**Draft Copy: Crumbling Rejuvenation: Archetype, embodiment and the "Aging Beauty Myth"**

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Within the space of five years, two big budget fantasy films, *Stardust* (Dir., Vaughn, 2007) and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (Dir., Sanders, 2012) exploit the archetypal figure of the ageing crone that has its roots in myth and fairy tale, and is best known through the Grimm Brothers', *Snow White*, and its Disney mediation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. *Stardust* is an adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel that weaves together three stories; first, the search for a ruby whose ownership will determine the right to the throne of the magical kingdom of Stormhold by the Princes Primus (Jason Flemyng) and Secundus (Rupert Everett); second, the adventures of a forlorn Tristan, who crosses from the earthly village of Wall, to the magical world of Stormhold, where he seeks the star that he had witnessed falling from the sky. He believes this star to be a token that will gain the heart of Victoria (Sienna Miller), the object of his unrequited love; and third, that of an earthbound and humanised star, Yvaine (Claire Danes), who is pursued for the rejuvenating energy of her heart by three ancient witches, the sisters Lamia (Michelle Pfieffer), Empusa (Sarah Alexander) and Mormo (Joanna Scanlan). Like *Stardust*, *Snow White and the Huntsman* interleaves stories of intersecting power struggles for ruler-ship and for everlasting youth and beauty. The film tells how Snow White (Kristen Stewart), the daughter of a king, motherless from an early age, whose father remarries before being murdered by her stepmother, Ravenna (Charlize Theron), who then exiles and imprisons her. Ravenna has extraordinary powers of bodily regeneration and rejuvenation that are derived from her ability to inhale the youth force of other women, leaving them dried-up husks of abjected femininity. However, Ravenna's sense of power is disturbed when her magical mirror predicts that Snow White will eventually outstrip her in both power and beauty unless she consumes the heart of the princess. She orders Eric the Huntsman (Chris Hemsworth) to find and kill her rival, and to secure her heart as a trophy. At first compliant, Eric subsequently turns against Ravenna when he learns the true identity of Snow White. After gaining the support of various underworld tribes, including eight dwarves, Snow White leads an attack on Ravenna's palace, where in hand-to-hand combat she kills her. As with *Stardust*, *Snow White and the Huntsman,* depicts the death of the evil, rejuvenated woman as a revelation of the ancient crone that lies beneath her veneer of rejuvenation.

With their references to wicked stepmothers, magical mirrors and rejuvenated crones, both of these films draw on the Snow White story, though neither claims to be a 'faithful' adaptation. (Adaptation scholars quite rightly point out the impossibility of such a claim). Rather, the references made by these films to the Grimm Brothers' story and to Disney animated films are highly allusive, designed to mobilise memories of previous versions via familiar tropes, whilst also staking claims to originality by foregrounding departures, deviations and additions. Indeed, with *Stardust*, any connection to either the Grimm Brothers or the Disney versions

of *Snow White* is more dependent on cultural associations with the tropes of the 'wicked stepmother', such as the magic mirror and the pursuit of rejuvenation, than to any overt gesture made by the producers. Whilst the eponymous titling of *Snow White and the Huntsman* does explicitly invite inter-textual associations with other versions of the *Snow White* tale, it is similarly allusive in its deployment of dwarves, as well as the familiar magic-mirror. But more than anything, in *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the figure of the ancient crone for whom happiness, power and rejuvenation combine into an evil, potent mix offers the most powerful allusion to the 'wicked stepmother' of the Snow White fairytale.

This figure of the 'wicked stepmother' chimes with Jungian formulations of universal archetypes, such as the mother, father, the child or the trickster, that are inscribed within the collective unconscious, and which, James Iaccino (1998: xi) suggests are 'forms without content' that find their 'expression in tribal lore, mythology, fairy tales, religious systems and primitive art'. Crucially, as argued by a cohort of scholars researching across literature and film, as diverse as Jack Zipes and Luke Hockley, archetype should not be reduced to ahistorical or timeless formulations. Rather, a clear distinction needs to be drawn between archetype as a recurring form and archetype as meaningful figure. As Zipes suggests, 'social relations and psychological behaviour' are, 'the very stuff which constitutes the subject matter of the tale' (1986, p.1), To put this another way, post-Jungian theorists are crucially alert to the ways in which universal symbols are appropriated, re-visioned and accrue meaning within the symbolic order of particular times, places, social groups and practices. Thus crucially, myth and archetype are always culturally and historically specific as they play through both the conscious and unconscious of the symbolic order.

