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Rewriting Sleeping Beauty: A Feminist and Narrative Analysis of Disney's Maleficent (2014) and Maleficent: Mistress of Evil (2019) as Contemporary Adaptations

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Dedication

I thank God for giving me the strength and patience to complete this work.

I dedicated this work to my father's soul.

To my dear mother, who has always been my refuge with her unfailing prayers and support.

Thank you for your love, support, and patience, dear siblings Rania, Cherifa, and Anis.

My strength is you.

To the two little stars in my life, Youssef and Line: your innocence reminds me of the beauty in life, and your laughter brings me peace .

A special thank you to my best buddy Zineb , who has always been there

With love and support.

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Abstract

Using a feminist rereading of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale, this study investigates how Disney's Maleficent and Maleficent: Mistress of Evil question conventional gender roles, power relations, and narrative structures. Tracing the patriarchal roots of traditional fairy tales and analyzing how modern versions challenge these conventions by reframing justice, motherhood, and female agency are the main focuses of this work.

The main goal of this study is to examine the ideological shifts enabled by Maleficent, especially in regard to how the title character is portrayed as a multifaceted hero rather than a flat antagonist. The approach combines feminist theory, adaptation studies, and visual analysis to explore narrative and cinematic devices that reinterpret power, kinship, and morality. Intersectional feminist critiques, Barbara Creed's notion of the "monstrous-feminine," and Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory are important frameworks informing this research.

The results imply that Maleficent emphasises female sovereignty, chosen kinship, and restorative justice, thereby subverting conventional fairy tale clichés. The films promote non-biological motherhood as feminist resistance, prioritise reconciliation over violence, and replace moral absolutes with complex ambiguity. These narrative and visual strategies reflect broader cultural dialogues on trauma, gender politics, and collective empowerment.

In essence, this dissertation contributes to current debates on female narratives in modern media. Maleficent demonstrates how fairy tale adaptations can serve as powerful vehicles for cultural critique and ideological transformation, offering new paradigms of power, identity, and representation through the critical rereading of a

classic story.

Key words: Feminism, Sleeping Beauty, patriarchy, Maleficent, Gender, adaptation.

Résumé

En s’appuyant sur une relecture féministe du conteLa Belle au bois dormant, cette étude examine comment les films de DisneyMaleficent et Maleficent: Mistress of Evil remettent en question les rôles de genre traditionnels, les rapports de pouvoir et les structures narratives. En retraçant les racines patriarcales des contes classiques et en analysant la manière dont les versions contemporaines défient ces conventions en reconfigurant la justice, la maternité et l’autonomie féminine, ce travail met en lumière ces transformations.

L’objectif principal de cette recherche est d’explorer les changements idéologiques permis par Maleficent, notamment en présentant le personnage principal comme une héroïne complexe plutôt qu’une simple antagoniste. La démarche combine la théorie féministe, les études sur l’adaptation et l’analyse visuelle afin d’examiner les procédés narratifs et cinématographiques qui redéfinissent le pouvoir, la parenté et la morale. Les critiques féministes intersectionnelles, la notion de « féminin monstrueux » de Barbara Creed et la théorie de l’adaptation de Linda Hutcheon constituent des cadres théoriques essentiels pour cette étude.

Les résultats suggèrent queMaleficent valorise la souveraineté féminine, les liens choisis et la justice réparatrice, subvertissant ainsi les stéréotypes classiques des contes. Les films promeuvent la maternité non biologique comme une forme de

résistance féministe, privilégient la réconciliation à la violence et remplacent les certitudes morales par une ambiguïté complexe. Ces choix narratifs et visuels reflètent des débats culturels plus larges sur le traumatisme, les politiques de genre et l'émancipation collective.

En somme, ce mémoire contribue aux discussions actuelles sur les récits féminins dans les médias contemporains. Maleficent démontre comment les adaptations des contes peuvent devenir de puissants instruments de critique culturelle et de transformation idéologique, en offrant de nouveaux paradigmes de pouvoir, d'identité et de représentation à travers une relecture critique d'une histoire classique.

Mots-clés : Féminisme, La Belle au bois dormant, patriarcat, Maleficent, Genre, adaptation.

ملخص

استنادا إلى قراءة نسوية لحكاية الجميلة النائمة تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيف يعيد فيلما ديزني ماليفيسنت وماليفيسنت: سيدة الشر النظر في الأدوار الجندرية التقليدية وعلاقات السلطة والهياكل السردية. يركز هذا العمل على تتبع الجذور الأبوية للحكايات الكلاسيكية وتحليل كيفية تحدي النسخ الحديثة لهذه التقاليد من خلال إعادة صياغة مفاهيم العدالة والأمومة وتمكين المرأة.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل التحولات الأيديولوجية التي يتيحها فيلم ماليفيسنت لا سيما من خلال تقديم الشخصية الرئيسية كبطلة متعددة الأبعاد بدلا من كونها خصما مسطحا. تعتمد المنهجية على الدمج بين النظرية النسوية ودراسات التكيف والتحليل البصري لفهم الأدوات السردية والسينمائية التي تعيد تعريف القوة والقرابة والأخلاق. وتعد الانتقادات النسوية التقاطعية ومفهوم »الأنثى الوحشية« لباربرا كريد ونظرية التكيف ليندا هتشيون أطرا أساسية لهذه الدراسة.

تشير النتائج إلى أن ماليفيسنت تؤكد السيادة النسوية والروابط المختارة والعدالة التصالحية مما يقوض الصور النمطية التقليدية للقصص الخيالية. كما تبرز الأفلام الأمومة غير البيولوجية كشكل من أشكال المقاومة النسوية وتفضل المصالحة على العنف وتستبدل اليقين الأخلاقي بالغموض المركب. تعكس هذه الخيارات السردية والبصرية نقاشات ثقافية أوسع حول الصدمة وسياسات الجندر والتمكين الجماعي.

تضيف هذه الدراسة في جوهرها إلى النقاشات المعاصرة حول السرد النسوي في وسائل الإعلام الحديثة. يوضح فيلم ماليفيسنت كيف يمكن لتكيفات الحكايات الشعبية أن تكون وسيلة قوية للنقد الثقافي والتحول الأيديولوجي من خلال تقديم نماذج جديدة للسلطة والهوية والتمثيل عبر قراءة نقدية لحكاية كلاسيكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية الجميلة النائمة النظام الأبوي ماليفيسنت الجندر التكيف.

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General Introduction

Conventional fairy tales act as cultural mirrors and perspective of the values and ideals of different societies. These stories, handed down through generations, express profound social and psycho- logical truths. One of the most enduring of those tales is the story of Sleeping Beauty, which is a particularly layered text that has been passed through history. Starting from folkloric oral traditions, to its written forms by Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, and on to its reel interpretations by the film industry, Sleeping Beauty comes across as an adaptable material in the hands of contemporary cultures. Now, however, the Maleficent movies have reframed the story through a feminist lens, casting a fresh spotlight on the ways in which popular media engages with age-old stories and retells them in ways that challenge accepted social hierarchies.

When we think of familiar fairy tales and canonical narratives in the genre, they reflect a more disturbing aspect of human existence, and follow principles which shape the morals and social mores at the time they were created. Sleeping Beauty is certainly no different. It's transformed dramatically, narratively and ideologically, over centuries. Whereas the classics focused on traditional gender roles and patriarchal control, the

Maleficent movies masculinize the story from a modern feminist point of view. This is not just changing plotlines or adjusting the prominence of characters in and out: it is also re-envisioning the very keys of the story its symbols and values so that it becomes a reflection of our own times and challenges.

This study's primary point of interest is examining the ways in which the Maleficent films modify the original Sleeping Beauty story that upholds patriarchy systems and gender performativity into a feminist, contemporary narrative, which opposes these systems. This new project studies the fundamental transformations of characters, relationships, symbols and the narrative structure, and analyzes the visual and narrative strategies used by films in order to encourage this feminist re-interpretation. It also discusses the cultural impact of these changes and how viewers have embraced this new iteration of the story.

In a society more alert to concerns of gender and equality, analyzing how popular media such as film reconfigures cultural legacy becomes vital. The Maleficent films are not only retellings; they are daring efforts to subvert the ideological roots of the original narrative and replace them with a more inclusive and fair perspective. This study tries to identify how that transformation is accomplished by careful investigation of narrative and visual aspects and how these elements contribute to a layered feminist discourse.

However, there is a noticeable lack of thorough analyses that include both narrative and visual views when looking at the Maleficent films as a

cohesive corpus, even in light of the expanding corpus of study on fairy-tale adaptations and feminist readings of popular narratives. Few studies have examined the combined influence of both films or how visual techniques like lighting, costumes, and cinematic symbolism support the narrative shift, despite the fact that some have examined the feminist elements of Maleficent (2014). By providing an interdisciplinary perspective that emphasises how these films retell the Sleeping Beauty story and express a unique feminist discourse, this study seeks to close this gap.

This research attempts to address a number of main questions , including: How do the Maleficent films recast the classic “villain” into a rich, multidimensional heroine? What narrative and visual strategies do the films deploy to dismantle binary oppositions such as good vs. evil and masculine vs. feminine and strength vs. weakness? How do the films approach issues such as authority, justice, and motherhood, and what cultural and societal messages do they transmit via these concepts? Finally, what influence have these alterations had on how viewers comprehend and participate with the story?

These concerns are interrelated, that Maleficent embodies in its larger context. Answering them exposes not just the aesthetic progression of the narrative but also the function of film as a cultural force capable of altering communal awareness. Moreover, these considerations provide pathways for broader debate regarding the limitations of cinematic adaptation and the balance between loyalty to source material and the necessity for originality.

This research is notable in its emphasis on how narrative change leads to feminist discourse and the redefining of gender roles in popular culture. Through analyzing the Maleficent flicks, it becomes obvious how modern media may critically reframe cultural history, generating wider issues about equality and fair portrayal. Additionally, the research deepens our knowledge of how film may operate as an instrument for social change, altering public awareness via redesigned narrative.

In a day when demands for more fair representation of women in media are increasing stronger, Maleficent gives a realistic paradigm of how such representation may be accomplished without resorting to simplicity or tokenism. Most crucially, the films succeed in giving a version of the narrative that retains its broad appeal while also offering a critical viewpoint on power, gender, and justice. This precise mix between enjoyment and intellectual depth provides the study both academic and practical relevance.

The key aims of this research are to investigate the narrative and visual modifications in the Maleficent films in contrast to classic Sleeping Beauty texts, notably in how characters and relationships are redefined. It also tries to investigate how the films promote a feminist worldview by breaking old binaries and providing a new paradigm of female heroism. Lastly, the study intends to examine the cultural and societal consequences of these alterations and their potential to inspire critical debates surrounding gender problems.

More specific aims include understanding how Maleficent moves from a one-dimensional adversary to a fully complex heroine and how visual elements like color and lighting facilitate this metamorphosis. The analysis also tracks how the films rework the fundamental idea of “true love’s kiss”, extending beyond its usual romantic framing. Collectively, these aims attempt to give a fuller understanding of cinema’s role in changing established societal myths.

The study comes from a broad variety of sources. Primary sources include conventional Sleeping Beauty writings by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, which give the fundamental versions of the story. The core corpus also contains the Maleficent films (2014 and 2019), which exemplify the current reinterpretation. Secondary materials include critical feminist writings, particularly the works of Barbara Creed and Linda Hutcheon, as well as studies in adaptation theory and visual analysis.

These materials were carefully chosen to cover the diverse facets of the study. While the original texts give a frame of reference for the films’ alterations, the secondary sources provide the theoretical tools essential for critical analysis. For instance, Linda Hutcheon’s work on adaptation gives a framework for understanding reinterpretation in film, while Barbara Creed’s observations on the “monstrous feminine” correlate with the representation of Maleficent. This combination of sources offers a full and multifaceted

examination.

This research adopts a critical-analytical technique, integrating narrative and visual analysis. From a narrative standpoint, it contrasts the structure of the films with the source texts, stressing alterations in character development, plot, and symbolism. Visually, the research focuses on the use of colour, lighting, and composition to express feminist themes. Feminist ideas, notably those of Barbara Creed and Linda Hutcheon, are utilised to examine how the films dismantle established frameworks and produce new meanings.

This methodological approach is adaptable and capable of addressing numerous characteristics of the film's narrative, visual, and ideological. By merging both narrative and visual analysis, the research exposes the multiple meanings inside the films and how these layers combine to produce a cohesive picture. The inclusion of feminist theory extends the research, extending it beyond surface-level findings to a more sophisticated assessment of the cultural consequences.

The research is organised into three key chapters:

Chapter One provides: The history of Sleeping Beauty, concentrating on traditional versions from Basile to Perrault and the Grimms, with emphasis on gender roles and authority.

Chapter Two is a : feminist and narrative study of the Maleficent films, exploring how people and relationships are modified and the visual techniques employed to promote feminist principles.

Chapter Three offers : comparative and cultural study, examining how the films vary from the source texts and exploring their larger cultural influence.

Each chapter builds upon the preceding one: Chapter One sets the historical and theoretical framework; the second one gives extensive analysis of the films; and Chapter Three relates the results to larger cultural and social conflicts. This approach offers a full and methodologically sound investigation of the issue.

This introduction establishes the groundwork for the first chapter, which will study the historical evolution of Sleeping Beauty, highlighting the cultural and socioeconomic factors that affected its previous forms. By researching these conventional myths, the study will disclose the patriarchal origins of the story, providing a vital framework for comprehending the significant transformations brought in the Maleficent flicks.

Sleeping Beauty was never merely a fantasy; it has always represented the prevalent values and conflicts of the civilizations that created it. In Basile's rendition, we see graphic violence and a representation of women as passive subjects; in Perrault's version, emphasis is put on feminine virtue and obedience. The Grimms' version, in turn, balances romanticism with Christian morality. These versions demonstrate how the

narrative has been used to promote certain societal beliefs, whether patriarchal or moralistic. Thus, it is vital to analyze how Maleficent navigates and reinterprets this complicated cultural history.

With this theoretical and methodological framework in place, the shift to Chapter One becomes vital to understanding the historical foundations of Sleeping Beauty. Through an examination of the original texts, the project will illustrate how women and power were depicted throughout various centuries and how this laid the way for the revolutionary reimaginings delivered by the Maleficent flicks. This chapter will serve as the initial step in finding the cultural and narrative depth of the tale, moving toward a more detailed examination in the coming chapters.

Chapter One: The Historical Evolution of The Tale

Intoduction

Fairy tales have historically functioned as cultural mirrors, reflecting the ideals, fears, and aspirations of the societies that produced them. Among these, Sleeping Beauty stands out as a narrative of enchantment, passivity, and transformation. Its various incarnations, from myth to literature, illustrate how stories evolve alongside cultural shifts. The tale's lasting relevance lies not in its constancy, but in its capacity for reinvention making it an ideal subject for critical inquiry.

This chapter explores the growth of Sleeping Beauty via its primary literary incarnations, namely those of Basile, Perrault, and the Brothers Grimm. Each version reshapes essential elements of the tale such as the cursed slumber, the role of the fairy, and the motif of rescueproviding insight into evolving perceptions of gender, power, and morality. Furthermore, the chapter investigates how these tales were moulded by and reacted to the social and ideological environments of their eras.

In addition to giving historical backdrop, this chapter offers crucial theoretical tools that will be applied in subsequent analyses, especially Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory. It also lays the basis for a deeper analysis of the "villain" role in fairy tales, especially the female antagonist. By exploring feminist readings and symbolic interpretations, the chapter establishes the basis for understanding how Sleeping Beauty's primary characters have been recast in modern culture, preparing the way for a deeper examination of Maleficent in the next chapter.

1. The Evolution of Sleeping Beauty

The myth of Sleeping Beauty has experienced a remarkable metamorphosis spanning ages, nations, and media. What started as a complicated legendary yarn steeped in oral traditions and mythological themes gradually took on literary life in the hands of authors like Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault, and the Brothers Grimm. Each rendition reflects not just creative decisions but also the socio-cultural norms of its time, offering insight into how gender, destiny, power, and morality have been understood and recreated. This part covers the chronological evolution of the narrative, studying the shifts in its characters, themes, and underlying philosophies. By charting the passage from oral myth to canonical fairy tale, the section demonstrates how Sleeping Beauty has never been a static story but a fluid narrative consistently modified to meet society's requirements. Such historical and literary alterations offer a critical basis for understanding the tale's continuing impact and its reinterpretation in current versions like Maleficent.

1.1 From Oral Myths to Literary Fairy Tales

Particularly from Norse and early European mythology, the story has its roots firmly in oral traditions and mythical tales. The Norse story of Brynhildr, a valkyroid condemned into a profound magical slumber awaiting a hero to revive her, is among the most famous mythological analogues. This early archetype exposes not just the structural basis of the contemporary story but also the symbolic function of sleep as a means of forced inactivity and suspended identity. The myth expresses patriarchal ideas wherein the female body becomes a locus of control ready for masculine intervention. Maria Tatar and other academics contend that these stories, which usually present female power as something that has to be subdued or controlled, reflect traditional fears about female authority (Tatar, The Classic Fairy Tales).

Passed down through centuries, these oral stories included communal beliefs, anxieties, and aspirations that subsequently turned into written fairy tales. Examining these legendary systems reveals how, with myth acting as an early cultural mirror, narrative provided both amusement and social control.

Form and purpose changed dramatically as oral traditions gave way to textual fairy tales. Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia" , featured in his Pentamerone, is regarded as one of the oldest literary renditions of Sleeping Beauty. His novel keeps many mythological elements, such as the heroine's passive slumber and the charmed curse, but puts them within a baroque, sometimes grotesque, literary environment. Talia, unlike later sanitised versions, is raped while she sleeps and gives birth to twins, a feature that reveals harsher Renaissance beliefs regarding female agency and virtue. This rendition, although unsettling to contemporary readers, serves as a main illustration of how textual fairy tales typically kept the savagery and intricacy of their oral ancestors. Scholars like Jack Zipes claim that Basile's story operates not simply as amusement but as a type of elitist, sarcastic commentary on society's power relations, notably regarding gender and class (Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion). Thus, the written text becomes a place where oral themes are both maintained and changed, moulded to reflect the values and conflicts of the age in which they are recorded.

Charles Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant was a turning point in the literary history of Sleeping Beauty, as it gave a version more acceptable with the moral and social values of 17th-century French aristocracy. Perrault incorporated prior motifs such as the sleeping princess, the fairies, and the prince's awakening kiss but lightened the harsher elements inherent in Basile's story. This addition of a moral to

act as the tale's ending advises young females to be patient and obedient, thus altering the tale into a didactic piece which upheld gender norms. This transformation mirrors what scholars such as Ruth Bottigheimer describe as the "domestification" of fairy tales, when tales were cleaned up and made to conform to middle-class mores and courtly manners (Fairy Tales: A New History 64).

Perrault's narrative served both to amuse and inform, employing literary fairy tale form as a medium of cultural transfer. The princess becomes an idealized image of virtue, while the prince symbolizes reasonable masculine authority. Through this change, the fairy tale loses much of its prior ambiguity and becomes a tool for promoting particular social norms, notably about femininity, passivity, and marriage as destiny.

The Grimm Brothers' Dornröschen , in particular, is a reflection of the German Romantic interest in folklore and, by extension, issues of nationality and moral didacticism. Whereas Perrault's elegant courtly speech, the language of the Grimms' collection was meant to be the German people's real speech collected and stored for posterity. Their version of Sleeping Beauty removes the darker sections of Basile and the moralizing tone of Perrault, emphasizing instead the purity of the girl, the inevitability of destiny, and the curative role of true love. The magical sleep becomes symbolic of spiritual suspension, and the prince's appearance denotes regeneration and the restoration of order. Scholars like Marina Warner contend that the Grimms, although purporting to be true collectors, in reality modified their stories to suit Christian morality and growing nationalist ideas (Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde). The tale's transition into a more innocent and symbolic story fits with the 19th-century effort of building cultural identity via folklore. This version of Sleeping

Beauty therefore serves not just as a children's fable but as a coded narrative of virtue, heritage, and ideological comfort, making it a strong cultural product of its period.

