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THE CHARACTERIZATIONS OF MERIDA IN DISNEY'S 2012 BRAVE

Oleh:

**Kadek Rossinta Dewi¹, Ni Komang Arie Suwastini², I Ketut Supir³,
Ida Ayu Made Istri Utami⁴**

^{1,2,4}English Language Education, Language and Arts Faculty, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Singaraja, 81116, Indonesia

³Visual Communication Design, Language and Arts Faculty, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Singaraja, 81116, Indonesia

¹rossintadewi@undiksha.ac.id, ²arie.suwastini@undiksha.ac.id, ³ketut.supir@undiksha.ac.id, ⁴istriutami@undiksha.ac.id

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Abstrak

Pengungkapan kepribadian karakter utama dalam sebuah narasi mempengaruhi alur cerita dan bagaimana karakter utama mencapai tujuannya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penokohan Merida sebagai pemeran utama wanita dalam film Disney Brave (2012). Dengan menerapkan analisis tekstual dari McKee (2003), penelitian ini menggunakan pembacaan dekat untuk mengidentifikasi penokohan Merida, sedangkan segmentasi plot dari Bordwell, Thompson & Smith (2017) digunakan untuk memecah narasi menjadi unit analisis untuk memudahkan pengumpulan data dan analisis data. Studi tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa Merida adalah seorang putri yang ceroboh, pemberontak namun pemberani. Dia kemudian belajar untuk bertanggung jawab sesuai dengan posisinya sebagai seorang putri dan cita-citanya sebagai pribadi. Jadi, sementara kecerobohan dan karakter pemberontak membawa masalah, ketika dia berani belajar untuk bertanggung jawab, dia bisa bangkit dari masalahnya dan menjadi orang yang lebih dewasa.

Kata kunci: *karakterisasi, putri Disney, film, tokoh utama*

Abstract

Revelations of the main character's personality in a narrative affect the narrative's plot and how the main character achieve its goal. This study aims to describe Merida's characterization as the main female character in the Disney film Brave (2012). By implementing textual analysis from McKee (2003), the present study employed close reading for identifying Merida's characterizations, while plot segmentation from Bordwell, Thompson & Smith (2017) was employed to break the narrative into units of analysis to facilitate data collection and data analysis. The study revealed that Merida was a careless, rebellious yet brave princess. She then learned to be responsible according to her position as a princess and her aspiration as a person. Thus, while her carelessness and rebel-

rious character brought her problems, when she bravely learned to take responsibility, she could rise from her problems and become a more mature person.

Keywords: *characterizations, Disney princess, film, main character*

INTRODUCTION

Disney's 2012 *Brave* depicts Merida as a princess who refuses to follow the expected behaviors of a graceful princess (Ramadhanty, 2020). Refusing to dress elegantly and learn needlework, Merida preferred horse-riding and archery, distressing her mother, Queen Elinor, who planned to marry Merida off for diplomatic purposes (Aprilia & Sutrisno, 2020; Khairnisa, 2018). At some points during her rebellious out- rage, Merida put her family in trouble that required her to take responsibility. From this, she became a princess who responsibly balanced her diplomatic duties and aspirations (Rakhmawati, 2015). Aprilia & Sutrisno (2020) analyzed Merida's characterizations and revealed her as fearless, caring, stubborn, reckless, mature, and responsible. Likewise, Khairnisa (2018) compares Merida's and Moana's characterizations, and both the characters were argued to have strong leadership because of their bravery. From a feminist perspective, Merida's characterizations have been deemed representative of the film's title, highlighting Merida's bravery and responsibility as the main character of a feminist (Aninda et al., 2019; Itmeizeh, 2017), while her boyish characterizations became the representation of gender deconstructions (Dundes, 2020).

Characterizations of a character in a narrative affect the plot development because they provide motives and plausibility for a character's actions that shape the plot (Aquino, 1996; Gill, 1995; Kennedy & Gioia, 1995; Putri, 2017). While bravery has become the pivotal point for Merida's characterizations in most studies (Aninda et al., 2019; Aprilia & Sutrisno, 2020; Dundes, 2020; Khairnisa, 2018), the present study takes side with Rakhmawati (2015) and Itmeizeh (2017) who place responsibility as the key in Merida's characterizations in the film's plot. Indeed, bravery becomes the critical per-

sonality in Merida's role as the main character. The trait became the strength of her rebellious careless character because it provides the mentality to deal with any situation and calm a person when solving a problem (Kinsella et al. (2017).

