Brave: The New Face of Princesses?

By

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I confirm that all work included in this thesis is my own unless indicated otherwise.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Pixar Animation Studios have been around for many years and in those years it has made some outstanding feature and short films. It has exchanged hands three times but has kept its flare and individuality. It is the company that has created some ground breaking technology that has changed how animation looks and is received today. It is the company that is making history for all the right reasons and makes childhood memorable and creating memories for the adults. It joined forces with one of the world’s most influential and powerful company’s, The Walt Disney Company.

With these two sensational companies coming together they create something truly magical and continue to this day, to make stories come to life on the big screen. They have captured our love, our interest, our intrigue and now our expectation. We as a modern audience have certain expectations when it comes to films and it is something that is constantly continuing to grow with every feature we see. There are new technologies and new styles coming onto the cinema screen that we haven’t seen before and we want that to continue. We need stories to be developed and to be surprising at times.

Pixar made history when they made their first princess, first period feature and first fairy tale all in one film. Brave is that coming of age film that I will be
looking at. I shall have an in-depth look at how animation has developed over the years. I want to discover where the idea of Merida being a lesbian came from and if it is true. I’m going to explore how audiences received it, whether it was good or bad and why. Where did the concept even come from? How did its female heroin differ from the previous Disney made princesses and was it right road to take? Brave is a film that will be remembered whether you liked it or not. Brave is the studio’s densest and arguably most thought-provoking work yet. 

THE HISTORY OF ANIMATION

Animation has been around for a lot longer than most people would comprehend. It has been around since the cave men have been. I could not write about animation and Pixar’s Brave without saying how it got there.

The Oxford Dictionary’s definition of what animation is,

‘The technique of photographing successive drawings or positions of puppets or models to create an illusion of movement when the film is shown as a sequence.’

Animation is a process far beyond its product. The art of animation is derived from prehistoric cave paintings which have been present since the Stone Age.

‘One of the oldest dating cave paintings is of a pig, which was found in Sulawesi, Indonesia. It is dated at ‘35.4 thousand years old’. It was more common to find cave paintings from thousands of years ago in caves around Europe such as France and Germany, however, they did not find cave paintings outside of Europe easily. In the same cave as the pig-deer, there was a hand stencil right next to it and the minimum age of that stencil was 39.9 thousand years ago which made it the oldest in the world. Due to the stencil and pig-deer’s paintings being so old, it has caused scientists to reconsider the evolution time line of man.  

1 http://www.toledoblade.com/Movies/2012/06/22/Pixar-enters-Brave-new-world.html

2 http://www.nature.com/news/world-s-oldest-art-found-in-indonesian-cave-1.16100
These cave paintings were often animated in the sense that the drawings told a story. They would have a sequence of drawings depicting them killing a bison or other animals on the wall.

Another more well-known early approach to animation is a series of drawings by Leonardo Da Vinci. This sequence shows multiple angles of the man’s shoulder and upper arm as it moves and extends. It was showing how the arm looks when it is in a new position. Da Vinci began dissecting and studying the human body at night. He began his study in 1489 and completed the drawing of the man in the 1510s. It was known as, Man’s Shoulders and Neck. It is located in the Windsor Collection, in Pen and Ink Royal Library, Windsor Castle.³

With these drawings, Da Vinci was the first person to draw 3 dimensional images of the human body as well as being the first person to correctly draw a baby in its mother’s womb.

The difference between drawings and animation is that animation is a number of images put together to appear to be moving while a drawing is a single image that doesn’t appear to move at all.

Long after cave drawings first appeared and long before animation in film was created, there were devices invented over years to entertain the public. They were used both in theatres as well as at home. Animation as a global business was never the intent when it was first realised, but was thought of more as a toy.

The first of these devices goes back as far as 1650. It is called The Magic Lantern. There is no definite answer on who invented the first one but the best guess was an important Dutch scientist named Christiaan Huygens. By the end of the century there were men, known as lanternists, who would go around the towns with their lanterns on their backs and put on shows in great halls and castles to small inns. The shows would mostly consist of goblins and devils and that is where the name magic lantern originated.  

When the magic lanterns were in their stride they were everywhere including in the home. Children could get small ones and play with them at home or you could go to a great theatre and see one in action with a large brass lantern being used. What made going to the theatres for it that bit more

http://www.magiclanternshows.com/history.htm
interesting was that it could be considered the very first 4D experience. There would be a live showman and possibly a musician for the showing. The lanternist would show the images and they would be shown each for 30 seconds as the showman would tell the tale for the show. He would also get the audience to join in and play an instrument, clap their hands, cheer or boo etc. It would have similar in that way to a pantomime today.

The next device to be created was the Thaumatrope. The Greek meaning of ‘wonder to turn.’ It was invented in 1824. It came about when a group of men that were highly recognised in the world of science in the 1820s when they were at a dinner party together and began discussing how you could see the two sides of a coin at once. The Thaumatrope, was a circular piece of cardboard with string tied on both sides of an image and having an image on both sides. Then you would hold it out and spin the string between your fingers.

The Phenakistoscope would be the next device developed in the 1931. It was invented by Joseph Plateau and Simon von Stampfer. It consisted of a disc with a series of images on it going around it and it sits on a handle so you can spin it and look at its reflection in the mirror. Due to it having slits between each image, the pictures did not blur together but gave the illusion of animation. This was a toy that was only acquired but the very wealthy people such as the Emperor of China.

http://www.stephenherbert.co.uk/thaumatropeTEXT1.htm
The Zoetrope from the 1830s by British mathematician, William George Horner, was the next step up from the Phenakistoscope. What made it better was that you didn’t need a mirror to play with it. It was cylinder and the sequenced images were put inside and then spun around. Again, it had slits between each image so not to blur them together.

The Flip Book was the most recent one from 1868. The flip book is a series of images drawn onto multiple pages and the pages laid on top of one another. They are then flipped through fast to appear to be moving. These became increasingly popular through the years and are still used today.

