

MALEFICENT’S SUPEREGO IN ROBERT STROMBERG’S “MALEFICENT” MOVIE (2014)

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Abstract

This research is conducted to describe Maleficent’s superego and its function in Robert Stromberg’s Maleficent movie 2014 version by applying Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis. The qualitative method is used to describe the analysis. The result of this research reveals the evolution of Maleficent’s superego before and after Aurora’s birth. The first one is the superego believing that humans are wicked, represented by the human king and Stefan. In the second one, after meeting Aurora, her superego changes into believing that humans can be good. In the end, she is the true love of Aurora and can live side by side with her, eventually leading a harmonious life with the human kingdom. Hence, the superego’s function in the movie is pivotal to the plot twist, redefining Maleficent as both a villain and a heroine.

Keywords: Ego, Id, Freud, Maleficent, Psychoanalysis, Superego

INTRODUCTION

As part of modern society, many people have been entertained by films that sometimes adapt literary works. One of the most well-known adaptations comes from the production of Disney which chose fairytales as their favorites, such as Cinderella (1922), Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Sleeping Beauty (1959), etc. Disney adapts these fairytales into animations and this effort has met with big success. It can happen mostly because fairy tales can be defined as powerful stories and as equipment and productive technologies of control that can shape the discourses of childhood (Tesar, Kupferman, Rodriguez, & Arndt, 2016) so parents willingly let their children (and also themselves) to get hooked in these stories. In the Disney versions, though, the princesses in the stories possess child-like innocence, such as sweet, and kind under oppressive conditions, while their greatest happiness seems to be in their service to others (Puechner, 2016). Hence, Disney, at this point, can be a master narrative capable of shaping identity (Inman & Sellers, 2016). Those who watch Disney princesses, especially children, may think that the ideal woman they are supposed to be is like them. With this logic, how Disney narrates the villains is also important. For instance, how Disney depicts the villain which is sometimes also a woman is significant in shaping one’s identity and judgement. Nevertheless, in the modern era, villains may have come to face the light of fairness. One of them, who recently just got her justice is, Maleficent.

Maleficent is the fairy who cursed Aurora in the Disney animation movie of 1959 entitled Sleeping Beauty. In this version, she is not invited to the christening of Aurora despite three fairies getting invited (Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather). It makes her angry

and curses the newborn princess to get her finger pricked on the spindle of a spinning wheel which will make her die. Luckily, the third fairy, Merryweather, has not yet cast her charm. She then weakens the curse of Maleficent by making Aurora just sleep for a hundred years. This story comes from the fairytale with the same title, just slightly different, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* by Charles Perrault. Perrault (1628-1703) was among others who wrote the story of *Sleeping Beauty* in *Mother Goose* to amuse his children (Britannica, 2024). In his version, the fairies have no name and instead of three, seven fairies get invited to the christening. The supposed-to-be Maleficent is narrated as 'an aged fairy who never quits her tower and people think she has been dead or bewitched'. The king only prepares seven golden caskets and it makes her angry resulting in her cursing the princess. In another version, which comes from the Grimm Brothers (1812), the title is completely different which is *Briar-Rose*. In Perrault's version, the princess has no name, but in the Grimm Brothers' version, the princess is named after *Briar-Rose*. Different compared to Perrault's version, twelve fairies (wise women) get invited to the christening because the king has only twelve golden plates which makes the supposed-to-be Maleficent not get invited. The cursing part is similar but the rest of the stories are different between Perrault's version and Grimm Brothers' version.

With these variations, it is not weird at all, that Disney makes new versions of its adaptations, from giving a name to a no-name-old fairy to giving all the spotlight to her by changing completely the focus of the story on her, resulting in the release of a *Sleeping Beauty* universe movie called *Maleficent* (2014). The 2014 movie version has Aurora as the narrator of the story. She has the function of retelling the history of her own life but in a new light. Maleficent is told as a fairy who lives in Moorland and meets Stefan, Aurora's father who is not born into the royal family, instead, he is just a low-class child obsessing to live inside the kingdom castle. This unexpected encounter has made them to be best friend and eventually to be a couple of lovers. Maleficent at that time wants to believe that humans are not bad by befriending Stefan. However, as they get older and mature, their relationship grows apart, and they do not meet for quite a long time until the king attacks the land where Maleficent lives which fails miserably. Stefan, who still wants to be the king listens to the king's will that whoever can kill Maleficent will be the next king, then traps Maleficent later by asking her to meet him and giving her a poisonous drink. When Maleficent is dead-sleeping, he wants to kill her, but he has no courage, and instead, he just takes her wings. He brings the wings to the king and declares that Maleficent is dead. With this, he is gifted the throne of the king, making him to be King Stefan.