From this position, Zipes also forges a link between traditional myth and fairytale, and *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes (1967 [1953]) account of modern myth. Barthes suggests that the denotations and connotations of any sign or image produce chains of signification that accrue a multiplicity of meanings in ways that effectively efface the arbitrary link between sign and meaning. In this way, meaning production is made to *seem* inevitable and made to *seem* natural, rather than being a process of cultural production. Once the cultural production of meaning is obscured, and thus rendered 'natural', it becomes depoliticised speech and takes on the function of ideology. Barthes formulation of mythology is of particular importance here since it is largely concerned with the attenuation of the ideological function as facilitated by the rapid global circulation of mass produced images. And, to state the obvious, the circulation of myth and archetype is similarly bound up in this rapid process of mythologisation. In other words, in the Barthesian sense, myths and fairytales can be seen to perform *mythological* functions. More especially, archetypes are pivotal to this mobilisation of ideology by myth and fairytale. Thus, despite their seeming timelessness, archetypes should always be seen as both the product of a specific time and place and as the articulation of culturally and historically specific ideologies. The meanings of archetypes are never neutral - rather they are bound up in the circulation of dominant ideologies of any given moment. With this said, questions concerning the ideological function of the old crone archetype in its

recent articulations are raised: what meanings are currently inscribed on the old crone archetype in *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*; what mythologies are brought into play by these narratives?

**Myth, technology and believability**

Before these questions can be approached some discussion of the mechanisms through which both archetypes and mythologies are secured within contemporary cinematic discourse is warranted. Central to this discussion is the importance of 'realism' and 'believability'. There can be little doubt that the popular reach of both *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* is bound up in the broader success of contemporary fantasy films, such as the *Harry Potter* series and the *Lord of the Rings* cycle. This success can be attributed (in part at least) to the CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) technology that is coming to dominate mainstream film and is wresting cinematic fairytales from their dominant Disneyesque animated form. As with the introduction of any new cinematic technology, such as happened with sound and colour, its arrival is in itself a source of curiosity and, or, spectacle. Effectively, the changes wrought by technology to familiar stories, genres and forms become a major attraction for audiences and, of course, a source of profits for producers. At the very least, due to its cooption within the contemporary film industry, the crone archetype has a function within the capitalist economy. But this is not the whole picture because paradoxically, the spectacle of CGI is predicated on its capability to disappear from the screen; to produce its special effects and yet leave no disruptive traces of technological intervention. In this way, the 'reality' effect of CGI plays a part in securing the ideological function of the crone because it enables filmmakers to realise the most fantastical imaginings of location and character with no disruption to believability. For example, in the course of *Stardust*, the crone Lamia undergoes several instantaneous and seamless age transitions as her rejuvenating magic is either depleted or restored.

In comparison, films made in previous decades that employed latex based prosthetic make-up to realise their aging effects struggled to secure the believability of similar aging transitions. For instance, the Hammer adaptation of Rider Haggard's *She* (Dir., Robert Day, 1965) has its female protagonist, Ayesha, (Ursula Andress) step for a second time into a sacred flame. This reverses the flame's rejuvenating effects and triggers an accelerated aging process that concludes with her disintegration into a pile of dust and rags. Shot as a series of cuts between a group of horrified onlookers and close ups of hands and face that signify a degenerative aging process; the mechanics of Ayesha's rapid aging are evident in a prosthetic facial overlay that does not quite reach her eyes and which thus retain a disturbing youthfulness, whilst Andress's face is fixed into an immobile and expressionless mask that draws attention to its artificiality. Crucially, unlike the effacement of CGI aging in *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, this kind of visible prosthetic ageing ruptures the suspension of disbelief that stitches audiences into the 'realist' diegesis (on-screen world) of the film. With the rupture to the seam of 'realism' also comes a rupture to the mythological and ideological operation of archetype.

