The Magical World of Patriarchy: Exploring Gender Representations and Faux Feminism

in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," *Sleeping Beauty,* **and** *Maleficent*

by

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increase of feminist narratives in contemporary North American popular culture. However, some of these narratives perpetuate traditional gender messages under the pretences of feminism. This study examines faux feminist narratives in children's films and how they convey patriarchal concepts of gender by analysing the history and trajectory of gender representations from one traditional conservative text to a recent text that purports to be feminist. Through the critical framework of adaptation theory (Hutcheon 2006; Zipes 2013; Blankier 2014), this study analyzes three versions of the fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" from three different time periods: Charles Perrault's seventeenth-century tale "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," Disney's animated film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and Disney's live-action film *Maleficent* (2014). The gender roles and gendered social structures in each text are examined to explore which gender representations have changed over time, and which representations have persisted throughout the three "Sleeping Beauty" texts. This study finds that while *Maleficent* may have feminist revisions, the film duplicates many sexist representations of gender found in the film's source texts, conveying traditional gender roles and gendered social structures to contemporary audiences under the pretences of feminism.

Lay Summary

This study analyses three versions of Sleeping Beauty from different periods to examine how representations of gender may or may not change over time and across adaptations. Through this analysis, the study addresses what messages about gender "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)*,* and *Maleficent* (2014) convey to young audiences and finds that many of *Maleficent*'s representations of gender are continuations of the sexist representations found in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and *Sleeping Beauty*. The importance of this study is that it explores how children's stories inform young audiences about their identity and place in the social world.

Preface

       This thesis is an original work by Marlo Humiski. No part of this work has been previously published.

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Dedication

To my parents and grandparents, whose analytical minds and creative hearts shaped me into the person I am today.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Feminism and Faux Feminism in Popular Culture

Feminism is on the rise, or so it seems. Mass culture is filled with coverage of feminist movements, celebrities and artists claiming feminist identities, texts praised for strong female characters, and people advocating for feminism through social media. However, despite feminism having become a popular topic, the definition and motives of feminism are generally misunderstood. Feminist theorist bell hooks best defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (*Feminism is for Everybody* 1). Sexism, the discrimination against or depreciation of someone based on gender and/or biological sex, is the societal problem the movement seeks to eradicate. Feminism advocates for gender equality for everyone but focuses on women's rights because society is currently dominated by a patriarchal system in which women face the most challenges.

Unfortunately, many people's understandings of feminism are not based on feminist theory but rather on representations of feminism found in Western mass media and popular culture. Feminism is often depicted as an extreme ideology and an anti-men movement comprised of men-haters. This misunderstanding is echoed in current media as some celebrities, such as Meryl Streep, Kelly Clarkson, Susan Sarandon, and Katy Perry reject feminism based on its radical or women-exclusive reputation (Holmes "A Venn Diagram of Hollywood's Confused Feminists"). Other times, feminists are portrayed in popular culture as middle-class white women who fight for women's rights out of boredom and are neglectful of their families, like the vivacious housewife Mrs. Banks from *Mary Poppins* (1964) who is too swept away with her ridiculous musical account of the suffragette movement to notice that her children are missing. Another common misrepresentation, often conveyed by conservative media outlets like *Fox*

News, National Review, or even more liberal outlets like *TIME* magazine, is that feminism is "dead," that feminism achieved its goal during the 1970s, and that any feminist movement today is superfluous (Venker 2016; French 2014). Another convoluting phenomenon is post-feminism, which posits that Western society has moved beyond feminism to a "postfeminist era" in which women are equal, empowered, and have the same freedoms as men. Although post-feminism is a contested term that many feminist scholars have widely criticized for operating within the framework of patriarchy, post-feminist rhetoric in today's culture continues to offer ways for women to bargain or appropriate power within a sexist system rather than achieve equality (for further discussion, see section 2.1.2). These common misrepresentations of feminism are a form of backlash against the movement, and are created, communicated, and amplified by the patriarchal media and popular culture that has long dominated Western society and from which most people form their understandings of gendered social structures.

However, despite the perpetual misunderstanding of feminism and aversion to the movement in contemporary society, "feminism has a visibility in media culture that it did not have even a few years ago, and we are currently witnessing a resurgence of feminist discourse and activism as well as a renewed media interest in feminist stories" (Gill, "Post Postfeminism?" 615). A shift is occurring by which positive female characters are becoming increasingly desired and produced in children's culture, with many novels, films, toys, and games featuring representations of women who are intelligent, ambitious, diverse, and valued for more than their looks and reproductive systems. Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games series and Veronica Roth's Divergent series became widely popular for featuring strong, resourceful female leads in dystopian narratives, with each series becoming successful movie franchises. Disney's *Frozen* (2013) and *Frozen 2* (2019) have been praised by parents and reviewers for featuring princess

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storylines that focus on familial over romantic love, with the sequel currently reigning as the highest-grossing animated film of all time (Rubin 2020). Mattel's Barbie doll "Fashionistas" line, which features three new body types and seven different skin tones for Barbie, won the "Doll of the Year" category at the Toy Association's annual Toy of the Year Awards in 2017 ("2017 TOTY Winners"). Among a myriad of recent children's products, these examples are indicative of an increased interest in positive representations of women from consumers and companies alike. The fundamentals of feminism are becoming more widely embraced as important messages for young audiences, whether people support the movement, reject it, or are uncertain of its intentions.

However, because young people often learn about feminism from popular culture, many audiences engaging in dialogues about gender representations in children's texts are misinformed about the many manifestations of sexism in Western culture. A lexicon has developed, with stock phrases like "girl power" and tropes like "strong female characters" commonly describing texts that feature non-stereotypical representations of women who exhibit agency (Gill, "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism" 607). Even "feminist" has become a popular label for signifying a text that appears to have positive gender messages, despite its controversial status in contemporary culture. However, due to misunderstandings around how sexism manifests, many texts that are being labelled as empowering participate in patriarchal discourses under the pretences of feminism. These narratives have been described by scholars as pseudo-feminist (Marshall and Sensoy 2009; Gibson and Heyes 2014) or as faux feminist (Perishing and Gablehouse 2010; Williams 2010; hooks 2013). Faux feminism, the preferred term for this study's purposes, "assumes a feminist stance but offers a mass-mediated idea of feminism where individual women can be strong and achieve equality through personal actions

that do not, however, challenge or change the underlying patriarchal structure of society"
(Williams 101). Similar to how post-feminism manifests in popular culture, faux feminism
appropriates feminist vocabulary and ideals to present sexist values as liberating for women
(McRobbie 2007). Faux feminism uses such devices as a misconstrued attempt to advocate for
feminism or to masquerade as feminism for capitalistic gains. In doing so, faux feminism
believes, or wants others to believe, it *is* feminism (Williams 101). In contemporary popular
culture, many narratives are emerging that are faux feminist, whether or not they intend to be,
and are, according to hooks, a "patriarchal male dominated re-framing of feminism" that
undermines criticisms from feminism by infiltrating the movement with patriarchal content
(hooks, "Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In").

Faux feminism in popular culture is problematic because it contributes to contemporary
North American society's ongoing confusion about the feminist movement and gender equality
by diminishing feminism's criticisms of sexist and patriarchal structures. As previously stated,
many people form their understandings of feminism from popular culture, leading to
misunderstandings of the feminist movement and how sexism manifests. Faux feminist texts add
to this confusion by presenting audiences with "narrow depiction[s] of feminism" (Williams
101). As Christy Williams notes, the problem with a faux feminist text is not that it fails to be
feminist, but rather that the "popularized, restricted, and simplified version of feminism it
presents masks the elements of the [text] that reinforce social and patriarchal structures" (114).
Williams explains that faux feminism "naturalizes gender expectations and the idea that
demonstrations of female strength are akin to gender equality" (114). Aligning female strength
with gender equality simplifies and distorts understandings of gender equality by limiting
feminism to solely pertaining to women, not all genders or structures of society (115). By

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misrepresenting feminism and gender equality, faux feminist texts reframe and redefine the principles of feminism to disregard, naturalize, or even support the sexist, patriarchal social structures the movement seeks to eradicate. In doing so, faux feminist texts undermine feminism, disassembling the movement's power from within.

1.2   Research Statement

While not all audiences take faux feminist texts, or any form of popular culture for that matter, at face value, faux feminist texts are challenging because it is difficult to identify and address the nuanced sexist content as definitively as with overtly patriarchal content. Faux feminism's latency is particularly problematic in children's texts because faux feminism introduces negative gender roles and gendered social structures as positive to young audiences, potentially influencing how young people form their understandings of their own social identity and the world. The purpose of this study is to examine faux feminist narratives in children's texts by analysing the history and trajectory of gender representations from one traditional conservative text to a recent text that purports to be feminist. My research analyzes three versions of "Sleeping Beauty" from three different time periods, "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and *Maleficent* (2014), to explore how texts reflect and reinforce contemporary notions of gender roles and gendered social structures. Through this analysis, my research seeks to understand how faux feminist texts challenge and/or convey patriarchal and sexist concepts of gender to young audiences.

1.3 Rationale for Selected Primary Texts

Due to my interests in gender studies and fairy tales, I decided to examine fairy-tale films produced by the Indeed, there are many ways in which the company has embedded itself in children's lives, whether it be on a small, day-to-day scale through televisions shows, toys, costumes, or even toothbrushes, to travel experiences such as Disney World and other theme parks, resorts, and cruises where consumers can physically step into the world of Disney. One of the main facets through which the company continually shapes children's culture is through its popular fairy-tale films. Since Disney's first production, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the company has monopolized the fairy-tale genre and American consumers through its repetitive, formulaic approach to storytelling and use of the most recent technological advances (Zipes 1995). In North American society, and perhaps even internationally, Disney's fairy-tale film adaptations have become so universal that they are the most popular versions of fairy tales, as many people are most familiar with Disney's account of a tale or are completely unaware of a tale's traditional or literary versions (K. Stone 1975; Zipes 1995). Disney is favoured by many audiences for its consistent ability to produce whimsical, sanitized musicals that feature beautiful princesses, daring princes, and cute animal helpers.

However, despite the reputation Disney films hold as wholesome family entertainment, cultural critic Henry Giroux cautions that "while Disney films do not promote the violence that has become central to many other forms of popular and mass culture, they do carry cultural and social messages that need to be scrutinized" (*The Mouse that Roared* 85). Despite sanitizing fairy tale narratives and removing sexual and violent content, Disney films often reinforce the traditional gender roles and gendered social structures found in literary fairy tale tradition. These messages are subsequently taught to young audiences through Disney films, informing children

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about their identity and place within the world based on patriarchal ideas of gender. Therefore, Disney fairy-tale films are ideal for examining gender representations in children's texts, not only because of the company's monolithic cultural presence, but also for the messages Disney films convey about gender.

Although Disney's fairy-tale filmography is vast and has many films to consider for representations of gender, I am interested as a researcher in how Disney's twenty-first century fairy-tale films reflect and reinforce contemporary notions of gender and feminism. Since the company's release of *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009, Disney has produced many fairy-tale films, specifically princess films, which feature strong narratives of female empowerment at the forefront of the films. These narratives appear at first glance to be subversive of Disney's past sexist representations of women. Many of these recent films have been widely praised by reviewers, with many of the films being announced as feminist films on popular news websites like *Refinery 29, The Daily Beast,* and *the Huffington Post* (Gloudeman 2014; LeVine 2015; Yamato 2016). Questioning whether Disney has changed its patriarchal ways and created feminist films, or whether the company is merely utilizing faux feminism for financial gain, I compiled a list of Disney's princess films released over the past several years (2013-2020), including both new animated adaptations and live-action remakes of past Disney films, and began examining them according to the following criteria:

- The selected texts must be a fairy-tale adaptation created by The Walt Disney Company, and not in collaboration with Pixar Animation Studios or merely distributed by Disney.
- The selected texts must contain a female lead and a narrative that focuses on female empowerment.

Upon analysing Disney's princess films released from 2013-2020, I found that while some of Disney's recent animated adaptations fit the criteria, they do not reflect upon the company's changing representations of gender to the same extent the live-action remakes do. For example, *Frozen* is Disney's first adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's literary fairy tale "The Snow Queen," and *Moana* is Disney's first depiction of Polynesian folklore and mythology. Although these two films do exhibit the signs of the feminist and faux feminist content I am looking to examine, they are Disney's first adaptation of their respective source tales. While being a first-time adaptation was not an original criterion for selected texts, these films do not present the same potential for an in-depth analysis of Disney's changing approach to gender representations as the live-action adaptations do. Disney's live-action remakes interestingly required the company to reflect upon its own past gender representations in order to update the classic princess narrative for contemporary audiences.

There were three live-action films that were potential candidates for this study. *Maleficent* (2014) is a live-action film adaptation of both Charles Perrault's fairy tale "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (ATU 410) and Disney's earlier animated film adaptation of Perrault's tale, *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Similarly, *Cinderella* (2015) is a live-action film adaptation of Perrault's fairy tale "Cinderella: or, The Glass Slipper" (ATU 510A), as well as an adaptation of Disney's earlier animated film adaptation of the same tale, *Cinderella* (1950). Following in the live-action footsteps of *Maleficent* and *Cinderella,* Disney released *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), which is an adaptation of Disney's 1991 animated film by the same title, and both films are adaptations of Madame Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont's fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast" (ATU 435C). While all three live-action films are Disney fairy-tale adaptations

with strong female leads, I chose to focus my study on one live-action film and its source

materials due to the limited length of this study.

  Maleficent was chosen over the other two films due to actress Angelina Jolie's significant

presence in popular culture. Not only did the film's popularity warrant a sequel, *Maleficent:*

Mistress of Evil (2019), but the film also features actress Angelina Jolie as the main protagonist

and as a prominent figure in the film's creative process as an executive producer (Vorel 2018;

Zipes, "Beyond Disney in the Twenty-First Century" 25). Jolie brings her reputation to the film,

not only for her Academy-Award-winning acting, but also for her extensive humanitarian work

and advocacy for feminism. Jolie is involved with many foundations helping in developing

countries and her United Nations campaign against rape as a weapon of war led her to be named

the UK's 2015 "top feminist icon" in a survey conducted by *The Mirror* (McGeorge 2015). As

for her influence in popular culture, in 2013 Jolie announced she would undergo a risk-reducing

mastectomy, causing what scientists now refer to as the "Jolie Effect" in which her openness

about her procedure and her advocacy for women's health caused a substantial increase in

genetic testing for breast cancer and risk-reducing mastectomies across the United States and

Australia (Mao et al. 2017; Liede et al. 2018). Jolie has proven to be influential on audiences and

her involvement in the film ties her reputation as a feminist to the film's messages.

  Choosing *Maleficent* and its source texts, rather than examining all three live-action

films, creates a manageable, cohesive body of primary texts that focuses on one tale type,

allowing an analysis of gender representations across historical periods. This study will have

three "Sleeping Beauty" texts, which can also be examined as a seventeenth-century tale, a 1950s

animated film, and a contemporary live-action film. As a result, my study will examine the

history and trajectory of gender representations across each retelling and time period.

Perrault's fairy tales and Disney's previous fairy-tale films, including *Sleeping Beauty,* have been widely discussed and criticized by scholars for their patriarchal sexist content (as discussed in the following literature review). However, there is substantially less analysis of Disney's live-action fairy-tale film adaptations and their engagement in faux feminism. Together this specific body of "Sleeping Beauty" texts is indicative of a cultural shift in Disney's approach to adapting fairy tales, a shift where Disney is influenced by socio-cultural and financial changes to produce films with female characters who are more empowered than before. While this study does not seek to examine the entire phenomenon by including *Cinderella* (2015) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2016), my research will examine a representative sample in order to clearly analyze this intricate change in Disney's film practice that has yet to be fully explored in academic scholarship.

1.4   Research Questions

My research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What messages do the representations of gender in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," *Sleeping Beauty,* and *Maleficent* convey to young audiences?

- What gender representations have changed over time and what gender representations have persisted throughout the three "Sleeping Beauty" texts?

- Where do the gender representations in *Maleficent* fall on the continuum between sexism and feminism?

1.5   Significant Terms

I use the following significant terms throughout my discussion:

Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale -type index (ATU) – a formalist approach to classifying fairy tales, the ATU tale type index categorizes and groups folk and fairy tale variants into categories based on shared motifs and plot structures.

Archetype – a typical or traditional example of a person or thing. In relation to gender, an archetype commonly perpetuates conventional understandings of a gender through simplified representation.

Duplicates –instances of plot, characterization, imagery, motifs, etc. within an adaptation that reproduce and reinforce traditional and conservative ways of gender through patterns, images, and codes. (See section 3.2)

Faux Feminism – a "patriarchal male dominated re-framing of feminism" that undermines criticisms from feminism by infiltrating the movement with patriarchal content (hooks, "Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In"). (See sections 1.1 and 2.1.3)

Feminism – Broadly speaking, "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* 1). (See section 1.1 and 2.1.1).

Feminist (noun) – a person who advocates for the movement to end sexism and its oppressive structures (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 2000). Being a feminist is not a lifestyle or a pre-packaged identity, which focuses on personal and individual gain, but rather a political commitment to the feminist movement focusing on social and "collective change" (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 30). The term "feminist" was coined during the second wave of feminism by activists (McHugh 45).

Femme Fatale (Archetype) – a character type popularized by 1940s film noir, the femme fatale is a beautiful, dangerous, and mature woman whose agency and sexuality stimulate patriarchal fear and desire by challenging social order (Grossman 2007). Characterized by her pale

complexion, red lips, bold eyebrows, and haughty demeanour, the femme fatale is a seductress who "functions as the obstacle to the male quest" and is defeated and punished by the male protagonist, often by death (Kaplan 3). (See section 5.5)

Intersectionality – a concept that recognizes the "multiple oppressions experienced by non-white and poor women in particular, but more generally to all women as differences in sexuality, age, and physical ableness are also sites of oppression" (Zack 7). The concept was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." (See section 2.1.1)

Innocent Persecuted Heroine Archetype – a young, passive heroine who is wrongfully and persistently victimized in a story. The archetype commonly appears in fairy tales, especially those featuring princesses (See section 4.2)

Male-Rescuer Archetype – a young, adventurous male who foils the antagonist's plans and restores peace by saving a young maiden. The archetype commonly appears in fairy tales, especially those featuring princesses/young heroines. (See section 4.2)

Patriarchy – The institutionalization of sexism through systemic oppression of women through social structures (hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* ix; McHugh 94).

Post-feminism – founded on the ideas spread by the mass media of the 1980s and 1990s which declared feminism radical, out-dated, and obsolete, post-feminism posits that Western society has moved beyond feminism to a "postfeminist era" in which women are equal, empowered, and have the same freedoms as men. Post-feminism is a contested term as many feminist scholars have widely criticized post-feminism for operating within the framework of patriarchy, offering ways for women to bargain or appropriate power within a sexist system rather than achieve

equality. Rosalind Gill contends that post-feminism is a "sensibility," explaining that post-feminism is a "phenomenon into which scholars of culture should inquire" and a cultural object that needs to be explored, as opposed to an analytical perspective or historical period ("Postfeminist media culture" 148). (See section 1.1 and 2.1.2)

Revisions – instances of plot, characterization, imagery, motifs, etc. within an adaptation that alter or challenge the representation of gender from the source text. (See section 3.2)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Feminist Theory

There is an absence of a cohesive definition of feminism within recent feminist critical theory. While many contemporary feminists focus their writings on dispelling common misconceptions about the movement, few provide a clear definition of feminism and leave the definition to be inferred or formed from commonalities drawn between theorists. Although it is likely these scholars are assuming an informed reader who understands that feminism advocates for gender equality, the lack of a precise description of the movement and its intricacies is problematic considering feminism's fragmented state. There are many forms of feminism derived from interpretations based on mass media representations or from offshoots of critical theory. Despite the widespread use of the word feminism, there is little consensus on what the movement means, and, according to hooks, this "'anything goes' approach to the definition of the word has rendered it practically meaningless" (*Feminist Theory* 25). The following section seeks to define feminism in order to inform my research with a developed understanding of the movement.

2.1.1 Defining Feminism

As previously stated, hooks defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (*Feminism is for Everybody* 1). A prolific scholar, hooks has written extensively on gender, race, and classism and uses this definition throughout her works, first in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) and again in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000). In *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks clarifies the importance of this definition, explaining how it does not implicate "men as the enemy," but rather names sexism as

the problem that "is at the heart of the matter" (1). The definition is "broad enough to include systemic institutionalized sexism" as it incorporates people of all age, race, class, and sexual orientation, and recognizes that anyone can be a victim, or a perpetrator, of sexism (1). hooks' understanding of feminism is not exclusive to her work. As Pershing and Gablehouse explain, contemporary feminism focuses on inclusivity and "seeks to disrupt conventional masculine/feminine polarities, see other positions and identifications, and raise significant questions about issues of power and privilege, not only with regard to gender and sexuality but also race, ethnicity, class, culture, dis/ability, religion, and nationality" (151).

Contemporary feminism's emphasis on inclusivity stems from the concept of intersectionality, which first appeared in critical race theory and has become an important basis for contemporary feminism (Zack 2005). The concept was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw as a way of acknowledging the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience" that was often overlooked by "feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (139-40). Crenshaw analyzed court rulings with Black female plaintiffs, finding that courts unfairly viewed the plaintiffs' claims as either that of an African-American *or* that of a woman, and not as a subset of both. This demonstrated the larger issues of how "Black women are regarded either as too much like women or Blacks and the compounded nature of their experience is absorbed into the collective experiences of either group," or are regarded as "too different, in which case Black women's Blackness or femaleness sometimes has placed their needs and perspectives at the margin of feminist and Black liberationist agendas" (150).

Since Crenshaw's article, intersectionality has evolved to refer to the "multiple oppressions experienced by non-white and poor women in particular, but more generally to all

women because differences in sexuality, age, and physical ableness are also sites of oppression"
(Zack 7). Integrating the concept of intersectionality into feminist theory avoids essentialist
insistence that there is "a sameness about women that can be derived from theories based only on
the experiences of white middle-class women" (7). Indeed, intersectional feminism recognizes
"more fluid and shifting" categories, such as age, race, class, ableness, and sexual orientation, as
aspects of a woman's social identity and as various sites of oppression (Damant et al. 129).
Moreover, these categories "reflect existing power relations in our societies" and "acknowledge
the existence of multiple systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and
heterosexism" that women experience (129). By incorporating intersectional thought into
feminist theory, contemporary feminism acknowledges that sexism is a result of the
interconnected systems of oppression that affect various groups of women and is experienced
differently based on aspects of their social identity. Thus, feminism informed by intersectionality
recognizes that sexism manifests differently for everyone and seeks to eradicate the societal
problem as a whole, instead of for one individual group alone.

2.1.2   Defining Post-Feminism

Angela McRobbie defines post-feminism as a social and cultural "process by which
feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined… [T]hrough an
array of machinations, elements of contemporary popular culture are perniciously effective in
regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-
informed and even well-intended response to feminism" (McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*
15). Post-feminism is founded on the ideas spread by the mass media of the 1980s and 1990s
which declared feminism radical, out-dated, and obsolete, claiming that Western society has

moved beyond feminism to a "postfeminist era" in which women are equal, empowered, and have the same freedoms as men (Hall and Rodriguez 878; Gamble 36). This perspective of a postfeminist era boasts a new mode of womanhood where women have the social and financial autonomy to have successful careers, dress however they like, buy whatever they want, and have sexual relations with whomever they choose, as epitomized by popular culture like the musical group The Spice Girls and the television series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) (Gill, *Gender and the Media* 2007; Bae 2011).

