

REVOLUTIONARY MODE: AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNIST RHETORIC  
SURROUNDING THE DISNEY CORPORATION

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Revolutionary Mode: An Analysis of Communist Rhetoric Surrounding the Disney  
Corporation

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To my mother and father, who instilled in me the curiosity and drive needed to  
complete this thesis.

And to my friends, my adopted family, for all of their help and support.

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ABSTRACT

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A journey to the African Pride Lands uncovers more than a battle for power between two lion brothers. The expedition also proves that Disney was not out to tell just the story of an African cub coming of age. Upon closer inspection of Disney's 1994 classic *The Lion King* the viewer discovers that there is a red moon rising over the Pride Lands.



## VITA

Nicole Renee Fisher was born in Alamogordo, New Mexico, on November 29, 1990, the daughter of Lea Ann Almond and David Fisher. After completing her work at Wheatland Union High School in Wheatland, California, and Rosewood High School in Rosewood, North Carolina, in 2009, she entered Texas State University-San Marcos. During the summer of 2012, she attended the Universidad Latina in Heredia, Costa Rica. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Texas State in August 2012.

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## Introduction

Since the 1950s, the Disney Corporation has established itself as a creator of a magical world for children and adults alike. In a 2000 *Global Media Journal* article, Lee Arts explains how Disney uses many mediums to communicate with the public:

With enterprises in film, video, theme parks, cable and network television, cruise ships, toys, clothing, and other consumer products, Disney leads in the construction and promotion of U.S. popular culture. Yet, despite its position as global media giant, its sordid past as cold war propagandist and union buster, and its current exploitation of sweatshop workers, Disney maintains the Mickeyesque-aura of Uncle Walt and wholesome family entertainment. Indeed, Disney now serves as America's moral educator. Dominating market power in entertainment mitigated by avuncular representation adheres to Disney in large part due to its primary production art form: the animated feature. (par. 1)

One such animated feature is Disney's 1994 classic *The Lion King*, a playful film set in the African Pride Lands that would become nationally recognized for its story and soundtrack..

*The Lion King* is at least in part about the struggle between two competing political ideologies. In this paper I investigate the symbolic methods used by Disney animators to act as "moral educators." Specifically, using a cluster analysis in which the major characters of Mufasa and Scar function as key symbols, I argue that *The Lion King* continues Disney's work as "cold war propagandist" through the rhetorical promotion of anti-communist ideology.

The paper is broken into five sections. First is a discussion of the significance of the artifact including a discussion of the importance of mass media generally and the cultural impact of *The Lion King* specifically. Second is a synopsis of the competing governing styles portrayed in the movie. In the third section I describe the methods of criticism used to analyze the movie. The fourth section includes an application of these methods and what they uncover. Finally, in part five I discuss the conclusions and significance of the analysis.

### Significance of Artifact

In their text Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences, authors David Croteau and William Hoynes address the importance of mass media and its influence on culture, "Most media scholars believe that media texts articulate coherent, if shifting, ways of seeing the world. These texts help to define our world and provide models for appropriate behavior and attitudes" (159). Croteau and Hoynes further discuss ideas suggested in mass media by addressing the effect the ideas have on an audience:

The media give us pictures of social interaction and social institutions that, by their sheer repetition on a daily basis, can play important roles in shaping broad social definitions. In essence, the accumulation of media images suggests what is "normal" and what is "deviant." (163)

Essentially, mass media serves to tell the public what is good and what is bad. Such notions of the world may become dangerous because they are often accepted without question. Audiences see millions of films and television shows normalizing certain ideas and casting others as deviant. Croteau and Hoynes

argue that the American public sees so much of this normalization, in fact, that they have ceased to question it.

If adults have a hard time questioning what is normalized by mass media, children are even more helpless to discern cultural normalizations. In her article "Media and Children's Aggression, Fear, and Altruism," Barbara Wilson argues that, "Television programs, movies, and even the internet provide children with a window into popular culture. Children can come to appreciate norms and standards of conduct by watching social actors in fictional stories and can even experience emotional and social situations in a vicarious way through the media" (88). According to Wilson, the media has a huge effect on children. Just as media can normalize some behaviors and casts others as deviant for adults, children are susceptible to these categorizations.

