Discuss the Representation of Gender in Disney Fairy Tale (Princess) Feature Films

Representation is the ideology and themes that a text presents to an audience. These representations are used so that the producer of a text can create a message or ‘reading’ in order for the audience to make readings for themselves – oppositional (disagreeing), negotiated (in-between) or preferred (agreeing). In Peter Wall’s ‘AS Media Studies’, representation is considered to be “the media’s interpretation of the world”. Gender is the social characteristics found amongst the sexes, femininity (traditionally about females) or masculinity (traditionally about males). ‘Gender; a Sociological Reading’ believes that gender is a “more critical analysis of sex roles”. Texts can represent gender in different ways that can sometimes be offensive or controversial, considered to be ‘sexist’ or stereotypical. Disney’s Princess film collection demonstrates different representations of both male (through princes) and female (through princess). These ideas have evolved through time, from being what is considered to be - archetypal to counter typical- which is why I will focus my essay on the oldest and the newest Disney Princess films – ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarves’ (1937) and ‘Frozen’ (2013). I will analyse these texts to discuss representation of both genders, including the issues of stereotypes, countertypes, messages and readings as well as constructions.

Biography of the Texts

Walt Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarves

‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarves’ was Disney’s “most advanced aesthetic use in its first full length, Technicolor, sound-synchronised animated cartoon feature”, according to ‘An introduction to Film studies’, released in 1937. Produced by Walt Disney and directed by numerous directors including Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey and Perce Pearce, the production was written by several writers including Ted Sears and starred only voice actors: Adriana Caselotti as Snow White and Lucille La Verne as the Evil Queen/Old Hag/Witch.

Nominated for ‘Best Musical Score’ for “Some Day My Prince Will Come” and winner of an ‘Oscar’ award, Snow White is considered Disney’s biggest success. ‘The New York Times’ declared the film to be “Sheer fantasy, delightful, gay and altogether captivating” on January 14, 1938 claiming that “the amazing technical crew have outdone themselves”.

Frozen

The latest instalment in the ‘Disney Princess’ franchise, only being released in 2013, uses Many famous stars to voice in the feature, including Kristen Bell as Ana, Idina Menzel as Elsa, Jonathan Groff as Kristoff and Josh Gad as Olaf. The film was written and directed by Jennifer Lee and produced by Peter Del Vecho.

The film won ‘Best Animated Feature’ at ‘The Golden Globe Awards’ as well as winning two ‘Academy Awards’ for ‘Best Animated Feature’ and ‘Best Original Song’, a ‘BAFTA’ FOR ‘Best Animated Film’, five ‘Annie Awards’ and two ‘Critics Choice Awards’ for ‘Best Animated Feature’ and ‘Best Original Song’. Frozen has received widespread critical acclaim; The Telegraph said that Frozen “is just squeezably lovely: another example of the kind of nostalgic yet forward-thinking storytelling that has become the studio’s hallmark since John Lasseter’s arrival from Pixar in the mid-2000s.”