



## THE FICTIONAL FEMALE CHARACTERS OF WALT DISNEY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHARACTER DESIGN

### KARAKTER TASARIMI BAĞLAMINDA WALT DISNEY'İN KURGUSAL KADIN KARAKTERLERİ

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#### Abstract

In the United States, the production of cartoons and animation as an industrial process dates back to the 1930s. Cartoons produced until this period were generally short and had limited narrative time. The introduction of feature-length productions led to significant changes in the character design process for animators. The extension of the narrative allowed for the exploration of new dimensions in the structural forms and design stages of fictional characters. During this phase, Walt Disney Studios utilized reference images in character design and divided the production stages of animations into different segments, distributing these stages among various animators. The design of a character involves more than just an animator's drawing skills; it also requires the contribution of other artists who voice the character and provide references for the visual representation that will breathe life into the character. Walt Disney Studios became a pioneering production company by integrating various areas of expertise during these stages, thus producing groundbreaking fictional characters. Animators from different specializations within the animation department applied diverse approaches to bring a character to life. Ultimately, the final decisions regarding the character were made in collaboration with the voice actor and reference image actress. This collaborative process highlighted the team-based nature of character design in animation. The interpretive paradigm was adopted as the research method and as a result, it was observed that Walt Disney studios took inspiration from real life in the character design process. As a company, Walt Disney divided the process of animating characters into different dimensions and brought together different areas of expertise that could assist the animator.

**Keywords:** Character Design, Animation, Walt Disney.

#### Öz

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde, çizgi film ve animasyonun endüstriyel bir süreç olarak üretilmesi 1930'lu yıllara dayanmaktadır. Bu döneme kadar üretilen çizgi filmler genellikle kısa metrajlı olup, anlatım süresi sınırlıydı. Ancak, uzun metrajlı animasyon yapımlarının üretilmeye başlanması, animatörlerin karakter tasarımı süreçlerinde köklü değişikliklere yol açmıştır. Anlatı sürecinin uzaması, kurgusal karakterlerin daha derinlemesine işlenmesini gerektirmiş, dolayısıyla karakterlerin yapısal formları, hareket kabiliyetleri ve tasarımı aşamalarındaki detaylar daha fazla önem kazanmıştır. Bu süreçte, Walt Disney Stüdyoları, karakter tasarımı referans görüntüler kullanarak, animasyon üretim aşamalarını sistematik bir yapıya kavuşturmuştur. Stüdyo, animasyon sürecini farklı uzmanlık alanlarına ayırarak, her aşamanın belirli sanatçılar tarafından yürütülmesini sağlamış ve karakter tasarımı ekip çalışmasının önemini vurgulamıştır. Bir animasyon karakterinin oluşturulması yalnızca animatörlerin yeteneğiyle sınırlı kalmamış; seslendirme sanatçıları, referans görüntü aktrisleri ve senaryo yazarları gibi farklı uzmanlık alanlarından gelen sanatçılar süreci dahil edilmiştir. Bu araştırma, çizgi film ve animasyon disiplindeki kurgusal karakter tasarımı süreçlerini Walt Disney Stüdyoları bağlamında ele almakta ve seçkisiz yöntemle belirlenen kadın karakterler üzerinden incelemektedir. Araştırma yöntemi olarak yorumlayıcı paradigma benimsenmiş ve sonuç olarak Walt Disney stüdyolarının, karakter tasarımı sürecinde ilhamını gerçek hayattan aldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bir şirket olarak Walt Disney, karakterlerin canlandırılması sürecini farklı boyutlara bölmüş ve animatöre yardımcı olabilecek farklı boyutlu uzmanlık alanlarını bir araya getirmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Karakter tasarımı, Animasyon, Walt Disney.



## INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly, the universal language of art has been one of the rare contexts that unite the species of Sapiens throughout its journey of existence. The proof of this claim can be observed in the figures drawn by Neanderthals on cave walls and the handprints they left behind. It is astonishing that the drawings made by this human species, which lived tens of thousands of years ago, converge within a common context despite being created independently of each other. For instance, it is undeniable that the traces left by Sapiens in the Lascaux Cave in France and the Cueva de las Manos Cave in Argentina could not have been influenced by one another. While there is no definitive proof of why these cave paintings and traces found in various parts of our planet were created, some existing theories attempt to explain their purpose. However, what is certain is that our species has an inherent drive to communicate, narrate events, and convey emotions to an audience through alternative methods. At this point, it becomes possible to relate this drive to the philosophy of art's existence.

