

Evilution

The Progression of Animated Female Villainy Examined through the Lens of
Character Design

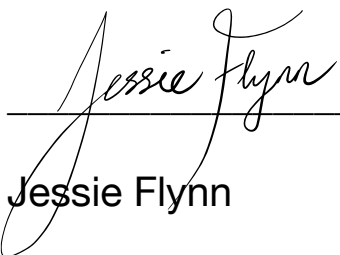
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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Animation. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.



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In your face.

Abstract

Animated films use character design to encapsulate a character's personality. Through it we are instructed on our initial perceptions and opinions of the people we see on screen. Part of what character design does is differentiate the good characters from the evil.

Because badness is not inherently visual, animated films have had to come up with a visual language to allow audiences to represent the moral groundings of the onscreen characters.

I will be looking at how this visual language applies to female villains. By examining these characters in chronological eras I could look at the trends in coding villainy; what causes these trends and what affect do they, in turn, have on our society.

I will examine what effect it has on our perception of women when we synonymise certain characteristics with villainy. I will identify how the portrayal of female villains has changed as a reaction to this and how our ideas of evil and the villain have changed.

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Fig. 56 Banner 2 - figure 24

Fig. 57 Banner 3 - figure 42

Fig. 58 Good vs Bad era 2

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Fig. 60 Analysis of hidden and forgiven female villains diagram

Fig. 61 Large Timeline of all Villains with Hidden Status

Fig. 62 Small Border Timeline of All Villains with Hidden Status

Fig. 63 Era 1 Good Adult Female Human Body shape - figure 3

Fig. 64 Era 2 Good Adult Female Human Body shape

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Fig. 65 Era 3 Good Adult Female Human Body shape - figure 43

Fig. 66 Timeline of Moments in Women's History with Female Villains

Fig. 67 Timeline of Moments in Women's History with All Villains

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Fig. 72 Analysis of Gabby Gabby's Introduction

Fig. 73 *Tangled*. Dir. Nathan Greno, Byron Howard, Walt Disney Pictures, 2010. *Disney+* app. 01:02:43

Fig. 74 Moana from the 2016 film *Moana*. *en.wikipedia.org*, 16 Mar. 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moana_\(character\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moana_(character))

Introduction

Animated villains are often a foil to their heroic counterparts. For a film to be able to hold a character high on a pedestal as the embodiment of good, it also needs to embody the bad. It needs someone who will highlight the hero's good features by lacking those qualities and showing the audience the wrong ways to think and behave.

By virtue of animated films' visual nature, this means that they must also show the bad through the character designs of the villains. These people need to juxtapose the hero in their looks as well as attitudes. Because badness is a concept rather than a literal, physical thing, this leads to an interesting commentary on what evil looks like.

“The construction of identity, [...] goes much further than an expression of who someone is; it can be a deliberate attempt by individuals and organizations, even nations, to create a particular image and meaning intended to shape, even pre-empt, what others perceive and understand.”¹

Character design is the way that a visual identity is created for characters in animated films. It is artists and studios who are attempting to shape or pre-empt our perception of the characters with their character designs rather than the characters themselves. With villains' character designs they are trying to warn us of their wickedness and show us their flare for the bad.

I will be looking at the character design of female villains in animated movies. I will be looking at how they are portrayed and what brands them as the villain. By examining this visual language, I will explore what qualities in women are apparently synonymous with evil.

In looking at specifically female villains I will be able to see how their villainy is expressed through their femininity, whether it be through deviance or hyper femininity. I will examine how they are shown as the foil to the good female characters and that they don't fit into the young, pretty, white, straight, submissive female stereotype that is so often reinforced

¹ Hesket, John. *Design: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.

as the “ideal” in animated films. I will investigate if it is largely this that makes them the villain.

I will be examining how the character designs have changed and evolved over time using the lens of different chronological groupings of the villains. These groupings emerged during my research stage, the process of which is outlined below. I will look at some of the influences as to why certain tropes were used in character designs. I will show that these are mostly rooted in views held in society at that time. However, I will also show that some tropes became a shorthand for villainy and stuck around a long time after society's views had changed.

I will look at three eras within the time since the feature animated film became widespread, with *Snow White* in 1937 all the way up to today. These eras are defined by the groupings which formed within my analysis when I was examining the female villains in the array of films I looked at. The three eras are 1937-2000, 2004-2010 and 2012-2021. It is clear from first glance that the first era is substantially longer than the two latter. While this may seem wholly imbalanced, I believe that the commonalities within the groups are strong enough to support my decision to split them this way. It should also be noted that in the first era, where not as many animated films were being produced, there were more female villains. Then in the following two eras, the amount of both animated films being produced and male villains appearing, went up exponentially. This meant that the sample sizes of the three eras were not hugely different, without having to do any sort of editing or selection.

I needed a way to define my villains and separate them from the antagonists who were not villains.

In order to define what we are examining as ‘villain’, I first had to cross reference several definitions of ‘villain’ given by various dictionaries.^{2 3 4 5 6 7} I highlighted qualities which were integral to defining a villain. I used these to decide on what I thought was necessary to define a character as the villain of their film. The definitions outlined that: the villain should be bad; their evil actions or motives should be important to the plot; they should be a deliberate scoundrel, criminal or malicious individual; they should be either involved in or devoted to wickedness or crime; they should be the cause of a bad thing and they should harm people or break the law. The definitions did not always contain every one of the above requirements. I took the minimum amount of specifications, while ensuring to protect the integrity of the villain character, to create my definition.

In some films there are multiple villains but there is usually an overarching villain. I will be looking at the villain who is in control — the mastermind behind the evil plot. Under my definition of villain, the villain, firstly, must be the main villain. They must answer only to themselves in their evil schemes. Secondly, the villain must act willingly and deliberately. Thirdly they must act with immoral or malicious intent. In some instances the villain’s goal is not actually a negative thing. However, the way they go about achieving that goal is harmful to others. They must be aware of the harm they are causing and continue with their plan regardless to be considered a villain.

I began my research by collecting theatrically released films from large animation studios. These studios included: The Walt Disney Company, Pixar Animation Studios, DreamWorks Animation LLC, Fox Animation Studios, Warner Bros. Animation, Blue Sky Studios, Inc., Laika LLC, Sony Pictures Animation, 20th Century

² “Villain,” *n.* (1, 2). *Britannica*, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/villain>.

³ “Villain,” *n.* (1, 2). *Collins*, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/villain>.

⁴ “Villain,” *n.* (1, 2, 3, 4). *Cambridge*, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/villain>.

⁵ “Villain,” *n.* (1, 2, 3). *dictionary.com*, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/villain>.

⁶ “Villain,” *n.* (1, 2, 3). *Merriam webster*, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/villain>.

⁷ “Villain,” *n.* (1). *Oxford Languages*, 2022, https://www.google.com/search?q=villain+definition&rlz=1C5CHFA_enIE780IE780&oq=&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

Animation, and Illumination⁸. I put these films into a spreadsheet⁹, put down the main protagonist and villains' names and began extracting data from them. I looked at the villain's gender, the hero's gender and then whether the two were the same gender. I determined whether the villain looked human, if they looked like the hero and whether the hero and villain were actually the same species (Maleficent and Aurora both look alike in that they are both human forms but Maleficent is actually a fairy.)

I was able to discount the films which had male villains, as I was looking at the female villains. I extracted the female villains and put images of them into a document¹⁰ to see if I could find any commonalities or groupings from their character design. Immediately, I noticed similarities between the villains from the Evil Queen up to Yzma. I could also see that there were extreme body types and many of them had unnatural skin tones. After Yzma there seemed to be a change; there were less extreme body types, no unnatural skin tones and the villains' age wasn't as clearly emphasised on their faces.

With this in mind I looked at the villainesses following Yzma. A pattern which I noticed fairly quickly was how many of the following villainesses were mother figures. Most of the villains after Yzma up until Mother Gothel (five out of seven) were portrayed as mothers in their films. As well as this there was a similar demographic in terms of age and race in this group. I assigned this as my next group and looked at the remaining villains.

There was a lot of diversity in the last nine, most recent villains and they did not have an obvious overarching commonality. I took these villains to be my last group with diversity as their defining characteristic. The only fairly common characteristic which jumped out at me was the fact that a good portion of them were not introduced to the audience as the villain.

I made a timeline and added all of the villains to it. I included the male villains to show the distribution of female vs male villains and also to show the significant increase in the amount of male villains as well as the amount of films produced in more recent years. I needed a control to compare the villains to so I added the most central female characters

⁸ I only looked at Western animation studies so as to keep a manageable sample size

⁹ See Appendix 1 - Initial research

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 - Initial research

from each of the villain's (both male and female) films to my timeline. I distinguished (by colour) whether their film had a male or female protagonist and (by font) whether their film had a male or female villain.

Next I created various visual timelines. Some of these included timelines of the female villains, faces of good characters, body types of good characters and comparison timelines comparing the villains to their good counterparts.¹¹

I also created visual representations to examine the trend of the hidden villain. I made a timeline with all the villains I had noted in the beginning, male and female, and labelled what their status was in terms of being overt, hidden from the other characters or hidden from the audience. I created an in depth diagram to examine these features in the female villains and included whether they ended up as good or bad at the end of the film.

All of the visual research I undertook within the course of this project has served as an invaluable tool to make my own observations of this subject as well as making my findings clear and accessible to the reader.

What I will be examining in this body of work is in what ways the depictions of female villains have changed since the start of the widespread popularity of feature animated films. I will be looking at the particular traits which characterised the villains as such. I will look at the origins or reasons for these characterisations. I will then examine how the use of these traits has changed or ceased in the portrayal of female villains. My research up to this point will be hugely helpful in providing me with visual reference for my comparisons and observations.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 - Initial Research

Chapter 1

Classic Villainesses



Fig. 1

Era 1 - the Other

The first era consists of our more 'classic' female villains. This era is very concentrated on defining the villain as 'the other'. These villains are set in their ways, evil is a part of them, they are devious and malicious by nature and this is the defining characteristic of who they are. This comes across over and over in the villains' character design. Repeatedly, they are set apart by their bodies, skin, voice, mannerisms, clothes, etc.

We can see how this was influenced by society. Around the time that the earliest feature animated films were coming out there were negative attitudes and prejudices towards groups of marginalised people. These were widely accepted as the norm. Civil rights movements around race, gender and sexuality only really began to gain a lot of momentum and see hugely significant change and results during the 20th century.¹² Hate speech regulations only arose around the 1980s¹³ and before this there wasn't as much pressure or longing to be tactful or politically correct. Society was quite comfortable in othering groups of people or assimilating minorities with evil.

Cultural and social change and its wider acceptance is gradual and slow. Our first era spanned across some of the time where we were seeing a big shift in civil rights and general attitudes towards marginalised people. This era reflects the pace of this shift and we can see the remnants of the earlier societal views sticking around even as society started to change. The depictions of female villains remained largely the same over this sixty-three year period; tactful or not.

The earlier, more 'classic' female villains reigned between around 1937 and 2000. This is the first era of my study and the villainesses which I will be looking at are: the Evil Queen, *Snow White* (1937); Lady Tremaine, *Cinderella* (1950); Queen of Hearts, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951); Maleficent, *Sleeping Beauty* (1959); Cruella De Vil, *101 Dalmatians* (1961); Madam Mim, *The Sword in the Stone* (1963); Madame Medusa, *The Rescuers* (1977); Ursula, *The Little Mermaid* (1989); Mrs

¹² Hamlin, Rebecca. "Civil Rights." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Mar 8, 2022. Web. Mar 20, 2022.

¹³ Gould, Jon B.. *Speak No Evil : The Triumph of Hate Speech Regulation*, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Tweedy, *Chicken Run* (2000) and Yzma, *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000). Unless otherwise stated, in this chapter when I refer to 'female villains', 'villains' or 'villainesses' I will be referring to this group of women only.

