

REPRESENTATIONS OF CAMP IN DISNEY'S 101 DALMATIANS AND THE LITTLE
MERMAID

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ABSTRACT

Dodie Smith's children's novel The 101 Dalmatians and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Little Mermaid" were adapted by the Walt Disney film company into successful animated films. The villainesses, Cruella de Vil and Ursula, are two of the most memorable characters in the Disney film canon, because, I argue they are aligned with camp in a way that challenges deeply engrained notions about gender identity. These villainesses ignite every scene with electrifying performances that draw attention to gender conventions. While Disney films typically have some elements of camp, Cruella and Ursula represent two of the most fully fleshed out characters.

Little scholarly work has been done on the relationship between Disney and camp, and what has been done has been fairly brief. This thesis will analyze the characters of Cruella and Ursula as representations of camp and the importance of them being defined in such terms. First, I will examine what camp is, particularly as it relates to performance. From there, I will discuss camp's importance as a field of study, especially as it pertains to children's literature and films. Next, I will discuss the different types of camp, such as political camp, which has been appropriated by queer theorists. From there I will more closely examine Disney's use of camp, which will include a brief discussion on the previous Disney villainesses as they relate to camp. Finally, I will look closely at Cruella and Ursula and the literary source texts and real-life personas that they were based on to demonstrate the role of camp and performance within children's literature and films. I argue that in characterizing these villainesses as camp, the films illustrate how gender is a construction made through a repetition of bodily acts.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, whose love, support, encouragement, and understanding kept me going.

INTRODUCTION

When we experience the camp rush, the delight, the savor, we are making a private airlift of lost cultural matter, fragments held hostage by everyone else's indifference. (Koestenbaum 117)

Cruella de Vil and Ursula are the infamous villainesses of the Walt Disney film company's 101 Dalmatians and The Little Mermaid. As the villainess of 101 Dalmatians, Cruella is a looming beanpole of a woman, with a booming, husky voice, whose actions alternate between mania and seething rage. Ursula, the villainess of The Little Mermaid, is a slinky, voluptuous half-woman, half-octopus, who gracefully glides throughout the film, while she schemes and performs song and dance routines. Both characters have crazy hair, droopy eyes, and loose lips, making them appear paradoxically (and simultaneously) deranged and glamorous. These villainesses are two of the most memorable in the Walt Disney film canon as their campy actions ignite every scene with dramatic gestures and performances that draw attention to gender conventions. Both films were adaptations of literary texts, The 101 Dalmatians, a children's novel by English author Dodie Smith, and "The Little Mermaid" fairy tale by Danish storyteller Hans Christian Andersen. This thesis will analyze the characters of Cruella and Ursula as representations of camp and the significance of this characterization. I will discuss the sources for these characters, including literary texts as well as the famous camp personalities, Tallulah Bankhead and Divine, who inspired these depictions. Then I will examine what camp is, particularly as it relates to performance and I will discuss the different types of camp, such as political camp as appropriated by queer theorists. From there, I will discuss camp's importance as a field of study, especially as it pertains to children's literature and films. Next, I will more closely examine Disney's use of camp, which will include a brief discussion on the previous

Disney villainesses as they relate to camp. Finally, I will look closely at Cruella and Ursula along with the literary source texts and real-life personas that they were based on to demonstrate the role of camp and performance within children's literature and films. I argue that in characterizing these villainesses as camp, the films illustrate that gender is a construction that is made through a repetition of bodily acts.

Released in 1961, Disney's animated film version of 101 Dalmatians follows fairly closely to Dodie Smith's 1956 novel of the same name.¹ The film follows Dalmatians Pongo, his wife Perdita, and their owners Roger and Anita Radcliff who live in London. Perdita gives birth to fifteen puppies, drawing the attention of Cruella de Vil, the villainess and former schoolmate of Anita. Cruella, being obsessed with furs, kidnaps the puppies so that she might use their furs to make coats. The puppies, along with countless other Dalmatians that Cruella has acquired, are housed in her family's old home, Hell Hall. Cruella hires two petty criminals, the Badun brothers, to do her dirty work for her by stealing the puppies and later commanding the Baduns to kill them. Meanwhile, Pongo and Perdita have discovered the location of their puppies with the help of a network for the canine community known as Twilight Barking, and manage to rescue all the puppies being housed at Hell Hall with the help of various animal friends. After barely escaping from Cruella and the Baduns, the Dalmatians make it back to London, where they are warmly welcomed home. In Smith's novel, Cruella is camp in the sense that she is a highly stylized female character who relies heavily on performance, and the Disney film adaptation makes Cruella even campier and over the top, allowing a comparison to known camp figures like Tallulah Bankhead. In book The Disney Villains the animators Ollie Johnston and

¹ In addition to the 1961 animated film, the Walt Disney Film Company also produced a live action version of the story in 1996, starring Glenn Close as Cruella de Vil.

Frank Thomas note that, “In the original story by Dodie Smith, Cruella was presented as a spoiled, blasé, inconsiderate daughter of a wealthy family. The studio’s concept was considerably more flamboyant, dangerous, and humorous” (128). In looking closely at the film version of Cruella, it becomes clear that her “flamboyant, dangerous, and humorous” nature is what makes her a camp character. The film received and continues to receive praise by viewers and critics alike. In 1995 film critic Leonard Maltin said of the film

[It] is real enough to be believable and engrossing, but at all times retains its identity as an animated cartoon, to be enjoyed and laughed at. [The] film was a bigger hit than Disney’s more ambitious Sleeping Beauty, and has stood the test of time through several reissues, taking its place along side the other Disney cartoon classics. In fact, some aficionados believe it was the studio’s *last* great cartoon feature. (183-184)

Maltin cites other reviews of the film, one a Time magazine review that claimed the film was “the wittiest, most charming, least pretentious cartoon feature Walt Disney has ever made” and another from New York Times that declares, “Cruella makes the Snow White witch seem like Pollyanna...Imagine a sadistic Auntie Mame, drawn by Charles Addams and with a Tallulah Bankhead bass” (184). The New York Times comparison to Bankhead is important, as it signifies that the film incarnation of Cruella as Bankhead is a well known camp icon, suggesting that Bankhead herself may be another source text.

Critic Andy Medhurst discusses Tallulah Bankhead’s role as a camp figure in his article on the 1960’s Batman television series “Batman, Deviance, and Camp.” As Medhurst enumerates the ways in which the Batman television series embodied camp, he discusses a few episodes in which Tallulah Bankhead guest starred. Of Bankhead he states, “Too intelligent not

to be self-conscious, too ambitious to bother about her self-consciousness, too insecure ever to be content, but too arrogant ever to admit insecurity, Tallulah personified camp” (755-756). This description could be easily applied to Cruella as well, as she appears to be fairly intelligent in her plotting, ambitious in her desires, with just a suggestion of insecurity (one might question whether or not her elaborate wardrobe is used to mask this insecurity) and clearly arrogant, especially seen in the way that she regards the Radcliffs. Medhurst suggests that this inclusion of a camp icon on the television show illustrates the commitment of the Batman series to camp, going so far as to purposefully include a well-known camp icon in the show. Medhurst provides examples of Bankhead’s outrageous and disruptive nature, such as when she found a bathroom stall had no toilet paper and slipped a ten dollar bill under the partition to ask the woman beside her for two fives, and a second time when she whispered to a priest conducting a service, “Darling, I love the drag, but your purse is on fire” (756). These descriptions of Bankhead’s over the top personality show how she could be a template for the character of Cruella, who is seen in both the book and film as inappropriate and vulgar. And just as including Bankhead shows a commitment to camp on the part of the Batman series, it shows an acknowledgment on the part of the Disney animators on characterizing Cruella as campy.

Edward O’Neill also discusses Bankhead and her relationship to camp in his essay, “How to Become a Camp Icon in Five Easy Lessons: Fetishism—and Tallulah Bankhead’s Phallus.” O’Neill’s essay centers around an anecdote (that O’Neill notes may or may not have been true) about Bankhead that appeared in an unfinished manuscript by Truman Capote. The anecdote itself is about a comment Dorothy Parker made about Montgomery Clift’s sexuality and how upon realizing that she might have sounded offensive, she appealed to Bankhead to confirm Clift’s sexuality. Bankhead’s response neither confirmed nor denied Clift’s sexuality, and

instead Bankhead chose to make a comment on her own ambiguous gender. As O'Neill states "What's important about the anecdote for me is the way it marks a site where the difficulty in getting the truth about Tallulah Bankhead and about male homosexuality come together. What's interesting about Bankhead's riposte is that it underlines the way certain obscurities about Bankhead, such as her gender, take up the burden of an epistemological obscurity around male homosexuality" (318). O'Neill's essay shows not only the vulgar, risqué side of Bankhead's personality that would be ascribed to Cruella, it also shows how Bankhead's own gender was ambiguous, and how that aligned her with camp and the importance that has for the homosexual community on a political level. Bankhead's persona works to subvert traditional notions on gender, and like Bankhead, Cruella's characterization accomplishes the same.

