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Disney Witches and Feminism

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this B.A. Dissertation is to analyse the characterisation of witches in Disney films, from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to *Maleficent* (2014). This will be done in relation to the different waves of feminism, to be able to prove whether feminist discourse exerted any kind of influence on them. After having analyzed their physical appearance, character, and use of magic, three stages can be established depending on the different bearing that feminism has on them: The Traditional Era (1937-1960), The Liberation Era (1961-1989) and The Empowerment Era (1990-2014). While Queen Grimhilde and Maleficent represent the prototype contrary to the ideal of a virtuous woman, Ursula displays a role of a liberated woman, in her body and sexuality, and Elsa and Maleficent, not only take the leading role, but embody a more diverse and ambivalent witch, capable of making a benevolent use of their magic.

Keywords: Disney, Witches, Feminism, Magic, Empowerment, Liberation.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta trabajo de fin de grado es analizar la caracterización de las brujas en las películas de Disney, desde *Blancanieves y los siete enanitos* (1937) hasta *Maléfica* (2014). Esto se hará en relación con las diferentes olas del feminismo, para poder comprobar si el discurso feminista ejerció algún tipo de influencia en ellas. Después de haber analizado su aspecto físico, su carácter y el uso de la magia, se pueden establecer tres etapas en función de la diferente incidencia que el feminismo tiene en ellas: La Era Tradicional (1937-1960), la Era de la Liberación (1961-1989) y la Era del Empoderamiento (1990-2014). Mientras que la reina Grimhilde y Maléfica representan el prototipo contrario al ideal de mujer virtuosa, Úrsula muestra un papel de mujer liberada, en su cuerpo y en su sexualidad, y Elsa y Maléfica, no sólo asumen el protagonismo, sino que encarnan a una bruja más diversa y ambivalente, capaz de hacer un uso benévolo de su magia.

Palabras clave: Disney, Brujas, Feminismo, Magia, Empoderamiento, Liberación.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1. STATE OF THE QUESTION	3
1.1 Witches in North America	3
1.2 Witches in literature	4
1.3 Witches in Films	5
1.4 Disney Witches	6
1.5 Feminism and Witches	7
2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	8
2.1 The Traditional Era (1937-1960)	8
2.1.1 <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> (1937)	9
2.1.2 <i>Sleeping Beauty</i> (1959)	12
2.1.3 A feminist perspective	14
2.2 The Liberation Era (1961-1989)	15
2.2.1 <i>The Little Mermaid</i> (1989)	16
2.2.2 A feminist perspective	19
2.3 The Empowerment Era (1990-2014)	19
2.3.1 <i>Frozen</i> (2013)	20
2.3.2 <i>Maleficent</i> (2014)	22
2.3.3 A feminist perspective	24
CONCLUSION.....	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	27

INTRODUCTION

Disney is an American company dedicated to the production of films and series oriented not only to the youngest, but also adult audiences. Since 1923, this film company has not only entertained the public, but also provided values with its animated films. For this reason, it is important to analyze what values this company transmits, and, in this case, whether the feminist movement has been an influence on the representation of its characters.

This B.A. Dissertation, which is framed within the field of Cultural and Gender Studies, deals with witches in Disney and the feminist movement. There has been much discussion on the female role in Disney films. There are many research papers on Disney princesses but the article that fits best with the study we want to do is “From the Evil Queen to Elsa: Camp Witches in Disney Films” by Lisa Duffy (2019). For this reason, we want to shift the focus from princesses and look at the role of witches. They are also women but have generally been relegated to the background by researchers, to foreground their main studies on the princesses. We would like to study their characterization and whether this has changed throughout the history of the production of Disney films in relation to the advance and changes of feminist discourse.

To carry out this task, we have researched about witches in the cultural, literary, and cinematographic tradition, as well as their presence in North American history. We have read about witchcraft since Antiquity and up to the Salem Witch Trials in North America. The creation of the printing press was a starting point for the propagation of these stories, fictional or historical, that became more easily accessible. We have examined the presence of witches in folklore literature, emphasizing those authors that heightened its popular dissemination in the 1800s, such as the Brothers Grimm, with fairy tales like *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)*, or Hans Christian Andersen, with *The Little Mermaid*. Many of these books have been adapted to the big screen and with it propagated a stereotype of the witch, some with new nuances, such as the witch of the Wizard of Oz, but mostly following the models of the traditional witch of folklore literature: a woman, with great knowledge of botany and black magic, able to create potions and perform spells on her adversaries to satisfy her desires for power or revenge.

Feminism is a social movement that aims for equality between men and women. This movement emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arising the first feminist wave, with Mary Wollstonecraft and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). This first wave fought for women's rights. The second wave emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and, with Betty Friedan with *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) as a highlight, it is characterized by an era of sexual liberation. Finally, the third wave emerged at the end of the twentieth century until today and this period is characterized by the empowerment of women. This division of the feminist waves is based on the book *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (2004).

We have also read about the history of Disney productions. In the book *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (2006) by Amis Davis, she established a three-stage division of Disney films: The Classic Era (1937-1967), The Middle Era (1967-1988) and The Eisner Era (1989-2005). This division is widely accepted but does not fit entirely with our own views on the influence of feminism in the Disney productions, when looking at the witches. The consideration of feminism has led us to establish three stages, representing three steps of evolution or change of Disney films in relation to the waves of feminism. The first will be called "The Traditional Era" and includes *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), with Queen Grimhilde and Maleficent respectively. These are witches that show traditional characteristics that do not deviate from the model of cold, distant, and despotic women. In a second stage, "The Liberation Era," we include appear *The Little Mermaid* (1989), with Ursula, also mentioning Cruella de Vil, from *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961), as the female character who revolutionized the period as an independent and cruel woman, notwithstanding she did not have magical powers. The last period will be called "The Empowerment Era." It includes *Frozen* (2013), with Elsa, and *Maleficent* (2014), in a live-action version, two films where females with magic powers will show a drastic change with respect to the earlier witch-evil relation.

In the following, we will review all this film production to analyze the witch characters, in principle, malevolent and characterized as witches, by focusing on three aspects: physical appearance, character, and their use of magic. For their physical appearance we will examine aspects such as their physical traits and the colors that Disney has used for

their costumes. For their character, we will consider their relationship with the other characters in the story and their personality. Finally, for their use of magic, we will look at whether they show the traditional features ascribed to witches such as spells and incantations and the purpose with which they use their powers.

With all this, we will try to see to what extent these characters had evolved or influenced by the advances of feminism over the last century. We would like to demonstrate that the role played by witches in Disney films has changed from the traditional counterpart of the virtuous woman of the house, through the independent and (sexually) liberated woman, to the empowered and diverse female woman of the twenty-first century.

