

Abjection on Ice: The Unique Representation of Abjection in Frozen

Shanubhog Kushala^{1,*} 

¹Independent Scholar, India

Received: 01/ 07 / 2025

Accepted: 03/ 08/ 2025

Published: 15/ 01/ 2026

Abstract

Feminist film scholars have extensively explored the theme of abjection, primarily within the context of horror movies. Barbara Creed argues that abjection is prevalent in horror films because it evokes fear in the subject within the symbolic order by reminding them of their connection to the maternal, and, by extension, their fragility in the paternal symbolic order. These reminders, embodied in abject forms, are ultimately defeated by a patriarchal hero, who symbolizes the normative order, thus alleviating the anxiety generated by the film. This has led many scholars to contend that abjection, despite being a feminist tool of study, serves to justify the patriarchy's disdain for abject bodies that deviate from the symbolic norm. This paper aims to examine the animated film *Frozen* through the lens of abjection theory, illustrating a shift in these trends and demonstrating that abjection is not confined to the horror genre. Elsa, the protagonist of *Frozen*, is queer-coded and embodies numerous abject elements. Initially feared, she is ultimately integrated into the symbolic order. This study will analyze Elsa's portrayal to highlight a unique representation of abjection and explore the depiction of abject bodies and women in contemporary popular media.

Keywords: Abjection, female castratrice, Feminism, feminist analysis, Psychoanalysis

Cite as

Kushala, S. (2026). Abjection on Ice: The Unique Representation of Abjection in Frozen. *Atras Journal*, 7(1), 184-198. <https://doi.org/10.70091/Atras/vol07no01.12>

*Corresponding author's email: kshanubhog@gmail.com

Introduction

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines abjection as a lack of pride or self-respect. This paper does not abide by that definition and uses the word "abject" in a strictly psychoanalytic sense. Abjection, as explained by Kristeva (1982), is a tool of patriarchy (p.60). Based on Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, the conception of abjection does not take place until the subject enters the paternal symbolic, the world of the father, after separating from the mother. After birth, a child cannot differentiate itself from its mother and does not have an individual existence of its own (Creed, 1993, p. 17). Anything that reminds the subject of this violent process thus becomes abject, as the subject himself was an abject, existing within the womb of the mother, where there is no difference between inside and outside, between mother and child. Abjection is anything that defies the border between the proper and improper, or the natural and the unnatural/supernatural, and reminds the subject of its fragile existence in the symbolic (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

Creed (1993) observes that patriarchy uses this abjection as a tool to maintain its relevance. Horror movies constantly portray objects that violate the principles of patriarchy. With devouring mothers, unnatural births, and villains who violate the proper/improper boundaries, horror movies raise the fears of their audience to confront them as the heterosexual patriarchy-protecting hero comes to defeat these perverse villains, usually armed with phallic weapons, or the audience is forced to face their fears on the big screen (Creed, 1993, p.151).

Although Creed (1993) observed this phenomenon with respect to horror movies, it is usually a staple feature in most movies. Since popular culture is a mechanism of society that entertains, it is bound to reflect the values of the organizations that propagate it. Simply put, movies produced by patriarchal institutions propagate patriarchy. Disney movies have not been an exception to this rule. Despite abjection being an essential tool of analysis, the study of Disney movies using abjection has been surprisingly limited, primarily focusing on the characterization of antagonists, as observed in the Review of Literature. This paper aims to bridge the gap by studying the portrayal of abjection by the protagonist, Elsa, in *Frozen* and answering the question: Can abjection be portrayed in a positive light, rather than merely reproducing patriarchal values?

Review of Literature

Christopher Kowalski and Ruchi Bhalla liken the movie *Frozen* to a coming-of-age film, comparing the troubles Elsa faces with her superpowers to the problems adolescents face in dealing with life in the article, "Viewing the Disney Movie *Frozen* through a Psychodynamic Lens". Elsa's struggles with her powers are compared to the challenges adolescents face in

navigating their developing emotions. Her explosion of power in the form of icy shards is seen as her 'acting out' and surfacing of the same feelings that she is used to repressing. The relationship between Anna and Elsa is also viewed as a typical sibling dynamic, where Elsa is envious of the adoration Anna receives as the youngest in the family. Freezing Anna's heart seems like a result of sibling rivalry against the "warmth" of Anna.

