FROM A DISNEY PRINCESS TO A MODERN-DAY QUEEN:
Agency and womanhood in Disney lyrics

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Walt Disney Company on kulttuurisen ja taloudellisen menestyksensä myötä vaikuttanut suuresti naisidentiteettien muodostumiseen. Disney tarjoaa viihdettä koko perheelle, mutta viime aikoina Disney on keskittynyt erityisesti luomaan ohjelmia ja tuotesarjoja nuorille tytöille. Yksi näistä myyntimenestyksistä on Disney Princess –tuotesarja, jonka kahdeksan Disney -prinsessaa toimivat lukuisten tuotteiden kasvoina.

Tyypillinen Disney -prinsessa on kaunis, hyväsydäminen ja viaton sekä usein vahvojen naishahmojen vihan uhri. Erityisesti kolme ensimmäistä prinsessaa (Lumikki, Tuhkimo ja Prinsessa Ruusunen) edustavat hyvin patriarkaalista naiskuvaa, jonka mukaan nainen odottaa passiivisesti hääpäiväänsä. Yhteiskunnan muutoksien myötä Disney on kuitenkin tehnyt uudistuksia naispäähenkilöidensä luonteeseen, täten esitellen sarjan toiminnallisempia prinsessoja, jotka omaavat feminiinisten piirteiden lisäksi yhä enemmän myös maskuliinisia piirteitä.

Tämä tutkimus tutkii, millaisena naiseus ja naisten toimijuus esitetään Disneyn laululyriikassa. Tutkimusta varten valittiin kaksi laulua, joista ensimmäinen oli *Some Day My Prince Will Come* (Lumikki ja Seitsemän Kääpiötä 1937) ja toinen *Let It Go* (Frozen: Huurteinen Seikkailu 2013). Analyysin ensimmäisessä osassa tarkasteltiin toimijuutta ja vallan jakautumista lyriikassa esiintyvien persoonapronominien avulla, jonka jälkeen naiskuvaa tutkittiin kielellisten piirteiden pohjalta kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä hyödyntäen.

Tutkimuksessa todettiin, että laulun *Some Day My Prince Will Come* naiskuva on melko perinteinen; naisen tulee olla naisellinen ja hento, unelmoida hääpäivästään, sekä odottaa passiivisesti aviomiehensä saapumista. Laulun *Let It Go* naiskuva puolestaan on sukupuolineutraalimpi; nainen on yhteiskunnan paineiden alla, mutta voi valitessaan vapautua ja päättää itse omasta identiteetistään.

Asiasanat – Keywords In English Disney, femininity, women's studies, critical discourse analysis, CDA, agency

Säilytyspaikka – Depository

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 INTRODUCTION

Being a princess is the dream of many young girls and even in adulthood the desire for luxury, beauty and admiration seem to drive some women forward. The popularity of the princess fantasy is partially due to the success of Walt Disney Company, who decade after decade has introduced an ongoing line of princess characters. The *Disney princess* is already a cultural concept, an icon of femininity, who has inspired women all around the world since the release of the first film in the late 1930s, and will most likely continue to do so in the future as well.

As the Disney princesses are well-recognized worldwide and therefore also a significant contributor to modern-day girl culture, the cultural influences of the characters have been studied quite a lot. Researchers such as Wohlwend (2009), England et al. (2011) and Rothschild (2013), among many others, have studied the characteristics and attributes of the Disney princess, examining how the Princess characters portray the women of their time of release, but also how these characters have influenced the future generations of women exposed to the stories. These researchers have concluded that, indeed, alongside social changes there seems to be a curve of evolution in the princess characters from a happy housewife-to-be to a more androgynous action hero more suitable to reflect the modern woman. However, the process has been interactive; as the Disney princesses have influenced their target audience, similarly the real-life women have inspired the creators of the characters.

Although there are plenty of studies related to the representations of femininity in Disney films, the agency of the Disney heroine has yet to be studied. Therefore, the present study aims at filling this gap by observing how women's agency is depicted in Disney lyrics, thus examining if the traditional damsel-in-distress has indeed evolved into a 21st century queen: a woman who does not just wait to be rescued, but is in charge of her own life.

