



A Visual Signs Analysis of The Characters in the Movie Maleficent Mistress of Evil

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-02-04 Revised: 2026 02-13 Accepted: 2026 05-19</p> <p>Keywords: Semiotics; Film; Characters; Ferdinand De Saussure; Roland Barthles.</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.9590</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Tasya Rahim tasyarahim03@gmail.com Universitas Negeri Gorontalo</p>	<p><i>This study examines how visual signs represented through characters construct meaning in the film Maleficent: Mistress of Evil. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research applies semiotic theories by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes to analyze the relationship between signifier and signified, as well as the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The research data consist of visual signs that appear in the film, particularly those related to the characters. Data collection techniques include intensive observation of the film, identification of visual signs, and documentation of relevant scenes. The study finds that visual signs in Maleficent: Mistress of Evil are polysemic and context-dependent. Maleficent's wings shift from signifying autonomy to protection, while Aurora's flower crown signifies peaceful leadership and sincerity of values across different power spaces. In contrast, Queen Ingrith's white costume subverts conventional purity, instead signifying hidden threat, moral hypocrisy, and cruelty, naturalizing ideologies of power disguised as virtue. This study contributes to film semiotics and media studies by demonstrating that visual character elements function not only as aesthetic components but also as dynamic systems of meaning that convey cultural and ideological messages. The research emphasizes the significance of semiotic analysis in understanding how films construct meaning through visual representation.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Semiotics is an analytical approach used to understand how meaning is constructed and communicated through systems of signs within social and cultural life (Alfarifqi, 2021). In semiotic studies, signs are not limited to verbal language but also include various forms of nonverbal communication, such as images, sounds, gestures, and other visual elements that play a role in the process of

meaning-making. Therefore, semiotics serves as a relevant analytical framework for examining visual media, including film, as a medium rich in signs and meanings.

According to Preminger (as cited in Fadhliyah, 2021), semiotics is the study of sign systems in relation to social and cultural phenomena. In the context of popular media, film functions as a space of representation where visual and narrative signs interact to construct particular meanings. Cinematic elements such as color, costume, lighting, setting, and character gestures are not neutral; rather, they are selected based on cultural conventions and narrative purposes. Through these elements, film not only tells a story but also represents values, ideologies, and social relations.

Previous studies have widely applied semiotic approaches to film analysis, particularly to examine representations of gender, power, identity, and ideology across various film genres. However, most of these studies tend to focus on realist films or films with explicit socio-political themes. Semiotic analyses of popular fantasy films, especially those that emphasize the construction of visual meaning through characters in contemporary film franchises, remain relatively limited. Moreover, few studies specifically address how visual signs in post-classical Disney fantasy films contribute to ideological meaning-making and character identity construction.

Maleficent: Mistress of Evil (2019) is a sequel to *Maleficent* (2014) that presents a reinterpretation of the classic *Sleeping Beauty* narrative. The film depicts a conflict between the human world and the world of magical creatures, triggered by Princess Aurora's impending marriage to Prince Phillip and the escalating political and cultural tensions between the two realms. Within its narrative, the film explores conflicting values, issues of discrimination against "the other," and the transformation of the main character, Maleficent, who is no longer positioned merely as a conventional antagonist.

Visually, *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* presents a strong contrast between the human world and the magical world through the use of distinct color schemes, costumes, architecture, and character designs. The richness of visual symbolism, the complexity of its characters, and its fantasy setting imbued with layered meanings make this film a promising object for semiotic analysis. These visual elements function as signs that not only support the storyline but also construct connotative meanings related to power, identity, and social order.

This study focuses on analyzing the visual signs represented through characters in *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*. The analysis is directed not only at individual characters but also at the visual elements attached to them—such as costumes, dominant colors, and patterns of interaction—as a system of signs that constructs meaning within the film's narrative structure. In doing so, this study seeks to address the research gap related to semiotic analysis of characters in contemporary popular fantasy films.

Based on this background, the research questions of this study are formulated as

follows:

How do the visual signs represented by the characters construct meaning in the film Maleficent: Mistress of evil?

This analysis also holds contemporary relevance, despite the film's release in 2019. In the context of 2025–2026, popular fantasy films increasingly function not only as entertainment but also as media for reflecting social and cultural issues, including identity, inclusivity, and power relations. Therefore, examining *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* through a semiotic perspective is important for understanding how popular media constructs and represents meaning through visual sign systems and how such meanings contribute to shaping public perception.

2. Method

Research Approach and Design

This study employs a **descriptive qualitative approach** aimed at interpreting the visual signs that appear in the film *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*. This approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of meanings through the interpretation of social and cultural phenomena represented in film media, particularly through visual signs.

Research Object

The object of this study is the film *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* (2019), directed by Joachim Rønning and produced by Walt Disney Pictures, with a duration of 118 minutes. The focus of the research is directed toward the visual signs attached to the main characters, especially in relation to the representation of meaning and ideology constructed within the film's narrative.

