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A STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION OF FAIRY TALES IN DISNEY FILMS

This work intends to analyze the manner in which the historical, social, and cultural changes have influenced Disney productions since the beginning till the present. We will focus upon the adaptation of some well known fairy tales. Likewise, we will approach the treatment of the following fictional elements: characters, setting and plot. In addition, the work will deal with the transmission of values and stereotypes and the treatment of social issues.

Este trabajo pretende analizar el modo en que los cambios históricos, sociales y culturales han influenciado las producciones de Disney desde su comienzo hasta la actualidad. Nos centraremos en la adaptación de algunos conocidos cuentos de hadas. Asimismo, nos aproximaremos al tratamiento de los siguientes elementos de ficción: personajes, narrador, escenario y argumento. Además, el trabajo tratará con la transmisión de valores y estereotipos y el tratamiento de valores sociales.

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1. Introduction

In this work I intend to analyse the evolution of the fairy tale, through the Disney vision. It is divided in two parts. In the first one, I speak about the importance of cinema in education, emphasising some of its purposes. The second part is divided into five sections. In the first one, different definitions of fairy tale are presented. In the second section there is a short explanation about the original fairy tales. It is in the third one where we look into the Disney vision of fairy tales. We analyse its characters, plots and settings. After that, we will focus on the gender's role through Disney's film, and finally, in the last section I talk about how Disney carries on with the treatment of social issues.

It is true that Disney fairy tales have been criticised. Nevertheless, its versions are well known all over the world. It doesn't matter where you go, Cinderella, Snow White or any Disney classic will be the same.

2. Cinema and education

Cinema has been one of the most innovative resources since the 80's. Maybe one of the reasons is that cinema acts as a mirror of society, and its sources are human dramas and concerns. Through its own filmic language and devices, it helps to complement the knowledge and ideas of a period. Because of that we can think about it as a sort of document about contemporary life.

Through cinema, people can understand classics and works of art, it can encourage the spectator to read the book which served as a base or provided inspiration to the film. However, if we want to achieve those objectives we cannot forget that interests and motivations are different for each age, culture and condition. For example, the little ones prefer the animated films and Disney is a good start. Its films and short films have dynamism, color, music, and plenty of action, all of these features likely to attract young children. In this sense, Walt Disney was the most representative director of animated cinema.

The messages and contents of films are elements of undeniable value. Cinema is an interdisciplinary art, and a great way to work with several themes. As stated by Segovia

(2007: 7-8), cinema is a great asset as a didactic resource, in order to facilitate the transmission of knowledge and values. Therefore, we should take advantage of such a resource in the learning process. A good option is working with the fantasy and adventure genres, since they are close to the children's interests. For example, stories such as *Peter Pan*, where it all starts with a family but then children travel to a fantastic world called Neverland, and the story develops into an amount of fantastic adventures.

One of the most outstanding advantages of working with films in the Primary classroom is the fact that students may interact and be motivated with the combination of sounds and images. It is also an ideal way to introduce students to different themes, such as the knowledge of other cultures, diverse landscapes, other problems or realities. Cinema can also serve the purpose to achieve the objectives of different areas, in particular cross-curricular ones, for instance learning how to behave or being respectful to others.

In Primary education, children start to understand and solve suitably the problems that they have to face. Within this educational period, children develop their personality because they learn to understand and respect the rules and the principles of society, while they develop social knowledge and moral reasoning. Besides, this is an essential stage for the students' psychological and personal progress. Children's self-esteem is one of the protagonists. The students start to focus in their thoughts, their tastes and their interests.

Due to the fact that Disney films are a favourite entertainment for children, we understand that the content and the educative environment of the Disney dimension must be analysed. It is important to look at the content of these productions in order to know what children are learning and what we can teach them. In order to analyze Disney's productions, we should keep in mind the date of the release of each film in particular, and the original story in which it is based because, as I said before, those films reflect the society of a period. Obviously, a classic released in the 30's is totally different to a film released in our times.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that Disney is a multinational industry that has devised its own educational cultural curriculum, based on a global culture. Our students get absorbed and take part of such a curriculum. Because of the fact that Walt Disney's utopian vision and spirit remain even in the latest films, it is important to have in mind that Disney not only sells its products, it also sells values and identities.

3. Fairy tales

3.1. Towards a definition

The Collins dictionary provides the following definitions of fairy tale:

1. noun. A story, about fairies or other mythical or magical beings, esp one of traditional origin told to children.
2. A highly improbable account.
3. Noun. A story for children involving magic and imaginary creatures.
4. A fantasy; untrue story.

Other Fairy tales definitions are:

"A story for children about fairies, or about magic and enchantment // a very improbable story // a lie. (The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, 1990 Edition. New York: Lexicon Publications, 1990.)

