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Trabajo Fin de Grado

Aiming at Gender Stereotypes, Aiming for Freedom: The Figure of the Disney Princess in Brave (2012)

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Resumen

Este ensayo busca realizar un análisis en el cambio de patrón de la figura de la princesa en las películas Disney. Para ello, se va a utilizar *Brave* (2012), una de las primeras películas en la que se puede apreciar este cambio de manera más clara. Esta da lugar a una representación de la figura femenina independiente, alejada de los valores tradicionales. El análisis se realizará usando el personaje de Mérida y explorando su aspecto físico, su personalidad y sus habilidades. Además, se comparará el final respecto a las películas de princesas Disney anteriores y lo que supone el cambio de ese final para la princesa.

Abstract

This BA thesis seeks to analyze the change in the pattern of the princess figure in Disney films. For that matter *Brave* (2012), one of the first films in which this change can be fully appreciated, it will be used. This film gives rise to a representation of an independent female figure away from traditional values. The analysis will be carried out using the character of Merida and exploring her physical appearance, her personality and her skills. In addition, the ending will be compared with the previous Disney princess films and what this change means for the princess will be commented.

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1. Introduction

1.1. *Brave:* Opening New Paths for Disney Princesses

Brave (Mark Andrews, Brenda Chapman and Steve Purcell, 2012) is the 13th animated film produced by Pixar Animation Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Pictures. It tells the story of Merida, a 16-year-old Scottish princess daughter of King Fergus and Queen Elinor. *Brave* could have been a typical princess film like all the company's previous ones, but Merida's behavior makes it different from the rest. From the beginning of the film, her strong attitude can be perceived; she prefers practicing archery or horseback riding rather than fulfilling typical princess responsibilities. Merida is a strong character who challenges traditionally established norms and struggles to make her own path in life, for example, concerning marriage. She must be engaged with the son of one of her father's allies, otherwise this could damage the kingdom and its relationships but she is not willing to do so. Marriage is one of the most recurring themes and where this change in behavior from previous films and princesses is most noticeable.

For these and other reasons that I will develop throughout this B.A. Thesis, Merida is considered a revolutionary princess who has turned the traditional concept of how a princess should behave upside down. Even for some people, such as Mark Andrews, the co-director of *Brave*, Merida is considered an "anti-princess". In an interview, he refers to Merida as not "your typical princess. She doesn't wear nice clothes except in a couple of scenes when her strict mum, Queen Elinor, makes her do it for special functions." In addition, he thinks that "she's an active and action-oriented person. She wants to get out in the outdoors of the Highlands, escaping from castle life and exploring the woods" ("Meet Disney's"). Merida is not like other princesses. She has a strong personality and decides to fight to get out of the private sphere.

Brave is an interesting film to deal with because although it is not the most recent, it is the first one that gave way to a change. It was released after *Tangled* (2010), where Rapunzel's attitude reflects a slight change in the values of traditional princesses and their role in society, but not as drastically as in *Brave*. "We've had female protagonists in our movies; we've had Helen and Violet and the little girl in *Monsters Inc.* who's a little tough cookie. And Eve is fantastic." Mark Andrews, *Brave's* co-director, said. "So we've had female protagonists before, just not the center main character. […] but I think it's important to have one because that just opens it up to more", he continued (L Davis). Merida is the second princess protagonist in the Disney universe after Rapunzel and her film marks the beginning of a new era with movies like *Frozen* (2013and *Moana* (2016). In these films, we can clearly see a change towards a princess with a strong personality, far from traditional roles and who defies the established by making her own decisions. In addition, it is one of the few films, if not the only one in which the figure of the mother plays an important role. In most Disney princess films, the mother is dead and is replaced with the figure of the stepmother, who is usually the antagonist of the princess. In this case, the figure of the mother reappears and the film explores some unusual Disney themes; the mother-daughter bond and the intergenerational problem.

