

Christian Lenz (Dortmund)

Fulfilling Desires.

The Spatial Problems of Disney Princesses and Why Their Husbands-To-Be Are So Much Better Off

In 2013 Disney released its 53rd animated movie *Frozen*. (Very) loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Snow Queen",¹ it tells the story of two sisters, one of which, Elsa, has the power to manipulate ice. Instead of making her the real villain of the film, Disney opted for a misunderstood and suppressed young woman, who flees her castle, which she deems a prison, when her subjects find out about her powers. Her younger sister Anna vows to bring her back and to show everyone that her "sister's not a monster. [i]t was an accident. [...] So [Anna] needs to go after her."² *Frozen* is the story of the re-bonding of two sisters and Elsa even saves her kid sister eventually by showing Anna that *she* truly loves her and not some prince. According to Stephen Holden, it is supposed to be a story that "shakes up the hyper-romantic 'princess' formula that has stood Disney in good stead for decades and that has grown stale."³ Holden's review reverberates a general agreement that *Frozen* is finally a movie that can be truly enjoyed by both sexes and that does not promote the idea that love triumphs over anything else.

Yet, just like most other Disney films, which feature a central human couple of man and woman, there is no escaping the 'happily ever after':⁴ There will be a couple happily in love – at any cost. Naturally, it would be

¹ Hans Christian Andersen: *The Snow Queen*.

www.online-literature.com/hans_christian_andersen/972/ (16/03/14).

² Jennifer Lee: *Frozen – Shooting Draft*, p.34–35.

<http://waltdisneystudiosawards.com/downloads/frozen-screenplay.pdf> (20/02/14).

³ Stephen Holden: „From the Heat of Royal Passion, Poof! It's Permafrost. Disney's 'Frozen,' a Makeover of 'The Snow Queen'“, *The New York Times*, (26/11/2013).

www.nytimes.com/2013/11/27/movies/disneys-frozen-a-makeover-of-the-snow-queen.html?_r=0 (20.02.14).

⁴ Famous Disney movies that feature heterosexual leads from both sexes are *Pocahontas* (1995) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996). But whereas *Pocahontas* does not get her happy ending due to 'historical accuracy', the Disney ideal of the perfect heterosexual couple would have been deeply disturbed had sexy Esmeralda chosen deformed Quasimodo over strapping, manly Phoebus.

best if that is what the characters wanted too. But herein lays the problem: Almost every main (human) protagonist voices their desires in a Disney movie and when they have done so, “usually very early in the film, [...] they tend to get it.”⁵ Anna, arguably the main protagonist of *Frozen*, wants to find her true love⁶ – that is her *only* goal. Other Disney heroines, Colman argues, at least have a different desire and will get their perfect partner as a ‘bonus prize’. In Disney movies, both female and male protagonists want to achieve different goals and only during the course of their adventures do they fall in love with the dashing hero or sprightly heroine who they then tend to pursue as an additional quest. The desire for finding, winning or rescuing the characters’ personified true love is thus a secondary desire. However, while Disney heroines will fulfil their desire to some extent, namely to escape from the confining walls of their respective castles, their eventual husbands will always strike the better deal. It is astounding that Disney princesses are actually just swapping one castle for another with their husbands gaining not only the princesses’ hands in marriage but also their wives-to-be’s territories the men secretly pined for before even meeting the princesses and which is represented by the women. And at the heart of all the toing and froing is the ‘home’.

This essay will consider two Disney movies – *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Aladdin* (1992) – from a cultural geography point of view, explicitly focusing on the constructions of ‘home’. Although this topic lends itself to a gender-oriented approach, this topic will only be touched upon. The reason for that is that this essay argues that Disney characters’ will always end in the (human) palace, if the women want to or not.

Desiring a Home

In her book *Understanding Disney*, Janet Wasko describes the concept of Classic Disney, which “follow[s] careful formulas in creating characters and stories, which typically revolve [...] around heroes or heroines who are strikingly handsome/beautiful, with an upper-class or aristocratic background.”⁷ Added is, of course, an opposition in the very thin or extremely fat antagonist – here, emaciated Jafar (*Aladdin*) and voluptuous Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*) – and “humorous sidekicks”.⁸ Having been ‘educated’ along the lines of the Classic Disney formula since their early childhoods, audiences tend not to question any of the events happening in Disney movies, no matter how magical, fantastical or indeed ‘out there’ they

⁵ Dani Colman: “The Problem with False Feminism (Or Why ‘Frozen’ Left Me Cold).” <https://medium.com/disney-and-animation/7c0bbc7252ef> (20.02.14).

