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# The Classic-Novel Adaptation from 1995 to 2009

Rebecca Arwen White

## Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamic relationship between the nineteenth-century novel and the screen, interrogating evolving trends in film and television adaptation from the mid-1990s to 2009. In contrast to many other studies in this field, such productions are understood as both adaptations *and* ‘costume dramas’, whilst the often neglected televisual context is highlighted alongside the paratexts which shape and surround adaptations. At the same time, the enduring (yet often dismissed) notion of ‘fidelity’ is recognised and developed, as expectations of faithfulness extend beyond the literary text to privilege the legacies of prior adaptations. As this thesis will show, classic-novel adaptations are increasingly framed by change and tension, as movements towards ‘contemporising’ representations of the past, and reinvigorating costume drama, have been shadowed by a growing unease with the stylistic innovation and ubiquity of the genre.

An introductory chapter outlines theoretical approaches towards, and critical studies of, adaptation and costume drama, contextualising this thesis whilst defining new directions for study. Chapter one focuses upon Jane Austen, re-exploring the significance of Andrew Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) and examining ‘Austenmania’s’ tense pull between tradition and innovation. Chapter two considers how conflicting perceptions of what constitutes ‘Gaskellian’ become interlinked with the struggle to characterise contemporary period adaptation. Chapter three explores the evolving interrelationship between the Brontës, the ‘Brontë Myth’ and the screen, whilst chapter four readdresses the long history of adapting Dickens, the ‘Dickensian’ film redefined by Davies’s ‘soap-like’ treatment of *Bleak House* (2005). A concluding chapter examines classic-novel adaptation in 2009, returning to Austen as emblematic of many of the issues confronting the genre, and offering some thoughts about its immediate future. Above all, this study interrogates the ever-shifting relationship between text and screen, enabling refreshing interpretations of both novel and adaptation.



# The Classic-Novel Adaptation from 1995 to 2009

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A thesis presented for the degree of  
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University of Durham

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---. "'No attire had ever so well become me': The Significance of Costume in Franco Zeffirelli's Adaptation of *Jane Eyre*." *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Frédéric Regard and Augustin Trappenard (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008). 115-126.

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## Introduction

“I have heard of a faithful performance” exclaims Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, his comment encapsulating Jane Austen’s subtly ironic and self-reflexive adaptation of literary conventions; as Tilney discovers, Catherine Morland – a self-proclaimed heroine – constructs a Gothic romance out of her experiences at Northanger, which performs faithfully, re-configures and deconstructs the motifs and preoccupations of Austen’s writing.<sup>1</sup> The nineteenth-century novel has long been associated with the phenomenon of adaptation. Dickens’s stories, for instance, were famously reproduced and re-explored by other writers during his own lifetime. On the one hand, the resulting proliferation of different versions of Dickens’s novels privileges his literary creations, redirecting attention onto his texts; as Erica Sheen argues, Foucault ‘is right about the way the adaptive return reinforces a link between authors and works’.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, responses to rewritings of Dickens’s novels indicate the complex – and frequently conflicting – interplay between literature and adaptation, as the ‘original’ work is perceived as almost sacred, its ‘meaning’ in need of protection against the encroachment – and yet powerful ubiquity – of reinterpretation.

Such issues, however, become especially pronounced in the relation between the novel and the screen, not only in terms of semiotics but also culturally. Although Kamilla Elliott maintains that the nineteenth-century novel ‘in some sense *became* film’, noting Sergei Eisenstein’s proclamation that ‘from Dickens, from the Victorian novel, stem the first shoots of American film aesthetic’, there has existed, as Thomas Elsaesser comments, a ‘war of independence’ between English Literature and Film (and, latterly, Television) Studies.<sup>3</sup> Fundamental to this divide is the traditional assumption that film, and, more specifically, cinema and television broadcasting, are part of popular culture and consequently lack the aesthetic and intellectual refinement of high or middle-brow culture. Indeed, despite George Bluestone’s passionate belief in the artistic integrity of film, his pioneering comparative study – *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (1957) – recognised the medium prior to

the 1950s as an ‘upstart’ seeking to ‘accept respectability’ and ‘adult consideration’.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, theoretical debate has struggled with adaptation, with certain scholars maintaining its unfeasibility as a concept. As Elliott comments, ‘at the heart of the novel and film debate lies a particularly perplexing paradox: on one side, novels and films are diametrically opposed as ‘words’ and ‘images’, at war both culturally and formally’; such a divide was compounded in early screen adaptation studies by Bluestone’s assertion that ‘the novel is a linguistic medium, the film essentially visual’.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as Joy Gould Boyum argues, adaptations themselves occupy ‘a no-man’s-land, caught somewhere between a series of conflicting aesthetic claims and rivalries. For if film threatens literature, literature threatens film, and nowhere so powerfully, in either instance, as in the form of adaptation’.<sup>6</sup>

To a considerable extent, however, the critical climate of the later twentieth century has provided a framework within which adaptation has been understood – and arguably accepted – in new ways. As Peter Brooker notes, ‘postmodernism [...] brought with it a new vocabulary and perspective upon relations between the real and the image, and the present and the past’.<sup>7</sup> Interest in Bakhtinian intertextual dialogism, together with Genette’s writings on hypertextuality (*Palimpsests*, 1997), unsettled ‘the hierarchies and prejudice governing the common response to adaptations’.<sup>8</sup> Most particularly, as Linda Hutcheon has analysed, the idea of a novel as the ‘original’ or ‘source’, to which an adaptation must remain ‘faithful’, began to be challenged, for ‘by their very existence, adaptations remind us there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history’.<sup>9</sup>

Recent critics have, for example, protested against ‘novel and film studies’ neglect of [...] films that adapt other films’.<sup>10</sup> An emerging interest in inter-filmic dialogue has shaped newer studies of adaptation, thereby complicating notions of fidelity, canonicity and the acquirement of ‘classic’ status. As Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan recognise, ‘the appearance of a new film version may latterly confer classic status on its elder sibling upon which it may derive some of its shape’, whilst, significantly, ‘the film adaptation can usurp the appellation ‘classic’ from its literary source’.<sup>11</sup> As Bluestone proclaimed in his early study, films can achieve a ‘mythic life of their own’.<sup>12</sup>

Linked to this is a growing understanding of the reception of adaptations; the work of Linda Hutcheon has helped to illuminate the importance of audience perceptions of adaptation as a phenomenon, leading to an appreciation of ‘adaptations *as adaptations*’.<sup>13</sup> Increasingly, therefore, criticism is remedying Sarah Cardwell’s observation that ‘adaptations are rarely studied for themselves – rarely is interpretation valued as much as theorising’, as ‘broader theoretical issues take precedence over local aesthetic concerns’.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, even Sheen’s and Giddings’s return to fidelity theory and ‘close reading’ offers stimulating discussion in their collection of essays, *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen* (2000). Particularly interesting is Sheen’s assertion that ‘the tendency for “fidelity critics” to make objections’ which are ‘couched in terms of amorphous ill-defined disapproval is in itself a phenomenon worthy of analysis’.<sup>15</sup> Sheen therefore broadens fidelity theory as a concept, as she posits that ‘the way adaptations produce not just animosity, but incoherent animosity, suggests that what are at stake are institutional definitions and identities rather than textual forms and contents’.<sup>16</sup>

It is within this dynamic context and ever-changing critical landscape that this thesis explores and further interrogates screen adaptations of nineteenth-century English novels. Authors to be discussed include Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontës and Charles Dickens. In contrast to many other studies, adaptations will be examined through a dual perspective, appreciating their status as both adaptations *and* ‘costume dramas’, a genre which demands responsiveness to its own legacies and conventions. At the same time, despite the current interest and reinvigoration in the field, it is recognised that theorising about adaptation has remained problematic and contested. Overwhelmingly, research into screen adaptations of ‘classic’ novels is still dominated by certain biases which, as is being increasingly illuminated, obscure or neglect vital areas of study. This thesis therefore approaches contemporary classic-novel adaptation not simply as a theoretical process but as a cultural, technological and artistic phenomenon which has evolved rapidly over the past two decades.

The very timeliness of such research is indeed a point of interest in itself. The fascination which adaptations of classic novels continue to exert, over academic and mainstream audiences alike, is a significant fact worthy of critical attention, and has been paralleled (and consolidated) by the emergence of several

new forums within which the phenomenon can be discussed. Alongside Internet sites, such as The Republic of Pemberley and BBC web-pages, two new journals – the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* and *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen* – present specific arenas for scholarly debate about the subject, working with and developing the ideas explored previously in periodicals such as *Literature/Film Quarterly*.<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, an ITV documentary, broadcast in November 2008, charted the developments in classic-novel adaptation as a genre and as a phenomenon.

At the same time, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* (2007) has provided an overview of many of the most recent book-length studies of adaptation, whilst contextualising the debate through commentaries on the history of the field. Offering new papers written by leading scholars, the collection opens up questions and areas of study, and recognises the sheer diversity of approaches to, and the characteristics of, adaptation. This has indeed been consolidated by a growing number of academic conferences devoted to the development of the subject. Although Elliott stresses that there is ‘a mounting dissatisfaction with the paradigms and methodologies that govern the field’, Cardwell’s call for ‘a more realistic, complex and nuanced understanding of adaptation’ is surely a positive movement.<sup>18</sup>

However, central to the need for further research into classic-novel adaptation is the continuing struggle with fidelity theory. Despite Sheen’s more intricate approach to fidelity, critical debate remains frequently focused upon traditional – and reductionist – understandings of ‘faithfulness’.<sup>19</sup> Although Elliott maintains that the proliferation of film adaptations of Victorian novels renders them ‘particularly rich and variegated places for examining interdisciplinary exchanges across decades, genres and nations’, the subject often continues to be aligned closely with somewhat simplistic (and hierarchical) comparisons of the adaptation to the novel.<sup>20</sup> Above all, despite the intellectual discourses opened up by post-structuralism and interdisciplinary cultural studies, together with Morris Beja’s pointed assertion that ‘what a film takes from a book matters; but so does what it brings to a book’, an adaptation is often still perceived as subsidiary.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst existing scholarship recognises that adaptation (as a process and as a phenomenon) is subject to change, as having ‘a context – a time and a place, a

society and a culture', the fact that adaptation criticism has in some ways remained static becomes as significant as the abundance of attempts to understand adaptation.<sup>22</sup> For example, although Thomas Leitch's paper – "Adaptation at a Crossroads" – seeks to recognise the complexity of contemporary adaptation (and the subsequent need for greater sophistication in adaptation criticism), his work is similarly undermined by some of the problems which he attempts to address. Whilst Leitch critiques the title of *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, for instance – 'the assumption that the primary context within which adaptations are to be studied is literature [...]. It is as if adaptation studies, by borrowing the cultural cachet of literature, sought to claim its institutional respectability and gravitas while insuring adaptation's enduring aesthetic and methodological subordination to literature proper' – the same argument can surely be applied to the journal within which Leitch voices his complaints: *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies*.<sup>23</sup>

Crucially, then, simplistic notions of fidelity theory persist despite clear and conscious attempts to the contrary, and are often underpinned by emotive responses to the phenomenon of adaptation. Such potential for subjectivity is coupled with the complexity of efforts to posit a definition of adaptation, each approach shadowed by its own particular failings. In attempts to re-assess fidelity theory, critics have offered medium-specific, comparative and pluralist studies of novels and screen adaptations.<sup>24</sup> Medium-specificity asserts the uniqueness of each form of artistic expression, enabling adaptations to be studied in their own right. Similarly, comparative analyses stress the importance of examining adaptations as adaptations, rather than subjecting them to derogatory, hierarchical comparison to the literary text. However, comparative theory complicates medium-specific theory through its appreciation of semiotics, which enables an understanding of the many factors which make up a narrative, and the resultant possibility for both 'faithful' and 'unfaithful' adaptations; elements of a novel's narrative can be presented through the screen adaptation's own sign system.

Nevertheless, medium-specific and comparative theory also pose difficulties. Medium-specificity, with its emphasis upon artistic distinctiveness, complicates the very possibility of adaptation (suggesting as it does the 'uniqueness' of each work of art), whilst comparative theory often provides a

somewhat narrow framework, ignoring intertextuality, for instance. Recently, as the work of critics such as Hutcheon has shown, pluralist approaches have therefore attempted to encompass wider issues (such as the relationship between adaptations) in critical examinations of adaptation as a process.<sup>25</sup>

As Austen's *Northanger Abbey* demonstrates, the relationship between literary texts and adaptation is rather more complex – and complementary – than scholarship often recognises. As already indicated, the nineteenth-century novel has a strong association with adaptation, as reinterpretation both shaped and asserted the fiction of Austen and Dickens. Arguably, therefore, classic-novel adaptation in many ways becomes a binary process, rather than a divisive concept that is to be struggled with; as literary texts can themselves be seen as adaptations, screen adaptation becomes a continuation rather than a 'violation'.<sup>26</sup>

In this thesis, therefore, a pluralist approach, which recognises classic-novel adaptation as a product placed within a framework of cultural, social and technological influences, will be combined with a 'close reading' of both the novel and the screen dramatisation; by approaching the screenplay through the novel, and the novel through the screenplay, it is hoped that refreshing analyses will be offered. Above all, whilst appreciating the significance of attempts to understand adaptation as a theory, it is not so much adaptation as a *process* but as a *phenomenon* which forms the central point of discussion here.

This approach has been shaped by an awareness that, in purely theoretical debates, critics often obfuscate the adaptations, ignoring or diluting the wide-ranging and intricate social, cultural and artistic influences and inter-textual dialogues which create and drive adaptations. As Cardwell indeed wonders, is adaptation 'a problem *per se*' or have 'adaptation critics [...] worked to problematise it'?<sup>27</sup> Adaptations will be recognised as adaptations – as individual art forms – whilst also highlighting their inextricable links with their literary source texts and cinematic and televisual contexts. As such, understandings of fidelity also become broadened, as adaptations are shown to be driven by 'faithfulness' to more than just the literary text. At the same time, the continued desire of many producers and audiences for fidelity (either to a novel or previous trends in costume drama) is explored as an interesting phenomenon in itself.

Chapters which focus upon author-specific adaptation will enable intricate examinations of individual texts and authors (re-exploring the notion of

‘Dickensian’, for instance), whilst also highlighting the development of screen adaptation as a phenomenon. Whereas many studies concentrate upon a limited, often isolated selection of adaptations, it is important to appreciate the aesthetic and cultural interrelationships which exist between costume dramas (although this is proposed by Cardwell in her attempt to posit an understanding of adaptation as a televisual form, her studies of various period dramas remain somewhat detached from each other).

Moreover, adaptations will be set alongside the recent trend in producing biopics, as *Becoming Jane* (2007) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008) sharpen understandings of the relationship between authorship and adaptation. The biopics, together with ‘spin-offs’ such as *Lost In Austen* (2008), broaden Leitch’s observation that ‘when films self-consciously raise questions about their own status as adaptation, what general implications do they offer adaptation studies?’ Leitch, in reference to Patricia Rozema’s *Mansfield Park* (1999), recognises the ‘specific appeal of adaptations that incorporate figures or features of the author or the author’s biography’.<sup>28</sup> *Becoming Jane*, *Miss Austen Regrets* and *Lost In Austen*, however, also provide significant commentaries upon costume drama as a genre and the processes of adaptation, whilst illuminating issues specific to the ‘Austenite film’. *Miss Austen Regrets* is a particularly interesting production, its self-reflexivity embodying the complexity of recent costume drama and adaptation. A still on the CD cover of the musical soundtrack, for example, presents an aesthetically-pleasing image of Austen as a writer at work, yet it leaves the cameraman deliberately visible in the photograph. As will be seen, the boundary between self-consciousness and parody often merges, highlighting the dynamic, yet ambiguous, status of contemporary period drama.

In 2006, for example, a *Radio Times* headline, focusing on Sandy Welch’s adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (BBC), proclaimed “Fresh Eyre? Can Charlotte Brontë’s classic appeal to a new generation?”<sup>29</sup> *Jane Eyre*’s ostensible promise of ‘Fresh Eyre’ highlights the often innovative stylistic development and the revitalising interpretations of literary texts that have marked recent classic-novel adaptation. Although Patsy Stoneman argues that ‘where the adaptation is of a nineteenth-century “classic” realist novel [...] and the production context is the BBC, with its known responsibility to the national literary heritage, adaptors tend to take few obvious “liberties” with their originating text’, it is clear that this



premium upon 'fidelity' has been changing.<sup>30</sup> In particular, Andrew Davies's *Bleak House* (BBC, 2005) presented a turning-point (both for the genre as a whole and for Dickens adaptation), developing the trends towards innovation and contemporisation apparent in productions of the later 1990s (such as *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (BBC, 1996), *Moll Flanders* (ITV, 1996) and *Great Expectations* (BBC, 1999)), and consolidated by Welch's immensely popular *North and South* (BBC, 2004).<sup>31</sup>

As Davies himself noted of *Bleak House*, "the BBC were keen that this adaptation should feel new, be bold and different in execution", a premise born out of a perceived need to reinvigorate approaches to reading and screening the classic novel.<sup>32</sup> As Cardwell explains, 'up to the 1970s, it was preferred that the medium itself remain invisible, or at least transparent, when adapting classic literature, and the relative stillness of the camera and corresponding lack of emphasis on 'directorial style' such as that found in cinema enhanced this'. Classic serials therefore 'developed as stylistically distinct from other television drama, where the form/content balance was struck differently, and where transparency was more often rejected in favour of formal experimentation, innovation, or reflexivity'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Andrew Higson has noted the generic trends apparent in period drama of the 1980s and 1990s, maintaining the significance of the ubiquity of 'heritage' film and television productions which, broadly, offered the viewer 'luxurious country-house settings, the picturesque rolling green landscapes of southern England, the pleasures of period costume, and [...] canonical literary reference points'.<sup>34</sup> Above all, 'nostalgic', idealised images of the past became equated with high production values which operated at the 'culturally respectable, quality end of the market', appealing to presuppositions about classic-novel adaptation which were 'closely allied to educational discourses, English literary culture, and the canons of good taste'.<sup>35</sup>

However, although classic-novel adaptations conventionally 'announce their generic identity through their claims to be part of a literary, rather than a televisual, tradition', significantly, Davies's *Bleak House* was instead characterised by its 'contemporary' use of colour, lighting, sound and music, its rapid, often disjointed editing, and the self-reflexive, 'televisual' use of 'breathing camera'.<sup>36</sup> As Cardwell argues, the 'televisual' is characterised by its 'presentness', a notion epitomised by the use of 'breathing camera', in which a

hand-held camera responds to the operator's breathing and movement (and, implicitly, emotional reactions).<sup>37</sup> Filming thus becomes dynamic, immediate and psychologised, whilst also being voyeuristic; it remains clear that a spectacle is being observed.

The movement to equate period drama with such stylistic motifs consequently associates classic-novel adaptation with 'popular' television drama, as do recent trends in scheduling and promotion. As Davies noted of *Bleak House*, it was broadcast in the early evening in half-hour, 'soap-like' episodes, in order to diminish the "cosy" "Sunday tea-time" image of classic serials and to "attract a young [...] and perhaps a more popular audience, hoping that what's left of the *Eastenders*' audience [would] carry on watching *Bleak House*"; a similar strategy was adopted with regard to *Oliver Twist* (BBC, 2007), *Little Dorrit* (BBC, 2008) and *Wuthering Heights* (ITV, 2009).<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the use of 'breathing camera', and disorientating, rapid filming, is to be found in both the most recent Dickens adaptations and *Spooks* (BBC, 2002-2010), for example. Although Linda Troost maintains that 'as the world moves towards greater complexity and impersonality, we have begun to rediscover the delights and uses of the past', in many ways such a conclusion is, therefore, a simplification.<sup>39</sup>

In trailers, for example, popular music is now often used to promote costume drama; in contrast to the 'folk' music associated traditionally with Thomas Hardy, the BBC used a contemporary soundtrack to advertise *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (BBC, 2008), whilst *Wide Sargasso Sea* (BBC, 2006) was linked with Snow Patrol's *Run*. Moreover, 'remakes' of classic novels such as *Sparkhouse* (BBC, 2002) simultaneously contemporise the past and affirm the act of reinterpretation. As Kaye and Whelehan observe, 'adaptations of classics can reveal as much about the concerns of their own time as they can about those of the original text'.<sup>40</sup> Above all, the contemporisation of the past redefines notions of costume drama as a nostalgic escape to an idealised English heritage.

Certainly, this is linked, in part, to the changing status of the literary text. Whilst critical theories such as feminisim and postcolonialism have altered academic perceptions of the novel, popular audiences have also seemingly redefined their attitudes towards canonical English Literature. Tellingly, the *Radio Times* headline, "Fresh Eyre?", somewhat conflates Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Welch's adaptation, pointing to the growing tendency for adaptations to

‘become’ the literary text. Despite attempts to privilege the literary author (*Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (UCA, 1994), *Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights* (Paramount, 1992)), screenplays are now sometimes regarded as the ‘definitive’ versions of the novel’s ‘story’. As will be seen, such a phenomenon is epitomised by Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC, 1995).<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, whereas Robert Stevenson’s version of *Jane Eyre* (1944) commenced with an image of Brontë’s novel, thereby ‘legitimising’ the production through its literary framework and ‘fidelity’, in many ways it is the literary text which today looks to the screen adaptation as a means of assertion; whilst the *Radio Times* intimates that the ‘classic novel’ has lost its appeal with popular (and specifically younger) audiences, it is the BBC’s television series which will potentially revitalise Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, The Gaskell Society petitioned the BBC to adapt *Wives and Daughters* (1999) in order to reinvigorate interest in a then relatively under-read Victorian writer. The success of Davies’s adaptation led subsequently to the production of Welch’s *North and South*, and a resurgence of Gaskell’s popularity (indeed, in August 2008, Gaskell quotations even appeared on packets of ‘Bertolli’ Olive Spread). Leitch’s assertion that ‘literary texts have already been approved by a jury whose verdict on their film adaptations is still out’, and Sheen’s notion that ‘fidelity criticism is [...] a rhetoric of possession’ as ‘the literary work is ‘owned’ by the academy’, therefore need reassessment.<sup>42</sup>

Classic-novel adaptation is marked by great dynamism and development. At the same time, however, it is clear that period drama is in a state of some ambiguity, both as an art form and in terms of popular and critical perceptions. As Cardwell comments, ‘at the start of the 1990s, the genre was at risk of becoming stale. It seemed that the classic-novel adaptation might founder, as it appeared resolved to repeating the same fundamental conventions’; similarly, British director Alan Parker bemoaned the stylistic tendencies of many ‘costume dramas’, castigating the ‘Laura Ashley school of filmmaking’.<sup>43</sup> Revealingly, despite the re-development of classic-novel adaptation over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, it can once more be seen that these issues are haunting present-day productions. Just as Cairns Craig, in 1991, believed that the genre was ‘in danger of turning into a parody of itself’, adaptations have in many ways become caught in a conflict of tradition and innovation, as the ‘contemporisation’ of the

‘classic serial’ has been subjected to questioning and, in the case of many reviews, cynicism.<sup>44</sup> The ‘originality’ of Welch’s visualisation of Brontë’s novel is thus challenged by the implicit ambivalence of “Fresh Eyre?”, for example. Arguably, although recent developments in adaptation seemingly indicate the form’s secure hold upon producers’ and viewers’ interest, the focus upon innovation intimates potential concern over the future of the classic novel and the popularity of the costume drama.

The ‘modern’ trends of adaptations such as *North and South*, *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist* have, to an extent, been followed by a return to a ‘nostalgic’ style in dramatisations such as Heidi Thomas’s *Cranford* (BBC, 2007; 2009) and Sandy Welch’s *Emma* (BBC, 2009). At the same time, as will be seen with *North and South* in particular, certain ‘stereotypes’ have prevailed throughout the 1990s and 2000s, perhaps most markedly the privileging of the male lead within a romantic idyll. Above all, it is clear that costume dramas are increasingly defined – and in many ways unsettled – by both the coalescence and conflict between innovation and tradition.

In this context of change and tension, an understanding of contemporary classic-novel adaptation as a product therefore becomes vital. Integral to this thesis’s attempt to widen adaptation studies is an analysis of the frequently overlooked notion of adaptation as a cultural commodity, recognising the significance of advertising and (evolving) popular perceptions of costume drama and classic novels. Bluestone’s pioneering observation that ‘because the shaping power of reader and movie-goer has [...] been too often neglected in considerations of the filmed novel, it requires special emphasis’, has often been ignored.<sup>45</sup> It is clear, however, that the interplay between novel, screen and audience is essential to an appreciation of the developments and trends of period drama over recent years.

Linked to this is the ability of adaptations to shape an author’s or a particular novel’s ‘mythology’, in dialogue with audience presuppositions. As Jean-Paul Sartre comments, one ‘cannot write without a public and without a myth – without a certain public which historical circumstances have made, without a certain myth of literature which depends to a very great extent upon the demand of this public’.<sup>46</sup> As will be discussed, promotions of adaptations form an important part of the propagation or re-working of ‘Austenmania’ and the

‘Brontë Myth’, for instance, whilst at the same time highlighting the issues which inform contemporary costume drama.

Just as Hutcheon is interested in the ubiquity of adaptation, it is similarly important to recognise the wide possibilities presented by modern, promotional technology (such as the Internet), and the part this plays in influencing contemporary presentations of literature and the past. Certain Internet sites, for example, are of vital interest, and embody the complexity of the genre today. BBC costume drama ‘homepages’, with their games, commentaries and stories (Grace Poole’s ‘Autobiography’, for example, is penned by the actress who plays her and is to be found on the BBC’s webpage for Welch’s *Jane Eyre*), arguably promote further ‘adaptation’.

At the same time, it is vital to appreciate the reception of classic-novel adaptations, not just in terms of positive and negative response, but through an awareness of the changes which have occurred in popular and critical reviews. Although Leitch argues that his ‘analysis of [...] genre markers [...] has necessarily emphasised the reception rather than the production of the genre’, he, like other critics, does not recognise the complexity, confusion and ambiguity of reception today.<sup>47</sup> As will be discussed in later chapters, contemporary classic-novel adaptations often form a complex dialogue with Andrew Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* (and, implicitly, the notion of the ‘traditional costume drama’), for example. Again, this has been consolidated by the Internet; in September 2006, a Google search (UK) for ‘costume drama’ listed Davies’s adaptation first, regardless of what was being screened at the time (most particularly Welch’s *Jane Eyre*). However, a search on 13/11/08 revealed that this had altered, with articles criticising the genre (and particularly the BBC) listed high. Significantly, costume drama is seemingly ‘vulnerable’ to popular and critical cynicism, challenging Kerr’s observation that ‘for the BBC at least, the classic serial has been institutionalised to the extent that it has become a kind of anthology series slot’.<sup>48</sup> As critical reviews increasingly demonstrate, it is instead arguable that the genre has now reached ‘saturation point’.

Although Cardwell asserts that ‘television adaptations have seen immense changes in their technological, institutional and creative contexts’, yet ‘some fundamental features of early adaptations linger’, what is not so much recognised is the tension that this pull between tradition and innovation causes, both for the

production of the screenplay and in terms of reception.<sup>49</sup> Newspaper reviews which explore “Why BBC Costume Drama Needs to Go Beyond Bodices” confirm Andrew Davies’s concern about the art form.<sup>50</sup> Although he maintains that classic-novel adaptation has become inexorably institutionalised – “the BBC will continue to do [costume drama] because it is one of the things that people expect the BBC to do” – he responds somewhat negatively to questions about the genre’s future. In answer to Whelehan’s question that “the 1990s [were] really the heyday of the resurgence of literary adaptations, particularly of the nineteenth-century novel, latterly perhaps some eighteenth-century novels. How do you think approaches have changed because of that increasing popularity?”, Davies observed that “they’re in a bit of a tricky or ambiguous situation at the moment”.<sup>51</sup> Such ambiguity is recognised and interrogated throughout this thesis, helping to deepen analyses of individual adaptations and authors, and broadening understandings of contemporary adaptation as a cultural and artistic phenomenon.

What becomes clear, as such, is the highly intricate relationship between the literary text and the screen, and the shifting dialogues between novel and adaptation. Moreover, this thesis develops Sheen’s concept of the ‘rhetoric of possession’ by exploring successful productions which are ‘unfaithful’ towards their literary source texts (such as aspects of Davies’s *Wives and Daughters*), highlighting once more the complexity of classic-novel adaptation.

Linked to this is Brooker’s observation that, from the 1990s onwards, ‘trends in film and TV [...] seemed increasingly to feed off repeats and remakes. Both tendencies undermined the concept of the original and therefore had clear implications for the study of adaptations’.<sup>52</sup> However, this is complicated by repeats of certain productions which can be read as a privileging of these adaptations as ‘originals’; some channels regularly re-play Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, illustrating the enduring popularity of the series, whilst implying that it is a ‘proper’ costume drama and ‘Austenite’ film (despite Davies’s clear divergences from the literary plot). Likewise, Cardwell’s comment that ‘an adaptation [...] shares its author with the source text, and expresses the intentions of this sanctified author’ is challenged by the privileged status of certain screenwriters (especially Andrew Davies), and by particular

broadcasters; as Stoneman maintains, the ‘BBC’ has its own specific characteristics, which act as a ‘hallmark’ of ‘quality’.<sup>53</sup>

In *Adaptation Revisited* (and “Literature on the Small Screen”), Sarah Cardwell in many ways offers a highly stimulating examination of classic-novel adaptation as a television genre. To a considerable degree, she thus develops Paul Kerr’s early work on the television ‘classic’ serial, asserting that ‘an understanding of the specificity of [the] televisual form is long overdue’.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, to an extent, Cardwell’s work provides a background for this thesis, as she recognises that ‘the efforts of programme makers to revitalise classic-novel adaptations around the turn of the century can be seen in two areas in particular. First, there was a marked broadening in the range of source novels’, and secondly ‘adaptations became stylistically more innovative, varied and reflexive’.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in a ground-breaking moment, Cardwell maintained that ‘it is clear that the programmes’ emotive representations of the past and distinctive filmic, slow-paced styles, are part of their continuing appeal’, yet, at the same time, ‘the televisual context in which they are situated is characterised by its emphasis on its contemporaneity, presentness and performativity. The classic-novel adaptation thus appears sited in a unique and contradictory position’.<sup>56</sup>

This thesis, however, develops Cardwell’s realisation that ‘it is vital to recognise the increasingly powerful influence of the televisual context in which contemporary classic-novel adaptations exist’, working to expand and redefine her arguments in light of recent trends.<sup>57</sup> Firstly, although Cardwell bemoans ‘why does writing about adaptation [...] tend to end up returning to the methodology of comparison and the related notion of “fidelity”?’’, this trend can be seen as an interesting phenomenon in itself, relating to the ways in which costume drama is driven, and helping to explicate the ‘patterns’ of contemporary classic-novel adaptation.<sup>58</sup> Although McFarlane, like Cardwell, dismisses fidelity theory as ‘unhelpful’, it is clear that ‘faithfulness’ continues to shape the production and evolution of classic-novel adaptations; the question ‘fidelity to what?’ provides a significant context for understanding costume drama today.<sup>59</sup> As will be discussed throughout this thesis, there exists not simply a ‘nostalgia’ for an idealised image of the past, or a desire for ‘faithfulness’ to the canonical literary text, but a privileging of individual adaptations themselves. As in

Hutcheon's work, the 'how' and 'why' of adaptation thus becomes a point of interest.<sup>60</sup>

Equally, whilst intertextuality is focused upon, it is also crucial to maintain the notion of author-specific adaptation. Kerr argues that 'the very profound formal differences between [classic novels] and their tele-versions reveal the tendency towards homogenisation in television adaptation. The very profound formal differences that [exist] between novels become all but invisible on television'.<sup>61</sup> Whilst this is true to an extent, there are specific issues inherent to the adaptation of Dickens or Gaskell, for instance, which both merge and conflict with classic-novel adaptation as a genre. As will be seen with Gaskell, the tension between tradition and innovation in Welch's *North and South* has implications both for understandings of contemporary costume drama as a genre, and readings of Gaskell's literary standing; conflicting perceptions of what constitutes 'Gaskellian' become interlinked with the struggle to characterise contemporary period adaptation.

Moreover, the links between the cinema and television are also significant. As will be seen particularly with Austen, television productions can greatly influence the screenplays and marketing of large-screen films. Although Cardwell observes that 'one of the most commonly held prejudices against [...] television adaptations is that they reflect television's tendency towards conservative, staid, and unimaginative programming in contrast with cinema's more vibrant, eclectic, and innovative offerings', it is clear that the relationship between, and characteristics of, the small and big screen have developed.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, it remains important to appreciate the long, intricate relationship that certain novels share with film. The first screen adaptation of Dickens was a silent version of *Oliver Twist* in 1897, for example, and Hollywood films (and Oscar winners) have been associated strongly with classic-novel adaptation throughout the twentieth century. Although Cardwell comments that 'as television has developed stylistically, and greater expressive opportunities have opened up, [...] adaptors have become more concerned with conveying the 'spirit' of the source text', it is arguable that this 'spirit' – 'Dickensian' or 'Brontëan' – has in many ways been shaped by film versions of the novels.<sup>63</sup>



The current critical and popular interest in adaptation, both as a process and as a phenomenon, certainly provides an exciting framework within which to expand understandings of the relationship between literary texts and the screen. It is also clear, however, that the field can be interrogated and developed further. Whilst recognising the important analyses posited by Hutcheon, Cardwell, Leitch and Sheen, for instance, this thesis seeks to develop existing scholarship in light of recent adaptations (whilst also re-exploring film and television productions of the 1990s, taking Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) as a pivotal moment in the genre's history), and to stimulate further discussion by examining currently under-explored areas.

Chapter one discusses Jane Austen, re-examining 'Austenmania' through an analysis of productions from 2005-2009, and revisiting the significance of the 'Austenite' film of the 1990s. In many ways, the 'Austenite' film defines costume drama and classic-novel adaptation, and, as a consequence, the issues outlined in this chapter provide the basis for the ensuing thesis; 'Austenmania's' tense pull between tradition and innovation exposes the increasingly ambiguous status of the genre as a whole.

Chapter two, focusing on Elizabeth Gaskell, continues chapter one's analysis of costume drama as an evolving, yet often problematic, form; the popular and critical success of Welch's *North and South* (2004) has been followed by an uneasy pairing of stylistic tradition and innovation in Thomas's *Cranford* and *Cranford Christmas Special* (2007; 2009). Drawing also upon the significance of author-specific adaptation, the chapter considers how conflicting perceptions of what constitutes 'Gaskellian' become interlinked with the struggle to characterise contemporary period adaptation.

The ever-shifting interrelationship between the Brontës, the 'Brontë Myth' and the screen likewise highlights this struggle in chapter three. Increasingly conflicting approaches to costume drama, caught between convention and a desire to 'refresh' the genre, assume a particular character in Welch's *Jane Eyre* (2006); the production holds an often troubled relationship with the long tradition of filming Charlotte Brontë's novel, whilst also forming a rather unsettled moment in period drama's self-conscious reworking.

This ambiguity finally marks Dickens's relationship with the screen, as examined in chapter four. The long history of adapting Dickens, and his special

association with film and television, is chartered and re-explored, as the ‘Dickensian’ film has been redefined by Davies’s ‘soap-like’ treatment of *Bleak House* (2005). However, many of the contentious issues facing costume drama, traced throughout this thesis, culminate in the BBC’s decision to ‘axe’ Davies’s proposed *Dombey and Son*. The decommissioning of Dickens’s relatively unknown seventh novel in favour of a potential version of *David Copperfield* in several years’ time signifies a return to tradition and the familiar that is simultaneously unsettled by a movement away from adaptations of classic (implicitly nineteenth-century) novels; the BBC and ITV have announced plans to ‘rest’ the genre for the foreseeable future, concentrating instead upon ‘contemporary’ drama. Although, for many viewers, costume drama continues to be attractive, this study demonstrates that traditional attacks on classic-novel adaptation, born out of hierarchical comparisons of literary text and the screen, have widened into attacks specifically upon costume drama as a worn genre that has reached saturation point.

This double-bind, both in terms of popularity and stylistic approach, characterises Welch’s *Emma*, which forms the basis of discussion in the conclusion, as costume drama in 2009 is examined and some thoughts about its immediate future are offered. Fundamentally, by tracing costume drama through the 1990s and 2000s, providing detailed analyses of individual adaptations and recognising the significance of their popular and critical reception, this thesis explores and develops Andrew Davies’s belief that classic-novel adaptation is in “‘a tricky [...] situation’”.<sup>64</sup>

This thesis presents an examination of novel and screen which will offer new directions for the study of costume drama and adaptation. Unlike many other studies, this critical balance between novel and screen will enable a dynamic interrogation of costume drama as a cultural and artistic phenomenon, appreciating its technical and artistic evolution over the past two decades. Equally, in contrast to recent rejections of the idea of ‘faithfulness’, the importance of the literary text in the complex dialogue between novel and screen will be stressed and explored. Above all, it offers an approach which both enables interesting readings of literary texts whilst remedying critical tendencies which obfuscate screen adaptations.

- <sup>1</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen: Seven Great English Classics* (London: Penguin, 1996) 1110. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- <sup>2</sup> Erica Sheen, "Introduction," *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen*, ed. Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 1-13. 10. See also Michel Foucault, "What Is An Author?," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald Bouchard (New York: Cornell UP, 1977) 113-138.
- <sup>3</sup> Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 3; Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History," *Sight and Sound* 55:4 (1986): 246-251. 246.
- <sup>4</sup> George Bluestone, *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1961) vii.
- <sup>5</sup> Elliott 1; Bluestone viii.
- <sup>6</sup> Joy Gould Boyum, *Double Exposure: Fiction Into Film* (New York: New America Library, 1985) 15, as cited in Imelda Whelehan, "Don't Let's Ask For The Moon: Reading and Viewing the Woman's Film," *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 138-153. 151.
- <sup>7</sup> Peter Brooker, "Postmodern Adaptation: Pastiche, Intertextuality and Re-Functioning," *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 107-120. 109.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Stam, *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006) 111.
- <sup>10</sup> Elliott 6-7.
- <sup>11</sup> Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan, "Introduction: Classics Across the Film/Literature Divide," *Classics in Film and Fiction*, ed. D. Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, H. Kaye and I. Whelehan (London: Pluto, 2000) 5; 10. As will be seen, the 'privileging' of a particular adaptation over subsequent versions, and indeed the literary text, becomes particularly marked with regard to Andrew Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC, 1995).
- <sup>12</sup> Bluestone 62.
- <sup>13</sup> Hutcheon 4. See also Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>14</sup> Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 69.
- <sup>15</sup> Sheen 3.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> The journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* (2008) also offers the opportunity to discuss film and television adaptations of Victorian literature.
- <sup>18</sup> Elliott 1; Cardwell (2002) 25.
- <sup>19</sup> Traditionally, fidelity theory compares the adaptation to the novel, based upon the expectation that an adaptation seeks only to be 'faithful' to the literary text; this often results in a listing of the screen version's 'failings', set against a privileging of the novel.
- <sup>20</sup> Elliott 3; Michael Klein and Gillian Parker, eds., *The English Novel and the Movies* (New York: Ungar, 1981) 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Morris Beja, *Film and Literature: An Introduction* (London: Longman, 1979) 88.
- <sup>22</sup> Hutcheon xvi; Thomas Leitch, "Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads," *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies* 1 (2008): 63-77. 63.
- <sup>23</sup> Leitch 64. Despite the efforts of critics such as Brian McFarlane, Deborah Cartmell, James Naremore, Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, who have sought to develop the subject, Leitch concludes that 'the field remains haunted by the notion that adaptations ought to be faithful to their ostensible source texts'. Leitch 63-64.
- <sup>24</sup> Cardwell (2002) 43. For a detailed overview of each of the three main approaches to theorising adaptation, see Cardwell 43-72.
- <sup>25</sup> However, despite the plethora of different labels attached to adaptations, many of which propagate the debate over fidelity, the subject remains confused and unsure. Hutcheon provides a commentary upon the various debates over the term 'fidelity'. Wagner (1975), for instance, posited a theory of analogy vs commentary vs transposition; Andrew (1980) borrowing vs intersection vs transformation; Klein and Parker (1981) the source as a raw material vs reinterpretation of the core narrative structure vs literal transference. See Hutcheon 9-16.
- <sup>26</sup> This notion will be discussed at greater length elsewhere, linking to the idea of the 'adaptability' of certain authors against others.
- <sup>27</sup> Cardwell (2002) 38.

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- <sup>28</sup> Leitch 67.
- <sup>29</sup> *Radio Times* (23/09/06).
- <sup>30</sup> Patsy Stoneman, "Wives and Daughters on Television", *The Gaskell Society Journal* 14 (2000): 85-100. 85.
- <sup>31</sup> Although Henry Fielding's *Moll Flanders* is not a nineteenth-century novel, Davies's adaptation helped to reshape the style and image of 'costume drama' as a genre; the irreverence, self-reflexivity and energy of the BBC's 1997 production of *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* worked to similar effect.
- <sup>32</sup> Andrew Davies, Interview, as cited in Robert Giddings, "Soft-Soaping Dickens: Andrew Davies, BBC1 and *Bleak House*," [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft Soaping Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.
- <sup>33</sup> Sarah Cardwell, "Literature on the Small Screen," *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 181-196. 188.
- <sup>34</sup> Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 1.
- <sup>35</sup> Higson 5.
- <sup>36</sup> Cardwell (2002) 81.
- <sup>37</sup> Cardwell (2002) 4.
- <sup>38</sup> Andrew Davies, as cited in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, "A Practical Understanding of Literature on Screen: Two Conversations with Andrew Davies," *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 239-251. 245; 247.
- <sup>39</sup> Linda Troost, "The Nineteenth-Century Novel on Film: Jane Austen," *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 75-89. 87.
- <sup>40</sup> Kaye and Whelehan 4.
- <sup>41</sup> Moreover, as becomes clear with Welch's *North and South* (2004), the popularity of certain actors overwhelms the presence of the literary characters; a popular review of *North and South* hoped that 'Margaret and Richard [Armitage] will get it together'. [www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth). Accessed 06/10/2006.
- <sup>42</sup> Leitch 64; Sheen 3.
- <sup>43</sup> Cardwell (2007) 189; Alan Parker, as cited in Eckart Voigts-Virchow, "Heritage and Literature on Screen: 'Heimat' and Heritage," *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 123-137. 128.
- <sup>44</sup> Cairns Craig, "Rooms Without A View," *Sight and Sound* 1:6 (1991): 10-13. 10.
- <sup>45</sup> Bluestone 31.
- <sup>46</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. B. Frechtman (New York, 1949) 50-51, as cited in Bluestone 31.
- <sup>47</sup> Thomas Leitch, "Adaptation, the Genre," *Adaptation* 1 (2008): 106-120. 115-116.
- <sup>48</sup> Paul Kerr, "Classic Serials To-Be-Continued," *Screen* 23:1 (1982): 6-19. 8.
- <sup>49</sup> Cardwell (2007) 192.
- <sup>50</sup> Boyd Tonkin, "Why BBC Costume Drama Needs to Go Beyond Bodices," *The Independent* (07/11/08). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/why-bbc-costume-drama-needs-to-go-beyond-bodices-997577.html>. Accessed 13/11/08.
- <sup>51</sup> Andrew Davies, as cited in Cartmell and Whelehan 250; 249-250.
- <sup>52</sup> Brooker 109.
- <sup>53</sup> Cardwell (2002) 24; Stoneman 85.
- <sup>54</sup> Cardwell (2002) 73. See also Paul Kerr, "Classic Serials To-Be-Continued," *Screen* 23:1 (1982): 6-19. Related to Cardwell's study of television adaptation is the work of critics such as Andrew Higson, Claire Monk, Amy Sargeant and John Caughie, which examines the concepts of 'nostalgia', 'heritage' and the relationship between British culture, history and film and television drama. Since the 1980s, screen adaptations of 'classic' English novels and the portrayal of 'historical' events have been involved closely with the creation of the 'heritage industry'. Whilst recognising the diverse appellations granted to such productions ('costume drama' as opposed to 'heritage film', for instance), and the specific nuances inherent to each film type, the complex position which these works hold in 'popular' and 'high' culture is also explored. Monk and Sargeant, in particular, comment upon the ambiguous (and often negative) light in which 'heritage films' are perceived, both culturally and in terms of their artistic integrity. See Claire

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Monk and Amy Sargeant, eds., *British Historical Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002). Caughie observes similarly that ‘academic television criticism [...] has treated the classic serial with a certain disdain’. See John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 207.

<sup>55</sup> Cardwell (2007) 190.

<sup>56</sup> Cardwell (2002) 4.

<sup>57</sup> Cardwell (2002) 82.

<sup>58</sup> Cardwell (2002) 9.

<sup>59</sup> Brian McFarlane, “Reading Film and Literature,” *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (Cambridge UP, 2007) 15-28.

<sup>60</sup> Hutcheon 1.

<sup>61</sup> Kerr 11.

<sup>62</sup> Cardwell (2007) 181-182. Moreover, Cardwell observes that ‘classic-novel adaptations are [...] differentiated from other television programmes – even from those that share some ‘generic’ characteristics, such as costume dramas based on pulp fiction’, as ‘the emphasis placed upon high production values and other markers of quality works to differentiate these programmes from the ‘debased culture’ of every day life’. Cardwell (2002) 80-81. This, however, is now complicated by productions such as *Lost In Austen* (2008). In a similar vein, Leitch offers a somewhat reductionist, static understanding of contemporary classic-novel adaptation in “Adaptation, the Genre”, noting its lack of ‘elasticity’. Leitch 108. Such a statement ignores the self-reflexivity of many adaptations and biopics, and the interrelationships between ‘mainstream’ adaptations and classic-novel adaptations; novel and film versions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001), *Emma* and *Clueless* (1995), and *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) are cases in point.

<sup>63</sup> Cardwell (2007) 193.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Davies, as cited in Cartmell and Whelehan 250; 249-250.

## **Chapter One: ‘A faithful performance’? The ‘Austen Phenomenon’, from Andrew Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) to *Sense and Sensibility* (2008)**

‘Of all great writers [she is] the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness’ noted Virginia Woolf of Jane Austen, her comment in many ways embodying the enduring popular and critical fascination with – and confusion about – Austen’s life and works.<sup>65</sup> Her place in the English literary canon has long been a complex one, in part stemming from her position as a female author, and compounded by the perceivedly gendered narrowness of her ‘little bit [...] of ivory’, upon which Austen claimed to work ‘with so fine a Brush’.<sup>66</sup> As Joseph Conrad indeed expostulated in a letter to H. G. Wells, ‘What is all this about Jane Austen? What is there *in* her?’<sup>67</sup>

Screen productions of Austen’s novels hold a particularly interesting and significant position within the field of adaptation studies. Perhaps more than any other ‘classic’ author, film and television dramatisations of her work excite immense – and often heated – responses on the part of both popular audiences and scholarly critics. In particular, Andrew Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC, 1995) initiated a wave of ‘Austenmania’ (and, more specifically, ‘Darcymania’), which persisted throughout the latter half of the 1990s in terms of the proclivity for film and television renderings of her work.<sup>68</sup> The powerful legacy of this adaptation continues to be felt, both in its influence upon later versions of *Pride and Prejudice* and ‘Austenite’ films, and in its interplay with productions of other ‘classic’ authors and texts. In many ways, Davies’s screenplay has constructed today’s notion of costume drama, establishing and consolidating ‘tropes of content, style and mood that together constitute the traditional generic microcosm of the television classic-novel adaptation’.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, as Davies himself commented, “‘*Pride and Prejudice* is the benchmark Jane Austen adaptation’”.<sup>70</sup> Tellingly, Stamford Arts’ Centre, used as a location in Joe Wright’s *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), sells souvenirs depicting Colin Firth’s, not Matthew Macfadyen’s, Darcy. Critics are often divided over Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, however, perceiving it either as

embodying tradition, or asserting the innovation which then acted as a springboard to ‘modernisation’ in the costume drama of the later 1990s and 2000s. The BBC production forms a watershed in period drama precisely because it both incorporated ‘traditional’ images of heritage films *and* reinvigorated the stylistic presentation, thematic preoccupations and popularity of classic-novel adaptation. Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* developed approaches to screening the nineteenth-century novel, illuminating the genre’s ability to both formulate and manipulate preconceptions about heritage, whilst also providing a tradition to which other adaptations defer.

At the same time, it is clear that contemporary screenwriters now often seek to question and rewrite the notion of costume drama that is so closely intertwined with images of Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*. As will be seen, this phenomenon becomes especially pointed with regard to Julian Jarrold’s and Jeremy Lovering’s biopics of Austen, *Becoming Jane* (2007) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008), as well ITV’s 2008 ‘remake’, *Lost In Austen*. In the case of *Becoming Jane*, the film displays strong and uncontested intertextual links with Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, despite its attempt to present stylistically and thematically ‘original’ renderings of the writer’s life. As will be discussed later, the figure of ‘Austen’ thus both challenges, and merges with, the ‘Austenite’ film.

As Robert Giddings notes, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed ‘a period of profound cultural change’ with ‘basic assumptions about aesthetics and ‘Classical’ status [...] being overhauled’.<sup>71</sup> Such trends become especially significant in relation to Austen productions. As Cardwell argues, period film has long been associated with ‘nostalgia’, both in terms of its effect upon the interpretation and screening of Romantic and Victorian literature, and in costume drama’s ability to then reinforce and validate constructed (and often idealised) images of the past.<sup>72</sup> As Devoney Looser maintains, Austen adaptation is seen as a form of escapism from the uncertainty of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century life, enclosing the viewer within the harmonious stability of a genteel past.<sup>73</sup> Fay Weldon, screenwriter of the BBC’s 1980 version of *Pride and Prejudice*, notes that Austen’s popularity stems partly from the fact that “‘the past is preferable to now’”, for example.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, perhaps even more than the legacies of past ‘Dickensian’ or

‘Brontëan’ films, Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates ‘a nostalgic yearning for the televisual past’, both in its own embodiment of the ‘traditional’ values of costume drama (emulating productions such as *Brideshead Revisited* (ITV, 1981), for instance) and in its ‘importance as an Austen adaptation in confirming the archetypal image of the genre’. Later Austen dramatisations are framed, and in many ways directed, by the preoccupations and success of the almost mythologised Davies screenplay.<sup>75</sup>

Significantly, however, although Cardwell maintains the ongoing importance of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, and argues that ‘to emphasise an adaptation as being one of “Austen” is to advertise the expected characteristic features of the programme (its generic style, content and mood), as much as to highlight its source text’, these phenomena are changing.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, even in the immediate aftermath of the *Pride and Prejudice* ‘phenomenon’, it is arguable that the production’s status as a ‘definitive’ period drama was challenged. As will be explored in Chapter Three, it is perhaps telling that the BBC’s version of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1996), broadcast the year after *Pride and Prejudice*, presented a strikingly different approach – visually, musically and thematically – to costume drama. In contrast to the often static shots of *Pride and Prejudice*, the disorientating rapidity and abruptness of the camera movement in *Wildfell Hall* (which in many ways prefigures Davies’s innovative *Bleak House* (2005)) literally forces the audience to perceive costume drama in a new light. Similarly, recent adaptations such as Sandy Welch’s *North and South* (BBC, 2004) and *Jane Eyre* (BBC, 2006), Coky Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights* (ITV, 2009) and, perhaps most particularly, Davies’s *Bleak House*, heralded a profound revolution in the approach to period dramatisations – a revolution which has strongly coloured the latest Austen productions, and potentially altered perceptions of past adaptations of Austen’s novels.<sup>77</sup>

The idealisation of the past, and of Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, is thus itself becoming adapted and rewritten, a notion prefigured by Mary Crawford’s contemporaneity – ‘It’s 1806, for heaven’s sake’ – in Patricia Rozema’s *Mansfield Park* (1999).<sup>78</sup> As noted in the Introduction, the widespread use of ‘breathing camera’, for example, literally brings period drama into the present through the overt presence of the modern-day cameraman. Such a technique can lend a scene a dynamic immediacy, heighten its emotional and visual power, and



psychologise its characters through the impression of first-person perspective. In many ways, such energy, intimacy and spontaneity has revised both the 'Austenite' film and costume drama as a genre, and is embodied by the preoccupations of ITV's 'Jane Austen Season' (2007), comprising Maggie Wadey's *Mansfield Park*, Davies's *Northanger Abbey* and Simon Burke's *Persuasion*.

Wadey's reinterpretation of the 'Austenite' Ball scene is significant, for example. Foregrounding the use of 'informal' folk music in Davies's *Sense and Sensibility* (BBC, 2008) and *Miss Austen Regrets*, Wadey's dance sequence frees the characters from social formality and restriction, and expresses the ambiguities which are discernable in Fanny's characterisation. Just as Fanny's quietness is juxtaposed against her strongly-held love of nature in Austen's text, Billie Piper's heroine asserts that her 'own way' is to hold social gatherings in the freedom of the outdoors; as in Rozema's adaptation, Fanny thus rejects, to an extent, the confines of the domestic sphere.

At the same time, Wadey visualises the romantic tension and humour apparent in Austen's novel. Following the dance, Fanny, the Bertrams and the Crawfords play 'Blind Man's Bluff'. The ensuing game subsequently symbolises their burgeoning romantic feelings, and their blindness to the true merits and faults of each other. As in Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, Wadey makes explicit the sexual undertones of Austen's novel, whilst also maintaining the divide between the physical and the spiritual which differentiates Mary and Maria from Fanny. The blindfolded Edmund, for example, touches Fanny and, tellingly, confuses her with Mary. The physicality that is ascribed to her by the sensuality of the shot, as Edmund moves his hands over her body, is counterbalanced against her purity; Edmund finally recognises her by the cross that she wears, whilst Fanny guesses the identity of her partner through his hat, as opposed to bodily recognition.

Wadey's re-conceptualisation of the Ball is further explored through the humorously self-reflexive dance in Davies's *Northanger Abbey*. Just as Austen's text presents the dance as a performance, Davies translates this onto screen through exaggerated shots of Tilney allowing himself 'one smirk' as he partners Catherine. The metafilmic reinterpretation of the dance sequence, a stock device often highlighted in promotions of Austen adaptations, is coupled with the use of

‘breathing camera’ in ITV’s *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Whilst ‘breathing camera’ draws attention to the televisual nature of the productions, it is also harnessed in order to psychologise their characters and to energise the image of costume drama.

This is perhaps most clear in Burke’s *Persuasion*, in its exploration of Anne’s selfhood. In marked contrast to Nicholas Dear’s *Persuasion* (BBC, 1995), Anne – like Rozema’s Fanny Price – communicates directly with the camera and audience. Indeed, the opening shot of the adaptation is a close-up of her face, her position as the focal point of the production stressed as the camera revolves around her. Burke asserts his feminist commentary through subtle camerawork and sequences. The domestic servitude that the Elliots impose upon Anne, for example, is embodied by the circularity of the opening scene; following her auditing of Kellynch, she is forced to retrace her steps at the arrival of Lady Russell. Moreover, although it can be argued that Burke alters the symbolic significance of Austen’s figural narration by having Anne communicate her feelings directly, she is both psychologised, and silenced and externalised, through the camerawork and editing. As the Crofts discuss the likelihood that she will remain a spinster, for example, the camera cuts to Anne as she leaves Kellynch; the scene thus highlights her vulnerability, as the silent image of Anne is framed by the pressures of social expectations. At the same time, Anne’s interiority is expressed visually, her feelings ‘directing’ the stylistic presentation of the adaptation. As she runs through the streets of Bath after receiving Wentworth’s declaration of love, the rapid, blurred camerawork emulates her emotional intensity and disorientation.

Alongside textual interpretation, the postmodern reflexivity of ‘breathing camera’ stresses the televisual (or cinematic) framework of costume drama, in contrast to past heritage adaptations which sought to appear ‘un-televisual’ as a means of emphasising fidelity to the literary source text.<sup>79</sup> ITV1’s ‘Jane Austen Season’ in many ways epitomises this phenomenon, as it both embraces the need to visualise ‘original’ readings of Austen’s novels through modern filmic devices, and exemplifies what Cardwell identifies, in her analysis of Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, as the ‘television event’.<sup>80</sup>

‘The Jane Austen Season’ styles itself as a popular televisual event, both through its promotion as an entire television ‘season’ devoted to Austen, and in

the presentation of trailers advertising the productions. Just as Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* has become inextricably linked with Colin Firth, heightening 'our perception of the adaptation as contemporary', Wadey's *Mansfield Park* was, in particular, advertised through association with popular actresses from mainstream television, alongside those actors more traditionally connected with costume drama.<sup>81</sup> Billie Piper (*Dr Who*) and Michelle Ryan (*Eastenders*) contemporise and popularise the image of period drama and, implicitly, the classic text – most significantly, that of *Mansfield Park*, which is often regarded as Austen's least enjoyable novel. At the same time, the casting of Douglas Hodge (*Middlemarch* (BBC, 1994); *The Way We Live Now* (BBC, 2001)) 'legitimises' ITV's version of Austen's novel and their production values with regard to period adaptation.<sup>82</sup> Significantly, all three ITV adaptations were advertised together, giving the appearance of a single narrative, as extracts from each dramatisation were interwoven to illustrate the typically 'Austenite' themes of 'passion' and 'romance' – concepts which have, often in contrast to Austen's complex exploration of love and courtship, been equated with her works through screen adaptation; the DVD Anniversary Edition of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, describes 'the subtle hint of passion, the lingering looks' of Colin Firth's (and notably not Mr Darcy's) 'smouldering presence' and 'Jennifer Ehle's passionate performance'.

Certainly, the screenplays of particularly *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* are distinctive. *Northanger Abbey* is characterised by Gothic lighting and music, for example, whilst the gentle score, subtle camerawork, soft lighting and muted colours of *Persuasion* emulate the maturity and reflective nature of Austen's last completed novel. However, what becomes significant is the way in which the adaptations were *promoted*. Trailers distinguished them not by their authorial and textual 'uniqueness', but by their shared identity as 'ITV productions', framing them with an advertisement for 'The Jane Austen Season', and concluded by the voiceover 'Part of the Jane Austen Season – ITV1'.

Moreover, 'The Jane Austen Season' was advertised in cinemas prior to screenings of *Becoming Jane*. The 'Season' thus became a cinematic, as well as televisual, event. Significantly, the adaptations were 'validated' not simply through an emphasis on the literary source text and author (following the pattern prevalent in the 1990s of including the writer's name in the title, as in Davies's

*Jane Austen's Emma* (ITV, 1996)), but through linking them with a screen reworking of Jane Austen as a woman. The figure of the author is thus asserted, but what is perhaps more noticeable is the promotion of 'Austen' and the Austen productions as 'events' that are to be consumed. The audience's post-*Pride and Prejudice* enthusiasm for her life and works is harnessed, reinforced, and, to an extent, rewritten, by the re-emergence of 'Austenmania' in the contemporary filmic and televisual context. This relationship, and the commodification of 'Austen' through film, is indeed demonstrated by the fact that cinemas offered free copies of Austen's novels with popcorn bought prior to screenings of *Becoming Jane*.

At the same time, Austen adaptation is a genre that is in many ways unsettled by contemporary screenwriting, moving towards contemporisation and yet caught within the continuing influence of 'traditional' 'Austenite' films; as will be discussed in the Conclusion, this tension culminates in Sandy Welch's *Emma* (BBC, 2009). Following this trend, 'The Jane Austen Season' emphasises elements of Austen's works in order to adhere to the often simplified, and idealised, concepts of love and courtship that have been produced by screen adaptations (or, perhaps more specifically, by the *image* that has been constructed of certain productions).<sup>83</sup> In the individual trailers promoting *Persuasion*, for example, Wentworth is over-privileged (like Darcy/Firth through 'Darcymania') both visually on screen and in the extracts of dialogue taken from the full adaptation. The advertising campaign thus undercuts the feminist leanings of Burke's screenplay.

ITV instead promotes *Persuasion*, tellingly, through lingering full-frame close-ups of Wentworth's face as he regards Anne (and the viewer) piercingly. The focus on Rupert Penry-Jones's attractiveness, together with the stylisation of his appearance, subsequently adheres to the Byronic image that Colin Firth helped to create of Mr Darcy.<sup>84</sup> Although Sarah Wootton argues that, in Wentworth, 'Byronic attributes are neither endorsed nor derided, resulting in a complex masculine hybrid', the ITV adaptation attempts to entice female viewers in particular with a masculine 'ideal' to equal (or perhaps supplant) that of Mr Darcy/Colin Firth.<sup>85</sup> Extreme close-ups highlight Wentworth's physicality, whilst the exclusion of others from the full-frame shots emulates the Byronic

characteristic of social isolation (his expression invariably exuding lofty pride and hauteur).<sup>86</sup>

Through its adherence to many of the romantic conventions and expectations attached to Austen adaptation and period drama, ITV's carefully styled promotion of *Persuasion* thus changes the complex nuances of Anne's position, her relationship with Wentworth, and his own characterisation, that inform Austen's narrative and, to a degree, the actual ITV adaptation. It is significant, for example, that in the text of *Persuasion*, Anne criticises Wentworth, and absolves herself of some blame for her earlier refusal of his marriage proposal:

Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character, and whether it might not strike him, that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits. She thought it could scarce escape him to feel, that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, Anne is, at times, aware of – and manipulates – her growing power over him:

For the first time, since their renewed acquaintance, she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two. She had the advantage [...]. All the overpowering, blinding, bewildering, first effects of strong surprise were over with her. Still, however, she had enough to feel! It was agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery (*P*, 1244).

In contrast, ITV promotes Burke's screenplay in terms that simplify Anne's response to her former actions and Wentworth's return. Significantly, the final shot of the trailer depicts her weeping helplessly over her diary, whilst the dialogue arguably favours Wentworth and castigates Anne; again, the tenor of ITV's advertising is at odds with the feminist overtones of the full production. Although Austen and Burke imbue Wentworth with an element of self-doubt and self-reproach, the trailer instead gives the impression of a conventionally 'strong'

male and dependent female.<sup>88</sup> Wentworth's lines – 'What I desire is a woman who knows her own mind. A weak spirit which is always open to persuasion can never be relied upon' – are juxtaposed against an image in which Mr Elliot kisses a rather passive Anne. Indeed, the trailer also focuses upon her emotional vulnerability and self-negation: 'My heart was always constant. My regrets were persistent. My unspoken love remains' (compared to Austen's Anne, who, despite her doubt and self-scrutiny, also professes to feel 'equal to everything she felt right to be done' (*P*, 1248) and alleges "'I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided'" (*P*, 1287)).<sup>89</sup>

'The Jane Austen Season', despite its claims (and, in many respects, achievements) of 'originality', thus remains coloured by the conventions and expectations derived from 'traditional' costume drama and Austen adaptation in particular. This, in turn, raises the question of the appeal of Austen and her novels. It is clear that popular (and critical) audiences often hold strongly-defined perceptions of what constitutes the 'essence' of Austen's novels and the 'Austenite' film; such preconceptions both feed into, and are reinforced by, the ongoing trend for screening her works.

Emma Thompson's screenplay for *Sense and Sensibility* (Columbia, 1995) was critically and popularly acclaimed at its release, and has since become, like Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*, representative of a 'quality' 'Austenite' film. By contrast, Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, which failed financially at the Box Office, provoked a considerable degree of discord through its 'radical' reworking of Austen's text; Fanny (Frances O'Connor) is transformed into a self-declared 'wild beast', whilst Rozema explores controversial critical understandings of Austen's novel – including lesbianism and racial and gendered slavery – in an often self-reflexive filmic framework. Although Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* also incorporates many divergences from Austen's novel (in its alteration of the plot and characterisations, and in its interpretation of many of Austen's 'themes' within a contemporary cultural and historical context), the film was still perceived as faithfully 'Austenite'. Tellingly, critics and popular audiences failed to realise the irony apparent in O'Connor's voice as Fanny declares 'Yes, I'm a wild beast'. Although set within a modern framework, it is essentially *Austen's* irony and 'feminist' commentary that Rozema wishes to incorporate and adapt within her screenplay; moreover, in

Fanny's ensuing comment – 'I'm sure Sir Thomas would agree' – her vulnerability touches upon the fragility that characterises Austen's heroine in the novel. As the differences in the reception of Thompson's and Rozema's films show, however, the adaptation of Austen often has to be informed by something essentially 'Austenite' – a concept itself largely derived from film.

To a considerable extent, Austen adaptations – and audience expectations – are thus underpinned by the notion of 'a faithful performance' that is remarked upon by Austen herself in *Northanger Abbey*. There is, arguably, an element of Austen's texts, and critical understandings of her work, which lends itself to adaptation. As Isobel Grundy notes, Austen 'looked for what she could use – not by quietly absorbing and reflecting it, but by actively engaging, rewriting, often mocking it'.<sup>90</sup> Her novels are themselves, in many ways, works of literary adaptation which then engage in complex and rich dialogues with their filmic counterparts.

In Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, for instance, Austen's version of Goldsmith's *History of England* is further reconfigured, as Fanny instead composes her author's juvenilia; Rozema thus adapts Austen's ability to adapt. Significantly, Fanny recites her passage about Mary Queen of Scots to an audience – to Edmund, and, through the directness of the camera, to the viewer (and is later taken up in Davies's *Sense and Sensibility*, as Margaret reads *The History of England*). The scene exemplifies the issues of performativity and authorship (and, linked to this, the position of female writers and protagonists) that characterise Austen's writings. This is seen not only in Fanny's assumption of the role of director and performer, and in her relationship with her creator (Austen's heroine has taken the position of authoress from her), but also in the piece's commentary upon writing; Fanny's/Austen's work is a narrative, which, in its historical inaccuracies, draws attention to its fictional crafting – and, in Fanny's wry remark to Edmund that history is written by men – its gendered colouration.<sup>91</sup>

Austen's *Northanger Abbey* similarly examines, reworks, and adapts literary motifs and cultural milieu. Whilst in *Mansfield Park* the plot of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*, together with the symbolism of Sterne's caged bird, form intertextual links with Austen's novel, in *Northanger Abbey* she implicates both character and narrator in her metafictionality:

After chatting some time on such matters as naturally arose from the objects around them, [Tilney] suddenly addressed her with – “I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before [...] and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent – but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are I will begin directly” [...]. Then forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice, he added, with a simpering air, “Have you been long in Bath, madam?”

“About a week, sir,” replied Catherine, trying not to laugh.

“Really!” with affected astonishment.

“Why should you be surprised, sir?”

“Why, indeed!” said he, in his natural tone – “but some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed [...]. Now let us go on. Were you never here before, madam?” [...] “Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again” (NA, 1012-1013).

Tilney’s illumination of the performativity of social etiquette, and the resultant intertextuality with, and reworking of, the fictional motifs of ‘society’ novels (including those ostensibly apparent in Austen’s other works), is heightened by Austen’s crafting of the narrative voice. The omniscient narrator juxtaposes the fluency of Catherine and Henry’s ‘chatting’ with the unnaturalness of his need to conform to the “proper attentions of a partner here”, the abruptness of his interruption configuring his speech as constructed and rehearsed lines. This is then emphasised by the dash (‘he suddenly addressed her with – “I have hitherto been very remiss, madam”’), which separates Austen’s own narrative from the dictates of convention; the ‘realistic’ characterisation of Tilney is divided from the presentation of a mere role. Just as Tilney assumes the guise of a ‘proper’ gentleman and ‘hero’, in its ‘staged’ quality, the narrator emulates (and, through the ironic tone, challenges) conventional narratives: “‘Really!’ *with affected astonishment*”.



Tilney's ensuing assertion – “I shall make but a poor figure in your journal tomorrow” (NA, 1013) – similarly manipulates the figure of the stock romantic and gothic heroine through its knowing (and gently mocking) assumption of the routines that are followed ‘when a young lady is to be a heroine’ (NA, 1007) (although, significantly, Catherine – who for most of *Northanger Abbey* devours the work of Ann Radcliffe and wishes to shape herself as a literary figure – laughs at Henry's role-playing; Catherine also both embodies and questions fictional stereotypes). Tilney's remark again points to an awareness of both literary character construction and the shaping of identities according to prescribed social roles – and, through his divergence from such conventions, Austen's own attempt as a writer to rework literary forms. As has been seen, Davies harnesses and adapts this self-reflexive element of Austen's novel in his version of *Northanger Abbey*, translating her metafictionality into metafilmic terms which humorously undercut traditional images of costume drama and ‘Austenite’ films.

Despite such adaptability, however, ‘narrower’ notions of ‘fidelity’ remain. Significantly, for example, BBC Austen adaptations of the 1970s and 1980s have been reissued in DVD editions, the design of the boxes implying the ‘seriousness’ and quality of ‘classic’ period drama; their deep reds and sombre blacks link them stylistically to Oxford World's Classics texts. Alexander Baron's *Sense and Sensibility* (1981), for instance, is advertised prominently as ‘a glorious adaptation of Jane Austen's most romantic novel’. Tellingly, this is in spite of rather negative scholarly criticism of Baron's screenplay. Brownstein notes, for example, that today's viewer is ‘astonished by its slowness and dullness’, together with its shadows and muted colours, especially when compared to Emma Thompson's 1995 screenplay of the same novel.<sup>92</sup> The promotion of these older films thus points to the often dichotomous relationship between changing attitudes towards period adaptation, and the ‘traditional’ image of costume drama that is frequently presented.<sup>93</sup> Significantly, despite the attempts to reassess and transform the ‘Austenite’ film in *Becoming Jane*, *Miss Austen Regrets*, ‘The Jane Austen Season’ and Davies's *Sense and Sensibility* (as well as ‘mainstream’ productions such as *The Jane Austen Book Club* and *Lost In Austen*), the DVD covers advertise the older productions as ‘The Perfect Gift’. It can be argued that contemporary films provide a context in which previous

productions are revisited, whilst the re-release of ‘traditional’ adaptations provides a validating framework in which modern versions of Austen’s novels (and Austen herself) are perceived. The latest productions are thus divided simultaneously between the dictates of modern screenwriting, Austen’s novels, and the ‘traditional’ ‘Austenite’ film – issues which culminate and conflict in Welch’s *Emma*.

### ***Pride and Prejudice (1995)***

In many ways, such tensions in filming Austen continue to be rooted in the enduring presence of Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*. To a considerable extent, Davies’s screenplay has ‘superseded’ Austen’s narrative; for many, Davies’s adaptation *is Pride and Prejudice*. A significant proportion of internet websites and discussion forums devoted to ‘Jane Austen’, for example, were established in the aftermath of the BBC dramatisation (such as ‘The Republic of Pemberley’), and focus attention primarily onto the Davies series (and, to a lesser extent, other film adaptations of Austen’s novels). The appreciation of Austen is, in such instances, shaped largely by perceptions and ‘myths’ derived from the filmic ‘Austen’.

In Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) and the later film adaptations (2001 and 2004) – which are themselves important manifestations of ‘Austen’ as a cultural commodity that is to be reworked – Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* is privileged over Austen’s novel, for example. This can be seen both in Colin Firth’s dual role as Mark Darcy in *Bridget Jones* and Fitzwilliam Darcy in Davies’s adaptation, and in Bridget’s interview with ‘Colin Firth’ himself in the novel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999); the latter focuses attention entirely onto Davies’s dramatisation of *Pride and Prejudice* (and, in particular, the sexualised aspects of his screenplay) and the actor’s role within it.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr Darcy/Colin Firth are construed firmly as romantic ideals. Whilst Mark Darcy is, significantly, not a symbol of masculine perfection, *Pride and Prejudice* (particularly Davies’s adaptation) is returned to as an idyll for Bridget, who, like many of Austen’s female characters, is faced with the problematic issues of spinsterhood and social vulnerability.

At the same time, it is clear that the legacy of Davies's adaptation has influenced dramatisations of other nineteenth-century novels. Tony Marchant's *Great Expectations* (BBC, 1999), for example, contains a scene reminiscent of Darcy's famed dive into the lake; in a divergence from Dickens's novel, Pip plunges into the Thames in order to save Magwitch. The camera is positioned underwater as Pip dives, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, and follows him as he swims. Although the scene has a clear relevance to Dickens's text, visualising the growing attachment that Pip feels for Magwitch, together with his remorseful self-evaluation, it is telling that it embodies thematic, as well as visual, similarities to *Pride and Prejudice*, and that it was included in promotions for *Great Expectations*. Pip's self-realisation and commitment to Magwitch is prefigured and reasserted by Darcy's own metaphorical 'rebirth', the dive into water illustrating in both adaptations the revelation (to both the protagonists and the audience) of the hero's humanity and emotional regeneration.

Nevertheless, although the popularity and success of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* stems, in part, from its 'televisual' nature, and promotion as a popular 'televisual event', there remains a great deal of focus on its (perceived) fidelity to Austen's novel; to a considerable degree, the adaptation reasserts the 'primacy' of the literary text. The BBC video release (1997) of *Pride and Prejudice* was advertised by the heading: 'Remember the first time...*Pride and Prejudice*'; the event of the first, televised screening of Davies's adaptation is constructed as an important – indeed almost mythologised – cultural memory.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, however, at the time of its production, and in subsequent promotions of the series, the adaptation was endorsed through its emphasis upon *Austen's* dialogue and characterisations; a point which critics such as Cardwell have, to an extent, overlooked. Whilst it is clear that the dramatisation was distinguished by much technical and stylistic development, rather than being defined simply by its 'televisuality', and its 'possession' of the written text of *Pride and Prejudice*, the adaptation's 'classic' status also derives largely from its professedly 'faithful performance' of Austen's 'classic' novel. Indeed, Davies, commenting upon the stylistic 'radicalism' of his *Bleak House*, maintained that he had wanted to adhere to Austen's dialogue and characterisations when adapting *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>96</sup>

However, the relationship between literary text and screen, and the reasons for the success of the adaptation, remain complex (and somewhat elusive) issues. Davies's screenplay presents all the visual pleasure of a technically-advanced film, whilst also maintaining and reinforcing the impression that it is imbued with 'tradition' and literary faithfulness; the production's continuing success then sanctions it further. In this, Davies's adaptation marked a profound change in the approach to, and perceptions of, Austen and dramatisations of her work. As noted, many Austen adaptations of the 1970s and 1980s are underlined by what is perceived today as a 'static', formal quality (characteristics which were born largely out of 'reverential' attitudes towards costume drama, heritage and tradition). By contrast, as a 1990s reviewer remarked of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* and other contemporary costume dramas, 'My goodness, how they've changed!'.<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, as Mireia Aragay notes, the 'modern' tendency to energise screenplays with 'original' and 'daring' readings of classic novels has, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, reawakened critical (and often popular) interest in literary fidelity.<sup>98</sup> As Aragay maintains, 'a response to an adaptation in terms of whether it is 'faithful' or not is in itself a phenomenon worthy of some critical attention, especially the way in which adaptations which are perceived to be 'unfaithful' often give rise to 'incoherent animosity''.<sup>99</sup> In Austen adaptation, the 'animosity' towards, or acceptance of, certain productions once more highlights the extent to which the novels and the films have become intertwined, as certain films have 'become' the literary source text. Again, the success and relative failure of Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* and Rozema's *Mansfield Park* becomes a case in point.

It is above all clear that Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* in many ways both embodies, and provides a framework for, this phenomenon. To a considerable extent, Davies's screenplay 'rewrote' Austen; diverging from the 'muted colours' and 'dullness' of the past, it presented a filmic Austen which interwove televisuality and the notion of 'literariness' and the 'classic'. Despite some of its thematic and plot divergences from Austen's novel, however, the use of 'modern' (early to mid-1990s) filming techniques and styles creates the *appearance* of fidelity to Austen's text (as discussed below), in addition to the use of original dialogue. This promotes, and then continues to confirm, the

adaptation's reputation as quintessentially 'Austenite' – and, as such, arguably constitutes its 'acceptability'. The resultant perception of the 'Austenite' quality, developed both from the literary and the screen 'Austen', and epitomised by the 1995 adaptation, is then further compounded – and complicated – by the fidelity to Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* which often shapes later adaptations of the novel, of other Austen texts, and of biopics.

This notion of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* as an 'Austenite' film can be seen, for example, in the production's camerawork. In many ways, Davies's screenplay adheres to the traditional visual conventions of heritage drama and Austen adaptation, focusing on historical 'accuracy', period detail and aesthetic quality. In the opening credits, for example, the embroidery sequence both locates the production within the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century drawing room, highlighting gender roles and social customs, and magnifies for the viewer the intricacies of the period drama costume. Similarly, the camera presents sweeping shots of a lush English countryside, together with magnificent country residences and quaint villages.

At the same time, the camerawork embodies the humour and irony of Austen's narrative, whilst, like the novel's free indirect discourse, it also psychologises, and creates a tension between, the hero and heroine. There consequently exists a fidelity to Austen's novel, translated into visual terms. This is most marked in the dance sequences and social gatherings of Davies's screenplay and Austen's text. Whereas Fay Weldon's 1980 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* somewhat dilutes the dynamism between Lizzy and Darcy through its often uniform and objective shots, Davies's version visualises the complex perspectives and shifts of the novel.

At the Lucases' assembly and the Netherfield Ball, for example, images of Lizzy and Darcy are often framed by their mutual gazing. At their initial meeting, Darcy is first seen through the eyes of Lizzy; by the conclusion of the first episode, the shot of her (and Jane) is underlined by Darcy's presence – the viewer is placed with him as observer as he falls in love with her. This reversal frames the complex tensions and emotions that energise their developing relationship in Austen's novel:

Elizabeth, having rather expected to affront him, was amazed at his gallantry; but there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never before been bewitched by any woman as he was by her.<sup>100</sup>

The narrative is marked by shifts of perspective; of the observer becoming the observed, underpinned by Austen's dual ability to depict her characters both internally and externally. Lizzy's opinions are thus followed by an externally-observed image of the 'sweetness and archness in her manner' – an image which is coloured by Darcy's perspective. Coupled with this is the relationship of the reader to the narrative's nuanced changes; the reader is both an omniscient observer, and directed by the feelings of the hero and heroine.

In Davies's adaptation, both characters similarly 'possess' the screenplay's narrative in turn, and control (and struggle with) the presentation of each other. In Episodes One and Two, Darcy is positioned as the observer of Lizzy. He emerges from a bath, for example, in a scene which prefigures his dive into the lake at Pemberley, and regards Lizzy in the Netherfield grounds, 'fighting' with a dog. The scene conveys a rich multiplicity of meaning; its physicality, aptly suggesting Lizzy's free-spirited, sparring nature, implies both the physical attraction and antagonism that Darcy feels towards her. As in the Pemberley scene, his semi-nakedness and the cleansing symbolism of water also intimate his humanity, emotional vulnerability and rejuvenation. Above all, the sequence visualises his conflicting feelings: 'He certainly looked at [Lizzy] a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but [Charlotte] often doubted whether there was much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind' (*PP*, 327).

Narelle Campbell argues that Davies's screenplay overwhelms 'the distinctly female point of view present in Austen's novel and work[s] to position Elizabeth Bennet as a sexual commodity'.<sup>101</sup> However, Lizzy's changing (and yet still troubled) feelings towards Darcy – 'she followed him with her eyes, envied everyone to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against herself for being so silly!' (*PP*, 417) – are translated onto screen, creating both a visual tension and equality between the two characters.<sup>102</sup>

At the Lucases' social gathering in Episode One, Bingley entreats Darcy to dance in an image that is seen in medium long-shot from Lizzy's perspective; in this sense, she exerts her control and presence over Darcy. Darcy's retort – 'In company such as this. It would be unsupportable' – is again shot from Lizzy's point of view. However, the camerawork alters the nuances of the visual image. Although Lizzy still directs the shot, she is seen listening to his words through a camera which looks down from Darcy's height. Her change in expression – from contempt to hurt – is underpinned by her visual diminishment, whilst Darcy's pride and hauteur is emphasised through the camera's heightening of his stature (just as in the novel, 'Mr Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien' (*PP*, 229)).

Nevertheless, at Darcy's remark – 'she is tolerable, but she is not handsome enough to tempt me' – the camera is again fixed upon Lizzy's face. Her pain, however, turns quickly to laughter (she is indeed a character who 'dearly love[s] to laugh'), as she marches smilingly past Darcy. The camera moves into a close-up of Darcy's confused face, exposing the performativity of his resolute social stance and previously negative words, and the tense burgeoning of his attraction to her. He then observes Lizzy at a distance mocking him with Charlotte. Just as the camera focused formerly upon Lizzy at Darcy's derogatory remarks, so the viewer is placed with him as he is similarly belittled (the exclusion of the viewer from hearing their remarks serving to enhance the effect). The flux of feeling and tension apparent in Austen's narrative – 'Mr Darcy walked off; and Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him. She told the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous' (*PP*, 231) – is thus translated onto screen through the camera angle and shot.

Equally, however, Davies's screenplay – despite its assertions of 'fidelity' to the plot and characterisations of Austen's text – incorporates many elements which diverge from the novel. As with Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility*, somewhat paradoxically the 'Austenite' quality is framed by the filmic rewriting of the literary text. As has been seen, Davies's creation of the Pemberley dive, for instance, has assumed an almost mythologised status; although the scene *is* a symbolic visualisation of the psychological struggle that

Austen's Darcy endures, it has to a considerable extent taken possession of responses to *Pride and Prejudice*. Whilst the 'literariness' of Davies's screenplay must be stressed, the adaptation has in many ways removed *Pride and Prejudice* from the realm of 'the novel', and redefined it as a visual, popular concept within the cultural consciousness.

It is clear that many of the production's divergences and original insertions to Austen's narrative contributed to its success. At the same time, although the popularity of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* has established its reputation as the 'quintessential' period drama, it is arguable that it has subversive elements which challenge the conventions of heritage adaptation. To a considerable degree, its camerawork, characterisations, preoccupations and plot divergences undercut the traditional images and expectations of costume drama.

Although Joe Wright, in discussing his version of *Pride and Prejudice*, maintained that he wished to make his costume drama 'different' from previous Austen adaptations, moving away in particular from the 'nostalgic', 'polished' look of heritage film, Davies's production also does this to an extent.<sup>103</sup> On the one hand, the adaptation clearly contains classic 'heritage' shots (the first view of Pemberley; the landscape around Longbourn; the gentle gathering of flowers in the garden as an ironic, yet suitably 'proper', framework in which the Bennets' affairs are discussed). However, it is significant that there is often a certain irreverence in these shots, which differentiates the production from many previous and later Austen adaptations.