Data Sources

1. Primary Data

The primary data of this study consist of the film *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, which serves as the main source for identifying and analyzing visual signs.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data are obtained from supporting literature, including scholarly journal articles, books, previous studies, and theoretical discussions relevant to semiotics, the theories of Saussure and Barthes.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through **non-participant observation** using the following procedures:

1. The researcher watched the film in its entirety **four times**.
 - The first viewing was conducted to understand the general storyline.
 - The second and third viewings focused on identifying scenes that display significant visual signs related to the main characters.
 - The fourth viewing was conducted for data verification and further analysis.
2. During the observation process, the researcher systematically recorded visual elements such as costumes, colors, gestures, and visual composition.
3. Relevant scenes were captured in the form of **screenshots** to be analyzed in greater detail.

Scene Sampling Technique

This study employs purposive sampling, in which scenes are deliberately selected based on specific criteria. Scenes were chosen if they:

1. Prominently feature the main characters;
2. Contain recurring or visually dominant signs;
3. Are directly related to character conflict, transformation, or ideological messages within the film.

This sampling technique was applied to ensure that the analysis remained focused and aligned with the research objectives.

Research Instruments and Tools

In the process of collecting and organizing visual data, the researcher utilized:

1. Digital film playback devices for repeated observation;
2. Screenshot features on a computer to capture film scenes;

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through the following three operational stages:

1. Identification of Visual Signs

The researcher identified visual signs based on operational criteria, namely visual elements that appear consistently or significantly and possess symbolic meaning potential, such as costumes, dominant colors, body gestures, and supporting visual properties.

2. **Classification of Signs**

The identified visual signs were then classified according to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory into two components: the *signifier* and the *signified*.

3. **Interpretation of Meaning**

The interpretation stage involved relating the classified signs to Roland Barthes' theory, which includes the analysis of meaning at the denotative, connotative, and ideological (myth) levels. Interpretations were conducted by considering the film's narrative context as well as the broader social and cultural background.

Data Validity

To ensure the validity of interpretation, this study applied several strategies, including:

1. **Theoretical triangulation**, by comparing analytical results using the theories of Saussure and Barthes;
2. **Peer review**, through discussions of interpretations with academic supervisors or fellow researchers to minimize researcher subjectivity;
3. **Analytical consistency**, by ensuring that similar signs were interpreted using the same conceptual framework.

Ethical Considerations

This study uses film screenshots solely for academic purposes. All visual materials adhere to the principle of *fair use* and are not utilized for commercial purposes. The source of the film is clearly acknowledged to respect the copyright of the rights holder.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. The interpretation of visual signs is highly dependent on the researcher's perspective; therefore, potential interpretive bias cannot be entirely eliminated. In addition, the study focuses only on the visual signs of the main characters and does not include an in-depth analysis of dialogue or audio elements.

Theoretical Framework and Research Timeline

The theoretical framework of this study integrates Saussure's concept of signs and Barthes' levels of meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure, as one of the pioneers in the field of semiotics, introduced a fundamental concept regarding how signs operate within a linguistic system. Saussure, a prominent figure in semiotics, viewed language as a system of signs consisting of two inseparable elements: the signifier and the signified (Muzakky et al., 2023). A sign is formed through the close

relationship between the signifier, which is the material form or aspect of the sign, and the signified, which is the mental concept or meaning referred to by the signifier.

The **arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified** is a key concept in Saussure's theory (Uyunnisya, 2024). He emphasized that the connection between the signifier and the signified is **arbitrary** and **conventional**, meaning there is no natural or intrinsic link between the physical form of a sign and the meaning it conveys.

In this context, the signified cannot be communicated or interpreted without the presence of a signifier. This illustrates the close relationship between the signifier and the signified. A signified would hold no meaning without a signifier, and conversely, the signified cannot be interpreted or constructed without a signifier (Sitompul et al., 2021).

In film, the context of meanings related to signs messages is generally constructed through two key components: **cinematic and narrative elements** (Sya'Dian, T. et al., 2021). Thus, film presents **consistent signifiers**, but the **signifieds (meanings)** continuously differ and evolve depending on the narrative context. In other words, meanings can differ or shift according to how they are used within the story or communication.

Roland Barthes expanded Saussure's theory by adding social and ideological dimensions to the construction of meaning. Barthes introduced two levels of meaning and the concept of myth to analyze how meaning is not only communicated but also ideologized within society.

Denotation: This refers to the literal, objective, or first-level meaning of a sign. **Connotation:** This is the second-level meaning that arises from the cultural, emotional, and ideological associations attached to the sign (Setiawan & Yoedtadi, 2025).

Essentially, Roland Barthes does not depart significantly from Saussure's view that a semiological sign consists of a signifier and a signified. In the context of film, denotation refers to what is directly shown by the Saussurean signifier. For example, the denotation of an image of a rose is simply "a rose." Meanwhile, connotation is subjective and can vary between individuals or cultural groups. Connotation often involves deeper values, emotions, or interpretations. For instance, the connotation of a rose might be "love," "romance," "beauty," or "passion." Connotation is the second-order meaning of the signifier. It functions when the signifier (the image of a rose) and the signified (the concept of a rose), as directly indicated by Saussure's signifier and signified, become a connotative signified.

At the connotative level, which is influenced by culture and ideology, Barthes expanded Saussure's theory by introducing the concept of myth to explain how signs carry meanings related to social, cultural, and ideological contexts within society (Setiawan & Yoedtadi, 2025). Myth is a way in which society naturalizes meaning—making it appear "natural" or "universal" when in fact it is a cultural construction that serves particular interests.

