

DECONSTRUCTIVE ANGLES IN MALEFICENT

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Abstract : The paper analyses the Maleficent production, a (post-)modern retelling of the story of Sleeping Beauty approached from the perspective of the spiteful fairy. The interest lies in the extent to which this new outlook modifies the original tale, up to the point of twisting the roles of the characters, shifting the focus (centre), onto a different hero(ine). We follow the implications of the changes in the plot and angle: rounder characters, additional drama, new layers of meaning and interpretation, ambiguous positions of the characters, double roles, potential feminist twists. We resort to myth theory, in particular Campbell's monomyth (the hero's journey), as well as archetypal theory. Also, the hermeneutic and turns in the film rely on a deconstructive vantage point, on deferral and difference (Derrida's différance). The conclusions bear on the aspects mentioned above, as well as on the impossibility to apply binary, black-and-white thinking, normally associated with traditional fairy-tales, to a complex revisitation such as Maleficent.

Keywords: *deconstruction, fairy-tale, monomyth, archetype, ambiguity.*

Introduction

The *Maleficent* production (Roth & Stromberg, 2014) is a (post-)modern retelling of the fairy-tale of *Sleeping Beauty*. A few aspects are compelling enough to dedicate it a study. The most noticeable of these is the change of perspective – the main character being the spiteful fairy, whom the king forgot to invite to the celebration of the royal child's birth. However, not only the manner of the story, but also its content is amended. We begin looking at events from a time prior to the actions present in the traditional fairy-tale, as well as from a different realm – the fantastic one. The succession of occurrences is enriched and the causal relations alter. For instance, it turns out that the grudge borne by the isolated fairy does not come from being omitted in the guest list, but from a long-waged war against her people by humans, as well as from having been deceived in her sentiments and robbed of her wings (literally). The characters get humanised and complex. There is composite psychology behind their actions, reactions and attitudes. There is evolution and shades of grey to them, just as there is ambivalence – something odd for the regular fairy-tale character, with, perhaps, the exception of the protagonist (who was, then again, expected to be “different” and extraordinary, and whose exceptionality was sometimes constructed by internal contradictions and struggles). Last but not least, the element of surprise is present, both in terms of action and psychology, despite the story keeping the fairy-tale tone consistently to the end.

The Spaces in the Story

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. The first scene in the film is a bird's eye view over the magical land of the forest (“The Moors”), presented in a flight over its perimeter, where various fantastic creatures dwell, including the child Maleficent. Supernatural beings such as fairies, gnomes, spiteful trolls, elves and winged, ethereal life forms coexist, surpassing in their variety the populations of Scottish and Irish legends and lore. They need no ruler, because their communality is based on trust. In opposition to this

realm of the imaginary, clearly separated from it by a natural frontier – the border of The Moors, marked by high and heavy stones – there lies the land of humans, ruled by a “vain”, “greedy” king, which makes his people envious of the beauty and richness of their neighbors’ home (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014). The separation between lands is not only physical, but also reinforced by the narrator’s words, who presents the two kingdoms as “the worst of neighbors”, which only a “great hero or a terrible villain might bring [...] together” (*Ibidem*). This divided landscape reminds one of the oppositions between: nature and culture; instinct, insight, wilderness and untamability, on the one hand, versus reason and practicality, on the other; innocence and simplicity, versus civilization and perversion (Williams 1993).

As separated as these regions may seem, beings from one penetrate the other. There are two reasons for this crossing of the line: war, i.e. aggression, and a drive or quest for knowledge and identity. This stepping over the line may figuratively draw to the hybrid nature of the characters that cannot be judged in terms of binary oppositions such as good-bad although they are of a fairy-tale.

Potential Heroes and Their Evolution

Maleficent is the centre of the story at the beginning. She lives “in a great tree on a great cliff” (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014). We are told that one might take her for a girl, but at the same time warned that she is no such ordinary thing, but a fairy. The fact that she is special is suggested by the use of the adjective “great” twice in relation to her place of dwelling, and by the height of her “nest”. Also, her lack of parents is in this case a way of suggesting lack of any prerogative held over her person by any other being (such as a parent), independence and power.