Patel (2015), in his article, "The Quirky Princess and The Ice-olated Princess," compares the princesses of *Frozen* to their predecessors. Patel observes the evolution of Disney princesses by categorizing them into three distinct eras: Classic Disney, Renaissance Disney, and Revival Disney. Patel observes a complete lack of agency in Classic Disney Princesses. The leading ladies from Disney's Renaissance era, although they have better agency compared to their predecessors, seem to abandon their life goals and aims after meeting their love interest. Their life is centered around the male lead, whereas Anna exercises her agency in *Frozen* quite freely. Patel notes that the characterization of Elsa is more similar to the villains of Disney than to the leading princesses. For instance, the possession of a strong magical power is often seen in villains.

Although many researchers have observed *Frozen* as a mold-breaking Disney movie, Streiff and Dundes (2017), in their essay, "Frozen in Time: How Disney Gender-Stereotypes Its Most Powerful Princess", observe that Elsa is actually stereotyped under the guise of empowerment. Elsa poses a threat to the patriarchy and needs to be subdued. Her father steps in, as the preserver of patriarchy, and provides her with gloves, the essay observing this as a metaphor of virginity to her emasculating powers. The essay also notes that Elsa is not given a love interest, suggesting that women can only pursue either power or love, but not both. They also observe the idea of sacrifice, which is romanticized in the movie, as Anna sacrifices herself for her sister.

In "Hegemony, Gender Stereotypes and Disney: A Content Analysis of *Frozen* and *Snow White*", Arnold et al. (2015) comparing the so-called modern representation in the character of Elsa to one of the first Disney princesses, *Snow White*, who lacks the agency Elsa has, examine ideals of masculinity and femininity in its characters which are aimed at children still developing opinions regarding these very subjects. Another shortcoming observed by researchers is that Anna is rarely trusted to make the right decisions, as she often fails to heed the advice given by Kristoff, which frequently lands her in trouble.

Comparing Elsa to Captain Hook and Ursula, Adelia Brown in "Hook, Ursula, and Elsa: Disney and Queer coding from the 1950s to the 2010s" examines the representation and intrinsic messages spread in Disney's *Frozen*. Scholars draw parallels between the society's rejection of the queer community and Elsa's rejection by society and isolation. There is also a

visible juxtaposition of Elsa's need to hide her powers and Anna's need for heterosexual love, especially in the song, "For the first time in forever". Although this has been mostly seen as an instance of positive queer-coding, Elsa is portrayed as a danger to the face of heterosexual love, that is, Anna. Brown condemns this move as intrinsically propagating ideas of "harmful homosexuality".

Methodology

Abjection is a result of the fight for control between two powers – the masculine and the feminine. Although the masculine is victorious, there remains a relentless struggle to establish the phallic order. The theory of abjection, most notably, has been employed by Barbara Creed to analyze representations of feminine horror in horror films. She examines the various feminine monsters in popular cinema. Initially, this paper aims to study abjection as the act of defying patriarchal expectations within the symbolic order. This paper intends to follow the parameters observed by Creed in the construction of the monstrous feminine in popular horror movies and draw parallels with the portrayal of Elsa to establish her as an abject character. The paper then aims to compare the characterization of Anna, a non-abject character, with Elsa to illustrate Elsa's abjection further. The conclusion of the movie is then studied as an acceptance of abjection, indicating the changes brought to the status quo of the symbolic.

Abjection in Disney

Disney has been providing fun-filled family entertainment through their animated movies since 1937. A cursory look at their famous Princess movie franchise reveals that characters who were portrayed as abject were often portrayed as villains or social outcasts. Magic, in Disney movies, serves as an effective metaphor for abjection, as it defies the boundaries between the natural/unnatural and the human/inhuman. However, what is natural? The answer to this question keeps changing, and by examining Disney movies, we can observe how society's reaction to the abject evolves. However, that is beyond the purview of this paper. Although this paper will touch upon the historical representation of the abject in these movies, it will explore the film *Frozen* in depth.

Disney scholars conveniently divide the timeline of princess movies into Classics, Renaissance, and New Age (Alp, 2021). The classic princesses of the era — Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora — are mostly passive. They are subjected to horrible ordeals by abject villains - The evil shape-shifting witch¹ in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the unmotherly stepmother in *Cinderella*, and Maleficent, who scholars have found to be queer-coded, in *The Sleeping Beauty* (Veera, 2023, p.68). The antagonists all tread the fine line between what is proper and improper, or what is natural and supernatural. The fairy Godmother in *Cinderella* is another abject character. However, she is not a member of society and appears only once to

grant Cinderella her wish to attend the ball. She exists entirely outside society, as her abjection has no place in the symbolic. They are all rescued from their fates by Princes, heterosexual men armed with "true love," which is the heteronormative love propagated by patriarchy. There is absolutely no tolerance for anything that challenges the status quo, as the protectors of patriarchy brutally murder the abject characters.

