



DEPICTION OF MEDIEVAL SCOTTISH CULTURE IN DISNEY'S *BRAVE*

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ABSTRACT

Literature does not merely serve as entertainment but also functions as a medium for delivering messages, meanings, and the author's experiences and ideas within the context of reality and culture. One such medium is film. This research focuses on the representation of Scottish culture during the medieval era in the film *Brave* (2012), directed by Brenda Chapman. The study examines traditional cultural symbols as part of the narrative structure and meaning-making process, which also aid in introducing and understanding Scottish culture. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with an objective approach, analyzing symbols through Perrine's theory. The data are examined based on the film's intrinsic elements, particularly symbols related to Scottish culture. The results show that symbols such as the tartan, bagpipe, and festival in *Brave* not only depict Scottish culture but also reflect values such as clan pride, solidarity, and the conflict between tradition and individual freedom. These symbols also convey moral messages about freedom and destiny. The study concludes that *Brave* successfully presents Scottish culture by combining traditional elements with social messages that remain relevant to contemporary life.

Keywords: *Scotland Culture, Symbols, Brave, Film.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a medium for preserving and sharing cultural heritage, through its nature that based on reality. All kinds of literature work come from different places, convey their own messages about morality, sociological problem, sometimes it serves as a mere entertainment with hidden meanings. Nonetheless, it shows norms that become the stand of each works of literature, where it takes places, and how they tell stories in their own language and uniqueness. This form of preservation has rooted in ancient forms such as folklore, myths, and legends, as a way to transmit ideological culture from one generation to generation.



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Therefore, a study of culture in literature is strongly tied to the history. As expressed by Taine in (Sujarwa, 2019), “*sastra dapat dianggap sebagai dokumen sejarah jika karya tersebut berfungsi sebagai monumen budaya*”. In addition, Taine explained that literature affected by racial, environment, and time, as it reflects the condition of one’s civilization, culture, and certain events in the history. There are kinds of literature as time pass by, films are one of it in this modern era, blending visual storytelling that also consist of cultural symbols to uphold indigenous elements on a global scale. According to *Le Cinéma et la littérature moderniste* (2016), with an English translation, film, from its early years onwards, sought narrative form and its stories were frequently drawn from plays, poems, and novels. Film, as a medium of visual art and adaptation form of literature, represent stories through series of shots that gives an image of a plot, different from the experience of imagination when reading.

In this context, the writer chose Disney’s *Brave* as the object of this research. This movie based on Scotland’s culture in medieval era, known for their festive musical performance, arts, and traditional celebration. According to Scottish Government (2024), Scotland culture emphasizes the differences on each individual and their community. These customs play an important role in uniting their people through solidarity, despite the diversity of each background and identity. Disney’s *Brave* directed by Brenda Chapman narrates the journey of Merida, a daughter that fight for her freedom to choose her own path, however it’s a contradictory wish from her mother who wants her to be responsible to her family and their clan. Beside the familial conflict, the story is surrounded by the setting of Scotland’s tradition as part of the plot.

The focus on this article is how Disney’s *Brave* (2012) tells Scotland’s culture with its essence and meaning that express the sense of solidarity and the importance of individuality freedom in uniting people through their tradition. Essentially, the purpose of this research is to analyze how the Scotland culture in medieval era depicted in *Brave* as a way to symbolize Scotland’s rich heritage and enduring values. By examining symbols, this study uncovers how the film uses these elements to blend folklore with themes of community bonds and personal autonomy, showcasing how medieval Scottish traditions nurture unity while honoring individual expression.

In this research, the discussion consists of interpreting Scottish culture shown in the film as a way convey certain meanings using the theory of symbols.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Objective Approach

The approach applied in this research is objective approach, in line with Ratna’s (2013) perspective, which emphasizes the analysis of intrinsic elements within a literary work that exists and function inside the work itself. Through this approach, the analysis focus on the cultural symbols embedded in Disney’s *Brave*, particularly



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those that reflect the essence of medieval Scottish culture that still uphold their traditions. According to Laurence Perrine (1969), symbols in literature hold meaning that extend beyond their literal sense. A symbol may take the form of an object, characters, situation, action, or other elements that convey deeper messages.

Based on this framework, this research examines various scenes and events that illustrate the essence of Scottish culture, which serving both as a way to tell historical culture of Scotland and as a medium for expressing certain symbolic meanings. The aim of this study is to identify the cultural symbols represented in Disney's *Brave* and to relate them to the narrative and its underlying messages. Through this research, the study provides a clearer understanding of Scottish culture itself that reflected through the film's visual animation and narrative elements, while also demonstrating the connection between those cultural symbols and the film's central theme.

Scotland Culture Portrayed on Disney's *Brave*

The medieval era of Scotland is portrayed in *Brave* through its depiction of a kingdom featuring Romanesque style architecture, surrounded by forests inspired by real locations in Scotland. The authenticity of the setting is further characterized through the characters, their dialects, tradition attire, customs, and other cultural aspects that rooted in historical and folklore, many of which are still preserved today through various traditional celebrations.

One of the most significant cultural aspects presented in the film is the Scottish tradition and legend that based on Europe mythology—which appear from the very beginning of the story. The folklore about a Kelpie; a mythological creature known as the *will o' the wisp* in the film, is illustrated as a mysterious blue light that guides someone toward a particular path, which may lead either to treasure or to their own destruction. This is seen in the scene where young Merida encounters the *will o' the wisp*.

