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Normal Hero(ine)s and Deviant Villains: Musical Representation of Moral Archetypes in a Selection of Disney Films

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the musical representation of hero(ine)s and villains in selected Disney animated films: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994). While existing scholarship extensively scrutinizes Disney characters, this study provides a musicological approach to elucidate how music complements and underscores insights into the representation of the characters' particular dimensions. Specifically, this research reveals connections between well-established traits associated with character portrayals, such as morality, gender, and sexuality, and the musical-performative elements within their musical numbers. Notably, the scenes featuring love ballads and villain songs provide intriguing opportunities to identify and assess these aspects, shedding light on the depiction and perception of the hero(ine)s as *normal* and the villains as *deviant*.

The analytical framework of this research centers on musical elements related to lyrical content, musical performance, and contextual considerations such as genre and style. These musical components play a pivotal role in shaping the processes of representation, supporting and advancing conventionally used musical codes of character portrayal.

Throughout this dissertation, I delineate the perceived normality of the protagonists, characterized by virtues, gender conformity, and heterosexuality, in stark contrast to the deviance embodied by the villains, depicted as evil and queer-coded. This dichotomy is musically reinforced by elements that resonate with Western cultural ideals of identity and alterity. Specifically, I discern dualities pertaining to the musical representation of the natural and the artificial, the familiar and the exotic, as well as the conventional and the unconventional.

This study, then, provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate relationship between music and character representation in Disney animated films. However, this research

goes beyond character analysis to unveil cultural intersections between beauty, gender, and sexuality, which serve as markers of morality in popular culture, and elements related to the musical texture of the songs.

Keywords: Disney / Heroes / Heroines / Villains / Normality / Deviance / Music / Songs / Love ballads / Villain songs / Disney Style

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Introduction

One of my strongest childhood memories is watching *The Lion King* (1994) with my siblings so frequently, that we not only memorized the songs but also the dialogues. I particularly remember a scene where Simba, the young lion cub, excitedly shares his aspirations as the future King of the Pride Lands with his uncle Scar. A despondent and sarcastic response from Scar prompts a comeback from Simba, who says: "*You're so weird*," to which Scar replies with irony: "*You have no idea*."[1]

As I revisited this scene and other Disney animated films as an adult musician, this seemingly trivial conversation led me to reflect on how Scar's deviance, as perceived by Simba, is a common theme in Disney villains, often expressed through their musical numbers. I distinctly remember feeling, as a kid, that the villainous songs were indeed *weird*, temporarily disrupting the film's sense of normality.

While Disney characters have been widely researched, and insights into the *weirdness* of the villains—and thus into the implied *normality* of the protagonists—have been offered, there is still an overall lack of comprehensive analyses of how these traits are specifically underscored during the films' musical numbers. This research aims to identify and compare musical performative markers of deviance and normality, as respectively attached to villain songs and love ballads, in four iconic Disney animated musicals from the so-called Renaissance era: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994).[2]

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[1] *The Lion King*, directed by Rob Minkoff and Roger Allers (Walt Disney Pictures, 1994): 00:11:32.
[2] *The Little Mermaid*, directed by John Musker and Ron Clements (Walt Disney Pictures, 1989); *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (Walt Disney Pictures, 1991); *Aladdin*, directed by John Musker and Ron Clements (Walt Disney Pictures, 1992); *The Lion King*.

To develop a theoretical framework to address character portrayal in musical numbers of the selected Disney films, examining and interpreting the musical objects of study, I draw from different scholarships. I situate my dissertation mainly in the field of critical musicology, contributing to disciplines related to popular music and film music. Furthermore, my research is also informed from interrelated areas such as film and media—and Disney—studies, gender and queer theory, and cultural studies.

In this introduction, I provide an overview of the study, by first discussing the general context and relevant musicological approaches. Then, I outline the research problem, objectives, and significance, while also acknowledging the study's limitations. Finally, I summarize the research's structure.

* * *

Examining the musical characterization of "good" and "evil" in Disney films through musical numbers is a challenging task. It delves into the intricate components shaping the musical texture and lyrical content, intertwined with the films' narrative and cultural dimensions. Susan McClary and Robert Walser acknowledge a similar, and related, challenge in the context of discussing popular music and, more broadly, when writing about music; they identify a syntactical dimension, involving "a grammar of expectations, *normal* continuity" (emphasis added), as well as a "wide-open semiotic dimension," influencing our perception of complex emotions, archetypes, and contextual factors.[3] Similarly, my objective prompts an exploration of both intrinsic elements of Disney's musical numbers, and the associative dimension linking them to the narrative contexts. Hereunder, I elucidate some aspects related to the "semiotic

[3] Susan McClary and Robert Walser, "Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles with Rock," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (1990), 237-249: 237.

dimension"[4] of the hero(ine)s and the villains in Disney animated musicals from the Renaissance era, and how they might inform a musicological reading that complements the understanding of the problem of character representation.

Disney's hero(ine)s and villains are widely recognized, even intuitively so, for their distinct portrayal, sparking discussions among audiences, especially on fan-based online platforms.[5] Scholarly interest in character representation has also grown significantly, with an apparent increased engagement during Disney's Renaissance Era. Authors have analyzed characters in Disney animated musicals, categorizing them using cultural conventions that emphasize opposing forces like "good" and "evil." These narrative forces, governing Disney stories, permit these films to evolve into moralizing instruments. While Douglas Brode recognizes the positive impact that Disney entertainment products might have produced in the creation of identities, and the formation of values in terms of diversity and inclusion,[6] cultural critic Henry A. Giroux, in *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, raises concerns about Disney's reinforcement of certain social values, shaping childhood perceptions, and impacting society in general.[7] Indeed, the films' dialogues, actions, and character depiction

[4] I use "semiotic dimension" as employed by McClary and Walser in the quote above. Although I acknowledge the importance of the field of semiotics in the type of research I am engaging in, and also that my findings might nurture a semiotic approach to film and popular music, my analytical framework does not emerge from this field. For that reason, I do not provide an overview of semiotic approaches to the representation of morality, and do not use terminology from such a scholarship. I subscribe to the general definition of semiotic as a science of how "meanings (such as facts, relationships, or feelings) become associated with material (such as pictures, sounds, or gestures – all called "signs")." See: Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music* (Indiana University Press, 2012).
[5] See, for instance, the characters' descriptions in: https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/The_Disney_Wiki; https://tvtropes.org/ .
[6] Douglas Brode, *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment* (University of Texas Press, 2005).
[7] Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

strongly underscore a sense of morality, focusing on the dichotomy of "good" and "bad." On a deeper level, the representation of these values contributes to societal notions of what is deemed "normal" and "deviant." Scholars in cultural studies, media studies, and psychology identify markers of moral difference that amplify the hegemonic *normality* and *deviance* linked to the depiction of hero(ine)s and villains.

For instance, the symbolization of internal morality through external appearance has proven successful in Disney films. By conflating morality and appearance, Disney films connotatively assign higher value to certain physical attributes over others. Problematically, these normative standards are formed by preconceptions tainted with ageism, racism, and/or queerphobia.[8] Thus, the hero(ine)s often exhibit normative beauty, with facial features, body shapes, and light skin tones that align with hegemonic Western standards. Villains, on the other hand, consistently bear racialized, exaggerated, and stereotypically unattractive facial features and body types, a manifestation of attributes deemed "ugly" within the normativity upheld by the hero(ine)s. The physical markers linked to these characters particularly underscore the relevance

[8] This topic is recurrent in the influential books *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (Indiana University Press, 2007) and *Handsome Heroes & Vile Villains: Men in Disney's Feature Animation* (Indiana University Press, 2014) by Amy Davis, as well as in several articles featured in the following collections: Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds., *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1995); Johnson Cheu, ed., *Diversity in Disney films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability* (McFarland, 2013). Additional studies from media, film, and communications about the relationship between beauty and morality in Disney animated films are the following: Rebecca-Anne C. do Rozario, "The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess," in *Women's Studies in Communication* 27, no. 1 (2004): 34-59; Natalie S. Wellman, "Disney's Portrayal of Women: An Analysis of Female Villains and Princesses," in *Concordia Journal of Communication Research* 7, no. 1 (2020): art. 4. Some psychological studies on this topic are the following: Doris Bazzini, et al., "Do Animated Disney Characters Portray and Promote the Beauty–Goodness Stereotype?," in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 40 (10), (2010): 2687-2709; Michelle Garofalo, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Teaching Critical Media Literacy with Disney," in *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 106 (2013): 2822-2831.

of *balanced* physicalities in the perception of the protagonists' virtuousness, and in turn placing the monstrous, *unbalanced* features of the villains in the realm of the deviant.

Such a strategy of representation has been analyzed by various authors, some of whom have critically focused on the issue of race. In the article "Cannibals and Croons: Blackness in the Early Days of Walt Disney," scholar of African American studies Kheli R. Willets highlights how early Disney films used stereotypical characteristics associated with *whiteness* and *blackness* to enhance narrative antagonization; very generally, *whiteness* represented "good," while *blackness* represented "bad." Willets traces these representational strategies back to ethnographic and artistic materials from the 15th century, a time when European explorations of Africa intensified:

> A large majority of the images continued to highlight the differences between Africans and Europeans and create a dichotomous relationship that presented Europeans as good, pretty, intellectual, refined and driven, commonly articulated as *whiteness*, juxtaposed against bad, ugly, emotional, savage and lazy Africans, representing *blackness* (emphasis in original)[9]

While Willets focuses on the lingering presence of these characteristics in mid-20th century Disney films, her findings could be further extended to the broader use of racialized—and exoticized—traits to represent negative actions and values in many other Disney animated films. Interestingly, the qualities Willets identifies as markers of *whiteness* and *blackness* can also be also viewed through the lens of balance, as I have previously mentioned. In this sense, the hero(ine)s' beauty, intelligence, refinement, and initiative might be interpreted as *balanced* and qualities of countenance; the opposites—ugliness, emotion, savagery, and laziness—are to be read as *unbalanced*, excessive and *dangerously* incomprehensible.

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[9] Kheli R. Willets, "Cannibals and Coons: Blackness in the Early Days of Walt Disney," in *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, ed. Johnson Cheu (2013), 9-22: 10-11.

Furthermore, the portrayal of beauty in these films intricately ties to gendered performances. Scholarly discussions, particularly centered on female leads, shed light on this aspect. Media scholar Clare Bradford, for example, observes that Disney princesses frequently supplement their looks with "gendered expressions of innocence," manifested through their attire and manners.[10] Bradford's analysis suggests that female beauty is perceived as virtuous when veiled in prudence, a traditionally feminine-adequate quality, again underscoring the significance of *balance* in the portrayal of virtue. Consequently, heroines seldom discuss or sing about their appearance or that of their romantic interest. This tendency may extend to the male leads, who, influenced by the avoidance of conventional masculinity's concern for appearance, also downplay looks. In contrast, villains deliberately accentuate their unbalanced appearances through disruptive performances that either challenge or exaggerate the expressions of gender, and utterly value the bodily dimension. The intersection between race and gender expressions is particularly evident in the depiction of the antagonists, as the provocative and threatening emphasis on sensuality, along with manifestations of *excessive* masculinity or femininity are often linked to racialized or exoticized bodies, as I will discuss later in this introduction, recurring to Susan McClary's analysis of the musical representation of the Other.

Furthermore, some studies have characterized moral archetypes in these movies in terms of their sexual difference and gender. Media scholar Amy Davis adopts such an approach, as the titles of her pivotal books in this regard suggest: *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (2007) and *Handsome Heroes & Vile Villains: Men in Disney's Feature Animation* (2014). While acknowledging the differences in action and physical beauty,

[10] Clare Bradford, "Where Happily Ever After Happens Every Day": The Medievalisms of Disney's Princesses," in *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2012), 171-188: 179.

Davis' work connects the portrayal of hero(ine)s and villains with notions of Butlerian gender performance. Davis, as others after her, suggests that the hero(ine)s enact their gender in *normative* ways, while the villains do not.

The villains' performance—and bending—of their genders, in fact, mark their disruptive narrative function, as opposites to the protagonists. This quality accounts for the well-acknowledged queer-coding inscribed into Disney villains, particularly during the Renaissance era.[11] The documentary *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), centered on discussing the portrayal of queer identities in film, remarks that "the sissy made everyone feel manlier or womanlier by occupying the space in-between,"[12] highlighting the functional relationship between normative and non-normative—queered—characters. In her book *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*, musicologist Freya Jarman-Ivens highlights that beyond implications about gender and sexuality, the term "queer" encompasses a disruptive nature, one that is inherently *antinormative*.[13] This allows us to infer that the traits exhibited by the villains within their narratives are to be understood as tools deliberately used to oppose what is regarded as normal, linking evilness, non-conformity, and deviance. The villains *perform* their otherness by embodying camp subjectivities, often associated with queer identities, and the stylized actions of gender performativity.[14]

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[11] See: Koeun Kim, "Queer-coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," in *Dialogues@ Ru* 18, no. 1 (2017): 156-165; Sean Griffin, *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens* (NYU Press, 2000): 141-142.

[12] This quote is cited in: Kim, "Queer-coded Villains…": 159.

[13] Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer voices: Technologies, vocalities, and the musical flaw* (Springer, 2011): 15-17.

[14] Relating Disney villains with camp subjectivities, see: Kerry Mallan and Roderick McGillis, "Between a Frock and a Hard Place: Camp Aesthetics and Children's Culture," in *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 1-20; Will Letts, "Camp Disney: Consuming Queer Sensibilities, Commodifying the Normative," in *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin, and Julie C. Garlen Routledge (2016): 148-160.

In recognizing their disruptive relation to ideals of femininity and masculinity, it has also been noted that the villains challenge heteronormativity, representing a threat to hegemonic ideals of sexuality. Notably, Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe have identified the intersections between appearance, gender, sexuality, and morality in the portrayal of Disney villains, in their article "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film."[15] The authors argue that the performance of gender plays a pivotal role in presenting the villains as evil and disruptive characters:

> By performing gender outside of normative expectations, individuals may therefore draw into question much more than their gender: in a culture with firmly naturalized constructions of gender, gender transgression may also cast doubt on a person's competence, social acceptability, and morality.[16]

Assessing the connection between narratives and cultural normativity, it is acknowledged that Disney films, as narratives rewarding virtuous actions, are undeniably intertwined with hetero-romantic relationships. In fact, scholar Amanda Putnam suggests that the standardized tropes of femininity and masculinity embodied and enacted by the protagonists are instrumental in Disney films to present them as heterosexual.[17] Ultimately, the "happily ever after" is reserved for the virtuous, beautiful, and hetero-coupled protagonists, implying that to attain perennial fairy-tale happiness it is *necessary* to conform to these ideals. In his dissertation "Unmasking the Quillain: Queerness and Villainy in Animated Disney Film," media scholar Dion Sheridan McLeod argues that one of the main roles of the queer-coded villains, which he names "quillains," is to disrupt the protagonist's path to happy ending, consistently equaling

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[15] Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe, "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film," in *Popular Communication* 1, no. 2 (2003): 89-109.
[16] Ibid., 91.
[17] Amanda Putnam, "Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films," in *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, ed. Johnson Cheu (2013), 147-162: 154.

heterosexual marriage. He asserts that the villains not only perform their genders outside of heteronormative conventions, engaging in culturally sanctioned performances, but also directly threaten them.[18] As the villains weaponize desire and sexuality, they are further distinguished as deviant, exhibiting an abnormal relationship with Disney's most cherished value: love. Against this threat, the protagonists are compelled to uphold and reinforce their—essentially, Western—values with unwavering determination.

In sum, Disney's hero(ine)s and villains as moral archetypes can be recognized through their physical attributes, gender performances, and narrative function. This framework enables a contrasting map of these elements against conventional Western standards of beauty, gender, and sexuality, facilitating our understanding of these characters as conforming to or deviant from cultural norms. Putnam succinctly summarizes these facets and ties them to additional performative and moral dimension asserting the following: "Dramatic and daring, the villains often outperform their heterosexual rivals, setting up a transparent comparison between 'normative' and 'deviant' behaviors, but also connecting the villains' transgenderism[19] with sarcasm, selfishness, cruelty, greed, and brutality".[20]

While the distinctions between hero(ine)s and villains are evident in both non-musical and musical scenes in Disney films, the latter remains less systematically explored, likely due to the challenges articulated by McClary and Walser regarding the interpretation of popular music,

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[18] Dion Sheridan McLeod, "Unmasking the Quillain: Queerness and Villainy in Animated Disney films," (PhD diss., School of the Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong, 2016). https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/4802

[19] McLeod makes a valid observation regarding Amanda Putnam's approach to the issue of queer-coding in these films. Putnam employs the term "Transgenderism" to describe different strategies of gender non-conformity displayed by the villains, seemingly conflating them. This quote could be improved by substituting the term "transgenderism" with "non-conformity" or "queer coding" to better align with the nuanced nature that this discussion requires. See: McLeod, "Unmasking the Quillain"

[20] Putnam, "Mean Ladies…": 151.

a category that encompasses Disney songs. Notions of normality and deviance, expressed through actions, motivations, physical appearance, gender performativity, and sexuality, are present throughout the films, supported the instrumental score that relies on musical codes drawn from the Hollywood tradition. These conventions, crucial for representing characters' morality, often rely on pitch organization to mark the contrast between characters.[21] However, McClary and Walser argue that in popular songs, pitch-related procedures alone "cannot begin to explain what is significant [about these repertoires]." Instead, they advocate for a more comprehensive analytical approach considering "dimensions systematically overlooked by traditional musicology," such as performance, referentiality, and notably, lyrics—dimensions often viewed as "distracting" from more structural elements.[22]

Besides conventionally focusing on pitch, film music studies often regard lyrics as a "distracting" element. Influential authors, such as Claudia Gorbman and Kathryn Kalinak, emphasize that classical Hollywood film [instrumental] scores ensure an "unobstructed narrative

[21] General film music books primarily use pitch-related oppositions, such as Major-Minor, Diatonicism-Chromaticism, Consonance-Dissonance, to characterize good and evil characters. See, for instance, Kathryn Kalinak, *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010). In fact, in his book *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*, film academic Emilio Audissino deems "chordal progressions [and] syntactic relations between tones" as the primary, structural parameters of music, recalling Leonard B. Meyer's classification of musical parameters. (See: Emilio Audissino, *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach.* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)). Some interesting examples of the use of pitch-related oppositions to represent morality are the analyses that take as objects of study the music of the *Star Wars* sagas, such as: James Buhler, "Star Wars, Music, and Myth," in *Music and Cinema*, eds. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (2000): 33-57; Irena Paulus, "Williams versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics," in *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* (2000): 153-184.

[22] McClary and Walser: "Start Making Sense": 240. In this quote, the authors are using the blues, with its "simple and unvarying harmonic progression," as an example. Their claim, however, can be applied to many popular musical practices.

exposition,"[23] while film music with a lyrical content, particularly [popular] songs, *disrupts* the narrative flow, potentially offsetting the balance between music and cinematic representation.[24]

In their interruption of the narrative exposition, the *texted* musical numbers play a crucial role in the process of character representation, as they shift the focus from the story, putting a spotlight on the characters and their performativity. In fact, subsequent research in film studies has reinforced that songs add a layer of significance to the representational process, engaging the audience's conscious attention and contributing to the complexity of narrative interpretation.[25] Scholars like Anahid Kassabian have approached film music considering the differentiating features of popular songs for analyzing their impact when used in classical films in regards to discussions of identity and alterity, concepts that could be mapped onto notions of normality and deviancy.[26] However, considerably fewer approaches of this type have been applied to Disney animated musicals.

Despite this void, some authors have undergone significant inquiries similar to my own. Notably, in the article "'This Burning Desire is Turning Me to Sin': The Intrapersonal Sexual Struggles of two Disney Singing Villains," media scholar Craig M. McGill analyzes the musical numbers involving the villains Gaston and Frollo, respectively from the films *Beauty and the*

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[23] Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992): xv.
[24] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indiana University Press, 1987): 12.
[25] See: Kathryn Kalinak, *Film Music*; Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (Routledge, 2002). In the article "Popping the Question: The Function and Effect of Popular Music in Cinema," media scholar Hilary Lapedis inquires about the contrast in functionality between conventional, instrumental film scoring and the use of popular songs, precisely engaging with Gorbman's claims about popular music in film. Lapedis concludes that popular music has a stronger influence on the audience, and can more easily modify the reading of certain scenes. See: Hilary Lapedis, "Popping the Question: The Function and Effect of Popular Music in Cinema," in *Popular Music* 18, no. 3 (1999): 367–79. doi:10.1017/S0261143000008928.
[26] Kassabian, *Hearing Film*.

Beast (1991) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996). McGill examines the narrative context, the lyrics, and certain musical elements—mostly associated with pitch—characterizing these villains within the dichotomy of monster/man, which interestingly overlaps with the questions of normativity and deviancy in terms of gender, sexuality, and morality. I see the current research as a complement to the findings and reflections suggested by McGill.[27]

Albeit with a different final goal, the article "Disney does Broadway: Musical Storytelling in The Little Mermaid and The Lion King," by Rebecca Coyle and Jon Fitzgerald, offers an interesting analytical approach to the songs from these two films, in order to determine the significance of the songs in "Disney's revitalization of the animated feature film."[28] Including the analysis of some harmonic and melodic elements, their approach focuses on the idea of the "popular song," underlying the importance of the lyrics, the performance, and the genres. Although the authors only superficially mention differentiating elements between the hero(ine)s' and the villains' songs, it is significant in recognizing the stylistic and performative differences between their numbers.

Considering the relationship between musical performance and morality, a number of authors have inquired about the vocality of Disney characters, mainly the protagonists. Authors such as Jennifer Fleeger, Liske Potgieter and Zelda Potgieter, Maria Beherendt, among others, assert that vocal performance is crucial in the perception of the lead's likability, enhancing their portrayal as virtuous. Particularly in the context of films from the Disney Renaissance, they recognize the use of a mixed voice—a belting singing style—which allows the characters to

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[27] Craig M. McGill, "'This Burning Desire is Turning Me to Sin': The Intrapersonal Sexual Struggles of Two Disney Singing Villains," in *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture* 3, no. 1 (2018): 27-49.

[28] Rebecca Coyle and Jon Fitzgerald, "Disney Does Broadway: Musical Storytelling in *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King*," In Drawn to Sound: Animation Film Music and Sonicity, ed. Rebecca Coyle. Equinox Publishing LTD (2010), 223-248: 223

easily transition from song to speech, making their musical involvement more natural within the context of the films.[29] Their work, however, does not delve into the intricacies of the unnaturalness of the villains' singing, an aspect that I deem crucial in the musical portrayal of their deviance.

Lastly, I find it relevant to mention Lisa Scoggin's article "The Foreign and the Other in the Music of Mulan (1998)," in which the author addresses the influence of the music—both the instrumental score and the songs—in the portrayal of different levels of alterity. Scoggin identifies that the music in Mulan is crucial in helping the Western audience recognize the hero(ine)s and villains, employing conventional musical codes and preconceptions that depict virtuous and relying on conventional musical codes and preconceptions representing characters' likability in regards to ideals of gender and cultural identity.[30] While Scoggin discusses a film beyond my selection, her methodology can be applied to other Disney animated films, given the overarching narrative role played by gender and exoticism in character portrayal.

Following the previous discussions, I recognize that songs as non-canonical film scoring are an interesting and rich area of study. I find it particularly compelling that the analysis of songs from films encompasses conventions of classical films, of various traditions of popular music and songwriting, and, within these disciplines, the power of representation through music, lyrics, and performance.

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[29] See: Jennifer Fleeger, "The Disney Princess: Animation and Real Girls," in *Mismatched Women: The Siren's Song Through the Machine* (2014): 106-136; Liske Potgieter and Zelda Potgieter, "Deconstructing Disney's Divas: A Critique of the Singing Princess as Filmic Trope," in *Acta Academica: Critical Views on Society, Culture and Politics* 48, no. 2 (2016): 48-75; Maria Behrendt, ""'That's How You Know He's Your Love': The Male Singing Voice and Disney's (Re) interpretation of the Male Romantic Lead," in *Sound Stage Screen* 2, no. 2 (2022): 5-32.

[30] Lisa Scoggin, "The Foreign and the Other in the Music of Mulan (1998)," in *American Music* 39, no. 2 (2021): 196-211.

My interest in the musical representation of deviance and normality in Disney animated films, however, stems from an exploration of the perception of opposites within music-driven contexts. Susan McClary's analytical approach has been pivotal in shaping my interest and comprehension of this subject. Specifically, McClary's examination of the musical representation of the feminine, often depicted as a complex array of signs denoting deviant alterity, equips me with a critical analytical perspective and a toolbox of narratological and interpretive instruments for approaching the analysis of musical compositions featured in films.[31]

Throughout her book *Feminine Endings*, McClary identifies common musical elements signifying femininity and representing deviation within male-dominated Western canonical practices. For instance, the excessive chromaticism linked to characters like Carmen or Lucia di Lammermoor is interpreted by McClary as equating the dangers posed by these characters through the musical threat that unrestrained chromaticism poses to the rational—and thus, masculine—structures of tonality. Beyond the pitch-related elements, McClary additionally notes that these characters are often musicalized with exoticized and excessively contrasting elements, emphasizing their portrayal as Others, and thus the implicit need for them to be either framed, tamed, or ultimately eliminated.

Conventions used to represent threatening female operatic characters, as identified by McClary, surface in film music as means of portraying villainy. It is precisely the characterization of such *excessive* performances—and thus, the normative referential frame—that I aim to identify throughout this research, in which the normative hero(ine)s are ensured continuity, and the deviant villains are to be rejected.

[31]Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Scope of the research

The title of my dissertation "Normal Hero(ine)s and Deviant Villains: Musical Representation of Moral Archetypes in a Selection of Disney Films" contains several key terms that require some initial clarification, providing a preliminary context for the scope of my research. To achieve this, I will start from the end and progressively move forward to the first words of the title; I will begin by addressing the term "Disney."

In my research, I use the term "Disney" to encompass both the studio and the creative teams behind the films. However, it is essential to acknowledge the multilayered meanings of "Disney," as pointed out by the scholars Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells in the introduction of their volume *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. These layers include references to Walt Disney as a person, the production studio, a "canon of popular film," the corporation, and ultimately, an ideology. Their perspective emphasizes that engaging with a Disney film involves more than consuming a work by a specific individual or company; it is a participation in a complex interplay of expectations and conventions rooted in a long-standing narrative and cinematic tradition.[32] In this context, "Disney" extends beyond the studio, and encompasses canonical and ideological elements underlying their films. Exploring conventions and notions of normality and deviance in Disney films acknowledges the canonical and ideological influence they embody and disseminate.