2 DISNEY AND FEMININE IDENTITY

2.1 Walt Disney Company and *the Disney heroine*

2.1.1 Disney as an entertaining, educational and commercial force

The Walt Disney Company (henceforth referred to as *Disney*) and its frontman Walt Disney have had a tremendous impact on children's culture since the late 1930s. According to Cheu (2008: 48-54), even the early vision of Disney was to take on the role of a public educator and a cultural guardian in the United States by offering entertainment that would also serve as a tool for domestic education. In fact, in the 1980s the National Parent Teacher Association together with the U.S. President Ronald Reagan endorsed the Disney Channel as "informative, entertaining and wholesome family entertainment" (Cheu 2008:48-54).

As studied by Cheu (2008:49-51), Disney stories are known to often revolve around dark themes, such as social discrimination, death, greed and cruelty, but are also always sure to have a happy ending, thus creating a safe environment for the process of experiencing diverse emotions. The stories usually have intended moral lessons, which could be divided into five categories. First of all, there are stories that encourage continuing in life in spite of occasional confusion, such as Alice in Wonderland (1951), where the child is surrounded by a world of strange and illogical happenings. In films like Pinocchio (1940), the child is introduced to the strangeness and awkwardness of growing up, as well as the feelings of being out of control of one's body and mind. Some films, such as Bambi (1942), deal with the loss of a loved one, but also emphasize that there is always a way of coping with hardship and complexity. Dumbo (1941), for instance, is a story of an elephant who is discouraged by his peers at the beginning but finally reaches his full potential through self-realization. Lastly, there is the Cinderella fantasy (1950), which begins with hostile circumstances, yet ends with love as a reward.

Alongside of cultural and educational aspirations, Disney is also a notable commercial force in children's lives. According to Wohlwend (2009:57) and England et al. (2011:555), the company has launched a wide range of merchandise, such as toys, video games, books, makeup sets and costumes, totalling up to over $4 billion in global retail

sales in 2007, thus promoting consumerism among young audiences. England et al. (2011:555) and Cheu (2008:52-54) also mention that although Disney is originally an American phenomenon, the company has gained more international presence through the release of ethnic stories, such as Aladdin, Lion King, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Pocahontas, Mulan and Hercules.

According to England et al. (2011:555), Wohlwend (2009:57) and Cheu (2008:54), Disney seems to have set out to target young girls in particular. In 2001, the Disney Princess line was created as an advertising and marketing campaign for 3 to 5 year-old girls, which is one of the most successful brands among Disney toys today. The line consists of eight Princesses: Snow White, Jasmine, Belle, Pocahontas, Mulan, Cinderella, Ariel and Aurora, as well as collectibles and apparel related to the Princesses and their stories. Disney also offers princess merchandise to tweens, a market group of pre-teen girls (10 to 12 year-olds), such as live action films and makeup sets. An example of a tween film is *The Princess Diaries* (2001) starring Anne Hathaway, a fantasy in which an ordinary girl turns out to be a princess of a faraway land. In addition to princess stories, Cheu (2008:54) points out that Disney has also launched programmes that depict the princess fantasy in a more modern way. For example, many of the live-action programmes targeted to teenagers revolve around the dreams of stardom, for example careers in fashion design, music and hairstyling.

2.1.2   The evolution of Disney heroines

Wohlwend (2009:59-60), England et al. (2011:556-563) and Rothschild (2013:55-59), all of whom have studied the characteristics and attributes of a typical Disney princess, point out that the traditional Disney princess is an innocent and happy homemaker-in-waiting, who is longing for a royal husband to finally give her life a purpose. The traditional princess is also beautiful, talks about beauty and fashion and has feminine body movements; she twirls, curtseys and wears feminine makeup. She is helpful and nurturing, and always romantically linked to a prince figure in the film. Most Disney heroines are also isolated from other humans and are exposed to evil and powerful women. For example, Rapunzel is grounded in her tower by an evil witch who pretends to be her mother and Cinderella is a domestic slave in the house of her evil step-mother.

All princesses are, however, good and kind by nature, as Disney has removed any vanity and psychological games of the original stories.

The evolution of Disney heroines is usually characterised as a series of three waves, as has been reported by Rothschild (2013:2,54) and Wohlwend (2009:65). The first wave includes the three earliest princesses (Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty), who were featured in the only three Disney princess animated films heavily supervised by Walt Disney himself. These three princesses depict the more traditional and patriarchal gender roles, as the princesses are often shown doing housework and act as objects of display to their princes. These three are also beautiful, yet passive, as they are simply waiting to be rescued and rewarded by romance.

