

Character and Storytelling

Maleficent (2014) Directed by Robert Stromberg

Maleficent is a postmodern adaptation of Sleeping Beauty which focuses on the villain Maleficent and tells her story before and after Aurora (Sleeping Beauty) is born. Before this film everyone knew Maleficent as the wicked witch who placed Aurora under a curse, that on her sixteenth birthday she would prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and fall into a sleep like death, which could only be broken by true love's kiss. No one ever knew why Maleficent was so wicked, why she placed her curse, why does she have a staff or even why she has a raven as a sidekick of all creatures. The two characters discussed in this review are Maleficent and King Stefan who are equal but opposite, protagonist/antagonist vs antagonist.



Figure 1: The World of Maleficent

Maleficent has a five act structure and in the first act we are introduced to the two neighbouring worlds - the Moors, a utopia filled with magic, light and magical fairy creatures, juxtaposed next to the human Kingdom - a darker, a more dystopian place filled with envy and greed. Their worlds create world views and external rules, the Moors is light and magical with bright colours where as the Kingdom is darker colours so it would make sense for Stefan the villain to be from the Kingdom and Maleficent our hero be from the Moors and the Moors darken when Maleficent does. We meet Maleficent in her inherited world, when she was just a young girl as far as we know about her family she doesn't have any, no parents, the fellow inhabitants of the Moors are. Her role is to preserve the Moors, to use her powerful magic and strong wings to heal and protect, which is when we meet Stefan, a human child from the kingdom, attempting to steal treasure from their lake. Maleficent learns that Stefan is an poor orphan child living in a barn who's goal is to

live in the Castle. Maleficent and Stefan quickly became friends and the conflict between humans and the Moor folk was forgotten, their friendship became more than that and on Maleficent's sixteenth birthday he gave her the gift of true love's kiss but they were not meant to be, as the years went by Stefan saw Maleficent less and less following his ambition for power and wealth, he became a servant to the king and Maleficent became the main authority figure of the Moors. We aren't told everything about Maleficent's or Stefan's childhood, only the parts relevant to the story, we don't need to know what happened to Stefan's parents, knowing he's grown up with very little is enough, knowing that Maleficent was good, is enough.



Figure 2: Young Maleficent's Moors

Act two begins with the King marching his army to the Moors in an attempt to conquer and own their land alongside stealing their treasures, Maleficent deals with the confrontation and summons the other protectors of the Moors to fight alongside her which they do and they defeat the humans, wounding the King in the process making him very ill. The King's goals were to conquer the Moors and own their treasures, now he wants Maleficent dead - for one of his successor's to avenge him before he dies, overhearing a conversation about this Stefan seeks out Maleficent. He finds her and although she's a bit bitter towards him for not returning to her for many years, she forgives him and all is as it was when they were young. Stefan gives Maleficent a drugged drink to knock her out - he tries to kill her but can't go through with it so instead cuts off her wings and gives that to the dying King as proof of her demise and in return, Stefan married the Princess and became King. Stefan has selfishly and despicably achieved his goal. Maleficent awakes the next morning in agony, shock, confusion and disbelief, she uses her magic to turn a twig into a staff to help her walk. The first two steps in becoming the villain we recognise - no wings and a staff. During her travels she finds a raven in danger, tied down in a net with a dog barking and a man attacking it - the raven is unable to escape so

Maleficent turns him into a man. Indebted to Maleficent for saving his life, Diaval (the raven) makes an oath to serve her for whatever she needs - becoming her sidekick - and at that point the thing she needed most were wings, back into a raven he flies to the Kingdom and sees Stefan being crowned King. When Diaval returns and Maleficent learns why Stefan has betrayed her in this way, her heart darkens, her magic goes from a friendly yellow to a wicked green. She is now the Maleficent we know from the Disney animation and with that she turns the Moors into a darker, scarier place.



Figure 3: Aurora's Christening

Rising in action, act three becomes familiar as Aurora is born and the Kingdom celebrate with a Christening, three fairies attend to bless magical gifts on the baby Princess and halfway through the third fairy's gift, Maleficent appears and places her curse to take revenge on Stefan. His precious baby daughter will grow with grace, beauty and happiness but on her sixteenth birthday she will fall into a sleep like death which can only to be broken by true loves kiss - which they both know doesn't exist. She has taken something dear from Stefan and has hurt him in a way like no other, just like he did to her with her wings. When she leaves, Stefan entrusts the three fairies to raise Aurora outside the Kingdom and to bring her back the day after her sixteenth birthday alive and awake. Stefan starts defence plans and has every spinning wheel brought to the castle to be burned, whilst Maleficent builds barriers of her own - a wall of thorns around the Moors that can't be burned down. Over the years she revelled in the misery her curse brought and the paranoia that soon consumed Stefan. Towards Aurora's older years, Maleficent grows to love her

and attempts to reverse her curse but fails to do so, Aurora plans on leaving her three aunts and live in the Moors with Maleficent who she believes is her god mother. Learning about her curse Aurora goes to the castle to meet her father who locks her up in her room to keep her from any spindles and is more concerned about his battle with Maleficent. The power of the curse lures Aurora out and the inevitable happens. Maleficent finds the Prince and takes him to the sleeping beauty in an attempt to save her, but the kiss fails because in this fairy tale true loves kiss after meeting a prince once isn't true love. Maleficent goes in and tells Aurora of her sorrow and regret, giving her a kiss on the head before leaving which wakes Aurora up because in this fairy tale, true love's kiss doesn't have to come from a romantic partner.