Like 101 Dalmatians, Disney takes Hans Christian Andersen's source text and "campifies" it for the film adaptation, going so far as to base the character of Ursula off Divine, the drag persona of actor Harris Glenn Milstead. Disney's animated film adaptation of The Little Mermaid was released in 1989 and won an Academy Award for best song, "Under the Sea" and best original score.² The film made many changes from the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, which was published in 1837. In Andersen's tale, the little mermaid lives in an underwater kingdom with her sea king father, her grandmother and five older sisters. When the little mermaid turns fifteen she is allowed to go to the surface of the water, where she sees the prince and falls in love with him and saves him during a storm. Later, the little mermaid asks her grandmother about human life and her grandmother explains that humans live a short time in

² The 1989 film has spawned a prequel and sequel film as well as an animated TV show and Broadway production.

comparison to mermaid's 300 years. Once a mermaid dies, she turns into sea foam and no longer exists, while when human's soul will ascend to heaven. In order to help her in her quest for a human soul, the little mermaid goes to the Sea Witch to ask for her help who warns the little mermaid, "I know exactly what you want, [How] stupid of you! But I'm going to grant your wish, and it will bring you misfortune, my lovely princess" (142). The Sea Witch provides her with a potion that will give her a human form and explains that she must gain the love of the prince; otherwise she will never gain a human soul. When the little mermaid meets the Prince she enchants him, but he is in love with another woman, whom he eventually marries. Meanwhile, the little mermaid's sisters have also been to see the Sea Witch who gave them a knife in exchange for their hair. The sisters tell the little mermaid that if she can kill the prince with the knife she will become a mermaid again. The little mermaid is unable to kill the prince, and throws herself into the sea, where she then is transformed into a "daughter of the air" and can gain a soul by doing good deeds for humans and eventually gain entry into heaven.

Many critics and scholars have taken issue with the film adaptation of The Little Mermaid; their critiques usually address the themes and values that are different from those that occurred in the fairy tale. Scholar Roberta Trites discusses the changes that the film made in her article, "Disney's Sub/Version of Andersen's the Little Mermaid." According to Trites, in the Andersen fairy tale there is a "value system" in place that acknowledges the "legitimacy of feminine shapes" despite the many nineteenth-century patronizing attitudes towards women that also occur. Trites takes issue with the changes made as she feels they eliminate "the values that affirm femininity in the original story" (1). Trites' issues with the film are important to note, as they provide support for the idea that Disney films value and reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, even if the characters play with gender notions. Scholar Regina Bendix argues in

“Seashell Bra and Happy End: Disney’s transformations of ‘The Little Mermaid’” that the film version “prefers a definite patriarchy to the ambiguities of a matriarchy” which is accomplished by creating Ursula as the villainess and eliminating the female characters that appear in Andersen’s fairy tale. Bendix points out that some critics dislike Andersen’s tale for its pessimistic tones that value “self-denial instead of self-assertion” but she notes that, “his protagonists, although their demise may move one to tears, are ‘not defeated in spirit,’ an important lesson that children need and appreciate in real life, [not] a lesson deemed suitable at Disney Studios” (282).

In the film, the little mermaid, now named Ariel, lives in her father, King Triton’s underwater kingdom and is fascinated by the human world. Ariel goes on various expeditions with her fish friend Flounder and a crab named Sebastian, and she eventually comes into contact with Prince Eric. Much to the chagrin of King Triton, Ariel falls in love with Eric and so she seeks out Ursula with the help of Ursula’s pet eels, Flotsam and Jetsam. Ursula agrees to turn Ariel into a human so that she can be with Eric, and as payment she takes Ariel’s voice. Ursula tells Ariel that she must get Eric to kiss her in three days; otherwise she will be the property of Ursula. Ariel agrees, is turned into a human and begins trying to gain Eric’s love. Ursula sees how close Ariel is getting to her goal and turns herself into the seductress Vanessa and puts a trance on Eric using Ariel’s voice. Ariel, though the help of her friends breaks Eric’s trance, which angers Ursula who has been trying to use Ariel as a way to gain control over Triton’s kingdom. Triton agrees to take Ariel’s place, and Ursula takes Triton’s power, literally growing larger until Prince Eric stabs her with the bow of a ship, killing her and ending her brief reign of terror. King Triton’s power is restored, and he turns Ariel into a human so that she might marry Prince Eric.

In the comparison of the fairy tale versus the film, the Sea Witch takes a passive role towards the little mermaid when compared to Ursula, who actively seeks out Ariel and manipulates her. One official Disney website <http://disney.go.com>, provides insight into Disney culture in its description Ursula: “Bejewelled and lip-pouting like an overweight, over-rich, over-pampered, over-the-top society hostess gone mad, she is all flair, flamboyance, and theatricality mixed with a touch of con-artistry. Except when her wrath -- the only genuine emotion she seems capable of expressing -- bursts through, her every movement is a deceitful artifice, as if she's performing for an audience.” The use of the words “flair,” “flamboyance,” “theatricality” and “performing” all speak to notions of camp and nod to the Disney film corporation’s recognition Ursula as a camp figure. The production team that worked on The Little Mermaid acknowledges that Harris Glenn Milstead, perhaps better known by his drag persona Divine, served as the basis for Ursula. Born in 1945 in Baltimore Maryland, Milstead met filmmaker John Waters while in high school. Milstead’s biography on The New York Times online website states that “Waters indulged his chubby friend’s penchant for cross dressing” and that he launched Divine’s acting career with roles in some of his first films, Roman Candles and Eat Your Makeup. The two continued to work together, with Waters’ films becoming more “funny and outrageous” while Divine became known for wild and at times raunchy performances and together Waters’ and Divine’s became camp icons. Some of the pair’s most famous films include Pink Flamingos (1972), Female Trouble (1974), Polyester (1981) and Hairspray (1988).

Waters and Divine were both acquainted with play writer Howard Ashman, another Baltimore native. In 1982 Ashman collaborated with composer Alan Menken on Little Shop of Horrors, and both were recruited to work on the music for The Little Mermaid. In “Treasures Untold: The Making of Disney’s The Little Mermaid,” one of the bonus features on The Little

Mermaid DVD, Waters was interviewed and says of Divine's influence on the creation of Ursula:

I thought it was great, it was the ultimate irony. I'm sure that if you went to the Disney executives where they made this movie and said, we're gonna have a very large character, and this character is a big character in the movie it's not some tiny little ingénue part that comes in for a second, and we're gonna base it on Divine, and you know who that is, on dopey lane that ain't flyin' I'll tell ya!"

It did fly, however and co-writers/co-directors Ron Clements and John Musker acknowledged that Divine was in fact the inspiration for one of the most popular films and villainesses of Disney films. Divine's mark can be seen on Ursula's hair, her makeup, her body and bodily movements, her lines, her performance. Like Divine, Ursula is a flamboyant diva, who is a little inappropriate, but fun to watch. As a drag queen, Divine played with gender conventions, which scholar Mike Kelley briefly notes in his paper, "Cross Gender/Cross Genre" through a discussion of what he calls gender slippage. "[There] is a similar play with gender slippage in the figure of the grotesque 'drag queen' Divine, who could never be mistaken for a woman" (3). Kelley's statement acknowledges how gender is played with by drag queens. Therefore it becomes significant when the Disney film company openly admits that Ursula was based on Divine, even though Kelley argues that Divine didn't pass.

Author Dan M. Harries also looks at the ways in which Divine played with gender in "Camping with Lady Divine: Star Persona and Parody." In the article, Harries analyzes how the persona of Divine operates as parody, and how parody and camp play a role in "turning social norms upside down and constantly challenging the normalized boundaries of the social order" (14). Harries describes Divine as "[Over] three hundred pounds and dressed in an evening gown

and pumps for most of his performances, Divine was uncontestedly one-of-a-kind, and always controversial” (14). According to Harries, the physical appearance of Divine, particularly in the wardrobe choices, parodies not only gender roles, but also the Hollywood glamour and the Hollywood image of femininity. As a male actor playing female characters, Divine achieves this parody through “the collapse and reformulation of gender boundaries deemed normal in Western society and thus exposing the construction of such roles” (15). Harries argues that Divine’s persona is built on an exaggeration of the patriarchal ideas of what a “normal” woman is and through this parody Divine’s persona draws attention to the idea that sex roles are in fact constructed and not natural. For Harries, Divine’s excessive characterization of femininity works as a parody that takes constructed sex roles and removes their credibility, therefore “exposing the system which reinforces such norms” which allows for a critic of the system itself (16). Harries argues that Divine’s use of the Hollywood image of hyper femininity and sexuality in Divine’s grotesque form dismantles Hollywood’s idea of the “perfect” and “normal” woman. “Although Divine’s characters carry themselves in a glamorous fashion, particularly in terms of clothing and mannerisms, their disproportionally large breasts and protruding stomachs seem to negate any sense of normalized glamour and indeed parody such expectations” (17). It is this negation that serves to subvert the normalized image of the female body, despite the fact that Divine’s wardrobe still reflects it. Harries final thought on Divine is that: “Divine’s presence will go on subtly ripping apart the societal fabric, providing an on-going critique of a repressed culture. Although Divine is dead, his persona, a campy combination of various parodies, remains, if not on new strips of celluloid, then in the deep recesses of our psyches” (21). Harries’ statement proves to be true when one looks at the character of Ursula and the ways in which she is similar to Divine. In looking at these camp characters not only does the way in

which gender is constructed become clearer, it also shows how that construction can be subverted, even while under the constraints of society.