My dissertation title further suggests an exploration of moral archetypes in Disney films. However, delving into these archetypes from a Campbellian or Jungian perspective exceeds this study's scope. Instead, I focus on the musical representation of the "good" and "evil" dichotomy through the well-defined hero/heroine and villain archetypes, emphasizing their moral

[32] Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds. *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1995): 2-3.

dimension. These archetypes are defined by their alignment or deviation from "virtuous behavior or conduct."[33] As media scholar Annalee R. Ward notes, Disney narratives often feature easily identifiable "proper" actions, partly because they draw from traditional myths and archetypes.[34] Although an oppositional view of the ambitions and actions of the characters provides a clear framework for identifying musical representational strategies, I strive to recognize nuances in the characters' actions and music. For example, in Chapter 1, I briefly discuss how musical elements unveil underlying intentions when the characters—often the villains—adopt attitudes associated with the opposite archetype, a trait identified by various scholars in many examples of literature and popular media.[35]

In exploring the morality underlying archetypes in Disney films, I grapple with the terms *normality* and *deviance* linked to hero(ine)s and villains, respectively. As extensively debated in philosophy and various social sciences, including musicology, what is considered normal and abnormal is shaped by socially constructed expectations, enforcement, and perception. In this research, "normal" characterizes behaviors aligning with a shared set of rules, particularly from a moral perspective, reflecting Ward's notion of easily identifiable "proper" actions. In this sense, "normality" signifies the perceived alignment with what is considered "proper," emphasizing the hero(ine)s' actions, including musical behaviors. As it will be explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the perception of these behaviors is closely related to naturalness and performativity, notions reinforced by the character's musical involvement. "Normativity" corresponds to the

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[33] Annalee R. Ward, *Mouse Morality: The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film* (University of Texas Press, 2002): 7.
[34] Ibid., 25-26.
[35] See: Mike Alsford, *Heroes & Villains* (Baylor University Press: 2006); Daniel A. Forbes, "The Aesthetic of Evil," in *Vader, Voldemort and Other Villains: Essays on Evil and Popular Media*, ed. Jamey Heit (McFarland: 2011): 13-27.

prescriptive, socially and culturally constructed, set of rules against which these actions are evaluated,[36] primarily in terms of what is good, desirable and permissible. I employ these terms to characterize the hero(ine)s, as they underscore that narrative aspects, from the plot to animation and music, rely on hegemonic cultural values inherent to "Disney" as ideological layer.

On the other hand, the terms "deviant" and "deviance" serve as opposites to "normal" and "normality." Nevertheless, and as I have mentioned before, this opposition is not strictly binary. In fact, "deviance" denotes a condition in which a behavior or phenomenon evades "normativity," through various and varied processes. This perspective allows me to shift the focus towards the spectrum of compositional and narrative strategies employed to depict the "deviant." Sharply delimiting the "normal" and the "deviant" is risky, as such distinctions have often been used to marginalize individuals, communities, behaviors, and procedures that do not align with hegemonic forces.[37]

In my pursuit of identifying connections between the notions of normality and deviance, and specific musical structures shaping the hero(ine) and villain archetypes, I engage with discussions that analyze the prescriptive nature of normative behaviors within Disney animated films, specifically regarding gender and sexuality. However, my primary aim is not to offer an exhaustive account or analysis of these discussions within the films. Instead, I highlight them to bolster my hypothesis that the perception of the love ballads and the villain songs contributes to a

[36] Marco Spina, "Norm and Normality, Starting from Merleau-Ponty," in *Phenomenology and Mind* 3 (2012): 36-44.

[37] Musicologist Joseph N. Straus discusses this matter in relation to the notion of disability in music and music theory in: "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory," in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, no. 1 (2006): 113-184.

mutifaceted characterization, encompassing roles, actions, gender dynamics, and performances of these figures.

Evaluation of current situation

Disney has greatly influenced the consolidation and dissemination of cultural values, not only within the United States but also across the globe. Consequently, scholars from various disciplines have undertaken comprehensive examinations of representation within Disney films, addressing critical issues such as morality, appearance, gender and sexuality. It is readily apparent in animated musical films that these aspects are accentuated through the music, a fact that we instinctively acknowledge while watching the films, recognizing that the music significantly amplifies our perception of the characters' morality.

Yet, it is remarkable that, in the majority of character portrayal studies, the songs within these films are either overlooked or cursorily explored, with the analysis of musical elements, including the lyrics, the texture, and performative elements, remaining superficial and isolated. Thus, I recognize a considerable void in our understanding as there is an absence of comprehensive investigations of both the lyrics and the musical performances as fundamental elements in characterizing the hero(ine)s's normality and the villains' deviance in the context of animated musicals. Surprisingly, sociocultural discussions related to character representation have been less studied in relation to the musical realm of the movies, given the importance of music in the emotional and narrative setting of these animated musical films.

I posit that a generalized assumption prevails, suggesting that these songs do not *require* in-depth technical analysis due to their popularity. This assumption mirrors—or rather inherits—concerns that have been raised by musicologists specializing in popular music for many years, noting that its alleged simplicity and lack of a rigid notated score, indicating the "composer's

intentions," make this repertoire unfit to be scrutinized.[38] Given that the songs in Disney's animated musical films from the Renaissance Era draw from the conventions of popular music, musical theater, and Hollywood scores, as discussed in Chapter 3, it may appear that there is little left to uncover regarding their influence on character development, as their musical codes are unquestionably grasped by the audience. This perspective, however, understates the significance of these "conventional" musical codes as powerful tools evoking a complex web of cultural beliefs and connotations related to normality and deviance.

Furthermore, I strive for a holistic analytical approach that complements the textual analysis of song lyrics with a musical performance-centered perspective. Scholar Marc Lafrance has identified this issue within the domain of popular music analysis, advocating for the necessity of examining both the text and the music to comprehensively grasp the cultural impact of a *popular* musical creation. This viewpoint is convincingly expressed—and applied—by Lafrance in the book *Disruptive Divas*, co-authored with musicologist Lori Burns:

> If musicology has tended to privilege the study of music while ignoring the meaning of such music within specific sociocultural contexts, then cultural studies have privileged the study of music's meaning within specific sociocultural contexts while ignoring the ways in which music actually contributes to the generation of meaning. In their dismissal of either the text or the music, neither approach seems entirely appropriate to the study of popular musical forms. Indeed, to produce a truly comprehensive account of popular musical artifacts, the theorists must be sensitive to both the textual and musical constituents of a musical work.[39]

In light of Lafrance's assertion, this study contributes to the specific understanding of Disney's songs and their intricate meanings, which serve an essential role in portraying the characters' nature. Through my research, I address the gap in musicological approaches by

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[38] This problem has been recognized, among others, by Philip Tagg, and Susan McClary and Robert Walser; see Philip Tagg, "Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice," in *Popular Music*, 2 (1982): 37-67; Susan McClary and Robert Walser, "Start Making Sense!"

[39] Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance, *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music* (Routledge, 2002): 29.

exploring how the hero(ine)s and villains distinguish themselves through their musical numbers, examining the lyrics, the performance, and the referentiality of the music showcased in the numbers. This endeavor contributes to a more profound understanding of the narrative in these musical films and, given their undeniable cultural influence, it also sheds light on broader cultural beliefs.

In the pursuit of a thorough understanding of the musical representation process within the selected Disney films, this research is limited in various ways. First, the findings drawn from this analysis are confined to a limited set of musical procedures from a distinct era in the history of Disney animated musicals. While this constraint is essential for delineating the study's scope, it revolves around four iconic and musically-rich films, leaving untapped musical content that could enhance our understanding of how hero(ine)s and villains are portrayed. Notably, an analysis of the tonal space in these songs could further illuminate the perceived normal stability of heroines and the deviant instability of villains. Additionally, to develop a comprehensive theory covering Disney's characterization strategies in the Renaissance era, it is imperative to analyze additional films from this period, as well as unexplored songs within the selected films.

Furthermore, the benefits offered by a multimodal analytical approach come hand in hand with the challenge of establishing a methodology that can be systematically applied to the selected repertoire. While I provide interpretations that invite further scrutiny, it is crucial to acknowledge that the current research has inherent constraints. Nonetheless, I aspire that it furnishes scholars and enthusiasts with valuable tools, analytical perspectives, and a foundation for future explorations in this domain.

Aims and Objectives

This research aims to systematically identify and categorize musical techniques utilized in a range of songs featured in the films *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *The Lion King* (1994), specifically the hero(ine)s' love ballads and the villain songs. Considering the overall focus that the tonal space receives in conventional musical analysis, my approach focuses on the lyrical content, the musical performance, and the musical contexts informing the processes of representation. I seek to elucidate the relationship between recognized markers of "good" and "evil" attributed to each character, the musical elements within their songs, the overall components of the musical numbers featuring the songs, and the musical performances enacted by the characters. In doing so, this study aims to uncover cultural connections between notions of beauty, gender, and sexuality, which serve as markers of morality in these films, and compositional and performance-driven musical techniques employed. I attempt to achieve these objectives by answering the following research questions:

- what musical procedures are employed in the love ballads and villain songs from the first animated films from Disney's Renaissance Era to respectively represent "good" and "evil"?;

how do the songs and the musical numbers linked to the hero(ine)s and villains, as well as their musical numbers, differ in these films?; and

how does the musical portrayal of good and evil in these films relate to notions of beauty, gender and sexuality, creating notions of normality and deviance?

I hypothesize that the manifest distinction between the hero(ine)s and the villains in the selected films is underpinned by musical elements culturally perceived as "normative" and

"disruptive." Specifically, the musical traits found in the protagonists' ballads position them within the realm of perceived "normal" musical expression. In contrast, the villain songs represent a deviation from the established conventions employed to represent the protagonists. I anticipate that by musically characterizing the villains with high-flown musical elaborations and performances, Disney not only underscores their moral divergence but also accentuates negative connotations tied to non-conforming performances of identities, particularly of gender and sexuality. Simultaneously, the hero(ine)s' ballads, restrained and cohesive, serve to reinforce the core values associated with the protagonists' appearances, desires, and life paths.

This research identifies three key dimensions through which Disney employs music to establish the hero(ine)s as "normal" and the villains as "deviant": on the one hand, the "normal" is linked to notion of the "natural," the "familiar" or "homely" (often construed as American), and the conventional or traditional. On the other hand, the "deviant" is consistently tied to the "artificial," the "exotic," and the unconventional or modernist.

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The focal points of this research encompass the examination of specific songs and musical numbers, primarily the love ballads associated with the romantic relationships of the protagonists, and the villain songs. From *The Little Mermaid*, I focus on the reprise of Ariel's iconic "I want" song,[40] "Part of Your World," and Ursula's grandiose number "Poor Unfortunate

[40] The term "I want song" is a common descriptor in musical theater, referring to a prevalent type of song, typically a ballad, that unveils "character's desires, or the motivation for an action about to be taken." (See: Allen Cohen and Steven L. Rosenhaus, *Writing Musical Theater* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 66)). While it is acknowledged that early Disney musicals incorporated "I want songs," the undisputable influence of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken from Broadway to Disney's Renaissance era animated musicals is notably reflected in the significance these numbers gained. In fact, Ashman and Menken often referred to Ariel's "Part of Your World" as "Somewhere that's *Wet*," humorously evidencing the influence of the "I want" song "Somewhere that's Green" that they composed for the musical *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Souls."[41] *Beauty and the Beast* offers a broader array of songs for analysis: the protagonists' portrayal is explored through the musical numbers "Something There" and the main title "Beauty and the Beast," while Gaston's deviance is scrutinized in his number "Gaston," drawing supplementary insights from its reprise and the climatic musical scene, "The Mob Song." In *Aladdin*, I analyze Jafar's villainous reprise of "Prince Ali," and in *The Lion King* the dramatic and sinister number "Be Prepared." The portrayal of the hero(ine)s in these movies is scrutinized through their love ballads "A Whole New World" and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," notable for being the only songs in their respective films showcasing the female leads' singing voices. Throughout this thesis, I endeavor to describe and examine all these songs within the framework of the devised analytical categories, attempting to provide a comprehensive analysis of the musical markers of normality and deviance I identify in them.

In this introduction, I have established connections between various defining elements of hero(ine)s and villains in the analyzed films, with notions of hegemony and disruptiveness. I discussed how characters are portrayed in relation to their beauty projection—in its relation with hegemonic Western beauty standards—and gender performance, highlighting the notion of ideal proportion embodied by the protagonists. Afterwards, I delved into the characters' narrative roles concerning morality and sexuality, demonstrating how the films depend on heteronormative desires to shape their trajectories.

[41] I choose to examine "Part of Your World (Reprise)" to identify the musical markers characterizing Ariel, as this song is intimately linked to her character, and her romantic feelings toward Prince Eric. While "Kiss the Girl" may be considered the film's primary love ballad, depicting the interaction between Ariel and Prince Eric, its emphasis is primarily on Sebastian's performance rather than the main characters. Therefore, it proves more effective in characterizing the crab. In fact, the musical style of the song is informed by Sebastian's exoticization as Jamaican.

In Chapters 1 and 2 “Uttered Sincerity and Deceitfulness” and “Performed Naturality and Artificiality” I explore how the characters’ morality is communicated through the lyrics and the way they perform their songs. First, I identify markers of naturalness and artificiality in the songs’ lyrics, considering both the imagery employed and the perceived sincerity of the words. Following this, I study the performative aspect of the musical numbers, acknowledging that every performance inherently incorporates a degree of artificiality. I explain how this artificiality is attenuated in the hero(ine)s’ ballads by filmically manipulating the musical diegesis, while it is accentuated in the villain songs through grandiose and theatrical camp performances.

The third chapter “‘Americanization’ and Exoticization: Musical Genres and Styles” examines the musical elements distinguishing the protagonists’ ballads from the villain songs in terms of specific musical genres and styles. I argue that this characterization reinforces a sense of normality and deviance, culturally and geographically: the protagonist’s songs synthesize elements from various musical traditions strongly linked with an American sound, into a recognizable “Disney Style.” In contrast, villain songs exhibit exoticized musical features, underscoring their sense of alterity and, consequently, intensifying the necessity for their containment.

The final chapter “Voiced Normality and Deviance” offers an analysis of the vocal performances, examining how the focus on pitch—or its neglect—underlines the hegemonic or deviant nature of the characters. In this analysis, I recover some discussions from the introduction, explaining that the perception of the vocal performance as normal or deviant relates, to a large extent, to the embodiment of ideal notions of femininity and masculinity, and the revealing of the body in the voice. Furthermore, this discussion supports claims from

Chapters 1 and 2, asserting that the vocal techniques influence the perceived naturalness or theatricality of the characters.

Chapter 1
Uttered Sincerity and Deceitfulness: Lyrical Content

The depiction of the hero(ine)s and the villains in Disney animated musicals as respectively "normal" or "deviant" significantly depends on their perceived naturalness. Within these films, the actions undertaken by the protagonists in their pursuit of [romantic] happy endings are portrayed as *natural*, complying with long-standing and still pervasive cultural norms about heterosexual desire fulfillment. Analogously, their love ballads stand as sites of effortless musicality that verbally value natural imagery. Opposed to the hero(ine)s quest, the antagonists contravene the natural pursuit of happiness within the structures of heteronormativity. Consequently, their actions are interpreted as unnatural, a perception reinforced by their either exaggerated or liminal queer performativity, qualities that in these films are deemed as abnormalities linked to moral deviation. The villains use their songs to further distance themselves from the aesthetic values that underpin the natural quality of the hero(ine)s' musicality, showcasing their words and musical engagement as artificial.

In the following two chapters, I aim to explore how the hero(ine)s and villains convey naturalness and artificiality through their songs, by means of the lyrics they sing and their performance style. In the present chapter, I conduct a concise analysis of the songs' words, linking the characters to natural and artificial imagery, as well as to expressions of sincerity and deceit.

Natural Imagery: Setting and Metaphor

Lyrics are, perhaps, the most salient musical element characterizing the characters morality, as "the verbal dimension of a song is much more readily grasped and discussed in

terms of meaning."[42] Lyrics provide meaning both by communicating ideas, and by evoking images. The influence of love ballad lyrics on the perceived naturalness of the hero(ine)s is evident, mainly through the incorporation of nature-related imagery. Disney has long employed this strategy to depict protagonists, especially princesses, using the lyrics to establish potent connections between nature, beauty, and musicality. Scholar Jennifer Fleeger, in her examination of Disney princesses as animated and singing women, aligns the princesses' attitudes and singing style with ideals of the natural world.[43] Here, I argue that by recalling the natural world, the musical love scenes strengthen the perception of both female and male leads as ideal.[44]

The Little Mermaid poses an interesting starting case, as Ariel navigates the conflict between her natural underwater habitat and her longing for the, arguably, more civilized human world.[45] In "Part of Your World," Ariel's desires are initially sparked by her fascination with human-made objects and activities typically associated with urban environments. During the climax of the song,[46] however, Ariel's most heartily expressions of desire focus more on her natural surroundings than the human world, mostly yearning for the sand and the shore. Even in

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[42] McClary and Walser: "Start making sense": 243.

[43] Jennifer Fleeger, "The Disney Princess: Animation and Real Girls," in *Mismatched Women: The Siren's Song Through the Machine* (2014): 106-136.

[44] Scholar David Whitley offers an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the "natural" and various Western ideals and values. See: David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation: From Snow White to WALL-E* (Routledge, 2016).

[45] For a critical perspective of this opposition between the sea world and the human world as depicted, among other Disney films, in *The Little Mermaid*, see: Patrick D. Murphy, "The Whole Wide World was Scrubbed Clean: The Androcentric Animation of Denatured Disney," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (1995): 125-136; and Whitley, *The Idea of Nature*: 39-57.

[46] "Part of Your World" represents a challenge in the formal analysis, in terms of conventional formal function labeling. I consider the climax of the song (and its reprise) the section in which Ariel sings "*I wish I could be / part of your world*."

"Part of Your World (Reprise)," where Ariel expresses her romantic feelings for Eric, her dream of living on land remains tied to natural settings rather than the civilized world he represents.[47]

The reference to the sun in these songs, particularly in their climactic sections, is particularly memorable. The sun comes to symbolize the "upper" land, and Ariel's upward movement towards the light externalizes her desire for the human world.[48] Musically, the word "sun" appears at the peak of Ariel's singing, a word-painting device emphasizing its significance in her ascent from the merworld to the human world (figure 1.1). This "upper" land, however, is constantly marked in Ariel's songs by the "sunny" and, above all, natural environment known to her: the beach, the shore, the sand.

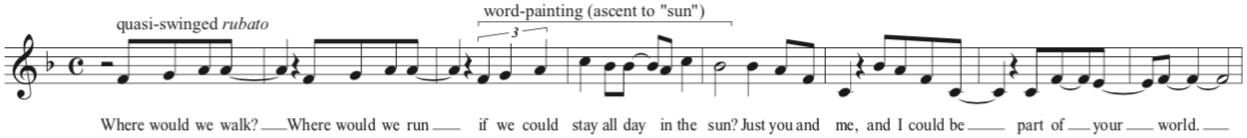


Figure 1.1: The Little Mermaid, "Part of your World (Reprise)," chorus (fragment): Word-painting.[49]

Ariel's repeated reference to the sun as a symbol of natural life finds resonance in the feature ballad of *Beauty and the Beast*. Here, the sun, stripped from its more literal meaning, represents both the immutable and the natural in the context of the image of the "rising sun": "*Ever just as* sure / *As the sun will rise*" and "Certain *as the sun* / *Rising in the East*."[50] In the song, the immutability of the rising sun sheds light into the inevitability of Belle and Beast's love, portrayed thus as imminently natural (!), marking the beginning of a new life for both characters: something more that the "provincial life" for Belle, and freedom from the Beast form

[47] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:15:22 and 00:25:22.
[48] Ryan Bunch, "Soaring into Song: Youth and Yearning in Animated Musicals of the Disney Renaissance," in *American Music* 39, no. 2 (2021), 182-195: 186.
[49] All musical examples featured in these thesis have been transcribed by the author.
[50] *Beauty and the Beast*, 00:58:35.

for prince Adam. This imagery, coupled with a key change emphasizing a dramatic shift, reinforces that the transformative journeys of the protagonists are something to be desired and celebrated as naturally happening.[51]

In *Aladdin*, the symbolism of the sun is replaced by nocturnal references, carrying both scenic and metaphorical meanings. In "A Whole New World," Aladdin and Jasmine soar "*through an endless diamond sky*,"[52] with the princess likening herself to a shooting star. This metaphor goes beyond her first flying experience, signifying an irreversible journey of self-growing and falling in love. The analogy of the shooting star as an inevitable event, with a nature-determined path, is telling in regarding Aladdin and Jasmine's love as natural, similar to the natural progression represented by the rising sun in "Beauty and the Beast."

The Lion King's "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" also incorporates nocturnal allusions with mentions of "twilight," "evening," and the overarching song theme of "night." However, these nocturnal images are not explicitly tied to natural settings, beyond the films' nature-centric backdrop. Rather, they tap into a cultural code where the night symbolizes a metaphorical calm preceding a fresh beginning, a narrative device comparable to the "rising sun" and the proverbial "darkest before the dawn." This is significant in *The Lion King* since the love song signals a pivotal turning point: Simba embracing his destined role as ruler and savior of the Pride Lands. "Can You Feel Tonight," then establishes an interesting connection between the protagonist's growing love and the persistent notion of "*perfect harmony [among] all the living things*."[53] This suggests that love might not only be inevitable, but necessary in order for nature to survive.

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[51] The "rising sun" is a common trope in various cultures and faiths, and has been incorporated in popular culture narratives, including literature, film, music, etc.
[52] *Aladdin*, 00:59:26.
[53] *The Lion King,* 00:58:51.

In stark contrast, the villain songs eschew the incorporation of elements linked to the natural world into their lyrics, even in nature-centered films like *The Lion King*. Instead, the lyrical content of these songs focuses on the characters' plans and motivations, with seldom use of nature metaphors. Jafar's short number in *Aladdin*, "Prince Ali (Reprise)" is exemplary, as it exclusively consists in an explanation and justification of Jafar's actions against Aladdin. Notably in *The Little Mermaid*'s "Poor Unfortunate Souls," Ursula's sole reference to any element associated with nature is found in the mention of "coals," albeit in the metaphorical expression "*I had to rake 'em 'cross the coals*."[54] While not intended in a literal sense, the allusion to a mineral, particularly one closely associated with industrial processes and environmental pollution, suggests a direct opposition to nature. Similarly, in "Be Prepared" (*The Lion King*), Scar employs a metaphor that further reinforces his deflection from natural elements. Condescendingly insulting the hyenas' intelligence, he remarks that their "*lights are not all on upstairs*,"[55] invoking imagery of electricity, industrialization and, thus, artificiality.

In the case of Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*, his musical numbers not only present him in opposition to nature but also as a direct threat to the natural world. In the song "Gaston," the only reference to an element derived from nature pertains to the antlers that Gaston uses in "*all of [his] decorations*,"[56] effectively depicting him as an egotistic killer of wildlife. Gaston's perpetration against nature is intensified throughout the film, particularly in "The Mob Song"; during this number, Gaston and the villagers frenziedly disturb a natural setting, depicted in a negative light, and exoticized by Gaston as frightening due to its mysterious qualities, all in their relentless pursuit to kill the Beast.: "*Through the mist, through the woods / Through the darkness*

[54] *The Little Mermaid,* 00:41:20.
[55] *The Lion King*, 00:27:50.
[56] *Beauty and the Beast*, 00:29:30.

and the shadows / It's a nightmare, but it's one exciting ride."[57] David Whitley accurately notes that Gaston's actions are "directed towards turning the life forms around him into things," which not only encompasses his attempts to possess Belle as a trophy wife, but also hunting and killing what is threateningly "unknown."[58]

The analysis of natural imagery in the lyrics of the love ballads and villain songs reveals a fundamental difference between the hero(ine)s and the villains. Love ballads, by incorporating elements such as the sun, stars, and nocturnal settings, imbue the protagonists' scenes with a sense of naturalness, highlighting the inevitability and desirability of love as a transformative force linked to nature.[59] In contrast, the villain songs disregard nature and favor the villains' selfish individuality, positioning them in opposition to the natural world, and even as a threat to it. In exploring these lyrical choices, it becomes evident that Disney's use of natural imagery in songs shapes the audience's perception of the characters and their moral alignments. A further analysis of the ways the characters express their wishes during their songs allows us to better characterize the protagonists' normality against the villains' deviant ambitions and methods.

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[57] Ibid., 01:06:25.

[58] Whitley, *The Idea of Nature*…: 47-48. About this musical number, Griffin states that "'The Mob Song' taps into the demonization of persons with AIDS," an interpretation that results interesting if we consider Gaston as a character that goes against the alterity embodied by the unknown and the natural (Griffin, *Tinker Belles…*: 135).

[59] Whitley connects the protagonists with the concept of the pastoral, that is, with an idealization of the country life. Accordingly, the elements of the pastoral musical topic can also be identified in the hero(ine)s' love ballads. Although my musical analysis of these songs will not draw from topic theory, it is worth recognizing that the musical landscape surrounding the love stories is imbued with a sense of naturality via musical codes with a long tradition in Western art music.

Sincerity and Deceitfulness

The perceived naturalness in the hero(ine)s' love ballads and the "anti-naturalness"—read as artificiality—in the villain songs, which serve as markers of good and evil, are effective to some degree. However, they provide only scarce information about how the words reinforce the representation of good as normal and natural, and evil as deviant and artificial. In this section, I will explore rhetorical strategies employed by the characters to present their desires and ambitions, devious or sincere, through their songs. I propose that the overly confident and indubitably attitude performed by the villains might be read as a sign of artificiality, while the self-doubting of the hero(ine)s adds to their perception as more sincere.

Confidence is a revered virtue in the narrative constructions of the hero(ine)s from the Renaissance Disney films, serving as a fundamental trait for overcoming fear and confronting their ultimate challenges. This has been noted, for example, in some feminist approaches to Disney films, recognizing as a positive change in the Renaissance heroines their confident autonomy.[60] Yet, the possession of sheer confidence can be perceived as non-virtuous, interpreted as arrogance, or even, as a tool for trickery and cunning. In fact, this is suggested by Susan Jeffords' analysis of the shift in the portrayal from the violent overconfident man of the 80s films, into the 90s' hesitant "New Man," a category in which she includes Disney Renaissance princes and heroes.[61] I interpret, however, that Disney narratives from the

[60] See, for example: Libe García Zarranz, "*Diswomen* Strike Back: The Evolution of Disney's Femmes in the 1990s," in *Atenea* 27, no. 2 (2007): 55-65; Cassandra Stover. "Damsels and Heroines: The Conundrum of the Post-Feminist Disney Princess," in *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University* 2, no. 1 (2013): art. 29.

