

#EvilBoobs:
A Case Study of the Evil Queen's Cleavage in *Once Upon a Time* and its Female Fans

by

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This thesis is dedicated to evil women everywhere.

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Abstract

In ABC's series *Once Upon a Time*, the Evil Queen is defined in part by her prominent cleavage. Her cleavage exemplifies a trope that I refer to as "evil boobs." This thesis aims to establish the "evil boobs" trope in academic discourse. More specifically, it aims to explore how the Evil Queen's cleavage functions for female spectators. The Evil Queen is popular with female fans on social networking websites, and the Evil Queen's prominent cleavage receives significant attention from those fans. So, while this thesis first addresses how the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" pander to the male gaze, it then turns to the female fans and offers a close reading of the recorded texts of this female fandom. This thesis advances a relevant interpretation of the Evil Queen and her "evil boobs" as an empowering feminine ideal—a reading informed by online research into female fan practices and female pleasure.

List of Abbreviations and Symbols Used

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
CGI	Computer-generated imagery
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
<i>OUAT</i>	<i>Once Upon a Time</i>
@	At sign
	Face Screaming in Fear emoji
	Face Savoring Food emoji
	Face with Tears of Joy emoji
	Fire emoji
	Flushed Face emoji
#	Number sign or “hashtag”
	Red Heart emoji
	Smiling Face with Horns emoji
	Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes emoji
	Thumbs Up emoji
;)	Wink emoticon

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Female breasts are both the central symbol of femaleness (Naugler 100; Spadola 239) and the most scrutinized aspect of female embodiment (Naugler 103; Spadola xiii), yet one of the ways that female breasts are represented in contemporary popular culture has been largely overlooked by scholarly discourse—luckily, the fans have been paying close attention.

“Evil boobs”¹ is a trope that pops up in contemporary popular television. This trope mainly appears in science-fiction, action-adventure, and fantasy series, and it receives little attention outside of online fan discourse. In a now defunct thread on *TVTropes*, the original poster ChrisX observes, “[o]ne of the good ways to signify that you’re a bad girl is just to see how big your breasts are.” While this observation may sound reductive and crass, it flags intersecting issues in gaze theory, visual rhetoric, and female embodiment. As such, it begs further consideration.

You may have seen some of the most widely disseminated and unambiguous examples of “evil boobs”: those found in contemporary popular television series where there is a “good” control subject for the “bad girl” character. The first mirror-world episode from *Star-Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) offers an example: in “Crossover,” the typically high-collared-pajama-jumpsuit-clad Major Kira Nerys (Nana Visitor) finds herself face-to-face with her villainous mirror-world alter-ego, Intendant Kira Nerys, who initially wears a bondage-inspired harness that frames the covered

¹ I recognize that my use of the term “evil boobs” may seem ill-conceived. However, I do not use this term naively. I am aware of the concerns that Diane Naugler raises in her insightful essay, “Credentials: Breast Slang and the Discourse of Femininity,” concerns about how breast slang constructs the narrow standards of femininity and contributes to the overwhelming importance that society places on the way women look. But I want to honour the female fans of *Once Upon a Time* by using the term that they use. I think it’s important to pay homage to the fans and to take their pleasure and play seriously. I use the term “evil boobs” throughout this project out of respect for them.

mounds of her breasts and later appears in a purple dress with a strappy sweetheart neckline that draws attention to her full, round cleavage. Another example occurs in an episode of the animated series *Gargoyles* (1994-1996) where Elisa Maza goes undercover as a crooked cop: although usually only her clavicles are on display above the jewel neckline of her fitted t-shirt, in “Protection,” Elisa’s neckline drops considerably to reveal a black line of animated cleavage. Yet another example occurs with the introduction of Willow Rosenberg’s Wishverse alter-ego in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1996-2003): in “The Wish” and “Doppelgängland,” instead of regular Willow’s high-cut sweaters, Vampire Willow wears a low-cut corset with a ruffle that frames her delicate décolletage. As audience members, we know that these versions of “good” characters, are “bad” or “evil” not just by the colour or style of their new costumes, but at least partially by the way the costumes draw attention to their female bodies, to their breasts. We know that a prominent display of cleavage is a visual sign of an evil woman.

In recent years, this trope figured prominently in ABC’s action-adventure-fantasy series *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018). *Once Upon a Time*, or *OUAT* for short, is a revisionist take on familiar fairy tales that’s set in the Enchanted Forest and in our world. In *OUAT*, the main villainess is the Evil Queen. She is a powerful witch known for her unique method of murder: she shoves her hand into her victim’s chest, pulls out their still-beating heart, and crushes it into dust right in front of their eyes. And she also does curses. The Evil Queen employs something called the Dark Curse to transport fairy-tale characters Snow White (Ginnifer Goodwin) and Prince Charming (Josh Dallas) against their will from the Enchanted Forest to Storybrooke, a fictional town in our world. The series focuses on the Evil Queen, the Charmings, and the Charming’s daughter, Emma

Swan (Jennifer Morrison). Their stories unfold through present-day events and flashbacks in the Enchanted Forest and in the real world. And the “good” and “evil” characters, the heroes and villains, move between worlds, timelines, and conflicts with the help of a little magic and a lot of CGI.

With the Evil Queen, *OUAT* self-consciously constructs the same visual contrast we see with Willow, Elisa, and Kira, but sustains it across multiple seasons. In *OUAT*, the Evil Queen wears her breasts high and rounded, molded by gothic corsetry, and on display for television viewers. Of course, she’s not the only villainess on *OUAT* with “evil boobs.” Throughout the series, multiple “evil” female characters prominently display their cleavage: Maleficent, Zelena, Ingrid, Cora, Ursula, and Cruella De Vil, to name a few. But the Evil Queen, unlike the other “evil” women in the show, is present throughout the entire series—and so are her breasts. In addition, her visible cleavage supported by push-up bras, corsets, and bustiers clearly signifies a transformation, an “evil” makeover. In the episode “Wish You Were Here” from the sixth season, Rumpelstiltskin and the Evil Queen share a metatextual moment that confirms how she embodies “evil.” She is dressed in a turtleneck sweater and a peacoat and standing in front of Rumpelstiltskin. He says, “[i]f you’re going to play the part of an evil queen, you should look like one as well.” She grins. She waves her hands, stomps one foot, and poof! Her costume changes. Suddenly, she’s wearing an ornate gown that prominently displays her cleavage. As Rumpelstiltskin emphatically approves, the camera offers a medium close-up that frames the Evil Queen’s newly-revealed cleavage. The dialogue, visual rhetoric, and cinematography combine to confirm what spectators already know: her prominent cleavage is synonymous with her “evil.” It’s a visual sign of an evil woman.

And we know that the opposite is true because in a flashback to her pre-evil days the Evil Queen is covered to her chin by a riding coat and puffy cravat (“The Stable Boy”).

The series also constructs a contrast between the breasted embodiments of the “evil” women and the “good” women. This contrast is suggested by our *TVTropes* friend ChrisX who notes that female heroes may appear to be “underdeveloped” compared to female villains. While we may bristle at this phrasing, ChrisX has observed an important component of the trope: there is a visual dichotomy between the prominence of the villainesses’ breasts and the inconspicuous appearance of the heroines’ breasts. In *OUAT*, goodie-goodie Snow White wears higher necklines than the Evil Queen and street-smart Emma Swan wears layered t-shirts up to her clavicles—neither one has any cleavage to speak of.²

I’ve chosen *OUAT*, the Evil Queen, and her female fandom as an “evil boobs” case study because the series, the character, and her female fans are unique in a few ways. First, the series features the ubiquitous presence of the Evil Queen, an “evil” woman with “evil boobs.” Second, there is no scholarship that deals with the series’ intense preoccupation with female breasts.³ Third, although both gender stereotypes and actual gender preferences suggest that men prefer action, adventure, and fantasy genres more than women do (Wühr, Lange, and Schwarz), the ratings reveal that women really responded to *OUAT*. In every age category more women and girls watched the show than

² Emma and Snow White are occasionally styled with visible cleavage, but it is not part of their typical looks, and it is not nearly as extreme as the Evil Queen’s cleavage. Emma and Snow White are usually styled with cleavage for special occasions (such as Emma’s date night look in “The Apprentice” and Snow’s evening gown look in “The Price of Gold”) or undercover operations (such as Emma’s first look in the “Pilot” episode and her looks in “Snow Drifts”).