The villains' gender plays a huge part in their characterisation as villains.¹⁴ We can see that aspects of their femininity are often exaggerated, whether hyper feminised or deviating from the feminine norm. The heroines which we see in this era are more alike than they are different in a number of ways and their likenesses often stem from their being the ideal feminine form. It's in this contrast that the warping of the villains' gender performance becomes clear and I will delve further into this idea below.

To examine the deviance of the female villains, we must have some sort of understanding of what they are deviating from. I will briefly look at the 'normal' and good female characters from this era so that we can have a better understanding of what the ideals and expectations were like for women of that time.

To find the 'ideal' woman or girl, I'll have to look at the heroines/female characters of the time. I named the most prominent female characters from my sample films and added those to the timeline. As the female villains from this era all happen to be either human or humanoid I extracted all the good female characters who were human. The characters I looked at were: Snow White, *Snow White* (1937); Cinderella, *Cinderella* (1950); Alice, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951); Wendy, *Peter Pan* (1953); Aurora, *Sleeping Beauty* (1959); Anita, *101 Dalmatians* (1961); Princess Eilonwy, *The Black Cauldron* (1985); Ariel, *The Little Mermaid* (1989); Belle, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991); Jasmin, *Aladdin* (1992); Odette, *The Swan Princess* (1994); Pocahontas, *Pocahontas* (1995); Bo Peep, *Toy Story* (1995); Esmeralda, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996); Anastasia, *Anastasia* (1997); Megara, *Hercules* (1997); Mulan, *Mulan* (1998); Tzipporah, *Prince of Egypt* (1998); Annie Hughes, *The Iron Giant* (1999); Jane, *Tarzan* (1999); Jessie, *Toy Story 2* (1999); Chicha, *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000) and Chel, *The Road to El Dorado* (2000). (Fig. 2) The first 10 of these female characters have faces which are practically identical. Their pale complexion, soft features, big eyes, small mouths, small round noses, long fluttery eyelashes and thin eyebrows mean that these women and girls have very few differences between them. This is regardless of the fact that they range from six (Penny) to forty three

¹⁴ Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe, "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film" in *Popular communication*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2003, pp. 89-109, DOI: 10.1207/ S15405710PC0102_2

(Anita) years of age. They all have natural, mostly fair hair except for Ariel with her iconic bright red locks.



Fig. 2

We begin to see more diversity between 1991 and 2000. Even in these more diverse characters, there is still more similarity than difference. All of them are petite girls with a tiny waist (I'll be returning to their body shape later) who still have big eyes and small mouths and noses regardless of the slightly wider range of skin and hair colours.

Looking at this shows us that during this time period of 1937-2000, there was a fairly definitive illustration of what good women should look like. It should therefore come as no surprise that it is in the deviation from this where we find ourselves with the design of the female villains of the time. Where the heroines features are small and neat, the villains' are exaggerated. Where the good characters are slender and delicate, the villains are too narrow, too wide, too short or too tall.

There are definite visual statements made in this era in regards to body type. In terms of body shape, the villains tend to lean towards the extremes and being too 'something' compared to the heroine- whether that be wide or narrow, tall or small.



Fig. 3

Before looking at the villains we should first have a look at the trend in body shapes of our heroines. While the range of shape and size differs significantly in our villains, the same cannot be said of the heroines. If we take a look at the human adult counterparts of this era's villains (Fig. 3) we can see that they are extremely similar. The outlier of the group is obviously Chicha at the end who is pregnant for the duration of the film but even from the one shot at the end of the film when she has given birth (Fig. 4) we can see that she does bear quite a resemblance to the rest of the group. It is also clear to see the evolution of the ever-shrinking waist:

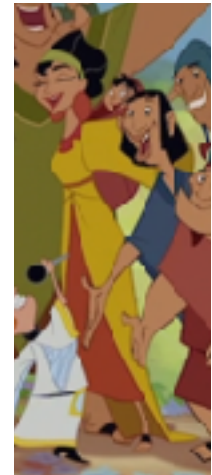


Fig. 4

“although Snow White starts off incredibly thin, as time goes by the princesses only get thinner and thinner.”¹⁵

Snow White Begins the line with a slender waist to start with but we see this shrink until Ariel's is barely wider than her arm. There is also a lengthening and slendering of the neck as well as the wrists growing smaller. From cinderella onwards all the characters have a slightly fuller chest, which along with the tiny waist suggest a more hourglass figure. All of these women are of 'average' height - that being a small and 'appropriate' amount shorter than the men they are surrounded by. The repeated portrayal of a good female character as being slim with a minute waist, neck and wrists.

In the cases where the female villain hails from any category other than this slender, idealised shape, their body type or size is brought to our attention. For example Alice calls the Queen of Hearts a “fat, pompous, bad-tempered, old tyrant” or Ursula describes herself as “wasted away to practically nothing! [...] and practically starving” as she gestures to her body and drapes herself dramatically (Fig. 5) across the screen as she moves into the light; all emphasising her large body.



Fig. 5

¹⁵ J. “Disney Princesses & Disappearing Waistlines” Sunfollower.wordpress.com. Apr. 22 2009. Web. Mar. 19 2022



Fig. 6

The Queen of Hearts is the first example we see of a female villain with a body type other than slim. She dwarfs Alice when the two appear on screen together. (Fig.6) While the two villains preceding her are much more reserved and calculating, the queen is much louder with an extremely short temper. It doesn't seem to be a coincidence that this change to her larger attitude has been matched with a larger presence. Then when we return to a skinnier body shape next with Maleficent, we return to a more reserved and cunning attitude.

Ursula is also significantly wider than any of the other characters in *The Little Mermaid*. She is also the only humanoid character to live under the sea who does not have a fish tail; she instead possesses the tentacles of an octopus. This is another way of highlighting that her body is something which immediately differentiates her from the rest of the merpeople, othering her from the outset.

These villains are a very clear contrast to our already slim heroines. There is a definite and undeniable message about body image and what is acceptable versus what isn't.¹⁶ From these visuals it is clearly more desirable to be slim than wide. On the other hand, we are then shown that being too thin is equally as unappealing as being too large is. Cruella De Vil illustrates this nicely for us. (Fig. 7) John Grant describes her in his encyclopaedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters:

“Cruella is a fabulous caricature. Her desperately thin body is a physiological impossibility, yet it is perfectly attuned to her character, so that no viewer worries about this.”¹⁷

¹⁶ See Appendix 2 - Desexualisation of Villains

¹⁷ p267 Grant, John. *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters: From Mickey Mouse to Hercules* — 3rd ed. New York: Hyperion, 1998. Print

Indeed, Cruella's physicality is just as sharp and exaggerated as her personality. She has a skeletal presence and Roger likens her to different creatures including a "spider", "vampire bat" and "inhuman beast" in his song about her.

The villainesses of this era were often the only characters whose skin was not an 'inoffensive', bland shade of peach. For example, Maleficent is a green hue (Fig. 8), Cruella is grey (Fig. 9) and Ursula is a shade of purple.

In cases where the other characters were meant to be people of colour such as in the *Emperor's New Groove* which is set in an Incan Empire (Modern Day Peru), the villain is the only character to be seen with her opposing shade of skin (Fig. 10). With the lack of people of colour existing in the animated universe, this differentiation of the villains based on their skin tone is a subtle but definitive statement which others and vilifies skin tones which are different from the majority.



Fig. 7

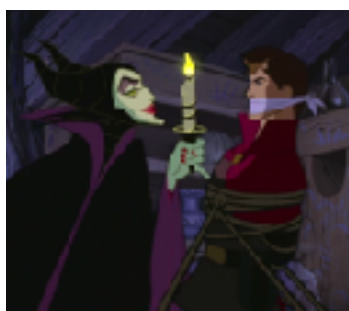


Fig. 8



Fig. 9

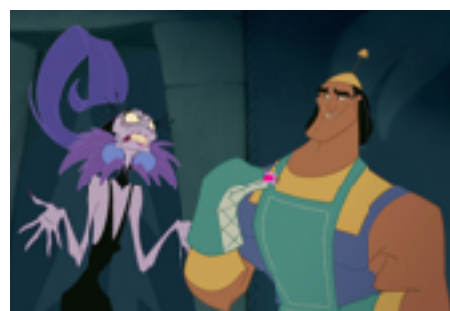


Fig. 10

Where the heroines have soft, feminine features the villains' are exaggerated, pointed or bulbous. Any of the good characters who may be slightly older must still carry a youthful grace while age is etched into the faces of the villainesses.

Ageing is one of the things which is very much highlighted in our female villains. Society has never been kind to the ageing woman, often accusing them of being witches¹⁸. So it should come as no surprise that the older woman is shown to be a synonym with badness. Something which unites our female heroines is the smoothness of their skin.

¹⁸ Ramadan Elnahla, Nada. "Aging With Disney and the Gendering of Evil" in *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Feb. 2015, pp. 114-127. doi: 10.17265/2159-5836/2015.02.004



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

The only lines deemed necessary on their faces are used only to pick out their features, even with more mature female characters like Anita (Fig. 11)— and sometimes they barely even do that, we can see that Pocahontas' nose is only shown by her nostrils (Fig. 12). Their feminine beauty lies in their youth. Our villainesses however often have lines to accentuate their wrinkles (Fig. 13), eye bags or nasolabial folds (Fig. 14). Their skin is depicted as loose and saggy or you can clearly see their bones (Fig. 15) and some of them are depicted with greying or white hair (Fig. 16). If any of the villainesses are older, this is often brought to the attention of the audience; Kuzco introducing Yzma as “Living proof that dinosaurs once roamed the earth” or Madam Mim self proclaiming to Arthur that she’s “an ugly old creep”

“By continually depicting aging as negative, the media creates a society that denies and mistrusts all persons who are past their youth”¹⁹



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

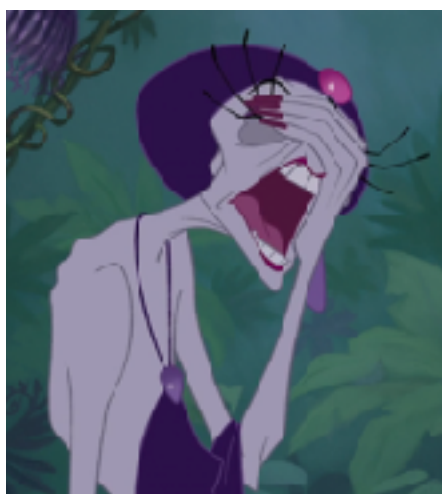


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

these women is meant to make them undesirable and unpleasant.

¹⁹ Ramadan Elnahla, Nada. “Aging With Disney and the Gendering of Evil” in *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Feb. 2015, pp. 114-127. doi: 10.17265/2159-5836/2015.02.004

These characters' physical appearances along with their villainous personas create a parallel between their body types and evil, when contrasted with the rest of the characters. Both personally and physically, they are the only person with these qualities, so naturally the audience will make a subconscious connection between the two.

Another one of the ways in which the villains were set aside from the other characters in this era was through the use of queer coding. This was caused largely in part by the Motion Picture Production Code of censorship in America, popularly known as the 'Hayes' code.^{20 21} The Hayes code came into being/practice in 1934 and ruled over Hollywood until the early 60s; many associate the end of the Hayes code era with the release of the Film *Some Like it Hot*. This was a film which violated the Hayes code with the very concept of the film but was still allowed to be widely distributed.²²

The Hayes code stated that "Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation." One of the things listed as a violation of these laws was 'sex perversion', which alluded to homosexuality. This meant that to show any queer characters, they must be framed as the villain. As a result, a trend was created of queer²³ coding the villain. The code also required evil to be punished or vanquished by the end of the film so as not to present it alluringly to the audience.

This as a result, meant that queer coded characters, who were already tied to the evil roles, must be punished by the end of the film and were often killed off.