A fairy, according to Wikipedia, turns out to be an ambivalent being. On the one hand it is good-natured, a hybrid between humans and angels, wherefrom its name of a fair, beautiful creature both on the outside and on the inside – “*good folk, people of peace*”; on the other hand, fairies are feared for their “malice” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy>). The two aspects of the personality of a fairy are visible in *Maleficent* by physical insignia: strangely glittering eyes, the way she is both winged and horned. Firstly, the positive side of her double nature comes to the fore as she “heals” and restores to life a dried tree branch, making it green and leafy. Then, other qualities of hers become evident: generosity, forgiveness, order-making etc., along the description given to child heroes in myth theory: “precocious strength, cleverness, and wisdom” (Campbell 2004: 302).

As she grows into an adult, the strongest of the fairies becomes a protector of her land and implicitly a warrior creature, with all the attributes of a leader: might, courage, dedication, an amount of aggressiveness and righteousness. Even at adult age though, she is described as having yet to learn the envious and greedy nature of people (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014), which means her innocence is there still, and thus her ambivalence preserved. Her uniqueness triggers on the opposite realm, of the humans, a reaction from the king, who wants to annihilate the growing power of The Moors, in a petty attempt to counter anything that might function as a potential threat or limiting factor to his influence. He tries to invade The Moors and subdue its residents, but meets the joint opposition of Maleficent and the tree creatures who repel the army of humans at the frontier.

At the opposite pole, Stefan is also a candidate to the title of hero, for the other side and world, that of humans. He serves the king and wants to help him fulfill a lifelong objective, that of uniting the two worlds, under his command of course, which actually means taking over The Moors by subduing its most fearless defender, Maleficent. From this perspective, of the humans, Stefan is merely a brave man helping them accomplish this task. He could be read as a uniter of lands. He is the future king, who bears offspring and has a little girl, Princess Aurora. Aurora is cursed by Maleficent, whom Stefan does not invite to the baptism, to be stung by the spindle of a spinning wheel at the age of 16 and fall into a death-like slumber.

In the traditional story, the real heroine is the king's child, Aurora. She is the only one fulfilling the requirement of noble origin, a *sine qua non* requirement in conservative tales. In the film, she is nevertheless surpassed in importance and complexity by Maleficent.

Key Scenes and Moments. Turns and Falls

A key episode filled with substance is the first encounter of child Maleficent with the future king Stefan, at this time only a poor boy. Their positions are contradictory. Stefan is reported as a thief by the Pixies, who announce Maleficent that the border guards have seen a bandit at the pool of jewels. When Maleficent gets there, Stefan is hiding in the bushes, in the dark, and she summons him to come out into the open and into the light. Summing up, we realise that the human is presented as a trespasser, thief, coward and rude, as he insults one of the guards (who looks quite frightening in fact, a tree monster with a putrefied "face") calling it hideous. Moreover, he is a liar too, as he does not admit at first that there would be anything to "give back" as the fairy asks him for the stolen object. Maleficent is ready to forgive, another quality or plus on her part. She is understanding towards quite a number of things: his lack of manners in addressing the guard and hurting its feelings, the human's insincerity, and his deed, as she assures him they do not punish thieves by death. She is manifesting her angelic side at this moment again.

This key moment functions as a "call to adventure" in Campbell's terms (Campbell 2004: 45), which may begin with a "blunder" that in Freudian interpretations is the mirror of one's "suppressed desires and conflicts": "A blunder – apparently the merest chance – reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood." (*Ibidem*: 46). The event is obviously a blunder from the boy's part. The call to adventure is nevertheless one towards gain of knowledge and personal development not so much for the prince, but mostly for Maleficent, though neither of them knows that yet.

