Multiculturalism and the Mouse

Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment

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For my son, Shea Thaxter Brode
A Disney fan from Day One

THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS. Disney films, it is generally believed, offered impressionable audiences perfect role models of teenagers who were less sexual than their counterparts in the era's youth-exploitation films. Not true, as *The Light in the Forest* makes abundantly clear. (Copyright 1958 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

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"If It Feels Good, Do It!"

Disney and the Sexual Revolution

> The mystical Fairy with the Blue Hair of *Pinocchio* turns out to be Marilyn Monroe, blonde hair and all.
>
> —DOROTHY SAYERS, 1953

> The message of *Sleeping Beauty:* what may seem like a period of deathlike passivity at the end of childhood is nothing but a time of quiet growth and preparation, from which the [female] will awaken mature, ready for sexual union.
>
> —BRUNO BETTELHEIM, 1975

Paradoxical as it may at first sound, all revolutionaries are at heart reactionaries. Their various rebellions—cultural and political, intellectual or emotional—would never occur without the stimulus of whatever came directly beforehand. For the social as well as sexual revolutionaries of the 1960s, all their attitudes and behavior existed as an explosive response to the fifties, most notably the Eisenhower era's mainstream celebration of a conformist ideology. As one keen observer noted about that period: "The 1950s in this country were a decade far more obsessed with the horrors of bodily secretions and smells than the nineteenth century."[1] Self-help books written to educate average people held that the all-but-unmentionable act be contained in a society that strove for a morality more rigid even than that of the Victorian era, parents now responsible for what others previously oversaw. One such tome insisted:

> In a world of chaos and in an era in which national and international integrity have fallen to a low level, there remains only the solid structure of the home to form the basis for the re-establishment of the ancient standards of virtue.[2]

Any gains made toward sexual enlightenment during the intense period of sexual revolution that characterized the 1920s were gone and virtually forgotten. Unconsciously obeying the Marxist dialectic, the pendulum had swung back the other way, if to a more fierce extreme.

There was, however, an unofficial "underground." The Beats—or, as they were derogatorily referred to, Beatniks—had been scoffing at such straight values while living in the cocoon of a counterculture, celebrating freedom from constraint in such places as New York's Greenwich Village and San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. Novelist Jack Kerouac celebrated their lifestyles in novels like *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans.* The Beats' vision and style would never make the kind of inroads into mainstream America that would occur when the hippie movement became (albeit briefly) the very epicenter of fashion and thought between 1967 and 1970. Still, they were noticed, at least by impressionable youth. The virtually overnight embracing of rock 'n' roll by teenagers in 1956–1957, its big beat affronting their parents, can be read as an acceptance by suburban youth of the Beat Generation's views on sexual liberation—as such, an intended slap in the face to the strict and rigid code of their suburban parents.

As always, Walt stood with the rebels. Parents may have been, by this point, programmed to believe that Disney represented the last refuge from what they considered a threatening new order of things. Understandably, they breathed a collective sigh of relief whenever one of his films appeared at the local theater. Here, they assumed, was "safe" entertainment. What those kids encountered, however, provided their initial entry into an alternative vision that rejected the era's mainstream conservatism, providing a liberal/progressive mind-set on all issues, particularly those relating to society's sexual mores.

Cinematic Sex Education

The Vanishing Prairie (1953)
Secrets of Life (1956)

"The Big Lie" of the fifties was that "if nobody was doing it, nobody had any responsibility to instruct us."[3] Adults continued to believe (or pretend they believed) the preposterous notion that teenagers weren't engaging (or even interested) in sex. Why, then, consider sex education? Disney saw things differently, instructing young people by offering a commonsense

vision of the facts of life, in most cases skirting censors by doing so under the guise of harmless nature documentaries, the *True-Life Adventures.*

While spending two years capturing images of the American West, N. Paul Kenworthy Jr. and a team of naturalist-photographers amassed more than 120,000 feet of 16 mm film. This they delivered to Disney and James Algar, whom Walt had assigned to transform an excess of riches into a compact film. In the process of reducing the footage to 30,000 feet, Disney and Algar became captivated by one sequence. Accidentally, Kenworthy and company had captured the birth of a buffalo calf. The censors, however, had other ideas, and not only in Bible Belt locales. Incredibly, in "sophisticated" New York, the state censorship board refused to permit *Prairie* to be screened until the offending sequence was excised. As one film chronicler reflected:

> That Walt Disney, the purveyor of the screen's finest family entertainment, should ever have censorship problems was the target of many a snicker in 1954—and a cause of considerable embarrassment for the New York board of censors.[4]

Fully understood, the controversy reveals the distinction between Disney as perceived and Disney as he really was. The filmmaker himself defended his decision to include the sequence: "The birth scene would never have appeared on the screen if I believed it might offend an audience," and he wryly noted that "it would be a shame if New York children had to believe the stork brings buffaloes, too."[5] Disney had reinforced the old stork myth in *Dumbo* (1941). Now, he forsook reassuring fairy tales, conveying the realities of life to children in a judicious, sensible manner that would not threaten impressionable psyches. The board relented, though only after the American Civil Liberties Union—scorned by the then-powerful McCarthy element as defenders of communists, Negroes, and other supposedly "dangerous" elements, Disney now included in their number—lodged a complaint. *The New Yorker*'s reviewer noted that, much like the buffalo calf in the film, censors "must at one time have been born," adding: "I lived through the scene, and I suspect you will, too."[6] Happily, the facts of life were left intact.

Arguably, *The Facts of Life* is what Walt would have liked to call one subsequent film, released under the less incendiary title *Secrets of Life.* "This is an authentic story of nature's secret world," the opening crawl tells us, "of

her strange and intricate designs for survival . . . and her many methods of perpetuating life." Other nature films included the concept of sexual reproduction; *Secrets* focused almost exclusively on it. Reproduction among every living element, from plants with throbbing buds to bees fashioning the honeycomb and ants scrambling through tunnels toward their queen, was entertainingly catalogued. Time-lapse photography transformed the excited, extending stems of plant-forms into G-rated phallic symbols, each "obeying the ancient urge to propagate its kind."