³ There isn’t any scholarship that deals with *OUAT*’s intense preoccupation with female breasts. However, there are some non-scholarly articles that deal with this topic. For example, see Eliza Thompson’s *Cosmopolitan* article “20 Times the Cleavage on *Once Upon a Time* Was Totally Insane.”

did men and boys, and in some age categories twice and even three times as many women and girls watched the show than did men and boys.⁴ Fourth and last—but certainly not least—my online research shows that women of all ages, sexualities, ethnicities, nationalities, occupations, shapes, sizes, and skin colours responded to the show, the Evil Queen, and the “evil boobs” trope specifically.⁵ On *Twitter*, female fans are responsible for adopting and adapting the playful hashtags #evilecleavage and #evilboobs.⁶ On *DeviantArt*, female fans post fanart that features the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs.” And, on *DeviantArt*, *Twitter*, and other online platforms, female fans post portraits of themselves cosplaying the Evil Queen with special emphasis on her “evil boobs.”

So we know that female spectators, or at least some of them, enjoy the Evil Queen’s prominent display of cleavage. But how might it function for female spectators? Why do female fans celebrate the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs”? And how might the Evil Queen’s female fans prompt us to look differently at the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs”?

To investigate these questions and offer answers, I look to gaze theory. In my first chapter, I apply Laura Mulvey’s foundational theory of the male gaze and Wendy Arons’ more recent update of Mulvey’s theory to explain how the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs”

⁴ See Mitch Metcalf’s analysis of ABC’s primetime demographics by age and gender. His analysis of the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 seasons reveals that in every age category more females than males watched *OUAT*. The numbers indicate that in many age categories twice as many female viewers, and even three times as many female viewers in some cases, watched *OUAT* compared to male viewers.

⁵ In many cases, fans self-identify in their online profiles. I have only asserted details about the identities of individual fans (such as gender, sex, ethnicity, and occupation) that they have made clear and publicly accessible.

⁶ Both the #evilboobs and #evilecleavage hashtags were occasionally used before *OUAT* fans adopted and adapted them. However, by 2012 and 2013 respectively, both hashtags were used frequently and exclusively by female fans of *OUAT*. See #evilboobs and #evilecleavage on Twitter.

pander to a sexist and patriarchal way of looking at women's bodies. Then, in my second chapter, I advance a counter-argument wherein I apply Jackie Stacey's theory of the active look of the female spectator to explain why the female fans who cosplay the Evil Queen seem to see her and her "evil boobs" as an empowering feminine ideal. I begin with Mulvey and Arons because the theory of the male gaze has had a massive influence on our understanding of the way female bodies function in contemporary visual culture. Although I recognize that the theory of the male gaze has received significant criticism from contemporary Lacanian theorists,⁷ it is still a useful and relevant conceptual tool. Then, because I recognize the limitations of Mulvey's and Arons' theory of the male gaze, I advance an alternate reading inspired by the female fans, a reading of the recorded texts of this particular female fandom. While many of the theorists that I turn to in this paper are heavily influenced by Lacanian theory, I take a dynamic and interdisciplinary approach to this material—I draw from a variety of theoretical viewpoints and ultimately defer to the female fans as my critical and theoretical guides.

⁷ Contemporary Lacanian theorists Joan Copjec, Slavoj Žižek, and Todd McGowan (among others) have repeatedly criticized the way Mulvey interprets, reduces, and applies the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Chapter 2: The Evil Queen's Cleavage and the Male Gaze

We meet the Evil Queen for the first time early in the pilot episode of *OUAT*. Prince Charming has just woken Snow White with true love's kiss. Seconds later, they're getting married in a beautiful fairy-tale ceremony, all smiles and "I dos." As the priest pronounces them "husband and wife," the large crowd that has gathered erupts into claps, cheers, and toothy grins. Life is good in the Enchanted Forest—until it isn't. Just before the couple seals their union with a kiss, the door to the great hall flies open, the crowd gasps, and the Evil Queen enters. We get our first glimpse of her, and she's not difficult to look at. She's dressed in a fantastic black costume, her makeup is impeccable, and her long dark hair cascades from a high ponytail. But perhaps the most satisfying thing about the Evil Queen is her fantastic cleavage. The Evil Queen's breasts are supported by an embellished black bustier, framed by the deep V of her riding-coat collar, and pointed to by a statement necklace. They're high and round. They're smooth and symmetrical. They move rhythmically, the curve of each breast raising and falling in response to her gait. As she approaches Snow White and Prince Charming, gliding as she walks as if aided by some invisible moving sidewalk, two male guards rush at her from opposite directions, and she effortlessly and ruthlessly flings them high up into the air and out of frame with a graceful flick of her wrists. A moment later, she stands before Snow White and Prince Charming and vows to make the couple and their complicit crowd suffer: "I shall destroy your happiness, if it is the last thing I do."

In the world beyond the boundaries of *OUAT*, the "happiness" the Evil Queen is most likely to destroy is that of hopeful feminist media critics. This is because the pilot episode of *OUAT* can be read as drawing on traditional misogynist stereotypes to

reconfirm patriarchal values and heteronormative male privilege and to disenfranchise powerful women and embodied femininity, or more specifically, breasted embodiment.

The Evil Queen is a stock character: a fairy-tale femme fatale. She is erotic and deadly.⁸ To borrow Elisabeth Bronfen's definition of femme fatale, the Evil Queen is a "figure of fascinating and threatening alterity" (73).⁹ The series presents the Evil Queen as an alternative to more conventional conceptions of femininity. Whereas Snow White offers a soft, maternal, family-oriented femininity with a sword-wielding feminist twist, and Emma Swan offers a gritty, skeptical, street-smart, contemporary femininity that is eventually tempered by motherhood and family, the Evil Queen is characterized by a selfish, ruthless, destructive, and hypersexual femininity that is both fascinating and threatening. The series introduces viewers to a powerful woman, a woman who coopts conventionally masculine traits such as independence, aggression, cruelty, and violence (Worell 92, 287, 405). She is raised to a position of authority in the narrative, but her authority is vilified. Indeed, the Enchanted Forest has a familiar patriarchal structure that's indicative of medieval fantasy: kings, knights, and traditional heteronormative families with traditional divisions of labour. And in the Enchanted Forest, the women with the most power are witches and fairies, women who have supernatural powers. But the Evil Queen isn't "evil" because she has supernatural powers—the Evil Queen is "evil" because she uses her supernatural powers to disrupt the peace and harmony of the reigning social order: she challenges conventional gender roles, and she challenges the patriarchal social order that governs the Enchanted Forest and, of course, our own world.

⁸ For scholarly discourse on the erotic and deadly nature of femme fatales, see Mary Ann Doane's *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* and Bram Dijkstra's *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Culture*.

⁹ Arons borrows this definition from Bronfen, and I was inspired by Arons to do the same.

This is evident in the pilot episode when she violently dispatches two male guards while interrupting Prince Charming and Snow White’s “happy ending,” their heterosexual marriage ceremony predicated on “true love.”¹⁰ And the important thing to remember is that the Evil Queen does all this with her high, round breasts prominently on display for spectators to see. Her power is constantly negotiated because while she is an active participant in the narrative, she is also an object of erotic visual pleasure for the television audience. Although the Evil Queen is represented as a uniquely powerful woman in the Enchanted Forest, she is simultaneously defined by her physical beauty and sexual attractiveness, by her breasted embodiment. High and round as they are, the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” perfectly pander to the male gaze.

In her groundbreaking and now canonical essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey theorizes the male gaze as a foundation of patriarchal film language. She asserts that “the patriarchal order in which we are caught” (834), the social order that is both androcentric and phallogentric, results in women being represented as onscreen sex objects. She explains how classical Hollywood films coopt the image of the female body to provide visual pleasure. Mulvey explains that the “determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (837), and that “[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (837). Mulvey also explains how classical

¹⁰ I’m reading marriage as an institution that is representative of the patriarchal social order. To explore how marriage has been read as a tool of patriarchal oppression see Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*. For an indictment of the myth of love and an explanation of marriage as a tool of patriarchal oppression, see Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* and Ti-Grace Atkinson’s *Amazon Odyssey*. For a useful overview of the feminist perspective on marriage as a tool of systematic patriarchal oppression, see Sara-Jane Finlay and Victoria Clarke’s “‘A Marriage of Inconvenience?’ Feminist Perspectives on Marriage.”

narrative film aligns spectators with this masculine and heterosexual way of looking (838)—a way of looking that reduces the female figure to a sexual object and codes it so that it doesn't just submit to, but actively encourages and invites objectification. And she explains, from a psychoanalytic perspective, how and why this visual paradigm is perpetuated. Mulvey locates its *raison d'être* in sexual difference and feminine lack: a woman's lack, specifically her "lack of [a] penis" (840), implies, for male viewers, "a threat of castration and hence unpleasure" (840). The castrated woman threatens the male spectator, and the male unconscious must escape this threat through one of two ways of looking: either through voyeurism or fetishistic scopophilia (840). The latter is most relevant to my discussion of "evil boobs," since, as Mulvey explains, "fetishistic scopophilia [...] builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself" (840). And, after all, the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" are a physically beautiful and satisfying object of desire.