[61] Susan Jeffords, "The Curse of Masculinity," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (1995): 161-173.

Renaissance portray as undesirable both the lack of confidence as well as its excess. Instead, these plots rely on the leads' (both heroes and heroines) virtuous journeys of overcoming uncertainty and attaining clarity and a triumphant self-assurance.

Such a transformative trope is mirrored in the love ballads' lyrics**.** These songs share a common lyrical journey marked by a progression from questions to the outward recognition of self-worth and self-confidence. This development is exemplified in Ariel's reprise of "Part of Your World." At the outset, she poses seemingly rhetorical questions that, as the plot unfolds, evolve into genuine dilemmas about her sacrifice in pursuing her dream: "*What would I give to live where you are? / What would I pay to stay here beside you? / What would I do to see you smiling at me?*"[62] Progressively, Ariel transitions from uncertainty about the "price" of her dream to hopeful fantasies: "*Just you and me / And I could be / Part of Your World*," with the modal verb "could" hinting a glimmer of hope. By the song's conclusion, this hope transforms into a resolute and confident imperative voice, as Ariel declares "*Watch and you'll see / Someday I'll be / Part of your world*."[63] Ariel's love declaration exhibits a lyrical evolution that powerfully conveys an ambition-driven attitude, which is regarded as virtuous.[64] This is echoed in the love ballads of subsequent films.

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[62] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:25:22.

[63] Ibid., 00:26:48.

[64] Interestingly, Ariel's unwavering determination, whether viewed as daring or innocent, nearly results in her losing everything, a common punishment for the overconfident villains. While she ultimately secures her happy ending, it is crucial to note that this achievement is facilitated by Prince Eric's decisive actions in killing Ursula, and Triton's magical transformation of Ariel into a human, as if granting her permission to follow her dreams. Feminist critiques of the film argue that this resolution perpetuates traditional narrative tropes, portraying Ariel as a feminist female lead while reinforcing the image of the princess in distress rescued by masculine figures. Ariel's confident ambition is instrumental to trigger her narrative journey, but is not enough to secure—and, in fact, put at risk—her successful outcome.

Both love ballads in *Beauty and the Beast* exhibit a comparable lyrical evolution. The duet "Something There" offers a glimpse into the protagonists' perspective, employing the first-person perspective to convey their emotions, demonstrating the "emotional growth of [Belle's and Beast's] friendship and trust,"[65] while "Beauty and the Beast" recounts the love story from an external point of view. In "Something There," both Belle and Beast engage in self-reflections regarding the growing bond between them. Belle questions herself for not noticing sooner how "*dear*" and "*unsure*" Beast is—"*unsure*" interestingly deemed as a virtue, most probably as opposite to Gaston, the overconfident harassing antagonist. Conversely, Beast doubts Belle's changing perception of him, struggling to believe that she now views him differently: "*No, it can't be / I'll just ignore / But then she's never looked at me this way before*."[66] During the bridge of the song, Belle revisits her self-questioning but expresses it in an affirmative form: "*But* there's *something in him that I* simply *didn't see*."[67] Her initial uncertainty is here accepted, with the adverb "*simply*" reinforcing the sincere embrace of her initial omission in judging Beast's personality. In the final verse, Lumiere, Cogsworth, and Mrs. Potts sing with an optimistic anticipation about Belle and Beast's budding romantic connection. Despite the use of words still representing unsureness—"*There* may *be something there*" and "Perhaps *there's something there*"—the playful tone in which these phrases are delivered implies a slight interplay between a denotative doubt and a connotative certainty.[68]

The underlying certainty hinted at by the enchanted objects at the end of "Something There" comes to the forefront in the film's main title ballad. Solely performed by Mrs. Potts, this song narrates the love story chronologically, highlighting the lyrical progression outlined in the

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[65] Minelli, "The Whole Other World…": 93.
[66] *Beauty and the Beast,* 00:55:15.
[67] Ibid., 00:55:51.
[68] Ibid., 00:56:00.

previously analyzed songs, yet strongly resorting to metaphorical language. In this case, the shift from uncertainty to certainty is presented as the transformation of an interaction that starts with vulnerability and mutual distrust—"*Barely even friends / [...] / Both a little scared / Neither one prepared*"—and leads to self-recognition and personal growth: "*Finding you can* change / *Learning you were wrong*." "Beauty and the Beast" is especially striking in evoking an overall sense of certainty through its choice of words, a mood intimately linked to the already discussed perception of love as inescapable, timeless, and unending. This is underscored during the bridge of the song, as the word "ever" is repeatedly stated, right before invoking the metaphor of the rising sun, as a sign of certainty.[69] The overarching tone of the song revolves around the inevitability of love, a sentiment that can only be fully embraced through virtuous actions such as discovery and learning, which enable the overcoming of fear and doubt.

The multiperspectivity in reckoning the love stories, evident in both love songs from *Beauty and the Beast*, is acutely employed in *The Lion King*'s love ballad "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." In his introductory verse to the song, Timon openly asserts that he recognizes that Simba and Nala will fall in love ("*I can see what's happening*"), but they are not yet aware of that ("*But they don't have a clue! / They'll fall in love…*");[70] in a way, Timon is anticipating how the lyrical trajectory will unfold following the pattern identified in the love ballads from the previous films.

The verses performed by Simba and Nala, much like those from "Something There," exhibit an initial sense of doubt and fear of rejection. Simba does not know how to tell her the truth about why he left the Pride Lands out of fear that "*She'd turn away from [him]*." On the

[69] Ibid., 00:58:06.
[70] *The Lion King*, 00:58:04.

other hand, Nala recognizes that he is hiding something and she does not understand his motivations; she wonders, with a question that could be interpreted as both rhetorical—with a tone of despair—and non-rhetorical: "*Why won't he be the king I know he is? / The king I see inside?*"[71] Nala's verse is followed by the final chorus, that starts with the song's title rhetorical question that smoothly connects to her previous claim, and further assures to Simba, using a second person voice, "*you needn't look too far / Stealing through the night's uncertainties / Love is where they are*."[72] This chorus interestingly encompasses my claims about the perceived naturalness of these characters. By merging the uncertainties with the nocturnal, these are presented as natural conditions that ought to be embraced and overcome through love.[73]

Aladdin's love ballad, "A Whole New World" showcases a contrasting portrayal of certainty through the lyrics. The number starts with Aladdin attempting to shun his insecurities from his actions and words. However, his vocal performance exteriorizes his own uncertainties and insecurities, as it will be explained in the next chapter. We will see that the progressive attainment of security and, thus, the perception of the characters' involvement as honest and authentic, is more clearly related to their musical performative interaction. However, following the designs of the examples analyzed so far, by the end of the song both characters are shown as having obtained a sense of certainty that allows them to continue their righteous and natural narrative paths. It is through these processes that the protagonists realize the type of person they

[71] Ibid., 00:59:20.
[72] Ibid., 01:00:00.
[73] Given that "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" is more deeply rooted in a tradition of pop music, with the use of a chorus at the beginning of the song (right after Timon's introductory verse), its formal organization may influence in the perception of the lyrical trajectory that I identify. The first chorus only includes one strophe, while the last one is extended with a second strophe that, in fact, incorporates the words that I quote and that, in my analysis, aid in the recognition of the transformation in the protagonists' relationship.

need to become "in order to achieve [their] dream—the dream of continued existence, wealth, and reproductive success."[74]

I have demonstrated that confidence, as a virtue of Disney's leads, is a product earned through self-growth, a characterization outlined in the love ballads. This acknowledgment is further reinforced by the actions of the villains, as evil has a fundamental role in defining our perception of good and bad.[75] Villains in media often adopt virtues traditionally associated with good, as noted by scholar Jamey Heit, and confidence is one such virtue skewed in their portrayal.[76] Disney villain songs exhibit a relentless pursuit of evil goals, with a persistent sense of unwavering certainty. Their lyrics, however, carry layers of meaning, concealing not only the intentions of their actions but even their problematic confidence, creating a jarring contrast with the love ballads, and allowing us to more clearly difference the hero(ine)s' and the villains' moral stances.

Villains skillfully hide their selfish ambitions behind objectives presented as moral: Jafar and Scar exercise or claim morally rightful positions, while Ursula and Gaston supposedly use their magic or physical strength to advocate for others' needs. Recognizing the deceit in these songs requires, thus, identifying connotative elements, unveiling the villains' words that superficially adopt attitudes and actions that, as Heit notes, align with those of the hero(ine)s'.

The villains mask their overt confidence by incorporating rhetorical questions with a deceitful effect. Gaston, for example, introduces his excessively confident songs with a violent

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[74]Sarah Lynne Bowman, "The Dichotomy of the Great Mother: Archetype in Disney Heroines and Villainesses," in *Vader, Voldemort and Other Villains: Essays on Evil in Popular Media*, ed. Jamey Heit. McFarland & Company (2011), 80-96: 81.

[75] Jamey Heit, ed. *Vader, Voldemort and Other Villains: Essays on Evil in Popular Media* (McFarland, 2011): 3-11.

[76] Ibid.

rhetoric question, in which he openly undermines Belle's agency and autonomy: "*Who does she think she is?*"[77] In other cases, such questions just seem to highlight the theatricality—and thus, the artificialness of the villains' performances, as it will be explored in the following chapter. For instance, Ursula ornaments most of the cadences in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" with exclamations such as "*and do I help them?*"[78] or "*and after all dear, what is idle babble for?*"[79] only to answer them with confident sassiness.

Among the intricate web of lyrics falsely denoting good actions and intentions, it is interesting that the villain songs contain at least one line revealing their dark intentions.[80] In "Prince Ali (Reprise), Jafar seems to acknowledge himself as a con man, by saying "*take it from me"*[81] after accusing Aladdin of being one. In "Poor Unfortunate Souls," Ursula interrupts her performance of virtuous witch and turns to her eel sidekicks, and cunningly whispers "*Flotsam, Jetsam, now I've got her, boys*,"[82] making flauntingly evident for the audience that her whole number was a trickery show. Similarly, in *The Lion King*, Scar openly labels his plan as "*the coup of the century*" and "*the murkiest scam*,"[83] descriptions that imply an unlawful takeover of the throne, leaving no doubt about his awareness of disrupting the natural course of power. I deem these moments as excessive eruptions of deceit, over the fabric of confident [fake] virtuousness reproduced by the villains.

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[77] *Beauty and the Beast*, 00:26:42.
[78] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:40:58.
[79] Ibid., 00:43:30.
[80] "Gaston" is the only song in which this is not found, in part because the characters—LeFou, the townsmen, the Bimbettes and Gaston—are clearly convinced of what they are singing, even when it is not true. For example, at one point the lyrics say "No one [...] matches wits like Gaston" while showing him losing a game of chess. In this case, the staging helps in creating the discordance with the lyrics and suggesting that what is being said is, if not a lie, an exaggeration.
[81] *Aladdin*, 01:13:22.
[82] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:44:10.
[83] *The Lion King,* 00:29:37.

This interplay between confidence, deception, and revelation not only adds depth to the characterization of Disney villains, portraying them as inherently dishonest, deviant, and disruptive, but also imbues them with a performative quality perceived as artificial. This artificiality sharply contrasts with the perceived naturalness of the heroes and heroines. In the following chapter, I delve into how the musical performative aspect of the hero(ine)s is deliberately subdued, seemingly with the intention of preserving their image as natural and genuine, while the villains' confidence leads them to present grandiose performances that highlight their artificiality.

Chapter 2
Performed Naturality and Artificiality

In Chapter 1, I have argued that the perceived normality of the hero(ine)s is supported by notions of naturality and sincereness expressed in the lyrics of their love ballads. Conversely, the villain songs represent their characters as artificial and insincere, particularly due to their relentless display of confidence. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the incorporation of these songs into the musical numbers. Firstly, I focus on the concept of diegesis and, particularly, its potential influence on the perceived naturalness of the hero(ine)s. Then, I thoroughly scrutinize the musical numbers performed by the villains, as they tend to highlight their lyrical deceitfulness with elevated levels of theatricality, embodying camp sensibilities. This characteristic often leads to their songs being construed as artificial, deceptive, and emblematic in the representation of deviant behavior, in clear contrast to the hero(ine)s' musical numbers.

Naturally Invisible Hero(ine)s: Diegesis

Singing constitutes a form of performance that has historically been characterized as othered, often associated with notions of femininity and/or queerness. In this regard, musical film as a genre is characterized by the excessive celebration of the type of entertainment embodied in the musical's numbers, moments often disapproved of in other genres.[84] This tension, by which musical performances are "condemned" as feminine or queer, can also be identified within the narratives of Disney's musical films, despite the widely documented and studied positive links between Disney animated films and queer sensibilities. I argue that in the love ballads, where the hero(ine)s embrace their heteronormative romantic destiny, the protagonists are, filmically,

[84] Ian Conrich and Estella Tinkell, ed. *Film's Musical Moments* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006): 1-2.

either hidden or detached from their voices, as if protecting them from disapproval. Strikingly, the antagonists' musical numbers feature prominent on-screen singing, embodying the theatrical quality that marks the genre's otherness. Villains' performative persona, marked by inhibition—and highlighted by the confidence of their words—is seen as deviant, openly engaging in an act that is viewed with suspicion.

Film and media scholars Estella Ticknell and Ian Conrich assert that on-screen performances in film—which they call *musical moments*—serve as "points of disruption" capable of disturbing the text through unexpectedness or excess.[85] Although the disruptive effect of musical moments described by the authors is obviously more pronounced in non-musical films, it offers a lens to compare the more-diegetic villain numbers with the less-diegetic love numbers involving the hero(ine)s.[86]

In Disney's animated musicals, protagonists sing during their "I want songs" early in the narratives. Such an allowance, however, may stem from their innocence, childlike ingenuity, or actual childness—as in Simba's case—at the onset of the films. Ryan Bunch states that in the Disney Renaissance films the young protagonists' "I want songs" are moments of "adolescent jouissance," an aspect associated with the "queer, feminine, prelinguistic, and sexually diffuse," in which a "transitional sexual energy" is released.[87] Hence, when the protagonists are not yet

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[85] Ibid. Ticknell and Conrich assertion aligns with Gorbman's analysis of the disruptive effect of using songs in a film score. When these songs are sung on-screen by the characters, the effect is heightened considering performative aspects.

[86] While *diegetic* and *nondiegetic* are typically used as straightforward descriptors without nuanced intensity levels ("*more*"; "less"; almost"; "mostly"), there are instances, notably but not exclusively in musical films, where a more refined perspective is appropriate. For an in-depth exploration on the gradient between *diegetic* and *nondiegetic*, and the intricacies of recognizing and navigating this liminal space, see Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap Between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (2007): 184-202.

[87] Bunch, "Soaring into Song": 184.

perceived as capable of fully participating in their awaiting heteroromantic narrative trajectory, they are seemingly allowed to "femininely" or "queerly" sing at sight.

However, a notable shift occurs in the musical involvement and diegesis when it comes to the leads' love songs. For instance, the main title song from *Beauty and the Beast* is not performed by the protagonists but by a secondary character, Mrs. Potts, thereby excluding Belle and Beast from active musical participation. Moreover, although Mrs. Potts is seen singing on-screen within the diegetic narrative at the start and end of the musical number, the focus shifts to the leads' romantic evening. During this transition, Mrs. Potts disappears from the montage, and her voice continues with no peceivable timbral change as the protagonists move between scenarios, reinforcing the non-diegetic nature of the song.[88]

Even when the protagonists in these films do sing their love songs, like in "Something There"[89] and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight,"[90] their performances are often presented through montage, accompanying a sequence of images that illustrate their emotional connection. I

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[88] A similar narrative technique is employed in the film *The Little Mermaid* during the musical sequence "Kiss the Girl." In this scene, Sebastian, the crab, delivers a "Caribbean-flavored" love song to create a romantic atmosphere for Ariel and Eric's boat ride. Unlike "Beauty and the Beast," Sebastian's song is more explicitly diegetic, meaning it is audible to the characters involved in the scene, albeit at a somewhat subliminal level. In contrast, "Beauty and the Beast" predominantly utilizes a non-diegetic approach, where the characters appear to dance to a separate rhythm (see Chapter 3), and the lyrics are presented from an external perspective: Mrs. Potts uses words that otherwise would not be employed on a diegetic level, such as addressing the Prince as "Beast" within the context of the song.

[89] As mentioned before, the last verse of "Something There" is performed by the secondary characters Mrs. Potts, Lumiere and Cogsworth. These characters are shown performing from within the castle and against a window, while Belle and Beast can be seen outside playing with snow. This may be explained by the non-sexual and campy nature of these characters (and shared with other Disney sidekicks); the performativity of these type of characters, however, falls outside the scope of this research.

[90] The song "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" in *The Lion King* exhibits a distinctive structure. It begins with an on-screen performance by Timon and Pumba and concludes similarly, while the middle section features the non-diegetic voices of Simba and Nala. Consequently, this song amalgamates elements from both love songs in *Beauty and the Beast*: the on-screen performative framing, which is enacted by secondary characters (from "Beauty and the Beast"), and the vocal performance by the protagonists presented in montage (from "Something There").

interpret that this approach attempts to portray the characters' bonding scenes as more "natural" and heteronormative, by removing them from the performative *jouissance* act of singing.

The song "A Whole New World" from *Aladdin*, unfolds differently. Albeit with a strong emphasis on montage, showcasing sequences of the magic carpet's journey, Aladdin and Jasmine are shown singing to each other. Unlike the other songs, we recognize that this number initially serves as a performance by Aladdin, who, disguised as Prince Ali, seeks to present himself as an adequate suitor for Jasmine. From a narrative perspective, framing this musical number as a "courtship" performance is crucial, as it establishes on-screen gender roles and romantic dynamics instrumental to the plot.

In the article "That's How You Know He's Your Love": The Male Singing Voice and Disney's (Re)interpretation of the Male Romantic Lead," musicologist Maria Behrendt analyzes the "musical display of romantic masculinity" in relation to the singing style and voice type (*Stimmfach*) of some Disney's male romantic leads, including Aladdin.[91] Also acknowledging the gendered bias toward singing as inadequate for many boys and young men, Behrendt employs an analytical framework derived from post-feminist masculinities to explore how these male characters balance the expression of emotions through song, and the potential threat this poses to their masculinity. She asserts that male characters, particularly when musically expressing emotions, convey a vulnerability that they manage through their performance; in Aladdin's case, an adoption of a more "masculine" role, represented by his vocal delivery. Following our discussion about the emphasis on "naturalness" that Disney grants to their protagonists during their musical love scenes, the potential artificiality of Aladdin's musical

[91]Maria Behrendt, "'That's How You Know He's Your Love'": The Male Singing Voice and Disney's (Re) interpretation of the Male Romantic Lead," in *Sound Stage Screen* 2, no. 2 (2022): 5-32.

performance is defused by aurally evidencing his impersonation, further highlighting the deconstruction of Prince Ali, Aladdin's more masculine (idealized) alter ego.

The song begins with Aladdin/Prince Ali taking the initiative to show Jasmine "*a whole new world*," attempting to "[assert] his masculinity by presenting himself as the more dominant, mature, and active party in the relationship."[92] During the first verse, Aladdin's vocal range spans from A2 and G3, a relative low register for his physical appearance. Behrendt observes that when Aladdin sings in this lower register to appear more mature, his performance results in a breathier voice with uneven registers, occasionally affecting his pitch accuracy. This pitch deflection does not arise from an artistic or theatrical choice but rather mirrors a natural vocal strain derived from the character's coping with the struggle linked to his romantic masculinity. About Aladdin's singing, Bunch argues that this struggle may be understood as an unsuccessful effort to grasp an "uncomplicated adult masculinity," leaving Aladdin "in the liminal, queer space of male adolescence."[93] Aladdin's discomfort with the low register may also symbolize, not just his incapability, but also his unease in assuming the role of Prince Ali and, by extension, adopting the associated traits of masculinity and wealthiness as artificial constructs.

During "A Whole New World," however, the lead experiences a transformation. Prince Ali's/Aladdin's embodiment of the active romantic role within the relationship is textually evident during the first verse, which is framed from an *I* to a *You*, with each phrase clumsily concluding with the low A2. In the chorus of the song his language shifts to a *We* perspective: "*No one to tell us no / Or where to go / Or say we're only dreaming*."[94] These phrases, which more explicitly represent the connection between Aladdin—not Prince Ali—and Jasmine, are

[92] Ibid., 17.
[93]Bunch, "Soaring into Song": 189.
[94] *Aladdin*, 00:58:47.

sung in an upper register, from D2 to D3, where Aladdin appears more comfortable, as his voice resonates more fully, and more sincere (figure 2.1). The progressive musical involvement of Jasmine, taking on the second half of the chorus and the following verse, reassures Aladdin into accepting his true self.[95] Aladdin's "authentic" voice is exploited in the final chorus, where both characters sing simultaneously, and in which Aladdin embraces his natural vocal register. As in the other ballads, "A Whole New World" exhibits a progression from a state of uncertainty—evident in his vocality—to a final acceptance of self and embracing of love. His on-screen performance is, in fact, crucial in portraying his transition from an unresolved adolescent masculinity, to an "authentic" (post-feminist) one.



Figure 2.1: *Aladdin*, "A Whole New World," verse 1 and chorus (fragment): Aladdin's shift in register.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated how the love ballads' lyrical construction delineates a trajectory, showcasing an honest transition from doubt to certainty, a process connected to the representation of virtue. In "A Whole New World," this journey is mirrored in Aladdin's vocality and performance, moving from an uncertain exploration of the low register to a confident

[95] The certainty of Jasmine's awareness of Prince Ali's true identity during "A Whole New World" remains ambiguous, and I consider that, by this point, she is at least somehow doubtful. The moment preceding the romantic musical number hints at Jasmine's realization of Prince Ali being Aladdin when he asks, "Do you trust me?" Nonetheless, her apparent surprise during "Prince Ali (Reprise)" when Jafar reveals the true identity of the prince adds a layer of uncertainty to the extent of her prior awareness.

expression within an upper register. This transformation, literally resonating and harmonizing with Jasmine, symbolically represents not only his voice but also his self. This interplay between the vocal performance, lyrical content, and expression of gender and sexuality, relevant in the portrayal of the protagonists as "natural," also influences the musical numbers of the villains. Beyond expressing their evil ambitions, the antagonists revel in their queerness through unwavering theatrical and excessive performances, which I will explore in the upcoming section.

Excessive Villains: Theatricality and Campiness

I have posited that on-screen performances significantly shape how characters' actions are perceived in terms of naturalness. Unlike most hero(ine)s, divested of their performative roles during their love songs, villains are portrayed singing and, in the fullest sense, performing their songs, infusing their characterizations with pronounced theatricality. This aligns with our previous discussion on the interplay between representations of evil and queer-coded behaviors in Disney films, where theatricality and melodrama, often associated with queerness in popular media, influence the musical representation of villains. In this section, I will first contextualize the relation of these elements, and then I present an analysis of the theatrical elements of the villain numbers, drawing elements from camp sensibilities and the theater studies' concept *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect).

Musical performativity has served for a long time as a differentiator of good and evil characters, a recurring theme in musical theater and films spanning the 20th century. This phenomenon can be traced back to compositional strategies dating from the Middle Ages, where villains' actions are often accompanied by background music, yet these characters are typically

unable or unwilling to sing.[96] This dynamic suggests a link between a character's morality and their level of involvement in musical-driven performances. As musicologist Geoffrey Block notes, "in a musical (or opera), a character who does not sing proceeds at their own peril."[97] This historical pattern is notably evident in Disney's films. Craig McGill points out that before Disney's Renaissance era, musical movies seldom featured songs for the villains.[98] However, with the evolution of musical film narratives, influenced by the integrated musical of the 1940s and 50s, there emerged a shift toward providing songs for all significant characters, including villains.[99] According to McGill, this shift was crucial in "creating a musically complex animated film."[100]

During this era the villains assumed significant roles in musical performances, with their numbers becoming iconic celebrations of evil with distinct musical and staging attributes. The "songs of disruption" featured in the numbers performed by the queer-coded villains, as categorized by Sheridan McLeod, are characterized by their uniqueness and clear distancing from the sonic landscape of the films. Marked by extravagant and carnival-like performances, these moments allow villains to be "as excessive as they want without immediate repercussions".[101] McLeod's notion of "immediate repercussions" is related to the normativity provided by the narrative, because in these numbers the villains momentarily celebrate their deviant appearance and non-conforming gendering and sexuality.

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[96] Michelle Boyd, "Alto on a Broomstick: Voicing the Witch in the Musical Wicked," in *American Music* 28, no. 1 (2010): 97-118.
[97]Geoffrey Block, Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from 'Show Boat' to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber. Oxford University Press, 2009: 50.
[98] McGill, "This Burning Desire…"
[99] Block, *Enchanted Evenings…*
[100] McGill, "This Burning Desire…": 28.
[101] McLeod, "Unmasking the Quillain": 59.

McLeod's claims align with Susan McClary's analysis of operatic scenes featuring madwomen, underscoring the musical and theatrical framing of disrupting musical moments. McClary notes that madwomen's excessive spectacles, with their overt displays of feminine sexuality and defiance of normative musical conventions, are often contained to prevent contamination of their *normal* surroundings. Framed by musical signifiers of male rationality, these spectacles serve a moral purpose, publicly exhibiting the deviant and encouraging the audience to accept and embrace the framing normative behavioral codes.[102] Ultimately, these excessive musical numbers strengthen the plot by briefly placing the deviant at the center of attention, and further marking their Otherness.

Similar to McClary's observations, Disney villain musical numbers are also strongly framed. Firstly, these characters are only allowed to use the luring power of music once or twice. Furthermore, the narrative-stopping theatricality of the numbers isolates them from the plot, as they seem to develop in staged and *contained* spaces. In these regards, the villain's numbers sharply contrast with the hero(ine)s' musical love scenes, which seamlessly integrate into the narrative with a more *natural* musical and theatrical cohesion.