However, the present study argues that it is the responsibility that determines the main character's success in achieving her goal, that is, to attain freedom in deciding whom and when she would marry. Without the growth of responsible traits in Merida's characterizations, her bravery would only fuel her carelessness and push her to be rebellious at the cost of her kingdom's welfare. This study aims to highlight Merida's growing responsibility for her brave recklessness and rebellions as the characterizations that shape the narrative's plot. By doing so, the study can show the role of character and their characterization in shaping a narrative while highlighting the moral of the story of how responsibility can guide bravery into positive impacts.

METHOD

The present study was designed as qualitative interpretive research, where the data analysis integrates the data collection, data classification, data display, and conclusion drawing into a simultaneous interactive process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) causing the pole inequality relations between men and women. Therefore, in this study wanted to dismantle the detail view of some theories, both social and feminist about gender relations in the family. Each of these theories (structural functional, conflict and feminist. The analysis was conducted textually, following McKee's definition of textual analysis (2003). An analysis is conducted by analysing the intrinsic elements to find the ideology delivered through the text. The subject of this research was a film entitled *Brave*, directed by

Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman, produced and distributed by Disney in 2012. The film lasts 1 hour, 34 minutes, and 12 seconds. The object of the study was Merida's characterizations, especially those related directly to the plot development, namely her recklessness, rebellious traits, brave dispositions, and a growing sense of responsibility.

The researchers of this study were the main instrument of data collection, data categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing. At the same time, field notes and tables acted as supporting instruments during the data collection and data categorization. The data collection method included close reading to understand the text in general, where in this case, the close reading was conducted through repeated film streaming. The next step was segmenting the narrative into sequences and subsequences to divide the narrative into manageable units of analysis (Bordwell, Thompson, & Smith, 2017). A sequence is usually a significant event in the narrative, while the subsequence is the detailed events composing the event of its sequence (Dewi et al., 2021). After the segmentation was completed, the study continued by taking notes of subsequences that contained characterizations of Merida, especially those that depict Merida as reckless, rebellious, brave, and responsible. In many cases, a single subsequence can reveal more than characterizations of the main character. The collected data were then categorized following these four characterizations. The data display presents the proofs of the four characterizations and elaborates how scenes in specific segments can be interpreted as revealing Merida as reckless, rebellious, brave, or responsible. These interactive processes of collecting, categorizing, and elaborating the data led to a trustworthy conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that Merida's characterizations as reckless, rebellious, brave, and responsible are depicted in multiple subsequences, presented in the following table 1.

Table 1. Merida's Characterizations in Disney's 2012 *Brave*

No	Charac-terizations	Appearance	Frequency
1.	Reckless	4e, 5b, 9c, 9e, 10d, 12c, 12d, 12g	8
2.	Rebellious	6a, 6f, 6i, 6j	4
3.	Brave	5c, 5d, 5f, 13h, 15c, 15d	6
4.	Responsible	12h, 12i, 14a, 14b, 15f, 16b, 16h	7

From the table above, it can be seen that Merida was depicted as a reckless teenager in at least eight subsequences, a rebellious daughter in at least four subsequences, and a brave child in at least six subsequences. In comparison, her sense of responsibility started to show late in the narrative and is reflected in at least seven subsequences.

1. Merida as a Reckless Princess

According to White (1961), being reckless is being ignorance about appearance, the environment, or how people think. Adyatmasani (2021) and Putri (2021) argue that a reckless character is usually ignorant of others' appraisals and careless in his or her actions. Ignorance towards rules and norms can lead to problems. Princess Merida's carelessness in the film *Brave* (2012) caused her to fall into a complicated problem, as presented in subsequences 4e, 5b, 9c, 9e, 10d, 12c, 12d, and 12g.

Subsequence 4e contains a scene where Queen Eleanor tried to educate Merida about etiquette. In this scene, Merida looked overwhelmed and sometimes had difficulty following the Queen's orders to become the perfect princess. Merida's facial expression shows that she lacked enthusiasm when her mother trained her. Merida often forgets how to eat her food politely so as not to look greedy and also in appearance. During a routine gathering for the kingdom, Merida casually forgot her position as a princess while walking, which was finally reprimanded by her mother. Merida's expression was seen when she was lazy and made several mistakes while practicing with her mother. A medium shot shows how Merida acts in response to

her mother's attitude towards her.

