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In Light of Luxo: Masculinity, Fatherhood, and the Hardest Bodies in Pixar

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M.A., Emory University, 2010
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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By David S. Braught

Pixar films are dominated entirely by masculine protagonists. Women appear in these films, and sometimes have major roles, but they are, for the most part, relegated to the sidelines. This thesis looks at the issue of masculinity in Pixar in depth, concentrating on two hard bodied Pixar protagonists: Bob Parr from *The Incredibles* (2004) and WALL-E from *WALL-E* (2008). The hard bodied masculinity represented by Bob and WALL-E goes hand-in-hand with an alpha male identity, driven by hard work, competition, and an inability to form emotional attachments. However, these two Pixar protagonists offer a unique case in the history of hard bodied males, presenting characters that undeniably possess alpha male qualities, but in whom alpha male qualities are not viewed as flaws, but instead as positive qualities worthy of respect and emulation. For Bob Parr and WALL-E, their masculinity is tempered by a kinder, sensitive side, a mark of individuality that separates them from the traditional alpha male of the 1980s.

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Introduction

Luxo Jr., a film starring the little lamp that would eventually become Pixar's mascot, premiered at the Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques (SIGGRAPH) conference in 1986 and met with an overwhelmingly favorable response. After the screening, computer scientist Jim Blinn approached John Lasseter, the film's director (and the future principal creative advisor for Walter Disney Imagineering) with a question about the short film. Lasseter mentally prepared himself for a line of abstruse interrogation that he would have no hope of answering (most likely something related to the science or procedures behind the technology used to render Luxo Jr. and its parent). To his shock and delight, Blinn instead asked, "John, was the big lamp the mother or the father?" (Price 92).

Representations of gender continue to be key threads in the academic analyses relating to Pixar films, as evidenced by Ken Gillam and Shannon Wooden's article "Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar." The two scholars place Pixar's representations of gender in dialogue and opposition with Disney's, stating that "unlike most Disney animated films, which have been criticized for their stereotypical female leads and traditional representations of gender, all the major features released by Disney's Pixar studios since 1990 have featured masculine protagonists" (Gillam 1).

Gillam and Wooden overstate the issue. Disney's female-centric, princess-driven narratives, represented chiefly by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), encompass only a fraction of the studio's filmography. A plethora of Disney animated features starring male protagonists spans

the Disney's history, including, but by no means limited to, *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941), *The Jungle Book* (1967), *The Lion King* (1994), and *Treasure Planet* (2002).

However, Gillam and Wooden are correct in noticing that all of Pixar's feature films star male protagonists. These able-bodied characters burst onto the screen as action figures, fathers, cars, robots, monsters, and superheroes – characters firmly rooted in male fantasy. Diverse female characters unquestionably appear in these films, and, in some cases, these female characters might even have some narrative significance, but, on the whole, men dominate Pixar films, while women support, or remain completely separate from, the action of the story.

Despite this dominance of male roles in Pixar films, studies of the way in which the studio addresses notions of masculinity in Pixar features, especially when compared to the magnitude of scholarship on the role of women and the nature of femininity in Disney films, remains in the early stages. Of course, this is to be expected. Pixar as a company has existed for less than thirty years and has been producing features for fewer than twenty, making it a young studio, particularly in light of Disney's eighty-year history, and for this reason much of the research and reporting on the content of Pixar's products remains in its early stages. What is more troubling than this dearth of probing and analysis is that, of the scholarship that does concern masculinity in Pixar films, such as the aforementioned article by Gillam and Wooden, most present shallow readings on the subject. This thesis, through an analysis of two Pixar films, *The Incredibles* (2004) and *WALL-E* (2008), will consider and dissect the notion of masculinity as portrayed within the films and as informed through the reviews and writings of other critics and

will detail the unique and robust ways in which the films present attributes of masculinity to audiences.

WALL-E revisits Blinn's question about *Luxo Jr.* at the SIGGRAPH awards because the robot's juvenile innocence is reminiscent of the child-like lamp. WALL-E

Top: WALL-E, losing control of a fire extinguisher as he "skates" around a scrapyard.
Bottom: The Tramp, similarly unable to stay on his feet in roller skates in *The Rink* (1916)

interacts with everyday objects in the same manner that Luxo Jr. plays with his ball. As WALL-E catalogues and compacts trash, he utilizes everyday objects in improper ways, turning items as diverse as boxes, fire extinguishers, and even bras into toys for his (and the audience's) amusement. This use and misuse of materials is reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp character, a personality famous for his child-like behavior and his transformative use of objects. Seeking to replicate aspects of Chaplin's creation, director Andrew Stanton instructed his staff to observe The Tramp's various incarnations everyday for a full year while they worked on the modes and methods to animate *WALL-E* (Mondello). Both the Tramp and WALL-E, as well as Luxo Jr., are forced to rely entirely (or almost entirely) on nonverbal methods of communication to transmit their individual narratives. In many ways, *WALL-E* feels like a test that Pixar is proposing to itself – to see how far the organization can push the ideas and techniques presented by John Lasseter in *Luxo Jr*. using computer animation technology twenty years more advanced.

The Incredibles might not have as distinct a visual relationship to *Luxo Jr*. as does *WALL-E*, but it connects with the earlier film because, like *Luxo Jr*., *The Incredibles* is explicitly concerned with representations of parenthood. The film revolves around Bob Parr's efforts to find a way to balance his present life as an everyday dad with his past life as superhero Mr. Incredible. His relationship with his children, like that of Luxo with Luxo Jr., signifies a central thread of the narrative structure. This family-centric narrative structure underlying *The Incredibles* does not put the film in a self-contained category – there are other Pixar films that address the nature of fathers and parenting, as exemplified by *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Up* (2009). If not the parent/child relationship, then what

makes *The Incredibles* unique among Pixar's filmography, and why study it alongside *WALL-E*?

The bodies.

Bob Parr and WALL-E, in addition to their ties to *Luxo Jr.*, share a physical exceptionalism unrivaled even by the plethora of male Pixar protagonists. Through their physical attributes, they exemplify a trend in masculinity first illustrated by Susan Jeffords in her 1994 book *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* and later incorporated within a study of animated films in her 1995 article, "The Curse of Masculinity: Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*." Both masculine leads represent this hard-bodied ideal in their own distinctive way: Bob Parr through his expansive

Left: WALL-E, metallic and angular, looking "hard."
Right: Bob Parr, rippling with muscles, representing the hard-bodied male ideal.

musculature and WALL-E via his angular, metallic construction. Marlin, the father in *Finding Nemo*, and Carl Fredericksen, the father-figure in *Up* – as a clownfish and a wrinkled old man, respectively – hardly fit into the hard bodied masculinity represented by Bob and WALL-E.

The physicality of Bob and WALL-E stand as first-rate examples of hard bodies, thanks in part to their animated nature, constructed from start to finish through computer imaging software. The creative leeway available to these filmmakers enables them to create musculatures of exaggerated proportions. Bob Parr's musculature is so overstated that it is hard to imagine any real human being, even the quintessential hard body Arnold Schwarzenegger, possessing an approximating physique. Computer animation also allows for the representation of the robotic, eternally durable, WALL-E.

For Jeffords, this hard bodied masculinity ties in directly to U.S. President Ronald Reagan and his efforts in foreign policy (efforts that dominated the news during the 1980s) as well as his knowledge of and leverage within the media. Jeffords describes Reagan's public image in her book *Hard Bodies*:

> In Reagan's self-promoted image – chopping wood at his ranch, riding horses, standing tall at the presidential podium – his was one of these hard bodies, a body not subject to disease, fatigue, or aging. 'Ronald Reagan lifted the double-edged ax above his head and slammed it into the three branch lying on the ground. He swung again, his right hand sliding the length of the long wooden handle, and kept swinging for two full minutes. His face glistened with sweat…. In his faded denim shirt, leather gloves, scuffed boots and cowboy hat, he looked fit and even young." This hard body became for Reaganism what Jurgen Link has called a "collective symbol," what he defines as "collective pictures that are culturally 'anchored' in the most literal sense and that act as carriers of symbolic meaning." The depiction of the indefatigable, muscular, and invincible masculine body became the linchpin of the Regan imaginary; this hardened male form became the emblem not only for the Reagan presidency but for its ideologies and economies as well (25).

A representation of manliness and leadership that endured through the 1980s, Reagan's public image as a masculine standard resurfaced in the past decade: for example, George W. Bush presented himself in the Reagan mold of physicality as he quipped with the press during his presidential brush-clearing exploits at his ranch in Texas or as he donned his Air Force flight suit for his flight to the USS Lincoln, and

Vladimir Putin, Bush's counterpart in Russia, offered over-the-top public glimpses of his KGB-quality pecs as he ambled along on the back of a worthy steed.

(Left to right) Ronald Reagan (University of Texas Presidential Archives), George W. Bush (ThinkProgress.org), and Vladimir Putin (Druginyn), world leaders all, offer glances of hard bodied masculinity to the public.

The years 2004 and 2008 not only mark ending points of Bush and Putin's terms in presidential office, they also correspond to the box office releases of *The Incredibles* and *WALL-E*, tying the two films firmly to twenty-first century head of state hard bodies. Susan Jeffords sees the factors that affect the representations of masculinity of such heroes as the Beast (Robby Benson) as broad reflections of shifts in popular culture and politics from the 1980s and beyond. These masculine representations invoke mental pictures of fit, hard bodies and a "man's man" persona; examples of this model abound in film. This trend died off in the 1990s, with fit and firm alpha males giving way to kind, sensitive, and soft men – men to whom cultural critic Richard Collier refers as New Men. During the first decade of the new century, however, a change has found its way into the public consciousness, allowing filmmakers to present strong male protagonists with hard-

bodied, alpha male qualities as well as to advance a sensitive, romantic side, thus allowing these men to have their cake and eat it, too. A narrative analysis of *The Incredibles* and *WALL-E*, reinforced with a visual and stylistic examination of the main characters of each, shows that these films are central to this shifting paradigm, portraying male characters whose strength showcases the power of the individual to overcome the intuitive pressure to comply with popular standards of appearance and conduct.

"A Hard Man is Good to Find":

Fatherhood and the Triumph of Individuality in Brad Bird's *The Incredibles*

Animation targets youth. Animated feature films thrive thanks to the combined attendance of children under the age of thirteen and the parents footing the bill. And yet, a surprising number of films from Pixar Animation Studios, a company undeniably loved by children, focus on fathers or father figures, not kids, in leading roles. As explained in the introduction, of the ten Pixar films released since 1995, three – *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, and *Up* – star grown men who either begin the film as parents or take on a paternal role as the action of the film progresses. Two of these three films depict similar narrative trajectories: a soft, clueless father, unequipped for his responsibilities and in way over his head, discovers that his family (or surrogate family in the case of *Up*) represents the most important and meaningful relationships in life and learns how to properly care for his household. However, the third film, Brad Bird's *The Incredibles*, differs from the other two because of Bob Parr's hard bodied mentality as well as his story arc. Bob might appear to the viewer to be detached, disinterested or ill-equipped in his role as father, but, by its conclusion, the film tells the audience that Bob had the right idea. He inherently knew the best way to raise his family. The film's narrative showcases society as it imposes its constrictive standards upon Bob, then follows him as he breaks through these limitations, revealing an individualistic, alpha-male identity tempered with the familial love of the New Man.