⁶ Cf. Lee: *Frozen*, p. 17

⁷ Janet Wasko: *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2001, p. 115.

⁸ Ibid.

are. They believe in a system termed ‘Classic Realism’ by Catherine Belsey, because “[s]peaking animals, elves [or the likes] are no impediment to intelligibility and credibility [of a fantastical world] if they conform to patterns of speech and behaviour consistent with a ‘recognizable’ system.”⁹ Viewers have been trained in accepting the illusion from very early on, they can even find it irritating if animals do not suddenly quip in a Disney movie because they expect them to. Thus, viewers are not surprised when “Disney plots revolve around characters wishing to escape from their current setting or situation.”¹⁰ Audiences understand poor Snow White, who has to flee her wicked stepmother, they feel with Arthur when he asks Merlin to teach him to be a man – the list is near endless. Viewers can identify with the Disney heroes and heroines because this particular trope is elemental to almost every hero’s or heroine’s story: The protagonist answers the call to adventure and sets out into the unknown, or the belly of the beast, as defined by Joseph Campbell in his hero cycle.¹¹ With regard to the chosen protagonists, Ariel and Jasmine want to escape the palaces in which they are imprisoned and Aladdin wants to escape poverty, which is signified by living on the streets. Only Eric seems quite content to stay where he is.

In contrast to all the other characters, Eric rather likes his home. Roger Silverstein sees the home as a heavily invested place (human) beings mould from space in order to live or be in, and his quote also foreshadows the idea that home does not need be simply one’s dwelling – in this example, Eric’s castle:

Home is a construct. It is a place not a space. It is the object of more or less intense emotion. It is where we [as people; C.L.] belong. Yet such a sense of belonging is not confined to house or garden. Home can be anything from a nation to a tent or a neighbourhood. Home, substantial or insubstantial, fixed or shifting, singular or plural, is what we can make of it.¹²

Many critics award home a significant role within (a) territory – and rightly so: “Home is hearth, an *anchoring point* through which human beings are centred.”¹³ It is the locale from where one sets out to work, to which one returns at night, from where one goes to meet one’s friends, and which is connected to countless other activities: “Integral to the average everyday life is awareness of a fixed point in space, a firm position from

⁹ Catherine Belsey: *Critical Practice*. Second edition, London: Routledge 2002 (1980), p. 48.

¹⁰ Wasko: *Understanding Disney*, p. 117.

¹¹ Joseph Campbell: *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Third edition, Novato: New World Library 2008 (1949), p. 23–31.

¹² Roger Silverstone: *Television and EverydayLife*. London, New York: Routledge 1994, p. 26.

¹³ Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling: *Home*. London, New York: Routledge 2006, p. 11. Emphasis added.

which we ‘proceed’ (whether every day or over large periods of time) and to which we return in due course. This firm position is what we call ‘home’.¹⁴ The home can therefore be compared to the human heart: It becomes the central organ which has the inhabitant(s) travel the whole of the body (territory) and to which they (ideally) return in order to recharge. This is in tune with Joseph Campbell’s model of the hero cycle: The home is both start and finish.¹⁵

These ideas present the first indicator why, from the beginning, Eric is the most content of the four characters discussed: He is already where the others need to come to and thus does not desire another space to live in. For Eric is the only one who remains in his happy home and his attitude towards it is not changed – as opposed to the other characters. It is only after he has been rescued from drowning by Ariel that he wants to find and marry her, making the quest for his ‘true’ love a secondary quest. But this desire enters fairly late into the story, whereas the others utter their longings much earlier. If one looks at the desires the characters disclose, it becomes apparent that three of them are related to a change of the station they are currently occupying: Ariel wants to be “Up where they walk, up where they run / Up where they stay all day in the sun / [...] Part of that world.”¹⁶ The little mermaid wants to belong to the human realm. Additionally, Aladdin wants to live in a palace, whereas Jasmine wants to get out of the same. All three do not deem their current location which they have to call ‘home’ a good or supportive space – they would rather live somewhere else. The reason for that is that their homes do not function on the level of the home as it should.

