

**“Diffractions of a serial archetype:
The Evil Stepmother as a Meta-Narrative Trope”**

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Myth is one of the oldest forms of narrative adaptation. Characters, actions and situations passed from generation to generation are a remarkable source of seriality. It all started orally, then came the printing press, and now it's time for the moving images. Not only that but the moving images are subdividing in several serial possibilities as well: there is cinema, television and the in-between. It is exactly in this hybrid space that I want to focus, analysing how the tradition of classic fairy tales has been appropriated by meta-narrative serial products in order to generate archetypes that are used in more than one media. In fairy tales the archetypes of evil are known as “villains”, a term commonly used in literature and cinema/television alike. I will use as the starting point of my argument the television series *Once Upon a Time* () where villains wish to become heroes. I will contend that the strategy pursued by the diegetic characters, as well as the creators of the show - who subvert the roles of good and evil in a very post-modern move - is a self-reflexive exercise in meta-narration. In this form of rewriting, heroes and villains acquire a mythical stature.

The Evil Queen and Malefica, two characters from that series, although derived from classical fairy tale sources, are themselves reminiscent of two other female villains who Walt Disney visually blended together in a couple of his feature films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* () and *Sleeping Beauty* (). Therefore, at this level, The Evil Stepmother can rightly be considered a serial figure. I specifically want to focus on the revamped relationship of evil stepmother and good stepdaughter, taking the Evil Queen and Malefica as self-conscious figures in a self-reflexive television piece, only to arrive at what I consider to be the pinnacle of the meta-narrative tendency in material derived from fairy tales: the film *Mirror Mirror* (Tarsen Singh). The whole *opus* partly follows, and partly subverts, the renowned actions and characters of the two previously mentioned Disney films. The film director has a meta-cinematic authorial discourse on fiction and on the way it is conveyed narratively. In this article I will both ponder on the revamped reflection of the archetype(s) this specific film conveys and on the reflexion it induces regarding the nature of

fiction and its innate seriality through iconic figures. As long as there is Evil in the world, there will be Myth in the art and, in cases as such as this one, an opportunity to make seriality live on, not only on the screen, as a product, but also on the minds of the spectators, as a concept. The film *Mirror mirror* will be partially analyzed to convey this point and the self-reflexive strategies it contains will be explained as a way to make the meta-narrative stronger, therefore reinforcing the seriality of the Evil stepmother.

Bio:

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