CHAPTER ONE:
DESCRIBING CAMP

As Andy Medhurst states in his article “Trying to define camp is like attempting to sit in the corner of a circular room. It can’t be done, which only adds to the quixotic appeal of the attempt” (753). What makes camp even harder to define is that it is not an analytical discourse, but instead experimental, and so a definition of camp can only be drawn by a description of what camp is, and how that description is being used within a specific context. Harries notes that camp utilizes “[Certain] forms of incongruity—the most common being the contrast of masculine/feminine. Androgyny, cross-dressing, and transvestism have all contributed to camp sensibility [An] important element of camp is the exaggerated dressing and acting like women by men” (14-15). He also notes that camp can have a liberating and subversive quality and since camp “[does] not immediately subside after the moment of critique” (21). Camp itself is a broad, contested topic, and so I will provide a discussion of some of the viewpoints on camp in order to establish the parameters of how I will be using camp in my discussion of Cruella and Ursula as campy characters. As I am using the term camp, it refers to an aesthetic sensibility that deals heavily in stylization, artifice, and allusion, whether in culture, entertainment, or persona such as the “Batman” TV series, Tallulah Bankhead, or Divine. To quote from Medhurst again, “Camp is [a] way of poking fun at the whole cosmology of restrictive sex roles and sexual identifications which our society uses to oppress its women and repress its men” (753). In this case, my description of camp relies heavily on looking at the performances and excess of Cruella and Ursula and how these performances draw attention to gender construction. In order to situate my discussion and further describe camp I will trace a brief history, beginning with Susan Sontag’s 1964 essay, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” which contained fifty-eight numbered theses that emphasized

various aspects of camp such as frivolity, excess, and artifice. Despite the fact that the essay is now somewhat dated, Sontag's essay was one of the first that attempted to define camp, thereby bringing it into the mainstream and many still associate camp with the definitions outlined in "Notes."

Sontag herself addresses the difficulty in defining camp:

A sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about; but there are special reasons why Camp, in particular, has never been discussed. It is not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such. Indeed the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric---something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques. [T]o talk about Camp is therefore to betray it. If the betrayal can be defended, it will be for the edification it provides, or the dignity of the conflict it resolves. For myself, I plead the goal of self-edification and the goad of a sharp conflict in my own sensibility. I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it. That is why I want to talk about it, and why I can. For no one who wholeheartedly shares in a given sensibility can analyze it; he can only, whatever his intention, exhibit it. (288)³

Although Sontag addresses the difficulties she feels many have had in discussing camp, she provides a reason for why she can: she is at once drawn to and offended by camp. Herein lies one of the problems that many scholars since Sontag have had with her "Notes," which is that the tone of the essay implies a disdain for camp on Sontag's part. However, Sontag's conflicting feelings towards camp illustrate the power that camp possesses in

³ Sontag capitalizes the word camp, most likely to distinguish it from other uses of the word.

its ability to disrupt expectations while still being esthetically appealing and Sontag's essay does provide an insight into camp and therefore is worth looking at more closely.

Sontag's first thesis briefly sums up how she defines camp, "To start very generally: Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization" (289). As Sontag describes it, camp is concerned with emotion and sensation of the highly stylized craftiness that camp portrays. In other words, camp isn't concerned with looking at the beauty alone, but the emotions and the operation or actions behind constructing that beauty. According to Sontag, camp draws attention to and is concerned with that which is contrived, almost to the point of being conventional. An example of this contrived stylization is drag, in which a person dresses in the clothing of the opposite gender, making the conventions of gender that much more noticeable. This can be seen in Cruella and Ursula, as they were both animated in two different highly stylized depictions of women, almost to the point that they look distorted or grotesque. The characters of Cruella and Ursula embody this aestheticism of artifice and stylization that Sontag discusses throughout the rest of "Notes on Camp." For Cruella, this is seen through her clothing and material wealth; for Ursula, it is through her performance of song and dance, and both characters share an exaggerated, over-the-top performance.

While Sontag doesn't specifically address drag as an aspect of camp, she does discuss androgyny:

As a taste in persons, Camp responds particularly to the markedly attenuated and to the strongly exaggerated. The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility. [H]ere, Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste: the most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined

form of sexual pleasure) consists in going against the grain of one's sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine [A]llied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn't: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms. For obvious reasons, the best examples that can be cited are movie stars. The corny flamboyant femaleness of Jayne Mansfield, Gina Lollobrigida, Jane Russell, Virginia Mayo; the exaggerated he-man-ness of Steve Reeves, Victor Mature. The great stylists of temperament and mannerism, like Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, Tallulah Bankhead, Edwige Feuillere. (292)

What is useful about Sontag's thesis on androgyny is that she explains why androgyny is attractive and how that in turn is tied to notions of camp. In her description of the beauty of androgyny, Sontag focuses on the construction of that beauty (hinting at her first statement on camp) through gender. Sontag addresses how this is connected to the idea of exaggeration, providing examples of movie stars that are known for their exaggerated characteristics, whether they are highly feminine, highly masculine, or a mixture of both. While drag itself is not strictly androgynous, like the idea of androgyny, drag draws attention to gender. It is interesting to note that both Cruella and Ursula are physical exaggerations of the feminine, while still having androgynous traits. In addition, both characters enact drag-like performances, adding yet another layer to the notion of these characters playing with gender conventions and performance. Ultimately, this is what makes them so interesting as characters, but also what villainizes them, as their characterization as camp was a deliberate choice on the part of the animators.

In a discussion of intention, whether deliberate or not, must be addressed; Sontag suggests that there are different types of camp based on intention. “One must distinguish between naïve and deliberate Camp. Pure Camp is always naïve. Camp which knows itself to be Camp (‘camping’) is usually less satisfying” (293). For Sontag, camp is either unintentional or deliberate, with deliberate camp being somehow less than desirable. I disagree with Sontag, and say that deliberate camp is just as valuable and enjoyable as unintentional camp, since camp is so associated with artifice, allusion, performance, and parody as she and others point out. There shouldn’t be a value judgment placed on these two types of camp, but it is important to acknowledge the difference between them. To make a comparison, I would say that Tallulah Bankhead would be a person who could be considered what Sontag calls naïve camp, because it is her personality that is camp like, and Divine would be an example of deliberate camp, as Divine is a drag persona that acknowledges the artifice.

Sontag’s final thought on camp is, “The ultimate Camp statement: it’s good *because* it’s awful” Sontag’s thesis refers more to the esthetics of camp, as a “so bad it’s good” sentiment but the statement could be applied to Disney’s ultimate camp villainesses, Cruella and Ursula. The appeal of these villainesses is that they revel in their awfulness and campy nature and this makes them so much more dynamic and layered than their respective protagonists. When Cruella and Ursula are on the screen, they demand attention to the point of overshadowing their protagonists and they steal the spotlight. The viewer delights in their wretched behavior, in their glamour, and excess while still fearing their evil nature. While Sontag brought camp into the mainstream, many scholars have taken issue with her definition and assessment of camp, particularly in the way that Sontag erased any queer implications from camp. Since Sontag’s work, scholars have attempted to expand and in some cases, redefine camp. Judith Butler’s

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, published in 1990, is one such work that takes a more queered perspective on camp.

In Gender Trouble, Butler attempts to subvert the binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, and gay/straight through a discussion of how these notions are culturally constructed through repetition of performed bodily acts. It is through the performance of these acts that one establishes these notions, and Butler attempts to demonstrate how certain performances are deemed “natural” and “unnatural.” Butler describes the performance of bodily acts as “gender performance.” Gender, according to Butler, comes from one’s constant performing of gender acts which produces the feeling that gender in terms of “male” or “female” is normal, despite a person’s actions or feelings that are contradictory to that single notion of gender. Butler states, “As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (15). For Butler, gender is not something we are physically born with, but rather something that we learn through repetition of those gender behaviors that are dictated by society. In looking at gender in this way, Butler shows how notions of gender can be played with and even though one might be physically male or female, he or she can and does possess masculine and feminine traits. Butler states, “When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (10). In allowing for these gendered terms to be ascribed to either gender, one can see how gender is simply an illusion. Butler uses drag as a way to illustrate how these notions of a single ascribed gender are problematic, as drag draws attention to the very notion of gender. Butler says of drag:

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself [In] other words, the naturalistic effect of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of the heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation of its effect. [In] other words, heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself—and *failing*. [In] other words, those compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real. (qtd in Richter 1713)

A discussion of drag in relation to camp is important, as drag is often considered to be camp, and also speaks to similar notions. While Cruella and Ursula aren’t necessarily drag, in some ways they enact drag performances, in their hyper stylized and performative feminine behaviors and actions. Cruella and Ursula therefore illustrate Butler’s point on how all gender is a performance, how there is no “real” man or woman.

