
PREMIERE: My Panda, My Call, Why is Red an Awkward Movie?

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A few days after its premiere on March 11th on the Disney + platform, the North American animated film Turning Red, or simply Red (Domee Shi), already raises unique positions.

It's not common for a product of its characteristics -within the adventure comedy- to produce itching and opinions as radical as that of the renowned youtuber Sean Chandler, who described it as alienating and strange, in addition to ensuring that only a small segment of the population could identify with it.

Why would a man, middle-aged and white, feel this way in front of a film whose main protagonist is a girl? It happens that little Mei Lee, 13 years old, belongs to a traditional Chinese family living in Canada, where she keeps a secret that she must remain locked up; otherwise, she could cause great havoc in her life and the lives of others.

What at first was considered a blessing, today is assumed as an inconvenience. Every woman in this family can turn into a huge red panda when her emotions are shaken, once she reaches the age where she leaves childhood behind to enter puberty.

Yes, indeed, the first menstruation, menarche, period or any other expression used to define it, and that in this film, produced by Pixar animation studios has been represented by a wide range of symbols, from a delicate flower from red petals to the moon of the same color, lady of the skies every 28 days.

Red therefore dares to show packages of sanitary pads and a thermal water bag to alleviate menstrual cramps approaching for the first time such a significant moment in a woman's life.

The slap on the face of Western patriarchy lies in planting such objects, so deeply rooted to adulthood and to quasi-rituals related to reproductive capacity that women practice in the most absolute privacy, in a work for "childish" audience.

And it dares more: it dares to put the word "sexy" in the mouth of a 13-year-old girl, and to recognize that at that

age sexual awakening, incipient desire, as well as the first approximations to motherhood, clearly understood as the result of the man-woman union, are established realities, until concluding that the successful transit towards full maturity goes through its normalcy.

Walt Disney Pictures have never gone this far. Although it must be recognized that the film studio has taken steps in the direction of diversity with stories set far from the usual settings, its too progressive attempts are often frustrated, as when it was impossible to openly address Elsa's sexual identity in the film second film of the successful Frozen.

For this reason and for that pathetic blush that the demystified body of a woman still provokes in any counter-hegemonic story, they do not forgive Red for telling, even in a metaphorical key, the "intimate things" of an adolescent, who in this case have as a background the city of Toronto, year 2002, and the exquisitely light soundtrack of a pop quartet.

They do not forgive —how to do it? — for being a film made for and by women (direction, script, production, and animation), until it became one of the most daring of this century.

This film takes up the reflective existentialist tone with which public could gloat in Soul, although this time loaded with more spectacular adventures typical of the genre, and the innocence of four girls united by a close friendship, despite their differences.

The idea of transforming into a red panda, in a clear allusion to the color of the period and to the wild nature that lurks behind the socially accepted canons for the female model, coincides, to a certain extent, with the fundamental postulate of the book.

In that work, the psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés argues that "not insisting on following your own rhythm, feeling self-conscious, being separated from your own revivification, dragged towards domestication, intellectualism, work or inertia because this is the safest place for someone who has lost her instincts" are emotional symptoms of a break with the wild force of the female psyche.

And although menstruation is the topic of its plot, Red delves into the building of the identity of the young woman, her relationship with the mother as a repressive figure, the management of others' expectations, the search and finally the finding of the inner voice that defines her as an independent being.

Based on elements common to more than half the planet (in response to youtuber Chandler's concern), the excellent animation reinforces the halo of mystical and the mystery that inhabits the misnamed weaker sex, and it's an exemplary denunciation of the stigma of stain, shame and dirt that must be kept in the intimate space of the home, in contrast to the masculine sign, to whom the public domain has been granted. Consequently, locking up or letting the beast go free, whether or not to be the perfect daughter according to the standards of her overprotective mother, is a decision that only Mei Lee can make.

Domee Shi, the first woman to direct a Pixar film, already deserved recognition from the academy with an Oscar in 2008 for her animated short Bao, also about the figure of women focused on motherhood, and it would not be surprising that for her the Oscar or other award were reserved for her direction in Red. The film is available to the Cuban public platform Picta.

There are no reasons to miss it.

Translated by Amikal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
