Queer Representation in Disney's Recent Feature-Length Films:

A Visual Discourse Analysis

Tessa van Westerop
6388388
MA Intercultural Communication
Utrecht University
Supervisor: Carlo Giordano
Second Reader: Roselinde Supheert
17-04-2023
11.305 words

Abstract

This research investigates and decodes Disney's representation of queerness in four of its recent animated and live-action films, namely *Cruella* (2021), *Jungle Cruise* (2021), *Lightyear* (2022) and *Strange World* (2022). It uses queer theory, imagology, and stereotypical tropes (twelve in total, divided into seven categories) to conduct a qualitative visual discourse analysis and close viewing of the films. It aimed to conclude how Disney represents queerness in its recent feature-length films but found that there is no one way of describing Disney's queer representation in its recent films. It did, however, observe some patterns. Most notably, it found that Disney is no longer using queer characters as its villains in any of their recent films, which is a significant change from their older films. Moreover, it found that there is a noticeable difference between Disney's animated films and its live-action films. The animated films portray a more fluid and inclusive image of queerness by including, for example, non-white queer characters and not making use of rigid stereotypes. These portrayals, however, do often border on a sense of tokenism, and leave the queer characters relatively one-dimensional. The live-action films, on the other hand, make more use of the stereotypical tropes, which results in a more rigid, limited and often subservient representation of queerness. However, on the other hand, these representations also touch upon some more 'realistic' aspects of queerness, and the characters' queerness often influences their storylines.

Keywords: Queerness; representation; (cultural) stereotyping; visual discourse analysis; Disney.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In 2022, Disney made headlines when it was revealed that their animation film *Lightyear* (2022) would include a same-sex kiss (Ives). Not half a year later, it was announced that another animated film, *Strange World* (2022), would be their first film to include a canonically gay main character (Factora). While many people lauded these decisions, both films also received a lot of negative responses to the decision to feature these storylines, and the films were even banned in a few countries due to these themes (Lang, *'Lightyear' Banned*; Lang, *Disney's Strange World*).

Queer representations in any kind of modern media are often accompanied by controversy. With films for children, such as Disney films, these controversies often centre around the discussion of whether children should be exposed to these kinds of inclusive themes (Sweeney 130). More generally, queer representations are plagued by controversies surrounding whether the representation is 'positive' or 'negative', basing assessments on whether the representations adhere to/reinforce certain stereotypes (Kohnen 65). However, the problem with this categorizing is that a representation will never be able to "accurately represent reality" (Kohnen 65), both because the production of film and TV is subject to formal constraints, and because 'reality' is an unstable concept in essence, which is partly shaped by media representations themselves (Kohnen 65). Specifically, in the case of queer representation, it raises questions about the "truth of homosexuality" and "whose experience is genuine" (Hanson, in Baker, 43; Martin 68). Queer representations in film often have to represent a wide demographic and are thus often criticised for not being inclusive enough.

While it can be argued that it is understandable that Disney has stayed away from portraying queer characters on screen to prevent the seemingly inevitable controversy surrounding it, their recent efforts show that they are looking for ways to incorporate these themes into their films. This trend cannot only be observed in animated films, as some of

Disney's recent live-action films, for example, *Cruella* (2021) and *Jungle Cruise* (2021), also included queer representation in some manner (and were subsequently praised for being the 'first' to include queer representation (Rude)). These persistent attempts at including queer characters in their films raise the question of how these representations are shaped and what kind of image of queer people they project.

1.1 Research Questions & Sub-Questions

The main research question this thesis will attempt to answer is: *How does Disney represent queerness in its recent feature-length films?* To answer this question successfully, the following two sub-questions were formulated:

- *What stereotypical queer tropes does Disney use in their queer characters in* Cruella *(2021),* Jungle Cruise *(2021),* Lightyear *(2022), and* Strange World *(2022), and what patterns can be noticed in their use or disuse of these tropes?*
- *What is the difference between Disney's approach in animated films, geared towards children specifically, and their live-action films, that target a family audience?*

To answer these questions, a theoretical framework of relevant theory will first be given. It will use constructionism, imagology, and visual discourse analysis (VDA) to justify the use of certain terminology and frame concepts such as queer theory, culture, stereotypes, and the intersectionality of these topics. Then, an account of queer representations and stereotypes in popular media will be outlined, providing a list of twelve tropes that are often used in queer representation in media, based on previous research. Finally, it will take a look at Disney's representation of queer characters over the years.

After this extensive theoretical and conceptual framework, VDA and close watching will be conducted to analyse the aforementioned films and their queer characters, using the aforementioned list of twelve common tropes (for more details, see "3. Methodology"), in order to answer the first sub-research question. Then, the findings in the animated films and

the live-action films will be compared to answer the second sub-research question. Finally, the overarching research question will be answered, and suggestions for future research will be made.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Terminology and Queer Theory

Before delving further into this discussion, it is pertinent to discuss this thesis' use of field-related terminology, specifically the word 'queer'.[1] This term has been around for some time, with seemingly the first use of it in reference to someone's identity stemming from the end of the 19th century (Clarke). For a long time, the term was used solely in a derogatory manner, but from the 1980s onward, the term began to be reclaimed (Brontsma 4; Selden et al. 252). In present day, this has led to the coexistence of various uses of the word. It is used by self-identified queer people familiar with queer theory as a term to contest the rigidity of terms such as 'lesbian' or 'gay', instead embracing the inclusiveness of the term which could be claimed by anyone with a non-normative sexuality or sexual practice, or by anyone who simply has "a kind of position against normative or dominant modes of thought" (Whittington 157).

At the same time, it is used by people who identify as part of the LGBT[2] community – but who do not personally identify as queer themselves – as a synonym for LGBT, which removes the fluid aspect of the word (Brontsma 12). This convenient umbrella term is also taken over by the media, often ignoring the more gender-inclusive aspect intended by the queer community and only using it as a "trendy, hip replacement of gay" (Bronstma 12). Besides these three uses, the term is also still used pejoratively, and some even argue that the reclaiming of the term has rekindled this use of the word (Brontsma 13).

---

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'queer' as both "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character. Also, of questionable character, suspicious, dubious" (OED) and – as is relevant in this context – as "Of a person (usu. a man): homosexual. [...] Hence, of things: pertaining to homosexuals or homosexuality" ("Queer").

[2] Often used acronym for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

‘Queer theory’ is a field of post-structuralism that emerged in the 1990s, which designated a “radical rethinking of the relationship between subjectivity, sexuality and representation” (Selden et al. 252). In practice, queer theorists examine the way power works to institutionalise and legitimise certain forms and expressions of sexuality and gender while stigmatizing others. Queer theory seeks to bring often hidden queer histories to light and to occupy a viewing position that is neither rigidly male nor female, but multiple and more fluid and therefore to practise spectatorship that does not depend on stable identity but shifting identifications (Kohnen 5; Selden et al. 256). This is where the difference between LGBT studies and queer theory lies, seeing as while LGBT studies seek to analyse LGBT people as stable identities, queer theory problematises and challenges rigid, essentialist identity categories (Raymond 98; Selden et al. 257).

While the term ‘queer’ is thus contested, this thesis uses the term to describe the characters because it will use insights from the field of queer theory to analyse them through a lens of inclusivity and openness, which does not aim to define them into rigid, stable categories. This thesis will use the term queer to denounce their non-normative sexualities or sexual practices but will aim not to label them, except for when this is necessary to the discussion, for example when discussing homonormativity.

2.3 Politics of Representation

As a category of cultural analysis, representation has become the preferred term to designate how texts and other media provide images of the world (Beller 415). Hall claims that it is through the way we represent something that we give them meaning, partially by applying frameworks of interpretation, i.e. the discourse around them (3). In his book *Representation,* Stuart Hall takes a social constructivist approach to culture and representation as he argues that language is used to construct meaning and transmit it. It does

not have any clear meaning in itself, but rather it is a vehicle that carries meaning (Beller 415; Hall 3).

This process of representation of otherness is highly political and not free of power and power relations. It raises issues of who is representing whom, for what reasons, and how (Hall 259; Kohnen 3). When writers choose certain individuals or groups to represent their nation or people as a whole, the way they choose to portray those individuals/groups is a way of implicitly or explicitly projecting certain characteristics onto the group as a whole (Beller 416). While imagology mainly focuses on how stereotypes and representations are created and perpetuated through cultural texts, visual discourse analysis (VDA) examines how this discourse is used to construct and reinforce these power relations that perpetuate social hierarchies through visual media such as film and images. This approach is especially relevant in the case of queer representation, seeing as pictures carry subtle associations, values, and ideas with them. This means that the reading of images is a very open and fluid process, similar to how queerness is also open and fluid (Leeuwen 137).

Melanie Kohnen takes a closer look at the intersectionality of queer representation and argues that whenever a form of queer visibility is projected on film and/or TV screens, other possibilities are filtered or screened out, which raises questions such as which forms of queer representation have existed where, when, and for whom (Kohnen 3). She underlines that with these questions and interconnecting aspects, the projection and filtering of queer visibility in media is a deeply racialised process, which is too often overlooked in academic writing (3). She advocates a new take on queer visibility that acknowledges the fundamental interdependence of whiteness and queer visibility.