Brave shows us a strong female protagonist who rebels against traditional norms to follow her own path in life and discover who she really is. The change towards revolutionary ideas provides the audience with alternative visions regarding the search for one's own identity and marriage. I think it is important to highlight how these changes alter the audience's perception. Especially, how this may influence children who have been watching "prince charming" saving a princess throughout their childhood. On the one hand, boys grew up thinking that they always had to be heroes and that they could not ask for help. On the other hand, girls cannot take any decisions in their lives, they had to sit and wait to be saved. *Brave* gives the audience and especially children, the target audience, a fresh vision of ideas like marriage. Merida teaches

the viewer that we do not need a prince charming to rescue us; we can make our own decisions that will change and set a new course in our lives. In addition, the film explores how two different generations, Merida and her mother, consider these issues. *Brave* teaches us that the solution is not to fight to see who is right, but that both sides need each other. In this film, Disney reconciles with the figure of the mother and the mother-daughter relationship to show us that we must be united to overcome whatever happens. Mark Andrews provides another interpretation; he thinks that "what people are going to get out of this, is get a realness that we can aspire to forgive ourselves and to learn that mistakes are okay and you don't have to have things that are solved right away" (L Davis). *Brave* (2012) teaches us that no one is perfect and that real bravery lies in accepting them and finding a solution. This BA thesis analyzes how Disney broke the traditional princess' pattern with *Brave* (2012). Through this movie Disney gives rise to a change towards a princess figure that challenges the established gender roles. Merida has a strong personality, her physical appearance is more similar to that of a real woman and she does not depend on "Prince Charming's" male figure for her happy ending.

1.2. Historical Context

The Walt Disney Company was founded in 1923. Throughout its history, the company has produced a vast number of animated films with a wide variety of themes but definitely, Disney princess films have been one of the most popular among viewers. According to Juliana Garabedian, we can divide the Disney princesses into three categories: Pre-Transition, Transition and Progression (23). In the first one (1937-1959), we find traditional and submissive princesses. In the second (1989-1998), we can appreciate some changes in the personality of the princesses as they manifest their desire for freedom. Finally, in the last period (2009 -) we find fully independent princesses that make their own decisions (Garabedian, 23).

The first Disney princess movie was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. It was released in 1937 and gave rise to a series of princess films. After *Snow White*, the company released

Cinderella (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). These are part of the Pre-Transition period in which "women are seen as domestic, focused mainly on family and personal relationships; they are considered highly emotional individuals, less competent and dependent on their male counterparts for emotional and financial support" (Matyas, 4). Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora are traditional princesses and their behavior reflects the conventional values of the time. In this period the power resided in the male gender; men were part of the public sphere, so they worked, voted and studied. On the contrary, women remained in the private sphere and oversaw the house and its chores. As Garabedian points out "women were confined to the stereotype of homemaker, with only 39 percent of American women working by the end of the Pre-Transition period (Bureau of Labor Statistics)" (23). When *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937) was released, women's suffrage was not internationally approved. They were not allowed to vote, work or study; they had to stay at home. Moreover, to be considered good women they had to get married and have children, so just like in the movies they depended on a man to save them. Moreover, these princesses represent the female figure as something delicate and vulnerable, since beauty is the aspect that stands out the most and not their behavior or skills.

A slight change can be perceived in the Disney Princess figure as we get closer to the present time; as Davis M notes "the middle movies, ranging from 1989 to 1998, mark the beginning of Disney's initial transition to a more active representation of the female characters" (49). *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998) are within this period of transition which "represents the aftereffects of the second wave of feminism" (Garabedian, 23). This change has to do with the degree of dependence princesses have on the male figure; while in the older films they are presented as damsels in distress, the princesses of this period begin to have a certain independence on the male figure (M Davis, 48). It must be considered that these periods are separated by 30 years.

After *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the company decided to make movies with other characters, usually animals. During this period Disney made a total of nine movies about animals. The most famous include: *101 Dalmatians* (1961), *The Aristocats* (1970) and *Robin Hood* (1973). In 1989, with the release of *The Little Mermaid,* Disney went back to princess movies. In the second half of the 20th century, the feminist movement in the United States contributed to the changing role of women in society. Thanks to the The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 women were able to move away from the private sphere working and studying. After 30 years, society progressed and although it was not much, it was enough to notice that small advance in the role of the following princesses. The princesses that are part of this transition period are more independent; they begin to make decisions on their own and stop depending on or obeying superior figures such as the father, the stepmother or "Prince Charming". The most notable change is that the princess begins to seek her freedom and expresses "the need to be free of societal bonds", although in the end, "her happily-ever-after depends on her return to the role expected of women, be it docile princess or subservient wife" (Garabedian, 23).