It is always worth restating the truism that realism is never an unmediated reflection of the real world, but rather it is itself an illusory special effect: a construction of an ostensible reality mediated through a variety of cinematic conventions in which time, space and character are woven together into a coherent diegetic world. The numerous versions of realism such as documentary realism, British social realism, Italian neo-realism, Hollywood classic realism are a useful reminder that realism is never simply a given, but that its conventions are culturally and historically specific and that the exigencies of time, taste, and cinematic technologies, such as camera, sound, colour and, or, editing techniques, intersect to render realism a fluid and mutable formation that crosses genres and film forms producing that suspension of disbelief that secures cinematic spectacle as a believable and knowable world.

Arguing that a film's *believability* is the crux of cinematic realism, rather than its capacity to reflect the extra-diegetic (off-screen) world, Steve Neale (1981) adopts a term from literary criticism, verisimilitude, to underline the fact that in fictional genres, 'reality' is always constructed. In literary criticism, verisimilitude means believability and, or, faithfulness, which Neale suggests are organised in relation to *both* the conventions of specific genres and to recognisable societal norms. For Neale, the believability of cinematic fictional worlds stems from the combination of what he terms generic verisimilitude (faithfulness to genre) and cultural verisimilitude (faithfulness to everyday reality). This combination of cultural and generic verisimilitude renders plausible the most improbable and, or, fantastical scenarios, such as invisibility, time travel, special powers of all kinds. Christine Geraghty (1997) usefully sums up:

> Whereas generic verisimilitude allows for considerable play with fantasy *inside* the bounds of generic credibility (e.g. singing about your problems in the musical; the power of garlic in gothic horror movies), cultural verisimilitude refers us to the norms, mores, and common sense of the social world *outside* the fiction
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> (Geraghty, 1997, p. 360).

Following from Neale and Geraghty, we can see while CGI technology plays a part in securing the fairytale realism and generic alignment of *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the believability of their narratives cannot be reduced to such factors. Vitally, it is equally the case that their believability and realism is dependent on a recognisable cultural verisimilitude and the extent to which they reference the apparent everyday norms, mores, and common sense. Indeed, even with the 'magic' of CGI technologies, if cultural verisimilitude is ruptured or disturbed in some way, then the believability of the story and its characters breaks down. By the same token, if believability breaks down, the capacity of myth and archetype to articulate ideology, that is to be *mythological* in the Barthesian sense, is similarly unsettled. Thus, the stakes of cultural verisimilitude reach beyond the formulation of a believable diegesis, and extend to the circulation and recirculation of ideological mythologies as they flow between the diegetic and extra-diegetic world. It is this circuit of discourse (du Gay in Hall, 1997, p. 1) that flows between

audiences and producers and which enables archetypes to be continually refreshed. It allows archetypes to be rendered contemporaneous, relevant and believable and thus secured for the ideological work of mythology.

**Embodied archetypes and Myths of Aging Beauty**

One of the key ways in which *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* secure cultural verisimilitude, and hence historically specific ideological functions for their archetypes, is through the bodies of stars, and those supporting actors who never achieve the luminary status of stardom, whose flesh and blood populates and inhabits the spaces and action of CGI created worlds, and which, following Iaccino, gives embodied content to archetypal forms. Indeed, the bodies of stars also bear testimony to a lived connection between the diegesis of the film and the everyday practices of the extra-diegetic world - a connection that both pre-figures, and extends beyond, the running time of the film. In his study of the emergence of film stardom in Hollywood's burgeoning studio system of the 1920s, Richard de Cordoba (1999) makes the point that actors and actresses are transformed into stars in, and through, the publicity circuits of magazines and radio (we can now include TV and the world wide web in this process) that extend knowledge of stars beyond the diegesis of the film and takes in their private as much as their public lives. As testified by the likes of Rudolph Valentino or Marilyn Monroe, the death of the actor or actress does not spell the death of the star image, and like archetypes, they become signifying systems available to subsequent generations. Whilst this does not necessarily render the star timeless in the manner of Jungian archetype, it certainly enables a correlation of temporal longevity to be drawn between archetype and the body of the star: a longevity that extends beyond on-screen verisimilitude.