²⁰ Black, Gregory D.. "Hollywood censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940" in *Film History*, Vol. 3, 1989, pp.167-189. Print.

²¹ See appendix 3 - Hayes Code for how this code came about

²² Mondello, Bob "Remembering Hollywood's Hays Code, 40 Years On" npr.org. Aug. 8 2008. Web. Apr. 1 2022

²³ I would like to acknowledge that the word queer has been used as an insult in the past but has in more recent times been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community. Any time I use the word queer I use it in a descriptive way and do not wish to attach any negative connotations to the word.

“even the evil elements seem to be coming out on her side until one of them — a bolt of lightning — destroys her. This is the nearest concept that the film gets to the old moral concept that the evil shall fittingly be destroyed by evil.”²⁴

Queer coding and in this case, specifically lesbian coding, which happens in film and the media makes use of stereotypes which can be and often are offensive. Queer coding also relies heavily on the assumption that characters who are queer will mimic traits of the opposite sex. Queer coded male characters are often overly effeminate while queer coded female characters are often painted as more masculine.²⁵ There is a lot of lesbian coding which occurs in this first era of female villains.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

I have already discussed the fact that the villainesses are portrayed as older. One of the ways that female characters can be lesbian coded is if they are older, unmarried and childless. Lady Tremaine obviously has her two biological daughters and so is the only villain here who is not childless, but she is still older and unmarried in the film. Being unmarried applies to all but two of our era 1 villains, The Queen of Hearts and Mrs Tweedy; both of whom adopt an attitude of disinterest or disdain towards their husbands. The Evil Queen and Lady Tremaine are both stepmothers to the respective protagonists of their films and so have been married. However, neither of them show any sort of grief, mention their late husbands or seem to be anything other than happy and comfortable in their husband's former role. The remaining villains express no interest in men whatsoever and are instead only interested that their goal be attained, whether that be wealth, power, or a spotted fur coat. This is explicitly pointed out in some

of the films. Take Cruella for example during her first on-screen appearance when Anita

²⁴ p161 Grant, John. *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters: From Mickey Mouse to Hercules* — 3rd ed. New York: Hyperion, 1998. Print

²⁵ Russo, V. (1987). *The celluloid closet*. New York: Harper & Row. Quoted in Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe, "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film" in *Popular communication*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2003, pp. 89-109, DOI: 10.1207/ S15405710PC0102_2

comments on her new fur coat: “My only true love, darling. I live for furs. I worship furs!” Cruella is flagrantly declaring that her love lies solely in her material possessions.

The villainesses are frequently queer coded in their appearance also. This is done through giving the villains masculine features. Often the villainesses are very tall. Mrs Tweedy towers over her husband. As does Cruella over Anita, her miniscule frame offset by her height as well as her large hands and feet. (Fig. 17) They have sharp or strong jaws (Fig. 18) which contrast with the soft, rounded faces of the heroines. They also have deep voices. Ursula has one of the deepest voices regardless of gender of any animated villain to date.²⁶ Often the villainesses will have also short hair (Fig. 19) or their hair will be covered (Fig. 20) (mimicking or suggesting short hair). Long hair is often associated with femininity and feminine beauty whereas short hair or more ‘boyish’ hairstyles are often a stereotype that is associated with lesbians; again feeding into the notion that gender non conformity is a sign of sexual deviance.²⁷ All of these are considered to be traditionally masculine attributes so the use of them in the villainesses designs gives them a transgressive performance of gender. Associating this with the villain simultaneously associates this practice with villainy.



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

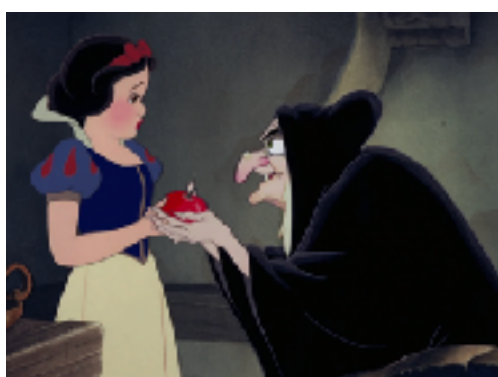


Fig. 21

Another device used in the queer coding of villains is the seduction.²⁸ The villain seduces the same-sex hero, in the case of this study, two female characters. The Evil Queen with the apple (Fig. 21), Maleficent with the spinning wheel, Ursula with the promise of becoming a human (Fig. 22), etc. This interaction is meant to feel wrong and unwholesome. The

²⁶ “What Makes Disney Villains so Gay?” *YouTube*, uploaded by Matt Baume, 20 Jun. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GswpUSEKSbk&ab_channel=MattBaume

²⁷ Russo, V. (1987). *The celluloid closet*. New York: Harper & Row. Quoted in Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe, “Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film” in *Popular communication*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2003, pp. 89-109, DOI: 10.1207/ S15405710PC0102_2

²⁸ “What Makes Disney Villains so Gay?” *YouTube*, uploaded by Matt Baume, 20 Jun. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GswpUSEKSbk&ab_channel=MattBaume

audience know that the hero allowing herself to be tempted by the villain will cause her problems and ill fortune. This in turn, reinforces a negative depiction of same sex relationships. It lends to the idea that there are negative consequences for those who allow themselves to be allured by those of the same sex. (Fig. 23) This depiction was allowed under the Hays code as it frames the female villain as the offender as she is the seductress and the hero is merely the victim of her crime.



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

This era is all about opposites. It's all about highlighting the hero's features by juxtaposing them in the villain character; creating a foil. At the beginning of the time in society that these films were created it was acceptable, or even required (under the Hayes code) to characterise these villains using stereotypes associated with minorities. Even despite the waves of feminism, civil rights movements, the end of the Hayes code and a general new air of consideration becoming the norm, the films were slow to catch up with these trends and so we don't see a huge shift in the attitudes of the filmmakers towards how the villains are depicted.

Chapter 2

Breaking Away From the Classic

Era 2 - from other to mother

A change starts to become apparent as we move into the 21st century. We see a new group emerge between 2004 and 2010. This group consists of: the Fairy Godmother, *Shrek 2* (2004); Madame Gasket, *Robots* (2005); Gladys Sharp, *Over the Hedge* (2006); Monster House/Constance Nebbercracker, *Monster House* (2006); Sour Kangaroo, *Horton Hears a Who* (2008) the Other Mother/Beldam, *Coraline* (2009) and Mother Gothel, *Tangled* (2010).

This era is predominantly made up of characters who are presented to us as mothers. 5 out of the 7 villains have a motherly role. Framing these mothers as villains creates an interesting commentary on society's views of motherhood. Lots of different terms for types of over-parenting styles were cropping up from the late 80s onwards. Some of these include helicopter parenting, snowplough parenting, lawnmower parenting and bulldozer parenting. These described the ways that parents would constantly hover around their children all the time or aggressively clear life's obstacles out of their way. This over involvement of parents was becoming more widespread and these phrases would more often refer to the mother rather than the father.²⁹ Numerous studies came out warning parents of the harm that these types of parenting were causing to children. It makes sense that following their rise in popularity, these practices and their observed results would eventually trickle down into animated films. This over parenting shows itself in different ways with the mothers of this era but it is clearly a huge influence in why this family role suddenly implies villainy.

The characters who are defined as villains by virtue of their being mothers can be broken into two groups.³⁰ The first group of which is the true mothers: the Fairy Godmother and Madame Gasket. Both of the subgroups are quite controlling and manipulative, but this group do this to

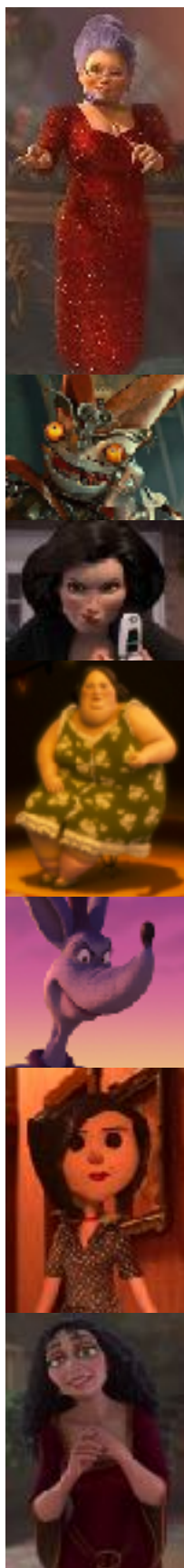


Fig. 24

²⁹ Ellie Lee and Jan MacVarish, "The 'helicopter parent' and the paradox of intensive parenting in the 21st century" in *Lien Social at Politiques*, No. 85, 2020, pp. 19-42.

³⁰ See appendix 4 - Sour Kangaroo analysis of her relationship to her motherly role

guarantee the success of their child so that they can reap the benefits. They revel in their motherhood (fig. 25) and are quite overbearing, obsessing and fawning over their children and controlling their every move. (fig. 26) It seems that they would go any lengths to ensure the victory of their children without concern for others or the destruction that they might cause. This sort of parenting style is similar to those discussed above; they are constantly surveilling their child and getting rid of the obstacles in their way for them. It has been shown that there is harm in this kind of parenting³¹ but these mothers pay no regard to this. Albeit in this case the stakes are much higher than we would usually see in the real world because the characters' status in society is higher and

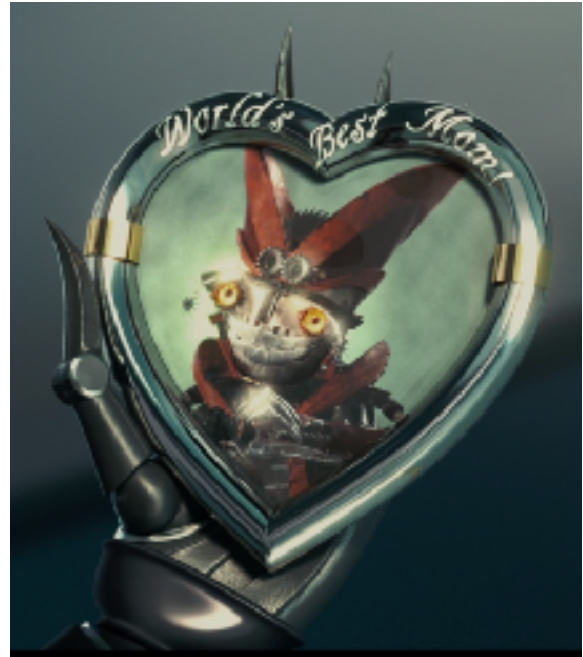


Fig. 25

therefore they are in control of more.



Fig. 26

Constance Nebbercracker bears most similarities with this group. She is not a mother and actually hates children in *Monster House* because of how they treated her. However, in the same way that the true mothers are completely and utterly devoted to their role as a mother, Constance is

devoted to her role as Mr. Nebbercracker's wife. She is driven purely by her love for her husband and does not have a separate goal which she is trying to achieve, unlike the true mothers. Her success and happiness lies in her completion of the role of being a wife itself, rather than using this as a means to acquire something else. It is interesting to see that while she is not a mother, she still falls into the category of having a very traditionally feminine role at the centre of her story. This gives six out of seven of this era's villains

³¹ ³¹ Ellie Lee and Jan MacVarish, "The 'helicopter parent' and the paradox of intensive parenting in the 21st century" in *Lien Social et Politiques*, No. 85, 2020, pp. 19-42.

these more domestic roles, which is a huge shift from the previous era, where we barely saw these kind of roles in the villains at all.

The second group of mothers are the manipulative mothers: the Other Mother and Mother Gothel. Unlike the true mothers, the manipulative mothers exploit their motherhood merely as a necessity to get what they want, regardless of the wellbeing of the child. What they are trying to gain from the relationship comes directly from the child rather than as a result of the child's actions; youth from Rapunzel's hair (Fig. 27) for Mother Gothel, Coraline's eyes (Fig. 28) for the Other Mother. These mothers also differ from the first group in that they are not the birth mothers of the children in their care, they are only acting as mothers to achieve a goal. They are not step mothers as the child is convinced of their maternity.



