sex roles, behaviours, manners and customs" through his films. See more in Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 206-208.

the stepmother's facial expressions to highlight the growing tension between the pair. Meanwhile, in the background of the scene, one of the stepsisters continues to sing loudly and off-key as they play the piano, while the other stepsister is settled on the chaise lounge opposite the stepmother. As the stepmother commands Ella to pick up the tea cup, a brief cut to the stepsister's face shows that she is curious about the exchange between the stepmother and Ella, though she does not contribute to the conversation and remains silent. In another scene, when Ella's dress is being ripped apart by the stepsisters and the stepmother, quick jump cuts between the stepsisters and close up cuts of the stepmother's smirking face emphasises on the stepsisters' roles as the stepmother's sidekicks, who continue to do her dirty work as she gleefully watches on.

While the stepsisters in the live remake continue to display obnoxious, ditzzy and extremely childish personalities from the 1950 film, their malicious intent towards Ella has significantly lessened. This difference is apparent in the scene where Ella is about to leave the manor with Kit. As Ella and Kit approach the front door, a startling cry from the stepsisters is heard as they hurry into the drawing room and collapse onto their knees, begging Ella for forgiveness for their actions as they had only followed the stepmother's orders. Their positioning on the floor as they glance up at Ella reveals not only their regret and remorse over their actions, but also the power imbalance between the trio as Ella gains an upper-hand by attaining marriage with a king, whilst the stepsisters remain in a penniless manor with a widowed mother. Therefore, while there is no significant remediation made to the stepsisters' characters, their roles are significant enough in Disney's *Cinderella* films, where they are remembered as the heroine's silly and childish stepsisters. However, in the live remake, the stepsisters' personality traits are remediated through the film's explanation for their behaviour and attitude towards Ella. Perhaps as a result of the stepmother's own feelings of inferiority as a

widow in a pseudo-medieval social system,<sup>71</sup> the stepsisters' own behaviour serves to be reflections of their mother's own inferiority complex. Nonetheless, the depictions of the stepsisters have been remembered in the live remake, with some remediations made to their characters that appears to reflect on Branagh's claims that the live remake is intended for the audience living within the contemporary context that we reside in. Thus, the live remake mediates the roles of the stepsisters by remembering key features from the 1950 film, while also remediating certain characteristics, such as depicting the stepsisters as twins, in order to present a new cultural memory, which depicts them as Ella's ditzy, yet remorseful stepsisters in the film.

### *Justifying the Stepmother*

In the live remake, another important character whose role from the 1950 film is remembered is the stepmother. While the stepmother's name, status and her original role as the primary antagonist has been retained in the live remake, certain features that were inherent to the stepmother's character have been remediated in the live remake to contest the depiction of her character in the 1950 film. Here, this study contends that Branagh remediates the cultural memory of the stepmother's cruelty in the 1950 film with contemporary views of femininity. While Davis notes that depictions of women in contemporary popular culture now includes single mothers and other permutations of these identities, the stepmother's status as a twice-widowed woman with no career or money, combined with a terrible attitude involving evil schemes clearly misaligns with Davis's figure of the "respectable woman".<sup>72</sup> However, it is also important to examine the stepmother's status as the anti-figure of the respectable woman when dissecting her complex character in the film. Here, the live remake divulges further

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<sup>71</sup> Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 204.

<sup>72</sup> Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 169.

revelations into the stepmother's complex personality, remediating her character in order to reflect issues surrounding depictions of femininity in contemporary popular culture. Some of these issues include the themes of female rivalry that were previously featured in the 1950 film, depictions of the femme fatale figure in popular film, as well as the complexities of blended families in contemporary society.

The stepmother is first introduced to the film as Lady Tremaine, a widow whose husband had tragically passed away and who was also an acquaintance of Ella's father, as he had previous business dealings with her late husband. Further emphasis is placed on the stepmother's status as a poor widow, and her supposed difficulty in providing for her two daughters from her previous marriage. Serving as a nostalgic reminder of the 1950 film, the stepmother's character is remembered through her vindictive and jealous nature and re-affirms arguments that female rivalry is inevitable in fairy tales.<sup>73</sup> Described as "a woman of refined taste,"<sup>74</sup> the stepmother's jealousy of Cinderella's beauty and youth, as well as her own extravagance and desperate attempts to attain wealth leads to her ultimate downfall. This portrayal of the stepmother recalls Lieberman and Gilbert and Gubar's previous arguments that the stepmother is the perfect example of an 'un-feminine' character whose overly ambitious personality results in her own detriment and punishment at the end of the story.<sup>75</sup> However, in an attempt to justify her actions, the evil and scheming stepmother also reveals a softer, weaker side to her character. While she may appear to be physically intimidating and sharp looking compared to Ella's more friendly and soft-looking features, there are certain scenes of the stepmother within the film that invite sympathy and understanding from the viewer.

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<sup>73</sup> Gilbert and Gubar find that many fairy tales tend to pit the heroine against her stepmother, in which the latter is depicted as a jealous, ugly woman. See more in Gilbert and Gubar, "Snow White," 291.

<sup>74</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

<sup>75</sup> Lieberman's article suggests that 'good girls' are rewarded with a prince, marriage and wealth, while women who stray from the patriarchal ideals of femininity are punished for their non-conforming behaviour. See more in Lieberman, "Some Day My Prince," 383.

While the live remake remembers the role of the stepmother's character as the main antagonist, Branagh again remediates her character with more humanistic elements that invites pity and understanding from the audience.

One of the major remediations made to the character of the stepmother is the film's depiction of the stepmother's physical appearance and personality traits, which appear to mirror the features of the femme fatale figure in Hollywood cinema, where she is portrayed as a dark, sensual woman whose agenda is to foil the protagonist's plans. Likewise, the stepmother's jealousy of Ella's youth and innocence is similar to how the femme fatale's motive in the film is to effectively complicate the plot line by becoming an obstacle that the protagonist must either overcome or defeat in order to 'live happily ever after'. In order to differentiate between protagonists and antagonists,<sup>76</sup> many films primarily featured the role of a femme fatale, or evil woman, who is depicted as a woman with a shapely, sexualised body, sharp facial features that are further accentuated by dark makeup, and a lower, monotonous tone of voice. Rejecting all the stereotypical feminine qualities of the female protagonist, the femme fatale figure is depicted as a woman who is cynical and highly sexualised, preferring to be promiscuous and rejecting motherhood. The femme fatale figure is also referred to as the "Killer Dame"<sup>77</sup> and is often featured in crime dramas as the murderous woman or villain who plots behind the scenes in order to pursue her own hidden agenda. This femme fatale image is reflected in the initial appearance of the stepmother in the live remake. For example, there is a low, close-up shot of the stepmother's shoe as she first steps out of the carriage, seemingly signifying her intimidating and dominant presence before the camera slowly pans out to reveal a full body shot of the stepmother as she gazes upwards at the household. The

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<sup>76</sup> Putnam, "Mean Ladies," 152.

<sup>77</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*, 134.

low camera angle of the stepmother gives the impression that the viewer is looking up at the stepmother, while the sounds of a low bass line, similar to the one of the shark approaching its victim in the film *Jaws* is heard, symbolising the imminent danger about to face Ella. In addition, the stepmother's cat is leashed and seen stalking across the drive way, hissing and meowing as it begins to inspect its new surroundings. The cat's black coat, mean facial expression and languid way of walking acts as a personification of the stepmother who carries a certain dark and ominous aura with a dissatisfied facial expression. Furthermore, much like the cat's dark coat, the stepmother is dressed in an all-black outfit combined with a netted veil over her face further adding to her imposing and guarded persona. During this scene, viewers are reminded of the stepmother's character from the 1950 film when the voice-over narration describes the stepmother as a woman of keen feeling and refined taste; which is demonstrated by her elaborate dress style, bold makeup, refined posture, and her upper-class, New England accent, reminiscent of the stepmother's accent in the 1950 film. Therefore, while there has been a remediation of the stepmother's physical appearance in the live remake, the film ensures that there is a cultural connection between both *Cinderella* films through the remembrance of certain aspects of her character from the 1950 film, such as the stepmother's cruelty and tyranny towards Ella.

While most of the stepmother's key characteristics from the 1950 film have been remembered in the live remake, one remediated aspect of the stepmother contests the stepmother's personality from the 1950 film. Instead of depicting the stepmother as a purely evil, cold, calculating woman, Branagh utilises her status as a widow in order to highlight her own internal struggles as a widowed woman with two daughters living within a pseudo-medieval world where there is a very rigid social system set in place. Thus, the stepmother's

status as a widow is also explored through the lens of our contemporary world to reflect contemporary insights into blended families.

While the live remake depicts the stepmother as the primary antagonist in the film, there are also scenes that depicts the stepmother as a woman who has experienced extreme difficulties in her life, such as the unfortunate death of her first husband which lead to her marriage to Ella's father for both financial and emotional support. For example, in one scene, the stepmother attempts to find Ella and her father, who are later shown in a medium-shot talking intimately in the reading room. When the stepmother is about to call out to Ella's father, she overhears the pair discussing Ella's late mother, whom Ella's father describes as the heart of the house, and someone who will never be forgotten. Ella's father's statement effectively reduces the stepmother's status in the household even further, as she is reminded once again of her status as the stepmother. This is further exemplified in the scene with a close-up shot of the stepmother's face as she watches the pair from behind the glass door, her face displaying her emotions as clearly feeling dejected when reminded that she will always remain as an outsider and secondary to Ella's mother in the house. Likewise, in a later scene when the stepmother and the stepsisters learn of Ella's father's death from a messenger at the front foyer of the house, the stepmother is portrayed feeling dejected and disappointed that she is once again widowed for the second time. Upon hearing that Ella's father had only thought of Ella and her mother leading up to his death, the camera zooms onto the stepmother's face which was partially hidden by the shadows of the hallway, with the stepmother's facial expression being one of disappointment and further dejection which she attempts to hide by exclaiming that she and her daughters are now ruined. It is from that moment onwards that we begin to see a development in the stepmother's animosity towards

Ella, and her desperation to stay financially afloat dictates the stepmother's schemes to ruin Ella's chance at happiness.

The death of Ella's father in the film also serves to further highlight the issue of ongoing complexities in blended families, as the death of Ella's father becomes a catalyst for the stepmother's tyrannical attitude and domineering personality to manifest into a crueller and vindictive attitude toward Ella, who has to deal with the brunt of all her anger and disappointment. Here, the live remake remembers the stepmother's tyrannical and cruel nature from the 1950 film that re-emerges as the death of Ella's father allows her character to take the main spotlight.

Following the death of Ella's father, the stepmother's confinement to her role as an outsider is obsolete as she suddenly takes the reigns and controls the household as she pleases. Here, her dislike of Ella intensifies as she is constantly reminded of the fact that the house and husband she had acquired has both gone and left her to be a widow for a second time. It becomes even more insulting for the stepmother after she realises that the household's aura and style has been kept to the taste of Ella's mother. Here, feeling threatened by Ella and Ella's mother's presence in the house, the stepmother resorts to desperate measures in order to erase their presence. An example is seen in the scene where the stepmother insults Ella's mother's sense of style when she sees Ella's mother's old baby pink dress that Ella had painstakingly repaired to wear to the royal ball. The stepmother proceeds to remark that Ella's mother was not of a higher social status based on her outdated sense of style and insinuates that Ella's rural upbringing and her mother's carefree personality automatically excludes Ella from being accepted into higher society. Ella, who had spent her spare time sewing and repairing her mother's old dress is visibly offended and responds by demanding that the stepmother apologise for insulting her late mother. Here, what can be seen in the live



remake is that the stepmother's status as an outsider is properly addressed, expanding the storyline of the 1950 film.

