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EVOLUTION OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DISNEY FILMS

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To my family.

To Paula for all the hours and Disney movies with me.

To my Princesses, they know who they are.

To C. for his patience.

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. METHODOLOGY	10
3. BEING A PRINCESS- DAMSEL-IN-DISTRESS	11
3.1. <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>	12
3.2. <i>Cinderella</i>	14
3.3. <i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	14
4. ARE DISNEY FILMS FEMINIST?.....	15
4.1. <i>Mary Poppins</i>	15
4. 2. <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	18
4.3. <i>Aladdin</i>	19
4.4. <i>Pocahontas</i>	19
5. REBEL CHARACTERS.....	21
5.1. <i>Mulan</i>	21
5.2. <i>Tangled</i>	22
5.3. <i>Brave</i>	23
6. MODERN PRINCESS	24
6.1. <i>Frozen</i>	24
6.2. <i>Wreck- it Ralph/ Ralph Breaks the Internet</i>	26
6.3. <i>Moana</i>	26
6.4. <i>Other examples: Elastigirl - Leia- Rey</i>	27
7. FINDING PRINCE CHARMING.....	28
8. MOTHERHOOD.....	29
9. DOLL VS EVIL	33
10. CONCLUSION	39
11. REFERENCES.....	42
12. ANNEX 1.....	46
13. ANNEX 2.....	47

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to study the evolution of the role of female Disney characters in history. Several films have been analysed along the work, especially those whose main character is a girl with the position of princess within the story. Our aim is to examine the role of first princesses (Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora) and compare them to a second classification of them: Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas as well as Mulan, Rapunzel and Merida. We will finish with the protagonists of *Frozen* (Elsa and Anna), *Moana*: Moana, and the modern Vanellope from *Wreck-it Ralph*. Meanwhile the late princesses are more resolute, proactive, with clear ideas about what they want to accomplish and how to do it, the classic ones were submissive, passive and in need of a man who rescued them. A special treatment will be given also to those women who play the role of the antagonist and who normally show high cruelty towards the main protagonist.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es estudiar la evolución funcional de los personajes femeninos de Disney a través de la historia. A lo largo del texto, se analizan varias películas, en especial aquellas cuyo personaje principal es una joven que desempeña el rol de princesa en la historia. El propósito es examinar los papeles de las primeras princesas (Blancanieves, Cenicienta y Aurora) y compararlos con una segunda clasificación: Bella, Jasmine y Pocahontas, así como Mulán, Rapunzel y Mérida. Terminaremos con las protagonistas de *Frozen* (Elsa y Ana), *Moana*: Moana y la moderna Vanellope de *Rompe Ralph*. Mientras que las nuevas princesas son más resolutivas, proactivas y con ideas claras sobre lo que quieren alcanzar y cómo hacerlo, las clásicas eran sumisas, pasivas y con necesidad de un hombre que las rescatase. Se dará un tratamiento especial a aquellas mujeres que encarnan el papel de las antagonistas, las cuales normalmente muestran gran crueldad hacia la protagonista principal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time there was an American cinema company that made several generations dream of being the princess in a fairy tale. Most of us grew up watching Disney films. These films still have a deep influence on the entertainment industry, not only in other movies but also on clothing, games and toys. Disney has left a great print in our culture, as Alexandra Heatwole points out: “First and foremost, Disney girlhood is Western. For many scholars, the now almost ubiquitous canon of Disney princess films represents, more specifically, an Americanization of the fairy tale.” (2016: 1). The company makes use of powerful marketing strategies.

It can be said that gender roles are designed for males and females from a very early stage in our lives. These differences are set since we are children. As M.Talbot explains in her article ‘Gender and Language’:

Women and men behave differently because they are segregated in childhood. Boys, who tend to play in large groups with hierarchical social structure, learn to value status and become power-focused; whereas girls, who tend to play in small groups of ‘best friends,’ learn to value intimacy and become solidarity-focused. In the process, children acquire different gender appropriate behavior. (2006: 740)

As it is stated by S. Gardner, if children cross these imposed ‘limits’, they have the risk to get harassed, discriminated, and even abused by their peers and adults. (2015: 35). When we are young, we are continuously bombarded by advertisements of toys that (now even more than before) make differences between girls (usually pink) and boy (blue). As stated by Coyne et.al, based on Aurora Sherman’s opinion, we are highly influenced in gender roles from an early stage of our lives:

From Disney’s wide marketing and product campaign, children also have frequent opportunities to rehearse the gender stereotypes they view in the movies through playing with princess toys, dressing up in princess costumes, and more. (...) Playing with Barbie dolls, is associated with girls seeing fewer career options for themselves in the future. (2016: 2)

Traditionally, it could have been seen that especially girls, more than boys, have dreamt sometimes of becoming a princess of a movie and having a Prince Charming defeating monsters for us. This magic story has no correspondence with our real life. History has changed and with it, on a slow path, also have Disney movies. In this work, we are going to see how the main characters and stereotypes of the factory have been modified in terms

of genre, from the stereotypical domestic women, *damsel-in-distress* ladies to characters with a more rebel and independent spirit, as Daalmans and van Kessel remark: “Merida, Elsa and Anna show a remarkable progress from Snow White. They rescue others, are curious and interested in the world around them, they are brave and resourceful, and they believe in their own ideas. These princesses are light-years away from the dreamy, but helpless and passive princess of the 1930s.” (2014: 14)

Trying to follow a chronological line in the production of Disney films (see table 1) this study is divided into several parts. A first section deals with those first films whose protagonists dream of being a princess and are rescued by a prince; paying special attention to the first cartoon full-length film: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), and others produced in the first period of the company: *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). It is followed by a point which analyses if Disney movies are becoming truly feminist mainly focusing on *Mary Poppins* (1964) and followed by *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992) and *Pocahontas* (1995), the so-called Disney Renaissance. A third part will talk about those films that deal with a more rebel character: *Mulan* (1998), *Tangled* (2010) and *Brave* (2012), followed by a group of modern princesses: *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), and Vanellope (*Wreck-it Ralph*, and *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, 2018), among others.

After the analysis of this filmography the common figure of the prince charming and his role in Disney movies will be studied as well as the importance of motherhood, or its absence, as it can be seen in most of the cases. Last but not least we will finish with an interpretation of the personification of evil characters in the history of Disney by seeing several examples of them, what they have in common and how they are contrary to the ‘good ones’, finishing later with a conclusion. Here we will include both Disney for their cartoon productions and the Pixar studios, which belongs to the former from 2006 (see table 1; Pixar films are indicated with an asterisk).

Female roles in films, especially in Disney ones, are full of stereotypes, as Judith Butler explains in her book *Gender Trouble*: “it becomes impossible to separate ‘gender’ from political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Butler 1990: 3). Everything around us establishes roles of gender. If we look at politics, how many women PMs are there in the world? Spain has never had one, not even any present candidate is a woman. In the sphere of science, the number of Nobel prize winners of

medicine, mathematics, or physics is higher in men (as in every category of this prestigious award). The referent that girls mainly have are not of a triumphant figure but a passive domestic caretaker personality. As the journalist Pedro Torrijos perfectly:

Esto es, la mujer y la sartén en la cocina están; o lo que es lo mismo, la mujer vale para ser guapa y para que la rescate un hombre. Y si quieres ser una mujer fuerte, independiente y carismática, entonces te toca ser, literalmente, la mala de la película. (Torrijos: 2014)

Furthermore, the established female role is full of stereotypes: women drive worse than men, if we like fashion more than them, if we play sports worse than they do... (as a personal point here: I would like to see any tennis player playing Grand Slam finals again after giving birth to a baby as Serena Williams did or even winning them as Kim Clijsters, for example). All in all, women are seen more and more in the workplace, at universities, and leaders within society than before. Disney movies are still full of those stereotypes: Cruella de Vil is criticised for driving as a ‘crazy woman’ or Peter Pan says about Wendy that she talks “too much” the first time they meet.

Disney bases several of his stories on tales of the oral tradition. It was not until the 17th that the term ‘Fairy Tale’ was used. It was first formulated by a woman, the French writer Madame d'Aulnoy. Artists from the Romantic period, in general terms, are influenced by nature and deal with imaginary characters in their works. As it is indicated in “The Literary Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained”:

Folklore collections that synthesize into a single written text cultural tradition such as fairy tales, oral history, and popular beliefs (as told in homes and at social gatherings) have been compiled since the Middle Ages. (2016: 116).

It was thanks to the work of several folklorists of the period such as Charles Perrault (France 1628- 1703), who published tales such as *Cinderella* or the *Sleeping Beauty*; the famous Grimm brothers (Germany), giving literary form also to *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* as well as *the Prince and the Frog*, *Snow White* or *Rapunzel*; or Hans Christian Andersen (Denmark 1805-1875), *The Little Mermaid*, that we have several tales traditional compiled. As a general rule these writers modified some aspects of the old stories and even softened them; as, for example, following the narration of María Míguez taking the first Disney princess as an example of a kindest version of the Grimm’s story:

La romantización de la historia, de mayor violencia en su versión escrita, en la que, por ejemplo, la reina malvada es obligada a bailar en la boda de Blancanieves y el príncipe calzada con zapatos de hierro ardiendo hasta su muerte. (2015:7)

It could be almost impossible to imagine our Snow White suffering this torture. Even the worst Disney evil characters will not be able to fulfil such kind of actions. They are wicked and make several of the protagonist's lives miserable, but extreme violence of this kind is something the factory does not show in any of its films, at least in the classic animated ones¹.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned fairy tales and Disney princesses' films, as indicated by Canton share some characteristics:

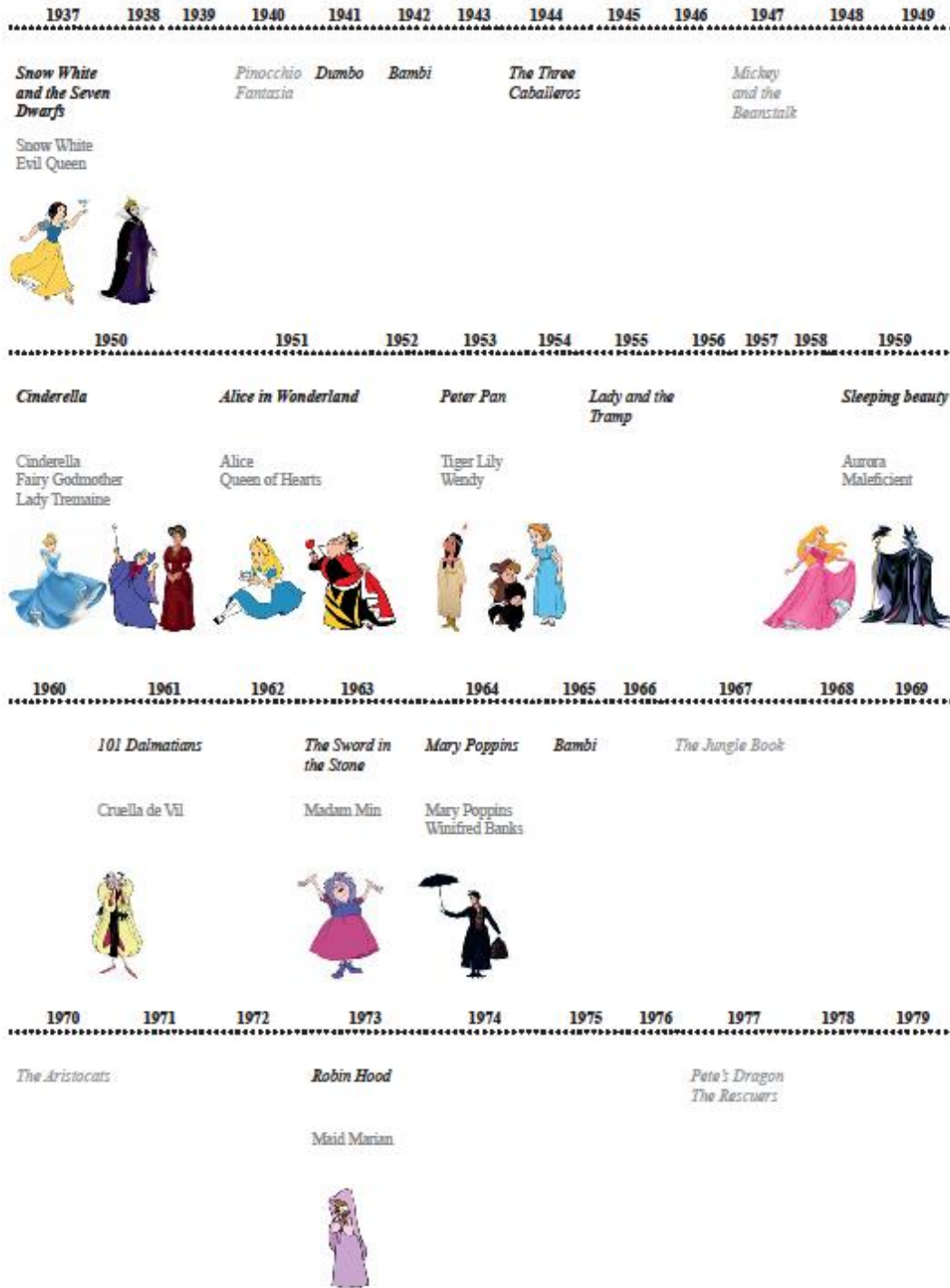
real places, people of events are not cited. Instead, these stories are ahistorical, existing "once upon a time...", and readers and audiences expect stock characters, random magic, reward and revenge, and "happily ever after" ending. (2016: 116)

Most of these traditional fairy tales include an evil character, an innocent protagonist and changes of the plot due to the use of magic. As Daniel Kothenschulte explains in the introduction to the magnificent book *The Walt Disney film Archives- the animated movies 1921-1968*: "Walt Disney loved books. Many of his greatest animated films start with the opening of a large book" (Kothenschulte 9: 2016). Many of us might thank Disney and his productions that traditional tales have come to us. As María Míguez detaches talking about the successful films (2015): "la importancia de las adaptaciones literarias como base para conformar sus historias: cuarenta y seis de los cincuenta y cuatro "clásicos" (un 85,1%) parten de obras escritas." (2015:6). It is, in fact, a high number of adaptations, as we will see along this work.

Eventually, this work is the result after an exhaustive reading in this field related to the topic and gender roles seen both in language and in our culture. Disney films can be considered to be a mirror of how female perspective has changed along the years.

¹ NOTE: Marvel films belong to Disney company since 2009 and *Star Wars* saga and others characters also became part of it in 2012. In this kind of movies, the degree of violence is higher than in the classic princesses plot we are going to analyse in this work.

Table 1. Chronology of the films



1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Tod and Toby					The Black Cauldron	The Brave Little Toaster		Oliver & Company	The Little Mermaid
								Ariel Ursula	
									
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
The Rescuers Down Under	The Beauty and the Beast	Aladdin		The Lion King	Pocahontas *Toy Story	The Hunchback of Notre-Dame	Hercules	Mulan *A Bug's Life	Tarzan
	Belle Mrs. Potts	Jasmine			Pocahontas Grandmother Willow	Esmeralda		Fa Mulan	
									
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Dinosaur The Emperor's New Groove	Atlantis: The Lost Empire	Lilo and Stitch *Monsters Inc. Treasure Planet	*Finding Nemo	*The Incredibles Brother Bear	*Chicken Little	*Cars	*Ratatouille	*Bolt Wall-E	The Princess and the Frog *Up
		Nani		Elastigirl					Tiana
									
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Tangled		Brave Wreck-it Ralph	Frozen	*Big Hero 6 Maleficent	*Inside Out	Moana Zootopia	*Coco	*The Incredibles 2 Ralph breaks the Internet	
Rapunzel Mother Gothel		Merida Elinor	Elsa Anna			Moana		Vanellope	
									

Table 1: Storyline of Disney and Pixar films mentioned in this work.

Pixar productions are the ones with *.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this work we have fulfilled a qualitative analysis since numerous Disney and Pixar films have been watched and thoughtfully analysed so as to fully study their main female protagonists. Their role within the plots of the films are examined from a feminist perspective. We will see if they have evolved at the same time as society has.

Since several voices claim that our society is dominated by the androcentric system, we live in a patriarchal society. As Ana Bouza explains in her article “Princesas Disney”: “os varóns teñen nome propio: rei, príncipe, valentes e de acción, a súa heroicidade é a maxia que converte á princesa nun ser vivo.”² (2016: 29). Men tend to rule most of the spheres in our lives and, despite being girls and princesses the protagonists of the films analysed here, we will see how male influence is still strong on them in most of the cases. The world of cinema has always been considered to reflect opinions and real ways of life. Several Disney films are going to be analysed here from a gender perspective and see what the role of women is in them.

To justify if the following movies are sexist or not the Bechdel Test is going to be applied. It is a simple proof set by Alison Bechdel in 1985, based on three principles: a) the movie must have at least two women in it, who, b) talk to each other, about c) something besides a man (see: <https://bechdeltest.com/?list=all>). This information will be added to each of the main films seen in this work in order to classify them as feminist or not.



‘Self-portrait’ of Disney princess.

² “male characters have their own name: king, prince, brave and of action, their heroic acts are the magic that becomes princesses a living being”

3. BEING A PRINCESS- DAMSEL-IN-DISTRESS

Being a princess, especially a Disney one has been the dream of millions of spectators all around the world. The idea of wearing long dresses and reaching a perfect beauty has caught on deeply in our minds. As Cassandra Stover points out in her essay “Damsels and Heroines: The Conundrum of the Post-Feminist Disney Princess”:

The Walt Disney Corporation has enjoyed a lengthy reign in the realm of princess film production, helping to shape the ideals of femininity for millions of little girls both in America and around the world. Despite the obvious un-reality of these fairy-tale narratives, the central characters that inhabited these imaginary lands were human, and as such their representations bore a considerable likeness to contemporary gender expectations and stereotypes, giving audiences a figure with whom they could comfortably identify. (2013:3)

The fact of feeling trapped and wishing to be rescued is nothing exclusive from Disney. Several examples of great female characters who dream with a happy -ending story in their lives can be seen in the popular culture: the eternal dreamer Monica Geller from *Friends* (1994- 2004) wishes to get married and be a mother (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6QM0dKQa5Y>), as the same as Charlotte, one of the four protagonists of the series *Sex in the City* (1998- 2004) and the book with the same name written by Candace Bushnell (1997), (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THLbR-8F_VI). Even the girlfriend of America, Julia Roberts, in *Pretty Woman* (1990) dreams of being a princess one day (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-cOWuVutcE>).

The first group of Disney princesses to be analysed here- Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora- share some characteristics. They are rescued and they do not rescue anyone in return. They belong to the damsel-in-distress type who are not able to solve their own problems and endlessly wait for a man to help them. As Stover indicates: “Disney women were derived entirely from Grimm’s fairy-tales, voiceless heroines who performed conventional gender behaviors like housekeeping and nurturing.” (2013:3). We can see that these three women do their household chores with no complaints, even singing, looking happy to do them (especially Snow White and Cinderella because Aurora has the three fairies behind her doing almost everything).

Leaving apart the fact that these films can be considered to be a milestone in the history of animation, the earlier Disney princesses who are going to be analysed here share several characteristics, as María Míguez points out:

Una descripción de la mujer en el mundo disneysiano con las palabras más utilizadas por los estudiosos de la materia incluiría los términos sumisa, inocente, obediente, pasiva y bajo los designios del padre o marido. (2015:4)

Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora are all rescued by a male figure who, in fact, they barely know; the first one does not even talk to him before the ‘love kiss’. They are seen as girls with gracious manners, even a bit naïve in some aspects. These features and passivity are traditionally associated to femininity, especially, as Cassandra Stover explains in the above-mentioned work:

The very first Disney princess drew on associations of traditional femininity, indicating the widespread encouragement of these traits within 1930’s American culture. The Great Depression left tens of thousands of people jobless, and the competition for labor combined with Catholic moral reform movements fostered a national desire for women to return to the home, a mentality that was widely represented in 1930’s commercial media. (2013:3)

3.1. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

We are going to start analysing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It can be considered to be a milestone in the history of cinema. It was released in 1937, directed by David Hand (supervisor), William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen (all men) and won an Oscar (plus seven shorter figures simulating the seven dwarfs³). It was the first animated film ever made and, as an important fact, it is dedicated to a woman and titled after her. The plot is simple: Snow White is a young girl whose stepmother is jealous of her beauty and wants to kill her. She manages to escape and discovers a forest cottage inhabited by seven men. At first, she is seen as ‘poison’ by the dwarfs, especially by Grumpy (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyEgxSMgh1A>), and she has to show them she is a “good” woman because she can clean, cook and organize the house. This fact defines the role of women of the time, she is the “housewife who organizes everything at home”. The own Snow-White feels pity for the dwarfs because “maybe they have no mother” (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mc6sVY354oQ>). This role of women as a mother and housewife, the one that cleans and organizes the house may be criticised from our present perspective, however it should also be considered from the point of view of the time when the film was released. In 1937, the in-war period the perfect prototype of American woman was to be a good housewife, as Richard Johnson

³ A young Shirley Temple gives one Oscar and seven miniature statuettes to Walt Disney as a Special Award in the edition of 1939 (see: <https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1939/>)

points out in his essay “Women’s Roles in America: Wartime Expansion, Post-War Backlash, and Contraction”:

The First World War brought about a political and cultural change that expanded women’s roles through a now familiar pattern. First, women took part in the peace and preparedness campaigns, clearly in the public sphere as part of an expanded role. Second, heavy propaganda campaigns prior to and at the beginning of American belligerency encouraged women to step up and step into expanded roles. Women did step into multiple roles as part of the war effort and took male dominated jobs in industry and joined the military in auxiliary roles that were not available pre-war. A postwar construction began in employment almost immediately at wars end as women were, largely though not completely, ushered out of male dominated workplaces. (2017:46)

Thus, at this time the entertainment industry tried to reflect society somehow. In this case Snow-White embodies the example of a sweet docile girl who is devoted to the house and the care of others, especially men. At a first sight she considers the cottage in the forest to belong to orphan children and the mess of the room is accepted. However, when she discovers it was made by adult men the reaction is the same, she even presents herself as a volunteer to clean and tidy everything for men. It was the expected reaction of a woman of the time.