For example, in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ariel disobeys her father. Despite her father's words, she goes out to explore the world and there she marries a human. She has an adventurous personality and although by disobeying she faces dangers and is punished, what really matters is the change in the attitude of the princesses, even though, as Garabedian states, at the end the movie resorts to the princess-needs-prince plot (23). In the next movie, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), we find Belle. She likes reading and her life revolves around books, not a man or marriage; and, unlike the other princesses, she does not fall in love with the first man she sees. Moreover, she defies the people of the village by defending the Beast even though in the end the prince is the hero. In *Aladdin* (1992), Jasmine wants to choose who she marries, prioritizing love over arranged marriages and alliances between cities. As Garabedian argues, although

"Jasmine rebels against the traditional role of a woman in Agrabah … without the help of Aladdin and Genie, her assertion of opinion would have lasted only until her marriage" (23). *Pocahontas* (1995) opposes her tribe and its values and decides to help the conquerors even though they have harmed her tribe. Finally, *Mulan* (1998) also defies the established norms , disobeys her father, and disguises herself as a man to be a warrior. Her personality is strong and unlike other princesses she fights and takes part in combat. These examples show that although the movies return to the "princess-needs-prince" plot, there is a change in the princesses' way of thinking. The princesses of the transition period seek their freedom, disobey norms and challenge traditional values. They begin to think for themselves and make their own decisions, as well as open to other races and "the other".

Finally, in the progression period we find movies such as *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012)*, Frozen* (2013) and *Moana* (2016). Garabedian points out that "even though the third wave of feminism began in the mid 90s, Disney did not truly break the princess pattern until *Brave*" (24). In the first two, the princesses take more important roles but they still depend on the male figure. In *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), the romantic relationship is no longer the focus of the plot but Tiana still depends on Prince Naveen (Garabedian, 23-24). In *Tangled* (2010) Rapunzel defies her stepmother and fights but Flynn helps her. As Garabedian points out, "the ending, however, is where this movie differs from the previous seven; Rapunzel makes the heroic sacrifice to save Flynn, but the male hero controls the outcome" (24). Although these princesses are freer regarding parental male authority in comparison with the previous period, the prince charming figure continues to play an important role in the happy ending. The transition to a self-sufficient princess is completed when they are able to achieve that happy ending without the need for a male figure. This is what happens in the following movie: *Brave* (2012).

As mentioned before, Disney breaks the princess pattern with *Brave* (2012). Although great advances in women's rights were made in previous decades, Disney did not reflect these changes until this film. In *Brave* (2012) and the Disney films that follow it, this effects of the third and fourth wave of feminism can be perceived. In the 2000s, more and more people joined the feminist movement and fought for women's rights, achieving the reduction of the gender pay gap and the inclusion of women in areas where there have always been a female minority, such as politics. As a result of the change of women's role in society, the princesses are portrayed as adventurous and independent. According to Davis M the most revolutionary example is *Frozen* (2013), "because for the first time, not just one, but two Disney Princesses received their 'happily ever after' without the help of a man. For the first time, a man was not necessary for an act of true love to occur" (M Davis, 52). *Brave* (2012) was a turning point in Disney princess movies. As we have seen in *Frozen* (2013), the plot of the following films revolves around the princesses themselves and not the romantic relationship, which remains in the background. In addition, if we compare the personality of the first princesses with those of this last stage, we can see that they go from acting submissive and sweet to being rebellious, going out of the traditionally feminine standards. The princesses of the new generation have strong personalities, defy the father figure and achieve their happy ending on their own.

After considering in general terms how the Disney princess' transition has taken place, this BA thesis is going to analyze in detail how Disney broke the princess' pattern with *Brave* (2012). To do so, I am going to analyze Merida's physical aspect and its opposition to beauty standards, her brave and independent personality in contrast to pre-transition princesses' obedience and her skills with the bow. In addition, I am going to comment on the ending and Merida's happy ending independence from the male figure.