Some important personality features are made apparent here as well, as a consequence of manifest attitudes. When Maleficent casts the gem back into the lake and Stefan interprets her gesture as having thrown it away, she explains that what she did was actually restore it to its home, as she is about to do with Stefan himself, while accompanying him towards the border of The Moors. Here she shows herself as an order maker, prone to set things right, a harbinger of harmony.

Stefan's words reveal his ambitious nature. What we sense is a negative type of ambition, a pursuit of greatness, power and richness for which he might be willing to compromise a lot. He says he is an orphan, living in a barn, then shows Maleficent the castle shining in the horizon and announces that he will be living there one day. On the positive

side, as they part and shake hands, Stefan's iron ring hurts Maleficent's hand and as he sees it he throws the ring away, although it is perhaps one of his very few possessions; this shows his capacity to care. His gesture impresses Maleficent and is the trigger of their future *rendez-vous* and romantic involvement.

The real call to adventure for Stefan is the scene taking place by the old king's deathbed, when the latter throws a challenge to all the young men closest to him: to kill the valiant fairy and in this way succeed him to the throne. This dare, and especially its reward, cannot leave Stefan uninterested, as they address his one terrible flaw, his pathological ambition. It is a test that he needs to pass and an opportunity to accede to the throne. The balance draws heavier on the side of his dream of greatness than on that of his friendship and feelings towards Maleficent. Although petty, he is not a murderer, and the compromise he comes up with is to cut Maleficent's wings off while she is sleeping to take away her power, acting, once again, as a sly sneak and a robber.

The meeting between Maleficent and Diaval takes place in a field. The fairy notices a raven struggling to escape a man's net and orders it "into a man" (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014). This is not, however, the first time Maleficent and Diaval lay eyes on each other. The very first encounter takes place the night the fairy is robbed of her wings. Hurting as she is, both physically and emotionally, she notices the bird landing on a stone next to her and for a moment it seems that the bird looks into her eyes and acknowledges her pain. As they study each other, we can see in the fairy's eyes the pain of seeing a creature that is still able to fly and hence a reminder of her loss. Maleficent envies the raven for his gift. This situation is the basis of their future relationship. As the raven realises he has escaped death, he acknowledges the fairy's help and offers to be a servant for whatever she needs. Maleficent's reply is "Wings... I need you to be my wings" (*Ibidem*). Diaval spies over the castle and keeps Maleficent informed: about Stefan's coronation, the birth of his child etc. The fairy has found a way to compensate for her loss with the help of the raven.

The moment when Aurora actually meets Maleficent comes somewhat fortuitously. Aurora is inspecting the wall of thorns surrounding The Moors out of curiosity, as King Stefan's soldiers are trying to find a way to break it down with iron tools. Maleficent needs to retaliate, but Aurora would be a witness to potential atrocities, so she casts a spell on the girl to put her to sleep. Transformed into a wolf, Diaval is chasing away the king's men, whom Maleficent then lifts from the ground and pushes back. Maleficent carries Aurora after her, the girl still asleep and floating in the air, then lets her awaken; when she does, Aurora urges her to come out from the bushes, reassuring her not to be afraid. Maleficent laughs, saying that if she comes out Aurora will then be afraid, but the girl proves courageous when faced with the horned fairy. She thinks Maleficent is her fairy godmother, saying she has felt her shadow protect her all her life. This joining of the two characters is a double "meeting with the mentor" (Vogler 2007: 117), because they function as mentors/"donors"/"providers" (Propp qtd. in Vogler 2007: 117) for each other – Maleficent for Aurora's transformation into a potent, more complex adult, and Aurora for the fairy's reformation.

