

Going Back to the Womb: Womb Symbols in *Frozen II*

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks into the intricate use of womb symbolism in the Disney animated film Frozen II and its representation of the concept of returning to the womb. Through a comprehensive analysis of various scenes and symbols, we explore the profound impact of this symbolism on the characters' personal development, the narrative's underlying themes, and its connections to psychological and mythological frameworks. By dissecting the film's visual and narrative elements, we argue that the womb symbolism serves as a powerful metaphor for rebirth, empowerment, and transformation. This metaphor not only enriches the understanding of the characters' individual journeys but also enhances the film's overall message, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between mythological archetypes and modern storytelling.

Keywords: Symbolism, Womb, Rebirth.

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Disney animated film *Frozen II* is a follow-up to the hugely popular 2013 film *Frozen*. Directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, the film became an international sensation, earning over \$1.4 billion (Kandell, 2020) at the box office. The film examines the value of accepting one's genuine identity and themes of self-discovery and empowerment.

Given that it appealed to audiences of all ages and became a global sensation, *Frozen II* has acquired considerable cultural value. Engaging narrative, stunning animation, musical sequences, and the positive portrayal of powerful female characters have all received accolades for the film.

The indigenous people, notably those of the Sámi people of Scandinavia, influenced *Frozen II*. Scholarly research has focused on how Sámi tradition is portrayed in *Frozen II*. Kvidal-Røvik and Cordes (2020) talk about how the Indigenous Sámi peoples are portrayed in the film, emphasising how their landscapes and methods of life are shown. Kalvig (2020) investigates, in a similar vein, how “the Sámi” and “Sámi shamanism” are portrayed in the film through the use of magic and nature.

Womb Symbolism

The symbolism of the womb is a prominent subject in the fields of literature and film studies, examining the interrelations of femininity, motherhood, and the symbolic depiction of the womb as an

origin of life, artistic expression, and mystery. The womb is shown as a powerful symbol in several cultural and creative manifestations, representing concepts of genesis, childbirth, and even mortality. The uterus is closely associated with concepts of femininity and life in numerous cultures, and its removal frequently signifies a deprivation of fundamental feminine identity (Kav-Venaki & Zakham, 1983). The symbolic connection emphasizes the ingrained cultural views about the uterus and its significant role in shaping gender roles and expectations.

The analysis of womb symbolism in "Frozen II" from a cultural standpoint examines the incorporation of indigenous religious themes in the storyline, emphasizing the connection between cultural traditions and the art of storytelling. The film provokes critical observations on the ethical issues of depicting sacred cultural aspects in mainstream media by exploring the interconnection between the womb symbol and indigenous spirituality like that of the Sámi tradition.

In "Frozen II," the symbolic representation of the womb explores the deep psychological aspects of the characters, accessing their basic fears, desires, and unresolved emotions at a subconscious level. The womb, serving as a metaphorical realm, symbolizes a period of change and transformation, reflecting the internal struggles and external obstacles faced by the protagonists. Moreover, the analysis of womb symbolism in "Frozen II" uncovers the narrative significance of this motif, which effectively contributes to character growth and thematic depth in the film.

Going Back to The Womb:

The concept of "going back to the womb" is a deeply symbolic one, representing the beginning of life in all civilizations. It is a metaphorical or symbolic return to a state of solace, security, and nurturing, similar to what it feels like to be within the womb. This idea can be interpreted psychologically, symbolically, and biologically. In psychology, it alludes to the need to return to a feeling of security, comfort, and safety. The metaphorical idea often represents a return to one's origin, comfort, or place of protection, inspired by the womb as the first nurturing place where life starts.

It can be viewed symbolically as a longing for rebirth or a figurative return to one's origin. Numerous disciplines, including literature, philosophy, and religion, have investigated this idea. For instance, McAlister (2018) investigates the usage of maternal imagery for God in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, *Gregory the Great*, and *Augustine of Hippo*. The womb is shown in their works as a multifaceted metaphor that denotes conception and birth and emphasises the caring and creative facets of God. Returning to the womb can represent a desire to reunite with a higher power or a return to a more profound, unadulterated condition of being in spiritual and philosophical contexts. It symbolises a journey to enlightenment or transcendence, similar to how a foetus grows inside the womb before leaving it and entering the world.