And this correlation between archetype and star is a site where we can begin to see the mapping of historically specific meanings onto universal archetypal forms, since the bodies of stars are never neutral and are always inscribed with multiple significations. Theorists of stardom such as Richard Dyer (1979, 1986), argue that stardom cannot be reduced to marketing strategies and film industry economics, and that stardom exceeds the particularity of a given actor or actress. Rather, stars are produced at the intersection of marketing and publicity discourses, on-screen performances and off-screen publicity and media events. Consequently, stars need to be understood as 'always extensive, multimedia, intertextual and as complex and polysemic signifying systems that are fully implicated in the circulation and reproduction of dominant discourses and ideologies (Dyer, 1979, p3). Crucially, one of the ideological functions of stars is the embodiment of social values. As Dyer write, stars function as:

> embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they make sense of their lives, and indeed through which we make our lives – categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and so on.

(Dyer, 1991, 18).

To rephrase Dyer, stars make discursively produced identities *seem* as if they are biological, and hence, essential properties of the body. Thus stars can be seen to operate as a type of Barthesian myth in that they serve to efface the cultural production of identity categories and operate to depoliticise the meanings of identity categories by rendering them as biologically determined. From here it is not an unreasonable leap to assume that the embodiment of the crone by Pfeiffer and Theron in *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* can tell us something about contemporary discourses of old age femininity.

With their storylines about the crone's pursuit of everlasting youth and beauty it is strikingly obvious how the cultural verisimilitude of both *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, connects to the growth of those rejuvenation industries, both surgical and cosmetic that in contemporary western cultures shape ideals of femininity and which also serve to pathologise the signs of aging as inscribed on the body. This follows the gerontological paradigm in which old age is produced as a period of decline and its subject as a dying entity. As Pamela H. Gravagne observes:

> No matter how healthy and alive, no matter how functional and creative, the aged body was seen at one and the same time as pathological, since changes attributed to age were read as due to disease, and normal, since these changes were to be expected.
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> (Gravagne, 2013, p. 18)

The archetypal crones of *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* exemplify this paradigm in that their search for happiness is conflated with their seeking a curative for a pathologised old age.

Whilst the circulation of the crone archetype has always articulated some of the cultural anxieties about aging, especially for women whose identities and sense of self-worth are problematically imbricated in discourses of idealised beauty, there is an attenuation of the problem in contemporary culture due to the exigencies of 'successful aging' discourses. This discursive formation first emerged in the late 1980s (Rowe and Kahn 1987, 1997), just as the aging population began to be constituted as a problem in want of a solution, rather than as a marker of the West's social progress. Byrnes and Dillway summarise the successful aging configuration as being a regulatory regime concerned with 'the avoidance of disease or disease susceptibility, a high cognitive capacity, and active engagement with life' (Byrnes and Dillway, 2004, p67). This model of supposed successful aging is now hegemonically established as the common sense alternative to, and remedy for, a burdensome, vulnerable old age with its attendant economic and emotional costs to the state; to communities; to families; and to the individual old person.

It is largely self-evident that because of: their on-going careers; their continued presence on our screens; their high profile appearances on chat show sofas and within broader circuits of media culture; and through their seemingly perpetual desirability (as either actors in the film industry workplace, and, or, as sex objects in

the circuits of cinematic desire); that old age stars function ideologically to embody and naturalise the active engagement with life discourse that is central to successful aging agendas. As I argue fully elsewhere (Dolan, 2013a), old age stars also embody the formation of successful aging as it is organised around gender specific discourses of firm and hard, which for masculinity is all too frequently reduced to sexual function (and the profits of Viagra). For femininity, successful aging is predicated on its insertion into what Naomi Wolf (1991) has termed *The Beauty Myth*; that panoply of procedures, processes, products and panaceas that commodify women's bodies, even as they interpellate female consumers into the mythology's ideological purview through its promise of better looks, and hence, happiness. It is a central plank of Wolf's argument that the attention paid by stars to their appearance; and the extent to which they implicitly or explicitly endorse the equation of beauty and happiness ('We're worth it'!) positions them to embody, naturalise and disseminate an ideology of beauty. By extension then, older female stars can be seen to embody 'successful aging' as it intersects with 'The Beauty Myth', and thus, their bodies can be recognised as sites where a new 'Aging Beauty Myth' is constituted and naturalised.

