

Georgia State University

**ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University**

---

English Dissertations

Department of English

---

5-1-2023

## **Sound, Subjectivity, and Feminism: Victorian Novels and Their Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Adaptations**

Calabria D. Turner

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_diss](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_diss)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Turner, Calabria D., "Sound, Subjectivity, and Feminism: Victorian Novels and Their Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Adaptations." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2023.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/35310954>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

Sound, Subjectivity, and Feminism:  
Victorian Novels and Their Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Adaptations

by

Calabria Denise Turner

Under the Direction of LeeAnne Richardson, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

## ABSTRACT

Investigating how film and serialized adaptations interpret feminist Victorian novels for a more modern audience yields decades of cultural responses to feminist motifs presented by nineteenth-century authors Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Anne Brontë, and twentieth-century writer Jean Rhys. Analyzing *Northanger Abbey* (1817) by Jane Austen, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by Anne Brontë, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys and their adaptations demonstrates the nonlinearity of feminism as a political movement. The novels and their film and television adaptations reveal an ongoing and recursive response to feminism's development. I discuss adaptation, in film, television, and novel in relation to the novels' primary motif—feminism—to gauge cultural responses to the novels' feminist motifs and not place a hierarchical value on the novel by investigating how film adaptations in different decades have interacted with and re-represented or even distanced themselves from the novels' motifs. In keeping the original feminist motifs of the authors' works in mind while analyzing the works' adaptations, we engage with the cultural anxieties surrounding feminism in each cultural moment. There is never one clear answer for why an adaptation either maintains, deforms, or enlarges on these feminist motifs, but by engaging, they interpret and express Austen's, Charlotte Brontë's, Anne Brontë's, and Rhys' work.

INDEX WORDS: Victorian novel, Film adaptation, Feminism, Identity, Personal growth, Female voice in film, Subjectivity

Copyright by  
Calabria Denise Turner  
2023

Sound, Subjectivity, and Feminism:  
Victorian Novels and Their Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Adaptations

by

Calabria Denise Turner

Committee Chair: LeeAnne Richardson

Committee: Tanya Caldwell

Paul Schmidt

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2023

## **DEDICATION**

To my loved ones—thank you

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many have contributed to this dissertation: my tireless committee, the librarians who assisted me, my family and loved ones, as well as former professors who inspired me.

To Richard Alan Wall II, my wonderful, supportive, kind, encouraging, patient, funny, and uplifting partner, your support has restored and motivated me through this entire process.

To my committee, Tanya Caldwell and Paul Schmidt, and to my chair, LeeAnne Richardson, I am grateful for your feedback and encouragement.

To LeeAnne Richardson, thank you for helping me remember that I am not writing in a vacuum. I am forever grateful for your patience, time, and wisdom. You are a strong guide and mentor. Thank you.

To Georgia State University's wonderful film research librarian, Nedda Ahmed, you have been a kind, resourceful, and humorous help.

And my family, without your support and love, I would never have made it to this point. My parents, thank you for always encouraging my love of reading and for always making my dreams feel possible.

I want to thank those at the House of Sacrifice Ministries for their constant love and counsel.

Finally, thank you to those who taught me at Middle Georgia State University—you expanded my interest in Victorian literature. Also, I must thank Dr. Jennifer Flaherty at Georgia College and State University whose Jane Austen on film class helped me realize a dissertation on Victorian film adaptations is possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	V
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Works Cited.....	12
CHAPTER I— <i>NORTHANGER ABBEY</i> AND FILM: SUBJECTIVITY, SEXUAL	
DESIRE, AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	14
Social Experience as Catalyst for Growth .....	16
Analysis of Foster’s and Wadey’s <i>Northanger Abbey</i> .....	28
Analysis of Jones’ and Davies’ <i>Northanger Abbey</i> .....	36
Conclusion.....	47
Works Cited.....	49
CHAPTER II—A WHISPER COMPARED TO THE STORM: <i>JANE EYRE</i> BY BRONTË	
(1847), ROBERTSON (1944), AND FUKUNAGA (2011).....	53
Developing Self and Agency Through Focalization .....	55
Disempowering the Female Voice.....	64
Movement Expressive of Female Agency and Subjectivity.....	72
Conclusion.....	78
Works Cited.....	79
CHAPTER III—WHAT IS SAID THROUGH THE SILENCE: HOW SERIALIZED	
ADPATATIONS OF <i>THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL</i> ADDRESS FEMALE	
SUBJECTIVITY AND IMPLICIT ACTIONS .....	85



<b>Sshhh: Cultural Silencing, Male Mediation, and Female Self-Censoring .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Permission: Script Directions as Means of Realigning Power and Revealing Trauma. 100</b>	
<b>Empowerment: Making the Implicit Explicit and Expressing Subjectivity and Female Desire .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>117</b>
 <b>CHAPTER IV—IDENTITY AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH FEMALE</b>	
<b>GENDER EXPECTATIONS: <i>WIDE SARGASSO SEA</i> AND ITS FILMS .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Construction and Destruction of Place and Identity in Rhys' <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>.....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Racial Tension, Sex, Land, and Eye Contact.....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Sex, Insecurities, and The Negative Effects of Patriarchy .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>156</b>
 <b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>167</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Victorian novels' adaptations, like their source texts, are an act of social activism and engagement. Investigating how film and serialized adaptations interpret feminist Victorian novels for a more modern audience yields decades of cultural responses to feminist motifs presented by nineteenth-century authors Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Anne Brontë, and twentieth-century writer Jean Rhys. For many audiences, images of Colin Firth emerging from a pond, quick-witted women in elegant gowns, and candlelit ballrooms come to mind when thinking of Victorian book-to-film adaptation, but if we look into and beyond these images, we encounter significant interpretations of feminist literature. Analyzing *Northanger Abbey* (1817) by Jane Austen, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by Anne Brontë, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys and their adaptations demonstrates the nonlinearity of feminism as a political movement. I chose the first three novels because they represent significant feminist interventions in nineteenth-century culture; I chose the last novel because of its response to nineteenth-century feminism's limited applicability to White Englishwomen. In short, each text was chosen for being a feminist work with multiple twentieth- and twenty-first century adaptations. While Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* might be the more obvious choice, *Northanger Abbey* includes a specific feminist focus on how young women's reading and social experiences are involved in her development. The novel's claim to feminism is in Catherine Moorland's development—catalyzed by her social experiences and mistakes—into a young woman with the social acumen and personal agency necessary for thriving in society. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is also a less obvious choice because of how often it has already been adapted and analyzed. Yet, analyzing Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as focalizer of her

narrative shows a young woman determining her own self-definition. Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was chosen for its nuanced take on spousal abuse. Though scholars such as Terry Eagleton have previously all but dismissed *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, claiming it either lacks cultural relevance or was ill organized, the novel dramatizes how and why Victorian women self-censored their experiences. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a twentieth-century text, is perhaps the largest outlier in this dissertation. Written during Second Wave feminism when the feminist movement sought the intersection of both race and gender in its political movement, Rhys' novel is an adaptation of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys' work engages with nineteenth-century feminism to show why and how British colonialism, patriarchal ideology, and Victorian gender roles disrupted identity formation and selfhood. These novels and their film and television adaptations reveal an ongoing and recursive response to feminism's development.

Since sound film's early days, Victorian novels have been adapted to the silver screen. Adaptation scholars such as Kamilla Elliot and Brian McFarlane keenly note, "The Victorian novel looms monolithic: . . . as film's most immediate and proudly proclaimed parent" (Elliot qtd. in Leitch 4). As such, novel-to-film adaptations are numerous with an increasing number of offspring every year. For example, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861) saw four films produced between 1917-1946: two silent films (1917, 1924) and two sound films (1934, 1946), with the novel set to have a new adaptation released later this year (Allingham).

Like Dickens adaptations, adaptation theory has experienced permutations from its early days with George Bluestone's fidelity criticism to present-day discussions by Thomas Leitch, Linda Hutcheon, Brian McFarlane, and Sarah Cardwell among others.<sup>1</sup> According to McFarlane,

---

<sup>1</sup> See Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1957), Leitch's *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ* (2008), Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), McFarlane's *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996), and Cardwell's *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (2002).

the fidelity approach is “a notion of the text as having and rendering . . . a single, correct ‘meaning’ which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with” (8). This approach usually entails a one-on-one comparison with the source material, often “classic” works of literature. Bluestone’s work centers on a film’s fidelity to its source, while nonetheless showing an awareness that “‘changes are *inevitable*’” as soon as adaptation occurs (qtd. in Griggs 2). Though present-day theorists often eschew the fidelity approach, Yvonne Griggs notes, “From the early seventies to the late nineties, the comparative approach to the study of adaptation prevails” (2). Yet even when the fidelity approach was at its height, writes Gueric DeBona, scholars like André Bazin “suggest[ed] the importance of renegotiating a (formalist) binary arrangement in adaptation criticism into an intertextual space” (5). Bazin desired to move away from a strict fidelity approach to study how filmmakers adapted novels into a more consumable entity. Similar to writers such as Bazin and Robert Stam who use intertextuality as a means of analyzing adaptations, DeBona’s own theoretical standpoint addresses intertextuality as it “concerns itself with industrial choices, audience reception, and the sociocultural environment” (2).

Current theorists take varying approaches to adaptation theory, ranging from cultural intertextuality to removing the novel as source text. Cultural intertextuality looks to social customs, ideology, political movements, and more, to interpret the sociocultural moment that influenced both the novel and its adaptation. Sarah Cardwell, and those after her, aim to remove the novel as source text by “break[ing] with the traditional practice of reading novels as sources to which the films owe due respect and instead treat both novels and films with equal respect” (Leitch “Reframing the Victorians” 12). Cardwell, in particular, argues an adaptation is an evolution or betterment of the source text, rather than a means of continuing the novel (Griggs 3-

4). Furthermore, Leitch's work approaches film adaptation as its own film sub-genre. Hutcheon, though, analyzes "the *politics* of intertextuality" (qtd. in Leitch "Reframing the Victorians" 6). McFarlane also looks to intertextuality while using "the original novel as a 'resource,'" and acknowledging the multiple factors, such as film studio history, previous adaptations, and ideology, that inform an adaptation (McFarlane 10). In this way, adaptation studies can move away from hierarchical approaches that place value on the novel or canonical literature over the film adaptation itself.

In this dissertation, I discuss adaptation, in film, television, and novel in relation to the novels' primary motif: feminism. My goal is to gauge cultural responses to the novels' feminist motifs and not place a hierarchical value on the novel. Rather, I investigate how film adaptations in different decades have interacted with and re-represented or even distanced themselves from the novels' motifs. As Yvonne Griggs argues, "adapters prompt us not only to engage with ideas embedded in their own text but to question those found in its literary forerunner" (8). Griggs astutely claims that "Adaptations reconfigure the cultural anxieties" of the original texts and maintain their connection to the original text "even when reconfigured in a very different guise" (8). In keeping the original feminist motifs of the authors' works in mind while analyzing the works' adaptations, we engage with the cultural anxieties surrounding feminism in each cultural moment. There is never one clear answer for why an adaptation either maintains, deforms, or enlarges on these feminist motifs, but by engaging, they interpret and express Austen's, Charlotte Brontë's, Anne Brontë's, and Rhys' work.

This dissertation approaches the novels chronologically, so I begin with an analysis of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's satiric critique of gothic novels that reveals eighteenth and early nineteenth-century anxieties about women reading novels. These anxieties—that gothic novels

would corrupt young women's minds—resulted in limiting women's education and access to reading lest novels unduly influence young women's conceptions of the real world. As Sheila Kindred astutely argues, *Northanger Abbey* is “about the initiation and education of a young woman on the threshold of a complex adult world” (196). Austen's heroine does initially succumb to a gothic influence, making her less capable of successfully negotiating and thriving in society, but Austen shows that Catherine's limited education and lack of social experience are the true root of naïveté. Catherine gradually develops social agency at Bath and Northanger Abbey where her gothic worldview is challenged by those who would either take advantage of her naïveté—the Thorpes—or encourage her burgeoning maturity—the Tilneys. Catherine experiences a social education from internal friction caused by the Thorpes' limited morals and the encouragement she receives from the Tilneys, both of which are catalysts for Catherine's personal maturation and social agency. Ultimately, Catherine experiences self-reflection, realization, and an effort at personal evolution independent from societal thought and expectation, which makes *Northanger Abbey* an early feminist work.

Despite releasing near the end of Second Wave feminism, director Giles Foster's *Northanger Abbey* (1987), adapted by Maggie Wadey, questions Catherine's ability and decision to grow beyond her gothic imaginings. Though the film prioritizes Catherine's subjectivity and attempts to empower Catherine through the female gaze and sexual desire, the film's campy tone and nearly ironic use of the female gaze counteracts any progression Catherine may achieve in social acumen and agency. Director Jon Jones' *Northanger Abbey* (2007), adapted by Andrew Davies, rather than emphasizing the gothic to reduce Catherine's personal development, uses subjective narrativity and the film score to uphold feminist views by expressing that a young woman's sexual development is natural to her maturation and does not contaminate Austen's

naïve and innocent heroine. Where in Foster's adaptation, all sexual experiences appear pleasurable—emphasizing Foster's Catherine's naïveté—Jones' adaptation shows unwanted sexual advances—made to Catherine—as well as male sexual exploitation between Isabella Thorpe and Captain Tilney. Like Foster's adaptation, Catherine's subjectivity is prioritized by dramatizing her internal fantasies onscreen. But these gradually decrease as Catherine's knowledge of the world—fed by gothic novels—is contrasted with her lived experiences. As such, Jones' adaptation emphasizes that Catherine does become a more grounded young woman who learns perspective and judgment. In this way, the film offers Austen's feminist motifs to a twenty-first-century audience.

The second chapter analyzes Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a novel well-known for its narrator's strong female voice. Jane uses her voice to focalize her experiences and self-reflection to determine her own form of femininity and self-hood. Through Linda Shires' and Gerard Genette's study on narratology and focalization, this chapter argues that Jane's focalization is a necessary means for representing her self-reflection, which is experienced as Jane travels from Gateshead to Fern Dean. At each place, Jane experiences differing forms of femininity—both shown by the women she encounters and through cultural expectations for women—and Jane's focalization shows her discovering which aspects of femininity will best aid her in achieving self-hood.

Films have struggled to adapt Jane's strong voice as both a narrator and character to screen. Perhaps the most famous of these adaptations, Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1944) starring Jane Fontaine and Orson Welles, is also the film that has the most problems interpreting Jane's voice. Jane's voice is a whisper compared to the storm of Rochester's commanding tone and a film score that aligns itself with his interiority. Stevenson's adaptation does this by

resituating Jane's position of focalizer/focalized to simply a focalizer whose voice-overs focalize Rochester once she enters Thornfield.

Director Cary Fukunaga's and adapter Moira Buffini's *Jane Eyre* (2011), in contrast to Stevenson's, utilizes a subtle and rarely thundering score and more thoroughly presents Jane's interiority through Brontë's use of Jane's physical movement to express her mental state. The adaptation further engages with Jane's subjectivity through flashbacks that connect Jane's adult experiences with her childhood and often provide a contrast between her present agency and previous lack of power. A 2011 *Variety* film review claims Fukunaga's adaptation "provides only fleeting emotional and psychological access to its famous heroine," but such a claim fails to see the symbolic meaning in Jane's movements, the flashbacks, and even the film's framing of landscape during Jane's walks (Chang). It is through these seemingly subtle filming techniques that the outwardly quiet Jane's subjectivity is produced on screen.

The third chapter analyzes Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) which dramatizes women self-censoring their experiences in domestic abuse as a result of cultural ideology that shamed women for their husband's ills. Consequentially, women's self-censoring iterated further cycles of domestic abuse. Domestic and gender ideology often involved idealized womanhood as the Angel in the House who was the moral center of the home in both teaching her children and aiding her husband. Domestic and gender ideology would frequently disempower women, blaming them for their husband's moral failings, which is exemplified in Brontë's heroine Helen Huntingdon. Brontë uses an enclosed narrative structure that places Helen's future husband—Gilbert Markham—in power over her diary, which he uses to share her story at will. While some have argued that in using the enclosed narrative, Brontë reasserts



patriarchal ideology, I argue that her use of the enclosed narrative shows the problematic distribution of power in a patriarchal society that puts more credit in male over female voices.

Peter Sadsy's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1968-1969) series adapted by Christopher Fry was the first televised adaptation of Brontë's novel. Released over the Christmas holiday, the series was a progression in BBC2 tv programming, a means of signifying the channel's cultural importance and dramatizing "the 'other' side of" Victorian lives" (Han 40-42). Unfortunately for this study, Sadsy's adaptation is only available for viewing in-person at the British Film Institute in London. As such, this sections' analysis is based on Fry's scripts.<sup>2</sup> Analyzing the scripts provides a fruitful study that shows the adaptors engaging with Brontë's motifs, potentially finding Gilbert's possession of Helen's diary problematic, as well as negotiating Helen's self-censoring, especially when talking with her friend, Milicent Hargrave. In response, Sadsy's adaptation uses the female voice-over, original scenes, and stage direction to show Helen's brief moments of empowerment. Catherine Paula Han finds "adapting Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was a risky choice [for the BBC] that signals a willingness to deal with more challenging, controversial source material than usually associated with the genre" (40). As such, the series maintains key motifs from Brontë's novel, such as domestic abuse, objectification of women, and woman as marketable commodities (Han 41-42). Altogether, the series' willingness to address themes found controversial over a century after the novel's publication reveals the novel and its motifs' relevance one hundred and twenty years later.

Mike Barker's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1996) series adapted by Janet Barron and David Nokes also saw Gilbert possessing Helen's story problematic. In response, the series prioritizes Helen's subjectivity through original scenes, female voice-over, and through film editing that

---

<sup>2</sup> This purchase was kindly funded by Georgia State University's Department of English.

contrasts Helen as sexual victim and Helen as a creative and sexually desiring woman.

Addressing Gilbert's problematic possession of Helen's diary, the film opens with strong female agency: Helen leaving her husband and taking her child, which solidly places her story into her hands. Furthermore, the film uses Helen's voice-overs to reassert Helen's power over her diary and who reads it. The film realigns subjectivity and narrative authority to adjust the focus from male-male mediated storytelling to female agency and a woman's ability to tell her story. This interpretation continues to resonate: as the recent #MeToo movement has highlighted, abuses are often still silenced today and those abused are seeking a platform for their narratives. Barker's adaptation, though, does not anachronistically empower Helen. She endures the ramifications of being a woman in the nineteenth century as much as Brontë's Helen: she fears losing her child, having her property taken, and is unable to divorce her husband. Rather, the series bases Helen's empowerment on her internal strength, which is clearly presented in Brontë's novel.

The dissertation's final chapter analyzes Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a post-colonial adaptation of *Jane Eyre* that expands on colonial and feminist themes either briefly mentioned or overlooked in Brontë's work. Revealing the destructive influence of othering colonized women to construct an ideal British femininity, Rhys' heroine Antoinette Cosway, like Jane Eyre, constructs her identity around place, such as her plantation home—Coulibri. But unlike Brontë, Rhys explores British colonialism's and Victorian gender role's identity-disrupting effects. A Creole woman, Antoinette is neither of Black Caribbean heritage nor entirely of White British heritage, making her the result of British colonialism and affectively unsure of her place. Antoinette's disordered mental state at the end of Rhys' novel restores a semblance of Antoinette's agency as she retreats into a place of her own construction—an altered reality—rather than a physical place constructed by the British and British colonizers—leaving

her to eventually burn down Thornfield Hall: the physical representation of British gender expectations and colonialism.

Director John Duigan's film *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1993), adapted by Duigan, Jan Sharp, and Carol Angier, engages with the novel's sexual and racial tension between the Creole/White people and the formerly enslaved Black people. Sexual nudity and explicitly sexual actions create tension by demonstrating British male power over Antoinette and objectification and exploitation of both the Jamaican land and formerly enslaved peoples. In contrast, director Brendan Maher's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (2006), adapted by Stephen Greenhorn, prioritizes the cultural and gender differences between Antoinette and Rochester by specifically referencing the "dream"—Antoinette and her husband's inability to accept the others' culture—often mentioned in Rhys' novel. Furthermore, Maher's adaptation highlights Rochester's insecurity as a second son in a patriarchal society built upon establishing power through land ownership and inherited wealth. As a result of these insecurities, Rochester uses Antoinette's inability to entirely conform to British gender expectations as a means of imposing his views of femininity on her and regaining his own sense of power. Both adaptations, like the novel, conclude with Antoinette's decision to burn Thornfield and leap from the roof, using Antoinette's actions to symbolically regain her agency and destroy the patriarchal and British colonial issues that led to her imprisonment.

In studying these novels and their adaptations, I am investigating how different generations have interpreted and responded to nineteenth-century feminism and its growth into the twentieth- and twenty-first century. Adaptation creates the space for cultures to examine what has come before and comment on what is happening now. Austen's, the Brontë's, and Rhys' novels all participate in social activism that provides a platform for women's voices, their needs,

and even demands. Their works demand women's education; women's rights to inform their own selfhood; women's place in the social, active world; and women's freedom to exist without external determinations of identity. The adaptations engage with each of these feminist motifs and interpret them for a more modern audience, ultimately challenging what has come before and encouraging continued cultural engagement in order to further social activism in the present cultural moment.

### Works Cited

- Allingham, Philip V. "Great Expectations in Film and Television, 1917-2000." *The Victorian Web*, 26 June 2005, <https://victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/filmadapt.html>. Accessed 20 March 2023.
- Bluestone, George. *Novels into Film*. John Hopkins UP, 1957.
- Brontë, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. 1848. Penguin Classics. Edited by G. D. Hargreaves, Introduction by Winifred Gérin. 1986.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Edited by Richard Dunn. Norton. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 2001.
- Cardwell, Sarah. *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel*. Manchester UP, 2002.
- Chang, Justin. "Through a Classic, Darkly." Review of *Jane Eyre*, by Cary Fukunaga. *Variety*, 7-13 March 2011, 16.
- DeBona, Gueric. *Film Adaptation in the Hollywood Studio Era*. U of Illinois P, 2010.
- Griggs, Yvonne. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies: Adapting the Canon in Film, TV, Novels and Popular Culture*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.
- Han, Catherine Paula. "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's (1848) Residence at BBC: Neo-Victorian Adaptations in the 1960s and 1990s." *Neo-Victorian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 32-67.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.
- Jane Eyre*. Directed by Robert Stevenson, screenplay by Aldous Huxley, music by Bernard Herrmann, performances by Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, Twentieth-Century Fox, 1944. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yATMYlgdA>.
- Jane Eyre*. Directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, screenplay by Moira Buffini, performances by Mia Masikowska and Michael Fassbender, BBC. 2011.

Kindred, Sheila. "From Puppet to Person: The Development of Catherine's Character in the Bath Chapters of *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, no. 20, 1998, pp. 196-206.

Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. John Hopkins UP, 2007.

--. "Reframing the Victorians." *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*. Edited by Abigail Burnham Bloom and Mary Sanders Pollock, Cambria Press, 2011, pp. 1-23.

McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford UP, 1996.

*Northanger Abbey*, directed by Giles Foster, screenplay by Maggie Wadey, performances by Katherine Schlesinger and Peter Firth, BBC, 1987.

*Northanger Abbey*, directed by John Jones, screenplay by Andrew Davies, performances by Felicity Jones and JJ Fields, Masterpiece PBS, 2007.

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. 1966. Edited by Judith L. Raskin. Norton. 1999.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, directed by Peter Sasdy, screenplay by Christopher Fry, performances by Janet Munro and Bryan Marshall, BBC, 1968.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, directed by Mike Barker, screenplay by Janet Barron and David Nokes, performances by Tara Fitzgerald and Toby Stephens, BBC, 1996.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, directed by John Duigan, screenplay by Jan Sharp, Carol Angier, and John Duigan, performances by Karina Lombard and Nathaniel Parker, Laughing Kookaburra Productions, 1993.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, directed by Brendan Maher, screenplay by Stephen Greenhorn, performances by Rebecca Hall and Rafe Spall, BBC, 2006.

## **CHAPTER I—*NORTHANGER ABBEY* AND FILM: SUBJECTIVITY, SEXUAL DESIRE, AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Examining Jane Austen's, *Northanger Abbey*, written in 1790 and published posthumously in 1817, Genilda Azarêdo argues Catherine "will be a different heroine, a heroine that will undermine conventional features and introduce new ones" (120). Each of Austen's heroines refrain from fitting into a singular mold. They are flawed women who experience moments of personal growth outside of societal expectations for young eighteenth-century ladies. Often, they either lack interest in reading (*Emma*) or cannot boast of extensive education or piano skills (*Pride and Prejudice*). Catherine Morland is no exception. She is naïve and prone to gothic imaginings that stem from a sheltered life and a young and untested mind. However, Catherine's time in Bath and at Northanger Abbey expands her limited experience and places her in a position for reflection and personal growth. Catherine's personal growth is Austen's response to late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century fears that young women would be swayed by novels, rather than the teachings of their families and the church. Austen's social world responded by restricting women's learning and reading to prevent them from abandoning strong morals and re-enacting the troubling situations found in novels. In response to this mistaken belief, Austen creates a woman who is "tainted" by novels but grows from the misjudgments caused by her reading. Through expanded social experiences, Catherine tests her knowledge of gothic novels against a larger social sphere and develops into a more socially and self-aware woman who develops beyond eighteenth-century gender expectations by gaining stronger personal agency.

Perhaps because of her heroines' personal development and agency, Austen's novels positively affect women on a global scale both in print and film (Sadoff 89). Yet not all

adaptations maintain the novel's feminism. *Northanger Abbey* (1987), directed by Giles Foster, and *Northanger Abbey* (2007), directed by Jon Jones, diversely address women's issues, such as education, personal growth, and sexual desire. Through narrative subjectivity, each film utilizes Catherine's dreams to reveal the influence of gothic novels and to track her personal growth. Both the daydreams and film score create Catherine's subjectivity and provide a guide for ascertaining Catherine's development. Foster's adaptation, however, denies Catherine's personal growth by allowing her daydreams to become reality, ultimately showing that her subjectivity has not evolved beyond the young girl influenced by gothic novels. Diversely, Jones' adaptation supports Catherine's growth as laid out in Austen's novel: her daydreams decrease as her reality becomes satisfactory enough for her and her maturity evolves beyond desiring grotesque actions and traumatic adventures. Furthermore, whereas Foster's Henry Tilney appears just as deluded as Catherine, Jones' Henry maintains an empathic desire for Catherine to create and maintain her own conclusions rather than fully support his or others'.

While each film can overtly portray female sexual desire—something Austen could only allude to—Foster's interpretation leaves Catherine with little other than sexual desire, which over-simplifies her character and ignores her personal development. By contrast, Jones' film smoothly adapts the novel's feminist themes to the modern day by revealing both unwanted sexual attention from strangers and the natural development of Catherine's burgeoning sexual awareness. Films are rich in adaptive interpretation, and the feminism in Austen's novels only adds to the interpretive opportunity. The film adaptations of *Northanger Abbey* demonstrate feminism's constant flux. Foster's film, though produced during Second Wave feminism, revokes Catherine's growth and in so doing, revokes the novel's feminism. However, Jones'



reiterates the novel's feminism by supporting Catherine's growth from a naïve and easily trusting woman to a more cautious and sensible, but still good-natured, woman.

### **Social Experience as Catalyst for Growth**

Rather than blaming Catherine's unrealistic expectations on reading gothic novels, Austen upholds the right for women to read and lays clear blame for Catherine's assumptions at the Abbey on Catherine's lack of education and life experience. This issue appears generational, as Catherine's mother provides problematic educational experiences. Susan Allen Ford notes, Catherine's mother is more concerned with platitudes, which is an inadequacy fed by "the didactic texts she had read" (3). When discussing how Mrs. Morland educates her daughters, we hear only of music, didactic poems, and fables. Otherwise, it appears Catherine is "left to shift for [herself]," especially when the narrator notes Catherine's proclivity for outdoor activities (Austen 3). Austen advocates for female education and the inclusion of women in scholars' renditions of history and utilizes irony to note how society purposefully leaves women uneducated to flatter the patriarchal male ego: "A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can" for ignorance in women serves the vanity of men and only highlights women's "personal charms" (Austen 86). Austen's mocking narration responds to common ideology taught to young women in the eighteenth century. For example, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu "advised her daughter to 'conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness'" (Porter 23). In response to the societal stigma on an educated woman, Austen creates Catherine.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> For more on women's education in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, women reading periodicals, and education in Austen's work see the following: Rachel Scarborough King's chapter, "[L]et a girl read': Periodicals and Women's Literary Canon Formation" and James Robert Woods' "Periodicals and the Problem of Women's Learning," (2018) and Sheila Cordner's "'Scrambling' Into An Austen Education" (2016). Austen also shows how women's absence from contemporary accounts of history could also distance or lessen one's interest in history lessons. In a moment when Catherine is clearly admiring Henry Tilney, the novel's resident

In Bath, Catherine becomes her own bold actor as she experiences social interactions that expand her self- and social awareness. Though, initially, these experiences do not meet her gothic-novel-based expectations, she will learn that a better awareness of self and society is enough for personal growth and adventure. In a letter to thirteen-year-old Susanna Thrale, Samuel Johnson says,

When you favoured me with your letter, you seemed to be in want of materials to fill it, having met with no great adventures either of peril or delight, nor done or suffered any thing out of the common course of life. When you have lived longer, and considered more, you will find the common course of life very fertile of observation and reflection.

(*A Johnson Reader* 444)

Having little experience outside her home, Catherine is meant to learn the same as Susanna Thrale.<sup>4</sup> A selection from *The Spectator* by Addison and Steele from 1712-1713 notes a woman who “sings, dances, plays on the lute and harpsicord, paints prettily, is a perfect mistress of the French tongue . . . [and is] skilled in all domestic sciences” fulfills “all those accomplishments we generally understand [wives possess] by good-breeding and polite education” (9-10).<sup>5</sup>

---

teacher-hero, for his education, she speaks her reasons for being bored of history: “the quarrels of popes and kings . . . in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all” (Austen 84). As Gilbert and Gubar have noted, “Austen implies that history may very well be a uniform drama of masculine posturing that is no less fiction . . . than gothic romance. She suggests, too, . . . history is finally a matter of indifference to women, who never participate in it and who are almost completely absent from its pages” (134). At least in gothic novels, women may see themselves as bold actors.

<sup>4</sup> Susan M. Kroeg takes a contrary position on the influence of gothic novels, arguing reading gothic novels prepares Catherine for recognizing the threats to herself and women in her society (“the common anxieties of life”) and how the inserted sexual dreams and daydreams scenes in both films were a means of conveying those threats to modern viewers. For more, see Kroeg’s “Editor’s Choice Award: Reading and Writing the Gothic in Film Adaptations of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*,” *Kentucky Philological Review*, vol. 26, 2011, pp. 59–65.

John Dussinger concludes his argument on Foster and Wadey’s adaptation with a similar claim, arguing Catherine’s gothic imaginings envisioned real anxieties (174).

<sup>5</sup> As many scholars have noted, Austen makes a jab at *The Spectator* in her famous defense of novel reading in *Northanger Abbey*. She claims *The Spectator* is too full of “improbable circumstances, [and] unnatural characters” (22). It is no wonder then that the above character description of a wife’s duties should not fit Austen’s idea of an educated and self-sufficient woman.

Catherine will not grow in feminine accomplishments, such as art, music, and the French language, to make herself a stronger gothic heroine or the ideal picture of an eighteenth-century young lady. As Walter Anderson claims, “Austen protests, on artistic and moral principles, against the common romance fare of uncommonly accomplished heroines” (494). Instead, Catherine develops into a young woman with a stronger understanding of human character and her own faults—“the common course of life.”<sup>6</sup> While in Bath, Catherine not only meets new people, but learns how to decipher people’s character, stand up for herself, and formulate her own opinions. Catherine spends much of her time with either the Thorpes or the Tilneys. Each are a brother and sister pair who are instantly foils: the Tilneys highlight the Thorpes shallowness while the Thorpes highlight the Tilney’s sincerity and maturity. Catherine, though, is initially unable to differentiate between the two families’ depth as Catherine takes Isabella Thorpe as an instant friend by mistaking enthusiasm for sincerity and time spent together as trust. Isabella and John set themselves up as authority figures on society and use this faux expertise to manipulate and alter Catherine for their financial benefit. The Tilneys, however, catapult Catherine’s self-exploration by sharing experiences and knowledge, which they then give Catherine space necessary to make her own conclusions.

John Thorpe’s blundering inaccuracies are Catherine’s initial springboard for developing her ability to assess character. As John is a foppish rake who quite consistently overexaggerates his connections, ownings, and knowledge and/or experience to strengthen his sense of self-importance, Catherine is quicker to realize John’s more obvious faults. For example, while she

---

<sup>6</sup> In discussing why readers connect with novels’ characters, Juliet McMaster claims it is a character’s ability to “be intensively responsive and fully conscious” that draws readers in, which McMaster claims Catherine cannot do. McMaster claims, instead, that it is Catherine’s innocence and “imaginative awakening, an enlargement of understanding” that Catherine gains from her gothic reading and Bath/Northanger experiences that allows readers to love “Catherine, as Mr. Knightley does Emma” (26).

and John are riding in his gig and her brother and Isabella in another, John claims James' gig is a "little tittuppy thing" without "a sound piece of iron about it," entirely worn out (Austen 46). When Catherine expresses her concern and desire to help her brother, John states, "the carriage is safe enough" (Austen 46-47). As a result, Catherine "knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts of the same thing" (Austen 47). Kindred astutely notes, though, when confronted with John's contradictory assessments, Catherine exhibits clear reasoning skills by "marshalling relevant and sufficient evidence, thinking about the import of these claims, and then concluding what follows from them" (198). John's contradictions become glaringly obvious to Catherine, and it is not long before she feels strongly enough to ignore his blustering. For Catherine, learning to distrust and eventually reject John builds Catherine's confidence in her ability to judge character and navigate society without being taken advantage of (which happens frequently enough) and thus builds her internal agency. John's obvious blunders allow Catherine easy means of contrasting spoken and acted character, so John is the necessary friction for expanding Catherine's internal agency and social acumen.

Catherine's personal growth, though, is most affected by Isabella who attempts to take advantage of, or author, Catherine's pliable nature. In person and through her letters, Isabella creates a mirage of herself and utilizes this to affect others, including authoring others for her purpose. Unfortunately for Catherine, manipulation is only obvious in forms that resemble gothic villains, like Henry Tilney's father, General Tilney. As Henry observes, Catherine judges others' motivations based on what her own would be (Austen 103). For Catherine, Isabella's hyperbole is taken as sincerity, and her actions are given fewer, less obvious means of being contradicted. McMaster notes, in comparison with Catherine, "Isabella's mind is equally undisciplined and is also ill stocked with sense" (19). Isabella's sentiments are exaggerations and poor imitations of

female characters' close bonds in gothic novels—such as seen in Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*—which Isabella uses for her own marital and monetary advantage.<sup>7</sup> Because Catherine uses gothic novels for her knowledge of the world, Isabella appears sincere. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, Catherine spends her time in Bath and at the Abbey around those who create their own fictions of Catherine; they determine who she is and what purpose she shall serve according to their will (135-45). Gilbert and Gubar, though, do not include Isabella in the fiction making. To exclude Isabella, though, is to ignore the power she successfully wields over Catherine and James while together in Bath.

