

Life is (like) a hurricane

Analyzing Disney's *DuckTales* in the historical moment

Marlo Scholten

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Introduction

In 2017, Disney XD announced that they would be rebooting *DuckTales*, a cartoon from the Disney Afternoon lineup of programming that first graced television screens in 1987. *DuckTales 1987* was loosely based on the *Uncle Scrooge* (c. 1960s) comics, *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck* (1992) comics, and other fringe Disney materials where the ducks appear. *DuckTales 2017* (which wrapped with the close of its third season on March 15, 2021) has managed to establish itself not only in the same universe as *DT '87*, but they've also connected all of the worlds from Disney Afternoon: *TaleSpin*, *Rescue Rangers*, *Goof Troop*, *Bonkerz*, *Darkwing Duck*, and *Quack Pack*. Furthermore, they've drawn up some shot-for-shot remakes of old comic stories to put on the small screen, including *The Golden Lagoon of White Agony Plains*, *The Outlaw Buck McDuck*, and even the old *DuckTales* movie *The Treasure of the Lost Lamp*.

I'm not the first nerd to write an extensive paper about cartoons and children's media. Scholars young and old, past and present, agree that cartoons (specifically Mickey Mouse and the rise of Disney output) are "revolutionary," that they are "of the purest and most definitive graphic style, of the greatest efficacy as social products, drawings joyous and simple that make the masses of tired men and women rest, make the children laugh till they are weary and ready for sleep and will let the grown-ups rest undisturbed" (Rivera 1932/2013, 58). Terry Ramsaye called Mickey Mouse "at one with the Great

Common Denominator of the great common art of the commonality in terms of expression...a dandelion, and we do not know what makes it grow" (Apgar 61). Art galleries that contained only depictions of Mickey Mouse began to crop up as early as 1933. Mickey Mouse "came to us at the time the country needed him most," and despite people saying early on that he'll "never go Hollywood -- he is too real, too genuine," we're still discussing his legacy almost 100 years later (Hill [Apgar] 56). Furthermore, Mickey's influence in film: from technological advances, mannerisms, to branding style, cannot be understated. *Steamboat Willie* (1928) is often misremembered as the first cartoon with sound because this talkie was the first to synchronize sound to pictures, and it captivated the thousands in attendance at the premiere. A journalist in 1935 praised Fred Astaire's performance in *Top Hat* by calling him a "human Mickey Mouse...quick physical wit, incredible agility," and *The Band Concert* (the first Mickey cartoon in color) was called "Disney's greatest single work" (Apgar 80).

In case there is still any debate that cartoons might not be "high art", Diego Rivera, considered to be one of the "leading artists" of the 20th century, called cartoons "pure" and "joyous" and "the greatest efficacy of social products" (Rivera 1932/2013, 58). If we also include political satire under our cartoon umbrella it becomes impossible to separate the influence that cartoons have on the construction of culture and the public discourse surrounding it. However, even if there isn't agreement among elitists that cartoons can be classified as high art, we can most definitely agree that cartoons are worthy of study (given their influence on pop culture).

Anything that has even a measure of the effect on our society that the Walt Disney corporation has had is worthy of study. Any media curated for children that exhibits this

degree of effect on children should be studied. The cultural consciousness has been steeped in it. At the time of this writing most are aware that Disney is in charge of more than a few successful franchises, like *Star Wars*, *Marvel*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but Disney also has complete or partial control of ABC, ESPN, Touchstone Pictures, A&E, and The History Channel. Their relentless growth of capital¹ has unnerved many. Disney has its white gloves at least partially in the things this country has come to hold as normal, the narratives it has pushed, the moral high ground it prefers, and the things Americans spend hard-earned money on. Pop culture is explicitly and implicitly invasive.

Therefore, this project will examine the place that *DT '17* occupies in the Disney canon as a reboot. A reboot is particularly helpful for establishing snapshots of history, because it's the same story (the same characters, the same arcs, the same settings, etc) done twice. What gets changed from the original (and what doesn't get changed) can tell us something about the values and mores and beliefs of the show creators in that place and time. *The Richest Duck in the World*² could not be shown in its original form on a television screen in 2020 because 2020 has eliminated (or attempted to eliminate) the normalization of using slurs and simplistic, one dimensional depictions of marginalized peoples. As such, I will be investigating *DT '17* through a reboot lens primarily: what *changed* in *DuckTales*? What changed in our world? How are those connected? What does that say about the next era of Disney and their performative "woke-ness"? My thesis will focus on the portrayal of gender, mental health and its influence on familial units, and the Disney reboot legacy from *DuckTales 1987* to *DuckTales 2017*. I will offer brief

¹ their tendency to acquire everything (titles, channels, corporations) goes back to Disney's origins. Walt himself tried to create a company town more than once.

² a chapter from *Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck* in which Scrooge burns down an African village, cons the indigenous folks (who are drawn like racist caricatures) out of artifacts, and says a lot of racist things.

histories of Disney's historical ties to minstrelsy and Scrooge's (un)official backstory in order to both offer context and to situate these thoughts in our current historical moment. It is my belief that despite Disney's vague virtue-signaling, it is impossible to separate the mouse from his venture capitalist origins, and it is imperative that we keep this in mind as we study and interact with Disney's constituents. Given this information, perhaps we can reconsider Disney's cultural superiority in offering children's entertainment that most trust to illustrate moral uprightness.

Prelude/Disney Context

Despite Mickey's legacy of everyman charm, I cannot continue this project without first establishing Mickey as a blackface minstrel performer, a racist caricature that appeared in a lot of traveling shows through the antebellum south. Minstrel shows were a form of racist theatrical entertainment that reached a peak in the mid 19th century. The shows usually featured white people in blackface doing slapstick comedy acts or singing what were advertised as authentic "Negro spirituals." The skits portrayed African Americans as dumb, lazy, superstitious, and lighthearted (Sammond 3). I think it's interesting that 2020 is the year when a former United Nations Ambassador and former United States senator stood before 17 million viewers and said "In much of the Democratic Party, it's now fashionable to say that America is racist. That is a lie. America is not a racist country" (Yam), despite it being the year that the murder of an innocent Black man sparked the largest civil rights movement in history. But I suppose this tracks when one considers Americans' "love for the most popular unpaid actor of all time", this being Mickey Mouse (Apgar).

The white gloves, white spaces around the face, black bodies, and the mischievous yet rebelliously good natured behavior of Disney's early cartoon designs were all reminiscent of minstrelsy, and there's explicit references to racist media all through Mickey's early shorts. Nicholas Sammond goes as far to say that:

Commercial animation in the United States didn't borrow from blackface minstrelsy, nor was it simply influenced by it. Rather, American animation is actually in many of its most enduring incarnations an integral part of the ongoing iconographic and performative traditions of blackface. Mickey Mouse isn't like a minstrel; he is a minstrel (Sammond, 5).

Sammond situates his work's importance by pointing out the strange comeback that blackface performance has made in the 21st century. It's often depicted nostalgically, or as a "stand in for more racist times (Sammond 4)," when in reality it never left: it's simply changed forms. This of course becomes even more apparent when one considers the number of celebrities in 2020 who have made public apologies for past uses of blackface (Tina Fey, Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, Julianne Hough, Justin Trudeau, etc).

Minstrelsy is a "past practice that isn't even past" (Sammond, 4). He calls it a "durable performance form" because it "adapts to the social relations of the day (Sammond 5)." It's disappointingly fitting that Blackface took off in America: it's a performance that's built on white fantasies about African American song and culture. Blackface minstrelsy claims to reenact songs and dances learned from actual Black folks, and that "nostalgic fantasy" serves to both cover political critiques of the time and to ease white guilt (and perhaps fascination, in some instances). Minstrels are built upon imagined conceptions of blackness and whiteness and appeal to prejudice which made

(makes) them readily circulated symbols. Basically, American cartoons are one of the foundational pillars of modern racism.

Mickey isn't the only one who actively participated in Disney's racist history. In *Mickey's Mellerdramer* (1933), Mickey and his friends Minnie Mouse, Horace Horsecollar, and Clarabelle Cow put on a staging of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. While preparing in their dressing rooms, we see Clarabelle smear her face with oil from the nearby lamp. Mickey puts a firecracker in his mouth and lights it, wiping the ash and soot over his face. In *Steamboat Willie* (1928), Mickey and Minnie dance to "Turkey in the Straw", which is considered one of the most racist songs in American history for two main reasons: one, because it was the signature tune of the one of the founders of blackface minstrelsy. Additionally, a Broadway actor in 1916 also rewrote the original lyrics to "Turkey in the Straw" and titled it "N***** love a watermelon," so it's not too difficult to assume the song choice was deliberate (Burnett). In *The Haunted House* (1929), Mickey wanders around a spooky dark house, and only his eyes, mouth, and hands are visible in the dark. About three minutes into the picture he turns to the camera and sings "Mammy, Mammy!", quoting the most famous blackface song used in American film. In *Dumbo* (1941), the crow characters that help Dumbo fit the "magical negro"³ stereotype perfectly: they're a bit mysterious, sing an entertaining song, and offer the protagonist something useful for his journey (and the lead bird is named Jim! As in, Crow! And he's voiced by a white man!). These are not the only examples, and examples like this aren't found only prior to the 1960s. Though the crows were removed from the 2019 remake of *Dumbo*, there was no attempt to change the discourse or rework the

³ The term was popularized by Black American film director Spike Lee, who used it to describe the stereotyped and fanciful roles allotted to Black men in Hollywood. He specifically cited *The Green Mile* and *The Family Man* as examples (Gonzalez).

character into something that could have been a positive, fun (and not racist) part of the storyline. Disney instead chose to rely on a new subplot about the negative effects of animal cruelty, which many felt was more of a "cover up for a crime" than an apology or an attempt to subvert old stereotypes in a creative way. This doesn't encourage helpful discourse on systemic racism for anyone, a thought shared by many people of color during the civil rights movement of 2020. Kareem Abdul-Jabar said, on the removal of *Gone with the Wind* from HBO Max during March of 2020: "What we need is a way to present art within its historical context so the works can still be available and appreciated for their achievements but not admired for their cultural failings," and he suggested "including an introductory explanation — filmed or written — that explains that the work contains harmful racial or gender stereotypes that were acceptable at the time but which we now know are harmful" (Burnett).

I include all of this not to distract or detract from Disney canon and my ensuing discussion, but rather to inform and remind readers of Disney's roots and goals. Former Disney CEO Michael Eisner said

The pursuit of making money is the only reason to make movies. We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. Our obligation is to make money, and to make money, it may be important to make history. To make money, it may be important to make art, or some significant statement. Our only objective may be to make money, but in order to make money, we must always make entertaining movies. And if we make entertaining movies, at times we will make history, art, a statement, or all three. We may even win awards (Eisner 1980s).

Perhaps art has *always* come second to profit (at least within the context of capitalism), but it's important that this be kept in mind as Disney's outputs are studied. Furthermore, it's my hope that this era is the moment that this country finally reckons with its bloody history of xenophobia. If we want to rebuild the system from the ground up and be witness to genuine and long term change, then we have a duty to question everything.

Scrooge

With that, I want to take a moment to address the elephant in the room: how can we get on board with a DuckTales reboot if the main character is a greedy venture capitalist? I thought this paper wouldn't be complete without a brief discussion of Scrooge's finances, especially in 2020 as this country wrestles with the consequences of long-term, late-stage corporate capitalism. For the purposes of this project, "late-stage corporate capitalism" refers to the humiliating and absurd aspects of the modern economy, whether that's highlighting the shrinking middle class, the growing wealth gap, impossible medical debt from increased privatization, etc. Scrooge exists as a symbol of wealth in this country and elsewhere, as evidenced by the Dutch naming their ultra-wealth tax bill the "Scrooge McDuck tax" ("Dagobertducktaks").

The Original Backstory: a summary of *Life and Times Volume I*

Scrooge McDuck: as "the richest duck in the world," he is what I'd call the embodiment of bootstrap mythos, the very definition of the fickle "American Dream", but he's not American. Scrooge is named for Ebenezer Scrooge, of the famous Dickens story, and his humble-beginnings-to-industrial-tycoon origin story is believed to be loosely

based on Andrew Carnegie⁴. While shining shoes in Glasgow to help feed his family (at the tender age of ten) a man pays Scrooge for the shoeshine with an American dime. The American dime later becomes his "number one dime", which he carries around his neck at all times. This dime becomes a symbol of his determination to seek his fortune, and he travels all over the world doing so while sending money home to care for his parents and to help pay for the ancestral home and land.

He first took a job as a cabin boy on a cattle boat outside New Orleans, and from there "he worked his way up the Mississippi" (Rosa 17) in search of his long lost uncle Angus, who was last seen in Louisville, Kentucky. Scrooge helps Angus search for sunken treasure with Angus' riverboat and helps him defend his boat and loot from the Beagle Boys. Scrooge then heads west, getting thrown off a train by Jesse James on his way to Colorado. After being thrown off the train he snags a job as a trail hand on Murdo Mackenzie's ranch after proving he can ride a horse (which he was only able to do successfully because his money belt got caught on the saddle horn). When the cattle business hits a recession Scrooge heads over the mountains to find work as a prospector. He discovers that he's a bit late for silver and gold, but the widespread installment of electricity means the price of copper will be skyrocketing and for once finds himself on the front side of a rush with the potential to strike it big. He has to sell Seafoam McDuck's gold teeth in order to purchase a prospector's kit. Through an alliance with tycoon Howard Rockerduck (and the fine print on a long-forgotten law) he acquired the whole copper vein on Anaconda hill. He planned to mine the ore himself, however, upon

⁴ Scottish born American immigrant who moved to the states at 12 and went on to become an industrialist, philanthropist, and one of the richest Americans in history

receiving an urgent telegraph from his father detailing a "crisis at Castle McDuck" (Rosa 81) he sold the vein to a man for 10k.

Scrooge returns home to Glasgow with a check for 10k. Fergus informs Scrooge that he's behind on his taxes, and if he isn't able to pay in full soon he'll lose the ancestral land to the Whiskervilles, a clan with whom the McDucks have feuded for many generations. The Whiskervilles come to Castle McDuck to gloat and Scrooge is shortly thereafter challenged to a duel, which he accepts.

During the duel Scrooge falls from one of the castle towers and lands in the moat. He meets a few deceased ancestors who tell him that he's going to go on to become the "cheapest, stingiest, most miserly, turnip-squeezingest, penny-pinching tightwad on earth" (Rosa 89) and that he must protect Castle McDuck. Scrooge comes to, uses his number one dime to unscrew the bolts on his armor, and emerges from the moat after dark covered in moss like something out of a 1950s monster mash. He demands the stolen check back from the Whiskervilles (because his ancestors told him what they did) and the ghosts of old McDucks scare the Whiskervilles away.

Scrooge then heads to South Africa to try his hand at diamond mining. There he rescues a young Afrikaner who later double crosses Scrooge. Scrooge stomps into the local pub and drags this man through the street, tarred and feathered, and eventually brings him to jail and presses charges. Scrooge says he does this because he wants everyone to know that "nobody double crosses Scrooge McDuck" (Rosa 100), but he makes himself a permanent enemy, for we discover at the end of this chapter that the name of the Afrikan boy was Flintheart Glomgold (a classic Scrooge nemesis).