From our point of view of women from the 21st century, doing the house chores does not mean to be a good woman; nonetheless, it is a role that is mainly performed by females. Furthermore, in this film we can see the cliché of beauty: the antagonist is a mature lady characterized as a witch who_hates the beautiful and young Snow White. Following the opinion of Jack Zipes:

[i]t also pits women against women in competition for male approval (the mirror)
[...] No matter what they may do, women cannot chart their own lives without male manipulation or intervention. (1995:36)

Perfection is related to youth in contrast to old age and ugliness and, from Snow White’s step mother point of view there is nothing as important as beauty. This topic is going to be seen in several other films in this work such as *Cinderella* (1950) or *The Little Mermaid* (1989) where the bad character (also females) tries to ruin the protagonist’s life because of their beautiful aspect.

Despite the fact it is somewhat dubious, this film is considered to have passed the mentioned Bechdel test. Both protagonist and antagonist are female characters, they speak (although not too much) and it is not about men.

3.2. Cinderella

Cinderella (directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, 1950) is a masterpiece of animation based on the tale written by Charles Perrault: *Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre* (1697). It tells the story of an orphan girl who lives with her wicked stepmother and her two not better stepsisters. She ends up being their servant in her own house until her destiny changes when she meets her prince charming. It can be seen as a highly sexist film where the protagonist does not show any talent or hobby, just singing. It could be said that she lacks personality somehow. She is just waiting for the prince to save her, being unable to rebel against her wicked stepmother and her unbearable daughters who mistreat her. She is not searching for a solution to her situation. If we follow the Bechdel test, this film can be considered a feminist movie from the moment several women do not only speak about men, they deal with house chores and the attendance to a ball dance, but male characters are not their main focus. However, it could also be said just the opposite. With the lack of the mother referent, Cinderella lives in a cruel atmosphere of abuse and almost slavery from her step-mother; situation that she does not try to change and in which she looks nearly happy, in a passive behaviour. Her only friends are animated animals who help her with the house chores and to sew the dress for the ball she wants to attend. Even in this process we can see a sexist moment, when a female mouse insists that sewing is a woman's role; a stereotype is seen here again. A man can sew as well as a woman. (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mof0dEKT_9Q).

Being released in 1950, just the post-war period, the film might be considered to aim at the audience, especially young girls, that staying at home, even tiring, is safe and the happy ending will come. Prince Charming comes to Cinderella's rescue and her life will be solved thanks to marriage.

3.3. Sleeping Beauty

Sleeping Beauty (Clyde Geronimi, Les Clark, Eric Larson, Wolfgang Reitherman, 1959) is based on the tale *La Belle aus bois dormant* (The Beauty of the Sleeping Forest), written by Charles Perrault in 1697. As Charles Salomon points out in *The Walt Disney Film Archives*: "Its Gothic castles, armored knights, beautiful princesses, and good and evil fairies embody everything the words "fairy tale" suggest." (2016: 505). It follows the traditional scheme of damsel-in-distress pattern. Again, it is the man/prince who 'comes to the rescue' of the princess; it is the male figure that seems to be the salvation for the lady's life. In fact,

it can be said that Aurora, the protagonist does nothing but being poisoned and sleep. Following the opinion of Elizabeth Bell: “Disney’s animated heroines were individuated in fair-skinned, fair-eyed, Anglo- Saxon features of Eurocentric loveliness, both conforming to and perfecting Hollywood"s beauty boundaries” (1995: 110); these three first princesses are like this. This topic that is broken by Ariel, *The Little Mermaid* (1989), whose long hair calls the attention of the audience and, especially, Merida, the protagonist of *Brave* (2012), as we can see below. All in all, apart from Aurora, in *Sleeping Beauty* we can find four other women: three fairies who make a living by themselves and with a child, without the help of any man (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h0Y8Bzg13I>) just ‘a bit’ of magic is involved. But, the strongest character of the movie is Malefica, the antagonist of Aurora. She has a strong and independent personality; she reigns without the help of a man. Here we can see how the female gender role is defined: being a good girl implies staying at home and being obedient, conversely, being a powerful woman is seen as a bad character.

If we apply the Bechdel test, it can be appreciated that the protagonist speaks just a few lines. The princess, if quieter, better. Contrarily, the three fairies do speak a lot and it is not about men, thus, initially, the movie would pass the mentioned test.

4. ARE DISNEY FILMS FEMINIST?

There are several Disney movies whose protagonist or deuteragonist is a female character and not only the so-called Princess films. In fact, various productions are named after a woman. Despite the fact of being criticised for the contrary reasons, there are several voices that claim that Disney works show some feminist aspects. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the concept of feminism is “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim” (see: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/feminism?q=feminism>). Broadly speaking, it can be said that along history there have been several steps in the development of this movement. The first wave of feminism is considered to have started at the end of the nineteenth century, in urban and industrial areas with women (most of them belonging to upper classes of society) struggling for new opportunities, better life conditions and especially working for a universal suffrage.

4.1. *Mary Poppins*

Of course, the movie which better represents this moment is the monumental *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964). It deserves a highly special mention in this work. It is

the first movie (based on a book written by an Australian female writer: P. L. Travers) in which the protagonist is not a princess. Mary Poppins is a worker, an independent woman who does not allow men to be bossy to her (Mr. Banks remains speechless in front of her) (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxtxKPO9dUQ>). She is not involved in any love story, as her predecessors are, and does not need men for being happy and for earning her own money. Julie Andrews won an Oscar for her magnificent and “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” performance. In the movie, we can also see another female figure, the mother, who, despite the fact of being a secondary character, is a representative of the suffragist movement of England at the beginning of the 20th century. It is a subplot that has nothing to do with the main one, however it is worth mentioning here the moment when the mother of the children has her own song about women’s suffrage and their situation at the time, as she says, several suffragists were in prison for their political ideas (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds8cKgPdE6M>). It was not until 1928 when women in Britain gained equal voting rights with men. Mrs Banks also includes a comment about the strict dressing code of the time: long skirt and decorous outfit. Mary Poppins herself wears high neck shirts. In response to the song: Yes Mrs. Banks, the daughters of your daughters do adore you. Thank you.

Mary Poppins is the one who makes her decisions without a man and she is not the evil figure (in contrast to Malefica, the independent character seen above). She might represent freedom. Despite the fact she is the one who, as a role that has been seen before, is the carer of children, breaks the role of submission towards men; she faces Mr. Banks and sets her own jobs conditions: no references, her wages and “every second Tuesday off” (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxtxKPO9dUQ&t=64s>). It is worth mentioning here that the film was released in 1964. *Mary Poppins* would pass the Bechdel test with flying colours

Apart from the outstanding *Mary Poppins*, not many explicit examples of feminist characters can be found in the movies of this time. In fact, besides the already mentioned princess movies: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950) or *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), most of the great successful productions of the company tell stories of animals; examples of those are, just to mention a few: *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* (both released

in 1940), *Dumbo* (1941)⁴, *Bambi* (1942), *The Three Caballeros* (1944), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), or *101 Dalmatians* (1961). Most of these classic films represent quasi humanized animals who speak (except *Dumbo*) and who act almost like people. It is worth emphasizing here, as Melissa Dabakis points out, “princess characters were entirely absent, mainly due to the unprecedented public activism of American women in the war effort.” (1993: 182). There are no female characters of great importance in those movies. The factory tries to evade the public from reality in some way (war and post-war periods) creating new words where animals are, most of the time, better than humans.

Despite the fact being at this time of a second wave of feminism when women, especially in the USA were fighting for more equality, it can be said that a second wave of feminism ranges from the 1960s to 90’s. In this early period the company releases some of its greatest animation achievements mostly based on legends or novels: or *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *The Jungle Book* (1967) and *Robin Hood* (1973) where female characters are not of great importance, they seem not to show strong personalities except, perhaps, (Mad) Madam Min, whose role will be analysed below. As Cassandra Stover points out:

While the presence of the Second-wave feminist movement and the subsequent visibility of powerful, influential women did not jive with Disney’s image of the passive princess in the 60s and 70s, the presence of anti-feminist backlash and the subsequent rhetoric of post-feminism encouraged its resurgence in the late 80s and early 90s. (2013:4)

It was not until the decade of 1990 (including *The Little Mermaid* from 1989) that a new era for Disney came into scene. Princess with stronger characters than before became the protagonist of the new films. Following Cassandra Stover:

With its release of *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Disney underwent a shift towards a "New Wave" of princess films, which transformed the damsel into a heroine of sorts, with both a voice and a desire for adventure. (2013:4)

These new heroines to come are more acceptable by the present society. As we will see bellow, they are able to confront their societies at some points following the example of Ariel. They are not damsel-in-distress any more. The following heroines analysed here are Belle: *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Jasmine: *Aladdin* (1992), and *Pocahontas* (1995).

⁴ *Dumbo* reached such success the year it was released that it was going to be the protagonist of the front cover of the famous American magazine *Time*; however, in December this year, 1941, something happened, the U.S. was victim of the well-known Pearl Harbour attack, and it occupied every line of newspapers from then on. (See: <https://time.com/5557249/dumbo-time-cover-1941/>)

4. 2. *Beauty and the Beast*

Nonetheless, if we talk about feminism in Disney, we cannot forget to mention one of the most important female characters of the company: Belle; protagonist of the great *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise, 1991). It is true that it can be said that Belle ends up falling in love with the character who mistreats her at the beginning (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2DIPqUGTI>). The Beast is a highly violent being (at first sight), thus it might be seen as a wrong message for viewers, no girl should love someone who shouts at her. Albeit Belle is an uncommon Disney princess, different from what had appeared before on the screen. As Bouza describes in her article to this second generation of princesses from the 90's: "elas están atarefadas, son decididas, atractivas, non escravadas das tarefas domésticas, non obedecen aos homes; son atrevidas e aventureiras."⁵ (2016:29).