Additionally, children experience the emotions of characters in the media. Where adults can separate themselves from emotional battles depicted in the media, children have a hard time. Wilson notes:

A few experimental studies show that children engage in emotional sharing with well-liked characters. Because empathy requires the ability to identify others' emotions and to role-take, older children are more likely to share the emotional experiences of on-screen characters than younger children are. Once again, content matters. Children are more likely to experience empathy with plot lines and characters that they perceive as realistic. They are also more likely to share the emotions of characters similar to themselves, presumably because it is easier to role-take with such characters.

Thus, movies or television programs that feature younger characters in emotional situations that are familiar and seem authentic should produce the strongest empathy in youth. (92)

Children may not understand that people in the media are actors and that their struggles are intended for loose interpretation. The problems faced by media characters are often blown into extreme circumstances so that the proper moral and, as a result ideology is communicated. Because children cannot identify characters' emotional struggles as media tactics, they are pulled along on an intense emotional journey.

Consider the journey taken by Simba. He is lured into a trap by his uncle. When the trap's destructive forces are set in place, Simba's father dies trying to save him. Rather than comfort his nephew, Scar instead declares it Simba's fault that Mufasa is dead. Motivated by his guilt Simba runs away from his home. He comes to adulthood in the wild. Although far from suggesting children will be able to identify with the guilt of killing their father, Simba's guilt and the desire to run away are not uncommon in children of all ages. This phenomenon is discussed by psychologist James Deni in a 1990 *School Psychology Review* article:

It is estimated that one child in eight will run away from home over night before his or her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday...The most frequently cited cause is parent-child relationships...The majority of runaways are trying to escape situation they perceive as problems they cannot or will not deal with. They run because they are unhappy with the existing environment, sometimes to avoid abusive and intensive

parents. Many of them feel “pushed out” or “thrown away.” (par. 1)

Whether it is from accidentally breaking a glass plate or from the trauma of divorcing parents, children understand guilt. Although most never get away with it, many children have packed their backpack with crayons and crackers, intending to bolt at the first chance they get.

In addition to feelings of abandonment, the education of children is becoming more reliant on electronic media. According to a 2011 article from the *Australian Journal of Education* by scholars Michael Bittman, Leonie Rutherford, Jude Brown, and Lens Unsworth:

The current generation of young children has been described as “digital natives,” having been born into a ubiquitous digital media environment. They are envisioned as educationally independent of the guided interaction provided by “digital immigrants:” parents and teachers. (161)

The article discusses the increasing reliance of younger generations on “a range of digital devices and platforms simultaneously to drive their own informal learning agendas” (161). Because technology is so hard to avoid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is being embraced as a tool to aid in educating children.

Bittman et. al. go further in discussing the effect that this trend has on children’s learning:

These results indicate that parents’ characteristics and the context that they create for the child’s media use in the early years (age 0-4) have more influence on the child’s acquisition of vocabulary than raw “exposure” to television, or the supposedly transformative new

media environment prophesied by the “digital natives” thesis. Indeed, our findings point to the significance of the context of viewing and the parents’ role in negotiating media with the child. Our results suggest that attention should be paid to encouraging the child’s use of the oldest media of all—print—as this is closely associated with receptive vocabulary at age 4 years. Similarly, among children aged 4-8 years, there appears to be no development advantage in avoiding exposure to television. Parents’ socio-economic resources and time devoted to reading or using a computer or both are all associated with more advanced abilities with language, comprehension and literacy. (171-172)

Contrary to popular belief, if correctly monitored television and computers do help children’s brains. Mastering cognitive skills of reception from such forms of media can enhance children’s learning abilities. As studies like this one continue to be published, the trend of media “babysitting” will undoubtedly increase.

Armed with this understanding of just how the media affects adults and children, I now turn to the influence of *The Lion King* on popular culture. According to the Internet Movie Database, a site cataloguing story lines, reviews, awards, and box office performance of mainstream media, *The Lion King* really cleaned up. In 1995, the year after its release, *The Lion King* headed to the Academy Awards with four nominations under its belt. At the end of the night, *The Lion King* had won two Oscars: one for Best Music, Original Score and one for Best Music, Original Song. In that same year, *The Lion King* also headed to the Golden Globes with four nominations. As the night closed, *The Lion King*

won three Golden Globes: Best Motion Picture-Comedy/Musical, Best Original Score-Motion Picture, and Best Original Song-Motion Picture. *The Lion King* won three Grammy awards: Best Instrumental Arrangement with Accompanying Vocals, Best Male Pop Vocal Performance, and Best Musical Album for Children. And, at the 1995 Kid's Choice Award's, *The Lion King* was crowned Favorite Movie ("The Lion King"). Closing the year with a total of 2 Oscars, 3 Golden Globes, 3 Grammy Awards, and the children's vote of Favorite Movie, *The Lion King* excelled and became a classic.

