

THE DISNEY MIDDLE AGES  
A FAIRY-TALE AND FANTASY PAST

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## CHAPTER 14

REALITY REMIXED: NEOMEDIEVAL PRINCESS  
CULTURE IN DISNEY'S *ENCHANTED*

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"The real world and the animated world collide." This tagline, used to market the 2007 Disney film *Enchanted*, assumes an audience that knows what is meant by "real world" and "animated world." In particular, the animated world implied by the tagline is one defined by a history of Disney fairy-tale tropes, which invites potential viewers to enjoy its "collision" with reality. The slogan for this mixed animated and live-action Princess narrative suggests a subversive approach to the Disney canon, one that promises to grapple with the disjuncture between the medievalisms of its fairy-tale realms and the trappings of modern life. The result, however, is a film that refuses any historical anchor for Disney's fairy-tale ethos, fashioning instead what Carol Robinson and Pamela Clements call "neomedievalism," in order to insist upon the pervasive relevance of that ethos in the contemporary world.<sup>1</sup>

*Enchanted* was Disney's first return to the musical Princess film since the 1998 feature *Mulan*, and its first attempt at this mode of storytelling in the twenty-first century. At the time of *Enchanted*'s release, Disney had not produced an animated feature based on a European fairy tale since *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). The Disney brand nonetheless remained evocative of the medievalized fairy tale into the twenty-first century, as reflected in the Walt Disney Pictures logo—a turreted pseudomedieval castle—and in the continued popularity of its Princess merchandise. *Enchanted* marked a return to the European fairy tale, but rather than drawing upon a traditional story or legend, its plot derives from the tropes of canonical Disney films and is filled with references to the studio's animated features.

In *Enchanted*, characters from the medievalized realm of Andalusia appear in live-action New York City, transformed into “real” people and animals.<sup>2</sup> The film thus begins as an animated parody of Disney’s formulaic fairy-tale narratives, but ends as an homage that rehabilitates the Disney brand and celebrates its apparent ability to turn reality into a fairy tale. This structure of transformation relies on the techniques of what Henry Jenkins has called “convergence culture,” techniques, moreover, that are gendered.<sup>3</sup> In transforming masculine parody into feminine homage, *Enchanted* formally renegotiates the medievalist ideologies of gender that continually trouble the Princess genre, not only within the neomedieval Manhattan that it creates, but also, potentially, for individual viewers.

*Enchanted* comes well after the two major periods in Princess animation at Disney: the first being under Walt Disney’s personal direction (producing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*) and the second under “Team Disney,” led by Michael Eisner (yielding *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*).<sup>4</sup> *Enchanted* is thus distinguished by a retrospective and metatextual position relative to the medievalism of preceding Disney Princess films—a neomedievalism—that it realizes through the techniques of convergence culture. Jenkins defines convergence culture as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.” It is highly participatory, in that consumers “seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content,” drawing upon the collective intelligence that a hyperconnected media environment enables.<sup>5</sup> *Enchanted* engages the same forms by manipulating Disney’s own extensive media archive, making new connections as it maps “medieval” fairy-tale tropes onto modern-day New York City. This narrative strategy enables what Robinson and Clements call “neomedievalism,” which is “further independent, further detached” from the Middle Ages than is medievalism; it “consciously, purposefully, and perhaps even laughingly reshap[es] itself into an alternate universe of medievalisms, a fantasy of medievalisms, a meta-medievalism.”<sup>6</sup> *Enchanted*’s play on the medievalisms of previous Disney fairy-tale films yields neomedievalisms that are self-aware and even further abstracted from the Middle Ages than their sources. Robinson and Clements suggest that such “[n]eomedieval constructs of the medieval lack the medieval sense of solidarity and finiteness—all is fragmentary, fluid, either susceptible or conducive (depending upon one’s values) to constant change. In this way, neomedieval constructs participate in the postmodern techniques of fragmentation: anachronism, pastiche, bricolage.”<sup>7</sup> Disney’s appropriation of these

techniques may be read as a tribute to its fans and an embracing of the new media landscape, but it is also an intervention in the consumer’s participatory role: an attempt to provide company-approved guidelines for how viewers should create meaning from Disney films and products.

*Enchanted* opens with a reminder of the Walt Disney Company’s multimediated neomedieval empire: the current iteration of the castle logo, introduced in 2006, appears as part of a sequence of sweeping aerial animation in the computer-animated style of Disney’s Pixar films. This mash-up of the Cinderella/Sleeping Beauty castle dominates a pastoral landscape dotted with lights; a ship that recalls those of *The Pirates of the Caribbean* films (2003, 2006, 2007, 2011) and of the Disney theme-park rides sails down a river. A historically incongruous train emerges in a cloud of steam, evoking the American steam locomotives of the Walt Disney World Railroad. As the “camera” pulls back, the castle fills the screen in a confection of pastel spires and turrets. Fireworks erupt behind it, just as they do daily behind the castles of the Disney theme parks. The opening sequence confirms Jean Baudrillard’s contention that Disney “seeks to erase time by synchronizing all the periods, all the cultures, in a single traveling motion, by juxtaposing them in a single scenario.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this animated sequence resolves into the static Disney Pictures logo, asserting that this imagery of synchronous anachronisms and cultures is not merely branded by Disney; it *is* Disney.