According to Hall, stereotypes are the main way of representing difference, i.e. the Other, and are vital for our understanding of the world (258). They are a "form of 'ordering' the mass of complex and inchoate data that we receive from the world" by making sense of

society through generalities, patternings, and ‘typifications’ (Dyer 12). Stereotypes are “fixed pictures in our heads” (Beller 430), which take simple characteristics of people as the main point, and amplify them, which leads to these characteristics becoming associated with nature/the essence of these people, which leads to certain expectations and biases.

These stereotypes again bring up power relations. Stereotypes are often “taken to express a general agreement about a social group as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype”, while stereotypes are, in reality, where people get their biased ideas from (Dyer 14). While these stereotypes often seem to contain a core of truth (Beller 430), they portray a particular definition of reality, which is related to the disposition of power, leading to questions about who proposes certain stereotypes, who enforces them, and who is portrayed by them.

An important function of stereotypes is to maintain sharp boundary definitions and insist on boundaries where in reality there are none (Dyer 16). This is especially clear when dealing with social categories that are invisible and/or fluid, like class or sexuality. Unless people actively dress or act in accordance with certain stereotypes, one cannot read from simply looking at them to what category they belong, as opposed to categories such as age or race (Dyer 19). Dyer argues that the role of stereotypes is to “make visible the invisible” and “to make fast, firm, and separable what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit” (16).

2.4 Queer Representation in Popular Media

Hollywood has a complicated history with the representation of queerness, as from 1934 to 1968, the Hollywood Production Code (HPC) was in effect, which banned all overt

representation of same-sex intimacy (Kohnen 6). Vito Russo's book *The Celluloid Closet*[3] was one of the first to challenge the idea that this meant queerness was not part of Hollywood cinema until after 1968, instead claiming: "[g]ay visibility has never really been an issue in the movies. Gays have always been visible. It's how they have been visible that has remained offensive for almost a century" (221). These characters were subtly portrayed according to queer stereotypes and connotations (Baker 43; Kohnen 7). While some scholars argue that the connotative ways of rendering queerness were no longer used after the HPC, Kohnen argues that both representational tactics (connotative and denotative) are individual registers of representation and still coexist in present-day media (48).

While it is impossible to produce a complete list of all stereotypes that exist of queer people, several thematic patterns can be distinguished throughout the history of queer representation. What follows is an original list of these connotative and denotative themes, based on previous research, as all these stereotypes have been mentioned by scholars examining this topic in recent times (Baker; Dyer; Martin; Marshall; Kohnen; Selden et al.). To stay coherent, various smaller tropes have been grouped.[4]

2.2 Imagology and Queer Culture

Imagology is a term to describe research into the field of our mental images and cultural representations of the Other and the Self (Leerssen, *Imagology* 17). It aims to understand the discourse *around* representation, as opposed to society itself (Leerssen, *Imagology* 27). While this approach is often used in a national/ethnic context, it can also be applied to other types of cultures in a less essentialist sense.

---

[3] This book has since then been criticised for its singular outlook and limited scope but is nonetheless relevant (Baker 43).

[4] For example, 'comic relief', 'side characters' and 'gay best friend' are all separate tropes/stereotypes, but for this purpose they have been put together into one category, seeing as they centre around the same idea: the queer character cannot be the main character.

The term culture is elusive. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (“Culture”). Nowadays, in a more ‘social science’ context, the word ‘culture’ is used to refer to whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation, or social group (Hall 2). Hall argues that “culture is about ‘shared meanings’” (2), and claims that people use language to construct these meanings through representational systems. In other words, people use signs, symbols, and words to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas, and feelings. Hall further argues that “to say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same way and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other” (2).

By looking at culture in this way, the queer community can be interpreted as a type of culture, with shared values and meanings that are negotiated through language, both by people from the community and by people outside of it. This means that imagology can be used to assess the representations of queer characters, due to its relevance to the notion of identity formation as a whole which includes gender identity and the effect of media and its enforcement of stereotypes. When looking at culture in this way, queer culture and its representation are relevant when talking about intercultural communication, seeing as queer culture is represented by people from other cultures, and *for* people from other cultures. The thesis aims to provide a framework for the analysis of queer characters that can be used in future research into this subject.

2.4.1 Queer Coding

Queer coding is the subtextual coding of a character in the media as queer. It is the most obvious connotative technique used to represent queer characters. While it is said to have originated from the days of the HPC, it is something that is still often done when

representing queer characters. The queerness of a queer-coded character is not explicitly confirmed within the piece of media itself, but through the use of traits and stereotypes recognizable to the audience as queer, the character is still identified as queer.

Queerness is not something that can be read at face value, which means that over time, "signs of gayness" were developed, to signify that a character identified as queer, which Dyer calls "a repertoire of gestures, expressions, stances, clothing, and even environments" (19). Dyer argues that this repertoire, that which makes the invisible visible, is the basis of representation of gay people in visual media, as it "dispenses with the need to establish a character's sexuality through dialogue and narrative by establishing it literally at first glance" (22). These connotative techniques thus heavily rest on stereotypes of the queer community (Leeuwen 147).[5]

2.4.2 Homonormativism and In-Betweenism

Another trope often used is the reducing of queer characters to only lesbians and gay men, effectively leaving out all other queer identities. Even though the numerical increase of queer characters is often understood as a broadening of queer visibility, Kohnen claims that "the increasing codification of queer visibility as (homonormative) gay and lesbian characters decreased the possibilities for representing a variety of queer identities and textual forms on television" (151).

Related to this is the tendency to reduce gay male and lesbian characters to a sissy/queen and a butch/dyke archetype respectively.[6] Despite there being infinite variations to gay men and lesbians, they are often represented through what is assumed to be a gender

---

[5] Examples of these stereotypes include traits of exaggerated masculinity or femininity, vanity and hypersexuality (it is an old stereotype, that homosexuality has to do only with sex while heterosexuality is multifaceted and embraces love and romance (Russo 95)).

[6] These terms have been used both derogatorily and affirmingly throughout time, and are here simply used to denounce the stereotypes.

correlation, meaning that both are represented as if their sexuality means that they are in between genders (dykes/butch are mannish, queens/sissies are effeminate) (Dyer 30). This then serves the idea that gay men and lesbians are not real men and women, effectively assuming that true masculinity and femininity are defined by heterosexuality, resulting in often tragic, pathetic, wretched, despicable, comic, or ridiculous figures (Dyer 30).

2.4.3 Untimely Deaths and Victims

The tragic aspect of the representation of queer characters has often been the topic of discussion. This topic of 'necrology' was already extensively discussed by Vito Russo who argued that virtually the only variety permitted to queer characters from 1962-1981 was on how they died (Baker 42). This trope, which later became known as the "bury your gays" trope sees the death of queer characters significantly more often than their heterosexual counterparts (Hulan 17). Reasons for these deaths were often that queer characters were simply not important enough for the plot to stay alive – with their deaths often being used as a plot device to propel the (non-queer) main character's narrative further – or that the queer character was a villain, which would result in the non-queer hero punishing them for their sins.

The dead queer characters can also be seen as suffering victims who die tragic deaths in an uncaring world (Marshall 65). Many films that are lauded as some of the most game-changing moments in the history of queer representation[7] often end with at least one of the queer main characters dying an untimely, terrible death (Kohnen 180). This does not denounce the characters as 'bad' because of their queerness but instead shows how they are mistreated for their queerness in the real world. Scholars have argued that an effect of this reliance on this trope has been to "actively undermine or de-emphasise queer youth agency

[7] For example *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Milk* (2008).

by universalizing understandings of the queer youth as a subject who needs to be saved by external agents (Marshall 65). This can then also be linked to a strategy analysed in VDA which sees that minorities are often visually represented as subservient (Leeuwen 147).

2.4.4 Comic Relief, the Gay Best Friend, and Other Side Characters

Another trope shows queer characters being given roles of the (gay) best friend, the comic relief, or another type of side character, but never the main character. This is a trope that has some overarching themes with other types of minority representation, as non-white or lower-class characters are often positioned into the same roles, with only white, non-queer, middle/high-class characters taking up the main character's position (Martin 62). The gay best friend trope, specifically, is characterised by traits such as being friends with only girls, being into 'girl talk', fashion, giving makeovers (often to the straight main character), and being non-threatening, as their sex lives are often invisible (The Take). Comic relief means that the character is often the one making jokes, but in the case of queer comic relief characters, their queerness is often the instigator or punchline of the joke.

2.4.5 Villains and Murderers

During the time of the HPC, positive portrayals of queer characters were barred, resulting in the only representation that was possible (through queer coding) being queer characters in evil roles, who were punished for their evil doing. This resulted in villains often being represented in combination with characteristics, behaviours, or gestures that could be perceived as queer, with the most common trope being an effeminate male villain. As Baker argues, gay characters were often represented as "dangerous, violent, predatory or suicidal" (44). This strategy has overlap with the representation of other minorities, as this strategy for visually representing 'others' as wild, uncivilised, or evil is something that is also often employed when representing racially categorised people (Leeuwen 143).

