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*Snow White's censors: The non-domestic reception and censorship of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* with a case study on the Low Countries*

Daniël Biltereyst

The popularity of “Snow White” is certainly a reflection of the better tastes and desires of American audiences.¹

Although *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand, 1937) is now conceived as a landmark movie in the history of modern children's cultural industry and its exploitation of childhood innocence, it remains remarkable to observe how Walt Disney's first feature-length cartoon did not receive the unproblematic reception the company had hoped for at the time of its release.² Whereas *Snow White* did not encounter real problems in getting a seal of approval from Hollywood's internal censorship system, after which it became an immediate international box-office hit, the feature's release outside the United States was not completely trouble-free, especially among foreign censorship boards.

This chapter examines *Snow White's* non-domestic reception and censorship by concentrating on a case study around its censorial problems

and obstacles in Belgium and the Netherlands, aka the Low Countries. As Annette Kuhn argued in her analysis of the British reception of the movie, *Snow White* faced the problem that ‘it was seen as both a frightening film and as a film suitable for children’.³ In Britain, but also in the Low Countries and in other foreign territories, local censorship boards struggled with the possible impact of particular scenes on children’s imagination, in particular those where Snow White flees into the forest that produces monstrous trees, or where the Queen transforms into a witch. Some censorship boards like those in Belgium, Britain and the Netherlands saw the movie as dangerous and even nightmarish for children so that they imposed age restrictions, in some cases even combined with cuts in order to allow children to see Disney’s intensively hyped cinematic fairy tale.⁴

This chapter starts with a short introduction to *Snow White*’s preliminary censorial experiences with Hollywood’s Production Code Administration (PCA, 1934–68), an organization that did its best to consolidate all of the possible censorship problems from the United State and the rest of the world, so that American films could play everywhere. Before zooming in on the movie’s censorship in the Low Countries, I examine what happened in Britain and in a few other European countries where the movie was shown before being released in Belgium and the Netherlands. Besides being a comparative study on cross-national/cultural differences in the reception and censorship of the movie, this chapter uses *Snow White* as a case study in the context of wider discussions around Hollywood’s hegemony and its conflictual relationship with Europe. One of the hypotheses, which is part of a larger project on the historical reception and censorship of US movies in the old continent, is that many European censors were probably less tolerant, liberal or progressive than the ones in the United States – hence reconceptualizing common knowledge on US and Hollywood’s internal censorship as being paternalist, conservative or more restrictive than their European counterparts.

‘I cannot see (...) any censorable parts in the picture’

As with all motion pictures produced by members of the Motion Picture Producers & Distributors of America (MPPDA), Walt Disney Productions submitted the project to produce a feature cartoon based on Grimms’ fairy tale to the PCA.⁵ PCA, often referred to as the Breen Office (after its head, Joseph I. Breen), operated as the internal board for members of the MPPDA, which required producers and filmmakers to submit their projects for approval, often including the supervision of treatments, detailed screenplays with dialogue and the final film, eventually leading

to the PCA's seal.⁶ The first traces of the correspondence between Disney and the PCA goes back to early March 1936, when the script was not yet completed, but when the company suggested to 'spend a few moments with Walt discussing the picture from the censorship angle'.⁷ Although *Snow White* was presented by William E. Garity from the Disney company as 'an experiment on our part', he argued that he could not see 'any censorable parts in the picture'.⁸

Looking at the correspondence in the PCA file, which is kept in the Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, *Snow White* was a relatively easy project to be accepted by the PCA. In early November 1937, John Rose of the Walt Disney Productions' story department sent the synopsis and dialogue script of the movie to the administration in order to obtain a temporary approval certificate.⁹ In his letter to Walt Disney a few days later, Breen answered that he was happy to report that after reading the script, the PCA was convinced the story complied with the provisions of Hollywood's internal censorship system, and that Disney's feature cartoon 'should encounter no reasonable censorship difficulties'.¹⁰ Whereas many Hollywood pictures, which were submitted to the PCA in order to receive its seal, had encountered several difficulties, *Snow White*'s censorship history was a swift and easy one, resulting in a certificate of approval issued on 14 December 1937.