*Enchanted* proclaims its place in the Disney canon, and in the canon of medievalized Princess narratives in particular, by placing its opening sequence inside the castle logo itself. A long zoom brings the viewer from the static logo shot through one of the castle’s central windows and into an interior chamber, where a manuscript titled *Enchanted* lies on a flower-strewn podium. After the titles and music fade, the book opens, and then a voice-over narration begins, as if reading from the book’s pages. This device pays homage to Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Sword in the Stone*, each of which begins with narration from a richly illuminated manuscript. The *Enchanted* volume, however, opens to reveal a colorful pop-up book: at once a mass-produced commodity, storybook, and children’s toy. Here the animators embrace Disney’s status as the producer of beloved commodities and identify the brand’s core consumers as children, or else former children who grew up with the Disney legacy. The first pop-up page unfolds into the Andalusian royal castle, and its turrets and towers recall the Disney Pictures logo that houses the book itself. This circularity implies the continuities between the idea of fairy-tale romance, Disney’s animated films, and other Disney products that link the corporation to its consumers. And yet the three-dimensional quality of the

pop-up book also suggests difference from the earlier films that use the manuscript device, signaling *Enchanted*'s roots in the modern rather than the medieval era, and a commitment to a form of representation that is at once more "realistic" (three-dimensional) and more self-consciously artifice. In this revamping of the traditional Disney codex, the opening sequence both welcomes its viewers into a "once upon a time world" and announces the film's neomedievalist framework.

The narration that accompanies the pop-up book establishes the premise for a typical Disney Princess narrative: the power-hungry queen of Andalusia fears that her stepson Edward will marry and take her throne. "And so," the narration concludes, "she did all in her power to prevent the prince from ever meeting the one special maiden with whom he would share true love's kiss." The book's computer-animated pages fade into Disney's traditional cel animation, which reveals the heroine Giselle flitting past the window of her woodland cottage—a copy of Aurora's in *Sleeping Beauty*—simultaneously with the words "the one special maiden." This shift in animation style implies a move backwards into the realm of fairy-tale films from Disney's hand-animated past, inviting the viewer to compare the plot to Disney's previous fairy-tale films. Edward meets Giselle within a few minutes of the animation's start, following first the sound of her singing voice and then a troll bent on capturing her. Giselle falls from a tree in her escape and lands in Edward's arms; upon learning her name, he cries, "We'll be married in the morning!" The two ride into the sunset, completing Giselle's song about true love's kiss as a duet. The succeeding scene depicts Giselle arriving at the palace the next morning, dressed in a wedding gown and accompanied by her absurdly large retinue of animal friends. Edward's stepmother Queen Narissa disguises herself as a crone and intercepts Giselle, pushing her into an enchanted wishing well that will take her to "a place where there are no happily ever afters." Giselle (now played by Amy Adams) emerges as a live-action character in Times Square, marking the start of the second part of the film. Giselle is sure that Edward (James Marsden) will rescue her, and waits for him with divorce lawyer and single father Robert (Patrick Dempsey) and his young daughter Morgan (Rachel Covey), whom she befriends. Alerted and then accompanied by Giselle's chipmunk friend Pip, Edward follows Giselle to New York, where Pip loses his power of speech. Narissa sends her henchman Nathaniel (Timothy Spall) after Edward to prevent him from finding Giselle, providing Nathaniel with three poisonous apples with which to kill the princess-to-be. The rest of the film chronicles Giselle and Robert's growing romance as Giselle influences Robert's practical view with her fairy-tale sensibilities, and as she begins to question her own "medieval" assumptions about love.

Carolyn Dinshaw has shown that, in contrast to Disney's fairy-tale medievalisms, the vernacular usage of the word "medieval" can come to stand for that which is backwards and illiberal, even violent and feudal. She describes how the sodomitical violence in *Pulp Fiction* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 1992) "must be met by a personal vengeance that is itself ritualized, torturous, dark, and perverse." She asserts that "[t]his is the realm of the medieval in *Pulp Fiction*: it isn't exactly another time, in this movie in which time is peculiarly flattened out both by the manipulations of narrative and by the drenching of everything in postwar cinematic and pop culture references . . . The medieval, rather, is the space of the rejects—really, the abjects—of this world."<sup>9</sup> *Enchanted* asks to what extent Disney's medievalisms are "medieval" in this way, the "rejects" of contemporary society. Like *Pulp Fiction*, *Enchanted* uses pop culture (here, Disney) references to distance the idea of the medieval from any specific history. By the film's conclusion, Disney recuperates its fairy-tale approach by broadening the definition of the medieval to include neomedievalisms, thereby claiming the flexibility of its previous medievalisms. This narrative strategy relies in part upon the viewer's affective relationship to Disney's medievalisms, allowing positive associations with the brand to rewrite their meanings. Giselle concludes, for instance, that it is better to go on "a date" before agreeing to marry, but it takes just two days for Robert to become the "prince" who resuscitates her from an enchanted sleep with "true love's kiss." (Edward gallantly stands aside when his own attempt fails, and instead finds a bride in Nancy [Idina Menzel], Robert's fashion designer girlfriend.)