For the grand finale, volcanoes were filmed and edited in such a manner as to appear orgasms of the earth, satiated only after making contact with their female counterpart, the sea. Women's roles, as always, are fully depicted, the drones' worship of the queen bee culminating in the wedding flight. A quarter century before Bo Derek would, in Blake Edwards's *10,* surrender to sensuality while listening to Ravel's *Bolero,* Disney employed that musical piece for the same purpose while chronicling the sex life of plants.

"We Wear Short-Shorts!"

***Disneyland/Walt Disney Presents* (1954–1961)**
***The Mickey Mouse Club* (1955–1958)**
***The Hardy Boys* (1956)**

When Disney unveiled his first television series, a scantily clad Tinker Bell swept about, whisking away cartoon curtains for the host to appear. TV was at the time a considerably more conservative medium even than motion pictures. As reruns endlessly reveal, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball, a long-married couple in real life while playing one on *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957), were not permitted to utter the word "pregnant" (much less allow Lucy to "show") when she was with child in fact *and* fiction. Lucy and Ricky, like all other supposedly typical (in truth, grotesquely idealized) TV married couples, slept in separate beds. The only exception could be found in Walt's TV work. On the Disney hour, Davy and Polly Crockett didn't bother to slip into the single bed in their room of the log cabin, instead making impassioned love on the hardwood floor before a roaring fire during his brief leave from the Indian wars.

Disney's incarnations of Davy and Polly, ostensibly living in 1813, had apparently read Eustace Chesser. All but forgotten today, she provided a voice crying out in the fifties' sexual wilderness, shockingly insisting that

in a marriage, both partners must always be "frankly aspiring to become perfect lovers."[7] In the *Crockett* series, Davy never recovers from the death of his wife, Polly; in real life, the coonskin congressman was remarried within the year.[8] Disney improved on the Crockett shows by pushing for ever greater realism about adult marital (and sexual) matters in *Tales of Texas John Slaughter.* Following the untimely death of his first wife, John remarries and fathers more children with the second Mrs. Slaughter. They share—not surprisingly considering that this is Disney, though shockingly in terms of television depictions of adult couples at that time—a single bed at his Arizona ranch.

On afternoon TV, during the children's hour, Disney might have been expected to pull back a bit. The opposite proved true, as Disney dared to push all the then-dangerous buttons. A huge hit with the small fry, *The Mickey Mouse Club* introduced an ensemble of twenty-four child performers. One emerged as a star, Annette Funicello becoming an overnight sex symbol for millions of young boys (and not a few fathers) out there watching in televisionland. The hundreds of adoring letters that adolescents mailed in each week had more to do with Annette's physical attributes than any skills she may have had at dancing, singing, or acting.[9] Adult observers noted that Annette displayed "the classic Latin features—a creamy velvet complexion, lustrous eyes, naturally wavy hair."[10] As Annette matured during the following seasons, journalists noted that her "full-busted" quality helped explain why boys reacted to her precisely as their dads, if in secret, did to *Playboy*'s centerfolds. Again, Disney and Hefner shared a conception of the nondichotomized woman as displaying "innocent sensuality."[11]

In the summer of 1956, a fashion innovation known as short-shorts appeared, revealing more of a woman's leg than had ever been seen in public. Not surprisingly, much of the country reacted with outrage, imposing a "banned in Boston" mentality. Short-shorts were outlawed as obscene not only in the rural South, but in such seemingly cosmopolitan places as White Plains, New York, where women who failed to comply with restrictions were arrested.[12] Rock 'n' roll, the musical voice of an emerging rebellious youth, responded by defending the fashion statement. As the Royal Teens defiantly announced:

Who wears short-shorts?
We wear short-shorts!

But their defense would not hit the airwaves until 1958.

Disney, always siding with youth against the Establishment, was the first to positively respond by legitimizing the phenomenon in the least likely medium. In the fall of 1956, he premiered (as part of *The Mickey Mouse Club*) *The Hardy Boys,* an afternoon serial based on Franklin W. Dixon's perennially popular books for young readers. In the Disney Version, Iola (Carole Anne Campbell) is a twelve-year-old girl living down the street from the title heroes. She regularly roller-skates by the Hardy home, wearing the shortest of short-shorts. This does not qualify her as a dangerous local Lolita, however—only a typical, healthy (and sexy) teenage girl.

Appearing on any other show, the image might have provoked outrage. Contained within Disney entertainment, the opposite occurred. Swiftly, the controversy abated. Importantly, then, Disney championed not only a freer sexuality for men, but also women, an absolutely radical position in the fifties. Lest we forget,

> if one believed what one read in the second Kinsey Report (and most middle-Americans did indeed assume this the be-all and end-all on sex, as irrevocably etched in stone as the Ten Commandments), women (that is, decent, normal, everyday suburbanite women) were, by their very nature, repulsed by men's bodies. Moreover, they (as compared to the cheap, trashy prostitute mutant form of woman, dismissed as a genetic throwback on the evolutionary ladder) had little or no interest in sexual activity, other than for its reproductive importance.[13]

More Victorian even than the Victorians, at least in theory and principle, the American fifties middle class accepted what now seems an absurd myth: If any such woman were to become excited during sexual activity, even with her husband in the process of trying to create a baby, there was something seriously wrong with her. Depending on her degree of shame afterward, such a woman might secretly attempt to deal with her "problem," or sneak off to visit a psychiatrist (more likely than not, male), who would attempt to "cure" her of such a sickness. Before women could move on to other forms of liberation—intellectual and emotional, financial or social—they had to achieve sexual liberation, in spirit as well as body, accepting that in this sphere, they had the same rights as men. Few elements of mainstream culture dared to advance this idea. One of the rare

places that such then-outrageous notions were promoted was, surprisingly enough, in the context of Disney's "family" entertainments.