Crucially, although this practice of looking is produced by and for heterosexual men, it does not exclude female spectators—I provide evidence of this in the beginning of chapter two. Mulvey and other film scholars assert that "the male gaze is also the female gaze—namely that women look at themselves through the male gaze" (Sassatelli 127). In order to access the same visual pleasure as our heterosexual male counterparts, we learn to be complicit in the visual rhetoric of patriarchy. We learn to look in the same way, with the same set of expectations and assumptions. We learn to look at ourselves as sexual objects.

Mulvey's description of the narrative and visual "division of labour" (838) in classical Hollywood and its relationship to the spectator, does not, however, map

perfectly onto *OUAT*. Throughout her essay, Mulvey refers to the passive female figure in classical Hollywood films (838). This passive female figure defers to the look and activity of the male protagonist, the one who is responsible for “making things happen” (838). And she also defers to the look and fantasy of the spectator. Mulvey says, “the gaze of the spectator and that of the male character in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude” (838). But this doesn’t happen in *OUAT* because the series offers no neat and tidy active/passive division of labour. The women aren’t passive, and unlike the female figures Mulvey mentions (840), the Evil Queen is never ogled by male characters. When male characters interact with the Evil Queen, they may be indifferent, differential, or frightened, but they’re seemingly oblivious to her more seductive charms. However, just because the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” don’t affect the male gaze within the diegetic world, it doesn’t mean they don’t have an extra-diegetic function.

The extra-diegetic function of the “evil boobs” is directly related to the Evil Queen’s agency in the narrative. The fact that the Evil Queen often drives the narrative may well account in large part for her “evil boobs.” The unconscious threat that Mulvey’s passive female figure poses to spectators, to the stability of the social order on and off the screen, has the potential to become all-too-conscious when that female figure isn’t passive at all, when she’s an active woman like the Evil Queen. The threat that an active woman, especially an independent, aggressive, cruel, and violent woman, poses to the male gaze, to the armchair spectator, is far more explicit and far more pressing.

In “‘If Her Stunning Beauty Doesn’t Bring You to Your Knees, Her Deadly Drop Kick Will’: Violent Women in Hong Kong Kung Fu Film,” published twenty-six years

after Mulvey's article, Wendy Arons extends Mulvey's argument to account for the sexual objectification of active and violent women in Hong Kong Kung Fu movies—several of whom have a lot in common with *OUAT*'s Evil Queen. Although Arons concentrates on violent women as heroines (rather than villains like the Evil Queen), her arguments about the function of the sexual objectification of active and violent women still track for my purposes. She argues that the hypersexualization of these women dampens the more explicit threat they pose—the hypersexualization functions as a kind of embodied bondage, confining and containing the more explicit threat they pose. Arons explains, “[hypersexualization] mutes the impact of their display of violence by reminding the viewer of their (primary) status as sex objects. The threat posed by the active, violent woman is thus contained by her confinement as a passive object of spectators' desire” (41). So, the hypersexualization of active and violent women effectively neutralizes the explicit threat that those women pose to spectators and to the social order. In addition, the hypersexualization of active and violent women simultaneously reconfirms the primacy of the male gaze and the patriarchal social order. Arons explains, “[t]he focus on the body as a female body—as a body in ostentatious display of breasts, legs, and buttocks—does mitigate the threat that women pose ‘to the very fabric of... society’ by reassuring the (male) viewer of his privilege as the possessor of the objectifying gaze” (41). It's a violent argument. Arons dismantles the female figure into composite body parts and explains how those parts are reduced to compensatory visual fodder. Powerful woman? Put some tits on her! Independent woman? Show off her ass! The prominent display of body parts that symbolize femininity is palliative, offered to spectators as compensation for an especially threatening woman.

In light of Arons' argument, the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" can be read—and indeed, must be read—as pandering to the male gaze. The Evil Queen's "evil boobs" are tasked with a heavy burden: they function as the fetish object that compensates not just for her violence but for her narrative activity, for her "evil," for the ways she challenges traditional gender roles and patriarchal social order. And while the Evil Queen's breasts are always compensatory because as spectators we're always aware of her "evil," it's the scenes of violence where the compensation is the most explicit. Early on in the series' run, Adam Horowitz, a co-creator, executive producer, and writer of *OUAT*, said that the pilot is "the template for what the series will be" (Radish). Horowitz was referring to the characters and to how they develop throughout the series, and his comment is, perhaps, even more insightful than he intended it to be. As we've seen, the pilot establishes the character of the Evil Queen and how her "evil boobs" function, and in that way it does indeed become a template for subsequent episodes.

This pattern, the way "evil boobs" palliate the spectators' male gaze, is established by many subsequent episodes of *OUAT*. For instance, it appears in "The Thing You Love Most," the second episode of the series. This episode focuses in large part on the Evil Queen's origin story. Viewers learn more about what the Evil Queen does to enact the Dark Curse—the thing that destroys everyone's happiness (at least temporarily). She makes a choice that clinches her characterization as a violent and active woman, as an "evil" woman. And, of course, she makes that choice with her cleavage on display.

The pivotal scene in "The Thing You Love Most" begins with the Evil Queen marching through the dark hallways of her castle. She's wearing the same costume she

wears when viewers first see her in the pilot episode (described above). Once again, as in the pilot episode, viewers are offered an erotic spectacle, characteristic of fetishistic scopophilia. But here the Evil Queen becomes what Mulvey calls “the direct recipient of the spectator’s look” (841), unmediated by the looks of diegetic characters. In the pivotal scene, the Evil Queen marches through the dark hallways of her castle. Her Mirror (Giancarlo Esposito) incessantly questions her, stares at her, but she pays him no heed and marches on. The camera doesn’t offer a point-of-view shot that belongs to the mirror. She denies his look—but she can’t deny ours. For almost ten seconds, the camera follows the Evil Queen as she moves, as the curves of her breasts rock from side to side with each forward step. The camera looks at her from a low angle and offers a full shot that appears to get tighter as she walks toward the camera. Then, the camera looks at her straight on in a medium close-up that, again, appears to get tighter as she walks toward the camera. Her ample cleavage is always in the frame, and, in fact, increasingly takes up more of the frame. In the first few seconds of this scene, her breasts are made into a beautiful and satisfying fetish object for spectator consumption—they’re offered as a cushion for the “evil” that’s to come.

The Evil Queen enters a large room where her father is lighting candles. We watch as the camera follows her, and her cleavage, around the room. She explains that she’s “conflicted” about the decision she has to make in order to enact the Dark Curse. When her father questions her about the nature of that decision, she replies, “I have to cut out the heart of the thing I love most.” It turns out that the thing she loves most is her father—this, as you can imagine, is not good news for Daddy. As the realization of what’s to come strikes her father and the audience, and the threat posed by the Evil

Queen becomes increasingly explicit, spectators are treated to various shots that feature her breasts. Then, the scene ends in a series of close-ups of her and her father's faces. Her father says, "I believe, given the chance, we can find happiness together. But the choice is yours." Crying a few tears into her father's shoulder, the Evil Queen responds, "I think you're right. I can be happy." And with that, while the camera stays trained on their faces, her shoulder makes a horrible motion—the audience infers that she takes her father's heart based on the brutal thrust and retraction of her right arm.

This part of the scene works to humanize, or more specifically, to feminize the Evil Queen with a visual display of softhearted emotion.¹¹ Arons would argue that this show of softhearted emotion works to "establish and reconfirm the reassuring and inescapable "fact" of [her] womanhood" (42). Horowitz might say it makes her more "real and relatable" (Radish)—viewers will like her, be less afraid of her, if she at least *cries* while she kills her father. But here, the creators seem to have made a choice at least as significant as the Evil Queen's: her breasts aren't on display in the final moments of this scene and neither is her father's heart. The visual display of violence is dampened in accordance with the removal of the palliative fetish object. In fact, it's the only time in the series where the Evil Queen takes a heart, and the audience isn't offered a comprehensive visual display complete with a red organ. Here, her breasts confine and contain her threat until it erupts in what is likely intended to be an especially melodramatic moment. When her violence and activity does erupt, however melodramatically, the Evil Queen's particular brand of "evil" is further defined.