Disney's shift from self-parody at the film's beginning to self-promotion at its end takes place through Giselle's translation of reality into a hybrid fairy-tale space. Giselle views Manhattan as an amalgam of medievalisms and fragments of previous Disney classics, recombined in the contemporary landscape to form an anachronistic but interconnected web of romantic neomedievalisms. In that sense, she is an expert at interpreting reality and models for viewers how to collect and arrange fragments from Disney sources to reinvent their worlds: to convert their mundane lives into neomedieval Princess narratives. Disney thus broadcasts its awareness of postmodern culture and its desire to engage with it, but uses the fragmentary approach of intertextuality to reconcile contemporary life with patriarchal and "medieval" (that is, medievalist) romance narrative.

*Enchanted*'s relentless citation of extant material echoes the picking and choosing that Jenkins describes in *Textual Poachers*, his work on television fan culture. These techniques position Disney as a fan as well as a producer, in what reads as an attempt to confer grassroots credibility upon the film. Jenkins calls fans' reuse of corporate material to create new

products such as fan fiction and fan art “textual poaching”; drawing on Michel de Certeau’s arguments about readerly “poaching,” Jenkins contends that fans “poach” fragments from their favorite shows and reinterpret them to fabricate their own experiences and meanings. This concept relies upon the unequal power relationship between the fan and the producer of the original material, and Jenkins argues that “[f]ans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media.”<sup>10</sup> In this view, fans consciously or unconsciously piece together source material, forcing it to conform to their interests and desires. Jenkins extends this approach to the individual identity and narrative of all media consumers: “Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives.”<sup>11</sup> Disney constructs a new mythology from the “bits and fragments” of its diverse media output in *Enchanted*, especially drawing on its Princess films. Jason Sperb notes that Disney “mastered ‘convergence’ long before the advent of new media,” citing the reappearances of elements from the mixed animated/live-action film *Song of the South* (1946) in television shows, records, books, games, theme park rides, and other media.<sup>12</sup> In *Enchanted*, Disney employs fannish recombinatory techniques to “make sense” of Disney’s legacy in a contemporary context.

Director Kevin Lima admits that there are so many Disney references in *Enchanted* that he “doesn’t know if there’s a number,” but states that “you could watch this movie a hundred times and still find things.”<sup>13</sup> References include reused plot devices and characters, live-action restagings of iconic moments from previous Disney films, and allusions to Disney’s film production history. Chuck Tryon likens such “sampling” (to borrow a musical term) in mashed-up online videos to the social practice of quoting lines from films with friends. He suggests that by taking movie lines out of context and reusing them in life, individuals display their own cleverness while also paying affectionate homage to the original. Translated to video-making, “the recycling of the original is certainly connected to a desire for building community while also providing the video maker a venue for illustrating his or her skill in manipulating a familiar text.”<sup>14</sup> *Enchanted* similarly encourages the audience to imagine itself as such a community, joined by their shared memories and fondness for previous Disney films. It gives those with even the most cursory familiarity with Disney Princess films the sense of belonging to a club that understands its playful quotations, and rewards serious devotees with numerous obscure references. Lima reveals, for instance, that Robert’s

law firm Churchill, Harline, and Smith is named for the three songwriters of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.<sup>15</sup>

*Enchanted*’s references also allow Disney to demonstrate its savvy in a media landscape that has been transformed in the past decade by user-made videos that have been uploaded to video-sharing sites like YouTube. Part of this involves Disney’s assumption of a critical distance from its own products, using the references to parody its own narrative and aesthetic tendencies. Tryon writes that parody invites us “to view genres critically, to make ourselves aware of the ways in which texts are constructed,” and that, as a result, it can “challenge the authority of dominant texts.”<sup>16</sup> Parody is also complicit in the continued dominance of such texts through its attention to them, but can raise questions about the texts that otherwise remain unaddressed. Lima states, for example, that his “favorite random reference” in *Enchanted* is that the “troll from the opening animation wears a collection of Disney Princess dresses as his loin cloth. He even wears two purple seashells as earrings. They’re [*The Little Mermaid*] Ariel’s shell bra!”<sup>17</sup> Decked out in remnants of past Princess attire and with Prince Edward trailing behind him, the self-aware troll (“I supposed to eat you”) reads more as a tired device to effect a traditional and narrow feminine destiny than the exciting precursor to Giselle’s happily-ever-after. The very possibility of creating a complete Disney Princess narrative in under eight minutes—the length of the animation from when the pop-up book opens to when Giselle and Edward ride into the sunset—pokes fun at the formulaic nature of the genre. When parodied in this way, the romanticized “medieval” of Disney’s early Princess narratives looks more like the vernacular understanding of the medieval as not just laughably, but also dangerously, backward in comparison to modern reality.