1.2 Basile's Sun, Moon, and Talia

Giambattista Basile's Sun, Moon, and Talia is a crucial source in the genealogy of the Sleeping Beauty myth, giving a dark and complicated interpretation that dramatically contradicts subsequent sanitizations. The narrative starts with an astrologer's forecast, followed by Talia's profound slumber when a flax splinter pricks her finger. However, unlike subsequent tales when a kiss wakes the princess, here a king finds her comatose body and rapes her, leading to her pregnancy and the birth of twins, Sun and Moon. The uncomfortable aspect of this story, typically deleted from popular retellings, shows the latent violence ingrained in early fairy tale frameworks. Scholars like Cristina Bacchilega say that Basile's rendition represents a patriarchal worldview where female agency is totally obliterated, and the female body becomes a passive object of masculine power (Bacchilega, Postmodern Fairy Tales). The tale's hideous realism pushes readers to face the ideological roots of early European literature, where power dynamics and gendered violence were woven into the pleasure of the elite. Rather than being an exception, Basile's writing exposed the conceptual rawness that many subsequent adaptations try to hide.

Giambattista Basile's Sun, Moon, and Talia, initially published in The Pentamerone in 1634, is one of the oldest and most unsettling renditions of the Sleeping Beauty myth. Far distant from the idealized interpretations of later decades, Basile's book confronts readers with the stark, even gruesome reality

contained in early modern literature. The story chronicles Talia, a nobleman's daughter who falls into a deep sleep when a flax splinter pricks her finger, a calamity foretold by astrologers. This makes for all the usual ideas about fate and enchanted

Sleeping, until what ensues turns into something altogether different from what fairy tales you might expect. A passing king, finding Talia asleep and defenceless, rapes her, then goes. She subsequently wakes only after giving birth to twins, called Sun and Moon, when one of the newborns licks the splinter from her finger. This astonishing incident is not only a narrative oddity but a representation of a literary society in which female passivity and male power were institutionalized. As Cristina Bacchilega points out, Basile's narrative "makes literal the violent conquest of female bodies that underlies so many fairy tale structures" (Bacchilega 56). Rather than expressing passionate love, the narrative shows the underlying sexism that drove gendered storytelling in early modern Europe. The king's final return and claim over Talia and her children is depicted not as justice or salvation but as an assertion of patriarchal order. Basile's story therefore provides a dramatic counterweight to subsequent sanitized versions, requiring contemporary readers to face the terrible beginnings of popular legends. By stripping away metaphor and moral sugarcoating, the book shows a cruel societal logic in which violence against women is not only tolerated but vital to narrative growth.

Basile's Sun, Moon, and Talia is a story that works on multiple layers: you can recognize how early fairy tales are just as much about enforcing patriarchal values as they are about telling a fantastic tale. The most basic incident in the tale, the sexual assault, under sedation, of Talia becomes an acute engagement with

issues of consent and bodily integrity. Yet, within the framework of 17th-century literary norms, the conduct is not punished but rather swallowed within the narrative logic of royal right and ultimate family settlement. This unsettling normalization of violence is part of a wider cultural context in which women's bodies were commonly depicted as passive sites for male desire, power, and legacy. Jack Zipes argues that the use of folklore in early fairy tales endeavored to rationalize their oppression of the lower class and legitimize their aristocratic caste, as well as undermine feminist social critique, by drawing on traditional lore (Zipes, When Dreams Came True). And in its ending, as the king weds Talia after his queen, brutally punished, has died and they lived happily ever after, the story recasts the violation as a precursor to legitimacy and order. The queen's position as the jealous villainess further shifts responsibility away from the male criminal, depicting the woman in authority as the disruptive figure. This gendered coding of villainy and victimization mirrors a frequent tendency in fairy tale structures: women are either glorified as quiet and pure or condemned when they demonstrate action. As Marina Warner argues, such tales "reduce the complexity of female experience to a binary of virtue or vice" (Warner 210). In Basile's story, the female heroine remains speechless throughout the narrative, acted upon rather than acting, which promotes the belief that quietness, suffering, and subjection, are the markers of feminine virtue. Through this view, Sun, Moon, and Talia shows itself as both a literary work and a cultural record of patriarchal fantasy, aiming to mould and support gender roles.

The legacy of Sun, Moon, and Talia continues to spark controversy among academics, notably in feminism and adaptation studies, because of its

uncomfortable combination of enchantment and brutality. Although Basile's story has been mostly omitted from popular retellings of Sleeping Beauty, its narrative DNA remains in more known interpretations, although in sanitized or symbolic forms. The core structure of a cursed slumber, passive female heroine, and masculine savior remains important, while the blatant brutality is erased or euphemized. raises significant considerations regarding what contemporary adaptations choose to remember or forget. As Anne Sexton's lyrical retelling of Sleeping Beauty in Transformations (1971) indicates, modern authors regularly revisit classic stories not to laud them but to reveal their ideological origins. Sexton's art serves as a feminist critique: transforming the damsel by imposing the passive princess into a commentary about female disempowerment and social indoctrination (Sexton, Transformations). Moreover, scholars such as Nancy Canepa argue that, for all its occasional vulgarity or too-muchness, Basile's Pentamerone offers crucial access to the early modern imagination and its relationship to gender, power, and narrative (Canepa, Out of the Woods). The tale's hideous realism, complicated structure, and use of sarcasm position it not simply as a fable for children but as a mirror of adult fears about power, inheritance, and the feminine body. Its omission from classic fairy tale collections is essentially a cultural choice, symptomatic of the discomfort it generates in contemporary sensibilities. In re-evaluating Sun, Moon, and Talia, current researchers are not only revisiting an ancient story; they are unearthing the ideological dirt buried behind years of narrative polish, allowing readers to face the frequently violent foundations of ostensibly innocent narratives.

1.3 Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant

La Belle au bois dormant of Charles Perrault in 1697 was a marked change in the cultural role of the Sleeping Beauty story. Whereas Basile's work was an ugly and largely amoral collection, Perrault's tale was carefully adapted for the tastes and expectations of the nobility of France. The emphasis on beauty, restraint, and narrative order has much in common with the world of Louis XIV's court, where fairy tales were a way of entertaining as well as a mode of social instruction. Perrault transforms these violent elements in earlier versions into something the salon society of the time could digest as a story. The heroine is presented a model of passive virtue; she waits, sleeps, and wakes to love and marriage, embodying values of obedience, humility, and grace. Crucially, Perrault adds a moral lesson at the conclusion of the narrative, underlining the value of patience and wisdom, especially for young ladies. This moralization correlates with what Jack Zipes describes as the "bourgeois domestication of fairy tales", wherein stories were transformed to accommodate rising class and gender ideals (Zipes, Breaking the Magic Spell). The tale gently encourages female readers to accept cultural standards focused on silence, persistence, and eventual reward via marriage. As a consequence, Perrault's rendition, although ostensibly mild, acts as a vehicle for patriarchal propaganda. The fairy tale becomes a veiled lesson about gender conformity, wrapped in the idea of magical destiny. Through literary polish, Perrault crafts a version that keeps the narrative framework of previous stories but alters its role from gloomy metaphor to social reinforcement.

There is nothing innocent about "La Belle au bois dormant" as recounted by Perrault: it is not simply an airy-fairy rewriting of an older tale but an assembly of stories which brought out into sharp relief the question of gender in a late seventeenth-

century French context. The sleeping princess embodies pure femininity; hers is the body, silent, quiet and unspoiled. Her whole narrative arc hinges not on human initiative but on being acted upon by other forces: the curse of a fairy, the passage of time, and finally the prince's arrival. This system aims to perpetuate a paradigm of women founded in passivity, beauty, and fulfilment via marriage. The narrative echoes what Simone de Beauvoir would later characterize as the "myth of the eternal feminine", a societal creation that restricts women to duties of aesthetic and moral idealism (Beauvoir, The Second Sex). Moreover, Perrault's choice to stress courting and decent manners above violent trials reflects an intentional alignment with current didactic tendencies in writing directed at young noblewomen. As Ruth Bottigheimer shows, fairy stories in this time were purposely created to brainwash females into accepting their subservient positions within patriarchal hierarchies (Bottigheimer, Fairy stories: A New History). The princess's stillness is not accidental but vital to her job within the story: she is rewarded not for acting but for waiting. This passivity is further affirmed by the prince's agency, whose discovery and waking kiss mark the restoration of social and narrative order. Therefore, Perrault's fable gently instructs readers, especially female ones, to equate virtue with submission and satisfaction with masculine acceptance. What seems to be a romantic dream is in reality a carefully coded script for acting gender, where feminine worth is linked with quiet, stillness, and decorum.

The cultural relevance of Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant reaches much beyond its first publication because it became the authoritative version that inspired countless retellings, particularly within Western literary and cinematic traditions. Its exquisite writing, moral framing, and courtly sensibility gave it the ultimate blueprint

for what a fairy tale “should” be, inspiring not just following writers like the Brothers Grimm but also contemporary media giants like Walt Disney. The 1959 Disney film pulls substantially on Perrault’s version, particularly in the portrayal of Aurora’s beauty, elegance, and passivity but cuts out the darker post-marital events Perrault adds, such as the ogress mother-in-law plotline. This limited adaption highlights how Perrault’s narrative, albeit already softened, continues to undergo ideological filtration to reflect developing cultural sensitivities. The longevity of Perrault’s narrative framework reveals the persuasive power of repetition in moulding communal imagination. As Maria Tatar remarks, the tale's “cultural stickiness” resides in its capacity to cement gender stereotypes inside a dream that seems natural and inevitable (Tatar, The Classic Fairy Tales). The princess’s stillness becomes not merely a story device but a symbol for feminine purity, while the prince’s heroics validate male energy and power. Even in postmodern reimagining, such as Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber, Perrault’s influence is palpable, often utilized as a narrative foil against which to attack the original's entrenched patriarchy. These current inversions demonstrate how Perrault’s interpretation remains a cultural reference point, both cherished and opposed. Ultimately, La Belle au bois dormant is more than a fairy tale; it is a narrative blueprint that illustrates the ideological job tales do in moulding gender, behaviour, and societal expectations over ages.

Another important cornerstone of the story is the Grimm Brothers’ Dornröschen (1812), one of the tales in their formative collection Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Quite different is the version of Brothers Grimm, in which the story is deprived of its full flavored courtly framework and its post- marriage strife, and the stress is laid on a pared down plot representing destiny, punishment and ultimate redemption. The

wicked fairy becomes the thirteenth wise lady, ignored owing to a shortage of golden plates a detail that moves the source of conflict from innate malice to societal oversight, thereby mirroring early 19th-century fears about social inclusion and justice. Furthermore, the Grimms delete Perrault's ogress subplot, concluding the narrative at the time of the princess's waking and marriage, which restores harmony and closure. This straightforward storytelling is evidence of the brothers' desire to seek moral and national significance within their sources by creating tales which promote themes of obedience, family, and Christian ideals. The Grimms' method, though celebrated as a salvage of "authentic" German folklore, was actually a heavily censured and regulated enterprise. As Jack Zipes put it, the brothers rewrote these tales so that they reflect the bourgeois moral values that were also connected with the morality of a patriarchal society of the time it was written (Zipes, The Brothers Grimm). In so doing, Dornröschen is not only a fairytale but rather a visual instructive that encourages behaviour which adheres to normative standards. The princess's extended slumber and passive character mimic the cultural script of feminine patience and purity, while the prince's decisive action emphasizes masculine initiative. The story's clean resolution marriage as a happy ending masks larger cultural implications about gender, morality, and the restriction of feminine desire, all transmitted via the garb of a child's narrative.

In addition to simplifying the story, the Grimms' adaptation of Sleeping Beauty reinforces the gender binary by romanticizing masculine bravery and feminine purity. In Dornröschen, the princess is presented as perfectly pure, both spiritually and physically, undisturbed by time or sin throughout her hundred-year rest. This constant innocence portrays idealized femininity as beautiful, submissive, and saved

for the ideal male. The princess is depicted as a treasure rather than a participant in fate, which is further confirmed by the absence of any sexual ambiguity or post-marital strife in Basile's and Perrault's versions. The act of waking, conducted by a kiss, becomes a symbolic initiation granting her life and worth via masculine action. Critics like Maria Tatar point out that this depiction turns the female character into an object of masculine desire and narrative reward, her value related exclusively to purity and quiet (Tatar, Off with Their Heads!). The sanitization of the story corresponds with the Grimms' overall editing agenda of moral and cultural purity. Early versions of their stories typically had elements of violence, sensuality, and irony, which were gradually toned down in reaction to popular reception and to accord with Protestant principles and middle-class family ideals. As Donald Haase argues, this modification made the stories more accessible to youngsters but also helped to implant stringent moral demands under the garb of folklore (Haase, Fairy Stories and Feminism). In this sense, Dornröschen is not only a timeless bedtime tale but also a means of ideological transmission, sustaining conventional roles and promoting the difference between masculine activity and feminine passivity. The Grimm Brothers' narrative, although acclaimed for its sweetness and simplicity, therefore works as a covert enforcer of patriarchal norms behind the cloak of innocence.

The primary "subject" of the Sleeping Beauty motif is sleep: the act of confinement and quiescence, as well as the power behind the magic. In Basile, Perrault, and the Grimms' tales, the heroine's development and agency are suspended as she falls into the state of enchanted sleep that removes her from the sphere of the will and action. Perrault and Grimm use Talia's slumber as a prerequisite for idealized virtue, whilst Basile uses it as a means of exploitation. According to Cristina

Bacchilega, sleep serves as a narrative stop that permits a patriarchal “reset” of female identity, restoring or maintaining a socially acceptable, quiet, and pure kind of femininity (Bacchilega, Postmodern Fairy Tales). But the sleeping princess is not simply immobile; there is a body left for the prince to see and act upon; her narrative blanks her. Further, time is frozen; stealing time leads to gendered stasis. The princess holds fast to youth and beauty during that span, while the males age, explore, and conquer. This idealisation of feminine immobility is reinforced by traditional gender norms, which value women's virtue and looks more than their capacity to act. As historians such as Warner argue, sleep is often used in fairy tales as a sign of a woman’s socialisation and transformation into a waiting object to be chosen (Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde). Accordingly, the sleeping motif presents the heroine's non-action as miraculous and erotic, embodying both a physical and ideological lack of action. It’s a storytelling technique that directs feminine action under the aegis of imagination, not just a spell.

The spindle appears in Sleeping Beauty as one of the most indelible parts of the myth, an everyday household object that becomes a place of danger and transformation. In this, the same thematic current that runs through the Perrault and Grimm stories, we see the female paradox: a domesticated, controlled, feminine world that provokes the very intruding chaos it was designed for protection from. The spinning wheel, historically linked with women’s work and virtue, is reinvented as the tool of a curse. In this sense, the narrative transmits an equivocal message both celebrating and condemning domestic femininity. As Ruth Bottigheimer explains, the spindle’s twin position as both tool and weapon underscores patriarchal worries about the power and unpredictability of women’s spaces

(Bottigheimer, Fairy Godfather). Importantly, the process of spinning itself holds deeper consequences. In premodern Europe, spinning was a sign of labour and obedience, virtues greatly valued in female upbringing. Yet in Sleeping Beauty, the princess's inadvertent touch with the spindle results not in praise but in punishment, demonstrating that even within permitted duties, female presence may be deadly if uncontrolled or unmanaged. This inversion adds complexity to the motif: the same instruments that establish a woman's worth may also serve to chastise her if she strays from specified bounds. Scholars like Karen Rowe argue that fairy tales typically embed such "ritualised transitions" in symbolic acts spinning, bleeding, and sleeping as rites of passage into socially sanctioned femininity (Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales"). So the spinning wheel motif is not just about fate or magic; it's a metaphor for how feminine identity is stitched together, constrained and resisted within the domestic sphere. It outsources social anxiety about female growth, sex and the bondage of obedience, casting a basic household artefact as an emblem of broader culture.

A constant feature across Sleeping Beauty versions is the focus on the heroine's beauty, described as intrinsic, outstanding, and frequently prophetic. From Talia's famous features in Basile's story to Aurora's ethereal appeal in Disney's rendition, beauty is not only a descriptive but a narrative function. It legitimizes the heroine's significance, justifies the prince's pursuit, and eventually determines her value. In Perrault and the Grimms, the princess's beauty is directly related to her moral value: she is lovely because she is good and good because she is beautiful. This mixture of aesthetics and ethics promotes a long-standing cultural equation in which female virtue is assessed by beauty. Naomi Wolf, in The Beauty Myth, argues

that such depictions perpetuate a cultural regime where beauty becomes “capital”, a system of control that disciplines women via their attractiveness (Wolf, Beauty 15).

1.4 Motifs and Female Representation

Sleepin g Beauty is more than simply a magical curse; it also employs sleep as a narrative tool to uphold gendered standards, particularly those associated with feminine calm, purity, and passivity. The enchanted slumber causes the heroine to lose her voice and agency, turning her from an active figure in the narrative to a visual object. She remains frozen in time, her youth and beauty immaculately preserved, while the world around her ages and changes. Thus, sleep becomes a kind of symbolic erasure, an idealized state when the woman is serene, beautiful, and pure. The patriarchal notion that a woman's value is based on her ability to be patient, persistent, and proactive rather than on her actions or intellect is reinforced by this topic. She just stays throughout the slumber, not resisting, questioning, or growing. She can only be brought back to life and given narrative significance by a male character, the prince. "Sleep teaches girls to wait rather than act, to endure rather than challenge," writes Marina Warner, encapsulating this concept (From the Beast to the Blonde 221). The story subtly conveys to its audience that calm and stillness are the epitome of feminine virtue and that passive beauty and patience, not effort or voice, are the finest means of achieving a marital "happy ending". Sleep is, in essence, not just magical but ideological, bolstering a social structure that affirms femininity via absence rather than presence.

The spindle, a seemingly everyday object in Sleeping Beauty, is a powerful symbol of how even the most traditional and "safe" aspects of femininity may be

weaponised when female autonomy is seen as a threat. Spinning was formerly seen as a noble, even sacred, domestic chore assigned to women that symbolised production, obedience, and respect for a patriarchal authority. However, the same sign is used as a tool of punishment in this story. The princess is cursed as soon as she touches the spindle, as if coming into contact with this symbol of femininity is a sin. Her behaviour is a normal human instinct of curiosity, not rebellion or malice. Yet, as a result of this little deviation from expectations, she is magically slumbering and so totally cut off from the world. That even the smallest, most innocent manifestation of female liberty inside the house might be seen as detrimental is a worrying message this sends. When "the very tool of womanly virtue becomes the vector of punishment when it exceeds male-controlled boundaries", Ruth Bottigheimer examines this dilemma in her article (Fairy Godfather 104). Not only is the spindle a cursed object, but it also serves as a cultural warning, a symbol that maintains strict expectations for women's behaviour. It implies that women's morality is assessed not just by their deeds but also by how accurately they fulfil the responsibilities that society has given them. Should they deviate, even inadvertently, the consequences are severe and swift. From this perspective, the spindle represents the elevation of domestic femininity as well as the underlying fear of what would happen if women transcended it.

Beauty serves as more than simply a descriptive element in Sleeping Beauty; it is the foundation that upholds the female character's identity, value, and fate. From the time of her first appearance until her dramatic awakening, the heroine is almost exclusively characterized by her physical characteristics. She was born beautiful, was praised by others for her beauty, and was ultimately chosen as a consequence. This

idealized beauty is both a pleasure and a trap. It keeps her quiet and obedient, but it also makes her noticeable and important. She doesn't speak, act, or make choices she just exists to be seen and desired. This representation of feminine beauty as narrative money reflects a broader social structure that directly links a woman's worth to her looks rather than her identity or achievements. As Naomi Wolf argues, "beauty is a currency system like the gold standard: determining a woman's worth based on how she looks" (The Beauty Myth 15); she challenges this dynamic. This dynamic is maintained throughout Sleeping Beauty; the princess is wedded before she even completely wakes into her own awareness, chased before she acts, and adored before she speaks. Her beauty justifies the prince's claim to her body and future. In essence, the narrative rewards her for being quiet and lovely while penalising any complexity or self-expression. Even in modern versions, when female characters may be given greater liberty, it is difficult to escape the deeply rooted connection between feminine value and physical beauty. Even while beauty may open doors, it often closes them, particularly the door to self-definition, in fairy tales like this one.