The research process was conducted over a period of approximately three months, which included the stages of data collection, data analysis, and the preparation of the research report.

3. Results

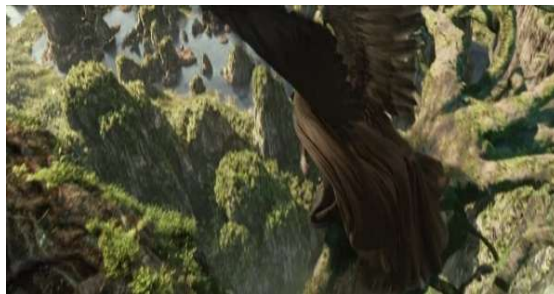
In this study, the data consist of visual signs found in various scenes of the film. In this context, consistent signifiers produce different signifieds depending on the narrative or cinematic context, which is further reinforced by the social and cultural values depicted in the scenes of *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*. Furthermore, to comprehend the ideological meanings underlying these signifieds—referred to as myths in Barthes’ theory—an additional level of analysis using Roland Barthes’ framework was required.

1. Wings



(Maleficent's Wings)

Using Saussure signifier – Signified :



(Rejection of Aurora's proposal scene at the minute 12.47-13.03)

In the scene depicting Aurora’s rejection of the marriage proposal, Maleficent spreads her wings and flies away while saying, “Don’t... ruin my morning.” This action cannot be understood as a natural or inherent meaning directly attached to the object of the “wings” themselves. The relationship between the signifier, in the form of the visual image of wings and the act of flying, and the signified, namely autonomy, is arbitrary, because this meaning does not emerge

automatically but is instead constructed. Maleficent's dialogue functions as a narrative reinforcement that guides the audience to interpret the act of flying not as an escape, but as a statement of independence. The meaning of autonomy is also formed through multiple layers of construction.

First, the film's narrative positions the moment of flight as a consequence of the rejection of the proposal, so that the action is understood as a conscious choice and an affirmation of Maleficent's personal will.

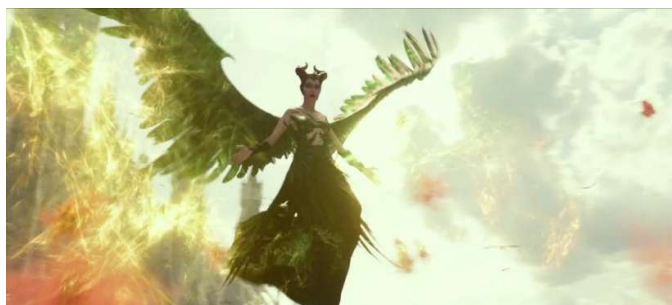
Second, cultural conventions in the representation of power often associate the ability to fly with freedom, independence, and a rejection of restrictive relational bonds.

Third, the film's visual system—through framing, camera movement, and scene timing—reinforces the reading that the movement away into the air is a symbol of self-release from the romantic relationship being offered.

Thus, the wings in this scene function as a signifier that, through narrative, cultural, and visual construction, is interpreted as a signified of autonomy, not because of a natural relationship, but because of an agreement of meaning constructed within the film text.

→ Signifier: Wings and the act of flying away

→ Signified: Autonomy / subjective independence



(The final battle scene at the minute 32.08- 32.31)

In the climactic scene of the final battle against the humans, Maleficent actively uses her wings to protect Aurora and the magical beings from physical threats, while Aurora calls out, "She's going for the queen." This verbal statement guides the visual interpretation of the wings not merely as bodily attributes or physical power, but as instruments of sacrifice and collective responsibility. In this scene, the relationship between the signifier, in the form of the visual representation of wings, and the signified once again undergoes a shift in meaning. This shift reinforces that the signifier-signified relationship is not fixed or

essential, but rather arbitrary and constructed through the representational context established by the film.

Narratively, the final battle scene is positioned as a point of conflict, where the safety of Aurora and the magical community becomes the primary stake. The positioning of Maleficent as a subject who actively protects others directs the reading that the use of the wings is no longer merely an expression of personal freedom or the courage to confront authority, but rather a protective act.

Within the framework of cultural conventions, the act of protecting—especially toward a child figure or a vulnerable community—is often associated with values of care, responsibility, and affection, which in many cultural representations are attached to female figures. This convention allows the wings to be read as a symbol of protection, even though materially the wings do not inherently possess such meaning.

Meanwhile, the film's visual system reinforces the construction of meaning through the use of Maleficent's body blocking that positions the wings as a shield, visual composition that places Aurora behind Maleficent's body, as well as movement dynamics and visual effects that emphasize the defensive function of the wings. These visual elements work to guide the audience toward a particular reading of the sign.

Thus, in the final battle scene, the wings as a signifier are no longer interpreted solely as autonomy or courage, but rather as a signified of protection. This change in meaning underscores that signs in film are polysemic and that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, shaped by the narrative, cultural conventions, and the film's visual system.

→ Signifier: Wings used as a shield and a means of rescue

→ Signified: Protection

Thus, Maleficent's wings function as a polysemic sign whose meanings vary according to narrative context, cultural conventions, and the film's visual system. In general, the wings represent expressions of personal and relational power. Maleficent's wings do not possess a fixed intrinsic meaning; rather, their meanings are arbitrarily constructed through the interaction of narrative, cultural symbolism, and the film's visual strategies. The wings become a primary signifier that expresses power—whether in the form of protection, or autonomy—depending on the context of the scene.

