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Maleficent (2014): A Feminist and Posthumanist Twist to Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)

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Abstract

This paper examines the retelling of the worldwide known Disney fairy tale film *Sleeping Beauty*. However, in this case, the story is narrated through Maleficent, previously classified as antagonist in both the classic fairy tale and its homonymous film adaptation. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on the symbolic journey that starts in the duality of the two kingdoms until the unification of these realms. This is a journey that challenges the traditional conventions of the genre, and simultaneously the hegemonic patriarchal and androcentric visions of the world. This critical analysis will be articulated through a feminist and posthumanist methodology. Moreover, this thesis aims to explain the fluidity and plurality of identities displayed by a posthuman Maleficent, who manages to establish an especial bond with Aurora based on true love, respect and trust. Indeed, it is this feminist connection between these women, as argued in this paper, which eventually brings the happy ending to the story and unifies The Moors and the human kingdom. This research thereby reveals a reversal of the prototypical Disney's cinematographic characters, empowering women and defying the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy. Then, space binarism is erased and a harmonious balance is shaped between the two species.

Key Words: Feminism, Posthumanism, Disney, Dualism, Plurality

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1. Introduction

Since the invention of cinematography, the American film industry has been a prominent mean of communication and transmission of its way of life and ideals. Within this field, the outstanding leadership of Disney Studios is inarguable. In the 1930s, this company released the first set of fairy tale films that belong to the fantastic genre. However, the traditional European fairy tales, which functioned as the major source of inspiration for Walt Disney, have been americanised, that is to say, they have undergone a process of 'disneyfication,' which according to Alan Bryman "denotes the company's bowdlerization of literature, myth, and/or history in a simplified, sentimentalized, and programmatic way" (2004, 5). These "sweetened" (Bryman 2004, 6) tales suppress women's voice and agency, adjust to strict social hierarchies and do not conform reality. That is why *Maleficent* (2014), directed by Robert Stromberg, supposes an enormous shift as far as former Disney cinematic products are concerned, mainly on account of the depiction of female identity. This film recreates the traditional story of *Sleeping Beauty*, but this time, "offering an explanation for the behaviour of the eponymous 'wicked fairy'" (Newstead 2014, 88). Not only does this new adaptation break away from previous traditional conventions but it also strays from stereotypical children's stories.

Taking into consideration the target audience of *Maleficent*, it is crucial that people be aware that this film is fundamentally aimed at those who grew up watching *Sleeping Beauty*, assimilating the message it conveyed and dreaming of being able to achieve it someday for themselves. "Thus, subconsciously women transfer from fairy tales into real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a female's cardinal virtues. In short, fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal *status quo* by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate" (Rowe 2010, 237). Children, for the most part girls, extract from those fairy tales fantasies that extol acquiescence of masculine authority and make of marriage not simply an ideal, but their maximum aspiration in life. Indeed, *Sleeping Beauty*'s Aurora "is unable to act independently or self-assertively; she relies on external agents for rescue; she binds herself first to the father and then the prince" (Rowe 2010, 239). Nevertheless, the Aurora seen in the aforementioned tale does not correlate with the one in *Maleficent*, in the same way as the assumed antagonist of *Maleficent* does not correspond either to the one portrayed in *Sleeping Beauty*. Furthermore, *Maleficent* displays a great influence of feminism due to the fact that both Aurora and Maleficent, as Henke, Umble, and Smith emphasise, exhibit "an increasingly stronger sense of self, of choice, and of voice" (2015, 234). Therefore, there is a shift in the paradigms because this film neither "continue[s] to

glamorize a heroine's traditional yearning for romantic love which culminates in marriage" (Rowe 2010, 238), nor centres the storyline on the perspective of the prototypical Disney princess and her quest for ideal happiness. Contrary to that, all the events revolve around what *Sleeping Beauty* formerly categorised as its antagonist, and how the different circumstances she encounters along the story affect and alter her posthuman identity. Hence, *Maleficent* begins a new pattern by praising female agency rather than valuing passivity. Women are empowered and given both individual and collective power. In this way, this film breaks new ground by totally disassociating the two female characters from earlier presumed ideologies about women's subjugation and lack of action.