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

Fig. 30 *Tangled*.

The fact that they are older, childless women preying on young girls harps back to the queer coding which we saw in the first era. These characters are also guilty of the 'seduction' trope; another aspect of queer coding. In *Coraline*, the Other Mother tempts Coraline with a better life (Fig. 29) than the one she has and in *Tangled*, Mother Gothel keeps Rapunzel in the tower with the promise of safety and family. (Fig. 30) In several cases this seduction gets in the way of the romance plot between the protagonist and her male love interest, namely in *Shrek 2* and *Tangled*.

The villainesses are also still being queer coded themselves. Most of them do not have a male love interest. This reinforces the 'older unmarried' stereotype which we saw in the

first era as a way of lesbian coding characters. Even as mothers, in most instances the fathers to their children are nowhere to be seen and when there is a father figure present the mother bears little or no interest in him. In *Coraline* where there is the Other Father it quickly becomes clear that he is entirely under the control of the Other Mother in the same way that she controls the other characters around her like puppets. From this we see that her relationship to him in its heteronormativity is nothing more than a facade and he is merely a pawn in her game. It's a power dynamic which she controls and that is all there is to it.

Another link that we can see between motherhood and villainy with some of these women is through the queer coding of their sons. An idea emerged in the mid 20th century that maternal overprotection led to homosexuality in men.

“Harping on the dangers of both maternal overprotection and maternal rejection, they pointed to poor mothering as the cause of everything from homosexuality to autism to schizophrenia.”³²

Because Prince Charming and Ratchet are so heavily queer coded as well as clearly being extremely dependant on their mothers, this vilifies the Fairy Godmother and Madame Gasket as they are the source of their sons' queerness and their sons are merely the 'victims' of it.

In this era we see the beginnings of the hidden villain trend which will become more prevalent in era 3. The hidden villain here refers to villains which the audience is introduced to as a good character before their true colours are revealed. It had happened before that the villain might be introduced or known to the main character as a good person when the audience are aware of their villainous nature e.g. Yzma or the Evil Queen, and in this era Mother Gothel. However the difference which we start to see here is when the villains are introduced to the *audience* as good characters too. We have two examples of this within this era, the fairy godmother and the Other Mother.

What is important to note about the hidden villain who is concealed from the audience is that the villain's character design cannot suggest to the audience that they are evil. It was

³² Plant, Rebecca Jo. “Motherhood.” in *Rethinking Therapeutic Culture*, ed. Timothy Aubry and Trysh Travis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 72–84. Print.

believed in the early days of criminology that criminality and physical appearance were related. Later in the 1970s it was argued that this was not, in fact, the case.³³ It is this evolving understanding of the wider perception of criminals' appearances that is a clear influence on the introduction of the trend of hidden villains. As we can see from our first era of villains, change in the media is slow. It takes a while for our films to catch up and reflect the change that happens in the world.

Similarly, the Sour Kangaroo is the first example we see of the 'forgiven villain'. This trope reinforces the fact that people aren't bad through and through. It is the first time that we are told that the villain is able to feel remorse and change their ways. Their villainy is not all encompassing, it is merely a part of their personality.

These changes in attitudes towards the villains had an effect on how the character design represented their role as villain — or rather, didn't. In this era there is much less of an emphasis on extreme body shapes to represent evil. The example that would come closest to our era 1 depictions would be the Other Mother after her transformation into the Beldam where she becomes increasingly thin until she resembles a spider-like creature. (Fig. 31) There is a parallel here between her and Cruella de vil when Cruella is likened to a spider in Roger's song about her. The Beldam is the only villainess who represents an overly thin body type so we can see that this image has very much detached itself from being evil.



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

This depiction of the Beldam places a lot less emphasis on making a statement on being

³³ R. H. C. Bull and J. Green. "The Relationship between Physical Appearance and Criminality" in *Medicine, Science and the Law*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1980, pp. 79-83. Print.

extremely thin and instead uses this image to suggest her likeness to a spider. This is reinforced by the fact that the floor of the room turns into a sort of spider's web during the climax of the film. (Fig. 32) Her evil comes from her likeness to the arachnid and suggests something very inhuman rather taking her divergence from the good body type as the statement of her evil.

We also see more positive body representation. In *Monster House*, Constance Nebbercracker is extremely overweight, so much so that she's mocked in the circus for her looks. (Fig. 33) This is extremely positive

considering the substantial stigma towards overweight bodies which was (and still is) present in society.³⁴

However, Mr Nebbercracker loves her regardless (fig. 34) and in this section of the movie where we see what

Constance looked like before her soul possessed the house she is represented as mistreated rather than evil. It also sends a very strong message about how it is wrong to treat larger people badly.

This is a healthy move away from the treatment of the heavier villains in the first era.



Fig. 33

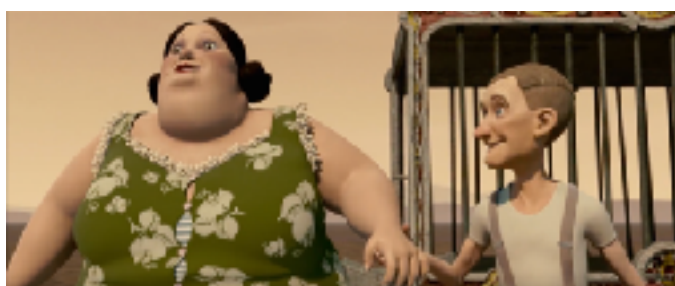


Fig. 34



Fig. 35

Otherwise the villains have a similar generic slim figure. (Fig. 35) This lines up with our new concept of hidden villains. This makes the villains more difficult to single out based solely on their looks and therefore more similar to the character design of the heroines.

³⁴ p.52 Harjunen, Hannele. *Women and Fat: Approaches to the Social Studies of Fatness*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2009. Print.

All of these villainesses who are human are white. (Fig. 36) Even the non-human characters, Madame Gasket and Sour Kangaroo, have lighter coloured faces as if to suggest whiteness. (Fig. 37 & 38) They may have darker colourings on their bodies but these are more a representation of garments rather than actual skin tone. From this we can see that the animated films have moved away from using a different skin tone from the other characters to suggest otherness and villainy. With the civil rights movements, banning of hate speech and any other general racial issues being brought to the forefront, it was very much overdue that animated films caught up with society and stopped using difference of skin colour as a shorthand for evil.



Fig. 37



Fig. 38

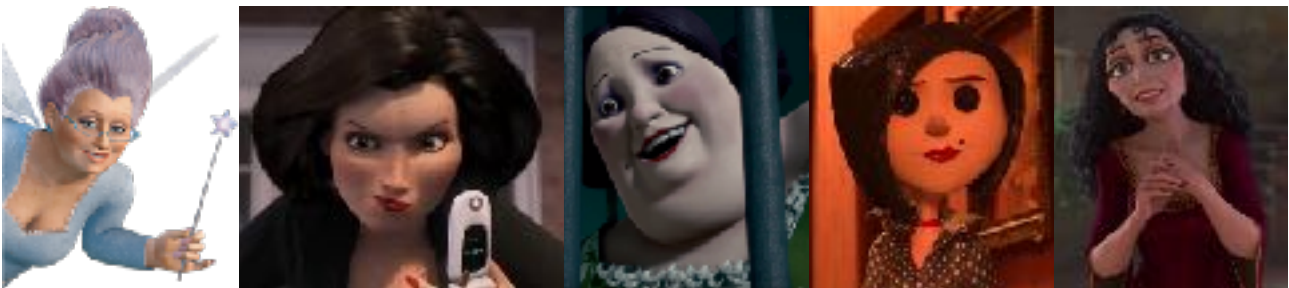


Fig. 36

Ageing still plays a part in identifying the villain although for the most part it is slightly more subtle in this era. The demographic of women that we see here is more middle aged, so a little younger than the previous era. This move toward middle aged villains is likely influenced by the attitude toward middle age in recent decades.

“To put mid-life culture into a nutshell, during the last twenty to thirty years middle age has increasingly become a cause for concern.”³⁵

³⁵ M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B.S Turner. “The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course”. *The Body: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. Vol. 1. Eds. The Aberdeen Body Group. London: Routledge, 2004. 389-404. Print.

Signs of ageing are not obvious on the faces of these villains. They don't have defined wrinkles and generally instead have a smoother complexion.

The Fairy Godmother is the only villain who is depicted with grey or white hair.

There is an exception of course with Mother Gothel.

Gothel's whole storyline revolves around ageing, or rather her evasion of it. At various points through the film we can see signs of her ageing slightly before she can use Rapunzel's hair to make her young again. In the first scene that we encounter Gothel in the film, excluding the prologue at the beginning, one of her first exchanges with Rapunzel is telling her to hurry up by saying "I'm not getting any younger down here," and as soon as she comes inside the first thing she does is go to the mirror and express distaste at the signs of ageing which she can see; grey hair, wrinkles and liver spots. (Fig. 39)

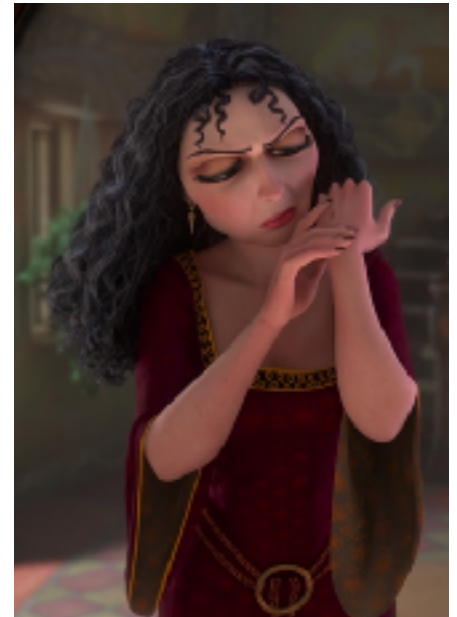


Fig. 39

"With villains like Mother Gothel, Disney reinforces the demonization of age, power, independence, and lack of family for female characters, therefore furthering the idea that these are undesirable characteristics for women."³⁶



Fig. 40



Fig. 41

At the end of the film when Rapunzel's hair is cut all the years of ageing which Gothel had been keeping at bay catch up with her and she ages rapidly into an old woman. (Fig. 40)

³⁶ Rivera, Sasha. "The Development and Impact of the Female Villain on Modern Women" academia.edu. Alexandra Rivera, Dec. 2015. Web. 28 Mar. 2022.

As this happens she is consumed with horror and disgust at her own appearance, clutching her hood (Fig. 41) over her face, repeatedly screaming “no” and “what have you done?”. This being the only depiction of an elderly female character in the main characters of this era sends a very anti-age message. The only depiction of a character ageing is shown through the context of her worse nightmare coming true.

Although in most of the films there is less of an emphasis on vilifying ageing, *Tangled* singlehandedly sends a stronger anti-age sentiment than we have seen in any of the films so far; across both eras. While in era 1 villains were portrayed as older as a way to make them unappealing, the ageing illustrated in *Tangled* is downright horrifying to the characters. The complete and utter anguish experienced by Gothel simply because she looks older firmly asserts that ageing should be looked on as a negative thing.

“for children who spend a significant amount of time watching Disney animated films and whose experience and exposure to older people is limited, such images and depictions can have a powerful impact on their perceptions of older people and can influence the way in which they interact with older individuals”³⁷

Overall, in this era we see a mostly positive shift in the portrayal of our female villains. There is less of an emphasis on using body type or skin colour to distinguish the villains. There is still a negative connection between the villains and ageing through the strong depiction of a singular demographic (middle aged women) and the extremely negative depiction of ageing in *Tangled* by Mother Gothel. It is interesting to see these women have a role other than being the villain in their respective films and even more so that this role was nearly unanimously that of being a mother.