The "delayed crisis" (Vogler 2007: 158) of the story is double: Aurora's awakening as a result of Maleficent's kiss, and the fairy's fight to escape from the castle. As she is trying to leave with the princess, she is caught under an iron net falling from the ceiling and attacked by the king's soldiers with spears. With one last effort, she transforms Diaval into a fire-

spitting dragon which frees her, but gets immobilised with chains. The men form a circle of iron shields around Maleficent, in which Stefan appears, clad in iron, throwing the fairy to the ground. It is the preparation for the “Ordeal” (Campbell 2004, Vogler 2007). There is a perfect symmetry between the moment Stefan confronts Maleficent in this circle, while the men hit the ground rhythmically with the shields, and the time Aurora, fled from the battle scene, finds in the secret room the encased beating wings of the fairy and releases them, overturning the casket. There is also a ritualistic tinge to the confrontation scene, because it takes place in a circle and to the rhythmic shield drum. As Stefan enchains her and is about to stab her with his sword, the wings find their mistress and reattach – a mythical rebirth. Maleficent flies away with Stefan chained to her. She deposes him on a tower and wants to leave, declaring the end, but as she turns around Stefan attacks her. Maleficent rises in the air and Stefan falls, killed, in the end, not by her, but by his hatred and resentment.

Maleficent and Aurora return to the budding Moors, where Maleficent crowns Aurora the queen. The blooming woods are the equivalent of the final feast in fairy-tales, symbolising physical and spiritual richness: “The motif (derived from an infantile fantasy) of the inexhaustible dish, symbolising the perpetual life-giving, form-building powers of the universal source, is a fairy-tale counterpart of the mythological image of the cornucopian banquet of the gods.” (Campbell 2004: 160) Aurora and Maleficent are elevated beings and that is why the boon or elixir they bring is indeed “life energy”; had they had a pettier nature, the gift would have been of a lower kind, as it is “always scaled to [the worshipper’s] stature and to the nature of his dominant desire” (*Ibidem*: 175). The passage of power takes place down a matriarchal line – a feminist statement. Also, the struggle with black-and-white interpretations is revealed in Maleficent’s characterisation as both a hero and a villain, so the initial assumption that *either* one *or* the other can reunite the kingdoms is refuted.

Archetypes

The two protagonists, Maleficent and Stefan, start out in a confrontational stand not only due to the situation of theft of the gem, but also, and above all, because they belong to opposite kins known to be at enmity – humans and fairies. That is why the love relationship that springs between them is doomed not to bloom, or, as the narrator puts it, it is “not to be” (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014). From this perspective, they resemble the star crossed lovers.

Both Stefan and Maleficent are heroes/antiheroes, as they identify at some point with their malevolent cynical side. The definition of an antihero is “one who may be an outlaw or a villain from the point of view of society, but with whom the audience is basically in sympathy” (Vogler 2007: 34-5). The only one who has no such side (at least not manifest) is Aurora, the real heroine, functioning as a catalyst for both the personal evolution of the other two, and the peace and harmony of the universe. Paradoxically or not, Aurora is also the flattest of the three characters, an “unwilling” hero “full of doubts and hesitations, passive, needing to be motivated or pushed into the adventure by outside forces” (*Ibidem*: 34) and subversively backgrounded by the central figure who remains Maleficent. Aurora’s passivity is mostly, however, due to her innocence, tender-heartedness and peacefulness, which play a key role in melting Maleficent’s heart, and it is in this respect that she is a “catalyst hero”, belonging to the category of those “who do not change much themselves because their main function is to bring about transformation in others” (*Ibidem*: 37).

The old king's deathbed moments reveal some archetypal content as well. He functions as the tempter, or figure of the devil (Jung 1990: 214). His proposal is a task or trial (Campbell 2004: 89) to establish the worthy for the succession to the throne. Stefan's crossing into the realm of The Moors at night to the purpose of achieving it is equivalent to stepping over the threshold to adventure, and Maleficent plays in this scenario the role of a temptress (*Ibidem*: 111-116), whose charms are meant to detour Stefan from his path of greatness.