"Fairy tales are unique, not only as a form of literature, but as works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child, as no other form of art is. As with all great art, the fairy tale's deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life. The child will extract different meaning from the same fairy tale, depending on his interests and needs of the moment". (Bruno Bettelheim.The uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and importance of Fairy Tales. 1975, 1976, p.12)

"A fairy tale is a story-literary or folk-that has a sense of the numinous, the feeling or sensation of the supernatural or the mysterious. But, and this is crucial, it is a story that happens in the past tense, and a story that is not tied to any specifics. If it happens "at the beginning of the world," then it is a myth. A story that names a specific "real" person is a legend (even if it contains a magical occurrence). A story that happens in the future is a fantasy. Fairy tales are sometimes spirituals, but never religious." (Lane, Marcia. Picturing a Rose: A Way od Looking at Fairy Tales. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1993.)

"Fairy tales are narratives predicated upon magic." (Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjaer. Language and Control in Children's Literature. p.157)

Briggs defines the fairy tale within his distinction between folk legends and folk narratives:

Briggs (1970) distinguishes, first, between folk legends, once believed true, and folk narratives which have always been conceived as fiction, 'told for edification, delight or amusement'. (1970:1). Second, within the genre of folk narrative, Briggs perceives five groupings: (I) fables and exempla, 'those animal stories after manner of Aesop that point a moral or satirize human frailties'; (ii) jocular tales, 'a great body of drolls, noodle stories, bawdy tales, and so on, that are handed about for entertainment'; (iii) novelle, 'narratives in which there is no explicity supernatural element'; (iv) nursery tales, 'obviously invented for small children and of a type to be appreciated by the very young'; and (v) fairytales, 'narratives containing or hinging upon supernatural happenings'. (1970:2). (Language and Control in Children's Literature. Murray Knowles, Kirsten Malmkjaer. P.156.)

3.2. Original fairy tales

Fairy tales have its roots in the oral tradition. The oldest fairy tales were told and retold before they were written down. Those stories were not written for children but for adults. In Jack Zipes' words: "The literary fairy tales differed remarkably from their precursors, the oral folktales and the Italian literary tales, by the manner in which they portrayed children and appealed to them as a possibly distinct audience." (2006: .29). Nowadays, when we talk about fairy tales, we inevitable think about children.

> Fairy tales are constantly rearranged and transformed to suit changes in tastes and values, and they assume mythic proportions when they are frozen in an ideological constellation that makes it seem that there are universal absolutes that are divine and should not be changed." *(Zipes, Fairy Tale and Myth, 1994:19)*

Interestingly enough, according to this fairy tale scholar (Zipes, 2006: 33), there is a direct line from the Perrault fairy tale of court society to the Walt Disney cinematic fairy tale of the culture industry. This is a very important aspect, since Perrault's fairy tales portrayed the values of his age, which are not concurrent at all with our own values nowadays. Perrault's fairy tales contain his own view about how young people should behave, and how they should act in society. It was in 1697 when he published a collection of tales, called *Histoiries ou Contes du temps passé*. With this collection he became famous and a new literary style began:

the fairy tale.

Although the classical fairy tale of Perrault was, and still is, considered harmless and entertaining (Zipes, 2006: 34), the truth is that his tales are full of stereotypes. For instance, the female characters in his stories fulfil the requirements of upper-class society: they are beautiful, kind, elegant, and always know how to behave. If they do not behave properly, they will inevitably be punished.

Other well-known fairy tale authors were the Grimm Brothers. They went across Germany looking for traditional tales and they published them in 1812 with the name of *Traditional Tales*. The Grimm Brothers considered that their works were not directed to children. But, to satisfy the requirements of the middle class public they had to change several details of the original stories with that aim. For example they had to omit all the allusions to sexual things.

> *"Disney has in common with the brothers Grimm that he personally achieved fame against the odds, through selfreliance and hard work, and these are not only the values of his class but the values that both he and the Grimms represent favourably in their work, selecting tales for public consumption that lend themselves to their promotion". Issues in Americanisation and culture.Neil Campbell, Jude Davies & George McKay. 2004: 186).*

The original versions include premarital sex, as in Rapunzel, where a prince impregnates the title character after both spend many days together living in joy and pleasure, the same as in The frog King, where a princess spends the night with her suitor once he turns into a handsome bachelor. It also includes graphic violence, as in Cinderella, when the evil stepsisters cut off their toes and heels trying to make the slipper fit and later have their eyes pecked out by doves, or in Snow White where the wicked queen dies after being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes. In original versions much of the violence is directed at children, for example Snow White is just seven years old when the huntsman takes her into the forest with orders to bring back her liver and lungs. And there are also changes on the characters. Some of the original versions included some evil biological mothers, Snow White also has an evil mother, but the authors turned them into stepmothers in subsequent editions.