Belle is intelligent and fearless; she is the only girl who reads in her town (she is highly surprised when she is shown the big library of the castles) and dreams with a new life in a far place, new adventures and she is courageous enough to replace her father as a prisoner in the Beast's castle and later in the film, she escapes from it in the middle of the night. She faces dangers and, at the same time, can pacify Beast and teach him how to behave properly (and how to read in the extended version). In this film, we can appreciate a fierce critic of male sexism represented by the character of Gaston. He is a macho- like boy who is interested in Belle just because she is pretty. He wants to marry her and have numerous children (role of traditional women again). Since he does not achieve what he wants he chases the girl, accuses Belle's father to be a fool and convinces the whole village to fight against Beast. Besides Belle, the only female character of the movie who gains certain prominence is Mrs. Potts, a woman in the form of a teapot (and also with the Wardrobe, female character as well). The dialogue between them and Belle deal with Beast but also about freedom. Despite this, it can be said that this movie would pass the Bechdel test. Belle is a strong Disney princess. A special mention here is made to the 'human' version of this story released in 2017. The new Belle is an inventor (as her father in the original film), she creates a kind of washing machine, thus, she can read -and teach a girl how to do it- instead of doing the laundry by hand (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhjwUr6PifM>). She

⁵ "They are busy, confident, attractive, not slaves from the house chores; they do not obey men and are brave as well as adventurous."

is smarter than her counterpart. Even when gender roles are still defining here, it can be appreciated they are changing step by step.

4.3. *Aladdin*

In this section we cannot forget to talk about Jasmine, the deuteragonist of *Aladdin* (John Musker, Ron Clements, 1992)- the original film- and its ‘human’ reboot released in 2019, directed by Guy Ritchie. The film is named after the male protagonist and it is in fact based on his story, nonetheless the female character is a powerful woman.

Again, some differences can be appreciated in the characterization of the princess between both *Aladdin* films. Similarly, to the next analysed film: *Pocahontas* (1995) here we can also see, albeit not real, a character with different ethnicity, with Arabic origins. Disney is not creating only white and fair skin princesses (after others will come such as Esmeralda (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1996), a gipsy woman, Fa Mulan (*Mulan*, 1998) from China, or Tiana (*The Prince and the Frog*, 2009), an Afro-American waiter.

Jasmine is a strong female character. She decides to confront her father, the Sultan, and the tradition being brave enough to run away from the palace in the middle of the night (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1P6Laso6JpE>). In the newer version Jasmine is even stronger and, by the same token, in this film social rules evolve and are modified, e.g. at the end of the movie she becomes a sultan, not Aladdin. She inherits the throne, not him (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kp6R3w1Q10U>). Things may be changing.

Despite the presence of this character, the original animation movie will not pass the Bechdel test from the moment there is no other female role apart from Jasmine who she can talk to about anything. The situation changes in the ‘human’ reboot (2019). Now the princess speaks with her maiden/friend Dhalia about many different topics among her wish to be a Sultan can be heard (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db2ldccRgK4>). This version would pass the mentioned test.

4.4. *Pocahontas*

According to the professor Martha Rampton, “This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world.”(2015). Disney adds to its list of princesses their first animation film based on a real character: *Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg, 1995). Here we can see a strong heroine who confronts her community for love. Pocahontas, is a

native American princess (almost the first character of the company with these features, just after Tiger Lily, the criticised reflection of native Americans from *Peter Pan*, 1953- see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p361dNn8Ank>). In this case it can be considered that the image of the original history is also softened, as the same as happened before with the traditional fairy tales; as María María Míguez points out:

La presentada como revisión seria de los orígenes de la población indígena americana acabó siendo, en realidad, una reinterpretación a la Disney, con la historia de la propia Pocahontas ampliamente romantizada y distorsionada y con otros hechos (como la corresponsabilidad que la película implica en la masacre que siguió al asentamiento en Jamestown) tergiversados o inventados en su totalidad. (2015:50)

Pocahontas meets the first English conquerors/explorers to arrive in American soil. She shows her land to one of them, the attractive John Smith, and falls in love with him, a fact that both her father and her tribe deeply dislike. She faces a world of men, in truth only another woman appears in the film together with a tree with a female personality. She lives in nature and this world is what she tries to show to the white man who has the idea of conquering her people. She defends her roots and, at the same time she changes her traditions when she refuses to marry and also saves John Smith's life -he was going to be beheaded by her father- (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD9d9WSU5TQ>). *Pocahontas* is the first Disney princess movie that has not the traditional happy ending in which the couple ends up being together. She chooses to stay with her people. It is also curious to see here, as Ana Luisa Bouza says: "Curioso que a única historia que non remanta en matrimonio é un amor interracial,⁶" (2016:30). Pocahontas is seen as a heroine, she saves both: the hero and her people. Here, as Bouza follows:

Os antagonismos son entre etnias-pobos, redúcese o maniqueísmo nun choque de civilizacións entre a tradición e a modernidade, entre a conservación da natureza e o espolio que representan os invasores.⁷ (2016:30)

The film tells a story which is not based (only) on a love relationship but also says something else such as the respect for nature and its preservation in contrast to the spoiling intentions of determined groups of people. Love between a girl and a boy, even almost always present, is not going to be the main leitmotiv from the future Disney films.

⁶ "the only (Disney) story that does not end up with marriage is the one which is a multiracial one."

⁷ "the antagonisms are between ethnic groups, the Manichaeism is reduced to a confrontation of civilization and modernity, between nature conservation and the plundering represented by invaders."

Despite the fact not many female characters are present, the Bechdel test reveals that this film can pass it. Pocahontas has a strong personality and she can be considered to be a feminist protagonist.

5. REBEL CHARACTERS

It can be considered that Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora were doing what was expected from them to do at their time: cleaning, marrying with their princes and being happy 'ever after'. Now we can see a slight change in the plot of princesses' films presenting movies with a more complex plot. Currently we can find princesses who either do not get married, as Pocahontas, or who simply oppose their parent's will somehow. In this group we deal with the following films: *Mulan* (1998), *Tangled* (2010), and the Pixar production *Brave* (2012).

5.1. *Mulan*

Mulan (Barry Cook, Tony Bancroft, 1998) can be classified as one of the most feminist of Disney films. It is based on a medieval Chinese legend in which a girl is dressed up as a boy to fight in a war and keep the honour of the family. The traditional role of women (and not only in China) is that they should stay at home meanwhile men go to the front to battle for their country. As it can be seen at the very beginning of the film, girls are educated to be silent, make tea and wear makeup (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnUEDaeoF0Q>). That is how she can bring honour to the family.

However, Mulan decides to cut her hair (with a sword) and disguise herself as a warrior. She leaves her house with the company of a small dragon and joins the Chinese army. At first, she suffers bullying from her colleagues, even though they are not aware she is a woman. In the army the captain trains the soldier to '*make a man out of them*'. She works so hard and becomes the best warrior of them. She is the only Disney princess who kills other characters. In fact, by provoking an avalanche she kills dozens of Huns. After saving everybody from her army her secret is discovered and she is fired from the troop. In the end, she solves the day and even the great Emperor kneels before her. Mulan is not only a brave soldier but also a woman who struggles against the roles imposed by society: beautiful and mindful wife vs. the one who can think by themselves (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiqmZLOaD8o>). Thus, the character must change who she really is to be accepted in this Chinese culture where the man has the responsibility to

carry the family's honour on his shoulders. According to M. Barber in her article 'Disney's female gender roles: the change of modern culture': "She found her sense of worth and identity by stripping away what her culture was telling her to be. What sets Mulan apart from the damsel-in-distress is that she does not need saving by a prince." (Barber 2015: 17) She does not need a man; she fights together with them. Together with the other princesses from the 90's (Ariel -1989-, Belle, Jasmine and Pocahontas), she opens a new era of Disney girls who represent stronger female gender roles. Now they tend to be against authority. Regarding the Bechdel test, it can be said that this movie does not fulfil the third premise: two women do speak about men. At the beginning of the film Mulan talks to her mother and grandmother but the topic is marriage and children. In the rest of the story, many other women appear (except Mulan's ancestors among whom we can see some ladies). Despite this, it is still considered to be a feminist movie.

5.2. *Tangled*

Now we are going to talk about *Tangled* (Nathan Greno, Byron Howard, 2010). It is based on the famous fairy tales of Brothers Grimm about Rapunzel, a princess trapped in a high tower. She has such long hair that helps her to escape from her enclosure. The Disney version shows a girl who, contrarily to her predecessors of the beginning of the 20th century, does not need to be saved, she is able to fend for herself. She yearns for a different life, not the one she is having in a room with the only company of a chameleon and her 'mother' (the one whom she thinks is her mother but she is not, she is the villain of the film who had kidnapped Rapunzel when she was a baby), thus, following the words of Ana Bouza: "a maldade volve ter cara de muller. Os tres estereotipos dos corenta: a nai, a bruxa e a nena."⁸ (2016: 30). *Tangled* represent a traditional fairy tale but with a strong character now. Rapunzel is drawn as a carefree teenager who spends the movie being barefoot. She might seem naïve because she paints the walls of her room and her best friend is a chameleon, however she bats everyone with a frying pan in a highly effective way.

In this movie the princess also meets a boy; he is not a prince but a thief, and she sees in him her only option to leave the tower (despite the fact she would not need him for that). The couple finds more characters on their way to the castle to meet Rapunzel's family: a group of bandits considerably bigger and stronger than Rapunzel. In a fight she shows she can beat them with shrewdness and agile skills (see:

⁸ "Evilness is seen again on a female face. Stereotypes of the 40's: mother, witch and girl."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZH1AE312aI>). Her hair ends up being magic and it helps the protagonists several times. She is a rebellious character who faces the rules established by her 'mother' and runs away. Nonetheless, following a classical pattern at the end of the day, she sacrifices her magic to save her love: she gets her hair cut to rescue her loved Finn. Here we can see a change from the previous Disney movies, now the princesses are the ones who rescue men when they are in trouble, they do not play the role of 'damsel-in-distress' any more. She is the salvation, not him. Dealing with the Bechdel test, this movie would be suitable in terms of feminism. Rapunzel shares with Mother Gothel several dialogues and they are not about men.