1. STATE OF THE QUESTION

1.1 Witches in North America

The history of witches in North America is mainly related to the witch hunts that took place in New England during the seventeenth century. There are historical records of persecutions from as early as early colonial North America. Religion and magic have always been linked. Witches use dark magic, which comes from the occult, the opposite of God. In this way, the religion justifies that the devil's existence on earth is through witches.

During the 1650s in New England, English Quakers began to integrate female spiritual leaders into their churches, believing that anyone, regardless of gender, could teach the divine truth, as Kalsen says in her book *The Devil in The Shape of a Woman* (122). On the contrary, the Puritans were strongly opposed to this introduction of women into the church by the Quakers community because Puritans were characterized as an inflexible religion on the issue of the women's role. The Puritans believed that the witchcraft was related to the devil because they claimed that these "powers" came from the occult. The most important location of witchcraft accusations in North America was in Salem, a town located on the North Coast of Massachusetts, named, the "Witch City" because of the trials that took place there in 1692 by the Massachusetts Bay colony. It is estimated that, during the Salem witch trials, fourteen women and five men accused of witchcraft were executed (Schiff 14). According to Rosen, as a town where everyone knew each other, neighbors were able to

accuse each other of witchcraft easily if the situation went awry (23). Any healer or person who knew how to use concoctions to cure the sick was considered a witch.

However, it is true that these trials were not the first documented cases of witches in history. Several literary sources can betray that witchcraft has existed since ancient times.

1.2 Witches in literature

Witches have appeared in literature as fictional female characters since ancient times. In the Old Testament the use of magic is forbidden. For example, in the *Bible* this quotation appears: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18, King James Version)

Many witches appear in classical literature. De la Fuente reports that in ancient Rome and Greece there were documents relating witches to witchcraft and black magic (5). Magic was used to perform spells on daily life such as love, crops or money, hence many of these practices were performed to satisfy desires in an unorthodox way. It should be noted that there were two different types of magic: “pure” magic, performed by priests, and “forbidden” magic, which is called witchcraft. Hecate, Circe and Medea, who used botany to make potions, were the most important witches in ancient Greek literature (Roberto 6).

Popular literature, or folklore literature, are stories transmitted orally for the purpose of educating people (Domínguez 21). The main point of this literature is that they are stories which have no author and they are transmitted from generation to generation reflecting the culture of the time. In this way, authors such as the Grimm Brothers were responsible for collecting and publishing these folktales during the nineteenth century. In Grimm’s *Fairy Tales* the use of black magic and witchcraft were very present. For example, *Hansel and Gretel*, published in 1812, a witch appears characterized with the appearance of an elderly woman, intelligent and fearful, who beguiled the two brothers to be able to eat them.

In popular literature, the traditional attire of witches are dark clothes, with a pointed hat and a broom with which they can fly. The witches’ physique is distinctive: pointed nose, ugly and warts all over the face. They are usually accompanied by a black cat, since they live in a forest away from society. In their home cauldrons and potions with which they cast their spells can be found. In other words, the witch is characterized by her physical appearance and the use of magic.

There are many well-known witches throughout literature such as in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in which there are three witches who used the "thread of life" like the Greek Fates; Claudina in the Spanish novel *La Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas; Ursula, the octopus-like sea witch who appears in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* in 1836. or Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizarding World of Oz*, written by Lyman Frank Baum in 1900, among others.

All in all, the witch's role in literature is to be the obstacle in the development of the hero/heroine. Several tales have become so popular and they have been taken to another form of popular culture: the cinema.

1.3 Witches in Films

From the beginning of the film history, it is possible to find a large number of movies about witches. The concept of the witch in the cinema is characterized, mostly, by a common appearance: a fearful figure with a pointed hat, black and old clothes and repulsive appearance (Zamora 7). In the film *The Wonderful World of the Wizard of Oz* (1939), the Witch of the West represents this appearance to perfection, and even more repulsively, she has green skin. Nevertheless, this representation of the witch in cinema has not been the only one. Witches also appear as an ordinary person, based on real events, seductive, repulsive, modern, kind, old and even young. A film based on the events of the Salem Trials is *The Crucible* (1996), in which the witches are represented as ordinary women and do not become witches with the typical appearance based on literature. Moreover, not all films about magic have witches with evil intentions as protagonists, in *Harry Potter* it is possible to appreciate evil witches (Bellatrix Lestrange) or kind witches (Hermione Granger). In addition, it is also possible to find TV series about witches. *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* was a popular series in which the main character, Sabrina, was represented by an ordinary woman, with magic powers. This American sitcom was broadcast on television from September 27, 1996, to April 24, 2003.

In the last twenty years, the representation of witches in cinema has been changing. The debate begins: are witches always the bad characters in movies? In the Disney film

Maleficent (2014), starring Angelina Jolie, it is possible to appreciate this new change. Although the traditional characterization of the witch (ugly, evil and old) is still present.

1.4 Disney Witches

Many of the popular tales of literature have been transformed into movies by Disney. Davis in *Good Girls & Wicked Witches* (2006) confirms that Disney is a company that has been a benchmark for children and for films companies since 1924 with the creation of Walt Disney Studio – which at the beginning was Disney Brothers – and with their first animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* released on 21 December 1937 (39: 90). With the great success of the first animated movie, the company generated a high amount of money and became involved in the creation of more productions.

The Disney company divides its films into three periods. Firstly, The “Classic” Years (1937-1967), in this period the most important films that Disney company produced were: *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* (1941), *Dumbo* (1941), *Bambi* (1942), *Cinderella* (1950), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) *Mary Poppins* (1964) and *The Jungle Book* (1967). Secondly, The “Middle” Era (1967-1988) a period with these films: *The Aristocats* (1970), *Robin Hood* (1973), *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* (1977), *The Fox and the Hound* (1981), *The Black Cauldron* (1985) and *Oliver & Company* (1988). Finally, The “Eisner” Era (1989-2005) the last period with these films: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Hocus Pocus* (1993), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998), *Tarzan* (1999), *Fantasia 2000* (2000), *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), and *Chicken Little* (2005). Although Davis’ division ended in 2005, the Disney company is still producing more films, such as: *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Tangled* (2010), *Frozen* (2013), *Maleficent* (2014), *Mohana* (2016), *Frozen II* (2019) and *Encanto* (2021).

Several studies based on feminism in Disney princesses and its change over the years. Rapunzel, Brave and Elsa represent the beginning of the change in the role of the princess in their movies. They are no longer princesses who need to be rescued by a prince or simply the

person who must obey. Feminism has played an important role in the company, as Aguado and Martinez postulate in their article: “Todas ellas se empoderan desde la reivindicación, revalorización y visibilización de lo femenino” (Aguado and Martinez 10) (“All of them are empowered from the vindication, revaluation and visibilization of the feminine”; my translation).

