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Not just sheer pleasure:

Critiquing animations and their scope in children's socialisation

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Abstract

As the title suggests, the dissertation focusses on critiquing animations to understand their scope in children's socialisation, as to what extent animations could offer a type of content that possesses an 'edutainment' value. As a result, animations (1) attempt to reinforce some 'intrinsic' values related to a variety of subjects/themes, including personal growth, meaningful relationships, and social responsibility, (2) providing children with an opportunity to rehearse those values that are deemed key elements for their socialisation. To understand this more closely, we have analysed animations from five different perspectives, leading the dissertation to be designed as a 'patchwork quilt' (Wibben, 2011). This metaphor implies that the five chapters are autonomously distinct and deal with exclusive frameworks that are later contextually assimilated in the conclusion to provide the reader with a complete picture that vindicates animations' scope in children's socialisation.

Chapter I looks at the framework of the 'odyssey' employed in animations as a metaphor for personal growth and identity-formation. Chapter II focusses on how *Doraemon* reconceptualises the features of the classical Greek/Aristotelian form of 'tragedy' to develop its own postmodern critique of the Seven Deadly Sins through the image of its transgressive protagonist. Chapter III studies the role of 'utopianism' in children's superhero narratives that inspires a more critical mode of hoping and envisions social progress and welfare. Chapter IV is founded upon the concept of the 'feminine aesthetic' to (1) analyse the transition and development of animated women's representation from passivity to subjectivity and individuality, and (2) briefly explore the evolving representations of new, subversive masculinities. Chapter V emphasises the significance of 'anthropomorphism' in children's media, and is informed by the literary genre of animal autobiography to critique animal-centric narratives as tales of animal liberation that reposition and rehabilitate the 'human-animal kinship, bestowing 'the animal' with a voice.

Keywords: *animation, socialisation, journey, tragedy, utopianism, gender, anthropomorphism*.

Declaration and Statements

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Statement 1

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by in-text citations giving explicit references. A reference list is appended.

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Throughout my study, all the University's ethical procedures have been followed and, where appropriate, ethical approval was granted by the university.

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to Ma and Pa . . .

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Ashish Dwivedi

Introduction: Not just sheer pleasure!

Over the course of the 20th century, animations have proven their potential to complement and support the process of children's socialisation by offering a type of content, as Disney (1954) implied, that juxtaposes education with entertainment. This mechanism amalgamates to develop what is now colloquially addressed as 'edutainment', re-echoing the traditional combination of "the delightful with the useful" (Ziegler, 2006, p. 134). As a result, animations (1) 'play' with children's inherent attraction towards similar animated forms of entertainment (Habib & Soliman, 2015) and (2) apprise and advise children about what Grusec (2002) labels as "intrinsic" values that encompasses a variety of subjects, including "personal growth, meaningful relationships, social responsibility, and physical health" (p. 144).

Wells' (1998) critiques on the discourse of 'animation' have been invaluable to our understanding of the philosophy of animation. Expanding upon Jan Svankmajer's (1992) subjective experiences with animations, Wells (1998) appraises the latter's ability to "redefine the everyday, subvert our accepted notions of 'reality', and challenge the orthodox understanding and acceptance of our existence. . . and endow lifeless things with dynamic and vibrant properties" (p. 11).

Wells' (1998) arguments impart an ideological agency to animations with respect to their abilities to be construed as 'performances'. These performative agencies help animations communicate what Schechner (2013) calls "'restored'" or "'twice-behaved'" modes of behaviour/norms that have been passing down as part of any community's close-ended traditions (p. 22). In doing so, animations may function either as reinforcements of 'restored' behaviour or as challengers to the same (Wells, 1998). Consequently, animations transform into ubiquitous socialising sub-category of mass media, helping children understand both themselves and the world around them (Özer & Avci, 2015, Wright & Huston, 1983).

This awakens us to animations' clever reliance upon an 'edutainment' content. The idea of edutainment was pioneered by J.A. Komenský, though it was Disney (1954) who had first employed the portmanteau word to imply the juxtaposition of 'the delightful with the useful' (Ziegler, 2006). Komenský had used the phrase, 'school as play’, to elucidate his belief in a stronger pedagogical effect when traditional manifestations of education are combined with other aesthetically delightful elements (Nêmec & Trna, 2007). It has been realised that, unlike strictly-formal teaching methods, edutainment could serve as a less formal and, thereby, a more interactive, student-friendly, and open-ended pedagogy (Makarius, 2017; Rapeepisarn et al., 2006). We believe that animations are informed by a similar pedagogical framework, as they narrate and reinforce a miscellany of intrinsic values for children to cultivate and internalise (Grusec, 2002) while, simultaneously, playing on children’s fascination for television as a source of entertainment (Habib & Soliman, 2015, p. 250).

However, before we progress any further, we would like to reflect over the overall structural dynamics of the dissertation which shall help inform our understandings of socialisation, animations, and the key ideas that have been raised within. We have sought significant help from Wibben’s (2011) metaphor of a “patchwork quilt” (p. 8) to design and describe the dissertation. Re-echoing Wibben (2011), the five chapters have been “individually crafted in detail” (p. 8) but are autonomous in terms of the conceptual questions they raise/trigger. Here, the conclusion would serve as the final connecting post - “sewing together” (p. 8) all the conceptual arguments raised in the chapters to manifest a complete, bigger picture that would validate animations’ complementary significance in the processes of children’s socialisation.

Introducing the Chapters

We are now aware that the dissertation is going to develop according to Wibben’s (2011) metaphorical framework of a “patchwork quilt” (p. 8). Therefore, despite focusing on distinct concepts and frameworks, we aim at returning to a collective awareness of their incorporation within the thematic structure(s) of the discussed animations, which the latter pursue for the combined purpose of apprising and advising (to inculcate) children about “intrinsic” values (Grusec, 2002, p. 144), supporting children’s social and emotional growth. It should be noted that the chosen frameworks and concepts have been discussed at-length in the succeeding chapters and so, at this stage, we would only glance through all of them to develop an idea about how they have influenced our later analyses.

Chapter I dwells over Forceville's (2016) reconceptualization of the metaphor of 'journey' to explore the self-transformative potentials of independent journeys (Morgan, 2010). It aims to understand how 'the journey' could be perceived as a powerful metaphor for personal growth and self-discovery. For this purpose, we focus on three animations- *Triton of the Sea* (1972), *Belle and Sebastian* (1981 - 82), and *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974)- and employ Smelser's (2009) paradigmatic trajectory of what he calls "the odyssey experience" (p. 8) to analyse the respective journeys recorded in these animations and how these independent enterprises transform into invaluable sources of self-knowledge for our eponymous protagonists (Dietz, 2019).

Chapter II probes into *Doraemon* (1979 - 2005) to understand the anime's contemporary remodifications of (1) the Aristotelian/Greek tradition of 'tragedy' and (2) the once-medieval concept of the 'Seven Deadly Sins'. The anime pursues this framework to re-locate its protagonist, Nobita Nobi, at the epicentre of tragic katharsis. Nobita's endless tragic downfalls- triggered by his excessive indulgence in the 'five sins of the spirit'- translate into moral lessons to young viewers about ethical notions pertaining to high moralities. Nobita's 'eroded' moralities manifest into an introspective mirror for the audiences to 'peep-within' and treat *Doraemon*'s many 'narratives of sufferings' (Silverstone, 2007) as an opportunity for self-analysis, self-regulation, and self-redemption (wherever possible) (Rorty, 1992).

Chapter III digresses to encapsulate superhero-narratives into our oeuvre. We perceive superheroes as exemplary models of utopian imagination and thought and attempt to understand how a variety of superhero-narratives could be perceived as exploratory avenues for 'a mode of critical utopian hoping' (Webb, 2008, p. 199). Superheroes significantly personify Nietzsche's (1883-1885/1969) notion of the '*übermensch*' and strive to accelerate contemporary humanity towards a spectrum of positivity, hope, and progression. As "moral examples" (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 30), superheroes possess the potential to communicate morally-transformative values to modern humanity that has been lost in self-centredness, hatred, and hopelessness. These ideas are largely embodied in the two 1978-produced superhero-animations- *The Freedom Force* and *Web Woman*- that we aim to discuss, and argue their positions as utopian examples.

Chapter IV serves as an exclusive investigation into ‘gender’ and analyses the media-representations of gender in three animations: *Triton of the Sea*, *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971-72), and *Doraemon*. To begin with, we reflect over what Tuchman (1978) addresses as the “symbolic annihilation” of women in - and by - media (p. 8) and move forward to explore a rising feminist consciousness in media, driven by women animators and cartoonists, that Wells (1998) has called “the feminine aesthetic” (p. 198). Against the gender-stereotypes attached to Pipiko (from *Triton of the Sea*), we analyse the women characters from the remaining two texts as pioneers of a wave of feminist thought that began in the 70s and culminated in the 90s and early 2000s (Perea, 2015). We aim to discover how these animations pursue this fresh consciousness to embody their women characters with an empowered frame-of-mind.

Later, in our discussions on *Doraemon*, we briefly reflect over the character-development of Nobita as the anti-thesis of what Connell (1987) calls ‘hegemonic masculinity’. In Nobita, we may partially perceive instances of the “new man” (Beynon, 2004, p. 200) which is frequently treated as one of the sub-branches of subordinated masculinities (Sales, 2019). This brief discussion paves the way to our understanding of how *Doraemon* bifurcates from several animations of its times (like *Triton of the Sea*) to communicate the rise of other masculinities that defy(ied) the norms of hegemony and heteronormativity. Overall, the chapter offers an overarching understanding of how the changing paradigms in media-representations of gender were reflected in animations.

Chapter V appraises the presence of the ‘autobiographical animal’ in three animated movies - *Finding Nemo* (2003), *The Ant Bully* (2006), and *Ferdinand* (2017) - and advances into understanding a contemporary genre of children’s fiction called “the animal autobiography” (You, 2021, p. 190). This new genre of fiction bestows animal characters with a poignant sense of agency that allows them to re-position themselves as independent ecological entities, beyond the need of human control. We analyse these movies within this contextual model to perceive these anthropomorphic animal-characters as archetypal symbols of the ‘autobiographical animal’, and how these anthropomorphic representations could pave the way to our recognition of the nonhuman-environment as an equal and worthy ‘subject-of-a-life’ (Regan, 1988). These arguments punctuate an urgent necessity to re-evaluate ‘the human-nonhuman’ relations and seek out other similar mediums through which these strained dichotomies could be resolved and improved. This chapter asks for peoples' discovery of what humanity can stand for.

From an overarching perspective, the five chapters help inform our defence of (1) animations' apparent role in children's socialisation and (2) to what extent could mass media be generally perceived as a helpful medium to reinforce- and sometimes instate- positive thoughts about ourselves and others. However, before we progress onto the individual chapters, it is necessary to review a body of research that concentrates upon the processes of socialisation; the arrival of mass media onto mainstream thought; and the impact (both negative and positive) of its popularity onto the public imagination. These reflections, then, can become critically vital to support our affirmation about animations' socialising capacities and demand substantial exploration and reflective analysis. Because children's socialisation is an important sub-component of our research thesis, we genuinely need to understand what this process really signifies.

Children's Socialisation: Some Reflections

The culmination of children's socialisation, retrospectively speaking, may not be possible without a firm intervention of "stories". Gerbner (2004)- in his foreword to Shanahan and Morgan's (2004) apology of the cultivation theory, *Television and its Viewers* - notes that stories help "socialize us into roles of gender, age, class, vocation and life-style, and offer models of conformity or targets of rebellion" (p. ix). Such stories, irrespective of the communicating medium, are often deemed milestones for children's systematic entry into their socio-cultural community, supporting the development of what Mills (2000) calls "the sociological imagination" (p. 5). This phrase is defined as "the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world" (Mills, 2000, p. 4). The sociological imagination is central to socialisation, as it helps individuals not only develop an inherent understanding of themselves and society, but also stimulates necessary reactions against any institutional shortcomings society may have. Situated at the crossroads of "history and biography" (Mills, 2000, p. 4), the sociological imagination enables individuals to (1) position themselves against the leap of historical reality, (2) identify any societal issues, and (3) move forward as "history makers"

(Thompson et al., 2019, p. 4). As archetypes of the latter-category, individuals could manifest benevolent/progressive changes in society, for instance by reforming social ideologies (explored in Chapter III), dismantling gender-based stereotypes (Chapter IV) or championing animal rights (Chapter V). The sociological imagination, therefore, empowers them to be able to make a difference.

This corresponds to Gerbner's (1999) account of how and why stories are formed: to act as inspirational sources of reformation. To Gerbner (1999), stories awaken us to a cognizance about how a society works, while, at the same time, presenting "things, behaviours or styles of life as desirable (or undesirable), [and proposing] ways to obtain (or avoid) them" (p. x). In doing so, stories leave the possibility of any reaction/action (if needed) upon the reader/audience concerned, like the animations discussed herein. These stories indirectly perform a socialising/enculturating function by either revealing an existing problem within society or recommending the adoption of morally-upright behaviour but leaving the thought of all potential action (or reaction) up to the individual. For example, *Doraemon* (Chapter II) plays on Nobita's tragic misadventures as they "convert into a sort of life lesson added to the experiences children [like Nobita] need in order to pass successfully into adulthood in a social context" (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 72). However, the anime never imposes or dictates its moral lessons onto its viewers, leaving them to their discretion to internalise or avoid.

The social importance of stories is crucially explained by the process of socialisation. As Elkin (1960) underpins, a human develops in three ways: biologically, psychologically, and sociologically. This is where Elkin (1960) explains that an individual's sociological development is as vital as the former two, and that without socialisation, the other two developments may hold a "limited value" (p. 3). Similarly, Mead's (1934) reflections on the 'self' become pivotal to our understanding of socialisation (1) as a process and (2) as a catalyst for the development of the 'social self' which he perceives as being composed of a "spontaneous and creative" 'I' and a "reactive" 'Me' (Thompson et al., 2019, p. 90). According to Mead (1934, p. 177-178), despite having the same bio-social source, the "I" and "Me" function quite differently: where the 'I' is more inclined towards the individual's personal interests and choices; the 'Me' is a reactive recognition to the individual's own actions towards society and others and, therefore, is prompted by the individual's awareness of their social position and impact. Mead (1934) concludes that the development of the ‘self’ vastly relies upon human experience and interaction. Here, the role of animations comes into play, as they could be treated as ‘brief instances of substituted human experience’. We have reserved an intensive discussion over this argument for the conclusion because we suspect that this argument could not be connected to animations’ socialising symptoms without having first explored what animations really stand for in the succeeding chapters. For now, it would be helpful if we quickly return to our reflections over children’s socialisation, the self, and human nature.

Mead’s (1934) concept of the ‘self’ influences the formation of what Cooley (1964) had called the “human nature” (p. 31), a human-faculty that comprises the ability to experience universally sentient feelings, like love or ambition (Elkin, 1960, p. 13). However, where Elkin (1960) treats human nature as a precondition for socialisation, implying its presence in human genealogy- which even Cooley partially agrees with- Cooley (1964) perceives it as part of an individual’s social make-up that develops, shapes and reshapes over the socialisation years and is consistently “subject to change” (p. 33). These intriguing discussions about the formation of the self and human nature conjoin with Wrong’s (1961) observations on the subject, who takes socialisation as being in possession of dual connotations, as he differentiates the way the phenomenon should be perceived:

> on the one hand socialisation means the ‘transmission of the culture’, the particular culture of the society an individual enters at birth; on the other hand the term is used to mean the ‘process of becoming human,’ of acquiring uniquely human attributes from interaction with others (p. 192).

The latter-half of Wrong’s (1961) definition- that emphasises the ‘humanisation of a human’- may invite curious rhetorical questions about our anatomical birth as humans: ‘Are we not born as humans, and post-birth develop to become human?’. Turchenko (1973) as cited in O’Dell (1978) provides rational answers to such questions, as he equates the process of ‘becoming human’ to the “process of becoming a social being” (p. 47). By ‘becoming human’, however, Wrong (1961) does not imply any anatomical or embryological aberration in human biology but perceives socialisation as a process involving an internalisation of general human values and norms through significant and productive human interaction (Elkin, 1960) and experience (Mead, 1934).

Turchenko (1973) as cited in O'Dell (1978, p. 47) goes further to include 'education' as another gateway to children's socialisation. Although it is not exactly clear what type of education Turchenko (1973) purportedly hints at, it could be deduced that it embraces all forms and mediums of education which can even encompass open-ended mediums as mass media. It is surprising to see how mass media has made a riveting mark for itself over the last century as an influential socialising medium for individuals of all age-groups (White, 1977). However, with special relation to children, mass media has been critically accused of reinforcing misleading and stereotypical content that may not be suitable for children to cultivate on (Elkin, 1960, p. 71) and, subsequently, has caught the attention of critics and researchers who often propose conflicting opinions about mass media's (ab)use and interference in children's parental socialisation. However, because the criticism on mass media mostly stems from its representations of gender and sexuality (Levinson, 1975; Wilson, 2008), it is imperative to first analyse what gender and gender socialisation implies and some of its takeaways for children.

Gender Socialisation: Its Necessity and Impact

As Gonzalez (2018) beautifully reflects, "childhood does not only consist of the child's social standing and the adult's rules; it represents children's voice, view, and actions in the world" (p. 74). This observation suggests children's ability to self-socialise, which also further informs their understandings of gender(s) from a relatively early age (Coltrane, 1998). Wharton (2005) speaks about gender as "one of the forces that contributes to [the] patterning of social life" (p. 2). Gender quickly develops as an intrinsic aspect of children's socialisation, for "it is something that individuals possess as part of themselves and that accompanies them as they move through life... [and] is understood as something that resides in the individual" (Wharton, 2005, p. 17).

From the standpoint of gender constructivism, children are usually upheld as 'active agents' (Liben & Bigler, 2002) during their early socialisation years. They develop their own concepts about gender and gender-correlations, while simultaneously being influenced by other socialising agents (Coltrane, 1998, Gelman et al., 2004; Maccoby, 1998). The efficacy of parental influence could be, however, slightly questioned after zero/negligible similarity was once-discovered between parents' and their children's attitudes about gender (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002). Nonetheless, this constitutive agency of children informs us about their tendency to "essentialize gender" (Gelman et al., 2004, p. 2), forming and reshaping their own first-hand opinions about gender based on what ideologies they are reinforced with, sometimes dwelling upon the same opinions till adolescence (Martin et al., 1990). It is here that both parents (Bem, 1983; Witt, 1997) and mass media (Levinson, 1975) may help children by communicating "gender-aschematic" (Bem, 1983, p. 610) ideas, values and concepts pertaining to gender, sexuality, or both.

In the wake of mass media's stereotypical reinforcements, Levinson (1975) notes that these reinforcements damage notions of self-esteem relatively in females. Triggered by this problem, Witt (1997) calls for an urgent need for more "androgynous" parents who do not conform to a "strict adherence to traditional gender roles" (p. 253) but instead offer an unbiased, anti-sexist environment for children to grow. This could be implemented either through parents' own reversal of traditional gender roles in their private and professional lives (Witt, 1997, p. 257), by educating children about gender-equality and freedom (from the beginning years), or both. Interestingly, Witt's (1997) androgynous parents share a striking similarity to Bem's (1983) "feminist parents" (p. 610) who want to cultivate similar gender-free ideologies in their children. To serve that purpose, Bem (1983) suggests three alternative schemas that feminist parents may adopt. Firstly, the "individual differences schema" (p. 613) that provides counterexamples to stereotypes (pointed out by children themselves) from a circle of people that they are acquainted with. Secondly, the "cultural relativism schema" (p. 614) that highlights the co-existence of beliefs that oppose the dormant norm(s) in society and does not present this oblique set of beliefs as an abnormality; and lastly, the "sexism schema" (p. 615).

About the latter-most schema, Bem (1983) encourages feminist parents to react against the often-mediated sexism and apprise children of its lurking ideological dangers. Bem (1983) strongly feels that such parents "should not be satisfied to pretend that they think all ideas- particularly those about gender- are equally valid” (p. 615). As an inevitable factor of gender socialisation, the ‘sexism schema’ prompts children to question about the hegemonic media-images of gender and sex-roles that they witness predominating children’s television/entertainment (Davis, 2006; Carter & Steiner, 2004; Levinson, 1975).

For example, the children’s literature of the late 80s/90s has substantially reflected on this sexist tendency and contributed to the emergence of what Lehr (2001) calls a “feminist book” (p. 15). As a reaction against traditionalist stories that feature passive, dependent women characters, a feminist book is a form of literature that provides independence and agency to its women characters, paving the way to their individual, social growth as a woman (Trites, 1997). This is where the feminist novels, for example, by Cynthia Voigt (b. 1942) and Mildred Taylor (b. 1943) not only outshine as exceptional archetypes, but also poignantly correspond to Bem’s (1983) conception of the “sexism schema” (p. 615). As models, such novels for children/young adults reinforce the ideas that are explicitly advocated by Bem’s (1983) feminist parents about gender-equality and anti-sexism, helping children develop gender-free ideologies and notions about themselves, their sexuality, and others.

Gender has been one of the overriding components of children’s socialisation and features as a vital ingredient in an individual’s identity formation processes (Wharton, 2005). Therefore, naturally, gender socialisation becomes crucial in children’s social development. It enables feminist parents (Bem, 1983) to (1) instate a balanced and emancipated perspective about gender-values in their children and (2) ‘de-influence’ the latter from damaging media-representations.

The ‘Positives’ and ‘Negatives’ of Mass Media

It is overwhelming to notice that much of the research conducted on the effects of mass media on children centres around television. This is because, as Levinson (1975) highlights (though in context to American children), television functions as one of the earliest examples of mass media that children are exposed to (p. 561). Its popularity amongst- and proximity to- children is bound to attract large-scale criticism from researchers and critics who frequently raise concerning questions about the role of television (or mass media in particular) in children's moral development (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Elkin, 1960; Livingstone, 2007; Wright & Huston, 1983). In terms of children's relationships with television, most criticism is often levelled either against an abnormal manifestation of violence (Anderson et al., 2003; Hapkiewicz & Roden, 1971) or sexism (Perea, 2018; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). One of the reasons for this thoughtless inclination towards re-presenting similar damaging aspects on children's television finds its foundations in materialism and capitalist interests (Chouliaraki, 2008; Seiter & Mayer, 2004).

To tackle these conundrums, the concept of 'media advocacy' is alarmingly propagated by some researchers. This not only involves "'the strategic use of mass media for advancing a social or public policy initiative'" (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999, p. 134) but also encapsulates a whole-range of regulations that could be independently used by parents (Vandewater et al., 2005), the government (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999), and the media-industry (Levinson, 1975) to monitor children's involvement with television. Conway et al. (1981) had asserted that children learn "attitudes and opinions" (p. 165) from media sources, making it essential to regulate televised contents for children and ensure that children's early socialisation years are not wasted in dwelling over regressive ideologies.

Having said that, there are some intriguing opinions that have been brought forward by researchers in favour of mass media (in general) and television (in particular). It is argued that television possesses "the potential to foster positive social interactions, reduce aggression, and encourage viewers to be more tolerant and helpful" (Mares & Woodard, 2005, p. 316). However, this becomes realistically possible only through (1) parents' active intervention into children's television-viewing habits/behaviours and (2) constant rehearsals and re-enactments of the 'accepted' media-reinforcements (Wilson, 2008). If achieved, Wilson (2008) argues that children's television may capitalise on children's moral reasoning, improving their levels of empathy and role-taking abilities (p. 91). This is usually pursued through the introduction of likeable and relatable on-screen animated characters who may help promote certain prosocial ideologies (Warren, 2017), therefore, not only paving the way to children's identification with the characters, but also helping parents achieve their motives to inspire 'intrinsic' values within children (Grusec, 2002).

Chouliaraki (2008)- in her discussions about the suffering of ‘distant others’- leads us to a dualistic understanding of how we approach questions pertaining to mass media. On one hand, she criticises contemporary media-images as indulging in “the play of a sensuous hype” (p. 834). On the other, however, she proposes the possibility of media as becoming a source of “moral education”, relying on “a power that capitalizes on a set of potential capabilities for civil action that television both ‘imagines’ on behalf of the spectator and enables the spectator to enact as a ‘free’ subject” (p. 845). Chouliaraki (2008) defines the spectator’s ‘free’ position as being “‘conditional’” (p. 846), implying the capacity of a television-image to evoke an ethical response of emotional connectivity within the spectator for a suffering ‘other’, while, at the same time, leaving the call to action onto the spectator. In a sense, media re-performs a reality, or re-presents a problem (a tragic one, in this case; could be a manifestation of any intrinsic value at other instances) but leaves the choice to act or avoid on the viewer concerned. For example, as mentioned above, this is exactly what *Doraemon* engages in with its representations of Nobita’s tragedies. It suggests a rather ‘take-or-leave’ approach with the audiences’ understandings of the very moral transgressions that led to Nobita’s misadventure. *Doraemon* offers the audiences with the ‘conditional freedom’ to reflect over Nobita’s flaws and rectify (if they discover a similar-looking flaw) their own ‘self’ to save them from a similar tragic discomfiture.

Chouliaraki (2008), further, makes a few remarks about media’s ability to ‘humanise’ viewers by departing from what Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) loathe as “crass commercialism” (p. 137) and stimulating the rise of ethically-informed morals within individuals. To Chouliaraki (2008), media mediates between the relationship of a representation and its public consumption, and it is this “pedagogic function” (p. 832) that helps - and triggers - viewers to respond in empathetic ways towards a media image. Quite differently, Grusec (2002) re-echoes a similar standpoint (though in context to parental socialisation) when he writes, “the foundation of a successful socialisation may indeed lie in a secure relationship with the caregiver and in minimization of feelings of forced compliance” (p. 163). Grusec’s plea to abstain from ‘forced compliance’ subtly corresponds with Chouliaraki’s (2008) concluding thoughts on media as an unimposing medium for moral change and action.

Animation, Childhood, and Socialisation

Re-tracing the latter arguments back to children and their association with television, Fisch (2004) argues in support of what he terms as “educational television” (p. 1) that he deems a gateway to the introduction of a gamut of opinions, experiences, attitudes for children. Although Fisch’s (2004) arguments are more inclined towards highlighting the ‘academic’ benefits of such mediums, he, nevertheless, expands upon animations’ role in reinforcing not only ‘academic’ insights, but also prosocial values and attitudes that are considered bedrocks for children’s socialisation as discussed above. This notion also co-relates to the production contexts and aesthetics of animation, and how they inform the production of rhetorical meaning being disseminated through and across a range of digital formats (Yoon, 2017; Yoon & Malecki, 2010; Wells, 2002). Katsaridou (2014) mentions that the language of animation is significantly governed by exo-semiotic sociocultural and material forces. These ideas retrieve us to the cultural nuances of McLuhan’s (1964) idea of ‘medium [as] the message’. It oscillates around the view that the production aesthetics influence the semiotic and cultural construction of animation, further shaping the type of content/message being propagated to the public eye.

Popular children’s culture, unlike other modes of traditional learning, is deemed a sensitive conglomerate (Giroux, 1994), apart from being a burgeoning space for “consumerism and commodification” (p. 26). The centrality of children’s edutainment in socialisation stimulates the importance of concentrating on the industrial dimensions of animation-production to explore its ideological manifestations. As Wells (2002) illustrates, the conceptualisation phase of animation-production unfolds the “‘controlling idea’” (p. 16) that governs the potential outputs of any animated work. This phase anticipates how the final animated product would stand as, including the characters’ depictions, narrative structure, dialogues, and background (Yoon, 2017). Essentially, this becomes apparent why several major animation studios outsource to smaller transnational/off-shore studios for only a restrictive ‘production phase’. As Lee (2011) observes, “the animation industry operates in the dynamics of transnational geography” (p. 184). This suggests that animation-production is not geographically-limited, but remains culturally and socially-grounded. The language of animation, as Katsaridou (2014) reflects, is determined by the localised nuances of the industrial site that conceptualises it. The animation speaks through the vocabularies of the editorial team that manages the structural and narrative architecture of a specific animated product (Wells, 2002), which we consume later.

Furthermore, Lee (2011) notes, the language of animation is equally affected by the *otaku* community, who consistently intervene with the distribution processes by facilitating translations/dubbed versions of several animations. Even though this illegitimate practice hampers the economic prospects of the sector, Lee (2011) mentions that otakus' intervention translates into a strong promotional medium that, nonetheless, reproduces the possibility of a product's popularity in the public imagination. These contemporary interventions become plausible due to the recent-upsurge in multiple digital formats through which animations become available. Before the introduction of the Internet and globalisation, cinema and television were the only sources of animation distribution and consumption (Yoon & Malecki, 2010). However, technological advancements like information technology and computer-generated imagery and graphics have stimulated the introduction of animation onto other multimedia formats like DVDs, iPods and mobiles (Ichikohji, 2013). This digitalisation of humanity, however, unpacks issues pertaining to socialisation and the public reception of these products. Many of these concerns address the potential/possibilities of these transitioning formats to affect the audiences' interpretation of the broadcast content (Greenfield & Beagles-Roos, 1988), or if differences in the medium(s) influence how a specific content is perceived (Bell & Dittmar, 2011).

McLuhan's (1964) concept of the 'medium' becomes illuminating in these contexts. A study exploring the impact of television and radio on audience-interpretation revealed largescale differences between how a specific content was interpreted in exclusively distinct ways when it was played on a radio versus when it was depicted on a television (Greenfield & Beagles-Roos, 1988). This study validates McLuhan's claim and the centrality of the 'medium' in the processes of reception and interpretation. Bell and Dittmar's (2011) correlational study, however, unsettles the notion that interpretation is exclusively dependent on the 'medium'; instead, their research argues that media-type does not determine the interpretation of any depicted image, and would have the same impact on individuals irrespective of how an image was presented (p. 489). The latter argument, nonetheless, is not a negation of McLuhan's idea; it briefly helps us support the hypothesis that unless an animation is depicted on audio-visual platforms, its meaning may remain unchanged/stable. Yet again, this does not imply that any animation cannot be differently perceived/received by audiences, or that it denies the theory of reception aesthetics (Tatum, 2014; Holly, 2002; Iser, 1980; Holub, 1984; Schmidt, 1979). These arguments stimulate a closer understanding of the unlikeliness of an audio-visual format (including television, cinema, or DVDs) to affect the language and meaning of an animation. What may affect the interpretation is the viewers' sociocultural backgrounds, life experiences, and their personal characters and beliefs, which is where we may appreciate the polysemic nature of artforms and the credibility of reader-response. Nonetheless, the digitalisation of entertainment has exploded a gamut of animated productions, intensified the production and marketing processes, triggered the rise of animation as a viable creative-cultural industry, and centralised animation in the public imaginations of childhood (Yoon & Malecki, 2010).

Raffaelli (1997) makes a controversial remark about the presence of animations in the universe of children when he writes, "the world of animated cartoons is closely linked with that of the child" (p. 113). Even though his statement broadly fuels our insights about children's fascination for animations, it is, nonetheless, only scarcely true. Similar opinions about animations as being only 'child/family-centred' have been subject to severe criticism, with supporters claiming animations' ability to 'perform' much more than slapstick humour (Wells, 1998) and influencing people irrespective of age (Pilling, 1997). Criticising this stream of thought, Pilling (1997), at one instance, accused *Disney* of this shallow approach, leading animations to be conceived as only materials for a 'child's play'. Some critics even mention that *Disney*'s intervention led to a personal paradox. On one hand, where *Disney* thrived in materialist profits (at the expense of exploiting the art of animation); on the other, animation - as a form of artistic expression - received a setback in its decline in receiving scholarly attention (Pilling, 1997).

However, around the 60/70s, these opinions started re-forming, and animation (as an artform) began re-gaining its lost position in the media-industry, with its significance and modes of approach being analysed, studied, and critiqued (Wells, 1998). As

Halberstam (2009) notes, animations approach us with "a pedagogical opportunity" (p. 47), in the sense that they provide parents/the school with a platform wherein they may "rehearse" the cultivation of the values (in children) that the former reinforces (Wright & Huston, 1983, p. 842). Indeed, this argument widens our approach about animations as (1) intelligent tools to complement children's socialisation and as (2) "an ideal medium for suggesting what cannot be said by the printed word" (Kemnitz, 1973, p. 84). The latter-point seems most intriguing. It hints at animations' inherent ability to indulge in two disparate possibilities: (1) to explore/satirise sensitive and tabooed subjects 'from a distance' (Wells, 2009); and (2) provide expression to emotions/metaphors that cannot be represented within the physical limits of theatre or live-performances (Boguszak, 2014). Even though Boguszak (2014) is strictly speaking in context of animated adaptations of Shakespeare (and the live-theatre's inability to capture many of Shakespeare's outstanding metaphysical and abstract feats, which the animated versions successfully achieve), his arguments could be used to establish a more general opinion about animations' abilities to 'perform' the unspoken, the inexplicable, and the abstract (Kemnitz, 1973), and yet manage to neatly convey "socialist messages" (Halberstam, 2009, p. 47) that empower and contribute to the personal growth of viewers (mostly children).

At a parallel thought, it would be beneficial to shed light on some proposed definitions of 'animation' that may further widen our understandings of the latter in context of children and childhood. On an extremely basic, technical level, Bendazzi (2006) defines animation "as a 'frame by frame' method of creation of movement" (p. xxi). He advances to treat 'animation' from a philosophical standpoint when he notes that it is "a pure work of the spirit" (p. xxi). On the contrary, however, Denslow (1997) notes that the word is usually defined within academia as a "'created performance'" (p. 3).

One may discover a subtle thread of connectivity here. In both cases, animation is conceived as a process of 'creation', which is where one could be reminded of the word's etymology. Wells (1998) discusses the origin of the word, 'animation' from the "Latin verb, *animare*, which means 'to give life to'" (p. 10). Within this context, animation emerges as an expressive artform that "endow[s] lifeless things with dynamic and vibrant properties" (Wells, 1998, p. 11), a point we had briefly touched earlier. This ability to impart life to inanimate entities can push animation to the category of performative media-texts (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 832) that plays on the inanimation of animated characters and upholds them as ‘alive’, moving subjects.

Furthermore, as Tinwell and Sloan (2014) highlight, children relatively fail to identify with ‘uncanny’, emotionless characters, thereby, unintentionally revealing another milestone that the animation industry has achieved. Their arguments become helpful to suggest that for animation to function as a socialising agent, it is essential for its characters to be full-blooded and expressive of a heterogenous range of human emotions (Wells, 1998). In the presence of an emotional distance, animations may lose their ideological efficiency as sources of entertainment, instruction, and socialisation.

This leads us to an understanding about animations and their contributions in cultivating progressive and altruistic thoughts in children about a plethora of discourses, including leadership, courage, humanity, gender-sexuality, and human-animal relationships. Here, the successive chapters would help validate and vindicate animations’ position- as a sub-category of mass media- in children’s socialisation. The world of animation is a world abundant with meanings which may only help children to establish/reshape their own meanings about the nature of things and the world around them. This further notifies us about the far-reaching influence of animations and to what degrees they could be used to not only complement certain child-related developmental phenomena (Wilson, 2008), but also function as remarkable inspirations for socio-political, cultural, and moral change (Halberstam, 2009). It is on this note that we may now turn our attention to analyse how animations play with the metaphor of ‘the journey’ to understand their protagonists’ development of the self and what viewers can take away from these ‘animated odyssey experiences’.

Chapter I

Tales of Wandering Children: The ‘Animated’ Odyssey Experience and the Journey to Selfhood

Into the Journey, Towards the Self

Forceville (2016) refers to the concept of ‘journey’ as a “conceptual metaphor” (p. 8). This metaphor offers individuals a space to (re)imagine their aspirations, ‘sense of being’ and future expectations, deepening their understandings about the communities they are a part of, the people they are related to, and the values and norms they are expected to cultivate as part of the culture they grow up in. These aspects could be cited as one of the central meanings that the metaphor intends to explain to us about who we are and what purposes do we have as members of society (Maclean et al., 2015). Considering the scope of our research, we aim to approach this metaphor in the context of children’s animations and analyse (1) the transformative potentials of independent journeys and (2) how the latter may function as a metaphor for what Morgan (2010) calls a “superior existential mode of ‘being-in-the-world’” (p. 248). This analysis would help us return to animations’ participation in children’s socialisation, and how their participation envisages mass media’s potential to edutain.

We shall discuss the social significance of this metaphor more closely at a later stage, but, here, it is more important to highlight that for the purpose of our discussions, we focus on three animations- *Triton of the Sea* (1972), *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), and *Belle and Sebastian* (1981 - 82). These three animations share one significant factor within their narratives that stands as crucial to our contextual framework for our analyses in this chapter. All three animations revolve around exclusively autonomous journeys being undertaken by our protagonists that help these characters reshape their identities- usually in a positive light- as independent, responsible, and empowered individuals (Dietz, 2019).

Here, it would be necessary to highlight that the journeys recorded within each narrative follow a specific trajectory that roughly aligns with Morgan’s (2010) threefold scheme of “pre-liminal”, “liminal”, and “post-liminal” phases (p. 252). This threefold scheme is expanded over by Smelser's (2009) empirical framework of "the odyssey experience" (p. 8). The 'odyssey experience' is usually marked by neat demarcations between what Smelser (2009) addresses as (1) the "social destructuring" of everyday routine, (2) a phase of liminality, and (3) a "re-entry into the world of routine on a new. . . regenerated basis" (p. 11, 206-207). Smelser (2009) opines that the journey is a "finite" phenomenon (p. 10), in the sense that the odyssey/journey is temporary, but frequently results in perpetual, long-lasting social benefits, and that the essence of the odyssey lies in a voyager's status of liminality.

It is in the liminal phase that the voyager can encounter the 'Other'- a disparate, separable, unrecognisable identity- and may be in a situation to interpret their own identity against the reflection(s) of the 'Other' (Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Morgan, 2010). Mezirow (2000) offers a befitting framework to understand this process, when he proposes his concept of the 'disorienting dilemma' which allows for the voyager's encounters with the 'Other' to facilitate the reshaping of their ways of thinking about the world or what Mezirow (2000) calls the "habits of mind" (p. 18). This might also be addressed as an act of "'coming to consciousness'" (Clifford, 1988, p. 167), in the sense that a journey may facilitate what Galani-Moutafi (2000) calls a "simultaneous discovery of self and the Other" (p. 205). It is here that one may perceive such journeys as being "existential" by nature, defined by a transition "from immaturity to maturity; ignorance to wisdom. . . from egocentrednes to reality-centeredness" (Morgan, 2010, p. 248). These subjective transitions become possible due to the temporary liminal phase that a voyager passes through that opens the possibility for the latter to locate, recognise, and understand his sense of self that they had previously formed against the image of the 'Other'.

A journey, additionally, may reconfigure the cultural position/status of the 'Other' as more of a known territory/reality, rather than belonging to the realm of imagined impossibilities that could never be identified or explored (Galani-Moutafi, 2000). It is for such aesthetic reasons that journeys are often called self-reflexive exercises. They enable the individual to transform the self and their ability to comprehend others and the world around them (Dietz, 2019). The three animations, therefore, employ the framework of a 'journey' to encapsulate their characters' self-transformations into individuals, who now possess a strong sense of what Dietz (2019) refers to as the "'knowledgeable self'" (p. 197), with a purpose of simultaneously inspiring viewers/readers to 'travel-along' with the characters and reshape their own selves, as the characters venture out (Stock, 1993).

The Journey Models and their Contextual Value

Due to the ubiquitous nature of the metaphor of 'journey', it has immediately gained immense popularity in contemporary times and is often reconceptualised to introduce narratives revolving around an array of diverse themes including education (Murray, 2009; O'Shea & Stone, 2014), mental health recovery (Fullagar & O'Brien, 2012; Thomas & Rickwood, 2016), and entrepreneurial philanthropy (Maclean et al., 2015). Several developed models incorporate a metaphorical framework of the journey to understand the participants' journeys of self-transformation (Morgan, 2010), as (1) they entered a university, (2) recovered from a mental illness or (3) participated in charity. Here, it is imperative to shed some light upon three key models that have shaped the modern understandings of the 'journey metaphor', before we advance forward in the chapter.

One famous example is Joseph Campbell's (1968) mono-mythic, linear model, providing a proper trajectory for the classical odyssey or the hero's quest. The model is divided into three distinct phases- involving "departure" (p. 49), "initiation" (p. 97), and "return" (p. 193)- to imply a one-way movement from ignorance to knowledge or darkness to light (Morgan, 2010). In more than one way, Campbell's (1968) model speaks about the self-transformative potential of journeys, wherein it emphasizes a hero's return as a wiser, more experienced, individual. However, Campbell's model has been criticised (1) for not considering "the many social and psychological differences between men and women" and, thus, (2) has been branded as "gendered" (Ray & McFadden, 2001, p. 202, 201).

Contrary to the outward-physical journey that the hero embarks, the journey of the "heroine" is more of an inward voyage that could be called a

> quest to fully embrace [her] feminine nature, learning how to value [herself] as [a woman] and to heal the deep

> wound of the feminine. It is a very important inner journey toward(s) being a fully integrated, balanced, and whole human being" (Murdock, 2020, p. 3).

This argument stimulates the arrival of the ‘Heroine Model’ that views the heroine’s quest as a non-linear “lifelong cycle of development, growth, and learning” (Murdock, 2020, p. 5), unlike Campbell’s (1968) linear model. More intriguing is the fact that Murdock’s model is an offspring of Campbell’s model, emerging from the latter’s deficiencies. It often derives much of its structure from Campbell’s, but digresses to capture women’s journeys to highlight and extract their sense of identity and an empowered manifestation of ‘the feminine’ (Murdock, 2020). Extending this argument is Ray and McFadden’s (2001) model that emphasises the possibility of using the alternative metaphors of “the web and the quilt” (p. 203) to reflect over women’s journey towards the spiritual and the aesthetic.

Ray and McFadden (2001) believe that the metaphor of a journey is “limited” (p. 201) and may not be adequate to be able to collectively hold the “richer diversity and complexity in spiritual development” (p. 203). For this reason, they propose the idea of using the ‘web’ as a metaphor to embody women’s lives as an “interconnected pattern of relationships that are typical of women’s development, and the interactive nature of women’s lives” (Murray, 2009, p. 111). The metaphor of the ‘web’, furthermore, could be substituted by the ‘quilt’ that serves similar purposes as the former to reflect the diverse and interdependent aspects and factors of women’s spiritual/personal journeys, dimensions that were overlooked by Campbell (1968).