7 https://www.google.ie/search?q=who+invented+the+zoetrope&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=09JUVamxHoXT7QbNxoGoDQ
8 http://zoetrope.org/zoetrope-history
reason they became so successful was that they didn’t require immense wealth to obtain.

![Flip Book Image]

**Chapter 2**

**Animation**

The first animated film was shown on April 6th, 1906 by The Vitagraph Co. of America titled, *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* and was animated by J. Stuart Blackton. I would also consider this to be the first stop motion animation. It is a technique where you take a photograph of an object and then slightly move or manipulate the object and then take another picture. After many photos you would end up with a moving animation. It was a blackboard with different characters being drawn on and rubbed out with a piano playing in the background. After this, more heavily detailed animated cartoons were created, the first of which by Winsor McCay entitled, *Little Nemo* (1911). McCay was a well-known newspaper cartoonist so in *Little Nemo* he used the same characters. It took 4000 drawings to make this nonsensical short. However, in 1913, McCay began to draw Gertie the Dinosaur to prove to audiences that he was not using wires and such but the pure talent of animated drawings in his cartoon. 

In 1914, the first animation studio in America was set up by John Bray. He hired Earl Hurd who invented the cel technique. This was when different segments of an overall drawing were drawn onto celluloid transparent sheets.

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9 [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0565560/]

10 [http://vegalleries.com/gerthistory.html]
and then put together to make a film. Generally, one second of a film would take an average of 25 drawn frames.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1923, Walt Elias Disney was given the chance to show his first creature and no it was not Mickey Mouse (or Mortimer Mouse as he was known then). Walt had come up with the Alice Comedies series in the 20s in which a young girl dreams she is in an animated land. It was the first time that animation and live action appeared on screen together.\textsuperscript{12} Mickey Mouse made his debut in 1928 in the classic Steamboat Willie. Disney could not afford to hire an actor to do the whistling that Mickey does so he had to do it himself.

Contrary to most people’s understanding, Flowers and Trees (1932) was not the first colour and sound animation. Disney had brought out another three years previously on August 6\textsuperscript{th} 1930 named Fiddlersticks. It featured Flip the Frog and Mickey Mouse.\textsuperscript{13}

Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) was the first ever animated feature and set as a milestone in animation history. It was all hand drawn and painted using the cel technique.\textsuperscript{14}

Crusader Rabbit was the beginning for animated TV. It was first shown by Jay Ward Productions from 1950 to 1959. From then on there came very popular (still to this day) cartoons on TV such as Tom and Jerry, The Flintstones and Huckleberry Hound.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.artograph.com/infocus/animation-history-john-bray/

\textsuperscript{12} http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Alice_Comedies

\textsuperscript{13} http://gizmodo.com/5613973/happy-80th-birthday-fiddlersticks

\textsuperscript{14} http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Snow_White_and_the_Seven_Dwarfs

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/751993/Tom-and-Jerry
The next almighty leap for animation comes many years later when in 1995; Pixar makes the ever incredible, *Toy Story* using CGI (Computer Generated Imagery).\(^{16}\) Audiences couldn’t get enough as it was so new and looked completely different to anything ever seen before. Pixar soon became the credible rival to Disney for the top spot for feature film animation. *Toy Story* was also the first of another ground breaking innovation when it was the first animation to use 3D.\(^ {17}\) Audiences had the option to see the feature in cinemas in 2D or 3D.

![Toy Story](image)

Now onto *Brave*, which had two pieces of technology developed just for it. The first and most obvious of the two was the technology known as TAZ. This stands for the Tazmanian Devil from Looney Toons. This new simulator was developed in 2009 by simulation supervisor Claudia Chung to make hair look to have individual strands. It forms individual coils around computer-generated cylinders of varying lengths and diameters.\(^ {18}\)

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\(^{16}\) [http://www.empireonline.com/features/history-of-cgi/p9](http://www.empireonline.com/features/history-of-cgi/p9)

\(^{17}\) [http://www.slideshare.net/bashscrazy/the-history-of-3d-animation](http://www.slideshare.net/bashscrazy/the-history-of-3d-animation)

\(^{18}\) [http://www.wired.com/2012/06/pl_bravehairtech/](http://www.wired.com/2012/06/pl_bravehairtech/)
Before this Aqua Net was used which did not give the same effect. It took 6 months for the team to develop this technology from a dream into a reality. Rachel Gross, a writer on

‘The Little Mermaid’s Princess Ariel was meant to sport curls, but the technology just wasn't there in 1989—rendering that kind of bounce and frizz, cell after hand-drawn cell, was all but impossible.’

The second piece of technology that was developed for the film was called Windows. The animation team struggled with working on the river scenes. They had spent years working on their water simulators for movies such as Finding Nemo and Cars 2. In those films they made open ocean scenes while in Brave they were working on a 40 foot river. Windows gave them the opportunity to take one small section of the river at a time and work on it in great detail.

19 http://www.wired.com/2012/06/pl_bravehairtech/

THE BACKGROUND OF THE COMPANY

The Walt Disney Company is the second largest media company in the world today.\(^2\) The Disney Company has been in existence since the 16\(^{th}\) of October 1923.\(^2\) Although some would say it was in 1928 as that was when audiences first seen the sensational *Steamboat Willie*, which featured Mickey Mouse and the first appearance of Minnie Mouse. It was founded by the man himself, Walt Disney Since the early 1920’s, Disney has been a rising phenomenon with an astronomical amount of film and television shows having been made. As well as making films, having *Disney Channels*, having a number of theme parks around the world, cruise ships and over 300 Disney Stores around the world, The Walt Disney Company owns some high profile television stations that not many are aware of. These would include ABC, NBC and ESPN.\(^3\) It has a whopping 52 classics out on release at the moment and has announced a further two more to join, those being *Big Hero 6* to be released on DVD this year and *Zootopia* to be released in cinemas in 2016.\(^4\)

For many years The Disney Company has been releasing films for other production companies and taking a share in the profits. One of these production companies’ was Pixar Animation Studios.