2. Merida: A Brave, Rebellious, Adventurous Princess

Merida is not the typical Disney princess. She does not follow the traditional female roles and their beauty standards. Brenda Chapman, *Brave*'s director, supports this idea in *The Guardian*, "Merida was created to break that mould. To give young girls a better, stronger role model, a more attainable role model, something of substance, not just a pretty face that waits around for romance." ("Brave Director"). She is not attached to the private sphere and her appearance is completely opposite to the Eurocentric standard of beauty; "white, blonde ideal, blondness and fair-headedness retain symbolic ties to beauty in the USA, as well as a western, Christian-inluenced ethereality rarely accessible to those of darker complexions and hair colors" (Leader, 5). In addition, she has a tough and adventurous personality with which she defies the established rules. It is thanks to Merida's character that *Brave* (2012) can be considered more significant than other Disney princesses movies; it is the first one that gives way to a change.

2.1. Physical Aspect

On the one hand, regarding Merida's physical aspect, and specially her hair, the difference from past princesses can be perceived at first glance. Most of the pre-transition period princesses have long hair and it is usually tied up by some kind of ribbon as in the case of Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora's hair. The long and tied hair represents traditional standards of beauty and the sexualization of women. According to Wade, "Medieval English Christian leaders required that virgins keep their hair long and lowing to represent their chastity and femininity, while married women remained veiled or with their hair covered" (132). This is why the ribbon may reflect the oppression and lack of freedom these princesses face. It is in the transition period that we find changes in the hair of the princesses: Ariel and Pocahontas' hair enhance their adventurous character. As Leader mentions, when Ariel is thinking about her freedom and her human life as she sings, her hair takes center stage in the scene. The same happens when Pocahontas thinks about her future; her hair moves in the wind and stands out

in the scenery (3). For these two princesses, long hair represents their freedom and dreams. Mulan, on the other hand, decides to cut her hair to look like a man. This hair change reflects her rebellion and the break from the feminine standards of beauty. As Leader states, only in *Tangled* and *Brave* is hair narratively essential and dominant in the frame (4). In *Tangled* (2010) Rapunzel's long blond hair goes from being sexualized to provide an image of freedom: it is thanks to her long hair that she manages to escape from the tower. In addition, when Flynn cuts Rapunzel's hair to protect her, her blonde mane becomes short and brunette. Her hair is now the opposite of female beauty standards and represents Rapunzel's true freedom since it liberates her from her mother.

In her case, Merida has a messy, curly red hair. In one of the first scenes, we can see Merida riding a horse with her mane in the wind. The first things that catches our attention is the contrast that her hair makes with the Scottish landscape; her hair "is a beacon of red, orange, and gold light in an otherwise green, blue, and grey Scottish film landscape" (Leader, 7). Due to the great contrast of colors in this scene we could interpret the dominant color, green, as the norm and traditions. On the other side, red could represent the change towards a different and potentially more progressive society. This contrast shows us from the beginning how different Merida is from the rest of the princesses and how different her ideas are from traditional society. If we analyze her hair in detail, on the one hand, her long hair shows freedom and contrasts with past princesses' ribbons which represented oppression and sexualization. On the other hand, her curls accentuate the empowerment and rebelliousness of her personality. Her curls contrast with the straight and well-groomed hair of the early princesses. Curls are more difficult to brush and control than straight hair; even she finds difficult sometimes dealing with her own hair. This is why we could establish a connection between the degree of waviness of the princesses' hair and their personality. The ones with straight hair are more docile and submissive while Merida is rebellious and independent like her curls. One situation in which

the features of her hair stand out is when Queen Elinor, Merida's mother, helps her get dressed to receive her suitors. The interpretation that we can give to this scene is that Queen Elinor insists on imposing her traditional ideals on her daughter. Her goal is for Merida to be as feminine as the rest of the princesses. First, she tries to style and control Merida's unruly hair. As we mentioned before, curly hair is difficult to brush, so she struggles with her curls until she manages to put a tight wimple on it. Although she manages to tame her hair, and impose her ideals, Elinor fails: a rebellious lock of hair manages to escape. Again and again her mother puts it back, but she pulls it out again. This independent lock reflects Merida's own rebelliousness and her resistance to obey her mother.