However, Catherine does not permit Isabella's authoring, and it is her initially subtle and eventually outright refusal to bend to and believe in Isabella's lies that gives Catherine stronger social acumen and internal agency. As Isabella attempts to use her assumptions about Catherine's identity for her own benefit, she attempts to override Catherine's strong sense of right and wrong. However, this only cements Catherine's growth. Initially, Catherine does not trust the small moments in which Isabella provides clues to her true nature.<sup>8</sup> Catherine notes Isabella's odd behavior both in the Rooms when Isabella, James, and John all wish for Catherine to join them on a daytrip to Clifton and when Captain Tilney and Isabella are in the Pump Room after James and Isabella's engagement. In one note, for example, Isabella says, in the narrator's

---

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Johnson argues that Isabella and General Tilney are equally villainous for their faithlessness, self-interest, and "their policy favoring wealth" (*Women, Politics, and the Novel* 45). Johnson notes the two's primary difference is their positions of power and further observes that of all those who wrong Catherine, Isabella is the only who is also betrayed. Gilbert and Gubar analyze Isabella's ending as punishment for her ambitions. Yet if readers are to keep with the novel's gothic theme, Isabella's ending can be read as another problematic circumstance of patriarchy.

<sup>8</sup> In terms of eighteenth-century England, Isabella is a coquette, but personal naivete and eighteenth-century gender roles influence Isabella's actions. Modern-day readers may judge Isabella less harshly and can see the influence of a patriarchal society that provides few means for women to provide for themselves, and in its set-up encourages women to marry for monetary, rather than personal, reasons. Azerêdo argues, "Isabella, being a poor woman, can only exert power through eroticism momentarily. As such, her belief in her 'independence of spirit' . . . is a chimera" (126). Porter notes most women's career choices were limited to "housekeepers, subordinate workers, [and] domestic servants" (22). Women's next options were "wives, mothers, . . . [and] maiden aunts" (Porter 22). Isabella's naivete—she overexaggerates feminine qualities and overplays her knowledge of men—and monetary status thus lead her to act the coquette.

paraphrase, “She knew her beloved Catherine to have so feeling a heart, so sweet a temper, to be so easily persuaded by those she loved” (Austen 75). It is through these scenes, where Isabella attempts to coerce Catherine into either breaking her word or where Isabella shows herself fickle-hearted, that Catherine learns Isabella is only capable of receiving people’s love and kindness and fails to give love and kindness back. In Catherine’s assessment, Isabella “appeared to her ungenerous and selfish, regardless of every thing but her own gratification” (Austen 75). At this stage of personal growth, Catherine only notes the appearance of selfishness in Isabella, but this appearance is enough to provide a contrast for Catherine to reflect upon and use to assert her own sense of right and wrong. In this way, Catherine can expand her personal agency. She refuses to break her word or be bullied.

Catherine’s growth is highlighted when the strength of her conviction forces her to displease one group—John, Isabella, and James—in order to do what is right for another—the Tilneys. This is shown the moment Catherine departs the Pump Room, rushes through the streets of Bath, and allows herself into the Tilney’s Bath residence with no introduction or guide, a clear display of Catherine’s conviction in morals over social conventions. Unlike Isabella, where sentiment and friendship are a means of coercion, Catherine’s feelings are genuine. Until this moment, however, she lacked the discernment and internal agency to act on her own judgments. At the Tilney’s home, in “irritation of nerves and shortness of breath,” she claims “I did not care what you thought of me.—I would not stay for the servant” (Austen 78). Of course, Catherine does care what Henry and Eleanor Tilney think of her, but not in a social sense. Catherine’s concerns are broader than social expectations of decorum and land directly on her perception of the moral good. As many of Austen’s novels have shown, particularly *Mansfield Park*, Austen is more concerned with characters who maintain strong morals rather than with those who maintain

a strong sense of what is socially proper.<sup>9</sup> Catherine is an expansion of the belief in good morals over strong social graces and decorum. Kindred argues, as Catherine moves towards becoming a fully autonomous person, she must make decisions based on her own assessment of right and wrong outside the influence of others' actions and beliefs (203). In this moment, unlike in some others, Catherine dictates her behavior on what decides is correct. Hence, Catherine barges into a person's home without regard for good manners and with all regard for good morals, so she can explain to the Tilneys why she broke her word. Despite this glimpse of Catherine's assertiveness and strong will, she does not learn to fully engage with others' perspectives until she knows of Isabella and James' broken engagement.

It is clear that while in Bath, Catherine is developing her social acumen by learning to trust what she sees and can infer rather than assessing others based on her own motivations. Also while in Bath and at the Abbey, readers are shown how Catherine's reality is contrasted with the gothic lens in which she perceives her experiences. For Catherine, building personal agency and developing self-reflection also means learning to assess situations outside of the realities given in gothic novels. A primary example is the narrator's commentary of the journey to Bath, which implies Catherine daydreamed of experiencing a traumatic journey of gothic proportions. The narrator notes, "Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero" (Austen 6). In fact, throughout Catherine's time in Bath, the narrator consistently contrasts Catherine's reality and the gothic lens in which she views her experiences. For example, when nearly jilted at the ball, Catherine feels "disgraced in the eye of the world . . . her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence, and the misconduct of another the true source of

---

<sup>9</sup> *Pride and Prejudice* also mocks this through Lady Catherine de Burgh and Mr. Collins who, though a man of the cloth, is more concerned with social expectations and graces than living a Christian lifestyle as directed in the Bible (not as directed in social conduct and instructional manuals).

her debasement” (Austen 36). Here, the narrator speaks with clear irony because Catherine is missing a dance partner, and few have noticed her sitting between Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe in the overcrowded Bath ballroom. These moments express Catherine’s mindset through witty narration that contrasts reality and perception. Discussing female sensibility in novels, Claudia Johnson notes how Austen would often show the defects in such behavior (see *Sense and Sensibility*), and further notes how Catherine Morland rejects such sensibility, for example, “Catherine returns home in her disappointment not to weep or toss sleeplessly in bed, but instead to ‘appease’ her ‘extraordinary hunger,’ and then to fall asleep early, for nine refreshing hours (NA 60)” (164). This is an interesting point as Catherine’s rejection of female sensibility in gothic novels reveals Catherine’s practical sense and self-respect, while the narrator’s commentary clearly juxtaposes Catherine’s expectations, reality, and her actions.

Though Catherine has developed her ability to gauge character, it is not until she experiences a deep sense of shame that she fully develops personal agency. Catherine lives in two realities: those of her personal experience and those of the gothic novel. While in Bath, her personal experience and inability to assess others leads her into poor friendships. As Kindred notes, “She has acquired some self-confidence, she has honed her reasoning skills, and has increased self-awareness about what judgments of character entail,” (205). However, she lacks the personal experience and self-confidence to believe what she sees, which limits her understanding of people’s behavior and their motivations. At the Abbey, her observations become investigations into Mrs Tilney’s death—Catherine believes General Tilney murdered his wife—and because Catherine refuses to trust her own observations and purposefully relies on gothic novels, she fails to properly interpret the evidence proving General Tilney’s innocence (at



least innocent of murdering his wife). The full force of shame, then, is left to reinforce Catherine's ill-made judgments.

The ill-made judgments and refusal to rely on reality follow: as evidence of mischief and guilt, Catherine expects to find Mrs. Tilney's rooms the perfect image of romantic decay and decorated in the style of centuries past. Yet she is disappointed when the rooms are clean and tastefully decorated. Catherine assesses the General's character and finds his actions contradictory: his welcoming behavior contrasts with the rigidity and selfishness displayed towards his children and servants. As with Isabella and John, Catherine notes his odd behavior, but is unable to account for it until she finds herself within her second realm of experience, the pages of gothic novels. Briefly, Catherine distrusts her budding conclusions: "She had often read of such characters; characters, which, Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn; but here was proof positive of the contrary" (Austen 144). Catherine notes the General's dislike for his deceased wife's painting and for her favorite garden walk. Catherine becomes so convinced of General Tilney's guilt that "what had been terror and dislike [of General Tilney] before, was now absolute aversion" (Austen 144). No "grandeur of air" or guided tours "could [sh]ake the doubts of the well-read Catherine" (Austen 145). Though the Abbey is often full of servants when it should be nearly abandoned, decorated in the modern style when it should be decaying and dirty, and neither when it lacks secreted rooms does Catherine fully reevaluate her conclusions. The narrator's sardonic, or perhaps sympathetic, tone instructs readers of Catherine's wrongs.

Catherine's doubts may not be shaken by the Abbey's appearance, but her investigations are interrupted with minute moments of shame. Ashley Bennet, in discussing Austen's use of shame, claims shame is the perfect place between sensibility and pragmatism. It allows for a

balance of sentiment and sense without allowing one to become too stoic or entirely insensible. As such, shame is the perfect emotion to usher Catherine into the necessary balance to achieve her own personal and internal agency. Feeling shame connects her to the sensibility of gothic novels while also catalyzing her into stronger self-awareness and a conviction to trust in her own observations. Small moments of shame occur when Catherine finds a chest she so eagerly and nervously attempted to open the night before was locked in her own panic and when she finds secreted papers that are former laundry bills and not the General confessing to his wife's entrapment. Catherine, nonetheless, and despite her conviction to be sensible, shakes off her shame and doubt: "She could remember dozens who had persevered in every possible vice, going on from crime to crime, murdering whomsoever they chose," but as Catherine noted in Bath, she is not well-read in histories, so it is easy to conclude these characters she is familiar with are those from gothic novels (Austen 152).

When Catherine's conviction to be more sensible fails, the novel utilizes Henry Tilney to catalyze Catherine's shame. Catherine's explicit admiration of Henry and her marital desires make him capable of sparking Catherine's sense of wrongdoing. Catherine was not convinced in her own wrongdoing during her previous realizations—in which she felt shame and believed herself wrong—and so, she shares her suspicions about Mrs. Tilney's death with Henry for Catherine has already concluded "Henry Tilney must know best" (Austen 120). Yet, her faith gothic novels depict life as it truly is, as her faith in her experience at home, is too much for her to trust her senses. Therefore, the teacher-hero is used to address Catherine's wrongs as a stand-in for more rational thought: "Henry's address, as short as it had been, had more thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies than all their several disappointments had done" (Austen 159). Catherine trusts Henry more than her experiences, and therefore, stands on

his advice.<sup>10</sup> However, rather than leaving her as another Mrs. Allen, Catherine develops her own self-reliance.

The need of a male teacher-hero implies an eighteenth-century call for a man's more rational mindset to aid a woman, but such harkens back to women's education. Catherine is inexperienced and has little formal education. Austen uses Catherine's reliance on Henry to aid Catherine's development, while also criticizing a society that creates said reliance. Once all is done—the General throws Catherine out—she self-sufficiently returns home with Eleanor's aid. Furthermore, Catherine determines her own opinion of General Tilney's behavior without Henry's influence. When she is home, she reflects on her experiences without Henry. Catherine's thoughtfulness and observations are now aided by further life experience. Even before Henry is aware of Catherine's imaginings, she reassesses Isabella with more confidence. While in Bath, Catherine investigates Isabella: "Catherine, though not allowing herself to suspect her friend,

---

<sup>10</sup> While Henry does create space for Catherine's development, scholars, such as Douglas Murray and Kathy Justice Gentile, have noted Henry's presence can be problematic. Douglas Murray utilizes *Northanger Abbey* to discuss recent #MeToo issues: rape culture, gaslighting, and mansplaining (to name a few). Murray utilizes Henry's enlightening-Catherine speech at the Abbey to exemplify mansplaining as a means of reinforcing patriarchal ideology: "Henry stops Catherine's exploration of the house and prohibits her ideological questions about the methods and history of patriarchy" and that Austen uses Catherine's exploration to discuss domestic abuse and "the lengths to which patriarchy will go in order to control women's bodies, movement, and minds" (7). Kathy Gentile also finds Henry problematic, but less so than Murray. She claims Henry is a means of working out England's new masculinity adopted in contrast to French masculinity: Henry is one who is interested in women's fabrics, novels, and is both a clergyman and the second son of a wealthy gentleman (83). Gentile notes, Henry's genius "lies in his mocking awareness of society's artificially scripted courtship rituals and condescending stereotyping of female preferences and abilities," but also claims Henry can be condescending to those who are unaware (84). Indeed, Henry appears condescending when discussing diction at Beechen Cliff, and his speech at the Abbey is simply full of holes. For, of course, horrible incidents did occur in England even with neighbors nearby and newspapers to report. And despite Eleanor's warning to Henry at Beechen that he best stop before Catherine really believes he truly thinks poorly of women, Henry, as Gentile says, "also comes to learn more about his own problematic manhood as he rises to meet the challenges posed by his courtship of Catherine" (84). He is not the braggadocio and blocking character posed by John, and he is not the swashbuckling hero of Gothic novels (just look at his awkwardness when visiting Catherine's family home). Henry is not enforcing patriarchal standards. Instead, he provides Catherine the tools needed to expand her mental awareness. Henry is an experiment. He can be perceived as condescending, depending on the reader, and his speech at the Abbey does not pass muster. The character of Henry is a means of testing what masculinity may become when women are given more mental freedoms. His path shows this new masculinity may initially be unique and difficult – see the patriarchal father and windbag John – but it will ultimately be worthwhile in that it serves to aid women on their path to personal development outside of eighteenth-century social gender expectations.

could not help watching her closely. The result of her observations was not agreeable. Isabella seemed an altered creature” (Austen 116). Catherine initially ignores her misgivings, but after reading James’ and Isabella’s letters at the Abbey, Catherine’s sense of shame expands when she realizes Isabella’s unfaithfulness: “She was ashamed of Isabella and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty” (Austen 176). For the Bath episode, Catherine’s journey is nearly complete. Isabella’s letter, while still attempting to fool Catherine, makes everything clear. Catherine’s suspicions and observations have been confirmed, and Catherine now possesses the confidence to trust her own conclusions. Her personal experience has expanded beyond her time at home, and she knows more of life and human character. With no guidance but her own morality and concern for others, Catherine’s internal agency has grown, and she now relies on her own observations and conclusions.

In Bath and at Northanger Abbey, Catherine learns to trust her judgment and gains a broader perspective. As Bennet notes, the sentimental and gothic novel reading “was widely feared to be seducing its feminized readers into sensibility’s over-identifications, emotional extravagances, irrationality, and susceptibility” (380). Through Catherine, Austen counteracts such fears by showing a young woman capable of self-reflection and personal growth. Catherine’s experiences are not simply the satire of gothic novels but the representation of a woman whose ultimate goal is not to become more the accomplished eighteenth-century woman but is to gain a better understanding of the world around her through her own experiences and investigations. Catherine grows beyond the naïve girl incapable of assessing character into a young woman capable of critical thinking with her own personal agency.

### Analysis of Foster's and Wadey's *Northanger Abbey*

In Giles Foster's and Maggie Wadey's 1987 adaptation, viewers are immediately immersed in Catherine's subjectivity, but the notably campy gothic style sets the film's tone more as satire than as a successful adaptation of Austen's feminist themes.<sup>11</sup> This film's campiness, added in with the almost ironic depiction of female sexual desire and the female gaze, removes Catherine's personal development in social acumen and internal agency. Marilyn Roberts and Ben Stovel note, "a campy Gothic texture" to the film, while reviewer John O'Connor observes "the film's images are wonderfully bizarre," but not in a good way, as the film is "far from successful" (Roberts 129, Stovel 240 & O'Connor). Immediately immersed in the gothic, the film opens with an establishing shot of an old church that transitions to Catherine in a tree, clothed in white with hair down, reading Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*. This scene cuts to Catherine transposed into the novel with the villain in an open white shirt and long hair carrying Catherine's wide-eyed, but nearly unconscious body.<sup>12</sup> Catherine's subjectivity is granted through the establishing shot and immediately allows viewers access into Catherine's mindset and links Catherine's point of view with a gothic proclivity, which is contrasted with reality. Upon opening, the diegetic sounds of birdsong accompany the scenes of soft daylight on a church, but non-diegetic orchestral music and an operatic choir overlay these sounds to establish Catherine's subjectivity, for while her physical body was in a tree, her mind was in the

---

<sup>11</sup> Camp is defined as "Art, performance, literature, etc., which is exaggerated, affected, or over the top in style or execution, esp. in a knowing or playful way, or which is not restrained by traditional or prevailing ideas of good taste or decorum, or current fashion; camp style, taste, or sensibility," and depending on the film and viewer can be an either positive or negative aspect to any film ("camp, adj. and n.5."). For Foster's and Wadey's adaptation, though, the film's use of the gothic and feminine gaze, as well as female sexual desire is a dramatic failure rather than a humorous rendering of Austen's work.

<sup>12</sup> As it happens, actor Robert Hardy, who portrays General Tilney, is carrying Catherine, which hints at Catherine's predisposition for casting General Tilney in the brutish role of wife-murderer. The casting implies General Tilney, regardless of his innocence, holds the characteristics of a gothic villain—sinister personality but welcome and respected in society, imposing presence, sense of entitlement, and wealthy owner of an ancestral home—which is enough to link his actions in Catherine's mind to Radcliffe's villains.

novel. Also, as the narrative progresses, the film score by Ilona Sekacz provides viewers with immediate knowledge of when Catherine is squarely within her gothic imaginings (either as daydreams or overlaying eye-line shots that follow Catherine's gaze).<sup>13</sup> The film also favors Catherine's gaze and makes clear which male gazes Catherine accepts in return or rejects altogether, as well as her fluctuating opinions on their gaze. And though the film favors Catherine's gaze and subjectivity, which aligns the film with feminism, the film rejects the novel's feminism by substituting Catherine's growth as a young woman with Catherine's sexual agency and unwillingness to put aside gothic fantasies.

Foster's film generally overlooks personal growth and education while satirizing the teacher-hero. Instead, the film focuses on repressed female sexuality.<sup>14</sup> This seemingly feminist promotion of female desire is negated, however, by removing Catherine's personal development. She is left a sexually desiring woman who lacks the acumen needed for critically assessing people and situations beyond obvious meanings and intents. There is a brief moment when it appears Catherine will realize her own lack in education, but like the rest of Catherine's personal development in Foster's adaptation, the realization is fleeting. When summoned from the grove by her brother, Foster's and Wadey's Catherine speaks her first lines, "you've interrupted a vital part of my education. Literature and solitude are as necessary to a young woman's development as sunshine to ripe fruit" (Wadey 00:01:30).<sup>15</sup> In this moment, Catherine accepts her education

---

<sup>13</sup> Ilona Sekacz has composed for other tv movie adaptations, such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1988) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1997) and has composed for the Royal Shakespeare Company: *King Lear* (1982 & 2016); she won a BAFTA for her work on *Mortimer's Law* (1998) (IMDb, Fuller). Her work is also known for its "choral pieces," and "hymns and anthems" (Fuller).

<sup>14</sup> Many, like scholars Bruce Stovel and Jonathan Shears and critics Gethyn Thomas and Martin Cropper, have noted the "Ken Russell-style romp" occurring throughout Foster's adaptation (Stovel 236, Shears 140, Parrill 174, and Roberts 133).

<sup>15</sup> As punctuation to her sentence, Catherine takes a large bite from a plum. Roberts argues this moment is a means of reassuring male audiences that this is not your typical period drama and further claims, "Her avid enjoyment of the plum seems to promise pleasure for the male spectator, who is encouraged to make her part of his fantasies" (134). As a whole, Roberts' argument finds issue with Catherine's sexualization in the film. Where I do agree that

from gothic novels. Yet when one considers Catherine's daydreams—Catherine in a stupor being carried by an older male to a bed—her education appears sexually violent and sensational, one that removes, rather than restores, sexual and personal agency. Not until her walk with Eleanor and Henry Tilney does Catherine realize her education may be lacking. Her earlier confidence in claiming literature as education contrasts with her immediate awe at the Tilneys' education and her subsequent self-consciousness. Her admiration of their education reveals Catherine may now see a gap in her formal education and the insufficiency of an education formed solely by novel reading. However, the film omits the trio's conversation from the novel on why Catherine dislikes history and therefore omits the novel's argument for a stronger inclusion of women in history. So, rather than grow beyond gothic desire and speak out on women's absence in recorded history, Catherine leans more heavily into the gothic regardless of personal wrongdoing.

Indeed, Foster's and Wadey's adaptation favors suppressed sexual desire over mental self-development. Catherine's sexuality, while not explicitly shown in the novel, is forefront in the film. Plenty have commented on Catherine's sexuality in Foster's film, such as Marylin Roberts, Sue Parrill, Bruce Stovel, and Susan Kroeg, with reactions varying from seeing this development as problematic—ranging from male gaze to reduced innocence/naiveté—as a ploy to reach 1980's audiences, and/or addressing inferred sexual tension in Austen's works. The issue, though, is not that Catherine's sexual desires are explicitly shown; the issue is that they so entirely take over the film and reduce any personal growth that would truly empower Catherine in her or our own time. In Catherine's first daydream, she is scantily clothed. Her clothing

---

Catherine's sexualization outweighs all other aspects of Austen's feminist themes, I do not agree that she is sexualized for the male viewer. Instead, like Roberts states early in her argument, I find Wadey's use of these dreamlike scenes as a means of providing a psychoanalytic approach to Catherine (130). But also like Roberts, I agree when she claims the film "remains an interesting failure" (136).

references more Ariel after the shipwreck rather than the typical female attire of Period films. In her daydreams, Catherine is often either laid on a bed with the threat of physical harm alluded to through the low angle on a raised sword or she is running from kidnappers in the same loose off-the-shoulder gown with her hair down. Neither scene provides female empowerment as Catherine is always victim to male wants. Other scholars, like Jonathan Shears and Parrill, have argued “the fantasy sequences of the earlier production [1987 BBC adaptation] are more disturbing in their use of recurring imagery of virginal sacrifice” and that “Cathy’s dreams obsessively return to images of bondage, spilt blood, animals and aggressive medieval settings and costume” (Shears 139). Her gothic obsession translates into victimizing herself in sexually aggressive daydreams where male figures violently possess her body. She appears sexually charged and excited through her daydreams. By creating fantasies in which Catherine is excited to become a sexual victim, the film regresses Catherine’s mentality.<sup>16</sup> There is nothing regressive in allowing Catherine to naturally develop and explore her sexuality through daydreams. The issue comes when Catherine does not progress into a mature young woman capable of self-empowerment.

Laura Mulvey’s 1975 article in *Screen* on the male gaze and women’s visual function in cinema had been out for nearly twelve years by the time Foster’s and Wadey’s adaptation hit theaters. The film’s strong use of female desire and the gaze is a failed attempt to boldly address the feminist themes made popular through Mulvey’s work. With a supposed female audience, it is logical for Henry to become the desired object, but as past films of both Hollywood and the

---

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Roberts interprets Catherine’s reading with a Lacanian lens and her daydreams with a Freudian lens, claiming reading provides a Lacanian *jouissance* and that Catherine initially has an oedipal phase that she develops from and is rewarded by her engagement to Henry Tilney. Sue Parrill notes how Catherine’s fantasies, while showing male dominance, also show Catherine placing the real villains as villains in her daydreams, i.e., General Tilney and John Thorpe.



BBC have shown, neither a female heroine nor female audience ensures successful female subjectivity or favoring of the feminine gaze. The film does attempt to favor Catherine's subjectivity and therefore distance Catherine from male objectification and the disempowerment of her sexually aggressive/victimizing daydreams. Often, the camera privileges Catherine's line of sight with eye-line match cuts, such as when Catherine first meets Henry and then follows him with her eyes. With eyes wide, chin slightly tilted down, and an acute grin, Catherine is clearly excited by the idea of meeting her hero. Catherine exhibits the same expression when first meeting John Thorpe. With a mirrored facial reaction, it would appear Catherine is indiscriminately excited to meet both men, but only with Henry Tilney do we receive the dramatic leitmotif and Catherine's extended watch over Henry. By favoring Catherine's perspective and entitling her subjectivity over Henry's, Catherine is empowered. She actively desires, and therefore, the audience's desires and interests align with Catherine's. Moreover, in the same scene, Henry walks down the staircase with Catherine remaining on the higher level. The shot uses a high angle to provide Catherine's point of view, which implies Catherine's power over Henry. Henry is the desired object, rather than Catherine. Even so, the campy style and melodrama of the moment creates a satiric effect that destabilizes legitimate feminine power.

The film also dismisses multiple frictional moments between Catherine, John, and Isabella that should constitute Catherine developing social acumen and internal agency. John is still "a rattle," but his demeanor is left to guide Catherine's judgements rather than his multitude of verbal contradictions. Austen's novel provides conversations between Catherine and John, such as their conversation on James' gig, and the film removes these dialogues. As Stovel points out, other such dialogues—John's complaint about driving his sister in his gig and Isabella and Captain Tilney's flirtation—are removed from Catherine's hearing and therefore remove the

impact those moments have on Catherine's development in the novel (243-244). Therefore, Catherine's initial catalyst for personal growth is removed. Catherine's time with Isabella is also rather limited in the film, and while it takes Austen's Catherine seeming decades to gather Isabella's connection to James, Foster's and Wadey's, Catherine makes the connection in one hint. In point, the film momentarily elevates Catherine's social agility, but she is still unable to assess Isabella accurately. Furthermore, Roberts claims "the characters' grotesque campiness" in the "Bath sequences" are another issue in the film, I would claim, because they remove moments that contrast Catherine's gothic expectations with reality (134). By removing scenes of friction for Catherine to better gather John and Isabella's characters, the film relegates matters of Catherine's personal growth to the sidelines. Neither matters of female education nor of critical character assessment and personal growth are motifs for Foster's and Wadey's adaptation.

Catherine's desire for Henry, in both film and book, gives him space to make a positive impact on Catherine's personal development. Yet Foster's and Wadey's adaptation troubles Henry's role of teacher-hero by tainting his character with haughtiness and a negative connection to the gothic outside Catherine's daydreams. Part of the teacher-hero's success is his lack of condescension towards the female protagonist. The teacher-hero must also be grounded in practical sense and knowledge that the female protagonist lacks. And while Henry does possess the academic education Catherine lacks, the Foster and Wadey adaptation weakens Henry's practicality by aligning him with the gothic *outside* of Catherine's daydreams. In discussing the problems of this adaptation, Roberts lists "the lack of a world of reality to counterbalance Catherine's Gothic fantasies" as a primary issue (130). One example plays out through the film's melodramatic or gothic leitmotif. The film score often shifts between diegetic ballroom music and one of two leitmotifs that aid in setting the film's gothic tone: the first denotes trouble or

passionate excitement, while the second denotes pleasure and renewed peace. Each score possesses mysterious and otherworldly tones created by a choir. The pleasant one tends to overlay, for example, gatherings with Catherine, Eleanor, and Henry, while the second more tense one often occurs in the ravishing portions of Catherine's daydreams.

With one exception, the themes are only utilized for Catherine's subjectivity. The one exception is when the gothic score expresses Henry's subjectivity as fellow participant in gothic imaginings. As Catherine and Isabella walk through Bath, they unknowingly pass Henry. The camera follows their movement and pans to Henry's face as the women walk through the shot. As the camera favors Henry's perspective by following his gaze, the second, more pleasant, gothic theme plays over the action, beginning when the audience realizes they are within Henry's perspective and continuing as the camera Henry walking away and glancing over his shoulder for a final reference to Catherine (Foster & Wadey 00:21:36). Henry warns Catherine that it is not "what we read . . . but how we read. We must exercise our own judgment after all and not mistake fantasy for reality" (00:29:43). He further notes "art is as different from reality as water is from air . . . if you mistake water for air, you drown" (00:30:08-00:30:12). Despite his warnings, Henry acts within a gothic influence. Henry leans into the melodramatic when guiding Catherine to dinner at the Abbey, when addressing her theories of his mother's death, and when seeking her out after her banishment. Catherine fails to see the inconsistency in Henry's claims and behavior. What the novel construes as playful teasing, Foster's adaptation portrays as melodrama, which distances Henry Tilney from the role of teacher-hero and reveals him as a key player, not in Catherine's personal development, but in detaining Catherine in her gothic mindset.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> It is worth recognizing that Foster and Wadey's Henry Tilney fits more so into the problematic male character discussed of Austen's Henry in a previous footnote.

While Catherine's subjectivity is undeniably provided in the film and her sexual agency expressed, the film overlooks female growth. Catherine does not evolve. By only giving attention to Catherine as a sexually desiring woman, the film overlooks the need for social agency. The novel makes Catherine's dependence on Henry's judgment clear, but by the end, Catherine is less dependent and out of danger of becoming Mrs. Allen. Foster's Catherine, though, remains in danger of becoming Mrs. Allen because Catherine lacks the teacher-hero to catalyze self-development. Henry's shortcomings are perhaps best expressed in the film's final moments. For example, Henry responds melodramatically when Catherine boldly expresses her claims about Mrs. Tilney's supposed murder. Stovel claims, "the film makes Henry Tilney seem a great deal more smug, more priggish, more lacking in sympathy and comic awareness when he rebukes Catherine" (241). Henry delivers his "this couldn't happen in England" speech, but he does so slowly as he closes the distance between himself and Catherine to where she must shove past him to leave the room. He triggers her shame, which would imply the catalyst of the teacher-hero's rebuke has worked.

Yet, the film's ending suggests Catherine is as immersed in the gothic as ever. As Catherine walks into the grove from the film's opening scenes where she read Radcliffe, she is enveloped in fog. Her outfit mysteriously alters from a long-sleeve dress into a shorter-sleeve white gown resembling a more conservative version of her gown/sheet from her daydreams. As the fog envelops her, the camera moves in on Catherine. Henry appears shortly thereafter on white horse and without a jacket. Both Henry's and Catherine's clothing contribute to their shared gothic mindset. In this moment, the film reflects Catherine's and Henry's shared subjectivity through their clothing, eye-line matches, and the fog. In contrast with their gothic mindsets, when Catherine is called by her brother, the camera provides the young boy's

perspective where the fog is gone but Catherine and Henry are left in their embrace among the trees. Neither Catherine nor Henry appear to leave their gothic mindsets despite Henry's warning about reality as air and fantasy as water. Therefore, the film ultimately leaves Catherine squarely within her gothic mindset with no personal development. In doing so, the film negates Austen's novel's feminist themes. Instead, the film focuses on Catherine's sexual agency and power to desire. While these motifs fit with a more modern female audience, they imply the sexually desiring woman cannot be both inquisitive and knowledgeable while projecting her sexual desires. In short, they make Catherine out to be sillier and more naïve than capable and cognizant of the world around her, leaving her exactly what eighteenth-century readers feared for young women readers.

### **Analysis of Jones' and Davies' *Northanger Abbey***

Jones' and Davies' adaptation maintains a stronger focus on Catherine's personal development. By including more scenes in Bath where Catherine interacts with Isabella and John, the film emphasizes personal growth through trial and error. Rather than deemphasizing Catherine's growth by primarily focusing on the gothic, Jones' and Davies' interpretation provides a balance between gothic fantasy/reality and personal development. The film also continues the sexual motifs in Foster's adaptation but shows how sexual development is natural to a young woman's maturation and does not taint Austen's innocent and naïve heroine. The *New York Times* film review states that the adaptation "hyperboliz[es] the sex that always lurks beneath the surface of Austen's astringent presence" (Bellafante). Sex and Austen have become synonymous with Andrew Davies, but not without purpose. Sexual motifs play an integral role in Catherine's developing sense of self and internal agency. Rather than dramatizing these motifs by utilizing camera angles to establish Catherine's sexually desiring gaze, Jones' and Davies'

adaptation exhibits sexual motifs primarily through Catherine's dreams and builds on this motif by establishing Catherine's distaste at unwanted sexual advances. While the earlier adaptation makes all sexual advances exciting for Catherine, the latest makes clear points that not all advances are welcome and takes on prescient #MeToo themes of verbal sexual assault. This is continued as the film questions the empowerment of pre-marital sex when both participants have disparate expectations.

Catherine's sexual desire—expressed through daydreams and dreams—is shown as a natural progression of female development. Catherine's sexual desires are new to her maturation, and her confusion and concern with their arrival dispels any fear of “tainting” Austen's innocent and naïve young woman. Shears looks at Catherine's dreams as both “an endorsement of, rather than a threat to, the social and narrative equilibrium,” and a “privile[ging of] the erotic inner life as opposed to the social figuring of sexual behavior” (140-141).<sup>18</sup> My argument aligns with Shears, but I would also stress how Catherine's sexual awakening is expressed, not as social or moral deviance, but as an organically growing awareness to sexual desire. Azerêdo claims, “it becomes highly problematic to conciliate [Catherine's] subjectivity as, at the same time, that of a naïve girl, who hasn't had any sexual experience, and that of a girl whose fantasies are loaded with sexual connotations” (125). Yet, as I have noted, Catherine's fantasies are limited to her sexual awakening, showing that sexual fantasies do not preclude innocence. Often, if not always, Catherine either blushes or expresses confusion when she wakes from her nighttime dreams.

---

<sup>18</sup> Any negativity associated with sexual knowledge is dispelled when neither Catherine nor Henry act outside Christian and societal mores. Their desire for one another comes across with unthreatening intent because the end goal for each is marriage, which further highlights the threatening nature of Captain Tilney's actions with Isabella. That Henry is also a conduit for his sister's expanding sexual desire also neutralizes any negative associations with sexual desire as their intentions are also marriage. By keeping sexual desire within containable limits – marriage – the film appears to remove the threat of internal trauma that Isabella experiences with Captain Tilney. But the underlying implication is really that sexual desire is safer, not simply when marriage is involved, but when there are mutual goals and reciprocated feelings between both desiring parties.

Because these dreams are not part of her conscious daydreams, ones where she controls the actions, they express a burgeoning sexual awareness that had yet to be so deeply awakened. Rather than serving as melodrama, as daydreams do in Foster's adaptation, dreams in Jones' adaptation are expressions of Catherine's development which converts Austen's feminist themes into recognizable and relatable situations for its viewers and express Catherine's development as a young woman.

Catherine's growing sexual awareness is evidenced through her dreams. Catherine's dreams transition from active daydreams to passive nighttime dreams only after Catherine meets Henry, which aligns their meeting with Catherine's developing sexual awareness. Bellafante calls these fantasies "campy," just as others called Foster's and Wadey's film "campy," but the primary difference is that one film wants viewers to note the satire, where the other takes these gothic fantasies with melodramatic seriousness. In this most recent film, viewers see one gothic-tinted dream where Catherine and Henry are escaping from John Thorpe on horseback. Henry and John swordfight. With each clash of their swords, the scene cuts from the men's fight to images of Catherine's arousal. Catherine leans her head back and releases a moan, which continues as the fight increases (Davies 00:17:18). In another eroticized dream, Henry comes to Catherine while she is bathing and she rises from the bath fully naked; Catherine awakes with a start and appears concerned with the content of her dream, which serves to share that Catherine's dreams have not typically been so explicit (Davies 00:38:48). Catherine's desire for Henry is a noted catalyst for her personal development. As viewers, we may laugh or feel uncomfortable watching Catherine's clear sexual desire, but taking these fantasies in their entirety, along with Catherine's growing internal agency, we are aware that Catherine's desire is part of her personal

development. As such, the film expands on what it means for a woman to grow beyond eighteenth-century societal expectations for young women.