Scrooge's adventures take him to Australia next, once again in search of gold. While on a camel in the desert he meets a Shaman, whom he rescues from a couple of thieves. This Shaman is illustrated as an anthropomorphized bear⁵ with incredibly dark skin who speaks in an exaggerated broken English. He's unbelievably kind and helpful to Scrooge throughout the whole story, despite Scrooge mentally referring to him as an "old geezer" (Rosa 112), calling his culture's creation story "stupid" (Rosa 121), and botching a didgeridoo performance beyond recognition. This isn't to suggest that Scrooge is malicious toward the Shaman, but the portrayal of the Shaman would easily fit into the category of the "magical negro" stereotype, given that Scrooge doesn't ask much of him and the Shaman exhibits little growth of his own. He exists only in order to teach a white man a lesson on patience, which not-so-subtly matches and reflects the colonization narratives lead and practiced by Europe through the 18th-20th centuries.

Scrooge goes to Dawson City next, in the Klondike, where he meets Goldie O'Gilt, another future major antagonist. Before meeting her though, he meets Wyatt Earp, who arrogantly says "don't you recognize my famous buntline special?" (Rosa 126), to which Scrooge removes his number one dime from within his shirt and dangles it on his string. Recognizing the "silver dime on a string", Earp gasps, "You're Scrooge McDuck! The Buckaroo of the Badlands! The Maverick of the Montana Cattle Wars! The Pizen of Pizen Bluff!"

Scrooge responds in turn, "Not to mention the terror of the transvaal, the orneriest cuss in the outback, and several other scary (but quite accurate) names!" (Rosa 126). Earp immediately offers to buy him a drink.

⁵ which is kind of a strange choice, since this sort of bear (it's not a koala) isn't anywhere close to being an Australian native. This is probably indicative of the historical demonization/beastification of people of color.

Scrooge reluctantly gets a loan with Soapy Slick, the slimiest businessman in Dawson with the highest interest rates. While working tirelessly at prospecting, Goldie sells Scrooge out (with an overly complicated and vaguely romantic poisoned wine sort of gesture) to Slick and his henchmen. They kidnap him and taunt him until Scrooge breaks literal chains in his hurricane of rage. Scrooge becomes an even bigger legend in Dawson and elsewhere. After paying Slick off in full when he gets an early (and lucky) start on the gold prospecting in the Klondike mountains he vows to never take another loan again.

With the "goose egg nugget" from the Klondike he returns home to Glasgow in his nicest fineries, where he's greeted by his neighbors with multiple tomatoes to the face. In order to demonstrate that he still belongs in Glasgow (and wanting to prove wrong those who called him an "oopity robber baron") he enters the highland games. At the games, rather than do things the "traditional" way, Scrooge utilizes techniques for fishing and golfing that he learned during his travels. In doing so, he realizes that he can no longer call Scotland home, and he returns to America with his two younger sisters, Hortense⁶ and Matilda.

He takes his younger sisters to a small plot of land he purchased on the West coast, in the Calisota territory⁷. On this land sits Killmule Hill (later renamed Killmotor Hill as America enters the "automotive age"), and on Killmotor hill sits Fort Duckburg. A family of settlers⁸ who live at the bottom of the hill tell Scrooge that the Junior

⁶ Donald Duck's mother.

⁷ The state that Duckburg resides in is called Calisota (a portmanteau of *California* and *Minnesota*) to explain their kooky weather patterns (because that's easier than trying to figure out why Scrooge has access to so many reality-altering devices, I guess).

⁸ Humperdink and Elvira Duck, who have three children: Daphne, Eider, and Quackmore (future husband of Hortense).

Woodchucks (a boy scouts group⁹) have made Fort Duckburg their clubhouse. When Scrooge kicks the boys out they alert the state militia that "a Scottish billionaire seized a military installation on the coast" (Rosa 172), who in turn alert the president, Teddy Roosevelt. However, before Roosevelt gathers the rough riders and storms Fort Duckburg, Scrooge is attacked by the Beagle boys, who want to pay him back "for gettin' us tossed in the Hoosegow 22 years ago" (Rosa 173)¹⁰. The rough riders charge Killmotor hill and Scrooge gives them everything he's got (going so far as to set a stick of dynamite inside the fort itself, prompting Roosevelt to declare "I've attacked many a fort, but this is the first time a fort ever attacked me!"), but when Roosevelt and Scrooge are finally nose to nose they recognize each other from their cattle ranching days in Montana. They catch up and trade stories, and Scrooge begins building atop Killmotor hill his famous "money bin," which he endeavors to fill with the famed "3 cubic acres" of money.

Duckburg grows into a thriving metropolis, and Scrooge makes enough money to continue traveling the world while sending money home to the bin, which is taken care of by his sisters. When he returns home briefly his sisters beg to come with him on the next adventure, which he only agrees to after shouting verbal abuse at the new secretary (Emily Quackfaster) and accountant (Quackmore Duck) that Matilda has hired in his absence. Scrooge, Hortense, and Matilda sail up the Congo river in search of a prospecting deal. Scrooge buys a whole diamond mine for 25 cents from a Native man¹¹ by convincing him that it's an important portrait of "a chief from [his] village" (Rosa 187). Hortense confronts him, saying "you didn't used to do business like that", to which Scrooge asserts that he's done "playing square" (Rosa 188). Scrooge tries to charm the

⁹ Founded by Clinton Coot, son of Cornelius Coot

¹⁰ Scrooge is ~33 years old at this point.

¹¹ Whose name Scrooge butchers repeatedly.

tribe leader like he did the previous man, but the tribe leader is insulted by Scrooge's patronizing and he throws Scrooge out of his village. Scrooge returns with a group of white Afrikaners who've been paid by Scrooge to destroy the village. After setting it on fire, Scrooge disguises himself and returns to the tribe leader, asking for him to sell the land once again. The tribe leader sells it cheaply, given the damage. The tribe leader recognizes Scrooge after signing the paper and curses Scrooge¹², who shrugs it off initially¹³.

However, upon reflecting on his deceased relatives values and ideals he realizes his error and attempts to find his sisters (who have gone home to Duckburg) to make amends. Along the way he keeps getting distracted by possibilities of business deals, and it takes him a whole 27 years to get to Duckburg. His sisters have thrown him a welcome home party, but he storms in and demands the latest audit from the bin without greeting anyone. Hortense again points out his rudeness, and Scrooge tells the lot of them to get out. Everyone leaves, but Donald (no older than a toddler) walks back into Scrooge's office to give him a swift kick in the tail before leaving again. Scrooge proudly asserts that he "doesn't need anybody" as he opens the letter that declares him the richest duck in the world (Rosa 206).

¹² This is the famous "Curse of the Bombie" that haunts whoever is the richest person in the world. The Bombie is a large zombie-like creature that's capable of living forever and is constantly hunting and tracking the richest person in the world. Scrooge later ends up spending a small fortune to purchase an island and outfits it with state of the art security technology, where he traps the Bombie indefinitely.

¹³ This comic was originally published in the early 90s, and it's a Disney-fied account of King Leopold II's take over of the Congo in the late 1800s. King Leopold of Belgium's rule over the Congo is where we get the phrase "crimes against humanity." He tortured, pillaged (and was known to amputate hands) of approximately 10 million Congolese people. It took only about 100 years, but it's so very American to capitalize on atrocity without context or gloss over the dirtier aspects of history.

Many years later Donald returns to McDuck manor with Huey, Dewey, and Louie. Scrooge hasn't been seen in public in over a decade at this point, and most of the stories told about him have become exaggerated or faded into myths. Donald tells the boys before they get there that Scrooge can be a bit eccentric and that he's full of stories (one of the triplets even remarking how impossible it'd be to fit that much history into one lifetime), but while they catch up Scrooge is adamant that they understand that all of the stories are true, that he made every cent *square* and *on his own*. The Beagle boys attempt to rob him, and Scrooge instructs Donald and the boys on what to do while he constructs his elaborate escape and sabotage. When the Beagle boys are hauled away by law enforcement the boys excitedly begin asking Scrooge about the next adventure, to which Scrooge sighs. Donald and the boys rile him up, calling him "antique" and a "fossil", which prompts Scrooge to kick Donald in the tail like Donald did to him years ago. Donald rubs his tail and groans, but Scrooge thanks Donald, saying "I almost feel like...like *me* again" (Rosa 225), and Scrooge decides to reopen his businesses and continue adventuring, which are chronicled in *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck Volume II* and the television shows.

Scrooge's 21st century legacy

Forbes used to release a list of the top 10 wealthiest people at the close of each year. They also used to release a list of the top 10 wealthiest fictional characters each year. The fictional characters list was always topped by either Scrooge or Smaug (the dragon that resides in the Lonely Mountain in *The Hobbit*). Smaug comes from the Middle-Earth that JRR Tolkien created, and as such is classified as a Western style dragon. Western dragons are often illustrated in popular mythos as the embodiment of

greed, and for a long time Smaug's "net worth" was never widely known because it was supposed to be a number that humans can't fully grasp. Similarly, Scrooge was first known as the curmudgeonly millionaire miser in the Disney Duck comics of old. A bit one dimensional, perhaps, but all of the original characters in the Disney gauntlet were kind of structured in this fashion. Donald was angry and unlucky. Mickey was friendly and thoughtful. Scrooge was old, rich, and rude. He takes his name from Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, so he was originally an antihero or antagonist-of-sorts for Donald. It wasn't until Don Rosa took over from Carl Barks as head of Duck comics that the fierceness of Scrooge's misanthropy dwindled. The historical arc of Scrooge's ethics become more clear when one considers Barks' own stance on capitalism:

I think a lot of the philosophy in my stories is conservative—conservative in the sense that I feel our civilization peaked around 1910. Since then we've been going downhill. Much of the older culture had basic qualities that the new stuff we keep hatching can never match. Look at the magnificent cathedrals and palaces that were built. Nobody can build that sort of thing nowadays. Also, I believe that we should preserve many old ideals and methods of working: honor, honesty, allowing other people to believe in their own ideas, not trying to force everyone into one form. The thing I have against the present political system is that it tries to make everybody exactly alike. We should have a million different patterns. They say that wealthy people like the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers are sinful because they accumulated fortunes by exploiting the poor. I feel that everybody should be able to rise as high as they can or want to, provided they don't kill anybody or actually oppress other people on the way up. A little exploitation is

something you come by in nature. We see it in the pecking order of animals—everybody has to be exploited or to exploit someone else to a certain extent. I don't resent those things (Barks 2003).

In sum, perhaps we're happier to remember Scrooge simply: as the bloke who enjoys swimming in his money. However, I'm an anthropologist, so I'm going to tangle with and critique corporate capitalism until everyone's uncomfortable with the disillusionment of consumerism.

As such, Scrooge's net worth has been something of a mystery. In *The Second Richest Duck* (Barks 1956), Scrooge is told that the contents of his money bin and all of his assets total "one multiplujillion, nine obsquatumatillion, six hundred twenty-three dollars and sixty-two cents." In the *DT '87* episode *Liquid Assets*, Fenton (Scrooge's accountant) tells him that the money bin contains "607 tillion 386 zillion 947 trillion 522 billion dollars and 36 cents". In *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck, Volume II* (Rosa 1996), Scrooge is told that his assets total "five multiplujillion, nine impossidillion, seven fantastica trillion dollars and sixteen cents." In *DuckTales The Movie: Treasure of the Lost Lamp*, Scrooge says to the boys, "We quadzillionaires have our own ideas of fun." In *Woo-oo!*, the first episode of *DuckTales 2017*, Scrooge says to the boys, "I run a multi-trillion dollar business." In addition to the folks at *Forbes*, plenty of other people have attempted to quantify Scrooge's wealth: sometimes they try to make a calculation from the depth gauge of the money bin, the length of the ladder into the money bin, or by trying to figure out just how much "three cubic acres" actually is. From the most conservative to "more money than the entirety of the currency on Earth" (Theorists), the calculations range anywhere from \$52,348,493,767.50 - \$333,927,633,863,527. The

mean of these two numbers is ~\$166,989,991,178,647. Adding in the two calculations, the median of this set is ~\$6,336,160,476,285.

Jeff Bezos (the richest person in existence) is worth 194.9 billion USD as of February 2021. That puts him behind Scrooge's most conservative estimate by only ~\$6,152,760,476,285, which is still a large margin, make no mistake. However, economists also predict that Bezos will become the world's first trillionaire as early as 2026. Bezos has come the closest to surpassing man's wildest imaginations about amassing fortune. He's truly become cartoonish. It's unsurprising that a place like America, which prides itself on its individuality and rugged individualism, is what created the Scrooge of our world¹⁴. If America is good at one thing, it's creating *really* rich people; in fact, 11 of the 15 richest people in the world (as of April 2020) are from the US (Hoffower 2020). Billionaires don't really make sense in places that aren't super capitalist: socialism doesn't reward excessive hoarding, and collectivist cultures don't tend to value the fast-paced, self-reliant, work-yourself-to-death lifestyle of America.

In conclusion, I didn't think it'd be fair to talk about DuckTales for this long without at least a summary of Scrooge's adventures, not only for the story context and the fun Easter eggs in the reboot, but because I want it to be abundantly clear that Scrooge's fame (or infamy) and the ensuing legend-like status doesn't negate the terrible things that he (along with many other venture capitalists¹⁵) did in their lifetimes. Furthermore, I think there's potential for a hegemonic flavor of irony when we consider who Disney is, what Disney and their properties mean in the Western world, and what they could be

¹⁴ Why were people surprised when the pandemic mask mandates didn't work? This is where 200+ years of teaching people that the most critical things in life are "look out for #1 at all costs" and "buy stuff, don't share" gets us. You didn't hear anyone in China complaining about how a 5"x8" cloth over their nose was "violating their personal freedom."

¹⁵ Vanderbilt owned slaves. Rockefeller was convicted in the Supreme court on anti-trust laws for his oil monopoly. Mellon opposed progressivism and antitrust actions.

trying to say when they reboot Scrooge McDuck, have him voiced by one of the most well-loved actors¹⁶ of the historical moment, and try to smooth over and retcon the darker spots of his history.

Gender

Considering the 30-year history that's taken place between 1987 and 2017, it'd follow that the showrunners of this series might feel compelled to modernize these characters. DuckTales 2017 doesn't play with gender-expansive identities in any direct or obvious fashion, but the modernizations/changes administered to the female characters far outnumber the re-drawings that happened to male characters. Webby and Goldie, for example, are given more agency, dimension, and narrative importance in the reboot, as opposed to acting as demonized foils or accessories for the main (male) characters. Though a stereotype could be considered "useful" in that they are efficient shorthands, the feminine-assigned stereotypes depicted in DuckTales 1987 are mostly untrue, unfair, hurtful, and frankly "lazy" storytelling (Carstarphen, 284). Thus, the narrative shifts made to the female characters in DuckTales could correlate to the recent advances in women's rights and advocacy¹⁷, and I think that those narrative shifts helped make a previously well-loved show into something bigger and better than it was. Furthermore, these narrative shifts have allowed a previously well loved show to be loved by a new (and important!) group of people.

