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From Snow White to Mulan: An Exploration of Conflict in the Disney Princesses

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ABSTRACT

Many aspects about the Disney Princesses have been studied, such as gender and race. However, conflict has not been investigated in them. Thus, this dissertation hopes to contribute to a field that has been quite discussed, especially from the feminist perspective, by exploring the conflicts of the 20th-century Disney Princesses and by tracing their evolution to prove that these princesses become deeper and more complex. It will also examine the possible connections between the princesses' conflicts in their respective fictional worlds and the society at the time when the movies were released. This will be carried out by presenting a classification of the types of conflicts that exist. The conclusion will be that these princesses' complexity and depth, observed through the progress of their conflicts, did increase over the last century.

Keywords: Conflict, Disney Princesses, Complexity, Values, Female image, Disney movies.

RESUMEN

Se han estudiado muchos aspectos de las Princesas Disney, como el género y la raza. Sin embargo, el conflicto no se ha investigado en ellas. Así, este Trabajo de Fin de Grado espera contribuir a un campo que se ha tratado bastante, especialmente desde la perspectiva feminista, explorando los conflictos de las Princesas Disney del siglo XX y siguiendo su evolución para demostrar que estas princesas se vuelven más profundas y complejas. También estudiará las posibles conexiones entre los conflictos de las princesas en sus respectivos mundos ficticios y la sociedad en la época en la que se estrenaron las películas. Esto se realizará presentando una clasificación de los tipos de conflictos que existen. La conclusión será que la complejidad y la profundidad de estas princesas, observadas a través del progreso de sus conflictos, sí que aumentó a lo largo del siglo pasado.

Palabras clave: Conflicto, Princesas Disney, Complejidad, Valores, Imagen femenina, Películas Disney.

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1 Introduction

Female protagonists are part of the Disney history. Among these main characters there is a group which is called the Disney Princesses. It "[…] involves […] female Disney characters identified by the corporation, many of whom are princesses by birth or marriage (e.g., Cinderella), though some are not (e.g., Mulan)" (Coyne et al., 2016, p. 1910). Their increase in importance is in line with the evolution of feminism throughout the 20th century and its development as a school of literary criticism. As narrative products, the Disney Princesses play both a specular role since they reflect social changes, and an exemplary one, in that they promote mentalities.

They have been studied from different perspectives, which I will explain in a detailed way in the-state-of-the question section, but to study their conflicts is a way of showing how complex and deep they are from an angle that has not been as explored. Thus, my hypothesis is that the 20th-century Disney Princesses, Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan, gained intricacy and depth throughout this century.

This paper will be divided into two parts. In the first one I will provide a contextualization, which will contain in turn a state of the question, a theoretical background, and the methodology which I followed for the investigation. The theoretical background will include a classification of the existing conflicts, which I have created to be able to study the princesses' conflicts. Some of the ideas for this classification are based on concepts from the theory of conflict suggested by Bartos and Wehr (2002) and on some basic categories proposed by Pavis (1998). This first part of the essay will lead to the second one: the discussion, where I will address the most interesting aspects concerning the princesses' conflicts, and a final section of conclusions.

In this dissertation my goal is to prove a progressively complex nature and depth of the 20th-century Disney Princesses through the examination of the evolution of their conflicts and correlate it with the changes which took place in the 20th-century society with regards to the female role and image.

2 Contextualization

2.1. The state of the question: Scholarship and the Disney Princesses

The development of conflicts in the plot of Disney movies, and related to the Disney Princesses as well, has not been particularly discussed in academic literature. Despite this, the Disney Princesses have been widely studied and from different perspectives. Said studies can be divided into two groups. One of them encompasses research that concerns itself with how Disney movies and the Disney Princesses affect and influence society, especially children. The other includes investigations that revolve around the representation of social issues, mostly in relation with gender and race.

Thus, regarding the first group, some authors have been concerned with the ways in which the Disney Princesses have influenced girls (and less frequently boys) from preschool to college (Bruce, 2007; Coyne et al., 2016; Inman & Sellers, 2016). The focus has often been on ascertaining how much of their behavior and their way of thinking, particularly regarding gender roles, can be traced back to the ways in which the Disney Princesses are portrayed, in terms of both their physical appearance and their personality.

There has also been concern among scholars with the moralistic issues prominently featured in many Disney movies involving issues such as innocence and imagination, especially where protagonist Disney Princesses are concerned (Ross, 2004; Whitley, 2013). Scholarly interest, in this respect, has focused mainly on how moralistically loaded messages and characteristics impact children (in general, rather than specific groups) and the extent to which they play a relevant role in the way in which children develop particular imagination-related traits.

In addition, concerning the second group, scholarly attention has been devoted to the feminist aspects of the Disney Princesses, either focusing on a specific character or contemplating all of them, including the earliest princesses (Brocklebank, 2000; Reilly, 2016). These studies address how the characters are represented and what values are transmitted through them. They are also concerned with explaining the way in which the most recent Disney Princesses challenge the traditional female image, thus contributing to progress, and they state that there remain important inequality issues that should not be overlooked.

Several authors (Bacchilega & Rieder, 2010; Crowley & Pennington, 2010) have also explored the evolution from the underlying traditional folk tales and their Disney versions into more modern reimaginations of those tales and movies, often emphasizing the incorporation of concerns, such as feminism, in the process of adaptation, particularly during the 21st century.