The christening part of the *Maleficent* movie in general similar to other versions, in that the curse upon Aurora can be lifted by true love (or, a kiss). However, the distinction between this version to other versions is in the later part of Aurora's life. In the 1959 *Sleeping Beauty* movie, Aurora lives far from the kingdom but still Maleficent lures her in the evening before she turns sixteen years old to the tower where she pricks her finger on the spindle causing her to have been sleeping for a hundred years. However, Phillip, the prince with whom Aurora falls in love is in the castle and fights Maleficent, kills her, and eventually kisses Aurora to awaken her. In Perrault's version, the prince comes to save the princess (in this version there is no kissing requirement to wake the princess) but the prince has a complicated life including having a race of ogres as his mother who wants to eat the princess and their children. But, still, *Sleeping Beauty* has a happy ending with the prince. On the other hand, the Grimm Brothers' version is quite simple, just like how

the casual story of Sleeping Beauty people know. Briar-Rose has been made to sleep for a hundred years by the curse with all the kingdom's people, including the king and the queen. Many princes try to get inside the castle but they all fail until one who comes right on one hundred years the princess sleeping in, making the castle open for him. He kisses Briar-Rose, the whole kingdom wakes up, they get married, and live happily ever after, which is classic. Meanwhile, in Maleficent movie, after Maleficent curses Aurora, the king makes the newborn live in the woods with the three fairies who get invited to the christening. The story turns to an unexpected twist with the incompetent of the three fairies to raise a baby, which in the end makes Maleficent and her right hand, a raven, Diaval, guard young Aurora until her sixteenth birthday. Surprisingly, Aurora likes Maleficent, and she thinks she is her Godmother. She wants to live with her in Moorland, but then the curse happens, and eventually she goes to her father's kingdom, and her finger gets pricked by the spindle, making Maleficent devastated. To save Aurora, Maleficent brings the prince she suspects will be her savior. However, when the prince kisses Aurora, nothing happens. Later, Maleficent cries and kisses Aurora's forehead which makes the princess wake up. It makes Maleficent the true love of Aurora. At the final of the story, Aurora becomes the queen of both kingdoms and lives happily side-by-side with Maleficent.

The story of the Maleficent movie is interesting because of the differences in the story and also the main focus of the characters. From this movie, the spectators can look at Maleficent's point of view. It is different compared to the older versions which readers or spectators cannot take a glimpse of her life. By looking at her life, the audience can understand better why she becomes the character of a well-known villain as she has her reason to curse the main character, the princess. From the movie, it can be seen that her behavior has changed from time to time because of her surroundings, as her beliefs and values toward others dynamically change too. By the end, she is completely guarded by the morality principle that makes her better than just a villain. She is a villain but also something more than just wicked.

According to Cornelia and Limanta (2022) in their research entitled "Maleficent's Personality Changes in Maleficent", Maleficent's personality changes are influenced by the interaction of her personality elements (id, ego, and superego). Using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory, they found that Maleficent can be evil because her id, ego, and superego are not well-balanced. While, Maleficent can be good because her id, ego, and superego are well-balanced. They also found that Maleficent experiences anxiety during the process of her personality changes, and she applies a defense mechanism to deal with her anxiety. In addition, Andini, Anggraeni, and Wijayanti (2023) in their research "Anxiety and Self-Defense Mechanism of the Characters in Maleficent Movie" using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory focus the result on anxiety and self-defense mechanism existing in the characters of Maleficent and Stefan. On the other hand, in their research "Maleficent's Personality Changes in Robert Stromberg's Maleficent", Wulandari, Santoso, and Ocktarani (2017) describe the factors that influence the personality changes of Maleficent by combining the structural approach and psychological approach of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic. They found that Maleficent is the main character because she has problems in the story; she is a good fairy and changes into a bad fairy so it makes her a protagonist as well as antagonist character; and she is a round as well as a dynamic character because her character changes in the story.