Call of the Wild

Pollyanna (1960)

All at once, the Eisenhower era was over, the pendulum about to swing once more in the opposite direction. From their opening hours, the 1960s offered a dialectic to '50s thinking and behavior. In 1960, the first contraceptive pill, Enovidone, was created and marketed. Shortly, middlebrow entertainment, in the form of the James Bond series, portrayed casual sex as not only acceptable but enviable. Though *Playboy* had been around since 1954, Hefner's publication had not immediately been understood as something entirely other than such preexisting sleazy girlie magazines as *Swank* and *Titter.* Now, and virtually overnight, all-American college boys openly enjoyed the magazine, often claiming to buy it for the quality articles and fiction. Many mothers purchased subscriptions for their sons as Christmas presents. More notable, "nice" girls, including respected A-list movie starlets and coeds at posh universities, posed nude for the magazine, where they were identified by their real names. Young men who gazed at their glamorous images did not perceive them in the same light that men of the 1950s had ogled Bettie Page and her contemporaries in sleazy pulp publications: i.e., as threatening objects of dark desire or nervous derision. These were the girls they hoped to meet, date, marry.

A complete turnabout in values had occurred in popular culture and the mainstream ideology that it both reflected and helped to create. The sixties were to the fifties what England's Romantic era had been to the Age of Reason, the Roaring Twenties to the late Victorian age. But while Disney entertainment paved the way, the filmmaker never approved of casual abandonment to the pleasure principle. In the context of the Disney canon, *Fantasia*'s orgy sequence served less as a suggestion of what we ought to emulate, in place of Puritanical posturing, than a necessary corrective to the opposite extreme. Long overdue was a healthy, sensible Golden Mean. This represented precisely what all great thinkers, beginning with the ancient Greeks, had proposed and what Disney always conveyed. Like Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Disney's role-model lovers in his 1960s films opt, at the woman's insistence, for the sanctity of marriage before the couple consummates their romantic relationship. This

may sound like the opposite of sixties-era hipness, though in truth the youth-rebellion generation swiftly moved beyond the free-sex ideal of the decade's early years, toward a free-love reality as the seventies approached.

As Paul Stookey, who like Walt sensed the need for maintaining traditional values if in a progressive context, postulated in "The Wedding Song":

> Well, the man shall leave his mother,
> And the woman leave her home.
> They shall travel on together
> Where two are joined in one.
> As it was at the beginning,
> It will be until the end.
> Woman draws her life from man,
> And then gives it back again.

Such a sensibility proves identical to Disney's. In *Pollyanna,* however attracted Aunt Polly's Swedish maid, Nancy (Nancy Olson), may be to George (James Drury), she will not let him go "too far" until she's certain that he wants a companion for life, not merely a Playmate of the Month. Nancy's decision in no way implies she's uninterested in sex (clearly, she's excited), which would qualify her as a Victorian-era image of the American woman, one who embodies the period during which the film is set. That isn't the case, nor is Nancy playing games (she makes her values clearly known to George). This distinguishes her from the supposedly "cute" teasers so prevalent in post–Production Code films. Nancy resembles Juliet, the strong-willed young woman—wise beyond her years—who, in the balcony scene, makes certain that Romeo is totally committed:

> ROMEO: Would thou leave me so unsatisfied?
> JULIET (concerned): What satisfaction would thou have tonight?
> ROMEO: The exchange of thy true-love's vows for mine.
> JULIET (relieved): Thou hadst *that* before thou asked for it!

Similarly, Nancy demands (and, as a result, receives) total commitment. This includes a solid dose of sexuality, which, in its proper perspective, will complement all other aspects of a full and lasting relationship.

Still, Nancy regularly slips away from the mansion (civilization) to the garden (nature), secretly embracing her working-class fiancé. The healthiness of Nancy's shift toward the Dionysian—as long as it comes to a halt at the Golden Mean—is compared to Aunt Polly's stultifying Apollonian

extreme. The contrast is highlighted by one early confrontation between the two. Aunt Polly (Jane Wyman), learning that Nancy has been slipping off, scolds the girl:

> AUNT POLLY: Conduct yourself properly and modestly!
> NANCY: I assure you, George has been a perfect gentleman!

Perhaps "perfect" is stretching the truth. George openly gropes and kisses Nancy, even in front of impressionable Pollyanna! Still, Nancy remains in control, forcing George to control himself. If less than modest (in the superficial "keeping-up-appearances" value scheme of a Victorian extremist like Aunt Polly), Nancy emerges as a natural woman *without* abandoning herself to Dionysian wantonness. Again, she resembles Shakespeare's Juliet. Nancy is progressive enough to demand a marriage of like souls rather than a coldly arranged one, yet traditional enough to believe that marriage—altered from its previous patriarchal form reducing the woman to a commodity lacking her own will—remains the best possible way to create a lasting couple.

Likewise, Disney is often written off as the purveyor of simplistically goody-goody entertainment. Yet he defends lying and manipulation when they are employed for the sake of a healthy relationship, even as the Bard excused such things for precisely that purpose in *Much Ado about Nothing.* When Aunt Polly insists Nancy break off the romance, she agrees (to save her job), but goes on seeing George anyway. Pollyanna (Hayley Mills) regularly twists the truth, lying outright to cover for Nancy and George—with the audience encouraged to root for her.

When Pollyanna encourages the latent romance between Aunt Polly and Edmond (Richard Egan), what occurs is intensely sexual without becoming antifeminist. Disney, all but alone among male filmmakers of his time, did not subscribe to the stereotype that a woman must surrender to a man, as in the D. H. Lawrence view, if she is ever to experience fulfillment. That notion would be incarnated in hundreds of "adult" Hollywood romantic films, *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Spellbound* (1945) among the most memorable. But in Disney's equally romantic yet more enlightened view, gender has nothing to do with sensuality in relationships. A person, male or female, who has bought into society's rules must acknowledge the call of the wild, though that does not necessarily entail giving in to it. Aunt Polly isn't expected to rush off into the woods, where Edmond likes to camp. This would entail transforming into a Constance Chatterley by sexually surrendering to him as her Mellors, in hopes of

being "saved" by doting on the male member. Edmond is, for the most part, relatively civilized himself. A doctor, he's happy to live in society, so long as he can escape on Sunday afternoons to the fishing hole, keeping in touch with his primal sympathy. Disney's ideal, then, is the character (male or female) who combines the best of both worlds.