One week later, on 21 December, *Snow White* premiered at the Carthay Circle Theatre in Los Angeles, then in New York where it broke all popularity records. In his memoirs, the head of the MPPDA Will H. Hays looked back at the New York premiere as an unforgettable event, praising Disney's *Snow White* as a great 'tribute to the spirit of the American people', noting:

As *Snow White* spread like wildfire across the screens of the nation it hung up records that were as fantastic as the picture itself. Railroads ran special excursions; early daily openings in city theatres were ordered; police had to be called to prevent stampedes; in Tennessee, the governor led a parade from the State House to the theatre. This response was perhaps as great a tribute to the spirit of the American people as to the genius of Walt Disney.¹¹

Snow White's general release in February 1938, and its unprecedented popularity in the United States in the months to follow, inspired more representatives from the industry to think about the movie as reflecting quintessential American tastes and values. In a letter to Breen in early February 1938, the novelist, producer and screenwriter Val Lewton of Selznick International Pictures described Disney's first feature-length animated film as 'a reflection of the better tastes and desires of American audiences'.¹² In the meantime, *Snow White* was ready to be released abroad, with the British market the first to be conquered.

**‘They are more easily upset by
fairy stories than their “tougher” American
cousins’¹³**

The first major non-domestic market where Disney’s cartoon feature was to be released was Britain, where *Snow White* premiered on 24 February 1938 in the New Gallery cinema in London. In her sophisticated analysis of the British reception of Disney’s picture, Kuhn describes *Snow White*’s release and subsequent success as a unique, remarkable and highly memorable event, one that coincided ‘with a moment of change in Britain’s cinema culture’.¹⁴ According to Kuhn, the film arrived at a time when discourses on cinema and its audiences were undergoing significant shifts, with, in this case, unprecedented media coverage and wider discussions on consumerism, horror films and the impact of cinema on children. A key trigger for these discussions was the decision by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), on 14 January 1938, to give the film an adult rating (A certificate) so that under 16s needed to be accompanied by an adult. This decision understandably did not please Disney and its UK distributor, RKO Radio Pictures, who had hoped for an unrestricted all-audience category. The BBFC’s A certificate prompted a debate in the British press on cinema and the question ‘on how far children should be protected from terror’.¹⁵

In his memoirs on his experiences as a BBFC examiner, chief film censor and later secretary, John Trevelyan referred to the British censors’ troubles with *Snow White*. Being warned by parents who had told that their children were scared by the witch and some other scenes in the movie, Trevelyan testified that the BBFC ‘had anticipated this and for this reason had given the film an “A” certificate in order to convey a warning’.¹⁶ Upon seeing the movie, the Board felt that the dark forest scenes and those with the old witch were too frightening for children.

It remains unclear whether these censorial problems added an extra layer to the hype around *Snow White*, but one of the results of the public discussions in the press was that many local authorities ignored the BBFC’s recommendation and gave the picture an all-audience ‘U’ category (universal).¹⁷ *Snow White*’s censorial obstacles in Britain obviously also troubled Disney and the PCA, which closely tried to ensure a swift release of the picture. This was, for instance, the case in the beginning of March 1938 when Breen himself wrote a letter to Mary W. Burd, who had dealt with *Snow White*’s overseas censorial troubles in a column which was published in a magazine for the Delphian Society, which promoted education of women in the United States. In her ‘March Thoughts’, Burd explicitly referred to the BBFC’s decision:

Another news-item from Britain which may surprise most readers is that no British child under sixteen is to be admitted to cinema houses showing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, unless accompanied by an adult. The reason for this ban is that the film censors think the picture will give children the nightmare. English young folk are unused to excitement, so that, as one British paper says, 'they are more easily upset by fairy tales than their "tougher" American cousins'.¹⁸