In subsequence 5b, Merida sometimes went down the stairs by sliding on the banister and ran off with the fruit that her maid brought. The characteristics displayed by Merida received a negative response from her mother, who thought she was lazy by using a medium shot that showed the annoyance on her mother's face. Merida also often committed mistakes when invited to practice public speaking with her mother, saying, "*This is all for naught.*" The background music is also a little silly to show Merida's point of view that it looks careless.

Arriving in the middle of the forest, she found a hut. There, a witch in disguise was shown against the background of the sound of carving wood. In the subsequence 9e, even though she showed a slightly surprised face at the Witch's presence, Merida still wanted to ask the Witch for help to change her mother's mindset and cancel the betrothal. Unfortunately, the Witch was wrong in casting a spell on the cake Merida gave to her mother contained in the subsequence 10d. With a confused face, Merida wanted to ask about the spell the Witch gave, but it was too late.

The Witch : What was that thing about the spell?

Merida : Did you say something about the spell?

(Disney, *Brave*, 2012: subsequence 10d)

The conversation shows Merida's carelessness Merida about the crucial spell. The Witch's line "*What was that thing about the spell*" implied that she was about to warn Merida about the cautions. However, the Witch had not figured it out. When Merida wants to confirm the spell contained in the cake, the Witch and her hut have disappeared without a trace, with Merida's expression looking confused and the music starting to fade. Despite the confusion, driven by her intention to change Queen Elinor's mind, she gave the cake to her mother. After her mother felt nauseous and dizzy, the spell turned her into a bear instead of changing Queen Elinor's decision. Merida's hasty action brought unintended calamity. Merida's carelessness is also shown in the analysis of characteristics con-

tained in the analysis of the film *Brave* (2012) by Aprilia and Sutrisno (2020). Merida's careless characteristics is displayed starting from using the abilities of the Witch she finds in the middle of the forest.

The subsequent careless characterization is in subsequences 12c, 12d, and 12g. Especially in the subsequence 12c when Princess Merida wants to find the Witch she met in the forest to turn her mother back into a human. Nevertheless, unfortunately, the hut was empty, and there were only three bottles of potion left to give her a hint. Lighting also looks minimal or dark because the atmosphere at that time was quiet and uninhabited. The subsequence 12d shows that Merida threw the first bottle, and a witch's shadow appeared, giving incomplete and unclear information. Merida looked panicked by showing her wrinkled face and eye movements that began to tremble, supported by a quick camera movement. The addition of up-to-beat instruments matched the panic atmosphere at that time. Panic causes Merida to throw all the potions that cause an explosion that scorches the hut contained in the subsequence 12g. Thankfully, her mother, who was a bear, protected her from the rubble. The explosion implies that Merida was a troublemaker, which implies her careless characterization.

Merida's disobedience towards her lesson, her intention to change her mother's opinions, and her spontaneous experiment in the Witch's cottage displayed her carelessness. Putri (2021) analyzed similar characteristics in *Frozen 2* (2019), which displays a good, independent, and strong princess who does not escape carelessness and is also referred to as a trouble maker. Adyatmasani (2021) also found that careless characterization can be seen in how Mulan in Disney's 2020 Live-Action *Mulan*. It happened when Mulan chased the runaway chicken without paying attention to its surroundings. She ended up disturbing neighbors, breaking statues, and dropping fruit baskets.

2. Merida as a Rebellious Princess

It is common for characters to show rebellious characteristics in films; everyone has these characteristics. Rebellious characters usually have very high self-esteem and prefer their path

in life rather than being determined. According to McDermott (2001), Raharjo (2017), and Rohde et al. (2003), rebellion is an attitude of individuals or groups who fight or try to change the system of government or regulations that exist in that place. Rebels also represent the ego of a character who can also be said to be stubborn. Rebellious characteristics also display a character who displays toughness and a mission in life without being forced by others (McDermott, 2001; Raharjo, 2017; Rohde et al., 2003). In the characterization of Merida's character, rebellious characteristics are displayed. Moreover, Kurniawati (2020) also emphasized that Merida's characteristics that show a rebellious side can be seen in how she rejects or denies existing regulations in her kingdom. The pressures put on her by her mother also made her rebellious side stronger.

