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Disney on Ice as Remediated Fairy Tale: Unsettling the Disney Juggernaut

In terms of world problems, one of the most pressing is the global power of corporate entities. In *Globalization—The Juggernaut of the 21st Century*, Jan-Erik Lane identifies globalization as an unstoppable and crushing force, a juggernaut, that “makes all countries of the world interdependent in relation to the coming energy crisis, the unstoppable climate change, the sharper cleavages between rich and poor countries, as well as superrich and the middle classes within any country, and the coming of a multicultural social structure” (xi). The Walt Disney Company is easy to condemn in this context, with its corporate monopoly, celebration of consumerism, and cultural ubiquity. The company bombards contemporary, global culture with neoliberal ideas about childhood, innocence, and the American dream. Unsurprisingly, condemnations of Disney proliferate in academic venues, from Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock’s lambasting of the company’s corporate practices in *The Mouse that Roared* to Jack Zipes’ lament about how Disney movies dumb down and homogenize fairy tales’ complex and specific cultural work.

Taking as my text a March 2018 performance of the “Follow Your Heart” *Disney on Ice* production that my husband and I attended with our three-year-old daughter in Wichita, Kansas, my paper asks, can the Disney juggernaut be undermined from within? First, I suggest that *Disney on Ice* marks a return of fairy tales to what Vladimir Propp identifies as local ritual, because the live, ephemeral performance evokes a secondary world where the stories are shared and archives of human experience visited. Further, the element of sport in *Disney on Ice* restores to sanitized Disney fairy tales some of what Bruno Bettelheim describes as the dark side of human nature that we learn to cope with from traditional fairy tales, because figure skaters can achieve great heights of beauty and grace but also risk horror and injury. Skated excerpts from the film *Frozen* form the basis for my explanation of how *Disney on Ice* invites children to be more than passive consumers and to embrace empathy and action. Ultimately, I argue, *Disney on Ice* exemplifies its parent company’s corporate practices but also returns reductive, sanitized film fairy tales to the immediate, the local, and the performative.

Keywords: Disney, Propp, Bettelheim, *Frozen*, sport

Bio: Wendy Matlock is a medievalist whose research concentrates on English literature from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. She has an on-going interest in fairy tales, ritual, and performance.