In the Renaissance era, which included *Beauty and the Beast*, *Mulan*, and *The Little Mermaid*, princesses had significantly more agency. They actively pursue their dreams and voice their opinions. The abject in *Beauty and the Beast* is the beast himself, under the spell of a witch, but he is spared death in the hands of the patriarchal protector, Gaston, as he is a victim of the real abject villain, the witch who cursed him. True love spares him from his abject existence. In *Mulan*, although no magic is involved, Mulan herself is forced to be an abject that defies the border between masculine and feminine. After peace is restored, she retakes her place in the patriarchy as a wife. *The Little Mermaid's* Ursula is famously observed to be queer-coded by scholars (Brown, 2021), and with her powers, is the abject antagonist. She tries to prevent the union of Ariel with her true love, Eric, and attempts to enslave Ariel, but is defeated by Eric, who impales her. Abjection here looms more dangerously, as abject characters affect the lead characters. However, everything is safe at the end of the day, with the abjection of the lead characters banished along with the abject antagonists. Even with *Mulan*, she takes her expected role towards the end of the movie.

In New Age movies, princesses often have dreams that do not center on finding their one true love and exhibit some unconventional characteristics. In *The Princess and the Frog*, Tiana turns into a frog, defying the human-nature boundary, but is restored to a human after she marries Naveen. The antagonist here is Dr. Facilier, who defies the boundaries between the living and the dead using his powers of black magic. In *Tangled*, Rapunzel is once again the abject, but just like Tiana, she cannot be incorporated into the symbolic while still holding onto her abject status. Her magical hair is cut off by Eugene Fitzherbert, her love interest, who facilitates her entry into the metaphorical world, where she can successfully take her place as a subject. In these movies, there is a tolerance towards abjection until the point of officially entering the symbolic. This official entry point in the context of these movies is marriage.

Thus, we observe two variations of the representation of the abject. In the first case, princesses were threatened by villains of abject power but were saved by the princes, who were patriarchal heroes. In the second instance, the princesses were affected by the abject or represented abjection in some ways. However, they later conformed to the symbolic, usually through the interference of a patriarchal hero. This all changed with the release of the movie *Frozen* in 2013.

The Evil Snow Queen

Frozen is an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen," first published in 1844. The story follows Gerda, a young girl, as she rescues her friend and foster brother Kai from the clutches of an evil snow queen. The Snow Queen is, both literally and metaphorically, a cold-hearted villain in the story who feels nothing, nor does she have any companions, as she resorts to abducting a young boy to battle her loneliness. Just as the abject cannot exist in the symbolic, the Snow Queen lives far away from civilization, serving as the sole ruler of the snow bees. Kai had once encountered the Snow Queen and had feared her. However, a splinter of a magic mirror enters his eyes, which makes him only able to see the worst in people. Thanks to this mirror, he is no longer scared by the Snow Queen but is enchanted by her and opts to go with her. Her kisses numb him from the cold and remove memories of his family and Gerda. The Snow Queen is the femme castratrice (i.e., the phallicized woman who parodies male characteristics as dictated by patriarchy) (Creed, 1993, p. 153), and her kiss effectively reduces the humane characteristics of the young boy, Kai. Gerda, with her kindness and warm heart, saves Kai from the Snow Queen with a tear she sheds. Gerda is the ideal representation of femininity, sacrificial and emotional as opposed to the horrible femininity of the Snow Queen, who endangers a child and is incapable of feeling.

Frozen combines the characteristics of Kai with both the Snow Queen and Gerda. Elsa has attributes of both the Snow Queen and Kai; she is the threat, but she also needs rescuing, although not in the traditional sense. Anna's character is an amalgamation of both Gerda and Kai; she is both the rescued and the rescuer.

Studying Elsa and her powers as the Abject

One can observe abjection in the character of Elsa, particularly in the way she is portrayed as both powerful and potentially dangerous. In the first introductory scene featuring Elsa and Anna, we see Elsa's unique ability to control and create ice and snow. At first, her powers appear wondrous and even playful as she uses them to entertain her younger sister. However, as the film progresses, these same powers become a source of fear, isolation, and rejection, marking Elsa as an outsider within her own kingdom. Before we dive fully into studying Elsa as an abject, we must examine how abjection is generally represented in horror movies, as outlined by Creed.