Those holding extreme positions are, like Lady and her Tramp, expected to meet midway. On her first night in the house, Pollyanna asked Aunt Polly if she might kiss her goodnight, the older woman reacting in silent horror. There was not the slightest hint of sexuality in Pollyanna's request; Polly's fear, not specifically sexual in nature, is of the more generalized notion of physicality in human relationships. Aunt Polly, we learn, destroyed her one chance for happiness by rejecting Edmond, who hoped to shower Aunt Polly with kisses of, granted, a decidedly sexual nature. As Pollyanna plays Cupid, the kiss she now hopes to engineer between Aunt Polly and Edmond is, then, not *exclusively* sexual. A better term would be "sensuous," alive with a pantheist's cognition that the physical (natural) best conveys the religious (spiritual). This essential truth, Pollyanna instinctively senses, knowing also it is what her aunt desperately needs.

On some repressed level, at least, Aunt Polly knows it, too, though she has given herself over too fully to rationalism to ever admit this without help. As Pollyanna and Edmond before her, Aunt Polly must learn to enjoy the experience of kissing. Or, more correctly (and in a Wordsworthian sense), must *un*learn the Classicist constraints of an uptight society and relearn the Romantic ideal of the naturally inclined individual. Following Pollyanna's accident, Aunt Polly finally confesses her inability to love, crumbling in Edmond's arms. The scene's effect is less the sexist cliché of a weak female surrendering to the strong male than a person liberating herself from constrictive attitudes by learning to love—and physically join together with—another person. It means little, in Disney, whether the object of her affections is a grown man, a little girl, or humanity itself.

We the audience grasped that Aunt Polly would complete this inner journey. At mid-movie, she reached her point of no return, revealing a potential for reclamation of her natural self. Visually, this was signified by Polly's letting down her overcoiffed hair, something Edmond and Pollyanna begged her to do. The natural woman, however repressed, had never been entirely absent. Long hair—in Disney as for the Woodstock Generation—represents a rightful rebellion against stultifying convention.

A WOMAN OF THE BOULEVARDS. During the early sixties, prostitutes were positively portrayed in arthouse imports; Hollywood movies offered negative images of such women. The exception was *Bon Voyage*, in which American Fred MacMurray meets a highly admirable streetwalker (Françoise Prevost). (Copyright 1961 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

The Generation Gap

Bon Voyage (1962)

In response to the growing differences between middle-aged Americans and their offspring in terms of music, manners, and morals, a new term entered our language. "The Generation Gap" implied the ever-expanding

chasm between the way grown-ups and young people perceived the world and their place in it. To illustrate this, Disney relied on a device he regularly returned to: contrast heartland hicks with the freer lifestyles of other cultures. *Bon Voyage* concerns a family from Terre Haute, finally making a long-planned trip to the continent. Harry Willard (Fred MacMurray) and his wife Katie (Jane Wyman) bring their children along on the grand tour: pretty Amy (Deborah Walley), just turned twenty-one; teenage son Elliott (Tommy Kirk); and little "Skipper" (Kevin Corcoran), a nonfantastical Puck, the perennial mischief-maker.

Harry undergoes a life-altering experience, introducing the middle-aged American male to the sexual revolution's reality. This was the film in which Disney openly acknowledged the swinging lifestyle that had developed in postwar Europe, immortalized by Federico Fellini in *La Dolce Vita* (1960). Shortly, the sexual revolution would likewise make itself felt in America. Essentially, such a transition began in 1962, the same year that this film premiered. So in *Bon Voyage,* we meet Disney's first onscreen prostitute. At a café on the Champs-Élysées, Harry encounters (and quickly comes to like, admire, and respect) a Parisian day-lady of the boulevards (Françoise Prevost) who attempts to pick him up. What qualifies the unlikely sequence as Disney-esque (in the best sense of that term) is the noncondescending portrait.

Ordinarily, a family film that included such a scene (the notion in and of itself highly unlikely) would have simplistically contrasted the good, simple American male with a jaded, devious Frenchwoman. This would result in a smarmy, superficial scene, the filmmakers winking to their middlebrow audience while smirking at another nation's sexual conventions even as they exploited the heartland's secretive interest in such stuff. That doesn't happen here. Harry, however typical he appears, turns out to be that rarest of rarities, an enlightened American male, also serving as Disney's role model for the mature male element in the audience that would identify with any character played by the genial star of TV's *My Three Sons.* Harry turns the young woman down not because he believes himself, or his values, to be morally superior. Far more appealingly, his reason is that he happens to be madly, truly, deeply in love with his wife. Likewise, Katie is pursued by a professional gigolo (Ivan Desny). No Mrs. Dodsworth, offering superficial pretenses of middle-class respectability while secretly enjoying the flirtation, Katie is, like her husband, the real thing, discouraging (and meaning what she says) the gigolo's attentions.

Disney contrasts the adults' activities with the romantic misadventures of their grown children. Amy becomes involved with Nick (Michael Callan), an early screen example of what would come to be called Eurotrash. Educated at Yale, armed with a degree in architecture, Nick is devoid of any values other than living for the moment as he kicks around the continent. If Disney seems square to some for putting down such a lifestyle, it's worth noting that, two years earlier, Fellini criticized rather than celebrated what he tagged "the sweet life." The two filmmakers share moral outrage at the modern notion of living without meaning, though their ultimate philosophies are at odds. Fellini's pessimism is clear at *La Dolce Vita*'s end. His equivalent to Nick, Marcello (Marcello Mastroianni), meets an innocent young woman, with whom he might escape his own shallowness by returning to a simpler, more satisfying life in the presence of an unspoiled peasant woman whose warm folk songs signify the opposite of the decadent pseudosophistication the film's antihero wallows in. Marcello fails to take that option. He is—tragically, in Fellini's view—lost forever in an amoral abyss. Disney, ever the guarded optimist, ends his film with the opposite implication. Inspired by Amy's decency and simplicity, Nick turns his back on the fast life, determining to work hard and establish himself in New York.