While the stepmother's character and cruelty are remembered in the live remake, Branagh contests and remediates her original role as an inherently evil woman by utilising the themes of loss and loneliness in the live remake. This remediation of the stepmother's originally purely evil character from the 1950 film therefore further explains and justifies her reasons for being tyrannical and cruel towards Ella as being a reflection of ongoing complexities in blended families in contemporary society. To further the argument that Branagh has remediated the stepmother's character with more humanistic elements. The stepmother's tyranny is also justified in the live remake. In comparison to the live remake, the 1950 film had no reason or justification for the stepmother's cruelty, offering only a black and white image of an evil or good person in the film. However, in the live remake, a different perspective of the stepmother's character is revealed here, where the audience gains an understanding of how her traumatic past has changed the stepmother into a cold and cruel widow. The stepmother's character in the live remake also serves to further the film's focus on the themes of loss and loneliness. Therefore, while the stepmother's cruelty towards Ella is retained, the live remake remediates the stepmother's abuse towards Ella from the 1950 film and instead justifies her actions as the result of a culmination of her own personal issues, and the fact that she has repeatedly lost both love and financial stability throughout her life. Here, the stepmother's struggles are further justified in the live remake, which is a sharp contrast to the stepmother's portrayal in the 1950 film. Rather than depict her as a purely evil character, the stepmother's role as the evil female protagonist is reconsidered, and instead given a back story that justifies her reasons for being cruel. Here, Branagh seems to have intended to remediate her image in order to reflect on the diversified depictions available of

women in contemporary popular culture. Instead of depicting the stepmother as a woman who represents the 'respectable' woman figure, the stepmother has lost two husbands, is financially broke, and has no career.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, her two daughters are yet to marry rich, successful man like the stepmother had planned. Instead, the stepmother is constantly scheming throughout the film in order to find husbands for her daughters to save them from poverty and loneliness. The stepmother's inner conflict and personal struggles all culminate at the end, when she confronts Ella in the attic. In this scene, the stepmother, seen sitting in the farthest corner of the attic, her face shrouded by the shadows of the room, tells Ella her life story in a fairy tale narrative format. However, rather than achieving a happy ending as most fairy tales, hers was an 'unhappily ever after' with a unique monologue during the attic scene highlighting the stepmother's weaknesses, losses, as well as her desperation to escape her own fate as a widow. It is in this scene that the stepmother reveals her back story, shedding some light on her cruelty towards Ella, as well as an explanation for her motives:

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful girl who married for love. And she had two loving daughters. All was well but, one day, her husband, the light of her life died. The next time, she married for the sake of her daughters. But that man, too, was taken from her. And she was doomed to look everyday upon his beloved child. She had hoped to marry off one of her beautiful, stupid daughters to the prince. But his head was turned by a girl with glass slippers. And so...I lived unhappily ever after. My story would appear to be ended.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A respectable woman is a woman who could be a mother, wife and career woman at the same time. Refer to Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 169.

<sup>79</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

This fairy tale narrative reflects upon *Cinderella* tale's folk tale origins, while at the same time provides a chance for the audience to understand the motive behind the stepmother's cruel personality. Rather than end the story with an expected 'happily ever after' that is synonymous with Disney's fairy tale films, the stepmother's role as a villain meant that her ending will always remain 'unhappy'. This effect of the fairy tale narrative format used by the stepmother invites the audiences to both pity and sympathize with the stepmother, as they understand the reason behind her cruel and vindictive personality. Furthermore, when Ella rejects the stepmother's demand that she agrees to comply with her scheme, Ella questions the stepmother's motives and asks the stepmother to explain why she is so cruel toward her. Here, the stepmother admits that it is because Ella is still a young girl, whose youth and inexperience in life deems her innocent and good, whilst the stepmother has long past her youth, and is left with neither husband nor financial stability.

Reminiscent of the key theme of female rivalry in the 1950 film, the intertextual reference included in the attic scene between the stepmother and Ella also shows a regression in the stepmother's character, while remembering the main theme of female rivalry that was previously featured in the 1950 film. However, compared to the character of the stepmother in the 1950 film, there is more depth to the stepmother, whose past experiences have affected the way in which she thinks and acts in the film, thus inviting understanding and sympathy from the viewers. Thus, the live remake has mediated between the stepmother's character from the 1950 film with contemporary socio-cultural issues on blended families and single mothers, as well as depictions of the femme fatale figure in film. While certain aspects are remembered, such as her cruelty towards Ella, other aspects have instead been remediated, such as the inclusion of the background context for the stepmother's cruelty, which contests and remediates the 1950 film's depiction of her character as a purely evil woman. Thus, this

depiction of the stepmother reconfigures her past depiction in the 1950 film and creates a new cultural memory in the live remake, where the stepmother's personality is given more emotional depth and presents a more complex character in the film.

### *Ella as Pro-active Heroine?*

The character of the heroine, now aptly named Ella, also goes through a similar process of remembering and remediating in the live remake. Firstly, there is an obvious remediation made to her previously docile nature, where she was initially depicted confined to the household, aside from the scene where she goes to the Royal Ball and meets Prince Charming. The remediation made to Ella's character gave her more pro-active traits that better aligned with contemporary depictions of women. As Davis states, depictions of the 'good girl' image disappeared in popular culture. Instead, contemporary depictions portrayed a more complex heroine, "whose goodness was exemplified by her being innocent and asexual, and beginning to emerge in this period was the woman who was kind, virtuous, good, and aware of (as well as able to enjoy) her own sexuality".<sup>80</sup> As a result, images of the passive, kind-hearted and innocent young woman, which had previously reflected in the depiction of the heroine in the 1950 film, began to phase out and become replaced with a more pro-active, strong image of women in line with contemporary culture views.

Furthermore, Davis also argues that this new category of Disney Princess heroines was a dramatic departure from the first generation of Disney Princesses, with this new Disney heroine exuding qualities such as "independence, strength of will, determination to engineer their own fates, and insisted on being true to themselves".<sup>81</sup> Thus we notice the beginning of

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<sup>80</sup> Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 169.

<sup>81</sup> Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 176.

a trend in Disney movies based on the awareness and impact of second-wave feminism on contemporary popular cultural views on femininity.

The character of Ella has also been updated with a more pro-active personality that seems to reflect the efforts of second-wave feminism and the consequent diversified depictions of femininity in contemporary popular culture, which coincides with Davis's previous argument of Disney's increased awareness.<sup>82</sup> In support of Davis's previous argument, Ella's pro-active personality appears to be a reflection of the company's attempt to portray more "tough gal" heroines who were independent, strong-willed, determined to engineer their own fates and were true to themselves.<sup>83</sup> Also, as Davis previously stated, popular culture in the 1980s depicted 'respectable' women as women who were adept at household work, manage high-flying careers, be a caring mother to their children, as well as be a loyal and loving wife to their husbands.<sup>84</sup> This new image of the 'respectable woman' was also reflected in Disney's second generation of Princess Fairy Tale films, depicting the heroine as independent, head-strong and determined women seeking to find their own identity in the midst of a burgeoning romance with the male lead. For example, the live remake dedicates the first 15 minutes of the film with a montage of Ella's happy childhood with her parents and delves into the development on her independent personality. Scenes that feature Ella and her parents are bathed in a natural, warm sunlit glow that makes the scenes appear to be ethereal and dream-like, which also seems to foreshadow the impending death of Ella's mother and the arrival of her stepfamily. While Ella happily enjoys her short time with her parents, the dream-like sequence of events also suggests that Ella's happiness will be short-lived. After Ella's mother passes away, subsequent scenes are constantly shrouded in dark

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<sup>82</sup> Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 176.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 176

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

shadows and dominated by the presence of the stepmother and stepsisters. This contrast of Ella's scenes with her parents and her subsequent scenes with her new stepfamily also seems to be reflective of women's newfound freedom and independence, as Ella is depicted as being not submissive towards her stepfamily but chooses to act diplomatically around them. This is first demonstrated in the scene where Ella first learns of her stepfamily's arrival. While a close-up shot of Ella's face shows that she is a bit confused with the idea of having a new family, she nevertheless smiles and assures her father that she is happy to welcome her new stepfamily. Furthermore, the initial scenes of Ella and her parents further reflects women's choice of lifestyle, as Ella is depicted as a young, happy girl who is encouraged by her parents to grow up as a well-mannered and independent young woman. Additionally, Ella's parents do not encourage Ella to marry and instead encourage Ella to explore and show faith in magic, which is a belief that she adopts from her mother.

The changing depictions of women in popular culture appears to be reflected through Ella's pro-active personality and intellect, which is first demonstrated when she meets Kit for the first time in the forest. Prior to their first meeting, Ella had run away from home and rode on horseback from her household into the forest, where she incidentally meets Kit for the first time. Her sudden display of action in this scene seems to reflect the impact of second-wave feminism on depictions of femininity in popular culture. Perhaps to serve as a reflection of the new lifestyle choices where young women could take control of their lives post second-wave feminism, Ella's ability to run away from home after the abuse from her stepfamily demonstrates Ella's ability to make choices of leaving her situation when she chooses to. Ella is also depicted to reflect a more independent and pro-active personality post second-wave feminism, in the scene when Ella refuses to concede to Kit's opinion that stag hunting is merely 'something that is done' and argues Kit has the choice to change tradition. Ella

refuses to leave the forest until she is satisfied that Kit will not pursue the stag and kill it, displaying a very determined and stubborn personality. Her bold personality is a departure from her 1950 counterpart, and also signifies how Disney has re-created *Cinderella* for a contemporary audience. Furthermore, Ella's intellect is also acknowledged by Kit himself, who upon meeting Ella in the forest, confesses that he cannot forget Ella because of her intelligence and how she encourages him to not follow tradition, but to change it. Kit is also shown to repeat Ella's words, and uses it as motivation for his role as future king. During their first meeting, Ella replies with witty remarks to Kit and remains coy when Kit inquires about Ella's identity. Rather than appear weak and dependent, Ella leads Kit to believe that she is only a lowly, scullery maid whose family treats her 'well enough' and does not invite any pity or sympathy from him. This is shown with the medium shot of both Ella and Kit circling around each other on their horses as they converse. This suggests that both Ella and Kit are depicted as equals in the scene and also demonstrates Ella's ability to converse with and maintain a conversation with Kit, who most likely has a more highly educated background in comparison to Ella. This meeting is important as it sets up the future romance between Ella and Kit, which also remediates the theme of 'love at first sight' in the 1950 animated film, which depicted Cinderella and Prince Charming's first meeting at the Royal Ball scene. This remediation seems to be in reflection of changing depictions of women in popular culture as they are now depicted as independent, pro-active young women who are no longer confined to their household. The previous Disney theme of 'love at first sight' is also obsolete, and instead presents a more realistic view of relationships in reality, which would require more than one meeting between a man and woman before they fall in love. Ella also refrains from giving her name to Kit and assesses his reaction before she gives him a response. Therefore, this seems to be a further reflection of the independent lifestyles young

women experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, as Ella does not act submissive to Kit and remains coy about her true identity.