Davies has Lizzy jump over a stile into some mud, for example. Embodying Elizabeth's partiality for the outdoors, the humour of the shot also works in tension with the polished beauty of the rural scene; although the landscape is verdant and the sky is blue, the sight and sound of the mud reminds the viewer, to an extent, of the 'gritty reality' of the countryside, and of the façade of perfection that the *mise-en-scène* of heritage film traditionally presents. As in the novel, Lizzy's hem *will* be six inches deep in mud, and an affront to Caroline's sensibilities. Just as Austen challenges social dictates, Davies reworks conventional images of period adaptation – contrasting his screenplay with the visual decorum of the costumes and settings of Aldous Huxley's *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), for example (in which the opening scene is indeed located in a dressmaker's shop, asserting the delights of *costume* drama).



As Mike Crang notes, in heritage productions the landscape shot often becomes a ‘character’ in itself, taking ‘possession’ of the screen from the protagonists and preoccupations of a text.<sup>104</sup> In Thompson’s *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, the final shot of Willoughby presents him on horseback, at the pinnacle of a hill which overlooks the valley and the church in which Marianne has just married Brandon; in Welch’s *Emma*, shots of Mr Elton recall simultaneously the scenery and the figure of Willoughby found in Thompson’s film. The splendour of both scenes in many ways configures the shots as purely aesthetic, focusing upon ‘a nostalgic geography of a lost English society’.<sup>105</sup>

By contrast, although Julianne Pidduck argues that in the mid-1990s’ Austen film the camera ‘rests undoubtedly *inside* with the female protagonist looking out’, in Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* exterior shots are often directed by the female gaze.<sup>106</sup> Significantly, the landscape is often framed by Lizzy’s perspective; the viewer does not perceive the scenes purely as aesthetic and nostalgic, but is instead located with the heroine. The very first shot of the series, for example, is seen from her viewpoint. Positioned on a hill, her gaze encompasses the male characters (Darcy and Bingley), the landscape, the country house, and land as male property. In many ways, it is therefore a challenging shot, its feminist undertones complicating and enriching the visual display perceived as conventional to costume drama. Indeed, such nuances make an interesting comparison with Davies’s adaptation of the previous year, *Middlemarch* (BBC, 1994), in which shots of the town (Stamford, regarded widely as the ‘finest stone town in England’) are continuously repeated purely for aesthetic value.<sup>107</sup>

Significantly, *Pride and Prejudice*’s irreverence towards, and reworking of, the heritage ‘property shot’ anticipates Burke’s *Persuasion*, Davies’s *Sense and Sensibility*, and Wright’s *Pride and Prejudice*. In *Persuasion*, for example, Kellynch is viewed through closely-shot but disorientated images as Anne leaves the Hall. As with Davies’s Lizzy, the camerawork is specifically from Anne’s perspective, with an emphasis upon character commentary rather than scenery; whilst the intimacy of the close-up images point to Anne’s love of her home, the unsettling camera movements indicate her troubled displacement and vulnerability. Similar shots mark the Dashwoods’ departure from Norland in Davies’s screenplay, embodying many of the same issues as in *Persuasion*, and

arguably constituting a feminist commentary; like Margaret's indignation at her brother's assumption of her home, the wide-angle distortion of Norland both reflects and defies the injustice of patriarchal inheritance.

Although Joe Wright claims he had “never seen the other adaptations [of *Pride and Prejudice*]”, it is nevertheless clear that his film is in dialogue with at least the cultural presence of Davies's adaptation, together with the traditional stereotypes of ‘heritage film’.<sup>108</sup> It is significant in itself that Wright felt the need to question Davies's influence upon perceptions of Austen's work – “people talk about [...] Colin Firth's *Pride and Prejudice* [...] hopefully this is Keira Knightley's *Pride and Prejudice*” – and to imbue period adaptation with ‘British realism’, as opposed to “the picturesque tradition, which tends to depict an idealised version of English heritage as some kind of heaven on earth”. He instead wanted to make his costume drama “real and gritty and [...] as honest as possible”.<sup>109</sup>

Tellingly, however, Wright's adaptation forges immediate inter-filmic links with Davies's screenplay. His *Pride and Prejudice* also commences with Lizzy separated from her family and out walking, and, as in the earlier production, Austen's opening scene between Mr and Mrs Bennet is filmed from Lizzy's perspective as she stands outside her home. Although Ehle's and Knightley's Lizzys are thus privileged in the films' narratives, and removed from the feminine domestic sphere, Austen does not separate her heroine so distinctly from her sisters and their home in the early part of her text. It is, as such, specifically the earlier adaptation which Wright invokes.

Similarly, Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* also reconfigures the novel according to the historical moment in which it was produced, and pays homage to the contemporary cultural rewriting of Austen that is in many ways interlinked with Davies's adaptation. As Dole notes, the advertising campaigns for Wright's drama promoted the fact that the adaptation was ‘from the producers of *Bridget Jones*’ prior to any reference to Jane Austen.<sup>110</sup> Allusions to Colin Firth, Mark Darcy and the Mr Darcy of Davies's screenplay thus prefigure Austen's own literary creation. However, although the light, colourful design of the DVD box of Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* emulates the ‘sparkle and wit’ of Austen's novel, it is significant that the production is advertised, like *Bridget Jones* and

*The Jane Austen Book Club*, as a ‘rom-com’; the romantic and humorous elements of the literary text are reconceived in the context of a popular contemporary genre. By contrast, the BBC packages its Anniversary Edition of Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* in a black DVD box; although Austen maintained that her novel ‘wants shade’, the BBC redefines its image in order to fit the ‘seriousness’ required of their high-quality, ‘classic’ tradition of costume drama.<sup>111</sup> Opposed to the ‘definitive’, ‘timeless’ status that the BBC attaches to Davies’s screenplay (despite its own elements of cultural specificity), the Wright film presents Austen as a commodity that is to be reworked and appreciated according to a particular historical moment (a simplified ending, with Darcy kissing ‘Mrs Darcy’, was written for the American market, for example).<sup>112</sup>

### ***Pride and Prejudice* (2005)**

To a considerable extent, Wright succeeds in reinterpreting *Pride and Prejudice*, both the novel and previous film adaptations. In his ‘Costume Drama with Muddy Hems’, with its deliberate attempt at ‘grittiness’, Wright in many ways historicises his adaptation – although, significantly, this movement has links with the strong social commentary and ‘gritty’ camerawork found in Nicholas Dear’s *Persuasion* (BBC, 1995) and Davies’s *Emma* (1996).<sup>113</sup> Even in its professed ‘realism’, Wright’s film is, to a degree, in dialogue with other Austen adaptations.<sup>114</sup> However, in his film, the Bennet family is taken from the gentility that Weldon and Davies ascribe to Longbourn, and placed on a chaotic farm. Elaborating upon Austen’s comment that Mr Bennet’s horses are needed for work, the family lives directly alongside its means of financial sustenance, thereby acknowledging the importance in the novel’s narrative of the Bennets’ (often vulnerable) social and fiscal standing.

Indeed, the outdoors and domestic space converge, as livestock wander through the open, airy passages of Wright’s Longbourn. Moreover, the encroachment of the outdoors into the Bennet household can also be seen as a comment upon Lizzy’s characterisation; she uses the same easy gait when walking in the fields or in her home, for instance, intimating the free-spiritedness of her nature. In contrast to Davies’s adaptation, in Wright’s *Pride and*

*Prejudice* it is noticeable that whilst the outdoors provides a constant setting, it does not contain as many ‘domesticated’ exterior scenes as in the BBC production. In Wright’s desire to produce his film according to the tenets of ‘British realism’, the energy and speed of his camerawork also becomes significant; the visual and musical dynamism of his country dance sequence, together with its close-ups of worn clothes and dishevelled appearances, provides a marked contrast to Davies’s and especially Weldon’s versions of the dances (Weldon’s gentle – and genteel – folk music differs strongly from the raucousness of Wright’s score, for instance).

To a considerable extent, Wright also rewrites the aesthetic and symbolic use of exterior shots of ‘property’ which traditionally define heritage, and especially Austen, films. As David Fulton comments, costume drama is often marked by ‘one National Trust property seamlessly succeeding another’.<sup>115</sup> Wright instead manipulates this device for his own effect. Mr Collins’s approach to Rosings, for example, provides a humorous and suitably ironic visual comment upon his true relationship with Lady Catherine. Whilst he lauds the splendour of Rosings and his social connection, he is noticeably entering the estate via the servants’ entrance; the slanted shot thus obscures the view of the property, and ‘pushes’ Collins away from it (he scurries across the frame, parallel to the building, as if he is going past – rather than towards – it). At the same time, the obscuration of Rosings undercuts Lady Catherine’s pomposity, and prefigures Lizzy’s silencing and dismissal of her.

Wright’s resistance to aesthetic shots of the country house thereby challenges conventional notions of the heritage film as a nostalgic exercise, and as a means of validating a production. Indeed, in contrast to Austen adaptations, Austen’s narratives often include little detail of the buildings in which her protagonists live; her description of Collins’s sycophantic subservience to Lady Catherine, however, is treated with the irony that Wright has translated into visual terms. Similarly, despite Mr Collins’s pride in his parsonage, Wright offers only an obstructed view of his property at Lizzy’s first arrival at Charlotte’s marital home – in contrast to Davies’s full-frame view of Hunsford.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, whilst the camera in Davies’s adaptation lingers on a magnificent shot of Pemberley, initially Wright presents Darcy’s home through a close-up of Lizzy’s reaction to it.

Wright couples his reassessment of the tropes of the heritage film with several interesting interpretations of Austen's novel. Unlike the rather caricatured portrait of Collins in Davies's and Weldon's screenplays, Wright has his pomposity and pedantry stem from the character's fundamental insecurity and self-doubt; interestingly, he also depicts a growing distance between Jane and Lizzy.<sup>117</sup> Above all, Wright attaches great significance to the character of Lizzy, maintaining that he "tried to make a film about Elizabeth Bennet".<sup>118</sup> By contrast, Lizzy is portrayed at times as 'weak' in Weldon's production; she fetches her mother to confront Darcy following his slight of her at the Lucases' gathering, for example, whilst she is often positioned as a female object to be gazed upon. Construed as a figure of feminine display, the camera angles deliberately show off her 'form' as she confidently sings and plays (despite the poor musicianship that Austen accords her).

It is Jennifer Ehle, however, who has perhaps exerted the strongest influence over the image of Austen's Lizzy; her 'passionate performance' has played a large part in the establishment of Davies's series as a cultural icon. Wright's casting of Knightley is in many ways part of his attempt to present a fresh view of Austen's heroine. Knightley immediately contemporises the role; the 'classic' status of Lizzy is merged with the actress's image as a young, modern cultural icon. Knightley's Lizzy is thus placed at the centre of the adaptation; in the opening sequence at Longbourn and at the Netherfield Ball, for example, the camera moves away from her and then tracks back, so that she is the pivot of the scenes and frames their perspective.

At the same time, Wright explores Austen's treatment of Romantic individualism (whereas Davies, whose narrative is split more evenly between Lizzy and Darcy, perhaps loses this focus). Sarah Ailwood argues that 'rather than endorsing a relational approach to the self for her heroine [...] Austen constructs the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy as in fact enabling Elizabeth's individuality'.<sup>119</sup> Wright visualises this divide between the relational and the individual self through his equation of Lizzy with the outdoors at key symbolic moments. Following Charlotte's assertion that she is to marry Collins, Lizzy enters a period of self-reflection as she sits on the swing. Significantly, the passing of time and the static nature of her life (visualised through the circularity of the swing) is not presented through images of domestic confinement (as will

be discussed later, this is instead characteristic of *Becoming Jane*). The scene is rather located firmly outdoors, intimating the freedom that defines Lizzy. Her musical theme similarly emulates this. Rather than using the piano (the classic instrument of costume drama), she is characterised through birdsong; whilst Lizzy herself admits of her poor musicianship, the natural and liberated sound of birds aptly embodies her free-spiritedness, and accords with the Romantic ideals of Wright's film (demonstrated by his aestheticised portrayal of the countryside, for example).<sup>120</sup> In a marked contrast to Davies's adaptation, both marriage proposals between Darcy and Lizzy are made outdoors (whilst Bingley also rehearses his proposal to Jane on the banks of a lake). Tellingly, the scene of Darcy's first, rejected offer, is set in the 'un-natural' confines of a garden pavilion; opposed to this 'domesticated' outdoors, Lizzy accepts Darcy in the freedom and naturalness of a meadow.

Crucially, however, Wright's film becomes contradictory, finally adhering to many of the conventions and expectations inherent to Austen adaptation. The film undermines the important and nuanced shifts in perspective that characterise Austen's free-indirect discourse, for example. During Wright's dance sequence at the Netherfield Ball, Darcy and Lizzy become the only couple in the room. Ailwood asserts that this scene 'visually encapsulates both their respective determination to maintain the integrity of their individuality, even from each other, and their mutual positions as social outsiders'.<sup>121</sup> However, Wright simplifies his screenplay at this point, placing Darcy and Lizzy on the same plane of feeling and understanding as he brings them together using a stock romantic device. By contrast, in both Austen's text and Davies's screenplay, the dance sequence embodies their simultaneous attraction and antagonism, contained ironically within the harmony and formality of late-eighteenth-century dancing.

Wright's portrayal of Darcy, and the 'possession' that Firth exerts over the role and image of Austen's protagonist, are also problematic. Ailwood maintains that 'Wright [...] foregrounds the Byronic features of Darcy's personality, as he is constructed in Austen's novel, to present him as a Byronic hero who is driven solely by his love for Elizabeth and whose love can enable Elizabeth to achieve the independent selfhood she so desperately seeks'.<sup>122</sup>

However, Wright's and Macfadyen's presentation of Darcy rests merely upon an image of the hero as Byronic, prefigured and largely constructed by Firth (whereas the reader arguably responds, initially, with as much vehemence as Mrs Bennet – 'How I detest the man!' – it is clear that many viewers found little that was detestable about Firth's Darcy). In many ways, the acting and the characterisation of Darcy are 'flattened' in Wright's film. This is exemplified by the camera's lingering close-up of a statue of Achilles at Pemberley, meant to represent Darcy. Whilst Davies intercuts the image of Darcy's portrait with his dive into the lake, establishing the contrast between his austere external being and his inner emotion (pointing also to late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century notions of masculinity, and the divide between social and individual selfhood), Wright's 'Living Statues of Pemberley' focus largely upon image rather than character engagement.

Moreover, Wright's desire for 'gritty realism' conflicts with his highly aestheticised landscape shots. Although Dole argues that Wright transforms 'props and settings into unprepossessing realism rather than nostalgic spectacle', his adaptation, significantly, presents a stylised 'grittiness', softly lit and artistically coloured.<sup>123</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the unmediated starkness of Dear's *Persuasion*, for example, which shocked many viewers by its portrayal of 'an unappealing Anne Elliot, a pockmarked Captain Wentworth, a greasy necked Benwick, and a slovenly looking Lady Russell'.<sup>124</sup> Instead, attractive lighting and landscape shots in some ways align Wright's production with conventional heritage films, encouraging what Andrew Higson describes as the 'look of the observer at the tableau image'.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, it can again be seen that the film's 'realism' is coloured by the presence of other literary texts and adaptations; two landscape shots in particular (both of which are included on the DVD menu and box cover) are highly reminiscent of 'Brontëan' iconography, showing a dramatic crag and a windswept tree. As Anthony Lane comments, 'Jane Austen has been Brontëfied'.<sup>126</sup> Although such images fit the film's interest in Romanticism, it is telling that Wright promotes (and validates) his adaptation through the legacy of literary and filmic 'classics'.

The complexities raised by Wright's plot and characterisations are finally softened through the adaptation's happy resolutions. Romantic escapism succeeds the tense struggle experienced by Darcy and Lizzy in the novel and

Davies's adaptation; indeed, Wright himself concedes in the DVD 'Special Features' that his film, and especially the scene in which the lovers meet at daybreak, is possibly 'overdone' and 'slushy' at times (its adherence to the 'rom-com' pointing again to the film's status as a commodity within a moment of cultural specificity). Similarly, family, marriage and the home are idealised to an extent which dilutes the ambiguities of Austen's narrative. In Wright's film, the Bennet family is presented, ultimately, as a harmonious 'unit'. On the DVD commentary, Wright maintains that he wanted to portray Mrs Bennet as a caring mother, for example.

On the one hand, this links his screenplay with Weldon's. During the viewer's first introduction to Weldon's Mrs Bennet, she remarks that Bingley is 'a single man of large fortune [...]. Well, what a thing for our girls!' Her views and actions have been justified, however, by the previous scene, in which romantic ideals have been challenged by Charlotte's comments upon love, marriage and practicality. As in Wright's film, Mrs Bennet thus becomes less of the caricature seen in Davies's version, and less alienated from both her daughters and the viewer.

At the same time, however, Wright's film undercuts the nuances of Austen's novel, in which Lizzy's family is questioned and forms an important element of her personal, and class-based, struggle with Darcy. Wright depicts instead an essentially loving relationship between Mr and Mrs Bennet (who, in the novel – and in Weldon's adaptation – in many ways prove Charlotte's bleak outlook upon the compatibility of spouses). By contrast, Wright upholds the Bennet household as an ideal; as Lydia leaves home with Wickham, for instance, the shot, taken through Longbourn's window, tries to locate the married daughter back within her family home. Similarly, the repeated musical theme at Longbourn and Lizzy's visit to Pemberley connects the two places, thus melding what will become her married home with that of her childhood – and contradicting, to an extent, the film's Romantic focus upon Lizzy's struggle 'to achieve self-fulfilment through the pursuit of individual desire within an oppressive patriarchal social order'.<sup>127</sup>



### ***Mansfield Park* (1999)**

The conflicts in Wright's film suggest once more that Austen adaptation is, to a considerable degree, subjected to particular expectations. Although Dole argues that Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* is 'a hybrid that embraces both an irreverent realism [...] and the classic heritage film's reverence for country houses, attractive landscapes, and authentic period detail', achieving a balance between genres, the film presents tensions which ultimately lead Wright to conform to – rather than explore and re-create – the traditional period drama.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, as he noted in an interview, in “a period film you feel like you have to have carriages all the time”.<sup>129</sup>

Whereas Wright finally softens his desire for originality and grittiness (most particularly through his film's visual and musical aesthetics), Rozema presents her controversial postcolonial and feminist reading of *Mansfield Park* within a stylistic framework which reinforces her resistance to the idealisation of Austen's narratives and Austen adaptations. Like many literary theorists in recent years, who express 'impatience with the conservative Austen', she widens and darkens Austen's sphere both in terms of her reading of the novel and in her rewriting of the 'Austenite' film.<sup>130</sup>

As already noted, the negative reception of Rozema's dramatisation indicates the potency of the mythology that has come to surround 'Austen', and the significance of screen adaptations in creating, and reasserting, resistance to readings which *overtly* complicate both her novels and screen versions of her work. As Keith Windschuttle comments, 'many among Jane Austen's legions of readers [were] upset at the film taking such license with the novel because it imposes a controversial political issue [slavery] onto the quintessentially domestic concerns of their favorite author'.<sup>131</sup> As will be seen, in its desire to explore – and explode – the conventions which confront Rozema's screenplay, *Mansfield Park* in many ways foreshadows the complexities and tensions discernable in the most recent Austen adaptations.

Indeed, it is significant in itself that, despite Rozema's desire for 'originality', there are clear attempts to reassert the written text of *Mansfield Park* and Austen as authoress. The opening credits (which, in their listing of the actors and producers, draw obvious attention to the filmic nature of *Mansfield*

*Park*) focus upon images of ink, quills and writing. In the merging of the literary and the filmic, it is Austen's status as a novelist which is emphasised. Her character, Fanny Price, composes and recites her juvenilia, whilst this initial assertion of Austen's early formation as a writer is compounded by the film's final scene, in which Fanny is to become the author of *Effusions of Fancy* (her wry laugh at the suggestion of the title emulating Austen's own characteristic humour and irony); aptly, this work is to be published by Egerton, Austen's own publisher.<sup>132</sup>

At the same time, the promotion of the film and the DVD becomes significant. Ultimately, Rozema's controversial adaptation was (and still is) framed by the expectations and characteristics engendered by the 'Austenmania' that occurred in the mid 1990s; the film is advertised on the DVD cover by the caption 'For everyone who loved *Emma* and *Sense and Sensibility* comes the story Jane Austen loved best'. Whilst this attempts to validate the production through reference to the author, the implication is that it alludes to the McGrath and Davies versions of *Emma* and the Thompson *Sense and Sensibility* (interestingly, *Pride and Prejudice* is not mentioned). Significantly, preconceptions about *Mansfield Park*'s 'unacceptable' controversy are thus challenged by linking the film with previous (and successful) Austen adaptations.

Nevertheless, Rozema's film overwhelmingly marks a break with tradition. The adaptation is strongly influenced by Edward Said's reading, in *Culture and Imperialism*, of *Mansfield Park*'s dialogue with the issues of slavery and the slave trade that were prominent in the late eighteenth century.<sup>133</sup> This concern is widened to encompass not only racial slavery, but also the gendered, domestic enslavement that is arguably implied by Austen's free indirect discourse, and its effect upon the presentation of her heroine. Just as Sir Thomas silences debate about the morality of the slave trade (both in the novel and in Rozema's film), Austen's narrative form, in its ability to juxtapose Fanny's inner being with her external, societal self, emulates the suffocation which she feels: '[Sir Thomas] calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown! Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed' (*MP*, 549).

In Rozema's adaptation, Fanny's oppression is highlighted by linking her immediately with the slaves that are implicit in Austen's novel, and explicit in

the film. Read alongside Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Margaret Kirkham notes that 'Jane Austen follows an analogy used in the *Vindication* between the slaves in the colonies and women, especially married women, at home'; 'far from being the work of conservative quietism that much twentieth-century criticism has turned it into', *Mansfield Park* 'embodies Jane Austen's most ambitious and radical criticism of contemporary prejudice in society and literature'.<sup>134</sup>

In stark contrast to David Giles's version of *Mansfield Park* (BBC, 1983), Rozema harnesses this dissident element of the literary text, and reinforces it through a subversion of the conventional tropes of Austen adaptation.<sup>135</sup> Instead of the 'nostalgic' shots of property and idealised landscape which mark the opening of many Austen productions (including Giles's *Mansfield Park*, with its illustration of Mansfield Park transforming into a shot of the actual location), the viewer is presented with an image of a ship bearing slaves off the coast of Portsmouth.<sup>136</sup> Significantly, therefore, Fanny's parental home is also shadowed by connotations of slavery; enslavement, for her, seems inescapable. The emotional resonance of the scene is heightened by the troubling sound of the musical score. As the coachman points out the 'black cargo' (much like Fanny's position as a piece of 'cargo'), the shot is accompanied by haunted – and haunting – African voices (marking a strong contrast to the gentle, buoyant themes of many Austen films, the orchestral elements of Lesley Barber's score are constantly interwoven with African instruments). Fanny's lingering gaze at the vessel connects her firmly to the slaves, as does her later memory of the scene – significantly expressed through the African voices, rather than a physical image of the white man's ship – at her return to Portsmouth and domestic servitude.

The film's unsettling opening – both in terms of its challenging of aesthetic and plot conventions, and its rapid dislocation of the central character from her home onto a disorientating journey – is compounded by the ensuing reversal of many of the 'unwritten expectations' that Dole notes as being inherent to the popular and critical success of heritage films.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, Rozema furthers the effect by interlinking much of the symbolism of her film; her rewriting of the traditional concepts of the family, the home, and the country

house are connected visually by disturbing images of slavery, moral decay, sexuality and performativity.

The parallel which Rozema draws between racial slavery and Fanny's gendered, domestic slavery, for example, is emphasised through shadows and dark lighting. The film's opening immediately darkens the domestic sphere, combining the 'realism' of Dear's *Persuasion* with symbolic effect. A beetle scurrying across the shadows, intercut with images of Fanny's writing, intimates not only the Prices' vulnerable social standing (and, as in *Becoming Jane*, an unromanticised vision of authorship as a means of financial sustenance), but also the practical and emotional hardships that Fanny will face both in Portsmouth and at Mansfield. Arguably, the squalor of Fanny's cramped bedroom foreshadows the image of the slave ship. The connection between slavery and Sir Thomas's property is then asserted, as the shot of the slave vessel is followed almost immediately by the first glimpse of Mansfield. Significantly, however, the Park is obscured by darkness; Fanny arrives unceremoniously in the middle of the night, encountering a drunk Tom (implicated in, and the heir of, the moral dubiousness of his father's estate), and preventing heritage-style shots which laud the visual splendour of their country-house locations.

The references to slavery which occur unsettlingly throughout the film – the glimpse of a statue of a 'negro' as Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris listen languidly to music; maps of Antigua; Tom's blackened face as he rehearses *Lovers' Vows* – are compounded by Rozema's re-conceptualisation of the *mise-en-scène* of the country estate. Whilst Chatsworth and Burghley are often favoured by 'Austenite' films, Rozema's location is the derelict Kirby Hall. Its disrepair and sparsely-furnished interior become symbolic in her film, as Tom's gambling debts and the failure of the Antigua plantation have prevented the maintenance of building work. In contrast to the idealisation apparent in Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, the family home becomes a manifestation of the moral decay of its residents, whilst patriarchal constructions of nineteenth-century femininity are also tested; although Lady Bertram proclaims that Fanny is 'an angel', the conventionality of her statement is undercut – she perceives her niece as angelic largely because she dispenses her opium. The traditionally 'safe' and domesticated world of Austen is thus starkly encroached upon.

This is perhaps epitomised by a scene in which Fanny finds Tom's drawings of the ills of slavery. Accompanied by disturbing sounds of discordant African voices and instruments, Sir Thomas is revealed suddenly as the abuser; significantly, enclosed within a suffocating and darkened room, Fanny discovers a sketch of her uncle violating a female slave. His entrance into the room, and his wrenching of the sketchbook from her, connects Fanny and the slave through the camera's focus upon his brutal physicality, and forms the culmination (both thematically and visually) of a sequence of earlier scenes.

In one such scene, Sir Thomas ignores Fanny's inquiries into the morality of the slave trade and comments instead upon her improved looks and manner; he regards her as an asset – a slave – to be placed upon the marriage market. Austen's novels, and Austen adaptations, often connect marriage, money and property humorously, as Davies's comic and rather caricatured portrait of Mrs Bennet demonstrates. Indeed, at other times in her film, Rozema depicts physical attractiveness with an ironic humour. At the Crawfords' introduction to Mansfield, the slow camera which moves suggestively up Henry's and Mary's figures is thrown into relief by the buoyancy of the musical score, the exaggerated close-ups of the Bertrams' awed and admiring faces, and Henry's smiling remark upon their dullness. Vitally, however, the viewer remains unsettled by Rozema's ability to contrast humour with a darkened portrayal of many of the themes often perceived as integral to Austen's novels and 'Austenite' films.

Following her uncle's remarks, Fanny escapes his oppressive presence, which taints the conventional gentility of the drawing room, and rides passionately through Mansfield's grounds. Although her actions express her autonomy and desire for freedom, the scene is tellingly set at night; the darkness once more reasserts the connection between racial and gendered slavery, and, in the intimation of Sir Thomas's incestuous feelings, the tarnished morality of Mansfield's domestic and familial sphere.<sup>138</sup> Sir Thomas later chastises Fanny brutally upon her refusal to marry Crawford, again in a room in deep shadow; the scene then cuts to an exterior shot of Mansfield. As in many Austen productions, marriage and property are thus linked visually. However, in contrast to the humour of *Becoming Jane*, for instance, in which Mrs Austen extols the

‘excellent prospects’ of her daughter’s potential suitor, Mansfield is presented powerfully – and unsettlingly – as a darkened silhouette.

The stylistic innovations of Rozema’s film are coupled with characterisations and readings of the novel which stress the adaptation’s location within its late-twentieth-century context. Nevertheless, many viewers objected to the portrayal of Fanny as spirited and assertive, speaking direct to camera. As John Wiltshire maintains, by incorporating the characteristic voice of Austen’s novels into her film (Fanny speaks many of the omniscient narrator’s lines), Rozema’s adaptation ‘conspicuously repudiates Austen’s great achievement, in the very gesture of its own assimilation. Private selfhood is acknowledged in this film, through Fanny’s soliloquies, but at the same moment interior depth is abolished’.<sup>139</sup> In many ways, Sylvestra Le Touzel’s introverted, almost awkward performance as Fanny in Giles’s *Mansfield Park* is indeed an apt translation from novel to screen of Austen’s characterisation.

However, Rozema’s adaptation, whilst consciously reworking aspects of Austen’s novel, also expresses a fidelity to the literary text; the fact that such fidelity was rejected by popular and critical audiences points once again to strongly-held notions about what constitutes the ‘Austenite’ quality. Rozema’s heroine is placed as the focal point of the film’s narrative. At the start of the adaptation, in contrast to the conventional opening shot of property, the viewer enters the internal world of Fanny’s imagination, whilst she becomes a director of the film as she provides voiceover and commentary in various scenes. Nevertheless, Fanny’s vociferousness is tempered by subtle changes in her manner which capture the confinement and expression accorded to her by Austen’s free-indirect discourse, and the schism between her interior and societal selves (a theme which is also explored, both in Austen’s novel and Rozema’s film, through the concept of ‘performance’).

In the novel, Fanny is characterised with considerable depth and emotional power, heightened by the narrative’s juxtaposition of her external guise and internal feeling, together with Austen’s subtle use of language:

“I would not have the shadow of a coolness arise,”  
[Edmund] repeated, [...] “between the two dearest  
objects I have on earth.”

He was gone as he spoke; and Fanny remained to tranquillise herself as she could. She was one of his two dearest – that must support her. But the other! – the first! She had never heard him speak so openly before, and though it told her no more than what she had long perceived, it was a stab – for it told of his own convictions and views. They were decided. He would marry Miss Crawford. It was a stab, in spite of every long-standing expectation; and she was obliged to repeat again and again that she was one of his two dearest, before the words gave her any sensation [...]; [Miss Crawford's] faults were what they had ever been, but [Edmund] saw them no longer. Till she had shed many tears over this deception, Fanny could not subdue her agitation; and the dejection which followed could only be relieved by the influence of fervent prayers for his happiness (*MP*, 598).

In Rozema's adaptation, Fanny's complexity is translated onto screen. Just as Austen's heroine is often a silent (yet powerful) observer of the proceedings at Mansfield, Fanny quietly 'possesses' many of the shots in Rozema's film; the Crawfords' and Bertrams' card game is observed through her gaze, for example, their flirtatiousness and superficiality regulated and undercut by the framework of Fanny's morality and sense. Moreover, although Rozema invests Austen's character with an often feisty independence, it is an assertiveness that is interlaced with the modesty and innocence that is to be found in the novel. The child Fanny is talkative and opinionated, yet her confidence is tinted with demureness. As Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris discuss Fanny's future upon her arrival at Mansfield, she interrupts their conversation with a sweetly self-deprecating politeness: 'Please – please do not trouble yourself on my behalf'. At Sir Thomas's request – 'will you excuse us?' – Fanny assents, yet waits for her aunt and uncle to move away from *her*. Rozema thus blends her contemporary reworking of Fanny with an acknowledgement of her literary characterisation, together with an 'Austenite' humour.

The nuances of Rozema's portrayal of Fanny are carried throughout the film. Despite Fanny's claim that she is 'a wild beast', her physicality asserted by the slow, sensual shots of her horse-riding, she is oblivious to Edmund's attraction towards her; as he looks lingeringly at her, she asks innocently 'what?;

what?’. As the film progresses, however, the emotional connection between Fanny and Edmund is presented powerfully and intensely. Rozema emulates the deeply-felt bond that is seen in the novel by allowing Edmund to wrest some of the narrative control from Fanny in her film. Just as Austen’s heroine expresses complete devotion to her cousin – “‘there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown’” (*MP*, 568) – Fanny ‘allows’ her commentaries to be intercut only by Edmund’s voice.

Rozema’s manipulation of camera perspectives also translates onto screen the nuances of Austen’s characterisation and narrative form. In a scene between the Bertrams, the Crawfords and Fanny, for example, Henry inquires of Fanny’s sensibilities: ‘What do you think, Miss Price?’ Fanny, aware of her societal role, replies that she does not ‘have a ready opinion’. Whilst Edmund expresses his own feelings about the worth of her mind, Fanny gazes lovingly at him. The audience is suddenly made aware, however, that Crawford has been gazing at Fanny; seen in medium long-shot, looking at her cousin, Fanny’s emotional vulnerability is framed by Henry’s predatory gaze. Moreover, in Crawford’s assertion that she is ‘almost entirely composed of ready opinions not shared’, the schism between inner and outer being – integral to the power of Austen’s narrative form – is also highlighted. When in company, Rozema’s heroine is shy, ‘living in dread of an audience’. By herself, and with Edmund, however, she is able to express her true self; Sir Thomas’s command – ‘Fanny Price! Will you please try to *act* with some decorum!’ (my italics) – and her enforced restraint (abandoned as soon as she is alone with Edmund) highlight the internal conflict that Fanny experiences in Austen’s novel, as she negotiates her ‘duty’ and her own feelings.

The performativity of *Mansfield Park*’s characters – as Mary comments, ‘we need an audience – everyone needs an audience’ – is compounded by the self-reflexive nature of Rozema’s film.<sup>140</sup> Her production is strongly metafilmic, just as Austen offers a metafictional reference to *Lovers’ Vows*; the play is staged in her novel, with its plot unfolding in *Mansfield Park* itself. In Rozema’s adaptation, Aunt Norris, Julia, Maria and Edmund all regard themselves in the mirror and perform different poses; they are actors. As Edmund himself finally proclaims to Fanny, he loves her ‘as a hero loves a heroine’. Finally, Mrs



Norris's disparagement of Tom's self-portrait – 'Very modern...very modern' – becomes a wryly conscious comment upon the adaptation as a whole.

The self-reflexivity of Rozema's film, however, conflicts with its seemingly happy resolutions, characteristic of much Austen adaptation. The implied relationship between Julia and Yates, who is portrayed negatively in the rest of the film, is idealised through the former's delighted response to his letter. Similarly, building work in the background suggests that the moral deficiencies of Mansfield have been rectified; it can, moreover, also be seen as a movement towards the traditionally 'Austenite' 'property' shot.

Nevertheless, Rozema retains an ambiguity which unsettles any firm idealism. In *Mansfield Park*, the narrator exclaims 'let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest' (*MP*, 712). Whilst this *can* be read as a resolution of the novel within a 'feminine' narrow sphere – a 'little bit [...] of ivory' – at the same time, it unsettles the narrative, pointing by implication and irony to the troubled issues that underline the plot and characterisations.<sup>141</sup> At the film's conclusion, Fanny states repeatedly in voiceover 'it could have all turned out differently, I suppose', her lines directing the characters as they momentarily freeze their positions (again, drawing attention to their roles as performers). There is an awareness that, despite the conventions of Austen adaptation, other endings and other readings are possible. The film thus both defends itself, and, in its self-reflexivity, renders itself open to questioning.

### ***Becoming Jane* (2007)**

As such, perhaps the greatest significance of Rozema's adaptation is the negative criticism that it attracted. The failure of this film can be explained partly through reference to Jarrold's biopic, *Becoming Jane*, in the contrast between Anne Hathaway's portrayal of the author and Rozema's merging of Fanny Price and Jane Austen. Rozema's strong female writer – speaking directly to camera – is rejected, and a conservative view of 'Dear Aunt Jane', and the 'Austenite' film,

is finally embraced.<sup>142</sup> Once more, this suggests the complex, and yet firmly-held, expectations which frame Austen adaptation.

Certainly, to an extent, *Becoming Jane* attempts to 'radicalise' perceptions of Austen. Like Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, and as will be discussed in the Conclusion in relation to *Miss Austen Regrets*, Jarrold's seemingly feminist biopic seeks to widen appreciations of Austen's literary and intellectual scope, as well as traditional images of the 'Austenite' film (and, by extension, costume drama). The first shots within the Austen household, for example, point to the lethargy of conventional domestic life that confronts – and confines – Jane. As in *Miss Austen Regrets*, close-up images of her home, and the overwhelming sound of a heavily-ticking clock, submerge the viewer within the domestic space; the first word of the film – 'Propriety' – is simultaneously apt and troubling. The image of Jane writing whilst enclosed within domesticity (she is often shot through windows, whose lattices create a rather cage-like effect) is a motif that is repeated throughout the film, remaining even as Austen pens her celebrated *Pride and Prejudice*. The film then explores this issue by emulating the confines forced upon women by late-eighteenth-century social expectations. Following Jane's rejection by Lefroy, she returns home to domestic drudgery. The scene repeats the opening shots of the film, underlined by the discomfiting drone of the clock; through its circularity, Jane seems as 'trapped' in the film as she is confined by what she 'must do'.

Despite its feminist leanings, however, the film in many ways aligns itself with Lady Gresham's troubled inquiry as to whether 'anything can be done' about Austen's writing. Equally, despite the production's movement to rewrite the 'Austenite' film, harnessing the use of 'breathing camera', for instance, in order to energise the relationship between Jane and Lefroy, the biopic is deeply implicated in the legacy of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* (as well as other Austen adaptations). Although the title, *Becoming Jane*, intimates autonomy and self-development, it actually points to a process already known, understood and *expected* by the viewer. Austen will 'become herself' through the processes preordained particularly by screen versions of her novels' plots and characters, her status complicated and in some ways superseded most especially by Andrew Davies.

Tellingly, for instance, the trailer for *Becoming Jane* contains a strong visual reference to Darcy plunging into the Lake at Pemberley, as Jane watches Lefroy dive into a river. Moreover, as Pucci notes, ‘nearly every Austen remake [...] opens with the camera [framing] carefully constructed views of a country house and estate’.<sup>143</sup> Potential viewers of *Becoming Jane* are similarly enticed by the trailer’s opening exterior shot of the Austens’ family residence.

Like Lizzy in Davies’s and Wright’s adaptations, Austen is first shown in isolation from the rest of her family, engaging – and struggling – with her writing, until she finally violates their peace through her vigorous piano playing. Her mother’s shriek – ‘Jane!’ – invokes specifically the infamous cries of Davies’s Mrs Bennet, however. Indeed, the conflict between passion and propriety that underlines Cassy and Robert’s relationship is likewise visualised in terms that recall Lydia and Mr Collins’s humorous encounter in the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*; semi-undressed, Cassy and Robert also meet accidentally and awkwardly on the stairs.

*Becoming Jane* locates itself, to an extent, within the growing trend of producing costume dramas ‘with Muddy Hems’.<sup>144</sup> Jarrold’s biopic attempts to challenge what Dole sees as the ‘prettification’ expected of period drama following the legacy of the Merchant-Ivory productions.<sup>145</sup> The Austen farm is therefore presented in all its mud, hardship and rain, whilst close-ups reveal the Parsonage to be shrouded by aged paint and brick work.

However, as seen with Wright’s adaptation, this ‘realism’ – often evident in naturalistic lighting, the ‘unpolished’ look of the sets, the use of ‘breathing camera’ and the juxtaposition of certain scenes in order to enforce social commentary – stems from an interplay with other Austen screenplays, not only technically, but also in narrative terms. In its focus on making Austen ‘gritty’ – as opposed to the ‘sentimentalised vision’ of convention – *Becoming Jane* draws close parallels with Wright’s *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>146</sup> The farmyard, the focus on the rural, and the strained social standing of the Austen and Bennet families cross over into both films. Even in its ‘realism’, *Becoming Jane* is thus still in dialogue with a film adaptation of an Austen novel.

Moreover, whilst the biopic commences with lines authored by the historical figure of Austen, *Becoming Jane* problematises the nineteenth-century female writer (as will be further examined in Chapter Three in relation to Emily

Brontë). Indeed, *First Impressions* is penned in a dreamlike, almost uncontrolled state; writing is an emotional, rather than intellectual, act for the female author, undermining the claims of Enlightenment feminism. At times, the process becomes comical; Jane sabotages her letter to Cassy as she physically cuts out her surfeit of adjectives (indicators of emotion), leading her sister to exclaim ‘what on earth is *she trying to say?*’

The film’s complex – and often contradictory – presentation of Austen’s literary identity is embodied by its portrayal of Ann Radcliffe. Radcliffe is held up by Lefroy as proof of the professionalism and feasibility of female authorship. Nevertheless, just as Elizabeth Gaskell emphasised Charlotte Brontë’s ‘quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife’, Jane immediately comments that Radcliffe ‘live[s] so quietly’ (thereby equating her, patriarchally, with the sheltered order of home).<sup>147</sup> Although the scene is ostensibly informed by feminism – in the foreground of the shot, Austen and Radcliffe discuss the female writer’s imagination (whilst Radcliffe’s husband and Lefroy linger scarcely perceptible in the background) – it is arguable that the film actually reinforces the notion that for a man ‘to have a wife with a mind is not thought quite proper’. The first shot of Radcliffe shows her to be in a dazed stupor (paralleling Austen’s dreamy creation of *First Impressions*); the female author is firmly delineated as ‘odd’. Although such images perhaps point to trance-like states of Romantic individualism, they become somewhat contradictory when set against the film’s grounding of Austen’s writing within economic necessity. The confusion and inconsistencies underlining this scene thus ultimately define her by patriarchal perceptions.

This can be seen in the film’s imaging of the male characters (particularly Lefroy) as the ‘creators’ of Austen’s personal awakening and literary growth. Tom initially trivialises Jane’s authorship, maintaining that, since she lacks ‘history’, her works are inevitably condemned to the status of ‘accomplishment’. Instead, ‘to be the equal of a masculine author, experience is vital’. To an extent, Jane questions Lefroy in this, demanding ‘what qualifies you to offer this advice?’, whilst critiquing *Tom Jones* (and the male author Fielding). Nevertheless, Jane covers her neckline as Lefroy reads in voiceover ‘scandalous’ passages from *Tom Jones*; although she seemingly confronts his references to sexuality, she is still imbued with ‘feminine’ propriety and reticence, whilst

Lefroy (and Fielding) are privileged as sexually knowledgeable – and therefore powerful – beings.

Significantly, Jane is also directed by the other male characters in the film. Austen's most famous line – 'it is a truth universally acknowledged' – is attributed to Jane's rejected suitor; although she asserts her autonomy in her refusal of him, Wisley partly constructs her literary identity. Similarly, lines from *Northanger Abbey* – 'A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can' – are credited to Reverend Austen's sermonising; their literary fame thus stems from Austen's father as instructor. On the one hand, the quotation can be read as a form of female assertion; Austen will take her father's conventionally patriarchal views and ironise them in her novel. On the other hand, it is arguable that the film actually upholds Reverend Austen's sermon through its portrayal of the mature Jane, and the camera's privileging of Lefroy at the biopic's conclusion. Austen is 'punished' for being an 'ironical little authoress'; it is her witty defence of irony that initially sets the Judge against her, and contributes to the destruction of her happiness with Lefroy. To an extent, it would seem that Jane has internalised this lesson by the film's end. She is unwilling to display her intellect and talent publicly; although she delights in her fellow female artist's music, it is significant that she silences her own artistic expression. She is instead physically diminished (indeed, almost consumptive-looking). Her brother finally speaks for her, voicing his sister's desire for anonymity; in her genteel and demure passivity, her writing is, as such, somewhat relegated to the confines of 'accomplishment'.

Austen seemingly continues to pine for Lefroy's love; fragile and sedentary, she is an Anne Elliott who has not regained the love of Wentworth. Significantly, the biopic closes by echoing the traditional, Victorian image of 'Dear Aunt Jane', as Austen befriends Lefroy's daughter. In this, she is positioned not as the celebrated authoress, but in terms of her relationship with Lefroy; the final image of Austen's hand closed around *Pride and Prejudice* is shadowed by the intimation that she should have been his wife, and the mother of his child. In a telling circularity, Jane looks to Lefroy for affirmation and applause as she finishes reading from her published work, just as she sought his approval at their first meeting. Lefroy thus remains privileged both by the film's

narrative and by the camera; depicted in a low-angle shot, Jane (and the viewer) look up at him, as he gazes down at her, reinforcing the conventional stereotypes found in the passage that is read from *Pride and Prejudice*: ‘from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit’ (*PP*, 400).

### ***Sense and Sensibility* (2008)**

It is clear that Austen adaptation has become a self-reflexive genre, stressing both the potency of conventional attitudes and expectations derived from ‘Austenmania’, and the perceived need to reinvigorate and reassess approaches to Austen. On the one hand, ITV’s ‘Jane Austen Season’ and Davies’s *Sense and Sensibility* achieve what Aragay sees as a defining quality of Rozema’s *Mansfield Park*; they ‘self-reflexively [point to themselves] as intertext, as an intervention into contemporary debates on Austen and authorship’.<sup>148</sup> At the same time, despite their professions of ‘originality’, the most recent Austen adaptations are, ultimately, highly complex, contradictory, and in many ways conservative workings of both Austen’s novels and the ‘Austenite’ film.

In Wadey’s *Mansfield Park*, for example, although ‘breathing camera’ is employed in order to psychologise the protagonists, intensify the viewer’s engagement with them, and energise its narrative, Wadey’s characterisations are often weak and contradictory (a similar problem will be seen in Welch’s *Jane Eyre*). Whereas Rozema relies upon tense silences and unspoken feelings in order to intimate the emotional chemistry between Edmund and Fanny, the voiceovers which Wadey accords her heroine – ‘I came to love him as more than a cousin’ – dilute the complexity of Austen’s and Rozema’s narratives. Indeed, the range of responses to ‘The Jane Austen Season’ points to the complexities that characterise contemporary Austen adaptation: ‘Thank you so much for changing my view of Austen forever’; ‘[ITV] never [...] get the period look and sound of dialogue exactly (or even remotely) right’. The conflict between innovation in adaptation and fidelity to the literary text and the ‘Austenite’ film is also to be found in Davies’s *Sense and Sensibility* (BBC, 2008).

Significantly, and arguably in response to ITV's Austen adaptations, the BBC advertised *Sense and Sensibility* as a 'classic', high-quality BBC production, placing an emphasis upon traditional images (such as Balls). At the same time, there is a clear tension between the influence of past Austen adaptations – most especially Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* – and Davies's 'new' readings of the novel.

The underlying sexuality of Austen's narratives, intimated in Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* through Darcy's fencing and diving, is made even more explicit in *Sense and Sensibility*; Willoughby as seducer frames the production, his illicit activities brought to the fore as the opening scene depicts him with Eliza. The final shots of the series similarly move away from the romantic idealisation of Thompson's screenplay. It is not Delaford's nostalgic and aesthetic spectacle which is privileged in Davies's narrative, but the Ferrars' small household. In contrast to the romanticism of the previous scene (in which Marianne is carried by Brandon under a bower of roses towards his country mansion), the final image of Edward chasing chickens in his kitchen yard conveys the 'realism' foregrounded by Dear's *Persuasion* in particular; indeed, earlier in the adaptation, Elinor is seen buying provisions from tradesmen.

Moreover, Davies's *Sense and Sensibility* is characterised by a 'modern' stylisation in terms of its lighting, musical score, and editing. In a scene highly reminiscent of *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), for example, Marianne stands in a storm, absorbed in her passionate recollections of Willoughby. The disorientating sounds and lighting, together with the rapid cutting together of shots and powerful music (dominated by an electric guitar), visualise both Marianne's emotional intensity and engage with the contemporisation of classic-novel adaptation which will be discussed further in ensuing chapters.

The stylistic redefinition of costume drama is likewise harnessed in order to rework the 'Austenite' film. *Sense and Sensibility* does not commence with an image of a country house, for example. Instead, rapidly-paced, short scenes, with accentuated breathing camera, recall Davies's *Bleak House* in particular (culminating in the production's conclusion, as the camera revolves, as it does with Esther and Allan, around Elinor and Edward). The camera therefore blurs rather than presents clear views of Norland and its inhabitants. Significantly, Fanny provides the voiceover to the first 'heritage' shot of property – 'Norland

Park. Ours at last!’ – yet the funeral procession, further subdued by icy cinematography, shadows the image. Similarly, as Brandon watches Marianne and Willoughby dance, disturbing sound effects complicate the conventional ‘Austenite’ Ball.

Davies’s *Sense and Sensibility* employs dynamic camerawork throughout. Edward and Elinor are seen in close profile shot, for example, asserting a visual equality and connectedness. However, the cut to medium-long shot stresses their simultaneous distancing. Alongside its nuanced character development, the adaptation therefore draws conscious attention to the camera’s presence (as seen in other markedly ‘contemporary’ productions, such as *Bleak House* and Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights*). As in *Bleak House*, the documentary-style camerawork follows the Dashwoods around Barton Cottage, the intimacy of shot emulating the confines of a home that is drearier than that presented in Thompson’s film. Likewise, Brandon and Willoughby’s duel is energised by rapid, ‘breathing camera’ and zoom, alongside its synthesised music and muted light. Perhaps most significantly, however, ‘Darcymania’ is invoked and yet re-visualised. In Edward’s wood-cutting, Davies conceived ‘another wet-shirt scene’.<sup>149</sup> However, the disjointed editing of the sequence emulates his agitation and displacement (a similar technique is used to present Davies’s Esther and Lady Dedlock, Welch’s Boucher, and Giedroyc’s Heathcliff). Furthering the physical spectacle now associated with Firth’s Darcy, the camera is a means of psychological exploration.<sup>150</sup>

Certainly, the BBC’s decision to follow the ultimately nostalgic *Cranford* (discussed in Chapter Two) with a ‘grittier’, more ‘contemporised’ version of *Sense and Sensibility* is significant in itself. At the same time, however, the production remains in dialogue with established traditions in filming Austen. The enduring popularity of Thompson’s *Sense and Sensibility* can be found in the casting and characterisations of the BBC production, for example. Whilst Baron’s adaptation abandons the figure of Margaret, Davies’s inclusion and development of the youngest Miss Dashwood in many ways invokes Thompson’s, rather than Austen’s, characterisation. Similarly, although Austen ascribes plainness to Edward, Davies’s version of her character resembles Hugh Grant’s Ferrars (just as Charity Wakefield’s Marianne recalls Kate Winslet’s).



As seen with Firth's Darcy, the male is often privileged in period drama, and placed in the context of modern sensibilities about physical attractiveness. Accordingly, as in Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility*, the appeal of Brandon is reworked. In Davies's adaptation, Austen's middle-aged character is eroticised, the viewer's perception of Brandon altered alongside Marianne's changing feelings for him. As Marianne is shown into his library in order to play his piano, for example, the muted tones of the room are thrown into relief by a brightly-coloured bowl of fruit in the foreground of the shot. Brandon's intellectual and artistic depth is coupled with a suggestive physicality. As in Davies's juxtaposition of Lizzy reading Darcy's letter with the image of him fencing, shots of Brandon engaging in falconry are intercut with Marianne playing his piano; traditional constructs of masculinity and femininity are therefore upheld. Marianne finally joins Brandon in the freedom and physicality of the outdoors; whilst Austen presents the male as a liberator and yet protector of the emotionally vulnerable female, Davies and Thompson place this within an accentuated eroticised context.

This movement embodies in itself the complexity of the 'Austenite' film, as it merges modernisation of the novel with tradition in adapting Austen. Many Austen adaptations offer potentially conflicting views, however. Feminist readings of Austen's novels, presented to primarily female audiences, are juxtaposed against arguably privileged portraits of male characters and patriarchal constructions of the 'gaze', for instance. Likewise, stylistic innovation in costume drama often conflicts with the expectations ascribed to the heritage film.

The significance of Davies's *Sense and Sensibility* rests in its stylistic difference from Thompson's and Baron's versions; just as *Miss Austen Regrets* complicates and redefines the Austen biopic as presented by *Becoming Jane*, Davies's production marks itself as a 'contemporary' adaptation and costume drama. At the same time, it remains problematic. Alongside its invocation of Thompson's film, certain scenes are highly reminiscent of Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*. As with Lizzy and Jane, Elinor and Marianne confide in each other under the bedclothes, whilst their hurried tidying of Barton Cottage prior to receiving Brandon mirrors that of the Bennets preparing for Bingley's visit; in both films, the divide between the performativity and reality of domestic life is

accentuated comically. Although providing interesting visualisations of the literary texts, the strong parallels between Wright's and Davies's adaptations, as well as those with Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility*, therefore question adaptation as a refreshing interpretative process. Such tense issues will be examined throughout this thesis and, as will be seen, are in many ways epitomised by Welch's *Emma*.

- <sup>65</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Jane Austen at Sixty," *Athenaeum* (15/12/1923), as cited in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1987) 301.
- <sup>66</sup> Jane Austen, Letter to James Edward Austen (16<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1816), as cited in Marghanita Laski, *Jane Austen and Her World* (London: Hudson, 1969) 108.
- <sup>67</sup> Joseph Conrad, Letter to H. G. Wells (1901), as cited in Southam 300.
- <sup>68</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. Simon Langton, adapt. Andrew Davies (BBC, 1995).
- <sup>69</sup> Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 158.
- <sup>70</sup> Andrew Davies, Interview, as cited in Stuart McGurk, "Sense and Sensitivity," *The Times* (22/12/07).  
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=pride+and+prejudice+benchmark&p=tto&pf=all>. Accessed 17/09/10.
- <sup>71</sup> Robert Giddings, "Soft-Soaping Dickens: Andrew Davies, BBC1 and *Bleak House*," [http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 10/12/06.
- <sup>72</sup> Cardwell 133.
- <sup>73</sup> Devoney Looser, "Feminist Implications of the Silver Screen Austen," *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 2001) 159-176. 160.
- <sup>74</sup> Fay Weldon, "Jane Austen and the Pride of Purists," *New York Times* (08/10/1995) 15, as cited in Looser 160.
- <sup>75</sup> Cardwell 156; 134.
- <sup>76</sup> Cardwell 153.
- <sup>77</sup> *North and South*, dir. Brian Percival, adapt. Sandy Welch (BBC, 2004).  
*Jane Eyre*, dir. Susanna White, adapt. Sandy Welch (BBC, 2006).  
*Bleak House*, dir. Justin Chadwick and Susanna White, adapt. Andrew Davies (BBC, 2005).
- <sup>78</sup> *Mansfield Park*, dir. and adapt. Patricia Rozema (Miramax, 1999).
- <sup>79</sup> Cardwell 136.
- <sup>80</sup> Cardwell 156.
- <sup>81</sup> Cardwell 155. Similarly, promotional articles and television advertisements for *Cranford* (2007) focus overwhelmingly on Dame Judi Dench (Miss Matty).
- <sup>82</sup> Television channels similarly harness costume drama in order to present an image of 'quality'. BBC Four was promoted through *Wide Sargasso Sea* (2007), broadcast on the channel to coincide with BBC1's *Jane Eyre*, and Andrew Davies's *Fanny Hill* (2007). The front cover of *The Observer* (21/10/07) featured a still from *Fanny Hill*. Tellingly, it is Davies's name, rather than the relatively unknown Cleland, that *The Observer* highlights; the elevation of the screenwriter again intimates the complex relationship that exists between literary text and the screen.
- <sup>83</sup> For a detailed examination of love and courtship in Austen's novels, see: Cheryl L. Nixon, "Balancing the Courtship Hero: Masculine Emotional Display in Film Adaptations of Austen's Novels," *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 2001) 22-43.  
 Deborah Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women, and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations," *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 2001) 177-187.
- <sup>84</sup> In terms of Penry-Jones's looks alone, he does not constitute the typically dark Byronic hero; what is significant, however, is the Byronic stylisation of ITV's image of Wentworth.
- <sup>85</sup> Sarah Wootton, "The Byronic in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*," *Modern Language Review* 102:1 (2007): 26-39. 34.
- <sup>86</sup> Many internet websites and discussion boards are devoted to the evaluation of the attractiveness of costume drama male leads; Richard Armitage's Thornton, Toby Stephens's Rochester and Rupert Penry-Jones's Wentworth have been described as usurping the especial favour that has been granted to Colin Firth's Darcy.
- <sup>87</sup> Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen: Seven Great English Classics* (London: Penguin, 1996) 1211. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- <sup>88</sup> In Austen's text, Wentworth questions "'whether there may not have been one person more my enemy even than [Lady Russell]? My own self'" (P, 1287). Burke lends his Wentworth a similar emotional complexity and vulnerability (in the actual adaptation, as opposed to the trailers), as he murmurs nervously 'Are you...quite sure?' following Anne's acceptance of his proposal.

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<sup>89</sup> In Burke's screenplay, Anne relates these sentiments to Lady Russell, and not to Wentworth, thus altering the significance that can be ascribed to these lines in Austen's text; in the novel, Anne's assertion of her beliefs to Wentworth 'equalises' their relationship to a considerable extent, and demonstrates her growing self-assurance.

<sup>90</sup> Isobel Grundy, "Jane Austen and Literary Traditions," *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). 189-208. 190.

<sup>91</sup> This is emphasised in Rozema's film, as Fanny names her mare 'Shakespeare'; she takes 'possession' of the male canonical author, just as in her novels 'Austen takes familiarity with Shakespeare for granted'. Grundy 196.

<sup>92</sup> R. M. Brownstein, "Out of the Drawing Room, Onto the Lawn," *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 2001) 13-21. 17.

<sup>93</sup> Reissued in 2005 by BBC Worldwide Ltd.

<sup>94</sup> In many ways, 'Colin Firth' is now a persona defined by Davies's portrait of Austen's Darcy. The *Bridget Jones* films contain scenes which present Firth/Darcy in or around water, in a clear reference to the Pemberley lake sequence. In *Love Actually* (2003), he similarly dives into a river, whilst in *St. Trinian's* (2007) he is seen, dishevelled, pacing the grounds and approaching a group of young women (just as he meets Lizzy in Pemberley's gardens).

<sup>95</sup> Cardwell 156.

<sup>96</sup> Andrew Davies, "A Passionate Woman," *Sunday Times Magazine* (01/12/1996) 51-56, as cited in David Fulton, "A Holiday from High Tone: Politics and Genre in Andrew Davies's Adaptation of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*," *EnterText* 1.2 (2001): 132-156. 134.

<sup>97</sup> A. Graham, "My Goodness, How They've Changed!," *Radio Times* (12/07/1997) 22-23, as cited in Cardwell 154.

<sup>98</sup> Mireia Aragay, "Possessing Jane Austen: Fidelity, Authorship, and Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 31:3 (2003): 177-185. 178.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice, The Complete Novels of Jane Austen: Seven Great English Classics* (London: Penguin, 1996) 253. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>101</sup> Narelle Campbell, "An Object of Interest: Observing Elizabeth in Andrew Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*," *Adaptation* 2: 2 (July, 2009): 149-160. 149.

<sup>102</sup> Just as Lizzy follows Darcy 'with her eyes', prefiguring the premium placed by 'Darcymania' upon his body, it can be argued that Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* privileges an implied female audience and 'female gaze'.

<sup>103</sup> Tim Appelo, "An Interview with Joe Wright," <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2005-11-09/film/an-interview-with-joe-wright.php>. Accessed 14/01/08.

<sup>104</sup> Mike Cragg, "Placing Jane Austen, Displacing England: Touring Between Book, History and Nation," *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, ed. S. Pucci and J. Thompson (New York: SUNY P, 2003) 111-132. 113.

<sup>105</sup> Cragg 111.

<sup>106</sup> Julianne Pidduck, "Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Austen Adaptations," *Screen* 39 (1998): 381-400. 383.

<sup>107</sup> See Jenny Rice and Carol Saunders, "Consuming *Middlemarch*: The Construction and Consumption of Nostalgia in Stamford," *Pulping Fictions: Consuming Culture across the Literature/Media Divide*, ed. Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto, 1996) 85-98.

<sup>108</sup> Joe Wright, as cited in Appelo <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2005-11-09/film/an-interview-with-joe-wright.php>. Accessed 14/01/08.

<sup>109</sup> Joe Wright, as cited in Appelo <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2005-11-09/film/an-interview-with-joe-wright.php>. Accessed 14/01/08; Joe Wright, "Pride and Prejudice Production Notes," [www.workingtitledfilms.com/.../PridePrejudice\\_ProductionNotes.pdf](http://www.workingtitledfilms.com/.../PridePrejudice_ProductionNotes.pdf). Accessed 07/03/10.

<sup>110</sup> Carol Dole, "Jane Austen and Mud: *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), British Realism and the Heritage Film," *Persuasions On-Line* 27:2 (2007). <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.

<sup>111</sup> Jane Austen, Letter to Cassandra (14<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1813), as cited in James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 84.

<sup>112</sup> Wright's perception of films in terms of actors'/ 'stars'' possession over them again defines his production as a cultural commodity.

- <sup>113</sup> Joanna Briscoe, "A Costume Drama with Muddy Hems," *Times Online* (31/07/05). [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/article549627.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/article549627.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1). Accessed 07/03/10.
- <sup>114</sup> *Persuasion*, dir. Roger Michell, adapt. Nicholas Dear (BBC, 1996). This film, produced at the same time as Hollywood Austen adaptations (such as McGrath's *Emma*), was relatively well-received and in many ways diverged from the trends of 'Austenmania'.
- <sup>115</sup> Fulton 134.
- <sup>116</sup> However, it can be argued that the inflated elaborateness of the Parsonage in Davies's production also constitutes a biting humorous comment upon Collins's character.
- <sup>117</sup> Similarly, Davies depicts a growing distance in the relationship between Ada and Esther in *Bleak House*.
- <sup>118</sup> Joe Wright, as cited in Appelo <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2005-11-09/film/an-interview-with-joe-wright.php>. Accessed 14/01/08
- <sup>119</sup> Sarah Ailwood, "What are men to rocks and mountains?: Romanticism in Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*," *Persuasions On-Line* 27:2. <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/ailwood.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>120</sup> Birdsong also brings the film into dialogue with other novels and films (such as Rozema's *Mansfield Park* and Welch's *Jane Eyre*), which use bird imagery (especially that of the caged bird) to explore issues of nineteenth-century womanhood.
- <sup>121</sup> Ailwood <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/ailwood.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>123</sup> Dole <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>124</sup> Brooke Allen, "Jane Austen for the Nineties," *The New Criterion* 14 (1995): 15-22. 15. In contrast to Dear's *Persuasion*, the social commentary implicit at the end of Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* is softened. Brandon throws coins to the villagers assembled at his wedding. However, the buoyancy of the musical score – 'Toss the Coins' (which, interestingly, is used as the theme to the *Becoming Jane* trailer) – undercuts any possibility for the kind of social observations explicit in Dear's screenplay and at the conclusion of Davies's *Emma* (with the theft of the chickens); whereas the chicken thieves return even after the communal celebration of Emma's marriage, Thompson's film depicts a closed, contented and idealised community.
- <sup>125</sup> Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) 39.
- <sup>126</sup> Anthony Lane, "The Current Cinema: Parent Traps," *The New Yorker* (14/11/05), as cited in Dole <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>127</sup> Ailwood <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/ailwood.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>128</sup> Dole <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>129</sup> Joe Wright, as cited in Dole <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>130</sup> Julian North, "Conservative Austen, Radical Austen: *Sense and Sensibility* from Text to Screen," *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan. (London: Routledge, 1999) 38-50. 40.
- <sup>131</sup> Keith Windschuttle, "Rewriting the History of the British Empire," *The New Criterion* 1 (08/05/2000) 5, as cited in Aragay 177.
- <sup>132</sup> Moreover, as Aragay notes, 'Fanny's acceptance and subsequent rejection of Crawford parallels the Bigg-Wither episode in Austen's own life', whilst 'the 'lesbian' scenes may be framed in the context of the heated debate on Jane Austen's sexuality that took place in the Letters section of the London Review of Books between August and October 1995' (Aragay 182).
- <sup>133</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993).
- <sup>134</sup> Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) 117; 119.
- <sup>135</sup> *Mansfield Park*, dir. David Giles, adapt. Ken Taylor (BBC, 1983).
- <sup>136</sup> John Glenister's *Emma*, for example, similarly commences and concludes the adaptation with an image of Mr Woodhouse's property. *Emma*, dir. John Glenister, adapt. Denis Coustanduros (BBC, 1972).
- <sup>137</sup> Dole <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/dole.htm>. Accessed 23/05/10.
- <sup>138</sup> At the same time, Maria's unhappiness with Rushworth is also foreshadowed. As Fanny gallops past the house, Maria and Henry are seen sitting intimately by a window. Whilst their

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actions feed into, and are part of, the moral corruption of Mansfield, the film also incorporates a feminist commentary which stresses Maria's entrapment within marriage and domesticity, and questions the conventional idealisation of Austen's romances (seen in Thompson's double marriage ceremony at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*). Just as Fanny seeks to escape, Maria responds to Edmund's disapproval of her relations with Henry by asserting 'I can't get out – I can't get out'; the female is thus configured as the caged bird in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, which Henry himself recites both to Fanny and (unbeknown to him) to Maria.

<sup>139</sup> John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 96.

<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the production's attempt to contemporise the past is furthered by humorous references to popular culture and other films; Rushworth shouts 'Good morning, Mansfield Park!', echoing the famous line from *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987).

<sup>141</sup> In many ways, Jarrold's biopic obscures Austen's irony, and takes literally her gendered division of writing. Noting that 'men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story [...]; the pen has been in their hands' (*P*, 1279), Austen instead both places herself within, and redefines, literary and gendered expectations.

<sup>142</sup> Austen-Leigh 1.

<sup>143</sup> Suzanne Pucci, "The Return Home," *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Suzanne Pucci and James Thompson (New York: State U of New York P, 2003) 133-155. 139.

<sup>144</sup> Briscoe

[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/article549627.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/article549627.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1). Accessed 07/03/10.

<sup>145</sup> Carol Dole, "Austen, Class, and the American Market," *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2001) 58-78. 62.

<sup>146</sup> As Southam notes, Henry James, in "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905), 'charted the strange course of Jane Austen's emergence into public view. It's origins he found in 'a beguiled infatuation, a sentimentalised vision, determined largely by the accidents and circumstances orginally surrounding the manifestation of the genius'' (Southam 22). See also "Henry James on Jane Austen," Southam 229-231.

<sup>147</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Penguin, 1997) 259.

<sup>148</sup> Aragay 182.

<sup>149</sup> Andrew Davies, Interview. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFZrXzKLYDQ&NR=1>. Accessed 01/12/2009.

<sup>150</sup> Just as Lizzy walks, Elinor beats a carpet; Davies extends the equation of physical activity with emotional expression to the female characters.



## Chapter Two: ‘How am I to reconcile all these warring members?’ Elizabeth Gaskell on Screen

‘How am I to reconcile all these warring members?’ exclaimed Elizabeth Gaskell, as she reflected upon the diversity of her writing and the multiplicity of characters and roles which she herself assumed as an author, wife and mother.<sup>151</sup> As seen with Jane Austen, a writer’s literary identity, together with the need to define a particular ‘quality’ associated with their work, has long been a subject of much critical and popular interest. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the figure of the author and perceptions of fiction have increasingly been constructed by film and television; as will be explored in Chapter Four, the notion of ‘Dickensian’, for example, is inextricably linked to the images which have been produced by the many screen adaptations of Dickens’s novels.

Gaskell, however, holds a unique relationship with film and television, as demonstrated by the three screen productions of her work over the past decade – *Wives and Daughters* (BBC, 1999), *North and South* (BBC, 2004) and *Cranford* (BBC, 2007).<sup>152</sup> On the one hand, as with other authors, the serialisations highlight both the power of adaptation in reconfiguring and directing literary understanding, and its ability to (re)focus attention onto the written text. As noted in the Introduction, it is indeed significant that The Gaskell Society petitioned the BBC to produce *Wives and Daughters* in order to raise public awareness of a writer who was then relatively under-read and under-researched.<sup>153</sup>

At the same time, issues specific to Gaskell (and, therefore, Gaskell serialisations) raise interesting questions about adaptation theory and modern period drama as a genre. As Gaskell has been, until recently, less studied and ‘possessed’ by the popular cultural imagination than other major Victorian writers (such as the Brontës with *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*), it is arguable that, in contrast to Stoneman’s evaluation of the BBC’s premium upon fidelity to classic texts, adaptors are able to take greater license with her novels. Davies’s *Wives and Daughters*, for example, with the striking inventiveness of the screenplay’s ending, embodies the complex, and often ambiguous, position of the literary author in modern adaptation – Barthes’s concept of the ‘death of the



author' made all the more marked by the novel's unfinished conclusion, due to Gaskell's own unexpected demise.<sup>154</sup> Whilst Sheen advocates the study of a 'rhetoric of possession', and observes 'incoherent animosity' towards 'unfaithful' adaptations, the popularity (and approval from literary critics) achieved by *Wives and Daughters*, despite its divergences from Gaskell's text, demonstrates that positive responses towards 'unfaithful' adaptations are also worthy of critical attention.<sup>155</sup>

As Gaskell herself wrote, she perceived her life and career in terms of 'many mes'.<sup>156</sup> It is perhaps in this elusiveness that the overall success of the Gaskell adaptations lies; the unexplored status of her work has, to a considerable extent, freed the screenplays from fidelity to the novels or to a heritage of Gaskell adaptation. Moreover, as Susan Hamilton notes, Gaskell's 'reputation has been shaped until very recently by a robust critical impulse to define her writing achievements by a single book' (whether it be *North and South*, *Wives and Daughters* or any other major novel).<sup>157</sup> In this, the adaptations again demonstrate the intricate dialogue between text and screen, as they stem from, and feed into, a growing movement to illuminate the breadth of Gaskell's work. Gaskell herself declared that she 'always felt deeply annoyed at [...] any set of people who choose to consider that I had manifested the whole truth; I do not think it is possible to do this in any *one* work of fiction'.<sup>158</sup> Likewise, whereas notions of the 'Dickensian' or 'Brontëan' are often defined in filmic and televisual terms, to a considerable extent, each of the Gaskell adaptations retains individuality; expectations of a generic 'Gaskellian' screen production have not emerged to the same extent. As will be discussed, the varied styles of the BBC's *Wives and Daughters*, *North and South* and *Cranford* reflect Gaskell's diversity, an author who 'was gifted with some of the choicest faculties bestowed upon mankind, [which] grew into greater strength and ripened into greater beauty in the decline of her days'.<sup>159</sup>

It is above all clear that the interplay between literary text and the screen, and the relationship between Gaskell and constructions of her life and work, are highly complex phenomena. Gaskell adaptation harnesses, reinforces and perhaps determines the trends which underlie critical understandings of her fiction, whilst the screenplays also trace the stylistic patterns and developments which have occurred in period drama from the 1990s to the present day. Linda

Hughes comments that, through the influence of ‘feminist theory, materialist analysis, and new historicism, Gaskell’s idylls have been increasingly repositioned as [...] multivalent narratives that address fundamental social conflicts and that, like the fiction of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy which followed (and learned from) the mature Gaskell, reveal a deep awareness of historical change’.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, Jill Matus notes that the BBC adaptations grant ‘recognition to her intellectuality, her familiarity with matters of scientific, economic, and theological inquiry, and her narrative sophistication’.<sup>161</sup> As will be examined in this chapter, there are indeed inter-filmic links to be made between Davies’s *Middlemarch* (BBC, 1994) and Heidi Thomas’s *Cranford* (BBC, 2007), whilst Davies’s visualisation of Gaskell’s underlying feminism in *Wives and Daughters* prefigures the ‘gritty’ social ‘realism’ and gender conflicts of Sandy Welch’s *North and South*.

Moreover, whilst the productions are sensitive to contemporary, theoretical readings of Gaskell, they also act as cultural signifiers in themselves. As Matus argues, Gaskell’s ‘part in British heritage drama as a response to continuing class division and growing globalisation prompts an awareness of how, in diverse ways, Gaskell is enlisted in contemporary negotiations of nationhood, as well as gender and class identities’; as Susan Hamilton maintains, ‘a film adaptation such as *North and South*, marketed as a “passionate love story” set against “the backdrop of Victorian England’s industrial north”’ thus ‘shows the ways in which Gaskell’s novel provides a new canvas on which to draw current preoccupations with class and gender’.<sup>162</sup> As with contemporary screen productions of other authors, to a considerable extent *Wives and Daughters*, *North and South* and *Cranford* demonstrate a growing tendency to ‘modernise’ the past, rather than present it nostalgically through pastiche.

Nevertheless, it is equally clear in these adaptations that there is a tension between contemporary preoccupations and styles of filming and the traditions of costume drama as a genre. As Kathryn Flett commented on the release of *Wives and Daughters*, for instance, ‘costume drama nostalgia ain’t what it used to be’.<sup>163</sup> Such a response arguably foreshadows *Cranford* (alongside *Lark Rise to Candleford* (BBC, 2008-2010) and Welch’s *Emma*), and the attempt to return, in many ways, to a ‘traditional’ costume drama – whilst also incorporating (or, perhaps more significantly, thinking it is incorporating) – new styles of television

drama. As will be seen, *Cranford* embodies the divide between televisual innovation and an adherence to past conventions of heritage drama. Revealingly, Aileen Atkins enthused that the adaptation was ‘something new’.<sup>164</sup> Ultimately, however, the production is as traditional as Atkins’s character, Miss Jenkyns (who vociferously advocates Johnson over the ‘modern’ Dickens), would wish; although there is a lack of a ‘Gaskellian’ filmic legacy, the adaptation is still responsive to the traditions of costume drama as a genre. Nevertheless, as will be further questioned, what becomes interesting is the fact that there is an expectation to at least present period drama as contemporary and innovative.

Indeed, the Gaskell screenplays, whilst asserting many refreshing readings of the novels within frameworks which are (particularly in the case of *North and South*) stylistically striking, embody also elements of cliché and stereotype – both in their imaging of Gaskell as a ‘feminine’ writer concerned with domesticity and love, and in conventional scenes of costume drama romance. Davies’s *Wives and Daughters* is in many ways positioned at (and a facilitator of) a ‘crossroads’ in period adaptation, sensitive to development yet also adhering to tradition, whilst Welch’s *North and South* examines nostalgia thematically, simultaneously translating Gaskell’s critique of idealisation into metafilmic terms; the glowing cinematography that depicts Margaret’s rose-adorned southern home in Episode One, for example, is exchanged for a starker visualisation of the traditional period cottage at her return. However, the adaptation’s somewhat clichéd, romantic concluding scene (invented by Welch) arguably conflicts with the rest of the production, both stylistically and in its dilution of the thematic complexity and ambiguity of Gaskell’s *North and South*. Again, this schism anticipates the often problematic nature of Thomas’s *Cranford*.

Just as Gaskell is critically ‘as divided a figure as ever she was in 1865’, it is clear that Gaskell adaptation both feeds into this and presents the conflicts that are apparent in the genre as a whole.<sup>165</sup> Gaskell – both as literary author and as cultural commodity – thus remains a complex, problematic and ambiguous figure, the adaptations translating her ‘warring members’ into modern terms as ‘the constant reconsideration of Gaskell’s status, begun in 1865 by the writers of her obituaries and those who renewed her literary career, continues with different questions and different scripts’.<sup>166</sup>

### ***Wives and Daughters* (1999)**

Andrew Davies's *Wives and Daughters* provides a complex example of period drama, both in terms of its place within the genre as a whole, and in its specific position as a Gaskell adaptation. The production in many ways adheres to the traditional view of costume drama as nostalgic escapism. Significantly, many reviewers perceived that *Wives and Daughters* met such conventional expectations. The production was hailed as 'lush', 'even richer and more beautiful than its predecessors'; its status as a contemporary adaptation was seen not in terms of innovation, but in its continuation and exemplification of the traditional standard of classic-novel drama (a belief compounded by Davies's trusted reputation as a 'peerless adaptor of classic fiction').<sup>167</sup> Tellingly, however, whilst it is clear that the BBC did strive to maintain their reputation for 'high quality', lavish portrayals of the past, the adaptation's 'lushness' was derived in large part from their desire to develop the conventions of the genre. Although critics proclaimed enthusiastically that viewers ought to 'have a bath, pour [...] a glass of wine' and 'wallow in a bit of nineteenth-century social history', the producers stress that their attention to historical detail was not to facilitate nostalgia, but to contextualise the production.<sup>168</sup> Such 'realism' thus challenges Victorian and early-twentieth-century assessments of 'Mrs Gaskell's' domestic, feminine 'nosegay[s]', and instead politicises and intellectualises her work (and the costume drama form).<sup>169</sup>

Indeed, despite the stereotyped interpretations of the BBC's *Wives and Daughters* offered by some reviewers, the production was engaged in an intricate and complex dialogue with contemporaneous adaptations of other authors and texts, testifying to the changes that occurred in period drama at the end of the 1990s.<sup>170</sup> Davies's adaptation of Gaskell's novel formed part of a Costume Drama 'Battle' against ITV's *Oliver Twist* and the BBC's *Great Expectations*.<sup>171</sup> On the one hand, such a phenomenon privileges classic-novel adaptation, the considerable interest provoked by the serialisations construing period drama as a distinct and respected genre. At the same time, in the 'competition' that existed between the adaptations (and broadcasters), it is clear that the three productions were born out of – and fed into – a watershed in the styles and preoccupations of period screenwriting. Rather than simply asserting period drama's privileged,

‘classic’ status, the so-called ‘corset wars’ heralded not only the developments in the content and image of adaptations, but also the changes in marketing strategies and producers’ attitudes; costume drama became more concertedly a modern cultural commodity.<sup>172</sup>

There exists a complex interplay between conventional perceptions of costume drama and modernisation. Significantly, *Wives and Daughters* is an interesting bridge between the two Dickens productions. Tony Marchant’s *Great Expectations* is characterised by its innovative camerawork and cinematography, whilst *Oliver Twist* challenges Dickens’s authorial hegemony by screening a ‘prequel’ to his canonical novel. However, *Wives and Daughters* merges its fresh interpretations and imaging of Gaskell with many of the idyllic, familiar icons of costume drama (such as the country house and rural splendour). Tellingly, *Wives and Daughters* and *Oliver Twist* coincided in their broadcasts, as the BBC and ITV competed in demonstrating both their traditional values and their expertise in contemporary television. Although viewing figures for the first episode of *Oliver Twist* were slightly higher than those for *Wives and Daughters*, the BBC dramatisation generally maintained its audience (while that of ITV declined somewhat).<sup>173</sup> Such figures arguably gauge perceptions of period adaptation at the end of the Millennium, highlighting the pull between innovation and tradition which continues to characterise costume drama.

Certainly, in many respects *Wives and Daughters* is a landmark adaptation in the development of period drama, prefiguring at the same time Welch’s feminist reading of *North and South*. Davies’s Molly Gibson, for instance, anticipates the assertiveness of Welch’s Margaret Hale (indeed, both adaptations commence by almost immediately focusing on the heroines’ faces), whilst a comparison of Davies’s *Middlemarch* (BBC, 1994) with his later adaptation of *Wives and Daughters* charts the genre’s stylistic development. Eliot’s *Middlemarch* shares thematic preoccupations with Gaskell’s last novel, most notably the ‘web’ of social and personal interconnections within small rural communities, the dynamics of change and the durability of tradition, and the spirit of scientific discovery which energised the nineteenth century. In many ways, the BBC’s *Middlemarch*, although regarded at the time as reinvigorating attitudes towards costume drama, can be seen as maintaining the traditions and

expectations of the genre, asserting the ‘classic’ nature of Eliot’s text – and the adaptation – through its strongly intellectualised image. The often humorous social insight which Eliot shares with both Austen and Gaskell is thus undercut at times.<sup>174</sup> By contrast, the ‘themes’ and tone of Davies’s *Wives and Daughters* are considerably reinforced by the style of the adaptation as a whole. In contrast to the controlled tenor of Davies’s *Middlemarch*, *Wives and Daughters* demonstrates that costume drama, as a stylistic framework, can be more flexible; the reverence accorded to heritage drama, harnessed in order to assert a screenplay’s ‘classic’ status, is transformed into a revitalising immediacy.

In *Middlemarch*, for example, Lydgate (both in the novel and in the adaptation) shares much in common with Gaskell’s (and Davies’s) Roger Hamley. Like Roger, Tertius is energised by the buoyancy of youth and scientific endeavour. In the BBC’s production of Eliot’s novel there are, as in *Wives and Daughters*, several shots viewed through a microscope. These not only historicise the adaptation by highlighting the Victorians’ interest in science, but also hold symbolic import with regard to the characterisations of the two men; in both cases, the precise, microscopic and intricately-analysed view of the world is contrasted ironically with their lack of clear-sightedness in their romantic attachments. Nevertheless, in Davies’s *Middlemarch*, the rather staid camerawork and the generally muted lighting perhaps conflict with the energised progressiveness that the opening shots attempt to convey (as Lydgate travels to Middlemarch in a horse-drawn carriage, the fast pace of the scene seemingly embodying his youthful enthusiasm and optimism, the camera focuses on railway works; the doctor is immediately equated with innovation, as he forces his fellow passengers to confront social change: ‘Look – the future’).

However, in *Wives and Daughters*, the image of the production is styled throughout in order to embody and enhance its characterisations and thematic preoccupations; the traditional visual splendour of period adaptation is reconfigured to hold deeper symbolic resonance. As Davies noted of Gaskell’s novel, ‘more than almost any book I know this neglected masterpiece tells us what it feels like to be alive’.<sup>175</sup> As such, in sharp contrast to the conventionally ‘classic’ tone of the earlier *Middlemarch*, the adaptation’s energised visual focus on the intricacies of nature, together with the use of a buoyant musical score and bright cinematography (emulating Roger’s and Molly’s innate spiritedness),

encourage the viewer to see the world of the novel and the period drama from a fresh perspective; as Roger indeed proclaims, ‘we should all look strange under a microscope!’ ‘Life’ is thus illuminated, just as Roger finally discovers his true feelings for Molly, Squire Hamley realises his regard for his younger son, and Dr Gibson admits to Hyacinth’s failings.