The calculated and unnatural quality of villain performances imparts an air of artificiality and "out-of-placeness" to their songs, qualities that McLeod convincingly maps onto the perception of the characters' morality and gender performances: "The fact that the audience is aware of these musical numbers as staged performances—staged in the sense of *artificiality*—adds to the interruption of the narrative flow as we are encouraged to enjoy the excess of the solo

[102] Susan McClary, "Excess and Frame": 83. McClary, in her reading of Michel Foucaults' *Madness and Civilization*, identifies that the process of framing and containing the musical numbers of the madwomen is consistent with the practice of public display of mad persons as a form of entertainment during the nineteenth century.

as a spectacle, as aberrant, perverse, and queer"[103] (emphasis added). Villains' excessive and artificial shows become temporary moments where they revel in their moral and gender/sexual deviations from heteronormativity.[104] The juxtaposition of conventionally gendered behaviors under excessive performances aligns with the aesthetics of "camp," an aesthetic particularly exploited in Disney's Renaissance era.[105]

Camp

Philosopher Susan Sontag defines "camp" as a form of stylized performance that presents culture within quotation marks,[106] an approach that, among other aesthetic impacts, lead to what she terms the "triumph of the epicene."[107] The concept of "epicene" offers insight into camp as a method of generating tension through the juxtaposition of opposites, particularly of masculinity and femininity. Anthropologist Esther Newton asserts, indeed, that camp's central characteristic lies in the incongruity between these opposing elements, deeply rooted in the historical characterization of non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality.[108]

Examining the strategy of characterizing Disney villains via camp juxtapositions, scholar Will Letts recognizes that "Camp subjectivities imbued in these villains are gendered and sexualized in ways that are an affront to dominant cultural narratives and norms."[109] Such

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[103] McLeod, "Unmasking the Quillain": 73.
[104] Ibid., 75.
[105] Griffin, *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens*: 145.
[106] Sontag exemplifies this definition with the idea that Camp presents, for instance, "not a woman but a 'woman'."
[107] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. Farrar Straus & Giroux (1966), 275-292: num. 10-11.
[108] Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. University of Chicago Press, 1979: 106.
[109] Will Letts, "Camp Disney: Consuming Queer Sensibilities, Commodifying the Normative," in *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*. Routledge, ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin, and Julie C. Garlen (2016), 148-160: 153.

hegemonic norms, delineated and reinforced in these films by the actions and performances of the hero(ine)s, perceived as natural and virtuous, are deliberately challenged by the villains. Thus, by intentionally engaging in exaggerated performative acts—whether related to gender, sexuality, or the inherent campy nature of their musical performances—these characters use their musical numbers to showcase their moral deviation.

The use of *incongruity* as a camp strategy to represent the deviant nature of Disney villains is readily apparent in *The Little Mermaid*. The "gendered and sexualized camp subjectivities" mentioned by Lett play a particularly crucial role in Ursula's number, "Poor Unfortunate Souls."

Firstly, the campy nature of "Poor Unfortunate Souls" is foreshadowed by the initial score marking, labeled *Purely Weill*, a pun that not only acknowledges established conventions regarding the musical portrayal of evil, but also alludes to the German-American composer Kurt Weill (1900-1950). This marking relies on subjective shared perceptions of aural vileness, and also to objective musical elements of a particular repertoire: cabaret.[110]

Kurt Weill's association with cabaret music, notably showcased in the 1963 Broadway production *A Kurt Weill Cabaret*, contributes significantly to the inspiration behind Ursula's song. In her dissertation about the influence of musical theater conventions in Disney Renaissance animated musicals, musicologist Kelli Minelli notes that "Poor Unfortunate Souls" draws from "Zühalter Ballade," a song belonging to Weill's opera *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928). Minelli particularly highlights the "cabaret-esque rhythmic gestures and appeal" of Ursula's

[110] Musical meaning as a multilayered process of subjective and objective processes has been thoroughly studied and explained by Philip Tagg. Refer, particularly, to his consideration about the terms *intersubjectivity* and *interobjectivity*. See: Philip Tagg, *Music's Meanings: A Modern Musicology for Non-Musos*, 2013.

song.[111] This musical number, then, relies on the intrinsic relationship between camp, and the epicene style and performance of cabaret.

The "Weillean" influence on the campy aesthetic of "Poor Unfortunate Souls" extends beyond the cabaret musical style. Aligned with Newton's relation of incongruity and camp, it is known that Weill's stage works often exhibit an ironic detachment between the music and the accompanying text and context, resulting in a dialectical conflict rather than a "cohering [...] unified whole."[112] Such types of detachments can be identified in "Poor Unfortunate Souls," providing a way to appreciate the song's conflicting layers. These layers—namely appearance, gender, and lyrical deceit—have been individually explored previously; here, I acknowledge how they contribute to the portrayal of Ursula as a villainous camp figure, reinforcing the "out-of-placeness" of her musical performance.

Visually, Ursula detaches from normative gender norms by simultaneously embodying a female persona and a drag performer, exhibiting the type of epicene juxtaposition referred to by Sontag. This duality gains added significance considering the paratextual information surrounding Ursula's conception and development. Initially modeled after the famous drag artist and "cult transvestite star" Divine,[113] Ursula is also voiced by the often-cross-dresser actor Pat Carroll.[114] The evil witch's appearance, then, presents an ironic contradiction between her

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[111] Kelli Minelli, "The Whole Other World of Ashman and Menken: Broadway Conventions in Disney's 'Renaissance' Musicals" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2023): 35. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=case1670604856603896

[112] J. Bradford Robinson, and David Drew. "Weill, Kurt," in *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 11 Nov. 2023. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000030032.

[113] Griffin, *Tinker Belles…*: 146.

[114] Laura Sells, "Where Do the Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in The Little Mermaid," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, ad Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Hass, and Laura Sells (1995), 175-192: 182.

voluptuous body and rough face, her short hair, and excessive makeup.[115] Ursula's exaggerated features "suggest something much more masculinized,"[116] which in a female character is coded as ugliness. As she exhibits features regarded as "ugly," thus undermining her value as a woman in a world that values beauty so highly, she engages in a deliberate and exaggerated gender performance to exteriorize her femininity.[117] Ursula's campiness is, in fact, deeply rooted in her ironic appropriation of femininity during the song, aligning with Sontag's concept of "Being-As-Playing-A-Role,"[118] where the androgynous character becomes a prominent facet of camp sensibility.[119] Her deviant appearance, then, is deeply connected to her expression—and bending—of gender.

The detachment in Ursula's "misgendered" looks is accentuated by the song's narrative function in terms of presentation of gender. Ursula aims to control Ariel by misleadingly instructing her in the art of performing femininity to attract Prince Eric. McLeod characterizes Ursula's song as "a *masquerade* of femininity and heterosexuality" attempting to subvert

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[115] Numerous authors that identify queer-coding in the depiction of the villains assert that their deviant nature is also visually conveyed by the apparent use of makeup, which is considered an "unnatural" in comparison to the pristine, unaltered, and naturally beautiful faces of the protagonists.

[116] Amanda Putnam, "Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films" in *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, ed. Johnson Cheu (2013), 147-162: 154.

[117] The representation of Ursula as "ugly" is not only linked to notions of corporal and facial features of hegemonic beauty, but also to issues of racial alterity. Among the "humanized" characters of the film, she is the only one depicted as a different "species," a squid, emphasizing her outsider's status in Triton's—and Ariel's—kingdom. This difference is further highlighted by her purple skin color, which contrasts sharply with the the hero(ine)s' *human* whiteness. Additionally, Ursula's voluptuous body, and her performance of an exaggerated femininity through her body, can be interpreted as race-coded, reflecting the long-discussed association between voluptuousness, "thick" bodies, overt sexuality, and black Women. This last aspect can be identified in the featuring of Queen Latifah as Ursula in the 2019 musical television special *The Little Mermaid Live*, produced by ABC. Her performance of "Poor Unfortunate Souls" evidences some of these issues.

[118] Sontag, "Notes on Camp": num. 10.

[119] Ibid., num. 9.

heteroromance by exaggeratingly embodying it (emphasis added).[120] Ursula's incongruous appearance and gender are, thus, detached from her speech of teaching femininity, emphasizing the artifice underlying her performance. Described by Mallan and McGillis as a scene where "an octopus in drag as a woman instructs a mermaid (with a pre-Madonna sea shell bra) on the art of come-hither moves and heterosexual romance," it invites the audience to perceive the world queerly, challenging the notion of normality.[121]

Another layer of camp detachment in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" involves the incongruous relationship between the song's lyrics and its musical character. While Ursula's constructed and exaggerated performance of femininity aligns with the cabaret style of her show, her initial words about redemption and virtuous deeds, as analyzed in the previous chapter, are incompatible with the sly and deceptive nature often associated with cabaret music. Past associations of cabaret with "vice and illegal activities of all kinds "[122] still linger in the media and collective imagery surrounding this type of spectacle. Consequently, Ursula's words can only be interpreted as a facade of virtuosity—a performance layered over a performance, which contributes to her perception as an untrustworthy and always-in-character villain.

So far, we have identified several elements contributing to the campiness of "Poor Unfortunate Souls," aligning with Newton's characterizations of camp performances as primarily marked by incongruity. Newton further contends that the second key property of camp, closely

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[120] McLeod: "Unmasking the Quillain": 79-80.

[121] Kerry Mallan, and Roderick McGillis, "Between a Frock and a Hard Place: Camp Aesthetics and Children's Culture," in *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005), 1-20: 15.

[122] Klaus Wachsmann, and Patrick O'Connor. "Cabaret," in *Grove Music Online*, 2001; Accessed 11 Nov. 2023. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000004505.

tied to performance, arises from the theatrical exhibition of these inconsistencies, both of which relate to the perception of the camp in terms of deviation:

> If moral deviation is the locus of the perception of incongruity, it is more specifically role deviation and role manipulation that are at the core of the second property of camp, *theatricality*. [...] Camp is [...] exaggerated, consciously "stagey," specifically theatrical. This is especially true of *the* camp, who is definitely a performer[123] (emphasis in original).

In both performance and in staging, theatricality highlights the deviation within Ursula's number. Functioning as a framing technique, theatricality ensures that the incongruities on display are perceived as part of an artificial show, presented by intentionally deviant performers.

Verfremdungseffekt: Alienation Effect

The display of theatrical elements within a performance, as exemplified in "Poor Unfortunate Souls," can be illuminated through the lens of the 'alienation' or 'distancing' effect: *Verfremdungseffekt*. This concept, linked to the practices of playwright Bertolt Brecht,[124] involves the deliberate use of techniques to make the audience aware of the "artificiality of the theatrical performance." One of Brecht's theatrical strategies consisted in momentarily breaking the illusion of the plays' settings, "exposing lights and ropes to keep spectators conscious of being in a theater."[125] In most Disney villain numbers such strategies are indeed recognizable, so the audience is implicitly prompted to identify the performance as camp because its artificial staging becomes evident, as *stylishly* fake.

At the beginning of "Poor Unfortunate Souls," for instance, the underwater setting transforms into a cabaret auditorium, with Ursula retouching her lipstick in front of a [backstage]

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[123] Newton, *Mother Camp*: 107.

[124] Brecht's theatrical theory gains particular significance in this context, as a substantial portion of his artistic contributions materialized through collaborative efforts with composer Kurt Weill.

[125] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Alienation Effect," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. February 7, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/art/alienation-effect.

mirror, a conventional burlesque image. As the song unfolds, artificial lights and fumes emanating from Ursula's cauldron create theatrical conditions for her to assume the role of a *femme fatale* drag/camp performer.[126] Meanwhile, Ariel and the audience adopt the position of theater spectators,[127] seeing the *exposed* machinery behind the theatrical and artificial elements—lights, fog, bubbles (figure 2.2). In this unmasked setting, Ursula delivers a bombastic soliloquy, shrouding her deception-imbued scheme. When addressing Ariel, Ursula's conduct is characterized by a dissonant and artificial shifting between vulnerability and power, and empathy and coercion. These camp elements found in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" can be further identified in other villain numbers.



Figure 2.2: *The Little Mermaid*, "Poor Unfortunate Souls": Theatrical setting, with artificial lights and smoke.[128]

A performance akin to Ursula's grandeur is Scar's "Be Prepared," possibly "the most *dramatic* and *theatrical* of the songs [from *The Lion King*]" (emphasis added).[129] Scar's musical

[126] For a further analysis on Ursula as a *femme fatale*, see: Elizabeth Bell, "Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (1995): 107-124. Also, see: McLeod, "Unmasking the Quillain": 73-74.

[127] Even further, there are moments where Ursula seems to break the fourth wall, speaking almost directly at the "camera," as in the bridge of the song where she sings "*Now it's happened once or twice / Someone couldn't pay the price…*" (*The Little Mermaid*, 00:41:15)

[128] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:43:49.

[129] Coyle Fitzgerald, "Disney Does Broadway": 239.

number unfolds in the hyena's cave, which is rapidly transformed into a theater hall with catwalks and balconies. Mirroring Ursula's theatrical spectacle, Scar also performs amid artificial lighting and eerie fumes—perceived as artificial even emanating by gheiser-like holes and cracks in the ground. Such a theatrical setting is complemented with movable platforms, a choreographic result of a seemingly geologically unstable terrain. This culminates in the dramatic emergence of a stone column, lifting Scar for the grand finale of the song.

The theatrical quality of "Be Prepared" is added to the attitudinal incongruity exhibited by Scar throughout the song. At the start of the musical number, we witness Scar singing and walking among the hyenas, his immediate audience at the beginning of the number. Here, Scar resembles a nightclub cabaret performer, flirtatiously moving between tables and clients (figure 2.3). However, Scar's attitude toward the hyenas is marked by aggression and violence, even as he calls/demands their assistance in achieving his ambition of becoming King. This behavior is jarringly juxtaposed with the sudden adoption of a seductive attitude—reminiscent of a supermodel(!): Scar rhythmically walks over a stone that looks like a runway or a club bar, flicks his mane, and locks eyes with the "camera" with a seductive look, in an outburst of campiness (figure 2.3). This dissonance in Scar's behavior, contrasting his actions in front of the external audience—us—and the hyenas—his "in-show" audience—creates an even more pronounced alienating effect than that generated by Ursula's performance.



Figures 2.3: *The Lion King*, "Be Prepared": Scar's aggressive (left) and seductive (right) attitude.[130]

Moreover, the evolving theatrical roles of the hyenas during the song contribute to the alienation effect. Initially, they serve as the malleable audience for Scar's politically-infused speech, swiftly transitioning into recruits marching in a "goose-step" style. Then, they become the backing choir to Scar-as-diva, and ultimately, they are portrayed as onstage musicians, dancers, and shadow-puppeteers. This shifting role of the hyenas accentuates the artificiality and fluidity of the performance, underscoring that we are the intended subjects of the number's charm, not them.

An additional element characterizing the campiness of "Be Prepared" is the discordant interplay between music, text, and context. I have previously noted that the lyrics of the villain songs, including "Be Prepared," exhibit incongruities between the evil plans and ambitions they suggest, and the deceptive way these ambitions are presented as virtuous. Scar's lyrics and actions bring to the foreground a cascade of percolating binaries—masculine/feminine, militaristic/carnivalesque, violent/lurring, among others—tied together by the central theme of Scar's forthright ambition to usurp the throne by killing Mufasa and Simba. Although Scar justifies his scheme as a matter of quasi-revolutionary justice—"*I know it sounds sordid / But you'll be rewarded / When at last I am given my dues / And injustice deliciously squared*"[131]—the celebratory music accompanying his words imbues them with an undertone of cunning and, much like Ursula's "Poor Unfortunate Souls," and inherent sense of falsehood and artificiality.

Like Ursula and Scar, Jafar from *Aladdin* emerges as a campy villain, as his musical number and performance is saturated with incongruity and theatricality. While the stage elements

[130] *The Lion King, 00:27:46; 00:28:09*.
[131] *The Lion King*, 00:28:21.

in “Prince Ali (Reprise)” are less pronounced than those previously described, they distinctly frame Jafar’s excessive and deceitful performance. The scene unfolds at a partially damaged section of the palace, resembling an outdoor stage. On this “stage,” Jafar sways to the rhythm of the music, smiling and flaunting his newly-acquired magical powers, which he employs to control and dominate Aladdin and Jasmine. At one point, he manipulates their bodily movements, treating them like puppets and incorporating them, almost as dancers, into his performance. Similar to Ursula’s number, Jafar’s use of magic results in artificial lights, along with lightning and sparks. Electrical discharges from his snake staff eventually transform into a massive cloud of dark smoke, filling the background for a dramatic conclusion to the musical number. Besides, the theatrical staging is highlighted by the continuous use of low-angle shots during the latter part of the song, particularly at the end when Jafar sends Aladdin to the “end of the world,” positioning the audience as theater spectators (figure 2.4).



Figure 2.4: *Aladdin*, “Prince Ali: Reprise”: Theatrical setting with artificial lights and smoke.[132]

Jafar’s number is also discordant in its relationship between the lyrical content and the musical spirit, unmistakably manifesting as a campy performance. Throughout the song, Jafar assumes a moral high ground, suggesting the need to punish Aladdin for his royal impersonation and deception of Jasmine. Employing the same music as the earlier bombastic and parade-like number, “Prince Ali,” performed by the Genie, Jafar's denouncing and sentencing take on a layer

[132] *Aladdin,* 01:13:41.

of irony aligning with camp sensibilities. Mallan and McGillis suggest that carnival offers a culturally sanctioned departure from convention, exemplified by Genie's performance, while camp is often disapproved or perceived as a disruption.[133] Jafar appropriates a song inherently "artificial," a creation of Genie's magic originally celebrating Aladdin's impersonation, and encouraging a "more conventional sense of good-hearted parody."[134] However, in Jafar's rendition, the song assumes an incongruous character as it is utilized to denounce and "reveal" Aladdin's truth, ultimately serving Jafar's mischievous plan to become the ruler of Agrabah.

The performances by Ursula, Jafar, and Scar predominantly embody camp sensibilities purposefully exposing incongruous opposites, generating tension between their word choice, their underlying meaning, and the theatrical delivery. These dualities align with Newton's assertion that the subject matter of camp is *incongruity*, while its style is *theatricality*. Moreover, Newton identifies *humor* as the third recurrent theme of campiness, serving as its strategic element.[135] Although comedic content may not be immediately apparent in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" and "Prince Ali (Reprise)," it becomes more prominent in "Be Prepared," intensifying the discordance within the song's context. In *The Disney Song Encyclopedia*, indeed, it is noted that despite the comedic element provided by the hyenas Shenzi, Banzai, and Ed, the song serves as a chilling Fascist promise of a new age.[136] The seriousness of Scar's speech, *camped* by his own divalicious performance, is mitigated by the strategic infusion of silliness and physical comedy enacted by the hyenas. This interaction introduces tension between "the serious" and the "frivolous," a characteristic also attributed to camp by Sontag, who states: "the whole point of

[133] Mallan and McGillis, "Between a Frock…": 5.
[134] Ibid., 13.
[135] Newton, *Mother Camp*: 109-110.
[136] Thomas S. Hischal, and Mark A. Robinson, *The Disney Song Encyclopedia*. Scarecrow Press, 2009: 13

Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to 'the serious'."[137] [138]

In navigating the balance of being "serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious,"[139] we can understand the song "Gaston" from *Beauty and the Beast* as camp. Unlike the previously analyzed villain songs, in which the characters' evil plans and ambitions are outlined, "Gaston" celebrates the character's hypermasculinity. The musical number is an over-protesting display of homosocial performance, reaching absurdity due to the excessive attention devoted to this mundane matter in terms of its length, production, and dramatism. Furthermore, the song presents a definition of masculinity solely focused on male recognition, admiration, and affirmation, creating an incongruity with its initial purpose: cheering Gaston for being rejected by Belle. Gaston's sexual desire is overshadowed by his homosocial interactions, with his true interest lying in the male gaze. In "Gaston," he is the center of attention of predominantly male characters. Such an incongruity is underscored by historian and media scholar Matt Roth:

> Gaston, vain and preening, covets heterosexual status in pursuing Belle, the beauty of the title; but he constantly ignores both her and the trio of blonde bombshells that swoon over him. He is only truly interested in male gazes, and blossoms in the midst of his all-male lodge, where he sings a *showstopper celebrating his own masculinity*. Provided [...] with an elastic, high-contact companion, he is the *epitome of camp*[140] (emphasis added).

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[137] Sontag, "Notes on Camp": num. 41.

[138] My examination of comedic content as a camp signifier is centered on the musical numbers. However, the villains, as characters, have been recognized as integral components of comedy within these films. Mallan and McGillis contend, for instance, that "the deliciously evil and sinister actions, measured enunciation, and sarcastic retorts of Jafar elicit a perverted kind of humour," a characterization that could similarly be extended to Ursula and Scar. See Mallan and McGillis, "Between a Frock…": 13. Moreover, the comedic sidekicks from these films can also be recognized as embodying camp sensibilities.

[139] Sontag, "Notes on Camp": num. 41.

[140] Matt Roth, "The Lion King: A Short History of Disney Fascism," in *Jump Cut* 40 (1996): par. 34. https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC40folder/LionKing.html?sfns=mo

The exaggerated portrayal of Gaston as the "prototype" of man through this campy performance humorously casts doubt on his masculinity, as camp's exaggeration and artifice are strongly linked to queer identities, pushing him from the heteronormative to the boundaries of gender normativity. Thus, the gender incongruity in "Gaston" lies between the praised hypermasculinity and a potentially "lesser" masculinity; Gaston appears, thus, a "hysterical 'male impersonation' number,"[141] an assertion that connects gender deviation with humor.

The over-theatrical performance in "Gaston" is contrastingly distinguished by a lack of a theatrical staging. Set in a tavern, the absence of darkness, artificial lighting, or smoke contributes to its portrayal as an exaggerated interaction among mainly drunken men in a bar.[142] As the song begins, Gaston's sidekick LeFou attempts a sort of burlesque setting by positioning Gaston's chair as a one-person audience, and also by singing while walking and dancing among the other characters, as Scar does around the hyenas at the beginning of his camp show; LeFou even showcases ballet steps and twirls. The absence of theatrical scenery and the gender-inadequacy of LeFou's dance movements heighten the incongruous and humorous ridiculousness of the number. When the villagers and even Gaston join in singing the memetic phrase "*No one*

[141] Griffin, *Tinker Belles*: 146.

[142] In "The Mob Song," a later musical sequence depicting Gaston and the villagers marching to Beast's castle with intent to kill him, notable theatrical elements akin to those found in "Be Prepared" emerge. The scene unfolds outdoors at night as the characters, illuminated by torchlight casting shadows on the walls, create a dramatic ambiance reminiscent of the aforementioned theatrical setting. Notably, Gaston wields Beast's magical mirror, emitting a green glow that artificially illuminates the surroundings. At the beginning of the number, Gaston, positioned on a stage-like platform, addresses the audience, beckoning them to join him in the impeding "hunting" journey, and singing "*it's time to follow me*" in his highest baritone register, as in the climax of an operatic aria. Subsequently, Gaston adopts an exaggerated performance style directed at the villagers, elaborating on the journey's hardships and emphasizing the monstrous nature of the Beast—an artifice that parallels the deceptive narratives found in villain songs from other analyzed films.

[verb] like Gaston," the song reaches its peak level of campiness, emphasizing the artificiality of Gaston's masculinity, even without elaborate staging.

Like the other analyzed villain songs, "Gaston" features a festive musical style. However, unlike "Poor Unfortunate Souls," "Prince Ali (Reprise)," and "Be Prepared," where the musical background creates a campy incongruity with the lyrics, "Gaston" maintains coherence between its drinking-song character and the lyrical content, supporting its comedic nature. I interpret that it is precisely the contrast between the light character of the music, the frivolous lyrics, and the "unsarcastic" delivery of such lyrics that makes this song so detached from reality, as an entertaining celebratory delusion. In Chapter 3, I further explore how the musical genre and style in "Gaston" aid in portraying him as deviant, adding a sense of exoticism to the excessive campiness he embodies.

While the villain songs and their musical numbers are characterized by their excess and exaggerated theatricality, both in performance and staging, the love ballads of these films seamlessly integrate into the narrative, conveying a profound sense of naturalness. The campy, queered performances serve as explicitly framed sites where "normality has no place,"[143] in disruption of the unstaged renditions of the protagonists, presented as the benchmark of normality.

Visually, the love ballads' musical numbers are notably more illuminated and colorful than the villains' numbers, even in night-time scenes like "A Whole New World" and "Beauty and the Beast." The love scenes distinctly lack theatrical elements such as artificial lighting and smoke. Instead, they often unfold in non-staged, natural environments, reinforcing the lyrical content of the songs. Examples include a beach in "Part of Your World (Reprise)," a garden in

[143] Mallan and McGillis: "Between a Frock…": 15.

"Something There," the skies in "A Whole New World," and the jungle in "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." These settings depict characters engaged in non-performative, nature-related activities, like bird feeding in "Something There" or drinking water from a pond in "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." In "Beauty and the Beast," the protagonists partake in a stylized dating ritual, but in which personal—and romantic—growth is emphasized rather than a theatrical display. Unlike the villain songs, these love numbers do not rely on "special" effects to enhance the character's performances.[144]

Furthermore, freed from their on-screen musical performative "obligations," the hero(ine)s can partake in non-theatrical activities during their musical numbers, fostering a perception of genuineness and sincerity without the weight of an audience gaze. These activities encompass leisurely strolls or flights, playful interactions, joyous laughter, and shared meals. Given that the campy and artificially theatrical nature of villain songs resonates with queer-coded aesthetics, the heroes and heroines' love ballads, characterized by their non-theatricality and embedded within the context of hetero-romantic bonding, create a framework where activities linked to romantic love are inherently considered natural.

Having delved into the performative and theatrical dimensions of both villain songs and hero(ine)s' ballads, added to the lyrical analysis of Chapter 1, a distinct thematic dichotomy emerges. The protagonists' musical expressions are imbued with an overarching aura of naturalness: they sing about nature, and their songs narrate so-valued personal growth as an organic process within the structures of heteroromance. As they engage in nature-centric and romantic activities seamlessly integrated into their numbers, deliberate avoidance of the

[144]An exception to the absence of theatrical special effects in the love ballads could be noted, such as the wave crash behind Ariel during the final note of "Part of Your World (Reprise)." This dramatic effect may be tied to the song's intrinsic theatrical nature as a love song version of Ariel's "I want song."

artificialities linked to musical performance becomes evident. In stark contrast, the villain songs exude artificiality, contaminating the objects, intentions, and actions contained in their numbers. The performance of their songs is marked by pronounced incongruity, theatricality, and often laced with wicked humor, making them stylishly artificial. This deliberate artificiality not only categorizes them as unnatural but as anti-natural, reinforcing the perception of deviance and evil within these characters.