As we can observe, not all the authors pretended to write children stories. For example, the

Grimm's never even set out to entertain kids. Only later, as children became their main audience, they took out some of the more adult content. There is not a fairy goodmother in the original version of Cinderella, in Disney version the punishment of the queen from Snow White in the Grimms story is excluded. Then, their stories were further sanitized as they were adapted by Walt Disney.

Hans Christian Andersen was part of a poor family, but his imagination made of him one of the most important fairy tale authors. He began to pay attention to the fairy tale genre, remembering the folklore of his childhood, which he used for his accounts. In 1835 he publishes his first four stories in *Fairy tales told for children.* And, after that he continued writing until he wrote one hundred and fifty children tales. Among his best well know tales we find The little Mermaid and The Snow Queen. Andersen knew that what he was doing with tradition was new, even his stories were based on popular tales.

  "From the dominant class point of view his tales were deemed useful and worthy enough for rearing children of all classes, and they became a literary staple in Western culture." Zipes. Fairy tales and the Art of Subversion 2006.p.81)

Andersen knew that although his readers were children, they could face stories that give something more than simple comic strips, he believed that they will be able to understand perfectly what he was telling. And he was right. Andersen's fairy tales admit all kinds of readers.

The Danish writer managed to join fantasy and reality in narrations. He employs this perfect fusion, using animals or objects typical of fables or mythological heroes, or simply, characters that he invented. His personal life had a special influence in his works, putting his characters into certain fates that several times ended rewarding the main character's effort.

Disney's productions attrack children and adults, which every year come as the real classics. As Andersen in some of his stories, Disney rewards the protagonist for his effort. In fact, in Disney's versions even *The Little Mermaid* has a happy ending. Walt Disney never thought of children as the main public: <<When we make a film – he said – we try to please us, and not to an imaginary and theoretical child>>. If he made fantastic things, he liked that they had a human and terrenal feeling. He was smart enough to know that in that was its attractive. (*Walt Disney. Disney Miller, Diana. 1961.)*

4. Disney versions of classical fairy tales.

4.1. Basic features

Walt Disney fairy films are not entirely original, all of them are based in previous stories from the authors mentioned above: Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, and Andersen. The most outstanding feature of the tales selected by Disney is the fact that all of them include heroes that, after making some effort, defeat the villains, together with their happy ending.

Despite the fact that they are based on traditional stories, the Disney versions are considered the most child-friendly of all. It is important to bear in mind that the characters portrayed in the Disney films represent important values and attitudes, likely to influence the young audience. Through the world of Disney's fairy tale, the spectator is led to believe that everything is possible, a characteristic that was particularly evident in its first films. We find the first example in Disney's first film release: *Snow White*. At that time, during the Great Depression, people were poor and turned to do manual labor. Including the seven dwarves, Disney made the film relevant to the times and with the happy ending, gave hope to the viewers too. These and other of Disney films allow the spectator to forget the unfortunate moments of their lives, giving them the hope to believe that they can live happily ever after too. The secret of Disney is not unknown. People like stories where good defeats evil and generosity is rewarded, where a hard working character achieves his goals, and where love, mercy and kindness are the best powers of all.

4.2. Common characters in Disney's Fairy Tales

When we read or listen to a fairy tale we find some typical characters, such us witches and queens, princes and princesses, dragons, talking animals, giants and elves, magicians, fairies, enchanted objects and so on. Those characters have a connection between their mood, personality, emotions and their appearance. Those who represent evil in the story usually have an ugly appearance, wear dark clothes and have supernatural powers. Those details allow the audience to classify the characters in two groups: the good and the evil.

Fairy tales have a constant structure. Vladimir Propp (1928) identified thirty-one basic functions, and concluded that all the characters in fairy tales could be resolved into 7 broad

character functions in the 100 tales he analyzed:

1. The villain, who struggles against the hero.

2. The dispatcher, the character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.

3. The (magical) helper, who helps the hero in his quest.

4. The princess or prize and her father. The hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her because of an unfait evil, usually because of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, thereby beating the villain.

5. The donor, who prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.

6. The hero or victim hero, who reacts to the donor, weds the princess.

7. The falso hero, who takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess.

These roles could sometimes be distributed among various characters.

Regarding the gender issue, it is in the 20th century when gender roles experience a change in fairy tales. Before, the female character was obedient, innocent and vulnerable, and the male character was heroic, handsome and brave. If we look at the Disney versions, we can see more or less the same pattern. Even in the latest films, some of these characteristics are still prevalent.

- The heroine: The heroine is the perfect good girl. She is lovely, good-looking, kind, and gentle. She never complains or gets angry. Instead, she takes her troubles as they come. Besides, she is, in most cases, naïve and sometimes downright foolish. She never tries to save herself, neither does she ask others to save her from misery. In the end, the heroine is saved by a noble prince and gets her happy ending because she deserves it.