However, we also need to acknowledge that for female Hollywood stars, and other national cinemas that adopt Hollywood aesthetics and forms in the competitive frame of the global film economy, old age commences at a much younger chronological age than it does for the majority of women. As far back as 1973 Molly Haskell observed that the elision of beauty and youth that underpins Hollywood casting impacted upon the professional longevity of female stars, who at the first visible signs of aging, were deemed too old or over-ripe for a part - except as a marginalized mother or older sister. Meanwhile, the careers of their similarly aged male counterparts were, and continue to be, shored up by hetero-normative, romantic couplings with much younger female stars, both on and off screen (Haskell, 1973: 14). This has implications for the embodiment of the aging beauty myth by Theron and Pfeiffer. At the time of filming Theron was thirty-seven, and therefore, just too young to convincingly wear the mantle of the aging beauty without support from CGI morphing. Meanwhile, at forty-five, in the everyday world outside the film's diegesis, Pfeiffer is also a young woman. Yet, within the Hollywood paradigm, she is already 'over the hill' and an ideal site for the embodiment of the aging beauty myth, as it resonates with her extra-diegetic existence and with the CGI manipulations age that are a conceit of *Stardust's* narrative.

With that said, the ideological imperative of the aging beauty myth can be readily recognised in the proliferation of post-menopausal female stars such as Merryl Streep, Helen Mirren, Judi Dench, Elyn Burstyn, Diane Keaton, Julie Christie and Glenn Close who since circa 2000 have been nominated for their performances at Oscar and BAFTA ceremonies. Whilst we might be tempted to applaud this alleviation of the longstanding sexist/ageist regime that, for decades, has impacted on Hollywood's casting practices, there is little to celebrate in the disturbing and striking normative 'whiteness' embedded in this new visibility of aging female stars. It is troublingly noteworthy that stars like Angela Basset and Whoopi Goldberg

whose youthful successes have already thrown into relief the acute marginalisation of non-white actresses in the Hollywood paradigm (c.f. Ed. Tasker, 1988) are excluded from both this celebration of aging female stardom, and major roles in prestigious films. Whilst Bassett has been sidelined into less prestigious television roles, Goldberg is literally rendered invisible through recent performances in which she is heard rather than seen, as a documentary film narrator or as the voice of Stretch an animated character in *Toy Story 3* (Dir., Unkirch, 2010). Alternatively, she is pushed to the margins in cameo roles as herself. Such exclusionary practices are highly problematic not only because they marginalise non-white older stars, but because they also reproduce the ubiquitous and pernicious white, racial privilege that is normalized and rendered ideologically hegemonic through the embodiments of Hollywood's star system (Dyer, 1977).

**The Aging Beauty Myth, archetype and the unconscious**.

One conclusion that can be reached from the above discussion is that through films like *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, Hollywood, and its ilk, is mapping the myth of aging beauty, and its attendant ideologies, onto the archetypal crone, which here, is self-consciously consumerist, and self-consciously white. Conversely, the repressed unconscious revealed by this version of the archetypal crone is knowledge and appreciation of those female forms which through body size or skin colour do not conform to the myth. As I will elaborate, this is not the only unconscious repression to rupture the ideological seam of aging beauty. Leaving aside rare exceptions such as Judi Dench who, as Christine Geraghty (2002) has argued, helps mark the difference between the dame of American glamour and the ladylike Dame of British theatrical prestige, the new visibility of aging female stars is largely contingent on the ability of older stars to dispel the signs of aging on their bodies (Dolan, 2013b). In the aging beauty myth, the privileged white bodies of older female stars are characterised by smooth brows, slender legs, flat stomachs, pert breasts and buttocks. These aging female bodies are seemingly unmarked by pregnancy, or injury, or surgery or overindulgence and thus play a pivotal role in securing the perfection implied by the myth. Typically, many of the procedures used to attain this perfection are obfuscated by accounts of grueling hours in the gym and healthy eating regimes. Only rare exceptions such as Madonna and Cher make public the extent of time spent in clinics and treatment rooms; and of the skills of surgeons and beauticians that produce their bodies as ideals of feminine allure and as exemplifications of the aging beauty myth's achievement.

