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THE EVOLUTION OF THE STORYLINE IN THE ANIMATED SERIES MIRACULOUS: THE ADVENTURES OF LADYBUG
Analysis from Season 1 to 4

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ABSTRACT
In thecompetitive world of animated series, one from outside the leading studios stands out with a creative and compelling storyline: Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir. In a qualitative, descriptive, non-experimental study, five episodes from each of the first four seasons were subjected to discourse analysis using a recording sheet based on the three-act paradigm: exposition, development, and ending (Field, 1995). The central research question was: How did the storyline of the French animated series Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir, seasons 1-4, evolve?

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1. Introduction

The storyline, in any audiovisual or cinematic production, marks the starting point that describes the main storyline. Also known as narrative structure, or argument, it defines the events in the story to catch attention. As the first narrative element (Ditus, 2021), it condenses the story into a few sentences, serving as the basic outline of the script and as a fundamental tool for initiating the writing process, which will be developed and enriched throughout the creative process (Aguirre, 2024).

The story, as an audiovisual product, must be constructed in a way that conveys logical meaning, guided by the course of events, whether successive or enveloping. For Orejuela (2024), developing a clear and well-organized chronology is essential for coherence in the progression of events within a story. Similarly, Teichmann (2021) argues that structure is the design that supports the material to be developed—an invisible component that enables visible manifestation. Field (1995a, p. 19) emphasized the importance of having structure in screenplay writing, warning about the consequences of neglecting it.

> A screenplay without structure has no storyline; it wanders aimlessly, searching for itself, and becomes monotonous and dull. It does not work. It has no direction or line of development. A good screenplay always has a solid dramatic line of action; it goes somewhere, advancing step by step toward ending (Field, 1995a, p. 19).

In the work that awaits creatives regarding the storyline, the role of the central character stands out. Specifically, the character's desire becomes the key to this structure—the pivot of the story—referred to as the super-objective or even as the storyline itself, as it unifies and gives coherence to all other elements of the story (McKee, 2002). In audiovisual storytelling, the storyline revolves around the character, and more precisely around their dreams, goals, and their reason for being within the fictional universe.

1.1. Following ... the storyline

Analyzing the storyline requires first clarifying certain milestones and adopting foundational concepts. Understanding how stories are analyzed and how their organization has evolved leads back to Aristotle, the pioneer in studying narratives, their components, and their structure (Hernández, 2022). According to Parra and Hernández (2021, p. 13), cinematic narrative is indebted to the Greek philosopher:

> In Poetics or On Poetics, Aristotle expresses the art of storytelling through three acts: beginning, development, and ending. The Aristotelian conception has been used as a basic structure to organize many cinematic narratives. From this ordering, new models for screenplay writing have been developed (Parra and Hernández, 2021, p. 13)

The way a story is told—animated or otherwise—any form of audiovisual narrative is still based on scenes and sequences organized according to the Aristotelian three-act model: setup, conflict, and ending (Chahuara et al., 2024). One of the contemporary authors who drew upon Aristotle was Field (1995). His paradigm, which adopts the three-act structure, serves as a normative guide for audiovisual productions to present and develop their stories (Carcaboso et al., 2023).

However, Syd Field's paradigm is not based exclusively on Aristotelian principles. According to Cohn (2013), cited by Zhang (2024), Field was also inspired by Gustav Freytag's act segmentation. Although Aristotle and Freytag initially devised their models for theater, their concepts laid the foundation for the subsequent development of studies on cinematic narrative structure and, later, audiovisual narrative.

1.2. Field's Three Acts

In Field's model, each of the three acts that make up the structure of a story contains different plot elements. The first act, or Setup, involves two key components: the inciting incident and the first plot point. The second act, or Confrontation, is composed of the midpoint and the second plot point. Finally, the third act, or ending, presents a single key moment: the climax, which leads directly to the closure of the story (Shah et al., 2023). Optionally, elements such as an opening scene or status quo, anticlimax, as well as the denouement or epilogue, may be included to provide greater depth to the story (Rodríguez & Baños, 2013).

However, Field's paradigm has proven its effectiveness.