Maleficent herself is the most complex character, as she embodies various archetypes throughout her evolution. To understand her, we should think of Vogler's intimation that a hero "proceeds through the story gathering and incorporating the energy and traits of the other characters. She learns from the other characters, fusing them into a complete human being" (Vogler 2007: 25).

As a heroine, Maleficent displays most of the adult phases announced by Campbell in his chapter "Transformations of the hero". Thus, she is a warrior (Campbell 2004: 309), a lover (*Ibidem*: 316) (or almost, but in-love anyway), an empress and tyrant (*Ibidem*: 319), as she reigns over The Moors inspiring fear and bringing about transformations to the land that suit her morose disposition (the forest becomes thicker, tree branches grow gnarled and plants develop thorns until they form a wall), and, finally, a "world redeemer" (*Ibidem*: 322), as she teaches everyone the lesson of love saving life and the world. Her triumph is as resonant and her evolution as sky-rocketing as her previous despair and decadence are dark, mirroring Campbell's theory that "The deeds of the hero in the second part of his personal cycle will be proportionate to the depth of his descent during the first" (*Ibidem*: 296). We can couple these phases with Vogler's "dramatic functions" of the hero (Vogler 2007: 30), which the character Maleficent fulfills all. Among the most prominent lie "growth" and "action" (*Ibidem*: 31), or "sacrifice" and "dealing with death" (*Ibidem*: 32). Indeed, the observation that sacrificing means "making holy" (*Ibidem*) helps us better understand Maleficent's complexity and capacity for self-perfecting. She ultimately proves capable of true (motherly) love above and beyond the need to compensate for the injustice and evil done to her in her identity core, hurting at the same time her innermost feelings. No need for revenge, no hurt ego, thrashed trust or mocked affection are in the end stronger than her generosity and capacity for love.

A shadow is the "negative side" of an archetype (De Coster 2010: 17), "our darkest desires, our untapped resources, or even rejected qualities. It can also symbolise our greatest fears and phobias" (*Ibidem*: 10). If we were to enter the field of psychoanalysis and pathology, "the Shadow archetype stands for psychoses" (Vogler 2007: 66). For a woman, it is "the dark side of femininity, the repressive, smothering potential of motherhood, a witchy, scheming queen" (*Ibidem*: 240).

When Maleficent loses her wings, it triggers her embrace of her shadow; she is in the "belly of the whale" phase (Campbell 2004: 83). Firstly, a person in this metaphorical state feels having lost direction. (S)he faces the unknown and her/his state is a kind of figurative death (*Ibidem*). The sense of one's own identity is affected, as one faces a crisis, not knowing who one is. Secondly, "the physical body of the hero may be actually slain, dismembered, and scattered" (*Ibidem*: 85). Maleficent's trauma is double: she has not only been maimed physically and impaired in her powers, but also emotionally, being betrayed by the one person she has allowed herself to trust and even fall in love with. Hence, she is affected both in her trust in (and willingness for) interrelatedness, and romantically. The effects enumerated above

are only apparently, at the beginning, negative, because this (symbolical) death and destruction are necessary for the person to be reborn (also symbolically) into a more evolved or illuminated individual who has learnt a lesson and become better: “the hero goes inward, to be born again” (*Ibidem*: 84), undergoing a “metamorphosis” (*Ibidem*: 85).

Maleficent’s hurt and identification with the shadow determine her to want revenge and cast a curse on Aurora, displaying the features of a scheming witch and repressive, smothering mother mentioned above as attributes of the shadow. Her darkest desires translate in reigning by fear. Even her appearance changes to match her heart: she wears a dark cloak and cap, as she is a dark queen.