The idea can also be understood via the lenses of psychology and neuroscience. According to research, a person's growth and emotional reactions can be significantly influenced by the noises and feelings they receive when in the womb (Teie, 2016). It can also be investigated in terms of individual

experiences and feelings. For instance, how people conceptualise these frozen embryos can affect how they decide how to dispose of them (Nachtigall et al., 2005). Parents may view frozen embryos as biological material, live beings, or as a sign of their earlier infertility. These various conceptualisations, which reflect the complicated emotions and attachments connected to the concept of returning to the womb, add to the ambivalence and difficulties in making a decision.

The paper explores the concept of “back to the womb” in the film *Frozen II*, focusing on the symbolic and allegorical nature of the idea. It examines the use of womb symbols, their relevance, and their role in the narrative. The paper analyses the visual, narrative, and symbolic components of vaginal symbols, their location, context, and possible meanings. It also explores how these symbols are interpreted and have cultural importance. The paper aims to understand how these symbols are used in the film and their cultural significance.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the utilization of womb symbolism in *Frozen II* and its influence on the characters' personal development and transformation.
2. To examine the correlations between the representation of the womb in *Frozen II* and its impact on the film's storytelling and thematic complexity within psychological and mythological contexts.

Significance of the Study

Studying womb symbols in *Frozen II* can reveal the film's profound layers of meaning and its profound impact on audiences. The womb, a powerful archetype in mythology and psychology, symbolizes safety, creation, and the beginning of life. Analysing how *Frozen II* uses womb symbols reveals the film's connection to universal themes, forging a subconscious bond with viewers. The protagonists' journeys, particularly those of Elsa and Anna, serve as metaphorical returns to the womb, symbolizing their quests for identity, origin, and transformation. The study will also explore how womb symbols reflect contemporary societal values and collective psychological themes, including the film's feminist ethos. This analysis will illuminate *Frozen II*'s cultural relevance and its profound engagement with universal human experiences through a modern narrative.

Literature Review

The study of symbolism in film conducted by Gao (2021) examines the analysis of symbols in the film *Ash Is Purest White* through the lens of film semiotics. This resource presents a systematic way for examining visual and aural symbols in films, offering a structure for comprehending how symbols contribute to the storytelling and thematic aspects of cinematic creations. In addition, the study conducted by Varghese & Balasubramanian (2017) explores the utilization of Carl Jung's archetypes in Malayalam film. The research sheds light on how films utilize these archetypal characters to communicate universal themes and psychological elements. Comprehending the utilization of

archetypes in film narratives is essential for decoding the symbolic language of cinema and unraveling the profound meanings embedded within visual storytelling.

Feminist Film Theory

Symbolism analysis is essential in feminist film theory since it helps to deconstruct cinematic narratives and examine how gender, power dynamics, and society standards are represented in films. Upon analysing the chosen references, it becomes clear that feminist film theory provides a discerning perspective for interpreting the symbolic language of cinema and untangling the intricacies of gendered portrayals on screen.

A relevant source for examining symbols within the framework of feminist film theory is the research conducted by Zhou et al. (2023). This study delves into the impact of feminist movements on the representation of women in film and television plays. This reference emphasizes the connection between feminist concepts and the use of signs and symbols to shape the portrayal of women's appearance, conduct, and control in movies. It highlights how these symbols are used to question established gender conventions and give female characters on screen a sense of empowerment.

Psychoanalytic interpretations of symbols

Erdelyi's (2006) study explores Freud's comprehensive theory of repression and defense mechanisms. This reference provides a fundamental comprehension of how the mind employs different techniques, such as repression, to eliminate specific thoughts or wants from consciousness. Researchers can utilize Freud's theories on defense mechanisms to analyze films and reveal how symbols in cinema may symbolize suppressed wants, fears, or conflicts inside characters and narratives.

Another noteworthy reference is the research conducted by Balanzategui (2014), which analyzes the portrayal of childhood trauma in Spanish and American horror films from a Freudian perspective. This source examines the fears influenced by Freudian theories of disruptions in childhood and suppressed secrets. It demonstrates how movies can reflect and engage with psychoanalytic ideas concerning trauma, repression, and the unconscious mind.

The Use of Symbols and Semiotics in Film Analysis

A critical method for examining the deeper meanings and messages presented in films through their visual and aural components is using symbols and semiotics in film analysis. Symbols can be employed in cinema analysis to represent ideas, feelings, or cultural allusions. For instance, the rose symbolises beauty, desire, and the frailty of life in the film *American Beauty* (ISLAM & Incirkuş, 2022).