Pixar began its career in 1979 when Ed Catmull was recruited by George Lucas with Lucasfilms Computer Division. This group was in charge coming up with state of the art computer technology for the film industry.\(^5\) In 1983, John


\(^3\) [http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about-disney/disney-history](http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about-disney/disney-history)


\(^5\) [http://www.imdb.com/list/Ls003947956/](http://www.imdb.com/list/Ls003947956/)

[http://www.pixar.com/about/Our-Story](http://www.pixar.com/about/Our-Story)
Lasseter was asked to join the company. In 1984 the first animated short was premiered titled André & Wally B. The team behind making this short said,

‘It features ground-breaking technology such as complex flexible characters, hand-painted textures, and motion blur.’

It wasn’t until 1986, when Steve Jobs purchased the Computer Graphics Division from George Lucas for $10 million,26

‘Pixar would take all the graphics hardware and software technology it had developed, but Lucasfilm would retain a stake in the advances the Computer Division had developed before the sale,’ was what Paik had to say in her book.27

On selling the division, George Lucas had this to say,

“We lost a ton of money on the Computer Division, even after selling it, but in the end it paid off. Because it put us ahead of everybody else in the special-effects business and ultimately got me where I wanted to go, which was to be able to tell the Star Wars story the way I wanted to tell it.”28

Later on Jobs named the company Pixar. From then on they made a steady stream of shorts until they made their first feature in 1995, Toy Story.

When Pixar was still part of LucasFilms, it was working on its own 3D rendering software known as REYES (Renders Everything You Ever Saw). REYES was the compound for the Renderman software. ‘The term RenderMan actually refers to two different things: the renderer itself (also known as ‘PRMan,’ short for ‘Photorealistic RenderMan’) and the interface that digital artists use to feed information to the renderer.’29

“A renderer is a piece of software that takes the hundreds, even thousands, of individual instructions that tell the computer what is going on in any given picture - what the digital code looks like, how they are shaded, how they are lit, how they are positioned – and follows those instructions to generate the pixels that make up the final image.”30

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Things in the animated world were about to take a turn for the better in 2006. In January 2006, Disney announced that it was going to buy Pixar that year. The papers were signed on May 5th 2006 and Pixar was sold for $7.4 billion. Some of the board members at Disney thought that they were paying too much money for Pixar so when asked about it Barry Ritholtz, the chief investment officer with Ritholtz Capital Partners said,

"The question isn't did Disney pay too much but how expensive would it have been for Disney if Pixar fell into someone else's hands."("32

As part of the deal, Steve Jobs would become a board member of The Disney Company. Also, John Lasseter, who was the highly respected creative director for Pixar would be coming on board and become the chief creative officer for the combined animation studios and also help oversee the design of new attractions in the Disney Theme Parks.

Steve Jobs was head of Pixar Animation Studios and founder of Apple. In 1991, Pixar agreed with Disney that together they would

"Make and distribute at least one computer-generated animated movie."("33

The 1995 the first film they would work on together was made which was Toy Story. Due to the incredible success of Toy Story, making $362 million worldwide," in 1997, The Walt Disney Company and Pixar Animation Studios announce that they agree to make a further five animated films together within the next 10 years." If only they knew that within the next 10 years they would team up together to form one company.

Pixar, like Disney has kept certain traditions with its films. No one seems to know if that was a decision made due to Disney being involved or they wanted to put their own stamp on things. In every single Disney feature film, the audience can see characters from other films appear in the film in the background. The audience can also see that there is a hidden Mickey Mouse in every film too. Pixar has done their own spin on it in their films. Pixar has

31http://money.cnn.com/2006/01/24/news/companies/disney_pixar_deal/
33http://www.pixar.com/about/Our-Story
34http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=toystory.htm
35http://www.pixar.com/about/Our-Story
characters from its feature films appear in its shorts and vice versa. It also has the pizza planet truck from Toy Story appear in every feature.

The other item that always appears in every single feature length is, A113. It was the classroom number used by character animation students at the California Institute of the Arts.36

36http://pixar.wikia.com/A113
Chapter 3
Origins of Brave

Brenda Chapman was the person who wrote the original story of Brave. Brave was released in cinemas in 2012 and was Pixar’s first princess film. It was also Pixar’s first period feature and also first fairy-tale. Chapman had come up with the original story and written it 9 or 10 years before the release. Chapman’s daughter, Emma Rose, was 4 or 5 at the time and Chapman says that her daughter was a lot like her that she is strong willed and very independent. She thought if she was like this at that age, what she would be like when she was teenager. She then decided that she wanted to write a story about a young girl’s relationship with her mother and the struggles they can have on a daily basis as well as the big struggles. Chapman wanted to concentrate on the relationship between mother and daughter because mothers often are absent or replaced by evil stepmothers in traditional fairy tales.

""I went through many fairy tales looking for a mother-and-daughter story, and I just didn't find one. I'd find some with a mother, but she would disappear for no apparent reason, and a prince would show up to save the day. So I decided to try to create my own story.""
Chapman loved fairy tales of all sorts and especially the Grimm Tales. She hated the idea of a fairy-tale in which a princess waits around for a prince to rescue her and then they live happily ever after, because that is just not the case in reality. She was aware that princess fairy tales were for children but that their mothers would be watching the film as well. That mothers would be seeing their daughters reaction to this iconic princess role, she wanted to change that. She wanted to develop a princess that would be a strong female character for young girls to look up to and not for parents to have to watch their children dress up and act like everything will turn out fine but to embrace their independence and parents would encourage them. In an interview Chapman was asked about her inspiration,

“I look around in my life. I like to pull from a truth. You can talk about Brave, and how that came out of my life. I have creative friends who inspire me with their work. Art, movies and books. There might be something in a story that pops out and inspires me go forward with something totally different.”