Many previous researches use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freud offers a theory which delves into the structure of the mind and personality through the id, ego, and superego framework (Wang, 2020). In his research "An Analysis of Salieri in Amadeus from Freudian Personality Theory: Id, Ego, Superego", Wang found that Salieri's inability to reconcile the conflicts between his id, ego, and superego ultimately leads to his downfall and ongoing suffering. Fitriani (2019) in her research titled "Analysis of Psychological Aspects of the Main Character in Movie Joker Based on Sigmund Freud Theory" shows that the id, ego, and superego interact together to create a behavior and have a powerful influence on the individual personality. Meanwhile, based on the research by Septiadi, Andayani, and Wardani (2019) entitled "Analysis of Character's Personality in Novel Ulid by Mahfud Ikhwan Using Sigmund Freud Psychoanalysis" it is found that the character Ulid exhibits a dominant superego aspect.

In line with the very last previous study mentioned above, this research is focused on the aspect of Maleficent's superego. It is because, in the older versions of the fairytale, Maleficent's superego is not shown clearly. It is one of the psychological aspects inside every human, according to Freud, which includes the id and the ego. The psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud can be used as a device to know and describe the characters in literary works (Niaz, Stanikzai, & Sahibzada, 2019). The id is the unconscious part of the human psyche; without rationality and to fulfill the pleasure principle. While, the ego is the rational governing force of the psyche, conscious, and protects the individual from the id; it is the intermediary between the world within the id and the ego. On the other hand, the superego is the regulatory agent to protect society from the id which is governed by the morality principle. From the previous studies, Maleficent has been seen as a dynamic character whose personality changes by the end of the story which can be seen through her id, superego, and ego. However, the older versions of the story always tell the id and ego of Maleficent as uniform and never change, but in the 2014 movie version, the superego has played an important part as the reason why the plot is different compared to the other versions. Hence, this research offers different aspects to study which is the superego of Maleficent, and to see its function in the whole story plot. While prior studies examine Maleficent's personality changes, this research uniquely focuses on her superego and its role in shaping the plot.

METHOD

This research was conducted using the qualitative method. According to Denzin and Lincoln (Mawuntu, Valiantien, & Setyowati, 2023), qualitative research uses written text as the material by reading the data and other sources then trying to pin the key themes. Meanwhile, Berg and Lune (2017) define qualitative research as research that refers to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, and descriptions of the things studied.

The main source of data in this study is the movie Maleficent (2014). This version was chosen to show the differences in the character of Maleficent as the villain compared to the other versions. The data was collected through observation by watching the movie and closely reading the script. After the data is collected, they are analyzed using the theory of Sigmund Freud, especially the superego. The next step is to see the function of this superego as it makes the story different by describing it.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Maleficent's Superego: Before and After Aurora

The story of the 2014 *Maleficent* movie begins with Stefan who comes to Moorland and gets caught by the guards but young Maleficent sets him free. It is narrated that Moors and the kingdom of humans cannot live side by side in peace, as it is elaborated below,

Narrator: Let us tell an old story anew, and we will see how well you know it. Once upon a time, there were two kingdoms that were the worst of neighbors. So vast was the discord between them that it was said only a great hero or a terrible villain might bring them together. In one kingdom lived folk like you and me, with a vain and greedy king to rule over them. They were forever discontent, and envious of the wealth and beauty of their neighbors. For in the other kingdom, the Moors, lived every manner of strange and wonderful creature and they needed neither king nor queen, but trusted in one another. (Maleficent, 2014)

From this narration, it can be seen that the kingdom which is inhabited by humans always feels discontent and envies the Moorland. It means the two kingdoms will never be together and live in peace. Hence, it is not strange at all that the Moors are always on guard with the appearance of humans near them as they believe that humans will be the cause of war, as seen in the dialogue below,

Fairy: Humans, here.
I hope there's not another war.
(Maleficent, 2014)

The Moors are afraid of humans and do not want to get close to them. At this time Maleficent is still so pure and has the belief that humans are not as bad as how the Moors believe. It is since every time humans come to Moorland there is always war. It is shown in the scene where she tries to get close to Stefan although the guards warn her. In her dialogue, she says that she never once meets a human and she is not afraid. After that, she asks Stefan to come out of the cave and they become friends fast as pure as how two kids try to know each other. Then, the two become best friends regardless they have different race.