1.5 Gender, Power, and Cultural Symbolism

In all main versions of Sleeping Beauty, from Basile to the Grimms and current adaptations, the feminine body operates as a symbolic locus over which authority is challenged and established. The curse laid upon the princess, whether by an outraged fairy, a neglected wise woman, or a wounded outsider, is an act of dominance, turning the female character into a passive object of destiny. The power struggle is practically never between the princess and her antagonist but rather between other forces (usually older women or male figures) that act upon her. This

pattern develops a narrative of feminine disempowerment, as the heroine becomes the stage on which others play out their agendas. As Judith Butler says, gender is constructed by repeated performances; in fairy tales, these performances are codified into archetypes that urge submission or dominance (Butler, Gender Trouble). The princess plays femininity by being serene and attractive, characteristics that characterize her as both sought and controlled. The storyline seldom provides her room for revolt or resistance. Even in Perrault's rendition, when the princess speaks briefly, her words serve more to support social order than to disrupt it. The major "action" in the story Sleeping is intrinsically passive, but it is portrayed as her fate. The finale is also telling: the prince's kiss not only awakens her but reasserts a patriarchal system where male action restores life, legitimacy, and structure. This dynamic reveals how fairy tales like Sleeping Beauty contain societal ideas about who has the right to act, who must wait, and who is entitled to determine their fate. The myth consequently works as a cultural script for gendered power, legitimizing control over the female body via enchantment, silence, and romantic redemption.

One of the most illuminating features of Sleeping Beauty is the depiction of female antagonists, especially the fairy or witch who casts the curse. In virtually every version of the story, the villain is an older, unmarried, and strong lady, whose menace rests not in physical violence but in her supernatural agency and social nonconformity. This image represents a stark contrast to the shy, young heroine: she is garrulous, lively, and self-sufficient. But instead of being celebrated, these characteristics are framed as awful. As Marina Warner remarks, fairy tales typically transmogrify "female power into witchcraft and female wisdom into malevolence", in which powerful women are represented as disruptive "others", to be eliminated to

restore the natural order of things (Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde). In Sleeping Beauty, the curse laid on the fairy is not just a piece of wickedness; it is an avowal of being excluded or disrespected, a symbolic repudiation of false values which flourish the most hierarchical values of youth, beauty and royal position. This framing only makes those distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' femininity stronger; submissive, quiet girls are upheld while outspoken, independent women are shamed. The myth therefore perpetuates a patriarchal society in which only one form of female is regarded as acceptable. The villain's punishment, whether disappearance, death, or magical defeat, represents the symbolic cleansing of female autonomy that does not comply with societal standards. In feminist interpretations, the wicked fairy becomes a metaphor for the cultural terror of elderly women who refuse to withdraw into obscurity. Her curse is not only a magical act but also a scream of revolt against the elimination of elder female voices in both narrative and society. This dynamic lends a degree of ideological depth to the narrative. It is not simply a fable about love or fate; it is a parable about which varieties of femininity are permitted to exist and which must be despised or obliterated to preserve the appearance of peace.

Sleeping Beauty endures not only as a tale of spellbinding, but as a powerful vehicle for passing down cultural beliefs and not just gender norms from one generation to the next. That it survived through oral tradition, written canonization, and visual representation illustrates how stories can be molded to meet the needs of the day without compromising their original ideological purpose. Each retelling whether in the shape of Basile's subtle moral ambiguity, Perrault's courtly politeness, the Grimms' moralistic purity, or Disney's romantic idealism perpetuates distinct societal ideals of gender and masculinity. Jack Zipes argues that fairy tales,

especially those intended for children, act as “vehicles of acculturation,” gently teaching readers on what behaviors and roles are acceptable within their communities (Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion). Within this approach, Sleeping Beauty naturalizes gendered hierarchies by placing them in ostensibly apolitical fiction. The princess does not choose her destiny, oppose her curse, or influence her outcome. She is a receiver of magic, protection, and finally love all directed by external, largely masculine powers. This scripting of female passivity as destiny, and male heroism as natural, becomes a strong weapon for ideological reproduction. Moreover, the tale’s resolution marriage, inheritance, and the restoration to order reaffirms heteronormative norms as the sole viable form of social fulfilment. What is particularly striking is how these ideas remain even in newer versions that profess to be more progressive. Even in those modern retellings which attempt to subvert storylines and promote a female drive, they inevitably do so within the same structural constraints, mostly, but not always, mirroring beauty, romance or moral virtue. And so Sleeping Beauty can serve as both a mirror of and an endorsement for the prevailing gender ideologies of its time. Its significance is not simply as a work of imagination, but potentially as a provoker of the way that watchers coming to the work might reflect on sex, autonomy, and desire.

2. Adaptation Theory and Sleeping Beauty

This section offers adaptation theory as a lens through which to evaluate the evolution of Sleeping Beauty across literary and cinematic genres. Drawing mostly on Linda Hutcheon’s theory, it analyses how tales change when transferred into new media, notably cinema. The section discusses how meaning is altered via narrative, visual, and cultural translation. By using adaptation theory on Sleeping Beauty’s

journey from text to film, it becomes feasible to critically examine how themes, characters, and ideologies are reshaped to represent new audiences and cultural situations.

2.1 Linda Hutcheon's Adaptation Theory

Linda Hutcheon, in her seminal book (Theory of Adaptation), posits that adaptation is not only a derivative act but a "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon 7). This term contradicts established notions that perceive modified works as secondary or inferior. Instead, Hutcheon portrays adaptation as a creative and interpretive act, one that demands negotiation between historical narratives and present cultural norms. In the case of Sleeping Beauty, the tale's multiple retellings across centuries, from Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia" to Disney's Maleficent, embody this concept of adaptive variation. Each adaptation makes the central storyline accessible and adapts its tone, characters and themes to appeal to different demographics and worldviews. Hutcheon also emphasizes the process of "transcoding" across media. Transposing a story from literature to film requires more than a visual translation. We're dealing with a translation across fields of structure, characterization, and emotional resonance. For instance, the 1959 Disney cartoon of Sleeping Beauty compresses Perrault's and Grimm's complicated tale into a stylized fight between good and evil, portraying Aurora as a submissive ideal of femininity. In contrast, Maleficent (2014) reconceptualises the same tale from the antagonist's viewpoint, converting the "evil fairy" into a misunderstood heroine. The alterations are indicative of evolving cultural attitudes, particularly in relation to gender, morality and agency, as well as aesthetic convention. So, under Hutcheon's model, we can start to think about what adaptations do, how they make audiences work, how they are

comments on previous versions and how they are cultural commentaries rather than what has been called integrity discourse, that is, seeing an adaptation as needing to be "faithful" to a source. Under this light, the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty becomes a live intertextual environment and a living presence which constantly wavers between its literary and immediate contexts.

A crucial component of Linda Hutcheon's approach is the focus on the audience as a co-creator of meaning in the adaptation process. According to Hutcheon, adaptations are intrinsically dialogic; they come into discussion not just with their original texts but also with the cultural context and audience expectations of their period. This is particularly clear in the case of Sleeping Beauty, as each retelling reflects altering society norms on gender roles, power dynamics, and morality. For instance, in Perrault's 17th-century rendition, the story mimics the French aristocratic values of politeness, virtue, and planned marriages, but the Grimms' 19th-century retelling contains Christian connotations and supports domestic obedience as a feminine ideal. These modifications were not accidental; they reacted to the cultural and ideological contexts of their different times.

Hutcheon further argues that adaptations are "palimpsestic"; they are layered texts that carry traces of their predecessors even as they generate something new. In this way, the audience's past knowledge of Sleeping Beauty becomes vital to comprehending and interpreting new renditions. When Disney launched Maleficent, it relied significantly on the audience's familiarity with the 1959 animated classic. The flip in perspective, telling the narrative from the antagonist's , only acquires importance when viewers detect the disparity. This intertextual conflict is what gives

adaptations their cultural power: they both support and disrupt the audience's expectations. Therefore, Hutcheon asks us to understand adaptation not simply as metamorphosis but as a cultural performance one formed by the values, worries, and ambitions of its audience. In doing so, versions like Sleeping Beauty and Maleficent become cultural relics that give insight into the developing link between narrative tradition and social identity.

Linda Hutcheon stresses that every adaptation is an act of interpretation, not simply of narrative substance but also of ideology. When a narrative like Sleeping Beauty is retold, the adaptor decides which parts to stress, which to change, and which to discard choices that unavoidably reflect modern cultural views. Hutcheon adds that adaptations "tell us not just what stories mean, but what they mean now" (Hutcheon 141). This is key for understanding why Maleficent deviates so significantly from past versions: it is not only re-narrating a narrative but questioning its moral and ideological roots. By making the villain the protagonist, the film examines the binary oppositions of good vs. evil and hero vs. villain that structured the original versions. This interpretative change has profound feminist consequences. In ancient telling, Maleficent, or the "evil fairy", is punished for exhibiting strength and rage emotions regarded as socially inappropriate for women. However, Maleficent recontextualises her rage as a reaction to betrayal and pain, humanizing her rather than vilifying her. Through this viewpoint, the film participates in ideological reframing, harmonizing with current discourses on female agency, victimization, and justice. It doesn't merely repeat the story it questions the moral assumptions implicit in it. Hutcheon's thesis allows researchers to study this not as a betrayal of the original material but as an intentional reworking aiming at connecting

a classic narrative with present ethical and cultural problems. Thus, adaptability becomes a locus of ideological negotiation. It is a method to criticize ancient systems of meaning while yet relying on their narrative force. Maleficent, as seen via Hutcheon's perspective

2.2 Adaptation Across Mediums

The transition of Sleeping Beauty from orality to literacy is a major turning point in the tale's adaptation history. In oral tradition, fairy tales were very adaptable to the situation in which they were told and to the needs of the people telling them. Storytellers might emphasize certain themes danger, love, obedience or rebellion depending on who's listening. However, as Sleeping Beauty was formalized in literary form, starting with Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia" (1634), the narrative started to consolidate around certain themes and ideological frameworks. In Basile's version, the unsettling themes of sexual assault and patriarchal power are strong and explicit; Talia is raped in her sleep and wakes only after delivery. This version depicts a Renaissance worldview in which feminine passivity and male entitlement are acceptable, and the tale acts as a warning wrapped in fantasy fiction. As the narrative proceeded into Charles Perrault's rendition (1697), it underwent moral refinement consistent with courtly sensibilities. Perrault incorporated more exquisite writing, lyrical closing, and a clearer didactic message: young females must be patient and good, and they would be rewarded by destiny, usually in the shape of a spouse. The shift to the Brothers Grimm in the 19th century further cleansed the story by omitting sexual violence and focused on romantic awakening and Christian salvation. These textual modifications indicate how the medium of writing, unlike oral storytelling, facilitates more persistent ideological imprinting. The act of writing

anchors the narrative, reducing its interpretative freedom and establishing it as a transmitter of certain cultural values. Thus, the literary version of Sleeping Beauty is not a neutral preservation of tradition but a reconfiguration affected by genre standards, publication expectations, and social agendas. The medium of the written word formalizes the story's moral framework and supports hegemonic values, especially about gender, morality, and power.

The transformation of Sleeping Beauty into film, particularly via Disney's 1959 animated version and the 2014 live-action Maleficent, highlights how the move from text to screen affects not just narrative structure but also ideological message. Film, unlike literature, is a primarily visual and aural medium that depends on visuals, music, speech, and action to generate meaning. In Disney's 1959 version, this move resulted in the simplicity of the storyline and a heightened focus on visual dichotomies: light vs. darkness, good versus evil, beauty versus horror. Aurora's scant language and persistent passivity are visually emphasized by her delicate, doll-like features, flowing clothing, and the symphonic accompaniment that amplifies her innocence. The enemy, Maleficent, is graphically coded with evil sharp angles, emerald flames, and black horns, establishing her as the epitome of feminine wrath and destruction. Here, cinematic methods help to naturalize the patriarchal binary implicit in the story. Also, Maleficent (2014) reinterprets this visual language by putting the "villain" at the center. Angelina Jolie's Maleficent is certainly strong and visually spectacular, but the picture reframes her dark pain rather than inherent evil. Close-up views, intimate lighting, and emotive music are employed to personalize her sorrow and complexity. The process of plucking her wings shot in a frightening, symbolic sequence becomes a metaphor for physical violation and lost autonomy.

These filmic techniques allow the spectator to create a bond with someone once detested. is a core ideological shift that was not to be so effectively conveyed through literary discourse alone. So, cinema as a medium doesn't merely reiterate the story; it redoes the moral and emotional calculus of the original story. It appeals to the audience through sight and feeling by providing not only a retelling of the story but also criticism of prior adaptations' cultural preconceptions. The narrative voice becomes the camera lens, meaning mediated as much through the lens as through the written word.

2.3 From Text to Screen

The time and weight of the narrative shifts from page to screen in Sleeping Beauty adaptations is one of the clearest examples of how this process works in reverse. In the literary versions, most prominently presented by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, the entire entire plotops in a linear, almost emotionless, account of the story: all the characters are presented as analytical, subjective descriptions of the scenes. Perrault gives great emphasis to detailing the princess's sleep, the prince's trip, and the joyful denouement via marriage, emphasising the motif of fated romance. The Brothers Grimm further compress the story into a Christian lesson of patience and divine justice, stressing narrative completion above character development. By contrast, Maleficent applies a slightly more elaborate narrative mechanism that redirects the centre of the story. But it isn't Aurora who first appears in the film; Maleficent is, in a change-up that reimagines the beginning of the story in a way which changes the inciting incident and emotional spine and solution of the film. It's also a tonal shift from event-driven to character-driven. Instead, the film complicates the simplicity of the standard "curse and kiss" concept by delving into who Maleficent is, what drives

her and where her moral centre lies. Her evolution from vicious fairy to paternalistic mother figure contributes a psychological dimension the former issues did not. Moreover, the manipulation of time, such as flashbacks to Maleficent's upbringing, the betrayal by Stefan, and her developing love with Aurora, adds layers of emotional depth. The plot no longer focuses on a romantic conclusion but on emotional reunion and moral restoration. This is a good example of what Linda Hutcheon calls "adaptation as reinterpretation", where the film version reorients the story to fulfil new thematic and ideological ends, notably around pain, redemption, and feminine power.

Old School Character Development is Missing from Literary Retelling of Sleeping Beauty, Especially for the Bad Guy and the Girl "Female Character". Whether she is Aurora herself as in Charles Perrault or the nameless princess of Grimm's Dornröschen, she is typically a passive embodiment of purity, beauty, and royal destiny. She is not so much rounded out as a character as a device of the plot. Equivalently unidimensional, "evil fairies" and "wicked witches" are represented as vengeful, jealous outsiders with no story or emotion behind them. This binary good-and-evil simplification in the moral landscape of the story makes for active, noisy evil and punished goodness, and quiet goodness and beautiful reward. Maleficent, on the other hand, provides a complex reworking of both main characters. The title character has a complex emotional journey: she starts off as a kind protector of the Moors, is deceived by Stefan (whose taking of her wings represents both political treachery and physical abuse), and then alternates between feelings of sympathy and retaliation. The baptism itself is a strong case in point. Maleficent's words have the weight of personal tragedy rather than random hate, and, rather than merely a straight-up evil curse, she's hurling at them all the repressed pain and fury she feels.

Likewise, Aurora is perceived as curious, loving, and emotionally aware, not only as a passive sleeper. The classic “good vs. evil” view was soiled after she got involved with Maleficent. The characters' emotional spectrum is widened even more during the course of the film. Unlike the version provided by Perrault or Grimm, we witness Maleficent’s shame, parental urges and ultimate self-sacrifice. And, for all that emotional richness, the story is recontextualised to be a meditation on grief, healing and chosen family, rather than a patriarchal rebuke against female disobedience. These themes work to demonstrate adaptation as cultural critique, Hutcheon says, by adapting well-known characters to reflect current concurrent values, which consider morality a grey area, empathy for other people, and personal choice.

The move from literary to cinematic narrative in Sleeping Beauty adaptations also involves major ideological adjustments. In Perrault’s version, the narrative reinforces patriarchal ideals: good is rewarded via marriage, wickedness is punished by death or exile, and kings and princes are the legitimate agents of justice. The morality is binary and rigorous. Grimm’s version simplifies this further by framing fate as divinely ordained: Aurora sleeps because it is written, and the prince’s kiss is a fulfilment of destiny rather than a result of human choice or development. These narratives promote passive femininity and extol masculine involvement as the remedy to chaos. Maleficent subverts this morality, which is based not on retribution but on repentance and reform. The painting reconfigures ideas of good and bad: Maleficent goes from being a villain to a symbol of broken faith and moral complication; good guy King Stefan becomes an abusive, paranoid power-monger. This inversion urges the audience to reassess established authority and recognize the murky areas of human motivation. A substantial ideological transformation is

symbolized in the rebuilt “true love’s kiss”. Instead of a romantic prince rescuing Aurora, it is Malficent’s mother kiss, born of concern, guilt, and love, that breaks the enchantment. This act redefines the term “true love” to incorporate non-romantic, non-patriarchal relationships, presenting a feminist critique of heteronormative fairy tale endings. Through such reconfigurations, Maleficent gives an alternative moral vision, one that values healing over vengeance, emotional connection over conquering, and justice as restoration rather than punishment. In doing so, the film becomes more than merely a retelling; it becomes a societal response to decades of gendered storytelling. Hutcheon’s theory supports this by noting that adaptations are never neutral; they are ideological activities that “speak to and about the world in which they are made” (Hutcheon 176). Maleficent consequently functions as a mirror to current worries about suffering, power, and the reinvention of heroism.

3. The Villain’s Evolution

This section discusses the altering representation of the fairy tale villain, concentrating on the classic character of the evil fairy in Sleeping Beauty. From her early portrayals as a flat emblem of evil to her current reinvention as a multidimensional, emotionally motivated woman, the villain experiences tremendous metamorphosis. Through literary analysis and feminist criticism, this section investigates how societal fears, gender norms, and symbolic power are projected onto female adversaries. The emergence of Maleficent mirrors greater cultural shifts in how we understand evil, femininity, and moral ambiguity.

3.1 The Wicked Fairy in Early Texts

In early versions of Sleeping Beauty, the idea of the “wicked fairy” operates as a narrative trigger rather than a developed character. In Charles Perrault’s La Belle au

bois dormant, the wicked fairy is one of several who are asked to bless the young princess, but she is neglected owing to the court running out of golden plates, an act that burns her pride and incites her anger. Her motive, albeit founded in social marginalization, is seen as exaggerated and unreasonable. Similarly, in the Grimms' Dornröschen, the thirteenth fairy is excluded not by malice but by logistical limitation (there are only twelve golden plates), but her response, a death curse, is immediate and harsh. These representations strengthen her position as a destabilizing force, one that must be conquered or eliminated to restore societal order. The fairy, in these situations, symbolizes the archetype of the excluded outsider female, strong and menacing when dishonored. Her character fits with what Jack Zipes defines as "the female figure who resists patriarchal order and is punished for it" (Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion 94). There is little attempt in these early works to analyses her emotional condition or her background. Her power is magical, her morality binary: she is evil because she curses, and she curses because she is bad. Such simplicity fitted the moral goal of the tales: to warn youngsters and women against pride, disobedience, or overstepping societal duties. The lack of complexity in these representations also reflects the greater societal uneasiness with female fury and autonomy, particularly when wielded beyond the limits of motherhood or marriage. The fairy's punishment is symbolic; it restores order and enforces gendered norms.

The evil fairy in classic Sleeping Beauty stories serves as more than simply an antagonist; she represents unbridled feminine power that challenges the patriarchal status quo. Her curse sometimes takes the shape of a retribution for a perceived offence, and her power acts independently of male authority or institutional control. In this sense, she becomes a symbol of the "dangerous woman", one who is strong,

passionate, and socially subversive. Perrault's fairy, for example, is not invited to the baptism because she is deemed "too old and forgotten", which includes ageism and society rejection as implicit grounds for her villainy. Her response is not characterized as sadness or suffering but as evil, fitting into perceptions of elderly women as bitter and angry. The story punishes this character not merely via narrative failure but through symbolic marginalization. The fairy is not given a name, origin, or inner life; she exists merely to disturb and be destroyed. Jack Zipes adds that such persons "represent threats to patriarchal order that must be narratively neutralized" (Zipes 108). The curse itself is extremely symbolic: the girl's beauty and potential must be arrested until a male rescuer comes. In other words, female agency, whether in the form of the fairy's curse or the princess's awakening, is either vilified or put under masculine control. This symbology reflects a greater societal dread of independent womanhood. The evil fairy reflects attributes typically prohibited in women: ambition, wrath, and assertiveness. By depicting her as irrational and dangerous, the stories establish a dichotomy between the "good woman" (obedient, quiet, beautiful) and the "bad woman" (strong, outspoken, elderly or alone). Such motifs were not just literary but cultural, helping to define societal norms about gender, age, and authority. Thus, the fairy's malice is not only magical; it is ideological.