The visual freshness of *Wives and Daughters* compounds the screenplay’s attempt to broaden both the traditional thematic scope of heritage drama and critical understandings of Gaskell’s novels. In many ways, the adaptation foreshadows other costume dramas (such as Rozema’s *Mansfield Park*) in its overt illumination of often controversial issues which form undercurrents in Gaskell’s text. Just as recent criticism has widened Jane Austen’s ‘little bit [...] of ivory’, Davies’s screenplay incorporates images and issues which challenge the ‘domesticity’ of *Wives and Daughters* and heritage productions. Traditional ‘drawing-room’ scenes are therefore juxtaposed against direct visualisations of Roger’s – and later Molly’s – experiences in Africa, as Victorian imaginings of the ‘Dark Continent’ are translated into ‘realist’ terms which again assert Gaskell’s interest in scientific inquiry. Similarly, just as social change is signified by the repeated presence of rail journeys in Welch’s *North and South*, the confines of rural Hollingford are exploded by images of the ships which Cynthia and Roger journey on; the freedom embodied by shots of the ocean intimate, perhaps, the screenplay’s many refreshing interpretations of Gaskell’s novel.

Davies visualises aspects which are indirectly apparent in the literary text (it is clear only in passing that sea voyages are made, for instance), which then assume multi-faceted meanings relevant to Gaskell’s narrative. The shot of Cynthia on the ship, for example, acts immediately as a powerful signifier of her strong autonomy – “‘You look quite a woman.’ ‘And so I am’, said Cynthia’ – whilst also pointing to the notion of female independence explored in the novel.<sup>176</sup> The scene also visually differentiates the more homely Molly from her step-sister, whilst at the same time foreshadowing the former’s own travels with Roger. It was indeed Davies’s transformation of Molly into a breeches-wearing explorer that gave rise to most controversy amongst viewers and critics – despite the fact that Davies’s conclusion to *Wives and Daughters* can be read as

stemming from, and developing, the issues and characterisations of the literary text.<sup>177</sup>

Like Eliot, Gaskell positions her individual characters within broader social issues and relationships. Despite Molly's professed desire to remain always near Hollingford and her father, such idealism and parochialism are in many ways undermined by the novel. Molly and Hollingford are instead inextricably and inescapably linked to the modernity of the outside world, as tradition is challenged and change asserted. The custom of eldest sons as inheritors, for instance, is partly questioned by Osborne's character, just as Squire Hamley finally overcomes his racial and class prejudices in his acceptance of Aimée. Moreover, Gaskell imbues Molly from childhood with a spirited adventurousness: 'the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm to her' (*WD*, 14). Davies's visualisation of Molly and Roger together in Africa therefore reinforces the underlying feminism apparent in Molly's character in the novel and the adaptation (as will be discussed further), whilst also linking the individual to wider spheres.

At the same time, responses to the production's innovation highlight both preconceptions about 'classic fiction' and the ability of classic-novel adaptation to redirect attention onto the literary source text. Tellingly, some reviewers admonished the 'modernity' of actions and dialogue, perceived as Davies's distortion of Gaskell's nineteenth-century novel, which actually stem directly from the literary narrative. As Davies commented, 'Gaskell lets the characters speak for themselves. It's like living with these people for a while, getting the wrong idea about them, then getting surprises and shocks'.<sup>178</sup> Critics such as Kathryn Flett nevertheless lamented that 'Molly Gibson [...] has been given a very Nineties spin [...]. Justine Waddell, as Molly, even got away with the sort of insolence that, as recently as the 1980s, would have had her confined to her room with bread and water'.<sup>179</sup> As Stoneman notes, however, 'the scene in question is presumably that where Molly responds to news of her father's engagement by saying "So that's why I was sent away - so that all this could be quietly arranged in my absence!" Gaskell's original reads: "So I was sent out of the house that all this might be quietly arranged in my absence?" (*WD*, 115). Oh, what a Nineties spin is here!'.<sup>180</sup> In this, Sheen's 'rhetoric of possession' applies equally to costume drama as a genre; despite its basis in Gaskell's novel, it is



significant that reviewers objected to the perceived ‘modernity’ of both Davies’s rendering of the literary text, and the consequent style of the production.

In Davies’s *Wives and Daughters*, preconceptions about heritage drama are indeed challenged and reconfigured throughout, again anticipating, in many ways, Welch’s innovative *North and South*. As in Welch’s adaptation, Davies harnesses Gaskell’s ‘realism’, which is often reinforced through intertextual dialogues with other literary forms. In *Wives and Daughters*, for example, Molly ‘had always wished to come into direct contact with a love-story; here she was, and she only found it very uncomfortable’ (*WD*, 212). Gaskell’s novel therefore evokes its ‘realism’ by rewriting (and undermining) the patterns of the conventional ‘love story’; rather than romanticising her narrative, she exposes the psychological struggles faced by Molly and Cynthia in their relationships with men. *Wives and Daughters* is, instead, ‘An Every-Day Story’.

Davies manipulates the conventions of costume drama to similar effect, as changes in image (asserted through lighting and music) trace the developing narrative and assert Molly’s own personal growth. Significantly, the cinematography becomes muted as Molly’s hitherto uninterrupted relationship with her father is altered, and the ‘invasion’ of The Towers and Mrs Kirkpatrick renders (initially at least) bitter pain and division. Such a device prefigures Welch’s *North and South*; formerly sunlit visions of Helstone are replaced by the bleaker lighting associated with Milton, intimating not only Margaret’s revised views with regard to the south, but also her new-found tendency to idealise the north. Moreover, as in Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, nature acts (to an extent) as a signifier of the characters’ feelings in Davies’s adaptation, an element of the production which also revises period drama as idyllic escapism. Roger’s proposal to Molly is made as they stand in the rain and mud, for example, the somewhat unromanticised scene embodying their rather tempestuous relationship.<sup>181</sup>

Davies’s screenplay is indeed energised throughout by sensitive readings and powerful visualisations of *Wives and Daughters*. Gaskell’s interest in exposing social performativity, for example, is embodied in a scene in which Molly responds to Mrs Kirkpatrick’s false kindness with her own stiff curtsy; Molly thus exposes her future step-mother, and adopts social graces for her own

ends. Her relationship with Roger is similarly portrayed in terms which assert multiple meanings. She is first informed that she is to be sent to Hamley Hall whilst she is gardening, for instance. Davies's scene therefore foregrounds Molly's love of the natural world, which, as in the novel, is to be nurtured by Roger. At the same time, an intricate pattern of visual links is created between the characters. Just as the shots taken on board ships form a connection between Roger and Cynthia, close-up images of flora and fauna become a developing theme throughout the production. The adaptation opens with young Molly observing a caterpillar. The intimacy of the commencing shot, focusing closely on Molly's wide-eyed wonder, works immediately to lend her screen characterisation some interiority, as the viewer's attention is directed onto her intellectual and emotional engagement with the natural world. At the same time, the scene prefigures the relationship that is to develop between Molly and Roger, as images of insects and plants visualise the bond between the couple (whilst also connecting Roger to his brother Osborne; as Osborne dies on a grassy bank, a beetle almost lovingly traces its way across his face).<sup>182</sup>

Moreover, in his creation of such visual motifs, Davies also intimates Gaskell's complex – and often ambiguous – discussion of gender in *Wives and Daughters*. As in Sandy Welch's *Jane Eyre*, shots of the natural world hold a complex gendered significance in Davies's *Wives and Daughters*. The opening scene demonstrates that Molly has an innate interest in nature (with its implications of freedom), thereby 'equalising' her, to some extent, with Roger and granting her intellectual autonomy. As with Jane and Rochester, however, there remains the problematic notion of the male acting as tutor to the female. In the final scenes of *Wives and Daughters*, the camera privileges Roger as he possesses the first shot and then lifts Molly into the scene, helping her to climb a rock; although Molly is imbued with an independence of heart and mind, it is confined within a patriarchal framework.

Such ambiguity stems from Gaskell's narrative. Early critical traditions read *Wives and Daughters* as distinctly 'feminine'. By contrast, as Hamilton notes, 'the early feminist attention of the 1970s and 1980s [...] brought Gaskell back into focus, by vigorously rewriting the problem of domesticity that has haunted her critical reputation since her death'.<sup>183</sup> The very title *Wives and Daughters*, for example, arguably constructs women from a patriarchal

perspective, yet, as the novel demonstrates, such roles are tested by the very women so defined. In this, it can be seen that the power of Gaskell's texts often lies in their ambivalence, in their notoriously Gaskellian critical and intellectual 'balance'. Gaskell presents both 'sides' of an issue, leaving the question of gender unresolved yet forcefully explored – a complexity which is only enhanced as the intellectuality of her narratives is placed within a conscious framework of domestic, feminine concerns.

In *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell establishes this challenging ambiguity with regard to gender immediately; Molly sits both 'square and quiet on her rough little pony' (*WD*, 9), demonstrating the docility that Squire Hamley later praises in her, and the physical and mental strength which enables her, 'a little vixen' (*WD*, 36), to gallop fearlessly in the dark. Gaskell invests Molly with an overt feminism; she believes that 'thinking more of others' happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself?' (*WD*, 134). Likewise, she exclaims to Roger that "It will be very dull when I shall have killed myself, as it were, and live only in trying to do, and to be, as other people like. I don't see any end to it. I might as well never have lived. [...]. But we are ourselves, [...] not angels, to be comforted by seeing the ends for which everything is sent" (*WD*, 135-136). Such feelings are seemingly rooted in Molly's 'fighting and struggling hard' in order to persuade Gibson 'to let her have French and drawing lessons'; 'being daunted by her father in every intellectual attempt, she read every book that came her way, almost with as much delight as if it had been forbidden [...]. Her summer place of study was that seat in the cherry-tree, where she got the green stains on her frock' (*WD*, 34).<sup>184</sup>

Indeed, whilst Gibson constantly diminishes and controls Molly – "I know my Molly – my silly little goosey – better than she knows herself" (*WD*, 121) – her own internalisation of the patriarchal role of dutiful daughter is complicated by its psychological import (in addition to the sparring quality which often characterises their relationship, and, to an extent, equalises Molly with her father).<sup>185</sup> Significantly, her privileging and love of her father is also an expression of her own sense of identity; in her absence from her father, she "felt like a lighted candle when they're putting the extinguisher on it" (*WD*, 27).

Nevertheless, Gaskell places Molly within a tense divide between silence and expression; often, ‘the rebellious heart rose [...] but said nothing’ (*WD*, 172), whilst ‘she knew that very often she longed to protest, but did not do it, from the desire of sparing her father any discord’ (*WD*, 362). In Molly’s confrontation with her father, for example, Gaskell illustrates both a woman’s feelings and the social need for repression:

She did not answer. She could not tell what words to use. She was afraid of saying anything, lest the passion of anger, dislike, indignation – whatever it was that was boiling up in her breast – should find vent in cries and screams, or worse, in raging words that could never be forgotten. It was as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore, and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone [...]. “So I was sent out of the house that all this might be quietly arranged in my absence?” [...] “Oh, papa, papa – I’m not myself – I don’t know what to say about this hateful – detestable – ”  
(*WD*, 111).

Although Molly attempts indirectly to maintain her role as ‘angel’ – in her anger she is not ‘herself’ – her repentance finally distorts into a return of her impassioned emotions. A similar tension can be seen in Molly’s realisation of Roger’s attraction to Cynthia.

He feasted his eyes as much as he dared by looking at Cynthia. Molly suddenly felt as if she could scarcely keep from crying – a minute ago he had been so near to her, [...] now he almost seemed as if he had forgotten her existence. She thought that all this was wrong; and she exaggerated its wrongness to herself; “mean,” and “envious of Cynthia,” and “ill-natured,” and “selfish,” were the terms she kept applying to herself; but it did no good, she was just as naughty at the last as at the first (*WD*, 270-71).

Whilst her feelings for Roger are evident through her attempts at repression, Gaskell, significantly, juxtaposes Molly’s internalisation of the language of childhood (‘she was just as naughty’) against her emotional awakening as a woman. In her ‘gentle power’ (*WD*, 549), Molly thus resembles critical

assessments of Gaskell as an author who combined ‘something of the serpent’s wisdom with the dove’s innocence’.<sup>186</sup> Molly is a complex, compelling and divided figure, ‘a young lady with a pretty stubborn will of her own’ (*WD*, 276), who both contentedly accepts – and yet asserts herself against – patriarchal constructs of womanhood.

To an extent, Davies accentuates Gaskell’s feminism, thereby placing his screenplay within a late-twentieth-century ideological context. At the Towers, for instance, Molly responds to Lord Cumnor’s riposte about the ‘Three Bears’ with a fearless directness; whereas she blushes and trembles in the novel (and, revealingly, only gains an assertive voice once her father arrives), she corrects Cumnor’s habit of ‘getting hold of what he fancied was a joke, and working his idea threadbare’ (*WD*, 23): ‘If you please, sir, it was the lady they call Clare’s bed’.<sup>187</sup> Whereas Gaskell’s Molly (like Hardy’s Tess) is asleep and passive at several key, ‘threatening’ points in the narrative – ‘she looked very soft, and young, and childlike’ (*WD*, 110) – Davies alters this, at times, so that she is alert. As she reads a book, for instance, she is intellectualised and engaged with her own emotions; it is Molly’s conscious choice to separate herself from the other characters. Moreover, as Stoneman comments, Davies similarly omits Molly’s illness, thus empowering her on the one hand, but also diminishing Gaskell’s critique of the debilitating effects of caring and nurturing.<sup>188</sup> Such shifts in gender relations are reinforced by Davies’s Roger, as his ‘sermon’ to Molly following news of her father’s engagement advocates not feminine self-sacrifice and stoicism (as in the novel), but rather initiates the affectionate bond that grows between them, as he talks to her as an equal and a friend.

As the adaptation’s final scene demonstrates, however, Davies in many ways maintains Gaskell’s thematic preoccupations, as he both tests and adheres to the dictates of patriarchal ideology.<sup>189</sup> Such ambiguities likewise inform the opening of Episode One. Whilst the childlike, ‘fairytale’ style of music confines Molly to the nursery, she is at the same time privileged; it is Molly who is both the focus of the camera and the director of the viewer’s perspective. Moreover, the scene’s location within a botanical glass house holds a gendered significance, as Molly is split between ‘domestic’, interior confines and the outside, natural world.<sup>190</sup> Such a schism is presented throughout. Whilst many images of the

domestic sphere ostensibly construct womanhood in patriarchal terms (Molly is often framed by windows), at the same time she is empowered and privileged as she moves into the foreground of certain shots, placing herself at the centre of the narrative.

Molly is thus both contentedly her father's 'goosey' *and* able to debate medical ethics with Gibson and his (male) students. As in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, Davies engages in a complex portrayal of Molly's sexuality. Although women's 'angelic', innocent qualities are noted in the literary text, there is also a distinct awareness of the potential for female sexual feeling; for Molly, 'it was flattering rather than otherwise to perceive that a very fine young man, who was a poet to boot, should think it worth while to talk on the tight rope for her benefit' (*WD*, 168). Rather than construing such feelings as a negative, 'immoral' force, Gaskell presents them as part of Molly's self-awakening; her repeated confrontations of herself in the mirror become, at times, a realisation of her attractiveness and identity as a woman. The relationship between the female mind and body becomes crucial to both Gaskell's depiction of women's emotional vulnerability, and her challenging of patriarchal ideology. Molly is highly aware of Cynthia's physical charms, which intensifies her often doubtful curiosity about her own appearance. Significantly, Molly equates female attractiveness as being rooted in physicality (as opposed to ideological values which constructed women as emotional and spiritual supports):

She had caught the reflection of the two faces in the glass; her own, red-eyed, pale, with lips dyed with blackberry juice, her curls tangled, her bonnet pulled awry, her gown torn – and contrasted it with Cynthia's brightness and bloom, and the trim elegance of her dress. "Oh! It is no wonder!" thought poor Molly (*WD*, 376).

Gaskell thus complicates elements of Molly's character which define her in conventional, patriarchal terms by depicting her not as an 'angel', but as an individual bound to her body and aware of its power. Nevertheless, whilst Molly is aware of female physicality, her own appearance is, significantly, marred by her own enjoyment of childish pursuits; her face is stained with 'blackberry juice', for 'after all Molly was a girl, not so far removed from childhood; and in

the middle of her grave regrets and perplexities her eye was caught by the sight of some fine ripe blackberries flourishing away' (*WD*, 371). Gaskell thus merges girlish innocence with an adult consciousness to striking effect.

Davies's screenplay is similarly underlined by a complex juxtaposition of 'knowing and not knowing'.<sup>191</sup> Gibson's recognition of Molly's growth to womanhood, for example, is visualised as they sit by the fire. Whilst Gibson and the viewer perceive that her face is illuminated and her movements sensuous, Molly herself is entirely oblivious to the effects of her physical presence. Significantly, her womanhood remains framed by the pursuit of her childhood – eating toasted cheese with her father – which, crucially, she longs to revert to and safeguard. In her opposition to her father's remarriage, with Hyacinth's and Cynthia's more concerted introduction of men and sexuality into Molly's world, she wishes, essentially, to remain in a childlike stasis.

Indeed, the reader is more aware of Molly's sexuality than she herself is. This is again captured by Davies during a scene at Hamley Hall. At her first sight of Osborne and Roger's portrait, Molly comments 'I like their faces', childishly repeating Mrs Hamley's own praise of Molly. Mrs Hamley's dubiously-knowing look, however, indicates the potential for female passion that forms a constant undercurrent in Gaskell's narrative. This is then compounded by the close-up of Molly's face, as she regards Osborne's picture; men are placed within the scrutiny of the 'female gaze', as Osborne and Roger are 'seen', initially, through Molly's fascinated facial expressions. Later in the series, Davies again visualises Molly's potential to be as sensuous and as enticing as Cynthia; as both 'sisters' gaze into the mirror, Molly's earlier, more searching look at herself is transformed into one of greater confidence. Davies therefore reconfigures Molly and Roger's relationship, privileging Molly in her growth to womanhood. Whereas, in the novel, Roger first sees Molly as an invalid at his return, Davies reunites them at the Towers, with Molly 'in her pretty evening dress, with her hair beautifully dressed' (*WD*, 616) markedly able to send 'his blood coursing at full gallop' (*WD*, 599). An earlier scene in which Roger is privileged by the camera's perspective (as he meets Cynthia at the Brownings' party) is thus powerfully reversed; it is now Molly who is placed by Roger at the centre of the narrative, as she is seen in medium-long shot through his compelled gaze.

To an extent, however, Davies's adaptation reverts to the conventions of the heritage film. As has been noted, the natural world is used as a signifier of the characters' emotions, both in the adaptation and in the novel:

Molly went into the garden, thinking over the last summer, [...] when the warm air seemed to be scented with roses and sweetbriar. Now, the trees were leafless, – there was no sweet odour in the keen frosty air [...]. Then she thought of the day her father had brought her news of his second marriage: the thicket was tangled with dead weeds and rime and hoar-frost (*WD*, 208).

It nevertheless remains significant that certain moments in Gaskell's novel are altered. Whilst in the text Mrs Hamley dies during the deadened winter months, this is not emphasised in the adaptation; similarly, Molly's confrontation with her father regarding his engagement occurs in a blooming summer garden on screen. Although such a change is still symbolically apt – Molly's enthusiasm for nature is, like her love for her home and parent, suddenly shadowed – it is possible to interpret the overwhelmingly 'glowing' visualisation of Hollingford and rural England as the visual splendour conventional to the heritage genre. Indeed, at times *Wives and Daughters* presents somewhat dichotomous readings, through stylistic elements which assert Gaskell as both powerful and intellectualised, as well as a writer of 'light', feminine 'nosegays'. As in Thomas's *Cranford*, there is occasionally a conflict between 'dark', serious images and the buoyancy of the musical score; the emotional resonance of Molly's encounter with Preston at the end of Episode Three, heightened by a long-shot view of Molly (who is diminished amidst tall silhouetted trees), is somewhat undermined by the cut to the gentle, pastoral tones of the end-credits music.

Similar conflicts can be seen in Davies's presentation of Hyacinth. On the one hand, the screenplay offers many interesting and subtle characterisations.<sup>192</sup> Michael Gambon's particularly emotive portrayal of Squire Hamley, for example, embodies both the character's commanding presence and his personal vulnerability, whilst Keeley Hawes lends Cynthia a nervous tension which implies the psychological struggles existent beneath her veil of flippancy and social confidence. However, parallels between Davies's characterisation of



Hyacinth and his famed depiction of Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC, 1995) are discernible, which somewhat dilute Gaskell's portrayal of Molly's 'mamma' and undermine the nuances that are otherwise evident in Francesca Annis's performance. Whilst Mrs Bennet can be seen as a humorous caricature in Davies's adaptation, Gaskell's Hyacinth is psychologised and complex. In many ways, Gaskell's comedy stems from her astutely-observed portrait of Hyacinth's social and personal insecurity.

It is made clear that Hyacinth is not simply defined by the stereotype of the 'wicked step-mother'. Whilst she inflicts much pain on Molly, Gaskell generally provides social and economic reasoning as a mitigating framework. Although she is materialistic in her view of marriage, this is grounded in social realism: 'It was a very pleasant change to a poor unsuccessful schoolmistress to leave her own house [...] where the look-out was as gloomy, and the surrounding as squalid, as is often the case in the smaller streets of a country-town' (*WD*, 97). Indeed, Hyacinth's internalisation of the effects of poverty leads her (in a reversal of Preston's machinations) to be 'always kind to poor people' (*WD*, 456). Similarly, whilst her desire to treat Molly well stems partly from a need to maintain social appearances, Gaskell makes it clear that Hyacinth has some genuine feeling for her step-daughter: 'Mrs Gibson really meant to make Molly happy, and tried to be an agreeable companion' (*WD*, 489).

Although the parallels between the pompous Mr Collins in the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr Coxe in Davies's *Wives and Daughters* reinforce Gaskell's humour – 'He was now a rich, though still a red-haired, young man' (*WD*, 400) – Davies's exaggeration of Hyacinth's flaws occasionally becomes conflicting. Davies's proposal scene arguably reduces Hyacinth to a more simplistically comical figure, for example, as she sobs vociferously upon Gibson's breast (recalling, at the same time, Alison Steadman's shrieked expostulations: 'Mr Bennet!'). Gaskell's narrative, however, challenges Victorian patriarchal beliefs regarding female emotional instability; Hyacinth's 'hysterics' are not so much gendered or a manipulative guise, but stem from personal, economic and social hardship: 'a little to his surprise, *and a great deal to her own*, she burst into hysterical tears: it was such a relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood' (*WD*, 106, my italics).

To an extent, Osborne and Cynthia also demonstrate *Wives and Daughters*' responsiveness to generic conventions and expectations of costume drama. Cynthia's seemingly contented acceptance of Henderson, for instance, arguably derives from an equation of heritage film with idealised, 'escapist' conclusions; by contrast, Gaskell's Cynthia is more ambiguous in her reactions towards her suitor, as the narrative also highlights the vulnerable social position of spinsters: "I am sorry mamma still looks upon me as 'an encumbrance', as the advertisements in *The Times* always call us unfortunate children. But I have been an encumbrance to her all my life. I am getting very much into despair about everything" (WD, 595). Osborne is similarly made less ambiguous than he is in Gaskell's novel. Instead, 'the languid, careless, dilettante Osborne' (WD, 350) is, in Tom Hollander's portrayal, transformed into a more unquestionably compelling, rather Byronic-looking figure. His relationship with Aimée is considerably romanticised, altering the patriarchal selfishness that Gaskell makes apparent in Osborne's marriage:

he knew where to go for a comforter; one who poured out praise till her words were choked in her throat [...]. Only she did yearn, and she did plead, for a little more of her husband's company; and the good reasons which had convinced her of the necessity of his being so much away when he was present to urge them, failed in their efficacy when she tried to reproduce them to herself in his absence (WD, 305).

Whereas their union provokes complex discussion of racial, social and gender issues in Gaskell's text, Osborne's unhappiness at Hamley Hall is intercut with idealised memories of his wife and child in the adaptation.<sup>193</sup> Such changes arguably form part of the privileging of male costume drama leads that has been compounded in the past two decades (as discussed elsewhere). The attractiveness of Davies's Osborne thus anticipates the popularity of Welch's Thornton in *North and South*.

### ***North and South* (2004)**

Sandy Welch's screenplay of *North and South* (BBC, 2004) was generally greeted with popular and critical acclaim, garnering several television awards and earning the plaudit that 'this is possibly the best BBC adaptation ever'.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, the interest of the production lies not only in its relationship with scholarly and filmic readings and reworkings of Gaskell, but also in its engagement with previous period adaptations of the 1990s and 2000s. As will be seen, *North and South* clearly offers innovative and refreshing understandings both of Gaskell, and, more particularly, of classic-novel adaptation; as Welch herself asserts, her production is 'different from other period drama'.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, to a considerable extent, Davies's 'breakthrough' adaptation of *Bleak House* (BBC, 2005) is foreshadowed technically and stylistically by Welch's version of Gaskell's industrial novel. As with many of the adaptations already explored in this thesis, *North and South* presents an urge to make costume drama 'gritty'. As will be seen, the 'prettification' (and, arguably, 'feminisation') of period adaptation is often reversed through stark cinematography and rapid, disjointed camerawork. The concept of 'nostalgia' is thus reworked as the past becomes contemporised, whilst the potent immediacy of Gaskell's language and the force of her social commentary are also translated onto screen.

However, as discussed in relation to Austen adaptation and Davies's *Wives and Daughters*, the innovation of *North and South* is framed by – and, in some ways, diluted or contradicted by – an adherence to certain conventional preoccupations of costume drama. Significantly, popular responses towards *North and South* themselves place the adaptation within this context of revision and tradition. They commend the production's 'freshness'; according to some viewers, '*North and South* is even better than *Pride and Prejudice* [...]. Television does not get much better than this'.<sup>196</sup> In its blending of a contemporary style with the historical detail associated with costume drama, Welch's production crosses the boundaries of period adaptation and 'mainstream' television; it re-assesses the adaptation genre, and epitomises a standard for broadcasting in general. At the same time, in their very referral to *Pride and Prejudice*, such reports also assert the durability of Davies's

adaptation in the nation's cultural consciousness: 'definitely the best thing the BBC has shown since *Pride and Prejudice*'.<sup>197</sup> Once again, the legacy of Davies's 'definitive' (and now 'traditional') adaptation influences perceptions of Welch's *North and South*. As will be seen, in some ways *North and South* 'becomes' *Pride and Prejudice* as John's character is linked to that of Austen's (or, more specifically, Davies's) Darcy, complicating the production's often nuanced portrayal of the Milton 'master' and Gaskell's exploration of Victorian gender ideology. The dialogue between tradition and innovation in Welch's *North and South* therefore has implications both for understandings of contemporary costume drama as a genre, and readings of Gaskell's literary standing; conflicting perceptions of what constitutes 'Gaskellian' become interlinked with the struggle to characterise contemporary period adaptation.

Commissioned partly through the success of Davies's *Wives and Daughters*, *North and South* holds a particularly interesting relationship with the earlier adaptation. The productions are linked through their ostensible reassessment of Stanton Whitfield's 'sweet and fragrant' nosegays, and Lord David Cecil's patriarchal assertion that 'the outstanding fact about Mrs Gaskell is her femininity'; 'so far from chafing at the limits imposed on her activities, she accepted them with serene satisfaction'.<sup>198</sup> It is indeed significant that the BBC chose to consolidate and further the feminism of Davies's *Wives and Daughters* by screening an 'Industrial', rather than 'Domestic', novel. Whilst Cecil maintained that 'it would have been impossible for [Gaskell] if she had tried, to have found a subject less suited to her talents', *North and South*'s striking visualisation of the Industrial Revolution credits Gaskell with the 'virile fire and life' that early (male) critics found lacking.<sup>199</sup>

Both adaptations clearly attempt to dispel Cecil's proclamation that Gaskell 'was the typical Victorian woman'.<sup>200</sup> In Welch's adaptation, such a movement is supported by the same quietly subversive power in Gaskell's *North and South* that has already been examined in relation to *Wives and Daughters*. Whilst both hero and heroine attempt to exalt each other in the literary text – "“Oh, Mr Thornton, I am not good enough!” “Not good enough! Don't mock my own deep feeling of unworthiness” – the novel closes by asserting Margaret's individuality and strong female identity (both the heroine's and Mrs Thornton's):

“what will [Aunt Shaw] say?” [...] “Her first exclamation will be, ‘That man!’” “Hush!” said Margaret, “or I shall try and show your mother’s indignant tones as she says, ‘That woman!’”<sup>201</sup> Gaskell’s nuanced final lines conclude a text which is energised throughout by the illustration of personal and social schisms which stem beyond ‘northern-ness’ or ‘southern-ness’. Although the narrative proclaims that ‘we have all of us one human heart’ (*NS*, 500), the opposition between masculinity and femininity is shown as a powerful (and often divisive) force which directs and informs both personal relationships and social mores; Margaret establishes quickly her own gendered ‘north and south’, exclaiming ‘how different men were to women!’ (*NS*, 33) following Lennox’s proposal, for example.

In Gaskell’s assertion that ‘when you are forty [...] you will write ten times as good a novel [...] just because you will have gone through so much more of the *interests of a wife and mother*’, she suggests not conformity but an awareness of the paradoxes of Victorian womanhood.<sup>202</sup> As Enid Duthie notes, although she held an ‘affectionate dedication’ towards her husband, Gaskell explored the shadows, as well as the light, of the domestic hearth – depicting marital breakdown in *Sylvia’s Lovers*, for instance.<sup>203</sup> Similarly, whilst Victorian domestic ideology celebrated the home as a sanctifying protection from the ills of the industrial and economic world (embodied by the idealised isolation of Wemmick’s ‘castle’ in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*), *North and South* instead challenges the perceived ‘femininity’ of Gaskell’s equation with the domestic sphere. Rather than simply critiquing the outside world from within safe domestic confines, Gaskell’s intellectual vigour and direct, often dialectical language emulate and embrace the ‘masculine’ spheres of commerce, work and strife, and cross class boundaries; it is with a marked ‘roughness’ of expression and tone that Higgins proclaims that “‘north an’ south have each gotten their own troubles. [...]. For sure, th’ world is in a confusion that passes me or any other man to understand”” (*NS*, 365).

Gaskell’s romance between Thornton and Margaret is underpinned by tensions and ambiguities which, rather than being diluted by romantic escapism, feed into the intellectual, thematic preoccupations of the novel. As Stoneman argues, ‘their relationship, which conventional criticism reads as a “romance plot” offering a false resolution to the “industrial theme” [...] proves to be an

essential analysis of the ideologies which structure industrial organisation, dictating why, among other things, class struggle is always aggressive'.<sup>204</sup> Whilst serving a thematic purpose, their relationship is also enriched by the contrast between Gaskell's psychologised, intricate portrayal of Margaret and Thornton and the deliberately stereotyped romance between Edith, that 'little lady' (*NS*, 489), and Captain Lennox.

Indeed, the notion that 'Margaret [is] of different stuff' (*NS*, 41) is established rapidly. Whereas Mrs Hale is 'almost like a child' (*NS*, 63), paralleling Edith's character, Mr Hale confirms Margaret's stronger womanhood as he confers on her the responsibility and respect of an equal. Indeed, like his daughter's ambivalence about 'playing with' Edith's shawls (*NS*, 7), Hale's language reinforces a questioning of conventional femininity, marking with it Margaret's movement into the adult world: "Margaret!" said Mr Hale at last [...]. "Is that *tapestry thing* of *immediate consequence*? I mean, can you leave it and come into my study? I want to speak to you about something very serious to us all" (*NS*, 34, my italics). Moreover, Margaret asserts decisions over Mr Hale (to an extent); as with Molly Gibson, Gaskell enforces her underlying feminism through a complex portrayal of the relationship between father and daughter: "I suppose we have about a hundred and seventy pounds of our own. Seventy pounds of that has always gone to Frederick since he has been abroad. I don't know if he wants it all," he continued in a hesitating manner [...]. "Frederick must not suffer," said Margaret decidedly; "in a foreign country; so unjustly treated by his own" (*NS*, 40-41).

Indeed, a challenge to the patriarchal order can be discerned even in Mrs Hale, as woman's position as spiritual guide is questioned. Mrs Hale's wish that her husband had confided his religious doubts in her are based largely upon materialistic impulses, whilst her discomfort in both the Helstone and Milton homes undermines the concept of woman as a presiding domestic 'angel': "I daresay, if he had told me his doubts at the first I could have nipped them in the bud [...]. You can't think the smoky air of a manufacturing town, all chimneys and dirt like Milton-Northern, would be better than this air" (*NS*, 50).<sup>205</sup>

However, as with Molly, Margaret's strength is often derived and supported by her exalted image of her father. Margaret – despite her queenliness – is rooted in her home, framed by the patriarchal reverence accorded to Mr Hale

as ‘her beloved father’ (NS, 36). To an extent, this is tested throughout the novel in the criticisms of Hale’s resignation; indeed, he is brought to a point of self-assessment and negation as he laments the removal to Milton following his wife’s death. Nevertheless, when Margaret’s spiritedness is called upon to combat her unsettled life, to a considerable extent it remains based upon duty towards her father: ‘Margaret did dislike it, did shrink from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her whole life before [...]. Then she conquered herself, and said, with a bright strong look on her face – “It is a painful thing, but it must be done, and I will do it as well as I ever can. *You [Mr Hale] must have many painful things to do*”’ (NS, 40, my italics). Indeed, Dixon tellingly constructs Margaret’s independence as a masculine, rather than feminine, attribute; “Miss Margaret has a touch of the old gentleman in her, as well as poor master Frederick” (NS, 53).

Although Margaret is ‘pungent’ with ‘taste, and spirit, and flavour in her’ (NS, 248-249), she in many ways internalises patriarchal gender ideology. Despite the underlying sexuality characteristic of Gaskell’s writing – as Thornton declares, “If you do not speak I shall claim you as my own in some strange presumptuous way” (NS, 519) – Margaret both recognises her physical maturity and rejects it: ‘Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage’ (NS, 34). Indeed, marriage and its implications are seen as a threat: ‘since that day when Mr Lennox came, and startled her into a decision, every day brought some question, momentous to her, and to those whom she loved, to be settled’ (NS, 56). Margaret instead consciously asserts her identity, and upholds her actions, through the images and language of patriarchal discourse.

For example, Margaret’s self-assurance – her ‘powerful and decided nature’ ‘stood calm and collected, ready to counsel or advise the men’ (NS, 54; 58-59) – is tempered: “if I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman’s work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will – I walk pure before God!” (NS, 226). Consequently, following her mother’s death, Margaret’s strength is guided by her dutiful assumption of the role of daughter and sister: ‘Margaret rose from her trembling and despondency, and became as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother’ (NS, 296-297); chapter fourteen is similarly entitled “Angel Visits”.

Whilst Gaskell paints a strong image of womanhood, not only in Margaret and Mrs Thornton, but also at times in Dixon and Bessy, she thus poses the limitations of ‘feminism’; Mrs Thornton, for example, ““would have lifted those heavy stones, and dropped them with as good an aim as the best man there, but that [she] fainted with the heat [she] had gone through”” (NS, 136).

As in *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell’s narrative in *North and South* consequently embodies in itself the complexity and ambiguity of patriarchy and the ‘Woman Question’, as it both conforms to and challenges ideological norms – both thematically and in terms of the perceived ‘femininity’ of her writing. It is significant, for instance, that much of Margaret’s power stems from physical descriptions; whilst Thornton assumed that Mr Hale’s daughter was ‘a little girl’ (NS, 70), it is Margaret’s womanhood which empowers her as ‘she held herself aloof from [Thornton] as if she had been a queen, and [he] her humble, unwashed vassal’ (NS, 89).<sup>206</sup> Indeed, Thornton’s compelled, somewhat predatory, fascination with Margaret’s physical appearance is often undermined as he negates himself through her eyes. Internalising her assertion of his lack of ‘gentlemanliness’, his male gaze is transformed into that of the female:

her full beauty met his eye; her round white flexile throat rising out of the full, yet lithe figure; her lips, moving so slightly as she spoke, not breaking the cold serene look of her face with any variation from the one lovely haughty curve; her eyes, with their soft gloom, meeting his with quiet maiden freedom. He almost said to himself that he did not like her, [...] he tried to compensate himself for the mortified feeling, that while he looked upon her with an admiration he could not repress, she looked at him with proud indifference, taking him, he thought, for [...] a great rough fellow (NS, 71).

Equally, however, just as Thornton is sensitive to Margaret’s admonishment of his ‘roughness’, she internalises the manufacturer’s language as a subtle means of indicating her changing feelings towards him. Following their previous conversation about ‘gentlemanliness’, Margaret employs Thornton’s own beliefs about ‘manliness’ in her emotional entreaty during the riot: ““Go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man [...]. If you



have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man!” (NS, 209).

At the same time, Margaret’s physicality positions her as an object of the ‘male gaze’ when she is vulnerable: ‘The large dark eyes, gazing straight into the Inspector’s face, dilated a little [...]. Her lips swelled out into a richer curve than ordinary’ (NS, 323).<sup>207</sup> At such times, Margaret is thus further ‘threatened’ as the bodily object set before the masculine figure of authority and power. Despite previous occasions in which Margaret defies gender stereotypes (Donaldson, for instance, proclaims that ‘another, who had gone that deadly colour, could never have come round without either fainting or hysterics’ (NS, 149)), she falls into a conventionally ‘feminine’ swoon following the Inspector’s departure. Indeed, even Donaldson’s praise of Margaret – ‘that girl’s game to the backbone’ (NS, 149) – is, like her dealings with the Inspector, underpinned by masculine hegemony in the narrative’s complex engagement with male perspectives:

That’s what I call a fine girl! [...] Who would have thought that little hand could have given such a squeeze? [...] With her head thrown back at first, to force me into speaking the truth [...]. Poor thing, I must see she does not overstrain herself. [...]. Such a girl as that would win my heart, if I were thirty years younger (NS, 149).

Revealingly, Margaret remains a ‘strong angel’ (NS, 297), an embodiment of Gaskell’s ‘knowing and not knowing’ in her negotiation of patriarchal discourse (which, through its quietly ‘feminine’ subtlety, becomes subversive). Margaret’s blushing responsiveness to Thornton both confirms her as Cecil’s ‘typical Victorian woman’, and, through her compelled female gaze at the Milton master, recognises both her own and Thornton’s physicality. As Stoneman maintains, ‘balanced emancipation seems to be the novel’s conscious goal’, yet such equality is naturally born out of a highly intricate, and often ambiguous, exploration and questioning of Victorian society.<sup>208</sup>

In many ways, Welch’s screenplay is similarly complex. The motif of the train journey and Margaret’s face in the window, for instance, is repeated

throughout the series. Shots of the train cutting across verdant English countryside simultaneously bridge ‘north’ and ‘south’, urban and rural, *and* demonstrate the encroachment of modernity and industrialisation upon tradition. The Hales’ journeying therefore emblematises their emotional uprooting and movement to the technologically-advanced Milton, whilst the frequent interruption of the screenplay’s narrative visualises Margaret’s vulnerability in her unsettled home.<sup>209</sup> At the same time, however, the repeated shot of Margaret’s steady gaze – which rather emulates the ‘deep-set earnest eyes’ which Gaskell accords Thornton, ‘intent enough to penetrate into the very heart and core of what he was looking at’ (*NS*, 92) – locates the heroine as the focus of the narrative (at such points) and invests her with control over the family’s changed life.

Indeed, at times, Welch constructs Margaret as the adaptation’s focal point by granting her more of the narrative than in Gaskell’s text. Margaret is thus more directly involved in Bessy’s death, for example, comforting Nicholas in the assured manner which characterises her superintendence of her own family. Moreover, it is she who relates her brother’s plight to Bessy; in contrast to her often girlish ignorance – and innocence – of worldly affairs in Gaskell’s text, Welch’s Margaret is imbued with decided political opinions about Frederick’s condemnation. The retrospective images of Lieutenant Hale’s departure from Helstone, and later disgrace, assert Margaret’s perspective. As in her later serialisation of *Jane Eyre*, Welch’s use of flashback construes costume drama as more than a series of aesthetic scenes; although the sequence is ostensibly concerned with ‘master Frederick’, privileged in Gaskell’s text by his parents’ and Dixon’s lamentations over their ‘poor boy’s’ sufferings, it is *Margaret’s* memories which direct Welch’s narrative.<sup>210</sup>

Throughout the adaptation, Welch likewise attempts to enforce Margaret’s ‘originality’ as a female character. The motif of Edith and Margaret’s letters, for example, visually and thematically juxtapose both north and south and typical and atypical women, consolidating the exploration of Victorian womanhood which Welch establishes early in her screenplay. In Episode One, Welch captures Margaret’s ‘haughty and determined [...] manner’ (*NS*, 53) in an invented scene in which she demands to be taken to Marlborough Mills. The sequence becomes significant on a number of levels. In contrast to

Gaskell's novel, the adaptation visualises the interior of the factory. Although the fact that the mill is not directly illustrated in the text arguably heightens its threatening power (whilst also locating its effects within the human), images of the factory help to define *North and South* as a 'new' costume drama. Resisting nostalgic heritage shots, which 'exalt' the past, the working mill is instead both contemporised through 'breathing', rapid camerawork and 'modern', synthesised sound, and presented in its 'realistic' hardships and danger.

Above all, however, the scene holds a gendered significance. As in the novel, Margaret is privileged during her first meeting with Thornton:

Mr Thornton was a good deal more surprised and discomfited than she. Instead of a quiet, middle-aged clergyman, a young lady came forward with frank dignity – a young lady of a different type to most of those he was in the habit of seeing [...]. Mr Thornton was in habits of authority himself, but she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him at once (*NS*, 69-70).

In the adaptation, such 'stateliness' is translated onto screen as Margaret explores – and impatiently dismisses – the privacy of Thornton's office; the viewer's first (albeit indirect) 'image' of Thornton is thus directed by the heroine.

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, Welch writes a similar scene in *Jane Eyre*, as Jane subjects Rochester's study to her scrutiny. As in *Jane Eyre*, however, the scene also becomes problematic, as Margaret is made vulnerable by her intrusion into the industrial space owned by Thornton; he not only dominates the shot physically, but is framed by the 'masculine' sphere of the factory, thereby mastering the screen as well as the mill. He is therefore able to assert his dominating presence over her plea that he reforms his behaviour towards his workers: 'Get that *woman* out of here!' (my italics). Whilst this scene suggests costume drama's over-privileging of the male romantic lead, Thornton's emphasis upon Margaret's womanhood also highlights gender as a complex, ambiguous and schismatic force.

Indeed, Welch attempts to negotiate the ideological complexity of Gaskell's novel throughout her adaptation, exploring, in particular, the interweaving of the male and female gaze. The series is marked by the repeated motif of Margaret looking back at Thornton, for instance, thereby locating him as

the centre of the shot. Crucially, however, this is in many ways balanced by Thornton's emotional plea 'look back – look back at me' as Margaret leaves Milton for London; Welch captures powerfully both the equality and emotional vulnerability between the protagonists. Although the camera focuses upon Thornton, his yearning for Margaret's gaze places her as the camera's indirect focus. Moreover, just as Margaret is privileged and empowered by her lingering emotional control over Thornton – 'he could not forget the touch of her arms around his neck' (*NS*, 229) – Welch visualises this through the use of flashback as Thornton stands in his empty mill, his consciousness of his reduced social and financial circumstances overwhelmed by his memory of Margaret. Although it is arguable that Welch's heroine often regards the manufacturer with 'a mixture of disapproval and awe rather than attraction', it remains significant that Margaret's flashback to her (and the viewer's) first sight of Thornton, standing over the mill, works to 'equalise' the protagonists in their thoughts and feelings.<sup>211</sup>

Indeed, although reviewers have criticised Welch's brutalisation of Thornton in Episode One (as he attacks one of his workers), his emotional vulnerability as Margaret leaves Milton demonstrates a deeper understanding of his character. As Sarah Wootton comments, 'the glimpses of Thornton's "inexpressible gentleness"' and nobility are 'often overlooked' in Welch's adaptation.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, in typically 'Gaskellian' fashion, even his punishment of his worker's smoking is rendered morally complex; as he asserts to Margaret, factory fires kill children. Significantly, whilst Thornton is ostensibly silent at Margaret's departure in Gaskell's novel, Welch's scene instead captures the fragility evident elsewhere in the text: 'strong man as he was, he trembled at the anticipation of what he had to say, and how it might be received' (*NS*, 229).

As has been indicated, there is a link between Armitage's Thornton and Firth's Darcy. However, at times, Welch complicates the image of the costume drama hero which has been so strongly defined by Firth. As discussed in Chapter One, Davies presents Darcy through overt, physical shots. He therefore fences as a means of confronting his conflicting emotions, purging his passion in typically masculine terms through the aggressive, powerful display of swordsmanship; similarly, whilst his dive into the lake intimates his troubled spirit, it also places a firm focus upon the body.

On the one hand, Welch reinforces this legacy. Thornton's emotional conflicts and vulnerability are visualised by 'the trademark open-necked shirt of the Byronic hero'.<sup>213</sup> However, to an extent Welch complicates this conventionally physical image of the male figure. Shots which implicitly focus upon John's youthful physicality and strength are instead often linked to Margaret, or defined by Margaret's view. Again, this is rooted within Gaskell's text, as she redefines literary conventions and complicates gender ideology; Thornton, a 'plain' man and not 'set up for a hero' (*NS*, 101), is transformed into a physical attraction only through Margaret's perspective: 'Margaret thought she had never seen him to so much advantage' (*NS*, 92). In Welch's adaptation, Thornton's pacing through the mill at the end of Episode One is thus framed by Margaret's voiceover; his striding in the open air likewise intimates his feelings for Margaret, as his walk through the graveyard is prefigured by her own numerous excursions.<sup>214</sup> The adaptation's camerawork similarly renders Thornton's 'Darcyesque' pacing more subtle, as disjointed, rapid shots visualise his inner turmoil following his rejection by Margaret.

Whilst Welch offers some intricate interpretations of Margaret and Thornton, she also explores Gaskell's complex presentation of gender ideology with regard to Mrs Hale and Mrs Thornton. As with the father/daughter relationship already discussed, Gaskell frames Mrs Thornton's 'feminist' power by her conventionally 'feminine', maternalistic feelings. In Welch's adaptation, Mrs Hale – whom the producers believed to be 'insipid' in Gaskell's text – is shown with greatest energy when she is in a maternal context, vehemently tearing up the newspaper containing Frederick's condemned name (whilst Mr Hale is markedly more passive).<sup>215</sup> Similarly, Gaskell complicates Mrs Thornton, granting her a gentleness which is based on her role as a mother: 'a sudden remembrance [...] of a little daughter – dead in infancy [...] that like a sudden sunbeam, melted the icy crust, behind which there was a real tender woman' (*NS*, 285). In Welch's serialisation, Sinead Cusack's Mrs Thornton is likewise severe but fair, her sound business judgement guided by her maternal sympathies: 'The child is ill [...]. She cannot work'.

Welch visualises the relationship between Margaret and Mrs Thornton through a series of sensitive invented scenes. In both novel and adaptation, the two women have the potential to merge; in many ways, Margaret will 'become'

Mrs Thornton. Rather than illustrating simplistic divides between people, Gaskell links Mrs Thornton and Margaret in a bond of strong womanhood. Significantly, Margaret's 'saving' of Thornton is prefigured by Mrs Thornton's aiding of Mackinson, for instance: "I have known the time when I have had to thread my way through a crowd of white, angry men, all swearing they would have Mackinson's blood as soon as he ventured to show his nose out of his factory; and, he knowing nothing of it, some one had to go and tell him, or he was a dead man; and it needed to be a woman – so I went" (NS, 135-136). Both Mrs Thornton and Margaret thus harness their womanhood, and conventional images of woman as a moral saviour, as a means of empowerment. Crucially, however, Mrs Thornton is both attracted to, and repelled by, Margaret. Such conflicts in feeling again form part of Gaskell's complex and subtly subversive exploration of the 'Woman Question', as the unconventional woman is both embraced and rejected.

As with Margaret's relationship with her father, Mrs Thornton's strength is derived largely from her love for her son; her pride and independence is not simply based upon a 'feminist' sense of autonomy, but is a projection of masculine achievement and power. In Welch's adaptation, striking images of Mrs Thornton are thus often framed by her son. Episodes Two and Four, for example, commence by echoing the conclusion to the first episode, as Thornton paces the factory; the shot of Mrs Thornton (and later Higgins) similarly striding through the mill in powerful and forbidding silhouette grants her stature, yet also privileges John, as his image becomes a directive of the narrative (and the other characters). The interconnectedness between John, his mother and the mill is epitomised by a particularly resonant image, in which Mrs Thornton and her son are shown in profile at a window, their faces merging with the looming reflection of the factory. Although Mrs Thornton proclaims that 'the mill is everything', it is John – supported by his mother – who invests it with power.

Welch's invented meeting between Margaret and Mrs Thornton at the end of Episode Four occurs, however, in the empty mill, following John's economic collapse. The two women are located within a site of male hegemony, drawn together by the figure of Thornton. Nevertheless, as in Gaskell's text, Welch complicates readings of gender ideology and the relationship between Margaret and Mrs Thornton. Although the mill is defined throughout the series as a

masculine sphere, Mrs Thornton and Margaret unite in their feelings for John at a time in which Margaret has ‘mastered’ the factory property. As with the tension between hero and heroine in Gaskell’s narrative, John is both exalted and diminished by Margaret.

The meeting – both a reconciliation and confrontation – therefore exemplifies Welch’s intricate visualisation of their feelings towards each other. Throughout the adaptation, Mrs Thornton and Margaret are drawn together by an almost subconscious connection, translating onto screen Gaskell’s complex rendering of Victorian womanhood. In Episode Two, for example, Margaret instinctively turns to find Mrs Thornton looking down at her from the mill window. The shot does not simply confer dominance onto the older woman, however. The camera depicts Margaret from a low angle, looking up at Mrs Thornton, whilst at the same time visually heightening Margaret’s stature; the sequence thus embodies the tension evident between the women in Gaskell’s novel. The scene is indeed aptly concluded by a profile shot of Mrs Thornton as she turns away from the window, simultaneously compelled and unsettled by Margaret’s presence. Just as Margaret’s characterisation is both autonomous and ‘angelic’, Mrs Thornton’s struggle with Miss Hale indicates her own divided female identity.

Such nuanced analyses are often reinforced by the adaptation’s striking and contemporary visual effects. Throughout the production, traditional aesthetics of the heritage film are inverted, embodied by the *mise-en-scène* of the mill. Angus Easson notes that ‘Gaskell describes scarcely any machinery, as though she wishes to concentrate on the human drama’.<sup>216</sup> The adaptation, however, uses the mill almost as another character, as both a physical setting which draws together the actors in ‘the human drama’, and as a symbol of the ambiguities of the novel and the screenplay. The factory interior is thus beautiful, emulating the artistic ‘polish’ expected of costume drama as the looms and billowing cotton are filmed in graceful slow-motion, the spinners engaged in a seeming ‘dance’ with the machinery – yet it is clear that horror lies behind it: ‘I believe I have seen hell. And it’s white – it’s snow white’.<sup>217</sup>

Colour becomes an emblematic motif throughout the series. As Katherine Wildt argues, ‘Gaskell uses colour in *North and South* [...] to set

moral tone while defining character’, thereby ‘foreshadowing events and establishing mood’.<sup>218</sup> Similarly, in Welch’s adaptation, the visual lushness typical of heritage drama (and ascribed to Davies’s *Wives and Daughters*) is, to a considerable degree, reworked, as the production’s cinematography holds a symbolic resonance beyond aesthetics. Significantly, just as the conventionally ‘angelic’ associations of white are inverted, the vibrant colour of the ‘very picturesque’ (*NS*, 25) Helstone is transformed into starker tones as Margaret’s perspectives change; *contrast* of colour thus becomes important.

In Welch’s adaptation the characters themselves are also attuned to colour; both visual and verbal references become important. In Thornton’s proposal scene, for instance, he remarks ‘one minute we talk of the colour of fruit, the next of love’. Colour, first seen at Helstone, is gradually brought into the Milton scenes to reflect Margaret’s changing feelings towards her new life. The talk of colour during the first proposal scene therefore points to the ambiguities of feeling experienced by Margaret; just as Phipps’s musical ‘love’ theme is increasingly woven into the score as Margaret and Thornton’s relationship develops, the hint of colour within an otherwise shadowed interior scene works to similar effect.

At the same time, Welch complicates Margaret’s gradual acclimatisation to Milton, again through the use of colour. The purple dyed cloths and Fanny’s dress, although adding visual vibrancy to Milton (contrasted with the shadows, blacks and greys of the earliest scenes), also link to Boucher, his death in river water stained violet by the cotton mills, and, implicitly, the plight of the impoverished poor. Similarly, in contrast to the rich images of countryside which frame the production (at the start of Episode One and conclusion of Episode Four), the rural scene surrounding Boucher’s death is noticeably stark and muted in colour.<sup>219</sup>

Indeed, in Margaret’s railway journey from London to Milton in Episode Four, the focus upon the countryside that characterises previous travels is exchanged for a close shot of the mechanics of the train. The visual link to industrial Milton thus intimates Margaret’s shift in heart and mind, whilst also connecting north and south. Gaskell also makes subtle links between the natural and industrial, Milton and Helstone. Urging herself to inform Mrs Hale that they are to move to the city, for example, Margaret’s ‘eye caught on a bee entering a



deep-belled flower: when that bee flew forth with his spoil she would begin – that should be the sign’ (*NS*, 48). Demonstrating Gaskell’s richly-psychologised portrait of Margaret, the bee also signifies both the rurality of the south, and, as a ‘manufacturer’, the enterprise of the north. Moreover, the transition from south to north is often enforced in the novel by Margaret having found a ‘human interest’. Welch visualises this in an invented scene in which Margaret ‘cannot find the words’ to communicate with her cousin; she instead seeks ‘a chat with Bessy’. With the richness often typical of the adaptation as a whole, the scene becomes multi-layered; it is at this point that Bessy dies. As in Gaskell’s novel, Milton is both a place of happiness and deep pain.

This is also portrayed on screen through careful editing. Just as Gaskell implies similarities between master and worker, the meetings of both unions coincide in scenes which conflict and draw parallels; as Mr Hale observes, both ‘sides’ are presented. Likewise, just as Gaskell presents illness as a universal condition, and one which bridges north and south (tellingly, Mrs Hale dies in the north, whereas her husband dies in the south), Welch intercuts Boucher’s and Mrs Hale’s deaths. While such a device illustrates Higgins’s assertion that “‘All men must die’” (*NS*, 259), the sequence also retains an astute class commentary; although linked in death, the differences between their social and personal situations are made all the more marked by the juxtaposition.

Subtle camerawork also imbues many of the scenes with a deep symbolic resonance. Shots are often taken from high above, emulating the ‘blue skies’ that are very apparent in the Helstone scenes (the first shot of Margaret at Helstone is taken from above as she lies asleep on lush, verdant grass), but also pointing to the height of the Milton buildings, and the entrapment of the inhabitants within this urban setting. Significantly, at times of distress, characters of both classes are seen walking ‘high above the city’ (notably Boucher, as he struggles into the shot). Although William Ferrell maintains that ‘good novels probe the depths of human consciousness in striving to comprehend reality’, whilst ‘films are not as concerned with themes, preferring to emphasise entertainment’, Welch’s adaptation confronts such simplifications.<sup>220</sup> The close focus on Boucher’s shoe, for instance, does not then lead to a dead body, but to a deeply tormented – yet living – figure; rocking himself on the riverbank, his trauma is heightened by the silent pause in the musical score.

Sound is indeed used to powerful effect throughout the adaptation, again redefining the aesthetics of costume drama. In the exchange between Boucher and Higgins following the strike, for example, a ‘Gaskellian’ balance is maintained through the presentation of both perspectives, yet the scene remains unsettled by ambiguity and tension; in stark contrast to the rich musical scores of many heritage films, the conflict between man and union is accompanied, appropriately, by the sound of a baby wailing in the background. Just as Gaskell’s powerful language lends a potent immediacy to her social commentary, the use of sound forms part of the adaptation’s ‘realism’. The noise of the mill thus aptly pervades the musical score.

As Easson maintains, Gaskell’s *North and South* ‘insists upon debate and finds no facile solution’.<sup>221</sup> In many ways, Welch’s adaptation presents a deeply sensitive rendering of Gaskell’s novel, the visual devices and crafting of the production asserting the complexity and ambiguity of the literary text. Moreover, in its stylistic innovation, *North and South* also debates and re-defines costume drama as a genre, incorporating the developments of adaptations of the later 1990s, whilst anticipating productions such as Davies’s *Bleak House* and Welch’s *Jane Eyre*. However, whereas ‘Gaskell is able in the way she raises questions to leave us finally with the feeling that they have been explored and left unanswered only because she is aware of the complexity of the situation she has created’, Welch’s screenplay becomes troubled by its seeming resolution.<sup>222</sup> Margaret and Thornton accept each other at a railway station, bridging the divide between north and south, and thus ostensibly settling the ambiguities which underlie Gaskell’s own union of the hero and heroine. As has been discussed in relation to Davies’s *Wives and Daughters*, and will be seen in Thomas’s *Cranford*, *North and South* is thus undermined by certain simplifications which problematise contemporary re-workings of Gaskell, and costume drama as a genre.

In Richard Armitage’s John Thornton, Welch’s *North and South* reinforces a long tradition of producing period drama for a female audience. Thornton is subjected to the ‘female gaze’ of both the heroine and women viewers, thus aligning the adaptation with the female empowerment that is to be found in *Jane Eyre*’s scrutiny of Rochester’s physicality. Equally, however, it is

arguable that Welch privileges Thornton's screen presence to the extent of diminishing Margaret's 'straight, fearless' (NS, 69) dignity. Whereas Gaskell in many ways points to a 'balance' in Margaret and Thornton's relationship, the focus upon John (whom, significantly, Gaskell declares "is not a lady's man" (NS, 86)), at times confuses Welch's intricate negotiations of Victorian gender ideology. There is, paradoxically, an almost nostalgic return to the heritage film's privileging of the male lead within a romantic idyll.

In many ways, Gaskell's text challenges Welch's focus upon Thornton as a physical object. Just as Toby Stephens redefines the attractiveness of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Welch contemporises Gaskell's language in terms that privilege male physicality; whereas in the novel "Mr Thornton is plain enough, but he's not like a bulldog, with its short broad nose, and snarling upper lip" (NS, 159), Welch's Margaret exclaims 'Surely he's better looking than a bulldog?!' In Gaskell's narrative, Thornton is instead 'neither exactly plain, nor yet handsome, nothing remarkable' (NS, 73); 'a noble, if not a handsome, man' (NS, 206).

For Gaskell, Thornton's awareness of his body intimates vulnerability rather than power: 'he felt more awkward and self-conscious in every limb than he had ever done in all his life before' (NS, 72). Gaskell consequently inverts Margaret's attractiveness and makes it a powerful threat, as well as a pleasure, for Thornton. By contrast, Armitage's Thornton gazes at Margaret at his leisure, as she passively falls asleep at tea (just as in an earlier scene Lennox regards her as she reposes in a meadow; to an extent, Welch imbues Margaret with the lethargic passivity that Gaskell accords Edith). Later, Margaret is crestfallen as an assured Thornton is introduced to Anne Latimer.

Welch's invention of Anne Latimer – of whom Cusack's Mrs Thornton 'greatly approves' – is indeed one of the most problematic elements of her screenplay. Her presence (unfailingly highlighted by Bell's blatant observations) undermines the psychological complexity which Gaskell, and Welch herself, accord the hero and heroine. As Margaret sits 'in burning silence, vexed and ashamed of her difficulty in keeping her right place, and her calm unconsciousness of heart, when Mr Thornton was by' (NS, 282), she undergoes the same complex mental struggle that Thornton does in his realisation of his regard for her: 'How reconcile those eyes, that voice, with the hard, reasoning,

dry, merciless way in which he laid down axioms of trade, and serenely followed them out to their full consequences?’ (NS, 180-81). Gaskell thus complicates the conventional love story by underpinning Margaret’s feelings for Thornton – and the male as an idealised romantic object (‘those eyes, that voice’) – with the political and moral discourses apparent in the rest of the narrative: ‘Margaret’s whole soul rose up against him while he reasoned in this way – as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing’ (NS, 180). To an extent, Welch instead visualises the growing relationship between Margaret and Thornton, and internal shifts in feeling, through a more simplistic, stereotyped intimation of jealousy; Welch compounds Margaret’s reactions towards Anne by using Lennox to similar effect upon Thornton (in contrast to Henry’s rather positive reaction towards John in the novel).

Moreover, Thornton’s dismissal of Margaret from his mill in Episode One foreshadows a sequence of incidents in which he closes the many heated exchanges with Margaret, forcing her into an undermined, submissive position. Despite Margaret’s determined vociferousness at Mrs Thornton’s dinner, it is Thornton who concludes their conflicting views about providing food for the strikers, for instance. By contrast, Gaskell once more presents her customary balance at the dinner scene in the novel, considering both the male and female gaze: ‘he was struck anew with her great beauty [...]: the curving lines of the red lips’ (NS, 191); ‘Margaret thought she had never seen him to so much advantage’ (NS, 192).

Gaskell’s Thornton not only confronts his position as a master of others, but also learns to master himself in his awareness of his conflicting feelings about Margaret and his own character. Such a struggle once again informs Gaskell’s own labour to understand the ambiguity of gender, as she attempts to negotiate the masculine and feminine in order to create an equality; just as Mr Hale and Margaret demonstrate feminine and masculine attributes respectively, the ‘puzzle’ of Thornton is only to be solved if he is simultaneously ‘large and strong and tender, *and yet a master*’.<sup>223</sup> By contrast, at certain points Welch undermines the complexity demonstrated elsewhere in her screenplay, and rather more simplistically re-invests Thornton with a self-assured, dominating control over Margaret; his assertion ‘I’m looking to the future’ (to the crestfallen

Margaret) is followed in the next episode by his seemingly blissful acceptance of Anne Latimer on his arm at Fanny's wedding.

Such problematic elements culminate in the adaptation's conclusion. Although the producers maintain that this is 'one of [Welch's] finest creations', many reviewers objected to it: 'Terrible ending [...] stick to the book version!'; 'what was Sandy Welch thinking of when she wrote the last scene?'<sup>224</sup> With Margaret and Thornton's public kiss, *North and South* in many ways reverts to costume drama as wish fulfilment. Indeed, just as *North and South* foreshadows *Bleak House* in its technical and stylistic innovation, to a degree it also anticipates its confinement within romantic expectations (as discussed further in Chapter Four).

As Wootton maintains, 'the final scene poses something of a problem'. Thornton's

face is softened and his sneer is teased into a smile; equally, however, Thornton pointedly refuses to engage with Margaret's business proposal. [...] Rather than the exquisitely ambivalent 'gentle violence' that transfers to Margaret in the closing lines of the text, indicating a continuing and evolving power struggle after marriage, Thornton retains an incontestable mastery by holding her face in his hands. The dominant masculinity that has been somewhat controversially exposed, questioned and revised throughout the adaptation is now repackaged as sexually appealing.<sup>225</sup>

On the one hand, despite criticisms of the production's (and Gaskell's) conclusion, it is possible to discern certain nuances which continue and consolidate the thematic preoccupations of the screenplay and novel. Reviewers' objections focus upon Thornton's physical 'mastery' of Margaret – which, tellingly, connects him visually to the overbearing image of Orson Welles cradling Joan Fontaine's face in promotions of Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*. In the novel, however, Gaskell does shift the narrative perspective into that of Thornton: Margaret 'turned her face [...] towards him, and laid it on his shoulders, hiding it even there; and it was too delicious to feel her soft cheek against his, for him to wish to see either deep blushes or loving eyes' (*NS*, 520).

Margaret seemingly confirms Thornton's patriarchal dominance, trusting her identity to his protection. Seen in this light, Margaret's timidity in Welch's scene is apt.

Likewise, the final image of the adaptation becomes significant. Although Wootton notes that the station scene exacerbates 'our unease at Margaret's imminent loss of her newly-found financial independence in Gaskell's novel', Welch's feminist concluding shot enforces Gaskell's own final focus upon "'that woman!'"<sup>226</sup> In contrast to Darcy and Elizabeth's kiss at the conclusion of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*, Margaret and Thornton do not, at the last, indulge in a somewhat conventional gazing at each other. Once more seen in a train carriage, Margaret is instead the centre of the shot, having seemingly 'journeyed' to her own sense of personal fulfilment. Whilst Thornton is in the background of the scene, Margaret gazes out of the window, and, significantly, past the camera. Despite the fact that she is now, according to Victorian legislature, Thornton's betrothed 'property', her autonomy of vision and feeling is untrammelled.

Crucially, therefore, Thornton's seeming dismissal of Margaret's intellect and business arrangement in Welch's screenplay, as he regards her instead as a physical 'object' for his possession, conflicts with the intricacy Gaskell accords their reconciliation, as well as the subtlety of Welch's own final image of Margaret. Admittedly, it is possible to see Margaret as the directive of the scene, as *she* assents to Thornton's surprised remark 'You're coming with me?', while he is invested with some emotional complexity; the camera rests on John, crestfallen, as Margaret returns (briefly) to Lennox. Ultimately, however, Thornton is privileged at the adaptation's denouement as the male romantic lead; despite Margaret's initiation of physical contact between them, there is something rather desperate in her clasping of his hand. As such, although Gaskell complicates the roses which Thornton gives to Margaret, subtly joining Helstone and Milton through the language of love and commerce – "you must give them to me," she said, trying to take them out of his hand with gentle violence. "Very well. Only you must pay me for them" (NS, 520) – Welch simply presents the flower as an idealised emblem; unwithered and uncomplicated, it is an assured token of Thornton's claiming of Margaret. Whilst Thornton and Margaret both embarked on their respective train journeys

as a form of escape (from Milton and bankruptcy, and London and feminine inaction), Welch's scene thus also becomes one of costume drama escapism, both visually and thematically.

Significantly, this problematic element of Welch's adaptation has been reinforced and elaborated by the aftermath of the production's release. In *North and South's* promotion and popular reception, important issues regarding perceptions of both Gaskell and contemporary costume drama are once more raised. The nuances of Welch's adaptation conflict with enduring responses towards period drama romance, which, through their ultimate privileging of the male lead, dilute the complexity of Victorian novels and, in many cases, their screenplays. Again, the relationship between Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* and Welch's *North and South* becomes central.<sup>227</sup> In the focus upon their physicality, Firth's Darcy and Armitage's Thornton finally become conflated: 'Mr Thornton is the new Mr Darcy'.<sup>228</sup> Significantly, re-issued DVD editions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South* (2008) both figure close-up images of the male leads on otherwise pictorially blank covers (no visual reference is made to the heroines).<sup>229</sup> Although Welch's adaptation deliberately leaves the audience with a privileged image of Margaret, costume drama romance 'rescues' Thornton from the background of the final scene, re-asserting patriarchal control over the story of 'Margaret Hale' as he is placed within his own hegemonic tale. Whereas Gaskell's 'romance blown to pieces' (*NS*, 492) reconfigures literary and romantic tropes, the popularity and promotion of *North and South* thus locate the adaptation's innovation back within a context of 'traditional' attitudes towards costume drama. Revealingly, such a movement prefigures the tensions and simplifications which finally undermine Heidi Thomas's *Cranford*.

### ***Cranford* (2007)**

'It is the only one of my own books that I can read again; [...] – whenever I am ailing or ill, I take *Cranford* and laugh over it afresh', exclaimed Elizabeth Gaskell in a letter to John Ruskin.<sup>230</sup> Her attachment to the gentle humour of her 'little book' points to the unique position held by *Cranford*, the understated tenderness of its narrative earning Miss Matty's story a distinctive and

enduringly popular voice among the major works of both Gaskell and other Victorian authors.<sup>231</sup> The BBC likewise promoted Heidi Thomas's adaptation of *Cranford* as a significant period drama, which sought both to preserve 'Gaskell's magic, her intimate understanding of this very small, very particular community', whilst also presenting 'completely fresh' readings of her work.<sup>232</sup> As with *Wives and Daughters* and *North and South*, *Cranford* presents a highly complex and dynamic relationship between literary text and the screen, and once more demonstrates an ostensible urge to contemporise visualisations of the past. Developing the conventions of costume drama as a genre, stylistically, technically and thematically, *Cranford* was hailed as a new and innovative period serialisation.

To an extent the adaptation also forms part of a reassessment of *Cranford* as a literary text. Since the nineteenth century, *Cranford* in particular has been associated traditionally with the domestic sphere. First published in *Household Words*, for contemporary readers the narrative was indeed framed by a context which – ostensibly at least – both explored and exemplified Victorian domestic ideals and gender roles. In many ways, *Cranford* offers itself as an embodiment of patriarchal ideology, as male critics in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries constructed the novel into 'a nosegay of violets, honeysuckle, lavender, mignonette and sweetbriar'.<sup>233</sup>

However, although *Cranford*'s preoccupations are often to be found within the 'sanctuary of the home', the text is more nuanced than traditional criticism suggests; the light of the domestic hearth is instead all too often darkened by the shadows which haunt the simplicity of the spinsters' lives.<sup>234</sup> It is in this that the humour of *Cranford* becomes significant. The seemingly benign veil of affectionate amusement enables Gaskell both to be complex and subversive, concealing yet reinforcing an exploration of controversial gender and social issues, and facilitating an intricate dialogue with other writers and literary forms. Although, as George Meredith noted, comedy has traditionally never been 'one of the most honoured of the Muses' (an opinion upheld by the Victorians' uneasy perception of the comic), it is clear that Gaskell's dynamic and multi-faceted humour enriches her novel beyond its ability to incite fond laughter in its readers. The delicate irony of Mary's narrative instead becomes



both the enforcer and the embodiment of much of the text's power and interest.<sup>235</sup>

In many ways, it would seem that the BBC's *Cranford* is rooted within an understanding of Gaskell's complexity. As executive producer Kate Harwood comments, '*Cranford* is light and funny', yet it 'is a complex portrait of a real town'; 'death, and unexpected reversal, both happy and sad, come frequently'.<sup>236</sup> Whilst laughter remains a focal point of the production (as director Simon Curtis notes, 'the humour in *Cranford* makes it very special' as 'comedy is at the heart of it in a very unique way'), Heidi Thomas highlights and reinforces the deeper social issues apparent in the text by interweaving two other Gaskell novellas, *My Lady Ludlow* and *Mr Harrison's Confessions*, into her *Cranford* screenplay.<sup>237</sup> The incorporation of these stories, with their themes of social change and tension, accentuates the production's study of class unrest and mobility, tradition besieged by modernity, and the position of mid-Victorian women (the merging of the texts affirming, at the same time, the act of adaptation). Indeed, in the screenplay's broadening of *Cranford's* preoccupations, reviewers commented that the adaptation 'resembles a benevolent pastiche of *Middlemarch*, as the advent of railways, romance and a new doctor transforms for ever the lives of rich and poor around and within a typical early Victorian provincial town'.<sup>238</sup>

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot balances a powerful seriousness – Dorothea is 'hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty causes' – with 'a delicate sense of social comedy'.<sup>239</sup> Like Eliot, Gaskell blends light and shade in *Cranford* (and the two shorter stories) as part of her astute portrait of human psychology. Thomas's adaptation similarly offers many interesting interpretations of *Cranford*, the screenplay often visualising and developing Gaskell's textual nuances with insight. Nevertheless, the series becomes increasingly marked by an uneasy tension, as a conflict between scenes which depict laughter and tears is created. Whilst *Cranford* is distinct from many of Gaskell's other major novels, its distinguishing feature – its sustained humour and gentle tone – becomes problematic in Thomas's adaptation, as it accentuates the patriarchal, diminutive readings of Gaskell which can occasionally be discerned in *Wives and Daughters* and *North and South*. Consequently, a return to more traditional images of the nostalgic heritage film is facilitated. Whilst comparisons of the BBC's *Cranford* with *Wives and*

*Daughters* and *North and South* attest to Gaskell's literary diversity and demonstrate conflicting understandings of her narratives, they also finally intimate the tensions apparent in contemporary screenwriting.

Tillotson's observation of the 'serpent's wisdom' and 'dove's innocence' in Gaskell's writing is closely interlinked with *Cranford's* humour.<sup>240</sup> Beyond the lightness of tone exists an incisive commentary upon mid-Victorian gender roles, and a biting exploration of 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of writing; indeed, the fact that 'when the rector came to call, Mr Peter talked in a different way about the countries he had been in' (C, 211), demonstrates Gaskell's keen awareness of gendered storytelling. Despite criticism which extols the nostalgia of *Cranford*, stylistically, the text is not static. Just as Miss Galindo in *My Lady Ludlow* indirectly upholds female writing – her pretensions to authorship 'ended in my having nothing to say [...]. But sometimes, when I get hold of a book, I wonder why I let such a poor reason stop me. It does not others' – the narrative of *Cranford* asserts the text's dynamism through its intertextual dialogue, and explores through its intricate humour the position of women at a time of social change.<sup>241</sup> The Johnsonian voice of Deborah, for example, is juxtaposed against what Peter Keating perceives as the 'slangy' tone of Mary, the canonical male writer finally undercut by a youthful perspective which, in its gentle mocking, both reassesses the traditionally 'feminine' mode of 'epistolary writing' (C, 48) and aligns itself with Captain Brown in its appreciation of modern literature.<sup>242</sup> Miss Jenkyns's aversion to 'that strange old book, with the queer name, poor Captain Brown was killed for reading – that book by Mr Boz' (C, 62) becomes part of a humorous exchange between Gaskell and Dickens – who was, of course, the publisher of *Cranford*. Behind a guise of conventional femininity, which consciously harnesses a traditional humour associated with female verbosity, Gaskell quietly manipulates and reworks the male literary legacy.

Gaskell thus forges 'a poetics of [...] dissimulation', an 'artful posture of "knowing and not knowing"' in order to overcome the difficulties faced by a female author confronted by patriarchal expectations (an ability that is, significantly, emulated by Mary herself; she writes 'a letter which should affect him if he were Peter, and yet seem a mere statement of dry facts if he were a stranger' (C, 180)).<sup>243</sup> Gaskell's humour is integral to the formation of this narrative strategy. As critics such as Patricia Pulham and Eileen Gillooly

comment, the ‘quiet comedy’ of nineteenth-century women writers ‘functions as a resistance to the inequalities of the female condition while ostensibly upholding patriarchal law’.<sup>244</sup> Whilst Thackeray’s narrator in *Vanity Fair* attacks society openly by calling attention to its biting satire – ‘we are not going to cajole the public into a sermon, when it is only a comedy that the reader pays his money to witness’ – Gaskell shapes a deliberately ‘feminine’ humour which relies upon gendered issues (such as domestic economy and women’s dress), and maintains through its understatement and gentleness the façade of female ‘tact’.<sup>245</sup> Through conforming to patriarchal dictates, Gaskell is able to quietly, yet potently, challenge them as she works within, and yet manipulates, the received image of feminine writing. *Cranford* thus becomes a text of gentle nostalgia, deeply-rendered psychology, and subversive power.

To an extent, Thomas’s adaptation offers many nuanced visualisations of *Cranford*. Her use of language and crafting of speech, for example, often captures a ‘Gaskellian’ quality which embodies and enforces the humour of the literary text. As in Gaskell’s novel, the screenplay’s humour is often associated with domestic and feminine concerns: ‘What is all this agitation? Are the summer gloves come in?’ Moreover, in true comic tradition, comments expose characters gently; as Miss Pole laments, ‘this looking-glass must be defective [...]. Have you nothing that will elongate my face?’, while Deborah is accorded suitably Johnsonian sentences (expostulating against ‘the incommodious consumption of oranges’, for instance). Pompous, slightly anachronistic speeches, with their often winding sentence construction, reflect well the small absurdities of the town: ‘Turn yourself about. There are some ladies running’. Humour stems from the guise of propriety, upheld and protected by the decorum of the ladies’ speech – even whilst it is clear that such social restrictions are being tested and upset. Accordingly, Mrs Forrester remembers to give an exhausted curtsy to the doctors as she runs with her retching cat.

Just as Gaskell demonstrates the potential for shifts in social mores, her humour acts as a signifier of the interplay between past and present, tradition and progress, which featured so strongly in Victorian thought. The ‘Amazonian’ world of *Cranford* is emulated by Gaskell’s narrative structure as the young woman, Mary, observes the elderly spinsters and forges a female bond of

common interests (Margaret's position as narrator in *My Lady Ludlow* works to similar effect). At the same time, however, Mary is from industrial Drumble; her amusement at life in Matty's home thus stems from her knowledge of a modern world outside of a little town that is almost 'blind and deaf to what was going on' (C, 165) around it. Although *Cranford* has been perceived as an 'exquisite' piece of 'social painting', expressing a Ruskinian nostalgia for the past at a time of industrialisation, the schism in feeling that often exists between the young Mary and the older Cranfordians renders the novel more complex.<sup>246</sup>

It is with great affection that Mary records the 'eccentricities' of Cranford. She takes pains to prevent Matty from 'disfiguring her small gentle mousey face with a great Saracen's head turban' (C, 129), for example, and her final words – 'We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us' (C, 218) – in many ways affirm the validity of the 'old world' (C, 64) of the town. However, Mary's frustration at old-fashioned proprieties and class pretence points to the wider social and cultural climate of the mid-nineteenth century, as her amusement embodies the currents of change which encroach even upon Cranford. Her reaction to the thwarted love between Holbrook and Matty, for instance, indicates the gradually altering perceptions of class and female autonomy that occurred over the course of the Victorian period; it is with a marked independence of heart and mind that, in answer to Miss Pole's assertion that "Thomas would not have been enough of a gentleman for the rector and Miss Jenkyns", the young Mary 'impatiently' exclaims "well! But they were not to marry him" (C, 69).

In Thomas's adaptation, whilst Matty characteristically maintains that 'I never did like the notion that the world is round. It makes me giddy', her screenplay is similarly energised by an interplay between past and present, and an awareness of the Victorians' changing social, economic, and cultural mindset. Although the ladies' humorous fear of 'new-fangled ways' (C, 74) is established immediately (in response to Dr Morgan's assertion that 'it is time for a change', Deborah cries incredulously 'A change?'), Dr Harrison is proactive in bringing modern science to Cranford. Whereas he dismisses his affiliation to Sir Astley in Gaskell's narrative – "it had been the most trivial speech in the world [...], and before night all the town had heard that I was a favourite pupil of Sir Astley (I had never seen him but twice in my life)" – he actively upholds his medical

innovations in Thomas's adaptation.<sup>247</sup> The interweaving of the plot of *My Lady Ludlow* with *Cranford* similarly highlights social change. The relative gentility of the Cranford ladies is contrasted with the hardships faced by the Gregson family, whilst Lady Ludlow's (and Mrs Jamieson's) hierarchical class pretensions are challenged by Harry's social mobility. Humorous moments when the ladies 'expose' themselves therefore link with the adaptation's drive for 'grittiness'. Their enthusiastic surmises as to the bloody nature of Jem's operation reveal the contradictions in their social decorum, yet also highlight the proximity of pain and death. Just as Gaskell displays a keen realism ("people talk a great deal about idealising now-a-days, whatever that may mean" (C, 88)), Harry later snares a rabbit to feed his family, whilst Jem's screams disrupt the quiet of Miss Jenkyns's drawing-room.

At the same time, Thomas's characterisation of Mary touches upon Gaskell's juxtaposition of youth and age, the humour suggesting deeper social issues. Mary's values immediately conflict with the reserve of Deborah, in addition to intimating Matty's greater willingness for expression, despite her emotional suffocation (in Gaskell's text, Matty 'at last [...] could not restrain the tears which had long been silently flowing' (C, 63)). Although Mary's warm exuberance is accepted timidly by Matty, it clashes with Deborah's insistence upon formality; Mary's open arms are thus confined swiftly into a handshake, for example.

Mary's gift of oranges, transported by railway, suggests both personal and social freedom, and positions Cranford from the start as a town besieged by modernity. The humour of their conversation about oranges – 'My sister does not care for the expression 'suck'. We will repair to our rooms and consume our fruit in solitude' – represents an adherence to tradition and propriety that is vulnerable to change. The ensuing image of Deborah enjoying her orange, whilst Matty vehemently sucks her fruit, demonstrates the performativity of social graces and, by exposing the schism between 'respectability' and true feeling, privileges Mary's youthful indecorum. This continues to be reinforced by the relationship between Mary and Deborah. Just as Gaskell gently undermines Miss Jenkyns through Mary's wry observations, Thomas establishes a similar dynamic in her screenplay; whilst Deborah beats uneven time to Jessie's song, Mary

smiles ironically at Matty's assurance that her sister has 'always been exceptionally musical'.

Beneath a self-conscious veil of humour – 'I will answer for it, the last gigot, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford – and seen without a smile' (C, 40) – Gaskell's contrast between young and old women holds deep psychological import. Whilst 'faint, ghostly ideas of grim parties, far away in the distance, when Miss Matty and Miss Pole were young!' (C, 80) present themselves sub-consciously to Mary, her 'modern' feelings point to Gaskell's complex examination of the position of women (especially spinsters). As *Ruth* demonstrates, Gaskell's portrayal of women is often ambiguous; the fact that Ruth is 'fallen', yet 'innocent and snow-pure', both asserts her identity and autonomy, and constructs her according to patriarchal ideals of woman as 'angel' (just as Lady Ludlow vehemently protests 'against women usurping men's employments' (MLL, 236)).<sup>248</sup> Whilst *Cranford* can be seen as one of Gaskell's most domestic (and, arguably as such, uncontroversial) novels, it can nevertheless also be read as a surreptitiously subversive text as the sadness of Matty's repressed life – 'I saw how faithful her poor heart had been in its sorrow and its silence' (C, 78) – challenges patriarchal ideology. 'Left deserted in the world' (C, 63), Matty is caged within both societal dictates and the pain of her memories and suffocated emotions.