All three of these films belong to a time-honored tradition of animated dysfunctional families. Early Disney features often tended towards the rendering of atypical family units – *Snow White* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), and *Cinderella* (1950)

standing out as salient examples of this trend. As America moved into the post-WWII era and the term "nuclear family" entered the lexicon, animation began focusing on representations of traditional families, exemplified by the emergence of *The Flintstones* and other Hanna-Barbera produced television shows of the 1960s. This trend has not abated in recent years, typified by the glut of contemporary, family-concerned animated shows on prime time television, with *The Simpsons* (1989-present), *Family Guy* (1999-2002; 2005-present), and *King of the Hill* (1997-2009) best exemplifying the pattern.

In these three shows, narratives revolve exclusively around the overt ineptitude or enervating struggle of a father attempting to connect to (or flat out ignore) children with whom he has nothing in common and little hope of shared understanding. However, despite the differing models of family and fatherhood among the three shows, the conflicts depicted therein center on paternal incompetence and the tension it creates within the family. *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* exemplify a family dynamic in which the idiot father causes endless problems for his long-suffering family unit. As Rebecca Feasey succinctly states: "Homer is a man who happily engorges himself to obese proportions in order to work from home, a man who takes a bucket of fried chicken to church, a man who complains about taking his children out on a Saturday afternoon and misses his son's little league games because he finds them dull" (Feasey 35-36). Likewise, she describes Peter Griffin, Homer Simpson's obvious counterpart in the *Family Guy* universe, as "an overweight, routinely unemployed, obnoxious and irresponsible father-of-three who seems to do little but watch television, avoid work and reserve his Sundays for browsing internet porn" (Feasey 41). While Feasey's reading overlooks conspicuous examples of episodes in both shows where the wife or children

are the direct cause of familial strife and conflict (such as episode 5:10 of *The Simpsons*, "$pringfield [Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling]" in which Marge becomes addicted to slot machines), Feasey is, for the most part, correct: nearly every episode of *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* revolves around the bumbling incompetence or callow immorality of the family's patriarch.

Pixar's newest feature, *Up* (directed by Pete Docter), depicts a family dynamic similar to the one represented by most episodes of *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* – one defined by a self-absorbed, egocentric, and disinterested father figure. For the majority of the film, aging balloon salesman Carl Fredricksen regards his Wilderness Explorer companion, Russell (Jordan Nagai), with equal parts disdain and disinterest, and, like Homer Simpson before him, Fredricksen makes his disinterest in Russell as plain as possible. A childless man and now completely family-less following the death of his wife, Ellie (his soul mate and the love-of-his-life), Fredricksen barely notices that his remaining days could benefit from some sort of family of his own. As far as Fredricksen is concerned, the child's only marketable trait is his corpulence, enticing Fredricksen to tie himself and Russell to the house, using the boy as a ballast to keep the domicile from floating away. This act of tying the characters together fully illustrates Fredricksen's opinion of Russell: he thinks of the boy as his albatross, dead weight and nothing more to him in his quest to reach the Falls. Since Russell's only contribution, as far as the old man can see at the onset, is his corpulence, Fredricksen decides to take full advantage of that capacity on the journey through Paradise Falls.

Unlike Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin, however, Fredricksen eventually realizes the error of his ways and learns to appreciate Russell for more than his heft.

Fredricksen comes to this realization late in the film, thanks to his discovery of the last entries in Ellie's adventure book, which ends with a note reading "thanks for the adventure – now go have a new one!" Fredricksen realizes that Ellie would want him to continue to go on with his life and find a new family, not just dwell on his past with her. He immediately sets off on a mission to rescue Russell from Charles Muntz (Christopher Plummer), cementing a father-son relationship that has developed between himself and Russell during the narrative. The strength of this kinship is affirmed at the conclusion of the movie, when Fredricksen appears at a Wilderness Explorer meeting to pin a badge on Russell at their accomplishments ceremony – a task performed in all other cases by Explorer-dads. Instead of bestowing upon Russell an Assisting the Elderly badge, Fredricksen applies a bottle cap "badge" that Ellie had worn as a child, thereby symbolizing his acceptance of Russell into his family. Fredricksen's father-like role is further reinforced during the closing credits of the film (and just before them) wherein he performs a number of paternal tasks, including playing a game of "Spot the Car" with Russell (a game that the boy had loved to play with his now-absent father), going fishing with Russell, and taking Russell camping.

By contrast, *King of the Hill* presents a fatherly struggle drastically different from the developments presented in *Up,* and also in *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*. While Homer and Peter have little or no compassion for or interest in their respective families and spend as much time as possible watching TV or drinking Duff Beer or Pawtucket Pat's Ale at the local bar, Hank Hill goes out of his way to be a good father and role model for his son, Bobby. Hank had a strained relationship with his own father, Cotton, a domineering WWII vet with a unique disability – no shins. Cotton misunderstood Hank

as a child and never bothered to appreciate his boy's redeeming qualities (chiefly his athletic prowess). Now an adult and a father in his own right, Hank finds himself positioned with his son, Bobby, much as Cotton once had been with him: "…in the same way that we see Cotton despair at Hank's shooting skills, so too, we witness Hank's total frustration at Bobby's lack of sporting aptitude, hearing him tell his wife that 'I never get to bond with Bobby on account of he's not much good at stuff' (2:01 "How to Fire a Rifle without Really Trying")" (Feasey 39).

While Homer, Peter, and Cotton would either despair of or ignore an "inferior," non-alpha-male son, Hank actually gives extra effort to support and nurture his son's interests, even when he discovers that his boy wants to be the school mascot (rather than to make a spirited attempt to qualify for the sports team itself), a beautician, or a horticulturalist.

It is unfair to say that Homer and Peter never have moments wherein they try to be good fathers, husbands, and providers, but their incompetence or lack of interest always catches up with them, with the inevitable result that they never have the same success as Hank in the fatherhood department. Feasey recounts an episode of *The Simpsons* in which Homer attends a lecture at the National Fatherhood Institute and makes a conscious decision to be a model parent, but still lacks basic parenting skills: "for example, we see him trying to teach Bart to ride a bike even though the boy is already capable, encouraging Lisa to play on a dirty, greasy tyre-swing and allowing Maggie to both drink beer and play with an electric drill" (Feasey 36).

A similar narrative trajectory occurs in the *Family Guy* episode "I Never Met the Dead Man" (1:02) in which Peter quits watching television and resolves to be a good father by participating in more activities with his family. To no one's surprise, he goes so far over the top with his attempts at good parenting that he leaves his family dazed, exhausted, and depressed. At the end of the episode, Peter gets injured while playing in the rain with William Shatner and winds up trapped in a hospital room with the television turned on. With his customary lack of self-control and restraint, Peter soon becomes tube-addicted once again, and his family – now recovering from Dad's episode of contrived and overbearing dotingness – decides they prefer their inattentive (but predictable) father to the involved (but misguided) one.

Marlin, the parental clownfish in *Finding Nemo*, subscribes to the same brand of overbearing parenting performed, on occasion, by Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin; however, his motivations are more reminiscent of Hank Hill's than of Homer Simpson's and Peter Griffin's. Marlin is not being overprotective and domineering in order to make up for past omissions or indiscretions, but, rather, because he is in so far over his head as a single father (his wife and all their other children were killed by a barracuda), he cannot imagine alternative strategies for parenting Nemo. Matters are made worse because, in addition to being Marlin's only remaining child, Nemo was born with a slight disability, a small fin – Marlin calls it Nemo's "lucky fin." Partly from instinct and partly from self-interest, Marlin uses Nemo's malady as the ubiquitous justification for his overprotective parenting style and for his anxiety regarding Nemo's well-being.

Unlike *Up*, in which Russell, near the end of the movie, calls out Fredricksen for his failure to "parent up" and become the dad that he wants and needs, Nemo points out

early in the film Marlin's inexperience, even incompetence, at the business of fatherhood, and it is Nemo's rebellion against his father's overbearing ways that serves as the provocation for the dramatic action of the film. The balance of *Finding Nemo* details Marlin's journey through the ocean to Sydney, where Nemo is held captive in a dentist's aquarium. As he tracks Nemo to Australia, Marlin comes to realize that he has been singularly focused and far too sheltering of his son; by the time the two are reunited, Marlin is able to trust his son's capabilities enough to allow him to help rescue a school of captured fish ensnared in a trawling net and finally (and even more nerve-rackingly) to allow Nemo to go off to school all by himself.

In contrast to his fellow Pixar father figures in *Finding Nemo* and *Up*, *The Incredibles*' Bob Parr does not begin the film as an unfit or inattentive father, but the audience initially is led into thinking that he is exactly that. The film presents Bob in such a way as to play into viewers' preconceptions about animated father figures, a notion instilled in them through more than a decade of viewing *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill* (shows on which, it is important to note, Brad Bird worked as a consultant before moving to Warner Bros. and, later, Pixar).

In "Post-Princess Models of Gender," Ken Gillam and Shannon Wooden not only misrepresent Disney as a studio that portrays only female princesses in the starring roles, they also misinterpret Bob Parr as a negligent father figure. They argue that the principal characters from Pixar's *Toy Story* (Woody and Buzz Lightyear), *Cars* (Lightning McQueen), and *The Incredibles* (Bob Parr) generate a common narrative trajectory: "they all strive for an alpha-male identity; they face emasculating failures; they find themselves, in large part, through what Eve Sedgwick refers to as a 'homosocial desire'

and a triangulation of this desire with a feminized object…and, finally, they achieve (and teach) a kinder, gentler understanding of what it means to be a man" (Gillam 3). According to Gillam and Wooden, Bob Parr begins the film as a complete and utter failure, and, only through abandoning his alpha-male identity and thereby becoming a New Man, does Bob become a whole and happy human being. This analysis reads a clean dichotomy between alpha-male and New Man that does not exist in Bob Parr, sweeping his obvious masculine qualities under the rug in order to present a more dramatic transformation than Bob actually experiences.