Breen was far from interested in any cross-cultural difference in American and British children's psyche. What troubled the PCA chief was that this information on the British censors' reservations and difficulties with *Snow White* could awaken more conservative forces in the United States. In fact, Breen had been approached with questions on the British censorship problems by Mary Hearn from the powerful Catholic National Legion of Decency (LoD), who argued that 'it is our duty to foster and encourage the production of good pictures, as it is our duty to condemn bad ones'.¹⁹ Hoping that this might calm down the discussion on *Snow White*, Breen answered Hearn's question on the British 'ban' by (mis)informing her about the fact that 'the picture has been given a "U" Certificate in England, which means that it may be shown universally'.²⁰

Whereas the movie continued to break all-time records in the United States, Disney prepared the movie's international release with the help of the PCA. One of the tasks of the MPPDA's censorship administration and moral arbiter was to monitor the reception and censorship of the members' movies in foreign territories. In some of those markets the picture had to be cut, like in Australia, where one deletion was demanded in order to allow children to watch the movie, but in other territories *Snow White* passed without any significant problem.²¹ This was the case in one of the biggest foreign markets for Hollywood films, France, where a French dubbed version of the movie was made and where it enjoyed a broad release. Disney's feature cartoon didn't encounter any problems with France's state censor, so that *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* premiered on 6 May 1938 in Paris, attracting wide press coverage. In 1938 *Snow White* became the big money maker of American films in France, as one of the internal PCA reports mentions, and it was one of the few films which is 'expected to gross more than the best French film' (see Chapter 11 in this volume).²²

La Grande Muette's scissors

It was the same French dubbed version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* that was used by RKO Radio Films S.A.B., the Belgian branch of RKO Radio Pictures, for the Kingdom of Belgium. Given the small size (8 million inhabitants) and the bilingual character of its film market (French and

Dutch), it was common practice to distribute French versions of Hollywood pictures in Belgium, especially in the multilingual capital Brussels and in the French-speaking south. The first step in RKO's release scheme was to submit the movie to the Belgian Board of Film Control (BeBFC) in order to try to attract a large, family-oriented audience.

In terms of film censorship, Belgium was one of the few countries in the world without a system of obligatory film control.²³ This policy was inspired by the liberal Belgian Constitution of 1831, which explicitly forbids any form of censorship. Confronted with criticism on cinema's impact on children, however, the Belgian Parliament had adopted after the Great War a film control law which stated that, in principle, all films were forbidden for children under 16 years old, unless the film had been approved by a film control board. One of the implications of this September 1920 law was that no adult film censorship was ever installed in the country and that many controversial movies like revolutionary Soviet pictures could in principle be released for adults and adolescents above 16 years.²⁴ When distributors wanted to attract children and families for their movies, however, they needed to submit their pictures before the board, which mainly consisted of representatives of the judicial system, the film industry, politicians and (high) school teachers and pedagogues. One option for the BeBFC was to forbid a film for children under 16 ('children not allowed', 'enfants non admis'/'kinderen niet toegelaten') on the basis of a list of criteria which explicitly aimed at protecting children (political censorship was explicitly forbidden). The other option for the members of the BeBFC was to grant a 'children allowed' certificate ('enfants admis'/'kinderen toegelaten'). In the latter case the board could eventually make suggestions to the distributor for cuts to be made in the movie – a practice that the board often applied (around one-third of the movies controlled by the BeBFC were subjected to cuts in the 1930s). It was up to the distributor then to either follow this advice or not. But economic concerns cast a shadow over Belgium's liberal conception of film regulation, since fear of income loss made distributors comply with almost any cut the board asked for.²⁵

This was exactly what happened during the control board meeting of 7 May 1938 (one day after the Parisian premiere), when the BeBFC stated that *Snow White* contained too many frightening scenes of terror. In order to be able to receive a 'children allowed' seal the board requested five cuts to be made by RKO. Although the official report of the board meeting (Figure 13.1) is quite short, it mentions that one of the five members of the board (probably a representative of the local film industry) had some hesitations about requesting cuts, but the board finally decided unanimously about where to cut the movie in order to be allowed for children. The board minutes state that the requested deletions were imposed due to 'the fairy-tale scenes which could upset younger children'.²⁶