> It is a tool, a guide, a map to find the path in the screenwriting process. As he defined it in"The Screenwriter's Workbook," a paradigm is a "model, an example, a conceptual scheme."
>
> The more I learn about the paradigm and its function in the process of writing a screenplay, the more I am surprised by the importance it truly has. (Field, 1995-b, p. 23)

The setup begins at the start of the script, presenting the characters and their environment (Guarin, 2022). The creation of the status quo or ordinary world (Field, 1979) facilitates the introduction of the protagonists, the definition of the setting, and the transmission of the overall tone (Dueñas & Gutiérrez, 2024). In this part of the story, an event, dialogue, action, scene, or sequence must occur that alters the protagonist's life and pushes them toward a decision to restore balance (Seger, 2022). This is referred to as the inciting incident (Llerena & Barbera, 2024).

The Development of the storyline is characterized by its length and complexity, as it must keep the audience in suspense. At this stage, subplots usually appear, and the antagonist, if one exists, gains relevance (Cea, 2023; Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2014). In this phase, the midpoint was conceived to divide the second act into two symmetrical parts, functioning as a guide that orients and gives direction to the development of the plot (De La Torre, 2022). This element has two commitments to the story: 1) to push it forward and 2) to provide it with increasing intensity (Naranjo & Fernandez, 2020). Afterwards comes the second plot point, or crisis, which causes an imbalance in the protagonist but at the same time redirects the narrative toward its outcome (McKee, 2009; Llerena & Barbera, 2024).

In the Ending, maximum tension is reached, conflicts are resolved, and the plot is ended (López, 2024). It establishes an ending that allows the objectives set by the protagonists to be achieved, based on the experiences lived throughout the plot, within a range of possibilities (Velásquez, 2021).

In this final act we find the climax, the moment in which the highest dramatic expression within the narrative erupts (Rodríguez, 2021). The culminating point is reached when the protagonist faces their greatest challenge and makes a crucial decision that will bring consequences (Villegas & Urdaneta, 2024). At the end, we ask ourselves: How does it end? Is the character safe and sound? Did they accomplish their goal or not?

A well-structured ending successfully brings the narrative to an appropriate conclusion, providing coherence and facilitating the viewer's understanding of the story (Hernández, 2022). In contrast, according to Serrano et al. (2023), episodes may conclude in either a closed or open manner. The open ending serves to link with subsequent content, especially when moments of heightened tension are placed at the end.

1.3. The Analysis of Ladybug

Created by Thomas Astruc, Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir is a French animated television series that premiered in 2015. A digital animation, by the end of 2025 it had six seasons, 130 episodes, and four specials. The genres it addresses combine romance, action, and comedy (Wikipedia, 2025).

According to Television Fandom (2025), Marinette and Adrien are two high school students who possess a quality that distinguishes them from others: they transform into superheroes. Wearing tight suits and masks, they protect the citizens of Paris from the evil caused by the supervillain Hawk Moth.

The series has been scarcely addressed from a scientific research perspective; studies have examined representation models in production and what the characters convey on screen from an ethnic diversity approach, as well as how young audiences construct their perceptions in these areas (Aguasanta et al., 2021; Aguasanta et al., 2023). It has also been analyzed as a space for representing social dynamics that reflect behaviors and conflicts present in everyday life (Daşdeler & Üstündağ, 2024). Furthermore, translation techniques used for social references in the Latin American Spanish and English dubbing have been scrutinized to understand variations in cultural values, social references, and translation processes (Caballero & Astete, 2024).

No research has been found that covers technical or technical-semantic aspects, much less its storyline. Thus, we have a series whose storyline unfolds over time. A rich element in any fictional audiovisual product is precisely that which is constructed from the protagonists' expectations, who, consciously or not, seek to restore balance in their lives, thereby forming the backbone of the story (McKee, 2002; Rodríguez, 2023).

With these preliminaries, this research aims to analyze the evolution of the storyline of the animated series Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir. Each of the acts of Syd Field's Paradigm is taken as a dimension of the evolution variable to outline three specific objectives.

The results will directly contribute to a more academic and scientific understanding of the series addressed. They will also serve as background for researchers in digital media communication who focus on the narrative analysis of audiovisual pieces. Likewise, at a methodological level, it will provide an analytical instrument for the narrative comprehension of similar discursive phenomena.