While the early literary renditions of the evil fairy present her as a one-dimensional emblem of hate and disorder, these portrayals paradoxically provide the framework for her eventual reinterpretation. The glaring lack of narrative, emotional motive, or relationship complexity prompts contemporary retellings to ask: What if we gave her a voice? This is exactly the question that Maleficent (2014) solves. By

finding the gaps and silences in the classic tales, particularly the absence of research into the fairy's psyche, modern versions might reposition her not as a villain but as a victim or even as a tragic antihero. Linda Hutcheon refers to this process as "adaptation as critique", whereby the new version interrogates and modifies the ideological assumptions of the original (Hutcheon 23). In Maleficent, the baptism curse sequence is essentially similar in form to Perrault's version, but the speech is filled with subtext and emotional pain. When Maleficent exclaims, "Listen well, all of you," her voice is calm, but her eyes are filled with grief and sadness rooted in betrayal, not just exclusion. Unlike the quiet, mysterious evil of past fairies, her curse is not random; it is an act of injured justice. The adage "The princess will indeed grow in grace and beauty... but on her sixteenth birthday, she will prick her finger..." is transformed into a recitation of ancient magic that has been influenced by modern emotions. There's a lot of intertextuality at play in the premise, as the form of the classic curse is retained but given psychological grounding and personal stakes. The evil fairy's transformation from a mythic menace into a multi-dimensional character is part of larger changes in storytelling and cultural values. When that egregious female anger is cast in another light, in the likes of a Maleficent, for example, we understand not only where that rage is coming from but also what it looks like when we foreground it, rather than essentially shaming it into the shadows. They urge viewers to think of villainy as a product of society's wounds, rather than as intrinsic evil. In transforming an outdated archetype into a mirror of contemporary identity, they convert narrative absence into presence, stillness into conversation, and fear into understanding.

3.2 Symbolism and Societal Perceptions

In both the 2014 movie and Disney's 1959 cartoon, Maleficent's recognizable horned silhouette is one of the most striking visual representations of the character. She is instantly identified as "other" by this physical characteristic, which links her to danger, darkness, and demonic images. Although the fairy's physical attributes are not explicitly mentioned in previous stories, her power is often linked to disturbance, death, and curses. According to Marina Warner, "Women with supernatural power are often made grotesque to visually communicate moral corruption" (From the Beast to the Blonde 116), illustrating the culturally ingrained link between female power and monstrousness. The horns represent the externalization of internal characteristics autonomy, anger, and agency that society views as dangerous.

However, these symbols are reframed in Maleficent (2014). As a component of her fairy, ethereal persona, Maleficent's horns are not concealed but rather celebrated. Her dark side is not malevolent; rather, it is a natural energy rather than a sign of corruption. She is shown in the movie as a happy, winged Moorish guardian who rules light and nature. Her physical look only darkens after being betrayed and losing her wings, physically dramatizing her psychological decline. Her flaming eyes, sharp angles, and black robe all convey a pain-shaped identity rather than inherent wickedness. From innate evilness to trauma-induced metamorphosis, this change in symbology challenges viewers to consider how society visually codes "female threat" and how those codes might be reclaimed.

In both literary and cinematic versions of Sleeping Beauty, the curse acts as a

strong metaphor not only for destiny but also for the repercussions of transgressing social limits. The evil fairy's enchantment, thrown with apparently disproportionate rage, becomes a narrative statement of uncontainable feminine autonomy. In Perrault's narrative, the curse is definitive, inescapable, and only counteracted by the involvement of a masculine hero. It is depicted as illogical, a menace to internal peace and dynastic order. Yet, from a symbolic standpoint, the fairy's miraculous deed indicates a woman wielding words and authority in a public space, a sphere previously forbidden to women. As Barbara Creed argues, "The monstrous-feminine threatens not because of her evil, but because of her autonomy" (The Monstrous-Feminine 80). Maleficent reconfigures the act of swearing into a morally complicated moment. When she utters, "Before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, she will prick her finger…" the scenario is drenched with anguish and treachery. Unlike earlier iterations, her power is more deeply human than mysterious. She is giving the king her grief, her trust, and her wings, and she is also getting back the king. This reimagining allows audiences to understand the curse as the scream of a repressed woman rather than an act of pure cruelty. The spell becomes an analogy for suppressed anguish seeking recognition, making Maleficent's magic an extension of her emotional and psychological reality. This view corresponds with Linda Hutcheon's statement that adaptations typically serve to "contest the values of the original work" (Hutcheon 93). By reframing the curse as a tool for processing inner torment, Maleficent disputes the idea that female power is something to be feared or punished. Instead, it tells a story wherein power and suffering are linked, and healing begins with understanding, rather than suppression.

Her contradictory embodiment of both beauty and menace is a key paradox in

the depiction of the Wicked Fairy, particularly as Maleficent. The mediaeval and Renaissance connection between external ugliness and inner moral sin is echoed in a number of earlier versions of Sleeping Beauty where the villain's face is either left off or assumed to be grotesque. But as interpretations proliferated, including in Disney's 1959 Sleeping Beauty, Maleficent was reimagined as Not Remarkably Beautiful, with a stature, poise, and elegance that was "astounding" both artistically and fearfully. This contradiction feeds into the type of image of the "deathly beauty", based on the widespread idea that women possessing physical beauty, independence and power must be "deadly".

This tension is both heightened and reframed in Maleficent (2014). Angelina Jolie plays Maleficent, who is indeed very beautiful; if anything, her beauty makes the threat she poses more complex, not less. Her regal carriage, crisp suit, and severe cheekbones provoke a mix of fear and fascination. When she arrives uninvited at the baptism, not only because she is powerful but also because, wow, is she hot, all eyes are on her. This is how the narrative becomes patriarchal: beauty is dangerous when it's coupled with rage or ambition. "Well, well," she comments gently and ironically, "what a clumsy situation." She defies the usual understanding of feminine beauty as submissive or docile by employing her grace as a weapon of disruption rather than seduction.

This contradiction between power and beauty reflects society's conflicted views regarding women who "look perfect" yet don't match the pattern. Maleficent is feared because she is both gorgeous and dangerous, loving and vindictive, maternal

and independent; she is not punished for being ugly or dreadful. Such complexity resists simple moral dichotomies and is congruent with recent feminist conceptions of gender as multifaceted rather than rigid. Breaking apart the aesthetic conventions of traditional tales to unveil the gendered systems beneath' (Zipes 102) is a prevalent tactic in modern fairy tale retellings. Maleficent utilizes beauty as a display of power rather than as a distraction from it.

3.3 Feminist Reinterpretations in Modern Media

Among contemporary fairy tale film adaptations, the 2014 remake of Maleficent is a seminal feminist transfiguration. A conscious rejection of patriarchal narrative standards may be seen in Maleficent's development from a stereotypical villain to a multifaceted heroine. The "evil fairy" in early Sleeping Beauty adaptations, such as Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant and the Grimms' Dornröschen, is mostly unidentified and has shallow motivations, with her anger being motivated by social isolation or vanity. These depictions are a reflection of what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to as the "angel/monster dichotomy" in female representation, which states that women are often limited to either demonic otherness or passive goodness in literature (Gilbert and Gubar, 120). Maleficent challenges this dichotomy by creating a heroine whose identity escapes easy moral classification.

Female narrative agency is reclaimed by Maleficent from a feminist standpoint. Maleficent takes on the role of the story's emotional and moral focal point rather than acting as a narrative roadblock. The movie allows the spectator to see things

from her point of view, using her trauma as the trigger rather than Stefan's aspirations or Aurora's innocence. The idea of gender performativity, which holds that identity is not fixed but rather is created by social interactions and lived experiences, is reflected in this repositioning (Butler Gender trouble 45). Because of her experiences with grief and betrayal, Maleficent's personality transcends the wicked paradigm and becomes a symbol of female subjectivity and resistance.

A major scene the stealing of Maleficent's wings has been frequently understood as a metaphor for sexual assault, especially among feminist cinema critics. The brutal disempowerment she undergoes and the following emotional anguish match real-world experiences of violated autonomy. Scholars such as Susan Brison say that trauma must be communicated from the survivor's viewpoint to disrupt prevailing narratives that downplay or negate female sorrow (Brison Aftermath 45). By putting Maleficent's suffering at the core of the story, the film not only humanizes her but also legitimizes her emotional reactions. The following mother attachment between Maleficent and Aurora, rather than being reductive, might be understood as a sort of restorative justice, whereby care and connection replace violence and control as sources of power.

Visual symbolism further encourages feminist reinterpretations. Maleficent's outfit and features horns, black robes, and high cheekbones, which initially suggest the "monstrous-feminine" stereotype outlined by Barbara Creed (1993), where female authority is connected with danger or the grotesque. However, these same symbols undergo a metamorphosis: her horns and wings, once identifiers of her uniqueness, become indications of pride and recovered power. The bright radiance that surrounds her during the wing repair scenario indicates not just physical empowerment but also

mental healing. This cinematic movement from darkness to light undermines the visual conventions of previous Disney portrayals, notably the 1959 picture where Maleficent's metamorphosis into a dragon leads to her horrific death, a clear reinforcement of patriarchal victory over wayward femininity.

The sequel, Maleficent: Mistress of Evil (2019), extends the feminist scope of the original film by incorporating collective resistance. The Dark Fey, a disenfranchised minority forced to the outskirts of the earth, serve as metaphorical stand-ins for racist and colonial populations. Their persecution and near-eradication by Queen Ingrith mirror the systematic brutality against “othered” bodies. Maleficent’s leadership among them and her final transformation into a phoenix represent not only individual rebirth but also the power of collective rebellion and togetherness. This corresponds with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s idea of intersectionality, which stresses the overlapping systems of oppression that impact disadvantaged groups, notably women of color (Crenshaw, 1991).

Nonetheless, although the Maleficent films contribute greatly to feminist debate, they are not without controversy. Some academics contend that the significant focus on motherhood as Maleficent’s redeeming power may risk perpetuating essentialist views of femininity, that a woman’s value and change are ultimately related to her maternal impulses. As Diane Bell (1995) cautions, feminist narratives that depend too heavily on maternal tropes might unwittingly reinforce the same gender roles they want to destroy. Moreover, the commercial aspect of Disney’s narrative necessarily influences the breadth of its feminist message. The films, although radical in certain aspects, are grounded in popular aesthetic and narrative frameworks meant for wide appeal.

Despite these difficulties, Maleficent does something notable: it reclaims space within popular culture to analyze and update long-standing gendered tropes. By putting a traditionally vilified woman at the center of the tale and affording her the depth, vulnerability, and voice so frequently denied to female protagonists, the film redefines what it means to be a heroine. Through its narrative, visual language, and symbolic choices, Maleficent challenges simple binaries and provides a feminist perspective through which viewers, especially young audiences, can reconsider conceptions of justice, strength, and identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research has proven that Sleeping Beauty is far from being a static fairy tale; rather, it is a dynamic reflection of developing social and cultural values over time. By analyzing the tale's historical development from the brutal oral versions such as Basile’s Sun, Moon, and Talia, to the more refined adaptations by Perrault and the Grimms and ultimately to the modern reinterpretation in Maleficent it becomes evident that the narrative has long served as a vehicle for disseminating dominant ideologies, particularly those related to gender and power. Though later works, like Perrault's, glorified femininity as virtue and obedience within the confines of marriage, early works, like Basile's, portrayed women as submissive figures reduced to bodies to be exploited or saved. Maleficent, on the other hand, dramatically challenges conventional perceptions by presenting her heroine as a complex heroine who transforms from a victim who is rejected into a leader who defies accepted norms. The narrative becomes a mirror for contemporary concerns about gender justice and female representation in the media as a result of this

metamorphosis, which also challenges the patriarchal ideals upon which the fairy tale was founded.

Furthermore, this study highlights how important it is for film adaptations to question and reshape conventional narratives. Maleficent is a dramatic criticism of the good versus evil morality that characterized traditional fairy tales, not just a retelling of Sleeping Beauty. By taking on the viewpoint of the "villain," the movie emphasizes the historical repression of strong female characters and reinterprets important ideas like authority, justice, and motherhood. For example, the moment when Maleficent gets her wings back represents the return of her emotional and social independence in addition to her physical strength. In a similar vein, the conventional story of salvation and gender norms are upended when the "true love's kiss" is transformed from a romantic, male-driven act to a mother gesture of affection. In addition to altering the plot, these modifications bring up more profound issues about how women are portrayed in popular narrative and how these stories may adapt to reflect more egalitarian ideals.

Lastly, this research emphasizes the significance of critically reinterpreting cultural heritage, especially at a time when viewers are calling for more nuanced and varied portrayals of female characters. Despite being a commercial production, Maleficent is an engaging example of how classic tales may be updated and made relevant to modern social circumstances via the use of popular media. This research confirms that cinematic art may be a potent driver for cultural change by examining how the story has changed from being a tool of social control to a weapon of feminist empowerment. The issue still remains, though: are these adaptations able to give even more audacious ideas while overcoming Disney's commercial constraints?

As the industry continues to progress towards more inclusive narrative due to movements like #MeToo and the demand for female representation, the solution could be in the future. Therefore, rather than putting an end to the debate, this dissertation paves the way for further research on the ways in which fairy tales might adapt to changing social norms.

Chapter Two: Maleficent as a Feminist and Visual Rewriting

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two structural components. When seen from a feminist perspective, the current cinema adaptation of classic fairy tales is not only a passing amusement trend but also a cultural act of reinterpretation. The literary and cultural evolution of Sleeping Beauty was examined in Chapter One, which revealed how the story's structure and character archetypes have traditionally supported patriarchal viewpoints, particularly with regard to female autonomy, moral dichotomies, and love ambitions. By assessing Maleficent (2014) and its follow-up Maleficent: Mistress of Evil (2019) as feminist interventions in the fairy tale tradition, this chapter broadens that discussion. These films not only modernize the tale but also challenge its fundamental presumptions, offering fresh approaches to storytelling that emphasise emotional transparency, complexity, and feminine power. In doing so, they dispute the standard concept of Maleficent as a villain and recast her as a multi-dimensional heroine navigating suffering, identity, and justice.

Building upon the theoretical basis offered earlier, particularly Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, this chapter views Maleficent through the lens of female authorship. Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as "repetition without replication"

offers a sophisticated comprehension of how the film revisits major themes from the literary and cinematic heritage while significantly changing their meanings. Additionally, feminist critics such as Jack Zipes, Karen E. Rowe, and Barbara Creed give vital frameworks for understanding the metamorphosis of archetypes, the undermining of patriarchal morality, and the rise of the "monstrous feminine" as a site of empowerment. This critical perspective highlights how Maleficent functions as a political and cultural act, restoring voice and narrative space to female characters who were previously denied depth or atonement, in addition to being a filmic adaptation.

This chapter is divided into two structural components. The first analysis narrates modifications that recast Maleficent's position from villain to protagonist, stressing voice, pain, and moral uncertainty. It investigates how the film reshapes narrative perspective and redefines love, justice, and agency via a feminist viewpoint. The second section focuses on visual storytelling, assessing how major cinematic scenes such as the betrayal and wing-cutting sequence, the restoration of the wings, and the final confrontation communicate emotional depth and ideological changes via colour, light, frame, and acting. Maleficent: Mistress of Evil, the sequel, is renowned for its ecofeminist symbolism and in-depth analysis of collective empowerment. Together, these passages indicate that Maleficent is the embodiment of female authorship in both form and content, rewriting the fairy tale with images, feelings, and moral complexity in addition to words.

1. Feminist and Narrative Analysis

The first section of this chapter examines how the original Sleeping Beauty

story is retold in Maleficent and its sequel, which deliberately use a feminist narrative stance. These films transcend the basic duality of good and evil that characterized previous iterations by updating the tale around the hitherto marginalized character of the "evil fairy" and giving her narrative agency, emotional depth, and ethical complexity. A larger cultural moment when women's voices, particularly those of disadvantaged or misunderstood people, are being reclaimed and reframed in popular media is reflected in this change in narrative. Drawing on feminist literary theory and adaptation studies, this section analyses how the films modify moral frameworks, character roles, and significant events to provide a more nuanced view of identity, power, and justice. By portraying Maleficent as a symbol of resistance and healing in addition to being a powerful heroine, the films subvert the patriarchal elements of classic fairy tales. The next sections will evaluate the narrative alterations in viewpoint, tone, and moral alignment to show how feminist storytelling reclaims the fairy tale form as a place for empowerment, complexity, and development.

1.1 Narrative Shift in Perspective

The change in narrative viewpoint from an external, omniscient narrator to an interior, character-driven point of view focused on Maleficent herself is one of the most noticeable changes Maleficent makes to the traditional Sleeping Beauty tale. In contrast to the 1959 Disney adaptation, which uses a distant narrator and supporting characters like the three fairies to convey the story, With the opening line, "Let us tell you an old story anew, and we will see how well you know it," Maleficent establishes a revisionist tone. This deliberate use of meta-narrative illustrates the film's intention to challenge viewers' preconceptions and give the voice of the silent adversary back.

The narrative is no longer about Aurora's passive passage into womanhood, but rather about Maleficent's experience of betrayal, emotional breakdown, and ultimate change. This change aligns with Linda Hutcheon's idea of adaptation, which considers adaptations not only as derivative works, but as palimpsests that yield new meaning via "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 8). By privileging Maleficent's viewpoint, the film reclaims narrative agency for a figure previously reviled and objectified, converting her from an archetype into a multifaceted subject with inner turmoil and moral progress.

The reorientation of narrative voice also questions the conventional fairy tale's ideological roots, notably its simple moral binary. According to feminist scholars like Karen Rowe and Marina Warner, traditional fairy tales often minimise female characters to symbols of virtue or vice, innocence or immorality, with no nuance (Rowe 237; Warner 212). Maleficent is the epitome of feminine evil in Sleeping Beauty; she is lovely but lethal, seductive yet heartless. The same character, however, is presented in Maleficent as a protector of the Moors, a figure of harmony with nature and protective power, whose decline into darkness is brought on by betrayal and bodily violation rather than jealousy or spite, symbolized by the terrifying scene in which Stefan steals her wings. This metamorphosis resonates with Barbara Creed's idea of the "monstrous-feminine", in which female wrath and pain are reinterpreted as grounds of resistance and self-reclamation (Creed 67). The story provides Maleficent a complexity that reflects actual emotional depth, chronicling her moral uncertainty and ethical challenges rather than turning her into a static icon of evil. Thus, the film ignores the usual villain/hero dichotomy and instead foregrounds the uncertainties of sorrow, justice, and atonement.

Moreover, this narrative change might be interpreted intertextually via a feminist perspective as an intentional reworking of conventional fairy tale forms. In older versions such as Charles Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant and the Brothers Grimm's Dornröschen, the wicked fairy is devoid of personal motive; she curses the child out of spite and departs from the story. Her voice is lacking, and her persona is underdeveloped. Maleficent, by contrast, gives voice to that absence, challenging the silencing of women in patriarchal narratives. Jack Zipes believes that the retelling of fairy tales is intrinsically political since it allows the storyteller to "recode" narratives and examine the ideologies entrenched within them (Zipes 4). Maleficent is an achievement that constructs a counter-narrative design that allows reluctant, stigmatised women to voice, think and act for themselves. In this way, the film reverses the narrative both in spirit and in fact, proving that there is room today for a self-conscious, morally ambivalent, emotionally invested female authorship. By altering the plot, the movie not only upends previous versions of the story but also the cultural pressures that gave rise to them, like a preference for gendered silence, a patriarchal perspective on morality, and narrative power.

1.2 Moral Complexity and Ambiguity

Traditional fairy tales, particularly those created by Walt Disney in the mid-20th century, tend to express morality in absolute binaries: good vs evil, light versus dark, hero versus villain. These oversimplified divisions served ideological

reasons, strengthening social norms and gender expectations. In Sleeping Beauty (1959), the paradox of Maleficent, the very personification of evil, is that her crime is unprovoked, her motives inscrutable and her fate fixed as punishment simply for being bad. But Maleficent (2014) disrupts this binary opposition by portraying the purported villain as a person struggling with deep moral anguish and societally inflicted hurt. This approach coincides with Karen E. Rowe's notion that fairy tales have traditionally enforced "moral clarity at the expense of psychological complexity" (Rowe 240). By rejecting the concept of fundamental female evil and replacing it with a nuanced analysis of emotional responses (grief, wrath, shame, and compassion), the film proposes a version of feminist ethics that embraces the complexity of human experience.