When examining the historical development of animation and cartoons, it is possible to argue that the existing data predates the commonly known timelines. One of the fundamental tools required for the production of industrial animation is the camera, which was developed in the late 19th century. However, the history of animation and cartoons extends further back than the invention of the camera. This claim can be substantiated by Emile Reynaud's Praxinoscope, invented in 1877, and his later development, the Theatre Optique, which allowed him to present animations to a wider audience. These devices, which predate the invention of the camera, aimed to use animation as a medium for storytelling. As the 1900s approached, cartoonists such as James Stuart Blackton and Winsor McCay were observed creating moving images in front of the camera through an application known as vaudeville. Vaudeville, a term that has been adopted into the Turkish language, refers to an entertainment method that involves the creation of sequential and eclectic visuals, which are presented to the audience in real time. Vaudeville artists were skilled in drawing, and in the 1910s, the first moving images captured on camera were created by vaudeville artists in the United States. During this period, when cinema had not yet become widely accessible, animations were produced as short films that did not necessitate sequels. From a different perspective, since the systematic production of animation had not yet evolved into an industrial process, animators did not have the goal of creating a standardized character—meaning they did not focus on developing fictional actors that could be used repeatedly. The 1910s can be identified as the era when animation and cartoons in the United States began transitioning into an industrial structure. Winsor McCay was a significant animator of this period, and his works left a lasting legacy for future animators. Although animation production had not yet taken on an industrialized form during McCay's time, thousands of eclectic drawings were recorded at Vitagraph Studios, in collaboration with James Stuart Blackton. Thanks to the animation viewing system developed by this studio, McCay was able to present pioneering cartoons such as *Little Nemo*, *How a Mosquito Operates*, and *Gertie the Dinosaur* to large audiences. However, despite these advancements in animation production processes, animators still did not feel the need to create recurring characters for sequel animations. By 1919, the first fictional and anthropomorphic character to be used in animated sequels, *Felix the Cat*, emerged. This character is recognized as the first in animation history to be used in a continuous series and was designed by Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer in the United States during the silent film era. Around the same period, *Old Farmer Alfalfa*, created by Paul Terry, also falls within this context, though its sequels came later than those of *Felix the Cat*. The development of rotoscope and cel animation techniques significantly facilitated the systematic production of animated films. As a result, characters such as *Koko the Clown* and *Betty Boop* from Fleischer Studios became pioneering figures designed for use in serialized productions. However, it is important to note that until the 1930s, the animation industry in the United States was marked by intense patent disputes, and the use of copyrighted production methodologies by other animators was not well received. This restrictive approach likely hindered the ability of animators to create standardized fictional characters.

## METHODOLOGY

The general framework of this research is to analyze and evaluate the fictional female character designs of Walt Disney Studios. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to establish the study's foundation. The document analysis method is identified as an effective approach used to construct the

scientific framework. The specific methodology chosen for this research is the Interpretive Paradigm. In social sciences, the interpretive paradigm aims to analyze and describe social phenomena by examining interpersonal relationships within social life and interpreting events from the perspectives of individuals interacting within microstructures. This paradigm provides relevant concepts, principles, theories, and methods that facilitate the understanding and interpretation of social behaviors (Yakut, 2014, p. 18). This method is particularly effective in historical studies of animation, as it helps analyze the structural processes of Walt Disney Studios' character designs and their societal impact on audiences. A limitation of this research arises due to the vast number of fictional character visuals. However, as these characters are globally recognized and given the researcher's sensitivity to Law No. 5846 on Intellectual and Artistic Works, no images have been included in the study. None of the designers (animators) of the discussed characters are alive today. While images from Walt Disney Studios could be used with proper citation, the author has chosen not to include them as a personal preference.