There is no easy happy ending here. Amy doesn't promise to join him; the two will likely never see each other again. Still, she—and the traditional love Nick discovers still existing in her functional family unit—turns him away from the cynicism that formerly overwhelmed him. Elliott emerges from being an uptight teenager at the beginning, constricted by heartland values, into a protohippie. First, he enjoys a shipboard romance with a beautiful young Indian woman, Shamra (Ana Maria Majalca). Significantly, Elliott finds Shamra appealing not only because she's exotically beautiful. He's fascinated too with Eastern religions and their alternative approach to life's spiritual side. Elliott embodies what one observer noted as the youth movement's "Romantic flight to the East" owing to the "claim of Indian philosophy to embrace the primitive unity of Being,"[14] expressed in the Beatles's fascination with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and the sudden popularity of Ravi Shankar's sitar music.

This also allows for full expression of Disney's antiracist attitudes. The issue of color is never raised, either by Elliott's father or mother. Interracial dating is presented as a perfectly natural part of a young person's experiences, a generally accepted idea today, if a notable departure from

attitudes contained in non-Disney movies of the early sixties. As always, Disney makes clear that it is indeed a small world after all. The young woman's father (Hassan Khayam) is clearly as protective of his beloved daughter's virginity as Harry is of Amy's. In diversity, Disney discovers a universal chord. Shamra's father closely follows Elliott and Shamra around the boat, precisely as Harry does Amy and Nick. After disembarking, Elliott buys a beret and grows a mustache, heading for Paris's Left Bank, where he mixes with the youth culture he discovers there. Elliott dates an Englishwoman, played by Carol White, several years later to incarnate the 1960s Brit "bird" in Kenneth Loach's *Poor Cow* (1967). On the French Riviera, Elliott meets a young Frenchwoman (Marie Sirago), whose virtue he despoils. Perhaps surprisingly, for those who cling to the vision of Disney as ultraconventional, this occurs without any horrific long-term consequences. Though at movie's end we do not learn what Elliott will do with his life, it's doubtful he can go home again. Having been exposed to an emerging lifestyle, Elliott would likely enter college, becoming a part of the new youth that emerged in the mid-sixties.

In *Bon Voyage,* Disney also achieved the same legitimacy for the bikini that he had won several years earlier for short-shorts. Throughout the 1950s, this bathing suit had been the controversial choice for swimming attire of such European sex kittens (a decade ahead of their American counterparts) as Brigitte Bardot. Any moviegoer hoping to view such near-nudity had to head for an arthouse, the true bikini remaining as absent from American movies as from American beaches. Even in the more liberated early sixties, a partial ban remained in effect. Ursula Andress, first of a new decade's European sex symbols, was forced to wear a modified compromise between the true bikini and a conservative two-piece suit in *Fun in Acapulco* (1963). Even the first of the *Beach Party* films (1963) featured only modified bikinis. Then, Disney entered the fray. Deborah Walley's all-American girl unashamedly models the wildest bikinis (including one composed of faux leopard skin, what there was of it) to appear in an American commercial film. In true Disney fashion, this shocking abandon in no way impinged on her wholesome image or reputation. Immediately, things changed—the mainstream as always following Walt's lead. One year later, Walley was again wearing just such swimwear (the stigma having been erased by Walt) in teen-oriented films that now boasted titles like *Bikini Beach* (1964). Shortly, women across America were donning the swimwear that initially was associated only with such California girls.

"SHE WORE AN ITSY-BITSY, TEENY-WEENY BIKINI." In the late 1950s, the bikini bathing suit, still considered scandalous in America, could be glimpsed only in imported European movies. When wholesome Deborah Walley donned such a suit in a Disney film, the negative stigma immediately disappeared. (Courtesy the Deborah Walley Estate and the late Ms. Walley.)

