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Evil Never Looked So Good: Reimagined Wicked Queens in 21st Century Screen Media

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From Harley to Hela, Maleficent to Missy, Cat Woman to Catra, female villains are alive, well, and raising hell in film, TV and other popular screen media. A continuing fascination with villains as well as heroes, coupled with the rise of fantasy genres in visual media, results in new villains for the twenty-first century, villains who emerge from a rich heritage of representing evil.

This makes commercial sense: recent attempts to critique or renegotiate the villain's place in a range of genres are part of the constant drive to reinvent long-running, malleable, and saleable, properties, titles and characters. In the twenty-first context of #MeToo, BLM, TERFs and Karens it is not surprising that female heroes in contemporary media now frequently embody intersectional identities designed to promote the idea of inclusivity, in some cases to actively appeal to under-served audiences—and so do some female villains. Thus, reimaginings often work to reframe familiar villains in terms of race, gender, sexuality, disability and so on, situating them as marginalised and misunderstood. This process of critical retelling gives the evil female characters we know and love on screen *reasons* for being nasty, angry and persistent. We argue that key screen iterations of the Wicked Queen character from the Snow White fairy tale, such as Lana Parrilla's Regina from ABC's *Once Upon A Time* and Charlize Theron's Ravenna in the *Huntsman* films exemplify trends in representing female evil across popular visual media. Our presentation covers costume, hair, make up, and casting to interrogate how the female villain is visually signalled as competent, powerful, and arrogant, often through overt sexualisation (or, as one of the presenters chooses to call it, evil cleavage), at times in uneasy contrast with recuperation of the evil queen in a reimagined, redemptive narrative.

Key Words: Fairy tales, Female, Film, Popular culture, Retelling, Representation, Television, Wicked Queen.