Finally, other authors have approached the topic of race in Disney movies and by Disney Princesses, either paying attention to an ethnic group in particular, analyzing multiple ones, or discussing the evolution that the Disney universe has undergone throughout the history regarding race (Benhamou, 2014; Hurley, 2005; Meek, 2006). They show how the first installments of Disney movies provided a completely negative image of racial characters, and how racial equality has failed even in later ones, despite attempts to correct it by placing non-white characters and non-white princesses in protagonist roles: despite the maneuver, these characters either behave in a too-American way, inconsistent with their supposed origin, or possess some features that still contribute to racist stereotyping. Often, these authors claim, racial issues are not fully addressed in Disney movies but rather they get tiptoed around in favor of other matters.

2.2. Theoretical background

2.2.1. Scholarship on the topic of conflict

The topic of conflict has been investigated from three points of view. The first one is social, in the sense that some scholars have studied the different aspects in society which can trigger conflicts, such as gender (Caprioli, 2005; Schaftenaar, 2017), ethnicity (Esteban et al., 2012), intra-generational and intergenerational confrontations (Adams, 2009; Adams & Laursen, 2001), or the control over a specific region, for example a river (Tiwary, 2006; Yihun, 2014). The second point of view is psychological: specifically, studies have focused on how inner conflicts are representative of human beings (Redekop, 2014). Finally, the third one is literary. Some scholars have claimed that fictional conflicts (which are comparable to the concept of imbalance) are not only necessary in order to create a good, engaging story, but also that becoming familiar with their development in imaginary worlds contributes to the identification of real ones (Cámara-Arenas, 2018; Cochrane, 2014).

2.2.2. Classification of the types of conflicts

Within the field of literature, conflict is understood as "the opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to the dramatic action in a drama or fiction" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Hence, I have created a classification of the types of conflicts that exist. Some of the ideas in it are based on concepts proposed by Bartos and Wehr (2002), and on some basic categories presented by Pavis (1998). I will use what is going to be presented and explained in this section to comment on the conflicts of 20th-century Disney Princesses in the discussion part.

Thus, using the definition that has been previously provided as starting point it can be considered that the opposition, that is, the conflicts, can be divided into three types: in the first place, inner conflicts, as Pavis (1998) claimed, are those which involve the protagonist facing a moral debate within themselves or between two sides, that have the objective of convincing this hero of something. This is referred to as a dilemma, in which said main character has to make a decision and choose between two intolerable, conflicting aspects: reason and passion, love and duty, having to obey two people who confront each other, political need and moral principle, objectivity and subjectivity (Pavis, 1998). Taking these definitions and what I have observed in the eight Disney Princess movies into account, there can be other conflicting elements which also cause the central character to have inner conflicts: oneself and a loved one, what one wants for oneself and what others want for that person, or what society expects of a person and who that person actually is. In the second place, outer conflicts are those that take place between the protagonist and other characters. And in the third place, there can also be blended conflicts; in other words, when the protagonist encounters both inner and outer conflicts throughout the story.

Outer conflicts can be subdivided into coexisting conflicts and exclusive conflicts. Coexisting conflicts indicate that there are multiple conflicts occurring throughout a narrative, and they can in turn take place either between the protagonist and different characters, or between the lead and the same character. For its part, a conflict is exclusive when in the entirety of the storyline the hero only faces one conflict with one character.

2.2.2.1. The Origin Dimension

Regardless of how many occur and the number of characters with which the protagonist undergoes them, outer conflicts can be grouped depending on who causes them. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between generated conflicts and received conflicts.

Generated conflicts are those in which the main character is the one who initiates the conflict. Regarding received conflicts, they are the ones which are caused by another character and the protagonist is simply involved in them.

2.2.2.2. The Causative Dimension

The different reasons that are responsible for the appearance of outer conflicts constitute another aspect by which they can be divided into other subgroups as well. There can be three causes that can lead to these conflicts and in some cases, the conflicts are triggered by two of them, not just by one: the first one is the hate or resentment of the main character towards the one or ones who oppose them or vice versa. This feeling can be caused in turn by envy or thirst for revenge, or by social motives.

The second cause for the emergence of an outer conflict is the fear of one of the opposing characters, the hero or the other or others with whom they enter into conflict. There can be in turn varying types of fear: fear of being rejected by other characters, fear of not being able to protect one's loved ones, or fear of the unknown. In order to prevent the second kind of fear the characters who experience it may establish certain rules, expecting the character who they face to follow these orders. In this situation, the fact that sometimes this other character does not comply them is what ultimately leads to conflict.

The third reason for outer conflicts is the duty that one of the characters in the conflict, protagonist or not, has to another or to an entity.

2.2.2.3. The Complexity Dimension

Outer conflicts can also be classified by determining how complex these ones are depending on the main character's reaction to their conflicts and the way in which these conflicts are resolved. According to this, they can be divided into complex and non-

complex conflicts. For a character to be involved in both complex and non-complex conflicts is a possibility as well.