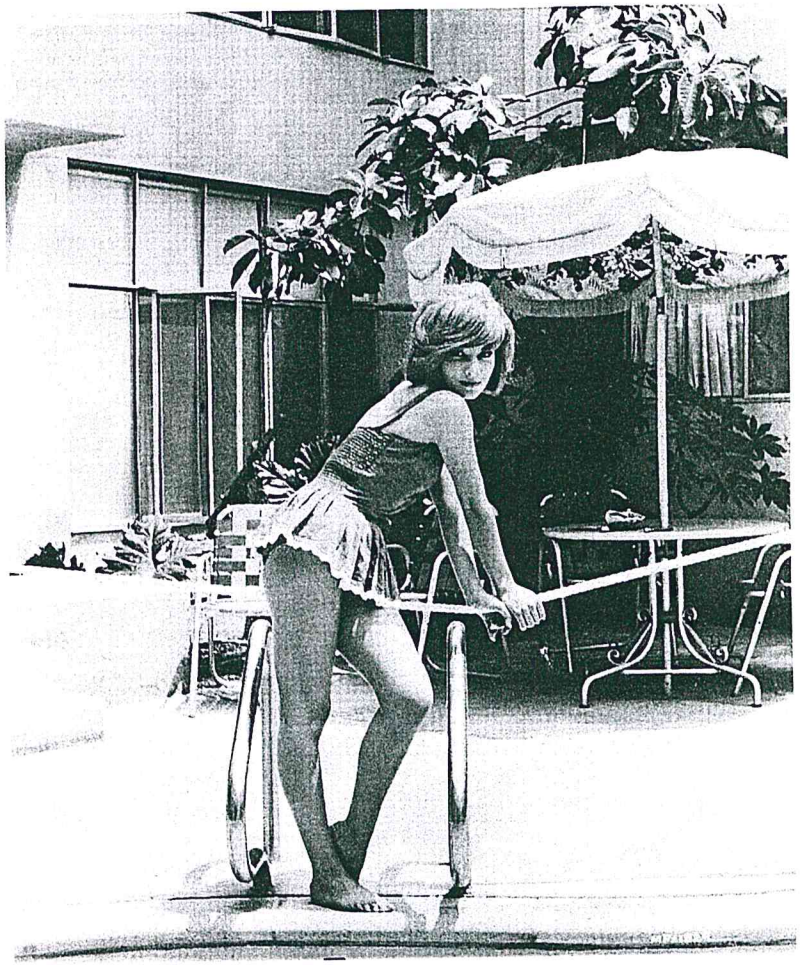
Into the Sixties

***Moon Pilot* (1962)**
***The Moon-Spinners* (1964)**
***The Ugly Dachshund* (1966)**

We can chart the progress of the sexual revolution in the titles of sequential books written by a single author. First, America needed to be assured that sexuality was not necessarily a bad thing, at least when confined within traditional institutions. *Creative Marriage* (1961), by Dr. Albert Ellis, insisted on the need for enjoyable sex on the part of legally wed couples. A mild concept today, this constituted something of a radical notion at the time, constituting as it did an early-sixties reaction against fading 1950s values. In 1967, Dr. Ellis took a giant leap further, publishing *The Art of Erotic Seduction,* in which he notably chose to ignore whether or not the enjoyable sex was being practiced by a married couple. Finally, in 1972, he offered *The Civilized Couple's Guide to Extramarital Adventures,* assuming that most Americans were now involved in adultery. Perhaps they always had been—the difference being that, for better or worse, participants no longer bothered to be so secretive or guilt-ridden about it.

As *Bon Voyage* made clear, Disney could never condone adultery, which remained antithetical to his essentially traditional values. Yet his films do favor great sex within a lasting relationship, in itself a progressive notion when first advanced, particularly considering the context in which his family films were created and received. Nurturing relationships—free love with the single person whom one truly does love, a commitment including but not limited to an intense sexual bond—formed the basis of Disney's 1960s comedies, light enough on the surface but with serious subtexts.

Perhaps no single image so completely conveys his attitude than the final shot of *Moon Pilot.* One more uptight American, Richmond Talbot (Tom Tryon), has been approached by an exotic female, Lyrae (Dany Saval). The Gallic actress, then being hyped as "the next Bardot" (apparently, she forgot to wish upon a star, for her dream didn't come true), made her American debut in a Disney film. Talbot is an astronaut, Lyrae a girl from space who arrives on a mission of peace, determined to keep him from being killed. Her people realize that Talbot's spacecraft will explode upon takeoff, owing to a failure in its construction. Initially, Talbot can't grasp his attraction to someone so different from the uptight American women he's always dated. When he eventually gives in to his romantic



AND GOD CREATED WOMAN. During the early sixties, French sex kitten Dany Saval was trumpeted as "the next Brigitte Bardot." Though she never became, like "B.B.," a household name, Saval did incorporate the ultracontemporary sensuality of a Gallic sex symbol into a family-style comedy when Disney cast her in *Moon Pilot.* (Copyright 1961 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

feelings, he's saved in more ways than one, for only then can Lyrae convince him to correct the craft's flaws in time. When Talbot is successfully launched into space, the earthbound control team is shocked to hear giggling emanating from the craft. Their communications system then goes dark. Lyrae has stowed away; she and Talbot make love onboard. Their

coupling is anything but superficial. In Disney, as with Shakespeare, the Romeo and Juliet characters eventually consummate their relationship, initiated by physical attraction yet expanding to something considerably more spiritual. The man gradually comes to accept the woman's mature wisdom as superior to his own.

That theme underlies *The Moon-Spinners,* essentially "Pollyanna comes of age." Hayley Mills had turned eighteen, and Disney had no plans to extend his star's reign as America's Sweetheart. Instead he offered her a vehicle that paved her way to more mature roles. This diverting exercise in Hitchcockian suspense (a variation on 1938's *The Lady Vanishes*) cast her in an intense tale of young love. No wonder that, in his *New York Herald-Tribune* review, Robert Salmaggi noted the once "bubbly" child-star was "now grown up and sexy at 18."[15] Film historian Leonard Maltin added that "in the film, she is something of a man-chaser," and "rather worldly, even capable of wearing a dress with some decolletage."[16]

Based on a best-selling novel by Mary Stewart, the film opens on Crete. Two Englishwomen—one mature (Joan Greenwood as Aunt Frances), the other a teenager (Mills as Nikky Ferris)—check into an isolated hotel. The owners (Eli Wallach and Irene Papas) initially refuse to acknowledge their reservations, suggesting that something illegal is going on. Undeterred, Nikky quickly becomes involved with a handsome young Englishman, Mark (Peter McEnery). When her overprotective aunt suggests caution, Nikky—a member in good standing of the sixties youth culture—informs Aunt Frances that she's already experienced. At one point, she states outright, "I'm not all that innocent," predating Britney Spears's identical statement by thirty-seven years.

The fadeout is shocking for anyone who insists on clinging to the cliché that Disney's final films served as a last bastion of conservatism in a shifting sea of ever more sexual cinema. What the teenagers exchange is no sweet, simple, innocent kiss, as in most other teen-oriented movies of the decade's first half. The embrace of Nikky and Mark is a notably passionate one. Once the crime has been solved, the villains brought to justice, Nikky and Mark are not merely heading off to hold hands by the sea.

In *The Ugly Dachshund,* the sex drive is again presented as something other than the Eisenhower-era conception of a superficial (and potentially dangerous) attraction. As in all Disney films, a strong physical attraction makes the individual characters, particularly the males, "better" in the most substantive sense. Brutus, a Great Dane raised with a litter of dachshund pups, is initially unable to function when his master, Mark (Dean

POLLYANNA A-GO-GO! Most producers attempt to keep their female child stars cute and innocent for as long as possible. Disney provided the notable exception, insisting that Hayley Mills act her age in *The Moon-Spinners,* playing a "twisting" British "bird" of the Beatles era. (Copyright 1964 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

Jones), enters him in a dog show. Despite formidable size, Brutus acts like one of his cute little "sisters." Then, Brutus spots a comely female Dane, also in competition, and everything changes. His identity, ambiguous up to this point, alters. To impress her, Brutus acts like a Dane, winning a blue ribbon. Learning from his pet, Mark comes to see that his success as an artist derives from the influence of wife Fran (Suzanne Pleshette). This

allows Mark, like his pet, to arc, appreciating her and the magic of sexual attraction ("twitter-pation"):