While there is a remediation of Ella's character in the live remake, such as replacing her docile nature with more pro-active characteristics, the live remake continues to remember some key defining features of the *Cinderella* heroine from the 1950 film. Here, the idea of cultural memory demonstrates that these key features are remembered in order to maintain the legacy of Disney's variant of the *Cinderella* tale in contemporary popular culture. As argued by Zipes<sup>85</sup> and Wood<sup>86</sup>, the legacy of the *Cinderella* tale continues to be identified through the heroine's kind and passive personality, which has remained consistent over time as the universal theme of the *Cinderella* tale. Furthermore, Greenhill and Rudy note that while Disney began to demonstrate the company's awareness of the impact of second-wave feminism on contemporary popular cultural views on femininity, the company's contemporary Princess Fairy Tale films continued to depict more traditional, conservative images of the heroine. This is argued by Sawin:

Both feminist criticism of "traditional" fairy tales and folklorists' efforts to popularize tales with forceful heroines contribute to the fairy-tale heroine's positive reimagining. Still, the Disney enterprise remains an extremely influential and largely conservative purveyor of images, especially for young girls.<sup>87</sup>

Although the live remake does attempt to promote a more pro-active, independent image of the heroine, it is obvious that certain retentions of the heroine's key features not only

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<sup>85</sup> Zipes, "The Triumph of The Underdog," 388.

<sup>86</sup> Wood, "Domesticating Dreams," 34.

<sup>87</sup> Sawin, "Things Walt Disney Never Told," 106.



culturally connects both *Cinderella* films, but also has the potential to reinforce “outdated patriarchal ideologies”<sup>88</sup> that were also featured in the 1950 film. Thus, some of the key features of the heroine that have been remembered includes the heroine’s relatively kind and passive personality, the colour of Ella’s ball gown and the symbolic importance of the heroine’s glass slippers, which determines her future marriage to the prince. Therefore, the retention of these key motifs that represent the heroine of Disney’s *Cinderella* tale ensures that the live remake remembers and continues the transmission of Disney’s variant of the *Cinderella* tale into contemporary popular culture.

One of the key features that has been remembered in the live remake is the heroine’s kind and passive personality, which Branagh reasons is further demonstration of Ella’s “nonviolent resistance”.<sup>89</sup> While this can also be viewed as a reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies of femininity, in which women were submissive towards men and remained in the domestic sphere, this feature of the heroine in Disney’s *Cinderella* films has continued to be re-asserted into contemporary popular culture for the sake of maintaining a cultural connection between both *Cinderella* films. In her essay on Disney’s 1950 *Cinderella* film, Wood writes:

Mirroring other aspects of American ideology, Disney's *Cinderella* offers the quasi-religious reassurance that hard work, clean living, self-control, and adherence to the ideal will produce the desired result, in this case, appropriate to the American Dream for Girls: rich and handsome Mr. Right.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Pershing and Gablehouse, “Disney’s Enchanted,” 99.

<sup>89</sup> Rich, K, “Kenneth Branagh on the “Little Revolution” he brought to *Cinderella*,” *Vanity Fair*, March 13, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/03/kenneth-branagh-cinderella-interview>.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*.

While Wood's argument was based on the 1950 film, the live remake has been marketed as a contemporary adaptation of the 1950 film, thus making Wood's argument still valid when examining the key themes and ideas on gender that the live remake has remembered from the 1950 film. While there are some alterations made to the character of the heroine (e.g. changing her name from Cinderella to Ella), the heroine still retains the same personality traits of hard work, determination, kindness and passivity. While Ella's personality traits have been supposedly updated in line with current socio-cultural views on femininity, the sharp contrast of her personality with other female characters in the film alludes to Wood's argument that the heroine embodies the ideal femininity traits that are used to attract Prince Charming in the tale. From the very beginning, Ella is depicted as a young, able woman who is adept at housework, singing, language and reading. Her proficiencies coupled with her natural beauty are therefore an attractive package that attracts Kit when they first meet in the forest. While Kit insists that he was first attracted to her personality, he does admit in a later scene during a conversation with The Royal Captain that he finds her a "pretty girl". Therefore, the 2015 live remake does continue to reinforce key Disneyfied depictions of femininity and the theme of beauty and passivity from the 1950 animated film, despite Branagh's claim that the film aims to depict a more active, 21-st century role model for young women and girls.

### *The Blue Ball Gown*

One memorable key feature of the heroine in the 1950 film was her powder blue, shimmering ball gown, which the fairy godmother had commented was to match the colour of her eyes.<sup>91</sup> It is therefore no surprise that the magnificent, azure blue ball gown reappears during the magical transformation scene, in which Ella and some of her animal friends are transformed

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<sup>91</sup> Craven, *Fairy Tale Interrupted*, 187.

in order to take Ella to the Royal Ball. Disney appears to have deliberately re-imagined the same scene in the live remake, where all the magical and supernatural elements that were contained within the same scene in the 1950 film are given a new “lease of cultural life”<sup>92</sup> in the magical transformation scene in the live remake. This can be seen through the incorporation of new film-editing techniques, such as the use of CGI effects that provides the animated, magical aspect to Ella’s ball gown, which appears to engulf Ella during her transformation scene. While the fairy godmother’s supernatural intervention and the transformation of the heroine’s animal friends into chauffeurs and horses are reminiscent of the 1950 film, it is Ella’s blue dress that takes centre stage in the magical transformation scene. In this scene, when the fairy godmother casts her spell and Ella’s dress begins to take shape, CGI effects are heavily used to emphasise on the magical element of the scene. The entire scene is engulfed in a dizzying array of bright glittery lights as Ella is spun around by the magic spell. Butterflies encircle her form as she is set against a black backdrop that reinforces the magical element of the scene when a shade of azure blue engulfs the darkness and directs the viewer’s eyes to focus on Ella’s dress as it takes shape. Craven also notes that the choice to retain the heroine’s blue ball gown from the 1950 film may have been a deliberate choice in order to retain the passive, submissive personality of the heroine.<sup>93</sup> The colour blue can also signify and reflect the heroine’s purity, innocence and chastity. According to Warner, the Virgin Mary is represented by the colour blue which symbolised her chastity and her purity. This idea seems to have been reflected in the live remake in order to emphasise on Ella’s chastity and obedience.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, while Ella has been remediated to be a more pro-active heroine, one of her key defining characteristics that the audience remembers from the 1950 film is her enduring kindness and passivity, which is noticeably

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<sup>92</sup> ErlI, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>93</sup> Craven, *Fairy Tale Interrupted*, 187.

<sup>94</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, xxxi.

reinforced throughout the film when she recites her mother's words of "Have courage and be kind".<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, viewers familiar with the heroine's transformation scene in the 1950 film will easily recognize that the same scene has been re-inserted into the live remake, although it has been updated with more technologically advanced film editing techniques, such as the use of CGI and SFX during Ella's magical transformation scene.

While the cultural memory of the blue ball gown from the 1950 film is remembered in the live remake, some slight remediations have also been made. In this sense, while the live remake remembers the blue ball gown from the 1950 film, some aspects of the original ball gown in the 1950 film have remediated instead in order to present a new cultural memory of the heroine's infamous ball gown in the live remake. Here, Branagh's claims to present a contemporary *Cinderella* adaptation is highlighted by the modification of key motifs of the 1950 film. When examining the symbolism of butterflies, they can be seen as a metaphorical representation of resurrection, endurance, change, hope and life.<sup>96</sup> When we apply this interpretation to the live remake, we can also make sense of the idea that the live remake intends to both preserve the cultural memory of key gender depictions in the 1950 film, while also remediating some of these depictions in order to re-imagine the film in contemporary popular culture, thus offering Disney's *Cinderella* film variant a new "lease of cultural life"<sup>97</sup> that enables the film to carry into the contemporary context.<sup>98</sup> While there is no further information on whether the inclusion of butterflies on Ella's dress are meant to reflect this idea, the fact that Branagh had previously stated in his interview that he had wished to release the live remake for the audience within the contemporary context that we live in certainly attests to this idea. Thus, Branagh leaves his own cultural mark on the film through the

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<sup>95</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

<sup>96</sup> Allinson, "The Butterfly, The Mole," 213.

<sup>97</sup> Erll, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

inclusion of the butterflies on the dress, which intersects and contests with past depictions of Cinderella's transformation scene and her ball gown that was featured in the 1950 film, therefore presenting a new cultural memory of the heroine's infamous ball gown and transformation scene in the film.

### *The Glass Slippers*

The symbolic importance of Ella's glass slippers is also remembered in the live remake and serves as a direct, nostalgic reference to the heroine's glass slippers in the 1950 film. While older tales of *Cinderella* also feature the symbolism of the heroine's shoes, it is Disney's variant that portrays the heroine's shoes as glass slippers, seemingly to reinforce the heroine's purity and innocence. In the scene where Ella is preparing to get ready for the Royal Ball, the fairy godmother incants a final spell that transforms Ella's plain ballet flats into a pair of sparkling, Swarovski glass heels. A close-up shot revolves around the heels in order to highlight all of the intricate details of the glass heels, as well as to signify the importance of the glass slipper previously featured in the 1950 film. Upon seeing her new heels, Ella comments that "They are made of glass" and looks delighted with the idea of wearing on such precious shoes. Ella's comment serves to symbolise the importance of the glass slipper in the 1950 film, as well as earlier tales, such as Perrault's *Cendrillon*.

As the live remake is based on Perrault's *Cendrillon*, the importance of the glass slipper referenced in Perrault's tale symbolises the fragility and beauty of the heroine.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, this idea that a woman's value is through her virginal, fragile status reflects the 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions that are featured in Perrault and the Grimms's *Cinderella* tales.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Delarue's study of French folklore argues that the inclusion of glass was a symbol of virginity, in which glass is fragile and can only break once. See more in Delarue, "From Perrault to Walt Disney," 113.

<sup>100</sup> Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," 348.

Furthermore, Delarue states that the use of glass in folklore is symbolic, as precious materials such as glass, diamonds and gold have been traditionally used in literary fairy tales as the material predominantly used to create things in the fairy tale realm. Here, the use of precious metals such as glass symbolised purity and fragility. Delarue states that most literary fairy tales incorporate the precious metals of glass, copper, gold, silver, diamonds in order to represent the things that are created in the fairy tale realm.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, by highlighting the magical aspect of the film, the retention of the heroine's glass slippers not only highlights of her virginal, pure status as a young woman, but also of the fact that the glass slippers were used to symbolise the supernatural help stemming from the fairy tale realm, further culturally connecting the live remake back to the more fantastical and magical elements of the 1950 film. Thus, the key themes and motifs from the 1950 film, such as the glass slippers, the heroine's docile and passive personality and the blue ball gown have been remembered in the live remake as key motifs of Disney's *Cinderella* heroine. Meanwhile, slight remediations made to these motifs, such as the addition of butterflies to Ella's ball gown and to the Swarovski glass slippers signify of Branagh's intention to leave a cultural mark on the film. This is done by slightly remediating these key motifs in order to update and culturally connect the symbolic significance of the motifs from the 1950 film with the audience in contemporary popular culture.

#### 2.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the utilisation of the idea of cultural memory in this critical analysis reveals that the cultural memory of some key depictions of femininity in the 1950 film have been remembered in the live remake for the sake of culturally connecting both *Cinderella* films. Meanwhile, certain aspects of these depictions have also been contested and remediated by

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

contemporary views of femininity. Nevertheless, what is evident through the live remake is that various key features of the female characters, such as the heroine's passive personality, as argued by Sperb:

The princess has thus always been rendered in the cinematic trends occurring at her original release. Disney actually maintains her contemporaneity in its dual aspects: maintaining the original design, while successively renewing its appeal by re-rendering her in new releases, marketing and merchandising. Disney does not precisely erase her original quality, so much as create continuity between that quality and her contemporary audiences.<sup>102</sup>

In this sense, the remembrance of certain 'Disneyfied' depictions of femininity in the live remake remembers and continues the legacy of the 1950 film, such as the heroine's passive personality, glass slippers, and her famous blue ball gown during the magical transformation scene. Meanwhile, certain remediations made to these key depictions both reflect contemporary views of femininity, while they contest and forget certain features of their predecessors from the 1950 film. These remediated features include the addition of the heroine's more pro-active personality, the stepmother's back story, the fairy godmother's more youthful and glamorous appearance, and the 'female' mice's relegation to secondary, non-speaking roles in the film. These examples in the live remake demonstrate the ongoing process of remembering and forgetting the cultural memory of key depictions of femininity by simultaneously connecting and differentiating the live remake from the 1950 film. Thus, it is through this intersection of past and present depictions of femininity that signifies the cultural mark that Branagh has left on the film, where there is a mediation between past

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<sup>102</sup> Sperb, *Flickers of Film*, 119.

depictions of femininity from the 1950 film with contemporary views of femininity that creates new cultural memories of femininity.