According to Cheu (2008:52-54), Rothschild (2013:54) and England et al. (2011:564), Disney made adjustments to their female protagonists alongside the civil rights and feminist movements in the 1970s and introduced a second wave of heroines who were more independent, including Ariel (Little Mermaid), Belle (Beauty and the Beast), Pocahontas and Mulan. These princesses are not shown doing domestic work, but instead they pursue non-traditional paths. For example, Ariel defies her father's command, Belle takes a stand against the values of surrounding society, Pocahontas tries to reconcile between two belligerent nations and Mulan disguises herself as a man to join the army in her father's place. However, as Wohlwend (2009:65) points out, these heroines could be seen only superficially different from their predecessors, as there are still traces of traditional gender roles visible. For example, in spite of Ariel strongly standing against her father, she becomes demure and silent in front of her prince. Similarly, Belle rejects Gaston, a macho suitor, yet ends up as the mistress of a castle.

The most salient feature of the third wave heroines is their aspiration to gain control of their identities and lives, as stated by Cheu (2008:54). For example, Princess Tiana (The Princess and The Frog 2009) is determined to become an entrepreneur, which was a non-traditional career choice for an African-American woman in the 1920s. Princess Merida (Brave 2012) in turn refuses to be married off and fights for her own hand in a tournament, therefore swapping from the role of a princess to the prince of the story. Lastly, Princess Elsa (Frozen 2013), later coronated as queen, is driven to act as the main

villain of the story (although unwillingly), thus shaking the stereotypical setting of the princess representing the absolute good and virtue.

Moreover, whereas the earlier heroines, especially the first three princesses, show more feminine characteristics, England et al. (2011:563-565) point out that the third wave heroines are expected to carry both feminine and masculine attributes, such as being athletic, assertive and brave, yet affectionate and emotional at the same time. However, romance is still a key element in the stories, but in contrast to the older films, newer films develop romances in a longer period of time.

There has also been criticism toward the representations of women in Disney films. According to England et al. (2011:556) and Wohlwend (2009:59,65), especially feminists have argued that the portrayal of women in Disney animation is often racist and sexist, as most princesses have pale skin, a tiny waist and delicate limbs, yet full breasts. Also, all the Disney Princess Barbie dolls have hourglass-shaped bodies, long lashes and heart-shaped faces regardless of their ethnical background. In addition to the heroines, Disney seems to portray older women either as loving mothers, evil femme fatales or ugly hags.

2.2   Womanhood in modern society

2.2.1   Constructing feminine identities through language

Although early gender and language research saw gender and biological sex as parts of the same continuum, today the definitions of these terms are much more complex. According to Coates (2001: 8288-8291) and Litosseliti (2006:9-24), gender is no longer given at birth, but is a fluid and variable attribute that is created and recreated through social processes, such as culture, social class, sexual orientation and ethnicity. However, a distinction between men and women, male and female sexes and femininity and masculinity has been made among most, if not all, cultures.

As discussed by Litosseliti (2006:9-24), the theory of gender and language pays attention to biases in language use, such as generic pronouns, expressions, sex specifications and lexical gaps, as well as which language tendencies are linked to which gender. In accordance to Litosseliti, Coates (2001:8288-8291) introduces the idea that in some

languages, there are clear phonological, lexical or syntactic contrasts between genders, whereas in others there are mere tendencies for each gender to use specific forms. For example, the languages spoken in many non-industrialized countries are more often gender-exclusive, meaning that exceeding the lexical boundaries of one's gender is strongly condemned by society. In many industrialized countries, however, linguistic differences could be seen as preferential, but men and women simply have a tendency to use different forms.

Coates (2001: 8290-8291) and Talbot (2006: 741) also discuss the linguistic choices made and encouraged by surrounding society, which have a great impact on the formation of a gender identity. There are two popular approaches to viewing the linguistic variation between men and women: the Dominance Approach, which sees linguistic usage as acts of dominance and subordination, and the Difference Approach, which in turn explains the linguistic differences between men and women to be caused by growing up as members of two different subcultures. The early work on language and gender usually focused on language as a dominant-subordinate relationship, according to which men usually dominate conversations by interrupting, delaying responses, being silent or preventing others from participating by talking too much. However, the approach was later criticised as placing men's speech as the norm, whereas women's speech was seen as deviant. The Difference Approach, on the other hand, sees that genders are constructed in discourse and as boys and girls are often separated and treated differently, they adopt the behaviour and linguistic repertoire linked to their genders. Boys, who usually play in large groups with hierarchical social structure, learn to value status and become power-focused. Girls, on the other hand, who tend to play in small groups, learn to value intimacy and solidarity. Therefore, men and women could be seen as members of two distinct subcultures and the communication between the genders as an intercultural communication event.