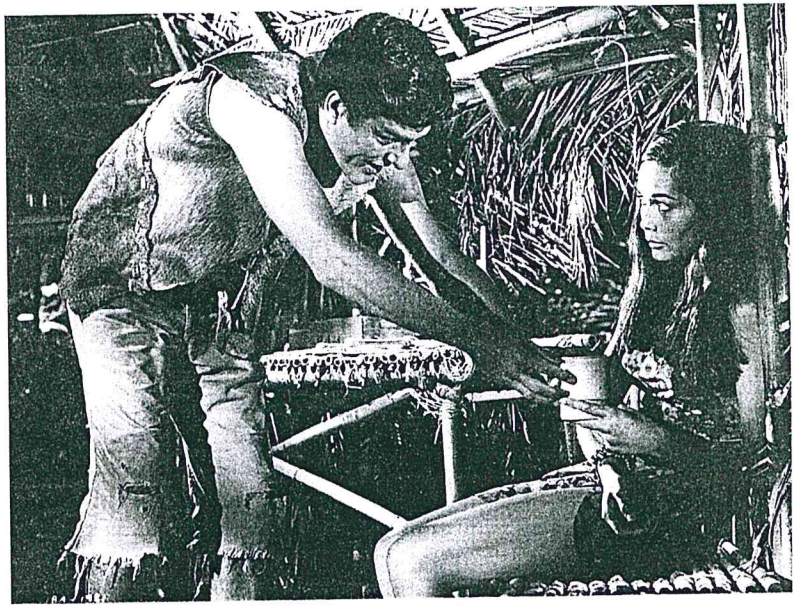
FRAN: Do you think that's why [Brutus] won, Mark? Did a female make the difference?
MARK: Honey, females *always* make the difference!

Beyond the Sexual Revolution

***Lt. Robin Crusoe, U.S.N.* (1966)**
***Monkeys, Go Home!* (1967)**

A woman's freedom to choose, in terms not only of sexual identity but *every* aspect of life, is as essential to *Lt. Robin Crusoe, U.S.N.* as it earlier was to *The Sword and the Rose,* despite a contemporary slapstick tone. The title character (Dick Van Dyke), castaway on a South Sea island, is joined by his own Friday, a lovely native woman (Nancy Kwan) whom he nicknames "Wednesday." The film chronicles the attempts of Robin, engaged to a girl back home, to balance his waning commitment to a typical suburbanite while sharing a makeshift shack with the immodestly costumed Wednesday. That their sensual relationship develops as the story progresses is obvious, if implied. Wednesday warms to the American, eventually addressing him as "Admiral Honey," a term he doesn't mind. The natural setting does wonders for this previously uptight Establishment type, who grows ever more at ease with his own sexual self.

This erotic situation, incidentally, was not the brainchild of one of those independent producers who regularly came up with projects for Buena Vista. The story credit reads "Retlaw Yensid," Walter Disney spelled backward. The movie that finally brought the sexual revolution home to the family-film audience was Disney's own highly personal project. Just as personal was Disney's insistence on moving beyond the expected smarmy sex farce, which might have seemed "liberating" during the mid-sixties but appeared sexist only a few years later. Such films were typified by *The Swinger* (1966), with Ann-Margret, in which her character pretends to be sexually profligate to turn on an attractive male (Tony Franciosa), while actually remaining purer than the new-fallen snow. This is simply an updated variation of what had occurred when, beginning in 1934, the Production Code for Hollywood films quickly ended onscreen portraits of flappers who felt free to seek sexual liberation. In their place, films now



THE SWINGIN' SIXTIES. *Lt. Robin Crusoe, U.S.N.* offers an updating of Daniel Defoe's hapless hero as an uptight American suburbanite who loosens up with female companion "Wednesday" (TOP); later, he enjoys (implied) group sex with her "sisterhood" (BOTTOM). (Copyright 1965 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

offered "the tease," considered "cute" when she presented herself to a man as free-spirited, then darted away at the last possible moment.

Moving beyond eroticism, Disney allows Wednesday to emerge as a person, not just a male's sex fantasy come to life. Wednesday, we learn, was cast away on this island by her father, Chief Tanamashu (Akim Tamiroff). He had (like Henry VIII in *The Sword and the Rose* and Mary Tudor) insisted that Wednesday marry a man she didn't care for. Although refusing to conform to patriarchal power, Wednesday did at the time assume there must be something wrong with herself, since none of the other girls minded such a system. Robin explains to her that in America, women have begun to rebel against living their lives in male-directed ways. This amazes Wednesday, who suddenly realizes she was not crazy but right on. Summoning other native women to the island, she forms an army of Amazons. When Tanamashu and the men arrive to retrieve them, his warriors are greeted by feminist protestors, carrying signs demanding women's rights. At the end, the male hierarchy has been toppled, the women have won, and things are better in the South Seas.

One year later, such a situation would be replayed in a different setting, as the opening of *Monkeys, Go Home!* makes clear. One more uptight American, Hank (Dean Jones), arrives in a provincial French town to claim his inheritance, an olive farm. He arrives, suitably, in a Volkswagen, the car of choice for so practical a person. Hank spots the female lead driving into town: Maria (Yvette Mimieux) arrives on a motorcycle. Significantly, this marks the first time that a biker babe was portrayed as a positive character in an American film. Such women had consistently been depicted as sleazy ever since *The Wild One* (1954). In France, however, women were allowed to embrace motorcycles without surrendering a respectable image. Several of Brigitte Bardot's most popular posters featured her in black leather, on a bike. Significant, then, is the fact that shortly before this Disney film went into production, actress Mimieux had been hailed by the media as America's answer to Brigitte Bardot. Posing in revealing bikinis on California beaches, including a *Life* magazine cover story,[17] Mimieux had a wholesome sexuality that made her a key (if brief) symbol for mainstream America's belated acceptance of the new sexual freedom—clean-cut as Sandra Dee though as sensuous as "B.B."

The actress ordinarily associated with surfer-girl roles here convincingly affects a Gallic accent. At times, we almost forget that we're not watching Bardot herself. The movie, at least in terms of subtext, is "about" a typical American falling under the spell of a Bardot-type Frenchwoman.