¹⁶ David Tennant. He's multiple BAFTAs, an Emmy, and a people's choice award. He's also won "the people's favorite Doctor" in online polls multiple times.

¹⁷ Title IX, #MeToo, reauthorization of the Violence Against Women act, along with all of the counter protest measures that took place through summer/fall of 2020 against the reactionary abortion bans enacted under Trump

Webby

Webbigail Vanderquack is the granddaughter of Mrs. Beakley, Scrooge's housekeeper. She is the unofficial "fourth triplet", considers Huey, Dewey, and Louie to be family, and transitions from calling Scrooge "Mr. McDuck" to "Uncle Scrooge" in episode 17.

Webby 1987

We first meet Webby in "3 Ducks of the Condor", part three of the five part opening serial, "The Treasure of the Golden Suns." The episode opens as Scrooge is attempting to hire a governess for the triplets. Huey, Dewey, and Louie are intent on scaring away every potential candidate. Mrs. Beakley introduces herself, and Scrooge isn't sure of her ability to handle the boys, but he hires her on the spot when she says that she'll "work for nothing", save for room and board for herself and Webby. Excited to save money (he pats Webby's head and figures that she won't eat much anyway), Scrooge offers that the boys "might learn some manners with a bonnie wee lass around", to which Huey, Dewey, and Louie reply with "Yuck!" Webby responds by blowing them a raspberry. Scrooge heads off to meet Donald for Donald's three day break from duty and instructs Mrs. Beakley to take good care of the boys, and the boys chuckle while muttering "if we don't take care of her first." The rest of the episode follows Scrooge and Donald's progress in finding the Treasure of the Golden Suns.

Part four of five, "Cold Duck", opens back at the mansion with Duckworth, Mrs. Beakley, and the kids. The boys are "hunting Beakley", attempting to sneak up on her in order to prank her by putting a ringing tuning fork in the keyhole to her door. Webby

laments the fact that the boys won't play with her, saying "they'd make fun. They don't like me bothering them. They think I'm a tag along." Mrs. B says "Well, I don't know if they like me either, but we'll give them some time." Duckworth receives a telegram from Scrooge, who is in Antarctica and in trouble. Webby, wanting to tell the boys that their uncle needs help, heads to their room and knocks. The boys are already halfway down a makeshift ladder that they've created out their window because "that little tagalong is following us again." The four kids stowaway on the plane with Launchpad in order to join Scrooge on the adventure. Mrs. B runs outside as the plane lifts, waving a scarf in the air because "Mr. McDuck will need something warm!" When she realizes that Launchpad doesn't plan on landing the plane she sighs, ready to admit defeat, but when she sees Webby's face from the window she immediately runs after the plane and makes a leap of faith into said moving aircraft, pulling herself into the plane via the landing gear. Upon catching her breath, she asks Webby why she's in the plane. Webby says that she was just following the boys, who sputter "tattletale!" and "Can't trust a girl!"

After arriving, when Webby thanks the boys for saving a small penguin she's befriended (who looks startlingly like Webby given her large eyes and the bow in her hair) they squawk out "Well, *we* don't like her" and "just what we need. Another tagalong." Dewey continues to criticize and shame Webby, saying "Sounds about right. She's makin' friends with penguins while Unca Scrooge is lost in the snow!"

The young female penguin roaming with Mrs. Beakley and Webby doesn't speak until the boys leave the scene with Launchpad. When Webby is surprised that she can communicate, the penguin said she wasn't sure if the kids would like her as she has "no friends."

'87 Webby analysis

The word "tag-along" gets used to describe '87 Webby frequently: by the triplets, watchers, and herself. There's a lot of unnecessary emphasis on Webby's gender and the way she differs from the boys, which follows given America's obsession with gender and oppositional framework for childhood. Furthermore, most of Webby's characterization in the opening episodes comes primarily from the words that other people (men) use to describe her; she's rather passive. In all of the instances where she has an opportunity to "save the day" she does so by showing compassion, kindness, and patience. We never get to see Webby solve a problem with cleverness or her ability to crack a puzzle (or a grappling gun).

Webby 2017

Webby is introduced in the pilot episode fairly early, and the second episode of the series focuses on her characterization alongside the boys. Like in the original pilot, the triplets are left in Scrooge's care when Donald has to attend to work responsibilities. However, Webby makes herself known to them first. When the boys break out of their "designated play area" in the attic, she hides in the shadows as she throws a rope toward the triplets that ensnares them. Everything goes black, and Huey, Dewey, and Louie come to while tied up, hanging upside down in a room they've never seen before. She continues to stick to the shadows, not revealing herself as she aggressively interrogates them. Louie panics, sobbing out "Uncle Scrooge!" as Webby grows more threatening. Upon hearing the word "uncle", she reveals herself, introduces herself *enthusiastically*, and shows the triplets her McDuck family lineage charts and notes. She explains that Scrooge's

housekeeper is her grandmother and guardian, who's kept her in the mansion her *entire* life while teaching her various combat and general life skills. In her free time she researches the McDuck family, whom she admires greatly and wants to be considered part of. After the boys introduce themselves somewhat nervously, she excitedly asks "Wait! Are we...friends now?" to which Huey replies "If we say yes will you let us live?"

Episode two opens with the four kids engaged in an intense Nerf gun war. Scrooge is delighted to have chaos about the mansion again. The three boys sneak around corners, talk smack, and do typical brotherly things. Webby is wearing night vision goggles while hanging upside down from a chandelier, carrying her Nerf gun in one hand and her grappling gun in the other. She sees Louie come around the corner and whispers "target acquired" under her breath menacingly. After Louie springs a trap she's set in the hallway he exclaims "You set traps?! It's just a game!" to which Webby responds "If you're not a player, you're a pawn." Dewey suggests somewhat nervously that Webby "maybe take it down a notch", and Webby shrieks something about Peking. We find out that Webby has constructed an actual backstory for her "character" in the Nerf war. She goes on to annihilate her opponents with both Nerf darts and awesome but vaguely frightening declarations like "This is no foyer! This is a tomb!" They eventually wander outside and Webby says that "Death darts was fun!", to which Louie says "Again, *just* supposed to be darts." Webby asks what they want to play next, listing some unknown games with violent titles. The boys convince her to accompany them to Funzo's Funzone¹⁸ instead after they discuss amongst themselves.

Louie: I don't know, Webby's great for treasure hunting and mine cart chases, but she's

¹⁸ A Craig's Cruisers/Chuck-E-Cheese sort of place. Kids love it, parents hate it.

not exactly built for everyday kid stuff.

Huey (with panic in his eyes): I still see the darts when I close my eyes.

Dewey: She's been cooped up in a mansion her whole life! Of course she's going to be a

little...off, but we can help her! She'll be fine.

While they discuss, the camera cuts back to Webby, who's frantically packing her backpack full of magical artifacts and spy equipment as she mutters "Alright Webby, just a totally casual hang out in the real world. Like regular kids do. Play it cool. Play it cool."

Webby misinterprets something at Funzo's as a threat and they're thrown out.

Louie mutters under his breath to Dewey "this is why I said we shouldn't bring her." She's crushed, to say the least. She continues to rein in her free spirit around the boys, even staying silent as the four of them are captured by the Beagle boys. She can get free of her bonds easily and defends them against the villain, but then goes back to her discarded ropes. When Louie asks, incredulously, why she didn't get loose earlier, she says "I didn't want you to think I was weird." Dewey assures her that "normal is overrated," and Louie asks her to continue being her own "Webby-normal." She ends up capturing the Beagle boys, keeping everyone safe, and impressing her grandmother so much that Mrs. Beakley agrees to let Webby roam about with Scrooge and the boys, confident in both Scrooge's adventuring prowess and Webby's own maturity and skill.

'17 Webby analysis

Webby still navigates the transition from outsider to insider (within the Duck family) awkwardly, as most do, but she's given more agency and resilience in this drawing of the character. She stows away on a mission with Scrooge (with no triplets in

tow) and her quick thinking saves his feathers more than once (episode 17). Mrs. Beakley instructs her to train the boys against potential enemy attacks (episode 60). She befriends Lena (the shadow child of Magica de Spell) and helps her crash a birthday celebration for the Beagle boys and takes intel back to Scrooge (episode 5). Her bond with Lena actually brings Lena back to the mortal realm after being banished by Magica (episode 31).

In close

The choices the showrunners made to progress Webby's character to a degree that'd be appropriate for the 21st century probably wouldn't make a *revolutionary* thesis, but it's short sighted to assume that '87 Webby has nothing to offer modern day readers. I feel a certain kind of relief watching '87 Webby (as someone who grew up in a woman's body) in a post 1987 world: I can see the not-so-distant past where the glass ceiling still loomed large and the thought of a woman having a mortgage in her own name was still unfamiliar. Moreover, there's a nostalgia factor that had me longing for a simpler time: not for the year 1987, but for the time in my life when I could watch ridiculous cartoons without wondering how I'm going to pay off my debts.

Plenty happened between 1987 and 2017¹⁹ that could have contributed to Webby's characterization changes. I'm thinking specifically of the increase in women holding public office. Women have been saying this for years, but if 50% of today's America is female and 0 women were involved in the crafting of the constitution, then it could probably use regular updates. However, all too often the choices are left to white men over 65. If we're living in a world that has greater and more equitable access for female

¹⁹ Affirmative action, Gender Equity in Education Act, Violence Against Women Act, First female speaker of the house (along with many other "firsts" in authority roles, specifically politics), free birth control,...

interaction, or is better equipped to recognize those ideas and acts, then surely the media is going to have better representation. Webby is more empowered to seek out what she wants, while still looking similar enough to be identifiable, as both drawings illustrate a wee duckling in pink and purple with a bow and a skirt. However, Webby still lets her eagerness to please authority and her fierce desire to impress Scrooge lead her astray at times. Perhaps it bears repeating that the two showrunners for *DT '17* are white guys, but given that and the politics of working for a corporate giant they've made a very likeable and believable character. All things considered, I think it's dangerous to assume that just because we've seen some success of the various feminism "waves" take hold that we are existing in some "post-3rd wave" world, and I think Webby might represent a kind of "missing link" between 3rd wave feminism and current intersectional models of feminism. Webby isn't perfect, but she's a product of her time and space, as we all are.

Mrs. B

Ms. Bentina Beakley is Scrooge's housekeeper and grandmother to Webby Vanderquack. As a permanent fixture at the mansion, she's also been known to act as (un)official nanny to the triplets and has offered fighting aid and battle strategy to Scrooge. In the reboot it's established that she and Scrooge worked together as spies for a secret anti-terrorist organization before her arrival at the mansion, and she's also trained Webby in several styles of combat and reconnaissance.

Mrs. B 1987

Mrs. Beakley is introduced in tandem with Webby. She assures Scrooge in "Three ducks of the Condor" that she's capable of handling the triplets, though few seem to believe her at first. She's dressed in an apron and heels, and spends most of "Cold Duck" attempting to rescue Scrooge and bring him a scarf. In addition to leaping inside a moving aircraft, she also "orders" Launchpad to take them back to Duckburg, even though they've never met. She also stares down a full grown walrus in defense of Webby. When she screams in terror the triplets tediously remark "Great. I guess *we* gotta save her." After the boys accuse Webby of not caring about Scrooge as much as she should, Mrs. Beakley suggests backtracking the walrus' tracks in order to find Scrooge. Embarrassed, they hastily agree, and Dewey mutters "They must get smarter as they get older" under his breath. Mrs. Beakley orders that Webby stay close to her, but doesn't ask Huey, Dewey, or Louie.

When Mrs. Beakley arrives at the jail for Scrooge, Launchpad, and the boys, Scrooge is the first to hear her voice. He jumps up and says excitedly "Beakley's here? Then there's still hope!" The triplets exchange looks, saying "What's she gonna do, knit us out?" and "She'll be captured easier'n we were." Scrooge shouts "I knew you'd come to my rescue!" with glee. Louie considers whether they underestimated her. When she tosses the tuning fork through the window, enabling their escape, Dewey proudly asserts "that Beakley is o-kay!"

Mrs. Beakley also leads the mammoth walrus away from the group matador-style with her scarf and gives each of the kids commands to follow. Each triplet in turn vocally affirms her authority.

Mrs. B 2017

Mrs. Beakley's characterization is more gruff, though she's drawn similarly. She still wears an apron and spectacles, but she wears flats, rather than heels. We see little of her in the first two episodes. Her first lines are to the nephews, whom she is escorting into the empty attic room that Scrooge has designated as the "play area" for the children he's been tasked with watching. She offers them a bag of marbles before closing and locking the door, saying "A gift from your great-uncle. You will return them upon your departure. He's counted them."

She returns to her vacuuming, but stops when she hears some rattling and crashing coming from a nearby room. She throws open the door with ferocity, ready to defend the mansion with her vacuum, still running. She listens to Scrooge groan about the fact that he's been tasked with watching the triplets. She listens to him gripe for a while until reminding him that she's "not his secretary" by throwing a pen at his head hard enough to stick in the wall behind him.

After Scrooge returns from Atlantis with the kids, Mrs. Beakley addresses the fact that Webby lied to her and snuck on Scrooge's submarine. She says to Webby "You are safer in a sunken city with Scrooge McDuck than you are locked in a vault in Fort Knox. No more lies, and you can go with him wherever you'd like."

Analysis

Mrs. Beakley's voice actor, Toks Olagundoye, when asked in an interview about how she channels her character and what she brings to the page, cited the fact that she was "raised by some pretty strong ladies" (DisneySisters 2019). Olagundoye's mother is

Norweigan, her mother's mother was German and her paternal grandmother was Nigerian. "They all worked and had their own businesses," and her grandmother was in the resistance in World War II. She says that this "solid, strong stock of women" she comes from who "don't apologize" and "get it done without complaining" were not only instrumental in creating herself, but the voice she puts forth for the character.

I was quite warmed to find this information about Olagundoye and her creative process, but it forces me to ask a somewhat disheartening question: if Olagundoye's creative fodder for this "modern, empowered woman" (to use the words of the male interviewer) all came from women who didn't grow up in the 21st century, why couldn't the Mrs. Beakley of 1987 have been a James Bond-esque, take-charge sort of hero that new Mrs. Beakley is? Modern Mrs. Beakley is still a housekeeper and grandmother, but she has an extensive identity that's separate from those roles. Perhaps this is what the interviewer meant by the "empowered woman" becoming a staple of most media. But there were women who were both homemakers *and* business owners prior to the 1980s. It was perhaps less common, but not unreasonable.

Furthermore, Mrs. Beakley's gruffness and lack of patience seems to subtly underscore the idea that in order to hold and maintain power women either need to forsake their femininity or embrace masculinity. As previously stated, Mrs. Beakley is still a housekeeper and cares for the children of the mansion deeply, but her silhouette differs pretty sharply from other female characters in the reboot. Though the physical shapes of the characters contrasted more and were more obvious in 1987 (when Goldie's curves were so dramatic you had to wonder how she could walk upright), Mrs. Beakley is still extremely square and broad, compared to Della or Goldie (who don't have the weird

hypersexualization from the 20th century either). Though Mrs. Beakley's shape could be indicative of a growing acceptance of the idea that feminine bodies needn't and shouldn't all look one prescribed way, (and this is perhaps supported by the fact that Goldie and Della have more believable proportions in the 21st century) I fear that the writers are still just repackaging masculinity (Brown 40).