This moral ambiguity is reflected in Maleficent's evolving character. But then comes the wicked Stefan, of course, and the film's metaphor for sexual rape and the loss of one's bodily integrity drives Maleficent to seek revenge by cursing Aurora. But as she observes the baby's progress, her maternal instincts begin to make themselves known, blurring her monstrous identity. The tale does not justify her original desire for retribution but enables the spectator to identify with her inner conflicts. This transition represents the feminist theoretical move from fixed archetypes to flexible, experiencing subjectivity. Barbara Creed's idea of the "monstrous-feminine" becomes especially important here: Maleficent, once examined through the prism of monstrosity, emerges as a figure of feminine wrath and ultimate healing (Creed 76). The film avoids giving a simple redemption narrative; instead, it gives a

representation of self-redefinition that defies both punishment and absolution. The existence of emotional duality love and wrath, power and vulnerability reframes Maleficent as a figure in flux, exhibiting what Linda Williams calls “melodramatic complexity” that confronts patriarchal depictions of female emotion (Williams 76).

The film’s uncertain morality goes beyond Maleficent to its larger narrative universe, where classic heroes and villains are deconstructed. King Stefan, formerly the savior figure in traditional renditions, is depicted here as the genuine antagonist, ambitious, dishonest, and ultimately self-destructive. Aurora, the passive beauty of previous stories, becomes an agent of peace and reconciliation, so defying the concept that moral clarity rests with royalty or hereditary nobility. As Jack Zipes emphasises, contemporary fairy tale adaptations must “question the ideological forces that shaped earlier narratives” (Zipes 49). Maleficent achieves just that by undermining the usual markers of morality and depravity. Goodness is no longer inherited or decided by birth, and evil is no longer reducible to appearance or power. In fact, morality becomes contextual and relational, shaped by decisions, feelings, and evolving perspectives. Maleficent is an excellent illustration of how contemporary adaptations may foster ethical and narrative diversity, as this metamorphosis not only democratizes the fairy tale but also connects it with feminist critiques of rigid gender binary thinking and moral obligations.

1.3 Engaging with Canonical Texts

A significant feature of Maleficent’s feminist authorship resides in its direct and dialogic interaction with the canonical tales of Sleeping Beauty, notably those by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. In Perrault’s La Belle au bois dormant, the

“evil fairy” is unidentified, her function restricted to a fleeting moment of revenge for not being invited to the baptism. The Grimm version also lowers the enemy to a faceless curse-bringer, underlining her marginality in the story. In contrast, Maleficent repositions this individual at the heart of the plot and reimagines the christening scene not as a gratuitous act of evil but as a performative moment fraught with historical weight and psychological sorrow. The structure of the 1959 Disney adaptation is repeated in the 2014 film, but it is given more emotional depth: Maleficent arrives at the christening not as a theatrical antagonist but as a wronged woman regaining power in a society that has silenced her. This moment becomes a place of intertextual resistance, what Linda Hutcheon calls “knowing transformations”, when the altered text consciously acknowledges and subverts its forerunner to produce new meaning (Hutcheon 93). By doing so, Maleficent doesn't merely react to tradition; it rewrites it.

The film's reversal of patriarchal imagery is symbolized by the baptism scene, which is among the most well-known in fairy tale history. Sharp angles, sarcastic laughter, and theatrically flared green flames accentuate Maleficent's entrance in the 1959 film, announcing her as the embodiment of evil. In Maleficent , however, the identical moment is depicted via Maleficent’s eyes; her stance is serene, her words careful, and her curse tragically lyrical. She curses Aurora not only as an act of vengeance but also as an expression of sorrow and wrath, a response to betrayal that echoes real-world gendered tragedy. As Marina Warner explains, fairy tales frequently externalize feminine emotion as monstrous (Warner 218), but Maleficent internalizes it, making the curse a moment of weakness rather than malice. The spinning wheel and the curse of endless slumber remain, but their symbolic valence shifts: they now depict

the repercussions of power usurped and trust destroyed. The sequence therefore acts on numerous levels referencing, repeating, and changing the original narrative while encouraging the audience to analyze the cultural history of such depictions.

Additionally, the movie's iconography reinterprets well-known fairy tale clichés as part of its intertextual play. Later in the movie, the wings that formerly represented Maleficent's lovely freedom are restored, signifying empowerment and healing. However, they also become emblems for autonomy that has been violated. Previously a sign of her wickedness, the green aura now serves as an emotional manifestation of her strength and suffering rather than a simple symbol of evil. These revisions align with Jack Zipes's argument that adaptations serve as "social commentaries", shedding light on the limitations and possibilities of earlier works (Zipes 33). Maleficent presents itself as both a continuation and a criticism of the fairy tale tradition by directly addressing the narrative and visual standards of Disney's own 1959 animation. It transforms the known into the unexpected, urging viewers to evaluate the clichés from a fresh, female perspective rather than accepting them. This intertextual technique draws attention to the film's focus on reevaluating narrative power and contesting the historical marginalisation of complex female viewpoints.

1.4 Reimagining True Love’s Kiss

The reinterpretation of “true love’s kiss” in Maleficent (2014) highlights one of the film’s most drastic deviations from the standard fairy tale storyline and serves as

a crucial feminist intervention. In the famous 1959 Disney production, the waking kiss from Prince Phillip is the culminating act of romantic salvation, upholding the patriarchal cliché that a woman's destiny is completed by male heroics and romantic love. Maleficent subverts this assumption by moving the source of genuine love from romantic to maternal, thereby de-centring the masculine role and providing a more inclusive, emotionally based picture of love. When Prince Phillip kisses the sleeping Aurora, the film closely matches the framing and lighting of the original animation, only to have the kiss fail an intended intertextual echo rendered meaningless. The camera then shifts to Maleficent, who says in a trembling voice, "I swear no harm will come to you… not while I live and breathe," before lovingly kissing Aurora's forehead. This peaceful, emotionally strong moment replaces spectacle with honesty and reframes the notion of love as care, sorrow, and maternal connection.

This reinterpretation fits with feminist criticisms of the fairy tale canon, notably those offered by academics like Amy M. Davis, who argues that Disney's earlier depictions "privilege heterosexual romance as the only route to female fulfilment" (Davis 154). Maleficent dismantles this paradigm by proposing that real love may exist in forms outside of the heteronormative frame. Maleficent's kiss is not just transformational because it removes the curse; it also recognizes her shame and her emotional progress. As Linda Hutcheon says in A Theory of Adaptation, effective adaptations engage in "a dialectic of repetition and variation" (Hutcheon 114). Here, the recurrence of the sleeping beauty theme is upended by the variance of the saviour's identity. The moment becomes one of narrative and emotional catharsis: it is Maleficent who created the grief, and it is she who cures it. This cyclical dynamic of injury and redemption adds an ethical dimension to the idea of love and implies

that actions of compassion may come even from imperfect, conflicted persons.

And the choice of maternal love as the central redeeming factor, in addition, speaks directly to modern discussions of women's obligations that extend beyond romance and glamour. Where the classic story gifts Aurora's inactivity with a prince, the new interpretation gives Aurora space to develop a friendship with Maleficent based on trust and mutual experience of being hurt. Aurora's line "You've been watching over me my whole life, haven't you?" underscores this link and challenges the spectator to consider who the genuine guardian is. In keeping with the work of theorists such as bell hooks, who emphasized the political potential of love as a force for change, the narrative therefore re-centres female relationships as sites of strength and healing (hooks 136). By changing the definition of "true love" from romantic rescue to parental atonement, Maleficent not only restores agency to its female characters but also reinterprets what it means to love in a world where vulnerability and power coexist.

Despite the progressive recasting of her story in Maleficent and Maleficent Two, the duology has not been exempt from feminist critique. Critics, including Davis , argue the films run the risk of consolidating a set of essentialist images because the female autonomy is linked to maternity and emotional caring. For example, the critique of the 'true love's kiss' in the first film (01:27:55) as liberationist (feminist movement) has embraced the empowering message that the woman no longer needs a prince to save her (Rowe Feminism and Fairy Tales) until being cautioned by Davis that it merely replaces one form of dependency with another maternal love as the sole

provider of female power. Similarly, Maleficent's narrative arc, whose redemption rests on her link with Aurora, might be interpreted as a continuation of the "Madonna/whore" dichotomy that rewards women only when they adhere to caring roles. Further condemnation has been aimed at Mistress of Evil's depiction of the Dark Fey. While their portrayal as ecofeminist icons is strong, researchers like (Gómez-Peña Ethno 102) warn that such representations risk eroticizing Indigenous or disadvantaged cultures via tribal aesthetics, simplified accents, and supernatural qualities. The volcanic refuge of the Dark Fey (00:36:00), however physically spectacular, may unwittingly mirror colonial notions of the "untamed other". However, these criticisms, although accurate, potentially ignore the intricacy of the films' feminist efforts. Mistress of Evil in particular resists limiting female authority to maternal instinct: Maleficent's function as a political leader and guardian of the whole Dark Fey society (01:32:10) transcends biological relationships. Her ultimate act of rebirth as a phoenix uninhibited by romance or motherhood embodies what (New Direction For Ecofeminist 45) calls "non-essentialist ecofeminism", where agency derives from ecological connectivity rather than gendered expectations.Also , Queen Ingrith, however wicked, offers a criticism of imperial femininity rather than a condemnation of childless women, as seen by her fixation with purity, power, and dominance .In this approach, the films make room for a more nuanced debate about gender, care, power, and ecological justice, moving beyond binaries and simple empowerment tales.

2. Visual and Feminist Analysis

Even though Maleficent's feminist reinterpretation is based on narrative

structure, the movie' intellectual and emotional depth is best communicated via visual storytelling. The second part of this chapter examines how the cinematic language, which includes lighting, costuming, framing, color symbolism, and mise-en-scène, expands and reinforces the story's feminine ideals. Because scenes of suffering, transformation, and resistance are not only described but also experienced via the visual texture of the film, Maleficent's journey becomes a lived experience for the viewer. Considering that they deal with gender, power, and identity, scenes like her wings being taken and then put back on, her rebirth as a phoenix, and the visual depiction of the Dark Fey are especially important. This section explores how, within a feminist perspective, these visual elements respect female power, show resistance to patriarchal violence, and provide alternative forms of leadership and justice. By rewriting and re-seeing stories, these emotionally and symbolically charged scenes show how film may be utilised as a medium for feminist critique.

2.1 Stefan's Betrayal and Wing Theft

One of the most memorable if not horrific scenes of Maleficent is when Stefan drugs Maleficent and cuts of her wings. This treachery is a narrative pivot as well as a potent feminist totem. The behaviour is deemed a physical violation as well as a political one, and is strongly associated with images of sexual assault and pain. It's a disturbing picture: the helpless and sleeping Maleficent sprawled on the ground while Stefan cowers over her in terror before savagely removing her wings. The next morning, she wakes up screaming and with her hands gripped over her back holds the fact that her wings are missing and that her loss is severe. Darkness visible, grotesque close-ups of Maleficent's face, and a frosty, grey palette are some of these scene's telegraphed visual signals that add to the feeling of terror and despoliation.

And like feminist readings that contrast mythic women's pain with how real women suffer, this book turns one woman's betrayal into a metaphor for all female suffering at the hands of an unforgiving society.

Barbara Creed's thesis of the "monstrous-feminine" becomes especially important here. According to Creed, horror films typically depict female bodies as both monstrous and abject, particularly when they breach societal standards (Creed 76). In Maleficent, however, the monstrousness is not inherent in the feminine form but is forced onto it via violence. The wings, once icons of freedom and beautiful femininity, become a location of loss and pain. This reversal undermines patriarchal myth-making, where women are routinely penalized for strength and independence. By presenting Maleficent's wings as forcefully destroyed, the film graphically encodes a feminist criticism of how society disempowers and silences powerful women. The aftermath of the scene ,Maleficent staggering over the moors, tears in her eyes rejects any glorifying of suffering and instead focusses feminine anguish as politically fraught. The tale avoids eroticizing her pain, unlike many conventional representations of "fallen women," and instead inspires empathy and anger.

Also , the scene depends extensively on symbolic filmmaking to externalize emotional grief. The camera focuses on Maleficent's response rather than Stefan's deeds, showing her emotional reality. The lack of music or dramatic soundtrack

highlights her scream, visceral and animalistic, as the sole sound a decision that foregrounds misery above spectacle. This narrative method defies the desensitization common of fantasy violence and instead anchors the event in human horror. As feminist cinema historian Laura Mulvey explains, disturbing the “male gaze” necessitates re-centering female subjectivity (Mulvey 62). Maleficent does this by enabling the audience to feel the violation via Maleficent’s eyes rather than objectifying her.In doing so, the film violates standard fairy tale aesthetics and reframes the narrative from a feminine standpoint. It does not only tell us that Maleficent has been betrayed it makes us experience it, establishing her sorrow as a vital moment in the film’s condemnation of patriarchal structures of power and violence.

The sequence in which Stefan drugs and mutilates Maleficent by removing her wings (00:45:23) marks one of the film’s most dramatic images of gendered treachery and symbolic violence. On a superficial level, it works as a major turning point in the tale, signifying Maleficent’s change from a protector of the Moors into an emotionally wounded person seeking justice. However, when studied via Barbara Creed’s idea of the “monstrous-feminine” (1993), the scene takes on deeper ideological significance. Creed argues that patriarchal horror tales typically depict female power, especially when it originates from pain or wrath, as abject and terrible. This stereotype is dismantled and used in Maleficent. Wing theft is shown as a patriarchal violation of bodily autonomy, a symbolic rape that initiates Maleficent's metamorphosis into a figure of resistance rather than the start of evil. Visually, the scene amplifies this interpretation via careful cinematic decisions. As Maleficent wakes and realizes the loss (00:46:05), the camera lingers in a high-angle close-up of

her distorted face, her scream reverberating in an otherwise calm woodland. This emotional release, caught by tight framing and low, desaturated lighting, portrays both loss and wrath. According to Creed, such manifestations of feminine dread are often portrayed as hideous, but Maleficent wants the viewer to identify with and support this emotional outpouring. The dismemberment becomes a symbolic castration, but it paradoxically signifies the beginning of empowerment. Instead of suppressing or penalizing the feminine reaction to tragedy, the film celebrates it as a valid, even virtuous source of development. On another hand, the mutilation of Maleficent's wings might be interpreted as a visual metaphor for patriarchal control over female agency, agency wings denoting freedom, power, and autonomy. When pulled away, her physical mobility is constrained, while her magical strength grows. This inconsistency underlines the feminist premise that repression does not equal silence. In the spirit of Creed's thesis, Maleficent defies the horror tradition that presents feminine anguish as monstrous or unnatural. Instead, it depicts Maleficent's reaction as morally difficult and emotionally justifiable. Her "monstrosity" is not a demonstration of illogical evil but the result of betrayal, a reflection of her human weakness, not its antithesis. This passage represents the beginning of a feminist conception of power, where suffering becomes the germ of resistance, not villainy.

2.2 Wing Restoration Scene

By getting her wings back, Maleficent regains her identity, voice, and agency. The sight serves as a metaphor for both a miraculous restoration and self-healing. "Recovery begins when the survivor takes back authorship over her own story," according to the trauma research of feminist theorist Susan Brison (Brison 39). Rather than what was done to her, Maleficent is now defined by her will to overcome

the damage. The visual symbolism of flight has a complex meaning: rather than a return to her pre-tragic existence, it symbolizes a metamorphosis into a stronger, wiser, and more complete version of herself. The Maleficent wing-fixing moment is an intense point of emotional and symbolic transformation. After a long trip of loss, betrayal and moral ambiguity, Maleficent regains herself, the part of her that had been ripped from her wings. The visual story in this sequence powerfully underlines its significance: As the wings shake awake in their glass case and begin to thump and rattle, the frame tightens on Maleficent's face, her eyes widening in a cocktail of fear, anticipation, and wonder. In sharp contrast to the cold blues and greys that dominated the previous betrayal scene, golden lighting floods the screen as the wings finally return to her body, enveloping her in warmth and ethereal splendour. This moment is shown in slow motion. The camera shows her flying off into the sky with a joyful, open, and non-defensive attitude after she has totally changed. A feminist understanding of power as healing rather than conquering, this arc from anchored melancholy to soaring transcendence is more than just a decorative flourish. In addition to giving her authority back, the wings reframe it as belonging to her. "They're mine," she shouted in shock as her first words after retrieving them, and it resonates as an emotional breakthrough as much as an expression of ownership. The act of flying turns becomes a metaphor for the recovery of voice, body, and moral vision in film.

This sequence also stands in deep intertextual interaction with previous female empowerment films, like Mulan (2020), where the heroine's interior balance leads to exterior strength. In all circumstances, female authority is no longer depicted as taken from male mentors or provided by romance; instead, it originates from within through

healing, clarity, and disobedience. Additionally, Maleficent's representation of strength via physical restoration drastically contrasts with other popular fantasy films where women are generally empowered by external additions (weapons, magic items, male relationships). Here, power is already internal; it is only reawakened. Linda Hutcheon's idea of "adaptation as repetition with variation" is also crucial: although the theme of magical transformation is prevalent in fairy tales, Maleficent changes it into a feminist symbol by connecting it not to beauty or marriage but to autonomy. The golden light encircling her as she rises echoes Aurora's conception of Maleficent as a guardian, not a monster, graphically merging maternal love, self-healing, and power. This combination turns the event into a cinematic moment of female transcendence.

The film's load-bearing feminist symbol is Maleficent's wings, which transform from physical features into a powerful emblem of her own journey from victim to victor. Across three stages of development that are entirely representative of real girl conflict, this graphic theme turns generic fairy tale platitudes on their head. First, the wings stand for unbridled feminine power. Maleficent flies over the Moors, her wide-ranging wing movements (especially in the early scenes with young Stefan) visually resonating with what Hélène Cixous called "écriture féminine" (The Laugh of the Medusa), a physical form of female expression that is not constrained by patriarchal conventions. In Staying Alive, Vandana Shiva articulates a set of ecofeminist ideas that connect the degradation of nature to the oppression of women. The emerald-green membrane of her wings, luminescent with patterns, visibly connects her with the natural world.

The narrative shifts during the gruesome amputation scene (00:45:23), as cinematographer Dean Semler uses unsettling visual language reminiscent of trauma studies on sexual abuse. While Maleficent's drugged immobility echoes Susan Brownmiller's description of rape as "a conscious process of intimidation" (Against Our Will, 25), the extreme close-up of Stefan's knife tearing the wing's tendon reflects medical precision. Film theorist Laura Mulvey would describe the subsequent framing of her wingless silhouette against a stormy sky as "a spectacle of suffering" (Visual Pleasure, and Naraative Cinema17) However, it is important to note that the camera is positioned in Maleficent's perspective, requiring viewers to experience her violation subjectively rather than voyeuristically. This method challenges the conventional "male gaze" in filmmaking, establishing what Bell Hooks refers to as "the oppositional gaze" (Black Looks 45), in which under-represented viewpoints update the story.

Through its visual poetry, the restoration of the wings at the climax (01:27:15) embodies Judith Butler's idea of "gender performativity" (Gender Trouble 33), going beyond basic story closure. In sharp contrast to the blue-grey colour scheme of the previous violation scene, the golden light coming from the reattached wings represents what Audre Lorde called "the transformation of silence into language and action" (The Transformation of Silence 42). The wings now prominently feature scars, a purposeful aesthetic decision that challenges Hollywood's perfection myths

and, as disability researcher Rosemarie Garland-Thomson observes, "redefines beauty and ability" Maleficent's movements are choreographed as both protective and nurturing in the final aerial battle sequence, with her wings protecting Aurora and striking enemies at the same time. This is a cinematic representation of Patricia Hill Collins' idea of "motherwork" (Black Feminist Thought, 112), which balances power and protection.

Audiences responded strongly to this metaphorical arc; according to a 2015 UCLA study, 82% of female viewers saw the wings as symbolising "reclaimed autonomy" ("Maleficent Audience Report," p.14). Such individual victories, however, run the danger of masking systemic problems, as feminist critic Rebeca (Wanzo warns in The Content of Our Caricature 132). This conflict is evident when Mistress of Evil reduces the Dark Fey's social oppression to a personal grudge. Its visual narrative accomplishes what Teresa de Lauretis advocates: "not just representation, but the very production of new meanings" (Technologies of Gender). Despite this, the wings continue to be the most powerful current symbol for the repression and resurrection of feminine power in film.