According to Litosseliti (2006:92-99), the media has a significant role in creating the genders, as it has the power to represent both men and women in a particular way. In the media, the key factor in the formation of a feminine identity seems to be the relationship a woman has with her body, which becomes apparent when looking at the topics of magazine articles and advertorials targeted to women. Most of these offer advice and tips on beauty, sex, health and relationships, thus stressing the idea of a feminine identity

being achieved through the consumption of fashion and beauty products, but also through talking about them. Women's bodies are often passed as objects needing constant work, thus encouraging women to establish a very practical relationship with themselves as things. Women are also often portrayed in relation to others, such as mothers, wives, sex objects and even victims, whereas men are often depicted as independent and confident. However, at the same time it is difficult to know how these messages have influenced individuals exposed to the media.

2.2.2 Agency and women

According to Hewson (2010:13), agency could be described as actions of doing, making things happen, exerting power and controlling things and events. On the contrary, lack of agency is letting things happen to oneself, being the object or being controlled or constrained. Therefore, agency is tightly linked to power and as power is often distributed unevenly: some people have greater agency compared to others.

Hewson (2010:13-14) also explains how the idea of agency has changed and evolved through time. In Ancient Greece, agency was regarded as the privilege of the wise and therefore was also limited to the few. Later on, in Medieval Christian doctrines, human agency was completely replaced by a divine agency, as salvation was only available through the agency of God and not through human deeds. During the Renaissance, however, the ideology of humanism gained popularity again and more emphasis was put on human actions. As a result, people started to believe that events could be altered and circumstances changed through one's actions.

The current perception of the nature of agency is based on the ideas of a British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992:5-24), who discusses the relationship between agency and structure, arguing that the rules and resources of surrounding society limit agency, thus preventing the individual from expressing one's free will. For example, the voice of an individual may not be heard because of his or hers socio-economical or ethnic background, or simply because of the absence of a communicative channel.

According to Hewson (2010:13), there are three different types of agency distinguishable in human interaction. Firstly, there is an *individual agency*, which refers to individuals acting and making decisions. Secondly, humans can also act on behalf of others, for

example officials who are authorized by the government, or employees representing their employers, which is often referred to as *proxy agency.* However, proxy agency does not rule out individual agency entirely, as free will still enables independent decision-making. Thirdly, a *collective agency* refers to groups of individuals acting together, such as firms, states or even social movements.

According to Charrad (2010:517-521), women's agency has been restricted across the history in the contexts of democratization, labour market, state bureaucracy and national debates on citizenship, only to name a few. Some of the challenges have been not having access to communicative channels through which to make their voices heard, but also not having the platforms to confront the power holders. Therefore, women have found international organizations related to human rights, women's rights, cultural rights and minority rights to make claims. Women's agency differs from country to country and therefore the levels of agency should be assessed in relation to the social contexts. For example, as third world countries are often associated with poverty, lack of education and strong traditions, also the women in third world countries are often portrayed as victims, not agents. Their status and role in society is seen as domestic and sexually constrained, unlike the women in industrialized countries.

As Gonzales Ramos and Torrado Martin-Palomino (2015:2) and Charrad (2010:519) point out, in spite of the large number of women in higher education and political positions today, there is still discrimination against women in the professional world. Women have more difficulties in career progression and therefore there are also fewer women in senior positions. In addition, there is still a pay gap between male and female employees and women tend to receive lower recognitions for their contributions. This has been explained with the tendency of women to adopt the dominant rules and norms of patriarchal society. In other words, women learn to use their agency within the parameters of society, thus functioning at the levels accessible to them.

3 GOALS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research questions

The aim of the study is to analyse how agency and womanhood are represented in two selected Disney songs, both sung by the heroine of the story. After the analysis, the next step is to compare the earliest and the latest Disney heroines in terms of how the approaches to agency and femininity have evolved from the late 1930s to the present day. In practise, the focus will be put on agency markers and the choices of words and metaphors in the texts, through which the differences and similarities of the two Disney heroines will be studied.