From the beginning until nowadays, Disney has used an antagonist who is characterized by a witch or a wizard. Lisa Duffy, in her article, “From the Evil Queen to Elsa”, affirms that magical women in Disney had two variants: either being the fairy who helps the protagonist (for example in *Cinderella*) or the evil witch, who is more common. One of the main women differences in Disney is that female protagonists possess “natural beauty” while witches “must build their beauty with makeup and witchcraft,” as Duffy postulates in her article. Elsa, the protagonist of the movie *Frozen* is a key point in the evolution of Disney's vision of witches because she does not use her magical abilities for destruction—as other witches and wizards do—they are used in a positive way.

1.5 Feminism and Witches

Feminism has had a great social impact in the world and this social movement dates many decades back. The history of feminism is divided into three stages, which are differentiated by the important events of each one of them. Firstly, the first wave of feminism in the eighteenth century, with the writer Mary Wollstonecraft and her work *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). As Sanders says in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post feminism*, the objective was to make women rational to fight for the same rights as men, such as the right to vote (15). Secondly, the second wave of feminism, the liberation of sexuality movement, in twentieth century, with Betty Friedan and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). According to Thornham, this wave was more complex because there was an internal division among the women (25). They not only fought for the recognition of civil rights but also for inequality, work, family and reproduction. Curiously, in this wave a social group was formed called W.I.T.C.H. “Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy of Hell's women,” who fought against the radical left that sought to build a new society without feminism. Finally, the third wave since 1990s to currently. In this last wave, it is defended that there is

not only one model of woman and that it is necessary to become aware of the ideals of equality of the sexes after having covered the fundamental rights. Women now have more power in the face of a world ruled by patriarchy.

Witches and feminism are more related than we thought. To begin with, witches were the ones with knowledge (fertility, botany, sexuality, etc.). This gave rise to the idea that any empowered woman was related to evil. Feminism has turned the chauvinistic stigma of witches, making visible the reality: that they were free, powerful women, unafraid to explore and enhance their own powers and abilities. Witches did not want to obey, women were forced to obey, and that is why witches have become a feminist icon. For this reason, women have always been an easy target for these charges. According to Rosen, witch hunts continue to exist because the image of the witch serves to reinforce inequality and marginalize women who oppose patriarchal society (28).

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Disney movies, with the participation of witches, may be divided into three periods. We have named them The Traditional Era, The Liberation Era, and The Empowerment Era. The Traditional Era starts in 1937 and finishes in 1960, The Empowerment Era extends from 1961 to 1990 and finally, The Contemporary Era begins since 1991 until now. Witches or female villains appear in each one of them, with Queen Grimhilde, Maleficent, Ursula and Elsa figuring prominently. This section will include an analysis and a discussion of their representation. This will be done considering three aspects: their physical appearance, the portrayal of their character, and the use they make of magic that each of them possesses.

2.1 The Traditional Era (1937-1960)

The first era is characterized by endowing female villains with very similar features: they are cold, distant and despotic, and envy the princess for her beauty and virtue. The portrayal of the witches is traditional, since it does not differ from the traditional model widespread in the pages of folk tales: a witch who, in order to achieve her evil plans, only resorts to the use of

magic by potions, incantations, or cauldrons, and is usually accompanied by henchmen who will help them in their wicked plans. The analysis of this period is focused on two films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), with Queen Grimhilde, and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), with Maleficent.

2.1.1 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)

It is the first full-length movie of *Walt Disney Productions*, released in 1937. Snow White, a young princess, lives in a castle with her wicked stepmother, Queen Grimhilde. The queen is jealous of her stepdaughter because of her beauty. The magic mirror reveals to the queen Snow White is the most beautiful woman in the kingdom and this is the reason why the queen commands a vassal to assassinate her. Snow White manages to flee the kingdom and hides in a house where she lives with seven dwarfs. The queen, discovering that her stepdaughter is still alive, decides to use her skills in dark magic and creates a poisoned apple which will cause Snow White to fall into a deep sleep. In the end the queen dies and Snow White is awakened from the spell by a kiss from a prince.

Queen Grimhilde

Queen Grimhilde, also known as The Evil Queen, or just The Queen, is a fictional character based on the Evil Queen from the Grimm brothers' fairy tale *Snow White*. Its original title was *Schneewittchen*, published in 1812 in the brothers' collection of fairy tales called *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. The Queen's aim is to become the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, and she is considered one of Disney's cruelest villains because, besides the reality that Snow White is her stepdaughter, she orders her murder and demands her heart as a proof.

The queen has several servants at her disposal to achieve her purposes. As most Disney villains, the antagonists are supported by one or more henchmen who will help her to achieve her terrible goals. Firstly, the Magic Mirror. In it dwells a powerful imprisoned spirit, that looks like a theatrical mask surrounded by fog and fire on a black background. It possesses the power of wisdom, always telling the truth in verse form: "Famed is thy beauty, Majesty. / But hold, a lovely maid I see. / Rags cannot hide her gentle grace. / Alas, she is more fair than thee" (00:02:58-00:03:15). In fact, the mirror cannot be considered an evil being, because the only thing it tells the Queen is the truth, even though she visits it daily and

she is enraged when she does not get the answer she wished for. This henchman appears from the beginning of the film, proving to the queen that Snow White is the most beautiful woman in the kingdom: “Lips red as the rose. / Hair black as ebony. / Skin white as snow.” (00:03:21-00:03:29). It will also reveal to the Queen that Snow White is still alive and the heart which she has in the box is not hers, but the heart of a pig: “Snow White still lives, / the fairest in the land. / 'Tis the heart of a pig / you hold in your hand.” (00:48:34-00:48:45). This mirror is represented by a male figure, both by the voice Disney uses and the features drawn. Secondly, Humbert the Huntsman, one of the Queen's trusted men. He is in charge of murdering Snow White, ripping out the young girl's heart and later presenting it to the Queen in a box: “But to make doubly sure you do not fail, bring back her heart in this” (00:07:29-00:07:49). At first the vassal refuses to do it, since Snow White is the princess, but she forces him to do it or he will die: “You know the penalty if you fail” (00:07:18-00:07:24). Finally, the witches are usually accompanied by an animal. In the case of Queen Grimhilde, it is a raven. Although its appearance in the movie is scarce, it appears during the queen's transformation into an old woman, the raven being the witness of her witchcraft (00:49:11-00:52:00).