In films all across the world, the motif of “going back to the womb” frequently appears to express a longing for security, comfort, and a return to childhood. Numerous films have explored this issue, each in a different way.

The protagonist's effort to survive in difficult circumstances is shown as a struggle that drives him into hiding in the Lina Wertmüller-directed movie *Seven Beauties* (Brown, 2011). The movie also depicts the exploitation of women's bodies, evoking the abhorrence of the state of the unborn and the terror of being drawn back into the womb (Brown, 2011). Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* explores the idea that the outside world can serve as a womb, a shell, and a harbour from all storms (Nevins, 1968). The physical dizziness that the character Scottie experiences is interwoven with his metaphysical awareness that the universe, as he perceives it, might suddenly collapse beneath him (Nevins, 1968). The film portrays the real world as a haven of protection, similar to the womb.

The breathing and non-breathing bodies are explored in Camille Vidal-Naquet's *Sauvage*, where breathing is seen as the womb's initial outgrowth (Talijan, 2021). *Anak*, a film from the Philippines, analyses how transnational imaginaries are created and how feminised labour is exported into the heart of the world economy (Raymundo, 2011). The conflict between expected feminine virtue, worry, melancholy, and maternal sacrifice is explored in the movie. Animations like *Ren and Stimpy* and *South Park* also feature the idea of returning to the womb, with depictions of anal flesh and biological functions conjuring feelings of regression and a return to a primaevial condition (Scholfield, 1999).

Caves

Caves also hold metaphorical significance in psychological and philosophical contexts. In Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, the cave represents the depths of the human psyche, where hidden aspects of the self reside. Metaphorically, caves can embody themes of self-discovery, transformation, and the journey into the depths of the human psyche. In mythology and folklore, caves are often depicted as entrances to other realms or as the dwelling places of supernatural beings.

Caves have been interpreted as symbols of the womb or vagina in various cultural, mythological, and artistic contexts. This association stems from the similarities between the physical characteristics of caves and the reproductive organs of the female body. A cave's dark, hollow interior can be seen as analogous to the womb, a space of creation, nurturing, and birth.

Among the Maya, caves have been associated with creation, reproduction, fertility, personhood (Prufer & Brady 2005, p. 11), the feminine, the sexual (Brady & Prufer 2005b, p. 370), transformation (Pugh 2005:58). Among Mesoamerican groups, caves have been seen as birthplaces and could symbolise vaginas and wombs (Pugh, 2005, p. 50). Sahagún (1969:vi, 118, 151) reports that among the Aztecs, women referred to their vaginas as 'caves,' indicating that children were created in human caves (Moyes, 2005b, p. 189) and the Tzotzil and Ch'orti' Maya use the word for the cave as a comical metaphor for the vagina (Moyes 2005b, p. 190).

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a multi-faceted methodology drawing from Psychoanalytic theory, Archetypal criticism, and Feminist theory as the primary theoretical frameworks. The research design will involve a qualitative analysis of symbols related to the womb in *Frozen II*. Data collection will focus on selecting specific scenes, symbols and dialogues that depict or represent elements of the womb within the film.

The application of Psychoanalytic theory will delve into the subconscious themes and representations surrounding the womb symbols in the film. Archetypal criticism will be utilized to uncover universal symbols and mythic elements present in the portrayal of the womb. Additionally, Feminist theory will provide a critical lens through which to explore gender dynamics, empowerment, and representation within the context of the womb symbols in *Frozen II*.

Data analysis will involve a systematic examination of selected scenes, symbols and dialogues, applying the aforementioned theoretical frameworks to interpret the deeper meanings and implications. Examples will be provided to illustrate how each theory contributes to the overall analysis.

Analysis

Elsa embarks on a trip that quickly transforms into a quest for self-discovery when she hears a mysterious voice calling out to her. She travels to the magical forests and terrifying oceans beyond her kingdom.

A crucial sequence in *Frozen II* with a wealth of significance is when Elsa and her group approach the magical woodland through the mist. Elsa, Anna, Kristoff, Sven, and Olaf set off on an adventure through the enchanted forest to learn the truth about Arendelle's past and Elsa's magical powers. Passing through this dense mist that envelops the forest signifies a pivotal moment in the film's narrative. This scene from the film can be viewed from the perspective of the transformation that will soon take place between Elsa and Anna. The idea of transformation that is going to take place is brought up by Olaf when he says: "*Did you know that an enchanted forest is a place of transformation?*" This line foreshadows what is going to happen to them.