Feminist scholars have widely criticized this idealistic portrayal of a postfeminist society as a "myth," stating that despite what mass media and popular culture portrays, "women continue to support feminism and find it relevant in their lives" (Hall and Rodriguez 899). Operating on the notion that feminism achieved its goals during the 1970s, post-feminism takes up elements of feminism and uses "a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice'" in order to establish itself as a "kind of substitute for feminism" which allows patriarchal social structures to continue under the guise of post-feminism (McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism* 7). Insisting that women have more agency than ever before, post-feminism shifts "The dynamics of regulation and control" so that the focus is "less about what young women ought not to do, and more about what they can do" (McRobbie, "Top Girls" 721). Indeed, post-feminism is "critical of any definition of women as victims who are unable to control their own lives," allowing patriarchy to prevail under the assertion that women have chosen contemporary gender roles and gendered social structures and are therefore empowered by them, whether the system is sexist or not (Gamble 36). Post-feminism operates within the framework of patriarchy; it does not challenge the current patriarchal structure, but rather offers ways for women to bargain or

appropriate whatever power they can muster from within the sexist and oppressive systems of society.

Critics of post-feminism, such as Rosalind Gill, McRobbie, and Susan Faludi have widely criticized post-feminism as a form of backlash and a patriarchal response to feminism's limited accomplishments during the second wave (Faludi 1991; Gill, *Gender and the Media* 2007; McRobbie 2009). However, as McRobbie (2007; 2009) and Gill ("Postfeminist media culture" 2007; 2016; 2017) have argued, post-feminism should not be viewed "solely as backlash" to the feminist movement as this focus does "not facilitate the possibility of seeing contradictions or entanglements in postfeminist discourses" (Gill, "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism" 607). Gill asserts that post-feminism is a "sensibility," a cultural object or phenomenon that should be "the *object of analysis* rather than— as it is sometimes [seemed] to be— a descriptive notion, an historical one or even (bizarrely) a scholarly perspective" (607). Analysing post-feminism as a sensibility "emphasizes the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes within them," allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of how post-feminism manifests in popular culture and society (Gill, "Postfeminist media culture" 147).

2.1.3   Defining Faux Feminism

In her article "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times" Gill examines the resurgence of feminist discourses, raising the questions "What place does the notion of postfeminism have at a moment in which feminism has seemingly become hip? Is postfeminism irrelevant in these new times? Are we now *post-postfeminism*?" (611). Gill argues that the recent rise of feminist discourses in contemporary media and culture is not indicative of

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post-feminism's departure from society and explains how post-feminism is still prevalent. These new "visible" forms of feminism occurring (such as feminist activism, neoliberal/corporate feminism, and style and celebrity feminisms) are neither post-feminism nor a part of the generational "waves" of feminisms (621). Gill asserts that while post-feminism is an important term in feminist scholarship, there is also a "need to make distinctions between different kinds of (mediated) feminism" (612).

While Gill does not name these different kinds of mediated feminism as faux feminism, the term is apt for the visible, mediated feminisms emerging in contemporary media and culture. As previously mentioned, faux feminism "assumes a feminist stance but offers a mass-mediated idea of feminism where individual women can be strong and achieve equality through personal actions that do not, however, challenge or change the underlying patriarchal structure of society" (Williams 101). While there is a limited amount of research that discusses faux feminism by name, scholars have been exploring the topic using other terms. As previously stated, faux feminism has also been referred to as pseudo-feminism (Marshall and Sensoy 2009; Gibson and Heyes 2014). Linda Pershing and Lisa Gablehouse found in their research on faux feminism that hooks refers to it in *Feminism is for Everybody* as "lifestyle feminism" (153), and Christy Williams, in her respective article on the subject, notes that Zipes explains faux feminist fairy-tale texts as tales that "pay lip service to feminism" in his book *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling* (109). While scholars have explored faux feminism by many different names, the overarching connection is how faux feminism is characterized by its narrow and simplified version of feminism that focuses on individual female strength and liberation, and fails to challenge the existing patriarchal structure

of society (Marshall and Sensoy 2009; Pershing and Gablehouse 2010; Williams 2010; hooks 2013; Gibson and Heyes 2014).

Faux feminism is often discussed in relation to corporate and political feminisms. In her review of Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead,* hooks explains how neoliberal feminism masquerades as feminism ("Dig Deep"). Focusing on the individualistic empowerment of women in the corporate workforce, neoliberal feminism maintains that if a woman is willing to endure the obstacles, she can balance work and family while being equal to men (Rottenberg 2014). Neoliberal feminism therefore transforms "gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair," asserting that woman can achieve equality within the current structures of society if they try (Rottenberg 420). Indeed, hooks calls this "brand of women's liberation *faux feminism,*" explaining how neoliberal feminism ignores intersectionality and the existence of patriarchy, speaking only to the white, heteronormative, upper-class women who could potentially endure "the imperial white supremacist capitalist patriarchal corporate world" ("Dig Deep").

Similarly, in an article examining conservative feminism and Sarah Palin's book *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith, and the Flag,* Katie L. Gibson and Amy L. Heyse explore how Palin inserts women in the myth of the American frontier in order to present her conservative views as feminist values. Through a rhetorical analysis, Gibson and Heyse find that Palin's conservative feminism "refuses to acknowledge" patriarchal structures and the many different ways in which women face oppression (113). Using a "pseudo feminist rhetoric," conservative feminism masks the "topoi of individualism and essentialism" at its core, seeking to legitimize its political beliefs as empowering to women. However, as Gibson and Heyse (2014) and hooks (*Feminism is for Everybody* 2000), explain, this notion that one can be an advocate for

feminism despite conflicting political beliefs is deeply problematic because "its underlying assumption is that women can be feminists without fundamentally challenging and changing themselves or the culture" (*Feminism is for Everybody* 5-6).

Another area where faux feminism is visible is in films, specifically those of the fairy-tale genre. In their article, "The same old hocus-pocus: pedagogies of gender and sexuality in *Shrek 2*," Elizabeth Marshall and Ölzem Sensoy argue how underneath the guise of Princess Fiona's "girl power" moments, the film conveys normative messages about gender and white, heterosexual romance. While the *Shrek* franchise has been widely regarded as progressive for its humorous subversions of fairy-tale and Disney conventions, Marshall and Sensoy explain how, through the character of Princess Fiona, "*Shrek 2* teaches a very familiar lesson about romance and femininity" (155). While Fiona rejects superficial needs, "speaks her mind, is physically strong and practices martial arts," she does so only "to compete for, and ultimately keep, her man" (155). Moreover, her "girl power" moments do not liberate herself (or others) from traditional gender roles and gendered social structures as she does not subvert heteronormative ideals of femininity and romance, and she does not challenge the patriarchal structures of her fairy-tale world. *Shrek 2* places Fiona's mainstream "girl power" at the forefront of the film, distracting viewers from the conventional gender roles and gendered social structures elsewhere in the film (159).

The same faux feminist approach to "girl power" is established in the film *Ever After: a Cinderella Story.* As Christy Williams outlines in her article "The Shoe Still Fits: *Ever After* and the Pursuit of a Feminist Cinderella," *Ever After* takes the traditionally passive character Cinderella and revisions her into the spirited character Danielle, who rescues servants, climbs rocks, saves the prince, and bargains her way out of slavery with her sword skills. However, as

Williams explains, despite her "girl power" and "masculine" behaviours, Danielle is not as liberated as she appears, as "she is so embedded in the naturalized complex of gender, class, political power, and upward mobility that any power she may wield as a strong feminist is restricted by the patriarchal authority" of the men in her life and her conformity to the obligatory, heterosexual fairy-tale ending (114). Both Danielle and Fiona from *Shrek 2* represent a "distilled" version of feminism in which "demonstrations of female strength are akin to gender equality" and there are no challenges or critiques of society's social structures (114).

An important commonality between the aforementioned body of scholarship on faux feminism, whether it be about politics or films, is that the researchers do not engage in what Marshall and Sensoy aptly call the "fault-finding strategy," as in, naming a particular person or "the contents of media or popular culture as the problem," instead of examining the "larger discursive networks" of oppression at hand (161; 162). The problem faux feminism presents is not contained within an individual person or text. Rather, "It is [the] patriarchal male dominated re-framing of feminism… that is most disturbing and yes threatening to the future of visionary feminist movement" (hooks, "Dig Deep"). Faux feminism contributes to the sexist, patriarchal structures of society and does not advocate for equality as it reaffirms gender roles and gendered social structures. By focusing on faux feminism as a greater cultural object or phenomenon, scholarly research seeks "to open up spaces to examine the symbolic functions of how girls and women are represented in cultural texts, how femininity as a category is tied to the larger discursive networks, and what those constructions mean in any particular moment/context" (Marshall and Sensoy 162).

2.2   Disney's Fairy-tale Films

Throughout the Walt Disney Company's long history of producing fairy-tale films, scholars have examined the reoccurring gender stereotypes and gendered social structures that can be expected with each film, especially with Disney's princess films. Disney princesses live within patriarchal, male-centered social structures, as the films portray fantasy worlds where the purpose of women and nature is to serve heroic men. Moreover, the princesses themselves are often young heroines defined by their beauty and domestic abilities. While the company has developed more dynamic princess characters over time who possess distinguishable personality traits and skill sets, many scholars are unconvinced that the company has abandoned its traditions and begun creating positive role models. The following literature review will examine the patriarchal world of Disney before exploring the three generations of princess films and the evolution of the Disney princess character.

2.2.1   The Patriarchal World of Disney

Despite the majority of Disney's animated fairy-tale films' centering around the lives of young heroines, the realm of a Disney film is undoubtedly a man's world. An important social structure in Disney films is the hierarchy that places men above all other people and non-human beings. Scholars like Kay Stone (1975), Jack Zipes (1995), and Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix (2010) have criticized Disney's use of cute animals, singing beings, and pretty worlds to sanitize the "powerful fantasy" of fairy tales and replace it with "false magic" (K. Stone 44). Disney films are filled with subservient beings and anthropomorphized animals who act as "helpers" who aid the prince or heroine through song, dance, and comedic relief. These helpers are predominantly male characters, not only creating a predominantly male cast, but also often

replacing female characters existing in the source texts. As Regina Bendix exemplifies in her article on *The Little Mermaid* (1989), "Disney eliminates two important female characters (grandmother and bride), and deemphasizes the role of the sisters; in turn, Disney adds animals and human characters, and those who carry major action and dialogue are all male" (285).

While it may seem that the function of these non-human helpers is to serve humans in general, Patrick D. Murphy explains that Disney's androcentrism is purely patriarchal: "It is not simply that humans are conceptualized as the center of the universe, but rather that men are the universal center... women and nature remain ready to serve them, no matter how messy they may be, since women are a domesticating and civilizing presence and non-human nature is a resource pool to provide beasts of burden" (128). The heroines of Disney films act in service to the men by maintaining passive and domestic roles that allow the men to become the hero of the tale, while non-human helpers act as trusty sidekicks or informant that are never equal to the men they answer to. If a helper is aiding the heroine, it is either to assist her so she succeeds in her domestic duties, to advise her on how to civilize her man, or to usher the woman into (or back into) the domestic realm by guiding them to marriage (Giroux 1999). Indeed, the animals and non-human beings are ultimately serving the male hero of the film by helping the woman actualize their domestic roles, creating a societal structure and patriarchal utopia that centers on the advancement of men and their heroic endeavours.

The androcentric structure of each Disney film also places male characters at the center of the film, even in a princess movie. In his influential article "Breaking the Disney Spell," Zipes illustrates how from the company's beginnings, Walt Disney adapted fairy tales into films that celebrated "the triumph of the banished and the underdogs," and in doing so "perpetuated a male myth throughout his fairy-tale films" which spoke to the working class of

America with messages of hard work and perseverance ("Breaking the Disney Spell" 37).

Starting with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney adapted the Grimms' tale into a narrative

that turns the princess into a "helpless ornament in need of protection" (37). The film shifts

the tale's focus towards the dwarfs, who, through their hard work "are able to maintain a world of

justice and restore harmony to the world," and towards the romantic prince who heroically

ventures into the woods and saves Snow White with a kiss (37). The success of *Snow White* set

a precedent for future Disney animated films with many of Disney's films following a similar

male-centered plot structure. Despite producing films about the trials and tribulations of

princesses, Disney's films ultimately glorify the determined, hardworking, and persevering

men whose efforts maintain and restore social order.

2.2.2   The Classics Era (1937 – 1959)

The Walt Disney Company has been widely criticized by scholars for choosing to adapt

fairy tales that feature young, beautiful, and passive heroines. Scholars such as Kay Stone

(1975), Betsy Hearne (1997), Jacqueline M. Layng (2001), and Celeste C. Lacroix (2012) have

examined how the female heroines of Disney's animated fairy-tale films are consistently young,

innocent heroines who are valued for their beauty, passivity, and domesticity. Even Alison Lurie

(1971) and Marcia R. Lieberman (1972), who widely disagree about whether fairy tales are

liberating for women, are unified in their criticisms of Disney for choosing to showcase some of

the most passive, domestic female protagonists from fairy tales and for popularizing such

depictions of young women.

Disney's representation of young heroines as innocent and passive is especially true in

the company's first three princess films, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)*, Cinderella*

(1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Created under Walt Disney's supervision, and often referred to as "Walt's girls," Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora are all young beauties who are far more demure and inactive than those in the Grimms' and Perrault tales, as well as any other Disney film released between 1937-1967 (K. Stone 1975; Davis 2011). Moreover, despite their varying physical appearances and voice actresses, Walt's girls are nearly interchangeable as each princess has the same personality traits and story arc (Davis 2011). As Zipes ("Breaking the Disney Spell" 1995), Layng (2001), and Amy Davis (2011) assert, each princess is a innocent, graceful, kind, and musically-talented young girl who is unfairly persecuted by a middle-aged femme fatale and saved from their predicament by a prince. Each heroine seems "barely alive" and spends the height of the film's conflict asleep, locked in a tower, or in Aurora's case, both (K. Stone 44). As scholars such as Lisa Brocklebank (2000), Layng (2001), and Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario (2004) argue, the only time these princesses exhibit agency or self-determination is when performing domestic duties, which reflect and reaffirm the North American feminine ideal of the domestic housewife during the 1930s and 1950s. The films of the classics era conveyed the message that "Women's proper place, just like it is for Snow White, [is] in the home," and the popularity of these films set a precedent for the Disney princess genre moving forward (Layng 204).

2.2.3   The Renaissance Era (1989 – 1998)

Disney's second generation of princess films, sometimes referred to as the "renaissance" era or the "Eisner" era (after CEO Michael Eisner), spans from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) to *Mulan* (1998). These films offer more contemporary approaches to princesses than the earlier films. Influenced by second-wave feminism (Sells 1995), the princesses of these films, although

young, innocent, and beautiful like their predecessors, are also daring, intelligent, and yearn for something more than only romance. However, scholars have found that despite introducing more distinguishable personality traits to the princess characters, the films still contain sexist gender roles as the young heroines move from their father's care to their prince's, and abandon their ambitions in order to conform to heteronormative romance narratives and domestic life.

In their respective analyses of *The Little Mermaid,* Roberta Trites (1991), Bendix (1993), and Laura Sells (1995) find that despite her "spunky behavior" and teenage disregard for her father's rules, Ariel's determination to live on land is motivated by her love for Prince Eric and she "is willing to give up her identity as mermaid and singer" to be with him (Bendix 288). In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Belle's intelligence and love of reading is undermined by her very name which objectifies her in the eyes of Gaston, the townsfolk, and the audience (Sumera 2008). Belle sacrifices her dreams of the wider world beyond her small provincial town first to rescue her father and again to save her captor and eventual lover, the Beast, whom she spends the duration of the film civilizing dutifully in his secluded castle (Giroux1995; Murphy 1995; Hearne 1997). Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin* (1992) also yearns for life and adventure beyond her limited living situation, dreaming of life beyond the palace walls and a marriage founded on love. However, as Erin Addison (1993) and Layng (2001) state, Jasmine's feisty attitude and "moments of self-assertion are always ineffectual, and frequently contradicted altogether" (Addison 13). Despite her insistence that she is "not a prize to be won" (*Aladdin,* 00:53:50-00:53:53), Jasmine's economic status and sexualized body are passed between the orientalised, Anglo-Arab villain Jafar, who wishes to marry her for political power, to the Americanized Aladdin, who marries her for love and economic gain, climbing from "street rat" to prince of Agrabah (Addison 1993; Layng 2001).

The eponymous characters of *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998), although not technically "princesses" due to cultural difference, have been brought into the princess pantheon for merchandising purposes (Lester 2010; Sweeney 2011; Pershing and Gablehouse 2010; Dundes and Streiff 2016). Although their stories do not end in marriage, both Mulan and Pocahontas follow the same patterns as their princess predecessors. As scholars such as Giroux (1999), Brocklebank (2000), and Lauren Dundes (2001) have noted, Pocahontas, although courageous and politically minded, is guided by her relationships with her father and John Smith, and her heroic self-sacrifice to save John Smith "seems to be a means for her to continue her budding romance" rather than to bring peace between the battling groups (Dundes 256). Moreover, the film sanitizes the romantic tale of the genocidal history of colonialism, as the film makes no mention of "the fact that John Smith's countrymen would ultimately ruin Pocahontas's land, bring disease, death, and poverty to her people, and eventually destroy their religion, economic livelihood, and way of life" (Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared* 101-2).

In 1998, Disney released *Mulan,* which is not only problematic for its "deeply flawed mimicry of a number of facets of Chinese culture," but also for the film's central romantic plotline that did not exist in the Chinese ballad (Dundes and Streiff 3). In Disney's version, Mulan, who seemingly rejects traditional gender roles by successfully impersonating a male soldier, does so out of concern her father, and, when offered to serve China as a high-level council member for her heroics, turns down the Emperor's offer in order to return home to her traditional, domestic place as dutiful daughter and to her budding romance with Shang (Dundes and Streiff 2016; Limbach 2014). In summary, while the princesses of Disney's renaissance era can be described as spunky, smart, feisty, courageous, and even heroic, these added traits "are not necessarily evidence of self-determination and a more enlightened view of gender roles," as

their self-sacrificing actions are motivated by their fathers or partners, and their dreams are abandoned for marriage and domestic duty (Bendix 288).

2.2.4   The Modern Era (2009 – Present)

Disney's third and contemporary era of animated fairy-tale films features princesses who seem to have evolved past their predecessors as they actively achieve their dreams through their own skills and determination; In *Princess and the Frog,* Tiana works multiple jobs and braves the Bayou of New Orleans so she can own a restaurant; Rapunzel in *Tangled* (2010) escapes her tower to pursue her lifelong dream of seeing the lanterns on her birthday; *Brave*'s Merida defies her mother's insistence she marry young by winning her own hand through her archery skills; sisters Anna and Elsa of *Frozen* traverse Arendelle's winter to find the love they've dreamed of in the form of sisterly friendship; and the eponymous character of *Moana* pursues her dream of sailing the ocean to save her island. However, despite these princesses independently achieving their goals, scholars are at odds about whether these princesses are indicative of a new and improved Disney.

In their quantitative study of gender compliments in Disney princess films, linguists Carmen Fought and Karen Eisenhauer found that Disney's modern era of princess films compliment (and therefore value) their princesses more for their skills and accomplishments than for their appearances for the first time in Disney history (qtd. in Guo "Researchers have found a major problem with 'The Little Mermaid' and other Disney movies"). Of the various compliment categories, Disney's most recent princess films have an average of forty percent of compliments focusing on skill, as opposed to the renaissance era's twenty-three percent, and the classics era's dismal eleven percent (qtd. in Guo "Researchers have found a major problem with 'The Little

Mermaid' and other Disney movies"). Scholars such as Jena Stephens (2014) and Katie Kapurch (2017) have argued that Rapunzel and Merida successfully challenge Disney's princess archetypes as they continually save themselves and those around them from danger with their skills, and even subvert post-feminist beauty ideals with their unruly hair.

However, much of the research on Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* and *Frozen* argues opposing conclusions, finding that while the films feature princesses who are more skilled and self-determined, the films still have problematic, sexist content. In their respective studies of *The Princess and the Frog*, Ajay Gehlawat (2010), Sarita McCoy Gregory (2010), Neal A. Lester (2010), Kimberly R. Moffitt and Heather E. Harris (2014), and Lauren Dundes and Madeline Streiff (2016) find that while Disney's inclusion of an African-American princess role model is important, the film is problematic for its idyllic depictions of interracial friendships in 1920s New Orleans, and Tiana's transition from "hardworking girl, to frog, and finally to hardworking cook and restaurant owner…is neither an ending consistent with princess fantasies" ascribed to white princesses, "nor demonstrative of personal growth or transformation" (Dundes and Streiff 11).

Scholars have also found negative gender representations in *Frozen* despite audiences praising the film as Disney's first feminist film. As Maja Rudloff (2016) and Streiff and Dundes ("Frozen in Time" 2017) state, while the film promotes a positive message about the power of sisterly love and familial bonds, Anna's story line largely revolves around a love triangle with Prince Hans and the iceman Kristoff. Not only that, but Queen Elsa's powerful moment of self-acceptance is a post-feminist transformation. Elsa "lets go" of her conservative clothing and rigid demeanour in order to embrace her magic powers through a makeover and carefree attitude (Rudloff 2016).

Disney's most recent princess film *Moana* is also problematic, not only for its appropriation of Polynesian culture but also for Moana's conflict with her father. Despite the company's highly publicized collaboration with Polynesian artists to ensure authenticity, *Moana* presents a Disneyfied, westernized version of Polynesian music by consolidating traditional Polynesian sounds with Broadway and western Symphony orchestra sounds (Armstrong 2018). As a result, the film uses one of its most important elements "as a tool that pushes a colonial agenda under a patina of cultural authenticity" (Armstrong 1). Streiff and Dundes state how Moana's relationship to her father echoes those of her princess predecessors, Pocahontas and Ariel, as her adventurous nature clashes with her overprotective father through psychoanalytic conflicts and imagery, creating an Electra theme ("From Shapeshifters to Lava Monsters" 2017). Streiff and Dundes' conclude that Moana's Electra relationship with her father undermines her independence; however, their examination is limited. While Armstrong and Streiff and Dundes' research suggests that Moana continues Disney's tradition of problematic representations of gender in other cultures, the film requires more research.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about Disney's ongoing modern era of princess films as a whole because the princesses cannot all be painted with the same brush. Although many studies have been conducted, researchers are divided about the trajectory of Disney's princess line, with some scholars finding certain third generation princesses as indicators of change, and others disputing that the company is continuing traditions. However, as this literature review demonstrates, Disney has a long and problematic history of sexist representations of women, and while Disney's approach to princess characters has slowly shifted with each film era, the company appears to have a long way to go before they reach a "feminist" era.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1   Textual Analysis

Content analysis "has often been used in feminist research to provide a measure of the kinds of roles in which men and women appear in on TV or the kinds of traits they are represented as possessing" (Gill, *Gender and the Media* 45). A common method of content analysis for feminist researchers studying popular culture and representations of gender is textual analysis. One of the ways in which people receive knowledge about the social world is through texts. Simply defined, texts are social and cultural artifacts "we make meaning from" and are produced at particular times and "for particular reasons, speaking to particular audiences in particular ways" (McKee 4; 89). Creators of texts, whether they are individuals or companies, transpose their knowledge and understandings of the world into their text. Audiences then interpret the content and form their own meanings. Texts therefore reflect and create cultural knowledge, including understandings of the social world and notions of gender, such as what it means to be feminine or masculine.

Analysing texts can be an informative method for understanding constructions of gender and "the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world in which they live" (McKee 1). More specifically, analysing children's texts demonstrates how people begin forming understandings of their gender identity and place in the world at a young age through the texts they consume. Giroux calls Disney films "teaching machines" as they "possess at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching roles, values and ideals as more traditional sites of learning, such as the public schools, religious institutions, and the family" (*The Mouse that Roared* 84). Therefore, textual analysis of Disney films can explain what gender messages these "machines" are teaching.