¹¹ Showing softhearted emotion is traditionally associated with femininity rather than masculinity. In particular, crying is traditionally associated with femininity rather than masculinity. See Worell, pages 287, 397, and 511.

We know from the pilot that the Evil Queen is “evil” because she challenges the social order for selfish reasons. The second episode furthers this characterization. While the whole of this scene hinges on the confession that the Evil Queen supposedly loves her father most of all, which would seem to reinforce a conventionally feminine characterization of a dutiful daughter who respects the patriarchal social order, the irony that the scene turns on produces a very different effect. When the Evil Queen shifts the pronoun from her father’s use of the first-person plural “we” to her use of the first-person singular “I,” it marks a rejection not only of her father, but of all fathers, of the patriarchal social order. In this moment the Evil Queen chooses independence. Yes, she cries. But during that passing display of conventional femininity she willfully uses her supernatural powers to commit patricide. She destroys her father, and she destroys a symbol of the patriarchal society that orders the Enchanted Forest and our own less enchanted world. Of course, this kind of violence is not an isolated incident for the Evil Queen.

Many of the Evil Queen’s scenes throughout the series reveal her unique brand of anti-patriarchal and gender-bending “evil” activity and the corresponding compensatory function of her “evil boobs.” There are many examples where the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” work to palliate the male gaze of her television audience—so many, in fact, that it would be impossible to explore them all here. So, I’ve chosen to explore a few representative scenes where the Evil Queen’s violence and her cleavage are both on display. These scenes don’t just provide a snapshot of her character, they provide clear examples of how the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” function as compensation for the male gaze.

For instance, in “The Evil Queen,” the twentieth episode of the second season, the title character searches for the fugitive Snow White in a small village where, it is rumoured, she is hiding. As the opening credits roll, the Evil Queen rides into the frame on horseback, a host of dark guards with burning torches behind her. She’s wearing an embellished red and black riding coat with another deep V neckline. Her cleavage fills the V and bounces from side to side with the motion of her horse. After dismounting, investigating the village, and coming up Snow White-less, the Evil Queen addresses a frightened crowd of villagers. She tells the crowd that “[i]nformation leading to Snow’s capture will be richly rewarded.” But the villagers remain silent. As the Evil Queen walks back and forth before the villagers, as she becomes increasingly frustrated, as the situation becomes increasingly tenuous, we are treated to a couple medium close-ups that feature the Evil Queen’s cleavage. Eventually she retreats to her guards and instructs them on what to do: “[k]ill them all. No Mercy. Find me Snow White.” As she pronounces this death sentence, the camera offers a close-up that carefully excludes her cleavage. Like when she commits patricide, her breasts aren’t on display to spectators in the final moments of the scene and neither is the violence itself. But unlike when she commits patricide, the absence isn’t due to melodrama. Here, she’s not physically committing the violence, and we don’t see it—the scene ends abruptly before the guards act on their orders. Once again, the Evil Queen’s breasts confine and contain her threat until the moment it erupts. In this scene, that moment is anticlimactic since both the visual display of violence and the palliative fetish object are absent.

But that isn’t always the case. In “Mother,” the twentieth episode of the fourth season, we flashback to a time in the Enchanted Forest before the Evil Queen kills her

father and enacts the Dark Curse. In the beginning of this episode, the Evil Queen is not impressed when she spies a peasant couple getting married in a meadow that forms part of her Royal Lands. She stops her carriage and hops out with her father in tow. She's wearing an embellished blue and black riding coat with yet another deep V neckline. Although this costume doesn't boost her cleavage as much as some of the other outfits she wears, it certainly highlights the mounds of her breasts and her décolletage. As she voices her frustration to the small crowd, the camera offers a medium close-up shot of the Evil Queen—a shot that includes that deep V. The audience is treated to a few moments of the shadowy curve of her breast as it responds to her bold gesticulations. The camera offers a close-up of the groom's face as he pleads ignorance, and it cuts back to a medium close-up of the Evil Queen, décolletage on display, as she thrusts her hand into his chest. The groom doubles over as the Evil Queen removes his red, glowing heart. She and her father squabble about what she should do next, but he is unable to control her—she defies him and the patriarchal social order he represents. She makes a pronouncement to the groom: "I was going to spare you, but someone just made me angry." In a medium close-up, the groom's heart in her hand, her décolletage framed by the shot, she starts to squeeze. A moment later, after the groom has fallen dead to the ground, we get a low-angle medium close-up that frames the Evil Queen's deep V as the cremated remains of the man's heart pour from her hand. A moment later, she's climbing back into her carriage, telling her father to walk home, and leaning over to reveal another few seconds of shadowy cleavage just before the scene ends. In this scene spectators have direct visual access to the Evil Queen's décolletage both before, during, and after the moment she commits violence.

In “Wish You Were Here,” the tenth episode of the sixth season, the Evil Queen’s breasts are once again on display as she murders someone—or, in this case, two someones. In this episode, the Evil Queen enters an alternate version of the Enchanted Forest where the Dark Curse never happened. In a particularly important scene, the Evil Queen is trying to goad a cloying and passive Emma into taking some much-needed action. She’s using Emma’s parents as leverage against her, threatening to kill them if Emma doesn’t do something. The Evil Queen is pacing around a large room in her castle, wearing a full length black and grey gown with an ornate underbust jacket that frames an embellished black bustier. Her high, round cleavage is fully displayed as she threatens Emma. Although the Evil Queen’s prominent cleavage is momentarily obscured as she leans over and simultaneously thrusts one fist into each of the Charmings’ chests, it’s visible again almost as soon as she pulls out their hearts. Queen Snow White and King Charming wince in pain as the Evil Queen continues to pace around the room, their hearts in her hands. As the Evil Queen stops to address Emma, the camera treats us to a low-angle shot of her breasts overflowing their fantastic bustier, flanked on either side by a tightly grasped, red, glowing heart. Frustrated and yelling at a sobbing Emma, the Evil Queen squeezes the Charmings’ hearts again and again until she eventually squeezes for the last time. The Evil Queen leans into a low-angle shot, cleavage prominently on display, as the dusty remains of the Charmings’ hearts fall through her clenched fists. This scene confirms the Evil Queen’s threat and the function of her breasts. This image perfectly exemplifies Arons’ argument by using an “ostentatious display of breasts” (41) to “mitigate the threat” (41) the Evil Queen poses to the social order and the viewer. Emma, Snow White, and Charming are the undisputed heroes of *OUAT* and a family unit

to boot. Even though this is an alternate timeline and the Evil Queen isn't killing the real Snow White and Charming, it's still a significant act of violence against the patriarchal social order of *OUAT*, and it's still momentarily shocking for viewers who are invested in these heroes. Spectators are given easy visual access to the Evil Queen's prominent cleavage before, during, and after the moment of violence in order to compensate for that violence, to ease her threat. Indeed, in the rhetoric of the show, this degree of visual access is at least partly indicative of just how explicit and affecting this violence is.

These scenes share several commonalities that illustrate how the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" pander to the male gaze in the way Arons theorizes. Each of these scenes represents the Evil Queen as an active and violent woman who poses an explicit threat. These scenes combine to further define the Evil Queen's "evil" activity as the ways in which she challenges traditional gender roles and the patriarchal social order. For instance, in "The Evil Queen," the title character instructs her guards to murder an entire village. She's the military authority. She's in control. She wields the power. She tells her guards what to do, who to execute. In "Mother," she rips out the heart of a groom. She kills him. But, importantly, she disrupts yet another marriage ceremony, a symbol of the patriarchal social order. In "Wish You Were Here" she immobilizes and rips out the hearts of the Charmings, a heterosexual married couple who represent a "beacon of hope and true love" (Vick). In each of these scenes she asserts a threatening femininity characterized by independence, aggression, and cruelty. And, just like how she denies her Mirror's look and commits patricide in "The Evil Queen," in each of these later scenes she challenges male dominance within the narrative whether it's represented by an individual like King Charming or by an institution like marriage and "true love."