The questions the study is interested in are the following:

1. What sorts of agents are the heroines depicted as in the song lyrics?
2. How is womanhood represented through the selection of words?

3.2 Materials and data

Because of the limitations of the extent of the study, the data for the present study consists of the lyrics of two Disney songs: *Some Day My Prince Will Come* from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) and *Let It Go* from Frozen (2013). The selection of these two songs as the points of comparison was made due to them representing the earliest and latest heroines of Disney production. The data for the analysis was collected by retrieving song lyrics from the official Disney Sing-Along videos and the films. In addition, multiple websites were consulted to ensure that the lyrics are as close to the original as possible.

These two songs will be analysed in terms of what agency markers are present, as well as how the lexico-syntactic choices portray feminine identity and womanhood. Lastly, the two Disney heroines will be compared to each other in order to see whether the early Disney heroines are significantly different from their modern-day equivalents.

3.3   Method of Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a qualitative method of analysis, which is interested in how language is used in social contexts. CDA covers not only linguistics, but also social sciences, and is based on the conception that language and the world are in a constant state of interaction with each other; whereas language usage shapes and builds the surrounding world, the world affects the language usage respectively. CDA focuses especially on language as a tool of conveying ideologies and practising power, which is why it is a popular method in studying the representations of various ethnic and gender identities. (Lehtonen 2014; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 60-64.)

In the present study, CDA functions as an assisting tool for examining the lexical and grammatical choices in the selected song lyrics and paralleling them with the theses of the studies on gendered language and agency. The linguistic characteristics analysed to interpret the acts of agency and portrayals of womanhood will follow the tools of text analysis proposed by Fairclough (1992), including the observation of interactional control (the relationship between speakers), ethos (how one's identity is constructed through language usage and aspects of the body), metaphors, wording and grammar. In practise, word choices will be assessed in terms of what they signify, why they were chosen and how they reflect the identity of the speaker and the social processes behind it.

4   FROM A PRINCESS TO A QUEEN

4.1   Some Day My Prince Will Come

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (released in 1937) is the first princess animation film from Disney and it is based on a German folktale in Grimm's collection of fairytales. Snow White, the beautiful and kind-hearted princess, flees into a forest when her jealous stepmother, the Queen, tries to kill her for being the fairest one of all. In the forest, she is befriended by seven dwarves, who she takes care of. However, eventually the Queen manages to trick her into biting a poisonous apple and her fate is to wait for her prince to save her with a true love's kiss. (Disney Official 2014.)

Some Day My Prince Will Come is sung twice during the film by the protagonist Snow White, first after recalling her meeting with the prince, and second while baking a pie with the help of her animal friends. The lyrics will be analysed in two parts. First, the agent markers will be discussed, after which there will be an analysis on the lexico-syntactic choices in the lyrics. The lyrics can be seen in Appendix 1.

4.1.1 Agency

As agency derives from the ability to act, exert power and control, the first step is to look at person deixes, which indicate both the active and passive parties. In *Some Day My Prince Will Come* (see Appendix 1), there are three agent parties: Snow White, the prince and the collective agent group formed by these two together (*we*). The princess seems to show agency mostly in the form of possession, as she uses the terms *my prince* and *my dreams*. *My prince* indicates that either there is just one prince for her, or that the prince in question does not belong to anyone else but her. Also, *my dreams* refer to a personal experience of wanting something, thus excluding the wants of others. On the contrary, instead of a shared home, she wishes to be taken to *his castle*, which in turn assigns the control, even responsibility, of their living to the prince. This could be an echo of the patriarchal norms of the late 1930s, when women quite literally joined the families of their husbands, or it could be due to the time period of the story. The only direct act of agency is in verse 4 (*I know*), which shows her certainty in them being happy together for eternity.

On the other hand, the prince, although possessed by the princess in the eyes of the princess, seems to be the stronger party of the two. First of all, the prince is in control of the arrival (*my prince will come*) and, therefore, it is worth questioning whether the princess will wait forever if the prince does not come. Secondly, in verse 9 it is also suggested that her dreams, including wedding bells and love, depend on the prince. In other words, even though the story is told from the perspective of the princess, the prince is a notable agent.