It is interesting to note how vividly Campbell’s (1968) model of the classical hero’s quest has been critiqued, modified, and reconsidered to become more inclusive by nature, and be able to reflect the journey of the ‘individual’ towards personal growth, irrespective of any differences between sex. Unfortunately, this has not been properly achieved yet. It is precisely because where Campbell (1968) focusses on the ‘hero’, Murdock (2020) and Ray and McFadden (2001) overlook the ‘hero’ while paying more attention to the ‘heroine’s’ journey. None of these models have been able to perceive the ‘individual’ from what Robbins (2006) calls a “gender-neutral” lens (p. 777). This discrepancy leads her to insist upon using the word ‘hero’ from a “gender-neutral and racially-blind” perspective (p. 777) during the formulation of any similar model(s) of journey in the future.

Le Guin (1996) attempted to transform this normative trajectory of hero-centrality by criticising traditional forms of fiction that dwell over uncomforting instances of exclusion and focus solely on moments of conflict. Such stories celebrate the ‘hero’ who is revered only because of his participation in gory “killer stories” (p. 152), without which a ‘hero’ may not stand as a significant entity. In an attempt to revitalise fiction, Le Guin (1996) proposes the metaphor of the “carrier bag” (p. 151) that concentrates on the diversification of human experience and debunks the one-way dimension through which we have been looking at the hero.

The ‘Other’ and the ‘Knowledgeable Self’

Despite a few limitations, these models, nonetheless, help validate the transformative potential of a journey and how journeys could be understood as metaphors for self-growth. As mentioned above, the concept of a ‘journey’ symbolizes a simultaneous process of discovering and identifying the “self and the Other” (Galani-Moutafi, 2000, p. 205) that helps the voyager to become self-conscious about oneself and others (Clifford, 1988). It is essential for the voyager to encounter the ‘Other’ and its ‘Otherness’ because it would be against the latter’s image that the former would be able to view and identify one’s self:

> . . . only in the context of the relation with the Other- concerning what it is not or what it precisely lacks- can ‘identity’ be produced and conceptualized. . . Overall, the process of identity construction is subject to the ‘game’ of difference and presupposes the drawing of symbolic boundaries" (Galani-Moutafi, 2000, p. 205).

The above-cited lines reify the significance of the ‘Other’ in the existential journey/quest for inner growth and self-transformation. It is worth noting that this perception is shared by many thinkers, including Morgan (2010), Smelser (2009), and

Mezirow (2000). It is often felt that the introduction of the ‘Other’ during the liminal phase of a journey renders the latter existentially complete and meaningful. Here, we could perceive the significance of transformative expeditions, as they cater to the formation of a rising consciousness- an enlightening pathway that conjoins the self to the world (Clifford, 1988), informing the individual about pragmatism that often stands as a crucial element for the continuance of a community. Campbell (1968) vividly reiterates the same principle when he writes, “it is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse” (p. 391).

Additionally, the encounter with the ‘Other’ is usually attributed as a symptom of what we may address as “autonomous cross-cultural hardship travel” (Lyons, 2010, p. 286). This could be defined as a form of travel marked (1) by “intense cross-cultural engagement” and, subsequently, (2) a precursor to feelings of “personal growth”, “autonomy”, “creativity”, and courage (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013, p. 285). It is interesting to note that the four-mentioned traits are inter-related to peoples’ connections with the vital self (p. 296) and contribute to the moral and social growth of the voyager, the individual, and the hero.

However, with respect to children’s involvement with the metaphor of journey, there is a slight twist in how the metaphor could be reconceptualised to integrate with a child’s universe and imagination. Brian Stock, in his seminal essay, “Reading, Community and a Sense of Place” (1993), reflects over the two significant processes of “seeing” and “reading” (p. 315) and how they are co-dependent on one another. He maintains that both are, in a way, crucial to an understanding of the “sense of place” (p. 314) or temporal spaces. Leading ahead from this context is Feike Dietz’s (2019) argument that seeks to understand children’s reading of travel narratives as “a process of ‘reading about’ created places” (p. 197). She draws much of her arguments from the 18th century Dutch travel-narratives for children which integrated the processes of ‘reading’ and ‘travelling’, transforming reading experiences into a form of “mental travelling” (Dietz, 2019, p. 200).

To Dietz (2019), these narratives often invite the child-reader to accompany the travellers on their journeys without having to cross the physical boundaries of the home. In doing so, the child’s reading experience translates into an episode of ‘mental travelling', functioning as "a stepping stone to inner growth and mental reflection" (p. 199). The process of 'reading about' (Dietz, 2019) a journey may facilitate a similar reaction amongst children like the travellers in the fictional story, paving the way to the formation of the "knowledgeable self" (p. 197) which is defined as the ability to comprehend knowledge about the world, others, and oneself. This context shall help us focus on the three animations and each respective journey as a 'text' for child-viewers to 'watch', and learn from, as "an opportunity for personal growth" (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013, p. 285).

The journeys documented in these animations could be deemed a proper medium to inform the child-viewer about the possibility of not only 'travelling' with the characters, but also 'growing-up' as they do. In their characters' transformative phases, child-viewers receive an equal opportunity to acknowledge (1) their sense of identity, (2) their relationship with others and the community, and (3) how their "habits of mind" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18) could be (re)organized, (re)framed, and(re)shaped. Quite alike the characters on-screen, child-viewers may be provided with as much of insights as the characters, given if they are ready to be inspired and be open to advice.

Discussion: The Odyssey Experiences

I. *Triton of the Sea* (1969)

Triton of the Sea has been structured as a quest for revenge that manifests itself as a journey towards personal growth and self-discovery. We aim to analyse how the backdrop of a revenge-narrative helps the protagonist discover his identity as a member of the Triton-clan, accompanied by the consequent-formation of a "knowledgeable self" (Dietz, 2019, p. 197). In terms of the trajectory that Triton's journey adopts, we can quickly perceive that, unlike Smelser's (2009) contention that an odyssey experience is "finite" (p. 10), Triton's path is neither finite nor linear (Forceville, 2016). It would be beneficial to address, at this stage, that Triton's journey, in terms of trajectory, is non-linear and does not explicitly comply to Smelser's (2009) concept of "restructuring. . . into the world of routine" (p. 206-207), like the other two animations that possess more of a cyclic journey-outline and, therefore, could be called as closer adherents to the framework formulated by Smelser (2009). However, this does not imply that *Triton of the Sea* fails to co-relate its narrative with any other features of the “odyssey experience” (Smelser, 2009, p. 8).

Here, it would be interesting to note that one of the earliest visible features of the odyssey experience within the animation is the feeling of existential dilemma- explained by Smelser (2009) as “emotional *ambivalence*” (p. 16)- that Triton initially struggles with during the first three chapters of the narrative. Smelser (2009) reflects over ‘emotional ambivalence’ as an assimilation of more positive emotions of hope and “euphoria” (p. 16) with negatives like “apprehension and anxiety” (p. 16). This is vividly reflected in the breaking of Triton’s images of the ‘home’ in the first three chapters. He dwindles between feelings of belongingness with the land or the sea (as in Episode I, “The Calling from the Distant Sea”) before he decides on refusing the call of the odyssey (Campbell, 1968) in Episode III, titled “The Coruscant Olihan Dagger”. In this context, Campbell (1968) makes a pertinent observation, writing “that sometimes the predicament following an obstinate refusal of the call proves to be the occasion of a providential revelation of some unsuspected principle of release” (p. 64).

What is implied here is that the hero’s refusal is often overturned by a sort of a strange predicament that pushes the hero to accept the calling. This is where Triton’s refusal- in Episode II- to (1) accept his identity as a Triton and (2) “fight for the peace at sea” (Triton of the Sea, 2018a, 13:42), is overturned by the death of the giant sea-turtle, Merton, at the hands of Siren (a follower of Poseidon). It is the death of Merton that stimulates Triton’s anger and sense of participation in the nemesis of the Poseidon-clan, and, therefore, avenge the death of his parents and the rest of the Triton-clan. This episode serves as the penultimate “*destructuring*” (Smelser, 2009, p. 11) of Triton from Yipin’s ‘home’, as he ventures out to the Atlantic to fight against the Poseidon family, never to return to Yipin’s village again in the future. This is precisely why we address *Triton of the Sea* as a non-linear journey towards identity and self-awareness (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013). The animation stands as Triton’s journey towards truth and an understanding of who he is as a Triton. Here, we may perceive his discovery of the self as a metaphor for ‘home-coming’, or rather as what Smelser (2009) calls the “re-entry into the world. . . on a new and presumably regenerated basis” (p. 206-207). Even though Triton never returns to the same village from where he began his journey, the final episode paves the way to the audiences’ understandings of the development of an altogether new perspective of the "'sense of place'" (Morgan, 2010, p. 253) for Triton. We aim to discuss this at a later stage of the analysis, typically because this formation occurs at the concluding phases of Triton's journey and is informed by other factors that unfold in the middle.

The middle part- the liminal phase- of Triton's odyssey, however, is "fraught with *uncertainty, danger, threat,* or *loss of security*" (Smelser, 2009, p. 14). It is precisely in this phase that Triton encounters, and fights, the 'Other' to recognise his own identity, or a sense of "'being-in-the-world'" (Morgan, 2010, p. 248), against the horrific images of the evil Poseidons who have been modelled as embodying the metaphorical presence of the 'Other' in the animation. Within the present context, we could refer to one of Galani-Moutafi's (2000) pertinent arguments to understand more closely the intricacies of the processes of Triton's phases of identity-development. Galani-Moutafi (2000) observes that "identities are constructed in relation to difference" (p. 205). On a similar vein, Triton views himself as a Triton- as the harbinger of "peace at sea" (Triton of the Sea, 2018a, 13:42)- against the Poseidons who are the present rulers of the sea, epitomizing chaos, disruption, and disharmony. However, it is worth noting that the stages of Triton's identity-formation are amplified as the narrative progresses. Triton's identity-formation is instigated after the death of Merton in Episode III and reaches a culmination once Triton defeats the anchor, the main villain, of the Poseidon clan in Episode-XXVII, wherein the narrative concludes.

The audiences may find the liminal phase of Triton's odyssey as the most enlightening for the protagonist. Not only is it marked by a complex experience with the 'Other', but also paves the way to the resolution of his existential 'disorienting dilemmas' (Mezirow, 2000). Within the framework of any transformative journeys, many critics have held the phase of liminality to be of immense value to the voyager (Morgan, 2010; Smelser, 2009). The 'liminal' phase is deemed to have self-transformative potentials, particularly through a direct exposure to the 'Other' and its related factors of 'Otherness'. This even echoes in Triton's journey as he (1) ventures out to discover his "secret" (Triton of the Sea, 2018a, 1:08) and self-identity, (2) battles not only demons and sea-monsters but also his own personal feelings of anxiety and "emotional *ambivalence*" (Smelser, 2009, p. 16), and (3) finally begins to understand and appreciate his communal roots as a member of the Tritons which he had earlier been exposed to, at the beginning of the narrative, but had chosen to initially deny and refuse (Campbell, 1968). Triton’s journey represents a dramatic, but ‘fantastic’, ritualistic passage from one “psychological and social. . . role or phase of life to another” (Smelser, 2009, p. 7), as he transforms into an altogether different individual who appears ready, and able, to revive the socio-cultural legacy of the Tritons that had been once damaged by the chaotic forces of disorder and anarchy, the Poseidons.

Furthermore, as part of the odyssey, Smelser (2009) mentions that during the journey, one may experience a few relationships or bonds of a more “unique and special” nature (p. 18) that may not re-occur once the voyager has restructured him/herself to the place/society of the odyssey’s origin. Considering this, one cannot overlook the relative importance of Ruka (the white dolphin) in Triton’s journey for revenge, identity, and redemption. As one memorable character-companion, Ruka embodies Campbell’s (1968) characterisations of the “protective figure” (p. 69) or the animal-form of the “fairy godmother” (p. 71) for Triton. She represents that “benign, protecting power of destiny” (Campbell, 1968, p. 71) that enables Triton to successfully justify the purposes of his journey. Triton’s odyssey was strewn with battles against monsters and evil symbols, and it was Ruka who helped and protected through those adventures. Even though Campbell’s (1968) ‘helper’ bears more supernatural parameters, Ruka may still qualify as the former, considering her saintlike presence and undying support across Triton’s odyssey in the sea.

Here, one may mention that there were other characters as well, including the other three dolphins- Uru, Karu, and Fin- and Pipiko, who accompanied Triton on his quest against the Poseidons and, at times, even ‘helped’ him battle some monsters. However, the type of relationship Triton and Ruka share within the animation, unfortunately, is not something that Triton shares (or entertains) with others from his team, including Pipiko, who is often suggested to be Triton’s sexual partner in the future. The animation mostly prioritises the refinement and development of Ruka and Triton’s relationship and centralizes Ruka as a crucial element in Triton’s journey. Sadly, the animation fails to balance-out the representation of the other four characters due to which (1) Triton’s bonds of association stays limited to only Ruka (Smelser, 2009) and (2) Pipiko, as a female figure, remains sequestered- and, most importantly, voiceless-in the narrative, a point which is integral, and of special interest, to our analyses in Chapter IV.

Coming back to Triton's journey is the "'sense of place'" that eventually develops for Triton to locate his socio-psychological boundaries (Morgan, 2010, p. 253). As mentioned above, Triton's journey is non-linear, unlike Smelser's (2009) linear odyssey-model; however, one may perceive that Triton still re-structures himself to "routine life" (p. 18), precisely as a "transformed home comer" (Morgan, 2010, p. 252). Certainly, both the locational points of initiation and return are separate in Triton's case, but what Triton, indeed, develops is embedded in imagination and perception. By locating and identifying his 'sense of being' as a Triton, he not only sheds off the identity he had earlier assumed in Yipin's care, but also moves on to accept "the sea" as his (1) place of origin and (2) destination of return. Morgan (2010) speaks of the "'sense of place'" as a "complex connection between people. . . and places or landscapes that goes beyond the merely material or functional to consider the affective and existential" (p. 253).

This is more vividly registered in *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (which we will discuss later in the chapter); in *Triton of the Sea*, however, it is more implicit than outwardly suggested. However, the audiences could still recognise the emergence of this 'sense of place' within the psyche of Triton as (1) he never returns to Yipin and (2) journeys ahead to the sea on the back of Ruka in Episode-XXVII, "The Sun will rise again in the Atlantic Ocean" (Triton of the Sea, 2018f, 21:35). In a way, Triton's acknowledgment of the "sea" as his home suggests a spiritual and psychological journey towards the inner self, as a manifestation of "'coming to consciousness'" (Clifford, 1988, p. 167). In Triton's acceptance of (1) his identity and (2) the sea as 'home' lies the central meaning of the odyssey experience which is grounded in the possibility of growth, emancipation, and self-realisation (Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013; Morgan, 2010).

Triton's journey, as highlighted above, is not a simple tale of revenge, but more of a subtle exploration of self-identity and self-discovery, sharpened with the emergence of the "knowledgeable self" (Dietz, 2019, p. 197). The latter-most argument may be best illustrated via Triton's recognition of the true powers of the magical, 'olihan dagger', which is also situated as a cultural symbol of Triton heritage and ancestry. The dagger emits an unbearable radiation, rendering Triton invincible, and, therefore, Triton uses it each time he gets in trouble until, in Episode-XVIII, "The Torrid Giant, Taros" (Triton of the Sea, 2018e, 16:13), he realizes that the dagger ceases to work if overused. From there onwards, he acknowledges the physical limitations of the dagger and resorts to employing it vigilantly and prudently, as the narrative continues ahead.

Triton of the Sea, thus, enables the audiences to appreciate the odyssey experiences of Triton as not only an episode of self-transformation and self-perseverance (Morgan, 2010), but also as a private lesson/opportunity of involving themselves with the transformative journey of Triton. His journey, further, may help the audiences reduce the possibility of unclear "habits of mind" to occupy the social and psychological spaces of their selves (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18) and rather shift their focus on more productive opportunities to gather knowledge about one's self, others, and society (Dietz, 2019; Murray, 2009). The animation desires to move child-viewers to 'watch' Triton's journey as a medium to view themselves both in "the inner and the outer dimensions" (Galani-Moutafi, 2000, p. 205) of their social and psychological circles as potentially transformed and enlightened. The animation, most certainly, asks from child-viewers to look up to Triton for inspiration.

II. *Belle and Sebastian* (1981-82)

Unlike the linear nature of Triton's journey, in *Belle and Sebastian*, the audience may clearly perceive the nature of Belle and Sebastian's adventures as being circular. It implies that their journey not only involves more defined patterns of "destructuring", but also a finite possibility of "restructuring" (Smelser, 2009, p. 12), thereby, hinting at the formal completion of the hero's quest (Campbell, 1968). This does not mean that Triton's linear journey fails to hold any substance due to the open-ended nature of its conclusion. Where Triton's sense of restructuring is enriched by his rejuvenated associations with his familial history and, therefore, is more psychological than outwardly projected; the circular nature of Sebastian's journey more formally abides by Smelser's (2009) inherent odyssey-model. What intersects their journeys is the sense of development that the former assumes in the lives of the protagonists, culminating their adventures into a manifestation of a ritualistic passage (Smelser,

2009. This factor about odysseys helps transform not only the protagonists to knowledgeable individuals (Dietz, 2019), but also their journeys into a quest towards consciousness, identity, and self-awareness (Clifford, 1988; Morgan, 2010).

What seems the most attractive factor about Sebastian's journey is his sense of amity and belonging that he constantly shares with the great white Pyrenees, Belle. Their relationship is marked by a strange aspect of commonality that not only connects their individual narratives, but also facilitates the enrichment of their sense of mutual love and identification with (or for) each other. This suggested aspect could be defined with respect to the social position that both the characters share as being what we may address as 'outcastes'. In both Belle and Sebastian's treatments by others as "a vicious dog" and "farm kid" (Belle & Sebastian, 2012a, 5:17; 12:20) respectively, the audiences may perceive how (1) intricately-close the two characters have been intertwined within the narrative, and (2) how this line of commonality helps to perpetuate Sebastian's journey to Spain, or rather quest to "the simultaneous discovery of self and the Other" (Galani-Moutafi, 2000, p. 205).

The equation that Sebastian develops between himself and Belle as being victims of the same system strengthens his sense of belief that Belle is to be protected, as he 'promises' to the latter in "The Hunt for Belle" that he "won't let anyone hurt [her]" (Belle & Sebastian, 2012b, 22:48). It would be worth mentioning that the animation extends its treatment of the theme of 'social segregation'- which is introduced in the representations of both Sebastian and Belle- through its portrayal of the ethnically-discriminated Romanies, something that we would be taking up ahead in the chapter. For now, it is adequate if we look at Sebastian's journey with Belle to Spain (1) as a reaction to his village's hostility against both himself and Belle and (2) as an opportunity to discover his mother, Isabel, when he finally ventures out in "The Journey Begins".

Sebastian's journey could be defined as an extended quest to understand the ultimate meaning of "friendships", which is an aspect frequently suggested within the narrative. Initially, this aspect remains limited to what Belle and Sebastian share, but, later, covers a whole range of people who Sebastian meets and befriends during his journey, who may be able to constitute the image of 'Other' (Galani-Moutafi, 2000) for

Sebastian and his own journey towards self-discovery (Clifford, 1988). It is here that Sebastian's meeting with Sarah (in "A Visit to Jail") not only closes the door of 'friend-lessness' for Sebastian, but also paves the way to his self-recognition of the first glimpses of true friendship, as the narrator concludes, "he knows he has found a friend at last" (Belle & Sebastian, 2013a, 23:14).

This friendly encounter, furthermore, assumes a developed manifestation in Billy, the bank robber, who sacrifices himself to save Belle and Sebastian from the searching police (who were, simultaneously, looking for both Billy and the latter-two), teaching the two "the power of true friendship" (Belle & Sebastian, 2013c, 23:34). It is here-through these interactions- that the audiences could perceive the transformative and facilitative potentials of Sebastian's liminal phase. It helps him cultivate a keen sense of "unique and special membership" (Smelser, 2009, p. 18) with an optimistic 'Other', and manifests his development into a self-reflexive individual who understands his social roles, mostly as a friend (Dietz, 2019).

Sebastian's encounters with the 'Other' appear to reach a culmination in the portrayal of Benedict, an aristocratic boy, when the former understands the social and cultural differences between himself and the latter (Benedict). Sebastian's interactions with Benedict and his family (in "The Runaway Car") represent a subtle, implicit manifestation of what Lyons (2010) had called the "autonomous cross-cultural hardship travel" (p. 286) which could be related to a form of travel, involving "intense cross-cultural engagement" and a sudden acknowledgment of one's own social and cultural reality (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013, p. 285-286). Ahead of this argument, it is crucial to highlight that Sebastian's cross-cultural hardships have not been widened up by the anime (as in *Heidi, Girl of the Alps*) but they perfectly glisten his understandings of his sense of identity as "the boy from the tiny mountain" (Belle & Sebastian, 2013b, 2:40), which soon intermixes with his socio-cultural identity as the son of a 'Romani-mother' (as in "Help! Save Belle").

As already mentioned, the sympathetic representation of the Romanies intersects with the themes of identification and socio-cultural segregation, and it is precisely these factors that facilitate the themes of 'difference' and 'otherness' (Morgan, 2010; Smelser, 2009). It is here that we could be reminded of Belle and Sebastian's episode with Jake Lombard, who Sebastian mistakes for a dangerous kidnapper, an assumption that Sebastian makes strictly based on Jake's physical appearances. Within this context, the narrative provides a befitting conclusion (in "Chased by the Desperados"):

> "Sebastian now realized he had been wrong about Jake. Just as many people were frightened of Belle because of her size, Sebastian had mistaken big, gruff Jake for a dangerous kidnapper- looks can be deceiving" (Belle & Sebastian, 2014a, 23:36 – 23:50).

Sebastian's misinterpretation of Jake's sense of otherness corresponds to the socio-cultural segregation of the Romanies within the anime, based on the latter's cultural construct of 'difference', as viewed from the mistaken perspectives of the "Other" (Galani-Moutafi, 2000, p. 205). This cultural distance manifests as a '*double- Other*' for Sebastian, who treats both the modernism of the 'city' and the traditionalism of the 'Romani' as significantly invaluable 'Others'. Having grown up in the village- away from any Romani influences- the animation positions Sebastian as culturally unaware of his roots, which he may pick up after he begins living with Isabel and, therefore, in the present, struggles with both the modern values of the "big city" (Belle & Sebastian, 2013b, 2:43) and traditional and conservative notions of the Romanies, all of which he perceives as 'new or different' (Campbell, 1968). These intercultural experiences of differentiation transform his journey into an "opportunity for personal growth" (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013, p. 285) and as an outlet for self-consciousness about where his roots actually lie (Clifford, 1988; Murray, 2009).

Within the circle of the Romanies, Sebastian grows closest to Mitch and Mingo. They not only actively support Sebastian to rescue Belle from police custody, but also emerge as primary role models from whom Sebastian learns some lessons about hope, courage, and togetherness. Surprisingly, they also become the few of the first individuals to recognise Belle not as "the white monster", but as an "obedient. . . [and] friendly" Pyrenees, as Mingo, at one instance, argues, in "Belle is Captured" (Belle & Sebastian, 2014b, 16:12; 16:52 – 16:54). As Mezirow (2000) had argued:

> Our values and sense of self are anchored in our frames of reference. They provide us with a sense of stability, coherence, community, and identity. Consequently, they are often emotionally charged and strongly defended (p.18).

Leading from Mezirow's (2000) argument, Sebastian's interactions with the 'othered' Mitch and Mingo stimulate the reconstruction of his 'frames of reference' into a more malleable frame of reference. Such a frame is not only built upon personal experiences, but also is palpable to change and reformation, which Mezirow (2000) has explained as a "dependable frame of reference":

> one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable. . . critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience (p. 19).

Naturally, Sebastian's encounters with Mitch and Mingo, and other Romanies, serve as the culmination of not only his odyssey/journey to discover Isabel, but also his understandings of the ways of the world and its peoples. However, his initial promise to Belle is fulfilled later, in "Climbing a Wall of Stone", when the head of the Spanish Border Guards, Costello, advises against capturing or harming either Belle or Sebastian, as he alerts his team:

> "It would be a disgrace to our honour if we shot such a brave boy and his dog. They should remain free because of their courage" (Belle & Sebastian, 2014c, 23:06 – 23:11).

It is this sense of undaunted courage that Sebastian significantly learns from the Romanies- intermixed with faith in both Belle and his friendship with her- which later helps Sebastian earn Costello's respect and actively facilitates "as a vehicle to growth" (Hirchorn & Hefferon, 2013, p. 294). Sebastian's odyssey, thus, transforms into a self-reflexive opportunity that disavows the negative influence of criminals or smugglers like Hernandez and Fernandez and allows for the reconstruction of an altogether different, fresh, and self-conscious frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19).

One of our final thoughts about this odyssey pertains to Sebastian's partial 'refusal to return' (Campbell, 1968) which might coincide with what Smelser (2009) writes about "affects of. . . nostalgia" (p. 18). In this context, Sebastian mentions to Belle, at one instance, about his psychological inclination to remember only "the bad memories", rather than concentrating on "the good ones" (Belle & Sebastian, 2014d, 12:54). Here, Campbell (1968) makes a pertinent observation about the hero's responsibility to carry those "runes of wisdom. . . back into the kingdom of humanity" (p. 193). We address Sebastian's refusal or sense of "emotional *ambivalence*" as 'partial' because his anxieties are solely the aftermath of an exhaustive ritual-passage (Smelser, 2009, p. 16, 18) and are, therefore, of a more fleeting nature than psychologically-embedded in Sebastian's imagination.

What seems certain, however, is Sebastian's return to the Pyrenees as a content, "transformed home comer" (Morgan, 2010, p. 252). His odyssey serves him multiple objectives, including his personal, unanticipated discovery of his sense of self or what Morgan (2010) calls as a "superior existential mode of 'being-in-the-world'" (p. 248). Furthermore, in discovering his 'Romani-mother', Sebastian discovers a dual-identity: one of 'not' being an orphan, and the other of being a member of the Romani-clan. Both identities assimilate to re-form Sebastian's personal and social identity that perpetuates itself as the subject of narrative-construction within the anime to delineate Sebastian's realisation of selfhood (Galani-Moutafi, 2000). Again, the narrator supplies a befitting conclusion to the present-argument, in "A Happy Ending":

> "Sebastian was home. . . and now that his mother was there, his family was complete. . . he had done a lot of growing up. He now understood what friendship meant and how you sometimes had to work hard for it" (Belle & Sebastian, 2014e, 22:58 – 23:15).

This sense of completeness corresponds with Sebastian's identity-formation as not only a son, but, more importantly, as a friend, which becomes one of the central themes in *Belle and Sebastian*. His journey enables him to discover Isabel, but what remains the most defining aspect of the former is that it paves the way to Sebastian's private recognition of the true meanings of friendships, sacrifice, love, courage, and hope, which he could not have understood without crossing both symbolic and physical boundaries of the 'home'. It was through his odyssey experience that Sebastian transforms the meaning of Cecil's house into a metaphor that possesses the characteristics of what he can now address as 'home'. Besides, his odyssey strengthens his bonds of friendship with Belle, yet again suggesting how Sebastian becomes more self-aware of what friendships stand for: as a symbol of compassion, sacrifice, and hope (Campbell, 1968). Strangely, the animation brings back memories of what Billy and his sacrifice had embodied, and how Sebastian takes his legacy forward to become a 'friend with a big heart'.

III. *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974)

Doreen Massey (1996) argues about the possibility for an individual's "sense of place" to be less "self-enclosing and defensive", and rather become more "progressive", "outward- looking" (p. 237), and inclusive by nature. We may experience a similar paradigm unfolding in *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), typically through its eponymous protagonist's inner journeys towards the self (Galani-Moutafi, 2000) and, most critically, towards nature that facilitates the protagonist's odyssey towards "spiritual maturity" (Hale, 2006, p. 527). Speaking about the transformative potentials of places, we may find Tuan's (1976) conceptual extension of John K. Wright's concept of "*geopiety*" (p. 11) useful in the context of understanding the development of Heidi's perception of the Swiss Alps in the narrative, and how Heidi's relationships with nature- the wilderness- corresponds to what Morgan (2010) refers to as "individual-nature transactions" (p. 255). Typically, within *Heidi*, 'nature' assumes a gamut of manifestations and each manifestation serves as a valuable bedrock for Heidi to simultaneously discover herself and 'others', strengthening her sense of "'being-in-the-world'" (Morgan, 2010, p. 248).

Heidi, Girl of the Alps is marked by a stark refusal to acknowledge the darker ramifications of nature, and instead focuses more upon the glorification of nature's sense of brightness and optimism. Darling-Wolf (2016) has pertinently observed this phenomenon as a striking feature of the earlier works of Hayao Miyazaki who helped reconceptualise Johanna Spyri’s 1880 novel of the same name along with Isao Takahata. This is reiterated by McCarthy (1999) who mentions about ‘Miyazaki’s Europe’ as a “never-never land. . . a rustic paradise of crumbling yet infinitely sophisticated cities and castles. . . lakes, mountains, and high flower-strewn meadows; and mystery and romance” (p. 65).

Nonetheless, Miyazaki’s systematic, implied deconstruction of European landscapes is a symptom of the (re)construction of Heidi’s character as a typical example of the ‘Miyazaki girl’, who emerges as a symbolic manifestation of nature (Darling-Wolf, 2016). This idea helps the narrative (re)position Heidi as “a child of the mountain”, from “Whistle Louder” (Radical Moose, 2016c, 23:25), and identify her spiritual maturity as a journey divided into four distinct phases. Her journey is supplemented by the *geopietic* symbiosis she develops with the Swiss countryside and its wilderness, as it emerges into a “focus of value, of nurture and support” (Tuan, 1977, p. 29) within the contextual framework of Heidi and her inner journey towards nature (Clifford, 1988). In a way, the anime’s ignorance towards the darker aspects of nature supports the development of Heidi’s odyssey to not only discover the significance of nature, but also wake up to epitomise the latter as her anchor, guardian, and spiritual companion-for-life. The animation elucidates and emphasises Heidi’s spiritual transaction with nature as a gateway for the protagonist to discover herself and sense of individuality, identity, and direction (Dietz, 2019; Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Morgan, 2010).

Unlike Triton and Sebastian’s odysseys that begin with a defining episode of what Smelser (2009) addresses as the “social destructuring of routine. . . [from] the normal ebb and flow of life” (p. 11), Heidi’s inner journey towards nature manifests itself without the necessary ramification of “departure” (Campbell, 1968, p. 49) that conventionally holds a significant place in the hero’s journey or odyssey. The first initiative phase of Heidi’s journey occurs as soon as she reaches the Swiss Alps and begins sensing an ‘unusual’ attraction towards the mesmerising marvels of nature, as registered in “Grandfather's Mountain Cabin”:

> "Deeply breathing the delicious air of the wide Alp meadows, Heidi's heart rejoices to the utmost" (Radical Moose, 2016b, 17:22).

Within this context, Tuan (1977) reflects over the possibility for children- typically infants- to understand and explore their physical environment, predominantly, through their gustatory senses. In the case of Heidi, her *geopietic* relationship is strengthened, at first, through the fresh dairy products she often consumes at her grandfather's cabin on the mountain-top, typically cheese, goat's milk, and brown bread. Her *geopietic* bond with the wilderness is, furthermore, complemented by Heidi's wish to become "a goatherd" (in "Whistle Louder") and remain in the mountains, in proximity to her grandfather, nature, and herself which later become the three most pivotal entities through which Heidi develops her sense of co-relation with the world around her (Dietz, 2019). However, the initiative phase quickly transforms to the second, wherein Heidi begins to perceive an inexplicable sense of 'being-within-nature' that not only helps her understand nature, but also allows her to grow closer to its transcendental and existential ramifications. One of Heidi's earliest experiences with the spiritual form of nature are recorded in "The Whisper of the Firs", where she first mentions about the firs' sounds to be giving the impression that "they are talking" (Radical Moose, 2016d, 13:10). Heidi's strange identification with the fir trees even perpetuates itself during her time at the Sesemann household in Frankfurt and, further, helps strengthen Heidi's spiritual and emotional affinities/ties with nature.

Nonetheless, the audiences might discover that Heidi's relationship with 'the wilderness' intensifies during the third phase of her inner journey towards self-consciousness and spiritual growth (Hale, 2006), when she leaves Dörfli and enters the Sesemann household to be a "playmate" (Radical Moose, 2016e, 4:26) for the physically disabled, Clara Sesemann. Heidi's stay at the Sesemann household becomes extremely crucial in her four-phased odyssey and serves as a milestone for Heidi to reaffirm her unbreakable faith in nature. In leaving Dörfli, the animation introduces Heidi's formal 'disaggregation' from the Swiss Alpine countryside, and 'entry' into a new phase of uncertainty, insecurity, and liminality (Morgan, 2010; Smelser, 2009). But, most important, the third phase exemplifies the character of Heidi as the archetypal 'Miyazaki-girl'. Conventionally-speaking, the Miyazaki-girl departs from the classical *shōjo* paradigm of "ultrafemininity that is often passive. . . [and rather is] independent and active, courageously confronting the variety of obstacles before [her]" (Napier, 2005, p. 154).

This may lead us to acknowledge Heidi's experiences at the Sesemann household, typically with Fräulein Rottenmeier (Clara's governess and the Sesemann housekeeper), as a powerful manifestation of Lyons' (2010) concept of the "cross-cultural hardship travel" (p. 286). Unlike Sebastian's brief pockets of cross-cultural hardships, in Heidi's encounters with Rottenmeier, we may perceive a more enduring and continued exposure to one's sense of otherness which worsened with time, but, in return, amplified Heidi's love for nature and her sense of place (Massey, 1996). Her behaviour or lack of mannerisms at the dinner-table, in "A New Life", for example, best explains her struggle to (1) identify or relate to (with) the ideas of sophistication and (2) adjust to the sense of otherness of the aristocratic Rottenmeier, as the latter once complains in "I Wish to Fly":

> "She has no manners. She doesn't know how to talk to
> us or the servants. She doesn't even know how to read"
> (Radical Moose, 2016f, 2:12 – 2:22).

Partially, Rottenmeier's prejudice against our young female protagonist stems from her own lack of knowledge about the countryside peoples, which Heidi represents. However, the reactions of Rottenmeier to Heidi's 'otherness' may lead us to conclude that this narrative-interaction is designed in a way that it evokes the 'city-pastoral' dichotomy. This dichotomy (1) appears as a key aspect in Miyazaki's oeuvre and (2) serves the purpose of 'glorifying nature', while apprehending 'the dystopian, modern city' (Darling-Wolf, 2016), reconnecting the 'Miyazaki-girl' to stand as a metaphor for untouched, hidden nature. Heidi's position as a metaphor for nature helps explain Alm-Onji's fear of Heidi's purported, consequential loss of innocence or emotional purity, after Aunt Dete threatens to take Heidi away to Frankfurt in "Separate Ways" (Radical Moose, 2016e, 7:14). Fortunately, the animation firmly treasures Heidi's metaphorical connections with nature/environment/wilderness, and instead of 'corrupting' her, it rejuvenates her love for nature and transforms Heidi's longing for the Swiss Alps into a personal mantra for renewal, hoping and resilience (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013).

Napier (2005), further, mentions that Miyazaki’s girl characters usually outshone due to their empowered outlooks. This seems evident in the ways through which Heidi controls her homesickness- her feverish longing for Alps- particularly at the face of Clara’s attachment towards her, as she confesses in “Ghost Commotion”:

> “Heidi: I dream every night. . . I am at Grandfather's hut. I hear the sound of the fir trees outside. I hurry to the door of the hut and open it. The stars are twinkling. Everything is so beautiful. . . But when I wake up, I'm still in Frankfurt. [. . .]
>
> Doctor: "Do you want to go back there?"
> Heidi: "Clara needs me. I cannot leave. (begins sobbing)” (Radical Moose, 2016g, 9:59 – 11:30).

In Heidi’s refusal to travel back to the Alps, it seems transparent that *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* celebrates its female protagonist’s *gambaru* spirit and sense of renewal from the mental trauma she experiences due to her immense longing for home: the wilderness of the Alps (Darling-Wolf, 2016). Additionally, the anime soon translates Heidi’s homesickness into Clara’s physical recovery, where Heidi enters the final phase of her spiritual odyssey (Smelser, 2009), when the role of the wilderness shifts to cover dimensions of spiritual and physical healing (Asamoah et al., 2019). The anime reinforces the significance of nature, nurturing Heidi’s belief in its powers and capacities to ‘transform’ humanity on physical, artistic, emotional, and social levels.

Clara’s recovery (as she is affected by being under the influence of nature), in a way, not only marks the culmination of Heidi’s spiritual quest towards ‘understanding nature’, but also reaffirms Heidi’s inherent faith in nature. Her quest stimulates Heidi’s rebirth as not only what Darling-Wolf (2016) suggests the archetype of Miyazaki's conception of nature- innocent, untouched, hidden- but also as the “child of the mountain” (from “Whistle Louder”). This is reiterated when Heidi sings a song- in the final episode of the series (“Until We Meet Again”)- that positions her and Peter as “the goatherds of the cheerful village” (Radical Moose, 2016h, 12:46) and reinforces her desire to be a “goatherd”, something that she had even expressed earlier in the narrative (in “Whistle Louder”).

Heidi's locational “restructuring” to the Alpine landscapes (Smelser, 2009, p. 206) manifests itself into the recognition of (1) her friendship with Clara Sesemann (when she comes to the Alps to pay Heidi a visit) that is built upon the idea of sacrifice and love, and (2) her sense of kinship or bonding with the Alps’ wilderness and nature in general. Her odyssey culminates with an acknowledgment of her *geopietic* symbiosis with nature that is built upon the essential emotion of “piety” or “reverence” (Tuan, 1976, p. 11), along with an outstanding emotional bonding with Clara, Peter, and Alm-Onji, who become the anchors for Heidi and her values of innocence, purity, and kindness. In Heidi’s journey, the audiences come to terms with the “transformative potential of places”, as Morgan (2010, p. 252) writes at one instance, as it completely redesigns one’s ‘frames of reference’ or ways of looking at the world and others (Mezirow, 2000). Heidi rejoices in the lap of nature, but at the expense of her refusal to acknowledge the darker realities of nature; however, it fulfils her sense of being (1) a part of nature and (2) around its manifestations and marvels. In a way, her journey to her grandfather’s cabin benefits her, as she realizes the peace of being closer to nature, thereby, negating Mr. Thomas’ opinions (the horse-cart driver who takes Heidi and Aunt Dete to Dörfli in the first episode, “To the Alm Mountain”) about Heidi in the beginning:

> “Poor girl. She is always going from one place to another” (Radical Moose, 2016a, 5:52).

Indeed, Heidi’s uneven movements to ‘places’ magnify her outlook towards the world. She begins to appreciate things for what and how they are; meets and befriends some “*unique and special*” individuals (Smelser, 2009, p. 18); and, most critically, revels in her identification with nature and its wilderness. Her odyssey completes with her recognition of her true-self immersed in the beauty, tranquillity, and isolated modes of nature. It manifests to influence the city-based Sesemanns about what nature, the countryside, can offer to the displaced or distant ‘Other’ and aligns with the possibility of personal reformation through a reconstruction of what Massey (1996) had originally discussed as the “sense of place” (p. 237). *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* illustrates the potential of wilderness (as ‘place’) to conjoin the voyager with deeper existential concomitants of nature, inspiring the viewers (and Heidi) to spread love and kindness.

Conclusion

While discussing the hero’s return, Campbell (1968) makes an intriguing observation that could be delicately applied to the aftermath of the three individual journeys undertaken by our protagonists within the animations discussed herein the chapter. These journeys open them up to the enduring possibility of personal growth and self-consciousness as they gather the lessons together, learnt (from) during their journey(s), and apply them later in their lives, and into adulthood:

> Though he had feared the terrible hag, he had been swallowed and reborn. Having died to his personal ego, he rose again established in the Self (Campbell, 1968, p. 243).

By the end of their odyssey experiences, the protagonists undergo a subtle self-transformation that targets- and refines- their understanding of themselves, others, and their social or communal roles within their socio-political structures (Galani-Moutafi, 2000). As Morgan (2010) points out, transformative journeys can function as a meaningful exercise that possesses the ability to sanitise the voyager by exposing them to influences of the ‘Other’, expanding their ways of approaching or thinking about the world (Mezirow, 2000). Such journeys help in identifying and reshaping immature “habits of mind” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18) to re-develop or re-adjust them into more straight-forward, inclusive, and flexible categories of cognition that pushes the voyager towards existential clarity.

In more or less ways, all our three heroes are potentially retransformed into experienced, relatively independent, self-aware, and active individuals. Their respective homecomings symbolise not only a mode of physical, silent “re-entry into the world of routine”, but also a subtle manifestation of personal growth that occurs on the level(s) of conscience (Smelser, 2009, p. 206-207). Triton, in his war against the Poseidon-clan, returns to discover where he truly belonged, as he determines himself to preserve the cultural legacy of the Tritons; Sebastian's home-coming is manifested via the three-fold renewal of his identity as (1) a friend to Belle, (2) son to Isabel, and (3) part of the indigenous Romani-clan, as he recognises the essential significance of friendships, the courage to sacrifice, and the power of being hopeful. With Heidi, however, the paradigm of Smelser's (2009) odyssey partially distorts to encapsulate her journey towards nature- the wilderness- as a neat and subtle example of a reverential, *geopietic* symbiosis with nature (Tuan, 1976).

An interesting line of difference between the three journeys, here, is the fact that where Triton and Sebastian's journeys covers both the physical and spiritual factors of Smelser's (2009) odyssey-model, Heidi's inward odyssey exclusively concentrates on the spiritual or emotional dimensions of the highlighted latter-model. However, this should not lead us to conclude that Heidi's odyssey experience has been of a limited or minimal value to the protagonist (Heidi). Surprisingly, Heidi's odyssey experience, unlike Triton's or Sebastian's, holds more emotional value as it becomes one of the strongest examples of the self-transformation phenomenon amongst the three animations analysed herein. Heidi's spiritual relationship with nature is an enigmatic evidence of the transformative potentials of the odyssey experience, as the anime revisits and registers Miyazaki's vision of "nature"

> as an image of sublime transcendence of the 'civil', and as an image of the harmony that would prevail in the absence of a civilized zeal to transcend a more animal state of being (Soper, 1995, p. 79).