THE BIKER BABE REDUX. Beginning with *The Wild One* (1954) and running through *The Wild Angels* (1966), female motorcyclists were portrayed as sleazy lowlife stereotypes. Disney reconsidered that image, casting wholesome yet sexy Yvette Mimieux as the American screen's first positively portrayed biker babe. (Copyright 1967 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

Initially frightened by his own attraction, he soon realizes the liberated lady can, if he passes beyond his restricting worldview, exert a positive influence. Hank is enraptured by her blond beauty and what, for him, is a decidedly unconventional way for a lady to arrive on the scene. He follows Maria when she steps into the butcher shop. Gazing in the window,

Hank is shocked to see her in the arms of the butcher, Marcel (Bernard Woringer). Assuming Maria must be a "typical" French girl (in the eyes of an American abroad, i.e., sexually promiscuous), Hank turns away, disappointed. In Disney, however, characters hailing from a country associated in our popular mentality with some form of behavior are never "typical." The films deprogram us from such stereotyping.

Marcel, we learn, tried to force himself on Maria, a virgin who will have none of it. This might initially seem a cop-out, in terms of Disney fully embracing the sexual revolution. It's important to recall, then, that in 1967, several of the young women who posed nude for *Playboy* insisted, in their biographical sketches, that they were virgins. Acceptance of their own bodies as sensuous vehicles did not, the magazine implied, empower the male viewer with a right to make any assumptions about the woman's sexual proclivities or experiences. Disney's view on this subject is strikingly similar to Hefner's: Do not make assumptions about an individual based on any specific aspects of her lifestyle. That is, do not dichotomize women into "good girl" and "bad girl" polarities by making snap judgments based on appearances, which may have nothing to do with reality. Hank wins our admiration only after learning to accept the woman he's attracted to as an individual. Like Disney's Mary Tudor, Maria—unconventional when it comes to flouting society's sillier restrictions on women—is anything but promiscuous.

Knowing less than we know and guilty of false assumptions, Hank is shocked, on his first morning at the villa, to wake up and find the lovely girl preparing his breakfast. This is not what an American girl would do, and reaffirms his false impression from the previous day. Maria, in fact, is a serious young woman in search of a lasting relationship. Only upon becoming convinced this is what she and Hank share does Maria put her traditional, self-confessed "religious" restrictions on sexuality aside for a roll in the hay (quite literally) with Hank. This doesn't occur at the end, as would be the case in most American "romantic" movies—lovemaking put off until the final credits are ready to roll. Maria and Hank consummate their relationship midway through, she—like so many previous Disney females—gently teaching him the art of love.

From that point on, they operate as a team. Hank's attempts to make the olive farm a going concern would fail if not for his new partner. Men are complete, in Disney films, only when they share with the woman all aspects of life: the business venture, mundane elements of everyday exis-

IF ONLY WE HAD BRAS, WE'D BURN THEM. In the early 1970s, feminism emerged as a cause celebre, though mainstream Hollywood all but ignored women's protests. The exception was Walt Disney, who as early as 1965 depicted such activity in *Lt. Robin Crusoe, U.S.N.*; significantly, it is the male patriarch (Akim Tamiroff), not the feminist leader (Nancy Kwan), who is cruelly caricatured. (Copyright 1966 Walt Disney Productions; courtesy Buena Vista Releasing.)

tence, and—fully accepted, if in its place—the bedroom. As in *Lt. Robin Crusoe, U.S.N.*, what began as a sixties study in sexual revolution concludes as a precursor to the 1970s call for women's rights.

With such an attitude, Disney moved beyond the limiting margins of the sexual revolution and into the larger and greater issue of feminism. By the mid-sixties, pro-civil-rights and antiwar demonstrations were essential to the emerging sensibility of a new American youth. Virtually ignored during the ever-louder, ever-more-disruptive demonstrations was the women's movement. The counterculture's attitude could not even be dismissed as benign neglect. Toward the decade's end, feminists attending a Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) convention were appalled enough by the blatant chauvinism there that they staged a walk-out.

Hippiedom's retro masculine point of view was vividly articulated in *Getting Straight* (1970). Playing an edgy college professor living with a

flower-power grad student (Candice Bergen), Elliott Gould at one point angrily rails at her for daring to disagree with him on some minor issue. "We shouldn't be burning our draft cards," he screeches. "We should be burning women's *library* cards!" More or less simultaneously with the film's release, the Guess Who hit the Top Ten with what may be the most unabashed antifeminist anthem in music history:

American woman, stay away from me!
American woman, Mama, let me be!
Don't come hangin' around my door;
I don't want to see your face no more.
I got more important things to do
Than hang around, growin' old with you!

Not content to merely attack American women for wanting committed relationships, in which they would be treated as sexual beings rather than accept their male-dictated roles as sexual objects, the rockers also blamed the female of the species for atrocities—most notably, war of an imperialistic nature abroad, virulent racism at home—that had been created by a male-dominated social structure:

I don't need your war machines;
I don't want your ghetto scenes!

Then, with the winding down of the Vietnam War and successes in the civil rights field, a new cause celebre was required. Jane Fonda's abrupt haircut in *Klute* announced that her days as Barbarella were over. A sizable portion of American womanhood fell in line with her new image, opting for similar styles. The Helen Reddy pop recording "I Am Woman" was accepted (if not necessarily intended) as a feminist anthem. Gloria Steinem's *Ms.* magazine appeared and, during its initial run as a commercial venture, proved highly successful with women whose consciousness had been transformed. Movies, of course, would shortly respond as well, with the release of such films as Martin Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), John Cassavetes's *A Woman under the Influence* (1974), and Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* (1978). And, belatedly, films about women that were actually written and directed by women arrived.

The point here, though, is that as always, in terms of a male artist who appreciated diversity before that term became a byword, Disney had been

there first. Moreover, he had—far ahead of his time—offered an enlightened vision as part of his worldview, without calculation or box-office considerations. Walt—and Walt alone among Hollywood's men—presented such portraits because, unconsciously, it came naturally to him and, when he did think about such stuff, it seemed the right thing to do.