As Keating maintains, Gaskell's *Cranford* is a 'study in repressed sexuality'.<sup>249</sup> Mary comments with typically mild amusement upon the outburst of feeling that Peter's return provokes: 'The ladies vied with each other who should admire him most'; 'Miss Pole seemed to think there were other ladies in Cranford who would have done more credit to his choice, and I think she must have had someone unmarried in her head' (C, 211; 215-16). The subtle indication of Miss Pole's own feelings for Peter is characteristic of Mary's gentle narration, yet intimates at the same time Gaskell's forceful critique of the pressures placed upon women by a patriarchal society which celebrated Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House*, and denigrated spinsters (as embodied by Charlotte Brontë's bitterly entitled chapter in *Shirley*, "Old Maids"). With typical buoyancy and warm amusement, Mary thus observes the spinsters' internalisation of the patriarchal image of woman as wife: 'after the announcement of an engagement in any set, the unmarried ladies in that set

flutter out in an unusual gaiety and newness of dress, as much to say, in a tacit and unconscious manner, ‘we also are spinsters’ (C, 169).

The emotional fragmentation that exists within these perpetual spinsters often haunts and unsettles the lightness of Gaskell’s narrative tone. Although Matty’s childlike innocence clearly provokes affectionate laughter (“‘there’s a gentleman sitting in the drawing room, with his arm round Miss Jessie’s waist!’” Miss Matty’s eyes looked large with terror’ (CD, 61)), it points at the same time to the psychological trauma that the ‘gentle little spinster’ (C, 40) has suffered as a result of her familial obedience and her ensuing relinquishment of Holbrook:

there was in [her parents’ love letters] a vivid and intense sense of the present time, which seemed so strong and full, as if it could never pass away, and as if the warm, loving hearts that so expressed themselves could never die, and be as nothing to the sunny earth [...]. I saw the tears stealing down the well-worn furrows of Miss Matty’s cheeks (C, 85).

Gaskell consequently employs the ‘failure’ of humour in order to heighten the emotional resonance of her characterisation: “‘only the old story, you know, of ladies saying ‘*when* I marry’, and gentlemen, ‘*If* I marry’”. It was a joke spoken in rather a sad tone, and I doubt if either of us smiled’ (C, 157). Matty’s chagrin that Martha “‘should talk about my age’” (C, 77) may incite a smile, but it also provokes a tear, as the incident acts as a sobering reminder of her lost life: ‘she was annoyed at finding that golden time so far away in the past [...]; [...] she remembered the time when she had looked forward to being married as much as anyone’ (C, 78; 157).

Thomas similarly employs a darker vein of humour. The spinsters’ repression is visualised with the amusement apparent in the literary text, as the ladies’ subconscious interest in the male characters manifests itself; at Peter’s return, Miss Pole exclaims enthusiastically (and suggestively) ‘I hear tell...he’s actually quite weatherbeaten’. Despite Deborah’s formality, the ambiguity that Gaskell accords her – she believes Jessie’s waist is the ‘most proper place’ for Major Gordon’s arm to be (C, 61) – is likewise translated to screen, as she casts the couple knowing glances and entreats Jessie to entertain him with her

musicianship. However, whilst Harrison's confusion over Miss Tomkinson's relationship to Caroline (and seeming affirmation of the younger woman's attractiveness) feeds into the comic romantic misunderstanding between them – her symptoms are 'no doubt injurious to your mother's nerves'. 'Dr. Harrison, we are sisters!' – it also illuminates the vulnerable position accorded to mature spinsters, and, in Caroline's desperate pursuit of the doctor, the pressures placed upon women to marry.

Elements of complexity are apparent in many of Thomas's female characters. Matty and Jessie discuss their sadly lost lives – 'It is not the despair that hurts one, but the hope' – whilst the humour apparent in the divide between social performance and true feeling is shadowed by the revelation of Mrs Forrester's emotional turmoil. At the meeting in which the ladies pledge to aid Matty, Mrs Forrester's slight simperings are castigated: 'Mrs Forrester, please – you are betraying your emotions'. The humour is juxtaposed, however, against the ensuing scene, in which the elderly widow – the sufferer of a 'not very happy or fortunate life' (C, 147) – breaks down, revealing to Mary her deep feelings for Matty and discomfiture at her own financial insecurity.

Matty is similarly complicated. In Episode One, for example, she is glimpsed in the background observing herself in the mirror. This self-awareness is a motif that is carried throughout the production. On several occasions, Matty regards her portrait of the young Holbrook, her older face reflected in its glass as the external, humorous life of Cranford is contrasted sensitively against her inner self. The sound of Miss Pole's flustered, trivial conversation fades as the camera closes in on Matty's face, expressive with her conflicting feelings at Holbrook's memory. As she later proclaims, 'I must make a sad sight for anyone looking down from heaven'.

The poignancy of Matty's lost love in many ways underlies Thomas's adaptation, asserting Matty as the focal point of the narrative and complicating the ensuing presentation of romance. Love stories are, to an extent, protected from conventionality by their symbolic link to Matty's plight, and the darker humour which acts as a reminder of the proximity of pain and death. Jem, for instance, answers Harrison's inquiry into the likely duration of his carpentry work with the darkly flippant remark that he will continue 'unless someone dies. Because then I'll have to drop the lot and go and make the coffin'. Jem is indeed



later filmed transporting Holbrook's coffin to the farmstead. Significantly, however, it is at this moment that Jem and Martha are reunited as lovers, following Matty's assertion that "'God forbid [...] that [she] should grieve any young hearts'" (C, 82). Their hopeful passion is therefore shaded by Matty's sorrow, the coffin connecting them to the mourning spinster and the intensity of a love which was nevertheless lost. This tension is reinforced by a later scene in which the couple are linked to Jessie's plight (which, in Thomas's adaptation, reasserts Matty's sadness through its similarities). Jessie confronts herself (like Matty) in the mirror as she overhears Sir Charles exclaim 'Dear God! She's lost her bloom'. In answer to his inquiry 'did she never marry?', Captain Brown remarks dolefully 'no one ever asked'. The cut to Jem and Martha cannot, therefore, be seen entirely simplistically or idealistically.

Thomas similarly complicates the love story in *Mr Harrison's Confessions*. At the auction of Holbrook's property, Harrison and Sophy are linked visually; he bids for an ornate desk, which needs only a 'young lady' to complement it, as Sophy stands in the foreground of the shot. Miss Pole, however, believes that Caroline is the intended recipient (whilst Mrs Rose is also later persuaded of its status as a love token). The scene then cuts to Matty gazing at the portrait of her lost 'follower' (just as Caroline and Mrs Rose will face disappointment). The couple's growing attachment is therefore unsettled, as love is set against spurned and blighted love. In the final episode, Matty visits Sophy and remarks upon their similarities; both are vicarage daughters who grew up knowing personal sadness. Matty thus bestows Peter's white muslin on the young woman: 'It was meant for a rectory bride – and now a rectory bride will wear it'. Although Matty's thwarted love is, on the one hand, resolved vicariously through Sophy and Harrison's wedding, as with Jem and Martha their love is also shadowed.

The adaptation likewise darkens the domestic sphere. Although the home is often humorously and warmly appreciated (Miss Pole enthusiastically commends Miss Jenkyns's parlour, as it offers a vantage point for spying and gossip), domesticity is questioned. As John Bowen notes, 'many shots are framed through doorways and windows, which make it picturesque, but also gesture to the possibility of lives and worlds beyond their immediate confines'.<sup>250</sup> This is embodied by the more overt feminism of Thomas's Mary (prior to her

arrival Matty markedly throws open the windows of a dimly-lit bedroom), and argued in the exchanges between Carter and Miss Galindo. Indeed, even Matty is rather adept at shop-keeping in Thomas's adaptation. Whilst Matty and Lady Ludlow pine for children, Mary points to the 'New Woman' of the later Victorian period, part of the dynamic of change that she brings to Cranford; her stepmother's assertion that 'your face will look so much pleasanter with a baby held up to it' is undercut by her negative portrayal and Mary's characterisation. Mary in many ways assumes the role of Miss Bullock in *Mr Harrison's Confessions*, challenging the patriarchal dictate of marriage. Her spinsterhood, unlike that of the Cranford ladies, therefore becomes a *chosen* assertion of female autonomy: 'I do not appreciate my stepmother's attempts to marry me off.' 'You don't wish to marry?' 'No. At least, not yet'. Mary's and Miss Galindo's independence is thus reinforced by an image of home and family whose idealism is often undercut. Although Gaskell's *Cranford* has been described as a 'nosegay', Sophy collects *dead* flowers from Walter's grave, whilst, recalling *Becoming Jane*, a close-up of Deborah's slowly ticking clock stresses the circularity and confinement of female life within the adaptation's often shadowed domestic interiors.

However, despite Thomas's many interesting interpretations of *Cranford*, the screenplay's rendering of the novel's subtlety and insight is often complicated and diminished. In her merging of *Mr Harrison's Confessions* and *My Lady Ludlow* with *Cranford*, the production finally becomes undermined by the very process through which it attempts to be faithful to Gaskell's depth. Although the shorter stories enable the adaptation to reinforce *Cranford's* social commentary, too much emphasis is accorded to the more farcical tone of *Mr Harrison's Confessions*. Gaskell herself expressed her doubts about the merit of her earlier novella, which Keating reads as a 'much less impressive work than *Cranford*; tightly-plotted to create a sense of farce and centred upon a conventional sentimentalised love story [...] Mr Harrison's adventures are alien to the tone of *Cranford*'.<sup>251</sup> Whilst Mr Morgan exclaims, in Thomas's screenplay, that 'Cranford has been disturbed' by the young doctor, this also relates more seriously to the balance and tenor of the adaptation as a whole.

To an extent, *Mr Harrison's Confessions* shares thematic preoccupations with Gaskell's later novel. Like Cranford, Duncombe is beset by social change (humorously intimated early in the narrative by Harrison's 'cut-away' coat, and, as with Mary Smith and Margaret Dawson, highlighted by the town's presentation through the filter of his 'modern' mindset). Similarly, Gaskell emphasises the often vulnerable status of women, comically through the Valentine's Day misunderstanding, and more forcefully through Miss Bullock's plight: "It is hard to feel that my marriage – my absence – is desired so earnestly at home" [...]. She cried more than ever' (*MHC*, 150).

However, Harrison's narrative voice offers a more overt comedy. Whilst humour psychologises the Cranford ladies, the laughter incited against Mr Harrison remains light and superficial. His self-deprecating comments about his plainness, for instance, are essentially comic, without exposing the personal vulnerability and fragmentation that is explored in *Cranford*. Whereas Harrison proclaims jovially 'I could not see any striking beauty in my round face, with an unshaven beard and a night-cap, like a fool's cap, at the top' (*MHC*, 148), Matty's realisation of her age and lost beauty manifests itself as a 'tremulous motion of head and hands' (*CD*, 81). Above all, the plot of *Mr Harrison's Confessions* often descends into farce:

Mrs Munton came to call on Mrs Rose; and the former being deaf, I heard all the speeches of the latter [...]. Mumble, mumble, mumble through the door [...]. "I'm not blushing, I believe. I really am quite in the dark as to what you mean." Mumble, mumble. "Oh yes, Mr Harrison and I are most comfortable together" [...]. Mumble, mumble. "I'm sure you are joking now, ma'am!" Then I heard pretty loud – "oh no!"; mumble, mumble, mumble for a long time (*MHC*, 140-141).

Significantly, Thomas transposes this overt humour onto incidents taken from *Cranford*. In this, she reconfigures and undermines the importance that Gaskell attaches to such scenes, and disrupts the unity – what Thomas describes as the 'fine close weave' – of her narrative through the screenplay's often unsettled juxtaposition of 'gritty' social realism and nostalgic, simplified

comedy.<sup>252</sup> Whereas Gaskell maintains tonal control in *Cranford*, to an extent Thomas's adaptation becomes a series of disjointed vignettes. Gaskell's own discussion, in "The Last Generation in England", of the humorous tales that are related in *Cranford* throws into relief the fundamental difference in tone with which novelist and screenwriter treat humour. In her essay, Gaskell's narration of the lost lace story demonstrates an intricately-crafted and multi-faceted humour:

One lady left her lace [...] in some not very sour buttermilk; and unluckily the cat lapped it up [...]. The lace was too valuable to be lost, so a small dose of tartar emetic was administered to the poor cat; the lace returned to view was carefully darned, and decked the good old lady's best cap for many a year after; and *many a time did she tell the story, gracefully bridling up in a prim sort of way, and giving a little cough, as if preliminary to a rather improper story.* The first sentence of it was always [...] "I do not think you can guess where the lace on my cap has been"; *dropping her voice,* "In pussy's inside" (my italics).<sup>253</sup>

Whilst a smile is raised by the quaint oddity and forgetful garrulousness of the lady, Gaskell also uses humour to test the boundaries of 'propriety', just as social decorum is at the same time asserted. Such nuances can similarly be seen in Mrs Forrester's lace incident. The story is told retrospectively, and not directly visualised; the humour that Gaskell derives is based instead upon her subtle intimation of changing social relationships, as Mrs Forrester drops her guise of class-based politeness and relates the episode to Lady Glenmire.

By contrast, the incident bears little import in Thomas's screenplay beyond its immediate comedic effect; ultimately, it conflicts with the adaptation's ensuing presentation of gender relations, as it depicts the town's women as simply ridiculous. Following Morgan's proclamation that 'this is Cranford...A society that knows itself. A place of peace', Miss Pole's exaggerated shrieks destroy the tranquillity. Her remarks, however, are rendered absurd when compared to Harrison's concern: 'Young man! Out of the way! We are in the throes of an exceptional emergency!' 'Is someone in need of medical attention?' 'This is no time for sport – there is lace at stake!' The sedan

carriers' looks of exasperation, as they turn to the doctors, only serve to intimate a bond of male solidarity against female inanity.

Deborah's clichéd proclamation to Harrison – 'You're in Cranford now' – again undermines Gaskell's amused, yet essentially respectful, presentation of 'the Cranford ladies' (C, 40). Shot from Harrison's (male) perspective, the comical unity of the women, as they proffer their candles, conflicts with the seriousness of the doctor's medical proceedings; masculine 'heroism' is privileged, as Gaskell's 'feminine', domestic humour is, at times, reduced to triviality. The gentle humour of 'elegant economy', visualised in Episode One, is thus undercut by Harrison's frustration at the lack of candles needed for Jem's operation, and his scathing refusal of the maid's offer of tea instead. An orderly meeting of townsmen to discuss Cranford's crime rate is likewise contrasted with Miss Pole's flustered cry to the assembled ladies that 'we must display calm common-sense!'

Gaskell presents a humorous, yet complex, exploration of gender relations; although Cranford is 'Amazonian', the ladies *need* men – yet such male figures are undermined, killed, or absent. Katherine Byrne argues that the BBC's *Cranford* 'seems to begin and end with images of virile men who are both damaged and undermined at every point'.<sup>254</sup> However, Thomas forges a bond of masculinity, which privileges male knowledge and action. Moments of female assertiveness are, by contrast, questionable. Miss Tomkinson demands that a dubious Jem cut down her tree, for instance. The next shot, located within her home and looking out, shows Jem falling comically from a branch. The woman's attempt to direct the male is rendered ridiculous; Caroline, in the foreground, is instead engaged noticeably in the 'feminine' pursuit of sewing. Harrison likewise cuts assertively through the melodrama of Jem's collapse in the marketplace: 'It's a compound fracture'. Miss Pole's concerns over Harry's poaching are consequently swept aside by Carter – 'Trout can wait' – as he rushes to aid Harrison. The ensuing scene then further asserts male authority, as Carter and Harry collect ice to assist the doctor. As later episodes demonstrate, the land-agent develops a paternal bond with the boy; his 'manliness' will, as such, be bequeathed and affirmed. Whereas Gaskell reveals in "The Cage at Cranford" that Mary remains a spinster 'past thirty' (C, 329), her position arguably validating and reinforcing the identity of the old ladies, Thomas

intimates instead an attachment between Marshland and Mary. Gaskell's feminine bond is thus broken.

Although the series has been praised as a 'painterly production', it is also unsettled by stylistic contradiction.<sup>255</sup> The adaptation is caught between a desire for innovation and its nostalgic, idealistic imaging of Cranford. Whilst the BBC asserts the production's originality, each episode is framed by 'rather cute' illustrations of the town and its rural environs, likening the adaptation to older, 'traditional' costume dramas, which employed this device in order to assert literary fidelity and their status as 'heritage' productions.<sup>256</sup> Again, this dichotomy is arguably linked to preconceptions (indeed misconceptions) about the humour of *Cranford*, and the benignity of Gaskell's writing. In many ways, the style of Thomas's adaptation draws parallels with Hugh Thomson's late-Victorian sketches of Cranford, which, rather than appreciating the subtlety of Gaskell's characterisations, depict 'the Amazons' as 'quaintly ridiculous'. Whereas Gaskell reveals 'the humour or social reality which gives oddity a meaning', Thomson's illustrations obliterate the novel's humanity 'by exaggerated period costumes and gestures'.<sup>257</sup>

In Thomas's screenplay, moments of sadness and psychological depth are similarly set against its inflated humour and, as some reviewers have noted, its 'sudsy' quality.<sup>258</sup> Admittedly, at times its melodrama heightens the emotional resonance of ensuing scenes; Caroline's exaggerated fainting fit, for example, throws Matty's genuine turmoil at Holbrook's return into greater relief. Moreover, just as Gaskell avoids sentimentality ('such simplicity might be very well in Cranford, but would never do in the world' (*C*, 201)), the starkness of Lady Ludlow's scenes in the adaptation attempts to challenge a simply nostalgic view of *Cranford*. It is arguable, however, that although the icy cinematography succeeds in intimating her repression and emotional vulnerability, they remain visually discordant with much of the production's warm lighting and 'cosy' *mise-en-scène*. This dilemma can likewise be seen in the adaptation's musical score; a close-up shot of Matty, as she requests a 'widow's' cap to mourn Holbrook, is disconcertingly undermined by the buoyancy of Davis's music. Whereas Gaskell forges a dynamic dialogue with other literary voices, the BBC's employment of traditional forms of period drama (seen in the use of a static, as

opposed to ‘breathing’ camera, for instance) often conflicts with the attempt to transform ‘a very beautiful set of books’ into ‘a very modern event’.<sup>259</sup>

It is clear that, in Gaskell’s *Cranford*, ‘we must consider laughter [...] a philosophy’.<sup>260</sup> Matty herself highlights the fact that ‘laughter is a complicated reaction’, part of ‘the intimate comedy we are playing alone, inside our vulnerable selves’.<sup>261</sup> When confronting the possibility of Peter’s death, she recollects “‘staring in [Clare’s] face to gather his meaning; and when I did, I laughed out loud. [...] I remember the ring of my own laugh now”” (C, 99). *Cranford* constantly questions the nature of ‘joking’, and, in many ways, much of the novel’s sadness stems from the Cranfordians’ inability to appreciate humour; Peter’s practical joke with the ‘baby’, intended to “‘make something to talk about”” (C, 95), ultimately leads to the death of his mother, after which the family never ‘laughed again’ (C, 103). As Matty remarks, Peter “‘seemed to think that the Cranford people might be joked about, and made fun of, and they did not like it; nobody does”” (C, 93). Through the inoffensive tone of Mary’s humour, however, Gaskell conceals and intensifies her exploration of complex, subversive issues, enabling her to examine the Victorian dread of ‘too much laughter’ for fear of ‘social impropriety’, and to overcome patriarchal literary expectations which believed that “‘women are too good to be humorists””, “‘too pure and saint-like””.<sup>262</sup>

By contrast, Thomas’s adaptation is ultimately undermined by contradiction. Although Gaskell lightens issues of love and matrimony in *Mr Harrison’s Confessions* – people ‘like a joke about marriage, it is so easy of comprehension’ (MHC, 139) – they are, vitally, made more profound in *Cranford*. In trying ‘very, very hard to be funny’, Thomas’s screenplay thus conflicts with itself.<sup>263</sup> The farcical presentation of Harrison’s multiple ‘betrothals’, and the implications for the ladies involved, finally dilutes the adaptation’s often sensitive visualisation of women who grow silently ‘sad and grave’ (C, 158). In *Cranford*, Gaskell succeeds in combining tragedy and humour through her astute understanding of human psychology: ‘I was full of sorrow, but, by one of those whimsical thoughts which come unbidden into our heads, in times of deepest grief, I no sooner saw the bonnet than I was reminded of a helmet’ (C, 57). Whereas Thomas’s adaptation becomes fraught with

stylistic and tonal tensions, Gaskell presents a novel of profound and subversive power, as she recognises that laughter and sadness can form part of the same expression.

Gaskell herself remains a divided figure, with ambiguities and conflicts in understandings of her novels both manifested in, and reasserted by, the adaptations. It is indeed significant that the endings of all three productions are defined by such uncertainty, presenting often problematic and contradictory visions of gender ideology in *Wives and Daughters* and *North and South*, and, in the idealised simplicity of the final shot of *Cranford*, a return to the appreciation of ‘Mrs Gaskell’s’ literary ‘wreath[s] of flowers and ivy leaves’.<sup>264</sup> In their struggle to ‘conclude’ Gaskell, the screenplays also demonstrate the tension evident in attitudes towards ‘the Classics’ and period drama. Revealingly, although the ending of Davies’s *Wives and Daughters* pointed not only towards an expansive understanding of Gaskell, but a renewed approach to adaptation, such energy and innovation was to be enclosed within the patriarchal nostalgia and idealisation that ultimately defines Thomas’s *Cranford*. Whilst Davies’s *Wives and Daughters* developed the ‘serious’ and ‘traditional’ image of his earlier *Middlemarch*, Thomas’s *Cranford* returns to a ‘benevolent pastiche’ of his now ‘classic’ adaptation of Eliot’s novel, incorporating within its patriarchal readings of Gaskell the ‘prettification’ of costume drama which the three adaptations of her work have (in varying degrees) both revised and succumbed to.



- <sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter (1850), as cited in Deidre D'Albertis, "The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 10-26. 14.
- <sup>152</sup> The *Cranford* Christmas Special (BBC, 2009) will be discussed in the Conclusion.
- <sup>153</sup> Susan Hamilton, "Gaskell Then and Now," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 178-191. 188.
- <sup>154</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Noonday, 1999) 142.
- <sup>155</sup> Erica Sheen, "Introduction," *The Classic Novel from Page to Screen*, ed. Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 1-13. 3.
- <sup>156</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter (1850), as cited in Jill Matus, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 1-9. 3.
- <sup>157</sup> Hamilton 178.
- <sup>158</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth (?1850), as cited in D'Albertis 10.
- <sup>159</sup> "A Note by the Cornhill Editor," as reproduced in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Penguin, 2003) 652.
- <sup>160</sup> Linda Hughes, "Cousin Phillis, *Wives and Daughters*, and Modernity," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 90-107. 91.
- <sup>161</sup> Matus 1.
- <sup>162</sup> Matus 9; Hamilton 188.
- <sup>163</sup> Kathryn Flett, "Let's Twist Again," *The Observer* (05/12/99) 16, as cited in Patsy Stoneman, "Wives and Daughters on Television," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 14 (2000): 85-100. 98.
- <sup>164</sup> Aileen Atkins, "Cranford," *Daily Mail: Weekend Magazine* (24/11/07) 33.
- <sup>165</sup> Hamilton 189.
- <sup>166</sup> Hamilton 190.
- <sup>167</sup> Flett 16.
- <sup>168</sup> Alison Graham, "Programme of the Week," *Radio Times* (27/11/1999), as cited in Stoneman (2000) 97.
- <sup>169</sup> Stanton Whitfield, *Mrs Gaskell: Her Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1929) 209, as cited in Kate Flint, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Plymouth: Northcote, 1995) 60.
- <sup>170</sup> As will be discussed more fully in other chapters, adaptations of the early and mid-nineties increasingly foreshadowed the 'modernisation' of period drama that occurred most noticeably at the end of the decade and beyond; *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (BBC, 1996) is a case in point.
- <sup>171</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/514130.stm>. Accessed 01/07/08.
- <sup>172</sup> Although the BBC has traditionally been regarded as the pre-eminent producer of classic-novel adaptation, *Oliver Twist* can in many ways be seen as an attempt by ITV to build on the success of their *Moll Flanders* (1996). These adaptations were not only viewed as financially lucrative, but also as signifiers of the image of 'quality' that ITV wished to project (indeed, ITV purposefully commissioned Andrew Davies as the screenwriter of *Moll Flanders*).
- <sup>173</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/542005.stm>. Accessed 01/07/08.
- <sup>174</sup> Admittedly, it can be argued that the somewhat stark, often muted lighting of Davies's *Middlemarch* exemplifies the much-noted 'realism' of Eliot's novel. Equally, the 'traditional' image of the adaptation perhaps exemplifies the old-fashioned spirit of the town of Middlemarch; it is against firmly-held notions of tradition (and subsequent prejudices) that Lydgate, Dorothea, Fairbrother and Ladislaw all struggle (and, perhaps, ultimately fail).
- <sup>175</sup> Commentary on BBC video edition of *Wives and Daughters*.
- <sup>176</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Penguin, 2003) 215. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- <sup>177</sup> Despite the fact that Molly's clothes are historically accurate (and Victorian women explorers, such as Mary Kingsley, certainly existed), Davies's concluding scene was seen by many viewers as a 'modern' invention. Again, historical detail in costume drama is expected to facilitate nostalgic, escapist visions of the past (with many preconceptions indeed constructed by former heritage productions).
- <sup>178</sup> Andrew Davies, Interview, *Radio Times* (27/11/1999) 20.
- <sup>179</sup> Flett 16, as cited in Stoneman (2000) 91.
- <sup>180</sup> Stoneman (2000) 91.
- <sup>181</sup> In Davies's adaptation, the contrast between Roger's drawing-room proposal to Cynthia and his declaration to Molly 'in the fresh air [...] at liberty' (*WD*, 15) is also fitting; the outdoors acts

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as a symbolic link between Roger and Molly throughout the production, whilst the ‘impropriety’ of their public declaration of love prefigures Molly’s liberated journey to Africa.

<sup>182</sup> A similar device is adopted in Sandy Welch’s *Jane Eyre* (BBC, 2006), as images of nature connect Jane and Rochester. As with Davies’s privileging of Roger’s scientific interests in *Wives and Daughters*, Welch’s inclusion of Eshton in *Jane Eyre* likewise embodies the scientific spirit of the nineteenth century.

<sup>183</sup> Hamilton 185.

<sup>184</sup> Gaskell similarly asserts herself over Gibson, the woman writer displaying a wiser reasoning than the male doctor’s: ‘He was always afraid of [Molly] becoming too much educated, though he need not have been alarmed; the masters who visited such small country towns as Hollingford forty years ago, were no such great proficient in their arts’ (*WD*, 34).

<sup>185</sup> Indeed, Molly’s very name attempts to confine her within childhood; adopted (like the more derogatory ‘goosey’ and ‘little woman’) in order to differentiate her from her mother ‘Mary’, the retention of the pet-name ‘Molly’ can be read as a signifier of Gibson’s unwillingness to let her progress to womanhood.

<sup>186</sup> Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961) 205-206.

<sup>187</sup> At the same time, the moment implies Gaskell’s crafting of the narrative perspective, as the camerawork embodies the indignant authoritativeness evident in Molly’s child-like view; the low-angled shot which privileges Molly, and the high-angled, diminishing shot of the lords and ladies, visualise Gaskell’s description of the little girl’s private feelings: “‘or all the rest of them”, as she irreverently styled them in her thoughts’ (*WD*, 26).

<sup>188</sup> Stoneman (2000) 88.

<sup>189</sup> Davies translates such ambiguities onto the male characters, whilst also intimating the sexual ‘double-standard’ that Gaskell makes clear in her presentation of Gibson’s ‘poor Jeanie’. Davies’s Roger gazes somewhat ambiguously at a semi-naked African woman. The image thus visualises Roger’s relative freedom as a male, whilst also pointing to racial and imperial issues relevant to the historical context (at the same time, it also demonstrates the adaptation’s responsiveness to post-colonialism, as it challenges Squire Hamley’s and Gibson’s belief (in Gaskell’s novel) that coloured women will hold little attraction for Roger).

<sup>190</sup> Similarly, the first image of Molly as a young woman is of a close-up of her face (arguably placing the female body as an observed, physical object), whilst the camera pulls back in order to reveal her as both firmly within an interior space, yet also conscious of the outside world.

<sup>191</sup> Deidre D’Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1997) 161.

<sup>192</sup> Justine Waddell played the lead heroine in *Wives and Daughters* and in Marchant’s *Great Expectations*; her status at that particular time as a young, modern actress thus helped to contemporise and popularise both adaptations.

<sup>193</sup> Davies’s Aimée, like Molly, presents a complex examination of the Victorian ‘Woman Question’. Like the other women in the adaptation, she is more overtly confident and assertive than in Gaskell’s novel. However, this is balanced against ‘patriarchal’ images of Osborne’s wife. The first direct shot of her is in the kitchen, as the camera looks out at Osborne; she is positioned as the conventional ‘angel of the house’, the creator of an idealised refuge to which the male can escape. In this divide, Davies thus points to the ambiguities and complexities surrounding the nineteenth-century woman, issues which are integral to Gaskell’s writing.

<sup>194</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth). Accessed 06/10/2006.

<sup>195</sup> Sandy Welch, Interview, DVD edition of *North and South*. *North and South*, dir. Brian Percival, adapt. Sandy Welch (BBC, 2004).

<sup>196</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth). Accessed 06/10/2006.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Whitfield 209; Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (London: Constable, 1934) 197-198, as cited in Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987) 2.

<sup>199</sup> Cecil 235; 220, as cited in Stoneman (1987) 4; 7.

<sup>200</sup> Cecil 198, as cited in Stoneman (1987) 3.

<sup>201</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Penguin: London, 1994) 520-521. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>202</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter (25<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1862), as cited in Enid Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 88.

<sup>203</sup> Duthie 89.

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<sup>204</sup> Stoneman (1987) 120.

<sup>205</sup> Revealingly, the Hales drop the full title Milton-Northern as the city becomes more familiar and the south farther away psychologically.

<sup>206</sup> At the same time, Gaskell further complicates the relationship between Margaret and Thornton by invoking the language of class, connecting the industrial struggles between masters and men with the 'feudal' power relations of lover and loved one ('vassal' and 'queen').

<sup>207</sup> Indeed, the descriptions of Gaskell's heroine in many ways foreshadow Hardy's portrayal of Tess, whose identity is both celebrated and condemned by a narrative which is, through its compelled focus upon Tess's body, underlined by male desire.

<sup>208</sup> Stoneman (1987) 138.

<sup>209</sup> Michael Winterbottom uses the train journey to similar effect in *Jude* (BBC, 1996).

<sup>210</sup> Welch potentially engages in a feminist commentary upon, and corrective to, Gaskell's rather patriarchal privileging of sons over daughters. Whilst Margaret exalts her brother with sisterly devotion and deference in Gaskell's novel, Margaret's expression at Frederick's return is somewhat ambiguous in Davies's adaptation. As Mr Hale and Frederick embrace, with the siblings' father proclaiming 'My boy! My boy!', the camera switches back to Margaret's face, which seems clouded with a jealous love of her father and an awareness of the ordeals that she has had to endure in order to support her family.

<sup>211</sup> Sarah Wootton, "The Changing Faces of the Byronic Hero in *Middlemarch* and *North and South*," *Romanticism* 14:1 (2008): 25-35. 32. At the same time, it can be argued that it counters the rather patriarchal first shot of Thornton in Episode One; the return to the image instead locates it within *Margaret's* memory – the scene embodies, and is framed by, the heroine's perspective.

<sup>212</sup> Wootton 32.

<sup>213</sup> Wootton 32.

<sup>214</sup> The image of Thornton in the graveyard also connects him with the workers Higgins and Bessy. The graveyard is returned to throughout the adaptation, forming part of the production's symbolic resonance; the characters are drawn to a place which both represents death and freedom from Milton.

<sup>215</sup> Production commentary on the DVD edition of *North and South*.

<sup>216</sup> Angus Easson, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge, 1979) 66.

<sup>217</sup> Significantly, Thornton then appears suddenly in black silhouette – visually striking, yet thematically and emotionally ambiguous. Indeed, as Wootton notes, Margaret's equation of 'hell' with the whiteness of the mill 'provides an example of why the BBC adaptation was, on the whole, a successful adaptation of the novel; this [scene], inverting our preconceptions of hell, replicates Gaskell's use of paradox and complementary opposites' (Wootton 35). Moreover, in Episode Four, Margaret is filmed leaving Milton in the snow, a deliberate visual connection to Thornton and the mill which again holds symbolic and thematic resonance; 'Margaret first sees Thornton [...] through this confetti-like snow, which conflates, in a single image, both the social agenda and the romance plot of the novel' (Wootton 31). It can equally be seen that the mill's *mise-en-scène* forges an apt link with Mrs Thornton's drawing room, as the 'icy, snowy discomfort' (NS, 131) of her home links with the image of the factory interior.

<sup>218</sup> Katherine Ann Wildt, *Elizabeth Gaskell's Use of Colour in Her Industrial Novels and Short Stories* (Lanham, Maryland: UP of America, 1999) 75.

<sup>219</sup> The adaptation is indeed rich in the subtle design of its *mise-en-scène* throughout the series. As the Hales arrive in Milton, for example, they are left stranded in between the market and the undertaker – between trade and death. Outside their Milton residence, a cartload of pigs' heads is often visible; as in the images of the butchery trade in Tony Marchant's *Great Expectations*, such 'props' also help to assert the 'social realism' of Welch's adaptation.

<sup>220</sup> William Ferrell, *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology* (Westport: Praeger, 2000) 119.

<sup>221</sup> Easson 93.

<sup>222</sup> Easson 87.

<sup>223</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter (27<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1854), *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. J. Chapple and A. Shelston (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 117.

<sup>224</sup> Production commentary on the DVD edition of *North and South*; [www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth). Accessed 06/10/2006.

<sup>225</sup> Wootton 32.

<sup>226</sup> Wootton 32.

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<sup>227</sup> From a literary perspective, Austen's and Gaskell's novels hold obvious similarities (indeed, Chapter Eleven of *North and South* – "First Impressions" – shares Austen's working title for *Pride and Prejudice*). Both present complex portraits of the hero and heroine's emotional fluctuations, and, in a century which largely categorised men and women through ideologically-constructed roles and images, both rework such conventions through the exposure of idealisation and presumption.

<sup>228</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/northandsouth). Accessed 06/10/2006.

<sup>229</sup> It is similarly revealing that *North and South*'s DVD extras focus on Richard Armitage/Thornton, rather than Daniela Denby-Ashe/Margaret.

<sup>230</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter to John Ruskin (?Feb. 1865), as cited in J. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, eds., *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966) 747.

<sup>231</sup> The perceived 'feminine' respectability and gentleness of Gaskell's narrative has been reinforced by John Forster's patriarchal construction of the text into a 'little book', and by the contrast in the popularity of *Cranford* and the uneasy reception of the more overtly controversial *Ruth*, written at the same time. John Forster, as cited in Peter Keating, "Introduction," *Cranford* (London: Penguin, 1986) 9.

<sup>232</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11\\_november/05/cranford\\_production.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11_november/05/cranford_production.shtml). Accessed 09/11/07.

<sup>233</sup> Whitfield 209, as cited in Flint 60.

<sup>234</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford/Cousin Phillis*, ed. Peter Keating (London: Penguin, 1986) 165. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>235</sup> George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 5.

<sup>236</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11\\_november/05/cranford\\_production.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11_november/05/cranford_production.shtml). Accessed 09/11/07.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> John Bowen, "Gird Your Loins," *Times Literary Supplement* (14/12/07) 17. The start of Thomas's *Cranford* bears a marked resemblance to that of Andrew Davies's *Middlemarch* (BBC, 1994); both series depict a young doctor approaching a town on the cusp of change, whilst intricate webs of characters and relationships are established.

<sup>239</sup> W. Harvey, "Introduction," *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1994) 7; 15.

<sup>240</sup> Tillotson 205-206.

<sup>241</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow*, *The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell: Volume Three*, ed. Charlotte Mitchell (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) 236. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>242</sup> Keating 14.

<sup>243</sup> D'Albertis (1997) 2; 161.

<sup>244</sup> Patricia Pulham, "Review: *Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*," *Review of English Studies: The Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language* 51: 202 (2000): 316-18. See also Eileen Gillooly, *Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999).

<sup>245</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. J. Stewart (London: Penguin, 1998) 229.

<sup>246</sup> Keating 9.

<sup>247</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mr Harrison's Confessions*, *The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell: Volume Two*, ed. Alan Shelston (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) 104. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>248</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. Angus Easson (London: Penguin, 2004) 40.

<sup>249</sup> Keating 23.

<sup>250</sup> Bowen 17.

<sup>251</sup> Keating 13.

<sup>252</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11\\_november/05/cranford\\_production.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11_november/05/cranford_production.shtml). Accessed 18/05/10.

<sup>253</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Last Generation in England," *The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell: Volume Two*, ed. Alan Shelston (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) 93.

<sup>254</sup> Katherine Byrne, "'Such a fine, close weave': Gender, Community and the Body in *Cranford* (2007)," *Neo-Victorian Studies* 2:2 (2009): 43-64. 51.

<sup>255</sup> Bowen 17.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>257</sup> Keating 11.

<sup>258</sup> Ben Dowell, "BBC Costume Drama *Cranford*: Splendid But Sudsy," *Guardian* (14/11/07). [http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/organgrinder/2007/11/first\\_look\\_at\\_new\\_bbc\\_costume.html](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/organgrinder/2007/11/first_look_at_new_bbc_costume.html).

Accessed 12/12/07.

<sup>259</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11\\_november/05/cranford\\_production.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11_november/05/cranford_production.shtml). Accessed 09/11/07.

<sup>260</sup> Alexander Bain, "Wit and Humour," *Westminster Review* (Oct. 1847) 47, as cited in Robert Bernard Martin, *The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) 9-10.

<sup>261</sup> Sypher xiv.

<sup>262</sup> Martin 8; "Feminine Humour," *Saturday Review* (15/07/1871) 75, as cited in Martin 8.

<sup>263</sup> Dowell [http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/organgrinder/2007/11/first\\_look\\_at\\_new\\_bbc\\_costume.html](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/organgrinder/2007/11/first_look_at_new_bbc_costume.html). Accessed 12/12/07.

<sup>264</sup> A. Ward, "Introduction," *Cranford* (Knutsford, 1906) ix, as cited in Keating 10.

### **Chapter Three: ‘To be for ever known’: The Brontës, the Brontë Myth and Screen Adaptation**

‘To be for ever known’ wrote Charlotte Brontë of her ambition as an authoress, a desire which has in many ways been fulfilled by the proliferation of adaptations of *Jane Eyre* over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>265</sup> It is clear that the Brontës hold a unique place in the popular and cultural imagination, with Charlotte’s yearning for individual success tempered by tendencies to perceive the sisters as a literary whole. As Terry Eagleton comments, ‘the Brontës, like Shakespeare, are a literary industry as well as a collection of literary texts’.<sup>266</sup> Perhaps more than any other literary name, the Brontës’ lives and works have become surrounded and refashioned by myth and mythologising, as Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) consolidated and furthered an enduring fascination with Haworth Parsonage and its inhabitants. As Lucasta Miller notes of Gaskell’s biography, ‘ironically, the book which would create the Brontë myth was initially commissioned as a work of demythology’, an attempt to challenge the controversies which had characterised the family’s life. Instead, Gaskell ‘produced an image [...] which would imprint itself indelibly on the collective mind’, heralding ‘the rebirth of the Brontës as cultural icons’ yet producing ‘a deeply ambivalent impact on [their] literary reputation’.<sup>267</sup>

Significantly, however, the roots of the ‘Brontë Myth’ can be discerned in the novels themselves, founded in their openness to multiple interpretations and their consequent adaptability. Indeed, a conscious engagement with the processes of adaptation shaped the early formation of the siblings’ writing. As Carol Bock maintains, ‘without discounting the originality of the young Brontës’ minds, one must acknowledge that theirs was an art of appropriation: as children and even as young adults, they took material – ideas, images, names, plots, conventional forms and actual facts – from available cultural sources, and made imaginative use of it’.<sup>268</sup> This is perhaps most evident in the figure and writings of Charlotte. Charlotte Brontë was keenly aware of her self-presentation, both as an author and as a woman. Throughout *The Life*, Gaskell notes her chameleon-

like ability to shape her behaviour according to circumstance, a tendency perhaps epitomised by the attempt to define (and control) her sisters' lives and literary standing in her Preface and Memoir of Anne and Emily. Charlotte's conscious adaptability, together with her sisters' own reworking of literary conventions in their novels, thus feed into the protean nature of popular (and critical) perceptions of 'the Brontës', 'a matrix of interlocking stories, pictures and emotional atmospheres' which 'does not remain static'.<sup>269</sup> The sisters' lives and works are, as such, both familiar and elusive, embedded within the popular imagination, and yet open to competing – and often unsettling – readings.

'Brontëan' adaptations, and responses towards them, are thus highly complex and multitudinous. In many ways, this becomes most apparent with regard to screen adaptation. Like Dickens, Charlotte and Emily have had a particularly long association with film; an Italian silent movie of *Jane Eyre* was produced in 1909, for instance.<sup>270</sup> The enduring attraction of film, and later television, productions of the Brontës' novels has significantly influenced perceptions of the sisters as writers, and coloured readings of their works; film has both facilitated and re-defined the 'Brontë Myth'. In particular, screen performances have privileged Emily and Charlotte, consolidating their personal fame and mythologising *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

It is in this, however, that certain tensions are to be found. As Heather Glen maintains, the Brontës' works (and lives) 'are not texts which seem to require elucidation, but stories which millions have urgently, if often incoherently, felt to be speaking of and to their most intimate concerns [...]. This passionate appropriation, this confident biographical interpretation, has in some ways been a barrier to understanding'.<sup>271</sup> Central to this is the romanticisation of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* on screen. As Stoneman asserts, 'critics and adaptors [...] whether consciously or unconsciously, inevitably select and emphasise in accordance with ideological agendas'.<sup>272</sup> As a result, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries much of the subversiveness of Emily's and Charlotte's novels was softened or silenced, as adaptors sought both to 'feminise' the writers' literary reputations, and, later, to create palatable, more simplistically romantic narratives for 1940s Hollywood.

In many ways, William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* (1939) and Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1944) are landmarks in both the 'Brontë Myth' and



Brontë adaptation. As Miller describes, ‘this was the period in which *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* were transformed by Hollywood into “the greatest love stories ever told”’.<sup>273</sup> Whilst the novels were frequently ‘flattened’ to accommodate conventional romance, with privileged images of the male heroes (Olivier and Welles) dominating the diminutive femininity of Joan Fontaine in particular, stylistically, the films also helped to create and consolidate the notion of ‘Brontëan’. As Stoneman demonstrates, Wyler’s imaging of the Yorkshire moors as the mythical home of the Brontës’ novels has profoundly shaped perceptions and expectations of their works, demanding inter-filmic dialogues with later dramatisations; in the recurring sight and sound of wild and barren landscape, ‘the focus of films and plays for *all* the Brontë texts comes to rest on the iconography properly related to *Wuthering Heights*’, as ‘many features which have come to be accepted as part of the Brontë Myth actually derive from [Wyler’s] film’.<sup>274</sup>

This phenomenon has received much critical attention, with scholars such as Miller and Stoneman tracing trends in romanticising ‘the Brontës’ from the 1940s onwards. Indeed, perceptions of the sisters as ‘romantic’ writers remain prevalent. In 2007, *Wuthering Heights* was voted the ‘greatest love story of all time’ (beating *Pride and Prejudice* and *Romeo and Juliet*, together with *Jane Eyre* in fourth place).<sup>275</sup> However, it is also vital to note the growing tension between ‘traditional’, romanticised ‘Brontëan’ images and re-evaluation. Whilst embracing many conventional attitudes towards Brontë adaptation, Sandy Welch’s *Jane Eyre* (BBC, 2006), for instance, also forges stylistic links with her version of *North and South* (as well as Andrew Davies’s *Bleak House*), whilst the ‘contemporisation’ of the past is coupled with challenges to popular expectations and critical thinking about Charlotte Brontë’s novel. Developing the (almost mythologised) arguments posited in Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, for example, Welch’s Bertha is not simply a symbol of repressed sexuality; rather, through her native tongue, she deflects passion *away* from herself, asserting her own ‘sanity’ as she proclaims *Jane* to be ‘Put!’ (‘Whore!’).<sup>276</sup> Likewise, Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights* (ITV, 2009) reworks the Brontë Myth concertedly.

At the same time, Brontë adaptations highlight the complexities of Sheen’s ‘rhetoric of possession’, as screen versions are both privileged and



derided. Whilst popular and critical responses to adaptations of the nation's 'favourite stories' are often heated, resting on a desire for 'fidelity', screen dramatisations are looked to as a means of reviving interest in the literary text. As noted in the Introduction, reviews of Welch's *Jane Eyre* intimated a concern over the popularity of Brontë's novel: "'Fresh Eyre?' Can Charlotte Brontë's classic appeal to a new generation?"<sup>277</sup> Such remarks demonstrate the intricate relationship, in some ways unique to the Brontës, which exists between novel, adaptation and myth, as text and screen become inextricably linked. Equally, however, the review's relative ambivalence highlights tensions in period drama as a genre; although Welch's *Jane Eyre* forms a significant landmark in Brontë adaptation, doubt as to its 'freshness' arguably reveals a weariness with the ubiquity of costume drama, as well as the proliferation of adaptations of *Jane Eyre*.

In this respect, comparisons between Brontë and Austen adaptation become apt. Like 'Austen', 'Brontë' has long been recognised as a 'brand', and, by the 1930s, 'Brontëmania had reached a stage where the mania had become as worthy of remark as the Brontës'.<sup>278</sup> Significantly, however, despite a substantial number of Brontë screen adaptations during the 1990s and 2000s, public interest was not raised as it had been with regard to Austen and 'Austenite' films.

This potentially illuminates several important points about both Austen's and the Brontës' novels, together with their 'adaptability'. Arguably, Austen's 'mythical' status has been shaped largely by the television adaptations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; in many ways, 'Austenmania' is a very contemporary phenomenon. By contrast, the 'Brontë myth' is complicated through its intricate interweaving of fact and fiction, embedded within a deeply emotive cultural consciousness which has become more ingrained – and perhaps confused – over time. As such, the reception of the Brontës on screen is in some ways more problematic, the Brontëan image underlined by multifaceted expectations and traditions.

Significantly, Brontë adaptation itself presents a unique tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Whilst adaptations of Charlotte and Emily are numerous, consolidating and creating their 'almost mythic place in the English cultural imagination', Anne Brontë has been largely ignored.<sup>279</sup> In David Lodge's *Nice Work*, for instance, 'the way to Haworth' immediately symbolises

‘the Brontës’, who are described by the academic Robyn as ‘novelists. Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Have you never read *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*?’<sup>280</sup> Although Wilcox has ‘heard of them’ (NW, 202), his lack of any further knowledge is revealing; Anne is visible merely through her absence. This tendency has been confirmed by the works of certain scholars (indeed, Lodge is himself a literary critic). Although Lucasta Miller attempts, in many ways, to ‘de-mystify’ the Brontës, she propagates convention in her almost total neglect of the youngest sister; whilst she notes that ‘Anne would never gain the iconic status of either of her sisters’, her biographical approach, with its focus on Charlotte and then Emily, mirrors trends in Brontë scholarship (and myth-making) from the Victorian period onwards.<sup>281</sup> Similarly, whilst Stoneman recognises that the ‘Brontë Myth’ is not ‘static’, in her analysis of screen adaptations in *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (a volume designed to promote advances in critical scholarship), the significance of the BBC’s 1996 production of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is largely overwhelmed by a focus on *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>282</sup>

### ***The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1996)**

It can instead be seen that Mike Barker’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is crucial to Brontë adaptation and a pivotal moment in period drama’s development. Vitaly, although the adaptation has been subjected to critical analysis (notably by Sarah Cardwell and Aleks Sierz), certain key issues have been overlooked. Perhaps most significant is the adaptation’s relationship to Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Cardwell recognises differences between the two adaptations, regarding *Wildfell Hall* as reacting against Davies’s screenplay. She maintains that Barker’s production ‘plays with nostalgia. The serial exploits a self-conscious use of generic tropes only possible [...] since these tropes have become firmly established. Without *Brideshead*, without *Pride and Prejudice*, there could be no *Wildfell Hall*’. Whereas ‘*Brideshead* and *Pride and Prejudice* revelled in nostalgia’, she argues that Barker’s serial ‘renegotiates the accepted meanings of generic conventions through a process of (postmodern) detachment’, ‘a knowing, self-conscious commentary on the classic-novel adaptation genre’.<sup>283</sup> Although

the self-reflexivity of *Wildfell Hall* is certainly apparent, and greatly significant, the dialogue between Davies's and Barker's productions is more complex, as is *Wildfell Hall*'s position within classic-novel adaptation as a whole.

Firstly, as examined in Chapter One, rather than simply 'revelling' in 'heritage' and 'nostalgia', Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* also reworks and manipulates the tropes which Cardwell sees the adaptation as exemplifying.<sup>284</sup> Where Cardwell perceives something of a schism between the two productions, it can be argued that Davies prefigures *Wildfell Hall* stylistically. For example, Cardwell traces inter-filmic dialogues between Barker's adaptation and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), especially with regard to landscape.<sup>285</sup> Ada and Helen are both characterised by images which stress their vulnerability, as they are diminished physically through the vastness of beach and barren moor; at the same time, such scenes reconfigure the traditional 'heritage' shot, as 'visual splendour' is infused with (and often challenged by) character interest. However, this is similarly apparent in Lizzy's relationship with the countryside in Davies's screenplay.

Secondly, Cardwell perhaps overlooks the extent to which *Wildfell Hall* also embodies many of the conventions of period drama. Just as the innovation of *North and South*, *Bleak House* and *Jane Eyre* is, a decade later, framed by conventional romantic escapism, *Wildfell Hall*'s feminism (evident in both the novel and the screenplay) is in some ways diluted by the privileging of Markham (Toby Stephens) as a 'romantic hero'; likewise, Rupert Graves's attractiveness is perhaps shaped by more of an awareness of 'Darcymania' than of Anne Brontë's Huntingdon. Although Cardwell maintains that *Wildfell Hall* 'subtly undermines the cultural significance' of period drama's generic conventions, like *Pride and Prejudice* it engages in a highly complex struggle, both harnessing and reworking them.<sup>286</sup>

Integral to this is the context in which *Wildfell Hall* was produced, again an element which has been neglected. Crucially, the BBC chose to screen a relatively under-read novel by the 'other' Brontë sister at a time when 'Austenmania' was at a height. On the one hand, this response is significant in its implicit 'challenge' to *Pride and Prejudice* as the 'definitive' period drama, whilst *Wildfell Hall*'s dialogue with *The Piano* placed the series (and classic-novel adaptation) 'within a wider televisual/filmic framework'.<sup>287</sup>

Foreshadowing the stylistic questioning and innovation of the productions of the late 1990s and the 2000s, *Wildfell Hall* complicates ‘nostalgic’ perceptions of *Pride and Prejudice* as the defining moment of classic-novel adaptation during the last decade.

Significantly, however, the reception of *Wildfell Hall* also becomes highly revealing. Cardwell asserts that, in Barker’s adaptation,

we are able to reflect not just on the unrealistic nature of a romanticised nostalgia for the past, but also on the way in which the genre of classic-novel adaptations utilises our emotional responses to the past in order to elicit nostalgia from us. Thus *Wildfell Hall* also encourages us as viewers to reflect upon the affective significance of generic tropes, in order to place the genre and our responses to it within a clearer analytical framework.<sup>288</sup>

Whilst this is, in many ways, theoretically true, what is perhaps more interesting is the complex response that was elicited on the part of *popular* audiences. Barker’s adaptation was generally received positively by critics, who – tellingly – found the production’s essential challenge to convention refreshing. Simon Hoggart praised the way it ‘refused to obey the lush conventions of costume drama’, whilst Alkarim Jivani noted that ‘the costumes were allowed to get dirty and the prettiness quotient is deliberately kept low’; using a ‘colour palette of murky browns and greys’, the camera is instead ‘furtive and halting, making the viewing experience an edgy one’.<sup>289</sup> It is indeed interesting to note the similarities between these articles and reviews of Joe Wright’s ‘muddy hems’ in *Pride and Prejudice* nearly a decade later; notice of challenges to convention demonstrate both continued change in costume drama (and the desire for such developments), and, implicitly, the ongoing prevalence of traditional tropes.

Nevertheless, in the so-called ‘battle of the bodice-rippers’ that existed between *Wildfell Hall* and Andrew Davies’s (ostensibly) more traditional *Emma* (ITV, 1996), the differences between critical and popular opinion become significant.<sup>290</sup> Whereas critics maintained that the ‘unfashionable Anne [Brontë] beat favourite Jane Austen by a clear margin’, as Sierz notes, ‘more people watched ITV that Sunday than BBC1 (11 million to 9 million viewers); 40

percent to 36 percent of audience share'.<sup>291</sup> Movements towards stylistic and thematic innovation were, as now, in tension with 'tradition'.

*Wildfell Hall* thus remains of vital interest, its screenplay both embracing and testing notions of traditional period drama and the 'Brontëan' film, whilst inviting refreshing readings of Anne Brontë's novel. The adaptation's innovation is perhaps linked to the concept of adaptability discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Gaskell, as 'screen versions of minor classics are usually greeted with a sigh of relief'.<sup>292</sup> The arguable 'freedom' which this affords the adapter is coupled with the rich possibilities of Brontë's writing. Traditionally, Anne's literary achievement has been 'perceived as a colourless shadow of her sisters''; as Elizabeth Langland's scholarly reassessment demonstrates, the youngest sibling has been construed, somewhat negatively, as 'the other one'.<sup>293</sup> In *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, for instance, Terry Eagleton denigrates Anne's inability to present 'richness of individual character' and structural complexity.<sup>294</sup> However, such readings are themselves informed by myth, as misconceptions about Anne's peaceful, Christian mildness – first facilitated by Charlotte herself – direct a tendency towards reductionism.<sup>295</sup> As will be seen, in a novel of often controversial issues, Anne Brontë instead presents deeply-psychologised protagonists, enhanced by *Wildfell Hall's* intricate narrative structure.

Barker's revitalising approach to costume drama, located within the still prevailing conventions of Brontë adaptation, therefore embodies in itself much of the force of Anne's novel; through its stylistic innovation the adaptation, to a considerable extent, exposes the mythologising and romanticising influence of conventional period drama upon perceptions of the Brontës (and 'classic' literature as a whole). The opening sequence provides a richly complex – and challenging – introduction to the serial and the literary text. On the one hand, the complex feminism of Brontë's novel is visualised in several interesting ways, illuminating both the power and the tension of Anne's exploration of the 'Woman Question'. Although Helen opens the door and holds the flame, establishing *her* actions as the driving force behind both her escape and the narrative as a whole, it is telling that the scene is shadowed and initially focuses upon an image of female passivity, as Arthur's nurse is shown sleeping. Such

depth is continued throughout the sequence. Although Cardwell maintains that Grassdale is 'filmed in a way typical of the genre: unlike the under-lighting that characterises the interiors at Wildfell Hall, these interiors are (at least, at first) well lit and tastefully furnished', this is complicated by Helen's location within these images.<sup>296</sup> Subsequent, more 'traditional' shots of Grassdale are framed by the dark disorientation of the first glimpses of Huntingdon's domain, which is, vitally, obscured or diminished by the figure of Helen. Rather than revelling in the period detail of the country-house interior, Helen is instead privileged through close-up; likewise, Grassdale is distanced through extreme long shot, and then distorted by Helen as she walks up into deep focus.

At the same time, however, Helen is also presented ambiguously in these images, embodying Brontë's portrayal of both her autonomy and inextricable confinement within patriarchal gender ideology. Although Helen provides the central focus of the interior scenes, for instance, she is filmed through the imprisoning bars of the stairwell, illustrating Mona Caird's notorious assertion that marriage for the Victorian woman was like an 'iron cage'.<sup>297</sup> Likewise, as Helen and little Arthur run through Grassdale's grounds (they literally seem to be 'hunted'), they are shot through the dying, confining branches of the undergrowth. Visually, Helen is thus simultaneously escaping and imprisoned.

This is furthered by the emphasis placed upon Helen's vulnerable, fugitive status, disallowed possession of both her body and her son as a married woman. Helen's escape intimates female solidarity (dispensing with the novel's Benson, it is only Rachel who assists her mistress), and is heightened by the musical soundtrack of powerful (yet tellingly discordant) female voices. However, Arthur's struggle indicates the illegitimacy of Helen's actions; he is not her child to take. Indeed, Huntingdon's possession of his wife's person is arguably suggested by the camera's 'editing' of her image; although Helen's close-up overwhelms the background shot of Grassdale, only half of her face is visible on screen. Such unsettling, challenging images are then enhanced by the stylistic dynamism of the opening sequence, as rapid, sweeping camera movements (similar to those in Davies's *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*) force the viewer into the same disorientating position that Helen herself has endured at Grassdale; in this respect, the camerawork, together with disturbing sound effects and the shadowy cinematography, is directed by Helen's perspective.

In many ways, Helen is similarly privileged by Anne Brontë's novel, her diary providing much of the text's focus. Integral to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is the narrative structure. Stylistically, the framed narrative of *Wildfell Hall* is part of Brontë's literary innovation, 'appropriated and modified from the familiar gothic frame-tale'.<sup>298</sup> As Jacobs observes, Brontë manipulates this device in order to serve

several functions that are strongly gender-related: it exemplifies a process [...] of passing through or going behind the official version of reality in order to approach a truth that the culture prefers to deny; it exemplifies the ways in which domestic reality is obscured by layers of conventional ideology; and it replicates a cultural split between male and female spheres.<sup>299</sup>

The structuring of *Wildfell Hall* thus becomes both an embodiment and an enforcer of the novel's thematic power. Anne's conscious illumination of the tensions and paradoxes of nineteenth-century gender ideology asserts a feminist protest in itself, as Gilbert's problematic epistolary presence both imitates and challenges the cultural mores of the Victorian public. As Charles Kingsley indeed noted, for the contemporary reader 'the book is painful'.<sup>300</sup>

Nevertheless, critical interpretations of *Wildfell Hall*'s framed narrative are often divided. Eagleton, for instance, critiques 'the structure of Anne's novels' as having 'neither the intriguing ambivalences of Charlotte nor the tragic contradictions of Emily'.<sup>301</sup> By contrast, Jacobs recognises the significance of placing Helen's diary within the framework of Gilbert's letters, noting that 'the outer reality is male and the inner reality is largely female', thereby symbolising coverture; the narrative frame simultaneously provides a 'satirical miming and disempowering of a masculine authority' and approximates 'the hidden self within the social world, the dark side of the psyche'.<sup>302</sup> However, despite recognitions of *Wildfell Hall*'s structural power, Anne Brontë's complex engagement with gender ideology is sometimes under-appreciated. Brontë balances her ability to psychologise male and female protagonists, whilst at the same time forcefully suggesting conflicts between men and women. In this

respect, Anne achieves the challenging ambiguity which Eagleton's (reductionist) reading discounts.

Helen is 'a very singular lady', whose voice dominates the novel.<sup>303</sup> Although the notion of Helen reforming Markham and Halford constructs her as an 'Angel', it remains crucial that, at times, she controls or edits the male voice. Whilst Helen's voice and person (both past and present) is framed doubly by her husband and brother-in-law – suggesting patriarchal social and domestic structures – her narrative places male characters within parenthesis. Significantly, Helen's first romantic encounter is concluded by her silencing of Boarham: "I would love you, cherish you, protect you, etc., etc." I shall not trouble myself to put down all that passed between us' (*TWH*, 141). The boorish suitor is undermined through both the irony of his female creator and by Helen's feministic irreverence: 'Mr Boarham, by name, Bore'em as I prefer spelling it, for a terrible bore he was: I shudder still, at the remembrance of his voice, drone, drone, drone' (*TWH*, 134). The 'coarseness' that contemporary reviewers perceived in Anne Brontë's language thus becomes part of her novel's subversive exploration of gender; Helen's narrative voice is female, rather than feminine, expressing her feelings with a stark frankness which again enforces Brontë's questioning of conventional romantic fiction.<sup>304</sup>

Significantly, Helen's treatment of Boarham prefigures her diary's presentation of Huntingdon and Markham. Arthur's predatory possessiveness of her mind and body is in some sense countered by Helen's requisitioning and rejection of his voice, as she disallows him direct speech and assumes his tone satirically: 'the little fellow came down every evening, in spite of his cross mamma, and learnt to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and send mamma to the devil when she tried to prevent him' (*TWH*, 350). The 'violent' and 'brutal' depiction of mankind's 'disgusting ways' becomes an ironic mirror to patriarchal speech.<sup>305</sup> Helen's careful shaping of expression is therefore part of her subtle protest (as she exposes Huntingdon's expostulation against 'that old bitch, Rachel' (*TWH*, 365), for example). Tellingly, she disassociates herself from her husband; although she asserts firmly that little Arthur is 'my son', Huntingdon and his companions are, noticeably, 'his father and his father's friends' (*TWH*, 350). Helen thus breaks the inexorable bonds of marriage through her linguistic power.



The struggle with, and challenge to, masculine hegemony is extended to her treatment of Markham. Anne Brontë's exploration of the 'Woman Question' in many ways rests on the highly complex – and often tense – relationship between Gilbert's and Helen's narratives. Arguably, Helen retains ultimate possession over her diary, as she controls Markham's access to her thoughts and feelings; she 'hastily tore a few leaves from the end', maintaining that Gilbert "needn't read it all" (*TWH*, 129):

The fine gentleman and beau of the parish and its vicinity (in his own estimation at least), is a young .... Here it ended. The rest was torn away. How cruel – just when she was going to mention me! (*TWH*, 396).

Whereas *Jane Eyre* privileges Rochester (to an extent) through typically Byronic images of male power and elusiveness, Helen instead prevents Markham from being declared the romantic hero of the novel. By placing him within parenthesis – and subordinating his self-assurance – she rather establishes a challenging tension with the male narrative framework.

However, although certain critics maintain that 'the outer, epistolary, witness is subordinate to and changed by the inner diary witness, and though spatially [Markham's] account encompasses [Helen's], spiritually hers dominates, rebukes and transforms his', in many ways this is too simplistic.<sup>306</sup> Whilst Helen's struggle for independence is projected through the narrative structure, Markham and Halford imprison her diary. Fundamentally, Markham breaks the confidence that Helen places in him, essentially aligning himself with Huntingdon in his flippant declaration that 'an old world story', contained within 'a certain old faded journal of mine' (*TWH*, 10), will amuse Halford; significantly, Gilbert has the power to silence Helen's voice, as his 'own patience and leisure shall be [his] only limits' (*TWH*, 10) in recounting the tale. Again, the notion of Gilbert as 'a principled hero', a romantic resolution to a love story, is complicated.<sup>307</sup>

It is significant that in the 'present' of the novel (the letters between Markham and Halford) Helen is a married woman. Her husband therefore edits what has essentially become his diary, confirming the unsettlingly possessive traits in his character evident in his marriage proposal: "You shall have a kiss [...]. There now – *there Gilbert – let me go*" (*TWH*, 487, my italics). Although

Markham proclaims Helen's significance, asserting that he is 'about to give [Halford] a sketch – no not a sketch – a full and faithful account' (*TWH*, 10), the narrative becomes coloured by patriarchal values which demarcate writing as a masculine occupation: 'I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporal interest to the writer, or *such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it*' (*TWH*, 129, my italics). Just as Robert Southey asserted to Charlotte that 'literature cannot be the business of a woman's life', Markham's editorial position, responsive to Halford as a male reader, reclaims control over Helen's rebellious act of storytelling.<sup>308</sup> Helen's diary instead becomes framed by the very vices which she seeks to escape. Her story is presented as a 'monetary' commodity, part of an enclosed male world which centres upon acquisition and possession:

This is the first instalment of my debt. If the coin suits you, tell me so, and I'll send you the rest at my leisure: if you would rather remain my creditor than stuff your purse with such ungainly heavy pieces, - tell me still, and I'll pardon your bad taste, and willingly keep the treasure to myself'. (*TWH*, 21).

Just as Huntingdon controls his wife's body, and Millicent is 'sold off' into matrimony, Gilbert similarly views Helen as an object to be owned and bartered; tellingly, Markham denotes Helen's diary as 'my prize' (*TWH*, 129).

This is extended into his refashioning and conventionalising of Helen's character. Significantly, the first part of the novel distances and externalises Helen; her intellect is silenced by Markham's somewhat predatory focus upon her physicality: she 'entered into conversation with [him], discoursing with so much eloquence, and depth of thought and feeling, on a subject, happily coinciding with [his] own ideas, and looking so beautiful withal' (*TWH*, 52). Vitally, much of Markham's response to Helen's plight deflects attention onto him – 'Well! I could readily forgive her prejudice against me, and her hard thoughts of our sex in general' (*TWH*, 396). Her subversive actions are rewritten according to patriarchal idealism: 'joy unspeakable that my adored Helen was all I wished to think her [...], her character shone bright, and clear, and stainless as that sun I could not bear to look upon' (*TWH*, 398). Equally, women become

displaced by men. Although he is deprived a direct narrative voice, Rose and Helen are overshadowed in Markham's eyes by Halford. Rose, who questions her mother's devoted domestic duty, thus becomes 'the wife of one [...] destined, hereafter, to become a closer friend than even herself' (*TWH*, 12); the potentially subversive sister is exchanged for a more valued brother, in a movement which seems to replicate the closed male community which exists between Huntingdon and his associates. Likewise, Helen serves to affirm male ties; her marriage to Gilbert becomes 'the most important event of [his] life – previous to [his] acquaintance with Jack Halford at least' (*TWH*, 10).

Certainly, Markham is complicated through moments of psychological depth and critical self-reflection: 'Respecting me [...] she had long since seen her error, and perhaps fallen into another in the opposite extreme; for if, at first, her opinion of me had been lower than I deserved I was convinced that now my deserts were lower than her opinion' (*TWH*, 396). However, although Gilbert seemingly respects Helen's autonomy of thought and feeling – 'I had no right to see it: all this was too sacred for any eyes but her own' (*TWH*, 397) – her diary remains metaphorically violated by his pride and possessiveness: 'the former half of the narrative was, to me, more painful than the latter'; 'I felt a kind of selfish gratification in watching her husband's gradual decline'; 'the effect of the whole [...] was to relieve my mind of an intolerable burden and fill my heart with joy' (*TWH*, 397). What becomes clear is that Anne Brontë's novel moves far beyond Eagleton's assertion that, 'in the end, it is merely a matter of love winning out'.<sup>309</sup> Ultimately, *Wildfell Hall* becomes 'a feminist manifesto of revolutionary power and intelligence' precisely through its refusal to present clear resolutions.<sup>310</sup>

Although Barker's adaptation is problematised by its resolved love story, the preceding narrative is energised by its structural and thematic complexity. Gilbert's manly jealousy as he reads Helen's diary is elucidated through careful editing and narrative shifts, for example, as an intimate shot of Huntingdon and Helen cuts to the frustrated Markham, who shouts aggressively 'leave me alone – get out!' to Rose before returning to the journal. As in the novel, Markham's desire to claim Helen underlies her struggle for independence, whilst the adaptation couples this with his patriarchal ability to command his sister. Similarly, just as Helen is constructed within the male imagination in the opening of the novel, she is presented through Gilbert's gaze in the film; as the villagers

whisper ‘what do you make of Mrs Graham?’, the camera focuses upon Markham’s face at the latticed window.

Exemplifying the adaptation’s subtlety, the image is multifaceted. Gilbert is, like Helen at other moments, trapped within conservative domesticity and, implicitly, Helen’s elusive power, visually prefiguring his later pursuit of her at Grassdale as he stands behind the iron bars of the gate. At the same time, the links between men which underline the novel are visualised, as Helen’s diary is placed within a closed male community. Although Markham’s jealous rage sets him against Huntingdon, his similarities to Helen’s first husband are stressed. Gilbert’s potential for vice is suggested by his treatment of Eliza, for example; following Lawrence’s advice that he relinquish Helen, Markham immediately approaches his former love, his ‘Goodnight, Eliza’ pronounced in a decidedly insinuating and predatory tone. Whereas Brontë presents Markham as a direct threat to Helen – “I can crush that bold spirit”, thought I. But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat’ (*TWH*, 126) – the adaptation implies his deficiencies through his interactions with more peripheral female characters.

Such ambiguity is extended to other male figures, consolidating the adaptation’s complex feminism. Barker complicates Tess O’Toole’s observation that ‘if we are to look for an optimistic, meliorist plot in the novel, it is more likely to be found in the brother-sister relationship than in the husband-wife one’.<sup>311</sup> Although Helen is privileged as she reads from her letters in voiceover, she is interrupted as the shot cuts to Lawrence conveying her story to Markham; the brother thus silences and ‘repossesses’ the sister. Equally, as Lawrence watches Helen through the church’s cage-like grille, she seems framed and scrutinised by both the patriarchal religious institution and her male relative.

Huntingdon is likewise depicted in nuanced terms. Rather than simply vilifying him, the screenplay extends Helen’s concern for him in the novel into an opportunity for psychological analysis: ‘If only you would love yourself’. ‘Perhaps I know myself too well’. His interiority is heightened by intricate camerawork and editing, coupled with apt cinematography. Grassdale is frequently lit in red, symbolically infusing suggestions of blood and wine, with their obvious import to Huntingdon’s corrupted – and corrupting – personality (whilst also forging a clear stylistic link with many film portrayals of *Jane Eyre*’s

Red Room). At the same time, dynamic camera movements visualise both the attachment and tension between Helen and Huntingdon, together with his own erratic, destabilising selfhood. Shots of Huntingdon shift from intimacy to distance, as he becomes as divided from himself as he is from Helen; his desperate cry, in extreme close-up, ‘Why must you always judge me, Helen? Why can’t you just love me?’, is both self-assertive and self-reflective. Revealingly, the ensuing scene portrays a docile Huntingdon, his head resting on Helen’s lap; as in the novel, their marriage retains an enduring devotion, yet it is clear that the grown man is the true baby of the story.

However, Barker devotes considerable attention to little Arthur. Perhaps most significantly, this elaborates upon the novel’s preoccupation with masculinity as a closed community, as well as further exploring male psychology. Vitally, little Arthur’s flashbacks to his experiences of being ‘made a man’ by his father point not only to Huntingdon’s omnipresent ability to haunt Helen – the child’s brutal actions at Wildfell (tormenting the birds) suggest that they both remain imprisoned psychologically at Grassdale – but also to Helen’s failure to reform male degeneracy through her religious and moral idealism.

The disorientating, alcohol-fuelled legacy of Huntingdon’s ‘man’s’ world is instead intensified as it becomes channelled through the child. The looming wine-glasses that invade little Arthur’s vision, coupled with dissonant sound effects, are juxtaposed with the magnified crucifixes which in some ways seem to support Helen, yet are implicitly undermined through the adaptation’s critique of the church. To an extent, Anne Brontë’s indictment of man as no more than a child who ‘[seizes] the bottle and [sucks] away’ (*TWH*, 193) is neatly encapsulated by the ironic contrast between the child Arthur and his father; as the camera spins with the boy, he seems a centre of calm set against Huntingdon’s mindlessness. Nevertheless, Arthur’s repeated moorland accidents, likening him to a hunted animal, again suggest not only the illegitimacy of Helen’s actions, but also her lack of power over men. Just as Brontë’s Helen suffers for Huntingdon’s sins, little Arthur’s potential inheritance of male vice is a destructive influence upon Barker’s heroine. An image of his face, bloodied from hunting, blends into that of him staring at a caged bird (in many ways a self-reflection). The scene then cuts to Helen; although she is writing in her diary, her figure is obscured and distorted.

The screenplay thus simultaneously visualises Brontë's rich, often subversive, portrait of a woman whilst making clear the tensions created by 'separate spheres'. In many ways the adaptation presents a deeply intricate relationship between Markham and Helen, resting upon the conflict between her search for independence and her position as a physical object, subjected to Markham's (and the viewer's) gaze. Helen (in the background) paints under a storm-blasted tree, for example. On the one hand, Markham is privileged visually as he is depicted in close-up in the foreground. Equally, however, he is distanced from an unattainable Helen, autonomous in her artistic and emotional consciousness; the weather-beaten tree indicates not only her struggles, but her ability to endure. In a further scene, Rose's exclamation, 'Why Gilbert, I do believe you're afraid of her!', cuts to Helen sketching, once more privileging her as an independent – and therefore powerful – being. Revealingly, however, the moment is also underlined by Helen's ever-present disquiet; the arrival of a visitor at Wildfell prompts her nervous response: 'Is it him?'

Certainly, Helen's relationship with Huntingdon is depicted powerfully and ambiguously, often enforced by the adaptation's stylistic innovation. Like Lizzy in Davies's and Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, Helen often compels the camera's focus. The interiority of Brontë's first-person narrative is thus embodied by a camera that often revolves rapidly around her person and gradually pulls into close-up, simultaneously aligning the viewer with her perspective and placing her as a figure caught within society; the unsettling camera angles both reflect her inner turmoil and the pressures that are imposed upon her from without (one such scene shows the villagers haranguing Helen). Nevertheless, although the effect is one of disorientation and entrapment, it also frequently locates her as the firm centre of the narrative.

This is complicated, however, in her interactions with Huntingdon. As she dances with him, the camera spins once more, the fast, freely-moving images intimating the youthful physicality of their relationship, grounded in the implicit sexuality of Brontë's novel (whilst Huntingdon comments lasciviously that Helen's paintings remind him of 'girlhood just ripening into womanhood' (*TWH*, 160), Helen is also attuned to her suitor's attractiveness). However, the dance sequence visually foreshadows ensuing scenes. Significantly, the camera focuses upon her bare neck, seemingly directed by Huntingdon's predatory perspective.

Similar shots at Wildfell – Helen is often depicted with a strong emphasis upon her physicality, noticeably when she is painting – are therefore framed by Huntingdon’s gaze, which becomes further complicated by the presence of Markham; whilst the camera’s sensuous portrayal of Helen as an artist at work affirms her femininity and creativity, it remains significant that Gilbert rides into shot, heightened and privileged by the stature of his horse, and seemingly an embodiment of (period drama) masculinity.<sup>312</sup>

Helen is thus ensnared within, and vulnerable to, male sexuality. Indeed, as argued by feminist film theorists such as E. Ann Kaplan, the act of filming and viewing itself objectifies woman, ‘presented as what she represents for man, not in terms of what she actually signifies’.<sup>313</sup> In many ways, this is prefigured by Brontë’s novel. Markham in particular emphasises Helen as a bodily object subjected to his appreciation: ‘there I beheld a tall, ladylike figure [...]. Her face was towards me, and there was something in it, which, once seen, invited me to look again’ (*TWH*, 17), as he notices ‘those fair and graceful fingers’ (*TWH*, 54). In the adaptation, the threat of the male gaze is, at times, heightened; disorientating shots which look down at Helen dancing with Huntingdon anticipate the attempted rape, for example. Likewise, the camera’s energy, whilst revitalising the style of 1990s period drama, symbolically emulates the flux and tension of the relationship between Helen and Huntingdon. Most particularly, the use of extreme close-up asserts the physical and emotional confines placed upon Helen in both the novel and the screenplay, visualising the enforced intimacy of a kiss snatched with threatening brutality. The apt use of camera is, moreover, coupled with several nuanced scenes original to the screenplay, embodying Helen’s simultaneous attraction to Huntingdon and her vulnerability at his hands. As they lie in bed together, Huntingdon flippantly relates to Helen the history of his mistresses. Encircled by the intimacy of his arm, Helen is both entrapped by her love for her husband and caught in the confines of a male-dominated marriage.

Such complexity is further asserted by the adaptation’s intricate narrative structure. On the one hand, the screenwriters invest Helen with more authority as they reshape her diary into a series of reflections written purely in the ‘freedom’ of Wildfell. Helen’s voiceover comment, ‘I shall set it all down [...] as a lesson to myself’, changes the novel’s narrative control; her matured and

unhindered perspective directs the screenplay. Indeed, the repeated image of the initial escape from Grassdale, with its close focus upon Helen, in some sense becomes the narrative frame through its circularity; Helen thus ‘usurps’ Gilbert’s and Halford’s position.

Nevertheless, visual ‘male’ frames complicate Helen’s position, the camera movement once more asserting the complexity of gender relations. Following Markham’s gift, he exclaims ‘You think that if you accept this trifle, I will presume on it hereafter. I assure you that is not the case’. The camera then spins round, from Helen as its focal point, until they are both ‘equalised’ in profile shot. Arguably, however, the camera movement imitates the frame structure of the literary text through its circularity; although Helen’s face is focused upon, it is Markham who finally rests in the foreground of the shot.

Barker’s editing likewise emulates the significance accorded to Brontë’s narrative structure, capturing the ‘layered’ quality of the novel. The semi-rape scene is interrupted by Markham’s observance of the carriage from Grassdale making its way to Wildfell. Helen’s assertion to Huntingdon, ‘I never want you to touch me again’, is thus undercut by the fulfilment of his promise that ‘wherever you went I’d find you’, as his horses speed towards his ‘property’. The film’s ability to juxtapose past and present therefore incarcerates Helen within male possession. As little Arthur is claimed by Huntingdon’s servant, shot from Helen’s perspective through cage-like lattices, the image recalls the serial’s opening sequence; through this circularity, Helen’s ‘theft’ of her child becomes inevitably futile. The extent to which the ‘present’ of the film is intercut with scenes from Helen’s past illustrates the degree to which her experiences have been internalised; in the adaptation, as in the text, Helen is caged within her marriage and within *herself*. The performance of Punch’s wife-beating at the fair, for example, is interrupted by a memory of Huntingdon’s assault (in the recurring images of this scene, the first is merely glimpsed, suggesting a repressive tendency on Helen’s part). In its nuanced use of flashback, heightened by unsettling camera and sound effects, *Wildfell Hall* thus prefigures the psychological resonance of later adaptations such as Davies’s *Bleak House* and Welch’s *Jane Eyre*.

Indeed, the adaptation’s striking style also exposes (to an extent) the performativity of traditional period drama, as well as conservative readings of the



‘Brontë Myth’. As a result, the production complicates the concept of ‘Brontëan’. Aptly, this is embodied by the adaptation’s visualisation of Brontë’s own literary critique. As Helen expresses the novel’s sardonic observation that she ‘took the old hall once on a moonlight night, and [...] must take it again on a snowy winter’s day’, the camera spins around the artist, a refreshing visual challenge to the static camera traditional to period drama. As discussed in Chapter One in relation to Austen adaptation, *Wildfell Hall* often refashions the conventional ‘heritage’ shot, as the aesthetic symmetry of certain scenes is tested through their underlying irony. In the final episode, an image of Helen places her within a perfectly orchestrated country-house interior. As she reflects upon her past life, however, the external order of Grassdale only highlights the degree to which social performativity conceals disturbing realities.

In some ways, *Wildfell Hall* is shaped by conventionally ‘Brontëan’ images. The title, for example, is transposed over a typical moorland scene. Whilst this certainly stems from Brontë’s novel, with its ‘scotch firs, themselves half blighted with storms’ (*TWH*, 22-23), it also engages in a visual dialogue with Wyler’s and Kosminsky’s versions of *Wuthering Heights*, enforcing their traditional illustrations of the ‘Brontëan’ landscape. Similarly, although Charlotte Brontë stresses the hardships of Jane’s plight in the wilderness, adaptations of *Jane Eyre* often present pictorial images of windswept moor.

*Wildfell Hall* complicates such imagery through the symbolic repetition of certain visual motifs, however. As Cardwell notes, Helen is frequently shot under a tree which becomes progressively weather-beaten, yet ‘the state of the tree does not simply relay changes in season’, as ‘its recurrence is employed to reflect the changes which are affecting Helen’.<sup>314</sup> The adaptation challenges tendencies which soften the relationship between heroine and nature; Helen is often diminished through long-shot, made vulnerable against the vast backdrop of sky and land. Similarly, although Markham’s discussion with Helen about the riot of moorland colour seems illustrative of conventional Brontë mythology, and romanticises the relationship between artist and lover, such idealisation is clouded. As Gilbert lyricises that ‘the whole moor turns into a sea of gold – I call it pauper’s gold, for no rich man could ever own such beauty’, he stares possessively at Helen’s bare shoulders; the changeability of nature is infused with potentially threatening masculinity.

Barker's production thus reassesses and redirects conventional perceptions of the Brontës, not least through his highlighting of Anne's literary presence, including scenes from *Agnes Grey* within *Wildfell Hall*'s screenplay. However, Barker's adaptation is also, to some degree, underpinned by contradiction, born out of a conflict between innovation and tradition. As seen in Welch's *North and South*, this confusion centres upon prevailing expectations of classic-novel adaptation. Markham, like Thornton, is in many ways privileged as the romantic hero expected of both costume drama and the 'Brontëan' film, shaped according to the legacy of popular images of Rochester and Heathcliff. It is perhaps noteworthy that Toby Stephens played Rochester in Welch's *Jane Eyre*, his Byronic pacing in the latter adaptation echoing his portrayal of Gilbert in *Wildfell Hall*.

Crucially, Markham twice saves little Arthur. Admittedly, the fact that his gunshot prompts the boy to fall from the tree complicates Gilbert's character; arguably, he hunts and threatens Helen as much as Huntingdon. Nevertheless, what becomes significant is his ostensible presentation within these scenes; tellingly, low-angled shots force Helen and the viewer to look up at the child's 'saviour'. Such privileging is, at times, also asserted through the adaptation's narrative structure. Scenes of Huntingdon corrupting his son are intercut with images of Gilbert reading Helen's account of them in her diary; Markham is thus presented implicitly as Helen's and Arthur's 'rescuer'. This is then consolidated by the omission of Gilbert's correspondence with Halford. In Brontë's narrative, Helen asserts that if she keeps her diary 'close, it cannot tell again' (*TWH*, 154); she demands that Markham 'bring it back when you have read it; and don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being – I trust to your honour' (*TWH*, 129). Through the inclusion of Helen's sentiments within his narrative, Brontë's Gilbert thus undermines himself as a 'hero' as he breaks her trust. In omitting Halford, however, the screenplay retains his 'honour'.