Despite the fact that the majority of academic writers have focused their interpretation and study of *Maleficent* on the deconstruction of the traditional fairy tales from a gender perspective, very few scholarly work has been produced taking on board a posthumanist approach to the film. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to critically analyse the fluidity and multiplicity of identities with regard to Maleficent's posthuman condition, considering at the same time, how her nature affects and aids to shape a feminist kinship with Aurora, which ultimately leads to the merging of the two kingdoms as one. The aforementioned will be examined under a feminist posthuman perspective in order to demonstrate how this film subverts the homogeneity of the Disney Princesses' cinematographic products by retelling *Sleeping Beauty* through the point of view of the so-called "antagonist." The emphasis will be placed on deconstructing the patriarchal and androcentric visions of the world, which conceive human beings as its most important beings. *Maleficent* reverses this notion and strikes a balance between the two species. Structurally, the first part of this paper will be devoted to explain space dualism and the duality concerning the protagonist's identity. Then, the dissertation will move on to analyse the relationship established between Aurora and Maleficent, from which their corresponding territories positively benefit. Lastly, the multiplicity of identities displayed by Maleficent and the sense of plurality and collectivity will be tackled in depth, paying special attention to the final union of the two realms.

2. Dualism concerning Both Space and the Protagonist's Identity

To begin with, it is worth reiterating that the story and interpretation of *Maleficent* can be explained through a symbolic journey that originates in the noticeable separation of the two realms and ceases in the unification of the same. As Marginean declares, "although one of the intentions of the film is to overturn binary oppositions, binarism is present initially in the organization of space in the story" (2014, 334). The film begins by introducing two spaces, one

alienated from the other: "In one kingdom lived folk like you and me, with a vain and greedy king to rule over them. They were forever discontent, and envious of the wealth and beauty of their neighbours. For in the other kingdom, The Moors, lived every manner of strange and wonderful creature. They needed neither king nor queen, but trusted in one another" (Stromberg 2014, 00:00:53). Thereupon, the narrator goes on pointing out that the two territories are "the worst of neighbours" (00:00:56), evincing the manifest physical separation and the dispute between them. With this initial description, a clearly human-non-human space dichotomy is established. Not only do the narrator's words emphasise this binary opposition, but they also irrefutably expose the immediate otherisation of the inhabitants of the fantastic realm. First and foremost, othering, or otherisation, is the process through which the magical collective is marginalised, excluded and socially disempowered by the humans (Barter-Godfrey and Taket 2009, 166). Originally, they are othered by means of the depiction given by Aurora as "strange" and "wonderful" creatures, a representation Jennifer Polish considers that "simplify[ies] non-human agency by both exotifying (strange) and romanticizing (wonderful) them" (2016, 18). Hence, the initial dualistic conception of space instantly raises viewers' awareness about the estrangement between the two species and the visible discrimination of the non-human one.

As a matter of fact, the characterisation of these fantastic beings as a different species, separate from the humans, directly alludes to the posthuman theory. Posthumanism is about rejecting and surpassing the explanation of Humanism as the unique way to understand the world (Smart and Smart 2017, 4). According to the renowned feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, posthumanism brings about "a serious de-centring of 'Man'" (2013, 2). Firstly, it is of high importance to explain that Braidotti, in her work *The Posthuman* (2013), constantly makes reference to the Descartes' Cartesian man. That being clarified, the idea of "de-centring Man," with the peculiarity of the uppercase letter in the word "Man," can be interpreted from two points of view. From the posthumanist perspective, she is referring to the decentring of the human race, whilst from a gender perspective, she is making an allusion to the decentring of the male being. Precisely, this is what the film intends to do throughout the whole story: criticise the idea of the fixed, coherent and unified Humanist male of the Enlightenment to lay bare a more fluid vision of the world, based on cooperation and plurality. Thus, *Maleficent* endorses the posthuman theory, through the protagonist and the other magical creatures of The Moors, to put an end to the totalising vision of the world, which corresponds to the Humanist philosophy of Descartes.