2.4.6 Queer = White

Another long-standing trope in the representation of queerness is that the queer characters are almost always white (Martin 63). Kohnen argues that this trope shows how whiteness is used as a neutral backdrop for queer identity (Kohnen 3). This reinforces the idea that having both a queer and a black/non-white character is creating a multi-faceted 'otherness' that is not normally represented in media. This is also argued by Dyer, who states: "to be normal, even to be normally deviant (queer, crippled), is to be white" (in Martin, 63). When queer people of colour are represented, however, they are often used as a plot device for a cliché. Non-white queer characters are also often depicted as 'race-neutral', meaning that their plotlines will only revolve around their queer identity, whereas their non-white identity, and its intersectionality with their queer identity, is not mentioned or discussed (Martin 64).

2.4.7 Outside Time and Space

An important part of visual representation is the strategy of distanciation, which focuses on social distance (Leeuwen 138). In photographs, this social distance often becomes symbolic, for example by showing certain people in a "long shot" and others in a "close-up" (Leeuwen 138). In film, this can function the same way, but more often than not it is taken to an extreme, where the stories of minorities are presented as playing out in a far away and almost irrelevant space, whether that be very far into the past or the future, or into a fictional land that is not relevant to our world. Kohnen argues that films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) lack an engagement with any relevant space and time, "rendering their representations of queer desires and identities non-threatening to the norms of Hollywood cinema and American society" (141).

2.5 Queer Representation in Disney

Similar to Hollywood as a whole, Disney has not shied away from covertly portraying queer-coded characters on the silver screen (Brown 3; Kim 157; McLeod 22; Sweeney 131). These queer-coded characters were often villains[8] or side characters/comic relief characters[9], but in more recent times, some main characters have also been queer-coded[10] (Putnam 147; Sweeney 131). Due to these characters only being denounced as queer through coding, they often adhere to stereotypical depictions of queer characters and often fall into the in-betweenism trope. While most of the queer characters in Disney films remain only connotatively queer, in recent years the company has also made small steps towards denotative representation, by for example introducing overtly queer characters in the background of its films[11] (King 24; Kinger 3072, Lee St. Jacues 5), and, even more recently, including major/main queer characters, and sometimes even actively portraying these characters' love lives on screen[12].

While significant research has been done on Disney's use of queer-coded characters, both in older and more recent films (e.g. Brown; Kinger; McLeod; Putnam; Sweeney), no research has yet been done on these very recent denotatively queer representations. This shift in approach to portraying queerness, however, raises questions about how these more recent films represent queerness, and about to what extent these representations are (dis)similar to their predecessors.

---

[8] For example Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989, modelled after drag queen Divine (Putnam 155)), Scar (*The Lion King*, 1994) and governor Ratcliffe (*Pocahontas*, 1995).
[9] For example are Pleakley (*Lilo and Stitch*, 2002), Timon and Pumbaa (*The Lion King*, 1994) and Cogsworth and Lumière (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991).
[10] For example Merida (*Brave*, 2012), Elsa (*Frozen*, 2013) and Raya (*Raya and the Last Dragon*, 2021).
[11] For example the married couples in *Zootopia* (2016) and *Finding Dory* (2016), LeFou dancing with another man in the live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), and a woman talking about her wife in *Onward* (2020).
[12] For example the four films discussed in this thesis.

3. Method

3.1 Qualitative Research Method and Procedure

Qualitative methods provide an effective way of analysing images and representational practices in films, as opposed to focusing on numbers in showcasing a research's findings (Dörnyei 243). This research combines into queer theory, imagology, and stereotyping to conduct a visual discourse analysis and close viewing of the films.

Visual discourse analysis is the decoding, understanding, and making explicit of the meaning of visuals and what they were intended to represent, as well as how the audience interprets them (Leeuwen 137). This is similar to critical discourse analysis and is often used by queer theorists to examine power relations in the expression of sexuality and gender. It is used in imagology to critically assess images of the Self and the Other and to understand the discourse around them (Leerssen, *Imagology* 17). It aims to identify political and social injustices and how social communities condone such inequalities (Albers 86).

To do this, the researcher will close-view all four films three times. For the first viewing, the researcher will only focus on the general plot and the characters, making notes of the setting, basic plot, point of view, diversity, and theme. Then, the researcher will watch the films again, now only paying attention to the identified queer character, noting things about their appearance (incl. race and outfits), their speech and mannerisms, their story arc, and to what extent their queerness is actively portrayed. Finally, the researcher will use the twelve tropes listed in "2.4 Queer Representation in Popular Media" to critically analyse to what extent stereotypical images of queerness are used. Eventually, all findings and notes will be grouped under their relevant tropes/categories and presented in "4. Results".

As is the case with all discourse analysis, in visual discourse analysis, multiple readings are possible (Albers 86). This means it is impossible to give a finite answer to the questions prompted by this thesis, seeing as different people will have different readings of

certain images and representations, depending on their personal history and identity. Despite taking on a critical perspective – meaning that different attitudes towards and interpretations of the findings will be given and compared – the findings discussed in this thesis are the result of an analysis done by one person: a white, 23-year-old queer woman from the Netherlands who has been a fan of Disney films all her life but who has always been critical about Disney's queer representation, which might have influenced the findings.

3.2 Materials

The corpus included four Disney feature-length films: *Cruella* (2021), *Jungle Cruise* (2021), *Strange World* (2022), and *Lightyear* (2022), all watched via Disney+, the streaming portal for Disney. These films were all produced by Walt Disney Pictures and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures in that span of two years, and all contain a queer character. The original film posters are displayed below. Both *Cruella* (2021) and *Jungle Cruise* (2021) are live-action films with a PG-13 rating (parental guidance for all children under the age of 13 (MPA)), whereas *Strange World* (2022) and *Lightyear* (2022) are animated films with a PG rating (parental guidance (MPA)). The genres of the films mostly overlap, with all of them being comedies and adventure stories, and genres such as action, fantasy, and science fiction appearing frequently. In Appendix A, Table 1 includes additional information on the films' genres, presented time and place, duration, director(s), main cast, and revenue. Appendix B includes short plot summaries of all four films.

Cruella, 2021

Jungle Cruise, 2021

Lightyear, 2022

Strange World, 2022

4. Results

4.1 *Cruella* (2021)

Cruella is the latest on the long list of Disney's adaptations of Dodie Smith's 1965 novel *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*. Despite Cruella having a husband in the original novel, all adaptations since then have presented her as a single woman who loathed the idea of family and children. This is for example clearly shown in the 1996 live-action adaption *101 Dalmatians,* when Roger and Anita announce that they are expecting a child and Cruella exclaims "[o]h, poor thing! I'm so sorry" (*101 Dalmatians,* 00:32:36 – 00:32:39). In all iterations of this story, Cruella is presented as the villain of the story. While the most evident reading is that she is a villain because she plans to turn 101 dalmatian puppies into coats, some have argued that instead her 'alternative' lifestyle, which threatens the idea of a heteronormative family, is another reason she is seen as a villain in the story (Putnam, 149), which is centered around family and heteronormative love (Berlatsky). This way of framing Cruella resulted in the queer community accepting her as an iconic queer representation, albeit in the way in which 'queer' envelops anything that deviated from the perceived 'normal'.

In *Cruella*, Emma Stone's iteration of the character seems to embrace the aforementioned anti-domestic queerness (Berlatsky). In the film, it is shown that her mom asks her to reject her 'weirdness' (read: queerness) to not disappoint her and fit in, but ultimately she fails to do so. Subsequently, early on in the film, Cruella meets her later-on best friends, Jasper and Horace, with whom she forms a chosen family, a theme often explored with queer characters. While her character is thus shrouded in queer subtext, this is never followed up by explicit queerness, for example through a queer love interest or storyline. Instead, her character is seen in a shallow near-romantic arc with a male character. This has led to some calling the film out for 'queer-baiting', where marketing for a piece of

media seems to promise the inclusion of queer romance and/or characters, but where the final product then lacks credible and sincere follow-through (Tadeo).

While Cruella herself can thus be read as representing the queer community to an extent, *Cruella* includes another queer character named Artie. When Cruella taunts the Baroness through bold fashion statements, she enlists Artie – who is a fashion genius – to help her design and sew her collection. While both can be read as representing queerness in their own way, this analysis will focus on Artie, because he was put forward by Disney as "the first major LGBT character in a Disney film" and because the queerness in Cruella is more contextual and metaphorical, whereas Artie's representation is more explicit (although mainly relying on stereotypes and tropes to convey the queerness, more on this later). This all is not to say that Cruella's character and her portrayal of queerness are not interesting to look at, but due to the limited scope of this paper, it will be largely taken out of consideration.

4.1.1 Queer Coding

It is notable that Artie is lauded to be the first major openly gay character in a Disney film, as he is only connotatively queer. His queerness is never made explicit (either through him pursuing a queer relationship or him/someone confirming his queerness), and instead, the assumption is mainly based on his appearance, manner of talking, occupation, and the fact that he is played by an openly gay actor (who has stated that he thinks the character is queer). Artie wears heavy eye makeup and stylish, non-gender conforming outfits that are reminiscent of David Bowie/Ziggy Stardust's non-binary style popular in the glam-rock era of the 1970s (see Figure 1). This style, however, was more heteronormative than modern-day viewers might expect when looking at his outfit, as it was relatively popular among straight

and queer people alike. However, his flamboyant look, stereotypical highly pitched voice, and his passion for fashion bring together a connotative picture of a feminine, queer man.

Figure 1: Artie's first introduction (00:34:59).