³⁷ Robinson, T., Callister, M., Magoffin, D., and Moore, J. “The portrayal of older characters in Disney animated films” in *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2007. pp. 203-213.

Era 3 - from mother to us

Between 1937 and 2022 there has been exponential progress in rights and attitudes for and toward minorities. There is a continually changing political climate which centres around inclusivity as well as an increased awareness and passion for social issues in audiences. As a result, filmmakers are going to lengths to be inclusive and not to offend their audiences.

The last and most recent group of villains are Agatha Prenderghast, *ParaNorman* (2012); Chantel Dubois, *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* (2012); Te Kā, *Moana* (2016); Dawn Bellwether, *Zootopia* (2016); Evelyn Deavor, *Incredibles 2* (2018); Gabby Gabby, *Toy Story 4* (2019); Virana Ray and the Last Dragon (2021) and Pal, *The Mitchells vs. The Machines* (2021).

These villains appeared between 2012 and 2021 and there is much more diversity in the kinds of villains seen in this section. Hidden and forgiven villains are much more prevalent here. This is a large factor in their character design being more varied. However, I will also discuss how some of the ways in which we have seen the previous eras' villains be characterised are still being used to identify these characters as villains.

Something which we began to see in era 2 but which becomes much more prevalent in this era are the ideas of both the hidden and forgiven villain. This trend of hidden villains has been shown to be more popular in today's animated films.³⁸ Five of this era's eight villains are introduced to us as good. Only six of the villains I studied across all the eras ended up good at the end of the film and four of those are from this era (Agatha, Te Ka, Virana and Gabby Gabby). Virana and Gabby Gabby³⁹ are both hidden *and* forgiven villains, the only ones of their kind in this study. Chantel Dubois is the only villain here who is depicted as bad at both the beginning and end of the film.⁴⁰ This shows us the shift



Fig. 42

³⁸ Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Sarah Helene Schmidt, "Disney's Shifting Visions of Villainy from the 1990s to the 2010s: A Biocultural Analysis" in *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2019

³⁹ See appendix 5 for analysis of Gabby Gabby's introduction and what it tells us about the hidden villain trend

⁴⁰ See appendix 1 for hidden & forgiven diagram of female villains

which has happened since the first era, where the villains were depicted as bad through and through and this was often reinforced through harmful stereotypes. Now the villains have to be more similar to the good characters to be easily able to feign their innocence convincingly.

The good characters have similar body types. (Fig. 43) They continue to sport the tiny waists that we have seen all the way through the good female characters.⁴¹ In general the ideal for women in terms of visuals has barely changed since the beginning of the animated feature's popularity in 1937.⁴²



Fig. 43

In the adult human villains of this era; Chantel Dubois, Te kā⁴³, Evelyn Deavor, and Virana, three out of the four still share a very similar slim body shape. We are no longer seeing extreme body types to be synonymous with villainy and are actually seeing a common body shape which is quite similar to the common body shape found in our heroines. They are all of slim build and possess quite a small waist.

4 out of the 5 of the human villains are white. Dawn Bellwether also has a pale complexion despite being a sheep. Virana is the first woman of colour in the entire



Fig. 44

⁴¹ See appendix 6 for comparison of Rapunzel & Moana to show slight less extreme

⁴² See appendix 1 for comparison of all eras of body shape

⁴³ She isn't technically human but she has a human shape as opposed to Dawn being a sheep or Pal being a smartphone

group of villains I studied.⁴⁴ Virana being a women of colour is not a statement alluding to her villainy either, as the other characters in the film have a similar skin tone to her. (Fig. 44) Following on from the second era where we also saw that othering characters using their skin tone is unacceptable, it would seem that different skin tones are no longer being used as a way to identify the villain.

The majority of this group are mature adults. While the villains are, on average, older than the good female characters, there is not a particular emphasis placed on the age or specifically old age of the villains. We also see Agatha and Gabby Gabby in this era. These characters are by far the youngest of any of the villains that we have seen previously. These factors illustrate that ageing is becoming increasingly less of a shorthand for depicting villainy.

We are still seeing examples of queer coding used on our villains. Take Evelyn Deavor, the most obvious example of a queer coded villain in this era. We can see almost all of the characteristics of queer coding which I have discussed already present in Evelyn's character. Evelyn and Helen's (Elasticgirl) height and figure is quite similar. This allows the subtle differences in the ways in which Evelyn is queer coded to stand out more. Evelyn has a sharper jaw, shorter hair and a deeper, more husky voice. She can often be seen wearing a shirt and trousers (Fig. 45) and is shown to be an inventor who is very good at working with technology. The former image harps back to the traditional image of the 'working man' and the latter concept pushes us to the association of men with STEM interests and careers because of the current disproportionate ratio of men to women in these roles.^{45 46}



Fig. 45

She is childless and unmarried which greatly contrasts with the huge emphasis on Helen's family life and her role as mother and wife which is deeply examined as a subplot in the

⁴⁴ See appendix 7 - Jafar & villains of colour

⁴⁵ Cheryan, S., Plaut, V.C. "Explaining Underrepresentation: A Theory of Precluded Interest." in *Sex Roles*, 63, 2010, pp. 475–488, doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9835-x

⁴⁶ Catherine Hill, Ph.D., Christianne Corbett and Andresse St. Rose, Ed.D.. *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*. Washington: AAUW, 2010. Print.

film. Evelyn also makes definite use of ‘the seduction’ by offering Helen the opportunity to get her role as a superhero back. Evelyn coaches Helen in a more ‘traditionally’ seductive way.⁴⁷ It is a clear and thorough example of queer coding being used to villainise a character and illustrates that this is continuing to happen long after the Hayes code has been discarded.

One of the ways in which female villains can be queer coded is having lower voice. However, villains may also possess deeper voices because of the relation of lower voices to associations with dominance or aggression.

“low-er-pitched voices tend to be perceived as more dominant and less trustworthy than higher-pitched voices: “If voice pitch influences perceptions of trustworthiness, it may do so owing to associations between hormone levels and [aggressive, antisocial] behavior” (O’Connor and Barclay 2017, 506). These findings would suggest that villains, who tend to be centrally motivated by dominance (Carroll et al. 2012), should vocalize with a lower pitch than should heroes.”⁴⁸

This has often been seen in our previous villains, but in this era we are seeing more hidden villains than before. If a villain is meant to be concealed, their characterisation of villainy through a low vocal pitch is not appropriate. However, voice pitch is still being

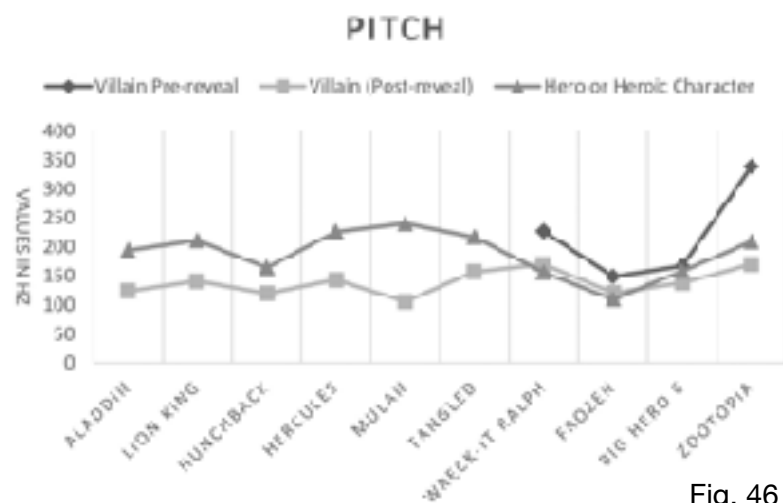


Fig. 46

used to characterise the villains once they expose their true identity. Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Schmidt found in their study that hidden villains tend to speak in a lower voice post reveal. (Fig. 46) Two of the villains from this study, Mother Gothel and Dawn Bellwether, were used in their report. It is clear that they adhere to this trend.

⁴⁷ See appendix 8 - Analysis of Evelyn Deavor’s traditional seduction

⁴⁸ Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Sarah Helene Schmidt, “Disney’s Shifting Visions of Villainy from the 1990s to the 2010s: A Biocultural Analysis” in *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2019

When I was collecting my data at the beginning of this project, it was clear that films without a clear central villain were few and far between in the earlier days of animation. However, our villains have gotten more complex and we have started to have a deeper understanding of people who may not be the same as us. We are also better at recognising and addressing the complexity of those close to us. As a result of these changes, it is becoming increasingly common for animated films to feature an antagonist in the film and leave out the villain.

In the 6 most recent films I looked at released since 2020⁴⁹, 4 of them featured an antagonist as opposed to a villain: *Onward* (Barley Lightfoot), *Soul* (Terry), *Encanto* (Abuela Alma) and *Turning Red* (Ming Lee). This kind of antagonist doesn't fit into our definition of villain as their intentions are not bad. Any harm which they cause is done accidentally while they are attempting to do good; whether that be for their job or their family. Three of these examples are a family member of the protagonist. Not only that, but their being a family member is what drives them as the antagonist. We have strayed so far from viewing villains as 'the other' that our new source of conflict is the protagonist's own family member, one of the closest possible people to them and one of the people who looks most like them. (Fig. 47, 48, 49) This further acknowledges the fact that people are complicated and doing bad things doesn't necessarily make someone evil. We had seen this previously with



Fig. 47



Fig. 48



Fig. 49

⁴⁹ *Onward*, *Soul*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, *The Mitchells vs. The Machines*, *Encanto*, *Turning Red*

the rise of the forgiven villain. Here however, it is done without even painting the person at the source of the conflict as the villain at all.

“Walt Disney Animation features began with clear presentations of binary oppositions, often mirroring and encouraging the binaries of society and culture. There was a clear line of good and evil, male and female, hero and villain. However, as society evolved the black and white lines blurred into gray areas, exposing different shades of gender, sexuality, and, most importantly, humanity and morals. The productions of Walt Disney started blurring their own binary oppositions.”⁵⁰

We no longer rely on these binaries of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and are instead looking at the world and its people in all of their messy complexity. By straying away from these binaries, we must also part with the binaries of ‘hero’ and ‘villain’ and introduce complexity on both sides.

The distinction between these more recent villains and the ones in our earlier eras is that they tell us that there are not specific traits that allow you to spot bad people, because people aren’t inherently evil, they’re only bad when they do bad things. The distinction promotes the idea that villains are around us and not necessarily in the ways that we think. They can be the sweet gentle person who has ulterior motives. It also warns us that we shouldn’t decide whether or not to trust someone purely based on what they look like. It’s a very positive shift in that it doesn’t rely on harmful stereotypes to single out the villain.

⁵⁰ Ourri, Angelica. “The Construction of Evil: The Evolution of Disney Villains from the Golden to the Revival Era” academia.edu. Angelica Ourri. 2017. Web. 28 Mar. 2022

Conclusion

The subject of my research holds the potential to say so much more. In the interest of time there was a multitude of things which had to be left unsaid. I would urge others to look into this topic. I was unfortunately only able to skim the surface but I hope that I could give a satisfying account of what I was able to find.

It is important to make note of this evolution of female villains as their portrayal is a good indication of society's attitude towards women in general. In contrasting them with the good characters and repeatedly associating certain features with female villains, it is reinforced that these features are inherently villainous. If those features are associated with a group of people, those people are vilified. By moving away from this practice of depicting them as minorities, we can see that society is becoming more understanding of women and accepting of the fact that just because a woman doesn't look like a Disney princess doesn't mean that she's evil.

In chapter 1 I looked at how female villains of the first era of my studies were characterised by their other-ness and their deviance from femininity. In examining the good characters of that time, I saw how there were definite ideals expected of women in terms of how they presented themselves. I found that these earlier villains' designs were defined by their non-conformity to the idealistic beauty standards of the good female characters. I also found that they were very much influenced by the Motion Picture Production Code of censorship (Hayes code). I noted that the villains of this era very much stood by those conventions even after the Hayes code went out of fashion and attitudes towards women and minorities were changing.