Nevertheless, even in her “shadow” hypostasis, Maleficent is ambivalent. Within her act while in identification with the shadow, there are shades of grey, contrasting attitudes, and even other roles simultaneously. While being the villain that destroyed Aurora’s destiny and a potential life threatening danger for her, Maleficent also acts like a mother, guardian angel and mentor. When king Stefan, wanting to protect baby Aurora from the curse, sends her away in the woods, far from any spinning wheel, to be raised by the Pixies who, although well-intended, are doing a lousy job, Maleficent starts supplementing the care needed for the welfare of the child. She tucks her in, does not let Aurora out of her sight (mainly out of curiosity at first), prevents her from falling into a precipice and the examples can go on. Maleficent surprises even herself in the protectiveness and benevolence of her actions towards the child. Her good nature transpires through her self-assumed darkness. Her heart is broken, but still there. Her instinct is to protect, despite the self-imposed mission of destruction. Maleficent gradually loses conviction in her retaliatory stance as days go by.

In this interaction, the two characters test each other’s strength and natures. The strength of Aurora’s innocence melts Maleficent’s heart and makes her reconsider everything, the curse and her attitude. Maleficent’s presence so near is for Aurora a test of her purity which, had it been less or faulty, would have put the child at great risk, as it would not have been enough to change Maleficent’s mind. As Vogler put it in discussing two male characters in a similar situation, in which one was for the other a villain and a mentor, “He tests the young man to the limit to find out if he has what it takes, and almost kills him in the process of bringing out the best in him” (Vogler 2007: 66). The same goes for Maleficent and Aurora. Both characters reveal each other’s true self, and in this respect are each other’s mentors. They both have something to learn from this interaction. When Aurora finds out who Maleficent really is, she goes through a crisis, but the way she surpasses it and remains as tender-hearted as before does nothing less than prove her quality. The way Aurora is helps Maleficent forget her ill intentions and pass from hatred to love, and more precisely true love, the only type that will ultimately raise Aurora from her deathlike sleep. To sum up, we could say that the two characters bring out the best in each other and help each other evolve.

We could interpret Maleficent’s display of feelings in the end as a manifestation of the positive side of her shadow, because there is such a thing as well. The positive aspects manifested by Maleficent at the end are “natural feelings we believe we’re not supposed to show” (motherly love) or “unexplored potential, such as affection, creativity, or psychic ability, that goes unexpressed”, “the roads not taken” (*Ibidem*: 68) (restoring The Moors to their initial state of “light”). Although she has cursed Aurora, a hint that she likes the baby is the way Maleficent cannot bear to hear her cry, how she puts her hands to her ears, worrying

aloud that Aurora will starve to death. In spite of calling the baby a “little beastie” and saying she hates her, Maleficent’s acts show motherly care. The best example is when Aurora is about to plummet from a cliff, because she is too little to realise the danger of getting close to the edge, and Maleficent keeps her from falling. Also, one day, soon after, she bumps into little Aurora, who urges Maleficent to take her in her arms, saying “Up, up!” (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014), and when the fairy does, she is embraced by the child and we see the adult’s awkwardness filled with emotion and affection. As Aurora becomes an adolescent, Maleficent is still protective of her. As the king’s soldiers come with iron tools to break the wall of thorns and get to Maleficent, the fairy protects Aurora (who is wandering about as well), preventing her to see the violent scenes that ensue, by putting her under a spell to sleep.

Another hidden characteristic of the fairy that makes its way to our awareness despite Maleficent’s gloom is her playfulness, a ludic side. She brings rain over the Pixies while they are playing cards inside their cottage, laughing at their pouting over losing at a game; when she meets Diaval’s reproachful look, she exclaims “Oh, come on, that’s funny!” (*Maleficent*, May 30, 2014) While the Pixies are on a meadow, Maleficent plays tricks on them by pulling their hair, blowing their hats off their heads and making them think one of them did those things. Also, she does not mind entering a mud fighting game while sitting by a pond with Aurora and other magical beings.

Maleficent’s contemplation of Aurora may also be read as the contemplation of the “divine child” (De Coster 2010: 26) within, the purest part of herself she aspires to be. The permanent connection with Aurora proves Maleficent has not lost contact with this innocence. How she takes care of the child, unseen, while pretending to hate her, represents her relation with this inner purity.

