FROM HAG TO HEROINE:
THE EVOLUTION OF THE FEMALE VILLAIN IN DISNEY'S *FROZEN* AND *MALEFICENT*

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to subject Disney's *Frozen* (2013) and *Maleficent* (2014) to scrutiny, in order to achieve a better understanding of the company's more recent revisionist approaches to character and plot development. Both movies (especially *Frozen*) have enjoyed immense popularity among many fans and critics alike, who believe these films to be in alignment with contemporary feminist ideals. By employing both scholarly and popular views, this study offers detailed analyses, close observations and fruitful comparisons, in order to shed more light on the transformation of former fairy-tale villains into heroines and the reasons behind such alterations.

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Contents

Introduction

In the early weeks of December 2013, a question that I was frequently asked by friends, students and colleagues alike was "Have you watched *Frozen*?" I constantly heard about the "unconventional plot", the "twist" and above all the song that seemed to follow me everywhere. I met the film's overwhelming popularity with scepticism and resistance at first but eventually gave in to my curiosity. I watched the film and admittedly, truly enjoyed it. I could comprehend the appeal of the stunning visual art, the unusual plot (for a Disney story, at least), the deviation from centralizing romance, the active female characters, the redeemed former fairy-tale anti-heroine, and the song, of course, which I could not get out of my head. Happy with the seemingly feminist changes made to the typical Disney plot in *Frozen*, I went to see *Maleficent* as soon as it was released a few months after that in May 2014. Although successful, as a live-action movie, *Maleficent* did not enjoy the same amount of popularity as *Frozen*, yet I noticed that *Maleficent* embraced very similar changes in its plot, revealing that Disney was following a certain pattern with its new movies. What fascinated me most about both films was the fact that the revisions made to the plots seemed to have made them very popular among many feminists, and at the centre of this popularity seemed to be the transformed character of the former anti-heroine. Hence, my analyses and interpretations in this thesis tend to reflect a balance of feminist approval and criticism of these two movies.

Frozen, which has been inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's *Snow Queen*, depicts the story of two sisters, whose strong bond in the face of adversities, results in

their redemption. In this animated film, Elsa takes on the character of the Snow Queen, but unlike the fairy-tale anti-heroine, her actions are justified in the story, resulting in her salvation rather than her banishment. *Maleficent* tells the familiar story of *Sleeping Beauty* from the eponymous former Disney villain's point of view by giving her a background story and portraying her as a complex character. As such, the redeemed figure of the former anti-heroine, the bond between the female characters, and decentralization of traditional romantic love affairs are among the reasons why these films are described as feminist films.

In the general array of stock characters, the presence of the archetypal wicked female villain is common, and Disney stories have been no exception in this regard. The stigmatization of the stronger woman in the story, however, seems to have been the concern of many feminist scholars and storytellers alike, who object to the one-dimensional and stereotypical portrayal of women of power. By revising fairy tales, however, many writers have provided alternative retellings to the dominant norms of storytelling. In *Kissing the Witch*, for example, Emma Donoghue creates new plots for classic fairy tale characters and lets the former female villain, or anti-heroine, narrate the new stories. Hence, fairy tales like *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Snow Queen* are retold from the point of view of the perceived villain, who is either misunderstood by others, or is a well-wishing acquaintance to the heroine or is even in love with the heroine. Similarly, the narratives of Disney's *Frozen* (2013) and *Maleficent* (2014) provide a new story that aims at redeeming former fairy-tale anti-heroines by modifying the plots.

As I have mentioned above, revising Disney stories in this manner has been met with enthusiasm and positivity, making them important subjects of scrutiny, as they trigger essential questions such as: What are the changes made to the plots? What are the factors that have contributed to successful modifications? Who are the people behind the scenes responsible for these changes? What are the reasons for these changes? What do they exactly signify? Why are they so well-received? What kind of ideologies do these movies promote? Why are these movies considered feminist? These essential questions have in fact formed the crux of my enquiry.

To begin my research, I dove into the rich body of literature dedicated to analyzing and criticizing films produced by the Disney Corporation. The work of these scholars has provided me with valuable insight. Throughout the four chapters of this thesis there are two works by Disney scholars that have been most helpful to me and therefore continually cited. The first is Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells' *From Mouse to Mermaid*. In this seminal work, the authors meticulously investigate the nuances of the issues related to gender and culture in Disney films, revealing how Disney manipulates and promotes several gender and cultural stereotypes that have been constantly reinforced throughout the decades that Disney has become increasingly powerful and influential. The second is Amy Davis' *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, which is a comprehensive work that offers insight into how gender has been portrayed in Disney films. *Good Girls and Wicked Witches* provides rich and detailed analysis of female Disney characters from 1937 to 2006. By dividing the chapters of the book into the "Classic" Years (1937–1967), the "Middle" Era (1967–1988) and the "Eisner" Era

(1989–2005), Davis examines the changes in the representation of female characters in Disney's animated feature films throughout the years by calling attention to the social and cultural variables that impact society's expectations of female behaviour.

This thesis makes use of many fairy-tale theories and analyses. Therefore, reading scholarly works that look at stories in more nuanced ways has been important to my research. The views of Jack Zipes expressed in the *Enchanted Screen*, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, and *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* along with *Maria* Tatar's *Off with their Heads* have significantly contributed to shaping the fairy tales' analysis. Furthermore, I have also considered Donald Haase's views in *Fairytales and Feminism* that re-evaluate the feminist critique of fairy tales in order to examine the female acculturation and the socio-political and socio-historical context that fairy tales emerge in and alter.

Moreover, the works of different Disney scholars, along with cultural and popular culture theorists, have been essential to my research; some examples of such works are: Johnson Cheu's *Diversity in Disney Films,* Eleanor Byre and Martin McQuillan's *Deconstructing Disney*, Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas*' The Disney Villain*, Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock's *The Mouse that Roared*, Janet Wasko's *Understanding Disney*, Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek's *Fairy Tale in Popular Culture,* and Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism.*

The original plan for this thesis started with the ambitious desire to compare recent Disney films to other works of popular culture, as well as older Disney films, through a feminist lens. Furthermore, I initially planned to carry out interviews in order to learn about how contemporary audiences of different ages and backgrounds responded to

these changes. However, as such inquiry proved to be beyond the scope of a master's thesis, by treating the films as texts, I primarily focused on analysing different aspects of the films, although inevitably my analysis was informed by looking outside of the context of the films as well. My intention is to look at two recent Disney films that are based on fairy tales that have been substantially altered from their original versions. Therefore, with the aim to shed more light on an implicit pattern of changes made to these two recent Disney stories, I divided this thesis into four chapters, three of which offer detailed analyses of the revised features of the films and the final chapter that explores the meaning and reasons behind these changes.

My main goal in this thesis is to analyse the acclaimed feminist figures in *Frozen* and *Maleficent* and offer some theories of what they implicitly represent. The chapters of this thesis are, therefore, designed to interpret the protagonists of the movies in order to grasp a better understanding of their role and significance both in and outside of the context of the films.

In his work titled *From Walt to Woodstock*, Douglas Brode, who views Disney in a positive light, writes that the company's films match Bruno Bettelheim's theory regarding 'good stories for children' perfectly. This theory suggests that:

> …for a story truly to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination, help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; to be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time

> suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him…simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and his future.[1]

Considering the importance of looking at this kind of stories, the first logical step to analysing the films is to examine the plots. Hence, in the first chapter, I will look at the stories' backgrounds and investigate the original stories on which the films are based. The views of scholars like Jack Zipes, Maria Tatar, and Veronica Schanoes will inform my approach. I will examine various theories related to fairy-tale origins, revisions, forms, purposes, and adaptations, and I will ask: How have the plots of *Frozen* and *Maleficent* been developed? What considerations have been made for contemporary audiences? What methods have been employed in this process? The focus of this chapter will thus be to investigate Disney's revisionist fairy tales and learn about the inspirations behind their creation and their creators' goals.

In the second chapter, the dialogues in the films will be subjected to scrutiny. I will employ scholarly methods of dialogue division to look at how speech contributes to the effective revision of *Frozen* and *Maleficent*. With this line of enquiry, I will ask: What kinds of dialogues take place? What does the speech convey? Who gets to speak and who does not? And what does the characters' speech reveal about them? Answering these questions, I will make fruitful comparisons between the two movies and *Maleficent*'s precursor *Sleeping Beauty*, offering a more nuanced examination of the dialogues.

[1] Douglas Brode, *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 226.

Analysing the protagonists' speech will lead me to the analysis of their characters, which will require the study of their physical appearance. The third chapter will focus on the characters of Elsa and Maleficent by scrutinising their personalities, attitudes and behaviours, roles, looks, clothes, etc. Considering the importance of representation, in this chapter, I will ask: How are the heroines represented? What messages do they convey through their clothes and body language? Are they similar to or different from other Disney heroines? Has revising the plots led to revising the characters? A close inspection of the heroines will provide detailed answers to these questions.

Finally, the fourth and last chapter will be dedicated to discovering what all the various changes made to the plots of Disney fairy tales mean. What are the reasons behind these recent popular developments? Is Disney changing the ideologies it has pursued and advertised for decades? How are these changes feminist? How are these changes anti-feminist? More importantly, are they a sufficient response to years of criticism against Disney? By using the analyses in the previous chapters and by employing the views of Foucault, Angela McRobbie and other scholars, I will bring this enquiry to a conclusion and demonstrate that, because of the existence of multiple aspects of Disney (the corporation, the studios, the films, the man, etc.), multiple and diverse responses can shape complex analyses.

Chapter 1: Fairy Tale Revisions and Adaptations

By emphasizing the volatility and fluidity of the fairy tale and its resistance to a universally accepted definition, Jack Zipes writes that "almost all endeavors by scholars to define the fairy tale as a genre have failed."[2] And although a litany of characteristics has been suggested to describe the fairy tale, it embraces many diverse stories that may or may not possess these characteristics. Fairy tales are therefore flexible and this flexibility has allowed them to be adapted, adjusted, transformed and indeed appropriated to include all types of genres and art forms.

Since the primary purpose of this chapter is to elaborate upon the revisions of the fairy tales that have come to be Disney's *Frozen* and *Maleficent*, a brief look at fairy tales and their revisions will help determine which plot changes have led to the transformation of the characters of Elsa and Maleficent.

The notion of fairy tales in the Anglo-American and European worlds has been greatly influenced and determined by the collections of oral folk tales gathered by Charles Perrault, Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen[3]— not to mention Disney.[4] Among the stories in these collections, there are a handful that have become more prominent and popularly told and retold with various different changes in their plots, sometimes maintaining only a few vital components. At times abbreviated information

[2] Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 22.
[3] It is worth mentioning that these are the sources that Disney has most frequently relied on as well.
[4] Zipes, *Irresistible Fairy Tale*, 105.

from a well-known fairy tale can reduce it to "a bare outline"[5] in mass-market books. Regardless of how they are told and retold, however, multiple versions of fairy tales can exist simultaneously.

Diverse versions of stories are rewritten under different circumstances for different readers and audiences. In other words, adaptation that is heavily influenced by reception transforms stories.[6] As such, "No fairy tale text is sacred"[7] and retelling is the "lifeblood of fairy tales."[8] While some retellings may add or change minor themes and motifs, others alter the text in the light of contemporary interpretations[9] and subject the story to profound comprehensive changes. It is important to clarify here the difference between duplication (repetition) and revision because both fall under the umbrella term of retelling. According to Jack Zipes, fairy tales can either be duplicated or revised. When a fairy tale is duplicated, a copy of the fairy tale is produced with no critical re-examination. Duplication aims at reproducing patterns and ideas that reinforce a traditional way of thinking and behaving. Therefore, the readers or viewers are not challenged and the comfort and pleasure that come with their familiarity with the context are not tested, thus leading to the confirmation of traditional and conservative worldviews. In other words, repetition is "merely another side of unchangingness, another

[5] M.O Grenby and Andrea Immel, *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 93.
[6] Donald Haase, *The Reception of Grimms' Fairy Tales: Responses, Reactions, Revisions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 11.
[7] Maria Tatar, *Off with their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Cultures of Childhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 229.
[8] Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek, *Fairy Tale in Popular Culture* (Petersborough: Broadview Press, 2014), 17.
[9] Grenby and Immel, *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, 92.

form of naturalization."[10] Disney's live-action film *Cinderella* (2015), for example, is a duplication of its cartoon version released in 1950, as the plotlines are almost identical. Revision, on the other hand, demands re-examining fairy tales with the purpose of amending or improving them. The revised fairy tale seeks to alter the reader or viewer's outlook, encouraging critical thinking in order to view traditional patterns and values in a different light. Zipes adds, however, that not all revisions are necessarily progressive. But the premise of a revision is "that there is something wrong with the original work that needs to be changed for the better."[11]

In the discussion of contemporary adaptations, a lack of clear definitions and concepts, in Vanessa Joosen's view, has "led to a mass, or even mess" of ambiguous terms like "retelling, revision, reversion, reworking, parody, transformation, anti-fairy tale, postmodern fairy tales, fractured fairy tale and recycled fairy tale."[12]

Disney's adaptations of fairy tales are mostly revisions that include strong appropriations. It is interesting to note that despite being continuously criticized for its departure from central themes, trivialization of tales and rigid representation of characters, the name of Disney has become synonymous with fairy tales[13] to the point that it can be safely assumed that, in contemporary Anglophone societies, exposure to fairy tales begins with Disney films. People in our contemporary society are familiar with the Disney version of the story of *Sleeping Beauty* and it is likely that younger audiences

[10] Veronica L. Schanoes**,** *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 72.
[11] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*(Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 9.
[12] Vanessa Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy-Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 2011), 9.
[13] Hallett and Karasek, *Fairy Tale in Popular Culture*, 116.

might associate the Snow Queen with Disney's Elsa with the huge success that *Frozen* has enjoyed. Thus, substantial changes to a story "can become quickly naturalised".[14]

Both *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Snow Queen* are fairy tales that have been adapted by various artists in numerous works from operas and ballets to novels and parodies. Many adaptations have been loosely based on what is perceived to be the original story, while other versions have just adapted characters from these two fairy tales and used them in completely new settings. The Snow Queen, for example, inspired the creation of the White Witch in C.S Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*[15] and although the character of Maleficent has been inspired by merging the nameless old fairy and the prince's jealous ogress mother in the *Sleeping Beauty*, she has also appeared in fairy-tale adaptations like the Disney-ABC fantasy drama television series *Once Upon a Time* as a complex, cunning and powerful character who joins forces with other villains (a depiction which stands in contrast to Maleficent's portrayal in the 2014 movie). The diverse portrayals of the character of Maleficent by different writers at Disney in the recent years, reveals how characters are adapted and modified with regards to the plots. But how does Disney alter characterization by changing the fairy tale plots? And what strategies are used to modify the fairy tales for contemporary audiences? To begin this line of enquiry, it is fit to ask: how far back do these stories go?

The story of *Maleficent* is an altered adaptation of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*. The plot of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* is based on both Charles Perrault's and Brothers

[14] Grenby and Immel, *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature,* 92.
[15] Jack Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 297.

Grimm's versions of the story. Charles Perrault based his version of the story, which he titled *The Beauty in the Sleeping Wood* (*La Belle au Bois Dormant*), on Giambattista Basile's *Sun, Moon and Talia*. In Basile's version the Sleeping Beauty (who is the daughter of a great lord) is named Talia. The child's life — as predicted by astrologers— is to be imperiled by touching a splinter of flax. And because it is the force of fate, regardless of the lord's precautions, a splinter of flax penetrates under her nail when she decides to help an old woman spin flax on a spindle. Unwilling to bury his daughter, the lord takes Talia to one of his country mansions—creating a shrine for her body— and leaves her there. Later, a king passing by during a hunting trip enters the mansion and, charmed by Talia's beauty, rapes her. After nine months, Talia gives birth to a girl and a boy. Searching for their mother's breast the infants suck the splinter out of Talia's nail and awaken her. She names her children Sun and Moon and, when the king returns, he is delighted to see Talia and his children. Discovering the king's affair, however, his wife orders for the children to be cooked and fed to the king himself. But the cook is unable to kill the children and hides them and lies to the queen. The queen then plans to burn Talia but is discovered by the king and pushed into the fire herself. The story ends with the marriage of the king and Talia. Although such a tale is full of potential meanings, I will avoid interpreting this version, partly because the ensuing revisions will imply their own interpretations, and mine will appear primarily in relation to *Frozen* and *Maleficent.*

Charles Perrault retells this story by changing the child's predestined fate into a bestowed curse. During the princess's christening, seven fairies are invited and treated as honoured guests. Six of the fairies bestow their gifts on the princess, so that she would

possess all perfections imaginable. When an old forgotten fairy (whom everyone had thought dead) appears, she is slighted at not receiving the same treatment and curses the child, willing for her to touch a spindle that would kill her. The seventh fairy, who had hidden behind a tapestry to observe the old fairy's actions, turns the curse by making it last for only a hundred years at the expiration of which a prince would come to wake her. Years later, when the princess touches the spindle and falls into her deathlike sleep, the fairy puts the whole court into sleep and grows twining dense trees and bushes around the palace. After a hundred years, a curious prince who had heard stories about the enchanted palace enters it and wakes the princess and her court. He keeps his affair a secret because his mother is an ogress. The prince and the princess have two children and name them Dawn and Day. When the prince is enthroned, his mother, who craves raw meat, decides to eat Dawn and Day and then the princess. The cook prepares other meat for the ogress queen every time and lies to her instead. When the queen finds out about this, she fills a tub with snakes and wants to push the cook, Day, Dawn and the princess into it, but the prince arrives in time to save them. Fearing her son's wrathful revenge the queen throws herself in the tub and dies.

The Brothers Grimm version is adapted from Perrault's story and is very similar to it. *Little Briar Rose* (*Dornröschen*) takes on the same events as Perrault's version of the story but in their plot there are twelve good fairies and the thirteenth is the evil one and after a hundred years when a prince manages to pass through the thorn-hedge and meet the sleeping princess, he kisses her to awaken her and her court.