While Olaf says this, he says it in a mysterious tone, which makes the other characters, Elsa, Anna, Kristoff, and Sven, have worried looks on their faces because in the earlier scenes, when Olaf talks about being wiser, all the characters started singing the song "*Some things never change*." This song talks about how each character is unwilling to go through change, and while the lyrics say something, the visuals show the opposite of what the words are saying. For example, when Anna sings, "*Some things never change*", she says the words that some things never change, but the visuals around her show that the townspeople are making some change to their surroundings either by building a new house or when she says "*some things stay the same*", but the visuals show that an old

tree is being cut down. Other instances with the same example show that when Anna says “*like an old stone wall that will never fall,*” but the visuals show that the stone wall she is talking about is crumbling down slowly. Thus, these instances give us the idea that, as humans, we are not susceptible to change even though change is bound to occur.

The scene, where Elsa enters the ice cave known as Ahtohallan, is a pivotal moment in the film. Elsa’s inner self is symbolised by the ice cave, a secretive and enigmatic location where she must face her darkest fears and discover the mysteries of her history. One could compare the trip into the ice cave to a plunge into her psyche.

However, this is also the scene where we can analyse the idea of going back to the womb, which signifies rebirth, transformation, and self-discovery. The depths of the womb or unconscious mind are comparable to the enigmatic and hidden realm represented by the ice cave. It is a place where Elsa faces her previous secrets and learns the real story of Arendelle and her abilities.

While looking at the visuals of this scene, we can see several symbolisms. For example, the shape of the entrance of Ahtohallan is anatomically similar to that of a vagina. This signifies that Elsa is literally and metaphorically entering the cave, giving us the idea of “Going back to the womb.” While entering the cave, Elsa sings the song *Show Yourself*, and as she approaches the cave, she sings the lyrics “I’m arriving, and it feels like I am home”, which gives us an idea that even though Elsa at first did not want anything to change, she soon succumbs to the voice that calls her which shows that Elsa always had a thirst to meet this voice that calls her even though at first she was reluctant to listen to it. We see this thirst in the scene when Elsa talks to the voice through a song in the middle of the night.

The song *Into the Unknown* by Elsa explores her initial fear of following a voice into the unknown. She feels she doesn't belong in this world and is afraid to succumb to change. However, in the second part of the song, she expresses a longing to go into the unknown, indicating that she is no longer afraid of the voice but wants to follow it. She justifies her decision by asking “Where are you going, don't leave me alone, how do I follow you into the unknown?” This song shows Elsa's first change as she initially hesitates to follow the voice but eventually decides to do so because she can resonate with it.

While in the ice cave, Ahtohallan, Elsa’s mother also welcomes Elsa home by singing, *Come my darling homeward bound*, and Elsa says, *I am found*, which signifies a significant moment in the whole journey that Elsa has taken to follow the voice that calls her because she always felt like she did not belong. However, now she is finally where she belongs.

In the cave, Elsa discovers she is the fifth elemental spirit, symbolizing harmony and balance between fire, earth, air, and water. The diamond-shaped object present around her throughout the film symbolizes these fundamental energies. One could see Elsa’s trip into the ice cave as a metaphorical plunge into her own inner realm. This is similar to the psychological process of individuation and self-

discovery. Analysing the scene in "Frozen II" where Anna explores the cave—also referred to as the "Memory Cave" or the "Cave of the Past"—is crucial because it touches on the concept of returning to one's womb or delving into one's psyche.

Anna's descent into the cave serves as a metaphorical journey into Arendelle's past, paralleling Elsa's ice cave adventure. Anna undergoes emotions before changing, uncovering the truth about her grandfather and Arendelle's past. After Olaf's death, Anna is left in pain, knowing something has happened to Elsa. However, when she comes out, she experiences courage and transformation, singing *The Next Right Thing*. Anna faces memories from her family and herself, involving happy, sad, and intimate experiences, giving her character depth and addressing her past and family's legacy.