2. Method.

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach, whereby reality is "analyzed, interpreted, and understood as it presents itself—that is, as it is and as it unfolds." (Piña-Ferrer, 2023, p. 2). This approach is characterized by providing detailed information about the subject of study, which requires that the information obtained be analyzed thoroughly to identify levels, norms, and arguments (Arías et al., 2022). The scope was descriptive; as Saldaña and Huamán (2024, p. 69) state, it "focuses on describing the various characteristics of a phenomenon or situation. Its objective is to provide a thorough and accurate representation." The design was non-experimental: conclusions regarding the variable or the relationships between variables were developed without researcher interference, and the phenomena were examined as they occurred in their natural environment (Vigo et al., 2020). Additionally, it was cross-sectional because data collection was carried out at a specific point in time, since "its purpose is to describe variables and analyze their incidence and interrelation at a given moment" (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018, as cited in Santa et al., 2024, p. 321).

The unit of analysis and observation consisted of each episode of the series Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir. The population comprised 103 episodes from the six seasons available at the time the study was planned. As the population allowed for a countable number of units, it was finite. The sample was non-probabilistic and based on convenience: researchers selected the elements according to their judgment, either to facilitate access or due to characteristics linked to the study's purpose (Montesinos et al., 2017, as cited in Huiare et al., 2022).

The inclusion criteria were: (1) complete episode, (2) sufficient technical quality in audio and video, and (3) unrestricted access to the content. The exclusion criteria were: (1) extended-length episodes and (2) episodes addressing special topics (for instance, commemorative dates requiring deviations from the main plot). Twenty episodes from the first four seasons were selected. Within them, the most relevant sequences encompassing the setup, development, and ending of the main storyline were chosen. Each episode has an approximate duration of 22 minutes.

As a data collection technique, discourse analysis was employed, focusing on examining how messages and meanings are constructed and communicated within a text or group of texts (Medina et al., 2023). It is based on the analysis of documents or other references containing information related to the object of study (Correa, 2024). A discourse record sheet was developed as the research instrument, allowing analysts to freely capture the characteristics established in previously defined subcategories based on the theoretical foundations reviewed in the introduction, following the operational logic of Alarcón et al. (2024).

The instrument's content was validated by three university professors with expertise in the field. Based on Rodríguez and Baños' (2013) narrative line model, the instrument was divided into seven aspects: Time, dramatic situation, sequence ID, events, characters, setting, and brand/product. However, as time and brand/product were not related to the topic under study, these items were discarded. One record sheet was completed for each relevant sequence observed in each season. A total of 20 discourse record sheets were applied.

The discourse analysis itself serves both as a technique for accessing data and for analyzing it. The qualitative approach provides sufficient grounds to rely on a conceptual analytical path. "To conduct a study such as this, it is not necessary to resort to statistical procedures. It is sufficient to construct the data, process them, and interpret them" (Sayago, 2014, p. 6). Nevertheless, as discourse analysis is considered a profound and qualitative variant of content analysis—traditionally quantitative in nature (Benites & Villanueva, 2015)—it implicitly and even explicitly incorporates quantitative elements within its instrument, including checking mechanisms, thereby fulfilling the necessary triangulation process.

In general terms, the research procedure followed the narrative line analysis model of Rodríguez and Baños (2013): (1) Instrument validation by specialized faculty members; (2) Observation and sample selection: the first four seasons of the series were viewed through the Disney Plus platform to determine the most relevant episodes for analysis; (3) Data analysis and instrument implementation: the dramatic situation, setting, and events of the selected episodes were analyzed using the discourse record sheets. Subsequently, a cross-sectional analysis was conducted for each aspect studied. The process began with the first season, summarizing the most significant plot twists identified in each episode and their evolutionary trajectory across the first four seasons; (4) Comparative analysis: the evolution of the storyline was examined for each proposed aspect, supported by bibliography; (5) Data triangulation: the obtained results were cross-checked with the instrument's verification data and interpreted within a macro context—the overarching plot.

Regarding ethical considerations, fundamental principles oriented towards the analysis of cultural content were upheld, adapting ethical criteria traditionally applied in health, science, and technology to the study of audiovisual content. The guidelines proposed by Canova (2022) were followed.

Content originality was prioritized, avoiding inappropriate practices such as plagiarism or self-plagiarism. Authorship of the sources used was respected by citing them in accordance with APA (7th edition) standards. Any type of data manipulation or alteration was avoided, in line with ethical standards of scientific publication, as noted by Oby (2025).

3. Results.

For the specific objective "To define the evolution of the series' storyline in its setup dimension (Act 1)," three indicators were analyzed: Status Quo, Inciting incident, and Dramatic Conflict.