Throughout all of these retellings, it is evident that the driving negative force of the narrative is a powerful, yet bitter woman whose actions seem extreme, but ultimately derive from a desire to protect her interests or defend her ego. Thus, Disney's female villains follow on from a centuries-old tradition of vilifying women in positions of power. It is important to note, however, that despite this tradition, Disney's Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas admit that:

> All of us are potential villains. In spite of ethics, morals, codes of conduct and a general respect for the law, if we are pushed enough, pressured beyond our breaking point, our self-preservation system takes over and we are capable of terrible villainy. [16]

Disney's animated adaptation of the *Sleeping Beauty* story, which was released in 1959, took on both Perrault and Grimms' versions of the story and changed several plot elements to fit the story to the screen. Disney also gave the main characters names and reduced the number of good fairies to three. The role of these fairies was so important that they actively took charge of all the important decisions throughout the whole story. Not only do the three good fairies bestow gifts upon the princess but they also take care of her in a hiding place for sixteen years. This time, the spell can be broken not by the number of years that pass but by true love's kiss. The evil fairy is given the name Maleficent and does not simply stop after placing a curse on the child at her christening. She vigorously searches for the child and ensures that the curse is fulfilled. The prince, now called Philip, meets Aurora/Briar Rose and falls in love with her before the climax of

[16] Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas, *The Disney Villain* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 15.

the story, when (with the help of the fairies) he slays Maleficent— who had turned herself into a dragon[17]—and passes through the thorny hedge to kiss the princess and awaken her and her kingdom. In Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* Maleficent becomes both the evil fairy who takes offence at being forgotten and the jealous bloodthirsty ogress.[18] Furthermore, cannibalism, rape and necrophilia are omitted, the princess remains virginal and pure, and the concept of true love's kiss is added to make the plot more romantic. Although the three good fairies move the plot forward, Maleficent creates obstacles, and other characters add humour to the plot, all characters are essentially one-dimensional.

As it can be seen from the summaries provided, through a process of calculated and meticulous omissions and alterations, the Disney version of the story relaxes it to the point that Jack Zipes writes:

> [Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*] flattens the literary tradition and transforms a classical fairy-tale about an unusually complex love affair that in the course of a few centuries has involved rape, adultery, illicit love, jealousy and matricide into a banal adolescent love story…"[19]

Thus, in *The Enchanted Screen*, Zipes draws attention to the omission of illicit affairs and violence from the storyline. With regards to the revisions made to Basile's *Sleeping Beauty*, Zipes even considers Brothers Grimm and to a lesser degree Perrault, prudish.

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[17] This aspect of the story might have been inspired by the tale of Mélusine, who when spited assumes the form of a dragon.

[18] It is important to note that Maleficent is a character created by Disney. A character with this name does not exist in any fairy/folk tale.

[19] Jack Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 88.

From Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, Zipes draws a pattern that he believes shaped the company's earlier fairy tale adaptations. According to him, an easy fourteen-step recipe[20] worked to perfection in mass culture. This pattern, which came to be the conventional Disney fairy-tale film, could be conveniently repeated and adapted to other plots. Following this recipe ensured that everyone worshipped royalty and praised the beauty of a young girl who could wait for her man while being persecuted by a villain of her own sex, thus creating a grand battle over the virginal body until in the end elitism triumphed.[21] Zipes further adds that because of Disney's manner of fairy tale adaptation to the screen, there have been several changes made to the genre as a whole. These changes imply, for example, that:

1. Technique has precedence over story; story is used to celebrate the technician and his means.
2. The images narrate seduction and imposition of the animator's hand and the camera.
3. Images and sequences engender a sense of wholeness, seamless totality, and harmony.
4. Characters are one-dimensional and serve functions of the film. There is no character development because the characters are stereotypes, arranged according to a credo of domestication of the imagination.

[20] To view Zipes' elaboration of the repetitious pattern existing in earlier Disney films refer to pages 87-91 of *The Enchanted Screen*.
[21] Jack Zipes, *Enchanted Screen*, 89.

5. The "American" fairy tale colonizes other national audiences, as the ideas and types are portrayed as models of behaviour to be emulated.
6. There is thematic emphasis on cleanliness, control, and organized industry, which reinforces the technics of the film itself.
7. Private reading pleasure is replaced by pleasurable viewing in an impersonal cinema.
8. The diversion of the Disney fairy tale is geared toward non-reflective viewing. Everything is on the surface, one-dimensional, and we are to delight in one-dimensional portrayal and thinking, for it is adorable, easy, and comforting in its simplicity.[22]

Although Disney follows many of these principles, Zipes' analysis offers a rather hostile and rigid depiction of Disney's adaptation of fairy tales. Firstly, one can argue that the role of the narrator alongside the literary text is in fact important in Disney films. This is because, aside from the meticulous selection of talented voice actors to vocally perform as Disney characters[23], many of them (e.g. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *etc.*) commence with a book opening as the narrator begins to tell the story, laying emphasis on the importance of the storyteller as well as the literary text. Secondly, the one-dimensionality of characters that Zipes believes diminishes their complexity, in fact, mirrors their fairy-tale and folkloric predecessors who, in traditional linear stories, serve a purpose in the good vs. evil

[22] Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 128.
[23] Thomas S. Hischak, *Disney Voice Actors: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 2.

dichotomy. Thirdly, the viewing experience of the audience in the cinema is not necessarily an impersonal and detached one; as a matter of fact, with the aid of multiple mediums (e.g. images, sound, etc.) that engage viewers on a deeper level, the audiences' experience of the fairy tale can be viewed as both private and shared. And lastly, the reflective and critical viewing of any given material is dependent upon the observer and not the material that is observed. Therefore, to suggest that Disney films do not encourage further reflection is to undermine the audience's intelligence and sense of agency.

Considering these various aspects, looking at the fairy tale plots and storylines of the films under scrutiny will help show a clearer picture. *Maleficent* is the story of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* retold from the former villain's point of view—an important strategy in retelling which I will discuss later. The plot of *Maleficent*, while drastically changed, maintains the essence of the previous Disney story. The story starts with the portrayal of Maleficent as a young happy fairy with powerful wings living in the moors among other fairies and magical creatures. Maleficent meets and befriends Stefan, a human boy who has trespassed onto the moors. The two develop a friendship and later fall in love. Stefan kisses Maleficent on her sixteenth birthday and claims that it is true love's kiss. The two drift apart as Maleficent becomes the protector of the moors and Stefan, who is a poor peasant boy, aspires to become rich and powerful. When the king of the human world, who wants to conquer the moors, faces defeat because of Maleficent, he announces that his throne will be passed onto anyone who kills her. Stefan goes back to the moors and, pretending to be there to warn Maleficent, drugs her, cuts her wings off and takes them to the king. This traumatic event turns Maleficent dark and bitter. She raises an impenetrable

wall of thorns around the moors so that no human can ever intrude again. The mutilated Maleficent saves a raven named Diaval from a human and makes him her helper and companion. When news of King Stefan's newborn child is spread, Maleficent appears at the christening and proclaims that Princess Aurora will touch a spindle at the age of sixteen and fall into a deathlike sleep. No longer believing in the existence of true love, when Stefan begs for her mercy, she declares that the princess can be spared with true love's kiss. Three rather incompetent fairies take charge of raising Aurora in the woods to protect her from Maleficent. But unlike Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, Maleficent knows exactly where they settle. When she sees that the fairies do not live up to their task of caring for a child in the years that follow, with the assistance of Diaval, Maleficent takes care of Aurora and develops affection for her. Aurora and Maleficent later form a kinship. Consumed by his thoughts of revenge, however, Stefan prepares for Maleficent's arrival. The curse takes place and Aurora falls asleep. Hoping to save her, Maleficent enchants Prince Philip, whom Aurora has met briefly on a previous occasion, and takes him to the palace, but his kiss is ineffective. Confessing her remorse and sorrow to the sleeping Aurora, Maleficent kisses her forehead and Aurora awakens. Before they can leave the palace, a battle takes place between Stefan and Maleficent, which ends with Stefan's death. At the end of the story, Maleficent, who has now gotten her wings back, goes to the moors with Aurora, brings her walls of thorns down and they celebrate the union of the human and fairy worlds together.

As it can be gathered from the plot of *Maleficent*, Disney writers have borrowed elements from previous fairy tales to tell a completely different story. The influence of the different

elements of contemporary popular culture, folk tale and myth, as I will further discuss later on in this chapter, show the flexibility of the fairy tale that has repeatedly adapted itself to different settings. Comparing the different versions of the story reveals how different adaptations change various parts of the plots to revise it. Basile, Perrault, Brothers Grimm, and Disney have all adapted the story and retold it in different ways, as it has been demonstrated. Thus, *Sleeping Beauty* is a story that has been continuously revised; perhaps more so than the *Snow Queen.* Nevertheless, if the *Snow Queen* has been less frequently revised, does it mean that it has remained entirely safe from change?

The Snow Queen, originally written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1844, is a tale that is made up of seven shorter stories that revolve around two children named Gerda and Kay. The tale starts with a demon inventing a looking-glass that distorts the images it reflects by showing things that are in reality good and beautiful as grotesque, thus magnifying the ugly aspects of things. The demons carried this mirror around so that people could "see what the world and mankind were really like."[24] When they decide to carry the mirror to heaven to mock God and the angels, however, the mirror slips and breaks. The sand-like shards of glass fall from the sky and enter people's hearts and eyes, making them evil and wicked. The story then portrays Kay and Gerda, two children who play in their little garden together. On one summer day, the wind blows two pieces of the mirror into Kay's eye and heart. After that, Kay becomes increasingly aggressive and horrid, until one day the Snow Queen meets him in the market and, kissing him twice to charm him by freezing his heart, makes him forget about his loved ones and takes him

[24] "Snow Queen", Gilead, accessed 15 November, 2015, http://hca.gilead.org.il/snow_que.html.

with her. Heartbroken and worried, Gerda sets off on a journey to find Kay. She meets a series of people including a woman with a flower garden, a prince and a princess, a little robber girl, a Lapp woman and a Finn woman, each of whom in turn help her or create obstacles that she overcomes to finally reach the Snow Queen's palace. After saying the Lord's Prayer she manages to pass through the snowflakes that guard the palace, where she finds Kay frozen and motionless, completing a puzzle with shards of glass to spell "eternity". Gerda discovers that if he manages to finish the puzzle he is spared but if he does not, he has to stay with the Snow Queen forever. Gerda runs toward him and kisses him while shedding tears. Her tears penetrate his heart and help the shard of glass slip out and Kay's own tears dislodge the splinter from his eye. The two complete the puzzle and leave the icy palace and go home to enjoy the summer. The story ends with this bible verse: "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

Disney's *Frozen*, on the other hand, portrays two close sisters in the imaginary kingdom of Arendelle who drift apart when the unmanageable and ever-increasing magical power of Elsa, the older sister, becomes a hazard to the safety of those around her. Concerned for her sister's safety, Elsa keeps this a secret and refuses to spend time with Anna as they grow up. Anna, who has no memory of her sister's power to control and produce snow and ice, continues to insist upon reviving their relationship. At Elsa's coronation, when Anna announces her engagement to Prince Hans (whom she has just met), the sisters get into an argument that leads to an emotional outburst that reveals Elsa's power. Frightened, Elsa flees and inadvertently summons an ever-lasting winter in

her kingdom. Finding peace and solace in her solitary state in the mountains, however, she builds herself a palace of ice. Meanwhile Anna, who refuses to believe that her sister is spiteful and evil, sets forth on a journey to find her. She leaves Prince Hans in charge of the kingdom and on her way meets a young man named Kristoff who agrees to help her. When they get to the palace, an agitated Elsa accidentally strikes Anna's heart with ice. After they escape, Kristoff's troll friends tell them that, unless Anna is saved with an act of true love, the ice in her heart will kill her. Thinking that Prince Hans' kiss will save her, they come back to Arendelle. Anna then finds out about Prince Han's treachery and his desire to take over the kingdom. Anna is cast aside while Elsa is trapped and put in prison. When Elsa escapes to look for her sister, Prince Hans lies to her and tells her that what she has done has led to her sister's death. Grieving, Elsa kneels while Hans quietly approaches her from behind in an attempt to kill her. Anna manages to get there just in time and throws herself in front of Hans' sword, saving her sister. Since this act counts as an act of true love, she in turn is also saved. The two sisters reunite and save their kingdom. Elsa, who has recognized the importance of love, learns to control her powers and brings summer back to Arendelle.

As the summaries make evident, the new versions of both fairy tales consider the inner thoughts and background stories of the former fairy-tale villains, and retelling the story from a different point of view requires significant plot changes (i.e. omitting, adding, or modifying events, settings, characters, etc.). Looking at the untold back story of certain characters is not a new concept. The successful musical *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* based on Gregory Maguire's novel, for example, is an

alternative retelling to Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Wicked* retells the story by making the wicked witch of the west, named Elphaba, the misunderstood protagonist of the tale. The nuanced characterization of the protagonist and the unexpected twist in the story have contributed greatly to its reception. And it is safe to assume that the huge success of this musical is bound to have inspired Disney's more recent revisions. Revising a fairy tale in this way includes a process of defamiliarization, which disrupts the world of everyday perception to enhance the awareness about the familiar and renew the audience's "lost capacity for fresh sensations."[25] As such, readers or viewers are encouraged to speculate about the motivations of characters and the power relations between them. Thus, presenting other or multiple perspectives "dismantles simplistic good-evil dichotomies and foregrounds the conflicting desires of the characters. Such narrative strategies enable a text to rework relationships grounded on gendered or other hierarchies and to negotiate the ideologies and values inherent in those hierarchies."[26]

As it has been discussed, engaging the audience occurs through presenting them with multidimensional characters that change familiar plots and according to Terry Pratchett, a successful challenge to a story must come from someone who is already a part of it.[27] The characterization of Maleficent and Elsa challenges the earlier familiar retellings of the fairy tales. Revision of a fairy tale, therefore, would, to a certain degree, require the revision of its characters.

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[25] M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 139.
[26] Grenby and Immel, *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, 96.
[27] Schanoes**,** *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory***,** 83.

Taking this thought-provoking tool of analysis into consideration, examining the movies' protagonists can reveal how character alteration can lead to completely different plots. Maleficent—as a character with a distinct name, visual design and personality—has a precursor in Disney. *Sleeping Beauty's* Maleficent was designed by Marc Davis (one of Walt Disney's chief animators) to look alluring yet menacing, as her name suggests.[28] Marc Davis (who had designed many of Disney's beauties, such as Snow White, Cinderella, Tinker Bell and Aurora), was given the task of designing Maleficent because, despite being an evil character, she was supposed to look glamorously attractive. Don Hahn, *Maleficent's* executive producer, admits that in the making of the movie many of Marc Davis' designs and imaginative strategies were maintained.[29] Choosing Angelina Jolie (who has gained an international reputation for being an inspirational maternal figure in recent years[30]) to play the role of the former villain helped Disney to depict a character with whom the audience could more easily sympathize.

The reinterpretation of the Snow Queen, on the other hand, presented the writers and animators with a big challenge. Walt Disney himself and the Disney Animation Studio had attempted to adapt Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale to the screen as early as 1937, but with no success. Elsa's character was initially designed to be a stereotypical Disney villain who is driven by rage and jealousy, but in the hands of Jennifer Lee (the writer of *Frozen's* script and the only female director in the history of Disney

[28] Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender and Culture*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 117.
[29] "How *Sleeping Beauty* Inspired *Maleficent*", D23, accessed November 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAA3ye3I9C8.
[30] Laura La Bella, *Angelina Jolie: Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2009), 7.

animations), and Chris Buck, *Frozen's* co-director, the Snow Queen became Elsa.[31] Several possible ideas were considered to make the plot and the Snow Queen's character more plausible and, during the course of five years, following the abandonment of several earlier attempts on the project, a few key ideas contributed immensely to the revision. Two important factors that had a great impact on the plotline's shift were the decision to make Elsa and Anna siblings and to choose fear as the driving force behind Elsa's actions. These changes made her portrayal more complex and the storyline less conventional.[32] With the modifications made to the Snow Queen's character and her motives, therefore, the adapted fairy tale underwent profound changes. As I have mentioned above, the musical *Wicked* had an impact on the creation of *Frozen*. Although they have different endings, the revisions focus on the misunderstood former anti-heroines of two popular stories. The impact of *Wicked* on *Frozen* becomes even more apparent when considering the fact that Disney hired Broadway singer Idina Menzel, who performed as Elphaba in *Wicked*, to voice Elsa's character in *Frozen*, thus notably alluding to the familiar to gain success.[33]

As a simple comparison of the storylines of *The Snow Queen* and *Frozen* shows, the plot of *Frozen* is very loosely based on Andersen's *Snow Queen*. In *Frozen*, the characters of Kay and the Snow Queen become one in Elsa. Elsa is both Kay, who has a strong bond with Gerda (renamed Anna in *Frozen*) before they drift apart, and the Snow

[31] "With *Frozen,* Disney Invents a New Princess", Hollywood Reporter, accessed November 20, 2015, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/oscars-frozen-disney-invents-a-659175.
[32] "The *Frozen* Directors' Characters Guide", Empireonline, accessed 21 November, 2015, http://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/frozen-character-guide/.
[33] In addition to plot similarities and hiring Menzel, *Frozen's* defining song "Let it go" is very similar to *Wicked's* "Defying gravity".

Queen who kidnaps him. Just like Gerda, Anna goes on a journey to find a person she loves and saves both her sister and herself with an act of true love— a notion which is more discreet in Andersen's story. But as mentioned before, being loyal to the original text has never been Disney's (both the man and the company) concern. Disney has repeatedly cannibalized stories and characters from the beginning, using them more as sources of inspiration for new creations rather than attempting to maintain traditions. This practice has been preserved by the Disney Company as Walt Disney himself seldom reproduced "the book's theme or original characters with accuracy. While his settings depended upon the (particular) author, the scene rarely maintained its original cultural and geographic heritage."[34]

To revise stories and characters, nevertheless, Disney looks for inspiration everywhere. Maleficent and Elsa are portrayed to be female characters with immense power—a characteristic attributed to goddesses in myth and fairies in fairy tales. "Pagan goddesses were the predecessors of fairies"[35] and their roles were transmitted to them. Pagan goddesses had extraordinary powers and were worshipped because they could perform extraordinary acts. According to Jack Zipes, goddesses and divinities in pagan times were later linked to fairies and witches in fairy tales who could bring about marvellous transformations, command some kind of magic, shield people from calamities, protect children, make prophecies and determine the destinies of newly born children. For the most part, these pagan goddesses and fairies "performed good deeds, but

[34] Douglas Brode and Shea T. Brode*, It's the Disney Version!: Popular Cinema and Literary Classics* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), xiv.
[35] Jack Zipes, *Irresistible Fairy Tale,* 30.

when wronged, could wreak revenge".[36] These characteristics are still prevalent in contemporary retellings of fairy tales, as is evident through the characters of Elsa and Maleficent who have magical powers, are able to transform the elements around them, and control and manipulate certain aspects of nature as well as protect it.