Chapman took great inspiration from her daughter and her relationship with her. Another place where she took profound inspiration was from Disney’s 1991 animated feature, Beauty and the Beast. Chapman was one of several key story artists on that film and before Merida came along, Belle was her favourite. Belle was to be seen that she was a selfless character who did what she had to do to save her father. When she found out her father was hurt, she didn’t go looking for help but went straight after him. She sacrificed herself to save her beloved father and then brought the good out of the beast. Some audiences were not on board with this film as they seen it that she was an abused captive and was spending time with her abuser. That was not the intent at all but to show that a girl can save the ones she loves same as a man and that everyone has good inside them when they are given the chance. Chapman wanted something similar to come across in Brave.

Chapman knew exactly what she wanted from Merida and where she wanted the character to go. For the small details she thought as she went along but she knew exactly how she wanted her to be perceived and where the character would end up physically, mentally and emotionally all throughout the film.

She knew she didn’t want Merida to be the stereotypical princess that has been seen before in previous Disney princesses. She also knew she wanted it


to be a fairy tale but with a modern family feel to it. To have the modern family appeal to it, it really helps make the independent and strong willed Merida more believable.

As Brave was going to be the first Pixar princess to be made, there was added pressure to make the film a success. Chapman was the first, and still to this day, the only female director to work for Pixar. Chapman struggled with keeping the character she loved true to the original story and maintaining the traditional Pixar feel to the feature. That is why mid production; Mark Andrews was brought in to co-direct the film with Chapman. They say in interviews it was down to ‘creative differences.’ It was not uncommon for directors to be replaced during filming for Pixar up to this point, however, the reason it was such a sensitive matter was that it was with the first female director for the company. When Pixar first asked Andrews if he would take over he did not immediately say yes, he asked could he think about. Even though it wasn’t a rare practise for Pixar to bring in other directors there were still trials and tribulations he would have to go through if he did it. The first thing he did was ring his good friend Brad Bird. He not only was his good friend and fellow director with the company, Bird had gone through the same situation when he was asked to take over for Jan Pinkava on Ratatouille, with a very similar time frame. He knew if he could ask anyone for advice on what to do it would be Bird. Andrews as the perfect person to take over for Chapman though as he had gone on the first research trip to Scotland with the rest of the crew in 2006. He not only went and seen the inspirational land which the film would be based off of but he has Scottish heritage.

“I’m a Scottishphile, history buff, everything Middle Ages and Celtic lore and myth are things in my wheelhouse.”

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Andrews knew exactly what he had to do to fix the film. As he had been in what’s called the Brain Trust (where directors would come together and give their opinions on certain things in a film to make it better) with Chapman, he knew before he was even asked to come on board what needed to be taken out and would be staying. He loved the dynamic between mother and daughter and how the relationship worked with the whole family as well as Merida pleading for the spell.

"Because the bones of the story were fantastic – the root of the parent/child relationship, the magic of this child in this desperate situation asking for this spell, not really knowing what it’s going to be – all that stuff was there and those elements were working," – Andrews.47

He did however make a point of taking a few things out that he felt were slowing the film down and making it more complicated when it didn’t have to be.

"Whose story it was – whether it was Merida or her mom's story or Merida choosing which parent she was going to be more like – these things weren’t working, and having more of an objective eye coming into it, I killed some babies to get the story moving again in the direction that was entertaining and had action in it and didn’t compromise the heart or the humour." – Andrews.48

Something that he kept true to with this film as did Brenda was that they both used their personal lives to help them with the making of it. Chapman had used her relationship with her daughter to build to the foundations of the


original story and Andrews did the same with his family. Just like in the film, Andrews has one daughter and three boys so he was able to think how he does things and how he did things as a teenager and adapted it to the film.

Chapter 4

The Film

Brave is a fairy tale story about a young Scottish teenage princess named Merida. It takes place in a mythical and historic Scottish land. Merida is young and impetuous who loves to live life to the fullest. She has an impending love for archery. She lives the life that she wants and not the life that society or history says she must due to being a princess. She loves to go out riding every day on her horse, Angus.

Her father, King Fergus, gave her, her first bow when she was a small child. She was never the typical princess and her father loved that about her. Once evening, after a day of adventure Merida is at the dinner table with her parents and three little brothers when her mother, Queen Elinor tells her that she must marry. Her mother has always been quite a proper lady and wants Merida to follow in her footsteps. There will be three suitors from each of the other three clans in the land that will come together at the kingdom to compete for her hand in marriage. There is Macintosh, MacGuffin and Dingwall.49

When the queen announces to the three suitors and everyone gathered,

49 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ceX3Pclx-Q
“In accordance with our laws, by the rights of our heritage, only the first born of each of the great leaders may be presented as champion. And thus compete for the hand of the Princess of Dun Broch. To win the fair maiden they must prove their worth by feats of strength or arms in the games. It is customary that the challenge be determined by the princess herself.”

An idea comes to Merida when she hears her mother’s words and announces that the game that the suitors will compete in for her hand shall be archery. On the day of the games, all three suitors shoot their arrows and only one that hits the target, is Dingwall. Fergus turns to tease Merida of her victorious suitor to see a dog in her seat. They all turn to the shooting arena to see Merida planting down her family crest and pulling her cloak off. She then announces,

“I am Merida. First born descendant of Clan Don Broch and I’ll be shooting for my own hand.”

This is not well received my any member present especially her mother. Back at the castle, a very emotional and heart breaking fight occurs between Merida and her mother. They say things that they don’t mean such as Merida saying that she would rather die than be like her mother and tears the family tapestry on the wall that her mother has worked on for years and Elinor takes Merida’s bow and tosses it in the fire. This was the defining moment when Merida belief in her mother is destroyed as her bow was and Elinor realises that she has ruined the love of her daughter’s life.