Creed (1993) notes that "the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film" (p.11). This "border" lies between what is normal and abnormal, and in this case, it is between the human or normal characters and the inhuman nature or supernatural powers of Elsa. Elsa has abnormal or supernatural powers of creating ice and snow. Elsa's powers can be examined from two similar perspectives. The first being that her

power represents the maternal world. Her powers allude to the 'fusion between mother and nature' that Creed points out.

Virtually all horror texts represent the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva's notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self's clean and proper body. Images of blood, vomit, pus, shit, etc., are central to our culturally / socially constructed notions of the horrific. They signify a split between two orders: maternal authority and the law of the father (Creed 1993, p.13).

Ice, with regard to Elsa's body, is a natural secretion. The expulsion of ice from her body (Kristeva, 1982, p. 53), coupled with its supernatural quality, proves to be an instance of abjection. By representing the maternal order, Elsa threatens the stability of the symbolic order like all abjects. We can also study Elsa's powers in relation to Medusa's powers (Creed, 1993, p. 111). Medusa can turn anyone who looks at her into stone. Although it is not explicitly shown, Elsa is capable of freezing anyone. As the audience witnesses, after she unintentionally hurts Anna the first time, Grand Pabbie says that Anna's head has been frozen, and later her heart needs to be thawed, implying that it has been frozen. Furthermore, Kristeva identifies fire as "a masculine and patrilineal symbol" (Kristeva, 1982, p.78).

Grand Pabbie describes Elsa's powers saying they hold both beauty and danger (Frozen 13:46). The "beauty and danger" is reminiscent of the way the ice harvesters describe ice in the song, "The Frozen Heart" which they sing at the very beginning of the movie while scoring a frozen lake (Frozen 0:00-1:45). This description without deeper analysis can be understood to be an appreciation of water, which is the source of life and an essential need for sustenance of all living beings. Its solidified form, ice, is a means of living for the ice harvesters, but this crystallized beauty is capable of draining out the same life force that it sustains. On deeper analysis, 'beautiful and dangerous' are words that describe that which is abject perfectly. Abjection is dangerous in terms of that which brings horror with it, but in reality, true abjects are signs of life. For example, menstruation indicates the existence of fertility in one's body, but it is also a reminder of the body's fragility (Kristeva, 1982, p. 71).

Fire is often regarded as a sacred element in many religious traditions, symbolizing a divine connection and serving as a medium between the mortal and the divine. In rituals, the sacrificial fire functions as a conduit through which offerings are made to God, reinforcing its role as a purifying and transformative force. Fire consumes, destroys, and renews, aligning it with themes of purification and transcendence.

Ice, however, presents a stark contrast to fire's dynamic nature. Rather than consuming, ice preserves—it stagnates the dead, suspending decay and maintaining what should have been lost to time. In doing so, ice holds a paradoxical power: it both halts the natural cycle of life and

death and magnifies the abject, embodying a state of liminality that is frozen. Unlike fire, which facilitates transformation, ice enforces stillness, making it an unsettling force. Thus, through symbolization, one can conclude that ice is a matrilineal power, the symbolic and elemental opposite of fire.

Arendelle and the Symbolic Boundary

The stone trolls, who seem to hold the answer to the magical powers Elsa possesses, do not live where the rest of the population resides. They live in the Valley of the Living Rock, a designated area reserved exclusively for their habitation. They, too, as supernatural beings, are not allowed into the heart of Arendelle, which here serves as a metaphor for the symbolic order. Even though people from Arendelle can visit the stone trolls, the stone trolls are not allowed into Arendelle.

The chief stone troll, Grand Pabbie, recommends removing all the magic from Anna when she is first hurt by Elsa's powers, including her memories of Elsa's power. After hearing the stone troll's warning, the king decides to isolate Elsa from the rest of Arendelle and lock her up in a room to make sure that the secret of her magical powers does not leave the kingdom. To further ensure this, he has even shut the gates of Arendelle.

Kristeva (1982) notes "religious answer to abjection breaks in: defilement, taboo or sin" (p.48). The king's reaction, after the stone trolls warn him about Elsa's powers, is quite reminiscent of the religious answers. Elsa's isolation can also be seen as a modern defilement rite, where she is separated from her 'normal' sister. The king here can be seen strengthening the 'imaginary border' where, according to Kristeva, the abject exists. The abject moving across this border is what provokes anxiety and reminds the symbolic order of its fragility.