Adding to its status as a must-see movie are the box office figures for *The Lion King's* original 1994 release. According to the Internet Movie Database website, on an estimated budget of \$45,000,000, *The Lion King* grossed \$1,825,849 on opening weekend alone. That gross figure only includes premiers in the United States. When adding the \$4,447,493 the film grossed in Argentina, the \$4,080,520 the film grossed in Australia, the \$1,366,380 the film grossed in Austria, and the \$465,882 the film grossed in the Netherlands, *The Lion King* made \$12,186,124 worldwide. Although far under production costs, that 12 million dollar amount reflects money earned on opening weekend only. Just in the United States in 1994, the year the film was released, *The Lion King* grossed \$4,382,414,405. In laymen's terms, the film grossed over four billion dollars more than it cost to make just in the year it was released. That figure does not include any money earned in foreign countries that screened the film that same year. In short, *The Lion King* was a real cash cow for the Disney Corporation. Young Simba and his crew did not stop at the American coast. *The Lion King's* story of triumph over childhood demons was viewed by large audiences all



over the world. As detailed on the Box Office Guru website, *The Lion King* was shown in 2,624 different theaters worldwide at its widest viewing point ("Film Database"). According to the Internet Movie Database, the film was shown in the United States, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

The over-night success of Disney's *The Lion King* in combination with the strong effects of media influence on normalization for both adults and children, it is crucial that the themes being normalized and those being cast as deviant in the film be exposed. In order to do this, however, it is important to first understand the political ideologies that are at odds on the plot's surface.

#### Description of Artifact

Although publicized as a coming-of-age story, Disney's *The Lion King* is truly a chronicle of competing political ideologies. Introduced as the leader of the Pride Lands, Mufasa rules the kingdom as a beloved monarch. Early in the plot, the viewer is introduced to Mufasa's brother Scar. The brother of the king dreams of ruling the Pride Lands. Scar's aspirations are foiled when Mufasa has a son. The cub, Simba, is now in line before Scar as heir to the throne.

Where the story really gets interesting is in the struggle for power between the Mufasa/Simba pair and Scar. Under Mufasa's rule, the kingdom is lush and green, the animals proudly serve their lion king, and the evil hyenas are banished. Under Scar's rule everything changes. The kingdom becomes barren, the animals leave the Pride Lands, and the evil hyenas become co-inhabitants of the throne that is Pride Rock.

In human terms, Mufasa's ruling style can best be described as a monarchy. In their text *American Democracy Now*, Brigid Callahan Harrison, Jean Wahl Harris, and Gary M. Halter note that a monarchy is a "Government in which a member of a royal family, usually a king or a queen, has absolute authority over a territory and its government" (12). Until Simba is born, the animals of the Pride Lands only bow to Mufasa. Accepted as a designation of status, the animals' bows indicate that Mufasa is their monarch.

The extent of the lions' power is showcased when Mufasa takes young Simba to the top of Pride Rock to show him the kingdom. As the sun rises, Mufasa says to his son, "Everything the light touches is ours." Although powerful, the lions cannot protect this kingdom alone. Throughout the film, Mufasa receives updates from his assistant hornbill, Zazu, and an unnamed mole about threats to the Pride Lands. Such help from animals not included in the ruling class indicates there is a contract between the animals of the Pride Lands and Mufasa. The animals agree to maintain harmony among themselves in exchange for food and protection from their monarch, Mufasa.

This contract between the ruling class and the subjects of his or her kingdom reflects a characteristic of monarchy discussed by scholars Sharri Mora and Patricia Parent in their text *Political Science: Institutions and Public Policy*. Mora and Parent look to Aristotle's original definitions of government to discover the nature of a monarchy. According to Aristotle, a monarchy is "rule by one" that is "good" and "to benefit the community" (2). As long as the ruler maintains a style which benefits the masses, the public will continue to engage in a social contract forfeiting equal status with the ruler in exchange for protection.