For this reason, I used textual analysis and the method of close reading from a feminist perspective to analyze *Maleficent* and its source texts. During the close reading process "a critic zeroes in on certain features of the text he has noticed and responded to and makes an argument based on his ideas about what he's noticed. A good close reading… shows us something about what [features of a work] may mean, and opens it up for critical debate" (Federico 6). My examination focuses on representations of gender within the selected texts in order to determine how patriarchal knowledge of the social world is being taught to young audiences through *Maleficent* and its source texts.

3.2   Theoretical Framework: Adaptation Theory

Integrating adaptation theory into my textual analysis provided a critical framework for examining the intricate relationships between adaptations, their source texts, and the societies in which they were created. Adaptation theory does not focus on an adaptation's "fidelity" to its source text (Hutcheon 2006; Leitch 2008), but rather explores the interconnected "dialogue between the society in which the works, both the adapted text and adaptation, are produced and that in which they are received, and both are in dialogue with the works themselves" (Hutcheon 149). Zipes offers the terminology "duplicates" and "revisions" to help unpack the intricate discourse of "mores, values, gender and power" with fairy tales, adaptations, and their societies (*Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* 8). According to Zipes, "duplicates" are adaptations that take up a classic fairy tale and "reproduce a set pattern of ideas and images that reinforce a traditional way of seeing, believing, and behaving" (9). "Revisions" are adaptations that aim to "create something new that incorporates the critical and creative thinking of the producer and corresponds to changed demands and tastes of audiences" (9). Adaptations that are duplicates

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confirm the "traditional and socially conservative" values and worldviews of the original fairy tale, whereas revisions seek to alter the "reader's views of traditional patterns, images and codes" (9).

While duplicate and revision are useful terms that can apply to many adaptations, Zipes' terminology has been "found wanting or limited when applied to specific texts" because it does not account for adaptations that are metatextual or for adaptations that in some instances duplicate and in others revise (Blankier 113). Not all adaptations are explicitly settled in one category or the other, especially multimedia texts that can, for example, use one media to duplicate and another to revise (for examples see Blankier 2014). However, Zipes' terminology is not impractical due to these limitations and is valuable if the use of the terms is slightly altered. Instead of using duplicate and revision to classify the adaptation in its entirety, I have modified Zipes' terminology to describe instances of plot, characterization, imagery, motifs, etc. within an adaptation that are duplicates or revisions of the source text's patterns, images, and codes. For my research, duplicates refer to instances that reproduce and reinforce traditional and conservative ways of seeing gender. Revisions refer to moments that alter or challenge the representations of gender from the source texts. Adjusting Zipes' terminology to focus on nuanced instances of adaptation allows for a more precise examination that acknowledges the intricacies of story adaptation and helped uncover how slight changes are part of the greater dialogue about gender occurring between *Maleficent,* its source texts, and the societies for which they were created.

First, I analyzed Perrault's seventeenth-century fairy tale "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." Conducting a close reading, I focused on representations of gender and gendered social structures within the tale and identifying those that are sexist from a modern perspective. The

sexist representations were explored alongside the historical and social context of Perrault's tale in order to examine how the tales reflect and reinforce the traditional gender values of the seventeenth-century French salons for which the tale was intended.

Next, I analyzed the 1950s animated film *Sleeping Beauty* in relation to Perrault's tale. Similar to the close reading of the literary fairy tale, I identified representations of gender and gendered social structures in the film. Once identified, these instances were compared to those in the Perrault tale to determine if the patriarchal and sexist representations in the animated film were duplicates or revisions of those found in the source text. Notions of gender and femininity in 1950s American society were examined in order to explore how duplicates signify continuing traditional ideas of gender from the seventeenth century, and how revisions indicate changes in gender values and norms in the 1950s. Through this analysis, my study explores the intricate dialogues between the animated film, the Perrault tale, and the societies for which they were created.

The same process was conducted with *Maleficent*. First, I identified representations of gender and gendered social structures in the live-action film. Then I compared them to those in the source texts and determined which representations in *Maleficent* are duplicates and which are revisions. The feminist revisions were evaluated against the sexist duplicates, assessing whether the film's content is more inherently feminist or patriarchal, determining whether the film is a feminist or faux feminist text. All three texts and their respective societies were examined, exploring the continuing dialogue of patriarchal gender values and norms across all texts in order to establish how *Maleficent* breaks from tradition and if these changes are indeed "a result of transformed values" of gender in contemporary North American society (Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* 9). Finally, the messages conveyed to audiences about the gender roles

and gendered structures of contemporary society were explored in order to examine how children's texts inform young audiences about their identity and place in the social world.

Chapter 4: "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" by Charles Perrault

4.1 Charles Perrault and his Fairy Tales

Charles Perrault (1628 – 1703) was a French poet and a courtier during the reign of King Louis XIV. Perrault was born into a wealthy Parisian family and dedicated his life to furthering the education and culture of the bourgeoisie. He was among the first members of the Académie Française, a prestigious and authoritative council concerned with matters of the French language (Zarucchi 2007). Throughout his career, Perrault wrote many politically motivated poems praising the King and those close to him. In 1687, Perrault wrote "Le Siècle de Louis le Grand" ("The Age of Louis the Great"), a poem in which he favourably compared King Louis XIV to Alexander the Great, and claimed that, due to King Louis' enlightened rule, all modern politics, science, and art, were superior to those from antiquity (Wood 440-1). Perrault's poem sparked La Querrelles des Anciens et des Modernes (the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns), a heated debate that lasted several years, and extended beyond the Académie Française into England, about whether the arts and culture of Ancient Greece were superior or inferior to contemporary creations (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* 169). Perrault was a leading voice for the Moderns, and his position within the debate has become his secondary claim to fame, with his fairy tales taking precedence.

In 1697, Perrault published *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mere l'Oye* (*Stories or Tales from Times Past, with Morals: Tales of Mother Goose*). Also known as *Tales of Mother Goose*, the small collection contained only eight tales, including what would become some of the world's most well-known fairy tales, such as " Cendrillon; ou, la Petite Pantoufle de Verre" ("Cinderella; or, the Glass Slipper"), " Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" ("Little Red Riding Hood"), "Le Maistre Chat; ou, le Chat Botté" ("The

Master Cat; or, Puss in Boots"), and, of course, "La Belle au Bois Dormant" ("The Sleeping

Beauty in the Wood"). Although considered original works, Perrault's collection adapted tales

from oral tradition, the Italian tales of Giambattista Basile and Giovanni Francesco Straparola,

and the stories of his contemporary female writers Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy and Marie-Jeanne

L'Héritier (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 29; *Happily Ever After* 3).

Writing at a time when authors were beginning to concern themselves with the rearing of

children, Perrault was among the first to write fairy tales for both adults and children (Zipes

2006). More specifically, Perrault created his collection to entertain and instruct members of the

bourgeoisie and aristocratic classes in seventeenth-century France (Zipes 2006). This is evident

not only from the content of Perrault's tales, but also from the paratexts of *Tales of Mother

Goose*, which incorporated the names of two young members of the aristocratic class. The

collection was originally published using Perrault's seventeen-year-old son Pierre's name,

signifying that Perrault's collection was intended for an audience younger than his previous

political poems (Zarucchi 2007). Also, the collection included a dedication to King Louis XIV's

twenty-one-year-old niece, Elisabeth-Charlotte d'Orléans (Zarucchi 2007). This dedication to a

member of the royal family established early into the collection that Perrault intended his tales to

morally advise even the most elite members of France's youth. While Perrault's collection was

indeed popular with its intended audience of aristocratic adults and children, later publications,

as well as an English translation published by Robert Samber in 1729, made the tales far more

popular and universal than Perrault could have ever imagined.

Perrault designed his tales to captivate young audiences with heroism, fantasy, and

romance, while simultaneously demonstrating behaviours, manners, and beliefs deemed suitable

for bourgeois and aristocratic children through characters and morals. For girls, the stories

provided models of ideal femininity, rewarding young female characters who are patient and modest, and penalizing those who are not. As for his male audience, Perrault's characters instructed them how to behave by exemplifying bravery, resourcefulness, and intelligence. For example, in the tale "Riquet à la Houppe" ("Ricky of the Tuft") (ATU 711), Ricky wins the heart of a beautiful princess through his wit, charm, and determination despite his ugly appearance. In "The Master Cat; or, Puss in Boots" (ATU 545B), the youngest son is rewarded with a princess and a castle for putting his faith in a crafty and quick-witted male cat. As Marina Warner aptly observes, Perrault enjoyed "having it both ways" with his literary fairy tales: his writing was funny, charming, and full of levity, yet sophisticated and serious with moral didacticism (*From the Beast to the Blonde* 142). Indeed, at the end of each tale, Perrault included a verse moral outlining the particular message his tale was meant to teach. Some of the tales even include a second moral, to either playfully reiterate the first, or emphasize a second, less obvious meaning of the tale. While Perrault may have written tales that charm and entertain children with talking animals and wicked ogres, he was "most sincere in his intentions to improve the minds and manners of young people" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 31).

The significance of the moral messages in Perrault's tales is evident when comparing which tales have become popular and which have fallen out of circulation. From *Tales of Mother Goose,* five of the tales are canonical within their tale type and have been continuously retold and adapted: "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," "Little Red Riding Hood," "La Barbe Bleüe" ("Blue Beard"), "Cinderella; or, the Glass Slipper," and "The Master Cat; or, Puss in Boots." While tales can become popular for a variety of reasons, a commonality amongst these tales is their ability to effectively convey Perrault's moralistic messages with strong narratives, memorable characters, and relevant moral verses. While the other three tales, "Les Fées" ("The

Fairies"), "Ricky of the Tuft", and "Le petit Pouçet" ("Little Thumb"), are not unknown, they are far less commonly told and adapted. Moreover, these lesser tales do not deliver their didactic messages with the same narrative clarity or moral fervour as the more popular tales. For example, "The Fairies" (ATU 480), sometimes known as "Diamonds and Toads," tells the tale of a beautiful girl who helps an old fairy and is rewarded for her kindness with jewels that fall from her mouth every time she speaks. While the story conveys the importance of kindness, "The Fairies" is lesser known in comparison to "Cinderella; or, the Glass Slipper," which teaches young girls the same moral, as well as other important female virtues, with a more engaging plot line. In the tale "Ricky of the Tuft," Ricky's female counterpart is a daft princess who is rewarded with Ricky's virtues despite having done little to better herself. While her dimwittedness is important to convey the story's message that love has the power to change people, her unintelligence inadvertently clashes with the model of femininity Perrault advocates elsewhere in his other tales. Lastly, "Little Thumb" (ATU 327B), a subset of the same tale type as the Grimms' better known "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327A), follows the morally questionable Little Thumb, who, in the second half of the tale, escapes an ogre by arranging the filicide of the ogre's children, only to return later to rob the household as well. Moreover, the tale's moral verse pardons Little Thumb's antics as fairy-tale pluckiness and warns parents against underestimating their atypical children, making the tale an unlikely candidate for audiences wishing to shape the behaviours of young children. While these three tales have merit within the fairy-tale genre, they do not possess the same succinct moral clarity that Perrault's other tales have. The contrast between Perrault's popular and lesser-known tales demonstrates how Perrault's fairy tales were valued for their execution of his moralistic intentions.

Perrault's fairy tales have become important works of literary history. However, Perrault's contributions to the fairy tale genre are often exaggerated. As Zipes clarifies, Perrault is frequently acknowledged for creating the literary fairy tale "vogue" that should be accredited to his contemporaneous female writers, "who founded the genre and played a more dynamic role in establishing the fairy tale" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 31). While female writers like d'Aulnoy and L'Héritier had previously published fairy tales and wrote more ingenious tales, Perrault's were far more popular and widespread due to a combination of his skilful writing, his position as a member of the Académie Française, and the advantages of being a male in seventeenth-century France (31). Nonetheless, Perrault's own contributions to the genre are substantial, as his didactic approach "shap[ed] folklore into an exquisite literary form and endow[ed] it with an earnest and moral purpose to influence the behaviour of adults and children in a tasteful way" (31). Perrault's tales demonstrated how fairy-tale characters and plots could successfully convey behavioural and moralistic messages for children. Moreover, he demonstrated the educational and utilitarian potential of children's literature, inspiring many others to write fairy tales or fantasy instilled with didacticism. While he may not have created the literary fairy tale movement, Perrault popularized a didactic approach to fairy tales that would become popular amongst folklorists and influence the future of children's literature.

4.2   "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (ATU 410) and Inherent Gender Roles

In his article "Kiss and Tell: Orality, Narrative, and the Power of Words in 'Sleeping Beauty'," folklorist Donald Haase observes how the tale of Sleeping Beauty is inherently gendered. Haase discusses the Aarne-Thompson classification system and how, when distilled into "such a sparse synopsis," Sleeping Beauty (ATU 410) becomes a tale that is fundamentally

entangled with gendered roles: "It is no accident that the reception history of the Sleeping Beauty story has focused on the canonical versions by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, and that those canonical tales have influenced the Aarne-Thompson description, which almost insists that the tale type be understood in gendered terms—that the story is first and foremost about female dependence on a male rescuer" ("Kiss and Tell"). Indeed, Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and the Grimms' "Briar Rose" tell of a sleeping princess who waits one hundred years for a prince to rescue her. While details, such as a frog announcing her birth or whether the prince kisses her, vary, the basic plot structure remains the same, as exemplified in the wording of the ATU description: "The king's daughter falls into a magic sleep. A prince breaks through the hedge surrounding the castle and disenchants the maiden" (Aarne and Thompson 137). Moreover, the language of the tale type classification is undoubtedly gendered and prescribes the story's gendered roles, as the victim of the spell is "The king's daughter", "the princess" or "the maiden," while her rescuer is "A prince" (Aarne and Thompson 137-8). The canonical versions and the tale type description inscribe "the male-rescuer archetype; in other words, they constitute a well-known corpus of tales where the rescuing agent is constantly presented as male, thus conveying the idea that the redeemer is naturally a man" (Rodriguez 52). In fact, the only requirement of the rescuer, both in the curse cast by the fairy and in the plot structure, is that he is a prince. The young fairy's spell demands that "a king's son will come to wake her" in one hundred years (Perrault 45). One hundred years later, the prince only has to arrive at the right time to be "the first prince who happens down the highway, penetrates the thorny barriers, and arrives *deus ex machina* to release her from the charmed captivity" (Rowe 352). There is no dragon for him to kill, no witch to outsmart, no heroic task to complete: "All he has to do is to

come at the right time… to choose the moment when the time is ripe is essentially a hero deed" (Travers 69).

Perrault's prince in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" proves this perhaps most of all, as he saves the day by arriving at the right time, not once, but twice. The first time is when he arrives at Sleeping Beauty's castle and breaks the sleeping curse. The second is when he comes home from war unannounced, causing his ogress mother, having been caught in the act of trying to cook his wife and children, to throw herself into the vat she was preparing. It is not the prince's actions that impact these situations as he does not kiss the princess or fight the ogress. It is simply his presence that saves the day. To be a prince and to arrive on time is all that is required of him to be the hero of the tale.

The tale of Sleeping Beauty's inscription of the male-rescuer archetype becomes more apparent when other folktales within the tale type are considered, whether they precede or follow the canonical versions. In the lesser-known Grimms' tale, "The Glass Coffin," the rescuer is a tailor and the sleeper is the daughter of a rich count. In other versions of ATU 410, the rescuer is also consistently male, and usually a prince or a figure of similar nobility. He is a knight in the Medieval Pre-Arthurian Romance *Perceforest,* a king in Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia," a soldier in the Italian "The Neapolitan Soldier," a prince in the Egyptian/*Arabian Nights* "The Ninth Captain's Tale," and a prince in the Bengal folktale "The Petrified Mansion." As for the sleepers in these tales, the one who needs rescuing is always a female, more specifically a princess. Whether canonical or not, the story of Sleeping Beauty (ATU 410) is at its folkloric core a tale that perpetuates the male-rescuer archetype by consistently casting males as rescuers and women as victims in need of saving.

Not only does the tale uphold the male-rescuer archetype, but it also perpetuates the archetype of the innocent persecuted heroine. Steven Swann Jones (1993) outlines the similar generic plot structure of fairy tales that feature young, passive heroines who are wrongfully and persistently victimized. Jones explains that the plot structure of the genre is comprised of three "Acts," with each tale containing at least two, if not all, of the acts: In Act I "the heroine is persecuted or threatened in her family home," in Act II "The heroine is attacked, interfered with, or otherwise abused in her attempt to be married," and in Act III "the heroine is displaced, slandered, or calumniated after she has given birth to children" (Jones 17). Each act represents a different stage in the young girl's life (childhood, young adulthood, and motherhood) and the relationships and perils they may experience at that time (16; 23). In the case of Sleeping Beauty, Jones finds that the tale contains both Acts I and II. Act I includes the very beginning of tale, as the princess is threatened in her family home, being cursed as a child to prick her finger on the spindle (18). Act II takes place in the first half of the tale and the princess' young adulthood, when the prince must rescue the princess from her enchantment before she can be married (18).

Jones' structuralist analysis focuses on the Aarne-Thompson descriptions of tales and not specific versions. Therefore, his analysis is unable to account for the second half of Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," which does include Act III of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine genre plot structure. Jones does acknowledge the possible presence of Act III in his discussion of the act itself: "In Act Three the heroine is persecuted in her husband's home, sometimes in connection with her giving birth to children, sometimes simply as a part of her domestic life there… almost any of the tale types of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine genre may have this third act appended to specific versions" (Jones 34). Indeed, Perrault's specific version has a second half where Sleeping Beauty faces further persecution, this time in the home of her

husband and in her third stage of life, motherhood. Unprotected by the prince's presence as he's off at war, Sleeping Beauty and her children are subjected to the tyranny of her mother-in-law, the Queen mother, who wishes to eat them for dinner due to her ogress appetite. Sleeping Beauty is then rescued from the ogress' persecution when the prince arrives home and all is right in the end. Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is an exemplar tale of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine genre, as this version thoroughly completes all three acts. As a character, Sleeping Beauty is indeed an innocent persecuted heroine, facing continuous harm in all three stages of her life, having brought none of it onto herself. While Sleeping Beauty is in itself a tale of male rescuers and innocent persecuted heroines, Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" perpetuates these gendered roles most of all.

4.3   Sleeping Beauty and Ideal Femininity

Since the literary tradition of the fairy tale began in Europe in the late seventeenth century, fairy tales have conveyed problematic socio-cultural messages, especially regarding gender. Second-wave feminism brought these problematic representations to the forefront of folklore research, criticizing the tales for didactically supporting the oppression and subordination of women through depictions of beautiful, submissive heroines. The tale of Sleeping Beauty is often discussed as a paradigm of fairy tale sexism, due to the very trope that characterizes the tale and endures canonical tellings; the helpless, innocent princess who waits passively asleep for her male rescuer. As Marcia R. Lieberman explains in her influential study of gender representations in fairy tales, "Most of the heroines [of fairy tales]… are entirely passive, submissive, and helpless. This is most obviously true of the Sleeping Beauty, who lies asleep, the ultimate state of passivity, waiting for a brave prince to awaken and save her" (388).

Charles Perrault's princess in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is no exception, having been written in the seventeenth century as a model of femininity for the young ladies of the French salons. As previously discussed, Perrault wrote his fairy tales to delight and instruct his dual audience of adults and children. The young heroines of Perrault's tales, such as the princess in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," were intended to instruct young ladies by demonstrating the perfectly passive behaviour considered desirable for courtship. Perrault's heroines were modeled after what he considered to be the ideal young woman of his social class:

> His ideal '*femme civilisée*' of upper-class society, the composite female, is beautiful, polite, graceful, industrious, and properly groomed and knows how to control herself at all times… The task confronted by Perrault's model female is to show reserve and patience; that is, she must be passive until the right man comes along to recognize her virtues and marry her. She lives only through the male and for marriage. The male acts, the female waits. She must cloak her instinctual drives in polite speech, correct manners, and elegant clothes. If she is allowed to reveal anything, it is to demonstrate how submissive she can be. (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 40)

Indeed, Perrault's Sleeping Beauty embodies all of these attributes, having been given such virtues by the good fairies. From the beginning of the tale, the princess possesses the ideal attributes of femininity, as her fairy godmothers give her magical gifts "to endow the princess all the perfections that could be imagined" (Perrault 44). At her christening, six (of the seven invited) fairies make proclamations that imbue the baby princess with characteristics that will make her the embodiment of feminine beauty and perfection. According to the fairies, "she will be the most beautiful person in the world" with "the temperament of an angel" and "the most admirable grace in all she does" (44) Not only that, but she will also "dance to perfection" and

"play every instrument in the most exquisite manner possible" (45). Beautiful, well-tempered and musically gifted, the princess is the epitome of the accomplished lady of the French salons, having been "bred to become the ideal aristocratic lady" thanks to her fairy godmothers' gifts (Zipes, *The Art of Subversion* 39).

As the tale continues and the princess grows older, she maintains her beauty and perfection while also exemplifying another of Perrault's valued female virtues, patience. Perrault's princess demonstrates her patience through her graceful endurance of her cursed sleep. However, her patience is better understood as passivity, as the princess does not make any decisions or actions to impact her fate; rather, she moves passively through the story, allowing the fairies and their spells to decide her future. As the wicked fairy and young fairy ordain, the princess pricks her finger on a spindle at age fifteen (or sixteen, the narration speculates) (Perrault 45). Falling into her enchanted sleep, she is submissive to her fate, waiting patiently for her destined prince.

Perrault's princess uses this lengthy waiting period to prepare for her prince, practicing both her patience and her charm in her dreams while she sleeps. Once again the princess has her fairy godmothers to thank for her good breeding, as the young fairy gives her pleasant dreams so that "the princess had had time enough to consider what she should say to [the prince]" (48). Upon waking, the narration explains that the princess' words are far more "coherent" and eloquent than the stammering prince's, due to her diligent preparation in her sleep (48). Although Sleeping Beauty has few lines of dialogue, she is affectively eloquent, leaving the prince "unarmed by these words, and still more by the tone in which they were uttered" (48). Despite the deathlike sleep she endures, the princess appears undisturbed after waiting immobile for one hundred years. Rather, she calmly greets the prince, saying he has been "long awaited" (48).

While her beauty certainly captivates the prince, it is her abilities as a conversationalist that enchants the prince, as the two talk "for four hours without expressing half of what they had to say to each other" (48). Respectable social skills, Zipes explains, are another important attribute Perrault conveys his young female audience through the tale of Sleeping Beauty: "Not only did Perrault inform his plots with normative patterns of behavior to describe an exemplary social constellation but he also employed a distinct bourgeois-aristocratic manner of speech that was purposely contrived to demonstrate the proper way to converse with eloquence and civility" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 42). Perrault's Sleeping Beauty is a model of ideal femininity for young women, demonstrating how practiced patience and good manners are rewarded with successful marriage.

The princess continues to exemplify lady-like behaviour in the second, less popular, half of the tale, as "Sleeping Beauty, who was, while enchanted, the archetype of the passive, waiting beauty, retains this character in the second part, when she is awake" (Lieberman 388). Despite her transition from young adulthood to motherhood, Sleeping Beauty remains a one-dimensional character; she shows no growth throughout the tale as she once again passively waits for male intervention. Sleeping Beauty, now a queen and a mother, takes no actions against her ogress mother-in-law, who threatens her children and herself. When Sleeping Beauty's prince (now king of his kingdom) goes away to war, his half-ogre mother decides she would like to "gratify her horrible longing" for "fresh meat" by eating her two grandchildren (Perrault 49). When the steward tasked with butchering the children is unable to do so, and hides the children away from the ogress, Sleeping Beauty presumes her children "dead ever since they had been carried off without explanation" (50). In the time after their disappearance, Sleeping Beauty does nothing to investigate or avenge her children's deaths. When the steward comes to kill her for the ogress'

third cannibalistic meal, Sleeping Beauty does not fight him. Rather she tells him to carry out the deed: "'Do your duty!' said she, stretching out her neck to him. 'Carry out the order given to you. Then I shall behold my children'" (50). She does not argue for life or defend herself; she submissively lays her life before the steward. Moved by her submissive acceptance of her death and her children's, the steward decides to deceive the ogress again and reunite Sleeping Beauty with her children in hiding. When the ogress discovers that she has been tricked, she prepares to cook Sleeping Beauty, her children, the steward, his wife and his maidservant in a large vat as punishment. For a third time, Sleeping Beauty remains inactive, waiting for male intervention. Her husband, the king, returns to save the day, the evil ogress dies, and Sleeping Beauty and her family live happily ever after. Sleeping Beauty remains consistently passive throughout the tale, doing nothing of impact; she only waits, patiently, for her male intervention.