In The Politics and Poetics of Camp, editor Moe Meyer expands on Butler’s work in gender and sexuality as related to camp; he writes that camp is “both political and critical” and “not simply a ‘style’ or ‘sensibility’ as is conventionally accepted and popularized by Sontag. As Sontag states in “Notes,” “It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged,

depoliticized—or at least apolitical” to which Meyer and others would disagree (290). For Meyer, camp is a construction of beliefs, which are one, that camp is political, two, that camp is solely a queer discourse, and three, that camp embodies a “specifically queer cultural critique.” According to Meyer, camp as a queer discourse “displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous while substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts” (3). Meyer grounds this definition of camp within a discussion of Judith Butler and her views on gender. Meyer quotes Butler, “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time--- an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (4). As Meyer points out, Butler argues that gender is performance and that gender is a social construction and through a stylized performance of gender, camp draws attention to those gender constructions.

Meyer continues, “Thus I define Camp as the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility” (5).⁴ For Meyer, the social visibility is important, as this allows camp to position itself within the social discourse on heteronormativity and allow for possible subversion. For Cruella and Ursula, it is another way to characterize them as somehow different than their protagonists, especially since it is what makes them so dynamic and interesting to watch. When compared to Cruella and Ursula, their respective protagonists seem flat and heteronormative, while Cruella and Ursula’s campy aspects give them visibility. By re-writing queer implications back into camp, Meyer argues that, “It can be engaged directly by the queer to produce social visibility in

⁴ Meyer capitalizes the word camp in order to distinguish his definition of camp from the others. By capitalizing camp, Meyer wishes to convey the importance of camp as a queer political discourse, as opposed to Sontag’s erasure of queer and political implications.

the praxis of everyday life, or it can be manifested as the camp trace by the un-queer in order [to] provide queer access to the apparatus of representation” (5). As stated previously, Meyer believes that camp is political, meaning camp is a way to discuss the dominant discourses at work, and how that discourse appropriates camp. Camp, however, can subvert this discourse and allow for the visibility of the marginalized. Meyer’s discussion of the role of camp within the dominant discourse illustrates why camp is valuable in the first place. Camp is not merely low culture entertainment it is the discourse of the marginalized, allowing for their advancement through a “entering of alternative signifying codes into discourse by attaching them to existing structures of signification” (11). In order to enter into the discourse and gain visibility and representation, the marginalized can use camp to work within the discourse, and enact a subversion of that discourse. This political discussion is just one that occurs when discussing camp and illustrates the vast nature and the various ways in which camp enacts and is defined. There has been some study on Disney’s relationship to camp, and the argument is still relevant. In the following section, I will provide a brief look at other scholarship on the subject in order to situate my own argument.

Disney and Camp

Disney’s animated films, in part due to their outrageous musical numbers, may be considered campy. Most of Disney’s animated films do contain musical numbers and 101 Dalmatians and The Little Mermaid are no exception. In addition to the musical numbers and various campy characters, Cruella and Ursula are two of the most fully fleshed out campy characters. Little work has been done on the relationship between Disney and camp, and what has been done has been fairly brief. In their article, Kerry Mallan and Roderick McGillis explore

camp and its relationship to children's culture using Disney's films of Aladdin and The Little Mermaid as examples. Mallan and McGillis begin with an overview of camp and the role that camp plays in children's culture, which is that children will often enact gender in conflicting ways as they attempt to learn what gender is, similar to the way that camp does. In their analysis of camp in Disney's films, Mallan and McGillis consider "male and female camp within a framework that takes into account camp aesthetics and performance" specifically of Jafar, the Genie and Ursula. According to Mallan and McGillis' analysis, Jafar and the Genie do not in fact, destabilize the viewers' assumptions on gender, but instead "reiterate certain constructions of American masculinity, but with a camp take." (12). This reiteration is in part due to the fact that the Genie's performance of camp is used for comic effect, which according to the authors, wins over the audience. In contrast, Jafar's performance serves to alienate him from the audience and thus, the Genie as "the camp 'good guy'" becomes more acceptable to mainstream audiences than Jafar, who represents a "camp villain whose queerness ensures his villainy" (13). For Mallan and McGillis, these performances of camp as aligned with "good" and "villainy" ensure that traditional conventions gender and sexuality are reinforced, which is the opposite goal that camp serves to achieve.

They continue with their discussion of Ursula who "offers a subversive femininity that embodies a queer camp aesthetics" (14). This subversion of femininity is accomplished through Ursula's position as an abject subject, as she has been cast out of King Triton's kingdom. For the authors this abjection, "embodies camp's discourse as the queer subject's proscription in the dominant order. Through using parody, performance and subversion, Ursula does more to disrupt and unsettle gender norms and conventions, than the sweet but feisty Ariel could ever imagine" (14). They demonstrate how Ursula's actions that enact a drag performance along with

her ambiguously gendered body are the methods which Ursula as a camp character disrupts conventions and norms of gender. As Mallan and McGillis state, this performance “invites the audience to look at the world queerly. Normality simply has no place” (15). Unlike Jafar and the Genie, Ursula’s performance subverts these norms rather than reiterating them, as her character helps to illustrate how camp views gender itself as a performance and not determined by biology. The discussion of Jafar, the Genie and Ursula is very brief, only spanning a few pages and so I will use their discussion as support for the argument that both Cruella and Ursula are celebrated camp characters that disrupt expectations of villains and gender, causing a feeling of disorientation within the viewer.

Camp versus Diva

While other films and villains might have some camp attributes, Cruella and Ursula represent a full realization of camp characters. Prior villainesses, such as the Queen from Snow White, Lady Tremaine from Cinderella, and Maleficent from Sleeping Beauty, I argue, are more diva characters than campy ones. By looking at these other villainesses and how they are depicted in similar ways to Cruella and Ursula, one can see that Disney has a history of playing with notions of camp, with the diva villainesses of the Queen, Lady Tremaine and Maleficent. I define diva as someone who is usually associated with the opera or music more broadly, unless the term is being used colloquially to signify a person who is ostentatious and pleased with (her) self. While Divine (the performer) is a drag persona, her behavior is diva-like in the colloquial sense. I would also argue that a diva is explicitly feminine, so if a drag performer adopts the term, it will be with a wink. Divine therefore illustrates how diva and camp overlap and relate to each other. In looking at the other Disney villainesses as compared to Cruella and Ursula, these

divas command the attention of the viewer as powerful and dangerous women, as opposed to Cruella and Ursula commanding attention more for their antics. The more diva like villainesses are serious in their actions, and because of this are seen as serious villainesses not to be trifled with, unlike Cruella and Ursula, who at times have an almost silly and playful quality about them, despite still being dangerous. It is this diva-like nature of the other villainesses' attributes that characterize them as less humorous and relatable villainesses.

The voice of Cruella, Betty Lou Gerson, comments on Cruella's character in The Disney Villains. "Cruella is a very interesting character. She's the only villainess who doesn't use magic; she's a dirty, mean dame but everyone can relate to her. She's real" (131). Roy Disney is also quoted in The Disney Villains and compares Ursula to Cruella, "Ursula was the same way in that she was a villain but she had that humorous kind of underpinning to where there was entertainment as well as villainy. So it wasn't all evil like Maleficent, where there's no redeeming anything, or the queen in Snow White" (191-192). As the quotes from The Disney Villain suggests, Cruella and Ursula are some of the most popular in the Disney film canon and as Roy Disney argues, there is an enjoyment to be had in these villainesses that redeems them as characters, even though one wants to kill puppies and the other is a glutton for power. It would seem that the same characterization that makes them easy to relate to or humorous and campy, undermines their villainy, unlike the other villainesses. I argue that the other villainesses are characterized not as camp, but as divas. To look more closely at what a diva is, I turn to the article "Diva Citizenship: A Case Study of Margaret Haley as Feminist Citizen-Leader" by Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Kate Rousmaniere.

In attempting to define a diva, Abowitz and Rousmaniere cite scholar Lauren Berlant, and what she calls, diva citizenship:

Diva citizenship occurs when a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege. Flashing up and startling the public, she puts the dominant story into suspended animation; as though recording an estranging voice-over to a film we have all already seen, she re-narrates the dominant history as one the that abjected people have once lived sotto voice, but not more; and she challenges her audience to identify with the enormity of the suffering she has narrated and the courage she has had to produce, calling on people to change the social and institutional practices of citizenship to which they currently consent” (qtd in Berlant 223).