MINISTÈRE DE LA JUSTICE

Commission du Contrôle des Films Cinématographiques

PROCÈS-VERBAL

de la Séance du 7 mai 1938

Section 2^e sous la présidence de M. Ottout ✓

Présents MM. goris ✓
M. Orlan ✓
Schmidt ✓
Stevens ✓

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NUMÉRO	TITRES DES FILMS EXAMINÉS	DÉCISION	NOMBRE DE VOIX	OBSERVATIONS COUPURES DEMANDÉES ET MOTIFS DES REJETS
1	Blanche neige et les sept nains	admis	5/5	<p>moyennant coupure de 2^e partie scène de terrain où les racines se changent en mains, où les racines menacent Blanche.</p> <p>La scène où le gardien sort et brandit un poignard, etc. jusqu'à en 6^e partie; la fin de la transformation de la reine en sorcière, dans l'orage</p> <p>7^e partie: le squelette bousculé par la sorcière</p> <p>10^e partie la fin de la chute de la sorcière dans un bûche d'orage</p> <p>Ces scènes d'une féerie faisant impressionner favorablement les jeunes enfants.</p> <p>un membre acceptait sans coupure</p>

FIGURE 13.1 Procès-Verbal (minutes) of the Belgian Board of Film Control meeting, 7 May 1938, on *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains*.

Source: *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* file, Archive of the BeBFC, State Archives of Belgium.

FIGURE 13.2 Second cut in the Belgian print of *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* with the hunter's dagger in close-up.

Source: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney Company.

According to the minutes, the first cut referred to the long 'scene of terror where branches change into hands and caimans threaten Snow White'. The second one shortened the scene where the hunter is waving a dagger (Figure 13.2), but the BeBFC minutes specify that 'especially the close-up' had to be deleted. The third cut, which was also controversial in other countries, related to the end of the scene where the queen is transformed into a witch during the storm, whereas the fourth deletion was the one where the skeleton in the prison is mashed together by the witch. The final one is the fall of the witch in the storm at the end of the film.²⁷

It is not completely clear whether it was this heavily shortened version of *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* which was shown during the official Brussels premiere (a major gala event in one of the most prestigious Brussels film palaces) on 19 May 1938. But, although the newspapers and movie magazines closely followed the movie already before the Belgian release, the censorial problems with the BeBFC were never mentioned. This fully corresponded with the BeBFC's general policy not to communicate about suggested cuttings, whereas for distributors, who were mainly interested in

getting the all-audience certificate, any public information about cuts could be harmful for their commercial and artistic credibility. The BeBFC acting as 'la grande muette' (the big silent) and imposing cuts, however, didn't seem to harm the commercial success and popularity of *Snow White* in Belgium where the movie also secured a big audience, was highly promoted and became an exclusive event. After its Brussels premiere, *Snow White* was released on several copies and subsequently shown for many months in the biggest first-run film palaces in the major cities (Brussels, Antwerp, Liège and Ghent, see Figure 13.3), followed by screenings in most of the other minor cities.²⁸

In hindsight, one might argue that the requested deletions did not prevent the movie becoming a major blockbuster in 1938 and into 1939, and also later when *Snow White* was re-released. Given that newspapers and magazines did not mention the cuts and the movie's mutilation in a handful of key scenes, the Belgian censors were perhaps quite efficient in taking the sting out of a picture that they considered too frightening for children. Besides objections related to artistic integrity, however, it is clear that the deleted scenes significantly weakened the picture's narrative strength and affective tensions. Some of these cuts also heavily modified Disney's art of animation and his worldview in general. An example here is the sequence of the anthropomorphized forest, heavily cut in the Belgian version; the cut not only destroyed one of the most impressive parts of the movie, it also weakened Disney's view upon wild nature as fundamentally ambiguous.²⁹