4.1.2 Homonormativism and In-Betweenism

While Artie is presented as a feminine man, he is not presented as explicitly gay, seeing as his sexuality is never discussed, and he does not have a love interest in this film. Artie is ambiguously queer, which means that *Cruella* does not make use of the trope of homonormativism. However, he does fit the trope of in-betweenism, as he is presented through many stereotypes used to represent gay men (as described above, similar to queen/sissy stereotypes), which makes him seem to fall somewhere between male and female. However, Artie himself makes the gender binary explicit and rigid when he states "look around, I have everything a girl – or boy – could ever want" (*Cruella,* 00:35:15), instead of, for example, "I have everything anyone would ever want". While this statement can be seen as a way of subtlety inviting queer readings of his character, it also suggests that Artie does identify as either gender, presumably male. This is also reflected by other people using he/him pronouns for him. So while it is strongly suggested that Artie does not identify

as non-binary himself, he is presented as somewhere in between the two genders through the stereotypical aspects of him that fall into the sissy/queen stereotype of a gay man.

4.1.3 Untimely Deaths and Victims

Artie does not die in this film, so the 'untimely death' trope was not utilised. However, during Cruella and Artie's first meeting, Cruella is impressed by Artie's style but asks him: "how does the look go on the streets?" (*Cruella,* 00:35:02). He replies "[h]mm, some abuse and insults, of course" (*Cruella,* 00:35:05). In this short exchange, it becomes clear that Artie is indeed the victim of anti-queer abuse. Moreover, it is implied that this is something that is to be expected when someone dresses in an unconventional, queer-coded way, seeing as Cruella pointedly asks this question. However, as opposed to many other stories about queer people, this victimization is not dwelled upon and it is never mentioned again in the film. Cruella too, as mentioned, is also often bullied and victimised for her different looks and way of doing things. She and Artie, during that first meeting, subsequently agree that "normal is the cruellest insult of them all" (*Cruella,* 00:35:05), and as such they bond over both being 'strange' and outside of the status quo.

4.1.4 Comic Relief, the Gay Best Friend, and Other Side Characters

While Artie does not function as comic relief, he does fit both the trope of 'gay best friend', and that of 'side character'. Artie appears various times throughout the entire film, but upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that his scenes are short and insignificant to the plot. The only thing he does in this film is befriend Cruella and help her with her fashion line (or: a make-over, as is often present in the 'gay best friend' trope). His character has absolutely no goals of his own, and is not personally tied to any of the characters besides Cruella. He only shows up when it is convenient for her, and – despite the characters pretending as if he is a vital part of their operation – the plot of the film would be the same if

Artie did not exist (or if he had been a straight man or woman). This means that he, or his queerness, had no impact on the story at all.

Figure 2: Artie working for Cruella, shown in a montage, working in the background (screen capture slightly lightened for clarity) (01:45:05).

4.1.5 Villains and Murderers

Even though Cruella was presented as a villain in the original book and other adaptations, in *Cruella* she is the protagonist. She is presented as a good person who was treated badly and thus has a good reason for doing bad things. Near the end of the film, Cruella states that she let people believe she killed the dalmatians because "people do need a villain to believe in, so I am happy to fit the bill" (*Cruella*, 01:44:16). This means that she is not a natural villain here, but merely someone willing to take on the performative role of the villain. Cruella is thus presented as an anti-hero at worst, meaning that Artie, who is only her sometimes-present sidekick, also cannot be interpreted as a villain. On top of that, Artie does seem to disagree with Cruella's way of handling her situation and actively shows doubt when Cruella states that there might be death involved with her plan. Eventually, it turns out that Cruella's plan did not include death after all, meaning that both Cruella and Artie do not become murderers.

Figure 3: Artie when Cruella enlists him again to help her enact her final plan, which might involve death (01:03:15).

4.1.6 Queer = White

The main cast of *Cruella* is overwhelmingly white, with the only non-white character being Jasper. Both Cruella herself and Artie are thus white. Some side characters are non-white, for example, Anita, Roger, and Jeffrey, but none of them play big parts in the story.

4.1.7 Outside Time and Space

While this film is set in a realistic London without any magical aspects to it, the film is set in a different time, namely the 1960s-1980s.

4.2 *Jungle Cruise* (2021)

The film starts with the main character Lily using her brother MacGregor to speak for her at a male-only scientific society. Their proposal to search for the Tears of the Moon is rejected, but MacGregor joins her in her quest to find it anyway, despite it being dangerous. He is present throughout the entire film, and he and Lily seem to have a close bond. Halfway through the film, during a heart-to-heart with the other main character, Frank, it becomes clear that Lily and MacGregor have such a close bond due to Lily standing up for MacGregor

when he came out as gay (although he never uses that world, instead stating “my interests happily lie… elsewhere” (*Jungle Cruise,* 00:56:18), and this is also the reason he is willing to help her. Throughout the film, MacGregor learns to be more confident, which is, for example, shown in the final scene, where he is in front of the scientific society again, but instead of being sweaty, insecure and uptight, he is now much more confident and tells the society what he thinks of them.


Figures 4 and 5: MacGregor speaking to the science society, before and after his adventure (screen captures slightly lightened for clarity) (00:02:39 // 01:55:57).

4.2.1 Queer Coding

Before the ‘coming out’ scene with Frank, MacGregor is already presented as queer through queer coding. He is interested in clothes and concerned with his looks. The first time this becomes clear is when Lily and MacGregor board Frank’s boat, and Frank thinks all of the luggage is Lily’s, but it is MacGregor’s. Later on, he comes up from below decks wearing an elaborate outfit, claiming he thought to “keep it casual” (*Jungle Cruise*, 00:37:40). Moreover, he is shown to do his skincare before going to bed (*Jungle Cruise*, 00:44:15), and when going out to chop wood with Frank he is shown to be bad at it, which contrasts with Frank’s bulking strength (*Jungle Cruise,* 00:54:19). Later in the film, MacGregor shows less stereotypical traits, as he, for example, gives up on trying to dress in a fancy manner, and

does not seem to care much when warpaint does not wash off of his face. One reason for this is that the jungle simply does not allow him to keep on wearing these elaborate, often warm outfits, but on the other hand, it also coincides with him gaining more confidence.

4.2.2 Homonormativism and In-Betweenism

Despite not having a love interest in the film, MacGregor is presented as a stereotypical gay man, fitting the homonormativism trope. The way he is portrayed, as explained above, fits the sissy/queen gay stereotype, which presents him as a feminine man who is somehow between male and female. The idea of him failing to be a man can be seen in the wood-chopping scene where his 'lack of masculinity' is shown as compared to Frank. However, later on in the film, as he grows more confident, he is shown as more multifaceted, as he, for example, stomps Frank in the face after he calls him a "wimpy brother", which Frank then calls "strong form" (*Jungle Cruise,* 01:06:55) and fights several of the bad guys successfully (*Jungle Cruise,* 01:43:25).

4.2.3 Untimely Deaths and Victims

In this film, MacGregor does not die. However, during a fight, he is wounded and left behind by Frank and Lily. MacGregor objects but accepts after Lily states "you have done enough. […] Look at the state of you, and you can't even walk" (*Jungle Cruise,* 01:16:42 – 01:16:49). He is, however, quickly found by some of the adversaries and brought back to Frank and Lily.

While it is not shown in the film, there are various references to MacGregor being victimised for his queerness. At the start of the film, he gets kicked out of the science society and states "[y]ou think you are the first to reject me? I have been turned out of some of the best clubs in Europe" (*Jungle Cruise,* 00:07:35). While it is never confirmed to be due to his sexuality, this is highly implied due to his later revelation. Subsequently, during his coming-out scene with Frank, he states "[u]ncle threatened to disinherit me, friends and family turned

their backs, all because of who I loved. I would have been ostracized from society were it not for Lily. She stood by me" (*Jungle Cruise*, 00:56:33 – 00:56:50).

Figure 6: MacGregor and Frank during MacGregors 'coming out' scene (00:56:30).

4.2.4 Comic Relief, the Gay Best Friend, and Other Side Characters

MacGregor does not fit with the gay best friend stereotype. He is one of the main characters in this film and as such, he plays an important part in the story. If his character were to suddenly be taken out of the narrative, the plot would be different. His character goes through personal development, meaning that his character is not only present to further the arch of the other, straight characters but instead is a multidimensional character himself. As such, the side character trope was not utilised in *Jungle Cruise.*

He does, however, act as the comic relief, and there are several points where his queerness is the driving factor behind a joke. For one, during the scene where he shows up fancily dressed on the boat, the scene shoots away to another scene, where he looks completely dishevelled and sunburnt, claiming his "eyeballs are sweating" (*Jungle Cruise,*

00:38:04, see Figure 7 and 8). Subsequently, when he is offered the warpaint, he exclaims "warpaint? Yes, for a warrior. Dilly", which is a stereotypical feminine way of speaking, and

Figures 7 and 8: MacGregor during the first day on the boat, on the left still neatly dressed, on the right dishevelled and sweaty (00:37:38 // 00:38:03)

then in the next scene he is distraughtly trying to wash it off but not succeeding. Finally, after the coming-out scene, MacGregor asks if Frank wants to "bite down on his stick" (*Jungle Cruise*, 01:15:43), and Lily quickly tries to explain that it was because of Frank's pain and not a sexual proposition, while Frank tries to state that that was not his interpretation in the first place.