Rehabilitating the Princess narrative depends in part upon negotiating away that dimension of Disney’s medievalisms in order to privilege the histories of childhood memory over medieval history and the history of medievalisms. After parodying the medievalisms of its early Princess films (as if to reject them), *Enchanted* uses them to create neomedievalisms that reconcile contemporary values with nostalgic recollections of the Disney canon. Such a process involves abandoning or reimagining those undesirable elements of the “medieval” fairy tale that hamper its integration into the viewer’s contemporary identity. Writing of the racially problematic *Song of the South*, Sperb contends that “there are at least two ‘pasts’ operating—the historical pasts (not) represented in the film, and the personal pasts of fans remembering *Song* as an experience from their childhoods.” He notes that the film retains enduring popularity among fans in spite of its troubling representation of race relations in

late nineteenth-century America, in large part because of the fans' affective relationship to it: "Because they enjoy the film, because *Song* fills them with pleasure and even love, nasty political implications are not just overlooked; they become impossible for fans who are so unambiguously positive in their emotions."<sup>18</sup> The possibility of creating new meaning out of memories of a text implies a gathering and sorting (conscious or not) that reorders reality.

From the start, *Enchanted* is more concerned with a multimediated approach to collecting and rearranging than with any kind of historical accuracy. The film opens with Giselle using household objects to construct the likeness of the prince she saw in her dream the night before, an allusion to Aurora's dream at the start of *Sleeping Beauty* ("Once Upon a Dream"). Giselle builds the life-sized sculpture from bits and pieces of everyday life, including books, bottles, a small pumpkin, a spade, a flowerpot, a broom, and other fairy-tale-appropriate—that is to say, familiar but plausibly preindustrial—items. Its heroic posture echoes the statue of Prince Eric that Ariel discovers and falls in love with in *The Little Mermaid*, but Giselle's idol is more humorous than noble because of its bric-a-brac construction. Meanwhile, her collecting of mundane objects also recalls Ariel's secret horde of human knick-knacks, so that *Enchanted's* gathering and placing of references creates another layer of metaphor in Giselle's building. This creative act foreshadows Giselle's self-determining ability to fashion her own reality when she arrives in New York; in this she displays the dexterity of the poaching reader, the fan producer, and the makers of *Enchanted*, who all manipulate existing material to yield new meanings.

Baudrillard asserts that Disney is "in the process of capturing all the real world to integrate it into its synthetic universe, in the form of a vast 'reality show' where reality itself becomes a spectacle . . . where the real becomes a theme park."<sup>19</sup> *Enchanted's* move from the animated fairy-tale realm to live-action New York is a fictional representation of this process, with Giselle leading the way as Disney's ambassador: a princess/fairy godmother who can transform the mundane into a neomedieval fairy-tale realm. She translates New York City into such a space and the camera sees with her eyes, "poaching" existing fragments of the city and editing them together to reveal Manhattan as a neomedieval landscape. As Susan Aronstein and Robert Torry note, *Enchanted* "works immediately and continually to deny the putative opposition between Andalusia and New York, fantasy and reality, by representing New York as replete with indices of the marvelous, hints of an available, if at times unnoticed, realm of imaginative possibility."<sup>20</sup> The material culture of the Middle Ages serves as key evidence of this overlap, especially the emblematic

castle that is also symbolic of Disney's cinematic enterprise. Aronstein and Torry cite a number of "castles" that the camera identifies in Manhattan when Giselle explores the city with Robert and Morgan, including Robert's apartment building, the Paterno at 440 Riverside Drive, which confirms Robert's status as a modern-day Prince Charming. The camera lingers on a number of potentially castle-like constructions in and around Central Park, and the final Kings and Queens Ball sequence is held inside the neo-Gothic Woolworth Building in lower Manhattan. The gables and spires of the building's roofs create a pseudo-medieval setting for the dénouement, in which Giselle and Robert do battle with Narissa, transformed into a dragon. I contend that the camera's (and Giselle's) selective looking in the film models how to use reality to construct a neomedieval Princess narrative out of one's own life.

This approach may, at times, require a willful rejection of evidence against neomedieval readings of the everyday. When Giselle arrives in New York, for instance, she remains fixed on a single goal: finding "the castle." When she catches sight of a billboard for "the Palace Casino," which sparkles with the image of a pink and blue cartoon castle, choral music swells and she rushes towards it. Giselle cannot gain entry, but her credulous pounding at the castle "door" is rewarded by attracting Morgan and Robert's attention. Morgan instinctively recognizes Giselle's identity, asking Robert why there is "a princess on the castle billboard." Robert, who represents the cynicism and pragmatism of (masculine) adult reality, dismisses Giselle as another simulation, calling her an "advertisement. It's a mannequin." Morgan, however, insists, "she's really there!" and darts out of their cab to approach Giselle. Within moments of meeting, Giselle falls from the billboard scaffolding into Robert's arms, the camera angles visually echoing her fall into Edward's embrace in the animated opening of the film. Giselle's reading of the billboard as a real castle and Robert's reading of her as a mannequin, a simulation, are equally incorrect. And yet it is Giselle's belief in the possibility of castles in a modern, live-action landscape—and Morgan's belief in the possibility of Princesses—that initiates the major romantic narrative of the film.