This problematic element is epitomised by the adaptation's conclusion. Gilbert and Helen's reunion is, on the one hand, resistant to romantic idealism, asserting instead female autonomy. Significantly, Helen remains as an independent woman, instructing Markham as to the date of her *future* wedding. In a crucial change to the novel, however, it is intimated that Markham is to be

married to another. Helen's turmoil, implying her emotional dependence upon Markham, therefore affirms the powerful and autonomous male. Despite *Wildfell Hall*'s many innovations, in some ways it thus establishes its own conservative – and confining – frame, as it privileges Markham as the conventionally desirable hero of costume drama romance. In so doing, it anticipates both the conflicts and the complexity of Welch's *Jane Eyre*.

### *Jane Eyre*

The BBC's promotion of Welch's *Jane Eyre* embodied the privileged position that Charlotte Brontë's novel holds in the popular imagination, its celebrated presence in the television schedule intimating its reputation as one of the nation's 'favourite stories'. As Jane Tranter, BBC Controller of Drama Commissioning, maintained, 'Welch's wonderful version [...] will add that special ingredient to the mix of dramas due for transmission this autumn'.<sup>315</sup> Tellingly, assertions of the adaptation's refreshing readings of the novel were also framed by promises of conventionally 'Brontëan' iconography, much of which has derived from now 'classic' films; the dramatisation's 'stormy and majestic' locations, for example, suggest not only Brontë's own exploration of Gothicism and portrayal of landscape, but the darkly mysterious Thornfield of Stevenson's 1944 adaptation.

At the same time, however, Welch's screenplay negotiates and re-examines both the relationship between literary text and screen, and the symbiotic interplay between myth and film – responding, like Barker's *Wildfell Hall*, to the stylistic developments traced in classic-novel adaptations of the later 1990s and 2000s. Indeed, Welch's own immensely popular *North and South* arguably forms an important intertext, both stylistically and in terms of her characterisations. However, the pull between convention and innovation, examined throughout this thesis, assumes a particular character in Welch's *Jane Eyre*, as certain issues culminate, collide and conflict; the production holds an often troubled relationship with the long tradition of filming *Jane Eyre*, whilst also forming a rather unsettled moment in period drama's self-conscious reworking as a genre. Whereas *Wildfell Hall* in many ways offered a drive towards redefining and re-establishing classic-novel adaptation, a movement

reassumed by Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights*, Welch's *Jane Eyre* arguably marked a watershed of confusion and uncertainty.

In many respects, the multifaceted and often contentious nature of Welch's *Jane Eyre* is the culmination of the complex tradition of adapting Brontë's novel for the screen. The numerous films simultaneously affirm the primacy of the literary text, assert their own readings and enable reinterpretation.<sup>316</sup> At the same time, they have themselves become subjected to a mythologising which can obscure their individual nuances.

Cabanne's 1934 version of *Jane Eyre* provides an often-forgotten illustration of the issues integral to adaptations of Charlotte Brontë's novel. Indeed, the fact that this early production remains relatively unknown demonstrates the enduring, overshadowing presence of Stevenson's (or, more particularly, Orson Welles's) *Jane Eyre*. Like many older adaptations (including Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*), Cabanne's film opens with an image of a book, seemingly a means of 'legitimising' the medium through implied literariness. However, as in Stevenson's film, Brontë's novel is rewritten:

*Jane Eyre*

Chapter 1

The cold winter wind had brought with it sombre clouds and penetrating wind. There was no possibility of taking a walk that...

Vitally, visual scene-setting is first established, as Brontë's famous opening line is shadowed and cut off by the frame. This commingling of filmic self-reflexivity and literariness is continued throughout; scene changes are marked by an image of the book '*Jane Eyre*' being opened at the appropriate 'chapter'.

Pre-dating Stevenson's and Wyler's legacy, Cabanne's film offers both interesting interpretations of Brontë's novel, and, in its divergences from expected 'Brontëan' iconography, highlights the extent to which *Jane Eyre* has been rewritten. The first shot of Thornfield, for instance, is not a dark fortress but a barred gate. Although the production pre-dates second-wave feminism, such imagery arguably implies feminist understandings of Jane's – and perhaps Bertha's – plight (it is noteworthy that its screenwriter, Comandini, was a woman). Likewise, whilst Adèle's antics, as she falls into a vase and becomes

entangled in a tree, showcase the child star (revered during the 1930s), they also intimate the dangers which haunt Thornfield.

Despite its pre-Rhysian context, the film offers an interesting portrayal of Bertha. Bertha is shown igniting Rochester's bed, yet her actions are calm and controlled rather than hysterical and animalistic. Crucially, she claims her husband as her own, implicitly condemning his attempt at bigamy and highlighting his marital obligation to her. This is reiterated visually; as preparations are made for Jane's wedding – 'we can decorate this arch [...]. It will be most affective as the bride walks through' – it is Bertha who appears and assumes this nuptial role. As she exclaims ominously, 'You can't separate me from my husband – no one can'.

In Jane, however, Comandini presents a strident heroine who – unlike Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine – overwhelms Rochester's screen presence. Jane is listed first in the film credits, contrasting with Stevenson's, Aymes's and Young's adaptations. In Aymes's film (1983), for example, the opening shot is seemingly of Rochester's study (though without the nuances of Welch's (2006) and Whitmore's (1996) screenplays, where Jane explores and subjects the library, as a 'masculine' space, to her scrutiny). Like the trailer to Stevenson's film, in which the book opens onto an image of Welles, Aymes showcases Timothy Dalton as Rochester. By contrast, Virginia Bruce's 1934 Jane is overwhelmingly associated with dominance and self-assertion. Unlike many adaptations, which mark Jane's growth to adulthood by positioning her at Helen's grave (thus implicitly framing her 'passion' with Helen's control, as well as tying her to her childhood), Bruce is shot through a spinning globe as she teaches astronomical science; the novel's preoccupation with the supernatural is exchanged for practicality and intellectual independence.<sup>317</sup> Indeed, the first mention of the heroine's name is in the context of control: 'Is that clear?'; 'Yes, Miss Eyre.'<sup>318</sup>

By contrast, Rochester is somewhat 'feminised', the sweetness of his disposition seemingly confirmed by his request for sugar in his tea. Indeed, Jane implicitly reduces Rochester to a child, literally teaching him a lesson as she informs him of her departure through a message on Adèle's slate. However, although Jane exclaims that Rochester is 'a strange man, [...] there is something about him', such intimations of Byronic intrigue draw upon pre-conceptions

derived from the novel, as opposed to his portrayal on screen. In this way, despite its re-workings and additions, the film implicitly privileges reader over viewer – a tendency which, as will be seen, is to be found in Welch’s screenplay over seventy years later.

Cabanne’s film, in its presentation of *Jane Eyre* as both a book and film, thus highlights many of the issues which underpin adaptations of Brontë’s novel (and indeed costume drama as a genre), pointing to ‘fidelity’ and yet grounding itself within the filmic medium. This early version illustrates the malleability of Charlotte Brontë’s novel in its seeming openness to interpretation. In particular, several aspects become prominent, forming a thread throughout subsequent productions of *Jane Eyre*, and demonstrating the novel’s simultaneous subjection to mythologising and retelling. Stylistically, for instance, adaptations both consolidate ‘Brontëan’ Gothicism, propounded most especially by Stevenson, and, like Delbert Mann’s 1970 version, re-present *Jane Eyre* through ‘contemporary’ camera effects and music. Equally, portrayals of Bertha trace changing critical climates, both postcolonial and feminist; in Joan Craft’s 1973 version, for instance, a Lowood lesson on the Sargasso Sea is audible, highlighting the intertextual dialogue between Charlotte Brontë’s and Jean Rhys’s novels.

Most significant, however, is the portrayal of Jane and her relationship to Rochester. Despite the famed vociferousness of Jane’s voice, adaptations are presented with the difficulty of screening her first-person narrative, not only practically but also in terms of reader/viewer expectations; Jane’s seeming accessibility, and the tendency for her direct addresses to the ‘Reader’ to create emotive responses, enforce a ‘rhetoric of possession’ which frames screen versions of her characterisation.<sup>319</sup> As Whitemore notes, ‘there is something about this girl and her struggle to find love and her own sense of identity which means more to the audience than just re-telling the story’.<sup>320</sup> However, Rochester also becomes integral. Whereas Comandini’s screenplay strongly favours Jane, there is, in some ways, a reversal in preference of Rochester in later adaptations, foregrounded by Orson Welles’s famously overwhelming performance, and linked to costume drama’s privileging of male leads that has been traced throughout this thesis. As Stoneman comments, ‘the “hideous”

Rochester of the text has [...] been replaced in at least some minds by a mythical Romantic hero'.<sup>321</sup>

A review of Aymes's *Jane Eyre*, for instance, proclaimed that "Sunday Tea-Time is Weak-At-The-Knees Time".<sup>322</sup> Arguably, female audiences – and the female gaze – are implicitly upheld through a romantic focus upon Rochester. However, as Zelah Clarke, who played Jane in the BBC's 1983 adaptation, remarked, "'*Jane Eyre* is the ultimate poisoned chalice. Everyone remembers the Mr Rochesters but no one recalls the Janes'". As the interview notes, 'Zelah Clarke loved starring with Timothy Dalton, but still can't understand why *Jane Eyre* made him a star but ended her acting career'.<sup>323</sup>

Clarke's 'disappearance' and Dalton's fame embody the ambivalence surrounding screen portrayals of Brontë's heroine; images of Jane have not been widely celebrated. Indeed, Joan Fontaine is rather more notorious for her passive diminutiveness than renowned for her performance as Jane Eyre. Although Adèle comically imitates Rochester's/Welles's expression, he is presented as a mythical figure who, like the Gytrash, appears from nowhere; whilst Edward seems to be conjured and summoned by Mann's Jane (1970), as her beating heart transforms into Mesrour's galloping hooves, Orson Welles looms suddenly and intimidatingly over Jane, demanding 'hand me my whip!'<sup>324</sup> Throughout Stevenson's film, Jane indeed hurries to keep pace with an actor who constantly cuts over her lines, a stark differentiation from both the novel's kindred minds and the balance offered by many later productions, in which reverse shots lend an 'equality' to dialogue between hero and heroine.

By contrast, Fontaine's/Jane's thoughts and feelings are dismissed by the film's Gothic overtones, which are associated strongly with Rochester in his visual and musical equation with storms; Jane's letter is blown away, throwing her implicitly back into Rochester's arms as she hears his supernatural cry. Generally, Welles's/Rochester's psyche is privileged; the text visible in the screenwriters' book '*Jane Eyre*' highlights his 'tortured' soul and face. Moreover, although Zimolzak argues that screen representations of Rochester (following his injuries) depict 'physical grotesquery' in order to reflect 'equal measure of psychological monstrosity', this is complicated by Stevenson's film.<sup>325</sup> Despite the problematic elements of Welles's performance of Rochester

– ‘everything about him was oversized, including his ego’ – he remains imaged as a conventional romantic lead through his lack of maiming.<sup>326</sup>

There are certain nuances to Stevenson’s film; overwhelming images of Rochester mean that subtleties in Jane’s characterisation have become overlooked. At times, Jane’s perspective is privileged as it is imitated through the camerawork, for example. Bessy presents Jane with her brooch, forging a bond of friendship and female solidarity: ‘It will help you remember me’. As Jane’s relationship with Rochester develops, she ornaments her dress by placing it on her breast. Upon hearing of Blanche, however, she fixes it, like Bessy, on a high-necked collar; in confronting Blanche, the high-angled shot diminishes Jane, whilst her costume’s similarity to Bessy’s places her self-consciously as a servant.

However, in Fontaine’s femininity and beauty, Stevenson’s film prefigures the tensions which frequently surface in visualisations of *Jane Eyre*, as adaptors struggle with, and often simplify, Brontë’s complex engagement with female identity and physicality. The child Jane’s dream that she will ‘have beautiful curly hair’ is fulfilled by her uncontested acceptance of ‘jewels for Jane Eyre’, the production’s resolution into a ‘fairytale’ romance later echoed by Zeffirelli’s conventional imaging of Charlotte Gainsbourg as she leans out of a window, brushing her hair dreamily. Zeffirelli’s adaptation was indeed declared as presenting, in Gainsbourg, ‘la plus belle Jane Eyre de tous les temps’.<sup>327</sup> Over fifty years earlier, such romantic idealisation was foregrounded by Welles’s and Fontaine’s blissful reunion, as Rochester caressed Jane’s ‘flower-soft face’. Deprived of her inheritance, Jane’s plea – ‘please don’t send me away’ – is answered by a passionate kiss, the crashing symbols heralding masculine dominance. While Zimolzak maintains that ‘Welles becomes a caricature of Rochester’, it is his legacy which in many ways endures; although Jane cries ‘I can’t read your face!’, the film’s final lines, illustrating his ‘large, brilliant and black eyes’, ensure that the image of Rochester lingers even as the screen fades.<sup>328</sup>

To an extent, during the 1970s and 1980s, Mann’s, Craft’s and Aymes’s productions attempted to present more complex relationships between Jane and Rochester. Susannah York’s performance, located within the rise of second-



wave feminism, depicts Mann's Jane as something of a late-nineteenth-century 'New Woman', for instance, not only in her tailored dress but in her poise, independence and seeming confidence in her physicality. Moreover, the film's musical score is played by Jane herself, thereby investing her with a narrative 'control' that is echoed by Zelah Clarke's and Sorcha Cusack's voiceovers in Aymes's and Craft's adaptations.

Admittedly, rather than York's/Jane's dress simply 'fitting to a nicety' (*JE*, 98), her slim, corseted waist potentially offers her up to what Laura Mulvey describes as the 'visual pleasures' of the male gaze.<sup>329</sup> Nevertheless, Jane's feminist self-belief undermines Rochester's patriarchal hegemony: 'You have lost me, Edward'; 'All rights would be on your side, and none on mine'; 'I come to you as an equal. I will not be less – even for the man I love'. In a similar vein, in contrast to the un-intellectualised Fontaine, Zelah Clarke's Jane speaks French with assurance, whilst, despite her diminutive stature, the camera heightens her at key instances; as Jane and Rochester meet on the stairs, and he proclaims her to be 'a little depressed', they are shown in profile shot at equal level. Vitality, many of Clarke's moments of greatest power and assertion are at times of potential negation. As she declares her feelings for Rochester through self-derision – 'if God had blessed me with some beauty and much wealth' – she walks away, resisting the propensity of other films to depict Jane entwined within Edward's arms.

Filmed in the immediate wake of Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, feminist connections are also drawn between Jane and Bertha in Mann's production (in contrast to Stevenson's version, in which Bertha is depicted merely as a shadow, embodying fears of a dark 'other'). Indeed, the Platinum DVD Edition of Mann's *Jane Eyre* (heralded as 'the Greatest Love Story Ever Told') is fascinatingly unusual in its inclusion of Bertha on the cover; whilst Jane is privileged in the foreground, Rochester and his first wife are shown equally in the background, Bertha's presence diminished yet incontestable. Crucially, Jane confronts Bertha through her own initiative, opening the 'prison' door as Rochester confines Jane in the turret, and momentarily linking the two women. York's Jane thus challenges Rochester's ability to shut away women's perspectives.

At the same time, Aymes's and Mann's productions enable some interesting visualisations of Rochester which, unlike Cabanne's and Stevenson's films, move towards psychologising the male protagonist. In Mann's film, for example, Rochester does not re-enter the ballroom following Jane's 'depressed' departure, but is instead seen diminished and alienated in long-shot, before he retires to his study. Like Jane, he scrutinises himself in the mirror; indeed, the casting of a mature George C. Scott as Rochester complicates in itself conventional notions of the male romantic lead. Elements of interiority are likewise accorded Aymes's Rochester. In contrast to other versions (perhaps most notably Young's), in which Jane is focused upon following the fire, the camera remains upon Dalton's Edward and the effect that Jane has had upon him.

Equally, an element of critique is levelled at Rochester in both films. Scott's Rochester, for instance, attempts to absolve himself following the revelation of Bertha's existence, proclaiming 'have you ever been in an asylum?' Ellis and Kaplan argue that this 'allows us to see more of Rochester's pain [...] so that we become sensitive to his view of things, which thereby becomes the dominant point of view in the film'.<sup>330</sup> Vitally, however, when Rochester turns for affirmation the wedding party – including Jane – has disappeared. Likewise, despite Dalton's famed attractiveness, Aymes's production consciously manipulates images of the romantic hero, challenging viewer expectations as his handsome profile is turned slowly to reveal his deformation.

Franco Zeffirelli's and Robert Young's *Jane Eyre* (in 1996 and 1997) offered similarly complex interpretations of Brontë's novel, drawing upon previous adaptations and expectations, as well as re-working conventional imaging of the literary text. Most particularly, both productions present interesting portrayals of Rochester, redefining the traditional 'Brontëan' Byronic legacy. At the same time, as seen with Aymes and Mann, the adaptations demonstrate a pull between convention and innovation, their feministic preoccupations complicated by undercurrents of 'fairytale' romance. Hugh Whitmore's and Kay Mellor's screenplays thus provide vital points of reference in the development of costume drama and the history of adapting *Jane Eyre*, and in many ways frame Welch's serialisation stylistically and thematically.

Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre* was screened in the same year as *Wildfell Hall* (1996). In some respects, the film is more conventional than the televised adaptation, perhaps resulting from its status as a Hollywood production; as already noted, romanticised shots of Charlotte Gainsbourg are focused upon, reinforced by the aesthetic, dream-like images of her on DVD covers. The film strongly incorporates, and relies upon, pre-conceived notions of the 'Brontë Myth'. Shots of Helen's dead body, for instance, are intercut with images of Lowood set amidst a bleak vision of the moors. Although this desolate tone fits with the adaptation's taciturn and sombre characterisation of Jane – 'will we be happy?'; 'we shall work hard and we shall be content' – it is also born out of a self-conscious awareness of the film's own place in *Jane Eyre*'s mythical status; the adult Jane is introduced as she walks into close-up through an atmospherically-lit graveyard, to the sound of swelling (somewhat melodramatic) music.

Nevertheless, Zeffirelli further explores the nuances in characterisation evident in Aymes's, Craft's and Mann's earlier productions, often presenting rich visualisations of Jane and Rochester. Whereas Craft, for instance, creates Jane's interiority through inner monologues (often as Rochester is speaking), to an extent Zeffirelli infuses external events and imagery with psychological resonance. As in Young's 1997 version, Jane's experience in the Red Room becomes part of the opening credits (as with the 'madwoman in the attic', the fact that both of these adaptations focus on this moment reinforces its place in the 'Brontë Myth'). Arguably, such prominence accords Jane's own feelings (as opposed to exterior shots of Gateshead) pivotal status, framing and directing the film's narrative.

During her conversation with Rochester about their future, for example, Gainsbourg's Jane does not proclaim that Ireland is a long way from Edward specifically. Such taciturnity lends her portrayal both a powerful interiority and control (and, as will be seen, prefigures Ruth Wilson's Jane). It is arguable that – in contrast to Brontë's narrative (and other screen versions) – Jane's evasion of her attachment to Rochester at this point figures her in conventionally patriarchal terms, as she 'angelically' silences forbidden feelings for a man. Crucially, however, Gainsbourg's Jane allows Rochester to kiss her *prior* to her discovery that he is not as 'good as married' to Blanche. Her feelings thus assume

‘ascendancy’ as she privileges them over social mores; likewise, despite the quiet restraint that characterises Gainsbourg’s performance, she kisses Rochester as acceptance of his proposal (perhaps a visualisation of Jane’s famously autonomous assertion, ‘Reader, I married him’ (*JE*, 442)).

At the same time, Gainsbourg’s Jane seems to gain ‘more colour and more flesh’ (*JE*, 151) through her absence from Rochester. Although she hears his despairing plea – ‘Jane – Jane – Jane’ – she does not immediately go to him; similarly, St. John is transformed by Whitmore into a boyishly comic figure, his simplified characterisation facilitating Jane’s growing assurance. Jane’s time away from Thornfield increases both her social standing (she is granted her inheritance in Zeffirelli’s version) and, seemingly, her self-worth; as in Aymes’s adaptation, she commences dressing herself richly and fashionably, heightened by the low-angled camera at her return to Thornfield.

Samantha Morton’s performance in Young’s film (written by Kay Mellor) offers a particularly nuanced exploration of Jane, her characterisation arguably the most feminist of all the adaptations. More than its predecessors, Young’s film harnesses dynamic camerawork – as in Barker’s *Wildfell Hall* – as an embodiment of the flux and tension which drives Jane’s and Rochester’s relationship in Brontë’s novel. As Lisa Hopkins has argued, the screenplay is infused with a striking cinematography (again, like *Wildfell Hall* and later adaptations such as Davies’s *Bleak House*), visualising Brontë’s division between fire and ice through a symbolic juxtaposition of red and blue colours.<sup>331</sup> In its marked sexual undertones and visual energy, Young’s direction and Mellor’s screenplay perhaps provide the most overt frames of reference for the 2006 adaptation of *Jane Eyre*.

Young’s feminist preoccupations are established immediately in his portrait of the child Jane. As in Zeffirelli’s adaptation, the titles are intercut with disorientating images of Jane being taken to the Red Room; as with the film’s later visual connections between Jane and Bertha, the concept of female imprisonment is placed at the centre of the adaptation’s narrative. To a greater extent than the 1996 production, Young’s Red Room sequence attempts to imbue Jane with the interiority of Brontë’s novel, in which the source of Jane’s terror seems to come from within herself:

I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. [...] the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit (*JE*, 14).

In Young's film, the camera is thus fixed upon close-ups of Jane's face, her image (as opposed to external effects) remaining the focal point of the scene.

Set against Jane's psychological vulnerability, however, is an overt independence which is illustrated through her interactions with Brocklehurst. The interesting dynamics in Young's initial confrontation between prospective pupil and master are shared by Zeffirelli's film. Through high and low-angled shots, other adaptations (including Welch's) depict Jane and Brocklehurst as diminished and domineering respectively. By contrast, Zeffirelli asserts Jane; whilst Brocklehurst sits, Jane stands, her viewpoint diminishing *him* as she looks down. Placed in medium long shot, he is distanced from both the viewer and Jane, whose feelings seemingly infuse the camera's perspective; despite their finery, the camera angles make Brocklehurst look down at the Reed children, rather than Jane. Likewise, in Young's film, Jane directs the scene, ending her interview with the schoolmaster on her own accord.

Throughout the film, the camera revolves around Rochester and Jane, defining them as the narrative's core. Generally, however, the camera privileges Jane through low-angled shots which heighten her 'little' stature. During her first exchange with Rochester at Thornfield, for instance, she is shown looking down at her 'master' (whilst, driven by the production's strongly feminist stance, Jane does not change into a finer dress at Mrs Fairfax's behest, Rochester's presence seemingly not deemed significant enough). In contrast to Stevenson's film, in which Jane is lost in a shadowed background as she plays the piano (to Rochester's derision), Morton is positioned in the foreground of Young's equivalent scene; Edward is instead diminished through medium long-shot. Echoing Bruce's performance in 1934, Morton's Jane constantly dominates Rochester, both verbally and visually. At Rochester's ambivalent comment that she is 'a rare breed', for example, she reworks his words into 'a compliment', whilst the camera frequently rests on her face at the close of conversations.

This is coupled with an interesting exploration of the female gaze, which frames not only the presentation of Ciaràn Hinds's Rochester but enriches the presence of the other female characters. Edward is often shot from Jane's perspective, perhaps most notably as she stands high above on a balcony. As will be seen, Welch's screenplay includes similar moments, during which Jane and, implicitly, the female audience gaze at Rochester. Arguably, however, Young's film offers a more complex visualisation of the dynamic between Jane and Edward. Although Rochester provides the visual focus, Jane again looks *down* at him; with the camera positioned behind Jane's shoulder, she is both in the frame and seemingly directing the shot's perspective.

This heightened image of Jane on the balcony then connects visually to Bertha, as it cuts to an exterior shot of Thornfield's Tower (as will be seen with Welch's adaptation, the film thus plays upon viewer/reader expectations). This motif of linking female characters is extended into a more subtle relationship between Jane and Blanche than is offered by earlier adaptations (which yet again prefigures Welch's screenplay). In Young's film, Blanche is presented by Jane in voiceover; 'everything about her was elegant, sophisticated'. Blanche is subjected to Jane's jealous gaze, underlined by a desire to conform to patriarchal imaging of womanhood. Young's film therefore visualises the complex tension between conventional ideology and the drive towards autonomy that defines Jane in Brontë's novel; even in her retrospective narrative – secure in the knowledge of Rochester's love – Jane remains haunted by the 'rosy cheeks' (*JE*, 98) of Rosamond Oliver and the grandeur of Blanche Ingram, both women 'competitors' for the regard of her two suitors (Edward and St. John):

I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked. And why had I these aspirations and these regrets? It would be difficult to say: I could not then distinctly say it to myself; yet I had a reason, and a logical, natural reason, too (*JE*, 98).

Equally, however, it is intimated that Young's Blanche feels threatened by Jane, again part of a feminist drive to psychologise and privilege the novel's women. Jane has a much closer relationship with Sophie, for instance, lending the 'lesser' female characters greater stature. As the adaptation makes clear,

Bertha and Jane are not the only females open to re-reading. In contrast to Joan Plowright's stereotypically kind matron in Zeffirelli's film, Gemma Jones's Mrs Fairfax is imbued with the irascibility normally associated with Rochester, the actress retaining some of Mrs Dashwood's troubled aura from Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995). At the same time, Young's film emphasises a community of women at Thornfield, which alienates and undercuts Rochester. At Jane's return from Gateshead, for example, she runs and embraces Mrs Fairfax and Adèle, who proclaim that it has been 'boring here without you'. The camera then focuses upon a crestfallen Rochester, isolated and excluded from Jane (and the other women he supposedly 'masters').

The nuances of Young's and Mellor's visualisation of Rochester indeed enrich the film as a whole. Although Mellor's modernisation of the dialogue between Jane and Edward has been criticised, it arguably holds a gendered significance which, like Brontë's novel, tests patriarchal conventions. Hinds's Rochester stumbles nervously over his lines, proclaiming to Jane 'I know this may sound silly...I feel I'm, sort of, attached to you'. In Rochester's uncertain expressiveness, Mellor challenges, like Brontë, narrative and language as a masculine domain. Equally, in contrast to Welles's 'caricature', Hinds's character is cultured and learned – Adèle maintains that Jane speaks French 'as good as Mr Rochester' – whilst an emotional vulnerability is discernible beneath his (self-consciously) melodramatic exclamations to Jane that he is 'so tiresome you wish to leave me already'.

This sensitivity aligns itself with Stoneman's notion that 'the point of the narrative for women readers is not the final marriage, with its loss of independence for the heroine, but the transformation of the hero into a softer, more feminised companion'.<sup>332</sup> This is shared by William Hurt's performance in Zeffirelli's film, his quiet introspection mirroring that of Gainsbourg's Jane. Jane and the viewer are offered an early introduction to Rochester, in which his character is filtered through Mrs Fairfax's sympathies; his presence is both psychologised and framed by a compassionate understanding of his past. Jane explores Rochester's study, subjecting his picture to her gaze, as Mrs Fairfax relates the 'barbarous' treatment inflicted upon him by his father and brother; revealingly, however, Edward keeps their portraits dutifully upon the wall, whilst he is relegated to a miniature.

In Zeffirelli's film, Rochester's otherwise softened character is complicated by Bertha's reaction to him; she consciously decides to commit suicide, her only word a direct challenge to Rochester's paternalism as she rejects his attempt to save her. Nevertheless, as Mrs Fairfax maintains, Rochester is 'not a happy man', the mirrors in his library shown aptly in prominent shot. As in Mann's film, Edward is granted the psychological reflection usually associated with the heroine, assuming – like Jane and Charlotte Brontë herself – a scathing aversion to his physical self, as he attempts to destroy a sketch in which Jane has caught his likeness 'utterly'.

However, as seen in the earlier adaptations, feminist visualisations of *Jane Eyre* become complicated and undermined through idealised notions of romance. This is perhaps particularly marked in Young's film. As Hinds's Rochester exclaims 'would you throw convention to the wind to achieve happiness? Tell me what you think', Jane's internal monologue – 'only that I loved his face, his eyes, his mouth, his voice' – dilutes the mental equality between herself and her 'master', and instead reconfigures the narrative as a typical love story in which Rochester is central.<sup>333</sup> Indeed, Rochester's first appearance in Young's film marks him as a somewhat mythologised figure. Although Jane proclaims 'I felt sure there must be more to life than this', this feminist current is undermined by the 'fairytale' image of Rochester as a knight on horseback, as he gallops through the mist. As in Mann's version, Mesrour's hoof-beats seemingly emulate the pounding of Jane's heart, yet, in contrast to York's control, the scene is imaged as a threat in Young's adaptation; Jane is diminished, crouching, subjected to the penetrating glare of a heightened Rochester.

To an extent, inconsistencies in the presentation of Rochester are extended into the portrayal of Jane. Arguably, this characterises the novel, as Brontë engages with the tension between conformity and autonomy, and perhaps most particularly with psychologically-divisive notions of female physicality and identity. Although Morton's Jane proclaims 'I am not a beauty. I am Jane Eyre. And I have everything I want right here', she still yearns for conventional femininity, fingering the elaborate French lace rather than upholding her command for plain attire. Crucially, rather than regarding her wedding-clothes as 'wraith-like', Morton's Jane moves towards her reflection in awe, proclaiming



‘is that me?’ Whilst this dilutes the complexity of the novel, in which Jane’s perceptions of herself as a bride intimate her fear of sexuality and marriage, it also unsettles the film’s feminist preoccupations; Jane’s struggle for self-affirmation is resolved through wish-fulfilment, as she realises her transformation into an image of normative femininity.

In many ways, Morton’s divide between individualism and convention symbolises the tensions in adapting *Jane Eyre*, the story simultaneously open to, and yet resistant against, interpretation and retelling. Welch’s 2006 version is coloured by this phenomenon, as it simultaneously raises exciting and interesting issues whilst calling into question the very trends in contemporary adaptation which characterise it.

Firstly, Welch’s *Jane Eyre* is problematised by the unique stature of Brontë’s novel; ‘is there any viewer over the age of ten who doesn’t know the dark secret locked away upstairs? The real danger at Thornfield is not pyromania but parody. One false move and a scene becomes a sketch’.<sup>334</sup> Secondly, linked to these author-specific difficulties is the confused nature of Welch’s adaptation as a period drama, both in terms of its style and its popular and critical reception. On the one hand, it follows the trend, noted in the Introduction, in which costume dramas are promoted through ‘modern’ popular music, for example. The BBC trailers were accompanied by the contemporary strains of a lone female voice, whilst the lure of Jane’s ‘love’, ‘passion’ and ‘jealousy’, together with the ‘fear’ and ‘fury’ of Thornfield, was accentuated by dynamic, rapid editing. Traditional notions of ‘Brontëan’ were thus incorporated *and* reassessed. Furthermore, despite Anthony’s condemnation of Toby Stephens, who played the male lead as ‘a purple shade of black’, with ‘a face-full of gestures that stopped just short of a theatrical wink’, the performativity of his Rochester arguably reflects consciously upon the mythical status of Brontë’s Byronic hero, and his place in screen history.<sup>335</sup>

Nevertheless, despite perceptive understandings of the potential schism between novel, adaptation and myth – ‘take [the dramatisation] for what it is, not what you want it to be’ – there remains a conflicting movement towards ‘tradition’.<sup>336</sup> As will be discussed, Welch’s screenplay ends controversially within a floral frame; although the adaptation’s opening sequence channels the

viewer boldly out of Brontë's Gateshead and into Jane's exotic imaginings, it closes within a convention dating back to the earliest films. Arguably, *Jane Eyre* thus frames Thomas's *Cranford*, the problematic implications of which have been examined in Chapter Two.

It is clear that Welch attempts to balance *Jane Eyre*'s 'classic' status with a dynamic re-exploration of both the literary text and costume drama. In a striking divergence from Brontë's narrative, Welch's opening sequence conceives the young Jane in a desert intense with vibrant colour and light. The scene holds a multifaceted symbolic resonance, resulting in a portrait which both stems from, and reworks, issues that are apparent in Brontë's novel.<sup>337</sup> Welch's scene points to Jane's actual isolation (as an unwanted orphan at Gateshead, she is physically distanced and separated from the other members of the Reed household), whilst visualising her psychological alienation; diminished into a fragile and lonely figure through the use of long shot, the image becomes an emotional, as well as literal, desert.

However, extreme close-ups of Jane's face, the richness of the lighting (with its telling focus upon reds), together with the sensuality of her dress and the film's score, illuminate Jane's interiority; aptly, she has escaped Gateshead's deprivations through her imagination. The attempt to privilege Jane's identity is compounded as the camera focuses upon her eyes as a means of transporting the viewer back to the present at Gateshead, where, revealingly, she is seen regarding herself in the mirror. Forced back to reality by the threatening approach of her cousins, she must also confront the troubling existence of her own self-awareness.<sup>338</sup>

Welch's visualisation of the Red Room, however, is somewhat problematic. On the one hand, the sequence recalls Zeffirelli's and Young's films, Jane's flight and struggle heightened by disorientating camera angles and rapid movement, whilst the zooms into close-up enable a duality of perspective. Aunt Reed's domineering presence is accentuated by the looming low-angled shot, as her disconcertingly disembodied voice, reverberating throughout the household – 'Take her to the Red Room' – compounds her threatening rule over Gateshead. At the same time, Mrs Reed's person is distorted, the image

seemingly infused with Jane's troubled reaction to her aunt; her power is both magnified and mocked.

Nonetheless, as has been noted, much of the terror that Jane faces in the Red Room stems from within herself. Rather than focusing upon the fear initiated by Jane's inner reflections and her disjointed selfhood, Welch's scene arguably becomes overwhelmed by external 'special' effects. In contrast to Aymes's adaptation, for instance, Jane's confrontation at the mirror is omitted, whilst the intensity of the red lighting loses the subtlety seen in Barker's and Young's use of the same device in *Wildfell Hall* and *Jane Eyre* (Aymes's Thornfield is also quietly, yet effectively, infused with red paints and fabrics). Diminished through high-angled medium long-shot, with her face hidden, the exaggeratedly Gothic stylisation of the Red Room becomes a visual display which is imposed upon, rather than engendered by, Jane. Welch's adaptation, at times, is thus unsettled by a conflict between self-reflexivity and parody.

However, the overt use of contemporary camera, lighting and sound effects does, at times, work positively. Through low camera angles and rapid shots, the threatening distortion of a Lowood schoolmistress's face and body illustrates Jane's vulnerability and disorientation (as in the earlier scene with Aunt Reed), recalling also Esther's visions of Miss Barbary in Davies's *Bleak House*; such developments in film technique arguably enable a more powerful visualisation of Jane's plight than the traditional use of camera angles to simply heighten or diminish a character's physical stature. Jane's flashbacks at Thornfield, for instance, are particularly interesting. During Lady Ingram's condemnation of governesses, Jane is troubled by a sudden recollection of her aunt's similar avowals of her insignificance. Stylistic effects again lead to the deformation of Aunt Reed's face and voice; such distortion illustrates both the fact that it is a childhood memory and the painful impression that it continues to hold within the adult Jane's consciousness.

Similarly, the narrative structure of Episode Four heightens Jane's interiority through the retrospective revelation of her interactions with Rochester after the interrupted wedding. Parallels can here be drawn between Welch's and Mellor's screenplays. In Mellor's version, Jane's painful encounters with Blanche, and her internalisation of her divergence from normative femininity, are visualised through the use of flashback. The camera pans around the empty

ballroom to the echo of Rochester's command that she attend 'every evening'. Seen reading a book (binding her to her alienation at Gateshead), Jane's solitude is interrupted by her memory of Blanche's singing, whilst the flashback shows her drawing her rival's portrait; as in the novel, narration becomes, to a degree, an act of self-negation. The scene is configured as Jane's memory, granting her interiority and positing her as the directive of the camera's perspective, yet she is also externalised and isolated in the image. Arguably, Young's film thereby aligns itself with Campbell's reading of Brontë's novel, in which 'Jane's homodiegetic [...] narration includes within the story episodes of [...] her own intuited, symbolised heterodiegetic relation to the narrative', forming a 'middle space [...] in which observer and creator are mingled and distinguished, and the self itself is both observed and created by the controlling narrative consciousness of Jane'.<sup>339</sup>

Welch's screenplay likewise manipulates retrospective narration as a means of psychologising Jane. As in the novel, Jane's relationship with St. John is underpinned by her constant awareness of Rochester. Flashbacks which progressively relate her last moments with her 'master' heighten Jane's inner anguish and struggle with her cousin, whilst they are also juxtaposed with other scenes in order to intensify emotional resonance. Following Jane's passionate plea to St. John – 'you have the chance to love someone who loves you with all her soul. Not many people are that lucky' – the screenplay cuts to Jane's avowal to Rochester that she 'must leave Thornfield', for example. Whereas St. John is as 'inexorable as death' in resisting Rosamond, Jane's struggle to relinquish Rochester is accentuated by the contrast between the two scenes. Similarly, the image of Jane and Rochester kissing is powerfully underlined by the sound of Jane, in the 'present' of the adaptation, crying; from the deep reds and soft lighting of Thornfield, the viewer is forced to the stark colour and light of Jane's room at Moor House, where she lies on a poignantly lonely bed.

Ruth Wilson's Jane offers an interesting and, at times, powerful, portrait of Brontë's heroine. Although some viewers castigated her rather taciturn performance, it draws upon the evasiveness and repression that underlies her identity and her relationship with the reader. Indeed, Rochester notes that she is 'grave and quiet' even 'at the mouth of hell', whilst his observation that Jane is silent on much that the heart experiences – "it is not your forte to talk of

yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves” (JE, 135) – points to her tendency to suppress her most painful fears from the reader. Moreover, Wilson’s performance, whilst holding a textual basis, is also informed by a filmic legacy; in contrast to Fontaine’s more passive silence, Zelah Clarke and Charlotte Gainsbourg in particular prefigure Wilson’s stillness.

Most significantly, Welch’s depiction of Jane and Rochester’s relationship is often sensitive to the ‘equality’ of spirit that connects them in the novel:

I feel akin to him, - I understand the language of his countenance and movements; though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him (JE, 175).

As discussed, this can be difficult to perceive in some film versions; Welles ‘masters’ Fontaine, whilst he ‘possesses’ Stevenson’s film, both in terms of his overpowering screen presence and in his prominence in trailers. However, foreshadowed by the spirited tone which marks the equality between Clarke and Dalton in Aymes’s version, Jane and Rochester’s shared interests are often well-developed in Welch’s adaptation, deepened through flashback. In the final episode, for example, the feelings that bind Jane to Rochester during her stay at Moor House are visualised by the appearance of an insect familiar to her at Thornfield. The flashback to Thornfield thus locates the moment within *Jane’s* memory (not simply the viewer’s), and becomes a potent symbol of her relationship with Rochester.

In many ways, however, Welch seemingly relies upon pre-assumed knowledge of *Jane Eyre*. The production attempts to stress the importance of Helen Burns, for example. However, little time is given to the development of Helen or her relationship with Jane; the depth of feeling that Jane accords her has to be informed by the viewer’s prior understanding of the novel or, indeed, its adaptations. In Welch’s serialisation, the adult Jane’s mournful look at Helen’s grave, and the memory of her friend’s example as she herself faces death, are therefore unjustified on screen as they have not been fully grounded by the portrayal of Lowood.<sup>340</sup>

Instead, whilst the screenplay was hailed as an ‘original’ dramatisation of Brontë’s text, the production often draws on previous adaptations and traditional ‘Brontëan’ images.<sup>341</sup> The first shot of Thornfield manipulates the viewer’s expectations that there is a ‘madwoman in the attic’, for example, whilst also reinforcing Stevenson’s Gothic legacy. Jane is informed that a lantern always burns in the Tower; although the adaptation follows Aymes’s and Zeffirelli’s ‘domestication’ of Thornfield, the initial image is conventionally ‘Wellesian’, as the camera focuses upon an intense light that dominates a dark and stormy fortress. Similarly, a red scarf flying from the Tower becomes a recurring motif (included in the trailers), holding significance on a number of levels. In line with postcolonial and feminist discourse, Bertha’s passion and desire for freedom is embodied in such shots (whilst she is also connected visually to Jane in her red necktie), yet they also conform to expectations of Gothic mystery. Indeed, rather than engaging in dialogue and re-visualisation, certain aspects of Welch’s version seem somewhat recycled. Stephens’s Rochester, for instance, is seen galloping away from Thornfield, the image shot from the Tower. The sequence is strikingly similar to a scene in Zeffirelli’s production, whilst Wilson, like Morton in Young’s film, glances frequently at the turret.

At the same time, in Welch’s attempts to ‘challenge’ and rewrite previous adaptations, she focuses on elements which often become somewhat contradictory. Welch attempts to ground her screenplay within the historical context of the Victorian period, for instance. The guests at Rochester’s gathering consequently discuss matters which were topical in the mid-nineteenth century (and which hold a relevance to *Jane Eyre*); the supernatural, the social position of children and the notion of ‘bad blood’ all feature in their conversation. Eshon’s commentary upon the migratory habits of wild birds, although illustrative of the Victorians’ interest in natural history and scientific discovery, nevertheless becomes problematic. Rochester’s remark following Jane’s return from Gateshead – ‘our bird has come home’ – rather ironically configures Jane as the ‘caged bird’ that she has no wish to be.

Indeed, gender remains problematic. The BBC’s casting of the male and female leads in *Jane Eyre* and, in particular, Welch’s focus upon the sexual attraction between Rochester and Jane, become both interesting and troubling. On the one hand, Welch, like Sandra Gilbert, recognises that Brontë’s and Jane’s

‘project throughout the novel will be not (as most critics have thought) to eradicate but to accommodate and decriminalise [Jane’s] fiery and desirous animal self’.<sup>342</sup> On the other hand, however, it is arguable that the explicitness of Welch’s screenplay both undermines the complexity of Brontë’s novel and aspects of the adaptation itself, altering vital nuances within the characterisation of Jane in particular.

Welch’s adaptation is again prefigured by Young’s film, in which a positive, energised view of Jane’s physicality is presented. Like Ehle’s Lizzy, Morton is often seen running, the image of Blanche’s equestrianism matched by Jane’s athleticism as she sprints into close-up (somewhat symbolically, a red curtain hangs in the background). Prefiguring Welch’s screenplay, Hinds’s interactions with Morton are also overtly tactile, placing her hand on his breast as he explains his emotional attachment to her.

However, Welch ultimately distorts vital points in her assumption of Jane’s overt physical responses to Rochester’s advances. Certainly, Brontë’s prose is marked by a striking focus upon physicality:

I used to rush into strange dreams at night [...], I still again and again met Mr Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him – the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire (*JE*, 366-367).

Nevertheless, in the novel, the divide between the soul and the body is crucial:

He crossed the floor and seized my arm, and grasped my waist. He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless [...] – mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety (*JE*, 317); I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart’s core (*JE*, 298).

Not only is Jane’s resistance an important aspect of her desire for autonomy (as Gilbert notes, Bertha, Blanche, Celine and even Adèle render female sexuality questionable), but her personal vulnerability with regard to her physical being is also fundamental.<sup>343</sup> Although Welch’s Jane regards herself disparagingly in the

mirror, she often seems somewhat confident of her physical attractiveness; whereas Brontë's Jane revealingly describes her wedding clothes as wraith-like, Welch's Jane (like Young's) smilingly looks at herself as a bride as Sophie proclaims 'vous êtes très belle, madame'. Welch thus adheres to the 'fairytale' image of Jane Eyre seen in the idealised, ringletted heroine of Cabanne's film, rather than the 'plain truth'. In Welch's adaptation, Jane's girlishly exuberant response to Rochester's handshake after the fire likewise simplifies the complexity of both the novel and certain other adaptations. Although inconsistencies in Young's film have been noted, Morton's portrayal of this scene is instead more nuanced, as she collapses in a shadowed corner whilst uncertainty and vulnerability haunt her face. Like Morton, Gainsbourg's Jane lies silently in a darkened room, visualising her complex emotional engagement with Rochester. Vitally, she is injured as she extinguishes the flames, her bleeding hand symbolically complicating her physical contact with Rochester and conventional emblems of romance: 'the roses had thorns'.

Welch's Jane instead becomes somewhat contradictory, as Rochester is often asserted as the romantic lead. In the novel, Rochester is subjected to the 'female gaze', as Jane scrutinises – and often critiques – her 'master':

I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognised his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils denoting, I thought, cholera; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw (*JE*, 119-120).

By contrast, Welch's Jane is occasionally undermined. As has been examined in relation to Austen and Gaskell, although there are attempts to screen the 'female gaze' of the novel, such moments often remain problematic and are tied to the complex privileging of male leads that recurs throughout costume drama.

Welch's *North and South* here becomes an important intertext, as *Jane Eyre* repeats a device used in the earlier adaptation. Margaret explores Thornton's office prior to her first meeting with him, just as Jane examines Rochester's study (in this, Welch's screenplay also engages in an intertextual dialogue with Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre*, as mentioned earlier). In both of Welch's adaptations, however, the subjection of the male to the female's scrutiny



becomes somewhat tense. Margaret is made vulnerable by her intrusion into the industrial space ‘mastered’ by Thornton. He is, as such, able to assert his dominating presence over her plea that he reforms his behaviour towards his workers: “Get that *woman* out of here!” (my italics). Similarly, the caged birds and butterflies, trophies of Rochester’s travels, ironically confine Jane through their intimation of her master’s contrasting freedom and male hegemony. Although Jane observes Rochester from her window, he is imaged in terms that privilege him; pacing his land, he is assertive and commanding.

Certainly, the focus placed upon male leads arguably privileges the gaze of an implicitly female audience, an agenda which seemingly informed the intentions of the (female) director; as Susanna White maintained, “I hope Toby will have ‘the Colin Firth Effect’. [...] I hope he’ll be a huge heart-throb. When he’s in those riding boots, that’s a great look”.<sup>344</sup> As examined in Chapter Two, however, Welch again unsettles the ‘original’ elements of her screenplay by a conventionalisation of the ‘hero’. Rather than imbuing *Jane Eyre* with a feminist drive, aligning the empowered gaze of the female audience with that of Jane, at times Welch’s characterisation recalls the domineering ‘caricature’ of Welles’s Rochester.

As discussed, the narrative of Young’s film, although problematic at times, often deflates Rochester’s position as master, part of the adaptation’s attempt to negotiate Jane’s ambiguous exultation of her ‘master’. Crucially, Hinds undermines himself through his self-conscious performativity – ‘I – the master of the house – had to learn from Mrs Fairfax that you were due home today’ – a trait which both psychologises him and, in its intimations of his own vulnerability, connects him emotionally and mentally with Jane. At Jane’s return to Thornfield, for instance, Hinds’s Rochester is seen sitting on a wall, his heightened stature complicated by the boyishness of his pose and by Jane’s (and the viewer’s) amused perception that he has been searching for signs of her arrival. Complaining that he has received no letter, the camera remains on Jane’s face; as in earlier scenes, both the film and Rochester literally revolve around her.

Welch’s Rochester is, instead, in many ways an attempt to repeat the success of Armitage’s Thornton. Brontë describes Thornfield specifically as unromantic, whilst Rochester is an unconventional romantic interest; crucially,

‘most people’ would think him ‘an ugly man’ (*JE*, 132). However, Stephens’s Rochester is, like Armitage’s Thornton, handsome, aggressive and irascible, undercutting his psychological complexity. In contrast to his rough treatment of Adèle in Welch’s adaptation, for example, Brontë accords him a subtler characterisation: ‘he had great, dark eyes, and very fine eyes, too; not without a certain change in their depths sometimes, which, if it was not softness, reminded you, at least, of that feeling’ (*JE*, 130). Although Stephens’s portrayal of Rochester is certainly intricate and refreshing at times, the boundary between nuanced performativity and melodrama is, occasionally, uneasily blurred.

Welch’s treatment of Bertha becomes similarly problematic. On the one hand, she visualises Bertha according to feminist and postcolonial theory, portraying ‘the other side’ that Rhys illuminates in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.<sup>345</sup> In contrast to Brontë’s ‘clothed hyena’ (*JE*, 293), Welch consciously envisages the incarcerated Bertha as beautiful and sensuous; as in Rhys’s novel, her humanity – and therefore her sanity – is, to an extent, asserted. Welch’s adaptation is the only production to clothe Bertha fully and alluringly, for example; shown performing her toilette, she graciously ‘invites’ the wedding party into her domain. As in Cabanne’s film, Rochester’s attempt at polygamy is highlighted and condemned by the racially and socially silenced female.

It is, as such, arguable that Bertha ‘possesses’ Welch’s adaptation, just as *Wide Sargasso Sea* is engaged in a symbiotic, yet challenging, dialogue with Brontë’s novel; interestingly, the BBC screened a new adaptation of Rhys’s novel alongside *Jane Eyre*.<sup>346</sup> As noted, the first direct shot of Thornfield focuses upon the light in Bertha’s tower, whilst Rochester’s wife is also privileged through ‘her’ musical score (which is harmonious and sensual, as opposed to the harsh and disturbing sound effects that characterise earlier portrayals, such as the deep-voiced, hissing figure of Young’s film). Welch similarly psychologises Bertha in the fire scenes at Thornfield. The camera follows her through claustrophobic and threatening shadows, almost as if the final scene from *Wide Sargasso Sea* is being filmed; the desecration of Thornfield is retold not simply by the old retainer, but from the perspective of the traditionally silenced woman. Interestingly, it is Jane’s wedding dress that Bertha ignites; the candle that Bertha carries in *Wide Sargasso Sea* ‘to light [her]

along the dark passage' (WSS, 156) becomes translated into a potent symbol of her imprisonment, frustrated desires and oppressed humanity.

On the other hand, however, it is significant that Welch presents Bertha as overtly physical. Although her reading of *Jane Eyre* is shaped by an aspiration to make it more 'passionate' than previous adaptations, highlighting the tensions and paradoxes of gender ideology, Welch's focus upon Bertha's sexuality in many ways aligns her screenplay with conventional Victorian discourses upon the 'savage', and with medical theories which equated female sexual passion with madness and illness.

Such conflicts are to be traced in earlier, post-Rhysian attempts to humanise and complicate Bertha. In Mann's film, for instance, Bertha is privileged through close-ups, whilst, interestingly, her garret still retains a double bed. However, in her loose-fitting chemise, accentuating her bodily movement, and her desire to stroke Rochester's face, she is positioned both within a feminist appreciation of female physicality and a Victorian alignment of sexuality with sickness. Similarly, in Young's film, Bertha's presentation is driven by a feministic reassertion of her autonomy, which challenges Rochester's hegemony: 'Bertha – it's Edward'; 'Who?' Nevertheless, Bertha subsequently offers her body to her husband; although this arguably highlights notions of gendered slavery, it again remains significant that Mellor focuses upon Bertha's sexuality as a manifestation of her 'madness'.

In Welch's adaptation, Bertha is not simply visualised as the puppet of her male relatives, an enticing – yet ultimately innocent – snare to Rochester's fortune. She is instead depicted as proactively engaged in the pursuit of sexual pleasure which is branded as excessive and condemnatory by the patriarchal framework within which such scenes are placed. Their wedding ceremony is therefore tainted by Bertha's overt desire as they stand at the altar; rather than asserting and condoning female passion, the scene instead undercuts Bertha and privileges Rochester. The context of the church – a traditionally patriarchal institution – articulates female sexuality as forbidden, diabolical and therefore punishable, as Bertha violates the 'purity' of her wedding vows and the sanctity of her surroundings. Similarly, the scene in which Rochester sees Bertha with another man cuts to his attempts to restrain his increasingly violent and unstable wife. Tellingly, it is Bertha's physicality which is carried through as the focus of

both scenes, her enslavement to her body, and consequent ‘madness’, sealing her marriage.

Whilst Welch’s destruction of Thornfield invokes *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester’s flashbacks to his marriage are thus located firmly within patriarchal self-assurance. Crucially, such inconsistency complicates Welch’s screenplay as a whole. As Bertha’s sexuality is ultimately presented negatively, it becomes somewhat ironic that Welch, in her attempt to make her adaptation ‘original’, chooses to highlight this element in Jane and Rochester’s relationship; *Jane’s* passion and desire is thus rendered questionable.

Welch’s *Jane Eyre* embodies the complexities inherent in contemporary costume drama. On the one hand, her adaptation in many ways reworks previous screen versions of *Jane Eyre*, revitalising perceptions of both Brontë’s novel (together with the notion of ‘Brontëan’) and costume drama. As A. Gill maintains, the adaptation is ‘a wonderfully reconceived and re-energised production, beautifully stylised, with a pared-down look and beautifully bleak lighting’.<sup>347</sup> Equally, however, dialogue and character development, for example, are overwhelmed at times by a focus upon stylistic presentation, as the *image* of the production becomes vital; as discussed in relation to Austen and Gaskell, costume dramas ‘need’ to be seen as ‘contemporary’, not least in promotion campaigns. Coupled with this is the pull between tradition and innovation, examined throughout this thesis, yet intensified by deeply-held emotive responses towards Brontë’s novel and the long legacy of adapting *Jane Eyre*.

Confusion and contradiction are thus to be found at the very conclusion of Welch’s adaptation. Whilst it is generally characterised by its contemporary style, the final shot of the Rochester family – neat, ordered and noticeably not in the seclusion and wildness of Ferndean – is decidedly dated. The characters – and the story – become contained and conventionalised through the imposition of a floral frame; ultimately, like adaptations before it, Welch evokes ‘fairytale Eyre’, rather than ‘fresh Eyre’.<sup>348</sup>

## *Wuthering Heights*

It is an unsettling of the enduringly-prevalent ‘Brontë Myth’ which forms the heart of Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights*, however, reassessing and contemporising a novel ‘undimmed [...] by the dust of time’.<sup>349</sup> More than Charlotte and Anne, Emily has assumed a mythical stature, due in large part to the perception of an intricate and symbiotic relationship with her poetry, a single surviving novel, Charlotte’s appraisal, and the fascination with her life (as opposed to her writing) propagated from the Victorian period onwards. At the same time, *Wuthering Heights* is one of Britain’s most admired novels. However, as Stoneman maintains, ‘*Wuthering Heights* has always demanded [...] a reading, which raises more questions than it answers’.<sup>350</sup> Indeed, the novel itself places a self-reflexive emphasis upon its intangibility – ‘I’ll give you a feeling of how I feel’ (*WH*, 119) – predicting the emotive fascination which it engenders; aptly, ‘Edgar, as multitudes [...] will be ever after, was infatuated’ (*WH*, 129) with Catherine. Certainly, the presence of Lockwood, placed in ‘the situation of the looker-on’ (*WH*, 60), intimates the compelling quality of the narrative, thereby anticipating the enduring hold of *Wuthering Heights* as a story and as a myth: ‘I felt incapable of moving from the hearth, and I was very far from nodding’ (*WH*, 102).

There exists, however, a somewhat tense dialogue between the novel’s ‘canonicity’ and its enduring popularity, as the focus placed upon its ‘literariness’ propagates the mythology that surrounds common perceptions of ‘*Wuthering Heights*’ and ‘Emily Brontë’. Both author and literary text are frequently defined by hyperbolic praise of their ‘greatness’; whilst novel and writer are seemingly privileged, the wider ‘Brontë Phenomenon’ is implicitly highlighted, as the text is construed as the inexplicable genius of a moorland mystic. For example, like Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Cecil’s interpretation of Catherine and Heathcliff as ‘Children of Storm’ has both forged, and become in itself, a myth; Cecil’s lyrical laudation of Brontë’s story creates an extra-textual legend which competes with the ‘prominence’ of the literary narrative.<sup>351</sup>

In many ways, *Wuthering Heights*'s confirmed canonicity, together with its notorious elusiveness (Wyler, for instance, saw the novel as 'impossibly diffuse'), creates a difficult relationship between literary text and film.<sup>352</sup> Arguably, *Jane Eyre* is more 'adaptable' than *Wuthering Heights* due to its openness to reader identification (especially amongst women). Charlotte's narrative perhaps lacks the intimidating (and alienating) ambiguity of Emily's 'dark tale darkly told', the seeming accessibility of Jane's first-person voice perceived as more attractive than the 'strange production', 'hewn in a wild workshop', with 'its storm-heated and electrical atmosphere' shadowed by 'horror'.<sup>353</sup> As Stoneman concludes, 'critics feel freer [...] to be familiar [...] with *Jane Eyre* than with *Wuthering Heights*'.<sup>354</sup>

Whereas the ubiquity of *Jane Eyre* adaptations arguably renders the text as 'malleable' and 'known' in the popular imagination, in some ways, reproducing and re-creating *Wuthering Heights* reinforces its impenetrability; its elusive literary force is further mythologised by the notorious difficulties faced by screenwriters and directors. Nevertheless, despite the seeming conflicts between *Wuthering Heights* and the screen, the novel is, like *Jane Eyre*, indelibly associated with adaptation and 'popular culture'. Indeed, Giedroyc's 2009 production is to be followed, in 2010, by another version, directed by Peter Webber, adapted by Olivia Hetreed, and starring Gemma Arterton as Catherine (popular through her role in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (BBC, 2008)).

Nevertheless, once *Wuthering Heights* is visualised, it is problematised, as the ambiguities of the novel are forced into definition. Indeed, as Haire-Sargeant argues, Peter Hammond's and Dick Coles's *Wuthering Heights* 'fails' precisely due to the fact that it attempts to be 'truly faithful' to Brontë's novel.<sup>355</sup> The complex relationship between Brontë's Heathcliff and Catherine, for instance, is based upon a myriad of memories, childhood and a ghostly spirituality which confuses notions that *Wuthering Heights* is purely a 'love story' in a conventionally physical sense. Indeed, Catherine herself ironises 'romance', declaring her attachment to Edgar in deprecatingly self-conscious terms: "'I love the ground under his feet [...]. There now!'"<sup>356</sup> The 'romantic heroine' thus rejects her role, her subsequent revelations pointing instead to a more complex dialogue between social mores and individual inclination, physical

feeling and spiritual intangibility, pain and pleasure: “It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now”, though

he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire (*WH*, 121).

As Jacobs notes, ‘the book focuses less on the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff than on the ways in which that relationship and others are distorted by the power structure of the characters’ world’.<sup>357</sup> Indeed, part of the novel’s ambiguous force lies in the fact that Heathcliff and Catherine are never (except for Catherine’s diary) presented directly, but are instead coloured by Nelly’s perceptions and Lockwood’s frame.

Moreover, as Geoffrey Wagner argues, ‘nothing erotic exists between Catherine and Heathcliff, who are brought up as brother and sister’.<sup>358</sup> Significantly, Heathcliff shows little male interest in Cathy during moments of ‘passion’ in the novel. Although he covers her ‘with frantic caresses’ (*WH*, 195) on her deathbed, for example, he seemingly recoils from her bodily presence: ‘he could hardly bear, for downright agony, to look into her face!’ (*WH*, 194). Catherine is similarly caught in a conflict between physical and spiritual identity. She directs her anger against the physical form of Heathcliff, cherishing instead the intangible essence of a man that she possesses within herself (“that is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet, and take him with me – he’s in my soul”) (*WH*, 196)), and restlessly fighting against her own bodily cage: “the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison...I’m tired, tired of being enclosed here” (*WH*, 196). Catherine remains in opposition to her womanhood, and is evasive at the thought of desire; Linton tellingly appeals to his wife that “it is impossible for you to be my friend and his” (*WH*, 156), as she abruptly silences him in his references to her ‘intimacy’ with Heathcliff.

The love that exists between Heathcliff and Catherine is thus fired by spiritual, rather than bodily, emotions, locked in a perpetual childhood; Ellen does indeed refer to them constantly as children and *friends*. Romantic love is instead construed as deadly: “No – don’t kiss me. It takes my breath” (*WH*, 269). Tellingly, Catherine dies in childbirth and is “flung...into the middle of

the heath” (WH, 121) as a ghostly little girl; she achieves her wish to be ““a girl again, half-savage and hardy and free”” (WH, 163). Significantly, the absence of sexuality also manifests itself in the second generation, complicating notions that Hareton and Cathy ‘resolve’ (and arguably conventionalise) the tensions and ambiguities of the first. Despite her seemingly romantic attachment to her cousin (and eventual husband), Cathy proclaims ““pretty Linton! I wish you were my brother”” (WH, 271). Likewise, the final union of Cathy and Hareton recalls the Hindley/Catherine relationship, as ‘Cathy Earnshaw’ is reincarnated; described as childlike, Cathy and Hareton are figured physically as brother and sister.

By contrast, developing Heathcliff and Catherine’s iconic embrace on Wyler’s Penistone Crag, Robert Fuest and David Skynner explicitly sexualise the adult couple’s feelings and actions in the 1970 and 1998 films (indeed, a focus upon physical attraction is apparent throughout Wyler’s film; Catherine proclaims, as a girl, that Heathcliff is ‘handsome’, thereby sexualising their childlike relations).<sup>359</sup> In Fuest’s film, for instance, little attention is given to Heathcliff and Catherine as children, focusing instead upon their adult relations; in contrast to Catherine’s aversion to physicality in the novel, for example, she recognises Ellen’s implicit desire for Hindley in the screenplay: ‘Nelly, you look very nice’. Although Catherine and Heathcliff’s feelings are expressed initially by childlike caresses, the film manipulates popular expectations of passionate love (drawn both from the mythology of *Wuthering Heights* and costume drama romance); an ‘innocent’ kiss on the forehead is preceded by a movement towards a passionate embrace, foregrounding the later physicality of the couple’s relations.

In a similar vein, the producers of Kosminsky’s adaptation, in their awareness of the ‘female gaze’ of their targeted audience, implicitly shape Heathcliff as a costume drama ‘romantic lead’, and direct responses towards him accordingly. As Ken Green comments, ‘because we felt that women were an important part of the audience we made two decisions – firstly to make the character of Heathcliff and [...] Ralph Fiennes [...] central to the campaign and secondly, when it came to putting the trailer together, we would use a woman’s voice’.<sup>360</sup> As Stoneman recognises, ‘Heathcliff has come to represent a certain kind of romantic hero’, occupying a complex place in the popular imagination as readers and viewers are both compelled and horrified by him.<sup>361</sup> In promotions



of Kosminsky's film, however, he is presented more simplistically. Although posters feature Heathcliff's face as demonically inflamed by red lighting, trailers soften his character; whilst he proclaims 'I'm a villain' in voiceover, the image of his dark figure, alienated through long-shot, is tempered by moorland splendour and subsequent scenes which visualise his 'curse', as he is beaten and spurned.<sup>362</sup>

By contrast, the novel resists such a directed, definite view of Heathcliff. Indeed, the other characters' constant questioning of Heathcliff (a tendency shared by Charlotte Brontë) highlights the fact that he cannot be categorised; "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (*WH*, 173). Attempts at definition attest instead to his inexplicability, as language struggles to portray him; he is "a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being" (*WH*, 188), and "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation" (*WH*, 141). Heathcliff himself exposes and dismantles preconceptions which establish him as conventionally romantic, again part of the novel's metafictionality. As he exclaims of Isabella, she is "under a delusion", "picturing in me a hero of romance"; "I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character" (*WH*, 187). As Catherine warns her sister-in-law, "don't imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior!"; as "rough as a saw edge, and hard as whinstone" (*WH*, 76), "he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" (*WH*, 141).

Certainly, Brontë's narrative focuses upon Heathcliff's body, yet his animalised 'sharp cannibal teeth' (*WH*, 212), as he 'gnashed [...], and foamed' (*WH*, 197), equate physicality and sexuality with 'diabolical violence' (*WH*, 302). Indeed, just as Jane Eyre conceives Rochester as an 'ugly' man, Cathy likewise undermines Heathcliff and points to Brontë's literary reworking of romantic fiction; as an "incarnate goblin" (*WH*, 208), "nobody loves [Heathcliff]" (*WH*, 319).

The (perceived) attractiveness of particularly Timothy Dalton and Tom Hardy is thus refuted by the novel, and stems instead from Laurence Olivier's gentlemanly legacy (a notable exception is Hutchinson's Heathcliff, whose haggard face is presented in disconcerting close-up).<sup>363</sup> Ultimately, the novel itself challenges Heathcliff's prominence, undermining his mythical hold on the

popular imagination just as it attests to his persistent power; as Isabella exclaims, “I would that he could be blotted out of creation, and out of my memory” (*WH*, 209).

The problematic determinacy of screen adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* extends similarly to the issue of genre. Whilst Brontë’s novel is perceived commonly as a love story, it is also often regarded as a straightforwardly Gothic ghost tale. Although Skynner’s dramatisation to some extent manipulates tendencies to shape *Wuthering Heights* according to a certain style, such difficulties are again discernible in promotions of Kosminsky’s film. Significantly, the trailer asserts that, ‘for the first time’, the ‘full story’ will be told; despite emphasising that it is *Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights*, it is implied that the adaptation possesses omniscient, definitive knowledge of author and literary text, thereby completing the process of storytelling and consolidating the identity of *Wuthering Heights*. A series of explanations are imposed upon the novel (and the film), tellingly set against a highly stylised, Gothic image of the stormy Heights: as the trailer proclaims, ‘it is a love story’; ‘it was Cathy’s choice and Heathcliff’s curse’; ‘it was a passion...an obsession...a love that destroyed everyone it touched’.<sup>364</sup>

However, integral to *Wuthering Heights* is the narrative’s complex reworking of genre, as Brontë’s tale of ‘domestic storm’ (*WH*, 149) is infused with Gothic undertones which are consciously both enforced and refuted by the ‘ordinariness’ of language and incidence; much of the novel’s power derives from the (albeit ironic) assertion that the Heights “‘are the same as anywhere else, when you get to know us”’ (*WH*, 103). Just as Catherine is a ‘double character’ (*WH*, 107), the narrative is chameleon-like in its shifts of tone and multiplicity of effect. With disarming detachment, Ellen rewrites the domestic narrative, for instance, blurring the boundaries between home and brutality: ‘I went to hide little Hareton, and to take the shot out of the master’s fowling piece’ (*WH*, 113); Hindley is instead ‘caught in the act of stowing his son away in the kitchen cupboard’ (*WH*, 114). Likewise, in her desperation, Isabella seemingly becomes complicit in the desecration of the Heights, noting complacently that “‘I knocked over Hareton, who was hanging a litter of puppies from a chair-back in the doorway; and, blessed as a soul escaped from purgatory, I bounded, leaped, and flew down the steep road”’ (*WH*, 181). Indeed, the Heights’ infectious

corruption, emblematised by the Lintons' feverish deaths, literally breaks the narrative, as the gap in Ellen's story-telling is caused by Lockwood's similar illness.

At the same time, Brontë's dark humour is part of her reworking of the Gothic, as Ellen's wry comments enforce a tension between 'horror' and 'realism': "I don't like the carving knife, Mr Hindley [...], it has been cutting red herrings – I'd rather not". [...] He held the knife in his hand, and pushed its point between my teeth: but, for my part, I was never much afraid of his vagaries. I spat out, and affirmed it tasted detestably – I would not take it on any account' (WH, 114). Such pragmatism underpins the novel's metafictionality, complicating *Wuthering Heights*'s identity as a haunting Gothic tale ("we're dismal enough without conjuring up ghosts, and visions to perplex us" (WH, 120)), or a romance of conventional passion; "a fine bundle of trash [...] – Why, it's good enough to be printed" (WH, 260).

As Wagner maintains, however, 'each new film version of *Wuthering Heights* inherits [Wyler's] idea that it is a great love story'.<sup>365</sup> Certainly, like Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*, Wyler's film has been subjected to a mythologising which detracts from the film's nuances. In many ways, Wyler's film *itself* engages in, and examines, the process of myth-making; certain scenes reveal a filmic manipulation of showing, just as the novel engages in a complex exploration of telling. In their fashioning of Penistone Crag as a 'castle', for instance, it is arguable that Heathcliff and Catherine self-consciously perform 'fairytale' love. Just as costume drama (and more specifically 'the past') is often perceived as a form of escape, Heathcliff and Catherine seek to reject the 'reality' of their world, and look to storytelling instead. As in the novel, this creates tension, often disenabling idyllic love; like Ellen's steadying common sense, 'romantic' scenes are, at times, shadowed in Wyler's film.

Nevertheless, Wyler's imaging of Penistone Crag as the lovers' 'castle' has instead become both an iconic emblem of *Wuthering Heights* and of the notion of 'Brontëan'; Fuest's film, for instance, depicts Catherine and Heathcliff in a similar rocky retreat (as Margaret Homans argues, 'there are [...] very few scenes in the novel that are actually set out-of-doors'; 'Cathy and Heathcliff [...] are never presented on the moors, together or apart').<sup>366</sup> Despite the fact that Heathcliff is "a source of little visible delight" (WH, 122) to Catherine, most

screen versions of *Wuthering Heights* visualise their ‘scamper’ upon the moors; extending their childish pleasure into adulthood, their playfulness points to a physicality underlined by sexual attraction.

Giedroyc’s production is concerted in its reassessment of the intertwining of *Wuthering Heights* and the ‘Brontë Myth’. Fundamentally, as screenwriter Peter Bowker comments, ‘How do you go about adapting the greatest love story in literature? Well, firstly by acknowledging that it isn’t a love story’.<sup>367</sup> As in *Sparkhouse* (Sally Wainwright’s 2002 ‘remake’ of *Wuthering Heights*), the ‘romance’ between Cathy and Heathcliff is therefore questioned and unsettled. Giedroyc’s opening sequence, for instance, is driven by Heathcliff’s memory of Cathy. However, images of the couple are accompanied by disturbing sound effects; love is not idealised, even in reminiscence. This is again embodied by a highly intricate scene in which Catherine Linton is transformed, through Heathcliff’s gaze, into her mother Cathy Earnshaw, as she stands at a window looking down at him. Significantly, Heathcliff’s memory of her is an unhappy one (as shown later in the production), marked by emotional and social tension; indeed, the repetition of the scene only consolidates this, creating an imprisoning circularity. The troubling undercurrents of their adult relationship are then exchanged for a happier image of Cathy as a girl. Replacing rain with sunshine, the move exacts an affirmation of childhood which recurs throughout the adaptation.

Vitaly, however, nuanced visual devices are manipulated in this sequence, again complicating Heathcliff and Cathy’s bond. The gradual close-up of Heathcliff’s face, intercut with images of Cathy, associate the pair indelibly; although Earnshaw’s voiceover announces him as ‘an orphan’, his identity is shaped and framed by Cathy. At the same time, the alternately closing and retracting camera emulates the alienation between the characters. As Heathcliff first remembers the girl Cathy, the camera moves *away* from her, yet, equally, closes in on him; visually, they are both drawn together and distanced. This double bind is then compounded through sound effects, as the noise of the rain ceases in the images of Heathcliff – a subtle difference which, like Brontë’s narrative structure, accentuates the fact that past and present divide them.

Brontë's complex depiction of love is interrogated through the adaptation's self-conscious exposure of romantic convention. The sardonic humour of Tom Hardy's Heathcliff, for instance, ironises romantic attachment: 'Well, I take it from this touching scene that you [Linton] have made your offer of marriage and young Miss Linton is expressing some misgiving' (as the cousins fight). Recalling the melodrama of Toby Stephens's Rochester, Heathcliff intimates instead the performativity of romance. His biting riposte to Cathy – 'If you think that I can be consoled by sweet words, then you are an idiot' – is followed by his deliberate assumption of the ingratiating tone of a conventional lover: 'I will ask you again – "Is Miss Isabella at home?"' Such self-reflexivity is consolidated by recurring references to *Ivanhoe*, which shadow Scott's love story through association with division and death. Passed through the generations, the novel becomes emblematic of emotional ties, but also of the pain and tension which splits the characters; first given to Heathcliff by Cathy following his dismissal to the stables, the memory of the book later prompts his suicide.

Indeed, Heathcliff parodies Cathy's constant use of the phrase 'my love', her complacency somewhat diluting its meaning and once more testing the romantic attachment between them. As in *Sparkhouse*, idealisation is resisted, reconfiguring at the same time certain elements of the 'Brontë Myth'. Giedroyc's Cathy, for instance, attempts to reconcile herself with Heathcliff: 'I know you – and I love you'. His reply, however – 'Come away with me then as we planned – there – the pause that betrays you' – highlights the emotional and class tensions which underline their interactions. Although Cathy exclaims 'I'm as trapped as you are', Heathcliff's comment – 'except your cage is more gilded than mine' – places the couple within a societal framework; contrary to legend, they are not idyllically and ethereally isolated lovers.

Their transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by a 'scamper' on the moors (as in Skynner's version), for example, yet Bowker and Giedroyc refuse to mythologise such scenes. Instead, both the landscape and Heathcliff and Cathy's relationship with it are framed by social parameters. Although they run away from the Heights towards moorland freedom, Nelly's warning – 'Don't get into trouble, or I shall have the magistrate onto you' – defies the lawlessness associated with Brontë's story (indeed, Heathcliff later reminds Cathy that

‘they’ll hang us’ if caught trespassing at the Grange). Significantly, as Heathcliff and Cathy retreat into the distance, the camera does not follow, a recurring motif which again opposes the traditional iconography of *Wuthering Heights* (exerting at the same time a fidelity to the novel’s absence of outdoor scenes). The focus is instead upon Nelly’s concerned face, making visible her interruptions of Cathy’s ‘nonsense’ in Brontë’s narrative, and, as the sequence is concluded by her return to the Heights, drawing the viewer back into an *interior* space. Indeed, Heathcliff and Cathy are first shown as sharing a particular bond when, as children, they sit reading in Earnshaw’s library, their imaginative and intellectual escape reworking Wyler’s fairytale moorland castle.

As adults, landscape scenes are similarly re-configured and unromanticised. Crucially, they are often shot in areas where man has encroached upon, and tamed, the natural world. A close-up of Heathcliff and Cathy by a river, for instance, shows a bridge in the background, challenging their concentrated intimacy. Likewise, Heathcliff himself is often depicted working outdoors, imprinting humanity onto nature as he builds walls and picks stones from the river (shadowing his earlier liaison with Cathy on its banks). Just as he literally imprisons the countryside into regulated, fenced areas, Heathcliff’s toil highlights his bondage to Hindley; in this sense, his being on the moors is in no way an escape, a fact compounded by the doleful music which often unsettles glorious landscape shots. Indeed, Cathy and Heathcliff’s first screen excursion as adults takes them to a busy Fair rather than to the seclusion of Penistone Crag privileged by Wyler, Fuest and Skynner, or the rocky outcrop of Kosminsky’s film. Once again, insinuations of Heathcliff’s gypsy heritage, denigrating him within social and class hierarchies, cloud Cathy’s fairytale notion that he ‘began in here – I dreamed [him] up’. Although Cathy exclaims that he is ‘fit for a prince in disguise’, Heathcliff maintains his ‘wretched beginnings’; ‘it’s like a badge I’ll always have to wear’.

Like critical reassessments which re-define Haworth’s isolation, the visual and thematic nuances of Bowker’s screenplay therefore re-negotiate the ‘Brontë Myth’; the Fair and Nelly’s visit to a bustling Gimmerton place the story constantly within the wider community, defying the configuration of *Wuthering Heights* as a moorland idyll. This is embodied by Heathcliff and Cathy’s final meeting at Penistone Crag. Cathy struggles to the Crag, calling ‘Heathcliff!

Heathcliff!'. Although they are reunited during a conventionally Gothic storm, careful editing complicates the sequence, resisting the idealisation of Wylers Castle (and indeed it is this encounter with Heathcliff which accelerates Cathy's death). Instead, the myth is established consciously, only for it to be deconstructed.

Did I come home?; Yes, you're home, you're home;  
We will wander these moors for all eternity; I could  
soon as forget you as my own existence; There's no  
Edgar, there's no Hindley. It's just you and I.

Their intimacy, however, is intercut with images of Edgar's search party. Heathcliff's assurances are finally interrupted by Edgar's shouts, reclaiming the couple to their wider ties. Just as their earlier lovemaking is followed by Francis's death (a cataclysmic upheaval which exacts change and division), Cathy and Heathcliff never remain in untouchable seclusion.

This reworking of 'romance' is furthered by an accentuation of the disquieting elements of Brontë's story; as Bowker's Cathy exclaims of Heathcliff, 'I sometimes think your true passion is hate rather than love'. The night before Catherine and Linton's marriage, Heathcliff recovers Cathy's body, for example. His desperate yearning – 'Close now, I'm close now, my love' – is intercut with, and tested by, Nelly's interpretation of their relationship. As the camera revolves through the shroud-like veils in Cathy's room at the Heights, connecting Catherine and Nelly with the grave-side scene, Heathcliff's popular reputation as a romantic hero is unsettled: 'Can it be true, Nelly, that my mother loved this monster?' The foregrounding of Catherine's (and Nelly's) plight, incarcerated at the Heights, instead throws into relief the twisted nature of Heathcliff and Cathy's bond; their love bears fruition in the disturbingly forced union of Catherine and Linton.

Although Nelly maintains that 'they were childhood sweethearts. Nothing more', Bowker and Giedroyc sustain the power of Heathcliff and Cathy's feeling (his passion leads him to exhumation), yet it becomes troubling. The myth is instead deepened and developed, illuminating Heathcliff's psychosis to a greater extent than previous adaptations, and manipulating viewer expectations to shocking effect. As Heathcliff uncovers Cathy, half of her

untouched body is revealed initially; the audience is aligned with Heathcliff's perspective, unquestioned through romantic anticipation. In striking contrast to other screen versions of *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy's rotting skeleton is then shown explicitly. Tellingly, Heathcliff continues to see her intact, a vision of beauty which overrides reality, as he lies with her pleading 'Oh, my love... Come home – please, just come home'. The camera pulls into overhead medium shot, distancing the viewer from the 'lovers', just as the reader is separated from Cathy and Heathcliff through the mediatory, yet forever uneasy, perspectives of Lockwood and Nelly.

As in Emily Brontë's 'wild weird writing', *Wuthering Heights* is thus asserted primarily as a dark, disconcerting tale.<sup>368</sup> Indeed, Bowker's first direct image of Heathcliff and Cathy together is that of their reunion in the coffin. The implicit physicality, as they lie intertwined, forms part of a recurrent shadowing of sexuality in Bowker's screenplay; although reviewers condemned Cathy and Heathcliff's explicitly physical relationship as 'overheated', such scenes provide a nuanced commentary upon the interplay between the bodily and the brutal evident in the novel, and finally affirm their rootedness in childhood.<sup>369</sup> This is embodied by the first scene of romantically physical contact between the couple. Cathy kisses Heathcliff hesitantly, before breaking away. Significantly, however, the sequence cuts immediately to Earnshaw's demise; sexuality is equated with death (both Francis and Cathy die in childbirth), whilst Heathcliff's cry – 'Our father is dead!' – complicates the couple by figuring them as brother and sister. Later, Cathy and Heathcliff's passionate embrace on Penistone Crag is disquieted by the focus upon his bloody, scarred back, their lovemaking darkened further by Francis's death in the next scene.

The physicality of their relationship is therefore re-registered as pain; during Cathy's sojourn at the Grange, Heathcliff beats Edgar's dog and smashes his head against a stone. Andrew Davies's use of physical activity as a means of expressing male desire (seen in Darcy's fencing and Ferrars' wood-cutting) is thus reconfigured to powerful effect. Cathy and Edgar's marriage is similarly construed as a union of pain and passion, culminating in a physical encounter which troubles and disturbs. Catching the performativity of social nicety, Heathcliff announces politely that 'the female heart can feel a certain and most irresistible attraction towards the most unlikely of men. Wouldn't you



agree...Edgar?’ The romantic idealisation of Edgar’s reply – ‘I know what my own heart tells me’ – is undercut, however, as the sequence moves to his aggressive consummation of his marriage (mirroring Heathcliff in Skynner’s depiction of his wedding night).

The merging of love and pain is extended to Cathy herself, as her feelings for Heathcliff manifest in a frenzied self-beating; Nelly’s act of slapping and then embracing her only compounds the double bind. For much of the first episode it is Hindley who exhibits most violence, his desire to ‘dash [Hareton’s] brains out’ accentuating once more the brutality of love, as his mourning for Francis draws him into a destructive decline. Heathcliff indeed becomes almost of parody of him, highlighting the parallels between the characters often lost in screen versions (Heathcliff collapses with Hindley after he attempts to murder him, for instance; both ruined, their heads rest together). At the same time, Bowker harnesses the idea of Heathcliff as romantically attractive in order to psychologise him. Manipulating the image of the Byronic hero, Nelly pushes him to the mirror, announcing ‘Now, don’t you think yourself rather handsome? [...]. When you come back – see if you don’t make all the ladies swoon’. However, just as Heathcliff commands ‘Don’t look at me’ as he consummates his marriage to Isabella, his protestation as he gazes at his reflection intimates both his vulnerability and his aversion to his adult self.

As in *Sparkhouse*, the darkening of Cathy and Heathcliff’s sexuality ultimately affirms their childhood relations; it is to this past which both characters seek to return. This is often implied through recurring emblems which link past and present. Cathy continues to wear the same red cap into adulthood, for instance, whilst her girlhood locket becomes a frequent motif. Heathcliff is shown on the stormy moors, alienated through long shot whilst Cathy remains indoors preparing to receive Edgar. Despite the divisiveness of class and personal change, it is her locket with which she chooses to adorn herself. She remains rooted within her youth and the day at the Fair with Heathcliff; tellingly, it is this necklace which she clutches on her wedding night with Edgar.

Likewise, Heathcliff announces his return through a child-messenger, who invokes Cathy’s memories of the past. As the boy looks in through the Grange window at her wedding-breakfast, the scene is shot implicitly from Heathcliff’s perspective; drawn outside through reminiscence, Cathy is thus

recalled to her childish exploits as she stands at the threshold of marriage and womanhood. This resistance to their adult selves is epitomised by their proclamation in Church, as they announce ‘we cannot escape each other’; ‘let’s run away’, and kiss passionately before the Altar. Interrupted by Joseph, his chiding shouts and their ensuing flight transform them back into children, a reversion which is consolidated by their removal to the Grange : ‘remember how we used to come here and taunt the Lintons?’ Their running away constitutes an escape only to the past, preventing the burgeoning of an adult relationship and, with it, a conventional love story.

Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights* forms a vital landmark in both adaptations of Emily Brontë’s novel and in the ‘Brontë Myth’. Moreover, as will be discussed more fully in the Conclusion, the production has been fundamental in the development of costume drama as a genre. Perhaps more than Welch’s *Jane Eyre*, Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights* responds intricately and self-consciously to the pervasiveness of the ‘Brontë Myth’ and period drama, offering a dynamic reworking of both. Unusually, the adaptation’s final shot, for example, shows Heathcliff and Cathy within the interior space of Wuthering Heights, thereby resisting the moorland legend and consolidating its movement towards reinterpretation.

At the same time, however, the production received mixed reviews, perhaps highlighting once more the myth of impenetrability which surrounds *Wuthering Heights*. As one critic maintained, the adaptation, ‘as a reflection of Brontë’s novel, [...] was still too much like televisual *York Notes*’.<sup>370</sup> Such comments expose both the expectation that *Wuthering Heights* ought to offer something ‘special’ and a hierarchy between novel and screen which privileges the literary and derides the adaptation as reductionist. Although it is clear that ITV’s *Wuthering Heights* is a highly nuanced production, like Welch’s *Jane Eyre* it embodies simultaneously the possibilities and the tensions which underline recent classic-novel adaptations.

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<sup>265</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Letter to Robert Southey (29<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1836), as cited in Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001) 1.

<sup>266</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Macmillan, 1988) xix.

<sup>267</sup> Miller 59; 79; 80; 57. Miller overlooks the extent to which *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* has, in fact, mythologised Gaskell. In many ways, in attempting to demythologise the Brontës, Miller presents ‘Mrs Gaskell’ according to the idealised vision of patriarchal critics such as Stanton Whitfield, construing her writing as a ‘feminine nosegay’ due to the domestic focus of *The Life*. As Chapter Two demonstrates, Gaskell’s life and works can be read as much more complexly subversive. Indeed, this can be perceived in the biography itself. As Miller herself notes, Gaskell’s drive to ‘domesticate’ Charlotte’s life and works rewrote the conventions of biographical writing (61–62); as in her novels’ ‘knowing and not knowing’, there is arguably a quietly intricate dialogue between the ‘feminine’ as conservative and subversive in Gaskell’s biographical approach.

<sup>268</sup> Carol Bock, “‘Our Plays’: The Brontë Juvenilia,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 34–52. 39.

<sup>269</sup> Patsy Stoneman, “The Brontë Myth,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 214–241. 214.

<sup>270</sup> Barbara Schaff, “The Strange After-Lives of *Jane Eyre*,” *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*, ed. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Shartmann (New York: Rodopi, 2007) 25–38. 31.

<sup>271</sup> Heather Glen, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 1–12. 1.

<sup>272</sup> Stoneman (2004) 232.

<sup>273</sup> Miller 155.

<sup>274</sup> Stoneman (2004) 223; 233.

<sup>275</sup> Martin Wainwright, “Emily Brontë Hits the Heights in Poll to Find Greatest Love Story,” *The Guardian* (10/08/07). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/aug/10/books.booksnews%2031/03/09>. Accessed 31/03/09.

<sup>276</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale UP, 2000).

<sup>277</sup> *Radio Times* (23/09/06).

<sup>278</sup> Miller 107; 104.

<sup>279</sup> Glen 1.

<sup>280</sup> David Lodge, *Nice Work* (London: Penguin, 1988) 202.

<sup>281</sup> Miller 157.

<sup>282</sup> *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, dir. Mike Barker, adapt. David Nokes (BBC, 1996).

<sup>283</sup> Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 192; 201; 190.

<sup>284</sup> The same argument can be applied to the now iconic Granada production of *Brideshead Visited* (1981), which for many has come to epitomise British ‘Classic’ costume drama. Like Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, the adaptation has itself become part of period drama nostalgia. However, the serial also challenges the conventions of the ‘heritage’ film. Rather than simply displaying the grandeur of the English country house and landscape, shots of Brideshead are often shadowed, obscured or distanced through extreme long shot, rendering a much more complex presentation of ‘heritage’. Although Waugh’s novel itself engages in this intricate examination of ‘nostalgia’, it is interesting that the visual nuances of the series have been overwhelmed by the popular ‘myth’ of *Brideshead* as the archetypal (‘traditional’) classic-novel adaptation.

<sup>285</sup> Cardwell 191.

<sup>286</sup> Cardwell 200–201. The variations in DVD and video packaging become interesting in this respect. Some editions present seemingly ‘feminist’ photographs; Helen is shown as visually ‘equal’ to, or dominating, Markham and Huntingdon, or as a writer at work (albeit in shadow). Others, however, depict ‘nostalgic’ and romanticised images of Helen and Arthur during their wedding; the flowers, costumes and privileging of the male lead in the foreground are all reminiscent of ‘traditional’ images of Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice* and, inextricably linked to this, ‘classic’ period drama romance.

<sup>287</sup> Cardwell 191.

<sup>288</sup> Cardwell 203.

- <sup>289</sup> Simon Hoggart, *Spectator* (23/11/96) 66; Alkarim Jivani, *Time Out* (13/11/96) 175; *Time Out* (20/11/96) 191.
- <sup>290</sup> *Daily Mail* (06/12/96).
- <sup>291</sup> Sean Day-Lewis, *Country Life* (05/12/96) 118; Aleks Sierz, "Angel or Sister? Writing and Screening the Heroine of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Sisterhoods: Across the Literature/Media Divide*, ed. Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto, 1998) 16-31. 24.
- <sup>292</sup> Sierz 16.
- <sup>293</sup> Elizabeth Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 1.
- <sup>294</sup> Eagleton 136; 134. The diminishment of Anne occurs similarly in popular accounts of the family. In Glyn Hughes's fictional 'biography', for example, she is sometimes overlooked. Indeed, the novel's title – *Brontë* – seems to refer most specifically to Charlotte, testament to her prominence in creating and representing the 'Brontë myth'. Glyn Hughes, *Brontë: A Novel* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1996).
- <sup>295</sup> Ellen Nussey and Branwell posed similarly reductionist views of the youngest Brontë; whereas Nussey, in July 1833, reminisced fondly of 'Anne, dear, gentle Anne', presenting her in conventionally feminine, 'angelic' terms, Branwell, in 1834, derided his sister as 'nothing, absolutely nothing...next door to an idiot'. As cited in Langland 10; 7.
- <sup>296</sup> Cardwell 199.
- <sup>297</sup> Mona Caird, "Marriage" (1888), as cited in Ian Ward, "The Case of Helen Huntingdon," *Criticism* 49: 2 (2007): 151-182. <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-183043375/case-helen-huntingdon-critical.html>. Accessed 25/05/10.
- <sup>298</sup> N. Jacobs, "Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *The Brontës*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Pearson, 2003) 216-233. 217.
- <sup>299</sup> Jacobs 217.
- <sup>300</sup> Charles Kingsley, *Fraser's Magazine* (1848), as cited in Tess O'Toole, "Siblings and Suitors in the Narrative Architecture of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *The Brontës*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Pearson, 2003) 234-251. 235.
- <sup>301</sup> Eagleton 122.
- <sup>302</sup> Jacobs 219-220.
- <sup>303</sup> Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. Stevie Davies (London: Penguin Classics, 1996) 40. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- <sup>304</sup> Indeed, as *Sharpe's London Magazine* (1848) expostulated, 'we will *not* believe that any woman would have written such a work' of 'disgustingly truthful minuteness'. As cited in Jacobs 219.
- <sup>305</sup> In her Prayer Book, Anne famously noted that she was 'sick of mankind and their disgusting ways'. As cited in Stevie Davies, "Introduction," *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996) vii.
- <sup>306</sup> Davies xii.
- <sup>307</sup> Eagleton 122.
- <sup>308</sup> Robert Southey, Letter to Charlotte Brontë (12<sup>th</sup> March 1837), *Selected Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 10.
- <sup>309</sup> Eagleton 133.
- <sup>310</sup> Davies xi.
- <sup>311</sup> O'Toole 243.
- <sup>312</sup> The positioning of the characters within certain shots provides many of the adaptation's nuances. After Helen watches Huntingdon consort with Annabella, husband and wife are shown reflected in a mirror (notably the same one in which Helen regards herself as she decides to 'take [her] child and go'). Significantly, Huntingdon is placed in the foreground, the image making clear that Helen belongs to, and is dominated by, her husband. Partially obscured, Helen is distanced and alienated both from Huntingdon and from herself.
- <sup>313</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Routledge, 1996) 18.
- <sup>314</sup> Cardwell 195.
- <sup>315</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/about.shtml>. Accessed 01/04/09.
- <sup>316</sup> One viewer compared Welch's screenplay not to the novel, but to prior films: 'Being perhaps the biggest fan in the universe of the Zelah Clarke and Timothy Dalton BBC version, I have to say that not one adaptation has come close to its excellence – until now [with Welch]'. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/yourreviews\\_episode3.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/yourreviews_episode3.shtml). Accessed 03/04/09.

<sup>317</sup> Whitmore's and Welch's screenplays show the child Jane transformed into a woman as she gazes at Helen Burns's grave.

<sup>318</sup> A link can be made between Bruce's portrayal of Jane and Katharine Hepburn's performances in stage versions of Brontë's novel during the 1930s. As Patsy Stoneman comments, Hepburn offered a similarly 'tough' heroine. Patsy Stoneman, "'Less of gall and wormwood': *Jane Eyre* and Zeffirelli," *Jane Eyre*, ed. Frederic Regard and Augustin Trappenard (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008). 129-136. 133. By contrast, Stevenson's version unintellectualises Jane. Very little is seen of Jane instructing Adèle; when she is teaching mathematics, however, she is interrupted by Adèle talking about Rochester, who later throws Jane's books across the screen as he takes her to be dressed up like a 'parterre'.

<sup>319</sup> Practically, the dilemmas faced by screenwriters adapting the first-person are highlighted by Stevenson's *Jane Eyre*. The opening of Stevenson's film depicts the words 'My name is Jane Eyre'. Although this seemingly upholds literary fidelity by privileging Jane's direct voice, Brontë's narrative has clearly been rewritten to fit the adaptation, whilst the shadows inadvertently cast over the image by the camera frame point ironically to the often uneasy relationship between page and screen.

<sup>320</sup> Hugh Whitmore, Production Notes (1996), as cited in Stoneman (2008) 132.

<sup>321</sup> Patsy Stoneman, *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights* (London: Harvester, 1996) 204. Susanna White, in an interview for the DVD Extras for *Jane Eyre* (2006), stressed that while Ruth Wilson was chosen for her ability to seem plain at times, it was imperative for Stephens/Rochester to be 'gorgeous'.

<sup>322</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* (26/11/83), as cited in Stoneman (1996) 199.

<sup>323</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Film/7518/Zelah/Zelah.htm>. Accessed 01/08/07.

<sup>324</sup> Perhaps the most interesting visualisation of the meeting between Jane and Rochester, and the balance of 'power' at this point, occurs in Zeffirelli's production. Jane literally fells Rochester, as his transfixed gaze undermines his control of his horse; Jane is located as the firm centre of the narrative here, as she is foregrounded by the shot and by Rochester's backward glance.

<sup>325</sup> Katharine Ellen Zimolzak, "'Mere Shadows of Human Forms': Intersections of Body and Adaptation Theories in Six Screen Versions of *Jane Eyre*," (MA Thesis: U of Missouri, 2008) 48. For a detailed analysis of Welles's Rochester, see Gardner Campbell, "The Presence of Orson Welles in Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1944)," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 31: 1 (2003): 2-9.

<sup>326</sup> Joan Fontaine, *No Bed of Roses* (New York: William Morrow, 1978) 172, as cited in Zimolzak 16.

<sup>327</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 259. All subsequent references are to this edition; the phrase 'la plus belle Jane Eyre de tous les temps' adorned posters and DVD covers relating to Zeffirelli's film.

<sup>328</sup> Zimolzak 17.

<sup>329</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18, as cited in Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997) 3.

<sup>330</sup> Kate Ellis and E. Ann Kaplan, "Feminism in Brontë's Novel and its Film Versions," *The English Novel and the Movies*, ed. Michael Klein and Gillian Parker (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981) 83-94. 93.

<sup>331</sup> Lisa Hopkins, "The Red and the Blue: *Jane Eyre* in the Nineties," *Classics in Film and Fiction*, ed. D. Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, H. Kaye, I. Whelehan (London: Pluto, 2000) 54-69.

<sup>332</sup> Stoneman (2004) 233.

<sup>333</sup> Admittedly, as in the novel, Jane expresses an unconventional, even subversive, awareness of (and interest in) Rochester's masculine physicality. However, what is perhaps of greater significance is the production's conformity to romantic convention.

<sup>334</sup> Andrew Anthony, "'Reader, I had not intended to love it...'," *The Observer* (01/10/06). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2006/oct/01/features.review7>. Accessed 01/04/09.

Anthony's headline embodies the adaptability of *Jane Eyre*, its openness to reworking reinforced by the ubiquitous nature of Brontë's life and works as cultural commodities; both Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre* are immediately recognisable, and, as such, seemingly malleable. Moreover, a viewer on the BBC website absorbed Gilbert and Gubar's landmark study into her comment, noting the "'madwoman in the attic' moment' in Welch's screenplay. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/yourreviews\\_episode3.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/yourreviews_episode3.shtml). Accessed 03/04/09.

<sup>335</sup> Anthony <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2006/oct/01/features.review7>. Accessed 01/04/09.

<sup>336</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/yourreviews\\_episode3.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/janeeyre/yourreviews_episode3.shtml). Accessed 03/04/09.

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<sup>337</sup> A link may also be made between Welch's opening scene and the conclusion of Davies's *Wives and Daughters* (BBC, 1999). Both adaptations widen the traditional visual scope of costume drama through their desert locations, in addition to asserting feminist overtones through their positioning of females as explorers and travellers.

<sup>338</sup> Indeed, the connection between the child and adult Jane is recognised. The production's trailers include repeated pronouncements of Jane's name, not only by Brocklehurst and Rochester, but by the child and adult Jane. An extreme close-up of the adult Jane's eyes zooms out to reveal her full face, to the reverberation of her childhood voice exclaiming 'Jane Eyre, Jane Eyre, Jane Eyre'; child and adult are both distinguished between and merged together in the assertion of identity.

<sup>339</sup> Campbell 4.

<sup>340</sup> Admittedly, several scenes between Helen and Jane were omitted from the final cut; they are included, however, in the BBC DVD Extras.

<sup>341</sup> Certainly, this complex engagement with myth and convention is to be found in other adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. In Young's film, for instance, the soundtrack to the opening Red Room sequence is seemingly infused with the sounds of Rochester falling from his horse and Bertha's screams. Although this arguably enforces the notion of Jane's retrospective narration, as her memories converge at this crucial moment, it is also a response to popular expectation in its prefiguring of the famed incidences of Brontë's novel and prior adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. In a similar vein, just as Welch's screenplay draws upon the mythical 'madwoman in the attic', Young's film foregrounds Bertha early in the film, as a white flash flits across the screen (embodying in itself varying readings of Bertha as an innocent or as a threatening spectre).

<sup>342</sup> Sandra Gilbert, "Jane Eyre and the Secrets of Furious Lovemaking," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (1998): 351-372. 362.

<sup>343</sup> Gilbert 359.

<sup>344</sup> Susanna White, Interview, as cited in James Rampton, "Jane Eyre: A New Adaptation Graces Our Screens," *The Independent* (19/09/06). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/jane-eyre-a-new-adaptation-graces-our-screens-416648.html>. Accessed 29/04/09.

<sup>345</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ed. Angela Smith (London: Penguin, 2000) 15.

<sup>346</sup> *Wide Sargasso Sea*, dir. Brendan Maher, adapt. Stephen Greenhorn (BBC Four, 2006).

<sup>347</sup> A. Gill, "This Plain Jane has Stuck in my Brain," *Sunday Times* (01/10/06). [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/article651723.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article651723.ece). Accessed 20/05/09.

<sup>348</sup> Zeffirelli's film becomes similarly problematic, as the final shot of Rochester and Jane is transformed into a 'literary' engraving.

<sup>349</sup> David Cecil, "Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*," *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (London: Constable, 1948) 147.

<sup>350</sup> Stoneman (1996) 216.

<sup>351</sup> Cecil 156.

<sup>352</sup> Robert Sabin, "Carlisle Floyd's *Wuthering Heights*," *Tempo* 59 (1961): 23-26. 23-24, as cited in Stoneman (1996) 167.

<sup>353</sup> Charlotte Brontë, "Editor's Preface to the New Edition of *Wuthering Heights*" (1850), as reproduced in *Wuthering Heights*, ed. David Daiches (London: Penguin, 1985) 37-41. Charlotte's Preface creates and reinforces the myth surrounding Emily's novel (and Emily herself); 'It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as the root of heath' (38). However, just as Gaskell softens the subversiveness of the female author in *The Life*, Charlotte domesticates *Wuthering Heights* and her sister's literary vision; although the novel was wrought from stone in a wild freedom, Emily's 'tools' were 'homely', whilst 'for a specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity, look at the character of Nelly Dean' (41; 39).

<sup>354</sup> Stoneman (1996) 198.

<sup>355</sup> Lin Haire-Sargeant, "Sympathy for the Devil: The Problem of Heathcliff in Film Versions of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Women at the Movies: Adapting Classic Women's Fiction*, ed. Barbara Tapa Lupack (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State UP, 1999) 167-191. 182-183.

*Wuthering Heights*, dir. Dick Coles and Peter Hammond, adapt. Hugh Leonard and David Snodin, (BBC, 1978).

<sup>356</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. David Daiches (London: Penguin, 1985) 118-119. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>357</sup> Jacobs 227.



- <sup>358</sup> Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (London: Tantivy, 1975) 235.
- <sup>359</sup> *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, dir. Robert Fuest, adapt. Patrick Tilley (AIP, 1970).  
*Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, dir. David Skynner, adapt. Neil McKay (LWT, 1998).
- <sup>360</sup> Ken Green, Interview with Ian Wall, as cited in Stoneman (1996) 208. See also Ian Wall, *The Making of the Film Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (UIP, 1991) 22.
- <sup>361</sup> Stoneman (1996) 220. As a reviewer commented of *Wuthering Heights*, 'this story still makes me ill'. <http://bronteblog.blogspot.com/2009/01/first-reactions-to-wuthering-heights.html>. Accessed 07/06/09. In Kosminsky's film, Sinead O'Connor's portrayal of Emily Brontë also aligns itself with the problematic elements seen in *Becoming Jane* and, as a point of interest, Chris Noonan's *Miss Potter* (2006). In both films, Austen and Potter are delineated as 'odd', possessed by the emotion derided by the rational feminists of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In *Miss Potter*, Beatrix's propensity to see 'the world differently' is posited as both inspirational and questionable, as Warne ponders critically 'however do you imagine such things?' The portrayal of Potter is a complex one, as the film attempts to combine the feministic qualities of the historical Potter with traditional, highly emotive perceptions of her children's stories as 'endearing'. As seen with the Austen biopics, the author becomes defined by her works, and popular images of them. In Noonan's production, this creates tension, as the underlying preoccupation of the film – the foregrounding of Potter's independence and intelligence – is undercut by the biopic's style (described as 'so sweet' (CBS News, 29/12/06)). Tellingly, promotions proclaimed that 'the life of Beatrix Potter was the most enchanting tale of all'; popular expectations of the film confine Potter within an 'enchanting tale', despite the fact that the screenplay focuses upon the death of her fiancé (just as her *Peter Rabbit* stories are underlined by darker tones largely ignored by the popular imagination). In a similar vein, Potter is not presented so much as a writer as a painter, as attention is centred upon her illustrations; again, construed as femininely 'enchanting', the film conceals the fact that Potter contributed botanical sketches to scientific journals. Significantly, whereas Austen, Potter and Emily Brontë are portrayed not so much as intellectual creators, but as channels of uncontrollable emotion (as O'Connor's Emily proclaims, 'something whispered...and I began to write'), *Finding Neverland* (2004) depicts the male author, J. M. Barrie, as the firm director of his imaginings; Barrie fashions and controls his dance with his 'bear' as part of a conscious performance, for instance.
- <sup>362</sup> Following the release of Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (Miramax, 1996), the relationship between Kosminsky's Catherine and Heathcliff is further framed as a 'love story' through the association with Katherine, Almsy and Hanna, as Fiennes and Binoche are again paired together in an emotional attachment.
- <sup>363</sup> Dalton's Heathcliff is particularly melodramatic, his aggression towards Edgar simplified into 'swashbuckling' antics. Admittedly, however, it is possible to see the sexualisation of Dalton's performance as intimating violence, in keeping with the novel's equation of sexuality with threat.
- <sup>364</sup> Paramount Trailer for Kosminsky's *Wuthering Heights* (1992). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4clztbOrFps>. Accessed 20/09/10.
- <sup>365</sup> Wagner 235
- <sup>366</sup> Margaret Homans, "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*," *PMLA* 93:1 (1978): 9-19. 9.
- <sup>367</sup> Peter Bowker, "Adapting *Wuthering Heights*," <http://www.itv.com/drama/perioddrama/wutheringheights/abouttheshow/default.html>. Accessed 27/02/10.
- <sup>368</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1997) 69.
- <sup>369</sup> David Wiegand, "Wuthering Heights," *San Francisco Chronicle* (17/01/09). <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/01/17/DD951598QF.DTL>. Accessed 20/08/09.
- <sup>370</sup> Hugh Montgomery, "Wuthering Heights ITV1," *The Independent* (06/09/09). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/wuthering-heights-itv1brthe-choir-unsung-town-bbc2-1782285.html>. Accessed 26/09/09.

## Chapter Four: ‘The Great Inimitable’: Dickens on Screen, from Sandy Welch’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1998) to Andrew Davies’s *Little Dorrit* (2008)

‘Hollywood would never dream of altering Dickens at all’ exclaimed David Selznick, producer of George Cukor’s 1935 version of *David Copperfield*.<sup>371</sup> Selznick’s comment points to the dynamic and yet frequently contradictory relationship that exists between Dickens, his novels and the screen, the long history of adapting his works for film and television both confirming a reputation for popular appeal and conflicting with his canonical literariness. Although Dickens fashioned himself as the ‘great inimitable’, his novels provided the basis of many early films, which, significantly, often emphasised their status as re-workings; *The Death of Nancy Sikes* (1897), *The Loves of David Copperfield* (1911), *Little Em’ly and David Copperfield* (1911) and *Oliver Twisted* (1917) attest to Dickens’s perceived ‘adaptability’ through their very titles, a belief perhaps drawn from the trend during the nineteenth century to ‘pirate’ his stories. Equally, it is arguable that the proliferation of Dickens adaptations during the early and mid twentieth century (Carnell Watt and Lonsdale note almost one hundred short versions before 1920) is linked to critical assessments of Dickens during this period.<sup>372</sup> As Jenny Dennett notes, scholars such as Q. D. Leavis maintained (initially at least) that Dickens was primarily an ‘entertainer’, regarding him as ‘uneducated and immature emotionally’, and equating ‘his readership with the audience of the [working-class] cinema’.<sup>373</sup>

Although Andrew Sanders describes Dickens’s hope that ‘his claim to national remembrance would rest solely on his published works’, he therefore occupies a unique position in the nation’s cultural mindset.<sup>374</sup> As John Glavin argues, there exists ‘an idea named Dickens’ which both incorporates and yet transcends his novels and writings; arguably, Dickens is ‘the most important unread novelist in English. It is not merely that millions of people feel comfortable deploying the word ‘Dickensian’ [...] but also that many more people who have never read Dickens know what Dickensian means’.<sup>375</sup> Significantly, however, Dickens was himself instrumental in foregrounding his perceived ‘adaptability’ and popular dissemination. Whilst Kamilla Elliott notes



Dickens's acknowledgement of the theatre as a source of literary inspiration, his own public performances of scenes from his novels are also vital.<sup>376</sup> As Sanders contends, these readings 'set a precedent, but he had equally declined to establish limits for reconfigurations of his work beyond which his successors could not presume to pass. Above all, he seemed to allow for the fact that "acting out" a page of Dickens was neither presumptuous nor sacrilegious'.<sup>377</sup>

In many ways, Dickens's staged presentation of his stories thus foreshadows their association with film and television, the ubiquity of Dickens adaptations continuing to the present day.<sup>378</sup> In the early days of cinema, Dickens provided (like the Brontës) immediately recognisable 'source' material, harnessed in order to entertain audiences and legitimate the screen. In some ways, however, Dickens's association with film is more intricate and embedded than the other authors examined in this thesis – not least in terms of his enduring reputation as a novelist who, had he been alive today, 'would be writing for Hollywood'.<sup>379</sup> Dickens is often regarded as the stylistic forefather of film, both in his energised vision – seen by Baudelaire as a 'kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness' – and in his construction of his narratives.<sup>380</sup> Grahame Smith, for example, proposes that Dickens 'anticipates in images the medium that would only come into being after his death', his prescience shaped by an intricate interplay between the technological developments of the Industrial Revolution (the 'magic' of photography set alongside the liberating – yet unnerving – speed of trains, for instance), the Victorians' interest in spectacular entertainment, and changing perceptions of selfhood.<sup>381</sup> Crucially, just as Dickens's readings emphasised and furthered the theatricality of his novels, his fascination with the burgeoning art of photography was 'adapted' into written form:

I walked from Durham to Sunderland, and made a little fanciful photograph in my mind of pit-country...I couldn't help looking upon my mind as I was doing it, as a sort of capitally prepared and highly sensitive plate. And I said, without the least conceit...it really is a pleasure to work with you, you receive the impression so nicely.<sup>382</sup>

Rather than proposing a division between words and images, his comments instead blend together his written letter and his mental 'photograph' in artistic harmony; visual and linguistic expression serve and reinforce each other.

Leon Edel has argued that novelists implicitly privilege the ‘filmic’, as they ‘have sought almost from the first to become a camera. And not a static instrument but one possessing the movement through space and time which the motion-picture camera has achieved’.<sup>383</sup> Again, Dickens’s observations reveal an interesting anticipation of the artistic and cultural implications of the cinema. He noted that, rather than access to paintings, the ‘working classes’ ‘want more amusement, and particularly (as it strikes me), something in motion [...]. [Painting] is too still after their lives of machinery’.<sup>384</sup>

In the twentieth century, Sergei Eisenstein’s writings consequently mythologised Dickens’s narratives as ‘cinematic’ in tone and style. In “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today”, Eisenstein famously drew parallels between Dickens’s novels and Griffith’s films, maintaining that the author’s writing, in its use of ‘close-ups’, ‘parallel editing’ and montage, prefigured and helped to consolidate a ‘film grammar’; ‘Dickens’s nearness to the characteristics of cinema in method, style and especially viewpoint and exposition, is indeed amazing’.<sup>385</sup>

As many later critics have indeed agreed, ‘in filming Dickens, [...] film returned to its origins in Victorian spectacle’, resulting in ‘a more striking affinity between Dickensian modes of narration and film’s developed techniques of storytelling [...] than exists between film and any other author’.<sup>386</sup> Although there is perhaps a tendency to over-exaggerate or simplify the proto-filmic elements of Dickens’s writing, in *Bleak House*, for instance, it is possible to regard the omniscient narrator as combining directorial comment with both the detail and the panoramic view of a camera lens:<sup>387</sup>

When they come at last to Tom-All-Alone’s, Mr Bucket stops for a moment at the corner, and takes a lighted bull’s-eye from the constable on duty there, who then accompanies him with his own particular bull’s-eye at his waist. Between his two conductors, Mr Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water – though the roads are dry elsewhere – and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses.<sup>388</sup>

Similarly, in *Great Expectations*, it is possible to discern a ‘filmic’ quality in Dickens’s descriptive power, as his symbolic externalisation of Pip’s identity is accompanied by a movement from establishing long ‘shot’ into close up:

the dark wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and [...] the low leaden line beyond, was the river; and [...] the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and [...] the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.<sup>389</sup>

More obviously, Dickens’s novels are themselves also visual sources; many adaptations consciously follow the illustrations provided by Phiz and Cruickshank, for example.<sup>390</sup> In a similar vein, Smith equates Dickens’s use of serialisation and advertising with the televisual, arguing that the inclusion of promotional material in the monthly parts suggests ‘an element of continuity, rather than an absolute break, between the novel and the social world from which it emerged. In this way, the novels can be seen as commodity fictions presented in a manner not dissimilar to the ‘classic’ television series, a text sandwiched between commercial breaks’.<sup>391</sup> As will be seen with Davies’s *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, the televisual form is also suited to the format of serialisation, with its emphasis upon short instalments and suspenseful endings.

What is above all clear is the inextricability of the notion of ‘Dickensian’ from film and television adaptation. Although Giddings maintains that ‘what we get on the screen is not Dickens. It may look like Dickens, and occasionally it may sound like Dickens, but it isn’t really Dickens at all’, this simplifies the complexity of the novelist’s position as a ‘national institution’; to a great extent, it is precisely what ‘looks’ and ‘sounds’ like Dickens which has both popularised him and asserted his status as a ‘classic’ author.<sup>392</sup> As seen with Wyler’s and Stevenson’s relationship with the Brontës’ novels, certain films – perhaps most notably David Lean’s *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948) – have themselves become part of a ‘classic’ film canon, which shapes and mythologises perceptions of Dickens and his work. Equally, productions such as *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992) demonstrate an intricate dialogue between populism, contemporisation and literary reverence; Brian Henson’s film simultaneously

adapts the precedent set by *Mickey's Christmas Carol* (1983), invokes Lionel Bart's and Carol Reed's stage and screen musicals of *Oliver Twist*, and pays overt homage to Charles Dickens as author (albeit in the form of 'Gonzo'). Whilst the example of Austen and the Brontës makes it possible to contest Sanders's exclamation that 'no other English novelist carries with him so much popular baggage', it is clear, as Fred Guida notes, that 'more and more people are coming to know [Dickens] primarily, or exclusively, through film and television'.<sup>393</sup>

At the same time, however, there are multifaceted tensions in the relationship between Dickens and the screen. Selznick's pledge against 'altering' Dickens's *David Copperfield* was reinforced by the production values of Cukor's 1935 adaptation, in which meticulous attention was paid to historical and literary detail (members of the Dickens Society were employed as advisers, for example). In this search for 'authenticity', an interesting dichotomy is therefore established; the novel is specifically privileged, despite the fact that Dickens is seen as filmic, and the filmic is seen as 'Dickensian'.<sup>394</sup> As Sconce notes, there exists a 'tension between popular medium and prestige production, Dickens the entertainer and Dickens the authorial signature'.<sup>395</sup>

Indeed, Cukor's and Selznick's desire for literary fidelity raises further problematic issues. Firstly, despite the enduring resonance of Eisenstein's theories, many critics regard Dickens's novels as 'unfilmable'. Significantly, even reviews from the early twentieth century, at a time when Dickens's literary reputation was flattened into that of an entertainer, affirm a narrative complexity which is seen to conflict with film's practical limitations; 'Dickens's novels do not [...] make good film plays. There is so much material in them, and it is so closely interwoven that it is really difficult to boil it down within the scope of a single film'.<sup>396</sup> Equally, whilst the proliferation of Dickens adaptations unquestionably attests to, and asserts, his popularity, this ubiquity also works against itself. As the *New York Times* argued, 'the danger of adapting so widely read an author as Dickens to the screen always has been that the mortals chosen to fill the roles will prove so much less than the characters he created out of pen, paper, and genius'.<sup>397</sup>

Dickens's 'genius' has been questioned throughout the twentieth century, a trend which both undermines, and yet is partly supported by, filmed versions of his novels. Aldous Huxley, for instance, derided Dickens's 'sentimentality' and 'really monstrous emotional vulgarity', whilst the *Daily Telegraph* expostulated 'did Dickens ever draw a human being, or are his creatures all just caricatures – types or 'humours' (in the Jonsonian sense), distorted to suit the Victorian passion for heroic virtue, blackest villainy and obvious farce?',<sup>398</sup> This negativity manifests itself in perceptions of Dickens adaptations, just as they are seen to emphasise the 'weaknesses' within his narratives. As Roger Manvell maintains, 'Dickens's dialogue at its most idiomatic is often suitable for the screen; but when it becomes affected, wordy, and sentimental, its faults seem exaggerated in the mouth of an actor observed at such close range at the moment of speaking'.<sup>399</sup>

Associated with the somewhat ambiguous artistic reputation of Dickens dramatisations is the sheer stylistic range of films adapted from his works. On the one hand, 'Dickensian' films become interconnected; the trailer for Roman Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005) uses music from Douglas McGrath's *Nicholas Nickleby* (2002), for example. As Sanders notes, "'Dickensian" has achieved a unique and unrivalled breadth of application, whether that application refers to snowy Christmases or the decaying schools or failing hospitals'.<sup>400</sup> Certainly, this multiplicity is derived from the novels themselves. As Giddings observes, 'Dickens's words, syntax, idiosyncrasy of dialogue, picturesque and masterly descriptions of scenes, recreations of moments in life, haunting observations of experience – these qualities are characteristic. Yet, it is equally true that each of his major works is uniquely itself [...]. Yet each is characteristic of Dickens'.<sup>401</sup> This trait has both informed, and been reinforced by, the shifting trends in filming Dickens (from the early twentieth century to the present day), the broad split between 'quaint' and 'dark' Dickens embedded also within changing social contexts.<sup>402</sup>

As a result, far from Dickens adaptations all demonstrating 'a terrible sameness', competing notions of 'Dickensian' arguably cause tensions in perceptions of the dramatisations.<sup>403</sup> As Jeffrey Richards argues, 'the 1990s [...] began with two wholly opposing views of Dickens coexisting in the mass media: on the stage, a cheerful, upbeat, all-dancing, all-singing, all's-right-with-the-

world musical Dickens, the reassuring, cosy, conservative family entertainer; and on television, the angry, unsparing indictment of social injustice, selfishness and greed, from the radical Dickens, the critic, prophet and preacher'.<sup>404</sup>

However, this conflict in the 'Dickensian film' is also linked to the development of costume drama as a genre during the 1990s and 2000s. Although Glavin argues that 'Dickens's fictions don't generate Dickens films. Just the reverse: it's those adaptations, for the big screen and the small, that generate whatever possibilities remain for reading the fiction', it is clear that Dickens has been harnessed, particularly by the BBC, in order to re-explore and re-invigorate classic-novel adaptation.<sup>405</sup> Certainly, Dickens's novels have long been associated with stylistic innovation on screen. Christine Edzard's *Little Dorrit* (1987) and Arthur Hopcraft's *Bleak House* (1985), for example, perceivedly galvanised costume drama during the 1980s. Likewise, Lean's *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* are energised, at times, by striking camerawork which prefigures the stylistic approaches of later adaptations; their 'classic' reputation perhaps detracts from their dynamic innovativeness. In *Oliver Twist*, for instance, the opening sequence defines Agnes's pain visually, the rolling camera attuned to her physical struggle; as Oswald Morris maintains, Lean pioneered the use of camera movement and angle as a means of psychologising film characters.<sup>406</sup> Similarly, the London crowd blurs into Pip's fever, the distorted, rapid camera and discordant sound anticipating later visualisations of Dickens.<sup>407</sup>

Above all, 'Dickens' remains a permeating presence, an immediately recognisable signifier. In *The Last Days of the Lehman Brothers* (BBC, 2009), for instance, Pieter Harding's *A Tale of Two Cities* (BBC, 1980) runs on the failed bank's computer screen, its images of revolution bearing contemporary relevance. Nevertheless, Dickens is not unquestionably open to reinterpretation, as evidenced by the popular and critical failure of John Sullivan's remake, *Micawber* (ITV, 2001). Equally, filming Dickens has become caught in costume drama's struggle to define itself. As will be seen, Davies's *Little Dorrit* (BBC, 2008), like Welch's *Jane Eyre* and Thomas's *Cranford*, is unsettled by stylistic tension, finally unable to fulfil the innovative legacy of, particularly, Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* (BBC, 2007), Davies's *Bleak House* (BBC, 2005) and Tony Marchant's *Great Expectations* (BBC, 1999).

***Our Mutual Friend* (1998), *Oliver Twist* (1999) and *Great Expectations* (1999)**

*Great Expectations* (BBC, 1999) is a landmark in Dickens adaptation and costume drama as a genre. Adapted by Tony Marchant and directed by Julian Jarrold, the series was produced on the eve of the new Millennium, alongside Alan Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* (ITV) and Andrew Davies's *Wives and Daughters* (BBC), at a time when nostalgia for the past and the 'classic' was both embraced and redefined. Moreover, Marchant's and Bleasdale's dramatisations ended a decade which proliferated with Dickens adaptations, and immediately followed Sandy Welch's *Our Mutual Friend* (BBC, 1998).<sup>408</sup>

In many ways, Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* renegotiates perceptions of the 'Dickensian', as the prequel's elaboration of Agnes's story offers a radical interpretation which simultaneously upholds the legitimacy of adaptation. Significantly, just as Episode One is devoted to the prequel, it is returned to at the production's conclusion in Leeford's voiceover; Bleasdale thus frames Dickens, arguably privileging his narrative over the 'classic' author's. However, Marchant's *Great Expectations*, whilst acknowledging the legacy of David Lean's 1946 film, provides the more overt stylistic re-invigoration of Dickens and classic-novel adaptation, addressing Stanley Reynold's scathing view that 'so adept is the BBC at translating Dickens to the screen that it could do it in its corporate sleep. Indeed, it often seems to sleepwalk through a series'.<sup>409</sup> Whereas tradition and innovation often conflict in Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* and Welch's *Our Mutual Friend*, Marchant's 'darkly different Dickens' consistently and strikingly redefines visual and aural conventions, anticipating Davies's *Bleak House* and the costume drama of the 2000s.<sup>410</sup>

Welch's *Our Mutual Friend*, awarded a BAFTA for Best Drama Serial, was 'commended for its "complexity" and its balance of the comic and the grotesque, as well as for being "visually stunning"'.<sup>411</sup> The photographic quality of the adaptation indeed provides much of its interest, translating Dickens's ironic social commentary – particularly his observations upon class, commerce and corruption – into visual terms.

The production's cinematography offers its most subtle exploration of Dickens's novel, and in some way reassesses the 'heritage shot' discussed in relation to Austen. *Our Mutual Friend* is centered upon an ironic interrelationship between waste and wealth, as Boffin, the 'Golden Dustman', recycles the detritus of London as a means of accumulating money and status. 'Society' is therefore indelibly associated with the working class, both rich and poor feasting on the carrion of the urban underworld: 'And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr and Mrs Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!'<sup>412</sup> In this 'Dismal Swamp' (*OMF*, 209), the polished grace of the Lammles is thus merged with the sly scheming of Wegg.

In Welch's adaptation, this connectivity is suggested by the subtlety of lighting in certain scenes. As in Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005), and as will be seen in Marchant's *Great Expectations*, *Our Mutual Friend* makes striking use of natural light. Vitality, this often creates a 'dusty' effect, similar to the ghostly haze within Marchant's Satis House, which engenders a symbolic resonance more intricate than the overt use of stylised 'fog' in Arthur Hopcraft's *Bleak House* (BBC, 1985). The ostensible contrast between images of 'high' and 'low' society is marked by cuts from the shadowed secrecy of the Thames to the glittering brightness of the Veneerings' ballroom. However, the simultaneous closeness of the social strata is suggested not only by the placing of scenes together, but by the metaphorical, visual 'dustiness' which pervades the entire adaptation.<sup>413</sup>

The cut from the literal and symbolic darkness of Rogue's dead body to the apparent light of the Veneering household remains shadowed by their comparable immorality; although seemingly dazzling, the 'heritage' sumptuousness of the ballroom is muted and satirised. Tellingly, the Veneering scenes become progressively darker (reminiscent of the dark streets without); although lit by candlelight, they are not bright. Instead, the effect of the candles further asserts the hazy cinematography, creating a 'golden dust' in the air which ironically affirms 'Podsnappery's' connection to the 'Golden Dustman', simultaneously lauded and reviled.



Welch's screenplay is engaged in the ever-shifting style of costume drama, prefiguring the innovation of Marchant's *Great Expectations* through some interesting camerawork. In Dickens's novel, the polished perfection of the Veneerings, the Lammles and the Podsnaps is finally undermined by their superficiality, a large, omniscient mirror framing their performativity and emptiness; they are mere reflections:

The great looking-glass above the sideboard reflects the table and the company. [...]. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy – a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. [...]. Reflects charming old Lady Tippins on Veneering's right; with an immense obtuse drab oblong face, like a face in a tablespoon (*OMF*, 10).

In Welch's adaptation, a slow-motion camera accentuates the sycophantic pretence of 'Society', whilst enabling the closely-observed caricature and distortion exemplified by Lady Tippins's 'face in a tablespoon'. Perhaps most significant in terms of style, however, is the energy of the camera at certain times. Hand-held perspective shots prefigure the dynamism of later adaptations, often moving fluidly with Bella. Scenes of threat, vulnerability and psychological distress are likewise heightened. Rokesmith's reflection, 'I lie buried somewhere else', cuts abruptly to a flashback of the revelation of 'Harmon's' body at the coroner's; seen this time from Rokesmith's, rather than Wrayburn's, perspective, the accentuated 'breathing camera' embodies John's emotional turmoil. Indeed, the flashback is repeated later in the series, the camera movement further distorted and accompanied by disturbing flashing lights (similar to those witnessed by a feverish Pip in Lean's *Great Expectations*). The image of 'Harmon's' body then changes to that of Rokesmith observing his unsettled reflection in the Thames (thereby prefiguring Marchant's Pip, as his face is likewise disrupted in the dark forge water).

Most interesting, however, is the visual energy of scenes associated with Bradley Headstone. Prefiguring Tom Hardy's Heathcliff, the use of 'breathing

camera' intimates both the emotional vulnerability and threatening rage of the maddened lover. Headstone's proposal to Lizzie ironically, yet aptly, occurs in a graveyard, his impassioned proclamation that his beloved 'could draw me to fire, [...] to any disgrace' accentuated as the 'breathing camera' moves into close up. As he screams 'I hope I may never kill [Wrayburn]!', he smashes his head against a headstone (just as Heathcliff, in extreme close-up and in a rapidly-cut, disjointed sequence, dashes his face against a rock in Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights*); the image powerfully conveys Bradley's literal and metaphorical attack against his own being. The use of reverse shot marks the fact that he stands in the shade, whilst Lizzie remains, symbolically, in the light. 'Breathing camera' then depicts Lizzie's view of Headstone, whilst she is filmed by a static camera from his perspective. The multifaceted nature of the shots, invoking both Lizzie's and Headstone's perspectives, thus foregrounds the dynamically intricate filming that characterises many later classic-novel adaptations; the camera embodies simultaneously Lizzie's fear, vulnerability and humanity, together with Headstone's violence, whilst the static camera from his viewpoint implies his deadness of vision and Lizzie as a point of calm.

Nevertheless, the contemporaneity of Welch's adaptation remains somewhat tensely in dialogue with 'tradition', both in terms of 'Dickensian' stereotype and in its self-consciousness as a 'classic' BBC costume drama. As in Merrick's *Oliver Twist* (1997), for instance, highly-exaggerated rain storms pervade the production, conflicting with the subtle cinematography already noted. Moreover, certain parallels can be drawn between the problematic elements of Welch's *Our Mutual Friend* and her version of *Jane Eyre*. A stylised storm is similarly to be found in Welch's later adaptation, unsettling its attempt to rework and under-emphasise the Gothic elements of Brontë's novel (and the 'Brontë Myth'). Equally, in *Our Mutual Friend* Welch seeks to undermine the Veneerings through a close-up of Twemlow's exasperated face; as with the diminished import of Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*, however, the effect is diluted by the lack of this character's foregrounding.

In addition, much of *Our Mutual Friend* remains visually static and slow-paced (contrasting with Welch's *North and South*). Admittedly, this has a textual basis. As E. S. Dallas commented, the novel 'labours under the

disadvantage of a beginning that drags [...]. There was an appearance of great effort without corresponding result'.<sup>414</sup> As will be seen in *Bleak House*, however, Dickens's writing aligns itself with the energy of a 'breathing', rapid camera; London is personified precisely through its movement:

It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. *Animate* London, with *smarting* eyes and irritated lungs, was *blinking, wheezing, and choking*; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. (*OMF*, 420, my italics).

In its staidly-shadowed streets, heavy mist and lamplight, Welch's reversion to stereotype overlooks the dynamism that drives the novel's darkness. Instead, she anticipates the problematic aspects of Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist*.

As noted in Chapter Two, the Millennium heralded a highly complex moment for classic-novel adaptation, embodied by the production and marketing strategies of ITV and the BBC, and culminating in the 'Corset Wars'. On the one hand, as screenwriter Bleasdale commented in an interview for *The Guardian*, "the programming showdown proved to be a victory for costume drama"; 'the fascinating thing was that 16m viewers [...] were watching classic dramas'.<sup>415</sup> Significantly, however, as seen in the concerns over the popularity of period adaptation in the 2000s, the productions of the late 1990s were marked by unsettled popular and critical acclaim. Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* (directed by Renny Rye) demonstrates the tense interplay between the need to refresh costume drama as contemporary television, and the enduring legacy (established especially by the BBC) of period adaptation as a 'classic', privileged genre.

Like promotions of Davies's *Bleak House*, the 'originality' of Bleasdale's screenplay was focused upon, both in terms of its re-exploration of costume drama and the Dickens film, and in its challenge to the specific legacy of *Oliver Twist* adaptations (particularly Lionel Bart's stage and Carol Reed's film versions of *Oliver!*).<sup>416</sup> As Paul McCann proclaimed, the series offered 'A new twist in Fagin's life', rejecting 'Ron Moody's 'singing Shylock' in favour of a more rounded, less stereotypical Jew'.<sup>417</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the ostensibly more 'traditional' *Wives and Daughters* ultimately gained more

viewers than *Oliver Twist*, sustaining its figures whilst ITV's audience declined. Significantly, the pull between tradition and innovation discernible in the 'Corset Wars' is embedded within Bleasdale's screenplay itself. Like Welch's *Our Mutual Friend*, *Oliver Twist* is involved in a complex, yet sometimes problematic, dialogue with established perceptions of Dickens on screen, presenting an uneasy relationship between the conventional and the contemporary.

Certainly, in Bleasdale's inclusion of a prequel, his adaptation of *Oliver Twist* contends that the novel is in no way 'known' or closed to interpretation. Instead, it 'challenges' Dickens as canonical author (making ironic reference to *Great Expectations*), whilst also resisting the romanticism perceived as traditional to classic-novel adaptation. To Leeford's assertion 'we will live happily together for the rest of my life', Agnes retorts, 'And what am I to do with the rest of my life?'; 'Mourn – weep – howl; keep to one room in your darkened mansion, with your wedding dress and your memories'; 'You have me mistaken for someone else, sir'.

Bleasdale's screenplay re-examines the characters of the novel and prior adaptations. Reviewers paid particular attention to the imaging of Fagin as an Eastern-European magician, a position which highlights both his allure and his performativity, whilst also developing Cruickshank's and Lean's Jewish stereotype. Low-angled cameras align the audience with Oliver's awed perspective as Fagin performs his tricks, whilst the cinematography is similarly subtle; whereas Fagin is often in bright, warm light, this is ironised by images of Oliver cast in icy blue shadows. As with Dickens's sardonic description of Fagin as a 'pleasant old gentleman', his magical acts heighten his threatening persona; although recalling Ron Moody's singing and dancing, Fagin's 'games' veil an underlying brutality which mirrors Sikes's violence.<sup>418</sup>

Monks, humanised as 'Edward', is softened and yet disturbingly psychologised, his malice driven by a desire for a domestic and familial ideal which has been destroyed (an issue which recurs throughout Dickens's novels): 'does my father mention me at all?'; 'my father must have mentioned me once, in that letter'; 'I used to dream about my father...Not any more. Not dream'. Bleasdale's reinterpretation of Monks is reinforced visually, as his despair is

intercut with Agnes's desolation, whilst he is also presented through bars as he consorts with Fagin; he is literally and metaphorically trapped, by Fagin and, by extension, his mother.<sup>419</sup> Reworking Dickens's arguably more simplistic delineation of 'good' and 'bad' characters, Bleasdale thus addresses Henry Crabb Robinson's contemporary view that 'Monks...is a failure'.<sup>420</sup> Conversely, perceptions of Brownlow as the bearer of a 'heart [...] large enough for any six ordinary old gentleman of humane disposition' (*OT*, 89) are challenged, as Michael Kitchen's performance manipulates and exposes sentimentalised images of Oliver's 'saviour'. In response to a beggar's observation that he seems 'like a kind man', he replies sardonically 'I am' as he walks away (indeed, the scene perhaps critiques the complacency of Dickens's John Jarndyce).

Bleasdale's adaptation likewise reassesses Dickens's portrayal of women, anticipating Marchant's Miss Havisham and Davies's Esther and Amy Dorrit, as well as recalling Davies's Molly Gibson. Dickens's characterisation of Rose, for instance, both constructs her as an angelic ideal and defines her as a physical object subjected to the male gaze. The focus upon the 'bloom and grace of early womanhood' (*OT*, 439) invokes simultaneously the spiritual and the bodily, yet places woman within a strict ideological paradigm which repudiates the 'fallen' such as Agnes, Nancy and Bet. Bleasdale instead reworks Dickens's complex patriarchal framework, as his prequel disperses 'the shade of Agnes' and develops the portrait of a woman 'weak and erring' (*OT*, 440).

Bleasdale, like Dickens, hoped 'to do great things with Nancy'.<sup>421</sup> In contrast to the Victorian equation of female sexuality with illness, Bleasdale's foregrounding of Nancy as a sexual being psychologises her – forming a marked difference to the problematic elements of Welch's *Jane Eyre*, discussed in Chapter Three. Whilst Dickens describes Nancy as a 'girl' (*OT*, 160) partly as a means of veiling her prostitution from middle-class sensibilities, Bleasdale focuses upon her physical and emotional vulnerability. The adaptation makes explicit Nancy's experience of "something worse than all" (*OT*, 323), stressing her entrapment within 'the agony of her mind' (*OT*, 325) as she is caught irrevocably between "the alley and the gutter" (*OT*, 323) and her love for Bill: "I cannot leave him now! I could not be his death" (*OT*, 325).

Bleasdale introduces Nancy specifically as a prostitute; the humorous irony of her 'remarkably free', yet nevertheless 'very nice' (*OT*, 68) spirit in

Dickens's novel is hardened into a powerful illustration of her imprisonment. As she sings 'how would I squeeze myself on thee?', she is seen in long shot through Fagin's seemingly coveting eyes; crucially, the film audience is also implicated in this preying voyeurism. Although Fagin comments that 'Bill must be about his business tonight', it becomes clear that this heralds no freedom for Nancy. Shot through the cage-like bars of the inn partition, her figure is obscured initially by the back of Fagin's head; the camera then moves behind him in order to reveal Nancy, yet it is Fagin who is foregrounded in the shot. Whereas many adaptations focus upon Sikes's violent possession of Nancy, Bleasdale visualises her emotional and literal incarceration; as in the novel, she is tied irrevocably to *both* Fagin and Bill: "It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and [Fagin is] the wretch that drove me to them long ago" (*OT*, 128). This personal and practical inescapability is extended sensitively into scenes between Nancy and Bill. Aptly, whilst they are, at times, affectionate, their feelings are fuelled by alcohol; staggering in a shadowed alley, spied upon by Monks, Bill declares presciently 'You know what, Nance? We'll be the death of each other'.<sup>422</sup>

The sexual threat made explicit in Fagin and Bill is continued throughout the adaptation, and, significantly, includes Fagin's boys. Dodger stares at Nancy's companions and exclaims 'I know what I'm doing today'; his predatoriness, in contrast to his upbeat persona in *Oliver!*, reworks at the same time the legacy of *Oliver Twist* as a children's story (Walt Disney's 1997 version depicts a particularly gentle Jack Dawkins in Elijah Wood). Although Dickens expressed a complex attitude towards prostitution, his writings and *Urania Cottage* in many ways confining women within patriarchal dictates, *Oliver Twist* certainly intimates the widespread subjugation of females by males. Whilst Dickens ultimately castigates Agnes, for example, her downfall is shown implicitly to be the result of predatory masculine desire; glancing at her dead body, the workhouse doctor comments tellingly that "she was a good-looking girl" (*OT*, 3). In Bleasdale's adaptation, Nancy is thus not only subjected to Bill but is harangued by crowds of men at the street corner. When she later confronts Brownlow, Rose and Mrs Bedwin in their drawing-room, she recoils from their attempts to embrace her, as Bleasdale translates her physical abuse into emotional trauma: 'I don't like being touched'. Such nuances are further

underscored by Bleasdale's development of the relationship between Mrs Mann and Bumble, as their sexual tension turns to physical violence; although comic, their marriage functions as a disturbing reflection of Nancy and Sikes.<sup>423</sup>

Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* is also significant stylistically, evoking prior adaptations yet prefiguring later Dickens productions. The opening credits, for instance, recall Martyn Hesford's *Nicholas Nickleby* (ITV, 2001); both dramatisations commence with icy blue colours, with dramatic musical scores infused with synthesised sounds of desolate wind and rain. In *Oliver Twist*, Agnes is shown alienated and diminished from a high-angled long shot, cowering at the cliff-edge. On the one hand, the figure of the storm-beaten Agnes recalls Marianne in Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* (not least due to Sophia Myles's physical resemblance to Kate Winslet). Equally, Bleasdale's introductory sequence acknowledges and develops Kay Walsh's screenplay; in the 1948 *Oliver Twist*, Agnes likewise battles through a (highly stylised) storm. At the same time, however, Bleasdale's close-ups of Agnes's dress trailing in the mud prefigure the 'costume drama with muddy hems' that has been discussed particularly in relation to Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*; the opening of *The Duchess* (2008) similarly focuses upon Georgiana's gown as it drags across the grass, ironising the film's attention to costume and foreshadowing the 'Queen of Fashion's' later downfall and disgrace.

The 'grittiness' of Bleasdale's adaptation also infuses the soundtrack at times. As with Hesford's presentation of Dotheboys Hall (and Christine Edzard's Marshalsea in *Little Dorrit* (1987)), flies can be heard in scenes involving Mrs Mann and Bumble, aptly implying their lack of morality and the destitution of the workhouse; tellingly, Oliver declares 'I can't read', thus challenging the sentimentalised images of Oliver which have been reinforced particularly by Lean's adaptation. The attempt to 'darken' the presentation of *Oliver Twist* (and, by extension, costume drama) culminates in the graphicness of Sikes's aggression and violence. As with previous versions of Dickens's novel, Bleasdale's production focuses upon Bulls-eye's fear as an implicit mirror to Nancy's abuse, a motif drawn from Lean's *Oliver Twist*. Bleasdale, however, shows Nancy explicitly beaten and bloodied.

Although ‘breathing camera’ is absent from Bleasdale’s adaptation, the shots are fluid and energised, whilst the short scenes (interweaving many stories and characters) anticipate Davies’s *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. As in Giedroyc’s *Oliver Twist* (2007), the image of Oliver ‘asking for more’ is shot rapidly, implicitly challenging the legacy of previous adaptations by redefining the famous scene; whereas Giedroyc’s contemporary, synthesised musical score resists the sentimentality or exaggerated humour apparent in other adaptations (such as *Oliver!*), Bleasdale ironises Oliver’s plight through his exclamation following the meal: ‘that was a lot!’. Similarly, as Rose relates her first meeting with Monks, the flashback to the scene in the cottage distorts the camera angles, lighting and sound; like Welch’s *Our Mutual Friend*, Bleasdale anticipates the use of stylistic devices as a means of psychological exploration, seen most markedly in Davies’s *Bleak House*.

Somewhat incongruously, however, Bleasdale’s adaptation, like Merrick’s 1997 *Oliver Twist*, uses titles throughout the production, announcing scenes ‘wherein it is shewn how Oliver Twist came to be born in such sad circumstances’, and those ‘containing fresh discoveries, and shewing that surprises, like misfortunes, seldom come alone’. This device is drawn from both the tradition of early silent film (including Dickens adaptations) and from the novel *Oliver Twist* itself, in which the chapter headings provide commentaries upon the ensuing action; Chapter VI, for instance, declares that ‘Oliver, being goaded by the taunts of Noah, rouses into action, and rather astonishes him’ (*OT*, 41). Arguably, Bleasdale employs this device as a self-reflexive examination of nostalgia, both for past filmic techniques and the legacy of older Dickens adaptations; as will be discussed further in relation to Giedroyc’s *Oliver Twist* (2007), Bleasdale’s screenplay can be seen as engaging in a conscious performativity (the imaging of London, for instance, is highly stylised, drawing attention to preconceptions of the ‘Dickensian’ which have been shaped partly by prior screen adaptations). Nevertheless, the archaically-worded titles somewhat conflict with Bleasdale’s reworking of *Oliver Twist*, expressing a fidelity (divided between literary and filmic legacies) which seems incompatible within the adaptation’s framework of interpretative autonomy.

Similarly, as in Thomas’s *Cranford*, the adaptation’s ‘grittiness’ is juxtaposed with its idealisation. Bleasdale’s *Oliver Twist* concludes with Rose’s



wedding, drawing upon the ‘soft and gentle light’ and ‘life and joy of the fire-side circle’ (*OT*, 439) characteristic of Dickens’s earlier fiction, as he rewards the ‘goodness and charity’ (*OT*, 439) of his morally-upright protagonists. In Bleasdale’s screenplay, the return to Leeford’s voiceover seemingly attempts to resist the ‘truly happy’ (*OT*, 439) ending that is embraced fully by McGrath’s version of *Nicholas Nickleby*, for instance; Rose’s bliss is shadowed by the memory of her sister’s destruction, as romance is unsettled by the emptiness of Leeford’s declaration of love and fidelity. Nevertheless, such nuances arguably conflict with the final image of an angelic Oliver, who, instead of attempting (yet failing) to reclaim Fagin with his prayers, has ostensibly reformed his brother Monks.

Admittedly, there is an element of ambiguity in Bleasdale’s final image of Monks; banished, like Little Em’ly or Magwith, to the fringes of Empire, he is seen with a pregnant black woman, complicating ‘Dickensian’ ideals of hearth and home through the intimation of racial exploitation and gendered slavery (providing a cross-reference to Rozema’s *Mansfield Park*, also screened in 1999). However, Oliver’s idealistic reunion with his brother is consolidated by the welcoming of the Dodger into the Brownlow family, positing the middle class as the saviour of the poor (an issue rendered more ambiguous in Dickens’s novels; Nancy, for instance, repudiates Rose’s claim that she “‘might be yet reclaimed’” (*OT*, 325), instructing her instead to “‘leave me, and let me go my way alone’” (*OT*, 376)).

The problematic elements of Bleasdale’s adaptation are exemplified by Masterpiece Theatre’s screening of the production for North-American audiences. Celebrating Masterpiece’s Thirtieth Anniversary, the dramatisation was promoted as a refreshing reworking – ‘a new twist on a beloved favourite’. At the same time, *Oliver Twist* and costume drama are defined as commodities which advertise ‘Exxon Mobil Masterpiece Theatre’. Russell Baker’s introductory commentary, however, reveals an enduring conception of costume drama as nostalgic escapism, with particular emphasis upon faithfulness towards the literary ‘source’ text. Each episode is placed within the context of a ‘Victorian’ library, accompanied by ‘classical’ music and with a portrait of Dickens over the log fire. As in older classic-novel adaptations (such as Lean’s *Great Expectations*), the Theatre’s credits are transposed over a traditionally-

bound novel, whilst the adaptation's re-interpretations are critiqued in the light of the literary text (Elizabeth Leeford's murder of her husband, 'an unthinkable obscenity for Dickens', is regarded as a 'liberty', for example). Vitaly, Bleasdale's 'new twist' is thus framed by tradition and fidelity.

Like Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist*, Marchant's *Great Expectations* was promoted specifically in terms of its innovation, bidding farewell to the 'cosy' 'tea-time classics of yesteryear' and focusing instead on the 'darker side of Dickens'.<sup>424</sup> The serialisation was generally received positively, as reviews highlighted its contemporaneity and implicitly critiqued prior trends in Dickens films. Robert Giddings, writing for *The Dickensian*, drew especial notice to the adaptation's cinematography, its 'fine washed-out quality' providing a symbolic resonance which differentiated Marchant's *Great Expectations* from the 'factory production line of shallow schedule fillers'.<sup>425</sup> Equally, James Rampton's interviews with Marchant emphasised the dramatisation's contextualisation within late-twentieth-century concerns (regarding Miss Havisham and Estella as entrapped by 'self-harm', for instance), together with his particular reputation as the author of 'stark, in-your-face contemporary dramas': 'you have to take account of modern sensibilities when interpreting *Great Expectations*; you can't pretend the 1990s never happened'.<sup>426</sup>

Although the adaptation acknowledges the legacy of David Lean's *Great Expectations* (particularly in the opening sequence and in Pip's rescue of the drowning Magwitch), the BBC's 'grippingly dark new version' negotiates and redefines interpretations of Dickens's novel, the 'Dickensian' and period drama as a genre.<sup>427</sup> As such, it explores the concept of 'adaptation' itself, challenging fidelity towards the 'Dickens canon' (be it literary or filmic) and reasserting the status of television drama as an (often belittled) art form. As Rampton questioned the BBC, 'for all the modern resonance of *Great Expectations*, isn't there still a danger that viewers will groan: "Oh no, not another period drama"?'. Instead, Marchant contested that

It's always worth revisiting *Great Expectations*, because every generation can bring something fresh to it. No one says to the Royal Shakespeare Company: 'Why are you doing *Henry V* again?'

[...]. Some things will upset the purists – that’s inevitable, [but] if I don’t upset the purists, maybe I haven’t done a good adaptation. The mark of a good adaptation is how many letters you can attract from the Charles Dickens Society.<sup>428</sup>

Just as Davies’s *Bleak House* was proclaimed as strikingly ‘different’, Rampton’s assessment of Marchant’s screenplay – ‘expect the unexpected’ – highlights its stylistic advances and complex analysis of Dickens’s novel.<sup>429</sup> Whilst Giddings’s review stresses elements ‘missing’ when compared to the novel, this obfuscates the adaptation’s subtle and simultaneous acknowledgement and reworking of the ‘Dickensian’, as it negotiates both conventional imagery and the dynamically re-visualised. Whereas the combination of the traditional and the innovative often creates tension, Marchant’s *Great Expectations* is consistent in its marriage of interesting, yet frequently disorientating, camera effects, lighting and sound with the distorted ‘realism’ of Dickens’s writing (and, at times, David Lean’s film). The production thus presents itself consciously as a ‘contemporary’ television drama, whilst at the same time adhering to, yet heightening and developing, ‘Dickensian’ motifs.

Such an approach is manifested in the adaptation’s *mise-en-scène*, as well as its characterisations. As the BBC maintained, ‘cobwebs would have been too tame’ for their Satis House, for example; whilst Miss Havisham’s reputation as ‘the witch of the place’ (*GE*, 83) (derived simultaneously from Dickens’s novel and Lean’s film) is acknowledged, lighting and the manipulation of camera angles refresh popular perceptions of ‘the strangest lady’ one has ‘ever seen, or ever shall see’ (*GE*, 56).<sup>430</sup> In contrast to Lean’s film, for instance, Satis House is not simply old and decayed. Just as Charlotte Rampling’s Miss Havisham imbues the character with a suppressed beauty and sexuality, her seclusion is psychologised rather than caricatured. Significantly, Miss Havisham is first seen as a reflection in the mirror, her image set alongside Pip’s; both figures are rendered ghostly by the dust on the glass. As she gazes upon their likenesses, demanding ‘Who are you?’, she is thus as alienated from herself as the outside world. Tellingly, her bridal flowers in Episode One are fresh; her grief is both propagated and prolonged, making visible Pip’s recognition of the spinster’s

emotional fragmentation, her pain performative yet deeply ingrained: “Broken!” She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it’ (*GE*, 57). Indeed, whilst Rampling’s character expresses some affection towards Pip, it is the man Joe who reawakens her coldness.

Such complexity is sustained throughout the adaptation. A visual link between Magwitch’s marshes and Satis House is suggested through the use of colour, for example, intimating the novel’s web of personal connections. Developing Lean’s cobwebs, the red, autumnal leaves strewn about Miss Havisham’s home recall the blood-red sky and setting sun which overlook Abel’s plight. The visual is then accompanied by recurring motifs on the soundtrack, highlighting the connectivity of characters and places. Most prominent is a tolling bell, which culminates in a shot of Newgate in Episode Two. The bell recurs throughout the production, foreshadowing both Miss Havisham’s death and Pip’s decline, whilst linking them to Magwitch’s final days in prison. Tellingly, the sound accompanies Pip’s first sight of Satis House, the deathly toll intimating Miss Havisham’s literal and metaphorical imprisonment, as well as his own. The toll is thus heard as Pip walks Miss Havisham around her wedding table as she relates her past; a ‘faded spectre’ (*GE*, 122), her bridal feast is figured as a wake.

Just as the novel’s retrospective narrative confines Pip within a certain inevitability, the adaptation’s visual and aural motifs assert a progressive inescapability, translating onto the screen the linguistic nuance of Dickens’s dialectical ‘meshes’ (Pip becomes enmeshed in his past).<sup>431</sup> Shots of marsh birds recur throughout, for instance, framing the production’s opening and conclusion with an apposite circularity, whilst intimating Pip’s simultaneous tie to his home and lack of settlement. Similarly, the screenplay commences with an image of a wheat field, which is recalled as the dramatisation’s final shot; the notion of sowing and reaping thus provides an apt undercurrent.

At Satis House, Pip’s visits are introduced initially as he observes the building through the iron railings. In Episode Two, however, Pip himself is seen behind the bars, shot in black silhouette as the sun sets; with the dead foliage twisted prominently around the railings, his entrapment is complete. The development of Pip’s perspective and judgement is foregrounded, however.

Pip's latter visits to Miss Havisham focus upon hitherto un-scrutinised characteristics, illustrating his gradual awakening following Magwitch's appearance as his benefactor. Although Giddings argues that Marchant's screenplay 'loses' the manipulative subtlety of Dickens's novel – 'we have got to misunderstand the evidence, just as Pip does. Were we credibly let to believe the legacy was Miss Havisham's?' – the adaptation illustrates Wemmick's belief "take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence" (GE, 332), implicating the viewer in Pip's former self-deception.<sup>432</sup>

After learning of Estella's marriage, for example, Pip returns to Satis in a fury which nevertheless enables clarity of perception. Previously, the camera has moved with Pip towards Miss Havisham, his expectations drawing him to her. On this occasion, the camera moves towards Pip, reasserting him (and, implicitly, Estella) against the spinster. Crucially, this sequence is intercut with images of the rotting bridal feast; although Pip is shown walking into the seeming light of the dining room (as in prior scenes), close-ups reveal this light to be decaying (a spider weaves its web in a crystal chandelier, recalling also Drummle's corrupting presence as 'the Spider'). The scene illuminates *Great Expectations*' preoccupation with deconstructing appearances, gradually lending details beyond initial impressions; 'I saw that everything within my view that ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow' (GE, 56-57).

Pip's perspective is energised throughout by dynamic camerawork and sound which, vitally, enables him to be both interiorised and objectified; the adaptation asserts his position as the centre of the narrative whilst also demonstrating that Pip and Estella are 'mere puppets' (GE, 264). 'Breathing camera' is prominent, asserting Pip's passion over the static formality of Satis, for example. Significantly, however, much of Pip's vision is figured through disorientating camera effects, foregrounding his (and the viewer's) delusions and confusion.

At the same time, the manipulation of camera angle and sound also enforces Magwitch's presence. Pip is bound intricately to his past, and is, in particular, chained psychologically to Magwitch; tellingly, he continues to refer to 'our lonely marshes' (GE, 260, my italics), whilst his boyhood experiences infuse his adult life:

I used to stand about the churchyard on Sunday evenings (*GE*, 105); If I had *turned myself upside down* before drinking, the wine could not have gone more direct to my head (*GE*, 151, my italics); I made my exultant way to *the old Battery*, [...] lying down there to consider the question whether Miss Havisham intended me for Estella (*GE*, 144-145, my italics).<sup>433</sup>

In contrast to the other characters, Magwitch is thus placed frequently as the directive of the camera's viewpoint, thereby aligning him subtly with Pip. The adaptation's first images are shot implicitly through Magwitch's eyes, as Pip runs away from him (framing the ensuing narrative with an apt irony); equally, however, the use of slow motion, together with the soundtrack's fusion of Magwitch's breathing with the tolling bell, externalises Pip's terror.

The opening sequence alternates between the perspective of Pip and the convict. The camera tracks behind the trees and gravestones in the churchyard, for instance, as the viewer observes Pip from Magwitch's implied vantage point. The shot moves suddenly into a rapid, extreme close-up, however, suggesting once again its dual perspective. Whilst the fast, disorientating sound and action assert both Magwitch's threatening power and fear of recapture, the scene also becomes a visual 'manacle', as the image of Pip thrust into Magwitch's face demonstrates his enforced association and intimacy: 'his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his' (*GE*, 5). Tellingly, Pip's dreamt analepsis – introduced through shots of the child's frightened eyes – focuses upon close-ups of Abel, forcing the viewer also into the encounter. As in Lean's film, Pip is shown cowering in his bed, before his nightmarish flashbacks reveal his full experience with Magwitch; with 'a most tremendous dip and roll' (*GE*, 6), the blurred camera swings with Pip, the overturned shots aligning themselves with his view.

Whilst frequent extreme close-ups of Pip suggest his first-person narrative and interiority, the use of dreams and delayed sequences emulate the novel's retrospective narrative. As with Jane Eyre's memories in Welch's adaptation, Magwitch becomes looming and slightly deformed in Pip's mind. Significantly, whilst suggesting the child's perspective, the scene also demonstrates that Pip has both internalised and distorted the screen narrative.

Marchant explores ‘the singular kind of quarrel’ that Pip is ‘always carrying on’ (*GE*, 125), as he becomes divided between his past and present (‘disgusted with [his] calling and with [his] life’ (*GE*, 125), his mimicking voice in the novel displays a conscious dichotomy between his two selves: ‘Go into the forge, Joe’s ‘prentice’ (*GE*, 105)). In Marchant’s adaptation, despite the many close-ups of Pip, his face is often partially obscured or shadowed, whilst he is frequently presented through an interconnected web of painful memories. As Pip and Herbert fight at Satis House, for example, the spinning camera and disturbing sounds (including that of a blacksmith’s hammer) recall earlier scenes with Magwitch, whilst Estella sings ‘Old Clem’ tauntingly. Pip’s reaction to Herbert is thus psychologised through his entrapment within the forge, making visible his personal disorientation and displacement: ‘What I wanted, who can say? How can *I* say, when I never knew?’ (*GE*, 106).

Later, as Pip’s indentures are read, his face becomes consumed by an image of the forge flames, as his class bondage is stressed constantly. Following the news that Joe is to meet Miss Havisham, a close-up of a horse shoe acts as an ironic symbol of both luck and his rootedness in the smithy; tellingly, Joe exclaims ‘right Pip, get the file’.<sup>434</sup> Joe’s prescient disregard of Pip’s ‘expectations’ culminates in Jaggers’s appearance at the forge; distracted by the sound of the visitor whilst he works, Joe commands Pip to continue to ‘go to it’, tying him to his need to ‘work for a living’.<sup>435</sup>

As Kate Flint notes, *Great Expectations* ‘focuses not so much on the idea of forward progression as on the motif of returning, or trying to return’.<sup>436</sup> However, although the dramatisation shows Pip gazing nostalgically at the forge, Marchant’s screenplay frequently figures the return to the past as troubling. Magwitch’s reappearance, for instance, draws visually upon both his first meetings with Pip and Mrs Joe’s attack. The scene focuses upon Pip’s back, once more intimating Magwitch’s viewpoint as he watches; as in the churchyard, Abel hurls himself suddenly upon Pip, re-forcing him into his confining embrace. Like the image of the unconscious Mrs Joe, both are shown as disembodied heads cast in deep shadow. Just as the novel’s retrospective narrative merges past and present in a metaphorical manacle, the adaptation’s constant visual repetitions thereby create their own prison.

Marchant's dynamic interrogation of the novel's characters and narrative form is extended in similar fashion to perceptions of 'the Dickensian', most particularly in its presentation of London. As Giddings has argued, 'British TV versions of Dickens err on the side of worthy, social realism. They miss the real essence of Dickens's fiction. He used his creative imagination to portray the real world, that we are conditioned to see as a rational and reasonable place, as it really is – a grotesque parody of reality'.<sup>437</sup> However, in his evaluation of Marchant's *Great Expectations* as social commentary, Giddings overlooks the adaptation's self-conscious stylistic re-working of Dickens's 'world'. Whilst the bleak natural light certainly asserts the 'grittiness' discussed in relation to Dear's *Persuasion*, for instance, the manipulation of camera angle transforms the city into a place of threatening distortion.

In Lean's *Oliver Twist* and Reed's *Oliver!*, London is frequently personified through its buildings (most particularly St. Paul's Cathedral), providing a motif which recurs throughout many subsequent Dickens adaptations.<sup>438</sup> Marchant's production develops conventionally 'Dickensian' images of the capital, reassessing its lamp-lit darkness and tendencies towards a nostalgic stylisation which recall the theatricality of Reed's musical (somewhat 'staged' portrayals of the cityscape are resurrected in Davies's *Little Dorrit*, however, contributing, as will be seen, to the serialisation's tense negotiation of the 'traditional' and the innovative).

Pip's introduction to London is presented through a cut from the tranquillity of the forge to the disturbing, blood-stained streets of the city's farmers' market; tellingly, the rural placed within the urban becomes disorientating, as rapid shots move from butchered pigs' heads (foreshadowing the executed criminals memorialised in Jaggers's office) to Pip's own alienated figure. Anticipating the stylistic preoccupations of Davies's *Bleak House*, Marchant's adaptation figures London itself as a prison, developing the *mise-en-scène* of Bleasdale's (and later Polanski's) *Oliver Twist*, in order to visualise the distorted 'realism' characteristic of Dickens's writing: 'London. [...]. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill' (*BH*, 3). Whilst the streets are 'ugly, crooked, narrow, and



dirty' (*GE*, 161), long, low-angled shots also depict the buildings as simultaneously soaring and enclosing, the hidden sky heralding the 'death of the sun' (*BH*, 3). In a neat touch, the windows in the foreground are boarded up; the buildings imprison the street and are in themselves prisons.<sup>439</sup>

In contrast to other adaptations (including Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist*), St. Paul's is not granted any prominence, just as in Dickens's novel the cathedral is not idealised:

I came into Smithfield; and the shameful place, being all asmeared with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So, I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of Saint Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison (*GE*, 163).

Instead, Newgate is located as a magnetic draw, both in Dickens's narrative and Marchant's screenplay, in which the tolling bell that has been a motif throughout is accentuated as the condemned are led to their cells. Crucially, visual nuances again foreshadow Pip's decline, as Newgate and Jaggers's office merge into each other; the image of the prison's arch and inner building cuts to Pip and Wemmick as they approach the lawyer's premises, the appearance of the buildings and the structure of the shot mirroring the previous scene. Newgate is portrayed as an all-encompassing presence; following Magwitch's death, Wemmick and Pip leave the prison, diminished and distorted through the wide-angled long shot.

The adaptation's cinematography is similarly subtle. As in Welch's *Our Mutual Friend*, bleak, natural light is often used. On the one hand, this asserts a telling contrast between the relative lightness of the forge and the dark claustrophobia of Jaggers's office. At the same time, like Welch's 'golden dust', the haziness of Satis House both renders Miss Havisham ghostly and acts as a further link to Magwitch and the marshes, emulating the latter's mistiness; as in Dickens's novel, Satis is infused with Pip's roots: 'the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air – like our own marsh mist' (*GE*, 82).

Marchant further develops *Our Mutual Friend*'s use of chiaroscuro, once again refreshing conventionally 'dark' imaging of Dickens. Carolin Held argues

that Welch's 'night chase sequence' translates the 'physical and psychological nuances of the characters' complex relationships of dominance and interdependence into spatial configurations which are created via the use of certain camera angles, camera movements and lighting'.<sup>440</sup> Held's evaluation of *Our Mutual Friend* is complicated, however, by the adaptation's reliance upon a generally static camera, and the prominence of shadow and mist as stock effects. By contrast, as Pip runs through labyrinthine alleys, imprisoning in their darkness, the camera speeds after him; tying him once more to his roots, the sequence recalls the adaptation's opening scenes as he runs from Magwitch. As he stops abruptly, however, he glances up to the sight of Jaggers looking down at him through silhouetted bars; past and present are merged threateningly, as the shadows seem to embody his flight from his *own* self. Invoking and yet furthering *Our Mutual Friend*, *Great Expectations* is imbued with greater energy and, vitally, distortion, exploring both Pip's personal fragmentation and, connected to this, the unsettling conversion of the familiar into the disorientating that is characteristic of Dickens, and which defines Davies's *Bleak House*.

### ***Bleak House* (2005)**

Andrew Davies's *Bleak House* arguably provides the most significant turning-point in both the history of screening Dickens and in costume drama as a genre, consolidating the development of Marchant's *Great Expectations* and other productions of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and influencing subsequent classic-novel adaptations – most particularly, Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* (BBC, 2007) and Davies's *Little Dorrit* (BBC, 2008). The commissioning and promotion of *Bleak House* indeed makes clear its importance, pointing not only towards the stylistic and interpretative possibilities open to costume drama, but the tensions which have underlined the genre from the Millennium onwards.

On the one hand, *Bleak House* was lauded by critics and popular audiences alike, winning BAFTAs and other awards.<sup>441</sup> As Giddings proclaimed, in its consistent and self-conscious re-assessment of the 'Dickens film' and period adaptation, Davies's dramatisation 'is as good as it gets'.<sup>442</sup> Most particularly, contemporary, 'breathing' camerawork arguably forges a more

intricate dialogue with Dickens's language and narrative form than previously achieved in Dickens adaptation.<sup>443</sup> As Glavin maintains, 'most [...] Dickens films are forced into the real-persons-in-real-places format that dominates feature-film syntax, but which has almost nothing to do with Dickens's pioneering imagining of high-coloured, high-contrast montage'.<sup>444</sup> Davies's *Bleak House* was instead the first adaptation of a nineteenth-century 'classic' novel to employ *marked* 'breathing camera' and zoom, together with rapid, unsettling sound and movement; such effects are then compounded by the distortion of wide-angled lens. As will be seen, such devices become 'the perfect instrument for the poetic or symbolic heightening of reality, for caricature, for the 'excesses' of satirical indignation' which typify Dickens's writing.<sup>445</sup>

Moreover, the screenplay's refreshing exploration of the literary text (and, at times, Hopcraft's *Bleak House*) was placed within a wider framework in which 'canonical', 'traditional' authors were reassessed; Davies's serialisation was screened during the same season as *ShakespeareRe-told* (BBC, 2005), which reinterpreted certain plays within 'contemporary' Britain (adapting even Shakespeare's own name within its title). As Ciar Byrne exclaimed, the BBC 'rebuilt' *Bleak House* 'for the *Hollyoaks* Generation', whilst Brian Appleyard noted that the production 'will have cliff-hanger endings and will look, generally, like popular drama – after all, it will be going out in the same time zone as *Eastenders*'.<sup>446</sup>

Tellingly, great stress was placed upon the need to 'refresh the period drama format'.<sup>447</sup> As discussed particularly in relation to Welch's *Jane Eyre*, such an agenda exposes the uncertainty which framed Davies's *Bleak House*, both with regard to the standing of 'canonical' Literature – perceived unattractively as a collection of 'weighty tomes for academics' – and the popularity of period dramatisations themselves.<sup>448</sup> As Owen Gibson observed prior to the screening of *Bleak House*, the 'BBC risks losing touch with [the] younger generation of viewers', whilst attacks upon British television's preoccupation with costume drama foreshadowed the escalating disillusion with the genre evident from 2006 to 2009.<sup>449</sup>

Equally, however, whilst *Bleak House* was posited as 'modern' television, the BBC's production strategies simultaneously affirmed the artistic and cultural importance of classic-novel adaptation; significantly, the

dramatisation was promoted as being amongst the first of the corporation's programmes filmed and screened in high definition. Indeed, the characterisation of *Bleak House* as 'soap opera' transformed into 'art' asserts a somewhat hierarchical standing over the popular dramas with which the adaptation was associated (and indeed promoted through). Although *Bleak House* sought ostensibly to create something of a hybrid, combining 'the suspense of *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* with the highbrow appeal of costume drama', in many ways the latter quality becomes an implicit focus.<sup>450</sup>

The promotion of *Bleak House* in the *Radio Times* (Autumn, 2005), for instance, upheld the literary, as academic John Sutherland introduced each television instalment with a scholarly commentary, and wrote a guide to the novel, *Inside Bleak House*, to accompany the dramatisation. As John Mullan noted, tension between the 'classic' and the 'contemporary' remained prominent: 'Aficionados of Charles Dickens must be blanching. [...] Andrew Davies has declared his new adaptation of Dickens's *Bleak House* to be one that 'kids of eleven can relate to, like *Hollyoaks*'. Is what many believe to be Dickens's greatest novel to become a kind of soap opera?'<sup>451</sup> Indeed, although the BBC's Laura Mackie maintained that the adaptation's short instalments were 'a new way of doing the classic adaptation, reinvigorating our approach to the serial form', its fidelity to the novel was stressed, 'matching it to the serial structure and narrative development of the original – and the way that it was originally published. The Dickens novel was very much the soap opera of its day' (Andrew Davies himself stated that 'if Dickens was alive today, he'd be writing for *Eastenders*').<sup>452</sup>

In many ways, Davies's *Bleak House* thus embodies, just as it interrogates, the complex and often contradictory interrelationship between the classic novel and the screen examined throughout this thesis. Produced at a crucial moment in the development of period adaptation, the production provides a unique lens through which several key issues are thrown into relief. On the one hand, costume drama is regarded as a means of refreshing, promoting and making accessible canonical literary texts. At the same time, however, *Bleak House*'s controversial association with 'soap' has foreshadowed the growing castigation of period drama as reductionist and, ultimately, worn, both as a television (and film) genre and in its treatment of classic novels. Although

Davies's *Bleak House* clearly embodies a high-point in classic-novel adaptation, the often contentious framework in which it was produced foreshadows the problematic character of Thomas's *Cranford*, manifested again in *Little Dorrit* and, later, Welch's *Emma* (BBC, 2009).