Secondly, talking about her body, Elinor ties Merida's corset tightly to make her figure slimmer and more in line with beauty standards. As well as the wimple, the dress and corset are an allegory for her oppression. Her mother tells her that she "looks absolutely beautiful" and Merida replies that she "can't breathe". In addition, Elinor asks her to turn around and Merida adds "I cannot move, it is too tight". For Mérida, the corset and the tight dress are a form of oppression of her body and mind. The corset is a garment traditionally associated with the repression of women. Although its use is uncomfortable and can be detrimental to health, it provides the stylization of the figure. The corset helped to achieve a slim body, so many women used it to acquire the "perfect" body according to traditional ideals of beauty. The stereotype was to be slim and wear tight clothes, even though, as in Merida's case, it did not allow them to breathe. On the other hand, for Queen Elinor "it is perfect". She sees wearing tight clothes as a tradition and a way for her daughter to achieve beauty standards. If we look at Merida's body, we can see that "she has more realistic body proportions than past princesses, with a slightly protruding belly and wider hips, and overall is not hyper-sexualized" (Morrison, 11). Her waist is not as thin as others, so her mother tries to achieve this through the corset. As Morrison considers, Merida "insists that her clothing be comfortable so she can enjoy her active

lifestyle" (11). Yet, her mother believes that wearing other clothes is not appropriate for a princess, as she must make a good impression. For Queen Elinor, the priority is not that she can move and practice archery or ride a horse, the priority is that she looks pretty.

The queen clings to the idea that the most important feature about a woman is her beauty, not her skills or strength, so she strives to make Merida look good. This belief is reinforced in the scene of the archery competition: Merida is presented as a trophy for which the men compete. The moment that she realizes this, she decides to rebel against traditions and starts to make her own decisions. The princess covers her hair with a hood and presents herself as her own suitor. When she removes it, we can see her free red mane, once again representing freedom and disobedience. Moreover, when she tries to shoot the arrow, she tears her dress, freeing herself from the oppression provided by this garment. Merida opposes to her mother's traditional ideas and proves that she is not only a pretty face, but also has great skill with the bow. Furthermore, following the idea that Merida's appearance is different from the other princesses, we can see how her face also shows this. As Morrison points out, her face is rounder and does not have the refined features of other princesses. In addition, is full of freckles, which makes her not have an "airbrushed" look (11). These features make Merida imperfect and make her look like a real woman unlike the rest of the princesses that are sexualized according to male fantasies (11).

Merida's physical appearance is the opposite of beauty standards. The physical appearance and especially the hair, have a great significance in the changing role of the princess in society; while princesses before the transition have their hair tied up and well groomed, in the transition period there is a change. These princesses have loose hair, showing a step forward towards their freedom. In Merida's case, it is also curly and does not allow itself to be brushed. It reflects her independent and disobedient behavior towards her mother and society's gender norms.

Brave (2012) shows us a female figure more akin to real women and opens the way to a less feminine generation of princesses.

2.2. Personality and Behavior

Apart from her appearance, Merida's personality differs from the previous princesses. While in the pre-transition period the princesses stand out because of their perfect appearance and beauty, Merida stands out for her skills with the bow and her rebellious personality. As we have already seen in the previous section, the princesses of the pre-transition period are related to traditional roles. Their behavior is submissive and strongly depends on the male figure. In addition, their role in society is stereotypically feminine, they are housewives. These princesses are not part of public life and are destined to remain in the private sphere. Thanks to the different waves of feminism and their consequences, we can find revolutionary representations of women like Merida in Disney Princesses films. Feminism has achieved important rights and advances for women and has allowed many of them to study and take part in public life. What differentiates Merida from the princesses of the pre-transition period is that even though in all cases there are authority figures that tell them what to do, Merida does not obey and decides to make her own decisions. Queen Elinor wants her daughter to be feminine and correct, but Merida challenges the mother figure and manages to leave the private sphere and enter the public one.

Brave (2012) is narrated by Merida herself, which reflects from the beginning the behavior and initiative of the princess. She narrates her own story, so she takes control of the narrative unlike other princesses whose stories are told by an external narrator. Her personality is not defined as traditionally feminine. As Morrison states Merida is a "new breed of Disney princess - one brimming with self-confidence" (19). As the title of the film itself indicates, she is brave. This idea is shown when she shoots a bear with an arrow to protect her family. In addition, she climbs a rock and drinks from the Fire Falls. As her father explains, "only the ancient kings

were brave enough to drink the fire" (Brave) (Blankestijn, 37). Merida, a woman, achieves something that until then only men had been able to achieve. Through this act, she proves to be as brave as the ancient kings. She is strong and active. She moves around the kingdom on horseback and does not stay at home. Additionally, when she shoots the last arrow in the archery competition, we can see that she scratches her face. Merida endures the pain and does not complain. Merida is also rebellious, independent and stubborn. She complains about depending on what her mother tells her to do. She says, for example: "she [her mother] is in charge of every single day of my life". She also wants to make her own decisions. Merida is determined to follow her own path in life, even if she makes a mistake. The important fact is that she will have taken a chance. When she makes the mistake of going to the witch, she takes responsibility for this mistake and tries to fix it herself, without the help of a man. Moreover, she is quick-tempered. We can see this when Queen Elinor tells her that she wants her to marry. Merida gets angry and tears up her mother's tapestry (Blankestijn, 38).