"Reality" conforms to Giselle's beliefs, and she and Robert unwittingly reenact iconic moments from the Disney canon throughout the live-action portion of the film. Like Cinderella, birds help Giselle prepare her dress for housecleaning, and her reflection floats up in a bubble as she sings and scrubs the floor. When Queen Narissa (Susan Sarandon) appears in New York, she casts the same dark silhouette as the witch Maleficent does in *Sleeping Beauty*, and Robert and Giselle's dance at the Kings and Queens Ball mirrors the motions of the Beast and Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. These visual cues are more than homages to previous

films; they also carry implied emotional meaning derived from their original contexts. Jenkins writes that “[e]ntertainment content isn’t the only thing that flows across multiple media platforms. Our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desires also flow across media channels.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, Giselle and Robert’s postures in a Central Park rowboat recall the unspoken desires of Ariel and Eric’s boating trip in *The Little Mermaid*, and by visually echoing the Italian restaurant scene from *Lady and the Tramp*, the film virtually guarantees that this human couple will also share a first kiss. Disney’s cinematic history serves as shorthand for Giselle and Robert’s budding romance, the references becoming less satirical and more earnest as the plot develops. When Giselle falls senseless at the bite of a poisoned apple at the ball and Robert attempts to revive her with “true love’s kiss,” these recycled Disney tropes are no longer presented as comedic. As Giselle adapts to the “real world,” it also adapts to her, reforming itself into a neomedieval realm suitable for a modern-day/fairy-tale Princess.

The Princess narrative is itself a neomedievalism that builds upon and responds to earlier Disney Princess films. As Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh write, the cinematic Middle Ages “has been historically recast as a place and time of an intransigent and romanticized vision of heterosexuality”: “moderns have . . . metonymized the clichéd materialities of a certain kind of medievalism—the knight in shining armor, the damsel in distress—as heterosexual.”<sup>22</sup> The Disney Princess narrative’s patriarchal vision likewise imagines heterosexual love and marriage as the most desirable outcome of a woman’s life, giving rise to the conflation of fairy tales, the Middle Ages, and heteronormative romance in the popular imagination of the Disney brand. Jack Zipes writes of what he calls Disney’s “civilizing mission” through the rewriting of fairy tales for its films. He notes the studio founder Walt Disney’s heavy involvement in the making of *Snow White*, which “follows the classic sexist narrative about the framing of women’s lives through male discourse.”<sup>23</sup> In spite of—or perhaps because of—their antifeminist bent, Disney’s Princess narratives afford a certain measure of pleasure to women and girls who live in patriarchal societies. In this, they echo the work of early English romances, which, as Helen Cooper argues, “do not offer any revolutionary attack on conventional sexual morals or a patriarchal system of dynastic inheritance, but they do repeatedly show women exerting their freedom within the system.”<sup>24</sup> Giselle’s desire for Robert enables her to question and reject her initial engagement to Edward, and her adoption of some contemporary ideas about love (and, perhaps, female possibility) result in her taking on the role of the prince when she attempts to save Robert from the Narissa-dragon. This exertion of freedom is acceptable

within the neomedieval construction of Princess culture, as is Giselle’s launching of a career in the closing montage of the film. These navigations within the structures of patriarchy allow Giselle some control and identity, but her Princess narrative remains intact: Giselle’s life, formerly framed by Edward, is framed by Robert by the end of the film.

Cory Grewell suggests that the postmodern culture that enables neomedievalisms also informs some neomedievalisms’ antagonistic response to that culture. Neomedievalism, he argues,

is a form of medievalism that is intrinsically linked to late twentieth- and twenty-first-century advances in technology, and . . . is distinguished from previous forms of medievalism by its multi-culturalism, its lack of concern for history, and its habit of imagining the medieval through the lens of previous medievalisms. I would add that it constitutes a particular response—or responses—to postmodernism, the construction of fantastic universes of good and evil being perhaps only one among many.<sup>25</sup>