A) Physical appearance: The Queen is characterized as a beautiful woman with a slim figure. Her skin is pale, the makeup is subtle and elegant. She wears a dark purple dress with long sleeves that end up in her fingers as rings and a red rope belt. Along with the dress, she wears a black cloak—black is associated with darkness, evil, the dark, the forbidden and diabolical, that is, the impurity of the villain's soul—lined on the inside with red with white trim on the bottom. This cloak is also accompanied by a white turtleneck. As for jewelry accessories, the Queen wears a gold necklace with a ruby in the center over the cape, and, of course, a royal crown of five points differentiating the central point with a diamond at its top. The first appearance of the Queen in the film is in minutes 00:02:32 to 00:03:32, where it is possible to appreciate these characteristics. The Queen uses her skills in dark witchcraft to transform herself into an old woman to trick Snow White to accomplish her objectives. When she transforms into an old woman, the Queen's appearance changes completely as she transforms from a beautiful young woman into an ugly elderly one. During her transformation, the Queen's long black hair becomes gray and unkempt; her pale, straight and

slender skin turns wrinkled; her nose, which used to be small, becomes large and long, with a wart on its tip—this being one of the witch's features in literature and films; her teeth are now ugly, old and dirty, with gaps and bare gums, since many have already fallen out; her hands and nails become pointed and long; her attire is also changed from her elegant purple dress to an old black hooded robe; and finally, her majestic voice turns into an old woman's, trembling and high-pitched. Her transformation is reflected in minutes 00:50:40 to 00:51:20.

B) Character: Queen Grimhilde is characterized as vain, jealous, cruel, arrogant, envious; she is narcissistic and only cares about her physical appearance; intelligent, educated, majestic, as well as sadistic, hateful, cold, obsessive and calculating. These characteristics can be seen throughout all her appearances in the film, like, for example, when she orders her vassal to deliver Snow White's heart in a box (00:07:00-00:07:49), it is possible to appreciate how cold and despotic she is: the only thing that matters to her is to be the most beautiful of the region, since Snow White is her stepdaughter. The people who live in the kingdom are aware of what the queen is able to do and they know how evil she is, as in minutes 00:09:45 to 00:09:25, where Humbert confesses “she's mad, jealous of you! She'll stop at nothing.” Another example is given by the seven dwarfs, when Snow White confesses to them that she is escaping from her stepmother and they answer, “she's wicked,” “she's mad,” “she's mighty mean!” “she's an old Witch!” and “If the Queen finds her here, she'll swoop down and weak her vengeance of us!” (00:38:10-00:38:35). We can see the fear that the Queen produces on the kingdom's inhabitants. Another example of the wickedness the Queen possesses is when she created the poisoned apple because she is concerned about whether her spell has an antidote that will awaken Snow White, but when she reads that it is a “kiss of true love” she is not worried because she thinks the dwarfs will bury her alive since Snow White will show the appearance of death. At minute 1:04:43, the Queen comes out of the dungeon and finds a skeleton (a past prisoner of hers) who wants to reach a jug of water, to which she replies: “Thirsty? Have a drink!” while at the same time kicking the skeleton and the jug and leaving with malevolent laughter. She is a liar and manipulative, appreciable in the scene in which she gives the apple to Snow White showing herself to be “an old woman with good intentions” and Snow White helps her to take refuge from the attack of the animals

that have recognized her by let her in the house. This is the way in which the old woman achieves the objective of being alone with her.

C) Use of magic: Queen Grimhilde has a knowledge of dark magic, as she is able to perform a magnificent transformation of her physical appearance from a beautiful and young Queen to a decrepit elderly woman. This physical change reveals the true essence of the Queen: showing her own evil nature and her external ugliness as a reflection of her inner darkness. The Queen is not characterized by having internal powers, instead she obtains them with the help of books and potions. These books can be seen in the catacombs of the castle, where she has a secret room with all the necessary gadgets to perform her spells. In her “laboratory” it is possible to find books with the titles “Astrology,” “Black Arts,” “Alchemy,” “Witchcraft,” “Black Magic,” “Sorcery,” “Poisons,” and “Disguises,” this last being one the selected to perform the enchantment against Snow White. For the creation of the potion, it is possible to see cauldrons, test tubes and distinctive ingredients that witches have throughout the story. All this can be seen from 00:47:50 to 1:05:40. The use of dark magic in the creation of the poisoned apple intended to kill Snow White is, naturally, a key point in this part. After her transformation into an old woman, the Queen is looking for the best method to kill Snow White. Searching in her book she finds how to create the poisoned apple: “One taste of the Poisoned Apple, and the victim's eyes will close forever in the Sleeping Death” (00:51:20-00:51:58). During the preparation of the apple in her cauldron, the Queen dips the apple in the brew and we can appreciate the symbol of death that appears on the apple: “The symbol at what lies within. Now turn red to tempt Snow White to make her hunger for a bite.” When she realizes that she is getting closer and closer to accomplishing her goal of killing Snow White she becomes happier (01:02:31-01:03:14). Also, red is usually related to blood, and thus to death (red apple Snow White).

2.1.2 *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)

This is the story of Aurora, the princess cursed by the witch Maleficent on the day of her christening. The three fairies are responsible for taking care of her and keeping her hidden

until her sixteenth birthday, the end date of the curse of the enchantress. In the end, the curse is fulfilled, and she falls into a deep sleep that will only end with a kiss of true love.

Maleficent

Maleficent, also known as “The Empress of Evil,” is a fictional character based on Giambattista Basile's *Sun, Moon and Thalia* (1634), Charles Perrault's *The Sleeping Beauty of the Forest* (1697) and later the Brothers Grimm adaptation *Little Briar Rose* (1812). Maleficent is a witch full of evil but, unlike Queen Grimhilde, she has no specific aim, since her only desire is to cause misfortune to the kingdom of King Stefano and his wife, Flor. To accomplish her wishes, Maleficent curses Aurora at her christening: “But, before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, she shall prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and die” (00:09:00-00:09:13). Maleficent also has henchmen at her command, first of all, there is the Devil Raven who is always at her side and, on the other hand, in her castle, it is possible to appreciate a huge wild boar. For sixteen years, they are under her command to look for Aurora across the kingdom. Maleficent does not deal with her henchmen in the same way. On the one hand, she refers to her raven as a “faithful friend,” while she insults the boars as “Fools! Idiots!” for their failed search of the princess, while she throws lightning bolts at them from her magic staff (00:15:40-00:17:15).

A) Physical appearance: Maleficent is a witch with a slender shape and green skin tone. On her head, she has two pointed horns that give her a demonic appearance. Her facial complexion is prominent, her lips are red, her eyes are yellow, with arched eyebrows and purple shadow on the eyelids. As attire, she wears a long tunic that covers her entire body, with borders whose pattern represents fire. Like Queen Grimhilde, her tunic has a raised neckline. The colors that can be seen in her clothes are black, purple and maroon. On her right hand she wears a black stone ring and on her left hand she carries her staff with a crystal ball at the top. This staff, considered as her magic wand, is responsible for recreating her spells. When she pronounces the incantations, the crystal sphere changes, with shadows appearing inside it or casting the spells on her enemies in the form of lightning. All this can be appreciated from her first appearance in the film (00:07:30). Maleficent shows a gloomy and evil aspect. In addition, every time she appears, a creepy music play. The main colors that accompany this witch are purple, black and green (Green is related to dark magic). When

she casts spells, they are green, and when she turns into a dragon, the color of the fire she expels is not red and yellow, just green.