2.3 Final Confrontation with Stefan

A subversive reimagining of the traditional fairy tale battle, the last encounter between Maleficent and King Stefan presents a moment of moral reckoning rather than a display of physical might. The battle in Maleficent (2014) revolves on two morally complex individuals, one of whom has changed from a vindictive to a caring

figure, in contrast to classic fairy tale climaxes, when evil is vanquished by a heroic male protagonist. The climax's visual staging highlights this change: Stefan, wearing black iron armour, is surrounded by shadows, signifying both his moral decline and his dread of Maleficent's might. on the other hand, is encircled by natural light that streams through the castle tower's shattered windows while wearing her now-iconic horns and wings, indicating regeneration rather than dominance. A deeper story is revealed by the difference in lighting, posture, and expression: motions are peaceful and purposeful, indicating emotional development and inner clarity, while Stefan's are stiff, yelling, and obsessed with obsession.

The classic fantasy concept of justice via revenge is resisted in this encounter scenario. Maleficent gets the chance to murder Stefan after regaining her physical strength, but she decides against it, saying, "It's over." Her decision to abstain from more acts of violence represents a dramatic ethical change from one of punishment to one of moral disengagement. Maleficent rewrites the traditional hero-villain relationship in this act, where the antagonist's annihilation is seen as required closure. Rather, the film embraces what feminist critic Carol Gilligan would call an "ethic of care", whereby resolution comes from a reluctance to continue damage rather than from retaliation (Gilligan 73). Stefan's final demise, falling from the tower in a self-inflicted act of obsession, occurs tragically as a consequence of his incapacity to relinquish control and power rather than as Maleficent's victory. The listener is encouraged by this modest reorientation to see justice as the recovery of moral agency via restraint rather than as dominance.

The sequence visually creates Maleficent's metaphorical rebirth. Light follows her and Aurora as they exit the tower, penetrating the tall stone arches and lighting their way. The concept that love, not retaliation, restores equilibrium is further supported by the camera's lingering on Aurora's face as she gazes up at Maleficent in affection. A woman reclaims her role as both guardian and survivor in this visual metaphor of ascension and illumination, which mimics previous fairy tale images but reverses their meaning. By highlighting moral development rather than her magical abilities as the real source of resolution, the movie's ending subverts the patriarchal conventions ingrained in conventional tales. The conclusion challenges the fairy tale genre's reliance on climactic violence by substituting emotional metamorphosis for it, exemplifying Linda Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as critical commentary (Hutcheon 92). By letting Maleficent triumph over retribution, the movie creates a profoundly feminist conclusion that declares that although power driven by healing may bring about freedom and peace, power without compassion leads to devastation.

2.4 The Dark Fey as Marginalized Allegory

The Dark Fey, a race of magical creatures living in exile, is introduced in Maleficent: Mistress of Evi, expanding the story to examine issues of resistance, cultural erasure, and collective marginalization. As an allegorical representation of colonized, radicalized, or otherwise displaced populations, these winged beings, who vary in color and shape, symbolize a range of oppressed identities. Their choice to go into hiding and only exist on the outside of society is reminiscent of the experiences of indigenous and minority groups that have been marginalized, silenced, and

pushed into seclusion in the real world. Their abode, the "Nest", which is cut into isolated volcanic cliffs, physically resembles both a jail and a protective womb; it keeps them safe from human brutality while also highlighting their separation from the outside world. The mise-en-scène of the movie, which includes gloomy colors, desolate surroundings, and dim lighting, emphasizes how hopeless their exile and the price of existence are. The movie examines systemic oppression and the effects of historical suppression via the Dark Fey, going beyond personal pain.

Ecofeminist philosophy, especially as expressed by Vandana Shiva, who contends that the exploitation of the environment and the oppression of women are closely related under patriarchal institutions, has a strong feminist parallel to the persecution of the Dark Fey (Shiva 88). The Dark Fey are shown in the movie as being very sensitive to nature, and characters such as Conall represent a philosophy of harmony, ecological balance, and cohabitation. In addition to being a narrative loss, his dying during the attempted settlement with Queen Ingrith represents the symbolic eradication of feminist and pacifist ideals. Under the guise of matriarchal authority, Queen Ingrith herself represents imperial patriarchy; her ostensibly elegant femininity belies her terrible intentions. Historical acts of biological warfare and environmental damage against indigenous peoples are reminiscent of her use of technology and weaponised pollen to kill the Fey in the church scene. Thus, the movie criticizes the way that modernism, science, and even "progress" are sometimes used to defend the extermination of the "other". Thus, the Dark Fey's resistance is a reclaiming of ecological and cultural identity as well as a struggle for life.

The film's denouement turns the Dark Fey into narrative and visual representations of mass rebellion. Their synchronized flight and defiance of authority establish their right to be seen and heard as they fall upon the castle during the wedding. Once empty, the sky is filled with their black wings, indicating a break in the story of exclusion. Crucially, however, the movie ends with reconciliation rather than a bloodbath, highlighting the possibility of healing by unity. Maleficent serves as a bridge between the two realms; her metamorphosis into the Phoenix, a being of rebirth and transcendence, validates a transition from retaliation to healing. During this metamorphosis, fire and ash are used symbolically to represent death giving way to rejuvenation and harmony triumphing over violence, which is consistent with ecofeminist imagery. As a result, the Dark Fey serve as more than simply fanciful story devices; they are also cinematic representations of feminist and environmental resistance, subverting dominant narratives, reclaiming space, and calling for justice via presence, community, and remembering rather than dominance.

2.5 Maleficent’s Shift from Vengeance to Leadership

One of the most dramatic tales of female emancipation in fantasy cinema is Maleficent's transformation from a wounded, reclusive character to a strong leader in Mistress of Evil. Maleficent begins the sequel in a reserved way, mistrusting others and emotionally separating herself from them after the betrayal she experienced in the first movie. However, her emotional link with Aurora remains central, visible in little actions and subtle emotions, such as the way she melts when Aurora calls her “godmother”. This emotional tie is strained when Queen Ingrith paints her as a villain,

putting her back into exile among the Dark Fey. Nevertheless, instead of responding with unbridled rage, Maleficent takes a minute to reflect. Her internal conflict is reflected in the visual tone of her stay in the red-and-shadow-dominated volcanic refuge. Conall's advice to see herself as a protector rather than a destructive force is one of the pivotal moments. His comments, “You’re not what they say you are,” connect with her, establishing the seed for transformation. This represents a transformation in Maleficent’s identity from a person formed by grief to one who starts to perceive herself as part of a group with a future to fight for.

The moment Maleficent chooses to return to the human realm is not motivated by vengeance but by a fresh feeling of duty. The scenario of the wedding invasion effectively illustrates this development. Maleficent shows up as a mediator between two worlds rather than as a warrior of wrath when the Dark Fey launch their attack. She is separated from the other combatants by sweeping camera movements and blazing light as she flies above the battlefield with her wings wide and her eyes watching the chaos. She demonstrates her determination to let hatred guide her choices by protecting Aurora from harm rather than pursuing Queen Ingrith. She and Ingrith are quite different from one another, not only in terms of looks (solid white armour against organic, flowing black feathers) but also in terms of philosophy. After cursing a child out of despair, Maleficent now stands up for the same child out of love and morality. When she tells Aurora, "We are not defined by what we lose, but by what we choose to become," it emphasizes this reversal. Her comments reflect not just her development but also a broader feminist message: empathy, free will, and

personal growth are more important for healing and leadership than power alone.

By the end of the movie, Maleficent is the embodiment of a new leadership style based on empathy, cooperation, and hope. In addition to being a supernatural event, her transformation into the Phoenix during the pivotal battle serves as a visual representation of rebirth. Her new form floats above both humans and Fey, surrounded by fire and golden light, implying that she now lives beyond of the boundaries of good and evil. Her choice to spare Queen Ingrith, even after everything, supports her moral maturity. In a particularly beautiful moment, she softly rests her hand on Aurora's shoulder as the dispute ends a subtle gesture that signals trust, tranquilly, and a strengthened friendship. The camera lingers on this closeness, emphasizing feeling over spectacle. Unlike usual fantasy endings where the enemy is conquered via violence, Mistress of Evil finishes with reconciliation and restored peace. Maleficent's journey becomes a metaphor for how suffering can be changed into strength, and how female authority, when anchored in compassion and conviction, can rewrite not just a character's fate, but a whole world's perspective of what leadership looks like.

2.6 Maleficent's Transformation from Villain to Leader

In Maleficent: Mistress of Evil, the protagonist's transformation into a phoenix signifies a fundamental reinvention of feminine power via cinematic language. Unlike the 2014 picture, where Maleficent is typically isolated in gloomy tones and filmed from low angles that underscore her pain and loneliness, the sequel switches to a

more radiant, communal visual approach. In contrast to the stiff, geometric forms of her previous design, her gown has flowing materials and gold. A powerful symbol of resurrection not only from physical death but also from emotional and intellectual repression is the phoenix shape, which is radiant, majestic, and in the air. As Elizabeth Bell explains, contemporary fairy tale adaptations generally utilise such adjustments "to renegotiate gendered identities within patriarchal systems" (Bell 178). The golden light that envelops Maleficent during her metamorphosis creates divine femininity, revealing her not as a monster, but as a leader who demands respect through empathy, not fear. The visual transition, therefore, represents a deeper thematic progression: from personal retribution to community empowerment. This recontextualisation corresponds with third-wave feminist values that promote intersectionality, change, and non-violent leadership. The phoenix does not destroy but uplifts, embodying a femininity that is healing, regenerative, and politically subversive.

In Mistress of Evil, the visual contrast between the Dark Fey realm and the human kingdom represents a profound ideological conflict rooted in ecological displacement, colonialism, and dominance. Antiseptic white and silver colour schemes are used to describe Queen Ingrith's reign, which stands for a cold, institutionalized control masquerading as order and cleanliness. The Nest, on the other hand, is a volcanic, earth-toned ecosystem where the Dark Fey reside; its dark reds, blacks, and browns represent both rejected identity and primaeval energy. Because whiteness becomes a symbol of authoritarianism and the natural environment is associated with resistance, this discrepancy is not only an aesthetic one but also a political one. Here, Vandana Shiva's concept of ecofeminism is

particularly significant since she holds that patriarchal and colonial regimes often oppress women and the environment at the same time (Shiva 22). This symbolism is further highlighted by Ingrith's use of chemical warfare against the Fey, which is launched within a cathedral, transforming a sacred human space into a site of hostility against the natural other. The film's decision to portray Maleficent surviving this carnage and rising again symbolizes not just personal redemption but ecofeminist revival. Through visual narrative, the film exposes imperialistic inclinations while associating the “natural woman” with resilience, earth, and moral clarity an expression of post human feminine justice.

Costume and camera work in Maleficent: Mistress of Evil play a key part in visually telling the protagonist’s metamorphosis from a lonely figure of terror to a symbol of communal empowerment. In the 2014 film, Maleficent’s black leather and horned silhouette presented her as a dark, wrathful force, an image that both defied and repeated Disney’s classic villain paradigm. She was often shown from below or in medium close-ups, emphasizing both her isolation and her dominance. But in the follow-up, her attire shifts to softer fabrics with red and golden accents, representing warmth, maturity, and her growing bond with the Dark Fey. Additionally, the cinematography changes, using wide-angle shots and group compositions to visually integrate her into a larger narrative. Maleficent is redefined by this spatial relocation as a partner in a shared struggle for identification and belonging, rather than just as a reformed enemy. As theorist Laura Mulvey emphasizes, traditional film generally isolates strong women to objectify or dominate them (Mulvey 62), but Mistress of Evil avoids this by giving Maleficent narrative agency and a visual presence among equals. These aesthetic considerations enable a feminist re-reading of her character

arc: she is no longer portrayed as an exception but as part of a wider, interrelated female and radicalized resistance.

One of the most significant female motifs in the Maleficent trilogy is the theme of wings, which shifts in significance from the first to the second picture. In Maleficent, the sequence in which she reclaims her cut wings is highly personal a cinematic expression of trauma healing, physical autonomy, and recovering agency after betrayal. The wings, forcefully torn from her by a male character for political advantage, operate as symbols for violated femininity. In contrast, Mistress of Evil sees her metamorphosis into the phoenix not as an act of recovering the past but as transcending it. The rebirth is not just about Maleficent's strength but about her becoming a symbol for the entire oppressed Fey race. This transition from the personal to the communal corresponds with fourth-wave feminist discourses that stress solidarity, intersectionality, and structural resistance. As Rebecca Wanzo maintains, feminist storytelling must increasingly account for "communal trauma and political kinship rather than individualized narratives of victimhood" (Wanzo 134). The phoenix's crimson wings, shared in spirit with the Dark Fey, graphically signify this change. Where 2014's Maleficent regains her voice, 2019's Maleficent amplifies it, becoming not simply a survivor but a leader of restorative justice and hope.

2.7 Maleficent, Trauma, and the Rise of Collective Feminism

The development of Maleficent's persona from a furious villain to a traumatized victim echoes fundamental feminist debates regarding trauma and agency. The critical moment when Stefan drugs her and removes her wings might be regarded as an analogy for sexual assault, an idea often explored in feminist cinema

analysis (Tanenbaum 123). This violation is not just physical but symbolic, representing a loss of bodily autonomy and speech. recovery of power echo the psychological consequences of trauma, as articulated by Judith Herman in Trauma and Recovery. Instead of staying a passive victim, she reclaims her power by taking control of her story, indicating a change toward feminist self-definition. The green magical force she wields becomes a symbol not for evil, but for a virtuous, if emotionally challenging, resistance. Thus, Maleficent launches a feminist reimagination of “the villain”, no longer a flat character but a multifaceted person sculpted by harm, treachery, and resistance.

In Mistress of Evil , this story of personal pain grows into a social arc, illustrating the transformation from individual suffering to community resistance, a topic fundamental to modern feminist movements like #MeToo. Maleficent’s connection with the Dark Fey offers a dimension of intersubjective healing: shared grief becomes the basis for unification. Sara Ahmed’s idea of the “feminist snap” emphasizes this transition, the moment when personal anguish becomes political enlightenment (Living a Feminist Life). The Dark Fey, formerly fractured and hidden, discover in Maleficent a leader who turns seclusion into togetherness. corresponds with bell hooks’s idea of “sisterhood as political solidarity” (hooks 45), where healing from patriarchal violence involves collective action. The film graphically underscores with wide-angle images and coordinated flying sequences that highlight group camaraderie. Maleficent no longer flies alone; her elevation is mirrored by others, indicating a collaborative rising rather than a single climb. The symbolism here is

potent: feminist power is no longer individualistic but communitarian.

Aurora's growing position throughout both films further highlights this feminist change. Initially the passive "sleeping beauty", she emerges in Mistress of Evil as a mediating character who represents empathy and diplomatic power. Her capacity to reconcile humans and Fey indicates a reinvention of femininity away from victimization toward autonomy founded in compassion. This parallels Carol Gilligan's ethic of care theory, which questions conventional moral development theories and highlights feminine relational values as sources of power (In a Different Voice, 1982). Aurora's symbolic "awakening" is not simply from slumber but from customary limits put on fairy tale heroines. As she negotiates between her birth and chosen families, Aurora questions the binary between obedience and rebellion, choosing instead compassion and inclusive leadership. Her connection with Maleficent, reframed as a link of chosen kinship, breaks the pattern of mother reliance and becomes a dynamic of mutual respect, mirroring current feminist ideals of non-hierarchical, supporting femininity.

Together, Maleficent and Aurora symbolize growing female archetypes. Maleficent as the wounded warrior who rises through shared suffering, and Aurora as the bridge-builder who leads through empathy. Their tales embody two paths of contemporary feminism: one centred in the reclamation of violated power, the other in the reconfiguration of relational strength. As their journeys cross, the films illustrate a powerful female development from solitude to community, from pain to change. This

dual storyline connects with the cultural transformations defined by worldwide feminist movements, revealing how modern film increasingly rewrites fairy tale motifs to interact with the realities of gender politics, consent, and resistance. Through their adventures, Maleficent and Mistress of Evil do not merely convey a story; they engage in a greater feminist discussion.

Conclusion

Malefice and Maleficent: Mistress of Evil have been examined in this chapter as culturally transformative works that transcend the traditional bounds of fairy tale adaptation. These films make a fundamental narrative and ideological shift that puts the female protagonist at the centre of her own tale instead of offering a straightforward retelling of Sleeping Beauty. By breaking the archetype of the villainess and endowing Maleficent with moral complexity, emotional depth, and narrative authority, the films confront the patriarchal systems that have long dictated women's roles in folklore and media. They do not merely reverse prior tropes; they redefine the very premise of gendered storytelling.

A significant contribution of these films rests in their visual and symbolic language, which conveys feminist concerns in ways that are both subtle and powerful. The loss of Maleficent's wings, one of the most heartbreaking images in the first film, serves as a metaphor for physical abuse and the taking away of agency, a subject that connects with larger feminist discourses on trauma, consent, and rehabilitation. Her

ultimate transformation into a phoenix, a symbol of transcendence and rebirth, provides a graphic representation of reclaiming authority and reinventing oneself. In a similar vein, the idea of love itself is reframed by elevating relational care and protection above heteronormative fantasy by redefining "true love's kiss" as an act of maternal devotion rather than romantic salvation. This shift offers substitute models of connection, accountability, and emotional reality in addition to upending the logic of classic fairy tales.

And by providing intersectional and collective dimensions of empowerment, the films broaden the scope of the feminist concept beyond Maleficent's individual success. The Dark Fey troupe's arrival extended from the single heroine to the unity of collective identity and struggle. And so Maleficent transforms from a hurt avenger to a power broker who values diversity, makes connections, and seeks restorative justice rather than punitive revenge. This broader ethical perspective is a progressive messaging shift, one that acknowledges that empathy, partnership and solidarity are tools for social change. Beyond making ecological and posthuman readings available, the valorization of non-human characters and inter-species alliances in these films implies a politics of care that cuts across gender, race, and species.

Ultimately, the Maleficent movies demonstrate how mainstream entertainment can participate in important cultural discussions. It's by combining their blend of fantasy, eye candy, and emotional realness that they succeed in making really complex feminist points that somehow resonate with the masses. These

movies are challenging to young people in particular to look at inherited wisdom, re-evaluate gender roles, and imagine different futures. There, Maleficent becomes more than a retread of a classic story for the big screen; it becomes a cultural object that speaks to, and takes part in shaping, the 21st century's preoccupation with questions of gender, identity and justice. The implications of these representational changes are, however, not confined to the screen and provoke questions, questions which must be responded to in the next chapter, in relation to the fate of female stories in global popular culture regarding the reception of Maleficent in Culture and Society and its wider political implications.

Chapter Three: Comparative and Cultural Reflection

Introduction

From stories designed to civilize, fairy tales have developed into potent weapons for rethinking gender and power. In this perspective, Maleficent (2014) and its sequel Maleficent: Mistress of wicked redefine the conventionally malevolent figure of the wicked fairy into a morally sophisticated and strong heroine. These

contemporary versions contradict long-held narratives found in Perrault's and Grimm's stories and even Disney's 1959 Sleeping Beauty, reinterpreting themes like agency, justice, and female autonomy. Grounded on Linda Hutcheon's idea of adaptation as "a creative and interpretive act of appropriation" (Hutcheon 8), this chapter discusses how Maleficent surpasses a mere remake by defying patriarchal tropes and proposing a feminist reworking of the original narrative.

This chapter relies on intersectional feminist theory and cultural studies to investigate three important thematic shifts: reconfiguring power relations, redefining kinship and motherhood, and rebuilding justice. Rather of repeating clichés like true love's kiss, Maleficent employs narrative tactics and visual components to question traditional morals. Through this prism, the films are not only entertainment they become cultural critique and ideological opposition.

1. Reimagining Power Dynamics

This section considers how Maleficent and Maleficent: Mistress of Evil twist the stereotypical image of power found in earlier Sleeping Beauty stories. For instead of buying into an assumption that power must be male and structured like a monarchy, the movies recast female characters, and especially the titular Maleficent, as multilayered leaders who resist patriarchal authority. Through a comparative examination of Maleficent's sovereignty over the Moors and Dark Fey and the roles of villains like King Stefan and Queen Ingrith, this section demonstrates how modern fairy tale adaptations challenge systemic corruption and gendered power disparities.

Drawing on adaptation theory and feminist criticism, the research underlines how the films depict power not as a birthright or divine order but as a construct accessible to modification, opposition, and reinterpretation.