### Limitations

Walt Disney Studios has a 104-year history, beginning with the establishment of Laugh-O-Gram Studio in Kansas City in 1921 and evolving into the globally influential Disney+ company based in Los Angeles today. Over this period, the company transitioned from a local studio to a multinational entity. Consequently, the scope of this research is too broad to be confined to a single article. Therefore, the study focuses specifically on fictional female character designs from 1928 to 1953—a period recognized as the Golden Age of Animation worldwide. Additionally, anthropomorphic female characters (characters designed by attributing human traits to animals or objects) have been excluded from this research. The study's scope is strictly limited to female characters. The selected Walt Disney productions, *Steamboat Willie*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Peter Pan*, were chosen randomly by the author for analysis.

### Research Questions

Within the historical framework of cartoons and animation, the number of studies conducted by artist-academics on Walt Disney's fictional female characters is quite limited. This research examines data from the period beginning with *Steamboat Willie* in 1928 and ending with the production of *Peter Pan* in 1953. Seeking to construct a narrative regarding this era, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What factors may have influenced the design of fictional characters in the history of cartoons and animation?
2. Which fictional female characters were designed at Walt Disney Studios during the Golden Age of Animation?
3. What was the design process of these characters, and which animators were involved in their creation?
4. What were the challenges encountered during the design process of these fictional female characters?

### Research Purpose and Objectives

It is unfortunate to note that academic resources on the history of cartoons and animation in our country are significantly limited. The vast majority of existing field studies are interdisciplinary and focus on non-animation-related areas, often remaining within theoretical frameworks of film studies. The lack of documentation from animators themselves is particularly noteworthy. At this point, the main objective of this research is to provide a Turkish-language resource on character design in animation history from an animator's perspective, strictly within the domain of Fine Arts and Animation Studies.

### FUNDAMENTALS OF CHARACTER DESIGN IN CARTOONS AND ANIMATION

Undoubtedly, an animator's most valuable tools are a pencil and paper. In today's digital era, these materials can be replaced with a tablet and stylus, yet traditional tools remain indispensable and highly valued among animators. The ability to draw is one of the most crucial skills for an animator. In fact,

the *solid drawing* principle, one of the 12 fundamental principles of animation, stands as a testament to this claim. A strong drawing ability provides a substantial advantage in the initial stages of character design. According to Roberts (Roberts, 2011, p. 55), a skilled animator, whether working in 2D or 3D, should be able to sketch a key pose in a simple yet effective manner. Exceptional drawing talent is not a prerequisite, but drawing remains the best way to interpret the surrounding world. For this reason, animators should practice drawing as frequently as possible. In the field of animation, characters are designed before the animation process begins to ensure a natural workflow. Preliminary sketches and envisioned poses should be created in advance. The most fundamental building block of character design is the sketch. Without sketches, neither the director nor the rest of the production team can predict the final character outcome. The importance of general knowledge in character design is exemplified by Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*. In this 1914 animated short, a mammoth walks past Gertie, despite the fact that mammoths and dinosaurs never coexisted.

While it is unclear whether scientists had established this fact at the time McCay created the film, the example highlights the necessity of general knowledge in animation. Harder (Harder, 2023, pp. 34-35) outlines key aspects to consider during character design:

- Physics,
- Posture,
- Expression,
- Costume,
- Props/Accessories,
- Color.

These elements help eliminate inconsistencies on the path to bringing a character to life. A character's body language, reactions, appearance, and attire all communicate messages to the audience, just as in real life.

## Sketching

Following the 1930s, the growing interest in animation in the United States led to a diversification of scriptwriting and animation production in studios. This increase in production created a need for more animators, and as a result, many artists pursued careers in animation. Throughout its history, Walt Disney Studios has functioned as both a production studio and an animation school. Disney also preferred to employ animators with diverse interests. For example, character designers were categorized based on their interests—those fascinated by animals and other creatures were assigned to one group, while those focusing on human and humanoid anatomy were placed in another.

Regardless of specialization, both fields required animators to incorporate anthropomorphic features into their characters. Sketching, which is fueled by an animator's emotions, general knowledge, and individual talent, serves as a collective guide for the production team. It is essential to remember that all of Walt Disney's fictional female characters—the subject of this study—came into existence through a structured sketching process.

## Reference Visuals

Throughout animation history, animators have consistently utilized reference materials. However, referencing should not be mistaken for direct copying. Studying reference visuals allows an animator to analyze and interpret their character in a more realistic manner. Rotoscoping, a pioneering animation technique patented by Max Fleischer, demonstrates the significance of reference images in animation production. The actions of fictional characters like *Koko the Clown* and *Betty Boop* were refined through this method.