B) Character: She can be described as vengeful, evil, selfish, cruel, sinister, and powerful. She has henchmen who fear and respect her, because she is an evil witch and can transform or kill them into whatever she wants if they do something wrong. From minute 00:15:46 to 00:17:15, we can see how Maleficent is a violent and aggressive witch, who realizes that her servants have been searching for a baby (Princess Aurora) for sixteen years, without realizing that during this time the baby has been growing up.

C) Use of magic: Maleficent is a very powerful witch. She does not need the use of potions or cauldrons like the other two witches mentioned above, she has powers by herself, but she channels them with her staff. She has transformation skills: she turns into a dragon at the end of the movie (01:08:55); and she also has teleportation powers: at the beginning of the movie (00:07:37), she appears with a lightning bolt, or in the middle of the movie she teleports as a ball of gas. Also, in 01:07:48, she is able to create a barrier of roots with thorns, so that the prince is unable to save Aurora.

2.1.3 A feminist perspective

In this first era, Disney does not seem to be responding to the feminist movement. It still maintains the stereotypes of the traditional witch, inherited from the classic fairy tales with one clear aim: that virtue is represented by the princess, Snow White in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty*, and evil is embodied by the witches, Queen Grimhilde and Maleficent respectively. The princesses respond to the “Angel in the House” ideal of the Victorian period: a perfect woman whose role was to love, honor and obey her husband (or father), and apart from taking care of him, she also had to take care of the housework and the children. On the one hand, Snow White represents this ideal because, when she arrives at the dwarfs’ house, she takes care of them, cooks for them and cleans their house, and is the object of the love of the prince. On the other hand, Aurora also represents this ideal, as it would seem that her only participation in life is being christened, spinning, and waiting to get married Prince Phillip. To reinforce those traditional roles with their opposites, the witches are characterized by being cold, distant, despotic and evil by nature.

With this villain it is also possible to speculate a connection between the poisoned apple and Eve's apple, tempting, beguiling, and bringing evil and death. Their role is one of a woman with no feelings for the protagonist, unlike the role played by the men, in this case the huntsman, who shows kindness and empathy by letting the little princess go free. We can also see how Disney shows that women are still guided by male opinion since her magic mirror is a man. In the case of the second film, *Maleficent* curses Aurora out of pure evil, without any previous and apparent justification. She also has no empathetic feelings towards the princess and her family, not even showing affection to her servants, the wild pigs in charge of searching for Aurora for sixteen years, only to her "faithful friend" Diaval. To summarize, Disney shows that witches are the model of women not to be followed, with the only aim of reinforcing the "Angel in the House" ideal represented by the princesses that the audiences would like to see represented on screen.

2.2 The Liberation Era (1961-1989)

The female villains featuring in Disney films between 1961 and 1989 undergo a change compared with those in the previous stage. On the one hand, *101 Dalmatians'* Cruella de Vil, is a free and independent woman. She does not have magical powers, but she is cruel. On the other hand, *The Little Mermaid's* Ursula, certainly with magical abilities, is characterized mainly using her "woman's weapons" to achieve her goals, highly sexualized. Sexualization and empowerment of independent women seem to be the main characteristics of this new phase. The period will be represented by Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) but taking Cruella de Vil as a reference for her characterization.

Cruella de Vil, the female who made a change

Cruella is the villain that probably marked this new era in Disney's portrayal of females. She is characterized as a powerful and independent woman. She is not a queen, neither has magical powers, but she does not need it to prove that women can be important on their own. This character had her own fashion "empire." She is the representation of a twenty-first century woman in the twentieth century.

2.2.1 *The Little Mermaid* (1989)

This film adaptation is based on Hans Christian Andersen's story *The Little Mermaid* (*Den lille Havfrue* in Danish) published in 1837. It is the story of a mermaid, Ariel, daughter of King Triton, who dreams of being human. One day she ascends to the surface of the ocean and there she discovers that a ship is sinking, so she assists in saving the young prince, Eric. Her father forbids her to have any relationship with humans and Ariel ignores him, making a deal with Ursula who grants Ariel her wish to be human, for a period of three days, on the condition that she gets a kiss of true love to win the deal. All this she does in exchange for her voice, and if Ariel fails, Ursula will own it forever. Ursula realizes that her plan was failing and decides to become human (Vanessa). In the end Ursula dies and all her spells and curses are removed.

Ursula

With the creation of this character, Disney experimented a new innovative change in the figure of the female villain in Disney. Ursula completely breaks with the canons of beauty because she is inspired by Divine, a drag queen, but without obviating the features of a mature woman with exaggerated voluptuousness. At this precise moment, the witch is no longer characterized by a slender and perfect figure, but is represented as a fat, old woman who does not care about the superficial aspect: she loves herself as she is. She does not hide her sexuality, in fact, she praises it. Ursula possesses a low, harsh tone of voice, manifesting a contrast with the patriarchally assigned femininity (*femme fatale*). She calls herself “the godmother of lost and hopeless souls,” while she is singing her main song “Poor Unfortunate Souls” from minutes 00:40:20 to 00:45:30. Instead of mistreating the inhabitants of Atlantica, she offers her services to them for a small fee: an enterprising villainess without the need for men to support her. The witch's main objective is to use Ariel as a pawn to obtain the Trident, which represents power over seven seas. Ursula's lair is located on the outskirts of the kingdom of Atlantica, showing the rejection and marginalization of her character because she lives apart from the kingdom. Flotsam and Jetsam are the servants in charge of carrying out the orders of their mistress, Ursula. These two mulberry fish accept their mistress's orders without complaining, although the reason why they do so is because they are afraid of her.