The home – ideally – “confers three substantial benefits on its occupants [which are] identity, security, and stimulation.”¹⁷ Theano Terkenli proclaims that the “concept of home alters with the passage of time and the accumulation of age. The process unfolds within an individual’s lifeworld and lifetime”.¹⁸ Although some people might occupy the same home from womb to tomb – so to speak, others realise that their childhood home cannot be the place to live in happily ever after as it does not support their developing or changed identity. Ariel does not feel that her family understands her – her father wants her to remain his youngest daughter forever and her sisters are only interested in beautifying themselves.¹⁹ Ariel can no

¹⁴ Agnes Heller: *Everyday Life*. London: Routledge 1984, p. 239.

¹⁵ Cf. Campbell: *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Ron Clements and John Musker: *The Little Mermaid*. Blu-ray. Disney Studios 1989, (00:16:41–00:16:55).

¹⁷ J. Douglas Porteous: “Home: The Territorial Core”, *Geographical Review* 66:4 (1976), p. 383–390, p. 383.

¹⁸ Theano S. Terkenli: “Home as a Region”, *Geographical Review* 85:3 (1995), p. 324–334, p. 330.

¹⁹ It is no coincidence that the only room that is clearly allocated to Ariel’s sisters is an under-water beauty salon with mirrors, powder puffs and hairbands. This is actually the first time that the audience gets to see the sisters interacting with

longer derive her identity from her father's castle and has thus established her own space outside his home from which she derives additional stimulation. She creates an external home in the form of the grotto which is closed off by a heavy stone. In this grotto, Ariel collects her 'treasures'. She even rates the search for human memorabilia higher than her family as she forgets to participate in a concert and instead rummages through a ship wreck. Chris Richards calls the two conflicting worlds "binary oppositions and it is through these that her yearning is constructed."²⁰ However, in her grotto, Ariel is able to combine these two worlds. Yet the common denominator is death: On the one hand, the things could not have made their way into the grotto without ships sinking. On the other hand, some of the artefacts are directly connoted with actively killing, such as the knight's helmet or more importantly, the hook at the end of a fishing line. Ariel systematically ignores the imminent death that is represented via these items. Moreover, Ariel "confuse[s] the physical signifiers of transcendent, ideal love with physical things."²¹ The grotto expresses her inner wish to be with the humans and even be one of them, meaning that her love is more connected to a state of metamorphosis which in turn is manifested in the physical signifiers she collects. She desires to be above sea level so much Eric merely becomes a means to her dream's fulfilment, because he is 'part of that world'. This is foreshadowed when Ariel's friend Flounder installs a statue of the prince in her grotto. Not only dominates the inanimate double of the prince her underwater world, Ariel fetishizes the statue: She is stimulated to do so by the privacy and security of the home she has constructed and it is of importance that she does not close the grotto's opening with the stone when she finds the statue in it.

Regarding the connotations of the grotto, it can be considered Ariel's private part(s) of the sea, her womb in which she cultivates and consumes her desires – and by being constantly in it giving birth to her human self via the surrounding items. Eric, via his stony doppelgänger, has penetrated this womb. Ariel is not able to close off the grotto or her desires ever again after the statue has penetrated it, hence the unclosed entrance. The mermaid's virgin status of dreaming about being a human has been abolished with her sexualised appropriation of the statue: Ariel has taken her desire to 'be a human' to the next level – 'be a human woman so Eric can love me'. Her father, in a psychosexually-interesting move, invades her private

Ariel, in the other two scenes – at the concert and at Ariel's wedding – they are reduced to mere 'background'.

²⁰ Chris Richards: "Room to Dance: Girls' Play and 'The Little Mermaid.'" In: Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham (eds.): *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*. London: BFI Publishing 1995, p. 141–150, p. 144.

²¹ Richard Finkelstein: "Disney's *Tempest*: Colonizing Desire in *The Little Mermaid*." In: Brenda Ayres (ed.): *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003, p.131–147, p. 141.

part(s) and destroys her memorabilia as the home-making devices so as to force her back into *his* home, a space he dominates absolutely. His destructive wrath is the final force which drives Ariel to go ashore, for she feels the security of her own space, the only place she felt comfortable and stimulated in, has been compromised and because the items and her home as the source of her identity and stimulation are gone, so is she.