In the end, Sleeping Beauty is rewarded and praised for this passivity, as Perrault ends the tale with a moral "which sings a hymn of patience" (Zipes, *The Art of Subversion* 39). Perrault finishes his tale with a verse moral which praises Sleeping Beauty's "rare" patience: "To wait so long,/ To want a man refined and strong,/ Is not at all uncommon./But: rare it is a hundred years to wait./ Indeed there is no woman/ Today so patient for a mate" (Perrault 51). Although the verse jests with the absurdity of a woman waiting one hundred years for a worthy partner, Perrault's moral is sincere in its message that good things come to girls who wait. The verse continues, explaining that marrying impulsively for love does not mean a more "blissful" marriage than for those who wait for a smart match (51). Indeed, the moral verse ends with a disheartening tone for "lovers whose ardor/ Cannot be controlled and marry out of passion" (51). Perrault declares he does not "have the heart" to "preach a moral lesson" to such couples, implying that those who impatiently marry are beyond reason (51). Perrault's verse seeks to

downplay any romantic, impulsive notions one may gather from the fantasy of a prince and princess falling in love, and instead promotes waiting patiently for the *right* prince as both romantic and sensible. Perrault's moral holds Sleeping Beauty's patience in the highest regard, imparting that of all of Sleeping Beauty's virtues, patience, or rather passivity, is the most important and desirable virtue for young women to emulate.

4.4   Sleeping Beauty as an Object of Desire

In many fairy tales, young heroines and princesses function as objects of desire. Beautiful and pristine, these young women are prizes to be won, married, and bedded by heroic men. The princess in Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is a prime example of how princesses function as objects of desire, as her story is perhaps the most voyeuristic of all, starting with the title: "The very name Sleeping Beauty invokes a double movement between a passive gerund (*sleeping*) and a descriptive noun (*beauty*) that invites a retinal response. Beauty may be sleeping, but *we* want to look at her to indulge in the pleasures of her visible charms" (Tatar 143). Indeed, throughout the tale the descriptive language and narrative structure invite the reader not only into Sleeping Beauty's story, but also her bedroom.

As many scholars (Bettelheim 1977; Jones 1993; Fay 2008) have discussed, the sleeping curse placed on Sleeping Beauty is a metaphor for maturation, as "the hundred years' sleep represents a necessary period of withdrawal and focus on the self" that allows her to transform, physically and mentally, from a child to a child bearer (Fay 268). Moments before she pricks her finger, the "fifteen or sixteen" year-old princess is described as "hasty" and "a little thoughtless" (Perrault 45). During her enchanted sleep, she goes through puberty without "the disturbing changes and emotions that characterize maturation" (Jones 31), as the good fairy "had procured

her the pleasure of very charming dreams" (Perrault 48). When Sleeping Beauty wakes up one hundred years later, she physically looks the same age but her demeanour has changed; she is poised and well spoken, having "had time enough to consider" how to be a young woman ready for marriage (Perrault 48). The sleeping spell placed on Sleeping Beauty is a metaphor for maturation as it transforms her from a heedless sixteen-year-old to a mature young woman ready for marriage and children.

It is during her enchanted sleep that the tale begins to emphasize her desirability and budding sexuality. Once the princess has fallen asleep, the narration alludes to the threat of sexual assault she faces in her unconscious state. The king "commands that she be left to sleep in peace" and forbids anyone from approaching the castle (Perrault 46). For good measure, the young fairy surrounds the castle with trees, brambles, and thorns so thick that "that neither man nor beast could penetrate… so that the princess might have nothing to fear from the curiosity of strangers," or more aptly, strange men (46). The implication that she must be protected from male intruders is an intentional revision of the Italian source tale, Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia," in which the heroine is raped in her sleep by the King and awoken only after giving birth to twins (Warner, *Once Upon a Time* 133). With his aristocratic audience in mind, "It can be easily understood that Perrault did not feel it appropriate to tell at the French courts a story in which a married king ravishes a sleeping maiden, gets her with child, forgets it entirely, and remembers her after a time only by chance" (Bettelheim 229). Perrault alters the tale to guard the virginity of the princess in order to distance his morally didactic tale, and its intended audience, from indecencies.

While Perrault's version may distance itself from rape and illegitimate children, it is Perrault's tale that establishes the sleeping heroine as an erotic spectacle. Perrault's tale

objectifies the princess by aligning the narration, and therefore the reader, with the perspective of the prince. Once the princess' virginity is safely secured behind a barrier of thorns, the tale moves forward one hundred years to the story of the prince. Having heard many legends about the castle, the prince becomes inspired by the notion of "the most beautiful princess ever seen" waiting patiently asleep at the top of a tower for him (Perrault 47). The reader follows his excitement as "The prince makes his way through the palace, 'mounts' the stairs, and 'pushes' on until he reaches the princess on display. In translation or not, the diction is highly charged in erotic terms, suggesting that penetrating the briars and entering the castle are forms of foreplay for the scene of beholding" (Tatar 144). When the prince finally reaches her bedroom, the reader is held in suspense alongside the prince as to what the sleeping princess will look like: "Finally he entered a chamber completely covered with gold and saw the most lovely sight he had ever looked upon—on a bed with curtains open on each side was a princess who seemed to be about fifteen or sixteen. Her radiant charms gave her such a luminous, supernatural appearance" (Perrault 47-8). As Tatar clarifies, "[Basile's] tale moves quickly out of Talia's bedroom, revealing almost nothing about her appearance" (146). It is Perrault's tale that introduces physical beauty as a defining feature of the princess and turns the bedroom scene into a voyeuristic spectacle. Perrault's tale expands the bedroom scene, lingering on the attractiveness of the sexually mature heroine as she lies asleep, on display, basked in gold and supernatural light. Tatar notes that the tale of Sleeping Beauty has cinematic qualities that elicit voyeuristic pleasure: "Had Laura Mulvey turned to fairy tales for evidence to support her thesis about the male gaze, she would surely have singled out 'Sleeping Beauty' as *the* story that captures, with a single stroke, the notion of women on display, to be looked at as erotic spectacle" (Tatar 143). By aligning the reader with the perspective of prince, the tale invites the reader to look upon the

sleeping princess through the male gaze, observing her as an object of desire. When it comes to the reader's perspective, "Whether that gaze is ultimately voyeuristic or fetishizing depends on individual spectators," however, the objectification of the princess remains (Tatar 143). The young princess in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is not regarded as a victim of a sleeping curse, but rather as a carnal reward at the end of a long, fated journey.

While Perrault's tale tries to quickly establish a romance between the prince and the princess, stating that the two talked for hours, their hasty marriage only further demonstrates Sleeping Beauty's function as an object of desire. After knowing each other for only a few hours, the two are married and consummate their marriage quickly as "The princess did not have much need of sleep" (Perrault 48). The prince then leaves "at sunrise" to return to his kingdom, having successfully won, married, and bedded the princess in less than twenty-four hours (48). Despite the story's attempt to romanticize their union, the relationship between the prince and princess is superficial and, evidently, sexually motivated. Even Perrault's moral verse backtracks on their hasty marriage, advising girls to see patience as a virtue in relationships: "Our tale was meant to show/ That when marriage is differed, / It is no less blissful than those of which you've heard" (51).

As the tale moves forward into the second half, the prince spends very little time with his new wife and children, having kept his family a secret for two years. When he does move them closer to him, he leaves for war and places his wife and children under the supervision of his mother, despite his mistrust of her ogre tendencies and rumours of her appetite for young children (49). Throughout the second half of the tale, the prince intermittently abandons his wife and disregards the wellbeing of their children. After his long and fated quest to obtain her, the prince quickly discards Sleeping Beauty after marrying and having children. The prince does not

regard her as his partner or equal, reiterating the notion that the princess functions within the tale primarily as an object of desire.

4.5   Fairy-story Justice and the Bad Women of Fairy Tales

The second, lesser-known part of Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" has perplexed scholars for some time. The story of the ogress queen mother-in-law who attempts to cannibalize Sleeping Beauty and her two young children is often seen as a digression from the themes and plot structure of the first half of the tale (Fay 259; Travers 62). In many retellings, the second half is often stripped away to shorten the tale, ending the story instead with the marriage of the prince and princess, much like the Grimms' "Briar Rose." While the ogress' narrative can be traced back to Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia," which contains a similar cannibalistic plotline featuring the king's jealous wife, the inclusion of the story's second half carries more significance than simple fidelity to source materials (Fay 259). One explanation for the ogress' plotline is that it presents a common gender archetype found in fairy tales, the wicked (step)mother, in order to demonstrates what happens to bad women who disobey social norms.

For scholars such as Bruno Bettelheim (1977), Philip Lewis (1996), and Caroline Fay (2008), the first half of Perrault's tale would be incomplete without the second, as it balances the narrative structure of the tale by creating "fairy-story justice" (Bettelheim 230). As Bettelheim explains, ending the narrative at the first half of the tale leaves a rift within the story, as "The happy ending requires that the evil principle be appropriately punished and done away with; only then can the good, and with it happiness, prevail" (Bettelheim 230). In the first half of the tale, the old fairy who casts the death curse on the princess is the story's antagonist. Her presence in the tale is brief; she appears at the christening, curses the child, and presumably returns to her

seclusion, as she is never mentioned in the tale again. Instead of seeking revenge on the fairy, the royal family focuses on preventing the curse, and the story moves forward with little thought given to the old fairy. The first half of the tale offers no fairy-story justice as the evildoer disappears unscathed into the background of the tale, leaving the scales of good and evil unbalanced.

However, the latter half of the tale offers a second chance at justice by introducing a similar evil, another older woman who also persecutes the young, beautiful princess (Lewis 150). For both Bettelheim (1977) and Lewis (1996) the ogress' plotline offers repetition, allowing the tale to face an evil principle once more and properly do away with it. However, according to Fay (2008), the second half of the tale is not repetition, but substitution, as the ogress and the fairy do not meet the same fate: "The purpose of the cannibalism plot, then, would be to punish the ogress in the place of the old fairy, substituting one woman, one death, for another" (Fay 260). Moreover, the substitution "carries a global meaning that resonates throughout the tale. It is not simply the punishment of evil, but the obliteration of the woman who withdraws from social order" (Fay 272-3). Unable to punish the old fairy, the story turns to the next problematic woman, the ogress queen mother-in-law.

While the old fairy withdraws from social order through her seclusion, the ogress does so through her uncivilized, cannibalistic nature and defiance of maternal instincts. Already at odds with society for her bourgeois status and ogre lineage, she is described as having the "greatest difficulty restraining herself" from giving into her monstrous appetite (Perrault 49). Although she tries to hide her uncultured diet, the queen mother is unable to suppress her ogre tendencies. When she finally gives into her cannibalistic urges, she callously turns to her family for sustenance. In a flawed attempt to remain civilized, she insists on having her grandchildren and

daughter-in-law prepared with sauce Robert, giving her "reversion to cannibalism a less savage, more savoury appearance" while "succumb[ing] sufficiently to the civilization curve to expose herself a fraud" (Lewis 152). The ogress' insistence on eating her kin with sauce Robert demonstrates her social and cultural failings; the queen mother is more concerned with superficial appearances than with the wellbeing of her family. In her attempt to make cannibalism civilized, the ogress further withdraws from social order by flagrantly defying all maternal instincts.

Indeed, the ogress in Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is an example of a common gender stereotype, the wicked (step)mother. In many fairy tales, "bad women come in the form of (step)mothers" (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* 222). Wicked women are rarely biological mothers, but rather females *in loco parentis.* Apparently lacking the nurturing, loving attributes of biological mothers, these women unrelentingly demean, persecute and torment the protagonist(s). Most often they are stepmothers, but also mothers-in-law and adoptive mother figures. Although Perrault's successors the Brothers Grimm and Walt Disney popularized the trope of the wicked stepmother, Perrault's tales also include wicked (step)mothers whose most villainous deeds stem from their lack of maternal instincts (207). In "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," the queen ogress' villainy is three-fold: she a duplicitous mother to her biological son, a wicked mother-in-law to Sleeping Beauty, and an evil grandmother to Sleeping Beauty's children. The ogress' attempt to cannibalize her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren whom her son has placed in her care is heartless, to say the least. She defies all maternal instincts, actively trying to end her family's bloodline to satisfy her own appetite and bloodlust. Her death in her own copper vat, then, not only offers fairy-story justice, but also exterminates the world of a socially deviant woman. Beneath the ogress' exaggerated

villainy lies a patriarchal message intended for female audiences, that women who do not uphold their maternal duties are wicked and socially deviant. The tale's second half and the ogress' demise demonstrate what happens to bad (step)mothers who defy social order.

4.6   Conclusion

From its characters to narrative structure, "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" by Charles Perrault is inherently sexist. Perrault's tale embodies some of the most traditionally sexist gender representations found in fairy tales: the male rescuer, the innocent persecuted heroine, the model of femininity, the object of desire, and the evil (step)mother. Moreover, the story's main character, Sleeping Beauty, embodies the majority of these, with the intention to shape the morals and behaviours of young readers. Although Perrault's didactic tale was written with a specific seventeenth-century aristocratic audience in mind, the tale's persistence throughout history is problematic. While the modern reader may excuse the tale's sexism as a product of seventeenth-century aristocratic ideals, the tale's many adaptations throughout history have carried the tale's gender representations and embedded them within North American popular culture. Of these adaptations, Disney's animated *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) can be accredited with popularizing the tale perhaps most of all. The following chapter will explore how Disney's film takes up the gender representations from "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and either duplicates or revises them for its 1950s audience.

Chapter 5: *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) by Walt Disney

5.1   Disney's Adaptation of Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood"

Although there are over two hundred years separating the works of Charles Perrault and Disney, "there is a direct line from the Perrault fairy tale of court society to the Walt Disney cinematic fairy tale of the culture industry" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 33). Indeed, there are many similarities between the two fairy tale creators and their didactic approaches to storytelling and shaping young audiences. Much like Perrault, who was among the first to write didactic fairy tales for children (Zipes 2006), Disney's animated films "challenged the assumption that entertainment has little educational value and is simply about leisure" (Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared* 18). "Disney was a radical filmmaker who changed our way of viewing fairy tales" by utilizing technological advances and American ideals to create fantastic, family-friendly films (Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 21). As discussed in section 3.1, Disney films are "teaching machines" which convey important messages about gender roles and gendered social structures in North American society despite their seemingly innocent content (Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared* 84). Like Perrault, Disney's fairy tales captivate young audiences with heroism, romance, and talking animals, while simultaneously demonstrating traditional and conservative behaviours and beliefs through characters, morals, and in Disney's case, songs. Disney's animated fairy-tale films also provide models of gender similar to Perrault, focusing largely on instructing young women through innocent, passive princess characters, but also providing models of masculinity through heroic princes (Zipes 1995). However, while Perrault created his fairy tales to instruct members of the bourgeoisie and aristocratic classes in late seventeenth-century France, Disney creates its films for the middle class of contemporary America.

When Disney produced *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, many decisions were made regarding the film's fidelity to its source texts. *Sleeping Beauty* is an adaptation of Charles Perrault's fairy tale "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" with music inspired by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), which is also inspired by Perrault's tale (Craven 2016). Like Tchaikovsky's ballet, *Sleeping Beauty* closely follows the first half of Perrault's tale, ending with the couple's marriage as opposed to after the ogress' death. Although Disney's film generally follows the structure of Perrault's tale, many changes were made in order to update the story for its 1950s audience. While some changes were made to streamline the narrative, such as reducing eight fairies to four or one hundred years to one lengthy evening, other changes were influenced by cultural shifts occurring in the time period and the society the film was produced for. One of the most noticeable alterations made by Disney is that the film features a "prolonged domestic interlude" in which the three fairies, disguised as commoners, raise Aurora in a cottage in the forest, "remov[ing] the action from the confines of palaces and antiquated nobility into something more recognizably modern" (Craven 192). Indeed, it is within this prolonged domestic interlude that Disney does its most interesting adaptation work and modernizing of Perrault's text, transforming the French fairy tale and its traditional values into "something peculiarly American" (Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 36).

In Disney's adaptation, three good fairies whisk the princess away to a woodcutter's cottage to hide from the evil fairy, Maleficent, until the princess is of age. On the day of her sixteenth birthday, the princess walks in the forest and has an enchanting encounter with the prince where the two sing, dance, and fall in love as strangers. The two meet before the princess falls into her enchanted sleep that the prince must later rescue her from, overcoming all the obstacles Maleficent places before him with the help of the three fairies. The revised plot is an

effort to establish a strong romantic bond between Prince Philip and Princess Aurora in order to appeal to Disney's contemporary audience whose marriage and courtship customs had diverged from the arranged marriages and transactional unions of Perrault's time (L. Stone 1977). Instead, modern relationships valued "intensified affective bonding…a strong sense of individual autonomy and the right to personal freedom in the pursuit of happiness" and "a weakening of the association of sexual pleasure with sin and guilt" (L. Stone 8). However, the prolonged interlude does more than cultivate the tale's romance; it allows Disney to portray Perrault's traditional values as contemporary. Despite modernized embellishments, Disney's characters intensify Perrault's problematic gender roles, including the male rescuer, the passive, innocent persecuted heroine, the problematic mother figure(s), and the socially deviant female villain. Through character development, *Sleeping Beauty* reproduces and reinforces traditional and conservative ways of seeing gender, creating duplicates of the problematic gender roles and gendered social structures from "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood."

As previously outlined in section 3.2, duplicates are instances of plot, characterization, imagery, motifs, and other story elements that reproduce and reinforce traditional and conservative patterns, images, and codes of gender from an adaptation's source text. While duplicates in *Sleeping Beauty* may appear as unintentional remnants of Perrault's text, Disney's perpetuation of gender stereotypes is far from innocent as "nothing accidental or serendipitous occurs in animation as each *second* of action on screen is rendered in twenty-four different still paintings" (Bell 108). Therefore, the direct line from Perrault's tale to Disney's film is intentional; Disney's adaptation of each character is designed with meticulous planning and care. Disney's duplicates of Perrault's problematic gender roles and gendered social structures are a calculated way of perpetuating traditional values. Disney's cultural hold "does not reside in the

uniqueness or novelty of the productions, but in Disney's great talent for holding antiquated views of society *still* through animation and his use of the latest technological developments in cinema" (Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 39). Indeed, Disney has made an art form of perpetuating traditional values as contemporary (39). Although they may have modern trappings from the 1950s, the characters of *Sleeping Beauty* reproduce the same problematic gender messages as Perrault's. The following chapter examines how *Sleeping Beauty* duplicates Perrault's antiquated views of gender for contemporary 1950s audiences by analyzing the film's characters and the gender roles and gendered structures they represent.

5.2   Perpetuating the Male-Rescuer Archetype in *Sleeping Beauty*

While Princess Aurora gets all the fame in *Sleeping Beauty*'s title, it is Prince Philip who gets all the glory in the film. Although Prince Philip may often be an overlooked character in Disney merchandising, popular culture, and scholarly analyses, Prince Philip carries his own cultural significance and patriarchal messages as the film's male protagonist and male rescuer. As previously discussed in section 4.2, it is not difficult to be the hero in a "Sleeping Beauty" tale. The prince in Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is the epitome of the male-rescuer archetype; his only requirement is that he is "the first prince who happens down the highway" after one hundred years (Rowe 52). Not much is different for *Sleeping Beauty*'s Prince Philip despite many changes to the hero's journey and the story's romance during Disney's prolonged domestic interlude. Not only does the couple's fateful meeting strengthen the legitimacy of their romance for contemporary audiences, but it also inflates the male rescuer's role by introducing him early in the tale and creating more obstacles in his quest to awaken his true love. However, despite Disney's alterations to the prince's journey, Prince Philip duplicates

the male-rescuer archetype from Perrault's tale through an androcentric social structure that indentures nature, women, and magical beings to Prince Philip's will, allowing the prince to fulfill his destiny with minimal effort.

True to Perrault's tale, Prince Philip stumbles upon the princess one fated day when hunting in the woods; however, instead of arriving "*deus ex machina*" at the end of the curse, Disney's prince appears before the enchantment has begun during the film's prolonged domestic interlude (Rowe 352). Yet despite this difference in timing, there are many similarities between the two princes and their times in the woods. Both men are driven deep into the forest by intrigue and adventure. Perrault's prince "inquire[s] about the towers that he [sees] above the trees of a large and dense wood" and seeks out the castle, having heard rumour of a beautiful princess (Perrault 46). Similarly, Prince Philip overhears singing in the woods and rides deeper into the forest to investigate the "strange voice" that is "too beautiful to be real" (*Sleeping Beauty* 00:24:20-00:29:00). As Prince Philip rides swiftly through the forest, triumphant music accompanies him, portraying his adventurous spirit and anticipation much like Perrault's prince who felt "impelled by love and glory" (00:24:44-00:25:15; Perrault 47).

However, Prince Philip cannot find the princess in the maze-like woods without outside help. In a comedic twist that cuts his ride short, Philip is knocked off his horse and into a stream, causing him to hang his hat, cape, and boots to dry on a nearby tree. In the distance, Princess Aurora's animal friends see the hero's clothing, and, having already heard her sing about her dream prince in the song "I Wonder," steal his clothes so that they may play along with her as she daydreams during the song "Once Upon a Dream" (*Sleeping Beauty* 00:25:33-00:26:47; 00:30:00-00:31:08). While the animals run off, Prince Philip's horse spots the clothing floating away deeper into the forest and the prince is ultimately led to Aurora. Indeed, the couple would

not have met without the intervention of Philip's horse and the woodland animals. Moreover, the anthropomorphic forest animals create a trail for Prince Philip, similar to how the briars of thorns magically create a passage for Perrault's prince. For both princes, nature magically reveals the way so that they may continue their pursuit with little effort. Like Perrault's prince, Disney's Prince Philip simply has to be in the forest at the right time and follow the path magically laid out in front of him in order to find the princess.

But Disney's film takes nature's servitude to a much higher level than Perrault's story. As previously discussed in section 2.2.1, Disney films create an androcentric social hierarchy where both "women and nature remain ready to serve" men (Murphy 128). Although the title *Sleeping Beauty* suggests that the fairy-tale realm revolves around Aurora, the film's gendered social structures suggest otherwise. Indeed, while the animals in the forest may be Aurora's friends, they follow Disney's androcentric hierarchy and act in service to Prince Philip. Not only do the animals lead the prince to the princess, but they also prepare her for his arrival. After stealing Philip's clothes, the animals surprise Aurora by dressing up like a prince so that she may dance with them. Aurora playfully remarks that the animals must be her "dream prince" and curtseys, receiving them as "Your Highness" (*Sleeping Beauty* 00:29:40-00:30:00). The princess begins to sing "Once Upon A Dream" and dances a joyful waltz with her "dream prince" as her real prince watches from the bushes nearby. Although the animals are Aurora's companions, the animals act in service to the prince. Aurora's animal friends give her a crash-course in courtship, allowing her to role-play her fantasy so that she is ready for when the prince arrives. As Kathleen Coyne Kelly explains, "[t]his scene signifies on many levels: Aurora's spin away keeps her in her dream, in innocence; her spin 'back'— her first face-to-face meeting with Prince Philip—tips her from fantasy into reality from childhood into womanhood. Aurora and her animal

companions rearrange themselves in a hierarchy that authorizes the Prince as sovereign" (Kelly 198). The animals prepare the timid girl on her sixteenth birthday, a formative age that often marks the transition to womanhood. When Philip steps in to dance with Aurora, he tosses the animals to the side without missing a beat, confirming their function within the tale as his placeholder (*Sleeping Beauty* 00:30:53-00:31:08). The woodland animals ensure that the young girl knows how to dance her way into adulthood with the prince; all Philip has to do is step into his rightful place as the leading man.