Narrator: Maleficent thought of how Stefan cast away his ring, he who had so little in the world, so that their hands might touch again, and her heart was moved. Thus did the young thief who had hoped to steal a jewel ... Steal something far more precious. Stefan and Maleficent became the most unlikely of friends. And for a time it seemed as if, in them at least, the old hatred between men and fairies had been forgotten. As it will, friendship slowly turned into something else. And on her 16th birthday, Stefan gave Maleficent a gift. He told her it was true love's kiss. (Maleficent, 2014)

From the quote above, after they become friends, they fall in love and become more than just friends. When Maleficent turns sixteen years old Stefan gives her a gift which is called true love's kiss. Through their relationship, it can be seen that men and fairies can befriend. Therefore, Maleficent's superego is constructed by the first man she has

met, Stefan. At this time her superego is built through the moral value that humans are not bad and she believes she can get friendly with them. However, not long after, Maleficent and Stefan's relationship grows apart.

Narrator: He told her it was true love's kiss. But it was not to be. As the years passed, Stefan's ambition pulled him away from Maleficent, and towards the temptations of the human kingdom. While Maleficent, the strongest of the fairies rose to become the protector of the Moors. Maleficent often wandered alone and sometimes wondered where Stefan might be, for she had never understood the greed and envy of men. But she was to learn. For the human king had heard of a growing power in the Moors, and he sought to strike it down. (Maleficent, 2014)

After not meeting for a long time, Maleficent still thinks dearly of Stefan and never thinks badly of him. Maleficent never thinks of humans' capability of being greedy. Until she encounters the human king who comes to the gate of the Moors with his army. The king is greedy for having what he hears as a growing power in the Moors which makes him want to strike it down. Maleficent in this scene has tried to be the leader of the Moors and leads the war to win over humans. She wins but also learns that humans are cruel and she can feel the pain of their brutality as the king's sword stabs her body. Unfortunately, the weakness of Maleficent is iron that can wound her and might as well kill her. However, Maleficent is still nice to Stefan when he comes to meet her in the Moorland.

Narrator: They spoke of many things, and the years faded away. And she forgave Stefan, his folly and his ambition, and all was as it had been long ago. (Maleficent, 2014)

Nevertheless, Stefan who looks innocent offers a drink to Maleficent. Without suspecting anything, Maleficent drinks the water given by Stefan. Not long after she falls asleep. At this moment, Stefan tries to kill her but he has no courage. Hence, as he knows iron is the weakness of Maleficent, Stefan just cuts her wings using his bayonet. Later when Maleficent wakes up she finds her wings have gone and she feels so betrayed causing her to lead the Moors and protect them by spelling magic in the gate of the Moorland. With this event, Maleficent's superego has changed and she starts believing that humans are indeed all bad. It is even strengthened by the scene of a man trapping a raven (which later becomes Diaval, her right hand) and hitting it with wood. With Diaval, Maleficent starts to spy on Stefan and his growing kingdom to get revenge. It is in line with the argument of Cornellia and Limanta (2022) that Maleficent has experienced anxiety during the personality change process and she then applies a defense mechanism to deal with it.

Then, the queen has given birth to a beautiful newborn, Aurora. The three fairies in the Moors are coming to the christening without Maleficent. In this version, the king doesn't invite them but the queen is a kind one and lets them bless her baby daughter. However, unexpectedly Maleficent comes and she curses the princess that she will prick her finger in the spindle when she turns sixteen years old and nothing in the world can save her except true love. It shows the result of her id which is actually a nice and kind fairy but then her superego has taught her that humans are no good, including Stefan, hence she builds an ego to punish and take revenge on him by condemning newborn

Aurora. It is in accordant with the findings of Wulandari, Santoso, and Ocktarani (2017) that Maleficent can become the main character because she has complications in the story, as she is naturally a good fairy but changes into a bad one, making her a protagonist as well as an antagonist character.

After Aurora gets condemned by Maleficent, King Stefan asks the three fairies to bring the newborn to the other side of the kingdom and wants them to raise Aurora there until she reaches sixteen years old. Once Aurora turns sixteen years old, she can be brought back to the kingdom. With this, the three fairies use magic disguising to be human, pretending to be Aurora's aunts, and raising her while having no basic skill of babysitting somewhere in the middle of the woods.