*Bleak House* holds a unique position in the history of BBC broadcasting, as the 'originality' of the 2005 version is underpinned by a tradition of innovation associated with adaptations of the novel (and indeed, Dickens's own use of a dual narrative was itself experimental). As Kevin Loader commented in 1991, 'there is a school of thought within the BBC that one of the reasons we haven't done any classic serials in recent years is because [Hopcraft's] *Bleak House* elevated the level of production so high it is impossible to follow it'.<sup>453</sup> Certainly, the 1985 adaptation often forges not only a dynamic dialogue with Dickens's novel, but is energised by subtle stylistic devices which anticipate the later production. Indeed, Davies himself acknowledged the significance of Hopcraft's legacy, as he incorporated several of the earlier adaptation's ideas directly into his own screenplay.

Most obviously, Jarndyce's despair at Jo's death, as he voices the sentiments of the omniscient narrator – 'Dead, your Majesty. [...]. And dying thus around us every day' (*BH*, 551) – is indebted to Hopcraft's negotiation of Dickens's dual narrative. Equally, the structure of certain shots in Davies's version bears strong resemblance to the 1985 *Bleak House*. In both adaptations, Ada and Richard are seen from Esther's perspective as they sit before the Chancellor; whilst this asserts Esther's viewpoint, privileged particularly in Davies's screenplay, it also establishes a striking visual dialogue between the two dramatisations. Davies's interrogation of the novel's multiplicity (and connectedness) of characters and perspectives is likewise anticipated by Hopcraft. Just as Guppy shadows Esther in Davies's screenplay, Hopcraft channels her first solitary meeting with Woodcourt through the lawyer's jealous eyes.

What is most significant about Hopcraft's *Bleak House*, however, is the use of camerawork and *mise-en-scène* as a means of visualising Dickens's 'unique hyperrealism' and the novel's thematic preoccupations, as well as its resistance to certain tropes of the 'heritage film'.<sup>454</sup> As will be seen, such

characteristics once again anticipate the 2005 production (and the emergence of the ‘costume drama with muddy hems’; Lady Dedlock’s dress literally drags in the dirt).<sup>455</sup> Just as Esther’s ambivalence at the ‘conclusion’ of her narrative draws the reader back into the novel’s ongoing social hardships and strife, Hopcraft’s screenplay frequently challenges idealisation and resolution. Most notably, the presentation of Chesney Wold resists the ‘heritage property shot’ discussed in Chapter One. Instead, despite being proclaimed ‘one of the noblest houses in the land’, it is shadowed and distorted through angled shots, and partially obscured by the bars of a gate; as in the novel and the later screenplay, Chesney Wold is a prison.<sup>456</sup>

Similarly anticipating Davies’s adaptation, and enabling an interesting exploration of Dickens’s novel, Hopcraft’s Chancery is presented through ever-shifting camera angles, accentuating the restless vulnerability and uncertainty born out of the law’s stagnation. Often, Hopcraft’s court and Chancellor are shot slantingly through small recesses, asserting the perspectives of Richard, Miss Flite and Gridley whilst emphasising their confinement. Like Chesney Wold, the court is thus obscured from full, clear view, enforcing the satirical observation that ‘at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery’ (*BH*, 4), and yet achieving a visual symbolism more resonant than the thick mist which at times blows in from the streets.<sup>457</sup> Moreover, extreme close-ups illustrate Grahame Smith’s observation that ‘if Dickens holds a mirror up to nature, it is a highly distorted one’.<sup>458</sup> The camera deforms Krook’s face, for instance, as he relates Tom Jarndyce’s suicide, just as he is figured as “‘very odd [...], [...] a little – you know – M -!’” (*BH*, 46) in Dickens’s novel. As he exclaims ‘Tom Jarndyce – gone!’, the shot then focuses revealingly upon Richard, as the extinguished candle leaves him in prophetic darkness.<sup>459</sup>

Hopcraft’s visualisation of Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock also influences the later serialisation. In both productions, Lady Dedlock leaves the room following her glimpse of Nemo’s handwriting. The camera, however, remains fixed upon Tulkinghorn, who, in a close-up profile shot, scrutinises the affidavit and looks after her. Nevertheless, despite the striking similarity in terms of the structure of the scene, Davies’s adaptation visualises Tulkinghorn’s menace to a greater extent, ‘[m]ute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light’ (*BH*, 11). Certainly, this is due partly to Charles Dance’s association with

Dickens's villains, having played Ralph in Hesford's *Nicholas Nickleby*.<sup>460</sup> Most significantly, however, the 'jagged' zoom into the close-up of Dance's Tulkinghorn, accompanied by discordant sound, posits the lawyer as both a magnetic draw and, through the visual disruption of the rapid, momentarily-blurred camerawork, an unsettling threat. As with Marchant's Magwitch, Giedroyc's Sikes and Davies's Blandois, Tulkinghorn's (and later Vholes's) disquieting presence is enforced continually by crashing metallic noises and contorted visual effects.

By contrast, although enriched by Peter Vaughan's quietly menacing facial expressions, Hopcraft's production somewhat 'softens' the disturbing dynamics between Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock through the harmonious cello instrumental on the soundtrack. The use of 'classical' music, traditional to costume drama pre-dating the late 1990s and 2000s, thus conflicts with the import of Hopcraft's screenplay at this point. Equally, despite subtle editing, asserting 'the tensions and the suspense of serialisation' and Dickens's intricate web of characters and places – '[w]hat connection can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom' (*BH*, 189) – the pace of Hopcraft's adaptation is relatively slow.<sup>461</sup>

Accordingly, whilst Davies maintained his respect for Hopcraft's *Bleak House* (feeling initially that it could not be 'improved' upon), the notion of 'energy' forms a vital element of the editing and visual style of his adaptation: 'the thing that was uppermost in our minds was to tell the story in a way that made people absolutely die to know what happens next'; 'we want the audience to think it's all happening now, vital, urgent'.<sup>462</sup> As will be seen, the production is characterised by a dynamic pace which emulates and explores the novel's narrative form, together with the mystery and suspense fundamental to 'detective fiction'. Clearly integral to this is the mode in which the serialisation was screened, as the thirty-minute episodes suggest Dickens's instalments, with their 'cliff-hanger' endings.<sup>463</sup> Equally, however, the rapidity of camera movement intimates the 'presentness' of the novel's omniscient voice, vital to Dickens's social commentary in its challenge to the 'resolution' of Esther's retrospective narrative. The camera, moreover, is not simply dynamic in its movements, but in its positioning. Like the novel's linguistic vibrancy, ever-shifting camera angles

and perspectives challenge fixed conceptions of *Bleak House*'s characters and thematic preoccupations, just as they redefine expectations of costume drama as a form.

The complex relationship between Dickens's novel and the screen, and the screen and the conventions of classic-novel adaptation, is embodied immediately in the production's opening credits. As in Davies's *Little Dorrit*, the titles are presented through a clutter of images, intimating the density of the literary text's interwoven narrative, and providing 'clues' as to the novel's mysteries (whereas *Bleak House* finally centres upon Jarndyce's Will, *Little Dorrit* focuses upon lockets and the inscription 'Do Not Forget'). Both adaptations therefore recall the intricately-suggestive decorations which border the covers of Dickens's original instalments, intimating his social commentary and suspenseful plots. At the same time, the pictures combine illustrations with stills from the adaptations, pointing to the actual and the imagined which form Dickens's 'distorted realism'. However, the title lettering of Davies's *Bleak House* is markedly informal. Although this stylistic device is reminiscent of Krook's painstaking scrawl, significantly, the production also announces its contrast to the 'classic' implications of the capitalised *Our Mutual Friend* (1998) or the italicised *Pride and Prejudice* (1995). Instead, *Bleak House* foregrounds the self-conscious 'challenge' to canonical hegemony seen in the titular presentation of Sandy Welch's *emma*. As with Davies's invented yet 'Dickensian' character of 'Clamb', tradition and reinterpretation are placed in dialogue.

Such a preoccupation is made manifest in *Bleak House*'s early sequences. Although the adaptation commences with the horse and carriage traditional to costume drama, the frenetic energy of the camera, as it shakes and zooms, disturbs the viewer just as it visualises Esther's disorientated alienation. Whereas Hopcraft's adaptation (like Aymes's *Jane Eyre*) focuses much attention upon dialogue, speech is absent from Davies's introductory scene, which centres instead upon the visual. This preoccupation is enforced by the movement to the second scene, figured not simply as a cut but as a zoom from Esther to a wide-angled (and appropriately distorting) image of Chancery; although the overhead



shot, as used in Hopcraft's production, somewhat diminishes the court, it is nevertheless a magnetic draw to the zooming camera.

In Dickens's novel, the density of the omniscient narrative becomes part of the metaphorical fog, as the windingly slow length of the passages suggests Chancery's stasis; the court's activity is grounded in inactivity:

Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained glass windows lose their colour, and admit no light of day into the place; well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlsh aspect, and by the drawl languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it, and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank! (*BH*, 4).

Although the pace of Davies's version perhaps detracts from this notion of stagnation (and indeed Lady Dedlock's observation, 'nothing ever happens in Jarndyce', is followed by the court's proclamation that 'something stirs in Jarndyce'), the novel's peculiar 'realism' – even the gaslight has 'a haggard and unwilling look' (*BH*, 3) – is explored in visual terms.

The often-noted 'colour' of Dickens's language, for instance, is derived frequently from the recurring use of present participles, suggesting an energised vividness and immediacy, together with an unrelenting myriad of striking imagery:

Jo lives – that is to say, Jo has not yet died – in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people [...]. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle [...] shall set right in five hundred years – though born expressly to do it (*BH*, 189).

In Davies's *Bleak House*, the rapid, unsettling and yet precise zooms embody the novel's combination of linguistic 'movement' and presentness (Krook does indeed *spontaneously* combust) with the pointed social commentary and satirical edge of the omniscient narrator (and, at times, Esther's voice); with its rapidity and surety of close-up, the zoom asserts the assured precision of an omniscient perspective. This is coupled with documentary-style camerawork (similar to that used in Philippa Lowthorpe's *The Other Boleyn Girl* (BBC, 2003)), which stresses – and implicates the viewer in – the act of observation. The camera maintains self-conscious medium-long shots, 'spying' upon, and yet remaining aloof from, its subjects as it hovers in doorways and amongst foliage. Emulating the pervasive insight of the omniscient narrative, humorous glimpses are afforded of Guppy's pretence and discomfort as he prepares to propose to Esther, for instance. Moreover, as Simon Jenkins notes of Dickens's dense narrative, 'the camera achieves the same claustrophobia with its nervy close-ups, dark sets and costumes and intense facial expressiveness. The pictures are fast and impressionistic. So is the novel. So was Dickens'.<sup>464</sup>

A dynamic negotiation of the novel's form is maintained throughout the adaptation, as the constant merging of, and shift between, long shot and close-up emulates Dickens's dual narrative. Esther, for instance, is filmed in medium close-up as she sits in silence with Woodcourt's flowers; the camera then pulls into long shot, making visible the duality of Dickens's first and third-person perspectives.<sup>465</sup> During moments of tension (as when Esther learns that Miss Flite has christened her new birds 'The Wards in Jarndyce'), the camera pulls frequently into long shot (and sometimes long take). In the character alienation implied through literal distancing, the screenplay once more blends the interiority of Esther's first-person narrative with detached omniscient commentary. Likewise, in the recurring visual motif which announces Krook's shop, an extreme close-up of his name on the sign is often followed by an extremely rapid zoom out; as in the novel's acerbic indictment of 'the Chancellor', the place is of vital significance and yet literally repulsive to the camera. One scene is announced, moreover, as a zoom out from Nemo's medal, which is shot through a magnifying glass. Whilst the accentuated emphasis upon the name 'Hawdon'

becomes part of the screenplay's detective motif, the image also makes visible the interplay between the macroscopic and microscopic in Dickens's novel:

Fog everywhere. [...]. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs, fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships [...]. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper (*BH*, 3).

As Smith argues, 'the panoramic and the detailed' are crucial to Dickens's writing, 'the perfect filmic embodiments' of which are to be found in long takes and deep focus; at the same time, 'the distortion involved in deep focus' provides 'an exact equivalence for the heightened exaggerations that are central to Dickens's symbolic rendering of the real'.<sup>466</sup> In Davies's *Bleak House*, such 'Dickensian' distortion is compounded by the use of wide-angled lens, yet, in its abrupt jumps and cuts, the screenplay is itself literally distorted.

The employment of sound, colour (as in Welch's *North and South*) and chiaroscuro is similarly striking, once again asserting the 'Dickensian' (in terms of its humour, its peculiarity and its 'grittiness') whilst reconfiguring the stylistic conventions of costume drama. Vibrant colours visualise Turveydrop's comic exaggeration, for instance, whilst bleak natural light (recalling Marchant's *Great Expectations*) heightens, like the documentary-style camerawork, the emotive immediacy of the brick-makers' plight. Significantly, however, the muted cinematography also characterises Chesney Wold. Just as Esther's smallpox scars embody the complex interrelationship between the social classes, the adaptation places rich and poor in a visual bind. This is foregrounded in Episode One, as Nemo's sojourn in the opium den is portrayed explicitly. Shot behind cage-like lattices, the visual disorientation of the den spills out into the wider narrative, providing an all-pervading metaphor like the fog in Dickens's (and Hopcraft's) *Bleak House* (indeed, Davies's adaptation also makes literal reference to the fog, as Nemo exhales, and obscures the camera with, his symbolically-drugged smoke). In similar fashion, Baby Emma's wailing reverberates, distorted, into the subsequent scene at Chancery, as visual and aural

devices combine in order to enforce the interconnectedness which underpins Dickens's social commentary.

Whilst traditional shadows and 'dark' music imply the presence of Tulkinghorn, absence of sound is also used to effect. Jo's disappearance, for example, is indicated first by the silent zoom into the exterior of Bleak House, differentiating the moment from the typical motif (in which metallic sounds are heard). At the same time, the soundtrack again suggests the notion of connectivity vital to Dickens's novel. The recurrence of keys ripping against locks (associated particularly with Chesney Wold, but also, symbolically, with 'Dame Durden's' domestic Bleak House) announces scene changes throughout, linking all the characters and places (culminating in the noise of George's swiping swords at the Shooting Gallery). Like the fog, the sound becomes emblematic of all-pervasive imprisonment and inescapability.

Such symbolic connectedness is also maintained by intricate editing, reinforcing the suspense and energy gained through short scenes and rapid cuts. In Episode One, the stories of Lady Dedlock and Nemo are intertwined, for instance. Following an image of Nemo with the love letters, the scene cuts to Lady Dedlock, presented in a static position in a confining close-up; as in the adaptation's first image of Honoria, her imprisonment within Chesney Wold's shadows is emphasised by her searching gaze out of a window. The escalating visual association of Lady Dedlock with Captain Hawdon, and, increasingly, Tulkinghorn and Inspector Bucket, thus further incarcerates her, both emotionally and literally; doubly harangued, Bucket's pursuit of her alternates with images of Clamb and Smallweed bargaining for her love tokens.

To a greater extent than Hopcraft's screenplay, editing manipulates viewer expectations in the tradition of a mystery plot; as Guppy proclaims to Krook, 'they're all connected'. Tension is especially well established between Tulkinghorn and George. At the conclusion of Episode Seven, George indicts the lawyer bitterly: 'You hold the lives of others very cheap...If I were you, I should be fearful for my own'. Significantly, Tulkinghorn appears momentarily fearful, as the camera zooms into the blackness of George's slammed door at the instalment's 'cliff-hanger' ending. The suspense is sustained at the start of Episode Eight, however, as the first shot of the dark Shooting Gallery recalls visually the previous scene; as George proclaims '[t]hey put me in a hard place –

a very hard place', his face is obscured partially by a sword, whilst Phil's concern is emphasised in close-up. Later, George's enraged expostulation at Jo's death – 'Tulkinghorn!' – is followed by a cut to Tulkinghorn at Lady Dedlock's, as Hortense spies upon them in the 'dark shade' (*BH*, 562) of the iron railings. The actions of George, Hortense and Lady Dedlock are then intertwined in a sequence of quietly-suspenseful shadow and secrecy; as in Chapter Forty-eight ('Closing In') of Dickens's novel, Tulkinghorn's impending death is announced through menacing anticipation:

Through the stir and motion of the commoner streets; through the roar and jar of many vehicles, many feet, many voices; with the blazing shop-lights lighting him on, the west wind blowing him on, and the crowd pressing him on; he is pitilessly urged upon his way, and nothing meets him, murmuring, "Don't go home!" Arrived at last in his dull room, to light his candles, and look round and up, and see the Roman pointing from the ceiling, there is no new significance in the Roman's hand tonight or in the flutter of the attendant groups, to give him the late warning, "Don't come here!" (*BH*, 562).

As importantly, however, Davies's adaptation draws constant and self-conscious attention to itself as interesting and innovative television, thereby also reworking motifs associated traditionally with costume drama. A shot of Chesney Wold, for instance, transforms abruptly into a disorientating zoom which spins through the trees and closes on Boythorn, Esther, Ada and Charley; such a device recurs notably in episodes of *Spooks*. As in Hopcraft, Davies's production thereby resists, and yet manipulates self-consciously, the conventions of the 'heritage shot'. An indignant Mercury, for example, exclaims 'Don't you see the carriage?' to Guppy. Rather than presenting the carriage in full view, fetishized as an object of the past, Guppy is instead depicted in long shot through the carriage window; whilst the incident is imbued with a 'Dickensian' humour, literally framing Guppy in his awkwardness, it emphasises the searching, dynamic presence of the camera.

Davies interrogates and challenges the expectations of costume drama romance which he is perceived partly as shaping. Although Dickens's novels are not regarded popularly as 'love stories', Davies's adaptation manipulates screen

romanticism, evident in Hopcraft's *Bleak House* as Ada and Richard court in idealised bliss. By contrast, the first image of the couple kissing in the later production is complicated, shadowing their happiness with a prescient ominousness (in Dickens's novel, the cousins' plight is indeed framed by the shattered love between Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon). Although set within a bower, the flowers are blurred in the foreground as they themselves are in silhouette, with dark cast-iron bars prominent behind them; tellingly, Ada cautions 'Richard – we shouldn't'. Later, an overhead shot of the lovers lying in sunlit, lush grass (reminiscent of Bleasdale's Agnes and Leeford and Welch's Margaret Hale) ironises Carstone's exclamation, 'Ada, if only life could be like this all the time'; as the camera pulls into close-up, the ostensible brightness becomes duller.

Such visual nuances culminate in the announcement of their engagement, as the 'warm' lighting associated initially with Bleak House transforms progressively into muted, 'colder' cinematography (the extreme of which characterises Chesney Wold). Significantly, this resistance to idealisation is extended to Esther and Woodcourt. Although, as will be seen, the adaptation simplifies the novel's conclusion, the portrayal of their growing relationship intimates in some way Esther's ambivalence – 'I know [...] that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can do very well without much beauty in me – even supposing...' (*BH*, 740). Tellingly, for instance, Richard's advice to Allan – 'If you like her – you should ask her' – is followed by a cut to Bleak House shrouded in mist. Woodcourt's subsequent proposal, although depicted within a rosy bower, retracts into medium-long shot, and is finally unsettled by a rapid, disjointed zoom to Esther weeping in her room.

The manipulation of the production's style thus simultaneously informs and enriches Davies's characterisations; whilst the zoom from the proposal scene to Esther's private distress re-energises the generic conventions of period drama, it also visualises her inner disjointedness. In particular, although Davies felt initially that 'breathing camera' was 'gimmicky', it is used as an effective indicator of emotion and tension throughout the production.<sup>467</sup>

In an exchange between Jarndyce and Richard, for example, the rising antagonism between them (as the former assesses his ward's procrastination) is

marked by the increasingly accentuated shaking of the camera. Such intricacies in the production's camerawork are extended to 'poor crazed Miss Flite' (*BH*, 734), developing her beyond caricature whilst still maintaining a dark, 'Dickensian' humour. Miss Flite is first presented at Krook's in medium long shot, surrounded and confined by a multitude of aviaries; whereas her birds are concealed neatly behind a curtain in Hopcraft's screenplay, in the later production she is also caged, literally and metaphorically. Significantly, Richard's death is followed by the spinster's release of her birds. As in the novel's bitterly ironic notion of 'liberty' – the birds, like Carstone, can only set about 'Beginning the World' (*BH*, 728) through death – both Miss Flite and her pets remain prisoners. As she lifts them from their cages, proclaiming 'last, but not least, the Wards in Jarndyce. Goodbye, my little ones', the camera shifts so that they remain shot through the bars.

The portrayal of Lady Dedlock is likewise characterised by dynamic and interesting visual and aural effects. Whilst her unchanging physical position from scene to scene suggests her emotional imprisonment, the camera's movement also implies her stasis. Honoria is first introduced staring out of a window; shot from without, she is literally framed by the domestic (recalling similar images in *Becoming Jane*). As she pronounces that she is 'bored to death with this place'; 'bored to death with my life'; 'bored to death with myself', the camera cuts to show Lady Dedlock from three different perspectives. Significantly, however, she remains fixed; it is only the camera which moves, caging her within her desolation. Such negation is further enforced by close-up shots which slightly deform Honoria's image; filmed through a slanting wide-angle lens, for instance, she is visually misfitted at Chesney Wold. Frequently solitary, isolated in the silent shadows of her husband's home, she instead becomes obscured by the objects of Sir Leicester's wealth. Just as Dedlock's concern prompts her to construe her despair as 'nothing' (thereby compounding the self-alienation apparent in her deathly boredom), she is obliterated visually by the prominent crystal chandelier.

At the same time, however, Lady Dedlock's interiority is visualised, explored and privileged through the adaptation's stylistic energy. As Jo leads her around Nemo's haunt, her black veil fluttering like a spectre, the unsettling metallic sounds accentuate the pain registered on her disturbed face. Most

particularly, as seen similarly in Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights* (as Heathcliff learns of Cathy's death), Lady Dedlock's emotional numbness and disorientated shock is signified by disjointed cutting, disrupting – and therefore displacing her from – a fluid sequence of time.

Like Welch's *North and South* and *Jane Eyre*, however, *Bleak House*'s conclusion somewhat conflicts with much of the screenplay's prior subtlety. Once more, this can be attributed partly to the continued legacy of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*, as the screenwriter's earlier work informs – and idealises – his visualisation of Esther and Allan's marriage. Just as Dickens had to forgo his original ending to *Great Expectations* in favour of a more optimistic one, Davies's final, close-up kiss between Esther and Allan recalls that of Darcy and Lizzy, thereby framing his later adaptation with the romanticism defined strongly by the 'Austenite' film. Equally, shaped by perceptions of the 'Dickensian' film as 'upbeat' (a preconception derived certainly, in part, from Dickens's early fiction), Davies collects together all of *Bleak House*'s 'good' characters at the end, united in their dancing at Esther's wedding; tellingly, Mrs Woodcourt and Skimpole are set apart.<sup>468</sup> In Dickens's novel, by contrast, the union of Dame Durden and the Doctor does not resolve the domestic, social and political ills examined throughout the text. In Davies's adaptation, the spinning camera which circles around the couple perhaps intimates an enduringly disturbed and disorientating world, yet they are located as a centre of calm stability. Significantly, Davies's problematic conclusion is compounded by the music which accompanies the final credits, as the buoyant score contrasts markedly with the production's otherwise 'darker' themes.

However, in addition to its stylistic dynamism, Davies's screenplay is, as a whole, infused with intricate interrogations and negotiations of the novel's form, characterisations and thematic preoccupations. Whereas many adaptations become centred upon particular elements of the 'Dickensian' (Marchant's *Great Expectations*, for instance, presents a primarily 'dark' vision of Dickens's often humorous novel), Davies's *Bleak House* is marked by its usually harmonious 'scope', as it marries humour with disturbance, exaggeration with 'grit'. Although the context in which *Bleak House* was produced highlights the complex standing of both costume drama and canonical literature, the production marks a vital watershed in much the same way that Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*



did a decade earlier. Whilst it is self-conscious in its reworking of the ‘Dickens film’ and exploration of the novel, the televisual innovation of Davies’s *Bleak House* arguably forms one of the most ‘Dickensian’ adaptations screened to date.

### ***Oliver Twist* (2007)**

Significantly, the innovative momentum of *Bleak House* was sustained in the BBC’s subsequent Dickens serialisation. Coky Giedroyc’s *Oliver Twist*, adapted by Sarah Phelps, invokes Davies’s *Bleak House* and its stylistic reassessment of costume drama, whilst also recalling, exploring and developing the particular embeddedness of Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* within the popular imagination. Despite the adaptation’s mixed critical reception (which, as will be seen, is significant in itself), *Oliver Twist* continues *Bleak House*’s (re-)interpretation of the ‘Dickensian’, whilst also providing an interesting lens through which trends in period drama can be viewed. Crucially, Giedroyc’s production contrasts markedly with the BBC’s *Cranford*, also broadcast in 2007. Although this divergence is certainly shaped by the novels’ differences, it also intimates a growing split in the perceptions and preoccupations of classic-novel adaptation; such a phenomenon will be seen similarly in the contrast between Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights* (ITV) and the BBC’s *Emma*, both screened in 2009. In place of the tension in Thomas’s *Cranford*, *Oliver Twist* is instead characterised by its self-conscious awareness of both tradition and innovation. Alongside its dynamic and subtle exploration of Dickens’s novel, and, as importantly, popular expectations of “The Parish Boy’s Progress”, it therefore examines and negotiates, rather than struggles, with costume drama as a form.

Nevertheless, the tense framework within which *Bleak House* was produced became accentuated in relation to *Oliver Twist*. As seen with Welch’s *Jane Eyre*, this is due partly to the sheer proliferation of adaptations (across various media) of Dickens’s early novel, as concerns over the ubiquity and validity of costume drama were coupled with the problems of presenting ‘an over-familiar text’.<sup>469</sup> Indeed, ITV’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*, also broadcast during Christmas 2007, in many ways received a more positive response. Arguably, this is due to the relative obscurity of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, both as a novel and in terms of adaptation (the last film was produced in 1995).<sup>470</sup> By

contrast, Paul Whitelaw condemned Giedroyc's production as 'yet another adaptation of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*'; 'There's nothing in Phelps's version that we haven't seen before. The idea behind yet another retelling is presumably to introduce the tale to a new generation of viewers, which is no bad thing. But for the rest of us, it's nothing more than a competent production', 'basically just a slight variation on previous screen versions'. Whitelaw's review indeed invokes the stereotypes, drawn particularly from Reed's musical film, associated traditionally with *Oliver Twist*: 'Cokernee tikes in top hats tearing through cobbled streets; ruddy-faced character actors bustling like barrage balloons; and a doe-eyed little orphan boy tremulously asking for more'.<sup>471</sup> As will be examined, such comments can certainly be reassessed; Giedroyc and Phelps are as self-reflexive as Whitelaw in their harnessing of imagery linked typically with *Oliver Twist*, whilst Oliver himself is 'a gutsy little lad', thereby reworking Dickens's 'overly sentimental' portrait.<sup>472</sup>

However, as discussed in relation to *Wildfell Hall*, it remains significant that viewer perceptions often diverge from the interpretations offered by an adaptation's producers (or indeed by scholarly assessments). Whitelaw's review itself embodies the enduring hold of *Oliver Twist*'s cultural myth, foregrounding and so perpetuating the 'traditional' readings and visualisations which frame Dickens's novel, and thereby obfuscating the nuances and innovativeness of the BBC's 2007 version. Revealingly, newspaper accounts of the production centred repeatedly on the same title – "Let's Twist Again"; although the promise of refreshing re-imaginings is implicit in the meaning, the word 'again' underlines responses to the production with negative connotations.<sup>473</sup> As Daphne Lockyer questioned, 'Do we need another *Oliver Twist*?'<sup>474</sup>

Clearly, as Lockyer notes, Phelps's screenplay is 'haunted as any new production must be by history and the (some might say) definitive casting of the angelic John Howard Davies as Oliver in David Lean's 1948 adaptation and the cor-blimey wonderfulness of Jack Wild's Dodger in Lionel Bart's 1968 musical *Oliver!*'; equally, Roman Polanski's 2005 film is an immediate, and high-profile, precursor to the later production.<sup>475</sup> As seen in Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist*, Giedroyc's adaptation is, at times, influenced directly by earlier versions of

Dickens's novel, particularly Lean's and Reed's. Interestingly, the final episode of the serialisation was followed by the announcement of a competition to find actors to play Nancy and Oliver in a new stage musical, affirming both *Oliver Twist*'s enduring hold on the popular imagination and Reed and Bart's continued legacy. In many ways, *Oliver Twist* has become a single commodity, as stage, screen and literary text merge.

Giedroyc's adaptation itself starts abruptly with a low-angled, slanted shot of Agnes struggling to the workhouse. As with the rolling camera in Lean's adaptation, together with the stormy silhouette of a withered, thorny tree, Agnes's pain is thus manifested visually. Likewise, as in the 1948 film, light struggles to penetrate the workhouse (the icy cinematography recalling similarly McGrath's and Hesford's renderings of Dotheboys Hall), while the bawdiness of Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist* is also evoked; Bumble stares at Mrs Corney's self-consciously-accentuated bustle, for instance. As in prior adaptations, Giedroyc's production continues Lean's legacy, as Nancy's murder is figured through Bull's-eye's terror. However, this is developed subtly, as Fagin's execution (not always visualised directly) is manifested similarly in the Dodger's cowering repulsion. By the same token, Mrs Corney and Bumble become the Punch and Judy of prior versions of *Oliver Twist*, as the former administers violent kicks with her demands that he 'stoke up the fire, husband'.

As in Davies's *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, elements of the plot are revealed through visual 'clues' in the production's opening credits. In Giedroyc's production, however, the sequence is acted out, highlighting *Oliver Twist*'s particular association with the stage (stemming from both from Bart's stage musical and from Dickens's own performances reading the "Death of Nancy"), and intimating the embeddedness of the story within the popular consciousness. Sikes, for instance, is signalled first through the image of Bull's-eye, whilst the buoyant soundtrack recalls Reed and Bart's influence. Significantly, Fagin is announced last, as he turns directly to the camera and bows. Complicating Whitelaw's assessment of the screenplay's unquestioning conventionality, the production is thus framed by its self-conscious performativity.

Composer Martin Phipps, for instance, harnesses, and yet develops, the renowned interrelationship between music and *Oliver Twist*. The comedy of

Bumble's passionate proposal to Mrs Corney, as he misses her mouth and instead kisses her nose (promising 'more of such kisses'), is accentuated by a humorous musical beat, whilst Oliver's summons to the Board is announced through discordant percussion; similarly, as Oliver hits Noah with a coffin lid, the overt brutality is tempered by a droll, Dickensianly-exaggerated tune. However, as discussed in the Introduction in relation to costume drama trailers, *Oliver Twist's* folk-like music is contemporised, often using synthesised sounds. While the choice of folk intimates *Oliver Twist's* popularity and accessibility, the reworking of this traditional musical form therefore becomes emblematic of the adaptation as a whole.

Visual images also challenge the musical myth of *Oliver Twist*; a maggot visible in the workhouse porridge, for instance, invokes implicitly, and yet is set in tension with, Bart's upbeat 'Food, Glorious Food'.<sup>476</sup> In a similar vein, in contrast to the scoring of Hesford's and McGrath's versions of *Nicholas Nickleby* and Polanski's *Oliver Twist*, sentimental strings are complicated by discords (reassessing also Dickens's idealised portrayal of Oliver). Phipps's compositions instead enrich Phelps's characterisations. As Nancy leaves to go to Pentonville (and, ultimately, her death), the theme which accompanies Bill's madness is first heard, for example; as in Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist*, the lives and deaths of both characters are intertwined, yet it is Nancy's shaping of Sikes's decline which is privileged.

Revealingly, the first episode of *Oliver Twist* was shown before *Spooks*, thereby locating the costume drama within the context of 'modern', mainstream and popular television. Like Davies's *Bleak House* (and *Little Dorrit*), half-hour episodes emulated both Dickens's original serialised format and the characteristics of soap; the adaptation was indeed promoted as 'Walford meets the Workhouse'.<sup>477</sup> As Lockyer commented, the 'choice of Phelps as the adapter is almost a mission statement. She is normally on the writing team of *Eastenders* and this is her first adaptation of a classic novel. But, as in the BBC's groundbreaking adaptation of *Bleak House*, the aim is to give the story an episodic, populist feel', creating 'a drama that would have resonance even to people who had never picked up a piece of classical literature in their lives'.<sup>478</sup> As part of this self-conscious contemporisation, certain of the characters therefore use 'soap-like' language (the Dodger exclaims 'moody mare', for

instance). Likewise, in contrast to Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (where the story is compressed into a single film), the televisual fast pace, intertwining of storylines and cliff-hanger endings once again re-energise perceptions of period drama and the 'Dickensian'. As in the novel and Davies's *Bleak House*, the dynamism of Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* is coupled with the humour, the exaggeration, the distortion and the darkness of the 'Dickensian', reconfiguring, interrogating and yet upholding the 'colour' of Dickens's writing.

Low-angled shots, for example, heighten the distorted 'realism' of the London streets, as Oliver's arrival in the Capital is signalled by the image of St. Paul's in the background. The *mise-en-scène* of Lean's and Reed's films is recalled and yet developed. Introduced through a 'contemporary' clash of folk violin and electric guitar, the camera is positioned so that the buildings become menacing and constricting, foreshadowing Oliver's imprisonment within Fagin's den. As in Marchant's portrayal of Mrs Joe and Magwitch, such distortion is extended to the presentation of certain characters. Significantly, Nancy is first seen as a disembodied head, confined (yet looming) as she is shot through the key-hole to Fagin's lair. 'Fat, stinking, 'orrible', Fagin himself is similarly depicted in gross distortion (just as close-ups of his broken teeth and spittle reconfigure Moody's and Lindsay's more attractive portrayals); an unnerving close-up of his eye, again shown through a key-hole, prefigures his incarceration in prison. Moreover, just as the bleak lighting and distorted sound enforce the workhouse's dungeon-like *mise-en-scène* (the set was actually a former prison), subtle cinematography is employed throughout the adaptation; aptly, scenes associated with Monks often share the workhouse's icy light.

'Breathing camera' is also used to effect, once more reinterpreting the novel and previous screen versions. Episode Three, for example, commences with highly disorientated, rapid camerawork and sound. Crucially, however, the shaking camera intimates Sikes's perspective as he flees from the aborted robbery; as will be discussed further, he is as hunted as he is a predator. Likewise, Giedroyc's visualisation of *Oliver Twist*'s most famous scene is marked in its reinterpretation, part of the production's stylisation as a 'great, modern version'.<sup>479</sup> Once again challenging Whitelaw's assessment of the screenplay's conventionality, Oliver's asking 'for more' is re-imagined both visually and in terms of the orphan's characterisation. Whilst the scene formed

the focus of many of the adaptation's television trailers, thereby invoking its conventional hold on the popular imagination, its electric, synthesised beat heightens the production's 'gritty' immediacy. At the same time, it reworks specifically Reed's and Bart's upbeat musical scores, together with the sentimentality of Lean's angelically-faced Oliver. Crucially, Giedroyc's Oliver stares around at the other famished children, focusing upon a boy beaten for eating oakum, before *he* decides autonomously to 'ask for more'; in a low-angled, heightening shot, he asserts himself self-consciously: '*I said*, Please sir, I want some more'.

Like Bleasdale, Giedroyc thus challenges preconceptions that *Oliver Twist* is a 'known' text. Developing portrayals of workhouse officialdom in other dramatisations, the system's enduring stagnation is reflected through the orphans themselves. Rather than showing the Board's hypocritical gluttony, recurring scenes present the orphans lining up to be given their meagre gruel; Oliver's protest is rendered futile. Significantly, to a greater extent than other adaptations of *Oliver Twist*, Phelps's screenplay, like Dickens's novel, intimates all the other individuals to be 'badged and ticketed', Oliver's narrative framed by an ongoing multitude of other stories: "'The last was a S, - Swubble [...]. The next one as comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins'" (*OT*, 7). In Episode One, the viewer's introduction to the workhouse does not, therefore, focus immediately upon Oliver. Lost in the mass, the camera instead pans around the oakum room, closing in on other boys and manipulating viewer expectations before revealing the main character. As in the telling anonymity of the novel's alternative title, "The Parish Boy's Progress", the orphans are both individualised and de-personalised.

In a similar vein, the vulnerability of the workhouse attendants is also intimated, complicating them to some extent beyond humorous caricature. Sally's theft of Agnes's locket, for instance, is explicated in the ensuing scene, as her desperate indictment of a boy reduced to eating oakum – 'I said, Mr Bumble, didn't I say!' – implies her need for self-recognition as protection against the very system which she upholds. The imperative of avoiding the workhouse, as ingrained in *Our Mutual Friend's* Mrs Higden, is indeed affirmed by the portrayal of Bumble. As he prolongs the orphans' hunger, to Mrs Corney's appreciative observation that he is 'such a joker', the self-conscious manipulation

of the humour associated traditionally with the Beadle hardens his reputation into something more menacing.

As in Bleasdale's adaptation, Fagin is likewise reinterpreted. In contrast to Polanski's *Oliver Twist*, in which Fagin's dances recall the musicals, he is more overtly violent towards Oliver than often depicted. However, as with Sally's social precariousness, Fagin reiterates that he is 'poor – but honourable' throughout the adaptation; his implicit uncertainty thus suggests that he is as unhappily trapped in his world as Oliver is. Most significant, however, is the adaptation's negotiation of the complexity of Fagin's Jewishness, which has underpinned and often haunted *Oliver Twist* since the Victorian period. Aptly, it is Fang who condemns Fagin to death. In response to his plea, 'I don't want to die', the Judge exclaims tauntingly 'Then ask Christ...Renounce your faith'. Crucially, Fagin replies 'I can't do that'. Configured as a martyr, Giedroyc's production is once more explicitly self-conscious in its acknowledgement and reassessment of *Oliver Twist*'s cultural myth.

Such reworking is extended to Nancy and Sikes. Whilst reviews focused upon the casting of Sophie Okonedo as a coloured Nancy, perhaps the greater significance is to be found in the psychological and emotional connectivity which imprisons them both. As with Heathcliff in Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights*, Tom Hardy complicates preconceptions of Sikes, reconfiguring brutish caricatures. Like Giedroyc's Dodger, Bill is underpinned by a personal vulnerability, as his anger towards Nancy is driven by his jealousy and, consequently, his insecurity: 'I thought you'd left me'. Significantly, Nancy's attachment to Sikes is indeed interlinked with her ability to manipulate his feelings for her. As she reassures and placates him – 'I'm your girl' – her control challenges his threatening possessiveness.<sup>480</sup>

Phelps's screenplay develops Bleasdale's privileging of Nancy through Bill's death, whilst also deepening his characterisation. Sikes's act of killing is shown as performative: 'Get up – you're alright. Get up'; 'That's enough now, get up...Get up, Nance'. As he realises that Nancy is dead, the 'breathing camera' depicts, unusually, her battered face, yet it is markedly from Sikes's perspective; the viewer is channeled through his feelings. Later, Oliver's quietly-challenging observation – 'There's blood on your face, Mr Sikes' – wakens him from his delusion that he would 'never hurt' Nancy. As even Bull's-

eye flees from him, disorientating stylistic effects instead imprison him in his visions of Nancy. Pursued by the London crowd and haunted by himself, Sikes's attempt to escape through the sewers traps him literally and metaphorically. Significantly, Nancy follows him into the underworld, singing "Abide with Me". Whilst the hymn recalls Dickens's softening of the prostitute through her Christian penitence, it is also ironised and complicated. Okonedo's Nancy instead incarcerates Bill in a psychological bond, her apparition taunting him emotionally: 'I won't never leave you Bill'; 'Bill – do you love me?' Fang's deathly hammer, condemning Fagin, cuts finally to Bill collapsing in the dark sewer before he hangs himself, spurred on by the reproachful presence of Nancy's 'ghost'. As in Bleasdale's adaptation, it is implicitly Nancy who is avenged against both of her murderers, Sikes and Fagin.

Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* thus presents a complex negotiation of literary text, cultural myth and period adaptation. On the one hand, the production recognises and harnesses the embeddedness of the story within the popular imagination; Fagin's introduction, for example, is via the sizzling sausages and toasting fork. Equally, as 'a gritty new adaptation', conventional expectations of *Oliver Twist* are reassessed.<sup>481</sup> Nancy therefore arms Oliver with a knife, whilst Monks's physical attack upon Bumble is heightened by his menacing threat: 'I will take the letters, and both your lives, and it will mean nothing to me'. Notions of Dickens's novel as a children's story (embodied ostensibly by Merrick's *Walt Disney* adaptation) are thus questioned.

Certainly, Giedroyc's adaptation bears similarities to ITV's 1999 version. As in Bleasdale's production, female vulnerability is stressed, for instance, as Rose and Nancy are linked in their subjugation; advised by Monks to 'learn to endure anything', Rose is, like Nancy, preyed upon as a bodily object: 'Hear that, she's looking for a boy. How about me, darling?'. However, arguably the greatest significance attached to Giedroyc's production is its self-reflexivity, as it invokes and yet tests the stylistic and thematic traditions surrounding, in particular, screened versions of *Oliver Twist*.

Its status as a 'meta-adaptation' is exemplified by its conclusion. In a typically 'Dickensian' manner, the dramatisation ends with a family circle at Brownlow's Christmas fireside. Such conventional imaging is indeed embodied



by the production as a whole, as it was screened, like Hodge's *David Copperfield* (1999), Hesford's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (ITV, 2007) and Disney's *A Christmas Carol* (2009), during the festive season. Nevertheless, in contrast to the trailers for *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which focused upon traditionally snowy, lamplit scenes, *Oliver Twist* forges an intricate, dynamic and challenging dialogue between convention and reinterpretation.<sup>482</sup> As the Brownlow family applauds Oliver, he turns directly to the camera and bows to the audience as he exclaims 'Merry Christmas'. Recalling the stage-like Fagin in the production's opening credits, the screenplay's circularity marks its self-reflexive performance, both in its tradition and in its innovation.

### ***Little Dorrit* (2008)**

In many ways, Andrew Davies's adaptation of *Little Dorrit* continues the reassessment of costume drama, Dickens and the 'Dickensian' seen in *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist*, whilst also recalling, yet developing, Christine Edzard's 'classic' 1987 version of the novel. The adaptation gained, like *Bleak House*, much critical recognition, competing against 'mainstream' drama in order to win seven 'Emmys' (including 'Best Mini Series').<sup>483</sup> Equally, popular viewers generally applauded the dramatisation (despite concerns regarding its convoluted storyline), commending it as 'spell-bounding from start to finish'.<sup>484</sup> Nevertheless, *Little Dorrit* is a problematic production, not only in terms of its screening of Dickens's highly complex plot, but in its stylistic tensions – both as a 'Dickens film' and as a period drama.

As has been discussed, Marchant's *Great Expectations*, Davies's *Bleak House* and Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* are, as a whole, consistent in their self-conscious reinterpretations of Dickens and classic-novel adaptation. By contrast, *Little Dorrit*, like *Cranford*, prefigures more markedly the conflict and confusion which culminates in Welch's *Emma*. Above all, the serialisation anticipated, and helped to create, the notion of 'fatigue' which is increasingly becoming attached to the genre. As *The Telegraph*'s headlines exclaimed, "BBC Costume Drama *Little Dorrit* Sees Audience Slide Only Halfway Through Its Run" (foreshadowing reports in 2009 that a "Case of *Emma* Fatigue Sees BBC

Viewers Turn Off In Millions”).<sup>485</sup> Whereas *Bleak House* sought to reinvigorate approaches and responses both to Dickens and to adaptation, *Little Dorrit* marked a growing disillusion with the form.

*Little Dorrit*'s contradictions are indeed highlighted in certain reviews of the adaptation. As James Walton postulated, it is '[u]nfair but true: *Little Dorrit* [...] doesn't seem to have caught on in the same way as other recent costume dramas'.<sup>486</sup> Walton contends that this lies in the fact that 'literary adaptations [...] have been so good for so long that we're in danger of taking them for granted. In short, we're getting spoiled'.<sup>487</sup> Certainly, Davies's screenplay is imbued with frequently dynamic and interesting explorations of Dickens's novel, asserted and enriched by intricate filming. However, *Little Dorrit* is more endemically problematic than Walton suggests, both in terms of its production and the popular and critical responses elicited.

On the one hand, its tensions arguably have a textual basis, as a 'couple of the middle episodes lacked energy – especially, as so often in Dickens, when the action left London'.<sup>488</sup> More crucially, the BBC's presentation and promotion of *Little Dorrit* embodied its divisiveness. The BBC Press Pack commissioning the adaptation compared it particularly with Thomas's *Cranford* and Davies's *Sense and Sensibility*, hoping that it would follow in 'their triumphant footsteps'.<sup>489</sup> Conversely, little immediate attention was focused on its association with *Bleak House*, despite the fact that *Little Dorrit* sought ostensibly to emulate Davies's earlier adaptation (particularly in its instalment form, again scheduled to follow *Eastenders*). Whereas *Bleak House* was advertised specifically, and prominently, through its 'soap-opera treatment', the less vociferous announcement of *Little Dorrit* intimated that the refreshed approach to Dickens and the screen had become unsettled and, arguably, worn. As Alastair Jamieson noted of *Little Dorrit*, 'its presentation as a soap-opera-style run of thirty-minute instalments [is] thought to have wearied viewers'.<sup>490</sup>

*Little Dorrit* thus became split (even prior to its production and screening) between tradition and innovation; recognised as another period drama 'soap', it was placed simultaneously in the same vein as *Cranford* and *Lark Rise To Candleford* (BBC, 2008-2010), adaptations which are both characterised by their nostalgic preoccupations and more traditional visual style (the DVD cover of *Lark Rise*, for instance, describes the production as a 'love letter' to the past).

Such contradictions were compounded by viewer confusion over *Little Dorrit*'s broadcasting, as they 'chased' the adaptation through the schedules.<sup>491</sup>

As Boyd Tonkin argues, BBC costume drama rests upon 'a cloud of complacency'.<sup>492</sup> Certainly, the corporation defended criticisms against *Little Dorrit* merely through the assertion that the 'BBC remained best placed to produce adaptations of this kind', a rather contentious notion that will be discussed further in the Conclusion.<sup>493</sup> Nevertheless, Tonkin's comment is something of a simplification, overlooking the very conscious struggle which is increasingly underpinning classic-novel adaptation. Vitaly, whilst many viewers were perplexed by *Little Dorrit*'s plotting and scheduling, the adaptation is itself confused.

Clearly, on the one hand, *Little Dorrit* embraces and develops the stylistic dynamism and innovation of *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist*, as well as adaptations of other authors and texts; as with Welch's *Jane Eyre* and David Nicholls's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, for instance, trailers for *Little Dorrit* were accompanied by a 'modern' soundtrack, and contained sequences of rapidly-cut scenes (in contrast to the slow-paced, heavily 'classic' advertisements for Edzard's *Little Dorrit*). Above all, although there is less use of 'breathing camera' and zoom than in *Bleak House*, visual and aural effects once again shape a nuanced exploration of the novel.

The rolling camera in the Clennam household, for instance, intimates its deterioration, the unsettled foundations mirroring the unsettledness of its occupants. The Dorrits' sojourn in Venice is presented in similarly intricate terms. Significantly, the first image of the family in Italy is figured as a distorted reflection upon a Venetian canal; as with Merdle's wealth, their aggrandisement is vacuously performative. Resisting idealised portraits of the city (Dickens indeed proclaimed Venice as a 'strange Dream upon the water'), the camera rolls with the gondola, the low angle presenting the overcrowded buildings as toweringly imprisoning as they obscure the sky.<sup>494</sup> Tellingly, the undulating camera movement connects Venice with the Clennam household, foreshadowing both the later decline of the Dorrits' fortune (just as Arthur and his home collapse) and Amy's personal tie to the family. Indeed, although Amy's expression registers her delighted wonderment at the city, the only image of

Venice as a whole is Gowan's picture, painted symbolically 'in the dark'; as a copy, produced for financial gain rather than artistic achievement, Venice too becomes superficial and commodified, as insubstantial as its shimmering reflections.

Such visual intricacies permeate Davies's adaptation. In particular, the notion of imprisonment – literal and metaphorical – forms a motif throughout. As in Edzard's *Little Dorrit*, the confinement of the Marshalsea becomes all-pervasive. In the earlier adaptation, whilst Dorrit's view from his cell is met only by a high wall, Clennam's gaze out over London's clustered rooftops similarly confines him physically and psychologically. In the 2008 production, overhead shots, although lofty, accentuate the narrowness of the streets (in addition to diminishing Amy, who, as the camera pulls into long-shot, becomes lost in the crowd). Whilst the Marshalsea itself is shot through jagged bars, its seeming homeliness shadowed by darker undercurrents, the city is also figured as a prison. Indeed, as with Miss Flite's release of her birds, even when Amy leaves the Marshalsea she continues to be filmed through lattices (whilst, in a neat touch, individuals leaving and entering the jail are required to stoop).

Matthew Macfadyen's depiction of Clennam is likewise enriched by *mise-en-scène* and camera effects, illuminating his personal disillusion and suffocation. Significantly, the first shot of Arthur, in extreme close-up, is initially blurred, whilst dyed cloth (emblematic of his family business) obscures him as it floats on the air. Tellingly, his ensuing nightmare is again associated with fabric, as the camera focuses on a white curtain, branded with dark silhouettes, before it reveals the feverish Arthur; he is trapped visually within the House of Clennam. Indeed, at his return to London, he is (like Amy) caged behind a latticed window, his childhood home reflected and distorted on the glass. Prison-like, just as the Marshalsea is Amy's prison home, the House of Clennam is impounded behind the bars of a fence, twisted with dead foliage and revealingly reminiscent of Marchant's Satis House. With an apt prescience, such inescapability permeates Arthur's life.<sup>495</sup> His offices at Doyce and Clennam, for instance, abound with cage-like latticed windows, whilst Bleeding Heart Yard's spiked wall provides a visual link to the Marshalsea, anticipating Arthur's fall.<sup>496</sup> Indeed, even the sign announcing 'Doyce and Clennam' is shot through the confinement of a lantern frame.

Like *Bleak House*'s fog, imprisonment thus connects Dickens's and Davies's intricate webs of characters and places. As Casby demands rent of Pancks, for example, the camera moves from the customary pink room (itself confining Flora within her lost girlhood) to a darker study, the scene once again shot through symbolic lead lattices which recall the restricted windows of the Marshalsea. The dangerous interrelationship between the freedom of riches and the suffocation of poverty is epitomised by Merdle (focused upon to a greater extent than in Edzard's adaptation), who stands at the parrot's cage, the camera angled so as to impound him also. Just as Dorrit struggles, literally and emotionally, to leave the Marshalsea, the prison is figured as a visual draw throughout the adaptation.

As in *Bleak House*, in which the (self-effacing) autonomy of Esther's narrative embodies Dickens's highly complex presentation of women (tellingly, she is 'angelic' in order to 'win some love' (*BH*, 23, my italics)), *Little Dorrit*, even in its title, implies the ambiguities and tensions of the Victorian patriarchy; although she 'possesses' the novel, the diminished Amy is signified through her father's name. Nevertheless, the first-person narrative of Amy's letters to Clennam, in which she dares to 'write a little more', intimates her self-consciously recognised interiority (as opposed to Agnes Grey's – albeit potentially ironic – silencing: 'And now I think I have said sufficient').<sup>497</sup> Amy thus denounces the vacuousness of the female self endorsed by Sarah Ellis, asserting instead a striking independence of feeling: 'there is one thought scarcely ever – never – out of my memory, and that is that I hope you sometimes [...] have a thought for me' (*LD*, 445).<sup>498</sup>

Although 'so little and light, noiseless and shy' (*LD*, 54), Claire Foy's Little Dorrit thus admits her womanhood in Davies's adaptation.<sup>499</sup> The bitterness of her unrequited love, for instance, is channelled into her rebuke of Clennam, thereby reasserting the adult individuality which he obfuscates: 'Little Dorrit!'; 'Don't call me that – I'm not a child'; 'You used to love to be called by that name'; 'Not any more – not by you'.

However, just as Esther (in Dickens's novel and Davies's screenplay) is debilitatingly conscious of her divergence from physical ideals, Amy's self-awareness is figured in terms which frequently negate and confine her. Like Esther's self-imposed characterisation as 'Dame Durden', Dickens's Amy insists

upon her diminutive names – ‘Little Dorrit’ and ‘Little Mother’ – and yet she struggles to internalise them. Whilst ‘Little *Mother*’ itself admits implicitly of sexuality, Amy is unsettled by Pet’s conventional attractiveness to Clennam. As with Fanny Price’s, Jane Eyre’s and Esther’s preoccupation with physical appearance (revealingly, Esther notes the kindness of the ‘ugly’ old gardener (*BH*, 22), for instance), Amy’s reflections once again intimate the complexity of Victorian womanhood, as ‘angelic’ ideals are underpinned by the bodily: ‘who could help loving so beautiful and winning a creature? I could not wonder at anyone loving her. No, [...] she looked most beautiful’ (*LD*, 443; 446). Amy’s act of writing thus acts both as a release and as a form of self-negation: ‘if I was Mrs Gowan (what a change that would be, and how I must alter to become like her!)’ (*LD*, 443).

In the 2008 production, Amy’s developing relationship with Clennam is presented in imprisoning terms, prefiguring the tensions in their association and, as a consequence, exteriorising her stifling emotional anguish. As Arthur follows her in Episode One, the camera pulls back into a medium-long shot, so that she is obscured, and incarcerated behind, the lattices of a shop window. Later, as Arthur informs his mother that he has ‘taken up a permanent lodging in Covent Garden’, Amy’s crestfallen, shadowed face is focused upon in the foreground. Subsequently, Amy stares back at Arthur through the carriage window as it leaves the Marshalsea, an image which then recurs throughout (recalling similar portrayals of Austen and Lefroy in *Becoming Jane*).

Significantly, the camera conceals Amy at times. As she walks through London (dwarfed, aptly, by the Circumlocution Office), her face is in extreme close-up, yet only half of it is visible (thereby recalling the first direct image of Helen Graham, as discussed in Chapter Three). The motif is later repeated, this time with her face to the right of the shot; just as she is initially unnamed in Dickens’s novel, she is seen as a whole – yet only in parts – in Davies’s adaptation.<sup>500</sup> Interestingly, in the trailers promoting *Little Dorrit*, the sequence is accompanied by Dorrit’s voiceover as he wishes that ‘time would stand still and keep [Amy] as she is today’; visually, she is stunted according to her father’s wish.

Although Davies does not fully interrogate Tattycoram and Miss Wade’s relationship (whilst trailers emphasised their implied lesbianism, little attention is

devoted to them in the screenplay), visual metaphors explore the Victorian ‘Woman Question’ throughout. Just as Amy’s rooms are literal and metaphorical prisons, Mr Meagle’s proclamation – ‘Home, sweet Home!’ – is ironised by the cage-like bower in which his family is enclosed. Indeed, Pet herself is often signalled first by images of caged birds (complicating Edzard’s unchallenged vision of Twickenham as ‘a Paradise’ (*LD*, 194)), whilst her girlishness is darkened through graphic images of her childbirth.

Equally, rapid camerawork and distorted sound are harnessed in order to psychologise and complicate the screenplay’s characters, whilst also redefining period drama. Disturbing visual and aural effects are associated most particularly with Rigaud/Blandois; the camera zooms jaggedly into a close-up of the villain, accentuating the implied threat of his presence, whilst his murder of Flintwinch is accompanied by crashing metallic sounds. Perhaps the most interesting portrait, however, is of Dorrit. Tom Courtenay catches well his fluctuating feelings (following his confrontation with John, for instance, he smells the cigars and sinks sobbing), yet fast, blurred camera movement and heightened sound further interiorise him.

As Chivery offers to take Dorrit into the forecourt, for example, an overhead long shot diminishes his hesitant figure, alienating him physically and emotionally. As he looks out at the street (which, significantly, is not shown directly), its sounds are distorted. The camera remaining upon Dorrit rather than the outside world, it focuses instead upon his retreat into the Marshalsea. Indeed, following his release, Dorrit hears an accentuated prison bell during moments of distress, together with the distortedly mocking voices of society; although it is pronounced that ‘Monsieur is not used to confinement’, the sound of keys and locks which accompany the close-up of his face assert an aural flashback. Later, as he sits at Merdle’s dinner table, the camera spins in a circular fashion towards him, confining him visually. As the shot closes in on his isolated person, his face becomes deformed through wide-angled lens; as with the exaggeration of seditious whispers on the soundtrack, Dorrit is disjointed externally and internally, displaced from Society and imprisoned within his past.

Davies’s *Little Dorrit* nevertheless becomes confused, as ‘contemporary’ visual and aural devices are set alongside more conventional approaches to

Dickens and costume drama. Certainly, traditional images of period drama can be harnessed self-reflexively, asserting an adaptation's exploration of a literary text. In *Lark Rise to Candleford*, the often gentle pace and musical score, together with sunlit images of cottages and hayfields (memorialised through the photogenic use of steadicam), embody Flora Thompson's retrospectively fond account of her childhood, the nostalgic return to an earlier form of costume drama intimating nostalgia for the past. Although the 'grittiness' of Victorian rural life is apparent in *Lark Rise*, this does not conflict with the overall tone of the adaptation, as tradition and contemporaneity are placed in balanced dialogue. The opening credits, for example, are figured as leaves turning in a book (recalling early films), yet the 'pages' are stills from the production. Although engaging in a televisual reworking of generic conventions (just as Laura leaves *Lark Rise* for the 'modernity' of *Candleford*), the sequence – shown aptly in slow motion – suggests also its 'fidelity' to Thompson's reminiscent novels.

By contrast, *Little Dorrit* seems divided in its presentation. Whereas Blandois's sudden appearance in Arthur's cell is announced through a metallic crash and zooming camera, the equally disturbing collapse of Merdle's Bank is figured through an old-fashioned superimposition of despairing investors over an image of his office; although their ghostly forms imply their destitution, the effect is strikingly staid and incongruous. Such inconsistencies are extended to the *mise-en-scène*. Although the House of Clennam is depicted in visually nuanced terms, the portrayal of London returns to a more traditional imaging. A view of London's highly stylised cityscape, for instance, recalls Lean's and Reed's 'stagey' *Oliver Twist*, yet it conflicts somewhat with the production's grittily 'realistic' portrayal of the urban underworld (as seen by Maggy and Amy). Moreover, whereas Davies's *Bleak House* and Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* reconfigure, yet uphold, 'Dickensian' distortion through camera angle, lens and movement, *Little Dorrit* often visualises London as stereotypically lamp-lit.

Similarly, the pacing of *Little Dorrit* becomes problematic. Despite its equation with soap-opera, longer scenes lack the energy of *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist*, whilst greater use of steadicam dilutes the immediacy characteristic of the earlier adaptations. Moreover, as noted by Philip Reeve, '30-minute instalments worked for *Bleak House*, [but] if the story doesn't carry it then it has the potential to be quite damaging'.<sup>501</sup> Crucially, the convoluted plot of Davies's



screenplay was rendered more confusing by the lack of connectedness between the conclusion of one episode and the start of another (a device maintained particularly well in *Bleak House*).

As Boyd Tonkin notes, when ‘Davies delivered his cliff-hanging but ‘modernist’ *Bleak House* in 2005, it looked as if the critical landscape had shifted’. *Little Dorrit*, however, heralded uncertainty not only with regard to screening Dickens but to costume drama as a form. Although Tonkin argues that ‘Charles Dickens has almost become invisible’, as everyone ‘appears to know what they think about the novels, the adapters and the actors’, what is instead clear is the confusion which marks the 2008 adaptation.<sup>502</sup> In the final scene, for example, Amy’s and Arthur’s marriage complicates the ‘slow-motion wedding which traditionally ends an Andrew Davies costume drama’.<sup>503</sup> In contrast to Lizzy and Esther, Amy recalls Welch’s Margaret Hale as she looks away autonomously from her husband, and gazes directly at the camera; Hablot K. Browne’s illustration of their union in Dickens’s novel indeed depicts *Amy*, rather than Clennam, signing the register (*LD*, 779). At the same time, however, the saccharine musical score, together with Cavalletto’s exaggerated enthusiasm as Arthur and Amy kiss, somewhat unsettle the screenplay’s nuances.

*Little Dorrit* thus recalls and compounds the problematic tensions which have formed an undercurrent in Dickens adaptation from the late 1990s onwards, framing the innovativeness of particularly *Great Expectations* (1999), *Bleak House* (2005) and *Oliver Twist* (2007) with complex and often divisive approaches to the ‘Dickensian’. As seen in *Little Dorrit*, the musical scoring of Dickens adaptations, for example, frequently creates schisms, unsettling and contradicting a screenplay’s preoccupations. Certainly, musical buoyancy invokes Dickens’s particular association with the stage, foregrounded in McGrath’s *Nicholas Nickleby* (just as the novel is preoccupied with performance). However, in Hodge’s *David Copperfield*, McGrath’s and Hesford’s versions of *Nicholas Nickleby* and Polanski’s *Oliver Twist*, scenes of ‘grittiness’ (depicting Smike’s hardships, for instance) conflict with their accompanying light-hearted or sentimentalised music (notably, Rachel Portman scored both McGrath’s and Polanski’s films). Likewise, in Edzard’s *Little*

*Dorrit*, the hardships faced by a family evicted from Bleeding Heart Yard are undercut by the jollity of the musical score.

The difficult negotiation of the ‘Dickensian’, as upbeat entertainment or darkly satirical prophesy, is bound inextricably to costume drama’s struggle to define itself as a genre. Although Giddings observes of the shifting styles of classic-novel adaptation that ‘nothing dates as rapidly as updating’, the return to the ‘traditional’ is also problematic; as Tonkin maintains in his review of *Little Dorrit*, the BBC ‘must impose a moratorium on meticulous but creaking costume dramas’.<sup>504</sup> Indeed, Giddings’s attitudes towards trends in screening Dickens are themselves somewhat contradictory, embodying the contentiousness of the period drama debate; although he applauds Hesford’s *Nicholas Nickleby* for its resistance to ‘update Dickens to modern times’, for ‘these works speak across the years with the authoritative power of timeless myth and the mystifying conviction of dream’, he also commends Davies’s *Bleak House* for its striking employment of televisual effects.<sup>505</sup> Such ambivalence, moreover, is deepened by the differentiation between ‘cinematic’ and ‘televisual’ Dickens. As Jeffrey Richards argues, while British television, from the 1990s onwards, ‘was triumphantly producing definitive versions of the later Dickens novels, cinema was on the whole failing to match their magnificence. Television is perfectly placed to adopt the serial form that Dickens originally used and to give far more time to the unfolding of the narrative than cinema can normally allow’.<sup>506</sup> As has been explored, television has increasingly provided a uniquely dynamic context in which to screen Dickens yet, crucially, the medium has become unsettled.

Clearly, Dickens adaptation continues to proliferate and, to an extent, develop. Walt Disney’s 2009 version of *A Christmas Carol* combines tradition and innovation; produced as family, festive entertainment (recalling simultaneously Dickens’s literary legacy and ‘The Muppets’ own rendering of the novel), the animated film presents the ‘classic tale as you’ve never seen it before: in Digital 3-D’, and has been transformed into a Nintendo game.<sup>507</sup> Nevertheless, as will be explored in the Conclusion, the BBC’s decommissioning of the relatively unknown *Dombey and Son* in favour of a projected version of *David Copperfield* epitomises the tense turn to tradition and the familiar which characterises Welch’s *Emma* and the future of (television) costume drama.

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<sup>371</sup> David Selznick, *Daily Telegraph* (12/05/1934), as cited in Jeffrey Sconce, "Dickens, Selznick, and *Southpark*," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 171-187. 176.

<sup>372</sup> Kate Carnell Watt and Kathleen C. Lonsdale, "Dickens Composed: Film and Television Adaptations 1897-2001," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 201-216. 201. This paper offers an extensive filmography of Dickens screen adaptations.

<sup>373</sup> Jenny Dennett, "Sentimentality, Sex and Sadism: The 1935 Version of Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*," *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen*, ed. Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 54-70. 56. See Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965) 33. Likewise, David Cecil claimed that 'conventional melodrama and [Dickens's] sentiment are the conventional melodrama and sentiment of the Cockney, no better and no worse than those which burgeon in flamboyant lusciousness from sixpenny novelettes and super-cinemas today; and indeed very like them'. David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London: Constable, 1957) 51.

<sup>374</sup> Andrew Sanders, *Authors in Context: Charles Dickens* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) 177-178.

<sup>375</sup> John Glavin, "Introduction," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 1-8. 6; 'jacket blurb'.

<sup>376</sup> Kamilla Elliott, "Cinematic Dickens and Uncinematic Words," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 113-121. 115.

<sup>377</sup> Sanders 193.

<sup>378</sup> Indeed, McGrath's *Nicholas Nickleby* (2002) commences with an image of a miniature stage.

<sup>379</sup> John Romano, "Writing After Dickens: The Television Writer's Art," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 89-94. 89.

<sup>380</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964) 9-10, as cited in Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 12.

<sup>381</sup> Smith 1.

<sup>382</sup> Charles Dickens, Letter (24<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1858), as cited in Smith 12.

<sup>383</sup> Leon Edel, "Novel and Camera," *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford UP, 1974) 177.

<sup>384</sup> Charles Dickens, Letter (3<sup>rd</sup> August 1857), as cited in Smith 15.

<sup>385</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today," *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian, 1957) 195-256. For a useful overview of Eisenstein's analysis of Dickens, see Garrett Stewart, "Dickens, Eisenstein, Film," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 122-144. Eisenstein's theories, however, have come under scrutiny. As Stewart highlights, 'for all of Eisenstein's sincere admiration and detailed celebration of Dickens, it is crucial to note how the Victorian storyteller's narrative technique becomes [...] mostly a marker for conceptual limitations in Griffith'. Stewart 123.

<sup>386</sup> Joss Marsh, "Dickens and Film," *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. John O'Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 204-223. 204-205.

<sup>387</sup> Kamilla Elliott provides a useful overview of the problems involved in seeing Dickens as 'cinematic' and as the forefather of film. She notes that, although Christian Metz argues that 'film took over the social function of the Victorian novel' (Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977) 110), many film scholars maintain that 'any type of verbal narration in film is 'uncinematic''; equally, 'art historians have repeatedly and convincingly demonstrated that any visual 'cinematic' propensities in Victorian novels are readily traceable to prior and contemporaneous visual and dramatic arts, arts which influenced both novel and film directly'. Nevertheless, the link between the novel and film, and Dickens and cinema, survives; 'both mythologies thrive [...] because they serve each side of the literature/film rivalry. On the literary side, designating Dickens in particular and the Victorian novel more generally the immediate ancestors of film forges a history of narrative that creates a continuous line from oral poetry through the rise of [...] drama and subsequently the rise of novel through to film and television'. For Dickens, 'it bestows on him seminal and prescient powers that allow him to be read not only as our contemporary, but as ahead of his own time, prophetic rather than antiquated, eccentric, or sentimentally nostalgic' (Elliott 113-116).

<sup>388</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Doreen Roberts (Ware: Wordsworth, 2001) 268. All subsequent references are to this edition.

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<sup>389</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell, introd. Kate Flint (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 4. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>390</sup> Perhaps most famously, David Lean defended his *Oliver Twist* (1948) against charges of anti-Semitism by claiming that Alec Guinness's portrayal of Fagin was based upon Cruickshank's images. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver\\_Twist\\_\(1948\\_film\)#Controversy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Twist_(1948_film)#Controversy). Accessed 06/08/09.

<sup>391</sup> Smith 6.

<sup>392</sup> Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley, *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatisation* (London: Macmillan, 1990) 46.

<sup>393</sup> Sanders 177; Fred Guida, *A Christmas Carol and its Adaptations: Dickens's Story on Screen and Television* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2000) 4.

<sup>394</sup> As David Thompson notes of Cukor's film, it is a 'magnificent [...] landmark in literary adaptation because of its fidelity to the spirit and the look of Dickens'. David Thompson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* (London: André Deutsch, 1994) 162, as cited in John Bowen, "David Copperfield's Home Movies," *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 29-38. 35. What Thompson misses, however, is the extent to which Cukor's film itself has created a notion of the 'Dickensian'; arguably, for instance, W. C. Fields has 'become' Micawber.

<sup>395</sup> Sconce 180.

<sup>396</sup> *The Times* (01/03/20), as cited in Michael Pointer, *Charles Dickens on the Screen: The Film, Television, and Video Adaptations* (London: Scarecrow, 1996) 7.

<sup>397</sup> *New York Times* (1935), as cited in Pointer 60.

<sup>398</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Vulgarity in Literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930) 54, as cited in Dennett 55; *Daily Telegraph* (04/02/35), as cited in Dennett 57.

<sup>399</sup> Roger Manvell (1965), as cited in Pointer 49.

<sup>400</sup> Sanders 177.

<sup>401</sup> Robert Giddings, "Pickwick Papers: Beyond that Time and Place," *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen*, ed. Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 31-53. 33.

<sup>402</sup> See Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity, From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 326-250.

<sup>403</sup> Giddings, Selby and Wensley 90.

<sup>404</sup> Richards 349-350.

<sup>405</sup> Glavin 5-6.

<sup>406</sup> Oswald Morris, Interview, "The Carlton Film Collection: A Profile of *Oliver Twist*," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d759WZn3vFY>. Accessed 15/08/09.

<sup>407</sup> Lean's inclusion of an archery scene, highlighting the tense relationship between Pip and Estella, is, as a point of interest, used in similar fashion in Douglas McGrath's *Emma* and Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993).

<sup>408</sup> Productions included: *Martin Chuzzlewit*, dir. Pedr James, adapt. David Lodge (BBC, 1994). *Oliver Twist*, dir. Tony Bill, adapt. Monte Merrick (Walt Disney, 1997).

<sup>409</sup> Stanley Reynolds, *The Times* (1977), as cited in Pointer 92.

<sup>410</sup> *Radio Times* (1999), as cited in Robert Giddings, "Great Expectations," [http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great\\_expectations\\_giddings.html](http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great_expectations_giddings.html). Accessed 20/08/09.

<sup>411</sup> Carnell Watt and Lonsdale 215.

<sup>412</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Michael Cotsell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 209. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>413</sup> The metaphorical pervasiveness of dust in Welch's adaptation is reinforced by an apt scene in which Bella polishes a shelf absent-mindedly, an indication of her subconscious tie to the Harmans and Boffins, families built upon dirt and dust.

<sup>414</sup> E. S. Dallas, *The Times* (Nov. 1865). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our\\_Mutual\\_Friend](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Mutual_Friend). Accessed 30/08/09.

<sup>415</sup> Janine Gibson, "More for *Oliver Twist* and ITV in Drama War," *The Guardian* (30/11/99). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/1999/nov/30/itv.broadcasting>. Accessed 20/05/10.

<sup>416</sup> The continued popularity of *Oliver!*, and the extent of its usurpation of Dickens's novel in the popular imagination, is attested to by audience reactions to the Stamford Shakespeare Company's production of *Oliver Twist* (Tolethorpe Theatre, Rutland; Summer, 2009); interest in the performance (in terms of inquiries and bookings) dropped once it was discovered that the play was not a musical version (Conversation with Director; Summer, 2009).

<sup>417</sup> Paul McCann, "A New Twist in Fagin's Life as Bleasdale Fleshes Out Dickens," *The Independent* (06/07/99). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/a-new-twist-in-fagins-life-as-bleasdale-fleshes-out-dickens-1104596.html>. Accessed 20/08/09. The review's commentary upon *Oliver!* (1960; 1968) demonstrates the interconnectedness of Dickens films and Dickens's novels, as perceptions of *Oliver Twist* are associated indelibly with the long history of adapting the orphan's story into a variety of different media; notice of 'Charles Dickens's Fagin' is thus exchanged readily for 'Ron Moody's' (indeed, the opening credits of Reed's *Oliver!* highlight that 'Book, music and lyrics' are by 'Lionel Bart'; it is only near the end of the credits that it is noted, in small print, that the film is 'Freely adapted from Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*).

<sup>418</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 64. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>419</sup> The use of bars (creating a cage-like effect) forms a motif throughout Dickens films, from the adaptations of the early twentieth century onwards; in Bleasdale's *Oliver Twist*, the motif culminates in the image of Fagin in his prison cell.

<sup>420</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson (1837), as cited in Stephen Gill, "Introduction," *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) xvi.

<sup>421</sup> Charles Dickens, Letter (3<sup>rd</sup> Nov. 1837), as cited in Gill xiii.

<sup>422</sup> Whilst Sikes literally kills Nancy, Bleasdale differentiates his screenplay from prior adaptations as Bill commits suicide. As he hangs by his fingertips on the roof, Fagin admonishes him for his murder: 'There was no need to do that to Nancy, Bill – none at all'. As Sikes proclaims 'I loved her', he lets himself fall; Nancy thus takes his life implicitly.

<sup>423</sup> In a similar vein, various adaptations of *Oliver Twist* (including Lean's and Reed's films) contain images of a Punch and Judy show; the humour of the puppets' fights acts as an unsettling mirror to the horrors endured by Oliver (and Nancy), both in the workhouse and Jacob's Island.

<sup>424</sup> Robert Giddings, "Great Expectations," [http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great\\_expectations\\_giddings.html](http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great_expectations_giddings.html). Accessed 20/08/09; James Rampton, "On The Darker Side of Dickens," *The Independent* (08/04/99). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/arts-on-the-darker-side-of-dickens-1085824.html>. Accessed 22/08/09.

<sup>425</sup> Giddings [http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great\\_expectations\\_giddings.html](http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great_expectations_giddings.html). Accessed 20/08/09.

<sup>426</sup> Tony Marchant, Interview, as cited in Rampton <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/arts-on-the-darker-side-of-dickens-1085824.html>. Accessed 22/08/09. Similar attention was focused upon Peter Bowker in articles promoting ITV's *Wuthering Heights* (2009) and the BBC's *Desperate Romantics* (2009), highlighting his contemporaneity and 'grittiness'. See, for example, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/wuthering-heights-itv1brthe-choir-unsung-town-bbc2-1782285.html>. Accessed 26/09/09.

<sup>427</sup> Rampton <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/arts-on-the-darker-side-of-dickens-1085824.html>. Accessed 22/08/09.

<sup>428</sup> Tony Marchant, Interview, as cited in Rampton <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/arts-on-the-darker-side-of-dickens-1085824.html>. Accessed 22/08/09.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>430</sup> Television trailer for *Great Expectations* (BBC, 1999).

<sup>431</sup> The novel's serialised form is also explored, as the soldiers' command – 'come on, look sharp' – is followed by a slight pause, thus recalling the first instalment's cliff-hanger ending.

<sup>432</sup> Giddings [http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great\\_expectations\\_giddings.html](http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/great_expectations_giddings.html). Accessed 20/08/09.

<sup>433</sup> The connection between Abel and Pip is also intimated through images of their boots, in a motif which recurs throughout the adaptation. In 'Dickensian' fashion, boots provide a humorous preoccupation which also psychologises Pip in particular, ever conscious of his 'coarseness'. Significantly, the first direct shot of Magwitch is of his boots, their convict's chains foreshadowing Pip's own tie to him.

<sup>434</sup> The image also recalls the beating hooves as Pip leaves for London in Lean's film.

<sup>435</sup> Similarly, Pip's transformation into a 'gentleman' is transposed across an image of him rowing; his 'arm of a blacksmith' binds him firmly to his past life.

<sup>436</sup> Kate Flint, "Introduction," *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) vii.

<sup>437</sup> Robert Giddings, "Soft-Soaping Dickens: Andrew Davies, BBC1 and *Bleak House*," [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.

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<sup>438</sup> Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* heralds Oliver's arrival in London through the image of St. Paul's in the background, thereby pointing also to Lean's and Reed's legacies.

<sup>439</sup> Equally, low-angled shots of Pip in London make him appear looming and distorted, out-of-place in the city.

<sup>440</sup> Carolin Held, "From 'Heritage Space' to 'Narrative Space' – Anti-Heritage Aesthetics in the Classic TV Serials *Our Mutual Friend* and *Vanity Fair*," *Janespotting and Beyond: British Heritage Retrovisions Since the Mid-1990s*, ed. Eckart Voigts-Virchow (Würtemberg: Narr, 2004) 113-124. 118.

<sup>441</sup> Ciar Byrne, "BBC's Star-Studded Adaptation of *Bleak House* Shines at Awards," *The Independent* (31/03/06). <http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/bbcs-starstudded-adaptation-of-bleak-house-shines-at-awards-472170.html>.

Accessed 18/10/09.

<sup>442</sup> Giddings [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>443</sup> As Jane Tranter, BBC Head of Drama, noted, 'Andrew's storytelling is always contemporary no matter what. We wanted a particular kind of contemporary storytelling and bizarrely we started talking about *Spooks* and *Lost*'. Jane Tranter, Interview, as cited in Ciar Byrne, "What the Dickens! BBC Rebuilds *Bleak House* for the *Hollyoaks* Generation," *The Independent* (05/10/05). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/what-the-dickens-bbc-rebuilds-bleak-house-for-the-hollyoaks-generation-509631.html>. Accessed 18/10/09.

<sup>444</sup> Glavin 6.

<sup>445</sup> Smith 147.

<sup>446</sup> Byrne <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/what-the-dickens-bbc-rebuilds-bleak-house-for-the-hollyoaks-generation-509631.html>. Accessed 18/10/09.

Bryan Appleyard, "*Bleak House* the Soap? What the Dickens...," *Times Online* (02/10/05). [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article573164.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article573164.ece). Accessed 18/10/09.

<sup>447</sup> *Radio Times* (22/10/05).

<sup>448</sup> Appleyard [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article573164.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article573164.ece). Accessed 18/10/09.

<sup>449</sup> *Radio Times* (22/10/05); Owen Gibson, "BBC Risks Losing Touch With Younger Generation Of Viewers," *The Guardian* (07/10/05). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/oct/07/newmedia.broadcasting>. Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>450</sup> Claire Cozens, "Great Expectations for Dickens 'Soap'," *The Guardian* (19/12/03). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2003/dec/19/broadcasting.bbc>. Accessed 19/10/09.

<sup>451</sup> John Mullan, "Will *Bleak House* Work as Soap Opera?," *The Scotsman* (15/10/05). <http://living.scotsman.com/features/Will-Bleak-House-work-as.2669809.jp>. Accessed 09/11/09.

Giddings takes particular issue with the notion of 'soap', denouncing Dickens's equation with the form. For his detailed debate, see "Soft-Soaping Dickens: Andrew Davies, BBC1 and *Bleak House*," [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). This topic is often focused upon in internet discussion forums about *Bleak House*. Malcolm Andrews (editor of *The Dickensian*), for instance, critiques the effect of 'soap' in diluting the novel's social commentary. See <http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=5387>. Accessed 09/11/09. Beyond the notion of 'fidelity' to the novel, however, such criticism fails to appreciate the wider significance of the attempt to blend costume drama and 'soap'.

<sup>452</sup> Laura Mackie, Interview, as cited in Giddings [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>453</sup> Kevin Loader, Interview (1991), as cited in Pointer 97. In some ways, Loader's observation reveals similarities between the position of classic-novel adaptations during the late 1980s and early 1990s and those of the 2000s, as a high-point in production was followed by a period of uncertainty. Crucially, Loader's sentiments also intimate the shift that has occurred in perceptions of costume drama as a genre. Earlier adaptations were generally privileged as 'quality' television, respected as 'classic' through their association with canonical literary texts and yet still popular; notably, the 'impossibly' high standard set by Hopcraft was followed by the success of Davies's *Middlemarch* (1994) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) (themselves now seen as 'classic' adaptations).

<sup>454</sup> Giddings [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>455</sup> Davies likewise makes explicit London's 'crust upon crust of mud' (*BH*, 3); Guppy, for instance, splashes through the muddy water, whilst Jo is completely begrimed.



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<sup>456</sup> In a similar vein, pastoral scenes and idyllic music are undercut through nuanced editing, as they are set against close-ups of thick mud, like the fog pervading town and country in an emblematic connectedness. Tellingly, as Richard exalts in the carriage leaving for Bleak House – ‘Goodbye London – good riddance Chancery’ – the camera remains fixed, rooted in the city and, implicitly, the court, before it cuts to filthy urban streets and the ominous figure of Tulkinghorn. As in Dear’s *Persuasion*, Hopcraft’s adaptation focuses upon ‘gritty’ social realism; Esther is thus extremely disfigured by smallpox, whilst the ‘dead of the river’ are shown overtly.

<sup>457</sup> The high stacks of paper in Hopcraft’s Chancery also recall *Little Dorrit*’s Circumlocution Office (both in Dickens’s novel and Andrew Davies’s adaptation). Interestingly, the nooses in Krook’s shop are likewise reminiscent of Jaggers’s office in Lean’s *Great Expectations*.

<sup>458</sup> Smith 159.

<sup>459</sup> Richard is often visually separated from the other characters in Hopcraft’s production. In the first interior scene at Bleak House, he is placed in the foreground of the shot, his restlessness intimated through his alienation from Jarndyce’s ‘domestic’ fireside group. Davies’s screenplay likewise foreshadows Richard’s decline. At Gridley’s death, the camera finally rests on Carstone’s face as he stands in the doorway, distanced from his friends and yet psychologised through the use of close-up.

<sup>460</sup> Davies’s characterisation of Vholes is enhanced through implicit association with another of the screenwriter’s villains, Francis Urquhart; both evade contentious issues through their proclamations ‘You might very well think that...’ (*The House of Cards* (BBC, 1990)).

<sup>461</sup> Sanders 205.

<sup>462</sup> Andrew Davies, Interview, as cited in Giddings [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>463</sup> *Bleak House*’s short episodes, emulating Dickens’s serialisation, also illustrate Sanders’s observation that television particularly ‘links words with images and then projects them, like the original monthly parts, into private rather than public spaces’ (Sanders 206).