Merida's rebellious characteristics are displayed in subsequence 6a when it is seen that Merida has just returned from riding her horse while shooting. The family was having dinner with the camera's point of view pointing at Merida, who is increasingly changing with a zoom into her family. Merida's presence also made all of her family happy and excited, especially the response of her three younger brothers. Unfortunately, Merida accidentally put her arrow on the table. Her mother strictly forbade this who would scold her for breaking the rules as a princess. Merida is also often warned by her mother not to put weapons on the dining table.

Queen Elinor : Merida, a princess does not place her weapons on the table.

Merida : Mum! It's just my bow.

Queen Elinor : A princess should not have a weapon, in my opinion.

King Fergus : Leave her be. Princess or not, learning to fight is essential.

(Disney, *Brave*, 2012: subsequence 6a)

Her mother's anger made Merida furious, and she rebelled to ask for justice why a princess should not do this. Questioning authority is one of the characteristics of the rebellious character, as argued by Kartini (2020). In her study on Disney's *Tangled*, she observed Rapunzel's rebellious character when she argued about

something that Goethel refused to listen. Similarly, Merida's facial expression shows she resisted her mother's scolding. The camera angle that originally featured Merida and Queen Elinor immediately changed to King Fergus, which also defends her from the Queen so that her mother would not scold her again just because of the problem of putting arrows on the dining table.

In the next scene in the subsequence 6f, Merida rebelled when she discovered the betrothal with the prince chosen by her father and mother. Merida was very shocked by the news and refused the betrothal. Although her mother said a princess should do it, Merida strongly rejected the news and rebelled. Merida's sad face signaled the rejection. Merida's facial expressions are apparent because of the shooting that highlights her face. Her raised voice with the melancholy background instrument also supports the scene. Raising the voice performed belongs to the rebellious characteristics as shown in the analysis of the film *Brave* (2012) by Pradani (2016), where Merida defends herself with anger and uses high intonation as a form of rejection.

Queen Elinor : The lords are presenting their sons as suitors for your betrothal.

Merida : What?

Queen Elinor : The clans have accepted!

King Fergus : What? I...you...see...Elinor!

Queen Elinor : Honestly, Merida! I don't know why you're acting this way. This year each clan will present a suitor to compete in the games for your hand.

Merida : I'm the only princess that just does what she's told!

Queen Elinor : A princess does not raise her voice. Merida, this is what you've been preparing for your whole life.

Merida : No! What you've been preparing me for my whole life! I won't go through with it! You can't make me!

Queen Elinor : Merida! (Shouting in annoyance).
(Disney, *Brave*, 2012: subsequence 6f)

The excerpt above shows how Merida defended herself, as she loved archery, making her mother even angrier. By saying, “*No! What you’ve been preparing me for my whole life! I won’t go through with it! You can’t make me!*” As the camera was zoomed in on her face, Merida showed her disappointment and anger at the betrothal. The rejection was supported by Merida’s action, where she immediately left the dining room and her parents.

In the subsequence 6i, a scene shows Merida forcing herself to participate in an archery contest. Merida proposed a plan to hold an archery contest to see the archery abilities of the three princes. While no prince managed to show their archery skills, Merida jumped into the contest as she mastered archery. Although she was allowed to practice archery, she was strictly forbidden to present herself as a princess with armor. In subsequence 6j, Merida forcefully tore her gown, which was too tight so she could shoot her arrow comfortably while saying, “*Curse this dress!*” Previously, her mother tightened the dress to make Merida look more feminine than she was. This incident can be regarded as a form of rebellion by Merida because she wants to defend her freedom. With bright lighting and a point of view that focuses on the serious expression displayed by Merida, it uses extreme close-ups and slow motion to show her archery process. After shooting the arrow, the camera zoomed in on the face of Merida and Queen Elinor, facing each other with angry expressions. It can be seen that Merida is afraid of going against her mother, but Merida firmly wants to defend herself and get freedom in making decisions.

Queen Elinor : What are you doing? Merida!

Merida : Curse this dress!

Queen Elinor : Merida, stop this! I forbid it!

Merida : ... (Continue archery).