## Chapter 3: Masculinity.

### 3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2, the utilisation of the idea of cultural memory in the critical analysis revealed that key depictions of femininity from the 1950 film have been remembered and shared in the live remake for the sake of continuing the legacy of Disney's variant of the *Cinderella* tale.<sup>103</sup>

While minimal remediation of the female characters occurred, nevertheless the live remake presents a new cultural memory of femininity in the film. However, in this chapter, a critical analysis of the depictions of masculinity in the live remake instead reveals that these depictions have changed as the live remake underwent a process of forgetting and remediating certain depictions of masculinity from the 1950 film.<sup>104</sup> Here, chapter 3 utilises the idea of cultural memory in order to understand why major changes have been made to depictions of masculinity in the live remake.

As cultural memory is an on-going process of forgetting and remembering, as well as sharing and contesting the past,<sup>105</sup> the live remake has functioned as a medium of cultural memory that has completely forgotten some depictions of masculinity from the 1950 film, while remediating other depictions of masculinity in order to reflect contemporary views of masculinity. While some roles of the main male characters from the 1950 film appear to have been remembered in the live remake for the sake of maintaining a cultural connection between both *Cinderella* films, their characters have been completely reconfigured and bear little to no resemblance to their 1950 counterparts. Furthermore, new characters have been

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<sup>103</sup> Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," 348.

<sup>104</sup> Erll and Rigney, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>105</sup> Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5; Stephens, "Cultural Memory, Remembering and Motherhood," 70.

introduced for the purpose of reflecting issues surrounding contemporary views of masculinity, such as homosocial relationships between men.

In comparing both *Cinderella* films, this remediation does not appear to be a random occurrence, but appears to address and contest previous criticism that male characters in the 1950 film tended to be inactive and removed from the principal drama surrounding the female characters.<sup>106</sup> For example, earlier criticism of the male characters in the 1950 film argued that the character of Prince Charming was something of a “MacGuffin”<sup>107</sup> who remains an unnamed and inactive character for the duration of the film, except for appearing in two scenes, being the royal ball scene and when Cinderella finally marries him at the end of the film. In contrast, the live remake completely remediates the prince’s role, where he is now given the name Kit, and his backstory is clearly presented in separate scenes throughout the film.

Therefore, in analysing and applying this definition of cultural memory,<sup>108</sup> forgetting and contesting the past role of the prince allows further understanding as to why certain depictions of masculinity have been either remembered or forgotten in the live remake film. Here, the focus of this analysis is on understanding why depictions of masculinity in the live remake significantly contrast to depictions of masculinity in the 1950 film. Here, the live remake mediates between depictions of masculinity in the 1950 film and contemporary views of masculinity. In this sense, the live remake has transmitted a new cultural memory that has remembered the original roles of the male characters from the 1950 film, while remediating

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<sup>106</sup> As Davis states, the hero in the 1950 film is aptly nicknamed “Prince Charming”. Here, by having no actual name, the prince’s symbolic value is heightened. See more in Davis, *Handsome Heroes*, 149.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, *Handsome Heroes*, 149.

<sup>108</sup> Erll and Rigney, “Introduction,” 2; Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory,” 5; Stephens, “Cultural Memory, Remembering and Motherhood,” 70.

their characters in order to reflect contemporary views of masculinity. To further demonstrate how the past and present continue to intersect in the live remake, events such as the aftermath of second-wave feminism and the subsequent total remediation of gender depictions in popular culture are considered to be some of the factors that have contributed to the changes made to the depictions of masculinity in contemporary popular culture, which are also reflected in depictions of masculinity in the live remake.

### *3.2 Masculinity in Contemporary Popular Culture*

Perhaps as an indicator of the inactive ‘Macguffin’ role of the prince in the 1950 film, depictions of masculinity in cinema prior to the masculinity crisis in the 1990s were very limited, with a very narrow perspective of the ideal masculine type. Neale discusses the ways in which masculinity is portrayed on screen, as well as how there is little to no change in how masculinity is currently being perceived in film. Neale argues:

While mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, can constantly take women and the female image as its object of investigation, it has rarely investigated men and the male anxiety, of obsessive enquiry; men are not.

Where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known.<sup>109</sup>

According to Neale, depictions of masculinity in contemporary cinema has for the most part, remained an unquestioned, ‘untouchable’ topic. As men were perceived to be the more dominant and controlling sex, there has been a lack of serious investigation into the problematic nature of objectified views and generalised assumptions of masculinity in

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<sup>109</sup> Neale, “Masculinity as Spectacle,” 19

popular culture. Cohan and Hark's edited book is one of the first published works that exclusively examines the representation of masculinity in cinema, and the problematic view that critics hold of the "secure and comfortable 'norm' of masculinity,"<sup>110</sup> which continues to appear on screens today. Similarly, Davis notes that Disney's classic Princess Fairy Tale films commonly neglect the male characters in the films, providing "card-board cut out princes" in the company's films, such as the 1950 *Cinderella* film, *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*.<sup>111</sup>

It was not until second-wave feminism that feminist inquiry into dominant patriarchal ideologies initiated interdisciplinary discourses on the theory of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a term used by feminists in order to describe the various forms of male power and bias within society. In general, the theory of patriarchy asserts that women remain oppressed and subordinate within a male-dominated society, where men hold power over women and are "invested with cultural pre-eminence".<sup>112</sup> These questions raised by feminists consequently seeped into popular culture, where differences in the depictions between femininity and masculinity were called into question. In this sense, second-wave feminism re-evaluated the unquestioned 'naturalised' gender roles of men and women in society, eventuating in an awareness of gender inequalities within society. Second Wave Feminists also questioned how gender was represented in the media, and in particular, in the classic fairy tales. These inquiries are highlighted in Mulvey's 1975 highly influential essay titled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Mulvey argues that masculinity is represented by active, 'tortured' characters whose struggles are depicted on-screen for the visual pleasure of the audience.

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<sup>110</sup> Cohan and Hark, *Screening the Male*, 2.

<sup>111</sup> Both Davis and Bradford respectively comment on Disney's choice of male leads and secondary characters in the company's Princess Fairy Tale film franchise, noting that the male characters tend to be delegated to secondary roles for the sake of the heroine's plight. See more in Davis, *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains*, 152; Bradford, "Where Happily Ever After Happens," 183.

<sup>112</sup> Segal, *Slow Motion*, 52.

According to Mulvey, the film is used as a medium for exploration of “sado-masochistic phantasies”,<sup>113</sup> which Mulvey uses to describe how the audience has a degree of control over the fate of the male character being portrayed on screen. Therefore, the actions of male characters, and the challenges and obstacles that they must undergo are depicted in film to both entertain and satisfy the viewing pleasure of the audience. Hark also furthers Mulvey’s argument and adds that the secondary male characters in popular film, who are usually rivals to the male lead, are often objectified in the film, in the sense that their loss and perceived weakness to the male lead’s strength means that they “symbolically if not biologically lacked the signifying phallus”.<sup>114</sup>

In consideration of Mulvey’s argument, the initial scenes of Kit and his father in the King’s quarters appear to reflect Mulvey’s concerns over the popularity of the ‘tortured’ male lead in contemporary cinema. Rather than portray Kit as a fearless, confident young man, the live remake depicts Kit as a conflicted and sensitive man who tends to always seek his father’s approval in matters relating to Kit’s role as future King. Here, this supports Mulvey’s argument that masculinity is represented by active, ‘tortured’ male characters whose struggles on-screen visually pleasure the audience. Likewise, Hark’s argument is demonstrated in the character of the Grand Duke, whose role as the secondary male lead, as well as main male villain, is revealed during initial scenes in the film in conversations between Kit, his father and the Grand Duke. For example, in the scene where Kit and the King are heading towards the Royal Painter’s room, the Grand Duke is seen to be walking closely behind Kit, urging him to marry a princess in order to strengthen the kingdom’s political alliances. As the King remains silent during this scene, the Grand Duke continues to

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<sup>113</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 14.

<sup>114</sup> Hark, “Animals or Romans,” 151.

aggravate Kit, perhaps as a way to signify the Grand Duke's role as Kit's main adversary. Similar to the stepmother, throughout the film the Grand Duke is seen to dress entirely in black clothing, which seems to symbolise the antagonists in the films and is a sharp contrast to the rich tones of blues, greens and golds that are worn by Kit, the King and the Royal Captain. Furthermore, in the Royal Ball scene, there are frequent long shots of the Grand Duke who argues with the Royal Captain on the right marriage partner for Kit. As the pair are shrouded by the shadows of the night, the Grand Duke is seen to be agitated by Kit's insistence on dancing with Ella, rather than the Princess Chelina. However, due to his secondary role as Grand Duke, his power is limited, and he is constantly depicted in the film as being overpowered and dominated by Kit, the King and the Royal Captain.

Craven observes that while there has been a wealth of knowledge on the depiction of femininity in fairy tales, there has been scant scholarship on depictions of masculinity.<sup>115</sup> One key factor to this appears to be from the focus on women's oppression under men during Second Wave Feminism. Second Wave feminists were concerned about the ways in which women were oppressed and subordinate to men and as a result, the political and ideological agenda of Second Wave Feminism tended to be viewed as extreme and not entirely representative of feminist critique. In addition, 1980s macho action films that celebrated traditional patriarchal ideals of masculinity (such as *Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon* and *Rambo*) were replaced with films that emphasized depictions of feminized and emotional masculinities.

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<sup>115</sup> Craven, *Fairy Tale Interrupted*, 117.

Cultural and social theorists perceived masculinity as a ‘fragile’ ideology, which has been constructed as “an impossible ideal”.<sup>116</sup> This fragility can be seen as culminating in the masculinity crisis of the 1990s. Following the masculinity crisis, the representation of ‘male trauma’ as a recurring theme in contemporary cinema has remained a popular. The *Cinderella* live remake reflects this issue through Kit’s personality and his conflicted feelings over his future role as King, which is reflective of the male trauma<sup>117</sup> image in contemporary cinema. This male trauma image that Kit’s character reflects is most evident in his solo scenes, such as the scene following his conversation with his father in the King’s quarters. As the pair proceed to Kit’s appointment with the Royal Painter, Kit is shown to be continually badgered by the Grand Duke about his behaviour in the forest, as well as his responsibility as the future King to marry a Princess in order to ensure that Kit is “in good hands”<sup>118</sup> after his father passes away. As the King speaks to Kit, Kit is seen modelling for the Royal Painter on a pedestal. A Dutch-angle shot of Kit as he looks down upon his father reflects Kit’s conflicted feelings as he listens to his father’s words, which further add to Kit’s inner turmoil as he attempts to reason with his father about his future marriage. The image of Kit being perched on the top of a pedestal as the King, Grand Duke and Royal Captain discuss the upcoming Royal Ball can be likened to the image of an audience in front of a museum piece. As Kit is being painted, his future has been decided for him by the King and Grand Duke, despite Kit’s growing uneasiness over his future role as King and his choice in a future marriage partner. Thus, what can be observed from juxtaposing these two initial scenes is that Kit’s character is remediated with a more relatable personality that seemingly reflects the current masculinity crisis, which occurred in the 1990s and is again reflective of the popular ‘tortured’ or ‘traumatic’ male lead image prevalent in contemporary cinema.