Almost immediately after the publication of Richard Collier's 1992 article "The New Man: Fact or Fad?" theorists and critics began applying the term New Man to animated feature films. Gillam and Wooden rely heavily on one of these articles in particular – Susan Jeffords' "The Curse of Masculinity: Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*." Jeffords begins her article by using Ivan Reitman's 1990 film *Kindergarten Cop* as her primary example of this shifting paradigm in order to set up her arguments about *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) that follow. The film stars Arnold Schwarzenegger, the quintessential example of the hard body aesthetic that rules this 1980s action film, as police officer John Kimball. However, instead of going out in a fiery blaze of glory as Ben Richards (Schwarzenegger) does in *The Running Man* (1987), Kimball gives up his life as a police officer and becomes a full-time kindergarten teacher. Jeffords explains the reason for the reversal of audience expectations:

> What happened to turn that relentless, law-making, brutalizing cop into a nurturing, playful, and loving kindergarten teacher…? It takes only one word: Family. John Kimball, the cop, had a wife and child, but his wife left him many years ago…. It was only when he is reintroduced to children…that he begins to remember this pain and realize how the loss has affected his life.… The

> message? The emotionally whole and physically healed man of the '80s wants nothing more than to be a father, not a warrior/cop, after all (Jeffords 162-163).

With this distinction in place, Jeffords moves onto the bulk of her argument: she explains that, "while *Kindergarten Cop* showed that men could change and that they were really loving and kind beneath those brutal exteriors, *Beauty and the Beast* offered the reasons for men's aggressive behaviors and suggested that they should not only be forgiven but helped along toward revealing their 'true' inner selves" (Jeffords 171). In this case, that inner self is the sensitive, fashionable man of the 1990s. This sounds identical to the "kinder, gentler understanding" that Gillam and Wooden apply to Bob Parr in "Post-Princess Models of Gender." Indeed, Jeffords actually defines the reformed Beast as the renovated male ideal:

> The Beast is The New Man, the one who can transform himself from the hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the '80s into the considerate, loving, and self-sacrificing man of the '90s. The Beast's external appearance is here more than a horrific guise that repels pretty women, but instead a *burden*, one that he must carry until he is set free, free to be the man he truly can be. The body that is strong (he fights off a dozen snarling wolves), protective (he shelters Belle from their attack), imposing (he frightens Belle's father), domineering (he growls every order he gives), and overpowering (he is even bigger than Gaston) – this body is not, as it was for Rambo, a gift but a curse. It is as if, the Beast's story might suggest, masculinity has been betrayed by its own cultural imagery: what men thought they were supposed to be – strong, protective, powerful, commanding – has somehow backfired and become their own evil curse (Jeffords 170-171).

Gillam and Wooden attempt to shoehorn Bob into Jeffords' description of the New Man vis-à-vis *Beauty and the Beast*, but their assertions repeatedly ring false:

> An old-school superhero, Mr. Incredible opens *The Incredibles* by displaying the tremendous physical strength that enables him to stop speeding trains, crash through buildings, and keep the city safe from criminals. But he too suffers from the emotional isolation of the alpha male. Stopping on the way to his own wedding to interrupt a crime in progress, he is very nearly late to the service, showing up only to say the "I dos." …He communicates primarily through verbal assertions of power – angrily dismissing Buddy, his meddlesome aspiring

> sidekick; bantering with Elastigirl over who gets the pickpocket – and limits to anger and frustration the emotions apparently available to men (Gillam 4).

While Bob Parr does commit all the "offenses" that Gillam and Wooden itemize, none of these actions emerge as negative or unseemly behaviors within the context of the film. Bob arrives late to his wedding because he is busy saving the city, not because he does not care about his wife, Helen (Holly Hunter), who is also busy fighting crime right before her wedding and could easily have been held up if she had also encountered a supervillain. The banter he exchanges with Helen over who gets the pickpocket (which Gillam and Wooden denounce as hyper-competitive, alpha-male posturing) develops as nothing more than playful, healthy flirtation, a perception reinforced when the audience discovers that the two characters plan to get married later that day. And, finally, Bob's "angry dismissal" of Buddy proves fully justified. Bob clearly knows Buddy on sight and obviously has been approached by the self-promoting boy many times in the past, so it seems perfectly reasonable that he might become weary of Buddy's relentless attempts to take up the Incrediboy mantle. Furthermore, when Buddy arrives on the scene of Bob's battle with Bomb Voyage, an explosive-themed supervillain, Bomb Voyage uses the boy's presence as a means of escape, nearly killing Buddy, not to mention a train full of innocent bystanders, in the process.

Buddy's failures as a superhero do not stop with these examples: even at the film's conclusion, when he carefully orchestrates a plan to make himself appear to be a superhero at the expense of others (both super and otherwise), Buddy still manages to fail and puts the lives of himself and hundreds of casual onlookers in jeopardy again. Buddy survives because of the timely intervention of the real superheroes – the Parr family. Try as he might, Buddy fails to perform as bona fide superhero material, and, in his decision

to turn Buddy down for the sidekick position, Bob clearly has the boy's, and the community's, best interests at heart. Once again, Bob got it right from the very beginning of the film. Granted, he may have judged Buddy impetuously or superficially at first, but his instincts proved correct as Buddy's true nature begins to unravel against the progressing action.

It makes sense that Gillam and Wooden arrived at their anti-alpha-male reading of *The Incredibles*, given the content of the first half hour of the film. Bob seems disinterested when his wife, Helen, calls him at work, he demolishes his car thanks to his super strength, he storms off during dinner, he reads the paper rather than discipline his children, he lies to his wife about his whereabouts after dark, and he loses his job when he lets his temper get the best of him. Helen goes so far as to accuse Bob of being an inattentive father, just like Homer and Peter.

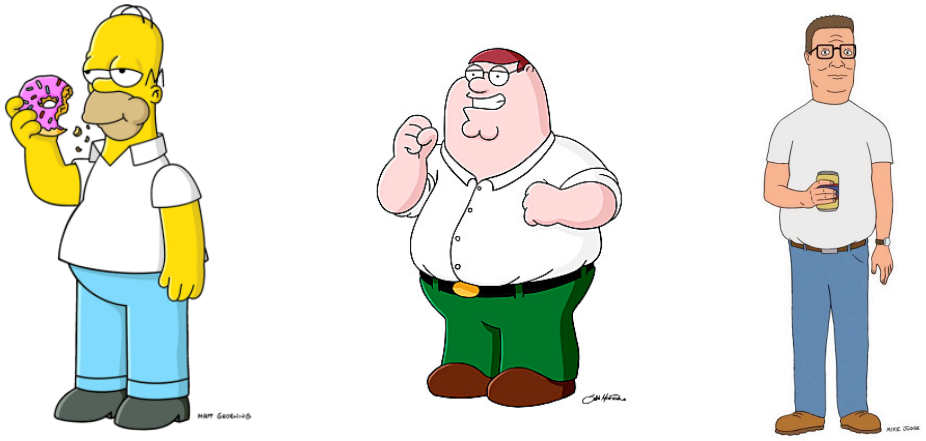
> Bob: "I performed a public service. You act like that's a bad thing."
> Helen: "It is a bad thing, Bob! Uprooting our family – again – so you can relive the glory days is a very bad thing!"
> Bob: "Reliving the glory days is better than acting like they didn't happen!"
> Helen: "Yes, they happened! But this, our family, is what's happening now, Bob. And you are missing this!"

In light of this scene, it may be understandable how Gillam and Wooden came to this conclusion, but Bob does care deeply for his family and wants them to be well and happy. After all, when he loses his job with Insuricare, his first thought is not of his stinging pride, but rather of the egregious negative impact this event will have on his family. When Rick Dicker (Bud Luckey), the government's superhero liaison, offers to move the Parr family, Bob thanks him but sadly says, "I can't relocate my family again. Everybody just got settled." This is neither a man who does not care about his wife and

children nor a man who is out of touch with his power to uproot, destabilize, and weaken his family's core on the basis of employment stipulations.

Thankfully, Bob manages to rebound quickly when a new, exotic beauty in his life, Mirage (Elizabeth Pena), hires him for a fast-paced, high-paying job that allows him to unfetter and use his super powers. Bob's love for his family is further reinforced by his behavior after he gets this new job. Instead of disregarding his family and cheating on his wife with the new woman (as his wife suspects he does), Bob becomes a model father (aside, of course, from lying about his job). In the montage shown after his first day at work, Bob makes sure to kiss his wife and daughter, Violet (Sarah Vowell), when he gets home, he feeds his baby, Jack-Jack (Eli Fucile and Maeve Andrews), at the dinner table (a job he used to leave to his wife), and he lavishes attention on his son, Dash (Spencer Fox), playing with Dash's racecars and enjoying a game of catch together, thereby giving the boy a much needed opportunity to stretch his super-powered legs.

The new job sparks an important physical transformation in Bob, as well, one diametrically opposing the transformation Susan Jeffords describes in *Beauty and the Beast*. Flashbacks aside, Bob begins the narrative proper with a decidedly "soft" body, as opposed to the hard bodies of the 1980s. In short, he is fat. Physically, he fits in better with animated television fathers like Homer Simpson, Peter Griffin, and Hank Hill, as well as weak or flabby Pixar protagonists, exemplified by Fredricksen and Russell in *Up,* than he would with the ilk of other superheroes.