This chapter has underscored the significance of musical styles, such as cabaret and waltz, in shaping the representation of villains as deviant figures, amplifying notions of trickery, camp aesthetics, and alterity. In the following chapter, I present a more in-depth exploration, delving into the specific musical genres and styles present in both love ballads and villain songs. These musical categories serve as a pivotal differentiating factor, further illuminating the perceived normality associated with hero(ine)s and the deviations characterizing the villains in the complex web of representations in Disney animated musicals.

Chapter 3
Familiarity and Exoticization: Musical Genres and Styles

Musical genres and styles significantly shape the representation of moments, places, cultures, and communities in popular culture. By activating interobjective and intersubjective sensibilities in listeners, genres and styles guide perceptions and uncover diverse meanings within musical compositions. In this chapter, I characterize the love ballads and the villain songs, exploring their reliance on specific musical genres and styles. Through this analysis, I illustrate that the portrayal of the protagonists' romantic scenes as normal and normative is, in part, rooted in the incorporation of distinctly American musical elements that define the style of their love ballads. In contrast, villain songs draw inspiration from exotic musical contexts, supporting their characterization not only as foreign, but as abnormal and deviant, in their opposition with the sonic landscape of the protagonists.

Hero(ine)s Love Ballads: Disney Style

The love ballads featured in the analyzed Disney films mirror the protagonists themselves, evoking descriptors such as charming, gentle, and beautiful.[145] These attributes owe their aural qualities to a set of shared musical elements that collectively define what can be regarded as the "Disney Style." That the protagonists' love ballads aurally represent the Disney brand is a pivotal indicator of their role in establishing a culturally influential sense of normativity. Despite the widespread use of the term "Disney Style" in popular and social media, an official definition is notably absent, and it proves more accessible to illustrate it through

[145] The adjectives mentioned above are recurrent across a spectrum of academic and non-academic sources. For comprehensive insights into the songs examined in this study, including general information and descriptions, my reference point has been: Thomas S. Hischak and Mark A. Robinson, *The Disney Song Encyclopedia* (Scarecrow Press, 2009).

renditions of classics like "Beauty and the Beast" or "A Whole New World" than to articulate its intricacies.[146] Often, what is considered normative or "normal" remains undefined, semiotically *unmarked*, and requiring no further explanation or justification—it simply "is." I will, however, attempt to elucidate the elements that configure the Disney Style. I posit that the sense of normality that this style evokes is due to the amalgamation of three different styles linked to American culture: Broadway musical theater, popular power ballads, and Hollywood film scoring.

Disney films from the Renaissance era exhibit a definite influence from Broadway, diverging from the more operatic previous animated musicals. The sound most commonly associated with Disney today originated during this period, and it was cemented and standardized in the first three musical films of the era: *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*. The Broadway influence can be certainly attributed to the creative contributions of lyricist Howard Ashman and composer Alan Menken, who not only provided the music for the films but had a major influence in the conception and production of the stories.[147] In her dissertation "The

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[146] Notably, the abundance of YouTube tutorials dedicated to guiding individuals in the creation of a "Disney Style" song consistently emphasizes the incorporation of elements characteristic of love ballads, or other songs from the film typified as ballads. In fact, these instructional resources rarely associate the Disney Style with fast-paced musical compositions, like the "I want" songs from *Aladdin* or *The Lion King*. This observation prompts an intriguing exploration into the potential connection between the Disney Style and a musical landscape often aligned with more feminine attributes, characterized by a leisurely and gentle pace typical of ballads.

[147] Due to Howard Ashman's death, the lyricist Tim Rice joined the production team for the films *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*. However, Ashman is more often credited for the particular *voice* [sound] or the Disney style exhibited in the movies. Moreover, Elton John, along with Rice, wrote the songs for *The Lion King*. Even though this film's songs, especially "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," exhibit Elton John's compositional style, he himself acknowledged that he aimed to follow "Disney's tradition of great love songs," a tradition that undoubtedly refers to the orchestral power ballad conventionalized by Menken's musicalization of Ashman's and Rice's lyrics from the previous films. See: *The Lion King: Platinum Edition, Disc 1, Director's Commentary*, DVD, directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff (Walt Disney Pictures, 2003).

Whole Other World of Ashman and Menken: Broadway Conventions in Disney's 'Renaissance' Musicals," Minelli documents and analyzes this phenomenon, underscoring the importance of *The Little Mermaid* in setting a model for subsequent animated musicals, characterized by musical theater conventions in terms of structure, song functions, and musical-dramatic processes. Under this light, the love ballads in these films are understood as fundamental narrative and emotional components incorporating harmonic and melodic procedures typical of the musical theater language, that underscore the love longing and emotional trajectories expressed by the lyrics.[148] These songs, then, integrate the language of the ballads from the 70s and 80s' Broadway tradition.

The resonance and familiarity evoked by the love ballads from the Renaissance films can also be traced to their connections with the conventions of sentimental popular ballads, a genre pervading the contemporary popular music landscape of the time. Beyond the hallmark features of a slow tempo and a focus on lyrical melodic lines, a significant textural element borrowed from this genre is the prominent role played by the piano, whether acoustic or electric, typically played in a more "popular" style. The piano contributes to establishing a tender atmosphere through arpeggiated harmony or continuous soft strumming, crafting a continuous and mellow texture that contrasts with the more rugged and jumpy textures found in villain songs, a topic to be explored later in this chapter.

The ballads' flowing texture is further supported by a rich orchestral arrangement, a common accompaniment technique in power ballads used as means of emotional escalation.[149] In film ballads, the orchestral arrangement serves to deepen the emotional impact of the songs

[148] Minelli, "The Whole Other World…"
[149] David Metzer, "The Power Ballad," in *Popular Music* 31, no. 3 (2012): 437-459.

through conventional musical codes. This is evident in the emphasis on the string section, particularly the violin, which is "commonly thought of as the most expressive instrument in the orchestra and thus linked to passion."[150] Furthermore, it is noteworthy that film love ballads often eschew the full rhythm section ensemble, omitting drums and guitars, while keeping the bass alongside the piano. The instrumental timbral quality in these songs is then marked by the orchestral background, often enriched with large vocal choirs, qualities that aid in integrating the songs into the instrumental score, adhering organically to established Hollywood score traditions.

The importance of the orchestral background in the configuration of the Disney style as a staple of the ballads is exemplified by *The Lion King*'s "Can You Feel the Love Tonight." Out of all of the songs included in the film, the love song is the only one with an orchestral arrangement, aligning it more closely with Western conventions, unlike the more "African sound" evoked by the other songs, including the villain song.

The combination of Broadway and power ballad elements, coupled with the use of classical Hollywood orchestration conventions, contributes to the creation of the magical sonic landscape characterizing the Disney style. This fusion of elements rooted in the American musical context is significantly appealing to American audiences, and has progressively evolved into a globally idealized standard for *cinematographic* romantic love.

The Disney style's universality conveyed by the love ballads, is tacitly underscored by the films' broader musical characteristics. Most of the songs from the analyzed movies are influenced by musical signifiers tied to the foreign geographical and/or historical locations of the stories; for instance, the settings of *Beauty and the Beast*'s rural eighteenth-century France, or

[150] Kalinak, *Film Music*: 14.

Aladdin's fictionalized Baghdad (Agrabah), are musically portrayed through exoticized melodic, harmonic and, above all, instrumental choices, which do not fully align to the characterization of the Disney style previously provided.[151] However, the *universally* resonant, non-exoticized, ballads depict the protagonists' behaviors as normative and reinforce the perception of romantic love as a universal desire.

It is important to recognize that the "universality" of the Disney sound goes beyond a mere geographical identification of an American sound; it must be analyzed through a racial lens. The three musical influences that I have identified as shaping the "Disney" sound are predominantly associated with white artists and performers, rather than simply being "American." Musical elements from American genres rooted in diverse racial and ethnic contexts, such as jazz, are notably absent in the protagonists' love ballads. Consequently, the sense of normality these songs present relates not only to a specific cultural context but also to a racially sanitized version of it.

In this sense, *The Lion King*'s "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" appears exceptional because the musical background is indeed permeated by the "African sound"[152] that characterizes most of the soundtrack. The *africannes* added to the song, however, is mostly superficial and does not hinder the recognition of its prominent Disney style. Hischak and Robinson indeed

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[151] Although *The Little Mermaid* is not clearly set in an identifiable, and musically represented, location, its soundtrack relies on various exoticized genres. The film resorts to "a broad musical palette to create an appealing musical pastiche," serving as historical and geographical signifiers, such as sea shanty, calypso, reggae, operetta, French-flavoured pieces (Coyle and Fitzgerald, "Disney Does Broadway": 229). Minelli further argues that these genres help reinforce the counterposing between the sea and land world in *The Little Mermaid*, fundamental to the narrative (Minelli, "The Whole Other World…"). Moreover, Ariel's love song/I want song exhibits a non-exoticized "Disney style," foreshadowing the special treatment that the protagonists' love ballads receive in the following films.

[152] This reductive description encompasses, more generally, the use of backing vocals from African choral traditions and a wide arrange of percussive instruments. This last feature is particularly special, as none of the other love ballads analyzed feature prominent percussion beyond isolated cymbals and chimes.

assert that the "African tribal accompaniment gives the number a distinctive and haunting tone," but that the song continues to be a "*traditional pop ballad* in music and words" (emphasis in original).[153] The song's exoticized tone is actually absent in the credit scenes, where a version in the traditional pop ballad style is featured, sung by its composer, Elton John.

The perceived normality of the love ballads' style is further sustained by musical elements commonly deemed as natural in discussions about music perception, especially in the realm of rhythm. An illustrating factor is the use of a duple meter, widely regarded as the "default" metric organization in Western music. Influential music theorist Heinrich Schenker considers this type of rhythmic organization as normative, stating: "since the principle of systole and diastole is inherent in our very being, metric ordering based on two and its multiples is *the most natural to us*. [...] Metric schemes involving the numbers 3 and 5 are *man-made* and not as *natural* as duple orderings" (emphasis added).[154] Highlighting the inherent naturality of the duple metrical organization, it is noteworthy that all love ballads from these films express a 4/4 meter with its four pulses regularly accentuated, with no distinctive metrical subdivision patterns. Given that over-two thirds of the songs in these films express simple duple meters, metrical aspects might be understood as tenuously connected to character representation. However, it is striking that villain songs consistently employ triple or compound meters, or duple meters associated with pre-existing exoticized genres or styles by means of ostinatos, and irregular grouping or subdivision patterns.

A compelling case study illuminating the significance of duple rhythmic organization in the Disney style, particularly showcased in love ballads, is evident in the song "Beauty and the

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[153] Hischak and Robinson, *The Disney Song Encyclopedia*: 29.
[154] Heinrich Schenker, in Justin London, "Rhythm in Twentieth-Century Theory," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (2002), 695-725: 709.

Beast." In the films' iconic ballroom scene, Belle and Beast are portrayed dancing in a style of a Classical ternary dance, such as a minuet or a waltz; however, the scene is accompanied by the 4/4 main title ballad. This deliberate choice emphasizes the use of a more normative piece with a normative rhythmic organization, prioritizing the distinct Disney style over non-normative alternatives that would allow strict musical-narrative congruence.

Minelli recognizes the significance of the dancing scene, describing the "waltz" as a narrative-musical device laden with ritualistic implications. Beyond bringing the characters together romantically, the dance unites their worlds: Belle "has the elegance and poise to traverse the class boundary and perform seamlessly in the dance" and helps Beast to behave in the noble manner that is appropriate for his stature.[155] The process of "rehabilitation" that Belle exerts on Beast is musically represented with a duple ballad conforming to the Disney style conventions, symbolizing Beast's "normalization" through a more "normal" musical style.[156] As it will be explained in detail later, it is remarkable that the main song for the antagonist Gaston is an actual 3/4 fast-paced waltz. While narratively significant and cleverly integrated into the film, Gaston's song is hardly perceived as *natural*.

Although it could be argued that the Disney Style is shaped by the musical techniques used to create the soundtracks of these films as a whole, encompassing both hero(ine) love ballads and villain songs, it is clear that the latter distinctly differ from the former. Villain songs

[155] Minelli, "The Whole Other World…": 98-99.

[156] Elizabeth Bell also recognizes the significance of dance scenes in Disney animated films, as crucial aesthetic constructions that symbolically represent and replace the sexual act as the consummation of the protagonists' love. She characterizes this representation as *natural*, emphasizing that "the elegant tensiveness of the *pas de deux* is carefully constructed, but always couched as the 'natural' expression of love." See: Bell, "Somatexts at the Disney Shop": 113.

are not necessarily perceived as quintessential examples of the Disney sound, likely due to their departure from the more American sound associated with the love ballads.

Villains Songs: Exoticized Styles

In the preceding chapter, I presented a camp reading of the villains' musical numbers, delving into the incongruous interplay between their guileful lyrics, seductive yet violent theatrical performances, and the festive musical style of their songs. The latter proves especially significant in distinguishing the villains from the hero(ine)s, as these songs evoke musical structures of genres that sharply contrast with the emotive nature of Disney-style love ballads. In my analysis, I identify that the singularity of these songs and musical numbers is indebted to the presence of elements from musical genres related to dancing or corporal expression. These genres, often imbued with exoticism, accentuate the otherness of the villains.

Firstly, the perception of the villains as deviant figures is influenced by music related to dance because such genres buttress the camp sensibilities embedded in their musical numbers. In Western culture, dancing remains commonly coded as feminine or queer, residing in the realm of the body as opposed to the "masculine" realm of the mind within hegemonic gendered binaries. The villains' campy juxtapositions of masculine and feminine traits, coupled with the queer coding shaping their performativity, is amplified by the bodily character of their dance-invoking songs (an aspect that is also racialized because of the stereotypical consideration of non-white music with sensual body movement). The connection between music, dance, and camp, is noted by Mallan and McGillis, who assert that: "music and camp go together, and [...] it is in the song and dance numbers that camp is often given the spotlight."[157] [158] Although the villains typically

[157] Mallan and McGillis, "Between the Frock…": 15.

[158] A further study on the musical numbers by non-villainous camp characters, an objective far beyond the scope of my present research, would show that they are also characterized by exoticized genres linked to

refrain from traditional musical-theatre dance numbers, as seen with other campy characters in these films, they are playfully depicted wiggling or swaying to the music.[159] Such a behavior invites an interpretation of the villains joyfully reveling in the calculated and cunning display of evilness in their musical numbers, embracing their deviation from the musical style of the love ballads.

The opposing musical styles used in these films to differentiate between the protagonists' and the villains' music can be elucidated by identifying the latter's songs as exoticized. Musicologist Ralph Locke provides a comprehensive definition of musical exoticism:

> Musical exoticism is the process of evoking in or through music—whether the latter is "exotic-sounding" or not—a place, people, or social milieu that is not entirely imaginary and that differs profoundly from the "home" country or culture in attitudes, customs, and morals. More precisely, it is the process of evoking a place (people, social milieu) that is *perceived* as different from home by the people making and receiving the exoticist cultural product (emphasis in original).[160]

Following Locke's perspective, I contend that the deliberate exoticization of the villain songs establishes a contrast with the Disney sound from the love ballads, perceived as neutral and signifying a universally shared idea of "home" in these films. Antagonistic characters, differing in "attitudes, customs and morals" from the hero(ine)s', possess a distinct sound

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dances. Even so, Jafar's number "Prince Ali (Reprise)" inherits its exoticized character from the first iteration of the song, which is sung by Genie, the epitome of Disney's "good" camp characters. Genie's mambo-like Vegas number "A friend like me" is another example of this phenomenon. In the other movies, camp/bodily sensibilities are evident in exoticized numbers like the calypso "Under the Sea" (from *The Little Mermaid*), the can-can number "Be Our Guest" (from *Beauty and the Beast*), and the up-beat "Hakuna Matata" (from *The Lion King)*.

[159] In the stage production of *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), as well as in the live-action remake from 2017, the musical number "Gaston" is indeed extended through an instrumental interlude accompanied by a choreography. Since this song is an ode to masculinity, to include a dancing number only reinforces its campiness. Also, in the Broadway production of *The Lion King*, a choreographed interlude is included in "Be Prepared," where only the hyenas—and not Scar—dance.

[160] Ralph P. Locke, "A Broader View of Musical Exoticism," in *Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 4 (2007), 477-521: 481-482.

designed to be perceived as foreign within the film's auditory environment, irrespective of geographical or cultural location it evokes.[161] Just as the villain's theatrical settings and performances aids in framing their numbers, the exoticization of their music serves as a sonic mechanism to mark their difference and contain these isolated musical moments. The perceived-as-exotic dancing nature results from various signifiers of musical alterity woven into the songs, a device that has been long recognized as a marker of otherness.

In her analysis of the opera *Carmen*, Susan McClary notes that the portrayal of the *sexually provocative* protagonist, as a disruptive force threatening the purity and sanity of the other characters, is partly accomplished by the use of an exoticized musical genre. McClary notes that Carmen's most iconic aria, deflecting from conventional titles indicating the narrative function—such as aria or duet—is exceptionally labeled in the score with the musical genre, *Habanera*. The incorporation of an "exotic, pseudogypsy dance" further accentuates Carmen's physicality and her awareness of her body, achieved through the suggestive act of dancing to an exotic-sounding music. McClary asserts that Carmen "arouses desire; and because she apparently has the power to deliver or withhold gratification of the desires she instills, she is immediately marked as a potential victimizer."[162] The celebration of the body—and the *bodily*—as a symbol of dangerous deviation, as noted by McClary, indeed parallels what we have identified in the

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[161] The depiction of villains as "outsiders" in these films extends beyond the exoticization of their music, to include racialized features and language use, as observed by Li-Vollmer and LaPointe. Notably, some villains adopt British accents and expressions, elements that may be perceived as foreign and suspicious by the American audience. Examples include Ursula using the expression "*innit*," and Scar sarcastically adopting a royal behavior with a British-accented declaration, "*Oh, I shall practice my curtsy*." See: Li-Vollmer and LaPointe. "Gender transgression…" For more on language and representation in animated films, particularly in *Aladdin*, see: Adrianna Waters, "Language Use in Children's Films and Aladdin," in *Ashen Egg* 72 (2019): 72-83.

[162] McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (1991), 53-79: 57.

villains' musical numbers, characterized by excessive and campy displays of villainy. In these spectacles, the villains showcase their corporality through artificial performances. The mark of deviation in this type of representation is only intensified, much like McClary's interpretation of *Carmen*, by the exoticization of the accompanying music.

A significant method employed to mark villain songs as exotic pertains to the instrumentation. While using a conventional orchestral ensemble, the villain songs from *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin* introduce instruments adding a distinctive, exotic, timbrical dimension associated with the characters' morality. For instance, "Prince Ali (Reprise)" and "Poor Unfortunate Souls" extensively use muted brass, underscoring the affiliation of the characters' performances with the style of cabaret, a style that is read as vile and exotic in these films. Additionally, "Poor Unfortunate Souls" features a synthesized harpsichord adding a layer of eeriness to Ursula's performance, with the highly chromatic motif it plays,[163] and its timbral reference to a temporally exotic Baroque context. In "Gaston," the inclusion of instruments like the fiddle, the tambourine and, more prominently, the accordion, locate the song both in rural mid-eighteenth-century France, and in the context of a tavern.[164] The drinking-song instrumentation employed in "Gaston" imbues the song with a sense of unsophistication,

[163] This motif is marked as "Ursula sound" in rehearsal and unofficial scores, having not only a melodic and harmonic identity, but also a timbral one.

[164]The accordion's association with France can be traced back to the influence of Italian immigrants in Paris at the end of the 19th century, notably the accordion-maker Felix Peguri. This influence led to the accordion's prominence in French culture, particularly in cafés and cabarets during the first decades of the 20th century. For further information, see: Sheri Mignano Crawford, "French Soirée: La Musique de Bal Musette," in *Lefrancophile* (June 18, 2021). https://lefrancophile.com/french-soiree-la-musique-de-bal-musette/

contrasting with the sophisticated and *royal* sonic landscape portrayed in the protagonists love ballads, which are characterized by a conventional Western orchestration.[165]

The instrumentation in *The Lion King*'s "Be Prepared" aids in perceiving Scar's performance as exotic, in ways that are even more striking than the other villain songs analyzed. This aspect will be further explored in parallel to the analysis of the musical elements that characterize the song by evoking various exoticized musical genres.

Exotic Genres: Rhythm and Patterns

As it was suggested earlier, the exoticization of the villain songs frames these musical numbers within the larger narrative scale. Besides the containment provoked by the instrumental contrast, the reliance on specific "codes and expectations"[166] of dance genres appears to confine the deviant and excessive performers to structures dictated by genre conventions. Notably, persistent and restrictive ostinatos and accompanying patterns dominate the musical texture, controlling and regulating the musical development. I have explained that during their musical numbers the villains are free to be as extravagant as they desire, following McLeod's analysis. The musical structures inherent to the villain song's genres, however, seem to provide boundaries to their performances, securely containing the excess they exhibit.

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[165] The other love ballad featured in *Beauty and the Beast*, "Something There," exhibits a highly sophisticated symphonic style. This song might be perceived, however, also as exoticized. Its style appropriately characterizes the aristocratic environment of the castle, giving the scene a sense of highbrow. As this "exoticization" is achieved through a musical and stylistic language from a Western canonical practice, such as the Classical symphony, its perception is linked more closely to the notion of "normality" than to the alterity conveyed by other exotic pieces in these films. This is fundamental to the narrative, as the musical number shows the process of "re-humanization" of Beast with Belle's help, as he must learn to behave not only like a human again, but as a noble. At the same time, we see how Belle embraces, and is being embraced, as a part of the royal life in the castle.

[166]The emphasis on "codes and expectations" as integral components in defining *genre* is derived from the book *Musicology: The Key Concepts*. Refer to: David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology: The Key Concepts*, Routledge, 2005.

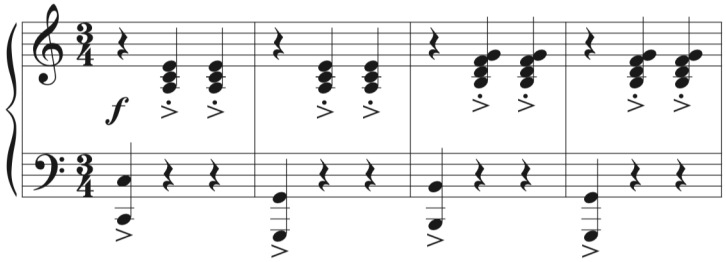


Figure 3.1: *Beauty and the Beast*, "Gaston," introduction (fragment): Waltz accompaniment pattern

Among the villain songs analyzed, "Gaston" is the only one explicitly labeled with a genre in the score—*Rowdy Barroom Waltz*. This designation appeals to the chaotic and excessive performance expected of a barroom drinking song, yet bound to a one-bar accompaniment pattern "oomh-pah-pah"[167] in the meter of 3/4, which is obstinately maintained for most of the song (figure 3.1). The identification of "Gaston" as an exoticized piece of music derives, thus, from the employment of the conventions of a waltz.

Although the history of the waltz has influenced its perception as a signifier of European high culture, perhaps recalling imagery of castles, palaces, and courts, its diminished popularity in the post-World War I Europe caused that composers throughout the 20th century continued to use it as a model of composition, yet almost always as a means to represent a *light* character.[168] Most certainly, such a light character is indebted to the perceived lack of variety generated by the rhythmic and textural patterns characteristic of the genre.[169] In this sense, Gaston's waltz is perceived as exotic because it musically evokes a pre-modern European setting.

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[167] Onomatopoetic description drawn from: Johanna Frymoyer, "The Musical Topic in the Twentieth Century: A Case Study of Schoenberg's Ironic Waltzes," in *Music Theory Spectrum* 39, no. 1 (2017): 83-108.

[168] Andrew Lamb, "Waltz (i)." in *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 15 Nov. 2023. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000029881.

[169] During the period surrounding the culmination of World War I, influential circles of composers in Europe began to write about their compositional processes favoring perpetual or developing variation,

As it was mentioned earlier, Gaston's musical representation through the waltz gains significance when compared to the colorful, clean and sophisticated dancing scene between the protagonists, who move to the rhythm of a Disney-style song. Gaston is, in turn, characterized not only by a musical genre featuring a non-normative metrical organization, but also by a rudimentary setting, unrefined companionship, and a rough performance. These qualities are further emphasized by the incorporation of musical instruments associated with popular or folk traditions. It could be interpreted that the use of a waltz to accompany Gaston's repulsive musical number constitutes a corruption of the genre, as it in fact loses its characteristic as a ballroom dance, becoming the musical background for a lowbrow performance.

The simplicity evoked by a light, pre-modern genre, such as a fast waltz, represents Gaston's unsophisticated beliefs and socialization, condensed in the hypermasculine ideals promoted by the song, and masking his inner complexity regarding his narcissism, insecurities, and sexuality. The excessively structured rhythmic, phrasal, and formal aspects of the song, with its maddening overstatement of the chorus ("*No one [verb] like Gaston*"), reflects Gaston's mental rigidity and overconfident attitude (explained in Chapter 1), lacking the flexible rhythmic and thematic elaboration characteristic of the protagonist's ballads. Even when the prevailing regularity is interrupted, especially in the cadences influenced by pronounced ritardandos, these gaps are swiftly *corrected* by the prevailing metrical structures, creating a ludicrous effect as the music falls back into the rhythmic conventions—i.e. the frame—dictated by the genre.

The exoticizing of the villain songs, aimed at framing their musical numbers and emphasizing their otherness, is notably evident in *The Lion King*'s "Be Prepared." While the

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regarding this procedure as essential for creating new music, and thus disregarding older models based on unvaried repetition. These concepts are notably associated with the composer Arnold Schoenberg.

song generally aligns with the "African sound" of the film's soundtrack, its unique setting inside a cave, which is "not the most stereotypically 'African' locale," accounts for the decisions regarding the rhythm-oriented instrumentation to "keep the audiences immersed in African-ness."[170] In fact, and unlike "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," "Be Prepared" does not feature an orchestral arrangement, relying heavily on percussive instruments, rich vocal arrangements, and low-pitched instruments as the bass and bassoon, creating an exotic "primitive" aura. The inclusion of the marimba further ties the song to the African backbone of the film and to the specific musical number, where the exposed bones of the elephant's graveyard, that is Scar's lair, resemble natural marimbas.[171]

Unlike "Gaston," the musical exoticization of "Be Prepared" does not adhere to the conventions of a specific musical genre or a non-normative meter. Instead, its exotic quality arises from a complex rhythmic structure, with various instrumental layers—drums, low winds, bass, marimba, choir, lead vocals, etc.—each contributing distinct rhythmic patterns. Although expressing a quadruple meter of 4/4, the overall rhythmic organization of the song is ruled by a syncopation of the third pulse, emphasizing the offbeat of the second pulse. This results in a pervasive irregular pulsation of two unequal beats, the first with the duration of a dotted quarter note, and the second one comprising a duration of an eighth-note tied to a half-note. This rhythmic framework is particularly accentuated by the hyena's choir's "laughing" attacks (figure 3.2).