In the context of Walt Disney Studios, numerous archival materials confirm that Disney animators used reference visuals during character design. This practice continues today. For instance, Weta Digital, a

leader in modern animation, used motion capture technology to create lifelike characters such as Gollum, Caesar, and Jake Sully. By capturing actors' movements and transferring them onto digital skeletons and facial structures, they achieved unparalleled realism. For an animator, utilizing reference images is key to achieving accuracy in design and animation. Harder (Harder, 2023, p. 49) asserts that reference images contribute significantly to character originality, as they are created by the animator and are unique.

These references enhance believability for audiences while increasing efficiency for animators. Harder provides an example: if an animator were to design a character playing the saxophone, but had never played the instrument themselves, how would they determine the correct hand placement? The only way to depict such a scene convincingly is through a series of reference images. Reference images are equally crucial in designing character expressions. Unlike live-action films, animated characters' exhibit emotions in an exaggerated manner.

Walt Disney archives include numerous documentary-style videos showcasing studio animators mimicking facial expressions to study their characters' emotions. Traditionally, animators used mirrors to observe their own expressions; today, this practice has evolved with the use of smartphones. For instance, in the *Character Design* course, animation student Merve Uzer employed her own photographs as references—an academic approach to contemporary animation studies.



**Figure 1.** The animator's own facial expression was used as a reference<sup>1</sup>.

### Colors

One of the key aspects of conveying emotions to the audience in animated films and cartoons is color. Colors carry symbolic meanings that evoke associations in human psychology. These meanings are not written but are entirely based on emotions. While it is true that colors are universal, the symbolism attached to a particular color can vary from country to country or culture to culture. According to Silver (Silver, 2017, p. 218), factors such as color, texture, and shape definitively determine a character's style and aesthetic, making them clear elements that communicate with the audience. Moreover, these elements play a critical role for producers who seek to differentiate the visual identity of their shows from others. According to Mattesi (Mattesi, 2008, p. 99), the subconscious perceptions that colors create in

<sup>1</sup> Pupil drawing by Ms. Merve Uzer (Figure 1).



viewers in animation and cartoons can be listed as follows:

- Red: Anger, evil, love, hatred, blood, warmth, activity, emotional intensity.
- Orange: Warmth, danger.
- Yellow: Excitement, happiness, lightness.
- Green: Organic nature, wealth, digital perception, disgust, illness.
- Blue: Friendliness, sadness, disorder, calmness.
- Indigo: Nobility.
- Black: Evil, fear, coldness, emptiness.
- White: Heroism, holiness, cleanliness.

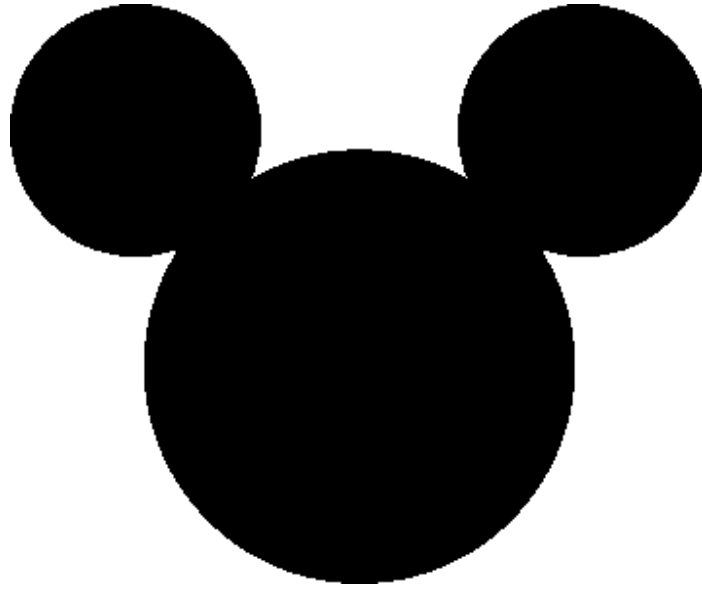
Colors play a significant role in shaping character perception and narrative structure, particularly in animated films produced by Walt Disney Studios. Through the strategic use of colors, Disney effectively conveys characters' traits and psychological-emotional states to the audience's subconscious (Makram, 2025, p. 158).