Of course, for the rest, as Vivian Sobchak (1999) reminds us, not all the glamour of rejuvenation can be attributed to the surgeon's knife and, or, the rigours of the gym; and, or, the potions and the lotions of the beauty clinic. Rather, the spectacle of smooth, firm, feminine bodies is equally reliant on post-production techniques such as air-brushing and computergraphic transformations, what Sobchak has termed the 'second operation of plastic surgery' (1999, p. 206). The artifice of these transformations has led to consumer protests and legal action on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2012, the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ruled that the L'Oreal campaign faced up by Rachel Weisz was exaggerated and misleading and banned it, although the watchdog agency rejected complaints about a separate

L'Oreal commercial for a moisturizer featuring a photograph of actress Jane Fonda (Reuters 2012). It also banned some Photoshopped cosmetics advertisements featuring Julia Roberts and Christy Turlington. After the National Advertising Division (NAD) of the Council of Better Business Bureaus ruled that a CoverGirl mascara advertisement was misleading, Procter and Gamble shut down the advertising. The NAD, which can issue rulings but cannot itself enforce them, said it was following the lead of its sister body in the UK And, most importantly, as suggested by Sobchak, the artifice of the second operation of plastic surgery is not confined to advertising but is fully embedded in popular cinema where, because of the prevalence of the aging beauty myth in contemporary culture, it helps establish cultural verisimilitude.

The dependency of *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* on the second operation of plastic surgery is a moot point. We can speculate that it is unlikely to have been used to rejuvenate the younger Theron, and that it was probably used to rejuvenate the older Pfeiffer. However, without access to specialist or archival knowledge, there can be no certainty here. What is certain is that in these films, CGI technologies of aging are used to establish a young-old binary that is itself mapped onto the bodies of the stars as archetype. And this embodied binary is organized around a conscious expression of white, normatively sized youthful beauty and an attendant repression into the unconscious of an inexpressible, delimited and unregulated old age femininity. Some mitigation is offered to this particularly vile articulation of the crone. For example, the mobilisation of the crone archetype in these films is aligned with Lamia and Ravenna who, consistent with their fairytale origins, are constituted as unredeemably vain and evil. Because of this their ultimate demise seems to be a just and logical punishment for their murderous intent; and the underlying intent to defy the hands of time. It seems almost as if the film closures that sees Lamia and Ravenna punished for their evil intent serves to redeem the narrative itself from its invidious mythologisation.

However, whilst such a conclusion is fully supportable, it misses the polysemic complexity of these narrative resolutions by neglecting the continuing existence of Pfeiffer and Theron beyond the diegesis of the film, and thus misses the ideological contradictions inscribed on their bodies. Notably, the demise of Lamia and Ravenna is not the whole picture, because the bodies of Theron and Pfeiffer have a *visibly* continuing existence outside the diegesis of the film due to their appearances at high profile publicity events, premiere screenings and award ceremonies, where, in the manner of the ubiquitous make-over show, all traces of old age are seen to be eradicated, whilst their fully restored youthful glamour is revealed as a spectacle of ideal feminine beauty. This spectacle of glamorous, aging female stardom effectively reiterates popular cinema's long standing endorsement of the Beauty Myth and its more recent co-option into aging femininity because of its continuing visibility beyond cinematic diegesis and its continuing inscription on the bodies of stars.

However, this endorsement is riddled with contradictions in that the extra-diegetic bodies of Pfeiffer and Theron shore up the Aging Beauty Myth even as the diegetic bodies of Lamia and Ravenna are ostensibly punished. Moreover, those

punishments are themselves troublingly complicated since they are symptomatic of popular cinema's on-going and pernicious pathologisation of older women's bodies. Crucially, whilst these punishments *culminate* in the deaths of Lamia and Ravenna, they *commence* when Yvaine and Snow White are rescued from the crones' all-consuming pursuit of the Aging Beauty Myth. At this point, once the magic of rejuvenation begins to fail, Lamia and Ravenna's beauty is exposed as an artificial, prosthetic glamour that; akin to the slimy, rotting flesh of Frankensteinian monster horror; drips and peels from their de-composing bodies, revealing the underlying actuality of their old age, whilst also equating that 'truth'; that old age; with moral *and* physical degradation and corruption. In this, both films reiterate a familiar trope of pathologised and abjected aging femininity that traces through the likes of *Sunset Boulevard* (Dir., Wilder, 1950), *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Dir., Aldrich, 1962), *She* (Dir., Day, 1965), in which women are ridiculed, vilified, and, or, punished because they refuse the mantle of an aging femininity that is constituted through discourses of redundancy and abjection (Dolan, 2013a).