The censors' dilemma with a gruesome cinematic masterpiece

In the Netherlands, newspapers also closely followed the international hype around *Snow White*. Between the Los Angeles premiere and the Dutch release in November 1938 many hundreds of articles appeared in the Dutch press. The British, French and Belgian releases were closely followed, often with the question of when the movie would finally be shown in the Netherlands. The British censorship troubles were also widely covered, with articles on how 'England censors fairy tales'.³⁰ In early March 1938, newspapers also started to report on the reasons why Dutch audiences were so late to have the opportunity to see the movie, noting that the making of a Dutch version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (as *Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dwergen*) was a difficult and costly enterprise that took several months to be completed.

Two weeks before the Dutch version's release on Armistice Day (11 November 1938) the Dutch branch of RKO in Amsterdam, RKO Films NV,

FIGURE 13.3 *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* shown in the most prestigious film palace in Ghent, Cinema Capitole, with a clear indication of ‘children allowed’ (‘enfants admis’).

Source: Sofexim-Cinex Archive, State Archives of Belgium.

finally submitted the picture to the Dutch censorship board, the *Centrale Commissie voor de Filmkeuring* (CCF). In the Netherlands, censorship was launched in 1928 and was an obligatory system with a board consisting of representatives from different religious and ideological strands in Dutch society. Similar to the Belgium system, the Dutch CCF could impose age ratings (including a 14 years certificate), in some cases accompanied with cuts, while the distributor could appeal and ask for additional rounds of film control. Similar to the BeBFC, distributors could start negotiations with the censors, but it mostly resulted in distributors having only a minor say in this negotiation process.

Looking at *Snow White*'s censorship history in the Netherlands, it is surprising how RKO heavily invested in getting the all-audience seal. Between the first submission of the movie before the CCF on 21 October 1938 and the final decision by the board on 1 February 1939, six screenings were held before the censorship board, who mostly reconfirmed the 14 years rating and demanded cuts.³¹ The first screening and discussion on October 21 resulted in the curious decision which not only imposed a 14 years limit but also recognized that *Snow White* was both 'a gruesome film' and a 'cinematic masterpiece'. The censors argued that, as a consequence, no cuts could be demanded because that would disturb the viewing experience.

RKO immediately appealed, but the censors reconfirmed their decision (24 October 1938). After accepting the trailer (85 metres, 4 November 1938) and the official release of the movie (11 November), RKO kept on resubmitting the picture in order to remove the age restriction which had now also become a topic of discussion in the press. Besides discussing the CCF's firm decision, film critics started writing about the movie's gruesome character and its possible impact on children, even before *Snow White* had been shown on Dutch screens. In one of those articles with the title 'A story for children and a film for adults' (*Haagsche Courant*, 3 November 1939), the journalist referred to the censors' dilemma:

The generation for whom the film is intended, the children under 14, will not be able to see *Snow White*. We have noticed that the decision by the CCF came as a surprise for many. Many have asked the question: why? A fairy tale is meant to be for children. ... We now have more information from the CCF about the reason for making Disney's famous cartoon inaccessible for children under 14. The answer was that the board was unanimous in its opinion that certain parts of Disney's film had to be considered so creepy and frightening for children that two things had to be faced: or to put the scissors in it and simply cut these fragments out of the film, or to make the film as a whole accessible to an audience over 14. The first option was just unimaginable because cutting into Disney's masterpiece would entail a mutilation of the work as a whole.³²

One week later, *Sneeuwwitje* was released in most of Holland's major cities, including Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, followed by Rotterdam, Leiden and Groningen (Figure 13.4). In Amsterdam, the movie was shown in cinema Nöggerath where it stayed on the programme for more than four months. According to data on the Cinema Context platform, with information on film programming for a wide selection of Dutch cities, *Snow White* was screened in the Netherlands till March 1940, just before the German invasion and the start of the Second World War in this part of Europe.³³

On 22 November 1938, RKO tried to get a better age rating again, resubmitting a picture that they seemed to have cut by 54 metres, but, although a new commission with other members watched this version,

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Vrijdag 11 November 1938 en volgende dagen
Dagelijks 4 Voorstellingen: 10 uur, 2.15 uur, 4.45 uur, 8.15 uur
ZONDAG: Doorlopend v.a. 2 u. en een besloten Avondvoorstelling; aanvang 9 u.

