IN THE WAKE OF SLEEPING BEAUTY. EVER-CHANGING FACES OF FEMININITY IN TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING. FROM CHARLES PERRAULT TO WALT DISNEY

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Abstract: *Within the broader discussion about remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1996), transmedial storytelling (Jenkins, 2006; Ryan, 2013) and transfictionality (Ryan, 2013), the present paper advances the proposal of a comparative intersectional qualitative analysis of femininity in Charles Perrault's version of the story La Belle au bois dormant (1697), Walt Disney's Sleeping Beauty (1959) and Walt Disney and Roth Films' Maleficient (2014) based upon associations between body representations, age groups and types of character. What would Evil look like if it were a woman? Would she be slender or voluptuous? What about the Good? Would she be wrinkled or sappy? This is a series of topics the current inquiry will put to the issue adjusting the intersectionality theory. However, it is not the experience of oppression that is central to the present analysis, but rather the pattern of intersection between gender, age and good or evil nature and how body representations coagulate at such intersections.*

Key words: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Maleficient*, *Disney*, *femininity*, *transmedia storytelling*

Instead of an argument

Starting from the assumption advanced by Bruno Latour (1992) and Bolter and Grusin (1996) that once cultural content is subdued to operations of readjustment to another medium, modifications and restructuring take place at the level of representation, the present paper is constructed upon two major axes of interest, that is how bodily representations of femininity convert in relation to (1) age and affiliation to good or bad forces and (2) three types of media in which the story develops: literary, animated and cinematographic. Hence, Charles Perrault's version of the story *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697), Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and Walt Disney and Roth Films' *Maleficient* (2014) will be employed in a comparative intersectional analysis of three feminine central figures of the story: the princess, the good fairy and the bad fairy. Furthermore, the study develops upon the assumption that European fairytales represent *reusable prefabs* (Spiridon, 2013) for contemporary American popular culture within the broader context of *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin, 1996), *transmedial storytelling* (Jenkins, 2006; Ryan, 2013) and *transfictionality* (Ryan, 2013).

The fact that folk tales, later on fairy tales, are at the very foundation of European cultural heritage is almost axiomatic. Yet, it is not only literature that reflects their influence, but also European art, especially the western division. In this line of thought, we can instance Sir Edward Burne-Jones' painting *Legend of Briar Rose* (1885 - 1890), John Maler Collier's (1921) or Hans Zatzka's nineteenth century *Sleeping Beauty* purchased in 2004 at an auction in New York with no less than 41,825 $. Adding up to such paintings, there are also famous sculptures inspired by the same fairy tale, for example, Ludwig Sussman Hellborn's *Dornröschen* (1878) or the contemporary work of Kraig Varner, *Sleeping Beauty*. Moreover, the Russian composer Tchaikovsky created music for the ballet performance *Spyashchaya krasavitsa* which was first played at the Mariinsky Theatre in Sankt Petersburg. In 1959, the Walt Disney company releases the fantasy animation musical inspired by the fairy tale *La Belle au bois dormant* adapted by Charles Perrault. This was to be the last of the series Walt Disney Animated Classics due to the lack of enthusiasm from both the audience and the critics. Since 2010 till present times, there have been released no less than four cinematographic productions of different genres, production which all deploy symbolic resources collectively acknowledged as affiliated to *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale: Australian romantic drama *Sleeping Beauty* (2011), American fantasy adventure drama *Sleeping Beauty I* (2014), American fantasy adventure horror *Sleeping Beauty II* (2014) and American action fantasy *Maleficient* (2014). Due to the subject matter, I have chosen to exemplify by referring to *Sleeping Beauty*, but I could easily have attested to the same realities related to other stories such as *Red Riding Hood* or *Snow White.* For the present article, I have decided to analyze *Maleficient* based upon three criteria: it is the most popular among the recent cinematographic productions adapted after *Sleeping Beauty*, it is most relevant for illustrating adaptation and poaching strategies as developed by contemporary theories of *remediation*, *transmediality* and *transfictionality* (Jenkins, 1992, 2006; Bolter și Grusin, 1996; Ryan, 2013) and it is produced under aegis of Walt Disney brand as well as the animated film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Similarly, Perrault's version of the fairy tale was chosen in favour of the Grimm Brothers' because both the 1959 animated film Sleeping Beauty and the 2014 Maleficient clearly state that the productions are inspired by Charles Perrault's *La Belle au bois dormant.*

The array of recent cultural products based upon classic literary fairy tales and of retailing media does not only stand as an argument for the present inquiry, but also offer a spawning ground for cross-disciplinary enterprise with multivariate behoofs for the sociology of the body, gender studies, cultural studies, communication studies and global studies. Hence, the relevance of the present research derrives from the global effect of both Charles Perrault's classic fairy tale and Walt Disney's adaptations upon children and adults all around the world.