Regarding the Status Quo, it was observed that the first and second seasons share a similar narrative centered on the presentation of the characters and their daily lives. The protagonists' status quo consists of learning to balance their roles as young students and superheroes (episodes 11.1 and 12.1, Origins 1 and 2; episode 1.2, The Collector), which delve into their daily routines and their work as protectors of the city. From the third season onward, greater complexity is perceived in their concept of normality, as their personal lives begin to interfere with their superhero responsibilities (episode 21.3, Backwarder), where Ladybug mistakenly delivers a personal letter, causing an important character to be akumatized. In the fourth season, they begin to question deeper aspects of their superhero lives and how these affect their daily routines, such as when Marinette is forced to keep secrets from Luka about her frequent disappearances, leading to the end of their relationship (episode 1.4, Truth).

Regarding the inciting incident, a key event triggers the narrative. In the first season, the situation changes when the characters are chosen by Master Fu to become superheroes and protect the city of Paris (episode 11.1, Origins 1). In the second season, new information is revealed that enhances their performance as heroes (episode 1.2, The Collector), where they gain greater knowledge about the Miraculous and their use in battles. In the third season, a confession endangers secret identities, generating dilemmas that destabilize the narrative (episode 1.3, Backwarder): Marianne, significant in Master Fu's life, is akumatized and reveals knowledge of the guardian and his secret lair. Finally, in season four, the narrative becomes more complex due to the difficulties associated with Ladybug's new responsibilities, as Marinette feels overwhelmed balancing her roles as heroine and guardian of the Miraculous (episode 3.4, Gang of Secrets).

Regarding dramatic conflict, across the four seasons it centers on the primary obstacle faced by the protagonists, thereby generating tension that drives the narrative forward. In the first season, the villain seeks vulnerable victims (episode 11.1, Origins 1), as Hawk Moth selects emotionally fragile citizens to akumatize them. In season two, the villain adopts a more strategic approach; for example, he plans to akumatize Chloé's mother as a key step in confronting Ladybug and Cat Noir (episode 19.2, Style Queen). In the third season, the antagonist evolves with the aim of obtaining greater knowledge about the location of the Miraculous: in episode 14.3, Feast, he uncovers information about an ancient dangerous creature linked to the other magical jewels scattered throughout the city. Finally, in the fourth season, the villain evolves into a more powerful version, as seen in episode 3.4, Gang of Secrets: Hawk Moth becomes Shadow Moth, posing a greater threat to Paris and to anyone who dares to oppose him.

Table 1. Characteristics of the evolution of ¨Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir" according to the phases of the setup dimension, act 1 and seasons,

	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Season 4
Status Quo	Presentation of Characters and their everyday life throughout the story.		Complexity in normality and interference in their responsibility as heroes.	Reflections on their superhero selves and their impact on their daily lives.
Triggering Action	Change in the everyday life of the characters.	Information that benefits their heroes' labor	A confession puts their identities at risk.	Difficulties in the new responsibility of the heroin.
Dramatic Conflict	Search for the victims for the malevolent plans of the villain.	More strategic approach of the villain to face the heroes.	Major knowledge of the antagonist on the location of the prodigies/Miraculous.	Transformation of the villain into a stronger and more dangerous version.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026

For the specific objective "To define the evolution of the series' storyline in its development dimension (Act 2)," the indicators Mid-Point and Crisis were analyzed.

Regarding Mid-Point, the analysis of the four seasons showed a progression in the magnitude and complexity of the plans executed by Hawk Moth, generating narrative twists and forcing the heroes to respond more strategically. Key moments were identified, such as in Season 1, Episode 18 (Simon Says), where the villain akumatizes the host of a reality show to obtain Ladybug's and Cat Noir's Miraculous. In Season 2, the antagonist takes advantage of the deepest and most vulnerable emotions of other characters to accomplish his objective at all costs; in Episode 20.2 (Queen Wasp), he akumatizes Chloé after she fails in her attempt to be recognized as a superheroine. Season 3 introduces the support of a new antagonist with whom he manages to uncover the past of the Miraculous, as seen in Episode 14.3 (Feast): Hawk Moth allies with Mayura to awaken a sentimonster known to the Order of the Miraculous. In this episode, the premise of Marinette's new role as Guardian also emerges, as she protects the Miraculous box, increasing her tension. Finally, in Season 4, the antagonist succeeds in his strategies to discover the heroes' identities and seize Miraculous; as observed in Episode 25.4 (Risk), Shadow Moth anticipates the heroes and devises a plan aimed at avoiding suspicion to achieve his goal.