Also, the film symbolizes Catherine's transition from innocence to knowledge with Eden imagery that plays out throughout the film, while ensuring Catherine is unassociated with any negative Eve-tainting representations. When the film opens, Catherine's life is narrated by "The Voice of Jane Austen" over peaceful, playful music that culminates with teenage Catherine in a white dress playing and running with her siblings in a game of cricket. The scene clearly associates Catherine with childhood and childhood thoughts, which is emphasized by her parents' discussion on Catherine's development. Furthermore, once the cricket game is over, the scene cuts to Catherine reading under an apple tree. The camera pans in through dry, tall grass that is secluding Catherine from the world. In placing Catherine under the apple tree, the film references the Garden of Eden (00:02:26). At the moment, Catherine is without knowledge, both sexual and of the world. As the film appears intent on highlighting Catherine's sexual growth as natural, not negative or tainting, she is not aligned with the biblical Eve. During a montage of Catherine, Eleanor, and Henry's time together at the Abbey, Henry is in an apple tree with Eleanor and Catherine underneath. Laughing and with similar joyful, but less playful, music to when Catherine plays with her siblings, Henry tosses down apples to Eleanor and Catherine (Davies 01:06:22). Catherine's desire for Henry is both intellectual and sexual. She admires his education, his wit, and he has become the object of her growing sexual desire. Eve giving Adam the apple is reversed. It is Henry who gives the apples to both his sister and love interest. In the film, Henry has also been the means of introducing Eleanor to her love interest and it is implied that he helps arrange for their secret meetings. In such a case, Henry has inadvertently been associated with helping Eleanor also have a deeper knowledge of sexual desire. For by tossing



the apples down to Eleanor and Catherine, Henry is made the sharer of knowledge and if not the sharer, then the inspiration.

And beyond the Eden imagery, the film almost self-consciously ensures Catherine's innocence is not lost due to her sexual desires. Catherine and Eleanor share a moment where they mutedly discuss sexual desire. The moment is brief but speaks of Catherine's concern for her purity. Henry believes Catherine is pure in heart, and when Eleanor shares this with Catherine, Catherine mentions she "has the most terrible dreams" (Davies 00:49:48). Catherine glances to Henry walking ahead of them; Eleanor shares a meaningful look with Catherine and both giggle. "Terrible" could imply the dreams are violent, but in looking to Henry and then in laughing together, the two share an awareness of unspoken sexual desire. By implying rather than explicitly stating the dream's subject, the film remains within plausible conversation for two eighteenth-century unmarried women, but by adding the discussion, which is not in the novel, and by using Eden imagery, the film brings out ideas of natural sexual development for young women.

Through sexual microaggressions—unwanted gazes and verbal advances—the film also extends Catherine's personal development by having her learn that not all sexual advances are pleasurable which expands on Catherine's experiences and develops her agency. On her way to Bath, Catherine daydreams of the carriage being robbed and smiles as she imagines a bandit playing with her necklace. In this daydream, she is aroused by the bandit's actions. In contrast, when Catherine is catcalled by men outside her Bath residence, she first expresses distaste and then annoyance (Davies 00:05:35). The man's comment, "Now, there's a little peach that's ripe for plucking," immediately objectifies Catherine and makes her a consumable commodity. Providing Catherine's reaction, though, supplies a sense of defiance and rejection of being

commodified. Such contrasts with Isabella who sees herself as a commodity in marriage. Isabella accepts similar comments from Captain Tilney, but in her case, Isabella is ready to be purchased and to make her own purchase. In contrast, Catherine (both novel and Jones' and Davies' film) rejects marriage as commodity and objectifying sexual advances as flirtation. Reality contrasts with Catherine's notion of gothic adventure, but she has yet to connect those gothic expectations with her experiences.

Jones and Davies also utilize Isabella's experiences to dramatize sexual aggression by expanding on Isabella and Captain Tilney's exhibition of sexual desire that ultimately leads to Isabella's internal sexual trauma. As such, the film utilizes the implied sexual desire in Austen's novel to reveal disparity in sexual agency. Isabella seeks marital conquest while Captain Tilney seeks physical conquest. For Isabella, sex means commitment and marriage. Like Catherine, Isabella is naïve, but her naivete manifests through her mistaken belief: all play for the same prize – marriage, and though she has managed an engagement with a man who loves her and could keep them both comfortable, in hopes of achieving a wealthier marriage, she pursues a man who only wishes to temporarily physically possess her. In such, Davies makes explicit what Austen only implies. Even though Isabella is a willing sexual partner, she is left asking, "And are we engaged," and Captain Tilney's response is to instruct Isabella to dress before she is missed (Davies 1:17:38). Isabella's experience makes note that sexual aggression can be emotional. Engaging a sexual participant through emotional manipulation creates an internal trauma. The film's shot of Isabella after Captain Tilney rejects her expresses her confusion and vulnerability: the wide shot is level with Isabella naked and holding herself up in bed by one arm while her other arm holds a sheet across her body. The previous confidence she exuded during their verbal foreplay is gone. Her face expresses timidity and confusion after Captain Tilney's response.

Isabella is now rejected, and her assumed power appears depleted. Isabella becomes less naïve through broadened experiences of society. Like Catherine, Isabella was also unaware of the breadth and depth of people's motivations. In expanding on themes of sexual aggression and emotional trauma, the film carries forward Austen's feminist themes for a more modern viewer.

But what's interesting is that these post-coital scenes between Captain Tilney and Isabella play out under Isabella's voice-over as she narrates a letter to Catherine. By covering the end of Isabella's vulnerability with Captain Tilney with her voice-over, the film attempts to restore Isabella's power. Isabella's tone holds contempt "for Bath," but her contempt is really for her misjudgment and Captain Tilney's mistreatment. Instead of leaving Isabella in a position of weakness, she is restored to her bed, fully clothed, and narrating her pleasure in leaving Bath and attempting to recover James. While Gilbert and Gubar have noted Isabella is punished by Austen, the film removes any sense of punishment and instead gives the viewer empathy. By adding Eleanor's sympathies for Isabella just before the voice-over, and by situating Isabella loosely covered by a sheet on the bed with Captain Tilney fully clothed at a higher angle, the film momentarily empathizes with Isabella rather than condemning her. And the voice-over interrupts a sense of victimhood as Isabella reconstructs her experiences and expresses anger. Britta Sjogren notes of *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945) the female voice's ability to become "a potential disruption to the specular female body. It connotes and is 'used' to connote an intimacy, confusion of limits, and a loss of (objectifying) perspective, even as the image seeks to structure point of view, center and isolate the subject, and insist on the definite in sexual difference" (23). Sjogren's discussion on the psychological implications of the voice-over also function for Jones' and Davies' adaption. For Isabella's voice-over reclaims possession of self and breaks any lingering sense of Captain Tilney's hunting and objectifying gaze. Where before

she was possessed and shown in a weakened position, she restores herself and reclaims subjectivity.

Catherine gains a stronger sense of self and internal agency, but like Isabella, this cannot occur before committing a life changing mistake. Unlike Foster's and Wadey's interpretation, Jones' and Davies' ensures Catherine realizes her errors and accepts legitimate growth. The film does this, though, by emphasizing Catherine's relationships with Eleanor and Henry and the affect they have on her development. Combined, Eleanor and Henry guide, but do not commandeer, Catherine's maturation and aid her in developing her own sense of agency. In realizing Catherine's peaceful childhood has, in part, led her into naiveté, Eleanor notes Catherine's happy upbringing may have been a dangerous one. The comment is said peacefully and as a warm-hearted warning—a testament to the film attempting to elevate Eleanor's participation in Catherine's development and positive female relationships. As with Austen's work, Catherine admits she is informed only by her life experiences and gothic novels, which leads her to assume the worst when Henry implies the Abbey has been the place of much sorrow. Catherine does not think of commoditized marriage or an overbearing parent; she thinks of murder and scandal. While the film removes the cleanliness and tidiness of Mrs. Tilney's room, it upholds Catherine's misjudgment of General Tilney and her personal alteration after confronting Henry.

The film removes smaller moments of Catherine's shame—contrasting her gothic imaginings with reality—but this emphasizes her connections to Eleanor and Henry, two more reliable teachers than gothic novels. Catherine does develop stronger internal agency, but unlike in the novel, Catherine will have more sensible and compassionate companions than her mother, Isabella, or James and John. As in Foster's and Wadey's adaptation, Jones' and Davies' film uses

a dramatic leitmotif, but sparingly and without a sense of satire. As Catherine mounts the Abbey stairs, the camera provides a high angle to emphasize a maze-like structure, and the gothic score plays. The combination of the staircase/maze and the mystery-movie gothic score combines to elucidate Catherine's mindset for viewers. In this moment, she is conducting an investigation that is reaching its climax. Unlike the novel, though, Catherine does not have a moment to see a charming and clean room. She finds it dusty and ill lit. As Greenfield and Troost note, the film undercuts Austen's effort to contrast the gothic with the Abbey's more modern furnishings, which makes the film momentarily "side with Catherine, supporting her fantasy rather than satirizing her" (7). Catherine's conversation with Henry is what enlightens her rather than her own conclusions. With the novel, it is the strength of Catherine's feelings for Henry that finalize her desire to grow, but the film places larger emphasis on the shame Catherine feels when her imaginings are discovered than on the small moments of shame Catherine feels as her gothic imaginings are contrasted with reality. Emphasizing the shame she feels when thinking of others' reactions further emphasizes her relationships with Eleanor and Henry and acts as a catalyst for personal empowerment. For realizing her mistakes only strengthens her internal agency.

It would appear that using Catherine's affection for Henry to spark her change would deemphasize the film's feminism. Shouldn't Eleanor enlighten Catherine? Shouldn't Catherine develop a strong enough will power to overcome these misguided notions on her own? But Catherine is still in development. She continues gaining knowledge of the world. At this moment, Catherine needs another to bring her into a clearer view of reality. Plotwise, Eleanor could not become this elucidating person for Catherine. It would need to be Henry as he and Captain Tilney were home when Mrs. Tilney passed. Captain Tilney, regardless of being in Bath, could not impart any revelations to Catherine because she does not trust his character. Therefore,

Henry must be the point of Catherine's enlightenment. Furthermore, Henry, as well as Eleanor, is more aware of the world's disappointments and wrongs. The novel is progressionist in that both Eleanor and Henry have experienced the world's taint, rather than solely Henry whose societal role places him squarely in the social/commercial sphere. So, it is the strength of Catherine's affections and her hopes for their future that when jeopardized become the bonding agent for Catherine's new perspective.<sup>19</sup>

Through lighting and contrasting actions between Foster's and Jones' Catherine when burning *Udolpho*, the film leaves no doubt of Catherine's personal development. She is a wiser woman. As the revelation between herself and Henry occurs, Henry is positioned in light, while Catherine's face remains in shadow, emphasizing his knowledge and Catherine's mistake. The dialogue for this scene does not follow the novel. Rather than providing the "England" speech which inaccurately reviews how unlikely it would be for such a crime to occur in England, Henry says, "Perhaps after all it is possible to read too many novels" and he questions her "fevered imagination" as his expression alters from one of anger to disappointment (Jones & Davies 01:14:04-01:14:14). The scene cuts from Mrs. Tilney's room where Catherine was in shadow to Catherine's room at the Abbey where Catherine is in full light. The transition from shadow to flooded light is symbolic of Catherine's new perspective. Furthermore, shortly after, Catherine relays her fear to Eleanor that Henry "will never ever respect me again" (Davies 01:15:26). Catherine's fear drives home the importance of her revelation. If she did not mourn Henry's respect, then the film would imply Catherine has not matured. Though Foster's and Wadey's Catherine similarly appears to mourn her loss of Henry, she does not express concern

---

<sup>19</sup> For Jones' and Davies' adaptation, Kroeg points out that it is Catherine's gothic novel reading that makes her more aware of the world's villainy. She further notes how Henry contradicts Catherine's claim that novels are not in fact like real life because, as Henry states, "broken hearts, betrayals, ... fear, hatred and despair" are "part of all of our lives" (qtd. in Kroeg 63).

for respect, nor does she appear to leave-off her daydreams. For Jones' and Davies' interpretation, Catherine's day and nighttime dreams are at an end.

Furthermore, both films utilize Catherine burning her copy of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to signify Catherine's either disgust or disappointment with her actions.<sup>20</sup> The action in Foster's and Wadey's adaptation implies Catherine takes a sense of ownership over her wrongs and intends to move forward in a different mindset, but Catherine places her novel in the fire in a moment of passion and the action is overplayed with the melodramatic score that only increases in volume and tone as the book burns. In contrast, the most recent film shows Catherine burning the book with calmness and a cool mind. The only sound is what is natural to the scene. The scene cuts to Catherine showing that she can still enjoy a good story, but knows now to be weary of undue influence. In this scene, Catherine is not playing outside with her siblings, like a child herself, but is putting them all to bed and giving them a warning of trusting too much in chilling tales. Catherine's transition from playmate to instructor further evidences her legitimate maturation.

The film shows Catherine's full maturation, which is supported by reintroducing Eden imagery. For when Henry proposes to Catherine, they are in a secluded, bright, and bountiful greenery. Rather than being cast out for their knowledge, Henry and Catherine are rewarded for having knowledge and upholding moral behavior. Catherine and Henry, once reunited, have formed their own garden outside of the eighteenth-century society each have mocked. They are able to leave society and return to the garden or the quiet English countryside. And their first kiss

---

<sup>20</sup> Likewise in Foster's and Wadey's adaptation, Catherine burns *Udolpho*. Parrill claims this is a visualization of Catherine's rejection of the gothic novel as a guide to understanding and living life; Parrill also draws the apt conclusion that burning *Udolpho* would not be historically accurate, as Catherine likely did not own the book herself but had it from a lending library (186). But in this film Catherine, as we have seen, does not reject gothic novel reading in the end. For Jones' and Davies' adaptation, Azerêdo claims the book burning scene represents one interpretation of Austen's novel: complete rejection of the gothic as a literary tradition (123).

is as awkward as any teenager first being introduced to the reality of physical intimacy. Their awkwardness only highlights their moral character (having not practiced with others—a characteristic specific to eighteenth-century courting) and as they kiss, they progress into the shade of a tree just off the walkway. Now, with both in full knowledge of the world, they can separate themselves from the bulk of society. Catherine is sharing her experience with siblings, and Henry has broken from his father's villainy.

## **Conclusion**

Gilbert and Gubar note that Austen's Catherine loses the power of authorship when she is broken from her daydreams of Mrs. Tilney and the Abbey. Yet if power is meant to be held socially, where power can be wielded, then breaking these delusions is precisely what Catherine needs in order to become a sensible woman, capable of personal growth beyond that which is prescribed to eighteenth-century women. Her gothic imaginings, which are taken as full expectations of reality, are a weakness. Taken as inspiration for a novel or career, they would suit her better. Instead, they weaken her stance in society. Her power comes from realizing her mistake and refusing to make it again. She does not reject novel reading, but rejects unchecked influence, and as such, there is hope Catherine will be weary of unchecked influence in the future. Combining this realization with her newfound power to better judge character, Catherine has strengthened her personal agency and holds a better chance of not being taken advantage of by peers or fictions. And Jones' and Davies' interpretation endorses and brings Austen's feminist motifs to modern-day feminist discussions on sexual agency and desire. Foster's and Wadey's film though leans more into melodrama and exaggeration. Rather than support Catherine's personal growth, the film focuses primarily on the thrill of gothic fiction and appears to overreact to discussions on the male gaze. Either mocking the gaze by weakening Catherine's personal



growth or by going too far with the female gaze, the film fails to support feminist themes.

Catherine's subjectivity fails to evolve, whereas the most recent film shows a Catherine with a stronger understanding of the world, fiction, and her own critical evaluations. Though each woman burns her copy of *Udolpho*, only Jones' and Davies' Catherine does so with a calm mind and a determination to bring perspective into storytelling. Through film score, subjectivity, and sexual motifs, each film addresses the feminist themes of Austen's novel, but only Jones' and Davies' film carries them forward as relatable and teachable moments of personal growth.

### Works Cited

- Addison and Steele. "Accomplished Wives." *Spectator Papers*, 1712-13, edited by Paul McPharlin, Pauper P, 1899.
- Anderson, Walter. "From Northanger to Woodston: Catherine's Education to Common Life." *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1984, pp. 493-509.
- Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. 1817, edited by John Davie, Oxford UP, 1998.
- Azarêdo, Genilda. "Screening Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: Adaptation as (Mis)Interpretation." *Itinerários: Revista de Literatura*, vol. 36, 2013, pp. 119-128.
- Bellafante, Ginia. "A Most Proper Marriage: Jane Austen and PBS: Television Review." Review of *Northanger Abbey*, directed by John Jones, *New York Times*, 19 January 2008, p. B18.
- Bennett, Ashly. "Shame and Sensibility: Jane Austen's Humiliated Heroines." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2015, pp. 377-400.
- "camp, adj. and n.5." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, December 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/26746](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/26746). Accessed 17 January 2023.
- Cordner, Sheila. "'Scrambling' into an Austen Education." *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation*. Routledge, 2016.
- Dussinger, John. "Parents Against Children: General Tilney as Gothic Monster." *Persuasion*, vol. 20, 1998, pp. 165-174.
- Ford, Susan Allen. "Ingenious Torments, Or Reading Instructive Texts in *Northanger Abbey*: The Mirror, the Rambler, and Conduct Books." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2010.
- Fuller, Sophie. "Sekacz, Ilona." *Grove Music Online*, Oxford UP, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.2021260>.

- Gentile, Kathy Justice. "'A forward, bragging, scheming race': Comic Masculinity in *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, vol. 32, 2010, pp. 78-89.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Yale UP, 2000.
- Greenfield, Sayre N., and Linda V. Troost. "Modernity and Antiquity in *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2019.
- Johnson, Claudia. "A 'Sweet Face as White as Death': Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1989, pp. 159-174.
- Johnson, Claudia. "The Juvenilia and *Northanger Abbey*: The Authority of Men and Books." *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, U of Chicago P, 1988, pp. 28-49.
- Johnson, Samuel. "To Miss Susanna Thrale." *A Johnson Reader*. Edited by E.L. McAdam Jr. and George Milne, Pantheon, 1964, p. 444.
- Kindred, Sheila. "From Puppet to Person: The Development of Catherine's Character in the Bath Chapters of *Northanger Abbey*." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, no. 20, 1998, pp. 196-206.
- King, Rachel Scarborough. "'[L]et a girl read': Periodicals and Women's Literary Canon Formation." *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century*. Edited by Jennie Batchelor, Edinburgh UP, 2018, pp. 221-235.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474419666>.
- Kroeg, Susan M. "Editor's Choice Award: Reading and Writing the Gothic in Film Adaptations of Austen's *Northanger Abbey*." *Kentucky Philological Review*, vol. 26, 2011, pp. 59-65.
- McMaster, Juliet. "'A surmise of such horror': Catherine Morland's Imagination." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line*, no. 32, 2010, pp. 15-27.

Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no 3, 1975, pp. 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>

Murray, Douglas. "'She could not repent her resistance': *Northanger Abbey* and the #MeToo Movement." *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2020.

*Northanger Abbey*, directed by Giles Foster, screenplay by Maggie Wadey, performances by Katherine Schlesinger and Peter Firth, BBC, 1987.

*Northanger Abbey*, directed by Jon Jones, screenplay by Andrew Davies, performances by Felicity Jones and JJ Field, ITV and PBS, 2007.

O'Connor, John. "TV: 'Northanger Abbey,' Austen Satire." Review of *Northanger Abbey*, directed by Giles Foster, *New York Times*, 6 December 1987, p. 106.

Parrill, Sue. "Northanger Abbey." *Jane Austen on Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Adaptations*, McFarland, 2002, pp. 169-187.

Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. Penguin, 1990.

Roberts, Marylin. "Adapting Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: Catherine Morland as Gothic Heroine." *Nineteenth-Century Women at the Movies: Adapting Classic Women's Fiction to Film*. Edited by Barbara Tapa Lupack, Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1999, pp. 129-139.

Sadoff, Diane F. "Marketing Jane Austen at the Megaplex." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 43, no.1, 2010, pp. 83-92.

"Ilona Sekacz." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0782794/?ref\\_=ttfc\\_fc\\_cr3](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0782794/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cr3).

Shears, Jonathan. "'Why Should I Hide My Regard?': Erotic Austen." *Television, Sex, and Society: Analyzing Contemporary Representations*. Edited by Basil Glynn, James Aston, and Beth Johnson, Continuum, 2012, n.p.

Sjogren, Britta H. "A Metapsychology of the Voice-off." *Into the Vortex: Female Voice-off and the Paradox in Film*, U of Illinois P, 2006, pp. 21-77.

Stovel, Bruce. "Northanger Abbey at the Movies." *Persuasions*, no. 20. 1998. pp. 236-247.

Woods, James Robert. "Periodicals and the Problem of Women's Learning." *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century*.

Edited by Jennie Batchelor, Edinburgh UP, 2018, pp. 25-39.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474419666>.

## CHAPTER II—A WHISPER COMPARED TO THE STORM: *JANE EYRE* BY BRONTË (1847), ROBERTSON (1944), AND FUKUNAGA (2011)

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* builds female agency through Jane's first-person narration that focalizes her interiority and builds her voice. Jane uses the sense of self she develops to negotiate social standards and determine her own form of femininity.<sup>21</sup> Telling her life's story, *Jane Eyre* connects to readers through her forthright voice, self-reflection, and direct address.<sup>22</sup> These qualities engendered reviews that praised *Jane Eyre* for being "nothing but nature and truth" (*The Era*, 1847). But while *The Era*'s review praised the novel for being "a delightful and comprehensible lesson . . . much of trial and temptation, of fortitude and resignation, of sound sense and Christianity," others, like Elizabeth Rigby's review in the *Quarterly Review*, claimed, "Jane Eyre is throughout the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit . . . the impression she leaves on our mind is that of a decidedly vulgar-minded woman" (176-77). The reviewers' disparate takes on Brontë's heroine highlight how *Jane Eyre* both subverted and accepted nineteenth-century cultural standards to form an alternate femininity that permitted Jane Eyre her own individualism and independence. *Jane Eyre*'s first-person narration—her internal voice and self-reflection—are essential to building Jane's internal agency that she uses to negotiate what she will and will not accept from society in order to establish a form of femininity she feels best achieves her desire for freedom, equality, and independence.

Scholars have discussed *Jane Eyre*'s narration in numerous terms. Whereas Rosemarie Bodenheimer claims that the narrator's evolution expresses the learned art of truth-telling which leads to narratorial empowerment, Cynthia Mieczkowski argues a psychoanalytic readings that

---

<sup>21</sup> Lorna Ellis' discussion in *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850* (1999) argues that *Jane Eyre* is a new type of female bildungsroman: it builds female agency on Jane's interiority, rather than on external factors such as family connections and wealth.

<sup>22</sup> In the novel's thirty-eight chapters, Jane directly addresses the reader a minimum of thirty-five times.

interprets Jane's wit as a means of creating distance between past pain and present empowerment.<sup>23</sup> Others, like Robyn Warhol, argue "Victorian women novelists like the Brontës are not so much unconsciously 'written by' gender codes as they are actively engaged in rewriting them," as Brontë does via narrative and doubling (858). Lorna Ellis furthers Brontë scholarship in her discussion on the female bildungsroman by arguing *Jane Eyre* is a new progression in the form for creating a female character whose agency is based on internal, rather than external, agency. Ellis argues Jane's "agency [is] something that separates the heroine from those around her, and that arises from within rather than from external circumstances such as wealth or status, [which] is similarly emphasized at each moment in the novel when Jane is faced with a serious moral or emotional decision." I continue this conversation by arguing that Jane's internal agency creates a hybrid femininity, which is expressed through a strong voice that focalizes her experiences. This chapter will then discuss how two film adaptations have attempted to engage and represent this voice on screen.

Possibly one of the most difficult tasks when adapting *Jane Eyre* to film is expressing Jane's active internal agency and voice. For the 1944 adaptation directed by Robert Stevenson, voice-over is the primary means of providing audiences with Jane's interiority. However, audiences of Stevenson's adaption, then and now, are often taken aback when Jane's voice is subsumed by Rochester's. Readers of Brontë's novel are consistently privy to Jane's interiority, but via film score and camera angle, Stevenson's film resituates Rochester's interiority as the main focal point, thus rejecting Jane's subjectivity. The most recent (2011) film adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, directed by Cary Fukunaga, actively responds to Stevenson's adaptation. With a quiet

---

<sup>23</sup> For art as truth-telling for empowerment, see Rosemarie Bodenheimer's "Jane Eyre in Search of Her Story" (1980). For humor and narration, see Cynthia Mieczkowski's "'Do You Never Laugh, Miss Eyre?': Humor, Wit and the Comic in 'Jane Eyre'" (1989).

film score that follows both Rochester and Jane, Fukunaga's film expresses Jane's internal voice and agency in physical movement—pacing and movement—that fills a seemingly quiet film with voice.

### **Developing Self and Agency Through Focalization**

The novel's use of voice is active and engaging. As narrator of her own story, Jane Eyre is both the focalizer and the focalized. Meike Bal briefly defines focalization as “the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented” (142). Linda Shires and Steven Cohan also discuss focalization through Gerard Genette's work, defining the term as “a triadic relation formed by the *narrating agent* (who narrates), the *focalizer* (who sees), and the *focalized* (what is being seen and, thus, narrated—in the case of mental life: emotion, cognition, or perception)” (95).<sup>24</sup> Having a first-person narrator does not guarantee that the narrator is both the focalizer and the focalized. As Heidi Pennington discusses for both *The Great Gatsby* and *Wuthering Heights*, the narrators' lives are the focus of neither the narrative nor the narrator. Though both are active players in the tale, they are not focalized (24-25). As Shires and Cohan point out, though, *Jane Eyre* is provided via Jane's emotion and perception of events, making Jane both the narrating agent and focalizer of her story. Making Jane the lens through which readers receive her experiences immerses readers in Jane's personal development and allows them to recognize Jane's internal reflection on Victorian social standards for women and the differing types of femininity she encounters. Through these encounters, both of embodied femininity (femininity expressed via the women Jane meets) and expected femininity

---

<sup>24</sup> Also see Gerard Genette's focalization: *Narrative Discourse* (1980). Furthermore, in “Expanding the View of First-Person Narration” (1999), Andrea Schwenke Wyile expands on focalization in her discussion on immediate- and active-distant-engaging narration where the first-person narrator directly addresses the reader at a temporal distance from the narrating events.



(cultural standards of feminine behavior), she develops a femininity she can utilize to achieve selfhood.

Jane tests out forms of femininity, either imaginatively or through her actions. In comparing her romance with Rochester to his affairs with Blanche Ingram and Céline Varens, Jane gains a stronger sense of self and self-respect, while eschewing a different model of femininity. In her actions, Jane experiences Mrs. Reed's vindictive personality and rejects it as a model to follow in favor of the calm, just, and self-possessed femininity modeled by Miss Temple and Helen. According to Bodenheimer, Jane's descriptions of Eliza and Georgiana show that Jane recognizes how each young woman's deportment is a parody of heroines from narrative plot conventions that Jane herself refuses to model (395).<sup>25</sup> As for Bertha Mason Rochester, Gilbert and Gubar argue she "is Jane's truest self and darkest double . . . the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead" (360). Overall, though, Jane rejects any "copy and paste" form of feminine identity. Rather, she pieces together aspects of femininity she accepts as sensible, right, and most conducive to her own selfhood. As Nancy Armstrong argues, "To achieve a position from which to speak with authority, Jane must abdicate roles within the economic, religious, and educational institutions of her society. She must become an institution in her own right" (54). Armstrong's claim recognizes Jane's rejection of what she has encountered in both social expectations and experienced forms of femininity. As many critics have noted, each of the homes Jane finds in her travels—from Gateshead, to Lowood, to Thornfield, to Moor House—present her with different female role models. Her

---

<sup>25</sup> Bodenheimer argues that Jane's verbal victory over Aunt Reed "is a victory won with the weapons of the oppressor," and that Jane then decides to "find a life, and a way of telling it, that does not equate truth-telling with revenge" (390). And for a discussion on Jane trying on behavior modelled by Miss Temple and Helen, see Cynthia Mieczkowski's "'Do You Never Laugh, Miss Eyre?': Humor, Wit and the Comic in 'Jane Eyre'" (1989).

focalization of each female character reflects on femininity and becomes her means of determining what she will be when she reaches Ferndean.

As narrator, Jane must recreate and represent Mrs. Reed for readers, and in doing so, she expresses how she came to realize her personal self-worth and individualism; her interactions with Mrs. Reed lead Jane to self-affirmation, rather than external affirmation.<sup>26</sup> Jane realizes she is a person worthy of rights and fair treatment and that she will no longer look to Mrs. Reed for affirmation. Jane's self-affirmation is not fully realized in just a singular moment, but her time with Mrs. Reed begins the path towards self-sufficiency, a lack of reliance on others to approve and affirm who she is and what she believes. As many have noted before, Mrs. Reed shows a clear unwillingness to love or appreciate anything unlike herself, which leads to Jane's punishment in the Red Room. It is there, that reflecting as a young girl, "A singular notion dawned upon me. I doubted not—never doubted—that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly," and subsequently fears his ghost will return for retribution and comfort (Brontë 18). The "singular notion" is not so much that a ghost may appear, but it is that Jane has every right to be defended. She realizes she is owed something she has yet to receive: protection, love, and comfort. By realizing her Aunt Reed is not providing what Jane is owed as a human, Jane begins her path toward self-affirmation. This focalization allows Jane to express her

---

<sup>26</sup> Bessie cannot be overlooked as an influence on Jane's development during her time at Gateshead, but for the purpose of this dissertation, it is more pertinent to focus on Mrs. Reed's influence. For commentary on Bessie's significance, see Alison A. Case's work, *Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (1999), which argues, "As both her first mother-figure and her role model for storytelling, then, Bessie offers the option of uncritically retelling stories 'from the pages of *Pamela*'—with all their submissiveness to patriarchal authority and uncomplaining acceptance of a lower social position. Indeed, Bessie even starts to initiate Jane into such a position, employing her 'as a sort of under nursery-maid, to tidy the room, dust the chairs, &c.' (30)" (91). Vicky Simpson's article, "'The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator': Storytelling and Autobiography in *Jane Eyre*" (2008) takes an alternative position: "an appreciation of storytelling and its imaginative possibilities is instilled in Jane as a child by the books she reads and by the female characters like Bessie who influence her with their tales. . . . Jane uses storytelling to implicitly challenge social institutions by gaining the authoritative position of storyteller."

growing self-awareness, a self-awareness that to this moment and beyond, Mrs. Reed attempts to dampen and redefine. Mrs. Reed deems Jane “not worthy of notice,” but Jane can now separate herself from her aunt’s perspective, no longer needing her aunt’s notice or affirmation (Brontë 35). After asserting herself, Jane realizes “It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I struggled out into unhopd-for liberty” (Brontë 50). This invisible bond is Jane’s internalized need for her aunt’s approval and Jane’s acceptance of her aunt’s opinions. Jane then takes her liberty to imagine new ideas of self that are expressed in her desire for school, a stronger confidence in her interactions with Bessie, and in asserting her right to her own perspective on Mrs. Reed. In short, Jane’s focalization of Mrs. Reed sets Jane on the path to self-affirmation that becomes the backbone of her character.

Furthermore, Jane’s newly discovered self-affirmation inspires a previously untested freedom of speech that Jane weaponizes against her aunt, a tactic she first borrows from Mrs. Reed but later reshapes for a more just and thoughtful means of self-assertion. In a verbally vibrant and violent outrage, Jane condemns her aunt’s mistreatment and lies, noting “You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity” (Brontë 49). Jane’s attempt to reprimand her aunt is as direct and unregulated as Mrs. Reed’s own condemnation of Jane. Each’s condemnation of the other stems from unregulated emotional responses not founded in self-reflection or empathy. Bodenheimer argues that Jane’s verbal victory over Aunt Reed “is a victory won with the weapons of the oppressor,” and that Jane then decides to “find a life, and a way of telling it, that does not equate truth-telling with revenge” (390). As the narrator Jane reflects on her experiences, she realizes her outburst stemmed from “the turbulent impulse of my nature,” but also reflects “I would fain exercise some better faculty than that of fierce speaking,” and so Jane uses this experience to reject Mrs.

Reed's harsh and cold response to those unlike herself (Brontë 51). Brian Wilks, among many others, has noted, "The desperate loneliness forced upon [Jane Eyre] by her Aunt Reed's rejection" (291). Jane takes her awareness of living without love and pity and ensures others she encounters will not receive a similar treatment, which for Jane, can only be accomplished by maintaining her strong sense of self, but refusing to mirror her aunt's vindictive manner.

When Jane as narrator shifts her attention to Helen to imagine another way of conceiving self, Jane shows her need of meta-critical thinking to aid and strengthen her newly found self-affirmation. Jane's reflections on Helen teach Jane meta-critical thinking she then uses to reflect on women such as Blanche and Céline when Rochester asks her to live with him outside of marriage. Furthermore, Jane's focalization of Helen teaches Jane that feelings and action should not always be linked, which leads to a stronger sense of self-awareness and needed self-control that was lacking when Jane had her outspoken moment with Mrs. Reed. In an early scene at Lowood, Jane reflects on Helen's response to punishment: "her sight seems turned in, gone down into her heart" (Brontë 72). It is Helen's ability to separate herself from her physical situation that inspires Jane's wonder. This ability to be mentally separated from one's circumstances, to rely on one's internal circumstances is inspiration for Jane's personal development. From Helen, Jane learns that emotional outbursts are not constructive responses to external circumstances. Jane learns that an emotional response is not always the just, moral, or good response. In her reflection on their conversations, Jane recalls, "I heard her with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; . . . Still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes. I suspected she might be right and I wrong" (Brontë 78). From Helen, Jane finds this invisible light, or new moral reasoning, and utilizes it to strengthen her internal self and better navigate future encounters with those, such as the party at Thornfield or even Hannah at Moor

House, who would scorn Jane for her social standing. In accepting Helen's reasoning, Jane learns meta-critical reasoning skills that provide a much needed maturity to Jane's growing self-assertion.

But, as with Mrs. Reed, Jane's reflections show that she also rejects aspects of Helen's perspective in order to fully realize her own sense of self. For Jane, Helen is too passive and submissive to unfair trials and burdens and is too resigned to mistreatment by consistently blaming herself for the faults of Miss Scatcherd, a particularly rough teacher with a penchant for verbally and physically chastising Helen for uncleanness or forgetfulness. While punishing Helen, Miss Scatcherd "inflicted on her neck a dozen strokes with the bunch of twigs," and while Helen does not emit an emotional response, Jane's "fingers quivered at this spectacle with a sentiment of unavailing and impotent anger" (Brontë 75). For Jane, enduring such unjust punishment is too much an injustice to passively permit. Fully mirroring Helen's conduct would silence Jane's internal voice. Victoria Williams claims Helen's passivity is ultimately destructive as she does not possess enough fight to remain in the physical world. Williams continues, "Helen is an expression of female resignation. . . . In order to find her own identity, Jane must resist destructive extremes, such as Helen's religion-fueled self-renunciation" (190). James Buzard provides a similar argument: Helen "turns forbearance into passivity" (213).<sup>27</sup> Jane does accept Helen's tutelage, while she cannot mirror her friend's passivity. According to Kelsey Bennet, "Helen's abstract negation has developed over the years in Jane's mind into mature, compassionate judgment that is at once as discriminating as it is affirmative" (80). And as Joan Peters argues, Jane's internal reflections while conversing with Rochester "are still borrowed

---

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert and Gubar provide an alternative interpretation to Helen Burns. While Helen "does no more than *bear* her fate," they claim that rather than resignation, Helen "burns with anger," implying that her untidiness is a form of rebellion, and that Helen is "carried off in a fever of liberty" (346).

from Helen Burns” (229). Jane’s reflections on Helen teach Jane that she cannot overlook mistreatment or gaslight herself when confronted with other’s faults, while she does critically review and accept Helen’s beliefs on forgiveness, self-reflection, and healing to maintain her sense of self-assurance and integrity.