4.2.5 Villains and Murderers

MacGregor is not a villain in this film. He is part of the protagonists and searches for the Tears of the Moon to stop the war and save lives. He did, however, technically kill someone. During the final fight at the end of the film, MacGregor is fighting with the main antagonist, a German officer. MacGregor gets the upper hand and pushes him against a rock wall, causing a huge boulder to fall on top of the German, killing him. MacGregor, however, actively states that it was an accident and not his intention (*Jungle Cruise*, 01:49:15), meaning it was not murder.

4.2.6 Queer = White

MacGregor is a white character, just as Lily and almost all other people shown in the scenes set in London are. After arriving in the Amazon there are some non-white characters, including the other main character, Frank. Moreover, there is a diverse group of people present on Frank's ship and there are several native tribes in the jungle.

4.2.7 Outside Time and Space

Jungle Cruise also complies with this trope, seeing as this film is set in a faraway time (1916) and in a faraway (for the Western world where this film was made) land. Moreover, even though the country where it takes place exists, the story is filled with myths, fables, and fantastical things such as curses and undead conquistadores, which makes the whole story feel like it is playing out in a fantastical, made-up world, effectively placing the story of a queer person outside of the boundaries of reality.

4.3 *Lightyear* (2022)

Despite being Buzz Lightyear's best friend and fellow space ranger, Hawthorne does not often feature in *Lightyear*. Due to Buzz standing still in time while others age, Hawthorne is effectively used to show the years passing. Through a series of very short scenes, she is shown becoming captain, getting engaged, being pregnant, having a toddler, having her son graduate, celebrating her 40th anniversary and finally dying and having a granddaughter. Throughout almost all of these short scenes, her fiancé and later wife, Kiko, is featured. During the scenes, the two lovers often show their affection, for example by holding hands (*Lightyear*, 00:22:00), looking lovingly into each other's eyes (*Lightyear*, 00:21:30), and kissing (*Lightyear*, 00:22:19, see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Hawthorne and Kiko kissing (00:22:19).

4.3.1 Queer Coding

Lightyear does not make use of queer coding. The only aspects of Kiko and Hawthorne's characters that could be seen as stereotypical are Hawthorne's eyebrow slit, which is sometimes linked to lesbianism or bisexuality, and Kiko's short hair, which – on women – is also sometimes linked to queerness. Kiko and Hawthorne always wear uniforms due to the nature of their jobs, meaning that their outfits do not express any personal – or stereotypical or queer-coded – style. The film does use a stereotype often linked to lesbians or queer women in a relationship, namely the idea that those people will move in together or get engaged after only knowing each other for a short amount of time. When Buzz returns from his first time-travel trip, he notices Hawthorne's engagement ring, and she explains to him that she met a woman from the science crew (Figure 10). Buzz then, surprised, asks "[y]ou got engaged to someone you just met?" (*Lightyear,* 00:17:50). However, due to the time skip, four years have passed for Hawthorne, which she tells him. This quick line may seem fleeting and simply humorous for a casual viewer, but in light of this existing stereotype, it becomes more intentional.

Figure 10: Hawthorne shows Buzz her engagement ring (00:17:38).

4.3.2 Homonormativism and In-Betweenism

The representation of Hawthorne (and Kiko) is queer, but not confirmed lesbian, bisexual, or any other identity. However, the way the characters are presented does suggest that these women are only interested in other women, or at least Hawthorne is. This can be seen when Buzz asks about Hawthorne's fiancé, and he asks "what's her name?" (*Lightyear*, 00:17:40), instead of going for a gender-neutral/heteronormative version such as "to whom?" or "what is his/their name?". Besides this, their characters are presented as cisgender women (a woman who was assigned the female sex at birth), thus not suggesting any kind of gender diversity, and meaning that they do fall into the long-standing tradition of allowing queer representation to only take the shape of gay men or lesbians. However, their characters do not follow the trope of in-betweenism. Their femininity is never questioned, their sexuality seemingly has nothing to do with their gender, and they are not queer-coded or stereotyped as a butch or a dyke.

4.3.3 Untimely Deaths and Victims

Hawthorne is not presented as a victim, and her queerness is not so much as blinked upon. It is simply part of her character, and none of the other characters question it or make a big deal out of it. However, due to Hawthorne being a plot device to show time passing, she does eventually die. Even though her death seems very fast for the viewer, seeing as she dies within the first half hour of the film, it is actually at the end of her long and fulfilling life, meaning that the untimely death trope does not get utilised in this film.

4.3.4 Comic Relief, the Gay Best Friend, and Other Side Characters

At the start of the film, Hawthorne is set up to become one of the main characters in this film. However, due to the time skips and her death, she remains relatively one-dimensional and a supporting character. Even though she is Buzz's best friend, her character does not fit into the gay best friend trope, as none of the stereotypes often connected to that are present here. Subsequently, while Hawthorne has her funny moments, she does not work as a comic relief character, especially since her character only features during the setting-up stage of the film.

4.3.5 Villains and Murderers

Hawthorne is not a villain, nor is she a murderer. The opposite is true, seeing as throughout the film, Hawthorne is often lauded as a wonderful captain, role model, grandmother, and friend.

4.3.6 Queer = White

This film counteracts this trope, seeing as Hawthorne is a black woman. Throughout the film, there are also various other black characters (Mo Morrison, Izzy Hawthorne, Commander Burnside), meaning that this film did not only make its queer character black. Moreover, while it is not very clear of confirmed, seeing as she only has a few short scenes and does not have any lines, Kiko seems to be Asian or of Asian descent (based on her name

and features (Monji), see Figure 11), meaning that, presumably, both queer characters are non-white. However, in both cases, following the trope explained by Martin (64), Kiko and Hawthorne are seen as race-neutral, with their race – and its intersectionality with their sexual identity – not factoring into their identity.

Figure 11: Kiko and Hawthorne with their son (00:21:30).

4.3.7 Outside Time and Space

Lightyear not only takes place in the past (presumably in the late 80s or 90s) but also on a fictional planet (T'Kani Prime). However, the entire plot revolves around the characters being stranded on this planet, meaning that if this story were transported to the current time/space, the story would completely change.

4.4 *Strange World* (2022)

At the start of the film, Ethan is shown flirting with his crush, Diazo, and being awkward around him. Quickly after this first encounter, Ethan embarks on a trip with his family to save their world, a trip which Diazo does not join. While their relationship is thus not physically presented throughout the film, Diazo is mentioned various times throughout the film (Ethan pretend-talks with Diazo (*Strange World,* 00:33:12), Jaeger asks Ethan about

any ‘sweethearts’ at home and he mentions Diazo (*Strange World,* 00:50:19), and Ethan’s mom states “if only Diazo could see you now” when Ethan is flying their plane (*Strange World,* 01:01:20)). At the end of the film, there is a one-year time skip and Ethan is seen together with Diazo, holding hands and with their heads close together, showing that they are in a relationship (*Strange World,* 01:27:56, see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Diazo and Ethan at the end of the film, holding each other close (01:27:56).

4.4.1 Queer Coding

Queer coding does not feature often in *Strange World*. Ethan’s outfit consists of a beanie, a red/blue shirt, a yellow scarf, green shorts, blue boots, two earrings, and some bracelets, and he wears his hair in semi-short dreads. Diazo wears a pink flowery shirt, purple pants, white and green sneakers, bracelets, and a helix earring. He has an undercut with the sides of his hair dark brown and the top bleached and styled into a quiff. Their outfits are thus colourful and have a lot of patterns, and they wear a significant amount of accessories. This could be seen as fitting the stereotype of queer men wearing flamboyant and colourful clothing. While

the accessories are something only they wear, other people in the film wear different coloured and patterned clothing items, so their outfits do not stand out.

Figure 13: Ethan and Diazo flirting at the start of the film (00:10:45).

4.4.2 Homonormativism and In-Betweenism

Throughout the film, there are some very subtle references to the possibility of Ethan not being a cisgender gay man. Early on in the film, Searcher states “what sixteen-year-old boy doesn’t like seeing their parent’s smooch” (*Strange World,* 00:08:12). Despite calling Ethan a boy early on in the sentence, later on, he refers to Ethan using ‘their’, while he could easily have used ‘his’. While this could only be a mistake or an unintentional use of ‘their’, it could also be interpreted as Ethan experimenting with using he/him and they/them pronouns simultaneously, thus suggesting a non-cisgender identity. Moreover, when Jaeger asks about Ethan’s ‘sweethearts’, he asks “who is it?”, instead of either “what’s her name?” (heteronormative way) or “what is his name” (homonormative way). This use of gender-neutral phrasing could simply be due to Jaeger not knowing about Ethan’s sexuality due to not knowing him yet, although the ‘careless’ response would then have been the heteronormative one. By actively using the gender-neutral approach, the writers suggest that

Jaeger does not assume anything about Ethan's identity, but as a viewer, it can also be seen as keeping the door open for other interests for Ethan, besides men. While there are thus some very subtle possible references to non-homonormative representation in Ethan, a casual viewer will see Ethan and Diazo as two cis-gender gay men, effectively fitting the homonormativism trope. While the characters of Ethan and Diazo are queer-coded as a little more feminine in their style than other male characters, they are not reduced to a sissy/queen stereotype. This means that their characters do not fall into the in-betweenism trope.