(Disney, *Brave*, 2012: subsequence 6i)

Merida was determined to win herself over the suitors with her excellence in archery and ignored Queen Elinor’s order, “*Merida, stop this! I forbid it!*” Therefore, Merida acted as a rebel by ignoring her feminine image and using archery to go against her mother’s plan for her future. After shooting the arrow, the camera zoomed in

on the face of Merida and Queen Elinor, facing each other with angry expressions. It can be seen that Merida is afraid of going against her mother, but Merida firmly wants to defend herself and get freedom in making decisions. Arcadia (2018) identified similar refusal behavior towards parents’ plans in Disney’s *Moana*. *Moana* and Merida are also similar in their temporary obedience before rebelling.

3. Merida as a Brave Princess

Brave is a characteristic that represents a fearless attitude and ambition to overcome all obstacles that exist. Kugel et al. (2017) and Rate et al. (2007) define bravery as a fearless trait despite pressure or threat. While synonymous with courage and heroism, bravery is related to taking dangerous action to gain desired result (Kugel et al., 2017; Rate et al., 2007).

Princess Merida displayed the brave characterization in subsequences 5c and 5d when she spent her time off from training. The activities carried out by Merida are pretty extreme in this scene, from riding her horse while shooting at targets that have been installed along the forest road with the camera angle focusing only on Merida and her horse. By showing an expression that looks very happy and enjoying the atmosphere accompanied by the background music, it also shows how Merida is in archery while riding a horse. According to Suwastini et al. (2019), the characterization brought by McCandless in a book entitled *Into the Wild*, where the main character departs on a journey to Mexico just by taking a canoe and rowing through the Colorado River. As Merida was practicing archery alone in the forest, free from her mother’s supervision, it belongs to the characteristics of being brave, as shown in the analysis of the film *Aladdin* (2019) by Ambarita and Efrata (2019). The analysis shows the figure of Princess Jasmine, who is brave in making decisions so that she can be herself without being controlled by others.

Merida was a princess who loved adventure, proven from the time she climbed the high and steep of the Crone’s Tooth. Climbing without safety tools emphasized Merida’s expertise. In addition, Merida also drinks water from the springs in the Fire Falls waterfall. The film was shot using a long shot and changed into a medi-

um, highlighting the high and steep waterfall. However, Merida looked satisfied with her sparkling eyes and a wide smile. The background music in the scene is also very fitting with the beautiful lyrics, representing Merida's freedom and courage. His father also said that only strong and brave people could reach and drink the spring in response to Merida's courage in facing the challenge. Following Kugel et al. (2017), Rate et al. (2007), and Suwastini, Utami, et al. (2020) traits of bravery, Merida's intense and risky activity in the forest and the waterfall reflect her brave characterizations.

Merida's brave characteristics are also found in the subsequence 13h, where Merida meets Mor'du, the evil bear in this scene. At the time, Merida and her mother were exploring the forest, searching for clues to release the spell. A blue wisp led them to go somewhere. When they arrived, it turned out that the place directed by Blue Wisp was an abandoned kingdom that confused Merida and her mother. Parts of the castle had collapsed, and the scratches resembling a bear's claws attracted Merida's attention the most. After looking deeper and saying, "*The prince became... Mor'du*", Merida accidentally heard a familiar breath. When she turned her body, it turned out that Mor'du was behind her and ready to attack her, as shown by using extreme close-ups. Merida's confused expression immediately changed to surprise when she saw Mor'du. Merida fearlessly fought Mor'du with her arrows and tried to distract him so she could get away from the place. The resistance carried out by Merida belongs to the characteristics of being brave, as explained by (Kugel et al., 2017; Rate et al., 2007).

Due to a misunderstanding in the betrothal process held by the four clans, the clans began to fight. The brave thing that Merida did was in the subsequences 15c and 15d, which featured a scene where Merida wanted to mediate the problem. There, Merida gave a speech that calms the atmosphere by using a medium shot to clarify Merida's character when convincing the three clans. Merida also managed to convince them to stop their fighting. In addition, Merida also said people's freedom to love is necessary without coercion. Even though Merida is a little nervous and looks scared, she went on with her

speech to prevent the clash, reflecting the traits of the bravery of Kugel et al. (2017) and Rate et al. (2007). The prevention of war carried out by Merida belongs to the characteristics of being brave, as shown in the analysis of the film *Pocahontas* (1995) by Aryangga and Nurmaily (2017), which features a princess named Pocahontas who bravely makes a speech to prevent war from occurring.