In contrast to the harmony and plentiful bounty of Mufasa's monarchy stands the tyrannical oligarchy of his brother Scar. An oligarchy is described in the Callahan Harrison text as a "government in which an elite few hold power" (12). Aristotle further describes an oligarchy as "tyrant, bad," and "to benefit those that rule" (Mora 2).

Scar is the brother of the king. Until the birth of Simba, Scar was in line to inherit the throne. Such status as second in line is sufficient for labeling Scar as on the fringe of aristocracy. Another group on the fringe of aristocracy in *The Lion King* are the hyenas. The hyenas were shunned by Mufasa because their home was cast in shadow. Because the sun did not touch the hyenas' elephant graveyard home, it could not be protected by Mufasa. Scar befriended the hyenas. They became the "elite few" which Scar needed to take power. Additionally, the hyenas were quickly established as the elite group that were allowed to share the benefits of Scar's rule. Whereas under Mufasa the lionesses hunted for themselves and the animals of the kingdom, under Scar the lionesses hunt to feed their tyrant and his hyena henchmen.

#### Description of Method

Communication scholar, Sonja Foss defines an ideology as "a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world" (239). Understanding ideologies portrayed in mass media is important. Such understanding can answer cultural questions like "'who we are, what we stand for, what our values are, and what our relationships are with other groups'—particularly groups that oppose what we stand for, threaten our interests, and prevent us from accessing resources important to us" (Foss, 239).

Additionally, comprehension of dominant ideologies allied with particular cultures allows insight into a culture's actions.

Although not always intentional, emergent dominant ideologies may repress others' points of view. In her text *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*, Foss discusses the significance of dominant ideologies:

Hegemony is the privileging of the ideology of one group over that of other groups. It thus constitutes a kind of social control, a means of symbolic coercion, or a form of domination of the more powerful groups over the ideologies of those with less power...When an ideology becomes hegemonic, it accumulates "the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others." A dominant ideology controls what participants see as natural or obvious by establishing the norm. Normal discourse, then, maintains the ideology, and challenges to it seem abnormal. (242)

Although the emergence of dominant ideologies is inevitable in all cultures, such dominant ways of viewing the world become dangerous when left unchecked. Buried subconsciously in mass media and pop culture, hegemonic ideologies become normalized to members of the cultures in which the ideologies are dominant.

Ideological criticism is a powerful tool used to combat unquestioned acceptance of norms. According to Foss, "the primary goal of the ideological critic is to discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and the ideologies that are being muted in it" (243). After exposing the norms reinforced "between the lines" of mass media and pop culture, the

ideological critic's job "is the emancipation of human potential that is being thwarted by an existing ideology or ideologies or a celebration of artifacts that facilitate this emancipation" (Foss 243). Much like activists of any age, the ideological critic must attack normalizations in favor of ideas repressed by dominant ideologies.

In the case of this paper, the ideological critic's weapon is the method of cluster criticism. According to Foss, "In cluster criticism, the meanings that key symbols have for a rhetor are discovered by charting the symbols that cluster around those key symbols in an artifact" (Foss 71). First, the critic carefully picks apart the artifact noting which symbols occur repeatedly. Next, the critic begins to record symbols which gather around the dominant symbol.

Often times, the associations made between a dominant symbol and its cluster are unintentional associations made by the author. Foss discusses this phenomenon:

The equations or clusters that a critic discovers in a rhetor's artifact generally are not conscious to the rhetor...although a rhetor is "perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, etc., he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations." As a result, the clusters manifest in someone's rhetoric can "reveal, beneath an author's official front," the level at which a lie is impossible. (72)

Foss suggests that cluster criticism allows a critic to look deep between the lines

of an artifact. Such deep probing allows a critic to discover intrinsic and sometimes unknown motivations of the artifact's author.

Because of the depth of understanding brought about from cluster criticism, it is the perfect tool for the rhetorical critic in uncovering ideology. Like author motivations sometimes unknown to the authors themselves, ideologies become normalized so much that they are often invisible to the viewer. In the following section, cluster criticism will be employed to uncover key symbols in *The Lion King*. In combination with ideological criticism, this paper will uncover deep seeded motivations of Disney animators buried within the film.