### **Silhouette**

Character silhouettes are a crucial element in animated films and cartoons. The significance of this element can vary from artist to artist, as art inherently involves a personal style and can be interpreted differently depending on the animator's approach. According to Tillman (Tillman, 2019, p. 61), silhouettes are essential for character design in terms of recognizability. If a fictional character maintains a distinctive and recognizable shape even when presented as a complete shadow, it indicates a successful character design. A striking silhouette allows a character to stand out among others in a narrative. This theory is validated by many iconic characters in animation history. For instance, Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny, or The Simpsons characters can easily be identified even when displayed as fully black silhouettes. This serves as a strong criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of character design.

In conclusion, the use of color and silhouette in animation is indispensable in character design. While colors convey the psychological and emotional states of a character to the audience, silhouettes ensure that the character remains memorable and distinctive. These two elements are regarded as fundamental

building blocks in the creation of a successful animated character throughout animation history.



**Figure 2.** Mickey Mouse silhouette (Walt Disney)<sup>2</sup>.

#### **FICTIONAL FEMALE CHARACTERS OF WALT DISNEY**

It was unimaginable that an animation studio founded in 1921 under the name “Laugh O Grams” would achieve global success in its field. The factors behind Walt Disney’s achievements as an animator and entrepreneur are varied. However, given that the research context is grounded in the field of fine arts and framed within animation and cartoons, the focus remains limited to the artistic endeavors of the studio. Particularly after the company moved to Burbank, Walt Disney always functioned as an animation school. One clear example of this is the formation of the “Nine Old Men”, a group established in 1940 within the company, consisting of nine key animators.

This group served as a senior council overseeing recruitment, employment, assignments, promotions, and training processes within the studio, which had by then expanded to over 200 employees. The name “Nine Old Men” was personally given by Walt Disney. Each member of this group had joined Walt Disney Studios in its early years and remained with the company until retirement. For them, Disney Studios was also an academy. Through the animated films they worked on, they collectively contributed to the Golden Age of animation. Each member possessed distinctive talents; however, this study focuses on these animators’ fictional female characters, aiming to create a Turkish-language reference on character designs in globally renowned masterpieces.

#### **Minnie Mouse**

Had there been an Oscar specifically for animation characters, Minnie Mouse would undoubtedly have won the award for Best Supporting Actress during her peak popularity. According to Kincaid and Malcolm (Kincaid & L. Malcom, 2023, p. 847), although Minnie Mouse was Walt Disney Studios’ first fictional female animation character, she has been largely overlooked by academic research. She first appeared before audiences in Steamboat Willie in 1928. However, she was initially designed for Plane Crazy, an animated short created before Steamboat Willie but never released. Mickey Mouse was designed by Ub Iwerks, who was an animator at Laugh O Grams Studios. According to Iwerks and Kenworthy (Kenworthy & Iwerks, 2001, p. 54), every handsome protagonist needs a beautiful woman to fight for. To fulfill this role, Iwerks created a female mouse as Mickey’s partner. However, he did not

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<sup>2</sup> Mickey Mouse silhouette from Walt Disney Studios (Figure 2).

display the same meticulous attention to Minnie's design as he did for Mickey. According to Deja (Deja, 2016, p. 15), animator Les Clark assisted in animating Minnie's feminine mannerisms. Walt Disney named the character after Minnie Cowles, in honor of a financial supporter of Laugh O Grams Studios. Sussain (Susanin, 2011, p. 189), further supports that Minnie Cowles was an inspiration for Mickey Mouse's fictional girlfriend's name. Minnie Mouse was designed as a charming, graceful, and elegantly dressed character with a supporting role. Although she is a mouse, which technically prevents her from being classified as a woman, her attire—particularly her skirt—symbolizes femininity.

In *Plane Crazy*, Minnie was depicted in a simple form, but by the time *Steamboat Willie* was released, her design had evolved to include high-heeled shoes, a more defined skirt, and a flower-adorned hat. Over time, her design continued in this aesthetic. Within the animated shorts included in this study's scope, Minnie Mouse often played the role of a young woman in distress, needing Mickey's rescue. Since these animations were created in the black-and-white era, colors were not a defining feature of her design. However, later color films depicted Minnie Mouse in red and pink hues, reinforcing her feminine persona.