After having 'read' and analysed these three individual journeys, we can validate the odyssey experience as a pathway to uncover the hidden or lost elements of one's self-identity, alike the protagonists. It allows the audiences to translate the heroes' journeys into opportunities for themselves to seek inspiration for a more personal, moral growth to occur within, as they look out onto the heroes' venturing out to unknown places, reshaping their journeys to their advantage. Their odysseys become a symbol that "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (Campbell, 1968, p. 58).

Speaking within the latter-context, involving the role of 'destiny', we may discover that destiny plays a stimulative function and adds an extra dimension to our heroes' odyssey experiences. In a way, Campbell's (1968) take on 'destiny' offers the viewers an understanding of destiny's imperative role in introducing the heroes to the possibility of "growing-up" (Belle & Sebastian, 2014e) by moving beyond comfort zones and explore not only unknown places, but also unidentified, hidden aspects about one's sense of identity (Morgan, 2010). This concept helps us perceive Heidi's imposed journey to Frankfurt, and subsequent transformation, as, initially, a result of Aunt Dete's prospects of working as a maidservant in an upper-class household in Frankfurt, to join which she had left Heidi under the care of Alm-Onji at the first place (in "To the Alm Mountain"); or Triton's return to the sea, for example, would not have been possible had Ruka not been there in the narrative to disclose his history to Triton. All these instances help us appreciate the role and function that destiny entails in the hero's journey and how it reshapes the 'present' and 'future' of the hero concerned.

Additionally, the role of destiny stimulates the introduction of the functional 'Other' and its sense of 'Otherness' that facilitates the protagonists' phase of regeneration and renewal (Clifford, 1988; Smelser, 2009). It helps them to recognise and appreciate the idea of difference, alongside developing insights about oneself and one's place in society. As Galani-Moutafi (2000) argues, the presence of the 'Other' affects personal identity and one's way of looking at the world, and, thereby, the sense of 'Otherness' comes out as a crucial component of the 'Other' to enable the hero's or voyager's recognition of what is different, uncanny, or unique in relation to their encounters with the 'Other'. This could be best explained via Sebastian's experience at the restaurant (in "The Runaway Car") when one of the waiters shouts out to him:

> "This isn't the kind the place for a kid like you to be in."
> (Belle & Sebastian, 2013b, 4:09).

Sebastian's encounter with the 'Other' extends when the former meets Benedict and fails to conform to the rules of sophistication at the dinner-table (in the same episode), inside an aristocratic household. This becomes one of the melting points for Sebastian as the anime awakens him to the 'city-mountain' dichotomy, allowing him to (1) internalise Benedict and his family's mode of 'othered' difference and (2) accept and understand his cultural position as "the boy from the tiny mountain" (Belle & Sebastian, 2013b, 2:40). These encounters with the 'Other' help Sebastian discover his identity as a mountain boy against a wider socio-cultural panorama built upon geographical boundaries. This is precisely where the essence of the odyssey lies: in the recognition of the self against the ideological, cultural, socio-political, and moral limits of the 'Other' (Galani-Moutafi, 2000).

The odyssey experience is a fresh avenue for self-rejuvenation. It allows the individuals to transcend the boundaries of the home and enter symbolic territories of selfhood and consciousness (Clifford, 1988; Smelser, 2009), returning to a sense of what was overlooked or unexplored. The respective animations pursue to achieve a somewhat similar outcome by dislocating, and later relocating, its protagonists outside their comfort zones and developing a space for existential self-transformations to occur (Morgan, 2010; Murray, 2009). Ahead of this, the animations tend to communicate to the audiences, inspiring them to visualise these journeys as a framework to identify, explore, and appreciate their own identities and that of others (Dietz, 2019; Stock, 1993). The process of 'moving across or beyond' possesses the capacity to bring self-empowering outcomes for the individual, only if the latter is determined to (1) cross the boundary of the 'home', one's sense of comfort, socio-political limitations, and sense of fear and anxiety, and (2) plunge into the uncertain possibility of purgation. As Mezirow (2000) again re-echoes:

> The process of self-empowerment, acquiring greater control of one's life as a liberated learner, is, of course, always limited by social, historical, and cultural conditions (p. 27).

Our protagonists overcome these conditions, in lesser or greater variations, converting their transformation-narratives into (1) archetypes of personal growth and independence, and (2) rich resources of inspiration and reformation for viewers. We learn from their adventures a gamut of thematic subjects- ranging from courage, sacrifice, friendship, *geopiety,* hope, independence, kindness, and love- which are gathered solely through their own experiences and, most important, through the downfalls and mistakes they make in the middle. Here, we may begin looking at the possibility of learning and reforming oneself through one's mistakes, typically through the lens of tragedy, which shall become the locus of our attention in the next chapter, highlighting how a tragedy is reconceptualised within the framework of a Japanese animation to facilitate the representation of its protagonist's morally-transgressive behaviour, and subsequent downfall, as a potential source for self-transformative learning. Coming back to our present argument, however, is the belief in the power of 'learning through mistakes' which the odyssey also entails, encouraging the individual to begin thinking more "like an adult" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3).

Chapter II

Eroded Moralities: The Sins of Nobita, the Animated Tragic

Not Funny, it's Tragic!

Robert Coles (1987) observed that children "summon language in the interests of retrospective reflection" (p. 3). It is here that Brownell (2021) emphasised the socialising significance of children's "play as representative of children's perception of the world and. . . as an invitation for others. . . to be a part of their world-making" (para. 4). In children's participation in symbolic play, they are frequently exposed to deploy, appreciate, and perceive the vividness of language to be able to (1) express their individual anxieties about their social perceptions and (2) comprehend what Eden (2005) addresses as a narrative's "psychagogic power" (p. 47). This type of power is treated- in psychology- as the capacity of art to elicit an appropriate balance of socio-moral ethics about self-behaviour. Informed by this context, we may analyse how *Doraemon* (1979-2005) transforms the aesthetic, structural vocabulary of the Greek/Aristotelian tradition of 'tragedy' to (1) re-position its protagonist, Nobita Nobi, as the animated embodiment of the tragic-hero and (2) his morally-transgressive indulgence (in) and cultivation of the polysemic, once theology-entrenched, concept of 'Seven Deadly Sins' as examples of tragic hamartia. This tangible framework allows child-viewers to reassess themselves, socially and morally, after being subjected to Nobita's tragic downfall due to his ethical blindness caused by his personal sense of hamartia. We pursue this to anticipate the potentials of animation in communicating wholesome values about morality, which further helps us defend our thesis about the possibilities of children's socialisation through animations in particular and mass media in general.

It should be noted that the plot(s) of *Doraemon* are unlike the plots we have so far analysed. They are non-episodic and each episode can survive separately as an autonomous, distinct unit. Nonetheless, the over-arching plot of *Doraemon* is based upon a tale of friendship/kinship that develops between Nobita and Doraemon, the latter being a 22nd century robotic cat that had been sent back into the past- by Nobita's grandson, Sewashi- to help and reshape Nobita's purportedly failing future. This background offers us an overview of *Doraemon*'s primary tale that would help reposition our arguments about the anime's framework as an Aristotelian tragedy. However, before we begin discussing further, it is imperative to acknowledge the concepts of 'tragedy' and the 'Seven Deadly Sins' as plausible products of "particular historical, social, and cultural contingencies" (Silverstone, 2007, p. 278) that have been constantly reshaped and adapted over centuries (Brown, 2007). Here, one may notice, for instance, the systematic and gradual hermeneutic philosophical transition of the traditional meanings of the seven sins from being religion-centred to ego-centred. This is sarcastically reiterated by Frank (2001), when she writes:

> . . . we no longer struggle to fight our natural tendency to commit these sins. Instead, we have chosen not only to accept them, but also to embrace them and even to use them to our advantage (p. 96).

Frank's (2001) argument helps testify the contemporary re-conceptualisation of historical culture (Silverstone, 2007). It refines our understandings of how these cultural artifacts (1) have been re-analysed and re-structured (2) to broaden the spectrum of human thought and life (Rorty, 1992). Undeniably, this has led to their recurrent deployment and dissemination in other literary and cultural discourses, like feminism (Wohl, 2005), decolonization and race (Reiss, 2005), and animation, as we shall discuss in this chapter.

In this regard, Sourvinou-Inwood (2005) makes an interesting counterargument where she locates Greek tragedies at the centre of ritualistic practice and religious exploration, instead of treating them in terms of theatre, entertainment, or philosophy. She posits that the concept of a 'tragedy' was intrinsic to sixth-century Athens, where it was perceived as a culturally shaped artform that sought to accentuate and resolve the religious predicaments and anxieties of the then-modern polis. This perception, eventually, encourages her to debunk any prospects of 'understanding the tragedy' as a "literary genre"- but more as ritual- as nothing, but a "methodologically flawed procedure" (p. 10) that clouds scholars' understandings of the socio-cultural realities of the artform.

Understanding 'tragedy'

The former argument- as much as it broadens our cultural appreciation of tragedy- could be, nonetheless, considered a critical limitation to how many may would like to 'understand' tragedy as an artform that possesses self-revelatory attributes (Silverstone, 2007) and as an agent of moral and social reformation (Eden, 2005). Adding onto this, Wymer (2007) insightfully once remarked that "Greek tragedy enacts the paradoxical relationship between Being and Becoming" (p. 262).

The interplay of 'Being' and 'Becoming', quite notoriously, has occupied the centre-stage in the audiences' understandings of tragedy as a gateway to moral awakening, something that, further, constitutes the psychology of Aristotelian tragedy (Rorty, 1992). Within the vortex of a gamut of structural "'zooming devices'" that help stimulate the audiences' identification with the on-stage characters (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2005, p. 9), tragedy encourages its subjects to move beyond the 'Ego', and into the 'Self'. Some scholars address this phenomenon either (1) as "reflective identification" (Rorty, 1992, p. 13), as (2) "education of the emotions" (Lear, 1992, p. 318), or (3) as what Hennegan (2007) meditatively defines the tragic recognition as "'suffering into wisdom'" (p. 212). The latter-most argument is, indeed, a curious way to associate tragedy with its moral functions. It helps and encourages the audiences to understand a character's suffering(s) as a cause-and-effect phenomenon, enabling them to retrospectively identify with the 'sufferer' and the sufferer's moral waywardness as a lesson not to repeat in their private lives (Eden, 2005).

The audiences' identification with the suffering-character becomes plausible due to certain ethical affinities that Silverstone (2007) perceives between the tragic "subject and the other, an other which is partly self-same" (p. 281). Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, and a full range of scholars and philosophers often argue that the emotions of 'pity and fear' are inter-linked, and that we usually pity the unfortunate, while fear for ourselves, precisely, by virtue of those subjects that "remind us. . . of our own fallibility" and "blemishes of character" (Sherman, 1992, p. 182, 191; Eden, 2005; Lear, 1992). Typically, audience-identification is achieved by means of a few 'zooming devices' (Rorty, 1992) that not only serve as causal links within the plot, but also nourish the audiences' capacities to understand the relationship between human action and character (Eden, 2005; Sherman, 1992). These devices are designed in a way that (1) criticise wicked human action and (2) defines the latter within the paradigms of what Nussbaum (1992) labels as an "*eroded character*" (p. 284). Eden (2005) succinctly repeats this point by mentioning that “our decisions. . . are what they are *because* of our characters and thoughts; and our actions are what they are *because* of our decisions” (p. 45).

One of the key devices for this purpose has been ‘hamartia’ that is frequently cited as one of the major highlights of a tragedy in the Aristotelian traditions. Sherman (1992) speaks about the principle of hamartia as “the causal [and logical] link that moves the protagonist from ignorance to recognition. . . [and] is the mechanism that initiates the movements of reversal and recognition” (p. 181). Hamartia is often treated as the ‘seed’ of any tragedy that determines not only the tragic subject’s entry into the realms of disaster or misfortune, but also how this entrance stipulates recognition or a sense of moral awakening in the subject (Silverstone, 2007; Rorty, 1992). Normally, the role of hamartia is deemed irrevocable and is purported to reveal certain discrepancies about human character that further determine the nature of the tragic action a subject indulges in (Sherman, 1992). This is where the subject encounters two other co-related devices that slides a tragedy down to the final closure, as Eden (2005) reminds us of their inherent importance within the aesthetics of tragedy, with respect to their function in moral katharsis. Within this context, we can reflect over the features of ‘anagnōrisis’ (recognition) and ‘peripeteia’ (reversal) as the two defining aspects of a complex tragedy. They collectively (1) stimulate the tragic subject to move beyond the Ego- and into the Self- awakening them to the messy plethora of moral deflections their hamartia led them to (Rorty, 1992) and (2) moves the audiences to attain a ‘katharsis of emotions’- an intellectual cleansing within the Self, a drifting away from the Ego (Lear, 1992).

Because anagnōrisis and peripeteia arrive swiftly and unexpectedly, the culmination of a tragedy (or tragic action) intersects with the audiences’ emotions that stir up to wonder and awe. Here, Eden (2005) offers us a comfortable conclusion by mentioning that one’s sense of “wonder, in turn, provokes the desire to understand. . . and both wondering and understanding cause pleasure” (p. 48). Ultimately, it is in “pleasure” that moral katharsis lingers (Golden, 1975, p. 48). Etymologically, there has always been much critical dispute about the interpretation of the term (katharsis), particularly with respect to what Aristotle meant by this polysemic phrase (Lear, 1992). However, most generally, katharsis is identified to imply four "principal" meanings:

> (1) as a form of medical purgation in which the pathological elements of pity and fear are purged from the spectator; (2) as a form of moral purification in which the spectator achieves the proper mean between excess and deficiency in experiencing pity and fear; (3) as a structural process by which the tragic deed of the hero is. . . purified of its moral pollution; and (4) as the process of intellectual clarification by which the spectator comes to understand. . . the nature of the particular pitiable and fearful events that have been depicted (Golden, 1975, p. 48).

It is interesting to note that if we speak from a moral perspective (which is also quite the foundational framework for this chapter to understand *Doraemon*), katharsis could be addressed as a connotative combination of Golden's (1975) second and fourth clause to imply a process of retrospective self-retribution. Even though Sherman (1992) mentions retribution in terms of the character's self, katharsis can invite the audiences' sympathetic participation in the character's moments of retribution through what Rorty (1992) had termed as "reflective identification" (p. 13). This involves not only understanding the character's pain, but also educating one's mind to not repeat the same errors as the tragic subject, else we may end up being in a similar situation as the subject. These concepts, indeed, help us understand *Doraemon* as a tragic narrative of an equally-tragic character whose shortcomings could remind young viewers of their own flawed selves, and whose indulgence in morally-transgressive actions- and subsequent downfall- becomes an interesting socialising framework to learn from Nobita's errors and strive not to repeat them in our personal lives and imaginations. Such an understanding, subsequently, renders the framework of 'tragedy' beneficial by internalising the moral outcome through the cognitive processes of "habituation" and positive repetition:

> The central task of an ethical education is to train youths to take pleasure and pain at the right sort of objects: to feel pleasure in acting nobly and pain at the prospect of acting ignobly. This is accomplished by a process of habituation: by repeatedly encouraging youths to perform noble acts they come to take pleasure in (Lear, 1992, p. 318).

The principle of katharsis is grounded deep within the Self, where pity and fear transform into feelings of self-acknowledgment- bereft of self-obsession- increasing our abilities to understand human emotions (Eden, 2005), as tragedy opens to us the possibilities of recognising ourselves. In a way, tragedy could be considered to possess the same social and moral functions as an odyssey (Smelser, 2009). However, where, in an odyssey, 'one's own experiences' tend to play an integral role, within a tragedy, we primarily focus and learn from 'others' experiences'. This encourages us to perceive tragedy more as a representation of a slice-of-life (Roberts, 1992). Wohl (2005) reiterates this sentiment by proposing an analogical relationship between "tragedy" and "life", treating the two ideas as "semi-autonomous but mutually informing symbolic systems; tragedy incorporates and speaks to the lived experience of its [audience] without simply mirroring it" (p. 149).

It is because tragedy speaks to us, to our shadowed selves, that we recognise the social benefits of tragedy- in its capacities to remind us of our inherent humanities and alter our biased perspectives about the world, others, but most important, ourselves; to attune us and refine our perceptions about emotions; and clarify our misconceptions about subjects, if we have any (Nussbaum; 1992; Rorty, 1992). However, tragedy's emphasis upon individual error or private empathy, unsurprisingly, has been a subject of critical scrutiny and debate. Here, for example, Curran (2001) defends Bertolt Brecht's ideas of epic-theatre as an attack on the Aristotelian tradition of tragedy which is philosophical by nature and focusses more on character, rather than projecting "the effects of a faulty social environment on. . . character" (p. 176).

The 20th century epic-theatre is a more contemporary artform that, essentially, relies upon social contexts, and instead of concentrating upon individual error, strives to probe into the social circumstances that instigated any tragedy. The epic-theatre pursues this to imply that ‘tragedy’ is not caused due to an ‘eroded character’ (Nussbaum, 1992), but due to certain faults within the socio-political systems in which a character exists (Curran, 2001). It is here that Aristotelian tragedy fails to be read as a social critique, precisely due to its focus on the individual- and not on any socio-political system that may operate outside the drama- rendering the epic-theatre more effective to capture collective social sentiments of a particular socio-cultural space. However, this does not imply that Aristotelian tragedy cannot be deemed any less effective or assertive. Contrarily, this form of tragedy has enabled us to read *Doraemon* critically as a narrative of tragic individual error or transgression, for Nobita’s tragedy is a result of hamartia and an evidence of an eroded character. To understand a tragedy of an ‘eroded character’ (Nussbaum, 1992), we find Aristotle’s ideas on drama, therefore, more applicable and helpful than Brecht’s critical thoughts on politicised drama (Curran, 2001), especially under the contextual reference to *Doraemon*.

Re-mapping the Deadly *Seven*

Nobita’s tragedy is informed by his transgressive or excessive indulgence in the five “sins of the spirit” (Frank, 2001, p. 96) that (1) constitute a part of the theologically informed Christian concept of the ‘Seven Deadly Sins’ and (2) make up for most of his hamartia. The concept of the seven deadly sins offers *Doraemon* its central subject-matter for Nobita’s sense of moral deflection. It renews our understanding of a once ‘strictly-Christian’ notion and provide a transitional re-stylisation of the sins by means of perceiving them not as acts against religion, but against modern humanity or social communities. This transitional shift becomes possible due to the ‘fluidity’ of such philosophical concepts, with their meanings being invariably subjected to negotiations

> within a cultural context as [they] change through time. . . [and] given constantly new shape and new definition by the cultural uses to which [they are] put by the members of a society who find that concept a living, that is communicating, idea (Newhauser, 2007, p. 2).

Most certainly, this implies that concepts are susceptible to interpretative alterations, and that their meanings (1) rely upon the existing historical culture's ideological vocabulary and (2) the ways in which its members decide on employing the prescribed meanings between and within their social contexts. Within these scenarios, if we look at the sin of ‘pride’ as an example, there has been a drastic transitional shift, one may notice, between the meaning and severity of committing pride. As a theological entity, one may view pride either as “the sin of rebellion against legitimate political authority” or as a “temptation... to ignore the common good” in favour of self-indulgence (Newhauser, 2007, p. 10). However, in contemporary times, pride is often connotative of a type of “self-love” that is “of absolute necessity” (Frank, 2001, p. 98) and is paradoxically deemed a positive habit/tendency to cultivate.

Indeed, the concept of the seven deadly sins has been re-developed to reiterate not only the ethical values and tastes of a contemporary audience/public, but also its socio-political environment within which they (the public) continually tend to exist. Tickle (2004) extends this point by asserting that “as an abstraction, sin. . . almost always requires an image to serve as its vehicle if it is to be entered into human conversation” (p. 30). Here, one may notice how *Doraemon* utilises Nobita’s hamartia as a springboard for the reaffirmation of socio-moral values and it achieves that by positioning Nobita within Tickle’s (2004) implications for the abstract, the very ‘vehicle’ of disorder. It is through Nobita’s moral transgressions that we learn about the realities of exceeding the limits of morality and underlining moral boundaries for the Self. Nobita’s tragedy evolves into the canvas for self-regulation, self-critique, and self-awareness, which becomes the purpose of both Greek tragedy and *Doraemon* (Eden, 2005; Rorty, 1992; Silverstone, 2007). Supporting this argument, Jenks (2013), furthermore, expands on the idea of ‘transgression’. He defines a transgression as an anti-thesis to a ‘rule’, a form of “impulse to disobey”, which reverses and “prevents stagnation by breaking. . . [and] reaffirming the rule. Transgression is not the same as disorder; it reminds us of the necessity of order” (p. 21).

The concept of transgression is extended by Dahl et al. (2014) who recognise three basic forms of child transgressions that are often typical to children’s phases of socialisation: “moral (harming others), prudential (harming oneself), and pragmatic (creating inconvenience) transgressions” (p. 651). Extensive research has been conducted on children’s reactions to transgressive behaviours which supports the possibility of young viewers to react to, and learn [from], Nobita’s tragedy in more prosocial directions. Many qualitative studies have discovered that in comparison to 3-or-4-year-olds, 8-to-12-year-old children tend to experience more intense ‘negatively valenced moral emotions’ at the prospect of having indulged in a moral transgression, for they possess more sharply defined “facets of perspective-taking and self-regulation” (Malti et al., 2016, p. 373). By “negatively valenced moral emotions”, Malti et al. (2016) imply a set of “self-evaluative emotions in moral contexts [that] reflect an internalized understanding of moral rule validity and a willingness to assume responsibility for real or imagined wrongdoing” (p. 373). Cognitively, these emotions support children’s interpretation of the meaning and severity of a committed transgression, as they encourage children to take on others’ perspectives to perceive their actions as self-damaging or upsetting to others (Dahl & Kim, 2014; Yucel et al., 2020). Researchers report that children understand the moral-norm dynamics and tend to abide, and act, by them in social and private settings, which increases by age (Nucci & Nucci, 1982) and highly depends on their cognitive and emotional development.

These studies support our points about children’s understandings of tragedy and notions of unethical sins, and this is where *Doraemon* becomes a riveting link to discuss the significance of tragic narratives for children’s socialisation. Tragic narratives, as Coles (1987) has argued, in a way, cultivate

> a true measure of one’s alert responsiveness to this world, one’s growing mental acuity. . . [about] what might happen as well as what is- the tragedies that ultimately stalk all of us. . . as children surely do know, and keep telling themselves (p. 6).

Doraemon is situated at the nexus of intersectionality that allows children the landscape to internalise the counter-effects of the five unethical sins that Nobita indulges in, thereby, enabling us to ‘read’ it as an animated manifestation of an Aristotelian tragedy. For our analysis, we focus on the five “sins of the spirit” (namely, pride, envy, wrath, sloth, and greed) as classified by Gregory I (cited in Frank, 2001, p. 96), while the other two sins (which Gregory I addressed as the ‘sins of the flesh’) have not been considered. The sins of lust and gluttony are not central to the animation; even though the animation does project the latter-two in other representations, they are never centralised as agents of hamartia and, therefore, have been omitted from this discussion. The five 'sins of the spirit' are not only frequently repeated within the narrative, but also help us understand the multifaceted character of Nobita in diverse ways. On this note, we shall now turn to analyse the role of 'sloth' in Nobita's tragic adventures to set forth our reading of *Doraemon* as a tragedy.

Discussion[1]: Nobita's Fives

I. It's all due to 'Sloth'!

As predominantly as it occupies the central character of Nobita, 'Sloth' ('*acedia*' in Latin) has equally remained a subject of misinterpretation and polysemy. As John Casey (2000) has summarized, it "has [naturally] passed, via seventeenth and eighteenth century ideas of melancholy, through Romanticism, to *Symbolisme* to become [a modern] allegory of the human condition" (p. 83). It implies that the history of sloth has been of contextual variation, which is where McMartin (2013) brings to us the medieval interpretation of sloth that differentiates the latter with the capital sin of *acedia* (p. 266). From a biblical viewpoint, the vice of 'sloth' and 'acedia' were inter-related, but not inter-changeably used: where the latter implied a "spiritual condition" emerging from an escapist disinclination from religious charity (McMartin, 2013, p. 267); the former, as a form of *acedia*, was connected to more 'physical' manifestations of inactivity, including laziness, sleepiness, and languor (Kallendorf, 2013). This can lead us to believe that sloth, as a moral transgression, is

> . . . a foolish, vile, infamous, and barbaric enemy which flees from work and must be fought. . . it is a base weakness or brutish negligence which must be overcome or left behind. It is a waste of time, a frivolous distraction. . . it delays both departures and arrivals and generally detains progress. . . it destroys people's good

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[1] Due to unavailability of the English version of the animation, the Hindi-dubbed versions were incorporated into the discussion and elsewhere and have been **self-translated** wherever required to the best of the author's abilities.

> intentions and reinforces their bad habits (Kallendorf, 2013, p. 98).

Adding to this body of conceptual knowledge is the common perspective that sloth is connected to ideas of ‘melancholy’ or ‘passive sadness’. This argument, further, stimulates the re-conceptualisation of sloth as an emotional state of mind (Casey, 2000), which is linked with general hopelessness (Wasserstein, 2005). This point succinctly inter-relates to Casey’s (2000) argument that speaks of sloth “as a sort of constitutive despair. . . a characteristic. . . not only of civilization but of a culture that values and creates inwardness” (p. 88). The contemporary socio-cultural status of sloth as a ‘human condition’ performs a double-edged function: it reflects over the tendency of humanity to become self-contained and introverted by nature, which, in turn, has been the by-product of modernity symptomised by emotional unavailability, self-indulgence, and indifference. This explains the centrality of sloth in the character of Nobita, and how sloth manifests itself as a major catalyst for the protagonist’s indulgence in the other four sins (like greed, anger, and pride) that are also indirectly inter-linked with Nobita’s indolence or lack of interest in self-reformation and self-regulation (Rorty, 1992). However, we often fail to acknowledge the root of this intoxicating form of sloth that poisons the possibility of personal growth for Nobita, rendering him either angry or envious of qualities he ‘longs’ to possess.

Informed by Casey’s (2000) recent-argument, *Doraemon* situates Nobita at the centre of social hopelessness and builds upon Nobita’s recurring tragedies as the outcome of ‘a loss of hope’. The animation frequently represents its protagonist as a disillusioned member of society whose academic failures, casual disinterest (or clumsiness) in sports/outdoor activities, sad experiences (typically bullying) with Gian and Suneo, and feelings of worthlessness contribute to his general social hopelessness about human potential (Wasserstein, 2005), as he begins to ruminate the pointlessness of self-change. This is not to imply that social conditions serve as the only pre-requisite for Nobita’s sloth within the narrative. However, even though, they predominantly function as the inception of Nobita’s indulgence in sloth, the latter is chiefly worsened by Nobita’s callous ignorance and (ab)use of Doraemon’s technology that enables us to read sloth as a definitive feature of Nobita’s “*eroded character*” (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 284), rather than as a socio-cultural discrepancy (Curran, 2001).

For instance, in an episode, featuring a gadget called the ‘Human-Magnet Belt’, Nobita’s requirement for the belt is precipitated by his (1) knowledge of the fact about his weak soccer-playing abilities and (2) subsequent fear of Gian’s acrimony. Here, the audience may be able to sympathise with Nobita and support his decision to use the belt (as the name suggests, it can attract anything towards Nobita) for his advantage. However, the situation overturns when Nobita begins using the belt for the most trivial of purposes (like fetching a bowl of snacks or a comic book from the bookshelf). This is something that *Doraemon* consciously pursues to reflect/mirror Nobita’s sloth, as Doraemon warns him somewhere in between:

“नोबिता, आलस के लिए इस गैजेट का इस्तमाल मत करो।”
translated as:
“Nobita, don’t use this gadget to serve your laziness!”
(PureToons, 2019a, 09:27)

Additionally, Nobita’s sloth is further associated with excessive sleepiness that contributes to another half of his tragic adventures. Here, McMartin’s (2013) account of “sleeplessness and excessive sleep” (p. 256) helps us locate Nobita within the context of our analysis of sloth. According to McMartin (2013), both these manifestations of sleep represent sloth: where sleeplessness could be associated with “workaholism”, excessive sleepiness may be linked with “laziness” (p. 268), however, both denote a sense of escapism from individual responsibility. Nobita’s sloth falls within the latter category, as is reiterated in an episode when Nobita uses a gadget called ‘Fairy House’ (PureToons, 2019b) to complete/fix certain tasks by the help of fairies who finish that task while Nobita is asleep. Unfortunately, Nobita preoccupies himself in finishing others’ tasks- thereby taking several micro naps throughout the evening- and completely forgets that the initial intention of having brought out this gadget was to let the fairies finish his homework, but to no avail.

Quite comfortably, *Doraemon* allows peripeteia and anagnōrisis to enter the narrative and awaken Nobita to the repercussions of having indulged in unnecessary, self-destructive sloth, as our tragic-hero (1) unconsciously maximises the magnetic power of the belt- thereby, stimulating a range of objects to cluster around him in an uncomfortable position- or (2) ends up completing his homework by himself after having failed to eventually sleep at night (rendering the gadget ineffectual). The animation, therefore, manages to inform the viewers about the two most-common symptoms of contemporary sloth: laziness and excessive sleep (Wasserstein, 2005). Where the first instance reflects on laziness as a symbol of “stagnation and decay” (Kallendorf, 2013, p. 98), the second focusses on excessive sleep as “a means of distraction or escape” (McMartin, 2013, p. 271), but both collectively reflect and affect Nobita’s character, his decisions, and, subsequently, his actions (Eden, 2005). Using Nobita’s sloth as a springboard for his character-discrepancies, *Doraemon* stresses over the katharsis reinforced through Nobita’s tragedy resulting from unwanted, undesirable, and unnecessary forms of indolence. It apprises and reminds viewers of sloth as a habit that survives best in active avoidance and ethical/ideological distance.

II. Work hard, swallow that ‘Greed’

As we remember, Newhauser (2007) had offered us a comprehensive understanding of the pliability of a ‘concept’, in the sense that any concept is (1) susceptible to ideological or contextual change which (2) mostly depends upon the social, cultural, and political inclinations of any society within which that concept exists as a “living idea” (p. 2). Naturally, the vocabulary of the ‘concept’, then, assimilates a broader range of interpretations within its conceptual reach to produce a more inclusive understanding about the subject. Like ‘sloth’, ‘greed’ has also been reconceptualised according to the contemporary needs of peoples to encapsulate- within its interpretative reach- a wider gamut of meanings and purposes (Seuntjens et al., 2015). Therefore, we may begin perceiving greed not only in negative terms of ‘self-indulgence’ or ‘self-satisfaction’, but also under a surprising, beneficial light.

In the corporate world, for example, greed is often upheld as a positive emotion, stimulating the rise of industries and economic prosperity (Melleuish, 2009); whereas many others understand greed as an evolutionary trait- endemic to humanity- that propels their welfare and social preservation (Cassill & Watkins, 2005; Robertson, 2001). However, diverse as the interpretations may be, the core value of greed rests upon its cultural position as a sin of ‘excess’ (Suentjens et al., 2015; Tickle, 2004) which serves as its causal connection to the other two sins of lust and gluttony. The latter-two are intricate manifestations of greed and connote to feelings of insatiable desire related to the body (Blackburn, 2004; Miller, 1997) and, therefore, have been tunnelled as 'sins of the flesh' or as what Epstein (2003) addresses them as "bodily sins" (p. 31). Greed, on the other hand, is a slightly 'bigger' emotion that is more related to the mind (Frank, 2001), affecting the mental faculties of thought and judgement. Denotative of 'excess', greed (1) has been rightly defined by Suentjens et al. (2015) as "the experience of desiring to acquire more and the dissatisfaction of never having enough", and (2) is frequently linked with "materialism and feelings of envy. . . [leading] to self-interested behaviour and tunnel vision" (p. 518).

It is a similar desire to have 'more' than required that tends to affect Nobita's psyche and influence his indulgence in greed that is predominantly directed towards attaining a 'sense of power', which is, in turn, partly inspired by his own dissatisfaction at himself. As a character, Nobita is stricken with under-confidence that often becomes responsible for his greed for control that he could exercise over others like his intimidating peer, Gian Takeshi. Across narratives, Nobita is represented as 'wanting' to be like Gian- powerful, dominating, and intimidating- and it is this unhealthy desire for superficial values that determines his actions, driving Nobita's character to its tragedy (Eden, 2005). Here, Nobita's (mis)adventures with the "Ten Commandments Slate" can become a suitable example to explore the animation's treatment of greed as tragic hamartia, and how hamartia (greed, in this context) becomes not a play of destiny, but a matter of conscious choice and "agency" (Sherman, 1992, p. 178). Nobita chooses to (ab)use the gadget to exercise control over the lives of others, as he not only allows greed to devour his moral sensibilities, but also mocks the significance of the original purpose of the ten commandments. It should be noted that even though the concept of the ten commandments is not central to this chapter, a brief account of its symbolism in modern philosophy may help us peruse *Doraemon*'s conceptualisation of greed. David Hazony's (2010) intersection of modernity, classical philosophy, and the ten commandments serves as a testament to the self-renewing properties of the commandments. He speaks of the latter as a representation of "a whole attitude to life, one that recognises both the weaknesses and the unfathomable potential of humanity- a worldview that has largely been forgotten" (p. 2).

Nobita fails to realise that and, subsequently, commits a dual sin. Nobita’s initial purpose of using the gadget was to punish his mother for having introduced a set of domestic rules that Nobita was meant to follow, failing to abide by any would result in a penalty from Nobita’s pocket-money. The gadget reversed that rule implemented by his mother and, as a result, his mother was electrocuted- not lethally- for having threatened Nobita of a penalty when the latter breaks a rule. Hazony (2010) mentions that the fifth commandment was to “honor your father and your mother” (p. xiv), and it is here that Nobita’s intention to punish his mother appears more like sacrilege, particularly from the perspective of moral ethics (Dahl & Kim, 2014). In his mother being hurt by lightning (the gadget stimulates a lightning bolt to be directed at someone who breaks what has been written on the commandment-slate), Nobita subverts the original commandment, which is what later becomes his karma, as Nobita’s tenth commandment becomes:

“कोई भी, कभी भी, फालतू रूल्स नही बना सकता।”

translated as:

“No body, never, can make any stupid rules!”

(PureToons, 2019c, 21:59)

The tenth commandment reverses (peripeteia) and ravages Nobita’s exercise of power/control; the lightning bolt awakens him (anagnōrisis) to the understanding of what he had committed in his maddening quest for power. The lightning bolt becomes a signifier of karma, as it not only avenges Nobita for his mother’s dishonour (Hazony, 2010), but also for his moral blindness in the face of greed (Tickle, 2004). This episode on greed, certainly, becomes a pivotal block of recognition and appreciation. It focuses on the interplay of ‘action’ and ‘repercussion’, rendering Sherman’s (1992) argument effective and true about the nature of tragic hamartia. Hazony (2010) had mentioned that the ten commandments represent an “ignored or forgotten” (p. 7) ideal. The current episode strives to re-capture and re-instate that ideal by (1) fictionalising Nobita’s commandments as values epitomising naivety, ignorance, and unwanted desire (Suentjens et al., 2015) and (2) reiterating a public interest in moral ethics, encouraging critical thinking about ‘greed’ as both a moral transgression and a moral highlight, depending on the individual and their contextual needs (Tickle, 2004).

III. Blind, who? Ah, Anger!

With respect to the sin of ‘anger’, a range of contextual perspectives arrest the contemporary imagination. Where some perceive anger as a source of creativity (Marcus, 1978, p. 94), some visualise the trait in terms of righteousness/justice (Barreca, 1995), whereas the remaining view it as a notoriously self-ravaging habit (Gordon, 1993). Here, Thurman’s (2005) reflection on anger provides us with an interesting account of anger. His account smoothly combines the above-mentioned ideas and offers an understanding of anger, its excesses and deficiencies, and their co-related impact upon the ‘Self’, the ‘Ego’, and others:

> Anger is healthy. We need anger to right wrongs, overturn social evils, revolt against oppression. Anger is only deadly, sinful, or bad when it is unfair, excessive, or self-destructive (p. 4).

Thurman’s (2005) statement strengthens our perceptions about the sin of anger, as the latter could be variously- distinctively- used within different contexts for a whole range of purposes and might serve as a productive source of reformation from both political and personal perspectives (Barreca, 1995). However, as it could be expected, *Doraemon* treats anger in the most destructive ways possible, locating Nobita’s anger within the spectrum of ‘deadly’ anger (Gordon, 1993, p. 3), as it emerges as one of the central sources of Nobita’s tragic misfortune and moral blindness. Anger (alongside greed) becomes one of the central moral transgressions in the narrative (Jenks, 2013), typically resulting from Nobita’s inability or passive disinterest to self-reform. Certainly here, anger reflects the influence of ‘sloth’ upon Nobita’s moral makeup (as we briefly discussed above). It is Nobita’s indolence that not only reflects his disinterest to reform himself, but also serves as the fountainhead of his angry disposition when either his sloth or any other causal action is criticised. As we pointed out, sloth becomes another problematic entity across the narrative. It complicates and affects the presence of other moral transgressions, rendering the tragedy more sloth-affected/inspired. However, the animation somehow manages to explain Nobita’s tragedy as the causal product of an inter-related system of transgressions, amongst which anger emerges as a “quintessential individual-signature emotion” (Barreca, 1995, p. 1), alongside greed and sloth.

The anger-led tragedy is often projected as a dangerous enterprise that not only damages the Self, but also prompts the subject’s entry into a morally eluded world where all senses and perceptive capacities are scarred (Nussbaum, 1992). Gordon (1993), here, has re-echoed this sentiment in a creative, but sharp and defined, fashion:

> . . . deadly anger actually forgets him, and is caried up in the black cloud of its own dominion. The country of deadly anger, with its own cultures, its own laws. A country ruled by a tyrant so obsessed with the fulfilment of his desire that all else is lost (p. 3).

The above-cited lines function as a useful backdrop to not only explore Nobita’s indulgence in the sin of anger, but also highlight how anger fractures Nobita’s psyche and notions of morality. As Gordon (1993) equates anger to a ‘a country ruled by a tyrant’, it becomes necessary to highlight how Nobita’s anger ends up swallowing his sense of being, leaving him lost in the vortex of dilemma, inferiority, and an unwillingness to reform. It is here that Nobita’s deployment of a gadget called ‘Opposite Pills’, at one instance, becomes an interesting platform to understand his character and how certain anger-led discrepancies in character erode his moral perception (Eden, 2005; Rorty, 1992). The pills were designed to make a person dream exactly the opposite of what they experience in reality and, naturally, these pills attract Nobita, as he frequently suggests displeasure in the way his real life goes on. Nobita’s fascination and preference for dreams over reality is punctuated by Doraemon, who advises Nobita:

“तुम्हे अपनी असली जिंदगी को भी अच्छा बनाना चाहिए।”

translated as:

“You should also improve your real life.”

This is contested by Nobita, who retorts:

“मेरी असली जिंदगी बहुत बेकार है।”

translated as:

“My real life sucks!”

(PureToons, 2019d, 17:54 – 18:00)

Nobita’s preference for dreams reflects his indolence; but, most important, it reminds us of the fragility of Nobita’s character. Instead of awakening himself to self-regulation, Nobita intends to remain as he is. He does not reflect any interest in reforming himself, rather he behaves in the tradition of an escapist. This instance triggers the occurrence of peripeteia in the middle of the episode, when Nobita’s day (in real life) does not go as bad as he had anticipated. Fearing that he would dream of nightmares, Nobita searches for trouble in the hope of reversing his future, but to no avail. The anagnōrisis is witnessed by Doraemon- and the audience- as Nobita twists in agony at the sight of nightmares in his sleep, where the episode concludes. From the outside, the episode may appear as ‘un-tragic’, for Nobita’s psychological suffering is not vividly presented in terms of extremes but is rather glanced through as a simple tale of misfortune. The tragedy might be understood if we, as viewers, collectively interpret Nobita’s anger as the causal result of his personal anxieties, disinterest, and sloth. At the threshold, anger, then, transforms into a volatile force that appears

> like a flaming boulder down a hill, gathering mass and speed until any thought of cessation is so far beside the point as to seem hopeless. . . but the causes are lost in the momentum of the anger itself, and in the insatiable compulsion to destroy everything so that the open maw of rage may be fed (Gordon, 1993, p. 5).

It is anger that pushes Nobita to consume those pills, to drift away from self-correction and self-regulation, and to be, then, subjected to psychological suffering in the shape of nightmares. *Doraemon*, through this episode, displays a mild outcome of anger (nightmares), but, beneath those manifestations, it ensures that anger is not exploited (Thurman, 2005) and used when critically needed, unlike Nobita’s frequent outbursts that are often stimulated by his sense of incompleteness and lack of self-worth. The katharsis, then, depends on the audiences' imaginations, if they wish to regulate their anger and use it for a more compelling cause (Barreca, 1995).

IV. Trapped in meaningless 'Envy'

Epstein (2003) reflects over Aristotle and his meditative argument about a form of envy that has been considered a manifestation of imitation, and that Aristotle had labelled as "good envy, or envy ending in admiration" (p. 26). However, as Frank (2001) had suspected, this positivist cognate of envy seems unavailable or beyond the cognitive reach of modern humanity but, most essentially, this popular manifestation of envy tends to occupy the public imagination, often being spoken about with relation to negative phrases like "secret hostility", "hidden rancor", "spite", or "malice" (Epstein, 2003, p. 30). Therefore, in more than one way, envy stands as one of the 'dirtiest', if not the 'deadliest', sins to be studied in moral philosophy (Frank, 2001). As Epstein (2003) mentions, envy emerges as one of the most insatiable forms of human desires and, certainly, distant from how Aristotle had spoken about it in terms of self-improvement and self-criticism. It seems imperative to highlight that Aristotle's moralistic concept of envy (as cited in Epstein, 2003), indeed, is the rightful way to approach this self-destructive trait and deploy it to our social benefits. However, as suggested above, this manifestation of envy is not generally entertained by many. *Doraemon* attempts to reiterate the counter-effects of exercising a much 'negative' form of envy by utilising Nobita's envious experiences as a conceptual evidence of envy as a self-damaging trait (Capps & Haupt, 2011; Frank, 2001).

The character of Nobita is often treated within the narrative as a middle ground for the exploration of what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' envy (Epstein, 2003). Nobita, in a way, cannot be addressed as an envious character in Epstein's (2003) terminology, and even succumbs to derive any significant inspiration from his emotions of envy at others' qualities he finds lacking in himself in the Aristotelian tradition of imitation and self-improvement. To understand Nobita's indulgence in envy, Ben-Ze'ev's (1990) reflections over the moral differences between 'envy' and 'jealousy' could be deemed useful. He notes that the former connotes to an

> emotional attitude of wishing to have what someone else has. . . [while the latter as an] emotional attitude of wishing not to lose something (typically, a favorable human relationship), which is important for the subject’s self-definition, to someone else (p. 489).