Saussure helps us understand how visual signs such as wings operate within a fluid and contextual sign system. However, to grasp the ideological meanings embedded behind these signs, we need to move one level further through Roland Barthes's theory.

Using Barthes connotative and mythic:

- Rejection of Aurora's proposal scene at the minute 12.47-13.03

Denotation

Denotatively, this scene shows Maleficent spreading her wings and flying away after Aurora's proposal is rejected. The wings here are merely a part of the body that enables the act of flying.

Connotation

At the level of connotation, the act of flying away is interpreted as a conscious decision to leave a particular situation. This meaning is not naturally inherent in the wings, but is constructed through narrative relations that position the act of flight as a direct consequence of the rejection. The visual system—such as camera movement that follows the motion of departure and the visual separation of space between Maleficent and Aurora—reinforces the impression of distancing and the affirmation of personal will.

Myth

At the level of myth, the wings function to naturalize an ideology of the subject as having full control over their own choices. The freedom to choose and determine one's life direction is represented as if it were inherent and inevitable, even though this meaning is in fact the result of cultural and cinematic construction.

→ Signifier: *Wings and the act of flying away*

→ Signified: *Autonomy / personal will*

→ Myth: *Individual freedom as a condition that appears natural*

- *The final battle scene at the minute 32.08- 32.3*

Denotation

In the final battle scene, Maleficent uses her wings to protect Aurora and the magical beings from physical attacks.

Connotation

Connotatively, the wings are interpreted as an instrument of protection. Body blocking that positions the wings as a shield, the placement of Aurora behind Maleficent's body, and visual effects that emphasize the wings' defensive function guide the audience toward a protective reading of the sign.

Myth

At the level of myth, the wings naturalize an ideology of responsibility toward others who are considered vulnerable. The act of protecting is represented as a

form of devotion that appears spontaneous and natural, thereby obscuring the construction of the value of care as something that is already “as it should be.”

→ *Signifier: Wings used as a shield*

→ *Signified: Protection*

→ *Myth: Protective responsibility as a naturalized value*

Through the perspective of Roland Barthes’s semiotics, Maleficent’s wings can be understood as a polysemic sign whose meanings continually shift from autonomy to protection. At the level of myth, these shifts in meaning function to naturalize various ideologies—individual freedom, resistance to authority, protective responsibility, and leadership—as if such meanings were inherently attached to the object of the wings. Thus, the film not only represents a story, but also constructs an ideological system of meaning that operates subtly through visual signs.

2. Flower crown



(Aurora Flower Crown)

Using Saussure signifier – Signified :



(Aurora’s interaction as queen of the Moors with the Moors scene at minute 7.49)

In the opening scene of the film, when Aurora appears as the Queen of the Moors and interacts with the creatures of the Moors, she wears a flower crown that functions as the primary visual signifier. When Aurora states, “Well, I’m Queen of the Moors, and I am a human,” the flower crown acquires a symbolic function that affirms Aurora’s position as a leader. Conventionally, flower crowns are often associated with beauty, gentleness, and closeness to nature; however, these meanings are not inherently attached to the floral object itself. Aurora’s dialogue

serves as a meaning anchor that guides the audience to interpret the flower crown as a symbol of leadership legitimacy grounded in harmony rather than domination. Nevertheless, the relationship between the flower crown and this meaning is not natural but arbitrary, as it is shaped by cultural conventions and the accompanying visual context.

Through the film's narrative, Aurora is introduced not only as a figure who is beautiful and in harmony with nature, but also as the leader of the Moors who exercises power without violence. Aurora's interactions with magical creatures, the way she walks through the Moorish gardens, and the Moors' acceptance of her presence all contribute to the understanding that her leadership is peaceful and empathetic. This narrative shifts the meaning of the flower crown from merely an aesthetic symbol to a sign of legitimate leadership.

In cultural conventions, a crown is commonly understood as a symbol of power and authority. However, the film deliberately replaces the rigid metal crown with an organic flower crown. This choice emphasizes that Aurora's leadership is not built on domination or coercive hierarchy, but on compassion, emotional closeness, and harmony with nature. Thus, the meaning of leadership attached to the flower crown is a result of cultural construction modified by the film.

Through the film's visual system, this meaning is reinforced by a bright color palette, natural lighting, and spatial compositions that present the Moors' environment as a lively and peaceful space. The camera positions Aurora on the same level as the Moorish creatures, rather than above or apart from them, so the flower crown is not read as a symbol of hierarchical power, but as a sign of leadership that is integrated with her community.

Thus, the relationship between the signifier (the flower crown) and the signified (natural leadership characterized by peace and compassion) is dynamic and contextual. The meaning of the flower crown in this scene is not merely beauty or closeness to nature, but is reconstructed through the narrative, cultural conventions, and the film's visual system into a symbol of peaceful and compassionate leadership.