In chapter 2 I looked at the eras following on from the first era of the more classic villains.

In the first section of this chapter I looked at the ways in which female villains of the second era began to be less obviously othered. I also looked at the ways in which they were still being othered. I examined how there was a strong uptake in the use of mothers as villains and the correlation this had to the rise in over-parenting techniques. I also noted that this era was where we started to see the rise of the hidden and forgiven villain tropes, further affecting the characters' design so as not to prematurely reveal their identity to the audience.

The difference in the villains of the first and second eras is a huge shift. The second era is where we start seeing the societal changes and attitudes from the 20th century starting to apply themselves to animated villains. We can see that the extent to which the villains are othered has retreated slightly as there begins to be a clearer understanding and more of a cry for the celebration of differences rather than the vilification of them.

In the second section of chapter 2 I looked at the diversity that can be seen in the most recent era of female villains. I illustrated that using different ages, skin tones or body shapes is no longer common practice in the distinction of animated villains. I saw that there are still examples of othering (such as queer coding) being used but not as regularly and to a more subtle extent. I noted how there is much more of an emphasis on hidden and forgiven villains and again, as a result of this that the villains must be created to look more similar to the good characters in animated film. I also briefly looked at the switch from villain to antagonist and how that follows on from our trend of hidden villains.

“The representation of good and heroic characters should increasingly make use of representational characteristics of underrepresented and/or historically victimized groups. [...] By ironic contrast, the Hollywood villain should increasingly come to look and sound like the classical hero.”⁵¹

From my research it is clear that this change is beginning to happen. The way we are visually treating female villains is changing drastically. We are becoming more inclusive and aware that we shouldn't shun people or mark them for their differences. This has nurtured a new way of representing badness. Our new narratives tell us that being bad is something that may be difficult to spot and possible to forgive. They tell us that people are complex and they have multiple layers — if they are bad, that is only one of the aspects of who they are.

⁵¹ Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Sarah Helene Schmidt, “Disney’s Shifting Visions of Villainy from the 1990s to the 2010s: A Biocultural Analysis” in *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2019

Appendix 1 - Initial Research

Animation Studio	Year	Film	Male Protagonist	Male Antagonist	Wears Gender?	Wears gender	Same gender as hero	Looks Human	Looks like hero	Same species as hero	Body	Height	Same as Hero	Same as Hero	Age	Humanform hero	Human form as	Species(s)	Secondary Antagonist/ function	Killed off
Disney	1987	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	Snow White	Evil Queen	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Tall	Y	Adult	Y	N				Yes, chased off after becoming queen
Disney	1987	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	Snow White	Evil Queen as witch	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Short	Y	Old	Y	N				?
Disney	1990	Cinderella	Cinderella	Lady Tremaine	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Tall	Y	Old	N	N	N	Orsola & Anastasia	Lucifer	Yes, but not until after becoming queen
Disney	1991	Aladdin in Wonderland	Aladdin	Queen of Hearts	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Short	N	Adult	N	N	N	King		Yes, she's in a dream and Aladdin wakes up
Disney	1993	Lady and the Tramp	Lady	mean man	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Lucky		Y	Old	N	N				Yes, but not until 1993
Disney	1993	Sleeping Beauty	Aurora	Maleficent	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Yes	Tall	N	Adult	N	N			Phantom	Yes, after she drops to Phoenix's magic sword
Disney	1997	One Hundred and One Dalmatians	Roger	Cruella De Vil	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Stumpy	Tall	Y	Adult	N	N		Jasper and Horace Badger		Yes, drove off in car
Disney	1998	The Secret in the Woods	Arthur	Madam Mim	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Lucky	Short	Y	Old	N	N				Yes, infected by Merlin as a germ
Disney	1999	The Little Mermaid	Ariel	Ursula	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Yes	Tall	Y	Old	N	N	N	Flotsam & Jetsam		Yes, impaled underwater
Disney	1999	The Tiggering of	Winnie	Winn	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Stumpy		Y	Adult	Y	N				Yes, falls into river
Disney/Sony/Pantheon	2000	Chicken Run	Ginger	Miss Tweedy	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Stumpy	Tall	Y	Adult	N	N		Mr Tweedy		Yes
Disney	2000	The Emperor's New Groove	Kuzco	Yzma	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Stumpy	Tall	N	Old	Y	N		Yzma's Pigeon hawks		Yes, turns into killer
Pixar	2003	Finding Nemo	Martin	Doris	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Yes	short	N	Child	N	N				Yes, but behind when Mr. Sherman
Disney/Sony	2004	Shrek 2	Shrek	Fairy Godmother	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Yes		Y	Old	Y	Y			Prince Charming	Yes, turned into a troll for her own magic
Blue Sky	2005	Robots	Robbie	Madame Gasket	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Yes	Y	Adult	N	N	N		Reichert		Yes, burnt in furnace
Disney/Sony	2006	Over the Hedge	RJ	Stanley Sharp	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Yes	Y	Adult	N	N			Vivian		Yes, arrested
Sony Animation	2006	Monster House	D. Walters	Constance Nebbercracker	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Yes	Y	Adult	N	N	N		Mr Nebbercracker		Yes, house became sentient and ate him
Sony Animation	2006	Monster House	D. Walters	House	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Yes		Y	Adult	N	N		?		?
Blue Sky	2006	Robot Herd & Wife	Robert	Star Kangaroo	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Lucky		Y	Adult	N	N				Yes, forgotten
Sony	2006	Coatline	Coatline	William Wallace	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes		Y	Adult	Y	Y		Queen Elizabeth		Yes, but she's alive and in prison
Lake	2006	Coatline	Coatline	Baldan	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Stumpy	Tall	Y	Adult	Y	Y		?		?
Disney	2010	Tangled	Rapunzel	Mother Gothel	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes		Y	Old & Adult	Y	N				Yes, caught growth too off
Lake	2010	Paranorman	Norman	Agatha Appleton	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Short	Y	Child	N	N				Yes, was trapped in
Lake	2010	Paranorman	Norman	The witch abduct	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Yes		Y	Adult	N	N				?
Disney/Sony	2010	Wrecking Ball & Kung Fu Panda Master	Kitty	Chow Chow	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Lucky		N	Adult	N	N		Police		Yes, shot with a tranquilizer
Pixar	2010	Inside Job	Jim	Sachs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	short	Y	Y Adult	?	?				Yes, forgotten
Disney	2010	Monsters	Maria	Te'ed	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Yes	Tall	Y	Adult	N	N			Tamara	Yes, but not until after she was married
Disney	2010	Enchanted	Andy	Queen Beowitcher	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Short	Y	Adult	Y	Y				Yes, arrested
Pixar	2010	Incredibles 2	Mr. Incredible	Evylgen	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Yes	Yes	Adult	Y	Y				Yes, arrested
Pixar	2010	Toy Story 4	Woody	Galaxy Salty	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Yes	Tall	Y	Child	Y	Y		Quinn		Yes, forgotten
Disney	2010	Ways across the Garden	Winn	Winn	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Yes		N	Child	Y	Y			Grand Ma	Yes, forgotten
Sony Animation	2021	The Mercs on the March	Kate	Pat	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Yes	Short	Y	Adult	Y	Y				Yes, dropped in ground while

Above is the spreadsheet which I made initially during my research to start collecting data

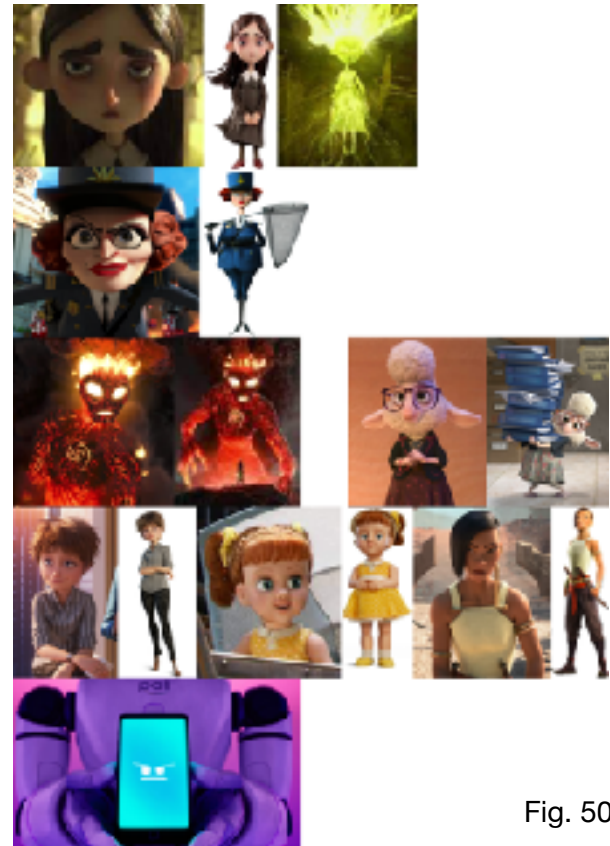
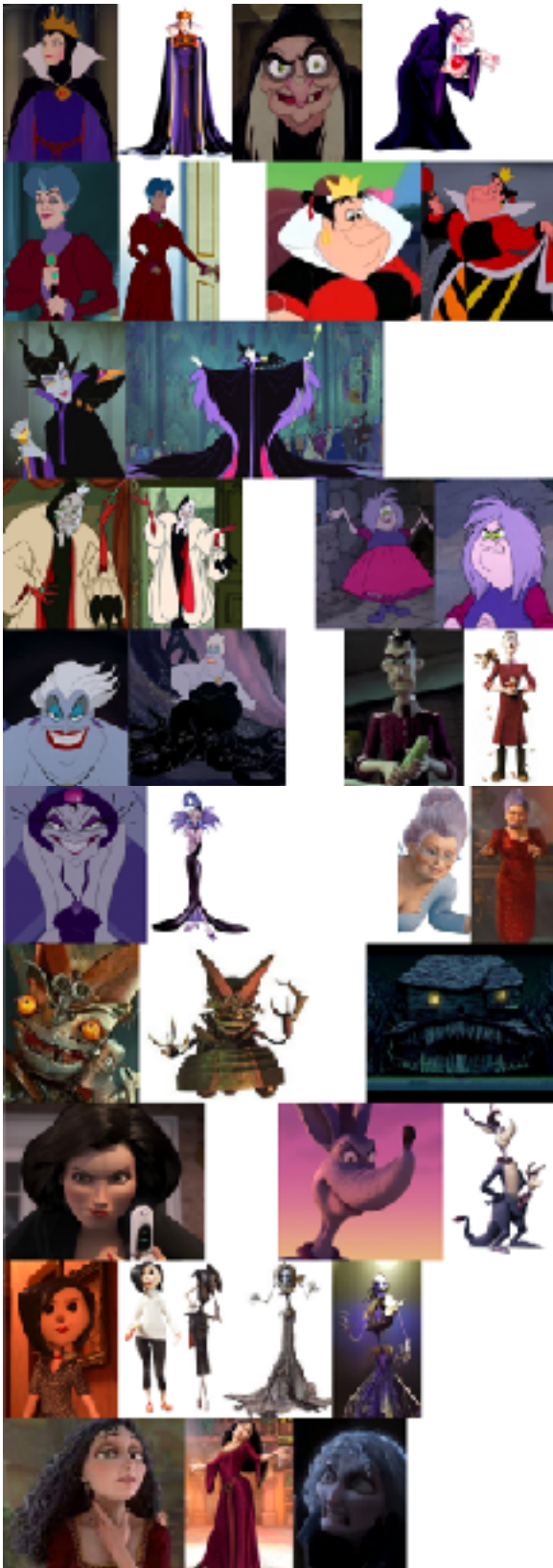


Fig. 50

These are the documents where I put images of the female villains in chronological order so as to find visual similarities and trends. They are to be followed left to right, top to bottom i.e. from the evil queen to Lady Tremaine to Maleficent to the Queen of Hearts and so on.