### Findings of Analysis

In a story cast as a competition of ruling styles, namely monarchy versus tyrannical oligarchy, communist symbolism seems out of place. However, an application of cluster criticism helps to explain the motive behind this anti-communist ideology. To begin the cluster criticism, key symbols must be identified. Croteau and Hones discuss how key symbols can be identified:

For much of U.S. history, most white-produced images of other racial groups have been unambiguously racist. As early as the late 1700s, the "comic Negro" stereotypes of "Sambo" appeared in novels and plays. On the stage, Dates and Barlow (1993) note, this racist character "was cast in a familiar mold: always singing nonsense songs and dancing around the stage. His dress was gaudy, his manners pretentious, his speech riddled with malapropisms, and he was played by white actors in blackface" (p.6). Such images in popular culture are the precursor of racist stereotypes in the

mass media. (204)

Here, Croteau and Hoynes explain how a main character became key in recognizing the racist trends at the time. I argue that Mufasa and Scar serve the same function that Sambo did in alluding to racism. Mufasa becomes the key term recognized as good while Scar becomes the key term recognized as evil. Three categories of symbols that cluster around Mufasa and Scar are the condition of the kingdom, portrayal of death, and physical appearance. Each cluster primes the audience to accept Mufasa as hero and Scar as villain.

#### Clusters Concerning the Condition of the Kingdom

During Mufasa's reign, the Pride Lands are fertile and harmonious. Many different species roam the Pride Lands, happily accepting protection of their land in exchange for sacrificing some of their members to feed the lions. The animal kingdom's love for their leading species is specifically displayed during the song, "I Just Can't Wait To Be King."

Prior to the musical number, Simba has learned about the elephant graveyard from his conniving uncle Scar. The curious cubs they are, Simba and Nala head directly towards the elephant graveyard. However, Simba's mother Sarabi is wise to the tricks of children. She sends along the hornbill Zazu, the king's trusted advisor, to supervise the children. Under the guise of visiting the watering hole, Simba, Nala, and Zazu head out on their adventure.

Once at the watering hole, Simba devises a plan to lose the pesky watch bird Zazu. Simba whispers to the animals around the watering hole and the plan commences. At the end of "I Just Can't Wait To Be King," Simba and Nala are depicted atop a tower of animals. Perched atop giraffes, elephants, ant-eaters,

and ostriches, the young cub couple triumphantly sings the last verses of the song. Just then, the animal tower begins to sway causing all of the animals to come tumbling to the ground. A large rhino lands its snout behind directly atop Zazu. This strategic sit allows the lion cubs to disappear unsupervised to the elephant graveyard. Although seemingly insignificant, the willingness of the animals of the Pride Lands to effectively kidnap the king's most trusted advisor upon request of the prince exemplifies the loyalty the animals feel towards their lion leaders. Another character deeply devoted to the lion rulers is Zazu. At one point, Zazu allows himself to be the object of a pouncing lesson for young Simba. Despite risking injury at the untrained paws of a pouncing juvenile cub, Zazu obliges his king and allows himself to be tackled to the ground by Simba.

The loyalty, harmony, and fertility of the Pride Lands under Mufasa evaporates during Scar's reign. The first sign of change is the introduction of the hyenas to Pride Rock. Unlike the sunlit and lush green portrayal of Pride Rock under Mufasa, Pride Rock under Scar's reign is black, beginning with the entrance of the hyenas. The hyenas come stalking out of the crevices of Pride Rock fitted with malicious grins and poisonously green eyes. The Pride Lands follow suit: the sky stops raining, the ground goes grey, and the trees lose their leaves and turn black.

The lionesses are charged with providing food for themselves and the hyenas. Soon, all other species leave the Pride Lands, likely because of the increased hunting patterns of the lionesses. The harmonious balance preserved under Mufasa's rule between protection and sacrifice is upturned by Scar. Because the lionesses have to provide so much more food, they must take



more animals as sacrifices. Not only is the threat of being hunted higher, the animals of the Pride Lands cannot graze or drink because the land is barren under Scar's reign. Thus, the animals of the Pride Lands end their loyalty to the ruling lion class, leaving the Pride Lands altogether.

Mufasa is a symbol for a positive monarchy. His reign is accompanied by fertility, harmony, and loyalty. In opposition, Scar is a symbol for a tyrannical oligarchy. His reign is accompanied by drought, famine, and desertion. Additionally, Mufasa's kingdom is associated with vibrant colors. Scar's kingdom, however, is completely drab and grey.