### **Snow White**

Among feature-length animated films, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* holds the distinction of being the first. Production began in 1934, and the film premiered in 1937 with a runtime of 83 minutes. According to Davis (Davis, 2021, p. 99), Walt Disney expected his animators to create a story structure that would achieve the highest level of audience immersion. This was a crucial factor that set Disney Studios apart from its competitors. During the 1930s, many animation studios, such as Bray, Terry, and Fleischer, favored loose narratives. However, Disney Studios rapidly shifted toward developing more intricate storylines, which positioned the company at the forefront of the industry. The success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* can be attributed to the integration of planned and systematic narrative strategies with character design and color.

Grim Natwick was responsible for designing Snow White as a fictional character. According to Collington and Friend (Collignon & Friend, 2021, p. 52), Natwick was transferred to Disney in the spring of 1936 specifically to work on *Snow White*. At that time, Disney's most talented artists formed a dedicated unit solely focused on refining Snow White's design. For two months, their only task was to practice drawing the character. Consequently, a highly stylized Snow White emerged after thousands of sketches. One of the primary challenges in achieving a definitive design was the necessity of making the character beautiful. Studies in cognitive psychology, ethology, and neuroscience suggest that a certain level of exaggeration and simplification enhances a character's expressive power and emotional resonance.

One of the prominent animators involved in this process was Marc Davis. According to Deja (Deja, 2016, p. 322), Natwick appreciated Marc's contributions to *Snow White*'s animation and entrusted him with animating several scenes, including the princess's dance with the dwarfs. Understanding that maintaining the princess's beauty from all angles was difficult, Marc created a small bust to assist in defining the correct facial perspectives and used it as a reference for character expressions. Hamilton Luske served as the animation director for *Snow White* (Davis, 2021, p. 109). The story is inherently dramatic, portraying a kind-hearted woman subjected to cruelty by her stepmother after her father's death.

*Snow White*'s character design included a pale complexion and a blue dress symbolizing friendship. As a princess, she was always depicted in an elegant gown. The value of reference images for animators has already been highlighted; in *Snow White*'s case, rotoscoping was used for animation. According to Kalmakurki (Kalmakurki, 2021, p. 88), dancer Marge Champion served as the live-action reference model for the character.

### **Cinderella**

The 1940s were financially difficult for Walt Disney Studios due to the closure of the European market during World War II. Films like *Bambi* and *Dumbo* failed to alleviate the financial strain. Consequently, the production cost of *Cinderella* was kept as low as possible. According to Ohmer (Ohmer, 1991, p. 242), in *Cinderella*, animal characters appeared on screen more frequently than human characters. In



fact, Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters did not appear until the 18th minute, nearly one-quarter of the film's total runtime. Cinderella was produced during Disney's golden age, and its character design was led by Marc Davis and Eric Larson (Deja, 2016, p. 334). The script required that Cinderella's purity and beauty be concealed beneath her servitude.

Thus, she was depicted as both hardworking and exceptionally beautiful. The prince was first drawn to her beauty and later intrigued by her mystery (Baker-Sperry, 2007, p. 719). Rotoscoping was used in Cinderella's animation, with actress Helene Stanley serving as the live-action reference model. As previously mentioned, reference images play a crucial role in making animations appear lifelike. One of the character designers, Marc Davis, sought input from his wife, Alice Davis, who designed and sewed Cinderella's dress. Helene Stanley wore this dress for live-action reference recordings (Zemler, 2022, p. 24). This serves as evidence of the many layers involved in character design and animation. Cinderella's voice was performed by Ilene Woods, highlighting the importance of voice acting in animated character design.



**Figure 3.** Marc Davis shows a sketch to Ilene Woods, who voices Cinderella<sup>3</sup>.

In the character design process of an animator, hearing the character's voice in advance provides emotional clues that help shape the final outcome. Similarly, allowing the voice actor to observe the character's sketches during production fosters an emotional connection, guiding them in their performance and helping bring the character to life. In short, Walt Disney Studios implemented advanced practices in character design during the production of *Cinderella*, refining the experience gained from previous projects.