Remediation. An endless story

The following chapter will focus upon delineating the broader theoretical framework necessary for a proper understanding of the process of adaptation of classic literary tales into animated films and cinematographic productions. Discussing dominant traits of *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin, 1996), *transmedial storytelling* (Jenkins, [1958] 2006; Ryan, 2013) and *transfictionality* (Ryan, 2013) and *spreadable media* (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013) will shed light upon content modifications affiliated to the transition from a medium to another in order to subsequently focus on the transformations of bodily representations of femininity.

David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1996) use the term *remediation* for referring to poaching media content, which is easily identified by the audience and is held familiar in the collective memory, and modify it according to the conditions of another host-medium while maintaining both a sense of transparency (*immediacy*) and self-referential function (*hipermediacy*). For example, most action, adventure and fantasy Hollywood movies currently use digital techniques and special effects under the aura of the inherent (Bolter and Grusin, 1996: 342). It is the same in the case of *Maleficient* every time a display of the supernatural is presented, for example, when the raven shape - shifts or at the celebration, when Maleficient puts the spell on the newborn princess. The process of remediation is strongly linked to the diversification of media technologies, especially *new media*, digital devices which make possible ongoing communication at distance in real time and user-generated unregulated content. According to Bruno Latour (1992), technological developments lead to transformations in terms of practices, therefore determining shifts in the social order. Literature, cinematography, painting, photography and other such media are 'technologies of representation', ultimately meant to embody fundamental cultural frames in the mundane realm by means of *immediacy* (Latour, 1992; Bolter and Grusin, 1996). Hence, the present paper is concerned with two types of embodiment. One refers to the technologies of representation, the other concentrates upon representations of femininity.

The notion of *remediation* suggests an unidirectional relation between the old and the new media, in which the latter poaches and adapts the initial content, referring to the first only for making a display of its supremacy in terms of representation. However, cultural products and channels usually interact at many levels and the relations between them are not always constructed upon the logic of competition. Rather than propagating the attention of the public, they are often designed as complementary in order to create a multivariate, but congruent universe, which comprises several consumption patterns. The higher purpose is *convergence* (Jenkins, 2006) in designing a virtual alternative reality in which the consumer actively takes part in, therefore, maximizing both the popularity of the product and the profit.

Thus, a concept that condenses the relations of exchange, cooperation and complementarity between different products and media more precisely is the one of *transmediality* defined by Monica Spiridon (2013, p. 134) as "a co-operative relation between products of the same channel or of different channels, which mutually endorse each other and transfer public segments between each other"[1]. Transmediality implies mutually sustaining relationships between different products or channels, for example, between advertising and popular culture products. In this line of thought, Henry Jenkins refers to *transmedia storytelling*, defined as"the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). In other words, Jenkins (2006, p. 95) understands *transmedia storytelling* as "a narrative so large, it cannot be covered in a single medium". Mary-Laure Ryan stresses upon the story more than upon the discourse when delineating the concept of *transmedial storytelling* as "the creation of a storyworld through multiple documents belonging to various media" (Ryan, 2013, p. 361). According to Ryan, the story world is central to maintaining cohesion between different products. Another concept that develops in relation with *transmedial storytelling* and captures the very nature of the cinematographic production *Maleficient* is *transfictionality*. This is often the case of written fictional narratives and it refers to the "migration of fictional entities across different texts, but these texts may belong to the same medium" (Ryan, 2013, p. 365 - 366). What is more, the relation between two story worlds falls under one or more of the three categories: *expansion*, *modification* and *transposition* (Doležel, 1998: 206-207).

Despite the time gap between Charles Perrault's version of the story *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697), Walt Disney's animated film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and Walt Disney and Roth Films' *Maleficient* (2014) and the fact that they weren't conceived to work together for triggering complementary modes of consumption like a book, a movie and a game based upon the same story world for example, it can be argued that this is a case of *remediation* and *transmedial storytelling*. Both Walt Disney's animated film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and Walt Disney and Roth Films' *Maleficient* (2014) openly rely on Perrault's account of *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697) for falling back on the fairy tales' popularity and emotional transference in order to achieve success and enhancing audiences' loyalty. Re-appropriating '*La Belle au bois dormant'* fairy tale set by Charles Perrault in order to match the requirements of another medium, the one of animated musical fantasy film implies modifications of both configuration and content. While fundamental operations of *transfictionality* discussed by Marie-Laure

[1] In the Romanian original version: "o relație de cooperare fie între produsele aceluiași canal, fie ale unor canale diferite, care se susțin reciproc și, mai ales, își transmit unul altuia segmente de public" (Spiridon, 2013: 134).