5.3. *Brave*

Moving now to a Pixar classic *Brave* (2012), we can see several changes here. It is worth mentioning here that *Brave* is the first film of the company to be directed by a woman: Brenda Chapman (together with a man (Mark Andrews)). It was not until the appearance of this movie that a Disney princess did not need a man to be happy. Merida is a strong-willed Scottish princess who repudiates any idea of marriage. She faces her mother's intention to become a lady (again, as in *Mulan*, education of girls would include to get married and be quiet). In this case, the protagonist shows bravery and determination (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaARXTWd0xY>), she refuses all her suitors. As a matter of fact, she is the first princess not to be interested and involved in any love relationship (Elsa or Moana will come after).

Merida is upset with her mother because she does not want to follow the familiar tradition and her mother tries to do so. She is a teenager that blames everyone (even her mother) of everything. She wishes to change her situation and, with the help of magic, she becomes her mother (and three brothers) into bears. To break that spell she fights by all means. It is her again who saves the day, not any man. Here we find, for the first time for a princess of a Disney film, a completely independent character, a true heroine. It is worth stressing here that, despite the fact of having three brothers she is the one who is going to inherit the throne. It is something that does not even happen in real life.

Another important feature in this movie is Merida's hair; meanwhile, other princesses pay attention to their appearance and brush their hair (Cinderella) or are always seen with the same hairstyle, here she has long orange curly hair difficult to comb. It reflects her personality: rebel and brave, as the title of the film.

Regarding the Bechdel test, here we can see that again, it is passed with flying colours. Merida and her mother speak about traditions and their culture, as well as their own relationship, not (only) about men and marriage.

6. MODERN PRINCESS

In this last section dedicated to Disney films we are going to deal with the most recent movies of the company. They have had great success among children, especially *Frozen*, released in 2013, when millions of girls were dressed up as Elsa and Anna. Following the temporal line we will talk about Vanellope, the female protagonist of *Wreck-it Ralph* (2012) and *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018). She is not exactly a princess but the best rider of a video game, and, one of the last Disney productions so far: *Moana* (2016). In those films we can appreciate a slight change in the treatment of girls, aspects that started in the previous ones.

Here we also include a character who is not exactly a princess as such but a superheroine and a mother at the same time: Elastigirl (*The Incredibles*- 2012- and its second part: *The Incredibles 2* -2018), both made by Pixar studios.

6.1. Frozen

Frozen (Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee- a woman- 2013) tells the story of two sisters who grow up together and during a game between them Elsa almost kills Anna. Their parents decide that the elder daughter must hide her powers: “conceal it, don’t feel it, don’t let it show”. As María Míguez indicates: “(to Elsa) la encierran en el castillo, ocultándola a todo el mundo. Desde pequeña le inculcan el miedo a su diferencia, a sus poderes, y la visten con guantes para esconderlos.” (2015: 52). Still, having superpowers, thus being different and powerful seems to be a problem. After the loss of their parents, Elsa becomes the Queen of the kingdom. Following an incident with them in public, she isolates herself again leaving her country in an eternal winter. Only her sister Anna, who is the one that loves her the most, can rescue everyone by saving Elsa first. Following the criteria of Disney that we have been analysing in this work it can be said that it is highly significative the fact that Elsa reigns without a man, she has directly inherited the throne and the plot of the film has nothing to do with marriage or the need of a Prince Charming to ‘help’ her to do her job. Anna, in her search, is surrounded by men, however, she makes her own decisions and any man can prevent her to do so; she is focused on saving her sister and she does despite the opposition of the men counsellors of the kingdom. It was a great step for the animation factory: two

female characters as protagonists. The two sisters are strong characters who talk to each other about many other things, not just men, thus it passes the Bechdel test without a doubt. A big change can be appreciated in this movie in contrast to its early predecessors. Let us remember, for example, the three first classic films: *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*; here the princess meets a prince and they immediately fall in love. Conversely here, Anna sees a prince, Hans, and thinks she loves him and Elsa does not allow the marriage from the moment she does not understand the situation (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmWm_WvWpGs). It is a wink to the older films where everything seems easy in love. Along the story Anna meets Kristoff, a guy who is not a prince, even not as tender and cute as other male characters, but they get to know each other and at the end they seem to fall in love. This fact is adapted to present times, nowadays 'love terms' have changed together with society and it is reflected in Disney movies. Love at first sight is difficult to fulfil. It can be mentioned here that from Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991) most of Disney princesses have more than one suitor, seem to have the option to choose their lover, as Stover indicates:

These feisty new heroines rarely felt love at first sight, and did not relish the idea of spending happily ever after with a rude, conceited prince. Belle, Jasmine, Meg, Tiana, and Pocahontas all reject, initially at least, suitors who would come into conflict with their goals. However, the ability to choose the right suitor at the end signifies post-feminist autonomy, and thus constitutes a happy ending. Post-feminism celebrates woman as the sexually autonomous individual, and thus Disney's rhetoric shifted from *any* prince to the *right* prince. (2013: 5)

Teenager love is not the only change seen in *Frozen* comparing it with the old ones; now princesses are powerful, they have their own personality. However, as in real life, being in charge is not always seen in a positive way: as María Míguez indicates:

El verdadero dominio femenino en Disney había estado a lo largo de la historia en manos de las malvadas. El poder de la mujer se asimilaba con el mal: la reina Grimhilde, la madrastra de Cenicienta, Maléfica o Úrsula son ejemplos de ello, y en *Frozen*, cuando la fuerza de Elsa alcanza su cénit, las consecuencias son catastróficas y también se duda de las intenciones de la protagonista. (2015:55)

Frozen brings to the audience a new character that is the good protagonist, a queen, and that has superpowers. Little girls may identify themselves with this profile of a strong female who is not necessary evil. Elsa might have made some mistakes (freezing your whole reign is probably not a very friendly action), however she corrects everything and is forgiven. We could be wrong sometimes, but good intentions are the path to follow.

Lastly, *Frozen* is the first Disney film in which a woman really rules over others. Reading the comment by María Míguez, it is: “El primer título Disney en el que una mujer ostenta realmente el poder, doce minutos exactamente tardan en hacer su aparición los hombres que van a intentar arrebatárselo.” (2015: 56). It seems that even in Disney films the glass ceiling is still present in several high institutions. It is worth mentioning here that even in real life, despite the fact many of the monarchies still ruling in developed countries have an heiress to the throne, Salic law is not eliminated.

6.2. *Wreck- it Ralph/ Ralph Breaks the Internet*

Vanellope von Schweetz is an animated girl who lives in a fantasy video game about racing cars in both *Wreck-it Ralph* (Rich Moore, 2012) and *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (Rich Moore, Phil Johnston, 2012). She is a bit moaner and not especially delicate. The other protagonist of the film, Ralph, is a big man who works in a different video game and, by accident, ends up in Vanellope’s game helping her to recover her position within the car race she was designed for. The girl admits to be a princess in her game but she is not dressed as such, she wears a green mini skirt, a sweater and a ponytail full of sweets. She is a different female character; she is independent and uses almost bad language. Special mention is made here to the second film: *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018), where Vanellope and Ralph steal a car (not a very honest action for a Disney princess) and the girl drives it across the imaginary city of a video game in a crazy race against the owner of the car: Shank, also a woman who is the leader of a urban gag. Probably it is the first car race whose main participants are two female characters. (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKUnMkT1rt0>). Disney here is trying to keep distance with the stereotypes aforementioned: women are not bad drivers.

Regarding the Bechdel test both films would pass it, thus the presence of feminine roles here is acceptable. In the first movie there are two main female characters: Vanellope and Calhoun although they barely talk to each other. The little driver argues with the other participants of the race about riding cars, not about any man. The same happens in the second part where Vanellope shares confidences with Shank (no men are involved here).

6.3. *Moana*

The last Disney production that is a new story and not a reboot or a second part of an existing film is *Moana* (Ron Clements, John Musker, 2016). She is an islander, the daughter

of the boss of the tribe (not a princess as she says), who loves the sea since she was a little child but her father prohibits her from sailing the ocean. Due to a bad harvest she decides to rebel against her father's will and set sail on an ancient boat. In this case her mother helps her to get ready for the trip, not a common point in Disney films. Moana has to find a god, Maui, who must help her to bring back the heart to a greatest goddess. Our new protagonist has also a rebel character as some of her predecessors, she leaves her home as did Jasmine for a day, or Rapunzel. Mulan also runs away at night but to save her father (she ends up saving China accidentally); but Moana sets sail to save all her tribe. It is the first Disney film where no love story is involved. She is compromised with her people and risks her life for their future.

Moana learns how to defend herself when she is in trouble (with a little help from the ocean and of Maui, that is true). She fights and defeats the lava giant. She is a strong girl who ends up being the leader of her tribe and guiding them to discover new lands (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWrPeMn9tr8>). Now princesses are made to be leaders and they do not need a man to rule with them.

Despite sharing the screen most of the time with Maui (a god- man), it can be considered that Moana passes the Bechdel test from the moment our protagonist talks with her grandmother about the meaning of life, the ocean and her destiny, which has nothing to do with being engaged to a man.

6.4. Other examples: Elastigirl - Leia- Rey

Even though the movies belonging to the brand of Pixar have not been deeply analysed in this work (apart from *Brave*), the film *The Incredibles 2* (2018) is worthy of mention. If the first part of the story dealt with all members of the group, led by Mr. Incredible (man of the family), fighting to restore the order of the world, this time there is a change in family roles, which represents many present families around the world. Now it is Mr Incredible who must stay at home meanwhile his wife, Elastigirl leaves the house to save the world. (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEwwdvMcLtU>), it is another example of how the Disney factory has changed the topics of its movies and their portraits of women.

Despite the fact of not being Disney princesses as such we should not forget to briefly mention the role of women in *Star Wars*, since the famous (and highly profitable) production belongs to Disney company since 2012. The only three important female characters of the

endless saga are Leia, her mother Padme/Amidala, and the young Rey are portrayed as strong- willing women, ready to fight and singularly powerful. They, in different movies, have great protagonist, a fact that Disney knows how to use in economic terms. They are being used for marketing purposes nowadays (especially Leia and Rey), but it is not good that they are girls? Now children might be more identified with those space fighters rather than the delicate princesses from the past.