4. Merida as a Responsible Princess

Responsible is a characteristic that displays the side of obligations someone must carry out. Being responsible is a characteristic that shows someone to do something that must be accounted for from how to accept responsibility for one's actions, words, and deeds (Bear et al., 2003; Neves, 2015). Esianita & Widyawati (2020) also said that responsibility is a sense of carrying or having an activity or work that must be borne. Princess Merida also displays some responsible characteristics.

The scene that displays responsible characteristics began to appear in the subsequences 12h and 12i, especially in the subsequence 12h, which shows Merida feeling guilty for turning her mother into a bear and taking responsibility. Realizing that her reckless and rebellious nature had caused the accident, Merida quickly took responsibility for the situation. While in the forest, Merida always protected her mother and took care of her mother because of her guilt. Merida's change in behavior was relatively quick, considering that previously she often despised her mother.

Further, in the subsequence 12i, Merida taught her mother how to catch fish, ate with her hands, and kept her mother feel calm and comfortable. Merida's expression showed guilt, and she wanted to help her mother. The background instrument also features funny and entertaining music to present a fun and warm scene. There are also two ways to capture scenes, namely long shots and medium shots, which emphasize their activities more. Merida also did not forget to keep thinking about ways and looking for solutions to turn her mother back into a human. With patience and perseverance, Merida cared for her mother. She consoled her and distracted her from the problems they were fac-

ing. The lively music supports the warming atmosphere in the mother and daughter interaction. How Merida relieved her guilt through protecting and caring for her mother reflects the traits of responsibility in which Merida took account for her selfish wish (Bear et al., 2003; Laranjo et al., 2014).

Merida also displays a sense of responsibility in the subsequence 14a, where Merida sews the rug she tore during her quarrel with her mother. The guilt turns out to be one way to find out how to turn her mother back into a human. Merida was awakened by the Witch's words saying a bond was necessary for a family. In the subsequence 14b, Merida quickly went to the kingdom to take the rug she tore and sew it back to how it was. It can be seen in Merida's panicked expression as she sewed her rug, accompanied by upbeat background music that sounded like she was in a hurry. The lighting used is also a little dark which makes the situation tense. The camera angle also shows how her seriousness about sewing the rug.

Subsequence 16h displays Merida's sense of responsibility towards her mother. At the end of the story, it is revealed that the four clans have mistaken Merida's mother for Mor'du, the evil bear, and hunted her into the forest. When her mother was caught and tied up, Merida tried to protect her mother. Their conversation was as the following.

Merida : *Get back. That's my mother.*
King Fergus : *Are you out of your mind, lass?*
Merida : *(Talk to her mother) Mum, are you hurt?*
 (Disney, *Brave*, 2012: subsequence 16h)

Merida also tried to convince everyone by saying, "Get back. That's my mother." to make everyone believe that the bear was her mother. Despite the panic and fear, Merida remained brave and responsible for protecting her mother against the accusations. Merida stood before the fully armed soldiers and fought her father to prevent them from killing her mother. The line she said to her mother, "Mum, are you hurt?" shows her responsible character in ensuring her mother was not injured during the chase. Saving innocent being from reckless judgment signals

responsible behavior, as presented by (Bear et al., 2003; Laranjo et al., 2014) and as identified by (Suwastini, Widasuari, et al., 2020). Although Merida was initially selfish towards her mother, she learned from her mistake and acted responsibly for her actions' consequences.

CONCLUSION

The film *Brave* (2012), which Brenda Chapman directed, featured a princess named Merida who went through a mystical adventure to save her mother. Previous studies focused on the bravery of Merida and the comparisons with another Disney princess, Moana; the present study focused on Merida's responsible characterizations. Merida has five characteristics: being careless, rebellious, brave, and responsible. These five characteristics are related to each other. Her rebellious character caused a rejection or a bluff for self-defense regarding freedom to do something. Being reckless, Merida was caught in an accident that changed her life. Supported by her brave character, it directs the solution to the problem. However, the final solution was inseparable from the development of her responsible character, where she was willing to sacrifice herself as the consequence of being reckless and rebellious. The characterizations of Merida imply the development of character through the willingness to learn from mistakes and to grow out of it.

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