As Elsa grows, so does her power, and to help control it, the king is seen handing her gloves. Streiff and Dundes (2017) have interpreted this action by the king as a metaphor for encouraging her virginity and her donning the gloves to be a symbol of hiding and 'concealing' her sexuality (p.4). Her father asking her to wear gloves can be a metaphor for symbolic castration. Creed defines symbolic castration as the cutting off of any part of the body (Creed 1993, p.107). The king here does not cut off her hands, but he hides them, as a symbol of symbolic castration.

Elsa, after being isolated, exhibits classic signs of reactions to abjection, as observed by Kristeva in reactions to taboo - dread and guilt. She dreads leaving her confined space for a place where other people can interact, and often, when she freezes her surroundings, she feels guilty.

A split seems to have set in between, on the one hand, the body's territory where an authority without guilt prevails, a kind of fusion between mother and nature, and on the other

hand, a totally different universe of socially signifying performances where embarrassment, shame, guilt, desire, etc. come into play—the order of the phallus (Kristeva 1982, p.74).

The guilt that Elsa faces is thus a result of her being forced to exist in the symbolic order as a representative of the maternal world since her body is a place of fusion between human and nature.

After her father's death, Elsa is next in line to the throne and is to be crowned as queen. With the only representative of the paternal world, her father, dead, the imaginary border that existed between her and the symbolic disappears. She is forced to interact with the metaphorical. With her being allowed back, Arendelle's gates are opened up to guests and the general public. During her coronation, she is forced to remove her gloves to hold the royal symbols. Streiff and Dundes (2017) observe these royal symbols as "phallic royal scepter and the testicle-like orb" (p.5). Even though her father is not present at this coronation, there are representations of the patriarchal world.

After her secret is revealed, Elsa runs away from Arendelle to the northern mountains. This can be observed as Kristeva's 'spatial exclusion', a phenomenon that is also evident in Kristeva's reading of the myth of Oedipus. According to Kristeva (1982), "Oedipus must exile himself, leave the proper place of his sovereignty, thrust defilement aside so that the boundaries of the social contract may be perpetuated at Thebes (p.84). The mountains she runs to are located away from Arendelle and are snow-covered, providing her with perfect asylum from the symbolic. The mountains, just like the room she was isolated in, are not easily accessible to the members of the symbolic.

After Elsa reaches the mountains, the movie shows her 'reclaiming' her lost freedom and building an ice castle while singing "Let it Go" (*Frozen* 54:26 – 58:05). This song is significant in showing Elsa's acceptance of the abjection in her and her status by extension, as abject. She is seen discarding her gloves, without which she had seemed scared earlier. The gloves, which were also seen as metaphorical castration, are no longer constricting her. The same power that she feared and held in guilt in the traditional symbolic world of Arendelle, she now exercises with pride outside of it. Her suffering in the kingdom of Arendelle signifies the presence of the subject, Elsa, away from the power of abjection that holds her.

The Femme Castratrice

Elsa, once she runs away from Arendelle, builds herself an ice castle, which scholars Streiff and Dundes have observed solidifying her as a femme castratrice (Streiff & Dundes, 2017, p. 5). The castles and ice fractals that Elsa created in the mountains are distinct from the kind she created in Arendelle while she was still a child. In Arendelle, when she is first seen making snow dunes with Anna, none of them are sharp and dangerous. This is the only time

that the audience witnesses the creation of snow, deliberately in Arendelle, before the ending. They are quite opposite from the sharp and phallic spikes, being tiny, soft mounds that she creates for fun. During her seclusion, although her ice creations are sharp and phallic, they are not made on purpose and are a result of her not accepting the abject power in her. Thus, the phallic imagery is evident when she receives her abject power.

When the search party, headed by Prince Hans, reaches the castle of Elsa, they are all seen armed with phallic-shaped weaponry. Hans and his soldiers are armed with swords, while the henchmen of the Duke of Weselton are armed with bows and arrows. The ice fractals that Elsa crystallizes in front of herself to protect herself are also phallic-shaped. This fight between Elsa and Hans can be seen as a constant struggle between the symbolic and the maternal. The symbolic, however, is seen to be the one that wins, as Hans reminds her of her place in the metaphorical, saying, "Do not be the monster they fear you are" (Frozen 1:14:13), implying that her powers are what make her a monster, irrespective of her intentions.