In each of these scenes, her breasts play an important role. Again and again, the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" stave off the explicit threat of metaphorical (and literal) castration for television spectators because *OUAT* manipulates the physical beauty of the Evil Queen's breasts to fashion them into an intensely satisfying object. The utterly outrageous, shiny, beaded, bejeweled, and bedazzled costumes support and frame what appear to be a perfect pair of female breasts. These breasts exemplify what Diane Naugler, in her work on "breasted femininity" (104), calls our contemporary "breasted standard" (104). The Evil Queen's "evil boobs" somehow manage to embody what Naugler refers to as our "contradictory prescriptions" (104) for breasted femininity: they are simultaneously "voluptuous but perky, soft but firm, round, and symmetrical" (104). This is the impossible aesthetic ideal espoused by contemporary North American popular culture. In *Woman: An Intimate Geography*, cultural commentator Natalie Angier theorizes what she calls the "fantasy breast" (127). She explains that as a culture, at this moment in time, we are not particularly interested in the maternal breast (127). Instead, we are obsessed with the aesthetic breast (127). Angier writes, "[w]hat we love is not the breast *per se* but the fantasy breast, the aesthetic breast of no practical value" (128). Indeed, the Evil Queen's narrative makes the nature of her breasts explicit—her breasts will never be maternal breasts because she has taken an infertility potion ("Mother"). Stripped of any potential for maternity, and looking the way they do, the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" are a pure aesthetic object—pure fantasy breasts. Engineered as they are to be a hyperbeautiful and hypersexual object of consumer delight, these fantasy breasts become an erotic fetish object. The Evil Queen's "evil boobs" neutralize her "evil" threat, the threat of her activity and violence. They remind us that we are not in danger like her

quivering crowds. She becomes a sex object so that we may be reminded of our safe and privileged position as possessors of the objectifying male gaze.

And so, it might be time to ask an important question about the Evil Queen's "evil boobs." If, according to the theoretical framework that I've borrowed from Mulvey and Arons, "evil boobs" function as an object of erotic visual pleasure, as something that compensates for the threat of an active and violent woman, as something that panders to the male gaze, are the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" actually "evil" at all? Perhaps not. Perhaps the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" are little more than a toothless erotic fetish object, a consumer talisman. Perhaps they're not actually all that "evil."

Or, perhaps they are.

Chapter 3: Female Fans, Phallic Breasts, and the Diversity of Women

The theory of the male gaze provides a tidy explanation as to why the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" exist and how they function in *OUAT*. It explains why some female fans who are aligned with the male gaze celebrate the Evil Queen and her breasts. For instance, @meshannen tweets, "@LanaParrilla this is amazing..the only thing i see are boobs..i mean hearts...all i see is are the hearts....oops ;) #EvilBoobs." Attached to this tweet is a high-angle close-up that features the Evil Queen's cleavage and a glowing, red heart clasped in each of her hands. Then there's @thewisdomtooth who tweets, "Apparently I'd die from my heart being crushed by the Evil Queen. I'd be distracted by the #EvilCleavage obviously. Damn #WhatAWayToGo." These tweets and many more suggest that the Evil Queen's breasts pander to the male gaze in the way that Arons describes. And, of course, they confirm that at least some of the female fans are aligned with this particular male gaze. However, the theory of the male gaze doesn't adequately address the complexities of the female fandom. It doesn't provide a nuanced and convincing explanation for why female fans want to embody and materialize the Evil Queen and her "evil boobs." While it's a useful and relevant theoretical model, it has its limitations. And contrary to Mulvey's position that "the male gaze is also the female gaze" (Sassatelli 127), subsequent theorists have argued that the male gaze is not the only way of looking available to female spectators. So, in an effort to explore a uniquely female way of looking at the Evil Queen and her "evil boobs," I now turn to Jackie Stacey and her article "Desperately Seeking Difference." I apply Stacey's theory of the active look of the female spectator to the female fans who cosplay the Evil Queen, and I

argue that these female fans seem to see the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs” as an empowering feminine ideal.

Stacey proposes a model of female spectatorship that accounts for the pleasure a woman experiences when she looks at another woman. She acknowledges that “sexual difference” (53), the difference between men and women, is “often seen as the sole producer of desire” (53), but she posits that “forms of otherness between women [...] which are not merely reducible to sexual difference” (53) fascinate onscreen women and female spectators. She argues that the difference between men and women isn’t the only axis of difference available to diegetic characters or spectators. She theorizes that “the difference between two women” (59) can account for the nuanced pleasures of onscreen inter-female desire and female spectatorship.

Stacey explains how the differences between women motivate identification and desire. She examines female protagonists in *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* who are actively engaged in trying to become women who are very different to themselves, women who are their “idealized object of desire” (55), what they consider to be a “desirable feminine ideal” (56). Stacey theorizes that, similarly, female spectators are tempted by the idea of “becoming an ideal feminine other” (61), becoming a very different woman. She theorizes that the pleasure of looking, as a female spectator, at an onscreen woman, relies on the “interplay of desire and identification” (55). Instead of being mutually exclusive as they are in the theoretical model of the male gaze, here desire and identification mingle and marry.

Of course, Stacey reveals that while *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* tempt female characters and female spectators with an ideal feminine other, that ideal

isn't what we might expect. Stacey examines female protagonists who are obsessed with other women: in *All About Eve*, Eve Butler (Anne Baxter), a female fan, adores Margot Channing (Bette Davis), a glamorous Broadway star and an "extremely powerful woman" (56); in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, homemaker Roberta (Rosanna Arquette) is taken with street-smart party-girl Susan (Madonna) who "transgresses conventional forms of feminine behaviour" (60). Neither of these ideals espouse a Suzy-Homemaker version of ideal femininity. These ideals aren't based on sociocultural norms that attach the saccharine social role of kind, concerned homemaker to women (Worell 565)—they're based on a subversion of those norms. Stacey's theory recognizes that for women there's a certain plasticity to the notion of ideal femininity.

These notions of ideal femininity and active female desire may even involve an erotic component, although they doesn't necessarily have to. The films Stacey explores aren't "lesbian films" per se. She's using them to theorize "certain possibilities of pleasure" (53). For instance, Stacey explains that in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, Roberta's interplay of desire and identification "is partly a desire to become more like [Susan], but also a desire to know her, and to solve the riddle of her femininity" (58). This active desire to "know" and to "become" another women isn't necessarily erotic, but it certainly doesn't preclude eroticism or a preoccupation with embodiment—especially when that embodiment is articulated by patriarchal film conventions of "to-be-looked-at-ness" and is such an integral part of an onscreen ideal feminine other.

Stacey's theoretical model acknowledges active identification with and desire for an ideal feminine other, but it also challenges that ideal. Stacey explains that although *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* tempt female characters and female spectators

with ideal feminine others, these films simultaneously deny the possibility that an onscreen or offscreen woman can seamlessly “become” their ideal. Stacey says that these films “tempt the woman spectator with the fictional fulfillment of becoming an ideal feminine other, while denying complete transformation by insisting upon differences between women” (61). Whether the actively desiring woman is onscreen or offscreen, she can never fully become her ideal feminine other because she is, of course, different. This raising and dashing aspiration may seem sadistic (and indeed, it might be). However, Stacey’s theory does manage to challenge the very concept of ideal femininity by recognizing the differences between women—the diversity of women.

Stacey’s theory is exemplified by the women spectators who cosplay the Evil Queen and post their cosplay portraits to *DeviantArt*, *Twitter*, and elsewhere, by their desire to “know” and to “become” the Evil Queen—if only for a few hours at a time. Far from a homogenous group, this cosplaying fandom is composed of different women from different backgrounds. It makes sense that *OUAT* would attract a wide range of different women, since the show is, in part, a show about feminine difference and the diversity of women. As previously mentioned, the show features three female leads with vastly different femininities: Snow White, Emma Swan, and the Evil Queen. Each of these characters offers female spectators a desirable ideal feminine other that is intimately bound up with embodiment. But in terms of breasted embodiment, the Evil Queen and her fantasy breasts are the most ubiquitous and, arguably, the most desirable for female spectators.

As *OUAT*’s resident fairy-tale femme fatale, the Evil Queen offers an “evil” femininity, a fascinating and threatening femininity that overlaps with the ideal

femininities of *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, and her fantasy breasts are bound up with that femininity. There is evidence from the female fan discourse on *Twitter* (evidence that I'll address shortly) that the Evil Queen's fantasy breasts are "evil," at least in part, because of how they look. But how could that be? As we've already seen, Mulvey's and Arons' theory of the male gaze tells us that fantasy breasts function as an erotic fetish object that panders to the male gaze, but as we will soon see, fantasy breasts can also function as something threatening. In an effort to unpack the significance of the Evil Queen's breasts for the female fans who cosplay her, for those who exemplify Stacey's female spectator, I will begin by invoking yet another version of the male gaze and yet another faction of the female fandom. I will return to Stacey's female spectator after I consider the evidence from the female fan discourse on *Twitter*.