7. FINDING PRINCE CHARMING

Following Daniella Meneses Tovío: “Las princesas o protagonistas de las películas animadas de Disney necesitan con frecuencia a un príncipe o a un hombre fuerte que las ayude cuando se encuentran en apuros.” (Meneses 2013:5) and she adds:

Parece haber un patrón narrativo dominante en estas historias: un carruaje se aleja hacia el horizonte mientras la princesa besa a su amado príncipe azul y una melodiosa voz en off pronuncia esas inmortales palabras: “Y vivieron felices para siempre”. Una música emocionante suena al fondo, la pantalla se pone en negro dejando a los espectadores con las emociones a flor de piel, soñando con la posibilidad de tener algún día su propio cuento de hadas. (2013:6)

One of the most common plots in Disney whose protagonists are princesses is the fact that they are waiting for a male figure to protect them, a prince charming. That is the case of Snow White (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937), Cinderella (*Cinderella*, 1950) or Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty*, 1959), to mention a few. This emphasis on romance can be seen in later films of the factory in which it is a different character, mostly someone from the family of the heroine, who insists on finding a ‘good’ match for them such as the Sultan with his daughter Jasmine (*Aladdin*, 1992) (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LArOpMwnD_I); the chief Powhatan (*Pocahontas*, 1995) with his daughter Pocahontas when he admits he will be highly proud of her if she accepts the proposal of the best warrior of their tribe (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYMXAcidi1g>); or Elinor, the mother of Merida (*Brave*, 2012), who wants her daughter to be a lady and get married. Different suitors are introduced to the princess and she seems to dislike all of them. She refuses the idea of getting married (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3Y0r1_fPdw). She is the only Disney princess who does not end her story with a boy together with Elsa (*Frozen*) and Moana.

In all these three cases it can be seen how our protagonists challenge the paternal/maternal figure and the traditions of their respective cultures to follow their own rules and feelings in order to find, or not, their love.

There are other female characters whose main aim in the story has nothing to do with finding a 'prince charming' as Rapunzel or Mulan, however, at the end of the day, love appears and they seem to have their happy ending. In the first case, Rapunzel wants to leave the tower where she lives in isolation to find the origin of those strange lights, she can see every year for her birthday. What she does not know is that they are sent to the air by her parents, the King and Queen of Corona, and their subjects. Our heroine finds a boy (to whom she hits with a frying pan the first time she meets him) and, after many adventures they fall in love. She sacrifices herself, her magic hair, for him, but still, it is a different kind of love from the one we could see in our first Disney princesses.

With Mulan something similar happens. She leaves her home to fight in a war and it is there, by chance, where she starts feeling something for her captain. It is also by chance, she is not looking for love, just honour. Mulan is the only 'princess' of the entertainment company who is not a princess neither for blood nor for marriage.

It is also the case of Anna (*Frozen*, 2013). She thinks she is in love with Prince Hans and also defights her sister, Queen Elsa, for him. Later she realises he does not love her and that her feelings were also not true. She meets another boy, Kristoff, who really gets to love her. However, the real love feeling in this movie is between the two sisters, nothing to do with a 'prince charming'. Love is not only towards a man who tries to rescue us. Maybe princesses do not need this figure anymore.

The audience of our time would identify themselves more with these strong-willed female characters, those who want to decide about their future and, especially about their love choices. The figure of Prince Charming seems to be an old-fashioned one; they do not have the need to rescue the princess any more, female characters can find their own way in life now.

8. MOTHERHOOD

The topic of motherhood in Disney movies is a highly controversial one. There is a long list of films whose main characters lack a maternal figure and those who have a mother this female figure does not play as an important role as fathers do. In the case when both

parents are present in the story, as in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and similarly in *Tangled* (2010) they seem not to have a highly special role. In those stories both children are kidnapped when they were babies and raised far away from their parents (see Annex 1: graph of orphan characters).

We cannot forget to mention here the case of the Darling family (*Peter Pan*, 1953). In this film also both parents are present. Wendy is the oldest of the three children of the Darling family. She has two little brothers: Michael and John. The three of them fly to Neverland following Peter Pan, the boy who never grows. There the Darlings face several adventures and meet other characters such Tiger Lily, the mermaids and, of course, Captain Hook. Neverland is the home of the Lost Boys, a group of children who have no home. Wendy, although being a child, is turning into adulthood and a strong maternal feeling can be seen in her. Peter Pan says to the Boys that Wendy was brought there to tell them fairy tales. She acts as a mother for either those children and for her brothers. She is a caring girl who ends up reading tales to the lost boys and gets worried about them. Wendy defines a mother as “the most wonderful person in the world”. Indeed, they are. (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3MNLowkRmo>).

At the beginning of this story based on the work written by the Scottish James M. Barry (1904), the parents of the family are getting ready for a party and it is the dog, the great Nana, who takes care of the children (a nanny dog); baby Michael even asks if Nana is his mother when he is in Neverland. It might be considered that the film follows the Disney prototype of a busy mother, present in some movies of the company such as the aforementioned *Mary Poppins* or, directly, with characters who lack a blood paternal figure; either mother, father or both.

Several characters who do not live with their parents we can also be found in Disney films, including those who have lost their loved ones at a moment of the movie⁹: Snow White (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937), Dumbo (*Dumbo*, 1944), Bambi (*Bambi*, 1942), Cinderella (*Cinderella*, 1950), the own Peter Pan (*Peter Pan*, 1953), Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty*, 1959), Wart (*the Sword in the Stone*, has not mother nor father), Mowli (*The Jungle Books*, 1967), one of the greatest loss in the history of cinema: Simba’s father: Mufasa (*The*

⁹ Disney films, and now also its animation brand *Pixar*, are specialists in making the audience cry our eyes out. As the journalist Diego Cuevas points out in the magazine *Jot Down*, in 2018: “Ellos se beberán tus lágrimas”. <https://www.jotdown.es/2018/07/ellos-se-beberan-tus-lagrimas/>

Lion King, 1994), Quasimodo, whose mother tragically dies at the beginning of the film (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1996), Lilo and Nani, the Hawaiian sisters of *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), Rapunzel (*Tangled*, 2010) even though she finds them at the end of the day and, of course the two protagonists of *Frozen*, the sisters Elsa and Anna (2013)- see Annex 1.

The fact of having no parents seems to be the main plot of *Lilo & Stitch* (2002). In this case it is again the oldest sister, Nani, who takes care of the youngest one. She is responsible for the family after the tragic death of their parents. We can see that once more it is a female figure who assumes the role of the care of the children although many domestic problems appear in this story (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKtL87tcj70>). Despite all their problems Nani is a tender character who loves Lilo above everything and she carries all responsibility over her shoulders. One of the main topics reflected on Disney movies is love. It is not always necessarily between a princess and her prince charming but also the one found in a family. Lilo and Nani form a small one. Nani looks after her sister as a mother would suppose to do and so they create “Ohana”, a family. It might be one of the small numbers of Disney films which show the role of motherhood (disguised as sisterhood) as such, with its ups and downs.

Another movie that deals with a strong relationship between mother and daughter is the aforementioned Pixar creation: *Brave* (2012). Here Elinor, a queen, has to deal with a rebel teenager daughter. They always had a strong relationship but Merida does not want to do what her mother (and tradition) has decided for her. The protagonist is the first (and only yet) Disney princess who has biological brothers (three of them in fact), and Elinor pays attention to all her four children. A family structured as this one: mother, father, and children, is not common in the films of the company.

Some other examples of Disney movies who have both mother and father can be seen in Disney history such as *Mulan* (1998), or in the newer *Maleficent* (2014) where both the mother of Mulan and Aurora seem to be behind the story of their husbands and they do not show a highly important role. They give the impression to be merely symbolic.

Thus, having a ‘traditional’ family structure in Disney is not the norm. Among those with one paternal figure (mainly a father is present in the stories but not an only mother): *Ariel* (Little Mermaid, 1989), *Belle* (Beauty and the Beast, 1991), both Aladdin (no parents) and Jasmine with only her father (*Aladdin*, 1992), Pocahontas (*Pocahontas*,

1995), or Nemo (*Finding Nemo*, 2003). The presence of a masculine figure and not a female one can be considered to be influenced by a patriarchal society. Fathers either described by Tanner et al. as “controlling, aggressive, protective disciplinarians” who “expect their children to earn their love”, as seen in King Triton in *The Little Mermaid*, or as “nurturing and affectionate parents that listened to their children”, like Maurice in *Beauty and the Beast*, the Sultan in *Aladdin*, Chief Powhatan in *Pocahontas*; (Tanner et al. 2003: 363- 363; Malfroid 2008: 7).

All in all, as the Canadian journalist Justine Smith says: “Of course, the “motherless character” is hardly a Disney-only trope. Its history in literature can be seen from the fairy tales that the studio chose to animate to the Harry Potter series.” (see: <https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/movies/why-are-moms-in-disney-movies-always-dead-dying-or-in-despair>). Other characters without a paternal figure of blood can be Superman (he is from another planet and is adopted here in the Earth); Batman, whose parents are killed when he was a child; or Spiderman (raised by his aunt and uncle). Having no mother seems to be common. In recent years several animated characters do have this figure: Moana (*Moana*, 2016) or Miguel (*Coco*, 2017) live with their parents. (see Annex 1)

We cannot deny the importance of probably one of the most fantastic mothers in cinema history: Elastigirl (*The Incredibles*, 2004 and its second part in 2018). She is the mother of three as well as a superheroine (which for me it is the same). Especially in the sequel of this Pixar film the role of this woman highlights how life of a worker mother is. As Justin Smith points out in the *National Post*:

The Incredibles 2, we have the first example of a Disney film that might be centred on the adventures of a mother, as Elastigirl takes centre stage. Yes, she flirts with some nagging stereotypes, but generally speaking, Elastigirl offers the perspective that motherhood is not an all-encompassing identity. She is an individual first and a mother second. (Smith: 2018)

Being a mother does not mean stopping doing different things from looking after one’s children. Mrs. Banks showed that to the world in 1964 and a much more evolved character, Elastigirl, puts the present situation of mothers on display. (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8sCRN2eZXg>). We can be at work and solve home issues at the same time. Real mothers are real heroines.

Finally, it is worth mentioning here the role of female characters, not necessarily human ones, as spiritual guide for our several princesses who lack a maternal figure. That might be the case of the Fairy Godmother for Cinderella, Grandmother Willow for Pocahontas or Mrs. Potts for Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991). This great teapot is in fact a mother of a child/tea cup, Chip. She is a loving figure who also is ready to fight and defend her castle. Amazing teapot. These three mentioned princesses share the fact that they have no mother and, as everybody does, they need advice from someone. As Wendy says “a mother is someone who loves and cares for you”. They should be everything.

9. DOLL VS EVIL



Portrait of Disney wicked characters.

We cannot leave behind a very important group of Disney characters, most of whom represented by women: the ‘bad girls’.