Changing the scene from the ocean to a stereotyped 'Orient' in *Aladdin*, this time both protagonists feel that they do not belong where they are at the moment. The movie's eponymous hero voices his desire twice to be "rich, [to] live in a palace and [to] never have any problems at all."²² Aladdin constructs a spatial binary in which his current location, a desolate room above Agrabah, is juxtaposed with the palace of the fictitious city. He feels that, although he is poor, his abode does not reflect his true identity, which is multiple times identified as that of a "diamond in the rough."²³ His unobstructed view of the palace is the main feature of his room and whenever he is depicted in this room he regards the palace longingly, proving that his dream home enables more stimulation than his actual home. He has heightened the palace to be the solution to his problems of poverty and being called a "worthless street rat."²⁴ When he meets the disguised princess and rescues her from a delicate situation, he brings her to his home and shows her the palace, thus incorporating her into his desire. The princess, however, is sharing neither his fascination nor his desire with regard to the palace:

ALADDIN: Well, it's not much, (he pulls back the curtain and exposes the palace) but it's got a great view. Palace looks pretty amazing, huh?

JASMINE: (turns away from the palace, sadly): Oh, it's wonderful.

ALADDIN: I wonder what it would be like to live there, to have servants and valets...

JASMINE: Oh, sure. People who tell you where to go and how to dress. [...] You're not free to make your own choices. [...] You're just— (in unison with ALADDIN:) – trapped.²⁵

What unites the two characters is that both Jasmine and Aladdin want to escape their current station and move to another, in their opinion, better place, in which they feel they can be free and live out their identities instead of being trapped. But whereas Aladdin wants to get *into* the palace, where he deems life to be easier, Jasmine is trying to get as far *away* from it as possible. It transpires that the palace only stimulates males to explore their identity, females are imprisoned in restrictions. Margaret Jane Radin

²² Ron Clements and John Musker: *Aladdin*. DVD, Disney Studios 1992, (00:11:34–00:11:39).

²³ Ibid. (00:19:06).

²⁴ Ibid. (00:10:32, 00:22:00).

²⁵ Ibid. (00:20:17–00:20:47).

says that “the idea that an individual’s attachment to a particular property, for example their home, may be so strong that the particular property becomes constitutive of their personhood.”²⁶ This can be also regarded in a negative way, for Jasmine wants to shed the shackles of the palace which has taken over her identity. She is not her own person, but an attribute of the palace. Shortly before she leaves the palace for the first time in her life, she says to her pet tiger: “I can’t stay here [in the palace] and have my life lived for me.”²⁷ She does no longer want to be protected from the world – or rather sealed off from it. However, although she voices criticism regarding the hierarchical structures of the palace telling her what to do or wear, she is not above calling on her royal prerogatives, betraying her strong connection to her home: When she is caught by the fruit seller, she tells him that she can get the money from the palace quickly and, when the guards catch Aladdin, she reveals herself and demands that they let him go.²⁸ If she were truly looking to make a new life for her own, she would have tried to find other ways instead of falling back on her rich and powerful heritage. She might have left the palace but the palace and its ways have not left her.

While Jasmine wants get away from the palace but cannot because it is too much part of her identity, Aladdin feels that the palace is the place in which he can finally come into his own, to become the “diamond”. Therefore it appears only right, when, shortly after the above quoted dialogue, he is relocated to the palace in which his destiny awaits him. It is striking that, following Aladdin’s relocation, almost every scene is set in the palace with only a brief stint in the Cave of Wonders in between. Audiences familiar with the structure of Classic Disney are likely to agree with Aladdin and his wish to live in a palace instead of with Jasmine’s desire to escape it: If one of the protagonists in Classic Disney is of royal descent, the formula has its characters always have their happy endings in a castle or palace to signify that ‘true’ love is rewarded with the most esteemed spaces. When Jasmine voices her criticism of palace life, the audience is meant to sympathise with her but at the same time know that as a princess, the palace is her ‘natural’ habitat: Jasmine is entitled to an opinion but it is disregarded by everyone – including herself – when she returns ‘home’ to the palace voluntarily and when she is lied to by Jafar that Aladdin has been executed. Here, Jafar signifies what happens to both Jasmine and Ariel in their respective realms: The female characters are constantly dominated by the males. Saunders and Williams write that the “home is a place invested with special social meaning and significance where particular kinds of social rela-

²⁶ Qtd. in Lorna Fox O’Mahony and James A. Sweeney: “The Idea of Home in Law: Displacement and Dispossession.” In: Fox O’Mahony & Sweeney (eds.): *The Idea of Home in Law. Displacement and Dispossession*. Farnham: Ashgate 2011, p. 1–12, p. 3.