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[170] Cameron Jordan, "World Music's Role in the Construction of a Hyperrealistic Africa in Disney's 'The Lion King'." (MM diss., Texas Christian University, 2015): 28-30.

[171] In fact, at one point the musical number features hyenas playing these rudimentary marimbas, a place that Jordan accurately recognizes as "the only instance in the entire film of a diegetic musical source." Ibid., 31.

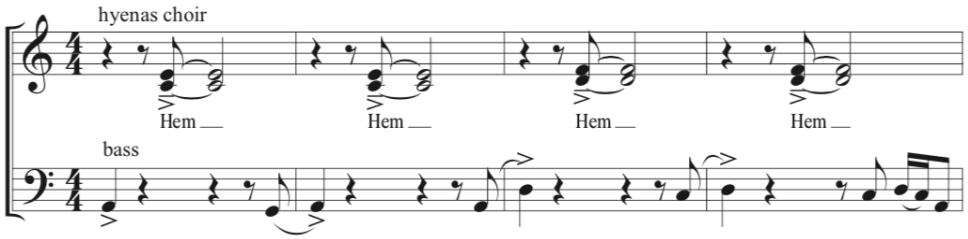


Figure 3.2: *The Lion King*, "Be Prepared," introduction (fragment): Hyenas choir syncopation

The syncopated nature of the song is crucial in its perception as an inviting-to-dance piece. While this feature integrates the song into the soundtrack, the song's rhythm-oriented approach extends beyond its inscription within an African sound. I interpret that, given that all of the film's songs are imbued with Africanness through their instrumentation, infusing a different "flavor" into the villain song serves to mark Scar as foreign and deviant. In contrast to the portrayal of the hero(ine)s' relationship through an American-sounding ballad with a superficial African influence, Scar's villainy acquires an additional layer of exoticism, with hints of Latin American musical elements.

While no specific genre is explicitly marked or readily identifiable, Cuban-influenced dancing genres permeate "Be Prepared," implicitly invoking broader musical contexts associated with Spain and Latin America through genres such as *contradanza* and *habanera*. This perception is reinforced by the rhythmic-melodic construction of the bass line, often arpeggiating the underlying harmony rhythmically using the head of a 3-2 *clave* (i.e., dotted quarter - dotted quarter - quarter), as illustrated in figure 3.3. The *clave*, or even a portion of it, serves as a distinctive exoticizing feature in "Be Prepared," due to its status as the "rhythmic anchor of Cuban music" and a central element in Afro-American music.[172]

[172] Mehmet Vurkaç, "A Cross–Cultural Grammar for Temporal Harmony in Afro–Latin Musics: Clave, Partido–Alto and Other Timelines," in *Current Musicology* No. 94 (Fall 2012) (2012), 37-65: 37.



Figure 3.3: *The Lion King,* "Be Prepared," Chorus (fragment): Characteristic bass line

Furthermore, the melodic elaboration of the marimba also supports the exoticized Latin sound of the song, as its quasi-motorhythmic line bear resemblance—albeit in a rather fast manner—to the rhythmic-melodic patterns usually performed by a piano or a Cuban *tres* in Afro-Cuban music. Moreover, in the interpolated spoken section of the song, a *güiro*, an instrument with indigenous Latin American origins, is introduced, further enhancing the "Latin" sonic palette sound of the number.

Beyond the musical elements that tinge "Be Prepared" with an exoticized tone reminiscent of dancing music associated with Cuban genres, the song also evokes another musical genre that, considering its cultural history, proves convenient to represent Scar's alluring yet deceiving performance: Argentinian *tango*.[173]

In the latter part of the song, an accompanying accordion is introduced to the already complex texture, presenting a rhythmic figure that is based on the pattern of the *clave* at double speed (i.e., dotted eighth - dotted eighth - sixteenth), as depicted in figure 3.4. The novel timbre provided by the accordion, resembling the sound of a *bandoneon*, coupled with the polyrhythmic interplay it creates with the bass, imbues the number with the exoticized flavor of tango.

According to scholar Marta E. Savigliano, *tango*—or at least a polished and stylized version of it—became a symbol of seduction during its global popularization in the early

[173] An earlier version of "Be Prepared" that was ultimately cut from the story, in which the newly-crowned Scar harasses Nala into being his queen, is explicitly arranged as a *tango*. A musicalized storyboard is available in the following link: https://youtu.be/zl8gDjaHWWA [consulted on June 27, 2023].

twentieth-century, reason why it easily found its way into the cabarets and ballrooms of cosmopolitan cities like Paris, London, and New York.[174] Indeed, the genre has been used in various musicals and movies to underscore explosive and campy performances.[175] Presenting Scar's "*murkiest scam*" through a genre "associated with its displays of restrained eroticism," where the dual tensions of male/female and civilized/barbarian abound,[176] reinforces the alterity of the musical number, both in terms of the musical exoticism and the dangerous, artificially incongruent performance it sets forth.



Figure 3.4: *The Lion King,* "Be Prepared," Verse 2 (fragment): Bass and accordion polyrhythm

Similar to the Latin/Tango infused "Be Prepared" that leads to Scar's exoticized and campy performance, the villain numbers from *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin* also exhibit sexually-charged dance styles. Both "Poor Unfortunate Souls" and "Prince Ali (Reprise)" share a fundamental accompaniment pattern sustained throughout most of the songs: within a duple, cut meter, the two half-note pulses are subdivided into quarters, with the second further subdivided into eighth-notes. The meter's two pulses are stressed by presenting the bass notes, while the upbeats present the block chords of the harmony, as depicted in figures 3.5 and 3.6. Although this pattern resembles that of a slow polka or other duple ballroom dance, it is also often

[174] Marta E. Savigliano, "Whiny Ruffians and Rebellious Broads: Tango as a Spectacle of Eroticized Social Tension," in *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 1 (1995): 83–104.
[175] Some musicals that incorporate tango numbers into their narratives are: *Happy End* (1929), *Peter Pan* (1954)*, Chicago* (1975)*, Rent* (1994).
[176] Savigliano, "Whiny Ruffians…": 84.

associated with what could be deemed as “Cabaret” style. This style is notably characterized by its rhythmic and “vampish” nature, a trait that owes itself in part to the ubiquitous use of this accompaniment figure.



Figure 3.5: *The Little Mermaid*, “Poor Unfortunate Souls,” introduction: Cabaret style accompaniment.



Figure 3.6: *Aladdin*, “Prince Ali “Reprise,” Verse 1: Cabaret style accompaniment.

The cabaret style can be understood as *exoticized* under Locke’s definition of *exoticism*, as cabaret evokes cultural practices that, while not necessarily geographically foreign, challenge conventional and normative “attitudes, customs, and morals.” Cabaret, as an adult form of entertainment playing with gender and sexuality through a comical and *indecent* lens, inherently represents a marginal practice. Associated with burlesque, a type of show that celebrates provocative gendered performances and puts an emphasis on feminine sexuality, both cabaret and burlesque have connections to musical elements linked with jazz. According to music film scholar Kathryn Kalinak, classical Hollywood films consistently score non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality with elements of jazz, blues and ragtime, because they carry

conventional implications of "indecency and promiscuity,"[177] and thus are treated as exotic.[178] Therefore, the cabaret-style accompaniment in villain songs could be seen as drawn from these practices as a means to invest them with a jarring sense of unfamiliarity.[179]

In this sense, the employment of the "jumpy" accompaniment figure in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" is crucial in reinforcing the threat posed by Ursula's drag show, as noted by Minelli: "Ursula's *burlesque* musical flavor speaks to the character's dangerous sexuality (and her own view of her physical being)."[180] In "Prince Ali (Reprise), this accompaniment is inherited from the original rendition of the song, during a carnivalesque street parade, where the pulsing pattern maintains Prince Ali's entourage marching forward. Jafar's appropriation of the song changes its original tone and invests it, similar to Ursula's number, with a disturbing superposition of his queered campiness, an embodied enjoyment and a vicious cruelty.

Tight and Loose: Texture

Genre-based rhythmic patterns serve a dual purpose in portraying the villains both as exotic—by suggesting specific musical contexts—and as framed, with the patterns acting like musical structures of containment. An examination of the accompaniment patterns in the villain songs also reveals a textural characteristic reinforcing the perception of these numbers as jarring

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[177] Kalinak, *Settling the score*: 120.

[178] Remarkably about this is the consideration that performers in cabarets and burlesque shows are often referred to as "exotic dancers."

[179] The association between villainy and jazz in these films might be further strengthened through an analysis of the tonal space of the villain songs, an ongoing endeavor in my research, but that falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. I can anticipate that the villain songs, unlike the love ballads, feature the use of blue notes both in the melody and in the harmonization. This feature not only generates a more chromatic harmonic landscape in the songs, but imbues them with an exoticized flavor that draws from stereotypes of African-American music and performances linked to promiscuous nightlife.

[180] Minelli, "The Whole Other World…": 67.

and unstable. The "jumpy" alternation between bass and chordal accompaniment from these patterns creates an over-articulated and *porous* texture—supported by the percussive backbone of the songs and, as it will be explored in the following chapter, the vocal performance. This is sharply contrasting with the textural continuity of the protagonists' love ballads, featuring a consistent piano strumming or delicate arpeggiation of the harmony, along with extensive filling orchestral arrangements, allowing the perception of the pieces as flowing and uninterrupted. These features, I argue, mimic the portrayal of the characters as normative and deviant in relation to their expression of gender and sexuality.

I have explained that the protagonists in these films embody ideals of masculinity and femininity, while the villains challenge them. Normative ideals surrounding gender and sexuality often paradoxically rely on the procreativity of heterosexual reproduction while valuing overt restraint to sexual pleasure as a sign of ideal gendered behaviors.[181] This paradox is reflected in the Madonna-Whore narrative dichotomy, where the [virgin] Madonna is seen as virtuous, and the over-sexualized Whore is deemed a threatening feminine force. In this duality, the *impenetrability* of the virgin is thus praised as ideal, while the *penetrability* of the whore is punished.[182] These notions extend to the portrayal and judgment of hegemonic masculinity, wherein the ideal man is also *impenetrable*, a quality that links ideal masculinity with

[181] This paradox is amplified in the common representation of Madonna's motherhood as asexual, and the sexualized whore as unmotherly.

[182] Sarah Lynne Bowman, drawing from Neumann's *The Great Mother*, asserts that the "virgin" represents the "spiritual transcendence beyond the realm of the physical." She further states that she "has the ability to inspire the transformation of a normal mortal to higher states of light and awareness [which] contrasts sharply with the Enchantress' lures of sexual ecstasy and intoxication." See: Bowman, "The Dichotomy…": 84. For further discussions on these types of dualities in regards to cultural evaluation of femininity, see: Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*. (University of Illinois Press, 2000).

heteronormativity; then, the *penetrable* man, linked to the "passive homosexuality [as] a form of feminine sexuality,"[183] is condemned as non-normative and non-virtuous.

In light of this interpretation, it is noteworthy that the protagonists' love ballads exhibit rich and continuous textures that, just as the hero(ine)s, are perceived as impenetrable. On the other hand, the queer-coded villains—with Ursula as a Whore-Femme Fatale, Gaston as a homosexual-in-denial, and Jafar and Scar as effeminized villains—are musically represented with jumpy, highly articulated, and texturally penetrable music.

A detailed musical analysis reveals additional elements supporting the perception of these songs in terms of their porosity, such as harmony and melodic chromatic or unconventional constructions.[184] Susan McClary's analysis of madwomen scenes unveils a similar trait, with the female deviant sexual excess being semiotically constructed through chromaticism, exoticism, and discontinuity. Without delving into such analysis, as it falls outside of the scope of the current research, I wish to draw attention to a terminology used in music theory to describe musical elements in relation to their stability level, which can be easily applied to the Disney songs in portraying the *penetrability* of the characters they represent.[185]

In his influential book *Classical Form*, music theorist William Caplin introduces an analytical methodology for studying the formal elements of Classical music. Caplin connects the

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[183] Mario Mieli, quoted in Jonathan Kemp, *The Penetrated Male*. (punctum books, 2013): 4-5.

[184]Harmonically, the love ballads maintain continuity through bass lines that smoothly progress stepwise and chord successions guided by goal-driven progressions. In contrast, the villain songs exhibit harmonic discontinuity with reiterative alternations between a limited number of chords, or incorporation of "out-of-context" sonorities, added to bass lines characterized by leaps. In terms of melody, the vocal performance of the villain song is marked by frequent leaps, resulting in less continuous lines compared to the more elastic melodies found in the love ballads.

[185] A very interesting discussion on the metaphor of *penetrability* in music and music theory is found in: Fred Everett Maus, "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory," in *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 2 (1993): 264–93. https://doi.org/10.2307/833390.

formal aspects of Classical instrumental music with the specific function a section serves at different moments in the composition. This perspective, grounded in principles of stability and instability, remains relevant to music influenced by the principles of the Common Practice, extending to examples of film and popular music. With this in mind, Caplin identifies specific musical procedures linked to *stable* or *unstable* formal functions.[186] From the elements outlined by Caplin, those related to pitch organization (tonality, harmony, cadences) result relevant to our understanding of the normativity or disruptiveness of the Disney songs: while the elements linked by Caplin to stability are more pervasive in the hero(ine)s' ballads, the unstable elements characterize the villain songs.[187] Remarkable for my present interpretation, is that Caplin deems the more stable musical configurations as "tight-knit." Such a term easily translates into my analysis of the impenetrability of the love ballads, which are perceived, then, not only impenetrable due to their texture but also to their *tightly*-knit harmonic and thematic construction. Conversely, Caplin characterizes the more unstable musical procedures as "loose," an image that also aligns with the porosity described in the villain songs.

The salient difference between the musical representations of the hero(ine)s and villains in relation to the texture is fundamentally connected to the styles and genres exhibited by their songs. By enveloping the villains in exoticized music, these films reinforce the contrast between these deviant characters and the protagonists. While the hero(ine)s' sound adheres to the conventional codes of [regarded as] timeless American musical contexts—Broadway, pop

[186] William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (Oxford University Press, 1998). See also the posterior workbook, including a summarized table of the information described in this chapter. William E. Caplin, Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom (Oxford University Press, 2013).
[187] Namely, Caplin links stability with diatonicism, harmonic functionality, and focus on the tonic harmonic space; instability, in turn, is marked by chromaticism, modulations, and sequential harmony.

ballads, and Hollywood scoring—shaping their *Disney sound*, the villains perform over musical structures dictated by historically, geographically, or culturally marked genres and styles. The extensive emphasis on the rhythmic aspect, especially through rigid repetitive patterns, ensures the framing of the villains, while portraying these characters as less sophisticated than their counterparts, whose music is more rhythmically flexible. Additionally, the use of accompaniment patterns associated with dancing music or sexually-tinged spectacles serves to accentuate the gender-inadequacy or queer-coding of the villains, highlighting the feminine side of the mind/body dichotomy. It can be argued that the villains in these films are musically marked by rhythm, where the jagged texture resulting from patterns and interruptions becomes a signifier of the villains' untrustworthy and problematic morality.

Chapter 4
Voiced Normality and Deviance

In Disney movies, the ability to sing has been consistently portrayed as a symbol of virtue. Since the early animated musicals, this attribute served as a fundamental differentiator between the protagonists and the villains, as the latter almost never engaged in musical performances, as mentioned in the previous chapter.[188] The conception of the Renaissance Disney films as "integrated musicals" motivated the musical involvement of the villainous characters. In Chapter 2, I have argued that providing exaggerated musical performances to the villains is a crucial strategy in contrasting them with the protagonists. Despite this shift, the singing voice has continued to be a marker of morality in the Disney Renaissance era, yet not in its presence or absence—i.e. who sings and who does not/cannot?—but in their naturality and virtuosity: villains deliver overt performances characterized by eccentric and scornful voices, suggesting a great performative effort, while the hero(ine)s easily and beautifully burst into song.

In this chapter, I provide an examination of the general characteristics exhibited by the voices featured in the love ballads and the villain songs, and I argue that these attributes further reinforce the perception of the characters' naturalness or artificiality. First, I address the singing style of the characters as well as their ranges. Then, I assess the vocal lines of the songs in terms of pitch alignment and deflection; I prove that love ballads adopt a pitch-oriented, perceived as virtuous, approach, while villain songs employ non-pitched, more gestural modernist vocal techniques. This exploration underscores the role of the musical voice in shaping the audience's

[188] This narrative choice elucidates why the antagonists in the musical films of the Classical Era—such as The Evil Queen, Lady Tremaine, and Maleficent—do not partake in singing. This deliberate representation is explicit in the musical number "Sing, Sweet Nightingale" in Cinderella (1950). Here Drizella, one of the evil stepsisters, attempts—and fails—to sing the song, followed in contrast by Ella's beautiful rendition of the melody. For an in-depth exploration of the connection between the singing voice and the representation of heroines and villainesses, refer to: Fleeger, "The Disney Princess."

nuanced understanding of characters and their moral alignment in relation to cultural codes linked to musical virtuosity and, more importantly, naturality.

Vocal Style and Register

The historical association of singing with femininity has prompted extensive exploration of the nature and use of the voice in Disney films as a defining aspect of ideal femininity, particularly but not exclusively in the depiction of princesses. Scholars Liske Potgieter and Zelda Potgieter, highlight the Renaissance-era princesses' adoption of powerful Broadway-style voices, with which they autonomously express their own and inner desires.[189] These characteristics sharply contrast with the early Disney princesses—Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora—who were depicted as damsels in distress with fragile operatic soubrette voices. Jennifer Fleeger notes that the culturally valued operatic sound was crucial in portraying these early princesses as *ideal,* and albeit ironically, natural.[190]

Although naturality and ideal femininity remains a benchmark of the Renaissance heroine, these attributes were linked with notions of autonomy and agency, markedly influenced by the third-wave feminism, for which the outdated operatic singing style was abandoned. Instead, a more familiar musical theater approach aligns the female leads with a "celebrated

[189] Potgieter and Potgieter, "Deconstructing Disney's Divas": 63.

[190] Jennifer Fleeger argues that in the early animated musical films, starting with *Snow White* in 1937, the operatic style justifies the artificiality that animation evoked in its early days. She asserts that: "opera makes animation seem more natural, explaining the excesses of color and characterization through recourse to a preexisting genre," a genre that could suggest that "animation can be art." Given Snow White's portrayal, as well as her successors', as a character in perfect accord with the natural world and animals, an implicit connection is forged between her operatic inclinations and the natural environment. Thus, Fleeger acknowledges the emergence of a complex dichotomy, as opera comes to embody both the *natural* and the *artistic* realms. See: Fleeger, "The Disney Princess": 109.

vocal dexterity" in the expression of their ambitions.[191] This transformation is mirrored in the depiction of princes and heroes, with Renaissance heroes adopting a less operatic and dramatic vocal style than their predecessors. Building upon the insights from the previous chapter, where Broadway conventions were identified as pivotal in shaping the Disney sound of the love ballads', it becomes evident that the protagonists' singing style in these films reinforces the perception of these ballads as narrative spaces of normality and familiarity.

The change in the protagonists' singing style influence their perceived naturalness, considering the modes of production of the voice and, thus, its tone. Adopting a belting style that seamlessly blends chest and head registers, these characters attain a broader range of expression due to the possibility to *naturally* transition from song to speech, and never shifting abruptly from one to another.[192] In this regard, the operatic singing of the early characters is perceived as more rigid and less natural, given the stark contrast between its sung tone and the spoken "normal" voice.[193] This distinction arises from the noticeable differences in the sound production between the trained, and highly *performative* head voice used in stylized singing, and the spoken chest voice. The hero(ine)s, therefore, wield voices over which they have full control of

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[191] Ibid., 123.

[192] Kevin Michael Jones, "Analyzing the Singing of Five Disney Princesses," *Musical Theatre Resources*, November 24, 2015. https://musicaltheatreresources.com/2015/11/24/analyzing-the-singing-of-five-disney-princesses/

[193] An intriguing point of discussion might emerge from this distinction, employing the duality of mind and body, where the former aligns with the masculine and the latter with the feminine. The prevalent belting style of singing in animated musical films from this era might be interpreted as a metaphorical influence, with the *bodily*—feminine—chest voice subtly impacting the more polished, high-art operatic head voice, which belongs to the masculinized realm of art music. This interpretation echoes critiques of popular music as a feminized practice, as noted by Adorno, consequently positioning it as undervalued in comparison to the ostensibly "valuable" art music, symbolizing the Western civilized and canonically masculine world. See: Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*: *A Reader* (1998): 197-209.

expression, integrating their chest voice—sometimes called *normal* or *natural voice*[!][194]—with their head voice, allowing them to easily move from song to speech, and attenuating the artificial performativity associated with operatic singing, while occasionally using their head voice for expressive purposes.

Although it could be asserted that the villains from the Renaissance era also incorporate a Broadway vocal style, given its theatrical qualities, its characterization is much more challenging. Notably, their singing is more talkative, consistently relying on their chest voice, but in an ambiguous performative space. This approach, particularly observed in Ursula, Jafar, and Scar, renders them less lyrical and less vocally virtuous than the protagonists, and highlights the in-betweenness of their queer-coding. An exception arises in *Beauty and the Beast*, where Gaston's grandiose operatic voice matches his role as a figure whose evil and deviant traits are connected to outmoded ideals of masculinity, femininity, social relationships, problem-solving, and others. His excessive embodiment of masculinity extends to an exaggerated exhibition of vocal qualities, contributing to his incongruous artificiality.

The villains' singing style, closely associated with their chest voices, places them in a lower register compared to the hero(ine)s', with occasional shifts to a relatively higher register during choruses or punchlines where the titles of their songs are intoned. This perceptual difference is not only related to their singing style, but also to their low tessituras: Gaston, Scar and, to a certain degree, Jafar, exhibit a baritone vocal type, while Ursula may be categorized as an alto. In contrast, the leads in these films showcase high voice types: Disney's singing hero/princes consistently adopt tenor roles, a tradition inherited from the early Disney princes

[194] See, for example, the comprehensive explanation of general terminology associated with voice in the following link: https://www.singwise.com/articles/understanding-vocal-range-vocal-registers-and-voice-type-a-glossary-of-vocal-terms

and, furthermore, from romantic opera.[195] Similarly, the heroines are portrayed as Broadway sopranos, establishing them as characters with the highest tessitura in their respective films.[196]

Considering the vocal quality and tessituras of hero(ine)s and villains provides insights into how their voices convey notions of normality and deviance. The relatively low and restricted singing of the villains seems to represent vocal inability or reluctance to *properly* sing. When the villains push the limits of their vocality during their performances, transitioning to speech or attempting to reach extreme registers, their singing takes on a disruptive artificiality brought by unconventional vocal techniques that often disregard pitch. In contrast, the virtuous singing of hero(ine)s, expressed through an on-pitch belting style that enables them to sing in a relatively high register as well as easily move from song to speech, allows for a wider expressive spectrum that their voices can explore while still presenting their performances as flowing and *natural*. In the next section, I delve into the perceived naturalness and sincerity conveyed by vocal pitch.

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[195]Maria Behrendt's analysis of masculinity and the voice in Disney animated films, which I reference in Chapter 2, relies on a framework that connects vocal types (*Stimmfach*) with narrative archetypes. Specifically about Aladdin, she asserts that in "A Whole New World," he, as a lyrical tenor, attempts to play a "cavalier baritone—a *Stimmfach* that is used to represent gentleman irresistible to women." (Behrendt, "That's How You Know…": 17). More generally, musicologist Freya Jarman-Ivens problematizes the ideological heritage generated by the style of *bel canto* ("beautiful singing") in linking vocal naturality, perfection, femininity and the light coloratura voice of the soprano heroines. See: Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*: 104-107.

[196]Scholars Daniel Shanahan and David Huron conducted a noteworthy study associating higher tessituras with increased sociability in operas, particularly evident in examples from the 19th century. The sociability element yielded consistent findings. Their research concludes that roles with higher tessituras, whether male or female, exhibit greater sociability compared to their lower tessitura counterparts, an observation mirroring patterns in Disney films. A direct comparison between the voices of Aladdin and Simba with those of Jafar and Scar, or Ariel's singing with Ursula's, aligns with this trend. Moreover, Shanahan and Huron further posit that female characters, due to their higher tessitura, are perceived as more sociable than their male counterparts, stating "Like growling bears, the most threatening sounds tend to be low in pitch." These conclusions might explain the overwhelming majority of male villains in Renaissance Disney animated musicals. (See: Daniel Shanahan and David Huron, "Heroes and Villains: The Relationship Between Pitch Tessitura and Sociability of Operatic Characters," in *Empirical Musicology Review* 9, no. 2 (2014), 141-153: 148.)

Pitch Accuracy, and the Perception of Naturalness and Sincerity

An analysis of the love ballads in these films reveals pitch-oriented vocal performances, expressively presenting uninterrupted melodic lines. The hero(ine)s rarely abandon the singing voice within their songs, and when they do, it enhances the sincerity of their desires, the naturalness of their actions, and integrates their musical numbers into the narrative. A notable example is found in *The Little Mermaid* during "Part of Your World," where Ariel employs her speaking voice for words like "legs" and "feet," and also to utter questions that reinforce her characterization as genuinely curious. This supports the lyrical trajectory identified in Chapter 1, outlining a progressive move from uncertainty to certainty.[197] According to voice pedagogue Kevin Michael Jones, Ariel's smooth transition between her speaking and singing voice invests her with a "*natural* sort of *beauty*."[198] These qualities, then, reinforce the hegemonic ideals embodied by Ariel: beauty, naturality, and a sincere desire of personal growth. In the reprise of "A Whole New World", Ariel's questioning disappears, and she solely uses her singing voice. As her desire to become human intertwines with a romantic interest, her singing becomes assured, transforming her song into a normative love ballad that leverages her virtuous voice—embodied as the epitome of ideal femininity—as seemingly essential for success in the realm of romantic relationships.