As such, and in a common thread, Mrs. Beakley has more characterization in 2017 than she did in 1987. The 2017 iteration is more enjoyable to watch, by most standards.

Goldie

Goldie O'Gilt is introduced in 2017 as Scrooge's "ex...ex rival, ex partner, ex everything." It's already been established that few are able to best Scrooge, so her character is immediately shrouded in mystery. In addition to detailing the characterization of Goldie on television in 1987 and 2017, I also plan to include some material from *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck Vol II*, as that includes multiple "side-stories" that feature Goldie more prominently than any television creation of the 20th century.

Goldie in Comics

_____ Goldie only appears as a main character (with more than 2 lines) in 3 episodes of the 1987 run. She appears in the background in 2 episodes, and appears very briefly in one episode to reprimand Scrooge for his willingness to marry another woman. As such, her characterization is somewhat limited (though the writers for the 1987 run pulled from some Barks and Rosa comics), and this offered a lot of potential when revisited in 2017,

in a world where the "femme fatale"²⁰ has not only become a more frequent character, but she's no longer *just* a villain. Make no mistake, Goldie isn't a hero, but she has her own characterizations and whims *beyond* simply distracting Scrooge.

I initially thought that seeing more seductresses on screens who aren't completely diabolical could be indicative of a world that's not nearly as plagued by heteronormativity (because men and women are capable of having relationships that aren't sexual or romantic in nature and some seem to forget this), but I think that the cultural approval of having more Elizabeth/Darcy²¹ dynamics stems more in part from society's ambiguity about the "modern" woman. Since the second wave of feminism, the dialogue about the glass ceiling and the other issues that women face has centered around the "dilemma" of the modern woman: how to balance a competitive career while also being housekeeper, cook, nurturer, and all of the other domestic roles that women have traditionally been expected to undertake. This seems to be echoed by Cecelia Baldwin, who writes in her essay about saloon women in the gold rush era that "Burlesque thrives on depression" (86), meaning that men seek entertainment when they're feeling sad or lonely, but women seek the industry when they fall on hard economic times. Baldwin connects this idea of the saloon girl as inherently "deviant" to the economic hardships that fell on women in the 19th century, specifically single women. Goldie's first introduction in the Rosa comics puts her in this category: a showgirl at the Blackjack saloon who'll cut a deal with anyone if it means being able to eat (and afford her next piece of jewelry).

In "The Prisoner of White Agony²² Creek" (Rosa), Scrooge wanders into the Blackjack Saloon looking for warmth. Goldie takes a liking to his rugged charm and

²⁰ A seductive woman who tends to cause disaster for the men she gets involved with

²¹ when the lover and the nemesis are the same person

²² After some research, I'm still unsure why Rosa decided to name it that.

invites him upstairs, where she drugs him and steals his famous Goose-egg nugget²³ that he had brought into town to hold over the other miners in Dawson. Scrooge manages to catch her and retrieve his nugget, but in penance for her thievery he commands that she work on his claim in the mountains for one month with him: one month of hard labor, no mattress, only Scrooge for company and nothing to eat but beans. They bicker constantly, but Goldie surprises Scrooge with her grit and tenacity. Scrooge surprises Goldie with his industriousness, and the slightly romantic/slightly threatening tension between them grows.

Soapy Slick pays Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Judge Roy Bean to kidnap Goldie from Scrooge, and when they snatch her she's already stolen the strongbox containing the deed and the goose egg nugget from Scrooge. She opens the box to look at the gold and the deed, and notices another parcel. She unwraps a lock of soft golden hair from within some parchment, and when she recognizes it as hair from her own head she goes back to the claim to help Scrooge defend it against Earp, Masterson, and Bean.

When Scrooge declares Goldie's debts paid after defending the claim for the one month period, she stops to ask if everything "that's happened in the past month...doesn't it mean anything?" (136). Scrooge offers her a month's wages at "fifty cents a day", and after pausing for a beat to understand what he's doing she takes the money and stomps away, tears silently streaming down her face.

Goldie 1987

For the sake of context, we first meet Goldie in the 1987 run in "Back to the Klondike", which is an adaptation of a Barks story of the same name. Mrs. Beakley and

²³ his pride and joy. He had found it only a few days prior to this.

Webby are decorating the mansion for Valentine's day, and Webby asks Scrooge if he's got a Valentine. Dewey mutters something about Goldie, which Scrooge confirms: "Aye. Glittering Goldie. Greediest gal in the Klondike." The scene flashes back to Scrooge's first interaction with Goldie: he's in the Blackjack Saloon in Dawson, and Goldie sings the following lines in a southern drawl from a trapeze-style perch overtop the men in an ostentatious pink ball gown and ridiculous amounts of fine jewels:

I'm just a poor girl, bashful and shy / Honest and truthful, I can't tell a lie / My needs are quite simple, they're honest and small, just listen while I'll tell you all...don't care for

diamonds, rubies, or pearls / don't care for fur coats like some other girls / just give me

the one thing that's easy to spend / Gold nuggets are my own best friend!²⁴

Scrooge remembers this fondly, saying "now there's a gal with good sense." He tells the four kids, now listening raptly, "Goldie turned out to be the hardest worker I ever knew...besides meself." Webby recognizes the loneliness on his face and asks if he still misses Goldie, while Dewey jumps up excitedly to ask Scrooge if there's a chance there might still be gold at White Agony Creek. Intrigued, Scrooge takes the boys north to the Klondike. They arrive at his claim after dark, and as Scrooge approaches the front door to his cabin a few bullets whiz past his head²⁵. Scrooge doubles back and takes cover behind a pile of rocks while the nephews cut to the side of the cabin and sneak around toward the

²⁴ a clear reference to "Diamonds are a girl's best friend", made famous by Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Goldie's rendition contains essentially the same sentiments as the original: flirting about with men might be fun, but money (or something shiny that a girl could sell on a whim without attracting too much attention) keeps one safe and fed.

²⁵ and this was after he had attempted to take the boys to the Blackjack and nearly been shot by claim jumpers from the old days, so I'm not sure what Scrooge was thinking, advancing while unarmed.

porch. When the boys see who's holding the gun, they shout "Crackaroonie! You're a lady claim jumper!"

Goldie lowers the muzzle of the shotgun and says "and darn proud of it. What do you yahoos want?" When they identify themselves as Scrooge's kin, she mutters under her breath "So! The no good varmint is back. Can't let him see me like this --" and Dewey puts it together as he shouts "Holy smokes! You must be Glittering Goldie!" She tries to shoot at him again, but as Scrooge raises his hands in surrender and clears up an old misunderstanding, she lowers the gun. Scrooge admits that he thinks of her every single day, and she reluctantly asserts that he "could always charm the quills off a porcupine." They catch up while they dance beneath the moonlight, and Scrooge leaves the deed to his claim for her in the cabin.

The scene cuts forward to Scrooge telling his heirs this story in their present as he sighs and concedes that he'll probably never see Goldie again. Huey assures him that "it's safer that way", and Louie pipes up "But she sure was pretty!"

Scrooge has to work with Goldie again in "Ducky Mountain High," but she ends up getting one over on him in the end. Scrooge buys land cheap from Glomgold and discovers that it sits right beside a piece of land that contains golden trees. With a bit of digging, Scrooge learns that the land with the potential gold deposit belongs to Goldie. He goes to her with flowers and chocolate in an attempt to "woo" her into a good deal on the land. She first tries to shoot him and calls him an "old cuss", but when she sees the flowers and chocolate she blushes and calls him an "old romantic."

Glomgold arrives with flowers and chocolate in a frantic bid for the alleged gold, but she quickly shuts him down. Scrooge starts waxing poetic about what Goldie means

to him, and she interjects "are you asking to get married?" He admits that he's really after this bit of land²⁶, which she sells to him. Guilty, he goes to her later and says "in good conscience I cannae keep your land." She chuckles and says that "a deal's a deal", and he's so overjoyed at the thought of keeping both the gold and Goldie's affections that he kisses her and continues digging (for the alleged gold) with renewed enthusiasm. She then pulls out the property record and reveals that the gold *trees*²⁷ were on Scrooge's land, but the gold *roots* were on land that still belonged to Goldie. Upset, he exclaims "Goldie, you're a dirty dealmaker!" She retorts that she "learned from the master", and as she kisses him and ruffles the feathers on his head his eyes cross and his tongue lolls comically.

Goldie 2017

Goldie is introduced as Scrooge's "ex everything" in "The Golden Lagoon of White Agony Plains," which pulls elements from "Ducky Mountain High" and "The Prisoner of White Agony Creek." Scrooge and the boys are headed to the Duckburg museum, because "as upstanding citizens of Duckburg it's important that we support our cultural institutions." Goldie corners Scrooge by the buffet table and the two catch up during an intense tango. She has no southern accent in this version, and though she's in a yellow ball gown, heels, and perfectly curled hair she has no trouble stealing an artifact directly under Glomgold's nose. Scrooge puts together (far after Goldie has fled the museum) that she was there to steal the other half of the map to the titular Golden Lagoon, as it had been stuck in the jaw of a mammoth²⁸ for a few generations. Scrooge,

²⁶ He conveniently didn't mention that this bit of land probably has a gold deposit on it

²⁷ which had been chopped down by the Beagle boys earlier in the story

²⁸ that was getting unveiled at the museum that evening

Launchpad, and the boys rush back to the mansion where Webby and Mrs. Beakley have been restrained and locked away in a closet. Goldie sits in the window of the drawing room, wearing Scrooge's top hat, as she drawls "Hey moneybags, where's the other half of the map?" as Scrooge storms in. After an intense scuffle, they agree to head up the quest to find the lagoon together, to which the triplets shriek and giggle about Uncle Scrooge having a "date."

Goldie and Scrooge catch up and reminisce in the caves on the way to the lagoon so much so that Goldie has a hard time betraying Scrooge when the time comes, though when Scrooge sighs it's implied that he knew this was inevitable. Goldie fakes her own death to steal the gold deposits from both Scrooge and Glomgold, and though Glomgold shouts and curses Goldie as she escapes Scrooge simply laughs, overjoyed that she's alive and slightly tickled to have been outdone.

In "Happy Birthday Doofus Drake", Goldie and Louie attempt to infiltrate the birthday party of the local spoiled brat. Louie initially calls Goldie after Scrooge tells Louie a story about the time Goldie and Scrooge helped a small Western town fight back against venture capitalist John D. Rockerduck. Louie invites Goldie to the mansion with the intent to learn more about how to run his amateur company *Louie Inc* in a more "shifty fashion", since Louie is mildly disgusted by Scrooge's stories of hard work and honesty. Goldie pretty much immediately locks Louie in a closet and starts raiding the shelves, but she frees him when he agrees to accompany her to Doofus Drake's birthday party. They have to impress Doofus with their best version of a loving guardian/child dynamic, so Louie introduces her as his "aunt" Goldie while she frantically (and aggressively) whispers instructions while people aren't looking. They manage to reveal

the other party guests as crashers or liars, and Louie has an opening to leave with *all* of the party favors²⁹ when Doofus spontaneously decides to kidnap Goldie. Louie leaves with the treasure, but goes back for Goldie after considering his own moral code. While in the process of righting his wrongs and teaching Doofus a lesson, he realizes that Goldie has run off with the treasure while his back was turned. He goes home to Uncle Scrooge, trying not to cry. Scrooge asks him what happened, and when he just groans the word "Goldie" Scrooge nods, smirks, and says "Aye. I'd say you get used to it, but that'd be a lie." Louie wonders aloud if anything that she said to him was truthful or if he learned anything remotely valuable from this, and Scrooge gives him a knowing look while proposing that Goldie may have learned something from this as well. The scene cuts to Goldie in the forest outside the mansion, hefting a sack of treasure over her shoulder. She slips a small print-out of Louie from the party into her wallet next to a picture of Scrooge from the gold rush days, and sighs.

Goldie gets another opportunity to reconsider the trajectory of her life and Scrooge's in "The Forbidden Fountain of the Foreverglades." Scrooge takes the kids south over spring break in a hunt for the Fountain of Youth, and they stay in a resort with a pool that's being dominated by teenagers. Scrooge grumbles about "youth being wasted on the young" as he runs into Goldie, who's there to investigate the fountain as well. The two of them are accidentally exposed to the water's power, and with their de-aged bodies they get cocky and start attempting more ridiculous physical feats in an attempt to impress the other. Goldie reaches for a vine to swing on and misses, and Scrooge valiantly catches her and lands with her in a dramatic dip. The romantic tension grows, and Goldie

²⁹ Each party favor was a bag of jewels (because Doofus is rich and arrogant). This is why so many people tried to attend without an invitation.

proposes that they have a proper restart. She explains that with access to the Fountain of Youth they could have more adventures like the ones they had when they were young, but with the foreknowledge that they have now. Scrooge laughs gleefully, restating that "youth is wasted on the young", but Goldie looks him in the eye and re-emphasizes that she wants a "fresh start. *Together*, Scroogie." Scrooge agrees, but when they later realize that the waters of the Fountain *steal* youth from others in order to give it to someone else Scrooge says "what's the point of a fresh start if you're going to make worse mistakes?", and gives up the opportunity to stay young in an act of morality. When Goldie sacrifices her de-aged body to save him, he looks surprised and asks "what about your fresh start?" While trying to hide her sniffles, she says "what's the point of a fresh start without you?"

Analysis

Cecelia Baldwin writes in her essay titled "The Historical Development of Women's Posing from the Post-Gold Rush Era to the Present Print Media" that the hypersexualization seen in the images of saloon girls and prostitutes still persists in modern women's magazines with alarming similarity (in poses, lighting, costuming, etc). She also offers that the saloon girl image of the West came from female scarcity and argues in defense of this entertainment by proposing women's resistance to eastern Victorian society and puritanism on the East coast pushed them to burlesque. I think this reading is particularly helpful while considering Goldie, who worked as a saloon girl in a gold rush boomtown. The illustrations of the Blackjack saloon show an overabundance of greasy men, and the other dancers speak amongst each other with the fluidity found among people of the same industry. They also keep look out for particularly creepy blokes, and there's a not-quite-unspoken rule about what'd be known today as "dibs", as

evidenced by the off-handed remarks that Goldie's coworkers make about not harming a feather on Scrooge's head.