→ Signifier: Flower crown

→ Signified: Natural leadership with peace and compassion



(Aurora in the Ulstead Kingdom scene at the minute 1.49.13)

In the scene in which Aurora is in the environment of the Ulstead Kingdom after her marriage, she continues to wear a natural flower crown, even though she is now spatially situated within a realm of human power associated with grandeur, hierarchical structures, and formal royal symbols. In this context, the flower crown functions as a signifier whose meaning undergoes a shift. Although Aurora has entered a human royal space, her continued use of the flower crown resists full assimilation into conventional symbols of monarchy. When Aurora calmly states, "It's a new day," the dialogue reinforces that her presence in the kingdom while wearing the flower crown is not merely a personal accessory choice, but a declaration of identity.

Conventionally, a flower crown is generally understood as a symbol of beauty, purity, and closeness to nature. However, the relationship between the flower crown and these meanings is neither fixed nor natural, but arbitrary, as the film constructs new meaning through the context of the story and the accompanying visuals. Aurora's decision not to replace her flower crown with a human royal crown becomes an important part of the narrative, affirming the consistency of the identity and values she carries as the Queen of the Moors.

Through the narrative, Aurora is depicted as a leader who has gone through the major conflict between two worlds and chooses to uphold the values of the Moors—honesty, harmony with nature, and compassion—even as she symbolically enters the human power space. Therefore, the flower crown no longer merely represents closeness to nature or peaceful leadership, but becomes a sign of Aurora's fidelity to the inner values she believes in.

In cultural conventions, palace spaces usually demand adherence to formal symbols of power. The incongruity of the flower crown with the visual norms of Ulstead's royalty instead reinforces the reading that Aurora is present not to fully assimilate, but to bring a distinct identity and set of values. From this perspective, the flower crown is read as a symbol of sincerity—a presence that is honest and unmanipulated by the structures of power.

Through the film's visual system, the contrast between the palace's grandeur and the simple, organic flower crown reinforces this meaning. The camera positions Aurora as a figure who remains 'different' yet accepted, so the flower crown functions as a visual sign of her inner honesty and moral integrity. This meaning is not inherently attached to the flower crown, but emerges from the visual, spatial, and narrative relations constructed by the film.

Thus, the relationship between the signifier (the flower crown) and the signified (sincerity of heart) is arbitrary and contextual, constructed through the development of the narrative, cultural conventions regarding power and authenticity, and the film's visual system, which positions Aurora within the human royal space without erasing her identity.

→ Signifier: Flower crown

→ Signified: Sincerity of heart

The flower crown worn by Aurora functions as a polysemic signifier whose meaning is contextual and shaped by the narrative, cultural conventions, and the film's visual system. The crown is not merely a symbol of beauty or closeness to nature, but dynamically signifies Aurora's identity, values, and position across various contexts.

Saussure helps us understand how visual signs such as wings operate within a fluid and contextual sign system. However, to grasp the ideological meanings embedded behind these signs, we need to move one level further through Roland Barthes's theory.

Using Barthes connotative and mythic:

- *Aurora's interaction as queen of the Moors with the Moors scene at minute 7.49*

Denotation

At the denotative level, Aurora is shown wearing a flower crown while interacting with the Moorish creatures in a lush and harmonious natural environment.

Connotation

Narratively, Aurora is introduced as the leader of the Moors who exercises power without violence. The flower crown is read connotatively as a signifier of peaceful and empathetic leadership, rather than merely an aesthetic accessory. Her fluid interactions with the Moorish creatures and the community's acceptance of her presence shift the meaning of the flower crown from a symbol of beauty to a symbol of relational authority.

In cultural conventions, crowns are typically associated with power. However, the film replaces the metal crown with an organic flower crown, thereby constructing the meaning that leadership does not have to rely on hierarchical domination, but on emotional closeness and harmony with the environment.

Myth

At the mythic level, the flower crown naturalizes the idea that ideal leadership arises from peace, empathy, and connection with the community, rather than from violence or coercive structures. This ideology is disguised as a form of leadership that appears to be natural.

→ *Signifier: Flower crown*

→ *Signified: Natural leadership that is peaceful and empathetic*

→ *Myth: Legitimate leadership is rooted in harmony and compassion*

- *Aurora in the Ulstead Kingdom scene at the minute 1.49.13*

Denotation

At the denotative level, Aurora continues to wear the flower crown while in the environment of Ulstead Kingdom, which is laden with symbols of formal power.

Connotation

In this context, the flower crown is read as a signifier of consistency in identity and sincerity of values. The incongruity of the flower crown with the visual norms of the palace reinforces the meaning that Aurora does not fully assimilate into the human power system, but brings the values of the Moors into that space.

Cultural conventions regarding the palace as a space demanding symbolic compliance are visually challenged, so the flower crown is interpreted as a symbol of honesty and moral integrity.

Myth

At the mythic level, the flower crown naturalizes the idea that sincerity and fidelity to inner values can be maintained within formal power structures. The film disguises the ideology of moral integrity as something that appears natural and ideal.

→ Signifier: Flower crown

→ Signified: Sincerity of heart

→ Myth: Authentic values are the foundation of meaningful leadership

Through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, Aurora's flower crown can be understood as a polysemic and ideological sign. At the denotative level, the flower crown is merely a decorative visual element. However, at the connotative and mythic levels, the flower crown becomes a medium that naturalizes ideas of peaceful leadership, reconciliation, and integrity of values. This shift in meaning emphasizes that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not natural, but entirely constructed by the film's narrative, cultural conventions, and cinematic visual system.