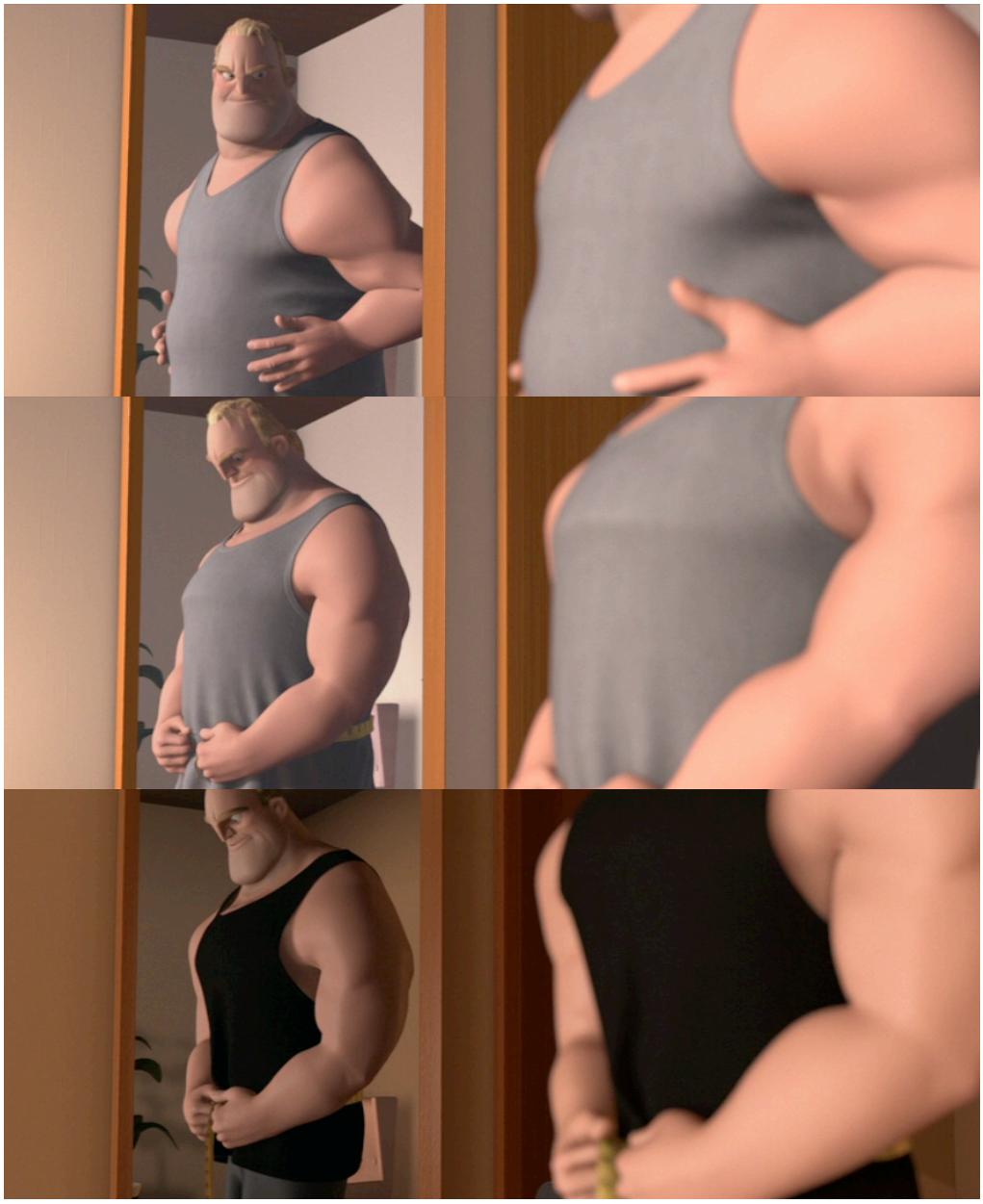
Left to Right: Homer Simpson, Peter Griffin, and Hank Hill:
the soft animated men of Fox Broadcasting.

Bob's physicality is even more exaggerated than his animated fellows, though. While Homer and Peter are unquestionably fat, Bob appears to be literally bursting out of his middle class, family man existence. Like other Superheroes, he is a larger than life characterization of a human being – an iconic representation of the father in the same way that Superman can represent hope and Batman justice – but Bob, at least at the beginning of his narrative arc, appears excessive in his softness, not in his superheroic hardness.

The portly Russell and the elderly Fredericksen: the soft bodies of Pixar's *Up*.

After he gets his new job and has the opportunity to use his superpowers once again, a motivated Bob begins exercising and loses most of

his excess weight. He moves from one pole of the 80s bodies, as described by Susan Jeffords in her book *Hard Bodies*, to the other in the span of a single workout montage:



Bob's three character models and their varying "softness" (*The Incredibles*).

> In the dialectic of reasoning that constituted the Reagan movement, bodies were deployed in two fundamental categories: the errant body containing sexually transmitted disease, immorality, illegal chemicals, "laziness," and endangered fetuses, which we can call the "soft body"; and the normative body that enveloped strength, labor, determination, loyalty, and courage – the "hard body" – the body

> that was to come to stand as the emblem of the Reagan philosophies, politics, and economies (24-25).

Bob's return to superheroic form can therefore be seen as a departure from the 90s' New Man style of masculinity and a return to the hard bodied, alpha male masculinity that dominated the 1980s.

Brad Bird accentuates the change in Bob's attitude, as our leading man transitions from his mundane, work-a-day world back into the realm of super heroism, a conversion reinforced cinematographically throughout the film. While Bob exists within the walls of Insuricare, Bird connotes a sense of entrapment by pulling the shot back and zooming in to create a compression effect in the image. Bob's working conditions are suffocating to

Compressed image (top) as Bob works at Insuricare, compared to a visually deep space in the forest (below) after the family unites as superheroes (*The Incredibles*).

him and the shallowness of the frame highlights this confinement. Conversely, after Bob leaves Insuricare and sets off for Buddy's uncharted island, the image suddenly opens to reveal unexpected depth of field and focus. Now that Bob is no longer hobbled with the duties and tedium of his dead-end insurance job, he can finally breathe deeply, move freely, and interact with his family in the way in which he knows they deserve to be treated.

From Bob's perspective, all of his family's issues originate from the social constrictions that obligate him to stifle those powers and capabilities that make the Parr father, mother, and children special. Bob's frustration surfaces in his aforementioned argument with Helen over her suspicions of his disinterest in his role as father. Their dialogue continues:

> Helen: "Yes, they happened! But this, our family, is what's happening now, Bob. And you are missing this! I can't believe you don't want to go to your own son's graduation!"
> Bob: "It's not a graduation. He is moving from the fourth grade to the fifth grade."
> Helen: "It's a ceremony!"
> Bob: "It's psychotic. They keep creating new ways to celebrate mediocrity, but if someone is genuinely exceptional then they-"
> Helen: "This is not about you, Bob. This is about Dash."
> Bob: "You want to do something for Dash? Let him actually compete. Let him go out for sports!"
> Helen: "I will not be made the enemy here. You know why we can't do that."
> Bob: "Because he'd be great!"
> Helen: "This is not about you!"

Helen is correct – this is not about Bob. True, Bob is frustrated by society, and, true, he loves to relive the glory days, but that does not mean that he is wrong about Dash. Unlike Homer, Peter, and even Hank, Bob is attuned to Dash, his wants, and his needs. Dash wants to use his powers, but he lacks a proper outlet. Bob completely

understands his son and wants to give him that outlet – sports would be perfect for Dash's needs – but social conventions enforced by Helen will not allow it.

Helen's point of view in protecting her children and keeping their identities secret seems perfectly reasonable – it is, after all, a staple of the superhero genre for those with super powers to hide their abilities from the public in order to have a normal life (the entire Superman/Clark Kent dialectic typically is constructed around the hero's desire to live out a human life with human relationships without his Superman persona interfering). Notwithstanding the prudence in Helen's drive for social acceptability, the film clearly weighs in on Bob's side of the argument by its conclusion. The happy finale of *The Incredibles* showcases the Parrs coming together and realizing their true potential, not just as a family unit, but also as a team of superheroes. Everyone – Bob, Helen, Violet, and Dash – stands united at the end of the film in high spirits and familial camaraderie, and all because they now understand, accept, and embrace their super-powered selves with confidence. Helen no longer cries over Bob, nor does she spend all of her time secluded inside the house. She has, as Edna told her to do, reemerged to remind Bob and herself who she really is – Elastigirl, a superhero fully capable of running with the big boys. She confronts her problems, super powers in tow, and proves that she can rise to the task at hand. Violet casts off her shy, mousey-girl, public image. Although once intimidated from invoking her powers (even while under duress), by the film's conclusion, Violet confidently defends her family from a jet plane on the brink of crashing down upon them and has the self-assurance to ask local dreamboat Tony Rydinger (Michael Bird) on a date. And Dash finally gets his long-awaited opportunity

to go out for sports and show his aptitude. Even better, all the Parrs now have the freedom to operate as unfettered superheroes once again.

For Bob, the chief conflict of the film is not his need to overcome lackadaisical parenting abilities, but his struggle against societal forces pressing down upon him. At the beginning of the film, Bob demonstrates a freedom to practice his superheroism publicly. He then gets caught up in legal battles over his superhero actions that cost the government millions of dollars, thus forcing him and all other superheroes to retire. Adding to his employment woes and to a general demise in his comprehensive self-image, Bob gets married simultaneously, believing that his bride is Elastigirl, superheroine extraordinaire, not merely her alter ago: Helen Parr, housewife. Kids soon follow, all of which have super powers, and then the dead-end, white-collar insurance job tarries not far behind. This all-for-the-family Bob Parr remains the same as the man at the beginning of the film – he has the powers, as well as the desire and ideals to use them properly, but he cannot do so because of his responsibilities and circumstances.

By the end of the film, Bob returns to superheroic form. Everything he preaches turns out to be the truth. All of his belief systems remain intact. What has changed are the attitudes of the other characters in the film, as well as society as a whole. The population at large comes around to the idea of superheroes – again – allowing Bob and Dash to finally use their powers in exactly the manner in which they have always believed they should be applied. Helen and Violet quickly adjust to Bob's way of thinking, as well.

Although the most constant and steadfast of all the superheroes, Bob Parr does appear to change in one key area: at the beginning of the film he works with no other

superheroes, telling Buddy "I work alone," but by the end of the film, he happily dons the same uniform as the rest of his family and fights alongside them without a second thought. Note, however, that Bob's assertion that he works solo is made to Buddy in a moment of complete exasperation – he just wants to get rid of the kid. The fact that Bob does not belong to a team of superheroes does not mean he is strictly a solo act or that he refuses to connect with other superheroes. Bob is shown having a very close relationship with fellow superhero Frozone (Samuel L. Jackson): Frozone fulfills the role of best man at Bob's wedding and, when Bob decides to moonlight as a superhero, he brings an unwilling Frozone along to back him up. Bob's reluctance to work with Buddy seems more an unwillingness to engage an ineffective sidekick. He is perfectly happy to fight crime with Frozone or to defend the city alongside his family; they have legitimate powers and are, therefore, able to defend themselves. They are completely trustworthy. The same cannot be said for Buddy.

From the onset, the film establishes that Bob Parr is not an incompetent alpha-male and that he does not experience an alpha-male-to-New-Man narrative trajectory like Gillam and Wooden suggest in their article. Equally, Bob certainly does not enter as a New Man at the beginning of the film. This begs the question: what archetype – if any – does Bob Parr fill in *The Incredibles* if he is not a New Man?

Bob actually occupies a middle ground between the alpha-male and New Man, possessing distinct qualities from each of the two types. He obviously displays the hard body of an alpha male at the beginning of the film as well as after he gets his new job from Mirage. In addition to possessing the unquestionable physical power that goes along with that body, he also places a high value on personal achievement, prizing his

glory days when he was a super hero and on top of the social ladder. Furthermore, Bob prizes competitiveness, encouraging his wife to let his son go out for sports, not just because it would give him a much needed outlet for his superpowers, but also because "he'd be great!"