Complex conflicts occur when the protagonist responds to the wishes, ideas or impositions of the character who opposes them by offering some kind of resistance, that is, by rebelling against them. These conflicts can be divided into two subgroups. The first one encompasses those where the titular character revolts against the other character in the conflict and acts as an agent, solving the conflict therefore on their own. The second group of complex conflicts features the ones in which the central character resists against the other character, but the conflict ultimately has what Pavis (1998) called an artificial settling: someone or something other than the lead character, a deus ex machina, suddenly solves it. Therefore, it can be said that the protagonist is an agent, in the sense that they rebel, but to a lesser extent than those whose conflicts are included in the first group, since they do not resolve them by themselves.

As for non-complex conflicts, they take place whenever the hero does not confront the character with whom they are in conflict. In turn, this can unfold in two different ways. One is that presented by Bartos and Wehr (2002), and it consists of a character obtaining what they want from the protagonist by using persuasion. The other option is that the main character responds to the words or actions of the other character passively. That is, the former resigns to what the latter establishes without complaining. Either way, the conflict is settled by the intervention of a deus ex machina in both possibilities.

2.3 Methodology

I will discuss the conflicts of the first eight Disney Princesses by dividing these princesses into two groups. First, I will analyze the conflicts encountered by the first group of princesses, that is, those of Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora. Afterwards, I will examine the conflicts of the second group of princesses: Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan.

The analysis which I will follow for both groups is the following: to begin with, I will determine whether the conflicts are outer, inner, or blended. Then, I will establish if they are coexisting, with one character or with different ones, or exclusive.

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In the case of blended conflicts, I will first analyze the outer ones: in the first place, I will discuss who originates the conflicts, that is, if these are generated or received. In the second place, I will provide the reasons which cause the conflicts between the princesses and the different groups of characters who oppose them: hate or resentment due to envy, revenge, or social motives; fear, specifically fear of rejection, fear of not being able to protect one's loved ones, and fear of the unknown; or duty. In the third place, I will discuss the complexity of the conflicts, in other words, whether they are complex or non-complex. To do this, I will explain both how the princesses react to them, i.e., if they offer resistance or not, and the way in which the conflicts are resolved, that is, whether they are settled by the princesses themselves or are solved artificially, by a deus ex machina, even if the princesses have confronted the characters with whom they are in conflict. To conclude with the outer conflicts, I will discuss three of the princesses featured in the second group with regards to their conflicts in a more detailed way.

Lastly, I will examine the inner conflicts: I will note if the conflicting aspects between which the protagonist has to decide are objectivity and subjectivity; political need and moral principle; passion and reason; duty and love; having to obey two people who confront each other; what one wants for oneself and what others want for that person; what society expects of a person and who that person is; or oneself and a loved one.

3 Discussion: Disney Princesses in conflict

The 20th-century Disney Princesses come across conflicts throughout their movies. There are aspects in which these conflicts are similar to each other and others that differentiate them.

3.1. The first group of princesses' conflicts: Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora

To begin with, in the case of the first three movies, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand et al., 1937), *Cinderella* (Jackson et al., 1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (Geronimi et al., 1959) the princesses' conflicts are outer and mostly coexisting with different characters. Although the ones which are the most relevant to the plot in these three stories are those that occur between the villainesses and the princesses, these princesses also undergo conflicts with other characters (with the exception of Cinderella, who only finds one with Lady Tremaine, making it exclusive instead of coexisting).

These conflicts are received since they are generated by the villainesses, not by the princesses; and they are due to hate because this is the feeling which the villainesses harbor towards the princesses (or towards someone related to them in the case of Maleficent and Aurora).The Evil Queen and Lady Tremaine hate Snow White and Cinderella, respectively, because of envy; as for Maleficent's hatred towards Aurora, it is due to her thirst for revenge. Specifically, the Evil Queen does not stand the fact that Snow White is prettier than her, as it can be appreciated in her anger when the Magic Mirror tells her so after she asks it who the most beautiful woman is in the well-known scene at the beginning of the movie. Similarly, Lady Tremaine does not like that Cinderella is nicer and prettier than her and her daughters, she is envious of these traits, as it is clear as soon as the movie starts, and it is stated by the narrator as well. In other words, both villainesses hate their respective princesses mostly because of their beauty, that is, due to superficial matters.

In the case of Maleficent, she wants to take revenge on King Stefan because she is the only one in the kingdom whom he did not invite to the party in honor of Aurora's birth. This can be appreciated when she curses Aurora, his daughter, in the famous scene that takes place only a few minutes into the movie.

Despite this pattern, there are two other conflicts in two of these movies which are slightly different. Both of them are due to duty. Regarding the first one, that occurs between Snow White and the hunter, the duty is the one that the hunter has to the Evil Queen since it is her who orders him to kill Snow White. As for the second conflict, which occurs between the three fairies and Aurora, the fairies have the responsibility to follow through with what they arranged with Aurora's parents: they must take Aurora back to the King on her sixteenth birthday.

These conflicts are non-complex as well since the princesses do not fight back the other character or characters when the conflicts emerge. On the contrary, they do what they are told to do.

In the case of Snow White, she does not refuse to clean the stairs of the castle at the beginning of the movie; what is more, she does this while she hums. Another example can be seen when she sees that the hunter attempts to kill her: she gives a passive response.

It consists of just screaming and covering her head with her arms instead of trying to run away from him or defend herself against him. She also gets easily persuaded by the Evil Queen, disguised as an old woman, to eat an apple that is actually poisoned in a recognizable scene: when the Evil Queen tells Snow White that a bite from that apple will make her dreams come true. Considering this prospect, Snow White does not hesitate to do it.