3. Silver or White Clothing Queen Inggrith



Using Saussure signifier – Signified :



(Welcoming Aurora to the kingdom of Ulstead scene at the minute 25.07)

In this scene, Queen Ingrith wears a white gown while greeting Aurora with a friendly demeanor. As she smiles and says, “Such a beautiful girl. I can see how you stole Philip's heart,” the white color of her gown and her outward friendliness function as a signifier conventionally associated with purity or goodness. However, within the narrative context of the film, this friendliness conceals a political strategy and a hidden threat toward the Moors.

Narrative: The story positions Queen Inggrith in an antagonistic role, so the white dress, usually a symbol of purity, is reinterpreted as a sign of hidden threat.

Cultural conventions: The color white in popular culture is often read as goodness or purity. However, in the context of this scene, that convention is subverted, showing how the meaning of a sign is arbitrary and dependent on socio-cultural context and narrative.

Film's visual system: The framing, lighting, and Queen Inggrith's body gestures support the reinterpretation of the white dress as a symbol of threat rather than purity. Visuals and narrative work together to create a new meaning for the audience.

Thus, the relationship between the signifier (white dress) and the signified (hidden threat) is arbitrary, because this meaning is constructed by the narrative, cultural conventions, and the film's visual system, rather than being inherent in the color of the dress itself.

→ Signifier: White gown

→ Signified: Hidden threat



(The battle scene at the minute 1.17.10)

In the battle scene, Queen Ingith wears a grand white and silver gown, despite being in the context of armed conflict. As she commands her troops, she speaks calmly but firmly, “Wait. Now.” Then all the soldiers open fire. The white and silver gown she wears functions as a signifier conventionally associated with purity or sanctity. However, within the context of this scene, Queen Ingith’s actions—coordinating a deadly attack on magical creatures and spreading poison in the chapel during the wedding ceremony—reveal that this appearance of purity conceals malicious intent.

Narrative: The story emphasizes Queen Ingith’s antagonistic nature, so the color white, which usually carries a positive meaning, becomes a symbol of moral hypocrisy, concealing cruelty behind an elegant appearance.

Cultural conventions: In popular culture, white is associated with goodness, but in the context of conflict and betrayal, this convention is subverted, reinforcing that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.

Film’s visual system: The lighting, framing, and Queen Ingith’s grand costume work together to create a new meaning: the color white no longer signifies purity, but moral hypocrisy constructed through the narrative and visual context.

Thus, the relationship between the signifier (white and silver dress) and the signified (moral hypocrisy) is not inherent, but is shaped through the narrative, cultural conventions, and the film’s visual system.

→ Signifier: White and silver gown

→ Signified: Moral hypocrisy



(Queen Ingrith shoots Maleficent scene at the minute 1.34.13)

In this scene, Maleficent comes to the castle to protect the Dark Fey from human attacks. Before firing, Queen Ingrith looks at Maleficent calmly and says, “There’s the evil that I promised them.” Maleficent’s intention is to safeguard the Dark Fey, yet Queen Ingrith responds with a cruel action, shooting an iron bullet at her, which is biologically lethal for Fae beings like Maleficent.

Narrative: The story presents Queen Inggrith as an antagonist committing acts of violence amid an apparently peaceful situation, causing the visual meaning of the white and silver dress she wears to shift from the conventional 'purity' to a symbol of cruelty or evil.

Cultural conventions: Generally, the color white is associated with goodness, sanctity, or purity. However, in the context of violence and conflict, this convention is subverted, making the relationship between the signifier and the signified arbitrary.

Film’s visual system: The costume, framing, and violent actions create a new meaning for the sign—the color white no longer signifies purity, but a symbol of cruelty and evil, constructed through the narrative context and the film’s visual system.

Thus, the relationship between the signifier (white and silver dress) and the signified (cruelty or evil) is not inherent, but is shaped through the narrative, cultural conventions, and the film’s visual system.

→ Signifier: White and silver gown

→ Signified: Cruelty or evil

The white and silver dress worn by Queen Inggrith functions as an arbitrary signifier, where its meaning is constructed by the narrative context, cultural conventions, and the film’s visual system. Although the color white is conventionally associated with purity, goodness, and sanctity, the film consistently subverts this meaning to emphasize the character’s antagonistic nature. Queen Inggrith’s white and silver dress is not merely a symbol of purity or sanctity, but a

complex visual sign indicating threat, hypocrisy, and cruelty, whose meaning is shaped through the film's narrative, visual culture conventions, and cinematic techniques.

Saussure helps us understand how visual signs such as wings operate within a fluid and contextual sign system. However, to grasp the ideological meanings embedded behind these signs, we need to move one level further through Roland Barthes's theory.

Using Barthes connotative and mythic:

- *Welcoming Aurora to the kingdom of Ulstead scene at the minute 25.07*

Denotation

At the denotative level, Queen Inggrith wears a white dress and greets Aurora with a friendly demeanor in the Ulstead palace setting.

Connotation

Connotatively, the color white, which is conventionally associated with purity, goodness, or good intentions, is interpreted as a hidden threat. The film's narrative reveals that Queen Inggrith's friendliness is not sincere, but part of a political strategy to weaken and threaten the Moors' world.

Cultural conventions regarding the color white are subverted through the story context. The film's visual system—through controlled body gestures, ambiguous facial expressions, formal framing, and cold lighting—guides the audience to read the white dress not as a symbol of goodness, but as a cover for hidden intentions.