Eerste Vertooning Nederland
WALT DISNEY'S KLEUREN TEEKEN-HOOFDFILM

SNEEUWWITJE
EN DE
ZEVEN DWERGEN

in de Nederlandsche taal
('n R. K. O. Radio Film)

Vooraf Speciaal Verzorgd, Uitgebreid en Actueel Voorprogramma

EXT-A ATTRACTIE:
Voor deze film zijn speciale rijk geïllustreerde programmaboekjes ontworpen, welke door ons doorlopend genummerd zijn geworden – Iedere koper van zulk een programma, waarvan het nummer op een 0 eindigt, ontvangt **GRATIS** een luxe doos **SNEEUWWITJE-CHOCOLADE** van de **VICTORIA FABRIEK** te Dordrecht

Plaatsbespreken steeds 3 dagen te voren Tel. 39.22.44 (3 lijnen)
Door de Centrale Filmkeuring toegankelijk verklaard alleen v. pers. v. 14 jaar en daarboven

FIGURE 13.4 Advertising for the first screenings of *Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dweren* in Cinema Metropole Palace in The Hague.

Source: *Haagsche Courant*, 10 November, 1938.

the CCF reconfirmed its decision due to the 'many gruesome images'. One month later, another screening was organized and the censors referred to cuts that should be made, such as the transformation of the queen into a witch and the hunter's dagger. In early February 1939 (1 February 1939), the CCF was asked to watch another version again, one which seemed to have been shortened by RKO once more, and the censors finally granted the movie an 'all-audience' certificate, on the condition that some cuts were to be made. RKO finally got what it wanted and the censors' dilemma was resolved, but the deletions needed to make the film admissible for children, however, were so extreme that a total of 100 metres of film was cut out of *Snow White*.

Censorship as negotiation, manoeuvring and power

The Low Countries, obviously, were only small pieces in Disney's European marketing and release puzzle, especially compared to Germany where the film producer and its distributor encountered a complex set of censorial, cultural and geopolitical problems of a completely different order. Although the Disney company saw Germany as a key element in its European marketing strategy, it finally failed to release *Snow White* in Nazi Germany, mainly due to the anti-Hollywood and anti-American policies at the time.³⁴ This relatively limited case study on comparing cross-national reception and censorship of *Snow White* at the time of its release, however, brings forward many questions. One of them relates to the different types of censorship with which a seemingly innocent cultural product might be confronted with. This chapter has not referred to internal or pre-production censorship at the time of conceiving, writing and producing the movie, when the Disney company tried to take into account, and deal with, possible future censorship problems in the different exploitation territories.³⁵ This kind of pre-production censorship activities also refers to negotiations with the PCA, which was not only a moral arbiter but also served as a sort of a central intelligence agency with specialized knowledge on foreign legal systems and their censorship sensitivities and strategies. From this perspective, the censorial problems that Disney encountered in the Low Countries and elsewhere may appear to be a failure for the PCA.

The case of Disney's *Snow White* also illustrates the different types, traditions and values of censorship that an American producer had to face when trying to release their film products. In their battles with all these different censorship boards, distributors like RKO often only had a quite restricted space for manoeuvring and negotiating the best possible conditions for getting their pictures in the best possible conditions on the local screens.

Snow White shows that commercial strategies were often more important than issues related to artistic integrity, respect for an author's world view or those linked to audience's experiences in terms of narrative coherence, or affects and emotions related to watching a movie.