The other love ballads from the analyzed films exhibit similar features. Even with the fragile, aging voice of Mrs. Potts in *Beauty and the Beast*, and the vocal challenges Aladdin faces in embodying hegemonic vocal masculinity (as discussed in Chapter 2), both "Beauty and

[197] Fleeger interprets that Ariel's utterance of the words "legs" and "feet" during her *I want* song emphasizes her narrative dilemma, as she will lose the ability to talk/sing in order to obtain these extremities. Fleeger, "The Disney Princess": 123.
[198] Jones, "Analyzing the Singing…": num. 2.

the Beast" and "A Whole New World" maintain a prominent focus on intonation and pitch accuracy. In the duets "Something There" (*Beauty and the Beast*) and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" (*The Lion King*), Belle and Simba respectively incorporate occasional speaking, reminiscent of Ariel's performance, adding authenticity to their singing. Belle's use of uttered syllables, resembling pitched chuckles, and Simba's self-commentary, saying "impossible," not only enhance the sincerity of their singing but also provide insights into their portrayal and development as virtuous characters.[199]

Notably, Jasmine and Nala, as female leads in the only two male-driven films analyzed, exclusively perform during the love ballads. In these ballads, akin to Ariel's case in "Part of Your World (Reprise)" they *appropriately* sing with virtuosity and without spoken expressions, reinforcing the intricate dynamics between ideal femininity, normative singing, and the portrayal of romantic bonds.

The singing quality exhibited by the hero(ine)s in these films, then, add to the gender adequacy, the sincerity, the naturalness and, more generally, to the beauty embodied by these characters. In Disney films, where beauty holds a significant value, the singing styles of the villains pose a threat to the normative beauty represented by the hero(ine)s. In their disregarding

[199] "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" is bookended by verses sung by Timon and, to a smaller extent, Pumba, while the middle section is performed non-diegetically by Simba and Nala, and presented in montage. When the sidekicks sing, however, they use vocal techniques that reinforce the comedic nature of their performance. As they realize that Simba may leave with Nala, Timon theatrically exclaims the word "clue" in "*I can see what's happening, and they don't have a* clue*!*". He also takes a French accent when saying "*The sweet caress of twilight / There's magic everywhere*" and with a torn voice dramatically sings "*Disaster's in the air*". At the end of the song, Pumba's voice is cracked and heavily off-pitch, as he is shown very close to bursting into tears. Timon and Pumba proceed to end the song in a perfectly tuned and synchronized interval, before comically starting to bawl. This section is perceived as funny in part because their concerns are real (for them), but are expressed in an overtly manner, an exaggeration conveyed by the vocal techniques included in their singing. In any case, they present themselves as good singers, as shown in the final notes, but that deliberately deviate from pitch as ways to demonstrate their most honest feelings.

of normative aesthetics, the villains embody a disruptiveness that is exteriorized with expressions of camp sensibilities, as explained before. Mallan and McGillis note that in embodying the opposite to the hallmark virtuous singing of the hero(ine)s, the villains emphasize campy qualities such as *audacity* and *energy*.[200]

The *audacity* and *energy* recognized by Mallan and McGillis is evident in aspects that we have identified in the performances that the villains present—or we could say, are *allowed* to present: grandiose musical numbers in which they excel as captivating performers, moving with confidence on self-constructed "stages," synchronizing their movements with the rhythms of ostinato-driven songs. Vocally, these qualities stem from a deliberate emphasis on rhythmic elements, often at the expense of pitch accuracy in the vocal performance. The rhythm-over-pitch singing that characterizes the energetic performances of the villains, leads to the incorporation of various unconventional, non-normative, vocal techniques. These vocal strategies, notably missing from the hero(ine)s performances, serve to disrupt the continuity of their lines, further contributing to the penetrability of their songs' texture, explained in the previous chapter. Such discontinuity accentuates the gestural qualities of the melodies that the villains sing, and underscoring the theatricality and artificiality of their performances.

The artificiality of the villains' musical vocality is most clearly defined by the mixture of singing and reciting. This type of vocal enunciation recalls the techniques known as *Sprechgesang* and *Sprechstimme*,[201] commonly associated with the modernist composers Arnold

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[200] Mallan and McGillis, "Between a Frock…": 3.

[201] Although *Sprechgesang* and *Sprechstimme* are often used interchangeably, a distinction can be drawn: *Sprechgesang* places greater emphasis on pitch, leaning towards a more "song-like" quality, while *Sprechstimme* involve relative and approximate pitches, leaning towards a "speech-like" performance. In the book *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century*, the notation for each differs. Both are represented on a 5-line staff (unlike, for example, the notation or spoken voice), but the *Sprechgesang* is marked with an X on the stem of the note, whereas in *Sprechstimme*, x-shaped note-heads are employed. I use these

Schoenberg and Alban Berg.[202] Notably, the terminology used to describe the effect of these techniques aligns with descriptions associated with villainous characters. Schoenberg, for instance, stated that the immediate abandoning of intoned notes in *Sprechgesang* created a sound that exists in the realm between "pure" singing and spoken voice.[203] This sound reinforces the perception of the villains' inability to sing *virtuously* or speak *naturally*. Furthermore, Schoenberg's use of this effect aimed to emulate speech, yet "not for the sake of simplicity or any naturalistic effect, but in order to *heighten the artificiality*, the *eeriness* of the music"; the liminal space of neither-speech-nor-song underscores the "studied *insincerity*, [...] *fun depravity*, [...] *blasphemy* against expression" (emphasis added).[204] These qualities precisely capture the tone and mood of the villains' performances. Moreover, these vocal techniques hold significant theatrical value. As *Sprechgesang* involves the abandonment of intoned notes through portamentos, creating a general gliding sound, composer Harry Partch identified this gliding effect as an effectively exaggerated way to enhance the drama or melodrama in musical pieces.[205] Indeed, the villains' singing heighten the incongruous theatricality of their musical numbers, as it will be exemplified hereunder.

Returning to Susan Sontag's characterization of camp as culture presented in quotation marks, it can be argued that the villains "sing," rather than sing. Hence, the in-between type of recitation offered by the *Sprechstimme* or the half-singing of *Sprechgesang* underscores the

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notations in my own transcriptions of the villains' melodic lines. See: Kurt Stone, *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook* (W. W. Norton and Company, 1980): 297-298

[202] Paul Griffiths, "Sprechgesang," in *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 27 Nov. 2023. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000026465.

[203] Arnold Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire* (Courier Corporation, 1994).

[204] Harry Partch, "From Emperor Chun to the Vacant Lot," in *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. Daniel Albright (2004), 30-38: 38.

[205] Harry Partch, *Genesis of Music*, 2nd. ed. (Da Capo Press, 1974): 40.

villains as camp, dramatic and disruptive.[206] Moreover, their artificially theatrical singing buttresses melodic elaborations that, given its overall low register, circular stepwise movements and uniform rhythmicity, transgressively disregard the normative conventions of virtuous lyricism. Both the melodic and the vocal aspects, thus, impart these songs with an inherently talkative and unlyrical quality, opposed to the protagonists' natural and flawless singing.

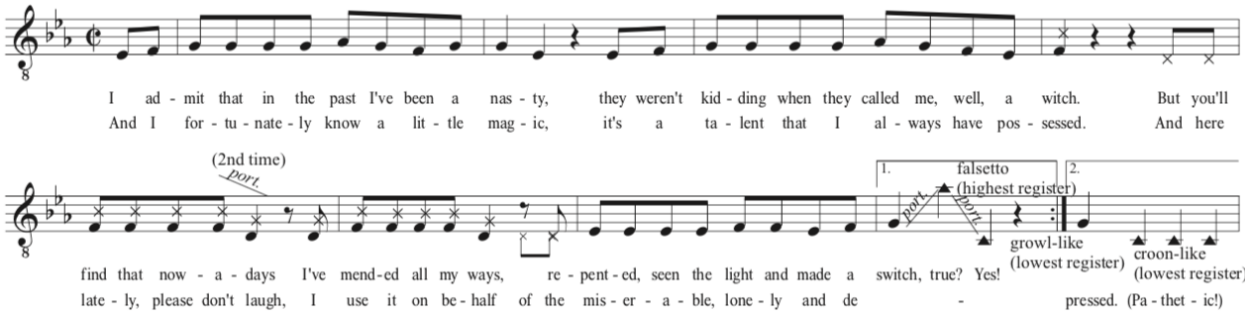


Figure 4.1: *The Little Mermaid*, "Poor Unfortunate Souls," verses 1 and 2: Ursula's vocal delivery

In general, the regular talkative singing of the villain songs is found in instances where the characters present facts, even if it is done with cunningly intentions. So, in "Poor Unfortunate Souls," Ursula resorts to a low stepwise patter to admit her "*nasty*" past, and to acknowledge her use of magic by request of others (figure 4.1). Similarly, Jafar *lyrically* sings the beginning of the two phrases comprising "Prince Ali (Reprise), in which he states that the prince is, in fact, Aladdin.[207] In "Be Prepared," Scar's singing is also characterized by low and narrow stepwise

[206] Some studies suggest that the *Sprechstimme* technique devised by Arnold Schoenberg for his *Pierrot Lunaire* can be traced back to the performance styles of the Austrian and German cabarets, an additional aspect that connects this technique with the musical content of the villain songs analyzed. See, for example: Jennifer E. Goltz, "The Roots of 'Pierrot Lunaire' in Cabaret" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2005). https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/roots-pierrot-lunaire-cabaret/docview/305462974/se-2.

[207] Given that this song is originally performed by Genie in a celebratory context, the opening vocal motif featuring the words "*Prince Ali*," subsequently reprised with "So, Ali," has a grandiose character. This is characterized by a wide melodic range, notably marked by the octave leap that initiates the phrases. However, as the song progresses, the register is reduced, and a more talkative tone is adopted.

melodies that in his case are instrumental in investing his voice with an assertive and commanding tone, a tone that is likewise encountered in "The Mob Song," with Gaston informing the villagers with the presence of a Beast in the premises of town (see figure 4.6).[208]

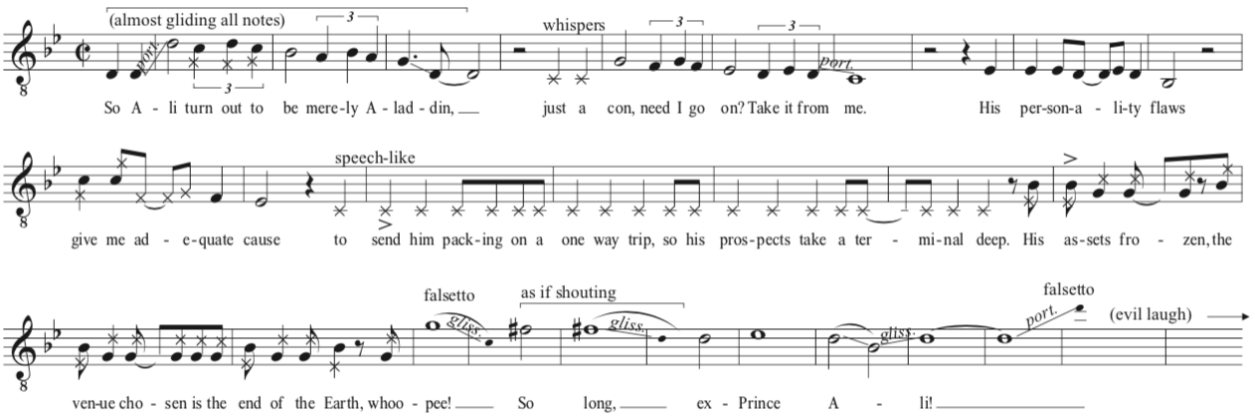


Figure 4.2: *Aladdin*, "Prince Ali (Reprise)," verse 2: Jafar's vocal delivery.

The statement of facts through *normal* singing, even if low and talkative, is utilized by the villains to present themselves as trustworthy characters through the uttering of facts. The shift into falseness-infused lyrics is vocally materialized through recitative techniques that indeed intensify the artificiality and the eeriness of the music. As shown in figures 4.1 and 4.2, these exaggerated performative styles are evident in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" and "Prince Ali (Reprise)," in sections where the lyrics are particularly deceitful. In the final verse of Jafar's song, his motivations shift from unmasking Prince Ali's real identity to actually taking a punitive action against him. Outlining his plans to punish Aladdin, Jafar adopts a general artificial recitative style. About Aladdin's wrongdoings, Jafar pronounces the statement "*give me*

[208] The number "Gaston" exhibits melodies that can be perceived as more lyrical that those from the other villain songs, in part due to Gaston's vocal proficiency and also given the naivety of the musical number. They share, however, the redundant melodic and rhythmic elaborations, aspects that do provide a sense of speech-like nature to the lines, particularly during the verses. I interpret that, as the characters sing about Gaston's great qualities from a sincere belief, they do not resort to the vocal artifices found in other villain songs.

adequate cause…" in an ironic *Sprechgesang*, as if acknowledging that the punishment Aladdin is about to receive is not coherent with his fault. The verdict is then proclaimed in a speech-like musical voice: "*…to send him packing on a one way trip / so his prospects take a terminal dip*," with the location "*the ends of the Earth*" vocalized again with half-singing (figure 4.2).[209]

The gliding that characterizes the *Sprechgesang* has a destabilizing effect, threatening the overall sense of intonation and pitch.[210] When the villains incorporate vocal gliding artifices, such as portamentos and glissandos, not as a means to *artificialize* recitations but as structural elements of the melodic shape, its dramatic effect is even stronger than the one conveyed by the *Sprechgesang*. For instance, in the chorus of "Poor Unfortunate Souls," after a relatively lyrical opening phrase—with a higher-register recognizable melody, featuring rhythmic identity and a distinct shape design, to which the words that name the song are set[211]—Ursula incorporates pronounced portamentos in the words "*In pain / In need*," accentuating her dishonesty and sarcasm.[212] In the second phrase of the chorus, the analogous words "*So sad / So true*" intensify the deceitful nature of the section, as they are intoned consecutively in different registers, as if

[209] *Aladdin*, 01:13:28.
[210] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*: 41.
[211] The chorus' main melodic line in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" (and many others from other Disney films) align with Phillip Tagg's concept of *transscansions*, a type of linguistic vocal anaphone. Tagg defines *transscansions* as instrumental motives with a melodic and rhythmic profile reminiscent of spoken words. Tagg recognizes that they "typically serve to highlight and reinforce key words or phrases that are sung elsewhere in the same piece of music or that appear in its title." In the context of musical films, we may identify *transscansions* in motives within songs that later serve as musical signifiers of characters and concepts, akin to leitmotifs, in the instrumental score. Considering the villain songs' consistent reluctance to pitch accuracy and linearity in their vocal lines, maintaining clear melodic identity in key phrases or punchlines becomes crucial in providing the film with effective musical "labels," or *leitmotifs*, to be used in the rest of the score. (See: Philip Tagg, *Music's Meaning*: 489.)
[212] Minelli, "The Whole Other World": 36.

dramatizing the inflection of a mournful lamentation by exaggerating the *Sprechgesang* gliding effect within a large melodic contour (figure 4.3).[213]



Figure 4.3: *The Little Mermaid*, "Poor Unfortunate Souls," chorus (fragments): Ursula's deceitful lamentations.

Such juxtaposition of extreme and contrasting registers are employed throughout "Poor Unfortunate Souls," particularly for intoning exclamations that in Chapter 1 I have identified as crucial in depicting Ursula as theatrically *sassy*. Dramatic annotations like "*True? Yes!*"; "*Pathetic*"; "*Yes, indeed*"; "*Yes, I do*," are performed with vocal artifices, such as the falsetto and a low spoken voice, coupled with portamentos and glissandos. The vocal movement "from shrieks to baritones," matching the artificiality of the words and the vocal production, also contributes to the reading of "Poor Unfortunate Souls" as an "unmistakable sendup of the campy female impersonation number,"[214] in which the gliding vocalization serves to connect the contrasting "gendered" ranges embodied by Ursula (see figure 4.1).

The gliding effect as a device linked with artificial explorations of extreme registers and, in general, in portraying deviant behaviors, is striking at the end of "Prince Ali (Reprise)." After subduing Aladdin, Jafar places him within one of the palace's tower. The wizard then transforms it into an anachronistic rocket ship with a golf swing movement using his snake staff, as depicted in figure 2.4 (Chapter 2). During this scene, Jafar shouts with a *falsetto* the onomatopoeic word "*whoopee*,"[215] which sustained and glided down, aurally mimics the towers' parabolic trajectory.

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[213] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:40:50.
[214] Erb, "Another World or the World of an Other? The Space of Romance in Recent Versions of 'Beauty and the Beast'," in *Cinema Journal 34*, no. 4 (1995), 50-70: 62.
[215] *Aladdin*, 01:13:40.

This celebratory and excessive exclamation gives place to the final words "*So long, ex-Prince Ali*,"[216] which are sung using glissandos and portamentos, as exemplified in the figure 4.2. The last note of the song, preceded by a circular glissaded melisma D-B♭-D in the word "*Ali*," is held and then abandoned by an upward portamento, reaching a short but campy D5 (again, through a *falsetto*), triggering a deranged laugh.

The connection of these *slithering* effects with Jafar's villainy is narratively significant, as these glided gestures seem to musically replicate the movement of a snake, an animal not only linked to Jafar in the film—including his magic staff and his eventual transfiguration into a snake—but that is deemed as "sneaky and deceptive" in various cultures and popular media.[217] While the correspondence of sonic gliding effects with cultural codes regarding evilness and deception are narratively evident in Jafar's portrayal, these associations might also inform the perception of the other villains' deliberate vocal gliding as marks of their moral deviation.[218]

Scar's musical number "Be Prepared" likewise showcases extensive recitations, imbued with the theatricality and artificialness of Ursula's and Jafar's performances. Notably, however, is the versatility demonstrated by Scar through the song, adopting different expression modes and adding different layers of meaning to the words and his campy performance. As mentioned earlier, in "Be Prepared," Scar adeptly charms and recruits the hyenas for his royal coup. At first, Scar "playfully" gaslights the hyenas—an evil yet campy incongruence—as he attempts to

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[216] Ibid., 01:13:45.

[217] Jafar's mode of talking is generally described as a "precise *lisping* speech" (See: Mallan and McGillis, "Between a Frock: 12). McLeod also states that Jafar's use of the sibilant "s" consonant "during moments of dishonesty" throughout the film foreshadows his later transformation into a giant cobra (See: McLeod, "Unmasking the Quillain": 50).

[218] In her analysis of *The Lion King* as myth, Annalee Ward relates Scar's actions to the figure of the snake, noting that "Simba and Nala represent Adam and Eve, who were tempted by the snake, in this case, Scar" (See: Ward, *Mouse Morality*: 19).

convince them that his royal "leonine" matters are relevant and significant even for them. The discordance of this passive-aggressive attitude emerges because this section is sung with a hoarse and seductive voice, interpolating condescending whispers—"*Pay attention!*"[219]—emphatic scoldings—"*But we're talking kings and successions, / even you can't be caught unawares!*"[220]—and phony falsettos with glissandos—"*Be prepared for sensational news*."[221] As the song progresses, Scar's tone becomes more commanding and emphatically talkative, and at the climax of the song, he even threatens the hyenas if they fail to comply to his orders with an unrestrained aggressive shouting of the line "*You won't get a sniff without me*."[222] [223] Although the ending of the song exhibits a mixture of intonation and different types of recitation, the lines are tinged with an overall aggressiveness, vocally represented by modified recitation styles.

The progressive adoption of a more varied array of vocal techniques in "Be Prepared," which could be interpreted as an unmasking of Scar's evil nature, is likewise evident in "Prince Ali (Reprise)"—as shown in Jafar's enacting of Aladdin's punishment—but also in "Poor Unfortunate Souls." By the end of her musical number, Ursula's performance becomes more intrusive into luring Ariel to sign the deal, with lyrics that are more deceitful—"*it's she who holds her tongue who gets a man!*"[224]—and more threatening—"*If you want to cross the bridge, my sweet, / You've got to pay the toll / Take a gulp and take a breath / And go ahead and sign the*

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[219] *The Lion King*, 00:27:40.
[220] Ibid., 00:27:54.
[221] Ibid., 00:28:06.
[222] Ibid., 00: 29:33.
[223] Allegedly, Scar's voice actor, Jeremy Irons, injured his voice performing the phrase "*You won't get a sniff without me*," and Jim Cummings had to intervene and sing the rest of the song. This is in fact audible, as there is a subtle change of vocal tone in the last chorus of the song.
[224] *The Little Mermaid*, 00:43:43.

scroll!"[225] [226] Correspondingly, the falsetto, the portamentos/glissandos and the recitation, now more nuanced with whispers, shouting, and aggressive articulations, progressively dominates Ursula's singing.

The identified vocal techniques serve as crucial indicators of deception in the villain songs, offering more than a mere symbolization of the villains' vocal limitations. Examples from *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* reveals that these techniques are also integrated into the performances of vocally skilled characters, enhancing the deceitful nature of their numbers. A notable instance occurs when Ursula, transformed into Vanessa, sings with Ariel's voice, yet incorporating techniques that emphasize gesture over pitch, amplifying her portrayal as a dangerous femme fatale. In the brief reprise of "Poor Unfortunate Souls" (figure 4.4), the interplay between sung and unsung elements unfolds with the insertion of unpitched laughs between the phrases. Despite the intonation accuracy expected from Ariel's stolen voice, these lines retain Ursula's theatrical singing style. The execution involves a pronounced rubato, emphasizing a "speech-like" singing, while prominent portamentos and glissandos enhance its gestural nature. Notably, the last line, "*And the ocean will be mine*,"[227] displays pervasive gliding effects, modifying every pitch. The last note of the phrase, a B♭4—the second highest ["proper"]

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[225] Ibid., 00: 44:05.

[226] Between the bridge and the second verse of the song, there is an interpolated conversation between Ursula and Ariel, focusing on "the subject of payment" for the deal proposed by the witch. While acknowledged as a spoken part of the script rather than a section of the song, Ursula maintains a heightened lilt in her speech and emphasizes the rhythm of her words, preserving a half-singing performative attitude, as if using *Sprechstimme*. This is evident in her delivery of the line "*I'm not asking much, just a token really, a trifle! What I want from you is - your voice!*" Ursula recites this rhythmically, infusing it with a pronounced curve of intonation and utilizing a considerably high-pitched tone. This behavior is similarly replicated in the interpolated conversation between Scar and the hyenas in "Be Prepared," in which the hyenas provide comic relief with their childish and naive attitude, while Scar commands his violent words with rhythmic emphasis and theatrical vocalization.

[227] *The Little Mermaid*, 01:06:45.

pitch intoned in the entire film, surpassed only by the C5 that Ariel sings in "Part of Your World" and its reprise—is followed by a large upward portamento triggering a demented, wicked laugh, akin to Jafar's in "Prince Ali (Reprise)." This intentional deviation from Ariel's virtuous singing emphasizes that the connection between song and morality extends beyond voice quality. It also delves into how singing is employed for persuasion and communication, shaping idealized concepts of femininity. In this case, Ursula's vixen look as Vanessa dismisses these ideal notions.[228]

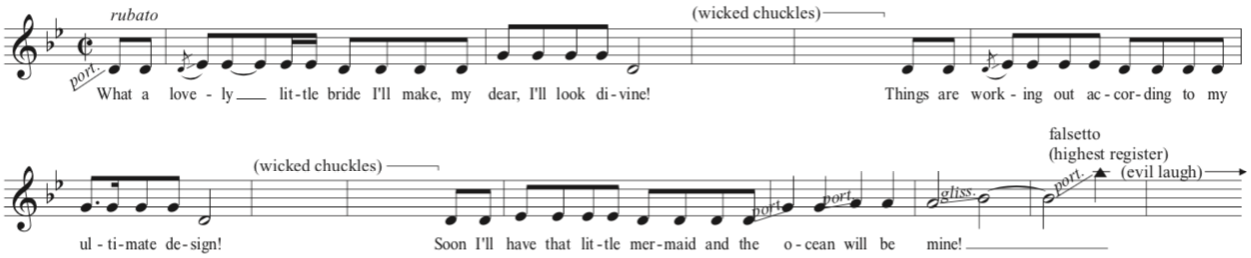


Figure 4.4: The Little Mermaid, "Poor Unfortunate Souls (Reprise)": Vanessa/Ursula's vocal delivery.

In this regard, I have previously asserted that *Beauty and the Beast*'s villain, Gaston, stands out due to his orotund baritone voice, showcasing vocal dexterity with a strong focus on pitch. The incongruous distinctiveness of his voice, more suited for an opera house, becomes even more apparent as he is the only villain performing in non-theatrical settings. Unlike other villains, who *artificially* modify their voices, Gaston confidently and truthfully sings, even if the content of his statements is ludicrous. This is evident in "Gaston," where he virtuously delivers demanding lines like "*As a specimen, yes, I'm intimidating*."[229] Notably, he only uses spoken exclamations with theatrical effects, responding "*That's right*" to praising about his manly physique, or uttering the onomatopoeic word "*Ptooey*" to demonstrate his expectorating abilities.

[228] do Rozario, "The Princess…"
[229] *Beauty and the Beast*, 00:28:12.

The deviation represented by these theatrical strategies come from an accentuation of the farcical and campy performance—as incongruous, theatrical and comic, resorting to Newton's terminology—that is this song, rather than a portrayal of evil deception.

Apart from Gaston's virtuous singing, "villainous" vocal elements are found in this song. As Gaston's sidekick, LeFou, is who initiates the performance, the vocal tone of the song is set by him. Possessing a rough voice, he carelessly ends the melodic gestures, failing to stay on pitch. Furthermore, LeFou uses portamentos that, rather than serving as symbols of irony, function as musical representations of sighs, a reading that is possible because they are used in words like "*admired*" and "*inspired*," as shown in figure 4.5.[230] Since these types of expressions in the form of sighs or lamentations are typically associated with femininity and reserved for moments of hegemonic romantic longing, LeFou's excited expression of adoration for Gaston through these vocal strategies tinges his performance with a sense of deviation, contributing to the comedic nature related to the homosocial campiness of the number.[231]

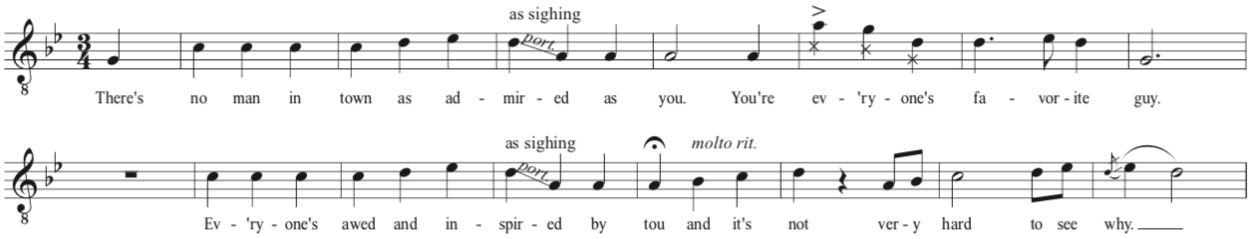


Figure 4.5: *Beauty and the Beast*, "Gaston," verse1 (fragment): LeFou's vocal delivery

While "Gaston" presents us Gaston as an overly confident and repellent character, the song does not showcase his intentions and motivations, which could explain the lack of a distinctively deceitful vocality as identified in the other villains' performances. In the short

[230] Ibid., 00:27:20.