Myth

At the mythic level, this scene naturalizes the idea that appearances of holiness or friendliness can conceal power interests and threats. The film constructs an ideology about the dangers of symbols of purity being used as tools of manipulation.

- *Signifier: White gown*
- *Signified: Hidden threat*
- *Myth: Power can disguise aggressive intentions behind an image of purity*

- *The battle scene at the minute 1.17.10*

Denotation

At the denotative level, Queen Inggrith appears wearing a grand white and silver dress amid a situation of war and armed conflict.

Connotation

At the connotative level, the white and silver costume is no longer read as a symbol of purity or grandeur, but as moral hypocrisy. In this scene, Queen Inggrith orchestrates lethal attacks against magical creatures and plans the spread of poison, contradicting the conventional meaning of the colors she wears.

Popular culture conventions of white as a symbol of goodness are subverted by the context of violence. The film's visual system—through dramatic lighting, a grand costume contrasting with the chaos of war, and the character's position as the orchestrator of the attack—constructs the meaning that visual elegance conceals moral cruelty.

Myth

At the mythic level, this scene naturalizes the idea that power can cloak violence with symbols of grandeur and purity, making evil appear legitimate or dignified."

→ *Signifier: White and silver gown*

→ *Signified: Moral hypocrisy*

→ *Myth: Violence can be legitimized through symbols of grandeur and purity*

- *Queen Inggrith shoots Maleficent scene at the minute 1.34.13*

Denotation

At the denotative level, Queen Inggrith wears a white and silver dress while firing iron bullets at Maleficent inside the palace.

Connotation

Connotatively, the white and silver costume is interpreted as a symbol of cruelty and evil. The violent acts occur amid an apparently peaceful situation, so the color white no longer signifies sanctity, but becomes a visual cover for destructive actions.

Cultural conventions regarding the color white are extremely subverted. The film's visual system—through the contrast between brutal actions and the pristine appearance of the costume, framing that emphasizes dominance, and the dramatic timing of the shots—guides the audience to read the color white as moral irony.

Myth

At the mythic level, this scene naturalizes the idea that the most dangerous evil appears in forms that seem pure, legitimate, and civilized. The film constructs an ideological critique of power hiding behind symbols of morality.

- Signifier: White and silver gown
- Signified: Cruelty or evil
- Myth: Destructive power often operates through an appearance of moral legitimacy

Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the white color of Queen Inggrith's costume no longer functions as a singular sign with a fixed meaning. At the denotative level, it is merely the color of the costume. At the connotative level, it shifts to symbolize threat, moral hypocrisy, and cruelty. At the mythic level, the film naturalizes the ideology that symbols of purity can be used as tools to legitimize power and violence. Thus, the film critically deconstructs the assumption that visual signs appearing 'good' or 'holy' always represent positive moral values, showing that the meaning of a sign entirely depends on the narrative, cultural, and visual context that shapes it.

Table Of Study Findings

No		Scene Time Code	Signifier	Signified	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1	Wings	Rejection of Aurora's proposal scene at the minute 12.47-13.03	Wings and the act of flying away	Autonomy / subjective independence	Wings and the act of flying away	Autonomy / subjective independence	Individual freedom as a condition that appears natural
		The final battle scene at the minute 32.08-32.3	Wings used as a shield and a means of rescue	Protection	Wings used as a shield and a means of rescue	Protection	Protective responsibility as a naturalized value
	Flower Crown	Aurora's interaction as queen of the Moors with the Moors scene at minute 7.49	Flower crown	Natural leadership with peace and compassion	Flower crown	Natural leadership with peace and compassion	Legitimate leadership is rooted in harmony and compassion
		Aurora in the Ulstead Kingdom scene at the minute 1.49.13	Flower crown	Sincerity of heart	Flower crown	Sincerity of heart	Authentic values are the foundation of meaningful leadership
	White gown	Welcoming Aurora to the kingdom of Ulstead scene at	White gown	Hidden threat	White gown	Hidden threat	Power can disguise aggressive intentions behind an image of purity

		the minute 25.07					
		The battle scene at the minute 1.17.10	White and silver gown	Moral hypocrisy	White and silver gown	Moral hypocrisy	Violence can be legitimized through symbols of grandeur and purity
		Queen Ingrith shoots Maleficent scene at the minute 1.34.13	White and silver gown	Cruelty or evil	White and silver gown	Cruelty or evil	Destructive power often operates through an appearance of moral legitimacy

4. Discussion

This study identifies that *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* constructs social, cultural, and ideological meanings through a complex system of visual signs, particularly through the representation of the three main characters: Maleficent, Aurora, and Queen Ingrith. Semiotic analysis based on the frameworks of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes demonstrates that visual signs in the film are multivalent, in which a single signifier can generate multiple signifieds depending on the context of the cinematic narrative.

The main findings indicate that Maleficent is consistently represented through signifieds of protection and autonomy, emphasizing her position as an empowered female subject who resists hegemonic authority. Aurora is interpreted through a combination of traditional femininity—such as sincerity and empathy—and diplomatic leadership qualities. In contrast, Queen Ingrith is represented through signs of oppressive hegemonic power, reflecting domination, control, and symbolic violence toward other groups.