Figure 5: Maleficent before her wings were taken



Figure 4: King Stefan

Now at the climax, act four begins with Maleficent being trapped in iron chains - iron burns fairies and Stefan uses lots of it, whilst under the chains she struggles but succeeds in turning Diaval into a dragon. Aurora escapes and finds Maleficent's wings trapped in a display cabinet which she pushes over and smashes allowing her wings to fly back to Maleficent which help her to defeat Stefan by flying out of reach from all the iron. Stefan's strong desire to defeat Maleficent becomes his downfall which leads to his demise in contrast with Maleficent she let's go of her revenge when she tries to reverse her curse, she overcomes her hard feelings towards Stefan. Now the battle is over and Stefan is dead, act five proceeds, Aurora

is next in line to the throne (since her mother died whilst Stefan was planning the battle) and Maleficent crowns her Queen of the Moors, the long ongoing conflict between the Kingdom and the Moors is over and is ruled by someone with pure intentions and qualities. It took someone both hero and villain to resolve the main problem in the story.



Figure 6: Aurora becomes Queen of both worlds.

Maleficent from the start is a heroine, her wants/goals start out as wanting to protect the Moors and when she meets Stefan she wants to unite the two worlds so they could be together, in contrast to Stefan who immediately starts out as the villain stealing but because he is a child and gives back what he stole we don't see him as one just yet, we know his wants are power and wealth. Later on their wants change, Maleficent wants revenge on Stefan which make his goals change to wanting her demise, he is so adamant and stubborn his wants do not and cannot change which is what makes him our villain, that he can't overcome this. Where as Maleficent wants and goals change where she wants to save Aurora and undo her curse - she overcomes her hatred and revenge making her our heroine. Stefan's values never really change, only in the Christening scene he went from superior leader who spared Maleficent's life to a begging and grovelling father, when the scene ended paranoia and fear began to grow. Maleficent's values changed in the scene where she led Aurora into the Moors, she let her into her home and heart at that point, Aurora starts out as happy and excited but when she learns of her curse she becomes disheartened. Maleficent begins certain and in charge but when she lets Aurora in and revokes her curse she becomes sorrowful.

The overall story arc is a hero's journey and the background conflict is that between the two worlds. The main conflict is between Maleficent and Stefan however they

both have conflicts of their own. Maleficent's first conflict is with the first King, then with Stefan and then she has conflict with herself when she learns of her affection for Aurora. Stefan on the other hand has conflict with his situation to begin with, he has conflict with being poor, he has conflict with his conscious when it comes to killing Maleficent, he can't do it. His main problem is Maleficent takes from him his symbols of achievements, her wings - symbolic of his success, his daughter - his reward of success a new life as king and father. They both have flaws, Stefan's minor flaw is he fears Maleficent, this majorly makes him paranoid and greedy, the tragic flaw is his stubbornness, selfishness and desire for her demise. Maleficent's minor flaws are she burns at the touch of iron, her major flaw is her lack of wings, and her tragic is her revenge and hatred that provokes her to cast a curse in the first place. We learn of a character's psyche by what they tell another character, Maleficent communicates with Diaval and Aurora however Stefan ignores his wife and doesn't treat his men with much respect which contributes to him being the villain but he talks to the wings he keeps locked up in a display cabinet, the wings are a prop but that acts as a character also this is exaggerated by the movement given to it later on when it tries to tell Aurora 'get me out of here'.

Their internal traits tell us about their external traits, Stefan externally is upper class - rich and powerful living in a castle where as internally we know he is that poor orphan boy living in a barn. Externally he is deranged where he talks to the wings that for him means more than a crown, the wings symbolise power, if he has the wings Maleficent is powerless where as internally this reflects his envy. At the start Maleficent's internal traits are innocent and happy which make her helpful and protective externally. Later her internal traits become sorrowful and revengeful which externally results in hate and retaliation, her internal regret and guilt make her act as the heroine in order to satisfy her conscious. Her difference in costumes reflect her personality, before she becomes the wicked fairy in black, she wears baggy dresses which suggest freedom of movement - freedom and innocence, when she wears black it's tight and restricting even her hair is masked away this suggests she's almost been completely consumed by darkness and this darkness restricts her, holding her back from that freedom and innocence. Every character has needs, Maleficent's needs are: her wings, revenge, to make amends for her curse and importantly loyalty which she seeks from Diaval. Stefan on the other hand needs: power and control, Maleficent's demise, his daughter's safety and to escape his peasant past.

Bibliography

Illustration List

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- Figure 2. Young Maleficent's Moors. Maleficent (2014) At: <http://maleficent.wikia.com/wiki/Moors> (Accessed on: 21st October 2017)
- Figure 3. Aurora's Christening. At: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2623624/Angelina-Jolie-makes-chilling-entrance-christening-wasnt-invited-Maleficent-clip.html> (Accessed on: 21st October 2017)
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- Figure 5. Maleficent before her wings are taken. At: <https://lamarzulli.wordpress.com/tag/disney/> (Accessed on: 21st October 2017)
- Figure 6. Aurora becomes Queen of both worlds. At: http://maleficent.wikia.com/wiki/File:Maleficent_Crowns.jpg (Accessed on: 21st October 2017)