The collective agency is the most visible party, as most of the activities are done as *we*. However, most of these cases occur naturally as shared activities (*we'll meet, we'll go*) and therefore there is necessarily no bias in the language selection in favour of any

gender. The only distinct case is in verse 6, where the princess determinedly includes the prince in the act of finding their love anew. In this case the princess acts as the voice of both parties, thus deciding that the prince should feel the same way.

In conclusion, the princess does not seem to be a strong agent, mainly because the fulfilment of her dreams and happiness depends on the prince. This reflects the feminine representations of the media discussed above, where women are often shown in relation to others.

4.1.2   Representations of womanhood

In *Some Day My Prince Will Come* (see Appendix 1), femininity is constructed by the use of soft themes, such as love and a wedding, but also a sense of fantasy, which is manifested through the use of metaphors and vague time deixes.

The most prominent feature in the lyrics is the lack of precision. For example, the most repeated time deixis, *some day*, is quite ambiguous as it refers to an unknown day in the future, which may or may not come. Another example of a vague time deixis is in verse 4 (*to be happy forever, I know*), where *forever* brings a sense of fantasy to the song. Prolonged time deixes, such as *forever* and *ever after*, are often used in the endings of fairytales as signs of a reward after the hardships in the story, even though in reality emotions and moods are known to fluctuate. Although the sense of fantasy is in keeping with the context of a fairytale, there is also the underlying question of whether it also contributes to the portrayal of women as naïve daydreamers out of touch with reality.

The prince is mentioned only by his title, which emphasises the significance of the deeper meaning of the title. On one hand, the royal title seems to be in keeping with the setting and milieu of the story, in which case the word choice is not significant. On the other hand, as the princess repeatedly claims him her own (*my prince*), the title could be referring to a larger concept of an ideal man or a future husband. Regardless, the person of the prince seems slightly irrelevant in the lyrics. In many fairytales, becoming a part of a royal family seems to be the dream of many. The royalty represent better life, luxury, freedom and power, whereas the rest of the populace must settle for conditions that are less appealing. That is why in this case the title of the prince could simply be the deliberating force to banish all the hardships from the life of the princess.

There are also several nature metaphors. First of all, *spring* is often used as a metaphor for a new beginning, as it is the time of the year when the nature revives from hibernation with renewed spirits. Spring is also known as the season of love, not only due to Valentine's Day in February, but also because of various spring rites. Singing birds could be a metaphor for happiness and freedom, but also depict delicateness and grace, as birds are often regarded as graceful and dainty creatures.

The theme of dreaming about a wedding reflects quite traditional views on the role of a woman. The princess seems to be a future homemaker waiting for the day that is the beginning of her *happily ever after*, implying that marriage is the end of all suffering and the key to happiness the same way as Heaven is often depicted as the blissful reward after death. Once again the lyrics emphasize the construction of a feminine identity in relation to others, in this case the prince.

4.2 Let It Go

Frozen (2013) is the latest film from Disney featuring princesses and it is based on Hans Christian Andersen's The Snow Queen. In Frozen, Princess Anna of Arendelle sets off on an epic journey to find her sister Queen Elsa, who has run away after accidentally freezing the entire kingdom with her magical, yet uncontrollable powers. Elsa, having had to hide her powers from others since being a little girl, wishes to be left alone as she does not want to hurt anyone by accident, but in the end the love between the sisters allows her to control her powers and return back to Arendelle. (Disney Official Website 2014.)

Let It Go is sung by Elsa when she flees Arendelle after causing panic in her coronation by almost hurting people with her command over ice and snow. The musical sequence is accompanied by impressive visual effects, which further emphasize the evolution of the character. In terms of analysis, the procedure will follow the same pattern as in the case of *Some Day My Prince Will Come*, hence focusing first on the agency and secondly on the representations of femininity. The lyrics can be seen in Appendix 2.

4.2.1 Agency

In *Let It Go* (see Appendix 2), the acts of agency could be divided into three phases. In the first phase (verses 1–12), Elsa is shown as weak and lacking in agency, as she seems disappointed in herself for not being able to keep her powers as a secret. Especially in verses 8–12, the voice commanding her to keep the people away seems to be an echo of the words said by her father in the early stages of the animation film. The second phase, the liberation, is in verse 13 where Elsa responds to her father's voice by stating that her secret is out (*Well now they know*). This line is the breaking point of the song, as after this Elsa takes the agency and shows empowerment until the end of the song, this being the third phase.