So, Goldie can be established as a "deviant" girl who worked in the entertainment industry, because that's the sort of work that was available to a single woman in the 19th century. In the 2017 reboot Goldie is a thief by trade, though it's implied through some stunts that she's pulled on quests with Scrooge that she has a showgirl background. The modern Goldie wears less flashy jewelry and prefers to do her operating under the table, indicative of the truth that if a single woman wants to stay safe the best thing she can do is be inconspicuous. 21st Century Goldie is also less inclined to verbally affirm her feelings for Scrooge. Though she's kissed him before, it's usually used as a distraction or confusion technique rather than an actual declarative act of love. By comparison, even though she frequently shot at him in the 1987 run she was also willing to humor the romantic side of Scrooge every now and again. The modern Goldie literally flees into forests when her heart warms a bit more than anticipated. I fear that this sort of habit may be playing into the drive to embrace traits normally associated with toxic masculinity (like suppressing emotions) in modern female characters, but I think it speaks more to Goldie's own discomfort around domesticity, which is something that probably wouldn't have been talked about in 1987. As such, I'm glad to see it portrayed as such to young girls that they don't *need* to do domestic things³⁰ in order to have a happy and fulfilled life, but this still leaves questions about Goldie's moral and ethical leanings. Is the arc of slow acceptance that's playing out in season 3, which culminated in the declaration about

³⁰ Scrooge has told her multiple times (in a vulnerable tone) that there's plenty of spare rooms at the mansion should she ever need a place, for however long she needs. She tends to scoff and change the subject. She seems to dislike children as well, given her willingness to con Louie multiple times and the fact that Huey, Dewey, and Louie are absent from the adventures that feature Goldie. I'm not suggesting she should be looked down upon for this, but her unease and awkwardness around Scrooge's family marks her as not domestic.

fresh starts being useless without Scrooge, supposed to be a subtle push toward more traditional roles in terms of romantic entanglements? What does it say about Goldie if she *does* seem happier with Scrooge? Does the nature by which she comes to that conclusion change the answer to the previous question? She wouldn't be introduced as his "ex rival, ex partner" anymore, and that's a pretty significant character and tonal shift. I suppose it would depend on the circumstances of a hypothetical "transformation", but I think that Goldie loses a fundamental aspect of her characterization and attitude if she does decide to "settle down", whatever that might mean for a woman like her.

All in all, it's been incredibly exciting to see Scrooge go toe to toe with not only an intellectual equal, but someone who fundamentally challenges his ideas about what it means to be independent and strong. I love watching Goldie's antics without the added subtext that demonizes self-sufficient, take-charge women that's common in media prior to the 21st century³¹.

Della

Della's chapter will be unique in that there won't be an inclusion from the 1987 run of the show simply because the character did not exist yet in the *DuckTales* universe. 2017 wasn't the first time Disney fans had heard the name of the triplet's mother, but due to Disney's long history of motherless heroes she was basically only mentioned in passing once or twice in long-forgotten cartoon shorts. She's first identified in 1937, when the triplets were first introduced to Donald and the Disney duck universe. Della leaves a note accompanying her three boys after dropping them off at Donald's. The note explains that

³¹ Early iterations of Poison Ivy, Harley Quinn, the long list of women who distracted James Bond, Medusa, etc

the boy's father is in the hospital³² and asks that Donald watch the "little angels" until she returns. She's mentioned in a few other cartoons and comic panels, but prior to 2017 next to nothing was known about Della Duck.

Della 2017

We see clips of Della on the moon attempting to get back to her family throughout season 1, and it's revealed in "The Last Crash of the Sunchaser" that the famed "Spear of Selene" that Webby and Dewey have been investigating the existence of was a rocket gifted from Scrooge to Della when he learned that she was expecting. Della took the spear out for a pre-emptive joyride before the triplets hatched without proper backup/coordination and encountered an asteroid storm that she couldn't out-manuever. When Della's communication line goes dead Donald blames Scrooge for Della's disappearance and leaves the mansion with the three eggs. Scrooge nearly goes broke trying to find Della in space, but Della's crash-landed and taken refuge beneath her mangled rocket on the moon so the search party Scrooge sends doesn't see her.

We're able to see what Della's been up to for the first decade of her children's lives in "Whatever happened to Della Duck?", the episode that aired between seasons 2.5 and 3. Only minor appearances from some natives of the moon means this episode features Della, and the writers don't miss any clever opportunities for characterization. She's immediately established as Donald's sister, first apparent from her angry outbursts and use of the phrase "Aw, phooey." Her legacy as one of Scrooge's best adventuring partners stands as well; she fashions herself a prosthetic leg from rocket salvage when she loses her leg in the crash on the moon, illustrating her ingenuity and drive to return home. As

³² for a prank that the boys pulled

soon as she's built herself a new leg and a shelter she begins working on sending transmissions to Scrooge to communicate with him and the sons she hasn't met yet. Even while stranded on the moon with no evident rescue en route she's brash and confident ("...but because I am an *amazing* pilot, I landed the ship safely. For the most part. Kind of."), sometimes coming off as immature (she freestyle-sings an action theme song while she attempts to leap back to Earth). Even though few of her attempts to get home are successful, she doesn't lose hope. Della meets the natives of the moon and helps them subdue a destructive moon mite by realizing that "the mite isn't a monster, it's a mother." Della soothes the baby moon mite with a lullaby³³ that she "used to sing to the boys before they hatched", which goes: Look to the stars, my darling baby boys / Life is strange and vast, filled with wonders and joys / Face each new sun with eyes clear and true / Unafraid of the unknown, because I'll face it all with you. She offers the last of her precious metals (that she was going to use to fix the rocket) to the mother moon mite³⁴, willingly stranding herself after fighting tooth and nail to get home for years because she answered the call of a mother in need.

In "Nothing can Stop Della Duck", Della is finally able to return home successfully. Though Scrooge drops a priceless artifact and embraces her as soon as Della walks through the door, the four kids hide in the foyer shyly until Della steps inside and promptly falls to her knees, tears in her eyes. Dewey embraces her immediately, followed by Huey (after a barrage of questions that are quickly answered with Junior Woodchuck quotations, to which Huey excitedly responds "You really are my mom!"), and then

³³ set to the tune of the moon theme from the old *DuckTales* '89 video game

³⁴ to feed to her baby moon mite

Louie, reluctantly at first³⁵. Della apologizes for getting on the rocket before they hatched, saying "I missed you so much. You deserve to have the best mom and I'm going to be the best mom, starting right now." She bounds off to the kitchen to make some dessert for all of the missed special occasions and Huey and Dewey gorge themselves to sickness. In an attempt to rectify the mounting disappointment she offers to tell the triplets a bedtime story, but she tells them (in great detail) of the time she conquered the Gilded Man with uncle Scrooge and frightens them all so much they don't sleep that night. The following morning she encourages Huey to surf down the stairway on a shield and he nearly breaks an arm in the process. When the chandelier comes crashing down Mrs. Beakley sends the boys to their rooms, sighs, hoists the chandelier over her shoulder and reassures Della, somewhat passive-aggressively, that she's "used to cleaning up after children, dear." While wandering through the mansion glumly, Della overhears a conversation being had about her.

Mrs. Beakley: I'm sorry Mr. McDuck, but I think Della is struggling to adjust to this new life.

Scrooge: Come now, Beakley, she's only just arrived.

Dewey: So she's not the best with cooking, or age-appropriate stories, or child endangerment, but nobody's perfect!

Huey: She's trying and that's what matters! JWG rule 3: no matter how hard things get,

never give up on a fellow woodchuck! She's our mom! Right, Louie?

³⁵ He's convinced that it's "a parallel universe, or a curse from Magica", but when Della steps forward and holds her arms out he starts crying and hugs her

Louie: Don't get me wrong, of course I'm happy to have mom back. But I've gone so long

without a mom, I don't really know how to have one...

Scrooge: That's because she's not a mom. Not yet, anyway. You've got to give her time to

figure out who she is and how she fits into this family.

Della runs into the garage weeping after Scrooge says "she's not a mom" and doesn't hear the rest of his statement. In her distress she re-awakens the Gilded Man³⁶, and the kids and Scrooge come to her aid in order to vanquish him yet again. Della uses her prosthetic leg as a jamb and makes a death-defying leap in order to save Louie, who then calls her "mom." She calls them in turn³⁷ and reassures them that even as they're not used to having a mom, she's "definitely not used to being one" either, but that she'll "figure it out, with time", as they all will.

"Timephoon" details the time when Louie damaged the threads of time after stealing a time machine from Gyro Gearloose³⁸'s lab and using it to steal "lost" treasures. Louie's been jumping all over the timeline to nick treasures just before history says they were "lost"³⁹, and bringing them back to the mansion. However, no one notices until his actions create a Timephoon, a hurricane-like storm that deposits all kinds of characters from history on Scrooge's doorstep, including but not limited to Benjamin Franklin and a group of French revolutionaries. Mrs. Beakley is busy making sure that Dewey and Webby don't devour *all* of the chili dogs, and Della writes off her concern with "Chili

³⁶ who's sitting alongside Scrooge's other dusty trophies

³⁷ by the names given by Donald, not the names in her head she's trying to unlearn

³⁸ A wacky scientist funded by Scrooge

³⁹ "It's not a crime if it's lost to time." ~Louie

dogs put the hooray in *hurricane* party!⁴⁰ Honk if you're a great mom! Honk Honk!" Most of Della's lines and reactions are similarly absurd (she says aloud to herself "problem solved, good parenting Della" and high-fives herself at one point) until the storm eventually starts snatching her family and vanishing them out of time. It's not until Louie sends all of the historical anachronisms back where they belong that Scrooge, Mrs. Beakley, Webby, Dewey, Huey, Launchpad, and Della are returned to the mansion in the present day. Everyone but Della accepts Louie's mediocre apology. She steps forward, raising her voice against one of her children for the first time. "I watched your brothers blink out of existence because you wanted a shortcut to riches! You took off in that contraption without thinking about the consequences or the people you would hurt!" She declares that Louie is grounded, and as Louie storms off, muttering about the "perfect scheme", Della falls to her knees, sighs, and groans out "That was hard." Mrs. Beakley puts a hand on her shoulder in reassurance as she says "it always is, but a little tough love now will make them better people later."

Analysis

_____ Sarah Boxer proposes in her essay "Why are all the cartoon mothers dead?" that the dead mother plot was woven into fiction long before Disney co-opted it⁴¹ if we consider the frequency of the trope's appearance in the Grimm fairy tales. Of course, it's worth noting that the prevalence of dead mothers in Grimm fairy tales could be partially due to the high pregnancy mortality rate of that era, and though the current pregnancy

⁴⁰ which she says while stuffing her face with chili dogs

⁴¹ Disney Movies where the mother is dead before the opening credits include but aren't limited to: *Aladdin*, *The Fox and the Hound*, *Pocahontas*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Ratatouille*, *Bambi*, *The Great Mouse Detective*, *Brother Bear*, *Finding Nemo*, *Lilo and Stitch*, *Snow White*, *Cinderella*...and if we include the movies with absent mother figures (like *Tangled* or *Frozen*) this list gets longer.

mortality rate is higher than you'd expect, it has improved since the 1800s. I don't know that we can attribute the continued existence of this theme *completely* to lazy storytelling (though that's certainly part of it), but perhaps its longevity could be linked to the consistent undervaluing of women through history.

This trope is startlingly frequent in children's cartoons that *aren't* Disney as well (consider *Chicken Little*, *Barnyard*, *Mr. Peabody and Sherman*, *Despicable Me*, *Cloudy with a chance of Meatballs*, and *Ice Age*). Some have offered that the dead mom plot offers a chance for cheaply executed character development, much like the way needless violence against women's bodies gets used as "character development" or "plot drivers" in the horror genre. Though Boxer states that there may be something more to that theory, Boxer offers up a "fun single dad" trope that is used to fill in the space left by the dead mother plotline. This tracks for movies like *Brother Bear* and *Finding Nemo*, but also *DuckTales*.

Della is "struggling to adjust to this new life", clearly, but this is also her first opportunity to be a proper mother for the first time in a decade. I love that her family gives her the space to make mistakes, but even as her character arc progresses she doesn't "fall into" a traditional motherly role. Even after Donald, Della, and the kids are all reunited properly and have gone on a few more adventures together, Donald is still overprotective and Della is still prone to dangerous levels of enthusiasm. She doesn't sacrifice who she is while in pursuit of that ephemeral, lofty goal of "be a good parent," but more importantly, none of her family expects her to either. I think this depiction of a "bad mom" who's still given compassion, grace, care, and love is an important step toward reassuring viewers (children, especially young girls) that becoming a mother isn't

a "given" or an automatic next step that's being imposed upon them, but also that becoming a mother doesn't have to mean the death of one's own identity. It also lets children know that "bad" moms are not "bad" people, that adults also experience failure, and that experiencing a failure doesn't make you a failure of a person.

Thus, I'm pleased to see that Della *exists* and has three dimensions. It's been rewarding to watch her bond with each of her kids in turn and learn something different from each of them.

In close

It follows that the writers would feel inclined to adjust these characters slightly, given the nature of the last 30 years, in order to achieve their goal of striking a balance between old and new fans. It'd be unreasonable to present the Webby of 1987 to a girl of the current age as satisfying media entertainment as the young girls of the current age have grown up in the wake of Title IX, the #MeToo movement, and now witnessed the first woman take the office of Vice President. The Webby of 1987 wasn't witness to those things, and didn't grow up in a culture that witnessed those things. As a result, '87 Webby doesn't protest the gender inequality present between her and the boys as vocally. Not only would a young girl from this age probably consider this bizarre, there's other (better) cartoon depictions of girlhood that encourage girls to be strong and confident. In fact, given the recent efforts in transgender rights and advances in sciences that are dismantling binaries, I'd be disappointed if the reboot of this show tried to maintain the same level of (frankly needless) gender divisions. I think one could reasonably figure that another reboot of this show in another 30 years would de-emphasize gender and its roles even less.

Mental Health

Though the changes and improvements in the mental health sector may be less conspicuous than the recent successes in gender equality, the attitudes surrounding mental health have shifted such that I felt it relevant enough to include and discuss. Mental health has become such a significant part of my generation's conversation about total body wellness, and more teenagers are depressed than ever before⁴². Frankly, it wouldn't make sense to write for a kids show⁴³ and *not* include discussions about anxiety and other stressors that children face⁴⁴. In addition, the last 30 years have also included strides in mental health treatment (in Westernized medicine). We're mostly past the *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* style of treatment, and the Americans with Disabilities act of 1990 officially prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability. However, we still prescribe pills that have "depression" as a side effect and an estimated 450,000+ teenagers died by suicide in 2019. There is still clearly much work to be done: psychologically, socially, and scientifically. But, the writers of *DuckTales 2017* have made some distinct enough updates to their characters to situate them in the current age, which I think is to be applauded and recognized.

Lena

Lena de Spell is the literal shadow of Magica de Spell. Magica is an original villain from the source material: a sorceress who's convinced that Scrooge's success *must*

⁴² Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in people ages 15-24 (Curtin)

⁴³ in the West, in the 21st century

⁴⁴ "talking to adults makes me more anxious because I feel like they don't get it" ~my 11-year old brother

have some source of magic, and *must* have it for herself. Lena didn't exist before 2017, and her character has been utilized to engage with more material not often seen in children's programming, so this chapter will detail her growth and arc and her impact on the other children in the 2017 narratives.