Distributors and the PCA also needed to closely monitor changes in the boards' strategies, practices and sensitivities, as well as shifts in the wider political-economic context in which they operated. After the Second World War, *Snow White* was re-released several times again, leading to more censorship interventions which tried to keep track with changing moral and political values.³⁶ This did not mean, however, that *Snow White* had an unproblematic post-war re-release. In Britain, for instance, RKO resubmitted the picture before the BBFC in 1953 for a proposed re-release in 1954. After another inspection of the movie, the BBFC informed RKO that the film remained most appropriately classified at A; a U certificate could be achieved by making cuts in a few sequences (e.g., deleting sounds of screaming and sight of clutching hands during the scene with Snow White's journey through the woods; the removal of the sight of a skeleton; the deletion of the witch's screams as she falls from rocks). RKO declined the offer and instead appealed against the BBFC's decision to the various local authorities. For another re-release in 1964, the distributor received an all-audience certificate (U, 31 July 1964) only when a set of cuts were made in the movie (the scene where Snow White flees into the forest, or the queen as hag kicks over the bones of a skeleton reaching for a water jug).³⁷ In Belgium, in October 1973, *Snow White* was resubmitted by a new local distributor, Elan Films, who argued that 'we think that the control board will now look differently at the movie than the one who did it in 1938'. This time, the film was admitted as children allowed without cuts.³⁸

This comparison between US and European censorship practices, though, brings forward more complex questions on how to interpret censorial similarities and differences across time and space. Could we argue that, based on this case study, European boards like the official state censors in the Low Countries were less tolerant than their American industrial counterparts? Were differences and shifts in censorship decisions and practices indicative of wider changes in the respective societies and their hegemonic socio-ideological and normative values? One part of the answer on these complex questions resides in examining power structures in and around those boards, with questions on who decided, why, as well as how these censorship decisions tried to keep track (or not) with wider shifts in society. Another part of the answer probably is to reject any idea of censorship practices reflecting societal values and norms at all, but rather to conceive the practice of censorship as a site of struggle and negotiation where various discourses and interests compete. Notwithstanding their differences in terms of censorship aims, practices and strategies, it is clear as well that (probably

apart from the BBFC) the censorship boards examined in this case study were heavily criticized, at times even condemned and finally dismantled.³⁹

Notes

- 1 Quote from a letter by Val Lewton (Selznick International Pictures) to Joseph Breen (Production Code Administration, hereafter PCA), 9 February 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 2 Henry Jenkins, 'Introduction: Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths', in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1–37. See also Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); and Eric Smoodin, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (London: Palgrave, 2012).
- 3 Annette Kuhn, 'Snow White in 1930s Britain', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7, no. 2 (2010): 188.
- 4 See on the British case Kuhn, 'Snow White in 1930s Britain', 189–93.
- 5 Kerry Segrave, *American Films Abroad: Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screens from the 1890s to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997). See also MPPDA Digital Archive, record #2353, <https://mppda.flinders.edu.au/records/2353> (accessed 30 August 2020).
- 6 Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & The Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 7 Letter by E. Garity (Walt Disney Corporation) to Douglas Kinnon (Association of Motion Picture Producers), 2 March 1936, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 8 Quote from a Letter by William E. Garity (Walt Disney Corporation) to Douglas Kinnon (Association of Motion Picture Producers), 2 March 1936, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 9 Letter by John Rose (Story Department, Walt Disney Corporation) to Douglas McKinnon (Production Code Administration/PCA), 1 November 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 10 Letter by Joseph Breen (PCA) to Walt Disney (Walt Disney Corporation), 3 November 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 11 Will H. Hays, *The Memoirs of Will H. Hays* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 488.
- 12 Letter by Val Lewton (Selznick International Pictures) to Joseph Breen (PCA), 9 February 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