Merida flees from the castle to find that a mystical fairy tale creature known as the will-o’-the-wisps, appeared and attempts to lead her somewhere. She follows them and they bring her to a cottage where she discovers a witch

50 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ceX3Pclx-Q
pretending to be a wood carver. She trades her family heirloom necklace for a spell to change her mother in order to change her fate. She is given a cake for her mother to eat. Merida returns to the castle to learn that her mother has still not changed her mind on Merida having to marry. Merida gives her the cake as a ‘peace offering.’ Elinor falls ill suddenly and when Merida helps her to bed, she falls from her four poster bed to the floor and rises as a bear. Once the initial shock has passed and Merida has confessed what she did to her mother, they leave to return to the witch’s cottage to reverse the spell.

The witch is not there but has left a message for her saying that the spell will become permanent by the second sunrise unless she remembers these words and can figure it out in time,

“Fate be changed, look inside, mend the bond, torn by pride.”

They spend the night in the rain feeling defeat until the next morning when Merida catches fish and they begin to help one another. They see some wisps and follow them to some old ruins. Merida falls down a hole and discovers a hall that she figures out to be the lost kingdom from a story her mother had told her about when she was younger.

It was the kingdom of a man who had done the same thing as Merida and had asked the witch for a spell to change his fate. He too tuned into a bear and gained the strength of ten men. That man made the spell permanent and became known as Mor’du. Mor’du had attacked them many years before and her father had his leg bitten off and he has been seeking revenge ever since. Merida sees a stone carving of the four brothers who lived in the kingdom and Mor’du had broken it so his portrait detached from his brothers. Merida figures out what she must do to return her mother to her former self, she must mend the tapestry she tore.

They sneak back to castle to mend the tapestry. To get by the clans without anyone seeing Elinor, Merida makes a speech about how all the clans had
come together in the past to help each other and that tradition should be broken so that the young people can decide for themselves who and when they will marry. Once they make it upstairs, Elinor turns to a bear on the inside. Just as this occurs Fergus enters the room and tries to kill the ear not realising it is his wife. Elinor runs for it and Fergus goes after her thinking that the bear killed his wife, but not before locking Merida in the room to try and keep her away from harm.

Merida calls for help and three little bear cubs appear, her brothers at the cake that was intended for Elinor. They get the key and release Merida. They jump on Angus’s back to try and stop their mother’s execution. Merida mends the tapestry while riding and gets there just in time. She pulls a sword on her own father to save her mother when Mor’du arrives. When Mor’du attacks Merida, Elinor breaks free from her bonds and jumps to defend. She defeats Mor’du and Merida throws the tapestry on top of her mother just as the sun is rising. Her eyes blacken and Elinor is gone. Merida gathers that she has failed and her mother will remain a bear. She cries into her fur and says how sorry and wrong she was and that she just wants her mother back. With that heart felt speech, Elinor, as a human, kisses Merida and she is back. Fergus runs to his wife and daughter and in turn so do the three little brothers back in their human forms.

The film ends with Merida and Elinor making a new tapestry together of Merida holding hands with her mother when she was a bear. Then they wave farewell to the clans and ride off together on horseback.
ABOUT BRAVE

The original title of the film was The Bear and the Bow. It was known internally as Brave but the public were told the other name. It got leaked that the name Brave had been trademarked by Disney Enterprises, Inc. who is responsible for all of Pixar’s trademarks.51

Brave took 6 long years to make, however, it was worth it as it won Best Animated Feature in the Golden Globes in 2013 and the very same year won Best Animated Feature in the Academy Awards.

When Elinor dresses Merida for meeting the suitors, she puts her in a tight dress and a head dress which hides her hair. As Merida has wild curly hair, a piece falls out and immediately Elinor tucks it back. The same thing occurs when the clans are entering the great hall. Merida deliberately takes out a curl and Elinor is there like a shot to tuck it back.

Merida’s wild locks are one thing that makes her stand out from other princesses and it seems as though her mother is trying to hide the fact that she is different. Queen Elinor has always strived for perfection and has wanted Merida to do the exact same; however, Merida’s hair is a prime example of something that cannot be tamed. Her hair is a reflection of her spirit. Her mother has been working for years to mould and change her into being the typical princess that everyone expects her to be. She may have the title of a princess but that does not mean that she fits all the traditional criteria of one.

When Merida and Elinor spend the night outside, they camp next to a river. When Merida awakens the next morning, she sees that her mother has set a table with berries and water for breakfast. She has even got twigs to use for their knives and forks. Elinor thinks that just because she is a bear on the outside does not mean that she should change who she is on the inside. Unfortunately, Merida is forced to point out to her that the berries she begins to eat are poisonous and the water she drinks to try get rid of them has got worms in it. Luckily for them at that time, Merida has picked up many skills over the years including catching fish with her bow and arrows. After Elinor requesting too many times for Merida to catch more, Merida makes her go and catch some herself with her mouth. Elinor eloquently takes off her crown and lays it on a rock. The pair go into the water and catch fish but also have fun that they have been lacking in their relationship for many years. After

51 http://www.pixar.com/behind_the_scenes
licking her paws, Elinor gets up and exits the water leaving her crown behind without even remembering that it was there.

When Elinor takes off her crown at first this is the first sign that she is beginning to let go of the old her and is open to change. We know the only way the film will get to an ending is if there is a change, whether that is physically or mentally or both. She must be open to seeing things differently and by leaving her crown she is saying that she is ready to change and leaving the old her behind. She can always replace the crown but cannot replace who she is.

When Merida is in the witch’s wood carving shop, the witch tries to sell her three pieces of art. Each piece tells a part of the story from the film. The first is of two bears passing a box to one another. This is a little joke at Queen Elinor when she first turns into a bear and knocks into everything she passes. The second is a bear catching fish. This represents when Merida teaches Elinor to catch fish. Finally the third, depicts when Adam from the Sistine Chapel. It is when Elinor as bear is reaching for Merida when she is being attacked by Mor’du in the cave she falls in.

When it comes to films and especially Disney/Pixar films, there is always a lesson to be learned. The biggest lesson that is to be learned from watching Brave is to listen. If people listen to one another in life, things would turn out much differently than if they hadn’t. The film would not even take place is Merida and Elinor did not have to learn this lesson.