These alpha qualities are viewed as positive influences on Bob's life as well as the lives of his children, in part, because he is chiefly driven by love for his family, a sensitive motivation that would fit even the most effeminate of New Men. Bob's words near the end of the film, as he prepares to fight Syndrome's Omnidroid, reinforce this reading:

> Bob: Wait here and stay hidden. I'm going in.
> Helen: While what, I watch helplessly from the sidelines? I don't think so.
> Bob: I'm asking you to wait with the kids.
> Helen: And I'm telling you, not a chance! You're my husband, I'm with you. "For better or worse."
> Bob: I have to do this alone.
> Helen: What is this to you? Playtime?
> Bob: No.
> Helen: So you can be Mr. Incredible again?
> Bob: No!
> Helen: Then what?
> Bob: I'm not... I'm not strong enough!
> Helen: "Strong enough"? And this will make you stronger?
> Bob: Yes-- No!
> Helen: That's what this is, some sort of workout?
> Bob: I can't lose you again! I can't. Not again. I'm not... strong enough.
> Helen: If we work together, you won't have to be.
> Bob: I don't know what will happen.
> Helen: Hey, we're superheroes. What could happen?

Just as when he loses his job and receives an opportunity to relocate, Bob's first thought is for the well-being of his loved ones.

Furthermore, Bob's alpha male qualities, tempered by his "softer" qualities, make him a picture-perfect representative for the triumph of and power within the individual.

As a superhero, Bob once stood at the very apex of society, not bound by the rules and limits accorded to the rest of the population. However, after a series of lawsuits, he and the remainder of the superhero community get relegated to the role of regular citizens. "Their secret identities become their only identities." They must find regular jobs, lead regular lives, never use their powers, and, most important of all, not protect the population at large. Bob Parr resents this mandatory leveling – after all, he is not an ordinary human and should not have to hide his obvious superiority just because the masses resent him. Bob cannot be happy or assuaged until people everywhere get with the program, restore the former status quo, and allow Bob, his family, and superheroes everywhere to use the powers that make them superior once more.

This reading is augmented when Buddy unveils his master plan for all the super power-mimicking inventions that he has constructed over the years: "I'll give them the most spectacular heroics anyone's ever seen. And when I'm old and I've had my fun, I'll sell my inventions so that everyone can be superheroes. Everyone can be super. And when everyone's super, no one will be." The film presents this as the most diabolical plan imaginable, as punctuated by Bob's unbridled expression of utter horror and Buddy's gurgle of villainous laughter. A world in which everyone has super powers? A world in which humans are equal to superheroes? Horror of horrors! Thankfully, Bob and the rest of the Parr family manage to stop the crisis in time, before such blasphemy occurs. The superheroes get to stay super, the humans stay human, and everyone winds up happy and in their proper place.

The representation of superheroes in *The Incredibles* parallels a major work about angry white superheroes: Alan Moore's celebrated comic book *Watchmen*. In *The Pixar*

Touch, David Price cites some of the similarities between the two stories: "in the world of *Watchmen*, as in *The Incredibles*, costumed heroes have been outlawed and someone is killing them off. [Buddy] has a parallel in the *Watchmen* character Rorschach, a red-haired killer who had been rejected in his boyhood by a beloved figure" (224).

While the parallels Price marks between the settings are both useful and accurate, his comparison of Buddy Pine to Rorschach rings false: aside from the superficial fact that they both have red hair, the two have little in common. Narratively and thematically speaking, a more constructive analysis comes from associating Rorschach with Bob. Both are costumed crime fighters that investigate the murders of other superheroes, both have outlived their public approval and their glory days, and both rail, with the angst only an angry white man can muster, against the new, superhero-less status quo. One of Rorschach's famous lines, "[e]ven in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise in this" could easily be imagined coming from Bob instead, as he argues with his wife about their place as superheroes within a restrictive and prosaic society. In fact, the only discernable difference between the two crime fighters is their respective levels of ruthlessness: it is hard to imagine the ilk of a Bob Parr indiscriminately killing criminals or putting his own goals and ideals ahead of the welfare of the entire planet, but these actions are perfectly reasonable and believable coming from Rorschach.

Rorschach emerges as a salient paragon of Ayn Rand's philosophy: Objectivism (Moore, *Steve Ditko*). Espoused in *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*, this concept, from a philosophical point of view, favors the individual over the masses, and holds capitalism as the basis of an ideal social structure because this economic system, according to Rand, allows the most talented, productive, and conscientious members of

society to flourish without encumbrance, thereby creating benefits for all through the development of enterprise, jobs, and individual security. The hard and fast tenants of Randian epistemology focus on a pragmatic view of personal capability that fits into the quasi reality of superheroes, and their counterparts – characters who must function without personal, societal, or philosophical fetters, characters who can never be weighed down or influenced by the needs or expectations of the masses.

Bob Parr, thanks to his hard bodied, alpha-male personality, possesses a self-sufficiency epitomizing the Randian ideal. Not only does Bob not need others doing for him, he does not welcome nor will he accept it. He is the best of the best, not only in his superhuman size and strength, but also because of his kind heart and willingness to stand up for those in need without being required to do so by the force of the government. Bob's personal freedom, that kind of liberation that would enable him to operate as a superhero without limitations, would benefit every man, woman, and child in society, not only Bob and his family.

It would be presumptuous to put forward the idea that Brad Bird is calling for a ruling elite or for one favored class to hold dominance over others, but it seems fair to suggest that, with *The Incredibles*, he is proposing a decidedly Objectivist view of a world without discrimination, reverse or otherwise. Right or wrong, *The Incredibles* preaches personal success based on one's drive and ability and without a helping hand from the government. If particular members of that society are superior or gifted in some way that gives them that leg up, well, so be it. This suggestion – that people are not all equal and that some, purely and simply, are born more talented, resourceful, and effective than others – is not a message unique to this Brad Bird film. In his monologue at the end

of Bird's 2007 film *Ratatouille*, Anton Ego (Peter O'Toole), the food critic, expresses an opinion decidedly in line with the ideals preached by *The Incredibles*:

> In the past, I have made no secret of my disdain for Chef Gusteau's famous motto: Anyone can cook. But I realize, only now do I truly understand what he meant. Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere. It is difficult to imagine more humble origins than those of the genius now cooking at Gusteau's, who is, in this critic's opinion, nothing less than the finest chef in France. I will be returning to Gusteau's soon, hungry for more.

Just like Gillam and Wooden suggest, Bob Parr begins the film with alpha-male qualities, but their argument that these qualities are presented as negative or unseemly attributes, or that Bob outgrows these qualities and becomes an idealized representation of the New Man by the end of the film, rings false. The alpha-male/New Man dichotomy in *The Incredibles* is not as clear cut as it emerges in *Beauty and the Beast*, and, while Bob does possess many alpha-male qualities – his physical power, his competitiveness, and his status as a super hero – he also has New Man qualities, represented chiefly by unconditional love for his family. The narrative arc of the film revolves around, not the transformation of Bob from alpha-male to New Man, but the depiction of society and the corporation imposing themselves upon Bob from the outside, then stripped away to reveal the individual in full alpha-male and New Man glory, triumphant.

"I Used to Be Snow White, but I Drifted":

Masculinity and Alpha-Males in the Inverted Fairy Tale of *WALL-E*

Typically, when theorists and critics talk about *WALL-E*, the discussion begins and ends with the film's clear-cut anti-pollution, anti-capitalism parable. While such readings may be a key aspect of the film's narrative and thematic structure, they merely provide a basic plot synopsis. That is not to say that *WALL-E*'s plot emerges as insubstantial, bland, or unworthy of deeper review – far from it; but *WALL-E* is a brilliantly layered and evocative narrative and addresses complex issues beyond conservationism. In particular, *WALL-E*'s plot structure and the delineation of its two main characters, WALL-E and EVE (Elissa Knight), call to mind, not traditional science fiction stories (as one might expect), but fairy tales and the biblical account of Adam and Eve. Through the film's depiction of the robots' male/female relationship, as well as through *WALL-E*'s deviations from the conventional tropes of the fairy tale (particularly in the rendering of male and female), *WALL-E* creates a fluid take on gender roles and, like *The Incredibles*, strikes a balance between alpha-male and New Man masculinity.

At first pass, a discussion of gender in terms of physically genderless robots may seem counterintuitive, but there is ample precedent for this analysis. While these characters cannot be deemed to be authentic representations of human physiology or sexuality, it is perfectly feasible to analyze and accept a character such as WALL-E and his gendered-ness from a social and emotional point of view. Readers have been opening their minds to embrace the fantastic and unimaginable for centuries, but the idea of computerized robots as humanlike beings is a concept that has only emerged within the past century. Kim Toffoletti espouses the difficulties of perceiving machines as social

equivalents to humans in her book *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture, and the Posthuman Body*: "although the computer-human interaction has opened up new ways to think about the self, there is still a pervasive tendency to secure human identity as something that can be differentiated from a machine. The characteristics that are commonly defined as essential to being human, such as emotion and intuition, are the qualities computers are supposedly unable to emulate" (28). WALL-E and EVE exist within their fictional universe visibly displaying distinct human-like qualities: they love, they adapt, they consume. Given the assumption that robots may manifest characteristics of people just like ourselves, of people with whom we are familiar and comfortable, the audience should have no issues with accepting these exemplars as the social equivalents of human beings.

The idea of bequeathing gendered traits and mannerisms upon non-biological entities is not new to animation: Disney's second feature length animated film, *Pinocchio* (1941), stars a constructed character (in this case, made of wood and strings, not metal and circuits) who is obviously coded as a young child. Both films, *WALL-E* and *Pinocchio*, require their audiences to accept a mechanical protagonist conceptualized in the nature of a human being (as well as each character's guiding insect – cockroach or cricket) for the narrative to work.

In fact, employing high tech machines as the main characters in a story that presents a fluid take on gender roles makes perfect sense. In *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway uses the concept of cyborgs and technology to move beyond a traditional gender dichotomy:

> …[C]ertain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of

> colour, nature, workers, animals - in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man…. High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine (177-178).

WALL-E and EVE do not fit neatly into the established male or female dualisms or stereotypes, just as they are neither human (due to their physiology) or mindless machines (due to their capacity for thought and emotions). They are in a certain sense of the word, cyborgs, in that they are human in their behavior, but mechanical in their physiology.

Susan Jeffords examines robots and mechanization in terms of gender in *Hard Bodies*, focusing her discussion on the T-800 Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *The Terminator* (1984). She explains that running parallel to the trend of hard bodies in 80s actions movies "is a complementary theme of anti-mechanization that reinforces the sense of the male hard body as 'natural,' not manufactured, and individual, not mass-produced, both qualities on which a Reagan philosophy – whether of economics or family values – intimately depends" (105).