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<sup>116</sup> Kirkham and Thumim, *Me Jane*, 11.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

### 3.3 Masculinity in other Disney Films

In response to the masculinity crisis of the 1990s, a complete reconsideration and remediation of Disney's male leads was initiated by Disney in the company's contemporary Princess Fairy Tale films. Since the release of *The Little Mermaid* in 1989, male leads in Disney's contemporary films began to display characteristics that are reflective of contemporary popular-culture views of masculinity. Here, a new model of masculinity began to dominate Disney's contemporary fairy tale films. Gillam and Wooden argue:

From the revelation of the alpha male's flaws, including acute loneliness and vulnerability, to figurative emasculation through even the slightest disempowerment, each character travels through a significant homosocial relationship and ultimately matures into an acceptance of his more traditionally "feminine" aspects.<sup>119</sup>

Male characters were therefore re-assigned more emotional and feminine roles, which, according to Davis, moved the male lead from his original 'cardboard character' to a more pro-active and arguably 'emotional' role, which, for Disney, started with Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid* in 1989.

Homosocial relationships between male leads and secondary male characters also began to be depicted in the company's films, where the male lead is seen to rely upon the secondary male character for advice and support. Since the 1989 release of *The Little Mermaid*, Disney's contemporary fairy tale films have portrayed male leads who display both patriarchal masculinity and new masculinity traits. These new depictions of masculinity have also reconsidered depictions of masculinity in many of Disney's contemporary films, such as

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 2.



*Aladdin* and *Tangled*, where the roles of the lead male characters are of “questionable moral character and dubious motivation”<sup>120</sup>, each having their own individual agendas in the film that do not necessarily include falling in love with the heroine. Though this bad boy character in Disney’s contemporary films (i.e. *Frozen* contrasts Anna’s two love interests) remains a popular choice with the company, Bradford argues that the trend of these new masculine qualities is in response to changed views on masculinity ideology in contemporary popular culture. Furthermore, Bradford argues that these new depictions of masculinity in the films also reflected recent cultural shifts in masculinity ideals that began to take shape since the 1990s-masculinity crisis. By taking into account the historical and socio-cultural context of contemporary popular culture, Bradford argues:

Their characterizations reflect changed perspectives of the masculine in popular and literary production for children and young people, from the tough, action-oriented figures who predominated in adventure narratives and *bildungsroman* during the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth, to boys and young men of wider emotional range, quick-witted and responsive, whose emergence in literature for the young has been intertwined with cultural shifts around concepts of gender and sexuality.<sup>121</sup>

Bradford’s argument acknowledges that ever-changing contemporary views of gender in a society at any given period of time are reflected through changes made to depictions of masculinity in popular culture. Consequently, the live remake also adopts this same formula and presents depictions of masculinity that are reflective of the after-effects of the

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<sup>120</sup> Bradford, “Where Happily Ever After Happens,” 183.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

masculinity crisis in the 1990s through the character of Kit. Rather than being portrayed as a “card-board cut out prince”<sup>122</sup> limited to the narrow expectations of the masculinity ideal,<sup>123</sup> Kit is shown to be an emotionally sensitive and well-developed character who undergoes his own personal journey throughout the film. He is often being depicted to be an undeveloped, uncertain young man who has no confidence in his ability to rule the Kingdom. For example, in the scene where the audience first gets a glimpse of the Royal Palace, a medium shot of the King’s private quarters depicts Kit pacing back and forth as he frantically talks to his father about his meeting with Ella in the forest. The King, attended to by the Royal Doctor, shrugs off Kit’s insistence that Ella is “more than just a pretty girl,”<sup>124</sup> the King refuses to meet Ella as she was not a Princess; rather she is just a commoner who is not allowed to socialise with royalty. As Kit finally stops pacing around the room, he takes a seat next to his father on the chaise. A medium close-up shot reveals that Kit’s face changes from playful banter to a more serious expression as he looks up towards the Royal Doctor and inquires about his father’s health. As the Royal Doctor remains silent, Kit’s facial expression shows that he is also conflicted by the ideas that his father is in failing health and that he must soon inherit the throne. While the scene is brief, it introduces Kit’s personal life, something which had never been revealed in the 1950 film. Furthermore, frequent close-ups of Kit’s face reveal a mixture of emotions as he speaks to his father and the Royal Doctor further highlighting how Kit has been remediated to have a more emotional and developed personality. Although this is only one example of the characterisation of Kit in the live remake, the significance of this scene is nevertheless vital in distinguishing the character of Kit from his 1950 counterpart.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Cohan and Hark, *Screening the Male*, 2.

<sup>124</sup> *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

### 3.4 *Analysis of Male Characters*

In light of the masculinity crisis and subsequent ‘male trauma’ image in popular film, this analysis finds that depictions of masculinity in the live remake are a stark contrast to depictions of masculinity in the 1950 film. While the live remake does ‘remember’ some of the characters’ roles from the 1950 film, their personality traits have been completely remediated and reconfigured in order to reflect contemporary views of masculinity. However, this cultural study also reconsiders the remembrance of these roles and demonstrates that the live remake still preserves the cultural memory of the 1950 film by remembering the roles of the main male characters.

While the ‘male’ mice characters seem to be more memorable than their female counterparts in the live remake, the film only remembers the name of one of the main, male talking mice friends in the 1950 film. This choice ensures that the name of one of the more popular male mice characters, Gus-Gus, signifies of the live remake’s intention to continue the “cultural wagon”<sup>125</sup> of the 1950 film into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Branagh states:

But you know what I was aware of was that I enjoyed the sound of Gus-Gus as a comedy rhythm. Gus-Gus connects across 65 years. It seems like a good name for a mouse, [and] that’s also carrying a great big cultural wagon behind it of memory and affection and connection to the Cinderella experience, with the Disney experience, with families going to the movies together.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Rich, K, “Kenneth Branagh on the “Little Revolution” he brought to Cinderella,” *Vanity Fair*, March 13, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/03/kenneth-branagh-cinderella-interview>.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*.

The name Gus-Gus is culturally significant here in Disney's *Cinderella* films, due to the cultural significance of the name that connects both films across 65 years. It is a name that is memorable and carries a nostalgic tone. However, other than the name of Gus-Gus, it appears that the characters of the 'male' mice friends have been treated in a similar fashion to their female mice counterparts, where they have been forgotten and remediated into a non-speaking role in order to further the purpose of the humanistic and realistic elements of the live remake. However, it is through the remembrance of the male mice characters that the live remake is able to culturally connect to the live remake and remind audiences of the cultural significance of their roles in the 1950 film. Therefore, Branagh's acknowledgment of the 1950 film highlights the live remake's purpose of maintaining a cultural connection with the 1950 film by remembering the cultural memory of the name of one of the main male mice characters. Furthermore, Branagh's decision to retain the name Gus-Gus helps to connect both films and to ensure that the "Disney experience"<sup>127</sup> of *Cinderella* continues the legacy into contemporary popular culture. Meanwhile, Branagh also leaves his own cultural mark on the live remake by remediating the characters of the 'male' mice friends to secondary, non-speaking roles that furthers the humanistic elements of the film. Thus, the live remake mediates between depictions of the male mice characters in the 1950 with the new humanistic elements in the live remake in order to present a new cultural memory of the heroine's 'male' mice friends in the film.

### *A New Prince*

The cultural memory of the character of the prince has been remembered in the live remake and reflects on the idea that cultural memory is a process of remembering and forgetting, as

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

well as sharing and contesting the past.<sup>128</sup> While the character of the prince is heavily remediated in the live remake, his physical features are remembered, such as his piercing blue eyes, wavy, dark hair and a waxen face, which is a complete regurgitation of Prince Charming's facial features in the 1950 film. However, other than his physical facial features, the prince's character has been completely remediated. Here, Kit now plays an active role as the male lead and forgets the previous "MacGuffin"<sup>129</sup> role of Prince Charming in the live remake by replacing him with a prince who has been given an actual name other than Prince Charming and who also has emotional depth to his character. Prince Charming is now Kit, a young man who is stereotypically handsome and seemingly confident on the exterior, while displaying uncertainty and doubt on the interior. The live remake therefore demonstrates that it has mediated between the prince's role from the 1950 film by remembering his facial features, whilst completely remediating his 'MacGuffin' character with a more active role that is reflective of contemporary views of masculinity. As a result, a new cultural memory of the character of the prince, who bears a physical resemblance to his 1950 film, while reflecting the new masculinities image in contemporary popular culture is introduced in the film.

One of the key defining features of Kit's character is the film's depiction of his emotional traits that contests his original inactive role in the 1950 film. Here, Kit displays traits that are reminiscent of what Bainbridge and Yates refer to as the "tortured and traumatic"<sup>130</sup> male lead in contemporary Hollywood cinema. For example, in the many scenes that focus on Kit's private life in the Royal Palace, Kit is depicted consulting with both the Royal Captain and the King on whether he has the ability to perform his duties well as the Crown Prince.

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<sup>128</sup> Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory," 5.

<sup>129</sup> Davis, *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains*, 149.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Kit's remediated characteristics are also juxtaposed with the grand, majestic, pristine and orderly environment of the Royal Palace, which further emphasises his conflicted feelings over his future role as King in such a contrasting environment., Branagh confessed that his inspiration for the setting of the royal palace was Buckingham Palace – a grandiose and historically rich setting. In particular, Branagh was inspired by the wide white corridors of Buckingham Palace, and how they accentuated the sheer size, imposing nature and sterile environment of the royal palace.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, the background music of high-pitched classical strings that play during scenes of the Royal Palace serves to further enhance the grandeur and regal setting of the Royal Palace. However, this perfect, orderly environment and size of the Royal Palace juxtaposes with Kit's own inner turmoil and confused feelings over his future role as King. For example, in the scene where Kit and the Royal Captain are in sword-fighting practice, a close up of the Royal Captain's sword at Kit's neck demonstrates both his victory and dominance over Kit in a 'manly sport'. Kit's facial expression during the close-up is also seen to be disappointed and frustrated, which also seems to suggest his inner turmoil at performing his duties properly. As the pair retire from sword-fighting practice, a medium-shot of the pair shows how the Royal Captain appears to overshadow and dwarf Kit. As Kit confesses that he cannot stop thinking about Ella, Kit's inner turmoil with his infatuation with Ella is expressed through the medium shot of Kit and the Royal Captain. Furthermore, the background of the shot also enhances on the extremely high ceilings and grandiose paintings on the ceilings, which appear to engulf Kit's character and further emphasise his unease at becoming future King. Therefore, emotional depth to Kit's character is further developed during scenes in the Royal Palace through the use of overhead and high-angle shots of Kit that diminish his size as he converses with Royal

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<sup>131</sup> Radish, C, "CINDERELLA Interview: Kenneth Branagh," *The Telegraph UK*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/cinderella/kenneth-branagh-interview/>.

Captain in order to depict his own internal feelings. This character development is also detailed in later scenes between Kit and the Royal Captain, with the positioning of the sizeable Royal Captain in the foreground and the grandeur of the room in the Royal Palace in the background highlighting Kit's inadequacies that engulf his 'tortured' and conflicted state of mind.