In a metaphorical sense, it could be argued that the human realm is building walls to separate what is different. As Braidotti understands it, "to be 'different from' [comes] to mean

to be 'less than'" (2013, 28). Humans are stressing and promoting distance by othering non-human creatures. The protagonist of the film, Maleficent, belongs to the latter group. Although "you might take her for a girl, she [is] not just any girl. She [is] a fairy" (Stromberg 2014, 00:01:27) with magical powers, wings, and horns, features normally attributed to posthuman beings. In many occasions, Maleficent is addressed as "the winged elf" (00:10:52), discriminated for her otherness and distinctiveness. As time goes by, she grows into an adult, the strongest of the fairies, and becomes the protector of The Moors. She struggles for its survival and the safety of all its inhabitants. This can be perfectly exemplified with the moment when Maleficent, together with the supernatural "giants made of tree roots" (Priyanka 2016, 39), vanquish King Henry and his soldiers. How Maleficent's "female agency face[s] the threat of patriarchal violence" (Jelaca 2017, 385), in order to defend her way of living, demonstrates that there is neither "tolerance" nor "peaceful co-existence" (Braidotti 2013, 40) between these two species; on the contrary, there are "forms of rejection of otherness and increased armed violence" (Braidotti 2013, 40). Another instance in which this idea can be easily perceived is when Stephan says to Maleficent: "How does it feel to be a fairy creature without wings in a world where you don't belong?" (01:22:09), assuming the world is a place which only suits humanity, and whether other species exist or not, they are of no importance to mankind. Jelaca proposes that "as a shift toward undoing anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, posthumanism is a site of both opportunity and struggle for feminism and beyond" (2017, 379). Despite the continuous patriarchal menace and forms of rejection and disrespect exerted by the humans, Maleficent develops a protective identity towards her companions and fights against speciesism and humans' intolerance.

However, there was a time when not everything was about discrepancy between the two territories. Stephan managed to build up a friendly relationship with Maleficent, until his behaviour ended up being the opposite to a role model of friendship. His insatiable ambition led him to betray his friend in order to climb the social ladder. So, he sliced off her wings and brought them as a trophy to the king as a proof of his allegiance. Due to this act, he was crowned successor of the throne and entitled to marry King Henry's daughter. "Stephan's choice [was] to pursue patriarchal power" (Crosby 2016, 23), no matter what the requisites were to achieve it. Thus, Stephan's cruel performance could be considered to follow Machiavelli's philosophy: 'the end justifies the means.' Acquiring a position of power in the human society was of greater significance to him than striking a blow for the conviviality of the humans and the non-humans. Most importantly, Stephan's disloyalty denotes how little he appreciated and respected Maleficent, as a friend and as a woman, since he carelessly used her as a means to obtain what

he wanted. Besides, this maltreatment of Maleficent reinforces the bias against The Moors' creatures, also known as speciesism, elucidated by Braidotti as "the anthropocentric arrogance of Man as the dominant species whose sense of entitlement includes access to the body of all others" (2013, 76). Maleficent is othered rather than considered a normal living being who deserves respect and care. Taking this into account while applying a feminist and posthumanist perspective, it could be asserted that "the posthuman woman [was] initially in control … Yet, … she f[ell] victim to a violation that reminds one that even the most threatening posthuman feminine figure is not immune to masculinist violence" (Jelaca 2017, 397). Not only does this act of violence ruin any possibility of reconciliation and peace between the two species, but it also increasingly accentuates the already division between them.

