

was another way to tell the story? Cinderella was exactly the way the cartoon said it was.

I gave thumbs up to THE SHAGGY DOG and THE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR. Of course, they were much smaller thumbs in those days. I was not

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really keen on Disney's 60s stuff with its genius teenagers or its sentient foreign cars and avoided them altogether. This was the low end of fantasy filmmaking, but at least they were peacefully queering their own stuff rather than queering someone else's work. This sort of filmmaking culminated in that amazing, colossal turkey THE BLACK HOLE.

Then came a sort of renaissance at Disney. I would still defend NEVER CRY WOLF as a really good film, even though I found out, only years later, that it was telling a very different story from the book it adapts. THE JOURNEY OF NATTY GANN is a splendid film too. Some of Disney's Touchstone comedies were very funny, RUTHLESS PEOPLE, for example. Then Disney moved into animation again in a big way. Hey, I have no strong attachment to Anderson's "The Little Mermaid" and I turned a blind eye to the liberties taken with that story. And BEAUTY AND THE BEAST may actually be better than the fairy tale. But then Disney started going wild. There was more of "The Thief of Baghdad" than "Aladdin" in ALADDIN. They moved the setting from China to Arabia and threw in the horrible Robin Williams schtick. I complained a bit but I had no strong attachment to the material. THE LION KING was their own story and they could do what they liked.

But now things are going too far. First, they have made a film supposedly based on a historical incident. No, that isn't fair. The story is true, only the facts and attitudes and tone have been changed to protect the profits. To understand this film's attitude, think of Disney studios as the RAF and think of the actual historical story of Pocahontas as Dresden. Disney seems to be doing penance for the negative racist images of Indians in PETER PAN by having switched over entirely to positive racist images. (Oh yes, there is such a thing as positive racism, It just takes more strength for the target group to object. And there are voices in the Indian movement who are objecting to portraying the Indians

as ecological saints the way it is done in this film.) The new film which pulls out all the stops and leaves no hontas unpoked, has this buxom buck-skinned adult playing the then eleven-year-old historical figure. Well, there are people who know history far better than I do to set the record straight on this one. I am interested in history but have no stronger attachment to this particular story than I have to the original Arabian Nights stories.

But what is galling me is that Disney has announced that they is ready to come after and writings I do hold dear. He almost was there when he did that horrible distortion of THE JUNGLE BOOK last year, almost entirely avoiding the story of the Kipling. But with his next animation feature it gets personal. Disney Studios have announced that next time they are going after--yeah, that expresses it better than adapting--they are going after THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME.

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Why can't they leave that one alone? This is not a story for children and I do not want to see it becoming a children's classic. This is a bitter angry book with no sympathetic characters besides Quasimodo himself. The anger of the book and the tragedy of the story of Quasimodo are what makes this a great book, bleak but great.

Gawd, I can see it now.... Quasimodo, lecturing about the beauty of nature. Cute little squirrels climbing over the parapets of Notre Dame Cathedral to be friends with the hunchback. A demure little Esmerelda singing about some politically correct cause or other. A happy ending. Oh, no, I bet there are going to be Quasimodo stuffed plush toys. Burger King will be giving out posable cutpurse action figures. Little plastic torturers complete with little plastic renditions of torture instruments like The Boot. Who am I kidding? Disney will cut out all references to floggings and torture.

No! This is all too terrible to contemplate. I would rather see Ted Turner colorize CASABLANCA than to see what Disney will do to HUNCHBACK. [-mrl]

2. ZODIAC by Neal Stephenson (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-57386-1, 1995 (1988c), 308pp, US\$5.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Before THE DIAMOND AGE, before SNOWCRASH, there was ZODIAC. Now, with Neal Stephenson's popularity and critical acclaim, Bantam has re-issued his earlier novel. (His first novel, THE BIG U, will be released, Stephenson is reported to said, "only over my dead body.")

Unlike SNOWCRASH and THE DIAMOND AGE, ZODIAC is not about computers. It is rather about the environment, and while the hero uses computers to analyze toxic waste patterns and such, they are no more the center of attention than the character's watch. The hero is part of an environmental activist organization, not quite as large as Greenpeace, but also tending toward the dramatic (such as challenging a corporate president on television to drink water from near the outlet pipes from his factory).

There is the same manic style that attracted such attention in SNOWCRASH, though not as developed. Naturally the problem the hero is trying to solve turns out to be bigger than originally thought, and at times verges on the unbelievable. (Not to mention that in the seven years since this book was first written we seem to have taken a different direction and Stephenson's then-near-future story now reads a bit like an alternate history.) But Stephenson's talent is not in writing a completely realistic story--it's in his

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writing style. And in that regard, this book delivers. You won't get any major philosophical ideas, but you will get an enjoyable read.

Oh, and there is no Blue Kills, New Jersey, but there is a Route 88 off the Garden State Parkway (page 38). And there is a Chicopee, Massachusetts (page 279). I should know--I used to live there.
[-ecl]

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The classes that wash most are those that work least.
-- G. K. Chesterton