Concerning Cinderella and Aurora, they both respond to their conflicts in a passive way as well. In *Cinderella* it can be appreciated all those times when Lady Tremaine calls Cinderella or tells her to do chores and she simply answers, "Coming, Coming" (Jackson et al., 1950, 18:48) or "Yes, Stepmother" (Jackson et al., 1950, 21:51). Another instance can be observed when Lady Tremaine locks Cinderella up in a room after realizing that she is the girl the Prince is looking for: Cinderella just begs and cries as a consequence, seen in the following excerpt:

> C: Oh! Oh, no! No, please! Oh, you can't. You just can't. Let me out! You must let me out! You can't keep me in here! Oh, please.
> (Jackson et al., 1950, 1:03:43)

As it can be appreciated, crying and begging is Cinderella's only resort; she does not make any other attempts, such as looking for a way out or screaming in the hope that someone other than her stepmother or stepsisters will hear her. What is more, later the audience notes that the mice are the ones that have resolve, not Cinderella, since they take the room's key from Lady Tremaine. Cinderella does not call them and asks them to do it.

For its part, in *Sleeping Beauty*, like in *Cinderella*, the passive response also takes the form of crying, as it is Aurora's only reaction when one of the fairies, Flora, tells her that she cannot meet with Philip again. Aurora does not even try to protest; she simply goes to her room and cries. This can be observed in the next fragment:

> A: [...] How could I marry a prince? I'd have to be...
> […]
> Fl: Princess Aurora. Tonight, we're taking you back to your father, King Stefan.
> A: But... But I can't. He's coming here tonight. I promised to meet him.

Fl: I'm sorry, child, but you must never see that young man again.

A: Oh, no! No! I can't believe it! No!

(Geronimi et al., 1959, 38:53)

The princesses' responses are in line with the resolution of the conflicts, this being another reason that explains why they are non-complex: their settling is artificial. In the end, a deus ex machina always resolves them: a thunder causes the ground where the Evil Queen is standing to crack and she falls off a cliff; Cinderella's other glass slipper proves that she is the girl with whom the Prince danced; and Philip kisses Aurora, thus breaking Maleficent's curse.

As it can be observed in Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora's respective reactions to their conflicts and in the way in which these conflicts are solved, it can be said that the three princesses are passive: they are innocent, submissive, and obedient. In short, they are good girls, as opposed to the villains, who do not embody these traits whatsoever. They are the opposite, that is, they are active: what characterizes them is that, judging by their words and actions, they are sly and manipulative. They are the bad ones. As I see it, these opposing models are represented in the movies possibly due to the social pressures of the time periods when they were made: 1937, 1950, and 1959, respectively. They may be reflecting what was probably approved and not approved at that time.

From my point of view, it is a possibility that all this affected the girls who grew up with these movies. It is probable that they caused these kids to unconsciously adopt what they watched on screen as a mindset and as an example of what being a good woman and being a bad one means.

3.2. The second group of princesses' conflicts: from Ariel to Mulan

As for the other five movies, *The Little Mermaid* (Musker & Clements, 1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991), *Aladdin* (Musker & Clements, 1992), *Pocahontas* (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995), and *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft, 1998) the conflicts that the princesses face are blended because they go through both inner and outer conflicts. The outer ones are also coexisting mostly with different characters, namely the villains of their respective stories, their fathers, and their love interests.

The majority of these princesses' conflicts, unlike those of the princesses of the first group, are generated since they are ignited by the princesses themselves, the exception being the one that occurs between Ariel and Ursula, which is caused by Ursula as a consequence of her hate towards King Triton, Ariel's father. Ursula wants to take revenge on him because he banished her from the kingdom. To her, Ariel is just "the key to Triton's undoing" (Musker & Clements, 1989, 11:54), like Aurora to Maleficent.

As for the conflicts that occur between the rest of the princesses and the villains, they are mostly due to the resentment of the latter group of characters, which in turns leads, as it happens with Ursula, to a thirst for revenge. This is the case, for instance, of Gaston and Jafar. It can be appreciated that they resent Belle and Jasmine, respectively, because the princesses reject their marriage proposals, hence causing the conflict between them in the first place. On another note, Belle's conflict with the villagers partly emerges because of the fear of the unknown, the Beast, in this case, that can be observed in the villagers when they discover that he exists.

What makes this group of princesses more interesting and elaborate than the first one in terms of conflicts is the fact that the majority of these princesses have conflicts with their fathers as well. They are mostly due to the fear of not being able to protect one's loved ones: given what they say and how they behave, the fathers want to keep their daughters save from dangers and harm. As a result, in some cases they forbid the princesses from doing certain activities or they establish some rules which they expect their daughters to follow. However, the reality is that this expectation is not fulfilled whatsoever. Let us see as an example the following dialogue between Jasmine and her father, the Sultan:

> S: Jasmine, […] I just want to make sure you're taken care of. Provided for.
> J: Please, try to understand. I've never done a thing on my own. […] I've never even been outside the palace walls.
> S: But, Jasmine, you're a princess.
> J: Then maybe I don't want to be a princess anymore.
> S: Ohh! I... I... […]
> (Musker & Clements, 1992, 13:31)

Here it can be appreciated that the Sultan wishes for Jasmine's safety. For her part, Jasmine, as it can be understood through her words, values her independence more than her status as a princess since she is willing to renounce the latter in favor of the former. Considering his last intervention, the Sultan does not seem to understand why Jasmine would want to do that; she seems to be trying his patience, given that he appears to get angry and frustrated, and leaves.