The Construction of the Maternal

Creed also observes abjection in horror movies through the portrayal of the maternal figure. This is because a symbolic woman is considered to be abject only when she is either menstruating or pregnant. Her connection with nature, her power to reproduce, is a poignant reminder of its fragility. Elsa is seen 'creating' Olaf, a sentient snowman, while singing "Let it Go". This scene establishes Elsa as Olaf's 'mother'. This scene, by definition, is a 'birthing' scene. Barbara Creed notes that horror movies establish abjection by paying attention to the primal scene and reworking the scene of birth. She explains this phenomenon with the help of scenes from horror movies where birth "takes place without the agency of the opposite sex" (Creed, 1993, p.17). By giving 'birth' to Olaf, Elsa takes on the role of the Creator.

Later, when Elsa is confronted with Anna and the henchmen of the Duke of Weselton, the audience witnesses another snowman of her creation, Marshmallow. Marshmallow is a dangerous snowman who fights off Anna and Kristoff, and he also has a cavernous mouth. This cavernous mouth is a re-interpretation of the vagina dentata. The term 'vagina dentata' is often attributed to Freud in his work, *Medusa's Head*, published in 1922, and is used to signify the castration anxiety that men faced due to the mystification of female genitalia. Unlike Olaf's bucktooth, Marshmallow has many teeth, and they are sharp and protruding. Marshmallow is the result of Elsa's rage, whereas Olaf is the result of her acceptance.

In specific characteristics, Olaf can be compared to the monster created in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Just like the monster, Olaf is made without the involvement of the other sex in an unnatural manner, and just like the monster in *Frankenstein*, he yearns for companionship. He

is initially feared by the people he meets as well. Anna and Kristoff, when they see Olaf, can be seen screaming (Frozen 21:30).

Elsa's desire to be alone is not normal, as humans are often described as 'social beings' who require society to exist. The song "Let It Go" should be examined here, as she sings, "I am never going back" (Frozen 1:06:23). Often, exile and solitary confinement are seen as a punishment to keep criminal and insidious activity away from society. However, here, Elsa is seeing something universally considered a punishment as an empowering thing. As human beings are warm-blooded creatures, they cannot survive in extreme weather. However, Elsa sings, "The cold never bothered me anyway" (Frozen 1:08:23).

When Elsa runs away from Arendelle, she accidentally freezes Arendelle completely and 'brings winter' upon it. Barbara Creed explains how the womb defies the inside/outside bordering as it brings the abject into the world, getting to the outside what are inherently abject – feces, afterbirth, blood, etc., along with the subject (newborn) (Creed, 1993, p.48). Elsa effectively turns Arendelle into a primeval womb, where there is no distinction between inside/outside, and no change in weather or climate. Freezing Arendelle traps all the visitors who traveled through the sea to arrive in the kingdom, making it impossible for them to return. Arendelle, as an island kingdom, is inaccessible without the sea. The frozen sea and fjord prevent visitors from entering the kingdom, and those who stay inside Arendelle are prevented from leaving it. Ice is also used as a means of preservation, which, in other words, prevents change. The boundary that separated Arendelle from the sea and the mountains is now erased, as the terrain has become undifferentiated – a land covered with snowfall and ice.

In the dungeons, Elsa is imprisoned in a cell from which she can see the damage she has inflicted on her kingdom. As the queen of the kingdom, she is the metaphorical mother of her subjects. Her crime against Arendelle is just as bad as the terrible mother who is inflicting damage on her children. The way Elsa is introduced in the scene is crucial to her symbolic function, as she is seen wrapped in a blanket. The blanket does not offer the comfort or warmth to Elsa that other 'normal' humans obtain from it. It is an attempt by the symbolic to "normalize" the abject which in turn sheds light on the symbolic's denial to comprehend or acknowledge the abject. Her handcuffs are specially made for her, and the audience is reminded of the gloves that symbolically castrated her in the beginning. They are even described as "iron gloves" in the screenplay, and their primary function is to prevent her from utilizing her magical powers. The phallic constraints can be seen immobilizing her as well as Hans's approach to speaking to her.

The Right Feminine vs The Wrong Feminine

Although Anna is Elsa's biological sister, she presents a stark contrast to Elsa. She possesses no powers that Elsa was born with, and has no memories of Elsa's powers. Growing up alone, she is seen to have a quite jovial life compared to her guilty sister, who is suffering in dread. She is seen to be hating the loneliness that she grew up in, as seen in the song, "Do You Wanna Build a Snowman?" (Frozen 3:20 - 6:25). The next time the audience sees her, she is 18, and she is seen rejoicing at the thought of the opening of the gates. As the 'normal one' of the two sisters, though she was allowed to roam the entirety of the palace, unlike Elsa, her isolation also led to Anna not quite interacting with the symbolic world.