Ben-Ze’ev’s (1990) definition paves the way to our understanding of Nobita more as a ‘jealous character’ whose tragedy (within the context of this sub-analysis) usually stems from romantic jealousy. This form of jealousy is internalised to exclusively affect Shizuka Minamoto, as he strives on antagonising everyone who comes closer to Shizuka, and who Nobita takes as a possible threat between his and Shizuka’s bond of friendship. At one instance, Nobita uses a “Magic Handkerchief” to impress Shizuka by his magic tricks, more because he envies Dekisugi and his abilities to perform magic:

“. . . पर मैं देकिसुगि से हार नही मान सकता।”

translated as:

“. . . but I cannot lose from Dekisugi”
(PureToons, 2019e, 02:37).

At another instance, Nobita uses a “Nostalgia Trunk”- that allows him to make others believe that they are meeting him exactly after the number of years he manually puts on the trunk- to ward off an old friend of Shizuka who she had met after four years, and, thereby, receive all of Shizuka’s attention:

“अब शिजुका अपने दोस्त को भूल कर मुझसे बातें करेगी।”

translated as:

“Now, Shizuka will forget about her friend and talk to me instead”
(PureToons, 2019f, 17:21).

In both contexts, *Doraemon* re-defines the social positions of Nobita around Shizuka's character and seeks to criticise his longings for the latter's attention. As a result, the anime re-locates our protagonist in uncomfortable, embarrassing situations: instead of deploying the handkerchief to impress Shizuka, Nobita accidentally falls inside the four-dimensional gadget; and where, at the other episode, he struggles to achieve the attention of Shizuka, in a moment of anxiety, he scrolls down to twenty years, pushing the locus of his attention (Shizuka) to completely erase her memory of Nobita at the end of the narrative. These are, indeed, two pivotal instances of a combined anagnōrisis and peripeteia (Rorty, 1992) that awaken Nobita to his moral blindness and cheapening at the behest of jealousy (Frank, 2001). Nobita competes against his 'rivals' for Shizuka's attention. These actions not only imply his distrust in Shizuka's friendship, but also reiterate his inferiority complexes that often become the sources of his indulgence in moral transgressions (Jenks, 2013), as Ben-Ze'ev (1990) reminds us:

> Like envy, jealousy also involves competition. . . jealousy stems from the desire to be 'favored' in some respect and the belief- or suspicion, or fear- that one is not (p. 493-494).

It is Nobita's sense of distrust in himself and others that leads him to similar predicaments. It is this distrust that (1) adds to his inferiority complex and (2) which the animation exploits to communicate the repercussions of his emotional imbalances to the audiences, rendering the purpose of deploying a tragic narrative effectual and liberating. In Nobita's indulgence in envy/jealousy, the moral katharsis arrives to inform us what Epstein (2003) had succinctly highlighted elsewhere:

> Envy clouds thought, clobbers generosity, precludes and hope of serenity, and ends in shriveling the heart- reasons enough to fight free of it with all one's mental strength (p. 103).

This statement is true to Nobita's condition, precisely because his jealousy with his possible romantic rivals bears him no advantage but plunges him deeper to self-despair and pain. *Doraemon* tends to inform its viewers about the unfortunate outcomes of exercising envy at others' prospects/qualities/being, rather than becoming inspired from these latter aspects, which if Nobita had acted on, he would not have to go through all these self-deprecating emotions. Towards the end, the animation implicitly recommends the power of self-acceptance and "self-honesty" (Epstein, 2003, p. 103) which may act as stark contrasts to 'envious wanting'. As a matter of choice, envy gets 'dangerously' overshadowed by self-satisfaction and the willingness to improve.

V. Confused to call it 'Pride'

Michael E. Dyson (2006) provides us with an interesting paradigm to analyse Nobita's sense of pride that often intersects with his 'angry' and 'greedy' dispositions. This may help us propose that Nobita's pride is frequently informed by either of the latter-two sins within the anime, and that it is his failure to distinguish the natures of pride as (1) "a playful. . . self-indulgence" and (2) as "a moral beacon to warn. . . against the plague of untamed arrogance" (Dyson, 2006, p. 25) that the plunge into tragic discomfiture occurs. Within this context, we have already pointed out that the concept of the deadly sins has been exposed to cultural and ideological pliability, therefore, rendering the sin of pride, for instance, diversely connotative to a wider range of socio-cultural contexts and meanings (Frank, 2001; Newhauser, 2007)- both positive and negative examples of moral/ethical values. It is here that Nobita's interest in cat's cradle cultivates into a manifestation of obsession/selfishness that (1) stems from his anger at others' active disinterest in the game, and a partial sense of unease for being associated with a symbol of femininity (the game of strings) and (2) thwarts Nobita's understanding of nurturing this artform in a morally informed manner that could have invited the appreciation and respect from the audiences, thereby, protecting him from tragic and unfortunate moments of embarrassment.

In one episode- featuring a gadget called the "Headmaster's Name Plate"- Nobita decides upon opening a school, called *Nobi's School of Cat's Cradle*. This school would be founded upon the idea of preserving and promoting the art of cat's cradle, as Nobita fears the death of this traditional artform if people ignore and undermine its cultural significance. Furthermore, Nobita raises a pertinent question that becomes a backdrop to the foundation of the school ahead within the narrative:

“आखिर ये लोग इस आर्ट को समझ क्यों नही पाते हैं?”

translated as:

“Why don't these people understand this art?”

(PureToons, 2019g, 14:31)

Initially, Nobita’s concern to preserve this art appears altruistic and innocent. He genuinely seeks to revitalise this art in the cultural domains of public imagination and aims to excite a gender-neutral interest in a social environment that labels cat’s cradle as a symbolic manifestation of femininity. For example, at one instance, outside the episode, Gain once spoke about Nobita and his interest in cat’s cradle as an aberration or transgression (Jenks, 2013):

“नोबिता तो आखिर बसेबाल खेलने से रहा, उसे तो सिर्फ लड़कियों की तरह

स्ट्रिंगस् से ही खेलना पड़ेगा।”

translated as:

“Nobita won't ever play baseball, so he has to resort to

playing with strings like girls”

(PureToons, 2019h, 19:57).

In a way, one could ‘read’ and explain Nobita’s concern to remind people about the cultural history and significance of cat’s cradle as an attempt to absolve himself from accuses that question his masculinity and retain his hegemonic notions about what manly behaviour should be like. These readings could be, then, challenged by our interpretations of Nobita’s non-masculine interests as evidence of ‘subversive masculinity’ (Sales, 2019) that we have explored in Chapter IV. However, coming back to our discussion on pride, it soon gets poisoned by Nobita’s misconception about what constitutes “dignity” after Doraemon informs Nobita, who is now a headmaster, that ‘a headmaster should act with more dignity’ (PureToons, 2019g, 16:46).

Here, Hutchinson (1995) passes an interesting point of intersection that looks at the differences between Aristotle’s perception over the “‘magnanimous’” man and the “vain” man (p. 227). Where the former “deserves what he claims. . . because [he] has earned it through genuine merit, through moral superiority” (Dyson, 2006, p. 34), the latter “claims too much respect, but that he does not deserve it enough, and he tends to confuse the outward marks of dignity with dignity itself” (Hutchinson, 1995, p. 227). *Nobi’s School,* therefore, becomes a space of inquiry that clouds Nobita’s rationalities to view himself as conceited or vanity-inspired. Nobita’s conceited sense of pride makes him forget that the school is ‘only’ a result of a hypnosis induced by the gadget, and pushes him to confuse ‘dignity’ with what we may perceive as ‘pomposity’, as our hero dreams about establishing the *Nobi’s School* as a worldwide phenomenon:

“. . . मैं अपने स्कूल की शाखाएँ विदेश में भी खोलुंगा।”

translated as:

“. . . I will also open branches of my school overseas”
(PureToons, 2019g, 20:35).

As a self-imposed headmaster, Nobita tends to exercise, quantitatively, both greed and pride in his dreams which culminate into his desire to become famous (Dyson, 2006), but which soon collapses as soon as the hypnosis breaks- after Suneo replaces the nameplate with a more flamboyant version to impress Nobita- and the school is left bereft and disbanded. Rorty (1992) has explained the effectiveness of a combined result of the devices of peripeteia and anagnōrisis on a character, as they push the tragic subject to acknowledge their misfortune not as a matter of ill-luck, but an obvious result of a personal “waywardness that pervaded [their] actions” (p. 12). This further reminds us of Eden’s (2005) argument that equates character-discrepancy to subsequent error of judgement and damage (p. 45), which helps us understand Nobita and his wayward belief in a gadget to rejuvenate a forgotten artform; and even if we overlook the over-arching presence of technology in cultural revitalisation, Nobita’s contaminated ego-centeredness and want of fame or power spoils his interests- and the audiences’ support- in a game the anime positions him as quite passionate about. In the collapse of *Nobi’s School,* our tragic hero is awakened to self-knowledge about his ignorance of belief or knowledge about cultural restoration, and the necessity to keep welfare separate from profit (Silverstone, 2007), which we can read as a subtle manifestation of “‘suffering into wisdom’” (Hennegan, 2007, p. 212).

Nobita’s episode with the headmaster’s name plate brings the audiences closer to the notions of moral katharsis as they (1) might begin to understand the differences between the various forms of pride and which forms to variably cultivate or avoid and (2) are reinforced to not let pride assume the form of pomposity or egoism (Dyson, 2006). In witnessing Nobita’s tragedy- related to the sin of pride- the audiences are subjected to the possibility of chancing upon internalising the counter-effects of exercising the negative facets of pride (Golden, 1975; Lear, 1992), as they are awakened to the reality of both positive and negative pride (Dyson, 2006). As Frank (2001) exclaims, the notion of pride is not exhausted, but remains a matter of subjective choice and moral interest, where *Doraemon* recommends the wiser option.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we deployed a broad range of conceptual accounts to analyse the five ‘sins of the spirit’ (Frank, 2001) and how each sin contributes to the morally-transgressive makeup of Nobita’s personality, leading onto a tragic misfortune unfolding within the narrative. Besides, we consciously made the choice to leave the sins of lust and gluttony (the ‘sins of the flesh’) unattended due to their peripheral nature within the animation and their tangible cultural influence and association with a more bodily form of desire, and, therefore, have been relatively ignored by *Doraemon* itself. Their omission from our analysis, however, should not imply that the latter-two sins are any less significant than the remaining five within the contexts of morality and philosophy, or that the original concept of the ‘seven deadly sins’ has been, in any way, distorted or misconstrued for the interests of the chapter. What we instead wish to imply is their relationship with ideas of ‘bodily’ desires that drifts them away from our ethical consideration for the purpose of children’s moral education to focus more on classical ideas of a moral-Self (Naito, 1990).

Moral education, according to Naito (1990), has become a pivotal element of children’s socialisation in post-war Japan that witnessed a pioneering transition from imperialism-driven ideologies to the rise of democratic ideals. Moral education sought to educate children through “moral heteronomy (dependence on authority figures such as teachers) to moral autonomy” (Naito, 1990, p. 30), rendering young students independent, self-reliant, and liberal. This social transition was predominantly (1) reinforced by the abolishment of the imperialist and nationalist principles of “Shushin” and (2) a hybridisation of an “American-type democracy” with Japanese forms of thinking (Naito, 1990, p. 27). This sense of ‘hybridisation’, further, informs our understandings of the renowned chimera-like quality of Japanese culture to assimilate foreign cultures within its traditional aesthetics, crafting an altogether new-and-unique artistic artifact (Napier, 2005).

No wonder how kabuki- as a Japanese theatrical artform- grafted elements off Shakespearean drama to innovate ‘difference’ on the kabuki stage (Kamachi, 2004), though at the cost of its own aesthetic individuality. Brandon (1999) argues that the symbiosis of Shakespeare and kabuki, pursued with positive intentions, was a failed enterprise from the perspective of kabuki and led to the partial dissolution of kabuki’s significance in modern-Japan, even though Shakespeare became a huge hit (and still is) in commercial mass-media. Unfortunately, the history of this artistic relationship and related vicissitudes falls outside our scope and interest and, thereby, would not be extended forward. However, this brief historical account of hybridisation helps us speculate the potential possibilities of *Doraemon* being a contemporary by-product of the ‘foreign-traditional juxtaposition’, precisely in its deployment of the traditional features of an Aristotelian tragedy to explore the repercussions of an abstract set of moral transgressions by encompassing the once ‘strictly-Christian’ concept of the ‘seven deadly sins’ as possible sub-themes within the narrative. Most certainly, the animation manages to re-conceptualise the seven sins according to the ‘contemporariness’ of its audiences and assimilate it with its Japanese social settings and scenarios (Naito, 1990), but, most important, it achieves to strike the purpose of ‘using’ Nobita’s tragedy as a narrative space to transform his personal sufferings into perceptible moral lessons about self-regulation (Rorty, 1992; Silverstone, 2007).

The present chapter reminds us about the potentials of Aristotelian tragedy, typically in its association with what Silverstone (2007) addresses as the “narratives of suffering” (p. 280) and the possibility of using the former as a medium of self-analysis. Similar to odyssey experiences, tragedy can also function as a potential platform to view oneself against multiple selves; to be morally-awakened and aware of one’s responsibility towards others’ welfare and sense of communal harmony; to learn from the mistakes of others to avoid repeating them in the future; and, most critically, to understand, and acknowledge, one’s vulnerabilities to human problems (Sherman, 1992). This could be achieved, in tragedy, by what Malti et al. (2016) calls “perspective-taking” (p. 373). Tragedy allows its audiences to step into the shoes of a suffering-character to not only understand the various causes of their tragedy, but also discover the multifaceted ways of avoiding it.

For instance, Nobita’s self-glorified *Nobi’s School of Cat’s Cradle,* though functioning as a partial source of the tragedy, could be re-evaluated as a possible agent of cultural reformation via its position as a space of innovation, curiosity, and inquiry related to the cultural game of cat’s cradle. Because the school was contaminated by greed and futile demonstrations of pride that it collapses and bears no result; had Nobita used the gadget, as we had suggested above, for an altruistic purpose, the outcome would have been distinctively reformatory, as cat’s cradle might have re-gained its lost charm and re-captured the public interest, to Nobita’s surprise. The disbandment of *Nobi’s School* allows the audiences to reflect over (1) the futility of nurturing pride-instilled thoughts and (2) the possibility of overturning the bleakness of pride into a subject of self-worth and self-confidence, which Nobita is represented as lacking or, mostly, ‘wanting’.

This sense of ‘want’ is the inceptive moment in the animation that stimulates our protagonist’s indulgence in the five unethical sins, and once ‘want’ is affected by a sense of abuse, it heralds Nobita’s anticipated susceptibility to err and fall (Sherman, 1992). Another interesting factor about the unethical sins is their inter-relationship within the animation, where the sin of ‘sloth’ emerges and functions as the central-most transgression and is, therefore, most frequently antagonised than the other four. Though the other sins are also entwined to each other (‘greed’ and ‘anger’ gives rise to ‘pride’, or ‘envy’ gives rise to ‘greed’), the sin of ‘sloth’ is manifested under such a complicated dynamic that it seems to be connected to all the other sins that constitute Nobita’s personality. Sloth contributes to the animation’s general definition of Nobita as a dissatisfied, disillusioned character, and it is dissatisfaction that poisons Nobita’s sense of acceptance for who and what he is. Additionally, Nobita’s dissatisfaction can be subtly twinned with personal disinterest to reform/change and even if he ‘seeks’ to reform himself, he wishes to be supported by a gadget, which, in return, he abuses more than he uses. Ultimately, this (ab)use plunges him to tragedy.

Coming back to the social and psychological effects of *Doraemon*, Wymer (2007) had referred to a “paradoxical relationship between Being and Becoming” (p. 262) that explains much of the animation’s “psychagogic power” (Eden, 2005, p.47) that exposes the ‘other’ (witness/audience) to a potential self-transformation. Eden’s (2005) reference to ‘psychagogic power’ connotes to the animation’s cathartic abilities to apprise viewers and activate their mode of what Golden (1975) had called “intellectual clarification” (p. 48). In the various accounts of the five sins, we have been frequently repeating the apparent effects of Nobita’s tragedy on viewers, and what precisely can young children learn from the character-discrepancies of the protagonist. Despite having quite simple plotlines, *Doraemon* is covertly didactic. The animation does not analyse Nobita’s tragedies, nor does it reflect over the moral outcomes of the episodes, but it simply presents a narrative, leaving it to the audiences’ discretion to drive any lesson to their homes. In a way, the katharsis about Nobita’s condition remains subjective and dependent upon the interests of viewers if they intend to blur the line between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ and identify (learn) with (from) Nobita’s tragedy (Wymer, 2007).

Doraemon, therefore, stands out as an extraordinary exploration of an assembly of unethical sins (moral transgressions) that are collectively embodied in Nobita and how these sins propel an understanding of the feelings of ‘pity and fear’. As central emotions stimulated in tragedy, pity and fear are excavated and exploited in the animation by two major agents: Doraemon and the audiences. Without the intervention of these two agents, the animation may fail its purpose to be seen as a complete tragedy, as Eden (2005) speaks about the centrality of pity and fear in a tragedy. The animation deploys Doraemon as an active agent to serve the purpose of exciting pity and fear, whose comments at the conclusion of Nobita’s tragedies express his understandings of the repercussions of Nobita’s actions.

Further, we can only speculate that Doraemon’s pity may intermix with the audiences’ sense of fear, as they internalise Nobita’s suffering to gain wisdom in thought (Hennegan, 2007), rendering the tragedy fulfilled and effectual. However, the extent of audiences’ participation is something that depends on personal subjectivity and inclinations, and we may not be able to concretise it at this point. Nonetheless, the latter-argument does not affect the current reading of *Doraemon* as a tragedy in the

Aristotelian tradition, as the animation opens to us about the endlessness of suffering and the thousand opportunities life may offer us to grow up from where those sufferings leave us. The animation positions Nobita as a vehicle to communicate its belief in human potential and strength; even though Nobita himself fails to acknowledge these human realities, *Doraemon* believes in our power and moral strengths that we are capable of “[coming] closer to fulfilling our natures- and virtues- as knowers and as citizens” (Rorty, 1992, p. 18). The animation is, undeniably, a testimony to what moral awakening stands for- with Nobita waving at us, close by.

Chapter III

S. for Hope: Superheroes, Utopianism, and the Interplay of Hope

The Utopian Promise of Superheroes

In the Afterword to his anthology of essays, connecting superheroes to therapy and psychology, entitled *Using Superheroes in Counseling and Play Therapy*, Lawrence C. Rubin (2007) argues:

> superheroes. . . satisfy deep existential needs, at both the personal and societal levels, to be stronger than we are, to break through barriers both external and internal, to connect with others (p. 320).

Rubin's (2007) reflection reminds us of Peterson and Park's (2008) hypothesis that "superheroes allow us to see ourselves in stark and entertaining ways and to dream of what we might be" (p. 17). It is here that one may perceive Rubin's (2007) reflection to be suggesting dual connotations: that (1) superheroes could function as how Loeb and Morris (2005) address them as "moral examples" (p. 30); and that (2) they possess the ability to inspire the envisioning of what Papastephanou (2008) calls "piecemeal pragmatist utopian change" (p. 91). It should be noted that by 'piecemeal', Papastephanou (2005) implies an unsystematic manner of implementation which departs from the blueprint-hypothesis that, further, becomes one of the primary reasons of anti-utopian criticism (Oudenamspen, 2016; Sargent, 1994, 1982), which we also aim to discuss ahead in the chapter. For now, it would be beneficial if we understand Papastephanou's (2005) perception of 'piecemeal change' as encompassing "a possibility, felt through disconnected instances of the good" (p. 94) that does not involve only one strict method of approaching a goal, but a range of scattered alternatives (Sargent, 1982). These alternatives, basically, allow societies to pursue small-scale advancements towards a desired goal, which- in our context- is utopia.

We may discuss the concept of utopianism in a full-fledged manner later in the chapter. However, before we progress onto that, it is imperative to shed some light upon how utopianism connects itself to the superhero-canon, and how superheroes manifest themselves as symbols of "utopian visions" and thought (Sargent, 2006, p. 11). These discussions would allow a general reconceptualization of animations' plausible intervention in children's socialisation, suggesting both the impact and influence of mass media in children's popular culture and imagination. Superheroes occupy a massive position in children's entertainment. Additionally, the most intriguing aspect about superhero narratives is not their representation of the superhero as a "larger-than-life" character (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002, p. 162), but their treatment of

> questions regarding ethics, personal and social responsibility, justice, crime and punishment, the mind and human emotions, personal identity, the soul, the notion of destiny, the meaning of our lives. . . the importance of friendship, what love really means, the nature of a family, [and] the classic virtues like courage, and many other important issues (Morris & Morris, 2005, p. vii-viii).

These highlighted aspects speak about the embedded nature of futuristic vision within superhero narratives in relation to children's socialisation and introduction to Grusec's (2002) "intrinsic" values (p. 144) that we had discussed earlier in our 'Introduction'. These values are frequently communicated in superhero narratives through the framework of utopianism to inspire what Webb (2008) addresses as a "critical utopian hope" (p. 204). Superhero narratives deploy the 'superhero' as a symbol of utopian thought, envisioning a mode of hoping that (1) criticises the existing problems of human society and (2) aspires to resolve them and arrive at a future where these current 'negatives' are negated, leading society towards social change that could be re-reformed (where needed) in the future (Webb, 2008, p. 199). These superhero stories manifest utopianism as a collective metaphor "to focus and express ideals, carry hopes and aspirations for the future, and anchor us to history" (Rubin, 2007, p. 16).

What implies here is that superheroes teach us to be positive of the future, to be hopeful. Here, we may be reminded of Polak's (1961) assertion that humanity's actual future relies upon the latter's ability to imagine the "new images of the future" (p. 53). Polak's opinion could be juxtaposed with Sargent's (1982) assertion that if "people's expectations are positive, if they believe that they can or will improve their lives, they are more likely to do so than if their expectations are negative" (p. 579). As beacons of hope, superheroes not only introduce us to the spectrum of intrinsic values (Grusec, 2002), but also inform the development of a collective critical mode of hoping (Webb, 2008, p. 204) that supports the viewers' imaginations of "how good [they] could look" (Sargent, 1994, p. 25) as morally informed individuals or as members of what Elshtain (2005) calls a "minimally-decent" (p. 93) society which, inspired by utopian thought, can reshape itself as and when required.

As Rubin (2007) had mentioned, superhero narratives "satisfy existential needs, at both the personal and societal levels" (p. 320). This allows us to perceive superheroes as purveyors of hope and social change who inspire children's imagination of themselves as "potential superheroes" (Dyson, 1997, p. 1). Children frequently occupy our social psyche as the future citizens of (a) society and, thereby, to imagine them as 'potential superheroes' is to believe that they possess the resources and agency to transform their respective societies in heroic/unusual ways like the superheroes from the world of mythology and fiction. It is here that superheroes guide the development of children's moral perception (Martin, 2007, p. 240), refining their abilities to distinguish the 'good' and 'bad', that they can take ahead in the future as "history makers" (Thompson et al., 2019, p. 4) and transform society at both micro and macro levels. This is impossible to conceive, however, unless the collective emotional orientation of society is reformed, reconfigured, and redirected.

Webb (2008) notes that for the critical mode of hope to function, it is vital that the "collective emotional orientation" (p. 200) of society is informed by the 'desired' mode of critical hoping. This is where superheroes attempt at shifting the configurations from less 'individual'-oriented modes of hoping towards more 'community'-oriented ways of thinking and hoping. Needless to say, this does not imply that one cannot hope for oneself because then that sense of hope would also complement the transformation of society and humanity, at least, at micro levels

(Sargent, 1994). In a way, a collective self-transformation of individuals would pave the way to an aesthetic and philosophical transformation of society, thus, cultivating utopian envisioning. On this note, we may divert our attention towards a deeper understanding of ‘utopia’, ‘eutopia’, and ‘utopianism’, and how they (1) inform our contextual discourse about superheroes and (2) manifest themselves in superhero narratives as “a key conceit” (Murphy, 2017, p. 71) for cultivating a transitional “critical utopian mode of hoping” (Webb, 2008, p. 204) from anarchy towards harmony and peace.

Some Reflections on Utopianism

For the purpose of this chapter, it is important to understand (1) the difference between the words, ‘utopia’, ‘eutopia’, and ‘dystopia’, and (2) how they are connected to the idea of utopianism. The word utopia was coined by Thomas More as a pun on the Greek word *eutopia* (translated as ‘good place’) to imply the ‘non-existent’ nature of the island he describes in *Utopia* (1516). Here, it comes as no surprise that a quarter of the criticism levelled against utopian imagination sources out of utopia’s sense of ‘fictionality’ and the boundaries it usually draws “between itself and actual experience” (Holquist, 1968, p. 111). These arguments are largely complicated through critics’ subjective misinterpretations of More’s understandings of the term. Many of them frequently refer to More’s play on the word ‘eutopia’ as the first validation of More’s own disbelief in such a society that further informs their distantiation from the philosophical and aesthetic interpretation of More’s ideologies and standpoints pertaining to the idea of ‘utopianism’ (Oudenamspen, 2016).

From a political perspective, the concept of utopianism is further charged of cultivating totalitarian visions for the future (Kateb, 1963; Popper, 1962). This arises in light of non-compliance to the ‘blueprint-hypothesis’ that may trigger more violent means to establish the proposed ideals of the blueprint, leading society towards a fascist regime instead of pushing it towards a positive social change. The “antiutopians”, as Sargent (1982, p. 566) calls the critics of utopianism, are wedded to an absolute compliance to the ‘blueprint’ for utopia(s) to develop and believe that “there is one, and only one, right method of doing everything” (Beauchamp, 1974, p. 467). This perception leads them to conclude that if there is ‘only one’ method (the blueprint) for utopia to evolve, then there would be ideological conflicts and disagreements amongst people, resulting in totalitarian doctrines to be implemented for society to abide by. This may further lead to the destruction of human individuality, for in a utopian universe all people are visualised as “uniform creatures with identical wants”, as Berneri (1950, p. 4) warns at one instance. The society, according to Beauchamp (1974), may transform in a positive way; however, this could be achieved only through the mediums of anarchy and fascism, leading several scholars to debunk the notions of utopian dreaming or imagination as implausible, impractical, or voids of existential nothingness.

Antiutopians’ compliance to the ‘blueprint’ is, at the same time, criticised by virtue of their belief in an unpliable utopian ideology. These critics tend to overlook two distinct factors: (1) that utopia is about “imagining a better alternative” (Sargent, 2006, p. 12); and that (2) utopia stands as “a critique of ideology”, assuming its shape through “comparison against actual society” (Garlington, 2012, p. 69). It becomes clear that utopia contradicts the notion of ideology by presenting a fresh range of alternatives and, simultaneously, critiquing the very power structures that are embodied in an existing socio-political ideology.

Another factor that appears on the surface considering the present criticism is the critics’ misguided opinion about utopia as a ‘perfect’ body or system of values, policies, or laws. This general misconception frequently re-directs antiutopians back to the ‘blueprint’, rendering utopia either as a diabolical manifestation of futuristic progress or an unattainable society deemed too ‘perfect’ for humanity to achieve (Holquist, 1968). It is here that the supporters of utopianism assume a philosophical standpoint to defend utopian imagination and thought by primarily rejecting the notion of ‘perfectionism’ that has been comfortably connected to utopian dreams. Sargent (1994) has been active in leading this discussion to clarify the critical position of utopia as a platform to present “alternatives colored to make them desirable... [catering] to our ability to dream, to recognize that things are not quite what they should be, and to assert that improvement is possible” (p. 26). To Sargent (1994), “perfection has never been a characteristic of utopian fiction” (p. 6) and has only been utilised as a political weapon by antiutopians to justify their point. Furthermore, he recognises that utopianism is not defined by a sense of certainty or fixity, but rather by a yearning to progress, transform, and improve according to societal needs and expectations.

When mixed with a “critical” mode of hoping (Webb, 2008, p. 204), utopianism could be “better conceptualized as a movement of hope”, as Fournier (2002, p. 192) highlights, and further establishes that

> utopianism is about movements and processes rather than ‘better states'; journeys rather than destinations; it is about opening up visions of alternatives. . . it is about what moves us to hope for, and to cultivate, alternative possibilities (p. 192).

Even though Fournier (2002) is speaking in context of “grassroots movements” (p. 191), the equation she draws between the latter and utopianism solidifies our understanding of how utopianism could be conceptualised as a “movement of hope” (p. 192). Fournier’s (2002) assertions help validate that utopian reality is boundless and always in the middle of transformation. Utopianism, then, is not only about what Sargent (2006) calls “social dreaming” (p. 15), but also our ability to seek ‘alternatives’ or other, fresher possibilities to transform the present. This way, we may view utopianism as a timeless concept that envisions a human society that (1) recognises its sense of ‘incompleteness’ and (2) is ready to make progress by means of what Papastephanou (2008) had earlier mentioned as “piecemeal pragmatist utopian change” (p. 91). This idea of ‘piecemeal change’ manifests a utopian setting as a perpetually transformative- rather than as an immovable, albeit ‘perfect’- society.

Corresponding with Fournier’s (2002) argument, utopianism is frequently perceived as a “tale of hope. . . hope deferred, and hope renewed” (Sargent, 1994, p. 1) and is connected to the idea of hoping (Webb, 2008). Without hope, utopian imaginations fail to grow. However, it should be noted, as discussed earlier, that the “collective emotional orientation” of society should be towards a ‘critical mode of hoping’ that stresses over negating the existing societal faults in the future as we progress towards utopia (Webb, 2008). Here, Webb (2008) is pertinent enough to mention that “hope needs to be educated, guided and directed” (p. 198). This is where our superheroes serve as significant lighthouses to guide us from darkness to light; hope lost to “hope renewed” (Sargent, 1994, p. 1). In doing so, superheroes represent a category of what

Webb (2008) addresses as “utopian clusters” (p. 200), typically in the sense that they may be collectively perceived as a site marked by “a proliferation of utopian ideas” (p. 200). Although Webb’s (2008) perception of a ‘utopian cluster’ more strongly aligns with Sargisson and Sargent’s (2017) idea of ‘Lived Utopianism’- highlighting the existence of independent, intentional communities that dwell over shared utopian ideals for “a better life” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2017, p. 23)- the superhero canon could, nonetheless, be still safely perceived as representing a collective category which we may interpret as ‘a utopian cluster’ (Webb, 2008).

Superheroes as Utopian Clusters

As a collective category, superheroes come to represent Nietzsche’s (1883-1885/1969) notion of the *übermensch*, “whose purpose was to ‘go under,’ to bring humanity the lessons learned, metaphysical or otherwise, as post-humans, in an attempt to affect utopia...[and] radically affect humanity” (Wolf-Meyer, 2003, p. 501). Following Nietzsche (1883-1885/1969), superheroes are supposed to (1) reveal to humanity the many existent problems in society and (2) guide it onto the right track that leads to utopic dreaming. However, some critics argue that superhero narratives are “predicated on preserving the status quo” (Wolf-Meyer, 2003, p. 511) and, therefore, are frequently defined by a “narrative stasis” (Yockey, 2008, p. 26) that precludes superheroes from moving beyond the existing social, political, and power structures.

In a way, supervillains damage the harmony of society (both social and political) and superheroes counter-fight to not progress society towards a ‘better’ state (Sargent, 1994), but revert to a former state of normalcy. It is here that critics accuse the comic fandom of being in possession of an obsessive, ‘conservative’ ideology that discourages the imagination of any socio-political change to occur within a society (Wolf-Meyer, 2003). Another way to pursue this curtailment of utopian dreaming in superhero narratives happens by means of keeping the superhero preoccupied in other thought processes, which may include ‘nostalgia’ or similar feelings of guilt and identity-crisis (Murphy, 2017; Wolf-Meyer, 2003; Yockey, 2008). These feelings often populate most of the superheroes’ narrative-presence, digressing them away from their visions and promises of reshaping the future of their society in utopic ways. It is not that the ‘superhero’ is completely divorced from utopian imaginations- as inactive in pursuing any utopian goals- but such existential dilemmas prevent them from justifying their ethical position as the "*übermensch*" (Nietzsche, 1883-1885/1969), guiding humanity towards progress and fulfilment.

In the middle of this, however, we usually overlook the superheroes' ideological and moral impact that may help mould our (as viewers) vision or imagination of a utopian state. In context of children's symbolic play, superheroes can significantly act as exceptional models to be imitated and acted upon by children. Symbolic play allows children to re-conceptualise the metaphors of utopianism, hope, and dreaming to not only "revisit past opportunities and problems" but also "venture into the future of possibilities" (Rubin, 2007, p. 5). Martin (2007) notes that children's fantasy play is an intriguing platform that complements the development of 'moral perception', which not only helps children understand their social environment, but also opens doors for them to express their individual opinions about themselves, others, and the world around them (Hancock & Hancock, 2008; Irwin, 1983).

However, in this case, superhero narratives are frequently criticised for fostering violence which children may be drawn to learn due to the fact that superheroes are 'rewarded' for being violent (Boyatzis, 1997). Despite these criticisms, we may substantially agree with Hart (2005) who asserted that superheroes' participation in violent activities is partly due to their social context and moral identity as protectors of humanity. Informed by a strong 'moral perception' (Martin, 2007), superheroes find themselves in possession of "conspicuous strengths of character" (Peterson & Park, 2008, p. 19) that includes the ability to make morally rational judgements about the use of violence. As Loeb and Morris (2005) rightly mention, superheroes exert power (1) when necessary, and (2) in light of the common good, for everyone's wellbeing and safety. This argument enables the perception of a transparent disparity between superheroes and supervillains. Additionally, researchers have found that violent fantasy plays amongst children is not detrimental, but rather an interesting medium to display anxiety-related issues, or even a "means of feeling stronger" (Rubin, 2007, p. 6), paving the way to children's physical, cognitive, and social development (Pena et al., 1987; Aldis, 1975). Either way, it should be encouraged, but constantly supervised.

Coming back to the differences between the superhero and the supervillain, and how the two characters complement each other, Verano (2013) observes that “the social identity of both heroes and villains is. . . informed by and defined by their opposition to each other, which justifies their very existence within the social fabric of the superhero story” (p. 83). This begins to make sense when we remind ourselves of how utopias are often positioned against dystopias, so that we may acknowledge hope that is often treasured within utopic images against the dystopian pictures of chaos (Papastephanou, 2008). In a similar fashion, the supervillain is situated as the antithesis to the superhero’s utopian values and symbols and is introduced for the sole purpose of lionising the superhero (Verano, 2013). This may have an additional benefit: it is through the supervillain that the superhero’s inherent goodness is appraised, strengthened, and legitimised. The former’s dark actions against humanity are criticised for the positivity that the latter illuminates, in the same way that utopias are positivised when viewed from/against a dystopian background.

Therefore, superheroes inspire children to perceive their society as “incomplete” or “inadequate” (Sargent, 1994, p. 25)- in an urgent need of social growth- and attempt to guide them to be critically hopeful about its future (Webb, 2008, p. 204). Children have, lately, been addressed as superheroes in their own rights (Dyson, 1997), implying the possibility of change to occur through their actions as adults in the future. It is here that superheroes possess the ability to leave children inspired (1) by their actions, and (2) by suggesting that children, as members of society, are (and would be) responsible for both the progress that humanity makes and the moral decay it allows to fester. This idea is reverberated in the two superhero stories that we shall discuss here and argue how the notion of ‘utopianism’ grounds itself within the narratives as a metaphor for a mode of critical hoping (Webb, 2008), essential for envisioning humanity that is driven by ideals, altruism, moral agency, and happiness.

Discussion: The Superhero Narratives

I. *The Freedom Force* (1978)

As “moral examples” (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 30), the five superheroes that make up ‘the freedom force’ stand as representatives of utopian thought (Papastephanou, 2008), and could be conceptualised as purveyors of what Webb (2008) had called “critical utopian hope” (p. 204). Throughout the five episodes that comprise the animation, the freedom force is projected as being involved in a full range of conflicts with different antagonists that they often identify, locate, and get ready to confront (typically, by the help of Merlin's magic). This ability could be perceived as a reflection of their ‘character’ as informed by a sense of ‘moral perception’ that guides their actions and choices (Hancock & Hancock, 2008; Martin, 2007) and helps them qualify as symbols of utopian imagination and hope (Webb, 2008).

However, this call to utopian imagination is constantly curtailed by the freedom force’s emphasis on returning to the same, old state of harmony, rendering Wolf-Meyer’s (2003) and Yockey’s (2008) criticisms as true. As mentioned earlier, superhero stories are often criticised for being “predicated on preserving the status quo” (Wolf-Meyer, 2003, p. 511) and are, therefore, defined by an unusual “narrative stasis” (Yockey, 2008, p. 26). We often perceive a similar dynamic unfolding in *The Freedom Force*, particularly in the episode called “The Dragon Riders”. In this episode, the heroes attempt to resolve an ideological conflict between two men who represent ‘science’ and ‘faith’. The episode is punctuated by (1) the freedom force’s preservation (or return to) of the old state of harmony and, further, (2) by Isis’ opinions about the matter. Where on one hand, the heroes insist upon preserving the state of things (Wolf-Meyer, 2003), Isis, on the other, refutes our interpretation about the animation’s (anti)utopian set of ideology that might cancel out our opinion about the animation as belonging to the same category of superhero ‘texts’ criticised by Wolf-Meyer (2003) and Yockey (2008).

Isis’ remarks about the predicament briefly remind us- as viewers- about the transparency in utopian beliefs, and the fact- as Beauchamp (1974) exclaims- that there is never “one, and only one, right method of doing everything” (p. 467). This may remind us of how utopian thought often debunks antiutopians’ critique of utopian dreaming as a source of violence and totalitarianism (Popper, 1962), as Isis asserts that the freedom force “cannot help one side win over the other” (interplanetarydream, 2011a, 2:53). Her remark could be read as the force’s belief in utopian notions of free will, democracy, and liberty that stand against the dystopic or anarchic ideals of fascism and political superiority. As superheroes, they possess all means to favour one side over the other, but they refrain from such totalitarian methods to confront this situation. Subsequently, they establish themselves as noble individuals of sterling "strengths of character" (Peterson & Park, 2008, p. 19), that includes their ability to use their sense-of-power towards the common good, rather than (ab)using it to capitalise on power dynamics (Loeb & Morris, 2005).

Leading the previous argument is Isis' claim that "there is [enough] room in this world for mistakes", and there is always a possibility for "a fresh start", as Isis comforts the two men in "The Dragon Riders" (interplanetarydream, 2011a, 10:20 - 10:25). This claim reminds us of how Fournier (2002) had conceptualised the idea of utopianism: as "a movement of hope. . . [of] alternative possibilities" (p. 192). Yet again, we may perceive Isis' remarks as being charged with an unusual utopian agency that permits the possibility of committing and learning from instances of error (Sargisson & Sargent, 2006). Furthermore, Isis' comments reverberate what Papastephanou (2008) had earlier mentioned as 'piecemeal change' (p. 91). It highlights the superheroes' abilities to envision not only a range of "alternative possibilities" (Fournier, 2002, p. 192) that the two conflicting sides may adopt for a productive collaboration in the future, but also believe in the method of seeking baby-steps towards accomplishing any dream driven by a utopian imagination, in the vein of Elshtain's (2005) perception of a "minimally-decent" society (p. 93).

However, it is equally interesting to note that where Isis establishes herself as an emblem of the freedom force's utopian imaginations, at the same time, she is also potentially stereotyped and sexualised (Miller et al., 2016; Summers & Miller, 2014). Even though Isis negates a few of those allegations by not qualifying as a "non-essential or passive" character (Miller et al., 2016, para. 6), much of the criticisms levelled against female superheroes reflect itself in the figure of Isis as a woman. As Summers and Miller (2014) mention, there has been a significant transition from projecting women as 'objects' of rescue to 'subjects' of freedom. Here, we also partially refer to Paul Wells' (1998) concept of the 'feminine aesthetic'- which we have discussed at length in the succeeding chapter on gender and feminism- that is defined by a social transition of 'the animated woman' from an 'object' of ridicule or spectacle to a speaking 'subject' (p. 200) and which was strongly governed by the second-wave of feminism in the 60/70s.

However, this transition was marked by a physical over-sexualisation of women characters who were, nonetheless, projected as level-headed superheroes and in a positive light (Summers & Miller, 2014). Unfortunately, Isis belongs to this category, as the animation constantly attempts to preserve her feminine side more than her super-heroism. Furthermore, Miller et al. (2016) mention that female heroes are more likely to “work in a team” (para. 6). This could easily be seen in the structure of the freedom force as comprising four males and a single female (Isis) which, however, later finds a suitable negation of fact in the representation of Web Woman as working as a sole superhero within an animated narrative. In Isis as a member of a male-dominated team, Miller’s et al. (2016) statements justify themselves, but are, unequivocally, complicated in her development as an empathetic, “nurturing, and understanding” character/superhero (para. 4).

It is intriguing to notice that Isis’ ‘empathetic’ character is not to be criticised but understood as a hallmark of utopianism. It is utopian agency that allows her, in “The Dragon Riders”, the wisdom to resolve the conflict between ideologies by some means “other than warfare” (interplanetarydream, 2011a, 9:43), and this is where Isis opens the possibility for the two men to seek new or different alternatives (Fournier, 2002). One may be bewildered by Isis’ rejection of violence as a means to resolve conflicts, but in her (and the freedom force’s) compliance to non-violence (unless absolute necessary), we may perceive what many had addressed as the responsibility of power (Hancock & Hancock, 2008; Loeb & Morris, 2005). It is considered a utopian quality to approach a situation through social or non-violent methods. Interestingly, this idea finds a powerful replication in *The Freedom Force* and in their abstinence from resorting to violence.

This is reiterated in an episode, titled “The Scarlet Samurai”, when Toshi attempts at comforting a jealous Kiyoto (a boy who was jealous of Toshi’s magical powers), pointing out that his powers are “from the gods” and must be used “only for the good of others” (interplanetarydream, 2011b, 3:47 – 3:51). Here, we may clearly perceive that the group understands their super-heroic prowess and depart from the category of superhero animations that are constantly criticised for indulging in meaningless violence (Boyatzis, 1997; Huesmann & Miller, 1994), thereby, cultivating an interest amongst children in “violence as a problem-solving tool” (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002, p. 162). However, as already pointed out earlier, if supervised, children's violent play could be rendered (1) a positive outlet for unwanted anxieties and (2) a platform or space where they can frequently exercise a sense of power/control over themselves and others (Rubin, 2007) which can be helpful for their social and personal development and transition to adolescence/adulthood (Aldis, 1975; Pena et al., 1987).