The character **Diaval** holds manifold functions. As a typology, he is a shapeshifter. What is different in his case from the type described by Vogler is that the raven is not a surprise to Maleficent in his shape-shifting, contrary to what usually happens with these archetypes in relation to the hero (Vogler 2007: 59). The lack of the element of surprise for Maleficent is due to the fact that Diaval’s shape-shifting is in fact Maleficent’s gift to him, not a quality he previously held on his own. He is also not fickle or unreliable, as the embodiment of such an archetype might be. On the contrary, he is loyal and consistent in his actions and allegiance. Perhaps a subversive stand here is that, unlike a human (Stefan), he does not betray. Diaval shifts *only* physically, not in his essence.

What suits him from Vogler’s theory is the way he can represent Maleficent’s animus, “express the energy of the animus” (*Ibidem*: 60), i.e. the male qualities and features existing in a woman. With the loss of wings, Maleficent has lost “power”, “assertiveness”, independence and knowledge – considered by Vogler to be male attributes – all supplemented by Diaval as a result of the fairy’s “projection” (*Ibidem*) of them onto him. As a parenthesis, it is, of course, debatable whether the announced qualities are (exclusively?) masculine, and the logical question arises why they could not be considered feminine just as well. The answer may be that archetypal content is the slowest to change in time, and that such polarities still function archetypally despite modernity having witnessed/imprinted a different approach to the matters of femininity/masculinity.

In relation to Maleficent, Diaval is not only merely a simple executive or provider of the missing parts from Maleficent. He grows too as a character, and becomes, besides a

helper, a counselor and an “ally” (*Ibidem*: 71). Apart from a “companion, sparring partner, conscience, or comic relief”, “someone to send on errands, to carry messages, to scout locations”, he is somebody “to talk to, to bring out human feelings or reveal important questions in the plot” (*Ibidem*). Allies do not only perform duties, but also have an impact on the heroes, changing and influencing them for the better, “humanising the heroes, adding extra dimensions to their personalities, or challenging them to be more open and balanced” (*Ibidem*). The ally can function as a voice, both for the hero, at times when (s)he would lack credibility or sound awkward if (s)he spoke, and for the viewer/reader/receiver of the story (*Ibidem*: 72). Some of the tasks performed by Diaval concern looking after baby Aurora: the raven brings the baby a dewy flower to drink from, as she has not been fed properly; the bird also lands on the cot and starts swinging it to make the baby stop crying; moreover, he is a playmate for little Aurora as she grows up, watching over her at the same time.

Conclusions

Unlike in fairytales, the characters in *Maleficent* are torn. Instead of being flat, remarked by one distinctive feature, they have roundness and complexity. They show remorse and have pangs of conscience for the evil they do. Stefan regrets his betrayal and dehumanisation, as we surprise him talking to the fairy’s wings, encased in a huge glass box in a secret room, the proof of his guilt. They function as a reminder for that, but also as a fetish, representing Maleficent, whom he probably misses. Also, Stefan has nightmares that Maleficent is coming after him. Meanwhile, nonetheless, he prompts his ironsmiths to work on tools that will help him hunt Maleficent down, waking them at night and becoming violent when contradicted. Hence, he has two sides manifesting intermittently. As for Maleficent, while watching Aurora sleep she tries to reverse the curse, but cannot, as she bound it to last to the end of time so that no power on earth be able to change it.

In *Sleeping Beauty*, the princess is the archetype of the damsel in distress. Asleep, she needs to be saved by true love’s kiss. This situation is a call to adventure for a potential hero – a young man who can reverse the spell by giving the miraculous kiss. In the film, however, men seem to occupy a secondary role. Those who could claim the position of the hero are Stefan and young Phillip, but they seem overwhelmed by events and can hardly qualify for the role. Stefan lacks the nobility to hold this status, flawed and incompatible with it because driven by greed and ambition. Phillip’s incompatibility resides in his plainness; what is missing in his case for the performance of the role of the hero is strength and out-of-ordinariness. Despite being called “the answer”, Aurora’s “only chance” and her “destiny” by Diaval, he appears to be a young-man-in-distress when he makes his entrance in the forest, needing directions from Aurora to get to the castle, as he is lost. And lost he is, also figuratively, as his kiss is not the magical one, failing to wake the princess.