Anna is also portrayed as the metaphorical opposite of her magical sister. She represents the ideal of acceptable femininity. Barbara Creed observes a theme in horror movies where the adequate form of femininity is pitted against the abject feminine horror (Creed, 1993, pp. 23-24). One of the examples she uses to explain this is Ripley in the movie *Alien*, who is the maternal and humane protagonist of the film and is pitted against the cold, mechanical 'mother' that holds sway on the ship. Ripley's concern for her cat is more maternal than the negligence of the 'mother' toward the people under her care.

Anna is perceived as extroverted, while Elsa, due to her powers, is introverted. Elsa and Anna's reactions to the opening of the gates are entirely different. Elsa is filled with dread and fear, while Anna is looking forward to it and is excited. The opening of the gates is symbolic of Anna entering the patriarchal symbolic order as she is 'of age' and can be married off. Elsa is not bothered by these aspects of her life and is entirely consumed by the overwhelming power that resides within her. Anna is seen constantly yearning for love and seems to have found it when she meets Prince Hans. However, Elsa again acts as an obstacle in the way of Anna. Anna's need to enter the symbolic and her ability to do so as a non-abject subject increase the dread and guilt that Elsa had repressed in the early years of her life, leading to an explosion of her powers, where she accidentally shoots phallic icicles into the floor of the ballroom.

Anna's experience trekking to the mountains is entirely different from that of Elsa. Elsa seems to possess an almost inhuman vigor and stamina as she runs and strides her way to the top of the mountains. Anna, despite being on horseback, is seen suffering throughout her journey as she leaves Arendelle. Her suffering is quite physical as she is out of breath, shivering, and her teeth are chattering as she seeks shelter in an inn. Unlike Elsa, who made it to the top of the northern mountain on her own, Anna is unable to reach even the base of the hill without encountering trouble and needs a man to guide her through the arduous process (Arnold et al., 2015, p. 18).

Elsa is also seen to despise company, whereas Anna cannot be seen to survive without company. When she is scaling the mountain after she meets Olaf, Kristoff suggests that she leave Elsa alone, as she decided to run away to the hills, but Anna replies that nobody likes to be alone. Her beliefs are in line with those of the expectations and rules of the symbolic patriarchy. When Olaf meets Anna and Kristoff, both are scared of him. However, later, she gives him a carrot. The phallic object, which Olaf uses as a nose, is used to convey Anna's 'humanity' (Patel, 2015, p. 24). As the 'child' of Elsa, a femme castratrice, Olaf needs to be 'inducted' into the 'normal' world. Unlike Elsa, who created Olaf, gave life to him, and ignored him, which is 'unmotherly'. However, Anna immediately takes on a maternal role for Olaf and gives him a nose, 'normalizing' him, and starts to bond with him. We can see Anna taking on the role of a surrogate mother to Olaf, even though Elsa does not remember creating him. The way Olaf describes Elsa when he has not yet met her is also according to the guidelines of the symbolic, as one would tell a mother, as he calls her the "nicest, gentlest, warmest person ever" (Frozen 00:48:17). Ironically, he gets impaled as he says that because of an icicle that's protruding out from a mountain.

The Definitions of True Love

Anna, the 'normal' sister, now has the responsibility of bringing back normalcy to Arendelle and saving it from winter. She tries to get Elsa to return, even if only to save Arendelle and thereby alleviate the suffering that is symbolic of it. However, Elsa and Anna's meeting does not go well, and Elsa accidentally freezes her heart.

The stone trolls, who possess knowledge of Elsa's magical powers, are introduced to Anna by Kristoff as "love experts" (Frozen 00:29:19). This concept of 'love' is noticeably the heterosexual monogamy propagated by patriarchy. The stone trolls, despite being abject, propagate the ideas of the symbolic and thereby protect them. Even though abjects, they stay relatively closer to Arendelle than Elsa since they protect the symbolic order. As soon as they meet Anna, they start trying to marry her to Kristoff.

Grand Pabbie says that the only way Anna can be saved is by an act of 'true love' (Frozen 01:08:54). This act of true love is re-interpreted as a true love's kiss. A true love's kiss, as observed earlier, is again a trope propagated by classic Disney, between the leading prince and princess. True love's kiss is seen to save the precursors of Anna, like Snow White, Aurora, and Ariel. The heterosexual act is meant to save Arendelle and thus kick out abjection.