What takes place in this instance unfolds in a very similar way for almost all the other princesses belonging to this group and their respective fathers: the princesses either break their fathers' rules or are reluctant to act by them, which unleashes a conflict between them. The conflict which slightly differs from this pattern is the one that takes place between Mulan and her father, Fa Zhou. It occurs because of Fa Zhou's duty to the Emperor, as he tells the Emperor's advisor that "[he] is ready to serve the Emperor" (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 15:16).

Conflicts also occur between the princesses of this second group and their love interests. The princesses are, once again, the ones who start them, in this case because each of the princes says something or acts in a way that bothers the princesses. This means that some of these conflicts take place due to two reasons, while others are caused only by one: fear of rejection in the case of Belle's and Jasmine's conflicts with the Beast and Aladdin, respectively. Jasmine's conflict with Aladdin is also caused by resentment due to social motives; the conflict that unfolds between Pocahontas and John Smith is a result of duty as well as resentment because of social motives, too; and this same cause, resentment due to social motives, is what triggers Mulan and Shang's conflict as well.

As an example, let us see the conflict that takes place between Belle and the Beast in a more detailed way: it seems that the Beast is afraid of being rejected by Belle. It becomes apparent when he is telling his servants that "[s]he's so beautiful, and [he's]…" (Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 33:52). Taking these words into account it can be concluded that he believes that their difference in terms of appearance will make it impossible for Belle to love him. As I see it, this is why he is harsh with Belle when he asks her to have dinner with him: when Belle refuses, this fear takes over the Beast, he begins to yell, and a conflict emerges between them; they start arguing.

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These princesses' conflicts are complex as well since, as opposed to the first group's princesses, these ones rebel against the impositions or the wishes of the character who opposes them. It can be observed in the two instances that were given above (Jasmine and the Sultan and Belle and the Beast), but let us see the next dialogue belonging to the conflict between Pocahontas and John Smith as another example:

> J. S: […] We'll show your people how to use this land properly. How to make the most of it.
> P: Make the most of it?
> J. S.: Yes. We'll build roads and decent houses and...
> P: Our houses are fine.
> J.S.: You think that. Only because you don't know any better.
> (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995, 38:14)

Given that the context of *Pocahontas* is the British colonization of America, through John Smith's words it can be appreciated that he, a British colonizer, feels that he has the duty to improve the life of Pocahontas and the other Indians by imposing the British way of living on them. Pocahontas is able to read between the lines of what John Smith is saying and discerns a patronizing attitude. She understands that what he is actually implying is the following: in the first place, that the Indians are using the land in an improper way. In the second place, that their houses are not decent. And, in the third place, that she, therefore all the Indians, is clueless. All this bothers Pocahontas and as a result a conflict between them starts. But instead of crying or remaining quiet and accepting this, like Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora would have probably done, she reacts to his comments in an active way: in her first intervention it seems that she is confused, probably because she does not understand why they need to alter the land and force it to give them something that it does not naturally provide, which is the Indian belief. Then, Pocahontas defends the way in which the Indian houses are built, and finally, upon hearing John Smith's final remark, she goes away, probably outraged considering his perception of her and the rest of the Indians.

Thus, Pocahontas proves to be able to have disagreeable opinions, as the rest of the princesses included in her group; she rebels, arguing when she does not concur with what the character opposing her is saying, in this case John Smith. In this sense she is an agent,

like the rest of the princesses of the second group are in almost all of their conflicts. This fragment illustrates as well why her conflict with John Smith occurs both because of the duty that he feels as a British to Pocahontas, to the Indians, and because of Pocahontas's resentment towards John Smith due social motives, which are related to their contrasting mindsets.

Another conflict which, from my perspective, is interesting to highlight in terms of the princess's reaction to it is the one which emerges between Jasmine and Aladdin. But first, let us see a conversation between Aladdin and the Genie:

> A: […] If Jasmine found out I was really some crummy street rat, she'd laugh at me.
> [....]
> A: […] I just... I gotta be smooth, cool, confident. […]
> (Musker & Clements, 1992, 54:46)

This fragment explains why part of the conflict involving the princess and the protagonist of the movie is due to a fear of rejection. Judging by Aladdin's words, like the Beast with Belle, he is scared of Jasmine rejecting him, in this case because Jasmine is a princess, while he is poor and an orphan. As it can be seen in this instance, he appears to believe that for her to like him he has to act like a prince does. However, the reality is that Jasmine seems to hate this princely attitude, as it can be interpreted when she tells him that he is like "every other stuffed shirt, swaggering peacock [she's] met" (Musker & Clements, 1992, 56:56).

Through this last quotation it can be seen that, as in the case of Pocahontas with John Smith, Jasmine does not keep quiet when she does not like Aladdin's attitude. Rather, she is an agent in that she responds in an active manner by using a not-so-polite expression to refer to him. This is why this conflict is complex.

In addition, it can also be said that this expression makes it possible to observe that the conflict between Jasmine and Aladdin unleashes because of a resentment which is due to social motives: Jasmine resents the attitude of people, specifically men, belonging to her own social status, and she identifies it in Aladdin's behavior (even though this one is actually due to Aladdin's fear of being rejected by her).