4.4.3 Untimely Deaths and Victims

In this film, the queer characters do not die, nor are they presented as victims.

4.4.4 Comic Relief, the Gay Best Friend, and Other Side Characters

Ethan is one of the three main characters in this film, and famously Disney's first queer main character. He is thus not the comic relief, gay best friend, or a side character.

4.4.5 Villains and Murderers

Ethan is one of the protagonists in this film, meaning that he is not the villain of the story. Instead, he is shown to be the hero, as he turns out to be the person who inspires others to do the right thing in the end to save their planet/world. To do so, he does have to kill pando, but his plant is framed as a type of infection that is killing their world, so killing pando is the right thing to do. Moreover, since pando is a plant, this cannot be interpreted as murder.

4.4.6 Queer = White

Ethan is of mixed race, as he has a black mother and a white father (see Figure 14). Diazo seems to be Latino, which is supported by the fact that his voice actor is also Latino, but this is never confirmed. Throughout Avalonia, there is a lot of diversity when it comes to people, seeing as there are white people, Black people, (South) Asian people, and native people. Their race, however, was not factored into their identities, as these characters seem

race-neutral, in a world where race does not matter at all.

Figure 14: Ethan's parents, an interracial couple (00:08:11).

4.4.7 Outside Time and Space

This story takes place in a non-disclosed time, in a fictional land called Avalonia. In Avalonia, there are things such as electric plants and huge turtles on which entire civilisations live. As such, this story takes a queer narrative and places it outside of realistic and close-to-home circumstances.

#	Trope	*Cruella* (2021)	*Jungle Cruise* (2021)	*Lightyear* (2022)	*Strange World* (2022)	%
1	Queer coding	Yes	Yes	No	No	50
2	Homonormativism	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	75
	In-betweenism	Yes	Yes	No	No	50
3	Untimely deaths	No	No	No	No	0
	Victims	Yes	Yes	No	No	50
4	Comic relief	No	Yes	No	No	25
	Gay best friend	Yes	No	No	No	25
	Side characters	Yes	No	Yes	No	50
5	Villains	No	No	No	No	0
	Murderers	No	No	No	No	0
6	Queer = white	Yes	Yes	No	No	50
7	Outside time and space	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100

Table 1: Broad Overview of All Queer Tropes in Cruella (2021), Jungle Cruise (2021), Lightyear (2022) and Strange World (2022).

5. Discussion

Whenever a form of queer visibility is projected on film screens, other possibilities are filtered or screened out, raising questions about which queer representations have existed where, when, and for whom (Kohnen 3). Due to the increase in queer representations in Disney films, and popular media in general, it is important to analyse these representations to answer these questions. This research analyses the queer representation present in four recent Disney films. To analyse and summarise the findings of this research (see Chapter 4, overview in Table 1 on page 41), answers to the two sub-questions, namely '*what stereotypical queer tropes does Disney use in their queer characters in* Cruella *(2021),* Jungle Cruise *(2021),* Lightyear *(2022) and* Strange World *(2022), and what patterns can be noticed in their use or disuse of these tropes?'* and '*what is the difference between Disney's approach in animated films, geared towards children specifically, and their live-action films, that target a family audience?*)', will be discussed, leading to the answer to the main research question: *How does Disney represent queerness in its recent feature-length films?*

5.1 Use or Disuse of Stereotypical Tropes

5.1.1 Overarching Use or Disuse

Table 1 shows a short overview of all tropes used in the four films. As shown, there is only one trope that is consistently used in all four films, namely 'outside time and space'. At first glance, in light of other research done on this topic, this may seem to suggest that Disney is actively trying to place queer narratives, desires, and identities outside of the perceivable space to keep it as non-threatening of modern society and its (straight) population (Kohnen 110). However, it is important here to make note of Disney's direction as a company. Disney, famously, is a production company geared towards children and families and strives to tell stories and teach children important values through narratives of wonder and fantasy. Thus, these four films telling the stories of people in faraway times and places does not necessarily

have anything to do with these stories including queer representation. However, while Disney films do almost always add a magical element to their films, not all of them also take place in different times/places, so it could still be argued that the company should include queer representation in a film that takes place in modern times and a real-life place to counter this over-used trope.

While the overarching use of the 'outside time and space' trope can thus be explained through Disney's direction, a similar justification can be given for some of the tropes that are consistently *not* used in any of these films, namely 'untimely deaths' and 'murderers'. Death and murder are not often presented in Disney films – especially not those made for younger audiences – so it is not surprising that these tropes are not linked to the queer characters in these films.

Another overarching disuse of a trope is that of 'villains'. This one is exceptionally notable because this trope was very often used in Disney's previous films with queer-coded characters (Brown 3; Kim 157; McLeod 22). Where in past times, Disney only added queer-coded characters in their films to act as horrible villains and bad people, in all four of the films analysed in this thesis, the queer (coded) characters belong to the protagonists of the story. There has been quite some controversy surrounding Disney's past with its queer-coded villains, so this decision to not make these recent queer characters villains was likely a conscious one, hoping to counteract this previous overuse of the trope and prevent people from raising controversy surrounding these characters.

5.1.2 Other Tropes

All other tropes were found in at least one of the films. Homonormativism was found in three of the films, making it a relatively often-used trope. This shows that while Disney does attempt to include queer characters, it still often excludes queer representation that falls outside of the 'generally accepted boundaries' set for queerness as represented in media,

effectively diminishing queerness' defining quality of fluidity (Dyer 16). A similar argument can be made for queer coding and in-betweenism. These tropes were present in two of the films, which does not make them the most used tropes, but means they are used relatively often. This too defines the boundaries of queerness, presenting it as something that has to comply with certain ideas already present in viewers' minds, tapping into stereotypical characteristics, storylines, and gender-related correlations. It is, however, important to note here that this trope was absent in the two of the films, which will be discussed to a fuller extent in the next subchapter since it is relevant for the second sub-question.

Victimisation was present in two of the films. While thus not used in all films, it was still relatively present in this visual corpus. The victimisation of queer characters, when used instantly, undermines or de-emphasises the agency of queer people by portraying them as needing help from external agents (Marshal 65; Leeuwen 147). This was especially present in *Jungle Cruise,* where MacGregor actively voices that his sister (who was a woman and also discriminated against herself) had to save him. This shows that Disney, to some extent, takes on a patronizing attitude towards queer people by supporting the image of queer people being weak and in need of help. This trope, too, will be further elaborated upon in the next sub-chapter.

The tropes of comic relief, gay best friend, and side character were used one, one, and two times respectively. While at first glance this seems like relatively low numbers, this makes sense because while these three tropes can easily coexist within one character, they are also relatively easy to disconnect from each other. However, since most of the films do not make use of all of these tropes together, the queer characters all do possess some kind of relevance or multidimensionality. While these characters do not completely support the idea that only straight people can have relevance or be the main character, it does also not actively

work to actively challenge it, except for in *Strange World,* where the queer character does not fit any of these tropes.

Finally, the trope queer = white can be found in two of the films. All four films present relatively diverse communities, but this is not always reflected in the queer character. While Disney does not consistently challenge the idea that queerness can only be presented on a white backdrop, it does do it in some cases, which actively works to broaden society's perspective of queerness and its intersectionality with race. This trope will also be discussed again in the next sub-chapter.

5.2 Live-Action Films versus Animated Films

There were four tropes in which the animated films and the live-action films deviated from each other, namely queer coding, in-betweenism, victims, and queer = white. Interestingly, in all of these cases, the animated films did not feature the tropes, whereas both live-action films featured all of these tropes.

Queer coding and in-betweenism are similar in that they make use of certain stereotypes that are present in the mind of audiences to present queerness in a rigid, stereotypical way. Both *Cruella* and *Jungle Cruise* featured a male queer character who was presented to comply with many of the stereotypes linked to the sissy and/or queen character. While *Strange World* also included a male queer character, this character was not reduced to any of these stereotypes and his gender was not questioned. In *Lightyear,* Hawthorne's sexuality is not something that was alluded to before her engagement announcement, and also afterwards, there are no stereotypical aspects to her storyline. A possible reason for this difference in portrayal could be the target audience for these films. While the animated films' target audience is younger kids, the live-action films are catered towards families, meaning older kids and adults as well. It could be that these "signs of gayness" (Dyer 19) are included in the live-action films because these audiences will recognise the references, whereas these

kinds of references may go over the heads of the younger children watching the animated films.

Another reason could be that the makers of the animated films aimed to make the queer characters as uncontroversial and subtle as possible, in order not to rouse any (negative) attention from parents who argue their children should not be exposed to queer representation. Due to the queer-coding and the in-betweenism present in *Cruella* and *Jungle Cruise*, more attention goes to the sexuality of these characters, whereas in the animated films not much attention is brought to the queerness of the characters, and they can thus be 'subtly queer'. This, then, seems to touch upon a sense of tokenism, where the only intention is to portray queerness on the silver screen, without allowing this part of the character's identity to affect the story in any way.

The other two tropes that differed in the animated versus the live-action films were victimisation and queer = white. These two tropes both have to do with the real-life consequences of being queer in a world where queerness is looked down upon. In *Cruella* and *Jungle Cruise*, both set in different times but in real-life places, the queer characters are mentioned to have been victimised for their queerness. On the other hand, in *Lightyear* and *Strange World*, which take place in fictional locations, this is never mentioned at all, and the queerness of these characters is simultaneously accepted by all of the characters in the film. An explanation for this could be that the live-action films present a more realistic portrayal of queerness, reminiscent of what it is actually like to be queer in modern society, whereas the animated films present a sort of utopia where queerness is not something anyone looks down upon.