On the following pages there is a large version of the timeline that I made. (Fig. 51) This timeline includes the central villain (situated below years) as well as the most central good female character (situated above years) from popular theatrically released feature length animated films. There can be a smaller version found afterwards (fig. 52) to show more clearly the overall visual trends. This includes

the rise of both the production of animated films as well as the presence of male villains in animated films.

Main female good character
vs female Villains
Era 1



Fig. 54

On the previous page there is a visual timeline of the female villains in my study.

To the left and on the following two pages there are diagrams which compare the female villains of each era with the most central good female character in their film. Where possible I used human characters if the villain was human. I also made a note of whether the good female character included was the protagonist of the film.

To the right I am including the banners from the beginnings of each of the three eras as the visual differences even here are quite striking.

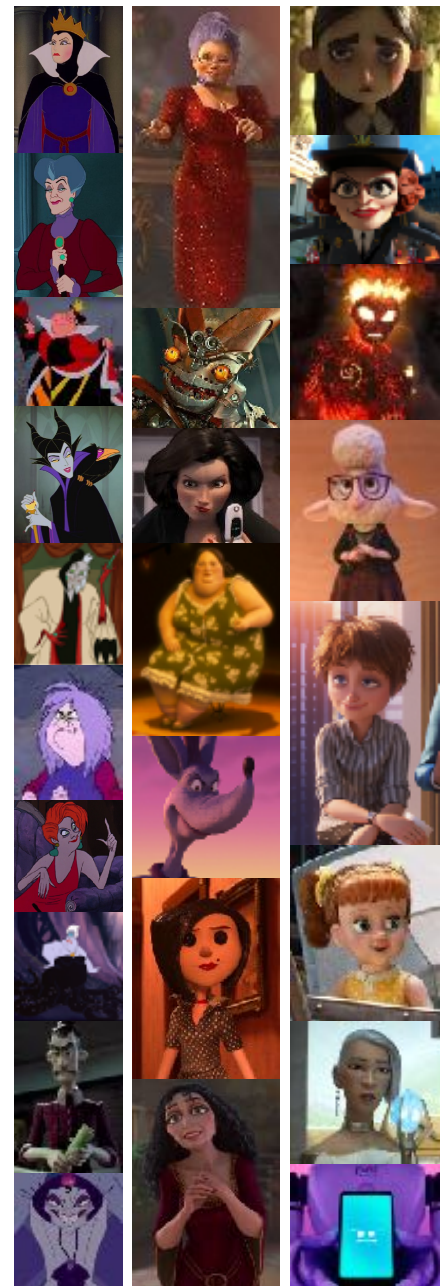
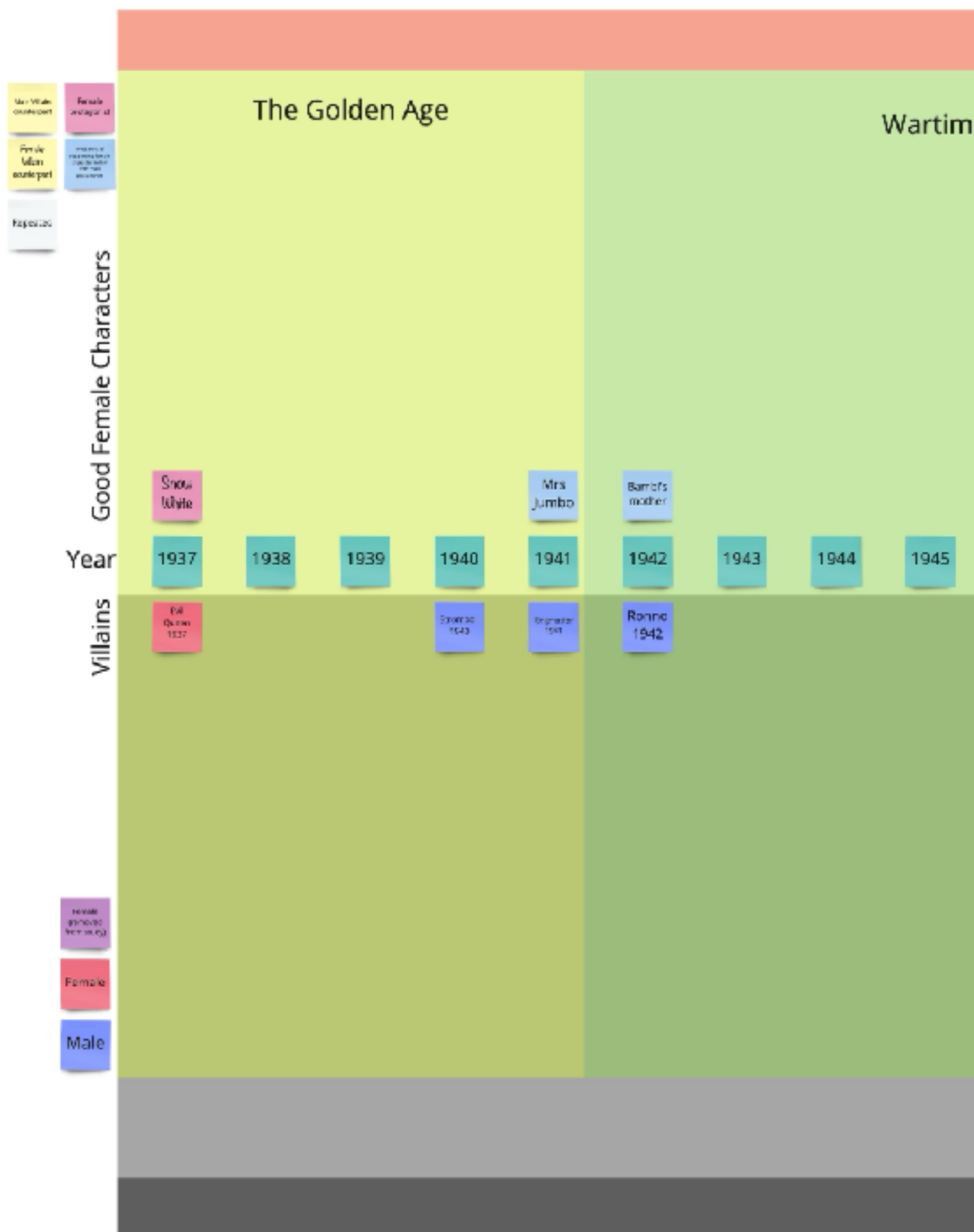


Fig. 55

Fig. 56

Fig. 57



e Era

1946

1947

1948

1949

Cinderella

1950

Alice

1951

1952

Wendy

1953

1954

Lady

1955

1956

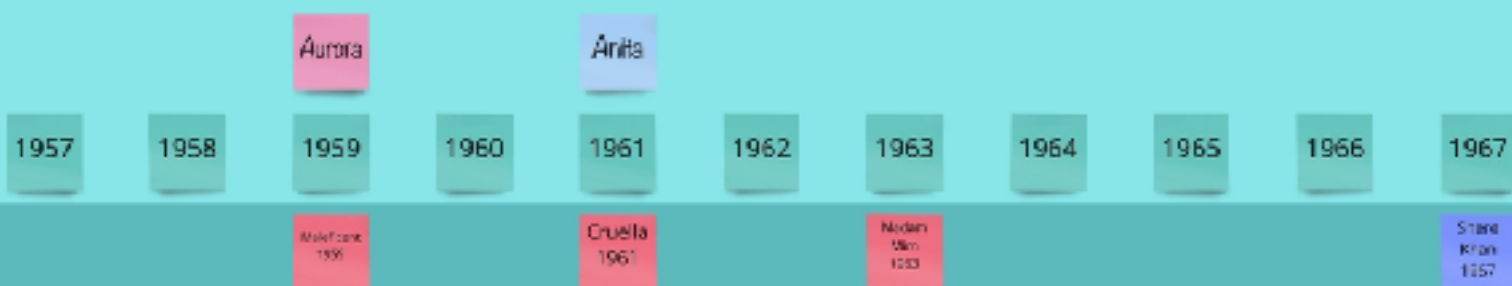
Lady
Tremaine
1950

Queen of
Hearts
1951

Captain
Hook
1953

Aunt
Satan
1955

The Silver Age



Beginning of
the second
wave of
feminism

Bronze Era

Duchess

Maid
MerianMiss
Blanca

1968

1969

1970

1971

1972

1973

1974

1975

1976

1977

1978

Edgar
Allan Poe
1970Prince
John
1973Madame
Modest
1977

Era 1

Disney Eras



Main Eras

Timeline

The Disney Renaissance

Disney's
Golden Age
of Animation
1937-1968

Belle

Jasmin

Sally

Odette

Arcadian

Emilia

Anastasia

Mulan

Anne
Hughes

Chicha

1990

1991

1992

1993

1994

1995

1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

Gaston
1991

Jafar
1992

Gepp
Beagle
1993

Scar
1994

Sid
Phillips
1995

Frollo
1996

Hades
1997

Shan Yu
1998

Stanley
Pete
1999

Mrs.
Turner
2000

Robert
1994

Geppert
Pardner
1995

Rasputin
1997

Pharaoh
Seb
1998

Clayton
1999

Yzma
2000

Hopper
1998

Kent
Mendley
1999

Tarzan
Khan
1998

Beginning
of the third
wave of
animation



Fig. 51

Main female good character
vs female Villains
Era 2



Fig. 58

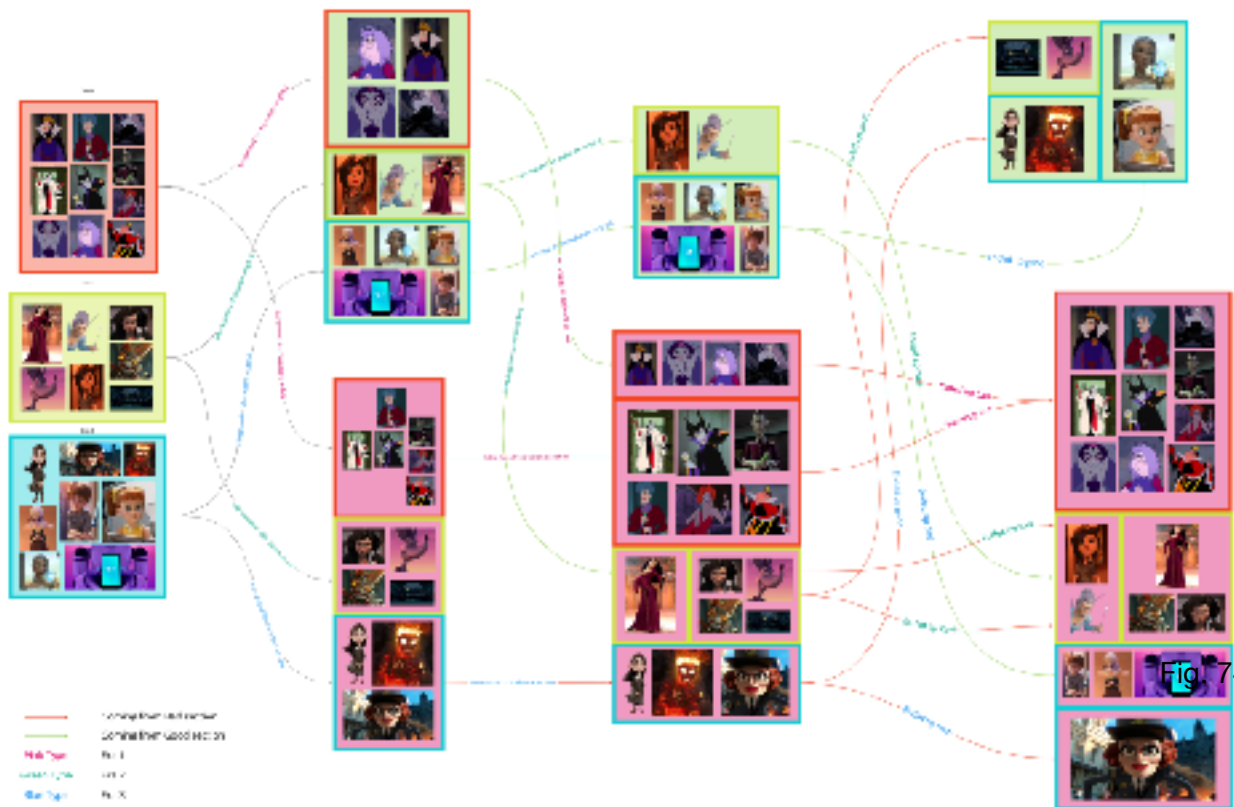


Fig. 74

Fig. 60

Above is the diagram I made which analyses whether the female villains in my study were

- Introduced to the other characters as good or bad
- Introduced to the audience as good or bad
- Whether they ended up good or bad at the end of the film.