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Thus, taking Pocahontas's and Jasmine's conflicts with John Smith and Aladdin, respectively, into consideration it can be concluded that some of the conflicts of the second group of princesses include social criticism and a denunciation of hypocrisy. This makes these conflicts more realistic, as it makes it possible to extrapolate them to real-life society.

The conflicts of these princesses are complex, as I have previously discussed, but most of them are included in the second subgroup of complex conflicts since in spite of the nonconformity that is shown by these princesses, practically all their conflicts feature an artificial settling. In most of the cases they are resolved by the princesses' fathers, who act as a deux ex machina. It is true that in *Pocahontas*, the princess is the one that convinces her father to stop the war between the Indians and the British. Despite this, it is her father who ultimately prevents the war from happening, as it can be observed in the following excerpt:

> F: My daughter speaks with a wisdom beyond her years. We have all come here with anger in our hearts, but she comes with courage and understanding. From this day forward, if there's to be more killing, it will not start with me.
> (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995, 1:08:48)

From my perspective, this instance proves two important aspects: that this movie, like most of the others, appears to transmit the idea that patriarchy, represented by the fathers' figure, is what ultimately solves many of the conflicts which the princesses face. Therefore, the fact that the princesses are an agent in some way, by being capable of disagreeing with the characters with whom they enter into conflict, seems to become secondary. This fragment also shows Pocahontas's father claiming that Pocahontas is wise, brave, and sympathetic. In other words, he is stating Pocahontas's worth. Hence, as I see it, this is suggesting that without a patriarchal figure to emphasize it, the value of women would not be recognized.

From my point of view, how these princesses react to the conflicts which they face, their rebellious attitude, the fact that they fight for what they want, is a turning point in the Disney's universe and it could be related to social pressures. Society was probably asking for a change in Disney movies regarding the female figure. It is true that it seems that during certain time periods such as the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the traditional role

of women as wives and mothers was more deeply rooted, as I explained when discussing the first group of princesses' conflicts. Despite this, progress concerning the female role and image had also begun to take place long before the 1990s, which is when the release of this second group of princesses' movies took place. Some examples of this are the suffrage movement or the feminist literary criticism. According to Carr (2007), the time that marked the appearance of feminist literary criticism, specifically the second wave of feminism, with authors like Kate Millett, was the 1960s, along with other demonstrations, such as the Civil Rights Movement. Taking all this into account, it can be said that this group of princesses and their conflicts prove that the change with regards to the female figure took place in Disney. Still, it must be emphasized that it came late compared to when it began to occur in society. In the end, it also appears to be clouded by the role of patriarchy in most of these Disney Princess movies, as I explained in the previous paragraph.

I would now like to highlight *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Mulan* since, as I see it, there are some interesting aspects in terms of the conflicts that Ariel, Belle, and Mulan undergo which should be discussed.

Regarding *The Little Mermaid*, the conflict that unfolds between Ariel and Ursula is non-complex, since Ariel is persuaded by Ursula of the fact that becoming a human and making a deal with her to achieve it is the only way for Ariel to be with Eric. Just as it happens with Snow White and the Evil Queen, Ariel quickly accepts Ursula's offer without much questioning or hesitation. This contrasts with Ariel's behavior when she enters into conflict with her father, King Triton. It can be exemplified by the following excerpt:

> KT: Ariel, how many times must we go through this? You could have been seen by one of those barbarians - by - by one of those humans!
> A: Daddy, they're not barbarians.
> KT: They are dangerous. Do you think I want to see my youngest daughter snared by some fish-eater's hook?
> […]
> KT: […] As long as you live under my ocean, you'll obey my rules!
> A: But if you would just listen…

KT: Not another word! And I am never, never to hear of you going to the surface again! Is that clear?

(Musker & Clements, 1989, 12:55)

It can be observed that King Triton, who embodies the patriarchal figure, tries to impose his authority over Ariel. She eventually does leave crying, but instead of doing this without offering resistance, like Aurora, before weeping she keeps arguing with him. The problem is that in the end the father's authority is stronger and, judging by her facial expression, Ariel is frustrated by the fact that King Triton does not listen to her. Ariel's tears are probably a result of this feeling. The important aspect is that she is able to express disagreement with her father, like the rest of the princesses in her group, as I have previously argued. This is what makes this conflict complex, even if it belongs to the second subgroup of complex conflicts since what I explained concerning the role of patriarchy and the artificial resolution of some of the conflicts in *Pocahontas* takes place in *The Little Mermaid* as well. It can be observed in that the conflict which emerges between Ariel and her father is settled by King Triton himself, who in the end, witnessing Ariel's sadness, decides to provide her with legs so that she can be with Eric.

Given that Ariel experiences both non-complex and complex conflicts, from my perspective, she is the bridge which unites the first three princesses with the rest of the princesses of the second group.