<sup>3</sup> Zemler, E. (2022). *Disney Princess: Beyond the Tiara: The Stories. The Influence. The Legacy.* New York: Epic Ink, p. 20 (Figure 3).

## Tinker Bell

Tinker Bell can be considered the only fictional female character from Walt Disney Studios to achieve immense popularity without having a lead role. She appears in the 1953 animated feature *Peter Pan*, which has a runtime of 77 minutes. Tinker Bell is a fairy and lacks the ability to speak. She communicates in fairy language, which humans cannot hear. She has fairy wings, wears ballet slippers, and leaves a trail of fairy dust when she flies. The primary animator responsible for Tinker Bell's design was Marc Davis; however, given that animation is a collaborative effort, it is also known that Les Clark contributed to her design. According to Bell (Bell, 1996, p. 119), Tinker Bell is the only controversial character in *Peter Pan*. Persistent rumors suggest that her design was inspired by Marilyn Monroe, but this is untrue. Tinker Bell was modeled after live-action video recordings of actress Margaret Kerry. Thus, the character's design process involved the use of rotoscope animation. According to Carter and Carter (Carter & Carter, 2021, p. 99), the contributions of actresses in shaping female characters during animation production, as well as the interventions of female artists in the studio, significantly influenced character development. Tinker Bell serves as an example of this phenomenon. She is neither as childlike as Snow White nor as fantastical as the centaurettes in *Fantasia*.

During the design process, Marc Davis collaborated with Mary Blair, whose portrayal of Tinker Bell's mischievous traits was met with some resistance, as the character was already intended to be playful. Tinker Bell's movements reflect those of a ballerina, even in moments of anger. Margaret Kerry, in an interview published in *The Walt Disney Museum* in 2023, described her experience as follows: "The wonderful man who designed Tinker Bell, Marc Davis... Everything people saw was thanks to him. They had sketched out what they wanted me to do as a rough guide. They brought in props and showed me exactly what I needed to do. When I first stepped in front of the camera, I asked Mr. Davis, 'What do you want Tinker Bell to be?' And he said, 'Margaret, we want her to be you.' And I thought, 'Oh my goodness, I think I can do that.' So, I stepped onto the stage, and he gave me complete freedom to embody Tinker Bell. He liked what he saw." These statements confirm that all of Tinker Bell's movements were modeled after a ballerina's gestures.

## CONCLUSION

One of the key aspects of animation and animated films is the design of fictional characters. Prior to the modern era of animation (mid-1920s), animators did not create characters meant for continuous use. One possible reason for this was that the transition to industrial animation had not yet been fully realized. However, following the introduction of rotoscope and cel animation techniques by animators such as Max Fleischer, Earl Hurd, and John Randolph Bray, animation studios began designing characters with sequels in mind.

In the context of Walt Disney Studios, it is evident that inspiration for female character design was often drawn from real life. From the 1930s onward, character design became a specialized field incorporating elements such as color psychology. By the 1950s, Walt Disney had introduced several iconic female characters—including Minnie Mouse, Snow White, Alice, Cinderella, and Tinker Bell—who became integral to pop culture. Many of these characters, alongside their antagonists, were developed under the guidance of Disney's key animation team, the *Nine Old Men*. Among them, Marc Davis emerged as a prominent figure in designing princesses and characters such as Tinker Bell.

Walt Disney Studios utilized every available resource to support animators in the character design process. One of the most important techniques was the use of reference materials. During what is considered the *Golden Age of Animation*, the preferred reference technique was rotoscope animation. By using live-action footage of real actresses, animators achieved greater realism in character movement. Furthermore, Disney employed artists with diverse drawing skills, broadening the studio's creative range. For instance, while Marc Davis was responsible for Snow White's design and animation, Eric Larson focused on animating the forest animals that interacted with her. This approach allowed different artistic talents to merge, ultimately enhancing the cartoon's impact. This research has presented alternative data regarding fictional female character designs evaluated in the context of Walt Disney Studios. In this context,

Walt Disney animators are divided into different areas of expertise. During the character animation process, animators made extensive use of reference images. This situation proves how important the reference image has been in the portrayal of a character from past to present.

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