- The hero: In fairy tales the hero is a character who is never wrong. He is handsome and generally presumed to be brave. However in many fairy tales, the hero character only appears a few times during the story, thus he really doesn't do much. He is only the character who seems to fix it all, when he arrives and rescues the heroine.

- The evil character: it could be the stepmother, a witch, or a wizard. They are cunning, ambitious and, in most cases they are also jealous and malicious. They will do everything in their power to obtain what they want and achieve their end. That

character doesn't have a happy ending.

☐ The friend/s: the characters that are always with the main character. They could be magic beings or animals. They usually give advice and help to fulfil the main character's desires.

So, the characters are not like real humans, who sometimes are good and on occasionally behave badly. The character is good or evil, but never both things at once. For example, the little mermaid is kind, young and beautiful whereas the witch Ursula is ugly, wicked, and a liar. The fact that they are totally opposite characters help the child to understand easily the difference between both and to reject the villain. As stated by Bettelheim (1976: p.11), in fairy tales "a person is either good or bad nothing in between. One brother is stupid, the other is clever. One sister is virtuous and industrious, the others are vile and lazy. One is beautiful, the others are ugly. One parent is all good, the other evil."

In this respect, the Disney industry has maintained this opposition, while there are many contemporary fairy tales that do not keep this simplistic division.

4.3. The plot in the Disney industry

Traditional fairy tales begin with the well-known formula "Once upon a time" and end with the famous convention "happily ever after". They usually start with a young woman or a princess who is cursed or kidnapped when she was a baby; who lives with her stepmother; with her father; or alone after her parents' death. It can also start with a male character that could be a boy, a young man or an animal who lose his mother; lives with other relatives or friends (who usually are animals) or whose father died.

The truth is that Disney didn't made many plot changes in the fairy tales he adapted to film, at least not until nowadays. As I said, the stories start with the introduction of who is going to be the protagonist. That character gets into trouble or something bad happens. If it is a female protagonist, she usually needs to be rescued. In the first Disney films, females were not able to rescue themselves, that was a job for the male character. If on the contrary, the protagonist is a man, he has to rescue himself. If we think about the period of its release or when those stories were written, that fact makes more sense.

The plot of a fairy tale may always be the same, but what happens until we arrive to the

wished happy ending? Within those stories we find enchanted objects like magic swords, mirrors, pumpkins that become carriages, a lamp that is a genie's home, poisoned apples, godmothers, magicians, talking animals, a puppet that becomes a real boy, children who go to another world and so on. In my opinion, that is the magic of fairy tales, always equal but never the same.

As most of the original fairy tales, a lot of Disney films start when the main character is a baby or a child and the story continues until they are teenagers. For example in *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The princess and the Frog*, *Tangled* or *Frozen*.

Moreover the films follow a lineal plot and all of them have their happy endings, finishing with the typical 'happily ever after'. We can also find 'Deus ex Machina', a plot device in which someone or something appears 'out of the blue' to help the characters with their unsolved problems. We locate that device in films as *Pinocchio*, *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, *Brave* and so on.

4.4. Setting

In the traditional fairy tales there are not many descriptions of the places or the specific time. On the other hand, through Disney's films we are able to see a progressive setting development. This is explained, at least partially, because of the very nature of the filmic genre. The cinema uses images in movement to tell the story. They need to show the setting where the story is developed during every minute of the film, because describing a few details about it, as in traditional fairy tales, is not enough. The spectator doesn't have to imagine how is the Beast Castle, what can can find under the sea, or how high is Rapunzel's tower, because it's all showed.

The first tale that Walt Disney adapted was Snow White. The original story does not make explicit the time period or the geographical location, it happens in an unknown kingdom, forest and time, however in the film, we see in detail how is her view of the forest, and also, the Seven Dwarfs' house. Nevertheless, in other films like Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin,... the location is told. Disney develops the setting until the point of recreate an authentic city of the desert.

As I said, traditional fairy tales did not develop their setting but, even though we did not have a detailed description, we know where the characters live or go. If we do a revision of the

Disney films, we see that almost all of them maintain the setting of the original tale, so we find that they are developed in some of these three places: a castle, palace or house, a village or city and a forest.

The Forest

Disney includes different types of forest in its films. It could be of infinite hectares or of a few. It is an enigmatic place which, as Cristina Pérez Valverde explains in *Cuentos de la edad de Oro*, is used as symbolic language.

The geographic spaces contain duality, in this case Palace/Forest. The forest is the path through the emotions or an introspective way to see the conscience. Its opposite is symbolised by the palace. In the words of Pérez Valverde (1999, 29-30): "the castle represents reason and ordered thought, whereas the forest is equivalent to feelings and emotions".

In some cases, the characters fulfil their destiny going into a forest, as Snow White, who runs away into the forest, which at the beginning is a scary place, to safe her life.