Ryan (2013: 361-363) focus rather on expanding the initial narrative or constructing different versions, therefore, on operations of addition and redesign, Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* is an example of compression.

Although it is not fan fiction, nor a T.V. series, *Maleficient* comes under one of the poaching strategies described by Henry Jenkins in his book *Textual Poachers, Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, that is *refocalization*. As Jenkins defines it, *refocalization* is meant to "(...) shift attention away from the programs' central figures and onto secondary characters, often women and minorities, who receive limited screen time" (Jenkins, 1992: 169). As Jenkins suggests, when *refocalization* is based upon a feminine character, it creates premises for exploring feminine experiences and identity and autonomy and authority derived from power relations socially constructed among genders. Moreover, it emboldens a thorough insight upon the psychology and the becoming of characters laterally presented in the initial product, in the present case Perrault's account of *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697), allowing character trajectories and developments which could have not been accomplished within the first scenario. For instance, *Maleficient* operates modifications upon the immutable nature of evil by accounting for the circumstances which engendered Maleficient's actions towards the princess. Thereby, *Maleficient* can be understood as an illustration of a *moral realignment* because it is one of the cultural productions which "(...) invert or question the moral universe of the primary text taking the villains and transforming them into the protagonists of their own narratives" (Jenkins, 1992: 171). Likewise, it grows out of the logic of comitted polarity of Perrault's account of Sleeping Beauty because it presents a heroine who exceeds the fundamental cultural distinction, the boundary between good and evil. *Maleficient* is of both, therefore, she is of none, surpassing the very distinction. Walt Disney and Roth Films' recent production is one of the few which advance the idea that it is possible for the role of villains to be understood as part of a higher understanding of the world, which is not legible within the initial account. Concurrently, it can be argued that the production also reflects operations proper to what Henry Jenkins (1992: 175-176) defines as *character dislocation*, a process in which "characters are removed from their original situations and given alternative names and identities".

Sleeping beauties, waking sorceresses. The Faces of Femininity: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly[1].

The present paper advances the proposal of a comparative intersectional qualitative analysis of embodied femininities in Charles Perrault's version of the story *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697), Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and Walt Disney and Roth Films'

[1] The title of the present section is inspired by the 1966 Italian movie *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*.

Maleficient (2014) based upon the associations between physical appearance in terms of physical characteristics like hair or eye colour, body weight or height, and also of clothing, footwear, cosmetics and decorative objects, age group and type of character, namely affiliation to the good or the evil.

The current study emerges in the context of public debate around the influence of femininity models advanced by Disney's fictional products upon young girls, the so-called *little princess syndrome*, reflected in articles like *What's Wrong with Cinderella?* (Orenstein, 2006) in *The New York Times Magazine* or *Are Disney Princesses Evil?* (Mechanic, 2011) in *Mother Jones* and Disney's recent paradigm shift in constructing the so-called *independent princess*: *No princes required: Independent Disney princesses not seeking romance* (Associated Press, 2014) in *Fox News or Daughters inspire independent Disney princess* (Associated Press, 2014) in *The Buffalo News.* Walt Disney's productions have been of interest not only for their aesthetic style and animation features (Pallant, 2010) or for their marketing practices or development strategies, but also related to issues of gender, race or ethnicity in Disney's discourse about the world and life (Faherty, 2001; Craven, 2002; Hurley, 2005; Lee, 2006), sexuality and 'queer sensibility' (Griffin, 2000) or Disney's influence upon children's culture (Giroux, 1994). However, the matter of good and evil still remains insufficiently covered, therefore, the exploratory and preliminary nature of the present study, interested in mapping out a series of associations to be further tested and developed by quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Thus, it is not the requirement of completeness that the present study arrogates to itself, but the perks of setting milestones for future cross-disciplinary research.

What would Evil look like if it were a woman? Would she be slender or voluptuous? What about the Good? Would she be wrinkled or sappy? This is a series of topics the current inquiry will put to the issue adjusting the *intersectionality theory* articulated by Patricia Hill Collins (1990) with respect to the experiences of black working-class women, according to which "while all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality" (Madoo Lengermann, Niebrugge, [2003] 2010: 218). However, it is not the experience of oppression that is central to the present analysis, but rather the pattern of intersection between gender, age and good or evil nature and how body representations coagulate at such intersections.