Such disturbing scene can be set to be speciesist and patriarchal because Stephan targets her both as a fairy and as a woman. Not only that, but this attack also triggers a new facet in her. In the first place, it is speciesist because he takes off a part of her body that is visibly non-human, and that part is also her source of power against the humans. In the second place, it is patriarchal because the film connects the wings with the idea of freedom, and with a woman who is strong, powerful and actively takes decisions. The disablement of losing her wings makes her suffer from an intense crisis and collapse into a state of distress and anger (Polish 2016, 18). As a consequence, she stops being the protector and guardian of The Moors and becomes a tyrant. Suffering from this cruel mutilation not just deprives her of the ability to fly, which is a crucial feature of her non-human existence (Polish 2016, 19), but "harms her desire to protect and nurture those weaker than her" too (Newstead 2014, 94). Such is the pain and sorrow that the fairies' kingdom is covered up in darkness and thorns without bearing in mind the effect that decision could result in, especially with respect to the rest of inhabitants. Henceforth, she crowns herself Queen of The Moors and adopts the role of leader by turning the other magical creatures into her subordinates. An illustrative example of it would be when she sits on the throne and the dwellers of The Moors are forced to bow to the new and self-proclaimed Queen. Considering that, it is inarguable that the grave aggression she is victim of entails a transformation in her character and personality as she loses an essential body part of her non-human being. From that moment on, she embodies the villainess seen in *Sleeping Beauty*.

Consequently, Maleficent now represents what Braidotti has previously defined as a fixed and unified Cartesian subject. She transforms in the villainess that Disney says she is. Owing to the physical and emotional crisis she is going through, she experiences different psychological stages which deeply alter her behaviour and the way she understands herself.

When Maleficent finds out about the birth of Aurora, the king's daughter, so angry and thirsty of vengeance is she that decides to punish the little girl for her father's betrayal. Then, Maleficent condemns Aurora to the well-known eternal sleep, which turns her into the 'sleeping beauty' of the classic tale. As in the traditional story, Aurora will prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel the very same day she turns sixteen years old. What is more, to remind the actual king of his own words, Maleficent underscores that "the princess can be woken from her death sleep, but only by a true love's kiss" (Stromberg 2014, 00:32:36). The previously mentioned "disturbing scene in *Maleficent* … certainly is intended to stand as the motivation for this archetype's cruel cursing of a new-born baby" (Newstead 2014, 91). Hereafter, her persona embraces a more cruel and evil nature: that of a villainess. Albeit the film does not justify the fact that Maleficent behaves as a villainess, it offers Stephan's ruthless incident in order to explain where her behaviour stems from. It also shows how violence and pain can unleash ire and desire for revenge without necessarily implying that the protagonist is "purely" a villainess. In other words, Maleficent's identity is affected and altered. Instead of displaying a plurality of identities, she becomes the unified and fixed traditional wicked character, epitomised by all the other previous Disney antagonists.

3. The Feminist and Interspecies Kinship between Maleficent and Aurora

Albeit embodying the figure of villainy by destroying Aurora's fate, Maleficent is also the magical being whose good nature and inherent protective instinct guide her identity to evolve into a more kind and benevolent state. In fact, her identity could be precisely defined as "an intricate and entangled construct in constant flux" (Kokoula 2017, 11), in that she is not either the heroine or the villainess of the story, but she exhibits both natures at the same time, and these change and fluctuate along the story due to her circumstances. In spite of the pixies' duty and responsibility as carers of the princess, it is actually Maleficent, who in many occasions, shields Aurora; for instance, when she is about to fall off a cliff. Little by little, it can be appreciated how Maleficent puts her resentment aside and starts worrying for the child. Indeed, Aurora is aware of that, and when they see each other for the very first time, Aurora calls Maleficent "fairy godmother" and acknowledges that Maleficent "ha[s] been watching [her] [her] whole life, always close by" (Stromberg 2014, 00:48:37). Aurora's assumption of Maleficent being her guardian angel reveals an already established especial bond between them. That feeling, which grows day after day, is a step towards the collectivity and the union of both species and their respective kingdoms. Once again, the fluidity and multiplicity of identities with regard to Maleficent's posthuman condition arises as crucial to understand her

development as a character. Rosi Braidotti defines the posthuman "as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated" (2013, 49). On the one hand, Maleficent "works across differences" because she ends up taking care of Aurora even though she is a human to whom Maleficent refers as "beasty" (00:51:01). Also, Maleficent learns to love her despite her bitterness towards the father. On the other hand, Maleficent is "internally differentiated" because she is a hybrid, but also because she is divided in terms of her kind and trusting nature, opposed to the resentment and distrust provoked by Stephan's betrayal and brutal attack. The fact that Maleficent now embodies this new role as fairy godmother does not cancel her previous characterisation as a villainous fairy. She is being transformed by her relationship with Aurora.