[231] LeFou also performs excited half-pitched, high exclamations as when he sings the word "*ev'ryone*," with the use of glided *falsetto* as a sign of queer *jouissance*.

reprise of "Gaston," however, he conceives a plan to force Belle into marrying him; in it, Gaston makes his voice more cunning by momentarily deflecting from pitch preciseness and using portamentos when uttering the words "*I know*" and "*father*."[232] Before falling again into the pompous chorus, that this time celebrates Gaston's vile scheming ("*No one plots like Gaston*"), Gaston inaudibly whispers his plotting into LeFou's ear, who approves with sudden interjections. This interaction ends with both shouting "*Let's go*" in a histrionic—almost childish—way. Even though the plan is not openly disclosed, the performative uses of the voice encompassing its conception—pitch deviation, shushing, whispering, exclamations, shouting, etc.—reinforces the manipulative nature of his plan.



Figure 4.6: *Beauty and the Beast*, "The Mob Song" verse 1 (fragment): Gaston's vocal delivery

Furthermore, in the film's climax, Gaston shifts his focus from acquiring Belle as a prize or championing masculinity over other men to a more sinister motive—the desire to kill the Beast. This transformation is not motivated by genuine concern for the Beast's perceived danger but rather stems from Gaston's wounded male ego.[233] Through the musical number "The Mob Song," Gaston both terrifies and persuades the villagers using a low and dramatic talkative tone, as well as a powerful and commanding lyrical singing. Gradually moving from low and wordy

[232] *Beauty and the Beast*: 00:30:44.
[233] McGill, "'This Burning Desire…": 33.

verses to a higher and more demanding register, Gaston eventually incorporates shouts into his performance. He utilizes, then, both his skillful singing and an unpitched, aggressive voice—roaring "*Good and dead! / Kill the Beast!*"[234]—as part of his malevolent and insincere quest, similarly to Scar's violent outburst of unpitched vocality (figure 4.6).

Despite Gaston's distinct singing style, which sets him apart from Ursula, Jafar, and Scar, it is evident that all these villains amplify the artificiality of their vocal performances. The incorporation of recitation and half-singing, reminiscent of modernist *Sprechstimme* and *Sprechgesang*, accentuates their theatricality, focusing on the delivery of deceitful lyrics within the song in a staged manner. This fake "talking" is strategically used in sections with prominent deceitfulness, with added effects like laughs and shouts intensifying the impact. Furthermore, the villains' voices exaggerate their words with glissandos and portamentos, emphasizing gesture over pitch. These techniques represent the villains' insincerity, creating fake intonations of solemnity, excitement or sadness, with a melodramatic character. The villains' deliberate use of extreme gliding for dramatic effects, surpassing their regular vocal ranges to reach extreme registers, further contributes to their portrayal as deviant characters, with their plastic voices mirroring their deviant excessiveness and liminality.

The Voice and the Body

Thus far, I have proved that the singing styles of the characters in Disney films shape their narrative archetypes, underscoring the hero(ine)s' naturalness and sincerity, and infusing artificiality and deceitfulness into the villains. Placing these vocal expressions within the character's bodies allows us to further identify markers of normality and deviance, connecting

[234] *Beauty and the Beast*, 01:06:46.

the voice with aspects like appearance, gender, performance, and gesture. Drawing from Freya Jarman-Ivens' work on the gendering of the notion of vocal naturality, and also on her interpretation of Roland Barthes' "The Grain of the Voice," this section succinctly suggest that the singing voice evidences the embodiment—quite literally—of notions of normativity and non-normativity in these Disney films.

Thus far, I have established connections between vocal production types, like chest and head voice, and character portrayals. For instance, villains consistently utilizing the lower [chest] register for wordy verses may contribute to the tradition of portraying Disney villains as inherently unmusical. Additionally, their use of falsetto, reaching unpitched high notes, along with the unstable nature of gliding effects, infuse their singing with theatricality and artificiality. The protagonists, on the other hand, adopt a "light speech-driven 'mix'" belting style, skillfully balancing their chest and head voices, transitioning seamlessly between pitch-oriented singing and occasional speaking, imparting a natural and balanced aura to their singing.[235]

Some of these findings align with established associations between vocal register theory and the perception of vocal naturality, such as Wayne Koestenbaum's verticalization of the voice: Koestenbaum places the voice as coming from the chest, the throat, or the head, going from *natural* to *false* singing.[236] These associations could be further informed by gendered notions of the voice, linking the lower chest voice to non-performative speaking and the masculine, and higher head voices to feminine and "false" singing. Musicologist Freya Jarman-Ivens challenges this view, arguing that the gendering of vocal registers lies not in the perceived resonating body part but in the shifting from one mechanism to another; she asserts that the "site

[235] Jones, "Analyzing the Singing…"
[236] Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (Poseidon Press, 1993): 166.

of trouble is not the head voice or the chest voice, but the lack of blending."[237] Our exploration of vocal techniques as markers of normality and deviance aligns with Jarman-Ivens' assertions, providing a nuanced perspective on the significance of blending in characterizing the voice within notions of naturality and gender-adequacy.

The highly valued belting singing of the protagonists is characterized by its seamless blending, moving the vocal resonance through chest and head without an audible shift. In contrast, the villains intentionally showcase breaks in their voices, juxtaposing different registers and techniques. This is perceived not only as a lack of vocal proficiency but also as a calculated and exaggerated disruptive performance, constituting a *vocal multiplicity*— a failure to integrate and blend various techniques and registers, as characterized by Jarman-Ivens.[238]

Examining the protagonists' and villains' vocal qualities through a gendered lens, considering vocal blend and multiplicity, prompts the exploration of "technologies of vocal production" as a physical act.[239] The villains' *failure*—or disregard—to blend their voices unveils the internal technology of vocal production, revealing their physicalities and attaching their performances to the feminine realm of the body. As the protagonists' singing favors the blended sound possible with the belting style, their voices are presented as having overcome the physical struggles of the bodily production of sound. By exhibiting control over their voices—namely, over the *mechanical* aspect of register shift, and in their focus on pitch precision—the protagonists position themselves as "ideal," in their disconnection with the body.

This gendered interpretation of hero(ine)s' and villains' vocalities, in relation to the body, aligns with ideas previously explored in this dissertation. The manifestation of the body in the

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[237] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*: 105.
[238] Ibid., 99-107.
[239] Ibid.

villains' singing resonates with the gestural quality of their melodies, as well as the corporality evoked by the musical genres and styles of their songs, as discussed in the previous chapter, as these genres are historically linked to femininity due to their association with bodily movement, particularly dancing.

Moreover, the protagonists' ability to conceal the bodily challenges of register breaks, separating their virtuous voices from the imperfections of the body, mirrors the filmic disconnection of these dimensions in their love songs. The musical love scenes consistently rely on non-diegetic montages, as explored in Chapter 2, presenting moving bodies and voices separately to paradoxically convey both as natural and ideal. In contrast, villains reveal their bodies, not only in their voices through vocal multiplicity, but in their on-screen performances, where we see and listen to the singing body, a trait that I have recognized as gendered given the perceived femininity of vocal performance.

Less explicitly, villains also bring the body to the foreground through their words, a phenomenon exemplified in "Gaston." Moreover, in "Poor Unfortunate Souls," Ursula weaves the significance of the corporeal into the fabric of her manipulation; she delivers the iconic line "*You'll have your looks / Your pretty face*"[240] to Ariel when instructing her on the art of performing a "voiceless" femininity. Protagonists, despite embodying normative beauty, influence their *ideal* perception by rarely mentioning this aspect in their interactions, and never doing it in their songs; they conceal their bodies not only through virtuous singing and the filmic technology of montage but also textually.

Identifying the body in the villains' vocal performances aligns with Roland Barthes' concept of the *grain of the voice*. Barthes argues that evaluating the meanings of the sung voice

[240] *The Little Mermaid*: 00:43:12.

involves exploring dimensions beyond communication, representation, expression. These aspects, grouped by Barthes under the term *pheno-song*, are presented in opposition to the *geno-song*, where the grain of the voice can be identified. Outside of the aspects of language, genre, style, then, Barthes notes that "the 'grain' is the *body in the voice* as it sings" (emphasis added).[241] Jarman-Ivens asserts that the "grain," as a meaningful expression of the body in the voice, allows the identification of queer meanings in the liminal space between song, body and language.

In this regard, the Disney villains reinforce their queer-coding by revealing their bodies through their voices' *grain*, incorporating vocal mannerisms involving their lips, tongue, teeth, and throat, in the form of vocal techniques. These indicators of exaggerated theatricality and, above all, artificiality, influence the perception of their queer-coding, because "the fiction of the 'natural' voice [...] is one intimately connected to the fictions 'natural' sexuality and of 'natural' gender,"[242] fictions represented by the protagonists' purity and naturalness. The various layers of concealment enacted by the protagonists, then, sustain ideals femininity and masculinity. The perceptibility of the villains' grain of the voice allows the recognition of the villains in their queer liminal space, as the singing, the body, and the language intertwine during their musical numbers, reinforcing their deviance from normative expression, communication, and action.[243]

Jarman-Ivens reflection of the interplay between voice performance—even if operatic—and gender, resorting to ideas from musicologist Carolyn Abbate and from philosopher Judith

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[241] Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice (1977)," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (1990), 250-255: 254

[242] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*: 105.

[243] Behrendt's analysis of Aladdin's vocal rendition in "A Whole New World" (explored in Chapter 2), where he grapples with the lower register to convey maturity, can be viewed as an interpretation of his vocal grain. Notably, Aladdin's grain is associated with his pre-sexual *jouissance*, connecting it to a feminine or queer phase of male adolescence. (Maria Behrendt: "That's How You Know…")

Butler, proves pertinent in exploring the voices of Disney love ballads and villain songs, recognizing the significance of this dimension in the portrayal of the characters, and the perception of their alleged normality of deviance:

> The voice may well be a primary marker of gender,[244] but, like so many other gendered/gendering acts, it is naturalized. For the operatic voice, the training it must undergo is another layer of process by which the act is made possible. Consequently, to reveal the necessity for vocal training by failing to conform to the ideal of the trained voice is to reveal the voice as part of a "corporeal theatrics";[245] it draws attention to the vocal performativity of gender in the same way that the drag queen (Butler's famous example) draws attention to its physical performativity.[246]

Throughout this chapter, I have strived, indeed, to delineate the dimensions of naturalization presented in the *vocal performativity* of Disney's hero(ine)s and villains. The protagonists, epitomizing the "ideal of the trained voice," effortlessly sing with pitch accuracy and deploy their whole "natural" range without any visible struggle. In doing so, they reinforce their virtuous actions, desires, and the embodiment of normalized bodies, gendering and sexuality. In stark contrast, the villains' "failing to conform to the ideal [...] voice" leads to the presentation of heterogeneous and fragmented vocal expressions that just as their music, is articulated and *penetrable*. With such a voice, they participate in the "corporeal theatrics," which plays a crucial role in their characterization as gender bending and sexually diffuse figures, diametrically opposed to the normative and idealized portrayals of the hero(ine)s, thus serving as potent markers of their perceived malevolence and deviance.

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[244] Jarman-Ivens is here referring to Carolyn Abbate's assertion that, in opera, voice is a primary marker of gender. Abbate notes that, more than the gendered physical appearance, voice-type is a fundamental cultural aspect in the perception of gender in opera. See: Carolyn Abbate: "Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (1993), 225-258: 256.

[245] The term "corporeal theatrics" is by Judith Butler, and is previously quoted by Jarman-Ivens to explain that the voice supplies the body, and the actions by which this is achieved, which are reiterated, also constitute gender. See Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/ Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991), 13-31: 28.

[246] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*: 107.

Conclusion

In September of 2022, the streaming platform *Disney+* released *The Simpsons: Welcome to the Show*, a short special integrating characters from The Simpsons, Disney animated films, and even from the Marvel franchise.[247] The short special features Lisa and Bart—later revealed as Loki in disguise—approaching a Disney castle, where Lisa is expected to become a Disney princess. At their arrival, a large group of Disney villains receive Lisa, attempting to persuade her that embracing villainy is more desirable than the traditional princess narrative.[248] This satirical scene, succinct yet densely packed, resonates with several thematic threads explored in this thesis.

The first villain to make an appearance is the Evil Queen in her elderly witch form, coming surprisingly from the shadows after Lisa confuses her for Snow White. This initial shock is grounded on the most pervasive distinction differentiating the villains and the hero(ine)s: the expectation of facing Snow White's beauty is disrupted by the old hag's ugliness. Later, when Lisa remarks that she is not a villain, Ursula tells her: "*We villains get to sing diabolical tunes, which become drag show favorites*,"[249] highlighting the connection between Disney's portrayal of villainy and gender-bending, and the presentation of this relationship within sexually tinged spectacles. Subsequently, the villains sing about the advantages of their moral deviation with predominantly recitative and theatrically modified voices, engaging in a campy performance set to a lively and eerie song—clearly influenced by "Poor Unfortunate Souls." Lisa interrupts their

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[247] *Welcome to the Club*, directed by David Silverman (Disney+, 2022).
[248] The Disney villains featured in this short special are: the Evil Queen (in her old hag form) (*Snow White*), Kaa (*The Jungle Book*), Hook (*Peter Pan*), Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*), Cruella (*101 Dalmatians*), Hades (*Hercules*), Scar (*The Lion King*), Jafar (*Aladdin*), Maleficent (*Sleeping Beauty*) and the Queen of Hearts (*Alice in Wonderland*).
[249] *Welcome to the Club*, 00:01:22.

celebration of evilness, asking in a sort of virtuous lyrical way, "*But don't you villains always die?*" The Queen of Hearts responds with dismay, "*Depressing kid*," while Ursula, using a highly artificial *Sprechstimme*, remarks: "*It beats living happily-ever-after / With some boring guy*."[250] The Queen of Heart's response tacitly reveals villains' acknowledgment and disregard of the consequences in their relentless wrongdoings, while Ursula's line further marks the narrative function of villains, disrupting heteronormative principles that link happy endings with a romantic relationship between the princess and the prince. The performance concludes with a mocky, Busby Berkeley-ish exhibition featuring numerous "generic" princes depicted as characterless, unintelligent, and somewhat effeminate. Their show, however, only highlights how the evil disruptiveness displayed by the villains, marked by their marginal traits, is more easily recognized and named, whereas the prince(sse)s remain, even with the satirical tone of the special, unmarked.

In this dissertation, I have examined the diverse strategies employed in portraying hero(ine)s and villains as "good" and "bad," respectively, through their associated musical numbers, and have correlated these depictions with the perception of normality and deviance linked with these characters. I have focused on performative elements, encompassing language usage, its denotative and connotative dimensions, the perceived naturalness or artificiality of performances, and the genres or styles suggested by their songs.

Musical representations of "good" and "evil" in film hinge on entrenched conventions that, while culturally determined and subject to change across historical and contextual landscapes,[251] generate "a type of collective experience, [and] activating particular and

[250] Ibid., 00:02:00 - 00:02:15.
[251] Kalinak, *Film Music:* 14.

predictable responses" in film scores.[252] The stability and instability associated with the culturally perceived musical structures for "good" and "bad" play a pivotal role in the musical representation of hero(ine)s and villains in Disney animated films. While the tonal space was not explored in this dissertation, I identify that villain songs exhibit instability with minor modes, dissonant and chromatic harmony, and an overall discontinuous musical texture that is enriched by the eventual incorporation of disconcerting instruments, elements that inform a mental idea of a musical "evil." These characteristics are, in fact, evident in the song the villains perform in *The Simpsons*' special. Conversely, the virtuous protagonists' music embraces stability with major modes, pervasive consonance, and a normatively *beautiful* sense of continuity. However, animated musicals offer an avenue for a comprehensive characterization, delving beyond pitch organization and texture—both interesting subjects of study—to explore elements crucial in the study of popular music, and that strongly influence these films' musical numbers: lyrics, performance, and genre/style. Examining these aspects not only enhances our comprehension of the musical conventions linked to "good" and "evil" but also enables us to connect these attributes to the perception of concepts such as "normality" and "deviance" within these narrative structures.

My analysis of the love ballads' and the villain songs' lyrics reveal nuanced portrayals of the characters' perceived "normality" and "deviance." Textually, love ballads convey a progression from sincere doubt to profound, almost mystical clarity, framing love as a *natural* path for transcendence. This perception is supported by the incorporation of natural imagery. In

[252] Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*: 12.

contrast, villain songs exude unwavering certainty and a rigid sense of morality, perceived as deceitful and unnatural, as it is used to mask the artificiality of their claims and ambitions.[253]

While the significance of the natural and artificial dimensions in actions and dialogue has been acknowledged as critical indicators of the perceived morality of the characters in these films, the evaluation of these aspects often overlooks distinctions between musical and non-musical scenes. My analysis demonstrates that a focused examination of these elements within songs can offer more comprehensive insights into this matter. In musical numbers, these facets are heightened not only by the emotional resonance of the music but also by the inherent performativity that music encapsulates.

Scrutinizing the performances in musical numbers reveals deeper connections between the morality of the characters and their perceived naturalness. Most saliently, villains are consistently portrayed as extravagant performers, in excessive musical sequences, set in auditorium-like settings and enhanced by theatrical devices related to scenery, bodily performance, and various vocal techniques. These villainous presentations amplify the artificiality of the characters, momentarily interrupting the filmic world's "normality," and creating a feeling of disruption. The protagonists' love scenes, in contrast, lack such theatricality, unfolding in non-theatrical locations and seamlessly integrating into the narrative. The hero(ine)s' performances maintain an overall sense of naturalness, sincerity and normality, as

[253] In analyzing these songs' lyrics, I emphasize the sense of emotional trajectory: love ballads delineate a "progression" from doubt to acceptance, whereas villain songs maintain a continuous sense of rigid and unmovable certainty. A deeper analysis of the tonal space in these songs reveals a correspondence between the lyrical progression in love ballads and their reliance on harmonic functionality. This reliance is anchored in established Western principles of progression and resolution, adhering to canonical notions of harmonic stability and instability. The villain songs' deviant lyrical *immobility*, coupled with false and deceitful nuances (moving from seductive to violent wording, for instance), reflects in their overall harmonic staticism. This is characterized by pedal points and cyclic, redundant chord successions, superficially adorned with overt chromaticism.

they adhere to a normative singing style and are rarely depicted performing on-screen. The disruptiveness of the villains' numbers, as well as the seamless integration of the love scenes into the films depend not only on decisions regarding the montage, settings, and the performance, but also on the sonic landscape that these numbers offer.

The genres and styles expressed in the musical numbers likewise serve as markers of the hero(ine)s' normality and the villains' deviance. Love ballads draw from musical traditions ingrained in [mostly white] American culture, constituting what could be recognized as the *Disney style*. In contrast, villain songs incorporate exoticized traits from foreign musical contexts. The juxtaposition of the "American" sound in love ballads with the non-American sound in villain songs reinforces the deviance of villain from the values embodied by their virtuous counterparts, whose desires, then, are somehow tied to the highly valued norms of the American Dream.[254]

After a thorough analytical and interpretive process, I conclude that a pronounced relationship exists between the representation of "good" and "evil" in these films, and the notions of "normality" and "deviance." This correlation is underscored by the portrayal of the "natural," the "familiar," and the "conventional" as contributing to a larger notion of what is presented and perceived as "normal" and desirable in these films. The concept of "deviant" is consistently linked to depictions of the "artificial"—both as unnatural and as staged—the "exoticized," and the "unconventional."

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[254] Scholar Marc Miller, for example, notes that "in triumph, [the hero/heroine] embodies timeless American values (regardless of the movie's setting or the protagonist's nationality), such as hard work, sacrifice, love of parents/home, or that Disney staple, belief in wishes." See: Marc Miller, "Of Tunes and Toons: The Movie Musical in the 1990s," in *Film Genre 2000: New Critical Essays* (2000), 45-62: 47. Annabelle Ward goes a step further, asserting that Disney reshapes the tales on which their films are founded to align with Disney's particular interpretation of American values. See: Ward, *Mouse Morality*.

All of these categories, evident in various ways within the songs, musical numbers and performances, further extend to non-musical elements crucial in characterizing Disney's hero(ine)s and villains. The normality of the love ballads supports the protagonists' physical appearance, gender-adequate behaviors, and heteronormative desires, all presented as natural, familiar, and conventional—thus, deemed desirable values in the films. The disruptive physical appearance, gender-bending performance, and rejection of happy endings associated with villains are portrayed as negative traits, contravening the natural order through "artificiality," "exotic" alterity, and "unconventional" actions.

That I am able, along with other scholars, fans, and general audience—many of them, kids—to identify these connections, underscores the significant role of Disney's Renaissance era films in incorporating hegemonic societal norms and prejudices as strategies for representing characters—quite effectively!—while further replicating them.[255] Disney, as a cultural force and ideology with global influence, deploys its music as a fundamental tool to exert this cultural impact. Susan McClary acknowledges the profound emotional and social power of music, stating that:

> music is able to contribute heavily (if surreptitiously) to the shaping of individual identities: along with other influential media such as film, music teaches us how to experience our emotions, our own desires, and even (especially in dance) our own bodies. For better or for worse, it socializes us.[256]

Given that Disney films amalgamate various meaning-conveying elements—word, image, music—their power in shaping our identities becomes even more pronounced. In this sense, the findings from this research are important in providing an interpretation of these

[255] Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared*.
[256] McClary, *Feminine Endings*: 53.

elements—social, cultural, filmic, and musical—encouraging self-reflection on our preconceptions on what we have incorporated to consider as "normal" and "deviant."

Moreover, identifying relationships between moral positions and notions of "normal" and "deviant" through a musicological lens creates a reciprocal process of meaning-making. So, musical elements reinforcing notions of "good," are deemed aesthetically *superior* than those conveying "bad" because, tautologically, "good" is better than "bad." I am not implying that markers of "bad" are immediately rejected; in fact, the villains' exaggerated performances and half-singing, for example, are highly appealing and intriguing. However, their sound is *othered* against the unmarked, normal, musicality of the hero(ine)s, thus rendering it *abnormal*.[257] While I have not employed a markedness framework from music semiotics, which studies the asymmetrical relations of musical opposites by means of conventionality or pervasiveness,[258] the process of marking and unmarking is evident in all analytical categories devised for this research. This not only provides insights but also suggests an area for further exploration concerning preconceptions about the various elements configuring the musical texture in these songs.

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[257] This reading of the musical representation process for characters deemed as *othered*, encompassing both "desired" and "prohibited" attributes, is crucial in Susan McClary's work. In her analyses, McClary introduces an additional layer of complexity to this issue, noting that musical elements considered as prohibited or problematic take on a different meaning and are regarded as indicators of "genius", when incorporated in instrumental music—often associated with male composers. See: McClary: *Feminine Endings.*

[258] In Inquiring into musicological perspectives on the semiotic theory of markedness, it is essential to turn to the writings of musicologist Robert Hatten. His scholarly contributions have centered on the musical meaning during the Classical period, particularly in the music of Beethoven. However, his insights might prove useful in approaching processes of musical representation in other musical contexts.

Further Research

In this thesis' Introduction, I expressed my intention to explore aspects beyond the tonal space of the songs under study, recognizing the disproportionate focus typically placed on this element in musicological analyses across diverse repertoires. Although I touched on this dimension sparingly in my arguments, my analysis yielded substantial insights into the harmonic and melodic facets of the songs, not included here. These findings convincingly support my proposed hypothesis and conclusions, directly relating with the particularities of the musical numbers, while also aligning and intensifying conventional codes of representation commonly found in film scoring.

The analytical and interpretive approach applied throughout this research also offers a promising avenue for examining other Disney animated musicals of the Renaissance Era. Such an exploration is likely to provide comparable insights into characterizing hero(ine)s as normative and villains as disruptive. As subsequent films feature different narrative approaches and involve different creative teams responsible for animation and musicalization, fundamental disparities might emerge. For instance, I have encountered a similar challenge in analyzing *The Lion King*, as the sole film in my selection without the involvement of composer Alan Menken and lyricist Howard Ashman. Despite this, I have recognized consistency in representational strategies across these films, encompassing *The Lion King*. An interesting question opens, then, in assessing similarities and differences in the musical treatment of subsequent productions, most certainly adapting Disney's notion of "normality" with the passing of time and, more specifically, broadening the characteristics of the *Disney sound*.

Furthermore, this research establishes a foundation for a comprehensive analysis of musical representation in recent live-action remakes of the four studied films: *Beauty and the*

Beast (2017), *Aladdin* (2019), *The Lion King* (2019), and *The Little Mermaid* (2023).[259] A comparative approach of substantial changes, such as the shortening of "Be Prepared" in the photorealistic animation of *The Lion King*, and the omission of Jafar's musical number in *Aladdin*, unveils shifts that devoid the villains from campy theatricality, marking their deviance, instead, through *unmusicality*. The examination of the additional numbers incorporated for the protagonists might shed light on evolving paradigms in representing the normativity of the hero(ine)s. Notably, songs like "Evermore" (for Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*), "Speechless" (for Jasmine in *Aladdin*), "Spirit" (for Nala in *The Lion King)*, "Wild Uncharted Waters" (for Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid*), adopt to a musical style more aligned with contemporary popular musical styles, featuring an excessive vocal virtuosity, reflecting changing cultural values compared to the Disney Renaissance Era, most certainly embodying postfeminist ideals.

During this research, I have identified diverse paths to follow in my initial interest in understanding the phenomena of musical representation of hero(ine)s and villains. Consequently, this process has provided me not only with analytical tools and research skills, but also with a broad base of results to engage in deeper analysis to unveil the representational strategies inherent in the hero(ine)s and villains in musical films.

[259] *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Bill Condon (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2017); *Aladdin*, directed by Guy Ritchie (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019); *The Lion King*, directed by Jon Favreau (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019); *The Little Mermaid*, directed by Rob Marshall (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2023).

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