However, in the case of the freedom force, their disinterest in violence is partly driven by their status as utopian subjects (Fournier, 2002; Sargent, 1982). Such subjects are meant to inspire their audiences to seek 'fresh' alternatives for being critically hopeful (Webb, 2008), and identify the faults of the present social structures and not repeat them in the future. For young viewers, Webb's (2008) concept of critical hoping could be evaluated from an ethical perspective to advise them on not being 'jealous'- for instance, as Kiyoto- and progress ahead in their lives as satisfied and happy individuals. *The Freedom Force* motivates young viewers to view themselves against the images of 'the supervillain' to understand and appreciate themselves as Dyson's (1997) "potential superheroes" (p. 1) who possess the ability to reform this world.

As Papastephanou (2008) had brought to our attention, utopian visions could be best understood when viewed through the lens of dystopian reality. This ideology makes sense within the superhero-context when we begin realising the necessity of the supervillain. As a social model, the supervillain embodies the state of dystopian reality and features as the source of the superhero's inherent goodness. Verano (2013) makes a poignant remark in this context to celebrate the supervillain as a necessity, when he writes, "the supervillain makes the superhero a superhero" (p. 86). This validates the point that the 'supervillain' could be treated as a "mirror" via which one may understand themselves, others, and the world around them (Sargent, 1994, p. 25). In the context of *The Freedom Force*, for example, the villains satisfy a similar purpose, as most of them are represented as critiques on 'jealousy' ("The Scarlet Samurai" and "Pegasus' Odyssey") or 'arrogance' ("The Robot"). The animation situates their selfishness or arrogance against the wisdom of the superheroes through which the audiences may be inspired to (1) unlearn the many morally-transgressive traits of the supervillains and (2) adopt a more utopian vision that is informed by our superheroes' message of hope, peace, and happiness.

As exemplars of “critical hope” (Webb, 2008, p. 204), the freedom force recognises their responsibilities and potentials as symbols of utopian thinking and imagination, inspiring morally guided actions that are informed by a poignant sense of “moral perception” (Martin, 2007, p. 240). As a critic had once mentioned, utopian dreaming is persevered by the help of a guided perception (Sargent, 2006). This is where the present animation ensures that the conflict between the superhero and supervillain is not wasted but represented as a springboard for hope to re-emerge- new possibilities to be explored- leaving the audiences informed of the ‘goodness’ indispensable for any utopia to be achieved or imagined (Fournier, 2002; Sargent, 1994; Webb, 2008).

Moreover, leading on from our discussion on the sexist representation of Isis (Miller et al., 2016; Summers & Miller, 2014), one may further perceive that the freedom force- as a team of an ethnically diverse range of legendary characters- has been “stripped of any meaningful sign of ethnicity” (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002, p. 162). This suggests that except for their physical appearances, the animation fails to reflect any other distinct ethnic-feature of the group, like in the form of accent-variations. Throughout the narrative, all the five superheroes (irrespective of the ethnicity they represent) speak in a uniform American accent, whereas Isis- being an Egyptian goddess- is relatively presented as white-skinned. These aspects, certainly, problematise the aesthetics of the narrative and may invite considerable criticism from researchers. Nonetheless, these representational shortcomings hardly prevent us from perceiving the utopian imagination that informs the guided actions (Hancock & Hancock, 2008) of the freedom force.

This becomes a striking quality of *The Freedom Force* that enables its survival in the public imagination as an example of utopian thought, inspiring the audiences to reflect upon themselves as responsible members of society and as crucial anchors of any progress our society makes. It is here that the superhero-animation has consistently attempted at informing us that we are, indeed, the ‘off-screen superheroes of humanity’, and that any utopian imagination is possible only through our visions and beliefs in notions of peace, hope, and collective community-building (Dyson, 1997).

II. *Web Woman* (1978)

In *Web Woman*, the sexualisation of women characters still pervades, typically via their uniformity in their physical appearances as “attractive, sexy, and feminine” (Miller et al., 2016, para. 7). This feminisation extends to the character of Kelly Webster (Web Woman) who, as Web Woman, is projected as being clad in “provocative clothing” (Miller et al., 2016, para. 7), as she could be seen wearing only a purple leotard, a pair of purple boots, and a black, antennae-like, "W" shaped mask. At this stage, if we compare Web Woman with Isis, one can hardly comprehend any considerable set of differences between the two female superheroes, because both are explicitly feminised or sexualised, particularly in the ways they are physically dressed (Miller et al., 2016). Moreover, like Isis, Web Woman is usually depicted as having “a [male] mentor”, if not a “team” of superheroes to work with (Miller et al., 2016, para. 6). Here, it is necessary to highlight that even though the latter works alone, she is constantly accompanied by a friendly alien called Spinner who is more of a source of help (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002), emerging as a ‘co-hero’ in her adventures (Campbell, 1968). In a way, therefore, one may keep both Isis and Web Woman on the same pedestal and treat them as mutually alike.

Further, as we have mentioned earlier in our discussion on *The Freedom Force*, both our female superheroes negate much of the criticism that has been generally levelled against female superheroes. Neither Isis nor Web Woman could be deemed “passive” characters (Miller et al., 2016, para. 6) nor their empathetic personalities could be taken as reflections of their subordinate statuses within male-dominated narratives (para. 4). Their sense of empathy carries a backdrop of utopian imagination that (1) allows them to pursue fresh alternatives in terms of feminist emancipation (Fournier, 2002) and (2) denies the necessity of violence or totalitarian doctrines to pervade the ethos of the superhero-narrative(s) for which they are often censored or criticised (Boyatzis, 1997; Huesmann & Miller, 1994). In Web Woman’s rejection of violence, for example, audiences may again perceive a recognition of ‘a utopian mode of critical hoping’ (Webb, 2008, p. 204). Critical hoping disavows the centralisation of power- which is a notion misinterpreted (and, thus, feared) by anti-utopians to support their criticism of utopian dreaming and hoping (Kateb, 1963; Popper, 1962)- but instead strives for introducing notions of freedom, free will, and peace. As in “The Eye of the

Fly”, Web Woman could be seen teaching a lesson to the evil Tsetse on the idea of greed:

> “Just remember that the greedy often lose more than they gain, especially when they strive after total power over their fellow creatures” (Creative Entertainment, 2018a, 16:34).

Most certainly, this statement validates Web Woman’s dismissal of anti-utopians’ purported fear of utopianism as the pathway to totalitarianism (Sargent, 1994), typically in the sense that Web Woman offers the viewer an understanding of what her functions are. Not only is she supposed to protect those in need, as she saves two men from a flood in “The Rainmaker”, but she is also required to inform the viewer about her responsibilities of being someone in possession of power (Loeb & Morris, 2005). Her statement about the repercussions of chasing ‘total power’ re-echoes Sargent’s (1982) affirmation that ‘utopianism’ is not about cultivating fascism, but about envisioning or hoping (for) positive socio-political changes which could be motivated by a critical mode of hoping (Webb, 2008). In Web Woman’s statement, we can identify her implied rejection of the idea of ‘absolute power’ that is neither a characteristic of the narrative nor of ‘utopianism’ as a philosophical concept.

Moreover, as Webb (2008) had mentioned, the “collective emotional orientation” (p. 200) of a society should be inclined towards any utopian mode of hoping that allows society to pursue fresh or different utopian visions (Sargent, 2006). Webb (2008) attempts to imply that for society to be able to make progress, a more ‘collective’ effort from citizens is deemed necessary for the utopian realisation of socio-political change. *Web Woman* perpetuates a similar ideology, promoting the power of united strength. As in “The World Within” (Creative Entertainment, 2018b, 14:41 – 15:00), the battle between the hypnotised bees and the ants is brought to a closure by Web Woman who asks the two sides to unite and fight the evil Dr. Abyss, who had stealthily manipulated the bees and the ants for his own selfish aim to exercise ‘total power’ over them. Here, the viewers may perceive Web Woman’s intentions to communicate the strength of ‘staying-united’ which could be treated more as a style of utopian envisioning that is attainable only through collective, altruistic efforts of any society (Webb, 2008).

Furthermore, it is interesting to highlight that Web Woman stands as a representative of a feminist utopian imagination. This is typically pursued through her alignment with the trope of “woman-as-insect” (Wilcox, 2017, p. 26) and this is precisely where Web Woman takes a leap ahead of Isis in their representations of the ‘feminine superheroic’. Where Isis’ powers could be perceived as basic to the superhero canon, Web Woman’s strengths come from the insect-world that are often intertwined as threatening the pillars of patriarchal domination (Creed, 1993). As Wells (1998) notes of the ‘feminine aesthetic’, Web Woman emerges as a solid archetype of a speaking ‘subject’ not only in her exploits against supervillains, but also in her portrayal as a dynamic feminist symbol of courage, determination, and hope.

The trope of ‘woman-as-insect’ is often deemed a bold symbol of feminist resistance against patriarchal power structures (Wilcox, 2017), which is clearly reflected in *Web Woman*. An intriguing point in the animation occurs when Kelly Webster speaks the classic line that first prompts her transformation to Web Woman:

> “Insects of the world. . . small creatures of the cosmos . . . lend me your powers – NOW!” (Creative Entertainment, 2018a, 3:58)

This statement becomes one of the major highlights within the narrative, precisely because (1) it is one of the first instances that reflects Web Woman’s associations with the insect world and (2) paves the way to an introduction of the “small creatures of the cosmos” as saviours of Web Woman (when in need). Often, *Web Woman* introduces insects as a “swarm” that further complement the role of Web Woman as a model to envision “new possibilities for connection and world-building” (Wilcox, 2017, p. 41). Yet again, the swarm of insects offer Web Woman the strength to believe in what she is pursuing through her altruistic adventures to protect humanity from possible harm (Loeb & Morris, 2005) which is where the role of ‘insects as nature’ is equally recognised and perpetuated for mass-appreciation.

In Web Woman's portrayals as (1) a superhero, and (2) woman-as-insect, one may note that she transforms into "a site of existential threat" to her male-dominated universe (Wilcox, 2017, p. 26), to an extent that her male enemies either attempt at killing ("Dr. Despair and the Mood Machine") or controlling her ("Send in the Clones"). Web Woman, indeed, threatens the masculine and patriarchal order which is why her image as the 'feminine superheroic' serves as both a comfortable site for exploring the questions of womanhood and identity (Wells, 1998) and "an unbearable dystopia for the men, who cannot reconcile themselves to a life of equality with women" (Wilcox, 2017, p. 26). This justifies the male villains' attempts to silence Web Woman in any way possible, more because they fail (1) to give up their dystopian dreams of absolute power and (2) accept a woman in a superhero's clothes. It is here that *Web Woman* attempts unpacking the idea of feminist utopianism (1) via Kelly Webster's transformation into Web Woman- a woman with powers gifted from the insect world- and (2) the intersection of her identity as *woman-as-insect* with the rejection of a patriarchal social system (embodied by the male super villains) to communicate a brighter portrait of utopian reformations marked by gender-equality, mutual respect (Murphy, 2008; Wilcox, 2017), and communal harmony.

However, where on one hand, the animation stands as a powerful exploration of 'feminist utopianism', on the other, it fails to completely protect itself from the features of mainstream superhero canon that are criticised and treated as impediments within the narrative that preclude the superhero(es) from pursuing their utopian dreams to 'go under' (Nietzsche, 1883-1885/1969) and affect society in radical ways (Wolf-Meyer, 2003). This way *Web Woman* paves the way to the arrival of what Yockey (2008) had criticised in similar superhero-narratives as "narrative stasis" (p.26) which is often introduced to preclude an acknowledgment of utopian alternatives (Fournier, 2002). This stasis is introduced distinctively in two separate instances: (1) in "Send in the Clones" (Creative Entertainment, 2018c, 9:53 – 10:00), when Kelly Webster gets concerned about the revelation of her identity as Web Woman, after Dr. Frankenstein creates her clone and hypnotises the 'real' Web Woman as his housemaid; and (2) when, in "The Lady in the Lamp", Ashta's proposal to take the convict (who had, accidentally, released her from Scarab's magical lamp) to "another world, a much better world" (Creative Entertainment, 2018d, 6:55) is strongly rejected by his desire to stay in the same, 'old' world.

In both the instances, we can perceive how the animation attempts to restrict the utopian attitudes of the superhero form by either (1) entangling Web Woman in the unnecessary vortex of identity-protection or (2) imposing the audiences with the thought of utopian impossibility, respectively. Via these means, *Web Woman* attempts to not only curb the utopian intentions of the ‘feminine-superheroic’, but also complicate the narrative-aesthetics by enforcing the superhero cloistered within the inability to move beyond the status quo (Wolf-Meyer, 2003). It is here that may begin wondering that in Web Woman’s exploits with supervillains and their journey to imprisonment(s), the animation reiterates this conservative ideology to keep the state protected from outside forces that may be defined by the concept of piecemeal utopian change (Wolf-Meyer, 2003), and that may be able to modify the ability of humanity to envision hope-induced alternatives (Fournier, 2002; Webb, 2008). The animation makes it explicitly obvious that Web Woman’s tasks are solely to dominate the supervillains, and capture them, before handing them over to the political systems she herself is a part of but has no apparent control over it. Essentially, *Web Woman* neither allows Kelly Webster to leave the territory of the superhero where they are monitored as “moral examples” (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 30) or inherent role-models to the young, nor treats her as a social pioneer (Verano, 2013) who can bring about a certain change that is both empowering and necessary. In the animation, the audience can perceive the containment of utopian imagination, but that should not discourage the viewership of an unusually different ‘feminine aesthetic’ at play which is combined with the ‘feminine-superheroic’ that endures and celebrates the possibility of utopian dreaming, now-refined by a feminist thought (Wells, 1998; Wilcox, 2017).

This is precisely the very quality that enables *Web Woman* to depart from the category of superhero-narratives to which *The Freedom Force* belongs to, typically in its treatment of the ‘feminine-superheroic’- in the form of Web Woman- as a symbol of resistance, intellect, and perseverance (Wells, 1998). In Webster’s portrayal as Web Woman- as an illustration of a feminist utopian tradition- we might significantly note striking dissimilarities between Web Woman and Isis. However, it does not imply that Isis’ character cannot be deemed any less inspirational than Web Woman’s, or that Isis fails to embody any emancipatory, feminist qualities. What we want to argue is that where Isis’ empowered ‘Self’ is usually subtly overshadowed by the presence of the male superheroes (Miller et al., 2016, para. 4), Web Woman’s feminist self is protected by her frequent assimilation with the world of insects (Wilcox, 2017) that uphold her as an archetype of radicalised utopian difference (Murphy, 2008).

Despite having a few problems, *Web Woman* manages to blossom its links with utopianism (Fournier, 2002; Sargent, 2006) and feminism (Wells, 1998; Wilcox, 2017) and, therefore, emerges as an extraordinary archetype for what superhero narratives could be like, and should be able to inform their audiences. As a utopian subject, *Web Woman* succeeds to not only preserve the possibility of the development of fresh alternatives for both major and minor socio-political change, but also advocate the rise of feminist utopian traditions. Certainly, the links between utopianism and feminism become milestones in the animation to recognise its strengths to (1) become one of Loeb and Morris' (2005) 'moral examples', (2) encouraging more individual thoughts upon ideas of social dreaming, community-building, peace, non-violence, welfare, and women empowerment.

Conclusion

This chapter has significantly tried to connect the world of superheroes with three key concepts of 'utopianism' (Fournier, 2002; Sargent, 2006), 'feminism' (Wells, 1998), and 'critical hoping' (Webb, 2008). We aimed to analyse and understand the formation of the superhero canon as what Webb (2008) calls a "utopian cluster" (p. 200), as to how superheroes could be (re)imagined as torch bearers of a retrieved form of hoping (Sargent, 1994). As symbols of a collective utopian category, superheroes could be studied as icons of a socio-political kind of piecemeal change (Papastephanou, 2008) that is not only informed by a utopian dimension of communal peace, harmony, or world-building, but also triggered by contemporary waves of feminist thought, as we visualise (briefly) in Isis and (strongly) in Web Woman. In a way, superheroes embody the shifting social paradigms within society and are strongly fuelled (1) with utopian imagination, (2) desire to view their worlds differently, and (3) inclination to bring a difference in the vein of Nietzsche's (1883-1885/1969) *ūbermensch*.

For the same reason, superheroes are upheld, or labelled, as inspirational models, particularly to young children who are often thought to exercise a pathological interest in superheroes or figures from mythology and folklore (Rubin, 2007). Adding another point to this argument is that superheroes' inherent utopianism is usually treated as an encouraging medium to inspire children to understand their social roles as potential "history makers" who may be able to replicate the superheroes' utopian visions (Thompson et al., 2019, p. 4; Dyson, 1997) and help society pursue the notion of piecemeal change in a more progressive sense. Superheroes are fashioned to not only reveal a gamut of inherently intrinsic values (Grusec, 2002) that viewers may adopt to refine their utopian imagination, but also exercise society's interests in changing itself from hopelessness, darkness, to being filled with hope and inspiration (Webb, 2008).

This is precisely what is achieved by the above-discussed animations, specifically in their treatment(s) of the superheroes as unusual models for utopian thinking. Here, we have addressed them as 'unusual' due to two key reasons which are frequently reflected over to understand the two animations as utopian subjects. Firstly, they potentially attempt to depart from the 'usual' type of superhero narratives that often preserve the status quo (Wolf-Meyer, 2003) and, secondly, however, their methods of 'going under' are implicit and, at times, too subtle to catch (Nietzsche, 1883-1885/1969). This clearly means that both the animations feature instances where they have attempted to preclude the realisation of utopian dreaming by either diverting the superheroes' attention to issues of identity (as in what we saw in *Web Woman*) or keeping them toward the periphery of power/political control.

It is here that one of Verano's (2013) poignant observations may help us justify the animations' attempts to restrict their superheroes' capacities to introduce utopian imagination onto mainstream thought. Reflecting on why supervillains are imperative within superhero narratives, he mentions that a "progressive superhero is inevitably a problematic figure", and "when a powerful figure forces societal change without the right to do so, he or she [enters] supervillain territory" (p. 86). In more than one way, a superhero may be branded an offender of communal harmony if they attempt to exercise control over any kind of political authority or pursue any activity that falls outside their political agency. It is here that critics have often highlighted that due to the same reasons supervillains are brought into play (1) to satisfy superheroes' sense of purpose or social function and (2) keep the status quo balanced and preserved (Verano, 2013; Yockey, 2008).

In light of the recent argument, one would be able to understand more clearly why, in *Web Woman*, Kelly Webster is often depicted as taking the villains to the police or any other local authority. This massively suggests that her ultimate purpose is to "offer optimism in the uncomplicated dispensing of justice" (Murphy, 2017, p. 71) and that she has no significant role to play in the antagonists' social futures. In a way, we might visualise Web Woman as a "moral example" (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 30) who may not be divorced from utopian thought, but implicitly 'controlled' in how she attempts to envision utopian dreams (Sargent, 2006), but who still manages or, at least, strives to communicate those utopian visions and ideals to young viewers who can 'rehearse' them in real socio-political settings and backdrops (Dyson, 1997).

This may, further, help us analyse the social positions of superheroes as role models or icons of admiration (Elkin, 1960). As icons, they are responsible to (1) share their utopian visions with the audiences and (2) inspire them to understand and rehearse similar visions in their social settings. Here, we may notice that superheroes' utopianism may fail to reproduce any affects unless we, as viewers, strive on transforming the world by seeking inspiration from the utopian value of superhero-narratives and superheroes as moral symbols (Hancock & Hancock, 2008).

Superheroes speak to our inherent humanity- that is often embedded within us- and ability to transform our world in enrapturing ways, more because they have faith in the powers of peoples (Fradkin, 2016, Dik, 2008). As Web Woman implicitly emphasises, there is much strength, that is unidentified, in unity. Ahead of this comment is Webb's (2008) idea of a "collective emotional orientation" (p. 200) that accentuates that for society to progress towards utopian change, it should possess a collective configuration that is aimed at a particular utopian mode of hoping. This idea clearly resonates with Web Woman's opinion and calls for individuals to unite, if they wish to experience the utopian visions of superhero-narratives. In a way, one could lead and argue that utopias are inconceivable without collective social endeavours of any involved society (Oudenamspen, 2016; Webb, 2008).

Furthermore, an interesting aspect unpacks in *Web Woman* which is the idea of feminist utopianism (Wilcox, 2017) that is attached with the representation of Web Woman as "woman-as-insect" (p. 26). This factor offers Web Woman to emerge as an archetype for patriarchal resistance and retaliation, enabling her to stand away from a one-way representation as Isis' in *The Freedom Force*. From a general perspective, the 'insect-trope' is described, and treated, as uncanny (Shaviro, 1995) and often viewed from an abject lens, typically in form. In a way, insects are 'othered' and embody a radicalised form of difference that catapults them to be viewed as a threat to hegemony or the social order of things (Wilcox, 2017). However, *Web Woman* combines this trope to an equally powerful notion of the 'feminine superheroic' that takes much of its formative thoughts from Wells' (1998) reflections on the feminine aesthetic.

The 'feminine aesthetic' partly discusses the transition of animated women's representation from 'objects' of patriarchal ridicule or gaze to their evolution into independent, speaking 'subjects'. It is here that *Web Woman* assimilates this ideology with the 'insect-trope' to re-modify the concept; to accommodate feminism with the 'uncanny' to develop the trope of "woman-as-insect" as what Wilcox (2017) had addressed as "a site of existential threat" (p. 26) to a patriarchal social order or space. This relationship helps Web Woman redefine herself as an archetype of the 'feminine-superheroic', reasserting *Web Woman*'s position as more of a feminist tale following a utopian tradition of hoping for a more gender-equal society (Murphy, 2008).

It is here that we might, yet again, recall how Isis struggles to radiate her sense of 'feminine-superheroic' which mostly relies on the fact that *The Freedom Force* accommodates four other male superheroes within its narrative, affecting- and eclipsing- Isis' overall potential as a feminist symbol. Having said that, it is quite imperative if we remind ourselves about the fact that Isis' inability to emerge- like Web Woman- as a symbol of feminist agency should not affect our interpretation of Isis as one of the most central, affirmative members of the freedom force. Despite the physical sexism that pervades across the narrative (Miller et al., 2016), one may not feel that Isis is being either overpowered or dominated by her male peers or silenced by the animation. Contrary to how some might feel, Isis is often treated with respect, and her opinions are constantly valued and never resisted or demeaned by a male-dominated universe. In a way, Isis could be equated with Web Woman in terms of the utopian values both radiate, but where Web Woman moves beyond to inculcate feminist traditions of dreaming, Isis' character stays within the boundaries of the traditional canon of superheroes.

In an attempt to consolidate all the proposed arguments that we have discussed across this chapter, one might be able to understand, and visualise, the superhero as an archetype of morally informed utopian visions of social change (Sargent, 1982). Throughout this chapter, we have attempted to focus precisely as to how superheroes could be treated as utopian models of inspiration for the implementation of pragmatic changes to occur at macro and micro levels by peoples of a society, guiding humanity about not only the faces of moral perception (Martin, 2007), but also how this perception would help individuals envision a clearer image of utopia. Here, we can treat 'moral perception' as the ability to identify transgressive modes of moral behaviour and rectify the same if internalised. Furthermore, Martin (2007) highlights that an individual's moral perception is a part of their "moral imagination" (p. 240) that informs a person's moral understanding of their social roles as members of a community.

It is here that, yet again, we begin addressing the role of superheroes into (re)shaping the ways their audiences might see themselves, others, and the world around them. As utopian symbols, superheroes are often burdened by the task of epitomosing Nietzsche's (1883-1885/1969) *ūbermensch* and, therefore, are most often blamed for society's own failures, or reluctance, to progress. This corresponds with Wolf-Meyer's (2003) critique of comic fandom that (1) revels in its subcultural level of 'difference' and, subsequently, (2) is never ready or interested to embrace any change in or within society that may pose a significant threat to their subcultural differences. This may lead us to reflect over the 'actual' purpose of superheroes and what they are meant to 'perform or pursue' as utopian examples.

Based on our analyses of the two superhero-narratives, (1) we might be clear in our approach towards the figure of the 'superhero' from the perspective of utopianism, and (2) how this approach may help us perceive the superhero as a shaper of one's moral identity and moral imagination (Martin, 2007), and, lastly, their roles in refining society's vision of a critical mode of hoping (Webb, 2008). However, we fail to remember the highlight when Dyson (1997) speaks of children as 'heroes of the future', as the real shapers and purveyors of hope, harmony, and happiness, who are just inspired by our superheroes. Here, we may curiously recall Webb's (2008) assertion that "hope needs to be educated, guided and directed" (p. 198). It is here that superheroes serve this function by renewing our senses of lost hope (Sargent, 1994) and ensuring that their utopian visions are communicated well to the audiences.

What is left, partly, is our responsibility to transform their visions to our present-day reality. Utopian imagination is conceived as a movement of “alternative possibilities” (Fournier, 2002, p. 192) which is where our superheroes attempt at suggesting the incorporation of alternative ways of thinking to be able to hope both critically and socially (Webb, 2008). However, the last step is ours to take, for utopias are possible, but, as Sargent (1994) hints, only through dedication, proactivity, and a collective kind of agency toward a common good, a common place (Dik, 2008).

Chapter IV

‘*Can I not get angry*?’ Shifting Gender Dynamics in Children’s Animations

Stories, Gender, and Misrepresentation

In the preface to his first edition of *The Empire’s Old Clothes*, Ariel Dorfman (2010) had remarked:

> Industrially produced fiction has become one of the primary shapers of our emotions and our intellect in the twentieth century. Although these stories are supposed merely to entertain us, they constantly give us a secret education. We are not only taught certain styles of violence, the latest fashions, and sex roles by TV, movies, magazines, and comic strips; we are also taught how to succeed, how to love, how to buy, how to conquer, how to forget the past and suppress the future. We are taught, more than anything else, how not to rebel (p. xxi).

Earlier in the “Introduction”, we had skimmed through Gerbner’s (2004) thoughts about the socialising function of a certain type of ‘stories’ that possess the ability to (1) awaken individuals to the existing socio-political problems and (2) inspire them to do something about it. It is interesting to note how Gerbner’s (2004) accounts contradict Dorfman’s (2010) in their opinions about stories’ potential(s) to instigate human action. However, where Gerbner’s optimism could be supported by media-texts that are marked by profundity, Dorfman’s arguments cannot be deemed completely untrue and does convey significant rationalism.

Dorfman’s (2010) critique perfectly fits into the descriptions of contemporary animations’ stereotypical representations of gender. It poignantly recollects from Carter and Steiner’s (2004) assertions about media-texts’ tendency to “socialize people, especially children, into thinking that dichotomized and hierarchical sex-role stereotypes were 'natural' and 'normal'" (p. 2). Their statements capitalise on media-texts' purported intention to leave no room for change, retracing the Gramscian philosophy of hegemony that paves the way to the 'naturalisation' and 'normalisation' of not only stereotypes, but also a gamut of other serious issues about gender, sexuality, and women's lives. Hegemony survives through the principles of ideological supremacy and is considered dangerous due to its natural inclination (1) towards the normalisation of what it deems acceptable/favourable and (2) the rejection of what it deems unconventional/non-conformist.

Furthermore, the misrepresentation of women characters is often inter-twined with male subjectivity that partakes in their on-screen characterization. This highlights another reason behind their misrepresentation, which was an abnormal preponderance of men occupying positions as content-creators (Perea, 2018), relegating women to more laborious tasks like "painting" or inking (Bell, 1995, p. 107). This professional imbalance instigated two discrepancies: (1) zero involvement of women in the ideological development of any animation (Bell, 1995); and (2) the creation of animated women characters that passively mirrored "men's beliefs [and fantasies] about women" that were, conversely, inspired by the then-cultural positions of women in society (Wosk, 2015, p. 10).

However, with the advent of second-wave feminism during the 1960-70s, the media-industry witnessed a subtle change that manifested as an alarming upsurge in women cartoonists and animators, who were able to touch upon issues/subjects that centred more closely around womanhood and the woman's body (Montresor, 2004; Wells, 1998). Although Montresor (2004) addresses many of these women's cartoons as "exaggerations" (p. 335)- in a vein similar to the ones created by men- she maintains that these cartoons were charged with "a sense of community" (p. 336) that built itself on freedom of expressions, female agency, and togetherness. To Wells (1998), this change reinforced the rise of what he addresses as "the feminine aesthetic" (p. 198).

Understanding the ‘Feminine Aesthetic’

The ‘feminine aesthetic’, according to Wells (1998), is more of a political expression of a feminine consciousness that departs from “male representations of women” and indulges in serious debates about women’s lives and issues that often spring as reactions against patriarchy and masculinist authority. It could be perceived as a gateway for women animators/cartoonists to lay open their insecurities/vulnerabilities and inspire discussions about personal, biological, social, or cultural issues that “male animators could not deal with” (Wells, 1998, p. 199).

The concept of the ‘feminine aesthetic’ is multifaceted. It allows animators to explore a broad spectrum of women’s issues, including language, desire, the female ‘body’, and other tabooed topics- like incest or menstruation- that are either negligibly discussed in men’s fantasies (Wosk, 2015) or are manipulated/mocked by a patriarchal discourse and intellect. As a reactionary movement to such representational inequalities, the ‘feminine aesthetic’ foregrounds the interplay of subjectivity and feminism, highlighting what has been ignored, misrepresented, or satirised.

Wells (1998) notes that one defining aspect of the ‘feminine aesthetic’ is its acknowledgment of “the shift from the representation of woman as *object*, to the representation of woman as *subject*” (p. 200). This solidifies itself in the representation of female characters in *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971-72) and *Doraemon* (1979-2005), wherein female characters are attributed with a sense of individuality and feminist agency. These animations become staples of an evolving consciousness that no longer positions women as “erotic spectacles or of marginal narrational interest” (Wells, 1998, p. 200) but reimagines them as active, “speaking subjects” (Sells, 1995, p. 177).

However, prior discussing these animations, we would be looking at *Triton of the Sea* (1972) as a counterexample to help us situate a disempowered-Pipiko against the images of much-empowered women from the other two animations and vice-e-versa. This may help us analyse the women from the latter two animations as unique precursors to a trend that occurred between the 80/90s, defined by the hashtags of ‘Girl Power’ (Perea, 2015). So many animations have since emerged that have passionately conveyed feminist messages. However, by discussing these children’s animations of the 70s, we attempt to align their productions with the growth of the ‘feminine aesthetic’ (Wells, 1998) and recognise them as fresh products of a changing consciousness that was influenced by the women’s movements of the 60/70s. Through these analyses, we ultimately aim to highlight how these animations provide the impetus to reinstate society’s perceptions about gender and sexuality through a pioneering range of human characters that defy stereotypes and conventionalisms. This helps us appreciate animations’ burgeoning importance in children’s socialisation, and how mass media is attempting to disseminate positivity about diversity and otherness.

Woman as ‘Object’

At this juncture, it is beneficial if we throw some light on how women were/are framed in children’s cultural products. Elkin (1960) points out that mass media is known to offer “a wider range of role-taking models” (p. 73). However, this may become a subject of immediate concern if children are made to dwell over distorted and stereotyped representations of things which could, further, lead to the development of children’s perceptions about the world around them from a ‘gender-schematic’ lens (Bem, 1983; Walsh & Leaper, 2020).

One such dangerous representation in children’s entertainment and media belongs to the ‘animated woman’ (Layng, 2001). Within this context, de Lauretis (1984) poignantly remarks that “the dominant cinema specifies woman in a particular social and natural order, sets her up in certain positions of meaning, fixes her in a certain identification” (p. 15). This status of fixity corresponds to what Tuchman (1978) had addressed as the “symbolic annihilation” (p. 8) of women in media-representations that capitalises on women’s media-image as non-speaking and monotonous subjects (McCabe et al., 2011). Here, it should be noted that by ‘non-speaking’, we connote animated women’s on-screen persona as being devoid of individuality, unlike Walsh and Leaper’s (2020) research that deduces that women talk more than men (p. 22). By ‘non-speaking’, we do not imply an individual’s physical ability to communicate, but the very emotional inability to be assertive and independent.

It does not surprise us that women's portrayal- and position- in animation, and other related products, over the years has been consistently bleak, limited, and aimed at naturalising a discomforting patriarchal sentiment (Gwynne, 2015; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2009). Contemporary animation has been accused of polarising women characters across stringent dichotomies between (1) 'beauty/good' and 'ugly/bad' (Bazzini et al., 2010) or (2) 'passive/good' and 'powerful/bad' (Burguera, 2011).

This implies that women characters were framed in two ways. Either they were beautiful and morally-virtuous or unattractive and morally-corrupt, or they were projected as passive subjects but morally-virtuous or as authoritative figures but morally-corrupt. Particularly, in terms of displaying power, animation movies (the ones by *Disney*, for instance) have been infamous for projecting powerful women in strictly "negative terms" (Burguera, 2011, p. 69). It reminds us of Layng's (2001) remark, wherein she notes that *Disney* propagates an ideology that approves women's sense of control only when it is practiced within the boundaries of the 'home'. The possibility of power being practiced by women beyond-the-home is either ridiculed (Gwynne, 2015) or suggested to bring massive repercussions for women (Ross, 2004).

Disney has been considered a staple in children's animation, a major influence on other animators, and, undeniably, the locus of extreme media-criticism. Though some critics appreciate *Disney*'s endeavours in creating memorable and complex women characters over the years (Schiele et al., 2020; Davis, 2006), many have offered equally immense backlash (Giroux, 1999; Layng, 2001; Ross, 2004; Whitley, 2013). Ross (2004) went ahead to argue that in the process of naturalising gender/racial stereotypes, *Disney* distorts and silences the "fairy tales' originally female voice" (p. 63) to accommodate the values of what Schiele et al. (2020) have addressed as "'soft feminism'" (p. 667).

This approach towards 'soft feminism' transpires "a complex blend of progressive and traditional attitudes" (Henry, 2007, p. 274) which is even reflected in the most-recent enterprises of *Disney* in the 21st century (England et al., 2011, p. 564), an age attended by the philosophies of post-feminism. With respect to contemporary *Disney* princesses, Wilde (2014) argues that they are allowed to "skim the surfaces of post-femininity", asserting power and free will, before they are pulled back "to the traditional resolution of romantic love and true loves kiss" (p. 147).

This predicament even applies to several other present-day animations that represent gender in a way that does not align with the shifting and progressive socio-political paradigms and developing male-female relationships (Pila et al., 2018). These concerns are being answered, albeit positively, by researchers who argue that gender-representations have substantially improved in children's media products, which has been possible due to a smooth influx of women animators and content-creators into the media-industry who are actively contributing to a developing body of animations that are feminist, diverse, inclusive, and 'agendered' (Mihailova, 2019; Potter, 2017).

Woman as 'Subject'

These animations are critically informed by the three under-represented, or over-looked, aspects of female/feminine experience (Montresor, 2004, p. 337), the queer identity (Mihailova, 2019), and cultural invisibility (Potter, 2017). Women animators have attacked this media-discrepancy by redressing "gender imbalance" (Potter, 2017, p. 65) in animations through three methods: 'subversion', 'minimisation' and 'diversification'. This implies that they have attempted to re-modify the cultural demographics by subverting traditional gender roles (placing women in non-traditional/unexpected roles); minimising (or, at extreme cases, avoiding) stereotypical representations of gender; and incorporating an ethnically and sexually diverse range of characters (Potter, 2017). By the latter-most point, we hint at the recent introduction of an assemble of sexualities (Mihailova, 2019), masculinities (Sales, 2019), and female minorities (Keys, 2014) that have begun receiving an unbiased share in animated representation.

The 'improved' animated representations of women, in particular, could be felt through their emancipated outlook, as they are often attributed the quality of what Neira-Piñeiro et al. (2021) address as 'transformational leadership' (p. 616). Such representations bestow women characters with an individuality to evolve as "speaking subjects" (Sells, 1995, p. 177), exercise control and freedom, and "achieve dreams and self-discovery" (Schiele et al., 2020, p. 666). This paves the way to accomplishing what Lemish (2010) implicitly suggests as ‘numerical equality’ that proposes a faithful treatment of gender across genres and an equal sex-preponderance. Even though this feminist trend is yet to solidify itself in contemporary animation (Spark, 2016), it is worth reflecting on how the animated representation of women have substantially enhanced since the advent of the second-wave of feminism in the 60/70s. If today’s ‘nuanced’ animated woman is perceived as possessing “depth, emotion, strength, vulnerability, courage and ambition” (Hughes, 2016, as cited in Potter, 2017, p. 68), it is largely because of the popular feminist imaginations of the 60/70s that helped shape and inform the shifting aesthetics in animated narratives (Burguera, 2011, p. 65).

Perea (2015) addresses the rise of cartoons that revolve(d) around the themes of ‘Girl Power’, reflecting a “cartoon renaissance in the 1990s” (p. 191). This stream of cartoons became famous for their representation of animated girls who embodied what Perea (2015) labels as the “feminine triptych” (p. 194), as beautifully captured in *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998). Perea’s (2015) feminine triptych comprised three intrinsic qualities that were repeated in the portrayal of many of 90s’ girl cartoons: “beauty, brains, and brawn” (p. 191). The triptych exemplified modern ‘girlhood’ that was perceived as an inspirational icon for young females (Schiele et al., 2020). It epitomised a kind of feminism that departed from the conventionalisms of female ‘symbolic annihilation’ (Tuchman, 1978) and opened avenues for ideological change.

Quite surprisingly, this ‘change’ began occurring way back in the 80s (Perea, 2015) and was even reflected, for instance, in many of Sweden’s feminist comics of the 70/80s. According to Nordenstam and Wictorin (2019), comics became an unusual platform for artists- inspired by the women’s liberation movement- to critically discuss women’s issues and re-locate women’s positions in private and public domains. These feminist comics were driven by the political agenda of the second-wave (the ‘personal being political’) and shifted the attention of the public eye to a massive range of female subjects, including “women’s history and culture, lesbianism, sexuality, the body, consumerism and environmental issues” (Nordenstam & Wictorin, 2019, p. 79). As Keys (2014) addresses cartoons as “a form of cultural pedagogy” (p. 357), the exploration of women’s issues through comics in the 70/80s suggests two crucial points of arrival: (1) that the significance of cartoon or animation to discuss more serious concerns (Wells, 2009) started receiving more critical thought/recognition; and

(2) that the effects of the women's liberation movements began reflecting itself in the social vocabulary of animations/cartoons of the 70s.

We identify a similar fashion formulating in *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971) and *Doraemon* (1979) in their treatments of the 'feminine aesthetic' (Wells, 1998) as argued above. Most important, that way these animations could be upheld as pioneers of a feminist trend in animations that later had its breakthrough in the 'Girl Power' renaissance of the 80/90s (Perea, 2015). These two animations departed from the usual, orthodox, conservative portrayal of women (albeit subtly) and introduced themselves to fresh avenues of feminist approach that upholds women as "speaking subjects" (Sells, 1995, p. 177), rather than diminishing them to voicelessness (Tuchman, 1978). The latter point, as we had mentioned in the beginning, about 'voicelessness' finds a discomforting illustration in the first animation discussed herein, *Triton of the Sea* (1972), and towards which we now should drive our attention to.

Discussion: From Objectification to Emancipation

I. *Triton of the Sea* (1972)

In Chapter I, we have already discussed the transformative factor about Triton's 'odyssey' and how the odyssey has been incorporated within the plot-aesthetics to inspire viewers about feelings of courage, self-reliance, and responsibility. Within that context, the anime manages to endure its socialising factor, but somehow dramatically fails in its portrayal of women characters, particularly Pipiko and Siren's. In their representations, the audiences might visualise an orthodox duality that critics like Perea (2018) and Burguera (2011) have pointed out in their critiques of the animations/cartoons of the 50/60s.

As discussed above, women characters were often segregated according to a rigorous dichotomy that positioned them as either 'docile/sassy' (Perea, 2018) or 'good/bad' (Burguera, 2011). A similar paradigm could also be perceived in *Triton of the Sea*, considering how Pipiko emerges as the voiceless, but naive, companion in Triton's enterprise; whereas Siren is depicted as an authoritative, but exclusively 'evil', member of the Poseidon clan, committed to killing Triton. This dichotomy, conclusively, corresponds with the ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women in children’s media (Tuchman, 1978) that either denies them agency or reflects that same agency negatively (Layng, 2001, p. 204) as possessing self-damaging traits, as we can, here, perceive being reproduced through Siren’s character.

If we first speak about Pipiko, it should be mentioned that she represents the figure of a ‘mermaid’, and it is in her portrayal as a ‘mermaid’ that an issue of representation could be easily located. Speaking exclusively in terms of *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Sells (1995) argues that the image of the ‘mermaid’ could be viewed as a “liberatory” symbol (p. 176). Although *Triton of the Sea* (1972) predates *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Sells’ arguments could be still employed to support and defend our critique of Pipiko as a female character, devoid of all values of Wells’ (1998) ‘feminine aesthetic’.

To Wells (1998), this feminine consciousness is vastly represented through the images of “woman as *subject*” (p. 200), in the sense that it reconceptualises women as assertive entities (Sells, 1995). This hopelessly fails to be reflected in the image of Pipiko, who is constantly portrayed as materialistic, irascible, impulsive, ignorant, and voiceless. *Triton of the Sea* either limits her within a relegated status or thoroughly (ab)uses her ignorance and impulsivity to put Triton and the accompanying dolphins in danger. This implies the restrictions within which the anime has created Pipiko, leaving no room for her sense of individuality to develop. Consequently, the anime traps Pipiko by positioning her as an “*object*” (Wells, 1998, p. 200). Her portrayal is not constructive for her(self) and gets overtly swallowed by the centrality that Triton receives (Aley & Hahn, 2020), as she succumbs to the fictional position of either a “silent or unopinionated consort” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 4).

At one surprising instance, in “Episode-IV”, during a dinosaur-attack, Pipiko loses her “hair accessory” (Triton of the Sea, 2018b) and- despite escaping to safety with Ruka and the other dolphins- decides on going back to retrieve the lost hair-necklace. It might seem that the anime is trying to mock her womanly attributes, when she goes to the extent of labelling the accessory as her “everything” (Triton of the Sea, 2018b, 18:04). This episode could be interpreted as a re-enactment of the same ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women (Tuchman, 1978) by imagining a woman’s world strictly within the realms of physical beauty, cosmetics, and fashion (Pila et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the status of centrality that Pipiko bestows upon her hair-necklace validates her position within the anime as that of an ‘object’: a worthless entity and a source of patriarchal laughter (Wells, 1998, p. 200).