²⁷ Clements and Musker: *Aladdin* (00:15:34–00:15:48).

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.* (00:22:17).

tions and activities are composed, accomplished and contextualised. Peace and tranquillity may pertain for some times but conflict, violence and tension are also characteristics of home.”²⁹ Both Jasmine and Ariel experience this tension, in the form of frustration: They can no longer live within the confinements of the dominant male patriarchy, signified in the palace as prison. However, they do not make it very far because they merely exchange one dominant male for another.

Molten Desires

In *The Little Mermaid*, Eric’s whole territory is characterised by its dominance over aquatic spaces Ariel is a representative of and as geographies can be expressive and significant of their (main) inhabitants, all features reflect directly on Eric’s wishes, just as Ariel’s grotto displayed her inner world:³⁰ “We create our immediate environment and then contemplate it and are worked on by it. We find ourselves mirrored in it, see what had been not yet visible, and integrate the reflection back into our sense of self.”³¹ That means that ‘home’ becomes a direct mirror of its dweller and therefore only by looking at the abodes of the two male rulers in *The Little Mermaid* one can deduce who is actually the truly mighty of them. Whereas the sea king’s abode is a palace with fragile, shining pillars, Eric’s castle seems to be constructed with strong walls and stone. It connotes the human’s strength, because if one takes the construction design of the palace and the castle as signifiers of their rulers’ might, Triton draws the shorter straw. He has to make up for this with his phallic trident and his phallic throne room, but his trident is eventually taken by Ursula and he is exposed as useless and impotent.

This is in opposition to Eric, who symbolises the masculine humans’ dominance of the feminised sea world. Within Eric’s castle one can find in almost every room presented signs of the dominated sea: Be it the bronze faucet in the shape of a fish, the pictures of ships at sea in the dining room or the huge windows, which have the diners look out onto the sea but from

²⁹ Peter Saunders and Peter Williams: “The Constitution of the Home: Towards a Research Agenda”, *Housing Studies*, 3:2 (1988), p. 81-93, p. 82.

³⁰ Whereas Eric’s doppelgänger was the immobile statue Ariel flirted with under the sea, in the human world *she* becomes the object for the actual prince. As she cannot speak – and is not as versed or aggressive as Ursula when it comes to body language – she is treated like a little child and she behaves accordingly: She is bathed, clothed, fed and taken out for trips. She gets all excited when they visit a puppet show in which a red puppet (signifying the human world) beats the blue puppet (the sea world below) with a stick. The foreshadowing could not be any more explicit.

³¹ James Yandell: “Foreword.” In: Clare Cooper Marcus: *House as a Mirror of Self. Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home*. Berwick: Nicolas-Hays, Inc 2006 (1995), p. xv-xvii, p. xv.

a safe distance. Hence, the two worlds are clearly demarcated and the beach doubles as the border between the realms as can be seen in the example of Ariel: She has to either return to the sea or cannot go back to it when she has legs instead of fins. And Eric is only ever visiting the beach very shortly, always being summoned back by his mentor or taking back Ariel – and the transformed Ursula – to his castle. Additionally, there is a staircase which leads from Eric’s castle directly into the sea. This staircase, which seems to be a leftover of the Andersen tale Disney used as a basis for their movie, is a mediator between the sea and the human world. But it is never used: Being rather unusual, namely leading directly into the sea without any form of pier, it shows the possibility of the two worlds meetings but none of the characters ever undertakes such an approach. Everyone stays in their realm, as designated by their bodies’ lower halves.