Narrator: The fairies were perhaps unequal to their task. (Maleficent, 2014)

With the incapability of the fairies to raise the baby Aurora, surprisingly, Maleficent has always kept watching Aurora and the three fairies. Thus, it starts to be her and Diaval's habit to watch over the little Aurora. Finally, Aurora has grown up and met Maleficent and even recognizes the raven Diaval. She even thinks that Maleficent is her Godmother because she always stays by her side all this time protecting her from anything dangerous. After spending time together with Aurora, Maleficent starts to get fond of her and starts to like human again. Once again, her superego has changed into a belief that humans can be a good friend too. Maleficent's id after cursing Aurora is to seek revenge on the King but then her superego which is influenced by gentle Aurora has made a new ego for her that she wants to cancel the curse. It is in agreement with Fitriani (2019) that id, ego, and superego intermingle together to cause a behavior and have an influential effect on the individual personality. Thus, in the end, Maleficent tries to save Aurora who gets pricked by the spindle by bringing a prince but fails to wake her up, and later Aurora wakes up by Maleficent's kiss. It turns out that Maleficent is Aurora's true love.

The Function of Maleficent's Superego: Plot Twist

From what has been elaborated before, it can be seen that the important part that makes the story of the 2014 Maleficent movie different compared to the previous and older versions of the fairytale *Sleeping Beauty* is the narrative of Maleficent's superego. It is revealed in the movie that the superego of Maleficent has made the plot of the whole story. The first superego is when she meets Stefan when they are still young and she thinks human is good thus she has no hatred towards them. However, this superego gradually changes when the human king attacks the Moors and when Stefan betrays her. From this experience, Maleficent starts to hate humans and her superego is believing that humans are wicked. Hence, she starts wanting to take revenge on King Stefan. After finally taking revenge on King Stefan by casting a spell on Aurora, she has another experience that changes her superego again. Here is the plot twist of the story where she becomes friendly with Aurora and even loves her just like the mother and daughter relationship. It shows that once again Maleficent's superego has changed into believing in humans again. With this, the story has changed to the complete opposite of the original one. It makes her image of being the bad fairy slightly shift to be a good one; the one whom the princess loves and becomes her life savior.

This version of Maleficent shows the importance of the superego in shaping the perspective of an individual. It is in unison with Septiadi, Andayani, and Wardani (2019)

that a certain character may have a dominant superego aspect. When she is surrounded by kind and friendly humans, Maleficent's view of them becomes so fond. However, when she encounters the bad deeds of humans, she eventually hates them. It is because the function of the superego is to negotiate with the id, or the desire someone has. The result of the negotiation is the ego. It is reflected in the action made by Maleficent. Before meeting Aurora, she just knows the betrayal she gets from humans, but after meeting Aurora she goes back to her old self, her very first id, who wants to believe that humans are good. Her superego is divided before and after Aurora. Before knowing Aurora, she is seen as a villain, but after knowing her, Maleficent is something more than just a villain. She is not completely bad, just like the other versions, but she is also a good fairy by heart before human corrupts her.

The elaboration of Maleficent's superego shows that people can change depending on their environment. When someone who is nice and kind meets a cruel environment, she can become cruel. On the other hand, when someone has decided to do something bad but her surroundings are kind and friendly, she might stop doing the bad deed she intends to do. As long as she was born and raised to be not cruel, as she is the fairy which is known to be nice, Maleficent will accept a healthy superego, which is on good morality and can decide which is good and bad. Hence, in the end, it can be seen that Maleficent is a good individual, who loves peace and humble life.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from this research that Maleficent has a different superego before and after encountering Aurora. Before meeting Aurora, she only meets wicked humans that shape her superego which is believing that humans are not worth being friends with. This superego has influenced her ego to be the villain as she dumps her id which is originally wanting to believe in humans as moral creatures. However, after Aurora, she has met the pure soul of humans and it changes her superego into believing humans again. Hence, Maleficent becomes the true love of Aurora, the savior of her life as well as the one who casts a curse on her. From this, it is found that the superego of Maleficent is important in influencing the plot of the story. Consequently, it makes the story interesting compared to the other versions as it gives justice and brings voice to the legendary villain, Maleficent, and shifts her image to be a heroine. Thus, this analysis has highlighted the significance of the narrative perspective in reshaping the audience's understanding of traditional villains.

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