



## Prince Florian Has a Name

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Analyzing a range of animated Disney films, Tia McCarley critiques the damaging qualities of the Prince Archetype, described here as an undeveloped, mechanistic, and often nameless character type who serves little purpose apart from rewarding a princess. This analysis was written for Writing II with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

**T**HERE EXISTS MUCH UPROAR IN many circles about how negative the Disney Princess is for young girls and the damage that the Disney Princess does to them. No Disney-lovers can go a single day without defending themselves by acknowledging how weak Snow White was when she fell in love with a man that she had met only once or acknowledging how useless Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty were. A Disney-lover must acknowledge that it was misogynistic for all three classic princesses to have to be saved, and that only through Mulan paving the way could we finally have princesses that are truly feminist and free. I would argue, however, that modern Disney movies are a step ahead of many texts on issues of gendered representation due to the simple fact that Disney Princes now have recognizable personalities and names, and that they have actual worth to their stories, other than being mere convenient tools to be used. In this essay, I will compare the criticisms of the Princess

Archetype to the behavior of the Prince Archetype in modern popular culture through the lens of Disney and discuss how the Prince Archetype damages men today.

The Princess Archetype, as defined by the Robert L. Johnson, is “the young girl who has a natural interest in life outside herself.” She is described as a girl who desires to help others to create harmony and nurture others—from woodland animals to the people of her kingdom—to their fullest strength. She is unboastful about her accomplishments. This archetype arises most obviously in classic fairy tales where the Princess receives praise for her pure heart and nurturing instincts, but rarely goes into battle herself and often needs to be rescued for her troubles, though she is still rewarded in the end. This is often criticized as an old-fashioned and sexist stereotype, as expressed in many papers looking into pop culture, where “researchers looked at award-winning Disney books and found that gender stereotypes, though decreasing over time, are still prominent and reflect the concept that ‘boys are more highly valued than girls’” (Clark et al. 439). The consensus in academia and beyond seems to be that the Princess stereotype is so negative that it is often mocked in pop culture as something to be rejected rather than embraced. Even Disney itself mocks its own stereotypes, not only in the early 2000s with their releases *Happily N’ever After* (2006) and *Enchanted* (2007), but even in their 2013 movie *Frozen* and their 2016 release *Moana*, where they mock the tradition of a princess marrying a prince after just meeting him. The titular character of *Moana* protests the very act of being called a princess, as if such a word was an insult to her. Both movies have also been praised for their portrayal of a strong female character and have met critical acclaim by feminist academics and popular audiences alike for seemingly rejecting the princess title. With such a glut of criticism against the fair Princess, it is no surprise that she has made changes in herself, and no surprise that the world is better for more diverse, engaging, and more human princesses who grace the world with their stories.

Even so, the Princess is only one half of the story, so we shall look at the archetype of her other half—the Prince.

The Prince is the boyhood King, and also the Hero of Jungian studies. However, when looking at the Disney princes and the fairy tales of the past, I must make a different argument. The Prince, in almost all cases of his adaptation for modern children, does not have much by way of character when he is to be a proper Prince. The Prince, instead, exists to be a vehicle for the Princess to be rewarded for her troubles, almost literally so in the case where he arrives on a white horse to carry her away. The story is always named after the Princess, starts with her and her fair heart and fair face, and ends with a nameless prince who acts as hardly anything but a reward for her troubles and who gives her a happy life like she desires. The Prince does not act as his own entity with his own desires or his own initiative—it is not even questioned why the Prince would want to help one he does not even know; it is only questioned why the Princess would accept the help of another when she can do it herself. The Prince in classic fairy tales does not even exist with a name or a backstory as the Princess does, nor does he seem to require one in the case of much criticism of Disney movies. Whenever one discusses the harm of Disney Princes on the youth that watches them, the criticism almost always boils down to looks, rather than what the Disney Prince does, or rather, what he does not do. Disney princes usually portray the what Christopher Barlett et al. term the “muscular ideal,” which is associated with poor body esteem in boys and men (283). This is, however, quite literally the shallowest way to view the harm of the Disney Prince, who does not even have a presence for the Princess other than to serve as a fashionable accessory to her happily-ever-after. In the most famous case of sexism often cited—*Snow White*, wherein the conflict literally arises from one woman’s jealousy over her step-daughter’s beauty—the Prince does not even have a stated name. The title Prince Florian only appears in supplementary material, and the same applies to Prince Adam, who is not named in his debut of *Beauty and the Beast*

(“Prince”; “Beast”). The Prince, then, is an archetype that does not exist to seek reward but that is meant to be a useful tool to the Princess Archetype in order for her to get her reward for her good deeds. Through the Prince Archetype, personal liberty is sacrificed for the good of another, and once the story of the Princess comes to a close, the story of the Prince, who only exists for her, does as well.

In the case of more modern fairy tales where the Princess is given more liberation, ironically, the Prince is as well. In cases such as *Aladdin* (1992), where Princess Jasmine declares that she is not a prize to be won, Aladdin himself is full of personality and bursting with character and charisma. In *Moana*, where the titular character denounces her princesshood, Maui is a character who has not only a personality but a sympathetic backstory and complex morality, and the exploration of his character is integral to the plot of the movie. This, it seems, would fit perfectly in the theories of Warren Farrell, author of *The Myth of Male Power*: “The single largest barrier of getting men to look within is that what any other group would call powerlessness men have been taught to call power. We don’t call [male-killing] sexism, we call it glory” (11). Warren even goes on to describe the myth of princehood and how it applies to men:

The princess falls in love with the prince who can provide for her or a warrior who can kill for her. Both the killer and the prince could protect her. . . . Both sexes prepared boys and men, from everything from circumcision to games, to endure pain, to deny pain, and to continue protecting until they died. (24)

Thus, the Prince is fulfilled as a mere vehicle for the Princess. The Disney Prince Archetype does not damage boys because it presents men who are too idealized in their bodies; the Disney Prince Archetype damages boys by teaching them that they only exist as vehicles for others, to the point where they are even denied a name. The lack of study on princes in Disney Movies only further proves the fact that princes are not seen for who they are, but for what they can do

for others. This, then, is dehumanizing and further damaging to boys who are seen as disposable by media and then by themselves.

In conclusion, the Disney Prince Archetype is a damaging archetype, not only because of what it says to girls, not because it teaches boys to see girls as lesser, and not because it shows muscles to boys who may not be able to attain them. The Disney Prince Archetype is a damaging archetype because it teaches boys that they are disposable, that they are seen not as themselves but as vehicles for others, and that who they are does not matter. It is a dehumanizing archetype that even strips the name from its characters. It perpetuates the idea that men are a disposable demographic. This is not to say that criticism of the Princesses is invalid—it is entirely justified—but only to say that criticism of the Disney Prince is needed, not only through the lens of the Princess, but by taking a step back and looking at the Prince not in how he pertains to the Princess, but in how he pertains to himself. ►►

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