In looking at Berlant’s description of diva citizenship, it becomes clear how camp and diva overlap, as a camp character and a diva one both challenge conventionally held notions on gender, but they do so in different ways and through different type of performance. Where a camp character deals with parody, a diva does not. Abowitz and Rousmaniere note that a diva “[C]ultivates a personality that befits such attention: a magisterial and confident pose, elegant diction, graceful movement, and a studied indifference to the mundane and tedious elements of daily life” (qtd in Jung 4-5). The Evil Queen, Lady Tremaine and Maleficent are all animated to appear in this way, as elegant and yet distant. In addition, these three villainesses are animated to appear as extremely beautiful and feminine, not only in appearance but in their actions. This is yet another way in which Abowitz and Rousmaniere define diva. “The diva constructs herself through an aesthetic performance of self—a self that may be, in the contemporary diva’s world, an utterly feminized icon of conventional beauty and grace. Yet divas twist the feminine into a commanding source of authority through their performance *as* powerful people. [T]he diva is inherently a performer, and one in whom the performance allows a liberating and autonomous

force” (10-11). In looking at the three diva-like villainesses, it becomes clear that this is how they behave as characters, as they use their feminine ways to command authority and become powerful. So while the three diva villainesses command authority through a twisting of the feminine, Cruella and Ursula command it through a subversion of the feminine, which in turn classifies them as champ characters.

CHAPTER TWO:

HOW TO CLASSIFY A CAMP CHARACTER

Cruella and Ursula can both be read as camp characters for various reasons; one being that they are such highly stylized depictions of women. In terms of the physical, both Cruella and Ursula have very feminine forms. Cruella has a narrow waist and wide hips, but her hands, feet and facial features are very sharp and hard. Her feet, for example, are long and her cheekbones are very sharp, almost to the point of distortion. Ursula is a very voluptuous octopus woman and as she glides through the water her hips sway back and forth. Cruella and Ursula also have heavily made-up faces—and—before which their eyebrows arched, their lips red and eyes lined which almost makes them look clown-like in comparison to their respective female protagonists. Their hairstyles are also eye-catching, as Cruella's is half white and half black, and Ursula's white hair is cropped short. They also share similar husky and deep voices that are almost masculine and slightly seductive. The overall impression these villainesses make is that they are women, but almost to the point of extreme, making them appear ambiguous and in turn, that ambiguity is what singles them out and makes them appear unnatural or different. The physicality of these characters is important to note in a discussion of their campiness, as camp is often associated with the visual: camp loves the surface, the image, and the body-as-text. However, it is more than their physical appearance that makes them campy characters, their behavior and actions are also highly campy. Kevin Shortleeve notes in his article "The Wonderful World of the Depression: Disney, Despotism, and the 1930s. Or Why Disney Scares Us" that these villainesses "over perform in ways that indicate what they are not" and say of Cruella that she

[similarly] sweeps into every scene likes a grand dame making a stage entrance for an enthusiastic crowd. Constantly carrying an absurdly long cigarette holder, she uses it repeatedly to further overemphasize every gesture and inflection. No movement or line of dialogue is subtle or underplayed. Instead her every moment is ‘played to the cheap seats.’ Cruella overdoes in everything. Yet in her attempts to be the epitome of feminine glamour, she consistently [reveals the opposite].

(qtd in Griffin 74)

In looking at these two characters as campy, it is important to be aware that they are campy in different ways and represent different types of camp. Cruella is depicted as a fallen aristocrat, which provides yet another connection to camp as there is a sense of the aristocratic in camp, as Sontag suggests, “Aristocracy is a position vis-à-vis culture (as well as vis-à-vis power), and the history of Camp taste is part of the history of snob taste” (300). Yet there is also a sense that camp might be connected with the vulgar, like the campy films by director John Waters in which Divine is often the star, and so this provides Ursula a connection to camp as well. However, the aristocratic and vulgar are just two of the various incarnations of camp, as camp can be gay or straight, male or female, but it at least concerns itself with queerness in some way—if it is not explicitly gay, it at least asks us to question the normalcy of heterosexual desire. There has been reclamation of camp by contemporary queer theorists, such as Meyer, as an attempt to recognize its more profound political implication. In looking at how the characters of Cruella and Ursula play with campy notions, and what this means for their respective films helps to highlight the political implication of camp in queer theory.

Cruella

When Cruella de Vil is first introduced in the novel, the Dearlys are out walking Pongo and Missis.⁵ As they are walking through the park, the narrator notes that the evening was beautiful and peaceful, with the houses “basking” in golden rays of sunlight and the sounds of children, chirping birds and a piano in the background (13). The scene described by the narrator creates a feeling of not only serenity, but also of bliss. Every sensory detail of the Dearlys’ walk is in harmony, with the sights and sounds all working together to create a soothing feeling. At one point during their walk Mr. Dearly says, “I shall always remember this happy walk” (13). His statement draws attention to the almost overwhelming feeling of peace and happiness that the scene depicts, but it also serves to foreshadow the danger that will occur throughout the rest of the novel. Immediately after Mr. Dearly utters this sentence, the serenity is broken by the “extremely strident motor horn” of Cruella’s car. Before the Dearlys actually see Cruella, her presence is made known by a shock to their senses. Cruella and her horn violently awaken the dogs and the Dearlys to the unpleasantness of life, as she (through the car’s horn) forcibly commands their attention. When the car pulls up to Cruella’s doorstep she walks outside to meet it and is described as wearing, “a tight fitting emerald satin dress, several ropes of rubies, and an absolutely simple white mink cloak, which reached to the high heels of her ruby-red shoes” (13). In contrast with the Dearlys and their appearance, Cruella’s appearance physically marks her as the villain and it is unexpected since it is striking and glamorous. Her appearance is one way that she stands out from those around her, as it displays her exaggerated nature that was translated into the film.

⁵ In the film the Dearlys are renamed as the Radcliffs and Missis is renamed Perdita.

As Smith describes Cruella's attire, the reader sees that she is not wearing any old dress; instead, it is tight and made of emerald green satin. The fact that her dress is made of satin suggests luxury, but also impracticality as satin is a flimsy and easily damaged fabric. To describe her dress as emerald in color adds to the overall glamour of Cruella, as the color is rich and vibrant much like the gemstone of the same name. In addition to the emerald satin dress, Cruella is wearing "several ropes of rubies" and the fact that Cruella has several ropes of precious gemstones that she has draped herself in speaks to the wealth that she has, but also to her garish nature. The contrasting colors are also very important, as it creates a visual duality with rubies being blood red and emeralds a rich green, both of which are considered to be precious gemstones. Cruella is literally clothing herself in wealth, which she places above everything else, as seen by her desire to skin puppies for luxurious fur coats.

The finishing touches of Cruella's attire are her white mink cloak that reaches down to her ruby red high heels, a bold choice. The cloak is also a striking choice as it is "absolutely simple white" and therefore completely unsoiled. This is despite the fact that white is very hard to keep clean, and is made from the fur of an animal, which is seen in the novel as particularly evil and sullied piece of clothing. Mr. Dearly notices Cruella's cloak saying, "What a beautiful cloak...But you'll find it too warm for this evening" (14). In this statement Mr. Dearly sums up Cruella's appearance as being eye catching in its contrasting beauty, but also impractical and garish. The suggestion is that although her clothing might be beautiful, there is a dark side and ambiguous side to it and thus Cruella. Mr. Dearly's comment also allows for Cruella to express her cold nature while hinting at her devilish qualities as she replies, "I never find anything too warm...I wear furs all the year round. I sleep between ermine sheets" (14). Once again Cruella's desire for the luxurious, no matter how ridiculous, is exposed, along with her cold

nature. Throughout the rest of the novel, Cruella is draped in furs, always attempting to warm herself through fires or hot food, such as pepper, which she uses liberally. The implication is that Cruella is cold natured and cold hearted, as she cares little for the lives of animals. Cruella tells the Dearlys, “I worship furs, I live for furs! That’s why I married a furrier” (14). Her declaration of love for furs shows how evil she really is, particularly in contrast with the Dearlys who love animals so much that they are willing to own one hundred and one Dalmatians. At one point Cruella even states that she doesn’t like her own cat, and would drown her if she wasn’t so valuable, illustrating that the only thing that matters to her is value, presumably monetary, of goods, people and or animals.

Cruella’s love of clothing becomes important, as it not only illustrates her value system, but also hints at her campy nature. Sontag states that, “Clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor for instance, make up a large part of Camp. For Camp art is often decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content” (290). In both the novel and film adaptation, Cruella’s clothing is visually striking and important to defining her character. She wears tight fitting satin, a fabric that is glossy, flimsy, and slick. Satin is often typically used to make finer articles of clothing, such as lingerie, neckties, evening gowns or ballet shoes, all of which are fine articles of clothing that suggest richness, glamour and sensuality. Cruella’s “ropes of rubies” paired with the emerald color of her dress alludes to the precious nature of the gemstones themselves is yet another way in which Cruella adorns herself with riches, however literal or figurative. The “absolutely simple white mink coat” and ruby-red shoes are the final attention grabbing accessories, with the fur coat being the definitive piece of Cruella’s wardrobe. Having Cruella adorn herself in satin, jewels and fur illustrates her desire to be surrounded by fine goods, to wrap her in glamour and pleasure, as Sontag suggests. The

Disney film version of Cruella is similar to the highly stylized wardrobe that is described and illustrated in the novel. In the film, Cruella is animated as wearing a form-fitting black sleeveless dress, pointy, red high heel shoes, red gloves, a fur bag, a cigarette holder and her signature white fur coat. This desire to be immersed in the sensuous makes Cruella appear superficial, in contrast to the Dearlys/Radcliffs who are not concerned with material wealth. In addition, both the novel and film use Cruella's physical traits to contribute to her villainous image.