The adjectives with which Merida is described are part of a traditional masculine description rather than a feminine one. We could say that Merida's personality portrays the typical characteristics of the traditional male hero. If we compare her with who should be the traditional heroes in the film, her suitors, we can appreciate Merida's athletic superiority. Moreover, she has a more mature character than the male figures. This can be seen when one of the suitors shoots the arrow and fails. As a result, he gets angry, cries and kicks. The masculinity represented by these male figures is fragile and weak in contrast to Merida's strong femininity. Through Merida's character, *Brave* (2012) shows the audience a different interpretation of the traditional hero, a strong and independent woman.

2.3. Skills

In the last section, it has been shown how Merida decides to make her own decisions and rebel to get away from the oppressive private sphere. Throughout the film, we can see the princess enjoying the public sphere and the freedom that nature gives her. She practices archery, horse-riding and climbs rocks. Merida is related to sports and adventure, while the pre-transition period princesses are related to the role of housewife and domestic activities such as cleaning and cooking. Unlike other princesses who do not leave home, "she can live in the wilderness, climb trees and mountains" (Barber, 20).

As mentioned before, one of Merida's greatest skills is the use of bow. Her father gives it to her when she is a child on one of her birthdays. Queen Elinor does not quite agree with this because she thinks that archery is not an activity a princess should practice. This is due to the queen's ideas about traditional roles. She believes that hunting is an activity reserved for men and women's duty is to stay at home. She considers the bow an inappropriate and unfeminine gift for princesses. Some pre-transition princesses, such as Aurora, are given dresses as a gift. Cinderella, in addition to the dress, is given shoes and a carriage to go to the castle and meet the prince. Dresses are gifts that enhance their femininity and physical appearance. They are intended to attract the attention of the male figure.

Returning to *Brave* (2012), the bow is also a powerful symbol in the film because has traditionally masculine connotations and it reflects Merida's rebelliousness, especially in the scene of the archery competition. In contrast to Merida's, the pre-transition period princesses' skills include talking with animals and singing. These abilities make them delicate and reinforce their feminine essence. Merida rebels against the social impositions and the traditional role of women. She does not stay in the private sphere fulfilling the responsibilities of princesses as her mother wants, but decides to go exploring, to be free and not depend on anyone.

2.4. Happy Ending and its Dependence on Marriage

Brave (2012) is a Disney movie that differs from the previous ones at diverse levels. The character of Merida makes Disney break the princesses' stereotypes and give rise to a change in that gendered pattern. Moreover, its plot is not based on a romantic relationship, so it also contributes to this change. Finally, it is the first time a princess gets a happy ending without the need for a romantic relationship or marriage. *Brave* (2012) decides to do away with the "and they lived happily ever after" and explore the relationship Merida has with her mother instead.

The relationship between Merida and Queen Elinor is not an easy one. Elinor is a traditional woman who tries to impose her ideals on her daughter and she rebels against them. One of the ideas on which they have completely different visions is marriage. Queen Elinor prepares an arranged marriage for her but Merida opposes to this. She even presents herself as her own suitor in the archery competition, demonstrating strength and rebelliousness to her mother's ideas. Through this powerful action, she reinforces the idea that she does not need a man to be happy. For Merida, marriage, rather than offering the promise of a happy future, is restrictive and even oppressive. She believes that it entails the loss of her rights and her freedom: "I don't want my life to be over. I want my freedom!" (*Brave*). In addition, the suitors also share this idea, none of them want to marry just because of agreements between kingdoms. This view of marriage contrasts with that of the princesses of the pre-transition and transition period. These films' endings state that "the only way women can find meaning and live happy lives is through marriage" (Morrison, 8), reinforcing the traditional belief that finding love and getting married is the goal of a woman's life. On the contrary, *Brave's* ending represents Merida's victory in her fight for independence. In the final scene of the film, we can see the princess riding a horse at the end of a cliff. We can interpret that Merida has reached the end of the path she has chosen.