Beyond character representation, the film’s socio-cultural settings also function as an ideological system of signs. The human world (the Kingdom of Ulstead) represents hegemonic power and the oppression of minority groups, while the fairy world (the Moors and the Dark Fey) is constructed as a space of freedom, harmony with nature, and solidarity among oppressed communities. The visual and narrative contrast between these two worlds consistently constructs a conflict between domination and resistance.

These findings align with previous semiotic film studies that position popular cinema as an ideological medium, as articulated by Barthes in his theory of myth and by feminist film scholars who examine representations of power and gender in

visual narratives. However, unlike studies that focus on isolated symbols or a single protagonist, this research emphasizes the relational dynamics among characters and spaces as an interconnected ideological sign system.

Theoretically, this study contributes to semiotic film studies by integrating character analysis and spatial representation into a unified ideological sign system. It demonstrates that myth is constructed not only through individual figures but also through visual relationships among subjects, spaces, and structures of power. In doing so, this study extends the application of Barthes' semiotic framework within the context of contemporary fantasy cinema.

The findings carry significant social implications for understanding how popular media represent and normalize power relations. The film symbolically reflects real-world hegemonic practices in which dominant groups produce narratives that marginalize minorities, while simultaneously presenting communal solidarity as a form of resistance. In this sense, *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* can be interpreted as a symbolic critique of hegemonic power and the legitimization of structural violence.

Practically, the results of this study can be utilized by educators as material for critical media literacy, enabling students to identify ideological meanings embedded in visual texts. For filmmakers, the findings highlight the importance of ideological awareness in character construction and world-building. For audiences, this analysis encourages a more reflective and critical viewing practice when engaging with popular media.

This study is limited by its qualitative and interpretive approach, which relies heavily on the researcher's subjective interpretation of visual signs. One of the main challenges in semiotic film analysis lies in the inherent ambiguity of visual meaning and the possibility of divergent interpretations based on the audience's social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the findings should not be understood as producing a single, definitive meaning.

The findings intersect with cultural studies and visual culture studies, particularly in discussions of representation, identity, power, and resistance in popular media. The semiotic approach enables interdisciplinary dialogue with feminist studies, minority studies, and ecocriticism, especially in examining the relationships among humans, nature, and power.

Future research may expand this study by analyzing other fantasy films or Disney franchises using a comparative approach. Additionally, integrating other methods, such as critical discourse analysis or audience reception studies, could enrich the understanding of how semiotic meanings are produced and interpreted. Alternative theoretical frameworks, including postcolonialism or ecofeminism, may also offer more diverse ideological readings.

Overall, this study affirms that semiotic analysis serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the role of popular media in shaping collective consciousness and social perceptions. Through critical and reflective readings, semiotics opens

space for uncovering hidden meanings and challenging ideologies that are naturalized through visual representation in film.

5. Conclusion

Overall, *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* successfully constructs a complex ideological narrative concerning the struggle between domination and resistance, as well as oppression and solidarity. The conflict portrayed is not merely physical or narrative in nature, but also represents broader tensions of values and power within society.

The visualization of characters—ranging from color, costume, and makeup to gestures—plays a significant role in reinforcing the conveyance of meaning. Thus, the visual elements in this film function not only as components of cinematic aesthetics but also as ideological media capable of communicating social and political ideas to the audience in a subtle yet profound manner. Therefore, this study affirms that visual signs in film do not merely serve as aesthetic support for cinematic expression, but also as instruments of meaning-making that reflect specific social, political, and cultural perspectives.

Through a semiotic reading of the visual elements, it becomes evident that every color, costume, and gesture within each scene plays a strategic role in constructing the ideological messages intended by the filmmaker. *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* demonstrates that visual language is able to transcend the boundaries of conventional narrative by presenting layers of meaning that stimulate the audience's critical thinking.

In a broader context, this study emphasizes the importance of viewing film not only as visual entertainment but also as a social text that both reflects and critiques the dynamics of contemporary society. Accordingly, film semiotic analysis not only deepens appreciation for cinematic works but also opens a space for reflection on the values and ideologies that shape the way we understand reality.

6. Suggestion

Theoretical Suggestion

To understand the meaning of signs in the film *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, the author employed Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotic Theory and its further development by Roland Barthes. This theory enabled the author to explore the meaning of signs in a broad and in-depth manner. However, the author hopes that future researchers will be able to derive alternative interpretations from literary works and conduct more comprehensive analyses using semiotic theory.

Thus, the author suggests that those interested in conducting similar research, particularly on semiotics and literary works, should engage more deeply with various semiotic theories. Combining semiotics with other research methods, such as audience reception analysis or interviews with filmmakers, can provide a richer perspective on how these symbols are received and produced.

Practical Suggestion

This study has the potential to enhance viewers' awareness of how visual signs in film contribute to shaping perceptions, ideologies, and social values that evolve within society. Through an understanding of semiotics, viewers are expected to perceive film not merely as entertainment but as a cultural text rich with meaning and hidden messages. Thus, this research contributes to fostering critical and reflective thinking toward the various forms of visual representation encountered in everyday life.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can be integrated into media literacy education curricula, particularly within learning contexts that emphasize critical analysis of mass media and audiovisual works. The application of these findings in education will help students understand the fundamental concepts of semiotics while training them to identify, interpret, and deconstruct ideological messages conveyed through films and other media.

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