Furthermore, the two protagonists' mystical/magical association links them not only to fairies but also to other feared creatures. Elsa and Maleficent are portrayed to be characters that are misunderstood and isolated because of what others presume makes them monstrous. Looking at the revision of the stories through a feminist lens, in the hegemony of the environment they live in, these characters become outcasts. In Foucault's view, a person who deviates from societal norms is represented as unnatural or bestial.[37] Elaborating on Angela Carter's claim that "A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster", Niall Scott writes:

> On the surface, this statement seems to suggest that a free woman is demonized by her liberated society. A different reading, however, reveals a deeper truth: in order that a woman may be free within an unfree society, she must first be monstrous. It is her monstrosity—that which separates and distances her from society—that enables the woman to escape her social shackles.[38]

If Elsa's difference is met by the audience with an 'ethics of resistance', this resistance would demand that her powers should "neither be effaced nor explained away, but

[36] Ibid., 57.
[37] Niall Scott, *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 188.
[38] Niall Scott, *Monsters and the Monstrous,* 187.

celebrated."[39] Difference is used to highlight normative identities.[40] In Scott's view, therefore, freedom is gained through the "acceptance and celebration of one's own monstrosity"[41], which is what the revision of the fairy tale allows Elsa to do, as she releases herself from the restraints that have been placed on her.

The idea of the monstrous is evident in *Maleficent* as well. Although the film has a happy ending, *Maleficent* possesses some characteristics that have been long avoided in Disney's retelling of fairy tales. Portrayal of violence, or rather sexual violence, is not a common practice in the rosy images that the Disney Corporation produces. Although refinement and censorship began with Perrault at the end of the 17th century,[42] violence has been an ever-present motif in the genre. In her book, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar writes:

> For many adults, reading through an unexpurgated edition of the Grimms' collection of tales can be an eye-opening experience. Even those who know that Snow White's stepmother arranges the murder of her stepdaughter, that doves peck out the eyes of Cinderella's stepsisters, that Briar Rose's suitors bleed to death on the hedge surrounding her castle, or that a mad rage drives Rumpelstiltskin to tear himself in two will find themselves hardly prepared for the

[39] Grenby and Immel, *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature,* 183.
[40] Ibid., *183.*
[41] Scott, *Monsters and the Monstrous,* 187.
[42] Hallett and Karasek, *Fairy Tale in Popular Culture,* 20.

> graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of these bedtime stories for children.[43]

In a rather unfamiliar fashion with regards to the typical Disney film, the plot of *Maleficent* contains the motif of sexual violence portrayed in the earlier versions of the story. The scene where Stefan cuts Maleficent's wings after drugging her is reminiscent of the violence frequently portrayed in earlier fairy tales, while also reminding the contemporary viewers of the concept of date-rape. In an interview with BBC Woman's Hour, Angelina Jolie, the star and the executive producer of *Maleficent*, confirmed this idea, saying "We were very conscious, the writer [Linda Woolverton] and I, that it was a metaphor for rape."[44] It is interesting to note that by going back to earlier practices common in fairy tales that had been long omitted or ignored, Disney has managed to also touch upon contemporary feminist issues.

In addition, Maleficent involves a love affair between man and fairy. The romantic involvement of man and fairy in fairy tales does not usually have a pleasant outcome. *Maleficent's* story can be compared to the pattern of Mélusine texts, in which a mortal discovers a beautiful fairy in a forest and falls in love with her. As the story continues, the hero proposes to the fairy and the fairy accepts under the condition of fulfilling a promise. The hero violates the pact and loses the fairy's love and his happiness (often with no reconciliation).[45] Disney may be alluding to this concept when it shows

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[43] Maria Tatar, *The Hard Fact of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3.
[44] "Angelina Jolie Confirms a Key *Maleficent* Scene Was about Rape", Vanity Fair, accessed November 20, 2015, http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/06/angelina-jolie-maleficent-rape.
[45] Zipes, *Irresistible Fairy Tale,* 32.

that the romantic affair between Maleficent and Stefan leads to her mutilation and eventually, at the end of the story, to his death.

Frozen and to a lesser degree *Maleficent* involve a fairy tale theme prevalent in some of Andersen's other stories. Elsa and Maleficent's banishment from society, for example, is reminiscent of the theme of abandonment and degradation in Andersen's *Swineherd*. Although the settings and the reasons behind the banishment are different in each story, Disney's revision might be discreetly referring to Andersen's idea that abandoning and banishing a woman are effective ways of degrading her. In *Fairy Tale and the Art of Subversion*, while elaborating on the works of D'Aulnoy, Jack Zipes explains that the themes of abandonment and degradation were and still are abundant in fairy tales as a dictum to women to control their inclinations and submit to the male decree, as he writes:

> Civility meant enduring the anguish of self-denial because men sought to rationalize their fear of women, sexuality and equality by establishing regulations that deprived women and other oppressed groups of self-expression and independence.[46]

However, on some level, in *Frozen* and *Maleficent*, this notion is challenged because the protagonists overcome barriers and find means of expression and redemption, as Elsa discovers how to control her powers and rule over her kingdom and Maleficent gets her wings back and makes peace with the human world.

[46] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York, Routledge, 2014) 37.

This theme is nevertheless further alluded to when one considers fairy tales' evaluation of the position of women. In many fairy tale traditions women who, like children, were volatile and unruly were subjected to disciplinary interventions that would make them more subservient. Putting a woman in her "proper place" according to Maria Tatar could be best achieved through pregnancy, i.e. making her body a sign of sexual condescension and subjecting her to physical and social mortification in order to degrade her. [47] Maleficent's metaphoric rape makes her a mother to Aurora. She is indeed triumphant in the story, nevertheless, by pertaining to fairy-tale ideologies, Disney's retelling still puts her in her proper place. Thus a redeemed woman's role as a mother in a hegemonic system is essentialised.

As it has been demonstrated, the concepts of rape, love affairs and banishment, which are recurring themes in many fairy tales, are subtly alluded to in these new stories. It can be concluded that, in the revision of these two fairy tales, Disney seems to have gone back to several formerly popular themes that seem to have been cast aside in the process of disneyfication (or disneyization) — a process associated with the kind of sentimentalization and simplification that results in depthless products[48]—which includes conventional tropes like "sweetening the characters… and adding cute comical animals to liven the plot."[49]

Aside from various other fairy tales, the plots and themes of other Disney movies are likely to have influenced the most recent revisions. Maleficent and Aurora's story is

[47] Tatar, *Off with their Heads*, 98.
[48] Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage, 2004), 9.
[49] Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, *Fairy Tale Films: Visions of Ambiguity* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010), xi.

reminiscent of the story of *Beauty and the Beast,* for example. Aurora acts like Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. Through her, the self-banished Maleficent, just like the Beast, finds solace and like the Beast, who becomes human again, Maleficent gets back her wings. Maleficent's salvation is achieved through her love for Aurora, who reminds her of how to be kind-hearted again.

In addition, the creation of both Maleficent and Elsa might have been inspired by other folkloric characters. The character of Maleficent, for example, can be compared to that of Baba Yaga in Russian Folktales. Baba Yaga, often portrayed as an ambiguous and enigmatic figure, has appeared in many tales in different parts of the world. As a maternal figure, she assists the protagonist and is a benefactress to those who seek her advice in the right way. Baba Yaga can be kind but she can be dangerous as well, especially when guarding her territory. She is also associated with crows that serve or accompany her.[50] These characteristics can be seen in Maleficent, as she too is protective of the fairies' territory, has a maternal side to her, assists the heroine and is accompanied by a crow. Baba Yaga is portrayed as a fearsome old woman who rides on a mortar and pestle and dwells in the forest. Maleficent can be rendered as a dramatically beautified younger version of Baba Yaga, with a glowing sceptre instead of a pestle. Similarly, as a weather deity, Elsa can be compared to several other folkloric characters like Cailleach the Gaelic hag of winter, Holda (or Frau Holle in Grimm's fairy tales) the goddess of winter in Germanic folklore and Skadi the Norse goddess of snowy mountains, to name just a few. The personification of winter does not seem to be an uncommon practice in folklore. In

[50] Andreas Johns*, Baba Yaga*: *The Ambiguous Mother and Witch of the Russian Folktale* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 18.

Elsa's case, however, many negative features associated with deities who control snow and ice have been softened, while her youth and her physical beauty have been emphasized to encourage more sympathy for her.

Fairy tale revision has always attracted writers working with feminist concerns and the power of stories and revisions has been essential to popular projects carried out by feminist psychoanalysts and writers.[51] Fantasy and feminism both study the exclusions made by dominant normative ways of understanding the world. Therefore, feminist revisions "manipulate structures or stories that often encode oppressions in order to reject and transcend those oppressions."[52] Second-wave feminism had a great impact on the reaction to the established notion of fairy tales. By emphasizing the question of identity and what it means to be a woman, during the 1970s and the 1980s, second-wave feminist writers began to revise fairy tales and myths, objecting to "the tales' depiction of gender roles, exemplified in the helpless passivity or dependence of the princess on the one hand and the demonization of the powerful older woman on the other."[53] The nonconformist reinterpretation of fairy tales by feminist writers like Angela Carter, Tanith Lee and Emma Donoghue reveal that reversals can produce thought-provoking stories that disrupt the constraints imposed by dominant cultural ideologies. It is not a coincidence, perhaps, that in the making of *Frozen* and *Maleficent*, which include deep character revisions, women have been present in the process of writing, directing and producing. However, as

[51] Schanoes, *Fairy Tales, Myth, and Psychoanalytic Theory,* 141.
[52] Ibid., 35.
[53] Hallett and Karasek. *Fairy Tale in Popular Culture*, 19.

I will explain later, this is not to say that every film that includes women in the process of production necessarily embraces feminist themes.

Linda Woolverton, who by writing *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) became the first woman to write the script for an animated feature film for Disney, created the story of *Maleficent*. As a self-identified feminist who was influenced by the 1970s awakening, she explains that without a feminist agenda that makes female characters relevant to women today, plots would be irrelevant. Therefore, she declares that with every screenplay that she has written, her characters like Belle, in *Beauty and the Beast*, Nala in *The Lion King* (1994), *Mulan* (1998) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), have become more empowered, showing a gradual progression.[54] In addition, in a recent interview in May 2016, Woolverton declared that "I have absolutely set out over my career to move the female protagonist forward through time."[55] With regards to *Maleficent*, Woolverton was approached to write a story about one of Disney's most popular villains. She therefore started to work on the story in order to challenge the earlier Disney film and not the fairy tale. Woolverton considered many ways to approach the story to turn the villain into a protagonist. The turning point for her after doing research on the movie was Aurora's christening scene in the earlier Disney movie. Wishing for the death of an innocent child due to petulance over not receiving an invitation seemed to be an overreaction. After watching this scene, it occurred to her that Maleficent is a fairy, not a witch, and unlike

[54] "The Impact of Legendary Linda Woolverton", Widelantern, accessed November 21, 2015, http://widelantern.com/2014/06/the-impact-of-legendary-linda-woolverton-writer-of-maleficent/ .

[55] "First Belle, now Alice", Los Angeles Times, accessed May 29, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-linda-woolverton-alice-through-the-looking-glass-20160523-snap-story.html.

other fairies she does not have wings. She then immediately pursued this idea by giving her and King Stefan, who treats her belittlingly, a romantic history.[56] Angelina Jolie, who played the role of Maleficent, had starred in a similar plot in *Beowulf* (2007) where, as Grendel's mother, her affair with the king was kept secret, as she was deemed a monstrous hag. Jolie's early involvement in the project was consolidated when she became the executive producer of *Maleficent*.

Jennifer Lee, *Frozen's* screenwriter who co-directed the movie with Chris Buck, is Disney's first female director. Along with chief creative officer John Lasseter and producer Peter Del Vecho, Lee developed the character of Elsa, helping transform her from a cold villain to a person "who makes some bad choices because she is in a difficult situation."[57] With her insight, the Snow Queen developed into a more complex character. The makers of the film agree that the key to the story's progress was focusing on the bond between Anna and Elsa and letting the story revolve around the female characters. Hence, "instead of a standard princess finding her prince story, the film became an exploration of the special kind of bond sisters share, a bond that can transcend years of separation and misunderstanding."[58] Emphasizing the importance of this phenomenon, Lee states, "We didn't want the boy to drive Anna and Elsa apart or save the day… It's about the two sisters saving each other; it's their broken relationship, and how they repair it."[59] With

[56] "Maleficent Movie Screenwriter Cried Writing", Hollywood Reporter, accessed November 21, 2015, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/maleficent-movie-screenwriter-cried-writing-708353 .
[57] Charles Solomon, *The Art of Frozen* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013), 14.
[58] Solomon, *Art of Frozen*, 13.
[59] Ibid., 14.

Lee's involvement, therefore, the creation of another stereotypically one-dimensional villain was replaced with a character whose motives and actions are more understandable.

The vilification of the powerful woman which is a remnant of folktales, is one of the common criticisms that Disney receives. But *Frozen* and *Maleficent* provide a context that redeems the powerful women and proves that interesting innovations can help reconsider jaded assumptions. One can hope that perhaps with the presence of more feminist women in the process of film production, the stories can thrive in unconventional spins that allows them to present a twist in the concept of 'true love', by revealing the possible duplicity of fleeting love interests and the importance of the bond between female characters. It is important to take into consideration, however, that not all the women involved in the film-making industry "necessarily hold feminist views"[60] and some may even support antifeminist sentiments. As bell hooks explains: "As with other 'hot' marketable topics, feminism has become an issue that can be pimped opportunistically by feminists and nonfeminists alike."[61] Since the final chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to exploring this viewpoint in the movies under scrutiny, I will leave deep elaboration upon hooks' analogy to later in this thesis. Regardless of the intentions behind these modifications, nevertheless, these changes show that Disney has creatively responded to criticisms.[62] This creativity, nevertheless, does have its own limits. Despite the unexpected twists and alternative characterizations, normative

[60] Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), 3.
[61] Rhonda Hammer, *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism: A Critical Feminist Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 16.
[62] Sue Short, *Fairy Tale and Film: Old Tales with a New Spin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 160.

ideologies such as the essential relationship between women being that of mother/daughter or sisterly bond are still very much present in the film.

An important contributing factor to this ideological stagnation is Disney's reliance on neat closure for its stories. Linearity is the typical practice of contemporary Western children's fiction leading the progress of the plot to be rounded into 'a happily ever after' end.[63] The linear plots of Disney fairy tales always include an exposition, a conflict, a climax and a resolution. Disney's obsession with such absolute closure enforces visibly conceived plans and predetermined fates for all characters, allowing Disney to brand the story with patriarchal imprints while using classical fairy tales as a "vehicle to spread his own messages about proper sex roles, behaviour, manners and customs"[64].

Nevertheless, many contemporary linear revisions of fairy tales are written with underlying motives that attempt to challenge ingrained dominant ideologies. This increasingly popular trend of fairy tale revision utilises methods that create what Cristina Bacchilega calls the 'postmodern fairy tale'. Postmodern fairy tales rework traditional tropes and rewrite classic tales, making room for revisions that "refuse to obey their authority by revising and appropriating them." [65] Although these new revisions in recent Disney films can be viewed in a different light, they demonstrate the adaptation of the trope of postmodern fairy tales. According to Jack Zipes, fairy tales were initially met with reluctance due to their lack of Christian teaching. Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, fairy tale writers began to rationalize tales and incorporate Christian

[63] Maria Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (Lanham: Children's Literature Association and Scarecrow Press, 2000), 6.
[64] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 206.
[65] Short, *Fairy Tale and Film*, 140.

patriarchal messages that appealed to middle-class aristocratic readers. Disney adopted a similar method by sanitizing fairy tales and reinforcing similar patriarchal and capitalist American family values.[66] With the modifications made to *Frozen* and *Maleficent*, how are these well-established ideologies going to be influenced? It is interesting to note that, for Walt Disney, the realm of popular culture was a place to make affective investments and construct identities, because to him entertainment and education were inseparable.[67] As children's literature remains "a crucial repository of humanist ideology,"[68] what do the changes made to more recent Disney films signify? If Disney is viewed as an all-encompassing educator, how can these changes be interpreted? Is a powerful corporation like Disney yielding to contemporary concerns, regardless of the ideology it has pursued for decades? Or is this just a strategy to appeal to a larger audience which feminism can deconstruct? If, according to Karl Kroeber, storytelling is humanity's primary tool for changing reality[69], are revisionist films like *Frozen* and *Maleficent* reproducing the constructs of culture with a feminist agenda? The following chapters will be dedicated to discussing these questions. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that although resisting, challenging, transforming, subverting and disrupting are the primary goals of revisions, there are various other factors that influence this process.

[66] Greenhill and Matrix, *Fairy Tale Films*, 6.
[67] Hallett and Karasek, *Fairy Tales in Popular Culture*, 148.
[68] John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories*, *Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 15.
[69] Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 13.

Chapter 2: Dialogue and Speech Analysis

In the previous chapter, I provided a summary of the plots of the movies and the fairy tales that inspired them. Discussing revisions made to the fairy tales revealed that different aspects of the stories have been subjected to calculated alterations in order to innovatively send out different messages. But what does a successful revision entail? What aspects of a story could be meticulously reviewed for a fruitful retelling?

In her introduction to *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, Sarah Kozloff, one of the few scholars who has written extensively about the importance of dialogue in films, writes:

> What the characters say, exactly how they say it and how the dialogue is integrated with the rest of the cinematic technique are crucial to our experience and understanding of every film.[70]

With further elaborations on different kinds of dialogues in films, i.e. monologues, duologues and polylogues, Kozloff explains how each type of verbal utterance or exchange is designed to reveal character and develop the plot.

Following Kozloff's view on the significance of dialogue in film interpretation, this chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the speech assigned to the movies' heroines and the evaluation of their interaction with other characters— especially other female characters— in the stories. Examining what Maleficent and Elsa say, and how the conversations are carried out, is central to achieving a better understanding of their characters and their progression.

[70] Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (California: University of California Press, 2000), 6.

In my analysis, I will look at both the literal content of the dialogue and the figurative implications behind it, because this approach will help both in interpreting the narrative and evaluating the aesthetic content.[71] However, as some lines yield greater fruit than others, they will be more central and subjected to further scrutiny.

Moreover, as *Maleficent* is the story of a character previously portrayed by Disney in *Sleeping Beauty*, a significant portion of my analyses will refer to *Maleficent'*s precursor. I believe this comparison to be a useful one as it can reveal if/how Disney's female characters have developed. In addition, the comparison of the dialogues will emphasize how the existence of certain dialogues between the female characters deeply influences and consequently changes the plots of the disneyfied fairytales.