These films exemplify a pathologizing gaze frequently brought to bear on aging femininity within popular cinema. This formulation of the pathological gaze derives from Foucault who, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, (1963/1974) suggests that the clinical encounter is structured through the clinician's gaze that seeks the signs of disease and abnormality on the patient's body through prior knowledge of normal, healthy bodies. It is in knowing the signs of the healthy body that the clinician can recognise the symptoms of the abnormal, and thus diagnose ill health. The clinical gaze is therefore split between knowledge of the normal and that of the pathological. Building on Foucault's account of disciplinary knowledge, Stephen Katz traces how nineteenth century gerontology emerged as a 'knowledge formation … linked to the disciplining of old age and the construction of specific subjects of power and knowledge' (Katz, 1996, p. 1). That is, chronological age was used to identify a distinctive and discrete group of subjects that were linked to a set of signs and symptoms that in turn were concretised as a 'problem' through pathologising discourses and practices. Here then, mainstream films such as *Sunset Boulevard*, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and *She* can be recognised as performing the work of age categorisation, whilst also mobilising the split gaze that pathologizes the body of the older female star through its knowledge of a youthful norm that enables the signs of aging to be recognisable and readable; and for these signs of aging to be constituted as symptoms of abnormality. However, with *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman,* there is a *doubling* of pathology: a *doubling* that can be recognised in the punishment of Lamia and Ravenna because, effectively, they are pathologised for *both* the pursuit of the Aging Beauty Myth *and* the signs of age exposed beneath its youthful veneer.

This doubling of pathology offers a neat fit with Sadie Wearing's account of the aging female body in contemporary media representations that cut across print and screen media through ubiquitous make-over shows and magazine features. Wearing suggest that many of these texts attempt to have it both ways insofar as they 'offer the fantasy of therapeutic rejuvenation while remaining firmly entrenched in a coercive and moralizing policing of aesthetic and gender norms, that, set the

standards of both chronological decorum and time defiance regulating (Wearing, 2007, pp. 304-305). As Wearing explains, even as women are located in ideologies of rejuvenation, condemnatory and regulatory discourses such as 'acting your age' and 'mutton dressed as lamb', place strict limits on the terms of rejuvenation. In a similar vein, Diane Railton and Paul Watson (2012) trace such regulatory discourses in the contemporary vilification of Madonna that marks a radical shift in her image from the lauded 'material girl' of the nineteen eighties when her film and music derived popularity was at its peak, to her current incarnation as an aging pop diva. Always a controversial figure because of her performance of pornographic gestures and use of fetishistic costume in the representational spaces of her music videos and films, she nonetheless mesmerized with her ability to switch between distinct sexed and gendered identities by her proud display of a well-toned body that served to highlight gender performativity by unsettling existing assumptions of muscularity and self-determination being biological properties of the male body. However, since she reached her fifties, Madonna has been increasingly vilified in the press for the exposition of her flesh – a 'tawdry embarrassment as Jane Fryer (2012) puts it.

Clearly, Madonna has breached the injunctions of chronological decorum and the likes of Fryer can be seen to be policing the regulatory terms of rejuvenation. Notably, in this regulation, there is a sharp contrast between the discourses surrounding Madonna's exposed flesh compared to that of Helen Mirren following a globally circulated paparazzi shot that carried the headline, 'The Bikini Queen Reigns Supreme'. Where Mirren is lauded for her 'enviable curves and flat stomach' (Anon. a. 2008) and is held up as an exemplary representative of the Aging Beauty Myth, Madonna is scorned because of her sinewy arms; gnarled, bony knees and 'wrinkled and vein-ravaged hands that reveal she is battling to defy the signs of aging' (Anon. b. 2007). Unlike Mirren, Madonna's skin is represented as bearing the signs of aging - it sags, it wrinkles, it is visibly veined. Therefore it seems as if Madonna's transgression of chronological decorum is not produced through the exposure of flesh *per se*, but rather, the terms of transgression are defined through the *type* of flesh on show, and by extension, by the signs of aging thus made visible. In short, Madonna displays the wrong kind of flesh to be allowed the burden of exposure because she embodies an incipient old age that ultimately cannot be contained, controlled, managed or concealed by cosmeceutical interventions.