By means of this unique link which arises between these two female characters, the film deconstructs the patriarchal conception of love and friendship that frequently excludes the possibility of women loving each other when they are not related by blood. A very good example of this would be the way most of the antagonists in both classic fairy tales and Disney films are women, and many of them are "stepmothers" to the protagonists. Expressed differently, "in Disney's versions of these tales, women are more often pitted against one another than supportive of one another" (Henke, Umble, and Smith 2015, 245). Certainly, the fairy tale in which this film is based, *Sleeping Beauty*, clearly typifies this quotation. Eventually, that initial especial bond is strengthened and turns into something more powerful and personal because they start getting to know each other in depth and discovering their true selves. Following Carol Guilligan, Henke, Umble, and Smith argue that "women learn to value connections with others and at least in part define themselves through their relationships with others" (2015, 230), which is exactly what both Maleficent and Aurora do. They recognise the value of the especial connection they have developed and how this has an encouraging influence that aids them to grow personally. Moreover, several academic scholars claim that a mother-daughter relationship could be extracted from this developing connection (Crosby 2016, 51). They substantiate this claim by alluding to the several instances in which Maleficent supplies the pixies' unintentional but evident void of care and supervision of Aurora. Maleficent, without revealing her identity at first, follows Aurora everywhere and does not let her out of her sight and protection. That is why Maleficent gradually "loses conviction in her retaliatory stance as days go by" (Marginean 2014, 340) and the reciprocal support, collaboration and attachment increase. This assumed mother-daughter relationship defies the typical protagonist-antagonist dichotomy, continuously fostered by Disney, by grounding it on mutual love, respect and trust

rather than hatred and rivalry. Referring to the possible maternal role of Maleficent, it is true that the film allows viewers to consider a familial bond between her and Aurora, but it is also true that it destabilises this idea through the figure of Diaval. This posthuman being is the one who accomplishes all the tasks that in theory are associated to a mother, such as feeding and caring. What is more, Maleficent reaches a point at which she truly and immensely values this emotional link, to the extent that she completely repents the curse she placed on Aurora and tries to revoke it, but "this curse will last till the end of time, and no power on earth can change it" (Stromberg 2014, 00:54:13). It has been demonstrated how Maleficent's fluid identity keeps changing depending on the circumstances she encounters, and also, the manner in which Aurora's intervention affects her and shifts her nature in a positive way.

Furthermore, *Maleficent* distances more and more from Disney prototypical conventions by centring on the love arisen between Aurora and Maleficent and not so much in the attraction felt between the former and the prince. Connecting with a recognisable episode in traditional tales, Aurora encounters Prince Philip while strolling about in The Moors. Evidently, they seem interested in each other and some sort of attraction can be observed, but the film breaks new ground by not following the Disney canon of 'love at first sight' between the princess and the prince (Henke, Umble, and Smith 2015, 241). Similarly, no attention is paid to the heterosexual romantic love with its subsequent marriage and the accepted standard of the 'happily ever after' ending. Assuredly, this reversal contrasts with *Sleeping Beauty*, which follows this precise and idealised pattern. Princess Aurora wakes up from the eternal dream and marries the prince who has just given her "the true love's kiss," and with whom she will live a happily ever after life. Therefore, *Maleficent* deconstructs the patriarchal vision of the world which only conceives the sexual or romantic love between a man and a woman and also breaks "some long-standing gender molds" (Polish 2016, 17) by not bringing into focus the classical rivalry or competition between women, as it happens as well in *Sleeping Beauty*. In this case, the emphasis is placed on the especial connection between two women, who love, respect, and help each other while preserving nature and maintaining a harmonious and respectful relationship with it. Hence, it is irrefutable that the film breaks away from stereotypes by subduing the heterosexual love theme to the theme of the female kinship without the existence of a true familial bond.