#### Clusters Concerning the Portrayal of Death

Further casting of Mufasa as benevolent monarch and Scar as a tyrannical oligarch happens in the portrayal of each character's death. Mufasa is lured into a trap and tragically killed. The lionesses mourn upon learning of the death of their leader. Additionally, Simba gets a chance to speak with his father's spirit after death. During this scene, Mufasa is shown as a mystical figure in the clouds. Although it is a dark blue night, when Mufasa's figure appears in the clouds, the clouds become colored vibrant white, orange, and pink. It is Mufasa's appearance to his son, Simba, which inspires the adolescent lion to return to the Pride Lands and reclaim Pride Rock.

Arguably, Mufasa's spirit is seen in heaven. His figure is associated with a star-lit sky. Throughout the movie, the stars are described as the resting places of great kings of the past. By appearing from the stars, the audience understands that Mufasa is finally resting where he belongs-with the great kings of the past. The idea that a body has gone to a spiritual resting place for all past kings after

death is closely associated with the Christian idea of heaven.

Contrary to the mourning of death and celebration of afterlife associated with Mufasa's death is the death of Scar. Simba has returned from a self-inflicted exile to re-claim the Pride Lands as the proper king. Simba and Scar face off while the lionesses and hyenas fight a battle of their own. Almost immediately, the audience is made aware that some higher power approves of this coup when a lightning bolt strikes the drought ridden land. With the powerful bolt, the land surrounding Pride Rock is engulfed in flames.

Scar and Simba continue their battle amongst these flames until Simba manages to overpower Scar, throwing him over the edge of a cliff into a fiery abyss. The viewer then sees Scar land on all fours, surrounded by flames. He is approached on all sides by angry hyenas. Rather than show the hyena's brutal turn on their former leader, Scar's death by hyena is depicted in shadows on a wall of rock. Immediately following Scar's death, the clouds open and rain pours. Through Scar's death, fertility is returned to the Pride Lands under the leadership of its rightful king, Simba.

Aside from choosing this depiction of death due to audience sensitivity, Scar's death speaks to Disney's rhetorical creation of his character. First, Scar is alone in death. The only real allies he had—the hyenas—are the ones who finally finish off this evil ruler. This coup within a coup is Disney's way of saying to its audience that villains never win. Even if they manage to get ahead for a little while, the bad guy will eventually lose. And when he does, he will take that loss painfully alone.

Another contrast to Mufasa's heavenly afterlife is Scar's absence of one.

Scar instead dies in flames, never to be heard from again. Disney's depiction of Scar going down utterly alone, in a cradle of fire, matches exactly with the traditional Christian view of hell. Rhetorically speaking, Mufasa, the hero, went to heaven and is still with Simba in the stars while Scar, the bad guy, died a torturous death and went to hell. One lion in heaven and one lion in hell serve to define for the audience which lion is good and which lion is bad.

#### Clusters Concerning Physical Appearance

Physical appearance is the final symbol classifying Mufasa as good and Scar as evil. As Artz notes, animation is uniquely capable of manipulating the physical features of characters to create reality:

All "film claims to show the truth, but constantly deceives" (Whitlock 35), but animation excels at both due to its technical and artistic openness. Documentary film, for instance, could not possibly re-construct the humanized characters and stories of Disney's *Little Mermaid* (1989), *Lion King* (1994) or *Tarzan* (1999) because the natural world disallows the fictional representations necessary. In contrast, animated characters, settings, and representations can be graphically adjusted to empower desired meanings. In fact, Disney's idealized worlds rest largely on the artifice of animation: good characters (e. g., Simba, the Sultan, Ariel, Pocahontas) exhibit juvenile traits such as big eyes and round cheeks (Lawrence 67) and are drawn in curves, smooth, round, soft, bright, and with European features; villains (e.g., Scar, Jafar, the Hun, Ratcliffe, Ursula) are drawn with sharp angles, oversized, and often darkly. (par. 4)

Disney animators spared no technical insinuation when depicting Mufasa and Scar. Mufasa is drawn as a yellow lion with an orange mane. He has huge features which are all rounded. Orange and yellow are both classified as warm colors. Used by interior designers to brighten up a room, warm colors are often associated with good feelings. Additionally, Mufasa's round features can be described as soft. His large paws are drawn with rounded knuckles, his nose is rounded, and most importantly Mufasa's jaw is large and strong, yet rounded. Along with the warm colors of his fur, Mufasa's rounded features help cast him as a good lion.

