

Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall: Reflections of Aging in *Snow White and the Huntsman*

Released on June 1st 2012, Rupert Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman* was touted as a decidedly dark and gritty incarnation of the beloved classic *Snow White*. While some may assume that *Snow White and the Huntsman* is appropriate – and indeed intended for – children, the film is actually rated PG (parental guidance) as opposed to G (good for all ages), and an explicit warning advises that the picture is “not recommended for young children.” In *Mouse Morality: The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film*, Annalee R. Ward identifies popular film as “a central storyteller for contemporary culture, [which] communicates myths and fairy tales, entertains, and educates the audience for better or worse” (Ward 1). Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman*, then, communicates with a more mature audience than its predecessor: it still entertains and educates, but with a more sophisticated viewership in mind. The film is, in the words of film critic Eric D. Snider, “serious and grown-up” (Snider).

This “serious and grown-up” *Snow White* includes a more nuanced antagonist: Queen Ravenna. In Sanders' interpretation of *Snow White*, we are given more insight into Snow's step-mother than in previous versions of the story – so much so that I hesitate to refer to her by the “Evil Queen” moniker for which she has become known. *Snow White and the Huntsman* is somewhat more complicated than good versus evil; as movie reviewer Tony Macklin observes, in this adaptation, “the powerful conflict is between age and youth” (Macklin)

This presentation will explore the tension between age and youth as presented in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, and more specifically, its depiction of Queen Ravenna. I will be referencing research pertaining to aging women in film with particular attention paid to “Scary Women: Cinema, Surgery, and Special Effects,” a chapter from Vivian Sobchack's influential work *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Writing for *The Salt Lake*

Tribune, Sean P. Means argues that the film inspires “a trace of sympathy for the hard-knock life that turned [Ravenna’s] heart so cold” (Means). I would like to emphasize Means’ use of the word *trace*, for even before Means’ actual review, readers are met with two headlines in bold: “Tougher ‘Snow White’ meets glorious *evil* Queen” and “Theron’s *villain* shines bright in dark fairy tale” (Means, italics added for emphasis). I will argue that while viewers may be encouraged to experience a “*trace* of sympathy” for Ravenna, she remains positioned as both “evil” and a “villain.” By offering film-goers glimpses into Ravenna’s past, Sanders makes her a more multi-dimensional character than she otherwise would have been. With access to Ravenna’s history, we form a better understanding of her motivation for committing “evil” acts. Unfortunately, the film does not delve particularly far beyond the surface of Ravenna, and depicts her quest for immortality as one of a misguided – possibly even crazy – and “evil” individual: the youth-oriented and sexist system she is enmeshed in is paid little mind.