Only Ariel crosses the threshold and quickly seems to have forgotten whence she came, which will inevitably result in her permanent exclusion from the merworld: She does no longer care about her aquatic friends, hardly even acknowledges their presence. At dinner with Eric she does not show any qualms of being a “fish-eater”³², as her father calls the humans. Ariel does not care that Sebastian had to succumb to the role of (sea) food to escape from the castle’s kitchen, in which he would have nearly been killed to feed the humans. But this does not come as a surprise as she showed these tendencies already when she treasured fish hooks in her grotto: She has betrayed everything her lower half once stood for. In Eric’s territory, Ariel relaxes into the very passive and submissive role of the damsel in distress, not attempting to kiss Eric when the mood is correct – during the *Kiss the Girl* sequence – and she is unable to stop the wedding of Eric to the disguised Ursula. She is merely present, just decoration. Also it is not her, who kills Ursula, but Eric – as the helmsman of a ship – reprising his deadly role from the beginning of the movie: There, he is depicted aboard his vessel and his crew fishes – i.e. killing the merworld. Moreover, his ship’s figurehead is a wooden mermaid, motionless and neotenzed with a huge bow on her head. He is not afraid of the merworld, quite the contrary. Throughout the film, Eric dominates the sea and its chief representative Ariel.

Meanwhile in Agrabah, Aladdin meets the Genie and wishes to become a prince to woo Jasmine. Although he could have easily asked the Genie to provide him with a kingdom of his own– which, too, would have made him a prince and thus eligible to marry Jasmine – he appears to want a specific new home: The palace of Agrabah. Aladdin deems it the ultimate boon,³³ having been taunted by it for so long and Jasmine is the key to his desired position of power and dominance. Jasmine, however, holds no active power herself: She is constantly overruled by both her father and Jafar, as well as disregarded by the apple seller and the guards. She is the key to the

³² Clements and Musker: *The Little Mermaid* (00:13:10).

³³ Cf. Campbell: *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, p. 146–165.

boon Aladdin has to get in order to successfully complete his adventure, but not the primary goal. So, once Aladdin has become “Prince Ali/Fabulous He/Ali Ababwa”,³⁴ he arrives at the palace and asks the Sultan for Jasmine’s hand in marriage. Instead of arranging a chance meeting with the princess – he has a genie after all – he takes the proper, patriarchal channels and does not even regard Jasmine as person but as “a price to be won” as she herself phrases it.³⁵ Jasmine might actually voice her anger and frustration about being constantly passed over, but apart from her very brief stint to the outside world, she does nothing to stop or change her passivity. Instead she pines for freedom in her chambers. Prince Ali invades this private space without any qualms – as do all the other male characters a little later. Where Ariel had at least a private grotto, Jasmine has not a space to call her own – the men can come and enter as they please.

When Prince Ali then takes Jasmine for a trip to *A Whole New World* on his magic carpet, he does not take Jasmine *away* as was her wish when they first met, he merely takes her *out*. It is striking that they never actually touch the ground, thus Jasmine is again confined to a male dominated space, in this case the carpet. And after they have been “Soaring, tumbling, freewheeling/Through an endless diamond sky”,³⁶ he restores her in her gilded cage. Living in a home “can [...] provide a sense of place and belonging in an increasingly alienating world”, which strongly suggests an aspect of security attached to the notion of home.³⁷ Jasmine is not able to live outside the palace, not like Aladdin, and she might actually be aware of this which would explain her swift return to the palace after her ‘escape’: She may say she wants to get away but she will always return. Therefore it is only logical that Aladdin *comes to* her, so that she can remain within her familiar surrounding – which is another reason why Aladdin could have not established another kingdom and live with her there as Jasmine would have to leave her secure palace. At the end of the movie, there is a vacuum of power at the palace: With Jafar gone and Jasmine only the key to power, it falls back on the incompetent Sultan to rule. The childish man, however, conveniently remembers that he can change the law and allows Jasmine to marry Aladdin and take the responsibility for Jasmine, the palace and Agrabah off his shoulders. Consequentially, Aladdin fulfils his desire – he will live in the palace with servants and valets, and Jasmine gets a husband, yet not the outside world, for she must not fly the carpet without her sultan as the very last scene shows.

The other couple, Ariel and Eric, marry as well – this is, after all, Classic Disney. In this movie, there was the chance of uniting two very different

³⁴ Clements and Musker: *Aladdin* (00:46:40–00:49:09).

³⁵ *Ibid.* (00:51:26).

³⁶ *Ibid.* (00:56:45–00:56:49).