A) Physical appearance: The representation of Ursula as an octopus means that she is associated to an animal that dwells in the depths of the ocean, solitary in the dark and that with her eight tentacles she can manipulate everything at will. The sea witch is not depicted as a mermaid—half human-half fish—thus showing the distinction between protagonist and villain. Her aesthetic appearance is linked to a deformed representation of a 1950s movie diva: Ursula's face is made up, accompanied by thin arched eyebrows, with red lips and a mole near her mouth. Her hair shows a contrast with the rest of the representation of women in Disney due to its lacking length and grayish tone with a spiky finish, thus showing a more modern woman. Traditional colors are kept being used in her visual representation: purple for the body (purple is one of the most important shades because of its close relationship with feminism because this color symbolizes this social movement), black for the tentacles, red used for the nails and lips, and green is used for the representation of her spells. She is a seductive villain because through her gestures and wiggles she brings out the sensual features of a woman's physique. As accessories, she wears a necklace in the shape of a conch shell, which later becomes the object in charge of guarding Ariel's voice. One of the most important songs of the film, “Those poor unfortunate souls” (00:40:18-00:45:15), oversees showing the description of herself, using phrases like “They come flocking to my cauldron, / Crying, ‘Spells, Ursula please!’ / And I help them? / Yes, I do,” and in this way she manipulates Ariel to achieve her objective. Ursula needs to make a change of image, becoming a human, Vanessa, changing her hair from gray to brown, now she is thin and still wears the shell necklace, which is the only visual aspect that makes you recognize that she is the witch, although when she shows her reflection in the mirror her true self emerges: it is only possible to recognize her in the reflection.

B) Character: Ursula may be said to be vindictive, planner, intelligent, manipulative and ambitious without limits. She is persistent, because when she wants something, she fights till the end to obtain it. Her only purpose is to rule Atlantic and that is why she makes a deal with Ariel to get the power from her, since her father, King Triton, would do everything to protect Ariel. In this way, she takes advantage of the situation and thus she externalizes that she adores the suffering of Ariel. Although at the beginning of meeting Ariel, Ursula uses a soft and trusting tone of voice, but at the same time she uses her evil laugh to externalize a

false sense of security. She is portrayed as an evil, unscrupulous being. Even though she will be a change in the representation of the villain in the American production, she is also a chauvinistic character because she warns Ariel that “don't underestimate the importance of body language!” (00:43:20), instructing her in the art of sexual attraction: “Come on, they're not all that impressed with conversation. True gentlemen avoid it when they can” (00:43:36). Ursula is an evil witch, but less cold than the villains of the earlier period –Queen Grimhilde and Maleficent– since, by making the deal with Ariel, she gives her the possibility to save herself: “If he does kiss you before the sun sets on the third day, you'll remain human, permanently, but –if he doesn't, you turn back into a mermaid, and –you belong to me” (00:42:06). Besides this scene, it also shows that she was seeking Ariel's welfare by freeing her from her father's yoke. She loves to make deals, but she cheats in order not to keep her part so that she gets success. At the end of the film, Ursula ends up being killed for her lack of sanity, lack of intelligence and recklessness of actions governed by insufficient self-control of her emotions (the accidental death that Ursula causes to her two followers brings out her fury).

C) Use of magic: As her name indicates, Ursula is the witch of the sea. A woman endowed with magical powers that will be used to achieve her goals. By making deals with mermaids of the kingdom, she grants them everything they desire with magic in exchange for something she wants. For the deal to be legal and lasting, both parties must sign an unbreakable magical contract. In that way, if the mermen do not give her what she asked for, she turns them into little polyps and they become the property of the antagonist. She possesses some characteristics of the traditional witch, such as the possession of a crystal ball, in the form of a magic bubble, which allows her to spy on people, she possesses potions, ingredients and a cauldron that is represented by an open animal mouth with sharp teeth around it. To turn Ariel into a human, she recites the words that will draw Ariel's voice from within her: “Beluga, sevruga, come winds of the Caspian Sea. Now rings us glossitis and max laryngitis, La voce to me!” (00:44:28). Ursula also has the power of transformation, which we can see in the deal of changing Ariel's voice by turning her into a human, or even at 01:03:00, when she herself transforms into a human to prevent Ariel from getting Eric's love.

2.2.2 A feminist perspective

In this second Era, Disney films coincide with the second wave of feminism: the sexual liberation movement. Here the witches are represented as independent, free, and cruel women. One of the characteristics that separates them from the two witches previously analyzed is the use of “feminine wiles,” in a sexual context and as a way of behaving socially. In the first case, Cruella de Vil, one of the cruelest characters in Disney films, shows a woman that does not need to have magical powers to achieve her goals. She has formed her own fashion empire by herself. Now, thanks to this woman, we see the change in the shades of virtue of women: she works, she lives independently from men, but she is not necessarily virtuous. Rather the opposite, she is the exploiter, she uses animals for her own aesthetic pleasure, when before her the exploiters were the men. However, despite this “liberation,” the main character in *The Little Mermaid* is still Ariel, and Ariel is still an innocent girl and the witch still plays the role of the traditional witch. Ursula takes that independence to the limit because she rivals King Triton for his kingdom, displaying all her body and her sexual power. Ursula, somehow, is instructing Ariel, a very innocent princess, and incites her to use her feminine wiles, as can be seen in minutes 00:43:20 to 00:43:46. In fact, Ursula wants to free Ariel from her father’s patriarchy, that Ariel will wise up and be free. At these stage of Disney productions, these female “witches” are still cruel, but at least, in the case of Ursula case, the witch is ambivalent and grants the princess a possibility, however small, of salvation. Their social and sexual liberation does not prevent Disney, however, from continuing to maintain the traditional clichés of innocence in the female protagonists.

2.3 The Empowerment Era (1990-2014)

The representation of the witch and the role of the Disney princess undergo a brutal change, influenced by the social ideologies of feminism in recent years. On the one hand, the princess is freer and stronger, without the dependence on a Prince to construct her future and changing the stereotype of “true love’s kiss”. On the other hand, the witch is no longer represented as

the “personification of evil”, as a dastardly being, but now uses her powers to show that she is a good character, with sentiments and at the same time eliminating the negative connotation of the word "witch" in her films. Also, during this stage the witch is not framed only as the antagonist, now, the protagonist can be a witch. Gradually the “witchcraft” in the woman is eliminated, leaving only the powers used for kindly purposes, or simply, eliminating her powers to represent a real woman. The analysis of this stage covers the films *Frozen* (2013), *Maleficent* (2014) live-action of *The Sleeping Beauty*-and *Encanto* (2021).

2.3.1 *Frozen* (2013)

Based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* (1844), *Frozen* is one of Disney's highest-grossing films, the biggest earning animated film in history and the first animated musical to get a theatrical sequel. It is the studio's first feature film directed by a woman. Elsa and Anna, two princesses from the kingdom of Arendelle. At her coronation, Elsa loses control of her powers and conjures the ice kingdom, which is why she flees to the mountains and isolates herself so as not to cause any more harm. Her little sister Anna, Kristoff and Olaf set out on a journey to bring their sister back home and break the spell.