In Smith's novel, Cruella is physically described as having, "a dark skin, black eyes with a tinge of red in them, and a very pointed nose. Her hair was parted severely down the middle and one half of it was black and the other white---rather unusual" (13). In the accompanying illustration, Cruella's hair is shown as being pulled back tightly so that the contrast between the black and white is made noticeable. She is depicted as stepping into her car, her body curving against it, her forearm resting on the doorframe. The posing makes Cruella appear to be both seductive and haughty, which is played up by her arching eyebrows and firm mouth. In this illustration Cruella is draped in her white fur, ropes of jewelry and form fitting dress so that she looks utterly fabulous in her excessive wardrobe. Additionally, all of her physical traits are described as dark or black, except for her unusual, half white, and half black hair. Cruella's physical and sartorial choices reflect how complex and layered she is as a character. While she is glamorous in appearance, she is also dangerous and dark: she is at once feminine and masculine, as her bold nature and strong personality show.

In contrast to Smith's introduction of Cruella, the film takes Cruella and makes her even more disruptive to the Radcliffs and their Dalmatians, as Cruella invades their private and secure home life, causing Perdita to want to seek cover. The scene begins with Pongo and Perdita

sitting by a window as the Radcliffs hum a tune to each other. Suddenly a horn blares and Perdita slowly sits up, her eyes shown widening to show fear, “Oh Pongo, it’s her! It’s that devil woman!” In the next frame, a red and black car is shown violently zigzagging down the street, causing birds to scatter and comes to a screeching stop at the Radcliffs doorstep as Perdita runs out of the shot presumably to find a hiding place. Roger states that it must be Cruella, Anita’s old schoolmate, and he begins to hum the tune again, this time adding the lyrics, “Cruella de Vil, Cruella de Vil, if she doesn’t scare you, no evil thing will! To see her is to take a sudden chill! Cruella, Cruella, she’s like a spider waiting for the kill, look out for Cruella de Vil!” As he is singing, Roger sneaks around, making his hand create a claw, and Cruella’s shadow is shown slowly filling up the door window. Anita tells Nanny to let Cruella in, and before she can Cruella pushes the door open, her head almost touching the doorframe.

When Cruella bursts through the door, the viewer sees she is in her white fur coat, with red gloves, red shoes, a black and white purse, a cigarette holder and a tight black dress. Her hair is black and white, her skin a strange grayish color, suggesting that she is somehow not like the other human characters. Her features are sharp and angular, her fingers and feet long and pointed. Leonard Maltin elaborates on Cruella’s odd and exaggerated appearance and actions. Maltin states that the film “revels in stylistic exaggeration of reality, best exemplified by the character of Cruella De Vil” (183). Of her physical appearance Maltin describes Cruella as a “caricature,”

[Her] body is a thin line, encased in a huge, billowing white fur coat. Her face is bony and angular, suggesting the canineness of her personality, and her hair is a shock of black and white moplike strands. She carries at all times a mile-long cigarette holder and leaves behind her a trail of smoke wherever she

goes. Even her car is an exaggeration—a long, long luxury limousine that careens down the city streets and screeches to a halt in front of the Radcliffs' home.

Cruella is doubly striking, of course, in contrast to Anita, who is drawn much in the classic style of Disney heroines. (183)

As the scene continues, the viewer hears Cruella speak for the first time. “Anita! Darling!” Cruella cries as she slinks into the Dearlys foyer, raising her hands above her head, her cigarette smoke swirling around her body. Anita calmly asks how she is doing, to which Cruella responds with, “Miserable, darling, as usual! Perfectly wretched!” It is this playful and overdramatic use of language given to Cruella that helps to make her character so dynamic. Within the novel, Cruella is portrayed as being sleekly beautiful, while the Cruella in the film is more of a perpetually unstable madwoman. This change in character is what makes Cruella not only campy, but dangerous, as the chaos that she inflicts is destabilizing for the other characters and viewers. This can be seen as the scene continues, as Cruella walks up to Anita and blows smoke in her face, quickly walking away as the smoke leaves a yellowish trail behind her. The smoke from Cruella's cigarette is important, as on the one hand, the smoke acts as an extension of Cruella herself, the disruption it causes lingering as Cruella herself walks out of the room. On the other hand, the smoke reflects the devilish and dragon like nature of Cruella, as smoke is often symbolic of both. Cruella begins looking around the Dearlys house, her mouth depicted as down turned, her eyes and forehead showing concentration. “Where are they?” she cries, as she almost storms into Pongo, making him jump up.

Cruella proceeds to wave her arms around, and begins to walk around the house, opening doors with her trail of smoke still lingering in the air. “For heaven’s sake, where are they?” she cries, as Roger can be heard upstairs, playing the tune to the song he was humming earlier. Anita asks Cruella who she is looking for and she replies, “The puppies! The puppies darling! No time for games, where are the little brutes?” As she asks Anita where the puppies are, she continues to waves her arms around, making herself seem to tower over Anita, her cigarette smoke engulfing her. Cruella’s face is shown to narrow in disgust and frustration. Anita tells her it will be at least three weeks before she can see them, and Cruella takes a long drag on her cigarette, her face squishing up as she does so. She then exhales and lets out a laugh, her eyes closing and her mouth opening in a wide grin, and she places a gloved hand on her hip. “Anita you’re such a witch!” she laughs, as she takes her hand and waves it towards Anita. In this scene, Cruella’s theatrical nature is seen as she moves throughout the Radcliffs’ house, waving her arms about and blowing smoke in Anita’s face. In many of her scenes, Cruella creates the theatrics and drama around her, either by throwing liquor bottles in the fireplace so that they explode, or by slamming doors so that the ceiling cracks and falls to the floor. Cruella also creates an air of tension and drama by being an affront to others’ senses, whether by blowing smoke in their faces or by her erratic and loud driving.

The scene where Cruella is asking the Radcliffs to sell her the puppies is also a perfect example, as they repeatedly tell her they will not sell them, and Cruella ignores them while she attempts to get her ink pen to write. She violently shakes her pen until it splatters ink all over Pongo and Roger, causing Roger to quietly seethe. He stands up and tells Cruella they will never sell the puppies and does not back down from Cruella, even as she becomes angry, leaning into Roger and getting right in his face. Roger stutters his responses, suggesting that he is afraid or

intimidated by Cruella, but Cruella leaves without the puppies, giving Anita a warning before she storms out the door, breaking the glass in its windows. Cruella is all theatrics, and Sontag address theatrically in “Notes.” “To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater” (292). For the character of Cruella, this is very much the case, as evidenced by her need to create theatrics as an extension of her emotion. In doing so, Cruella’s character draws attention to “the metaphor of life as theater,” as the whole world appears to be her stage and she seems to be relishing every minute of it. Sontag continues, “The question isn't, "Why travesty, impersonation, theatricality?" The question is, rather, "When does travesty, impersonation, theatricality acquire the special flavor of Camp?" (292). So even though Cruella’s theatrics have “the special flavor of Camp,” those same theatrics do not when they are attributed to another character, like Maleficent from Disney’s film adaptation of Sleeping Beauty. Maleficent’s theatrics are used to convey dangerous rage and power, while Cruella’s are used to similar to the way a child would throw a tantrum. Cruella wants her puppy fur coat now, and she will not take no for an answer. So while Maleficent and Cruella inspire fear through their theatrics, Cruella is less fearsome, because there is the underlying implication that there is something sort of silly and fun about her.

A good example of the playful nature of Cruella is when she calls up the Radcliffs to offer condolences over the lost puppies. The scene opens with the newspaper headlines of the stolen puppies and Cruella saying, “Dog napping! Can you imagine such a thing? Fifteen puppies stolen. They are darling little things.” At first it is hard to tell that Cruella is the one speaking, as she is nowhere in the frame. Her voice is low and soft, and full of sympathy, unlike her booming voice when she first appeared on screen at the Radcliffs. As she begins to utter the

sentence, “Fifteen puppies stolen” a puff of her yellowish-green cigarette smoke hits the newspaper, creating ominous looking swirls over the picture of the puppies. The shot then cuts to Cruella, sitting up in bed in a black fur, her hair in pink rollers. Cruella begins to laugh, “Anita and her bashful Beethoven! Pipe and all!” She can barely speak for laughing so much, slapping her thigh as she says, “Roger, you are a fool!” As she laughs, the shot pans out to reveal the Cruella’s feet kicking at her pink covers, and she throws her head back on her pink, ornate headboard with various articles of clothing draped on it. The scene does a good job of juxtaposing Cruella’s devilish nature with her silliness. When she first begins speaking, one is tricked into thinking it must be another character, as the voice is subdued and caring. Cruella’s devious nature is then brought to light with the realization that she is feigning sympathy for the puppies and the viewer is reminded that Cruella cannot be trusted as her yellow cigarette smoke seeps into the shot. The next shots continue to juxtapose the unexpected, as Cruella viciously laughs at the Radcliffs, while looking completely ridiculous. Her pink rollers and kicking feet make it hard to take Cruella seriously; instead she seems like a child playing dress up. This is perhaps what makes Cruella so dangerous, in that she can be two things at once. The scene illustrates both the madwoman and devil in Cruella, but also the fear and joy one has in watching her. Her oscillation between each shows just how dynamic a character she really is, as we hardly ever see any of the other characters being so expressive and almost playful. There is some pleasure in watching a woman named de Vil sit in her ornate bed which has nylons and fur bags draped on it, with rollers in hair and feet kicking at her sheets.