The reassertion of patriarchal narratives may be another, especially in the case of *Enchanted*, in which Disney’s commercial enterprise is at stake. Consumerism hovers behind the live-action sections of *Enchanted*, demonstrating that, in the neomedieval Princess narrative, American-style capitalism can replace the “pre-modern” economies of Disney’s fairy-tale realms. Buying power even stands in for some kinds of magic, as becomes evident when Giselle decides to attend the ball at the last moment but, like Cinderella, has nothing to wear. She turns to Morgan, whom she finds outfitted like a fairy godmother in toy fairy wings and holding a toy wand, surrounded by pink Princess-style merchandise. The girl assures Giselle that she knows “something better than a fairy godmother,” and pulls out one of Robert’s credit cards. Morgan demonstrates that well-directed money is the neomedieval solution to Giselle’s classic fairy-tale problem: like entry to the ball (which is ticketed), magical transformations can be bought. This is a powerful assertion for Disney to make; as part of the film’s model for how to transform reality in the image of a Disney fairy tale, it encourages not only recalling and celebrating Disney films but also purchasing products. *Enchanted* also takes advantage of the emotional connotations of shopping as a gendered ritual, pausing in the montage of buying and beautifying long enough for Morgan to ask Giselle if their trip is what “going shopping with your mother” is like. Thus female bonding—especially the bond of mothers and daughters—becomes part of finding a “prince” in the neomedieval universe, and both are enabled by commercial consumption. This collecting of commodities (Giselle and Morgan wield armloads of pink and white shopping bags)



joins Giselle's selective viewing and rearranging of reality and the camera's dexterity with Disney and medieval references to read as a kind of transcendent power: in this case, a particularly feminine one.

By imbuing shopping with feminine power, Disney asserts a woman's ability to create her own neomedieval Princess narrative (which itself is a negotiation of patriarchal society) through consumer activity. Such a reading is problematized by the fact that the credit card is Robert's, which reasserts the woman's subordinate position to male economic power. The flexibility of neomedievalism opens up an alternate possibility for Giselle, however, presenting her as a producer as well as a consumer in the closing montage of the film. This happily-ever-after depicts Giselle at work in Andalasia Fashions, a store that sells princess-style dresses for young girls. The shop relies on Giselle's skill for reworking the material of the modern world into neomedievalisms, which she initially demonstrates (to Robert's frustration) when she makes gowns for herself from Robert's curtains and linens. Giselle's new career is indicative of her "modern" understanding of female possibility, and indicates her investment in the kind of neomedieval fairy-tale universe that makes room for both female autonomy and capitalism. However, Giselle's talent as a seamstress is part of her Princess identity, and thus she acquiesces to a patriarchal system that privileges those feminine skills that relate to the domestic sphere. This vision of neomedieval Princess culture delineates the desirable boundaries of female ambition, while the film also refutes visions that threaten patriarchal hierarchies. For instance, the first time that Morgan appears onscreen, Robert gives her a book called *Great Women of Our Time*, saying, "I know it's not that fairy-tale book you wanted, but this is better." He points out that his then-girlfriend Nancy is "a lot like the women in your book" as a way of introducing his "rational" plan to marry her. The scene creates an opposition between rationality, Nancy, and a universe where women function outside of patriarchal models on the one hand, and love, Giselle, and patriarchy-friendly "fairy-tale" femininity on the other. Morgan becomes a contested object in this battle, a child who in her Romantic innocence "naturally" desires fairy tales but is being unwillingly socialized against them.

Jacqueline Rose argues that adults insist upon the idea of childhood innocence as a way of assuring our own stable relationship to a "knowable" world: in this view, the child has "special access" to "a primitive or lost state," and represents "something of a pioneer who restores these worlds to us with a facility and directness which ensures our own relationship to them is, finally, safe."<sup>26</sup> In *Enchanted* this "lost state" is the atemporal neomedievalism of Disney's fairy-tale worlds: when Robert's assistant informs him that she cannot find information about Andalasia,

she suggests that rather than "a country, or a city," Andalasia is "more like a state of mind." Morgan's intrinsic attraction to this state of mind and recognition of its medieval trappings is what brings Giselle into her and her father's lives. Giselle's ability to reconcile this worldview with adult modernity, meanwhile, is what enables her triumph over Nancy and Narissa, the film's symbols of unhappy female ambition, and facilitates her transformation of Robert and Morgan's family into a model of nuclear domesticity.

*Enchanted* thus celebrates female intuition and creativity so long as they do not undermine the patriarchal structures of Disney's previous Princess films, damaging these films' legacy (Disney's brand) and economic potential. *Enchanted* instead advocates for a feminine agency that is characterized by its upbeat, positive energy and makes do with what's at hand rather than criticizing the existing system. In this it echoes the gender divide between the genres of fan videos made by men and women: Jenkins reports that "the overwhelming majority of fan parody is produced by men, while 'fan fiction' is almost entirely produced by women." In particular, "[i]n the female fan community, fans have long produced 'song videos' that are edited together from found footage drawn from film or television shows and set to pop music."<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that all such videos affirm the narratives supplied by the original source material; Francesca Coppa argues that in "vidding," as this art form is known, "editing is not just about bringing images together; it is also about taking mass-media images apart."<sup>28</sup> The music is integral to this reconstruction: "the song tells the spectator how to understand the montage the vidder has constructed. Vids are therefore a form of in-kind media criticism: a visual essay on a visual source."<sup>29</sup> *Enchanted*'s musical homage to Disney may be read as a kind of tribute to female fan techniques that emphasizes the romantic and celebratory, elevating these over the cynicism of "masculine" parody.