Elsa

Elsa, the first witch protagonist to use her powers for good purposes, so this protagonist establishes a breakthrough in the Disney company. She is the older sister and, therefore, the heiress of the Kingdom of Arendelle. One of the relevant characteristics in this era, and that we can appreciate with this character, is the modification of the stereotype of “love at first sight”: Elsa does not approve of Anna's marriage to a man she has just met, so it is a drastic change with respect to previous times. This film also shows that true love is not only between men and women, indeed there are other types of stronger feelings, and in this case, brotherly love. Elsa defies the stereotype of the “prince who rescues the princess” because she is her own salvation. Disney has never talked about a love that is not male and female, in this case, it is not specified if Elsa has a definite love interest, therefore, it breaks the cliché of the protagonist having a partner.

A) Physical appearance: Elsa is an elegant young woman, tall and slim, with pale skin, blue eyes and long blonde hair. During the movie Elsa has two important changes in

her outfit. During the first part, at her coronation, she wears a green dress with a purple cape (colors that we have related to evil witches), accompanied by black gloves to control her powers; her makeup is characterized by pink tones in her eyes and magenta lipstick, with a braided bun and on top of her head the crown. The other outfit change takes place when she unleashes her powers during the song “Let It Go”. From that moment on (00:34:18), Elsa changes the green color of her dress for a blue one, the bun in her hair becomes a braid, the pink eye makeup turns into purple tones and the lipstick on her lips is now dark pink. In short, Elsa's appearance looks more natural, free and showing sympathy and good intentions, using blue and pink colors in contrast with the magenta and green colors of the beginning that provoke connotation of villainous person.

B) Character: Elsa is characterized by being reserved and calm, the opposite of her sister Anna. At the beginning she feels unhappy because, not being able to control her powers well, she wants to be a “normal” person and be able to spend time with her sister without fear of harming her. This causes her powers cause her many complexes, creating traumas from her childhood. From then on, Elsa is afraid of being guilty of provoking problems to others and this makes her become a cold and distant person. Responsibility dwells in her since childhood, she is capable of sacrificing her happiness to protect others. Elsa's values regarding marriage are clear: “You can't marry a man you just met” (00:26:37). In this way, Elsa is a rational person, with values and with a clear sanity compared to the rest of the previous Disney princesses. However, during the performance of “Let it go,” Disney shows us a freer, stronger Elsa, unafraid of hurting others with her powers. Because of this, Elsa becomes a determined and bold woman, able to face her problems and return to the kingdom of Arendelle to solve the problems she caused before.

C) Use of magic: Elsa possesses her powers from birth: a princess with the gift of mastering ice and low temperatures. She is able to cause blizzards, snowfall, and freeze water with a single hand movement. When Elsa and her sister Anna are children, she used her powers to play with her sister by making snowballs (00:04:20). At first, she is not able to control her powers at all and, therefore, Anna suffers a terrible accident (00:05:14). This event causes the sisters to live apart from each other. The isolation she suffers because of the accident with her sister causes Elsa to repress her powers even more. This uncontrolled power

of Elsa's is repeated during her coronation (00:27:26), in which despite using the gloves she is not able to put limits to her powers; therefore, she flees the Kingdom of Arendelle (00:28:57) and settles in a forest where she builds an ice castle and unleashes her powers while performing the song "Let it go." The song makes Elsa feel a great liberation, and consequently her powers are greater: she creates the ice castle, a monster guardian of her house, the character of Olaf and even creates her own ice dress.

2.3.2 Maleficent (2014)

It is the live-action movie based on *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), with Robert Stromberg as its director. Starring Angelina Jolie, it demonstrates how the two versions (1959 vs 2014) can be so similar and so different at the same time. Now, Disney presents the story from Maleficent's point of view so that its most human part is portrayed. In this version the events are narrated from the witch's point of view, and in this way, we can understand in a better way her personal context and the events that led her to become the person she is today. Despite having the same plot –Malefic curses Aurora at her christening and the princess will finally prick her finger with the spindle of a spinning wheel– the film company wanted to make some changes in its structure. One of these more drastic modifications has been that the real villain of the film is not Maleficent, but Stefan, who with his greed endangers his beloved and the whole kingdom for years. Magic plays a fundamental role in the film, unlike the original version, in this one we can observe that Maleficent lives in a magical kingdom called "The Moors," where all kinds of magical creatures live there. Diaval, the "faithful friend" is a character that appears in both versions, but in this last one with some new nuances: he is able to become human and is in charge of spying and helping Aurora because the three fairy godmothers are not able to protect her well (00:37:02).

Maleficent

The role of Maleficent in Disney's original version of *Sleeping Beauty* is quite different from the character played by Angelina Jolie. In the case of the latest film, Maleficent is not evil by nature, but becomes a character with malice when her beloved, King Stefan, deceives her and snatches her greatest treasure: her wings. Although it is to be assumed that Maleficent has the powers by birth, in this film Maleficent, from her childhood, is good by nature, she has a

good relationship with all the inhabitants of the Moors and, with her magic, repairs the damage to the trees of her home (00:01:55). In contrast to *Sleeping Beauty*, the creatures call her “fairy,” unlike in the original version, which is referred to as “sorceress” or “evil empress.”

A) Physical appearance: The first appearance of Maleficent in the movie (00:01:27) is in her childhood, her appearance is a smiling girl, greenish eyes, beaked ears, light brown hair, on the top of her head she has two black horns, her brown wings with feathers and at the tip we can see a claw. Her dress is brown and her accessories are a necklace of orange pearls and a bracelet that matches the necklace. At minute 00:08:17 Maleficent is no longer a girl, she is now a young woman (Angelina Jolie) with a slender figure, pale skin, prominent cheekbones and her green eyes stand out with her fleshy red lips. Her black horns are now larger, as are her beautiful wings that show majesty and strength. Now she is represented as a woman who represents beauty and empowerment in the kingdom. The appearance that most closely matches the original version begins at minute 00:20:00 where the staff with which she recreates her spells appears for the first time. At minute 00:24:28 her appearance changes completely—It is the most similar to the original version—where she appears at Aurora's christening with a black dress accompanied by her cloak of the same color. Her brown horns are now made of black leather, in charge of hiding her long hair. Her necklace changes from blue to black. In general, her appearance now reveals evil and dark energies.

B) Character: Maleficent's personality is totally different from the one we already knew. In this movie, Disney shows us that she is not evil by nature, but the events that happened make her become cold and vindictive, even though at the end she shows her true self: a kind woman. Although the narrator of the story comments that in the kingdom of the Moors there were no kings as in the human kingdom, Maleficent was considered a “queen,” since all the inhabitants—including the three fairy godmothers—would appeal to her in case of troubles: at minute 00:03:08 three fairies' comment to Maleficent that a human (Stefan) has appeared in their home. At minute 00:10:17 King Henry arrives with his troops to the Moors to fight against the magical beings, but Maleficent appears landing on a rock, showing strength and respect and says to her magical companions “arise and stand with me” (again we see the power she has in the kingdom). At that precise moment Maleficent is showing the

empowerment of women in front of King Henry. She was a character that transmits confidence, security and power, but since her event with Stefan (min 00:20:00), in which he snatches her wings, all this changes. Henceforth, Maleficent becomes a solitary, cold and despotic being. She moves away from the moors to a ruined castle where she will live with her raven, Diaval. During the film we can see that in fact, Maleficent is not as evil as in the first version since, although she initially cursed Aurora, she eventually changes her mind and wants Aurora to be safe from her spell: “I revoke the curse” (00:53:19).