Regardless of Aurora's similarity with her own character in *Sleeping Beauty*, in *Maleficent*, she has the opportunity to show other aspects of her persona that did not characterise her before. Aurora is no more the obedient and powerless princess who is distinguished by her passivity and lack of voice as a woman. For instance, when she discovers the truth about her

origins and realises that Maleficent is the "evil fairy" who "cursed [her]" (Stromberg 2014, 01:03:59), she immediately heads for the castle to confront reality. First of all, it can be examined how she rebels against her father's rules of remaining away until the day after her sixteenth birthday. Secondly, when she is at the castle, her father orders that Aurora be locked in a room, but one more time, she disobeys the orders and decides by herself. In contrast to other fairy tales, such as *The Little Mermaid* (1990), Aurora does not disobey her father because of going in search of romantic love, but because she wants to find herself and discover who she truly is. In so doing, Aurora's character is given a twist in this cinematic adaptation that contributes to an enormous shift in the way viewers perceive the character. Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that previous to these moments, in her first appearance, Aurora is portrayed as a passive character. Subsequent to Maleficent's malign curse, King Stephan, commended Aurora to the three pixies' care. Her father's choice "define[d] Aurora's destiny; and she ha[d] no voice in shaping that destiny" (Henke, Umble, and Smith 2015, 236). Even though these three magical creatures took Aurora as far away as possible from the castle to protect her from the truth, and supposedly for her own good, she was raised away from her family and from her home, without the possibility of making a decision on her own behalf. The male dominance exercised by Stephan over his daughter continues to perpetuate the patriarchal vision of the world. Still, Aurora's character in *Maleficent* quits resembling the Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty* by displaying much more agency and authority in her way of acting and behaving.

4. Plurality and Collectivity: Space and Maleficent's Nature

Just as the film's storyline moves forward, so does the symbolic journey associated to it that this dissertation unravels. Metaphorically, it could be asserted that both Maleficent and Aurora are building bridges towards the unification of their kingdoms while gradually undoing speciesism. At the beginning, The Moors and the human kingdom were entirely separated. Then, this division was aggravated by Stephan's act of violence. Nevertheless, this detachment is counterbalanced by the feminist kinship established between these women, which "assist[s] in building alliances with others, especially those residing in different cultural contexts" (Deckha 2012, 541). Thus, the initial space binarism is step by step being reduced thanks to this link that brings out the best in one another and allows their respective species to positively benefit from this interaction too. Within the natural space of The Moors, Maleficent is receptive to Aurora's affection and is able to share her feelings and emotions with her. Aurora becomes familiar with the fairy's childhood home and becomes acquainted with the other magical creatures she lives with, including her loyal ally Diaval. The most meaningful moment is when