As readers are permitted Jane’s reflections on Miss Temple—the headmistress of Lowood Institute—we are introduced to a significant female figure from whom Jane learns calm forbearance. Miss Temple’s appreciation for education and silent, but active, protests against Mr. Brocklehurst’s mismanagement inspire Jane and provide her with a temporary sense of fulfillment, but for Jane, Miss Temple is too silent to be fully emulated. Jane specifically watches and notes moments when Miss Temple provides a template for peacefully subverting patriarchal power through look and action. When challenged either by Mr. Brocklehurst or a Lowood follower of his (Mrs. Harden, for example), Miss Temple’s protest is engendered via a look of “petrified severity” or by “pass[ing] her handkerchief over her lips, as if to smooth away the involuntary smile that curled them” (Brontë 90, 91). In these looks, Jane finds Miss Temple recognizing both the full harm of Mr. Brocklehurst’s actions as well as the hypocrisy and imbecility of his dictates. Jane also observes moments when Miss Temple “by precept, and example” teaches others to maintain positive spirits during trials. Jane’s observations become another means of gaining internal strength. Buzard shares a similar view, noting “instructed by Miss Temple, Jane begins to learn the self-discipline necessary for the construction of her own private temple of interiority” (213). Buzard continues, though, by noting that Jane fully emulates neither Miss Temple, nor Helen, for “both figures offer too extreme a swing of the pendulum away from Gateshead-Jane’s wild rebelliousness” (213). As such, Miss Temple becomes “a temple of interiority in a wholly negative sense, [with] a self-petrification and self-silencing that

represents but the extreme reversal of the Gateshead Jane's bound-breaking fits and cries" (Buzard 214). As a result, Jane's observations of Miss Temple's femininity and example are a positive means for developing an interiority that clearly sustains Jane through future trials.

In future moments when Rochester at Thornfield and St. John Rivers at Moor House would assert their own definition of femininity, Jane experiences moments of self-reflection that are also moments of self-realization and outspokenness to both the men and raptly attentive readers. Through Jane's perspective as actor and narrator, readers are privy to Jane's understanding of each man, and as she better understands them and what they want from her, she better understands herself and reasserts this self to others. In response to Rochester's post-engagement behavior and to his later desire to live unmarried in France, Jane asserts, "I am no angel . . . and I will not be one until I die" and "*I care for myself. The more solitary I am, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself*" (Brontë 388, 475). Her understanding of Rochester and herself allows her to withstand temptation, both of avarice and adultery, unlike his former lovers. Furthermore, in response to St. John's industrious view of marriage, Jane reflects, "but as his wife—at his side always . . . forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry . . . *this* would be unendurable" (Brontë 613). When discussing St. John's manipulation, Ellis argues that it is in Jane's "lengthy internal monologue" that Jane comes to understand her personal goals and strength. Ellis continues by saying, "[Jane] uses her *knew* knowledge [of self and power] in order to stand firm, to force other people to adapt to her perspective." Through her internal reflections and firm verbal assertions to both Rochester and St. John, Jane forsakes a femininity that would require her to submit to a lifestyle without self-respect. Nor can she accept a femininity that is entirely made of self-abnegation. Through these encounters, Jane is catalyzed into further

self-recognition that is brought on by her focalization of Rochester and St. John's own misunderstanding of Jane's character.

Jane consistently counters varying expectations and differing forms of femininity via her acts of self-reflection and her voiced decisions. Readers receive a strong sense of Jane's voice and more of Jane's interiority during her time at Thornfield and Moor House than during her stays at Gateshead and Lowood. Scholars have credited this change in the narrator to various causes, such as Jane possessing a stronger sense of self, Brontë parodying other novel forms, and/or Jane finally achieving her full-fledged ability and power to narrate her tale.<sup>28</sup> As Ellis has noted, Jane's awareness of her own power to assert herself has grown through her self-reflection or internal monologues. Through her focalization of her tale and others, Jane establishes the power to build, maintain, and assert her own sense of self that has developed through her times at Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House, and even Ferndean where she utilizes her self-awareness to return to Rochester. By the time Jane reaches Ferndean, Jane has become, as Armstrong says, "an institution in her own right" (54). And it was through her encounters with differing forms of femininity that Jane reflected upon self. Through Mrs. Reed, Jane realizes her self-worth, through Mrs. Temple and Helen Jane learns to self-regulate and meta-critical thinking, and through Rochester and St. John Jane gains a deeper self-recognition when each man attempts to enforce their interpretation of Jane on herself. Overall, Jane's focalization permits readers to hear Jane's voice and self-reflection as she navigates society with growing internal agency and self-awareness.

---

<sup>28</sup> See Lorna Ellis, Rosemarie Bodenheimer, and Joan Peters, respectively.



## Disempowering the Female Voice

Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1944), starring Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, takes a regressive stance on Brontë's novel by overpowering Jane's subjectivity with a score by Bernard Hermann that aligns itself with Rochester's interiority. As a result, Jane's narrating voice-overs are more a narrative trope than a means of adapting Jane's focalization and self-reflection to the screen.<sup>29</sup> Rather than utilizing the female voice-over to display Jane's internal fortitude, her voice-overs focalize Rochester's experiences instead of her own self-reflection and self-assertion. The *New York Times* 1944 review by Bosley Crowther observes, "the heroine of the classic, little Jane, played by Joan Fontaine, is strangely obscured behind the dark cloud of Rochester's personality," which leads to "the emphasis [being] taken away from Jane Eyre as soon as she goes to Thornfield Hall."<sup>30</sup> As Pennington notes of Nick Carraway for *Gatsby*, by making Rochester the dominant subject in the film, Jane no longer functions as both the focalizer and the focalized. Because of this, the film fails to engage with Jane's strong, independent, and frank voice in the novel.

Scholars have often discussed the female voice-over as a multi-valent trope. In perhaps the simplest terms, the female voice-over "represents the female character's ability . . . to express her subjectivity" (Sjogren 27). Often voice-over expresses interiority, privileges the narrator's

---

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Herrmann, who often worked with Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock, composed the score for Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*. He also composed the scores for *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *Vertigo* (1958), and *The Birds* (1963). For more information, see Kenneth LaFave's "Mysteries, Thrillers, and Film Noir" (2017).

<sup>30</sup> Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* is part of the 1940s gothic and/or woman's film genre meant to attract and empower female viewers. The film's trailer attempts to attract female viewership by opening with a young, fashionably dress woman walking to her bookshelf filled with classics and choosing *Jane Eyre*. The narrator discusses other book to film adaptations, including Joan Fontaine's *Rebecca*, another woman's film from 1940 (00:24-26). Lisa Hopkins has also noted how *Jane Eyre*'s trailer is particularly aimed at women, and argues, "for all its anxiety to market itself as *Jane Eyre*, the film seems almost to find the real *Jane Eyre* an embarrassment, which must be replaced" (55). For scholarly work on the woman's film genre, see Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1987), Amy Lawrence's *Echo and Narcissus: Woman's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1991), and Helen Hanson's *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (2007).

subjectivity, and provides a guiding viewpoint that viewers can either question or trust. Helen Hanson notes, “The film sound theorist Michel Chion points to the privileged relationship that voice-over has . . . in its ability to foster audience identification,” and “emphasizes the way in which the voice-over that is connected to a flashback controls the images which it introduces” (101). However, writers like Mary Anne Doane “point out that this gift is hauled back by ‘male-coded’ narrative linchpins that work to suppress the feminine by defining the male at her expense. The female character bearing voice-off, that is, soon ‘loses’ the subjectivity initially promised by her offscreen speaking” (Sjogren 27). Amy Lawrence also argues that in women’s gothic films of the 1940’s that “the woman’s voice does not free her; she is either reduced to silence . . . or gives up. . . . perpetuating cinematic and patriarchal hegemony” (145). And such occurs within Stevenson’s *Jane Eyre*. The promise of Jane’s voice-over making her both the focalizer and the focalized at Gateshead and Lowood is lost as Jane arrives at Thornfield and the film’s subject shifts from Jane to Rochester. While the voice-over appears to promise Jane power, this power is mitigated by other elements of the film that prioritize Rochester. Altogether, Stevenson’s 1944 film adaptation of *Jane Eyre* overwhelms Jane with a film score that overrides the novel’s outspoken and self-reflective narrator.

In Stevenson’s film, voice-over and film score are a means of quieting female agency. Ben Winters claims non-diegetic music is “essential to the identity of the fictional narrative space presented in film” (230). Music becomes its own influential being and act, can influence characters, possess hidden knowledge, and allow or disallow the characters to hear it at will.<sup>31</sup> In this way, music within Stevenson’s *Jane Eyre* can keep Rochester’s secrets, such as his marriage and the current Mrs. Rochester. In discussing book-to-film adaptations, Glenn Jellenik

---

<sup>31</sup> Winters discusses *Star Wars*’ use of the Force and Obi-Wan’s conversation with Luke Skywalker, noting the Force can influence people to act and be used to act with (233).

goes even farther than Winters, arguing that soundtracks are “an adaptation embedded within an adaptation”: “more than simply *reflect* the adaptative process, the music of a film *affects* it, and at times acts as one of its prime engines” (223, 225). Furthermore, Bernard Hermann has famously said, “music on the screen can seek out and intensify the inner thoughts of the characters” (qtd. in Penn 47). As an active and interpretive agent, like the “Imperial March” in *Star Wars* or the “Jaw Theme” from *Jaws*, music heralds a character’s arrival, shapes viewers’ perceptions, and engages audiences in interpreting a character’s past and personality, as well as making viewers aware of burgeoning danger or happiness. In Stevenson’s adaptation, the film score overpowers the voice-over by “seek[ing] out and intensify[ing]” Rochester’s subjectivity.

As scholars have noted, during Jane’s time at Gateshead and Lowood Jane’s subjectivity is paramount, but as Rochester appears, the prime subjectivity and focalization shift.<sup>32</sup> At Gateshead, Jane delivers a pared-down version of her speech to Mrs. Reed, and at Lowood, Jane speaks her desire for love and affection to Helen, expresses her unhappiness with Helen’s punishment, and voices her sense of injustice to Mr. Brocklehurst before leaving Lowood. Michael Riley emphasizes that during Jane’s time at Gateshead and Lowood, “Jane shows determination and strength of character, but never again do we see the urgent demand for justice and self-expression which marked her childhood and which continue to mark her character in the novel” (148). A shift in Jane’s demeanor and focalization as well as the film’s subjectivity occurs

---

<sup>32</sup> See Kate Ellis’ and E. Ann Kaplan’s “Feminism in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and its Film Versions” (1999). Ellis and Kaplan argue “Joan Fontaine play[s] a very meek, docile, and submissive Jane in the second half of the film. . . . the first half of the film, prior to Orson Welles’s appearance as Rochester, sticks close to the novel in showing Jane’s rebelliousness and defiance, first toward the Reed family and then at Lowood” (195). Also see Meghan Jordan’s “Dislocated Heroines: Cary Fukunaga’s *Jane Eyre*, Romantic Love and Bertha’s Legacy” (2014) who argues “The task of Stevenson’s adaptation, however, is not to fan the flame of rebellion in the (1940s American or British) female viewer, but rather to allow her to recognise her own desire for individualism through romantic love, a union that will regenerate and repopulate a devastated nation” (87). For a counterpoint to Ellis’ and Kaplan’s argument, see Campbell Gardner’s “The Presence of Orson Welles in Robert Stevenson’s *Jane Eyre* (1944)” (2003).

upon Rochester and Jane's first meeting. As in the novel, Jane and Rochester meet when his horse is spooked, which elicits Rochester's fall and his confoundedness at seeing Jane on the road. Building towards this moment, the score is relatively calm; there is a slow pace and darker tone to the notes that suggests upcoming trouble. In contrast, Jane's expression is peaceful and contemplative as she looks out at the view ahead of her. Not until she hears Rochester's dog, Pilot, does her expression alter and the music coalesce into faster and louder horns with the rapid tempo of drums that leads into a crescendo when the two collide. The contrast between the score's tone and Jane's expression build a clear shift in the film's subjectivity. The score is no longer focused on Jane's interiority as it does during her hope-filled travel to Lowood; it now begins its shift towards knowing and revealing Rochester. Discussing the adaptation as a whole, Elizabeth Atkins claims, "Brontë's entire purpose of demonstrating the ability of women to be psychologically independent" is "edited out,"(54). As we are given more and more access to Welles' Rochester, we see the music denoting a patriarchal quality/male-centric focus that subsumes Jane's previous self-reflection and strong spirit.

Jane's voice-overs are used to counter Rochester's presence and would seem to make Jane the focalized subject, but because the voice-overs focus only on Rochester rather than Jane's personal self-reflection, they fail to become a means of restoring Jane's subjectivity and agency. For instance, during Rochester's and Jane's initial conversation at Thornfield, he asks after her competency with the piano. She plays, and her sound is drastically cut off with Rochester's shout of "Enough," which is quickly followed by the low tone of a stringed instrument (Stevenson 36:00). Jane's music is silenced, and the score takes her place. After Jane plays the piano and is dismissed, the scene cuts to a voice-over from Joan Fontaine over the image of a paragraph, and she says,

What sort of man was this master of Thornfield – so proud, sardonic, and harsh? I instinctively felt that his malignant mood has its source in some cruel cross of fate. I was to learn that this was indeed true, and that beneath the harsh mask he assumed lay a tortured soul, fine, gentle and kindly. (36:42)

The voice-over is an attempt to restore Jane's agency after Rochester reduces her power by his succession of orders: meet me, perform for me, cease performing, leave me. Similarly, Diane Sadoff's analysis finds, "Jane's periodic voice-over—which speaks the highlighted pages of a spurious *Jane Eyre*—psychologizes and moralizes Rochester's class and gender perversity" (73). In his primary research on the 1944 *Jane Eyre*, Jeffrey Sconce concluded Jane's voice-over, rather than being implemented to legitimize Jane's subjectivity, is simply a narrative tool. At Thornfield, Jane's agency is limited to discussing and excusing Rochester. This ultimately aligns Jane's purpose with telling Rochester's story rather than her own. These voice-overs then fail to restore Jane's agency because she becomes the focalizer of his story rather than her own.

Jane's interiority diminishes to that of a bewildered woman, lovestruck and yearning, but even in those moments when Jane's romantic turmoil is at its height, the film projects Rochester's feelings. The proposal scene is perhaps most emblematic of Jane's lost voice and Rochester's subjectivity. In this moment, Jane and Rochester are together, and he is listening to Jane sorrowfully express her heartache at the idea of leaving Thornfield when Rochester and Blanche will marry (1:14:38). The score reflects Rochester's mood, not Jane's, as he receives her flattery. Her emotions are heartache, sadness, and separation. Rochester, on the other hand, knowing he will never marry Blanche, is internally overjoyed by Jane's confession. As the scene continues, Rochester discusses Jane's departure, and the music notably shifts from the romantic tone of flutes to a more serious, foreboding tone played out through the deeper

instrumental sounds of the string section. The shift registers Rochester's knowledge that his proposal is immoral and illegal. Instead of the music replicating Jane's joy in hearing his confessions, the score reflects knowledge of Rochester's violation. The music continues flowing with Rochester's feeling. First, it was soft and romantic as Rochester listened and observed Jane's despair at the idea of Rochester's marriage to Blanche Ingram and the thought of having to leave him for a position in Ireland. Now, the score reflects Rochester's sense of wrongdoing. As Soyoung Lee argues, "The story is relayed through Jane's voice . . . However, her voice becomes mute when Rochester arrives on the scene. The sad, soft melody that had accompanied Jane's story is substituted by Rochester's imperial and booming signature music upon his appearance" (112). The score does not take on the perspective of the woman by empowering her emotional truth or the reality the heroine shapes for herself, as Heather Laing often claims of the women's film, but instead acknowledges the male character's perspective and rejection of reality in an operatic and destructive manner.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the camera angles and framing reinforce Rochester's perspective, rather than Jane's, which shows how the film utilizes multiple aspects of filmmaking to resituate Jane from the active self-reflecting woman to the object of Rochester's desire. When the shot-reverse-shot of the love confession is occurring, the camera angle during the close-up of Orson Welles is level with Rochester's face, but when the close-up of Joan Fontaine appears, we are given a

---

<sup>33</sup> Heather Laing notes music within Hollywood's 1940s films was a means of expressing emotion and gendering film. Laing argues the melodrama films valued "emotional truth" over that of reality in those films: the film score is often "taking a partially critical stance on her [the heroine's] point of view, . . . and actually accords a certain degree of truth to her romantic interpretation of events" in lieu of recognizing reality (5). The score also supports her emotional view of life, perhaps encourages, and also disapproves of the bland choices the female main character is left to choose (5). But when applying Laing's argument to Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*, we see the '44 film provides a space of reflection for Rochester's schemes, his pain at loving someone he should not have, and his determination to love regardless. But by choosing to represent Rochester's inner feelings, the film score genders itself male and therefore moves away from the feminist themes of Brontë's novel, keeping her emotions quieted, away from the spectator, and in darkness as Rochester likewise keeps Jane's in the dark.

slight high-angle, as if Rochester were looking down on her face (1:14:07-1:14:09). The disparity in camera angles places emphasis on Rochester's perspective. When viewing Rochester, the spectator is given a side-angle, but when viewing Jane, the camera provides a front view, thus preparing the spectator to identify with Rochester looking at Jane, leaving the spectator to receive Jane's longing simultaneously with Rochester. As Lee argues:

the camera work seems to favor Jane's point of view in the stages of her early life as in the point-of-view shots when she confronts Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst, or depicts her trials at Lowood. . . . the camera's gaze that the audience identified with had been that of Jane but is replaced with Rochester's gaze, and Jane becomes hereafter the object of his gaze. (112)

Similarly, after Jane accepts Rochester's proposal, the scene moves into a long shot that binds Jane and Rochester within "this swirling storm inside" Rochester's conscience. By combining the thundering music with the physical storm encapsulating Rochester and Jane—both by the swirling leaves and through the framing of the shot—the music is therefore a part of the narrative, fitting with the diegesis, inseparable from the film action and narration. The *mise-en-scène* couples with the framing and music to indicate Rochester's internal self. As with women who found themselves returning to the home with the return of WWII soldiers, so Jane finds herself no longer active, but the object of Rochester's action and desire. Coupling the score, angle, and framing with Rochester's hidden knowledge—not engaged to Blanche and married to Bertha—further serves to separate the viewer from Jane's point of view.

Stevenson's film also reduces Jane to a more stereotypical form of femininity—like that of Céline Varens or Blanche Ingram—as Jane accepts Rochester's extravagance after the proposal. Brontë's Jane refuses the clothes, jewels, and new pet names—in short, she refuses

redefinition. Even so, the film rewrites her refusals to blatant acceptance. By cutting out her uneasiness, her refusal to alter, and her ability and desire to remain unchanged by their relationship, the film reduces her agency and is undoubtedly a regression in the novel's feminist themes. Instead of utilizing her voice-overs to reflect the novel's use of Jane's focalization and internal critical thought, the film focuses on and reduces her commentary after the proposal to a few lines on her upcoming marriage: "All my doubts and all the grim shadows that hung over Thornfield seemed to vanish—shattered like the riven chestnut-tree. I loved and was loved. Every sun-lit hour I looked forward to love's fulfillment" (1:17:35). While Brontë's Jane is likewise undoubtedly happy in her upcoming marriage, she also has shadows of foreboding. By reducing her contemplation and having Jane accept Rochester's expensive gifts, they make Jane a naïve creature and reduce the novel's discussion on improved education, partnership in marriage, and women's financial independence. The reductionist stance on *Jane Eyre* leaves Jane happy with her subordinate lot, rather than fulfilled by the sureness of her qualities, abilities, and equality with all of humankind.<sup>34</sup>

Stevenson's adaptation ultimately negates the female voice with its Rochester-centric score. While Jane initially begins as the reflective and passionate woman from the novel, she falls into a stereotype of femininity, one that aligns itself more with images of the Victorian angel rather than creating a femininity that best suits her aims and purpose. It would appear Jane is the focalizer, which in itself is powerful, but when one considers the camera angles and framing, as well as the score, it is clear the film undermines Jane's authority. Because the female voice-over fails to provide female agency and depth and because the male-centric score

---

<sup>34</sup> For more on Rochester throughout other film and visual media adaptations prior to Fukunaga's adaptation, see Sarah Wootton's "'Picturing me a hero of romance': The Legacy of *Jane Eyre*'s Byronic Hero" (2007).



dominates the film, tying itself intrinsically to the male lead, the film is a retrogression in the feminist accomplishment that is Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel, *Jane Eyre*.

### **Movement Expressive of Female Agency and Subjectivity**

In contrast to Stevenson's adaptation, the soundscape in Fukunaga's is subtle and continuously reinforces Jane's interiority. Using a combination of physical movement, sound, and camera angles, Fukunaga's film reinforces Jane's subjectivity. In an interview with *NPR*, Fukunaga reports that he focuses largely on Jane's "emotional intellect as well as her normal one," and speaks admiringly of her unwillingness to "go against her morals, and against her respect for herself."<sup>35</sup> He continues: "she somehow has come up with her own sort of vision of what life should be like—her own sense of morals, of right and wrong, and truth. And she won't compromise that." The focus that is missing from the latter half of Stevenson's adaptation is successfully expressed in Fukunaga's. A. O. Scott's *New York Times* review notes that scriptwriter Moira Buffini "preserves . . . Jane's repeated invocations of freedom as an ethical and personal ideal." Furthermore, Scott interprets a theme of freedom in Fukunaga's adaptation, stating, "For the Jane in this movie, [freedom] means the ability to act without external constraint and to think without fear or hypocrisy." Jane's sense of interiority and desire for freedom in movement and mind are gratifyingly portrayed in Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*.

Fukunaga's adaptation, starring Mia Wasikowska and Michael Fassbender, introduces movement to express Jane's interiority: it gives Jane's subjectivity and agency immediacy by opening the film with her departure from Thornfield. Rather than opening when Jane is at her weakest as a young girl—still discovering who she is—the film begins with a moment of power

---

<sup>35</sup> Prior to this film, Fukunaga's previous directing credit was *Sin Nombre* (2009), which also features a strong female lead (IMDB).

that simultaneously builds intrigue and agency.<sup>36</sup> The shot opens with Jane silhouetted from behind as she looks over her shoulder and cuts to her quick pacing. Thornfield looms behind her as her path continues downhill. Opening the film with a show of Jane's strength—clearly making a large emotional decision—immediately positions Jane's authority as paramount.<sup>37</sup> Meghan Jordan notes that the film's opening establishes Jane's "already preconstructed subjectivity," and argues that "Fukunaga figures her as a unique individual" with "a self-conception that already exists" (85).<sup>38</sup> While Jordan's claim implies Jane experiences little growth at Moor House, it does express a clear point about Fukunaga's choices. In this film, Jane is established as an already self-aware person whose subjectivity is given high priority. Highlighting Jane's power of choice and tenacity starkly contrasts with Stevenson's adaptation that removes Jane's self-realizations and assertions to prioritize her as a subject only in relation to Rochester.

Fukunaga's adaptation follows the novel's lead by utilizing movement to reveal Jane's interiority. Often, Jane's movement is a means of escaping mental unrest. Discussing the novel, Trish Bredar argues, "Jane's drive to channel internal turmoil and longing into movement" is a means of opposing loss of subjectivity and submission (119). She continues, "This pattern [of walking] emerges as Jane enters adulthood and begins her famous 'liberty' speech and the short walks that follows" (120). The same can be said of the film's use of movement. As we will see, Jane's movement and its framing often reveals Jane's interior mindset. For example, following Jane's departure, viewers see an aerial shot of Jane at the four-way stop in desolate country. The scene continues with Jane's progress into the moors. The aerial shot is followed by long shots

---

<sup>36</sup> Michael Riley notes the original screenplay for Stevenson's adaptation intended the film to open on Jane leaving Thornfield with a voice-over that would start a flashback of events leading to her departure (n5). When you cite a footnote, you need to include the page # too, i.e. (367 n4)

<sup>37</sup> See chapter 3 discussion on Helen Huntingdon's departure in the 1996 mini-series of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that Jordan's argument, while appreciating Jane's "already preconstructed subjectivity," finds issue with Fukunaga's Jane needing a romantic partnership to find fulfillment, noting "the difference between subjecthood and the 'completeness' romantic love is supposed to engender in the modern subject" (85, 93).

that do not simply emphasize Jane's physical loneliness but her mental isolation. Beautifully shot, the camera's framing of the landscape, its movement from aerial to longshot, to closeup of Jane's face all serve to continue the subjectivity building that began with Jane's over-the-shoulder glance when leaving Thornfield.

In direct contrast to Stevenson's adaptation, Fukunaga's film ensures Jane is both focalizer and focalized as the film expresses Jane's subjectivity and self-reflection through sound and flashbacks that connect her present experiences with those from her childhood and early adulthood. Flashbacks are commonly accepted as a means of establishing subjectivity, but Fukunaga's adaptation frequently links Jane's flashbacks to emotional triggers. By linking the flashbacks to emotional triggers, the audience is not simply given access to the past but moved into the past as Jane is almost forced to relive or remember a bygone moment. Lee's analysis argues, "Rather than a natural progress of time, it is a subjective recounting of events in Jane's perspective" as the flashbacks are a "restructuring [of the narrative] according to her memory" (111, 113). Discussing Fukunaga's adaptation, Shirley Law also observes, "the real strength of the flashback technique is how it establishes the subjective voice of the protagonist" (32). This subjective voice is a means of incorporating Brontë's Jane's strong narratorial power and self-reflection as Fukunaga's use of flashbacks often reveal a difference in either Jane's situation or character between then and now. Though Brontë utilizes chronological storytelling, her adult narrator's perspective is always present and provides a means of seeing who the adult is by her reflections on childhood and young adult experiences.

In Fukunaga's film, Jane's subjectivity is achieved by connecting flashbacks to Jane's emotional triggers. For example, the first flashback establishes connection between her departures from Gateshead and Thornfield: Jane was cast out of Gateshead, and it was an easy

departure. In contrast, Jane chooses to leave Thornfield, and while viewers do not know why, they can easily feel the emotional difficulty and internal strength it took for Jane to leave. Though Jordan argues Fukunaga's film is problematic for prioritizing the romantic plot over sexual politics, she recognizes that "the film's structure shows Jane is self-sufficient and independent" (85). In bridging these two moments together, the film reveals not only Jane's strength and interiority but also her development into a woman capable of controlling her movement. The flashbacks further reveal her ability to reflect on her experiences, to see who she was and who she has become. Leaving Gateshead was easy for Jane who was unwanted and often physically abused and neglected. Once viewers know why Jane left Thornfield, the flashback gains additional meaning for it reveals that Jane will leave a happy situation that nonetheless holds the potential to disrupt her identity and self-worth.

The film's use of sound also connects itself directly to Jane's subjectivity in those moments by often distorting sound from Jane's perspective or using it to move viewers between the present and past. Though sound in film is often used to cover cuts, Fukunaga's adaptation specifically binds sound to flashback and Jane's subjectivity. This technique is first shown at Moor House. Jane is ill and incapable of focusing on a particular thought. As St. John, Mary, and Diane question Jane, the sound reaches her and the audience as if through water. We soon hear John Reed's sinister voice calling for Jane at Gateshead. Audiences are left momentarily disoriented without context for the scene. Initially, the scene appears to be a flashback to the manor Jane fled. Instead, the scene harkens back to Jane's childhood and what led to her departing her first home. In this flashback, viewers are permitted access to Jane's childhood where she endured physical and emotional abuse and possessed no power to leave. The flashback relates these two seemingly unrelated moments—Jane's childhood at Gateshead and her arrival

at Moor House—to express Jane’s internal and external agency then and now by contrasting a time when Jane had no power to leave an abusive situation with a time when Jane has all the agency needed to remove herself from a potentially identity-disrupting relationship.

Furthermore, the film score often accompanies Jane’s physical pacing to reflect her mental unrest. Jane’s pacing allows for more expression of her internal self than the voice-overs in Stevenson’s adaptation. As in the novel, Jane paces under internal stress and finds herself pacing Thornfield’s eves where she delivers a portion of Brontë’s Jane’s speech on women’s limitations. In these moments, the film score is often soft, melodic, and at times, wistful. Claire Monk says sound in Fukunaga’s adaptation is an “intimate use of natural sound (alongside Dario Marianelli’s classical orchestral score).” This can perhaps best be seen after Jane and Rochester are engaged. Jane is walking between hedges and a stone wall (01:22:55). Slow piano music plays over her movement. As in the novel, Jane is expressing uncertainty at becoming Mrs. Rochester. In this moment, she is both hemmed in by her doubts and by Thornfield. We can even see Jane’s internal determination to feel hope towards for their marriage as the combination of sound and movement continue with Jane looking up to see sky through cherry blossoms. Piano music then covers the cut and continues into a montage of Jane and Rochester enjoying their engagement.

Unlike Jane’s previous pacing at Thornfield, which was narrow and restrictive, Jane’s pacing at Moor House is introduced with a wide aerial shot that encompasses Moor House in the distance with St. John at the opposing side. The camera framing and landscape after St. John’s proposal expresses Jane’s interiority and the personal development she has experienced since Rochester’s proposal and leaving Thornfield. In this moment, Jane is walking near Moor House after St. John has proposed that she marry him in service to God. St. John’s attempts to repurpose

and redefine Jane are met with her internal struggle to please someone who has been a brother and still remain true to her nature. Viewers can readily observe how the landscapes between her post-proposal pacing at Thornfield and her post-proposal pacing at Moor House are opposed. Jane's Thornfield pacing was restricted though Rochester was not attempting to restrict Jane. Jane's Moor House pacing occurs in wide open spaces, and the camera draws specific and drastic attention to the broad landscape's spaciousness. The difference in environments does not reflect the men or Jane's relationship with them, but Jane's growth. Jane's self-development is emphasized in this scene, for as Lee claims, "Jane has come to her own understanding of love and independence" (117). Previously, Jane was without means and relied on Rochester. But at Moor House, Jane has proven her independence and abilities more than ever before. Jane has lived alone, gained wealth, and opened a school. Furthermore, she has gained a family of two sisters and a brother.<sup>39</sup> Though St. John represents attempts to silence and reconstruct Jane, she has used her own self-awareness to rebut and assert self. As the camera's framing of Jane's movement has expanded, so has Jane. In her newfound and cemented independence and self-awareness, Jane is able to hear Rochester and make her return to Thornfield. All the while, the film score is absent and allows dialogue and movement to express Jane's agency and personal development.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> See Catherine Han's "Picturing Charlotte Brontë's Artistic Rebellion? Myths of the Woman Artist in Postfeminist *Jane Eyre* Screen Adaptations" (2020) for Jane as artist and the function this serves in recent adaptations, especially in Fukunaga's film and Jane's time at Moor House. The article "demonstrate[s how] these contemporary adaptations emphasize their heroines' creativity through allusions to Brontë's life to signpost their interpretation of the novel as feminist, indeed rebelliously so" (241).

<sup>40</sup> While tone and lighting have not been a discussion in this project, they do play an important role in the film's development. For more, read Yvonne Griggs chapter, "Adapting *Jane Eyre*: A Critical Approach" (2016) and Rachel K. Bosley's "A *Jane Eyre* for Today" (2011) for her discussion with Adriano Goldman, the cinematographer for Fukunaga's adaptation.

## Conclusion

Interpreting Brontë's novel through focalization allows readers to see how Jane's strong narratorial voice focalizes herself and other characters, which leads her to self-reflection, self-realization, and ultimately, self-assertion. Applying this discussion to Stevenson's adaptation provides a means of discovering just how the 1944 adaptation fails to engage with Brontë's Jane's self-discovery. In viewing Fukunaga's adaptation with the novel's use of focalization in mind, we then see how sound and physical movement provide Jane's interiority far more than any voice-over in Stevenson's film. In Stevenson's adaptation, like some women of the early twentieth century, Jane's working independence and self-interests are subsumed to her husband upon marriage. For Jane, the subsummation occurs with their meeting. Therefore, the fantasy of a well-educated and independent woman finding an equal partnership marriage falls to a more traditional Victorian marriage model. On the other hand, Fukunaga's adaptation represents Jane's subjectivity, independence, and restlessness within the confines of Victorian gender roles. The film's ending, like the novel, packages Jane's return to Rochester in a sentimental, hopeful dream, but also begs the question of whether women of the 2000s are still striving for the fantasy of an equal partnership marriage rather than living within a twenty-first century version of Ferndean. Together, the films provide a space for reflecting on the progression of women's rights over the one hundred and sixty-four years between the novel's publication and Fukunaga's adaptation.

### Works Cited

- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Oxford UP, 1990.
- Atkins, Elizabeth. "Jane Eyre Transformed." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1993, pp. 54-60. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/jane-eyre-transformed/docview/226991871/se-2>.
- Bal, Meike. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., U of Toronto P, 1997.
- Bennett, Kelsey. "“To enjoy my own faculties as well as to cultivate those of other people”” *The Affective Bildung of Jane Eyre*.” *Principle and Propensity: Experience and Religion in the Nineteenth-Century British and American Bildungsroman*. U of South Carolina P, 2014.
- Bodenheimer, Rosemarie, “Jane Eyre in Search of Her Story.” *Papers on Learning and Language*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1980, pp. 387-403.
- Bosley, Rachael K. “A Jane Eyre for Today.” *American Cinematographer*, vol. 92, no. 4, Apr. 2011, pp. 16–18.
- Bredar, Trish “The Possibility of Taking a Walk: Jane Eyre’s Persistent Mobility.” *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, no. 132, 2017, pp. 116-129.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847, edited by Diane Johnson and James Danly. Modern Library. 2000.
- Buzard, James. “The Wild English Girl: *Jane Eyre*.” *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*. Princeton UP, 2005, pp. 196-217.
- Case, Alison A. *Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. UP of Virginia, 1999.



Cohan, Steven, and Linda M. Shires. *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.

Crowther, Bosley. "The Screen: 'Jane Eyre,' A Somber Version of the Bronte Novel, With Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, Opens at the Music Hall." Review of *Jane Eyre*. *New York Times*, 4 February 1944: 12. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

Doane, Mary Anne. *The Desire to Desire, The Woman's Film of the 1940's*. Indiana UP. 1987.

Ellis, Kate and E. Ann Kaplan. "Feminism in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and its Film Versions."

*Nineteenth-Century Women at the Movies: Adapting Classic Women's Fiction to Film*, edited by Barbara Tepic Lupack, Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1999, pp. 192-206.

Fukunaga, Cary. Interview by Renee Montagne. *NPR*, 11 March 2011,

<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/134426041>

Gardner, Campbell. "The Presence of Orson Welles in Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1944)."

*Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2003, pp. 2-9.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, 1980.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Yale UP, 2000.

Griggs, Yvonne, "Adapting *Jane Eyre*: A Critical Approach." *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies: Adapting the Canon in Film, TV, Novels and Popular Culture*. Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 21-70.