It is also interesting to explore the conflicts which Belle encounters since she confronts nearly all the characters in the movie, her conflicts being hence complex. As I previously mentioned, she argues with the Beast. In addition to this, unlike the Evil Queen with Snow White or Ursula with Ariel, even though Gaston uses Belle's father as a means of persuasion, he does not persuade Belle to marry him. This latter aspect proves that Belle is not as naïve as Snow White and Ariel, thus showing an evolution regarding the judgement of the princesses. This is why Belle's conflict with Gaston is more relevant, together with the one which she faces with the villagers. As I noted earlier, this conflict emerges because the townspeople "don't like what [they] don't understand in fact, it scares [them] and this [Beast] is mysterious at least" (Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 1:07:54). Therefore, they fear the unknown. Belle, for her part, offers resistance against their want, instigated by Gaston, of killing the Beast, as it can be seen in the following instance:

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G: […] I say we kill the Beast! (All exclaim in agreement) […]

B: No, I won't let you do this.

G: If you're not with us, you're against us. [...]

(Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 1:06:01)

Apart from Belle's determination, what can be appreciated here is her marginalization from her village. Through Gaston's last comment this aspect is further emphasized, considering that the fact that she is an outcast in town is established at the beginning of the movie, exemplified, for example, in the next fragment:

[...] But behind that fair facade I'm afraid she's rather odd. Very different from the rest of us, she's nothing like the rest of us. Yes, different from the rest of us is Belle.

(Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 6:23)

As I see it, this proves that Belle is the opposite of Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora. She could have been like them, in that her beauty would have granted her the admiration of the majority of the people who know her. However, her love for reading prevents this from happening. This activity allows her to have a continuous learning experience as well as personal growth, as she says that "[t]here must be more than this provincial life" (Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 7:48). This is hence completely contrary to the patriarchy's goal of keeping women conforming to the role which the first group's princesses perfectly embody: being obedient and dependent on men, without searching for intellectual aspirations. Therefore, the fact that Belle is not like this surely bothers patriarchy, and it translates into the townspeople judging her and labeling her as weird, claiming that "[s]he doesn't quite fit in" (Trousdale & Wise, 1991, 8:04).

Thus, Belle was likely to influence the girls that grew up watching her. In fact, she still made an impact on girls more than a decade later, as this excerpt from an episode of the show *Modern Family* proves:

Claire: […] That's a costume. You can't wear a costume to a wedding.

Lily: Why not? Belle's a princess. She faced the Beast. She stood to the townspeople. What have you done?

(Ganz & Hensz, 2014, 3:22)

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Instead of focusing on the fact that Belle is pretty, Lily's words make it clear that to her it is more important that she is brave enough to defy the Beast and the villagers. And she wants to wear her dress to be just like her. Therefore, what Lily says can be considered an example that shows what Belle represents to girls and which they want to imitate.

As for Mulan, before delving into the conflicts of the princess, a key element of the movie must be stressed. Let us see the following fragment:

> We'll have you washed and dried, primped and polished till you glow with pride. Trust my recipe for instant bride. You'll bring honor to us all. [...] A girl can bring her family great honor in one way. By striking a good match [...]. We all must serve our Emperor who guards us from the Huns. A man by bearing arms. A girl by bearing sons.
> (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 6:25)

From my perspective, the quote explains how women are prepared to look their best in order to accomplish what is said to be their goal, the only thing which makes them valuable to their family and to their country: to marry well so that they can fulfil their duty, which is to give birth to sons. Hence, this quotation is conveying the image of the traditional role of women in society. Not only this, but the last line is also contrasting this image with that of men, saying that they are the ones who fight, whereas women are only mothers.

Thus, this perception is part of the mindset of most of the characters in the movie, as it can be observed in the conflicts which Mulan experiences both with her father and with her love interest, Shang. As for the conflict which takes place between Mulan and her father, at one point Fa Zhou tells Mulan that "[i]t is time [she] learned [her place]" (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 17:13). Concerning the conflict that occurs between Mulan and Shang, let us observe the next fragment:

> S: You don't belong here, Mulan. Go home.
> […]
> M: […] You said you'd trust Ping. Why is Mulan any different?
> (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 1:06:38)

From my point of view, Shang's implication seems clear: Mulan does not belong there because she is a woman. Likewise, Mulan's reaction to Shang's resentment towards her

due to this social motive is appreciated, since the meaning behind her words is quite telling as well: it can be interpreted that she knows that Shang is treating her differently because she is a woman. As I see it, through her question she is doing what she has been trying to do throughout the entire movie and with which she shows that she is the antithesis of Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, even more so than Belle: prove that the social role of women should not be preconceived.

The point is that in *Mulan*, unlike in the other seven Disney Princess movies, the fact that the protagonist rebels in the conflicts which she encounters is not just a character trait, but it is part of the main theme around which the movie revolves: the right of women to choose for themselves the role which they want to play in society.

On another note, it should be stressed that Mulan is the only one out of these princesses whose conflicts do not feature an artificial settling. She solves her conflicts by herself, thus acting as agent in every way. This is why these conflicts are included in the first subgroup of complex conflicts. Let us see the settling of Mulan's conflict with her father, for instance:

> F: Mulan!
> M: Father, I brought you the sword of Shan-Yu. And the crest of the Emperor. They're gifts to honor the Fa family.
> F: The greatest gift and honor is having you for a daughter. […]
> (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 1:19:15)

In this fragment it can be interpreted that Mulan's father no longer cares about her not representing the traditional female role. From my perspective, Mulan has proven her worth herself, through her effort. It is true that there still is certain recognition of her value by the patriarchy because her father is telling her that he is proud of her. However, this acknowledgement is not as strong as it is appreciated in *Pocahontas*, for example. Through Fa Zhou's last words, it can be seen that, in addition to ignoring the Emperor's gifts, he also expresses his pride in Mulan privately, not publicly, like Pocahontas's father does.