To begin my analysis, it is important to touch upon the genderedness of speech. As most cultures' gender ideology often takes the form of "sketchy, oversimplified stereotypes"[72] the subject of women's speech has often been overlooked due to pejorative preconceptions. As Elaine Chaika explains in her book *Language, the Social Mirror*, women's talk has often been referred to as "babbling, chattering and gabbing", all essentially mindless, pointless speech production.[73] Drawing on this argument, Sarah Kozloff attributes this widespread association of idle talk to women to the dismissive patriarchal wish to keep women silent, as "silence is a desired state for women".[74] However, in this chapter, a study of the dialogues attributed to women in *Frozen* and

[71] Jeff Jaeckle, *Film Dialogue* (London: Wallflower Press, 2013), 11.
[72] Ruth Wodak, *Gender and Discourse* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 226.
[73] Elaine Chaika, *Language, the Social Mirror* (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1994),204.
[74] Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue,* 13.

Maleficent can be used as a simple device to investigate if this stereotypical phenomenon is extended to and mirrored in these two recent Disney films.

The female characters' dialogues in the films can be assessed with a feminist tool of analysis that is simple but helpful as it can shed more light on the overall distribution and design of the dialogues. Hence, in this section I will apply the Bechdel test to three Disney movies. First of all, I will apply the test to Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, and then I will examine it in *Maleficent* and, by doing so, I will compare the dialogues in the two movies. Since *Frozen* is not based on any other Disney film, I will look at the interaction between Elsa and her sister Anna.

The Bechdel test, popularized by Alison Bechdel in 1985, is a test derived from her comic strip *Dykes to Watch out For*. To pass this test, a film should fulfill three simple conditions: it should have two or more female characters who have names, who engage in a conversation and who talk about any subject other than a man. As applying this test to the dialogues in films can be problematic with regards to one or two line dialogues, I will take into consideration Anita Sarkeesian's additional 60 seconds criteria.[75] Therefore, in this section, I will only consider conversations that are at least 60 seconds long.

Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, released more than 56 years ago, passes the Bechdel test because the three good fairies, Flora, Fauna and Merryweather, who have the most important roles in the story have more lines than any other character. The fairies engage in 1-4 minute conversations about the evil fairy (Maleficent), Princess Aurora (whom

[75] " The Bechdel Test", Feminist Frequency , accessed October 5, 2015, http://feministfrequency.com/2012/02/15/the-2012-oscars-and-the-bechdel-test/.

they call Briar Rose), and about baking, cleaning and sewing dresses. However, it is the new inclusion of Maleficent in conversations in the new movie that adds to the complexity of interpretation. In Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* Maleficent never engages in a direct dialogue with any other female character for more than a few seconds. There are a few very short conversations at the beginning of the film at Aurora's christening that take place in the presence of the celebrating crowd that nevertheless qualify for the Bechdel test:

> Maleficent: I really felt quite distressed at not receiving an invitation.
> Merryweather: You weren't wanted!
> Maleficent: Not wa...? Oh dear, what an awkward situation. I had hoped it was merely due to some oversight. Well, in that event I'd best be on my way.
> Queen: And you're not offended, your excellency?
> Maleficent: Why no, your majesty. And to show I bear no ill will, I, too, shall bestow a gift on the child.

With the few lines that are assigned to Maleficent's character, however, she seems to be talking at the female characters and not to them; for example, when she presents the unconscious Aurora to the fairies after she has touched the spindle, her sole line delivered to the fairies is "You poor fools. Thinking you could defeat me, the mistress of evil. Well, here's your precious princess." Aurora and Maleficent never exchange a word and the only time Maleficent talks to Aurora is when she is under her spell which commands her to "Touch the spindle." Maleficent's speech as it can be gathered from the few lines that I have provided here, nevertheless, is full of an irony (e.g. "gift" and "precious") that provides the conversation with an additional layer to consider. As I will later discuss,

Maleficent's speech is replete with irony as well as sarcasm that allows her to convey a deeper level of meaning in fewer words.

Moving on to Disney's *Maleficent*, Flora, Fauna and Merryweather, now named Knotgrass, Flittle and Thistlewhit, like the three good fairies in *Sleeping Beauty*, carry out one conversation that passes the Bechdel test when they talk about the way they are going to raise baby Aurora in a cottage in the woods. However, in this movie, Maleficent and Aurora, who are the main characters of the story, continuously talk to each other and take part in conversations that easily pass the Bechdel test. For example, their first actual conversation takes place when the grown-up Aurora visits the Moors for the first time. This conversation is one minute and ten seconds long:

> Aurora: Don't be afraid.
> Maleficent: I'm not afraid.
> Aurora: Then come out.
> Maleficent: Then *you* will be afraid.
> Aurora: No, I won't. I know who you are.
> Maleficent: Do you?
> Aurora: You're my fairy godmother.
> Maleficent: What?
> Aurora: Fairy godmother. You've been watching over me my whole life. I've always known you were close by.
> Maleficent: How?
> Aurora: Your shadow. It's been following me ever since I was small. Wherever I went, your shadow is always with me.

This first conversation between the two main characters of the movie is significant because it discloses Aurora's unexpected recognition of and gratitude to Maleficent. In

this scene, Aurora's words deliver an important statement. She uses the word "shadow" (which normally symbolizes darkness and evil) to connote comfort and protection, thus planting a seed that eventually leads to Maleficent's redemption.

The second longer conversation that Maleficent and Aurora have is when Aurora asks Maleficent about her wings. This conversation arises from Aurora's curiosity about fair people's wings and Maleficent, although briefly, tells her about her wings that were stolen from her. This conversation takes up about 50 seconds and, therefore, falls ten seconds short of the required criteria of the 60 seconds but fulfills the other requirements to pass the test.

The third longer conversation between Aurora and Maleficent is one and a half minutes long and happens when Maleficent invites Aurora, who loves the Moors, to stay there with her:

> Maleficent: Aurora! Come here. Sit. There is something I need to tell you.
> Aurora: What is it?
> Maleficent: There is an evil in this world. And I cannot keep you from it.
> Aurora: I'm almost 16, godmother. I can take care of myself.
> Maleficent: I understand. That's not what I have to say to you.
> Aurora: I have a plan. When I grow up, I'm going to live here in the Moors with you. Then we can look after each other.
> Maleficent: You don't have to wait until you're older. You could live here now.
> Aurora: Then I will! I'll sleep in a tree and eat berries and black nuts. And all the fair people will be my friends. I'll be happy here for the rest of my life. I'm going to tell my aunties tomorrow.
> Maleficent: Until tomorrow.
> Aurora: Oh, I'm so excited!

And the fourth scene where the two main female characters engage in a conversation is when Aurora finds out that she is cursed. This scene takes up one minute and seven seconds and goes as follows:

> Aurora: Fairy godmother!
> Maleficent: I'm here.
> Aurora: When were you going to tell me that I'm cursed? Is it true?
> Maleficent: It is.
> Aurora: My aunts said it was an evil fairy. I... I can't remember her name. They said... that it was...
> Maleficent: Maleficent.
> Aurora: Is that you? Are you Maleficent? No! Don't touch me. You're the evilest in the world.

Aurora's quick change of heart in this dialogue is reminiscent of the common attitude of teenaged princesses in Disney films which are always ultimately resolved.[76]

As is evident, the conversations that take place between Aurora and Maleficent are suggestive of the existence of a connection between the two main characters that can be viewed both as a kind of friendship and a mother/daughter relationship that confirm rather than contradict each other. This relationship takes the form of a friendship that brings them closer to each other. A glance at the way Maleficent and Aurora converse, and what they talk about, portrays their mutual bond proposing that "talk is essential to women's friendship"[77] as some scholars suggest. Maleficent and Aurora's friendship can

[76] Ariel's attitude toward her father after a heated argument in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and Merida's clash with her mother in *Brave* (2012), serve as good examples in this case.
[77] Wodak, *Gender and Discourse,* 247.

be viewed in the light of what Ruth Wodak calls "a model for good human relationships" as she explains:

> The primary goal of talk between women friends is the construction and maintenance of close and equal social relationships…the linguistic strategies developed by women friends are designed to construct and maintain connection and to minimize social distance.[78]

She further clarifies that when women friends converse, "subversive discourses can be nurtured and patriarchal discourses can be challenged".[79] Aurora's first conversation with Maleficent initiates their friendship and allows their relationship to flourish. And the binary, one-dimensional view of good and evil is challenged when the characters are put into conversation with each other as equals in friendship. This friendship stands in direct opposition with King Stefan's wish to destroy Maleficent.

Furthermore, contrary to the continuously absent, dead, murdered or replaced mother figure[80] who is rarely there to aid the heroine[81], Maleficent and Aurora's relationship is indicative of a mother/daughter relationship, which is quite unusual in fairy-tale films. As Jeanne Wiley explains:

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[78] Ibid., 248.
[79] Ibid., 259.
[80] Several writers have written extensively about the absence of the mother in Disney films and generally in fairy tales. Among the most useful resources that elaborate on this penchant to erase the mother from the story are Elizabeth Belle, Lynda Hass and Laura Sells' *From Mouse to Mermaid*, Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock's *The Mouse that Roared*, Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan's *Deconstructing Disney*, Ann C. Halls and Mardia J. Bishop's *Mommy Angst* and Veronica L. Schanoes' *Fairytale, Myth and Psychoanalytic Theory*.
[81] There are of course examples where the heroine gladly confides in a mother-figure, like Pocahontas with her Grandmother Willow and, although briefly, Cinderella with her fairy godmother, but they are rare exceptions.

> As recorded in many popular fairy tales, the story of mothers and daughters is typically fraught with ambivalence and conflict—that is, when it is not marginalized through silence and absence. If and when the maternal agent appears, she is often indicated and repudiated as the instrument of her daughter's repression. Psychoanalytic readings of popular fairy tales (as well as recent Disney versions) legitimize the practice of silencing or demonizing the maternal agent in relation to the daughter's subject formation.[82]

In their friendship neither Maleficent nor Aurora is portrayed to repress or defeat the other, on the surface. Several lines from the dialogues between Maleficent and Aurora are reminiscent of a functional mother/daughter kinship. For example, in their first encounter, Aurora happily tells Maleficent that she knows that she is her fairy godmother who has been watching over her for her whole life. Aurora also tells Maleficent that when she comes and lives with her in the Moors, they can "look after each other". Maleficent, who has indirectly mothered and raised Aurora, concernedly warns her and advises her that "There is an evil in this world" and she cannot keep her from it. The mother/daughter relationship portrayed in *Maleficent* is one that includes conversations that demonstrate the existence of an active mother figure in Disney's new fairy-tale film.

My analysis above paints a positive picture portrayed by Disney of the relationship between the two main female characters in the story. Nevertheless, my intention is to offer a more nuanced analysis of these conversations. Reading between the

[82] Andrea O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey, *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Lanham: Lowman and Littlefield, 2000), 91.

lines adds a greater depth to what we receive on the surface regarding the optimism presented in the depiction of Maleficent and Aurora's relationship. This complexity is reminiscent of the ambivalent mother-daughter relationship portrayed in older fairytales. First of all, one should consider that the conflict in the story affects the relationship between the characters (e.g. Maleficent is the victim of Aurora's father's betrayal. Aurora does not know that she has been cursed by the very person who has protected her all her life. Struggling with her feelings of hurt and remorse, Maleficent does not inform Aurora of her true identity and her deeds in the past, etc.) As can be seen, the intricacy of the relations in the story that should contribute to the complexity of the dialogues between the characters is concealed under simplified affections and rosy depictions. Secondly, although I have considered Wodak's view of women's friendship to analyze the characters' dialogues in one way, I believe that it can simultaneously limit and essentialize the complexity of women's interactions. In other words, not all women interact the same way and not all talk essentially leads to understanding and friendship. Wodak's views are taken into consideration here because they may be more in alignment with Disney's intention to depict a positive image. Therefore, although one can appreciate that there are dialogues between the two main female characters of the story one should also challenge their depth and significance.

As is evident, *Maleficent* develops the relationships between women through interactive conversations to a degree not seen in its precursor. Such dialogues exist in *Frozen* as well although in comparison the girls say relatively little except in song because the plot of *Frozen* separates the two female characters, creating a setting for Anna to go on a quest to find her sister. At the beginning of the film, when the two sisters

are still very young, in the first scene that the two sisters are introduced to us, little Anna wakes Elsa up to ask her to play with her. The next scene shows the sisters playing in the palace hall. During their play, a few sentences are exchanged between them that are focused on their childlike play. These scenes last for one minute and forty five seconds. Their eighteen line conversation, which includes many one-word lines, can pass the Bechdel test; however, rendering these lines as a proper conversation can be questioned. Before Elsa's secret is revealed, causing her to flee, Anna and Elsa engage in three other conversations, two of which are not about men and could therefore pass the Bechdel test if they were longer conversations. The last conversation between the two sisters before Elsa's escape takes place when Anna announces to Elsa that she is engaged and asks for her blessing. However, when eventually Anna finds Elsa's ice castle, with the reprise of the song "First time in forever", the two sisters engage in a singing conversation that takes up more than two minutes and revolves around Anna's plea for Elsa to come back to Arendelle, while Elsa rejects this idea by singing about her newfound freedom and the safety of her sister and her kingdom. The first few lines of their conversation reveal the two sisters' concern for each other:

> Anna: You don't have to protect me, I'm not afraid
> Please don't shut me out again, Please don't slam the door.
> You don't have to keep your distance anymore. 'Cause for the first time in forever, I finally understand. For the first time in forever, we can fix this hand in hand.
> We can head down this mountain together! You don't have to live in fear...
> 'Cause for the first time in forever, I will be right here.
> Elsa: Anna, please go back home. Your life awaits, go enjoy the sun and open up the gates.
> Anna: Yeah, but…

Elsa: I know! You mean well, but leave me be. Yes, I'm alone but I'm alone and free!

Just stay away and you'll be safe from me.

Although due to her fear of harming her, Elsa has avoided Anna for many years, the talk between them in a way attests to the "primacy of that connection of sister with sister"[83] that the writers intended for them as it was discussed in the previous chapter. Despite the major conflict and dilemma that lies before them, Anna is portrayed to understand and accept her sister and wants her back, and Elsa wishes to protect her by staying away. The conversation between them in this scene is suggestive of a similar emotional bond that was discussed above in relation to Maleficent and Aurora. Therefore, the dialogue designed in these scenes reaffirms the emphasis on the importance of a kinship between women that is vital and well-meaning but yet working within the constraints of hegemonic ideologies.

As it has been demonstrated, both *Frozen* and *Maleficent* pass the Bechdel test which speaks of the existence of dialogue between the female characters but does not evaluate their depth or significance. The female characters engage in conversations that reveal more about their characters while they simultaneously essentialize women's relationships to be that of mother/daughters[84] or of sisters. This manner of portrayal both challenges and submits to popular notions about women's relationships. Thus, these conversations depict a kinship and an affinity between the female characters that has

[83] Toni A.H McNaron, *The Sister Bond: A Feminist View of a Timeless Connection* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 10.

[84] It is interesting to note that since their parents have passed away, at times Elsa acts more like a parent than a sister toward Anna.

often been overlooked and disregarded in even the most successful and most popular films.[85] The dialogue carried out between Maleficent and Aurora and Elsa and Anna shows that they are capable of conversing about their hopes and plans for the future, communicating their worries and anxieties, confiding in each other or simply having a playful chat, which helps offer a less one-dimensional representation of the female characters.

Maleficent's complex portrayal becomes more obvious in more detailed comparisons, for example. The original Maleficent, in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, is portrayed as a strictly one-dimensional character whose speech is always in alignment with her character traits. She calls herself the "Mistress of all evil" and hence always speaks accordingly. Her speech is eloquent, sarcastic, condescending, spiteful and full of irony. She addresses other characters belittlingly and constantly antagonizes those who provoke her anger and disgust. For example, when she finds out that her servants have been looking for a baby for sixteen years and it has not occurred to them to look for a young maiden, she addresses them angrily by saying "Fools! Idiots! Imbeciles! Oh they are hopeless! A disgrace to the forces of evil!". Her wit, sarcasm and sadism, are most articulately expressed when she captures Prince Philip and chains him in her dungeon:

> Maleficent: Oh come now, Prince Philip. Why so melancholy? A wondrous future lies before you. You, the destined hero of a charming fairy tale come true. [*holding her magic stick to depict the scene for Philip*] Behold, King Stefan's castle, and in yonder topmost tower, dreaming of her true love, the princess Aurora. But see the gracious whim of fate. Why, 'tis the self same peasant maid,

[85] "The Bechdel Test for Women and Movies," Feminist Frequency, accessed October 6, 2015, http://feministfrequency.com/2009/12/07/the-bechdel-test-for-women-in-movies/.

> who won the heart of our noble prince but yesterday. She is indeed most wondrous fair. Gold of sunshine in her hair, lips that shame the red, red rose. In ageless sleep she finds repose. The years roll by, but a hundred years to a steadfast heart are 'bout a day. And now, the gates of the dungeon part, and the prince is free to go his way. Off he rides on his noble steed [*depicting an old and frail Prince Philip*] ... a valiant figure, straight and tall, to wake his love with love's first kiss, and prove that true love conquers all. Come, my pet [*addressing her raven*]. Let us leave our noble prince with these happy thoughts. *[at the door]* A most gratifying day.

The sarcasm and irony in Maleficent's speech becomes even more patent in this scene, where she depicts a horrid picture for Prince Philip but describes it expressively, with positive words. She calls him a "hero" with a "wondrous future" and leaves him with "happy thoughts", none of which are meant literally.

To match her sarcasm and sadism, *Sleeping Beauty*'s Maleficent shows extreme verbal competence, dexterity and eloquence when she speaks and, according to Sarah Kozloff, in American cinema this characteristic is often attributed to the villains. She explains that:

> Given the distrust of language, and the overall anti-intellectual tenor of American culture, it should be no surprise that American films offer evidence of deep distrust of verbal proficiency.[86]

She supports this claim with examples of articulate, polished speakers like Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (1949), who are classic examples of villainous characters. It is worth mentioning here, that this eloquence

[86] Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, 77.

nevertheless emphasizes the power and dominance of the speaker because language "connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power".[87]

Maleficent, unlike *Sleeping Beauty*, gives its heroine a variety of different lines that show the complexity of her character. Therefore, in the recent movie, Maleficent's speech and the way she delivers it, changes in different situations. The new Maleficent's character traits revealed through her speech show that her character, unlike her predecessor, is not static and flat but dynamic and round. In the beginning of the film when she is introduced, the young Maleficent is shown flying over the fairyland moors and greeting its residents. She cheerfully pays compliments to many with phrases like "Good morning Mr. Shantuwell! I love your cap!" and "Love your walk, girls!" In the next scene, when informed that a human has entered the Moors and stolen a jewel, the young Maleficent curiously and determinedly approaches Stefan and confronts him for insulting the Tree Warriors and stealing:

> Maleficent: Come out!
> Stefan: No! They mean to kill me. And besides, they're hideous to look at.
> Maleficent: That's extremely rude! Don't listen to him, Balthazar [*addressing the Tree Warrior who is offended]* You're classically handsome. It's not right to steal, but we don't kill people for it.