- 13 Quote from 'March Thoughts' by Mary W. Burd (Delphian Society), March 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 14 Kuhn, 'Snow White in 1930s Britain', 197.
- 15 Ibid., 186.
- 16 John Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), 82.
- 17 On the British censorship and reception of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, see Kuhn, 'Snow White in 1930s Britain', Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw*, 83, as well as a special file on the movie on the BBFC website, <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/snow-white-and-seven-dwarfs-1937>.
- 18 'March Thoughts' by Mary W. Burd (Delphian Society), March 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 19 Letter by Mary W. Hearn (National Legion of Decency) to Mary W. Burd (Delphian Society), 3 March 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 20 Letter by J. I. Breen (PCA) to Mary W. Hearn (LoD), 7 March 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles. 'Universally' underlined in the original letter.
- 21 The cut referred to the elimination of the 'incident of witch kicking skeleton out of the way'. See Report 15 April 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 22 Letter by Harold L. Smith to Colonel F. L. Herron, 24 January 1939, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* file, PCA archives, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.
- 23 Daniël Biltereyst, 'Film Censorship in a Liberal Free Market Democracy: Strategies of Film Control and Audience's Experiences of Censorship in Belgium', in *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship around the World*, ed. Daniël Biltereyst and Roel Vande Winkel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 275–93.
- 24 See Daniël Biltereyst, 'Will We Ever See *Potemkin*? The Historical Reception and Censorship of S.M. Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) in Belgium, 1926–1932', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2, no. 1 (2008): 5–19.
- 25 For a case study on the Belgian censorship of the American *Tarzan* series, see Liesbet Depauw and Daniël Biltereyst, 'The Belgian Board of Film Control and the *Tarzan* Films, 1932–1946', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 38, no. 1 (2018): 1–19.
- 26 Procès-verbal (minutes) of the BeBFC meeting of the 7th of May, 1938, *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* file, Archive of the BeBFC, State Archives of Belgium, Brussels.
- 27 For an illustration of these cuts, see Kevin Giraud, 'Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains face à la censure', *Koregos*, <http://www.koregos.org/fr/kevin-giraud-blanche-neige-et-les-sept-nains-face-a-la-censure/> (accessed 30 August 2020).

- 28 See for a case study on the distribution, exploitation and reception history of Disney's animated feature films in the Belgian city of Ghent between 1937 and 1982, Liesbeth Van de Vijver, 'Going to the Exclusive Show: Exhibition Strategies and Moviegoing Memories of Disney's Animated Feature Films in Ghent (1937–1982)', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, no. 4 (2016): 403–18.
- 29 Kevin Giraud, '*Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* face à la censure'. See also David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
- 30 'Engeland Censureert Sprookjes', *Het Vaderland* (28 February 1938): 8.
- 31 See *Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dweren* file, Archive Centrale Commissie voor de Filmkeuring, Nationaal Archief, The Hague (file numbers F1947, F2119, F2436, G0269). See also the summaries on *Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dweren* on www.cinemacontext.nl (accessed 30 August 2020).
- 32 'Het Sprookje van Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dweren: Een verhaal voor kinderen en een film voor ouderen', *Haagsche Courant* (3 November 1939): 11.
- 33 See 'Programmes' for *Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dweren* on www.cinemacontext.nl (accessed 30 August 2020).
- 34 On the German reception of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in the 1930s, see Rolf Giesen and J. P. Storm, *Animation under the Swastika: A History of Trickfilm in Nazi Germany, 1933–1945* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012); Markus Spieker, *Hollywood untern Hakenkreuz: Der amerikanische Spielfilm im Dritten Reich* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1999), 123, 280, 289, 325; Dirk Alt, *Der Farbfilm marschiert!: Frühe Farbfilmverfahren und NS-Propaganda 1933–1945* (München: Belleville, 2013), 193–4.
- 35 See Smoodin, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.
- 36 See Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Janet Wasko, Mark Phillips and Eileen R. Meehan (eds), *Dazzled by Disney: The Global Disney Audiences Project* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001).
- 37 See <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/snow-white-and-seven-dwarfs-1937> (accessed 30 August 2020).
- 38 See *Blanche Neige et les Sept Nains* file, Archive of the BeBFC, State Archives of Belgium, Brussels.
- 39 I would like to thank Kristine Krueger, Eric Smoodin, Tomaso Subini and Roel Vande Winkel.