She has achieved her freedom and goals and she is now looking at new horizons from the edge of her own.

Brave (2012) teaches women and girls who have lived their whole lives waiting for a prince charming that a romantic relationship is not necessary to obtain a happy ending. Moreover, it teaches boys and men that do not always have to be heroes. Until then, the male figure had been represented through the stereotype of the prince charming, the hero who always had to save the girl. This representation makes the boys think that they must always be strong and brave, and does not allow them to be sensitive or to be saved by a woman, because that would be ridiculous for them. Merida's character encourages boys and girls to choose their own destiny and makes them see that they can make decisions that change and set a new course in their lives.

3. Conclusions

As we have seen, Disney princess movies can be organized into three periods: pre-transition, transition and progression, the one Brave belongs to. *Brave* (2012) is the first Disney movie that made way to a change towards an independent, strong and independent princess figure that challenges the traditional values. The princesses of the pre-transition period (1937-1959) represent the traditional female stereotype. In this period, women are tied to the private sphere, they were not allowed to study, work or vote. Their role in society and goal in life is to be housewives, good mothers and wives. They stand out for their beauty and their ability to do domestic activities. After the last film of this period, Disney takes a 20-year break from princess movies. So, when the transition period arrives (1989-1998), the attainment of rights thanks to the feminist movement brings about a small change in the representation of the female figure. These princesses begin to express their desire for freedom. In addition, they are more dependent on the male figure and dare to challenge it. Finally, the effects of the third and fourth waves of

feminism can be seen reflected in the films of the progression period (2009-), but it is not until *Brave* that Disney represents a fully independent female character. Unlike the other films of this period, *Brave* does not depend on the male figure and Merida makes her own decisions and defies established norms. It is the first time a princess gets her happy ending without the help of a man.

Merida's representation differs from the other princesses in several aspects. On the one hand, she does not follow the traditional Eurocentric beauty standards. Her face has freckles, so her skin is not perfect. Her hair is red, long and curly. Unlike the pre-transition period princesses, her hair is not tied back so it reflects freedom. This can also be seen in later films such as *Frozen* (2013), where Elsa lets her hair down whenever she feels more confident with her powers. In addition, Merida's uncontrollable curls reflect her rebellious and independent character towards her mother, contrasting with the obedience and submission of princesses with straight hair. *Moana* (2016) also shows us a princess with a curly mane that reflects her rebellious personality towards her parents. Regarding her body proportions, Merida provides a more realistic view of a woman's body. She is not represented under the male gaze, so she is not hyper-sexualized. She has more realistic proportions, unlike other princesses. In addition, the traditional princesses wear a corset to emphasize their thinness. For Merida, the corset is a symbol of oppression because it does not allow her to breathe or move. This garment restricts all her qualities except beauty. On the other hand, regarding her personality, Merida portrays the characteristics of the traditional hero: she is strong, brave and independent of the male figure. She rebels against the established norms and decides not to behave in an obedient, submissive and highly feminine way like the previous princesses. In addition, Merida does not stand out for her beauty, but for her skill with the bow, which, as we have already seen, is an important object in the film. It has masculine connotations, so it distances the protagonist from the traditionally feminine. Moreover, her ability to climb rocks and move through the forest

stands out. This creates a great contrast between the princesses trapped in the private sphere and Merida, who decides to explore the public sphere.

To conclude, *Brave* (2012) is the first film in which the princess gets a happy ending without the help of a male figure, but not the last. In *Frozen* (2013), Elsa and Anna also get their happy ending without the help of Prince Charming. In addition, the movie reinforces the idea that romantic love between a man and a woman is not the only true love that exists. Merida believes that everyone should make their own decisions and not depend on anyone to achieve their happy ending. "There are those who say fate is something beyond our command. That destiny is not our own. But I know better. Our fate lives within us. You only have to be brave enough to see it" *(Brave)*. Unlike the early princesses, Merida does not want to marry. For her, marriage means oppression instead of freedom and happiness. Through the ideas of this character, the movie puts an end to the social imposition on women to marry to be successful in life: *Brave* (2012) teaches both boys and girls to make their own decisions and choose their own path in life.

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