Another remediation made to Kit's character reflects on depictions of the 'feminized' new masculinities in contemporary cinema through his need to be 'educated' by Ella in the film. Ella's influence over Kit's development during the film bears some similarities to the influence that Belle held over the Beast in *Beauty and The Beast*. In her analysis of the new masculinities, Bradford argues that male leads in Disney's "post-1960s"<sup>132</sup> fairy tale films tend to be undeveloped, rough characters who eventually become tamed and educated by the female heroine.<sup>133</sup> In this sense, in Disney's attempt to break away from the "cardboard cut-out prince" stereotype, the company's contemporary male leads have all adopted a similar pattern; one in which the male characters are first introduced as imperfect, but who eventually discover their inner noble side through the intervention of the heroine.<sup>134</sup> This pattern is repeated in the live remake through the addition of scenes that primarily focus on Kit's personal life within the palace. Here, Kit is expected to adopt a façade that depicts him as a confident and able future leader of the kingdom. This is further accentuated in the establishing scene of the Royal Palace, where a bird's eye view of the kingdom depicts the royal palace and its inhabitants as a pristine, orderly environment, in which every person has

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<sup>132</sup> Bradford, "Where Happily Ever After Happens," 183.

<sup>133</sup> Branagh also claims that the film wishes to portray a realistic view of its characters by allowing them to grow and develop during the course of the film. See more in Brew, S, "Kenneth Branagh interview: Cinderella, Audiences, Statham," *denofgeek*, March 25, 2015, <http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/kenneth-branagh/34685/kenneth-branagh-interview-cinderella-audiences-statham>.

<sup>134</sup>

Bradford, "Where Happily Ever After Happens," 183. Male leads in Disney's contemporary fairy tale films are often educated and tamed into being the perfect prince charming character according to the female heroine's standards.

a set, defined role. Therefore, the stark, pristine environment exemplifies the flaws in Kit's character, who is mentally and emotionally unprepared for his future role as King. It is not until Ella influences Kit with her words to "be kind and have courage" that Kit's character begins to develop. This development between Ella and Kit therefore exemplifies Bradford's argument that new male leads in Disney's contemporary Princess Fairy Tale films are tamed and educated by the female heroine. This is evident following Kit's first meeting with Ella in the forest, when Kit begins to repeat Ella's words to him, 'Just because what's done doesn't mean it has to be done'. Her words leave a profound effect on Kit, especially as the film progresses and Kit begins to question the palace traditions and expectations placed upon him. Given their obvious difference in class status, Ella's ability to engage in a meaningful conversation with Kit during their first meeting clearly shows a great impact on his character development since the live remake. This is further emphasised during their conversation when Kit jokingly questions how Ella knows that the stag does not want to be hunted, to which she replies tradition should not always be kept. Kit, whose entire life was based on traditions and following in his father's footsteps, is seen to be visibly moved by Ella's words. A close-up of his face depicts his transition in expression, as he begins to ponder Ella's words and doubt his own confidence in his beliefs. It is therefore through this scene between Ella and Kit that the live remake demonstrates that it has completely remediated Kit's character with contemporary views of masculinity by depicting Kit as a flawed, undeveloped character who only begins to mature throughout the film through his interactions and developing relationship with Ella, who effectively 'educates' him.

The live remake also continues to emphasise and transmit themes of Kit's 'tortured and traumatic' hero image by focusing on his relationship with his father, whose traditional, patriarchal values clash with Kit's feminized, 'new masculinities' image. While Kit shares a



close relationship with his father, the pair generally clash over their ideals throughout the film. In the scene where Kit has his portrait painted by the royal painter, he is seen engaging in a discussion with both his father and the Grand Duke, in matters relating to the king's expectations of Kit to marry a princess from another kingdom. Kit is literally placed onto a pedestal as he speaks to his father and the Grand Duke, who are both traditionalists and insist that Kit follows their advice in order to strengthen the kingdom. The camera's close ups of both the king and Kit's faces display both their stubborn-ness and determination, whilst also displaying Kit's more conflicted feelings between his sense of duty to his father and his own personal feelings. In particular, Kit is confused when his father questions his attraction to 'some pretty country girl you had only met once'. Upon realising the credit to his father's remarks, Kit is once again confused with his decision to pursue Ella. However, Kit does still reveal some of his more feminized masculinity traits when he repeats Ella's words, which clashes with his father's ideology, during their conversation as they walk down the hall. Kit's relationship with his father also reflects on a common depiction of masculinity in contemporary cinema, which is the need for a father's approval of a son's masculinity in order for the son to be acknowledged as a matured, 'manly' man. Kvaran, in her article *Super Daddy Issues*, argues that contemporary Hollywood cinema depicts its heroes as young boys whose past traumatic experiences with their fathers result in their eventual maturation into men. The formula for a male lead in a contemporary Hollywood film, according to Kvaran, is based on a chronological list of events that must occur in order for the male lead to develop his masculine side, and therefore be 'accepted' as a true 'manly' man by other men<sup>135</sup> in the film. While Kvaran bases her analysis of male leads in contemporary superhero films, the

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<sup>135</sup> Kvaran explains that current Hollywood super hero films tend to depict male leads with the patriarchal notion that masculinity is constructed and based on the opinions of other men. Female characters within the film, and therefore in real life, are irrelevant to the recognition of a male individual's masculinity. See more in Kvaran, "Super Daddy Issues," 219.

essential ingredients for a male lead to exert masculinity are also applicable to Kit's character and his relationship with his father in the live remake. Kvaran states:

Most contemporary superhero films evoke father-son drama, thereby emphasizing heroics as masculine and homosocial stories about men as most essential... The near complete reliance on male role models and the removal or obfuscation of their female counterparts has created a film genre which doubly reinforces the idea that only male characters are inspirational or to be emulated... Father figures serve as inspiration and to encourage masculine endeavours. They provide a symbolically masculine image, which can either serve an idealized or adversarial function for the hero.<sup>136</sup>

In consideration of Kvaran's quote above, it is evident that Kit's personality and his relationship with his father reflect many of these features which are in relation to his undeveloped status as a young man who has not yet been acknowledged by other men. Thus, in order for Kit to become a fully-fledged man in the world of patriarchal masculinity he would require recognition from his father, as well as other male characters. In comparison to Kit's interactions with other characters within the film, it is his scenes with his father that the audience can see Kit remove his façade as a confident, reliable prince. Kvaran argues that Kit only displays his weaker side to his father, whom he looks up to as a constant source of inspiration and whom he actively seeks for acknowledgment of his masculinity. Although Kit does eventually show some independence and rebellion towards his father's traditional patriarchal views, his willpower to defy his father's orders is not so apparent in initial scenes between father and son in the film. For example, while Kit confides to Ella about his dilemma during the secret garden scene, close up shots of his face display his inner conflict

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 219-223.

with his loyalty and devotion to his father overriding his desire to create change for the benefit of the kingdom. This is exacerbated with the use of shadows and dark lighting in the scene, exemplifying the sombre and conflicted mood that Kit is experiencing with growing confusion between tradition and change.

The live remake delves further into this father-son drama, which is fully realized in the scene where the King is lying on his deathbed. Here, a two-shot of the pair conversing emphasises the emotional aspect of this scene, further with the camera is positioned at a high angle to depict Kit crouching next to his father's bedside and holding onto his father's hand. From this angle, it can be seen that Kit still exudes a young, boyish character in the face of his father, who he considers his masculine inspiration. His father, drifting in and out of consciousness, weakly attempts to convince Kit to marry the Princess Chelina to strengthen the kingdom's political alliances with bigger and more powerful kingdoms. However, Kit apologises, stating that he loves and respects his father, but cannot go through with his wishes. Kit's father concedes, with his final parting words being an approval of Kit's new masculine endeavour to 'follow his heart' and to find the 'honest country girl' who Kit was infatuated with. As the king finally loses consciousness, the camera switches to a bird's eye view of both father and son on the bed in a deep embrace, with Kit heard visibly sobbing over the sombre strings playing in the background. As the scene begins to fade out, further emphasis is placed on Kit's reliance on and devotion to his father, especially when he realises that he must now fulfil his role as future king while respecting his father's wishes. Kit's sobbing as he is crouched over his father also reveals the 'feminized' side to his masculinity, and his vulnerability. Therefore, this scene symbolises the start of a new era with the death of the King, as well as Kit's eventual maturation and acknowledgment as a 'manly' man with his father's final blessings.

### *Homosocial Relations*

True to Kvaran and Gillam and Wooden's argument, a significant homosocial relationship is explored in order for the male lead to realise his full potential as a man by embracing both his traditionally patriarchal masculine side, as well as his feminized masculine side.<sup>137</sup> This scene therefore highlights the close, emotional bond between the Kit and the King, whose acknowledgment is crucial for Kit to undergo the necessary rite of loss of his father (and masculine figure inspiration) in order to become a man who can be acknowledged by other men. Furthermore, the live remake also preserves some of the cultural memory of Prince Charming in the 1950 film by retaining his physical appearance.<sup>138</sup> However, Kit's character contests with the previous "cardboard cut-out prince" figure that was reminiscent of the prince character in Disney's classic Princess Fairy Tale films. Instead, the character of Kit has been remediated with characteristics that better reflect contemporary popular-culture views on masculinity, such as the depiction of the 'tortured hero' in contemporary cinema. Thus, the live remake remembers and remediates the character of the prince in order to create a new cultural memory of the prince's character in the film. This is demonstrated through the remembrance of Prince Charming's physical features in the 1950 film. Meanwhile, a heavy remediation made to the prince's characteristics are reflective of contemporary views of masculinity, such as the 'tortured' male lead image, as well as the depiction of an undeveloped, untamed male lead who is eventually educated by the heroine in the film.

In light of the depiction of the new masculine images in popular culture, the live remake's focus on this theme ("new man model" previously discussed by Gillam and Wooden) is demonstrated through the addition of the character of the Royal Captain to the Disney

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<sup>137</sup> Kvaran, "Super Daddy Issues," 219; Gillam and Wooden, "Post-Princess Models of Gender," 3.

<sup>138</sup> Erlil, *A Companion to Cultural Memory*, 1.

*Cinderella* tale, whose role as a secondary male character is crucial in supporting Branagh's previous claims that the film was created with the intention of situating the *Cinderella* tale within the contemporary society that we reside in.<sup>139</sup> This homosocial friendship between the Royal Captain and Kit is reflective of the 1990s 'masculinity crisis' that has been discussed by Kvaran and Gillam and Wooden, who label the representation of new close male relationships in popular culture as a type of 'homosocial'<sup>140</sup> relationship. This homosocial relationship between Kit and the Royal Captain is also reconsiders depiction of masculinity through the use of a two-shot scene that primarily focuses on the pair's conversations. Kit's friendship with the Royal Captain is a display of comradery, which is further emphasised in the film by including the Royal Captain's character in every scene that features Kit. In these scenes, the Royal Captain is either standing directly behind Kit, or beside Kit, displaying his loyalty to Kit as his closest friend in the Royal Palace. Kit is also seen to frequently consult with the Royal Captain and finds some solace in the Royal Captain's advice. An example is seen in the sword-fighting practice scene, in which there is a two shot of Kit and the Royal Captain, who are practising their sword-fighting skills amongst the kingdom's royal knights. The effect of a two-shot places emphasis solely on Kit's bond with the Royal Captain and effectively nullifies the importance of the other royal knights in the background of the scene. The scene is also once again bathed in an unnatural white lighting against stark white walls and white marble columns in order to emphasise on the palace's imposing size. In this scene, there is evidence that Kit and the Royal Captain's close friendship reflects on popular depictions of homosocial relationships in contemporary cinema.