> As Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner summarize these values in their discussion of films that portray 'technophobia': 'From a conservative perspective, technology represents artifice as opposed to nature, the mechanical as opposed to the spontaneous, the regulated as opposed to the free, an equalizer as opposed to a promoter of individual distinction.' In such terms, *Terminator*, for example, represents not only the more overt anti-nuclear messages that its plot professes but it also works to put to rest fears about the logical extensions of a hard-body mythology – that that body would become so hardened as to forget that it was human, or "natural," at all. In this sense, Rambo and the Terminator are necessary complements, one portraying the hard body at its best – reviving strength and individualism in the foreign policy – and the other starkly portraying that body's dark underside of hardened brutality as a destructive force directed against humanity itself (105).

WALL-E establishes the same tensions between the mechanized and the biological as *Terminator*, but weighs in on the opposing side of the debate. The hard bodied, mechanical robots, WALL-E and EVE, are seen by the audience, not as a destructive or brutal force, but instead as paragons of individuality and helpers eager to return humanity to a hard bodied existence on Earth.

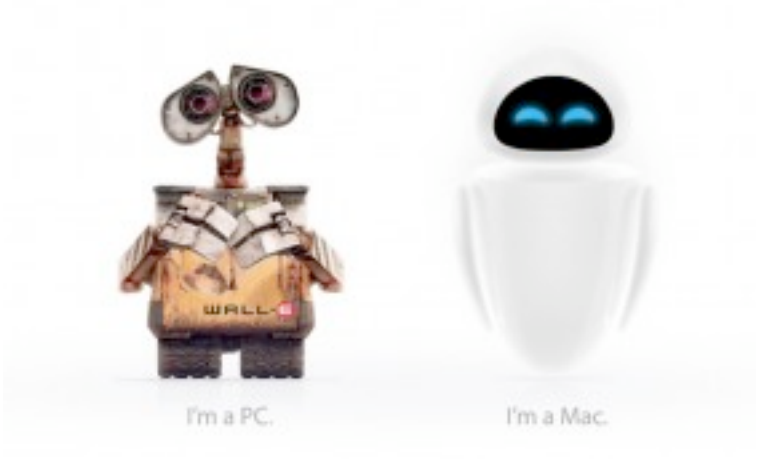
WALL-E's hard bodied, metallic form contrasts effectively and favorably against the soft bodies of the humans aboard the Axiom. WALL-E and EVE are active forces in the film – WALL-E tirelessly works for hundreds of years, alone and forgotten, while EVE performs her directive curtly and efficiently. In contrast, until Captain McCrea (Jeff Garlin) stands up to the Auto-Pilot, the roly-poly humans are represented as incapable of performing any actions themselves, relying on the active robots aboard the Axiom to do everything for them. Humanity in *WALL-E* has literally softened beyond the point of relatability, and it is the hard bodied constructs with which audiences identify.

WALL-E establishes a dichotomy within the hard bodied robot dynamic, placing old tech, represented by WALL-E himself, and new tech, epitomized by EVE, in dialogue with one another. WALL-E is rough and angular – built more like a man – as well as worn and dirty from centuries working on the surface of a post-apocalyptic Earth. EVE, in contrast, is glossy, sleek, and new. Where WALL-E has harsh corners EVE has soft curves, physically characterizing her as female (though, thanks to her metal exoskeleton, a hard female).

WALL-E's and EVE's new vs. old tech relationship clearly resembles the association between PCs and Macs (owned by Apple, a company co-founded and operated by Steve Jobs, former CEO of Pixar Animation Studios), as exemplified in the

"I'm a Mac and I'm a PC" marketing campaign. The masculine WALL-E represents the PC, a desktop computer running Windows (or maybe even Linux), assembled from parts from a variety of sources, and full of bugs. EVE's shiny, white exterior, on the other hand, resembles an iPod or iMac; she's cutting edge and state-of-the-art.

While the concept of computerized robots and automatons has grown familiar to the typical twenty-first century viewer influenced by commercial media, the term fairy tale can be more elusive. For children growing up before the advent of Disney, their familiarity with fairy tales developed out of the tradition of parents reading aloud about the likes of Hansel and Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood. Once Walt Disney came into the popular arena and began his company's century-long practice of adapting folklore, fairy tales inherently meant feature films about Cinderella, Snow White, and Pinocchio – traditional characters remolded, rejuvenated, and repopularized by the cartoonist-turned-producer. Though centuries of oral and written story-telling rituals preserved the fairy tale genre, Walt Disney Studios catapulted these fantasies into children's lives to a measure incomprehensible heretofore. As Jack Zipes points out in "Breaking the Disney Spell":



A Mac vs. PC parody from kimpix.net, featuring WALL-E and EVE.

> [Walt Disney's] technical skills and ideological proclivities were so consummate that his signature has obfuscated the names of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and Carlo Collodi. If children or adults think of the great classical fairy tales today…they will think Walt Disney. Their first and perhaps lasting impressions of these tales and others will have emanated from a Disney film, book, or artifact. Though other filmmakers and animators produced remarkable fairy-tale films, Disney managed to gain a cultural stranglehold on the fairy tales, and this stranglehold has even tightened with the recent productions of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992). The man's spell over the fairy tale seems to live on even after his death (21).

As a result, any analysis of *WALL-E* must focus on the relationship of this computer-generated robot's story with the Disney versions of fabled classics and not specifically with the versions that came before.

In addition to their position as sole arbiter of fairy tales in mass culture, the Disney films provide the most informative comparison for *WALL-E*'s structure because of Pixar Animation Studio's relationship with Disney. To state the obvious, *WALL-E* is an animated film, like the Disney fairy tales. Furthermore, Pixar Animation Studios, at the time of WALL-E's release, was a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company, which has been the sole distributor of Pixar features since the release of *Toy Story* in 1995. The idea for *WALL-E* first materialized in 1994 (as *Toy Story* neared completion), at a famous meeting between Andrew Stanton, John Lasseter, Pete Docter, and Joe Ranft in which they brainstormed the ideas for the films that would eventually become *A Bug's Life, Monsters, Inc.,* and *Finding Nemo*. Because of Pixar's inseparable relationship with Disney, anything that *WALL-E* says about gender, any deviations it makes from what popular culture views as the traditional fairy tale dynamic, reflects not only on Pixar but on its distributor and parent company as well.

While drawing from traditional literary sources for a string of children's hit movies in the mid-twentieth century, Disney's versions of the films eschewed producing

verbatim rehashes of popular print and oral renditions of fairy tale characters. Disney's animated features reveal alterations to the original versions of fairy tales (if any account of these stories can be called the definitive "original"); this hybridization of original stories with new conceptualizations clearly is visible in Disney's first feature-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937). Jack Zipes cites seven major points of incongruity between Disney's interpretation and the earlier folklore: in the Disney version, (1) Snow White (Adriana Caselotti) is a parentless orphan in the same vein as Cinderella, while in the original it is only her mother that is dead, (2) the Prince (Harry Stockwell) appears at the beginning and end of the film, instead of only at the end, (3) the Queen (Lucille La Verne) is jealous not only of Snow White's beauty, but also of the attention paid to her by the Prince, (4) anthropomorphized animals befriend Snow White, (5) the dwarfs are named and play a significant role, instead of being anonymous, unimportant characters, (6) the Queen only makes one attempt on Snow White's life, instead of three, and (7) Snow White is roused by a kiss from the Prince, instead of merely waking up when a dwarf drops her glass coffin (36).

An inspection of these alterations clarifies that the Disney version pays more attention to the representation of sexuality and gender than does the Grimm's adaptation of the story. Of the seven changes made to the Grimm version, three – the prince's appearance at the beginning of the story, the queen's jealousy, and the curse-breaking kiss – directly relate to varying degrees of sexual tension amongst Snow White, the Queen, and the Prince. The Prince's appearance at the beginning of the film coincides with Snow White's song "I'm Wishing," in which she declares she is "wishing for the one [she] love[s]." This wished-for love is marked as sexual at the conclusion of the film

when, in fulfillment of Snow White's dreams, the Prince arrives on the scene to wake Snow White from her slumber with a kiss, a definite show of romantic or sexual intent – an innocent sexuality to be certain (after all, it is just a kiss), but the intent remains unmistakable. The Queen's jealousy further strengthens this thread of restrained sexuality in the film: unlike Snow White, the Queen is a grown, presumably experienced woman, and any jealousy that she projects towards Snow White with regards to the Prince's affections could easily be read as sexual desire for the Prince or as sexual rivalry and frustration against the delicate beauty and sweet chastity of the virginal Snow White.

WALL-E showcases a similar struggle between innocence and sexuality in the relationship between WALL-E and EVE. EVE's debut in the film coincides with that of WALL-E, alone except for a single cockroach, hard at work on a deserted Earth. Similarly, the Prince's arrival in the garden occurs while Snow White works alone, with only the birds as company. WALL-E broadcasts the nonverbal impression that he is every bit as lovelorn as Snow White. This first becomes clear when the audience sees him, shortly before EVE's arrival on Earth, longingly observing a surviving videocassette of the musical *Hello, Dolly!* (1969). WALL-E watches Cornelius Hackl (Michael Crawford) and Irene Molloy (Marianne McAndrew) hold hands during their performance of "It Only Takes a Moment." As WALL-E mirrors their handholding, he reinforces with this physical gesture his desire for love while contemporaneously designating the guileless nature of his desire – after all, is there any representation of sexual desire more innocent than handholding?

Upon her arrival, EVE immediately becomes the object of WALL-E's affection. At first, while she punctiliously sets about scanning her surroundings for signs of plant

life, WALL-E observes her with what appears to be curiosity, even inquisitiveness, but, as soon as her ship leaves and she begins her "dance" through the skies, that curiosity gives way to stronger, more personal feelings of yearning and infatuation. As WALL-E continues to follow EVE around the desolate planet and hangs on her every move, he observes an unexpected transformation: EVE's fins metamorphose to reveal fingers, thus allowing her the dexterity to play with WALL-E's pet cockroach. This connective action between robot and insect solidifies the new "girl" EVE as the target for WALL-E's romantic intentions: the audience watches as the male robot again fantasizes about hand-holding – wishing for the one he loves – in his own future alongside the image of the female robot and the insect at play.

Just as the theme of sexuality and innocence so prevalent in *WALL-E* calls to mind fairy tales, both Disney's version and the precursors, it also resurrects images of the story of Adam and Eve. The narrative structure of *WALL-E* parallels the biblical account of the first man and woman on Earth. To begin with, there is EVE – the robot EVE, not the human Eve – whose name itself is a dead giveaway. Her search for and discovery of a plant (in this case a tiny sapling, not a full grown tree) is responsible for mankind leaving its perpetual bliss (here represented by the consumer paradise of the Axiom) and being cast out into the harsh, unforgiving, Earth, just as Eve's consumption of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is responsible for mankind's exodus from the protection of the garden into the broader world (however, in *WALL-E,* leaving the "garden" is read as a good thing: hard work and perseverance are prized more highly than being waited on hand and foot by robots all day). Not only that, when EVE locates the plant, she takes it

inside her assemblage, essentially impregnating herself with life as well as with the future of life on Earth.