Han, Catherine Paula. "Picturing Charlotte Brontë's Artistic Rebellion? Myths of the Woman Artist in Postfeminist *Jane Eyre* Screen Adaptations." *Adaptation*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2020, pp. 240–269.

Hanson, Helen. *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film*. I. B. Tauris, 2007.

Hopkins, Lisa. "The Red and the Blue: *Jane Eyre* in the 1990s." *Classics in Film and Fiction*, edited by Deborah Cartmell, et al., Pluto P, 2000, pp. 54-69.

IMDb. "Cary Joji Fukunaga." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1560977/>. Accessed 24 February 2023.

*Jane Eyre*, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, screenplay by Moira Buffini, performances by Mia Masikowska and Michael Fassbender, BBC. 2011.

*Jane Eyre*. Directed by Robert Stevenson, screenplay by Aldous Huxley, performances by Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles. Twentieth-Century Fox, 1944. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yATMYlgydA>.

Jellenik, Glenn. "Quiet, Music at Work: The Soundtrack and Adaptation." *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, edited by Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Ray Cutchins, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2010, pp. 221-43.

Jordan, Meghan. "Dislocated Heroines: Cary Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*, Romantic Love and Bertha's Legacy." *Neo-Victorian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2014, pp. 79-103.

LaFave, Kenneth. "Mysteries, Thrillers, and Film Noir." *Experiencing Film Music: A Listener's Companion*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2017, pp. 29-50.

Laing, Heather. *The Gendered Score: Music in 1940s Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ashgate Publishing. 2007.

Law, Shirley. "The Darkness Within The 'Spirited Sadness' of *Jane Eyre*." *Screen Education*, no. 63, 2011, pp. 30-39.

- Lawrence, Amy. *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema*. U of California P, 1991.
- Lee, Soyoung. "Jane Eyre in Our Times: Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* in Dialogue with Two Film Adaptations." *Trans-Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2016, pp. 99–125.
- Mieczkowski, Cynthia. "'Do You Never Laugh, Miss Eyre?': Humor, Wit and the Comic in 'Jane Eyre.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1989, pp.367-379.
- Monk, Claire. "Eyre Conditioning." *Sight and Sound*, vol. 21, no. 10, 1 October 2011, pp. 44-45,2.
- Penn, William. "Music and Image: A Pedagogical Approach." *Indiana Theory Review*, vol. 11, 1990, pp. 47-63.
- Pennington, Heidi L. "Fictional Self-Making in a Changing World." *Creating Identity in the Victorian Fictional Autobiography*. U of Missouri P, 2018.
- Peters, Joan. "Finding a Voice: Towards a Woman's Discourse of Dialogue in the Narration of 'JANE EYRE.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1991, pp. 217-236.
- "Review of Jane Eyre from The Era." *British Library*, 14 Nov. 1847,  
<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/review-of-jane-eyre-from-the-era>.
- Rigby, Elizabeth. "Review of *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*, and the 1847 Report of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution." *Victorian Prose*, edited by Rosemary J. Mundhenk and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher. Columbia UP, 1999, pp. 175-82.
- Riley, Michael. "Gothic Melodrama and Spiritual Romance: Vision and Fidelity in Two Versions of 'Jane Eyre.'" *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1975, pp. 145–59.

- Rizzo, Betty. "Renegotiating the Gothic." *Revising Women Eighteenth-Century "Women's Fiction" and Social Engagement*, edited by Paula R. Backscheider. Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, pp. 58-103.
- Sadoff, Dianne F. *Victorian Vogue: British Novels on Screen*. U of Minnesota P, 2010.
- Sconce, Jeffrey. "The Cinematic Reconstitution of *Jane Eyre*," *Jane Eyre*. 1847, edited by Richard Dunn. Norton. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 2001, pp. 515-22.
- Scott, A. O. "Radiant Spirit Blossoms In Barren Land." Review of *Jane Eyre*. *New York Times* (1923-), Mar 11, 2011, pp. 2. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/kadiant-spirit-blossoms-barren-land/docview/1620469479/se-2>.
- Simpson, Vicki. "'The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator': Storytelling and Autobiography in *Jane Eyre*." *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2008.
- Sjogren, Britta H. "Metapsychology of the Voice-off." *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film*. U of Illinois P, 2006. pp. 21-77. *EBSCOhost*.
- Topping, Amber. "15 of the Best *Jane Eyre* Movies and Adaptations, Ranked." *The Silver Petticoat Review*, 2021, <https://www.silverpetticoatreview.com/jane-eyre-movies-adaptations-ranked/#:~:text=HOW%20MANY%20JANE%20EYRE%20MOVIES,act%20play%20by%20John%20Brougham>.
- "Trailer: *Jane Eyre*." 1943. *IMDB*, 1990-2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036969/>.
- Warhol, Robyn. "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*." *SEL*, vol. 36, 1996, pp. 857-875.
- Wilks, Brian. "*Jane Eyre* Revisited." *Brontë Studies: The Journal of the Brontë Society*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2016, pp. 283-299.

Williams, Victoria. "The Bildungsroman as Quest Narrative: *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*." *Critical Insights: Hero's Quest*, 2012, pp. 181–97.

Winters, Ben. "The Non-Diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space." *Music & Letters*, vol. 91, no. 2, May 2010, pp. 224–244. *EBSCOhost*.

Wootton, Sarah. "'Picturing me a hero of romance': The Legacy of *Jane Eyre*'s Byronic Hero." *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*, edited by Elke Mettinger-Schartmann. BRILL, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*.

Wyle, Andrea Schwenke. "Expanding the View of First-Person Narration." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1999, pp. 185-202.

**CHAPTER III—WHAT IS SAID THROUGH THE SILENCE: HOW SERIALIZED  
ADAPTATIONS OF *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL* ADDRESS FEMALE  
SUBJECTIVITY AND IMPLICIT ACTIONS**

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) addresses cultural ideology that feeds domestic abuse and silences women: her novel shows how dichotomous Victorian gender roles reinforced a culture that shamed women for their husband's ills. As Elizabeth Langland notes, Brontë's work explores how "the myth of domestic heaven often concealed the reality of a domestic hell" (24). Using issues of addiction and alcoholism, Brontë highlights the secrecy around domestic abuse that only made the "domestic hell" cyclical. The socially-enforced secrecy was often fed by Victorian gender ideology. Female gender roles – such as wife, mother, and daughter – were infused with domestic ideology that created a system where women were to blame if their homes were unhappy. In response, women would censor or silence their experiences. Helen Huntingdon and Milicent Hattersley (née Hargrave) exemplify such actions. Their stories reveal how women's silence is founded in cultural ideology that iterates spousal abuse. Furthermore, the framed narrative—Gilbert provides Helen's story—is problematic as it implicitly values the male over the female voice and expresses a Victorian cultural standard: women may speak under their husband's authority, and it takes male supervision to legitimate women's expressions of their experiences. Nonetheless, Brontë uses the framed narrative to elaborate on the cultural ideologies that subordinate women's voices, demonstrating how they lead to cycles of domestic abuse.

This chapter will review scenes from the novel, both from Gilbert's perspective and from Helen's first-person diary, that demonstrate where Helen's voice is either subsumed, male-mediated, or self-censored. In that process, the chapter argues that certain Victorian works tacitly

blamed women for their husband's wrongdoing and shamed women into hiding their husband's abuses. I then apply this argument to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. By reviewing areas in Helen's diary that lack specific examples of abuse, we see how Helen censors her own work out of a personal sense of shame/blame and propriety. Following this, the chapter will analyze how serialized adaptations of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* reinforce Helen's subjectivity which is problematized in the novel due to male-mediation. The section will also explore how the series take vaguely described or implicit moments from Helen's experiences in the novel and make them explicit, as well as demonstrate how the serializations restore Helen's agency through voice-over narration.

The BBC 1996 *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* series directed by Mike Barker and adapted by Janet Barron and David Nokes also finds male-mediated female voices problematic. The series opens with strong female agency: Helen's departure from her husband, which solidly places her story into her hands and also aligns the film closely with Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*. The realignment of subjectivity and narrative authority in the film readjusts the novel's portrayal of female agency and a woman's ability to tell her story without male mediation. Additional scenes, such as Helen walking through the marketplace and explicit showings of Huntingdon's abuse, further increase Helen's voice and subjectivity. In addition, the series also favors female subjectivity through positive and empowering portrayals of Helen as a sexually desiring woman. This chapter will continue by a close analysis of the scripts for the 1968 BBC serialization directed by Peter Sasdy and adapted by Christopher Fry.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> The television serialization is presently unable for viewing without visiting the British Film Institute. A further viewing issue is the BBC has lost the first episode in the series. So, instead of analyzing the televised series as has been typical in previous chapters, my analysis will cover the scripts provided by the British Film Institute Archives.

### Sshhh: Cultural Silencing, Male Mediation, and Female Self-Censoring

While Anne Brontë's work has been gaining more attention in recent years, she has often been considered "the other one" of the Brontë sisters.<sup>42</sup> Scholars, such as Terry Eagleton in *Myths of Power*, praise Charlotte and Emily while noting "the slightness of [Anne's] fiction" (136). Many, like Eagleton, claim *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "is essentially a love-story and moral fable" (133). More recent scholarship, though, has seen the depths of Brontë's work. Like others, I argue that women's subjugation stemmed from cultural ideology that made woman's duty to serve and stand as moral light to her husband and children, and I further this argument by showing how women's sense of duty functioned as a call to action and a gag that formed a cycle of domestic violence and women's silence in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Scholars, such as Siv Jansson, Maggie Berg, Meghan Bullock, and Claire O'Callaghan, discuss angel rhetoric and its influence on domestic abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Jansson argues that Brontë shows how the Victorian angel was powerless to affect change in her male counterparts despite social ideology that forwarded women's position in the home as the sole means of affecting moral change. O'Callaghan's argument focuses on how angel rhetoric places women in a position of weakness that leads to domestic abuse and victim-blaming women. Jansson argues Brontë reveals truths in her novel, one such being "the ineffectuality of 'woman's influence', that mysterious and nebulous power to which so much was ascribed and by which so little is achieved, at least in this novel" (33). Both Berg and Bullock note how women would condition one another to accept "a social (but they believed natural) hierarchy" of the patriarchal society (Berg 24). Bullock claims cyclical violence is patterned from learned behavior as she argues that Aunt Maxwell, Helen, and Milicent all learn from each other to silence themselves. Perhaps the

---

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Langland's *Anne Brontë – The Other One* (1989) ironically utilizes this phrase for her title work that is part of the *Women Writers* series.



closest to my own argument, Bullock notes the lack of specific details in Aunt Maxwell's warnings and how Helen leaves out specific details of her own abuse. My argument, though, does not leave cyclical violence solely to inherited responses. My argument shows how nineteenth-century angel rhetorical and social ideology shamed women in domestic abuse relationships, both victim-blaming and silencing them, which led women to self-censor their written stories and female friendships.<sup>43</sup>

In works such as "Of Queens' Gardens" (1864) and *The Women of England* (1843), John Ruskin and Sarah Stickney Ellis promoted Victorian domestic ideology and implicitly blamed women for any moral failings in the home. By reviewing their work, we can see how Victorian cultural ideology would first set women as moral safeguards for their husbands and then shame wives into silence should their husbands fail to receive their wives' moral remedy. Sarah Stickney Ellis was a wife, mother, and lauded conduct manual writer of the nineteenth century. Her didactic texts often simultaneously praised women's efforts, belittled women's work as "trifles," and blamed women for poor domestic habits if there was an issue in their homes. Her work centered on placing women in the domestic sphere of life and held women responsible for upholding England's moral character. An example of the separation of men and women's domestic and social responsibilities follows: "How often has man returned to his home with a mind confused by the many voices, which in the mart, the exchange, or the public assembly, have addressed themselves to his inborn selfishness, or his worldly pride; . . . In the above

---

<sup>43</sup> Kimberly Cox's, "A Touch of the Hand: Manual Intercourse in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2017, pp. 161-191 argues that in Victorian culture decorum, social etiquette, etc. keeps people from verbally expressing themselves as they would like, and thus hand touching has become a coded means of expressing internal thoughts through physical action. The premise of her argument speaks to the verbally silenced or internalized emotions and acts that could not be spoken aloud. This premise aids my argument that nineteenth-century cultural ideology would silence topics not deemed proper to discuss.

section, Ellis' writing portrays men as weak-minded and easily influenced—almost childlike—and women as their mothers. In having the ideal woman's husband stand before her for correction, Ellis creates the image of a schoolboy who has fallen under the bad influence of his schoolmates. She furthers her instruction, claiming, "long-established customs . . . plac[e] in their [women's] hands the high and holy duty of cherishing and protecting the minor morals of life, from whence springs all that is elevated in purpose, and glorious in action" (Ellis 57). Anything "elevated in purpose" and "glorious in action" would fall to Englishmen, and Ellis' writing implies that should a husband or son fail in purpose or action, the wife or mother is the source of that failure. For if there was failure, then either wife or mother failed to perform her "long-established customs" of tending to the morals of the home.

Ruskin seconds both the nationalistic and moral purpose women serve. Though his lecture, "Of Queens' Gardens" was delivered nearly a decade and half after *The Tenant's* publication, his idea of separate spheres and gender roles was prominent ideology for the age. While he considered it "foolish" to discuss "the superiority of one sex to the other," he firmly believed in their "separate characters": "man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender" (Ruskin 260). In contrast, Ruskin claims women create home: "the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division" apart from the "outer world," and notes this home only exists "wherever a true wife comes" (Ruskin 261). In order to fulfill her duties, Ruskin claims women "must be incapable of error," and laments that women "are too often idle and careless . . . leaving misrule and violence to work their way among men" (Ruskin 261, 265). Ruskin chastises women for men's misdeeds and lays blame on women's idleness and failure to create those shelters of peace. Though both Ellis and Ruskin ultimately held different outlooks on women's educations,

each supported the roles men and women took in the home. And their writings implicitly blame women for any moral failing of home and country on the women of England.<sup>44</sup>

This ideology contained a paradox. While women were expected to serve as moral restorative to their husbands and properly guide their children, they were also seen as childlike, often requiring fatherly guidance from their husbands. Women were seen as both naturally moral and prone to moral weakness. Helen finds herself in both positions during her time in the marriage market with Mr. Boarham and Huntingdon. Her first proposal comes from Mr. Boarham, a favorite of Helen's Aunt Maxwell. Upon receiving Helen's rejection, he notes that he is aware of her follies as a youthful woman or rather believes she is foolish as a young woman: "I acknowledge them to myself, and rebuke them with all a father's care," and further claims "her little defects in temper, and errors of judgment, opinion, or manner were not irremediable, but might easily be removed or mitigated by the patient efforts of a watchful and judicious advisor, and where I failed to enlighten or control," he could pardon (Brontë 157-59). Mr. Boarham views Helen as misguided, someone to teach and correct. He sees her opinions and judgments as errors. His proposal reflects the Victorian idea of a child-wife, a woman who lacks the mental awareness or ability to draw her own conclusions and is meant to become a reflection of her husband's beliefs and ideologies, as Ruskin explains, "majestic childishness, which is still full of change and promise" (262).<sup>45</sup> Through Mr. Boarham's assessment, as she is, Helen is unfit to be a wife and a mother and would therefore fail her social role. However, according to

---

<sup>44</sup> This cultural ideology also fed women's legal subjugation. As the lives of Caroline Norton (1808-1877) and Catherine Dickens (1815-1879) can attest, a married woman's legal position was entirely subsumed by her husband. See Laura C. Berry's, "Acts of Custody and Incarceration in 'Wuthering Heights' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1996, pp. 32-55 and Ian Ward's "The Case of Helen Huntingdon," *Criticism*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2007, pp. 151-182.

<sup>45</sup> The child-wife is famously explored in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-50) with David's first wife Dora Spinlow.

Boarham's assessment, Helen would suit her role well if she were to bend to his guidance.

Should Helen marry Boarham, she would inhabit a paradox of child-wife.

While Helen rejects this formula of marriage when she is the tutee, she embraces it when she becomes the teacher. Though Helen's preference reveals how she would rather inhabit a positive, influential role and embrace her cultural duty, it also positions her to receive the societal blame implied in Ellis' and Ruskin's writings. Helen becomes the embodiment of the conflict. Her willingness to be the instructor of her husband's moral regeneration places her into the role so willingly promoted by Sarah Stickney Ellis as she claims women should "possess so clear a sense of right and wrong of individual actions, as to be of essential service in aiding the judgments of their husbands, brothers, and sons" (56). Likewise, as Helen does not wish for Boarham's tutelage, Huntingdon—after trying on Helen's morality for a short while—no longer desires her tutelage and influence. In effect, the only means Helen has to fulfill her domestic roles is through providing moral instruction for her son, but without legal power, Helen is essentially deemed incapable of fulfilling her social role. According to Jansson, "What gives Brontë's novel its power and its radicalism is that Helen has tried to play the role [of Victorian angel] absolutely correctly. . . . The angel may be perfect, but she has no influence" (39). Marianne Thormählen makes a similar observation: that Brontë's novel shows "nobody has the power to help save anybody else unless that person is predisposed to save him- or herself" (8).<sup>46</sup> In effect, Helen's wife-angel role is powerless. For whenever Huntingdon decides to punish Helen for perceived slights, he revokes Helen's access to their son and maintains power over her finances. Helen, too, more clearly sees the need for stronger moral and character alignment in a

---

<sup>46</sup> Thormählen uses Hattersley and Lowborough as examples. She claims that Hattersley was beginning to tire of his own behavior, which thus began his desire to change, and that Milicent's passivity and silence did nothing to promote Hattersley's personal growth. She further argues Lowborough changes despite his wife's interference because he possesses an internal desire to become a different man.

partner. Overall, Helen's understanding of gender and morality takes on a more balanced view: both husband and wife share moral viewpoints (neither in an educator role) and more equitable legal rights for both sexes.

Though Helen does gain a progressive view of educating children in order to avoid the wife/child paradox, cultural pressure and her own moral imperative restrain her from openly sharing her experiences with young men and women who may "profit by the experience of others," and also restrains her even from being fully open with her own diary.<sup>47</sup> Therefore Helen's "good moral fable"—as Eagleton termed the novel—is suppressed within Victorian ideology. Cultural ideologies shaming women, or victim-blaming women, are so ingrained in Helen that she does not often provide specific details of Huntingdon's sexual abuse even in her diary. Her complaints of this abuse are often discussed as unwanted caresses or moments of Huntingdon's yelling. Doreen Thierauf concludes that Helen's dislike of Huntingdon's physical touch "indicate[s] that Helen has little to no control over their physical contact and, at minimum, suggest[s] unwanted intimacy, if not sexual abuse." Helen's description is limited, "I could do with less caressing and more rationality: I should like to be less of a pet and more of friend, if I might choose – but I won't complain of that" (Brontë 215). Helen's reflection shows both lack of control over her own body and a desire for more control over Huntingdon's treatment and her self-abnegation. Her desire "to be less of a pet" denotes her position of weakness and Huntingdon's ownership of her, which is only compounded with her "if I might choose." Followed shortly by "but I won't complain of that," Helen silences herself and leaves off before

---

<sup>47</sup> While visiting the Markhams, Helen delivers a powerful speech on the difference between boys' and girls' educations. She notes how boys and girls are educated differently, which places young women into a social disadvantage. For more on how Brontë's work discusses education, see Thormählen's "'Horror and Disgust': Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2019, pp. 5-19., Siv Jansson's "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Rejecting the Angel's Influence," *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture*, edited by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, Palgrave, 1998, pp. 31-47., and Kimberly Cox's "A Touch of the Hand: Manual Intercourse in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2017, pp. 161-191.

she provides specific details. Helen's writing is private with no expected audience. Yet, she refrains herself from complaint and detail. That Helen feels the need to silence herself implies she holds an ingrained sense of guilt—guilt at not internally accepting her husband's desires and shame for his actions and even her own inability to restrain his touch. Furthermore, her “but I won't complain of that” reveals guilt for her inability to influence her husband's better actions. As Theirauf also notes, “Arthur further uses physical intimacy to resolve the disputes . . . ‘he tries to kiss and soothe me into smiles again—never were his caresses so little welcome as then!’” It is Helen's sense of shame and guilt that refrain her from providing specific details. Furthermore, the emptiness of Huntingdon's actions and their repetition tell Helen that her moral teachings are falling on deaf ears. Helen's detail is vague and any further action in their physical scenarios are left to be read between what is said and how Helen feels.

To further explicate Helen's censoring or cultural silencing, we must review Helen as the subject of Huntingdon's verbal abuse. Helen's limiting details express a sense of indecency or shame in sharing his actions in vivid description. Helen records, “His injustice and ill humour towards his inferiors, who could not defend themselves, I still resented and withstood; but when I alone was their object, I endured it with calm forbearance” (Brontë 271). Helen does provide an example of Huntingdon yelling at a servant when too much noise is made while Huntingdon is hungover. Helen also notes when Huntingdon throws a book at the dog, which hits Helen's hand, but she provides few specifics on how Huntingdon's anger physically manifests against Helen other than with these brief moments that provide little detail. Helen mentions she remains calm until her she loses her temper, but this only further incurs “fierceness, cruelty, and impatience” (Brontë 271). Again, the reader is left to imagine the physical actions Helen receives by reading between the adjectives and her feelings. Though Helen feels capable of rebuking Huntingdon for

harming their servants, dog, and son, she finds herself even unable to defend herself in her diary by providing exact description of circumstances. This falls in line, though, with Helen's domestic duty where servants and children would fall under her domain and tending to her husband's wants would take precedence.

Helen's censoring continues when discussing Huntingdon's influence on Arthur and when explaining her decision to her family to leave Huntingdon. For when providing her explanations, she must admit her perceived moral successes as well as the failures. While Helen is explicit in what Huntingdon teaches their son – "to hate and despise his mother and to emulate his father's wickedness [foul language, drinking, ribald jokes]"—specific scenes are not provided in Helen's diary (Brontë 376). She does, though, provide a triumphant entry: "I had much trouble in breaking him of those evil habits his father had taught him to acquire, but already that difficulty is nearly vanquished now: bad language seldom defiles his mouth, and I have succeeded in giving him an absolute disgust for all intoxicating liquors" (Brontë 375). While Helen has failed her husband as moral light, she has succeeded as the moral guide to her son. So, Helen's conflict is that in admitting one success, she must admit to her failure—according to Victorian gender roles—as a wife. Having to admit this failure, even though it's followed by success, elucidates reasons for Helen censoring her experiences. Helen censors her diary entry in a way that expresses her internal conflict with her roles as nurturer. This conflict of course continues when she feels obligated to provide specifics to her brother Lawrence in order to obtain his help. The shame of her situation and the impropriety of a wife speaking against her husband also keeps Helen self-censoring even when asking her brother Lawrence for assistance in leaving her husband. When she finds her first description of Huntingdon's behavior is insufficient, she tries again and succeeds in convincing her brother to help her. This censoring

extends to when she writes to various friends and family on why she left. In her letter to her young friend Esther, Milicent's younger sister, Helen says why she leaves, but without detail. Milicent receives a similar letter, and Aunt Maxwell likewise with a request that Helen be pardoned (Brontë 391).<sup>48</sup>

This silence in the novel is revealed as typical amongst its Victorian women but not necessarily amongst men. Women's silence even amongst one another stems from their sense of duty and continues the cycle of abuse. Women forward the lack of experience and press women into the cultural ideology through a sense of duty to the family and obligation to remove themselves from the position of financial burden. As Milicent and Esther Hargrave both experience, their mother and brother attempt to coerce the sisters into unwanted (and feared on Milicent's part) marriages. Milicent accepts their coercion as fulfilling an obligation to her family; her situation dramatizes young women's pressure to financially provide for themselves and their families through the marriage market. That Esther does not cave to such pressure shows hope for the next generation of young women, but this hope is not provided with Helen or Milicent sharing their experiences with one another. Even prior to leaving Huntingdon, Helen "had been very reserved in my letters" to Aunt Maxwell who only cobbled together Helen's married life through in-person "quiet cross-questioning" (Brontë 275). Though modern readers would also find it difficult to directly discuss their suspicions on spousal abuse with the abused, Aunt Maxwell is not being direct, which furthers problematic silence. For example, during

---

<sup>48</sup> Many modern-day readers would not realize that when Helen leaves her husband, she becomes a "fallen woman" in the eyes of her Victorian contemporaries. Even though her decision to leave is based on saving her son from the father's influence and fate, as well as extricating herself from an abusive and adulterous man, Victorian society would see Helen's departure as morally degrading and a failure in her wifely duties. For more on this, see Nora Gilbert's "Lilith on the Moors." *Victorian Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, pp. 273-298 and Jansson's "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Rejecting the Angel's Influence," *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture*, edited by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, Palgrave, 1998, pp. 31-47. For a combined discussion on Helen as the "fallen woman" and Barker's adaptation, see Aleks Sierz's "Angel or Sister? Writing and Screening the Heroine of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Sisterhoods: Across the Literature/Media Divide*, Pluto Press, 1998, pp. 16-31.



Helen's first visit to London, Aunt Maxwell provides specifics on how Helen should act, but left the "misery that would overwhelm you" if she were to marry a "worthless reprobate or even an impracticable fool" a vague mystery (Brontë 150). In response, Helen "asked no more impertinent questions," for "she [Aunt Maxwell] spoke it [her warning] *so* seriously that one might have fancied she had known it to her cost" (Brontë 150). How those regrets may appear in reality were then left to Helen's experience of the world at which time she had none. Bullock has also noted Aunt Maxwell's lack of details, saying, "She is full of advice, but strangely reticent on the subject of her own treatment by her husband" (136). Bullock credits abused women's silences as learned behaviors. Aunt Maxwell's behavior creates uncertainties and holes in Helen's understanding of marriage. However, Aunt Maxwell's silence, as well as Helen's, is more than a coping mechanism passed on from one woman to another. That Helen feels impertinent for wanting to know more speaks of a taboo in Victorian culture – a taboo that silences Aunt Maxwell, Helen, and Milicent.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, out of shame and a sense of duty to their husbands, both Helen and Milicent refuse to directly state the abuses they receive from their husbands. When Huntingdon and Helen are discussing her and Milicent's letters—a rough conversation with Huntingdon angry with the wives for discussing their husbands—Helen notes, Milicent "never speaks a word against him [Hattersley]; it is only anxiety *for* him that she expresses" (Brontë 270). When Huntingdon accuses Milicent of being "a little traitor" and both Helen and Milicent "heartening each other up to mutiny, and abusing each other's partners," Helen replies with a further negative that speaks to her sense of duty: "both of us are far too deeply ashamed of the errors and vices of our other

---

<sup>49</sup> Though Berg does not focus on silence and self-censoring, her analysis of abuse in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* does argue that women, such as Mrs. Markham and Aunt Maxwell, "aid and abet" in "conditioning the younger women to regard themselves both as objects and as fair game" in the marriage market/hunt (26). This shows how cultural ideology pervaded generations and cyclically affected women's position in marriage.

halves, to make them the common subject of our correspondence. . . . we would willingly keep your failings to ourselves – even *from* ourselves if we could, unless knowing them we could deliver you from them” (Brontë 270-71). Huntingdon’s rebuke for Helen and Milicent’s communication bespeaks a social condemnation for sharing abusive domestic experiences. Helen and Milicent are quickly considered mutinous against the patriarchal system that places Huntingdon and Hattersley above their wives. Both terms “mutiny” and “traitor” elicit a power system that women were punishable for breaking. Furthermore, Helen’s response supports Huntingdon’s assumptions of power. Her response, too, reveals her own sense of guilt for Huntingdon’s actions. As if she has failed her duty to her husband, she does her part to keep private his abuses. Ian Ward argues there was a “‘fortress of privacy’ within which Victorian marital relations were set” (154).<sup>50</sup> It makes sense then that this “fortress of privacy” would hinder women’s willingness to share their experiences even amongst women in similarly abusive marriages. And so, it is through lack of clear speaking from Helen’s aunt, Helen’s minimal education—being unable to “profit by the experience of others”—and a sense of duty built by society that Helen and Milicent are silenced.

While Helen and Milicent are silent, but tacitly aware of each other’s’ situations, their husbands openly joke about the abuse, showing dichotomous cultural inheritances for men and women. Milicent and Helen’s letters are bereft of details, yet full of a silent understanding of their shared experiences. In contrast, Huntingdon makes it clear during the hunting visits to Grassdale that the men share their experiences and, at times, even their wives’ letters with one another. The men equally, Hargrave excepting for ulterior motives, abuse women or their spouses as a sport. Huntingdon’s club gathers in part by creating bonds among men that are

---

<sup>50</sup> As Ian Ward notes, “fortress of privacy” was coined by James Hammerton in *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-century Married Life*. 1st ed., Routledge. 1992. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203191910>.

predicated on abusing women, which we can see within Huntingdon's club members and as Huntingdon teaches their son, Arthur. Furthermore, this is also noted in how Hattersley openly and drunkenly abuses his wife amongst his fellow men. Berg notes that "If the abuse in the Huntingdon marriage is only implied, it is explicit in the case of the Hattersleys," where Milicent is treated like a pet (30). When Milicent refuses to explain her tears—she is crying after seeing her husband's drunkenness and physical roughness with the men—he sets her on his knee and "attempted to extort the confession by shaking her, and remorselessly crushing her slight arms in the gripe of his powerful fingers," and shortly after repeats this actions to where Milicent had to "draw in her breath and bite her lip to suppress a cry of pain" (Brontë 289, 290). All this occurs while Huntingdon laughs. Though Milicent's brother, Hargrave, attempts to interfere, it is only at the bequest of Helen, whom he is attempting to seduce. The men openly act out scenes among one another that the women are too ashamed to speak of in their letters. Victorian Angel/domestic ideology does not profit either Helen or Milicent. Neither woman possesses the Herculean strength it would take to genuinely influence men who possess no desire to change. Within Helen and Milicent's circle, their acceptance of Victorian gender ideology only continues the cycle of abuse; for the women are encouraged to silence, while the men are encouraged to action. The openness amongst men shows an inherited cultural bias that is passed on. Women's cultural inheritance is an obligation to domesticity and silence, whereas men's is one of action and speech.<sup>51</sup>

The pattern of female silence and male outspokenness is further elaborated through the narrative's structure, for Helen's framed narrative is told from a male perspective, which

---

<sup>51</sup> For another perspective on Milicent and Helen's friendship, see Karen Dutoi's "Negotiating Distance and Intimacy in Female Friendship in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2011, pp. 235-246.

Also, for more on men bonding, see Berg's discussion on sportsmen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

reinforces a nineteenth-century hierarchy of male over female voices and privileges the male over the female experience. Scholars such as Langland and Clara Poteet have noted the power of the female narrator in *Tenant* and her position “to shape and revise a readers expectations and values,” (Langland *The Other One* 58) and “the potential for women’s writing [as Helen does in *Tenant*] to facilitate reform” (Poteet 255). Also, Brontë’s novel is often lauded for Helen’s “radical ability to tell her own story, and thus to challenge the structures of patriarchal society” (Quirk 232). It is that she speaks out that, some argue, is part of the feminist aspect of the novel. The male narrator, Gilbert Markham—Helen’s second husband—shares the tale of the most important moment in his life, which heavily involves sharing Helen’s trials. In sharing the private details of her journal from her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, he releases her experiences. Catherine Quirk notes that by including Helen’s diary within Gilbert’s story is “in fact limiting [Helen’s] self-narrating ability” (232). Rather than empowering Helen, the tale encloses her power. Quirk elaborates: “Much as her narrative voice is enclosed, allowed for, and made authoritative only by way of its inclusion in her second husband’s text, Helen herself remains under the control of nineteenth-century patriarchal social structures” (232). While the subject matter of Helen’s experiences is radical for the nineteenth century and does promote feminist issues, the framed narrative encloses Helen within patriarchal limitations. Berg even goes to say that “Helen’s diary functions as ‘coin,’ an oblation to appease a family member” (24). By using Gilbert to release her story, Helen is still silenced because it is not Helen who within her own agency publishes her experiences. Rather, Gilbert appears to maintain the patriarchal authority as speaker.<sup>52</sup> Many of the issues within Helen’s narrative could have been

---

<sup>52</sup> For an interesting conversation on Gilbert as a problematic character see Berg’s previously cited work, as well as a direct response to Berg’s article by Janina Hornosty in which she argues Gilbert’s enlightenment: “Let’s Not Have its Bowels Quite so Quickly, Then: a Response to Maggie Berg.”

avoided had women openly shared their experiences rather than having given vague, patronizing warnings to their unmarried female family members and friends, but Brontë's use of the enclosed narrative demonstrates the patriarchal limitations on women's experiences.

### **Permission: Script Directions as Means of Realigning Power and Revealing Trauma**

The 1968-'69 BBC2 *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* directed by Peter Sadsy and adapted by Christopher Fry is a straightforward retelling of Brontë's novel with more plot fidelity and few added scenes.<sup>53</sup> This particular serialization does favor Gilbert's subjectivity while subtly giving power back to Helen through the voice-over and body movement. As discussed in chapter 2, voice-over can provide subjectivity and focalization. Michael Chion "points to the privileged relationship that voice-over has . . . in its ability to foster audience identification" (Hanson 101). With Helen's voice-overs, audiences are more capable of identifying with her, rather than Gilbert, as viewers enter Helen's time at Grassdale. For example, the film inserts Helen's voice overplaying Gilbert reading in his bedroom as the scene cuts to Helen's experiences at Grassdale. As Han argues, Sadsy's and Fry's serialization "ensures the dissolution of Helen's marriage is told from her 'ex-centric' perspective" (42). The voice-over gives power to when she begins and closes her story. Furthermore, direction is consistently provided for Helen to "(turn into shot)" (ep. 4 "Pursuit"). The direction implies Helen is either often framed at an angle to the camera or with her back entirely to the scene's main action. Helen's refusal to show her entire self to others can be seen as another means of self-protection that derives from her trauma. That the camera permits Helen to hide and reveal when she desires is an act of empowerment that gives Helen choice to decide who sees her reactions. Her power of choice to reveal her emotions

---

<sup>53</sup> Presently, the serialization is only available for in-person viewing at the British Film Institute, London. The first episode of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* from this series is missing from the archive. As I have been unable to travel, the following analysis is based on the shooting scripts provided by the BFI Archive. The scripts cover all four episodes, and I have access to all scripts.

directly aligns itself with Brontë's Helen who can be seen becoming more and more discreet with her shows of emotion. Helen's discretion evolves in order to protect her internal self from the trauma of Grassdale and even the trauma of persecution at Linden-Car, for as in the novel, Helen is subject to the gossip and condemnation of the townspeople. This subtle camera work then empowers Helen while those like the vicar, Huntingdon, Annabella, and others would disempower her for their own vanity.