The point that really needs to be made here is that the cultural verisimilitude of *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* is highly reliant on its reiteration of specific myth of aging beauty, whilst simultaneously, it draws on the regulatory discourses that reflect those illuminated in the pathologization of Madonna: discourses that define and police chronological decorum. By the same token, this play of cultural verisimilitude illuminates some of the cultural anxieties (both public and personal) that attend the feared collapse of the Aging Beauty Myth. As with the CGI enhanced performances by Pfeiffer and Theron as Lamia and Ravenna, Madonna's flesh disturbingly foregrounds the myth's provisionality; its propensity to rupture, to break down and to revert to an underlying decay and degeneration that portends the final stages of life.

Here then is the nub of the matter, this flesh is not pathologized simply because it bears the signs of aging, but also because those signs of aging are a potent reminder of our universal mortality. Thus, in effect, the depoliticised speech of the Aging Beauty Myth serves to silence mortality discourse, whilst the policing of chronological decorum forges a powerful alignment with western silences and taboos about death and dying. This silencing of mortality discourse returns the argument to archetype, and, following Bettelheim, its propensity to symbolise the repressions of the unconscious. As Luke Hockley reminds us, archetypes 'encapsulate the totality of a psychological situation, both the aspects that are conscious, and the elements that are unconscious' (Hockley, 2001: p, 3). So, taking silence as a symptom of repression, it can be recognised that the breaches of chronological decorum represented by the punishment Lamia and Ravenna in *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, are also breaches in the repressions of mortality discourse.

One further point needs to be made about the spectacular transition from beauty to abjection; from youth to decrepitude made by the crone archetype. Because these transitions conclude with Pfeiffer and Theron marked with the signs of old age, old age is fixed as an unavoidable stage of life; a stage that may be temporarily forestalled, but one which will inevitably take its course. Thus, old age is represented as a fixed and knowable property of the body, and as an embodied, and hence biologically determined stage of life. The extent to which we should see biological aging as a fixed and knowable given has been complicated by cultural gerontologists who argue that 'old age' is a naturalised, discursive identity formation akin to gender, race, class or sexuality. For instance, Pamela H. Gravagne (2013) draws parallels between Judith Butler's (2003) account of gender performativity and the cultural construction of old age. Butler argues that gender is brought into being by social agents who, 'constitute social relations through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs' (Butler, 2003, p. 413). It is in the reiteration of speech, gestures and actions that gender difference is secured and gender roles are prescribed. As Gravange concludes, 'If gender (age) is performative, rather than expressive, then it is not performed to express or disguise an interior self, but to produce a recognizable self in the interests of a "social policy of regulation and control' (Butler, p. 423)' (Gravange, 2013, p. 15).

To conclude, this then suggests two points. First, the regulatory discourses embedded in the punishment of Pfeiffer and Theron as Lamia and Ravenna extend to include the on-going construction, reiteration and embodiment of old age performativity. And, crucially, the labour of this cultural production is rendered mythological in the Barthesian sense, even as it is inserted into the frame of myth and fairy tale by the appropriation of the Snow White story. Second, the 'Aging Beauty Myth', and its alignment to the cultural verisimilitude of *Stardust* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, is, *simultaneously*, a reiteration of embodied old age performativity (the speech, gestures and actions of old age) *and* an opportunity to recognise the cultural construction of age through Pfeiffer and Theron's CGI enhanced performances of rapid age transitions. And it is that opportunity that bears the brunt of repression heaped onto the archetypal figure appropriated by

these films. The violence of this repression is powerfully symbolic of an urgent and pressing anxiety about threats to the ideological seam of old age performativity. It marks a similarly urgent and pressing need to repress into the cultural unconscious any conscious awareness of old age performativity. Finally, it also marks a no less pressing and urgent need to secure the mythological alignment between old age performativity and the illusion of conscious embodiment.

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