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<sup>139</sup> Rich, K, "Kenneth Branagh on the "Little Revolution," *Vanity Fair*, March 13, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/03/kenneth-branagh-cinderella-interview>

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.; Kvaran, "Super Daddy Issues", 219; Gillam and Wooden, "Post-Princess Models of Gender", 2.

Another instance in which Kit shows a reliance on the Captain is shown in the scene where he requests that the royal ball be held for all fair maidens of the kingdom, on the pretence that it would help strengthen the royal family's relationship with its kingdom. While the King and Grand Duke are hesitant, the Royal Captain agrees that the royal ball would be beneficial for the royal family's reputation. Here, it can be seen that the King, the Grand Duke and Kit rely on the Royal Captain's opinion in order to decide on whether or not to invite all the fair maidens in the kingdom. The Royal Captain's consent is both crucial for the King to finally concede to Kit's request, as much as it is an act of complete loyalty in part of his close bond with Kit. Therefore, it becomes clear through this scene that the addition of the Royal Captain reflects on the depictions of homosocial relationships in popular culture, while creating a new cultural memory in Disney's *Cinderella* films through the addition of the character of the Royal Captain.

The live remake also continues to explore the theme of homosocial relationships through interactions between the Royal Captain and Kit. This theme is explored in scenes where Kit has to make decisions regarding his future role as King or with Ella. This is seen in the scene where the Royal Captain is arguing with the Grand Duke over the identity of Ella at the royal ball. As both are bathed in the shadows of the balcony at night, the mid-shot of the pair speaking shows that the Royal Captain has a very firm stance with his back upright, almost as if he were in a defensive position. In comparison, the Grand Duke is seen to invade the Royal Captain's space, demanding that the Royal Captain convince Kit to marry Princess Chelina 'for the betterment of the kingdom'. While the pair are cut short by the stepmother, the Royal Captain displays his loyalty to Kit by not yielding to the Grand Duke's request.

The homosocial relationship between Kit and the Royal Captain is further highlighted in the scene where the Royal Captain and a procession of royal knights arrive at Ella's home. The Royal Captain rides at the fore-front, indicating his status and position. His uniform is also much brighter than the rest of the knights who are uniformly dressed in darker shades of blue with steel helmets to mask their identities. The Royal Captain is also the only identifiable knight who greets the stepmother and takes on the task of fitting the glass slipper on the step sisters. Furthermore, it is the Royal Captain, rather than Kit, who follows the stepmother up into the attic to 'rescue' Ella. As the stepmother attempts to shoot down the Royal Captain's accusations that she had intentionally hidden Ella away from the Royal Captain and knights, the Royal Captain is shot once more from a low angle as he firmly states that Ella should respond to his questions rather than the stepmother. In this scene, the Royal Captain appears demanding and imposing, which is accentuated from a low angle shot of his full figure further asking the stepmother of what status she possesses to forbid Ella from trying on the glass slipper. A pause and mid-shot of both the Royal Captain and the stepmother emphasises the difference in both height and build between the pair, as the Royal Captain stands up-right and towers over the stepmother who is positioned at the front of the shot as she begins to nervously forbid Ella from stepping outside of the attic with the Royal Captain. Here, the Royal Captain questions the stepmother's power, "Who are you to stop an officer of the king? Are you an empress? A saint? A deity?".<sup>141</sup> The Royal Captain's build, which is much bulkier than any of the other male characters in the film, is displayed in its full size during this scene. The stepmother, who is generally confident and intimidating, is visibly nervous in his presence as she shrinks back from the Royal Captain after he asks for her to remain quiet as he speaks to Ella. In this sense, the character of the Royal Captain has been included in the live remake in order to serve as a reflection of the popular homosocial friendship that has

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<sup>141</sup> Cinderella, directed by Kenneth Branagh (2015; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2015), DVD.

been frequently depicted in contemporary cinema. However, the Royal Captain's role is also crucial in the film, as his intuition and level-headed thinking complements Kit's usually conflicted and confused personality in regard to his role as future King. In this sense, it is through Kit's homosocial relationship with the Royal Captain that further develops Kit's character in the film due to the Royal Captain's guidance and his loyalty towards Kit. Furthermore, the Royal Captain is also the only character who questions the stepmother's claims that there were only two young eligible maidens living in Ella's household, thus inadvertently rescuing Ella from her predicament. Thus, while the Royal Captain is considered a secondary, advisory role to Kit's character, his character and the homosocial relationship between the Royal Captain and Kit adds balance to the flaws shown in Kit's character. Furthermore, Branagh's cultural mark has been demonstrated by the addition of this new character, whose role adds onto the legacy of Disney's *Cinderella* films in contemporary popular culture.

### *The Grand Duke as Antagonist*

The role of the Grand Duke has also been remembered in the live remake, although his characteristics and personality traits are heavily remediated. Instead, the Grand Duke now serves as the primary male antagonist by being portrayed as an overly ambitious man whose agenda is never fully revealed in the film. Reflective of the 'hyper masculinity'<sup>142</sup> ideal, the Grand Duke's character is one who never falters in his confidence, attempting to dominate and control the king and Kit with his strong belief that only his judgment is correct.

Furthermore, the Grand Duke does not show any sympathy or care for others, presenting the traditional patriarchal notion of an alpha male, which is summarised by Gillam and Wooden:

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<sup>142</sup> Coined by Kvaran to describe the patriarchal notion that masculinity is a concept that is constructed and based on the opinions of other men. Women's roles are therefore removed and deemed irrelevant when examining a man's character. See more in Kvaran, "Super Daddy Issues", 219.



The phrase “alpha male” may stand for all things stereotypically patriarchal: unquestioned authority, physical power and social dominance, competitiveness for positions of status and leadership, lack of visible or shared emotion, social isolation.<sup>143</sup>

Displaying a majority of the traits in Gillam and Wooden’s quote above, the Grand Duke proves to be an even more traditional and patriarchal figure than the king. The only trait that the film does not divulge in is the Grand Duke’s reasoning for forcing Kit into marriage with Princess Chelina. The Grand Duke does not seem to strive for a higher status or position in the kingdom, but rather stays on the side-lines while he controls the situation surrounding the King and Kit’s future marriage partner. In comparison to his 1950 counterpart, the Grand Duke attempts to control both the king and Kit by encouraging Kit to marry for the ‘betterment of the kingdom’ to the detriment of his own happiness. An example is seen during the Royal Ball scene when the Grand Duke enters into a heated discussion with the Royal Captain over Kit’s political marriage. Though hidden in the shadows of the night, the Grand Duke’s face is livid, and he disregards the Royal Captain’s attempt to defend Ella by sarcastically questioning the Royal Captain about whether Ella is a princess who could offer the kingdom political strength or increase its wealth. While the Grand Duke does not win the argument with the Royal Captain, it is through this scene that the live remake demonstrates the remediation of the Grand Duke’s character, where his original 1950 role as the King’s devout advisor and friend has now been changed to the main male villain in the film.

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<sup>143</sup> Gillam and Wooden, “Post-Princess Models of Gender”, 3.

The Grand Duke's role as the main male villain and the secondary male lead in the film further supports Mulvey's argument that the character of the secondary male lead is usually depicted as a weaker, insignificant nemesis to the male lead.<sup>144</sup> This is evident in the scene where the Grand Duke's plans with the stepmother have been foiled by the Royal Captain and Kit's intervention. Here, the Grand Duke is seen to constantly shrink into the background of each shot of Kit and the Royal Captain as the pair refuse to believe that there were only two young maidens who lived in Ella's household. When sounds of Ella singing from the top of the attic window are heard, a medium close-up shot of the Grand Duke's face shows slight fear and hesitation as he grows more desperate. After Ella finally meets with Kit in the drawing room, she walks past a withdrawn, silent Grand Duke who stands at a distance from the entrance to the drawing room. As the hallway and room are bathed in warm lighting, which is similar to the warm lighting in the beginning of the film, the Grand Duke's side-profile of him dressed in black clothing with his head bowed contrasts with the mood of the scene.

Mulvey's argument that the secondary character is perceived to symbolically lack the "signifying phallus"<sup>145</sup> is further highlighted in the scene where the Royal Knights have entered Ella's household. As the Grand Duke realises his loss, he effectively begins to shrink further into the background of each shot. This is similar to Mulvey's argument that a secondary male character's loss and perceived weakness to the male lead's strength meant that they "symbolically if not biologically lacked the signifying phallus."<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, in the final scene of the live remake when Kit and Ella have married and are greeting the Kingdom on the balcony, the voice-over narration reveals that the Grand Duke, the

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<sup>144</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." 14.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Hark, "Animals or Romans," 151.

stepmother and the stepsisters were banished from the Kingdom and never seen again. Here, the removal of the main male villain seems to reflect Hark's comment that the Grand Duke's loss in the film is also symbolic of his lack of "the signifying phallus",<sup>147</sup> which reinforces the traditional, narrow phallogocentric view that men can only be identified as masculine by their display of dominance over other males. Thus, the live remake demonstrates its function as a medium of cultural memory that mediates between the Grand Duke's original role in the 1950 film with popular depictions of the secondary male characters in contemporary cinema. While the live remake remembers the role of the Grand Duke from the 1950 film, the characteristics and personality traits of the Grand Duke have been remediated, where the role of the Grand Duke as the main male villain in the film reflects contemporary views of the secondary male character, who is subordinate to the male lead in terms of strength and power.

### *The Absent Father*

The live remake also includes the character of Ella's father in order to contest and address issues of the absent father in the 1950 film.<sup>148</sup> In comparison to the brief glimpse of the back of Ella's father during the opening scenes of the 1950 film, the live remake dedicates the first 20 minutes of the film depicting Ella's close relationship with her parents. Ella's father is depicted as a loving family man, who is glorified in the film for his goodwill and kindness towards Ella, although he is frequently absent from Ella's life. Here, the depiction of Ella's father in the film reinforces similar 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions of gender that were found in the 1950 film.<sup>149</sup> While criticism continues to build over this retention of patriarchal

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Male characters are largely removed from the story to ensure that their status as men remained unattainable, or 'untouchable'. Women were instead vilified and subject to competition with each other under the influence of patriarchal ideologies. See more in Gilbert and Gubar, "Snow White," 291.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. Gilbert and Gubar had found that many father figures in classic fairy tales are deliberately absent from most of the tale in order to maintain their image as a benevolent, untouchable figure. Ella's father also maintains a benevolent and saint-like status throughout the story because his role as a good father cannot be compromised.

notions in the film, the addition of Ella's father can be interpreted as the film's way in which to contest earlier criticism over the absent father figure in the 1950 film.