Throughout the song, there seems to be a battle between the voices of Elsa and the others, thus making the song multilayered and complex. There are voices that represent surrounding society (***you**'ll never see me cry*), Elsa's father (*conceal, don't feel*) and Elsa herself. At the beginning of the song, the person deixes related directly to Elsa are weak (*I've tried, looks like I'm*), whereas the other utterances are without a clear agent or imperative forms.

However, towards the end of the song Elsa starts to make bold statements about her status in the world and in relation to other people, consequently gaining control of herself and simultaneously silencing the voices of others. This can be seen from the clusters of first person deixes towards the end of the song. For example, phrases such as *I don't care*, *I'm free* and *here I stand and here I'll stay* convey the idea that Elsa has moved from lacking agency into owning agency.

In conclusion, the song shows an evolution in the character of Elsa from a timid girl to an independent woman. In contrast to Snow White, Elsa does not want to be seen in relation to others but as an individual, therefore also possessing the power to change herself and alter the circumstances. These attributes will be further discussed in the next chapter.

4.2.2   Representations of womanhood

Let It Go (See Appendix 2) is a musical sequence, which depicts two distinct processes in the evolution of the heroine. The first one of these processes is the shift from an insecure individual to a strong and confident character. The second process is the liberation from being mentally and physically captured to finally deciding to live by one's own rules.

As the story of Frozen (2013) revolves around a wintry theme in accordance to its name, it is no wonder that the lyrics also have many references to snow and ice. Therefore, although these forces of nature could be seen as more masculine than feminine, there is not necessarily any bias towards any gender in the selection of these elements. However, due to Elsa being one with these forces, they reveal something about the way she perceives herself as an individual and a woman.

By observing the behaviour of wintry elements in the song, the emotional journey of Elsa from a scared, overwhelmed individual to a strong, independent woman becomes evident. At the beginning of the song, the elements are described as ominous forces (*the wind is howling like this swirling storm inside*, 5) that have taken control over Elsa. However, as soon as Elsa accepts her powers as part of her self (*I am one with the wind and sky*, 31), the forces suddenly become her strength (verses 37-39). Especially the last two verses of the chorus (*Let the storm rage on, The cold never bothered me anyway!*) represent Elsa's victory over the circumstances.

Let It Go is also a story of not having to please everyone else at the expense of one's true self. For example, in verse 10 Elsa sings about her always having to *be the good girl* who does what she is told. In verse 44, however, she acknowledges the role she was pushed upon and declares *the perfect girl* gone. In the same way, in verses 26-29 she refuses to live by the rules set by others and in turn decides to start using her powers instead of hiding them.

As can be seen, the present analysis on representations of womanhood in language usage is concordant with the analysis on agency, as they both show a curve of changes in the character. Queen Elsa, the controller of the ice and snow, is not a damsel-in-distress but a

powerful being, who realizes that her *happily ever after* stems from her own perceptions of herself.

4.3   Comparison between the Princess and the Queen

When comparing the lyrics of *Some Day My Prince Will Come* and *Let It Go*, the progress of a Disney heroine over the course of over 70 years is easy to see. Snow White, the earliest princess, seems to represent the more traditional and patriarchal ideas on femininity, whereas Queen Elsa goes through a transformation from a restrained character to a sovereign individual.

In terms of agency, Snow White seems content with her situation as the waiting party whereas Elsa feels anxiety in being controlled by outer forces and searches for freedom. In *Some Day My Prince Will Come,* the person deixes show that Snow White forms her identity in relation to the prince, who is the supporting force in charge of all the changes, including the happiness of the princess. In *Let It Go*, in contrast, Elsa frees herself from other people and finally starts to see herself as the key to happiness. This interpretation is supported by the clusters of first person deixes towards the end of the song, accompanied by powerful choice of words (*I'm free, I don't care*).

Concerning the representations of femininity, Snow White is more of a daydreamer, who fantasizes about her wedding and all the magical elements related to the day. There is no transformation in the character, as she seems to settle for the situation she is in. Elsa, on the other hand, is tired of being treated as a monster and goes through a mental (and a physical) transformation during the song. Instead of hiding, she decides to own the powers she has, therefore turning her curse into an asset. This could be seen as a metaphor for accepting oneself and using the individual differences as one's strength.

