



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 26, 2012

Movie Review: Brave

I have yet to see a Disney Pixar film that I did not thoroughly enjoy, and its most recent installment *Brave* keeps that record intact. Full of powerful themes and amazing visuals, it should prove to be appealing to both younger male and female audiences, as well as to parents.

Princess Merida (Kelly Macdonald) is plagued by her mother's incessant nagging to become a bride. And while Merida loves and respects her mother, her stubborn and fiery spirit makes it rather difficult for her to want to fully comply with her mother's wishes.



Merida's mother Elinor (Emma Thompson) is constantly training Merida for marriage by attempting to mold her into a lady. Her mother teaches her how to eat, talk, and walk, how to play the lute, and provides her academic lessons in her kingdom's history and geography.

For Merida, the lessons are overbearing, and are constantly accompanied by her mother's scorn and disappointment. Merida increasingly feels like she is not the master of her own life, but simply her mother's puppet.

And just when things seem as though they cannot get much worse, Elinor has arranged for Merida to be married. As if Merida has not been objectified enough, she is used as a prize in an archery contest.

Merida's rebellious and independent spirit prohibits her from allowing the objectification to continue any longer. In an unprecedented turn of events, she enlists herself to compete in that archery contest and wins, causing the lords and queen to seethe with anger.

Even worse, the entire incident severs Merida's relationship with her mother. Back at home, she destroys a picture of her family, literally dividing herself from her mother in the photograph. They exchange harsh words, and Merida flees the castle. She finds herself in the woods faced with evil temptation from an old witch (Julie Walters). So frustrated by her mother, Merida offers to make a deal: She will buy all the witch's woodwork if the witch casts a spell that will change Merida's mother forever.

Merida is convinced that the spell will change her fate.

But as is the case with any quick fix, the spell quickly goes terribly wrong, and Merida finds herself on a quest to undo the damage she has created before it is too late.

Like all the other Pixar films, *Brave* is characterized by stunning visuals, intelligent comedy, and fantastic storytelling. And unlike the clichéd children's films, there is no true antagonist here. The conflict is between two strong women, both of whom are too hard-headed to reach a compromise. But despite the unruly relationship between the two women, the presence of love is indisputable.

The film raises a number of interesting and powerful points. It calls into question the acceptance of



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archaic and unjust traditions such as parentally-arranged betrothals and reminds viewers that people have a right to make their own decisions about their lives.

One can even see parallels between the type of “tyranny” Elinor attempts to impose on Merida to the nanny-state tyranny our elected officials attempt to impose on us, always for our own “benefit.”

Perhaps unlike those Nanny-state proponents, Elinor does grow as the film progress, and comes to recognize that her daughter is not merely an unruly and rebellious child, but a confident woman who recognizes that she is more than just an object to be won by a man.

And Merida must learn to recognize that like herself, Elinor is caught in the trappings of their society’s traditions, and that her mother loves her and only wants what’s best. Moreover, Merida must learn to see that satisfying her own desires at the expense of what’s right is not the best choice.

Brave is highly realistic in its portrayal of the relationship between this mother and daughter. The relationship truly mirrors that which is likely found in many households, particularly between mothers and their teenage daughters. As a mother, Elinor feels compelled to help prepare her daughter for the real world, but as a growing woman, Merida feels that she should have more control over her own life. The struggle between the two women that results is entirely natural.

But what is so beautiful about the film is that it also underscores the underlying truth to nearly every mother/daughter struggle—that once those differences are stripped away, what remains is an undying love and an unbreakable bond.

The film also portrays true sacrifice that can only come from unbending love.

Amazingly, *Brave* is not the stereotypical princess story that necessitates the presence of a male hero. Merida is not the traditionally portrayed sensitive, fragile princess. She is a true heroine who seeks nothing more than the right to control her own life. It is wonderfully refreshing.

Some viewers may be a bit perturbed by the presence of magic in the film, and the references to fate that seem entirely separate from the Christian view of God’s will. However, much of that can likely be attributed to the film’s setting, which appears to be early Scotland, perhaps pre-Christian. There is also a bizarre inclusion of a depiction of Michelangelo’s famous image of God and Adam, featuring bears.

Overall, *Brave* is a wonderful story featuring relatable content. It is exciting on a number of levels, and humorous for all moviegoers. Most importantly, it features themes that are likely to be very well received by audiences who appreciate individual liberty and believe that no one should be treated as property.



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