Cruella’s car is another symbol of her material wealth and greed, and is yet another way that Cruella is distinguished from the Radcliffs and marked as “evil.” Not only is her car another way in which Cruella’s theatrics and emotions are extended to her surroundings, it illustrates a

differing worldview. While the Radcliffs are always seen walking, out enjoying the peaceful environment that surrounds them, Cruella uses her car to get around, and in doing so she disrupts the peace. The fact that Cruella's car makes physical marks on the environment mirrors how she herself creates emotional damage and destruction through her lust for fur. While the Radcliffs represent peace and the heteronormative love of a good, devoted couple, Cruella represents destruction and greed. The implication is clear: the Dearlys are in harmony with the natural world, and therefore will prosper, while Cruella is unnatural and in discord with nature and will suffer because of it. Cruella's car also an example of the "visual décor" that Sontag ascribes to camp as Cruella's car acts as an extension of the character and her villainous nature. In the novel, Cruella's car is described as being painted with black and white stripes, whipping around town, with its loud horn shattering the peace. In the film adaptation, the aggressive nature of Cruella and her car is played out on the screen, with Cruella's manic driving on display, the headlights of the car drawn to look like narrowed, angry eyes. At one point Cruella stalks around the town in her car, looking for the puppies. The scenes makes Cruella and her car by extension appear to be animal-like, as she slowly drives the car back and forth in a pacing manner, much like an impatient hunter waiting for the chance to strike at it's prey. In fact, most of the final scenes take place with Cruella in her car, driving wildly over the snowy English country, leaving deep tire tracks in the pristine white snow. The final chase scene shows Cruella, her red, swirling eyes, her hair suddenly wild and standing on end, giving her a Medusa-like appearance. This scene shows the physical manifestation of Cruella's wicked and villainous nature and the fact that she is depicted to appear Medusa-like is significant.

Freud says of Medusa, "To decapitate=to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something" (533). Freud continues his sketch of

Medusa, describing how her snake-like hair elicits fear in the viewer, causing him to become “stiff with terror” which Freud likens to the stiffening a penis during erection. For Freud, this stiffening in the viewer reminds him that he is in possession of a penis, offering some consolation. For Freud Medusa’s head also represents the “horror” of the female genitals, and that “What arouses horror in oneself will produce the same effect upon the enemy against whom one is seeking to defend oneself” (533). So then Cruella becomes the most monstrous of all females as she causes the viewer to become stiff with terror at the sight of her rage, therefore represents the fear of the female. Medusa is at once female, but also male, as she has phallic hair and the power to castrate. It could be said that Medusa is a queer subject, like Cruella and Ursula are queer subjects in their campy characterization. At the end of the film, Cruella is shown to be a campy villainess with the implication that her campiness, ambiguous gender construction (in terms of a hyper stylized female with hyper feminine and masculine personality traits) combined with her evil nature make her a character to be the villain, to be destroyed. From this, the conclusion could be drawn that although Cruella’s campy characteristics make her humorous and easy to relate to, they also make her the powerful, fearful and female villain. It then becomes easy to see that the gender options Cruella presents are being undermined by the film, which allows heteronormativity to appear good and desirable. Like Cruella, Ursula will provide similar gender options in The Little Mermaid.

Ursula

Ursula proves to be an interesting character to watch, as her characterization, actions, and the imagery that surrounds her hint at her ambiguous nature. This is accomplished by images of male and female, especially dangerous female imagery like vagina dentata and Medusa, birth,

and mothers. Viewers are first introduced to Ursula through the eyes of her evil eel pets/sidekicks, Flotsam and Jetsam, who are watching Ariel. During this scene, there is a close up of the eels, with Ariel's reflection in their yellow eyes as the frame dissolves to show Ariel in a bubble that is floating over a purple, toothed caldron, suggestive of vagina dentate, a symbol of a dangerous, threatening, female. The music playing over the scene is particularly ominous, creating a feeling of danger that is reinforced when we hear Ursula's deep voice growl, "Yes, hurry home, princess, we wouldn't want to miss old daddy's celebration, now would we?" followed by a mocking laugh. At this point the film has yet to actually show Ursula and so she is represented by her husky, almost masculine voice first. Throughout the film the idea of voice becomes important as it becomes clear that voice and agency are not linked; Ariel has little agency and loses her voice, Ursula has agency along with a loud voice. Ursula's use of language is also important to note, as she calls Ariel "princess" in a mocking tone, which illustrates how Ursula positions herself above Ariel. In his review of the film for New York Magazine after its initial release, David Denby commented that Ursula was a refreshing change from traditional Disney villains as she, "sounds more like a female impersonator than like a woman, which is a bit confusing, [P]erhaps low camp works best underwater" (143). As Denby points out, the fact that Ursula's voice is androgynous and her playful language is one way in which Ursula can be defined as a camp figure. In addition, the fact that Ursula uses her words as a way to establish her power allows her to be seen as an authority figure, or at least as a character that desires that authority. The importance of Ursula being a type of camp figure is that Ursula teaches Ariel (and the viewer) that gender is simply a construction, and that one's voice can liberate one from those constructions.

As the scene continues, the shot pans out to reveal Ursula sitting in the shadows

of a giant conch shell, with her narrow, snake-like eyes glowing . Trites describes the shell, “[Its] lips spread open to reveal a gaping hole leading to some unknown place. This gynophobic image is a grotesque parody of the female anatomy” (4). As Trites asserts, the “grotesque parody of female anatomy” that surrounds Ursula mirrors her true nature; the feeling created is that Ursula is a character to be feared, and her eyes look evil, and similar to the eyes of her writhing, insidious pet eels. The fact that Ursula is hidden away is also important, as it suggests that she is a character that lurks in the shadows and is not to be trusted. Lounging in her shell, Ursula begins revealing her bitterness towards King Triton, and how much better life was for everyone when she lived in the palace. As Ursula is lamenting her current state, there is a close shot of her picking up a shaking, squeaking shrimp from a bowl and throwing it in her mouth, which is lined with large angular teeth, and full, red lips, once again suggestive of *vagina dentata*. The shot is unnerving, as the shrimp looks completely helpless in its attempt to squirm away from Ursula’s long, sharp fingers. The shrimp’s body is without arms and legs and its eyes becoming large with fear as Ursula’s claws get closer and she grasps it between her thumb and forefinger, flicking the wiggling body into her wide and dangerous looking mouth.

Once Ursula devours the shrimp, she lifts her arm over her head and says, “Now look at me, wasted away to practically nothing!” While uttering this sentence, Ursula turns herself upside down, hanging out of her shell and revealing her whole body to the viewer for the first time. The scene reveals that Ursula is in fact, not wasting away as her body is voluptuous, almost to the point of being obese. Her breasts and hips are the most pronounced, as they are particularly large and rounded. Ursula’s hair is striking as well, as it is stark white, short and styled to a point. Ursula’s eyes are just as large and expressive as the rest of her and they are heavily made up and framed by her thin, pointy eyebrows. As the scene continues, Ursula then

becomes angry, as she has been “banished and exiled and practically starving,” clenching her fists as she sits up quickly and her eyes light up as her rage bubbles over. In seeing Ursula become visibly enraged, the viewer sees her highly performed actions, as every gesture is over the top and exaggerated. Her hyperbolic statements and dramatic movements make Ursula fascinating to watch, as she oscillates between emotions. As the scene continues, Ursula’s movements become more theatrical and graceful as she begins to move about.

As Ursula emerges from her shell, the shot is from below and shows Ursula gliding out, her tentacles fanning out and her underside opening up and spreading out to encompass the whole frame. Ursula’s tentacles are animated to be graceful as they unfold and glide through the water. At the same time, the tentacles are once again suggestive of evil in their snake-like nature, but they are also phallic. The phallic nature of her tentacles speaks to the ambiguous nature of Ursula herself: she is a half-woman, half-octopus that is gendered both feminine and masculine. In addition, the shot of Ursula emerging from her shell is reminiscent of a birth, as she pushes herself out of the womb-like shell in which she is hiding. Ursula’s birth from her shell propels her into the frame, so much so that her underside fills up the screen and the sight is almost overwhelming as it feels as though the viewer will be engulfed by Ursula’s presence. The shot of Ursula is also reminiscent of the painting of The Birth of Venus by Botticelli, which is interesting considering that Venus is the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility, three traits that one might not associate with Ursula. Ursula does, however, embody fertility in the sense that she is a stand in maternal figure and also represents the idea of a camp mother.