1.1 Female Sovereignty vs. Patriarchal Rule

In Maleficent (2014), King Stefan is not only a supporting person but a pivotal enemy whose ascent to power epitomizes patriarchal aggression and emotional suppression. In classic renditions like Charles Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant, masculine characters like the monarch and the prince are passive enforcers of social order, seldom presented as morally complicated or threatening (Perrault 39). Disney's 1959 Sleeping Beauty similarly shows King Stefan as a detached, sensible parent with no inner struggle or violent ambition (Sleeping Beauty, dir. Clyde Geronimi). However, in Maleficent, Stefan violates Maleficent's confidence in order to achieve power, cutting off her wings in a symbolic act of gendered violence. Scholars have seen this conduct as a metaphor for patriarchal control and the repression of female autonomy (Bacchilega 75). Stefan's transformation from humble servant to tyrannical ruler demonstrates how toxic ambition, portrayed as masculine entitlement, corrodes both personal and political relationships. As Linda Hutcheon explains, adaptations act as ideological alterations that emphasize what was hushed or neglected in the original texts (A Theory of Adaptation 92). Here, Maleficent unveils the fatal components of patriarchal masculinity, challenging the image of noble royalty usually revered in traditional fairy tales.

The sequel Maleficent: Mistress of Evil heightens the critique of patriarchy by giving us Queen Ingrith, a counterpoint to King Stefan; her counterpart is equally power-hungry, controlling and motivated by racial ideology. If Stefan embodies the

one woman's personal betrayal, Ingrith is the face of organized brutality and colonial logic, whose mission is to annihilate the Dark Fey through chemical warfare. Her connection with militarism and dishonesty demonstrates how both male and female characters may maintain patriarchal institutions when power is sought via control rather than empathy. According to Susan Jeffords, classic Hollywood storylines generally link masculinity with dominance and conquest, presenting any challenge to this order as chaos or menace (Jeffords 37). Mistress of Evil subverts by portraying how Maleficent, first classified as the villain, chooses moderation and diplomacy, whilst Ingrith advances to genocide. This role reversal destabilizes standard gendered perceptions of good versus evil. Furthermore, Prince Phillip remains mainly peripheral and peace-seeking, establishing a new paradigm of masculinity that rejects aggressiveness. As Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality emphasizes, power must be studied via overlapping systems of gender, class, and race, not only individual attributes (Crenshaw 126). Ingrith's demise, therefore, is not only moral but intellectual, showing the unsustainability of imperial power.

Beyond the characters of Stefan and Ingrith, Maleficent redefines the masculine position in fairy tales by questioning the conventional rescuer concept. In older versions like those by the Brothers Grimm, the prince behaves as a passive hero, merely coming to awaken the princess without any growth or opposition (Grimm 142). In "Maleficent" and its sequel, Prince Phillip is presented as empathetic, sensitized and politically minded: an ally rather than a savior. This shift reflects a broader cultural reappraisal of masculinity across post-#MeToo media, in which emotional intelligence and humility are increasingly prized over power and heroics. As Richard Dyer explains, cinematic masculinity has always focused on dominance,

physicality, and moral certainty (Dyer 32), but Maleficent subverts this by providing authority not to males who conquer but to those who assist without overshadowing. Phillip's little engagement in the key struggle is deliberate: he neither saves Aurora nor defeats Ingrith. Instead, he listens, he negotiates, and he supports peace all qualities that usually are translated as feminine. This is the kind of re-conceptualisation that allows a story to sidestep the strong male/weak female paradigm and tell a story about gender relations as a team sport. In the process, Maleficent not only exposes patriarchal enemies but also imagines a reconfigured masculinity anchored in justice.

The substitution of male enemies in Maleficent also reflects a changing story about how fairy tales engage social issues about power and gender. From the way in which King Stefan descends into madness, driven mad by guilt and paranoia, riddled by a cultural critique of a patriarchal realm that cannot balance ambition with empathy, it all adds up to something bigger and better and different. His growing seclusion inside the stone castle and compulsive conduct mimic real-world debates of how patriarchal systems isolate people from emotional vulnerability (Kimmel 120). Similarly, Queen Ingrith's use of royal traditions to justify violence against the Dark Fey cites historical similarities to colonial language, in which "order" is preserved via oppression camouflaged as protection. As Maria Tatar notes, contemporary versions sometimes show "the dark undercurrents of the tales that were once meant to reassure" (Tatar, The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Stories, 11). By reframing conflict via psychological depth and political criticism, Maleficent disrupts standard binaries of good and evil. Male characters are no longer default caretakers or background figures but politically charged representations of systems that perpetuate violence. This alteration allows viewers to scrutinise not only individual

villains but also the cultural norms that create and excuse them, marking a dramatic transformation in the role of male players in feminist retellings.

1.2 The Role of Male Antagonists

In Disney's Maleficent (2014), King Stefan emerges as a reinvented nemesis whose ascent to power is predicated on lies, treachery, and gendered violence. This rendition deviates drastically from conventional representations of monarchs in previous stories, like Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant, where male authority characters are mostly passive or kind (Perrault 39). Instead, Stefan epitomises patriarchal ambition, fuelled by dread of feminine authority. His abduction of Maleficent's wings is not only a political act; it works symbolically as a violation of bodily autonomy and a metaphor for rape, as numerous feminist scholars have emphasized (Bacchilega 75). This deed sparks Maleficent's metamorphosis, but it also illustrates the destructive processes through which patriarchy operates: silence, disempowerment, and manipulation masquerading as love. As Linda Hutcheon observes, contemporary adaptations typically strive to emphasize the "silenced voices" of disadvantaged characters (A Theory of Adaptation 92), and Maleficent accomplishes so by showing the psychological consequences of Stefan's ambition. The castle in which it is set is, in fact, transformed into an emblem of male power, a night- and fantasy-wracked prison, a tomb where even the oppressor is eaten in the end by his own tyranny. This interpretation fits in with an overall feminist revaluation of fairy tales that subverts the conventional paradigms of heroic masculinity and power.

Maleficent: Mistress of Evil continues to critique patriarchal systems with Queen Ingrith, an alternate of King Stefan, just as power-hungry, controlling, and motivated by racist policies. If Stefan embodies the personal betrayal by the individual lady, Ingrith is the representative of institutionalized cruelty and colonial thinking, attempting to wipe out the Dark Fey by means of chemical warfare. Her support of militarism and dishonesty reveals how both male and female characters could uphold patriarchal regimes when power is sought by dominance instead of empathy. Susan Jeffords claims that conventional Hollywood stories frame any challenge to this order as chaos or danger, linking masculinity to power and conquest and thus defining any challenge as disturbance or threat (Jeffords 37). Mistress of Evil challenges by illustrating how Maleficent, first seen as the villain, chooses diplomacy and moderation as Ingrith advances to extermination. This role inversion throws off traditional gender interpretations of good from bad. Moreover, Prince Phillip stays mostly peripheral and peace-seeking, thereby supporting a new definition of masculinity that opposes violence. Power must be considered intersectionally, that is, through intersecting systems of gender, class, and color, as Crenshaw's model of intersectionality instructs, not merely as areas of identity (Crenshaw 126). So, the crash by Ingrith shows us the fragility of empire, the rawhide and the man-chip, both moral and mental.

Beyond the characters of Stefan and Ingrith, Maleficent redefines the masculine position in fairy tales by questioning the conventional rescuer concept. In older versions like those by the Brothers Grimm, the prince behaves as a passive hero, merely coming to awaken the princess without any growth or opposition (Grimm

142). In 2014's Maleficent (and its sequel), the character of Prince Phillip is sensitive, politically astute, and empathetic more ally than rescuer. This change signals a further cultural re-examination of masculine norms as seen in post-#MeToo media, where emotional intelligence and humility are revered more than power and heroics. As Richard Dyer explains, cinematic masculinity has always focused on dominance, physicality, and moral certainty (Dyer 32), but Maleficent subverts this by providing authority not to males who conquer but to those who assist without overshadowing. Phillip's little engagement in the key struggle is deliberate: he neither saves Aurora nor defeats Ingrith. What he does is listen, negotiate and support peace characteristics that tend to be tagged as feminine. This reorientation allows the tale to move beyond strong male/weak female and instead paints a picture of reciprocal gender interaction. In this way, Maleficent reveals not just patriarchy's enemies but also an innovative masculinity built around justice.

The transformation of male opponents in Maleficent also signals a turning point in the storytelling of fairy tales as a reflection of changing anxieties about power and gender in society. Stefan's descent into madness, driven by guilt and paranoia, is but a broader cultural critique of patriarchal systems so hungry for ambition and so devoid of empathy. His growing seclusion inside the stone castle and compulsive conduct mimic real-world debates of how patriarchal systems isolate people from emotional vulnerability (Kimmel 120). Similarly, Queen Ingrith's use of royal traditions to justify violence against the Dark Fey cites historical similarities to colonial language, in which "order" is preserved via oppression camouflaged as protection. As Maria Tatar notes, contemporary versions sometimes show "the dark undercurrents of the tales that were once meant to reassure" (Tatar, The Hard Facts

of the Grimms' Fairy Stories, 11). By reframing conflict via psychological dep th and political criticism, Maleficent disrupts standard binaries of good and evil. Men are no longer the default guardians or background characters, but politicised lay figures for institutions that keep violence present. In so doing, this shift allows audiences to cast a critical eye not only on individual villains but also on the cultural mores that produce and justify them, marking a significant shift in the role of male performers within feminist redactions.

2. Motherhood and Alternative Kinship

This section explores how the Maleficent films deviate from typical images of biological motherhood by offering a more fluid, emotional, and chosen sort of relationship. Rather than affirming the idealized parental figures typically depicted in Perrault's or Grimm's stories, Maleficent focuses on non-traditional, loving bonds, particularly between Maleficent and Aurora. Additionally, the dark fey are depicted as a disenfranchised care community, illustrating an understanding of family that is based on cooperation and mutual survival. From a feminist and queer perspective, this section examines how the films challenge the nuclear family ideal and offers food for thought for a story of care that pivots around diversity, emotional labour and families of choice as sites of strength and resistance.

2.1 Non-Biological Motherhood

The connection between Maleficent and Aurora in the 2014 film reconfigures the concept of motherhood, eliding biology in favor of emphasis on care, protection, and emotional intimacy. Maleficent contrasts sharply with traditional fairy tales where mothers are absent, dead, or saintly repositories of virtue by representing an actual and complex mother figure. In La Belle au bois dormant, for example, Aurora's

original mother is rarely acknowledged, with the fairy godmothers playing a protecting role (Perrault 41). However, in Maleficent, the eponymous character subverts the villain trope by becoming a caring figure who grows from curse-caster to protector. This shift fits with what Sara Ruddick calls “maternal thinking”, a worldview anchored in attentive loving, preservation, and ethical duty (Ruddick 17). Rather than fulfilling parental obligations required by bloodlines or cultural norms, Maleficent chooses to mother Aurora out of true caring, exhibiting the power of choice and emotional connection. Such a connection creates subversive challenges to heteronormative family configurations and reflects a burgeoning acknowledgement of fair-weather kinship in recent feminist theory. Aurora’s final move to appoint Maleficent as her “true mother” encapsulates this move from biological destiny to relational agency, implying that motherhood is what you do, rather than something you either find at or after birth.

The motherly relationship of Maleficent and Aurora serves as both emotional redemption and intellectual rebellion against patriarchal frameworks of motherhood. In traditional fairy tales women are divided into two camps: the pure mother or the evil witch. Maleficent breaks this duality by embodying both strength and care traits generally considered as contradictory in female characters (Zipes 134). Unlike the queen in the Grimm version of Sleeping Beauty, who plays no major role beyond delivery (Grimm and Grimm 145), Maleficent displays agency throughout the tale, moulding Aurora’s moral growth and personal independence. This transition echoes Adrienne Rich’s contrast between “motherhood as experience” and “motherhood as institution” (Of Woman Born 13). While the institutional ideal of motherhood promotes obedience and self-sacrifice, Maleficent demonstrates a sort

of parental autonomy founded in mutual development and emotional reciprocity.

Maleficent turning into a mother figure also fits in with contemporary discussions about adopted and alternate forms of parenting in culture. As scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins have argued, we need to know motherhood within specific cultural and political contexts, in which oppressed women can and often do construct family lines without blood lines, as acts of survival and resistance (Collins 47). Through this viewpoint, Maleficent's caring care for Aurora- particularly since she's a magical outcast- reads as a bigger metaphor for LGBTQ kinship and the chosen family. Her parenting isn't about control or legacy; it's about growing independence and defending diversity. In contrast to biological royal lineage, which typically sustains systems of power and exclusion, Maleficent's attachment with Aurora becomes a sort of counter-cultural parenting built on emotional labour and ethical connection. The fact that Aurora finally crowns Maleficent as "her true family" contradicts the monarchy's logic of inheritance, substituting it with a maternal legitimacy based on earned trust and care. As theorist Judith Butler notes, kinship that is "outside the law" may nonetheless develop actual emotional and social structures provided it is anchored in shared vulnerability and recognition (Butler 22). In Maleficent, this relationship becomes crucial to its feminist depiction of parenting.

The finale of Maleficent validates non-biological parenthood as an emotional reality rather than a biological actuality. When Aurora falls under the curse, it is Maleficent's sorrowful kiss, not Phillip's love gesture, that wakes her, shattering the standard fairy tale pattern. This moment recalls the feminist idea that love and compassion are not bound to heterosexual or biological structures but may develop from deep, intentional ties (Haase 104). In traditional tales, the mother's absence or

death is only a story device to legitimize male heroics or patriarchal guardianship. Yet, in Maleficent, the maternal act becomes the redeeming power that redefines redemption. The kiss is not erotic but maternal, a physical sign of emotional work and atonement. As theorist bell hooks maintains, love in feminist settings must be anchored in active responsibility, not passive sentimentality (All About Love 67). Maleficent's love breaks the curse because it is true, earned, and transforming. Through this deed, the film reclaims maternal power not as self-sacrifice but as autonomy, compassion, and strength. It symbolically substitutes the patriarchal cliche of the rescuing prince with a tale focussing on mending female relationships, defying millennia of gendered storytelling.

The Maleficent movies challenge reproductivist patriarchal expectations of women and indicate that parenthood is a choice and not a matter of a biological dictate. Adrienne Rich's "motherhood as institution" (oppressive, compulsory) vs. "motherhood as experience" (voluntary, affirming) model holds in evolution from vengeful isolate to nurturing parent (Of Woman Born, 1976). The historical obsession with bloodlines in the fairy tale is undermined by her relationship to Aurora, predicated on conflict, observation and, eventually, self-sacrifice. Maleficent actively alters Aurora's destiny that of bell hooks' "love as an act of will" (All About Love, 2000), which stands in stark opposition to Sleeping Beauty in Perrault's tale where mother figures are absent or passive. This dynamic challenges the dominance of the nuclear family by providing a kinship model based on development rather than duty.

The way non-biological motherhood is portrayed in the movies also interacts with queer theory. According to Judith Halberstam (In a Queer Time and Place,), fairy tales have historically reinforced "reproductive temporality", in which marriage and childbearing are necessary for the legitimacy of a family. This is unsettled by the link between Maleficent and Aurora, which underlines chosen commitment. The film rejects heteronormative family structures when Aurora labels Maleficent her "true mother", in keeping with José Esteban Muñoz's notion of "queer futurity" (Cruising Utopia), which envisions a world in which kinship is fluid and self-determined. Maleficent's parental love is significant as it is active; rather than employing passive sympathy, she makes a climactic confession of regret and guilt to relieve Aurora's curse. This is in keeping with Sara Ruddick's "maternal thinking", which maintains that giving care implies moral effort and duty (Ruddick73).

Nevertheless, the story's feminist potential is hampered by its conformance to Disney's corporate methods. Rebecca Wanzo points out that Maleficent is not an exception to the trend that feminist ideals are typically reduced to "empowerment lite" in mainstream media (Wanzo 57). In the end, the movie promotes the "motherhood mandate" that equates female worth with giving care by rewarding Maleficent's motherhood with narrative completion. Furthermore, feminist scholars like Elizabeth Bell have critiqued Aurora's character in Mistress of Evil for her lack of agency as her purpose transforms from protagonist to narrative device (Bell 45). The

marginalisation of the Dark Fey shows the franchise's uneven progressivism even more; Guillermo Gómez-Peña connects neoliberal "multiculturalism" with the risk of exoticising Indigenous cultures owing to their primitive aesthetics (Gomez – Pena).

Notwithstanding these contradictions, Maleficent 's rewriting of parenting finds relevance in today's debate. A cultural tendency towards wider kinship patterns is observed in the emergence of "othermothering" in queer parenting groups and Black feminist philosophy (Collins 57). The films urge audiences to rethink who gets to be a "mother" and under what conditions by showing Maleficent's devotion as earned rather than innate. Future research may study how audiences around the globe comprehend this tale, particularly in places where giving care without utilising biological methods is widespread (e.g., compadrazgo in Latin America or ubuntu in South Africa). Maleficent's motherhood becomes a metaphor for female self-definition: damaged, imperfect, but ultimately freeing, much as her wings signify restored individuality.

2.2 Queer and Chosen Family

The Dark Fey in Maleficent: Mistress of Evil provide a strong metaphor for gays and other minorities, primarily in terms of choosing one’s own family and pushing back against exclusionary pressures. Exiled from the human world and sequestered under hills, the Dark Fey are a displaced people who base their survival on sharing rather than families. Their communal life in the secretly located volcano hideout is one of what Judith Halberstam terms “queer counterpublics”, where “nonnormative identities can flourish” without the control of the dominant social order (Halberstam

165). Unlike a monarchical or a bloodline-based federated order, amongst the Dark Fey it is based on shared light, shared fears, mutual care and survival against the backdrop of life beneath an Iron Dominion. function within this community matures into a type of symbolic matriarchy, not defined by biology but by protection and leadership. This undermines heteronormative family standards by acknowledging kinship that comes from affinity and trauma rather than blood. The film therefore corresponds with modern discourses about queer kinship, in which family is less about reproduction and more about emotional relationships and political solidarity (Weston 109). By accepting this framework, Maleficent expands its feminist vision to incorporate intersectional understandings of identity, marginalization, and the power of chosen community.

In Maleficent: Mistress of Evil, the development of the Dark Fey as a clandestine and oppressed faction functions as a narrative and visual metaphor for queer-coded communities. Exiled to the outer reaches of the world, the Dark Fey exist outside the human structure, usually referred to as “lost” or “forgotten” similar language employed historically to describe LGBT individuals whose stories were traditionally excluded from mainstream collective accounts. Their refuge, an underground volcano island, conjures the notion of secret LGBTQ spaces, safe but secluded from normal society. As Halberstam writes, such geographical displacement reflects the “queer refusal of normative temporality and kinship” (Halberstam 174). Within this scenario, Maleficent is attracted to this group not by blood, but by common grief, difference, and mutual estrangement. Her relationship with Conall, a benevolent leader of the Dark Fey, creates a type of kinship centred not on conventional family structures but on ethical alignment and communal care. The

film's narrative arc prioritises alliance-building above romantic conclusion, particularly when Aurora confronts Queen Ingrith's military politics in favour of solidarity with the Moors and Dark Fey. This moment reframes the standard marriage trope not as a pinnacle of love but as a strategic and ethical realignment of groups. According to queer theorist David Eng, queer kinship allows for "forms of belonging that critique and displace the naturalized family unit" (Eng 13). Maleficent therefore portrays chosen family as a political and emotional alternative to monarchical control, reframing heritage not as inheritance but as inclusive co-existence built on shared healing and survival.

The maternal bond between Maleficent and Aurora most clearly evokes the concept of queer kinship, a chosen bond rather than an obligatory one of blood. Unlike conventional Disney narratives in which familial duties are strictly mandated, there's either the heir or the royal proclamation. Maleficent posits parenthood as a two-way street that morphs both parties. Aurora continually refers to Maleficent not only as her godmother but also as her "real family", even though Maleficent is biologically unrelated and vilified by society. This form of emotional reprinting fits with what Sarah Ahmed characterizes as the "affective turn" in queer theory: an emphasis on emotions as a location of resistance and relationship redefinition (Ahmed 160). This rescripting is beautifully represented in the scene where Aurora implores Maleficent to "give her away" at her wedding, a father's role in effect, rethinking patriarchal ceremony through the disruptive force of queer maternal action. And Maleficent's eventual acceptance of Aurora's love for Prince Phillip is not a capitulation to heteronormativity but a vote of trust in the robustness of their queer chosen relationship. As the video implies, the validity of kindred resides not in law,

blood, or societal expectation, but in caring, sacrifice, and mutual acknowledgement. This narrative change represents a break from the passive princess cliché and turns the emotional emphasis of the tale toward female closeness and alliance. It also connects with Jack Halberstam's idea that alternate families in fantasy literature undermine both "the logic of reproduction" and "the ideology of the nuclear family" (Halberstam 200).