Scar is another story entirely. Rather than the warm color pallet of his brother, Scar's fur is brown and his mane is black. Also unlike his brother's rounded features, Scar is drawn using boxy angular lines. The dark colors associated with Scar's features are associated with villains across all animated mediums. The same is true of Scar's angular features. Scar's paws are drawn with pointed knuckles, his nose is squarer than his brothers, and his jaw is thin, boxy, and pointed. The dark color pallet chosen by Disney animators for Scar in combination with his angular features further solidify his depiction as an evil lion.

#### Clusters Concerning Communism

To this point, the comparison of the key symbols surrounding Mufasa and Scar has made no comment on communism. In a 2008 article by scholar Peter Meyer Filardo discussing the history of communism, the governing style is described in the following way:

For Communists the term "Communism" meant both an

international movement dedicated to the overthrow of capitalist systems and a classless society which would exist only in the future. What are generally known as Communist systems were called "socialist" by the Communists themselves...Communist systems possessed five common features which, taken together, distinguished them from other authoritarian regimes and, still more fundamentally, from socialism of a social democratic type: (a) the monopoly of power of the Communist Party; (b) intra party relations which were highly centralized and strictly disciplined; (c) state, rather than private, ownership of the means of production; (d) the building of communism as the ultimate, legitimizing goal; and (e) a sense of belonging to an international Communist movement. (145)

Following this definition of communism, the reader notes that neither Scar nor Mufasa rules as a true communist. Although Scar and his hyena henchmen do monopolize power and have highly centralized and disciplined intra-party relations, they do not privately own the means of production. Additionally, Scar's regime does not build communism as the "ultimate, legitimizing goal" nor does the regime "feel a sense of belonging" to any sort of larger communist movement.

During Scar's rise to power, two symbols representing communism cluster around him: a sickle-shaped moon and a band of goose-stepping hyenas. In the musical number "Be Prepared," the hyenas are solidifying their allegiance to Scar. Scar has announced his plan to kill Mufasa, banish Simba, and take over as king. He leads the hyenas in a musical number, telling them to be prepared for a

change in the kingdom. At one point in the number, Scar is depicted on top of a large rock looking down on the army of hyenas. In strict formation, the hyenas begin goose-stepping to Scar. A closer look at the history and use of the military step explains its ties to communism.

According to Ken Ringle, in a 1990 *Washington Post* article:

The goose step long predates its Nazification in Germany 50 years ago and may, in fact, have been practiced by the legions of ancient Rome. As an aspect of close-order drill, it was designed to display and promote the sort of unity and discipline that encourages soldiers to shoot and burn what they're told without asking a lot of troublesome questions. (C4)

The hyenas were the perfect troop for this type of drill. At their introduction, it is made obvious to the audience that the hyenas are not the brightest characters. In fact, the hyenas may be the least intelligent creatures of the Pride Lands.

The audience gets to know three of the hyenas personally: Bonzai, Shenzi, and Ed. Although all of the hyenas' speech is characterized by laughter modeled after the animal's real life vocalics, one hyena stands out in particular. Ed is the only member of the trio who can't form normal sentences. He is characterized as the "village idiot," taking punches from the other two, slobbering, and giggling and grunting through it all. Creatures of such low intelligence are perfect in forming an army to back Scar. Add to their low I.Q. the mind-numbing performance of the goose-step and Scar has an army of animals eating out of his paw.

Further information from the article discusses, in a rhetorical sense, why

the animators chose this step, "As Nazi Germany demonstrated rather convincingly, it is almost impossible to think while goose-stepping, so great is the concentration required for the maneuver. Thus a goose-stepping army has rarely, if ever, been the instrument of a popularly elected government" (Ringle C4). As discussed earlier, Scar is an oligarchical tyrant governing only for the benefit of those in the ruling class. Disney animators needed a way to communicate the tyranny of Scar's governing style symbolically. Thus, they chose the easily recognizable goose-step to communicate the rise of a highly unpopular army.

The use of the goose-step in *The Lion King* becomes even more interesting when looking to an article from Reuters published in 1990, "East Germany's army has scrapped the ceremonial goose-step, ending years of military tradition that linked the Prussians, Nazis and Communists" ("East German Defence..."). In multiple articles, the military goose-step is directly linked to Nazis and communism. The fact that, as late as 1990, the goose-step was being associated with Nazis and communism is important to note. Just four years before the release of *The Lion King*, the goose-step was associated with Nazis and communism: two things both demonized by dominant ideologies in America.