they talk about the sacred and intimate part of Maleficent's posthuman body, her wings, which were brutally amputated. Aurora's curiosity for the creatures and life in The Moors leads her to ask Maleficent if "all the fair people have wings" and "why is it that [she] do[esn't] have ones." Maleficent answers that "[she] had wings once … so big that they dragged behind [her] when [she] walked, strong … and they never faltered, not even once … but they were stolen from [her]" (Stromberg 2014, 00:54:54). This conversation evinces that love can repair and heal the grief and wounds bore by Maleficent. She is able to talk about this sad moment in her life within this atmosphere of trust in The Moors. One more time, this unique bond they maintain proves to be a healing bond too, as it is her feelings for Aurora that aid Maleficent to overcome such trauma and start focusing on the union of their worlds. Since this feminist kinship becomes more powerful and stronger, Aurora expresses her desire to spend the rest of her life with Maleficent, living in The Moors and surrounded by the other fairies: "The Moors are everything I imagined it would be … We can look after each other … and all of the fair people will be my friends. I will be happy here for the rest of my life" (00:57:55). From that moment on, Maleficent comprehends that not all humans are like Stephan. Aurora is the hope that the human kingdom will stop being so aggressive and harmful. By the same token, the underlying meaning of this feminist and interspecies connection is what gives rise to an egalitarian relationship between species. Maleficent and Aurora are "break[ing] down the boundary between the human and the posthuman in a way that blurs the lines that define traditional notions of humanity and of human(e) ways of being in the world" (Jelaca 2017, 382). The film makes the most of the relationship between these two individuals to deconstruct speciesism and seek equality, implying that both are living beings worthy of respect and consideration. As a result of the feminist tie they preserve, these characters manage to progressively move forward to a possible reconciliation and a peaceful and respectful coexistence of the realms.

Later on, *Maleficent* presents the expected conflict of the storyline, the fulfilment of the curse. It is solved owing to the especial connection between Aurora and Maleficent, leading this way to a closer relationship between The Moors and the human realm. As in the traditional story, Aurora is attracted by the powerful force of Maleficent's curse. She pricks her finger with a spinning wheel and is immersed in a profound dream. Maleficent, even believing that true love does not exist, brings Prince Philip with her hoping that his kiss will work, but it does not because this is not true love, in the same way as it was not 'love at first sight' when they formerly met. Thus, it can be argued that there is a huge reversal in comparison with the fairy tale of 1959, where "[Aurora] awakens and finds her 'dream come true,' a tall, handsome prince rescues her from an evil female's curse" (Henke, Umble, and Smith 2015, 236). In *Sleeping*

Beauty, Aurora is the archetype of the 'damsel in distress' that needs to be saved by the product of true love of a prince, whereas in *Maleficent*, there is no male representing the figure of the heroic redeemer, but a heroine. Afterwards, Maleficent laments the big mistake she made sixteen years ago induced by the rage and pain she felt towards Stephan: "I will not ask your forgiveness because what I have done to you is unforgivable. I was so lost in hatred and revenge. Sweet Aurora, you stole what was left of my heart, and now I have lost you forever" (Stromberg 2014, 01:15:50). This moment of apology and sacrifice strengthens her love and commitment to Aurora (Crosby 2016, 68). Then, Maleficent kisses Aurora on the head and she wakes up: "Hello godmother" (01:17:13). Therefore, there is a deconstruction of the binary gender roles. For the very first time, it is not the figure of a prince who saves the defenceless princess, but it is the love and devotion of a woman that breaks the enchantment, and as Diaval states: there is "no truer love" (01:17:34). A further interpretation of this instant postulates the idea that true love exists independently of species, stereotypes or social constructions, and gender. The kiss of true love given by Maleficent sets closer both species. Moreover, "Aurora's physical awakening mirrors Maleficent's spiritual one" (Marginean 2014, 343). This means that Maleficent buries the tyrant she once was to revive the good-natured, friendly and protective person viewers saw at the beginning of the story, and later on with Aurora. Maleficent is a multifaceted individual, her identity evolves and fluctuates to finally become the heroine of the story. Maleficent's identity is fluid and plural because, as it is said at the end of the film, she is "both hero and villain" (01:28:08). She goes from being one to another and both at the same time too, because even if she saves Aurora, she was also the one who condemned her. Thus, the feminist connection between Aurora and Maleficent reaches a climatic true love's kiss that puts an end to the well-known eternal sleep spell of the 'sleeping beauty' and propels plurality and collectivity between human and non-human beings.

