

## REPORT

**SOFT POWER: HEROINES AND DOLLS IN MEDIA CULTURE****Asunción Bernárdez Rodal****Fundamentos Publishing House, Madrid, 2018****Graciela Padilla Castillo:** Complutense University of Madrid. Spain.[gracielp@ucm.es](mailto:gracielp@ucm.es)

The spirit of this work is shown, honestly and directly, on the first pages: "This text does not try to be academic nor is it systematic. Its objective is to analyze how the mainstream productions that are produced mostly in the United States build the models of women that the public have liked most in recent times: the new heroines and the new doll" (p. 14). With this precedent, Bernárdez proposes an indispensable, suggestive and necessary work for academics and communication professionals. There are no similar precedents in Spain and, as every academic work should do, it offers a new field of research, with rich and multiple perspectives.

The author also explains the reasons for its title and the whys, which support the originality of the text: "Dolls and heroines are the two more powerful stereotyped forms to develop femininity in audiovisual culture. There are other stereotypes such as the seductive, charming teenagers, the terrible mothers or the self-sacrificing mothers, the brainless teenagers or the cantankerous old women that could also have been dealt with. But I had to choose between all of them because the theme of heroism associated with the power of male violence is one of the most deeply rooted symbolic constructions in audiovisual productions that stereotype genres, a construction that, of course, the media have not invented since it is implicit in the evolution of culture" (p. 14). After that, we find almost a dozen chapters, of different themes, classifications and very varied examples of those heroines and dolls in cultural products: movies, television series, novels, comics, video clips, information, entertainment ... There will be no reader who can keep apart, insensitive to reading, with these much needed analyses.

The chapter on *Barbie dolls, games and symbolic thought and toys that girls demand with passion* (p 49) is particularly remarkable. The author asks us: Why many women do not want to admit that they played with Barbies? She responds later and correctly reasons it throughout the chapter: "The fundamental reproach is that Barbie is hypersexualized and teaches girls that the main value for women is physical beauty" (p. 50). The author manifest, however, that there have always been Barbies. The dolls with the appearance of adult women have existed for more than 200 years (p. 50). "In the 18th century, in France, the so-called fashion dolls began to be manufactured, with large hips and a very big bust, which the fashion houses placed in the shop windows to advertise their designs. The girls of the European bourgeoisie immediately wanted to have one and their manufacture quickly spread from France to Germany" (p. 51).

In Spain, the manufacture of dolls took off in the 1950s, with Toyse, Vicma, Famosa, and since the 1970s, with the Nancy doll, looking like a young woman, aged

15 to 18 years (page 51). From there we can jump to the *Heroisms: symbolic battles and gendered tastes in the cultural industries* in the fifth chapter. The author dismantles the idea that heroes are no longer fashionable and antiheroes are triumphant. "As a society, we still like the heroic material (...) Fiction covers the gap between what is normative and desire" (p. 88). The sixth chapter is dedicated to *Football and television*. Bernárdez delves into the Rio Olympics, where the writers were surprised that there were more female than male medalists (p. 103). She also cites and considers a study by Clara Sainz de Baranda, which affirmed that women only occupy 5.11% in the presence of the sports press (p. 103).

*Wonder Woman* occupies the entire seventh chapter, with the emotions of power and the cases of Harvey Weinstein, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Spacey, Woody Allen... It also explores the power of media headlines, which talked about *Wonder Woman* as the first film with a super-heroine, forgetting *Catwoman* (2004) or *Elektra* (2005), among many others, like the previous versions of *Wonder Woman* for film and television (p.128). She tops with the feminist epic of *Outlander*, a beautiful television series that we can see in Spain. Its protagonist is a heroine traveling through time and Bernárdez dedicates the tenth chapter to her. Claire travels in a supernatural way, but she is a normal woman. The beautiful and feminist trait of her history: "Her authentic power is the knowledge that she carries with her from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her main capacity is her rationalism and courage in front of the men that gives experience to her as a nurse in World War II" (p. 162).

**Asunción Bernárdez** is Full Professor and Director of the Feminist Research Institute of the Complutense University of Madrid. PhD in Journalism and a bachelor's degree in Hispanic Philology from the UCM, she currently directs the R & D Excellence Program Project entitled *Cultural Produsage in social networks: industry, popular consumption and audiovisual literacy of Spanish youth with a gender perspective*. She carries out numerous international research works, with high impact, about the analysis of gender discourses, both textual and audiovisual.

**Graciela Padilla Castillo**  
Complutense University of Madrid