The Crisis, or second turning point, is resolved through a progressive evolution of the most difficult moments faced by the protagonists. In Season 1, the main challenge consists of learning to manage their double identity and properly use their powers, which represents a significant obstacle: in Episode 4.1 (Pharaoh), the heroes fight clumsily and do not fully master the strength of their kwamis. In Season 2, specifically in Episode 24.2 (Catalyst), Hawk Moth's attacks intensify, forcing Ladybug to recruit new Miraculous holders and better coordinate with Cat Noir. From Season 3 onward, Ladybug faces the consequences of her emotions and observes how they lead to mission failures; in Episode 24.3 (Heart Hunter: The Battle of the Miraculous – Part 1), due to Ladybug's oversight, Hawk Moth discovers Master Fu's secret lair, exposing him. In Season 4, the conflict acquires an interpersonal dimension: in Episode 23.4 (Kuro Neko), an increasing distance between Ladybug and Cat Noir becomes evident, as she has stopped including him in missions, generating feelings of exclusion and disappointment. Additionally, Marinette is emotionally burdened by her role as the new Guardian.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Evolution of "Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir" According to Phases of the Development Dimension, Act 2 and Seasons,

	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Season 4
Mid-point	Use of citizens against the heroes to obtain the Miraculous.	The villain's dedication to seeking more intense emotions for his plans.	Exploration of Miraculous secrets as a strategic resource for the villain.	The heroes' intense emotions create more serious consequences.
Second Turning Point	Challenge of managing dual identity and proper use of powers.	Recruitment and adaptation of new holders.	Consequences after being carried away by their emotions.	Growing distancing between the heroes Ladybug and Cat Noir.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026

For the specific objective "To define the evolution of the series' storyline in its ending dimension, Act 3," the results were determined based on two additional indicators: climax and anticlimax or ending.

Regarding the climax, this indicator focuses on the most significant moment in the series, where the conflict reaches its highest point and moves toward the end. In the first season, in episode 26.1 (Volpina), the villain Hawk Moth finds a new rival for the heroes, a transfer student named Lila. In the second season, in episode 25.2 (Mayura: Heroes' Day– Part 2), another antagonist appears who helps the central villain increase his power, with the objective of obtaining the heroes' Miraculous. In season 3, there is a significant increase in Hawk Moth's power: in episode 24.3 (Heart Hunter), he convinces a superheroine to join him and manages to have her gather the heroes' allies to confront them and capture Master Fu along with the Miraculous box; the latter occurs in episode 25.3 (Queen of Miracles). Finally, in the fourth season, the story acquires greater complexity because of an error. In episode 26.4 (Counterattack), the heroine is deceived, fails in her mission, and the villain seizes most of the Miraculous, marking a crucial turning point in the narrative.

Regarding the ending, each season initially concludes with an open ending that does not fully resolve the dramatic tension generated in the climax. In seasons one and two, in episodes 26.1 (Volpina) and 25 (Mayura: Heroes' Day– Part 2), respectively, a similar narrative is observed: the heroes manage to save the city, but the villain is not captured and has new allies. In the third season, there is some progress in the story, as the heroes receive help to win their battles and Ladybug becomes the new Guardian. However, the villain escapes and manages to repair the Peacock Miraculous, as shown in episode 25.3 (Queen of Miracles). It is in the fourth season that the most significant change occurs: episode 26.4 (Counterattack) closes the plot with an antagonist who becomes more powerful after obtaining the other Miraculous, and a heroine shrouded in the haze of defeat; however, Cat Noir encourages her to continue fighting.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Evolution of "Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir" According to Phases of the Ending Dimension, Act 3 and Seasons,

	Season 1	**Season 2**	**Season 3**	**Season 4**
Climax	Hawk Moth finds a new rival for the heroes.	Mayura appears as an ally of the antagonist.	The villain resorts to an alliance with a former heroine.	As a result of an error, the villain obtains some Miraculous.
Anticlimax	The heroes save the city, but the villain is not captured and gains support from new allies.		With help, the heroes triumph; however, the villain escapes and restores a Miraculous.	Hawk Moth becomes more powerful and Ladybug despairs after the defeat.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026

4. Discussion

The research could confirm that the storyline is, as Aguirre (2024) indicates, the summary and essence of the dramatic story that includes essential elements for its development, the narrative, consists of the protagonists, the main conflict, the events, and the ending. New times and narrative possibilities open new meanings for the storyline; thus, the animated series Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug moves away from what McKee (2002), cited by Rodriguez (2023), established regarding the protagonist's desire to restore stability as the guiding thread and main driving force of the story.