As I see it, this had to be very inspiring for the girls who grew up watching her in the late 90s and early 2000s and it probably encouraged them to believe in themselves. It

must have been especially exciting for those girls who did not enjoy the activities that are usually associated with them, such as playing with dolls. It surely made them aware of the fact that they should not be afraid of being themselves since they are as valuable and as appreciated as any other girl. This can be considered another aspect which Mulan tries to show through her actions, as "[m]aybe what [she] really wanted was to prove [she] could do things right, so when [she] looked in the mirror, [she]'d see someone worthwhile" (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 1:02:42).

Lastly, let us discuss the inner conflicts of the eight princesses. To begin with, only those who belong to the second group undergo them, to a greater or a lesser extent. Some of them involve the princesses making a decision between what some of their opposing characters want for them and what they, the princesses, want for themselves. An example of this inner conflict can be seen in Pocahontas: she has to decide whether to marry Kocoum, which is what her father wants and that would mean leaving her dreams behind, or not doing it and keep her dreams alive.

From my point of view, Belle's inner conflict should also be emphasized, along with the two experienced by Mulan. Belle's and one of Mulan's inner conflicts follow the same pattern: the princesses have to decide whether they sacrifice themselves in favor of their fathers' health. In other words, they must choose between themselves and a loved one. From my perspective, this implies a level of maturity and hence contributes to the depth of Belle and Mulan. In the case of the latter, she faces another inner conflict as well, which can be appreciated in the next example:

> M: […] Somehow I cannot hide who I am though I've tried. When will my reflection show who I am inside?
> (Cook & Bancroft, 1998, 12:51)

Considering what is shown in this quotation the battle that takes place within Mulan confronts what society expects of her, that she adopts the traditional role of women as mothers and wives, as I have previously explained, and who Mulan actually is. Judging by her words, she realizes that she does not fit in said role, that the way in which she has been dressed does not reflect the real Mulan. This is important because, as I see it, it shows the influence that society has in individuals and hence how hard it is for some people to admit and later defend that they are different from what it establishes.

From my perspective, it is relevant that the princesses of the second group face inner conflicts, regardless of what the conflicting aspects are. Struggling about something and not being certain about what to do constantly humanizes these princesses, enabling the audience to identify with them. It proves that they are not idealized, like Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora are by not having such conflicts.

4 Conclusions

In terms of conflicts, the 20th-century Disney Princesses can be divided into two different groups. The first one includes the earliest princesses, that is, Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora. Their conflicts are characterized by a relatively simple pattern since these princesses only come across outer conflicts. These conflicts are mostly coexisting with different characters, too, and received, since the ones who originate them are not the princesses. They are caused due to hate, which is in turn a consequence of envy or revenge in the case of the villainesses, and because of duty as well, regarding the hunter in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and the fairies in *Sleeping Beauty*. One last significant aspect is that they are non-complex: the princesses obey rather than fight back. Their reaction to the conflicts which they encounter tends to be a passive response, usually limited to crying, and the settling of these conflicts is artificial.

The second group, for its part, includes the five remaining princesses, that is, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan. The pattern which their conflicts follow is richer since this group's princesses are challenged by blended conflicts. Their outer conflicts are coexisting with different characters: the villains, their fathers, and their love interests. Most of the conflicts are also generated, the princesses being the ones who initially cause them due to hate or resentment, fear, duty, or a combination of two of these reasons. The majority of the conflicts are complex: even though nearly all of them are solved artificially by the fathers, the patriarchal figures, who act as a deus ex machina, these princesses express disagreeable opinions to their opposing characters. As for the princesses' inner conflicts, as I see it, they humanize them and allow the audience to identify with them as a result, as opposed to the first group's princesses, who are idealized.

Additionally, there are other interesting aspects about some of these princesses: Ariel faces both non-complex and complex conflicts. Hence, she can be considered a link, a

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transitional character between the princesses of the first group and those of the second one; Belle confronts practically all the characters she comes across with. Specifically, her resistance against the villagers' beliefs causes them to marginalize her even more since this marginalization was already there before, as a result of her thirst for learning and growth; and Mulan is the only princess who has the capacity to settle her conflicts by herself, besides challenging them by breaking with the established ideas of what a woman is and can do.

These movies transmit values regarding women, which can be appreciated in how the princesses of each group approach their conflicts. From my perspective, they probably coincide with those ruling in society at the time of the movies' release or with society's demand for a change in them which corresponded to the ones that had been occurring in real life for a long time. Hence, the princesses' behavior probably influenced female viewers accordingly. The mentality of women varies depending on the generation that they belong to, and part of the reason for it could be because of the group of princesses which they grew up with, who they likely took as their role models. Considering what I have explained in this essay I can conclude that the complexity and the depth of the 20th-century Disney Princesses did raise as the century moved forward.

Lastly, the 21st century has produced new Disney Princesses who I have not covered in this dissertation. Thus, they could be addressed in future investigations, to determine the similarities and differences which they feature regarding conflicts when compared to the 20th-century ones. It would also make it possible to know if, like them, those conflicts are influenced by the society and the times in which they are devised. If so, it would be possible to note through them the most important and distinctive values which are characteristic of women in contemporary society.

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