Chapter 12
Feminist Discourse in Animated Films

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ABSTRACT

Animation in cinema, which appeals not only to children but also adults, is one of the most important film genres that has existed since the birth of cinema. As in the other genres of cinema, feminist discourse formed through female characters is remarkable in animated cinema. This study aimed to present the feminist narratives in animated films, one of the most popular film genres today. In this context, computer-animated fantasy film *Brave*, regarded as one of the feminist films in animation cinema, was included in the scope of the study and was investigated in line with feminist film theory. The study revealed, as opposed to the powerless and passive woman image imposed by the patriarchal structure in society, the female characters in this film were represented as strong, brave, and free as designed by feminist ideology.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema, the system of visual and auditory symbols, is a multifaceted instrument that has a significant place in our lives due to its connection to many fields such as communication, art, propaganda, expression and language. Since 1895, the year when it was invented, cinema has continuously developed and various genres have emerged in due course in parallel with these developments. Ersümer attributes the emergence of cinema genres to commercial reasons. According to Ersümer (2013:
Feminist Discourse in Animated Films

175), any cinema genre is originally produced to reach the widest audience and provide the highest income for commercial purposes. One of the most important of these genres in cinema is animation.

Animation cinema first began in 1908 with “Fantasmagorie” produced by Emile Cohl (1857-1938). In 1926, German Lotte Reiniger (1899-1981), pioneer of shadow play, created world’s earliest feature-length animated film “Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed” (Adventures of Prince Ahmet) and achieved great success. The world-renowned Mickey Mouse emerged in 1928 (Kemp, 2014: 144). Animation cinema has developed as a genre in American cinema especially after Mickey Mouse and later Disney studios have mainly focused on shooting animation films. Disney has single-handedly dominated the animation industry for about 30 years (Gökçearslan, 2010: 353). According to Nowell-Smith, animation was a purely international concept up until World War I and the U.S. producers dominated the world market after 1915. Although there were some local attempts in Europe at that time, the 1920s remained under the domination of heroes in American series (2003: 95). The small animation studio founded by American Walter Elias Disney in California in 1923 is the basis of today’s world-famous Walt Disney studios. Kemp describes the historical adventure of the American Walt Disney cartoon world (2014: 144-146):

In the golden age of Disney, Walt Disney and his “Nine Old Men” (key animators) have consistently worked to produce animations for large audiences and set an example for feature-length animated films in the Western cinema. Between 1937 and 1942, they released Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Pinocchio (1940), Fantasia (1940), Dumbo (1941) and Bambi (1942). Each one of these films was a cultural landmark and a pioneer in its own way. Walt Disney believed that the animation should provide a space for full-length storytelling, real emotions and artistic expressions and manifestation rather than short-length films (featurettes). In the 1930s, this insight of Disney’s was regarded to be frenzied. However, even today, animation cinema is still regarded as an art form not only for children but also for adults. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was the first long animated film in Hollywood and the first film to be distributed worldwide.

Walt Disney’s animations reflect the ideology of the time in which they were produced. Disney is also known to keep up with the changing cultural climate. No matter how advanced Disney animations are in artistic terms, analyses of Disney animations from the past to the present show that Disney has not been able to escape being an ideological instrument. As a company that markets entertainment, it can be argued that Walt Disney is a means for commercial production as well as ideology transmission. For example, there is no conflict in Disney products and the villains
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