We first meet Lena in "The Beagle Birthday Massacre." Webby and the boys had planned to go for a trip in the canoe, but she's left behind when only three of them fit. While sitting glumly on shore a bottle floats by, and Webby grabs it. There's a message inside that reads "LOST SAILOR caught in a DEADLY WHIRLPOOL, no hope of survival! HELP!" Webby, thinking she's on the trail of a fresh adventure, excitedly walks down the shoreline until she comes upon a teenage girl sitting alone in an outdoor amphitheater, writing jokes and placing them inside bottles. Webby, *very* enthusiastically, announces "I'm here to save a sailor! Or a group of sailors! Or a sea-serpent with scurvy!" The teenager wearily says "what?" before sarcastically saying "Oh no, I was messing around. You know, like a game?" Lena responds dryly to all of Webby's attempts at conversation, but when Webby flips and leaps over backwards in order to retrieve another bottle Lena's eyes widen and narrow briefly. Lena invites Webby to a "blow-out"⁴⁵ on the edge of town, which ends up being the birthday party of Ma Beagle. Lena used Webby to leap over the tall fences at the junkyard in order to sneak in, but after spending the evening party-crashing with Webby: evading capture, outsmarting Beagle boys, laughing at inside jokes, rescuing the triplets, she decides to stay in touch with this strangely earnest kid.

⁴⁵ Webby was super excited to see a proper explosion before Lena explained that it was another word for party.

In "The Other Bin of Scrooge McDuck," Lena and Webby infiltrate Scrooge's "other bin" while on the hunt for Scrooge's #1 dime⁴⁶. The other bin contains dangerous artifacts and magical creatures from Scrooge's adventures all behind numbered doors down a hallway so large it appears endless. While trying to figure out the numbering system Magica keeps interjecting⁴⁷ and urging Lena to "grab the dime!" and encouraging violence and betrayal. Lena tries to pacify her with excuses about "needing Webby to find her way out", but Magica accuses her of sentimentality. Even as Lena finally approaches the dime she sighs and looks downcast, while Magica cackles maniacally. Lena grabs the dime and Magica, while still shadowy, gains enough presence in order to physically interact with her surroundings. Her power grows in the moonlight, and Lena tries to flee in a panic. Noticing this, Magica snatches her shirt collar and dangles her in front of her face like a puppy. When Magica sees the tears running from Lena's eyes she shifts her tone of voice and says sweetly "you deserve a hug for your hard work." Magica hugs her as Lena stiffens, trying not to recoil. Webby cuts through the door with a diamond dagger in order to rescue Lena, and when Magica reveals that Lena has been "working for" her Webby tries to run away and alert Scrooge. Magica snaps her fingers and turns Webby into a lifeless marionette that looks startlingly like the Webbigail from the 1987 cartoon and uses it to taunt Lena and threaten Lena's freedom. After Magica uses her power to vaporize the puppet Lena cries out in horror as it's revealed that Webby and Lena have been asleep. The magical artifact behind the door they previously opened contained a dreamcatcher that catapults people into their worst nightmare. Magica presses Lena about

⁴⁶ Lena/Magica wants the dime in order to perform a spell under the eclipse that will return Magica to full form. Magica's been living like a parasite in Lena's shadow since Lena's creation.

⁴⁷ When Magica interjects from her shadow form only Lena can hear her, which allows Magica to quite literally play the role of inner demon.

the dime again, and Lena says "Family is supposed to help you, not hold you hostage! You're the monster here, and I know just the monster hunter to take you down." As she runs ahead to Scrooge and Webby who are heading back into the mansion proper, she tries to alert Scrooge, but Magica takes control over Lena's body and keeps her from revealing her role.

"Friendship Hates Magic" details the time when Webby met Violet. Lena is stuck in the shadow realm for most of the story, a sort of purgatory between physical reality and the next dimension of existence. Lena's managed to maintain her sense of self and identity while stranded because she follows Webby around in her shadow everywhere. Webby can't hear the snarky comments she makes about the kids Webby bumps elbows with, but there's evidence that Webby feels the presence around her. At the top of the episode we see Webby return a book called "The Myth of the Shadow Realm" to the library. She wanders into the religions section and asks the librarian on duty for help finding literature, explaining "I'm just doing some casual research on shadow magic. Not trying to bring my best friend back from its depths or anything." Webby meets Violet, another "odd little girl" researching supernatural magic. Violet invites herself over for a sleepover, to Webby's delight and Lena's exasperation. They do lots of typical sleepover activities, like play board games and hold a seance in order to contact Lena. Together, Webby and Violet are able to summon enough power in order to speak directly with her. Lena directly accuses Violet of being a spy and shouts "Get away from her! Webby's mine!" Webby and Violet reassure Lena that she's nothing to worry about and help her defeat her demons. Lena makes amends with Violet, and Violet aides in restoring Lena to full form.

The "Nightmare on Killmotor Hill" is an extended dreamscape shared by the triplets, Webby, Violet, and Lena. Each kid gets their own dream landscape and they're designed in such a way to tell us about the psychological distress that each child faces. Each of them are interesting in their own right, but Lena's is responsible for the climax and resolution of the narrative. We see Lena's dreamscape last, and this comes after Lena's spent the majority of the dream being followed and taunted by Magica's visage. Lena's dream opens on a menacing purple castle in a massive thunderstorm. Lena's feathers have turned green and her hair has a black streak in it (to mirror Magica) and Magica uses this to further her psychological attack against Lena. Lena cries out "No! I was free!", and Magica says snarkily "did you think you'd turn out different than me?" She continues to gaslight her, saying "I'm trying to save you! You came from me! Evil is in your...whatever shadows have, instead of blood. Don't you ever feel like there's something off about you?"

When Lena hears the voices of her friends on the other side of the door she's relieved, saying "My friends are here to save me!" Magica proceeds to turn Lena into the likeness of herself, promising Lena that "they're here to stop you, like they've always tried to stop me. Because we are monsters, Lena." The kids break through the door and Lena frantically tries to assure them that she just *appears* to be Magica, but Webby shouts "you're a monster" as Lena transforms into a huge, terrifying dragon. Lena's still trying to communicate, but every other word that comes out of her mouth brings a plume of fire. A chandelier falls, and Lena/dragon/Magica creature rescues Webby from being crushed. Magica appears to Lena in a mirror and says "no matter how hard you fight it they'll always turn on you. Give in. No worrying if you'll measure up, if you're too flawed.

You're tired. Come home to me." Lena nearly takes the hand that's offered to her, but Webby notices the friendship bracelet on Lena/Magica's arm and addresses Lena by her name. When Webby asks Lena directly if this (while gesturing broadly at the landscape) has been what's bothering her, that she'll "become Magica", Lena sighs and says "I'm just so tired of fighting it, I am her", but her voice has changed back to her own. Webby adamantly disagrees, saying "We were trying to destroy you and you saved me!" Understanding blossoms on Lena's face as she says "Yeah, of course I did. Of course I would. She would never." Magica (from within the mirror) begins to panic, saying "Don't listen to her! You are me!", but Webby continues to comfort her friend, saying "You put so much pressure on yourself to be good. But you're good enough." Magica once again attempts to steal Lena's power and form and the kids all team up to vanquish her. The story closes when the kids awake and realize that Magica's been using cobbled together telepathic technology to terrorize Lena's dreams. Lena is finally given the opportunity to publicly denounce her "aunt" and stands defiantly before her, unafraid and "well-rested for the first time in a long time."

In "Challenge of the Senior Junior Woodchucks" it's revealed that Lena now lives with Violet and her fathers full-time. Lena is seen sitting beside Violet's dads, cheering for Violet enthusiastically and shouting "that's my sister!" In addition, during the season 3 Christmas special the audience sees Webby sneak into Violet's room in order to deliver presents, and we see that Lena and Violet share a bed. Webby tiptoes over to the bed and kisses them each on the forehead before leaving.

In "The Phantom and the Sorceress," Webby and Violet accompany Lena back to the bog where Magica is currently living in order to receive instruction on wielding

magic. This need for a teacher is prompted by the events of the opener. Scrooge sits down on the sofa in the living room and settles in just as the six children burst forth from the television. Scrooge says dryly "Let me guess. You were playing a *video-graphical* game, and someone made a wish around Lena, and the game became real." Lena looks ashamed and says angrily "this amulet⁴⁸ is ruining my life!" Webby tries to comfort her, saying "Don't worry, we'll just add 'playing video games' to the list of things that trigger your magic." Lena groans "Everything triggers my magic!" Scrooge hears their frustration and echoes with "You kids should know by now that nothing good ever comes from magic!" All of the kids immediately clear their throats awkwardly and gesture at Lena, and in a rare moment of humility Scrooge backpedals "except you, Lena. You're one of the good magical things I've dealt with." Della interjects to tell Scrooge that there's a mystical goat in his closet that needs his help, and after Scrooge groans something about "ram magic, again" he quickly throws an "again, no offense" in Lena's direction.

Webby, Lena, and Violet head toward the swamp where Magica lives. Lena complains, "As if asking for help from the person I hate the most wasn't bad enough, I have to walk through gross swamp water to get to her!" Magica answers the door and greets Lena warmly before quickly leaping out in an attempt to steal back the amulet. When Magica asks what they need Lena asserts that "if it were up to me I'd be as far away from you as possible." Magica calls Lena a "disgrace to the family legacy" and "a total magical failure," but agrees to help train Lena when she hears that they're being hunted by the Phantom Blot⁴⁹. After a training montage Magica attempts to snatch the

⁴⁸ the one previously wielded by Magica. Lena's worn it her whole life, but she stole it back from Magica after it was cracked in the shadow war and she uses it to perform simple spells.

⁴⁹ A magician-type villain who first appeared in Mickey Mouse comics in 1939. The 2017 version of the Blot hates magic and has vowed to do all he can to rid it from the world.

amulet yet again, and Lena holds up her hand and stops her with a force of blue energy. Lena wonders aloud why her magic glows blue sometimes, and Magica informs her that every sorcerer's magic has a different color aura⁵⁰. It's her access to blue magic, not purple magic, that allows Lena to triumph over the Blot *and* Magica, proving that Webby was correct: the magic shared among friends is the strongest.

Despite the minor setbacks, Lena's growth becomes apparent during Huey's break in "The Split Sword of Swanstantine." She's able to guide him through a nervous breakdown, drawing upon her own triumphs over Magica in order to coach him through handling his emotions. Huey successfully retrieves the sword from the burly FOWL agent.

Analysis

Lena's origins can act as a metaphor for the rocky process of growing up that involves extricating oneself from parental influence (which everyone can relate to, to a degree), but the nightmares and internalized guilt that she experiences are also common symptoms of PTSD (which would probably happen to anyone being repeatedly gaslit by an authority figure, nevertheless a child).

Wahl writes in *Media Madness* that even though we may be chronologically past the days of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* care that mental illnesses still involve heavy amounts of social stigma and that that stigma often prevents people from seeking out the care they so often need. He draws his readers attention specifically to the "violent, dangerous stereotypes" often attributed to victims of psychosis and uses this pathos to further his point echoed by the majority of those who suffer from a mental illness: the

⁵⁰ Magica's is, in her own words, a "vastly superior malevolent purple."

stigma and social shame/fallout is often worse than the disease itself (Wahl 99). Wahl also wants us to note well that the mass media didn't "single-handedly create the negative attitudes toward mental illness that exist" (Wahl 106), but that brushing off their influence because it's *just* fiction is both dangerous and untrue (Wahl 107). People tend to watch documentaries with a critical eye, but don't tend to do so while consuming fiction. Images (that are by definition meant to emotionally manipulate) are absorbed readily without examining for biases (Wahl 108).

I feel that these truths play out on Lena's arc in DuckTales, as her rogue magic and her emotions always come back under control after Webby speaks to her in a calming tone and reassures her of her identity, reminding her that she's *seen*. This makes the events of "The Phantom and the Sorceress" all the more distressing, since up until that point Webby and Violet seemed to show the utmost care and concern for Lena's continued emotional healing. Granted, the close of the episode does see Lena reveling in her newfound magical abilities and lording them over Magica, proud and dauntless, but I can't grasp a world where someone who claims to be your best friend would urge you to contact your toxic relative for magical training when Scrooge most likely has a minimum of five spellcasters on speed dial at any given time. Webby and Violet's affirmation and acceptance of Lena makes her narrative inspiring, but the quick repackaging of dangerous old attitudes about how to interact with abusive authority figures in order to wrap up a storyline is *still* dangerous. And, as previously stated, the media curated for children can and should be held to a higher standard. In short, though it's been incredibly rewarding to see a young girl conquer her demons and reclaim her identity, it makes it that much harder to watch when the writers miss.

Donald

Disney context

Though Donald is someone we've known since 1934, the showrunners for *DuckTales 2017* took this opportunity to update his character. This comes as a bit of a surprise, not only because the majority of the redrawing that happened to the *DuckTales* universe is illustrated in the way the female characters are represented, but also because it's unlike Disney to drastically alter their roots. Donald in *DT '17* is still recognizable as Donald⁵¹, but the writers gave the audience a backstory for Donald's anger (and shows Donald in anger-management therapy), and we get to see more about his struggles as a single parent. The explanation given in the narrative in 1987 for why Donald had to leave the boys with Scrooge was that Donald got drafted into the Navy, but the 2017 explanation is that Donald had to get to an important job interview and didn't want to leave the boys alone all day⁵². We see Donald rush through his morning routine, concerned that he doesn't have a nice enough suit to land the position. It's revealed later that this particular position was paying more than the usual dead-end jobs Donald had been working to feed the boys, and he was determined to provide the best he could. Cute pictures of Donald warming the triplets' eggs and coaching them through childhood milestones cover every wall of his houseboat, and Dewey finds more childhood pictures in Jones' file on Donald.

⁵¹ He's still the bloke who "gets stuck with all the bad luck", his speech is still nearly indecipherable, and he's still "the angriest guy we know" (according to Dewey). This is on par for Donald Duck.

⁵² This could be indicative of a world after the "latchkey kids" generation. It could perhaps be indicative of the (somewhat) freer gender roles within the home.

In addition to all of this new Donald content, *DT '17* also reintroduced Daisy and gave her a redraw. Prior to 2017, Donald and Daisy existed in the original Disney canon⁵³ to be a foil to Mickey and Minnie. Mickey and Minnie's relationship was characterized as Hallmark-esque: cutesy and perfect. Donald and Daisy were usually shown arguing⁵⁴. This isn't the case in 2017.

Donald 2017

In *Whatever Happened to Donald Duck* we learn that Donald has been stranded on the moon⁵⁵ for more than a few weeks while his family is under the impression that he's on a cruise, after being given a prescription hammock by his Doctor for stress-induced molting. The episode cuts back and forth between Donald's whereabouts and interactions with the Moonlanders, and Webby and Dewey's pseudo-mystery plot as they try to figure out who's been blackmailing Donald. They had found letters addressed to Donald that said "Your life is a constant deluge of pain. If you want it to stop, pay up." They use the return address to track down the sender and it leads them to a counseling office, where they learn that Donald has been in anger management therapy since the triplets were born. The therapist, Jones, explains that "Donald came here to vent his frustration" as he gestures toward piles of ruined furniture. Dewey asks "if uncle Donald was⁵⁶ seeing you, why is he still the angriest guy we know?" Webby agrees, asking what Jones has done to help. Jones explains that he

⁵³ When the main six (Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Goofy, Daisy, Pluto) were more one-dimensional characters

⁵⁴ <https://www.disneyplus.com/video/41695fe8-9d2c-441a-a82b-da851356a7dd>

⁵⁵ due to a miscommunication between him and Della after she successfully got off the moon

⁵⁶ Dewey incorrectly assumes that Donald isn't going to therapy anymore

found the source of his anger. Donald's anger issues stem from a fear that the world is out to get him, and that no one understands him, quite literally. His tendency to lash out was wildly unfocused. Until you kids came along. He came to me, wanting to be the best parent he could. So he channeled that anger into protective instinct. Every outburst is Donald wanting to protect his family. He loves you so much the thought of anything bad happening to you *infuriates* him!