³⁷ Shelley Mallett: “Understanding home: a critical review of the literature”, *The Sociological Review*, 52:1 (2004), p. 62–84, p. 66.

worlds – instead of two sides of the same palace wall, as in *Aladdin*. But due to Ariel's desire to be a human, she foregoes the possibility of a "Mahrtenhe",³⁸ a marriage between a human and a supernatural female. Eric had the chance and could have married Ursula, but Ariel is the less stressful option: Ursula would have not shared her power over the sea as her whole plotting is directed towards sole supremacy. As it is Eric's very active desire to rule the sea at some point, he must choose Ariel, the mermaid-cum-human who frequently displays her disinterest in the fate of the sea. Her passivity and willingness is constantly reinforced in the movie so that Eric can be sure to dominate the sea as he has Triton's most cherished possession – his daughter. In the beginning, he appeared as a ship's captain using a wooden mermaid to pave his way to fish the seas, now he has married a woman, who is – again – a key to power and who has spent most of their time together mutely. His desire is fulfilled, but so is Ariel's as she is now part of his world, a treasure Eric has fished from under the sea. Moreover, as Ariel has betrayed her realm many times during the story, it appears that evicting her from sea by 'fulfilling' her desire to have legs and be a human, she is a less likely danger to the merfolk and the aquatic creatures.

Desire? – Let it Go!

The analyses have shown that although most of the desires of the characters in the movies seem to be satisfied – Jasmine appears to settle for a likeable husband if she cannot have her freedom – but the men usually come out with more power and a larger territory than they had in the beginning: Aladdin rises from "street rat" to sultan-to-be because although Jasmine is allowed to choose her husband, her father did not abolish the patriarchal system that governs Agrabah. Eric, on the other hand, has always been the sole ruler of the human realm. With Ariel at his side, a woman who has proven to be comfortably silent and passive, he will eventually gain dominance over the seven seas as well when Triton passes down his crown and trident. Not only has Eric put himself forward by defeating Ursula, he has also married the one daughter of out Triton's seven who is the real source of the sea king's potency. In both movies the women are reduced to mere accessories of their husbands' successes and triumphs over their (female) spaces.

Returning to the initial example of *Frozen*, the narrative grants at least one of the sisters her desire: Anna finds her 'true' love and is shown to be with the man of her choice in the end. Yet it is not the suitor she wanted to marry initially, after having known him for only a few hours. This suitor

³⁸ Monika Schmitz-Emans: *Seetiefen und Seelentiefen. Literarische Spiegelungen innerer und äußerer Freude*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann GmbH 2003, p. 150.

turns out to be the ‘real’ antagonist of the story, who only wants a kingdom and sees Anna as the key to one. It appears that Disney has finally changed its tune and when the sisters punish the kingdom-hungry fiend in the end, they take revenge for all the crushed desires of their fellow Disney princesses. Here, Disney indeed makes a distinct choice to empower the females to take their own kingdom.

However, *Frozen* is still not as feminist or progressive as it seems: Anna falls in love with a man whom she has known only slightly longer than the antagonist – but not more than 72 hours. As this man is a good-natured yet socially-awkward peasant raised by trolls, Anna tries to bribe him into staying with her by buying him presents. Moreover, her desire to meet a man to fall in love with signifies her wish to leave the confinements of the castle in which she was – inexplicably – as imprisoned as her sister Elsa. Ironically, it is Elsa’s escape that enables Anna to truly leave the castle of Arondale for “the first time in forever”,³⁹ not a man. With Elsa’s eventual return and having found a good man to love, Anna ends where she started – in the castle of Arondale.

Her sister’s fate is yet even more questionable: Having made clear that her only desire is to “[l]et [...] go” of her past and her fears⁴⁰ – all of which are related to her notion of the castle of Arondale as prison – she creates her own palace from snow. It is crucial that Anna fails in persuading her sister to return but it takes men to come and capture Elsa: The snow queen’s powers are useless against male force. She is returned to Arondale and actually *incarcerated* in the castle’s prison. Eventually, she is set free and cleared of the accusation of ‘being a monster’.⁴¹ Nonetheless, she is where she never wanted to be – in Arondale’s castle, performing tricks with her ice-manipulating power like a circus act. Disney might have released a movie with two female leads – but it has not let go of its ideology that a princess needs to be in a castle, if she wants to or not!

³⁹ Lee: *Frozen*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32.