The few added scenes, which are often between Milicent and Helen, address problematic silence by giving Helen and Milicent physical space to discuss their marriages. Analysis of the novel shows how Milicent, Helen, and Aunt Maxwell are each silent and how this silence only reiterates the cycle of domestic abuse. However, the serial provides a scene that addresses women's silence and their own continuation of a culture of abuse. Milicent is home from London just after her engagement to Hattersley. In the novel, this scene plays out as a letter. However, episode 2, "Marriage," places Helen and Milicent together. While much of the scene's dialogue plays out as Milicent's letter describes, there is one moment where Helen can directly warn Milicent against marrying Hattersley and where Milicent directly asks whether Helen is happy in her marriage. Helen argues, "I beg you, with all my heart, I beg you to make a stand now. Don't make a lifetime of regret for yourself" (ep. 2 "Marriage"). In the novel, Helen only warns from her diary, whereas in the episode, Helen vocally protests Milicent's wedding. Milicent also asks directly, "you love him [Huntingdon], and seem to be happy and contented . . . are you not?" to which Helen replies, "Would it dissuade you from your course, to know that I am not?" (ep.2 "Marriage"). Their discourse creates a two-fold message: the first being that Helen projects a false sense of domestic happiness, which implies Helen's shame in both her marriage, husband, and self. The second implication is that Helen's momentary break in silence is a means of

attempting to break the cycle of abuse. Regarding Helen and Milicent's relationship in Sadsy's and Fry's series, Han argues, "Helen seizes her limited opportunities to challenge the structural inequalities that oppressed many nineteenth-century women" (42). Helen's challenge, though, dissolves as she blames Huntingdon's time in London as the sole reason for her unhappiness. Though Helen self-censors her reason for unhappiness, her attempt to speak and save Milicent is a moment of verbal action. Ultimately, the attempt to create a stronger female space evokes the need for open conversation on matters of abuse and how silence feeds abuse culture.

### **Empowerment: Making the Implicit Explicit and Expressing Subjectivity and Female Desire**

The 1996 BBC serialization of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, directed by Mike Barker, takes specific steps to ensure Helen's voice and subjectivity are the primary focus. By ensuring the action of the plot reveals how Helen is affected, rather than showing how what happens to Helen affects Gilbert, the series promotes the novel's protofeminist themes without the problematic mediation of the male narrator. The series further responds to the novel's problematic mediation through Helen's consistent voice-over while Gilbert reads her diary and Lawrence reads Helen's letter. Also, discussed in chapter 2, voice-over can provide power over who is/is not permitted into a flashback. For example, Hanson also discusses how Chion, "emphasizes the way in which the voice-over that is connected to a flashback controls the images which it introduces" (101). Although theorists like Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman have noted that women's films of the 1940s often undermined the power of the female voice through their use of "'male-coded' narrative linchpins," in Barker's adaptation, they are subverted by Helen's remastering of the gaze, her personal sexual desire, and the effective use of her voice to

regain ownership of her writings (Sjogren 27).<sup>54</sup> Barker and the adaptors ensure Helen's voice, not Gilbert's, Lawrences, or even "The Voice of Anne Brontë" is provided with that authority.<sup>55</sup>

The series also provides additional scenes that reveal how the gossip Gilbert hears in the novel actually affected Helen's day-to-day life. The series expands on scenes in the novel that were not detailed, such as Huntingdon's influence on Arthur, by adding on scenes where Helen's abuse is made explicit. Though we still live in a society whose members can shame and silence victims of domestic and sexual assault, Barker's series has fewer impediments – such as a being produced in a time of more open ideas on women's rights – that allow the serialization to show what Helen would not or could not tell. What Helen in the novel leaves implicit or vague, the series is able to make explicit. In doing so, Barker's serialization promotes women's agency and subjectivity.

Helen's subjectivity and agency are given immediacy through Barker's use of sound and rearrangement of the novel's narrative order. Discussing the novel, Langland claims "By initially making Helen Graham an object of Gilbert's narrative and not the subject of her own, the text enacts what it also presents thematically: women's objectification and marginalization within patriarchal culture" ("The Voicing of Feminine Desire" 115). The series attempts to rectify Helen's objectification in the opening scene. For example, episode 1 opens with Helen taking a sleeping Arthur from his bedroom as they escape Grassdale, Huntingdon's family manor. As she ascends a staircase, often furtively looking over her shoulder, non-diegetic women's vocals are heard singing. Their chant-like song and increasing volume possess urgency, panic, and warning.

---

<sup>54</sup> See Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire, The Woman's Film of the 1940's* and Kaja Silverman's "Disembodying the Female Voice."

<sup>55</sup> In Jones' and Davies' 2007 adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator is characterized as "The Voice of Jane Austen."

Also, for a history of film theory on the dis-embodied voice, read Anaïs Le Fèvre-Berthelot's "Audio-Visual: Disembodied Voices in Theory."



Throughout the serialization, these female vocals are part of Helen's subjectivity as they often bespeak her anxiety, trauma, and sense of unease. By building Helen's subjectivity in opening with a powerful moment of female agency—taking her child and leaving her husband to provide for them by her own skill—the film sets a pattern placing Helen as the mover of her own story. The film still shows Helen's marginalization but removes the problematic narration that engulfs Helen in Gilbert's objectification. The opening scene resituates Helen as the subject of her tale, rather than the object of Gilbert's.

The film further makes Helen the subject of her tale by showing how she is affected by the gossip in Linden-Car, rather than focusing on how Gilbert is angered by the town's gossip. In the novel, Helen's time at Wildfell is narrated and shown through Gilbert's perspective. Because of this, readers are unable to see the literal and emotional affects their gossip and mistrust have on Helen. The film addresses this by creating scenes that show their effects on Helen rather than Gilbert, which further promotes Helen's subjectivity. In three scenes specifically—Helen being greeted after church, Helen after the vicar's visit, and Helen walking through the marketplace—the audience receives Helen's emotional responses to their gossip and condemnation (many have assumed Arthur's father is Frederick Lawrence). As Helen departs the church, the camera aligns itself with Helen's annoyance in being accosted by people. After meeting the third new family in under five minutes, the camera movement shows that Helen's patience and anxiety are taxed: the camera swivels in a close-up on her face, which leaves viewers worried for Helen's healthy and emotional security. Catherine Paula Han analyzes these camera swivels and notes moments both of slow and quick circles around Helen, arguing that “the quickness of the movement creates the sense that she [Helen] is either losing control or being entrapped” (48). In this moment at the

church, Helen is experiencing both as she is presently incapable of ignoring social decorum, which makes her feel without control and unable to escape.

Helen's scenes in the marketplace and at Wildfell after the vicar's visit provide further insight into Helen's mindset that is obscured by the novel's male narrator. In the novel, Gilbert's perspective shows Helen "slowly pacing up and down her lonely room," at Wildfell and he assesses, "She seemed agitated" (Brontë 118). Little else is given about Helen's inner thoughts, and this is due both to Gilbert's limited insight and his greater concern with how Helen's inner turmoil affects Gilbert's emotions. Rather than using Gilbert's perspective the film empowers Helen's reaction by filming the scenes or adding scenes in Helen's subjectivity: viewers see Helen crying in her art room, attempting to return to her painting, and angrily dashing her art and tools to the ground as she emits sobs (ep. 1 40:30-40:55). In realigning the film with Helen's perspective, the series dramatizes the emotional damage of Helen's encounter with the vicar by showing Helen's indignation and persecution closeup. The marketplace scene does likewise as Helen is given side glances and commented on about her seeming hypocrisy. In both scenes, the female vocals return. The first, soft and somber, expressive of Helen's depressed spirits. The second, more urgent and expressive of danger. Both imply Helen is anxious, but the second more so connects Helen's sense of danger or fear to her escape from Grassdale. The adaptive liberty of taking a novel to film here provides space to engage Helen's subjectivity with responses through her time in Linden-Car.

But perhaps the simplest and most effective manner of reasserting Helen's subjectivity, agency, and of removing male-mediation from her narrative is the series' use of the female voice-over. Whereas the 1944 *Jane Eyre*'s use of the female voice-over only reasserts male subjectivity and the resituating of Jane's narrative as Rochester's, the voice-over here takes the

story away from Helen's second husband and away from her brother Frederick Lawrence. In the novel, all of Helen's narrative is provided through her diary and the letters she sends to her brother, which he then either gives or temporarily lends to Gilbert, which problematically shows a clear male-mediation of Helen's narrative as each man has power over expressing and releasing Helen's story. The voice-over, though, resituates Helen's power over her narrative, as well as provides an insight into her development. This is done by utilizing Helen's voice-over to open and close flashbacks of her time before Linden-Car. As Gilbert is seen reading or in possession of Helen's diary, her voice-over plays over him. This overlap of aural and visual situates creative power to Helen as sound takes power and precedence to create (unlike in the novel where Gilbert's pen in writing his story and copying Helen's diary is what creates the tale). The same applies when Helen writes to Lawrence. Though each man is in possession of her work, which places them in a position of power to protect or release her tale, the voice-over gives power back to Helen by making the men's reading beholden to her voice.

The film's use of voice-over also gives Helen the power, denied in the novel, to consent to the reading of her letters and diary. With each transition from Gilbert to Helen's past, her voice-over signifies permission for both Gilbert and the audience to hear her story. That her voice covers the cut, a cut delineating our transition from present to past, means Helen, not Gilbert, is taking us through time. The same remains true when Helen is back at Grassdale tending Huntingdon. Helen's voice-over covers her time there and her letter to Lawrence, which permits both audience and Lawrence to travel with her. Without her voice, the problematic male-mediation of Helen's narrative would remain. In utilizing the female voice-over, the series reaffirms Helen as author/creator, places Helen in a position of power over Gilbert and

Lawrence, and provides Helen the power to bring audiences forwards and back in her story thus prioritizing her subjectivity and agency in a way the novel has not done.

The film also utilizes flashbacks and scene mirroring to expand on Helen's subjectivity by openly showing Helen's traumatic stress. Episode 2 begins Helen's diary, which opens on a ball where she first meets Huntingdon as an adult.<sup>56</sup> Huntingdon and Helen dance together, and as the camera tracks their movement, it takes an overhead view of the couple with Helen's head back and arms out wide while Huntingdon spins her around. This scene foreshadows Helen's relationship with Huntingdon by mirroring the action and camera angles of a flashback scene with Arthur. During one of Helen's many flashbacks scenes in episode 1, Helen flashes to Arthur with blood on his face as he holds Helen's dead pet canary, wings extended, in both hands and spins in circles. While Arthur spins the dead bird, the camera takes on a similar overheard shot that shifts to spinning with Arthur and the bird held lifeless above (ep. 1, 15:45-15:53). This scene mirrors Helen's ballroom dance with Huntingdon to give warning about Huntingdon's future behavior. Just as young Arthur killed and used the bird as his own plaything, so will Huntingdon abuse Helen.<sup>57</sup> As *The New York Times* reviewer Caryn James observes, "When Arthur dances with Helen, he swirls her around the room, suggesting how completely she is losing her balance." The scene also does more than reflect Helen's blindness to Huntingdon's true character; it contrasts the joy Helen finds in dancing with Huntingdon with the mental trauma Huntingdon causes. Discussing the novel, Thierauf argues, "Helen reacts like a typical trauma survivor," as when Gilbert sees Helen react with an "electric start" when he appears behind her unannounced. Carol Senf agrees that "Brontë's portrait of Helen reveals her awareness of the long term effects of psychological stress" (450). Where the novel only reveals

---

<sup>56</sup> The serialization has Helen in the same circles as Huntingdon since childhood.

<sup>57</sup> Many of the scenes involving men and animals in this series are reminiscent of Berg's discussion.

the lingering effects of Huntingdon's abuse from Gilbert's observations, the film utilizes these flashbacks and the scene mirroring to provide Helen's mental state without a male character's point of view and even expresses Helen connecting moments of early warnings of Huntingdon's behavior to her marital experiences.

Explicitly showing Helen's reactions in moments of unwanted physical touch and how Huntingdon's anger towards Helen manifested also amplifies Brontë's feminist themes and provides space to discuss both Victorian women's issues and feminist issues present in the 1990's onward. Julianne Pidduck looks at 1990's costume films (also referred to as period films) as a means of exploring "creative juxtapositions between 'presentist' sensibility and past iconography" (Vidal 92). Showing specific moments of Helen's abuse then becomes a means of combining early-feminist and twentieth-century feminist themes by breaking through Victorian ideology that influenced Helen's censorship. Three scenes—Huntingdon leaving Helen for London, Huntingdon apologizing after flirting with Annabella, and Helen requesting to leave Huntingdon—provide an interesting contrast between what was said in the novel and what is shown on screen. The first scene—Huntingdon's departure for London—is seemingly small, but dramatizes early on how Huntingdon uses physical touch to appease Helen. In trying to soothe her, he says, "Oh, you do worry about me. Well then, in that case"—here he pauses to kiss Helen (ep. 2, 25:20-25:34). She happily receives his kisses, believing he will stay. He continues by assuring her that since she cares, he will not stay away long. Huntingdon's next effort to kiss Helen is rebuffed as she has realized Huntingdon only used physical touch as a means of assuaging her displeasure, not as a means of showing genuine care for herself. The scene is typical of Huntingdon's narcissism and the mind games he plays that are a small example of his emotional abuses. This scene is reminiscent of Brontë's Helen and her desire for "less petting,"

and in the series, it is the beginning of making explicit what Helen censors in Brontë's Helen's narrative.

Helen's request for less petting is a relatively vague one, but one that harbors hidden depths that the series utilizes to further dramatize sexual abuse in marriage and Helen's self-censoring in the novel. Two scenes in particular, both involving Huntingdon's infidelity, dramatize how Huntingdon's caresses become sexually aggressive. In one scene, Helen observes Huntingdon and Annabella—Helen's rival—openly flirting with one another at Grassdale. In response, Helen goes to bed early. Aware of Helen's unhappiness, Huntingdon retires for the evening, and as he does, he wakes a sleeping Helen while apologizing and kissing her face. His attentions flow into Huntingdon turning Helen on her back and straddling her, and the scene cuts to Huntingdon having sex with Helen (23:29-24:32). In the moment, the lines between rape and consensual sex are blurred, and what is evident is that Huntingdon is using physical intimacy as a means of controlling and dominating Helen. He is proving to both of them his ability to emotionally manipulate and physical use Helen even when he has displeased her.

The next example, and notably the scene with the most liberties taken, combines both Huntingdon's anger and his sexual abuse, which further explores the depths of Huntingdon's unwanted touch. Yet unlike in previous scenes, this one ensures that by the end, Helen will not accept herself as a victim. With Helen knowing of Huntingdon's affair with Annabella, she requests his permission to leave. What follows is the physical manifestation of Huntingdon's anger and desire for control: grasping Helen by the throat, he slams her into the wall, spreads her legs with his knee, throws her to the floor with himself on top, while the camera shows his hand moving up Helen's leg and disappearing under her skirt (ep. 2, 47:46-43:39). The scene, though, refuses to end with Helen's victimization. For in a moment of power—though clearly

traumatized—the camera provides a close-up of Helen’s face, eyes open in shock as she says, “I never want you to touch me again.” In closing the scene on Helen’s refusal to bend to Huntingdon’s sexual abuse, the film emphasizes her power rather than her physical weakness. Her words attest to her internal strength. The series utilizes its adaptation to show what the novel will only imply about the depth of Helen’s internal strength and the extent of Huntingdon’s abuse. These visual manifestations of Huntingdon’s touch make explicit what Helen’s diary would only hint at. Explicitly showing moments when Helen is abused, rather than implying the abuse, progresses Brontë’s themes by rejecting silence for the sake of duty and propriety, prioritizing Helen’s rebellion, and connecting the work with ongoing feminist conversations.

The series also takes the time show moments of received and desired physical touch that allows Helen not to be solely defined by her sexual trauma but also as a sexually desiring woman, which further empowers Helen. Throughout the novel, Helen is consistently guarding herself against sexual affronts, which are translated to film through physical action and moments where Barker and the adaptors purposefully use the male gaze to reflect Helen’s and objectification, which is then flipped when Helen is empowered as a sexually desiring woman. Aleks Sierz views the series’ camerawork during the sexual assaults as an “invas[ion] of Helen’s privacy, turning her into a defenseless object of a prying gaze,” further claiming that “However ‘tastefully’ done, such voyeurism negates the feminism of the novel by subjecting its heroine to the male gaze” (25). What Sierz fails to see is that the series does not endorse male objectification, just as Brontë does not endorse male mediation of women’s stories despite her use of a framed narrative. The series utilizes the male gaze to reveal what Helen endures, but later utilizes Helen’s gaze as a sexually desiring and artistic woman to empower her as woman with desire. Like how Helen’s flashbacks are connected to her present time at Wildfell/the

trauma she is working through or experienced, the film provides a contrast between her negative sexual experiences and the positive ones she experiences as an empowered woman.

A common trope in period or costume dramas of the more modern film era is iterating the female protagonist as desiring, not just desirable. As seen in both film versions of *Northanger Abbey* and in the 2011 *Jane Eyre*, filmmakers mitigate the male gaze through the female protagonists' gaze. These films often toe the line of modern adaptation and false Victorian stereotypes of prudery. Barker's *Tenant* finds itself in a similar position. The series expands Helen's agency by expanding her definition within the sexual realm. Two scenes—Helen's first bedroom scene with Huntingdon and Helen on the Moors with Gilbert—are indicative of filmmakers expanding Helen's agency while showing (in the first scene) how Huntingdon's gaze will later harm her, and (in the second scene) how Helen's gaze is predominant on screen, which provides a healthy role reversal between Huntingdon's objectifying sexual gaze and Helen's creative sexual gaze.

Helen's first bedroom scene with Huntingdon shows her both as desiring and desirable, but Huntingdon's words and the cuts used during shots of Helen's body show her primarily objectified and imply her future danger. In bed together, Huntingdon says to Helen, "I'd like to keep you in a museum. [he kisses her abdomen] I'd come and look at you. [his kisses travel up her body] My work of art [his kisses remain on her face]" (ep. 2, 15:01-15:53). His dialogue is easily compared to the eerily possessive and murderous tone of Browning's "My Last Duchess." As Huntingdon kisses Helen's body, the camera cuts her body in pieces, making shot cuts each time Huntingdon speaks. Though it flashes once to her face to show her desire and reciprocity of his actions, she is more objectified than shown as equally desiring. In analyzing this scene, Han argues the scene's assembly "introduce[s] a note of menace that foretells the abuse that Helen



will later undergo at Huntingdon's hands" and "make[s] Helen's limbless, white-clothed abdomen look like a Classical marble torso in a gallery" (43-44). By claiming Helen as his own creation, Huntingdon implies knowledge of his manipulating Helen into loving and marrying him. His manipulation and desire for her body overall invokes himself as master artist and Helen as object-creation.

But Helen's is not the only body that will be cut and desired. As the film sets up Helen as the object of Gilbert's sexual desire, the series provides a reversal as the camera denotes Helen's sexual desire for Gilbert (ep.1, 26:00-28:19). In episode 2, the scene opens on a sensual close-up of Helen's nape and slowly pans across. We shortly see this is providing Gilbert's point of view. If the series were to continue constructing Helen solely as a sexual object, audiences could expect a similar recreating of Huntingdon's cut view of Helen in bed. Instead, the series pointedly takes Helen out of the moment of being desired and into a moment of desiring. While she also reciprocates Gilbert's gaze, she steadily avoids gazing back. In avoiding his gaze, the film expresses both Helen's sense of duty—she will not commit adultery—and Helen's pleasure in desiring Gilbert. As Gilbert stands beside Helen, who is painting on the moors, (as with Huntingdon and Helen in bed), the camera focuses on Helen's reactions while audiences only see Gilbert's torso from groin to mid-chest. Though he is fully clothed, the scene remains sexual in its reference to Helen's first sexual experience. As with Helen and Huntingdon's scene, the camera momentarily glances to Gilbert, as it previously did with Helen, to show his pleasure in the experience. Likewise, the camera after shot-reverse-shots between their conversation, steadily makes it way up to framing both Helen and Gilbert's faces in one shot that implies the possibility of a kiss.<sup>58</sup> By resituating Helen as sexually desiring Gilbert, the film proffers a

---

<sup>58</sup> Han's work has noted the heavy influence of Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) in this scene and argues *The Tenant* fails to empower the Helen as it shows "the objectification of the female artist" (53-54). Rather, I argue this

positive moment of sexual reciprocity that emphasizes Helen's sexual desire rather than her label as sexual victim, which overall extends Helen's agency beyond the novel's ideological limitations. The scene also goes beyond Helen objectifying or recreating a similar possession/creation moment of Gilbert. For in this scene, Helen is literally creating her own artwork that stands in as her economic independence and success. And overall, Helen's sexual desire is elevated beyond Huntingdon's narcissistic wants and expands Helen's position into a more complex character who both desires and receives desire through her own sexual agency.

Helen's experiences and claims in the novel are further elucidated by visually telling Huntingdon's corrupting influence on Arthur, which explores how Arthur's tutelage was a means of punishing Helen. Helen's concern with Huntingdon's "contaminating influence" on Arthur is explained in the novel with vague terms, but the series ensures scenes of tutelage are shown. Huntingdon's introductions of Arthur to alcohol, sexual limericks, and hunting are filmed in such a way as to ensure audience members know Arthur is following his father's path. The strongest link to Huntingdon and Arthur's future is the hunting scenes, which end with Helen scolding Arthur for killing her pet canary. The scene initially provokes trepidation for Arthur's safety by showing him in a landscape full of armed men shooting. As he is the only child there, and no other men appear concerned with Arthur's presence, the audience and Helen are left trusting Huntingdon with Arthur's safety. The audience is further shown Arthur under Huntingdon's tutelage as he instructs his son, "The Lord God gave man dominion over the fowls in the air, the fishes in the river, and over every other creeping crawling thing that creeps and crawls on the face of the earth. It says so in the bible . . . Today we make war with a pheasant" (ep. 3, 18:22-18:34). Huntingdon follows this with putting the blood of a dead fowl on Arthur's face and

---

scene empowers the sexually desiring woman by ceasing the male gaze and starting the female gaze where the male left off.

telling him, “I’ll make a sportsman of you yet boy. Now, go on in and show your momma that” (19:24). Huntingdon is teaching Arthur multiple lessons in this moment: some that he realizes immediately and others he would later come to realize as an adult. The first is that he has the right to kill and use for his amusement all life on earth because it is his God-given right. The second would be that killing is a sport of men’s amusement, and the third, that he would learn as an adult, would be to punish women who oppose his viewpoint. Huntingdon’s twisted interpretation of Christian scripture is used to justify his mistreatment of Helen and his taking pleasure in whatever pleases him. As audience members, we are given evidence that these lessons did take root in Arthur—first seen when he returns inside and kills his mother’s bird—the flashback of the spiraling camera from episode 1 that connects his mother’s abuse with his own actions—and secondly seen as he abuses a crow at Wildfell.

In the novel, Helen’s agency soars beyond that of a typical Victorian woman when she inverts the gender traditions of marriage proposals by proposing to Gilbert with the metaphor of a winter rose. Noting Gilbert’s problematic assault of Lawrence and his childish temper, readers have questioned whether Helen is not simply replicating a kinder version of her first marriage. The series takes Helen’s agency and her problematic marriage to Gilbert to the screen in order to extend the warning of problematic marriages to the 1990’s audience. In Barker’s *Tenant*, Gilbert visits Helen and Arthur after they return to Wildfell and proposes to her there. Playful banter, as in the novel, ensues as they kiss and walk away together with Arthur. Calm, but joyful and triumphant music overplays the scene until Helen, though holding hands with Gilbert, is moved out of frame, leaving only Gilbert and Arthur on the screen. The moment Helen is out of frame, the women’s vocals—a consistent voice of Helen’s trepidation, anxiety and urgency—return, and the credits role shortly after. As many readers have experienced themselves, there is a sense

trepidation in Helen marrying a second time to a man who has proven himself violent. To emphasize his propensity to violence, the series intensifies Gilbert's attack of Lawrence by turning it into a full nighttime horse chase where Gilbert tackles Lawrence from horseback and beats him until Helen interferes. Whereas in the novel, Helen receives no notice of who attacked Lawrence, the series ensures Helen's full and undeniable awareness. Therefore, viewers feel uneasy when Gilbert's violence is dismissed as a lover's passion and Helen willingly agrees to marry again. By removing Helen's proposal and by pushing her out of frame as she and Gilbert walk away and the female vocals return, the series is not, I argue, attempting to remove the agency it spent three episodes negotiating, but instead is acknowledging Gilbert's problematic behavior and the implications therein. Ultimately, it is left to viewers to envision whether Helen and Gilbert finally meet Helen's marital expectations.

Throughout the three-episode mini-series, Barker and the adaptors ensure that the problematic silences in Brontë's work are explored and dramatized. The abuse, both emotional and sexual, that Helen endures and often only alludes to due to Victorian gender ideology and her own self-censoring are given full dramatization. In doing so, the series continues present-day discussions on feminism and domestic abuse. Furthermore, the series' use of the voice-over resituates Helen's control over her tale, while also attempting to actively negate the male gaze by empowering Helen as a sexually desiring woman.

## **Conclusion**

In the novel, Helen's self-censorship stems from her acceptance of social ideology. Her safety at Wildfell is also contingent on her silence as the Linden-Car villagers' knack for gossip—coupled with their acceptance of Victorian cultural ideology—imply that her story would reach Huntingdon if she shared it with others. Therefore, Helen's safety from Victorian

English law and domestic abuse is contingent on her secrecy. Brontë's novel has more and more recently been lauded for its feminist representation of women's domestic and legal abuse. The novel's feminist themes go even deeper. Helen's acceptance of her gender role is part of a larger social problem that feeds into women's domestic abuses that both shames and silences its victims. Helen's shame and silence are iterated in the fuller details she leaves out: Huntingdon's undesired touch, the manifestations of his anger, and his tutelage of Arthur. Furthermore, Helen's silence is trebled through her Aunt Maxwell and dear friend Milicent. Together, the three women participate in an understood silence that aids each other's abuses, which shows each woman complicit in the cycle. Barker's television serialization takes Helen's silences and makes them explicitly shown. The series' visual telling of events increases Helen's subjectivity and added scenes expand on Helen's active agency as a sexually desiring woman. As much as a film can when one takes into the consideration the influence of the film's creators (their own cultural biases and gender expectations), Helen's voice goes unmediated because the film prioritizes Helen's subjectivity and voice. The series addresses problematic issues in the novel by permitting the audience to see how events at Wildfell affect Helen (not how reactions to Helen affect Gilbert) and through the voice-over that narrates Helen's time at Grassdale. Sadsy's and Fry's serialization also utilizes the voice-over to resituate Helen's narrative power. Furthermore, the series uses body movement and camera angles to show Helen's trauma-induced regulation of emotions and her power to choose if/when she will disclose knowledge of her inner-self. The film also addresses women's problematic silences by attempting to create a space for women to speak openly, but shows that for the space to be effective, voices must speak out on difficult and cultural issues of abuse. Together, the television serializations of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* recognize the need for less censoring of voices who have experienced abuse.

### Works Cited

- Berg, Maggie. "'Let me have its bowels then': Violence, Sacrificial Structure, and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2010, pp. 20-40.
- Berry, Laura C. "Acts of Custody and Incarceration in 'Wuthering Heights' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1996, pp. 32-55.
- Brontë, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 1848, edited by G. D. Hargreaves, Penguin Books, 1979.
- Bullock, Meghan. "Abuse, Silence, and Solitude in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2004, pp. 135-141.
- Cox, Kimberly. "A Touch of the Hand: Manual Intercourse in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2017, pp. 161-191.
- Doane, Mary Anne. *The Desire to Desire, The Woman's Film of the 1940's*. Indiana UP. 1987.
- Dutoi, Karen. "Negotiating Distance and Intimacy in Female Friendship in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2011, pp. 235-246.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Myths of Power A Marxist Study of The Brontës*. MacMillan. 1975.
- Fry, Christopher. "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" by Anne Brontë Dramatised by Christopher Fry, the complete screenplay. British Film Institute Archives. 1968-1969.
- Han, Catherine Paula. "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s (1848) Residence at BBC: Neo-Victorian Adaptations in the 1960s and 1990s." *Neo-Victorian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 32-67.
- Hanson, Helen. *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film*. I. B. Tauris, 2007.

Hornosty, Janina. "Let's Not Have its Bowels Quite so Quickly, Then: a Response to Maggie Berg." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2014, pp. 130-140.

James, Caryn. "As Cameras Whir, The Brontë Novels Come Into Focus." Review of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* directed by Mike Barker. *New York Times*, 24 October 1997.

Jansson, Siv. "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Rejecting the Angel's Influence," *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture*. Edited by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, Palgrave, 1998, pp. 31-47.

Langland, Elizabeth. *Anne Brontë The Other One*. Macmillan, 1989.

---. "The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*. Edited by Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor, Northern Illinois UP, 1992, pp. 111-123.

Le Fèvre-Berthelot, Anaïs. "Audio-Visual: Disembodied Voices in Theory." *InMedia [Online]: The French Journal of Media Studies*, vol. 4, 2013.  
<http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/697>.

O'Callaghan, Claire. "Killing the 'Angel in the House': Violence and Victim-Blaming in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. *Intersections of Gender, Class, and Race in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond*. Edited by Barbara Leonardi, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 297-320.

Poteet, Clara. "The Word of a Woman, Thanks be to God: Women's Writing in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, no. 138, 2020, pp. 253-267.

- Quirk, Catherine. "Consent and Enclosure in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: "You needn't read it all; but take it home with you," *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, no. 3, 2020, pp. 231-41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/vct.2020.0018>.
- Reynolds, K. D. "Norton [née Sheridan], Caroline Elizabeth Sarah [other married name Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Stirling Maxwell, Lady Stirling Maxwell] (1808–1877), author and law reform campaigner." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford UP. 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20339>.
- Ruskin, John. "Of Queens' Gardens," (1864). Edited by Rosemary J. Mundhenk and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher, *Victorian Prose*, pp. 259-65, 1999.
- Senf, Carol. "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Narrative Silences and Questions of Gender." *College English*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1990, pp. 446-456.
- Sierz, Aleks. "Angel or Sister? Writing and Screening the Heroine of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Sisterhoods: Across the Literature/Media Divide*, Pluto P, 1998, pp. 16-31.
- Silverman, Kaja. "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice." *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*. Edited by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, U Publications of America, 1984, pp. 131-149.
- Stickney Ellis, Sarah. "The Woman of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits," (1843). Edited by Rosemary J. Mundhenk and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher, *Victorian Prose*, 1999, pp. 53-57.
- The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, directed by Mike Barker, screenplay by Janet Barron and David Nokes, performances by Tara Fitzgerald and Toby Stephens, BBC, 1996.



Thierauf, Doreen. "Guns and Blood: Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the Age of #MeToo." *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2020.

Thormählen, Marianne. "'Horror and Disgust': Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2019, pp. 5-15.

Vidal, Belén. *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre, and Representation*. WallFlower P, 2012.

Ward, Ian. "The Case of Helen Huntingdon." *Criticism*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2007, pp. 151-182.

## CHAPTER IV—IDENTITY AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH FEMALE

### GENDER EXPECTATIONS:

#### *WIDE SARGASSO SEA AND ITS FILMS*

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a postcolonial adaptation of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) that addresses issues of identity, intimacy, and race. Since its publication, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been adapted twice to film—once in 1993 and again in 2006. Rhys' work is included in this dissertation both for its interpretive response to Brontë's work and its remodeling of identity formation through the heroine Antoinette Cosway. In the previous chapters, I have argued how *Northanger Abbey*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* engage in women's rights to determine their identity based on their agency and personal growth beyond the limitations of Victorian British gender expectations, which is part of those novels' feminist characteristics. Nineteenth-century feminism, though, was restricted to White, middle-class Englishwomen. So, when Jean Rhys read Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, she found herself often troubled by Bertha Rochester's characterization. In a letter to journalist and literary editor Francis Wyndham, Rhys wrote, "For some time I've been getting down all I remembered about the West Indies as the West Indies used to be. (Also all I was told, which is more important)" and while this venture initially halted, it later came to fruition in *Wide Sargasso Sea* when Rhys realized,

I had material for the story of Mr Rochester's first wife—the real story—as it might have been. . . . It might be possible to unhitch the whole thing from Charlotte Brontë's novel, but I don't want to do that. It is that particular mad Creole I want to write about, not any of the other mad Creoles. There were quite a number it seems, and large dowries did not help them. On the contrary. (Rhys 136)

Through her own research on the state of the “West Indies as they used to be,” Rhys addresses the limitations of nineteenth-century feminism. Rhys’ work takes up the briefest of encounters in *Jane Eyre* by expanding on female Creole experiences – not often addressed in the nineteenth century British context – that express the detrimental and identity diminishing effects of British colonialism and gender expectations.

Many have agreed *Jane Eyre* is a female bildungsroman, and Brontë uses this format to show Jane’s development through her encounters in particular places/spaces, such as Lowood and Moor House.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Antoinette’s identity is established around places such as Coulibri and Granbois, a sugar plantation and the family summer home. A product of British colonialism, Antoinette Cosway (Mason) is subject to colonial race issues and an identity complicated by being neither of Black Caribbean descent nor of direct English descent. Her Creole heritage leaves her unsure of her place.<sup>60</sup> As Imen Mzoughi argues, “The classificatory racial and national imperatives borne by such a history [of imperialism and colonialism] have an impact on identities uneasily categorized in racial terms” which “produces the ambivalent position of the white creole among ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ in the ethnically and racially diverse Caribbean community” (93). Through the interference of British colonialism—represented by the tension between the Cosway/Mason family and the formerly enslaved peoples—and the application of Victorian female gender expectations—represented by Mr. Mason and Antoinette’s husband (the Rochester figure)—Antoinette’s identity is disrupted, broken, and eventually only reformed once she has been able to symbolically destroy British influence and power by burning Thornfield Hall. Rather than constructing the female heroine’s identity around personal agency or Victorian

---

<sup>59</sup> For more on *Jane Eyre* as female bildungsroman, see Lorna Ellis’ “Jane Eyre and the Self-Constructed Heroine” (1999).

<sup>60</sup> Though present-day, the term Creole has a broader meaning, its use in this chapter will refer “to those of English or European descent born in the Caribbean” (Raikin 18n2).

gender roles as Austen and the Brontës have, Antoinette's identity is built through place. Similar to Brontë, Rhys structures her novel around place, but rather than utilizing place to critique gender roles, Rhys uses the places themselves to show Antoinette forming a self. In adapting a nineteenth-century novel to a mid-twentieth-century perspective, Rhys challenges nineteenth-century feminism's limited applicability and burns down its symbolic confines in the form of Thornfield Hall.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* (1993), directed by John Duigan and adapted by Duigan, Jan Sharp, and Carol Angier, depicts the novel's tension between the White/Creole peoples and the Black/formerly enslaved peoples through look/sight. The film utilizes direct eye contact through eyeline match cuts to show people of the lower-class' self-assertion that disrupts social power structure.<sup>61</sup> This direct eye contact creates tension in the film that represents either Antoinette's precarious position in society or the subversion of patriarchal power dynamics between Antoinette and the Black/formerly enslaved people, Rochester and the Black/formerly enslaved people, or Antoinette and Rochester. Nudity and explicit sexual actions also create tension between male/female desire and objectification of both Antoinette and the formerly enslaved peoples.<sup>62</sup> Film critic Vincent Canby notes, "In the film, race is not only a fundamental concern of Jamaican society, but also a metaphor for the power struggle between Antoinette and Edward." The tension built in the film serves to represent the tenuous position Antoinette holds in her culture and the tenuous relationship between Antoinette and her husband. Like in the novel, as a Creole woman whose agency is attacked by cultural othering and patriarchal British

---

<sup>61</sup> Eye-line match cut – "An editing transition that shows us what a particular character is looking at. The cut joins two shots: (1) the character's face, with his/her eye clearly visible, then (2) whatever the character was looking at" or a "reciprocal eye-line match cut, and the cuts that follow, establish the two [or more] characters' proximity and interaction" (Gocsik, et al. 202).