Correspondingly, WALL-E is Adam, "put in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). He catalogues and collects the items and animals he finds, though he lacks the verbal abilities necessary to name them. This parallel not only strengthens the theme of innocence and sexuality so deeply rooted in biblical and literary accounts of the story of Adam and Eve (after all, it is not until they sample the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and lose their innocence that they are barred from the Garden), it also calls to mind representations and roles of gender through its allusion to the depiction of the first man and woman, thereby situating this movie firmly in a discourse of gender. By guiding humanity back to Earth and reintroducing them to nature, WALL-E's role in the film is to restore Earth and humanity to an Eden-like, pre-sin state.

Despite the sexualizing changes made in adapting the narrative structure of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* from the Grimm's version, Disney moved to desexualize the representations of characters themselves, compounding the sense of fairy tale innocence while making the characters' sexuality ambiguous. This becomes most evident in the portrayal of Snow White, an idea upon which Robin Allan elaborates: "the attitude towards Snow White is ambiguous because although she is seen as a child – running away, at play, saying the dwarfs' cottage is 'just like a dolls' house,' she also has sexually romantic longings for the Prince. This is emphasized by the Queen's jealousy when she sees the first meeting between the Prince and Snow White" (Allan 38-39).

More than seventy years after the release of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the human-like robot, WALL-E, is similarly portrayed in a desexualized,

childlike manner, not only in regards to his innocent romantic aspirations, but also by his physical depiction in the film. For starters, even though he is portrayed as a gendered robot, he is still a robot, which implies a certain level of asexuality. Furthermore, WALL-E resembles a child – at least, as far as robots can resemble children. He is gangly and awkward in his movements, and, when he encounters the WALL-A model robots aboard the Axiom, it is clear to the audience that these are "grown up" versions of WALL-E – all business and less whimsical. Similar to the representation of Snow White, WALL-E's childlike qualities highlight the innocence inherent in this character while playfully toning and contrasting the sexual charge of his relationship with EVE, resulting in a unique representation of masculinity for WALL-E.

Considering the female-centric narrative of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (as well as fairy tales in general), this might seem like an odd jumping-off point for an analysis of masculinity in *WALL-E*. Although the young female heroine is central to *Snow White*, men have just as much significance to its narrative as does the dark-haired, fair-skinned beauty. The dwarves, all male, have particular importance in comparison with WALL-E*:* "…they can be interpreted as the humble American workers who pull together during a depression…and their determination is the determination of every worker, who will succeed just as long as he does his share while women stay at home and keep the house clean (Zipes 37).

This account of the dwarfs sounds remarkably like the behavior WALL-E exhibits and the context in which he exists. He too is a mysterious character – though, in his case, it results from his lack of oral capability (WALL-E, like Bambi and Dumbo, is sub-articulate) – who works hard in a hostile world (he performs his job for centuries at a

time with no end in sight). The parallels between WALL-E and Zipes's description of the dwarfs are reinforced by Zipes's reference to the Great Depression: the film *WALL-E*, like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, was released for distribution during a worldwide recession and both WALL-E and the dwarfs exemplify the ethic of laboring on in the face of adversity or boredom or dejection.

WALL-E's relationship with EVE, despite its romantic overlay, bears more resemblance to the connection between Snow White and the dwarfs than to that of Snow White and the Prince. The Prince approaches Snow White with supreme confidence, and Snow White responds demurely but favorably to his advances. By contrast, WALL-E's courtship signifies less self-assurance on his part and less amorous responsiveness from EVE. If anything, WALL-E's relationship with EVE compares most favorably to

WALL-E (left) and Bashful (right) as they nervously approach
EVE and Snow White, respectively.

Bashful's (Zeke Clements) rapport with Snow White. When Bashful first encounters Snow White, he says "she's beautiful, just like an angel," indicating a sense of awe and infatuation that is not particularly difficult to read into WALL-E's reaction as he observes EVE's flight across the wasteland when she first arrives on Earth. While Bashful's intentions with Snow White might not be explicitly sexual or romantic in nature (unlike

those of the Prince and WALL-E), he undeniably has a crush on the princess, and his resulting behavior around Snow White definitively resembles WALL-E's with EVE: Bashful consistently reacts in a shy and befuddled manner whenever approached by the princess. The major difference between Bashful's and WALL-E's respective courtships is that the robot's feelings are eventually reciprocated. The audience can envision and even hope for a possible future in WALL-E's relationship with EVE. The same cannot be said of Bashful and his vague and impractical bond with the unblemished and highly prized Snow White.

Parallels notwithstanding, WALL-E differs from the dwarfs in one key aspect: he, like Snow White before him, does stereotypical "woman's work." While humanity is away from Earth onboard the Axiom, WALL-E is left to, as Zipes put it, "stay at home and keep the house clean." For seven hundred years, WALL-E follows his directive, compressing and organizing garbage so that humans will have a neat and tidy Earth upon their return. WALL-E does this cleaning in the most masculine way imaginable, though: compressing trash with his built-in trash compactor and using the cubes to erect garbage skyscrapers that dwarf even the most towering man-made buildings. So, even though he is cleaning, he is using that process as a means to build. To be active. To bring a better tomorrow. This role signifies a blurring of the function of men in fairy tale fiction.

Fairy tales, including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Pinocchio*, work with archetypes. As a genre, fairy tales transport the reader to a world of captive or enchanted princesses, heroic princes, and evil witches. What's more, these archetypes present characters who remain static throughout the course of the narrative: Snow White is passive at the beginning of the film and remains so until the very end; the protagonists

avert disaster only through the combined efforts of the prince and the dwarfs and save their ineffectual heroine. Princes triumph over evil and, as in the Disney movies, seldom appear to the audience, thus allowing little time for character development. And villains like the Queen receive little onscreen motivation – except perhaps jealousy or a mad quest for power – and have no opportunity for repentance and redemption. Critics and analysts prefer to think animation has bucked this trend in recent years, as C. Richard King, Carman R. Lugo-Lugo, and Mark K. Bloodsworth-Lugo explain: "full of fantastic computer-generated images and special effects, the characters in these films depart from the simpler, two-dimensional designs in earlier (mostly Disney) films and provide viewers with more sophisticated, three-dimensional, emotion-displaying characters" (King 34).

This is not necessarily the case. There are plenty of examples of two-dimensional characters with minimal motivation in animated films today. WALL-E is one of them, apparently driven only by his infatuation with EVE. Not only that, but WALL-E undergoes as little emotional development as does the Prince in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (or Bob Parr in *The Incredibles*): the WALL-E at the end of the movie is more or less the same plucky robot that audiences meet at the beginning. This does not make WALL-E the character or *WALL-E* the motion picture uninteresting or unlovable – far from it – but it does situate WALL-E comfortably within a context of traditional fairy tale and Disney heroes.

WALL-E contains two separate Snow White/fairy tale narratives that bookend the film. In the first, WALL-E, like the Prince in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, observes EVE and falls in love with her. After he gets her back to his home (and just

when it looks like handholding looms mere minutes away), EVE catches site of the plant WALL-E found earlier and goes berserk over the discovery before placing it securely inside herself and then going into "sleep mode," just like Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. WALL-E tries everything he can think of to wake up "Sleeping EVE," but he cannot revive her, indicating perhaps that WALL-E simply is not man enough to break the "spell." WALL-E contents himself with dragging EVE (whom he has now adorned with Christmas light) around with him, conducting faux dating situations (including a moment when he tries to hold her hand without her permission and pays a finger-pinching price for the attempt). Despite the devotion of WALL-E's one-sided courting foray, EVE remains asleep until she returns to the Axiom, at which point AUTO, the Auto-Pilot, gives the order to reactivate her.

WALL-E and EVE find themselves in another fairy tale situation at the end of the film, but this time with their roles reversed. AUTO, in his efforts to make sure the plant is not recovered, has battered WALL-E beyond his breaking point. WALL-E is electrocuted, crushed, and thrown into space twice, leaving him badly damaged, apparently irreparably. EVE manages to retrieve the plant, and the Axiom returns to Earth, but, by the time it lands, WALL-E's solar batteries are uncharged, and, in addition to his pulverized physical state, he is catatonic. EVE uses the spare parts WALL-E has collected over the years to make the necessary repairs, thus reviving WALL-E to a level of operational capacity. The severe damage inflicted on the robot, however, has caused a memory wipe, resulting in an all-business version of WALL-E, one that no longer recognizes EVE. With this new and indifferent outlook on his world, WALL-E proceeds to crush some of the cherished possessions he has collected over the years. He is under a

spell of his own that reduces him to somnambulist-like behavior, rendering him detached, isolated, and dull. Then, when WALL-E appears gone forever, an electrical "kiss" from a despondent EVE (in the fashion of the kisses that bring to a close the stories of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Sleeping Beauty*) breaks the curse and returns WALL-E to his former, loveable self. So, despite her apparent femininity, EVE, not the masculine-coded WALL-E, effectively fulfills the role of heroic, curse-breaking prince.

This inversion of the prince/princess dynamic that denotes typical fairy tales complicates the simple male/female reading of WALL-E and EVE, making WALL-E a perfect candidate for analysis as a New Man type. In spite of shortfalls and weaknesses in Ken Gillam and Shannon R. Wooden's article, "Post-Princess Models of Gender: The New Man in Disney/Pixar," and in particular their interpretation of *The Incredibles* as discussed in the previous chapter, the argument they make about masculinity and the New Man in Pixar does apply, with slight modification, to *WALL-E*. WALL-E is an unquestioned representative of the New Man type, but he is a New Man, not at the rolling of the closing credits, but from the get-go. Here is a robot, clearly gendered as male, who spends his days cleaning up debris and watching (and dancing to) musicals. WALL-E longs for love and companionship and unabashedly expresses his emotions. He may live a solitary existence on Earth (with no other humans or robots with whom he can interact), but he acknowledges and accepts his dependence on the parts he salvages from broken down WALL-E model robots to keep himself operational, he appreciates the companionship he gets from his pet cockroach, and he savors his newfound, but earnest, quest to make a connection with EVE.