Traditionally Disney princesses, as it was said before, are mainly characterized as fragile figures. They are drawn following the parameters of a nice woman's body; they represent beauty and softness together with good and abundant hair. In case of being real some of them could even work as top models in the most famous catwalks of the world. On the contrary we can find that most of the antagonists of Disney films, both male and female characters, are caricatured. Apart from the eyes, which are always big for every Disney picture, the evil characters have extreme physical characteristics. Since we are focusing our work on female characters we are not going to pay attention to male evil ones, even though some of them would share some features with those of women's which represent their wickedness such as elongated forms of the body and face or hyper developed muscles as

well as the presence of dark colours, e.g. Frollo, the bad guy from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NP-RsRGzVo>), the terrible Jafar (*Alddin*, 1991), Scar, the terrible uncle Simba in the magnificent masterpiece of *The Lion King* (1994) (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkU23m6yX04>) or Shan Yu and his army of Huns in *Mulan* (1998) (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUkw8_5BC14), just to name a few.

In the history of the so-called seventh art female role have mostly been characterised as object, specially at the beginning of this phenomenon; as the cinema historian Román Govern points out in his work *Historia del Cine*: “la mujer aparece ‘cosificada’ en un cine que, no lo olvidemos, está hecho por y para los hombres. Es un cine que hereda e incorpora las más viejas y estables fórmulas de la literatura y de la mitología, que de Oriente saltaron a la Europa cristiana para acabar asentándose en Hollywood. (...)”. He continues explaining that this industry was influenced by the Nordic figure of ‘femme fatale’ and that at this time “seguimos, no obstante, en el terreno de la mujer-objeto, de la mujer-hecha-para-el-placer, que se conocerá con el expresivo nombre de -vampiresa-” (2016: 107). The first female characters in Disney puzzle perfectly with the history of cinema. They have been either defined as a perfect girl whose physical characteristics resemble to those of a fragile doll¹⁰ (fair skin, perfect hair style), as it was mentioned before, specially Snow White, Aurora, and Cinderella who, somehow are inside a glass urn, as China dolls being the first one sleeping in a glass coffin made by her friends, the seven dwarfs, after the spell of the Queen (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkTCDnxRxew>); up in an isolated tower surrounded by fairies as Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) or, as the well-known story of Cinderella and her carriage together with the famous glass shoe, as it can be seen in the ‘human’ version of 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbkGWFsLRWc>). The search of perfection, youth and beauty has been present in traditional fairy tales and in Disney films, especially those from the beginning. All of us know by heart the famous mirror scene of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937, where the Evil Queen asks for information to the magic mirror: “Who is the fairest of them all?” (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br0DCEEBpIY>).

¹⁰ Things change with time and new princesses show a ‘more natural’ body shape, e.g. Moana’s marked hips (*Moana*, 2016) (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMLkZXMi8sM>)

Other Disney princesses such as Ariel (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989) can also be seen as a doll, in fact, a sexual one wearing a bra made of shells. She has a nice voice and it is almost the only thing Prince Eric sees on her (melodious voice is a characteristic of sirens, as it can be seen below), and she loses it for love¹¹. Rebelling towards this idea of being seen as an object we see how Jasmine (*Aladdin*, 1992) faces three men saying “I am not a prize to be won!” (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ridjqMqi9ak>).

Focusing on the use of the term ‘vamp-girl’, it can be said that it derives from the figure of the vampire; famous thanks to the literary work *Dracula* (1897) written by the Irish author Abraham Stoker. As it is popularly known, the main character of this novel drinks human blood to survive. This aspect of man-eater is translated to those women who are represented as either sexually active and lively (not only mere objects), including here intelligent women as well.

Dealing with Disney evil female characters, in several cases it seems they are smarter than their own princess protagonists who are innocent and even fairly naïve. Several evil characters get the appearance of the aforementioned ‘vamp-girl’. Let us take as example two of the most iconic antagonists of all times: Queen Grinilde from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Both are drawn as tall and slender figures dressed in black. They show a triangle on their foreheads and hide their hair that reminds the spectator of a vampire. They wear long dresses and cloaks, however, in the case of Queen Grinilde, better known as the Evil Queen, some feminine forms can be appreciated on her breast as well as using high heel shoes, symbol of femininity. It is worth talking here about the figure of Maleficent. She is an authentic ‘vamp-girl’¹². She has magic powers and becomes a dragon at the end of the original film so that she is seen as an unreal character (Evil Queen has a more ‘human’ appearance). She is dangerous and provokes mayhem around her. It is how a woman with her own personality is represented in this period contrary to the soft and fragile Aurora. Nevertheless, being the wicked character does not go against representing beauty. Disney factory has chosen one of the most famous and attractive

¹¹ Here we can see how the female character loses part of her identity when she gives her voice away. As Ana Bouza indicates: “a voz simboliza a autonomia: podes ter amor sempre que cales e ser intrépida mentres solteira, se queres parella, sométete, simula ser pouca cousa e deixa que a voz del brille” (2016: 30). (“Voice symbolizes autonomy: you can experience love once you don’t speak and intrepid meanwhile you are single; if you want a couple, submit yourself, pretend to be weak and let his voice to bright.”)

¹² Similar is the case of the appearance of Izma, the villain character of *The Emperor’s New Groove* (2000). She wears in black and shows a highly skinny and caricatured body shape. She also fights to get power and she makes use of magic tricks. She might remind us of Maleficent somehow but with a sharper sense of humour.

actors of the moment, Angelina Jolie, to play twice the role of Maleficent in a human new version of the tale becoming a blockbuster (*Maleficent*, 2014 and *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, 2019). They tell the real story of the character and the spectator gets to be fond of her. Having chosen this laureate actor is not by chance. Apart from the economic success (high for sure), she represents the idea of ‘femme-fatale’. Jolie has played action films and she is seen as a powerful woman, both physical and mentally. In this case, despite the fact of having her face a bit modified by make-up, she is still pretty as well as threatening, the kind of woman who may attract men.

In this section we cannot forget one of the most iconic evil characters of Disney’s production: Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989). She is a woman whose body resembles an octopus with six tentacles instead of eight. Again, we find a character whose main colour is black but this time she is drawn as a fat lady with short, white and spiky hair. She uses red lipstick, as a good vamp-girl, and she does it proudly (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpXoSFTEiRk>); she likes herself. She blackmails Triton, Ariel’s father, and achieves her triumph: being the Queen of Seas. Ursula is a powerful ocean witch, thus again we find that a woman, for holding power must make us of magic. She is a highly charismatic character (as her voice off as well), however, it can be considered that being beautiful and divine as Ariel (even though mythologically mermaids are extremely dangerous¹³) and not strong, intelligent and overweight as Ursula, is the way to reach our happy ending.

Ursula is able to destroy ships together with the lives of their sailors but she is not the only Disney cartoon villain that kills others. The peculiar Queen of Hearts, (*Alice in Wonderland*, 1951). Based on a novel by Lewis Carrol (1865), Alice is an innocent but curious girl who is suddenly trapped in Wonderland. There, among many different characters, she finds the Queen of Hearts. She is a short and a bit fat woman who shouts at everybody even at her husband, the King of Hearts. She wants to cut the heads of everyone around (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CENJTSmfwOM>). The Queen is drawn as a crazy woman with red cheeks when she screams and with bloody ideals. Again, we find that a powerful woman is caricatured and described as a mad person (well, wanting to cut

¹³ Mermaids are aquatic mythological creatures with the upper half of the body with female human form and the other a fish tail. Traditionally they have a melodious voice that dazzles sailors. In the ancient literary work of the *Odyssey*, written by Homer, sirens try to woo Odysseus and the crew of his ship. He blocks their ear with wax to prevent them to listen to their magical voices, however, he wants to feel this situation and ties himself to the mast to listen to the song.

heads off is not a feature of sanity). However, in this royal couple of Hearts he is a henpecked husband so that she is in charge. She “needs” to be a violent person to yield the power.

There are more Disney wicked characters that can be considered to be like ‘vamp-girls’. One the primary members of the factory villains is Cruella de Vil, *101 Dalmatians* (1961). She contrasts with Anita Radcliffe, a nice woman that loves dogs, who Cruella met in the past. This villainess (surprisingly) has not any magical powers, she is only obsessed with fur, especially the white one with black spots. She eternally wears a long and heavy coat that reminds us of the cloak of a witch. De Vil acts recklessly and in a violent way to get what she wants, as it was seen before, she drives as a “crazy woman”. It can be considered that Cruella De Vil is a ‘femme-fatale’ like kind of woman; she smokes thin cigarettes, wears a quite short skirt (comparing to the previous analysed characters here) showing her skinny legs and high heel shoes and, again, red lips. As Charles Salomon writes in *The Walt Disney Film Archives. The Animated Movies 1928-1968*:

The film is dominated by the scariest and funniest of all Disney villains: Cruella de Vil. In contrast to the wicked Queen from *Snow White* and Maleficent, Cruella is neither icy nor beautiful, but wild, flamboyant, and grotesque, with large hands, big feet, and a sharp-edged face that suggest an angry skull. (2016: 539)

She is described as the devil and also imitated by Roger, the male character of the film. He creates one of the greatest Disney songs of all times, (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcdQk7JBPzQ>). Cruella lacks social morals as we know them. She is able to kill a pack of puppies just for their fur. Probably this kind of plot would be unthinkable nowadays but, who of us did not want to have a dalmatian dog at home?

Disney has created great evil characters in the history cinema among whom we should not forget Lady Tremaine (*Cinderella*, 1950). She is the wicked stepmother of the protagonist and with the help of her two biological daughters she has decided to make the heroine’s life miserable. She is characterized (as many Disney cartoons) with big eyes as well as with a tall and slender body shape. Her daughters, on the contrary, are smaller and not as grateful as their mother. Lady Tremaine does not try to kill anyone (as the rest of villains we have seen so far), but she is highly abusive with everyone around. She has neither superpowers nor makes use of magic, thus she is probably the most manipulative character of the factory. The figure of a stepmother has always been associated with an evil one ever since. Many versions have been produced of the Cinderella story, being the ‘human’ one of

Disney (*Cinderella*, 2015), directed by Kenneth Branagh, a highly recommended one. Here an astonishing Cate Blanchett has the role of Lady Tremaine but this time a particularly beautiful woman who is (again) obsessed with beauty and youth (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxiFzp-fK_M).

As an example of another extremely manipulative character we find the first woman evil character in decades (from Ursula, *The Little Mermaid*, in 1989, all bad guys were men): Mother Gothel, villain of *Tangled* (2010), who also manipulates the heroine to convince her not to leave their 'ivory' tower. She makes her believe she is a loving mother and that only wants to protect the princess (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZolwEAe9dcE>). In this new century production, we can see in the antagonist of Rapunzel a villain that inherits features from previous evil predecessors. She kidnaps the princess when she was a baby and keeps her isolated, as the same as Maleficent does with Aurora; she is obsessed with beauty and youth, as many others before her; she uses magic and tries to get rid of the hero considering him as a rival. Time goes by but several topics are still the same. Children (especially girls) who are the target public of those productions, even now, are told that youth and beauty are connected.

