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ETERNAL LIFE OR YOUTH AND BEAUTY: NARRATIVES OF MALE VS FEMALE CINEMATIC CHARACTERS

ВІЧНЕ ЖИТТЯ ЧИ МОЛОДІСТЬ ТА КРАСА: РІЗНИЦЯ У НАРАТИВАХ ЧОЛОВІЧИХ ТА ЖІНОЧИХ КІНОПЕРСОНАЖІВ

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Ever since the publication of Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), gender differences in conversational behavior have been a topic of public and scientific interest. Mass culture cinema, which simultaneously reflects contemporary society and projects the director's views onto the audience, is a valuable source of material for investigating the issue. Narratives, being the core means to reveal the individual's identity delineate male and female characters basing on the opinions and stereotypes prevalent among viewers.

One of the persistent themes in visual art is the idea of eternal life. Humanity strives to prolong its physical life indefinitely. Numerous male villains and occasional antagonists represent the craving for eternal life. Characters such as Bilbo Baggins from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), Lord Voldemort from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2009), Captain Blackbeard from *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (2011), Ichirō Yashida from *The Wolverine* (2013), Master Kaecilius from *Doctor Strange* (2016), and Emperor Palpatine from *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019), are all motivated by a common desire for eternal life.

This drive dictates their actions and behavior. The repetitive characters represent the Recluse/Warlock archetype (the term by Schmidt [1]), focused on selfish desire and indulging in questionable occult or spiritual practices to prolong their existence. Master Kaecilius (Doctor Strange, 2016) expresses the general idea: You understand the laws of nature. All things age. All things die. In the end, our sun burns out. Our universe grows cold and perishes... This world doesn't have to die... We can all live forever... Life. Eternal life... Humanity longs for the eternal... for a world beyond time...

Usually, the craving comes at a high cost. Tom Riddle / Lord Voldemort (Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, 2009) has no hesitations about paying the terrible price: Voldemort: It's called, as I understand it a Horcrux. I came across the term while reading... and didn't fully understand it. Slughorn: I'm not sure what you were reading, Tom, but this is very dark stuff, very dark indeed. A Horcrux is an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul... One splits one's soul and hides part of it in an object. By doing so, you're protected, should you be attacked and your body destroyed. In other words, you cannot die. Voldemort: And how does one split his soul, sir? Slughorn: I think you already know the answer to that, Tom. Voldemort: Murder. Slughorn: Yes. Killing rips the soul apart. It is a violation against nature.

The outcome is generally deemed unnatural, 'a violation against nature' but not by the villain. Emperor Palpatine (Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker, 2019) admits: I have died before. The dark side of the Force is a pathway... to many abilities some consider to be... unnatural.

Alternatively, for female characters, it is not the length of life that is essential, but the ability to preserve their youth and beauty. Be it the Mirror Queen (The Brothers Grimm, 2005), Bella Swan (The Twilight Saga: New Moon, 2009), Mother Gothel (Tangled, 2010), or Ravenna (Snow White and the Huntsman, 2012), they focus on the idea that physical attractiveness is of utmost importance. Ravenna (Snow White and the Huntsman, 2012) proclaims this commonly held belief: I replaced his queen, an old woman. And, in time, I, too, would have been replaced. Men use women. They ruin us and when they are finished with us they toss us to the dogs like scraps... When a woman stays young and beautiful forever, the world is hers.

It agrees with the results of research in other fields of investigation. According to Croley, Reese, and Wagner [2], older female characters in mainstream productions are often portrayed with exaggerated dermatological conditions, which suggests that aging itself is viewed as disfiguring, particularly for women. This trend is consistent with research findings that highlight the lack of opportunities for women over 40 in Hollywood films. As women age, their dialogue in films decreases significantly, whereas men experience the opposite trend. Older male actors have more roles available to

them. The highest percentages of dialogue for female actors occur in the age categories of 22-31 years old (38%) and 32-41 years old (32%), whereas for male actors, the peak is in the age categories of 32-41 years old (32%) and 42-65 years old (39%) [3]. In other words, actresses possess less agency as they deviate from the traditional construct of beauty [4, p. 926]. In the collective mind of a wide audience, the idea of women getting evil with age and loss of beauty is deeply rooted.

The idea of keeping the youthful looks forever is also frowned upon by society. Mother Gothel (*Tangled*, 2010) is condemned by Flynn Rider: Instead of sharing the sun's gift, this woman, Mother Gothel, hoarded its healing power and used it to keep herself young for hundreds of years... You get the gist. She sings to it, she turns young. Creepy, right? Rider, being a male character, speaks of no beauty though the backward transformation of Mother Gothel into a young and beautiful version of herself is presented on the screen. Rider underlines the unnaturalness of the process, eliciting disapproval from the audience towards both the idea and the character.

Even female leads can be depicted as fixated on physical beauty. In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009), Bella Swan is willing to relinquish her humanity to become a vampire, which would suspend her aging and give her an otherworldly allure: Edward: Bella, your birth is definitely something to celebrate. Bella: Yeah, but my aging's not. Edward: Your aging? I think 18 is a little young to start worrying about that. Bella: It's one year older than you... You're not gonna want me when I look like a grandmother.

Two mainstream films were analyzed and found to feature characters who defy traditional gender values. In the homoerotic movie, *Dorian Gray* (2009), the protagonist's effeminacy is attributed to his good looks, artistic profession, self-centeredness, and passive tendencies, effectively pushing the boundaries of gender representation. The themes of everlasting youth and physical attractiveness are explored through first-, second-, and third-person narrative perspectives: Agatha: Oh, you really have captured something quite exquisite, Basil. Lord Henry: He'll always look like that. You, Mr. Gray, I'm afraid will not... We wither and scar because the gods are cruel and hateful. Dorian: Perhaps I should nail my soul to the Devil's altar. Lord Henry: And remain as you are? Fair trade. Basil: Dorian wouldn't really barter his soul. Would you, Dorian? Dorian: Yes... Look at me. Look at me. Because of your painting, this will never age, will never scar.

In *Doctor Strange* (2016), the Ancient One, being a female character, strives for eternal life, but not youth and beauty: You want to go back to the delusion that you can control anything... even death... which no one can control. Not even the great Doctor Stephen Strange... It's our fear of death that gives Dormammu life... His eternal life is not paradise, but torment... I've spent so many years... peering through time... looking at this exact

moment... I've prevented countless, terrible futures. And after each one, there's always another. And they all lead here... but never further.

In the comic series, The Ancient One was depicted as a male character, but for the movie adaptation, the character was transformed into a Celtic mystic donning Asian clothing and portrayed by the esteemed British actress Tilda Swinton, who has often been cast in androgynous roles [5, p. 90]. Renowned for her ability to portray characters who transcend traditional gender norms, Swinton seamlessly blends elements of both masculinity and femininity to create a captivating and gender-neutral character.

While the idea of acquiring immortality is usually characteristic of the Recluse/Warlock male archetype (represented by villains or antagonists), for female characters the craving for eternal beauty pertains not only to the Mystic/Betrayer (the female counterpart of the Recluse/Warlock) but to an array of other archetypes (both villains and heroes). Thus, Mother Gothel represents the Overcontrolling Mother, Queen Ravenna is the Scorned Woman, and Bella Swan embodies the Nurturer archetype. While these characters have different motivations and goals, the idea of eternal youth and beauty is a crucial element in each of their narratives, emphasizing its significance among many women [6]. Queer characters possess cross-gender narratives generally staying within their archetypes.

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