True to Disney's androcentric structure, Princess Aurora is also indentured to the will of the prince as the film prioritizes his desires over Aurora's comfort and safety. Although the song "Once Upon a Dream" is framed as a romantic duet, it raises concerns about consent as the prince uses the song to coerce the princess to dance with him. When Prince Philip is ready to meet the princess he hijacks the scene, stepping in as the lead and finishing the final lyric of the song for Aurora. When Aurora realizes the partner switch, she becomes frightened and tries to distance herself, visibly uncomfortable with a stranger's closeness. However, Aurora's objections are irrelevant as the prince continues to approach, reciting the song lyrics as justification for his advances and grabbing her hands (three times) as she continues to back away. While Aurora hides behind a tree, the prince restarts the song "Once Upon a Dream" in hopes to win her over (00:31:30-00:31:50). By the second line of the song, Aurora forgets her rational fear of strangers and begins to dance with him as the animals watch approvingly from the trees. In fact, Prince Philip does not even need to finish the song; the soundtrack's chorus takes over while the couple dances through the woods and fall in love. Prince Philip simply has to sing a few lyrics and the princess falls in line with the androcentric social hierarchy of the film and submits to his will. The song "Once Upon a Time" frames the prince's coercion and the princess'

submission as romance. Prince Philip's time in the forest demonstrates that all beings, whether animal or human, bend to the will and desire of the male rescuer.

Not only are women and nature in servitude to Disney's prince, but so too are magical beings. Although the three fairies are the most powerful beings in the film, they too must submit to the will of the prince. When Prince Philip is captured by Maleficent and imprisoned in her fortress, the three fairies sneak into the dungeon and use their magic wands to cut off his shackles. Once freed, Flora explains to Philip that "The road to true love may be barred by still many more dangers, which [he] alone will have to face" and gives him the "enchanted shield of virtue" and the "mighty sword of truth" to help him in his quest (01:04:59-01:05:18). However, contrary to the fairy's warning, the three fairies go with the prince and remove every obstacle he encounters. To escape Maleficent's fortress, the fairies lead Prince Philip out of the dungeons, transform enemy weapons into flowers, rainbows, and other cheerful forms of nature, and enchant his horse to soar over the moat safely. When Maleficent creates the briar of thorns to block Philip from the castle, the fairies lead the way through the thicket and have to use their magic to free his cape from a snag in the briars. Even in the final battle, when Maleficent transforms herself into a dragon, Prince Philip only survives because of the fairies' interventions. Throughout the battle, the prince relies heavily on his magic shield and sword and spends the majority of the scene wildly swinging his sword in a preposterously futile manner. When Maleficent corners Philip on a cliff, the fairies rush to his side and cast a spell that enchants the sword "to fly swift and sure" out of Philip's hands and into the chest of the dragon, defeating Maleficent (01:10:07-01:10:13). (For further discussion of the patriarchal symbolism behind Maleficent's defeat refer to section 5.5). From there on, all the prince has to do is run up the tower and kiss the princess to complete his quest and claim his title as rescuer. Although the film

may present Prince Philip as the hero and Maleficent as his foe, it is really the three good fairies

that are at odds with the evil fairy while "Philip is simply the vessel of their magic" (Do Rozario

40). Like the animals in the woods, the three fairies serve the prince by making his path to

Aurora as easy as possible. Despite the egregious amount of work the fairies do for him, it is

Philip who is presented as the film's hero, dancing centre stage with Princess Aurora in the

film's final celebratory scene. Through an androcentric social hierarchy, Disney renders the

efforts of the three fairies as the heroic deeds of the prince, asserting that it was patriarchy that

eradicated the world of evil.

Although Disney's Prince may have a longer, more treacherous journey, Prince Philip

does not earn his male-rescuer title any more so than Perrault's prince. Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*

uses its prolonged domestic interlude to introduce the prince early in the film in order to inflate

the importance of the male rescuer. Although he faces additional obstacles, such as

imprisonment and a fire-breathing dragon, all Philip has to do is show up at the right time, follow

the path before him, kiss the sleeping princess, and the androcentric world of Disney will do the

rest for him. Indeed, through an androcentric social hierarchy, Prince Philip duplicates the male-

rescuer archetype and its demonstration of white, male privilege as the prince's gender and

presence give him power over those around him, whether they are animals, women, or

supernatural beings. Despite his ineffectualness throughout the film, Philip is praised as the fairy

tale's hero, "thus conveying the idea that the redeemer is naturally a male" no matter how little

he does to deserve the title (Rodriguez 52). Through androcentrism and the character of Prince

Philip, *Sleeping Beauty* duplicates the male-rescuer archetype and reinforces the tale's

patriarchal structure, perpetuating traditional gender roles and gendered social structures for

contemporary audiences.

5.3   Modeling Femininity, the Innocent Persecuted Heroine, and Princess Aurora

A hero's journey would be lacklustre without a beautiful princess to save. When Disney

adapted Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" into an full-length film, animators were

faced with the challenge of adapting a "princess with all the perfections that could be imagined"

for contemporary audiences (Perrault 44). Disney's animated princesses began "as thumbnail

sketches for kind and beautiful young girls in the literary tales…Disney artists sketched the flesh

and blood on these folktale templates with contemporaneous popular images of feminine beauty

and youth, their sources ranging from the silent screen to glossy pin-ups" (Bell 109). In the case

of *Sleeping Beauty*'s Princess Aurora, Disney began with Perrault's minimalist description of

cheeks of "crimson colour" and lips "like coral" and added contemporary standards of beauty

from a time when white, beautiful blondes like Marilyn Monroe, Kim Novak, and most notably

Brigitte Bardot were major icons (Perrault 45; Bell 1995; Do Rozario 2004). Indeed, Aurora's

billowing blonde hair, expressive eyes, thick lashes, sculpted red lips, and pale complexion are a

testament to 1950s beauty ideals, making "Comparisons of this statuesque blonde to the

contemporaneous Barbie doll… difficult to avoid" (Bell 110). Moreover, Aurora's "dress differs

from the rest of the film's costumes in terms of its style being less derived from medieval

fashions," with Aurora's overly cinched waist "resembl[ing] the American style of beauty and

post-war glamour" (Kalmakurki 17). However, even with a 1950s makeover, the princess

duplicates the problematic gender roles and gendered social structures that Perrault's

seventeenth-century princess upheld. Disney's Princess Aurora has many of the characteristics of

Perrault's princess, creating yet another passive, innocent, persecuted heroine. Disney's film uses

modern aesthetics and teenage conflict to modernize Perrault's ideals, creating a contemporary model of femininity with traditional views of gender.

Much like Perrault's princess, Disney's Princess Aurora is a heroine of superior beauty, grace, and talent. Of the many gifts given to Perrault's princess by the good fairies, Disney preserved the two that are the most important to its own model of femininity, the gifts of beauty and song. Moreover, these two gifts vaguely summarize the six that were given to Perrault's princess. The gift of beauty encompasses Perrault's gifts of beauty, grace, and angelic temperament, while the gift of song addresses the gifts of dance and mastery of all musical instruments (Perrault 44-5). Although given fewer virtues than her source character, Aurora maintains the same charms as Perrault's "ideal '*femme Civilisée*'" and "is beautiful, polite, graceful, and knows how to control herself at all times" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 40). Aurora displays these virtues during the film's prolonged domestic interlude in which the princess enchants the forest animals, the prince, and the audience with her effortless talent and grace. Despite her peasant disguise and unawareness of her royal status, Aurora inherently possesses the composure of the elite, "moving through [her world] seemingly *en point* and turned out" (Bell 111). Indeed, Princess Aurora was constructed on the body of Helene Stanley, an actress and classically trained ballet dancer, better known as the inspiration for Disney's Cinderella. During *Sleeping Beauty*'s production, Stanley acted as the model for Princess Aurora in a live-action recording of the film that was later used as a blueprint for animators (Bell 1995). Drawn on Stanley's image, the animated Princess Aurora has the body of a dancer and moves with "the formal and poetic lines of classical ballet," even when walking or standing (Bell 110). Not only are Princess Aurora's ballet movements aesthetically pleasing, but they are also the perfect expression of Perrault's virtues. The artistic dance form upholds the

same feminine ideals as Perrault's tale; ballet dancers are beautiful, graceful, feminine, and have masterful control of themselves at all times. However, the years of practice and strict, physical discipline that accompany ballet are presented as an innate talent in Aurora, having been given the gift of song but not the gift of dance. Moreover, her upbringing in the woods does not suggest years of classical training. Therefore, Aurora's resilient dancer's body, controlled postures, and graceful movements are normalized, presenting unrealistic body ideals as natural to young viewers: "Indeed, the Disney apparatus buys into and then sells the twofold fantasy of little girls who want to grow up to be princesses *and* ballerinas" (Bell 111). Princess Aurora combines 1950s beauty ideals with the talent and grace of ballet to create a contemporary princess who perpetuates traditional values of feminine beauty, grace, and composure.

Disney's princess also upholds Perrault's feminine ideal of passivity. As discussed in section 4.3, Perrault's tale promotes female passivity through the virtue of patience, praising and rewarding the young heroine for submissively waiting for her male rescuer. Like Perrault's princess, Aurora is a heroine who has little agency and is submissive throughout the film. Although the princess is asleep for only twenty minutes in Disney's film (for further discussion see section 5.4), Princess Aurora is far from a part of the action, spending the majority of the film off screen or unengaged, with the three fairies, Prince Philip, and Maleficent dominating the majority of the plot and dialogue (*Sleeping Beauty* 00:51:08-01:11:33). When the princess is on screen she submits to the will of others: dancing with the prince despite her fear of strangers, travelling to the castle with the three fairies despite her discontent, and pricking her finger on the spindle under Maleficent's spell. When Aurora does speak, she often is soft-spoken and uses empty adjectives, questions, and hedges, which are stereotypical to female speech and have little meaning or impact (Azmi et al. 2016). Moreover, Aurora is only given dialogue in the first half

of the film before her enchantment (for further discussion of Aurora's lack of dialogue see section 5.4). Disney's Aurora duplicates Perrault's one-dimensional princess, as both are valued for their beauty, grace, and passivity. Although Disney expanded Perrault's narrative and developed the first half of the fairy tale into a full-length film, Disney does not use the additional scenes to establish agency for its princess.

On a structural level, Aurora is like Perrault's princess as she endures Acts I and II of the innocent persecuted heroine genre's plot structure (as outlined by Jones (1993) and discussed in section 4.2). Act I takes place at the very beginning of *Sleeping Beauty*, when Aurora is threatened as a child in her family home and cursed by Maleficent to prick her finger on a spindle (Jones 16). Act II unfolds throughout the rest of the film, depicting the princess' young adulthood and how Prince Philip must rescue the princess from her enchantment before they can be married (16). Although Disney does not recount Act III and the princess' persecution in her husband's home like Perrault's tale, Disney explores the second act to a greater extent than Perrault's narrative during the film's prolonged domestic interlude. As Jones describes, "Act two concerns the heroine's meeting and acquiring a mate. It dramatizes various obstacles that interfere with the desired union and concludes with the heroine's marriage to her husband" (16). Disney's domestic interlude significantly dramatizes the obstacles that interfere with Aurora and Philip's union by introducing the couple before the curse, establishing a stronger romantic bond, and creating a more contemporary form of persecution for the princess: teenage heartbreak. Princess Aurora and Prince Philip have a brief but apparently profound encounter only to be separated by external forces, sensationalizing the fairy-tale romance as star-crossed, teenage lovers. Indeed, Princess Aurora is a teenager in love separated from her partner by the confines of adolescence. At the young age of sixteen, Aurora is "unable to fully exert her own

independence" and must follow the strict rules of her guardians, the three fairies (Hobbs 145). When Aurora announces to the fairies that she's fallen in love, they inform her that she "must never see that young man again" because she is a princess heading home that very evening to reunite with her royal family and a prince who she is betrothed to (00:39:13-00:39:15). Distraught that she will be taken away from her lover, Aurora argues with her guardians in disbelief before running upstairs to cry on her bed in a maudlin display. Later, as Aurora makes her way to the castle, she walks solemnly behind the fairies and breaks down in tears once more when they place a crown upon her head. Aurora's melodramatic displays of heartbreak mirror that of an emotional teen. Thwarted by her guardians' authoritarian rule, Aurora is "determined not to enjoy herself in an act of protest" (Hobbs 146). Aurora's joyful return home is marred by teenage heartbreak, adding further misery to the innocent persecuted heroine's journey. Disney's Princess Aurora not only duplicates the passive, innocent persecuted heroine from Perrault's tale, but adapts her persecutions to "address the emergent new Baby Boomer teenager" of the 1950s (Hobbs 145). In doing so, Disney creates a modern version of the innocent persecuted heroine, perpetuating an antiquated archetype for contemporary audiences.

In many ways, Disney's Princess Aurora is a modern 1950s princess. Drawn with the aesthetics of 1950s American beauty and fashion, Disney's princess is more contemporary than she is renaissance. Moreover, her adolescent struggle with authoritarian guardians and heartbreak creates a contemporary heroine with relatable hardships. However, beneath these modern trappings, Princess Aurora duplicates the traditional model of femininity and the innocent persecuted heroine archetype from Perrault's tale. Through the artistic form of ballet, Disney imparts its princess with the same traditional values of beauty, grace, and composure as Perrault's princess. Disney's film also portrays its princess as passive, having little agency in the

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events of her life and following the plot structure of the innocent persecuted heroine. The result is a modern, American princess who perpetuates Perrault's traditional, patriarchal model of femininity through conventions that are relatable and accessible to Disney's 1950s audience. Disney's adaptation of Perrault's princess conserves the patriarchal messages from Perrault's tale for its contemporary audience, perpetuating an antiquated model of femininity in the modern era.

5.4   Princess Aurora as an Object of Desire

Despite being a young protagonist in a family film, Disney's Princess Aurora is subjected to the same sexualizing male gaze as Perrault's princess and functions within the tale as an object of desire. As discussed in section 4.4, "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is a voyeuristic fairy tale that objectifies its beautiful princess by aligning the reader with the perspective of the prince (Tatar 2014). Through descriptive language and narrative structure, Perrault's tale presents its teenage princess as an erotic spectacle and regards her as a reward at the end of the male rescuer's long quest. Although Disney censors the fairy tale to remove Perrault's sexual references, such as the couple's hasty marriage and consummation, the princess character nevertheless functions as an object of desire. Through narrative structure, character design, and cinematography, Disney duplicates Perrault's problematic sexualization of the teenage princess as an object of desire.

Although Disney's princess is only under her enchantment for one evening that takes a brief twenty minutes of the film, Princess Aurora's sleep nevertheless signifies a maturation like in Perrault's tale. As discussed in section 4.4, the princess' sleep in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is a metaphor for maturation as it transforms the princess from a heedless fifteen- or sixteen-year-old to a mature woman ready for marriage, both mentally and physically

(Bettelheim 1977; Jones 1993; Fay 2008). Disney's princess undergoes the same transformation. However, Disney's adaptation separates Aurora's preparation from her enchantment. While Perrault's princess spends one hundred years asleep dreaming of her prince and practicing what she might say to him upon his arrival, Disney's princess does not do this during her brief enchantment that lasts only one night (Perrault 48). Instead, Princess Aurora dreams of a prince during the film's prolonged domestic interlude before her enchanted sleep begins. Moments before the song "Once Upon a Dream," Aurora confides in the forest animals that she's met a prince in her dreams. She describes how the two "walk together and talk together" but just as he's about to kiss her she wakes up (00:27:40-00:27:43). Like Perrault's princess, Aurora mentally prepares for the arrival of her prince through dreaming.

However, having not yet undergone her enchantment, and therefore puberty, Aurora's sexuality is not fully actualized and so she wakes up from her dream before the prince can kiss her. Like Perrault's princess, who is heedless and immature before she falls asleep, Disney's Princess Aurora is a timid and innocent young maiden, dutifully following the advice of the three fairies and hesitating when her dream prince becomes a reality in the woods. It is only after the spell that the princess has matured into a woman ready for intimacy and marriage. Indeed, Aurora is awoken from her enchantment by Prince Philip's kiss, signifying the end of adolescent innocence and the beginning of womanhood. When Aurora opens her eyes to look upon her rescuer, the princess has a new composure. No longer skittish and shy, the princess "bestow[s] on him a look more tender" than ever before, blinking slowly and smiling eloquently (Perrault 48; *Sleeping Beauty* 01:11:33-01:11:37). Like Perrault's princess, Aurora wakes up looking the same but possessing a newfound maturity.

However, unlike Perrault's princess, who speaks eloquently with her prince, Aurora's new composure relies on body language to convey meaning, as the princess does not speak another line for the rest of the film. Although Aurora is only awoken with four minutes left in the film, the princess' lack of dialogue in the finale renders the princess speechless for over thirty minutes, having not spoken since the woodcutter's cottage half way through the film (00:39:40-01:15:00). Instead, Aurora uses delicate touches, knowing blinks, and coy smiles in the final scenes to convey meaning. Even through momentous occasions like reuniting with her suitor and her estranged parents, the princess remains silent and relies on radiant smiles and warm embraces to express her joy. When Prince Philip's father stumbles to find his words, Aurora calms and reassures him by tenderly placing a kiss upon the king's cheek before being whisked away to the dance floor by Prince Philip (01:13:13-01:13:25). Much like Perrault's prince, who appears incoherent in comparison to the princess' composure, the king is speechless in Aurora's presence (Perrault 48). Indeed, Aurora's interaction with the king demonstrates her maturation from a shy teenager who was fearful of strangers to a poised woman silently commanding the attention of the throne room. Having matured during her sleep, Aurora awakes with the silent composure and confidence of a woman and is finally ready to assume her royal role as princess and partner.

Although Disney's reputation as a purveyor of innocence would suggest that the film would remove the latent sexual content of Perrault's tale, Disney's princess is nevertheless put on display as an erotic spectacle for the male gaze. With her elongated figure, disproportionately small waist, and buxom torso, Aurora's animated body is a sexualized, unrealistic portrayal of female adolescent bodies. Although draped in modest clothing, the princess' hourglass figure is more aesthetically aligned with the curvaceous bodies of 1950s female "sex symbols," such as

Brigitte Bardot, Kim Novak, and Marilyn Monroe, than with the average, pubescent sixteen-year-old female figure. Moreover, Aurora's strong and graceful body movements inherited from classical ballet normalize her athletic body as natural (Bell 1995). Despite her youth, Disney's princess was designed as an object of heterosexual male desire.

Aurora's sexualized teenage body is put on display throughout the film, most notably during the film's prolonged domestic interlude in the forest. Indeed, Disney's film objectifies the princess through voyeurism and the male gaze. As discussed in section 4.4, Perrault's narrative aligns the reader's perspective with that of the prince, inviting the reader to look upon the princess as an object of desire through a heterosexual male gaze. It comes as no surprise that Disney's cinematic adaptation of Perrault's tale would adopt the male gaze, considering Disney's patriarchal practices and the psychoanalytic theory's origins in film studies (Mulvey 2000). As Mulvey explains, "the cinema offers a number of possible pleasures," one of which is scopophilia, a Freudian term which means pleasure in looking (37). Scopophilia is "the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as an object" by subjecting them to an active, controlling, and curious gaze (37). While the nature of the gaze, be it voyeuristic or fetishizing, depends on the individual viewer, the objectification of the person remains (Tatar 143). Film offers a unique platform for voyeurism and scopophilia as it "portray[s] a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy" (Mulvey 37). More often than not, mainstream films satisfy the scopophilia of heterosexual men utilizing the male gaze. Female characters function as erotic spectacle for the characters within the story and for the audience watching the movie, while male characters are the "bearer of the look" whose gaze the audience

is invited to objectify the female through with close ups and other cinematic techniques that align the audience with the male perspective (39).

Through cinematography and multi-layered compositions, Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* creates a voyeuristic spectacle that aligns the audience with the male gaze of the prince. When Aurora first enters the forest, the camera finds her as she's leaving a small clearing and begins walking deeper into the tree line. Once alone in the forest, Aurora begins singing, walking in the middle ground of the frame as the camera observes her through a foreground of tree trunks, foliage, and branches (*Sleeping Beauty* 00:22:34-00:22:44). As she walks, the camera often cuts to sweeping frames of the rugged, dense forest and playful depictions of the forest animals awakening, utilizing the 70mm Technirama widescreen technology in which the film was made (00:22:44-00:24:10). However, Aurora's operatic singing can be heard all the while, even when the camera has lost her in the woods. When Aurora begins singing and dancing during "Once Upon a Dream," the audience watches the young maiden through a shadowy forest foreground with the princess often moving behind the trees. Although there is nothing overtly sexual, the scene evokes a sense of voyeurism; Aurora sings loudly and dances confidently thinking that she is alone in the woods, meanwhile the audience is watching her from afar, sneaking glances at the beautiful maiden between the trees in the foreground (00:29:46-00:30:19). Indeed, it is from this same vantage point that the prince first lays eyes upon the princess. Emerging from behind a tree, the prince marvels at her beauty and watches her for a short while before stepping into the dance (00:30:20-00:30:57). Through cinematography and multi-layered compositions, Disney invites audiences to participate in voyeurism and objectify the princess through the gaze of the prince.

Following fairy tale tradition, Princess Aurora is put on display as an object of desire for the prince. Much like Perrault's effort to create romance by stating that the prince and princess

talked for hours, Disney also attempts to strengthen the romantic bond between the couple by introducing them during the film's prolonged domestic interlude, as discussed in section 5.2 (Perrault 48). However, these attempts are undermined as the couples fall in love in a twenty-four hour timeframe, presenting their unions as superficially motivated as opposed to driven by true love. This lack of romantic depth, combined with the film's objectifying male gaze and Aurora's silent composure, undermines the legitimacy of Prince Philip and Princess Aurora's relationship. Indeed, after successfully completing his quest to awaken the princess, the prince parades the silent beauty in front of society as if she were a prize he won. In the final scene, Prince Philip presents the princess to society for the first time and leads the princess down a grand staircase as an assembly of courtiers watch from below (*Sleeping Beauty* 01:12:38-01:12:48). The Princess only leaves Philip's side for a brief moment to embrace their parents before Philip quickly whisks her away to the dance floor where the two waltz on display for both the throne room and film's audience to admire (01:13:02-01:13:24). Aurora's lack of autonomy and speech in the final scene reduces her character to an object of desire put on display. The finale does not concentrate on Aurora reclaiming her royal position and reuniting with her estranged parents, but rather focuses on the princess' position at Prince Philip's side as his silent and beautiful reward for his bravery.

The three good fairies underscore Aurora's position as a woman on display by emphasizing the importance of her appearance in the final scene. Watching from a balcony, Flora is horrified to see that Aurora's gown is blue instead of pink. Flora and Merryweather begin to argue over the final colour, casting spells to change the dress from blue to pink and back again (01:14:06-01:14:25). Even as the throne room fades into a heavenly backdrop of clouds, the fairies' spells penetrate the couple's happily-ever-after montage (01:14:26-01:14:40). Aurora's

reunion with her parents and royal return are of little importance in the final scene, rather her romance with Philip and her appearance are what matter most, even down to the colour of her dress. Aurora's ever-changing dress colour makes clear that the princess' romance and beauty are of the utmost importance, as her family and kingdom fade away with the throne room.

