



The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence. Henry A. Giroux. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999. 187 pp.

MARIA D. BONHAM

MATTHEW KAPELL

University of Michigan at Dearborn

MariaDBon@aol.com and kapellm@umd.umich.edu

Henry A. Giroux has become a well-known and noted cultural critic, working on mass media as well as feminist and postmodern theory. And, by and large, his work has been insightful and interesting. Therefore, it is somewhat of a surprise that his newest book, *The Mouse that Roared*, should be such a readable but, in the final analysis, unfulfilling work.

Giroux states that his goal is to "offer readers a set of tools that will . . . enable them to inquire into what Disney represents . . . and to shatter commonsense assumptions regarding Disney's claim to both promoting fun and games and protecting childhood innocence" (p. 8). He further indicates that his desire is to make large conglomerate corporations such as Disney accountable in public discourse for their impact on and monopoly over the mass media images that are part of their attempt to turn us and our children into consumers of their products.

The literary style that Giroux employs to write *The Mouse that Roared* makes the book a quick, easy read. Indeed, his dispelling of "commonsense" notions about the understanding of Disney and its motives is readily available for the "common" person. The positive side of the use of this particular style of discourse and the audience to which the book is addressed lies in the refreshing change from cultural critics and other academics "preaching to the choir." In this book Giroux offers the "average" person an opportunity to understand the Disney "canon," which is what most of us who criticize it would like: for the public to understand and maybe protest as well. If reading this book would help them to understand why they feel this way, it would be well worth the effort. Although we are not sure that the general populous is ready to accept these critiques and analyses, it is impossible to fault Giroux for trying.

Yet writing for a general readership becomes problematic when Giroux's analysis is usually very brief, touching only on obvious surface details of the Disney products he claims to be criticizing. His examination of such films as *The Little Mermaid* or *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* cover only about a page each and would be rejected in a basic



composition course for their lack of a deep reading of these provocative Disney texts.

Giroux implies that the messages conveyed in Disney's animated films, as well as every other media product of the Disney Corporation, are important socializing agents on the identities of young children. However, because of the paucity of analysis, we are left wondering just what these messages might be. He further limits himself to one-sided analyses and rarely presents alternate views. Not offering such alternative analyses runs counter to Giroux's argument in the introduction of the text, which states that in the past cultural critics have "argued . . . for a particular interpretation of what Disney culture represents and failed . . . to consider other possible readings" (p. 8). Indeed, if Giroux insists on criticizing his predecessors for offering paradigmatically laden analyses, it is necessary for him to break away from that same method of analysis.

Overall, this book offers some excellent background information. It would be a good book for introducing students to cultural criticism, Disney, and criticism of Disney as a cultural purveyor. However, it would not have hurt the text to expand on some of the ideas that are put forth in that initial introductory chapter. When confronting a hegemonic mass media powerhouse like Disney, it is a flaw of any analysis to fail in a deep reading of such a firm's products. But it is especially difficult when a book makes a claim that it will offer such analysis and then fails to do so. As a result, *The Mouse that Roared* doesn't roar as all but, instead, begins announcing that it will do so and ends going out like a lamb.

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