Although Pipiko retrieves her necklace, her actions fuel Triton’s anger. Throughout the anime, Triton is portrayed as the most pivotal character (it is, indeed, Triton’s own journey), but there seems to be a constant imbalance between Triton and Pipiko’s representations. Both epitomise the sole surviving members of the Triton clan, mutually experiencing feelings of homelessness and nostalgia. Yet, the anime overshadows Pipiko’s longing for home (embodied in Proteus, a walrus and Pipiko’s guardian-figure) by the anxiety and identity-crisis that Triton often feels towards his role as the messiah of the Triton-clan. In multiple ways, *Triton of the Sea* liberates the stereotype of male-superiority by (1) overlooking Pipiko’s private anxieties (which are rarely attended by the three dolphins) and (2) yielding all sense of control to Triton (Sales, 2019).

This domineering factor about Triton allows him, at one instance (in “Episode-X”), to slap Pipiko when she disappears momentarily. This instance could be severely criticised as a hallmark in the anime, wherein male aggression on a woman is neither questioned nor ridiculed. More surprising is the fact that the anime projects Triton to be most-triggered (that he raises his hand on her) after Pipiko asserts that she “has [her] own will to go anywhere” (Triton of the Sea, 2018c, 19:54). It is here that one could easily perceive how the anime quickly snaps out Pipiko’s sense of self-liberation, pulling her back to her subjugated position.

In this context, we can recall Ross’ (2004) critique of *Disney* ‘girl’ movies that play with the “originally female voice” (p. 63) of the tales the movies are adapted from for two purposes: (1) to highlight the ‘repercussions’ of female emancipation/independence; and (2) curb feminine imagination. To Ross (2004), *Disney* manipulates the original tales (that could be deemed more progressive (in thought) than the films) to project its female protagonists’ ‘solo’ adventures as having negative consequences for themselves and, thereby, warning its female consumers to limit themselves within the protections of the home and domesticity (Gwynne, 2015).

Unfortunately, *Triton of the Sea* puts Pipiko on a similar tangent that disapproves of her as having a "will" of her own, reminding her of some patriarchy-imposed limits. This is re-echoed when Triton classifies her behaviour as a "bad manner" (Triton of the Sea, 2018c, 20:03). It is quite discomforting how the anime treats Pipiko, mocks her, silences her, ignores her personal growth as a woman, and resorts to violence if she tries to put her 'own will' on display. Sells (1995) interprets the mermaid-figure as a "critique [against] the narrow range of options that constrain women's lives" (p. 176), visualising the 'mermaid' as a symbol of emancipation, change, and agency. Sadly, these critical opinions do not match with the animated-portrayal of Pipiko, who is either projected in gendered ways or often kept at narrative-margins (Wells, 1998, p. 200). The anime decentralises Pipiko towards absolute docility and passivity, precluding her to demonstrate any kind of power like her antithesis: the 'evil' Siren.

If we were to compare Siren with Pipiko, we may positively witness a massive difference: where Pipiko represents voicelessness, Siren embodies unbridled power, chaos, and audacity, to an extent that we can define her as one of Sells' (1995) "speaking subjects" (p. 177). However, the anime reproduces our re-imaginations about Siren as a 'speaking' agent in a negative manner, leading her to be more hated than cherished by the audiences.

It is interesting to perceive how the anime has endured the binaries of 'ugly/bad' (Burguera, 2011) in the image of Siren, who appears to share an unusual similarity to the figure of Gorgon Medusa (from Greek mythology). Although this similarity is not physical (Siren neither has snakes in place of hair nor does her gaze can turn anything to stone), her stone-converting whip might evidence a relationship between her and Medusa. Yet again, in feminist criticism, the figure of Medusa has often been cited as a symbol of feminist defiance and resilience (Cixous, 1975/1976). However, in Siren's resemblance to Medusa, this relationship has been primarily used to vindicate the depictions of physically unattractive females as morally-corrupt (Bazzini et al., 2010).

Furthermore, it could be suggested that the anime presents a 'powerful/unattractive' female largely for satirical purposes. *Triton of the Sea* opens the possibility for Siren to express herself in assertive ways- constantly displaying authority and audacity (for example, during her confrontation with the Shark Commander (a male character) in

“Episode-XI”) (Triton of the Sea, 2018d, 9:48 – 10:40) - yet regresses her before the audience by means of her unpleasant appearance and essentially negative character. In Siren’s character-formation, neither combinations of ‘powerful’ and ‘pretty’ (Fischer, 2010) nor of ‘powerful’ and ‘positive’ (Burguera, 2011) seem to apply.

Here, Siren’s character-development as both ‘powerful’ and ‘negative’ may socialise viewers into thinking that powerful women are morally corrupt individuals, and that ‘good girls’ (Pila et al., 2018)- the female viewers, in this case- should not exercise any sense of control or power, considering the consequence that Siren’s character eventually faces. Siren’s death, in “Episode-XI” (20:15), at the hands of Triton, could be seen from two perspectives: where the (1) moral perspective may approach her death as justified (socialising viewers about the message of ‘goodness over evil’ that often perpetuates across several media-genres); the (2) feminist perspective may view her death as a reminder to young female consumers about exercising their sense of power exclusively within the limits of domesticity/home (Gwynne, 2015; Layng, 2001; Ross, 2004).

In this respect, the anime deploys Siren’s sense of agency to criticise the same ‘feminine aesthetic’ that demands critical attention towards women’ dreams for self-discovery and liberation (Wells, 1998) and maintains Pipiko’s docility to both ridicule and reinforce the societal positions of women. In doing so, the anime reproduces the same, old, traditional gender-stereotypes in its portrayal of either ‘subjugated’ or ‘overshadowed’ (Pipiko) or ‘hated’ or ‘authoritative’ (Siren) women, who are frequently driven a disturbing sense of masculinist control (Sales, 2019).

For all these reasons, *Triton of the Sea* could be perceived as a striking contrast to our other two animations in context to its approach towards female- and gender- portrayal. The anime reproduces a shallow, conservative, and gendered range of women characters who are constantly reminded, either overtly or covertly, of their powerlessness (Layng, 2001) against an ‘exalted’ male. Rather than subverting or challenging patriarchal control, the anime, as de Lauretis (1984) had argued, ‘fixes’ its animated women to specific social dynamics- operating outside the animation- that were often fabricated by the forces of sexism and patriarchy and that considerably denied women social visibility (Potter, 2017, p. 67), mobility, and vocality, which we may perceive as substantially improving in the succeeding two animations.

II. *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971-72)

Unlike the above-discussed anime, *Josie and the Pussycats* emerges, albeit subtly, as a buoyant example of Wells' (1998) idea of the 'feminine aesthetic' in its representation of two female characters: Valerie Smith/Brown and Alexandra Cabot. Even though there are two more female protagonists (Josie McCoy and Melody Valentine) within the narrative, the former two more closely fit within Wells' (1998) paradigm and, therefore, would be the centre of our critical attention, though we may occasionally run into the other two females for comparative/critical purposes. However, before we move onto analyse the animations' representations of its women, it seems necessary to shed some light on the backdrop that informs this animation, for this is the only animation that has not been analysed elsewhere in the dissertation.

Josie and the Pussycats involves a three-girl pop music band- comprising Josie (the band's lead-singer), Valerie, and Melody- as they travel and perform across the world alongside Alexander Cabot III (their manager), his sister, Alexandra, and Alan Mayberry (their technician, and Josie and Alexandra's mutual love interest). Across its sixteen, 'simple' episodes, the animation features the band's adventures and their subsequent entanglement into strange crime mysteries that they try resolving before successfully performing at their destined musical-venue, where the episode ends. However, where the episodes have been crafted with unwavering simplicity, the animation's representations of gender are covertly progressive and, thus, often not 'too simple' to perceive.

As Gwynne (2015) once noted, "domesticity, it appears, must be left behind if women are to become emancipated subjects" (p. 56). This sense of 'domesticity' significantly may imply dual connotations: (1) women's departure from the constraints of the 'home' towards industry and employment; and (2) women's rejection of their patriarchal subjugation as 'voiceless' objects (Wells, 1998). Quite interestingly, both the meanings perfectly fit the 'emancipatory' paradigm (Gwynne, 2015) within which the pussycats are positioned. Precisely, in their representation as travelling musicians, the animation manages to project the transition of its women from being a voiceless "*object*" to being a liberated, speaking "*subject*" (Wells, 1998, p. 200; Sells, 1995).

Unlike Pipiko's, *Josie and the Pussycats* attempts to depart from the frequent symbolic destruction of women characters (Tuchman, 1978) by bestowing them with individuality and independence that they exercise in their roles as 'travelling musicians'. This clause may break into two segments and can define the pussycats' positions as (1) travellers and (2) musicians, suggesting their feminist emancipation out of domesticity (Gwynne, 2015; Sells, 1995). This way the animation displays a brave feminine aesthetic (Wells, 1998) and effaces gender and social boundaries by featuring independent, liberated, unsilenced animated women (Layng, 2001; Tuchman, 1978). Amongst the pussycats, the portrayal of Valerie Smith seems the strongest, wherein *Josie and the Pussycats* answers critics' rising concerns pertaining to 'diversity' (Pila et al., 2018) and 'equality' (Potter, 2017). By depicting Valerie as an (1) Afro-American, (2) mechanical engineer, the animation offers freshness in its representation of members from other groups (Keys, 2014) and re-positions Valerie in a non-traditional role that has been often 'stereotypically' attributed to male characters (Potter, 2017).

Klein and Shiffman (2006) had pointed out that animated African-American characters have been systematically projected under the stereotypical limits of a "'singer', 'dancer', or 'musician'" (Keys, 2014, p. 364). This opinion does apply to the social position of Valerie as an Afro-American member of an all-girls' music band; however, the animation pushes her representation beyond the 'stereotype' that Klein and Shiffman (2006) speak of by re-positioning Valerie as a mechanical genius. Her mechanical feats are usually strewn across the narrative but are most evident in two respective episodes (entitled "Strangemoon Over Miami" and "X Marks the Spot") when (1) she alters the wiring system of a space-capsule (bringing Alexandra, Alexander and Melody back to Earth) (WatchCartoonOnline.bz, 2020d, 15:08) and (2) repairs the brakes of an uncontrollable bus (thus, regaining the bus's control) (WatchCartoonOnline.bz, 2020c, 10:28). In a way, one can perceive that Valerie is 'doubly emancipated': (1) as an Afro-American musician signifying the growing trend in animation about diversity and inclusivity (Keys, 2014); and (2) as an expert of mechanics, signifying not only women’s arrival onto fresh, non-conservative social roles, but also women’s evolution as Wells’ (1998) ‘speaking subject archetype’.

However, where the animation may uphold the empowered character of Valerie, it could become a subject of equally severe criticism for its implicit indoctrination of the prototype of the hourglass female figure (Sá & Tavares, 2017) and partial rejection of other female body types. *Josie and the Pussycats*, as Sá and Tavares (2017) highlight, only features women characters as having “slim (or even extremely thin) hourglass figures, long legs and pretty faces” (p. 351). It uses instances of the portrayal of ‘non-slim’ women for the purpose of either implicit “denigration” or “trivialization” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 13), wherein it projects only chubby, unattractive females. Here, it should be pointed out that these women are not featured as sentient entities, like the pussycats, but have been depicted either in a street-banner, in “Spy School Spoof” (WatchCartoonOnline.bz, 2020e, 04:43), or as balloon-dummies, in “Swap Plot Flop” (WatchCartoonOnline, 2020b, 14:18), which further suggests a discomforting philosophy that the animation attempts to disseminate (Burguera, 2011).

By projecting these women within 'non-alive' dimensions, *Josie and the Pussycats* cleverly accomplishes two purposes. Firstly, it reiterates the traditional ‘beauty stereotype’ that is connected to female body shapes (Rowe, 2019), and that frequently extols the hourglass figure as the most ideal and desirable (Sá & Tavares, 2017). Secondly, the animation reproduces a dominant ideology- that denunciates women (Tuchman, 1978) who possess other body-types, particularly ‘pear’ or ‘round’ shapes- without explicitly portraying a ‘physically-alive’ female character of a similar body shape that may attract similar aligning criticism, thereby, manipulatively guarding itself from the latter criticism. In “Swap Plot Flop”, for example, the animation places the two balloon-dummies against the bodies of Josie and Melody, as they are projected as holding the dummies, for (1) satirising the bodies of the dummies (and, in doing so, mocking their media-consumers who share the bodies as the dummies) and (2) offering an attractive-scale for the audience to compare the physical appearances of the pussycats and the two balloon-dummies.

These occasional, covert, and satirical representations of 'non-alive' and 'chubby' females regresses the animation back to the league of gendered animations like *Triton of the Sea* that are infamous for their voiceless female characters. Through these representations, the animation not only implicitly body shames young female consumers, but also contributes to the cultivation of low levels of self-confidence and optimism in women about their private and public identities (Bazzini et al., 2010). However, where the animation could be accused of developing a discomforting form of body-consciousness amongst young women (in particular), it could still be appreciated, as already-mentioned, for its innovative approach towards the 'feminine aesthetic' (Wells, 1998). We have already discovered how this aesthetic develops in Valerie, but of special interest is the character of Alexandra, who- despite not being a member of the girls' band- occupies the centre-stage throughout the episodes, to an extent that she could be deemed 'more' central to the animation than the pussycats.

Where Valerie's depictions are the strongest, Alexandra's appear the boldest. The animation constructs her as the most expressive amongst all characters, hinting at a volcanic manifestation of the feminine aesthetic at display. Wells (1998) had poignantly remarked that this aesthetic could be revealed through several means, including a woman's "interaction with men and other women, her perception of her private and public role" (p. 200), and the recognition of her feminine desire. These three aspects intertwine in Alexandra and are usually observed in her relationships with others, particularly Alan and Josie.

Josie and the Pussycats offers shades of progressive thoughts when it allows Alexandra (1) to suggest her romantic desire for Alan to the audiences and (2) pull Josie away from Alan's constant attention. It is worth mentioning that where Alexandra's romantic, yet unfruitful, chase for Alan may be interpreted as a reproduction of the stereotypical belief that men frequently occupy the centre in women's worlds (Davis, 2006)- and her constant attempts to embarrass Josie as a manifestation of romantic jealousy- her sense of control and detailed construction as a "speaking subject" (Sells, 1995, p. 177) eclipses her failed attempts in romance. As a woman, Alexandra is gifted with all the agency to express her sense of desire (Wells, 1998), unlike Pipiko who endures Triton's dominance and, finally, resorts to 'voicelessness' (Tuchman, 1978). This is where Alexandra's character arrives as a milestone in the historical evolution of animated women characters as “emancipated subjects” (Gwynne, 2015, p. 56; Perea, 2015).

Additionally, Alexandra’s sense of emancipation is subtly informed by her complete rejection of domestic roles (Giles, 2004). For instance, in “The Nemo’s a No No Affair” (WatchCartoonOnline.bz, 2020a, 03:05), the group is asked to “work [their] way over” the cruise trip for they did not have enough money, and so, in the kitchen, when Valerie asks Alexandra if she wants to “wash or dry” the dishes, she answers her back by stating that she would do “neither”, but “supervise” (03:42). Being the first episode of the series, it affixes Alexandra with assertiveness, self-liberation, and an uncompromising sense of radical agency, all of which the animation preserves across its sixteen episodes.

Another point worth remembering about Alexandra is that she is offered the most dialogues within the series, which is a factor often reported as another example of female-stereotyping (Walsh & Leaper, 2020, p. 22). Despite this finding, we perceive that the animation situates her dialogues- like her conversation with Valerie- as validations of her sense of authority that she exercises over others. Her statements stimulate her evolution as a more nuanced and complex character than the three pussycats. Where Valerie emerges as another empowered staple, she never manages to surpass Alexandra in terms of exerting power or authority. Alexandra’s character steps into an unexplored, unseen chasm of womanhood and self-liberation (Sells, 1995). Collectively, the characters of Valerie and Alexandra connote to a critical transition of female representation from objectification towards emancipation that witnessed its culmination and further movements in the cartoons of the 80s/90s (Perea, 2015). Their characters embody the spirit of the second-wave of feminism and take it forward to inspire viewers, especially women, to be independent, assertive, brave, and, most significantly, the “subject” that knows ‘how to speak’ (Sells, 1995, p. 177).

Josie and the Pussycats becomes a pioneering example in the animation world by virtue of its on-screen implementation of changing gender and social values, (re)modifying the public image of women as self-possessed, liberated, powerful individuals who do not need what Aley and Hahn (2020) address as the “masculine touch” (p. 7) to help them pave their ways. Rather, the women in *Josie and the*

Pussycats seek absolute control without requiring male intervention, as it happens, for example, when Josie drives a bus in "X Marks the Spot" even when Alan (a male character) was already present in the bus. This sense of patriarchal defiance reverberates in the pussycats' public image as musicians and successful position within the music industry- which is often attributed as sexist and male-dominated (Davies, 2004)- as they are make frequent travels across the world to perform in their global musical concerts. For its time of production, *Josie and the Pussycats* heralds the maturity of Pipiko, as she now holds her 'own will' to transform as a speaking subject, unafraid of Triton or his ruthless kind (Wells, 1998; Sells, 1994).

III. *Doraemon* (1979-2005)

What distinguishes *Doraemon* (1979-2005) from *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971-72) are two transparent strands of critical thought. Firstly, the former's partial rejection of what Connell (1987) had called "hegemonic masculinity" and, subsequent, mainstream introduction of what Beynon (2004) defines as the "new man" (p. 200). Secondly, its incorporation of the philosophy of the *ūman ribu* (women's liberation movement(s) in Japan) in the character-developments of Jaiko Goda and Shizuka Minamoto. In doing so, *Doraemon* (1979-2005) takes a leap ahead of other animated works of its time by offering viewers a critical mode of change that aligns with both women's and men's changing social dynamics, emerging as a trailblazer in the dissemination of *ūman ribu*'s feminist philosophy in post-war Japan and beyond.

Shigematsu (2018) speaks of the *ūman ribu* as "characterized by its militancy against Japanese patriarchy, [and] emphasis on. . . women-centered cultural transformation" (p. 206), amongst other aspects, including the movement's "connection with, and a desire to be part of, a broader range of liberation movements that extended beyond Japan" (p. 206). The latter-point may confirm *ūman ribu*'s growth out of the US-led feminist movements of the 60s/70s that were known for their global influence and appreciation. In the world of *Doraemon*, this treatment of the *ūman ribu* on the cultural transformation of women is, firstly, subtly embodied in the character of Jaiko Goda, Gian's younger sister, who often makes recurring on-screen appearances as a cartoonist and illustrator.

Ebihara (2002) mentions that manga/comic became an interesting form of expression for women to, typically, confront women's issues in Japan during the rise of the *ūman ribu*, reminding us of how feminist cartoons became a weapon at the hands of women in Sweden to discuss issues related to women's lives (Nordenstam & Wictorin, 2019), as revealed earlier in the chapter. It is interesting to note how comics (or manga in Japan), during the wake of the second-wave of feminism, began (1) defining a new trend in the entertainment industry that stimulated an influx of women artists/cartoonists (Nordenstam & Wictorin, 2019) which was (2) punctuated by an urgent recognition of women's issues and experiences as women (Montresor, 2004).

Even though *Doraemon* never discloses the content of any of Jaiko's comics, it, nevertheless, situates Jaiko's strength in her role as an author, allowing her to 'write' her destiny as a future comic artist. Additionally, the anime never employs Jaiko's dreams as sources of ridicule but, instead, offers her all the support and love that she needs through her on-screen co-characters. Through Jaiko's position as an author, *Doraemon* revolutionises the portrayals of women from being passive "objects" (Wells, 1998, p. 200) to becoming active "*subjects*" (p. 200), that further widens in the character of Shizuka Minamoto.

In Shizuka's portrayal as a 'schoolgirl', many viewers' opinions would align with Western thought that perceives "the Japanese girl as charming, shy, obedient, hard-working, deferential and uncomplaining" (Hinton, 2013, para. 6). Additionally, the Japanese meaning of 'Shizuka' as 'Quiet' strengthens her representation as an archetype of the Japanese schoolgirl- raising doubts if Shizuka possesses any elements of the feminine aesthetic (Wells, 1998)- who is only a "naïve, child-like character" (Hinton, 2013, para. 29) often employed as an erotic spectacle in animation (Wells, 1998, p. 200). At a closer look, however, one may realise that Shizuka is, indeed, a nuanced character, being in possession of not only the traditional 'Japanese girl' attributes, but also a modern range of other qualities like "strength, vulnerability, courage and ambition" (Hughes, 2016, as cited in Potter, 2017, p. 68). At one instance, Shizuka becomes a magical, charming fairy (PureToons, 2019i), fulfilling wishes or saving others from harm (as she saves Gian and Suneo from a dog attack); whereas, in the other, she expresses deep anger at Doraemon and Nobita, as she runs after them, with a broomstick, yelling:

“गुस्सा क्या मुझे नही आ सकता?”

translated as

"Can I not get angry?"
(PureToons, 2019j, 12:16)

At both instances, we may come across the level of centrality that Shizuka receives in the narratives, and the sense of agency that is offered to her character. These instances allow her to develop as an individual and woman, becoming the first milestones in Shizuka’s representation as Wells’ (1998) “*subject*” (p. 200). As a magical fairy, for example, the anime ‘dresses’ her up to exercise the power of believing in one’s dreams- as it was Shizuka’s dream to become a fairy, inspiring young girls to be aspirational/dreamful. However, one may severely criticise the nature of Shizuka’s dream to be a conventional, feminine ‘fairy’ as limited and sexist (Walsh & Leaper, 2020).

Here, it would be worth remembering that her portrayal as a ‘fairy’ or ‘saviour’- noting how she saves Gian and Suneo- functions as a reflection of what Neira-Piñeiro et al. (2021) call “a transformational kind of leadership” paradigm (p. 616). This fresh paradigm situates Shizuka within the spectrum of altruism and self-liberation. It is through Shizuka’s altruistic actions that the anime (1) reminds her of her individuality and independence and (2) celebrates her character as a woman who is “determined, brave, and capable of making decisions” (Neira-Piñeiro et al. 2021, p. 616).

Furthermore, it could be argued that a similar fashion may be felt in Shizuka’s angry demeanour, in the other instance, as she is seen running after (and yelling at) our two male protagonists. Firstly, Shizuka’s rhetorical question, “Can I not get angry?”, is a striking departure from the usual symbolic annihilation of women characters (Tuchman, 1978), and an enduring arrival at multiple points of female emancipation that could not be silenced, ridiculed, or ignored (Wells, 1998). Secondly, Shizuka’s apparent attack on Doraemon and Nobita is projected to serve dual-purposes: (1) to establish it as an archetype of feminist retaliation against the agents of patriarchal oppression, in the spirit of the *ūman ribu* (Shigematsu, 2018); and (2) re-confirm

Shizuka's narrative-position as a "speaking *subject*" (Wells, 1998, p. 200) who exerts an assertive 'control' over not only others, but also her 'self' and 'body'.

The 'feminine aesthetic' deepens in this context, which is reiterated by Shizuka's refusal to get her private-self exposed before Nobita. At one instance, to figure out which sex is better, Shizuka and Nobita exchange their skins (and get into each other's bodies) with the help of a gadget called the "Replacement Rope" (PureToons, 2019k). Though Nobita miserably fails to pull-off his new identity, Shizuka, as Nobita, becomes quite comfortable in this identity until she finally realises that her 'body' belongs to Nobita, and quickly asks Doraemon to return her to her own(self) before her body gets exposed to Nobita's 'male gaze'.

The question about women's 'control' over their bodies and the male gaze has consistently been a topic of critical discussion amongst a whole range of scholars (Wells, 1998). One may perceive Shizuka's anxious return to her 'body' as the anime's symbolic celebration of women's growing status as self-liberated agents who exercise, and possess, absolute authority and control over their private selves (Sells, 1995). Moreover, via Shizuka's success as a male (Nobita), we may also argue that *Doraemon* attempts to imply the possibility of women's success if gender roles are jettisoned. These transformations encourage a subtle introduction of women in masculine, "non-traditional roles" (Potter, 2017, p. 70) and a re-establishment of women like Shizuka as modern, post-war symbols of what *ūman ribu* stands for (Shigematsu, 2018).

Subsequently, Shizuka emerges as "a symbolic representation of young Japan" (Hinton, 2013, para. 5), reflecting the recovered and modern values of *ūman ribu*. In Shizuka, the audience may discover brief pockets of the 'feminine aesthetic' (though not as strongly as Alexandra's) but, as a whole, *Doraemon* embodies in her the shifting social definitions of a 'woman' as an emancipated "subject" (Gwynne, 2015, p. 56; Wells, 1998, p. 200). It maintains Shizuka's cultural preservation as a favourable role model for young viewers.

Apart from the anime's attempts to align its aesthetics with the values of the *ūman ribu* (Shigematsu, 2018) through the images of Shizuka and Jaiko, its most intriguing aspect rests in the character-portrayal of Nobita Nobi as the "new man" (Beynon, 2004, p.

200), as he becomes the anti-thesis to the hetero-normative codes of what Connell (1987) discusses as “hegemonic masculinity”. It should be noted that the ‘new man’ is considered as one of the three standard manifestations of the emergent, subversive masculinities (Sales, 2019) of the 70s/80s that arose, partly, due to the concurrent feminist movements’ impacts on men’s social and private lives (Beynon, 2004).

Amongst the other two were the ‘anti-sexist man’ (Christian, 1994) and the ‘new lad’ (Beynon, 2004, p. 210). The former was defined by (1) his pro-feminist attitudes about issues as central as sexual autonomy, education, equal division of domestic labour, equal pay scale, amongst many others and (2) his sense of solidarity and cooperation with the feminist movements (Segal, 1990). The latter, on the other hand, became a flagrant opposer of (1) women’s “growing assertiveness” (Beynon, 2004, p. 210) and sense of control over society and polity and (2) the rise of what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) call as “subordinated masculinities” (p. 832) which can include, but not limited to, the above-mentioned two types of subversive masculinities.

It would be worth noting that in the representations of the ‘new man’, we may perceive a complicated juxtaposition of what the ‘anti-sexist man’ and the ‘new lad’ represent. The ‘new man’ is widely advertised as “a narcissistic man portrayed as macho with a ‘soft centre'’, a man who takes an active part in childcare, at least when the cameras are about” (Christian, 1994, p. 11). Though the ‘new man’ has been immensely criticised as a projection of double standards, Chapman (1988) notes that the ‘new man’ may still provide some “useful role models for those redefining their masculinity” (p. 226).

Likewise, in Nobita, we may visualise similar glimpses of the ‘new man’, with an exception that he is not portrayed as “narcissistic” or “macho” (Christian, 1994, p. 11). The anime often pictures Nobita as a soft young boy with an incessant longing to become a ‘new lad’, at least in front of his peers. Here, we can interpret his inclination towards cat’s cradle (a game of strings), preferences for girls’ company, disinterest in sports/any other physical activity as symptoms of his subversive masculinity (Sales, 2019). While, at the same time, Nobita’s constant yearnings to become both physically powerful as Gian and intellectually capable as Dekisugi takes him back, albeit unsuccessfully, to the image of the ‘new lad’ that he desperately wishes to possess. In doing so, Nobita usually swings between being the ‘soft man’ and the ‘new lad’ before returning to his original masculinity.

At few instances, the anime reminds Nobita of his different masculinity, encouraging him to accept himself, and often comforting him by suggesting that there is nothing wrong with his choices and preferences. Though this task is usually performed by Doraemon, one episode features a sympathising robot that reiterates similar motivational words to a distressed Nobita. For example, when Gian pokes fun at Nobita by asserting that Nobita would have to “play with strings” all his life, the robot comforts an embarrassed Nobita:

“‘बेसबोल कोई खास स्पोर्ट नही है, और तुम्हारे लिए ये नही बना है।“

translated as:

"Baseball is not such a great sport, and it is not made for you"
(PureToons, 2019h, 18:50).

Even though the robot is talked of as an unreliable source of comfort and was solely manufactured to speak sugar-coated words of comfort- and, thereby, is more destructive than inspirational- its conversations with Nobita and, subsequent, rejection of gender codes and norms could be perceived as *Doraemon*’s appreciation of modern society’s transition from ‘conventional masculinity’ to ‘subversive masculinity’ (Sales, 2019), which is epitomised through the character of Nobita and prompted by the growing influence of the *ūman ribu* in the 70s. In Nobita, we may discover glimpses of a fresh type of masculinity that resembles Beynon’s (2004) ‘new man’, who is both traditional and unconventional, masculine and feminine, but who later accepts his different identity, albeit unwillingly than happily.

Such fresh portrayals of masculinity and femininity help *Doraemon* underpin its links with the liberation movements of its times, which is reverberated in the image of Shizuka, Jaiko, and Nobita. While the former two represent an outgrowing manifestation of the feminine aesthetic (Wells, 1998) in post-war Japan, rejuvenating the position of the ‘Japanese girl’ misconstrued (by) in the West (Hinton, 2013), the latter represents a shift towards the emotional emancipation of a once-tight form of masculinity. Here, one may compare Nobita to Alexander (from *Josie and the Pussycats*) considering their feeble physical makeups. However, where *Josie and the Pussycats* only presents a single side of Alexander's personality, *Doraemon* projects Nobita as a nuanced protagonist with all his strengths, vulnerabilities, and insecurities.

These intricacies in characterisation makes *Doraemon* an outstanding illustration of the feminist philosophy of the *ūman ribu*, wherein both the genders are represented in non-stereotypical fashions, levitating both men and women in the anime as archetypes of Sells' (1995) "speaking subjects" (p. 177). Though Nobita often problematises this notion through his purported laddism (Beynon, 2004), we may still perceive his representation as a pioneering example of an emergent form of masculinity that combines elements of both hegemonic and subversive masculinity. As a 'new man', Nobita stands way better than Triton and, consequently, a more suitable role model for audiences who struggle with gender-codes. *Doraemon*'s emancipatory representations of Jaiko and Shizuka- paired with its sympathetic treatment of Nobita- highlights the anime's progressive vision and its interests in departing from stereotypical attitudes/images and investing in more path-breaking representations.

Conclusion

Critics like Perea (2015) and Burguera (2011) have been invaluable in our crucial understandings of the evolution of girl cartoons during the 80s/90s. These productions were potentially infused with the philosophy of the 'feminine aesthetic' (Wells, 1998) that emerged in the 70s as a form of aesthetic and artistic expression, informed by an evolving feminine consciousness. We argued that this feminist renaissance (Perea, 2015) in animations- that witnessed its breakthrough during the 80s/90s- began displaying its first signs of change in the animations of the 70s, namely *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971-72) and *Doraemon* (1979-2005).

These two animations could be perceived as pioneers, representing a fresh, new dawn for feminism. In these two texts, we have perceived a significant development in the representations of women characters, in particular, and gender, in general, as they detach themselves from what we had discussed as the "symbolic annihilation" of women (Tuchman, 1978, p. 8) and progress towards a more emancipated manifestation of character-representation that is marked by diversity (Keys, 2014), equality (Mihailova, 2019; Potter, 2017), and mutual respect. These animations break away from a wide category of animations that are often accused of gender-stereotyping (Pila et al., 2018; England et al., 2011) or reinforcing ethnic and sexual prejudice (Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2009).

It is here that we had discussed *Triton of the Sea* (1972) as an example to archetype the latter-mentioned category and deploy it as a comparative model for feminist critique while approaching the other two animations. In the character of Pipiko, we had visualised a concerning picture of patriarchal subordination that (1) makes its way through "victimization" and "trivialization" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 13) and (2) is frequently repeated by means of aggression, domination, or authority, as we had perceived in the sense of control that Triton exercises over Pipiko (Sales, 2019, p. 16).

Against this gendered dynamic, we perceive how refreshing the feminist imaginations in *Josie and the Pussycats* and *Doraemon* are. By characters like Valerie, Shizuka or Alexandra, the audiences may discover an unanticipated rise of 'animated women' (Layng, 2001) who embody the strengths and vulnerabilities of womanhood (Potter, 2017), combined with the urgency to acknowledge and appreciate the female experience (Montresor, 2004). As these animations intertwine themselves with the notion of the 'feminine aesthetic' (Wells, 1998), they begin introducing their women characters as less in a vacuum-like state (Tuchman, 1978) and more as what Wells' (1998) had called a "*subject*" (p. 200), attributing them with everything that Pipiko had been denied: feminist agency, individuality, and, most importantly, the ability to speak (Sells, 1995, p. 177).

As speaking subjects, these women demonstrate three vital aspects: (1) the validation of female potential in both social and private spaces; (2) their value as inspirational icons to young female viewers; and (3) their contribution into the making of the often-celebrated animated girl characters of the 80s/90s (Perea, 2015). These women characters display signs of non-conformity, authority, liberty, and an unfamiliar sense of leadership capacity (Neira-Piñeiro et al., 2021). By 'unfamiliar', we imply a developing tendency in animation to portray gender in non-stereotypical fashions that was unsurprisingly absent in animations made before the 70s, but ultimately released as a new, different wave of social and critical thought through these animations.

This tendency towards an unorthodox, and more progressive, treatment of gender is, further, expanded over through the image of Nobita as the ‘new man’ (Beynon, 2004) and the transitions his character makes from the hegemonic strand of masculinity (Connell, 1987) towards the more subversive form (Sales, 2019). In one sense, *Doraemon* could be lauded for its inclusive treatment of the three forms of masculinities that Beynon (2004) highlights, all subtly represented through different male characters spread across the anime.

Where Nobita is the ‘new man’ (trying to ‘fit-in’, while preserving his softness), Gian and Suneo epitomise the ‘new lad’ in their usual disapproval of Nobita’s non-masculine preferences and their covert abhorrence towards anything that is ‘feminine’. However, while the ‘new lad’, as Beynon (2004) notes, despises the “growing assertiveness of women” (p. 210), *Doraemon* never positions Gian and Suneo as disrespectful towards Shizuka or any other female character. This may lead us to re-think that the anime precisely offers glimpses of the developing laddism in small quantities that would still not appear as challenging the liberation movements. Although they do not want themselves to be identified with traditionally feminine aspects of private/public life (as, sometimes, Nobita is), but they always display signs of respect for their female peers and are generally not positioned as ever voicing any anti-feminist or sexist opinions.

The third strand of masculinity that surfaces the narratives of *Doraemon* is represented by the recurring character of Hidetoshi Dekisugi who emerges as an example of the ‘anti-sexist man’ (Christian, 1994), by virtue of his chivalrous attitude towards both male and female characters. Although Dekisugi plays no leading role, his portrayal is the most positive amongst all other male characters, as he may epitomise the notion of male solidarity with feminist thought (Segal, 1990), emerging as a suitable, ‘gender-aschematic’ figure to be used by feminist parents for the gender socialisation of their children (Bem, 1983). However, his anti-sexism is never explicitly stated in *Doraemon* but is suggested through his ways of conduct that are preserved across the anime.

Josie and the Pussycats and *Doraemon* pioneer a fresh range of characters that do not shy away from being different and offer a transforming, progressive picture that aligns with the values of second-wave feminism. For example, in terms of female invisibility in animations (Potter, 2017) or the fixation of women to a single, outdated, gendered form of identification (de Lauretis, 1984), these animations depart from such orthodox practices and introduce their women characters to previously unexplored avenues of feminine representation as authoritative, liberated, individual subjects (Wells, 1998).

It is worth highlighting that these two animations were both directed and created by male artists and animators: *Josie and the Pussycats* by Dan DeCarlo (creator), William Hanna, and Joseph Barbera (directors), and *Doraemon* by the celebrated Japanese duo, Fujiko Fujio (creators). Unlike the traditional, fabricated portrayal of animated women that is often informed by the socio-cultural attitudes of men towards women (Wosk, 2015, p. 10), these male artists apparently exemplified a developing male consciousness that was inspired by the feminine consciousness of the 60/70s. Through these male artists, we may again perceive glimpses of the different masculinities that detached themselves from the normative form (Sales, 2019), and which later reflected in their respective productions, and that, further, became largely responsible for reshaping the feminist thought that later surfaced in contemporary animations (Burguera, 2011; Perea, 2015).

Here, it would be helpful if we return to Dorfman’s (2010) intriguing remarks about media’s purported intention to teach viewers "how not to rebel" (p. xxi). However, despite being undoubtedly true, his remarks cannot be applied to *Josie and the Pussycats* and *Doraemon*. Contrary to what he believes, these animations “rebel” against conventional representations of gender, represent self-liberated and opinionated women characters, and, therefore, motivate viewers to rid themselves off the voicelessness of Pipiko and instead embrace Alexandra’s authority, Shizuka’s leadership, or Valerie’s intellect. Either way, there is enough room for empowerment.

Chapter V

The Fish, the Ant, and the Bull: Instances of the ‘Autobiographical Animal’

Introduction to Anthropomorphism

Across the dissertation, we have been trying to understand animations as symbolic, independent abstractions of the real world by analysing them from multiple perspectives (Wells, 1998). Jardim (2013) extends this critical viewpoint by reflecting over the significance of anthropomorphic animals that have extensively occupied the centre-stage in the animation industry since the first decade of the twentieth century. Controversial as it appears, the phenomenon of anthropomorphism, nonetheless, has been argued as a poignant catalyst for the process of identity-construction as the former stimulates our understandings of the social positions of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ (Gebhard et al., 2003). Searles (1960) discusses the inter-relationship between individuals and the “nonhuman environment” (p. 6) to recognise the role of the latter in the emotional and psychological development of humans. Although however, Searles (1960) is speaking in the context of schizophrenia, his argument helps us concretize the importance of the ‘animate’ nonhuman ‘Other’ (including all forms of flora and fauna) in humans’ perceptions about their and others social positions and how this sense of affinity becomes the locus of human-animal relations (DeMello, 2012; Wilson, 1984), re-capturing a bigger portrait of compassion, dissonance, and identification.

In the wake of the Anthropocene, the practice of anthropomorphism allows us, as the human-race, to reconsider our opinions and approaches towards the nonhuman ‘Other’. It allows us to re-develop the avenues of human-centred interests into more inclusive spaces of moral consideration, and recognise the gravity of the Anthropocene (You, 2021). Anthropomorphism helps the nonhuman ‘Other’ re-discover its moral status as what Regan (1988) had beautifully expressed as “subjects-of-a-life” (p. 243). It repositions the ‘nonhuman’ by the pedestal of ‘othered’ centrality to recognise that “they have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future. . . an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain. . . the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time" (Regan, 1988, p. 243).

If we strictly speak in context to 'nonhuman' animals (our analytical focus in this chapter), Anderson and Henderson's (2005) scientific counterargument about animals as being incapable of "reflective consciousness" (p. 298)- which they argue as animals' ineptitude to realise their self-awareness- may decapitate Regan's (1988) account that is more engraved in moral ethics; but it is Regan's (1988) argument that skyrockets the philosophical undertones of animal-sympathy and inter-species harmony. This may become the foundation of anthropomorphic animals-representations that explains the vitality of human-animal kinship (You, 2021). Such representations not only impart traditional human values, but also raises our awareness about animal rights, animal agency (DeMello, 2012; Regan, 1988), and what You (2021) has labelled as "creaturely consciousness" (p. 183).

In relation to human values being imparted via using human-like animals, it is crucial to highlight that this feature of anthropomorphism has been severely criticised by critics like Hübben (2016) and Bone (2013). They argue that animals' deployment as "conduits[s] for learning to be human" (Bone, 2013, p. 61) blurs our moral understanding of animals as co-inhabitants of the same ecosystem (You, 2021) and precludes us to deeply appreciate their significance and centrality within humans' socio-cultural contexts. The latter criticism informs us about the urgency in introducing what Gebhard et al. (2003) have addressed as a "kind of 'enlightened' anthropomorphism" (p. 92-93). Such a manifestation of anthropomorphism, while apprising us of some human values, does not overlook the distinct 'otherness' of nonhumans and the various facets of their sense of 'being' and 'existence'.

This style of approaching anthropomorphism can become a bedrock to a genre of children's literature that You (2021) calls "animal autobiography" (p. 190). It may be deployed as "an apt form for de-familiarizing human-centred territory" (p. 190) and which shall become the intersectional nexus of our understanding of the three animated movies we would be analysing in this chapter: *Finding Nemo* (2003), *The Ant Bully* (2006), and *Ferdinand* (2017). This framework would further support our general understanding of animations and their significance in the processes of children's socialisation. Moreover, it would help us acknowledge these narratives' contributions to children's understanding of human-animal relationships, creaturely consciousness, and the necessity of kindness and reverence. Exhibiting subtle features of the 'animal autobiography', the three movies transform into symbolic narratives of animal agency.

These narratives probe into the human-animal dynamics to renew the audiences' understandings of the dichotomies between the 'human' (Self) and the 'animal' (Other), their inter-relatedness and the importance of being aligned with the natural world (Wilson, 1984). In an attempt to inspire a 'creaturely consciousness', these movies validate the practice of anthropomorphism as a healthy, eco-centred exploration that aims at strengthening the 'human-animal bond' instead of damaging it, as many scholars claim, debate, and scrutinise (McFarland, 2009) which now brings us closer to perceive how anthropomorphism is misinterpreted as a complicated exercise that is both governed and driven by human interests and human selfishness.

But is it 'that' Innocent?

Hübben (2016) makes a pertinent observation by equating anthropomorphism to the phenomenon of 'speciesism' that is frequently debunked by animal rights activists as a thoroughly unfair, 'evil' illustration of human selfishness, and is closely related to the 'sociozoologic scale'. As a form of ideological suppression, speciesism- as reflected in children's animal picture-books- socialises children "into a tradition of thinking that systematically values humanity over animality and naturalises the domination of animals by humans" (Hübben, 2016, p. 50) and implicitly deploys the sociozoologic scale to determine animals' relationships with humans and subsequent categorisation (as 'harmful', 'beneficial', etc.) based upon those relationships and inherent interests to humans. Following the same trajectory, de Waal (2001) notes that the purpose of anthropomorphism is more human- than animal- centred: that animals are exclusively used to "mock, educate, moralize, and entertain" (p. 73); and that anthropomorphism tells us nothing about 'the animal', but about how it has been culturally re-constructed by humans (Baker, 2001). This heavily implies that anthropomorphism misrepresents the natural kingdom and presents animals in "unrealistic and deceitful ways", and, furthermore, as active agents within many "pseudo-environmentalist films" like *Happy Feet* (2006) and *Over the Hedge* (2006) (McFarland, 2009, p. 94, 103).