Aguirre (2024) points out that when beginning the writing process, it is essential to have a basic outline, as it provides a starting point for better development of the creative process. This study considered narrative structure as a tool to fulfill the objective of demonstrating the evolution of the storyline in the production. Likewise, Hernández (2022) was followed regarding the importance of focusing on Aristotle, recognized as one of the pioneers in the analysis of narrative structures, with his enduring theory of the three acts: setup, development, and ending.

The setup act, as Guarin (2022) indicates, functions to introduce the characters in their everyday lives and establish, based on this, the foundations of the story by presenting their reality to the audience before the conflict. In the case of Miraculous, this does not remain the same throughout the seasons but develops from a simple introduction into a narrative environment with greater emotional weight in daily life. This evolution can be evidenced through the indicators of status quo, inciting incident, and dramatic conflict.

As Field (1979), cited by Dueñas & Gutierrez (2024), states, the status quo presents the characters' everyday life, defining their environment and atmosphere. This is evident in the episodes "Origins Part 1 and 2" of the first season, which present the normality of the central characters and their routines as teenage students; and how their lives transform when they are chosen as superheroes, revealing

emotional strain as the narrative progresses. We also see how this situation fractures from within in the episode "Truth" of the fourth season, where Marinette finds it difficult to be a guardian, heroine, and live a normal teenage life; from that moment onward, a noticeable emotional imbalance emerges.

Next, we find the inciting incident. Seger (2017) defines it as an action, event, or sequence that alters the status quo and activates the plot. At the beginning of the series, the protagonists receive the Miraculous—a magical charm that allows them to transform into heroes. Later, new inciting incidents will be revelations that either help the protagonists or place them at a disadvantage, signaling a more mature turn in the narrative construction of the first act.

Finally, within this first act, we find the dramatic conflict which, as Méndiz & Sánchez (2024) state, arises from the first turning point: an unexpected event that drastically modifies and closes the first act. This becomes visible in the series when the antagonist seeks to obtain the magical charms at any cost, and as the seasons progress, his methods become more complex and his knowledge increases, enriching his characterization as a villain. From the first season, when he searches for citizens with negative emotions to obtain the Miraculous, to the fourth season, when he becomes Shadow Moth—a threat with new powers that grant him greater control of the situation.

The development act, according to Pineda (2024), is the central axis of the story, the longest and most elaborate part of the plot. It keeps the audience in constant suspense and intrigue. In the series, one can observe a shift from a simple narrative to a more strategic and complex construction. This change can be verified through the indicators of midpoint and crisis.

According to Field (1984), cited by De La Torre (2022), the midpoint acts as a narrative junction that balances the second act, marking turning points within the narrative arc and redefining its course. In the early seasons of Miraculous, an external threat is presented; as seen in "Simon Says" and "Queen Wasp," where the villain manages to akumatize important figures in the city, cornering the heroes. However, as the series progresses, these attacks not only shift the narrative but also impact on the psychological dimension of the characters, especially the heroes. This becomes evident in the third season, in which the antagonist resorts to more planned and dangerous attack methods. In the fourth season, in the episode "Risk," he even anticipates the heroes' moves and reveals their identities, marking a new stage of emotional intensity with greater future consequences.

The crisis, according to Llerena & Barbera (2024), is the turning point that destabilizes the protagonist and guides the narrative toward the third act. In the first season, the plot focuses on discovering and controlling their powers, as well as strengthening their teamwork. In subsequent seasons, the series reveals a more intense crisis defined by emotional impact on the heroes. The episode "Heart Hunter" shows Ladybug emotionally affected in her role as a hero due to personal feelings, leading her to make mistakes that put others at risk. This evolution reaches its most vulnerable expression in the third season, in the episode "Kuro Neko": the superhero feels displaced by the heroine, fracturing the harmony of the duo and transforming the central conflict; it is no longer only about saving the city but about preserving the bond that unites the protagonists.