C) Use of magic: As I said before, Maleficent is magically gifted by nature. Since she was a little girl, her labor was to help the trees and magical creatures of the kingdom (00:01:05). During her development, the use of her magic was for positive purposes, represented with a yellow color, but since she suffers the snatching of her wings, her magic changes to a green color (as during all the movies previously analyzed, we know that green represents evil) as her personality changes to a cold and vengeful person, and the use of her magic also changes: now she performs spells and curses against aurora and the rest of the inhabitants. The first moment we see this change of color in her magic is at minute 00:22:05, blinded by the rage of knowing the news of Stefan's coronation. As in the two versions, she uses the staff to canalize her spells, but she also uses her own hands for “smaller” incantations. At minute 00:24:35 it is possible to perceive how Maleficent uses her powers to destroy everything that stands in her way, as opposed to the beginning when she was dedicated to repairing the environment of her home. Also, a common feature in both versions is the presence of a dragon: in the case of the latest film, the transformation is of Diaval, the raven, and arises as a defense against the troops of King Stefan and is not Maleficent transformed into the dragon fighting against Philip as we appreciated in the original film.

2.3.3 A feminist perspective

The continuation of sexual liberation is empowerment. The third era shows a dramatic change in the film company. We have called this era “The Empowerment Era,” because it coincides with the third feminist movement, the one we are living nowadays. While in the previous films analyzed the witches are not the protagonists, here they are. With Elsa and Maleficent, in the live-action version, Disney reveals that witches are not evil by nature, but rather they

are evil because of the events that influence their lives. In the case of Elsa, a witch with powers over ice, she is restrained from using her powers, so that she will not hurt the ones she loves; in the case of Maleficent, her evil powers are caused by the betrayal of her beloved Stefan. Diversity is also a nuance given in this period because many viewers argue that *Frozen* promotes LGBT normalization with its song “Let it Go,” because of its dual interpretation. With *Maleficent*, diversity is shown with the change in the stereotype of the “true love kiss” as it does not necessarily have to be a kiss between men and women, demonstrating that true love can also be between friends. Finally, Disney seems to be stating that witches do not have to be represented as villains. They do not have to be the evil characters of the plot and, despite everything they have suffered, witches have goodness, and their true way of being comes to the surface: a woman who, despite having powers, does not use them for evil purposes. These protagonists no longer embody the traditional feminine virtues, nor the traits of evil that oppose virtue. Now, they are embodying empowerment, diversity, and the ambiguity that all human beings share.

CONCLUSION

This Dissertation has tried to locate possible links between the representation of the witches in Disney movies and the different waves of feminism in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Witches have been part of popular culture from the nineteenth century onwards, and therefore, many of them have been turned into film versions. Although we have discovered that there are many essays on Disney princesses, and even, we have also discovered some articles that fit our study. such as Lisa Duffy’s article “From the Evil Queen to Elsa: Camp Witches in Disney Films” (2010), we have also studied the waves of feminism to see whether the representation of witches has changed with this social movement. These were some of the reasons why we wanted to focus on the perspective of witches because they have the same importance as princesses.

Witches have been part of popular culture from the nineteenth century onwards. In popular culture, witches were physically represented as women, mostly old, evil, with a knowledge of black magic and she used her powers for evil purposes, for example in *Hansel and Gretel*, to eat the two brothers who were lost in the forest. In contrast to the witches, the

fairies were synonymous of goodness since they used their magical powers for good purposes, as the fairy godmothers used them to help the princesses. Because these tales became very popular, a multitude of them have been transformed into film versions. Many authors, such as María Jesús Zamora Calvo, have undertaken studies about witches in the cinema, showing us that their stereotypes come from Antiquity. Due to the popularity of the topic, the Disney company has created many adaptations for its public, looking for the attention of the youngest and even adults.

All Disney films featuring a witch have been examined in detail, taking into account the state of development of the feminist waves at the time of their production. Three main criteria were analyzed in the portrayal of the witches: their physical appearance, character, and use of magic. In the end, three main stages were found, named by us as The Traditional Era, from 1937 to 1960, The Liberation Era, from 1961 to 1989 and The Empowerment Era, from 1990 to 2014. In the first stage, the Traditional Era, witches have been characterized as cold, despotic, evil and their use of magic was guided by feelings of malice, accompanied with their henchmen. Witches follow the traditional model as opposed to princesses who were based on the “Angel in the House” ideal, the responsible and caring woman who ends up marrying her prince because she lives for marriage. For example, Snow White shows this ideal when she came to the dwarfs’ house to cook for them and clean their house, and in this way, the dwarfs would be the children that the woman takes care of according to the thoughts of the Victorian era. In contrast to this idea, at the beginning, when Grimhilde only performs the role of Queen, she is shown with a slender and beautiful figure, but when this character uses black magic, she is represented as the stereotype of the classic witch taken from folk tales: an old and evil old woman who deceives the protagonist to achieve her goals, as we can see in *Hansel and Gretel*. With Maleficent we also saw the contrast with Aurora, as the princess also represents the “Angel in the house” ideal because she lives for marriage, while Maleficent represents the traditional witch stereotype because of her evil goals and her use of black magic. In the second era, the Liberation Era, Ursula continues to use her magic for evil purposes, but at least she gives Ariel a chance to save herself. In terms of feminism, a change in the perspective of women is established: they are now socially freer and some of them ready to rival with men and even exhibit their sexuality, occasionally showing the

features of the Femme Fatale. In the case of Ursula, she uses her “feminine wiles” and, somehow, she is educating and teaching Ariel how to use them when relating with men. Finally, the third era, the Empowerment Era, showed to us that the role of the witch has changed. Now, Disney witches are no longer related to a malevolent character, but rather they show their life to make the audience understand why they do evil, even though in the end, the witch will end up using her magic for good purposes. We could also see that, finally, it is the witches who are the protagonists of the story.

At the beginning of this dissertation, we said that we wanted to see whether the representation of Disney witches has been influenced in any way by the waves of feminism. We believe we have been able to prove that they do. The representation of witches has changed, as we have seen: the witches of the first stage (evil and counterparts of the virtuous woman) and second stage (independent and sexually aware, but still malicious) are almost unrelated to those of the last (protagonist, empowered, and using their magic for good purposes).

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