McFarland (2009) is sceptical about animals' sense of agency. She believes this sense of 'agency' brings more detriment than benefit if the purpose of environmentalist narratives is to spark collective awareness about the natural world, more because such anthropomorphic narratives allow animals to confront and resolve (by themselves) the environmental issues the film propagates. In doing so, these narratives invite negligible audience participation precisely because these narratives imply that the 'problem no longer exists', and that human-intervention and thought are not deemed necessary. Even though this critique might discomfort You's (2021) optimism about animal agency, we can still assume that anthropomorphic agency is meant to inspire human-intervention and is based upon the idea of human-and audience- participation in understanding the environmental problems. Because, as Anderson and Henderson (2005) have pointed out, while animals possess "phenomenal consciousness"- awareness about their environment- they do not possess "relative consciousness" (p. 298), where it becomes our responsibility- as relatively more conscious humans- to protect, preserve, and maintain the ecosystem and every entity that constitutes the nonhuman environment. In a way, such narratives are built upon the notion of retrospective analysis, sympathy, and an outward interest in the revival of what we have spoken about as "creaturely consciousness" (You, 2021, p. 183).

Animal misrepresentation, however, becomes a major source of concern for Anderson and Henderson (2005). They believe that fantastical representations of animals aggravate children's unnatural expectancy from real-life counterparts of these animated, talking animals that often act as children's caregivers during childhood. Their arguments are theoretically based upon Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory and the interplay of "representational models of attachment figures" (p. 141). One part of Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory argues that children's sense of attachment with- or perception towards- companion animals (caregivers) may

> persist relatively unchanged into and throughout adult life. . . often to continue. . . despite repeated evidence that the model is inappropriate. . . Such biased

> perceptions and expectations lead to various misconceived beliefs about. . . false expectations about the way [animals/people] will behave (p. 141-142).

These ‘false expectations’ are fuelled by anthropomorphic/fantastical representations of animals. These may cultivate unnatural wants- within an individual- out of a companion animal, rendering a “‘real’” animal (Baker, 2001, p. 10) in danger, and may even affect (and severe) children’s later experiences with animals if their wants remain unfulfilled. Therefore, Anderson and Henderson (2005) argue that anthropomorphism morphs natural reality and distances animals from what they are. The deployment of animals in children’s stories dealing with a ‘real’ human issue may simplify (or decorate) the narrative but is achieved at the cost of cultural sacrifice(s) of animals whose stories are being marginalised, manipulated, and, sometimes, scarred.

Another point that Anderson and Henderson (2005) refer to pertains to the idea of ‘moral vegetarianism’. This point emerges from their critique of Simons’ (2002) opinion that anthropomorphic representations may bear a positivist function by stimulating kindness towards animals. They contest Simon’s (2002) argument by seeking justifications for the scarcity of people practicing moral vegetarianism, which is where Singer’s (1980) utilitarianist ideology might be able to provide us with a rhetorical counter-stance. According to Singer (1980), the theory of utilitarianism relates to notions of “minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure” (p. 328), and, naturally, perceives animals as worthy of equal moral consideration, precisely due to their sentient natures. Utilitarianism is, then, connected to vegetarianism which Singer (1980) perceives as “a way of attesting to the depth and sincerity of one’s belief in the wrongness of what we are doing to animals” (p. 337). And it is this moral awakening that is heightened by the anthropomorphism represented in the three narratives we are about to discuss, one that ‘enlightens’ and renews the relationship between humanity and animality (Gebhard et al., 2003). Anthropomorphism offers a more utilitarian understanding of the ‘nonhuman-sentience’, awakening the audiences not only to the horrors of the Anthropocene but also how the Anthropocene ravages the human-animal kinship (Singer, 1980; You, 2021).

The ‘Real’ Purpose of Anthropomorphic Art

The misrepresentation of animals often becomes one of the primary sources of criticism levelled against anthropomorphism. Several critics maintain that anthropomorphism either forms a “corrupting” influence on children’s psychological growth (Fisher, 1964, p. 51) or completely fails to maintain children’s identification with nonhuman characters, for it is improbable for children to imagine human-like states in nonhuman-entities (Larsen et al., 2018; Russell & Cain, 2020). This growing section of criticism launches against the adoption of anthropomorphic picture-books in schools, as these arguments connect with children’s increasing anthropocentric reasoning, and decreasing scientific knowledge, after being exposed to anthropomorphic representations (Ganea et al., 2014). Anthropomorphism, it is feared, communicates scientifically inaccurate knowledge about the nonhuman ‘other’ and, thereby, affects children’s factual knowledge. This leads us to dwell over two counterarguments that may help us maintain a valid case in favour of anthropomorphism.

Geerdts et al. (2016) have contested that the ‘real’ purpose of anthropomorphism is not to impart scientific knowledge but raise ethical awareness about humanities and animalities, and that children prefer animal characters over human-counterparts (Severson & Woodard, 2018). This links to the second argument that, even though sceptical about anthropomorphism, defends the practice of anthropomorphism if the representations are subtle or mild (in terms of degree), and if language is not paired with imagery (Conrad et al., 2021; Geerdts, 2016). The latter-most critics suspect that anthropomorphic language alone is potentially harmless for children’s factual learning processes and a balance between language and imagery may rather complement children’s knowledge about the nonhuman others and the perceptions they develop about their socio-cultural ecosystems. This brings us to a realisation about anthropomorphism as more of a “mentalizing” phenomenon than a framework for formal education (Severson & Woodard, 2018, para. 8) that aims at imparting scientific knowledge. This line of countercriticism argues for the deployment of the phenomenon to raise more ethically grounded questions related to human-animal studies, where many speak in favour of the “talking animal” (Dunn, 2011, p. 2), and how the latter can re-define relations between the ‘Human’ and the ‘Other’.

De Waal (2001) and Baker (2001) have expressed concern over the socio-cultural manipulation of the nonhuman environment via anthropomorphic means, which leads us to connect their critique to the plausibility of outraging the human-animal dynamic through anthropomorphism. Wells (2009) argues in *The Animated Bestiary* that nonhuman-entities invite polysemic narrative interpretations of human-related issues that are difficult/sensitive to express in normal conditions as he observes that anthropomorphism “embodies the openness of debate and not the fixedness of conclusion” (p. 5). This observation has been supported by Burke and Copenhaver (2004) who extend this knowledge to political animal-cartoons that they believe enables cartoonists to “provide intellectual and psychological distance and allows [them] to critically explore that which we would not be comfortable exploring directly” (p. 207). Indeed, this practice bears a political function, giving credibility to Hübben’s (2016) above-cited argument. However, the ‘real’ purpose of anthropomorphism has usually been to strike a balance between being utilized to discuss both human- and animal- centred issues. And while the phenomenon is deployed to tackle human-related problems, its intrinsic purpose has mostly been to serve as the “epistemological pathway by which emotional relationships with objects are established that allows them to be invested with individual meaning” (Gebhard et al., 2003, p. 105).

Anthropomorphism permits the identification of the nonhuman environment within a moral context. It disavows medical claims that the ‘animate nonhuman’ lacks moral status (Fox, 1986) and is unentitled to moral consideration. Anthropomorphism attempts to subvert this systematic unfairness by re-positioning the nonhuman in terms of ethics and morality and introduces them to the human imagination as a pedagogical force. This argument (1) corresponds to Malaguzzi’s (2012) hypothesis about the ‘environment’ being the ‘third educator’ (Gandini, 2012, p. 339) which (2) later became the foundation for Bone’s (2013) acknowledgment of “the animal” as the “fourth educator” (p. 62). Bone (2013) criticises the human-driven atrocities on animals (Luk et al., 1999), and deploys this criticism as a springboard for her understanding of the pedagogical influence of animals on children’s socialisation. Many of these arguments have encouraged the incorporation of anthropomorphism in children’s media and education, for they realise its potential as a subversive eye-opener to the young and adults alike, and this unabashed belief stems from the phenomenon’s capacities to build itself on ethical values that respond to both the interests of humanity and animality.

This explains the stylisation of these animated movies as ‘animal autobiographies’ (You, 2021), for the genre invests the protagonists with what You (2021) addresses as a “co-constitutive agency” (p. 193). This type of agency enables the ‘autobiographical animal’ to stimulate subjective interpretations about its ‘othered’ nature, catapulting the animal to exert absolute control over itself with individuality and meaningfulness that is respected by others (including the ‘other’ humans). By re-locating the ‘human’ outside- and into- the dimensions of ‘*Other*’, the genre subverts the eco-hierarchy and *equals* humans with their nonhuman partners of the same planet/co-inhabitants. There have been instances where the genre dismantles the eco-hierarchy to subjugate ‘the human’ over ‘nonhuman’ domination. Such representations, while functioning as animal autobiographies, communicate an imperialistic ideology that stands against the peace-oriented demands of the genre that, however, easily suffice in the movies we aim to discuss here. *The Ant Bully* (2006), for instance, becomes a significant example to vindicate this case. In Lucas’ transformation into a human-ant, the narrative blurs the ‘human/animal’ dichotomies not to depict the ants’ colonization over Lucas’ ‘human’ self, but re-locate the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’ within the plethora of co-existence, mutual respect, and harmony (You, 2021).

It is by virtue of these examples that we collectively aim to understand the genre of ‘animal autobiography’ as an extraordinary manifestation of anthropomorphism that triggers the moral re-evaluation of human/nonhuman boundaries and opens a space of inquiry to question the ethical relationships between humans and nonhumans and how these relationships may sterilise the effects of an otherwise ravaging Anthropocene. The genre, as You (2021) proposes, allows us to perceive the animal-character as a ‘subject-of-a-life’ (Regan, 1988) and not as an “object for human utility” (Tipper, 2011, p. 149), for the genre re-designs the ‘animal’ with a distinctive individuality and as a maker-of-its-own-destiny (as in *Ferdinand*). As for the practice of anthropomorphism, its innovative re-conceptualisations, as we are to witness, speak for one cause: ecological coexistence.

Discussion: Animal Autobiographies

I. *Finding Nemo* (2003)

As we have elucidated, the phenomenon of anthropomorphism is often subjected to criticism or triviality (Simons, 2002) more frequently because it represents scientific or factual distortions, thereby, leading the form to being dismissed as transgressive. This is even true to *Finding Nemo* which finds itself abundant with a broad range of unbelievable anthropomorphic examples that may provide significant volume and plausibility to the criticism of anthropomorphism and derail our understandings of the phenomenon as an enriching source of human-animal relations. Dory's 'human'-problem of amnesia, or her abilities to read the English alphabet; the aquarium fish and sea gulls' comprehensions and conversations about complex dental procedures; the school of Mr. Ray (a spotted eagle ray); or the 'socially-heterosexual' clownfish become a few major examples, within the narrative, that can attract widespread criticism from pragmatic critics of the anthropomorphic form.

These concerned critics may argue about (1) the dissemination of scientifically-inaccurate knowledge to a general audience and (2) the loss of the intrinsic identity of animals as 'animals' (Anderson & Henderson, 2005; Baker, 2001). For example, the sequential hermaphroditism of clownfish is left unexplored by the narrative and both Marlin and Coral are depicted as a traditional, heterosexual mating pair in the image of a 'normal human' family. Such misrepresentations, then, potentially affect the identity of the 'anthropomorphised animal'. In the middle of identity-deconstruction, it bestows the subject with a recognisable human-demeanour (You, 2021) that the audiences can 'comfortably' relate to without having to step into a critical space of the nonhuman 'Other' (Gebhard et al., 2003).

However, instead of reading these instances as detrimental to scientific discourse, they should be interpreted as a "revisionist reinvention of the human experience" (Wells, 2009, p. 60) that offers us a deeper understanding of abstract human values. While, at the same time, this style of approach- despite its partial re-designing of animal identity- enables the acknowledgment of anthropomorphism as

> a tool by which a variety of discourses are simultaneously called into the interpretation of the animal and operate as a way in which any potential anxiety about animal otherness and difference might be potentially reconciled (Wells, 2009, p. 98).

Wells' (2009) understanding of anthropomorphism may serve as a favourable starting point for developing our discussion about *Finding Nemo* as both (1) a tale of emotional maturity and (2) critique of *unwanted* human-invasiveness onto nonhuman territories. Wells' (2009) conception raises awareness about unwanted human invasiveness, to confront which anthropomorphism re-dresses the animal with a re-constitutive agency and self-control "in a world that, arguably, in itself is increasingly distantiated from the animal as a co-inhabitee" (p. 98). In its re-formation, the animal is connected with its self-identity that, furthermore, allows the animal to blatantly address issues of co-existence and "creaturely consciousness" (You, 2021, p. 183). Even though this form of representation can be encountered in its highest degree in *Ferdinand* (2017), the present narrative yet manages to elicit a significant public exploration of nonhuman 'otherness' through its most pivotal characters of Marlin, Dory, and Darla.

The element of nonhuman-individuality has often been cited as a crucial feature of the 'animal autobiography' (You, 2021) that permits the subject to emerge as a self-embodied voice fighting for its own cause. It opens a critical avenue for the 'other' to remind humans about their coercive and ruthless cruelty upon nonhuman subjects (Luk et al., 1999) and assume power over their lives without any outside human control/influence. As we mentioned, this is vividly explored in *Ferdinand*; however, in *Finding Nemo*, the latter-half is minimalistic in approach. This means that while the narrative criticises human intervention in nonhuman territory/habitats, it keeps the criticism controlled and implicit, and outside of the 'control' of the animals (which we shall explore shortly). Meanwhile, Marlin and Dory are bestowed with a distinct individuality and co-independently have been established as embodiments of what Markowsky (1975) had called a "good 'dressed animal'" (p. 461). This connotes that even though the characters possess the emotional qualities of humans, they still manage to preserve their natural, outward manifestation of an 'animal' (Jardim, 2013,

p. 15). By natural outlook, these characters ‘are’ animals, but act ‘as’ humans (Markowsky, 1975).

Nonetheless, to read *Finding Nemo* as a tale of emotional maturity, we may step back to re-position Marlin’s insecurities and fear for Nemo within a personally historical context and perceive his ‘fear of the ocean’ as a result of the barracuda attack that had ravaged his entire family earlier. Marlin’s imposing belief that the ocean is “not safe” (Stanton, 2003, 6:57) is, further, strengthened by Nemo’s handicapped fin (“the lucky fin” (Stanton, 2003, 9:19)), as the former constantly over-protects Nemo from all possible harm, contrary to Nemo’s pleasure. It is, after all, Marlin’s fragile attitude towards Nemo that creates a fissure between the father and the son, which is ultimately resolved after Nemo is reunited with Marlin towards the conclusion, more because Nemo acknowledges Marlin’s parental love after Nigel, an Australian pelican, narrates Marlin’s adventures of the ocean to the aquarium fish (one of them being Nemo). It is these adventures that reshape and re-structure Marlin’s view of his life in the ocean, paving the way to his transformed outlook towards the future in the end. Undoubtedly, Marlin’s adventures- during his quest to find Nemo- are self-emancipatory and take us back to Smelser’s (2009) odyssey experience by virtue of how his independent quest re-modified his ‘Self’, diverted him from his fears, and re-introduced him as a “transformed home comer” (Morgan, 2010, p. 252). This could be viewed when the narrative reverses the opening scene in the end by depicting Marlin as being excited about Nemo’s school and looking forward to exploring the reef with Mr. Ray, connoting Marlin’s self-transformation as a carefree, unafraid, and ‘happier’ character.

Marlin’s journey to emotional maturity, however, seems incomplete without Dory, and it is through the ‘Marlin-Dory dynamic’ that the audiences come to acknowledge Dory’s role in the transformation of Marlin. One may mention that Marlin’s transformation is more self-inspired, but it is Dory that preserves his inspiration to grow; it is Dory that pushes him to take risks, to “keep swimming” (Stanton, 2003, 32:41) and enjoy life as it comes. Wells (2009) makes a noticeable point about “cross-species coupling [as] an endemic and unnoticed currency of the animated form- innocent, innocuous, banal- or looked at another way, shocking, boundary-pushing, camp, queer, subversive” (p. 4).

In no way ‘innocuous’ or ‘banal’, the Marlin-Dory relationship, on the contrary, assumes a polarising outlook to embody two completely opposite personalities, but strongly inter-connected to serve mutual purposes: where Dory inspires Marlin’s personal growth; Marlin manifests a sense of ‘home’ for Dory, a ‘home’ that Dory was devoid of. In Marlin, Dory discovers a friend and an answer to her loneliness. This factor about their relationship, further, re-echoes within Dory to understand the position Marlin shares in her life, as she once remarks after Marlin confuses a death-impersonating Nemo to be really dead and plans to travel back:

> “No one’s ever stuck with me for so long before. . . I remember things better with you” (Stanton, 2003, 1:23:12 – 1:23:20).

Indeed, Dory’s friendship is shared by Marlin, who recognises her intrinsic role in his journey toward emotional maturity; though, largely, it is depicted in *Finding Dory* (2016) where the audience realise how much Dory is valued by Marlin as a companion. In *Finding Nemo*, however, their relationship is not outwardly explored, more because the narrative concentrates upon Nemo’s discovery and Marlin’s personal growth. Nonetheless, what the narrative explicitly does represent are the aquatic adventures of Marlin-Dory and how these adventures reframe Marlin’s approach of perceiving the ocean and its ‘co-inhabitees’ (Wells, 2009, p. 98).

Of particular interest is their humorous encounter with the three sharks (Bruce, a Great White; Anchor, a Hammerhead, and Chum, a Mako shark) who pledge ‘vegetarianism’ and re-assure Dory and Marlin that they have been practicing “self-control” and should not be considered as “mindless eating machine[s]”. One of their most controversial statements- “Fish are friends, not food” (Stanton, 2003, 20:47)- possess the potential to spark ample criticism for implying plausible harm to the food chain and lead the phenomenon of anthropomorphism to yet another trail of scrutinisation and problematics. However, if the statement is hypothetically probed, then it may introduce several issues about moral vegetarianism, coexistence, and animal security (You, 2021). Within this context, Singer’s (1980) philosophy of utilitarianism encourages us to perceive the sharks’ vegetarianism not as an ecological travesty, but as a moral initiative to exert inter-species harmony and mutual respect/care. The sharks’ utilitarian approach signals their self-recognition about their higher position in the food chain- and occupation as a hunter- and the urgency to guard entities who may be at the bottom of the food chain (or ecological system that the sharks relatively reign).

Of course, these animated sharks cannot be compared to real sharks. The entire purpose of introducing ‘vegetarian’ sharks is to re-awaken the audiences’ recognition of their standings within the ecosystem, and the responsibility they have towards protecting the nonhuman ‘others’ from ecological degradation (Singer, 1980; You, 2021). It is in understanding the ‘pain’ of the ‘other’ that we may be able to act like the three sharks, and it is in self-realisation that one of the primary purposes of animal autobiography rests. The sharks push us to interrogate ourselves about our treatment of, and respect for, other natural entities who share our environmental space and while the sharks bestow the ‘fish’ with distinctive agencies, they help answer our moral culpabilities of having wronged the nonhuman ‘other’, having disrespected its territorial spaces, and having misunderstood its value as a ‘subject-of-a-life’ (Regan, 1988). This, furthermore, leads us to interrogate and analyse the selfish human-invasiveness onto nonhuman territory that contaminates the present narrative.

It is intriguing to note that *Finding Nemo* positions the scuba-divers- and their invasive action of capturing Nemo- as the inceptive cause behind the entire plot, as they serve as the focal point of the narrative’s criticism of human invasiveness and disrespect for the natural habitat. This criticism connects to the image of Darla (the dentist’s niece) who is addressed as a “fish killer” (Stanton, 2003, 29:34), and it is Darla’s narrative construction as a potential threat to the aquarium fish that the audience comes to understand the ruthless cruelty that is inflicted on animals by children (Luk et al., 1999). Darla’s image as a “fish killer”, surprisingly, contrasts that of the sharks who are culturally located as bigger threats to other aquatic creatures, and, therefore, the attribution of this title (‘fish killer’) suits favourably more to the description of the sharks. But the narrative reverses this analogy and places Darla at a position of criticism and reserves a rather sympathetic treatment for the sharks. In doing so, the narrative encourages the audience to view a self-alike individual (Darla) from a self-critical lens to retrospect about their treatment of the nonhuman ‘other’ and re-evaluate the consideration of nonhuman territories.

As an example of the ‘animal autobiography’, *Finding Nemo*’s manner of approaching Darla is both critical and satirical (You, 2021). While it is critical because through Darla the narrative raises some ethical questions about ‘nonhuman-sentience’, ‘nonhuman-space’, and ‘human indifference’, it is satirical in its representation of Darla as an impatient and rambunctious child. Darla’s satirical representation enables the narrative to implicitly pass a subtle remark about contemporary humanity’s impatience to discuss issues about ‘otherness’ and animality (Hübben, 2016), or rather its unwillingness to re-consider the ethical grounds of human-animal relationships that, if considered, would only help us poignantly deal with the influences of the Anthropocene. However, Darla’s position is of crucial significance. She pushes the narrative to a dénouement, for Nemo would never have been taken out of the aquarium had Darla not visiting; though, ultimately, it was Gill (a Moorish idol) who sets Nemo free through the drainage system.

Here, we come to an acknowledgment about inter-species togetherness and mutual harmony. *Finding Nemo* approaches these notions with subtle ingenuity to push its human viewers to reflect over their social position(s) as ‘co-inhabitees’ rather than as the *sole* receivers of the planet’s resources and value ‘nonhuman otherness-and-space*’* (You, 2021). In Marlin’s quest to trace Nemo, the viewers are subjected to another thematic, but, human, dimension that captures Marlin’s agency to reshape his individuality and perception about the ocean, while, at the same time, healing the wounded selves of both Marlin and Nemo as they are reconciled- both physically and emotionally- to the promise of a mutual sense of value/worth. The narrative vindicates its cultural and literary position as an illustrative example of anthropomorphic imagination that not only disavows human-centrism, but also re-conceptualises animal-centrism to encompass a riveting gamut of concerns pertaining to the environment, human-animal relations, and the nonhuman-sentience. It achieves that via employing the medium of ‘animal autobiography’ which locates the animal as a vehicle to communicate ethical and environmental concerns (You, 2021; Wells, 2009), left to be reflected by the general independence of the public and its inherent understandings of what seems urgent.

II. *The Ant Bully* (2006)

An intrinsic aspect in Gebhard's et al. (2003) arguments about identity-formation has been the presence of a nonhuman 'Other' to serve as a cognitive and psychological mirror for "making comparisons, assessing sameness and difference. . . and identifying with others" (p. 91). We have previously mentioned the role that the 'nonhuman environment' extensively plays in the nourishment of our identities as individuals and parts of a larger community (Searles, 1960). This is what *The Ant Bully* (2006) attempts to bring to our forefront. Unlike the mainstream aesthetics of anthropomorphic narratives, like *Finding Nemo* or *Ferdinand*, that deploy the 'autobiographical animal' as a metaphorical self-embodiment to exert a conscious animal-agency (You, 2021), *The Ant Bully* separates from the traditional paradigms of animal autobiography to re-create the aesthetic of the latter-genre by re-positioning both the 'animal' and 'human' at the polar edges of narrative centrality. This implies that while narrative remains 'animal'-centric, the typical effects of the animal autobiography are brought over by the introduction of a 'human' character whose moral transformation- and change of perception towards ants- becomes the locus of the audiences' understandings about human-animal relations. It is through the human character that the narrative probes into the ethical issues of ecological hegemony, human-invasiveness, and nonhuman conservation and compassion.

As Bone (2013) notes about the animal as "a conduit for learning to be human" (p. 61), *The Ant Bully* re-constructs the colony of ants as a critical space of retribution and enlightenment for Lucas Nickle (the ten-year-old protagonist), as he strives to assimilate himself with the ants. Lucas' arrival into the colony is instigated by his "barbaric" and "mindless" (Davis, 2006, 21:59) destruction of the ant-mound in his front-yard, following which he is miniaturised by Zoc (a wizard ant) and brought to the colony to be charged with

> ". . . wilfully and with malice. . . [crushing] the food storage chambers, [flooding] all the lower hatching chambers, and [dousing] the colony with the dreaded yellow rain" (Davis, 2006, 20:56 – 21:10).

These charges symbolically awaken Lucas to the ant's point-of-view. They encourage him (1) to understand his ignorance towards a 'lesser' species (ants) as a symptom of his indifference and (2) redeem himself by re-conceptualising an emotional framework that values the nonhuman 'other', its territorial space, and its nature as a living entity (Gebhard et al., 2003). Ideally, the Queen's suggestion to "change the nature of this human" (Davis, 2006, 22:25) serves as a morally uplifting manifestation of retribution that disavows the notion of cruelty and rather values an experience of what Jonathan Lear (1992) had called an "education of the emotions" (p. 318) that an individual can take ahead in their life. Even though Lear's (1992) argument relates to katharsis (from Chapter II), his phrase helps us situate Lucas' moral transformation and his journey to "discover the ant within" (Davis, 2006, 30:35) within the functions of the animal autobiography. In Lucas' discovery of "the ant within", the narrative indirectly implies the triumph of the ants as Lucas' understandings of the ant-world possesses a double connotation. This duality concentrates upon Lucas' reformulation about his ethical awareness of the nonhuman 'other', manoeuvring this sense of awareness to naturally protect the existence and peace of the colony.

The latter-most argument may appear to somewhat twist the central function of the animal autobiography, as it concretises upon the idea of human intervention to protect and conserve 'the nonhuman'. Unlike what You (2021) earlier spoke of the genre as "an apt form for de-familiarising human-centred territory" (p. 190), *The Ant Bully* recognises the necessity of the human 'other', within the space of the 'nonhuman', to intervene and fight for the cause of the latter. This seems to decapitate the claims made by critics like McFarland (2009) about animal agency as a problematic hermeneutic that disengages the public/audience from any subsequent human intervention/activism be implemented for the nonhuman and its protection. Lucas' fight with the local exterminator, Stan Beals, does not only stem from Lucas' self-interest to absolve himself from guilt-consciousness (for having called Beals in the first place), but also 'more' from a self-driven responsibility to protect the ants from any possible harm. This encounter, further, led to Lucas' valorisation as a 'saviour' within the colony.

This social transition of Lucas from being a 'destroyer' to a 'saviour' possesses a utilitarian outlook. Like the sharks from *Finding Nemo*, Lucas' intervention- and apparent knowledge of his 'superior' position in the ecosystem- dwells over the notion of compassionate understanding (Singer, 1980) that allowed him to acknowledge not only his personal faults but also his significance within the colony as a 'human' counterpart. His 'humanness' becomes a vehicle to fight dangerous human-invasiveness- represented, at first, through Lucas but, chiefly, through Beals- that poses an existential threat to the nonhuman. This is where *The Ant Bully*, in overturning the aesthetics of the animal autobiography, reconnects the 'human/nonhuman' dichotomy by acknowledging the inter-dependence of both humans and nonhumans upon one another. Where the ants are protected by Lucas, they simultaneously impart human-ethical values to the latter that may help not only Lucas but also the otherness of the nonhumans, as it would benefit and reassure their existential security from- and by- humans (You, 2021).

Reflecting over Lucas' discovery of 'the ant within', it is interesting to mention that the narrative is built upon the 'human/nonhuman nexus' which informs and pillars Lucas' moral transformation. As the conversation between Zoc and Lucas unfolds, the audiences are awakened to what differentiates the ant-world (nonhuman) from the human-world: where the ant-world is based upon the idea of togetherness; the human-world is made up of individual "differences", in the sense that where the ants work 'for' the collective growth of colony (represents a city in human definition), humans work 'for' self-interests and individual happiness. This is precisely why Lucas abandons an injured Hova during a wasp attack to save himself, more because his ideologies are oriented towards self-security and self-gain unlike the ants' who persevere for the colony. In the ant-world, the colony stands for a single, collective metaphor for individual existence, inter-dependence, and centralised harmony that become the hallmarks of underground existence, and yet another instance to criticise human selfishness and self-centredness (Hübben, 2016).

The logistics of togetherness, maintained within the colony, re-dresses Lucas' perceptions about himself and others (typically those who are 'weaker'). By 'weaker', please note, we do not aim to de-quantify the "co-constitutive agency" of the ants (You, 2021, p. 193), but only mean to address their status as a 'lower' species within the ecosystem, as a less powerful nonhuman entity. The ants' ecological position as being 'less powerful' reminds us of the notion of self-induced power that concurrently pervades across the narrative and contaminates Lucas' confidence over himself that is constantly affected by the neighbourhood bullies. Lucas' powerlessness over his bullies serves as a pivotal point of departure from ethical sensitivity, as his moral status of being 'bullied' not only punctures the sense of power he wishes to exercise, but also ravages his sensibilities while he destroys the ant-colony to only satisfy his broken ego. Surprisingly, it is from this sub-theme that the movie derives its title.

Lucas' foolishness to 'bully the ants' is an expression of his knowledge about his powerlessness, which is what he *unlearns* from the ants. During his time in the colony, Lucas is exposed to the synchronised functioning of the colony and its values of togetherness and how the 'ant' transforms into the antithesis of the 'bully' by virtue of its confidence over collective strength which, in return, serves as an essential backdrop for the colony's existence, and, furthermore, for Lucas' self-discovery of "the ant within". This sense of discovery is, however, fulfilled when the narrative repeats an earlier episode (involving Hova and Lucas) to allow Lucas another chance to validate his sense of metaphorically 'becoming-an-ant' by saving a wasp during Stan Beals' attack on the colony and its environs. The act of saving the wasp not only wins Lucas the respect of the ants (particularly Zoc and Hova) but also reinforces his own belief in his 'power' (both mental and physical). This instance allows him to experience the intrinsic nature and function of power.

The ants teach Lucas that 'real' power does not imply a figurative sense of domination, nor does it entertain any plausible connotation to harming others. What Lucas 'really' learns is that power should transform as 'moral strength' which comes when power is oriented towards a higher goal, and not driven to serve foolish, egotistic purposes. This is where (and how) the ants tend to become more powerful than Lucas (and us) because they do not exert power to inspire fear, hopelessness, or anarchy, but channelise their physical (and cognitive) strength for the prosperity of the colony. As You (2021) poignantly remarks, the animal autobiography "beckons us to reach out to the other lifeforms in the biosphere and meet them beyond textual representations" (p. 194). Similarly, in the representation of the ant-world as "different" from the humans', Lucas begins to identify with the ants and unlearns a set of 'human' ideologies to accommodate a few 'nonhuman' values that were epitomised by the ants, including co-existence, collective strength, togetherness, and centralised harmony.

Additionally, his moral transformation drags the audience back to a realisation of what humans are not. Through Zoc and Lucas' midnight conversation, the narrative aims to strip humanity of its hidden rancour and reflect the shortcomings of our human-selves. Morris (1977) had once observed, "[humankind] has competed with [nonhumans] for living space, dominated them, and all too often exterminated them" (p. 260). At a point of convergence, Morris' (1977) critique offers us an opportunity to re-evaluate human-invasiveness and subordination of nonhumans as an exemplary symptom of powerlessness, fear, and human-fragility. This is reiterated in *The Ant Bully* through the image of Lucas and his mindless destruction of an ant's colony that he pompously believed to embody- and reinforce- his sense of domination over the 'other'. But, contrary to what he deemed true, his conceptions are soon demolished, fresh memories and opinions reformulated, when he begins to 'live' as-an-ant.

Lucas' transformation, indeed, was alarmingly conditioned by the ants' socialising influence, as he recognises what it means to be 'human' in an ant's world and vice-versa. It is here that the narrative powerfully stresses upon the importance of perspective and the necessity of viewing others, at times (or more frequently), from their point-of-view. Through the narrative's representation of ants' point-of-view, Lucas is awakened to the realities of his perception towards little creatures and the horrors of his actions, as he begins to perceive everything from an ant's perspective. This is where he arrives at the shocking revelation that a simple "shag carpet" could look like a giant maze- or a little "jellybean" may appear as a "sweet rock"- when you are less than a centimetre long (Davis, 2006, 42:21 – 49:32). Through a fresh revamping of the animal autobiography, the narrative successfully captures the ideological purposes of the genre. It pursues this by placing the 'human' alongside the 'animal', at the narrative-centre, in a cherished attempt to enable the 'human' understand what it means to be an 'animal' (You, 2021) by re-locating the former within the habitat of the latter; to learn its ways of thinking; and deploy their understanding to self-evaluate, criticise, and re-modify human action towards the 'other' (Gebhard et al., 2003).

In doing so, *The Ant Bully* facilitates an outward, 'animal'-oriented manifestation of the "creaturely consciousness" (You, 2021, p. 183) that encourages the audience to not only sympathise with the ants, but also perceive the human world from the ants' viewpoint. It achieves that through the character-transformation of Lucas Nickle. In the middle of his discovery of ‘the ant within’, we are awakened to new possibilities of renewal that can promote a better understanding of the human-animal dynamic, the problem of human-invasiveness, and the ‘urgency’ for human intervention. Unlike what McFarland (2009) suspects about anthropomorphic environmental films that reflect that “[humans] have no obligation to change [their] approach to the environment. . . leaving [them] blameless for the harm [they] cause other animals” (p. 101), *The Ant Bully* emphasises human intervention for it recognises that ants themselves cannot protect their ant-mounds from indomitable agents that fall outside their control. If there can be a ‘saviour’, it must be a Lucas.

III. *Ferdinand* (2017)

Peculiarly subversive, *Ferdinand* (2017) outshines as the strongest narrative within our discussion on anthropomorphism and the ‘autobiographical animal’ (You, 2021). It deploys animal agency- and the animal’s ability to ‘talk back’- to strongly criticise the ‘ritualistic’ practice of bullfighting and, consequently, champion animal rights and welfare through its titular protagonist. As Cohen (2014) highlights, bullfighting has enjoyed a cult status in Spain, Portugal, and other Hispanic-American nations, and is frequently associated with notions of national identity, traditional aesthetics, and historical culture amongst the public (María et al., 2017). Against this view stands the present-day intellectual criticism of the practice that not only connects the sport with animal exploitation, human barbarity, and sadism but also serves as a defining catalyst for the declining popularity of bullfighting (Andrade, 2021). In relation to this criticism, Hemingway (1932) once spoke of bullfighting as an “[un]equal contest or an attempt at an equal contest between a bull and a man” (p. 22).

Even though Hemingway’s opinions were predominantly in favour of the practice, considering his enthusiastic passion for sports and belief in the “*paleo-Christian*” perception of the bullfight as a “spiritual project” to “conquer *Death*” (Ozwald, 2019, p. 340), his acknowledgment of the malpractice as ‘[un]equal’ corroborates our critical defence of *Ferdinand* as a subversive, self-emancipatory animal autobiography registering Ferdinand’s viewpoint and critique of the ‘art’ of bullfighting (Andrade, 2021). However, the subversive nature of the narrative has become a critical point of intersection between animal self-agency and the loss of animal identity, giving rise to conflicting opinions about the narrative's treatment of the "flower-bull". For instance, Lorca (2018) maintains a subjective perception about the narrative as being 'unnatural' precisely due to Ferdinand's dismissal of its 'true' animal nature. Contrarily, Wloszczyna (2017) rather appreciates Ferdinand's courage to escape the shackles of human 'misrepresentation' and "stand against aggression, competitive rivalry and conforming to the expectations of others" (para 2).

Indeed, subversion allows *Ferdinand* to 'speak' for the bulls. It attempts to re-vamp their moral status from being historically defined as "telluric and implacable object[s] of terror" or "the supreme enemy of Man" (Ozwald, 2019, p. 340) to being culturally normalised as "subjects-of-a-life" (Regan, 1988, p. 243). This narrative quality provides Ferdinand with an individual agency to challenge the human-perpetrators of his existential and ecological centrality and debunk the misconceptions about bullfights that the bulls at the *Casa del Toro* have perpetually maintained. It is intriguing to note that Ferdinand's discovery of the 'actual' nature of bullfights stems from (1) his refusal to stay at the ranch, and (2) self-acceptance about his softness for the "flower-bull" that he is, which is when- while escaping- he learns that "no bull wins" (Saldanha, 2017, 01:06:46). Ferdinand's discovery offers a climatic twist to the narrative, as the bulls' misconceptions are imploded and they are awakened to the urgent necessity for self-worth after the former confides that the arena is "just another chop-house" (Saldanha, 2017, 01:07:05).

However, this subversion truly culminates during the fight between Ferdinand and El Primero. Their duel becomes an archetype of self-assertive agency that upholds the animal as a 'self'-controlled subject (You, 2021), independent from outside human influence and domination that El Primero, in a way, constantly tends to epitomise. In El Primero's depiction as an undefeated matador, *Ferdinand* attempts to innocently play with Ozwald's (2019) unbreakable faith in the matador's "potential superhumanity", as he maintains that

> . . . the matador is that superman, since he succeeds. . . in conquering death and expelling anxiety, in warding

> off and dispelling the threat. . . in destroying evil (p. 340).

The narrative deploys subversion to symbolically denunciate the 'human' position of El Primero by swapping the cultural positions of Ferdinand and the former. It occurs when Primero's red cape gets stuck in one of Ferdinand's horns and Primero attempts to retrieve it back, communicating the episode as being a fight of the bull *against* the man, rather than being the other, 'traditional' way around (Tiznado, 2011). Outwardly, the scene may seem comedic, but it is precisely this episode that the narrative reserves much of its subversive quality for. The public encounter between Ferdinand and Primero allows the narrative to invest the former with individual meaning and self-definition (You, 2021), as Ferdinand later sits back, in a mood of introspective contemplation, to let Primero strike the fatal blow. Here, it would be wrong to confuse Ferdinand's 'docility' to a sense of 'surrender', for his docility before El Primero is a powerful manifestation of his acknowledgment about his self-identity as the "flower-bull". It is something that not only the narrative has maintained throughout, but also something Ferdinand takes pride in, more because the 'flower-bull' persona had always defined him, his decisions, and all his actions.

Undoubtedly, Ferdinand was 'bull enough' to have disrespectfully killed El Primero, but he chooses to stick with his sense of character. Interestingly, the inter-play between character and action has been one of our points of special interest in Chapter II (Eden, 2005) and Chapter III (Hancock & Hancock, 2008; Peterson & Park, 2008), as these critics strongly emphasise the significance of 'character' to study/understand an action, and how this paradigm is imperative for the structures of both Aristotelian tragedy and utopic superhero narratives. Similarly, *Ferdinand* utilises this philosophy to not only deconstruct or reconceptualise the stereotypical human representation of bulls as aggressive/dangerous beings (Baker, 2001) but also re-locate the 'flower-bull' within the framework of You's (2021) empowered, autobiographical animal. In Ferdinand's surrender before Primero, the audiences' faculties are tweaked to re-consider the scenario from the bull's point-of-view and re-evaluate the 'surrender' not as an example of animal subordination or human-conspired control, but as a triumphant vindication of a sense of being true-to-oneself. Therefore, in Ferdinand's surrender, there are inward traces of moral victory and a denunciation of attributes that fail to define the ‘Self’. Contrary to Lorca’s (2018) claim, Ferdinand’s animal nature is not ‘renounced’, but revitalised, redefined, and reborn, and is released from being culturally restricted to the horrors of speciesism (Hübben, 2016); while the matador is still not ‘defeated’ but sadly excused from collective humiliation.

It is a little discomforting to witness the narrative’s preservation of Primero’s arrogance, as he leaves the arena, suggesting that his ethical perception towards animals (in general) remains unchanged. Even though Ferdinand lives, El Primero returns with his initial sense of couched “superhumanity” (Ozwald, 2019, p. 340) which brings us to another interesting aspect that the narrative attempts to reflect. As Primero sets himself to plunge the sword into Ferdinand, the audiences’ catchy phrases- “spare the bull!” and “let the bull live!” (Saldanha, 2017, 01:33:56)- reverses the latter’s fate. We have reflected on Ferdinand’s determination to stick with his character as a symbol of subversive animal agency (You, 2021); but the picture stays incomplete. As much as Ferdinand’s determination gains him the respect of the matador, it could not have saved his life if it were not for the audiences who shouted to Primero for the bull’s pardoning, which leads to an uncomfortable realisation that it was ‘human intervention’ that spared the ‘animal’.

Potentially, this can become a valid junction for criticism for developing contradictory ideas against what we have defended a few pages before. While analysing *The Ant Bully*, we appreciated Lucas’ intervention to shield the ant colony from Stan Beals for the narrative juxtaposed the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’, redeveloping a collective metaphor to criticise human callousness and indifference. This enables the audiences to perceive plausible human intervention as a necessary and supportive exercise that not only provides help to the ‘animal’ but also strengthens the weakened ‘human-animal dynamic’ (You, 2021). However, we are inclined to criticise the same practice in *Ferdinand* because, within this context, human intervention overshadows animal agency and authority. The audiences’ united chanting of those phrases becomes the sole reason Primero spares Ferdinand, and, in doing so, the narrative not only wounds ‘the empowered animal’ but also stunts its ability to psychologically grow, taking the animal back to the passive protection of humanity. Where human intervention, in *The Ant Bully,* polishes animal liberty; in *Ferdinand,* it figuratively leaves the animal devoid of that same agency and independence, at least, briefly, but at an extremely critical point.

Nonetheless, the narrative manages to maintain its depiction of ‘inherently-good’ human characters without being affected by the influence of the ‘inherently-bad’. Where characters like El Primero and Moreno (the owner of *Casa del Toro*) symbolise human cruelty, greed, and apathy, Nina and Juan represent the antithesis by virtue of being compassionate, welcoming, and kind. Here, we may understand this deliberate attempt to represent these human characters as ‘opposites’, as a symbolic manifestation of the difference(s) between cruelty and kindness. By antagonising the former two characters- and patronising the latter- *Ferdinand* encourages the re-evaluation of our perceptions towards the ‘nonhuman’ and progress towards understanding, amicability, and love. Therefore, Nina and Juan’s farm begins to epitomise what Derrida (2006/2008) had called a “zoosphere” (p. 37) that is represented in contemporary philosophy as a new avenue- a space- to explore ideas of “absolute hospitality” (p. 37). Their farm becomes a space where the bulls are privileged and valued for who they are, and unlike the *Casa del Toro*, it embodies ‘Home’ and all the connected emotions of belonging, self-identity, and happiness:

“Home is where you’re happy
[. . .]
No more running
I am good knowing
that I belong
[. . .]
I got loving
inside this island”
(Saldanha, 2017, 15:41).