Left we have the timeline of all the villains (male and female) and whether they are an outright villain, hidden from the other characters or hidden from the audience. The same data is bordering the page but the linear structure makes it easier to see the chronological change in trend from more outright villains to more villains hidden from the audience.



Fig. 61

Fig. 62

Main female good character
vs female Villains
Era 3



Fig. 59



Fig. 63



Fig. 64



Fig. 65

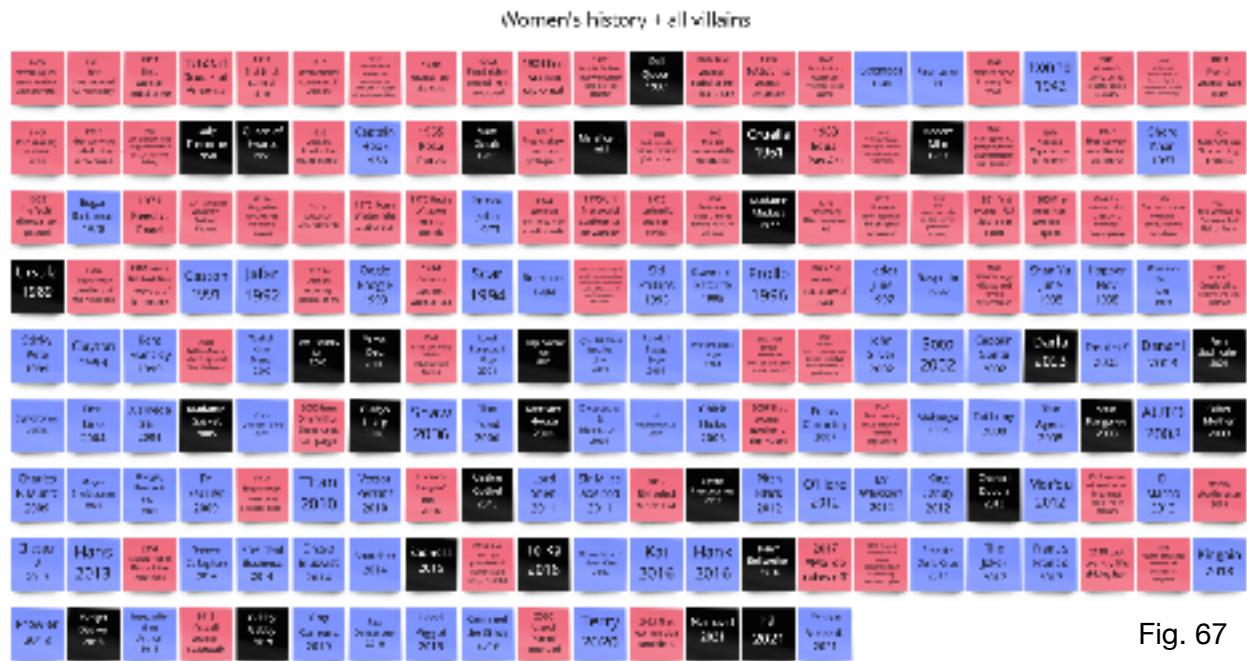
Above are the timelines which show the chronology of the body shape of good adult female human characters in animated film. It is clear to see that there is very little diversity in body shape and there has been minimal change since the beginning of the first era.



Fig. 66

Above is a collection of moments in women's history with the female villains added to the timeline. This allowed me to see trends in what was happening in the world around the time that each of the villains was being created.

On the following page is the same data with the male villains added to the timeline as well. The historical moments are in red, male villains in blue and female villains in black.



Appendix 2 - Desexualisation of Villains



Fig. 68

The villainesses, through portraying them as old or large or skeletally thin were hugely desexualised to the point that any sort of hint to their sexualisation was a source of humour. Often we are able to see Madame Mim's as well as the Queen of Hearts' bloomers. (Fig. X) As Brian Sibley said in a 1974 lecture to the Lewis Carroll Society

“...the Queen of Hearts’ performance,

otherwise the very embodiment of the uncontrollable fury Carroll envisaged, is brought to absurdity by the indecorous display of her heart embroidered XOS [extra-large] bloomers.”⁵²



Fig. 69

⁵² p244 Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters: From Mickey Mouse to Hercules Grant, John



Fig. 70

The showing off of these women's undergarments undermines both their dignity and their level of threat. In the same vein, Yzma is throughout the film described as "scary beyond all reason". There is a scene where she pulls up the hem of her skirt to reveal a knife strapped to her thigh. The joke in this scene lies in that Kuzco and Pacha are more horrified at her pulling her skirt up than by the knife. In maintaining that it is entirely ridiculous to find a woman attractive because she does not fit the ideals of the heroine, the villainesses, along with all of their associated features, are marked as entirely undesirable.

By desexualising their bodies, this allowed the villainesses to act or dress in a more sexualised manner while maintaining a safe and appropriate

viewing. From Cruella onwards we can see that more of the villainesses don low cut, figure hugging dresses more reminiscent of femme fatales. This is as opposed to some of the earlier high necked and layered dresses of the earliest villains which I have looked at.

"The femme fatale represented the "deviations from the norms of appropriate sexual and familial behavior [that] might lead to social disorder and national vulnerability," ⁵³

In likening specifically the villains to femme fatales, who can be described as sexualised, ambitious and independent, the films demonise these traits in women.



Fig. 71

⁵³ The Development and Impact of the Female Villain on Modern Women

Appendix 3 - Hayes Code

In 1930, the American film industry adopted a code of censorship written by a Catholic priest. The church was not content that this code was being enforced and denounced Hollywood as a “fortress of filth”. They were able to get millions of Americans to pledge not to attend ‘immoral’ films. Hollywood’s financial stability was already being threatened by a national depression so in 1934 Will Hayes, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of American (MPPDA) agreed to set up a Production Code Administration (PCA) to enforce the censorship code. John I. Breen, a lay Catholic, was appointed head of the PCA and the man to interpret the code. Every studio was forced to submit their scripts to the PCA before production. No production could begin without PCA script approval and no film could be distributed without the PCA’s seal of approval. Additionally, any films deemed ‘immoral’ were to be pulled from circulation. Anyone who did not adhere to these rules could be fined 25,000 dollars.⁵⁴

“By 1959, the man charged with enforcing the rules conceded that if a "moral conflict" provided "the proper frame of reference," a Code-approved film could deal with pretty much any topic but homosexuality.”

This was followed by the release of *Some Like it Hot*. Its not obvious violation of the Hayes code was the fact that it featured Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon in Drag for most of the film. Eventually in 1968 the MPA shifted from restricting filmmakers to alerting audiences of films’ content in the film rating systems we know today.⁵⁵

Appendix 4 - Sour Kangaroo mother

Despite being a mother, the Sour Kangaroo fits into neither of the groups of mothers; as her character and villainy rest on her authority in society rather than on her motherhood. She is terrified of being defied by both her child and also by society. “When Horton tells our children about worlds beyond the jungle he makes them question authority. Which leads to defiance. Which leads to anarchy.” Her one ultimatum to Horton is that he tell her that she is right so that she can have absolute power over all of the animals in the jungle again.

⁵⁴ Hollywood Censored The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930

⁵⁵ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93301189&t=1649261281180>

She is prepared to rope and cage Horton and she alludes to worse — “we don’t need to go into the details” — just because he has disobeyed her. She does not care about the lengths she has to go to in order to maintain her place at the top of society. We see a similar personality in Gladys Sharp in *Over the Hedge*. “I don’t care if [the De-Pelter turbo] is against the Geneva convention. I want it.” These women will stop at nothing to achieve their goal. This very active and determined mindset is something which has been an element of the female villain’s personality since the very beginning. It contrasts with the passiveness of the heroines which was more prevalent in the earlier era 1 films. However, in keeping it as a consistent component of the female villain’s personality and driving it to the extreme like we see in these two examples, it vilifies these traits in women.

Appendix 5 - Gabby Gabby

Gabby Gabby has an interesting introduction because while she herself is presented in a positive light when we meet her, everything surrounding her introduction suggests to us that she is not to be trusted. It’s not her character design or personality which immediately outs her as the villain, it’s the world around her and her actions which reveal her to be the villain. This is a great example of the distinction between these more recent villains and the ones in our earlier eras. They tell us that there are not specific traits that allow you to spot bad people because people aren’t inherently evil, they’re only bad if they do bad things.

Throughout Gabby Gabby’s introduction we can see the results of the world she has set up in the antique shop. The dummies and atmosphere are cultivated by her and the imbalance of power which she holds.

These mixed signals in Gabby Gabby’s introduction are exactly the new kind of messaging which we are seeing with modern villains. Sometimes it’s subtle



Fig. 72

like in Gabby Gabby's case, sometimes it's blatant and on the nose like Evelyn Deavor's name being a literal play on the phrase 'evil endeavour' The audience is being told that even though she isn't giving us a direct reason not to trust her right away it doesn't mean that we should. Even if the villain seems absolutely innocent without even subtle tell-tale signs and only later reveals their villainous side, the message of the villain's role is the same. It's this idea that villains are around us and not necessarily in the ways that we think. They can be the sweet gentle person who says they're trying to help but has ulterior motives. It's a very positive shift in that it doesn't rely on harmful stereotypes to single out the villain and it also warns us that we shouldn't decide whether to trust someone purely based on what they look like. This shift is a result of society's attitude towards marginalised groups of people. With the current understanding that it is not ok to stereotype people and that we must respect everybody.

Appendix 6 - Good Character extremes

They are starting to get a tiny bit less extreme - if you compare Rapunzel from era 2 to Moana in this era there are clear differences in the circumference of their arms and legs which are especially clear from looking at their wrists and ankles. Their arms and shoulders are also slightly more muscular and defined rather than just being straight down on both sides.



Fig. 73

Appendix 7 - Villains of colour

This is interesting because we have seen at least nine human male people of colour as villains since Jafar in 1998. This would suggest that the lack of women of colour in the villain's role is not because animated villains are always white. Rather than being a statement about race, this is probably down to the fact that there is so little representation of women of colour in animated films at all. In a study done by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, only 3% of lead or co-lead roles in animated film between 2007 and

2018 were women of colour.⁵⁶ There has been a slight increase in the diversity in animated films since with more recent movies like *Soul* (2020), *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), *Encanto* (2021) and *Turning Red* (2022).

Appendix 8 - Evelyn Deavor

There is a connection formed between the two women extremely early on which is clearly constructed to stand out from Evelyn's relationship with anybody else. Evelyn is extremely interested in Helen, the two share knowing looks, Evelyn comes to find Helen alone to offer her a drink at the party, Evelyn is more honest and upfront with Helen than Winston is so Helen can be seen to trust her more and have a closer bond, her and Evelyn seem to be on the same level.

⁵⁶ <https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aia-inclusion-animation-201906.pdf>

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