The closing montage of the film supports such a view, recasting visual cues from the parodic opening animation as part of a celebratory "vid" that reveals the characters' romantic and commercial successes and the triumph of neomedieval Princess culture. As in most vids the song is essential to understanding the larger text; this sequence uses country singer Carrie Underwood's "Ever Ever After," a song dedicated to making the connections between Disney-style fairy tales and everyday contemporary life. The opening notes begin as the camera pulls back from Giselle and Robert on the roof of the Woolworth Building. The uplift spires recall the castle from the Disney logo, a citation of the film's early scenes that is strengthened by a wipe that folds the image down as if it were a page in a pop-up book. The scenes that follow are all separated



by the same kind of transition, which turns both live-action and animated images into "pages" in a single pop-up "book." In the first scene, Edward tries Giselle's forgotten shoe onto Nancy's foot, and as they discover that it is "a perfect fit," the lyrics of Underwood's song begin: "Storybook endings, fairy tales coming true, / Deep down inside we want to believe they still do." Nancy and Edward rush to the manhole in Times Square that leads back to Andalasia, and as they jump down together and into an animated wedding scene, the lyrics urge, "Let's just admit that we all want to make it to / Ever ever after." Nancy flings away her Blackberry at the altar (it shatters before a crowd of curious animals) and then dips Edward into a kiss, becoming, like Giselle, a neomedieval Princess who exhibits joyful agency within her patriarchal romance. As the song continues, subsequent scenes unfold to reveal Andalasia Fashions bursting with young customers in princess dresses ("Start a new fashion, wear your heart on your sleeve, / Sometimes you reach what's real just by making believe," the lyrics assert) and book signings for Nathaniel and Pip's autobiographical works. Nathaniel's *My Royal Pain* appears to chronicle his release from Narissa's *femme fatale*-style domination, while Pip's *Silence Is Not Golden* recounts the indignities of his inability to speak while in New York. Attractive females (young women in Nathaniel's case and sultry-eyed woodland animals in Pip's) attend them and look on admiringly as they sign books for long queues of customers, underscoring the secondary characters' sexual and economic success in their "ever ever after." The final scene features Giselle, Robert, and Morgan dancing in their Manhattan apartment, as if to the music of Underwood's song. As the camera pans out of the window and past the ornate exterior of the building, the voice of the narrator from the beginning of the film returns to announce, "and so they all lived happily ever after." The shot appears to fold into the last page of the animated manuscript from the start of *Enchanted*, and Underwood samples a line from Giselle's "True Love's Kiss" song as the conclusion to "Ever Ever After."<sup>30</sup>

The multimeditated approach of the montage recalls the breadth of Disney's transmedia empire as it evokes the pop-up book, animated and live-action cinema, the music video, the American country music genre, and fan-made online videos. It assumes the viewer's ability to move between media to derive a single meaning from the vid's many fragments: in this case, the continued relevance of Disney's Princess narratives and their patriarchal underpinnings, transformed into neomedievalisms for everyday life. This "vid" not only pays tribute to *Enchanted* and previous Disney Princess films, but it also echoes the female fan videos that Jenkins writes can "explore undeveloped subtexts of the original film, offer original interpretations of the story, or suggest plotlines that go

beyond the work itself."<sup>31</sup> *Enchanted* renders the collisions from its tagline, which seems to promise readerly agency and a violent choosing and cutting that critiques the standard reading, into integration, culminating in a "mashup" song video that is entirely continuous with the standard reading. Disney's co-opting of the form deflates the genre's potential for subversive rewriting of the canonical film text, collapsing the critical metatext (i.e., the song video) into the canonical film text itself.

While *Enchanted*'s transition from masculine parody to feminine homage can be framed as a defeat of masculine cynicism and an assertion of a certain "girl power," it implies a femininity that is always already there, if repressed: a childlike femininity (figured by Morgan) that "naturally" desires a heterosexual Disney Princess narrative. The importance of *Enchanted*'s neomedievalism, as distinct from medievalism, lies in the way that its effacement of time naturalizes this model of female desire that the film constructs. The ahistoricity of neomedievalism thus not only proposes the possibility of seamlessly integrating Princess fantasy and capitalist postmodernity, but also retroactively discovers in the viewer's past the atemporal patriarchal fantasy that, as Carrie Underwood sings, we (women) should "just admit that we all want," ushering in a posttemporal, heavenlike "ever, ever after." The historical incongruities brought into relief by the "colli[sion]" of "real" and "animated" worlds, which constitute *Enchanted*'s neomedievalism, are leveraged into a refusal of history that makes the "once upon a time" both timeless and universal.