Like Perrault's princess, Disney's Princess Aurora functions as an object of desire within her tale. Through her enchanted sleep, the princess matures from a shy sixteen-year-old to a mature woman ready for marriage mentally and physically. Moreover, the sexualized design of Aurora's teenage body observed through the voyeuristic male gaze objectifies the young heroine as an object of desire. Despite changes made to the princess' sleeping curse and romance, Disney's film duplicates Perrault's objectification of the young princess, perpetuating the antiquated notion that young women are prizes to be won by heroic men. Aurora's function as an object of desire combined with her lack of dialogue in the final scenes makes Disney's patriarchal message abundantly clear, that women are to be seen and not heard. Through narrative structure, character design, and cinematography, Disney's modernized princess reproduces and reinforces Perrault's traditional and conservative ways of view young women as passive erotic spectacles.

5.5   Maleficent, the Femme Fatale, and Fairy-story Justice

Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* is one of Disney's most famous and powerful villains. No longer a forgettable, elderly recluse, the wicked fairy from Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is transformed into a femme fatale who can shoot lightning bolts, turn into a dragon, and channel "all the powers of Hell" (*Sleeping Beauty*, 01:09:01-01:09:05). In this adaptation, Disney removes the second half of Perrault's tale and has the evil fairy re-enter the

tale as an obstacle in the prince's journey, placing the fairy in the forefront of the narrative as the story's main antagonist. With her name etymologically meaning "wrongdoer" (the prefix mal- meaning "wrong" or "improper" and efficient meaning "Making, causing to be"), Maleficent is a fearsome villain who is as powerful as she is memorable (*Oxford English Dictionary* "mal-prefix"; "efficient, *adj.* and *n.*"). Her signature black-horned headdress, dramatically draped cape, and sultry voice (actress Eleanor Audley) have captivated audiences for decades. However, her depiction of the femme fatale and her importance to the story's structure make Maleficent one of Disney's most complex characters from a feminist perspective. While her depiction of the 1940s femme fatale mirrors contemporary anxieties around female sexuality and autonomy at the time of the film's release, Maleficent's inevitable demise to the tale's male rescuer duplicates patriarchal codes and messages from Perrault's seventeenth-century tale.

Maleficent takes her cues from the femme fatales of the 1940s and early 1950s film noir, a popular genre at the time of *Sleeping Beauty*'s production (Bell 1995). The femme fatale is a beautiful and dangerous woman of a mature, childbearing age whose agency and sexuality stimulate patriarchal fear and desire by challenging social order (Grossman 2007). Femme fatales are particularly captivating for the sexual paradox they present; while their beauty and sexual magnetism excite and arouse, their fierce independence confronts anxieties of male castration and loss of power on the psychoanalytical level (Bell 1995; Doane 2013). Characterized by her pale complexion, red lips, bold eyebrows, and haughty demeanour, the femme fatale is a dangerous seductress who threatens the male protagonist by drawing him in with her sexual allure and leading him into danger in her attempt to acquire power. Although she may have successfully ensnared men before, the femme fatale's plans are futile against the male

protagonist as the archetype "functions as the obstacle to the male quest" and is defeated and punished by the male protagonist, often by death (Kaplan 3).

While the femme fatale may appear feminist for her free sexuality, intimidating independence, and patriarchal challenge, "[s]he is not the subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears about feminism" (Doane 2-3). The femme fatale embodies patriarchal fears of how women would behave if given the equality, agency, and sexual liberation feminism advocates and how men would be powerless to unfettered feminine wiles. Moreover, the archetype "inscribes middle age as a time of treachery, consumption, and danger in the feminine life cycle," branding women who do not conform to patriarchal ideals of the domestic lifestyle and the nuclear family as socially deviant (Bell 116). While the femme fatale may challenge patriarchy, her inevitable defeat by the male protagonist solidifies the archetype's role as a patriarchal pawn rather than a formidable foe. Her demise is a "desperate reassertion of control on the part of the threatened male subject," portraying a propagandist narrative of patriarchy's triumph over a powerful, deviant woman through submission and defeat (Doane 2). The character of the femme fatale demonizes and destroys the independent, sexually active, mature woman in order to deter female audiences from such lifestyles and to reassert patriarchal control over women who do.

Although Maleficent may not be as overtly sexual as the typical femme fatale due to her role in a family film, Disney purposefully animated Maleficent to be an exceedingly menacing version of the archetype. While some of her facial features were based on voice actress Audley (Davis 2011), Maleficent's alluring facial expressions and haughty demeanour are reminiscent of famous femme fatales such as Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner) in *The Killers* (1946) or Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Maleficent is a tall, slender, woman

with red lips, large eyes, overstatedly arched eyebrows, and an angular face that appears around the age of forty. Her iconic headdress combined with her bold-lined animation accentuates her facial features even further, with many close-ups rendering her face in the same framing technique as film noir (Bell 1995).

Not only did Disney animators deliberately style Maleficent after the femme fatales of film noir, they also derived some of her body movements from intimidating animals, such as wolves, bats, and rattlesnakes, in order to make her presence inherently menacing: "While the signatures of a witch are clearly written on Disney's evil women—their familiars, caldrons, and spells—the construction of their bodies on predatory animals heightens the dangerous consumptive powers of the *femme fatale*" (Bell 117). Indeed, despite her witchy iconography, Maleficent's power and unpredictability are palpable beneath her graceful demeanour like a cobra about to strike or a femme fatale setting her trap. Disney designed Maleficent to intensify audiences' fear of the femme fatale on a subconscious level, choosing fearful features of predatory animals to play on the audiences' fight-or-flight response. From her introduction to her final defeat, Disney's Maleficent channels the powers of the femme fatale and the dark forces of nature in order to strike fear in audiences, whether they are on or off screen.

However, Maleficent's portrayal of the femme fatale runs deeper than just her menacing, physical appearance, as her story arc also follows that of the femme fatale. Like the archetype, Maleficent is a middle-aged seductress whose challenge to patriarchy functions as an obstacle to the male protagonist. Maleficent makes two challenges to patriarchal order throughout the film. Her first and over-arching challenge is against King Stefan and his patriarchal rule. In the film's most memorable scene, Maleficent interrupts the christening of King Stefan's child and curses the Princess Aurora in retaliation for not receiving an invitation to the gathering. Lightning

strikes the middle of the room and from a green flame emerges the villain, poised with a stoic expression. Maleficent addresses the king directly, explaining that she "felt quite distressed at not receiving an invitation" seeing as many others were invited from all across the land, from "royalty" to the "rabble" (*Sleeping Beauty*, 00:07:54-00:08:15). As she speaks, Maleficent is elegant and composed, alternating between sweeping hand gestures and affectionately stroking her raven Diablo. She seems to graciously accept that she was intentionally left out of the festivities as the assembly hangs on her every word in anxiety and anticipation. With her graceful demeanour and seductive voice, Maleficent uses the charms of the femme fatale to lull her victims into a false sense of security until she's ready to make her move. After promising she "bear[s] no ill will," Maleficent goes to bestow a "gift" upon the child and contradictorily curses the princess to "prick her finger on the spindle of the spinning wheel and die" at the age of sixteen (00:08:36-00:09:12).

While the curse may seem like a petty overreaction, the curse is Maleficent's merciless opposition to the land's patriarchal ruler. King Stefan publicly challenges Maleficent's status as an authoritative figure within their society when he excludes her from attending and participating in the prestigious event. The curse is therefore retaliation for being slighted in front of the entire kingdom and its neighbours. Moreover, the curse is a demonstration of the full extent of her powers and a reassertion of her authority as she challenges King Stefan's patriarchal rule by threatening to end his bloodline. Her curse upsets the patriarchal order, both in her independence and in her threat to the royal line of succession. While her attempt to overthrow social order certainly makes her a deviant woman, it is Maleficent's decision to enact revenge upon the child that demonstrates the full extent of her malice, as attempting to kill a child defies all the maternal

instincts women are expected to possess. True to the archetype, Maleficent is a menacing, deviant woman who threatens social order by challenging patriarchal rule.

Maleficent's second patriarchal challenge occurs when she acts as an obstacle in the male-rescuer archetype's quest to wake Sleeping Beauty. Like the femme fatale, Maleficent ensnares Prince Philip by seductively leading him into her trap. When he arrives at the Woodcutter's cottage at twilight, the prince is anxious to meet the young maiden he met in the woods for a second time. Philip joyfully runs up to the cottage door, adjusts his hat, looks back at his horse, and clasps his hands together, shaking them by his head like a champion celebrating a big win. The anthropomorphized horse looks back at him and blinks with a knowing expression in an exchange that underhandedly suggests that the prince is about to have sexual relations, or "get lucky," with the maiden inside. When he knocks on the door, he hears a mysterious and seductive female voice beckon him into the cottage. The prince eagerly enters and walks right into Maleficent's trap. As her monsters tie up the prince, Maleficent watches from the shadows with a look of pleasure on her face. Although the scene is not overtly sexual, there is something intrinsically erotic about the femme fatale's pleasure deriving from the bondage of the young, handsome prince. Layered with the semiotic eroticism associated with the femme fatale, Maleficent's patriarchal challenge is given a sexual nuance. Through feminine subterfuge, the femme fatale ensnares the prince and (temporarily) stops him from ruining her patriarchal challenge.

In the dungeons of her derelict castle on the Forbidden Mountain, Maleficent torments the prince with visions of failing his heroic quest. In a green haze created by the magical orb on her staff, Maleficent shows the prince her version of his and Sleeping Beauty's fairy-tale romance. In the swirling green smoke, Maleficent shows the beautiful princess asleep at the top

of her tower and tells the prince how the maiden he fell in love with in the woods is the very

princess he is betrothed to marry. Maleficent goes on to reveal to Prince Philip his role within the

fairy tale and explains how the princess is waiting "in ageless sleep" for him to rescue her with

true love's kiss (*Sleeping Beauty,* 01:03:13-01:03:18). The smoke vision then changes to an

image of Maleficent's face as she transitions her story to the future, showing next her plans to

release the prince one hundred years later. As Maleficent's vision shows an elderly and

transparent Philip slowly riding off on his horse, she mockingly narrates that his "valiant figure,

straight and tall" will finally reach the princess and wake her with true love's kiss, proving that

true love conquers all, even time itself (01:03:40-01:03:44). Maleficent's vision demonstrates

how her patriarchal challenge would emasculate the prince, draining him of his strength and

youth in order to thwart his heroic quest. This horrifying future Maleficent illustrates for the

prince not only revises Perrault's original, lengthy sleeping spell into a nightmare, but also draws

attention to the liminality of the femme fatale's threat to the male protagonist. Although

Maleficent tells the story to gloat, she inadvertently exposes her function as an obstacle within

the tale. Philip is destined to awaken the princess; it is only a matter of time. Maleficent, as both

a femme fatale and a fairy-tale villain, can only postpone the male rescuer from his destiny for a

period of time.

Therefore, when Prince Philip eventually escapes and battles Maleficent with the help of

the three fairies, Maleficent's defeat is inevitable. Even as Maleficent conjures "all the powers of

hell" and overwhelms the prince in her dragon form, the menacing femme fatale is certain to lose

to the male rescuer who swings his sword wildly and can barely keep his footing during the fight.

As previously discussed in section 5.2, while the three fairies are truly responsible for saving the

day, Prince Philip must be the one to defeat Maleficent in order for the femme fatale and the

male-rescuer archetypes to fulfill their narrative function and restore patriarchal order. Indeed, after the fairies enchant his weapon, the prince thrusts his sword up into the chest of the dragon and she falls forward, clutching her bleeding wound, causing a cataclysmic rockslide (Bell 1995). From the top of the cliff, Prince Philip looks down upon the remains of the femme fatale, finding only her signature black cloak pinned to the ground by his mighty sword. The phallic imagery of Philip's sword penetrating an emblem of Maleficent's feminine power emphasizes that it was indeed patriarchy that triumphed over the femme fatale in the end (Do Rozario 2004). Maleficent's doomed challenge and inevitable death convey the powerful message that patriarchy will always overcome feminine powers, even if the challenge is from the most powerful and menacing social deviant, the femme fatale.

The fate of Maleficent and the femme fatale duplicates the patriarchal codes of the two female antagonists in Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." As previously discussed in section 4.5, the old, reclusive fairy and the cannibalistic, ogress queen mother-in-law from Perrault's tale uphold fairy-story justice by balancing the scales of good and evil, as one deviant woman is eradicated from society in substitution for the one that got away (Bettelheim 1977; Fay 2008). In an effort to streamline Perrault's narrative, Disney merges the old fairy and the queen ogress into one main female antagonist who is defeated by the film's end, allowing Disney to uphold fairy-story justice without depicting the second half of Perrault's tale. Moreover, Disney's Maleficent amalgamates the socially deviant traits of the two villains to create one problematic female antagonist. Like Perrault's fairy, Maleficent withdraws from social order through her reclusive, independent lifestyle and makes her patriarchal challenge against the king during the christening of the princess. Additionally, Maleficent's irrepressible, predatory nature and defiance of maternal instincts make her a deviant woman who is inevitably defeated by the

tale's male rescuer, like Perrault's ogress. Maleficent combines the social deviances and

narrative functions of Perrault's two wicked women and adapts them as the dangers of the

femme fatale. While her depiction of the femme fatale may appear as a revision to address

contemporary fears of female independence in the 1950s, the archetype duplicates the same

patriarchal codes as Perrault's villains. Indeed, like Perrault's two female antagonists, Disney's

femme fatale codes a woman's nonconformity to the domestic lifestyle and nuclear family as

socially deviant and dangerous to the structures of society. Moreover, the film depicts

independent, mature, unmarried women and their challenge as a threat to younger women, men,

and social order. While Maleficent's depiction of the femme fatale addresses 1950s anxieties

around female independence and sexuality, these fears are merely a continuation of the

antiquated, patriarchal gender roles and gendered social structures from Perrault's tale that value

women for their maternal roles. Maleficent's death not only balances the scales of good and evil

but also removes the socially deviant woman from the world, allowing the film's patriarchal

figure to restore order. In the femme fatale's defeat lies the same patriarchal message as in

Perrault's tale; women who challenge patriarchy and do not uphold their maternal duties to

society are socially deviant, dangerous, and must be eradicated to maintain social order.

As both femme fatale and fairy-tale villain, Maleficent cannot escape her inevitable

demise. Like the femme fatale of 1940s film noir, Maleficent is a mature, independent woman

who uses her agency and feminine allure to challenge patriarchy. Although Disney's villain may

not be as overtly sexual as the archetype of the femme fatale, Disney's animators imbued

Maleficent with the frightening features of predatory animals in order to intensify the audience's

fear on a subconscious level, creating a particularly menacing version of the archetype. However,

Maleficent's fierce challenge to King Stefan and Prince Philip's patriarchal powers is futile, as

she functions within the story as an obstacle in the male protagonist's quest as both femme fatale and fairy-tale villain. Maleficent's inevitable defeat at the hands of Prince Philip conveys the powerful message that patriarchy will always overcome feminine powers, even if the challenge is from the most powerful and deviant woman in the realm. Indeed, Maleficent combines the function and social deviances of the femme fatale and Perrault's evil fairy and queen ogress to perpetuate the sexist notion that women who do not conform to maternal roles or the domestic lifestyle are socially deviant threats to society and must be eliminated. In depicting Maleficent as a femme fatale, Disney duplicates and modernizes the problematic gender roles and gendered social structures of Perrault's two female villains, conveying traditional views of gender to contemporary audiences. The fate of Maleficent is a warning to Disney's 1950s audience that even the most powerful and fearsome women must conform to patriarchal values or face the consequences.

5.6   Conclusion

In many ways, *Sleeping Beauty* is a contemporary 1950s adaptation of Charles Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." The prolonged domestic interlude in *Sleeping Beauty* streamlines Perrault's narrative, moves the tale to a more domestic setting, and cultivates the fairy-tale romance according to contemporary standards by introducing the prince character early. Moreover, Disney's heroine, Princess Aurora, struggles with contemporary teen issues, such as authoritarian guardians and adolescent heartbreak, and is aesthetically based on the ideal beauty standards of the 1950s. Lastly, *Sleeping Beauty*'s female antagonist, Maleficent, combines the villainy of Perrault's two social deviant women into the contemporary film noire

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archetype, the femme fatale. Through its domestic interlude, *Sleeping Beauty* develops its characters and modernizes Perrault's seventeenth-century tale for contemporary audiences.

Although the characters in *Sleeping Beauty* feature many contemporary embellishments, their representations of gender are traditional and duplicate those upheld by their counterparts from Perrault's tale. Through an androcentric social structure, Prince Philip duplicates the male-rescuer archetype as his gender, status, and presence give him authority over women, animals, and magical beings. Moreover, Princess Aurora's modern teenage conflicts are mere additions to her overall struggles as the story's innocent persecuted heroine. Disney also imparts its princess with traditional values of femininity and has her function as an object of desire through narrative structure, character design, and the voyeuristic male gaze. Lastly, the femme fatale archetype stems from the same patriarchal fear of women who repudiate the domestic role of motherhood that Perrault's female villains characterised. Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* not only duplicates the gender roles and gendered structures from Perrault's tale, it also amplifies them for its modern Audiences. Through its modern trappings, Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* amplifies Perrault's antiquated notions of gender by duplicating patriarchal messages in ways that are more relatable and accessible to its 1950s audience. Though over two hundred years separate the two texts, *Sleeping Beauty* is as traditional as Perrault's tale when it comes to representations of gender.

Chapter 6: *Maleficent* (2014) by Walt Disney

6.1   Adapting an Animated Classic

Disney's approach to fairy-tale films has noticeably shifted in the fifty-five years separating *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *Maleficent* (2014). For decades, the company has received criticism for featuring innocent persecuted heroines who conform to heteronormative romance narratives, with films from Disney's classic era, such as *Sleeping Beauty*, providing ample fodder for such reproaches (Lieberman 1972; Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 1975; Giroux 1995; Davis 2011). Responding to these criticisms as well as the rising visibility of feminism in contemporary culture, Disney's modern era of animated princess films features resilient female characters whose storylines no longer revolve around romance or domestic duty. The trailblazing film for Disney's modern era, *Frozen* (2013), received high praise from audiences for breaking from the traditional negative gender roles and gendered social structures typically found in Disney films (Mendelson 2013; Fisher 2019; Groskop 2019). Focusing on familial relationships as opposed to romantic ones, *Frozen* subverts Disney's romantic model by responding to a common criticism of Disney films, that "You can't marry a guy you just met" (*Frozen*, 00:26:36-00:26:38). With a touching display of sisterly kinship, *Frozen* redefined the familiar Disney trope of "true love" as a powerful bond between family members, as opposed to heterosexual couples.

A year later, a similar corrective shift towards familial bonds appeared in the 2014 film *Maleficent*, an adaptation of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and one of the company's first films reimagining a Disney animated classic as a live-action film. *Maleficent* redefines the classic fairy-tale trope of "true love's kiss," which has persisted throughout history as an act shared by heterosexual couples, especially between young princes and young maidens. Although the trope

has been embedded in fairy tales for centuries, it has flourished through Disney's animation and has "been firmly lodged in the popular consciousness as an icon of the idealized romantic love that is trademark of Disney films" (Haase "Kiss and Tell"). In order to redefine true love's kiss in *Maleficent*, Disney created a (adoptive) mother-daughter bond between the unlikely duo of Aurora and Maleficent. While *Sleeping Beauty* used its interlude to adapt Perrault's fairy-tale romance into a stronger, more modern romantic relationship, *Maleficent* uses its domestic interlude to legitimize the bond between Maleficent and Aurora, "tak[ing] a remarkable feminist approach to re-interpreting the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty,' whether it be the Charles Perrault, Grimm, or Disney version" (Zipes, "Beyond Disney in the Twenty-First Century" 290). In this film, Maleficent watches over Aurora and develops a maternal, fairy godmother-like relationship with the princess that heals Maleficent emotionally from her traumatic past. When the curse on Aurora comes true, despite Maleficent's efforts to stop it, Maleficent's true love's kiss on Aurora's forehead breaks the curse.

In order for this story line to appeal to modern audiences, the characters of Maleficent and Aurora had to be reformed. *Maleficent* seeks to humanize the all-powerful "mistress of all evil" from *Sleeping Beauty,* who curses a baby for not being invited to a party (*Sleeping Beauty*, 00:51:16-00:51:20). Maleficent is reformed from fierce femme fatale into a mother figure with a tragic backstory explaining her villainy. Her counterpart, Princess Aurora, is transformed from a sexualized teen that upholds a traditional model of femininity into a curious, tenacious princess whose character more accurately models contemporary understandings of adolescence. These alterations allow for their (adoptive) familial bond to flourish, creating an unconventional but authentic true love's kiss between mother and daughter. When Maleficent kisses Aurora on the forehead, the film offers audiences a new interpretation of the trope of the true love's kiss, one

that is devoid of romance and male rescuers. Through character development, Disney revises the traditional trope of true love's kiss and the traditional gender roles and gendered social structures that come with it.

Not only does the character development of Maleficent and Aurora adapt the trope of the true love's kiss, but it also places female experiences and relationships at the forefront of the film. Disney's animated princess films have widely been criticized by scholars for their androcentric plots that largely focus on the endeavours of the male rescuer (Zipes "Breaking the Disney Spell" 1975; Murphy 1995; Do Rozario 2004). Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* inflates the role of the prince from Perrault's tale with dances in the woods with Aurora and daring swordfights against Maleficent that place Prince Philip's quest at the forefront of the film's action. Conversely, *Maleficent* focuses on the experiences of female characters and the relationships they build with one another. *Maleficent* revokes the male rescuer and replaces him with a female rescuer whose familial love for the princess brings salvation for the princess, Maleficent, and the kingdom. In shifting the narrative away from the male rescuer and refocusing on female characters, Disney's *Maleficent* is able to reshape the historically sexist tale into a contemporary fairy-tale film that promotes female relationships and empowerment.

However, while Disney appears to take important strides towards undoing the company's past mistakes with female-focused character and plot development, *Maleficent* contains representations of gender that are a continuation of the traditional gender roles and gendered structures from Perrault's tale and Disney's 1959 animated film. Alongside the film's moments of female empowerment are problematic representations of sexual assault and an antiquated message that women are valuable members of society when conforming to the traditional gender role of motherhood. Through female-centered character and plot development, *Maleficent* both

revises and duplicates the traditional representations of gender present in its source texts, creating a complex adaptation that does not overtly subscribe to Disney's traditional coding of gender but does not radically challenge it either. As previously outlined in section 3.2, duplicates are instances of plot, characterization, motifs, and other story elements that reproduce and reinforce traditional and conservative patterns, images, and codes of gender from an adaptation's source text. In contrast, revisions refer to moments that alter or challenge the representations of gender from the source texts (Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* 9). The following chapter examines how *Maleficent* duplicates and revises Perrault and Disney's antiquated views of gender for contemporary audiences by analysing the film's characters and the gender roles and social structures they represent.