In her essay on camp entitled, “Fe/male Impersonation: The Discourse of Camp,”

Davy quotes the author of Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America, “A female impersonator will sometimes refer to himself as ‘mother’, as in ‘your mother’s gonna explain all these dirty words to you’” (134). What Davy is describing with this quote is the blithe and mischievous actions of impersonators, and how they acknowledge their own performance, in this case by using the persona of a mother. Ursula also performs “mother” to Ariel through her song and dance routine, in both the literal and Camp sense. On the literal level, Ariel’s mother is missing, (presumably she has died) and when Ariel goes to Ursula for help in matters of love, Ursula teaches her about feminine wiles. In this scene, Ursula breaks out into a song and dance routine, promising to help Ariel gain Eric’s love through transforming her into human. The dance itself is mesmerizing, as Ursula swirls through the water, and shakes her breasts and butt, and the viewer sees Ursula putting on a dramatic performance. Laura Sells describes the scene in “Where Do the Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in The Little Mermaid.” Of the scene Sells states, “During her song about body language, Ursula stages a camp drag show about being a woman in the white male system, beginning ‘backstage’ with hair mousse and lipstick. She shimmies and wiggles in an exaggerated style while her eels swirl around her, forming a feather boa. This performance is a masquerade, a drag show starring Ursula as an ironic figure” (182). What makes this scene interesting is that Ursula teaches Ariel through a drag show, enacting that Camp sense of “mother.” As Davy’s quote suggests, the Camp “mother” is possibly inappropriate, in the sense that Camp “mother” will teach one about the naughty, the deviant. However there is also a sense of playfulness in this teaching, a sort of winking that Camp mother is going to teach you about what you really want to know, and in a frank, naughty and or gleeful manner. Camp mother isn’t serious like “real” mother; she is over the top and a little inappropriate, but that is what makes her alluring. Ursula’s role as mother does have

limitations, as Ursula is only performing “mother” and doing so to appeal to Ariel. In appealing to Ariel as mother, Ursula is not sincerely trying to help her; rather she is attempting to gain what she desires. Trites hints at Ursula’s role as perverted mother in a description of Ursula’s breasts which “[Seem] suffocating, rather than nurturing, which is a perversion of the biological function of breasts. Disney portrays the mature female body as a perversion of the biological function of breasts” (4). Ursula as a maternal stand-in is one way in which she is characterized not only as camp, but also as the villainess, as seen in the scene where Ariel agrees to the terms of Ursula’s demands and her she is transformed in a human.

The scene uses birth images, as Ariel is enveloped in a yellow bubble and while her tail is split into a pair of legs. The yellow bubble is suggestive a womb, while the splitting of Ariel’s tail is suggestive of an egg dividing once it has been fertilized. Once Ariel has been transformed, light and air bubbles explode through the frame while Ursula laughs manically, with her hair wild and her eyes and mouth open wide, looking wild and dangerous. At this point, Ariel almost drowns, until she is pulled up through the top of the cave to the surface, where she bursts through the water, naked and reborn. Ursula has been her surrogate mother, giving birth to her and teaching her, before sending her out in to the world to put those lessons to work. As stated previously, Ursula is acting as Ariel’s mother not because she cares, but because she despises Ariel and sees her as a way to obtain her goals. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar state in Madwoman in the Attic, the Queen, or in this case, Ursula, wishes to destroy Snow White/Ariel.

An angel in the house of myth, Snow White is not only a child but (as female angels always are) childlike, docile, submissive, the heroine of a life that *has no story*. But the Queen, adult and demonic, plainly wants a life of ‘significant action,’ by definition an ‘unfeminine’ life of stories and story-telling. And

therefore, to the extent that Snow White, as her daughter, is a part of herself, she wants to kill the Snow White *in herself*, the angel who would keep deeds and dramas out of her own house. (39)

For Ursula, Ariel does represent a part of herself, as Ursula was cast out of King Triton's kingdom. In addition, as Ursula takes on the role of mother to Ariel, she passes down lessons in gender to Ariel and symbolically gives birth to Ariel, while also giving Ariel a part of herself. For Ursula it is not so much that she has a Snow White or Ariel within herself, but that she must destroy that which keeps her from her goal of obtaining power, specifically the power of King Triton. Throughout the rest of the film, Ursula will continue performing gender through the very lessons that she taught Ariel.

When Ursula sees that Ariel might succeed in being kissed, she turns herself into the seductress Vanessa, using Ariel's voice to hypnotize Eric. The significance of this scene is that Ursula is performing Vanessa and she is performing the very gender notions of femininity that she taught Ariel. As the villainess, this makes Ursula very dangerous indeed, as it shows just how deceitful of a character she can be. Gilbert and Gubar discuss the danger of a deceitful female character. "But because these other women can create false appearances to hide their vile natures, they are even more dangerous [women] use their arts of deception to entrap and destroy men, and the secret, shameful ugliness of both is closely associated with their hidden genitals--- that is, with their femaleness" (30). As a female character that is able to hide her true nature through the very feminine Vanessa, this once again serves to show how evil Ursula is, as she uses Ariel's womanly voice and power against her, and negating any positive qualities of motherhood and femininity. Through Ursula's performances of gender, her villainy is brought to

light, and what is curious is that her villainous actions are often associated with powerful female images, like the mythological Medusa.

At one point during the film Ursula tells Flotsam and Jetsam to keep an eye on Ariel, as she “might be the key to Triton’s undoing.” As Ursula utters these words, the shot frames her upper body and face, which is depicted as having an evil grin and narrowed eyes. Ursula’s tentacles creep into the frame, swirling around her face, almost snake-like as they weave around her head, giving her the appearance of a Medusa. Just like the image of Cruella as Medusa, the image of Ursula as Medusa hints at a monstrous female figure, embodying the feminine rage, and Ursula’s rage can be seen spreading across her face, as her grin and eyes narrow, while there is a hint of delight within her face. Triton also looks at the relationship between Ursula and Medusa, as seen through her octopus body. “Distinguished from other mer-folk by a lower body made of eight tentacles, Ursula seems to be an inverse Medusa figure. The snakelike appendages also make Ursula a perversion of femininity; her tentacles eight phalluses” (5). Sells also hints at Ursula’s Medusa like nature, “Ursula is the female symbolic encoded in patriarchal language as grotesque and monstrous; she represents the monstrosity of feminine power” (184). So while Ursula appears feminine and uses feminine ideals, she does so in a way that is threatening to the patriarchal society of The Little Mermaid. Ursula therefore, draws attention to notions on gender and how they can be seen to either comply with or subvert those notions. The film’s ending only reinforces this idea as Ursula gains King Triton’s power, and is then immediately killed by Eric. As a character that plays with and performs gender, Ursula’s death is problematic, as it suggests that those who do not perform gender within the constructs of society are corrupt, dangerous and unnatural. Despite her villainous nature and death, Ursula remains a character that challenges notions on gender by pushing the boundaries and blurring the lines.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the films, Cruella and Ursula are defeated and Disney's message of good overcoming evil is kept intact. A viewing of these films draws into question binary notions of good and evil, male and female. 101 Dalmatians and The Little Mermaid imply that those who do not fit gender roles are outsiders, somehow monstrous and villainous, and will be defeated. There is no denying that these characters are written to be devious, deceitful, manipulative and downright evil in their quests to gain what they desire, but only up to a point. Cruella and Ursula are also silly and playful, as their actions are at times so overly dramatic that the viewer can forget the threat that Cruella and Ursula pose.

Ultimately, these characters are more defined, more charismatic in their portrayal of gender. As depictions of camp, their characterization represents how effective camp can be in disrupting notions of reality, particularly in gender. As characters they might not be aware of their campiness, but I feel it is a deliberate choice on the animators part to characterize them in campy ways in order to make them humorous, easy to relate to, and to villainize them. This characterization ultimately says something about gender and its construction and performance. The vilification of that exaggerated gender behavior is a method of steering children away from deviant gender behaviors to the point that they (the villains) are singled out from the others, something most children are terrified of. Yet in spite of that, Cruella and Ursula remain delightfully campy characters that viewers love to love and love to hate.

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Watch 101 Dalmations videos to meet the adorable puppies and the outrageously evil villainess seeking their spots. Watch videos from the hilarious adventures of a feisty little fox who befriends a hound puppy in Disney's The Fox and the Hound. Take Quiz. The Little Mermaid. With unforgettable characters, thrilling adventures, soaring Academy Award-winning music (1989: Best Music, Original Score, and Best Music, Original Song, "Under The Sea"), The Little Mermaid is one of the most celebrated animated films of all time. Now spectacularly transformed for the first time on Blu-ray with digitally restored picture and brilliant high-definition sound! Venture under the sea where Ariel, a free-spirited merm... The Little Mermaid is a Disney Animated feature that focuses on gender equality and the conflicts that it may breed whilst grasping the policy. As always, the animation features are finely detailed and covers up their trajectory of the character with an elaborative plan that is exhilarating and just pure fun to encounter. The underwater world depicted in here has gone through various tests and thoughts that is clearly visible on screen and helps lure its younger audience in easily and gets them hooked within first few minutes of the feature. The Little Mermaid is not so little, not so fictitious due to its pragmatic three dimensional character along with a nail-biting plot track that helps keep the audience on the edge of the seat. Expand. 0 of 1 users found this helpful01.