Research expectations originate from classifications of femininity defined as the body of social accounts which regulate attitudes, behaviors, practices and appearance associated with a feminine gender identity. There are three fundamental coordinates inexorably affined to the concept of femininity: *ethics of care*, abnegation and relating to aesthetical standards established by men's predilections (Rovența Frumușani, 2002). The term *ethics of care*, coined by Carol Gilligan, refers to making moral choices based on empathy, mutual responsibility and prosocial behavior as opposed

to a masculine morality developed around the idea of rights and justice (Miroiu, 2002). Traditional femininity derives from the ethics of care while the non-traditional one appears as a result of emancipation and reluctance to domination. Prosocial behavior, self-sacrifice, passiveness and submission are central to traditional femininity. When associated with youth, traditional femininity implies sexual readiness (Rovența Frumușani, 2002) whereas in the case of mature women a condescending attitude is to be expected. In other words, young women are widely associated with eroticism and mature women tend to be affiliated to central attributes of motherhood.

The comparative analysis of Charles Perrault's version of the story *La Belle au bois dormant* (1697), Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and Walt Disney and Roth Films' *Maleficient* (2014) revealed that Good seems to be represented as a collective instance whereas Evil is conceived as singular. In Perrault's account of *Sleeping Beauty in the Woods*, seven good fairies are mentioned while in both of Disney's versions there are only three fairies. Except for indicating that there is an age distinction between them, the portrait of the good fairies remains vague in Perrault's case in terms of appearance as readers are not told about their clothes or about other physical traits. In Disney's animated film, the three good fairies, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather, are represented as middle-aged corpulent ladies of average height with their hair in a bun. One of them has black hair and the other two, brown. The cinematographic production illustrates much more variety when it comes to the three good fairies as one can easily discern there are differences of age between them and also differences of hair colour, type and style. The youngest is a curly blonde while the other two wear their tawny hair in braids. All three of them are slender and the youngest of them is wearing a dress with a cleavage. If in the case of the animated film, the good fairies resemble a couple of motherly housewives, *Maleficient* creates a much more individualistic representation of the collective character.

Perrault only describes the princess when she is already under the spell of the evil fairy, stressing that her beauty remains untouched by the passing of years. The only descriptions refer to her cheeks which resemble marble, her lips red like a choral and her gentle breathing. The ethereal aura never leaves Princess Aurora. Not in the Disney animation, nor in *Maleficient*. Young femininity glides along in translucence. Even if she is an animated character or one in flesh and bones, Disney's Aurora is invariably a light blonde. For that matter, Walt Disney's animated film *Sleeping Beauty* was released in a cultural context in which blonde was much more than a hair color as the 1950s were the year of a rising media celebrity: no other than Marilyn Monroe, the modest, yet beautiful blonde who conquered America's hearts (Spiridon, 2013, p. 116). The cultural icon of the blonde is enforced by the release of the Barbie Doll just one year before the Disney animated film, in 1958. Therefore, it could be argued that in the given cultural circumstances the princess could have easily triggered the stereotype of the

dumb blonde (Spiridon, 2013: 116) who can easily develop into another common representation of Freudian inspiration, the *woman-child*.

The image of the villain in Perrault's version of La *Belle au bois dormant* is constructed around a single feature which seems to be central to the representation: age. As a matter of fact, the negative character is not even referred as the "bad fairy", but as the "old fairy". Due to the development of the story, equivalence is established between malevolence and age. Disney's animated film alters this correspondence recreating a thin and tall bad fairy, all dressed in black. Her skin streams in a phosphorescent purple-blue, especially when she works her magic. An interesting aspect concerns the fact that she is the only one wearing makeup, jewellery and also nail polish. *Maleficient* can be assimilated to a representation of the non-traditional femininity, which constructs itself by antagonism, making a stand against hegemonic masculinity (Rovenţa Frumuşani, 2002: 148), in the present case, the ruling king who had betrayed her trust. Offering resistance, rebellion and dissimilarity from the traditional pattern are often considered to be traits of the marginal, fated to oblivion: sexual workers, lesbians, rebels, viraginians or witches (Connell, 1987:188 apud. Rovenţa Frumuşani, 2002).

Acknowledgment

This paper is suported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number SOP HRD/159/1.5/S/136077.

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