Walt Disney Pictures announced in late 2010 that *Tangled*, which is based on "Rapunzel," would be its last traditional Princess film for the foreseeable future.<sup>32</sup> This major shift seems to herald the end of Disney's iconic Princess culture and to repudiate the work that *Enchanted* does to rehabilitate the fairy tale for contemporary audiences. However, *Enchanted*'s postmodern approach to fairy tale, narrative, and Disney's archival material opens the door for other enterprises to continue exploring the brand's neomedieval possibilities. As of the date of this chapter's completion, for example, the ABC television network is midway through its first season of *Once Upon a Time*, a drama about fairy-tale characters cursed by an evil queen to lead "normal" American lives. The show, which is produced by Disney, places original Disney characters like Jiminy Cricket alongside classic fairy-tale figures and joins their stories in a new narrative that moves between fairy-tale universe flashbacks and present-day "reality" (both in live action). At the end of 2011 *Once Upon a Time* was the most popular Sunday night show on American television with adults aged 18–34, and with both women 18–34 and women 18–49.<sup>33</sup> Like *Enchanted*, *Once Upon a Time* encourages viewers to be textual poachers, actively seeking out the neomedieval possibilities in

mundane modernity and recombining them to reveal the hidden Disney Princess narratives embedded in everyday life.

### Notes

1. Carol Robinson and Pamela Clements, "Living with Neomedievalisms," *Defining Medievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009): 55–75. As Robinson and Clements note, this use of "neomedievalism" is markedly different from that explored by Bruce Holsinger in *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2007). I intend no reference to Holsinger's use of the term.
2. The film makes no reference to the similarity between Andalusia's name and the Spanish region of Andalucía, or to the Muslim nation in medieval Spain (Al-Andalus).
3. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
4. For analysis of the differences in Princess culture during these eras, see Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario, "The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess," *Women's Studies in Communication* 27.1 (2004): 34–59.
5. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2–3.
6. Carol Robinson and Pamela Clements, "Living with Neomedievalisms," 56.
7. Carol Robinson and Pamela Clements, "Living with Neomedievalisms," 64.
8. Jean Baudrillard, "Disneyworld Company," trans. François Debrix, *Liberation* (March 4, 1996); Web, accessed April 19, 2011.
9. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 185–86. Dinshaw also explores the homophobic and homoerotic connotations of the medieval in this scene. Although beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that *Enchanted* also flirts with such implications in its characterizations of Edward and Nathaniel. They each serve as the butt of homoerotic jokes, including several that play with the idea of a man desiring or seeking a "prince."
10. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 23. See also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
11. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 3.
12. Jason Sperb, "Reassuring Convergence: Online Fandom, Race, and Disney's Notorious *Song of the South*," *Cinema Journal* 49.4 (2010): 25–45, at 26.
13. Rob Carnevale, "Enchanted – Kevin Lima Interview," *IndieLondon*; Web, accessed April 30, 2011.
14. Chuck Tryon, *Reinventing Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 151.
15. Rob Carnevale, "Enchanted – Kevin Lima Interview."
16. Chuck Tryon, *Reinventing Cinema*, 155.
17. Amy, "20 Questions with *Enchanted*'s Kevin Lima," *PopGurls* (December 6, 2007); Web, accessed April 30, 2011.
18. Jason Sperb, "Reassuring Convergence," 35 and 41. It is worth noting that the span of the *Enchanted* narrative across both cel animation and live-action footage invokes *Song of the South*'s weaving of animated Uncle Remus tales into its nostalgic live-action frame story.
19. Jean Baudrillard, "Disneyworld Company."
20. Susan Aronstein and Robert Torry, "Magic Happens: Re-Enchanting Disney Adults," *Weber: The Contemporary West* 26.2 (2010): 41–54, at 49.
21. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 17.
22. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh, "Introduction: Queer History, Cinematic Medievalism, and the Impossibility of Sexuality," *Queer Movie Medievalisms*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 1–17, at 3–4.
23. Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 193 and 203.
24. Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 222.
25. Cory Grewell, "Neomedievalism: An Eleventh Little Middle Ages?" *Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), 34–43, at 40.
26. Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 9.
27. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 159.
28. Francesca Coppa, "An Editing Room of One's Own: Vidding as Women's Work," *Camera Obscura* 26.2 (2011): 123–30, at 124.
29. Francesca Coppa, "Editing Room," 123.
30. The merging of these songs encourages audiences to realize that Underwood's singing career is itself a kind of neomedieval princess narrative: raised on an Oklahoma farm, she rose to stardom by winning the reality television talent show *American Idol* in 2005. Disney has built a relationship between its own brand and *Idol*'s image as a purveyor of modern-day dreams, opening "The American Idol Experience" at Disney's Hollywood Studios in the Walt Disney World Resort in 2008. This attraction allows park guests to compete for a "Dream Ticket" to bypass the queue at a regional *American Idol* audition.
31. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 160.
32. Dawn Chmielewski and Claudia Eller, "Disney Animation Is Closing the Book on Fairy Tales," *Los Angeles Times* (November 21, 2010); Web, accessed May 6, 2012.
33. Robert Seldmann, "ABC's *Once Upon a Time* Is Sunday's #1 Entertainment Show with Key Women," *TV by the Numbers* (December 12, 2011); Web, accessed January 5, 2012.