Similarly, the live-action films present queerness in the form of white characters, whereas the animated films present it as something non-white. This could have to do with the live-action films presenting queerness in a way that is more realistic than the animated films.

In the animated films, the queer characters are treated as race-neutral, meaning that their race is not shown to impact their life in any way (Martin 64). Due to the nature of these films, this can be done, seeing as both show a diverse group of people where racism or xenophobia is not present, or at least not shown. However, if the live-action films were to do this, this would feel fake and unauthentic, seeing as the reality of it is that the intersectionality of these identities would impact these characters and their lives. Seeing as neither of these films explicitly want to make the queer storyline the main storyline of their film, making the queer characters white makes it easier to 'realistically' push that storyline more to the background.

While there are thus quite some tropes that are being employed by the live-action film that are not used in the animated films, this does not necessarily mean that either presents a 'better' or 'truer' representation of queerness. The live-action films, by touching upon real-life aspects and hardships of being queer, give a more 'realistic' and contemporary representation of queerness, in which queer people might recognise themselves. However, at the same time is does also fall back into a lot of stereotypical tropes, meaning that queerness is presented as something that can only be shown following a very specific set of rules, that only allow the character to go through a set of premeditated experiences linked to queerness, and nothing else. Moreover, the victimisation pushes a view forward that suggests queer people are in need of saving. In the animated films, on the other hand, there is more diversity and less stereotypical behaviour, meaning that the interpretation of what queerness is, is much broader and fluid. It allows queer characters to just exist without their queerness being the main focus or point of controversy, which is a liberating way to look at queerness with all its multiple facets. However, this then also brings up interpretations of tokenism, thus not allowing queerness to be part of the characters, but only a label to cater to the growing discussion around queer representation.

6. Conclusion

The research aimed at investigating and decoding Disney's representation of queerness in its recent animated and live-action films, using queer theory, imagology, and stereotypical tropes (twelve in total, divided into seven categories) to conduct a qualitative visual discourse analysis and close viewing of four films, namely *Cruella* (2021), *Jungle Cruise* (2021), *Lightyear* (2022) and *Strange World* (2022). The main research question this thesis aimed to answer was: *How does Disney represent queerness in its recent feature-length films?*

To answer this question, the sub-questions must first be answered. It was found that there were four overarching themes, of which three – namely outside time and space, untimely deaths and murderers – could be rationalised as non-conclusive. This was due to stories about faraway times and places and the lack of death and murderers all fitting with Disney's aim as a company to tell stories that portray fantastical stories for younger audiences. The overarching lack of the villain trope, however, was especially notable due to Disney's past reluctance to make their queer (coded) characters anything *but* the villains of their stories. This shows that Disney is deliberately distancing itself from this trope.

The other tropes were not exclusively used or disused, but almost all of them were used in at least two of the films. The predominantly present tropes of homonormativism, in-betweenism, and queer coding show that despite its apparent attempt to portray more fluid and diverse queer characters, Disney still often defines and supports boundaries to this queerness. The use of victimisation in two films shows a lingering patronizing attitude towards queer people and presents them as being weak and in need of help, and subsequently, the use of tropes as comic relief, gay best friend, and side characters further solidify the idea that queer characters are less important or below straight people. The use of the queer = white

trope shows that queerness is still often portrayed as something white, and when it is presented as non-white, the intersectionality between race and sexuality is not touched upon.

A relatively big difference was found between the animated films and the live-action films. In four categories (queer coding, in-betweenism, victims and queer = white), the division between present or not present was 50/50, and only present in the live-action films. *Cruella* and *Jungle Cruise*, through their use of queer coding and in-betweenism project a type of queer representation that is more rigid and pre-meditated to fit certain ideas viewers may have of queer people. There are two possible reasons for this difference, for one that the target audience of the animated films might not yet recognise these 'signs of gayness', or it might have been a deliberate choice to make the queer characters in the animated films as uncontroversial and subtle as possible, to not rouse parents who are against exposing children to diversity. This, however, then comes close to a sense of tokenism, where the character is only queer to portray queerness, but not because it makes any sense in/has any impact on the story.

The other difference between the two categories is that the live-action films make use of the victimisation and queer = white tropes, whereas the animated films do not. These tropes are both rooted in real-life consequences of being queer in a world that looks down on queer people. It makes sense, then, that the animated films – which are not meant to represent real life – make less use of these tropes, whereas the live-action films – that use real-life people to portray queerness in a could-be-real world – make more use of these tropes.

In conclusion, there is no one way of describing Disney's queer representation in its recent films. There are, however, some patterns that may be observed, most notably that Disney is no longer using queer characters as its villains in any of their recent films, and that Disney's animated films portray a more fluid and inclusive – but also more one dimensional

– image of queerness, as opposed to the rigid, limited and subservient – but relatively more 'realistic' – image in the live-action films.

While this thesis included some interesting findings, the scope of the research was limited, and a broader analysis of more Disney films with queer representation could have given more conclusive insights. Moreover, due to the nature of findings of qualitative research, the findings of research are subjective (Hua 18). Despite taking on a critical perspective, personal opinions, biases or pre-conceived ideas might have filtered through. Several researchers conducting this analysis simultaneously and then discussing their findings could have led to more objective analysis and results.

Subsequently, while this analysis only focused on the visual discourse analysis of these representations, there are still countless more ways of looking at the topic of queer representation in Disney films. For example, future research could take the current research as a conceptual framework to analyse the reactions/takeaways children have from these films by conducting interviews/surveys among these children. In this possible research, the difference between the animated and live-action films, as analysed in this thesis, could be used as an interesting sub-question as well. Moreover, as can be seen in Table 1 in Appendix A, *Strange World*, despite being the least stereotypical and most fluid and inclusive film of this corpus, made significantly less money than the other three films. Online, people have been accusing Disney of actively sabotaging this film by not marketing it well (Iftikhar), which could work as an interesting prompt for a marketing analysis.

Works Cited

Primary sources:

Cruella. Directed by Craig Gillespie, screenplay by Dana Fox and Tony McNamara. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2021. *Disney+*.

Jungle Cruise. Directed by Jaume Collet-Serra, screenplay by Michael Green, Glenn Ficarra, and John Requa. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2021. *Disney+*.

Strange World. Directed by Don Hall, screenplay by Qui Nguyen. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2022. *Disney+*.

Lightyear. Directed by Angus MacLane, screenplay by Jason Headley and Angus MacLane. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2022. *Disney+*.

Secondary sources:

101 Dalmatians. Directed by Stephen Herek, screenplay by John Hughes. Walt Disney Pictures, 1996. *Disney+*.

Albers, Peggy. "Visual Discourse Analysis." *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, vol. 56, 2014, pp. 55-95. *ResearchGate.*

Baker, Sarah. "The Changing Face of Gay Representation in Hollywood Films from the 1990s Onwards." *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2015, pp. 41-51. *ResearchGate,* doi:10.18848/2327-008X/CGP/v10i04/53191

Beller, Manfred "Stereotype." *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters – A Critical Survey*, edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, Rodopi, 2007, pp. 429-434.

Berlatsky, Noah. "In 'Cruella,' an Iconic, Queer-Codded Villainess is Still a Threat." *Observer,* 27 May 2021, https://observer.com/2021/05/disney-cruella-queerness/

Brontsema, Robin. “A Queer Revolution: Reconceptualizing the Debate Over Linguistic Reclamation.” *Colorado Research in Linguistics*, vol. 17, 2004, pp. 1-17. *CRIL*, https://doi.org/10.25810/dky3-zq57

Brown, Adelia. “Hook, Ursula, and Elsa: Disney and Queer-coding from the 1950s to the 2010s.” *The Machsey Journal,* vol. 2, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-14. *Richard Machsey Journal.*

Clarke, Mollie. “‘Queer’ History: A History of Queer.” *The National Archives,* 9 Feb. 2021, https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/queer-history-a-history-of-queer/.

“Culture.” *Merriam-Webster,* n.d., https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture. Accessed 3 Mar. 2023.

Dörnyei, Zoltán. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics.* Oxford UP, 2007.

Dyer, Richard. *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2003.

Factora, James. “Strange World Introduces Disney’s First Out, Gay Teen Character to Theaters.” *Them*, 17 Nov. 2022, www.them.us/story/strange-world-jaboukie-young-white-disney-first-out-gay-teen-character.

Hall. Stuart. *Representations Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* 1st ed., SAGE, 1997.

Hua, Zhu. *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide.* 1st ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

Hulan, Haley. “Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context.” *McNair Scholars Journal,* Vol 21, no. 1, 2017, pp. 17-27.

Iftikhar, Asyia. “Disney’s First Film with Openly LGBTQ+ Lead Bombs at Box Office – and Fans Have a Lot of Thoughts.” *The Pink News, 26 Nov. 2022,* https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/11/26/strange-world-box-office-reviews-fan-reaction-disney/

Ives, Mike. “Disney’s ‘Lightyear,’ With a Same-Sex Kiss, Faces a Backlash in Some Muslim Countries.” *The New York Times,* 15 June 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/15/movies/lightyear-banned-kiss-lgbt.html.