Her tone in these lines is serious but yet polite and kind, revealing a cheerful, moral and compassionate personality, which matches her role as a young powerful fairy who is responsible, well-respected and loved.

[87] Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman,1989), 12.

When Maleficent, the strongest of all the fairies, grows up, she becomes the protector of the Moors and rises against the humans' king to protect their territory. In the scene where the humans' king comes forth to conquer the Moors, Maleficent is shown standing right in front of the human army, demanding them to stop:

> Maleficent: Go no further!
> The King: A king does not take orders from a winged elf.
> Maleficent: You are no king to me!
> The King: Bring me her head.
> Soldier: Battalion! Attack!
> Maleficent: Arise and stand with me!
> Soldier: Hold the line! It's the dark creatures!
> The King: Charge!
> Maleficent: You will not have the Moors. Not now, nor ever!

Maleficent's voice in this scene is firm and unwavering and her tone cold and determined. Applying a Foucauldian analysis to Maleficent's speech in this scene, if further developed, she could be deemed a potential Parrhesiastes. Parrhesia refers to the free speech.[88] According to Foucault, when speakers use parrhesia in their speech, they speak their mind as candidly and as directly as possible, choosing frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of silence, duty instead of self-interest and criticism instead of flattery.[89] Therefore, when defending her territory and her people from the humans' invasion, Maleficent's opposition appears to manifest itself through speech that is

[88] "Discourse and Truth", Michel Foucault Info, accessed June 5, 2016, http://foucault.info/doc/documents/parrhesia/index-html.
[89] Michel Foucault and Joseph Pearson, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 20.

affected by parrhesia and not rhetoric. But aside from that, Maleficent's speech possesses many other different layers.

Just like her animated predecessor, Maleficent is of course sarcastic, too. During Aurora's christening, in a scene almost identical to that of *Sleeping Beauty*, Maleficent silences Stefan with her gestures and makes him beg her to leave Aurora alone:

> Stefan: Maleficent, please don't do this. I'm begging you.
> Maleficent: I like you begging. Do it again.

According to Kozloff, physically silencing someone is an act of dominance[90] and Maleficent explicitly asserts her power by silencing Stefan and allowing him to speak only if it is humiliating, i.e. begging to her in front of his guests and subjects. This emphasizes her power and authority over the most powerful male character of the film.

The ultimate goal of confrontational dialogue is not to find a commonly accepted solution but rather to "pursue and defend one's own position".[91] When confronting male authoritarian characters, Maleficent seems to assert her unthreatened and calm demeanor through well-expressed, sarcastic and dismissive speech which is manifest in her dialogue with others. Because interaction between men and women inevitably involves asymmetry in relations of power,[92] Maleficent's calm authority is prevalent through her interactions with figures of male dominance. In fact, the power relations evident through the speech between Maleficent and (both of) the kings can be extended. The Moors can thus be seen

[90] Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, 77.
[91] Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, *Discourses in Interaction* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2010), 197.
[92] Alexandra Dundas Todd and Sue Fisher, *Gender and Discourse: The Power of Talk* (Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988), 19.

as a matriarchal power to be reckoned with by the human kingdom that symbolizes patriarchy, as I will further discuss later on in the chapter.

In addition to speaking with assertiveness and sarcasm to display her authority, Maleficent speaks with nostalgia and sorrow too, when she describes her lost wings to Aurora, who curiously asks about them:

> Aurora: Do all the fair people have wings?
> Maleficent: Most do.
> Aurora: Then, why don't you? All the other fairies fly.
> Maleficent: I had wings once. They were stolen from me. That's all I wish to say about it.
> Aurora: What colour were they? Were they big?
> Maleficent: So big they dragged behind me when I walked. And they were strong. They could carry me above the clouds and into the headwinds. And they never faltered. Not even once. I could trust them.

Notably, aside from displaying the power of her character, with these lines, Maleficent talks about her physical strength as well, aligning herself not with fragile heroines but with the protagonists who display bodily power.

Furthermore, sharing parts of a traumatic experience portrays Maleficent's ability to confide in and trust another character that does not threaten or mistreat her. As Karen Prager explains, "all concepts of intimate interaction seem to center on the notion that intimate behavior consists of sharing that which is personal."[93] She further explains that revealing private or distressing information about oneself does not happen under impersonal circumstances. This characteristic exposed through the dialogue shows that

[93] Karen J. Prager, *The Psychology of Intimacy* (New York: Guilford, 1998), 21.

Maleficent is not a reclusive character who is incapable of intimacy as she previously was portrayed to be in *Sleeping Beauty*. The notion of reclusiveness is, however, evident in *Frozen*.

As a child, Elsa is portrayed as constantly worried about her uncontrollable, ever-increasing power. The sadness and worry that accompany her speech during her childhood and also when her sister confronts her are obvious through numerous dialogues where she asks to be left alone. Her speech at her coronation, however, is calm and composed and her reticent love and concern for her sister are obvious in the compliments she pays to her sister's beauty and in warnings about her safety. When Anna announces her engagement to Prince Hans, however, lines attributed to Elsa show her blunt and no-nonsense attitude toward fleeting romantic folly:

> Elsa**:** May I talk to you, please. Alone.
> Anna: No. Whatever you have to say, you can say to both of us.
> Elsa: Fine. You can't marry a man you just met.
> Anna: You can if it's true love.
> Elsa: Anna, what do you know about true love?

Elsa's line "You can't marry a man you have just met" shows her practicality and sensibility which is reminiscent of other female Disney characters like Esmeralda in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), Meg in *Hercules* (1997), Audrey in *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001) and Captain Amelia in *Treasure Planet* (2002), who are distrustful,

confrontational and reasonable in their actions and choices.[94] Furthermore, Elsa is the first Disney princess who finally utters these words. Since marrying men they have just met has been a long tradition among Disney princesses, Elsa's direct criticism of this tradition has met overwhelmingly positive reactions from fans who over the years have criticized the "someday my prince will come"[95] Disney trend.

Later in the movie, Elsa exchanges very few lines with other characters in the plot during and after her coronation. But it can be said that when she is not worried about her secret being revealed, she appears to be serene, addressing the people around her with royal dignity and respect.

So far, I have argued that studying the dialogues between the heroines and other characters is important but, to achieve a better understanding of the heroine's characterization, examining other dialogues that are about them are equally significant. Hence, I would also like to focus on the dialogues that are directed toward the heroines of the movies to examine how they are treated and perceived by other characters before moving on to the soliloquies that work as their innermost confessions.

In Disney's *Sleeping Beauty,* from the very beginning Maleficent is addressed with fear and hatred by others. And the thinly veiled respect she receives from the queen, for example, (who calls her "your excellency") is out of fear rather than reverence. The king, however, calls her "that creature" which is how Maleficent is still addressed by male figures of authority in the 2014 film. In *Sleeping Beauty*, other female characters

[94] Amy Davis, *Good Girls and wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), 210.
[95] "Someday My Prince Will Come" is the title of a popular song from Disney's first princess movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), which sets the tone of the romance in many earlier Disney films.

seem to have no compassion or sympathy for her. In conversations that take place between the female characters, Maleficent is regarded as unreasonably wicked and destructive:

> Fauna: Well, perhaps if we reason with her.
> Flora: Reason?
> Merryweather: With Maleficent?
> Fauna: Well, she can't be all bad.
> Flora: Oh, yes, she can.
> Merryweather: I'd like to turn her into a fat 'ol' hoptoad!

Furthermore, in the continuation of their dialogue, the fairies mention that "Maleficent doesn't know anything about love, or kindness, or the joy of helping others. You know, sometimes I don't think she's really very happy." As the character of Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* is essentially and one-dimensionally evil, the fairies who are the driving force behind the actions in the film's plot offer no solution for her redemption and help in killing her instead.

In the movie *Maleficent*, however, it seems that before the rise of the conflict, the female characters of the story, i.e. the three fairies, try hard to please her. At the beginning of the film, the three fairies, Knotgrass, Flittle and Thistlewhit seem to be quarreling over delivering news to Maleficent in order to impress her:

> Knotgrass: The border guards...
> Flittle: Why'd you get to tell her? I want to tell her!
> Knotgrass: There are rules, Flittle. I tell this time, you tell next time. The border guards...
> Flittle: No, you told last time. So I should tell this time and Thistletwit next time.
> Maleficent: Tell me what?

Knotgrass: Fine!
Flittle: Ah, thank you.
Thistlewhit: Maleficent, the border guards... The border guards have found a human thief at the Pool of Jewels! I'm sorry.

From the conversation it can be gathered that Knotgrass, Flittle and Thistlewhit, the three fairies who are based on the characters of Flora, Fauna and Merryweather, not only do not antagonize Maleficent (before the occurrence of the conflict at least), but yearn to gain her goodwill and be in her good graces: a reaction which is in direct contrast to the fairies' attitude towards Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*.

Elsa's treatment in *Frozen*, on the other hand, is suggestive of a mixture of attitudes towards her. After she flees, the frightened people of Arendelle begin to doubt her, while the Duke of Weselton goes around crying "Monster! Monster!" in order to tell those around him that Elsa has attempted to kill him. His accusations are met with Anna's defense of her sister:

Anna: …My sister is not a monster!
Duke: She nearly killed me!
Hans: You slipped on ice.
Duke: Her ice!
Anna: It was an accident. She was scared. She didn't mean it. She didn't mean any of this. Tonight was my fault. I pushed her.

It can be observed from these conversations that in *Frozen*, and especially *Maleficent*, the heroines have the support of other female characters, which directs the conflict elsewhere and elicits a sense of sympathy between the female characters. But where is this conflict directed instead?

As was mentioned earlier, in *Maleficent* the king of the humans whom Stefan wants to replace addresses Maleficent as a "winged elf" or "winged creature" to degrade her. Elsa is also continuously called a "monster" by the Duke of Weselton who from the beginning takes on the characteristics of a capitalist who wants to exploit the riches of his neighbouring kingdom. Such semantic derogations are used as tools by the male characters in the stories to initiate a sense of hostility toward the heroines, which of course are designed to mirror their own viciousness and corruption. As it has been previously discussed, *Maleficent* portrays patriarchal powers that attempt to capitalize on lands that are ruled/protected by a central female figure. This notion exists in *Frozen* as well. The existence of capitalist-patriarchal figures in the stories denotes the extended dominance of the male figures. In both stories the riches of the lands that Maleficent and Elsa rule become an incentive for the king, Stefan, Hans and the Duke of Weselton to dispose of the female characters that stand in their way; and capitalism cannot be achieved unless "patriarchal man-woman relations are maintained" [96]. With this representation of gender dynamics, Disney advocates an ideology which is in alignment with feminist (especially ecofeminist) perspectives, as characters in Disney movies are "tied to larger narratives about freedom, rites of passage, intolerance, choice, greed, and the brutalities of male chauvinism."[97] Through these dialogues, Disney engages with and critiques the concept of the genderedness of the process of capitalism, simultaneously condemning men for selfishly ruining nature and praising and essentializing women who

[96] Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 38.
[97] Neil Campbell, Jude Davies, and George McKay, *Issues in Americanisation and Culture* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 186.

protect it. It is noteworthy to mention, therefore, that gender relations are an important factor behind the dialogues that Disney writers have designed for the male figures to address the heroines.

The notion of power can be further extended to the heroine's monologues in the movies. Elsa's monologue in *Frozen* is in the form of a song and Maleficent's monologue, which is directed toward the sleeping Aurora, consists of eight lines that follow the climax of the movie.

According to Kozloff, monologues "connote an absolute honesty."[98] And in these two scenes Elsa and Maleficent confess their most private thoughts that will reveal more about them than any other line given to them in the films.

The song "Let it go", one of the best-selling singles of all time,[99] contains Elsa's monologue. When her magical powers are discovered by the public, Elsa runs away and in her isolation she learns about her freedom and finds solace in the fact that she no longer has to contain and hide her powers. In her monologue she sings of her newfound freedom, of breaking restrictions, of putting her abilities to the test, of leaving the past behind and letting go of everything that restrains and oppresses her. Her song is accompanied by magnificent images of her raising an ice palace from the ground, running through frozen staircases that she builds and literally letting her hair down as she creates a matching icy-blue dress for herself. Elsa's monologue speaks of the implicit misery and

[98] Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, 71.
[99] "FPI Publishes Digital Music Report 2015," International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, accessed October 10, 2015, http://www.ifpi.org/news/Global-digital-music-revenues-match-physical-format-sales-for-first-time.

loneliness she has suffered, her inability to suppress her powers any longer and her excitement to finally be able to use them freely without worry or fear, as she sings:

> It's time to see what I can do
>
> To test the limits and break through
>
> No right, no wrong, no rules for me I'm free!

Elsa's moment of liberation is defined through the demand for autonomy, which requires "the ability to affirm oneself without interference from others, by being able to define the situation within which one acts".[100] Hence, Elsa can be deemed as a character who freely defines herself. Consequently, as opposed to the patriarchal figures in the story that seek to gain riches through conspiracy and capitalizing on a stolen land, Elsa is depicted as a self-made woman who establishes her authority through her personal liberation.

Maleficent, on the other hand, who has displayed her authority and power all throughout the story and has stood against patriarchal powers, finds her redemption rather than liberation at the climax of the story that is conveyed through her monologue. When the prince's kiss does not awaken Aurora from her deathlike sleep, the crushed and remorseful Maleficent appears at Aurora's bed and expresses her sorrow and regret:

> Maleficent: I will not ask for your forgiveness. Because what I have done to you is unforgivable. I was so lost in hatred and revenge. Sweet Aurora! You stole what was left of my heart. And now I have lost you forever. I swear no harm will come to you as long as I live. And not a day shall pass that I don't miss your smile.

[100] Kathy E. Ferguson, *Self, Society and Womankind: The Dialectic of Liberation* (London: Greenwood Press, 1980), 106.

This monologue follows a kiss that Maleficent places on Aurora's forehead which breaks the spell and revives her. As the audience, we have seen Maleficent's growing love and devotion to Aurora from the beginning of the film. These lines spoken by Maleficent, therefore, confirm the dynamism of her character and the changes that result in her development. Thus, as the stories' narrator suggests in the end, she is depicted to be a multi-dimensional character capable of both villainy and heroism.

This more balanced portrayal of the heroines in the movies is suggestive of a shift from the generic characterization of women in earlier Disney films – and more broadly other popular Hollywood movies. Such characterizations, as I will further elaborate, emulate traditional views of women, which fall into a false binary that proposes that women are either all-virtuous or all-evil. As I demonstrated in this chapter, putting female characters into more diverse conversations with each other and with other characters, giving the protagonists a more powerful voice and assigning meaningful monologues to the heroines, proved that dialogues can significantly contribute to character modification.

But what are the other factors that influence this process? Except for the changes in the plots and dialogues, what other aspects have led to the popularity of the two films under scrutiny? In other words, what other significant changes have contributed to the transformation of these characters from fairy-tale anti-heroines to celebrated protagonists? To answer these questions, the next chapter will be dedicated to a deeper analysis of the altered methods of representation that had a huge impact on the movies' success.

Chapter 3: The Depiction of the Heroines

To grasp a better understanding of the transformation of "hags to heroines" in recent Disney films, the previous two chapters were dedicated to analysing the fairy tales' adaptations and the importance of dialogue revision in this process. But before questioning the motives behind these alterations, there is another very important factor that has to be subjected to further scrutiny in this chapter. As the materials under study are visual texts, therefore, a visual examination of the heroines is vital to my analysis.

The female body, according to Margaret Atwood, has become a "hot topic", whose analysis provokes discussions about "mind versus body, nature versus culture, determinacy versus agency, male versus female and sameness versus difference".[101] The study of the female body in different contexts has been at the heart of many feminist projects and, since film is primarily a visual art, the feminist study of a film would require the analysis of the representation of its female characters both individually and in the context of a given film. For this purpose in this chapter, I will focus on the physique of the heroines and look at how their development throughout the course of the films relates to the change in their physical appearance and what this signifies. To provide a clear discussion of this topic, I will concentrate on different aspects of visual culture including representations of the female body, Disney's representation of female characters, the association of nature with female bodies and the figurative role of fashion in pursuing an ideology. In other words this analysis will consider the importance of body language,

[101] Helen Thomas, *The Body and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2013), 54.

movement, gesture, dress and cosmetics because "the female body is not just an anatomical object but a cultural construction."[102]

When talking about women's presence, John Berger writes that a woman's "gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste"[103] can all contribute to her presence/appearance because she is primarily seen as a physical object. The cultural significance of the female body, however, stems from its "symbolic construct"[104] and not necessarily its corporeal entity. And feminism has always been concerned with the way female bodies have been "talked about, classified, disciplined, invaded, destroyed, altered, decorated, pleasured and more."[105] When analysing the female body, therefore, the importance of the context cannot be dismissed, because the discourse surrounding the context is never unmediated or free of interpretation, whether it be "verbal or visual, fictive or historical or speculative."[106] Within phallocentric systems of representation, the depiction of the female body has been constantly subjected to strategic manipulations not only for aesthetic pleasure but also for semiotic communication. Disney's depiction and representation of characters is not an innocent art form, as Elizabeth Bell demonstrates. According to Bell, there is nothing accidental or serendipitous about representations in animation, as "each second of action on screen is rendered in twenty-four still paintings."[107] Disney's manner of depiction of female

[102] Laurence Goldstein, *The Female Body: Figures, Styles and Speculations* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), ix.
[103] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 46.
[104] Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 2.

[105] Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Longman, 1999), 2.
[106] Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture,* 2.
[107] Bell, Haas, and Sells, *From Mouse to Mermaid*, 108.

characters has been the result of careful cultural and visual considerations and this method, as I will demonstrate, has been preserved in the era of computer-generated imagery.

In the sixth chapter of *From Mouse to Mermaid*, titled "Somatexts at the Disney Shop", Elizabeth Bell classifies Disney's representation of female characters into three groups: dancing girls, femmes fatales and grandmothers/godmothers.