If Elinor would just listen to Merida’s feelings and objections then she wouldn’t make her marry a suitor. When Fergus goes to see Elinor about the marriage situation with Merida, Fergus tells her to speak to Merida in which Elinor’s reply is,

“I do speak to her, she just doesn’t listen.”
On the other hand, if Merida would listen to what her mother has to say about tradition and why it is the right thing to be betrothed, she would not go as far as to want to change her mother. When both Elinor and Merida are practicing what they would say to one another they both say the same thing,

“I think I could make you understand if you would just listen.”

They answer their own question about one another without them realising it.

When Queen Elinor is a bear they have no option but to listen to each other. Merida was the one that put this spell on her mother and has seen the wisps before so Elinor has no chance of turning back into a human if she doesn’t listen to Merida. In turn, Merida must hold her tongue and really try to not just listen but understand her mother. As Elinor is a bear she cannot use words so Merida must be patient and understand her mother to communicate. It is a remarkable way to get the message across.

Without knowing anything about the film, the audience would know the film has something to do with a queen and a girl with long hair. In the image of the title at the beginning of the film, within the letter B, there is the image of Merida and within the letter E; there is the image of Elinor. Every little detail was planned out to ensure that it got across to the audience that this film was about a mother and daughter relationship and not about marriage.

52 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ceX3Pclx-Q
Chapter 5
Responses to the Film

From the first week after the film was released in cinemas, there have been controversies about Merida. One of which is the question if she is a lesbian or not. Adam Markovitz, of EW.com’s PopWatch blog, wrote about the film the weekend it came out in cinemas and he was the first on record to question the princess’s sexual orientation.53 In the article he wrote he said,

“But could Merida be gay? Absolutely. She bristles at the traditional gender roles that she’s expected to play: the demure daughter, the obedient fiancée. Her love of unprincess-like hobbies, including archery and rock-climbing, is sure to strike a chord with gay viewers who felt similarly “not like the other kids” growing up. And she hates the prospect of marriage – at least, to any of the three oafish clansmen that compete for her hand — enough to run away from home and put her own mother’s life at risk. She’s certainly not a swooning, boy-crazy Disney princess like The Little Mermaid’s Ariel or Snow White. In fact, Merida may be the first in that group to be completely romantically disinclined (even cross-dressing Mulan had a soft spot for Li Shang).”54

Since Markovitz put up this article on his blog, audiences have been considering the notion people are wondering around world, is she or isn’t she? There is no official word on the topic.

53 http://www.salon.com/2012/06/25/is_pixars_brave_princess_a_lesbian/

54 http://www.ew.com/article/2012/06/24/pixar-brave-gay-merida
“Neither Pixar, which created her, or Disney, which is distributing the film, has made any official attempt to tell the gay community that Merida might be one of them.”

Disney and Pixar have denied this controversy on the grounds that Merida was more a strong independent girl who was meant to break age old stereotypes of girls and princesses but never intended to be a female homosexual character. Brenda Chapman was asked about it during an interview and she stated,

“I do have to admit that wasn’t my initial intention. I just wanted Merida’s character to be strong, know who she was and what she wanted out of life.”

In my opinion, the reason people have been fixated on the receiving the answer to this question is down to the fact that Disney distributed it. Pixar created it and she was the first princess for them to make so they had an open ended book on where the tale could go. If it wasn’t for the fact that every single Disney princess that has been made and ended up with a man by the end of the film and the man was their happy ending, there would not have been such an issue with Merida.

The previous 10 Disney princesses all behaved and acted as they were expected to in regards to be royalty and were happy to be with a man as long as it was the one meant for them. Merida on the other hand never once said in the film that she never wants to marry; she simply states that she is not ready to marry anyone yet. Can you blame her when she is only a teenager? She, again in my opinion, did exactly what she was intended to do. She showed her independence and showed young audiences that you do not need a man to have a happy ever after but to just be happy with whom you are.

Markovitz said something else in his blog without fully doing his homework. He said,

“In fact, Brave’s heroine, Merida, isn’t interested in dudes at all.”

55 http://www.ew.com/article/2012/06/24/pixar-brave-gay-merida

56 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1217209/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv


58 http://jezebel.com/5921127/merida-from-brave-isnt-a-lesbian-but-she-could-be
This is false. As I stated previously, Merida declares that she is not ready for marriage and she also states,

“In fact, she might not ever be ready for this, so that’s that.”

This is a line that audiences have been hooked up on when it comes to Merida possibly being gay. By saying she may never be ready to marry is not saying that she may never be ready to marry a man down to her being gay but that it is a daunting and scary thing to marry someone. No teenager is ready to settle down and marry. If a parent of a child that had seen Brave said that they don’t know if they would ever be ready to marry, I doubt they would jump to the conclusion that their child is gay. In fact, it was revealed that there was a scene storyboarded where Merida was actually interested in Macguffin but the scene was scrapped because they wanted to show the love between a mother and daughter.\(^59\) This would be evidence that Merida is not a lesbian and that the makers of the film wanted to primarily focus on the relationship between Merida and Elinor.

When I was conducting my original concept and research for this dissertation I thought a reason for the gay question was down to Merida being very tomboyish and adventurous. When Merida is speaking to Angus in his stall she is also shovelling it out, brushing his coat and refilling his water pale. She is a princess that does things that not the typical Disney princess would do and also shows that she is not afraid of hard work.

Disney’s 8\(^{th}\) princess Mulan (1998) was very similar to Merida.\(^60\) Mulan had her daily chores to do and wasn’t afraid to get her hands dirty. She went off to war in her father’s place so did not dress like a typical princess and a very similar thing was down to expectation. Mulan was expected to behave a certain way and marry someone that others chose for her, the exact same as Merida. The only major difference between these two female heroines is that


\(^{60}\) [http://www.imdb.com/list/ls055561888/](http://www.imdb.com/list/ls055561888/)
Mulan ends up with a man (Li Chang) at the end while Merida ends up with a great relationship with her mother.