Along with the goose-step, there is another symbol in *The Lion King* directly alluding to communism which clusters around Scar. The symbol appears twice in the film; once when Scar establishes himself as a leader with the hyenas and again when Scar takes over Pride Rock. In both scenes, Scar is pitted against a black sky lit by the thin sliver of a crescent moon. Disney animators decided to depict the crescent moon with curved points—more curved than would be naturally seen. The moon is so curved, in fact, that the crescent is easily

recognized as the sickle present on the red flag flown by the Soviet Union.

Discussed in *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, an encyclopedia of world flags through history:

A red flag has been used as the flag of defiance since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century... In 1924 a red flag featuring a red star, a golden hammer and a sickle became the national flag of the Soviet Union. Soon the red star and the hammer and sickle (the crossed tools of workers and peasants) were regarded as symbols of communism. (Znamierowski 126)

Unlike the goose-step which has negative connections to communism, the Sickle is a pure and positive symbol of communism as it stands for unification of the working class and the very poor.

The first appearance of the sickle-shaped moon is at the end of Scar's solo "Be Prepared." Scar has galvanized the hyenas into taking over Pride Rock with him. He is perched atop a large rock as it shoots skyward. When the rock's motion stops, Scar is high above his hyena army silhouetted against the sickle-shaped moon. The scene pans out uncovering the hordes of hyenas standing at attention to Scar. Even as the camera angle gets wider, the sickle-shaped moon remains in the center. Eventually, an elephant rib cage comes into view in the foreground. The eerie bones envelope the moon, serving as two arrows directing the viewer's eyes to the communist symbol.

The second time the sickle-shaped moon appears is very similar. Mufasa is dead. Simba has run away. Scar has announced that he and the hyenas will inhabit Pride Rock. Hyenas with green eyes swarm Pride Rock. The lionesses are



disturbed. As Scar takes his newly stolen post atop Pride Rock, the sickle-shaped moon is again featured in the night sky. Again, the moon is outlined by the natural scenery. This time it is the perpendicular rocks which make the mountain and outcrop known as Pride Rock. The two rocky features form a ninety degree angle. Directly in the center of the angle shines the sickle-shaped moon. Again, the camera angle widens yet the sickle-shaped moon remains at the center of the frame.

Although some would argue that Disney drawing a moon to resemble a communist symbol in a children's movie is far-fetched, the visual strategy used in both appearances to guide the viewer's eye to the sickle-shaped moon are too thorough to claim that Disney animators' depiction of the moon was anything less than intentional. Both times the sickle-shaped moon appears, it is purposefully highlighted with scenery to catch the viewer's attention. Not only are there physical lines pointing to the symbol, it is also the brightest feature on the screen. The viewer, therefore, has no choice but to see the sickle-shaped moon.

Not only is the viewer forced into seeing the sickle-shaped moon, the symbol only surfaces in the presence of Scar. As does the goose-step. Amid the symbols surrounding Scar, it is apparent that neither the goose-step nor the sickle-shaped moon have any appropriate place around the tyrannical oligarch.

### Conclusion

My analysis further supports the idea that media is used as a tool to fortify hegemonic ideas in a culture. What is particularly intriguing is the misfit of communist symbolism in *The Lion King*. If, in fact, the movie is a depiction of

the struggle between monarchy and oligarchy, there is no fit for communist symbolism. Rather than representing the true form of communist government, Disney animators spent an entire movie depicting Mufasa as good and Scar as bad to tie loose communist symbolism to an evil symbol. Thus, the hegemonic ideology of anti-communism is further normalized. Considering that children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are considered "digital natives," exposed to media at an early age and often babysat by the television, leaving strategies like those used by Disney unquestioned will continue the normalization of hegemonic ideologies in America. Therefore, it is necessary to become an active viewer of all media forms thereby calling into question ideas which the public has been conditioned to accept.

Future research should investigate smaller niches of normalization in mass media. Although there are endless resources on rhetoric in Disney movies, many of those resources cover a broad range of topics. Instead of following that template, this paper investigated one set of symbols in only one film. There are many other themes in *The Lion King* which deserve attention. However, my analysis exemplifies the benefit of the particular. Narrow focus directed at other forms of media by other researches would serve to uncover in more depth just how much of American public opinion is dictated by the media from birth and frighteningly never questioned.

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