Disney's heroines, according to Bell, were based on beautiful teenage heroines of literary tales and were sketched by Disney artists on the basis of popular images of beauty and youth. They were fair-skinned, fair-eyed and possessed Anglo-Saxon features "both conforming to and perfecting Hollywood's beauty boundaries." [108] These virginal ingénues were modeled after different sources, from silent film heroines to pin-up girls, as they were inspired by actresses and models like Janet Gaynor, Grace Kelly, and Farrah Fawcett. Disney opted for girl-next-door prettiness, but these heroines' bodies simultaneously spoke of a more disciplined elegance, as they displayed the rigid grace and polished movements of classical ballet dancers. In fact, ballerinas like Marjorie Champion and Helene Stanley modeled for characters like Snow White and Cinderella. According to Bell, however, with a more scrutinizing analysis, Disney's dancing girls posed a conflict because their passivity and victimhood stood in contrast to the physical strength, discipline and control of ballet. Although Disney's dancing girls are what most people stereotypically associate the female Disney heroine with, it is worth mentioning that this classical manner of depiction has gone through several changes, while

[108] Ibid., 110.

maintaining certain essential characteristics, which I will elaborate upon later in the chapter.

Femme fatales make up the second category of Disney's female characters. Disney's femme fatales were inspired by the deadly women of silent films and the vain, active women in folktales. Their embodiment of beauty is sinister and threatening, displaying a stance of excessive power and agency. They assume the position of a sexual subject and not a sexual object. They are usually presented in mature middle-aged bodies dressed in black clinging robes, their faces carefully and heavily made up, while also wearing cowls and jewellery. Disney's femme fatales are the authoritative characters in Disney films and their sharp menacing appearance matches their status in the plots. They are usually likened to or possess some characteristics of predatory animals and they are the only characters whose gaze directly meets and confronts the viewers.[109] Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), for example, directly gazes into the camera, her smile widening as she carries on with her soliloquy about her evil plot, and Lady Tremaine in *Cinderella* (1950) fixes her darkened stare on the camera as her glare follows Cinderella. The femme fatales' gaze in this sense is reminiscent of Hélène Cixous' feminist interpretation of the stare and laugh of Medusa in her famous essay titled "The Laugh of the Medusa". In her revision of the Medusa myth, Cixous transforms the female character who displays agency from a threat to a subversive figure that has the ability to disrupt phallogocentrism with her direct confrontational gaze and laughter.[110]Disney's wilful and authoritative

[109]Ibid., 116.
[110] Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, *The Medusa Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 133.

femme fatales—whose analysis has been appealing to feminist scholars— display such stance as well.

Standing in direct contrast to the femme fatale are the third Disney stereotypical female characters. According to Bell, this group consists of grandmothers/godmothers who embody feminine nurturing, protection and sacrifice. They are warm, affable, pear or apple-shaped endomorphs whose simple appearance bears no cosmetics or adornments. Their white or silver hair and their rotund figures are suggestive of an aged, nonthreatening body. The design of Disney's godmothers was inspired by observing old ladies in supermarkets, according to Frank Thomas, who was one of Disney's chief animators.[111]

The three types of Disney female representations that Bell observes in her chapter speak of the existence of a virginal pubescent body, a body at the peak of sexuality and an asexual postmenopausal body. The characteristics attributed to these female bodies speak of the different roles the ideas of age, beauty, and even race play in Disney's depictions.

Bell's framework of analysis is a good match for my own enquiry as the categories she describes can successfully be applied to the representations of Elsa and Maleficent. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider other Disney scholars' views as well. For example, in her book *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, Amy Davis views the personalities and embodiment of the female characters in more specific ways. By dividing Disney films based on the era in which they were produced[112], Davis offers many

[111] Bell, Haas and Sells, *From Mouse to Mermaid,* 119.

[112] Because of the different factors that impacted Walt Disney productions in the last eight decades, Davis divides Disney productions into three groups: The "Classic" Era (1937-1967), the "Middle" Era (1967-1988) and the "Eisner" Era (1989-2005).

subcategories for the heroines and the villainesses. For example she divides Disney heroines into categories, such as princesses, good daughters, tough gals, etc. Davis draws attention to the representation of heroines of different races (for instance Pocahontas and Lilo and her sister from *Lilo and Stitch*), cross-dressing tomboyish heroines (such as Mulan and Audrey from *Atlantis*) and heroines who display sexual confidence (such as Esmeralda from the *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Meg from *Hercules*). Davis also discusses villainesses that do not necessarily display sinister grace and beauty but instead exhibit failed attempts to look glamorously beautiful (Yzma from the *Emperor's New Groove*) or maniacal villainesses (such as Cruella De Vil from *101 Dalmatians* and Madame Medusa from *The Rescuers*). Davis's detailed classification of female characters, offers a comprehensive and valuable insight into Disney's female characters. However, her research as a Disney scholar is incredibly extensive and her meticulous study of every successful and unsuccessful Disney production is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, while I am aware of the nuances in different Disney films, Davis's numerous analytical strategies will not form the basis of my approach.

In analysing Elsa and Maleficent's physical appearance and their characters, it is interesting to note that both are closely associated with or connected to nature and natural elements. According to Barbara Brook, within phallocentric symbolic orders there is "a tendency across different cultures to associate woman with nature and man with culture"[113] which often relates woman to animal life. This kind of association is prevalent in both *Frozen* and *Maleficent*.

Frozen begins with a group of ice harvesters chanting the following song:

[113] Brook, *Feminist Perspectives,* 18.

Born of cold and winter air
And mountain rain combining
This icy force both foul and fair
Has a frozen heart worth mining

So cut through the heart, cold and clear
Strike for love and strike for fear
See the beauty, sharp and sheer
Split the ice apart!
And break the frozen heart

Beautiful! Powerful! Dangerous! Cold!

Ice has a magic, can't be controlled
Stronger than one! Stronger than ten!
Stronger than a hundred men!

The ice in the harvesters' song serves as a metaphor for Elsa's character. Her beauty, abilities, strength and personality are likened to that of ice. And the terms "beautiful, powerful, dangerous, cold", used to describe the ice, also describe Elsa. Elsa possesses the ability to control some natural elements and the appropriate selection of her attire and her looks make her essentially a part of nature. Elsa is portrayed as a heroine with Scandinavian features: Her pale skin is very fair, her eyes are a clear shade of blue and her platinum blonde hair looks almost white. She has a slender figure with delicate features and thin arms and legs, yet her hips show voluptuousness when she does her famous walk in the film.[114] While she adheres to Disney's standards of desirable beauty she is not portrayed as a teenage girl. Elsa's body is depicted as a mature body past its pubescent stage. Her movements are graceful even at times of distress and display a subtle theatricality. Elsa's association with winter and the uncontrollable force of her

[114] Elsa's provocative walk which only takes up a few seconds of the film has triggered much debate and has been subjected to several different interpretations by online news writers and fans alike.

powers reinforce the idea of an unruly nature conceptualized in the body of a female character.

Taking this concept into consideration, a clear parallel can be drawn here between Elsa and Maleficent. From the beginning of the movie, Maleficent is portrayed as a protector of nature. The opening scene of the film shows a young Maleficent who at the sound of a breaking branch abandons her play and heals the branch. When she is informed about an intruding human thief at the moors, she confronts him and returns the stolen gem to the bottom of the pond. Maleficent stands in opposition to the men who want to conquer the moors by stripping it of its riches and disturbing the balance. Her wings, her horns, her pointed ears and shining catlike green eyes exaggerate her animalistic features and make her essentially a part of nature. In addition, the combination of avian, bovine and feline characteristics make her look like a powerful super being. Maleficent's character in this sense is reminiscent of mythological hybrid creatures (e.g. chimeras, griffins, centaurs, etc.) that possessed the capabilities of multiple species. Thus, Disney has used the imaginative combination used by ancient artists of myth who could "create super-or subhuman creatures"[115] by employing a similar kind of method. In addition, it is also interesting to note that Maleficent was initially designed by Mark Davis to look like a giant bat in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*[116] and many of his design concepts were incorporated into the live-action character of Maleficent in the 2014 film.

On the one hand, both Elsa and Maleficent control natural elements and protect nature in a way that asserts their power. This reinforces the idea that Disney women are

[115] Roger Woodard, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 290.
[116] Bell, Haas and Sells, *From Mouse to Mermaid,* 117.

essentialized in their relation with nature. On the other hand, men in both stories become avaricious characters symbolizing a greed for power and control. This kind of dichotomy can be viewed in the light of a Freudian analysis, because nature, in Freud's view, is "something civilized humanity seeks to subdue, dominate and utilize for its own benefits."[117] *Frozen* begins with the portrayal of a group of ice harvesters cutting the ice to prepare it for trade. They describe the nature they are making use of as "stronger than a hundred men" yet "worth mining" and as it was discussed earlier, the ice alludes to Elsa. Later on in the story, Elsa is driven away while Prince Hans of the Southern Isles secretly plans to take over the kingdom and the Duke of Weselton looks for the opportunity to exploit Arendelle's riches in her absence. In *Maleficent*, Stefan is at first caught stealing gemstones from a pond in the fairyland and later, after the King's failed attempts to conquer the moors, he himself accedes to the throne following his violent and disabling attack on Maleficent, the moors' protector. It seems that invasion takes place by men and protection is offered by women in both of these films. In addition, these invasions seem to become a gendered process. In a colonial language, the conquest of riches and the takeover of lands require the conquest and control of the female bodies. As Ann McClintock articulates in *Imperial Leather*, male dominance has eroticized the idea of subjugating land which is conceptualized as female,[118] a viewpoint echoed by Rachel Carson's criticism of Western cultures' increasingly toxic attempts to control nature.

[117] Bernd Herzogenrath, *From Virgin Land to Disney World: Nature and Its Discontents in the USA of Yesterday and Today* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 277.
[118] Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 26.

Focusing on the connection between women and nature and their mutual inferiorisation, Val Plumwood also draws upon a past and a present in which misogyny rules over both women and nature.[119] These ideas are the main focus of ecofeminism. Disney's constant promotion for the preservation of nature becomes apparent in these two movies' storylines, as the happy endings occur when balance is restored through the female characters, which is a central idea in ecofeminism. Therefore, because of Elsa and Maleficent's concern for the welfare of other creatures (and also female characters in the story) and their success in reinstating balance to their environment, they can be viewed as ecofeminists.

The notion of ecofeminism that is present in the films can be further extended to postcolonial theories. The male figures of dominance, in both movies, take the role of imperialists who abuse both the land and the female characters. The exploitation of nature through imperialist projects requires the acceptance of colonial and environmental histories as mutually constitutive.[120] As Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism:* "Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control."[121] The genderedness of empirical women-nature relations can be thus better understood with regards to ecofeminism that draws attention to the important connections between the treatment of women and minorities on the one hand and the nonhuman nature, on the

[119] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 21.
[120] Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.
[121] DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies,* 3.

other. [122] Ecofeminism stands against the logic of domination which maintains "oppressive conceptual frameworks,"[123] therefore, nature according to ecofeminists is a feminist issue. Considering their connections to nature, the heroines' role as ecofeminists hence becomes clearer.

This model of ecofeminism displayed in both films has its roots in other earlier Disney movies. The eponymous character of *Pocahontas* (1995), for example, whose "sense of connectedness in a network of relationships"[124] helps return balance, assumes the position of an ideal ecofeminist but the story offers a distorted account of the colonization of native lands. Pocahontas as a character, who is of and in alignment with nature, possesses a body that is highly eroticised. She has long bronze limbs and the attire that she wears resembles a short tight dress that covers her hips but leaves her legs and shoulders bare. If Pocahontas is the ecofeminist predecessor of Elsa and Maleficent, could these heroines accordingly bear any resemblance to her? Is Elsa and Maleficent's close connections to nature, in other words, essentially a sexualised representation?

Elsa and Maleficent display a unique sense of fashion, whose cultural appeal and significance can be better understood when their choice of clothes has been subjected to scrutiny both in and out of the films' discourse. Following this line of enquiry about the heroines' bodies and their clothes, it is worth remembering that both feminism and

[122] Karen J.Warren and Nisvan Erkal, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3.
[123] Warren and Erkal, *Ecofeminism*, 21.
[124] Herzogenrath, *From Virgin Land to Disney World*, 336.

fashion, according to Linda M. Scott, are "part of the commerce of women's culture and thus are difficult to clearly separate." [125]

At the beginning of *Frozen*, young Elsa, whose cryokinetic powers have not caused any harm yet, is shown wearing a bright blue dress and shoes, her hair is gathered in a hanging loose braid adorned with a simple blue ribbon. All her items of clothing are a sky blue colour and she possesses the appearance of a playful little girl. After Elsa is forbidden to use her powers, her choice of clothes begins to change. She starts wearing more layers and switches to wearing darker colours. Her father, the king, also adds to these restrictive layers by giving his daughter gloves to cover her hands in order to suppress her powers. As the king puts the gloves on Elsa's hands he says, "Conceal it. Don't feel it." This statement is completed by Elsa herself when she repeats what she has been taught by saying "Don't let it show." Elsa locks herself up to deal with her ever-increasing powers in isolation and starts wearing thicker and darker items of clothing. The process of change gradually takes over her whole appearance, as even the ribbon on her head becomes black. Elsa's isolation, inner conflicts and frustration manifest in her appearance and choice of clothes. Self-repression here is translated through oppressive layers of clothing that confine the heroine and inhibit her. During her coronation, Elsa wears a dark purple cape that covers her shoulders and neck, over a long teal dress that almost touches the floor. Her arms are concealed with black sleeves and her hands are hidden beneath gloves. Her hair, which is made up in a tight bun, becomes adorned with a delicate crown when she becomes the queen. Her face displays little use of cosmetics and

[125] Linda M. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 127.

she hardly smiles. Before fleeing, Elsa's choice of clothes is suggestive of a prudish and conservative fashion reflective of suppressed desires.

Her spectacular transformation into an ice queen later in the film is thus all the more dramatic and worthy of meticulous analysis. This transformation is triggered by an event that occurs following Elsa's coronation. When one of her gloves is accidentally taken off by her sister, Elsa panics and frantically tries to get her glove back on, to cover her bare hand. When the sisters' quarrel turns into a heated argument, Elsa's uncovered hand betrays her powers as she involuntarily darts thick shards of ice around her. The song "Let it go" begins when Elsa finds herself alone in the mountains. The words in the song are carefully matched with Elsa's movements during her moment of self-realization. As she begins singing, she repeats the words that her father had taught her as a child, but this time she acknowledges her failure to comply, as she sings:

[Imitating her father] "Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know!"
[As if admitting it to herself] "Well, now they know."

As these words are uttered, she takes off her glove and throws it in the air. This action is followed by unhooking her cloak from around her neck and letting the wind blow it away. Once she has disposed of her cloak, she starts building ascending steps out of ice almost reaching the top of the mountain, and she then constructs a magnificent ice palace as she sings:

> It's time to see what I can do,
> To pass the limits and break through,
> No right, no wrong, no rules for me.
> I'm free!

Once she happily creates a roof and a chandelier of ice in the castle she has just built, she takes her crown off and, looking at it disdainfully, throws it away, singing:

I'm never going back,
The past is in the past!

This action is followed by literally letting her hair down and forming a similar but more sophisticated braid to the one she used to wear as a child. In an impressive moment, she raises her arms up as a bright blue sparkly material begins to crawl up her dress, making her dark clothes vanish as they are replaced with a tight glittery blue dress with transparent sleeves that leaves her shoulders bare. Her sleeves are delicately attached to a long, trailing, shimmering cape that has snowflake prints on it. In the next scene, as she walks toward the sunrise on her palace's balcony, she is shown to be wearing matching high heel shoes and walking like a supermodel. Her walk shows a very theatrical movement of her hips and the slit at the front of her dress displays her legs as she does so. This provocative walk is accompanied by her boldly flinging her arms out with an air of confident self-declaration, emphasising her new-found power and liberation. As she reaches the sunlit balcony, just like other Disney femme fatales, she directly looks at the camera (her face now revealing a more obvious tone of make-up) as she ends the song with "Let the storm rage on, the cold never bothered me anyway."

Elsa's transformation can be viewed in different lights. First of all, the figurative notion of a hovering patriarchal repression of the female character's power is embodied in her imposed physical segregation and a well-meaning yet active discouragement of her abilities. Breaking free from social shackles happens with the disposal of the symbolic chains of repression. Secondly, Elsa's change from a prude to a supermodel promotes the idea of liberation through a gendered and sexualised consumerism which stands in opposition with ecofeminist ideals. In her state of miserable isolation, Elsa is depicted in

her old-fashioned and modest attire. Losing these layers, however, and opting for more fashionable, more glamorous and more revealing clothes, she liberates herself from her inhibited past. The process of a redeeming life transformation is accompanied with a dazzling dress, high heel shoes, a new hairstyle and a more pronounced use of cosmetics. Considering the success of the movie and the popularity of the powerful song that accompanies the character's development into a beloved figure, the subtle promotion and encouragement of a consumerist attitude in order to attain one's true potential can be traced here. Opting for fashion, therefore, becomes arguably "the arena within which the wares of consumerism are most visibly expressed and fervently endorsed as constituting a legitimate way of life."[126] Furthermore, Elsa's transformation showcases a particular sexualised femininity which is reminiscent of the rapidly expanding extreme make-over phenomenon, where women readily align themselves with the rewrites of patriarchal scripts to expose their empowered selves, through sexualised heteronormative femininity.[127] Disney's female characters have thus been essentially connected to nature and naturalised as sexual consumers.

This being said, it is important to further clarify the assertion made above with regards to the notion of consumerism in and outside of the context of the film. It is clear and undeniable that Disney wants viewers and fans to purchase themed products and the success of *Frozen* has indeed led to *Frozen* merchandise being the "single most

[126] Steven Miles, *Consumerism: As a Way of Life* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 90.
[127] Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 150.

demanded items in Disney stores"[128]. Nevertheless, within the context of the story, Elsa, who is portrayed to be self-sufficient, independently generates her attire and does not directly encourage consumerist ideologies. In a subtle manner, however, the impact of this scene on consumers of Disney products has been profitable.

Thirdly, Elsa's new look after her transformation is very similar to the way she looks during the happy time of her childhood. She picks the same colours and her hair is worn in a similar but more sophisticated braid. With the free use of her power, she rebuilds the things that brought her joy as a child and consequently finds a similar untainted happiness. The return to a nostalgic unadulterated past becomes a source of relief and redemption for her as she restores her freedom by reliving a cherished time in her life. Disney's delicate use of nostalgia is one of the key methods employed to lure audiences into taking part in a sentimental past; a past of which Disney has almost certainly been a part, because their global box office success is at least partially dependent on nostalgia.[129] And this subtle reference can hint at Disney's commodification of childhood happiness.