As well as there being some positive feedback about the film there has also been some bad feedback. Peggy Orenstein, author of the best-selling, Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture, has said,

“It’s a failure of imagination,”61 and “I cannot help but feel, after waiting patiently—and sometimes not so patiently—through twelve genre-busting films about male robots, male superheroes, male cowboys, male rats, male cars, male bugs, male fish, and a small male mailman, that it would have been nice if the movie was not about a princess, even a kick-ass one. Honestly, is that too much to ask?”62

She also thought that the film was rated in America as PG so that would appeal more to a male audience. Even though Merida was the stereotypical princess, she is still a princess and therefore men and boys would not want to go see it.

Mary Pols on her blog has thought very similar to Orenstein. She said she struggled to get her 8 year old to see it and thought,

“I have no doubt there are a lot of good men at Pixar, but if they’d grown up in an environment in which it was totally normal for them to see movies with girls in the lead, maybe it wouldn’t have taken 17 years for the studio to get around to making a girl the star. This wouldn’t feel so vaguely unsatisfying if Brave were just one of many Pixar movies that featured a strong female lead.”63

The Telegraph has mentioned on the other hand some astoundingly good reviews. Variety Magazine’s Carole Horst has said,

“Pixar caused a stir with its first princess movie, Brave, with animation world wags wondering if the Mouse House has turned Pixar into another merchandise pipeline for the Disney Store. Brave proved them wrong,

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delivering a princess who rejected her prince in a very un-Disney-like way, and set off on a journey of self-discovery and self-fulfilment."

Hearing from someone unexpected and with a completely opposite view is *The Walking Dead* creator and renowned comic book writer Robert Kirkman. He had tweeted back when the film was first released saying,

""I love that I live in a time where *Brave* will be my daughter's favourite Disney movie and not Princess Boy Crazy Lives Only For Marriage."

This is a great example of where the film is not only for mothers to watch and appreciate but also fathers. No father wants his daughter to grow up too fast and leave the nest and this film is an impressionable illustration of just that.

Other blogs and reviews mention and speak very highly of not the characters or story but of the landscapes that are used. Due to the animators having actually gone there and got a first-hand experience of the beauty they were able to give a precise and accurate depiction of the country. In the original script and when Chapman was directing the feature, the film was going to take place with snow covering the land. Once she was taken off and Andrews stepped in, it was the first thing to be changed.

"It's impossible to imagine that they were going to be almost completely covered in snow," was said on the blog Den of Geek.

**TO CHANGE OR NOT TO CHANGE**

Merida is loved not only for her feisty and adventurous personality but also that she is that princess who does what makes her happy. As she on a regular basis, (I would presume) would clean out Angus’s stable she does not worry about getting her hands dirty or care much for how she dresses. When her mother puts her in that light blue tight dress for meeting the suitors, she complains about it. Fashion is not a priority for her.

So why did Disney feel the need to change her look for her upcoming coronation in Disney World, Florida on May 11th 2013? Merida went from looking comfortable in her own skin to looking like a stereotypical princess.

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66 http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/brave/21618/brave-review
They glammed up her dress, changed her curly locks into flowing ones, brought in her waist, accentuate her hips, got rid of her recognisable bow and even put make up on her. They changed her from looking like a teenager to a sexualised woman. Once Merida had her coronation she would be an official Disney Princess and become number 11. Once she becomes official, she will appear on the multi-princess collection in Disney Stores so Disney wanted to revamp her look for the products and coronation. People around the world were outraged when they saw the image that Disney wanted Merida to have for appearing on the new toy lines. A spokesperson for Disney said,

“We routinely use different art styles with our characters and this rendition of Merida in her party dress was a special one-time effort to commemorate her coronation.”

A petition was created on Change.org to return Merida to original look. The petition had gained over 115,000 signatures in less than a week. The petition to Disney Chairman Bob Iger said,

“Merida was the princess that countless girls and their parents were waiting for – a strong, confident, self-rescuing princess ready to set off on her

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68 http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/16/disney-princess-merida-makeover
next adventure with her bow at the ready. She was a princess who looked like a real girl, complete with the ‘imperfections’ that all people have."\(^{69}\)

It even received the support of Chapman,

\[\text{““There is an irresponsibility to this decision that is appalling for women and young girls. Disney marketing and the powers that be that allow them to do such things should be ashamed of themselves.””}\(^{70}\)

It was pointed out that in the new redesign of Merida she is in a tighter dress. When Merida was put in a tight dress in the film by her mother, she showed utter hatred towards it. The week after Merida’s coronation in Disney World, Florida, on the official Disney websites there was the images of the original Merida.

\[\text{“While Disney has not officially announced a U-turn, the creator of the Change.org petition says "glam" Merida has gone missing from the Disney Princesses website after being officially inducted at Disney World last weekend. Numerous supporters have written to us to share the news that the new makeover version of Merida is no longer appearing on Disney.com.”}\(^{71}\)

There was no official statement by Disney to say they had done a U-Turn on the redesign but the facts speak for themselves.

**Chapter 6**

**Conclusion**

Throughout this process I have done extensive research into Pixar’s first female lead protagonist, Merida. To fully understand how the film was made and how it worked so well I had to do background work on where animation came from. It is so different and fascinating in how it is made to live action film making that gives audiences a want to see more. I had to look at how Pixar came into the world and made it stand out on its own from other animation studios. Pixar has such a profoundly intelligent team working for it and had ideas and technologies that no one else had, to which Disney had

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\(^{69}\) [http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/13/brave-director-criticises-sexualised-merida-redesign](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/13/brave-director-criticises-sexualised-merida-redesign)


\(^{71}\) [http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/16/disney-princess-merida-makeover](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/may/16/disney-princess-merida-makeover)
to have it and for them to work side by side. Once Disney came on board and the two animation genius studios began working together they were truly capable of making magic starting with Toy Story and all the way to Brave. In my opinion, neither company would have been as successful without the help of the other. They went from being animation studios not to be trifled with to animation super heroes. The possibilities are endless with Disney/Pixar as one.