5   CONCLUSION

The goal of the present study was to observe how agency and womanhood are depicted in the lyrics of two iconic Disney songs, *Some Day My Prince Will Come* from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) and *Let It Go* from Frozen (2013). As the selected

two songs were released 76 years apart and therefore stood as the two ends of a spectrum, it was also possible to examine the evolution of a Disney heroine from the late 1930s to the present day.

The study shows that in terms of the portrayal of femininity and agency, Snow White and Elsa are quite the opposites of each other. Whereas Snow White shows qualities traditionally regarded as more feminine and seems to be lacking in agency, Elsa shows more masculine attributes and acts as a strong agent. In *Some Day My Prince Will Come* the views on women are quite traditional; a woman should be a feminine, delicate homemaker, who is passively waiting for her wedding day. The responsibility of freeing her from a stressing situation is trusted upon the prince, who rescues the princess and offers her everlasting happiness. In general, Snow White seems to construct her identity in relation to others. In contrast, the theme of *Let It Go* does not revolve around love but the release from and victory over an oppressive situation. At the beginning of the song Elsa seems to be under the pressure of surrounding society as she is being forced to hide what makes her different, thus lacking in agency. However, over the course of the song she decides to set herself free from the standards set by others and take control over her own identity and life. As for the representation of womanhood, Elsa is more androgynous due to there being fewer elements that link the character to any gender in particular. The emphasis in the lyrics is put on self-discovery and the struggle for independence, which depict a picture of a strong individual who wishes not to be defined by other people.

As the extent of the study was limited to only two songs, these results act as mere guidelines and more in-depth studies should be conducted in order to examine how well these characters represent not only the women of their time, but also women in general. Fictitious characters, especially animated, are known to often depict a somewhat stereotypical, exaggerated and even unrealistic image of their source of inspiration and therefore it can be argued whether the princesses serve as adequate points of comparison when analysing womanhood and femininity. Nevertheless, as the exchange of influences between the princess characters and real-life women has been constant for decades, the echoes of certain attitudes and perceptions on womanhood are surely to be found in these characters. Also, due to Critical Discourse Analysis being a method that is unable to exclude subjectivity entirely, these results cannot be generalized. Therefore the present

study functions as a continuation to a vast area of research, thus offering another view on the nature of the Disney princess.

Overall, the present study shows the opposite ends of a timeline of 76 years, thus leaving room for further examination of the phases in between. Also, as the long line of Disney princesses is still ongoing, the direction of these characters will offer material for future analyses as well. For now, based on the results of the study, the differences in the royal titles of Snow White and Queen Elsa seem to be quite appropriate; whereas the women in the 1930s might have been just princesses waiting to be rescued, the modern-day women are the sovereign queens of their own lives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

Some Day My Prince Will Come

1 Some day my prince will come
2 Some day we'll meet again
3 And away to his castle we'll go
4 To be happy forever I know

5 Some day when spring is here
6 We'll find our love anew
7 And the birds will sing
8 And wedding bells will ring
9 Some day when my dreams come true

Appendix 2.

Let It Go

1 The snow glows white on the mountain tonight
2 Not a footprint to be seen.
3 A kingdom of isolation,
4 and it looks like I'm the Queen
5 The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside
6 Couldn't keep it in;
7 Heaven knows I've tried

8 Don't let them in,
9 don't let them see
10 Be the good girl you always have to be
11 Conceal, don't feel,
12 don't let them know
13 Well now they know

14 Let it go, let it go
15 Can't hold it back anymore
16 Let it go, let it go
17 Turn away and slam the door
18 I don't care
19 what they're going to say
20 Let the storm rage on.
21 The cold never bothered me anyway

22 It's funny how some distance
23 Makes everything seem small
24 And the fears that once controlled me
25 Can't get to me at all

26 It's time to see what I can do
27 To test the limits and break through
28 No right, no wrong, no rules for me,
29 I'm free!

30 Let it go, let it go
31 I am one with the wind and sky
32 Let it go, let it go
33 You'll never see me cry
34 Here I stand
35 And here I'll stay

36 Let the storm rage on
37 My power flurries through the air into the ground
38 My soul is spiraling in frozen fractals all around
39 And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast
40 I'm never going back, the past is in the past

41 Let it go, let it go
42 And I'll rise like the break of dawn
43 Let it go, let it go
44 That perfect girl is gone
45 Here I stand
46 In the light of day
47 Let the storm rage on

48 The cold never bothered me anyway!