Moving on to Maleficent, one can trace some similarities between the heroines' sense of fashion. Maleficent's appearance throughout the course of the film can be viewed considering several different factors. Maleficent's character and her choice of clothes make her embody all three different stereotypical female Disney characters that

[128] "The Disney Company Q1 FY14 Earnings Conference Call", last modified, August 5, 2016, http://cdn.media.ir.thewaltdisneycompany.com/2014/q1/q1-fy14-earnings-transcript.pdf.
[129] "The Nostalgia Machine: How Disney Keeps Roping You In", last modified February 20, 2016, http://ca.complex.com/pop-culture/2015/08/disneys-forever-nostalgic-appeal.

Bell discusses in her article. The different stages of Maleficent's life make her a dancing girl, a femme fatale and a godmother.

As a child at the beginning of the film, Maleficent is portrayed as an attractive little fairy. Although it is true that her wings and her horns give her a wild appearance, it is undeniable that she possesses the same loveliness and Eurocentric features that Disney's dancing girls do. She has long brown hair and big, bright, expressive green eyes. She wears a ragged-looking brown dress that makes her fit into the nature of which she is a part. Her only adornment is a string of beads around her neck. She is a joyful frolicking fairy who is loved and admired by those around her, just like all other Disney heroines. Before facing betrayal, the grown up Maleficent retains her old style of clothing. She wears a similar brown dress with no ornaments or jewellery and lets her hair flow down her shoulders. Her appearance as an assertive protector is simple, yet powerful, as her wings give her an aura of awe and authority. Maleficent's attitude, along with her style of clothing, changes when she loses her wings. After this trauma, Maleficent becomes a femme fatale. She starts wearing cowls that cover her hair and her attire changes from simple dresses to long elegant capes adorned with fur, animal skin, bones and teeth that cover her wingless back. To make Maleficent a stylish vision of vileness, Angelina Jolie formed a team of three London-based designers—namely Rob Goodwin, a well-known leathersmith; Manual Albarran, a couturier of metal, corsetry and leather creations; and Justin Smith, who is a bespoke milliner. Under the supervision of Jolie herself and Anna B. Sheppard (a two time Academy Award nominee for costume designs), the team started to accessorize Maleficent by creating rings made of animal skeleton, bracelets made of claws, shoulder pads adorned with feathers, precious stones, crystal and leather, bone,

teeth and human hair, thus accentuating Maleficent's wild look with an impressive list of non-vegetarian, animal-based materials. They reworked designer shoes with bones to give them an edgy look and Maleficent's head wrap was done with a variety of material like ostrich, leather and stingray skin. Finally, Rick Baker (a make-up artist who has won seven Academy Awards) created silicone-based prosthetic cheeks, nose and ears to exaggerate Maleficent's features.[130] These additions to Maleficent's appearance, gave her a "savage elegance" that reinforce the femme fatale's characteristics as a threatening beauty with predatory animalistic features.

Maleficent later becomes an unofficial godmother to Aurora, while retaining her appearance as a femme fatale. The godmother figure in Disney, as discussed earlier, is an old woman with a plump figure, a simple face and white hair. The elegant beauty of Maleficent, her carefully made-up face, her tall slim figure and the minute expert attention to the details of her appearance do not make her a stereotypical Disney godmother figure. The change in Maleficent's character from an elegant villain to a caring godmother is not shown through the change in her appearance, but through the transformation of Jolie's facial expressions, which show more tenderness and warmth as the story develops. Perhaps it is safe to say that regardless of the developments their characters go through, Disney heroines— or in Maleficent's case, new heroines— are attractive women who possess a keen sense of fashion.

In discussing Elsa and Maleficent's fashion, the idea of glamour becomes not only romanticized but also fetishized. Although glamour as a term that implies sophisticated

[130] "The Creepy Couture of *Maleficent*", last modified February 19, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/angelina-jolies-maleficent-costumes-707087.

allure "has a history which can be interwoven with changing constructions of femininity, consumerism, popular culture, fashion and celebrity,"[131] it could also be connected to a more assertive and powerful form of female identity, in Carol Dyhouse's view. Glamour, in her observation, was and still can be linked to a desire to transform and aspire. Glamour requires confidence and self-possession that does not sit easily with traditional feminine virtues of modesty and innocence.[132] Both Elsa and Maleficent embody an idea of a mature beauty that is glamorous and self-possessed. In a media-saturated context that fetishizes adolescent youth, their idealisation accompanies their adulthood. Nevertheless, although glamour can be used to assert power and ideology, outside the context of the stories it is still costly and entails consumerism. It is also worthwhile to consider the paradox inherent in the impact the two main characters have on fans: They embody ecofeminism as they are deeply connected to nature and yet incidentally encourage consumerism, by indirectly idealizing the idea of glamour.

Following this train of thought, it is worth considering that a useful way to encourage consumerism is to use celebrities to endorse products. Since people use celebrities as "role models and guides"[133] the use of celebrities has also helped the promotion of the films' consumerist ideologies. In the case of *Maleficent*, especially, the judicious choosing of Angelina Jolie as the star of the movie has hugely contributed to its success as a movie with a subversive heroine. As such, parallels can be drawn between Maleficent's character and Angelina Jolie's life. The transformation of Jolie's public

[131] Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (New York: Zed Books, 2010), 1.
[132] Dyhouse, *Glamour*, 45.
[133] Hamish Pringle, *Celebrity Sells* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), xxii.

image from a "wild child"[134] to a mother figure through multiple adoptions and later through giving birth can be seen in Maleficent's slow change from a volatile person who seeks revenge, to a loving godmother.

So far, it seems that the successful revisions made to the fairy tales in the two movies have included revising the plots, the dialogues, and the characters' representation. The previous chapters have also shed more light on how these changes can be viewed in more nuanced ways. The vital question that remains, however, is why these modifications have been so carefully taken into consideration? What are the reasons behind more politically correct representations, if these changes could be considered so? What role does the idea of consumerism play in this analysis? What other tools or theories can be employed to deconstruct the films' messages? These questions will form the crux of the next and final chapter of this thesis.

[134] "Rebel Without a Pause", Time, last modified February 21, 2016, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,995905-2,00.html.

Chapter4: Disney and Postfeminism

In the previous chapters, I elaborated upon how changes in the plots, the dialogues and the characterization of the heroines in *Frozen* and *Maleficent* have contributed to the creation of different stories that, judging by the success of the films, are appealing to contemporary audiences. In this chapter, I will argue that these changes are not haphazard but carefully calculated, because the process of production is influenced by the predicted audience response.

Although my primary goal in this final chapter is to elaborate upon how the impact Disney has on popular culture reinstates certain favoured ideologies, I would initially like to provide a brief analysis of the importance of the viewers and their gaze. When it comes to profitable marketing, doing research on consumers of a product is important and film producers who aim at box-office success carefully take this into consideration. Therefore, before a company like Disney "releases a product, introduces new media or entertainment outlets, or adds to its existing businesses, marketing research attempts to predict consumer responses."[135] Nevertheless, the variance in the audience's backgrounds results in different viewing experiences, and consequently different manners of interpretation. And while the media and other cultural texts play a crucial role in subject formation, if we diminish the spectator's role to a mere recipient of readily packaged ideas, we oversimplify a complex negotiation between consumers and producers. To give a cultural text an all-powerful position, in other words, is to say "the intention of the text and the

[135] Wasko, *Understanding Disney,* 187.

reception of textual meaning are defined as one and the same"[136]. Viral negative reviews on social media, protesting against and boycotting films prove, however, that the audiences are not completely devoid of agency.

Looking at the complex relationship between those who make and those who watch films, therefore, it can be argued that both influence each other to varying degrees. And while I am aware of this mutual impact and will use some examples to talk about the audiences' agency, my focus in this chapter, as I mentioned above, will be to look at the power Disney has over its audience. To study Disney's hegemonic tactics, therefore, it is important to initially learn about the company's popularity with its consumers.

Disney films are considered by many to be an essential part of childhood and aim to cater to the child and the children within adults – this is illustrated by the fact that Disney productions were and are still advertised as family films. Having said this, the majority of Disney's audiences are female. Disney himself recognized the importance of his female audience, stating that "After all, 80 percent of our audience are women."[137] According to Amy Davis, Disney saw women as essentially childlike and therefore, by designing soft adorable characters, appealed to women's maternal instincts and, by reducing low humour and slapstick comedy, he kept his female audience interested in his films.[138] The idea of a gendered spectatorship and the importance of female viewers add to the complexity of this phenomenon. Many feminists have argued that in popular cinema, aside from the scarce number of women in the process of filmmaking, the female

[136] E. Deidre Pribram, *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (London: Verso, 1988), 4.
[137] Davis*, Good Girls and Wicked Witches,* 128.
[138] Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 130.

audience has also been mostly disregarded. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, for example, Laura Mulvey discusses phallocentric and patriarchal ideas that surround movies that overlook the female viewer. In part of Mulvey's analysis, the spectator who has a repressed position in the cinema projects her "repressed desire onto the performer."[139] This process involves a certain type of identification. Creating characters that appeal to the target audience, in other words, is a process that requires meticulous study because it can simultaneously shape and reinforce desire and subjectivity. Simply put, cinematic representation can be viewed specifically as "a kind of mapping of social vision into subjectivity", where the "binding of fantasy to significant images affects the spectator as a subjective production, and so the movement of the film actually inscribes and orients desire."[140]

With regards to the notions of desire and subject formation, Jackie Stacey offers an in-depth theorization of cinematic identification in her book entitled *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. In Stacey's analysis, which draws heavily upon Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of identification, the production of identities initially starts with the formation of an emotional tie with external objects. This makes the relation between self, the ideal self and idealised femininity— and thus the relation between the female spectator and the star—important. The spectator, in other words, primarily "identifies with the camera and projector, and like the child positioned in front of the mirror, constructs an imaginary notion of wholeness, of a unified body"

[139] Amelia Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 59.
[140] Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8.

and secondarily relates to an actor or character, finding "an identificatory investment, a possible suit for the substitution/misrecognition of self"[141]. This process of identification that commands subject displacement, nevertheless, replicates patriarchy due to its totalizing agenda.[142] A movie's success is, therefore, hugely determined by the spectator's response to the depiction of characters in the movie that they can identify or sympathise with, or idealise. And for Disney, the creation of lasting characters is of great importance. This tradition has been preserved from Walt Disney himself who insisted that "…unless people are able to identify themselves with the character, its actions will seem unreal."[143] For this very reason, creators are also inspired by idealised celebrities. Therefore, many of these characters are either designed after, or voiced/played by people whose looks or talents are acclaimed. In addition, celebrities can influence opinions and have the ability to impact fans' views or even merely reinforce an already held belief as "it is not uncommon for a fan to buy a product simply because their favourite celebrity endorses or recommends it."[144] In the previous chapter, for example, I discussed how Disney princesses were modelled after Hollywood beauties of the time and, in the case of *Frozen* and *Maleficent*, Angelina Jolie and Idina Menzel's popularity helped the depiction of more accessible characters with whom spectators could more easily connect.

As it can be gathered, the process of designing characters requires close attention to the audience. With a large number of female viewers, therefore, the idea of a gendered

[141] Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 132.
[142] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992), 124.
[143] Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 191.
[144] Kerric Harvey, *Encyclopedia of Social Media and Politics: Volume 1* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), 13.

identification was and still is of great importance for Disney. However, it is interesting to note that although Disney considered gendered audiences important in the process of film-making, other factors, like the race and class of his audiences, did not seem to be as central to his approach. With peripheral considerations with regards to minorities, Disney assumed his audiences to be white and/or middle-class.[145] Moreover, while facing criticism about his films' insensitivities, he claimed:

> We watch so that nothing gets into the films that would be harmful in any way to any group or any country. We have large audiences of children and different groups, and we try to keep them as free from anything that would offend anybody as possible. We work hard to see nothing of that sort creeps in.[146]

Throughout the years, however, after receiving constant criticism, the Disney Company has become more inclusive by making characters and their stories more diverse. Creating protagonists of different races (e.g. Aladdin, Pocahontas, Mulan, Kuzco, Lilo, Princess Tiana, etc.) and assigning various non-Western settings for the stories (e.g. Iraq, Peru, China, Kenya[147], etc.), for example, have contributed to the films' diversity on the surface. As a multinational corporation whose products continue to be purchased and consumed by millions throughout the world, the Disney Company has shown a deep interest in their consumers and over the years has invested in carrying out a wide range of research in order to learn about their audiences. From early on, Walt Disney, unlike other film studio

[145] Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches*, 128.
[146] Ibid., 126.
[147] "The World Map of Animated Disney Movies", Disney Film Locations, last modified May 20, 2016, http://www.dorkly.com/post/70383/the-world-map-of-every-animated-disney-movie-ever.

directors, is said to have been "willing to change a film based on audience response."[148] The Disney Company's lasting success and popularity, in other words, is a result of "adjusting stories to be reflective of their audience's expectations, for it is only through articulating their values, fears and desires that the stories maintain their lasting popularity."[149] This method is also employed by Hollywood that responds to societal pressure and audience's desire, by taking "advantage of spectator energy and psychic investments" [150], because assuming this position in actuality lures audiences into Hollywood's own position. [151]

The continuous success of Disney's stories has led many to believe that it is a wholesome and safe entertainment. In the Global Disney Audiences Project, for example, which was carried out by researchers linking a series of investigations about the reception of Disney in eighteen different countries, 99 percent of the interviewees stated that they had been exposed to Disney films and 85 percent believed that Disney promoted moral values and principles regardless of being a corporate entity tainted with monopoly and cultural imperialism. Respondents in general were able to differentiate and "compartmentalize their approach to Disney as business versus Disney as entertainment."[152]

Disney films may seem to be packed with ideological principles and educational values and they may be advertised as entertainment with a moral agenda but Michael

[148] Wasko, *Understanding Disney,* 186.
[149] Hallett and Karasek, *Fairy Tales in Popular Culture*, 116.
[150] Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre", Cinema Journal 23 (1984):9, accessed May 18, 2016, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225093.
[151] Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach", 9.
[152] Wasko, *Understanding Disney,* 193.

Eisner (Disney's previous CEO of twenty-one years) made a statement that made Disney's approach to film-making clearer, as he notoriously said: "We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. To make money is our only objective."[153] However, he qualified this statement by adding "… but to make money it is important to make history, to make art or to make some significant statement."[154]

Judging by the fact that in 2007 Disney produced an estimated 40 percent of all licensed merchandise[155] in all of the United States and Canada[156] and in 2012 the Walt Disney Company held assets worth 79.4 billion US dollars,[157] the Company's continuous success in keeping up with audience expectations is evident.

When dealing with the spreading and promotion of ideologies, therefore, the important role of consumer culture cannot be dismissed, because consumerism has arguably become the religion of the twentieth century,[158] linking even the consumption of commonplace everyday goods to the "processes of value construction which are deeply rooted and have numerous cultural and social, economic and material ramifications."[159] As such, the statements that Disney characters make throughout the course of the stories

[153] Spencer Lewerenz and Barbara Nicolosi, *Behind the Screen: Hollywood Insiders on Faith, Film, and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 195.
[154] Mark I. Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust, and Pixie Dust* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 121.
[155] Licensed merchandise refers to products with distinct brands or images whose manufacture is permitted by those who own the copyright, upon a specified payment or agreement. Holding the copyright assets of many popular characters and designs, Disney receives royalties for any product sold bearing an image or design of Disney characters.
[156] Hallett and Karasek, *Fairy Tales in Popular Culture*, 149.
[157] "Disney's Income", last modified April 25, 2016, http://www.statista.com/statistics/193136/total-assets-of-the-walt-disney-company-since-2006/.
[158] Miles, *Consumerism*, 1.
[159] Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 39.

are packaged and made available to the public in neat, purchasable bundles because, as it was discussed in the first chapter, the numbing linearity and perfect closure of Disney plots advertise the favoured messages conveyed in the movies as inevitably right.

Disney's ability to promote ideologies and conveniently sell them worldwide gives the Company immense power as a cultural educator. Walt Disney himself refused to "separate education from entertainment" [160] and realized that cultural pedagogy was possible through "reconstructing identities and reinforcing dominant assumptions by means of affective investments."[161] This approach to entertainment has led Disney to become a corporation whose productions are deemed innocent and engaging family films, assuring parents that their children are in good hands when consuming Disney products. Indeed, the values that Disney endorses on the surface are constructive and welcome in many different cultures. By popularizing and manoeuvring upon themes that are remarkably consistent across cultures, such as happiness, family values, and the triumph of good over evil, [162] throughout the decades, Disney has established itself as a cultural educator that uses world-class entertainment to successfully promote dominant cultural values and meanings. Nevertheless, Disney's notorious monopoly is suggestive of the corporation's less obvious intentions. If Disney's powerful position is considered in the light of a Foucauldian analysis that "power operates at least in part through social

[160] Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 18.
[161] Hallett and Karasek, *Fairy Tales in Popular Culture*, 148.
[162] Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch, *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 94.

norms,"[163] then prioritizing, normalizing and advertising desired values is a way of establishing authority over the pedagogical and ideological aspects of popular culture. In addition, through a Foucauldian lens, it becomes evident that "the entire project of childrearing, including the telling of tales, is invested in a microphysics of power and is therefore never really in the best interest of the child. Any attempt to pass on stories becomes a disciplinary tactic aimed at control."[164] This could be stated about linear stories. And Disney, as "an instrument of social control and a catalyst for consumer desire,"[165] is no exception.

As Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan demonstrate in *Deconstructing Disney,* since Disney is associated with American cultural imperialism and has an ever-growing powerful hegemonic control over both Western and global popular culture, attacking it is not a novelty. In fact, throughout the years, Disney has received consistent criticisms regarding the company's "sexism, racism, conservatism, heterosexism, androcentrism, imperialism (cultural), imperialism (economic), literary vandalism, jingoism, aberrant sexuality, censorship, propaganda, paranoia, homophobia, exploitation, ecological devastation, anti-union repression, FBI collaboration, corporate raiding and stereotyping."[166] And yet, despite all these denunciations, the company continues to thrive.

[163] Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges, *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 223.
[164] Tatar, *Off with their Heads*), 236.
[165] Budd and Kirsch, *Rethinking Disney,* 30.
[166] Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 1.