There is the dark forest, where the protagonist has to face the danger. For example in *The Sleeping Beauty*, the prince has to go through a forest of thorns that appears around the castle to save the princess. And the Beast saves Belle from the wolves in *The Beauty and the Beast.*

Although the forest can be mysterious, dark and dangerous, it can also be a nice and peaceful place where some characters live. It is the example of the Seven Dwarfs, who have a nice little house there. In the Princess and the Frog, the main characters go through the forest to find the house of a witch that will help them with their problem, more or less the same that happens in Brave. The forest becomes a place to live adventures.

Palace, Castle and House

The palace is an important image in Disney, in fact its brand is formed by one. In the Disney films there are a lot of palaces: if the main character is a prince or a princess, where else could they live?

We have an amount of palaces, each one different from the others. For example, Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* lives in a palace under the sea, the Beast from *Beauty and the Beast* has his

palace in the middle of the forest, in *Aladdin*, Jasmine's palace is a totally Arabian building. The others are in the town, it's the case of Snow White, Aurora from *The Sleeping Beauty*, Rapunzel from *Tangled*, and Elsa and Anna from *Frozen*.

Although the palace is an important place within the stories, the main characters need to abandon it to fulfil their destiny and find themselves. That happens in stories like *Frozen, Rapunzel, Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast, Snow White* or *The Little Mermaid.*

Nevertheless, the palace is not only a place to live or leave behind, other things happens between its walls. Cinderella goes to a ball there, The Little Mermaid as a human stays in the Prince's palace and so on.

However, there are not only palaces in Disney's films. Those characters who are cruel, vain, wicked, dangerous and evil cannot live in palaces, so they have their own place in the castles. Their castles are usually old, dark and without many ornaments. It is in their castles where the strange or tragic events happen. A perfect example of that is the Beast's castle, from the *Beauty and the Beast.* At the beginning of the story, he is a handsome prince who lives in a beautiful palace. But then, a witch curses him and his palace, turning them into a beast and a mysterious castle respectively. When the curse is broken, everything turns into its original form.

Other villains who live in their castles are Maleficent from the *Sleeping Beauty*, Prince John from *Robin Hood* and Queen Grimhilde from *Snow White*. And there also some things that happen in the castles, for example, the Sleeping Beauty falls asleep in one, Belle from *The Beauty and the Beast,* has to stay in the enchanted castle and in *Frozen* Elsa builds an ice palace for herself.

<u>House</u>
Some characters live in small houses in the forest, like The seven Dwarfs or Madam Mim from *The Sword in the Stone*. There are others who live in villages as Belle from Beauty and the Beast, Mulan, Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog,* or Hercules. The puppets and toys that are alive are also placed in houses.

<u>Village, town and city</u>

The setting of villages, towns, and cities also appear in Disney films. Those could be real places like in *Mulan*, who at the beginning is in the village and then in China, or in *The Princess and the Frog* whose setting is New Orleans. Through the films we see different villages, towns and cities which are based in real places as Agrabah from *Aladdin*, a city in the desert where he goes through in different occasions. Then, there are others in which an unreal town appears, for instance in *Tangled,* where Rapunzel goes to the town to see the lights, in *Frozen* where the palace is in a town and the problems affect the residents. Moreover, in *Beauty and the Beast,* Belle goes to the village to change her book and Pinocchio goes through the village in his way to the school.

We can also say that *The Little Mermaid* is different from the others because half of the story happens under the sea. However, there are some exceptions. Disney adapted other stories and turned them into fairy tales. An example is a fantasy of Barrie called "Peter Pan". In this story the setting is Neverland, a fantastic world where he and the lost boys have a lot of adventures with mermaids, Native Americans, fairies, pirates and occasionally ordinary children from the world outside Neverland. Moreover, the literary work "Alice in Wonderland" of Lewis Carroll, was also adapted by Disney, who made a film called *Alice in Wonderland*. There Alice also goes to a different world full of strange creatures like a white rabbit who is always late, and a heart queen who takes the heads off.

4.5. Transmission of values and stereotypes: gender roles

As I have stated before, there are many versions of each fairy tale, since they have been told and retold for many generations by word of mouth. However, in a way they have been 'institutionalised' and spread throughout the world through the Disney adaptation. Disney versions arrive everywhere and consequently have an enormous influence in people, how is society influenced by Disney fairy tales? Which are the gender roles portrayed?

Films such as *Snow White* or *Cinderella* were based in stories developed in previous centuries. In this sense, they perpetuate gender roles, in accordance with the conventions of earlier times. In the films the heroes are fortunate, adventurous, brave, and handsome, while the heroines are beautiful, passive, and obedient.

Another aspect is that almost all the characters were from the royalty, and in the stories their

social role was exposed making the lower class to learn how to behave within its social status and gender expectations.