Anna seeks this from Prince Hans. When she meets Hans, she realizes that he does not intend to save her. Hans's explanation regarding his intentions can be studied as a comparison of Anna with Elsa. Comparing them, he says, "As heir, Elsa was preferable, of course. But no

one was getting anywhere with her" (*Frozen* 01:15:48). This indicates Elsa's disinterest in men and thereby her demeanor outlies the rules set down by the symbolic.

As the movie progresses, Anna foregoes her true love's kiss from Kristoff to save Elsa. This itself turns out to be the act of true love needed to break her curse, and her heart is saved. Anna's selflessness is also seen to be a potential 'lack' in Elsa. Elsa is often perceived as selfish, as she prioritizes her need for solitude and does not consider the needs of others.

This act of true love also establishes a sense of abjection in Arendelle. This is only done after removing the protective symbols. The Duke of Weselton and Prince Hans, both of whom played a crucial role in attempting to curb Elsa's powers and had tried to kill her, are ejected from Arendelle to ensure the safe establishment of abjection.

The ending of the movie significantly derives from the endings of other Disney movies, where abject characters are killed or removed from the symbolic realm. Elsa returns to rule over Arendelle as queen and is seen using her powers to entertain her people. There is both tolerance and acceptance of her powers.

Conclusion

Although many scholars have explained the popularity of *Frozen* and credited it to its unique message of independent feminism, abjection may be a more effective tool for psychoanalyzing its modern message. There is normalization and acceptance of Elsa's deviant existence. As observed and outlined in this paper, the movie goes to great lengths to establish her as an abject, a femme castratrice, and a horrible archaic mother without disturbing the aesthetics of the animated film aimed at children. Anna, on the other hand, is the ideal female character who initially seeks help and manages not only to save Arendelle but also to save herself from a frozen heart. Many scholars have disapproved of her need for Kristoff's help at the beginning. However, ultimately, it is she who manages to carry out the act of true love that she needs for her survival, and this inspires Elsa on how to control her abject powers through love. Thus, through this study, we can observe *Frozen* as a milestone movie for Disney, as it not only portrays its protagonist Elsa as an unconventional character but also, through her acceptance in her kingdom, it propagates a more welcoming and less rigid symbolic image. Studies in abjection going forward need to expand beyond horror movies and pay special attention to whether abject characters are shown in a good or bad light. By studying abjection, future studies can also shed light on the social identities that dare to cross the boundary between the symbolic and the maternal world.

Endnotes

¹The queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is a witch, and constantly defies the border between natural/supernatural, by speaking to a mirror and changing her appearance.

About the Author

Kushala Shanubhog is an independent researcher from India with an MA in English Literature from Mount Carmel College. Her research interests lie at the intersection of abjection, film studies, gender studies, and psychoanalysis. She explores how cinematic and literary narratives reflect complex social and psychological dimensions of identity. When she's not researching, you can find her lost in fiction and films. ORCID ID: 0009-0003-5006-1741

AI Statement

This document has been enhanced through the use of Grammarly which was employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of these technologies may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the author.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

References

- Alp, A. (2021). *From Snow White to Moana: The evolution of Disney princesses*, *The Stanford Daily*. <https://stanforddaily.com/2021/08/12/the-evolution-of-disney-princesses/>
- Arnold, L., Seidl, M., & Deloney, A. (2015). Hegemony, gender stereotypes and Disney: A content analysis of Frozen and Snow White. *Concordia Journal of Communication Research*, 2, Article 1. <https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/comjournal/vol2/iss1/1/>.
- Brown, A. (2021). Hook, Ursula, and Elsa: Disney and Queer-coding from the 1950s to the 2010s. *The Macksey Journal*, 2, Article 43.
- Creed, B. (1993). *The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Frozen*, Jennifer L. (dir.) (2013). USA: Disney
- Kowalski, C., & Bhalla, R. (2018). Viewing the *Disney* Movie *Frozen* through a Psychodynamic Lens. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 39(2), 145–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-015-9363-3>
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Patel, J. (2015). *The quirky princess and the ice-olated queen: An analysis of Disney's Frozen*, *ScholarWorks@UARK*. <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/commuht/1/>
- Streiff, M. & Dundes, L. (2017). Frozen in Time: How Disney Gender-Types Its Most Powerful Princess. *Social Sciences*, 6(2), 38. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6020038>
- Veera, S. (2023). The big, the bad, and the queer: Analyzing the queer-coded villain in selected Disney films. *Emerging Scholars*, 2, 62–181.