6.2   Dismantling the Male-Rescuer Archetype in *Maleficent*

For centuries, "Sleeping Beauty" has told the story of a daring prince rescuing a young beautiful maiden from an enchanted sleep. The male-rescuer archetype is embedded within canonical and lesser-known versions of "Sleeping Beauty," creating "a well-known corpus of tales where the rescuing agent is constantly presented as male, thus conveying the idea that the redeemer is naturally a man" (Rodriguez 52). Whether it is the seventeenth-century tale by Perrault or the 1959 animated adaptation by Disney, "the story is first and foremost about female dependence on a male rescuer" (Haase "Kiss and Tell"). When Disney released *Maleficent* in 2014, audiences were surprised to see the familiar story of "Sleeping Beauty" told anew with the male-rescuer archetype subverted and the motif of "true love's kiss" redefined (Wieselman "Angelina Jolie Explains the Twist Ending of 'Maleficent'"). Unlike *Sleeping Beauty*'s Prince Philip, who is confident, entitled, and a main character of the film, *Maleficent*'s Prince Philip is a

bashful adolescent who is reduced to a minor character and acts as a form of misdirection, or a red herring, within the film. Playing on the idea that "the redeemer is naturally a man," Disney introduces the prince in a familiar plotline, having him arrive towards the end of the film to administer true love's kiss. However, when the prince's kiss does not awaken the princess, Maleficent is revealed as the tale's rescuer, demonstrating that true love can exist in the form of familial bonding. However, while *Maleficent* takes great strides in creating a more comprehensive version of "true love," the inclusion of the prince's non-consensual kiss continues a problematic narrative within this seemingly feminist adaptation.

In order to misdirect audiences, *Maleficent*'s prince follows a similar plotline to his predecessors, appearing towards the end of the story *deus ex machina*, like many princes do (Rowe 52). As discussed in section 4.2 and 5.2, princes have it pretty easy in a "Sleeping Beauty" tale, all that is required of them is that they are in the right place at the right time. In Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," the prince is the quintessential male-rescuer archetype and becomes the hero simply by being "the first prince who happens down the highway" (52). Similarly, *Sleeping Beauty*'s Prince Philip benefits from Disney's androcentric social structure and rescues the princess with minimal effort as nature, women, and magical beings do the work for him. So, when Prince Philip materializes towards the end of *Maleficent* with just thirty minutes left in the film, his delayed, yet predictable appearance signals to audiences the arrival of the story's hero as is consistent with the well-known archetype. Indeed, watching from afar, Maleficent and her companion Diaval discuss the prince's ability to break the curse and how "That boy could be [Aurora's] only chance. It's her fate, anyways" (*Maleficent*, 01:01:38-01:01:43). Like many princes before him, *Maleficent*'s prince appears in

the right place at the right time and is superficially considered the story's hero due to his gender and status.

Although *Maleficent*'s Prince Philip follows the plotline of the male-rescuer archetype, he is initially different from his predecessors in demeanour. While Perrault's and *Sleeping Beauty*'s princes act with the inherent confidence and conviction of a hero, the prince in *Maleficent* is far less entitled by his gender and status. Prince Philip's first interaction with Aurora is in direct response to previous princes, more specifically revising the infractions of *Sleeping Beauty*'s prince with a parallel forest scene. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the prince is confident and coercive, continually grabbing the princess' hand and pursuing her in the woods until she submits to his advances. In contrast, *Maleficent*'s prince is chivalrous and bashful, apologizing repeatedly to the princess for startling her and for touching her hand when he helps her up from a fall (00:59:22-00:59:35). Throughout their conversation, *Maleficent*'s prince demonstrates no supremacy over nature or Aurora; the two adolescents are equally engaged and modest in forming their first romantic connection and Prince Philip adheres to social and physical boundaries. Unlike previous princes who approach the princess as though she is their divine right, this contemporary prince is reserved and initially acts with an understanding of consent. Indeed, Prince Philip wins the heart of the princess through kindness and respect, not coercion. When Prince Philip goes to ride off towards the castle, it is Aurora who does the chasing, running after him to ask if he'll be returning later (01:00:36-01:00:41).The forest scene establishes mutual interest and respect between the two adolescents, creating a romantic encounter that is free of the toxic, androcentric magic of Disney and is aligned with contemporary society's greater understanding of body autonomy and consent.

When discussing consent and the tale of "Sleeping Beauty," the most iconic and problematic moment is when the prince kisses the sleeping princess, an addition that is not present in Perrault's tale and is a direct violation of the princess' consent. However, for centuries the kiss has been viewed as romantic due to its framing as an act of "true love" and contemporary western society's slow recognition of the importance of consent. Despite the kiss' prominence in retellings of the tale, the trope of true love's kiss has not always been incorporated. In earlier versions, such as Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia" and Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," there is no kiss that awakens the princess. While Basile's tale has its own concerns in regard to consent, as the princess is raped by the king during her sleep, the princess is awoken not by a kiss but rather by her newborn child suckling the flax splinter out of her finger. In Perrault's tale, the mere presence of the prince is enough to break the sleeping curse. Although the Grimms introduce the kiss in their version of the tale "Briar Rose," it was Disney's 1959 film *Sleeping Beauty* that solidified the kiss as a canonical element of the tale in the minds of many audiences (Haase "Kiss and Tell"). Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* is the most popular and commonplace version of the tale and the film's enchanted, spell-breaking kiss between the heterosexual royal couple has not only become synonymous with Disney films, but also with the tale of Sleeping Beauty as a romantic act (K. Stone 1975; Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" 1995; Haase 2011).

However, *Maleficent* redefines the trope of true love's kiss to include familial relationships, opening the act to incorporate more versions of love than just heterosexual romance. While Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* magnified the romantic relationship between its prince and princess, *Maleficent* focuses on the growing familial relationship between Maleficent and Princess Aurora. Through spending time together in Maleficent's fairy kingdom, which is called

the Moors, the two women create an adoptive family bond, with Maleficent watching over Aurora as a mother figure (for further discussion see section 6.4). The film shifts the story's focus away from romance and towards family when in a surprising twist on the familiar trope, Prince Philip bestows upon Aurora what should be true love's kiss, only this time the princess does not wake up (*Maleficent*, 01:14:28-01:15:08). It isn't until Maleficent, the story's reformed villain turned hero, kisses the young girl on the forehead in a mournful goodbye that the princess is awoken (01:16:42-01:17:10). The moment, although brief, completely subverts the male-rescuer archetype and simultaneously redefines the trope of true love's kiss as a familial act. Maleficent is established as the film's hero, dismantling the antiquated male-rescuer archetype and promoting the importance of female and familial relationships.

While Disney's *Maleficent* goes to great lengths to redefine the trope of true love's kiss to include a familial relationship, the film does not remove or criticize the prince's breech of Aurora's consent. When Maleficent learns that Princess Aurora has fallen victim to the curse, she seeks out the prince, thinking he is the only one who can save Aurora. In a comedic twist on *Sleeping Beauty*, the prince does not charge the castle with the help of the fairies; instead, Prince Philip is unsuspectingly placed under a brief sleeping spell, floated through the castle, and (literally) dropped at Aurora's bedroom door by Maleficent (*Maleficent*, 01:07:27-01:12:37). The scene demonstrates the absurdity that the only requirement of the rescuer is that they are male; based on his gender and status, the prince is used like a like a pawn in Maleficent's strategy to undo her own curse. In a scene reminiscent of *Sleeping Beauty,* Prince Philip arrives at the princess' bedside and looks upon the beautiful, sleeping girl. Only this time, he does not know his role. The three fairies explain the curse and pressure him to kiss the princess, asserting that his gender, royal status, and the concept of love at first sight are sufficient grounds to violate the

princess' body autonomy (01:13:18-01:14:09). The prince, who previously demonstrated understandings of consent, raises the issue to the fairies, stating he "wouldn't feel right about it" because they've "only met once" (01:13:57-01:14:02). However, he ultimately succumbs to the fairies' external pressures and kisses the sleeping princess on the lips without the girl's permission in what is framed as a romantic scene (01:14:28-01:15:08).

For many reasons, the breech of consent is problematic; not only do the princess' four fairy guardians support the violation of her body autonomy (Maleficent by delivering him and the three fairies by pressuring him), but also the prince conforms to peer pressure, violates the princess' consent, and is still regarded as a viable love interest for Aurora. Although Prince Philip's kiss validates Maleficent's kiss through comparison, the film problematically condones the violation of the princess' body autonomy in order to make its point. Although sexual consent discourse often focuses on intercourse, "degrees of harm and individual experiences may differ and depend on a range of factors, your bodily autonomy is still violated by being kissed or touched against your will, not only by being penetrated against your will" (Popova 40). While Disney uses this moment to redefine the trope of true love's kiss to be more inclusive, the violation of consent is exceedingly problematic as it reiterates themes of sexual assault and male domination over the female body stemming from Perrault's and Disney's versions. Although the film demonstrates an understanding of consent, there is no reflective discourse or repercussions that recognizes the violation of teenaged girl's body autonomy. Rather, the princess' consent is assumed and the non-consensual kiss is framed as a good deed, all because the non-consensual kiss was performed by a prince. While *Maleficent* may assert a more inclusive form of true love, the film ultimately sacrifices the princess' body autonomy to do so, problematically continuing the tale's patriarchal narrative that male supremacy absolves sexual assault.

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In many ways, *Maleficent* subverts and revises the traditional, sexist male-rescuer archetype in order to challenge the antiquated notion that true love only exists between heterosexual couples. However, the film also duplicates the tale's problematic social structure of male supremacy when the prince kisses the princess in her sleep and violates her body autonomy. Although *Maleficent*'s Prince Philip demonstrates a modern understanding of consent, he ultimately succumbs to external pressures and sexually assaults the princess and in doing so perpetuates the traditional narrative that sexual assault is excusable when meant romantically. While *Maleficent* may subvert some of the sexist gender roles from previous tellings, the duplication of the princess' assault at the hands of the prince is inexcusable, especially in a contemporary adaptation that presents itself as empowering to women.

6.3   Princess Aurora and Representations of Adolescence

Princesses, whether they are from fairy tales or Disney films, are often characterized by the attributes they are valued for. Beautiful and passive, these innocent persecuted heroines convey problematic socio-cultural messages as they wait patiently for their male rescuers like prizes to be won. As discussed in section 4.3 and 4.4, the princess in Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" is a paradigm of fairy tale sexism that models female passivity as virtuous and functions within the tale as an object of desire. Similarly, the princess in Disney's animated adaptation, *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), duplicates the traditional model of femininity and the innocent persecuted heroine archetype while furthering the objectification and sexualization of the adolescent princess through the cinematic male gaze (as discussed in section 5.3 and 5.4). Whether she is from Perrault's tale or Disney's adaptation, the sleeping princess seems bound to an inherently sexist role and tale structure. However, Disney's *Maleficent* (2014) breaks from

this tradition, revising the tale's princess character in order to create an adolescent princess who no longer upholds an antiquated model of femininity or perpetuates the archetype of the innocent persecuted heroine. Played by the age-appropriate actress Elle Fanning, *Maleficent*'s Princess Aurora aims to be a more authentically adolescent princess, who is characterized by her curiosity, kindness, and tenacity, rather than her relationship to the prince.

One of the film's most important feminist revisions to the princess character occurs on a structural level. Categorically, the tale of Sleeping Beauty falls within the innocent persecuted heroine genre in which a young, passive maiden is persistently victimized in two or three acts, as outlined by Jones (1993) and discussed in section 4.2 and 5.3. While Perrault's princess endures all three acts of persecution—Act I: in her family home, Act II: in her attempt to be married, Act III: in motherhood— and Disney's animated princess undergoes Acts I and II, *Maleficent*'s Princess Aurora only experiences Act I where in "The heroine is persecuted or threatened in her family home" to prick her finger on the spindle (Jones 17). Acts II and III, which are not present in the 2014 film, centralize on the heroine's relationship to the prince and the tribulations she experiences in courtship and in her (future) husband's home (Jones 17, 34). As discussed in section 6.2, *Maleficent* dismantles the male-rescuer archetype traditionally found in the tale of "Sleeping Beauty." In making the adoptive mother figure, Maleficent, the rescuer and supplier of true love's kiss, the 2014 film removes the male-rescuer archetype, decentralizes the romantic plot of the tale, and presents familial bonds as an alternative form of true love. These revisions remove the film from the innocent persecuted heroine genre, as the princess' conflicts no longer centre on her relationship to the prince. Instead, her conflicts originate from her familial bonds, as she grapples with the repercussions of her father and adoptive mother's crimes. In dismantling the male-rescuer archetype, *Maleficent* concurrently removes the sexist female gender role of the

innocent persecuted heroine, creating a princess character whose conflicts no longer revolve around her romance.

Not only does this structural shift liberate *Maleficent*'s Princess Aurora from the sexist gender role of the innocent persecuted heroine, but it also removes themes of the princess' maturation and her subsequent function within the tale as an object of desire. As Bettelheim (1977), Jones (1993), and Fay (2008) discuss, the sleeping curse placed on Sleeping Beauty is a metaphor for maturation. In many ways, Perrault's princess was appropriate for her time, when arranged marriages were common amongst royalty, female consent was a nonissue, and adolescent women married and had children young. In both Perrault's tale and Disney's 1959 animated adaptation, the princess' sleep, regardless of length, signifies the princess' transformation from an innocent adolescent to a mature woman ready to marry the prince who wakes her. In maturing and waiting for a prince, both Perrault's and Disney's princesses subsequently function as an object of desire, acting as a reward for the male rescuer who awakens her from her curse and a model of femininity for young audiences.

However, in Disney's *Maleficent*, Princess Aurora does not undergo any changes, physically or mentally, during her enchanted sleep as she is not preparing for her male rescuer. In the 2014 adaptation, Aurora is awoken by the familial true love's kiss of her mother figure, Maleficent, not the romantic kiss of a prince. In displacing the male-rescuer archetype and removing the romantic connotations from true love's kiss, the film's adolescent princess does not need to prepare for marital or childbearing responsibilities during her enchanted sleep because she will not be ushered into marriage upon her wakening. Instead, the princess remains an adolescent with the kiss affirming the mother-daughter family dynamic between Maleficent and Aurora. Disney's *Maleficent* presents a young heroine whose conflicts correspond with "current

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social constructions of adolescence [that] assume it to be a stage of life characterized by the transition from childhood to adulthood, but because economic conditions in the United States and Canada in the twenty-first century have increased young adults' financial dependence on their parents, adolescence now, for many people, extends into their twenties" (Cadden, Coats, and Seelinger Trites 3). Princess Aurora represents this liminal stage in life, not quite child and not yet adult. While narratives of this age group often usher the adolescent into adulthood through a coming-of-age narrative, Maleficent's princess occupies this liminal stage, creating a unique princess whose story is not about her maturation but instead about the important familial relationships fostered in this stage of her life. In removing the innocent persecuted heroine and male-rescuer archetypes, *Maleficent* allows its princess to remain an adolescent, escape the antiquated sexualization that her predecessors endured, and explore the important familial bonds developed during this formative age.

Princess Aurora in *Maleficent* is more accurately an adolescent princess, not just in social construction, but also in appearance and behaviour. Although the film's casting of the character is far from intersectional, as the actress who plays Aurora, Elle Fanning, is blonde, white, and conventionally beautiful, her character does not mirror the "Bardot-like kitten in Dior skirts" image of her Disney predecessor (Craven 194). Instead, the fourteen-year-old actress dresses like "a costume-drama medieval maid" in flowing gowns with theatrical sleeves (194). Unlike Perrault's and Disney's princesses, who are concerned with modelling femininity and finding true love, *Maleficent*'s princess is a curious, kind, and tenacious girl who plays. Throughout the film there are many instances of play; Aurora rolls in the leaves, cares for animals, frolics with fairies, and even has a mud fight with her creature friends in the Moors (*Maleficent*, 00:43:05-00:43:37; 00:44:26-00:44:26; 00:52:33-00:53:12). Although Aurora's playful moments may

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sound infantilizing, the common adolescent pastime of play is rarely depicted alongside conventional princess characters, who are more often than not in the midst of courtship or persecution. Aurora's playful nature is a refreshingly spirited depiction of this liminal age where one is neither child nor adult. However, that is not to say Aurora is innocent or naïve. Aurora is a curious character who "wonder[s] at the world about her," observing the thorn wall that separates the two lands and inquiring about the political tensions (00:43:31-00:43:34). When Maleficent briefly explains the loss of her wings, Aurora demonstrates emotional intelligence, sensing her adoptive mother's grief and pain she comforts her by holding her hand (00:54:51-00:55:31). In *Maleficent*, Princess Aurora occupies the liminal space that is adolescence, demonstrating through play and political intrigue that she is transitioning from child to adult but has not yet fully transformed. In doing so, Disney offers audiences an adolescent princess whose behaviours, concerns, and conflicts are more attuned to those of its contemporary young audience.

Another notable feminist revision is that Princess Aurora exhibits agency, something that her passive predecessors problematically lacked. After a tearful confrontation with Maleficent about the truth of her royal lineage and the curse, Aurora rides off on horseback to the castle and delivers herself to her father, the king (*Maleficent*, 01:05:09-01:05:41). Aurora's decision to take charge of her own predicament is unlike any actions made by the princesses in Perrault's or Disney's version. Neither princesses make any attempts to change their fate and instead are passive victims of persecution who break down in tears as opposed to taking action. Although Princess Aurora cannot escape her fate in *Maleficent*, her attempt is commendable and separates her from the innocent persecuted heroines of the past.

Aurora's agency manifests as political power by the end of the film. When the battle is over and King Stefan is dead, Aurora takes her place as matriarchal ruler of both the Land of

Men and the Moors. In the film's final scene, flowers grow magically wherever Aurora walks (01:26:19-01:26:27). Maleficent's twisted throne of branches, which was once the symbol of her temporary dictatorship, transforms into a throne of flowers for Aurora's new reign (01:26:27-01:26:33). While Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* establishes an androcentric gendered social structure indentured to patriarchy (the prince), *Maleficent* creates a matriarchal world where nature is in harmony with Aurora's female power (Zipes, "Beyond Disney in the Twenty-First Century" 290). However, Aurora does not appear to have complete agency, as Maleficent stands at her side as her guardian and mentor in the film's idyllic, matriarchal new world order. The adolescent Queen Aurora is given power and agency as ruler but is also under the watchful eye of her parent guardian, like a young royal taking the throne with her advisor at her side until she comes of age. Although Aurora's agency has limitations due to her age, the end of the film suggests that Aurora "will undoubtably bring about a more just world" (290). Although Aurora is young, she rises to power and uses her status to create a better world, all without an obligatory happily-ever-after with Prince Philip. To solidify her power further, the film's unidentified narrator reveals herself to be an adult Aurora setting the record straight about her and Maleficent's story. The 2014 film gives Princess Aurora power and authority over her own life's story, one that has been continuously told by the male tradition of fairy tales and popularly told by Perrault and Disney respectively. Aurora asserts herself as the true authority of the "Sleeping Beauty" tale and her narration directly challenges and undermines the authority of the male narrated tales that came before. *Maleficent* not only offers audiences a powerful adolescent queen, but also amplifies her female voice as ultimate authority.

In many ways, *Maleficent*'s Princess Aurora is drastically different from Perrault's princess and Disney's 1959 animated princess. Through subverting the male-rescuer archetype,

Maleficent subsequently dismantles the innocent persecuted heroine archetype, creating an adolescent princess who no longer upholds an antiquated model of femininity or functions as an object of desire. Unlike her predecessors, whose main conflicts stemmed from maturation and marriage, Princess Aurora is concerned with the important familial bonds in her life, creating a more accurate depiction of contemporary adolescence. *Maleficent* revises the previously passive princess character into a playful, curious, and tenacious adolescent princess, one who not only exhibits agency but also has power and authority of her own. Through these radical revisions, Disney offers contemporary audiences a Sleeping Beauty character who is a new model of adolescent femininity, one who is concerned with issues like family and politics and seeks to create a better world for all.

6.4   Maleficent and Motherhood

Disney's *Maleficent* opens with a prophecy, not about a sleeping princess as audiences might expect, but instead about an unknown figure who is said to unite two warring kingdoms: "Once upon a time there were two kingdoms that were the worst of neighbours. So vast was the discord between them that it was said only a great hero or a terrible villain might bring them together" (00:00:36-00:00:50). Not only does this legend reframe the familiar story of "Sleeping Beauty" to focus on Maleficent, but it also presents a dichotomy of hero versus villain that asks audiences to question their preconceived notions of Maleficent, one of Disney's most famous and fearsome villains. *Maleficent* seeks to humanize Perrault's evil fairy and Disney's femme fatale who memorably curses a baby for not being invited to a party. In this retelling, Maleficent's actions are explained as retaliation for a heinous betrayal at the hands of a young King Stefan, who drugs Maleficent and steals her powerful fairy wings in order to claim the

throne. The emotional scene is a metaphor for rape and presents Maleficent's villainy as a result this abuse, creating a seemingly feminist revision of the character that addresses the important issue of sexual assault and presents Maleficent as a rape survivor overcoming her trauma and oppressor. However, undermining this narrative is a problematic representation of rape survivors, as Maleficent's villainy is a direct result of her assault and her redemption is directly dependent upon finding her maternal abilities. Although *Maleficent*'s story is supposed to liberate her character, the film perpetuates the harmful stereotype that women who have been raped are irrational and the antiquated message that deviant women must conform to heteronormative roles, such as motherhood, in order to be valuable members of society.

Maleficent's triumph over patriarchy is the film's most apparent feminist revision to the source material. At the beginning of the film, Maleficent is established as a representative of matriarchy. Although the Moors have no political hierarchy, Maleficent is named as the powerful protector of this fertile, green realm and represents it in battle using her powerful wings to fight off attacks from the neighbouring kingdom (*Maleficent*, 00:12:06-00:13:38). The world of humans, often referred to as the world of men, is a dark, barren land and is characterized as a patriarchal realm ruled by greedy, tyrannical kings who seek to take down Maleficent and conquer the Moors. *Maleficent* establishes the battle between the two worlds as a conflict between patriarchy and matriarchy and appoints Maleficent as a representative of the latter, a theme that continues throughout the film.

Maleficent's wings are the main source of her matriarchal power. Maleficent uses her wings to fly through the Moors and to protect the border from the King's army, using gusts of wind and sweeping attacks. When Stefan, Maleficent's childhood friend, returns to the Moors as an adult, he drugs Maleficent and steals her wings as she sleeps (00:16:25-00:18:47). The scene

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echoes how sexual violence often occurs between acquaintances and also depicts a common rape narrative where a woman is made unconscious and then sexually assaulted while incapacitated or unconscious (Park 11; Popova 23). In an interview, actress Angelina Jolie, who plays the role of Maleficent and is executive producer of the film, explains how she and writer Linda Woolverton decided that in order to humanize the villain, "Something would have to be so violent and aggressive and so of course for us, we were very conscious… that it was a metaphor for rape" (Jolie qtd. in Zipes, "Beyond Disney and the Twenty-First Century 290). Indeed, rape is a powerful metaphor for depicting patriarchal power over female characters. Rape is one of the most violent and oppressive acts that can be inflicted upon the female body: "classic texts of the debate… see rape not as a sexually motivated act, but as a form of oppression, social control, and political power; in fact, as the most significant expression of male dominance" (Sielke 368). Stefan's mutilation of Maleficent's body is a conscious act of political strategy, not an act of desire, as taking her wings oppresses her by taking the source of her matriarchal power. Moreover, Stefan brutally asserts his dominance over Maleficent to reduce her power and to gain more for himself, as stealing her wings allows him to prove himself worthy of claiming the throne of the patriarchal kingdom of men. Through the violent act of rape, *Maleficent* metaphorically demonstrates patriarchal oppression of matriarchal power.

Maleficent's metaphorical rape makes her confrontation with King Stefan in the final battle scene incredibly impactful. At the top of a tall turret, evoking the same phallic imagery as Perrault's tower, King Stefan falls to his death bringing an end to patriarchal rule. While Maleficent does not kill Stefan herself, Maleficent's confrontation does lead to social change. As Jack Zipes explains, "By overcoming abuse and confronting tyranny, Maleficent lays the groundwork for a different kind of society that will combine a cultivation of nature and the

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environment with a more democratic approach to government" ("Beyond Disney in the Twenty-First Century" 290). Maleficent overcomes one of the most violent abuses of the female body, confronts her abuser, and replaces his patriarchal rule with a matriarchal system governed by the kind-hearted Princess Aurora. In the end, Maleficent restores her wings, but more importantly improves the political world around her. Maleficent's confrontation and triumph over patriarchy demonstrates female power and promotes matriarchal social structures, marking *Maleficent* as what appears to be a turn towards feminism for the Walt Disney Company.