<sup>62</sup> The 1993 film has an NC17 US rating.

influence, Antoinette's means of escaping tension and restoring agency is through burning Thornfield Hall.

Instead of focusing on racial tension, the 2006 *Wide Sargasso Sea*, directed by Brendan Maher and adapted by Stephen Greenhorn, utilizes conflicting gender and cultural expectations to highlight the negative effects of Victorian patriarchal standards on both men and women. Antoinette and Rochester's conflicts with the other's culture is embodied in each character's figurative "dream," a term each character utilizes in the novel and film to refer to their individual sense of distance from reality due to an internalized struggle with understanding and accepting the others' culture. Though Antoinette only resides in England for the latter portion of her life, this "dream" of England is present throughout her childhood and influences her identity formation because of her internal struggle between being English and being Creole. For Rochester, the "dream" is a place where English gender roles do not meet his expectations and therefore threaten his power and control, a place Rochester can only internalize as a "dream" rather than reality. For both Antoinette and Rochester, the "dream" is a place where each feels disempowered, which only feeds their insecurities and ultimately creates a prison they are incapable of escaping. In this adaptation, patriarchal society is often at the root of Antoinette and Rochester's inability to accept one another/their differing cultures. Rochester's position as a second-son and Antoinette's position as a Creole woman engenders each's insecurities in their social standing. Antoinette assuages these insecurities through sex with Rochester. Nonetheless, Rochester's insecurities are never fully assuaged, and, in the end, he utilizes Antoinette's inability to entirely conform to Victorian gender expectations to justify his claim for her mental instability.

### **Construction and Destruction of Place and Identity in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea***

Antoinette's identity and marginalization in both English and Jamaican society is frequently discussed as Antoinette's inability to fit into either culture, which therefore creates a rupture in her identity formation caused by colonialization and post-emancipation racial tension. Gayatri Spivak's well-known work asserts, "In the figure of Antoinette, . . . Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism" (250). And Elaine Savory argues that race "is complexly portrayed and tangled with gender, class and national identities in Antoinette, and these designate her as different in complicated ways from those around her" (86). Mzoughi argues, "the relational understanding of hybrid creole identity insists on fragmentation rather than essence, as it brings the creole into contact with the others, or more accurately, with different human beings" (94). And Sylvia Stromburg-Scherff argues that Rhys' novel does not "create a harmonious image of a multicultural society but stress[es] differences, disparities, and discordance," and continues her argument, saying, "The images of creole identities Caribbean women writers create are complex, composed of a variety of different perspectives. Diverse experiences collide, intersect, mix and form, metaphorically speaking, a 'kaleidoscopic' or 'prismatic' shape, a 'mosaic' or 'patchwork'" (369 & 372). Sylvia Capello's argument reviews both mimicry and mirrors—both literally and figuratively—in Rhys' novel to see how Antoinette attempts to find herself in either culture, but ultimately fails at doing so. In all, Antoinette is seen as "other," never fitting into one culture. The promise of acceptance, represented by her childhood friend, Tia, and her nameless husband is always an empty promise used to reassert others' cultural dominance over Antoinette.

Angelia Poon's work has notably argued how British peoples' othering women, both English and non-English, was a means of establishing ideal female gender expectations that built

an overall British national identity.<sup>63</sup> Victorian gender ideology upheld the middle-class domestic wife as the moral example to the nation. As a moral compass and safehouse from corrupting influences, she was a homemaker who tended to her children and husband. According to Poon's analysis, lower-class women were too associated with work outside the home in order to fulfill women's domestic purpose. English women of the upper-class were too associated with foreign idleness and opulence. Foreign idleness and opulence were further associated with England's nineteenth-century colonial subjects. As such, female colonial subjects were defined as non-English and outside of British female gender expectations of the nineteenth century. By showing how Antoinette's identity is based on place rather than Victorian female gender expectations, this chapter explores British gender expectations and the impossibility of building a female colonial identity around a specific set of gender expectations that rely on othering both colonial subjects and non-White women and men.

Due to her marginalization and social othering, Antoinette Cosway's identity is often constructed through place: the two family estates, Coulibri and Granbois, as well as Coulibri's garden and nearby bathing pool. However, these places that inform her identity are consistently destroyed, either literally or metaphorically, by a culture that will not accept her which highlights the destructive effects of British colonialism on both a cultural and individual level. As the novel opens, readers are immediately informed that due to Antoinette's family history, she is neither accepted by British descendants in Jamaica nor by the formerly enslaved peoples: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. Be we were not in their ranks" (Rhys 9). The family's social isolation is also shown when Antoinette explains how her mother—Annette—was often mocked for her fallen social and economic status. The two primary

---

<sup>63</sup> *Enacting Englishness in the Victorian Period, Colonialism and the Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 2008.

cultural bodies are often hostile towards Antoinette's family, as when formerly enslaved peoples kill Annette's horse. Imen Mzoughi, discussing these opening sections, astutely claims, "The classificatory racial and national imperatives borne by such a history have an impact on identities uneasily categorized in racial terms" (93). Rick Rodriguez continues this analysis, claiming Antoinette willingly gives herself entirely to one person or another in a way that "disregard[s] social boundaries" (288). However, due to cultural othering, identifying with one particular culture—as represented through the people to whom she attaches herself—fails to produce a stable identity leaving Antoinette to form identity around place.

Antoinette's identity as a young girl—wild, independent, and existing under precarious circumstances—is informed and mirrored in Coulibri's garden, where both girl and garden are left to nature. Antoinette's description of the garden merges with her description of her childhood, "All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush . . . This never saddened me" (Rhys 11). Antoinette is part of a new cultural moment—post-Emancipation—attempting to reset, and like the formerly enslaved peoples, Antoinette is simply attempting to discover her place and walk the "in between" she inhabits as the daughter of an unwealthy widow of a former slave owner. Like Coulibri and the garden, Antoinette often goes unattended and untaught for a large portion of her childhood. And like the untended garden, she prospers outside, and despite of, the cultural struggle of her homeland. As Elaine Savory notes, "In Antoinette's early days, she is full of life, but wild, like the nature that surrounds her" (*The Cambridge Introduction* 81). However, this natural wildness exists under precarious cultural circumstances. In her ecocritical reading of Coulibri's gardens, Savory discusses how "Botanical gardens, established in colonies of the empire, demonstrate British colonial domination over horticulture," and that Coulibri is "an Eden lost because of slavery and the human corruption that



entailed” (“Jean Rhys’s Environmental Language” 89, 88). Others, such as Susan Capello and Ellen Friedman, have similarly posited Coulibri’s garden as a fallen Eden. However, if we only look at the garden as a fallen Eden, then we fail to see its full connection to Antoinette who thrives in the garden.<sup>64</sup> While the garden is undeniably connected to post-Emancipation Jamaica, it is also an expression of Antoinette’s formation. As Coulibri’s eventual destruction demonstrates, the environment within which Antoinette builds her identity is wild, but also likely be crushed within a power struggle created by post-Emancipation circumstances that left White landowners and formerly enslaved peoples in a perilous power struggle.

The garden, though, is not Antoinette’s sole place of identity formation. Antoinette’s time at Coulibri Estate creates in her identity a contradiction between white superiority and a strong affection for the formerly enslaved peoples who work at Coulibri and/or her honeymoon home, Granbois.<sup>65</sup> The dichotomy of superiority and affection speaks to Antoinette’s identity founded in place as historically represented in Coulibri Estate. The family’s link to the estate and its fate causes them to humble themselves before the people they once ruled. Yet they maintain their pride in the estate and family. Capello notes, “Antoinette’s position in relation to the blacks is not well defined and is contradictory. She is, in a way, part of the black society for she shares experiences, superstitions, and beliefs” (49). While Antoinette does identify with the Black culture, she resides within both cultures, and both cultures combine to make up her identity. Rhys’ characters find problem with Antoinette’s identity when they attempt to force her into a particular social mold. The Black people who serve at Coulibri and Granbois feel bitter about

---

<sup>64</sup> See Silvia Capello’s “Postcolonial Discourse in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized People vs. White Supremacy” (2009) and Ellen G. Friedman’s “Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (1989).

<sup>65</sup> For a reading of *WSS* that questions the Creole narrative Rhys provides and argues Rhys’s work is an “indictment of domestic fiction through the vindication of the Creole madwoman in *jane Eyre*,” see Carolyn Vellenga Berman’s “Indicting Domestic Fiction: *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (2006).

Antoinette's sense of superiority and her family pride; at the same time, her husband's aversion for her stems from her affection and appreciation for Black people and their culture. Mzoughi notes how Antoinette resides in an "in-between position" that "evoke[s] the multiple consequences of colonialism and plantation system on the white creole identity" where she is forced to choose "an essential identity so that she may occupy a space in the existing racial and cultural hierarchy" (97-98). But Antoinette struggles to exist in solely one place of identity, which sustains this dichotomy of her learned white superiority and the place she seeks out in the Jamaican Black culture. Defining the contradiction(s) in Antoinette's identity defines her relation to other cultures and self.

Antoinette gains her identification with Black peoples' culture during her childhood, but also internalizes a desire to fit into the white dominant culture. It is while at Coulibri that Antoinette learns patois and Christophene's songs that Antoinette later sings at Granbois. As Ambreen Hai notes, "Christophene's sayings constitute Antoinette's world" (493). Coulibri is where Antoinette gains an appreciation for the island's scents and culinary traditions that contrast with Mr. Mason's, and later her husband's, tastes. A primary example of the dichotomy occurs during Antoinette's childhood as she attempts to adapt to her stepfather's way of living. Antoinette notes different meals of "beef and mutton, pies and puddings" are prepared to which Antoinette says, "I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophene's cooking" (Rhys 21). Antoinette's reflection reveals her internalized awareness of the dominant white culture that contrasts with her desire to find comfort with Black people's culture that provides a sense of stability and familiarity throughout her childhood through Christophene who acts as a second, more affectionate mother.

The bathing pool, where Antoinette spends time with her childhood friend Tia (a Black, but not Jamaican, girl), is another place of identity formation. For it is Antoinette's time with Tia that explicates Antoinette's struggle to form an "essential identity" by showing their initial friendship turn to animosity inherited from British colonial influence and the slave trade. As a young girl, Antoinette describes a moment when "a little girl followed me singing 'Go away white cockroach, go away, go away'" (Rhys 13). It first appears that Antoinette's experience with Tia will provide Antoinette with acceptance and make the bathing pool a safe space away from cultural competition. At the bathing pool, the girls often swim, eat, and nap together. During this time, Antoinette expresses a clear admiration for, and perhaps even jealousy of, Tia: "fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry" (Rhys 13). However, Hai's argument also notes Antoinette's "internalized racism, especially in her encounters with Tia, and her idealization of a friendship not reciprocated by Tia" (519n19). After Tia mocks Antoinette, Antoinette calls Tia by a racial slur, which Tia reciprocates. Each young girl falls into cultural animosities engendered by British colonialism. As readers, we can see that, for Antoinette, a friendship with Tia represents cultural acceptance. So, while the bathing pool begins as a place of healing—healing a wound caused by the little girl taunting "white cockroach"—time with Tia deepens the fissure in Antoinette's identity.

Future moments with Antoinette—such as when Antoinette runs to Tia as Coulibri burns—will prove she cared more for Tia and the acceptance she symbolized, and less for their cultural differences. Even then, Tia enacts physical violence that emotionally wounds both Antoinette and Tia. Capello argues, "they feel that something has been lost. They see each other as in a mirror image. . . . As the image in a mirror is not exactly the same as reality, so the two girls are somehow similar but still different, they are separated as reality is separated from its

image” (49). Tia and Antoinette’s time together shows how British colonialism embittered the people near Coulibri and led to Antoinette’s inability to find security in relationships with those who could not understand her perspective. As a place of identity, the bathing pool is metaphorically destroyed by the young girls’ inherited positions in a post-slavery culture.

Coulibri is destroyed from a combined result of the Victorian gender hierarchy and racial tension caused by Annette’s husband, Mr. Mason. As a result, its destruction leads to a deeper fissure in Antoinette’s identity and to Annette’s weakened mental state. For Coulibri and its gardens, literal destruction is caused by the formerly enslaved peoples burning the house after Mr. Mason vocalizes his plan to bring in workers from India. Mr. Mason, then, is the figurative cause of Coulibri’s downfall for his actions stem from arrogance that causes an inability or unwillingness to accept Annette’s experiences and the conclusions she has drawn about the Black peoples. His patriarchal and British sense of superiority both over women and people of color leads him to assume Annette is simply overreacting and that the people of color are too simpleminded to enact violence. In contrast, what Annette and Antoinette know is “that out here is not at all like English people think it is” (Rhys 20). Like her daughter, Annette holds affection and respect for people of color, for example: her refusal to allow Mr. Mason to speak racial slurs. Mr. Mason’s assessment that the people of color are like “children – they wouldn’t hurt a fly” and furthermore are too lazy for violence is what leads to Coulibri’s destruction (Rhys 21). Furthermore, Mr. Mason’s faith in his own superiority affects his wife as well as Coulibri. Though previously disempowered by her loss of wealth, Annette maintained personal autonomy and agency that is revoked in her marriage to Mr. Mason. His refusal to accept her experiences as legitimately authentic and her inability to physical leave and even return to the burning Coulibri symbolizes the mental and physical power her husband removes from his wife. As Blais

argues, Mr. Mason causes Annette to “lose her ability to conceive of herself from any other position than her husband’s.” This is a power beholden to him by the British patriarchal and colonial society even though they both live under post-Emancipation law. Therefore, it is Mr. Mason’s refusal to accept differing points of view that influences Coulibri’s destruction and the subsequent removal of an integral place in Antoinette’s identity formation.

Antoinette’s final site of identity, Granbois, is destroyed by her husband’s inability to accept Antoinette’s non-Englishness, which is expressed in her non-conformity to British gender ideology and her affection for and participation in Black culture. In her husband’s mind, Antoinette threatens his sense of superiority and accepted reality when she crosses Victorian gender norms and participates in Black cultural practices and beliefs, such as obeah, dances, scent in her hair, and her knowledge of the land. Rather than noting likenesses or positive character traits, the husband’s initial perspective on Antoinette begins the process of othering: “Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (Rhys 39). Nearly the same problem that vexes Antoinette as a young girl bothers her husband. Though she looks as one thing—like a White British woman—she is made up of multiple place relations that make it difficult to categorize her into a single identity. Discussing the husband, Mardorossian argues, “there is no self outside of the relational identity that needs to put down its feminized and racial other to shore itself up. His masculinity entails no selfhood that would pre-exist its construction through that hierarchical relation” (149). When his marriage does not reinforce his concept of masculinity founded in Victorian gender roles and cultural superiority, he feels destabilized and threatened.

Where he sees his own actions/reactions as sane, he understands the same actions/reactions in Antoinette as insanity, which highlights the double-standard in British

accepted norms in British verses foreign behavior.<sup>66</sup> Unlike Helen Huntingdon after her husband's adultery, Antoinette is violent, drunk, and outspoken in her anger. And where Helen initially shows shame and a sense of responsibility for her husband's actions, Antoinette forthrightly blames her husband. To her husband, Antoinette is simply too manly, often responding in ways similar to his own. For example, where Antoinette bites and breaks a bottle for a weapon, her husband is sexually violent: Christophene notes, "I undress Antoinette so she can sleep cool and easy, it's then I see you very rough with her eh?" (Rhys 91). Where Christophene can sarcastically dismiss rough sex as "a little thing—it's nothing," Antoinette's husband cannot view Antoinette's physical violence as "a little thing" (Rhys 91). Similarly, Antoinette drinks her unhappiness away, and her husband likewise goes to the rum cabinet and later thinks "Indeed this rum is mild as mother's milk or father's blessing" (Rhys 97). His simile implies what he cannot get from either paternal or marital relations; he implies what Antoinette was meant to fulfill for himself—domestic assurances from a wife and the reciprocation of his father's approval by marrying a wealthy woman. But Antoinette is unable to fulfill his domestic fantasy. As such, the husband views Antoinette's actions as insane because they are more like his own, making her in his mind too manly, or too foreign, to serve as a proper British wife.

The husband's methods of controlling and making Antoinette a more known or familiar entity. He changes her foreign-sounding name—Antoinette—to Bertha, making her into something more familiar and therefore easier to subdue. Spivak has argued this renaming is an act of violence, and Blais further argues that renaming stands for "entrapment in a symbolic attic,

---

<sup>66</sup> For a more comprehensive reading of Antoinette's husband and his development in both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, see Robert Kendrick's "Edward Rochester and the margins of masculinity in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wide Sargasso Sea'" (1994).

Also interesting to note, Sue Thomas' reading of the novel includes seeing Rochester, in part, made up of Othello, which would place Daniel Cosway – Antoinette's possible brother and instigator of Rochester's belief in Antoinette's insanity and promiscuity – as an Iago figure.

. . . in a patriarchal household” and that he “distances Antoinette to a place where he has symbolic [and political] control over her.” Muste adds, “the Man begins actively turning Antoinette into the ‘Bertha’ of *Jane Eyre*, redefining her identity and contributing to her madness,” which is an attempt “to control her and her identity” (74-75).<sup>67</sup> In essence, his words have a more powerful effect in that they continue to break Antoinette from Granbois by breaking identity forming memories she has of the place. Antoinette’s husband also tries and fails to use sex as a means of familiarizing Antoinette as a male object of desire. There are also hints of sexual violence that implies her husband uses sex as a means of subduing Antoinette.

Antoinette’s connection to place means that sex becomes a symbolic means of asserting dominance over an unknown land that often, to his eyes, appears hostile. It is in one of their intimate encounters that Antoinette shows her submission, telling the husband, “tell me to die and I will die” (Rhys 55). He responds with dominance: “Die then! Die!” (Rhys 55).<sup>68</sup> Antoinette believes she may have found an accepting place alongside her husband, and her offer to die is her willingness to cast off her old self and create a new existence with her husband. The husband’s response, by contrast, signals his desire for all changes to come from Antoinette. Yet, despite his attempts to make Antoinette a known object of desire and to conquer their difference, his narration claims, “she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did” (Rhys 55). Despite his sexual attempts to make her a familiar and recognizable object through their shared sexual encounters, he fails to make her into something English or “reasonable,” which Blais defines as “a story he [the husband] recognizes and can understand.” Granbois’ destruction and the final fissures in Antoinette’s identity are founded in his rejection.

---

<sup>67</sup> Muste’s work also delves into the husband’s namelessness. Where other scholars, many referenced in this dissertation, directly refer to the husband as “Rochester,” Muste calls Antoinette’s husband “the Man,” and discusses this namelessness alongside obeah.

<sup>68</sup> This moment is also often interpreted as Rochester urging Antoinette into sexual orgasm.

As each site of Antoinette's identity formation is destroyed, whether literally or metaphorically, bits of Antoinette are likewise tainted or destroyed, which leads to her mental confusion when living in England. When Antoinette and her husband return to England two things result. First, Antoinette is removed from her sites of identity. And second, the renaming that positions her as something "reasonable" and therefore mentally and politically controllable has been successful. Antoinette's childhood land was always her definition of self and safety: she found comfort in "the barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe" (Rhys 16). This description of Coulibri can also be a simple description of Granbois. Removing Antoinette has in effect removed her known self. In her argument, Blais claims, "As a result of being locked in the attic, she discovers that subjectivity defined by shifting place can no longer work for her" (n.p.). I continue this analysis by claiming Antoinette realizes the only means left to restore self is to follow the dreams she has had since childhood. By doing this, she moves into a real space where she destroys her literal confines that are a metaphor of her life's attempt to make peace with her identity. In destroying Thornfield, she regains her power by breaking down the metaphorical walls symbolically responsible for the effects of British colonialism and gender expectations that broke apart her identity.

Antoinette cannot fulfill her husband's expectations because she does not form her identity around gender roles as was so often the case for British Victorian men and women. And her failure of Rhys's women to conform to gender roles is, for the patriarchs who dominate them, evidence of insanity. When Annette's and Antoinette's male partners fail to be that—partners—the women are locked away. Rather than aided, the women are condemned. As Christophene puts it, "I say this is not a man who will help you when he sees you break up. . . . she have the sun in her. . . . and you break her up" (Rhys 94, 95). The expected gender roles placed women as



moral and emotional comforters to their husbands. Victorian home stability was founded on a woman's ability to provide mental relief to her husband. Antoinette needs a partner who can provide this for her. Yet, his own misperceptions gained through British colonial ideology and gender expectations prevent him from embracing an unfamiliar femininity or embracing for himself a hybrid form of masculinity that would involve rejecting aspects of his own reality, such as British racial superiority and patriarchal gender hierarchy.

### **Racial Tension, Sex, Land, and Eye Contact**

In Duigan's adaptation Antoinette's identity is partially formed, or even primarily informed, by Black Jamaican culture that Rochester feels threatened by, because he cannot identify with Antoinette, consider her his equal, or see her as respectable by English social standards. In view of this, Duigan's adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* focuses on racial tension by utilizing eye-line match cuts to show direct eye contact that dramatizes Antoinette's precarious position in society as a Creole woman and the child of former slave owners. Furthermore, tension highlights and, at times, subverts patriarchal power.<sup>69</sup> As in the novel, Antoinette is often identified with land. However, rather than use land as identity building, the film uses Antoinette's relation to the land to reveal Rochester's objectification of Antoinette and the formerly enslaved peoples. Also, explicit sex scenes between Antoinette and Rochester, as with the novel, are a means of taming and expressing power. These scenes often become violent when Rochester feels at his weakest. Furthermore, power dichotomies that would typically place Rochester in charge are reversed through eyeline matches between himself and the Black women

---

<sup>69</sup> In her dissertation on Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Duigan's adaptation, Ana Maria Garcia Álvarez examines the film as an ideological inversion of Rhys' proto-feminist and proto-postcolonial themes, stating, "Rhys's narrative, constructed from the perspective of the colonized female subject, is undermined and reversed within the masculinist and colonialist narrative focalization in Duigan's adaptation which . . . reproduces various myths and stereotypes associated with race" (243).

and men who work at Granbois. The eyeline matches often leave Rochester uncomfortable and the workers at Granbois laughing, which challenges Rochester's authority. Furthermore, while Antoinette would appear to lose her agency through Rochester's eventual dominance over her life, as with the novel, Antoinette reasserts agency by burning down the final site of tension—Thornfield Hall—that represents the cause of much antagonism in her life: British colonialism. Overall, the film's focus on racial tensions between Creole/White people and the formerly enslaved/Black people is iterated through sites/sights that often explore or deny typical power dynamics, and by the film's end, the symbolic site of racial tension—Thornfield—is destroyed and Antoinette's agency is restored.

Racial tension between the Cosway family and the Black people at Coulibri is built by sight, or direct eye contact, that highlights a power struggle that ultimately shows the Cosway's impotent position in society. As Maria Pramaggiora and Tom Wallis argue, eyeline matches and scene cuts can both express a character's mindset, as well as reveal group dynamics (222-223). They continue, "editing offers filmmakers a powerful tool for drawing the audience's attention to what is important within the diegetic space. It allows filmmakers to bring the audience's perspective closer to (or further from) the action that unfolds in the story space" (223). Duigan's adaptation intentionally utilizes scene cuts to express racial tension between the Cosways and to draw attention to the Cosways' impotence. The first instance of sight tension occurs as Annette rides into Coulibri and the Black workers derisively call Annette racial slurs and openly watch her. Though Annette is on horseback—which would appear to place her in a position of power—the scene is filmed from a high angle that makes Annette's and the worker's physical placement appear nearly equal. Avoiding their gaze and quickly walking by, Annette calls for Christophene—shot in closeup from a low angle to reinforce her power—who confronts the men

silently with her look, which the workers receive with expressions of fear and discomfort while leaving the yard.<sup>70</sup> The scene makes clear that for the Cosway family to survive the tensions between themselves and the formerly enslaved peoples, the Cosway women need a powerful intermediary: Christophene. With their knowledge of Christophene's use of obeah, the local people are unwilling to cross Christophene, and so, for a time, their animosity only appears through sites of tension as defiant and derisive looks and jeers. And Duigan's adaptation utilizes direct gazes and eye contact to unsettle and revoke colonial power dynamics that would place White Creole people over the formerly enslaved workers.

Tension is similarly built between the Cosway family and the White/Creole families on the island through levels of watching. As Annette and Antoinette need Christophene to survive tension with the workers at Coulibri, so they also need Mr. Mason to survive in the White/Creole social world. Antoinette observes the interactions between her mother and the hostilities of a culture the newly formed Mason family does not entirely fit within. As she observes seated in a high position on a staircase, she looks down at two women speculating on Annette and Mr. Mason's marriage while the same women watch the newlyweds walk into the crowd. Their speculations on how Annette 'won' Mr. Mason begin with obeah and end with lamentations for Mr. Mason being "seduced by a woman like her" (Duigan 04:12). Though Annette and Mr. Mason are joining the crowd, the women's observations assure viewers that the marriage has cemented neither Annette nor Antoinette into White/Creole society. While the women's gazes and the film's eyeline match indicates a clear hierarchy of power, Antoinette's positioning in the scene disrupts the women's power. Having Antoinette above them, while they are positioned higher than the newlyweds, gives audiences a new subject to engage with and thus disengages

---

<sup>70</sup> For more on Christophene in Duigan's adaptation, see Hjalmar Rivera López's "The Obeah Woman: Christophene in John Duigan's Film Adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (2015).

viewers from the women's conversation, enabling viewers to question the women's judgment. And while viewers can align themselves with Antoinette rather than the women's judgmental conversation, the leveling in the scene and its cuts still enforces the new Mason's family social position is not entirely secure.

Furthermore, that Mr. Mason goes on without hearing the women's gossip contrasts with Christophene's actions at Coulibri. While Christophene is alerted and effectively acts to protect Annette, Mr. Mason is entirely unaware and is therefore incapable of seeing even a need to protect his wife and stepdaughter. His lack of awareness, scenes will later reveal, are due to his sense of superiority that will lead to the fall of Coulibri and his wife's mental illness. But before this occurs, Annette's marriage to Mr. Mason provides a means of reentering White/Creole society, yet does not remove tensions between Antoinette's family and White/Creole culture. As the White women's glances and talk prove, the Mason family's respectability in White/Creole culture is tenuous at best. The tenuous relationship—both between Antoinette and the formerly enslaved/Black peoples and the White/Creole peoples—further plays out with Antoinette, Rochester—specifically named so in the film—and the workers at Granbois.

As Antoinette and Rochester reside at Granbois for their honeymoon, glances and eye-line matches further build racial tension by disrupting the patriarchal power structure. Racial tension is caused by Rochester's consistent discomfort with the workers' refusal to treat him as a superior. Their agency and sense of equality is expressed by often directly meeting Rochester's looks or by providing glances that express knowledge—such as Rochester's sexual desire for Antoinette—that would otherwise be improper to discuss between an employer and hired servants. Their gazes then are a frank admission and recognition of their own agency, which they utilize when Rochester is no longer a man for whom they choose to work. Examples of these

frank and direct gazes begin when the servants at Granbois line up for introduction to Mr. Rochester. As Nelson, the estate manager, welcomes Rochester, all three working women and Antoinette laugh at Rochester's discomfort and Nelson's nervous, verbal stumbling. Rather than stifling themselves, they express familiarity and equality. Another example occurs one morning after Rochester and Antoinette have sex. When Rochester asks Hilda, Rose, and Amelie—serving women at Granbois—"How are you all today?", Amelie replies with a small smile, "Very tired, Sir. Are you very tired?" (Duigan 33:49-54). Rochester addresses Amelie's smile and comment by mounting his horse and leaving. Rochester's discomfort implies he expects servility from workers rather than their frank or open demeanors. So, when this expectation is not met, the tension between himself and the Black workers at Granbois grows.

Duigan's adaptation, particularly through an added dance scene, shows Amelie challenging power through look as she is often the main source of direct eye-line matches and indirect expressions of knowledge.<sup>71</sup> She furthermore threatens the power structure by challenging Antoinette and by openly expressing her sexual desire for Rochester. For example, Amelie and Hilda along with other members of the town and household are dancing at Granbois. This scene is not found in the novel but is a strong example of Antoinette's outsider status in White/Creole society and Black society on the island. It further serves as a means of explicating subverted power dichotomies.<sup>72</sup> The scene begins lightheartedly. As Antoinette walks outside,

---

<sup>71</sup> An additional dance scene in a Spanish Town ballroom allows Rochester to fully see Antoinette's non-Englishness and realize Antoinette is not the norm for White/Creole thought on the island. In looks and opinion, Rochester's dance partner is Antoinette's foil; where Antoinette is olive toned with dark hair, the young woman is light-skinned and blond. And where Antoinette shows a deep appreciation for the island and people that makes it clear Granbois is home, the young woman declares Spanish Town could have never been home, saying, "even in the good times, it was no fit place for a lady" (Duigan 56:54). The woman's declaration reinforces to Rochester that Antoinette is unknown.

<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting that some scholars, such as Sue Thomas, use this scene as an example of Duigan's adaptation relying on "primitivist tropes" of overly sexualized Black women (Thomas 34). But Thomas also analyzes the scene as an example of Antoinette's "cross-racial identifications" (34). Discussing an earlier dance scene that intercuts between Antoinette and Rochester consummating their marriage, Elaine Savory's review of the film also asks the

the drummers stop but shortly begin again as she smiles and begins dancing in the same style as Hilda and Amelie. Other members of the circle—both players, sideline dancers, and dancers—regain their lighthearted expressions. The scene, though, quickly becomes competitive as Amelie challenges Antoinette through large dance movements that nearly push Antoinette outside the dance circle until Antoinette recognizes the challenge and rejoins the dance. Amelie and Antoinette are shot in mid-closeup, where viewers see Antoinette has lost her smile and that each woman is inches from the others' face. While this scene further highlights Antoinette's in-between status, never fully fitting into one culture or another—and for Rochester, Antoinette's improper participation in Black Jamaican culture—it also shows Amelie rejecting any sense of servility. In directly challenging the mistress of the home—whom Amelie later refers to in racial slurs—Amelie expresses her own right to hold and wield power. Amelie openly disrupts the power structure at Granbois by challenging Antoinette, which asserts Amelie's place as social equal and sexual rival.

As in the novel, sex and desire are a means of making the 'other' familiar through sexual domination. Through sex and desire, Rochester attempts to make Antoinette into something known, but this ultimately fails. In early Granbois scenes, Rochester and Antoinette are often shown as mutual sexual partners. Their shared nakedness initially appears to make them equal. However, the scenes begin to alter into an objectification of Antoinette's body. Furthermore, as Rochester receives letters about Antoinette's past, sexual knowledge fails as a means of knowing or making Antoinette familiar due to his own paranoia because Rochester's power and knowledge in the bedroom does not extend to power over or complete knowledge of Antoinette's

---

question, "When Rochester and Antoinette make love as European music mingles with the sounds of the drums and the sexually charged dancing performed by the black members of the household outside, isn't a racially undereducated audience going to read this in the light of white stereotypes of black sexuality?" (13).

past and her ties to the culture.<sup>73</sup> Through her connection to the local culture—exemplified in her care for the people and participation in the dance at Granbois—Antoinette is increasingly non-English, and Rochester attempts to utilize sex as a means of making her a knowable female object.<sup>74</sup> Some scholars, though, argue “the film seemed . . . to naturalise the gendered eroticised racism” (Thomas 32). And Garrett Stewart argues the sex scenes “debas[e] the feminist empathies . . . with a reductive equivalence between feminine perspective and female point-of-view, itself pinioned and submissive,” while further claiming “the subordination of the woman” can be seen “by the female POV of the mounting and thrusting male torso: the style of X-rated immediacy rather than romantic voyeurism” (174). Both Stewart and Thomas argue the film implicitly endorses the subjugation of women and naturalizing gendered racism, and while I concede that Duigan’s adaption does show primitive tropes, gendered racism, and male subjugation of women, I argue that this is done not to endorse said behavior but to highlight its destructive effects as shown in Rhys’ post-Emancipation Jamaican setting.

Furthermore, Rochester and Antoinette’s explicit post-sex scenes often connect Antoinette with the land and Rochester as a symbol of colonial and patriarchal exploitation. This level of metaphorical connection between Rochester and Antoinette’s sexual acts furthers the

---

<sup>73</sup> In analyzing the opening scene—a sailor drowns while clearing seaweed (symbol for female genitalia) from the rutter of the ship (“phallic rudder of colonial transatlantic traffic”) in which Rochester arrives—Thomas argues that when Rochester dreams of drowning in seaweed it follows him facing his fears of Antoinette’s racial purity, such as when Daniel Cosway writes to him and when Antoinette dances with the Black peoples at Granbois (32).

<sup>74</sup> In fact, Rochester’s expression when finding Antoinette participating in the dance with the Black servants of Granbois is another cause for racial tension between them, not to mention how English women would not be found dancing with their servants.

Furthermore, Vincent Canby and co-authors Arash Moradi and Alireza Anushirvani argue the actress cast as Antoinette, Karina Lombard, adds an elimint of race not found in the novel due to her darker skin tone, referred by Moradi and Anushirvani as “almost colored” (105). Lombard is of Lakota Native American heritage (Canby). Moradi and Anushirvani take issue with Lombard’s casting, claiming “Duigan introduces the charm of the unfamiliar to the movie in order to arouse the interest of the white audience enabling them to fantasize about the possession of a colored female ‘slave’ figure by the white male ‘master’ figure” (105). While Lombard’s skin tone may be considered an interpretive liberty taken in adaptation, it can also be argued that the difference in skin tone between Antoinette and Rochester is another mean of purposefully highlighting the couple’s racial differences to continue Rhys’ discussion on the identity diminishing and agency-removing effects of colonialism.

film's iteration of tension caused by British colonialism. This exploitation and tension is further highlighted when Antoinette and Rochester's sex scenes become violent. Antoinette is visually linked to the island's landscape by cutting from moments where Rochester is watching Antoinette's naked body to extreme longshot landscape scenes that often replicate Antoinette's curves. Conquering Antoinette both politically and sexually is a means of continuing patriarchal control. And as with colonialism, violence appears when power is uncertain. As Rochester begins to doubt his full control over Antoinette and questions whether he has been fooled, his sexual acts become violent in order to dominate the woman who symbolizes his lack in power and knowledge. Furthermore, for Rochester, Antoinette's link to the land and culture also make her an unknown. The more she behaves as the people of the island and less like an Englishwoman, the less known she is to Rochester and therefore is more threatening to everything that has constituted his power relations and sense of self.

Rochester's quest for restored power is perhaps best dramatized in the final sex scene. By showing a final scene of physical dominance, the film explicitly shows what Christophene implies about sexual roughness. Physical representation of Rochester's sexual violence affirms that Rochester's rough sexual acts do not stem from reciprocated sexual desire, but only begin once Rochester feels he has lost control. By the final sexual scene, Antoinette is aware of Rochester's adultery and in response, no longer reciprocates Rochester's sexual attention. After the two circle one another like fighters in a ring, Rochester forces himself on Antoinette. Through Rochester's half smiles, the scene plays as if he believes this is a moment of reciprocated sexual roughness, but Antoinette spits into his face, and his smile fades. He responds by getting off Antoinette and walking away. It is once Antoinette refuses to forgive Rochester's mistreatment of their marriage and her body that Rochester fully commits to



believing Antoinette is insane. Therefore, through sexual dominance and violence, it appears Rochester has asserted his power over his wife both politically—as a husband who can have her declared mentally insane—and as colonial military man conquering a new land.