The point of view cuts back to Donald on the moon. The Moonlander general is explaining his battle tactics rather smugly. He admits that he's targeting Huey, Dewey, and Louie (as opposed to Scrooge, one of the bigger threats you'd have to neutralize before conquering Earth) because he'd rather "take out the children first, to break your spirit." Donald goes berserk and attacks the Moonlander general, who's taken by surprise at first but quickly overpowers Donald. Donald out-maneuvers him to try to send a transmission to Scrooge using a handheld communicator⁵⁷ and rides a shoddy, prototype rocket back to Earth as a last-minute escape route.

Donald first meets Daisy in *Louie's Eleven*. *Louie's Eleven* is an Oceans 11 spoof that chronicles Louie's heist: to get himself, Dewey, and the Three Caballeros⁵⁸ into an exclusive party. When Donald spies Daisy from across a room he stops suddenly, nearly running into Louie when he says "whoa, who's that?" Louie explains that she's the party planner and right-hand woman to Emma Glamour, the A-list celebrity who's hosting this party. Donald's job is to steal Daisy's stage pass. Once at the party, undercover, Donald starts tailing her. He follows her to the elevator, but hides behind the corner when he sees

⁵⁷ The static (and Donald's anxious rambling) makes the warning message indecipherable to Scrooge, once again evidence of Donald's chronic bad luck.

⁵⁸ First met in the 1942 Disney film *Saludos Amigos*. In 2017 they're introduced as "Donald's roommates from college that he's in a band with"

her roundhouse kick a vase in frustration. However, he seems more concerned than afraid. When the elevator doors open he springs forward and jumps into the elevator car with her. He's trying to swipe her ID card off her purse as discreetly as he can, but he keeps getting distracted and apologizing for getting in her space. She shrugs her coat off and Donald's eyes grow three sizes when he sees her outfit. He politely says "wow, nice dress", and she blushes when she says "you like it?", but she quickly recovers and says "of course you do, I made it myself" proudly. Donald is a captive listener, so she continues, revealing that she had hoped Glamour would see her dress and promote her so she can be a "real designer." She angrily realizes that that won't happen while she's stuck in an elevator, but sighs wistfully when she remembers that Glamour "never listens to [her] anyway." Donald empathizes, saying "Nobody listens to me either. They can't understand me⁵⁹." Daisy responds "Well that's weird, I understand you perfectly." They share a warm smile and she invites Donald to sing a song. Donald's singing voice is even rougher than his speaking voice, but as he continues to sing his voice morphs into a smooth tenor, revealing what *Daisy* hears, rather than everyone else. Daisy frees them from the broken elevator and they attack the hostage situation that's taking place at the party. A huge, threatening bloke approaches Daisy and Donald immediately springs to action and sees red. The muscled guy throws Donald off easily, which prompts Daisy to lose her head in a Donald-like manner. When she cracks a pot over the guy's head we hear the crowd gasp quietly, but Donald just smiles dumbly. The episode ends as the Three Caballeros take the stage, but when Donald starts singing everyone quits dancing save for Daisy, who wishes she could "listen to him all night."

⁵⁹ This isn't the first or the last example from *DT '17* of Donald being self-conscious about his speech impediment

The next time we see Daisy and Donald interact is in *New Gods on the Block*. Donald invites Daisy over for a date on his houseboat. Storkules⁶⁰, an old friend of Donald's, tries to crash, and even though Donald is beyond frustrated that Storkules won't leave he still blushes and gets fluttery whenever Daisy looks at him. Storkules eventually sabotages, and as Daisy is driving away from the mansion she's trying to rationalize her decision, saying "I won't be his mother. Teaching him to take the trash out, managing his playdates with his weird friends. Oh, but he is cute and I feel like I can be myself around him...no! You do not need to fall for other men who need saving!" She hears a roar and checks her rearview mirror. She sees a Titan storming toward McDuck manor, and she promptly turns her car around. When she gets back and realizes that Donald (and Della and Storkules) have been eaten by Kronos, she screams "you killed my boyfriend!" at the Titan. From within the belly of the beast she hears Donald say "boyfriend? Oh boy oh boy oh boy!" Daisy continues screeching at Kronos and driving her car into his feet while Storkules and Donald watch from within. Storkules asks Donald "What godly powers is she using to keep the beast at bay?" Donald says that it's "all Daisy," and Storkules mutters "Zounds." Donald gets to kiss Daisy at the close of the episode too, even though he's covered in Titan spit.

Analysis

As previously established, mental illnesses still carry a significant amount of stigma and most who suffer from a mental illness agree that the stigma is worse than the actual illness (Wahl 99). It should come as no surprise that Donald fell in love with the

⁶⁰ The DuckTales universe equivalent of Hercules

first person who was able to see past his speech impediment and occasional angry outbursts.

In addition, though Donald would technically fall under the "fun single dad" character outlined in *Why are All the Cartoon Mothers Dead*, Donald breaks form in that he's not really a "fun" dad. He's admitted that he's guilty of "getting a bit overprotective"⁶¹, and this has only grown more evident with Della around. Della is the parent who okayed Dewey's ride on the "ferris wheel of death", even saying "sounds fun!" As Donald put time and energy into raising the boys he's always focused on their well-being first. This isn't to suggest that the other single cartoon dads don't work hard, but Donald embraced both maternal and paternal roles as enthusiastically as he could: he cooked, cleaned, sewed, went to work, he even spent hours incubating the eggs before they hatched. He wasn't necessarily *proficient* at all of these tasks, but he put forth effort each time and the boys recognized it more as they grew. I think that this could also be indicative of the greater paradigm shift we're seeing around gender. People are coming around to the idea that gender-expansive education is good for everyone, even those who aren't in the LGBTQ+ community, and it's certainly true for Donald. It probably would have been harder for Donald to get the help he needed to raise the boys if he had to fight against people who promoted ideas like "incubating eggs is a *women's* job."

I think these new details about Donald enhance the character in ways that make sense canonically and cleverly. Though this mental health "representation" isn't as direct as other instances in the show, I think that the openness with which Donald's therapy is discussed and the bumpy yet forgiving interactions between him and Daisy are positive steps.

⁶¹ Dewey sputters sarcastically after Donald says this

⁶²Penny

Lieutenant Penumbra, or Penny, is the leader of the Moonlander army and second in command to Lunar⁶³. Penumbra prides herself on her warrior status and noble duties, and as such had a difficult time adjusting to civilian life on earth after the Moonlander uprising fell apart. All of the other Moonlanders are enjoying various earth luxuries and doing their best to acclimate to the local culture, but Penumbra refuses to engage positively with any earthlings, even Della. The events of "They put a Moonlander on the Earth" mostly consist of Dewey and Webby attempting to tackle Penumbra's soldier-during-peacetime discomfort by taking her to the pier. Penny reluctantly agrees to accompany them only after Della, Gibbous, Webby, and the other Moonlanders who stayed on Earth insinuate that she's afraid to try new things and engage in Earth culture. She groans reluctantly, "I must conquer this, *earth fun*."

The conquering of the Earth fun does not go well. Penny humors Webby for most of the day, but after falling repeatedly on roller skates (while mincing oaths under her breath) Penny states "Well, this has been a very enlightening lesson on earth fun, but now I think you should take me back to the hangar." Webby's disappointed, asking if Penny is "giving up." Penny stutters, "No, I'm not giving up. I have learned that I was right and the other Moonlanders were wrong and Earth is the worst and I'm ready to leave."

Webby: I know change is hard, but...

Penny: I don't need to change! I'm perfect on the mighty planet moon! I was the fearless protector of my people for years, and I can't do that here!

⁶² This is really more of a digression or an aside since only one episode bears mentioning, but I figured it'd fit here best.

⁶³ Ruler of the moon, hater of Scrooge

Webby: Is that what you're afraid of?

Penny looks startled at first before growling "I fear nothing." Webby's eyes well up, and Penny shouts in frustration as she throws the roller skates into the bay.

Webby: For most of my life I stayed in the mansion and studied. I was Webby: expert on all things McDuck. But then I left. Got out into the world. And the world was big. I didn't really fit in or even know where to start. Sometimes I wished I could go back to the mansion, where I knew exactly who I was. But the guys, my family, showed me new and amazing and wonderful things. I'm still 'mansion Webby', but I'm also 'world-explorer' Webby, and best-friend Webby. You will always be Moon Penumbra, and if you give it a chance I bet you'd be a pretty great Earth Penumbra.

Penumbra finally feels settled in on Earth after heroically saving Dewey and Webby from a compromised Ferris Wheel that Glomgold's running on the pier. When Penny reaches the gondola Dewey and Webby are trapped in, Webby starts apologizing to Penny for pushing her to do things she wasn't comfortable with yet, but Penny just laughs and says "are you kidding? I'm having a barrel of monkeys! You're much smaller than the Moonlanders and the beasts on the moon were never this big! This is my kind of Earth fun!" Before the episode ends we see Penny refer to Della as her best friend, accept Launchpad's offer to help her dismantle her aircraft, and scoop Dewey and Webby up under each arm as she carries them to the limo.

An aside

Della attempts to convince Penny to stay on Earth longer in the opener, citing that she "hasn't experienced any of earth yet." Penny assures her that that is untrue, stating that she "went on a date for earth coffee" (with Launchpad, of all people). It's an

incredibly awkward date, and Launchpad gets worried that he and Penny "have to be arch enemies now", but Penny reassures him that she just "doesn't wish to date an earth...male." Launchpad is relieved to hear this and all is well. In addition, one of the storyboard artists from this episode took to Twitter after the episode aired to confirm that that line of dialogue confirms that Penumbra is LGBTQ+, but that she wished it was "more overt" and that "we should always continue to ask for better [representation]." Representation for the "T" and the "+" portions of the queer community are even more meager, usually "absent" or "tragic" (Kelso), and as previously established, perpetuating misinformation about a vulnerable minority does 100% of the population a major disservice.

In close

Seeing a DuckTales episode that prominently features themes of identity reconciliation that doesn't feature one of the original protagonists was quite interesting, but it's still a bit disheartening to realize that LGBTQ representation is still something that has to be fought for, rather than being regarded as an extension of the human experience. We've only recently begun to understand the psychological burden that comes with minority⁶⁴ stress, and the fact that this science coexists with lazily drawn characters and queerbaiting is somewhat discouraging. However, the fact that the artist was adamant that we should "ask for better" implies that it was censorship choice, not a storyboard choice, and most would probably agree that placing young diverse artists in charge is a good way to spark change.

⁶⁴ racial minorities, gender minorities, sexual orientation minorities, etc

In addition, I think that the struggles Penny faces, though not exactly a perfect parallel for the struggles that 8-12 year old children face, are nonetheless still relevant and important for children to witness. Children learn from their parents via participant observation constantly, and seeing an adult character deal with their frustration and the consequences of the ways they've exercised that frustration humanizes authority figures and allows children to engage in critical thought processes about emotional maturity in a safe way.

Huey

Huey is the oldest triplet (by 3 seconds) and takes pride in being so. He wants to be a "distinguished, responsible eldest sibling", and he loves facts and logic. He carries the Junior Woodchuck Guidebook (JWG) everywhere he goes, both for quick reference and for soothing himself during moments of anxiety. This is a deviation from 1987, where the three boys wore identical outfits (in red, blue, and green, of course) and were voiced by the same actor as well. The triplets in 2017 have different styles, haircuts, voices, habits, etc, though they're still recognizable as members of the Duck family⁶⁵. As such, this chapter won't be set up like the chapters on gender, as I feel a comparison between one-dimensional '87 Huey and fully-fleshed out '17 Huey wouldn't be particularly helpful (because there's very little from '87 to go on). Furthermore, the other two triplets won't be getting their own chapter either, for reasons stated below.

The show ended with the close of season 3⁶⁶. The showrunners have stated that the overarching season 1 arc was for Dewey, the season 2 arc was for Louie, and the

⁶⁵ a few examples: Huey has an anger streak to rival Donald. Dewey rushes impulsively into everything, like Della. Louie loves gold, like Scrooge.

⁶⁶ As good as this show was, it wasn't good enough to break the 65 episode rule

season 3 arc is for Huey. Dewey's underlying lesson/mission was primarily about discovering Della, and Louie needed to learn about responsibility and accountability. Louie's arc seemed like pretty standard material when your target audience consists of people who still need instruction on socialization, and Dewey's arc was important for Della's eventual return, but I feel that Huey's arc was most deserving of page space because it began to tackle relevant themes not often addressed in children's programming, like emotional regulation, anxiety, and how to shift ones thoughts from negativity to positivity.

As such, this chapter will explore how the writers have begun recrafting the oldest triplet, what that means in *DuckTales* context, and what it *could* mean in children's cartoons.

Huey 2017

The only thing that marks Huey's dreamscape as a dream in "Nightmare on Killmotor Hill" is the fact that he's dreamt himself absurdly long legs. The triplets bedroom looks exactly the same and there's no magical mishaps to be had like in the other dreamscapes. Huey only wants to be a "tall, distinguished, mature oldest sibling." When Dewey incredulously asks "in what world does that description equal this?" Huey angrily retorts "I'm not good at imagination stuff, okay?" Huey asks the crew a bit smugly if they'd "like a jar of pickles...off the *top* shelf" before proceeding to the next dreamscape.

The events of "The Split Sword of Swanstantine" take place after the reveal of FOWL's plot against Scrooge. The episode begins in media res and the group is forced to separate early on as they're thrust into the middle of the action. Huey ends up pairing with

Lena in order to procure the blade of the sword, and Steelbeak attempts to steal it from them. Before Huey is attacked, Lena snaps her fingers and time freezes. She explains that she's placed them within Huey's mindscape while the landscape is temporarily stopped. Huey excitedly realizes that they "have all the time in the world" and that he could "analyze every *possible* scenario." Lena sarcastically replies that she was "thinking more about where to punch him." Huey disagrees, saying that "fighting is chaos" and that they "can't give in to the animal within." Huey's quest for the "perfect plan" inspires him to run "infinite simulations" in the mindscape, including a lot of absurd schemes like stage-crying, appealing to Steelbeak's nonexistent higher standards, and elaborate disguises. Lena rolls her eyes, eventually reminding Huey that "there's no thinking around this, you're going to have to face him head on." Huey begins to pull at his feathers as he says frustratedly "No! I can figure this out! Think smarter, Huey! You can do this! Ugh!" As he begins to spiral, a huge metal door like a vault manifests behind Huey. A sign made of construction paper and markers has been taped to the front: it reads "The Duke of Making a Mess, DO NOT OPEN." Despite Huey's protests, Lena opens the door. A rabid, nonverbal version of Huey speeds out and stares down real Huey, who looks terrified. Real Huey promptly shoves him behind the door once again. Lena, impressed and incredulous, says "that's your true strength! You have that hiding inside you?" The following exchange takes place.