Disney's subtle adaptability and their careful research in the effective and profitable manipulation of popular culture can be criticised through a feminist lens that can apprehend the Company's neoliberal and postfeminist approach to filmmaking. As the central political/economic paradigm of our contemporary period, neoliberalism, according to Noam Chomsky, refers to "the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit."[167] Furthermore, as it has become increasingly more convenient to rely on consumer culture to take care of our every possible need, there is the "tendency for more and more aspects of human life to be made available through the market."[168] Thus, neoliberalism thrives. With this in mind, Disney's neoliberal approach to popular culture can be easily understood. The company continues to expand its global empire, and as Michael Eisner has clarified, "It doesn't matter whether it comes in by cable, telephone lines, computer or satellite. Everyone's going to have to deal with Disney."[169]

Disney's willingness to engage with and satisfy contemporary audiences is indeed tactical and their neoliberal approach to production can be best viewed as an alignment with postfeminist ideas. As I will demonstrate, Disney has co-opted feminism via postfeminism in its more recent productions. Both *Frozen* and *Maleficent* revolve around atypical heroines who are portrayed as liberated, independent, brave and indeed empowered: aspects that are not present in many Disney female characters and are

[167] Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), 7.
[168] Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011),2.
[169] Wasko, *Understanding Disney,* 222.

praised in those few possessing them. In addition, these stories are even more eagerly received because of the uncharacteristic twists in their plots and the emancipation of former fairytale anti-heroines. Nevertheless, by disassembling the movies with the employment of postfeminist views, the positive reception of the movies can be called into question.

As a "well-informed and well-intended response to feminism"[170] postfeminism refers to the belief that feminism is no longer needed, as its goals and objectives have already been achieved and actualized. By undoing and brushing aside feminism's ideals and stigmatizing feminism as aggressive and needlessly defiant, postfeminism naturalizes feminism, rendering it as out-dated and irrelevant to the contemporary young woman. Correspondingly, silencing feminist concerns is attained through commodifying feminism via "the figure of the woman as an empowered consumer" [171] and it is thus that postfeminism's neoliberalist underpinnings can be better grasped by the attentive viewer.

By endorsing this manner of thinking, postfeminism exercises its blurry ideals in popular culture by offering a limited vision of gender equality and by drawing upon vocabulary such as individualism, "empowerment and choice"[172] that offer an illusion of the complete emancipation of the present-day woman. Hence, it promotes "a limited and normative notion of feminism that is essentially diluted and apolitical."[173] In addition, postfeminism disregards other factors such as race and class, making it "white and middle

[170] Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 11.
[171] Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
[172] McRobbie, *Aftermath of Feminism,* 1.
[173] Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie C. Garlen, *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 74.

class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy for the production of the self. It is thus a strategy by which other kinds of social difference are glossed over."[174]

Taking into consideration these characteristics of postfeminism, the analysis of *Frozen* and *Maleficent* as movies with a feminist agenda can be subjected to further scrutiny. As it was demonstrated in earlier chapters, the plots of the stories were carefully revised, the characters' speech meticulously designed and the heroines' looks and personalities reviewed to be suggestive of the feminist improvements made to Disney stories. Both *Frozen* and Maleficent (with different degrees of appraisal) have been admired because of their unconventional female characters—who display agency, power, and independence in accordance with contemporary standards— their dismissal of the priority of romantic love, and the strong bond between female characters. This demonstrates that Disney has responded to criticism and has become more politically correct by accommodating feminist concerns. A more critical viewing of the movies while considering the limitations of postfeminism would, however, reveal that, although some feminist issues have been dealt with on the surface, glamour is fetishized, idealised beauty is Eurocentric (firmly remaining within the confines of an able-bodied, slim, heteronormative, young, white body), consumerism is indirectly advertised (as a result of the impact of the films and not the content), and male characters are downplayed.

The permeation of postfeminism in popular culture may harbour issues that in actuality displace feminist concerns. As I have mentioned above, a major concern that feminist critics have about the normalization of postfeminist ideas in popular culture is the promotion of the belief in the universality of White Western middle-class feminism

[174] Tasker and Negra, *Interrogating Postfeminism,* 2.

by essentializing the modern woman's social position and justifying homogenization and exclusion of women of diverse class, age, racial and cultural backgrounds. In order to clarify that this discussion is not about mere aesthetics—as some online bloggers believe it to be[175]—it is necessary to "understand representation as a political issue"[176] and ideology as determining and determined by the mode of representation.[177] Both protagonists in the movies under scrutiny are white heroines whose beauty is aspired to and idealised. A restricted characterization like this works as a "subtle mechanism of racial exclusion… by reinstituting (Western) whiteness as a dominant cultural norm"[178] and thus minimizing considerations about race. Therefore, postfeminism in recent successful Disney movies works "not only to exclude racial diversity but to actually affirm the White, female heterosexual subject."[179]

Furthermore, a negative outcome with regards to postfeminism and its influence on popular culture is the endorsement of an individualism that creates identities that are "self-enclosed, self-obsessed, market-driven" and "surface-oriented, media-driven, and focused on personal and apolitical issues."[180] The promotion of individualism is not necessarily a postfeminist issue, as Keith Booker explains:

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[175] Some online bloggers insist that people's complaint about the Disney characters' whiteness and their looks is an overreaction, because the message of the film is more important. Cindy White's blog about *Frozen*, which can be viewed in the link below, serves as a good example in this case. https://geekdad.com/2013/11/feminist-controversy-frozen-misses-point/

[176] Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 66.
[177] Ibid., 268.
[178] Sandlin and Garlen, *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, 79.
[179] Ibid., 79.
[180] Anthony Elliott and Charles C. Lemert, *The New Individualism: The Emotional Costs of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 65.

> It is safe to say that the most consistent ideological message embedded in American children's film has to do with the promotion of an individualist mind-set. Almost every film… actively promotes individualism in one way or another, which is not particularly surprising, given that individualism is probably the central constitutive component of the official ideology of the United States as a nation and of capitalism as a system.[181]

Furthermore, postfeminist culture centralizes the privileged elite, emphasizing an individualism that allows confusion between self-interest and individuality, while elevating consumption as a tactic for dealing with those discontents that are in actuality social rather than personal.[182] Thus, with the help of neoliberalism, individuals are encouraged to view themselves as active subjects, exercising their freedom of choice and enhancing their own happiness, well-being, and success, which are tied to consumption. With the permeation of individualism within society, individuals are seen as responsible for social issues such as sexism, racism and classism, and thus systems of power and control that predominantly and systematically normalize these issues become exempted. Hence, individualism works in alignment with hierarchies such as patriarchy and capitalism. Therefore, the political association "of freedom with individual choice"[183] makes room for a false notion of an empowered individual. Warped versions of "girl

[181] M. Keith Booker, *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 175.
[182] Tasker and Negra, *Interrogating Postfeminism,* 2.
[183] Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 6.

power", in this case, simply encourage conforming to "the commercialized/stereotyped image of a powerful and independent woman."[184]

Nevertheless, to offer a more nuanced viewpoint, I wish to clarify here that in the context of the films, for both Elsa and Maleficent, dealing with the personal leads to active engagement in the political arena. For both heroines, overcoming the challenges of their private affairs requires their triumph within a system that oppresses them, along with other characters. Individualism, hence, is not a problem within the plot of the movies but the result of corporate filmmakers' continuous reinforcement of this worldview. Therefore, it is important here to differentiate between the ideology of the films and the ideology of corporate filmmakers. In other words, as I will further elaborate in the concluding chapter, the views and values expressed in the movies are not necessarily shared with those of the corporation that produces them.

When it comes to criticising postfeminism's impact on popular culture however, it is worth mentioning that, since it does not entail a clear ideology, it becomes "more of a good mood, a tone or a shifting worldview utilized by many women to understand their own particular preferences and practices in our current media-saturated culture."[185] With this in mind, a discussion of the movies' ideologies and the social media that influence and are influenced by them will be necessary.

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[184] Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown, *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers' Schemes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 1.
[185] Jeffery A. Brown, *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2015), 170.

The interaction between the audience and the media through the easy use of social media has become increasingly complex. Producing and reproducing cultural and personal values and identities has become a common phenomenon, as mass participation in online popular culture has become accessible to millions. The ability to partake in cultural production has made the set of relations between consumers and producers more nuanced and complicated. Because of the existence of social media, responding to audiences' expectation has become easier for a company like Disney. By the same token, voicing opinions and articulating one's criticism are no longer solely the domain of scholars. Hence, critical and creative responses to Disney productions is in reality a means of contemplating one's own position as a consumer of popular culture.[186] Thus, complicating the relation between influence and agency, we can assume that:

> Particularly at this point in history, when popular culture and the consumer marketplace provide endless options for self-positioning and self-expression via everyday choices, constructing the self has become a nearly constant activity.[187]

Accordingly, if popular culture provides a medium for self-reflection and self-transformation, what role do ideologies play in this process? Is popular culture, as Stuart Hall puts it, a site where collective social understandings are created and the politics of significance are planned out in order to lure people to see the world in particular ways?[188] Or are people as active agents, unravelling messages that they receive? As French Marxist

[186] Sandlin and Garlen, *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, 83.
[187] Cynthia Carter Ching and Brian J. Foley, *Constructing the Self in a Digital World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10.
[188] John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 3.

theorist Louis Althusser believed, the array of ideological messages available to us throughout the course of our lives influences us to think about the world in certain ways and call us into being as thinking individuals. In Althusser's view, "ideology is not simply an illusion that hides the truth of social practices but is the material fabric within which those practices are necessarily carried out… [the] goal, then, is not to avoid or overcome ideology, but to attempt to understand and delineate its working so that individual subjects can interact with ideology in more critical and productive ways."[189] Therefore, aside from scholarly reviews, the active encouragement of individuals to take part in the process of meaning-making and critical thinking is equally important.

And it is through considering this phenomenon that the films under scrutiny can be more critically viewed. The success of *Frozen* alone, for example, proves how cultural reception can influence cultural production, seeing that:

> Americans continue to reel from the global impact of *Frozen*. In grossing over a billion dollars in ticket sales, it financially surpassed every other animated movie, and thus has been named the number one animated film of all time. Additionally,… [the film] won both best animated film and best song at the Academy Awards; the soundtrack, the top-performing album of 2014, enjoyed an unprecedented 13-week reign at the top of the billboard charts; and its DVD sales totalled 3.2 million on its first day of release alone and has since sold 7.6 million DVDs and another 6.5 million blu-ray DVDs. Needless to say, Frozen has captured audiences and reinstated Disney as an animation—and cultural and

[189] Booker, *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films*, xxi.

> corporate—powerhouse. As such, spin-offs, sequels, increased TV presence, a Broadway play, increased merchandise production and a new theme park attraction are already planned or in the works to cash in on its popularity.[190]

In other words, the reflective welcome changes made to the stories and heroines in *Frozen* and *Maleficent* are a response to the feedback that Disney has received, while the audiences' eager consumption of this slightly improved recycled material, greatly impacts the ideologies the company decides to pursue to make profit. In sum, a happy consumer is a faithful consumer and an attentive provider is a successful capitalist.

As it can be gathered through the analyses in this chapter, what is perceived as progressive feminist values in contemporary popular culture is in fact a depoliticization of feminism. If we consider that popular culture is a "privileged terrain for the production of neoliberal values"[191], Disney's intention behind destigmatising the figure of the powerful woman by opting for a less conventional manner of fairy tale revision, becomes clearer. Disney's position can thus be viewed considering Foucault's notion of governmentality which has commonly been used with regards to neoliberalism. [192] The term governmentality refers to the manner in which systems of control exercise their power over the population. In Foucault's view, power can only be exercised over free individual or collective subjects.[193] Nevertheless, the way individuals practice their freedom can be strategically instrumentalised. In other words, society can be discreetly disciplined to

[190] Sandlin and Garlen, *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum*, 82.
[191] Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 22.
[192] Gill and Scharff, *New Femininities,* 8.
[193] Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Rethinking Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 30.

willingly serve power. Through a Foucauldian lens, the power to normalize this phenomenon results in both homogeneity and individualism.[194] Living with neoliberal values, individuals thus become self-managing and self-correcting while holding the belief that they are agents of their own destiny.[195] Therefore, through market mechanisms, idealised identities become apolitically autonomous[196] and in the name of empowerment the victims of social discrimination are encouraged to cast off their status as victims to actively transform their condition.[197] And thus, systems of power are excused from taking any responsibility rendering social issues that women and other minorities face as inconsequential.[198]

Therefore, postfeminism neatly dovetails with the notions of neoliberalism and individualism. Postfeminism consequently allows companies like Disney to create celebrated protagonists who impress many fans, viewers and critics and are fashionable and marketable in the girl power discourse, while maintaining their "retrogressive and reactionary conservatism"[199]. The complexity of this phenomenon, therefore, reveals a contemporary issue that subtly influences many aspects of popular culture.

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[194] Genz and Brabon, *Postfeminism,* 150.
[195] Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 44.
[196] Majia Holmer Nadesan, *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 187.

[197] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 82.

[198] Joel Gwynne and Nadine Muller, *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.
[199] Genz and Brabon, *Postfeminism*, 167.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to interpret the new representation of former fairy-tale anti-heroines in order to reveal the nuances of such alterations and the meanings behind them. As it was deliberated in the first three chapters, several factors have contributed to the successful reception of *Frozen* and *Maleficent* as feminist Disney films. For example, adapting the methods of revision employed in postmodern fairy tales led to heroines becoming more active, gave background stories to the perceived villains of the tales and made room for alternative modes of storytelling. In addition, putting characters into conversation with one another opened new opportunities for less conventional dialogues, creating expressive characters who reveal more about themselves and those around them through their speech. Furthermore, the bodies of the heroines are portrayed as being replete with ideological representations, with their climactic transformations accompanied by their suggestive physical makeovers.

One way to look at these positive changes is to view them with a dose of healthy scepticism. As it was demonstrated in the final chapter, these transitions, although positive in a way, also make use of elements of feminism in a 'gender aware' form of control that under a new guise, promotes a notional form of equality and complete emancipation, which results in homogeneity and exclusion. This process of displacement

and substitution, according to Angela McRobbie, is a kind of substitute for feminism that allows capitalism to encourage a "feminist agenda in plots and storylines"[200].

Nevertheless, how are we as spectators, fans and consumers supposed to react to such representations? Is boycotting films an option? Is it practical, healthy or even possible to show utter resistance by not consuming any products and encouraging children to do the same? Unfortunately, as citizens of our contemporary world, we cannot escape from consumerism. In addition, although "theoretically, the public has the capability to exert tremendous economic clout by boycotting films," Hollywood is aware of the fact that "the movie audience is decentralised and lacks national leadership… any individual or small group protests would have minimal, if any, financial impact."[201]

Having critically viewed Disney throughout this thesis, I have to admit to the shortcomings of my approach as a researcher who has mostly sided with radical critics. As I mentioned earlier in the thesis, the approach and ideology behind the makers of the films is not one and the same as those of the corporation funding them. Different approaches to the films would result in different findings. As Douglas Brode writes in *Multiculturalism and the Mouse*, approaching Disney without prejudices stemming from the far right or far left, shows that Disney has in fact been politically correct within the confines of every era and that a radical intellectual view that suggests that "*anything* offered by a media conglomerate is bad and unhealthy for us and our children"[202] is far

[200] McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism,* 4.
[201] Ernest D. Giglio, *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film and Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 82.
[202] Douglas Brode, *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 268.

too simplistic. Yet, it is the diversity of these critical approaches that makes their reception complex and multifaceted.

In my thesis, I have proposed that both *Frozen* and *Maleficent* seem to encourage postfeminist worldviews. Nevertheless, with the easy access to a world of knowledge online, contemporary viewers have taken a certain amount of responsibility with regards to decoding deeper nuances. As bell hooks declares, "There is power in looking."[203] By employing a Foucauldian worldview, which encourages resistance and critical thinking, hooks invites spectators to find their agency in the gaps and margins by stating that:

> Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.[204]

Both of the movies that have been subjected to scrutiny in this thesis represent a less conventional trope of heroines who seem to trigger a lot of theories, assumptions and debates online. Many, for example, seem to have interpreted both movies to harbour a "gay agenda"[205], which has resulted in heated debates that have either denounced the

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[203] hooks, *Black Looks,* 115.
[204] hooks, *Black Looks*, 116.
[205] "The gay agenda" in these movies has been a hot topic of debate among critics, news writers and online bloggers alike. The following websites serve as a few examples:
http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-echochambers-26759342.
http://www.penguinate.com/the-sexuality-of-cartoons-the-gay-agenda-of-frozen.html.
http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/04/its-not-just-frozen-disney-has-always-been-subtly-pro-gay/361060/.
http://www.ravishly.com/2014/02/19/warning-frozen-promoting-gay-agenda-and-now-children-will-become-gay-too.

films or have celebrated them. These kinds of debates show that viewers are actively participating in the process of meaning-making.

By laying emphasis on the importance of neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies with regards to the films' success, I have concluded in the final chapter that there is a hidden agenda behind Disney's more politically correct representations. Furthermore, I have also illustrated the numerous problematic restrictions (e.g. individualism, essentialism, exclusion, etc.) that such representations pose. The question to ask now is how is Disney going to keep up with the audience's demand? What ideologies is it going to pursue after the success of such movies as *Frozen* and *Maleficent*?

In March 2016, Disney released a comedy adventure animated film titled *Zootopia*, which features a rabbit as the heroine in a city of anthropomorphic animals. Through a witty, engaging plot, *Zootopia* addresses social issues such as sexism, racism, and classism in the context of the film by creating a hierarchy between the herbivore and carnivore animals and even includes a stereotypical gay character in the plot. *Zootopia* has been a box-office success, has been positively reviewed, and has received much critical acclaim.[206] Such novel plots speak of even more radical changes made to Disney films. In relation to such innovative Disney stories one might pose several questions whose tentative answers can open doors to further valuable research.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the continuing relevance of folktale in contemporary storytelling cannot be dismissed. Familiar stories are always partly retold in

[206] "*Zootopia* reviews", last modified, May 20, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/markhughes/2016/03/03/review-zootopia-is-the-best-disney-film-since-beauty-and-the-beast/#1549a89f5e0f.

accordance with contemporary moralities that address and criticise relevant societal issues. Therefore, it is not surprising to see Disney stories revised with current feminist concerns.

Disney is a powerful cultural phenomenon whose influence is spread worldwide. Hence, Disney films have always attracted the interest of cultural theorists. By writing this thesis, my aim has not been to utterly dismiss the value of the world-class entertainment that Disney offers. I do not wish to completely side with those scholars who overwhelmingly condemn and criticise Disney, without considering its valuable contributions (e.g. promotion of responsible individualism, sustainable consumption, positive moral values, etc.). Nor do I want to jump on the bandwagon with those who incessantly celebrate the changes in the films, declaring them the ultimate feminist Disney movies. As an attentive and aware consumer, my goal has been to propose a more nuanced observation of *Frozen* and *Maleficent* that encourages enjoying these films with a critical eye. I believe such an approach to be necessary in forming an enquiry about more recent Disney films that lend themselves fruitfully to scholarly inquisitions.

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