Finally, Maleficent recovers her wings and with the help of Aurora defeat Stephan creating a union based on collectivity and plurality. This union initially started with their especial feminist bond, but it finishes with the unification of their kingdoms as one. Near the end of the film, Maleficent and Diaval are attacked by the king and his soldiers. They are almost subjugated when Aurora releases Maleficent's wings from the cage and a sudden "magical restoration of her able-bodiedness" (Polish 2016, 21) is produced. Maleficent regains her ability to fly and therefore, much of her strength and power. This is a very significant moment because the reunification with her wings "is a symbolic re-committal of Maleficent to the magical world" (Dukes 2016, 56) because she is a fairy and the wings are the most characteristic feature of these posthuman creatures. This triumph ultimately results in Stephan's death and the

merging of the two territories as one. In the ceremony, which takes place in The Moors, Maleficent crowns Aurora and proclaims that "[their] kingdoms have been unified and [they] have [their] queen" (Stromberg 2014, 01:27:08). These female characters enact "power-with, a jointly developed power, a co-active, not coercive power … rather than exercise the traditional patriarchal 'power-over' relationships that can result in conflict or violence" (Henke, Umble, and Smith 2015, 232-241). The patriarchal system that was formerly imposed by Stephan comes to an end, and this territorial union achieves to foster collectivity and plurality finally ceasing with space dualism. Also, it undoes speciesism by encouraging equality and respect among species, and lastly, it deconstructs the patriarchal and androcentric visions of the world by promoting a supportive and cooperative environment. As Braidotti accurately explains it, "the posthuman in the sense of post-anthropocentrism displaces well-established dualisms with the recognition of deep egalitarianism between humans and animals. The vitality of their bond is based on sharing this environment on terms that are no longer so clearly hierarchical … This vital interconnection posits a qualitative shift of the relationship away from species-ism" (2013, 71). Henceforward, all living beings become part of the same community and their main goal is communal living and collective welfare. In this way, "this practice of relating to others requires" (Braidotti 2013, 48) the rejection of individualism and self-interests. Thus, Maleficent's link with Aurora leads to the defeat of King Stephan and the use of political power to merge the dualistic kingdoms, reaching a different but happy ending in any case.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, it could be argued that *Maleficent* is a fully feminist retelling of *Sleeping Beauty*. Despite the fact that Disney's traditional fairy tales culturally are imperfect reflections of contemporary society, women in this cinematographic industry are gradually gaining more voice, and Maleficent is the perfect example of it. The film concentrates upon her development as an empowered protagonist. In fact, she is empowered both as a woman and as a posthuman subject. Not only does she possess magical power, but also political because apart from being the most powerful fairy among all the fantastic beings, she is also in a position of power within The Moors. During the film, a more "human" Maleficent can be observed, who experiences diverse feelings and emotions depending on the circumstances. Sometimes she is happy, hopeful, others sad, disappointed, even angry or worried; actually, this is what occurs to any human or posthuman being with a human side. However, after suffering from that cruel mutilation, the Maleficent seen is permanently full of pain and ire, and acts as the vengeful and tyrannical villainess presented both in the classic story and in the Disney film of *Sleeping*

Beauty. These offered a monolithic and static version of this character, whereas *Maleficent* proposes a broader interpretation of her persona by demonstrating how she embodies various identities at the same time and how the different situations transform her. Moreover, Aurora also distances herself from the prototype of the Disney princesses, whose only aspiration is to marry a courteous and handsome prince and live their love story. Thus, the film's plot digresses from the romantic and idealised notion of the heterosexual love, portrayed and promoted by all the previous fairy tales, including *Sleeping* Beauty. As far as these women's relevance as characters is concerned, they can be considered round and complex, quite the contrary to other female characters in traditional tales, where they are identified by their flatness and lack of a significant role. All in all, albeit this film does not follow the conventional and stereotypical pattern of the fantastic genre, in the end, it also has its own happy ending thanks to the union of the two kingdoms through the feminist kinship between Aurora and Maleficent. The bond of friendship and true love is that strong that not only does it manage to break with the magic spell of the 'sleeping beauty,' but also, as for the film's implicit meaning, it annuls the androcentric viewpoint and deconstructs the totalising vision of the world, which conceptualises its organisation in strict hierarchical binary pairs, giving rise this way to a more fluid and cooperative world.

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