Another major remediation made to the story line of the 1950 film is the inclusion of Ella's parents at the beginning of the film. This also appears to be another cultural mark of Branagh's on Disney's *Cinderella* film, through the depiction of Ella's father as performing both a paternal and maternal role especially after Ella's mother passes away. These are seen in the opening scenes of the film, through a mis-en-scene of Ella's family sitting in the meadows underneath a big, oak tree. Ella is still an infant in the opening scenes, while both her parents are alive and happy and seen to fawn over her. Natural sunlight shines upon the family, who sit within a very picturesque landscape, almost as if they were part of a painting. Music is also light-hearted and soft, carrying on the happy and warm atmosphere of the scene. Ella's father is heard laughing and cooing over Ella, while Ella's mother watches on. In this scene, frequent close-ups of Ella's father depict him as a happy and content man who remains in this state while Ella's mother is alive. Furthermore, the same light-hearted and happy music, as well as the soft, natural lighting is maintained throughout all of the scenes in which Ella's mother is featured, with the exception of her final moments in the film. Laughter is heard throughout all of the beginning scenes and there is a constant warm, glowing light that engulfs each scene. However, these happy, whimsical scenes that depict Ella's father as a more active, present father appear to be romanticized with an almost dream-like effect as the film attempts to justify Ella's father's frequent disappearances as the result of his duty to provide for the family. Here, it appears that the inclusion of these scenes may be due to the pseudo-medieval setting of the film, which distinctly separated the roles of men and women. In this pseudo-medieval setting, men would be out in the public sphere working and earning money as the breadwinner of the family, while women would be confined to the domestic

household, where they would cook, clean and care for the children. Therefore, the historical context of the settings of the live remake enables a reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies on gender.<sup>150</sup> This is emphasised in the scene where Ella's father returns from a business trip. As the carriage pulls up into the driveway of the manor, an over-the-shoulder shot depicts Ella and her mother at the stoop in front of the house patiently waiting for Ella's father's carriage to reach them. This shot further emphasises the idea that women, who were confined at home, would patiently wait for their husbands to come home from work. As the men worked, the women would therefore ensure that the household was clean and that there was a cooked meal on the table for the men when they returned home. While this does not dispel previous criticism over the absent father figure in the 1950 film, the live remake does attempt to portray a more loving father who is depicted to be very much involved with Ella while he is at home with the family. For example, in the scene where Ella's father returns from a business trip, he is seen to automatically embrace his daughter first and is seen talking about his journey and the gifts that he had brought back for her. Camera close-up shots of the pair embracing each other and talking softly highlights the close bond that both share, despite Ella's father's frequent absences. In addition to close-up shots of the pair embracing, the scene is bathed in a soft, warm lighting as light-hearted music plays in the background. Therefore, while criticism may be raised over the father's frequent disappearance throughout the beginning of the film, it is also these opening scenes that not only reveal further insight into Ella's childhood, but also effectively differentiate the live remake from the 1950 film through the inclusion of Ella's father and the film's focus on Ella's happy, close relationship with both parents. Although the remainder of the plotline of the live remake is similar to the plotline of the 1950 film, the film's inclusion of these opening scenes presents a further backstory into the happy childhood life of Ella prior to her mother's death. These opening

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<sup>150</sup> Kelly and Pugh, *Queer Movie Medievalism*, 1-17.

scenes of Ella's life contrast to the remainder of film where she is reduced to the status of a housemaid. Thus, it appears that the inclusion of Ella's father in the live remake rebalances gender considerations and reflects on changes made to depictions of masculinity in contemporary popular culture, thereby providing a new cultural memory that reflects on contemporary views of masculinity. Furthermore, the addition of Ella's father signifies another way in which Branagh has left his cultural mark on Disney's *Cinderella* tale, by addressing and contesting previous criticism over the absent father figure in the 1950 film.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Previously, the roles of the male characters of the 1950 film were minor and secondary to the female characters in the film. In contrast, the live remake contests this view by reinventing inactive characters or incorporating new male characters that reflect on contemporary views of masculinity. This is demonstrated in many scenes throughout the film through the homosocial relationships developed between the male characters and their own personal backstories. Here, the focus on new themes such as the new masculinities, father-son drama and the feminization of the male lead not only demonstrates the ways in which Branagh has left his own cultural mark on Disney's *Cinderella* film, but also on the live remake's function as a medium of cultural memory, which mediates between the cultural memory of past depictions of masculinity in the 1950 film with contemporary views of masculinity. Thus, by functioning as a medium of cultural memory, the live remake has created its own cultural memory by mediating between past depictions of masculinity in the 1950 film, that was based on 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions, with contemporary views of masculinity.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion.

Cultural memory studies remain a relatively new interdisciplinary area that requires further investigation into the relationship between memory and culture, and how it can be applied to different disciplines. As Erll states, “cultural memory is not the object of one single discipline, but a transdisciplinary phenomenon”.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the focus of this study was to demonstrate that the idea of cultural memory can be applied to a critical analysis of gender depictions in the live remake in order to facilitate a reconsideration of gender. The use of cultural memory in the critical analyses in chapters 3 and 4 reveals that the live remake mediates between the cultural memories of key depictions of gender from the 1950 film, which reflects 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal notions,<sup>152</sup> with contemporary views of gender. Here, the live remake not only preserves the cultural memory of various key depictions of gender from the 1950 film, but also creates a new cultural memory by remediating some of these past depictions with contemporary views of gender.

In chapter 2, the utilization of the idea of cultural memory in a critical analysis of depictions of femininity in the live remake revealed that a majority of depictions of femininity from the 1950 film have been remembered in the live remake for the sake of culturally connecting both *Cinderella* films. While this remembrance further reinforces the company’s supposed “outdated patriarchal”<sup>153</sup> ideologies of gender, these key depictions that have been remembered are also crucial in maintaining a cultural connection between both *Cinderella* films. Furthermore, it can also be argued that the most memorable characters and themes in the 1950 film tend to revolve around the female characters. Hence, the roles of the heroine,

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<sup>151</sup> Erll, “Cultural Memory Studies”, 3.

<sup>152</sup> Zipes, “Breaking the Disney Spell,” 348.

<sup>153</sup> Pershing and Gablehouse, “Disney’s Enchanted,” 99.

the stepmother, the stepsisters, the fairy godmother, as well as the ‘female’ mice friends have been remembered in the live remake in order to culturally connect both Disney *Cinderella* films. Here, it is the remembrance of these key depictions of femininity that continues the legacy of Disney’s *Cinderella* films into contemporary culture. In addition to the remembrance of certain key depictions of femininity, the live remake also contests and remediates some aspects of the main female characters in the film. For example, Ella’s docile nature is replaced by a more pro-active personality, the fairy godmother is no longer a humble, old grandmother figure but a youthful, voluptuous and extremely glamorous woman, and the stepsisters are depicted as twins in the live remake. These remediations appear to contest their 1950 counterparts’ depictions by reflecting more contemporary views of femininity. These remediations also reflect the new themes of loss and loneliness in the film, as well as the cultural mark that Branagh intended to leave on the film, by emphasising the more humanistic elements of the film, such as Ella’s independent nature that allows her to transform and develop in the film from “inside a human individual rather than through a supernatural agent.”<sup>154</sup> Therefore, when we consider that the idea of cultural memory is an on-going process of remembering and forgetting, as well as sharing and contesting, what has been demonstrated in this chapter is that there has been a process of remembering certain depictions of femininity for the sake of continuing the cultural bandwagon<sup>155</sup> of Disney’s *Cinderella* films. Meanwhile, a process of contesting and remediating some of these depictions enables Branagh to leave his own cultural mark on the film, as well as to create a new cultural memory through the film that better reflects contemporary views of femininity.

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<sup>154</sup> Brew, S, “Kenneth Branagh interview: Cinderella, Audiences, Statham,” *denofgeek*, March 25, 2015, <http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/kenneth-branagh/34685/kenneth-branagh-interview-cinderella-audiences-statham>.

<sup>155</sup> Radish, C, “CINDERELLA Interview: Kenneth Branagh,” *The Telegraph UK*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/cinderella/kenneth-branagh-interview/>



While chapter 2 revealed that there was a heavy remembrance of recurring depictions of femininity in the live remake, chapter 3 instead focuses on utilising the idea of cultural memory in order to reveal that various factors that have occurred in contemporary popular culture has therefore resulted in a complete remediation made to depictions of masculinity in the film. While there has been a complete remediation of the male characters in the film, there is also a slight remembrance of some characters, such as the prince, the King and the Grand Duke. However, the roles of these characters are in contrast to their 1950 counterparts, such as the Grand Duke's role as the primary male antagonist in the film who conspires with the stepmother to separate Kit and Ella. Therefore, chapter 3 provides an overview and explanation of various factors that have contributed to these changing depictions of masculinity in popular culture following the aftermath of the second-wave feminist movement. Events such as the masculinity crisis in the 1990s and the popular depiction of the 'tortured and traumatised' male image, homosocial relationships, father-son drama, as well as the emasculation and feminization of masculinity in contemporary cinema are reflected through depictions of masculinity in the live remake. For example, the character of Prince Charming, who is now aptly named Kit, is revealed to have a complex and emotionally charged character, whose inner turmoil over his future role as King contests the masculinity ideals of a 'manly' man. Here, the previous role of the prince as a "MacGuffin"<sup>156</sup> is replaced by an active male lead who is stereotypically handsome and seemingly confident on the exterior, while displaying uncertainty and doubt on the interior. This double confliction between the Royal Palace's expectations of Kit's future role as King and Kit's own uncertainty of his ability to rule the kingdom is constantly highlighted through the film, where his interactions with certain characters delves further into his own frustrated feelings. This is particularly highlighted in his scenes with the King and Ella, where he exhibits

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<sup>156</sup> Davis, *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains*, 149.

popular depictions of the ‘tortured and traumatic’ hero image and a feminized ‘new masculinities’ image in the film. Another example of a male character who has also been completely remediated in order to reflect contemporary views of masculinity is the Grand Duke, whose role in the live remake is to serve as the primary male antagonist to the male lead. Following on from Mulvey’s argument that the secondary male lead symbolises the lack of a “signifying phallus,”<sup>157</sup> the Grand Duke is almost always depicted to be the conniving, silent character who attempts to foil Kit and Ella’s relationship for his own gain, although he claims his actions are for the betterment of the kingdom. Furthermore, the Grand Duke’s dark, regal clothing, which is similar to the stepmother’s attire, seems to symbolise his status as the male villain scheming in the shadows which is in contrast to the bright golds, blues and white shades of clothing worn by Kit, the King and the Royal Captain. There is also the addition of two new male characters, being the Royal Captain and Ella’s father, who both serve different purposes in the film. The Royal Captain’s role is to serve as Kit’s friend and trusting aide, while also reflecting themes of homosocial relationships in contemporary popular culture. Meanwhile, Ella’s father has been included in order to contest and address issues of the absent father in the 1950 film. The addition of these characters also further demonstrate how Branagh leaves his own cultural mark on the live remake as it transmits a new cultural memory with the addition of new characters. Thus, by functioning as a medium of cultural memory, the live remake has remembered and forgotten, as well as contested and remediated key depictions of masculinity in the 1950 film in order to create a new cultural memory of masculinity that reflects both past and present views of masculinity in the film.

Overall, the use of the idea of cultural memory in the critical analyses conducted in chapters 2 and 3 revealed that different aspects of gender depictions have been reconsidered when

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

comparing the live remake to the 1950 film. In chapter 2, there is a heavy remembrance of key depictions of femininity from the 1950 film in the live remake for the purpose of continuing the “cultural bandwagon”<sup>158</sup> of Disney’s *Cinderella* films into contemporary popular culture. Meanwhile, certain remediations made by Branagh to these key depictions also signify of the cultural mark that Branagh has left, that can be viewed as the creation of a new cultural memory of femininity through an intersection of past and present depictions of femininity in the film. Likewise, in chapter 3, Branagh’s cultural mark on the live remake is clearly shown through a remediation of all the male characters in the 1950 film in order to create a new cultural memory of masculinity in the live remake. Although it is evident that a heavy remediation has been made to depictions of masculinity in the film, the live remake does continue to demonstrate its cultural connection to the 1950 film by remembering the roles of the main male characters from the 1950 film. In this sense, the use of cultural memory in both chapters has clearly demonstrated that the live remake functions as a medium of cultural memory that mediates between both past and present views of gender, therefore creating new cultural memories of gender that reconfigures the individual or group’s relationship to the past.

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<sup>158</sup> Radish, C, “CINDERELLA Interview: Kenneth Branagh,” *The Telegraph UK*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/cinderella/kenneth-branagh-interview/>

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