<sup>464</sup> Simon Jenkins, The Education Forum. <http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=5387>. Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>465</sup> The intricate relationship between Dickens’s narratives is also suggested as Esther castigates Skimpole. As she exclaims ‘How do your children live, sir?’, his complacency – ‘Do you know, I have no idea’ – is followed by a move into an observing medium-long shot. Once again, first and third-person perspectives are intimated.

<sup>466</sup> Smith 195. Marchant’s *Great Expectations* also illustrates the effectiveness of the long take in filming Dickens. Although the production was criticised for its lack of comedy, long takes of the Pockets and of Wemmick’s wedding create, as also seen in Austen adaptation, humorously ‘staged’ vignettes; slight distortions due to camera angle and lens then consolidate the peculiarities of the ‘Dickensian’ perspective.

<sup>467</sup> Andrew Davies, Interview, as cited in Appleyard [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article573164.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article573164.ece). Accessed 18/10/09.

<sup>468</sup> Interestingly, Allan pulls Esther back into his arms as Esther moves (somewhat aggressively) to confront Mrs Woodcourt and Skimpole. Whilst this privileges, once more, the conclusion’s romanticism, it also perhaps suggests Dickens’s essentially patriarchal stance; as with Bagnet’s (albeit humorous) ‘Discipline!’, the potential for female subversion is subjected to male regulation.

<sup>469</sup> Paul Whitelaw, “Let’s Twist Again,” *The Scotsman* (15/12/07).

<http://thescotsmen.scotsman.com/critique/Let39s-Twist-again.3593401.jp>. Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>470</sup> *The Old Curiosity Shop*, dir. Brian Percival, adapt. Martyn Hesford (ITV, 2007).

*The Old Curiosity Shop*, dir. Kevin Connor, adapt. John Goldsmith (RHI, 1995).

<sup>471</sup> Whitelaw <http://thescotsmen.scotsman.com/critique/Let39s-Twist-again.3593401.jp>. Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>472</sup> Daphne Lockyer, “Let’s Twist Again: Do We Need Another *Oliver Twist*?,” *Times Online* (08/12/07). [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article3000514.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article3000514.ece). Accessed 09/11/09.

<sup>473</sup> Previously, Roman Polanski’s *Oliver Twist* was announced in the same terms by reviewers. See Ian Johns, “Let’s Twist Again: New Stage and Screen Versions of *Oliver Twist* Still Offer Us Gruel For Thought,” *Times Online* (23/02/04). [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/article1025822.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article1025822.ece). Accessed 09/11/09.

- <sup>474</sup> Lockyer [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article3000514.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article3000514.ece). Accessed 09/11/09.
- <sup>475</sup> Lockyer [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article3000514.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article3000514.ece). Accessed 09/11/09.
- <sup>476</sup> Bart's song is clearly ironic in its contrasting of the boys' dreams with the realities of workhouse life. What is significant, however, is the embeddedness of its buoyant tone within popular memory.
- <sup>477</sup> Lockyer [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article3000514.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article3000514.ece). Accessed 09/11/09.
- <sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>480</sup> At the same time, Nancy's implied strength is coupled with an often painful self-awareness. As she steals back Oliver, for instance, she exclaims 'I'm sorry. I had a bit to drink – Dutch courage'; her alienation from her actions culminate in her rebuttal of Oliver's good opinion of her: 'You're going to find out exactly what I am'.
- <sup>481</sup> Lockyer [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article3000514.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article3000514.ece). Accessed 09/11/09.
- <sup>482</sup> However, despite the conventional imagery used to promote *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Hesford's screenplay likewise follows *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist* in reassessing popular expectations of the 'Dickensian'. As Derek Jacobi ('Grandfather') maintained, "'this is not 'chocolate-box Dickens'"'. <http://www.itv.com/Drama/perioddrama/TheOldCuriosityShop/>. Accessed 02/11/09. Reviews focused upon its challenge to 'Dickensian' 'cosiness' (seemingly embodied by the title, *The Old Curiosity Shop*): 'Those warm, friendly, twinkly lights shining through from within may look welcoming, but in reality they illuminate a tale of wickedness and greed, loss and death that is anything but cosy' [http://www.tvcoop.tv/2007/12/set\\_the\\_video\\_t\\_137.html](http://www.tvcoop.tv/2007/12/set_the_video_t_137.html). Accessed 02/11/09. Moreover, *The Old Curiosity Shop* also sought to rework period drama as a form, asserting instead a 'grittiness' which contrasted with the BBC's *Ballet Shoes* (screened at the same time). As James Walton exclaimed, 'so to a sentence I never thought I'd write: if you wanted to avoid sentimentality, there was always *The Old Curiosity Shop*' (ITV1). James Walton, "Last Night on Television: *Ballet Shoes* (BBC-1) – *The Old Curiosity Shop* (ITV1)," *The Telegraph* (27/12/07). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/3670181/Last-night-on-television-Ballet-Shoes-BBC1---The-Old-Curiosity-Shop-ITV1.html>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- <sup>483</sup> Andrew Clark, "BBC Drama *Little Dorrit* Takes Seven Emmy Awards," *The Guardian* (21/09/09). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2009/sep/21/emmy-awards-little-dorrit-30-rock-mad-men>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- <sup>484</sup> Davies's *Little Dorrit* was criticised in particular for its confusing revelations as to Mrs Clennam's secret, and the part played by Miss Wade and Tattycoram. For an extensive overview of popular responses to the dramatisation, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/3710242/Last-night-on-television---Little-Dorrit-BBC1.html>. Accessed 02/22/09. Just as it is significant that costume drama attracts much media attention, often forming headline news, viewers' online debates attest to the genre's continued presence, however contentious.
- <sup>485</sup> Alastair Jamieson, "BBC Costume Drama *Little Dorrit* Sees Audience Slide Only Halfway Through Its Run," *The Telegraph* (23/11/08). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/celebritynews/3507849/BBC-costume-drama-Little-Dorrit-sees-audience-slide-only-halfway-through-its-run.html>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- Liz Thomas, "Case of *Emma* Fatigue Sees BBC Viewers Turn Off In Millions," *The Daily Mail* (21/10/09). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1221804/Case-Emma-fatigue-sees-BBC-viewers-turn-millions.html#ixzz0VqABRFFQ>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- <sup>486</sup> James Walton, "Last Night on Television – *Little Dorrit* (BBC1)," *The Telegraph* (11/12/09). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/3710242/Last-night-on-television---Little-Dorrit-BBC1.html>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- <sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>489</sup> "Little Dorrit – a Dickensian Drama for BBC1," BBC Press Office. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/01\\_january/24/dorrit.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/01_january/24/dorrit.shtml). Accessed 02/11/09.



- <sup>490</sup> Jamieson <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/celebritynews/3507849/BBC-costume-drama-Little-Dorrit-sees-audience-slide-only-halfway-through-its-run.html>. Accessed 02/11/09. Indeed, Whitelaw's assertion that Giedroyc's *Oliver Twist* offers us 'nothing [...] that we haven't seen before' arguably refers to its 'contemporary' style as much as anything.
- <sup>491</sup> Anita Singh, "Little Dorrit Loses 1.5 Million Viewers As Audiences Fail To Find It," *The Telegraph* (31/10/08). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/celebritynews/3330757/Little-Dorrit-loses-1.5-million-viewers-as-audiences-fail-to-find-it.html>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- <sup>492</sup> Boyd Tonkin, "Why BBC Costume Drama Needs To Go Beyond Bodices," *The Independent* (07/11/08). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/why-bbc-costume-drama-needs-to-go-beyond-bodices-997577.html>. Accessed 13/11/08.
- <sup>493</sup> As the Press Pack proclaimed, 'BBC Drama Production is a world leader in classic adaptations and follows the critically-acclaimed adaptations *Cranford*, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, and the recent Andrew Davies adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* on BBC One'. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/05\\_may/06/dorrit.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/05_may/06/dorrit.shtml). Accessed 02/11/09. Moreover, as with *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*'s 'soap' format was justified through comparison with the literary text's serialisation.
- <sup>494</sup> Charles Dickens, "An Italian Dream," *Pictures from Italy*, ed. Kate Flint (London: Penguin, 1998) 85.
- <sup>495</sup> A foreboding inescapability is also examined in Edzard's adaptation. As Amy watches her pot plant grow, it is revealed to be the same dead plant that Arthur looks at in despair when he is imprisoned in Episode One.
- <sup>496</sup> By contrast, in Edzard's film, Bleeding Heart Yard's bright colours and vibrant music recall a Musical set (attesting once again to the legacy of Dickens and the stage).
- <sup>497</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Peter Preston (Ware: Wordsworth, 2002) 445. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*, ed. Angeline Goreau (London: Penguin, 1988) 251.
- <sup>498</sup> Sarah Ellis, "The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt (London: Norton, 2000) 1722.
- <sup>499</sup> Although the DVD cover to Edzard's *Little Dorrit* depicts Amy as a child (her father towering over her), the film's first image of her is through Clennam's (male) eyes, and focuses upon her attractively-slim waist; her physicality, rather than her diminutiveness, is accentuated. Although seemingly a feminist production (enabling the viewer to 'see with Little Dorrit's eyes' (*LD*, 158), "Little Dorrit's Story" is told from her perspective), the film was criticised for its omission of Miss Wade and Tattycoram.
- <sup>500</sup> Likewise, Amy is seen through mere glimpses in the first part of Edzard's film.
- <sup>501</sup> Philip Reevel, as cited in Jamieson <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/celebritynews/3507849/BBC-costume-drama-Little-Dorrit-sees-audience-slide-only-halfway-through-its-run.html>. Accessed 02/11/09.
- <sup>502</sup> Tonkin <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/why-bbc-costume-drama-needs-to-go-beyond-bodices-997577.html>. Accessed 13/11/08
- <sup>503</sup> Walton <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/3710242/Last-night-on-television-Little-Dorrit-BBC1.html>. Accessed 19/09/10.
- <sup>504</sup> Robert Giddings, "Review: *Nicholas Nickleby*," <http://charlesdickenspage.com/nickleby2001-giddings.html>. Accessed 06/11/09.
- Tonkin <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/why-bbc-costume-drama-needs-to-go-beyond-bodices-997577.html>. Accessed 13/11/08
- <sup>505</sup> Giddings <http://charlesdickenspage.com/nickleby2001-giddings.html>. Accessed 06/11/09.
- Giddings [http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft\\_Soaping\\_Dickens.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/Soft_Soaping_Dickens.html). Accessed 09/11/09.
- <sup>506</sup> Richards 348.
- <sup>507</sup> Trailer, *A Christmas Carol* (Disney, 2009).

## Conclusion: The Classic-Novel Adaptation in 2009

“People like bonnets. I don’t think you can underestimate that” maintained Andrew Davies in the *Radio Times*, as he castigated the BBC’s announcement that Sandy Welch’s dramatisation of *Emma* ‘will be the last of its kind for some time’.<sup>508</sup> Davies’s comment, together with the BBC’s rejection of proposed adaptations of *Dombey and Son* and *The Pallisers*, in many ways indicates the complex, and often competing, issues which are increasingly surrounding costume drama and classic-novel adaptation.<sup>509</sup> On the one hand, period drama remains popular, not only in terms of its potential for technical and interpretative innovation, but in its perceived ‘escapism’. Despite the stylistic contemporaneity and often disturbing thematic preoccupations of many adaptations, an Internet site – “The Enchanted Serenity of Period Films” – defines its ‘Top BBC Period Dramas’ as ‘classic films that take us to another era, to a time of simplicity and serenity’.<sup>510</sup>

Moreover, whilst the *Cranford* Christmas Special (BBC, 2009) reworks Gaskell’s additional *Cranford* stories as mainstream television drama (recalling the *Dr Who* Christmas Specials, for example), the success of Heidi Thomas’s original, ‘sudsy’ adaptation (together with the nostalgic *Lark Rise to Candleford*) again upholds Davies’s conventional view of costume drama’s attractiveness. Indeed, *Lark Rise* is in many ways a response to the popularity of *Cranford*; although the notion that it is a ‘spin-off’ to the Gaskell production indicates period drama’s modern commerciality, *Lark Rise* reinforces the ‘gentle’ image of the past and classic-novel adaptation suggested by *Cranford*.<sup>511</sup> Although screenplays often become split between tradition and innovation, as has been examined throughout this thesis, this tension is not necessarily recognised by popular audiences.

However, the ubiquity of classic-novel adaptation, from the 1990s onwards, has led to an escalating degree of uncertainty and disaffection. Whilst the Internet site “YouTube” contains numerous montages of, and trailers for, costume dramas, parodies are also prolific. *Mock the Week*, for instance, produced a sketch entitled “Lines You Wouldn’t Hear in a Costume Drama”,

whilst *Dead Ringers* performed “Yet Another Costume Drama”, in which a tea-sipping lady (‘Jane’) declares her love for ‘Mr Parcy’. The *mise-en-scène* and camera angles render the episode confined and claustrophobic, whilst it satirises ‘period’ actors such as Ian McKellen, Alan Rickman and Brian Blessed as much as the genre. Tellingly, the sequence suggests that costume drama is (literally, in the final scene) going to implode.<sup>512</sup>

Significantly, although the *Telegraph* suggests that it ‘is a truth universally acknowledged that the Autumn is not complete without a BBC classic drama’, this is becoming increasingly worn, as the profuseness of classic-novel adaptations and their artistic and cultural purpose are challenged.<sup>513</sup> *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), for example, ‘made [...] headlines [...] when the British actor Dominic West, one of the show’s stars, criticised the BBC for drowning its schedules with costume dramas and failing to make any “high end contemporary stuff” to rival the American production.’<sup>514</sup> Concerns over television’s ‘saturation’ with costume drama are linked to the stylistic struggle that problematises, in particular, *Cranford*, *Little Dorrit* and Welch’s *Emma*. Despite the innovative success of Davies’s *Bleak House*, and attempts to align classic-novel adaptation with mainstream television and film, many conventional – and implicitly derogatory – perceptions of the genre remain. Together with the parodies noted above, the tone of certain reviewers of *Emma* embodies the contentiousness surrounding costume drama. Sam Wollaston, for instance, celebrates a ‘bonnet moratorium’, whilst his scathing denigration suggests the gendered audience associated traditionally with period drama:

They have actually decided on a bonnet moratorium, and this *Emma* will be the last for a while. [...]. One nil to the boys. [...]. Oh, it is very good, I suppose, even if it’s not necessary. Romola Garai is a lively and enthusiastic Emma. Her eyes alone deserve a Bafta – they’re practically popping out of her head for the whole episode; has she popped a pill? And Michael Gambon may not have read the book, but he’s still a splendid old Mr. Woodhouse, worried and fussy by the fire. [...]. And Jonny Lee Miller looks lovely with his sideburns [...]. [...]. It all looks great, to be fair – the splendid country houses, the wallpaper, the drawing rooms, the silver tea sets. And the neat lawns, the elegantly clipped box hedges, the cedar trees, the shiny carriages and the

steaming horses. And the frocks of course, and yes the bonnets – they’re everywhere. I still hate it.<sup>515</sup>

Above all, Wollaston’s humorous irreverence challenges costume drama as a ‘high-quality’, ‘serious’ genre. Instead, as will be seen in *Emma*, the genre has in some ways become a parody of itself.

As discussed in relation to *Little Dorrit*, there is, perhaps, an element of complacency (particularly within the BBC) in the approach to screening the nineteenth-century novel. Indeed, implicit to the criticism of ‘well-worn classics’ is a questioning of the nature and process of adaptation itself, testing the potential for *re*-interpretation. Just as concerns were raised over the ‘necessity’ of Giedroyc’s *Oliver Twist*, Welch’s *Emma* was not only compared to previous versions of Austen’s novel, but denigrated outright for being the latest adaptation. As Wollaston expostulated, rather than following the plot of *Emma*, ‘perhaps a more interesting conversation to have is about whether we need another *Emma* at all – after the film with Gwyneth Paltrow, and the other film with Kate Beckinsale, and *Clueless*, and that other TV adaptation from the 70s. Why keep churning out the same classics?’<sup>516</sup> This ennui is indeed a sentiment shared by many viewers: ‘*Emma* has been done to death. I think TV producers should start looking at novels by other writers’; ‘The BBC could spend money making big-budget, well-acted drama [...] filled with contemporary social and political relevance. Instead, they seem intent on milking Austen and Dickens for all they’re worth’; ‘It’s getting beyond tiresome having to watch yet another Austen adaptation’.<sup>517</sup> In this climate, the ratings success of *Cranford* and *Lark Rise* is perhaps driven by the relative obscurity of the novels (and, to an extent, literary authors), together with their lack of screen precedents. Seen in this light, film and television adaptation, as an interpretative process, has arguably reached its limit.

In defending *Emma* (or *emma*, as it was publicised) from critical condemnation, the BBC’s Kate Harwood maintained “sometimes you put modern in a period drama and it feels wrong, but not in this case. It’s a beautiful production that is very faithful to the book, but feels very fresh and immediate”.<sup>518</sup> As with the promotion of *Cranford*, a need to conform to the

expectation of ‘innovation’ is revealed; despite *Becoming Jane*, “The Jane Austen Season”, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Miss Austen Regrets* and *Lost In Austen*, the perception that Austen is to be reinvigorated, taken “off the literary shelf” and made to seem “part of our lives again”, is reasserted.<sup>519</sup> Nevertheless, Harwood also advertises the adaptation through its ‘faithfulness’ to Austen’s novel, recalling more traditional notions of costume drama and highlighting the tension that ultimately unsettles Welch’s production. Above all, rather than marrying stylistic contemporaneity and the literary text in dynamic harmony, *Emma* becomes confused in its approach, aligning itself with, and yet failing to respond to, the visual and interpretative innovativeness seen in Austen ‘remakes’ and Giedroyc’s *Wuthering Heights* (screened at around the same time as the BBC’s production).

Crucially, despite *Emma*’s professed ‘freshness’ and ‘originality’ – seemingly manifest in the contemporarily lower-case lettering of the title – an ultimately nostalgic view of Austen is presented. Such ‘reverence’ is in marked contrast to the reworking of *Emma* in Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995) (in which the shopping mall emblematises Austen’s contemporised commodification), as well as the celebration of, yet challenge to, ‘Austenmania’ seen in *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy* (2003), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008) and *Lost In Austen* (2008) (in addition to Seth Grahame-Smith’s and Ben Winters’s novels, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) and *Sense and Sensibility and Seamonsters* (2009)).<sup>520</sup>

An analysis of the complex and highly-charged context in which Welch’s adaptation is situated therefore becomes significant, highlighting *Emma*’s problematic relationship with the issues which are interrogated, and often ironised, in other Austen productions. Andrew Black’s *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy*, for example, provides an intricate commentary upon adaptation, examining relationships with both Austen’s novels and the ‘Austenite’ film. The first lines demonstrate a complex interplay between Austen’s text and the screen, stressing the significance of the literary yet invoking Austen’s perceived adaptability; Lizzy, the narrator and aspiring writer, announces that ‘it is a truth universally acknowledged that a girl of a certain age and in a certain situation in life must be in want of a husband’. Tellingly,

Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which the novel's famous opening line is spoken by Lizzy, is recalled at the same time.

The intertwining of literary and screen Austen continues throughout Black's film. Lydia's Pug, for instance, is called 'Austen'. Attention is thus drawn (albeit humorously) to the literary author's framing presence, whilst the implicit reference to Lady Bertram and her pet in *Mansfield Park* (both the novel and its film versions) invokes the wider Austen oeuvre. At the same time, as in *Sparkhouse*, the 'classic' novel and novelist are challenged. Lizzy attends a lecture on Austen, thereby placing her within a scholarly, privileged context. As in *Sparkhouse*, the students nevertheless express boredom. Aligned with a post-structuralist questioning of authorial hegemony, the 'dismissal' of Austen thereby affirms the 'legitimacy' of Black's film as an adaptation and self-consciously 'modern' reinterpretation (just as Rozema's *Mansfield Park* situates itself within an overtly postcolonial and feminist framework). Indeed, in contrast to the letter-writing pivotal to novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*, emails are instead integral to Black's plot, visualised and read on screen; the primacy of the printed, 'canonical' page is, as such, redefined.

Fundamentally, Black's production is as much an interpretation of Austen adaptation as the literary *Pride and Prejudice*. Although the film is intercut with quotations from Austen's novel, the device recalls early-twentieth-century costume drama; notably, the way in which Robert Leonard's and Aldous Huxley's *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) commences with a descriptive title is a case in point. Equally, the film affirms itself as a 'modernised' reworking through its dialogue with *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Darcy and Wickham fight, suggesting the brawls between Daniel and Mark, whilst Lizzy dreams that she has overdosed on ice cream and been eaten by dogs (implying also the notion of 'overdosing' on 'too much Austen' that is highlighted in *Lost In Austen*).

The adaptation's concluding sequence embodies the intricate web of connections which construct 'Jane Austen'. Lizzy's visit to England asserts Austen as writer, as she makes a 'pilgrimage' to her portrait. Equally, images of Derbyshire and Chatsworth form the heritage shots associated particularly with the 'Austenite' film. However, the 'modern' act of viewing – and consuming – is accentuated by the fact that Lizzy is a tourist. Finally, as discussed in relation to Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, Davies's 1995 adaptation is in many ways

privileged over Austen's novel; tellingly, Black's final image of Darcy and Lizzy kissing refers specifically to the conclusion of the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Swicord's *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) likewise provides a complex exploration of Austen as a cultural myth, heightened, as with *Bridget Jones*, by the fact that it adapts Karen Jay Fowler's novel; although the 'Book Club' privileges the literary, it is framed by film. In its images of the 'Sacramento Film Society Jane Austen Fest', for instance, the audience is shown reading Austen (recalling the offer, noted in Chapter One, of free novels prior to screenings of *Becoming Jane*). The viewers' conversations illuminate both the 'problems' and the possibilities of adaptation. Significantly, they focus upon a 'controversial' production, Rozema's *Mansfield Park*: 'I love this movie'; 'I like it...but it's not *Mansfield Park*. It's more of an interpretation'. However, although Prudie's scathing indictment of Allegra's analyses – 'Maybe if you'd read the book instead of watching the movie' – intimates the often antagonistic relationship between novel and screen, its implicit privileging of the literary is complicated by the film's own emulation of Austen adaptation; recalling Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, Grigg's introduction, as the camera runs up his body, is highly reminiscent in style to the 1999 film's first view of Crawford.

As with the opening of *Lost In Austen*, the stress of modern life (demonstrated by the soundtrack's traffic and sirens) asserts nostalgia for the past, idealising Austen as 'escapism'. As Bernadette exclaims, 'All Jane Austen, all the time – it's the perfect antidote [...] to life'. Nevertheless, Prudie's familiarity with 'Jane' is both upheld and tested. Austen's novels are 'performed' in the lives of the Book Club's members; the play rehearsal, the matchmaking and the return of the lost love adapt, and yet affirm the 'primacy' of, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, whilst *Pride and Prejudice* is privileged throughout (not only in the relationship between Jocelyn and Grigg, but in the assumption that it is the 'favourite' text). However, as implied by the film's opening quotation – 'Is not general incivility the very essence of love?' – Austen often presents strained relationships and strained romance. As the Book Club read the novels, it instead becomes increasingly clear that they are tense, problematic and often painful.

Such issues are integral to Linda Hughes's *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008). Whilst there are elements of intertextual dialogue between Hughes's and

Jarrold's biopics, there is, overwhelmingly, a movement towards reassessment, reworking both the 'Austenite' film and costume drama as a genre. Indeed, in Jane's proclamation, 'shall I be stared at like a wild beast in a zoo?', Hughes recognises 'Jane Austen' as a cultural commodity confined within particular preconceptions. More than *Becoming Jane*, *Miss Austen Regrets* examines the weight of the cultural and popular gaze placed upon Jane Austen – which, of course, Hughes's production is implicated in.

Perceptions of Austen as a romantic icon are unsettled, however, as Jane is equated instead with the failure of romance; she frames the shot of Plumtre's aborted proposal to her niece Fanny, for instance. Whilst Fanny maintains that love is all that matters, a belief propounded by her aunt's novels, this is tested throughout; as Edward Austen-Knight exclaims, 'if that's what you think they say [...] perhaps you should read them again'. This tension between sense and sensibility ultimately eludes desires to define Austen. Jane herself manipulates Haden's and Fanny's attempts to explicate her, maintaining instead an intricate relationship between idealism and reality: 'do you believe [...] that destiny always provides us with a perfect mate?'; 'I do – when I'm writing a novel'. Hughes's interrogation of 'romance' is epitomised in a final scene between Jane and her rejected suitor Bridges, Fanny's 'happy ending' spoiled through her aunt's ambivalence and refusal to commit to a *Persuasion*-like reunion: 'Tell me now you regret it. Tell me that sometimes in the night you think of me. Tell me even if it isn't true'. 'What on earth would be the point?'

In this, it is equally clear that the film inverts and questions many of the motifs of the 'Austenite' film, exposing the mythology surrounding Austen. Above all, Jane challenges the stature granted to Darcy, and, implicitly, Colin Firth: 'I suppose no man of flesh and blood would be worthy of the creator of Mr Darcy'. 'You're all quite wrong about him – he wouldn't have done for me at all'. Later, as Jane debates the 'modern novel', Haden and Fanny act the conventions she describes, as the 'heroine' goes to the piano to show 'off her arms beautifully'. The sequence 'performs' 'costume drama' romance, as the camera focuses upon the 'hero' and 'heroine's' bodies, dress and the piano sheet music (a 'Romance'). Jane thus observes both her novels and the 'Austenite' film.



Idealised images of the ‘Austenite’ film are undermined; indeed, Fanny’s discussion of romance is filmed as she relieves herself in a wood. Rather than resolving the screenplay with a ‘happy ending’, the cycle of weddings (and christenings) instead poses an ominous commentary. Anna Austen-Lefroy’s portrayal as a ‘poor animal’ shadows her cousin Fanny’s search for a husband, a complication which is reinforced visually. Shots of Cassandra and Jane walking to their great-niece Jemima’s christening echo those of the sisters making their way to Anna’s wedding; this time, however, the scarecrow of dead birds is focused upon unsettlingly in the foreground.

*Miss Austen Regrets* is a highly complex film, located within and yet interrogating ‘Austenmania’. Despite Hughes’s attempts to rework images of Austen, her biopic remained advertised through the legacy of *Pride and Prejudice*, now so entwined with Davies’s screenplay; as *The Independent* proclaimed, *Miss Austen Regrets* is about ‘How Jane Lost her Own Darcy’.<sup>521</sup> Nevertheless, the self-reflexivity of Hughes’s biopic in many ways embodies a growing frustration with period drama’s return to the generic norms of ‘traditional’ costume drama. The production recognises the weight of popular expectation, Jane’s image subjected to, defined and re-defined by a compelled interest that has been intensified and coloured by dramatisations of her works. By challenging the conventions of Austen adaptation, Hughes’s writer instead gazes back at the audience, demanding re-assessment of her novels and their presentation on screen. Austen is thus de-familiarised, just as *Lost In Austen* renders costume drama and Austen adaptation as a strange, alien world.

It is precisely this interpretative innovativeness, its ‘risk’ in its approach to both literary and screen Austen (and, by extension, costume drama as a whole), which marks *Lost In Austen*’s significance. In a telling contrast to Welch’s *Emma*, the production received overwhelmingly positive reviews, focusing upon its successfully dynamic interplay between the contemporary and the traditional, the cultured and the popular. As Thomas Sutcliffe noted, ITV hybridised ‘the dependable bonnet-and-bustle attractions of *Pride and Prejudice* with the left-field fantasy of *Life On Mars*’, whilst Tim Teeman observed ‘the sharp yet frothy, subversive-yet-utterly-respectful-of-Austen brilliance of it all’.<sup>522</sup> Written by Guy Andrews and directed by Dan Zeff, the production

negotiates above all a ‘fresh’ approach to Austen and adaptation. Whereas Welch’s *Emma* in many ways becomes unsettled as to its purpose, *Lost In Austen* balances the conventional and the reworked, upholding and yet challenging preconceptions of Austen’s novels and the ‘Austenite’ film; indeed, the title – *Lost In Austen* – constructs the author and her works as both enduringly compelling *and* disturbingly de-familiarised.

Such nuances are apparent immediately in the opening sequences, as well as the DVD’s presentation. The drama’s self-conscious dialogue between Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (and the notion of fidelity towards the literary text) and television rewriting is embodied by the image on the DVD box; the modern-day Amanda holds a Penguin Classics copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, yet she has been placed on the front cover in period dress, merging the literary Elizabeth Bennet with her contemporary self. The production is indeed introduced initially by the title “*Pride and Prejudice* By Jane Austen” (seen through a close-up of Amanda’s book), privileging the novelist over Andrews’s screenplay, and once more highlighting (as in *Becoming Jane*) the prominence of this particular novel. At the same time, however, the titles test traditional ‘reverence’ towards ‘classic’ literature. Crucially, the ‘pop-up’, one-dimensional images of the characters and settings acknowledge the fictionality of *Pride and Prejudice* (as ‘Jane’ herself maintains incredulously in *Miss Austen Regrets*, ‘they’re just stories!’). ‘Mythologised’ perceptions of the novel are thereby challenged, whilst also stressing *Lost In Austen*’s own status as a television drama; the production draws attention to its negotiation of the ‘real’ and the imagined that is itself placed within a fictional context.

This is highlighted by the opening titles’ references to costume drama and the ‘Austenite’ film; it is not the ‘real’ past to which Amanda travels. The move from present-day London is signalled by *Pride and Prejudice*’s turning pages, defining the ‘past’ through Austen’s novel yet invoking early classic-novel adaptation. The Bennets are placed subsequently within a portrait, acknowledging the pictorialism associated conventionally with costume drama, while the image of Pemberley’s interior zooms to an exterior view, emulating the camera movement of Davies’s *Bleak House* and yet invoking the traditional heritage shot. Significantly, although Darcy is shown before Pemberley’s lake (in a reference to Davies’s ‘Darcymania’ which recurs throughout), the image of

a sow ('Lady Ambrosia') also recalls Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which the farmyard intrudes visibly upon the domestic (as a pig wanders through Longbourn). Exemplifying the dynamism of the production as a whole, the title images are thus set in dialogue with both traditional and contemporary trends in screening Austen, whilst simultaneously privileging yet challenging the literary.

The start of Episode One continues this complex interrelationship. As in Black's film, the first line – 'It is a truth – generally acknowledged – that we are all longing to escape' – places the notion of fidelity alongside that of reinterpretation, focusing upon the image of the Penguin Classics edition of *Pride and Prejudice* whilst highlighting immediately its status as an adaptation. Tellingly, Amanda's bookmark is a bus ticket, contextualising Austen within the modern world. At the same time, nostalgia for the past is intimated through its association with the 'hell' of contemporary London; the novel will instead become Amanda's 'ticket' out of the twenty-first century: 'I escape always to my favourite book – *Pride and Prejudice*!' However, although Amanda declares that she will 'patch [herself] up with Jane Austen', she is jostled as she reads. Whilst this accentuates her escapist desires, it also ironises the fact that Austen is seen as a 'cure'. Later closing herself into a domestic, private world in order to read, Amanda nevertheless struggles against such confines when she finds herself displaced to the eighteenth century.

Amanda Price, like Fanny Price, is sent to a strange household, ostracised and yet the centre of a romantic intrigue. Together with (adapted) references to *Emma* ('That was badly done, Bingley – badly done'), Andrews's screenplay both reworks and pays 'homage' to the Austen oeuvre (whilst Amanda's fateful confession that she 'is not a maid' also recalls *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*). On the one hand, the familiarity of *Pride and Prejudice* is ironised – 'For my good opinion once lost is lost forever. Yes, I know' – whilst implicit references are made to theoretical and critical contexts.<sup>523</sup> Terry Castle's alleged perception of Austen's 'lesbianism', for example, is intimated by Lydia's declaration – 'I often get into bed with Lizzy...She strokes my back' – and Caroline's feelings for Amanda (who highlights wittily the contentiousness that often accompanies literary theory: 'Goodness, Jane Austen would be fairly surprised that she'd written that!').<sup>524</sup> Likewise, postcolonial readings of Austen (as explored in

Rozema's *Mansfield Park*) are ironised by Darcy's indictment of twenty-first-century London's 'surfeit of Negroes'.

As in Black's and Swicord's films, idealised images of Austen are thereby reassessed. Michael's drunken proposal to Amanda frames the ensuing examination of love and romance, for example, foreshadowing the problematic relationships depicted later in the production. Although Amanda declares 'I'm not hung-up on Darcy; I love the story...I love the manners, the language, the courtesy. It's become part of who I am, what I want...I have standards', her mother grounds her idealism in a biting realism: 'You have standards, Pet. Hope they help you on with your coat when you're seventy'. Later, Amanda's attempts to 'repair' *Pride and Prejudice* result not in 'fidelity' to the novel, but in a reconfiguration of perceptions of its plot and characters; the 'truth' of a literary text is not deemed as fixed, thereby affirming reinterpretation.

Rewriting Mrs Bennet's benign comedy, for instance, she is revealed as threateningly protective of her daughters' prospects, whilst Georgiana declares that 'what you have been told happened to me is not what happened' (her manipulative and consenting desire for Wickham instead upholding Davies's sexualised images of Austen, as presented in the opening sequence of his *Sense and Sensibility*). Moreover, as noted with reference to other adaptations (Cabanne's *Jane Eyre*, for instance), the visual is stressed and, arguably, privileged. As Amanda exclaims, 'I can see...I can *see* Darcy', whilst her admonishment of Mr Bennet – 'you can't just read a book!' – upholds implicitly the 'legitimacy' of screening the novel. Revealingly, spoken extracts from Austen's novel transform into (Andrew Davies's) visions of Darcy by a lake, the scene's romantic implications then confirmed by the idyllic wedding (recalling the ending of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*). Images of reading merge with the traditional iconography of period drama, as sequences of slow-motion balls and sunlit horizons are accompanied by sentimentalised strings.

At the same time, however, the film's performance of 'costume drama' establishes the genre in order for it to be reworked. Tellingly, Amanda's vision of the romanticised wedding is revealed to be Jane's unhappy marriage to Collins, whilst the production unsettles perceptions of Davies's *Pride and Prejudice*. On the one hand, Amanda's mobile ring-tone is Carl Davis's musical theme to the 1995 production, whilst Lizzy shows *Lost In Austen*'s Darcy

internet images of Davies's version of 'their' life; web-pages – "Colin Firth – Mr Darcy" and "The Darcy Obsession" – proclaim that 'many people would say there is only one Mr Darcy', thereby privileging Davies's adaptation (tellingly, no reference is made to Laurence Olivier's or Matthew Macfadyen's Darcy).<sup>525</sup>

However, Amanda's image of Darcy as she reads is not that of Colin Firth, but of *Lost In Austen's* Darcy. Certainly, the production invokes, and becomes part of, 'Darcymania' ('Never mind the Bingley – bring on the Darcy!'), yet the 'Austen phenomenon' is also challenged humorously; 'I can see Darcy...Woa, Amanda!' Just as Toby Stephens's Rochester is often somewhat parodic, the 'Darcy effect' (and the audience's engagement with it) is highlighted self-consciously, as his overtly Byronic brooding is ridiculed: 'Woo, smoulder alert!' Pointedly, Amanda announces 'You have no function, Mr Darcy, no purpose'.<sup>526</sup>

In many ways, *Lost In Austen* adapts adaptation, recalling and reworking *Becoming Jane's* implicit performance of *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance. Likewise, Mr Bennet's facetious observation – 'We are arrived at a particularly fine prospect' – invokes and undercuts the 'heritage shot' (including the production's own close-ups of sunlit Longbourn, framed pictorially by trees and hedges). Amanda's begrimed dress similarly recalls Wright's 'costume drama with muddy hems', whilst reference is made to Weldon's *Pride and Prejudice* through the claustrophobic close-up of the roses as Collins courts Jane. Equally, the disjointed cutting as Amanda hammers on the 'portal' emulates the visual style of Davies's *Bleak House*, Welch's *North and South* and Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights*. Most obviously, the series 'legitimises' itself – like Wadey's *Mansfield Park* – through the casting of 'Austenite' actors (such as Hugh Bonneville, who played Bridges in *Miss Austen Regrets*). At the same time, however, their previously 'serious' roles are challenged implicitly by their presence in *Lost In Austen*, whilst Jemima Rooper (as with *Mansfield Park's* Michelle Ryan and Billie Piper) popularises the production.

Indeed, an immediately recognisable dialogue is established with mainstream television and film ('Is this like the Jim Carrey thing, but period?'), embodied by the review headline: "Austen Powers: How *Pride and Prejudice* got a twist of *Dr Who*".<sup>527</sup> In particular, whereas the BBC arguably created the essentially nostalgic *Lark Rise* as a 'spin-off' to *Cranford*, ITV complicated the

return to the past through *Lost In Austen*'s dialogue with 'contemporary' dramas *Life on Mars* (BBC, 2006-2007) and *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC, 2008-2010), in which the protagonists travel unwittingly to the 1970s and 1980s, once more rendering the perceivedly familiar disturbing. Crucially, Amanda stresses her displacement repeatedly: 'Everything I do is wrong – I want to go home'; 'This is seriously weird and I want to go home'.

To a considerable degree, *Lost In Austen* offers, as Stephen Brook suggests, 'a drama breakthrough', negotiating, balancing and exploring various genres, styles and audiences.<sup>528</sup> A self-conscious production still, showing 'Mr Collins' reading *Culture Magazine* (recalling Austen's – and arguably Davies's – 'highbrow' *Pride and Prejudice*), is set alongside the popularity of the Teletubbies, for instance: 'I am acquainted with the gentleman in the bath-chair – Tinky-Winky'. As Amanda Rooper argues, *Lost In Austen* has 'all the elements that people love about the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, or even the BBC adaptation of it, but then [Guy Andrews] dealt it this very witty twist. He's kept all the nostalgia, all the affection you have for Mr Darcy and Elizabeth, but then he's made it up-to-date and punchy and interesting'.<sup>529</sup> Revealingly, *Lost In Austen* is itself to be adapted into a movie in 2011.

Whilst invoking the 'Austenite' film and the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, the production is bold in its attempt to set 'Jane Austen spinning in her grave'.<sup>530</sup> Arguably, the final scene, in which Amanda chooses to return to Darcy, closes the drama within a conventionally 'Austenite' idyll, conflicting with the screenplay's prior nuances. However, whilst *Lost In Austen* revels in Darcy's and Amanda's kiss, set against Pemberley's splendour, it is underlined by its challenge to 'the greatest love story ever told'; fundamentally, the 'mythologised' union between Darcy and Elizabeth is upset. As Teeman observes, the production presents 'Mr Darcy and Amanda Price being better suited to each other than Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet'; how 'clever to turn the time travel question to a radically conclusive purpose and for Andrews to discover that by recasting *Pride and Prejudice*, he could – convincingly and with feeling – change its central romance'.<sup>531</sup>

In many ways, the production therefore exemplifies the preoccupations of classic-novel adaptation, particularly from 1999 onwards, as it 'contemporises' and refreshes 'the past', interpretations of 'canonical' literature

and period drama as a form. Clearly, *Lost In Austen* forms a vital landmark in screening Austen. Tellingly, “The Enchanted Serenity of Period Films” lists its ‘favourite’ Austen dramatisations yet, somewhat ironically (given the website’s ‘reverence’ towards ‘straight’ adaptations), the production ‘still’ included depicts *Amanda* in bonnet and dress. As Didcock and Rooper indeed maintain, watching *Lost In Austen*, ‘you realise it’s going to be hard to take any future adaptations of [*Pride and Prejudice*] seriously. It’s as if this knowing, slightly mocking and entirely self-referential drama has finally burst the costume drama bubble. If it has, it’s not before time, says Rooper. “These great big lavish costume dramas are our favourites because they get more money spent on them, they have great casts, lovely scripts and high production values [...]. But we’ve seen all that. We saw it years ago and now everything’s just another remake”’.<sup>532</sup>

To a considerable degree, this stagnation and saturation defines Welch’s *Emma*. Whereas *Lost In Austen* defamiliarises, ultimately *Emma* revels in a ‘comfortable’ vision of Austen’s novel and period drama. Just as critics questioned the ability of another *Emma* to re-interpret the literary text, the production arguably fails to explore and further classic-novel adaptation as a genre. Davies’s *Sense and Sensibility*, although very much in dialogue with Thompson’s version, attempts to redefine it visually and aurally, for example, whilst Davies’s *Emma* challenges the idyllic ending of his *Pride and Prejudice*; it is not Emma and Knightley’s wedding but the chicken thieves which provide the final (and unsettling) focus. In *Lost In Austen*, the documentary-style, observing camera (as used in *Bleak House*) explores and manipulates the notion of viewing costume drama. Vitaly, Welch’s *Emma* lacks this interplay. In place of a sustained, complex – and challenging – exploration of ‘traditional’ Austen (perceivedly embodied by Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*), Welch, in general, embraces it absolutely, thereby conflicting with her desire to present literary re-interpretation and stylistic innovation.

Certainly, there are elements of Welch’s screenplay which forge interesting relationships with the literary text and prior adaptations of *Emma*. The title sequence, for instance, is self-consciously performative, just as the novel is a self-reflexive study of love, romantic expectation and misinterpretation. Recalling *Lost In Austen*, the puppet-like ‘cut-outs’ of

characters and settings emblemise Emma's own directorial manipulation of her acquaintances, whilst the images' humorousness intimates an 'irreverence' towards the 'seriousness' of classic-novel adaptation. A voice-over narrates Emma's childhood, set against a 'staged' shot of her pram being pushed across a view of Hartfield. As with the unnerving robbery at the start of Davies's *Emma*, bright shots of 'the best blessings of existence' are exchanged for Mrs Woodhouse's coffin in Welch's version; the production reworks the novel's assertion that 'Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, [...] had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her'.<sup>533</sup> The darker tones which underline Austen's humour are thus figured visually, as Jane and Frank – 'forced to leave Highbury' through misfortune – are accompanied by duller cinematography at their departure.

Indeed, the visualisation of Frank, Emma and Jane's childhood exemplifies the adaptation's professedly 'reborn' approach to *Emma* and costume drama, as does the greater attention devoted to Isabella.<sup>534</sup> In contrast to McGrath's *Emma*, in which Britain dominates a close-up of a globe, and Highbury is prominent within it, Welch's presentation of Isabella in London addresses the 'confines' of previous adaptations (invoking also the conscious decision to situate Barton by the freedom of the sea in Davies's *Sense and Sensibility*). Similarly, Welch starts not with Miss Taylor's marriage (as in Davies's and McGrath's versions), but rather re-interrogates the idealised 'Austenite' wedding. Isabella's union is focused upon, yet her sunlit courtship is exchanged quickly for the realities of wedded life, as her screaming children imply the hardships and hazards of marriage and motherhood. Indeed, romantic idealisation is (to an extent) shadowed throughout. Harriet, for instance, runs through the sunlight to inform Emma of Mr Martin's proposal. Her innocent exuberance, however, is clouded by the muted interior of Hartfield, the cinematography anticipating Emma's manipulative destruction of her hopes.

Such visual nuances are accompanied by some interesting characterisations, portraying sensitively Miss Bates's isolation in the blankness of her mother's companionship, for instance. Emma herself is often presented in medium-long shot, the visual distancing suggesting her complexity and ambiguousness as 'a heroine whom no-one [...] will much like'.<sup>535</sup> 'Staged'



medium-long shot emulates the performativity which drives many of Austen's protagonists, yet it also implies the act of observation. At times, *Emma* therefore displays a subtle self-consciousness. Knightley, in the shot's background, watches Emma's exchanges with Elton, for example, just as the audience is viewing Austen on screen. Knightley's subsequent misinterpretation of the scene highlights the romantic expectations associated with Austen, thereby exploring and manipulating – like her literary texts – the conventions of the 'love story'. As in Davies's *Northanger Abbey* and McGrath's and Davies's versions of *Emma*, this self-reflexivity is also expressed through, and directed at, the motifs of costume drama as a form. As in the prior adaptations of *Emma*, Harriet's account of Churchill's rescue, for instance, is highly performative, its exaggerated romance and melodrama seeking to accentuate the contrast between Welch's screenplay and stereotype.<sup>536</sup>

Welch's *Emma* attempts to redefine the 'heritage film', a genre which is, as discussed in Chapter One, associated particularly with Austen adaptation. Sunlit images of Hartfield's exterior, for example, are frequently at a slant rather than in full view (recalling the manipulation of the 'country house' motif seen in Davies's *Bleak House*); although the 'Austenite' film is often introduced through a beautiful image of 'Property', significantly, the opening of Episode Two of *Emma* depicts an angled long-shot of Hartfield, distanced in the cold winter light. Another shot presents Hartfield almost obscured by pink flowers in the foreground, yet this visual idyll is shadowed by Emma's actions in the previous scene; her manipulation of Harriet into refusing Mr Martin renders the idealised image of her home ironic, parodying at the same time 'traditional' costume drama's perceived fetishisation of the country house. Similarly, rather than reveling in 'heritage objects' at the ball, their presence is figured initially through the delight on Emma's face (invoking Wright's portrayal of Lizzy's first view of Pemberley); whilst the scene is 'beautiful, [...] magical', the focus is upon character. As in Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, *Becoming Jane* and *Miss Austen Regrets*, the use of folk music at the Ball also re-defines costume drama as 'gritty', energised and immediate (contrasting with Rachel Portman's sentimental scoring of McGrath's *Emma*), whilst the 'safety' of Highbury is occasionally challenged by disturbing sound effects.

Like Rozema's Fanny Price, Welch's Emma speaks directly to camera, again establishing immediacy rather than a distancing reverence towards the 'classic' text. At times, the combination of 'breathing camera' and close-up similarly energises Emma's presence, heightening her turmoil at Box Hill following Knightley's chastisement. Moreover, as in Welch's *North and South*, shifts in cinematography expose and resist the potential to idealise the past. An accentuated camera revolves around Churchill to reveal his unhappy memory of childhood, as his separation from his father is repeated from an adult perspective. Vitally, the idyllic image of his home is transformed by the movement from warm to colder light, compounded by the rainstorm. This interrogation of, and challenge to, nostalgia is seen again in Emma's flashbacks to her childhood. Emma's girlhood at Hartfield is, on the one hand, figured idyllically, shot in a mellow (almost sepia) haze. As in Davies's *Bleak House* and Welch's *Jane Eyre*, however, stylistic effects visualise the characteristics of memory, blurring and distorting sounds and images faded by time and coloured by a childish perspective; the tendency to construe events nostalgically is highlighted unsettlingly, juxtaposing an ideal with the processes of memory. Significantly, the sequence returns to the past through contemporary visual techniques, seemingly offering a nuanced commentary upon the negotiation of tradition and innovation that has preoccupied late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century costume drama.

As a whole, however, Welch's *Emma* struggles to engage in this dialogue; as in Davies's *Little Dorrit*, its stylistic dynamism is inconsistent and conflicting. Moreover, although it posits itself as 'fresh', reworking 'stuffy' heritage characters and images, this attempt to reinterpret *Emma* as 'gritty' can also be seen in McGrath's and particularly Davies's versions of the novel. Indeed, John's comment – 'They're off on a mystery honeymoon, whilst I get to protect the chickens' – seems to invoke Davies's screenplay specifically, in which the tension between Highbury as an idyll and as a place of rural threat (the gypsies, the coastal accident) is marked (and compounded by the debilitating confines of poverty and spinsterhood). Likewise, an image of Elton galloping towards Hartfield is highly reminiscent of Willoughby in Lee's *Sense and*

*Sensibility*. Even in its professed ‘originality’, Welch’s *Emma* (like *Jane Eyre*) is framed by prior adaptations.

The opening scene in many ways exemplifies its contradictions. As already discussed, Mrs Woodhouse’s death shadows Emma’s childhood. However, as noted with regard to certain Dickens adaptations, the scene is accompanied by incongruously ‘bright’ music. Later, as Emma expostulates against Mrs Elton, the scenery again remains idealised as she marches through meadows of flowers. A subtlety can arguably be discerned here; as in the novel, the adaptation perhaps places seemingly idyllic circumstances within potentially threatening frameworks (Emma’s blissful piano-playing is intercut with the gypsy incident). Overwhelmingly, however, images are set in tension with import, as seen also in Thomas’s *Cranford*. Although Knightley exclaims of Martin that he has ‘never seen a man more disappointed’, for example, the farmer is shown in a sunlit field, the image reveling in a rural idyll, and thereby undercutting the presentation of the spurned lover. Tellingly, Mr Woodhouse’s exclamation – ‘Emma has no need to travel anywhere’ – cuts to lingering shots of Highbury; in contrast to Barker’s disorientating portrayal of village life in *Wildfell Hall*, Mr Woodhouse’s comment in many ways defines the adaptation as a whole, as it becomes confined within a nostalgic return to the past, and to traditional motifs in visualising the past. The thematic nuances of Welch’s interpretation of the literary text are unsettled by *Emma*’s presentation as a costume drama.

Ironically, there are several close-ups of sweets throughout the adaptation, emblematising what many reviewers regarded as the production’s ‘sickliness’; it is indeed telling that *Emma*’s DVD cover depicts a sunlit close-up of Romola Garai, in contrast to the icily-coloured photograph which adorns Davies’s *Sense and Sensibility*. Although it is proclaimed that Highbury’s inhabitants ‘live in the real world’, the dramatisation re-asserts the heritage shots it attempts to re-assess. Frequent use of voyeuristic long-shot, emphasising landscapes and country houses, contrasts starkly with the close-ups of mud, rain and toil which characterise Davies’s *Emma* and Dear’s *Persuasion* in particular. Often, Harriet and Emma walk into long-shot, drawing focus upon picturesque cottages in a village which is, like Thomas’s *Cranford*, overwhelmingly clean and quaint. Such uncontested images therefore undermine the intricate self-

reflexivity which is discernible at other points in the screenplay. Emma's confession to Harriet about Elton, for example, is followed by an image of Hartfield in cold blue light, yet it dissolves rapidly into a warmly-lit view.<sup>537</sup> In the final episode, the camera revolves with Jane and Churchill (the lovers' circling recalling Marianne and Willoughby in Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, Esther and Woodcourt in Davies's *Bleak House*, as well as Rose and Jack in James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997)). However, their bliss somewhat undercuts Emma's feministic denigration of Frank, as the camera retracts into an elevated long-shot of Highbury's thatched cottages, pictorialising the couple within the idyllic rural setting.

This pictorialism characterises the adaptation throughout, reinforced by the general use of steadicam rather than 'breathing camera'. Indeed, Emma herself paints the landscape which Knightley so lovingly paces, the sunlight and classical strings on the soundtrack fetishising a countryside which is complicated overtly by Andrew Davies.<sup>538</sup> In the 1996 *Emma*, 'heritage' shots of Donwell and its grounds are tested by Harriet's observation, 'I could never have thought that one man could own so much', a comment sharpened by the presence of the servant (accentuated through his very guise of anonymity and invisibility).<sup>539</sup> In Welch's production, views of Hartfield are instead often 'framed', as its hedges point towards, and emphasise, its aesthetic symmetry (as discussed in Chapter Three, Welch's *Jane Eyre* concludes within a similarly problematic 'frame'). Likewise, as in traditional costume drama, the book illustration of Box Hill transforms into 'reality'; in their perfect symmetry, Frank, Harriet and Emma remain within the picture, however. Tellingly, the adaptation concludes with a long-shot of Knightley and Emma at the coast; although beyond the confines of Highbury, the focus remains upon visual splendour.

Such convention is in marked contrast to Giedroyc's *Wuthering Heights*, which both reassesses the 'Brontëan' and costume drama as a stylistic form. In this, it is significant that Giedroyc invokes *Sparkhouse*. Her opening scene is filmed through a rapid, tracking camera, positioned at grass level (thereby resisting 'Brontëan' moorland panoramas), and pulled towards the Heights. Marrying re-interpretation and implied fidelity, the sequence embodies both Cathy's ghost, yearning to be 'let in', and Lockwood's struggle to reach the farm (thereby acknowledging an otherwise omitted character). At the same time, a

strong stylistic dialogue with *Sparkhouse* is established, as Giedroyc's searching shots emulate those commencing Wainwright's production; Carol and Andrew likewise compel a fast-paced camera which connects and draws them together. Equally, just as *Sparkhouse*'s jaggedly-shot, often obscured moorland views deconstruct, like Giedroyc, the 'Brontë Myth', both productions harness contemporary visual effects in order to invoke, and yet challenge, the Gothic. Like Wainwright's self-consciously exaggerated storm, sudden, looming images of *Wuthering Heights* – further distorted by wide-angle lens – are placed alongside the 'normality' of its domestic interior, and the peacefulness of a blue sky heightened through Giedroyc's cinematography. In their shifting, rapid camera movements, both productions draw attention to their televisual context. Whereas *Emma* is unable to respond to re-visualisations of Austen, *Wuthering Heights* instead engages dynamically with Wainwright's 'remake', both thematically and stylistically. Although, like the BBC, ITV has halted immediate production of nineteenth-century costume drama, *Lost In Austen* and *Wuthering Heights* suggest the company's greater energy with regard to the form.

By contrast, following its original broadcast of Episode Three of *Emma*, the BBC advertised a repeat of the production on BBC I-Player. Significantly, there is a note of desperation in the promotion, stressing the adaptation's 'originality' yet intimating its stagnation in the television schedules: 'Don't forget, if you have missed any of this fresh new BBC drama adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* so far, the good news is that you can catch the series on BBC I-Player'. Above all, there is a struggle to define the production; it is simultaneously fresh and faithful, BBC drama and classic-novel adaptation.

Such troubling confusion manifested itself similarly in the BBC's 2009 Christmas scheduling and advertising. Tellingly, the *Cranford* Christmas Special seemed relegated to somewhat obscure slots, the weekends before and after Christmas Day; whereas Adrian Hodges's *David Copperfield* formed the BBC's 'centre-piece' in its Millennium television schedule, 2009 focused upon David Tennant's final appearance in *Dr Who* (screened on both Christmas and New Year's Day).<sup>540</sup> By contrast, Catherine Tate's comedic rendering of *A Christmas Carol* (*Nan's Christmas Carol*, (BBC, 2009)) occupied a prime slot on Christmas Day. The prominence granted to Tate's parody rather than *Cranford* highlights a tension in the BBC's approach to costume drama and classic-novel adaptation,

which again became evident in its promotion of *Cranford* alongside ‘mainstream’ programmes. Thomas’s production was included in trailers which also advertised Victoria Wood’s *Midlife Christmas* (BBC, 2009). In this, Wood’s sketch – *Lark Pies to Cranchesterford* – satirised *Cranford* and *Lark Rise*, suggesting their generic stagnation by merging them into a whole. The promotion of *Cranford*’s ‘bonnet and bustle attractions’ was thereby challenged, as scenes from Thomas’s adaptation were followed by those from Wood’s: ‘I can see you have a bee in your bonnet...No, *you have a bee...*’. Most particularly, *Lark Pies* ironises the portrayal of ‘simple sunlit days’ through a direct attack upon costume drama as a form; each sketch commences with the same static still, again implying a lack of stylistic dynamism (as does the ‘staginess’ of scenes and characters), whilst costume itself is mocked through increasingly-accentuated gigot sleeves (purchased from the Bennets’ Dressmaking Shop). Period drama is, as such, regarded as a ‘problem’. Indeed, Jane Campion’s biopic of Keats, *Bright Star* (2009), was highly acclaimed partly because it ‘dealt’ with ‘the sonnets and the bonnets [...] with wit and restraint’.<sup>541</sup>

Certainly, the success of *Lark Rise* and the decision to return to *Cranford* demonstrates, as Davies maintains, that ‘people like bonnets’. At the same time, however, the negative critical and popular response to *Emma* is significant in itself, suggesting a movement away from costume drama escapism. Instead, acclaimed ‘reality’ programmes such as *The Victorian Farm* (BBC, 2009) return to the past with ‘modern’ people, upholding but not idealising ‘heritage’; the farmhouse is sparse, the animals are butchered. Moreover, the growing emergence of so-called ‘literary mash-ups’ – Adam Rann’s *Emma and the Werewolves* (2009) and the forthcoming *Persuasion...In Space! By Jane Austen and W. Bill Czolgosz* – are perhaps part of a negative response to ‘straight’ adaptation and the saturation, and perceived stagnation, of costume drama.

Crucially, whilst the promotion of period adaptation as contemporary television has attempted to revitalise the classic (implicitly nineteenth-century) novel, the BBC is now turning to more ‘modern’ (twentieth and twenty-first century) texts in order to refresh costume drama. In December 2009, the BBC produced a screen version of Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* (2004), set in the 1940s, whilst its biopic of Enid Blyton (*Enid*, 2009) similarly lent itself to

‘contemporary’ visual and aural effects. At the cinema, Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) redefined Conan-Doyle’s stories (and the long legacy of adapting his works to screen), as the film was styled and promoted as a ‘James Bond’ action movie (with visuals that recall *The Matrix* (1999)). The BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010) likewise plays on viewer expectations, thereby raising self-consciously the issue of fidelity. The adaptation inverts them, however, as it presents Conan-Doyle’s stories in a twenty-first-century setting, consolidated by the dramatisation’s stylistic similarities to the BBC’s re-visioned *Dr Who* (Benedict Cumberbatch (Holmes) was indeed offered the role of the Eleventh Doctor, and his portrayal of the detective often recalls Matt Smith’s performance as the Time Lord).<sup>542</sup> In a similar vein, Sandy Welch’s *The Turn of the Screw* (BBC, 2009) re-set Henry James’s 1898 novella in the 1920s, foregrounding its feminism and Freudian psychology in Ann’s ‘talking cure’. In contrast to Welch’s *Emma*, the production is energised by consistent use of disorientating and disturbing camera, lighting and sound. Although this is clearly directed by the ghost story, the fact that the production is not caught in the struggle to visualise the nineteenth century arguably shapes its greater stylistic assurance.

As is becoming increasingly clear, contemporary adaptations of nineteenth-century novels are framed by change and tension, just as they are energised by their stylistic and thematic innovativeness. The traditional equation of period drama with nostalgia and ‘literariness’ has been re-assessed through a contemporisation of the past, thus also re-defining costume drama as a distinctive genre; from the early 2000s onwards, classic-novel adaptation has frequently been marketed as a ‘mainstream’ – and ‘modern’ – form. At the same time, this has caused complex responses on the part of critics and popular audiences, as the resurgence of interest in period drama from the mid-1990s onwards has been shadowed by an escalating unease with the stylistic innovation and, latterly, the sheer abundance of classic-novel adaptations and their growing struggle to define themselves. Although adaptations of literary texts and particular authors, such productions also have to respond to costume drama as a form; in many ways, this often causes tension within screenplays of nineteenth-century novels.<sup>543</sup> Most significantly, however, the immediate future of costume drama and literary adaptation demonstrates, above all, the enduringly complex relationship between screen and text, text and screen.

<sup>508</sup> Andrew Davies, as cited in Anita Singh, “BBC Period Drama Has Gone Downmarket, Says Andrew Davies,” *The Telegraph* (28/09/09). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/6239992/BBC-period-drama-has-gone-downmarket-says-Andrew-Davies.html>. Accessed 29/09/09.

<sup>509</sup> The BBC maintained that ‘*The Pallasers*’ was rejected on the grounds of ‘prohibitive’ costs and *Dombey and Son* will not be coming to the screen because the BBC is currently ‘resting’ Dickens’. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/6239992/BBC-period-drama-has-gone-downmarket-says-Andrew-Davies.html>. Accessed 29/09/09.

<sup>510</sup> <http://enchantedserenityperiodfilms.blogspot.com/2009/08/top-bbc-period-dramas-poll.html>. Accessed 24/11/09.

<sup>511</sup> However, trailers for Series Three of *Lark Rise* are accompanied by ‘modern’, popular music, embodying once again the complex relationship between tradition and innovation.

<sup>512</sup> “Lines You Wouldn’t Hear in a Costume Drama,” *Mock the Week* (21/08/08). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mMDmwmZho0>. Accessed 25/09/09.

“Dead Ringers: Yet Another Costume Drama,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv5aPvMciGU>. Accessed 29/09/09.

<sup>513</sup> “BBC Launches *Emma* Adaptation,” *Telegraph* (02/10/09). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/telegraphTV/6251954/BBC-launches-Emma-adaptation.html>.

Accessed 25/11/09.

<sup>514</sup> “*The Wire*: Arguably the Greatest Television Programme Ever Made,” *Telegraph* (02/04/09). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5095500/The-Wire-arguably-the-greatest-television-programme-ever-made.html>. Accessed 18/06/09.

<sup>515</sup> Sam Wollaston, “*Emma*,” *The Guardian* (05/10/09). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2009/oct/05/sam-wollaston-tv-review>. Accessed 05/10/09.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>517</sup> As cited in Liz Thomas, “Case of *Emma* Fatigue Sees Viewers Turn Off in Millions,” *Daily Mail* (21/10/09). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1221804/Case-Emma-fatigue-sees-BBC-viewers-turn-millions.html#ixzz0VqABRFFQ>. Accessed 22/10/09.

<sup>518</sup> Kate Harwood, Interview, as cited in Anita Singh, “BBC Banishes Stuffey Period Characters from New *Emma* Drama,” *Telegraph* (13/09/09). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/6176192/BBC-banishes-stuffey-period-characters-from-new-Emma-drama.html#>. Accessed 28/09/09.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> A new genre of ‘Austen horror novels’, adapting Austen’s own manipulation of the Gothic, has formed; Grahame-Smith’s and Winters’s novels have been joined by Regina Jeffers’s *Vampire Darcy’s Desire: A Pride and Prejudice Adaptation* (2009) and Amanda Grange’s *Mr Darcy, Vampyre* (2009).

<sup>521</sup> James Rampton, “*Miss Austen Regrets*: How Jane Lost Her Own Darcy,” *The Independent* (16/04/08). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/miss-austen-regrets-how-jane-lost-her-own-darcy-809470.html>. Accessed 01/03/10.

<sup>522</sup> Thomas Sutcliffe, “Last Night’s TV: *Lost In Austen* ITV1,” *The Independent* (04/09/08). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/last-nights-tv-lost-in-austen-itv1-br-god-on-trial-bbc2-917939.html>. Accessed 30/11/09.

Tim Teeman, “*Lost In Austen*,” *The Times* (25/09/08). [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article4819807.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article4819807.ece). Accessed 30/11/09.

<sup>523</sup> Similarly manipulating viewer familiarity, Lydia’s exclamation as she gazes at an approaching horseman – ‘I’ll tell you exactly who that is’ – cuts to an image of a simpering lady, as the scene plays upon Mrs Bennet’s immediate recognisability.

<sup>524</sup> Terry Castle, “Was Jane Austen Gay?,” *London Review of Books* (03/08/95).

<sup>525</sup> The internet pages also point to ‘real-life’ ‘Austenmania’, contextualising *Lost In Austen* within the phenomenon just as it reworks it self-consciously.

<sup>526</sup> Revealingly, the first direct image of Darcy is accompanied by disturbing sound effects, destabilising the ‘Darcy Obsession’. Indeed, although Amanda explains to a bemused Jane that ‘he’s not Colin Firth’, even ‘Colin Firth’s not Colin Firth – they had to change the shape of his head with make-up’. Similarly, Amanda later requests that Darcy submerges himself in Pemberley’s lake (her exclamation – ‘I’m having a bit of a strange postmodern moment’ – epitomising the production’s self-reflexivity), yet the music is again slightly discordant.



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<sup>527</sup> Barry Didcock, "Austen Powers: How *Pride and Prejudice* Got a Twist of *Dr Who*," *The Herald* (30/08/08). <http://www.heraldscotland.com/austen-powers-how-pride-and-prejudice-got-a-twist-of-dr-who-1.834695>. Accessed 28/11/09.

<sup>528</sup> Stephen Brook, "First Night: *Lost In Austen*," *The Guardian* (04/09/08). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/organgrinder/2008/sep/04/lostinaustendebutstosolid>. Accessed 28/11/09.

<sup>529</sup> Amanda Rooper, as cited in Didcock <http://www.heraldscotland.com/austen-powers-how-pride-and-prejudice-got-a-twist-of-dr-who-1.834695>. Accessed 28/11/09.

<sup>530</sup> As Tim Teeman enthuses, 'Andrews could so easily have lathered up the culture-clash laughs, but was sharp and clever enough to have Darcy unintentionally veer near to racism without knowing it [...] and to have Amanda note, disbelievingly, that "Elizabeth Bennet is lending me her mobile"'.

Teeman [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/article4819807.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article4819807.ece). Accessed 30/11/09.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> Didcock <http://www.heraldscotland.com/austen-powers-how-pride-and-prejudice-got-a-twist-of-dr-who-1.834695>. Accessed 28/11/09.

<sup>533</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma*, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen: Seven Great English Classics* (London: Penguin, 1996) 723. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>534</sup> The BBC indeed introduced the first episode of Welch's adaptation through the assertion that 'it's back to the beginning for Emma'.

<sup>535</sup> Jane Austen, as cited in James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 119.

<sup>536</sup> In McGrath's *Emma*, for instance, a similar self-reflexivity is to be found. As Harriet and Elton commune in a lush country lane, Emma (positioned as 'viewer') exclaims 'Can this be...the declaration?!' Her expectations, and the seeming conventionality of the scene, however, are deflated humorously: 'I love...I simply love...celery root!' Such self-reflexivity is pre-figured by Robert Leonard's 1940 *Pride and Prejudice*, in Jane's self-consciously melodramatic dreams of Bingley: 'Sometimes he comes riding...on a white horse'.

<sup>537</sup> Similarly, following a shot of Hartfield's exterior, the camera retracts so that the meadow flowers are in the foreground; the scene is consolidated by the cut to the peacefully mellow Highbury.

<sup>538</sup> Interestingly, the image of Emma sketching recalls Cassy's portrait of Jane Austen sitting on a log (invoked also in *Miss Austen Regrets*).

<sup>539</sup> In Davies's *Emma*, the excursion to Box Hill is similarly nuanced, as the sunlit lushness is challenged by the focus upon the mechanisms of the carriage and the servants' struggles. The juxtaposition of ease and strife therefore visualises the satirical force of Austen's novel, undermining Emma's self-absorption. Moreover, Davies's Mrs Elton is American, delighting in the 'Garden of England'; she thus becomes a commentary upon viewing costume drama and consuming a nostalgic past.

<sup>540</sup> This is not to say that adaptations of nineteenth-century novels were not screened over 2009's festive season; ITV repeated Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance.

<sup>541</sup> Anthony Quinn, "*Bright Star*: A Thing of Beauty in Itself," *The Independent* (06/11/09). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/bright-star-pg-1815516.html>. Accessed 14/03/10.

<sup>542</sup> "*Sherlock Star* reveals he was offered Doctor Who role...but turned it down," *Daily Mail* (27/06/10). <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1298040/New-Sherlock-Holmes-Benedict-Cumberbatch-turns-Doctor-Who-role.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>. Accessed 28/06/10. Equally, *Sherlock*'s musical score forges a strong dialogue with the soundtrack in Guy Ritchie's film.

<sup>543</sup> It is worthwhile noting that other studies explore the specific cultural and historical contexts in which classic-novel adaptations are located, providing valuable and interesting insights into costume drama and the issues facing the genre. Chris Loutitt, for example, reads Davies's *Bleak House* and Thomas's *Cranford* 'alongside wider political, social and economic forces at work in the New Labour Period', arguing that, 'much like the Blairite administration and other re-fashionings of British culture and heritage at this time', the productions' innovation conceals deeply-held conservatism (Chris Loutitt, "*Cranford*, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Adapting the Victorian Novel for Television," *Adaptation* 2:1 (2009): 34-48. 34). Other studies,

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such as Andrew Higson's *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), detail the relationship between 'heritage films' and 'Britishness'.



## Filmography

### Jane Austen

*Becoming Jane.* Dir. Julian Jarrold. Written by Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams. Perf. Anne Hathaway and James McAvoy. BBC, 2007.

*Bridget Jones's Diary.* Dir. Sharon Maguire. Adapt. Helen Fielding. Perf. Colin Firth, Hugh Grant and Renée Zellweger. Working Title, 2001.

*Bridget Jones's Diary: The Edge of Reason.* Dir. Beeban Kidron. Adapt. Adam Brooks, Richard Curtis, Andrew Davies and Helen Fielding. Perf. Colin Firth, Hugh Grant and Renée Zellweger. Working Title, 2004.

*Clueless.* Dir. Amy Heckerling. Written by Amy Heckerling. Perf. Paul Rudd and Alicia Silverstone. Paramount, 1995.

*Emma.* Dir. John Glenister. Adapt. Denis Coustanduros. Perf. John Carson and Doran Goodwin. BBC, 1972.

*Emma.* Dir. Douglas McGrath. Adapt. Douglas McGrath. Perf. Jeremy Northam and Gwyneth Paltrow. Miramax, 1996.

*Emma.* Dir. Diarmuid Lawrence. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Kate Beckinsale, Samantha Morton and Mark Strong. United Film and Television Productions, 1996.

*Emma.* Dir. Jim O'Hanlon. Adapt. Sandy Welch. Perf. Michael Gambon, Romola Garai and Jonny Lee Miller. BBC, 2009.

*Lost In Austen.* Dir. Dan Zeff. Written by Guy Andrews. Perf. Hugh Bonneville, Elliot Cowan and Jemima Rooper. ITV, 2008.

*Mansfield Park.* Dir. David Giles. Adapt. Ken Taylor. Perf. Nicholas Farrell and Sylvestra Le Touzel. BBC, 1983.

*Mansfield Park*. Dir. Patricia Rozema. Adapt. Patricia Rozema. Perf. Jonny Lee Miller and Frances O'Connor. Miramax, 1999.

*Mansfield Park*. Dir. Iain MacDonald. Adapt. Maggie Wadey. Perf. Billie Piper, Douglas Hodge and Michelle Ryan. ITV, 2007.

*Miss Austen Regrets*. Dir. Jeremy Lovering. Written by Gwyneth Hughes. Perf. Hugh Bonneville and Olivia Williams. BBC, 2008.

*Northanger Abbey*. Dir. Giles Foster. Adapt. Maggie Wadey. Perf. Peter Firth and Katharine Schlesinger. BBC, 1987.

*Northanger Abbey*. Dir. Jon Jones. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Felicity Jones, Carey Mulligan and Sylvestra Le Touzel. ITV, 2007.

*Persuasion*. Dir. Roger Michell. Adapt. Nicholas Dear. Perf. Ciarán Hinds and Amanda Root. BBC, 1995.

*Persuasion*. Dir. Adrian Shergold. Adapt. Simon Burke. Perf. Sally Hawkins and Rupert Penry-Jones. ITV, 2007.

*Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Robert Leonard. Adapt. Aldous Huxley. Perf. Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier. MGM, 1940.

*Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Cyril Coke. Adapt. Fay Weldon. Perf. Elizabeth Garvie and David Rintoul. BBC, 1980.

*Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Simon Langton. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Jennifer Ehle, Colin Firth and Alison Steadman. BBC, 1995.

*Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy*. Dir. Andrew Black. Adapt. Anne Black. Perf. Kam Heskin and Orlando Seale. Bestboy Pictures, 2003.

*Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Joe Wright. Adapt. Deborah Moggach. Perf. Keira Knightley, Matthew Macfadyen and Carey Mulligan. Working Title, 2005.

*Sense and Sensibility*. Dir. Rodney Bennett. Adapt. Alexander Baron. Perf. Tracey Childs and Irene Richard. BBC, 1981.

*Sense and Sensibility*. Dir. Ang Lee. Adapt. Emma Thompson. Perf. Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet. Columbia, 1995.

*Sense and Sensibility*. Dir. John Alexander. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Hattie Morahan and Charity Wakefield. BBC, 2008.

*The Jane Austen Book Club*. Dir. Robin Swicord. Adapt. Robin Swicord. Perf. Emily Blunt and Hugh Dancy. John Calley Productions, 2007.

### **Elizabeth Gaskell**

*Cranford*. Dir. Simon Curtis. Adapt. Heidi Thomas. Perf. Michael Gambon, Judi Dench, Carey Mulligan. BBC, 2007.

*Cranford* Christmas Special. Dir. Simon Curtis. Adapt. Heidi Thomas. Perf. Judi Dench, Michelle Dockery and Imelda Staunton. BBC, 2009.

*North and South*. Dir. Brian Percival. Adapt. Sandy Welch. Perf. Richard Armitage, Daniela Denby-Ashe and Anna Maxwell-Martin. BBC, 2004.

*Wives and Daughters*. Dir. Nicholas Renton. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Michael Gambon, Keeley Hawes and Justine Waddell. BBC, 1999.

### **The Brontës**

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Christy Cabanne. Adapt. Adele Comandini. Perf. Virginia Bruce and Colin Clive. Monogram Pictures, 1934.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Robert Stevenson. Adapt. John Houseman, Aldous Huxley, Henry Koster and Robert Stevenson. Perf. Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles. Twentieth-Century Fox, 1944.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Delbert Mann. Adapt. Jack Pulman. Perf. George C. Scott and Susannah York. Omnibus Productions, 1970.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Joan Craft. Adapt. Robin Chapman. Perf. Sorcha Cusack and Michael Jayston. BBC, 1973.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Julian Aymes. Adapt. Alexander Baron. Perf. Zelah Clarke and Timothy Dalton. BBC, 1983.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. Adapt. Hugh Whitmore. Perf. Charlotte Gainsbourg and William Hurt. Miramax, 1996.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Robert Young. Adapt. Kay Mellor, Richard Hawley and Peter Wright. Perf. Ciarán Hinds and Samantha Morton. LWT, 1997.

*Jane Eyre*. Dir. Susanna White. Adapt. Sandy Welch. Perf. Toby Stephens and Ruth Wilson. BBC, 2006.

*Sparkhouse*. Dir. Robin Shepperd. Written by Sally Wainwright. Perf. Richard Armitage, Joe McFadden and Sarah Smart. BBC, 2002.

*The Piano*. Dir. Jane Campion. Written by Jane Campion. Perf. Holly Hunter and Sam Neill. Australian Film Commission, 1993.

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Dir. Mike Barker. Adapt. David Nokes. Perf. Tara Fitzgerald, Rupert Graves and Toby Stephens. BBC, 1996.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*. Dir. Brendan Maher. Adapt. Stephen Greenhorn. Perf. Rebecca Hall and Rafe Spall. BBC, 2006.

*Wuthering Heights*. Dir. William Wyler. Adapt. Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Perf. Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier. Samuel Goldwyn, 1939.

*Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*. Dir. Robert Fuest. Adapt. Patrick Tilley. Perf. Anna Calder-Marshall and Timothy Dalton. AIP, 1970.

*Wuthering Heights*. Dir. Dick Coles and Peter Hammond. Adapt. Hugh Leonard and David Snodin. Perf. Kay Adshead and Ken Hutchinson. BBC, 1978.

*Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*. Dir. Peter Kosminsky. Adapt. Anne Devlin. Perf. Juliette Binoche and Ralph Fiennes. Paramount, 1992.

*Wuthering Heights*. Dir. David Skynner. Adapt. Neil McKay. Perf. Orla Brady, Robert Cavanah and Sarah Smart. LWT, 1998.

*Wuthering Heights*. Dir. Coky Giedroyc. Adapt. Peter Bowker. Perf. Tom Hardy and Charlotte Riley. ITV, 2009.

### **Charles Dickens**

*A Christmas Carol*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Adapt. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Jim Carrey. Disney, 2009.

*A Tale of Two Cities*. Dir. Michael Briant. Adapt. Pieter Harding. Perf. Sally Osborn and Paul Shelley. BBC, 1980.

*Bleak House*. Dir. Ross Devenish. Adapt. Arthur Hopcraft. Perf. Denholm Elliott and Diana Rigg. BBC, 1985.

*Bleak House*. Dir. Susanna White and Justin Chadwick. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Gillian Anderson, Anna Maxwell-Martin and Carey Mulligan. BBC, 2005.

*David Copperfield*. Dir. George Cukor. Adapt. Hugh Walpole. Perf. W.C. Fields, Edna May Oliver and Basil Rathbone. MGM, 1935.

*David Copperfield*. Dir. Simon Curtis. Adapt. Adrian Hodges. Perf. Alun Armstrong, Pauline Quirke and Maggie Smith. BBC, 1999.



*Great Expectations*. Dir. David Lean. Adapt. Anthony Havelock-Allan, David Lean, Cecil McGivern, Ronald Neame and Kay Walsh. Perf. Alec Guinness, Valerie Hobson and John Mills. Cineguild, 1946.

*Great Expectations*. Dir. Julian Jarrold. Adapt. Tony Marchant. Perf. Ioan Grufford, Charlotte Rampling and Justine Waddell. BBC, 1999.

*Little Dorrit*. Dir. Christine Edzard. Adapt. Christine Edzard. Perf. Alec Guinness, Derek Jacobi and Sarah Pickering. Sands Films, 1988.

*Little Dorrit*. Dir. Diarmuid Lawrence, Adam Smith and Dearbhla Walsh. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Tom Courtenay, Claire Foy and Matthew Macfadyen. BBC, 2008.

*Mickey's Christmas Carol*. Dir. Burney Mattinson. Adapt. Tony Marino. Disney, 1983.

*Nicholas Nickleby*. Dir. Douglas McGrath. Adapt. Douglas McGrath. Perf. Jim Broadbent, Anne Hathaway and Christopher Plummer. United Artists Films, 2002.

*Oliver Twist*. Dir. David Lean. Adapt. Eric Ambler, Stanley Haynes, David Lean and Kay Walsh. Perf. Alec Guinness and Kay Walsh. Cineguild, 1948.

*Oliver!* Dir. Carol Reed. Adapt. Vernon Harris. Perf. Mark Lester, Ron Moody and Oliver Reed. Romulus Films, 1968.

*Oliver Twist*. Dir. Tony Bill. Adapt. Monte Merrick. Perf. Richard Dreyfuss and Elijah Wood. Disney, 1997.

*Oliver Twist*. Dir. Renny Rye. Adapt. Alan Bleasdale. Perf. Michael Kitchen, Robert Lindsay and Sophia Myles. ITV, 1999.

*Oliver Twist*. Dir. Roman Polanski. Adapt. Ronald Harwood. Perf. Ben Kingsley, Ian McNeice and Jeremy Swift. R.P. Films, 2005.

*Oliver Twist*. Dir. Coky Giedroyc. Adapt. Sarah Phelps. Perf. Tom Hardy, Sophie Okonedo and Timothy Spall. BBC, 2007.

*Our Mutual Friend*. Dir. Julian Farino. Adapt. Sandy Welch. Perf. David Bradley, Anna Friel and Keeley Hawes. BBC, 1998.

*The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. Dir. Stephen Whittaker. Adapt. Martyn Hesford. Perf. Charles Dance, James D'Arcy and Sophia Myles. Company Television, 2001.

*The Muppet Christmas Carol*. Dir. Brian Henson. Adapt. Jerry Juhl. Perf. Michael Caine. Disney, 1992.

*The Old Curiosity Shop*. Dir. Brian Percival. Adapt. Martyn Hesford. Perf. Derek Jacobi, Toby Jones and Sophie Vavasseur. ITV, 2007.

### **Other Productions**

*Brideshead Revisited*. Dir. Charles Sturridge and Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Adapt. John Mortimer. Perf. Jeremy Irons and Anthony Andrews. Granada, 1981.

*Bright Star*. Dir. Jane Campion. Written by Jane Campion. Perf. Abbie Cornish and Ben Whishaw. Pathé, 2009.

*Dr Who*. Dir. Keith Boak et al. Written by Russell T. Davies et al. Perf. Freema Agyeman, Christopher Eccleston, David Tennant and Billie Piper. BBC, 2005-2010.

*Enid*. Dir. James Hawes. Written by Lindsay Shapero. Perf. Helena Bonham-Carter and Matthew Macfadyen. BBC, 2009.

*Fanny Hill*. Dir. James Hawes. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Rebecca Night and Hugo Speer. BBC, 2007.

*Finding Neverland.* Dir. Marc Forster. Adapt. David Magee. Perf. Jonny Depp and Kate Winslet. Miramax, 2004.

*Jude.* Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Adapt. Hossein Amini. Perf. Kate Winslet and Christopher Eccleston. BBC, 1996.

*Lark Rise to Candleford.* Dir. Moira Armstrong et al. Adapt. Carolyn Bonnyman et al. Perf. Brendan Coyle, Julia Sawalha and Olivia Hallinan. BBC, 2008-2010.

*Middlemarch.* Dir. Anthony Page. Adapt. Andrew Davies. Perf. Juliet Aubrey, Douglas Hodge and Rufus Sewell. BBC, 1994.

*Miss Potter.* Dir. Chris Noonan. Adapt. Richard Maltby. Perf. Renée Zellweger, Ewan McGregor and Emily Watson. Momentum, 2006.

*ShakespeaRe-told.* Dir. Brian Percival et al. Adapt. David Nicholls et al. Perf. Keeley Hawes, James McAvoy and Billie Piper. BBC, 2005.

*Sherlock Holmes.* Dir. Guy Ritchie. Adapt. Michael Johnson, Simon Kinberg and Anthony Peckham. Perf. Robert Downey and Jude Law. Warner Bros Pictures, 2009.

*Sherlock.* Dir. Paul McGuigan. Adapt. Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. Perf. Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman. BBC, 2010.

*Small Island.* Dir. John Alexander. Adapt. Paula Milne. Perf. Benedict Cumberbatch and Ruth Wilson. BBC, 2009.

*Spooks.* Dir. Bill Anderson et al. Written by Howard Brenton et al. Perf. Matthew Macfadyen, Keeley Hawes, Rupert Penry-Jones and Richard Armitage. BBC, 2002-2009.

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles.* Dir. David Blair. Adapt. David Nicholls. Perf. Gemma Arterton and Eddie Redmayne. BBC, 2008.

*The Other Boleyn Girl.* Dir. Philippa Lowthorpe. Adapt. Philippa Lowthorpe. Perf. Jodhi May and Natascha McElhone. BBC, 2003.

*The Turn of the Screw.* Dir. Tim Fywell. Adapt. Sandy Welch. Perf. Michelle Dockery and Corin Redgrave. BBC, 2009.



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