On *Twitter*, some female fans of *OUAT* perceive the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" as active and violent. For instance, @GryffinNad tweets, "Her smile like ; let me kill them all posting a pic of my boobs. 😏😁❤️ #EvilRegals #EvilBoobs #plungingneckline."

Attached to the tweet is an extreme close-up of the Evil Queen that frames her smile and her cleavage. @GryffinNad doesn't implicate the Evil Queen's ability to carve out a beating heart and crush it into dust—she implicates the Evil Queen's breasts.

@GryffinNad suggests that the Evil Queen's "evil" fantasy breasts are going to "kill" her admirers all by their lonesome. And @GryffinNad is not alone. @craftydarkpixie tweets,

"So so true 😏 also... #Evilcleavage kills me everytime 😏."

Attached to the tweet is a GIF that features the Evil Queen's prominent cleavage. @MsBrooklyn88 tweets, "Lana slays this scene. Oh my god 😏 I'm dead!!!! #EvilQueen #EvilBoobs #EvilRegals

#LanaParrilla." Attached to @MsBrooklyn88's tweet is a GIF that features the Evil

Queen doing a dance move where she draws her shoulders toward her chest and then quickly thrusts her prominent cleavage forward. @Prettyy_Regal tweets, “[y]ou know what, she totally knows we’re all gonna drop dead when she posts these things #Evilboobs are back lads 😏👉😏👊.” Attached to this tweet is a behind-the-scenes image of Lana Parilla dressed as the Evil Queen and squeezing her breasts together with her arms. It’s important to note that when @Prettyy_Regal uses the term “lads,” she explicitly aligns herself and other users of the #evilboobs hashtag with a very particular male gaze—a male gaze that I’ll explain in the next paragraph. Like @GryffinNad, fans @craftydarkpixie, @MsBrooklyn88, and @Prettyy_Regal suggest that the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” are responsible for the metaphorical violence done to them. The terms “slay” and “kill” coupled with the assertions that they are “dead” or are going to “drop dead” show how some female fans frame the Evil Queen’s breasts as something active and violent. Although these tweets are couched in humour and celebration (and lots of emojis), they recognize and articulate something intensely fascinating and threatening about the Evil Queen’s fantasy breasts. Instead of being domesticated through fetishization, as Mulvey’s and Arons’ arguments might suggest, here the Evil Queen’s fantasy breasts are perceived as a powerful erotic weapon.

Several theorists explain why fantasy breasts can be perceived this way. Angier explains that fantasy breasts have a unique power to affect us, to attract us, to fascinate us. She says the “aesthetic breast arouses us, grabs us by the collar or the bodice, and so it is used on billboards and magazine covers, and everywhere we turn” (127). Fantasy breasts have the power to transcend the rectangular confines of a billboard, page, or screen and demand our attention. Angier’s description of the power of fantasy breasts is

consistent with sociologist Michael Kimmel’s argument that feminine beauty can make men feel threatened. Kimmel argues that “beauty is experienced by men as an act of aggression” (257). He explains that feminine beauty “invades men’s thoughts, elicits unwelcome feelings of desire and longing, makes men feel helpless, powerless, vulnerable” (257). To buttress his argument, he points to the way we frame feminine beauty through a language of violence, saying a woman is “dressed to kill” (257) or a “bombshell” (257)—a language that squares with the hypermasculine language of violence that appears in the *Twitter* discourse. Those female fans use the same language of violence that Kimmel cites, and they reinforce it with hashtags, emojis, GIFs, and still images. Naugler draws on Kimmel’s argument to explain why female breasts are sometimes framed by this language of violence, referred to as “guns” (105), or “torpedoes” (105), or “missiles” (107), or explicitly as “threateners” (108). In this hypermasculine discourse, feminine beauty, and in particular, feminine breasts, are framed as erotic weapons that overcome or overwhelm. Naugler says this suggests that “women’s breasts are targets of the male gaze, but this gaze is uncertain and, seemingly intimidated” (105). And so, we get a different interpretation from Mulvey’s view of the female figure as something that is subjected to the male gaze and Arons’ view of the female body as something that palliates the male gaze. Here, Naugler, Kimmel, Angier, and the female fans show us that fantasy breasts like the Evil Queen’s can be experienced as something active and violent, an erotic weapon that fascinates and threatens an uncertain male gaze—the gaze claimed by @Prettyy_Regal.¹²

¹² Naugler, Kimmel, and Angier purpose a male gaze that is different from Mulvey’s and Arons’ male gaze. Specifically for Arons, hyperbeautiful and hypersexual breasts compensate for an onscreen woman’s violence and activity—they reassure the spectator of his or her position as bearer of the objectifying gaze. For Naugler, Kimmel, and Angier, the spectator is intimidated by hyperbeautiful and hypersexual breasts.

The epitome of this response to the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" is exemplified by the work of one female fan on *DeviantArt*. A woman who goes by the moniker Kiwi-Mystere has engaged in some very creative labour: she's made a GIF out of the Evil Queen's "evil boobs" ("Boobs Attack"). It features a comic-book style collage of nine extreme close-ups of the Evil Queen's signature cleavage as a static background with genre staples "WHAM!" "BOOM!" and "BAM!" superimposed. In the middle of the static banner, an animation appears: "BOOM." An illustration of a black bomb with a black fuse suddenly and repeatedly becomes the text "Boobs ATTACK" with the requisite spiky halo that signals an explosion. This fanart firmly displaces the Evil Queen's cleavage from the fantasy realm and places it in the even more hyperbolic realm of comic-book action and violence. Kiwi-Mystere plays with the idea that the Evil Queen's fantasy breasts are literal weapons. JeanneDeaux comments, "Hahahahahaha! I so love it. You made me laugh so hard with this one I almost cried." This GIF is funny. It's funny because it's hyperbolic. The Evil Queen's breasts don't function in the same way as, say, the breasts that belong to the fembots in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997)—the Evil Queen's breasts aren't exactly literal automatic weapons. But, as we've seen, they are conceived and understood as erotic weapons.

Fantasy breasts can be conceived and understood as erotic weapons because they are phallic objects. It's no accident that fantasy breasts can "invade" our thoughts. This sense of invasion, of penetration, is crucial. The fantasy breast is akin to a prominent male body part: the penis. They share many similarities: they protrude up and out, what was once flaccid can become full and erect, and size does matter. Indeed, because the Evil Queen is represented as having a "phallic attribute" (Laplanche and Pontalis 311),

she becomes a phallic woman. Barbara Creed addresses the phallic woman in horror films in her monograph *The Monstrous-Feminine*.¹³ She explains that “[t]he phallic woman is created in response to the fetishist’s refusal to believe that woman does not possess a penis” (116). Creed describes the phallic woman as the castrated woman that Mulvey posits, but she also describes the phallic woman as the castrating woman. Creed explains that the phallic woman is “an image designed to deny the existence of both these figures (woman as castrated/castrating)” (116). The phallic woman is an image designed to deny the threat of female monstrosity. Here, the male fetishist doesn’t evade his castration anxiety with the labyrinthine logic of fetishistic scopophilia, of building-up a fetish object. Instead, he bestows a phallic object on the “castrated/castrating woman” (Creed 116) or takes something of hers as a phallic object (Creed 116). Now, it’s not uncommon for a powerful witch to be represented as a phallic woman (Creed 76)—just think of all those long pointy hats, magic wands, and broomsticks! And, as Creed explains, “the representation of the witch continues to foreground her essentially sexual nature” (76). But what is different in *OUAT* is that the Evil Queen’s sexual nature is masculine—not feminine. The Evil Queen doesn’t square with Creed’s conception of monstrous females and the monstrous-feminine: the Evil Queen is not characterized by the messy physical abjection and incorporation of the gaping *vagina dentata*, the *femme castratrice*, or the castrating mother.¹⁴ No, the Evil Queen is different. Remember, the

¹³ Although Creed is focused on women in the horror genre, she specifically discusses witches throughout her book. As such, Creed’s analysis is relevant to a discussion of the Evil Queen—a powerful, supernatural, and homicidal witch.

¹⁴ These are the three forms of the female castrator that Creed explores throughout *The Monstrous-Feminine*. These three female castrators are often characterized by physical abjection in the form of blood (an implicit or explicit reference to maternal blood and/or menstrual blood). And they are often characterized by physical incorporation (often explicitly taking another into their body via one of their bodily orifices).