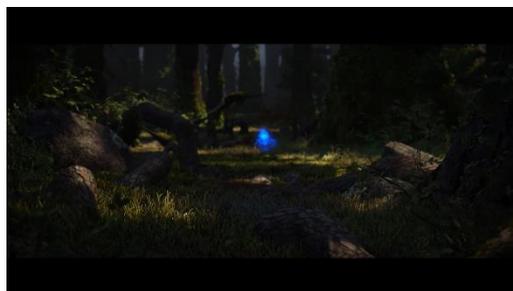


Figure 1. the will o' wisp

Merida: "The will o' the wisp!"
(00:03:11 – 00:03:12) (Chapman, 2012)

In the context of the story, the *will o' the wisp* is portrayed as a spirit that guides Merida's path. This light becomes the beginning of her journey and her



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curiosity to seek freedom and determine her own fate. In mythology, the *will o' the wisp* is described as a supernatural entity that leads travelers into danger, yet it also symbolizes hope or hidden fortune. The *will o' the wisp* thus serves as a main theme, portraying that the pursuit of freedom is often filled with uncertainty and challenges. This is shown in several scenes where Merida follows the light, leading her to situations that ultimately cause her mother to transform into a bear—a turning point that forced Merida to confront her family conflict. Through this journey, Merida learns to overcome her selfishness, while her mother learns to value compassion over societal norms. In this sense, the *will o' the wisp* indirectly guides Merida not only toward adventure but also towards reconciliation with her mother despite hardships.

In *Brave*, the *will o' the wisp* is also connected to the *Stone circle*, more commonly known as Stonehenge. In the film, Stonehenge serves as an important setting in Merida's journey, where she once again encounters the *will o' the wisp* that leads her to the witch's cottage. In mythology, Stonehenge is believed to be a portal or a means of celestial measurement used by ancient civilization to mark time. In *Brave*, the Stonehenge function as a symbolic parallel world—the witch's house that mysteriously disappears, and the transformation of Merida's mother from a bear back into her human form at sunrise, both reflect mythological beliefs. Symbolically, it represents change and the cycle of time, connecting to the film's broader theme of freedom. The mother's transformation is not merely magical, but also a metaphor for reconciliation between old traditions and personal will, showing how *Brave* made folklore into a lesson on an equity between heritage and individuality.



Figure 2. Stonehenge

Previously at the beginning of the story, the rising action begins when Merida is gradually confronted with her responsibilities through an arranged marriage.

Queen Elinor: "To win the fair mittens, they must prove their worth, by feats of strength or arms in the game. It is customary that the challenge be determined by the princess herself—"

Merida: "Archery, archery! I choose... archery."



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*Queen Elinor: “Let the games begin!”
(00:22:31 – 00:22:55) (Chapman, 2012)*

The dialogue above illustrates a festival held to decide Merida’s suitor, reflecting how Scottish culture often revolves around such festive celebrations. The festival becomes a symbol of unity and solidarity among the clans within the film’s context. The arranged marriage serves to unite different clans and honor the bonds that connect them. This reflects Scotland’s longstanding traditions that value community, honor, and collective identity.

However, under this seemingly positive meaning, the festival also symbolizes social pressure and patriarchal traditions that often restrict individual freedom as it is to celebrate the chosen suitor for a princess. Through these elements, *Brave* not only represent Scottish culture visually but also conveys a deeper message about the conflict between tradition and personal liberty—particularly from a woman perspective.

Another significant motive depicted in *Brave* is the use of tartan, which represent Scotland’s rich traditional cloth, not only that also as community and identity. In medieval Gaelic society, tartan cloth served as an identifier of clan affiliation, military regiment, or regional origin. The distinctive checkered patterns were not merely aesthetic but also a symbol of loyalty, pride, and solidarity among clan members.



Figure 3. Tartan

In the film, tartan is not only used as traditional clothing and identity, but also representation of the deep connection between clans within Merida’s kingdom. Each clan possesses its own distinct tartan pattern, expressing pride in their own community.

Merida: “Our kingdom is young, our story are not yet legend, but in them our bond were struck, our clans were once enemies, but when invaders threatens us from the sea, you joined together to defend our lands, you fought for each other, you risk everything for each other...”

Merida: “My dad rallied your forces and you made him your king, it was an



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alliance forge in bravery and friendship, and it lives till this day.”
(01:05:43 01:06:43) (Chapman, 2012)

Merida’s dialogue about the kingdom’s history and the alliance between clans deepens the symbolic meaning of tartan. She explains how clans that were once enemies can together when faced with external threats. By wearing tartan, the characters in *Brave* express loyalty not only to their own clans but also to the kingdom as a whole. This emphasizes the themes of pride and honor—values that are deeply ingrained in Scottish tradition.



Figure 4. bagpipe

Beyond clothing, the film also highlights the bagpipe, a musical instrument that has long been a symbol of Scottish identity. The distinctive melody of the bagpipe enhances the atmosphere of the film, especially during festival scenes. As such, the bagpipe functions as a symbol of Scotland’s cultural identity, emphasizing the point of moments that represent unity and solidarity among the clans.

CONCLUSION

Disney’s *Brave* presents various cultural symbols of Scotland that reflect its identity, traditions, and the internal conflicts faced by the main character Merida. These symbols not only serve as a medium to presenting medieval Scottish culture, but also to show how such traditions endure in the present day. The folklore elements such as the *will o’ the wisp* and Stonehenge play crucial roles in Merida’s journey. Not merely as a depiction of Scottish mythology, but as metaphors for her finding herself, familial reconciliation, and the balance between fate and personal desire. The tradition of arranged marriage and clan festivals illustrates the Scottish values of solidarity and honor, while critiquing patriarchal system that represent as restriction to individual freedom—a main elements of Scottish customs of respecting individuality as a way to connect and become one. Additionally, motifs such as tartan patterns and the use of bagpipes represent their identity and unity within Scottish society, through these symbolic interpretations, *Brave* emphasizes the significance of interpersonal relationship, cultural heritage, revealing how freedom can coexist harmoniously with tradition.

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