By the end of the film, WALL-E solidifies his status as a New Man, through and through. He responds with excitement and surprise when the chance to hold Eve's hand materializes, a demonstration of a gentle, sensitive, and awkward nature to the character. It might appear as though he reveals aspirations beyond simply holding EVE's hand as he ventures into the realm of the alpha-male by continuously putting his tired metal body through punishment after punishment for the sake of getting back to Earth. As the film draws to a close, WALL-E makes it clear that he wants to recover the lost plant to impress EVE, and he wants to get back to Earth so he can access parts to repair himself so that he will be hale and fit enough to deserve EVE's company and be her beau. WALL-E thinks in terms of his needs (particularly as they relates to those closest to him) rather than those of mankind. He is not the alpha male champion of humanity, nor does he wish to be: as WALL-E goes about his work, play, and projects, his bringing humanity back to Earth never appears to be anything more than a happy accident.

Like the prototypical animated New Man, Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*, WALL-E undergoes a physical transformation throughout the film as ATUO bludgeons and electrocutes his body past its breaking point. In *Beauty and the Beast*, an enchantress curses Beast with the repugnant form he retains over the course of the movie, and it is only Belle's kiss, and the manifestation of their shared love, that breaks the curse and restores his human form. This transformation, as Susan Jeffords points out in "Curse of Masculinity" (which was referenced in the previous chapter), marks Beast's alteration from domineering alpha male to a self-sacrificing New Man.

WALL-E's physical changes have a similar effect to that of Beast's. While WALL-E begins the film as a New Man, his transformation throughout the story blurs the

line between what constitutes a man or a woman according to societal conventions and demasculinizes him even further. WALL-E experiences physical trauma that dull his harsh edges in his efforts to help EVE in her quest to restore – or "rebirth" – life on Earth. Despite EVE's being a female-coded robot and her unambiguous directive (not WALL-E's) to obtain the plant and guide the Axiom home, the experience winds up traumatizing WALL-E's body, not hers. WALL-E is such a New Man, such a sacrificer and equalizer, that he takes it upon himself to experience the pain of her symbolic birthing process in her stead.

In spite of all of WALL-E's New Man qualities, he, like Bob Parr, possesses numerous attributes that type him as an alpha-male, especially in contrast with EVE. WALL-E can self-sustain on Earth. An eternal individual, WALL-E relies on himself alone (and a few maintenance parts from broken down WALL-E robots that he incorporates into his design) to stay functional. EVE, on the other hand, requires a full maintenance team (practically a pit crew) to stay operational. Furthermore, WALL-E is a completely autonomous entity throughout the entire movie; he does what he wants, when he wants. EVE, on the other hand, is subordinated by AUTO, until she meets WALL-E and he helps her to break away.

WALL-E, like Bob Parr, epitomizes the alpha-male ideal of individuality. He is the only robot left operational on Earth, presumably for scores of years at this point, and, in spite of the insurmountable job before him, he still happily works away. EVE, on the other hand, is just one of the many undifferentiated EVE model robots; the only thing that sets her apart from her sisters is the fact that she meets WALL-E. While it is clear that WALL-E must have been like EVE at some point (a nameless robot amid a fleet of

identical WALL-Es), he possessed a certain individuality that enables him to persevere and adapt long after all the other models cease functioning.

WALL-E's individuality is downright infectious. Whenever he comes in contact with another character, whether they be human, robot, or insect, he allows them to break away from the identity-less masses and individualize themselves. Through WALL-E's repeated attempts to court her, EVE becomes distinguished from the rest of the EVE robots as, not only the one that found the plant, but also the one who loves WALL-E. Likewise, WALL-E's interactions with John (John Ratzenberger) and Mary (Kathy Najimy) allow them to break out of the holovideo existences that ensnare the rest of humanity; they begin to explore their surroundings and interact with one another for the first time.

Just as WALL-E bridges the divide between the alpha-male and New Man within himself, his contact with EVE helps her to make the transition from being a simple alpha type to a female robot in touch with her sensitive side. She exudes alpha-male qualities, such as physical powers so lethal that she decimates a series of oil tankers with a series of laser blasts. Her interactions upon meeting WALL-E, likewise, demonstrate an inability on her part to form social connections. She ignores him at first meeting, as he has nothing to do with her mission, and, when she finally decides to converse with WALL-E, acts downright rude, giving him a curt "classified!" when he asks about her "directive."

As the film progresses, it is EVE's alpha edges that are softened by WALL-E's sensitive nature. WALL-E guides her through the dust storm back to his home, where he introduces her to music and dance. She starts to warm up to him, but her physical prowess and social isolation continuously get in the way as she accidentally shakes his

home, batters him, and pulls on the tape in his *Hello, Dolly!* cassette. WALL-E eventually makes some headway with EVE, but he mistakenly shows her the plant and her "work first/love second" instincts kick into action, causing her by design to go into sleep mode.

The first time the audience sees EVE demonstrate affection towards WALL-E comes when he saves the plant from being jettisoned into space. After WALL-E shows EVE that he has saved the plant, she embraces him, and the two dance together in space – EVE with her natural propulsion system and WALL-E using a fire extinguisher that he found on an escape pod. As heartwarming as the moment feels, there is no avoiding the fact that, underneath the sentiment, EVE is just as, if not more, happy about the successful return of the plant than she is about WALL-E's safety. Still, WALL-E's action on her behalf obviously touches EVE, and her attitude towards him specifically, and towards life in general, appears to soften. Not long thereafter, EVE's focus shifts again, and she leaves WALL-E behind on the Lido Deck of the Axiom while she storms the bridge, plant in tow.

After WALL-E has been brutalized by AUTO and thrown into the garbage chute, EVE finally ceases to function as an alpha type and starts putting WALL-E's needs before her mission. She has the plant again, but she tosses it aside to address WALL-E's damage. Once WALL-E reminds her that he has a bevy of replacement parts stored on Earth, EVE decides to resume her mission and takes the plant back to the Lido Deck to initiate the Axiom's return to Earth so she can conduct the necessary repairs on WALL-E.

The dialogue WALL-E delivers to its audience correlates with works of traditional fairy tale fiction which, taken in combination with the robotic nature of the two protagonists, allows for a fluid reading of traditional gender roles. This fluidity blurs not only the typical male/female gender dualism, but also the simple dichotomy Jeffords, Gillam, and Wooden create between the alpha-male and New Man in their articles. From the beginning of the film, WALL-E showcases diverse emotions, allowing them to drive his actions throughout the entire narrative. But, by the same token, he is housed within a stylized representation of a hard body and personifies alpha-male ideals of hard work and individualism. WALL-E spends the movie spreading this gender role fluidity to everyone he comes in contact with. As characters, whether they are man or woman, human or robot, come in contact with WALL-E, they acquire qualities befitting both New Men and alpha-men.

Conclusion

Bob Parr and WALL-E both exemplify Susan Jeffords' notion of the hard body, an idealized representation of masculinity typifying the alpha male. During his superhero career, and again after he loses his job at Insuricare, Bob represents a Herculean ideal, bristling with muscles that would impress even the Incredible Hulk. WALL-E's body is hard as well, but for different reasons. Unlike Bob, he is not a physical Adonis – his hardness comes from his metallic construction; WALL-E offers the resilience of an innocent, childlike Terminator.

Bob Parr belongs to a long tradition of animated father figures and family men. While the idea of the animated family man did not appear in feature film until 1977 with Bernard (Bob Newhart) and Miss Bianca (Eva Gabor) in *The Rescuers*, since then the appearance of married couples, as well as their children, have become more and more common in animation, to the point where shows starring animated family units, exemplified by *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and *King of the Hill*, have gained acclaim and viewership in prime time television. New cartoons revolving around fathers and their relationships with their children continue to crop up, as evidenced by a number of shows that have recently gained circulation on the [adult swim] programming block of Cartoon Network, including *The Venture Bros.* (2003-present), and *Squidbillies* (2004-present).

The Incredibles is by no means the only Pixar film that foregrounds a father figure as the central protagonist. Two other features, *Finding Nemo* and *Up*, detail the struggle of an ill-equipped adult who attempts to fill the role of father for a child in his life. Interestingly, all three of these father figures – Bob Parr, Marlin (in *Finding Nemo*), and Carl Fredericksen (in *Up*) – share an important quality; they are all trauma dads.

Marlin's faults as father stem from his overcompensations, because of the death of his wife and all their other children at the hands of a barracuda, and Fredericksen's because he refuses to give Russell the slightest bit of attention (he is stuck on hold in the mourning process following the death of his wife and soul mate, Ellie). On the other hand, Bob's trauma results, not from the death of family members, but from the death of his freedom. Because of societal constraints placed upon him and his family, they are unable to use their superpowers, publicly or otherwise. Bob finds this restriction suffocating, and, as a result, he has difficulty functioning in his role as dad.

Suffocating or not, working out or not, happy or not, Bob Parr bears the musculature of an out-of-this-world hard body. The other animated father figures, by contrast, are decidedly soft. Homer Simpson, Peter Griffin, and Hank Hill all toe the line (or downright cross it) of obesity, and, while they are not "soft" in terms of their girth, Marlin is a clownfish and Fredericksen is an elderly balloon salesman so neither screams hard bodied male.

Just as *The Incredibles* takes the family-centric animated narrative and adds a hard bodied male to the mix, *WALL-E* does the same with the animated fairy tale, riffing on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in particular. Both films revolve around a plant – an apple in *Snow White* and a sapling in *WALL-E* – that puts the female lead to sleep, and both films end with a kiss that breaks a "spell" – a cursed apple in *Snow White* and a damaged motherboard in *WALL-E*.

WALL-E particularly differs from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in its lead character's robotic nature, which aids in the blurring of typical gender dualisms. While WALL-E is obviously coded as male and EVE female, they are anatomically neither.

Furthermore, the two characters frequently act in ways that deviate from gender norms, with WALL-E spending years cleaning Earth and enjoying musicals and EVE toting a laser gun with a hair trigger. This blurring of gender roles applies not only to the basic dichotomy of male/female, but also to the distinction between alpha-male and New Man.

Both Bob Parr and WALL-E represent an amalgamation of the alpha-male and New Man, typically viewed from a dialectic point of view in regards to animation ever since Susan Jefford's 1995 article "The Curse of Masculinity: Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*." Bob may be an alpha-male, he may be exceedingly muscular and hyper competitive, but his underlying motivation, the most important thing that drives him, is not his reputation or want of material gain. Not at all. Instead, Bob is motivated by his love for his family, for their well-being and happiness. Similarly, WALL-E, a character that almost single-handedly returns mankind from its self-imposed exile on the Axiom to a renewed life on Earth, is heroic, not out of a sense of duty or a desire for fame, but because he loves EVE, wants to help her, and wants to be with her at any cost. Audiences see and believe in these Pixar men who speak to both the sensitive and competitive sides of masculinity, hitting a nerve that seems like real life. Both *The Incredibles* and *WALL-E* present gender dynamics far more complex than previous critics have acknowledged, testifying to their richness as popular texts and their place of prominence, not only within Pixar's filmography, but within the whole field of animation.

Oh, and the big lamp in *Luxo Jr.* was the father.

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