Though it appears Rochester has won, his removal to England feels more like a retreat to safe space rather than a victorious return. His victory, I argue, is only an appearance for while he has stripped Antoinette's agency and removed her from the place and culture that informed her life and actions, she has not lost her will. Though it takes years, Antoinette regains a semblance of herself when she decides to burn Thornfield Hall. Throughout the film, music has acted as another background character and often appeared alongside Antoinette. At first, it seems the music is only a means of creating atmospheric tension and a means of establishing a specifically themed score that is associated more with merengue music of the islands than with the typical orchestral scores often accompanying period dramas. However, as the location switches to England, we realize the score was not only used to create atmosphere but was also a means of expressing Antoinette's sense of self. Leaving Jamaica for England, the score transitions over a cut from their departure to Rochester galloping over a snowy field; the score fades out and only returns when Antoinette finds herself falling back into her childhood memories. The score continues to accompany Antoinette as she walks through Thornfield and eventually cuts to the roof where Antoinette dances as the fire she created turns the sky into an artificial sunrise. If Antoinette has lost the places that made up who she was, she regains them by burning down Thornfield.

The scene's music and filming does not produce feelings of tension, drama, danger, or rushed action but plays out peacefully as Antoinette dances on the rooftop to reflect Antoinette's internal sense self. The film removes her leap from the building, so that credits rolls as she

dances. In this moment, Antoinette dances unchallenged by Amelie and unbeckoned by Rochester (as happens when Antoinette is on the roof in Rhys' and Brontë's novel). Film critic Vincent Canby has claimed the women of Rhys' world "manage to have wills of steel that outlast even their sanity" (C6). In this final moment, Antoinette asserts her will and experiences momentary freedom from the pressures of either culture: Creole/White and formerly enslaved/Black. Antoinette has created a space for herself that functions under her own determinations. The soft and peaceful tones overplaying what could become a tense and melodramatic moment, imply Antoinette has finally regained at least a fraction of herself and has conquered Thornfield Hall, the symbol of the cultural constraints she often encountered.

### **Sex, Insecurities, and The Negative Effects of Patriarchy**

Reviews of Maher's adaptation often take contrasting perspectives that range from "this [is] a laborious adaptation" (Starkey) to "this compelling drama doesn't simply illuminate the current Jane Eyre : like the novel it is based on, it eclipses it" (Hughes).<sup>75</sup> Maher's adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* focuses less on racial tension than Duigan's, instead dramatizing patriarchy's negative effects on both men and women. This often plays out in Antoinette and Rochester's inability to accept the others' culture—the "dream"—due to their own insecurities. The film introduces patriarchy's influence over both Antoinette and Rochester by opening with an establishing shot of Thornfield Hall, a symbol of English patriarchy as land was historically passed down from father to son, establishing men as owners and rules. Thornfield's literal and symbolic presence plays on the characters' lives and is the source of their problems.

Furthermore, because the film removes Antoinette's opening childhood narrative, it might appear

---

<sup>75</sup> At the time of writing this chapter, there is no attainable scholarly research on Maher's television film adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

that the film prioritizes the male over the female voice and experience. However, the film balances Antoinette's and Rochester's perspective with Rochester's voice-overs and Antoinette's ability to open and close the narrative: it is through her gaze that we enter the body of the narrative and through her actions that the narrative closes. The film also expresses the negative effects of patriarchy with jump cuts, sound, and camera angles that express each character's mental distress that stems from their positions in society.

Expressions of negative patriarchal influence appear through Rochester's sense of inferiority that stems from his position of second son. Excluded from the family estate by Victorian legal primogeniture, his feelings of inferiority are partially caused by his need to leave England to provide for himself. Like many women of the nineteenth century who were encouraged to travel to the colonies in search of a husband, Rochester travels to Jamaica for a wife, which places Rochester in the feminine position of marrying for financial stability.<sup>76</sup> A Victorian woman's ability to marry well would often be based on her reputation and financial position, which are constant concerns for Rochester throughout the film. Moreover, his internalized desire to prove himself to his father is a secondary insecurity and motivates him to marry for wealth. His circumstances lead him to Jamaica where he mentally inhabits the "dream" he and Antoinette experience when attempting to accept the reality of the others' culture. This dream is consistently fed by their insecurities.

Rochester fears ruination from loss of reputation and name for they are a means of proving himself to his father. Rochester's fear for his reputation often plays out as non-diegetic,

---

<sup>76</sup> For a nineteenth-century point of view on women immigrating to the colonies for husbands, see W. R. Greg's "Why Are Women Redundant?" (1862), and for a twentieth-first-century discussion on such, see LeeAnne M. Richardson's *New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain: Gender, Genre, and Empire* (2006).

cacophonous whispers that expresses his paranoid concern of others' opinions and gossip.<sup>77</sup>

Rochester's anxiety is the whisper's only source and is first heard as Rochester waits outside to marry Antoinette: in a mid-shot, Rochester begins fiddling with his sleeves, but depicting Rochester's increasing anxiety, jump cuts provide a closeup of Rochester's face all the while whispers overlay the action. Rochester's fidgeting, the camera's jump cuts, as well as the closeup and whispers emphasize his uneasiness and paranoia. Furthermore, in this scene, the jump cuts are also occasionally interspersed with nearby people. Their presence, both literally and symbolically, accentuates Rochester's paranoia for his reputation. Although Rochester and Antoinette's marriage is meant to solidify his place in his upper-class patriarchal society, it does not solve all Rochester's issues.

Rochester's paranoia about his reputation is also expressed in physical violence in moments when Rochester feels his reputation is tainted by his connection to Antoinette due to her unknown past. Daniel Cosway—Antoinette's supposed half-brother—threatens Rochester's connection to Antoinette by insinuating she was sexually active prior to her marriage and by claiming Antoinette has inherited her mother's mental illness. Rochester listens to Daniel attentively, but as Daniel finishes his tale, Rochester shouts, "You are talking about my wife" while forcefully shoving Daniel (Maher 41:33). Rochester again expresses similar violence when they meet on a path just moments after he again hears the whispers. Daniel plays on his awareness Rochester's paranoia—emblematic of English culture—when he shouts he will "shut my mouth, sir, and do everything quiet like the English do" (Maher 51:42). Throughout the film, "everything quiet like the English do" is reinforced by the letters Rochester writes but does not send, letters that perpetually express Rochester's sense of inferiority and his father's

---

<sup>77</sup> Non-diegetic – "Not diegetic; *esp.* (of sound in a film, television programme, etc.) having a source external to the world of the story, and not heard by the characters." – Oxford English Dictionary

mistreatment. Rochester writes, “I have sold my soul, or perhaps you have sold it,” and later considers his father’s motives were “to make a fool of me,” as Rochester suspects his father knew Antoinette’s entire history (Maher 00:02:07-12, 01:18:32). So, when insinuations about Antoinette’s reputation reach Rochester, the tension that has been building within influences him to react self-protectively and violently. Rochester’s marriage to Antoinette then comes across as a desperate effort to secure his position within patriarchal society as represented by Thornfield and his father. Without Antoinette, Rochester’s social position is tenuous since as a second son he will inherit little from his father. Also, Rochester’s assertion that his father new of Antoinette’s history cements Rochester’s suspicions that he has been sold and removed from England like a fallen Victorian woman sent to the countryside.

Antoinette is also affected by the patriarchal system, especially her stepfather’s patriarchal assertion of verbal and legal power over Annette that leaves Antoinette fearing for her own safety and others’ acceptance of her credibility. Through this fear, though, Antoinette self-censors her past, which, combined with Rochester’s paranoia, weakens her husband’s perception of credible and sane speaker. Antoinette learned through her mother’s experiences the power of a husband’s words. When Antoinette shares her mother’s history with Rochester, she emphasizes that a man’s words can confine his wife: her mother is imprisoned because Mason claims that Annette tried to kill him. Following her mother’s experiences, Antoinette fears losing her husband’s faith. For example, when she and Christophene discuss Rochester’s emotional and physical distance from Antoinette, Christophene advises she share the entire Cosway/Mason history to assuage Rochester, and it works. However, Antoinette falls prey to her fear, poisoning her husband for one more night of sex. His subsequent affair leads her to violence and later an outwardly stoic composure. Antoinette falls prey to her husband’s legal superiority when he

claims she is mentally unwell, when in reality, she no longer fits within Rochester's concept of a proper British wife. Antoinette bluntly tells Rochester, "Doctors will say whatever you tell them to" (Maher 1:20:38). Antoinette's fears come to fruition because her husband's disbelief in her sanity, as she knows from experience that husband's assertions will be upheld by a patriarchal society that legally subsumes a woman's position to her husband.

As in Rhys' novel, once Rochester begins doubting Antoinette's mental stability, or feels powerless, he marks notes of insanity based on Antoinette's performance of—or failure to perform—Victorian gender ideology. The film opens on Thornfield to introduce the looming patriarchal influence over both Antoinette and Rochester. Shortly after, Antoinette escapes her imprisonment in the attic, and while walking the rooms, she lingers at a life-size portrait of a young Englishwoman in a pink dress. This portrait highlights gendered Victorian expectations as a component in Antoinette's deteriorated mental state. Her fixation informs viewers of the larger-than-life and even unrealistic standards of Victorian femininity. The painting represents both a false image of reality being that it is created and therefore unnatural. And the painting also gives viewers immediate knowledge: Victorian gender standards are a partial cause of her present prisoner status and mental state. The portrait would appear innocuous. Yet the power of that image of womanhood is evidenced as Rochester utilizes Antoinette's different gender expression as proof of her mental instability.

For Rochester, Antoinette's attire becomes a means of determining her Englishness, and he then uses Antoinette's dress to inspect her mental wellness and reassert control. His first negative comment on her attire appears after he begins doubting her history. When Antoinette leaves their bedroom with only her dressing gown on, he orders she dress. As Rochester is consistently fixated with appearance because of his insecurities, controlling Antoinette's external

self is a means of reinstating his own control. A contrast appears between Antoinette's appearance prior to their marital problems. She initially takes delight in having Rochester dictate his preferences for her dress, such as wearing the white dress and keeping her hair up. Yet as their marriage disintegrates, her hair is consistently disheveled or worn completely down, as when she visits Christophene for the love potion. Her disheveled state is the outward appearance of her mental distress, but in a scene when Rochester insists Antoinette is his "beautiful lunatic," Antoinette sits styling her hair as many films prior have styled Jane Eyre's. Antoinette wears her hair back in a low bun with her two front pieces parted in the middle and pulled back behind the bun. Her dress, which previously was often a light pastel color, is now a dark brown/Black with a large, white lace collar. By dressing Antoinette as filmmakers have often dressed Jane Eyre, the film shows Antoinette has broken from her own reality and is embracing the "dream." Though Antoinette does not accuse Rochester of *obeah*, as happens in the novel, Rochester has successfully transformed Antoinette into a new self, something so English that she cannot fully recognize herself.

However, Antoinette cannot fully inhabit ideal Englishness, and Rochester utilizes this to declare her mentally unfit. It may seem that the film is complicit with Rochester by not utilizing Antoinette's voice-overs to narrate her past, as Duigan's adaptation does, as well as through camera angles and lighting that distort Antoinette's facial features, making her appear mentally unstable. I would argue, though, that the film supports Antoinette's subjectivity by opening and closing the narrative at her command. Narrative action begins in the attic with Antoinette, whose physical movement propels the narrative forward. The camera follows Antoinette as she arrives in a gallery or hearth room where Rochester is asleep in an armchair. It is only when she turns from Rochester and finds herself exploring a landscape of Jamaica that the film enters the past

events leading to Antoinette locked in Thornfield's attic. Leading into Jamaica through Antoinette's gaze permits two things. First, viewers are permitted access to both Rochester and Antoinette's past by following Antoinette's gaze, which gives Antoinette the power to access both their pasts. Second, opening the Jamaican narrative with Rochester's arrival in Spanish Town makes viewers enter the film the same way Rochester and Antoinette meet one another: with no knowledge of either's history until their history is provided by their own dialogue.

Unlike Duigan's adaptation where sex is often a means of knowing/making familiar, sex in the Maher's adaptation reveals Antoinette's need for sex as assurance of love, safety, and protection; for Rochester, sex becomes the space where he most often deals with the discomfort of Antoinette's unrequited love. The "say die, and I will die" scene is instructive. The scene depicts the couple having intercourse, but Maher's film removes Rochester's response; he does not command Antoinette to die. Instead, he lays himself on her but looks off into the distance. Rather than triumphantly realizing the power he possesses by achieving Antoinette's love, as Duigan's Rochester does, Maher's Rochester experiences guilt. His unsent letter to his father claiming the elder Rochester has now sold his son's soul takes on more poignancy. For Rochester, sex has become another means of commerce. Rochester has already felt himself sold, both in body and soul, by his father through the commercial nature of his marriage to Antoinette. As, Antoinette's sense of love, peace, and security—which Rochester promises to provide—is achieved through sex, Rochester in a sense purchases these feelings for Antoinette through physical intimacy.

Dramatized through scene lighting and oblique camera angles, Antoinette's mental and emotional distress when Rochester ends their sexual relations stress sex was her means of feeling peace, love, and safety. This is strengthened by Antoinette's firm belief that another night of



intercourse will win Rochester back to her. Further, the film utilizes lighting and camera angles to provide the full sense of Antoinette's desperation when requesting obeah from Christophene. As Antoinette speaks with Christophene, the house is ill-lit with the only light coming in from one window. The sunlight touches Antoinette's right side, while her tilted head and wide-open eyes make her appear drawn, haggard, and mentally unwell. Rather than legitimately being on the edge of insanity, as the angle may imply, Antoinette is desperate, not mentally ill. The camera angle and lighting do not negate her reliability, but rather engage the audience with the depth of her desperation and how she has become entirely reliant on Rochester for her own internal sense of love and safety.

Ultimately, the couple's final post-sex scene—post-love-potion sex—is the couple's fall into their own patriarchally-inspired paranoia: Rochester experiences the ultimate betrayal from Antoinette in feeling she has, like his father, manipulated him. And for Antoinette, this scene is when she realizes she has broken her chances for love and protection. Their post-sex scene cuts between Antoinette, who is vigorously and desperately attempting to scrub out the word "POISON" on their mirror that Rochester wrote, while Rochester is sitting naked at the side of the bathing pool and hitting his left thigh with his hand. The film dramatizes the tragedy of the novel's Rochester's assertion, "I swear it was before I drank that I longed to bury my face in her hair as I used to do. . . . She need not have done what she did to me. I will always swear that" (Rhys 82). Maher's film interprets this moment, not as sexual, but as Rochester's realization of his and Antoinette's shared positions. Following Christophene's orders, Antoinette does not use the love potion until after she shares her history with Rochester. In the moment prior to drinking the wine, Rochester states, "We are letting ghosts trouble us" (Maher 1:06:13). In that brief time, Rochester appears to finally recognize he and Antoinette share a mutual burden—that of being

forced to act under others'/patriarchal influences that have negatively dictated their lives. But his empathy is lost when he realizes Antoinette has manipulated him. Therefore, to him, she has destroyed her credibility and reinforced his previous fears for her sanity. And for Antoinette, Rochester's subsequent adultery, that to him reasserts his own sexual power and sense of control, only cements her own fears.

The final scene at Granbois emphasizes that each have succumbed to their paranoia, a paranoia deriving from their insecure place in patriarchal society and have failed to live up to the social or emotional expectations of the other. The contrast between how Antoinette and Rochester's relationship began to how it ends highlights their failure. Where Antoinette previously questioned Rochester's promises of love and peace with, "but you don't know anything about me," before leaving Granbois for England, she now responds to his assurances with, "I don't know anything about you" (check the quotes and time stamp). Where Antoinette so desired Rochester's affection, his voice-over after his adultery and their physical altercation begs for any sign of affection from "my beautiful lunatic" (Maher 1:19:54). Now, it appears Rochester would find his security in Antoinette's physical affection. And Rochester's stoic appearance has been, if not exchanged, then taken up by Antoinette. Their altered positions reveal their failure to thrive in a patriarchal society, for Antoinette's paranoia created an emotional need for love from Rochester and led to self-censorship that silenced her on her mother's past. Furthermore, Rochester's paranoia for his reputation and desire to please his father led to similar self-censorship that kept him from asserting his self to his father. Rochester is incapable of rising to the patriarchal challenge of controlling his reputation and fails to utilize Victorian gender roles to maintain his wife. Through her inability to perform Victorian femininity, she is incapable of securing her marriage and removing her fears.

Both Rochester and Antoinette are hardened by their experiences, but this gives Antoinette the necessary internal will to close both their stories. Where Rochester desired Antoinette's compassion when leaving Granbois, Antoinette waits for a moment to "do battle for yourself," as Christophene once advised (Maher 55:45). Antoinette has said, "I am not a forgetting person," so though she does not commence battle immediately, viewers have an assurance that the film's opening scene will end with Antoinette's victory (Maher 01:02:22). And such is the case as the film follows Antoinette to the roof and with little effort and a small smile, she leaps from Thornfield's battlements. As the flames take the place of where she was standing, Antoinette's agency is restored. Unlike in *Jane Eyre*, viewers are given no assurances that Rochester has escaped. By not including him on the roof when Antoinette jumps, she is now in the most powerful position of her own life. There is no patriarchal interference in Antoinette's choices. While this initially appears triumphant, the film ultimately expresses how neither truly possessed the power of an unburdened choice and shows how both Antoinette and Rochester could not thrive within their nineteenth-century patriarchal system.

## **Conclusion**

No matter the adaptation, the "dream" the characters cannot accept, whether it is the others' culture, differing gender expectations, or patriarchy, is destroyed in the end. It seems, though, that perhaps for Rhys, the "dream" was also feminism. Jean Rhys' writing explores the restrictive nature of Victorian feminism. Having been troubled by the brief depiction of Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, she sought to tell the story of Brontë's Creole woman as a dramatization of the experiences of Creole women as Rhys new of them. Rhys' work concludes that women will not experience agency until feminism becomes more inclusive. The films explore Antoinette's position in society either by focusing on racial pressures and gender expectations or

the detrimental effects of patriarchy. Overall, the films concur with Rhys' message that agency is only restored when the thing restricting agency—Thornfield, and all that it represents—is destroyed.

### Works Cited

- Berman, Carolyn Vellenga. "Indicting Domestic Fiction: *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery*. Cornell UP, 2006, pp. 169-186.
- Blais, Joline, "Qui est La?: Displaced Subjects in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein*." *College Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1993.
- Canby, Vincent, "Mrs. Rochester No.1, Long Before 'Jane Eyre.'" *New York Times*. 16 April 1993, p. C6. *Proquest Historical Newspapers*.
- Capello, Silvia, "Postcolonial Discourse in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized People vs. White Supremacy." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2009, pp. 47-54.
- Ellis, Lorna. "Jane Eyre and the Self-Constructed Heroine." *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750-1850*. Bucknell UP, 1999.
- Friedman, Ellen G. "Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*. Edited by Ellen G. Friedman and Mariam Fuchs, Princeton UP, 1989, pp. 117-128.
- Garcia Álvarez, Ana M. *Ideological Inversion in the Cinematic Adaptations of "Memories of Underdevelopment" and "Wide Sargasso Sea": A Study Based on Narratology and Adaptation Theory from a Postcolonial, Feminist Perspective*. 2012. University of Puerto Rico, PhD Dissertation. *ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis*.
- Gocsik, Karen, et al. "Eye-line match cut." *Writing About Movies*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Norton, 2013, pp. 202.
- Greg, W. R.. "Why Are Women Redundant?" *The National Review*, April 1862.

- Hai, Ambreen. “‘There is Always the Other Side, Always’: Black Servants’ Laughter, Knowledge, and Power in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2015, pp. 493-521.
- Hughes, Sarah. "OTV: Monday 9 October: Pick of the Day: Passion, Lies and Madness: *Wide Sargasso Sea* BBC4, 9pm." *The Observer*, Oct 08, 2006, pp. 6.
- Kendrik, Robert. “Edward Rochester and The Margins of Masculinity in ‘Jane Eyre’ and ‘Wide Sargasso Sea.’” *Papers on Language and Literature*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1994, pp. 235-256.
- López, Hjalmar Rivera. “The Obeah Woman: Christophene in John Duigan’s Film Adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.” *Caribbean Without Borders: Beyond the Can[n]on’s Range*. Edited by Gabriel J. Jiménez Fuentes, et al., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 244-251.
- Mardorossian, Carine. “#Metoo in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.” *Wide Sargasso Sea at 50*. Edited by Elaine Savory and Erica L. Johnson, Springer International Publishing AG, 2020, pp. 143-159.
- Moradi, Arash and Alireza Anushirvani. “John Duigan’s 1993 Film Adaptation of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Repossessing and Reclaiming Rhys’s Liberated Antoinette/Bertha.” *Journal of Language Horizons*, vol. 1, no.1, 2017, pp. 95-107.
- Muste, Peter. “Authorial Obeah and Naming in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.” *The Explicator*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 73-76.
- Mzoughi, Imen, “The White Creole in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*: A Woman in Passage.” *HSS*, vol. 1, 2016, pp. 88-110.
- "non-diegetic, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, December 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/69156318](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69156318).

- Poon, Angelia. "English Homebodies: The Politics of Spectacle and Domesticity in Mid-Century Victorian Conduct Literature and *Jane Eyre*." *Enacting Englishness in the Victorian Period*. Ashgate, 2008. pp. 21-47.
- Pramaggiore, Maria, and Tom Wallis. *Film: A Critical Introduction*. 4th edition, Laurence King Publishing, 2020.
- Rhys, Jean. Letter to Francis Wyndham. 29 March 1958. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, edited by Judith L. Raitskin, Norton. 1999.
- . *Wide Sargasso Sea*. 1966. Edited by Judith L. Raitskin, Norton. 1999.
- Richardson, LeeAnne M.. *New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain: Gender, Genre, and Empire*. UP of Florida, 2006.
- Rodriguez, Rick. "The Servant's Laughter in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 27, no.4, 2016, pp. 275-293.
- Savory, Elaine. *The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys*. Cambridge UP. 2009.
- . "A Creole of Pure English Descent? Review of the Film *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Jean Rhys Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1994, pp. 11-16.
- . "Jean Rhys's Environmental Language: Oppositions, Dialogues and Silences." *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First Century Approaches*. Edited by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran, Edinburgh UP, 2015, pp. 85-106.
- Schomburg-Scherff, Sylvia. "Women Versions of Creole Identity in Caribbean Fiction: A Cultural-Anthropological Perspective." *Matatu*, no. 27, 2003, pp. 367-374.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 243-261.

Starkey, Gabrielle. "Television Choice." *Times (London, England)*, sec. Features, 9 Oct. 2006, p.2 21.

Stewart, Garrett. "Film's Victorian Retrofit." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1995, pp. 153-198.

Thomas, Sue. "Revisionary (Post)Modernist Plausibilities? Paul Monaghan's Staging of Obeah Night and the Film of *Wide Sargasso Sea*: A Commentary." *Jean Rhys Review*, vol. 8, no. 1-2, 1997, pp. 30-35.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, directed by John Duigan, screenplay by Jan harp, Carol Angier, and John Duigan, performances by Karina Lombard and Nathaniel Parker, Laughing Kookaburra Productions, 1993.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, directed by Brendan Maher, screenplay by Stephen Greenhorn, performances by Rebecca Hall and Rafe Spall, BBC, 2006.



## CONCLUSION

Like the Victorian novels discussed in this dissertation, their adaptations are a means of social activism. Adaptation engages and interprets not just novels but also cultures for a present-day audience. They gauge society's responses to the social movements of previous and present times. Kerri Lee Alexander states, "it is impossible to accurately pinpoint specific dates that started or ended each wave of feminism. In reality, each historical era was inspired by a long tradition of activism that transcended generational lines." The films analyzed in this dissertation engage with these generational lines of activism, for the art of adapting novels to film or television involves the heavy work of interpreting material for the adaptors' audience. Regardless of questions of fidelity or authorial intent, adaptors must engage with the original text in order to determine motifs, motivations, and how the narratives' outcomes came to be.

By engaging with the source text, the adaptors must also engage with the culture that fed the narrative while maintaining an awareness of their own cultural moment. Thomas Leitch argues that "Victorian novels, with their well-ordered stories of rich and varied characters set against a believable social canvas, seem ripe for adaptation. . . . their often prodigious length, density of incident, accretion of detail, and psychological penetration all pose what one might call exemplary challenges to cinematic adaptation" (7). Furthermore, Catherine Paula Han argues that the emergence of Victorian novels-to-film on the BBC shows how viewers were curious to explore the hidden lives of Victorians. In consequence, adaptations delved into what Ian Ward calls the "fortress of privacy" surrounding Victorians' personal lives (154). Following David Giles and James Cellan Jones' adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga* (1967), which boldly depicts marital rape, Sadsy's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* continues depicting Victorian women's wrongs in marriage for an audience just beginning Second Wave Feminism. In our present time, a

plethora and range of Victorian novel-to-film adaptations have reached the screen, each investigating the “psychological penetration” of the novels, as well as the cultural moment that fed such thinking.

What we gain from analyzing decades of Victorian novels’ adaptations is the knowledge that the psychological realities of Victorian peoples and their political movements are present for even today’s viewership. One conclusion to this dissertation is that decades of adapters have struggled with interpreting, engaging, and representing female voices on screen. Both Stevenson’s and Fukunaga’s *Jane Eyre* is a strong example of this struggle: Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* presents a strong first-person female narrator whose focalization of her own experiences provides her internal reflections that determined an individual self-hood beyond that of Victorian female gender roles. Stevenson’s adaptation forgoes focalizing Jane and instead uses her voice to focalize Rochester and reinforce patriarchal ideology. Fukunaga’s adaptation, though not utilizing the voice-over like Stevenson, presents a stronger female voice by prioritizing Jane’s subjectivity through her flashbacks and physical movement, but even this argument is up for debate as a 2011 film review of Fukunaga’s *Jane Eyre* claims “There is no Eyre of feminism about this modern Jane” (Cox). While I adamantly disagree with David Cox’s review, Cox’s claim is just another reason to continue adaptation studies, so filmmakers and scholars alike can delve deeper into what representation, engagement, and interpretation mean.

Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* famously engages with eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fears of women reading novels. Her activism is most often discussed in terms of how the narrator directly addresses readers. But the novel’s cultural engagement and activism extends beyond reading by providing a solution to the fear of fiction-readings’ influence. Through Catherine Moorland, Austen proclaims women’s need for a larger social experience.

For Catherine, a broader knowledge of the world means a better understanding of human character and therefore a stronger personal and social awareness that empowers Catherine's ability to function in society without being taken advantage of by men who would want their wives to echo their own worldviews and by men and women alike who would use Catherine for their own personal agendas. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have claimed Catherine loses personal agency—the power of authorship—when her gothic daydreams are shattered. Perhaps, in never maturing or extending Catherine's social awareness beyond her daydreams, Giles Foster's adaptation sought to maintain Catherine's agency. Ultimately, though, Catherine needs social power, and Foster's adaptation does not provide the personal growth Catherine needs to develop the personal agency necessary to successfully navigate society. Jon Jones' adaptation, though, ensures Catherine gains social acumen and personal agency. Like Foster's, Jones' adaptation brings Catherine's daydreams to the screen. Unlike Foster's adaptation, though, Jones' Catherine daydreams less and less as she realizes, in Samuel Johnson's words, "the common course of life [is] very fertile of observation and reflection" (444). In gaining this understanding, Catherine gains the necessary social acumen and personal development beyond eighteenth-century expectations for young women needed to thrive in her society.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* perhaps holds the most pronounced claim to social activism. The above statement may seem ironic considering the chapter argues Brontë's heroine, Helen Huntingdon, *self-censors* her experiences with domestic abuse due to cultural ideology that blamed women for their husband's misconduct or moral wrongs. But even with her self-censoring, Brontë's depictions of drunkenness, implied sexual abuse, and verbal abuse shocked contemporary readers. Today, though, scholars astutely connect Brontë's novel with the #MeToo movement that inspired women to speak out on their previously untold experiences

with abuse. The only two filmed adaptations do not ignore the novel's motifs, but rather bring them to the screen and delve into the novel's implications. Peter Sadsy's adaptation, according to Han, was part of the BBC's intent to create a solid cultural presence while also moving into a more mature and serious audience. Sadsy's adaptation does not balk from dramatizing Milicent Hargrave's abuse and even adds an original scene between Helen and Milicent where the two women briefly and openly discuss their problematic marriages.

Mike Barker's adaptation (1996) wholeheartedly engages with implications of sexual, physical, and verbal abuse. Going so far as to purposefully use the male gaze to represent the male tendency to objectify women, Barker's adaptation is bold, but also ensures the male gaze is not the primary means of focalizing Helen's narrative. Instead, the adaptation resituates narrative authority to Helen by opening in her strongest moment of agency, in using the female voice-over to allow audiences into her past, and through original scenes that show how events around Wildfell Hall affect Helen, rather than how what happens to Helen affects Gilbert. Furthermore, Charlotte Brunsdon's research finds that women in British television during the 1990s were struggling to achieve equal pay in film, were without paid maternity leave, and were having statistically fewer children than men working in television. It is not surprising then to find that the tale of a Victorian single mother struggling to maintain custody of her child was adapted to screen in 1996. Though scholars have identified the complexity of the novel's embedded storytelling as the reason there are only two film adaptations of Brontë's novel, Sadsy and Barker have proven that adaption solicits an interpretative creativity, allowing generations to engage in an ongoing social activism.

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* as an adaption with its own adaptations probes a problematic aspect of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and bridges nineteenth-century feminism's

limited applicability to Second Wave feminism's goal "to demonstrate that race, class, and gender oppression are all related" (Rampton). Taking up one of the briefest, yet significant, moments in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys' novel decisively dives into the identity-disrupting effects of British colonialism and Victorian gender roles. Previous chapters explored female agency as women matured or constructed a self beyond cultural gender expectations. But Rhys' work furthers the discussion with a female character who constructs a self based on place, rather than internal agency or gender expectations, and, unlike female characters in the previous chapters, never achieves the necessary agency to successfully navigate her society. The novels' two film adaptations explore the "why" behind Antoinette Cosway's identity disruption and lack of agency. Duigan's adaptation focuses on the novels' racial tension, while Maher's adaptation prioritizes the main characters' insecurities and inability to accept the others' differing culture. These adaptations were released as theorists like Giyatri Spivak, whom the *New York Times* proclaimed was a "celebrity scholar," "making a stir wherever she goes," and Homi Bhabhi, whose works focus on colonialism, the subaltern, and mimicry, were reaching beyond the academy (Smith). Rhys' work and its adaptations continue social activism by pushing at the reasons why cultural othering occurs and dramatizing the destructive results.

In concluding the dissertation, it is useful to explore how this research can be expanded to future projects. Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859) and its two film adaptations (1948 and 2018) would be exemplary texts for investigating how past and present social activism remains connected. The novel's social commentary ranges from legal marital abuse to a complete distrust of the British legal system to properly investigate and prosecute cases involving wronged women. It would also be useful to explore whether the author's gender impacts the novel's social commentary. For example, the primary investigative action occurs

through Walter Hartright, while the female characters, Laura and Marian, tend to Laura's healing and maintain the home, all of which contrasts with Austen's Catherine who actively investigates Mrs. Tilney's death, Charlotte Brontë's Jane who determines her own path, and Anne Brontë's Helen who removes herself from domestic abuse. Additionally, it would be productive to determine how director Peter Godfrey's adaptation (1948) interprets and represents these motifs on screen, especially when considering that like Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*, Godfrey's *The Woman in White* is also a melodrama film of the 1940s. Similarly, the film's use of female voice and subjectivity would be interesting topics in light of the novel's clearly negative portrayal of the patriarchy. Furthermore, Carl Tibbetts' televised serialization (2018) of Collins' novel particularly engages with female gender expectations: the series changes the ending by having the masculine sister leave for adventure travels rather than remain home with her sister and brother-in-law. Furthermore, though beginning in 2006, the #MeToo movement gained the popular press' attention in 2017 when allegations of Harvey Weinstein's abuses came to the forefront of popular media (Chicago Tribune). Tibbetts' *The Woman in White*'s release is contemporary with the #MeToo movement's media attention and correlates a past and present concern with men and women's distrust or disbelief in receiving justice.

Other projects, like the current Reimagine Residents program at Jane Austen's House where digital artist, Tricia Yu, is presently adapting *Northanger Abbey* into an interactive visual novel, are also open for discussion on Victorian novels' adaptations. Creating interactive multimedia adaptations expands audiences, provides a new means of investigating nineteenth-century novels, and creates the space for more voices to engage with past and present social activism. Furthermore, projects like Yu's helps remove negative stigmas of the Victorian canon's elitism by show audiences that canonical literature is for all. Ultimately, there is no end to the

investigative possibilities of researching and analyzing the various Victorian novel-to-film adaptations. What these investigations will always provide, no matter the theoretical approach, is an ongoing cultural engagement with works that actively question and respond to the social moment.

### Works Cited

- Alexander, Kerri Lee. "Feminism: The First Wave." *National Women's History Museum*. 5 April 2021. <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-first-wave-0>. Accessed 17 March 2023.
- Brunsdon, Charlotte. "Not Having it All: Women and Film in the 1990s." *British Cinema of the 1990s*, edited by Robert Murphey, British Film Institute, 2000, pp. 167-177.
- Chicago Tribune. "#MeToo: A Timeline of Events." *Chicago Tribune*, 4 February 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmlstory.html>. Accessed 17 March 2023.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. 1859. Edited by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Broadview, 2006.
- Cox, David. "There is no Eyre of feminism about this modern Jane." Review of *Jane Eyre*, by Cary Fukunaga. *The Guardian*, 12 September 2011.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Yale UP, 2000.
- Han, Catherine Paula. "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's (1848) Residence at BBC: Neo-Victorian Adaptations in the 1960s and 1990s." *Neo-Victorian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 32-67.
- Jane Austen's House. "We're delighted to welcome our third Reimagine Resident, Tricia Yu." *Instagram*, 14 March 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cpw7gdUteVE/>. Accessed 16 March 2023.
- Leitch, Thomas. "Reframing the Victorians." *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*. Edited by Abigail Burnham Bloom and Mary Sanders Pollock, Cambria, 2011, pp. 1-23.



Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University Oregon*. 25 October 2015.

<https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>. Accessed 17 March 2023.

Smith, Dinitia. "Creating a Stir Wherever She Goes: Gayatri Spivak, Celebrity Scholar, Says

Those Who Find Her Work Difficult Are Not Really Taking It Seriously Creating a Stir

Wherever She Goes, and Refusing the Label 'Difficult' A champion of the oppressed,

even the mad wife in 'Jane Eyre.'" *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 09, 2002, pp. 2.

*The Woman in White*, directed by Carl Tibbets, screenplay by Fiona Seres, performances by

Jessie Buckley, Olivia Vinall, and Ben Hardy, BBC, 2018.

*The Woman in White*, directed by Peter Godfrey, screenplay by Stephen Moorhouse Avery,

performances by Eleanor Parker, Alexis Smith, and Gig Young, Warner Brothers, 1948.

Ward, Ian. "The Case of Helen Huntingdon." *Criticism*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2007, pp. 151-182.