Evil Queen's activity and her violence involves thrusting her hand into her victims' chests and crushing their beating hearts. Thrusting! Penetrating! Invading! Her activity and violence, which are highly sexualized and are explicitly bound up with her sexuality when she kills her male lover in this way in the first season of the *OUAT* ("The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter"), are highly phallic. Like a penis, her activity, violence, and sexuality are defined by her ability to penetrate, to enter, to rape—to violently insert herself into a great hall or a body. She does not passively accept—she actively penetrates. And so, the Evil Queen's phallic breasts function as a visual synonym for her phallic activity, violence, and sexuality—her phallic threat. And while we can read her phallic breasts as a fetishist's attempt to allay his castration anxiety, that attempt fails because she's a phallicized woman. The male gaze can't successfully rewrite her masculine activity, violence, and sexuality with sexual sameness because instead of containing her threat, the sameness reminds him of it. Indeed, the failure of the Evil Queen's phallic breasts as a fetish object accounts for the ways that they might fascinate and threaten the male subjects described by Naugler, Kimmel, and Angier and the ways the Evil Queen's breasts do fascinate and threaten the female fans on *Twitter* who evince what Naugler calls an uncertain male gaze. Instead of becoming the fetish object that compensates for her activity and violence like Arons suggests, as a "phallic attribute" the Evil Queen's breasts remind the spectator of her phallic threat to their bodily integrity—her ability to violently penetrate them. And this reminder is doubly potent because the Evil Queen doesn't have just one "phallic attribute"—she has two. These quintessentially feminine phallic objects come in pairs unlike their masculine counterpart.

So whether it's a man's "sword" or a woman's "guns," the phallus, the penis, the fantasy breast, the Evil Queen's arm, can penetrate, can invade. By understanding fantasy breasts as phallic objects, we can understand how the Evil Queen's breasts function as a visual synonym for the way she uses her phallic activity and violence to challenge the patriarchal social order and traditional gender roles, how she imitates patriarchal power in a particularly high, round, firm, hyperbolic way. Instead of stepping outside the patriarchal order, she's putting it on. And because female fans can't escape patriarchy, some may align themselves with Mulvey's and Arons' certain male gaze and feel reassured by the Evil Queen's breasts, some may align themselves with Naugler's, Kimmel's, and Angier's uncertain male gaze and feel a little threatened, and some may identify with the Evil Queen's "threateners" and conclude that putting on the quintessential symbol of patriarchal power is, well, empowering. That sense of empowerment makes it easy to understand why the evil Queen's "evil boobs" are so tempting, so imitable for female spectators who actively look in that way that Stacey theorizes, who actively desire to "become" an "evil" ideal feminine other.

While there is plenty of love in the *OUAT* fandom for Snow White and Emma Swan on *Twitter* and plenty of women who cosplay those characters on *DeviantArt* and elsewhere, it's not surprising that many female fans celebrate the Evil Queen. She even shares some similarities with *All About Eve's* Margot Channing and *Desperately Seeking Susan's* Susan Thomas. Whereas Margot and Susan had their phallic cigarettes and their masculine character traits, the Evil Queen has her phallic breasts and her own masculine character traits. The Evil Queen, with her fascinating and threatening phallic femininity, augmented by and represented by her phallic breasts, becomes an enviable "ideal

feminine other” (Stacey 61)—a feminine other who is essentially phallic. In fact, the Evil Queen’s phallic characteristics are, I think, the very point of feminine difference that some female spectators respond to. The pleasure of looking that some female spectators experience, that “interplay of desire and identification” (55) that Stacey suggests, seems to find its fullest expression in the female fans’ Evil Queen cosplay, in their desire to “know” and to “become” this phallic woman, to embody and materialize her phallic power.

Since I began my online research, I’ve seen portraits of well over one hundred female fans cosplaying the Evil Queen. Their costumes range from modest, store-bought ensembles to extravagant, handmade masterpieces. It’s clear, as media studies scholar Matthew Hale explains, that many “[f]ans spend hundreds of hours and, even thousands of dollars handcrafting incredible outfits and accessories” (8). But in the case of the female fans who cosplay the Evil Queen, it’s also clear that they add to these outfits and accessories a very particular element of their own embodiment.

In her cosplay portrait, female fan Marie-Pier Nadeau is looking at you (see fig. 1). Her smokey eye and red lip are impeccable. Her dark hair is high on her head, and her stiff collar stands at attention. One gloved hand rests on the hip of her elaborate riding coat—it’s a rich black brocade with red piping, red lining, and white embroidery. Her statement necklace points downward, drawing your eye to the sweetheart neckline of her embellished bustier and the shadowy cleft of her cleavage. Her porcelain breasts fill the cups of her bustier but don’t overflow. Instead of high and round like the Evil Queen’s, they are soft and settled into the cups of her costume.



Fig. 1. Marie-Pier Nadeau cosplaying the Evil Queen from Marie-Pier Nadeau; 17 Oct. 2015; Marie-Pier Nadeau's personal collection.

Nadeau is a French-Canadian woman who describes herself as “a cosplaying programmer” (“Silyah245.”). She sews all her own costumes, and she shares her progress and cosplay portraits on social media: *Twitter*, *DeviantArt*, *Instagram*, and *Tumblr*. The cosplay portrait seen above appears in a tweet on *Twitter*.¹⁵ Nadeau confirms her cosplay identity with some accompanying text: “@LanaParrilla Looking fabulously evil in my Regina costume #50EvilWays.” But even without the confirmation, any fan of *OUAT* would instantly recognize her cosplay. Hale says a cosplayer must produce “a set of signs with their attire and performance that would generate an association between the ‘parent

¹⁵ The cosplay portrait that appears on *Twitter* features the watermark for Droo Photographer (Andrew Chin) in the lower right corner. Otherwise, it is the same as the cosplay portrait reproduced in fig.1.

text' and his or her body" (8). Nadeau does that—and more. She directs her creative labour into materializing and embodying *OUAT*'s Evil Queen. She mimics the Evil Queen with her hair and makeup, her riding coat and pose, and, critically, with her partially revealed breasts, her breasted embodiment. Fan studies scholar Nicolle Lamerichs recently argued that the “role of the body is crucial when expressing ourselves through media or participating in media content creation” (175) but that “researchers have rarely explored how embodiment shapes fan practices” (175). The female fans who cosplay the Evil Queen offer an excellent opportunity to explore the intersection of female embodiment and fan practice. The women who cosplay the Evil Queen come from different backgrounds and lead different lives, but they all mobilize their breasted embodiment in their fan practice. Nadeau and many other female fans use their breasts to attempt to materialize and embody the Evil Queen’s fascinating and threatening femininity. They wear their breasts like a Batman cosplayer wears a cape or a mask—their breasts become part of their costumes.

Take Victoria Avalor’s portrait. Victoria is an American woman who describes herself as “a light skinned Latina” (@Victoria_Avalor) and “a former preschool teacher who currently works as a professional princess performer” (“About”). She posts her Evil Queen cosplay portraits on her blog *Confessions of a Cosplay Girl*. In one, Victoria directly faces the camera and stares at her spectator. Her hands lift the corners of her luxurious black brocade riding coat. Her full, round breasts sit high on her chest, held in position by a tight corset and framed by an elaborate collar (“Regina the Evil Queen (*Once Upon a Time*) Gallery”).

Then there's Jamilet Rodriguez. She's a plus size American woman, and she posts cosplay portraits on *DeviantArt*. In one, she wears an opulent burgundy and black brocade gown. She stares straight ahead, straight at her spectator, and offers an apple. Her high collar is made entirely of feathers and her low neckline is sumptuously embellished with white lace and rhinestones. At the centre of the portrait, those lace and rhinestone embellishments frame Jamilet's plump, ample, voluptuous cleavage ("*Once Upon a Time* Regina the Evil Queen").

Next we come to Jacky Brodhead. Jacky is a petite American woman who posts cosplay portraits on *DeviantArt*. In one, she wears a luxe blue and black gown. Her hand is on her hip, and she's staring down at her spectators. Her collar is high, structured, and ornate, and her neckline is low, embellished, and revealing. Jacky's small breasts curve just above the embellishments ("*Once Upon a Time* Regina Cosplay").

Finally, there's Ginerva. She's an Italian woman who also posts cosplay portraits on *DeviantArt*. In one of her portraits, she offers an apple and locks eyes with the camera. Sans corset or bustier, Ginerva puts gravity to work. She leans over so that her heavy, medium breasts fill the neckline of her modest purple gown with a line of cleavage. In her comments just below the image, Ginerva says she did her best "to look evil and sinister enough" ("Regina/Evil Queen 1").