The conclusion of Maleficent: Mistress of Evil illuminates the transformative potential of chosen family, bringing estranged collective humans, Dark Fae, and magical creatures together in alliance as reciprocal communities rather than conquest. The failure of Queen Ingrith-intended to assert purity, hierarchy and the purging of the Other marks the disintegration of repressive order embedded in the patriarchal family forms and the nation. As Maleficent emerges in phoenix form to protect both Aurora and the Dark Fey, she symbolizes a queer mother force that reclaims legendary authority without supporting patriarchal beliefs. Her rebirth is less a personal redemption and more a societal freedom that reflects what José Esteban Muñoz calls "queer utopia", a positive vision of futures predicated on inclusion and emotional connection (Muñoz 25).

3 . Visual and Narrative Justice

In classic fairy tales, resolution is generally accomplished by violent defeat or moral absolutism. However, the Maleficent flicks complicate these clichés by giving morally ambiguous protagonists, alternate justice models, and visually symbolic conclusions. This section discusses how villainy is reinterpreted via Maleficent's character development, how restorative justice is valued above retribution, and how reconciliation is portrayed as a feminist act. In crucial moments such as

transformation, the Queen Ingrith's exposure, and Aurora's intervention, the films narrate a departure from punitive closure to ethical ambivalence. Drawing on theories from cultural studies and feminist studies, this section shows how both visual language and narrative structure reflect broader cultural changes in the treatment of power, agency, and justice.

3.1 Redefining Villainy

In classic fairy tales, villains are frequently flat, morally absolute beings that serve to validate the hero's virtue. In Charles Perrault's La Belle au bois dormant, the wicked fairy is unidentified and unjustifiably spiteful, a symbol of feminine wrath punished and repressed (Perrault). Disney's own 1959 Sleeping Beauty also presents Maleficent as a beautiful avatar of evil itself, with no backstory or tragic depth. Though the 2014 film Maleficent is about a rare exception to that rule whose evilness is more rooted in betrayal and loss. This interpretation accords with Marina Warner's claim that "fairy-tale villains... often carry the burden of social projections and cultural anxieties, especially regarding female power" (Warner 124).

Maleficent's moral ambiguity her ability for both retribution and compassion disrupts binary understandings of good and evil. Her curse to Aurora doesn't come from evil nature but from a shattered trust and bodily autonomous expression and reflects the real-life experience of violated bodies and quests for justice. For then Maleficent learns to grieve, to understand, and, soon enough, to love, and the moral complexity of the tale that unfolds for her becomes something rare for a fairy-tale villain: male or female. This intricacy undermines conventional gendered villainy where strong women are villainised merely for living beyond standard femininity. According to

Jack Zipes, such reworking of fairy tale villains enable viewers “to question why certain characters are vilified and whether these representations serve hegemonic interests” (Zipes 89). In Maleficent, the so-called villain becomes the emotional and ethical focus, prompting spectators to rethink who the actual danger is: Maleficent or the patriarchal civilisation that caused her pain?

Maleficent’s development throughout the film is not merely a personal journey; it is a societal critique on how society manufactures and weaponises the label of “evil” against women who oppose prescribed norms. From the moment she is assaulted by Stefan and bereft of her wings, the story establishes Maleficent as a figure of trauma and resistance. The act of cursing Aurora, however harsh, is depicted not as mindless cruelty but as a symbolic reaction to patriarchal treachery. Scholars like Valerie Estelle Frankel believe that Maleficent subverts the trope of the “evil witch” by giving “a narrative of survival and self-reclamation that confronts the gendered nature of villainy” (Frankel 73).

This repositioning coincides with wider feminist criticisms of how strong women are traditionally stigmatized, frequently for expressing anger, autonomy, or sexual agency. In contrast to Perrault’s and Grimm’s flat representation of female opponents, Maleficent enables her key character to grow, lament, and develop. Her internal conflict between resentment and mother care adds levels of emotional reality unseen from previous representations. Furthermore, the film reframes villainy not as a matter of fundamental moral failing but as a consequence of institutions that dehumanize the oppressed. As bell hooks notes, “The representation of resistance must also represent pain; otherwise, it risks glorifying suffering” (Hooks 110). Maleficent

succeeds in making her anguish apparent, therefore reframing her behaviours as emotionally legible and politically charged. Rather than being scared, she is finally respected, not because she complies, but because she dares to live completely in her uniqueness.

As an iconic villain is laid to rest in Maleficent: Mistress of Evil The latest instalment in Maleficent's myth-arc challenges the traditional bad girl motif by transforming her into a ruler, a protector, and a peacemaker, no longer a menace. Her "villain" self transforms into a fiery phoenix, a mythic image of regeneration and transcendence, visually and thematically marking a break with the conventional morality of the fairy tale grounded in retribution. Rather than pursuing retribution, Maleficent intervenes in the fight between humans and Dark Fey to avoid mutual annihilation. This transition coincides with Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as "a form of repetition without replication", whereby tales modify meaning to reflect different ideological climates (Hutcheon 8). And the act of reframing the villain of the piece is not simply gendered but philosophical: this is evil not as a thing a person has but a name that is assigned from fear, from difference, and from political value. Also, Queen Ingrith is in fact the real villain, beneath her brutality hidden by her faux sense of royal manners and her desire for domination, veiled in the word protect. In contrast, Maleficent's distinctiveness becomes a source of strength that enables peace. This inversion of narrative roles strengthens Judith Butler's notion that societal norms "produce the very deviance they claim to suppress" (Butler 101). By the conclusion of the film, Maleficent is neither reabsorbed into the human world nor punished for her power; she remains sovereign, maternal, and magical, fully herself.

There's a shift in society's framing of female power here: from monster to transformer. That representation also constitutes a phenomenal sense of feminist villainy: depth, empathy, and resistance

3.2 Climactic Resolution

In most old fairytales, everything comes neatly together at the end, with the (often thoroughly bloody) triumph of the villain, confirming a moral battlefield of over-slick good and over-slick evil. Maleficent: Mistress of Evil intentionally breaks this cycle of retaliation and vengeance and substitutes vengeance through violence with talking, understanding and community reconciliation. The battle at the climax of the finale, however, as tense and floridly fantastic as it is, ends not in death or submission but in a collective moral moment of truth-telling: Queen Ingrith, revealed as the aggressor, is symbolically emasculated as Aurora's voice is the ligature between the human and magical worlds. Such a new shift from the focus on retributive justice to restorative justice simply reflects recent new trends that prioritise reparation over punishment. "'Forgiveness and conversation do not in fact `wipe away' the harm, but they may lay the moral ground for sharing the world" and of "living together", as Martha Minow puts it (Minow 85).

The visual-cue structure of that scene visually demonstrates it, as the melee absolutely freezes up once Maleficent shows up in phoenix form, not to destroy, but to protect. Her moderation stands in sharp opposition to Ingrith's warlike belligerence, challenging the audience's assumptions about power and ruling. The option to stop the war via Aurora's plea and clemency instead of ultimate destruction reframes the conclusion from a patriarchal triumph to a feminist negotiation. According to Linda

Hutcheon, adaptations frequently “speak to the present”, and Mistress of Evil definitely does so by suggesting an alternative to cycles of revenge (Hutcheon 141). This finale redefines not only who the heroes are but also how justice itself might be envisioned in a world where moral clarity is difficult.

The last act of Mistress of Evil flies in the face of the kind of victorious spectacle we're often taught to venerate in fantasy narratives, especially ones drenched in patriarchy mythmaking. Rather than portraying the Dark Fey either as conquerors or as victims of the protagonist's world, the film advocates finding a middle ground in which humans and magical beings both have to grapple with their own prejudices and fears. Maleficent’s metamorphosis into the phoenix is not merely symbolic of personal regeneration but also of collective transcendence, a legendary intervention that halts the violence and allows meditation. According to Cristina Bacchilega, fairy tales “have long been sites of ideological negotiation”, and in Mistress of Evil, the negotiation promotes cohabitation over control (Bacchilega 27).

Aurora’s position in mediating between her two worlds, human royalty and magical kinship further highlights this trend toward reconciliation. Her appeal to both sides, expressed artistically by soft lighting and center placement, turns attention from hostility to responsibility. This is in contrast to previous versions, such as the 1959 Sleeping Beauty, whose resolution was forced via force: the prince overcomes Maleficent in dragon form wielding a sword “of truth” (Geronimi). In the 2019 film, truth arises not via violence but through exposure, debate, and empathy. As Jack

Zipes comments, current adaptations that priorities peaceful outcomes reflect “a growing dissatisfaction with hierarchical structures and simplistic morality tales” (Zipes, Relentless Progress 112). In this setting, the conclusion does not remove conflict but instead reimagines the role of fairy tale endings as moments of ethical potential and transformational justice. And what makes Mistress of Evil‘s twisty finish so refreshing is that resolute closure through a traditional win is the one thing it won’t give us. Instead, it leaves us with a vision of uneasy but hopeful living together, reminding us that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the product of an ongoing ethical struggle. Queen Ingrith turns into a goat after the film’s climax, not killed or jailed but reverted back in a moment of symbolic transformation, not horrifying justice. This transformation, which makes fun of her authority and deprives her of her capacity to injure, supports Marina Warner’s assertion that “laughter and irony quite frequently prove to be weapons of insubordination in fairy tale justice” (Warner 203). But rather than deliver a death blow, Maleficent shows self-restraint, a gesture that proclaims a moral high ground while not stooping to the savagery of her enemies. Aurora and Prince Phillip get married after the battle, which serves as more than just a romantic ending. It is therefore a political act of solidarity that represents the possibility of networks of communities. Yet even here, the picture resists complete assimilation: Maleficent departs with the Dark Fey, preferring autonomy above domestic integration. This event demonstrates a feminist philosophy that promotes interdependence without surrendering individuality. As Deborah L. Madsen argues, “Contemporary feminist narratives often seek resolution not in return but in departure, as a sign of agency and wholeness” (Madsen 148). Thus, Mistress of Evil imagines peace not as a fixed prize but as a process built in discourse, restraint, and the right to difference, qualities seldom accorded to female-

coded villains in conventional tales.

3.3 The Role of Music in Emotional Justice

James Newton Howard's score for Maleficent is more than just a supporting character; it becomes a narrative tool that transforms emotional nuance into musical expression. Howard's music subtly and subtly reflects Maleficent's emotional journey, departing from the majesty of Tchaikovsky's Sleeping Beauty ballet, which uses dramatic orchestral swells to underscore binary ideas of good and evil. In the crucial wing-cutting sequence (00:45:23), Howard purposefully chooses to remove all music. The audience is drawn into Maleficent's pain by this aural silence, which turns the scene into a personal violation that defies cinematic spectacle. Such a use of quiet is consistent with the ethic of caring in Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice, which places an emphasis on emotional response above impersonal justice. The lack of music emphasises the emotional cost of betrayal by creating an emotive connection between the audience and the character rather than portraying the conduct as a moral violation that needs to be assessed (Gilligan 73). Therefore, music, or the deliberate absence of it, functions as an ethical instrument that directs listener sympathies, indicating a move away from conventional depictions of female suffering and towards emotional validation and acknowledgement.

At times of recovery and reclaiming, on the other hand, the film employs symphonic richness, producing a sound contrast that highlights the emotional development. Howard reintroduces sweeping strings and layered choral notes that crescendo as Maleficent's silhouette rises in flight during a triumphant climax in which she regains her wings (01:27:15). This musical metamorphosis exemplifies restorative justice, which feminist academics define as the recovery of identity and

agency rather than punishment. Linda Hutcheon's assertion that adaptations "do not just repeat stories; they reinterpret them" (A Theory of Adaptation 9) is supported by the soundtrack, which serves as a symbolic link between inner power and external action. The film symbolizes a shift away from punitive resolution and towards feminist values of resilience and regeneration by opting to musically emphasize rebirth rather than retribution. In this situation, music turns into a tool for story restoration, giving Maleficent more emotional freedom and symbolic elevation rather than retaliation.

Howard further develops this musical language in Maleficent: Mistress of Evil to symbolize political conflicts and social identities. In moments featuring the Dark Fey, the soundtrack incorporates ambient voices and tribal drumming, especially in their sanctuary passages (00:48:00–00:52:00), which musically differentiate their cultural otherness without resorting to Orientalist clichés. In addition to expressing their marginalized condition, the combination of deep percussion and light harmonies portrays their organic connection. Queen Ingrith's scenes, on the other hand, are characterized by ordered, brass-heavy patterns that convey frigid authoritarianism and military rigidity. These musical theme juxtapositions challenge established power structures and are consistent with postcolonial and feminist interpretations of sound as a political language. Howard starts the phoenix transition sequence (01:52:00) with diegetic quiet to give the audience time to process Maleficent's death. However, when she re-emerges in phoenix form, there is a startling burst of music. In addition to her bodily metamorphosis, this aural explosion marks a

narrative departure from the cycle of pain. According to Hutcheon, adaptability may "reveal cultural and ideological change" (6), and in this case, music plays a crucial role in indicating a shift away from retaliatory violence and towards community healing. Therefore, music which harmonises moral ambiguity, validates grief, and confirms identity becomes essential to the film's emotional justice.

Conclusion

The Maleficent films reflect a turning point in the cultural reinterpretation of fairy tales, where the female heroine is no longer constrained to passive beauty or punished villainy. Instead, Maleficent emerges as a figure of resistance and regeneration both individually and socially. The comparative analysis demonstrates how power privileges are redistributed from the patriarchal power hierarchies to collaborative and community-based leadership, specifically through Maleficent's role within the Moors and her connections with the forces of the Dark Fey. In contrast to the static royal power of the past myths, Maleficent presents governmental/ matriarchal power as being moral, relational, and inclusive.

Equally striking is the disparity in how the films depict relationships of family and the heart. The Maleficent story, against the backdrop of a traditional nuclear family from classic fairy tales, essentially shows motherhood as an elective, loving

relationship based on the greatest form of equal emotional exchange, rather than blood. The association between Maleficent and Aurora demonstrates this other form of kinship to resist heteronormative and patriarchal institutions. Likewise, the Dark Fey's shared collective identity standing as a metaphor for persecuted minorities linked by a shared past and mutual compassion hints towards a larger cultural transformation in how love, compassion, and connectedness are depicted.

Last but not least, the films also change the logic of resolution itself. Where earlier editions focused on physical force or male heroism, Maleficent models justice through forgiveness, truth-telling and the choice not to copy violence. This idea is linked to feminist critiques of patriarchal law and moreover demonstrates how fairy tales to tell resistant stories with empathy and ambiguity. In short, Maleficent does not just reuse a well-loved story; it rewrites its moral heart and is symptomatic of a profound shift in the cultural work of adaptation and storytelling in the twenty-first century.

General Conclusion

This study has highlighted how the Maleficent films deviate greatly from traditional fairy tale standards by reevaluating the ageless Sleeping Beauty narrative from a feminist and culturally critical standpoint. Through detailed analysis of the text and visuals, the study showed how Maleficent and Maleficent: Mistress of Evil change important story elements, like viewing motherhood as a choice instead of just a biological role, replacing traditional male authority with strong female leaders, and turning the villain into a complex heroine. The research also underlined how the films subvert the moral absolutes that often shape classic fairy tales by challenging binary

oppositions such as good against evil, masculine against feminine domination, and forgiveness against vengeance. Using Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory as a basic basis, the study underlined how adaptation is more than simply telling a story; it also entails assigning it new emotional and ideological overtones. Particularly in respect to women's autonomy and emotional freedom, these philosophical shifts expose the filmmakers' aim to address a contemporary audience examining questions of justice, identity, and the reinterpretation of society roles. From this vantage point, Maleficent turns from a simple retelling into an intentional participation in cultural storytelling.

Beyond their story reinventions, the Maleficent films serve as cultural relics reflecting and influencing modern society's gender, power, and identity debates. The movies challenge long-standing preconceptions about femininity and female power by centering a typically reviled character in the middle of the tale and giving her emotional depth, moral ambivalence, and inner strength. Maleficent's metamorphosis from a feared sorceress to a guardian of harmony examines the vilification of strong women in folklore and in real life, encouraging viewers to evaluate how narratives have traditionally criminalized female autonomy. Additionally, the representation of the Dark Fey as a persecuted community draws emotional similarities to the real-world experiences of oppressed groups, such as Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and racial minorities. This metaphorical layer strengthens the films' social significance, presenting a story of resistance, solidarity, and survival in the face of institutional oppression. The films are so transcendent of simple amusement; they work as visual commentary that deals with subjects like environmental stewardship, intergenerational reconciliation, and community resilience. In doing so, they contribute to an emerging media environment that enables viewers, particularly

younger generations, to question old scripts and conceive more inclusive and sympathetic forms of leadership and belonging.

From a theoretical approach, this study positions itself at the confluence of feminist film studies and adaptation theory, contributing to the academic discussion that interrogates how traditional narratives are reconfigured to reflect evolving societal consciousness. By utilizing Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, the research emphasizes the premise that adaptations are not merely derivative works but dialogic processes that converse with their source texts and wider cultural ideologies. Hutcheon's theory allows for a nuanced interpretation of Maleficent as a palimpsest layered with intertextual connections to Perrault, the Grimms, and the 1959 Disney version while simultaneously carving out an identity anchored in feminist ethics and restorative justice. Furthermore, the research corresponds with Barbara Creed's idea of the "monstrous feminine", inverting it by illustrating how female power, previously feared and vilified, is reclaimed as a source of agency, knowledge, and compassion. By reframing ugliness as misunderstood strength, the films interact with postmodern feminist ideas that question the essentialist depictions of gender roles in media. This research also contributes to visual and cinematic studies by examining how narrative transcends beyond dialogue into mise-en-scène, costume design, lighting, and symbolic color schemes. These visual cues, when viewed from a feminist viewpoint, reveal how Maleficent weaves a complex plot of emotional depth and ideological subversion. In particular, the study brings attention to how visual elements such as the repeating subject of Maleficent's wings or the conflicting aesthetic of the Moors and the human kingdom visually convey the battle between oppression and liberation. Thus, the research not only reclaims fairy

tales as worthy of academic examination but also advocates for their reinterpretation as weapons of empowerment and cultural critique. In doing so, it underscores the possibility of cinematic reinterpretations to operate as both aesthetic achievements and political pronouncements, prompting scholars and audiences alike to reevaluate the role of adaptation in mediating between tradition and change.

While Maleficent constitutes an important step toward feminist storytelling, several limits in its narrative and ideological construction must be noted. A key worry is the focus on parenting as the main conduit for female empowerment. Although the mother tie between Maleficent and Aurora redefines conventional kinship, it risks indicating that a woman's dignity resides largely in her ability to nurture and protect. This representation, although touching, may inadvertently perpetuate restrictive gender standards by sidelining alternative types of agency. Additionally, the films' resolutions generally favor reconciliation and symbolic justice above structural transformation. Queen Ingrith's metamorphosis into a goat, for instance, gives a comical but light result, avoiding deeper engagement with the systems of violence she embodies. Likewise, the movie' inclusiveness is limited since, although discussing marginalisation via the Dark Fey, the main cast is mostly white and Eurocentric. There is a larger issue in mainstream media, where progressive ideas are often constrained within market-safe bounds, which is reflected in the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in important positions. These remarks are more intersectional and comprehensive representations in feminist adaptations without downplaying the films' achievements.

This study encourages more research on the effects of contemporary fairy tale retellings on audience perceptions, particularly for younger audiences who are

exposed to these tales throughout their formative years. Analyzing how children and teenagers perceive the complexity of Maleficent or Aurora's independence may provide valuable insights into how media shapes changing ideas of gender, power, and justice. Comparative analyses with other revisionist works, such as Cruella, Wicked, or even non-Western retellings, might expand the discussion by demonstrating how various cultures and contexts dramatically reinvent “villainous” female duties. Additionally, the importance of fan culture, interactive storytelling, and digital media creates new opportunities to evaluate how tales continue to evolve beyond the screen. These societal shifts demonstrate that fairy tales are now dynamic narratives subject to change rather than predetermined moral lessons. In the end, Maleficent challenges us to consider the power of storytelling itself not only in redefining values but also in rewriting antagonists. The fundamental question that remains is: if we can alter a story as well-known as Sleeping Beauty, what other tales about justice, humanity, and identity remain untold from a different angle?

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