Findings

In *Frozen II*, the concept of returning to the womb is entwined with the characters' quests for self-awareness, revelation of secrets, and historical investigation. Firstly, the enchanted forest is a symbolic womb, a secretive place full of mystery that conceals the characters' origin stories. Elsa and Anna's voyage into the forest symbolises a plunge into the depths of both their individual and Arendelle's pasts. We see that while entering the enchanted forest, Olaf says, "*Did you know that an enchanted forest is a place of transformation?*" and this sets the tone of the film where we will see that the main characters, Elsa, Anna and Olaf will go through a journey of transformation and self-discovery.

The enchanted forest serves as a metaphorical womb where characters explore the forest's mysteries and past history. Elsa meets the four spirits: fire, air, earth, and water, who resonate with her. The fire symbol represents Elsa's passion, tenacity, and capacity for creation and destruction. The air sign represents change, freedom, and the invisible forces shaping the world. Elsa's affinity for the air element represents her path to liberation and her abilities. The earth symbol represents the earth giants and the enchanted woodland's earth-centric setting. Elsa's affinity for the earth element represents her developing awareness of her role as a protector and her place in the natural world. The water symbol represents Elsa's command of water and her capacity to regulate ice and snow. Elsa's path of self-discovery and emotional development is reflected in the water element's associations with emotions and adaptability. A turning point occurs when Elsa recognizes herself as the fifth elemental spirit, connecting the magical and human realms, highlighting her special contribution to preserving harmony and balance.

As mentioned, the idea of returning to the womb can be interpreted in various ways, including psychologically, symbolically, and biologically. In the film, we can see that the idea of returning to the womb is interpreted symbolically as a womb full of secrets and mystery that conceals the secrets of the past, especially in the ice cave that Elsa enters. Psychologically, the womb is represented by the idea that Elsa delves back into the past to rediscover herself. She enters the cave that holds all the

memories she has had all her life, as well as the secrets of her family and how she is to use this new information to save her kingdom. It symbolises how Elsa delves back into her memories and psyche to discover herself. The idea of going back to the womb is also represented biologically when we see the shape of the memory cave that Elsa and Anna both enter are, in the shape of a vagina which signifies that they are returning back to the womb both literally and figuratively.

Separately, Elsa and Anna explore the Memory Cave, an area full of memories and enchanted symbols. It is possible to see this cave as a womb-like setting where the characters face their past, signifying a journey back to the wellspring of their identity. While the change between Elsa and Anna is different, as we see that Elsa moves towards the cave wholeheartedly, however, Anna reluctantly enters the cave of memory as she had "no way out." Elsa embraces the ice cave, saying that she feels like she is home, and it is something that signifies the idea that Elsa is entering the ice cave both literally (in the form of a vagina-shaped entrance) as well as metaphorically "Going back to the Womb" which signifies comfort. Elsa is finally where she is meant to be, a place where she can be herself, i.e., the fifth spirit, as well as a place she is comfortable at. Elsa feels that she had found herself inside the ice cave and found out who she truly is and where she belongs. Whereas Anna had to go through change more painfully as Anna had always wanted things never to change. The difference was that Elsa was afraid of change but somehow still willing towards change, as seen in the song "*Into the Unknown*," but Anna was not susceptible to change, as seen in the song "*Some Things Never Change*." However, Anna had to accept the fact that "*Things will never be the same*."

The Memory Cave and the magical forest are where Elsa and Anna confront their worries and doubts, undergoing a psychological investigation similar to a symbolic rebirth. The battle between Arendelle and the Northuldra people is revealed, revealing their family's background and the effects of their decisions. Through their travels, they experience profound metamorphoses, allowing them to grow as people and accept their roles in the story. Caves represent the depths of the human psyche, where hidden aspects of the self reside. Elsa's transformation and lyrics reflect her longing for a place where she feels comfortable.

At the end, we can also see that the other characters emphasise on the change and transformation that Elsa had gone through. This is justified in the dialogue given by Kristoff, "*You look different. Did you cut your hair or something?*" Olaf also justifies the idea of transformation in his dialogue: "*I don't know what real transformation means. But I feel like this forest has really changed us all.*" Returning to the womb is a recurring subject that is connected to ideas of growth and rebirth. After completing their symbolic trips, the characters have a better understanding of who they are, where they come from, and what role they play in the universe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Frozen II* skilfully incorporates the notion of returning to the womb into the story, using symbolic locations such as the Memory Cave and the Enchanted Forest to lead the protagonists

on personal growth journeys that force them to face their pasts and ultimately undergo life-changing experiences.

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