In Disney films we can divide the role of women in two types: the young princess and the old women who almost always play the villain's role. There are old women that help the protagonist, as the fairy godmother from *Cinderella* or the ones from *The Sleeping Beauty*. Besides, there are the ones who are jealous of the females protagonist's qualities like Cinderella's and Snow White's stepmothers, Úrsula, the witch of the Sea from *The Little Mermaid* or the false mother of Rapunzel from *Tangled*.

The roles of the main characters in Disney Fairy tales have been changing little by little through the years adapting its roles to the real world environment and society, although in fact, its firsts films have never been disconnected from the time in which they were released. Nowadays, Snow White remains the same from 1937.

The first female main character appearance was Snow White in 1937 and the last one, Anna and Elsa from Frozen in 2013. Between them, there are many different heroines that we can classify under three generations.

The first generation is formed by Snow White (*1937*), Cinderella (*1950*) and Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty, 1959*). These Princesses are beautiful, fragile, simple women with a submissive personality and a good heart. They are waiting for their prince charming, who will rescue and protect them for ever.

Snow White is the most passive and dependable of all the Disney heroines. She does nothing to stop the hunter who wanted to kill her, if he didn't take her heart is because he is not a bad person and he cannot hurt a beautiful girl. Besides, she doesn't do anything to survive in the forest or to safe herself from her stepmother's spell. She only does the housework and takes care of the dwarfs. The prince is who breaks the course with a kiss, and the dwarves are the ones who fight against the witch.

Cinderella is happy doing the housework and she does it really well. She is usually helped by her animal friends. She assumes the victim role, but she is not as passive as Snow White. She does nothing to escape from her stepmother and stepsisters and become independent, but she dreams of getting married someday, which is the way to leave the house.

Aurora from The Sleeping Beauty is pretty, friendly with the animals and a good singer. She has to hide in the forest because of a curse, but she only wants to fall in love. At the end, she is saved by Prince Phillip. This film is the first one in which the arranged marriage is questioned.

On the other hand, in the 90s the princesses start to become a bit more independent and determined. These princesses are Ariel (*The Little Mermaid, 1989*), Belle (*Beauty and the Beast, 1991*) and Jasmine (*Aladdin, 1992*).

Ariel's curiosity makes her become a human to fulfil her dream of seeing the world outside the sea. She is a law-breaker because she is the first princess who chooses a husband that her father dismisses and she is also the first one in not doing domestic tasks. Though Ariel is curious, intelligent and adventurous, she still wanted to fall in love with her prince.

Belle is not a princess but she is cultured, kind, beautiful, and sweet. She doesn't have the same interests of the other girls, she loves reading books and she is not interested in marrying a handsome man, at least not the alpha male of the village, whom she despises. It is in this case the prince (the Beast) who needs her to break the course and to be saved.

Princess Jasmine confronts her father, the Sultan of Arabia, since she refuses to marrying her claimants. Finally she marries the one who wants and for love. She is also the first heroine that marries someone from a lower social class.

Finally, the third generation starts with Pocahontas (1995) and Mulan (1998).

Pocahontas is a princess who has a free soul, and likes to run through the forest with her animal friends. She defies the desires of her father, when, as the daughter of the leader, she refuses to marry the most brave warrior of the tribe, Kocum. She is not interested in love until she meets John Smith. At the end, Smith saves the Pocahontas' father but he is hurt, so he has to return to England. For that reason Pocahontas does not marry him. She is also the first heroine that shows diplomatic abilities when she tries to stop the war between her tribe and the English colonisers.

Mulan is a young Chinese woman. She has a high sense of honor and although she is not able to follow the family tradition as a woman, marrying a good man, she goes to the war disguised as a man to help her father. There she fights for China and finds her true love.

It is not until the twenty one century that Disney changes the gender roles, making them more suitable for the actual society. Within this generation we also have Tiana (*The Princess and the Frog, 2009*), Rapunzel (*Tangled, 2010*), Merida (*Brave, 2012*) and Elsa and Anna (*Frozen, 2013*). They are the self-confident, daring and intrepid latest Disney princesses. Those princesses change their traditional role, now they make their own decisions in their adventure.

Disney makes of Tiana the first black main character. As a reflection of our society, Tiana is a young black woman that works as a waitress. From the beginning Tiana's desire is not to find love, but to open a restaurant. Once more is the enchanted man who needs to be rescued. She is who helps a small frog to recover his human form. Tiana, although finally falls in love with the prince and become a princess, is the unique who pursuit her dream to open a restaurant thanks to her work.