Kim. Koeun. “Queer-coded Villains (And Why You Should Care).” *Dialogues@RU,* edited by Tracy Budd and Lynda Dexheimer, 2017, pp. 156-165. https://dialogues.rutgers.edu/images/Journals_PDF/2017-18-dialogues-web_e6db3.pdf#page=164

King, Jessica Lynn. *Claiming a Place in the Magic Kingdom: A Queer Analysis of Disney Movies from 2010 to 2020.* 2020. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, MA Thesis. *Virginia Tech,* https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/106744/King_JL_T_2020.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Kinger, Raghav. “Content Analysis of Disney’s Portrayal of Minority Groups and its Impact on Minority Adolescents and Children.” *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews,* Vol. 3, no. 7, 2022, pp. 3065-3074. *IJRPR.COM,*

Kohnen, Melanie. *Queer Representation, Visibility and Race in American Film and Television; Screening the Closet*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2015.

Lang, Jamie. “‘Lightyear’ Banned in at Least 14 Countries for Including Same Sex Kiss.” *CartoonBrew,* 14 June 2022, https://www.cartoonbrew.com/distribution/lightyear-banned-for-same-sex-kiss-217573.html.

---. “Disney’s ‘Strange World’ Skips Markets Where LGBTQIA+ Content is Banned or Censored.” *CartoonBrew*, 22 Nov. 2022, https://www.cartoonbrew.com/distribution/strange-world-skips-20-markets-disney-223459.html.

Leerssen, Joep. “Imagology: History and Method.” *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters – A Critical Survey*, edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, Rodopi, 2007, pp. 17-32.

---. “Image.” *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters – A Critical Survey*, edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, Rodopi, 2007, pp. 342-344.

Lee St. Jacues, Macie. *When will my reflection show who I am inside?": Queering Disney Fantasy.* 2021. Rhode Island College, MA Thesis, *Digital Commons,* https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1346&context=etd

Leeuwen, Theo van. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis.* Oxford UP, 2008.

Marschall, Daniel. “Popular Culture, the ‘Victim’ Trope and Queer Youth Analytics.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* vol. 23, no. 1, 2010, pp. 65-85. *TANDFONLINE.*

Martin, Alfred L. “TV in Black and Gay: Examining Constructions of Gay Blackness and Gay Crossracial Dating on GRΣΣK.” *Race, Sexuality, and Television,* vol. 31, no. 2, 2011, pp. 63-69. *CINEMA.*

McLeod, Dion Sheridan. *Unmasking the Quillain: Queerness and Villainy in Animated Disney Films.* 2016. University of Wollingong. PhD Dissertation, https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5824&context=theses

Monji, Jana J. “‘Lightyear’ Is Good Family-Friendly Fun, But Fails on East Asian Diversity.” *Age of the Geek,* 17 June 2022, https://ageofthegeek.org/2022/06/17/lightyear-is-good-family-friendly-fun-but-fails-on-east-asian-diversity-/

MPA. “The Anatomy of a Rating.” *Filmratings,* n.d., https://www.filmratings.com/RatingsGuide.

Putnam, Amanda. “Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films.” *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability,* edited by Johnson Cheu, McFarland, 2013, pp. 147-162.

“Queer”. *The Oxford English Dictionary,* n.d., https://www.oed.com/oed2/00194686;jsessionid=29800D0408C3B2E9D6BF3ACB049B00E7. Accessed 3 Mar. 2023.

Raymond, Diane. “Popular Culture and Queer Representation; A Critical Perspective.” *Gender, Race, and Class in Media – a Text-Reader,* edited by Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, Sage Publications, 2003, pp. 98-110.

Rigney, Ann. “Representation.” *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters – A Critical Survey*, edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, Rodopi, 2007, pp. 415-418.

Rude, Mey. “A Brief Timeline of Disney's 17 ‘First Gay Characters’.” *Out,* 16 Dec. 2022, https://www.out.com/film/2022/3/22/disneys-first-out-lgbtq-gay-characters#toggle-gdpr

Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet; Homosexuality in the Movies.* Harper & Row, 1987.

Selden, Raman, et al. *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory.* 5th ed., Pearson Longman, 2005.

Sweeney, Gael. “‘What Do You Want Me to Do? Dress in Drag and Do the Hula?’: Timon and Pumbaa’s Alternative Lifestyle Dilemma in The Lion King.” *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability,* edited by Johnson Cheu, McFarland, 2013, pp. 129-146.

Tadeo, Jericho. “Cruella Repeats Disney’s Queerbaiting Problem.” *ScreenRant,* 5 June 2021, https://screenrant.com/cruella-movie-disney-artie-queerbaiting-lgbtq-problem/

The Take. “The Gay Best Friend - How It Became a Stereotype.” *The Take,* n.d., https://the-take.com/watch/the-gay-best-friend-how-it-became-a-stereotype

Varachia, Bushra. “Queer Christina: The Representation of LGBT Characters in Pre-Code Era Films.” *Screen Culture; A Journal of Media and the Moving Image*, no. 4, 2018, n.p. *Oakland University Cinema,* https://screenculturejournal.com/2018/04/queer-christina-the-representation-of-lgbt-characters-in-pre-code-era-films/.

Whittington, Karl. “Queer.” *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 33, 2012, pp. 157-168. *JSTOR,* https://www.jstor.org/stable/23924280

Appendix A

Films Information

Film	**Genre**	**Presented Time and Place**	**Time**	**Director**	**Main Cast**	**Gross Revenue**
Cruella (2021)	Comedy, drama, adventure, children, crime	1964 - 1977 England	2.14h	Craig Gillespie	Emma Stone, Emma Thompson, Joel Fry, Paul Walter	$233.5 million
Jungle Cruise (2021)	Action, adventure, comedy, fantasy, historical	1916, London / Brazil	2.07h	Jaume Collet-Serra	Dwayne Johnson, Emily Blunt, Édgar Ramírez, Jack Whitehall	$220.9 million
Lightyear (2022)	Action, adventure, comedy, children, science-fiction, family, fantasy, drama	Late 80s-early 90s / T'Kani Prime (fictional planet)	1.45h	Angus MacLane	Chris Evans, Keke Palmer, Peter Sohn, Taika Waititi Dale Soules James Brolin Uzo Aduba	$226.4 million
Strange World (2022)	Comedy, action, adventure, family, science-fiction, fantasy, animation	No date, Avalonia (fictional country)	1.41h	Don Hall	Jake Gyllenhaal, Dennis Quaid, Jaboukie Young-White, Lucy Liu	$73.6 million

Table 1: Extra Information About the Four Films.

Appendix B

Films Plot Summaries

***Cruella* (2021)**

This live-action film set in London during the punk rock movement of the 1970s revolves around Estella Miller, a clever and creative aspiring fashion designer. Once orphaned, she befriends two young thieves (Jasper and Horace) and together they make a life on the London streets. One day, Estella's creative flair for fashion catches the eye of Baroness Von Hellman, a famous designer, who takes her on as an apprentice. However, she then finds out that the Baroness was responsible for her mother's death, and with the help of Jasper, Horace, and a queer vintage shop owner named Artie, she devises a plan to take her revenge. This vengeance leads her to adopt an alter-ego the notorious fashion designer known as Cruella de Vil, who later becomes the notorious villain in the 101 Dalmatians film, through which she manages to defeat the Baroness.

***Jungle Cruise* (2021)**

This film tells the story of a small riverboat captain named Frank Wolff, who takes a scientist (Dr. Lily Houghton) and her brother (MacGregor Houghton) over the Amazon River in search of the Tears of the Moon, a mythical tree whose petals can cure any illness, heal any injury and lift any curse. However, they are not the only ones searching for it, as a German expedition, and a group of ancient, cursed conquistadors also follow the river in search of the tree. Eventually, the three groups collide at the location of the tree. In the end, Frank and Lily manage to save one petal from the tree, and all of them return to England.

***Lightyear* (2022)**

The film is the origin story of Buzz Lightyear, a character from Pixar Studio's *Toy Story* (1995). Buzz is a legendary space ranger who is marooned on a hostile planet (Tikani Prime) with his commander and crew. Throughout the film, he tries to find a way back home but

quickly realises that his attempts to find a way result in him effectively standing still in time, while his companions (under whom his best friend and college Alisha Hawthorne and her wife) continue aging normally. Buzz – together with his robot cat Sox – joins a group of ambitious recruits set on saving their world from the invading Zurg robots. In the end, Buzz finds a way to defeat the Zurg – who turns out to be an older version of him –, and finally accepts his life on Tikani Prime.

***Stange World* (2022)**

This original action-adventure centers around the Clades family residing in fictional Avalonia. Jaeger Clade, the patriarch of the family, is an adventurer who used to take his son Searcher into the wilderness to explore new worlds until Searcher one day decided to stay behind. Searcher starts cultivating a plant called pando, which gives off energy. Twenty-five years later, Searcher is married to Meridian and has a son, Ethan. However, pando is losing its potency, so the family sets off to save it. During their travels, they run into Jaeger, who joins them. After finding out that they are living on the back of an immense creature, which is being killed by the constant growth of pando, the three generations of Clade men join forces to save the creature by destroying pando.