Naturally, their farm- a ‘zoosphere’, a ‘home’- answers Lupe’s question about ‘love’. Throughout the narrative, Lupe is depicted as restless to figure out the meaning of love, which she ultimately discovers in Nina’s hug. For the homely-looking Lupe, who was often ostracised at the ranch, Nina’s hug transforms into a zone of “security” and reassurance, as Lupe once confides, “I love love” (Saldanha, 2017, 01:36:42). Nina and Juan’s innocent acceptance of Lupe- and other animals- communicates the power and necessity of human kindness (Luk et al., 1999), as it dismantles the modern centrality of human cruelty and apathy that characterises the Anthropocene (You, 2021). In more than one way, Nina and Juan’s farm concretises upon animal security and preservation that was absent in the exploitative territories of *Casa del Toro*, and, naturally, that complemented the animals’ incapacities to identify with the “chop-house”. This is where- and how- the narrative informs our understandings about the central disparities between ‘being cruel’ and ‘being kind’: where Nina and Juan’s kindness is returned with nonhuman-compassion; El Primero and Moreno’s cruelty is constantly abhorred (and mocked) by the animals. And even though Primero stays ‘undefeated’, the fact that Ferdinand returns un-slain is a response castigating enough to demolish Primero’s sense of untamed superiority/arrogance that he had been exercising over the ‘animal’. Ideally, Ferdinand wins both ways.

Ferdinand, therefore, emerges as a path-breaking landmark in anthropomorphic art for its unafraid treatment- and critique- of bullfighting, as it progresses to not only provide the bulls (particularly the titular protagonist) with an authoritative, empowered, self-controlling ‘self’, but also essays to reconnect the human/animal thread that dwells over compassion and love. Indeed, the narrative’s thematic quality rests in its subversions that allow the animal characters to exert inexhaustible control over their lives, but, most critically, subordinate the ‘human’ at regular instances; however, what remains the most admirable factor about the narrative is its exploration of being-human. In Nina and Juan’s ‘zoosphere’, the bulls regain a lost sense of belonging and are awakened by the inherent humanity of the ‘human’, something that they had never known before. It is the bulls’ unawareness about this side of humanity that explains Valiente’s counter-assertion to Ferdinand’s anti-bullfighting rhetoric, as the former differentiates a bull’s moral status between being “a fighter” or “meat” (Saldanha, 2017, 49:04). This dichotomy reflects a strangely restrictive framework around which the bulls visualised their lives, which is because *Casa del Toro* never opens to them the knowledge about human’s inherent humanity. It is the farm of the ‘good’ daughter-father that comforts the animals and reassures them the power of love, which is when they realise that the ‘bulls have won’. So, in a way, we might read *Ferdinand* as a tale about ‘humanity towards animality’, with Lupe now being aware.

Conclusion

Despite having acknowledged the benefits of anthropomorphism across the chapter, we may still fail to overlook a credible, paradoxical, reality that reflects over the repercussions of animal-centric narratives. Instead of raising ecological awareness, they tantalise human curiosity about the natural world. Using *Finding Nemo* as an example, DeMello (2012) has spoken about the problematics of anthropomorphic representation that harms the animal more than it helps (if!) and its culpability in disrupting the prevention of animal exploitation:

> After *Finding Nemo*'s release, the sales of clownfish skyrocketed, which meant that yet more fish were confined to bowls and tanks (p. 336).

Naturally, these concerns may support the criticism from scholars and animal lovers who argue not only against the (mis)representation of the animal (Anderson & Henderson, 2005) but also against the very animal-agency that leaves no room for the plausibility of human-intervention in animal-or nature-related themes (McFarland, 2009). The animal-agency, while possessing features of subversion, dissociates the kinship shared between 'humanity' and 'animality'- as McFarland (2009) believes- and constantly keeps these two categories at the edges of polarity: unrelated and invisible. In doing so, the intentions behind anthropomorphic practice are usually questioned and the practice is conclusively labelled as dangerous/unethical. This understanding may trigger another contextual question: would a mass-discontinuance of the practice be the easiest- and most logical- way to counter this problem and save the animal from human acrimony? Unmistakably, DeMello's (2012) concerned thoughts are notably valid. However, a complete discontinuance of anthropomorphism implies zero opportunity for the animal to 'speak-out' and self-trigger its subjective transition from an "object for human utility" (Tipper, 2011, p. 149) to a "subject-of-a-life" (Regan, 1988, p. 243).

Anthropomorphism allows the animal to manifest its self-agency and empowerment, and so we may not want to imagine a socio-cultural predicament that is completely devoid of the artform. We have frequently referred to anthropomorphism as 'art', precisely because, while it dwells upon the animators' individual perceptions about the 'nonhuman', it offers the viewers a polysemous environment to understand animals and other nonhumans, bestowing the 'animal' with multiple interpretations and connotations. Certainly, this would possess a yin-and-yang output, suggesting an alarmingly equal possibility of animal (ab)use in relation to speciesism, occultism, and human sadism (Hübben, 2016). But, if we stress upon deploying the art of anthropomorphism for ecological reasons and nonhuman-preservation- like the genre of animal autobiography (You, 2021)- then, we may believe that the phenomenon is more required than useless. Our analysis of the three animal narratives helped us to recognise anthropomorphism as a borderless endeavour that facilitates a poignant resistance to "the [human] allegorisation of non-human subjects and animal-related themes" (You, 2021, p. 184), allowing the 'animal' to assume absolute control over its existential centrality.

The above-discussed narratives uphold their respective autobiographical animals as powerful mouthpieces to re-address and critique the human/animal relationship and its concomitant aspects of (1) human-invasiveness and intervention and (2) human sadism and apathy. By using subversion, animal autobiographies frequently re-dress the 'animal' and bestow it with an independent meaning that pillars the animal's abilities to think, speak, and act. This, yet again, explains Ferdinand's "flower-bull" persona or Dory's "amnesia", for instance, because these animal characters may remind us of ourselves (at some stage), for they 'are' humans. However, contrary to what the critics of (mis)representation imply, this 'humanisation' of animals (1) is metaphorical and (2) is often employed as emotional support to the animals' empowerment. Pro-animal anthropomorphic narratives exercise crucial importance over animal-agency and the animal's prospects of self-emancipation (You, 2021).

As self-emancipated subjects, animals, then, may transform into what Bone (2013) had called "a conduit for learning to be human" (p. 61), communicating to the audiences the urgency to recoup some half-forgotten human values. Certainly, animals' humanisation possesses strong traces of speciesism- that pushes the 'animal' outside the periphery (Hübben, 2016)- and may preclude our moral consideration of the latter as a 'co-inhabitee' (Wells, 2009) and, therefore, should be discouraged. However, within this context, animals' self-embodiment of human values partakes in their own reformation as emancipated subjects and does not affect their individuality as animal-selves. As messengers of goodness and morality, they do not lose the war against humans, but only help them for their own good.

Here, Lucas' moral transformation could be considered a befitting example to illustrate the latter-most argument. It was Lucas' discovery of the 'ant within' that enabled him to perceive the fallibilities of his character, as he attempts to redeem his destruction of the ant-colony by fighting Stan Beals and re-modifying his human-self against the identity of the ants (Gebhard et al., 2003). *The Ant Bully* manipulates Lucas' morality-tale to function as a symptom of contemporary humanity lost in self-centredness, passion, and domination. The narrative inclines the viewers' attention towards a revival of the 'traditional' human values of collective growth, kindness, and communal happiness, taking the ants as epitomes of those human values and the necessity of identifying the 'Self' with these attributes. They help Lucas grow into a 'better human' without actually losing their intrinsic self-identity as ants. The narrative ensures that the ants' metaphorical humanisation leaves them unexposed to Lucas' 'human' influence and, therefore, even though Lucas' recognition of intrinsic humanity is facilitated by the ants themselves, they are neither lost in their humanisation nor in Lucas' moral awakenings.

This is, indeed, the power of anthropomorphism. It encourages the 'animal' to step out into the public domain and imagination- without being unafraid of human control- as a self-entity that is subject to agency, constituency, and authority. It encapsulates a utilitarian philosophy that acknowledges the sentience of nonhumans and uplifts them as morally-equal (Singer, 1980). Therefore, the sharks' assertion that "fish are friends" (in *Finding Nemo*) is not simply considered a comedic opinion, but an implicit, deeper manifestation of the sharks' acknowledgment of ethical equality, leading onto becoming symbols of utilitarianism (and moral vegetarianism).

Anthropomorphism, as an artform, endows the 'animal' with everything that humanity had kept it deprived of. In its recognition of human-conspired deprivation, the 'animal' is motivated to regain its ecological-and-existential centrality, its sense of dominion and power, its emotionality, its laughter- all at the expense of humanity's disapproval. The 'animal' recognises that its sense of authority upsets the 'human', but the former wins when it keeps on exerting an outward authority. As in *Ferdinand*, El Primero's sense of anguish was driven by Ferdinand's denial to comply inside the bullring, as Ferdinand's acceptance of his 'true' nature both humiliates and endangers Primero's exercised centrality. Ferdinand wins because anthropomorphism preserved its authority and identity of who he was, and this is where the essence of the 'art' lies: in its ability to make 'the nonhuman-other' grow out of the cloistered and inhibitive definitions prescribed by humanity, unaware of what it really means to be an 'animal'.

Conclusion: The Patchwork Quilt

Across the dissertation, we have been curious about animations' significance in the processes of children's socialisation, and how they could function as 'fantastical messengers' of what Grusec (2002) had called "intrinsic values" (p. 144). Through looking at animations from polysemic perspectives and paradigms, we realised that animations possess the required capacities to reshape the human-self and re-develop what Mills (2000) had called the "sociological imagination" (p. 5) in the 'Introduction'. The latter-most aspect could be peculiarly characterised as an intellectual framework that encourages individuals to "acquire a new way of thinking . . . [and] experience a transvaluation of values" (p. 8). Thompson et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of such sociologically-imaginative individuals in bringing positive ideological and institutional changes in societies and cultures. In this sense, animated characters could be taken as equally-inspirational icons for change and hope.

From *Belle and Sebastian* to *The Ant Bully*, and from *Doraemon* to *Web Woman*, we were privileged to probe into the intricacies of a diverse gamut of animations and view them through disparate conceptual dimensions. It brings us to an understanding of the dissertation's development as a "patchwork quilt" (Wibben, 2011, p. 8). This suggests the pivotal role of the conclusion in re-connecting the key conceptual ideas, frameworks, and arguments proposed across the work to defend, and explore, the above-mentioned research thesis upon which the present dissertation has been founded. Within the dissertation, we attempted to encapsulate a broad range of concepts that, though distinct from each other, help us in our vindication(s) of animations and their socialising/moralising faculties. Furthermore, these concepts inform the thematic nature(s) of these animations which, unsurprisingly, is manifested frequently in animations on a largescale, i.e., these philosophical concepts could be studied in several popular animated forms. For each chapter, we aimed at one key concept/idea to support our respective readings of the selected animations and, thereby, we managed to perceive the ideological underpinnings of the 'odyssey', 'tragedy', 'utopianism', 'feminine aesthetic', and 'anthropomorphism'.

Of course, these concepts are relatively broad and extensive by nature and, subsequently, have not been approached within a strict, single paradigmatic template. These concepts have been deployed (1) to closely understand and appreciate the animations' intrinsic value as a socialising sub-category of mass media, and (2) to stimulate further extensive research on the existence of sub-concepts within a 'concept'. Here, Tuan's (1975) concept of "geopiety" (p. 11) to 'read' Heidi's relationship with the Swiss Alps and her 'self-transformative journey' towards nature and belonging (in Chapter I) could be mentioned as one suitable example. Similarly, Lauren Wilcox's (2017) symbolic trope of "woman-as-insect" (p. 26) intersects with our analysis of *Web Woman* (in Chapter III) as a manifestation of 'the feminine-superheroic' and refreshes our understandings of the inter-relationship between 'utopianism' and 'feminism'.

We refer to these intersections as random examples to illustrate how the five primary concepts can become a springboard for the exploration of other sub-concepts and philosophical thoughts, some of which we have attempted to uncover across the dissertation. But the overall significance of the five dealt concepts (forming the dissertation) has crucially been to discover the socialising output of animations and inform our acknowledgment about these productions as purveyors of personal growth, balanced harmony, homogenous happiness, and love. Essentially, these ideas predominate the discussed-ten narratives and could be collectively treated as coherent themes that inter-connect the animations. These children's animations apprise and advise their viewers about similar human values and help us approach towards a phase of optimistic assimilation that un-clouds our moral/ethical vision, enabling a wide-appealing introduction of collective imagination for a collective, bigger cause of humanity. It allows us to view ourselves as tomorrow's "history makers" (Thompson et al., 2019, p. 4), promoting a philosophical understanding that each step an individual takes towards their personal/moral development could lead their societies' towards progress, liberation, and peace. These animations emblematise the belief that our actions shape the future of tomorrow, and an assimilation of positive individual actions may combine to establish a united utopia.

Subsequently, to the idea of optimistic assimilation is the parallel notion of ‘retribalisation’ connected with, which is extensively pursued by the animation industry, as we have attempted to bring out and vindicate through a thorough content analysis of ten animated productions (seven television series and three movies). Before we progress ahead to reflect over the concept of ‘retribalisation’- and how animations disseminate its ideology- it is relatively important to mention that these animations, particularly the television series, were selected mostly because of a discomforting absence of critical scholarship on these subjects. Where *Disney* films and *Warner Bros.* productions have been one of the most popular destinations for media critique, a whole range of other productions were overshadowed/overlooked, and these animated series emerge from that slush pile. Even though animations like *Heidi* (1974) and *Doraemon* (1973-present) have managed to garner some critical recognition- due to the influential oeuvres of its makers- it still fails to match the amount of critical and public attention that the former two have hitherto received. Thereby, by studying a few uncommon animations, we aim to inspire further research into more unfamiliar and less popular animations and contribute to the body of knowledge that concentrates on the intersections between children’s socialisation/welfare and media artforms.

However, contrary to several arguments brought over about mass media as a more detrimental- than rewarding- agent of socialisation (Levinson, 1975; Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999), we focus on manifesting the dissertation as a critical defence of the former, in general, and animations, in particular. As a sub-agent of media socialisation, animation has been found to possess an extraordinary quality that helps retribalise the audiences’ modes of thinking and consolidate it towards collective, humanistic ambitions. It is strange to note that the notion of ‘retribalisation’ could be compared to Webb’s (2008) idea of ‘critical utopian hope’, for both ideas are inclined towards collective thought, balanced harmony, and sustained peace.

The concept of retribalisation was pioneered by Marshall McLuhan (1964) in relation to his ideas about the ‘global village’. From a socio-political perspective, retribalisation was deemed a (1) response to the individual-centred print age and (2) a celebration of the liberalist electronic age (Lopez, 2014; Havers, 2003). The advent of electro-digital formats made the transmission of information across cultures and national boundaries easier, stimulating the development of a collective identity amongst individuals. This sense of identity was governed by notions of “tribalist communitarianism” (Havers, 2003, p. 520) that influences the erasure of differences (individual or national) and the imagination of retribalised spaces of community-building. In the paradigms of retribalisation, individual differences and prejudices are lost, and humanity is envisioned as a singular, collective entity. Retribalisation, indeed, becomes a dream about togetherness and equality.

This notion of ‘retribalisation’ takes us back to Gerbner’s (2004) account of ‘stories’ that were upheld as powerful sources of quite a wide-scale range of human values that concentrate upon the retribalisation of modern thought (p. xi). Typically, during the present telecommunications era, we begin to acknowledge the multifaceted worth of many of these ‘stories’ that have drawn recognition during what Gerbner (2004) addresses as the “electronic revolution” (p. xi). Furthermore, he maintains that “unlike the industrial revolution, [this] new upheaval does not uproot people from their homes but transports [these stories] in their homes” (p. xi.), which becomes possible due to the prevalence of its most pervasive manifestation: the television.

Levinson (1975) elsewhere had remarked about the growing popularity of the television and addressed it as an “‘early window’” (p. 561) for children. This argument may conjoin with Gerbner’s (2004) accounts of the dispersive nature of ‘stories’ to suggest that many of these stories can be- and are being- disseminated via the television. With respect to children’s media and entertainment, many of these stories are represented and reinforced through animations and because these ‘now-animated’ stories encapsulate a socialising function, they can be deemed gateways to brief instances of substituted human experience and interaction.

Mead (1934), in his reflections about the ‘Self’, draws extreme emphasis over the necessity of human experience and interaction for the development of the ‘Self’ and treats them as vital components for the re-evaluation of what he interrogates as the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ (p. 177-178). As we had discussed in the *Introduction,* Mead (1934) analyses the psychological, social, and emotional differences between these co-related latter concepts, as they juxtapose to become the two “distinguishable” (p. 178) elements of the ‘Self’. Indeed, the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ are reshaped and remodified- and constantly made to readjust- during the early socialisation years, and even further than our early ages into adolescence and adulthood.

In a way, socialisation never stops, as we are constantly in the middle of 'growing up'. As Graham White (1977) highlights, traditional sociology has frequently viewed and critiqued socialisation as a functional phase strictly inherent to childhood and, as a result, overlooked a few outside factors/agents that a child may never experience, but become riveting sources of socialisation or what has been identified as "adult socialisation" (p. 80). Amongst these, two major sources could be experiences at work and (with) family/partnerships that help redefine our individual faculties of the 'Self' and reshape our characters or public identities. Therefore, it does not surprise us when White (1977) outlines adult socialisation as an "on-going life-long process of learning experiences" (p. 81), suggestive of the social reality about humanity as constantly being in the middle of manifold phases of social evolution.

Unfortunately, the scope of our current discourse on adult socialisation is (1) too enormous to be justifiably dissected in the present discussions on animations and children's socialisation, and, naturally, (2) falls outside the scope of our analyses. We introduced this argument to propose and defend the possibilities (for) and realities about humans to be always in the middle of socialisation. In every walk of life, we are going to encounter, interact (and befriend) hundreds of individuals and will be learning something new, something we have been unaware of, either about ourselves or others through those interactions. It is the beauty of socialisation to transform into a range of perennial human processes of identity formation-and-reformation that rely upon as much as they nourish our abilities to extract learning from our experiences of interactions with others. These prospects about adult socialisation, yet again, opens another door for research that can focus on animations' potentials to inspire and apprise adults, acting as substituted manifestations of human experience, and how this relationship between adult socialisation and animations can promote a wider understanding about animations' particular status as sub-agents of socialisation. This can become an interesting avenue for further research around other intersectional and socio-cultural fields that can extend- and support- many of the arguments proposed across this dissertation on animations for children.

Coming back to Mead's (1934) concept of the 'Self' and the differences between the 'I' and 'Me', it is thoughtful if we briefly return and revise what these two componential segments of the 'Self' stand for, which may help us quickly advance over the arguments we aim to propose about animations ahead. Thompson et al. (2019) provide us with a lucid explanation about what constitutes the two bio-social systems of the 'I' and 'Me' and how they are interdependent, their many intricacies and pathological co-existence, and how they are different to each other:

> The I is *the unsocialized self as subject*. More spontaneous, creative, and uninhibited than the me, the I is the initiator of social action. . . through socialization, however, as the sense of self develops more fully, the me component, or *the socialized self as object*, develops. The sense of me represents people's ability to realize that they are members of a social world and that, while they have the ability to act in a way that has an impact on others, others can also act in ways that have an impact on them. Although the I is spontaneous and creative, the me is reactive; it is based on our perception of how others will respond to our actions (p. 90).

This interplay between 'I' and 'Me' is integral for the development of 'Self' as a complete, wholesome entity. On one hand, where the 'I' is more individual-oriented; on the other hand, the 'Me' becomes more community-oriented and more inclined towards communal/collective welfare and harmony. Precisely, this transition from the 'I' to the 'Me' happens due to socialisation, as individuals learn from experiences as they tag along the life-road. Most important, socialisation teaches them to incorporate multiple perspectives to analyse their actions and their impacts on others (Malti et al., 2016). An acknowledgment about this serves as a stimulation of the gradual appearance of the 'Me' that concentrates on our abilities to understand the responsibilities of our decisions and actions; this, however, does not divorce the 'Self' from the 'I' which is an equally-central factor of one's identity. What socialisation pursues is a balanced relationship between the 'I' and 'Me' and the ability to fluctuate between the two as per individual and communal needs (Thompson et al., 2019). Here, Nobita Nobi (from Chapter II) may become a striking example to illustrate this argument and the repercussions of failing to harmoniously balance the two components of the ‘Self’.

Nobita’s tragedy initiates because he is always busy satisfying the ‘I’, to an extent that the ‘Me’ is mostly diminished. Because he focuses on individual self-indulgences, the ‘I’ is manifested as a part of the *Ego* that clouds his moral vision and restricts him from entering the dimensions of ‘Me’. He fails to recognise the significance of ‘Me’ in his relationships with others, as this building component could have helped him understand his social position and the responsibility of his ego-centred actions. But, because the ‘Me’ is lost in an excessive indulgence in the ‘I’ that Nobita’s identity is withered to tragic circumstances and unsuccessful relationships. Through Nobita, it becomes transparent that a positive ‘Self’ cannot be born out of imbalances, and that the ‘I’ and ‘Me’ are beneficial if harmoniously organised/amalgamated (Mead, 1934). Lastly, these bio-social systems discover their foundational basis in experience and interaction, further informing our critical reflections over animations’ socialising potentials.

Ahead of this, it seems worthwhile if we recapitulate our five chapters to (1) briefly re-reflect over those key conceptual ideas and (2) understand how these concepts have helped transform our subjective vocabularies about animations as catalysts of self-discovery. Additionally, we believe that this recapitulation is an indispensable prerequisite for our conclusive thesis about animations’ socialising prospects as it provides a concise, but wholesome picture to support our understandings of why animations are important and what do animations perpetuate that we (as readers or viewers) can consider. Indeed, this dissertation has attempted to answer these questions across its five chapters; however, yet again, it is imperative that those key ideas are reconsidered for the purposes of a concrete reading of the dissertation.

Chapter I looks at the metaphorical centrality of ‘self-transformative journeys’ that allow for the characters (or animated voyagers) to reshape and restructure their “superior existential mode of ‘being-in-the-world’” (Morgan, 2010, p. 248). For this purpose, the chapter dwells over Smelser’s (2009) paradigmatic model of “the odyssey experience” (p. 8) to analyse the journeys registered in the three respective animations:

Triton of the Sea (1972), *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), and *Belle and Sebastian* (1981-82). Within the chapter, we reflect over the possibilities of self-growth that is motivated through the independent journeys/odysseys that the protagonists undertake, and how these journeys could be 'read' as an external, inspirational opportunity for the audiences to partake in the protagonists' moments of self-discovery and rejoice in the further individual possibility of self-growth.

This idea of 'learning-through-journeys' is derived from an interesting amalgamation of Brian Stock's (1993) formulation of an inter-relationship between "seeing" and "reading" (p. 315) - their intertwined significance to acknowledge one's "sense of place" (p. 314) - and Feike Dietz's (2019) concept of "mental travelling" (p. 197). Dietz (2019) deploys the interplay of 'seeing' and 'reading' to reconceptualise a distinct form of travelling, previously seen in several 18th century Dutch travel-narratives for children, that translates children's 'reading' of the narrative into a manifestation of 'travelling'. This way children's readings of a travel-narrative may help them re-position themselves alongside the characters (in the story) and be subjected to the same adventures and episodes of moral-learning as the characters. Similarly, this framework is redesigned within the three animations, enabling viewers to 'mentally travel' and accompany the protagonists on their respective odysseys without ever crossing the locational boundaries of 'home'. This results in a reversal reaction: like the protagonists, the audiences may also emotionally and spiritually develop, as the odysseys help the latter as much as the former in the structural formation of what Dietz (2019) had called the "knowledgeable self" (p. 197). This mechanism, indeed, supports our analyses of these animations as tales of ambition, hopefulness, courage, sacrifice, friendships, and love.

These values are repeated, albeit via a different approach, in our understandings of 'utopianism' in Chapter III and how superheroes could emerge as ambitious models of inspiration and utopian imagination. Loeb and Morris (2005) rightly address them as "moral examples" (p. 30), as they exert a wide-scale influence upon children to stay on the right track, directing them from darkness to lightness. Additionally, children's pathological inclination and attraction for these gigantic role-models justifies the latter's influence (Rubin, 2007). Superheroes are adored by children and adults primarily because of the noble qualities they possess and illuminate; they inspire our strengths through their sense of power, awakening our goodness through their sacrifices, altruism, and love for humanity. Loeb and Morris (2005) poignantly observe that superheroes' outstanding/fantastical prowess is what helps them qualify as (super)heroes, while there are several other peoples who have committed (and still do) equally-heroic acts like our superheroes, but who are lost/underappreciated in the quandary of post-modernist chaos. Many of these individuals, as Loeb and Morris (2005) reflect, exist beyond our binocular vision and fail to attract peoples' respect, largely because they are not 'larger-than-life' characters:

> There are many heroes in works of fiction, and in the real world, who don't have superpowers at all. . . [like] firemen, police officers, doctors, nurses, and teachers. . . They fight for human health, safety, growth, and excellence. They are the warriors of everyday life. . . But we don't often think of these people as heroes. And that's too bad. Their contributions are so common, and so regular to our experience, that we can easily overlook their distinctive character. We notice such people and recognize them as heroic only when they go far beyond the range of their normally heroic activities and catch our attention in a particularly dramatic way (p. 19).

This observation helps us reconsider the roles of Sebastian, Heidi, or Triton. In their respective pursuits, though personal by nature, they develop into "moral examples" (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p, 30) who can inspire audiences to be both kind and brave. Their odyssey experiences were fraught with uncertainties, insecurities, and dangers (Smelser, 2009), but they confront them and grow up into independent and selfless individuals. These animated children are 'heroes' in their own rights. Even though they fight for themselves, and not for humanity in the general sense, the values they propagate share a peculiar verisimilitude to what our superheroes embody in their socio-cultural positions as inspirational icons. Our three children and superheroes share the same platform, primarily in their abilities to elicit prosocial emotions that complement the audiences' identity-formation/reshaping processes. Both inspire and carry the potentials to reshape human-identity (Mead, 1934), though their methods might be variable.

Unequivocally, these odysseys implicitly insinuate the moral advantages of 'mistakes' for character-development as they often project a few moments- scattered across the narrative(s)- of their protagonists' self-realisation of a mistake (irrespective of any nature), and how these characters strive to learn something from their mistakes. For instance, Triton's abuse of the indomitable power of the olihan dagger soon transforms into a form of self-recognition about the differences between necessary and unnecessary use of power, as he begins using the dagger both vigilantly and prudently. This identification of the ethical purpose of 'mistakes' in a narrative, further, becomes a significant bedrock in Chapter II, as the chapter seeks out to encourage the audience to learn from Nobita's inherent nature of indulging in 'mistakes'. It is intriguing to note, here, that unlike the protagonists from Chapter I who actively reflect over their mistakes and attempt at discontinuing them (as part of their processes of self-growth), Nobita never learns from his mistakes and, instead, keeps recurring them across the narrative. Obviously, this is deliberately pursued by *Doraemon* in its revamping as an Aristotelian tragedy and its contemporary remodification of the polysemic concept of the 'Seven Deadly Sins' to centralise Nobita as a manifestation of the tragic-hero whose moral discrepancies could serve as believable platforms for audiences to self-identify, self-reflect, and self-rectify. Simply placed, *Doraemon* encourages viewers to learn from Nobita's mistakes and leave them at bay.

Chapter II becomes an intensive exploration on the subject of 'tragedy' and the 'unethical deadly sins' as it probes into how these concepts have been reconceptualised in *Doraemon*. The animation pursues this specific narrative design for the purposes of locating Nobita as the central source of tragic learning. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, the anime translates Nobita's tragic misadventures as a "sort of life lesson [that is] added to the experiences children need in order to pass successfully into adulthood in a social context" (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 72). For the 'tragedy' to be instigated, the anime manipulates Nobita's excessive indulgence in morally-transgressive behaviour(s) as the root-cause of all his troubles; and it is interesting to note that most of these transgressions are interlinked with the 'deadly sins'. This implies that Nobita's moral transgressions derive their thematic subjects and natures from the deadly sins and, subsequently, leading us to comfortably perceive Nobita's many-tragedies against our hero's fruitless indulgence in what Gregory I (as cited in Frank, 2001) had once classified as the five "sins of the spirit" (p. 96).

As a collective entity, the five 'spiritual' sins embody the moral degradation of Nobita's character (Nussbaum, 1992) which forms the backbone of the anime as a tragic narrative or as what Silverstone (2007) had called a "narrative of suffering" (p. 280). Here, we are reminded of Newhauser's (2007) ideological construction about what 'a concept' stands for (look: Chapter II). Philosophically speaking, a 'concept' has been maintained as a tangible- and pliable- set of ideas that is susceptible to change according to a culture's interests. *Doraemon* evidences this argument by incorporating a once-theology-engraved concept (the seven sins) to experiment with another traditional artform ('tragedy') and juxtapose these concepts to criticise Nobita's tragedies as outcomes of his own moralistic failings (Sherman, 1992). The anime, towards the end, pursues this to both warn the audiences against repeating Nobita's transgressive actions and inspire them towards self-introspection, self-criticism, and self-discovery (Rorty, 1992). These ideas about concurrent intro-and-retrospection, yet again, introduce us to the philosophy of 'utopianism' that (1) revolves around socio-political philosophies of comparison between a contemporary society with an imagined '*other*' society/community that may or may not be better than the state an author lives in (Sargent, 2006), and (2) that establishes as the crux in Chapter III.

Besides celebrating superheroes as utopian symbols, as we just reflected, Chapter III becomes an interesting space of inquiry for the relationship between 'utopianism' and 'feminism'. The latter-issue, further, transforms as a vital backdrop to our analyses in Chapter IV, and, thereby, it seems harmless if we reflect over the interconnectedness of 'feminist utopianism/feminine superheroic' and the 'feminine aesthetic' collectively. Paradoxically, animations' reputation has been scarred by its apparent reinforcement of sexist, gender, and ethnic stereotypes. It, unsurprisingly, becomes one of the most common grounds of criticism from media scholars, and that may lead many 'concerned' guardians to boycott animations, in general, accusing these media products of perpetuating- and normalising- stereotypes which are detrimental not only for children's socio-personal development, but also for their regular affinities with concepts of gender and sexuality. Against this backdrop, we analysed a few empowered women characters from three animations: *Web Woman* (1978), *Josie and the Pussycats* (1971-72), and *Doraemon* (1979-2005). Where Web Woman epitomises the ideas of *feminist utopianism* and *feminine superheroic* through her manifestation as Lauren Wilcox's (2017) symbolic montage of "woman-as-insect" (p. 26), the remaining female characters (from Chapter IV) embody the sentiments of an evolving feminist consciousness called the 'feminine aesthetic' (Wells, 1998).

Utopianism concentrates upon social progression; it juxtaposes with feminism to recognise its new boundaries and the indispensability of gender in society. This exemplifies in Web Woman. As an individual female superhero, she not only radiates with utopian implications, but also dismantles several stereotypes and gender limitations that pervade across superhero-narratives (Miller et al., 2016). One of her contemporaries, Isis, may briefly qualify as a treasure-trove of similar feminist ideologies. However, where Isis' feminist agency is blocked by the presence of other male superheroes, Web Woman thrives as a symbol of feminine resistance to not only patriarchal control, but also a sense of masculinist supremacy that revels over women's voicelessness and socio-cultural annihilation (Sells, 1995; Tuchman, 1978; Wilcox, 2017). As a female-superhero, Web Woman enables the reimagination of any futuristic society that recognises women's socio-cultural and moral status as equal citizens worthy of liberation. She emerges as a conscious thought towards the public emancipation of women in animation.

Web Woman's utopian feminism finds an extension in the reconceptualised characters of women like Alexandra, Shizuka or Valerie who represent and communicate the values of the feminine aesthetic (Wells, 1998). The 'golden' age of Betty Boop and Olive Oyl is now a distant history; what these characters tend to communicate is the age of feminist consciousness that disregards the bondages of patriarchal control/agency and seeks to redefine the territories of what 'gender', 'sexuality' and 'feminism' really imply. They now speak through a feminine aesthetic that celebrates womanhood, its insecurities and beliefs, its conundrums and values, and everything that women have been culturally deprived of. *Josie and the Pussycats* and *Doraemon*, in its portrayals of empowered women, introduce the contemporary meanings of womanhood, allowing its women to (1) embrace non-traditional roles like a mechanical genius (Valerie) or (2) spurn stereotypically-feminine roles like dishwashing/mopping (Alexandra).

As Gwynne (2015) had noted, women's liberation from the boundaries of 'home' often becomes a prerequisite for their public and private emancipation. Indeed, *Josie and the Pussycats* approaches this understanding via transitioning its women from domesticity to the outside-world and positioning them as 'travelling musicians'. These representational differences stimulate the conceptualisation of these animated women as doubly-emancipated. *Doraemon* progresses in its multifaceted portrayals of Shizuka Minamoto as a modern, post-war symbol of the *ūman ribu* (Shigematsu, 2018). As a Japanese schoolgirl, Shizuka debunks some of those conceptions that Western media had falsely- and stereotypically- represented in its cultural evaluations of the 'Japanese schoolgirl trope' (Hinton, 2013). Where she manages to transform into an affectionate fairy, at one instance, she even demonstrates her authoritative demeanour whenever required.

Additionally, *Doraemon*'s celebrations of 'difference' extends into its representations of Nobita as a "new man" (Beynon, 2004, p. 200), who rejects the traditional denominators of hegemonic masculinity. The anime positions him as a subversion. By imagining Nobita as a symbol of subversive masculinity, *Doraemon* blurs the dichotomies between masculinities and femininities, as cat's cradle becomes a neutral space of indulgence. Through these instances of positive experimentation, *Doraemon* validates its substantial and emotional value. Again, this connects to what the last two chapters have tried to uncover and defend. Via their depictions of gender, these animations capitalise upon some fresh trends in subjective representation that are distantiated from stereotyping and typecasting, and offer something that pushes people more towards emancipation than a pool of outdated thinking related to gender and sex.

Chapter V digresses from ideas of gender to bring into its focus the issue of anthropomorphism, leading us to a stark acknowledgment about the necessity of anthropomorphic practice and art, particularly in the wake of the proposed horrors of the Anthropocene. We argue in favour of anthropomorphism and strongly believe-contrary to claims about the practice as being harmful to animals and nonhuman others (McFarland, 2009; Anderson & Henderson, 2005)- that this artform contains the possibilities for the ‘animal’ to possess the individuality/voice it had long-awaited. To probe into these arguments, we extensively focus on You’s (2021) discussion about the subversive genre of the animal autobiography to analyse three narratives- *Finding Nemo, The Ant Bully,* and *Ferdinand*- as striking examples of the latter-mentioned genre.

As autobiographical animals, the characters are self-awakened by an unusual spirit of resilience and agency that provides to them an absolute control over their destinies/journeys. Of course, there is human intervention but, mostly, it is criticised and attacked by animals and, sometimes, humans (in *The Ant Bully*), which brings us to a realisation about the necessity of positive human intervention for the cause of nonhumans. As Lucas who fought for the colony of insects, we need to understand our responsibilities, as the top-most species in the food-chain, about changing the ways we perceive the ‘nonhuman-other’. From a utilitarian point-of-view, Singer (1980) helps us acknowledge the reality about ‘nonhumans’ as being equally-sentient as humans and that they deserve an equal moral and ethical consideration. Despite the representation of animals as self-emancipated subjects, this chapter translates into a passionate plea for the natural protection of nonhumans and their treatment (by humans) with respect and kindness (Luk et al., 1999).

Through Chapter V, we aimed to not only discuss the moral underpinnings of these narratives, but also trigger an emotional response from readers and viewers alike to re-evaluate their relationships with nonhumans and reflect over in what new ways can the latter be subjected to more instances/experiences of human compassion/kindness than mindless and barbaric cruelty. Surprisingly, this argument slightly connects with the overall purpose of the dissertation. Children’s socialisation capitalises on the processes of ‘becoming human’. Here, we allude to Wrong’s (1961) reflections on socialisation because it recapitulates the quintessence of growing-up under the shade of prosocial human values that one can aspire to take forward into the future. It explains why our wandering children’s odysseys were celebrated. During their individual enterprises, they were socialised about a range of ‘intrinsic values’ (Grusec, 2002), including sacrifice, loyalty, and courage, that further gives an emotional value to these works.

We referred to animations as ‘brief instances of substituted human experience’, precisely because of their capacities to transport, though partially, physical experiences of human-interaction or encounter to the comfort of our homes. This substitution of human experiences enables animations to transform themselves into similar ‘stories’ that Gerbner (2004) mentions; as a result, the characters’ journeys, adventures, or natures become the audiences’ very own. It corresponds with Dietz’s (2019) argument about ‘mental travelling’ where the voyagers’ experiences translate into the readers’ or viewers’ personal episodes of learning, emancipation and reformation. There is a type of ‘mentalising’ that is clearly involved in what animations offer to children. Animations provide us with virtual material that substitutes real-life based experiences and prepare us for our personal adventures outside parental boundaries.

We handpicked some animations to illustrate and advance this argument to encourage further thoughts on the possibilities of socialisation through animations and cartoons. With the advent of the electronic revolution, there was a rapid transformation in the manner of dissemination of stories (Gerbner, 2004). Visual media dominated households, and, naturally, children’s entertainment was made to evolve, leading animations and cartoons to be manifested/deployed as intermediaries for narratives that complement the socialisation process (‘stories’). This becomes possible due to the aesthetic nature of many of these animations that punctuates them with an individuated agency, stimulating their development as independent stories of personal growth, liberty, feminism, animal-human symbiosis, self-analysis, self-reflection and harmony. Furthermore, it is the aestheticism within animations that renders them a polysemic value. It intersects with notions of reception and accentuates the possibility of these animations being received/interpreted by individuals differently, as we had earlier reflected in the Introduction.

Holly (2002) and Iser (1980) enlighten our understanding of the ever-transitory nature of ‘meaning’ which could be transformed and reshaped with time, and which depends upon several factors outside the control of the text. According to reader-response criticism, these factors chiefly involve the reader’s participation and what Schmidt (1979) addresses as “the totality of life experience[s]” (p. 160). Reception aesthetics takes into serious consideration the multiple nuances of a reader’s sociocultural, political, and linguistic backgrounds/inclinations and their life-experiences, which might affect their interpretation of a text. This may even apply to animations and the different ways in which children may perceive a specific content. These interpretational disparities, for example, might get influenced by children's geographical locations: the Japanese backdrop of *Doraemon* might be different from how an American or Indian audience perceive certain notions about the school, family, and the home. Indeed, the digitalisation of animation-culture has stimulated a rapid interest/growth in overseas distribution; however, their reception might be affected by the audiences' geographies. Thus, to ease these swift transcultural exchanges, dubbing often assimilates and incorporates the sociocultural overtones of the target-culture (Lee, 2011), localising an otherwise international product. Additionally, these notions about reception connect with ideas of retrospective viewing and attract curiosity about the lasting effects of an animation, and if the same content would evoke the same reaction amongst the same audiences after a specific amount of time.

Potts et al. (2008) inferred that an individual might be able to retrospect and remember their episodes of childhood television-viewing. Although their research does not highlight if these animated products are received in the same way by the participants, nonetheless, it helps us answer the plausibility that the lessons learnt through the studied animations might be remembered and might influence individuals' adolescence and adulthood. The researchers mention that memory is affected by repetitiveness (Potts et al., 2008, p. 41), and the episodic nature of televised animations triggers a strong impact on the viewers' cognition and memory. It helps the animation sustain itself in the viewers' sub-conscious and, therefore, even if the animation is no longer physically available, the context and content could be remembered and recalled (p. 55). There are alarming possibilities that the content might be contested when retrospectively viewed because, like technological progress, humanity has also transformed. The world has evolved; the politics has changed. Acts like Sebastian's casual border-crossing or Triton's physical abuse, therefore, might now be considered serious offences under criminal laws. These socio-political changes stagnate the possibility of present-day depictions of such images/beliefs. However, they should not obstruct the moral vision of the viewer to internalise the socialising impact of these productions. Present-day viewing of many of the analysed works relies much on a wilful suspension of disbelief, so that we concentrate on the character - and what we might/not learn from them - rather than on the apparent paraphernalia of modernism.

Bendazzi (1994) had addressed animation as “a pure work of the spirit” (p. xxi). This serves true to what animations achieve through their fictional depiction of human-nature and appreciation for retribalisation (Gerbner, 2004). Our discussed animations have proven their capacities to raise challenging concerns about society and environment and help individuals sustain their faith in largescale humanity, and this dissertation has attempted to validate that. These animations operate through the systems of ‘conditional freedom’ (Chouliaraki, 2008), leaving the choice to act upon any socialising lessons propagated through these stories on us. As viewers or readers, we need to realise that we hold the keys to our communities’ progress and our actions may either mar it down or catapult it to prosperity; the choice remains chiefly ours. Therefore, none of the analysed animations- with *Web Woman* as an exception- attempt at preaching about their ideological reinforcements upon the audiences, but instead leave everything to the audiences’ interests/discretion.

Now, it becomes obvious why Nobita’s tragedies simply conclude with an outcry. *Doraemon* never explains the cause of his tragedy; the meaning of the narrative extensively relies upon the viewer’s ability and interest to study the tragedy and internalise some hidden lessons into their personal lives, so that the tragedy is not repeated. Animations are stories about personal emancipation that can retribalise our imaginations towards collective harmony and welfare. We need more awareness to perceive that these representations are not just a bunch of smiling faces, neither caricatures nor weapons of mockery, but proactive agents of ideology that we could either discard or treasure. This, however, does not change the bottom-line that animations could emerge as homogenous representatives of a heterogenous humanity, communicating through collective instances of laughter, awakening us from a dead silence.

In short, animations could be anything- frivolous, sagacious, evocative- but ‘not just sheer pleasure’. They teach us several patterns of socio-cultural behaviour; even though criticism might be levelled against some particular patterns, the patterns recorded in these ten animated productions undeniably have the potential to complement the socialisation phases, in ‘one way or the other’. We say this because while an animation may advance certain positive stances, it could simultaneously be censured for promoting something negative. For example, where we rejoice in Triton’s odyssey, we criticise the same animation for restricting Pipiko within passive, stereotypical depictions. This helps us conclude that animations may have their own pros and cons, but they leave enough room for audiences to grow-up along with their characters. It is about travelling to unexplored or ignored avenues of human values, but within the confines of home and parental supervision and rehearsal. For we understand, it takes practice and patience to grow.

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