Huey: Deep down. Where it belongs. The duke of making a mess is the part of me that's pure emotion. It gets in the way of my thinking. It's against everything I stand for.

Lena: Take it from someone who used to be Magica's shadow. You can't ignore the parts of yourself you don't like. Even the parts you're afraid of. You've gotta own them.

Huey: But he's pure, chaotic rage!

Lena: And you are pure, frustrating order! Think of what you two could do together! If anyone could handle that thing it's you. Now go!

Huey opens Duke's door and dramatically says "remember me as I was." Lena shakes her head, rolls her eyes, and as she snaps the time back Huey pulls a Donald on Steelbeak: unbridled fury with Tasmanian Devil-like speed and absurdity. "Real" Huey panics a bit, afraid that he "can't control him." Lena reassures him that he can because "he is you! Channel your inner strength!"

We cut back to the mindscape where Huey approaches Duke and offers a hand to shake, making a concession. When the scene cuts back to reality Huey's fighting style is still nonsensical but there's a connectedness and grace that wasn't there previously. He's able to snatch the sword from Steelbeak and says "I will be holding on to this" in an authoritative voice. Steelbeak, impressed and confused, just says "that kid's an animal!" Lena says to Huey that she'll "cherish this", as "that was the most beautiful butt kicking [she'd] ever seen."

The "Challenge of the Senior Junior Woodchucks" was when Huey competed against Violet for the title of "Senior Woodchuck." Only one woodchuck gets promoted to seniority each season, and in the event that two kids qualify they'll go head-to-head in a wilderness survival style race. Huey's confidence starts out high (he mouths all the woodchuck mottos and creeds with Launchpad during the opening formalities), but it

quickly peters out when the majority of the parents assembled cheer for Violet, not him. Before he's even begun the race he's trying not to panic, saying "If I'm not the best Junior Woodchuck then who am I?" When Launchpad reveals that use of the JWG is not allowed Huey freaks out even more, trying not to shriek about how he *needs* a big book of rules. Violet consistently bests him and is leading in the race, and while taking cover from a storm Huey gets lost. His training kicks in, quoting the JW rule about retracing one's steps in the event of getting lost, but then he realizes that retracing his steps would put him farther behind. He starts to stutter in dread: "no guidebook no map no clue no guidebook no hopes no chance no GUIDEbook!" He's able to pass Violet when she encounters her own obstacles, but his excitement doesn't outweigh his guilt, because of JWG rule #162: "A woodchuck always looks out for their fellow woodchuck, whatever the cost." She catches up with him and it's neck and neck as they approach the finish. Huey's muttering under his breath about how "ol Huey put in the time" and "Huey HAS to be Senior Woodchuck" so he loses his concentration. He slips and nearly falls, and when Violet catches him she quotes JWG rule #162. Huey says "you really are a better woodchuck than me" with tears in his eyes. "I left you behind. I didn't just fail the challenge, I failed my oath. I don't deserve this", he says gesturing to his badges. Violet shows Huey her "failure badge" and reassures him that "failure is a logical and natural conclusion of trying something new", and offers to finish the race together in a tie. Huey's adamant that she's earned it, and is content with the fact that he hasn't *yet*⁶⁷.

"Astro BOYD" chronicles the time Huey's Type-A nature led him to befriend a robot. The episode opens with Huey on a Junior Woodchucks camping trip as he

⁶⁷ When Launchpad announces that Violet is the Senior Woodchuck, Della (in full Woodchuck regalia) *cannot* believe that her boy didn't win, but Huey reassures her that he's okay and learned a lot from the experience.

meticulously explains the exact ratios that will create "the perfect smore" when one of his peers mocks him, calling him "Hue-bot" and mimicking a robot, attacking Huey's fastidiousness. The other kids follow the bully away and Huey glumly gathers the supplies that got knocked over as another kid approaches him and comments on the fact that the sticks in Huey's arms are "cut exactly to Woodchuck guidelines." Huey sighs "Thank you" in an exasperated tone. The boy introduces himself as "Boyd, a definitely real boy⁶⁸." Huey chuckles and introduces himself, adding "I'm also real." Boyd immediately asks Huey if he'd like to be friends. Huey agrees, remarking on how easy that interaction was before asking Boyd to start the campfire. When Huey begins to quote a Woodchuck Guidebook rule and realizes that Boyd can recite it with him he's even more enthralled by how much they seem to have in common. Huey says "there's nothing wrong with doing things exactly the right way. It doesn't make us robots. We're just kids⁶⁹. You get me, Boyd. We're a rare breed, you and I." The phrase "rare breed" triggers an old memory in Boyd's hard drive that he doesn't recognize and he freaks out, causing his laser vision to activate, which in turn starts a small forest fire.

Huey brings him to Dr. Gearloose, who recognizes the machine and tells Boyd and Huey of Boyd's origins. After Gearloose concludes that they'll have to travel to Toyolk⁷⁰ to visit his old mentor (Dr. Akita) he suggests Fenton bring the Gizmoduck suit along, as protection against Boyd. Huey asks "aren't you overreacting? Look at him. He's a kid, like me, just wired a little differently." Gearloose says nothing of this, only continuing to dehumanize Boyd by referring to him as an "it."

⁶⁸ Spoiler alert: He's not. He's a hyper intelligent droid who was built by Gearloose and hijacked by Beaks.

⁶⁹ Boyd nods affirmatively before using his laser vision to start the campfire.

⁷⁰ Other silly in-universe puns include: Mozambeak, Istanbird, Ithaquack, Eagleslavia...

They break into Dr. Akita's old lab and Gearloose begins to wire Boyd up to various computers in order to sort out the corrupted files on his hard drive. Boyd looks concerned, so Huey says "No need to be scared. Just a normal checkup where we jam wires into your computer brain to view your digital memories and...okay, this is not even a little normal."

The next time a phrase triggers a panic in Boyd, Huey notices before anything gets accidentally destroyed and says in a calm voice "Oh man, you're glitching again. Let's get you back to the lab, hey?" When they realize that they have no idea where the lab is and that Toyolk is *massive* Huey starts to worry, but Boyd enthusiastically reminds him that this is a chance to do "what a Junior Woodchuck would do: experience the local culture!" Huey thinks that getting Boyd back to the lab and checked out by Dr. Gearloose is more important, but Boyd convinces him to explore when he suggests that they take notes and analyze them later. A montage of the two boys happily enjoying ramen, mochi, cherry blossom trees, and the railway follows. They walk through a park while Huey rattles off facts about the Ancient Samurai when he stops himself and asks Boyd "are you sure you're not bored? Usually my brothers are begging me to stop." Boyd reassures him animatedly that that's not the case.

Later, while fondly reflecting on their day, Huey says to Boyd "I don't think you're a killer robot. You're just a kid." Boyd responds "That's the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me." Boyd then heroically saves Huey by activating previously unseen rockets in his feet⁷¹. They reconnect with Fenton and Gearloose in the city and Gearloose instructs Huey to step away from Boyd because he "doesn't know what he's capable of." Huey retorts back "Yes I do! He saved me!" Fenton, Gearloose, and the attending police officer

⁷¹ A clear reference to the Japanese manga "Astro Boy"

argue about how to deal with Boyd, paying no attention to the sad boy and the frustrated boy before them. Huey eventually steps forward and shoots "Stop trying to make Boyd something he's not! He didn't glitch once while we were having fun. He was just being a kid!" Boyd steps behind Huey and adds "Dr. Gearloose, please! I'm a definitely real boy! Why can't you see that?" when Gearloose reveals that when he said "I can fix you so that you won't glitch again" earlier in the narrative what he *meant* was "complete and total shutdown." When Huey puts this together he jumps on Gearloose and yells at Boyd to run, but Boyd panics and shuts down. His shut down allows Dr. Akita to overtake Boyd's controls and Dr. Akita begins attacking the city via Boyd. Gizmoduck springs to defend, but is quickly outmatched by Boyd's computer-speed reaction time. It's only after Gearloose stands before Boyd, unarmed and vocally affirming the fact Boyd is a definitely real boy that Boyd is able to snap out of Dr. Akita's control. When Boyd returns to the ground he's greeted by Huey, who high-fives him and congratulates him on "choosing his own programming." Huey encourages Boyd to pick his own real name. Boyd suggests "B.O.Y.D⁷².: Be only yourself, dude!" Gearloose cleans up Boyd's hard drive and the four of them return home.

Analysis

In addition to the episodes summarized I thought it was also worth mentioning that (one of) Huey's scientific idols is Fenton Crackshell-Cabrera/Gizmoduck. Huey's dressed up as Gizmoduck for Halloween, helped Fenton catalogue the different gizmos on the suit, and even helped set him up on a date with another scientist. Fenton, in addition to being the intern/comic relief of the sci-fi portions of this show, is also a

⁷² A parody of the name Beaks gave him originally: **BeaksOptimisticYouthDroid**

thoughtful and decent guy. He always thinks of others first and loves doing superhero work with the Gizmoduck suit even though he frequently gets injured because he loves to help people. I think this tie between them has helped foster Huey's sensitive side a bit, which I appreciate and think makes sense narratively.

When I first watched *Astro Boyd* and *Split Sword* I briefly wondered whether the writers were attempting to code Huey as on the Autism Spectrum. Though I couldn't find any dialogue directly from showrunners that confirmed or denied this and there's still so much left to be desired on the scholarship surrounding ASD, I watched these episodes with two close friends who both have varying degrees of ASD and they too wondered this, given the number of things they had in common with Huey. They specifically cited the "just wired a bit differently" rhetoric in *Astro Boyd*, and the visual of Huey fearfully confronting the Duke brought my friend to tears⁷³. I'm not trying to propose that '17 Huey has ASD, but I do think it's worth mentioning that the ways the writers drew up '17 Huey allowed underrepresented individuals to feel seen in a positive fashion. In addition to ASD, Huey's "tics" could also be relatable to kids who struggle with emotional regulation or have ADHD. In fact, the fact that Huey doesn't have a "diagnosis" allows more children who don't feel "normal" or "correct" to identify with him and see themselves represented in an empowering way.

The early 21st century model for autism (in television) was often used as an easy way to invite conflict, humor, or alienation. Sheldon Cooper's (*The Big Bang Theory*) specificity about his schedule or the way he fumbles "normal" social interactions is normally the butt of the joke, or the source of conflict. Dr. Brennan from *Bones* gets

⁷³ "If Huey can be brave enough to look his volatile emotions in the face *and* smart enough to understand that volatile emotions aren't ugly or scary, then I guess I can too." ~my friend

utilized similarly. In addition, Spock (*Star Trek*) and Sherlock (*Sherlock*) often get headcanon'd/categorized with characters who have ASD or other social hurdles, and the defining feature for them is that they are considered distinct from the rest of "humanity", Spock because he literally isn't human and Sherlock because his mind works too fast and machine-like for most people to keep up (Oren 244). This fails to recognize the wide variety of ways that autism manifests, the prevalence of autism in girls, or the inherent humanity in a group of people. Clearly autistic folks deserve better representation: characters who are empowered, human, believable/accurate, and just as three dimensional as their fellow protagonists⁷⁴.

Regardless of whether it was the author's intent to code Huey as someone with ASD is unknown, but I want to thank them nevertheless for this affirmative portrayal. "We read to know we're not alone", and positive representation can sometimes literally mean the world, especially in hypercommericalized and capitalist settings like the West.

In close

The last 30 years have changed drastically for Americans who have a mental illness, most notably in public discussion, awareness, and affirmation. Though the (mental health based) changes seen in *DuckTales* are entertaining to watch and have had a mostly positive outcome on the narrative and the viewership, asking for good representation is (and probably will continue to be) a constant struggle. The narrative shifts described here are modern-izing without being alienating or sloppy. Though nothing is executed *perfectly*, I think that *DuckTales 2017*, along with other recent

⁷⁴ said another way: autistic characters with defining features *other* than their autism

projects in children's entertainment⁷⁵, are doing their best in aiding the upward trend of positivity in mental wellness. Just acceptance certainly isn't the final goal, but it's a fruitful and creative start to an issue that needs/has needed addressing.

The Reboot "Legacy"?

The challenge with any reboot, as previously established in the media, is to create something "new" without alienating old fans. If the more direct character changes were done in an attempt to draw in a new, more culturally sensitive group of viewers, then most of the creative decisions that were made with the old(er) fans in mind come in the form of easter eggs and deep-cut Disney references. *DT '17* averages around 3-5 significant visual callbacks/easter eggs per episode, and though it's certainly evidence that the showrunners have "done their homework"⁷⁶ and devoted adequate care and thought to the source material, it's frustrating to see creative directors opt in favor of cheaply manufactured nostalgia instead of bold narrative strokes. Of course, a reboot literally can't often get "re-boot" without the support of the original fans, and as far as reboots go, *DuckTales '17* sets a high bar for maintaining these somewhat separate interests. However, given the nature of the last 30 years (and specifically the last four or so), I think new fans can and should request and expect more narrative representation: for neurodivergent individuals, gender-nonconforming individuals, and more. Something not mentioned in this project is the fact that Scrooge's accountant, Fenton, was white in 1987 and is Latino in 2017. This is reflected in the color of the character's feathers and the voice actor. Though this is most certainly something to be excited about, Fenton didn't

⁷⁵ see *Steven Universe* and *The Owl House* for more positive LGBTQ representation

⁷⁶ and it's entertaining to play "spot the reference" as a fan of both *DuckTales* and older Disney content

get his own chapter because that's the bulk of the racial diversification that took place between '87 and '17.

Conclusion

DuckTales might be shelved along with the myriad of other rebooted shows that aired in the 2010s⁷⁷, but I hope that it's remembered as more than a "rehash." It takes a degree of grace and creativity to repackaging an old and well-loved thing into something that's fresh but recognizable. I hesitate to shower praise on a corporation that's responsible for such an incredible amount of capitalistic indoctrination, but this show also stands on the shoulders of other recent cartoons that broke conventional Disney molds because those showrunners and artists weren't willing to budge from their creative vision.

The changes exhibited in *DuckTales 2017*, when compared to its predecessor(s) *DuckTales 1987* and other late 20th century Disney canon firmly establish it as of the 21st century and for 21st century children. In addition, the changes documented here reflect a greater societal change in recent history, namely greater understanding and advocacy for mental illnesses and true gender equality. However, since Disney is still a huge corporate and capitalist presence in the Western world, it's unlikely that every narrative decision will land *perfectly* among old and new fans alike. But given the circumstances, I think *DuckTales 2017* has essentially set the standard in children's cartoons and in reboots for their graceful and creative balance among nostalgia, social awareness, and fun.

⁷⁷ It looks like the sociologist who coined the "nostalgia pendulum" theory may have been on to something, given the trend of nostalgic or rebooted shows: *Stranger Things*, *Kobra Kai*, *GLOW*, *Wonder Woman 1984*, etc

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to get this across, so believe me I'm the first to say I wish it was more overt. But yes,

since Penny calls everything on Earth 'Earth ---' her saying 'Earth...Male' is specifically

saying 'Men'. She's a lesbian. I really appreciate that this means something to people and

that so many people were able to catch the intention immediately!! But I also want to be

clear, I want, and we should always continue to ask for, better. Let's all keep working for

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