Rapunzel is the character that differs most from its previous version. She is a loved child who is kidnapped by Madam Gother when she's a baby. We have a princess who doesn't know who she is. On the contrary of what happens in its original version, she is a girl with dreams and hopes. She is ready to do what needs to be done to go out of the tower where she is confined. Rapunzel wants to be free and without knowing it, she wants to discover which her true identity is. When a thief appears, she sees the chance to go out and see the lights that appear in her birthday, so she forces him to help her. Also in the original version, the sorceress Gothel, cut-off Rapunzel's hair to lure the prince and punished the couple. However, in Disney version, Rapunzel's hair is the magic thing that Gothel needs to look young and stay alive. It is the male character, who cut-off Rapunzel's hair. Although she is the first princess that doesn't need anyone's help to rescue herself, she falls in love with the male character.

As in all Disney film's the villain is defeated, and the couple have their happy ending.

After Rapunzel we have Merida, a young girl who is not elegant and who doesn't have good manners. She is athletic and likes to do things that are usually associated with boys, like riding her horse or practise archery. Since the beginning she rebels and defies her parents because she doesn't want to get married. Her goal is to convince her mother not to marry any of her claimants.

The latest princess are Elsa and Anna from Frozen, a film based on The Snow Queen by Andersen. Both sisters are very different from each other. Elsa is the oldest sister and the queen of Arendelle's kingdom. Elsa seems to be enigmatic, reserved and calm totally opposite

to her younger sister Anna, who is energetic, impulsive and cheerful. Elsa is quite complex, when they were little, her magic touched Anna's head, and although she was cured, Elsa grows isolated, being afraid of hurt someone because she can't control her ice powers. We see Elsa's development through the film, where at the end the pressure of hiding her powers to the other is all gone, so she is free to be herself. Anna represents the innocence and the ignorance. She also represents the modern version of the Disney princesses whose dream is to get married. Nevertheless, during the story she shows that her most valued treasure is the relationship with her sister.

Those women who are in their twenties or thirties, intelligent, kind, who have a strong personality and are in a position of power do not exist within Disney's films. However, there are other female characters in Disney films. Those are the other side of the coin, the wicked and evil women. Within Disney films we find out that the female villains could be the stepmother or the wicked witch. For example, in Snow White first of all we have a pretty stepmother and in the end an ugly witch, and in Tangled, madam Gothel ages until she dies. Besides, in the Slepping Beauty and The Little Mermaid the evil characters are witches.

However within the villains we have male characters too. The villain of the *Beauty and the Beast, Peter Pan, Aladdin, Mulan* or *The Princess and the Frog* are men. Through Disney films, we also see that those characters that do bad things, males and females, have a horrible ending.

If we focus on the male character in Disney films we see that they are the main character in films as *Peter Pan*. And then we have some films where the male character shares the protagonism with the heroine: *Aladdin, The princess and the Frog, Tangled* and *Frozen.*

Looking at the Disney princesses male characters we find that Snow White's prince is shown as the man every woman wants. He is the rescuer, a handsome prince who although only appearing twice in the film, he is the one that saves the princess from the death. We can almost say the same of Cinderella's prince. Nevertheless, Prince Phillip from *Sleeping Beauty* starts to develop the male character role. He appears since the beginning of the story and he keeps showing himself till the end. Phillip is also the first character that wants to marry the girl he is in love with, although he thinks she is not from the royalty. Besides, he has a friend, his horse.

Another Prince that has an animal as a friend is Prince Eric from *The Little Mermaid.* He is a

young prince who dreams to marry her perfect girl. He is handsome, loyal and kind. He's shown as the perfect man since the first moment he appears in the film. After him we have the Beast from *The Beauty and the Beast*. Because of his behaviour he is enchanted by a witch, so he becomes the first prince with an awful attitude and an ugly appearance. If he wants to break the curse and turn into his original form, he needs a girl to fall in love with. The Beast is the first prince who in site of everything, has a lot of friends who will help him to win the female's character heart. Aladdin is a poor young man who falls in love with the princess. Fortunately he has friends to help him.

Next we have John Smith from *Pocahontas* who is not a prince but a famous explorer. He changes his mind about the Native Americans when he meets Pocahontas and he helps her to stop the war between their people. Another male character that is not a prince charming but is shown as a man with the ideal qualities is Shang Li, an instructor of the Chinese army. He is brave, nevertheless he has social skills difficulties.

Within the latest princes we have Prince Naveen from *The Princess and the Frog*. He is a fun loving, lazy and vain prince who has run out of money. He needs money to keep his way of life, so he plans to marry a rich woman. Nevertheless he is enchanted and only the kiss of a true Princess can turn him into a human again. So he is another prince that needs the help of the female character. Then, we have Flynn Rider, an arrogant and a little bit self-centered thief who can also be calm, good-hearted and sensitive. He only cares about money until he falls in love with Rapunzel. From the latest Disney film we have Kristoff. He is a young man who works selling ice. His friends are a reindeer called Sven and the trolls that raised him. Kristoff is the first male character that finds stupid to marry someone when you only this person for a day. He helps the princess to save the kingdom and falls in love with her, starting a relationship.