Act III or ending, as Field (2013), cited by López & Pérez (2024), indicates, is the final part of the narrative structure where the highest point is reached, problems are resolved, and the story moves toward its ending. The conclusion of a story is crucial, as it must be properly organized for the ending to feel satisfying. If not well structured, the story may leave the viewer or reader with the feeling that something was incomplete or poorly resolved. However, in the series, the ending does not always follow a uniform or predictable pattern; instead, it evolves from a traditional episodic closure to a more open, tragic, and unfinished conclusion, granting it an unusual narrative maturity in youth animation. In agreement with Sanchez-Escalonilla (2014), cited by Cea (2023), this final stage of the story can include a wide variety of endings. This transformation is visible through the indicators of climax and ending, which reveal not only the characters' fate but also the level of narrative complexity achieved.

The climax, as Rodriguez (2021) synthesizes, is the point of greatest tension and emotional charge in the development of the plot. In the early seasons, the villain's threat intensifies through riskier alliances. As the seasons unfold, the antagonist forms more strategic agreements with a former heroine and gathers more allies to confront the protagonists in a major battle. The most radical change arrives in the latest season: the climax no longer represents victory but a partial defeat of the heroine and the strengthening of the villain, leaving Paris' fate in suspense. This moment moves away from the traditional resolving climax and adopts what Villegas & Urdaneta (2024) describe as a stage where the

conflict reaches its highest point, forcing the protagonist to make decisions with significant consequences. This evolution of the climax represents not only structural maturation but also emotional growth: the characters are no longer merely winners; they are beings who fail, doubt, and feel the weight of defeat.

To close the third act, the ending is understood as the part where the questions left by the climax are answered, such as: does the protagonist achieve her goals? and how does the story conclude? it also ensures proper closure of the narrative development, as mentioned by Field (1996), cited by Hernández (2022). In the early seasons, although the antagonist is not defeated and establishes strategic alliances, the heroes manage to restore peace. However, in later seasons, this ending becomes increasingly painful and inconclusive; in the third season, Master Fu renounces his mission to protect the Miraculous, and although the heroes win, the villain escapes and repairs a charm. The ending offers no relief but rather an accumulation of tension. Finally, in the fourth season, the ending provides no victory: the heroine is devastated by the loss of most of the Miraculous, and the city remains vulnerable. This aligns with Serrano et al. (2023), who state that episode endings may provide clear closure or leave matters unresolved; when they end at a moment of great tension without a solution, they generate greater anticipation for the continuation of the series.

5. Conclusion

This research began with the desire to understand how the storyline manifests and evolves in the animated series Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug. This interest arose from a critical and inspired view of an audiovisual product originally aimed at a children's audience, but also from the desire to unravel the reasons why it additionally captivates viewers of a broader age range; as well as the concern to explore how a classic storyline formula can be complemented and fully developed in modern animated narratives. Thus, the study became a search to decipher the structural threads that sustain the series, identify patterns, progressions, and relevant narrative findings. Indeed, after the analysis, it is concluded that throughout the four seasons of the animated series, a clear evolution is shown: from a simple setup to more complex developments and inconclusive resolutions, among other resources. The series matures both narratively and emotionally, granting greater depth to its characters and plot. It effectively projects anticipation for its future storyline—yet to be revealed in upcoming seasons—and offers lessons in narrative management to similar products, as well as to others that may not even be closely related.

At present, this study provides a reflective and methodologically grounded contribution to the analysis of the evolution of storylines in contemporary audiovisual products. By examining the protagonists' journey through Syd Field's (1995) three-act paradigm, it becomes evident that the series not only entertains but also constructs its narrative with an evolutionary and dramatic logic that reflects learning processes, crises, internal struggles, and change. The research results, therefore, become an interpretative instrument for other similar narrative analyses conducted simultaneously or in the future. Likewise, it is a call to examine more deeply the narrative forms present in contemporary animated audiovisual products.

In the future, the methodology established by this research will serve to continue exploring the evolution of the series' storyline. It will also encourage new studies, for example, comparative analyses among various audiovisual products, thereby strengthening dialogue regarding the three-act theory in current productions, which would be its main strength. However, the study also faced limitations, such as the fact that at the time of conducting the research, the complete series was not available on official broadcasting channels; therefore, seasons 5 and 6 could not be studied, limiting the scope of the analysis. Additionally, although the sole technique used—discourse analysis—was valid, central, broad, and legitimate for the topic addressed, it could have been complemented with other techniques, such as those involving audience participation, whether quantitative or qualitative, which would have enriched this inquiry further. The door remains open for future research to expand this study under the recommended terms and others, to consolidate academic and scientific perspectives on the series' storyline and other relevant aspects within the field.

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