However, beneath the film's seemingly feminist narrative, *Maleficent* perpetuates problematic representations of female rape survivors, as the film suggests Maleficent's villainy is a direct result of her trauma and portrays her as an irrational threat to society. After Stefan takes Maleficent's wings, her pain and suffering cause her to retreat to a desolate, secluded castle (which audiences may recognise as the Forbidden Mountain, Maleficent's home in *Sleeping Beauty*). There she gathers her strength and turns vengeful towards the newly appointed king. However, before seeking her revenge, Maleficent also problematically menaces her community in the Moors. Draped in dark clothing that is reminiscent of her femme fatale form in *Sleeping Beauty*, Maleficent returns to the Moors and brings darkness and destruction, sucking life out of the foliage where she walks and forging her own throne out of dark branches (*Maleficent*, 00:24:44-00:25:55). As a result of her trauma, Maleficent turns against the people and the land she once to protected, appoints herself as ruler, and forces the creatures of the Moors to bend the knee. Maleficent becomes the dark, heartless, and dangerous villain audiences know her to be due to her sexual assault.

Upon hearing the news of Princess Aurora's birth, Maleficent visits the castle, and the throne room scene from *Sleeping Beauty* ensues, as Maleficent attends the christening uninvited

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and curses the child. However, the familiar scene is given a new perspective, as the motive

behind Maleficent's curse on the infant Aurora is now understood as punishment for King

Stefan's crimes against Maleficent. In her discussion of negative media representations of rape

survivors, Zoe Brigley Thompson explains that a common narrative portrayed by the media is

that rape survivors are "broken, tainted, or hysterical even, and certainly not reliable as a rational

subject" (67). Maleficent's curse on Aurora is portrayed as a hysterical reaction to her trauma.

Overcome by pain and anger she irrationally lashes out, cursing an innocent baby for its father's

wrongdoings. While the film attempts to humanize Maleficent's villainy, explaining rape as

Maleficent's motive for cursing the child perpetuates a harmful stereotype that represents rape

survivors as tainted, emotionally irrational, and threatening to society.

It isn't until Maleficent begins to watch over the young Aurora that her morality starts to

change. Investing in the revenge spell she cast, Maleficent supervises Aurora from afar, saving

her from the ignorance and incompetence of the three good fairies who are watching over her

(*Maleficent*, 00:40:58-00:41:19). Over time, Maleficent and Aurora form a familial bond, and

Maleficent's virtue is slowly restored as she takes care of the young girl. Maleficent begins

healing the trees in the Moors as she once did before and her relationship with the other

inhabitants begins to mend as they watch her take on a motherly role with Aurora (*Maleficent*,

00:41:36-00:41:41; 00:52:56-00:53:08). When Maleficent is unable to reverse the sleeping curse,

her motherly kiss on Aurora's forehead revives the princess, undoing Maleficent's villainy and

establishing her as the hero of the tale. Moreover, Maleficent's adoptive mother role is portrayed

as a bond of true love, as it is Maleficent's motherly true love's kiss, not the prince's romantic

kiss, that awakens the princess. At the end of the film, Maleficent assumes the role of Aurora's

sole caregiver and is praised for her heroism. Maleficent's goodness is directly related to her

maternal abilities, demonstrating how even the most tainted, villainous women can be saved through conforming to the heteronormative role of motherhood.

In tying Maleficent's rehabilitation to her maternal abilities, *Maleficent* perpetuates an antiquated patriarchal message that harkens back to Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." As discussed in section 4.5, the ogress mother-in-law's plotline in Perrault's tale demonstrates what happens to women who disobey social norms. In the second, lesser-known half of Perrault's tale, the ogress brazenly defying all maternal instincts when she insists on eating her grandchildren for dinner. The ogress' villainy conveys a patriarchal message intended for female audiences, that women who do not uphold their maternal duties are wicked, socially deviant, and should be eliminated. Through the ogress character, Perrault advises his female audiences through negative example. This same message is continued in *Sleeping Beauty.* Like Perrault's fairy, Maleficent's irrepressible, predatory nature and defiance of maternal instincts make her a deviant woman who is inevitably defeated and removed from society. While Maleficent's depiction of the femme fatale addresses 1950s anxieties around female independence and sexuality, these fears are merely a continuation of the antiquated, patriarchal gender roles and gendered social structures from Perrault's tale that value women for their maternal roles.

Maleficent takes a different approach to portraying the same patriarchal message as Perrault's tale and Disney's 1959 film, only this time using positive example to demonstrate how women can find redemption through social norms. Maleficent, who was once an irrational and socially deviant woman, is rehabilitated through her undertaking of the care of a child, Princess Aurora. Maleficent's story then becomes a positive example of how conforming to heteronormative social roles can save socially deviant women. Through female villains, all three

versions of "Sleeping Beauty" perpetuate the patriarchal message that women are only valuable

members of society when fulfilling traditional gender roles such as motherhood. Although

Maleficent delivers its message from a positive perspective, the female villain overcomes

patriarchal oppression only to be ushered back into the patriarchal fold as a mother.

As a rape survivor, Maleficent is portrayed as a dark, irrational villain to all of society,

but through conforming to gender roles and becoming a maternal figure, she is transformed into

a hero. Maleficent's goodness is directly associated with her maternal abilities, conveying the

sexist notion that women are upstanding, valuable members of society when they are fulfilling

prescribed gender roles, such as being a mother. Although *Maleficent* offers audiences the

seemingly feminist narrative of a rape survivor triumphing over patriarchy and establishing a

brighter, matriarchal future, the film's problematic representation of rape survivors as irrational

and dangerous undermines the film's integrity and duplicates the patriarchal messages of Disney

and Perrault. *Maleficent*'s attempt to address contemporary society's rising visibility of feminism

through the important issue of rape fallaciously denigrates the experiences of the very women the

film is trying to advocate for. While Maleficent may be free of King Stefan's patriarchal

oppression, she is not free of society's gender roles, even in this twenty-first century retelling.

6.5   Conclusion

In many ways, *Maleficent* revises Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and

Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* for contemporary audiences by addressing the rising visibility of

feminism in popular culture. *Maleficent* successfully dismantles some of the most sexist and

persistent gender roles and gendered social structures that are present in Perrault's tale and

amplified by Disney's 1959 animated film. In *Maleficent,* gender roles such as the male rescuer

and the innocent persecuted heroine are done away with and replaced with a female rescuer and a more accurately adolescent princess who demonstrates agency. Moreover, Disney's *Maleficent* includes the powerful narrative of a female rape survivor overcoming oppression, confronting her abuser, and creating a better matriarchal world for all. *Maleficent* reframes the traditionally sexist fairy tale of "Sleeping Beauty" into a story focused on familial bonds and female relationships as opposed to romantic relations between heterosexual couples. Through revising the roles of the prince, the princess, and the female villain, Disney's *Maleficent* creates a fairy tale with a more inclusive version of true love that promotes familial bonds and female relationships.

However enticing this notion of a feminist "Sleeping Beauty" tale may be, caution must be taken with Disney, for "when offering active female role models, Disney gives with one hand and takes away with the other" (Sawin 106). Indeed, there are many duplications of the source material within *Maleficent* that directly undermine the apparent feminist revisions within the film. In efforts to create a more dynamic retelling of "Sleeping Beauty," Disney's *Maleficent* addresses some of the darker themes of the tale, such as rape and sexual assault. Although *Maleficent* successfully revises the prince character by dismantling and subverting the male-rescuer archetype, the film does not address Prince Philip's violations against the princess' body autonomy when he kisses her without consent. The inclusion of the non-consensual kiss perpetuates the problematic narrative that sexual assault is excusable when meant romantically. Additionally, as a rape survivor, Maleficent is portrayed as a dark, irrational villain to all of society who is only transformed into a hero through conforming to the traditional gender role of motherhood. Not only does *Maleficent*'s portrayal of a rape survivor perpetuate the harmful stereotype that women who have been sexually assaulted are irrational and even dangerous to

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society, but the film also conveys the sexist message from Perrault's and Disney's tales that women are upstanding, valuable members of society only when they are fulfilling prescribed gender roles, such as being a mother. While Disney's *Maleficent* may have feminist revisions within the film, *Maleficent* duplicates gender roles and gendered social structures from the film's source texts, conveying sexist gender codes from hundreds of years ago to contemporary audiences. To refer to *Maleficent* as a feminist adaptation of Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* would be to ignore the film's problematic representations of sexual assault and rape survivors, something that should not be overlooked in a twenty-first century retelling.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1   Summary of Findings

The recent resurgence of feminism in contemporary North America has inspired more positive representations of women in children's culture. However, because people often learn about feminism from popular culture, many audiences engaging in dialogues about gender representations in children's texts are misinformed about the many manifestations of sexism in Western culture and the deep roots of patriarchy in social structures. Due to these misunderstandings, many texts that are being labelled as empowering to young female audiences are participating in patriarchal discourses under the pretences of feminism. These faux feminist narratives are problematic because the "popularized, restricted, and simplified version of feminism [they present] masks the elements of the [text] that reinforce social and patriarchal structures" (Williams 114).

The purpose of this study was to examine faux feminist narratives in children's films and how they convey patriarchal concepts of gender to young audiences. Through the critical framework of adaptation theory, my research analyzed *Maleficent* (2014) in comparison to its source texts "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). I examined representations of gender in each "Sleeping Beauty" text using Zipes' terminology of "duplicates" to refer to instances that reproduce and reinforce traditional and conservative notions of gender and "revisions" to signify moments that alter or challenge gender representations in a feminist way (*Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* 2013). Through this analysis, my research addressed the following questions:

- What messages do the representations of gender in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," *Sleeping Beauty,* and *Maleficent* convey to young audiences?

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- What gender representations have changed over time and what gender representations have persisted throughout the three "Sleeping Beauty" texts?

- Where do the gender representations in *Maleficent* fall on the continuum between sexism and feminism?

In Charles Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," gender is represented through the use of patriarchal gender roles and gendered social structures. Perrault created his fairy tales not only to entertain his dual audience of children and adults, but also to morally instruct them based on seventeenth-century bourgeois and aristocratic ideals. Like many of the stories in *Tales of Mother Goose*, "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" uses some of the most sexist gender representations commonly found in fairy tales in order to didactically convey traditional models of behaviour to Perrault's young audience. Perrault's tale includes the male-rescuer archetype, the innocent persecuted heroine archetype, the traditional model of femininity, the object of desire, and the wicked (step)mother.

The main characters of "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" embody gender roles and gendered social structures in order to convey messages about gender. Perrault's prince character fulfills the role of the male-rescuer archetype. The prince saves the princess twice with merely his status, gender, and presence, exemplifying the patriarchal notion that men are inherently rescuers. In turn, Perrault's princess demonstrates that women are passive victims who need saving, by satisfying the role of the innocent persecuted heroine (Jones 1993). Sleeping Beauty passively endures all three acts of oppression that inform the innocent persecuted heroine genre and spends the majority of the tale helplessly awaiting her male rescuer. Together, the male rescuer and the innocent persecuted heroine archetype perpetuate a patriarchal social structure where men are dominant and women are submissive.

Perrault's princess also acts as a model of femininity and functions within the tale as an object of desire. Sleeping Beauty is "[Perrault's] ideal '*femme civilisée*' of upper-class society," instructing young audiences based on beauty and behaviour standards of seventeenth-century France (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 40). Though the princess is beautiful, well-tempered, and musically gifted, it is her submissive demeanour that is praised as patience by Perrault's moral verse and is rewarded with fairy-tale romance. Perrault's princess conveys the patriarchal message that submissive behaviour makes a woman desirable and virtuous. Indeed, desirability is an important aspect of the princess character, who also functions within the tale as an object of desire. Sleeping Beauty undergoes maturation during her enchanted sleep and transforms from a heedless teenager into a woman ready for marriage and children. Perrault's narration aligns the reader with the perspective of the prince, objectifying the princess as an erotic spectacle through the voyeuristic, male gaze which views the princess not as a victim of a sleeping curse, but rather as an object of desire that is the prince's right to acquire. Not only is Perrault's princess an innocent persecuted heroine, but she is also a model of ideal femininity who functions as an object of desire and portrays to young audiences that desirable women are passive prizes to be won.

Lastly, Perrault's lesser-known character, the ogress queen mother-in-law, fulfills the archetype of the wicked (step)mother. Perrault uses the second half of "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" to criticize women who neither adhere to social norms nor conform to traditional gender roles and gendered social structures, such as motherhood. In Perrault's tale the two socially reclusive, female antagonists are interchangeably wicked, as both are socially deviant in their own way, the evil fairy for her seclusion and the ogress queen mother-in-law for her cannibalistic nature that defies maternal instincts. While the ogress' death balances the narrative

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structure of the tale by punishing one deviant woman in substitution for another (Fay 2008), her death more importantly demonstrates to young audiences that women who do not uphold their maternal duties within society are wicked, deviant, and have no place in society.

Following in the didactic footsteps of Perrault's fairy tale, the Walt Disney Company's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) also represents gender through the use of traditional gender roles and gendered social structures. Although Disney's animated film incorporates modern trappings from the 1950s, the characters in *Sleeping Beauty* reproduce the same problematic representations of gender as their counterparts in Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." Through the film's prolonged domestic interlude, *Sleeping Beauty* not only duplicates the patriarchal gender roles and gendered social structures of Perrault's tale, but also amplifies their traditional messages for contemporary audiences. Disney's animated *Sleeping Beauty* duplicates the male-rescuer archetype, the innocent persecuted heroine archetype, the model of femininity, the object of desire, and introduces the femme fatale archetype.

Although Disney made many changes to the tale's plot and romance, *Sleeping Beauty*'s Prince Philip and Princess Aurora duplicate the male-rescuer and the innocent persecuted heroine archetypes from Perrault's tale. Like Perrault's character, Prince Philip's status, gender, and presence give him supremacy over nature, women, and supernatural beings. Through an androcentric social structure (Murphy 1995), Disney duplicates the traditional archetype of the male rescuer and presents the same sexist message as Perrault, this time for a 1950s audience: that men are inherently "redeemers" and desirable women are inherently passive (Rodriguez 52). Indeed, Disney's Princess Aurora duplicates the accompanying innocent persecuted heroine archetype and endures two of the three acts of the genre. Though Disney's princess is a 1950s teenage dream with her modern beauty aesthetics and contemporary teenage conflicts, Aurora

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maintains the same model of femininity as Perrault's ideal *femme civilisée* through her ballet background and her amplified displays of passivity.

 Sleeping Beauty also duplicates the princess' function within the tale as an object of desire. Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* gives visual representation to the objectification of the princess, who, like Perrault's princess, undergoes maturation in her enchanted sleep. Through the animated body of the teenage Aurora, with her sexualized, ballet figure and Bridget Bardot-like good looks, the film sets unrealistic body standards for young audiences (Craven 194). Through cinematography and multi-layered compositions, the film creates a voyeuristic spectacle that, like Perrault's tale, aligns the audience with the male gaze of the prince and objectifies the princess as a prize to be won. Moreover, the princess' lack of dialogue throughout the second half of *Sleeping Beauty* reproduces and reinforces Perrault's traditional ways of viewing young women as passive, erotic spectacles.

 Sleeping Beauty's female antagonist fulfills the femme fatale archetype. Disney removes the cannibalistic second half of Perrault's tale, however the patriarchal codes and messages conveyed by Perrault's wicked (step)mother archetype from that segment of the story are duplicated through the femme fatale archetype. The character of Maleficent reproduces the socially deviant traits of Perrault's two female antagonists as the dangers of the femme fatale. While the contemporary archetype addresses 1950s anxieties around female independence and sexuality (Bell 1995; Doane 2013), these fears are merely modern continuations of the antiquated notion from Perrault's tale that women are only valued for their maternal roles in society.

 Unlike *Sleeping Beauty, Maleficent* (2014) does not directly employ the same traditional gender roles and gendered social structures as "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." Influenced by the rising visibility of feminism in contemporary culture, *Maleficent* is a complex live-action

adaptation that does not overtly subscribe to its source materials' traditional coding of gender but does not thoroughly challenge patriarchal structures either. Although *Maleficent's* prince, princess, and female antagonist successfully subvert the archetypes represented by their source texts, many of gendered social structures and patriarchal messages from Perrault's tale and Disney's animated film still appear in the 2014 live-action film. Disney's *Maleficent* revises the male-rescuer archetype, the innocent persecuted heroine archetype, the model of femininity, the object of desire, the evil (step)mother archetype, and the femme fatale archetype, however, the film duplicates the patriarchal gendered social structures of male supremacy and motherhood.

Maleficent subverts the male-rescuer archetype by redefining the traditionally heteronormative trope of "true love's kiss" to include familial bonding. In this retelling, Prince Philip is a minor character whose romantic kiss is used as a red herring for when Maleficent's motherly kiss on Aurora's forehead breaks the curse and reveals Maleficent as the tale's rescuer. Initially Philip is different from his predecessor: he does not exploit an androcentric social structure and even demonstrates understandings of consent. However, Prince Philip's "true love's kiss" violates the princess' body autonomy and is an act of sexual assault. Nevertheless, the sexual assault is overlooked due to the Prince's gender and status that frame his offence as romantic, reiterating Perrault's message that men have supremacy over women and entitlement to female bodies. Although *Maleficent* removes the sexist gender role of the male-rescuer archetype, the gendered social structure of male supremacy remains in the form of sexual assault.

Unlike Perrault's and Disney's princesses, *Maleficent*'s Princess Aurora is not an innocent persecuted heroine portraying a traditional model of femininity and functioning within the tale as an object of desire. Indeed, *Maleficent* makes many feminist revisions to the character in order to portray a more authentically adolescent heroine by contemporary standards. The film

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removes the male-rescuer archetype and in doing so emancipates the princess from the innocent persecuted heroine archetype, as her conflicts no longer revolve around romance but rather familial relationships. Disney also depicts the princess as a playful adolescent occupying the formative, yet rarely depicted liminal space between childhood and adulthood, and in doing so, revokes themes of maturation and eroticism from the character. Moreover, *Maleficent*'s Princess Aurora not only exhibits agency but also has power and authority of her own by the end as the matriarchal ruler of the two united kingdoms and as the tale's authoritative narrator.

In *Maleficent,* the eponymous character revises the socially deviant trait at the heart of wicked (step)mother and femme fatale archetypes' villainy: her challenge to patriarchal structures. In this retelling, Disney revises the female antagonist's failed challenge into the powerful narrative of a female rape survivor overcoming abuse, confronting her oppressor, and triumphing over patriarchy. However, as a rape survivor Maleficent is depicted as an irrational threat to society, and the film's redemption narrative connects Maleficent's morality to her relationship with Aurora and the development of Maleficent's maternal abilities. Although *Maleficent* does not duplicate the sexist archetypes of the wicked (step)mother and the femme fatale, the film duplicates the same gendered social structure that only values women as mothers by associating a socially deviant woman's rehabilitation with conformity to motherhood. As female villain turned hero, Maleficent perpetuates the same patriarchal message as her source text counterparts, this time through positive example.

Having analyzed the history and trajectory of gender roles and gendered social structures across all three "Sleeping Beauty" texts, my research has demonstrated that the gender representations in *Maleficent* are faux feminist. Faux feminism "assumes a feminist stance but offers a mass-mediated idea of feminism where individual women can be strong and achieve

equality through personal actions that do not, however, challenge or change the underlying patriarchal structure of society" (Williams 101). Although *Maleficent* takes a feminist stance in its revision of many of the sexist archetypes represented in "the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and *Sleeping Beauty*, the 2014 film duplicates, and therefore does not challenge or change, underlying patriarchal social structures, such as male supremacy and motherhood. While Perrault's literary tale and Disney's 1959 animated film are steeped in patriarchal tradition that many contemporary audiences may be able to identity and dismiss due to the time period in which the texts were produced, the patriarchal content of Disney's 2014 live-action film is less recognizable due to its use of faux feminism, which masks its patriarchal content. This distortion surreptitiously slides sexist content into the feminist movement, creating yet another piece of popular culture that misrepresents to contemporary Western audiences the very gender equality that feminism is trying to achieve.

7.2   Limitations of the Research

Due to the interpretive nature of my textual analysis, one limitation of this study is my position as a researcher as a white, Canadian, middle-class, university-educated, heterosexual, cisgender female in her late twenties. My interpretations of "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," *Sleeping Beauty,* and *Maleficent* are filtered through my socio-cultural and socio-economical positions that can influence the way I view the world. Although I informed my research with intersectional academic scholarship to avoid bias, I recognize that another researcher may have different interpretations that are outside of my perspective and experience.

Another limitation of this study is its focus on texts created by the Walt Disney Company. Disney is a monolithic corporation that often dominates children's culture and media. In

choosing Disney films over texts created by other filmmakers and production companies, my research inadvertently subscribes to Disney's authority in children's culture by overlooking other children's films for my discussion and relying on one company for my text samples. Moreover, discussions of Disney can unintentionally occur in a vacuum due to the company's monolithic presence in popular culture. Although my analysis of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent* draws conclusions about the greater phenomenon of faux feminism in children's culture, my use of Disney films may limit my study's ability to speak beyond the realm of Disney in some regards.

7.3   Directions for Further Research and Implications

There is need for further study into faux feminist narratives in children's media to understand how such texts impact understandings of gender and the social world. In section 1.3, I identified two other live-action, fairy-tale Disney films that were viable for this study. *Cinderella* (2015), *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), and other live-action adaptations such as *Mulan* (2020), could be analyzed through a similar adaptation theory framework in order to determine if faux feminism is prevalent across the greater filmography of Disney's live-action adaptations. Another area for further inquiry is *Maleficent: Mistress of All Evil* (2019), which could be examined to see if faux feminist narratives from *Maleficent* are continued in the film's sequel. Alongside this, the marketing and merchandising behind the *Sleeping Beauty*/*Maleficent* franchise could be examined, rendering an intricate analysis into the socio-economical influences of the rising visibility of feminism in children's media. Lastly, further research on the three good fairies is needed as my research was unable to explore all representations of gender within the film to their greatest extent for clarity and study length. Although my discussion touched upon the role of the three good fairies in the androcentric social structure of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*,

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my research was unable to further analyze the ageism that surrounds the three good fairies and their adaptation in *Maleficent*.

The importance of this research is that it demonstrates how faux feminist children's films like *Maleficent* teach young audiences sexist gendered social structures under the guise of feminism. Faux feminist narratives present young audiences with an incomplete version of feminism that disregards, naturalizes, and even supports patriarchal gender roles and gendered social structures. Indeed, *Maleficent* perpetuates "the idea that demonstrations of female strength are akin to gender equality" (Williams 114). As a faux feminist text, *Maleficent* demonstrates that removing fairy-tale archetypes and replacing them with strong female characters does not undo the underlying sexism and gendered social structures the archetypes originally participated in, like male supremacy and motherhood. Concurrently, as a contemporary fairy-tale film, *Maleficent* illustrates that removing traditional archetypes from a sexist fairy tale does not create a feminist adaptation. Although archetypes are indeed sexist representations of gender, they are just one of many ways in which patriarchal notions are embedded in popular North American culture. The problem faux feminist texts like *Maleficent* pose is not simply that they fail to be feminist; rather "[i]t is [the] patriarchal male dominated re-framing of feminism…that is most disturbing" for falsely presenting traditionally sexist gender roles and gendered social structures as gender equality to young audiences under the guise of feminism (hooks, "Dig Deep"). My research contributes to feminist scholarship by demonstrating how faux feminist texts like *Maleficent* perpetuate traditional gender roles and gendered social structures under the guise of feminism. Furthermore, my reseach reiterates feminism's assertion that patriarchal notions of gender are deeply rooted in North American culture and that we all must continue to closely analyze gender representations in children's media, even if the film has feminist intentions.

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