In the traditional stories the characters had specific roles, but in Disney films, depending on the year of their release, we see that they follow more contemporary roles. So is the case of Tiana, the first princess with black skin, or Elsa, the first princess without a prince. Is the same for the male characters, where in the latest Disney films we see that they are not perfect, although they possess qualities that make them ideal.

4.5. Treatment of social issues

Fairy tales are more than simple stories told to children for entertainment. Through History, those stories had been used to teach people about how to go on with their life. As Bruno Bettelheim says, fairy tales are stories that stimulate children's imagination, clarify their emotions and develop their intellect. To achieve that goal those stories have to be connected with their worries and hopes. Through the fairy tale, children are able to recognise some of their difficulties and several solutions to their problems. In his own words: *"Fairy tales have unequal value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own"*. (Bettelheim, 1975,1976:10)

Fairy tales don't show our current society context because they were created in previous centuries. However, Disney fairy tales make a progress throughout the years in some aspects.

Through its films, Disney shows to children the importance of values like respect, understanding, love, friendship, tolerance, hope, responsibility, freedom, peace and so on. The way mice and birds make Cinderella's dress, Flounder and Sebastian, the Little Mermaid animal friends, help her to win the prince's heart, the enchanted objects advice the Beast about how to behave with Belle or the magic carpet, the monkey Abbu and de genie help Aladdin during the film are examples of that.

In relation to social class, in the first Disney films the main characters are from royalty, like Snow White, the Sleeping Beauty or the Little Mermaid. The role of each social class is determined through its characters. The Seven Dwarfs have to help Snow White, in *Bambi* all the animals expects its birth as an unique event, in *Sleeping Beauty*, we see the difference between the princess life style's when she is in the palace and when she thinks she is a peasant and in *The Little Mermaid,* as a princess, she has a crab as a servant, Sebastian, that helps her. Nevertheless, other characters are peasants who become part of the royalty as in *Cinderella, Aladdin* or t*he Beauty and the Beast.* Through these films we see the daily life of a poor or middle-class character and of those who live in the palaces.
The villains can also form part of the highest social class. They are represented by characters who manage to have a lot of power and who represent values such as violence, injustice or envy. We have a queen in Snow White or the Sleeping Beauty, that rules a kingdom or wants

to do so, and who are able to use magic. The narcissism of the first, and the anger of power and rancour of the second, is what made them become the evil characters. Those evil characters who are not from royalty, have other characteristics, such as power, magic or enchanted objects that they will use to obtain the throne of the kingdom, as the witch of the sea from The Little Mermaid, who after been exiled, lives in a cave planning the way to return as a queen. And then, we have those who have power over the main characters like Cinderella or Rapunzel stepmother's. These wicked women, because of their desires to be rich, or young and powerful, treat their stepdaughters badly.

There are other messages that Disney Fairy Tales give to children. In the first films what the female good character shows is that if you want or need something there are three options. First, you can wait until a man gives it to you or helps you. The second choice is to use magic. We can think about that as waiting for a miracle, let the destiny decide or once more by someone's help. And finally, we have an evolution, Disney starts to focus in those stories where the main characters start to fight for what they want showing diplomacy skills, fighting for their ideals or working hard until they reach their goals.

As Bruno Bettelheim says, fairy tales show that the fight against life's difficulties cannot be avoided because it is part of the human existence. The message given to children in different ways is that if we don't run away and we face the unexpected circumstances, we will pass all the obstacles, and finally, we will be victorious.

If we think about it, the villains work hard to fulfil their goals too, but, why do they never succeed? Fairy tales tell us to fight for what we want in the correct way, without cheating or damaging others. In Disney's fairy tale world, the good characters never lose, and the evil ones always pay for what they do.

Bruno Bettelheim says that what makes fairy tales educative and moral is not the fact that the villain always lose at the end, although it's an important aspect. So, it is not the fear to the punishment but the conviction that doing bad things does not solve anything. The morality is caused because the child is identified with the hero in all his battles.

> The child needs a moral education,which subtly, and by implication only, conveys to him the advantages of moral behaviour, not through abstract ethical concepts but

through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him.[...] The German poet Schiller wrote: Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life. (The Piccolomini, III, 4.) (Bettelheim. 1975, 1976:5)

Speaking about the family, we find similarities between Disney films, such as the fact that the main characters live with only one member of their family who is usually the father, or live with their stepmother who treats them badly. We find that Snow White lives with her stepmother, because her parents are dead, the same as Cinderella. Besides, in Sleeping Beauty, The little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin and Pocahontas all the female characters live with her father. Moreover there are those characters whose parents die at the beginning of the film, as in The Princess and the Frog and Frozen. The are only three Disney films where we can see a whole family. Those are Mulan, Tangled and Brave. That is the way of Disney, to show different types of families, helping those children who lost a member of their family, or those who are adopted to think that they can also have a happy ending.

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