Disney/Pixar has a very exciting couple of years ahead of it. With this year alone there will be Inside Out and The Good Dinosaur being released in cinemas.

Inside Out which is set to release in the UK in June 2015 seems to be the Pixar we know and fell in love with back in 1995. It is about a young girl who is uprooted from her life and moved to San Francisco because her father acquired a new job. Her emotions that live in the Headquarters in her brain try to help her adjust to her new life and get through the day. Audiences will see how a person’s emotions make them behave in certain situations. It looks like audiences will be falling off their seats from laughing with seeing the dynamics of the mother’s, father’s and young girl’s emotions.72

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72http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2096673/
The Good Dinosaur is set to come to theatres in November 2015. There has been no official trailer released as of yet so by just going on images, this film seems different. It doesn’t have that 3D feel to it at all and seems to come across more of a young child’s film instead of a film for all ages, which Pixar has been able to do up until now. It is about a dinosaur named Arlo who falls in a river and ends up somewhere far away after his father is killed. He befriends a young boy named Spot. John Lasseter has spoken about the film and said,

“This is a boy and a dog story, but the roles are reversed. Arlo, the dinosaur, is the boy in the story and Spot is the dog.”73

Lasseter has also said that for this film Pixar is aiming to make environments with a higher level of realism than anything they did before. I personally am not convinced yet but with the talents they have shown in the past I am willing to be surprised.

The exceptionally long awaited films from Pixar will not be released until 2016 and 2017. Audiences are going to be delighted with the releases of The Incredibles 2 and Finding Dory next year after audiences have been asking for sequels for many years.

73http://pixar.wikia.com/The_Good_Dinosaur
The Incredibles wowed audiences in 2004 and with an open ending people automatically assumed there would be a sequel. Well, Pixar was listening and began making a script. The plot is still unknown. Will it be as good as the original though?

Finding Dory was something on everyone’s mind when they were making the original, Finding Nemo (2003). Ellen DeGeneres who voices the lovable forgetful Dory will be reprising her role in the sequel. She showed her enthusiasm while working on the first film that if there was a sequel she wanted to be in it. The plot of this tale is that Dory goes off in search of her family and learns the true meaning of family.

74 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JJmDavBXrw
At this point people are astounded that there will be a Toy Story 4. Woody and Buzz will brighten our screens once again 17 years after we first met the duo. It will not be as audiences would expect.

“It is not a continuation of the end of the story of Toy Story 3. Temporarily it is, but it will be a love story. It will be a romantic comedy. It will not make much focus on the interaction between the characters and children,” said Pixar president Jim Morris.75

It was also announced that Tom Hanks (Woody) and Tim Allen (Buzz Lightyear) will be reprising their roles. As Toy Story was the film to really put Pixar on the world’s radar, it is not surprising that there will be a fourth edition. Whether the film will be as successful as the previous films remains to be seen. Making the film not as a continuance but as a film on its own is a brave move and could be a ground-breaking creation.

There is no official word on a Brave sequel however there is interest shown from fans of the film and even Andrews himself.

“Mark Andrews only comments in regard to the sequel were that he would like some additional characters, and that he found that American audiences didn’t understand the ‘Scottish humour’ in the film.”76

Andrews has said he would be up for making a sequel if the right story was there. Emily Asher-Perrin thinks that there could be a sequel where Merida finds the perfect partner, a Robin Hood type or because the film is so based

75 http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/toy-story-4-plot-romantic-comedy-focus-woody-buzzs-love-bo-peep-jessie-1490908

76 http://www.tor.com/2013/04/10/brave-sequel-pixar/
around family, they could make it more with the involvement of her brothers as they would be older.77

I think they could make a Brave 2 but it would be a huge mistake to do so. There was so much controversy and issues with the original that making a second one, they may be second guessing themselves during production and make it a disaster.

2013 made sparks fly for Disney in introducing a very different and yet slightly similar character in Frozen. The film was made purely by Disney and introduced the ever favourite Elsa. Elsa began the film as a princess but was made queen during the fabulous animation. Elsa is similar to Merida in the way that she does not find her happy ending with a man but with her sister. Elsa has powers that make her produce and control ice. Throughout the entire film she struggled to accept who she was and to let others in, even her own sister. When the girls were younger, Elsa hurt Anna accidently and from then on Anna was made forget about her sister’s powers. Elsa shut herself away from everyone thinking she was doing the right thing by staying away, to prevent her hurting anyone. Elsa and Anna’s parents died when they were teenagers, they then only had each other.

Elsa revealed her powers and everyone showed fear towards her so she fled. Anna sacrificed herself for Elsa when the villain of the story tried to kill her. Like most fairy tales, true loves kiss was what broke the spell. However true loves kiss was not from a man but Elsa’s true love for her sister. Like Brave, Frozen celebrates the relationship between family and while Anna falls in love with Kristoff, Elsa fell back in love with herself. She accepted herself and the love from her sister and that was it.

77http://www.tor.com/2013/04/10/brave-sequel-pixar/
That leaves questions into how both films were received. Merida did not have a love interest, neither did Elsa. Elsa learned to listen to Anna when she said she loves and accepts her as she is and Merida learned to listen to mother and see things from her point of view. Both films have similar dynamics so why was there no criticism with Frozen?

Micah Jones makes some good points on moviemicah.blogspot.com, when they talk about how romance is replaced with sisterly love and the fact that in the film Elsa and Kristoff talk about how crazy it is to marry someone that you just met. This is why Frozen has been praised and admired for being a feminist film. Brave was the feminist film made up until Frozen and in my opinion it still is.

78 [http://moviemicah.blogspot.ie/2014/02/frozen-versus-brave.html](http://moviemicah.blogspot.ie/2014/02/frozen-versus-brave.html)
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