The women of the film, on the other hand, compete for the role of heroine. At the beginning, Maleficent is the central figure, and she does not fail or disappoint in any way as events unfold. On the contrary, as we have seen, she becomes more complex, grows and evolves, showing admirable qualities to the end. She is the one riding to Aurora’s rescue at the time the curse is due. Aurora, who starts as the epitome of innocence and daintiness, becomes so much more, surprising us with her potential to become the heroine herself in the

final scenes, when she is introduced as the boon by Maleficent and as the one to whom she can pass on the dominance over The Moors.

Consequently, we can speak of two reversals in the horizon of our expectations at least. One concerns the preference of a female hero over the traditional male one. The other has to do with unexpected turns in one's evolution. Thus, at some point, we could not imagine a reformed Maleficent just as we cannot believe the way she is both a spiteful bitter witch and the most careful protective mother figures simultaneously, or the avenger who nevertheless takes pity on Stefan, her condemner. Aurora shows the greatest of vulnerabilities and at the same time incredible strength and courage, not fearing Maleficent and standing by her side even when she finds out who she is.

The ending makes us ponder on the meaning of true love, the figure of the hero and the subsequent subversive interpretations that derive. Facts are that Maleficent rides Diaval transformed into a horse in gallop to save Aurora, then gives her the kiss of true love. What we notice is that Maleficent substitutes the male figure of the hero, the young prince who does not actually exist in a full-fledged form in the story. She has long-gone taken on his attributes as well. In this light, we can interpret her illumination as the road that had to be walked in order to ensure creation – Aurora's physical awakening, which pairs/mirrors Maleficent's spiritual one and fulfillment as a heroine. In this interpretation, a genesis takes place when male and female attributes get united in one, at their peak or best quality. Campbell saw in the reunion of the two principles, male and female, the *figura* of the primordial being, the first Adam or androgynous being, and thus the reassertion of perfection: "This image stands at the beginning of the cosmogony cycle, and with equal propriety at the conclusion of the herotask, at the moment when [...] the divine form [is] found and recollected, and wisdom regained." (Campbell 2004: 141-2). Figuratively speaking, Maleficent is androgynous.

Let us not forget that the curse involves pricking one's finger in a spindle. In the interpretive direction above, if we think that the spindle is a male symbol (*Ibidem*: 229), we can see Maleficent's curse as a mirror for her misbalance and blight with the animus. Consequently, in the end, the rejected, betraying (in her eyes) male principle is come to terms with by Maleficent (perhaps during the collaboration with Diaval, who proves reliable) and thus a figurative "Sacred Marriage" (*Ibidem*: 227) takes place (between principles in her person) (along Vogler's vision) (Vogler 2007: 168), the result of which is for Aurora the absolution from her dark destiny.

The other subversive implication regards the meaning of "true love". Contrary to expectations, it need not be romantic love between man and woman (unless we are ready to connect the ending with the idea of Maleficent's androgyny). In our case, it seems to be the love of a mother, although Maleficent is not Aurora's mother, and this is another subtlety transpiring subversive intentions: a fake mother's love can be more genuine than a mother's. A further subversive interpretation relies on the idea that true love is, so to speak, "colorless", faceless, unconnected to a certain type of ties, perhaps even genderless etc. Though confusing, the final message is positive: true love exists, irrespective of its form, despite what Stefan and Maleficent fear and state on a few occasions. True love is the "clue"/"clew" (Old English) i.e. (Ariadne's) thread (*Ibidem*: 166) tracing back to the Centre/Ultimate Meaning, solving the dilemma, the one that ultimately saves.

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