These cosplay portraits suggest that these women are recognizing and reiterating, or at least attempting to reiterate, the Evil Queen's fascinating and threatening femininity—with special emphasis on her "evil boobs." These photos are just a small sample of the dozens of cosplay portraits that share striking similarities. These cosplayers seem to be identifying with and taking inspiration specifically from some of ABC's

promotional photos of the Evil Queen.¹⁶ In these promotional photos and in the cosplay portraits they inspire, the pose and framing emphasize the breasts and the active female look. There is no explicit violence—no heart being ripped out like on the show. So explicit violence isn't what these cosplayers are identifying with.¹⁷ In each cosplay portrait, the woman's stare unapologetically breaks the fourth wall and confronts the spectator while her breasts, with all their phallic entitlement, demand attention. What these cosplayers seem to take pleasure in, at least in part, is the erotic aggression that is clear in the promotional photos, the way the Evil Queen's phallic breasts remind the spectator of her phallic threat. Although in these portraits the makeup is on point and the gowns are spectacular, the cosplayer's look and her cleavage are the most striking visual features, and each reinforces the other in a harmonious visual bid that seems designed to fascinate and threaten an uncertain male gaze.

These female fans, these cosplayers, are engaging in a kind of gendered “play.”¹⁸ They're fulfilling the logical conclusion of Stacey's theoretical model—they're realizing an interplay of identification and desire by materializing and embodying the Evil Queen. They harness the power of their own breasts, dressed and positioned as the Evil Queen's fantasy breasts, in an effort to become a fascinating and threatening ideal feminine other—and perhaps, even an ideal feminine other for their own female spectators. Hale says that cosplayers engage critically with the text they want to reference (8). I think that's true. I also think they're engaging critically with the world around them, with the

¹⁶ A cursory Google image search turns up several promotional photos that share these similarities. For example, see the promotional photo that nevara91 has posted to *Fanpop*.

¹⁷ There are cosplayers who represent the explicit violence of the Evil Queen. And in those cosplay photos, the cosplayers' breasts seem to function in the same way Arons' theory suggests the Evil Queen's breasts function in the text during scenes of explicit violence.

¹⁸ For detailed definition of “play” as it applies to fan practice, see Matt Hill's theory of “affective play” (60-81) in his book *Fan Cultures*.

patriarchal world and the variety of male gazes. I think they know implicitly what Stacey makes explicit, that “women’s sense of themselves as sexual subjects cannot exist without their awareness of themselves as sexual objects” (*Star Gazing* 8). Women’s sexuality, female sexuality, and specifically female breastedness, is constantly constructed and reconstructed, for us and by us. We exist as subjects but that existence is inextricable from our existence as objects of Mulvey’s and Arons’ male gaze and our awareness of our own objecthood. This critical awareness may explain why the cosplaying female fans are tempted by the Evil Queen’s breasted embodiment: by watching the show and looking at the promotional photos, they can read the Evil Queen’s breasted embodiment as something other than a consumer talisman; they can read her breasted embodiment as a synonym for her phallicized femininity. These female fans are critics, and they certainly seem to be looking critically at the Evil Queen, her body, and their own bodies. These cosplay portraits suggest that, at least on some level, these female fans recognize the Evil Queen as a phallic women, recognize her breasts as phallic objects, and recognize their own breasts as potentially phallic objects that they can leverage to reference a desirable and empowering phallicized femininity.

As we further consider the female fans’ cosplay portraits, the delightful irony of Stacey’s theoretical model becomes clear. As we know, her theoretical model unpacks the complicated relationship between a feminine ideal and the differences between women. She explains that although the films she studies tempt the female spectator with a feminine ideal, they simultaneously deny that possibility “by insisting upon differences between women” (61). The relationship between the Evil Queen and her fandom functions similarly. While the female fan is tempted to become the Evil Queen, while the

cosplayer works toward materializing and embodying the fascinating and threatening feminine ideal, they can never quite achieve it. The Evil Queen represents what Naugler would call the “impossible standard” (106) of the “breasted feminine” (101). While some of the Evil Queen’s female fans come very close to that impossible standard, they don’t achieve it because they’re not Lana Parrilla—they’re not the Evil Queen. They’re different women with different bodies and different breasts. And, of course, they don’t thrust their fists into people’s chests and tear out their beating hearts (at least not that we know of). But their difference doesn’t stop these ardent fans. Marie-Pier Nadeau is a French-Canadian programmer. Victoria is a Latin-American who works as a professional princess performer. Jamilet Rodriguez is plus size. Jacky Brodhead is petite. Some of these women have voluptuous, ample breasts. Some have small, firm breasts. Some have medium breasts that sit heavier and lower. And some have buoyant, round breasts that seem to defy gravity. In this array of women, we actually see what Naugler calls “the diversity of women’s breasted embodiments” (104). And so the attempt, *en masse*, to become an ideal feminine other actually results in a revelation of feminine diversity—the diversity of women. And this revelation works along two axes of feminine difference: the differences between the fans and the Evil Queen and the differences amongst the fans themselves.

So now we return to that perennial question: are the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” actually “evil”? I think the answer is both “yes” and “no.” The Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” may be understood as “evil” because they might fascinate and threaten Angier, Kimmel, and Naugler’s uncertain male gaze. As perfect fantasy breasts, as phallic objects, they demand attention and remind the spectator of the Evil Queen’s phallic threat. But beyond

that, they have a different function. The Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” inspire *OUAT*’s female fans to celebrate femininity, to play with female stereotypes, and to ultimately showcase feminine diversity—and there’s nothing “evil” about that.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In the introduction to this project, I asked how does the “evil boobs” trope function for *OUAT* spectators? Why do female fans celebrate the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs”? And how might the Evil Queen’s female fandom prompt us to look differently at the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs”?

To answer these questions, I turned to gaze theory, to a variety of theoretical viewpoints, and to the female fans and their recorded texts. I explored how Mulvey and Arons conceptualize the male gaze in an effort to explain how the Evil Queen’s “evil boobs” pander to a sexist and patriarchal way of looking. Then, I considered the active look of the female spectator in order to explain how some female fans see the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs” as positive and empowering. This is not to say that *OUAT* in general, or the Evil Queen in particular, are feminist texts—that is not my aim. My aim, much like Stacey’s, is to understand and respond to the activity and pleasure of female fans.¹⁹ My guess is that many scholars, myself included, if they ever thought about it, would lean towards reading the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs” in a negative light, teasing apart all the problematic and sexist ways she is constructed by the text, all the ways that she and her high, round cleavage pander to the male gaze. But my online research reveals that the female fans and their recorded texts offer us another way of looking at the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs.” The various factions of the female fandom are interesting because through their desire and creative labour they reveal a variety of ways that female fans look at the Evil Queen and her “evil boobs.” And the

¹⁹ In “Desperately Seeking Difference,” Stacey explains that her aim is not to reclaim *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* as “progressive” texts, but “to point to cinematic pleasures which may be available to the spectator in addition to those previously analyzed by feminist film theory” (58).

female fans who cosplay the Evil Queen are particularly interesting because through identification, desire, embodiment, materialization, critical labour, and creative labour, they clarify the Evil Queen's value in a way that might not otherwise be visible to us. When these female fans turn their active look on the Evil Queen, she becomes an unlikely feminine ideal that diverse women identify with and desire. Of course, by the series' end, the Evil Queen is "good"—she's redeemed.²⁰ But the Evil Queen's fans tackled that project long before *OUAT*'s writers got around to it. The female fans take pleasure in the Evil Queen and her "evil boobs," and their cosplay redeems a seemingly irredeemable character and her seemingly sexist visual rhetoric.

²⁰ See the *OUAT* series finale "Leaving Storybrooke."

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Appendix A

26 June 2019

Re: Request for Copyright Permission for Educational Use

Hello Marie-Pier Nadeau,

My name is Jade Nauss. I am writing to request permission to reproduce your images for educational use.

I am a Dalhousie University graduate student. I am writing a Master's thesis entitled "#EvilBoobs: A Case Study of the Evil Queen's Cleavage in *Once Upon a Time* and its Female Fans." I would like permission to reproduce three of your cosplay portraits in my Master's thesis. The three cosplay portraits that I would like to reproduce are found on *DeviantArt* and *Twitter* at the following URLs: <https://twitter.com/silyah246/status/743422738203828224> and <https://www.deviantart.com/silyah246/art/Regina-The-Queen-s-Castle-733618061> and <https://www.deviantart.com/silyah246/art/Regina-The-Final-Battle-692703459>.

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