Last but not least, we are going to study Madam Min (*The Sword in the Stone*, 1963), also known as Mad Madam Min. She has magical powers which make her rival of one of the greatest literary magicians of all times: Merlin. Madam Min cheats her counterpart and breaks the rules that she had set before the duel between them (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCKVSPcd8Gs>). Her nickname says everything about her. It is Merlin who qualifies her as a mad lady, why? Because she is powerful, at least as good as he is himself, and he is scared for this. It is true that she is not a good character either, she lies and even tries to kill our magician, but, still, she is probably not crazy to our adult's eyes. At the end she becomes a dragon (again the same simile) to destroy Merlin but now he is more intelligent and turns himself into a virus to make Madam Min feel sick. What have you done in 2020, Merlin?

Even when these movies were released around 80 years ago, they could be considered to be a help for those women to be heard. The same authors see that.

10. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we have seen here that, as time goes by, Disney's female characters evolve to have a more independent personality, and it does not imply they are the villain counterpart of the fragile princess, as it was shown in the first analysed examples: *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Not only princesses have been seen here but also a female worker, a nanny, *Mary Poppins*, who is independent and does not need a man to make her living. In the decade of the 1990s there was a change in society. It started in the 80's when women began to work outside their homes in big numbers, the role of housewife was less common now. Princesses of Disney had to 'adapt' to the new reality and they became stronger, with their own ideals and ready to fight for their convictions (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Jasmine -Aladdin-* and *Pocahontas*). Love was present indeed as well, but it was not the only topic seen in those movies. Female roles gained prominence, they spoke more minutes on the screen and girls were more powerful than before, as seen in *Mulan*, who faces a whole army and defeats the 'bad guy' with a fan; Rapunzel (*Tangled*), who confronts either her captor and all kind of dangers outside her comfort zone or Merida (*Brave*) that fights against all the odds to save her mother. Modern princesses such as the ones found in *Frozen*, who are the sisters, not a boy, who save each other; the adventurous *Moana* and the fast and not especially polite Vanellope (*Wreck-it Ralph*). Society is changing, step by step, and it is reflected in films.

As it was said before, the main target for this kind of Disney movie are children, especially girls. They are not always able to analyse from a critical point of view everything they watch on TV, thus, for them, film characters are a mirror to see themselves. It is worth seeing what the films are teaching about gender roles from a linguist point of view. The authors Carmen Fought and Karen Eisenhauer analysed every dialogue from the Disney princess franchise. As it is seen in the article from *The Washington Post* written by Jeff Guo, it is claimed that the characters of these films talk differently:

In the classic three Disney princess films, women speak as much as, or more than the men. "Snow White" is about 50-50. "Cinderella" is 60-40. And in "Sleeping Beauty," women deliver a whopping 71 percent of the dialogue. (2016)

Conversely, the princess films from 1989-1999 “are male-dominated”¹⁴ (Gao: 2016). Regarding the last group of princesses, the average of lines for female roles rises considerably. According to this research in *Tangled*, women speak 52 percent of the lines, and in *Brave*: 74 percent. In contrast, *Frozen* “breaks with that trend, though. Despite being a story about two sister princesses, men claim 59 percent of the lines in that film.” (see graphs in appendix 2). But still, there is a long way to run towards equality in the industry, as, for example, from 92 editions of Oscar Awards from Hollywood only five women have been nominated to the category of best director. Only one has won it so far: Kathryn Bigelow for her work *The Hurt Locker* (2009). It cannot be forgotten here that only two of the analysed films here were directed by women: *Brave* and *Frozen*, thus, we can say that all out princesses’ stories are told from a male perspective somehow.

Regarding the origin of the princesses, as the scholar Alexandra Heatwole writes in her essay “Disney Girlhood: Princess Generations and Once Upon a Time” regarding the analysed company: “Disney girlhood is Western. (...) the now almost ubiquitous canon of Disney princess films represents, more specifically, an Americanization of the fairy tale.” (Heatwole 2016:1). Slowly in time the audience can see how the princesses represent different nationalities (fictitious most of them though), different from a Caucasic style (white and fair skin). Now among all the female Disney characters we can find a Native American one, an Afro-American worker, a Polynesian princess, and now even Latin American characters in *Coco*. Step by step we can say there is an internationalization of the prototype of movie heroes and heroines.

Last but not least, dealing with heroes, just to mention here, despite the fact the Disney factory has purchased the Marvel industry (and all its superheroes included), not many superheroines are seen on screen yet. It is worthy to remember that only two Disney princesses have superpowers: Rapunzel, whose magic long hair can bring youth to whom brushes it as well as healing wounds, and Elsa, who is able to produce ice with her hands. In my humble opinion, children would need more strong female roles to look at. We are not princess anymore. Despite its magnificent value in cinema and animation history

¹⁴ As it is read in the aforementioned article: “Men speak 68 percent of the time in “The Little Mermaid”; 71 percent of the time in “Beauty and the Beast”; 90 percent of the time in “Aladdin”; 76 percent of the time in “Pocahontas”; and 77 percent of the time in “Mulan” (Mulan herself was counted as a woman, even when she was impersonating a man).” (Guo: 2016)

(without doubt of course), we need more Meridas and Moanas than Cinderellas and Auroras in our present world.

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Graphs indicating the percentage of words women speak in Disney movies in contrast to those by men. Taken from: *The Washington Post* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/01/25/researchers-have-discovered-a-major-problem-with-the-little-mermaid-and-other-disney-movies/> (Visited 10-10-2020)

ANNEX 1

List of Disney characters who lack a member of the family. Taken from https://www.abc.es/play/cine/noticias/abci-protagonistas-disney-casi-siempre-huerfanos-201903011913_noticia.html?ref=https:%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

Los huérfanos de Disney

Situación familiar de los protagonistas de sus clásicos de animación

*Con asterisco, el padre o la madre mueren o abandonan al protagonista durante la película

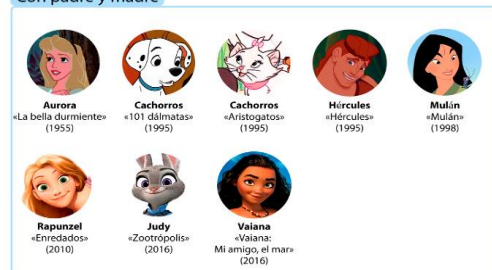
Sin padre ni madre



Sin padre o sin madre



Con padre y madre



Sin especificar su situación familiar

«Fantasia» (1940), «Saludos, amigos» (1942), «Los tres caballeros» (1944), «Música, maestro» (1946), «Las aventuras de Bongo, Mickey y las judías mágicas» (1947), «Tiempos de melodía» (1948), «La leyenda de Sleepy Hollow y El viento en los sauces» (1949), «Robin Hood» (1973), «Lo mejor de Winnie the Pooh» (1977), «Los rescatadores» (1977), «Basil, el ratón superdetective» (1986), «Los rescatadores en Cangurolandia» (1990), «Fantasia 2000» (2000), «El emperador y sus locuras» (2000), «Atlantis: el imperio perdido» (2001), «Zafarrancho en el rancho» (2004), «Winnie the Pooh» (2011).

Fuente: Disney

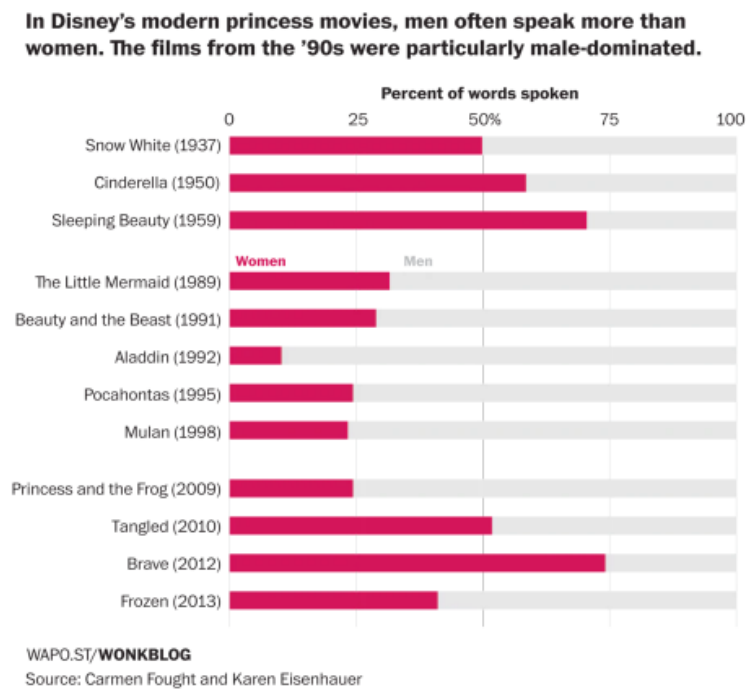
LUIS CANO / ABC

ANNEX 2

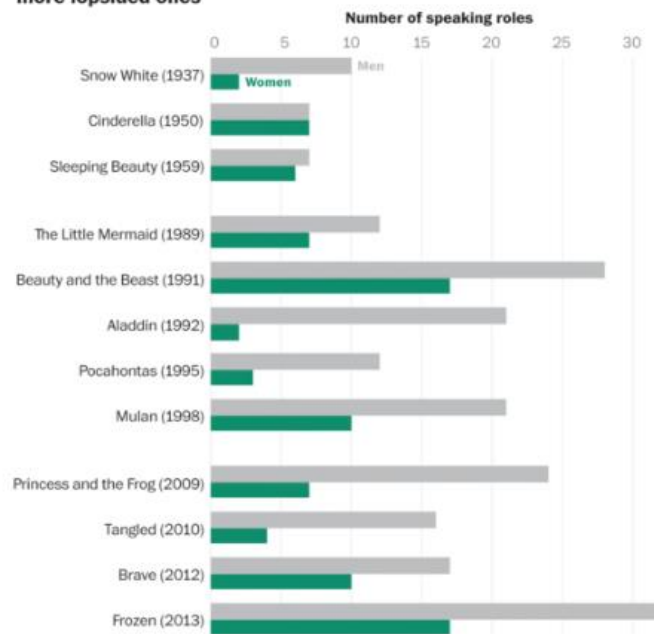
Graphs indicating the percentage of words women speak in Disney movies in contrast to those by men.

Taken from: *The Washington Post*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/01/25/researchers-have-discovered-a-major-problem-with-the-little-mermaid-and-other-disney-movies/>



More recent Disney princess films tend to have larger casts, but also more lopsided ones



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Source: Carmen Fought and Karen Eisenhauer