

The Shifting Tides of Politicized Domesticity in 21st-Century Disney Films

When the twentieth century began, mostly female American activists championed the notion that, as Laura Shapiro has explored, “domestic science was a more radical solution than socialism to the problems of urban poverty, and ... the indignities suffered by women.” In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, hegemonic views of domesticity remain tinted by the home-economic saints and nutritional martyrs who succeeded the Angel in the House throughout the era Shapiro elucidates.

In this panel session, three scholars will present brief, 5- to 10-minute close readings of specific 21st-century Disney films’ presentations of domesticity as a political stance. A moderated discussion will follow that highlights common threads and broadens the question to other recent children’s films by Disney.

From Moana, torn between the parental responsibilities she can fulfill on land and those she can fulfill through water; to Tiana, whose journey into the bayou offers more domestic success than her "man-catchin' beignets" or gumbo; to the 2017 Belle, peripheral to frozen forms of domesticity that her personal ethic calls upon her to complicate or reinscribe; recent Disney protagonists offer a compelling literature of how contemporary culture interacts with notions of domesticity. By combining shorter papers with a lengthier round-table discussion section, this panel will combine deep single-text readings with broader intertextual explorations to inform a historicized critical perspective on this ample body of work.